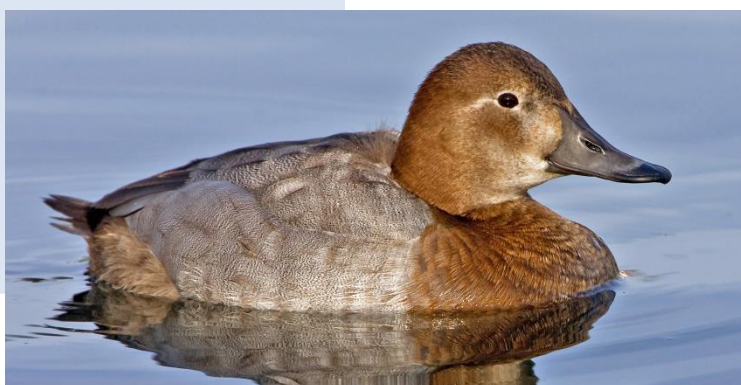
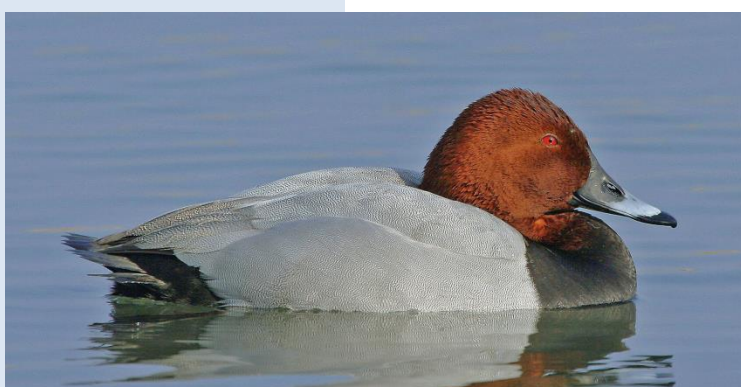
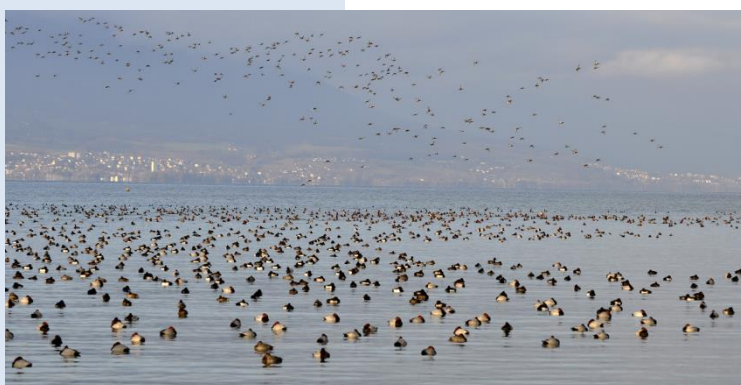


Wintering Waterbirds in Switzerland

Results of the Swiss Waterbird Census 2014/2015 and 2015/2016

Nicolas Strebel



vogelwarte.ch

Impressum

Wintering Waterbirds in Switzerland Results of the Swiss Waterbird Monitoring 2014/2015 and 2015/2016

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Photos

Marcel Burkhardt (Male and female Common pochard), Verena Keller (Waterbird Flock)

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1. Summary

Since 1967, waterbirds are systematically counted in Switzerland as part of the International Waterbird Census. The collected data is a valuable base for assessing the situation of the waterbird populations and the importance of sites in Switzerland and at the international level.

Previously, the results of the winter waterbird census were published in annual reports usually around one year after the census. Following the last of these reports (Müller & Keller 2015) reporting on national monitoring programmes was restructured. The main results are integrated in a status report (for the recent update see Sattler et al. 2016). From now on, the detailed results are published in a short summary report with accompanying information on the web as an annex to the status report. As a result of the changes in the reporting cycle we decided not to publish a separate report for the season 2014/2015 but to integrate the results in the present report.

1.1 Winter 2014/2015

Temperatures in October, November and December 2014 as well as in the first days of January 2015 were above average. With around 483'000 individuals, the total count in November was close to the average of the last ten years ($\bar{x}$ 2006–2015 $\approx$ 477'000). The result of the January counts was relatively low (492'000 ind., $\bar{x}$ 2007–2016 $\approx$ 514'000).

