

Location



Introduction

The Kingdom of Morocco is a country in North Africa, bordered by the Mediterranean sea to the north, the Atlantic ocean to the west, with land borders with Algeria to the east and the disputed territory of Western Sahara to the south. Morocco also claims the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta, Melilla and Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera and several small islands off its coast which are Spanish controlled.

The presently accepted coastline of Morocco measures over 3,500 km in length. The Atlantic coastal region is characterized by long stretches of sandy beaches with rocky outcrops, whilst the mountainous Mediterranean coast is comprised of sandy beaches, marine lagoons, sea cliffs, and rocky shores. Most of the country's population lives to the north of the Rif mountains and the Atlas mountains. The coastal climate is mostly hot summer mediterranean, with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The coastal plains do experience moderate temperatures even in summer but can also experience temperature increases when summer sirocco winds blow.

Regional Seas and Biogeography

Mediterranean Sea LME
Canary Current LME
Alboran Sea
North Atlantic ocean

Habitats

Upwelling along the Atlantic coast of Morocco creates a rich marine biodiversity and fisheries resources. The Mediterranean coast of the country is characterised by mostly steep cliffs and rocky coves along the Rif Mountains broken, with more sandy shores towards the east and the Algerian border. The Atlantic coast (north of Western Sahara) is exposed, dominated by wide sandy beaches, shifting dunes, lagoons and estuaries, with rocky headlands and low cliffs becoming more frequent and the landscape drier toward the south.

- Tidal flats occur on the Atlantic coast, mostly mud but also some sandflats.
- Seagrasses are found in Belyounech Bay and in the Jbel Moussa area on the Atlantic coast, also in several of the lagoons on the Atlantic coast.

Biodiversity Hotspots

→ National Parks

Souss-Massa National Park, on the Atlantic coast (also a RAMSAR site) has dunes and marshes which provide an important refuge for 270 different bird species, including marbled teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) and the northern bald ibis (EN).

Al Hoceima National Park, on the Mediterranean coast to the east of the Rif mountain range, is important for nesting cattle egrets and Osprey. Balearic shearwater (CR) are also observed here. It includes the Côte des Bokkoyoas RAMSAR site which hosts breeding osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) and loggerhead turtles (VU).

→ RAMSAR Sites

On the Atlantic coast, key RAMSAR sites include:

Cap Ghir-Imsouane is a narrow coastal strip at the foot of the High Atlas Mountains, with a wide range of marine and estuarine habitats and a high rate of endemism. The site, being on the East Atlantic flyway is an important nesting and wintering site for many migrant birds. Northern bald ibis (EN) nest there.

Sidi Moussa-Walidia wetland complex, southwest of Casablanca, is a chain of discrete wetlands separated from the ocean by dunes, with lagoons, marshes and salt pans. It is an important site for various waterbirds.

Merja de Fouarate is a shallow swamp, which serves as a vital year-round habitat for waterbirds. More than

60 species use the site for wintering, nesting and stopovers and populations can surpass 20,000 during migration and winter months.

Complexe du Bas Lakkos wetland complex, located southwest of Tangier, is important for European otter (*Lutra lutra*), purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*) and crested coot (*Fulica cristata*).

Complexe du Bas Tahaddart is a huge wetland complex on the Atlantic coast southwest of Tangier, with estuaries, and inland open waters and marshes. The Site is a vital habitat for various waterbirds, including greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*).

There are various other RAMSAR sites along the Atlantic coast, which, as well as some of those mentioned above, provide important habitat for marbled duck (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*).

On the Mediterranean coast:

Lagune et barrage de Smir, has a marshy lagoon inked to the Smir wadi, so a rare estuarine mediterranean ecosystem in Morocco. It is home to about 100 species of migratory waterbird and. Key stop over for Western Palearctic waterbirds during their passage and also over the winter

Cap des trois Fourches, east of the Rif Mountains, north of the city of Nador is known for loggerhead turtle and Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*), while also providing important habitat for waterbirds.

Sebka Bou Areg (also an IBA) is the largest lagoon along the entire southern Mediterranean coast, with salt pans and reedbeds, separated from the sea by dunes. It is a wintering site for migratory birds and hosts nesting wader, tern and gull species.

Embouchure de la Moulouya (also an IBA), comprises the mouth of the Moulouya river, close to the ~and its associated estuary and floodplains, close to the Algerian border. It is an important stopover for wintering migratory birds including gulls and marbled duck.

