The East Atlantic Flyway is a network of sites used by millions of birds migrating between their breeding grounds in the Arctic and their wintering grounds in Europe. More than 12 million water birds stop along this flyway annually on their way to and from Africa and Europe.

The East Atlantic Flyway

Key sites for migratory shorebirds:

> 1 million birds
> 500,000 birds
> 100,000 birds

World Heritage Site

Photography: RED KNOT Jan van de Kam/Buiten-Beeld, EURASIAN SPOONBILL Marc Guyt/Agami, LESSER FLAMINGO Dirk-Jan van Unen/Buiten-Beeld, PARTICIPANT IN BIRD MONITORING Barend van Gemerden

Birds without borders

Marathon Migrants

Since time immemorial, migratory birds have braved mountains, seas, deserts and storms on their journeys between Europe and Africa. Reliant only on wing power, millions of birds navigate breeding grounds in Europe to wintering grounds in Africa, up to 10,000 kilometres, twice a year!
Migratory shorebirds

During their migration shorebirds are especially vulnerable as they need to stop for food and rest between their long flights. Missing links in the chains of stopover sites can affect the survival of the whole population.

Roughly one third of the populations of European and African shorebirds are declining. Among them long-range migrants such as Red Knot, and intra-African migrants such as Lesser Flamingos.

Key sites in Africa

Some 2.5 million shorebirds spend northern winter at the Banc d’Arguin in Mauritania, and more pass through on their journeys further south. In the Bijagós Archipelago in Guinea-Bissau some 1.5 million birds winter each year.

Other sites of extreme importance for shorebirds along the Atlantic coast of Africa are: Atoufou as Sâhili, Diawling (Mauritania), Djoudj, Sine Saloum (Senegal), Tago River (The Gambia), Keta Lagoon (Ghana), Walvis Bay (Namibia) and West Coast National Park (South Africa).

Threats

The biggest threats that coastal wetlands face are overexploitation of fish and mangroves, conversion of estuaries into agricultural land, poorly planned infrastructure development and indiscriminate hunting. Other threats include oil and gas exploration, rising sea levels and increased frequency and force of storms as a result of climate change.

Many important sites lack formal legal status as a protected area and even if they do the management is often insufficient.

BirdLife conservation actions

BirdLife International is leading the Coastal Migratory Birds project. It sets out to increase the capacity for the conservation of migratory birds along the Atlantic Coast of Africa.

BirdLife-led action for migratory birds is taking place in Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Cabo Verde. Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa are also involved. BirdLife plays a coordinating role in linking national projects to flyway initiatives and regional policies.

International collaboration

The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) is the intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caspian region.

AMBI (The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna) is an Agreement of the Arctic Council that covers countries in the eastern Arctic whose populations of migratory birds are affected by activities within the Arctic region.

The Waterbird Flyway Initiative (WSFI) focuses on the conservation of waterbird species that breed, pass through or winter in the Wadden Sea.

The European Convention for the Protection of Migratory Birds of the Caucasus (EBF) is a convention to protect migratory birds that travel through the Middle East and South Asia.

The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) is an international treaty that protects wild birds, their nests and their habitats across Europe.

Key Partners supporting migratory shorebirds

Key Partners supporting migratory shorebirds

MOROCCO BirdLife Partner GREPW leads the monitoring of waders at an important Bird Area in Morocco.

MAURITANIA Nature Mauritana contributes to conservation by identifying key threats for migratory birds in Diawling National Park, Atoufou as Sâhili and Lac Newa.

SENEGAL National Coordinators of Development (NCD) works for the conservation of migratory birds in the Casamance. NCD initiated a Western Gannet Project to eradicate the bird parasite at the University of St Louis. A first for West Africa!

THE GAMBIA WADIA is experienced in monitoring and restoration of mangrove areas. WADIA volunteers have planted 25,200 mangrove seedlings in luring northeast National Park.

GUINEE Yalata Eco-grove plays an important role in raising awareness on mangrove issues and promoting the conservation of migratory birds.

GUINEA-BISSAU ODZS is monitoring the movement of flamingos and other coastal species.

The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) is the intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caspian region. AEWA aims to conserve, manage and sustain their habitats and associated conservation of migratory waterbirds along the East Atlantic Flyway.

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The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) Working Group’s Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI) engages Arctic Council countries in conserving Arctic migratory birds including outside the Arctic. In West Africa, AMBI aims to ensure important Arctic habitat of Arctic waders in the Banc d’Arguin and Wadden Sea.

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