

Travel report of a long birding weekend to Algeria in June 2022

Erik Ernens, Ronald de Lange and Roland van der Vliet

Introduction

My first bird book on European and north African bird species, the Birds of Britain and Europe, with North Africa and the Middle East, by Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow, did not depict the Algerian Nuthatch as the species had not even been discovered when that book appeared in 1972. So, ever since I found out about the species, I wanted to see this very special species. I was too young in the early 1980s, when several birders visited the species. After the 1980s, Algeria became a dangerous country to visit. However, things changed in the 2000s so I planned a visit in summer 2020, but then the covid pandemic broke out. After two more years of waiting, we were finally able to visit in June 2022. And we were not disappointed!



Algerian Nuthatch, Tamentout-forest, 25 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange)

Pre-trip preparations

We contacted Karim Haddad (karim241267@yahoo.fr) who had guided birders previously in the area of Constantine. So when he had time during our preferred weekend, we seemed all set. We 'only' had to arrange our visa with the Algerian embassy in The Hague... This proved more nerve-wrecking than we had anticipated. Despite applying for it four weeks before our departure, we only received our visas the day before we left. Documents we needed to supply were:

- passport (plus photo)
- statement of current employment
- proof of travel arrangement (plane tickets)
- proof of hotel arrangement (hotel address)
- proof of financial security
- proof of travel insurance
- filled-in visa application form.

Itinerary

24 June: we left the Netherlands from Arnhem by car. We drove through Antwerp, Lille to Paris Orly. Several traffic jams in these cities but we arrived very much on time to catch our Air France-flight at 16:00 to arrive at Algiers at 17:15 (all local times). While walking from the arrivals to the departure hall, we see Western Cattle Egret, Eurasian Kestrel, Common Wood Pigeon, Common Swift and Eurasian Blackbird. Many sportsmen were present to attend the 19th edition of the Mediterranean Games at Oran. At 19:15 we flew on towards Constantine where we were greeted by Karim Haddad and his good friend Larbi Afoutni on arrival. It was already dark so had a dinner at a chicken-restaurant before transferring to the Hotel El Khayam.

25 June: full day in the field. Besides Karim and Larbi, also Mehdi Chetibi joined for the day. They guided us to Tamentout-forest in Setif-province which proved to be very birdy. After a very successful morning, seeing all targets, including of course the Algerian Nuthatch, we suggested to visit sites where wild Barbary Macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*) could be seen. So to our surprise, we crossed Tamentout-forest to drive to Ziam Mansouriah, situated at the coast. From there, we drove east to several picknick sites near Taza where macaques can be seen as they descend from the mountain sides. After having seen those and having had lunch at the sea side, we continued east along the coast to a freshwater pond just east of Taher. We continued eastwards and then inland along RN43 and RN27. Just north of Sidi Maarouf we stopped where the Oued El Kebir cuts through some impressive rocks. Arrived at Constantine in the dark where we ate in a fastfood restaurant in the old city. Said good-byes to Karim who had to visit family in France.



First evening meal, with Karim Haddad (Ronald de Lange) / Market underway on 25 June (Ronald de Lange)



Temperature rising to 44 C on 26 June (Erik Ernens) / cattle in Tamentout-forest (Erik Ernens)

26 June: final morning in the field with Larbi. We first visited an unnamed site along CW51 just east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch. The latter parc is forested with pine trees making it a good site for species like Eurasian Jay, Common Firecrest and Red Crossbill. After that, we visited the beautiful Gorges du Rhumel with its bridges. It dissects the city of Constantine and is home to the localised *cirtensis*-subspecies of Eurasian Jackdaw. Very hot with the highest recorded temperature being 44 C, the highest I ever experienced anywhere in the world. After having seen and photographed the Gorge, the bridges and the birds, we were dropped at the airport where our plane departed at 13:30. We arrived on time at Orly, Paris, after which we drove back to the Netherlands where we arrived safely at our houses around midnight. Next day, it was a working day for us as usual.

Birding sites

The sites we birded are discussed below. Most of our observations have been entered in www.observation.org, so the exact localities can be found there.

Tamentout-forest

Main birding site during our trip. Of the 13 known forest patches where Algerian Nuthatch occurs, this is one of the largest. We found the forest very birdy and spent a whole morning there seeing most of the local subspecies (although not all), including the difficult-to-find Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Both our goals, Algerian Nuthatch and Atlas Flycatcher, were particularly easy to find. Biggest surprise were two singing (cooing) Stock Doves. Later on, we heard that this would be the third record for Algeria (if only we had sound-recorded them). To reach the coast, we crossed the crest of the forested hills. At the other side of the hills, we had a productive hour seeing Eurasian Golden Oriole, a soaring Eleonora's Falcon and the local subspecies of Eurasian Wren.