→ IBAs

On the Atlantic coast, key IBAs include:

The Canary Current Shelf has three marine IBA sites used by foraging Cory's shearwater during the breeding period.

Lagune de Khnifiss (part of a National Park) is located on the Atlantic coast west of the Canary islands, in the south of the country. It is a long, narrow inlet, separated from the sea to the west by dunes and to the east by cliffs, with the lagoon open to the sea at its mouth and also with saltmarsh seagrass. The mudflats and sandbanks exposed at low tide are important bird habitat.

Sidi Moussa-Oualidia, southwest of Casablanca, is a site with two lagoons linked by salt-pans and marshes and lined by dunes. The area is important for wintering waders.

Merja Zerga (also a biological reserve) is a tidal lagoon north of Kenitra on the Atlantic coast. Its large mudflats are exposed at low tide, providing feeding areas for waders and waterfowl.

Merja Bargha is a shallow freshwater pond, lined with dunes north-east of the town of Moulay Bou Selham. Red-knobbed coot (*Fulica cristata*) breed here.

Marais Larache extends inland from the mouth of the Oued Loukkos, including the estuary and its saltpans, marshes and reedbeds. This is another important wintering site for waders.

→ IMMAs

The Atlantic Coast of the Iberian Peninsula IMMA includes the Strait of Gibraltar. It hosts a small, endangered, and genetically distinct population of Iberian harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), and a very small subpopulation of the killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), plus several other cetacean species.

The Alboran Sea IMMA, which covers the waters off the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, being a transition area between the two basins with differing oceanographic characteristics, is important habitat for endangered Mediterranean common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) and vulnerable common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), with a considerable diversity of cetacean species.

At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable

to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

→ At risk birds

The wetlands on both Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts are important resting and feeding areas for millions of migrant and wintering birds each year. Morocco is on a main migration route between Africa and Europe across the Strait of Gibraltar with vast numbers of Palearctic migrants passing through each year, including tens of thousands of raptors and storks. Birds of conservation concern include white-headed duck (EN), common pochard (VU), ferruginous duck (*Aythya nyroca*), black-tailed godwit (*Limosa limosa*), marbled duck (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*), Eurasian curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Audouin's gull (*Ichthyaetus audouinii*) and the endemic breeding population of Balearic shearwater which is common in Morocco and nests on its islands. Nesting is known for several species of gulls, terns and waders (ducks, rails and avocets).

→ At risk reptiles

Sea turtles are not known to nest in Morocco, but both coasts are foraging habitat for loggerhead (VU) and leatherback turtles (VU). Green turtles (EN) are more rarely observed. Most turtles seen in Moroccan waters are juveniles or sub-adults. Loggerhead turtles migrate into the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar in spring and summer.

Grass snakes are often found in the marshes and edges of the wadis.

→ At risk mammals

Mediterranean monk seals have been observed in the central and eastern part of the Moroccan coast, including around Cap des Trois Fourches and in the Al Hoceima National Park. Should the Western Sahara region be accepted as part of Morocco, a significant resident population of critically endangered Mediterranean monk seals in the region would need to be protected, due to the presence of the largest global monk seal aggregation at Cabo Blanco, in northern Mauritania close to the southern limit of Western Sahara. At present the oversight and protection of the colony (within a reserve named Costa de la Focas), is largely managed by Mauritania with assistance from Spain.

Stranding records in Morocco point to these species being most common: striped (*Stenella coeruleoalba*), common (*Delphinus delphis*) and bottlenose (*Tursiops truncatus*) dolphins, as well as sei whales (EN), sperm and fin whales (both VU) and long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*).

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

A number of major oil spills occurred in Moroccan waters: Samir (1982), Khark V (1989), and the Sea Spirit (1990). There were no reports of oiled wildlife in these incidents and no major incidents have been reported since the Sea Spirit.

The Strait of Gibraltar and adjacent Atlantic corridor are among the busiest oil shipping routes in the world, with high traffic of oil shipping passing close to Morocco's northern coast.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

→ Oil spill and HNS Response

d CLC Convention 69

CLC Protocol 76

CLC Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 76

FUND Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 2003

LLMC Convention 76

LLMC Protocol 96

OPRC Convention 90

HNS Convention 96

HNS PROT 2010

OPRC_HNS 2000

BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

→ Marine Biodiversity Protection

- Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS)
- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)
- Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution
- The Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)
- Cooperation Agreement for the protection of the coasts and waters of the north-east Atlantic against Pollution (Lisbon Agreement).