In 2014, record counts for November were reached by Red-crested Pochard ($\sim$ 41'000 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1991–2015 $\approx$ 20'000), Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*, $\sim$ 7700 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1991–2015 $\approx$ 6200) and Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*, $\sim$ 270 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1996–2015 $\approx$ 150). The following species reached their highest January counts in 2015: Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*, $\sim$ 1800 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1997–2016 $\approx$ 910), Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*, $\sim$ 900 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1997–2016 $\approx$ 720), Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*, 91 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1992–2016 $\approx$ 39), Egyptian Goose (56 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1992–2016 $\approx$ 15) and Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*, 22 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1997–2016 $\approx$ 9). Greylag Goose, Common Kingfisher and Great Egret also reached new record counts for winter 2014/2015, but the counts were exceeded in the following winter.

November counts for the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) were the lowest for the last 25 years, only 9 individuals were found ($\bar{x}$ 1991–2015 $\approx$ 26). The lowest November counts for the last ten years were found for Mallard ($\sim$ 37'000 ind., $\bar{x}$ 2006–2015 $\approx$ 45'000), Gadwall ($\sim$ 5600 ind., $\bar{x}$ 2006–2015 $\approx$ 11'000) and Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*, $\sim$ 2300 ind., $\bar{x}$ 2006–2015 $\approx$ 7000). Mallard and Eurasian Teal also showed the lowest January counts for the last 25 years with around 45'000 ind. (Mallard, $\bar{x}$ 1992–2016 $\approx$ 51'000) and around 3500 ind. (Eurasian Teal, $\bar{x}$ 1992–2016 $\approx$ 6100).

1.2 Winter 2015/2016

Switzerland experienced a very dry autumn 2015 leading to exceptionally low water levels. November, December and the first days of January 2016 were much warmer than average.

In Winter 2015/2016, the total number of waterbirds in Switzerland (including foreign parts of Lake Geneva and Lake Constance) was generally low. In November 2015, the population size of 464'000 was below the average of the last ten years ($\bar{x}$ 2006–2015 $\approx$ 477'000 ind.). The number in January was around 483'000 representing the second-but lowest value within the last 25 years. The main reason for the low numbers is the decrease in wintering population of species that breed in Northern Europe and Russia. Ice cover of water bodies located more in the north or east of Europa is decreasing. This allows the birds to spend the winter closer to their breeding grounds (Lehikoinen et al. 2013). In absolute numbers, the wintering population of Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) shows the largest de-

crease. In the 1990s, November counts of Tufted Duck reached a maximum of around 160'000 individuals, January counts went up to 200'000 individuals. In November 2015, only around 86'000 individuals of the species were found, in January around 105'000. The numbers of wintering Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) are decreasing as well. Between 1980 and 2000, wintering population of the Common Goldeneye was usually above 10'000. In January 2016, a new all-time record low was reached with about 4100 individuals. Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) also experienced a record low for January, 82'000 individuals of the species were found ($\bar{x}$ 1992–2015 $\approx$ 105'000 ind.). The same applies to the Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) with a January count of only around 1600 individuals ($\bar{x}$ 1992–2015 $\approx$ 5400 ind.). The lowest January counts for the last ten years were found for Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*, $\sim$ 46'000 ind., $\bar{x}$ 2007–2016 $\approx$ 51'000) and for the Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*, 49 ind., $\bar{x}$ 2007–2016 $\approx$ 74). In contrast, several species experienced noticeable increases during the last years. A continuous growth of the wintering population was found for the Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*, $\sim$ 2000 ind. in January 2016, $\bar{x}$ 2007–2016 $\approx$ 1500) and the Great Egret (*Egretta alba*, 410 ind. in January 2016, $\bar{x}$ 2007–2016 $\approx$ 250). Wintering populations of the Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), the Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and the Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) also showed marked increases. The local population of these species is mostly or totally descending from individuals introduced by humans. The January total of Greylag Goose was around 1700 individuals in 2016, a marked plus compared to 200–300 Individuals that were usually found in the 1990s. Observations of Ruddy Shelduck were very rare in the 1990s, in contrast 1200 individuals were found in January 2016. The Egyptian Goose was virtually absent in the 1990s, in January 2016 around 50 individuals were found. January record counts for the last 25 years were found for Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*, 35'000 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1992–2016 $\approx$ 20'000) and – a bit surprising after the low numbers of January 2015 – for Gadwall (*Anas strepera*, almost 13'000 ind., $\bar{x}$ 1992–2016 $\approx$ 8300). With currently around 5000 individuals, the wintering population of the Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) doubled compared to the 1990s. The Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) reached the highest numbers since it was considered for the waterbird census in winter 1996/1997. Last winter, 610 individuals were found in November, 370 in January. The increase is presumably due to favourable weather conditions in winter, in addition it might reflect the increase in breeding population.

