

Tunisia 2019

A long weekend trip made 17-20 June 2019, largely to the Tunis area. The weather was hot, but overcast, with the odd spot of rain, and quite high winds.

We stayed in Sidi Bou Said, in the very north of Tunis, and made day trips out and around. As previously, car hire was around £25 per day for a small (but new) hatchback.

Tunis salt lake

The city of Tunis has four large (3-4km across) lakes visible on any map. The two in the middle (marked as Lake of Tunis) are split by a causeway, and can provide interesting birding during passage for terns and waterfowl. But the banks are largely large boulders, and there is little shallow water accessible.

The South-Western lake, Sebkhja Essijoumi (which is poorly marked on Google Maps), is a fantastic, albeit awkward to access, site. It is extremely shallow, and seemingly heavily saline, and provides excellent feeding for **Greater Flamingos**, in particular. These numbered 4000-5000 at the time of our trip, spread pretty evenly across the lake, and with several dozen **White Storks** mixed in. Waders included c.100 **Black-winged Stilts** and c.10 **Avocet**. As well as **Yellow-legged Gulls**, there were smaller numbers of **Slender-billed Gulls**, and singleton **Little** and **Gull-billed Terns**. Around the lake, in the rough ground, scrub and rubbish, were 10+ **Kentish Plover**, several **Great Grey Shrikes**, and **Zitting Cisticola**.

Access is interesting: a 3-lane (each way) road runs close along the west and south-west side of the lake. We pulled over on the dirt shoulder, and walked across both carriageways; it was well worth it for the views. An even better place to park was by one of the roundabouts. Again, we walked across the carriageways, and along a long spit, at the end of which is a (locked) hide. Overall, this is a fantastic site, well worth the rather dodgy parking, and definitely worth exploring.

Sidi Bou Said

Large numbers of **Common Swifts**, and smaller numbers of **Barn Swallows**, with the odd **House Martin** in the evenings. These frequently mobbed the **Common Kestrels**, **Common Bulbul**, and a **Sardinian Warbler**. Offshore, in the evening, a handful of likely **Scopoli's Shearwaters**.