

Algerian Nuthatch

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Introduction

Ever since we saw the page of the Algerian Nuthatch in our bird guide we cherished the ambition to search for it. The problem was that Algeria had become dangerous after a civil war started in 1991. The war ended in 2002, but still it was generally not considered safe enough to go. However, in June 2017 Peter Kaestner posted a [photo](#) of the bird on eBird, in combination with the words “Easy twitch from Constantine”. Being stunned by the apparent ease with which Peter had visited the place, we immediately e-mailed him to get more information. He told us that it was indeed an easy twitch and that he was surprised that not more WP birders went there. He also provided us with the e-mail address of Karim Haddad, a local birder who took him to the bird (karim241267[at]yahoo.fr). We e-mailed Karim and he told us we were welcome and that it was safe to go.

Currently, the Algerian Nuthatch is only known from four forests in the province of Kabylie. Two of these are big, which makes it difficult to search according to Karim. But more importantly, he said they are “military” and getting there would come with a lot of bureaucratic trouble. This leaves two smaller ones, of which we visited Djimla Forest. It is important to point out that binoculars are considered “arms of war” and you can’t take them into the country. Fortunately, Karim has got some that you can use. It is possible to bring your camera.

Practical issues

One full day should be enough to see the nuthatch. At first we couldn’t find affordable tickets but when we checked a few months later we found tickets for €291. Getting a visa was not difficult. We paid €60 for this. As invitation letter we used a hotel booking that Karim sent us, of a hotel where we didn’t even stay. In total we paid €155 per person to Karim for all his help including food and the hotel he had arranged, which was owned by his brother. This brings the total costs of the trip to €506 per person. A minor inconvenience during our trip was the fact that it was Ramadan, which meant that it was difficult to get food. It also meant that it was more tiring for Karim to guide us, since he couldn’t eat or drink water during the day and he had to be awake a part of the night too to eat. One weekend was not a problem, but if you are planning to stay longer you should avoid this time of year. According to Karim the best time to go is from March to September, supposedly because of the weather. When we were there the weather was quite sunny and the temperature was very pleasant, even cooler than in The Netherlands.

Itinerary

In the early morning of Friday 1 June we left from Amsterdam Schiphol Airport and after a long day with transits in Paris and Algiers we arrived in Constantine at 3 pm. We were picked up by Karim and his brother and immediately left for a forest outside of the city. This was an optional addition for which he asked us to pay €30 per person and it was a nice way to spend the rest of the day. The forest was filled with European Serins and Western Bonelli’s

Warblers. We also saw African Blue Tits and a singing male Atlas Pied Flycatcher, which were lifers for both of us as we had never visited Africa before. There were some interesting subspecies too: Common Chaffinch ssp. *africana* ("Atlas Chaffinch") and Great Spotted Woodpecker ssp. *numidus*. After we finished birding we drove back to Constantine. The center of the city is surrounded by an impressive canyon which holds breeding Peregrines ssp. *brookei* and Western Jackdaws ssp. *cirtensis*. The latter is endemic and only occurs in the surroundings of this city. We also saw Spanish Sparrow, Blue Rock Thrush and lots of Alpine Swifts. The spectacular views were a good way to end the day.

The next morning Karim picked us up at 4 am and we started driving. It is a three hour drive to the Djimla Forest. On the way we had a small breakfast mostly consisting of tea and biscuits and we did some short roadside birding which delivered Melodious Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush and Common Bulbul. After parking the car it was a twenty minute walk uphill to get into the forest. Once we were in a forest we walked to a small football field where Karim knew the location of a nest. When we got to the right tree there was already a nuthatch in it! For more than an hour we watched both parents regularly coming to the nest to feed the chicks. During this time we also saw Eurasian Jays ssp. *cervicalis*, more Atlas Chaffinches and Atlas Pied Flycatchers, and a Southern Smooth Snake. We also heard Levaillant's Woodpeckers. After this we walked further into the forest. The place was filled with Atlas Pied Flycatchers and there were African Blue Tits and Great Spotted Woodpeckers ssp. *numidus* again. There were also Coal Tits ssp. *ledouci*, which have yellow underparts and cheeks and a very different call, and we found three more Algerian Nuthatches which were very vocal while feeding together. Bring long clothes, because there are a lot of mosquitos.