Similarly to previous winters, 60 % of all waterbirds concentrated on Lake Constance and Lake Neuchâtel during the counts in November and January.

2. Wintering population size

After a marked increase until the early 1980s, waterbird numbers levelled off between 500'000 and 600'000 individuals. Within the last 20 years, we observe a slight decrease, mainly due to the decline of the wintering population of Tufted Duck that shifted its wintering range towards north-eastern areas. In addition, Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) and Eurasian Coot also showed population decreases since the 1990s. In contrast to the changes found by Tufted Duck, the decreases are not due to shifts in wintering range but reflect the declines that these species experience all over Europe (further information in "The state of Birds in Switzerland", Sattler et al. 2016).

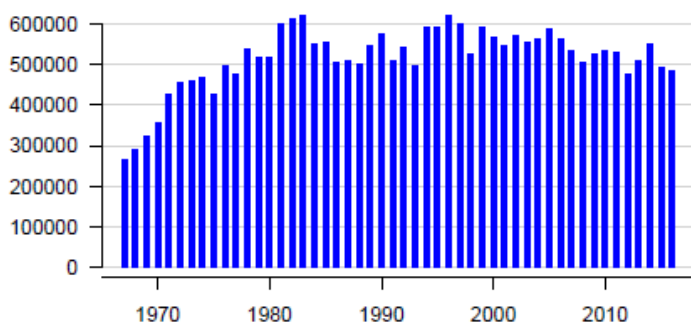


Fig. 1. Total individual numbers of waterbirds in Switzerland (including foreign parts of Lake Constance and Lake Geneva), January counts. The January counts cover the period from 1967 to 2016.

Tab. 1. January counts of the ten most abundant waterbird species in Switzerland (including foreign parts of Lake Constance and Lake Geneva). The total counts since 1967 (January) and 1991 (November) can be found in the attached excel-file  (double-click on the icon to open).

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Tufted Duck	137829	137678	125213	127481	134939	95963	119599	118814	111008	104977
Eurasian Coot	92926	89233	97737	94277	102049	85742	97116	94473	95009	81917
Common Pochard	79719	66580	65185	65295	65071	66138	60691	70286	68438	65086
Mallard	48147	50468	50244	58077	48673	58246	51124	58315	45442	45680
Black-headed Gull	45315	38809	45532	42490	42356	44799	45265	47800	42767	44607
Red-crested Pochard	26588	21412	28324	28803	22857	25061	24631	32003	30827	34858
Great Crested Grebe	36565	38830	43466	47512	44666	37094	45909	59254	36460	31651
Gadwall	9937	9057	10942	10916	8205	7356	7423	10751	5986	12756
Eurasian Teal	7891	5777	7450	6316	4311	5227	3628	5486	3485	8909
Mute Swan	5945	6026	6010	6471	6018	7007	6992	7532	7334	6623
Others	41810	42928	46517	48177	49518	43190	45374	46182	45497	46051
Total	532672	506798	526620	535815	528663	475823	507752	550896	492253	483115

3. Wintering populations on the different sites

In November 2015, waterbirds were strongly concentrated on Lake Constance (Bodensee). The upper part (Bodensee-Obersee) hosted around 30 % of the Swiss total, the lower part (Bodensee-Untersee) around 20 %, summing up to around 230'000 individuals.

In January 2016, around a quarter of all waterbirds were found on the lower part of Lake Constance. Together with its upper part, Lake Constance was then home for almost 200'000 individuals which equals to 40 % of the total number of wintering waterbirds in Switzerland. Lake Neuchâtel (Lac de Neuchâtel) and Lake Geneva (Lac Léman) hosted 17 % and 13 % of the waterbirds. The most abundant species on Lake Constance were Tufted Duck, Eurasian Coot and Common Pochard. Lake Neuchâtel was the most important site for the Red-crested Pochard. The most abundant species on Lake Geneva was the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*).

