COMPOSITION AND DISTRIBUTION OF PELAGIC AND COASTAL BIRD POPULATIONS IN TUNISIA

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INTRODUCTION

As sensitive indicators of environmental changes, seabird populations can offer unique insights into ecosystem status and change. Therefore, investigating seabirds contributes to our understanding of their ecological processes, facilitating management efforts for marine ecosystems (Piatt, J *et al.*,2007).
As part of the Torda initiative, an exhaustive survey of avian fauna in the sea and along the coast revealed important information on the population of marine and coastal birds in Tunisia.

METHODOLOGY

The bird census were conducted in late December from Malloula in the Northwest to the extreme Southeast of the country (Figure 2).
Sea survey was carried out aboard 4 boats led by 7 teams, while on land along the coast, 5 teams conducted the survey. The fieldwork involved recording the date of each observation, the observed species, the number of individuals and the geographical coordinates of the observation location.

Figure1: Map of the sampling area

RESULTS

- The survey revealed a total of 178,980 seabirds distributed over 73 species, the majority of which were coastal birds (42%), Shorebirds (38%) and pelagic birds (9%) (Figure2).

Pelagic birds

- A total of 17380 birds for 7 species of pelagic birds (Northern Gannet, Scopoli Shearwater, Yelkouan Shearwater, Great Skua, Parasitic Jaeger, Great Cormorant and Great Crested Cormorant) belonging to 5 families were observed. Cormorants and Yelkouan Shearwaters are the dominant species, representing 78% and 21% of counted birds.

Coastal birds

- A total of 78,557 birds for 12 seabird species belonging to the Larid family were observed during this census. The majority of the population is White-legged Gull, followed by Slender-billed Gull and Black-headed Gulls.
- We note that the zone (6) is the most important for the winterers of the various families (larids, phalacrocoracides, shorebirds, etc.). There is also the area (3), including the Hammamet Golf area, which is very important for wintering and supplying Yelkouan shearwaters where about 3625 individuals have been observed fishing and resting in these sites (Figure3).

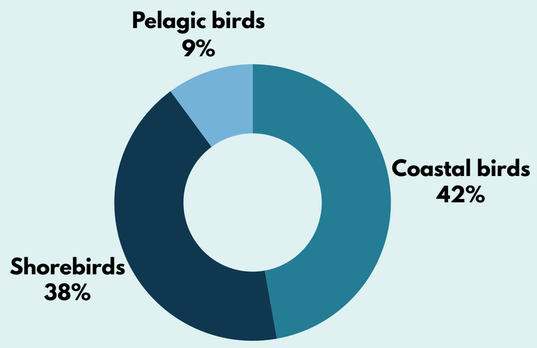


Figure 2: composition of the seabird population

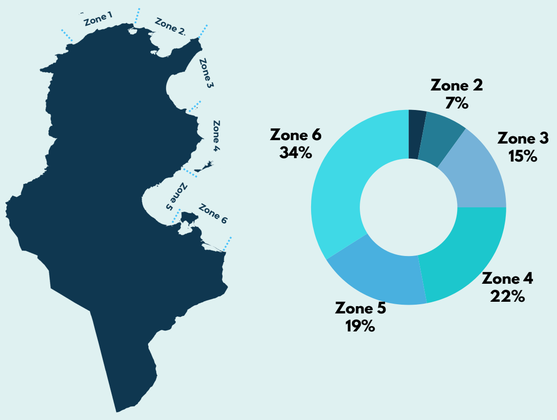
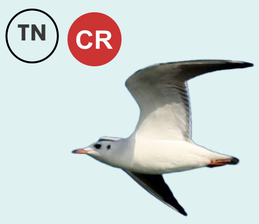


Figure 3: percentage of seabirds in the sampling areas

Yellow-legged Gull
Larus michahellis
34880

Slender-billed Gull
Chroicocephalus genei
26154



Black-headed Gull
Chroicocephalus ridibundus
14048

Great Cormorant
Phalacrocorax carbo
13059

Yelkouan Shearwater
Puffinus yelkouan
3625

Sandwich Tern
Thalasseus sandvicensis
938

Audouin's Gull
Ichthyaetus audouinii
671

CONCLUSION

The initiative has allowed to:

- Gather a vast amount of crucial data on marine birds ;
- Enumerate species of high conservation interest ;
- Locate important sites for marine birds.

REFERENCES

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- Piatt, J. F., Sydeman, W. J., Sydeman, W. J., Piatt, J. F., & Browman, H. I. (2007). Seabirds as indicators of marine ecosystems. MARINE ECOLOGY-PROGRESS SERIES-, 352, 199