



**Cross-border capacity-building workshop for staff of state institutions and local associations in Mauritania and Morocco
Identification and monitoring of waterbirds, site management and threats linked to climate change**

**Nouadhibou (Mauritania)
30 November - 03 December 2024**



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I. Background and Justification

Mauritania is first and foremost a Saharan country. No less than three-quarters of its area are covered by desert which stretches from the north of the country of the country southwards to about 19°N-18°N, the remaining part belongs to the Sahel. Thus the number of resident afro-tropical breeding species is much higher than that of Palearctic visitors. Rainfall is highly variable in space and in time and this is reflected in the unpredictable nature of the ephemeral inland wetlands. The coastal zone is rich in wetlands, including the iconic Parc National du Banc d'Arguin (PNBA), which has long been recognised as West Africa's most important site for migratory waterbirds, holding one of the world's largest concentrations of non-breeding waders. Established as a National Park in 1976, this Ramsar site encompasses 40% of the Mauritanian coastline. It also has a satellite reserve on the Cap Blanc peninsula, which was created principally for the protection of the Mediterranean Monk Seal. The transboundary Senegal River Delta includes important wetlands in Mauritania, notably the Parc National du Diawling (PND), also a designated Ramsar site, and Aftout-es-Saheli, the only breeding site of Lesser Flamingo in West Africa. The building of the Manantali and Diama dams radically altered the ecology of the delta.

Previous training in Saharan Morocco

In 2017, 2018, 2022 and 2024 (first, second, third and fourth phases), field trainings on waterbird identification and monitoring were carried out at different wetlands along the Atlantic Sahara of Morocco: Baie d'Ad Dakhla, Baie de Cintra, Boujdour coastal wetlands, Saquiat AL Hamra in Laayoun, Sebkhat Imlili, Guelmim wetlands and the Khnifiss Lagoon. 130 participants from 8 NGOs have benefited from the training and committed to participate in the IWC and advocate for wetland protection from local threats, including climate change adaptation.

One of the greatest results and impacts of the past WSFI training carried out in 2017 and 2018 was the strong participation of local Sahraoui communities in advocating to nominate new Ramsar sites. As a consequence, 3 wetlands were classified under the Ramsar Convention: Oued Assaquia Al Hamra À La'youne (Site number: 2382), Côte Aftissate-Boujdour (Site number: 2377) and Sebkhat Imlili (Site number: 2323).

Workshop aims

This WSFI training transboundary training workshop in Nouadhibou in the Cap Blanc peninsula of Mauritania followed in the perspective of these previous workshops. It came in response to promote south-south collaboration between southern Morocco and the northern Mauritania using the flyway approach. It was conducted in Nouadhibou in collaboration between WSFI, the PNBA and the Scientific Institute of Rabat. The training aimed to enable more regular and sustainable IWC surveys to be conducted in this part of Mauritania, and build interest and involvement in the monitoring and management of less surveyed sites such as the Baie de l'Étoile et Baie de Cansado in Mauritania.

It also aimed to build local capacity for wetland management through discussions on the threats to wetlands, including climate change impacts, adaptation measures and site management. This approach should strengthen the ability of local NGOs, early-career conservationists and students to play future proactive roles in wetland conservation and monitoring, with further benefits expected, such as increased awareness of migratory birds, flyways and climate change impacts.

Two Moroccan participants from Khnifiss National Park and the Wetlands of Essemara attended the workshop.

II. Actions

On the 27th November 2024, we visited Dakhla Lagoon with two Moroccan NGO representatives who benefited from previous training organized by WSFI. A third Moroccan participant was due to participate, but was unable to come due to a medical emergency.

A partial count of waterbirds in Dakhla Lagoon was carried out. Also, a group of Short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) was observed fishing off the Dakhla coast.



On the 28th November 2024 we traveled from Dakhla to Nouadhibou through Moroccan-Mauritanian borders. The border crossing took several hours to complete. Arrangements were then made with PNBA to secure the training venue and other arrangements. PNBA had already invited participants and secured various permissions and logistics needed for the workshop.

The workshop for 25 participants, representing local associations, students and wardens was carried out in Nouadhibou from 29 November to 03 December 2024. The training included waterbird identification and monitoring following Wetlands International guidelines and the flyway approach to conservation (see the detailed planning). It also included local presentations, exercises and plenary discussions relating to wetland conservation issues in the area. The workshop included two significant field trips to local wetlands and the museum at IMROP.

The WSFI photographic field guide of waterbirds along the East Atlantic Flyway was distributed to some participants who were trained in how to use it.

III. Results

R1 Visit of Dakhla Lagoon with local CSO representatives

A partial count of waterbirds was carried out including ring controls, followed by a discussion on future avenues of collaboration and needs with representatives of Moroccan NGOs that had already benefited from previous training courses supported by WSFI.



Moroccan team at Dakhla Lagoon



Waders in mudflats (Dakhla Lagoon)



Ringed Audouin's Gull



Group of terns and gulls



Lesser Black-backed Gull ringed



Northern Pintails and Grey Herons

During this visit, a group of Short-finned Pilot Whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) was observed offshore, fishing off the Dakhla coast. Dakhla Lagoon is an extensive body of water, and of international importance for waterbirds. Some of the wetlands are brackish. Parts of the area are heavily used and with some environmental problems, including litter.



