

INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS REPORT

LIBYA • 2009-2018

LIST OF PARTICIPATING STRUCTURES / INDIVIDUALS

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INSTITUTIONS AND NGOS:

- Environment General Authority (EGA) and the University of Tripoli
- Libyan Society for Birds (LSB), Bado Society (Zwara)

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CONCERTED EFFORTS TO CONSOLIDATE A TEAM OF ORNITHOLOGISTS DURING A PERIOD OF NATIONAL INSTABILITY

During the 10 year period covered by this report, the average number of waterbirds counted was 21,146. Up until 2011, the counts were carried out over a wider range of wetlands. Since then however, due to the effects of civil war, and the political and social instability that has followed, it has been impossible to monitor certain sites. The number of suitable monitoring sites has therefore decreased significantly since 2011. Thanks to the efforts made by the LSB to consolidate a team of expert ornithologists prepared to go out into the field, the number of sites monitored has increased slightly since 2017. However, it is still not possible to monitor the same number of wetlands as before due to the ongoing heightened security situation which continues to prevent access to certain isolated areas, particularly in the east of the country.

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS:

MORE THAN
34 VOLUNTEER
COUNTERS



NUMBER OF WETLANDS COUNTED:

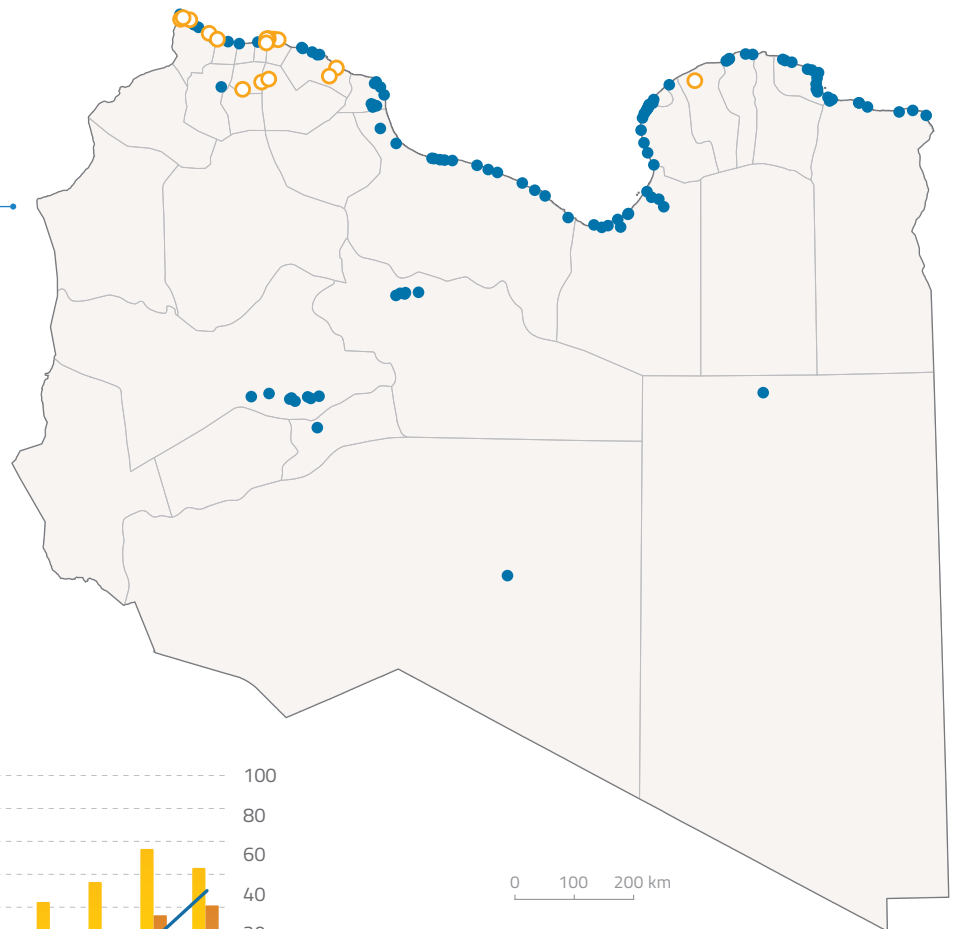


MEAN OF NEARLY **38**
WETLANDS COUNTED
AT LEAST ONCE
(2009-2018)