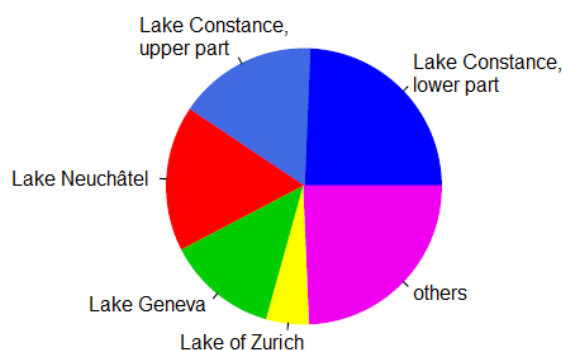


Fig. 2. Proportion of the total individual number for the five most important sites, January 2016. Total: 483115 individuals

The attached tables contain the number of individuals per site and species for November 2014  and January 2015.  (double-click on the icon to open)

Tab. 2. Individual counts on the five sites with the highest total individual numbers, January 2016. Indicated are the number of individuals of the five most common species per site and the proportion of individuals present at the site, compared to the total number of that species in Switzerland.

Lake Constance, lower part	Lake Neuchâtel	Lake Constance, upper part	Lake Geneva	Lake of Zurich
Eurasian Coot 26228 (32 %)	Tufted Duck 22711 (22 %)	Tufted Duck 23973 (23 %)	Great Crested Grebe 17816 (56 %)	Eurasian Coot 7210 (9 %)
Tufted Duck 24299 (23 %)	Common Pochard 19403 (30 %)	Eurasian Coot 19907 (24 %)	Tufted Duck 12293 (12 %)	Black-headed Gull 4875 (11 %)
Common Pochard 24083 (37 %)	Red-crested Pochard 19388 (56 %)	Common Pochard 9250 (14 %)	Black-headed Gull 7672 (17 %)	Tufted Duck 4441 (4 %)
Red-crested Pochard 8762 (25 %)	Eurasian Coot 7513 (9 %)	Mallard 5750 (13 %)	Common Pochard 4960 (8 %)	Mallard 1941 (4 %)
Gadwall 7841 (61 %)	Great Crested Grebe 2969 (9 %)	Black-headed Gull 5487 (12 %)	Eurasian Coot 4815 (6 %)	Common Pochard 1375 (2 %)
others, 26364	others, 10311	others, 14634	others, 15288	others, 4365
total, 117577 (24 %)	total, 82295 (17 %)	total, 78698 (16 %)	total, 62844 (13 %)	total, 24207 (5 %)

4. International reserves for waterbirds and migratory birds in Switzerland

In November 2015 and January 2016, around 17 % of the waterbirds were found in the International reserves for waterbirds and migratory birds. The reserves at Lake Constance and Lake Neuchâtel hosted the highest waterbird concentrations. In the attached excel-files, the proportion hosted by the different reserves is indicated for each species for season 2014/2015  and for season 2015/2016  (double-click on the icon to open). Thus the tables provide information on the importance of the reserves for the different species.

