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NOTABLE BIRD OBSERVATIONS FROM MAURITANIA

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Received 21 Nov 1989

Revised 1 Mar 1990

Between 1985 and 1988 various teams of Dutch ornithologists visited the Banc d'Arguin, Mauritania (e.g. Ens et al. 1989) and found several bird species not previously or rarely recorded from the region. This paper summarizes the most interesting records, a few of which have already briefly been mentioned by Lamarche (1988) and by Smit & Van Spanje (1989).

Observers are referred to in the text by their initials, as follows:

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HB Henrich Bruggemann	TP Theunis Piersma
HS Henk Spijkman	TvS Tom M. van Spanje

Coordinates of Mauritanian localities mentioned:

Baie d'Aouatif 19°53N, 16°15W	Iouik 19°53N, 16°17W
Cap Tafarit 20°10N, 16°14W	Nouadhibou 20°54N, 17°01W
Cap Timiris 19°23N, 16°32W	Nouakchott 18°09N, 15°58W
Ebelk Alznay 19°54N, 16°17W	Tidra (Ile de) 19°42N, 16°20W
Ile d'Arguin 20°30N, 16°22W	

Eleonora's Falcon Falco eleonora

On 16 Jun 1988 a dark phase bird was seen flying north along the western shore of Tidra (EM, HS). The only previously published record from Mauritania was that of a single bird at Ile d'Arguin on 4 November (year not stated) (Mahé 1985, cited in Lamarche 1987). The nearest known breeding colonies are situated on Lanzarote (Canary Islands) and on islands off the Atlantic coast of Morocco (Walter 1979).

Purple Gallinule Porphyrio porphyrio

The following records at the Banc d'Arguin of Purple Gallinules belonging to the green-backed subspecies P. p. madagascariensis suggest occasional northward movements of birds from subsaharan Africa; two females (one adult, one juvenile, already dead for two to three months) were found on Tidra in April 1986 (TvS). On 20 and 21 Apr 1988 an adult was observed

near Iouik (HB, PD), on 8 May 1988 an adult was seen at Ebelk Aiznay (PD) and a bird (not freshly dead) was found there on 29 May 1988 (HS). All 1988 records probably concerned the same bird. This species was formerly known from the southern part of the country, in highly variable numbers (Lamarche 1987).

Purple Sandpiper Calidris maritima

An adult in winter plumage was observed at Ebelk Aiznay on 5 Apr 1985 (PD). The bird was observed at close range, while feeding among Turnstones Arenaria interpres on wrecked Zostera during high tide. This is the first known record from Mauritania (Lamarche 1988). The normal winter range of Purple Sandpipers extends south to the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula (Cramp & Simmons 1983). It is considered a vagrant in N Morocco (Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962, Urban et al. 1986), Madeira and the Azores (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus

Single birds were observed at close range at the Baie d'Aouatif on 22 Mar 1985 (BE, MK) and on 25 and 26 Apr 1985 (CS, MK). The first was in winter plumage, just starting to moult to summer plumage. The other two were in summer plumage. There were no previously published records from Mauritania. Populations breeding in northern Europe generally migrate south to south-east and the species is rare in western Europe (Cramp & Simmons 1983). The only North African record west of Tunisia, where it occurs regularly, is from Morocco (Cramp & Simmons 1983), although it has been observed inland in Mali (Urban et al. 1986).

Upland Sandpiper Bartramia longicauda

A single bird was observed and photographed just south of Nouadhibou on 11 May 1986 (TVS). The bird was apparently in good condition and feeding on flies among other waders at a rubbish dump on the beach. This record (already mentioned by Lamarche 1987) is the first for the African continent (Urban et al. 1986). This North American species has been observed as an autumn vagrant in several European countries and on the Azores (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Red-necked Phalarope Phalaropus lobatus

A female in summer plumage was observed on 17 Jun 1988 on Tidra, feeding in a shallow pool (EM, HS). Lamarche (1987) mentioned only two previous records from the country. The European breeding populations are believed to winter exclusively in the Arabian Sea; no regular wintering areas are known in the Atlantic (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Plain Swift Apus unicolor

In the Banc d'Arguin area the following observations were made:

On 25 Apr 1988, after a dust-storm from the north, at least four Plain Swifts were identified in a mixed flock with Pallid Swifts A. pallidus and Little Swifts A. affinis, flying over the sebkha near Iouik (AG, PD); 26 Jun 1988 about 50 flying over Tidra, in a mixed flock with House Martins Delichon urbica (EM, FdR); 27 Jun 1988 20 flying north at Iouik (AvD, EM); 28 Jun 1988 at least two over Iouik (EM); 1 Oct 1988 a single bird flying south at Ebelk Aiznay (PM, RB, RL); 21 Oct 1988 four birds over Ebelk Aiznay, in a mixed flock with Pallid and Little Swifts (RB).

These observations were made by teams who had the opportunity to study this species on Gran Canaria immediately before their arrival in Mauritania. The species was identified by its relatively small size, fast wing-beats and brown throat. Moreover, the semi-translucent flight feathers (mentioned by Hollom et al. 1988) proved to be a useful field character from below.

There were no previous records from Mauritania. The Plain Swift is a common breeder in the Canary Islands and Madeira but it is largely migratory and the winter quarters are unknown (Cramp 1985). The only previous records on the African continent are from Morocco as follows. Smith (1965) observed small numbers of dark Apus along the coast between Casablanca and Oued Massa (late November-late January 1963/64). Records of up to 60 Apus in the Agadir-Oued Massa area in December- January (year not stated) were attributed to A. unicolor (Thévenot et al. 1980, cited in Cramp 1985). Between 26 Jan and 15 Feb 1986 up to 200-400 Plain Swifts were regularly observed at Agadir (R. Vogel pers. comm.). According to Thévenot (in Van den Berg 1988) there are six records from Morocco (perhaps including some of those cited above).

