INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS REPORT

ITALY · 2009-2018

Mediterranean Waterbirds
Oiseaux d'eau Méditerranée
الطيور المائية بمنطقة البحر المتوسط

LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

This report could not have been realised without the enthusiastic contribution of Italian IWC (International Waterbird Census) counters, whose huge and continued efforts have allowed a complete annual survey of Italian wetlands to be achieved yearly since the early 1990s. Among the thousands of counters taking part in the project, the following people ("local coordinators") coordinated IWC counts in specific areas of the country, retrieved and checked the data forms, and regularly inputted the data into the national database:

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A WELL ESTABLISHED NETWORK OF COUNTERS

Italy has a total of 2,620 wetlands (count units) identified as important for the International Waterbird Census (IWC). Count units are grouped into 869 larger wetland systems according to the principle of "functional or ecological unit" (Ramsar Convention Bureau, 1990). Each functional site includes on average 3 count units (range: 1-72) which are simultaneously monitored. Population estimates are obtained through daytime and roost counts. Details on the identification of functional sites and on the calculation of species totals can be found in Zenatello et al. (2014) and in EGA–RAC/SPA Waterbird Census Team (2012). During 2009-2018, 695 sites (80% of their number) were monitored at least once. The annual coverage was 56-60%, with a slightly fluctuating trend (minima in 2014 and 2017).

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS:

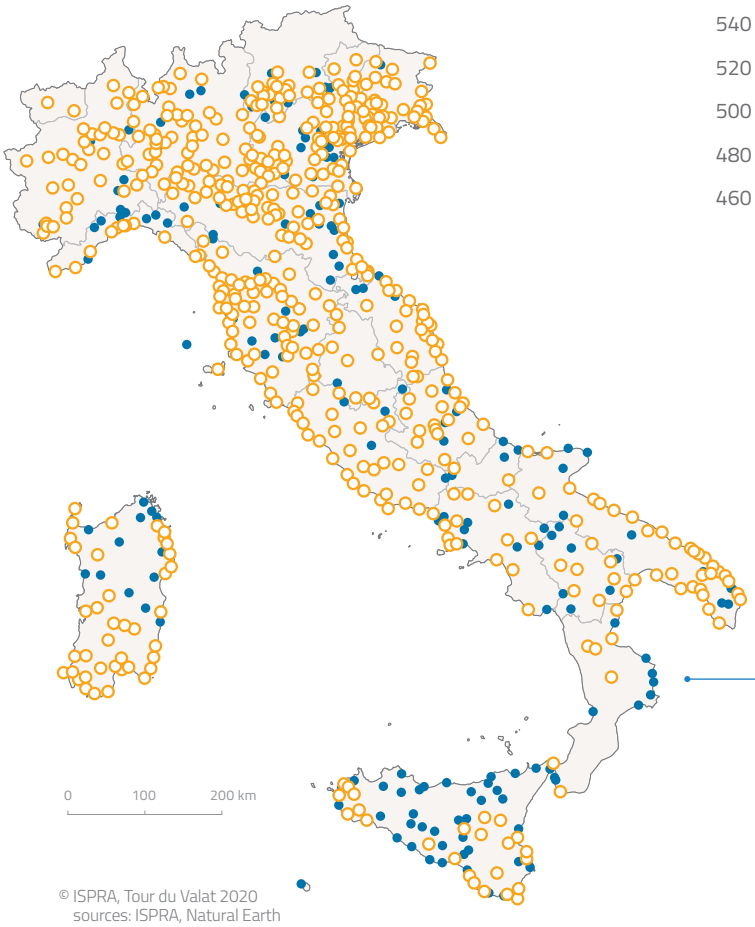
MORE THAN 2,500 PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED IN IWC COUNTS DURING 2009-2018

Among them, **554** were qualified observers, i.e. ornithologists or bird watchers who had passed a specific testing procedure (Baccetti et al. 2004).