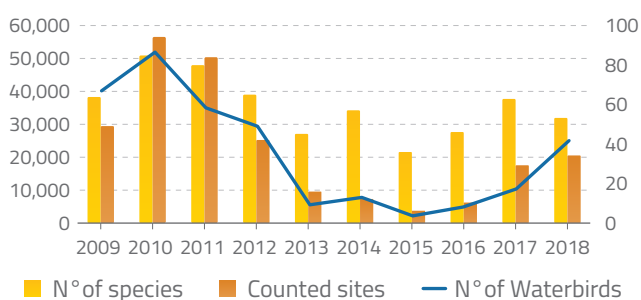
WETLANDS COUNTED in Libya from 2009 to 2018

National census network

- Sites irregularly counted (less than 5 of the years between 2009 and 2018)
- Sites regularly counted (at least 5 of the years between 2009 and 2018)



EVOLUTION OF NUMBER OF VISITED SITES, counted waterbirds, and number of species



0 100 200 km

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sources: Libyan Society for Birds (LSB), Natural Earth

MOST OF THE COUNTED SPECIES ARE DECREASING

Most of the counted species are decreasing or fluctuating but it is difficult to determine whether this trend has been influenced by the limited monitoring since 2012. Some of the most interesting sites have been impossible to reach due to the ongoing security issues, and some of the waterbirds that would have been counted on the inaccessible sites have not been represented in the survey.



SPECIES IN DECLINE,
ACCORDING TO CALCULATIONS
MADE DURING THE PERIOD 2009-2018*

ORDER		Mid-January 2018	
Species		Total	N° sites
ANSERIFORMES			
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	27	3
Common pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	41	2
CHARADRIIFORMES			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	2,909	13
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	402	9
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	218	6
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	4	1

Sites counted since 2012 have mostly been situated around Tripoli, and therefore are more impacted by human activities and pollution, important factors which can have an effect on the presence of certain species.

Due to the very irregular monitoring of sites, it is difficult to estimate the exact population trend of most of the species, and for most it is undetermined. Nevertheless, for some species, a simple estimate of the numbers over 10 years gives an idea of the declining dynamics of the population (see table).

*The table represents only the 2018 counts of species that result in a decrease over the period 2009-2018 when compared to IWC counts (but without statistical analysis).



Counters during International waterbirds census in Tawergha - © K. Alhrare

THE MOST REPRESENTED GROUPS ARE THE "GULL, LARUS OR STERN" GROUP, AND THE WADERS

Regular Libyan waterbird censuses, carried out since 2005, have revealed that the most abundant of the counted birds belong to the Laridae, followed by the Waders. This may be due to the nature of the environments that were covered along the Libyan coast. Most of the wetlands in Libya are salt marshes and coastal lagoons, with few freshwater habitats.



This would explain why the majority of the birds counted are gulls and small waders. Although there are other species representing different families, their numbers are very few when compared to the gulls.



Black-winged Stilt flight - © Libyan Society for Birds

Moreover, the existence of landfill or dumping sites adjacent to, or on the wetland would increase the number of gulls due to their scavenging nature. There is perhaps another reason; hunters do not tend to target gulls and small waders; field observations have revealed many remnants of gun cartridges used in hunting, as well as the remains of hunted birds, such as Herons, Egrets, Flamingos and Ducks.

GROUPS	MEAN 2009-2013	MEAN 2014-2018
Gull, larus and stern	15,812	3,637
Wader	6,431	2,310
Larus	2,836	1,929
Ducks	1,809	774
Phala	1,301	404
Crane	1,174	1
Phoen	937	593
Heron	827	359
Rails	808	155
Grebe	444	143
Galin	181	17
Stork, ibise and plata	119	56
Stern	73	26
Goose	2	1
Swans	0	3
TOTAL WATERBIRDS	32,248	10,399

MEAN TOTAL NUMBERS OF WATERBIRDS counted during the mid-January census, 2009-2013 and 2014-2018

Black-winged Stilt flight in Wadi almjenin dam
© K.Alhrare



DIFFICULTIES ESTABLISHING THE INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF SITES BECAUSE OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

The present situation in Libya doesn't allow access to all of the wetland sites which had been monitored in previous years. Since 2013, not all the sites have been visited regularly. One of the most important sites for waterbirds in Libya, Sabkhat Qanfudhah, has not been visited at all since 2013. Two of the other most important sites for waterbirds, which were counted in 2017 and 2018, Farwah Lagoon and Sabkhat Qasr Ahmed (East), showed results that revealed a decline in waterbird numbers.



Libya has been politically unstable, and has been going through difficult circumstances since 2011. These adverse factors, especially the security situation, have restricted access to a number of important sites, which has negatively affected the number of counted waterbirds.

