

FIRST PURE PAIRS OF YELLOW-LEGGED GULL *LARUS [CACHINNANS] MICHAHELLIS*¹ ALONG THE NORTH SEA COASTS

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Vercruijsse H.J.P., Stienen E.W.M. & Van Waeyenberge J. 2002. First pure pairs of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus [cachinnans] michahellis* along the North Sea coasts. *Atlantic Seabirds* 4(3): 127-129. In 2002, two pure pairs of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus [cachinnans] michahellis* were found breeding in the outer harbour of Zeebrugge (51°21'N, 3°11'E), Belgium. These are the first pure pairs breeding along the North Sea coast. Pellets found in the vicinity of the nests suggest that the diet of their chicks consisted of fish and young rabbits. Both pairs fledged two chicks.

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Since 1985, newly created land in the outer harbour of Zeebrugge (51°21'N, 3°11'E), Belgium, supports fast growing populations of gulls, terns and plovers (Seys *et al.* 1998; Stienen *et al.* 2002). In 2002, 2100 pairs of Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, 3400 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. [fuscus] graellsii*², 950 pairs of Herring Gull *L. argentatus*, 2450 pairs of Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* and smaller numbers of Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*, Mediterranean Gull *L. melanocephalus*, Common Gull *L. canus*, Sandwich Tern *S. sandvicensis* and Little Tern *S. albifrons* were found breeding here. In the same year, the first two pure pairs of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus [cachinnans] michahellis* settled in the outer harbour of Zeebrugge. Their nests were situated less than 50 m apart, the territories bordered one another and there was regular interaction between the individuals of the two pairs. Back-calculating from the assumed hatching date, the eggs were laid in the first and third week of April, respectively, much sooner than those of most Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls breeding at Zeebrugge. The pure pairs were highly productive: both fledged three chicks. Within 200 m distance from the pure pairs, two Yellow-legged Gulls were found interbreeding with Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull, respectively. In the surroundings of the nests of both pure and mixed pairs many pellets containing either fish remains or bones of young rabbits were found, suggesting that these were important prey items.

The colonisation of the Belgian coast fits well into the ongoing expansion of the breeding distribution of Yellow-legged Gull to the north. In the



One of the males of the pure pairs Yellow-legged Gulls Een van de mannetjes van de zuivere broedparen Geelpootmeeuwen (Geert Spanoghe)

second half of the twentieth century, Yellow-Legged Gulls originating from colonies in the Mediterranean have expanded their breeding range northwards (Nicolau-Guilamet 1977; Yésou & Beaubrun 1994). Nowadays, colonies are found in the valleys of the Rhône and its affluents, along the north Atlantic coast of French, in the Lake Region of Switzerland, in the valley of the upper Rhine at the border between France and Germany and even in Poland (Yésou 1991; Yésou & Beaubrun 1994; Schmid *et al.* 1998; Faber *et al.* 2001). By the end of the twentieth century many instances of Yellow-legged Gull interbreeding with Herring or Lesser Black-backed Gull were reported from countries bordering the North Sea (Vercruysse 1995; De Scheemaeker & Lust 1996; Van Swelm 1998; Faber *et al.* 2001; Ogilvie *et al.* 2001). To our knowledge, the pairs in Zeebrugge are the first pure ones breeding along the North Sea coasts.

EERSTE ZUIVERE BROEDPAREN VAN GEELPOOTMEEUW *LARUS MICHAHELLIS* LANGS DE NOORDZEE

Vanaf 1985 worden nieuw opgespoten delen van de voorhaven van Zeebrugge (51°21'N, 3°11'O), België, in toenemende mate gebruikt door kustbroedvogels. In 2002 broedden er 2100 paren Kokmeeuw *Larus ridibundus*, 3400 paren Kleine Mantelmeeuw *L. graellsii*, 950 paren Zilvermeeuw *L. argentatus*, 2450 paren Visdief *Sterna hirundo* en kleinere aantallen van Bontbekplevier *Charadrius hiaticula*, Strandplevier *C. alexandrinus*, Zwartkopmeeuw *L. melanocephalus*, Stormmeeuw *L. canus*, Grote Stern *S. sandvicensis* en Dwergstern *S. albifrons*. Ook broedden in 2002 de eerste twee zuivere paren Geelpootmeeuw *L. michahellis* in de Zeebrugse voorhaven,

terwijl er ook twee gemengde paren (Geelpootmeeuw x Zilvermeeuw respectievelijk Kleine Mantelmeeuw) werden aangetroffen. Braakballen die bij de nesten werden gevonden, bevatten voornamelijk resten vis en konijn. Beide zuivere paren brachten drie kuikens groot. De kolonisatie van de Belgische kust past goed in de noordelijke opmars van deze soort vanuit het Mediterrane gebied gedurende de laatste decennia. Het is echter vermeldenswaard omdat het hier gaat om de eerste zuivere paren langs de Noordzeekust.

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¹ *Larus cachinnans michahellis* is presently known as *Larus michahellis* on the Dutch list (*Ardea* 87: 139-165).

² *Larus fuscus graellsii* is presently known as *Larus graellsii* on the Dutch list (*Ardea* 87: 139-165).