NUMBER OF WETLANDS COUNTED:

695 WETLANDS COUNTED AT LEAST ONCE DURING 2009-2018

WETLANDS COUNTED
in Italy from 2009 to 2018



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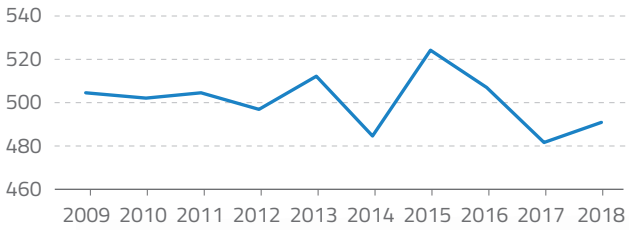
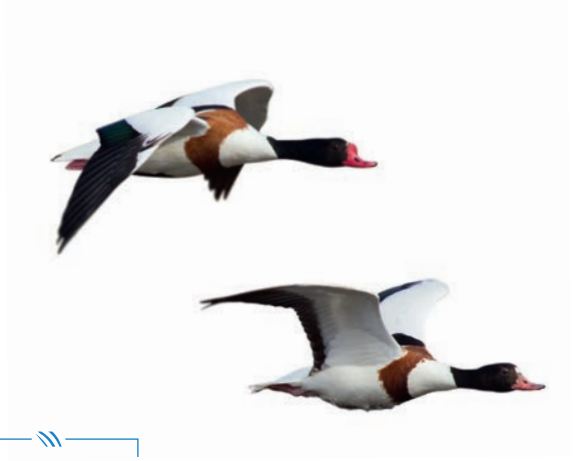
sources: ISPRA, Natural Earth

NUMBER OF FUNCTIONAL SITES
counted 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)*

SIZE AND TRENDS OF WATERBIRD POPULATIONS IN ITALY

In January 2018, almost 2 million waterbirds were counted in Italy (1,922,148 birds), belonging to 126 species. The trend of the 2009-2018 counts was slightly positive: a minimum of 1,609,132 birds was counted in 2010, and a maximum of 2,030,129 birds in 2017. The 2018 species totals and trends are summarised below. Six species have national totals higher than 100,000 individuals. Four of them, namely the Green-winged Teal, Common Coot, Black-headed Gull and Mallard exceed 200,000 birds.

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

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME	2018	N SITES 10 YEARS	TREND 10 YEARS
Anser fabalis rossicus	Bean Goose (rossicus)	4	13	**Steep** decline (p<0.01)
Anser indicus	Bar-headed Goose	3	14	Moderate decline (p<0.05)
Branta leucopsis	Barnacle Goose	9	20	Moderate decline (p<0.05)
Aix galericulata	Mandarin Duck	33	44	Moderate decline (p<0.05)
Bucephala clangula	Goldeneye	334	53	**Steep** decline (p<0.01)
Gavia arctica	Black-throated Diver	176	66	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Phalacrocorax aristotelis	Shag	162	43	**Steep** decline (p<0.01)
Botaurus stellaris	Eurasian Bittern	74	164	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Nycticorax nycticorax	Black-crowned Night-heron	418	70	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Egretta garzetta	Little Egret	5,380	437	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Egretta alba	Great White Egret	5,918	462	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Ardea cinerea	Grey Heron	10,471	614	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Tachybaptus ruficollis	Little Grebe	8,570	520	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Rallus aquaticus	Water Rail	702	328	Moderate decline (p<0.05)
Porphyrio porphyrio	Purple Swamphen	17	35	**Steep** decline (p<0.01)
Fulica atra	Common Coot	219,332	533	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Charadrius hiaticula	Ringed Plover	73	41	Moderate decline (p<0.05)
Charadrius alexandrinus	Kentish Plover	525	104	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Vanellus vanellus	Northern Lapwing	44,061	309	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Calidris minuta	Little Stint	476	61	**Steep** decline (p<0.01)
Limosa limosa	Black-tailed Godwit	7	23	**Steep** decline (p<0.01)
Limosa lapponica	Bar-tailed Godwit	44	22	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Numenius arquata	Eurasian Curlew	6,393	126	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Tringa totanus	Redshank	1,752	66	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Larus genei	Slender-billed Gull	522	56	Moderate decline (p<0.05)
Larus ridibundus	Black-headed Gull	210,806	450	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Larus melanocephalus	Mediterranean Gull	10,614	141	Moderate decline (p<0.01)
Larus argentatus	Herring Gull	27	60	Moderate decline (p<0.05)
Larus michahellis	Yellow-legged Gull	79,783	527	Moderate decline (p<0.01)