White-rumped Swift Apus caffer

On 4 May 1988 three birds were seen at Cap Tafarit, flying around with Little Swifts (PD). Compared to this species the A. caffer were slightly larger, with a smaller white rump and a clearly forked tail. In the afternoon of 11 May 1988, after a dust-storm in the morning, flocks of seven and four White-rumped Swifts were seen passing at close range near Iouik (PD). Five birds were seen at Iouik on 22 Jun 1988 in a mixed flock with Pallid Swifts, Little Swifts and House Martins (AvD, FdR).

There were no previously published records from the country. White-rumped Swifts are widely distributed in subsaharan Africa and the nearest known breeding areas are in southern Senegal (Fry et al. 1988). Since the mid-1960s the species has also been known as a very local breeder in southern Spain and in the High Atlas of Morocco. It is perhaps a summer visitor to Spain, although there are several winter records (Cramp 1985).

Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis

On 6 Oct 1988 a single bird was seen perched on a sailing boat at the village of Iouik (PM, RB). This species is considered a visitor to the

Senegal River area of southern Mauritania in July-February (Gee 1984). There are no published records from further north in NW Africa (Cramp 1985, Fry et al. 1988).

Richard's Pipit Anthus novaeseelandiae

Between 30 Sep and 13 Oct 1988 there were several records of this species, involving at least seven individuals: one seen and heard Iouik (AB, RB); one flying south over Ebelk Aiznay (seen and heard; PM, RL); two single birds flying south at Ebelk Aiznay, one of which was seen for five minutes on the ground (PM, RB, RL); one on the ground Baie d'Aouatif (RB); two flying south at Cap Timiris (RL).

Richard's Pipit is considered a regular autumn vagrant in western Europe (Cramp 1988). There are a few observations from the Mauritanian coast, with passage at Nouakchott occurring in October-November and March, and winter records in the south of the country (Lamarche 1987).

Robin Erithacus rubecula

A single bird was observed on 10 Mar 1987 in Nouadhibou (TvS). Four previous records in the country were all dead birds found in autumn (Lamarche 1987). The Robin is a winter visitor to N Africa, but scarce south of the coastal strip (Cramp 1988).

Jackdaw Corvus monedula

At La Cherka, Nouadhibou, two birds were seen on 11 and 16 Mar 1985 (JvdK, PD) and 5 May 1985 (BE, CS, JvdK, TP, TvS); five birds on 3 Feb 1986 (JvdK). The only previously published record from Mauritania was of two birds at Nouadhibou in October 1985 (Lamarche 1987). The Jackdaw breeds in Morocco and has occasionally been observed in the Canary Islands (Etchécopar & Hùe 1964).

Chaffinch Fringilla coelebs

A single male was observed in Nouadhibou on 24 and 25 Oct 1988 (PM), the first record of this species from Mauritania. It breeds in Morocco, where it winters south to the edge of the Sahara (Etchécopar & Hùe 1964).

Brambling Fringilla montifringilla

The following records of adult males at Nouadhibou were the first for the country: 9-15 Jan 1988 (a singing bird) (TvS) and 5-18 Apr 1988 (HB, ME, PD, TvS). The locality of these records was incorrectly stated as Nouakchott by Lamarche (1988). There are only a few records from Morocco (Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962).

Greenfinch Carduelis chloris

The following observations were from Nouadhibou: four 22-25 Jan 1986 (TVS), five on 2 Mar 1986 (TVS), and a pair (including a singing male) 4-8 May 1988 (TVS). The only previously published records from the country were from Nouakchott (one May-June 1980: Browne 1981) and Nouadhibou (three on 1 Oct, year not stated: Mahé 1985 cited in Lamarche 1987). The Greenfinch breeds in NW Africa from Morocco to Tunisia, where it winters south to the edge of the Sahara. It is accidental on the Canary Islands (Etchécopar & Hùe 1964).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the Mauritanian authorities, in particular the director of the Parc National du Banc d'Arguin, Mr. Hadya Amadou Kane, for their permission to carry out our studies and for their support. We also thank the collaborators of the Parc National du Banc d'Arguin and the other participants in Banc d'Arguin projects, notably the observers mentioned in the introduction. Financial support was given by: British Ornithologists' Union, Commission of the European Communities, Fund for Research for Nature Conservation, Netherlands' Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, National Geographic Society, Natuurmonumenten, Prince Bernhard Foundation, Shell Internationale Research Maatschappij, Netherlands State Forestry Service, Netherlands Marine Science Foundation, World Wide Fund for Nature (Netherlands), and Bachiene Stichting.

SUMMARY

This paper presents observations of bird species not previously or rarely recorded from Mauritania. Species new to the country include Purple Sandpiper Calidris maritima, Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus, Upland Sandpiper Bartramia longicauda, Plain Swift Apus unicolor, White-rumped Swift A. caffer, Chaffinch Fringilla coelebs and Brambling F. montifringilla.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article relate l'observation d'espèces jusqu'ici jamais ou rarement signalées en Mauritanie. Les espèces nouvelles pour le pays comprennent le Bécasseau violet Calidris maritima, le Bécasseau falcinelle Limicola falcinellus, la Maubèche des champs Bartramia longicauda, le Martinet unicolore Apus unicolor, le Martinet café Apus caffer, le Pinson des arbres Fringilla coelebs et le Pinson du Nord F. montifringilla.

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