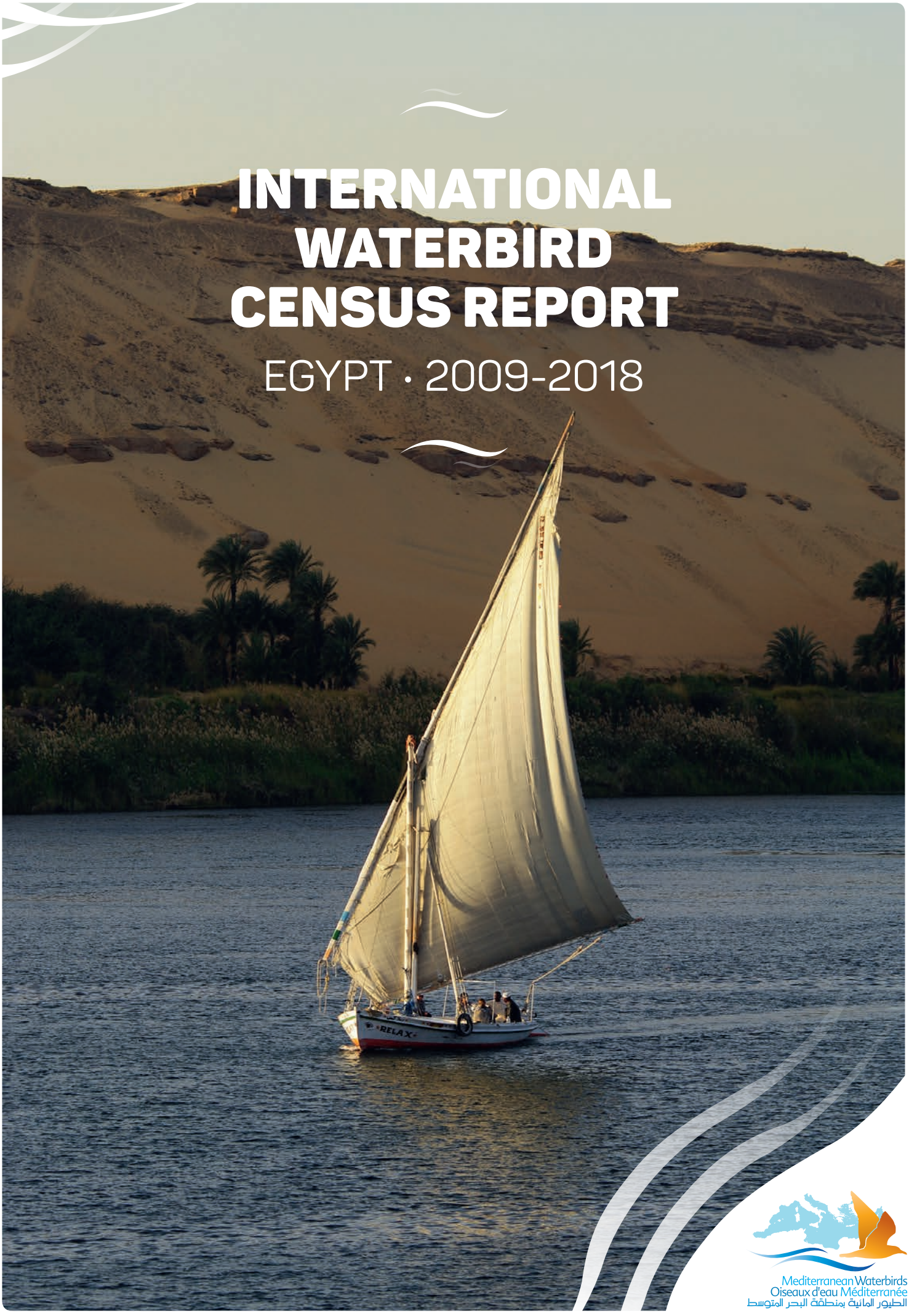
INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS REPORT

EGYPT · 2009-2018



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

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ORGANISATIONS:

- **EEAA:** Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency
- **OFB (ex-ONCFS):** French Office of Biodiversity
- **Tour du Valat**
- **RAC/SPA:** Regional Activity Centre for Special Protected Areas

INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS:

Abd el Halim El Sayed, Ahmed Ebaid, Ahmed Ibrahim, Amr Abd Elhady, Anne-Laure Brochet, Carol Fouque, Dik Hoek, Habib Dlensi, Haitham Ibrahim, Hellin de Wavrin, Hosni Helmy Asran, Jean-Yves Mondain-Monval, Khaled Noby, L. Ben Nakhla, Madg Sad, Maurice Benmergui, Mohamed Ezat, Mohamed Hammad Mohamed, Mohamed Zaki, Naoufel Hammouda, Osama El Gebaly, Pierre Defos du Rau, Wed Abdel Latif Ibrahim Abdou.

