

Western Sahara

27 April -1 May 2017



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Introduction

A long weekend independent trip to Western Sahara for some desert birding with Sander Bot & Lenze Hofstee. The destination has become more interesting in recent years since it offers the chance to see Golden Nightjar and Sudan Golden Sparrow. Both were seen in addition to many other new species.

For some photo's see: <https://goo.gl/AA7ouN>

Itinerary

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|-------|---------------------------------|---|
| Day 1 | Thursday April 27 th | Flight Amsterdam to Dakhla (via Casablanca), arrival at 23:50h. Night in Dakhla |
| Day 2 | Friday April 28 th | Supply shopping in Dakhla, birding along Awsard road. Camping at Oued Jenna |
| Day 3 | Saturday April 29 th | Birding Oued Jenna, birding back to Dakhla. Night in Dakhla |
| Day 4 | Sunday April 30 th | Birding around Dakhla (around and tip of peninsula La Sarga). Night in Dakhla |
| Day 5 | Monday May 1 st | 8am flight back to Amsterdam (via Casablanca) |

Logistics

We booked our flights with Royal Air Morocco from Amsterdam to Dakhla with a transfer in Casablanca for €415 pp. A car was rented through click-car-hire.com for €140 euro (for a Kia Picanto). Because later Sander and Lenze also joined our trip we tried to make an upgrade for the car. It turned out all large vehicles were rented out so we ended up with a Ford Fiesta for an extra of 300 Dirham. The car was just big enough to fit all 4 of us plus luggage and water/food supplies but a bigger one would have been more convenient. We also paid 300 Dirham for out of office pickup since our flight arrived after 23:00h on Thursday. For the first night in Dakhla we had booked 2 rooms (€25 per room) in the Imperial Playa Hotel through booking.com. The other two nights in Dakhla we arranged on the spot with the same hotel.

Literature

Last year we got the idea for this trip by reading the report of Swann & Stronach 2016. Other reports we used were Stronach 2015, Poelstra 2015 and some recent sighting from Observado.org and Ebird.com. Since these reports give good descriptions of the main birding sites we keep it brief in our report.

Birding

Main targets here are Dunn's Lark, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Cricket Warbler and in recent years also Golden Nightjar and Sudan Golden Sparrow. Since we had not been to (northern) Morocco yet, many other desert species were also new. In general we were very lucky with the weather; almost no wind and not extremely hot. This (and

some luck?) meant that after less than 24 hours along the Awsard road we had seen all our targets and decided to go back to Dakhla for some extra bonuses (Royal tern, Scrub Warbler, White-throated bee-eater). For more details and gps points see list below.

Species that we did not see but can also be seen: Desert Warbler, Desert Lark, Temmincks Lark, Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Spotted Sandgrouse and Kelp Gull. Overall we saw very little migratory birds compared to other tripreports in the same period, probably also due to the good weather?

Visited sites

Dakhla Peninsula: Some common species in Dakhla itself and south of Dakhla just before the village of La Sarga are some tidal flats, good for waders and terns. Furthermore the kitesurf-resort Dakhla Attitude held a White-throated bee-eater present since 28 February 2017, only the second record for Western Sahara and the WP.

Streaked Scrub Warbler sites: two sites, one 20 k north from the main roundabout in the main road when exiting Dakhla, the other about 10 k east of the roundabout (see species list for exact GPS points). Holding not much more (Thekla Lark and Sardinian Warbler).

Gleb Jdiane (although apparently this name is wrong, actual name is Tachehtent, but this name is used by all birders): Watertower site where sandgrouse and other desert species come to drink, bushes around the water can also hold migrants. A few km west we found Thick-billed lark.

Oued Jenna: The main wadi along the road just before Awsard, driving in we stopped at a few sites with some acacias, but most other sites were very barren. The grassy fields south of the road about 4-5 km from Oued Jenna were good for larks.

Awsard: Army camp with a fuel station/supply shop. Only place we saw Pale Crag Martin after a short wait. A few bushes north of the road just west of the Army camp held 'reiseri' Olivaceous warbler and Maghreb lark.

