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News & Letters — Nouvelles & Lettres

First Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* equipped with a satellite transmitter in West Africa

There are four main populations of Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*: at coastal sites and in wetlands between Yemen and Bangladesh (Hoyo *et al* 1992, Mundkur 1997, Parasharya & Tere 2006), on soda lakes in the East African Rift Valley (Brown *et al*. 1982), in southern Africa (Wetlands International 2006, Childress 2005) and in West Africa. The latter (15,000–25,000 birds: Wetlands International 2006), is mainly concentrated in and near the Senegal delta, in Guinea (Trolliet & Fouquet 2001) and at coastal sites in northern Mauritania (Isenmann 2006). Reproduction has rarely been reported in West Africa: a colony of about 800 nests was observed in 1965 in S Mauritania (Naurois 1965), and a failed breeding attempt occurred in the same area in 1988 (Lamarche 1988). Concentrations of juvenile birds and displaying by groups of adults led to speculation about undiscovered breeding sites in West Africa (Dugan 1984, Hamerlynck & Messaoud 2000, Diawara *et al.* 2008) but Lesser Flamingos frequently participate in nuptial displays at wetlands far from their breeding sites. The origin of the West African Lesser Flamingos therefore remains an enigma.

Lesser Flamingos are not regularly migratory but show nomadic, irregular movements, which can cover distances of several hundred kilometres (McCulloch *et al*. 2003, Childress *et al*. 2007). Apparently compensatory fluctuations in the regional populations of Lesser Flamingos suggest that movements between them may occur but the only record of connectivity is of a bird ringed as a chick in Kenya in 1962 which was found dead in Western Sahara in 1997 (Childress & Hughes 2007).

A project to investigate the movements of Lesser Flamingos by satellite telemetry has been initiated by the Max Planck Institute of Ornithology. In 2009, four and 15 birds were equipped with satellite transmitters in Ethiopia and Kenya respectively (Salewski *et al.* in press). Similar studies have revealed data about Lesser Flamingo movements for several years (Childress & Hughes 2007), so this project may reveal migration routes to and from West Africa and movements within the region. It may also help to discover unknown breeding sites. On 11 Feb 2010 a Lesser Flamingo was captured at Lac Khar in the Djoudj National Park in northern Senegal (Fig. 1). This was the first flamingo in West Africa to be equipped with a satellite transmitter. We expect it to provide insights into the movements of this population.

During the first eight days with the transmitter the bird moved frequently between Lac Khar and Grand Lac in Djoudj NP, a distance of about 5 km. However, during the night of 18–19 February it flew *c.* 33 km to the Aftout es Saheli area in SW Mauritania where it stayed until 27 February before returning to Djoudj NP (Fig. 2). This is notable because Aftout es Saheli is the site of the only breeding records in

Figure 1. Lesser Flamingo taking off after being equipped with a satellite transmitter at Lac Khar, Djoudj NP, Senegal (photo: Nina Seifert).

West Africa (Naurois 1965, Lamarche 1988) and about 3000 Lesser Flamingos were observed there on 25 Jan 2010, some of them displaying and building nests (V. Salewski & Z. Elabidine Ould Sidaty pers. obs.). So after only a few days, the transmitter

Figure 2. Satellite-tracked movements of a Lesser Flamingo between 11 Feb and 6 Mar 2010. The dot in circle (lower left) indicates the Biological Station, Djoudj NP (16.3600°N, 16.2756°W) where the tag was first activated. The curving white line is the approximate border between Senegal and Mauritania. Background image: Google Earth.

has provided interesting results and more may be expected in the future, when hopefully more birds can be equipped with satellite transmitters.

We are grateful to I. Diop for the permission to work in Djoudj NP and for all the help he provided. T. Diop and Y. Diop helped with the field work. Z. Elabidine Ould Sidaty kindly allowed us to stay in the Diawling NP, Mauritania, and organized the trip to the Aftout es Saheli.

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Comments on Issiaka & Awaïss (2009) "Avifaune des zones humides du Parc National du W du Niger: importance et répartition dans le temps et dans l'espace."

A recent paper by Issiaka & Awaïss (2009) did not cover all available knowledge of wetland avifauna in the area, but is a contribution to our knowledge of it. Papers not referenced therein include Crisler *et al*. (2003) and Ambagis *et al.* (2003), which include bibliographies of previous work. These papers contain summaries and analyses similar to those of Issiaka & Awaïss (2009), and it would have been useful had the latter explicitly updated them. Both analyse the numbers of birds observed, their distribution and monthly presence. It could have been instructive if Issiaka & Awaïss had discussed how their different methods might have produced different results. Their analysis and interpretation could also have been extended by consideration of the wider network of wetlands. The seasonal lake Nyafaru (site PWN4) we are told is one of about 30 lakes in Parc W, but we are not told if these other lakes are of comparable size, whether they dry out at similar times, or where the nearest permanent lake at the end of the dry season would be.

In addition to normal variability in the resources used by waterbirds, the Niger River basin is experiencing significant and complex long-term hydrological changes, particularly at the Sahel–Sudanian boundary (Descroix *et al.* 2009). In order to analyse the avian implications of these changes it is vital that waterbird records be comparable between studies and linked to meaningful environmental measurements. Though many of the environmental variables that contribute to waterbird distribution are beyond the capacity of many studies, every effort should nonetheless be made to include those that most directly impact upon waterbird habitats. Stream gauge data are available for the Niger upstream at Diamangou as well as for the Tapoa and Mékrou