

## Djibouti

Île Moucha and Tadjoura Gulf Islands

5-6 May 2017



*Crab-plover, Dromas ardeola, relatively common around the islands*

### Synopsis

I spent a weekend visiting Ile Moucha and surrounding Islands in the Gulf of Tadjoura/Red Sea availing myself of a private ferry service from Djibouti Ville (40 minute crossing). The islands are sparsely inhabited by Djiboutian fishermen, including seasonal visitors from Yemen. My main purpose in visiting was to connect with Crab Plover, a bird that had hitherto eluded me in the Djibouti capital. I was fortunate to have prolonged views of 20+ plovers and also survey the avifauna on the islands – consisting mostly of common palearctic passage migrants and a few resident species.

Île Moucha has one small beach resort with seven comfortable huts and a communal dining facility. The cost per night is DJF 30,000 (1 US\$ = Djibouti Franc 177). There is also a day ferry costing DJF 10,000 return trip with lunch included. Only word of caution: the torrid day temperatures in the northern summer can reach 45 – 50C and sun protection and adequate hydration is absolutely essential.

A total of 27 species were seen, of which 3 were personal lifers.



*View from the southern tip of the island, in the distant background is the capital city, Djibouti Ville*

Friday, 5 May

I arrived at the île Moucha resort at 09:00 and settled into my cabin for the weekend. Around the beach were the two resident and very common Gull species:

1. **White-eyed Gull, *Ichthyaetus leucophthalmus***
2. **Sooty Gull, *Ichthyaetus hemprichii***



*Adult White-eyed Gulls*



*White-eyed Gulls: Adult (top) and First-year*



*Sooty Gulls*

I explored the island on foot. The birdlife was sparse, possibly not helped by the intense heat:

3. Western Reef Egret, *Egretta gularis* – 5 birds seen fishing in and around small bays



4. Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos* – a few seen actively probing on sand bars close off-shore
5. Little Stint, *Calidris minuta* – one lone bird seen resting on a sand bank
6. Speckled Pigeon, *Columba guinea* – at least one dozen birds around the island

7. Lesser Sand Plover, *Charadrius mongolus* – one lone bird



8. Eurasian Hobby, *Falco subbuteo* – one of this palearctic migrant seen; hovered and seemed to catch a lizard on the ground
9. Common Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus* – two birds seen in flight
10. Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus* – one bird attracted to fish scraps around the resort



In the afternoon, I hired a local boat to take me off-shore and circumnavigate the island:

11. White-winged Tern, *Chlidonias leucopterus* – two birds in breeding plumage
12. Greater Crested Tern, *Thalasseus bergii* – 4 birds
13. Lesser Crested Tern, *Thalasseus bengalensis* – two birds
14. Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo* – at least half dozen in flight low over the water
15. Pink-backed Pelican, *Pelecanus rufescens* – one bird
16. Brown Booby, *Sula leucogaster* – three birds in formation flying to shore

However, despite much searching, I failed to connect with White-cheeked Tern, *Sterna repressa*, Persian Shearwater, *Puffinus persicus*, or Jouanin's Petrel, *Bulweria fallax*, all of which have been reported off-shore from Djibouti.

Returning to the resort for some respite from the sun and heat, I found:

17. Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, *Eremopterix nigriceps* – male and female common at the resort



18. White-throated Bee-eater, *Merops albicollis* – intr-African migrant; one seen only



Saturday, 6 May



I got an early start. Hoping to beat the heat and explore the far northern end of the island where the only magroves are located. During my walk across the centre of the island, I came across:

19. Graceful Prinia, *Prinia gracilis* – a noisy pair in a shrub
20. House Crow, *Corvus splendens* – common close to the fishing settlement
21. Somali Crow, *Corvus edithae* – uncommon; only two seen foraging on the ground in desert country
22. Common Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus collybita abietinus* – two individuals gleaning insects inside low shrubbery
23. Red-backed Shrike, *Lanius collurio* – the most common shrike; many juveniles also observed



24. Southern Grey Shrike, *Lanius meridionalis aucheri* – the sub-species *aucheri* was numerous in thorn bushes



25. Common Rock Thrush, *Monticola saxatilis* – a group of 5-6 was found concentrated in the centre of the island; most appeared to immatures



26. Whinchat, *Saxicola rubetra* – at least one dozen seen; mostly in pairs



*Whinchat, with photograph showing the heat distortion at 45 C*



27. **Clab-plover, *Dromas ardeola*** – on the mudflats behind the mangroves, I finally connected with my target. There were in all, 20+ birds quietly patrolling the falling tide:





With the heat becoming almost unbearable, I beat a retreat to my hotel for lunch. I departed Moucha at 14:00 to return to Djibouti satisfied that I had found my target, Crab-plover, after having failed to do so on two recent visits to the Gulf States (Bahrain and UAE).

The trip back was eventful in coming across a large school of stingray (60+):





*Farewell to île Moucha*

David Karr, Djibouti

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