ANNOTATED SPECIES LIST

We have tried to accurately indicate the proper subspecies for all our observations, usually based on geographic locations based on the IOC World Bird List version 7.2. We tried to keep detailed notes throughout the trip but especially commoner species might not have been written down daily. Triplist generated with iGoterra trips, see www.igoterra.com for details. In our view the best listing software/website!

- 1 **Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus*
50 en route along bay 30.4 and 1 La Sarga 30.4.
- 2 **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia leucorodia*
1 fly over Dakhla 28.4 and 6 La Sarga 30.4.
- 3 **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta garzetta*
10 La Sarga 30.4.
- 4 **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus*
11 Dakhla Bay 28.4 and 1 La Sarga 30.4.
- 5 **White-breasted Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax lucidus*
1 Dakhla 30.4.
- 6 **Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus haliaetus*

- 1 flying across the bay Dakhla 30.4.
- 7 **Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*
1 circling above Oued Jenna 29.4.
- 8 **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus cirtensis*
1 close to Awsard 29.4, 2 en route 30.4.
- 9 **Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola squatarola*
1 en route 30.4 and 70 La Sarga 30.4.
- 10 **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula*
25 La Sarga 30.4.
- 11 **Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*
5 Dakhla Bay 28.4 and several La Sarga 30.4.
- 12 **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica lapponica*
70 La Sarga 30.4.
- 13 **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*
1 La Sarga 30.4.
- 14 **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*
2 Dakhla 30.4.
- 15 **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres interpres*
2 La Sarga and 30 Dakhla 30.4
- 16 **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus canutus*
45 La Sarga 30.4.
- 17 **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*
7 La Sarga 30.4.
- 18 **Sanderling** *Calidris alba alba*
180 Dakhla Bay 28.4 and 1+1 La Sarga 30.4.
- 19 **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina arctica*
140 La Sarga 30.4.
- 20 **Cream-colored Courser** *Cursorius cursor cursor*
2, only observed en route close to Awsard road 28.4. (gps: 23.8585, -15.6834)
- 21 **Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
3 La Sarga 30.4.
- 22 **Audouin's Gull** *Ichthyæetus audouinii*
4 Dakhla Bay 28.4 and 1 La Sarga 30.4.
- 23 **Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis atlantis*

- 11 Dakhla 28.4 and 10's La Sarga 30.4.
- 24 **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus graellsii*
21 Dakhla Bay 28.4 and 10's La Sarga 30.4.
- 25 **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia*
15 Dakhla 28.4, 1 Dakhla Bay 28.4, 100 La Sarga 30.4 and 10 Dakhla 30.4.
- 26 **Royal Tern** *Thalasseus maximus albididorsalis*
2 La Sarga 30.4 and 1 Dakhla flying along coast 30.4.
See : <https://britishbirds.co.uk/article/new-species-tern-discovered/>
- 27 **Lesser Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bengalensis emigratus*
1 La Sarga 30.4.
- 28 **Sandwich Tern** *Thalasseus sandvicensis*
30 along the bay Dakhla 30.4.
- 29 **Crowned Sandgrouse** *Pterocles coronatus coronatus*
Group of 6 birds present when we arrived at Gleb Jdiane around 10.40am on 28.4.
(gps: 23.6132, -15.7231)
- 30 **Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto decaocto*
1 Dakhla 28.4, 1 Gleb Jdiane 28.4 and 1 Oued Jenna 29.4.
- 31 **Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis phoenicophila*
Several in Dakhla 28.4 and 30.4.
- 32 **Golden Nightjar** *Caprimulgus eximius simplicior*
3 birds started calling just before 7am in Oued Jenna. We walked towards the sound and found a male + female at (gps: 22.6837, -14.4946). Very well seen in flight and on the ground with full daylight. 29.4.
- 33 **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus brehmorum*
Common at Dakhla 29.4 and 1 en route 30.4.
- 34 **Little Swift** *Apus affinis galilejensis*
group at Dakhla on 28.4 and 30.4.
- 35 **White-throated Bee-eater** *Merops albicollis*
1 individual present at Dakhla Attitude resort since early this year. We found the bird catching insect close to the entrance (gps: 23.8937, -15.7705) 30.4.
- 36 **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus erlangeri*
2 seen flying en route from Awsard to Oued Jenna 29.4.
- 37 **Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis algeriensis*
Common along Awsard road on both days.
- 38 **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator senator*