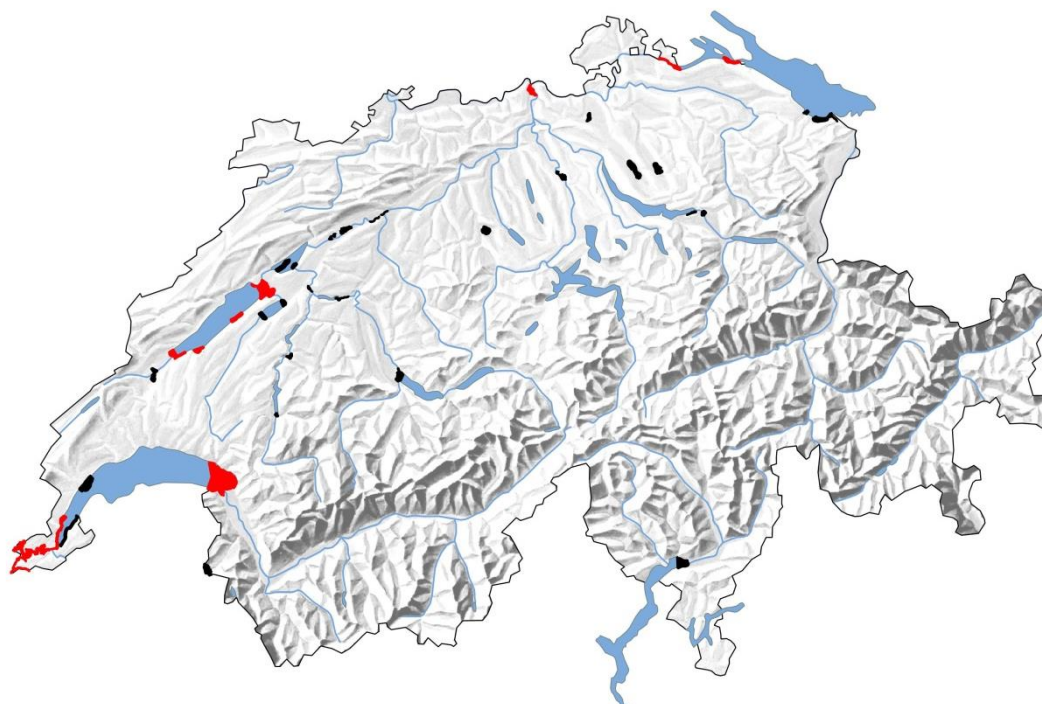


Fig. 3. Location of the reserves for waterbirds and migratory birds in Switzerland. Reserves of international importance are marked in red, reserves of national importance in black.

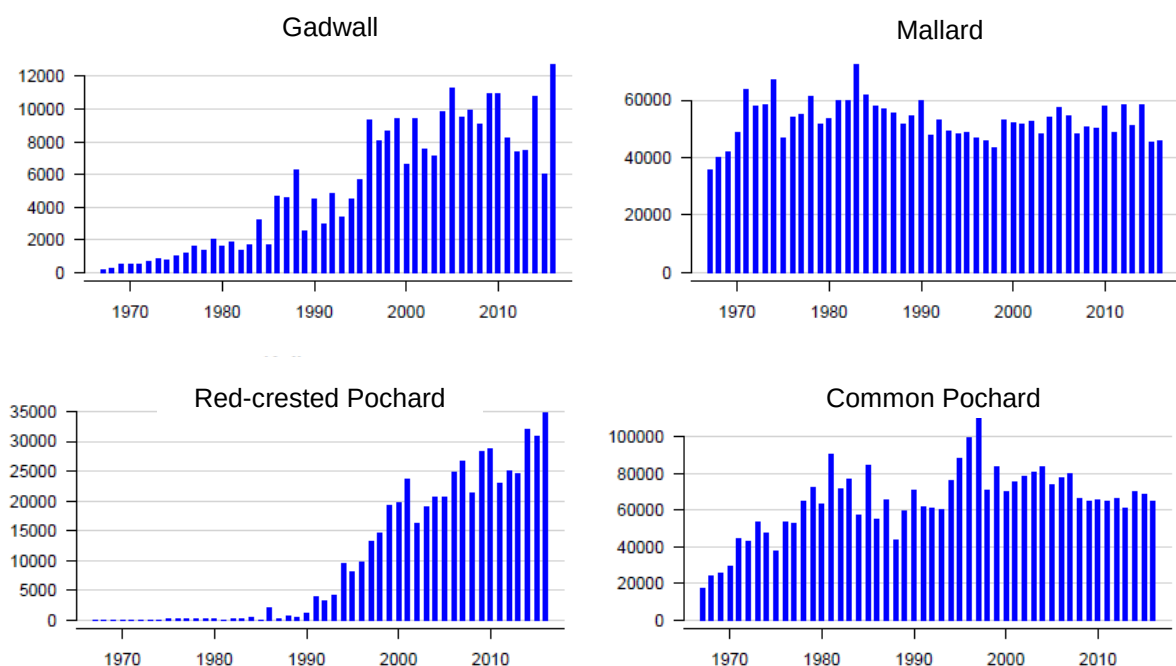
On most sites, waterbird counts are conducted in November and in January. In the International reserves for waterbirds and migratory birds, the counts are conducted more frequently, usually monthly (Tab. 3). The results of the monthly counts can be found in the attached excel files: winter 2014/2015  and winter 2015/2016  (double-click on the icon to open).

