

SUMMARY

In order to study the distribution, abundance and status of the White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) in the wetlands of the province of Albacete (Castilla-La Mancha), a monthly survey was conducted between 1998 and 2013 (over a 16-year-period) in the Pétrola-Corral Rubio-La Higuera wetland complex. 454 records were obtained and 12,984 birds were counted.

The species was observed in 17 of these lagoons, although data was also available from 4 other locations outside the area studied. The Ontalafia, Pétrola and Salobrejo Lagoons provided 64.1 % of the recordings and 91.1 % of the birds. The Ontalafia Lagoon had the highest number of citations and birds, with 33.7 and 51.7 %, respectively. The observations were distributed throughout the annual cycle, with peaks at the end of the breeding season and during the postnuptial concentrations and minimum in winter.

After an initial rapid occupation (1997-2000), with a presence in up to 8 locations (including 6-7 nestings) and with a maximum of 236 individuals/census, the white-headed duck was located almost exclusively in the Ontalafia Lagoon for a period of 9 years (2001-2009). From 2010 to 2013, there was a dramatic change in the dynamics of this species in the lagoon complex, being observed in 16 wetlands (6-12 nestings), and reaching a maximum population of 598 birds/census.

Over time the abundance of this duck has increased, significantly expanding its area of occupancy and breeding. A determining factor was the local maintenance of water levels and the proper depth of the Ontalafia Lagoon (1998-2013), as well as favorable conditions in other wetlands during the 1998-2000 and 2010-2013 periods.

Key words: White-headed Duck, Albacete, distribution, abundance, status.