

First record of Wood duck *Aix sponsa* (Linnaeus, 1758) in Libya (Aves Anatidae)

Khaled Etayeb^{1,2,*}, Saleh Buirzayqah³ & Habeeb Alghyhi³

¹Zoology Department, Faculty of Science, the University of Tripoli, B.o.Pox 13227, Tripoli, Libya

²Libyan Society for Birds (LSB), Alforraj street, Tripoli, Libya

³Alhaya Organization for Protection of Wildlife and Marine Organisms, Derna, Libya

*Correspondent author

ABSTRACT

Birds move from one place to another without regard to international borders during their migrations. Particularly, the Mediterranean region is considered a link in the African-Eurasian bird migration route, especially migratory water birds. Among the North African countries, Libya is located in the middle of the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, it is considered a stopover and resting ground for many bird species. A Wood duck *Aix sponsa* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves Anatidae), species commonly found throughout North America, was recorded for the first time in Benghazi city at the eastern coastal part of Libya on 04 Jan 2025 in a Sabkha (salt marsh). It is a female characterized by the gray and brown color of the body with a white ring around the eyes. It can be confirmed that this species is not among the ornamental birds imported into Libya for trade but may have escaped from a farm in countries bordering Libya.

KEY WORDS

Wood duck; first record; hunting; Benghazi; Libya.

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INTRODUCTION

Birds are the most mobile animals on Earth and moving from one place to another without regard to international borders during their migration with regular migration lines and determined distribution so that each species has its own territory. Moreover, they often make very long journeys, usually in spring and fall, where billions of birds migrate vast distances across the world (Birdlife International, 2018). This migration is a natural process, where different birds fly distances of up to hundreds and thousands of kilometers in order to find the best environmental conditions and habitats for feeding and breeding. Due to environmental and seasonal changes such as temperature or rainfall,

migratory birds fly to areas where conditions are better. Long-distance flight requires crossing many international borders and entering different regions with their own environmental policies, legislation and conservation measures. Clearly, international cooperation between governments, NGOs and other stakeholders is needed along the migration route of species in order to exchange knowledge and coordinate conservation efforts. However, uncontrolled migration occurs by some birds that exceed their natural range or are introduced by humans into other countries and become either invasive (Lincoln, 1935).

The Mediterranean region is considered a link in the African-Eurasian bird migration route, especially migratory water birds (Zöckler, 2005).

Libya is located in the middle of the southern coast of the Mediterranean among the North African countries, it is considered a stopover and resting ground for many bird species (Azafzaf et al., 2005; Smart et al., 2006). Although bird studies have recently become active in Libya compared to neighboring countries that started their studies since the beginning of the last century, many studies, surveys and reports have been achieved (EGA-RAC/SPA, 2012; Etayeb et al., 2015; Zenati & Etayeb, 2022; Etayeb et al., 2023). There are also many studies that included Libya at the level of the Mediterranean region through the winter survey of waterbirds International Waterbirds Census (IWC), for example (Sayoud et al., 2017; Pavon-Jordana et al., 2020; Popoff et al., 2021). After the publication of the Libyan Birds Book (Isenmann et al., 2016), which included 350 species of birds and the number of duck species was 25, a white-faced whistling duck *Dendrocygna viduata* (Linnaeus, 1766) was added to the list of the Libyan birds (Elsowayeb & Etayeb, 2022). The research continues to update these lists.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Wood Duck, *Aix sponsa* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves Anatidae), partially migratory species of perching duck found that are commonly found throughout North America (Schaefer et al., 2016), was recorded for the first time in Benghazi city at the eastern part of Libya on 04 Jan 2025 in a coastal salt marsh ($32^{\circ}04'35.5''N$ $0^{\circ}02'42.8''E$) (Fig. 1). This record was of only one female hunted in a Sabkha (salt marsh), characterized by the gray and brown color of the body (the male is one of the most colorful waterfowls) with a white ring around the eyes (Fig. 2), and of which some photo-images were taken.

Aix sponsa is not among the ornamental birds imported into Libya for trade and the way this species arrived in Libya is unknown.

This species is highly appreciated by ornamental breeders all over the world, where it is one of the most bred species even with different color mutations obtained in captivity and it is usually kept in captivity also in the countries bordering Libya, including neighboring Italy and Greece. Some speci-



Figure 1. The study area: Benghazi, Libya.



Figure 2. Hunted female of Wood Duck in Benghazi, Libya.

mens may have escaped into the wild and arrived in our country with migratory ducks. For example, Gates et al. (2010) reported that small numbers of wild wood duck have been recorded in the UK since the late 19th century.

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