AUTHOR: Wed Abdou Latif Ibrahim

Cover image: M. Benmergi - **Page 2:** H. Azafzaf - **Proofreading:** Jeanette Freynet
Cartography: Marie Suet, Tour du Valat - **Graphic Design and Layout:** Atelier Guillaume Baldini

HUGE WETLANDS
BUT A WEAK NETWORK OF VOLUNTEERS

In Egypt there is a huge range of important wetland sites, including extensive seashores and coastal wetlands along the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea, coastal and inland lakes, the River Nile and the Delta Complex, as well as desert oases distributed along the whole of the region. These different types of wetlands represent a wide range of habitats for a huge diversity of waterbirds, to breed or overwinter, or to rest and feed before continuing their migration journey.

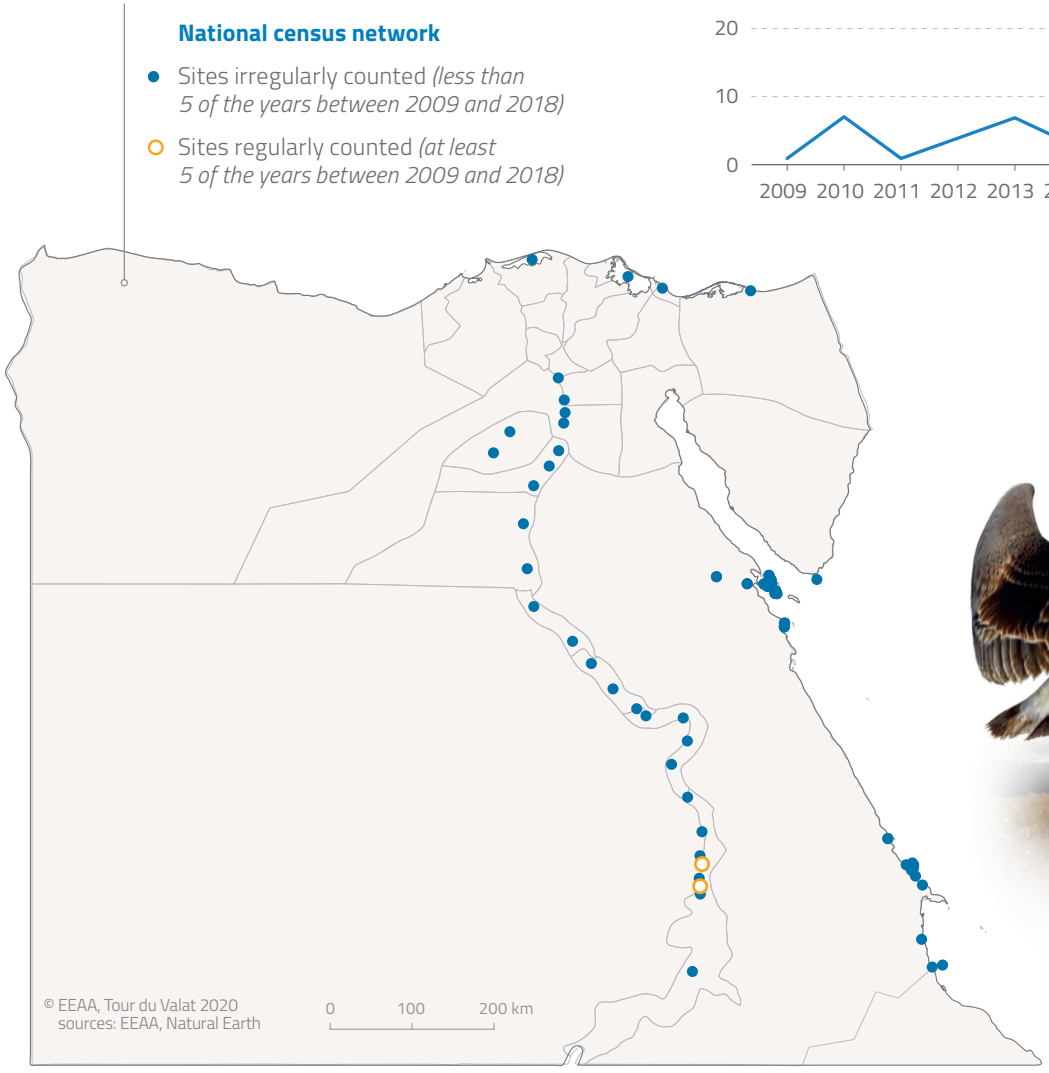
NUMBER OF WETLANDS COUNTED:

33
WETLANDS COUNTED AT LEAST ONCE
DURING 2009-2018

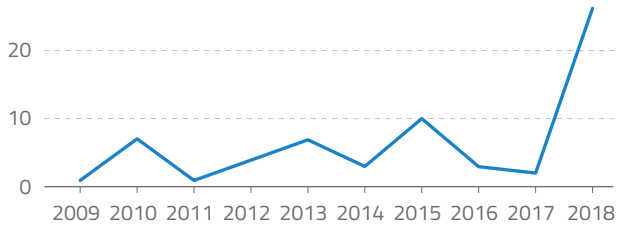
At the crossroad of several flyways of waterbird populations, Egypt's vast wetlands represent important milestone hotspots for migratory waterbirds. Hence, millions of waterbirds have been recorded either overwintering here, or passing through at some point during the migration seasons (autumn to winter).

Due to a lack of economic resources and a lack of counters, the censuses have not been regularly carried out, and it has been impossible to regularly monitor even the most important sites in the country. Therefore, the number of wetlands surveyed has been extremely variable from year to year. Where regular monitoring of wetlands has been carried out, different survey methods have been applied, by boat, from the river side and by plane.

WETLANDS COUNTED
in Egypt from 2009 to 2018



NUMBER OF MONITORED SITES
in Egypt from 2009 to 2018



Great White Pelican drying its wings
© M. Benmergi

103 SPECIES OF WATERBIRDS IN EGYPT

A total of 103 species of waterbird has been counted across the different wetlands in Egypt during the period 2009-2018, but only 77 during the winter 2018. This year, gulls, cormorants, coots, egrets and ducks were the most common waterbird species documented.

Among the ducks, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard and Common Teal were dominant across all of the counted wetlands, indicating that these species are relatively common each year when compared to other ducks and waterbird species. Due to missing data, the calculation of population trends for many of the waterbird species has not been possible.

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME	2018	MEAN 2009-2013	MEAN 2014-2018
Phalacrocorax carbo	Great Cormorant	24,339	4,345	13,453
Larus ridibundus	Black-headed Gull	29,364	3,993	6,265
Chlidonias hybrida	Whiskered Tern	23,662	1,319	5,026
Larus genei	Slender-billed Gull	15,896	10,486	3,868
Fulica atra	Common Coot	13,051	1,838	3,338
Mareca penelope	Eurasian Wigeon	7,551	973	3,273
Egretta garzetta	Little Egret	12,152	1,070	3,153
Spatula clypeata	Northern Shoveler	9,958	3,568	3,013
Plegadis falcinellus	Glossy Ibis	7,109	316	2,165
Calidris minuta	Little Stint	6,501	971	2,060
Bubulcus ibis	Cattle Egret	7,302	1,045	1,950
Anas platyrhynchos	Mallard	6,006	80	1,937
Ardea cinerea	Grey Heron	5,177	433	1,751
Anas crecca	Common Teal	5,016	505	1,635
Ardeola ralloides	Squacco Heron	5,876	843	1,492
Aythya fuligula	Tufted Duck	3,085	1,627	1,162
Aythya nyroca	Ferruginous Duck	2,973	201	1,144
Vanellus spinosus	Spur-winged Lapwing	2,495	418	1,050
Gallinula chloropus	Common Moorhen	2,367	936	1,040