Tab. 3. Counts conducted in the International reserves for waterbirds and migratory birds in Switzerland. Example: in the Ermatinger Becken, counts are conducted from September to April.

	Counts within season (Month)											
	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6
Ermatinger Becken (TG)												
Stein am Rhein (SH,TG)												
Klingnauerstausee (AG)												
Fanel - Chablais de Cudrefin, Pointe de Marin (BE,FR,VD,NE)												
Chevroux jusqu'à Portalban (VD,FR)												
Yvonand jusqu'à Cheyres (VD,FR)												
Grandson jusqu'à Champ-Pittet (VD)												
Les Grangettes (VD,VS)												
Rhône jusqu'à Verbois (GE)												
Versoix jusqu'à Genève (GE)												

5. Species of national priority

If at least 1.4 % of the entire biogeographical population of a species spends the winter in Switzerland, the species is considered to be of national priority (a detailed description of the criteria can be found in Keller et al. 2010). This results in a list of ten waterbird species. Fig. 4 illustrates the January counts for these species since 1967.



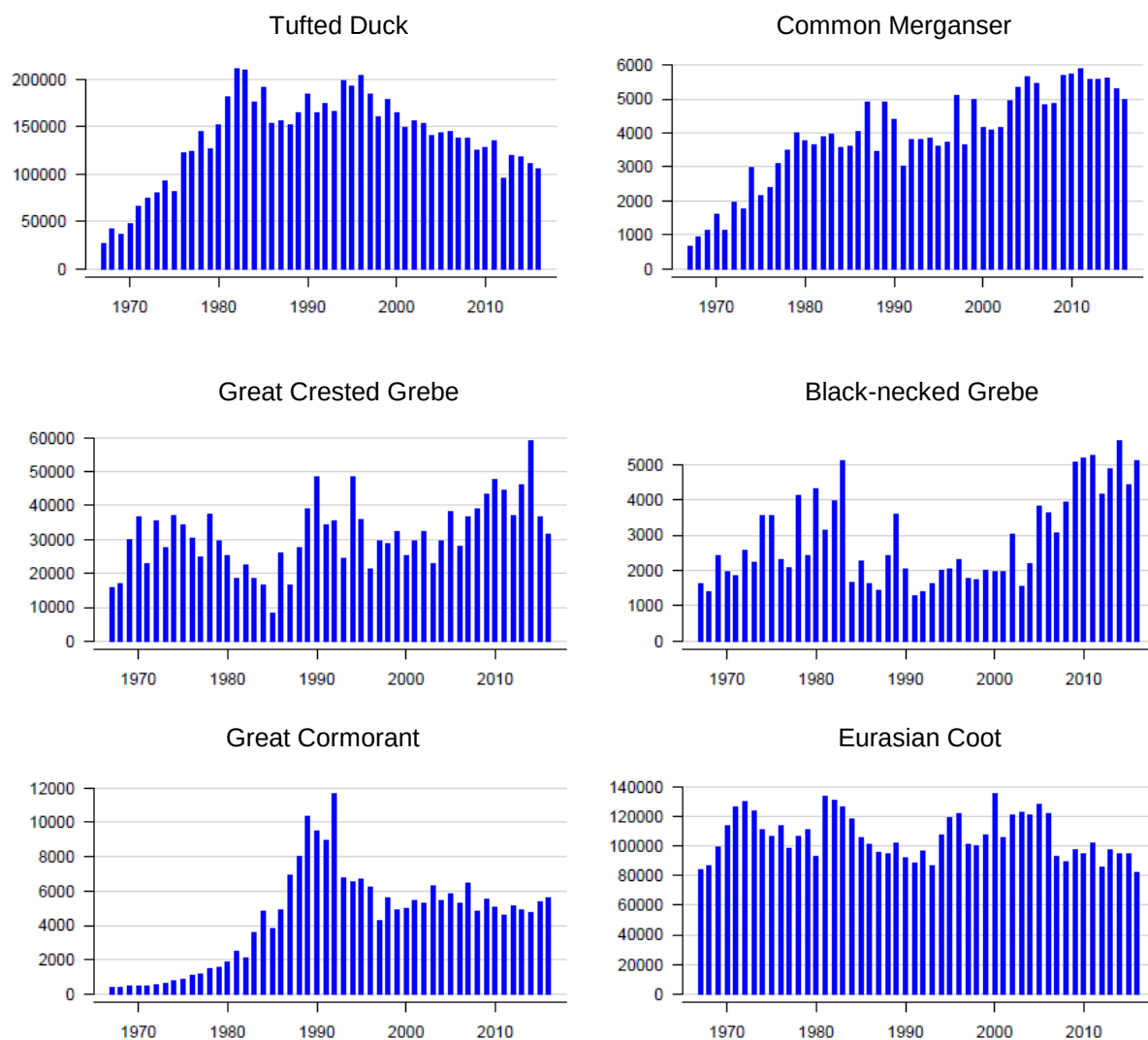


Fig. 4. January counts of the species of national priority in Switzerland (including foreign parts of Lake Constance and Lake Geneva).

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Appendix

Methods

