



East Asia/ East Africa Flyway

No. of migratory species **331**

CR	EN	VU	NT	LC
4	6	10	13	298

Flyway area **56,731,881 Km²**

No. of countries **64**

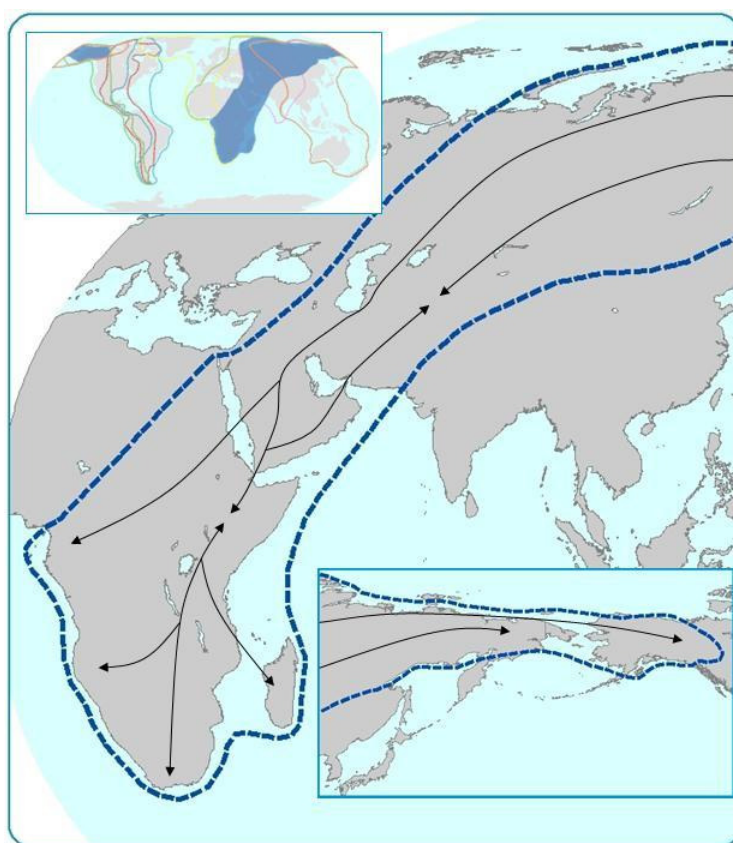
IBAs triggered by migrants **1355**

Fully protected **292**

Partially protected **284**

Not protected/status unknown **779**

Sites with over a million birds **7**



Flyways



Migration remains one of the most compelling aspects of the avian world. Twice a year, billions of birds migrate vast distances across the globe.

Typically, these journeys follow a predominantly north-south axis, linking breeding grounds in arctic and temperate regions with non-breeding sites in temperate and tropical areas. Many species migrate along broadly similar, well-established routes known as flyways. Recent research has identified eight such pathways: the East Atlantic, the Mediterranean/Black Sea, the East Asia/ East Africa, the Central Asia, the East Asia/Australasia, and three flyways in the Americas and the Neotropics.

