

# New fifth biotope of Algerian Nuthatch September 24/09/2018

Published by Karim Haddad

Participants: Karim Haddad, Saber Dekkiche and local guide Ryad M.



*Algerian Nuthatch in Lerabaa forest of Ouadjana, 24/09/2018*

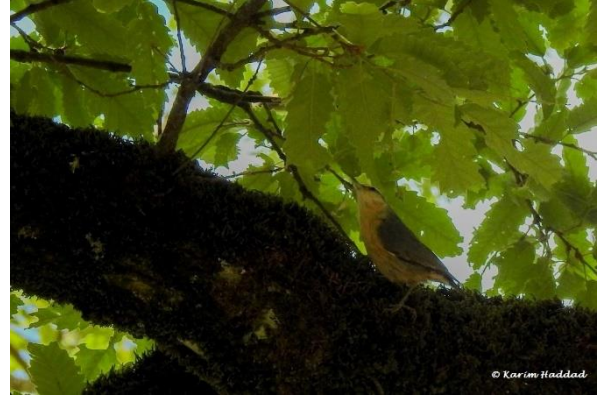
## **Introduction**

The Algerian Nuthatch is the only species endemic of Algeria. It was only observed in four localities isolated from one another. The first discovery was on Mount Babor in 1975. The second one was within Taza National Park in the Guerrouch Forest (June 1989) and the third and fourth ones were in the Tamentout and Djimla forests (1990). Finally, it is in the forest of Oudjana in 2018 that the latest one was found; and I hope it will not be the last.

My first meeting with an Algerian Nuthatch was in 2016 in the Bouafroune forest of Djimla. It was on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2016 that we, Algerian birdwatchers, gathered from different regions of the country to see and take photographs of the Algerian Nuthatch. That day, our dream was to see for the first time the only endemic bird of Algeria. We wandered in the forest all day long. We separated in groups and took different routes to find new species. By the end of the day, many had left because we were all hundreds of kilometres away from our respective homes; but our group stayed in the forest because one friend had gotten lost and could not find his way back to the car. Three brave guys went to look for him and eventually returned with him. At the same time, together with two local guys, I was able for the first time to take pictures, shoot a video and record the voice of the bird in this forest. The joy was indescribable. Moreover, since then, I found a new dream - find the Algerian Nuthatch in a biotope where no one had found it before.

My close friend, Saber, said he knew more places to see this bird. While we were going, our other friend, Abdelwahab B., made a post on Facebook stating that this bird can be found in the forest between Oudjana and Shahna. For us, this was the main motivation for an immediate trip. After I saw Abdelwahab B. had made a successful visit in this fifth biotope for the Algerian Nuthatch, I contacted him immediately to make an appointment in the new forest of the Algerian Nuthatch. However, unfortunately, he was very busy and I did not want to bother him any longer.

Therefore, I decided to leave with Saber, since he knew the place and had already been there before. Saber phoned his old friend Ryad, who lives near the forest. The appointment for our meeting was set for 24th September.



*Algerian Nuthatch in Bouafroun forest of Djimla 20/05/2016*

## **Itinerary**

### **Monday 24 September 2018**

Depart from Constantine to Lerabaa Forest in Oudjana.

As always, our ornithological trips began in the early morning.

We departed from Constantine at 4:00 am and stopped at 5:30 for breakfast; at 7:30, we were near Riyadh's house.

He met us at his home, and we went directly to Lerabaa forest. When we went to the Oak's forest, we could see and hear lots of Rock dove (*Columba livia*), Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*), Eurasian collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), Sardinian Warblers (*Sylvia melanocephala*), Common Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*), plus a group of Spanish sparrows (*Passer hispaniolensis*).

When we entered the dark forest with Cork oak trees (*Quercus suber*), to explore it, the Nuthatch could not heard, because this period of the year is quiet and the young birds follow the adults so that they can feed them and avoid danger. While we were among the tall Algerian oaks (*Quercus canariensis*) with clear water running below them, the Coal Tits ssp. *ledouci*, which has yellow underparts, came to meet us first. After 10 minutes at an altitude of 952m, exactly at 09:09 am first three Nuthatch birds appeared on a tree, then four others on another tree and two on a third tree. It was as if they had prepared a special performance for us. It was a great show and we watched them for two hours. We did not explore the whole forest, so we found the Nuthatch at an altitude between 900m and 1050m.



***Algerian Nuthatch in Lerabaa forest of Ouadjana, 24/09/2018***

Then we decided to be acquainted with the flora of the forest. By 12 o'clock, together and cheerfully, we took our lunch alongside the stream.

After we had had lunch and had rested, we started watching other bird species. The first bird that we saw was the African Blue Tit (*Cyanistes teneriffae*). We did not see much of the Great Tit (*Parus major*) and the European robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), but the Short-toed treecreeper (*Certhia brachydactyla*) was present where the Nuthatch fed themselves.



**Short-toed treecreeper, 24/09/2018**



**European robin, 24/09/2018**

Other species included the distinctive Great Spotted Woodpeckers ssp. *numidus*, complete with red breast spotted with black. We had a good view of the Eurasian Jay ssp. *cervicalis* with its very distinctive white face and black cap. We also saw a Levillant's Woodpecker that showed itself nicely while flying and looking for food on the tree.

Coming out of the forest around 850m, a raptor flew over us but we could not identify it because we were not allowed to bring our binoculars out of our backpacks since the whole area is militarized.

Our observations finished at 15:30 with the European Sparrowhawk (*accipiter nisus*), which passed over our heads to join the forest; the Common swifts (*Apus apus*), the Alpine swift (*Tachymarptis melba*) and the south migration of Barn swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) over an open ground not far from the house of our local guide and friend.

