

Breeding seabirds along the coast of Libya in July 1993

Broedende zeevogels langs de kust van Libië in juli 1993

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Introduction

From 17 to 30 July 1993, a field trip covering the larger part of the Libyan coast (figure 1), was made by two Libyan zoologists (Dau A. Hadoud and Mohamed F.A. Essghaier) and the authors. This was a joint project of the Foundation Working Group International Waterfowl and Wetland Research (WIWO) and the Marine Biology Research Centre, Tajura, Libya. The main aim was to rediscover the breeding site(s) of Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*. The whole Mediterranean population of this species is believed to be breeding in Libya, but the one and only estimate of the number of breeding birds (2000 birds, Gulf of Surt) was made as long ago as 1937 (Moltoni 1938). Details on the two breeding colonies of Lesser Crested Tern found in 1993 have been published by Meininger *et al.* (1994a). A general account of the expedition and a complete list of bird observations is given earlier (Meininger *et al.* 1994b). This paper presents information on breeding seabirds collected on this trip. Generally, these are additions to Bundy (1976).

Methods

Notes were taken systematically of all birds observed during the trip. Most islands off the Libyan coast as well as several wetland areas and stretches of beach were visited. The most important localities are shown in figure 1. Unless stated otherwise all dates refer to 1993.

Results

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* On 21 July, 11 birds (2 adults, 9 juveniles) were swimming and fishing in Ayn al Ghazalah Bay, and a flock of 15 (7

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* There were no known breeding records of Yellow-legged Gull from Libya (Bundy 1976, Cramp & Simmons 1983). In 1993 four breeding localities were found in eastern Libya. On 25 June about ten breeding pairs of Yellow-legged Gull were present on Geziret al Elba. Three chicks were found, varying in age between one and two weeks (DAH & MFAE). On 21 July no signs of breeding Yellow-legged Gulls were found anymore. On Geziret Garah we found 30 recently used nests and five dead, not yet fully fledged chicks of Yellow-legged Gull on 27 July. In spring 1993, five large chicks were taken by children from a small island at Marsa Lek. On 21-23 July a flock of c. 200 birds (95% adults) was seen at a rubbish tip near Al Chadrun. These may well have been mainly breeding birds from nearby Geziret Bardaa, where according to local fishermen 'many birds breed'.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Three adults and a well-flying juvenile were seen at Wadi Tawurgha on 28 July. Since Gull-billed Terns are known to migrate in family groups, these birds could have been early migrants. Although this species is not known to breed in Libya, breeding at this wadi seems possible.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* Two breeding colonies were located: 40 pairs on Geziret al Elba (25 chicks ringed) and 1700 at Geziret Garah (nearly all nests with eggs, one chick ringed). Details on habitat choice, clutch size, food, behaviour and threats have been presented earlier (Meininger *et al.* 1994a). These two Libyan colonies are the only known regular breeding sites of Lesser Crested Tern in the Mediterranean. The presence of a colony on Geziret al Elba means an eastward extension of the known breeding range of this species in Libya by c. 500 km. There appear to be no serious threats to the two colonies found. The population seems vulnerable, however, since it is small and confined to just a few traditional breeding sites. It is impossible to say if there has been a change in numbers compared to the situation in 1937.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* Adults feeding fledged young were seen in Tripoli on 18 July. Approximately 25 pairs, most with fledged young were found on Geziret al Elba on 21 July. These birds were daily foraging on fry in Ayn al Ghazalah Bay between 21 and 24 July. A concentration of over 300 birds, which - based on their alarm calls, behaviour and the presence of suitable habitat - appeared to be local breeders, was found at Ayn Zayanah

on 25 July. Among these were only three recently fledged juveniles, indicating a low breeding success. According to Bundy (1976), Little Terns breed sparingly in western Libya, in small numbers near Benghazi and probably near Zuwaytinah.