SPECIES CONSIDERED AS STABLE, ACCORDING TO CALCULATIONS MADE DURING THE PERIOD 2009-2018

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME	2018	N SITES 10 YEARS
Anas platyrhynchos f. domestica	Feral Ducks	3,915	260
Mergus serrator	Red-breasted Merganser	1,051	98
Phalacrocorax carbo	Great Cormorant	70,036	609
Circus cyaneus	Hen Harrier	279	239
Gallinago gallinago	Common Snipe	2,857	323
Tringa ochropus	Green Sandpiper	248	155
Larus canus	Common Gull	3,394	175

SPECIES ON THE RISE,
ACCORDING TO CALCULATIONS MADE DURING THE PERIOD 2009-2018

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME	2018	N SITES 10 YEARS	TREND 10 YEARS
Cygnus atratus	Black Swan	64	30	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Cygnus olor	Mute Swan	8,333	202	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Anser albifrons	White-fronted Goose	18,894	45	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Anser anser	Greylag Goose	24,918	115	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Anser anser f. domestica	domestic Goose	506	136	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Branta canadensis	Canada Goose	91	32	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Alopochen aegyptiacus	Egyptian Goose	100	50	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Tadorna tadorna	Shelduck	72,242	192	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Anas penelope	Wigeon	147,507	305	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Anas strepera	Gadwall	14,696	267	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Anas crecca	Green-winged Teal	331,933	442	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Anas platyrhynchos	Mallard	208,707	591	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Anas acuta	Northern Pintail	20,183	155	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Anas clypeata	Northern Shoveler	29,533	258	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Netta rufina	Red-crested Pochard	1,387	78	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Aythya ferina	Pochard	62,788	297	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Aythya nyroca	Ferruginous Duck	677	148	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Aythya fuligula	Tufted Duck	8,739	206	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Aythya marila	Greater Scaup	69	22	**Strong** increase (p<0.05)
Mergus merganser	Goosander	839	68	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Phalacrocorax pygmaeus	Pygmy Cormorant	13,138	98	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Bubulcus ibis	Cattle Egret	12,327	347	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Ciconia ciconia	White Stork	270	53	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Plegadis falcinellus	Glossy Ibis	150	29	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Threskiornis aethiopicus	Sacred Ibis	2 499	92	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Platalea leucorodia	White Spoonbill	1,046	77	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Phoenicopterus roseus	Greater Flamingo	42,118	93	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Podiceps cristatus	Great Crested Grebe	30,281	457	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Podiceps auritus	Slavonian Grebe	25	25	Moderate increase (p<0.05)
Podiceps nigricollis	Black-necked Grebe	17,869	228	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Circus aeruginosus	Marsh Harrier	868	239	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Gallinula chloropus	Moorhen	13,150	548	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Grus grus	Common Crane	6,294	96	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Haemantopus ostralegus	Eurasian Oystercatcher	597	16	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Recurvirostra avosetta	Avocet	8,171	52	Moderate increase (p<0.05)
Burhinus oedicnemus	Stone Curlew	150	28	**Strong** increase (p<0.05)
Pluvialis squatarola	Grey Plover	6,267	69	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Calidris alba	Sanderling	944	52	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Calidris alpina	Dunlin	114,440	109	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Actitis hypoleucos	Common Sandpiper	462	257	Moderate increase (p<0.01)
Tringa nebularia	Greenshank	734	100	Moderate increase (p<0.05)
Larus audouinii	Audouin's Gull	200	65	**Strong** increase (p<0.05)
Larus fuscus	Lesser Black-backed Gull	797	142	**Strong** increase (p<0.01)
Sterna sandvicensis	Sandwich Tern	1,759	154	Moderate increase (p<0.01)

