

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**  
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**The European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster* (Linnaeus 1758)) on Crete**

The Bee-eater belongs to the species of passerine birds (Coraciiformes) in the family Meropidae and is a very eye-catching, colourful bird with a size of approx. 28 cm. Abdominal and chest area is turquoise, vertexes, neck and back sections are rust-brown, the wings are also decorated in these two colours, and a black Eye stripe is located over the yellowish Chin. Another feature is the slightly curved, long bill and the extended central tail feathers, the so-called "tail pike" (at adult birds, chicks miss these tail-pike).

Bee-eater prefer warm climate. It ranges from Southwest- and Middle-East, Northwest Africa, South- and South-Eastern Europe and northwards to South-Eastern Poland. Probably due to climate change, it enlarged its range in Germany. Their habitats are open landscapes with individual trees and bushes. It breeds in steep slopes on banks of rivers, lakes and ponds; therefore see the fig.: Bee-eater within a gravel pit at "Neusiedler See".

**Picture:** P. Erlemann (NABU)



The birds are often in colonies and are very good, persistent flyer; on the ground they rather act awkwardly. They feed on insects they catch in flight (bees, wasps, bumblebees, but also flying beetles, dragonflies and cicadas). Bee-eater are hoot joyful birds. The call is performed in flight and often varies, alarmed you hear call him "pitt pitt pitt".

Bee-eaters are colony-breeding birds. The self dug nest tubes are up to 1.5 m long and have a diameter of approx. 5 cm, the entry hole measures up to 10 cm. The bubble-shaped breeding area is located at the end of the tube. The breeding season (usually 20 to 22 days) begins at middle of May and lasts including rearing of the young until end of July. The clutch consists of 5 – 6 (4 to 7) almost spherical, pure white, strong bright eggs, which lie in the hatchery directly on the ground. Egg size: 22.5 – 29.5 mm long axis x 17.6 – 23.6 mm width axis.

Both partners involved in breeding; there is only one a year. The young birds are looked after by both parents for 20 to 30 days in the nest and also for a time after leaving the hotbed.

Our member within the NAOM Landesgruppe Umwelt Kreta (NLUK) eV at Facebook, *Michalis Dretakis* (NHMC), sent us the following information to the Bee-eater on Crete which will be published in his book about “**the birds of Crete**” (birds of Crete newest draft 07062010.doc - in press) and which we can use in summary for our info sheet, as well as his two photos. For this purpose at this point our cordial thanks.

He wrote for example: to the history of the Bee-eater at Crete: the Bee-eater is on Crete a rarer, local and perhaps sporadically “breed visitor”. Two (2) colonies are known from the 1940’s; in the hills east of Sitia (1942 and 1944) and near Knossos (1943). Other reports concerning birds in the area Matala - Faistos on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, early July and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1973. According to the local population in the area they encounter almost every year.

Several nests have been found in this area in 1990 as well as in 1993; also on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 2001 near Matala. An unused nest was found on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1980 along the Tavronitis River where later, in June 1993 - 1994, some birds were probably "Breeders". Another colony was also found in June 1997 near Gregoria. Recurring reportedly is also a "breeding colony" located South of Palekastro. A "swarm" of 32 birds (including infants) was sighted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2001 Kare (south of Rethymnon, altitude 450 m), which probably were local breeders and not migrants. Therefore see the below fig.: Bee-eater on Crete,

**Pictures:** *M. Dretakis* (NHMC).



The area south of Prasio, Canyon and Potamoi (Prefecture Rethymno) is another breeding area of the Bee-eater (although irregular). Also close to Kouses within the Messara lowland are breeding areas (June 2003) and on the spring of the river Geropotamos.

Bird watching refer to autumn (mid-August to September), where reports of swarms with 10 to 50 birds, they fly very high (1000 – 1600 m). Last records show swarms of about 20 birds on 05<sup>th</sup> of November 2000 in Neo Chorio Kydonias and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 2004 near Nembros.

For further information see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merops\\_apiaster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merops_apiaster)  
*Merops apiaster* is on the red list of threatened species of IUCN 2008