

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE DRANA LAGOON IN THE EVROS DELTA RAMSAR WETLAND, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR WATERFOWL

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The Drana Lagoon is situated in the core of the Evros Delta, a major wetland in north-eastern Greece, designated of international importance under the Ramsar convention. The Lagoon has been used by the fishermen of the region as a fishpond. The Drana Lagoon was one of the most important parts of the remaining Evros Delta which, since 1950, has been almost entirely destroyed by "development", frequently undertaken illegally. The location of the Drana Lagoon within the Evros Delta is shown in Figure 1.

On 11 May 1987, farmers from the nearby village of Loutros used bulldozers to close illegally the seawards entrance of the lagoon, at the same time breaking a dyke on the eastern side. In this way the lagoon was quickly drained. The alleged 'justification' for this action was that salt had penetrated from the lagoon to the surrounding cultivated fields and grazing meadows (most of which have in any case been arbitrarily established in the past).

The ornithological importance of the Drana Lagoon at various times of year is briefly described below.

WINTER

Owing to its low water levels and the presence of islets, Drana formed an important feeding and resting area for wintering waterfowl. About 30-50% (that is 20 000-70 000 birds) of the total population of ducks wintering in the Delta used Drana. Large numbers of swans, geese, coots, avocets and flamingos also used the area. The importance of Drana in winter increased following the declaration of the area as a non-hunting zone by the local Forest Inspection authorities.

MIGRATION PERIODS

During spring and autumn migration, thousands of birds, mainly waders, used shallows in Drana for feeding and resting. Thousands of Dunlins *Calidris alpina*, Little Stints *C. minuta*, Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea*, Spotted Redshanks *Tringa erythropus*, Marsh Sandpipers *T. stagnatilis*, and Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax*, hundreds of Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* and Redshanks *T. totanus*, and many Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* used the

