

Djibouti

06.01.-16.01.2012

For professional reasons I stayed for 10 days in Djibouti and despite a lot of work I managed to observe some birds.

I stayed at the Sheraton Hotel in Djibouti City, which was a great choice because it is located directly at the coast. At low tide the whole area behind the hotel is teeming with birds, particularly terns, gulls and waders. Many observations were made while having breakfast or lunch. I didn't bring my telescope, so a lot of birds remained undetermined.

Two trips were made to our project area in the region of Lac Assal, a hypersaline lake, located some 140 km WNW of Djibouti City. The road from Djibouti City in direction Tadjourah is quite good, but Ethiopian truck drivers are really bad. Most observations were made from the roadside or during short stops.

On my only free day I visited the archipelago of Moucha (îles Moucha), located a few kilometres off Djibouti in the Gulf of Tadjourah. These islands can be reached by a tourist boat leaving from Kempinski hotel in the morning (30 min one way). Tickets can be purchased in travel agencies in downtown Djibouti or at the Kempinski hotel (about 50 EUR incl. lunch). On the main island there is some basic touristic infrastructure with restaurant and huts. It is possible to stay overnight. Main attraction is the coral reef around the island. Equipment for snorkelling or diving can be hired on the island.

Unfortunately I didn't see any fish on île Moucha because as soon as I reached the island I fell sick, must have eaten something bad the day before. So I stayed the whole day most time sleeping on a sun bed between the few tourists at the beach. Nevertheless I managed to see some really good birds that day, it seemed as they felt pity for me. After some sleep I awoke and saw a bird only 2 metres in front of me. I first thought it was a sparrow or what but it turned out to be a Dunn's Lark. No binocular needed. On the way to the restaurant I saw 6 Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks, a male Red-tailed (Kurdish) Wheatear and an Isabelline Wheatear. Sooty Gulls and White-eyed Gulls were frequenting the beach and several Ospreys displayed above my head.

Djibouti seems to be an interesting destination for birdwatchers, especially during migration. The country is more or less safe. Although the vast majority of its inhabitants is very poor, Djibouti is quite expensive.

I guess I could have seen a lot more with sufficient time and adequate equipment.

Some photographs at the end of the report. Please take note that all pictures have been taken with the camera of my mobile phone...

| English | Scientific | Observation |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Ostrich | <i>Struthio camelus</i> | One female on the roadside between Arta and Lac Assal came as a bit of surprise. Even my local colleagues who are regularly visiting the area didn't see one for long time. |
| Persian Shearwater | <i>Puffinus persicus</i> | About 40 dead birds and one alive on a stretch of 200 m at the beach of a basic tourist resort near Lac Assal (plage de Dankalêlo). I asked for the reasons but got diffuse answers. No obvious sign as oil stains. |

| English | Scientific | Observation |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Jouanin's Petrel | <i>Bulweria fallax</i> | up to 5 seen from the beach of a tourist resort near Lac Assal (Plage de Dankalêlo). |
| Red-billed Tropicbird | <i>Phaeton aethereus</i> | 1 from île Moucha |
| Magnificent Frigatebird | <i>Fregata magnifica</i> | 2 from île Moucha |
| Goliath Heron | <i>Ardea goliath</i> | up to 3 seen from Sheraton |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | 1 seen from Sheraton |
| Striated Heron | <i>Butorides striatus</i> | 1 seen from Sheraton |
| Sacred Ibis | <i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i> | up to 3, Sheraton, and singles elsewhere |
| Yellow-billed Stork | <i>Mycteria ibis</i> | 1 seen from Sheraton |
| Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> | 3 on île Moucha and several along the coast near Lac Assal. Obviously a common species, at least in winter. |
| Common Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> | up to 2, Sheraton |
| Lesser Sand Plover | <i>Charadrius mongolus</i> | up to 2 at Sheraton and 6 at the beach of a tourist resort near Lac Assal (Plage de Dankalêlo). |
| Pacific Golden Plover | <i>Pluvialis fulva</i> | up to 2 at Sheraton |
| Crab-plover | <i>Dromas ardeola</i> | up to 20 at Sheraton, seen daily and at close range. Great bird! |
| Eurasian Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> | daily at Sheraton |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa lapponica</i> | daily at Sheraton |
| Whimbrel | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> | daily at Sheraton |
| Common Redshank | <i>Tringa totanus</i> | daily at Sheraton |
| Ruddy Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | daily at Sheraton, many at île Moucha |
| Terek Sandpiper | <i>Xenus cinereus</i> | up to 2, Sheraton |
| Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> | common at Sheraton |
| Curlew Sandpiper | <i>Calidris ferruginea</i> | 1 at Sheraton, 2 at île Moucha |
| Sooty Gull | <i>Larus hemprichii</i> | c.50 at île Moucha, few at Sheraton |
| White-eyed Gull | <i>Larus leucophthalmus</i> | c.10 at île Moucha, few at Sheraton |
| Slender-billed Gull | <i>Larus genei</i> | daily at Sheraton (up to 10) |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus fuscus</i> | common on the coast |
| Great Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus marinus</i> | 1 at Sheraton was presumably this species. Vagrant? |
| Lesser Crested Tern | <i>Sterna bengalensis</i> | up to 3 at Sheraton and 1 île Moucha |
| Gull-billed Tern | <i>Sterna nilotica</i> | up to 5, Sheraton |
| Caspian Tern | <i>Sterna caspia</i> | up to 3, Sheraton |
| Saunders's Tern | <i>Sterna saundersi</i> | daily several Little/Saunders's Terns at the Sheraton. Two of them were definitely Saunders's Terns |
| Laughing Dove | <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> | some at Sheraton |
| Rose-ringed parakeet | <i>Psittacula krameri</i> | some in Djibouti City |
| House Crow | <i>Corvus splendens</i> | many everywhere. Reported to be a problem for indigenous species as Abdim's Stork. |

| English | Scientific | Observation |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Black-crowned Sparrow-lark | <i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i> | 6 on île Moucha |
| Dunn's Lark | <i>Eremalauda dunni</i> | 1 on île Moucha |
| Hoopoe Lark | <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i> | at least 2 on île Moucha |
| Bar-tailed/Desert Lark | <i>Ammomanes sp.</i> | 1 near Lac Assal |
| White-spectacled Bulbul | <i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i> | singles at Sheraton |
| Graceful Prinia | <i>Prinia gracilis</i> | several on île Moucha |
| Red-tailed "Kurdish" Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe xanthopyrna x.</i> | 1 male at île Moucha |
| Isabelline Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i> | 1 at île Moucha |
| White-crowned Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i> | 2 near Lac Assal |
| Blackstart | <i>Cecomela melanura</i> | 2 near Lac Assal |
| Shining Sunbird | <i>Nectarinia habessinica</i> | daily at Sheraton |
| Rueppell's Weaver | <i>Ploceus galbula</i> | daily at Sheraton |
| Red-billed Firefinch | <i>Lagonosticta senegala</i> | daily at Sheraton |

Mammals: Monkeys on the road side, at least 3 species of gazelles, dolphins and a dead hyena on the road to Lac Assal.



Goliath Heron, Sheraton Hotel



Sooty Gull (île Moucha)



Dead Persian Shearwater at Plage de Dankalêlo



Dunn's Lark (île Moucha)