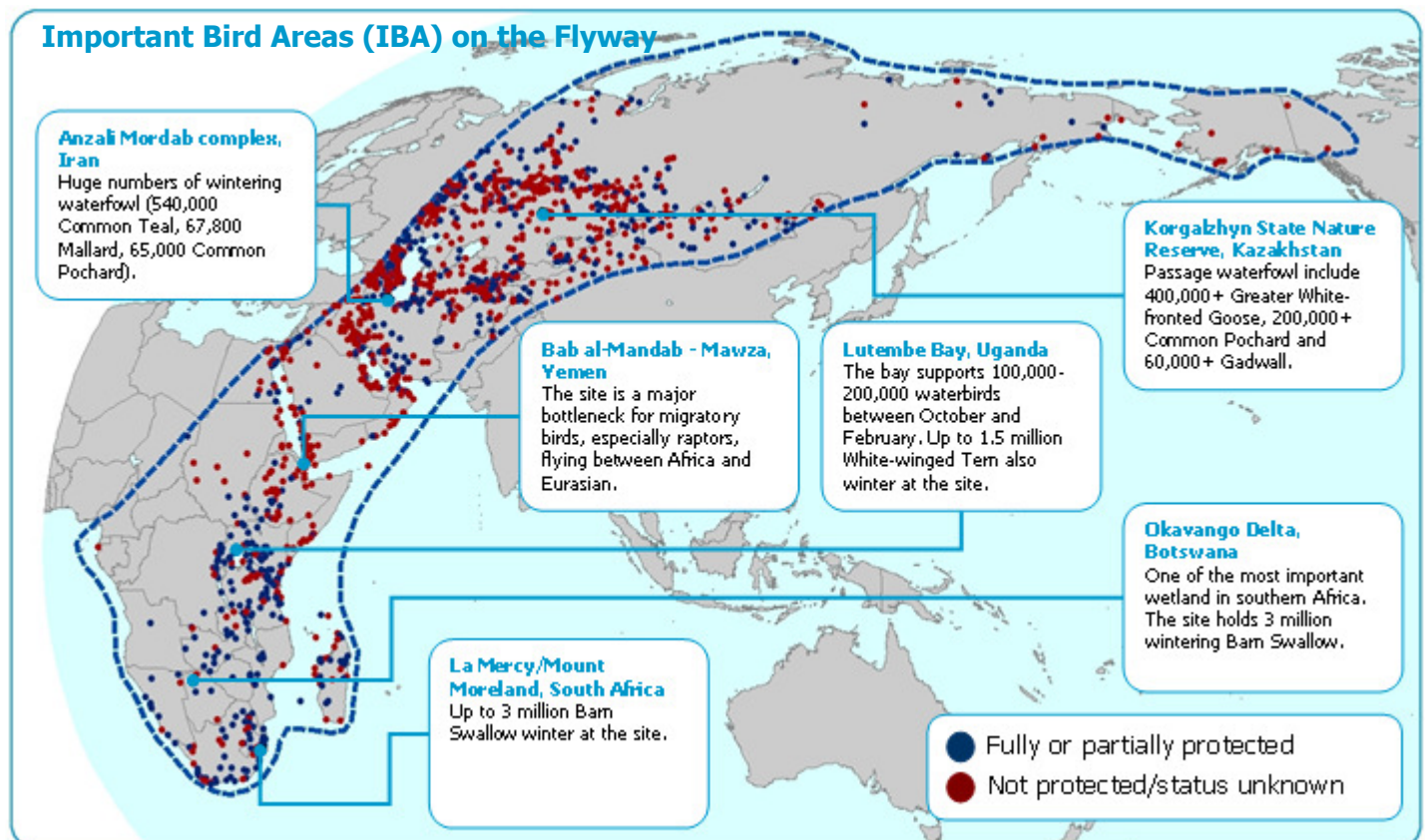
Many birds that breed in the mid-Palaeartic choose to embark on a much longer south-westerly migration to Africa rather than spend the northern winter directly to the south. By travelling westwards along the **East Asia/ East Africa Flyway**, migrating birds avoid the formidable obstacles presented by the Tibetan plateau and Himalayas, which effectively bar direct migration to the south. The much larger landmass of Africa is also able to sustain a greater influx of visiting birds than the comparably small Indian Subcontinent. Around 25 species, including the Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* and Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, head to Africa from the far eastern Palaeartic. Some even cross the Bering Sea from breeding grounds in Alaska and Northwest Canada, travelling as much as 200° west in order to reach their destination. As birds travel along the flyway they must negotiate numerous mountain ranges and the deserts of southwest Asia and Arabia. Many migrants circumvent the Red Sea to the west or cross from the Arabian Peninsula into northeast Africa via the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

Migration from the Palaearctic breeding quarters to northeast Africa is generally fast with most birds arriving in northern Sudan and Ethiopia during late August and September. However, many migrants, including the Eurasian River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*, Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Great Reed-warbler *A. arundinaceus*, choose to linger in northern Africa for much of autumn. Consequently, the overall southward journey can take up to five months and is typically completed in at least two distinct stages. Two principal migration routes have been identified south through equatorial eastern Africa. Species such as the Barn Swallow, Willow Warbler and Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* favour a route through Uganda and the Lake Victoria basin, whilst others, such as the Marsh Warbler, Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* and Basra Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* pass further to the east through the Kenyan highlands. The return migration in spring is relatively rapid with many birds making the entire journey from the southern tropics to their northern breeding grounds in no more than six weeks. The northward journey through eastern Africa tends to be centred further to the east with large numbers of migrants occurring along the coastlines of Kenya and Tanzania. The Afrotropics are also home to a number of intra-African migrants, such as the Southern Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicoides* and African Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*. These breed during the austral summer (October to March) towards the south of the continent before moving north towards equatorial latitudes for the non-breeding season.