R2 Participants trained in introductions to waterbird identification, monitoring and wetland assessment

The training workshop on waterbird identification and monitoring, site management and climate change impact assessment was organized from 29/11/2024 to 03/12/2024 in Nouadhibou. The majority of trainees were locally based in Nouadhibou, including representatives of the PNBA Satellite Reserve of Cap Blanc, the Institut Mauritanien de Recherche Océanographique et des Pêches (IMROP), the local governmental environment office and local NGOs. There were also participants and trainers representing Nature Mauritanie, the Faculty of Sciences of Nouakchott, the deputy AEWA national focal point / PND, and PNBA.

The workshop was opened by Dr. Cheibany, senior advisor of PNBA, and moderated by Tim Dodman and Imad Cherkaoui.



Gender and youth were well represented in this training, demonstrating how Mauritani is open to women and student contributions.



All trainees were willing to actively participate in site management and waterbird censuses and monitoring in the future. They were interested to collect data on birds and other environmental factors to help assess climate change impact and habitat occupation over time in the wetlands of Baie de l'Étoile and Baie de Lévrier. Additionally, they committed to work and to advocate for wetland protection and threat mitigation in this important area, which attracts outstanding numbers of migratory waterbirds and local breeding species.

Mauritania has four Ramsar sites, and after the training and field visit, trainees were convinced that the Baie de l'Étoile and other coastal wetlands of Cap Blanc deserved international recognition, through their designation by Mauritanian authorities as wetlands of international importance. Another important aspect was to fill the gap in the IWC for Mauritanian wetlands by including Baie de Lévrier wetlands regularly in the January waterbird counts. There is potential for more regular or monthly monitoring at certain sites. This would be particularly relevant for the Baie de l'Étoile, which has recently been nominated as a protected area.

Participants expressed their strong acknowledgement to WSFI and the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat for offering them this training opportunity.



The training workshop programme is provided in Appendix I, and a list of participants in Appendix II. All workshop presentations were developed and presented in either Arabic or French. The Flyway Training Kit and the Toolkit on identifying and counting waterbirds in Africa were used or referred to.

Some presentations were given by Mauritanian ornithologists. There was one session of group work exercise on drawing a flyway and numerous and rich plenary discussions during the two first two days of the workshop.



There were field visits on days 3 and 4 to the following sites:

1. Baie de l'Étoile
2. Baie Cansado
3. Cap Blanc plage
4. Îlot des Pelicans
5. Sebkha Aeroport
6. Monk seal visitors centre
7. IMROP Aquarium / museum

R3 Formation of GLOBE

The workshop ended with a final lunch in Nouadhibou and a closing session. During this session, a new network was formed as a local bird-watching and monitoring group. The new group was named the **Groupe Local des Oiseaux de Baie de l'Étoile (GLOBE)**. The group is informal, and future discussions are needed as to how to take it forwards and to determine its eventual status.

R4 Binoculars distributed

Two pairs of binoculars "Discovery WP PC Mg 8x42" were purchased and will be offered to active ornithologists from Nouadhibou.

R5 Field guides

A supplementary set of 16 WSFI photographic guides of waterbird field guides were disseminated to the three NGOs, and the use of the guide was well understood.

IV. Photographs, Communication and visibility

Photographs from the field visit are shown below, showing the group at Cap Blanc, Nouma Watt (Nature Mauritanie), Mohamed Vall (Nouakchott University), a field training session and rubbish collection. Other photos have been provided to WSFI. The event was aired on Mauritanian TV.



Appendix I – Training Programme

Date	Matinée			Après-midi	
vendredi 29 novembre	Arrivée des participants et formateurs				
samedi 30 novembre	Enregistrement ; Introduction de l’atelier et des organisations ; Tour de table Ouverture officielle (Dr Cheibany, PNBA)	Les zones humides et les oiseaux d’eau ; directives suivi zones humides et oiseaux d’eau (Imad Cherkaoui)	Le concept de voies de migration pour la conservation et les raisons de la migration et l’exercice ‘Draw a flyway’ (Tim Dodman)	Présentations des zones humides et des oiseaux d’eau mauritaniennes ; les menaces pesant sur les zones humides (Alioune Niang & Mohamed Vall)	Conservation et gestion des sites dans le contexte des voies de migration ; Conservation le long de la voie de migration (discours)
dimanche 1 décembre	Identification, comptage et suivi des oiseaux d’eau ; suivi des zones humides (Imad Cherkaoui) Les dénombrements PNBA / Cap Blanc (Ahmed Bouboutt) Discours			Présentation de l’AEWA (Boubacar Ba) Présentations des zones humides et des oiseaux d’eau marocaines (participants)	Utilisation du matériel optique (jumelles et télescope) ; guide d'identification d'oiseaux
lundi 2 décembre	Visite la Réserve Satellite du Cap Blanc et du Centre de Visiteurs « le Phoque Moine »			libre	
mardi 3 décembre	Visites des sites et recensement d'oiseaux (Baie de l’Étoile)			Réflexion sur les pistes de collaboration futures ; Réseautage et Partenariat / Stratégie de suivi des sites du Cap Blanc et de la Baie de Lévrier dans l’avenir ; Clôture et évaluation (Tim Dodman & Imad Cherkaoui)	
mercredi 4 décembre	Départ des participants et formateurs				