Taher (freshwater pond)

Just east of Taher, along the main road, a freshwater pond can be found. Although overgrown with water lilies, a little bit of open water is still present. Access is from the main road where the car must be parked along the shoulder (which may be a bit dangerous). We spent about an hour there, when we saw a few ducks and moorhens, while egrets and herons flew by and landed out of sight. In the reeds and tree lines, that surrounded the pond, several African Reed Warblers were present.

Impressive rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf

This site is easily visited within a few hours from Constantine. Apart from being a site where weddings take place (as we witnessed), it is also a site where vultures breed and other raptors congregate for the night. Commonest species is Black Kite but other species we saw were Booted Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle and Eurasian Griffon Vulture. Along the river, we saw Little Ringed Plover, Blue Rock-Thrush and Grey Wagtail that we saw nowhere else during the trip.

Unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch

This site consists of agricultural fields near some settlement. It is not particularly impressive but we found some hard-to-find taxa there like Barbary Partridge and European Greenfinch. Other nice species were Thekla's Lark, Melodious Warbler and Western Black-eared Wheatear that we saw nowhere else during the trip. Foremost, this site was conveniently situated on the way between our hotel and the main birding site Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Parc Djebel El Ouahch

Parc Djebel El Ouahch is a man-made forest with pine trees making it a good site for species like Eurasian Jay, Common Firecrest and Red Crossbill. The forest is open and can be walked easily. Several bird species are thus much easier seen here than in Tamentout-forest, like Eurasian Jay, and it is the only site where we saw for instance Common Firecrest and Red Crossbill.



Gorges du Rhumel (left: Erik Ernens, right: Ronald de Lange)

Gorges du Rhumel, Constantine

The beautiful Gorges du Rhumel is a must-see from a touristic point-of-view. For birders it is also the spot to see the localised subspecies *cirtensis* of Eurasian Jackdaw which is not difficult to find. It is also an excellent site to view Alpine Swift and Eurasian Crag-Martin entering and leaving their nest sites.

List of bird species

Subspecies listing is according to IOC 12.1. Underlined are the taxa endemic to the North African region.

Gadwall – *Mareca strepera strepera*

25 June: a female at the freshwater pond at Taher.

Ferruginous Duck – *Aythya nyroca*

25 June: at least five at the freshwater pond at Taher.



Ferruginous Duck, Taher, 25 June 2022 (Erik Ernens) / Levillant's Woodpecker, Tamentout-forest, 25 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange)

Barbary Partridge – *Alectoris barbara barbara*

26 June: a (presumed) female with three chicks while driving between the unnamed site along CW51 and Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Rock Pigeon – *Columba livia livia*

26 June: common at Gorges du Rhumel.

Common Wood-Pigeon – *Columba palumbus palumbus*

24 June: two at Algiers airport.

25 June: common at Tamentout-forest

26 June: common at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Stock Dove – *Columba oenas oenas*

25 June: two singing at Tamentout-forest. Only later we understood that this was about the third record for Algeria. Hopefully Karim will sort this out in the future!

European Turtle-Dove – *Streptopelia turtur arenicola*

25 June: two at the freshwater pond at Taher.

26 June: circa 10 at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Eurasian Collared-Dove – *Streptopelia decaocto*
25 June: a few underway towards Tamentout-forest.
26 June: circa 10 during the day.

Alpine Swift – *Tachymarptis melba tuneti*
26 June: common at Gorges du Rhumel (breeding).

Common Swift – *Apus apus apus*
24 June: common at Algiers airport.
25 June: common during the day.
26 June: common at Gorges du Rhumel.

Pallid Swift – *Apus pallidus brehmerorum*
25 June: a few during a brief stop at Jijel-city.

Eurasian Moorhen – *Gallinula chloropus chloropus*
25 June: two at the freshwater pond at Taher.

Western Swamphen – *Porphyrio porphyrio*
25 June: a single bird at the freshwater pond at Taher that had been present already for some time.

Little Ringed Plover – *Charadrius dubius curonicus*
25 June: a single bird along the river at the rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf.

Yellow-legged Gull – *Larus michahellis michahellis*
25 June: only seen along the coast, including several colonies on the rocks.

White Stork – *Ciconia ciconia ciconia*
25 June: common during the day.
26 June: five at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Grey Heron – *Ardea cinerea cinerea*
25 June: one along the RN27.

Purple Heron – *Ardea purpurea purpurea*
25 June: a juvenile at the freshwater pond at Taher that caused quite a stir with our guide.

Little Egret – *Egretta garzetta garzetta*
25 June: two at the freshwater pond at Taher.