Basra Reed-warbler © A. F. A. Hawkins/BirdLife

Important Bird Areas (IBA) on the Flyway



Threats along the Flyway

Unfortunately, many of the world's migratory birds are in decline. Many characteristics of migrants render them particularly vulnerable to a variety of threats. Undertaking such dramatic movements pushes birds to the limit of their endurance. They are reliant on favourable weather conditions and must find sufficient food resources at multiple sites throughout their migratory journey. In Europe and Africa, many migrants have undergone sustained and often severe declines over the past few decades. Twenty species that migrate along the East Asia/East Africa Flyway are now regarded as globally threatened, including the Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* (CR), Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* (CR), Spotted Ground-thrush *Zoothera guttata* (EN) and Basra Reed-warbler (EN).



Northern Bald Ibis © Terje Kolaas / www.rarebirdyearbook.com

Agricultural expansion and intensification is a major driver of Palaearctic–African migrant declines. In Europe, changing agricultural practices have been implicated in the declines of numerous farmland species. In sub-Saharan Africa, overgrazing and increased pesticide use have severely reduced habitat quality and depleted the insectivorous prey populations on which many migrants depend. Another significant threat is the **widespread and indiscriminate hunting** of migratory birds. The avian death toll is staggering, with the number of birds killed annually nearing a thousand million. Many of these birds are shot and trapped in Arabia and the Middle East. The region has a long history of bird hunting, and hundreds of thousands of people are still involved in the activity today. Most of the hunting is recreational, and both 'sport hunting' and falconry continue to grow in popularity. In Lebanon, for example, it is estimated that over 10% of the population regularly hunts; this compares with 6% in Finland, 3.4% in Ireland and 2.6% in France. In addition to direct mortality, hunting also poses a threat through disturbance and pollution. Lead shot, in particular, can present a serious environmental hazard, especially in wetland habitats. In Lebanon, 20–25 million cartridges are sold each year, equating to 640–800 tonnes of lead. In addition to hunting, larger species, such as storks and raptors, face the additional risk of **collision with man-made structures** such as powerlines.