LIST OF THE MOST COUNTED SPECIES (WITH MORE THAN 1,000 BIRDS)
in Egypt in 2018, and on average for the two periods 2009-2013 and 2014-2018

GULLS, LARUS, STERNS, CORMORANTS, DUCKS: THE MOST REPRESENTED GROUPS

Due to the irregular nature of the counts, and unequal coverage of the wetlands, the total number of waterbirds counted was extremely fluctuant. Hence, between 2009 and 2018, more than 600,000 waterbirds, belonging to 103 species, were documented as having spent the winter season across the different Egyptian wetlands surveyed. The average number of waterbirds varies between more than 50,000 and nearly 70,000 individuals, during the periods 2009-2013 and 2014-2018 respectively.

Little Egret, feeding in fishfarm in the Qaroun Protected area - © M. Benmergi

The most common waterbird species were Gulls, Larus and Stern, along with Cormorants and Ducks. Gulls and Sterns were represented by 23 species, followed by Ducks which were represented by 12 species, counted across different wetlands simultaneously. 12 species of heron were counted, while Pelicans, Cranes and Flamingos represented the smallest populations with only 2 species counted. See next table.

GROUPS	MEAN 2009-2013	MEAN 2014-2018
Gull, larus and stern	20,246	19,922
Phalacrocorax	4,345	13,453
Ducks	8,118	13,314
Heron	3,713	9,110
Wader	4,694	8,170
Rails	3,045	4,927
Stork, ibise and plata	6,413	2,345
Goose	195	763
Grebe	1,256	207
Galin	117	161
Pelec	82	145
Phoen	548	101
Crane	2	0
TOTAL WATERBIRDS	**52,775**	**72,617**

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

Counters during International waterbird census in Manzala lake © M. Benmergi

WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE MEAN 2014-2018

Egypt currently has 4 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), with a surface area of 415,532 hectares.

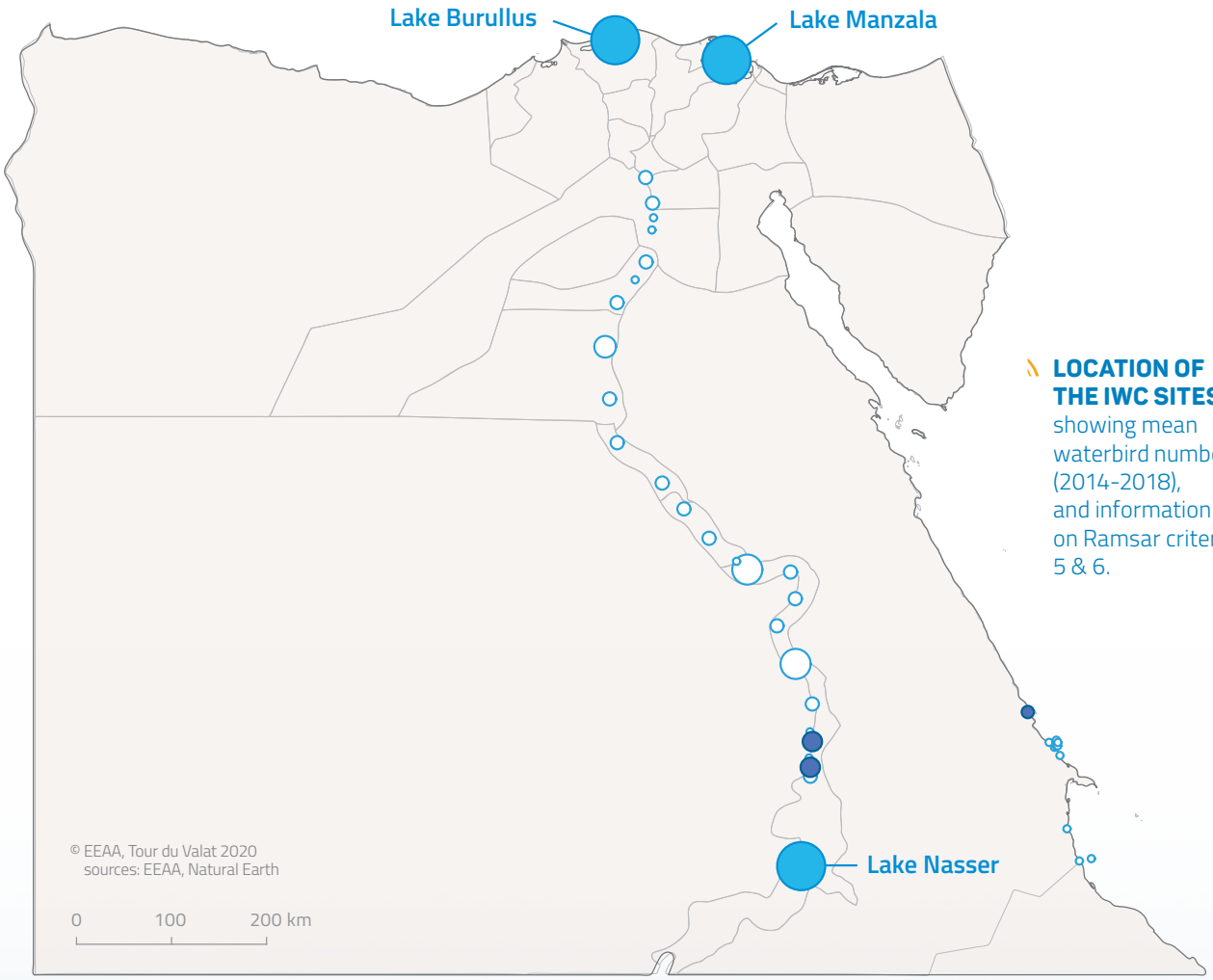
Shorebirds in Qaroun Lake - © M. Benmergi

