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Capture of Yelkouan Shearwaters *Puffinus yelkouan* at geographic bottlenecks at sea

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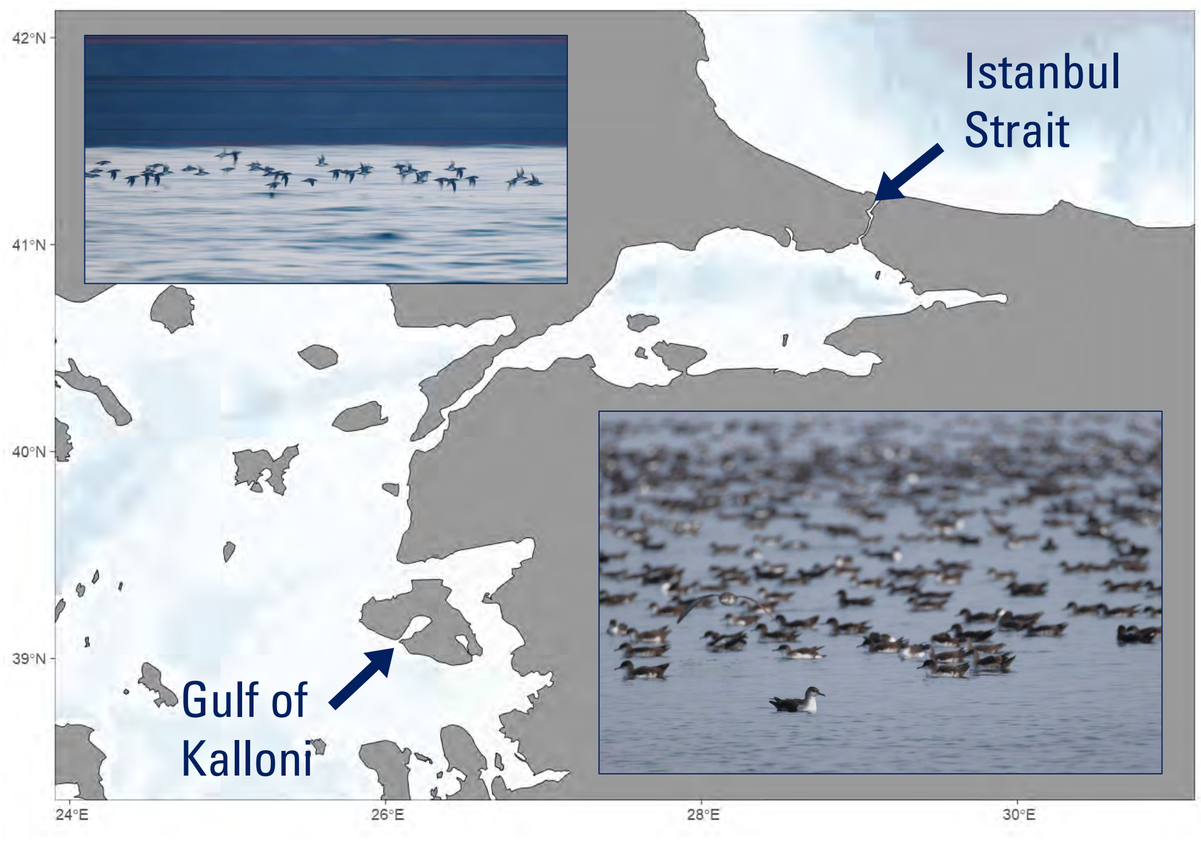
The long movements that shearwaters undertake may regularly take large flocks through narrow straits. Counting passing birds at such geographic bottlenecks does not inform on the population of origin. Remote tracking of birds caught at sea provides a tool to fill knowledge gaps, important for targeted conservation actions. We present a successful method of at-sea captures that was employed on Yelkouan Shearwaters in late winter 2024.



Birds were captured as part of two distinct tracking projects: (1) in the Istanbul Strait, Türkiye (CIESM, TÜBİTAK); (2) in the entrance to the Gulf of Kalloni, Lesvos, Greece (LIFE PanPuffinus! & LIFE MareNatura, Hellenic Ornithological Society).

We set up a c. 60 m – 100 m long, c. 3 m high monofilament gillnet (40 mm mesh) across part of the flight path. The net was set between two vessels (Istanbul Strait) or a vessel and a large marker buoy (G. o. Kalloni). A RHIB was used as a third platform from which the caught birds were extracted.

We captured 43 Yelkouan Shearwaters in 6 sessions over both projects. 39 birds were fitted with OrniTrack-9 GPS-GSM devices to track their movements. Tagging Yelkouan Shearwaters on flyways away from their nest sites provided insights into the synchronous distribution of distinct breeding populations, revealed several previously unknown breeding sites and underlined the importance of foraging hotspots in the Aegean and Black Seas. The information gathered is crucial for the improved protection of this vulnerable seabird endemic to the Mediterranean basin.

Tracks of Yelkouan Shearwaters captured in the Istanbul Strait can be viewed here:

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Tracking project (2) was carried out by the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS/ BirdLife Greece) within LIFE PanPuffinus! (LIFE19NAT/MT/000982) and LIFE Mare Natura (LIFE22-NAT-EL-LIFE, LIFE-2022-SAP-NAT), co-funded by the LIFE Program of the European Union.

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