

Recent counts of White-headed Ducks *Oxyura leucocephala* in Armash wetlands, Armenia

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The White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* is a globally threatened species, included in the IUCN Red List (BirdLife International 2017) and the Armenian Red Book (Aghasyan & Kalashyan 2010). In the past (Dahl 1954), the species commonly inhabited lake Sevan, Armenia, and its vicinity. However in the 1930s, due to decrease of the water level of lake Sevan and complete drainage of the adjacent Gilli marshes, it disappeared from the area. Later, after the establishment of the Armash carp farm in 1972, the White-headed Duck was found in its ponds, and it started breeding there (Adamian & Klem 1999). Recent estimation of the White-headed Duck's population in Armenia, suggested 15–20 breeding pairs (Sheldon *et al* 2017, Armenian Bird Census Council 2017). Our latest survey of the White-headed Duck population in Armash wetlands was conducted 6 April–3 June 2018 using timed counts from fixed points. During the survey eight ponds with a total area of 8 km² were examined. The survey recorded 12 males in breeding plumage, two females and five ducklings at one of the ponds (Plate 1). The birds were found in four groups in different parts of the pond: five males were together with a female and five ducklings, three other males together, two other males together with one female, and the last group consisted of two males. According to the available data in the National Armenian Database (TSE NGO) and the database of Armenia at observation.org (Observation International Foundation), this is the highest number of adult male White-headed Ducks observed at one place in Armenia during the last ten years, although there is no certainty that all of them were breeding. Further monitoring is required to understand the real number of breeding pairs and whether there is a real population increase.



Plate 1. White-headed Ducks *Oxyura leucocephala* with ducklings, Armash carp farm, Armash wetlands, Armenia.
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