The following species are considered in the Swiss Waterbird Monitoring: Ducks, Loons, Grebes, Gulls and a selection of species from other orders (e.g. Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Great Egret *Egretta alba*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Common Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*, Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* and some wader species). Since winter 2007/2008, the counters are asked to record Yellow-legged Gull *L. michahellis* and Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans* separately if possible. Individuals that can't be assigned to one of the species are listed as "Yellow-legged/Herring/Caspian Gull".

The monitoring is conducted on all Lakes, Rivers and streams in Switzerland including boundary water bodies (Fig. 5). The water bodies are divided in 375 sub-sites. Each sub-site is assigned to a responsible person that organizes the counts or conducts the counts by itself. In some cases, one person or organisation is responsible for several sub-sites. The counts are conducted in Mid-November and Mid-January, usually on the Sunday closest to day 15 of the month. In most international reserves for waterbirds and migratory birds in Switzerland, the counts are conducted on a monthly base (Tab. 3) and coordinated by local groups. In winter 2014/2015 and 2015/2016, almost 100 % of the sub-sites were surveyed (sub-sites in total: 375; missing: 0 in Nov. 2014, 1 in Jan. 2015, 2 in Nov. 2015, 1 in Jan. 2016).

The waterbird monitoring is conducted by volunteers, coordinated by the Swiss Ornithological Institute. More than 200 people responsible for a sub-site and an unknown number of assistants participate on the waterbird counts.