War and conflict, on and adjacent to some important wetland sites, and of course the disturbance and destruction of habitat caused by the use of heavy weapons, would deter

birds from these areas. It is clear that the birds are reluctant to return quickly to sites where destruction and explosions have occurred.

Also, the use of advanced bird-hunting weapons has significantly led to birds abandoning sites which would otherwise be highly attractive in terms of important factors, such as availability of water with suitable depth, food and vegetation cover.

Gulls flight in Farwa Island
© K.Alhrare



**SITES OF THE
MID-JANUARY
COUNTING
NETWORK:**
average total
numbers of
waterbirds counted
(period 2014-2018)
and potential
RAMSAR sites

**Waterbirds
mean
(2014-2018)**

- < 100
- 100 - 250
- 250 - 1500
- > 1,500



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sources: Libyan Society for Birds (LSB), Natural Earth



FOCUS ON "KEY" SPECIES IN LIBYA

GREATER FLAMINGO (*PHOENICOPTERUS ROSEUS*)

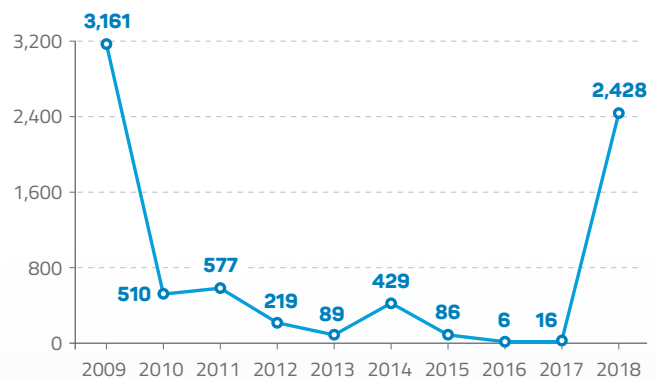
The Greater flamingo is a migratory species that crosses the Libyan territory on its migration route. Some remain in the Libyan wetlands and spend the period of their migration in Libya, especially during the winter season. This species finds suitable wetland habitat along the Libyan coast, which is characterised by marshes (Sobkhas), where saline levels are high, and this is what the flamingo prefers. They have been subjected to hunting and disturbance due to human activities, which has resulted in a decline in populations, as well as causing them to abandon sites where they were previously found in large numbers, for example Abo Kamash, Farwa lagoon in Western Libya, and Alwashka in the middle of the country.

Despite the fact that the general census of the wintering waterbirds in Libya has been affected by the decrease of the number of surveyed sites, and therefore shows a sharp decrease in general bird numbers since 2012, the number of Flamingos has been in decline since 2010.

This means that the decline was not only affected by the reduced number of covered sites. Human disturbance and hunting activities have played a major role in the population trends of the Greater flamingo in Libya.

There was however a recovery in 2018, where the highest number of individuals (2005) was counted in Abo Kamash Sobkha, adjacent to the Tunisian border. Unfortunately, they stayed for a very short time before flying across the Tunisian border.

THE TREND OF GREATER FLAMINGO POPULATION IN LIBYA during the period from 2009-2018