Based on the mean 2014-2018, three sites fulfilled both RAMSAR criteria 5 and 6: Lake Burullus (which is already a designated RAMSAR site), Lake Manzala and Lake Nasser. Three other sites are important areas for at least one waterbird species (criterion 6). The three other RAMSAR sites existing in Egypt were not surveyed during the period 2014-2018, preventing the qualification of their importance for this period in the following table.

SITES OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE	*Ramsar Site*	> 20,000 waterbirds	Armenian Gull	Glossy Ibis	Great Cormoran	Little Egret	Slender-billed Gull	Sooty Gull	Squacco Heron	Whiskered Tern
Number of sites		1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
WILAYA AL BAHR AL AHMAR										
Wadi El-Gemal								o		
WILAYA ASWAN										
Lake Nasser		o			o					
Nile: Aswan First Cataract to Kom Ombo				o						
WILAYA AD DAQAHLIYAH										
Lake Manzala		o	o			o	o			o
WILAYA KAFR ASH SHAYKH										
Lake Burullus	Ⓡ	o				o			o	

WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE FOR WATERBIRDS identified 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; "R" 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.



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

Cormorants and Pelicans in Nasser Lake
© M. Benmergi

FOCUS ON "KEY" SPECIES IN THE COUNTRY
THE FERRUGINOUS DUCK, *AYTHYA NYROCA*

Egyptian wetlands play an essential role in the conservation of a number of waterbird species, particularly those for which their annual cycle relies on specific types of wetlands, such as breeding seabirds. For example, the White-eyed Gull and Lesser Crested Terns are endemic species to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and they represent the group of species which breeds on the Red Sea Islands.

Another species, the Ferruginous Duck, was more frequent and distributed across different wetlands in Egypt. The number of Ferruginous Ducks is generally on the rise across the region, especially in the southern part of the Nile River.

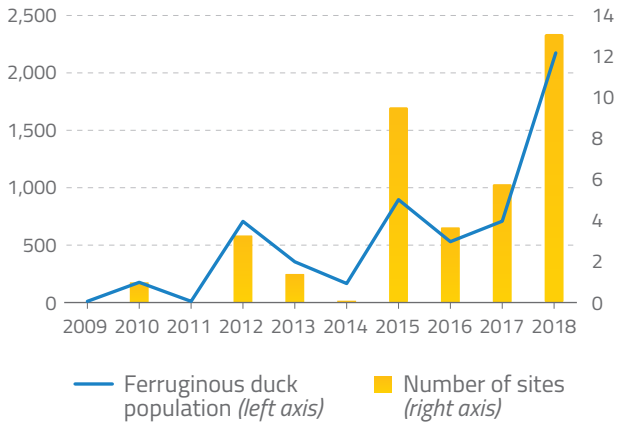
The Nile segment, between the Aswan reserve and Aswan First Cataract, reaches the threshold for the 6th Ramsar criterion, and recently, the species has established and started to breed in the Aswan reserve.