2018 COUNTS AND 10 YEAR TRENDS (direction and magnitude) over the period 2009-2018 of the numbers of 80 regular wintering waterbird species recorded in Italy in mid-January

DUCKS, GULLS & TERNS, COOTS, RAILS & CRAKES ARE THE MOST ABUNDANT GROUPS

All waterbird species have been routinely monitored during IWC counts, including species of feral origin, escapees, and raptors which largely depend on wetlands. The community of Italian waterbirds is dominated by three groups (Ducks; Gulls & terns; Coots, Rails & crakes), which account for more than two-thirds of counted birds.

Flock of Geese and Shelducks, Lagoon of Venice

Duck numbers showed a 22% increase between 2009-13 and 2014-18, whereas the gulls and terns decreased by 6%, and the rails and crakes by 12%. The most striking changes at the species level within these groups throughout 2009-2018 are the threefold increase of Shelduck, the twofold increase of Teal, Pintail and Pochard, and the threefold decrease of Goldeneye.

Considering all groups together, Loons showed the most negative change (-27%). Cranes (+462%) and Storks, Ibises & spoonbills (+86%) had the largest increase. The increase of the latter group is entirely due to the boost of the non-native Sacred Ibis, whose numbers in 2018 reached 2499 individuals. Swans and Geese showed a 44% and 66% increase, with a twofold increase of Mute Swan and Greylag Goose, and a tenfold increase of White-fronted Goose throughout the decade.

GROUPS	MEAN 2009-2013	MEAN 2014-2018
Ducks	663,317	813,929
Gulls and Terns	364,311	342,554
Coots, rails and crakes	267,385	234,762
Waders	155,438	169,769
Cormorants	80,165	90,703
Grebes	44,785	50,578
Geese	24,999	41,441
Flamingos	36,320	40,428
Herons	35,666	38,309
Swans	5,156	7,412
Cranes	929	5,219
Sea ducks	3,008	3,024
Woodcocks and Snipes	2,749	2,799
Storks, ibises and spoonbills	1,314	2,438
Raptors	1,250	1,225
Loons	260	190
Pelicans	2	1

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

TWENTY SITES QUALIFY
ACCORDING TO RAMSAR CRITERIA

The large tidal areas of the N Adriatic sea, the major coastal wetlands of N Apulia (S Adriatic sea), S Tuscany (C Thyrrenian sea) and Sardinia, and some large inland freshwater lakes (Lago di Garda, Lago Trasimeno) host the highest numbers of wintering waterbirds. Large numbers are also counted in the E Po Plain, an area featured by small, disperse inland wetlands, partly originating from restoration processes of cultivated fields which were realised since the early 90s on.

