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FIRST CONFIRMED NESTING OF THE YELLOW-LEGGED GULL *Larus michahellis* IN CONTINENTAL CROATIA

Prvo potvrđeno gniježđenje galeba klaukavca Larus michahellis u kontinentalnoj Hrvatskoj

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ABSTRACT

During the 2022 breeding season, we recorded two nests of Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus michahellis* in Zagreb, Croatia. This represents the first confirmed case of the species breeding in continental Croatia.

Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus michahellis* breed in southern Europe and North Africa along the Mediterranean coast, the Middle East along the Black Sea, the Atlantic coast of Portugal and France, and the Atlantic Islands from the Azores to the Canary Islands. They have expanded inland into Central Europe, establishing small breeding populations as far north as Poland, where breeding was first recorded in the 1980s (Cramp & Simmons 2006, Neubauer *et al*. 2006). Their breeding season begins in March and lasts until June. Yellow-legged Gulls typically nest on small islands, rocky or sandy shores, saltpans, pastures, lakes, riverbanks. Large gull species have been recorded nesting on buildings since the 1940s (Monaghan & Coulson 1977). Since the 1970s, Yellow-legged Gulls have been documented nesting on buildings in Spain, Italy, and France (Cadiou 1997; Coccon *et al.* 2022, Petit *et al.* 1986) and more recently in Slovenia, including in Ljubljana in 2005, and Maribor in 2012 (Mihelič *et al.* 2019). As an opportunistic species, they feed on both natural and anthropogenic food sources, especially on rubbish tips (Arizaga *et al.* 2014, Grémillet *et al*. 2017). In Croatia, Yellow-legged Gulls are a widespread breeding species along the Adriatic coast, nesting on rocky islets and buildings (Kralj *et al.* 2013). The capital city, Zagreb, has a

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large rubbish tip that attracts between 1 200 and 4 000 individuals during winter, although smaller numbers are present year-round (Jurinović & Kralj 2012).

Since 2020, small number of Yellow-legged Gulls have been observed during the breeding season in the city centre, flying low above roofs and even a begging call was heard in 2021. However, breeding locations have not been located. During the 2022 breeding season, we observed individual gulls landing on the rooftops at two locations in Zagreb. On April 13th, we confirmed one nesting gull on the roof of a building near an industrial area in eastern Zagreb (Figure 1). On July 3rd, two fledgling chicks from a separate nest in the city centre were found attempting to fly. They were rescued and taken to an animal shelter, where we ringed them the following day. This is the first documented case of Yellow-legged Gulls breeding in continental Croatia. The total number of breeding pairs in Zagreb is unknown. Locating nests within the city poses significant challenges because of the limited number of vantage points and abundance of potential nesting sites. Moreover, many non-breeding individuals roost on rooftops, making it difficult to confirm active nests. Given the species' ongoing range expansion in Europe, their year-round presence in Zagreb, and the consistent food supply provided by the city's rubbish tip, this was only a matter of time before they began to breed in the area.



Figure 1. Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* on a nest in Zagreb, Croatia
Slika 1. *Galeb klaukavac Larus michahellis na gnijezdu u Zagrebu, Hrvatska*

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SAŽETAK

Galeb klaukavac *Larus michahellis* proširio je tijekom prošlog stoljeća svoj areal u unutrašnjost Europe te se počeo gnijezditi u gradskim sredinama, osobito na krovovima zgrada. Od 2020. godine manji broj jedinki ove vrste opažan je tijekom gnijezdeće sezoneu središtu Zagreba, Hrvatska. U 2021. godini zabilježeno je glasanje mladunaca, no lokacija gnijezda nije pronađena. Tijekom gnijezdeće sezone 2022. godine zabilježena su dva gnijezda galeba klaukavca u Zagrebu. Ovo predstavlja prvi potvrđeni slučaj gniježđenja ove vrste u kontinentalnom dijelu Hrvatske.