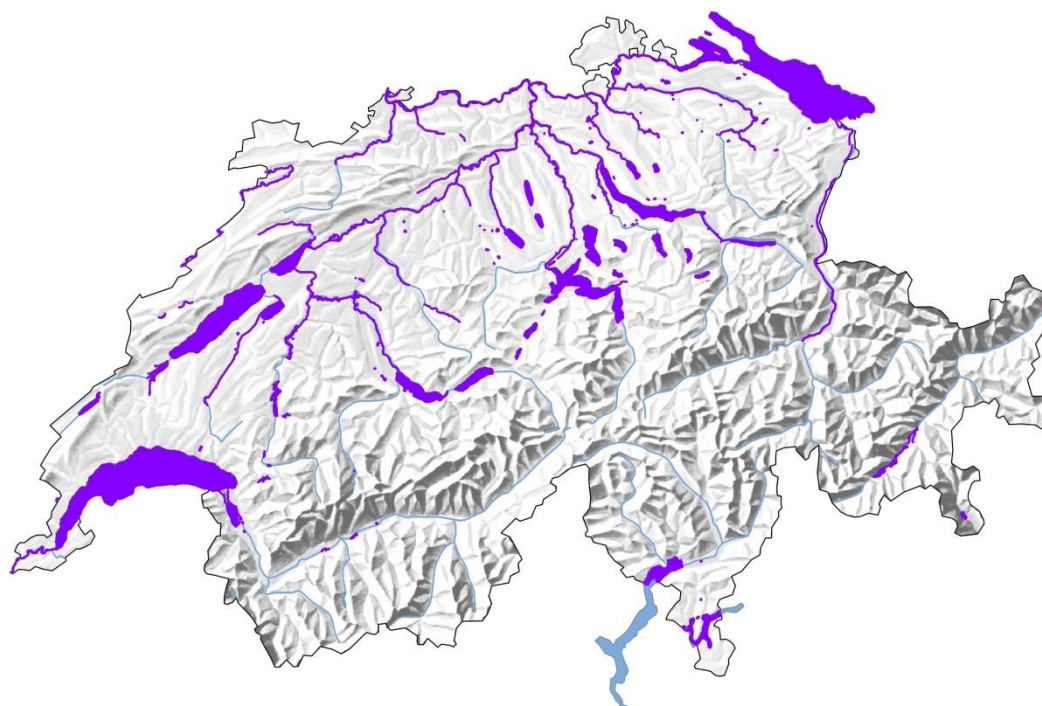


Fig. 5. Water bodies considered in the Waterbird Monitoring are marked in violet.

Sub-site responsables

Eugen Akeret, Oberneunforn
 Edith Altenburger, Buchs SG
 Christoph Angst, Perlen
 Urs Ankli, Basel
 Michel Antoniazza, Cheseaux-Noréaz
 Carl'Antonio Balzari, Muri b. Bern
 Hans-Günther Bauer, Radolfzell
 Pierre Beaud, Lausanne
 Christian Beerli, Winterthur
 Jean-Jacques Beley, Publier
 Christian Berger, Basel
 René Berner, Boniswil
 Markus Berset, Bülach
 Rösly Bienz, Wittnau
 Hanspeter Bieri, Hemmental
 Roger Bisig, Gross
 Andreas Blösch, Bütigen
 Adrian Borgula, Luzern
 Ursula Bornhauser-Sieber, Ottikon Kempththal
 Yves Bötsch, Meikirch
 Judith Brechbühler-Gut, Hildisrieden
 Ueli Bringolf, Schaffhausen
 Manuel Bueno, Paudex
 Dominic Buergi, Basel
 Edgar Bühler, Egolzwil
 Jost Bühlmann, Zürich
 Pierre-François Burgermeister, Genève
 Thomas Bürgi, Thundorf
 Thomas Burkard, Wohlen AG
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 Marcel Burkhardt, Sursee
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 Maurizio Camponovo, Bidogno
 Mikaël Cantin, Chevroux
 Franco Cappelletti, Losone
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 Eric Christen, Küsnacht ZH
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 Philippe Frei, Bern
 Jürg Frey, Winterthur
 Michael Frey, Arlesheim
 Hans Fritschi, Unterseen
 Stephan Gaar, Domat/Ems
 Walter Gabathuler, Rheineck
 Roland Gasche, Luterbach
 Max Gasser, Bözberg
 Roland Gautier, Zürich
 Walter Geiger, Frauenfeld
 Hanspeter Geisser, Lichtensteig
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 Rolf Gugelmann, Solothurn
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 Heinz Hess-Roth, Muhen
 Liselotte Hochstrasser, Wädenswil
 Heidi Hofstetter, Zollikofen
 Werner Holliger, Erlinsbach SO
 Martin Horn, Wigoltingen
 Alois Huber, Sins
 Leo Hüppin, Au ZH
 Arthur Ingold, Berikon
 Elisabeth Isler, Weinfelden
 Harald Jacoby, Konstanz
 Peter Jäggi, Härkingen

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 Jürg Kolb, Niederuzwil
 Daniel Kronauer, Steinhausen
 Pius Kühne, Lauerz
 Klaus Kühnlein, Küsnacht ZH
 Pius Kunz, Willisau
 Thomas Künzi, Würenlingen
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 Heinz Leitner, Thalwil
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 Martin Leuzinger, Basel
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 Jean-Luc Loizeau, Chavannes-des-Bois
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 Aurelio Lubini, Gordola
 Michael Lüdi, St. Moritz
 Bernard Lugrin, Bernex
 Stephan Lüscher, Berg TG
 Erich Lüscher-Riederer, Domat/Ems
 Urs Lustenberger, Triengen
 Hans Lüthi, Füllinsdorf
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Max Zumbühl, Hombrechtikon
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Local groups that organise the counts in the international reserves for water-birds and migratory birds

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