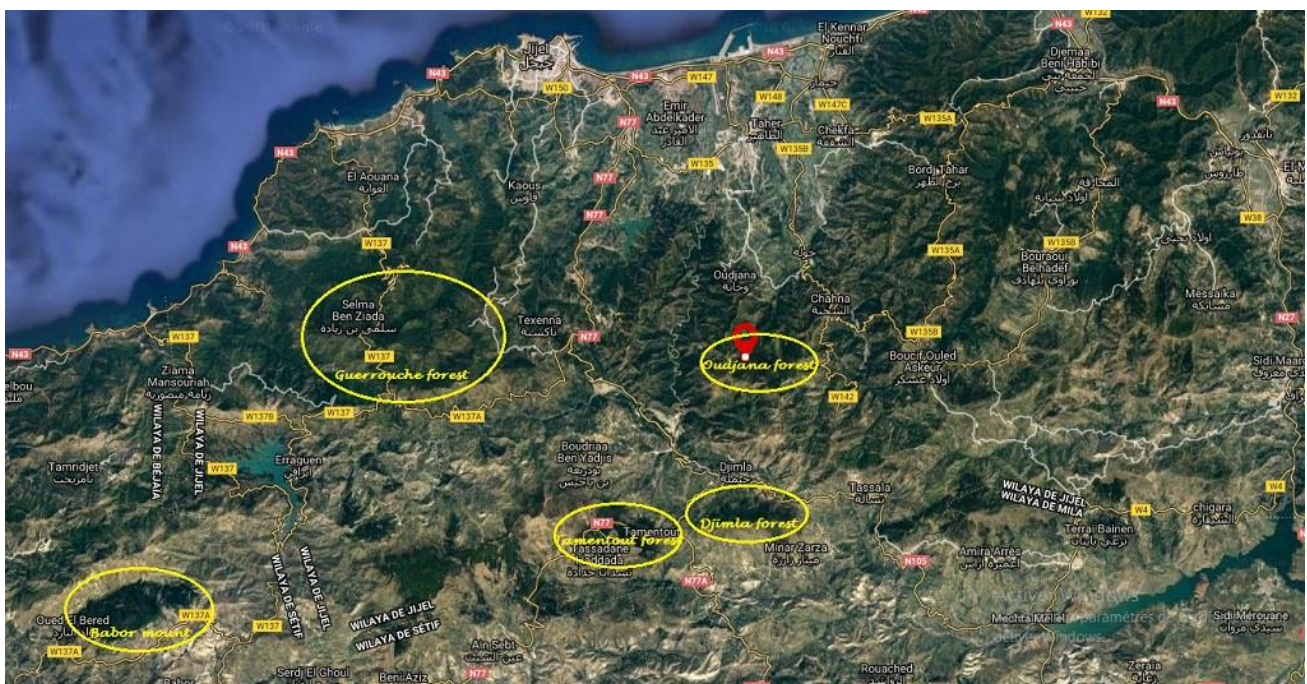
Ryad kindly fed us at his family home, where we enjoyed a delicious home cooked Jijilian, courtesy of his wife.

At 16:30, we took the road back to Constantine.

### Lerabaa Forest or Zeen Forest

Located North West of Constantine, South East of Jijel and North of the town of Oudjana. At an altitude between 800 and 1200m. From Constantine, it takes about three hours and thirty minutes. From Algiers, it takes about seven hours.

The forest consists mainly of Algerian oaks (*Quercus canariensis*), as well as many Cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) but very few trees of African oak (*Quercus afares*).



Map of the five biotopes of the Algerian Nuthatch

We also noted the presence of several other families of trees, such as the Bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) and Poplar (*Populus*). Therefore, the forest was dominated by Algerian Oaks (*Quercus canariensis*) which are the Nuthatch's favorite habitat.

Due to the fact that in the circumference of this zone there are permanent military posts, the forest is in good condition and all living creatures are safe there. Many places in the forest are not passable because the trees regenerate densely and naturally. Water is present in sufficient quantities. If we compare this new biotope with the ones I will describe later, this one is a paradise of fauna and flora. In this new Oudjana forest, there are Algerian oak trees and some Cork oaks that reach heights greater than 30 meters and girth greater than 3.80 meters.



**Algerian oaks (*Quercus canariensis*)**



**Lerabaa Forest in Ouadjana**



**Cork oaks (*Quercus suber*)**



**African oak (*Quercus afares*)**

The opposite cases were in the forests of Guerrouche, Tamentout and Bouafroune, which I visited and where I took photographs of the Algerian Nuthatch: they are all in poor condition and very sick. Unfortunately, there were no signs of regeneration, because the pressure of overgrazing is too strong.

The first responsible for this degradation are the local and national authorities; the second are the local residents of the region who need to answer their needs and assure the survival of their flocks.

After the Algerian authorities recently decided to set up a tourism and leisure site in the Nuthatch's forests an international petition was filed on Avaz by the Environmental Association AquaCirta; a letter was hand-delivered to the Minister of the Environment; a meeting was held with forest conservation of the wilaya of Jijel and another with the environmental direction of Jijel; and finally, a petition from the citizens of Djimla was made. Despite all these actions, we have not seen any positive results. Forest degradation continues and still today, the projects (Creation of recreational forests in Djimla and Tamentout) have not been cancelled but reconfirmed.

Karim Haddad  
Ornithological tour leader  
Field Guide/Association Environnementale AquaCirta  
Cité Boussouf  
Constantine 25000, Algeria  
karim241267@yahoo.fr  
Cell. Ph: +213 550 577 118  
<https://ebird.org/profile/Nzk1MTEEx/world>