New breeding sites of the Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons)* and the Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrines)* in Cyrenaica, Libya

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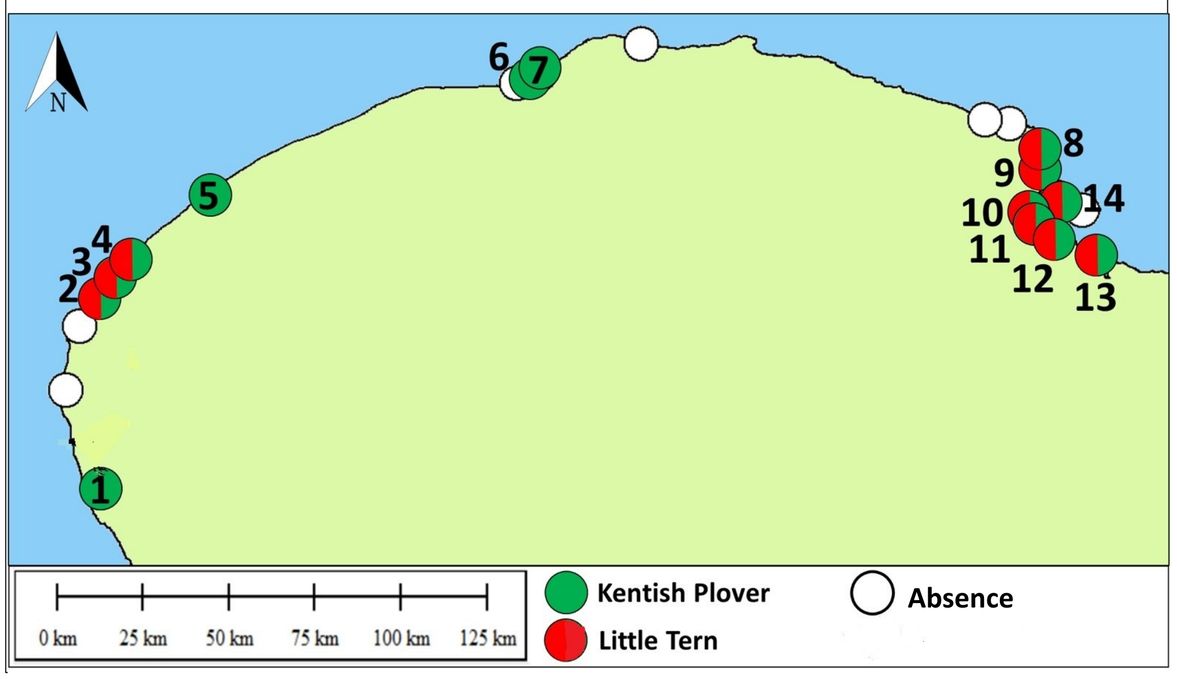
Abstract - A total of 23 coastal wetlands and islets of Cirenaica, Libya, were irregularly visited during the last 4 years in the breeding season. Kentish Plovers were present in 14 of them, Little Terns in 10, while 10 sites hosted both species and 9 none of them. Maximum number of pairs per site was 20 for Kentish Plover at Gsibaia and 16 for Little Tern at Ain Al Wahsh in Bumbah Gulf. Breeding of either species was previously unknown in 19 sites overall, according to the main reference text.

INTRODUCTION

- The main reference text "**Birds of Libya**" (Isenmann *et al.* 2016, Paris, 302 pp) has recently provided a detailed overview of the status of birds in this country, also including **distribution maps** of most breeding waterbirds and seabirds.
- Nevertheless, the coverage of many suitable breeding areas remains incomplete, especially for widespread species that breed along the **1850 kms of coastline**.
- The purpose of this work is **to fill some gaps** along the eastern coast of Cyrenaica (approx. 970 km) as a social output by the Nature Wildlife Resources Environment Society (NWRES) and to start focusing on conservation actions.
- We estimated the nesting populations of two species, the **Little Tern** (*Sternula albifrons)* and **Kentish Plover** (*Charadrius alexandrines)* and noted the impact of existing threats to the breeding sites, such as hunting and disturbance.

METHODS

All sites shown on the map were irregularly visited during the breeding seasons of the last 4 years (2020-2023, April to July) in Cyrenaica, Libya, covering the sector from Karkura saltpans to Ain al Ghazala. For the census of the **Kentish Plover**, direct count method was used to scan (with binoculars) beaches and suitable sebkhas, and counting adult pairs and/or adults with chicks or incubated nests. For the **Little Tern** we first located and observed the colony from distance and then approached it to count nests and chicks quickly to avoid exposure and disturbance.



Juvenile Kentish Plover at Sabkhat Ayn az Zarqa on 26.07.2023

No.	Occupied sites	Max no. pairs Kentish Plover	Max no. pairs Little Tern
1 *	Sabkhat Karkurah	5	-
2	Sabkhat Julyanah	9	11
3 *	Al Thama	3	9
4	Ain Zayyanah	9	7
5 *	Sabkhat Al Kuz	11	-
6 *	Sabkhat Ayn az Zarqa	19	-
7 *	Sabkhat Ayn ash Shaqiqah	11	-
8 *	Umm Hufayn	12	14
9 *	Umm al Jarami	9	3
10 *	Atamimi	15	6
11 *	Wadi Gsibaia	20	6
12 *	Ain Al Wahsh	12	16
13	Elba islet	7	15
14 *	Fatha islet	3	3

RESULTS

Nine out of 23 wetlands hosted none of the two target species (not numbered on Map, empty circles). Occupied sites (colored on Map) were 14 for Kentish Plover (Green circles) and 10 for Little Tern (Red), these 10 sites hosted both species (Red circles). Maximum number of pairs per site was 20 for Kentish Plover at Gsibaia and 16 for Little Tern at Ain Al Wahsh in Bumbah Gulf. Breeding of either species was previously unknown in 19 cases overall, indicated by the symbol * in the Table. The sums are 145 pairs of Kentish Plover and 90 of Little Tern, that are suitable for a future increase in consequence of steadily improving site coverage. Main threats observed were human disturbance at sites nos. 2, 3, 6,11; habitat transformation at site nos. 2,8,12,and predation by gulls at site 14.

Little Terns at Wadi Gsibaia on 10.06.2021

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