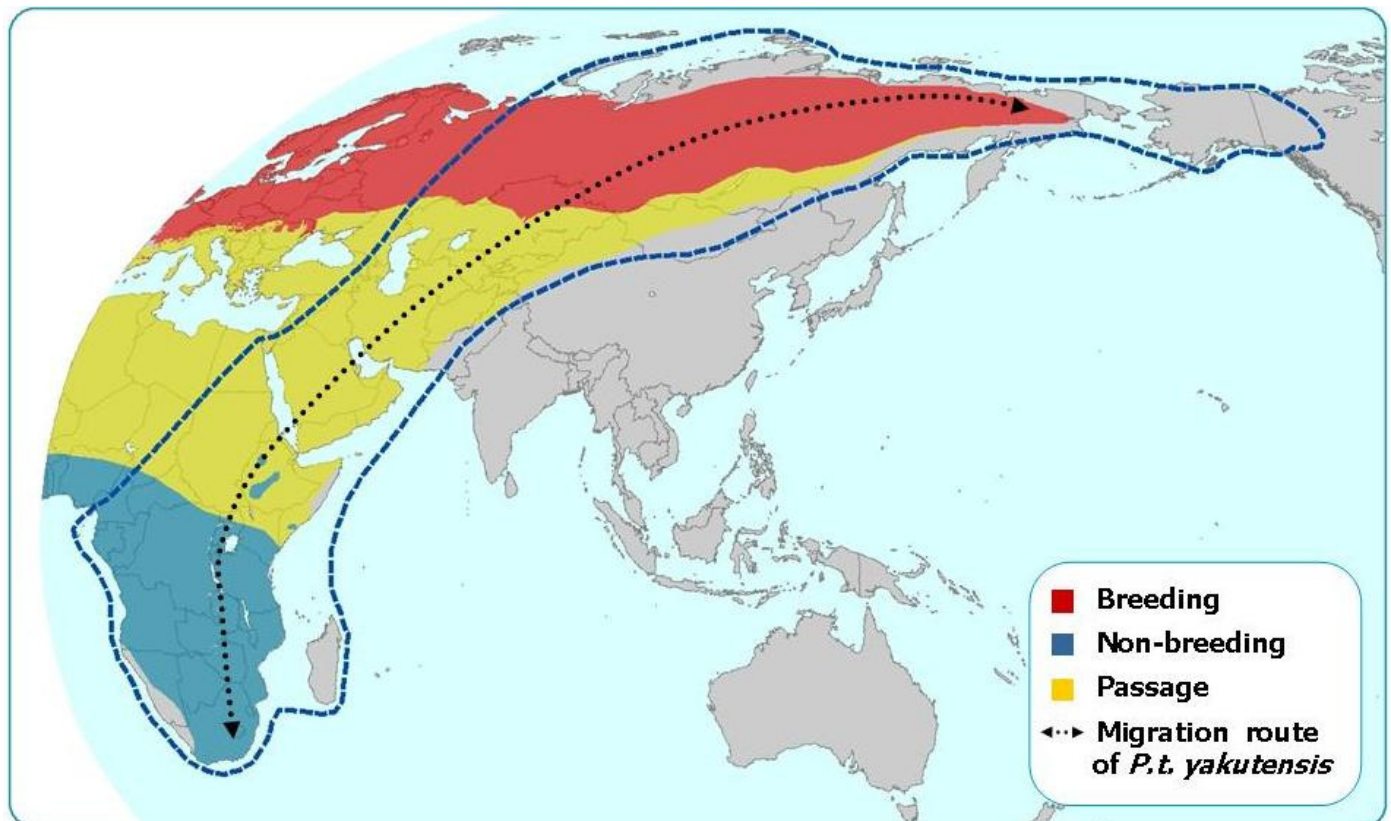
In the face of such a diverse array of threats, the conservation of migratory birds depends on international collaboration and a coordinated response along entire flyways. Through the designation of Important Bird Areas (IBAs), BirdLife International has identified a coherent network of critical sites for migrants, the effective management of which will go a long way to securing the future of migratory birds.

Willow Warbler

The Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* is one of the most common summer visitors to Eurasia, with a population estimated to stand between 300 million and 1.2 billion individuals. They are the most numerous Palaearctic-African migrant, accounting for 15.8% of all the passerines and near-passerines travelling between the two continents. The Willow Warbler is also one of the planet's most spectacular travellers. Birds from the Eastern race *P.t. yakutensis*, larger and more pale brown and white than European birds, undertake the longest migration journey of any songbird. They travel 11,300km from the far northeast of Siberia to winter in southern Africa, an incredible journey for a bird weighing no more than 10g. Although the Willow Warbler is one of the world's most abundant migrants, in some parts of its range, such as the UK, populations have suffered long-term declines and the species is of conservation concern.



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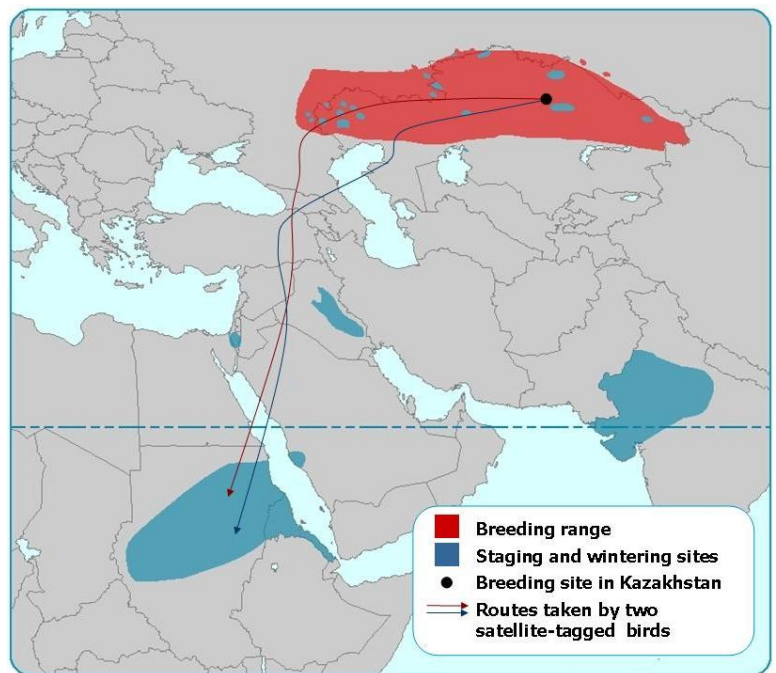