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

→ National Contingency Plan?

Le Plan d'Urgence National (PUN) de lutte contre la pollution marine accidentelle (the national oil spill contingency plan) was adopted in 1996 and is undergoing a revision in 2026, led by le Département du Développement durable (sustainable development department).

The PUN differentiates between minor incidents, which do not trigger the PUN and serious pollution which requires mobilisation of combined national resources.

→ Role of Competent National Authorities

Responsibility for marine pollution rests with the Department of Environment, who act as National Coordinator, with Governors as Local Coordinator (either of the Prefecture or the Province). The Department of the Environment's Service Stratégie d'Intervention (intervention strategy service) acts as permanent Secretariat for the PUN.

The existing PUN states that major response would be coordinated by the National Anti-Pollution Committee (CNAP) headed by the Under Secretary in charge of Protection of the Environment. The committee also includes the Royal Navy, the Ministry of Public Works, the Police, the Civil Protection Department, the Fisheries Ministry and the Ministry of Merchant Marine. The actions of CNAP will be relayed through Command Centres at provincial level, made up of personnel from the Royal Navy, the Police, the Royal Air Force and the Office of Ports (ODEP).

At sea, the royal Navy is charged with response operations, and on land this falls to the Direction Générale de la Protection Civil.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

→ Formal guidelines?

There is no reference of a national oiled wildlife response plan in Morocco.

→ Response objectives and strategy

No reference.

→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

No reference, although rehabilitation may be accepted as a response strategy.

→ Impact assessment

The INRH may get involved in impact assessment activities, as well as La Groupe de Recherche pour la Protection des Oiseaux au Maroc (GREPOM) who carry out monitoring of bird populations and aims to develop an open database on birdlife in Morocco. For marine mammals, the INRH and the Institut Scientifique of the Université Mohammed V de Rabat may provide assistance.

→ Notification and early response

No reference.

→ Wildlife responders

The Association pour la protection des Tortues Marines de Maroc (ATOMM), created by the Abdelmalek Essaâdi University Faculty of Science in Tetouan, gathers data on sea turtle nesting and occurrence in Morocco and conducts research on genetic populations. It is likely they would get involved in an incident where sea turtles were affected.

The Society for Protection of Animals Abroad (SPANNA) based in London, has an active programme for working domestic animals in Morocco. While they would not be able to provide wildlife expertise they might be able to

assist in locating supplies and facilities.

→ **Cooperation between stakeholders**

Morocco is a signatory to the Lisbon Agreement (with France, Portugal and Spain). A trilateral agreement for oil spill response also exists between Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

→ **Permanent facilities**

There are no permanent facilities for marine species in Morocco, although a number of wildlife rescue centres exist for terrestrial species, including l'Association Marocaine pour la Protection des Rapaces (AMPR), an organisation located near Rabat which rehabilitates raptors, created in partnership with l'Agence nationale des eaux et forêts (ANEF) and La Perle aux Oiseaux Wildlife Refuge near Marrakech, which rehabilitates a number of terrestrial species.

→ **Current processes**

Discussions are underway to setup a turtle rescue centre at the INRH Centre Spécialisé en Zootechnie et Ingénierie Aquacoles Marines (an aquaculture engineering and technical centre) at M'diq on the Mediterranean coast north of Tetouan.

WWF are in the process of establishing an office in Morocco.

Documentation and references

General references

Aksissou M. and Benhardouze, W. 2008. The status of marine turtles in Mediterranean Morocco. In Rees, A., Frick, M., Panagopoulou, A. and Williams, K. Proceedings of the 27th Annual Symposium on Sea turtle biology and conservation. <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/3589>

BirdLife International. 2026. Site factsheet for Morocco. <https://datazone.birdlife.org/country/factsheet/morocco>

Bulletin Officiel. 1996. Décret no. 2-95-717 du 10 rejeb 1417 (22 novembre 1996) relatif à la preparation et à la lutte contre les pollutions marines accidentelles. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/mor15503.pdf>

I TOPF. 2018. Country profile for Morocco. <https://www.itopf.org/knowledge-resources/countries-territories-regions/morocco/>

Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force. 2020. IMMA E-Atlas. <https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/>

Martin-Montalvo B.Q. and Munoz Cañas, M. 2025. Mediterranean monk seal – a comprehensive set of monitoring and research techniques for the study and conservation of *Monachus monachus* in the Mediterranean Sea (1st ed.). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2025-006-En.pdf>

