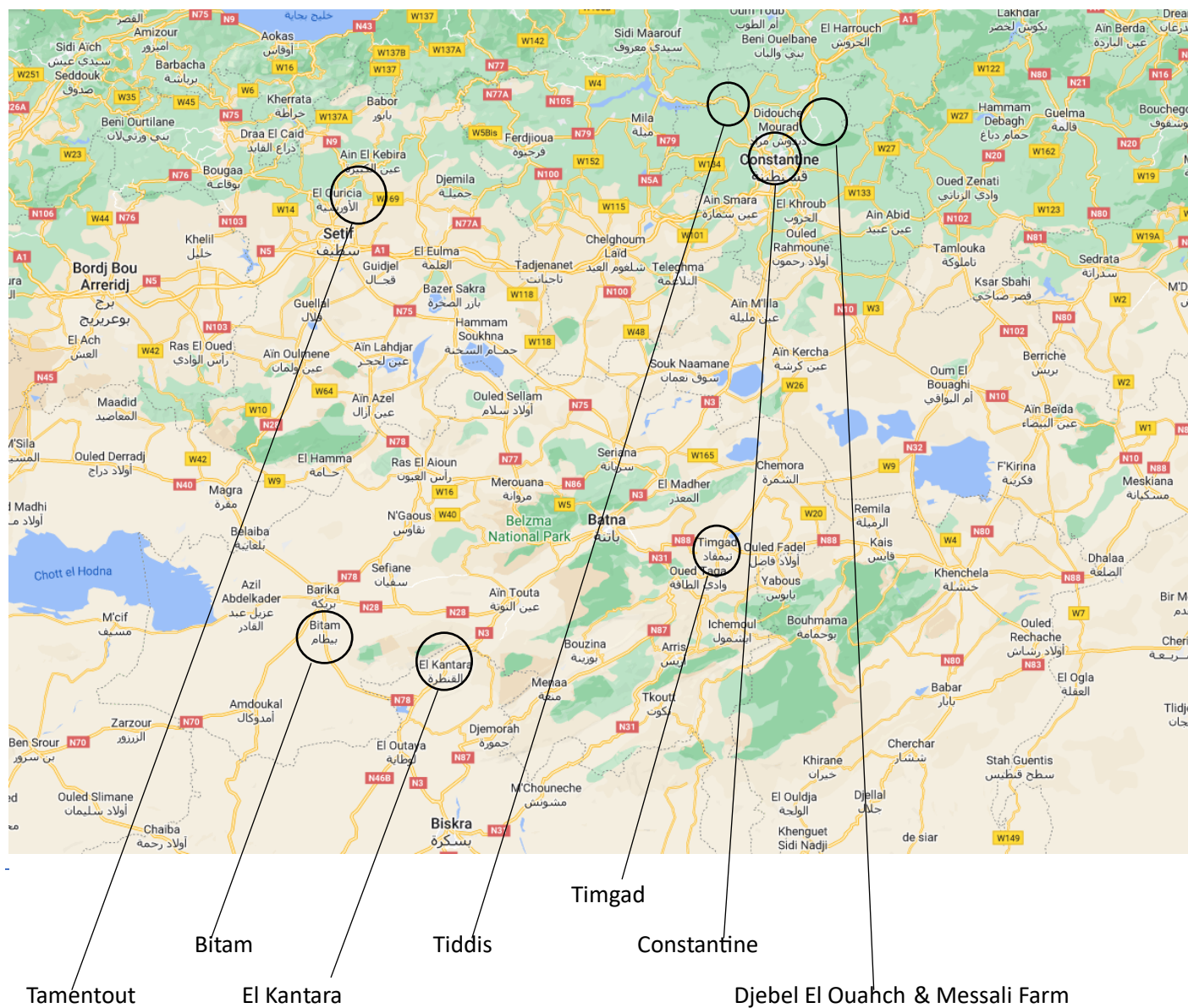




# ALGERIA 22-26 MAY 2023

BY HAMISH FLETCHER



22<sup>nd</sup> May. I flew from Gatwick to Constantine, changing flights at Nice. The flight from Nice to Constantine arrived at Constantine at 12:10 hours, Algeria being in the same time zone as the UK. Karim Haddad, with whom I had previously liaised, met me at the airport, drove me to the Hotel El Khayem, and after a quick meal we set off to Tiddis, a ruined Roman town with good birds in the scrubby hillside which surrounds the site. As we passed through farmland near Tiddis, it was gratifying to hear and see so many Turtle Doves. In addition to these birds, Cattle Egrets, White Storks, Black Kites, Common Swifts, Barn Swallows, Collared Doves, Spotted Flycatchers, European Greenfinches, House Sparrows and Corn Buntings were frequently seen. In addition, Common Ravens (and fewer) Spotless Starlings were both seen in flight. Accordingly, these will not be further mentioned. In the Tiddis area the best birds were Black Wheatear, Melodious Warbler, Rufous-tailed Bush Robin, Bee-eater and Woodchat Shrike. After a quick walk around the Tiddis ruins, we drove to Constantine to view the impressive gorges at Gorges du Rhumel, noting Cirtensis Jackdaws, Alpine Swifts and Rock Doves/Feral Pigeons.