SITES OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE	*Ramsar Site*	> 20,000 waterbirds	Mute Swan	White-fronted Goose	Lesser White-fronted Goose	Greylag Goose	Shelduck	Wigeon	Gadwall	Green-winged Teal	Mallard	Northern Pintail	Northern Shoveler	Pochard	Ferruginous Duck	Red-breasted Merganser	Goosander	Great Cormorant	Pygmy Cormorant	White Spoonbill	Greater Flamingo	Black-necked Grebe	Common Coot	Avocet	Grey Plover	Dunlin	Mediterranean Gull
Number of sites		14	1	3	2	7	3	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	7	1	1	3	1	2	3
LOMBARDIA																											
Lago Maggiore																	○										
Laghi Como, Garlate, Olginate																	○										
Lago di Garda		○																									
FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA																											
Grado - Marano e Panzano	Ⓡ	○	○	○	○	○		○	○							○									○	○	
VENETO																											
F. Brenta - tratto 1																	○										
Laguna di Caorle e Valli di Bibione		○		○	○	○																					
Laguna di Venezia	Ⓡ	○		○		○	○	○		○	○	○							○		○		○	○		○	○
Delta del Po	Ⓡ	○					○	○		○	○		○						○		○	○		○			
EMILIA ROMAGNA																											
Pialasse e valli ravennati	Ⓡ	○																									
Comacchio e Mezzano	Ⓡ	○				○															○						
Pianura bolognese - settore centrale						○																					
Pianura bolognese - settore est		○				○																					
UMBRIA																											
Trasimeno		○												○	○												
TOSCANA																											
Maremma Grossetana	Ⓡ	○				○																					
Orbetello e Burano	Ⓡ	○																			○						
PUGLIA																											
Bacini di Ugento																											○
Laghi di Lesina e Varano		○																									○
Manfredonia - Margherita di Savoia	Ⓡ	○					○	○													○			○			
SARDEGNA																											
Oristano e Sinis	Ⓡ	○																○			○						
Stagno di Cagliari	Ⓡ																			○	○						

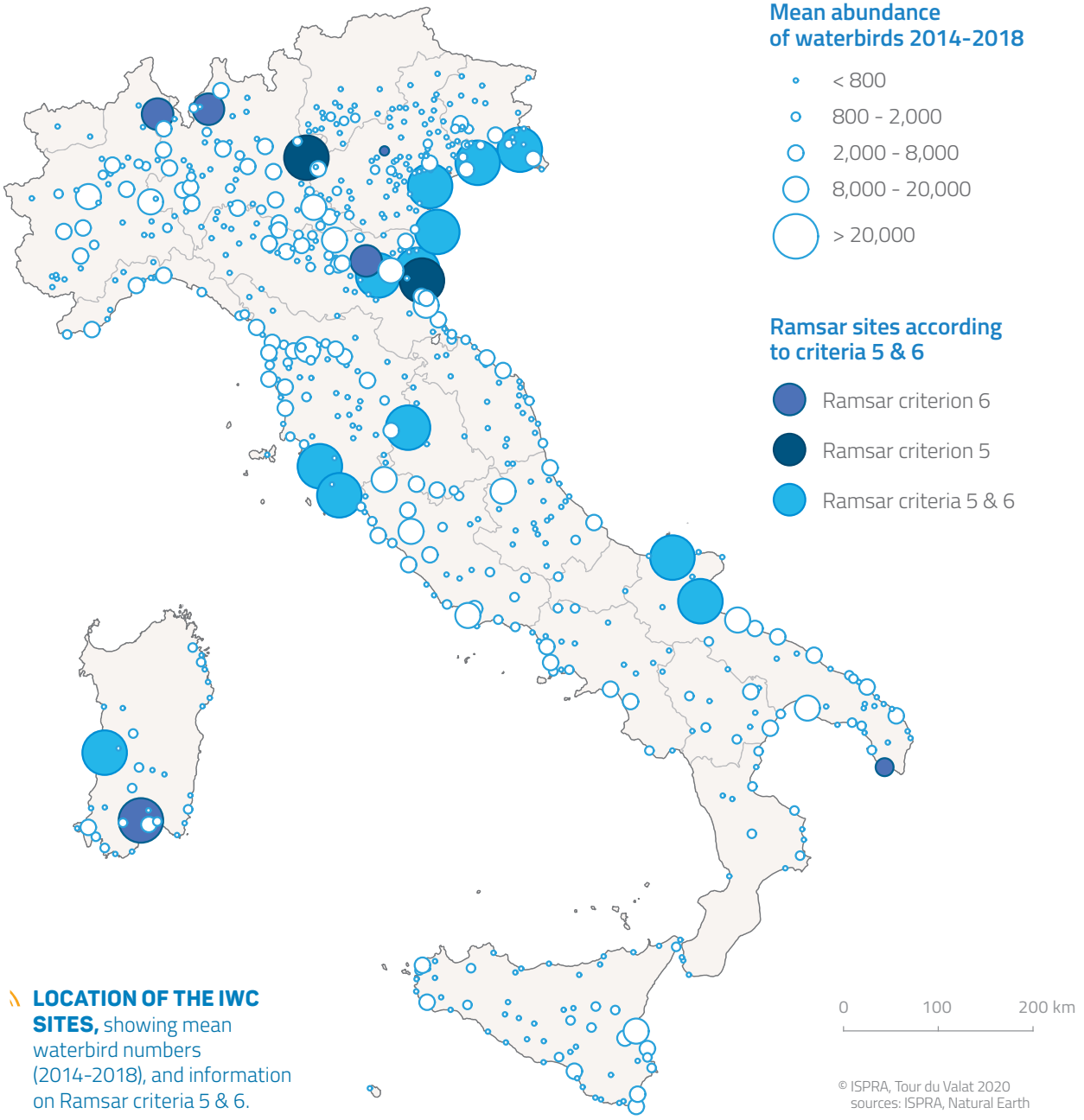
WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE FOR WATERBIRDS identification based on mid-January (2014-2018) count data for Ramsar Criteria 5 and 6*. Empty cells in the "Ramsar site" column identify sites not included in the Ramsar network; Ⓡ identifies wetlands with a partial Ramsar designation.

