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**AEWA Species Management Guidance for the  
African Comb Duck**

*Sarkidiornis melanotos*

Agreement on the Conservation of  
African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)

**AEWA Species Management Guidance for the  
African Comb Duck**

*Sarkidiornis melanotos*

**May 2022**

**Produced by the AEWA Technical Committee  
Compiled by Paul Buckley**

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## Contents

|   |   |
|---|---|
| SUMMARY AND FUTURE PRIORITIES .....                                 | 4 |
| 1. BASIC DATA.....  | 4 |
| 2.THREATS/PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSERVATION ACTION..... | 5 |
| 3.BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT .....                                       | 6 |
| 4.REFERENCES.....   | 7 |

## SUMMARY AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

African Comb Duck is a widespread and fairly common species across much of tropical Africa and also in parts of Asia. It is currently classified as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List. There is some evidence of a decline in numbers however, especially in West Africa. It inhabits a fairly wide range of habitats but there is a strong association with areas of close proximity to both wetland and forested habitats, which it uses for nesting, and so efforts for its conservation would also benefit a wider suite of species. It could be vulnerable to increasing aridity due to climate change and there is already evidence of a retreat from the southern end of its range. It is hunted and efforts should be made to monitor and manage this practice. Priority actions should include:

- Protect and manage key wetlands with nationally or internationally important populations of this species. Strive to ensure that areas of forest and woodland around the wetland are protected.
- Increase knowledge of the population size, trend and distribution by improved surveys, especially in large riverine systems which are not well covered by existing monitoring programmes.
- Improve monitoring of hunting and ensure that regulatory agencies have the skills and resources to monitor and enforce levels of hunting.
- Develop concise National Action Plans or include within relevant habitat or multi-species plans, especially where populations are considered vulnerable.

### 1. BASIC DATA

Species name: African Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)

Range states within AEWA region (Wetlands International 2021) (Principal Range States in **Bold** have significant breeding populations or non-breeding numbers of >1%)

West Africa population: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, **Chad**, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, **Togo**.

Southern & Eastern Africa population: Angola, **Botswana**, **Burundi**, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Eswatini, **Ethiopia**, **Gabon**, **Kenya**, Lesotho, **Malawi**, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, **Tanzania**, **Uganda**, **Zambia**, **Zimbabwe**.

(This species also occurs in a number of Asian countries outside of the AEWA region and in Madagascar, but the population is not listed in AEWA's Annex 3).

Range map downloaded from the Critical Site Network Tool (<http://criticalsites.wetlands.org>)