There are only few potential breeding sites for colonial seabirds along the coast of Libya. Along the mainland, there are several coastal lagoons and many extensive saltmarshes. The presence, however, of large numbers of Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, Golden Jackals *Canis aureus* and feral dogs makes the establishment of seabird colonies unlikely. The level of predation is illustrated by the fact that nearly all nests of Loggerhead Turtles *Caretta caretta* found along sandy beaches near lagoons of saltmarshes had been destroyed by predators. Except for small and scattered colonies of Little Terns *Sterna albifrons*, we did not find any breeding colonial waterbirds on the mainland. Most of the few islands shown on maps are just wave-washed rocks and therefore unsuitable for breeding terns. The few potentially suitable islands are all in eastern Libya.

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Samenvatting

In juli 1993 bezocht een Nederlands/Libisch team de Libische kust. Naast de vaststelling van broedende Bengaalse Sterns op twee plaatsen (Meininger et al. 1994a) werden ook gegevens verzameld over het (schaarse!) voorkomen van andere zeevogels. De Kuifzalscholver en de Geelpootmeeuw werden voor het eerst broedend vastgesteld. Daarnaast werd alleen het voorkomen van kleine aantallen broedende Dwergsterns geconstateerd. Van Lachsterns kon broeden niet worden aangetoond.

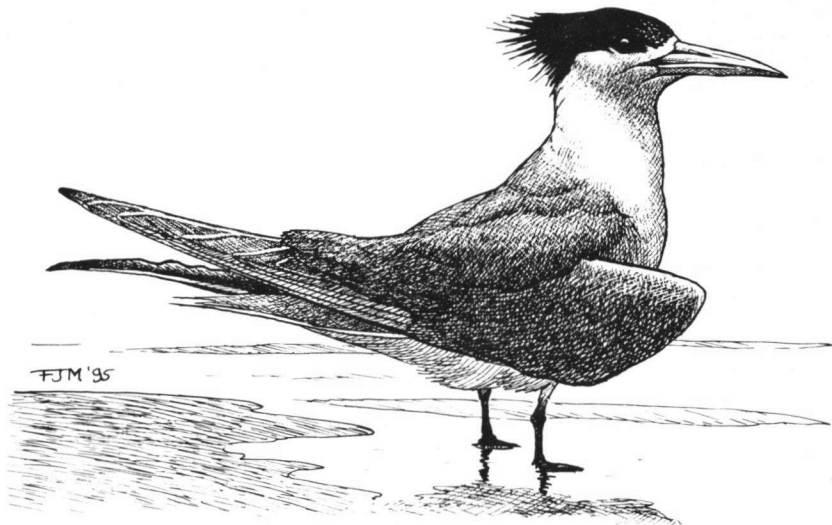
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Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* Bengaalse Stern (F.J. Maas)

Appendix 1. Gazetteer of Libyan localities mentioned

This gazetteer contains the localities mentioned in the text and their coordinates. Alternative place names on other maps and in the literature are mentioned (between brackets), though not always cross referenced. In an attempt to standardize the spelling of Libyan locality names, we generally have used those mentioned on the map 'Libya 1: 2 000 000', Kartografiai Vallalat, Budapest, Hungary (1989, ISBN 963 351 498 3 CM). For those localities not mentioned on this map we have adopted parallel spellings.

Al Chadrun	32°15'N 23°08'E
Apollonia see Susah	
Ayn al Ghazalah	32°12'N 22°20'E
Ayn al Ghazalah Bay [... Lagoon, ... Cove]	32°13'N 22°20'E
Ayn Zayanah	32°06'N 20°05'E
Bumbah [Bomba]	32°18'N 23°09'E
Darnah [Darnis, Derna]	32°41'N 22°40'E
Geziret Bardaa	32°17'N 23°09'E
Geziret al Elba [G. Maracheb, G. Ayn al Ghazalah]	32°13'N 23°18'E
Geziret Garah [= G. Legarah, = G. Zuwaytinah]	30°47'N 19°54'E
Marsa Lek	32°00'N 24°59'E
Sawani al Mallahah	31°53'N 25°03'E
Susah [Apollonia]	32°58'N 21°58'E
Tajura [Taguira]	32°56'N 13°20'E
Tubruq [Tobruk]	32°07'N 23°58'E
Tripoli [Tarabulus]	32°56'N 13°17'E
Wadi Tawurgha [Tawarga]	32°01'N 15°30'E
Zuwaytinah [Zuwatina, Zuweitina]	30°54'N 20°12'E