Criterion 5: A wetland can be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.
Criterion 6: A wetland can be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

TWENTY SITES QUALIFY
ACCORDING TO RAMSAR CRITERIA

Overall, 20 sites met the Ramsar criteria of international importance in the period 2014-2018. Fourteen sites qualified according to Ramsar criterion 5, and 18 according to Ramsar criterion 6 for one or more species. Internationally important sites include the largest lakes of N and C Italy and the major coastal wetlands of Sardinia and along the Adriatic and Thyrrenian coast of mainland Italy.

The three major wetland complexes of Northern Adriatic Sea (Grado-Marano-Panzano, Lagoon of Venice, Po delta) host the highest number of waterbirds and the highest number of internationally important waterbird populations. Among the 22 species with internationally important numbers, Greylag Goose and Greater Flamingo qualify the highest number of sites.



LOCATION OF THE IWC SITES, showing mean waterbird numbers (2014-2018), and information on Ramsar criteria 5 & 6.

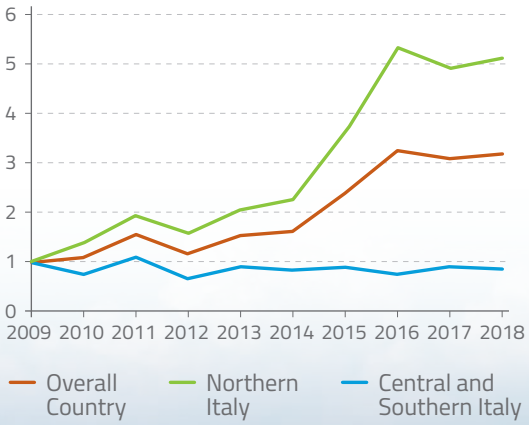
FOCUS ON "KEY" SPECIES IN THE COUNTRY
SHELDUCK *TADORNA TADORNA*

The Shelduck is a duck typical of coastal saline and hypersaline wetlands, with a current estimate of 440-500 breeding pairs. In the past, it was rather rare as a non-breeder in most of Italy, except in the S (Serra et al. 1997). Its winter population and range gradually increased after the turn of the 20th Century, and after 2007, the positive trend became steeper (Zenatello et al. 2014). Annual counts after 2015 exceed 70,000 birds, i.e. 10 times higher than in the early 1990s, and more than three times higher than in 2009.