Western Cattle Egret – *Bubulcus ibis*
24 June: common at Algiers airport.
25 June: common during the day.
26 June: common during the day.

Squacco Heron – *Ardeola ralloides*
25 June: three at the freshwater pond at Taher.

Black-winged Kite – *Elanus caeruleus caeruleus*
25 June: two while driving along the coast.
26 June: one at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture – *Gyps fulvus fulvus*

25 June: one while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

25 June: two flying around at the rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf.

Booted Eagle – *Hieraaetus pennatus*

25 June: a pale morph at Ziama Mansouriah.

25 June: a pale morph flying around at the rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf.

26 June: one at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.



Booted Eagle, Ziama Mansouriah, 25 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange) / Eleonora's Falcon, Tamentout-forest, 25 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange)

Bonelli's Eagle – *Aquila fasciata fasciata*

25 June: a single bird flying around at the rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf (together with the Booted).

Eurasian Sparrowhawk – *Accipiter nisus punicus*

25 June: one at Tamentout-forest.

Black Kite – *Milvus migrans migrans*

25 June: common during the day.

26 June: several at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Long-legged Buzzard – *Buteo rufinus cirtensis*

25 June: two together while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

Eurasian Scops-Owl – *Otus scops mallorcae*

25 June: a few heard within the city limits of Constantine during the evening.

Eurasian Hoopoe – *Upupa epops epops*

25 June: one at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: one at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

European Bee-eater – *Merops apiaster*

25 June: one along the coast near Taher.

26 June: heard at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Great Spotted Woodpecker – *Dendrocopos major numidus*

25 June: circa 10 at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: five at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – *Dryobates minor ledouci*

25 June: one male at Tamentout-forest (calling and beautifully seen).

Levaillant's Woodpecker – *Picus vaillantii*

25 June: at least 10 at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: two at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Eurasian Kestrel – *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus*

24 June: one at Algiers airport.

26 June: common at Gorges de Rhumel. We did not see Lesser Kestrels.

Eleonora's Falcon – *Falco eleonora*

25 June: one at Tamentout-forest (together with the sparrowhawk).

Peregrine Falcon – *Falco peregrinus brookei*

25 June: one while driving to Tamentout-forest.

25 June: two flying around at the rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf.

Eurasian Golden Oriole – *Oriolus oriolus*

25 June: three at Tamentout-forest

Woodchat Shrike – *Lanius senator senator*

25 June: one while driving to Tamentout-forest.

Eurasian Jay – *Garrulus glandarius cervicalis*

25 June: three at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: six at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Eurasian Jackdaw – *Corvus monedula cirtensis*

26 June: common at Gorges du Rhumel.

Common Raven – *Corvus corax tingitanus*

25 June: four while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

26 June: one over Gorges du Rhumel.

Coal Tit – *Periparus ater ledouci*

25 June: circa ten at Tamentout-forest.



Eurasian Jay, Parc Djebel El Ouahch, 26 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange) / Coal Tit, Tamentout-forest, 25 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange). Two very distinctive subspecies of North Africa.

African Blue Tit – *Cyanistes teneriffae ultramarinus*

25 June: circa five at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: five at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Great Tit – *Parus major excelsus*

25 June: two at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: one at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Wood Lark – *Lullula arborea pallida*

25 June: two at Tamentout-forest.

Thekla's Lark – *Galerida theklae ruficolor/superflua*

26 June: two singing birds at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Zitting Cisticola – *Cisticola juncidis cisticola*

25 June: three along the coast near Taher.

Melodious Warbler – *Hippolais polyglotta*

26 June: one at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

African Reed Warbler – *Acrocephalus baeticatus ambiguus*

25 June: several seen well at the freshwater pond at Taher. These include a pair feeding young.

Eurasian Crag-Martin – *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

25 June: a few near the coast at Zياما Mansouriah.

26 June: common at Gorges du Rhumel (breeding).

Barn Swallow – *Hirundo rustica rustica*

25 June: common along the coast.

26 June: circa 10 at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Common House-Martin – *Delichon urbicum meridionale*

25 June: two over the freshwater pond at Taher.

Common Bulbul – *Pycnonotus barbatus barbatus*

25 June: heard while driving to Tamentout-forest.

26 June: heard at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.



Short-toed Treecreeper, Tamentout-forest, 25 June 2022 (Erik Ernens) / Atlas Flycatcher, Tamentout-forest, 25 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange). Two more endemic taxa for North Africa.