#### International legal status

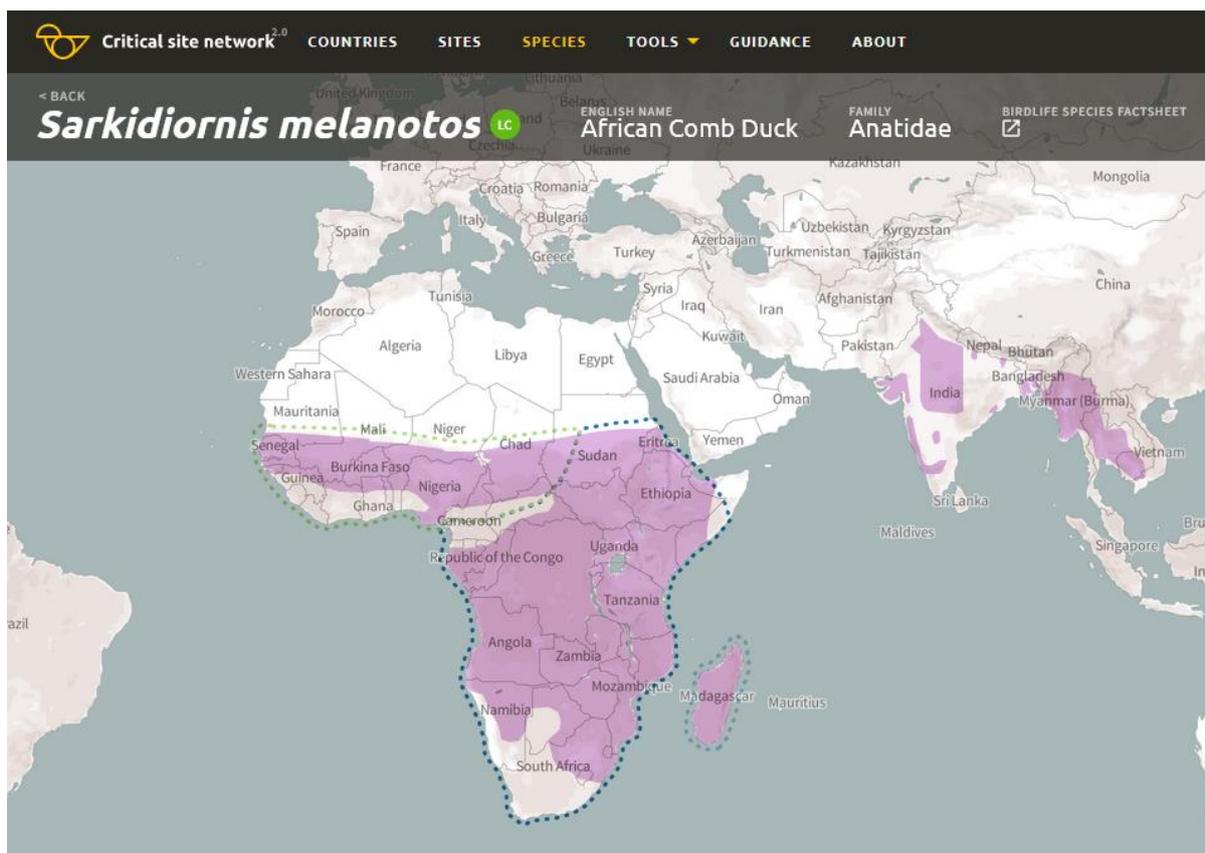
Global IUCN Status: Least Concern (last reviewed 2016).

AEWA Table 1: West African population A 3c

Southern & Eastern African population B 2c

CMS: Annex II

CITES: Annex II



Range map of the African Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*). Light green dotted line – population boundaries of the West Africa population; Dark blue dotted line - population boundaries of the Eastern and Southern Africa population.

## 2. THREATS/PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSERVATION ACTION

**Table 1. Threats/problems and Recommendations for Action**

\*Information in Table 1 adapted from BirdLife International threats assessment: [African Comb Duck \(\*Sarkidiornis melanotos\*\) - BirdLife species factsheet](#). These scores/ratings are for the species as a whole, while for individual populations or Range States a higher level may apply.

| <i>Threat/problem &amp; description (IUCN threat code)</i>  | <i>Threat/problem level<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>Recommendation for Action</i>  |
|---|---|---|
| Biological resource use – Intentional use (species being assessed is the target) (5.1.1) Hunted both legally and also through poaching (shooting, trapping or poisoning) for food, and this may be reducing | Low impact 5                            | Monitor hunting levels and seek to restrict to sustainable levels where over-exploited (Madsen et al 2015). (All countries). Address poaching through legislation, enforcement and awareness raising although most likely for a suite species rather than this one alone. |