ABUNDANCE OF FERRUGINOUS DUCKS, *AYTHYA NYROCA* during the period 2009-2018

Similarly, despite excessive pressures on its main breeding habitat due to anthropogenic impacts, especially on Qaroun Lake, the Slender-billed Gull has seen globally significant breeding colonies on the country's Fayoum and Manzalla lakes.

Ferrouginous Duck - © M. Thibault

EVOLUTION IN THE NUMBER OF COUNTED FERRUGINOUS DUCK



Burullus Lake
© N. Hamouda

NEED FOR STRONG COLLABORATION

The average numbers of waterbirds counted in the Egyptian wetlands were greatly variable. Northern lakes, in the northern part of River Nile and the Fayoum lakes, attract more wintering waterbird populations than other stretches along the River Nile, as the number of counted waterbirds decreased in the southern Egyptian wetlands. The lowest average number of wintering waterbird populations was documented in the southern part of the River Nile (except for Nasser Lake) and in the southern part of the Red Sea.

Since the 1970s, major efforts, with the valuable support of various partners, have been made to count waterfowl across the vast Egyptian wetlands. The main goal was to assess the significance of Egyptian wetlands as wintering habitat for waterfowl species of regional and international conservation concern. The objectives were to identify key sites and wintering hotspots, and to understand the scope and magnitude of risks that may threaten these waterbirds species during their annual life cycle, especially during seasonal migration across Africa and Eurasia. The country possesses huge areas of wetlands compared to other North African countries (e.g. Nasser Lake and the Nile river); therefore there is no doubt of its significant role in the conservation of these vulnerable waterbird species.

Monitoring these wetlands will surely add essential value to the conservation efforts of these threatened species on a global scale. In 2009, it was possible to count only one of Egypt's sites, however, since 2010 the number of monitored sites has steadily increased due to successful cooperation with the OFB (ex-ONCFS), thanks to whom annual funding and resources were secured up until 2015.

Thanks to this collaboration, the number of counted sites increased from 7 major sites in 2010, to 10 major sites in 2015. Meanwhile, the MedWaterbirds network was initiated in 2012, and since then, continuous technical and financial support and resources have been made available for Egypt to ensure the annual implementation of the IWC program.

International waterbird censuses are an effective tool for assessing the status of waterbird populations, to identify the country's hotspots for wintering waterbirds, and to guide future conservation plans for significant habitat and species. This is why it is crucial to push for systematic and representative wintering waterbird census in all countries. Based on the wintering counts, Fayoum Lakes (Qaraun and Wadi El Rayan) were named as Ramsar sites in 2012.

On the Manzala and Burullus lakes, the waterbird abundance evolution over the years shows the significant impact of human activities on the number of wintering waterbirds in these areas. Similarly, the expansion of agricultural activity around Fayoum Lake resulted in the dramatic reduction of the lake's surface area; therefore the number of waterbirds has dropped dramatically over the past years due to habitat loss.

It is highly recommended to collaborate with all concerned parties and different monitoring agents to establish a strategy to ensure the future systematic and comprehensive surveying of Egypt's important and sensitive wetland sites which provide essential habitat and wintering hotspots for many species of waterbird.

Waterbirds shore of Nasser Lake

\ COUNTRY CONTACT AND NATIONAL COORDINATOR:

Ministry of Environment Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA)
Ibrahim Wed Abdou Latif
30 Misr Helwan El-Zyrae Road, Maadi, Cairo - Egypt
✉ wed_abdou@yahoo.com

Arab Republic of Egypt
Ministry of Environment
Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency

Breeding colony of Lesser Crested Tern on Red Sea Islands - © H. Azafzaf

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

Mediterranean coordination:

Tour du Valat — Research institute for the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands

OFB — Office français de la biodiversité

With the financial support of:

Ministère de la Transition écologique — Liberté Égalité Fraternité

TOTAL FOUNDATION

FFEM — Fonds français pour l'environnement mondial

AFD — Agence française de développement

Technical partners:

AEWA

Wetlands International