

**First data on the breeding biology  
of Sandwich Terns (*Sterna sandvicensis*)  
in the lagoon of Venice (Italy)**

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The Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* breeds along the Mediterranean coastline at very few sites (in Spain, France, Italy and occasionally in Greece). In Italy the species nests at only two sites, the Valli di Comacchio (Emilia-Romagna Region) and, since 1995, the Lagoon of Venice. Here the species occurs with one colony, with 202 pairs in '95 and 385 pairs in '96, on a saltmarsh islet of 3.6 ha in size, which hosts some hundreds pairs of other terns and gulls, Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*), Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) and Little Terns (*Sterna albifrons*) and several pairs of Redshanks (*Tringa totanus*). The site is occupied from the beginning of April and the eggs are laid from the first days of May. In the first year of settle-

ment the laying took place later, around mid May; in the following year two sub-colonies were present, with a difference among them of about ten days in laying date. Mean clutch size was 1.67 in 1995 (N= 200, s.d.= 0.47) and 1.47 in 1996 (N= 275, s.d.= 0.5). Adults with non-flying juveniles are observed until mid-July, and the colony is deserted from the end of that month. Bad weather, in association with high tides, caused the death of at least 30 chicks in 1996, whereas in both reproductive seasons a few adults were killed by a summering Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). The colony site is totally unprotected; given its importance on a Mediterranean basis, it should be protected and managed in the very next future.