<sup>1</sup> IUCN (Red List) Threats Classification Scheme

|   |                 |  |
|---|-----------------|--|
| populations in some areas.<br>Some exploitation for pet trade   |                 | Improve data on population size and trends across range to underpin management.  |
| Biological resource use – logging and wood harvesting (5.3)   | Low impact 5    | Influence forestry policy to give greater protection for and restoration of riverine woodlands. Implement riverine and wet forest and woodland conservation projects (All countries)                             |
| Invasive and other problematic species, genes & diseases – Avian influenza (Gaidet <i>et al</i> 2007). Potential for other diseases (8.1).  | Low Impact 4    | Disease outbreak monitoring, control and containment (All countries)   |
| Natural system modifications – Large dams (7.2). Likely to be impacted by a range of infrastructure and irrigation projects large and small although no clear assessment. For example, reclamation of wetlands for sorghum in Southern Chad (Defos du Rau in. litt.) Species declined following damming of Senegal River (Triplett and Yesou 2000) and the impact of the Fomi dam on the Inner Niger Delta could be quite significant | Medium Impact 6 | This would need to be addressed by improved legislation for sustainable land use, policy and enforcement for infrastructure and irrigation projects including better EIA and mitigation measures (All countries) |
| Pollution - Herbicides and pesticides, affecting species accidentally in farmed areas, and deliberately through poisoning of waterbirds in rice fields (e.g. by carbofuran) (del Hoyo <i>et al</i> 1992).   | Low Impact 5    | Elimination of harmful poisons through legislation and enforcement and raising awareness of their danger to wildlife and people. Encourage sustainable agriculture with lower use of pesticides. (All countries) |

### 3. BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

#### Habitat

This species inhabits grassy ponds or lakes in savanna, open woodlands along large rivers and lakes (Johnsgard 1978), swamps (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992), marshes, floodplains, river deltas (Brown *et al.* 1982, Kear 2005a), flooded forest, pastures and rice-paddies (Kear 2005a) and occasionally sandbars and mudflats (Johnsgard 1978). There is a strong association with relatively well watered habitats and nesting occurs in holes in trees close to wetlands. They are locally migratory and can travel considerable

distances for example recorded moving from Zimbabwe to Chad. They can occur in considerable concentrations for example the recent concentrations reported in Southern Chad.

#### Population

Latest population estimates (UNEP-AEWA 2021) suggest a population of between 20,000-40,000 individuals in West Africa, and 50,000-250,000 individuals in Southern and Eastern Africa. These estimates are significantly higher than maxima counted during IWC, but maybe still too low as some very large concentrations (estimated at up to 70,000 have been recorded from Southern Chad between 2017 and 2020 (SWM in litt.). There is significant uncertainty around both population size and trends. The population appears to fluctuate, although the Southern and Eastern population may be declining (UNEP-AEWA 2021). More detailed information from Southern Africa is also inconclusive with evidence of a decreased reporting rate between the periods of the first and second Southern African Bird Atlases, and an apparent decline in the most southerly part of its range. However, Atlas reports have increased since 2016 (SABAP 2 2021). This emphasises the need for increased monitoring of wetlands in Africa, especially those in more remote areas.

Despite the fact that the population trend is reported to be decreasing (UNEP-AEWA 2021, BirdLife International 2022), there is much uncertainty, and any decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid to approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the population trend criterion (>30% decline over ten years or three generations). The population size is large, and hence does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the population size criterion (<10,000 mature individuals with a continuing decline estimated to be >10% in ten years or three generations, or with a specified population structure). For these reasons the species is evaluated as Least Concern.

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**SWM programme:** [Le Projet RESSOURCE dans les zones humides sahéliennes - SWM Programme \(swm-programme.info\)](http://swm-programme.info) »

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**UNEP-AEWA 2021** Report on the conservation status of migratory waterbirds in the agreement area - 8<sup>th</sup> Edition <https://www.unep-aewa.org/en/document/report-conservation-status-migratory-waterbirds-agreement-area-8th-edition> Wetlands International: Waterbird population estimates:

[Admin <i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i> \(African Comb Duck\) - West Africa \(wetlands.org\)](http://wetlands.org)

[Admin <i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i> \(African Comb Duck\) - Southern & Eastern Africa \(wetlands.org\)](http://wetlands.org)

[Admin Search \(wetlands.org\)](http://wetlands.org)

**Wetlands International 2021.** [Critical Sites Network Tool 2.0 \(wetlands.org\)](http://wetlands.org)