Masski, H. and de Stéphanis, R. 2015. Cetaceans of the Moroccan coast: information from a reconstructed strandings database. Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom, Volume 98, Special Issue 5: Marine Mammals, August 2018, pp. 1029 – 1037. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025315415001563>

Ministère de la Transition Energetique et du Développement Durable. 2015. Le Plan d'Urgence National de Lutte contre les Pollutions Marines Accidentelles (PUN). <https://www.environnement.gov.ma/fr/93-preventions-des-risques/risques-majeurs/185-le-plan-d-urgence-national-de-lutte-contre-les-pollutions-marines-accidentelles-pun?showall=&limitstart=>

Mo, G., Bazairi, H., Bayed, A. and Agnesi, S. 2011. Survey on Mediterranean Monk Seal (*Monachus monachus*) - sightings in Mediterranean Morocco. https://www.aquaticmammalsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/37_3_Mo-2.pdf

RAMSAR Sites Information Service. <https://rsis Ramsar.org>.

REMPEC, 2021. Country Profile for Morocco. <https://www.rempec.org/en/knowledge-centre/country-profiles/morocco>

Royaume du Maroc, Haute Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la lutte contre la desertification. 2012. Faune et Flore du Parc National d'Al Hoceima. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2012-001.pdf>

State of the World's Sea Turtles (SWOT) Report vol.14. Sea Turtles of the Mediterranean Sea. <https://www.seaturtlestatus.org/swot-report-vol-14>

UN Biodiversity Lab. <https://map.unbiodiversitylab.org>.

Terms and Conditions

These Country Wildlife Profiles are provided in good faith as a guide only and are based on information obtained from a variety of sources over a period of time. This information is subject to change and should, in each case, be independently verified before reliance is placed on it. Country Wildlife Profiles may have been issued solely to incorporate additional or revised information under one heading only. Each Profile has therefore not necessarily been completely verified or updated as at the stated Date of Issue.

Sea Alarm hereby excludes, to the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, any and all liability to any person, corporation or other entity for any loss, damage or expense resulting from reliance or use of these Country Wildlife Profiles.

© Sea Alarm Foundation, 2026

These Country Wildlife Profiles may be reproduced by any means for noncommercial distribution without addition, deletion or amendment, provided an acknowledgment of the source is given and these Terms & Conditions are reproduced in full.

These Country Wildlife Profiles may not be reproduced without the prior written permission of Sea Alarm Foundation either for commercial distribution or with addition, deletion or amendment.

Appendix 1

➔ At risk birds

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Balearic Shearwater / *Puffinus mauretanicus* / CR / /
White-headed Duck / *Oxyura leucocephala* / EN / /
Northern Bald Ibis / *Geronticus eremita* / EN / /
Common Pochard / *Aythya ferina* / VU / /
Leach's Storm-petrel / *Hydrobates leucorhous* / VU / /
Desertas Petrel / *Pterodroma deserta* / VU / Migratory (foraging during breeding season) /
Yelkouan Shearwater / *Puffinus yelkouan* / VU / /
Grey Plover / *Pluvialis squatarola* / VU / /
Broad-billed Sandpiper / *Calidris falcinellus* / VU / /
Curlew Sandpiper / *Calidris ferruginea* / VU / /
Black-legged Kittiwake / *Rissa tridactyla* / VU / /
Audouin's Gull / *Larus audouinii* / VU / /
Atlantic Puffin / *Fratercula arctica* / VU / /
Aquatic Warbler / *Acrocephalus paludicola* / VU / /

➔ At risk reptiles

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Green turtle / *Chelonia mydas* / EN / /
Loggerhead turtle / *Caretta caretta* / VU / Migratory (foraging) /

Leatherback turtle / *Dermochelys coriacea* / VU / Migratory (foraging) /

➔ **At risk mammals**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Harbour porpoise / *Phocoena phocoena* / LC (endangered, genetically distinct subpopulation of Iberian Harbour Poirpoise in Strait of Gibraltar) / /

Common dolphin / *Delphinus delphis* / LC (endangered Mediterranean population in Alboran sea) / /

Bottlenose dolphin / *Tursiops truncatus* / LC (vulnerable Mediterranean population in Alboran sea) / /

Mediterranean monk seal / *Monachus monachus* / VU / /

Fin whale / *Balaenoptera physalus* / VU / /

Sei whale / *Balaenoptera borealis* / EN / /

Sperm whale / *Physeter macrocephalus* / VU / /