- 1 bushes close to Awsard 29.4.
- 39 **Brown-necked Raven** *Corvus ruficollis*
Several en route 28.4 and 29.4.
- 40 **Greater Hoopoe-Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes alaudipes*
Several en route along Awsard road 28.4 and 30.4, 1 La Sarga 30.4.
- 41 **Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey*
3 birds seen from the car, then found back nearby at (gps: 23.6349, -15.7217) 29.4.
- 42 **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix nigriceps albifrons*
group of 4 Juveniles and later male + female at (gps: 22.6443, -14.4596) 28.4.
- 43 **Thekla Lark** *Galerida theklae theresae*
3 Gled Jdiane 28.4, 2 Dakhla 30.4 and 10 en route 30.4.
- 44 **Maghreb Lark** *Galerida macrorhyncha macrorhyncha*
5 close to Awsard at (gps:22.5733,-14.3553) 29.4.
- 45 **Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunnii dunnii*
2 birds found in grassy area, second bird gave excellent photo opportunities at (gps: 22.6527,-14.4585) 28.4.
- 46 **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia riparia*
Only observed en route with 1 30.4.
- 47 **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica rustica*
some en route 28.4 and several on migration at Oued Jenna 28.4, again on 29.4.
- 48 **Pale Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta presaharica*
1 flying by at petrol station Awsard (gps: 22.5585,-14.3324) 29.4.
- 49 **Streaked Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta theresae*
At least 4 birds along the main road going north from Dakhla (gps: 24.1015, -15.5486) 29.4, at least 2 birds at another spot (gps: 23.8763, -15.6061) 30.4.
- 50 **Eurasian Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus scirpaceus*
1 Gled Jdiane 28.4 and 1 bushes close to Awsard 29.4.
- 51 **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida reiseri*
1 at bushes close to Awsard (gps:22.5733,-14.3553) 29.4.
- 52 **Western Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna opaca*
1 Oued Jenna walking into the wadi to the north (gps: 22.6928, -14.4920) 29.4.
- 53 **Cricket Warbler** *Spiloptila clamans*
About 15 seen in Oued Jenna 28.4, at least 4 next morning 29.4.
- 54 **Fulvous Babbler** *Turdoides fulva buchmanii*

- 2 groups en route 28.4 and common in Oued Jenna 28.4, 5 there 29.4.
- 55 **Eurasian Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla heineken*
1 at Dakhla Attitude resort 30.4.
- 56 **Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis communis*
1 en route in small bush along the Awsard road 28.4.
- 57 **Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala valverdei*
1 bird singing at the Streaked scrub warbler spot (gps: 24.1015, -15.5486) 29.4.
- 58 **Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus phoenicurus*
1 male in wadi at Oued Jenna 29.4.
- 59 **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti homochroa*
Male + female present at Gleb Jdiane 28.4 and 30.4, several more en route
- 60 **Red-rumped Wheatear** *Oenanthe moesta*
Several birds en route, mainly at the beginning of the Awsard road 28.4. and 30.4
- 61 **Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucura riggenbachi*
Common in Dakhla city, also several at Thick-billed lark spot (gps: 23.6349, -15.7217)
- 62 **White-crowned Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga leucopyga*
2 birds at Awsard petrol station (gps: 22.5585,-14.3324) 29.4.
- 63 **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus tingitanus*
Several at Dakhla 28.4 and 1 at Awsard petrol station 29.4.
- 64 **Desert Sparrow** *Passer simplex saharae*
3 en route along Awsard road 28.4, flock of 70 Oued Jenna 28.4, next day a very big flock of around 350 birds 29.4 and 5 at Awsard petrol station 29.4.
- 65 **Sudan Golden Sparrow** *Passer luteus*
2 birds in flock of desert Sparrows on first afternoon in Oued Jenna including one male 28.4, next day at least 6 in very big flock (+/350) foraging close to the road through Oued Jenna (gps: 22.6759, -14.4915) 29.4.
- 66 **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis trivialis*
1 Gleb Jdiane 29.4.
- 67 **Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus zedlitzii*
Up to 2 birds coming to drink at Gleb Jdiane 28-30.4.