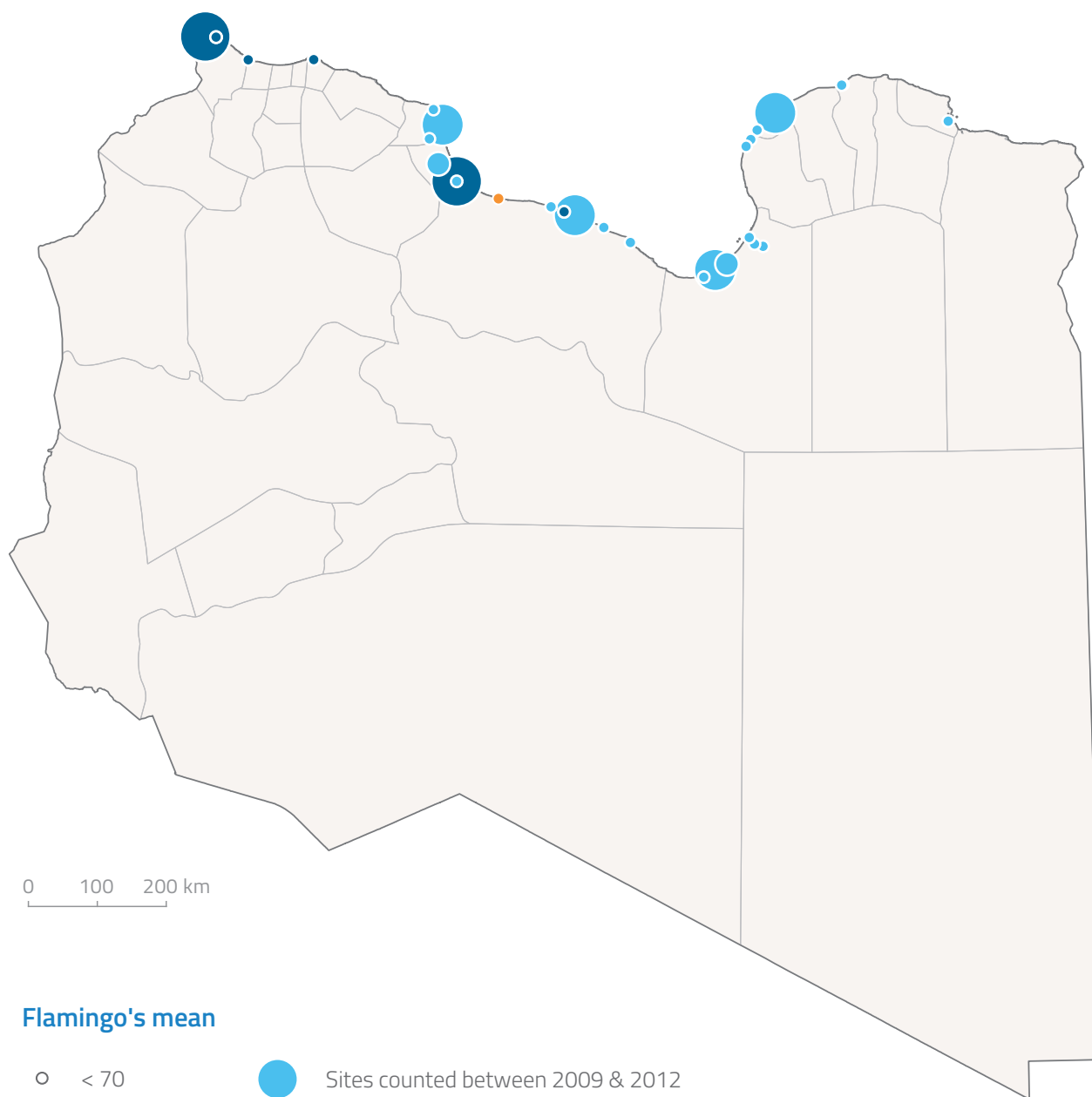
Young Flamingo's flight in Sirt
© M. Alrmeh



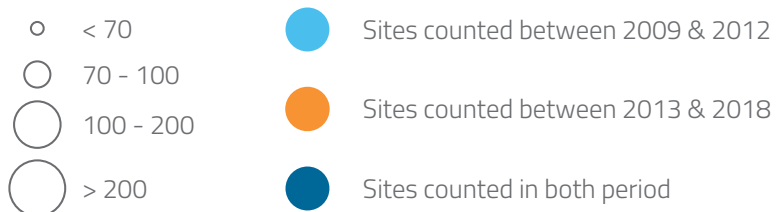
Flamingo group in Misrata
© A. A. Elsayeb - LOCN



FOCUS ON "KEY" SPECIES IN LIBYA GREATER FLAMINGO (*PHOENICOPTERUS ROSEUS*)



Flamingo's mean



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 Tour du Valat 2020
 sources: Libyan Society for
 Birds (LSB), Natural Earth

EVOLUTION OF THE FLAMINGO'S MEAN ABUNDANCE before/after 2012

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LIBIAN TERRITORY

IWC in Libya started successfully in 2005, where a large number of wetlands was covered, and the results of the waterbird census were showing positive. During the period from 2009 to 2018, the number of monitored sites reached its peak in 2010 with 94 sites covered, and the lowest point was in 2015, with only 6 sites covered.



The number of waterbirds counted ranged between 1930 birds in 2015, and 51,652 birds in 2010. The number of birds counted, and the number of sites on which the census was carried out, were affected by several overlapping factors. The most important factor was the compromised security situation of the country, and the wars that occurred during the period from 2011 to 2018.

This prevented the IWC team from being able to reach some important wetland bird sites. Also, the absence of the government, and the support which had previously been granted to the winter census via the Environment General Authority (EGA), had negative implications for the IWC.

Since the Libyan Society for Birds (LSB) has taken over the IWC program monitoring has been able to continue, albeit in a simplified form. After the establishment of the Med-Waterbird Network, the LSB has received financial and moral support which has helped the continuation of the IWC program in Libya, despite the ongoing difficult circumstances.

Waterbirds census
at Wadi Kaam dam
© K.Etayeb



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Waders species flight in Al-Washka salina - © M. Alrmeh



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