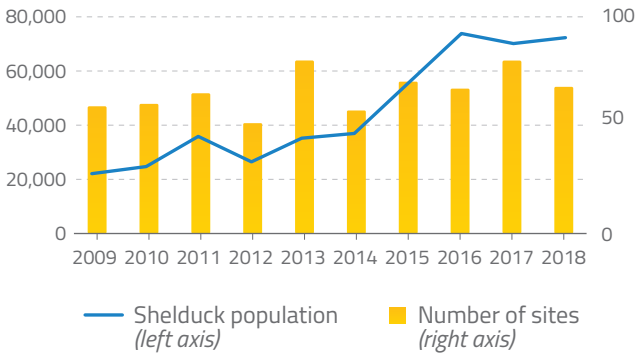
Sites of international importance in Italy in 2018 (threshold of 1% pop.): **3**

Birds wintering in Italy belong to the Black Sea – Mediterranean population, whose recent trend is classified as "strongly increasing" due to the trends in countries with the highest winter populations: positive in Algeria (e.g. Boulkhssaim et al. 2006), Italy and Tunisia, and fluctuating in Ukraine (Wetlands International 2017). 77% of the Italian winter population is concentrated on two large wetlands of the N Adriatic: the Po Delta and the Lagoon of Venice. The locally increasing stocks drive the overall national trend, which is stable elsewhere.

SHELDUCK POPULATION TRENDS
in Italy



EVOLUTION OF THE SHELDUCK POPULATION
in Italy, and number of occupied sites



The population wintering in Sicily, Sardinia and in continental Italy, S of the Po plain, is stable, whereas the N Italian population – which in the 1990s represented less than 10% of the wintering population (Serra et al. 1997) - shows a marked increase, which becomes even steeper after 2014. The causes of this trend are unknown, and could involve an increase of the Mediterranean-Black Sea population and/or a climate-driven shift of the population wintering in C Mediterranean towards more N-NE sites (e.g. Pavón-Jordán et al. 2020).

However, the positive trend featured in the same N Adriatic wetlands by several hunted and protected species belonging to different bio-geographic populations suggests that anthropogenic causes, such as habitat management and increasing artificial feeding to attract ducks on some hunting estates, could play a crucial role.

Waterbirds feeding on mudflats, Lagoon of Venice

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Dunlin roost, Lagoon of Venice

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IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING THE RAMSAR NETWORK

The International waterbird census (IWC) in Italy relies largely upon the work of volunteers and non-professional ornithologists, acting at a regional or sub-regional level. The Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) coordinates the counts at a national level, and hosts the national IWC database.

The regular and coordinated yearly coverage of most of the wetlands, since the early 1990s, allows the accurate calculation of population estimates and trends, the identification of wetlands of international and national importance, and the identification of key coastal areas for wintering seabirds within the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Data collected so far highlight the urgency of improving the existing list of Ramsar sites to include yet unprotected wetlands of International importance, as well as the need to achieve more comprehensive Ramsar coverage for many sites already included in the list (e.g. the entire Lagoon of Venice, Grado-Marano and Panzano bay, the Po delta, the Oristano gulf..., instead of just the small portions of these wetlands currently covered: Baccetti et al. 1995, Smart & Viñals 2004).

National trends of wintering populations strongly differ, in some cases, from trends at the flyway/population level (e.g. Pintail, Pochard), suggesting that, if not properly analysed within a 'flyway-wide' framework, even analyses at a national level may lead to misleading opinions on species status, as well as on the role of wetlands in the conservation of waterbird populations. Local increases of species with an unfavourable conservation status may be linked to habitat improvement or to changes of migration strategy and/or routes, but the possible existence of artificially managed sites acting as a sink for part of the flyway should always be taken into account.

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OFB — Office français de la biodiversité

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