**Turtle Dove**



**Tiddis**



**Rufous-tailed Bush Robin, ssp. *galactotes***



**Sardinian Warbler**



**Gorges du Rhumel**



**Jackdaw, ssp. *cirtensis***

23<sup>rd</sup> May. Woken at 03:15 hours by the call to prayer, I realised that leaving the window open had clearly been a mistake! Karim picked me up from the hotel at 06:00 hours with his friend, Mehdi Chetibi, and we began the three hour drive to Tamentout Forest, situated on the Petite Kabylie. Fairly open in nature, the forest is fairly heavily grazed by cattle and is mainly comprised of different oaks. We had a very successful morning, seeing all the desired birds, including very close views of the Algerian Nuthatch and Atlas Flycatcher (at least 20 birds), in addition to distinctive sub-species of Jay (*cervicalis*), Coal Tit (*ledouci*) and Great Spotted Woodpecker (*numidus*). A pair of Golden Orioles were seen along with several Levaillant's Woodpeckers. The return journey was very slow due to unseasonal torrential rain and much mud being washed onto the roads. We tried for Mahgreb Owl in a wood near Constantine, but failed to find one.



**Tamentout Forest**



**Algerian Nuthatch**



**Coal Tit ssp. *ledouci***



**Great Spotted Woodpecker ssp. *numidus***



**African Blue Tit**



**Atlas Flycatcher**

24<sup>th</sup> May. Today Larbi Afoutni took the place of Karim, and together with Mehdi, we drove to the northern edge of the Sahara Desert near Bitam. Driving south we saw a flock of distant Greater Flamingos at Sebket El Zemoul and again experienced unseasonal rain and low temperatures. Near some degraded farmland a pair of Little Owls were noted plus a Laughing Dove, among other commoner species. In the semi-desert the weather briefly brightened with the temperature approaching thirty degrees. Desert Warbler was well seen, Saharan Scrub Warbler less so as several birds gave us the run-around, creeping like mice under thorn bushes. Long-billed Crested Lark sub-species were also seen. Leaving this location and moving north, the temperature then dropped to under ten degrees! We stopped at El Kantara, admiring the Roman bridge as well as new species such as House Bunting, Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush and Common Bulbul before arriving at Timgad, an absolutely stunning Roman site, where we spent two hours, sight-seeing, noting Serin and Black Wheatear. We drove back to Constantine, via the Madghacen Mausoleum accompanied by heavy rain all the way.



**El Kantara (Gateway to the Sahara)**



**Desert Warbler**



**Little Owl**



**Black Wheatear**



**Bee-eater**



**Timgad**

25<sup>th</sup> May. We had a more leisurely start today, not leaving the Hotel until 06:30 hours with Karim when we drove to Messali Farm to the north east of Constantine. The habitat was a mixture of arable fields and uncultivated land of scrub, boulders and a few trees. There was a wide range of birds here such as Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus cirtencis*), many Quail calling from the barley fields and Woodlark, Cuckoo, Tawny Pipit, both Whitethroats, Melodious Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Moussier's Redstart, African Chaffinch and Western Black-eared Wheatear among the best birds. Moving to Djebel El Ouahch we saw both woodpeckers, a small flock of Common Crossbills, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Serin and a close view of a *cervicalis* Jay burying old acorns. Next to a pond a Robin was seen and in two different ponds Mallard and Little Grebe were noted plus a Grey Wagtail at the edge of one pond. In the afternoon we moved to an area of phragmites-filled ditches near Esskhoun where we heard many singing African Reed Warblers but we only managed fleeting sightings. We did, however, have better views of Nightingale and Common Bulbul. Returning to Constantine a Lesser Kestrel was seen at the Gorges du Rhumel.



**Site photograph of area near Messali Farm**



**Moussier's Redstart**



**Melodious Warbler**



**Western Black-eared Wheatear**



**Tawny Pipit**



**Jay ssp. *cervicalis***

26<sup>th</sup> May. Karim, Larbi and I drove to Messali Farm again, where the same birds as yesterday were present. In addition, we also saw Booted Eagle and Northern Wheatear.