In the afternoon we left the forest and Karim took us to a place at the coast he knew for Barbary Macaque. After sharing our lunch with them we slowly drove back to Constantine during which we made one more stop at a small marsh to do some birding. Birds we saw here included Western Swamphen, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Western Cattle Egret and Ferruginous Duck. The main vantage point was closed off, so we decided to walk along the edge of the reed bed to try and see more. Here, we encountered singing "small reed warblers". The taxon here is *ambiguus*, which used to be included in Eurasian Reed Warbler but recently has been reassigned to African Reed Warbler. However, the status of these birds still remains uncertain. The next morning we flew back with again (even longer) stops in Algiers and Paris.

All in all it was a very pleasant trip. During the whole time we felt perfectly safe, even more than we had expected. During the whole trip we were in the good hands and nice company of Karim, from the moment he picked us up from the airport to the moment he brought us to it again. In addition, we were not stopped at the many police checkpoints we passed, which was surprising because Peter was stopped and checked twenty times in one day. Finally, Karim told us that he would be more than happy to help more people find this bird. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact us via [lombregman\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:lombregman@gmail.com).

Observed species

In total we saw 68 species, which are listed below. You can find more details about our observations together with GPS locations in the following link. You can set “species group” to “mammals”, “reptiles and amphibians” or “butterflies” for the few animals we saw other than birds.

https://algeria.observation.org/soortenlijst_wg_v3.php?date=0%2F&g=1&fam=0&jaar=0&maand=0&from=2018-06-01&to=2018-06-03&kwart=0&rar=0&s%5B%5D=S&exo=0&esc=0&only_valid=0

Mallard	
Ferruginous Duck	
Little Grebe	
White Stork	
Western Cattle Egret	
Grey Heron	
Great Egret	
Little Egret	
Booted Eagle	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	
Western Marsh Harrier	
Black Kite	
Western Swamphen	
Yellow-legged Gull	
Common Wood Pigeon	
European Turtle Dove	
Eurasian Collared Dove	
Common Cuckoo	
Eurasian Scops Owl	
Alpine Swift	
Common Swift	
European Bee-eater	
Eurasian Hoopoe	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>ssp. numidus</i>
Levaillant's Woodpecker	
Common Kestrel	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>ssp. brookei</i>
Eurasian Golden Oriole	
Eurasian Jay	<i>ssp. cervicalis</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>ssp. cirtensis</i>
Northern Raven	
Coal Tit	<i>ssp. ledouci</i>
African Blue Tit	<i>ssp. ultramarinus</i> “Ultramarine Blue Tit”
Great Tit	
Crested Lark	

Common Bulbul	
Barn Swallow	
Eurasian Crag Martin	
Common House Martin	
Cetti's Warbler	
Western Bonelli's Warbler	
African Reed Warbler	<i>ssp. ambiguus</i>
Melodious Warbler	
Zitting Cisticola	
Eurasian Blackcap	
Common Whitethroat	
Algerian Nuthatch	
Short-toed Treecreeper	
Common Blackbird	
Mistle Thrush	
Spotted Flycatcher	
European Robin	
Common Nightingale	
Atlas Pied Flycatcher	
Blue Rock Thrush	
European Stonechat	
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>ssp. hispanica</i> "Western Black-eared Wheatear"
House Sparrow	
Spanish Sparrow	
Grey Wagtail	
Tawny Pipit	
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>ssp. iberiae</i>
Common Chaffinch	<i>ssp. africana</i> "Atlas Chaffinch"
European Greenfinch	
Red Crossbill	
European Serin	
Corn Bunting	
Cirl Bunting	