

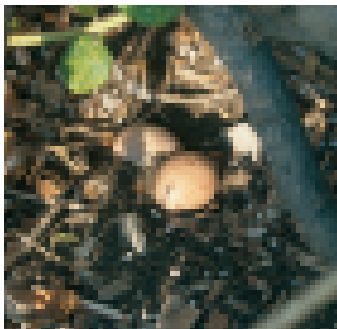
The Greek seas are dotted with innumerable small uninhabited islets, accommodating millions of birds flying over the Mediterranean. These islets constitute peaceful, secure nesting grounds, valuable for a number of important and rare species. It is in our hands to protect these areas, as part of natural inheritance and our own future.



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### Ecology

The Eleonora's falcon, is known in Greece as Mavropetritis or Varvaki. It is a migratory falcon, fast and skillful. It nests either on uninhabited islets or on steep, inaccessible cliffs of inhabited islands. It arrives in the Mediterranean in April and returns to Madagascar and other islands of the Indian Ocean by the end of October.



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Until the end of July, the diet of Eleonora's falcon consists mainly or exclusively of large insects. In order to secure its prey, the falcon has to travel over large distances, very

often reaching cultivated areas of big islands and the mainland of Greece.



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In August and September, during the young-raising season, Eleonora's falcon changes its habits dramatically. It switches from insect-hawking to bird-hunting, preying almost exclusively on small migratory birds on their way to Africa. This is the reason Eleonora's falcon does not breed in spring as most birds do, but in the end of the summer. This way the bird is able to provide food for its nestlings, since their raising coincides with the autumn migration.

### Importance

Greece hosts around 4.000 pairs of Eleonora's falcon, which constitutes the 75% of the world population. This fact makes Greece the single most important country, responsible for the conservation and survival of the species. Therefore and according to its international significance, Eleonora's falcon is one of the most important bird species in Greece.

### Threats

For the past years, there has been a decrease in the world population of Eleonora's falcon. The rapid development of tourism, (speedboats, sailboats etc), has



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rendered the once isolated islets accessible to visitors. The absence of man and terrestrial predators in the islets is very important for the species, since Eleonora's falcon needs isolation and a sense of security in order to nest and breed successfully. Intrusion into its breeding habitats can have a negative effect on the reproduction of the species. The birds are disturbed and leave their nests, abandoning their eggs to the rough weather conditions and the opportunistic predators. If the disturbance becomes intense they may abandon their nests permanently.



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Other problems include the lighting of fires, the degradation of local flora, hunting, the presence of domestic animals and flocks of sheep and goats, all of which cause disturbance to the birds and habitat degradation.

Human presence has also created an indirect threat for Eleonora's falcon nests, namely rats. Many islets have been colonized by large numbers of rats accidentally transported there by boats and vessels staying overnight in close range. It has been documented that rats are able to swim, covering distances up to 50 meters during the night. The speed with which rats reproduce is also well known. Rats are omnivorous and the eggs of Eleonora's falcon become an easy prey.

Hellenic Ornithological Society's (HOS) experience has shown that most negative effects can be avoided, when visitors are properly informed.