Serial	Name in English	Latin Name	Where Seen
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	3 at Djebel El Ouahch
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Ponds at Djebel El Ouahch
3	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	Distant flock at Sebket El Zemoul
4	Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	Possible in field between Constantine and Tamentout
5	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Common throughout
6	White stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Ubiquitous
7	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraeetus pennatus</i>	One at Messali Farm
8	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Common
9	Atlas Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>	One at Messali Farm on 25 <sup>th</sup> and 26 <sup>th</sup> May
10	Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Gorges du Rhumel,
11	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Gorges du Rhumel
12	Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Pond at Djebel El Ouahch & 2 on water north of Timgad
13	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	One on column at Timgad!
14	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Genuine wild ones at Gorges du Rhumel
15	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Seen throughout the north
16	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Common throughout
17	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	Common in north and also seen further south
18	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Seen near Bitam
19	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Messali Farm
20	Little Owl	<i>Athene Noctua</i>	Pair near Bitam
21	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Common throughout, especially at Gorges du Rhumel
22	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	Probable
23	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	Gorges du Rhumel
24	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Tiddis, Bitam, Djebel El Ouahch
25	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Tiddis 22 <sup>nd</sup> Bitam 24 <sup>th</sup> May
26	Levaillant Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	Several at Tamentout and Djebel El Ouahch
27	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendropocus major numidus</i>	Tamentout, Debel El Ouahch
28	Crested/Maghreb Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Bitam. Some with long bills.
29	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	Messali Farm
30	Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Messali Farm
31	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	El Kantara, Gorges du Rhumel
32	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Common
33	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Tiddis
34	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	Messali Farm
35	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Djebel El Ouahch

36	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Djebel El Ouahch
37	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Esskhoun
38	Rufous-tailed Bush Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	Tiddis, Near Bitam
39	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus mousseriu</i>	Messali Farm
40	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Messali Farm
41	Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	Messali Farm
42	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe melanura</i>	Timgad, Tiddis, Messali Farm
43	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	Probable near Bitam
44	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Not uncommon
45	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Not uncommon
46	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	El Kantara
47	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Tamentout, Djebel El Ouahch
48	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Messali Farm
49	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Tiddis
50	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Messali Farm
51	African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>	Near Bitam
52	Saharan Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocera saharae</i>	Near Bitam
53	African Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus baeticatus ambiguus</i>	Esskhoun
54	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Messali Farm
55	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Esskhoun
56	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	Tiddis, Messali Farm
57	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Djebel El Ouahch
58	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Gorges du Rhumel (H)
59	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Common
60	Atlas Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula speculigera</i>	Tamentout
61	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Tamentout, Djebel El Ouahch
62	African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae ultramarinus</i>	Tamentout, Djebel El Ouahch
63	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater ledouci</i>	Tamentout
64	Algerian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta ledanti</i>	Tamentout
65	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certia brachydactyla mauritanica</i>	Tamentout
66	Desert Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius (excubitor) elegans</i>	Near Bitam
67	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius Senator</i>	Tiddis, near Bitam
68	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	El Kantara, Esskhoun
69	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius cervicalis</i>	Tamentout, Djebel El Ouahch
70	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula cirtensis</i>	Gorges du Rhumel
71	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Seen throughout
72	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	As above but less common
73	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	Tamentout
74	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Abundant
75	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Probable or hybrid birds on the way south
76	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Messali Farm
77	African Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla africana</i>	Djebel El Ouahch
78	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	Messali Farm
79	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Several locations
80	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Timgad, Djebel El Ouahch
81	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra poliogyna</i>	Djebel El Ouahch

82	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza emberiza</i>	Common
83	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza circlus</i>	Djebel El Ouahch
84	House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	El Kantara

Miscellaneous Points.

- a. Obtaining a visa is tedious and time-consuming, rather than difficult. Reading the reports of birders from other countries who have been to Algeria, the rules for visas vary slightly. For example, applications from the UK do not need to provide proof of travel insurance or flights but do need to provide copies (in duplicate) of every passport page.
- b. Telescopes and binoculars are not allowed to be taken into the country but cameras, even with large lenses, are. Karim helpfully provided binoculars and I also used my bridge camera as an optical enhancer.
- c. While I was told that low temperatures and rain were exceptional in May in Algeria, reading previous reports does not necessarily bear this out. In addition to excess rain, droughts in previous years may have an effect on what birds are there if various water courses are dry. If there is heavy rain during a visit, that may also mitigate against seeing birds.
- d. Bureaucracy would appear to be endemic in Algeria. But the average Algerian was smiling and helpful.
- e. Note that translation of place names from Arabic can produce a number of alternative spellings in English.
- f. Ramadan can impact if it falls during a bird-watching trip.

Summary. My visit to Algeria had been hugely enjoyable, not only in birds seen but also looking at some impressive Roman remains and not least getting a little insight into twenty-first century Algeria. Concentrating on the birding, I had a great time seeing all but one species. While the birding was extremely good, what made the trip special was the comradeship of Karim ( karim241267@yahoo.fr), Larbi and Mehdi and their ability to find birds plus the trouble taken by Karim to ensure that accommodation, meals and transport were always well-organised. A fun trip to remember.



Hamish Fletcher, Karim Haddad



Larbi Afoutni, Mehdi Chetibi