Western Bonelli's Warbler – *Phylloscopus bonelli*

25 June: three singing at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: five at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Eurasian Blackcap – *Sylvia atricapilla heineken*

25 June: at least one singing at Tamentout-forest.

25 June: a male while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

26 June: heard singing at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Sardinian Warbler – *Curruca melanocephala melanocephala*

25 June: two at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: five at Gorges du Rhumel.

Greater Whitethroat – *Curruca communis communis*

26 June: one at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Common Firecrest – *Regulus ignicapilla balearicus*

26 June: one at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Algerian Nuthatch – *Sitta ledanti*

25 June: at least 15 at Tamentout-forest.

Short-toed Treecreeper – *Certhia brachydactyla mauritanica*

25 June: common at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: five at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Eurasian Wren – *Troglodytes troglodytes kabyloorum*

25 June: one at Tamentout-forest.

Mistle Thrush – *Turdus viscivorus deichleri*

25 June: a few at Tamentout-forest.

Eurasian Blackbird – *Turdus merula mauritanicus*

24 June: one at Algiers airport.

25 June: at least five at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: common at Gorges du Rhumel.

Spotted Flycatcher – *Muscicapa striata striata*

25 June: at least five at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: five at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

European Robin – *Erithacus rubecula witherbyi*

25 June: one at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: two at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Atlas Flycatcher – *Ficedula speculigera*

25 June: at least 10 at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: a male at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Moussier's Redstart – *Phoenicurus moussieri*

25 June: a male while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

26 June: two at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Blue Rock-Thrush – *Monticola solitarius solitarius*

25 June: two along the river at the rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf.

European Stonechat – *Saxicola rubicola rubicola*

25 June: a male while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

26 June: a male at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Western Black-eared Wheatear – *Oenanthe hispanica*

26 June: two at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Black Wheatear – *Oenanthe leucura riggenbachi*

25 June: one while driving to Tamentout-forest.

House Sparrow – *Passer domesticus tingitanus*

25 June: common in the cities.

26 June: common at Constantine.

Spanish Sparrow – *Passer hispaniolensis hispaniolensis*

26 June: circa 10 at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Grey Wagtail – *Motacilla cinerea cinerea*

25 June: a single bird along the river at the rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf.

Tawny Pipit – *Anthus campestris*

25 June: two at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: two at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

African Chaffinch – *Fringilla africana africana*

25 June: circa 10 at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: circa 20 at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

European Greenfinch – *Chloris chloris voousi*

26 June: circa 10 at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Eurasian Linnet – *Linaria cannabina mediterranea*

26 June: four at unnamed site along CW51 east of Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Red Crossbill – *Loxia curvirostra poliogyna*

26 June: at least three at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.



Red Crossbill, Parc Djebel El Ouahch, 26 June 2022 (both Ronald de Lange). Another endemic taxon for North Africa.

European Serin – *Serinus serinus*

25 June: one fly-by at Tamentout-forest.

26 June: common at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Corn Bunting – *Emberiza calandra calandra*

25 June: at least two singing birds while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

26 June: one seen while driving between the unnamed site along CW51 and Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

Cirl Bunting – *Emberiza cirlus*

25 June: at least three singing birds while driving between Tamentout-forest and the coast.

26 June: two males at Parc Djebel El Ouahch.

List of mammal and reptile species

Cape Hare – *Lepus capensis*

25 June: two during the day.

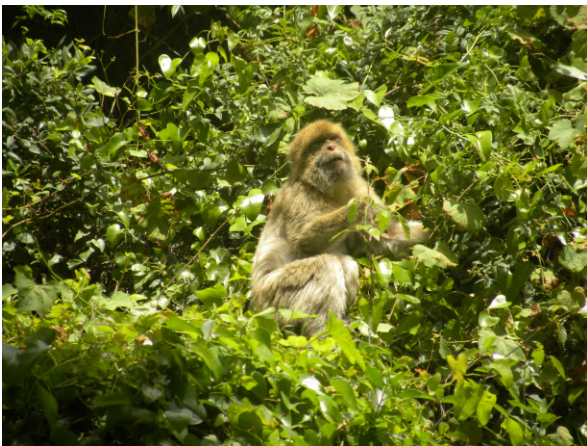
Barbary Macaque – *Macaca sylvanus*

25 June: 13 at a picknick-site along the coast near Taza.

25 June: 3 just north of the impressive rocks along RN27 north of Sidi Maarouf.

Ocellated Lizard – *Timon lepidus*

25 June: a few at Tamentout-forest.



Barbary Macaque, near Taza, 25 June 2022 (Erik Ernens) / Ocellated Lizard, Tamentout-forest, 26 June 2022 (Ronald de Lange).



Happy us. From left to right: Ronald de Lange, Larbi Afoutni, Roland van der Vliet and Erik Ernens. 26 June 2022.