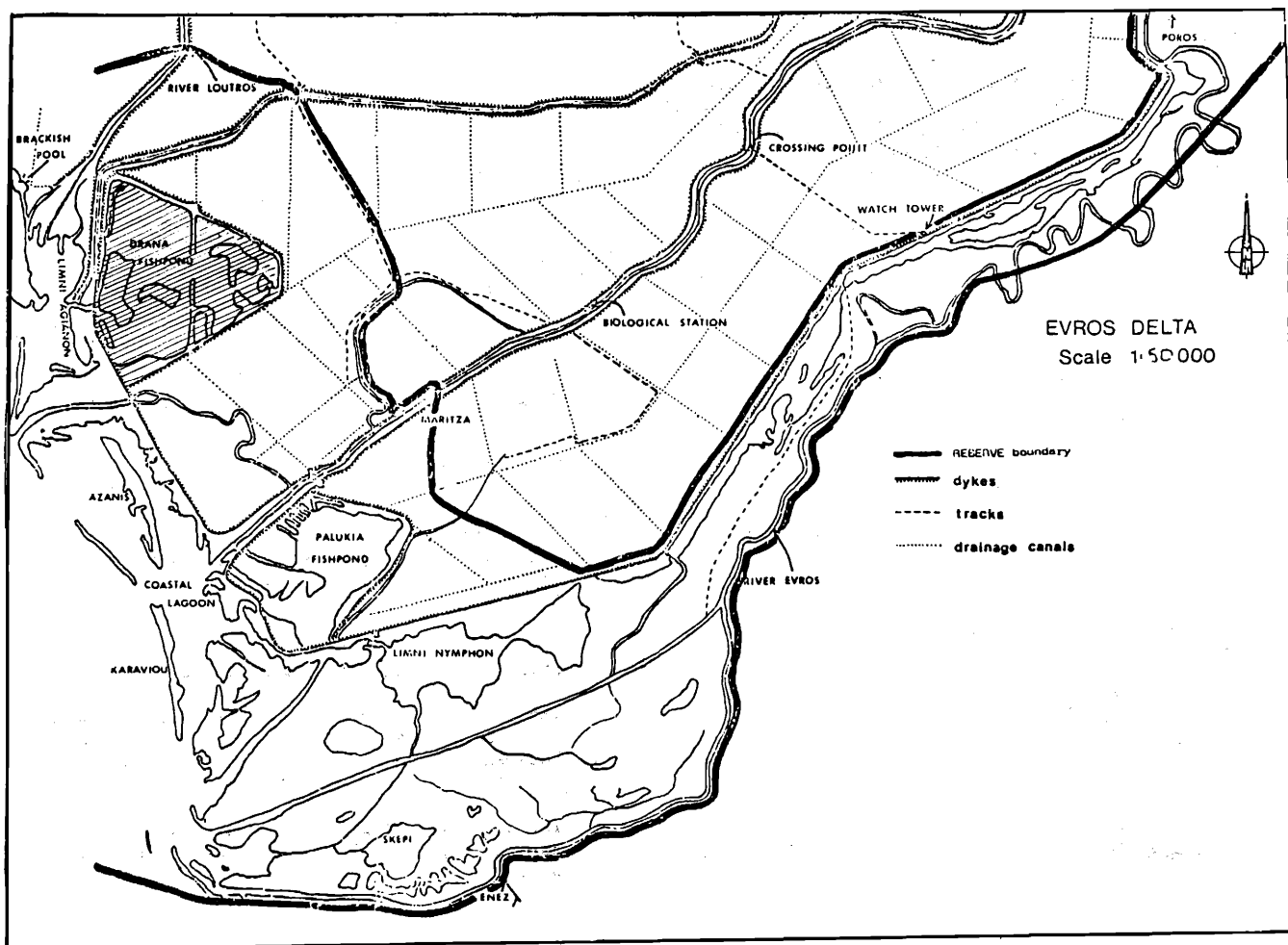


Figure 1. The Evros Delta, in north-eastern Greece, showing the location of the Drana Lagoon.

area. Drana was of great importance for feeding especially when the coastal mudflats elsewhere in the Delta were covered by water (Goutner 1983).

BREEDING

Drana was of major importance as a breeding area for rare birds, especially because during recent years only Drana, coastal islets and a very few sites along the River Evros, were suitable as breeding sites. Drana was of major significance for the following species which bred on the islets of the lagoon:

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Maximum 120 pairs (1982), although decreasing due to illegal grazing and consequent trampling of eggs and chicks by herds on the islets.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

Maximum 250 pairs (1985).

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Maximum c. 1 000 pairs (1985). This species first started breeding in the Evros Delta in 1981 (Goutner 1986a). The two largest colonies in the Mediterranean exist in Greece, one at Alyki Kitros (5 000 pairs) and the one in the Evros Delta (Goutner 1986b). Just before Drana was drained, c.2 500 pairs of these gulls had gathered on an islet, but quickly left in an unknown direction.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Maximum 370 pairs (1985). Preference for Drana as breeding habitat has been recently shown by these birds (Goutner and Kattoulas 1984).

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

Maximum 125 pairs (1985).

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Maximum 70 pairs (1985). This species also has recently shown a preference for Drana as a breeding habitat (Goutner and Kattoulas 1984).

All the above mentioned breeding species are included in Annex 1 of the EEC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (85/411/EEC) and are threatened in all European Community countries.

These breeding birds, and many of the wintering birds, their habitats, and also Drana as a wetland, are protected by the following international conventions and directives which also constitutes Greek legislation:

1. The Ramsar Convention.
2. The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats - the Bern Convention (82/72/EEC (L38/1)).
3. EEC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC - 81/854/EEC).

There is also special protective legislation for the Evros Delta following the decisions of two Ministers (for Coordination and Agriculture) of the Greek Government in 1980.

Draining of the Drana Lagoon has resulted in loss of valuable feeding, resting and breeding habitat for many species of rare birds using the wetland during various stages of their annual cycle. Local people intend to proceed with their own "management" plans, ignoring legislation and scientific proposals based on many years of research.

The destruction of the Evros Delta is a vivid illustration of the problems that exist in ensuring that wetlands and their birds actually receive the protection from damage that they should be afforded by their designation by a government under international conventions. Any assistance in bringing pressure for the restoration of the Drana Lagoon to its previous condition, and for the long-term effective protection of the Evros Delta wetland is urgently required.

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