Sociable Lapwing

The Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* breeds on the grassland steppes of northern and central Kazakhstan and south-central Russia. It disperses through central Asia and the Middle East to wintering areas in Israel, Eritrea, Sudan and north-west India. The species has suffered a very rapid population decline during the latter half of the 20th century for reasons that are poorly understood. However, recent fieldwork in Kazakhstan, Turkey and Syria has provided important information suggesting that factors on the breeding grounds do not appear to be limiting the population size. Instead, threats during migration and in wintering areas, such as hunting, may be more important. Until recently, however, the migration route taken by the birds and the precise location of their East African wintering grounds were unknown. In 2007, a satellite-tracking project carried out by scientists from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, the BirdLife partner in the UK) and the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) revealed the migration route for the first time. It was discovered that flocks from Kazakhstan migrate first to staging areas in northern Syria and the Ceylanpinar IBA in Turkey. The birds leave Turkey in late October, eventually arriving in central Sudan after a total trip of more than 8,000 km. Prior to the satellite tracking study, the species had not been recorded that far south in Africa for 20 years. Thanks to the coordinated research and conservation efforts of scientists in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, there is now fresh hope for the future of one of the region's rarest birds.



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Northern Bald Ibis

Until recently, the Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* was believed to survive in the wild at only a handful of sites in and around the Souss-Massa National Park in south-west Morocco, with an additional semi-wild population in Turkey. However, in 2002, a small colony of just seven individuals was discovered in the Syrian Desert at Palmyra. Being migratory, this Middle Eastern population is behaviourally distinct from the Moroccan one, from which it is thought to have separated long ago.

The newly discovered population became an immediate conservation priority. However, with few young birds returning to the breeding site each year, conservationists feared that the ibises were falling victim to hunting and pesticide poisoning on their wintering grounds and along their migration route. Effective conservation of this tiny population was therefore dependent on understanding the birds' movements away from their Syrian breeding grounds.

In 2006, with the Palmyra colony consisting of thirteen birds (two breeding pairs, six juveniles and three sub-adults), scientists from the BirdLife Middle East Secretariat and the RSPB set out to locate the ibises' wintering grounds and uncover why so few sub-adults were returning. In June, three adults were successfully trapped and fitted with satellite transmitters. It was discovered that the birds undertook a 6,115 km round-trip, across seven countries, and spent the winter in the Ethiopian highlands. The birds passed via 'staging grounds' in Yemen, while the return route took them north to Sudan, then across the Red Sea at its widest point to Saudi Arabia. Researchers from the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife in Ethiopia) quickly located the three tagged ibises at the wintering ground, along with the fourth adult bird. Surprisingly, there was no sign of the nine younger ibises. The ibises' wintering range was found to be very different to their Syrian breeding site: agricultural fields and pastureland instead of rocky open desert. Moreover, whereas the ibises were wary of humans at the breeding colony, within the agricultural landscape of the Ethiopian highlands the birds lived in close proximity to people, even roosting in the middle of a village.

The knowledge gained from the satellite tracking project will be critical to the conservation of the species. Working with colleagues in Ethiopia, Yemen and elsewhere along the adult birds' migration route, BirdLife can take action to protect the species from hunting and the use of harmful pesticides.



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Further information

African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA)

<http://www.unep-aewa.org/home/index.htm>

Wings over wetlands

<http://www.wingsoverwetlands.org/>

Waterbirds around the world

<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3891>

BirdLife species factsheet – Sociable Lapwing

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/index.html?action=SpchTMDetails.asp&sid=3791&m=0>

BirdLife species factsheet – Northern Bald Ibis

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/index.html?action=SpchTMDetails.asp&sid=3172&m=0>