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Rare birds in Mauritania. (Top) Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* (with Grey and Great White Herons), 20 January 1981, (middle) Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, 26 April 1981, (bottom) Senegal Puff-back Flycatcher *Batis senegalensis*, 25 November 1979. (Photos: P.W.P. Browne).

NEW BIRD SPECIES IN MAURITANIA

by P. W. P. Browne

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Mauritania is the westernmost of the large Saharan/Sahelian countries which lie in a belt across Africa. Its area is 1,030,700 sq km. About two thirds is desert (the north), which is considered part of the Palaearctic region, and the southern third is dry savanna, part of the Afrotropical region. Some 405 bird species have been identified in Mauritania since 1934.

The purpose of this short paper is to describe the occurrence of 21 species which I have added to the Mauritanian list (included in the 405) and 19 more species which I have recorded in western Mauritania for the first time, although they had previously been recorded in the east (east of 12°W).

In order to put these observations in perspective, Figure 1 shows the contributions of various western ornithologists to this list of 405 species. Each contributor is indicated by one or two letters of his name (see below) placed in Figure 1 above the year of his contribution. Figure 2 shows where these observations were made by half-degree square. Blank areas in Mauritania mean there have been no observations at all; squares with a black dot signify some observations but only inadequate coverage, and squares with a black star reasonably adequate coverage (more than 20 hours of observation by more than one observer during more than one season). Localities named in this paper are also shown in Figure 2.

The following comments on these contributions are based upon sources cited in the list of references. Though these are believed to give a fairly complete picture of the ornithological exploration of Mauritania, they derive from literature available in Nouakchott which is not exhaustive.

T. Monod (Mo) made extensive observations on many aspects of nature and culture in Mauritania and appears to have added two species to the list (in Heim de Balsac & Mayaud, 1962: since this work is often quoted, I refer to it hereafter as HM). C. G. Bird (Bi - 1937) added 46 species during his stay at Nouadhibou in April and May 1936; most were Palaearctic visitors. R. Holmes (Ho - in HM) added two pelagic birds in 1938 and W.B. Bierman (Bn - in HM) two more in 1947. H. Heim de Balsac (H) made a famous journey from Morocco to Dakar, travelling through Mauritania, in February, March and April 1947. He added 45 species to the Mauritanian list, including a number of breeding birds (Heim de Balsac 1949-51, Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962). He concentrated on the desert north of 20°N, and is the only observer to the present day with records north of 23°N in Mauritania. A. Villiers (V) made several expeditions into Mauritania from 1948 to 1953, visiting both desert areas in the north and savanna in the southwest. L. Dekeyser (D) interpreted much of the material he collected and also did field work in 1951 and 1952. Their papers (Dekeyser & Villiers

1950, Dekeyser 1954) added 99 species (both visitors and breeding birds) to the Mauritanian list. J. Douaud (Do - in HM) added two species in 1952.

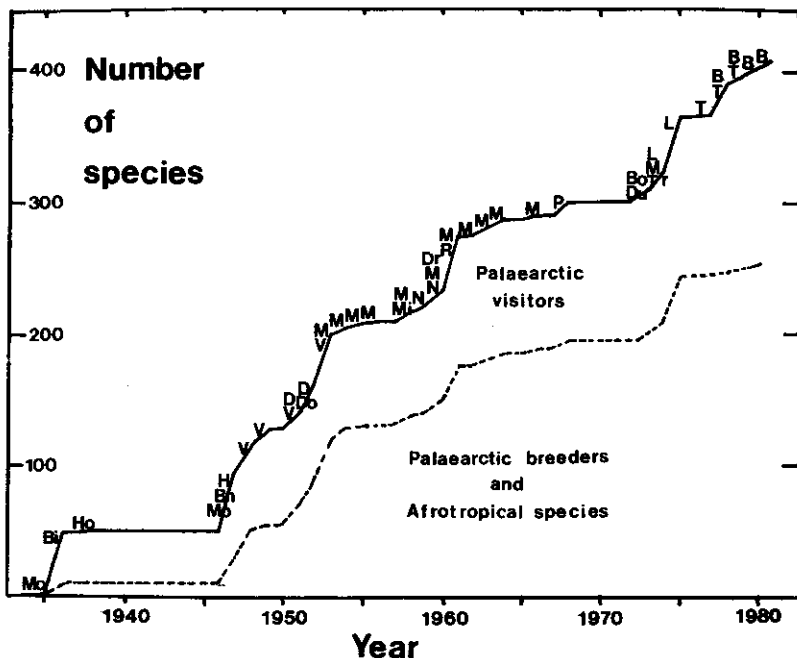


Figure 1 Cumulative number of species identified in Mauritania at the end of each year with indication of observers responsible.

From 1953 to 1975, G. J. Morel (M - personal communication) made many observations, mostly in southern Mauritania, near the Senegal River which forms the boundary between Senegal and Mauritania, and added 75 species to the list. P. Milon (Mi - in HM) added one in 1958. During the years 1959 to 1965 R. de Naurois (N - 1959 and 1969) paid a number of visits, mostly to the Mauritanian coast, and was one of the first explorers of the Banc d'Arguin. This has been found to be an important breeding and wintering area for water birds and is the site of Mauritania's first national park. De Naurois added 12 species, mostly breeders. F. Roux (R - in HM) was active on the coast in the Nouadhibou area around 1961 and added 16 species, many of them scarce Palaeartic migrants. In 1968 H. Politzar (P - pers. commun. via G.J. Morel) spent several months at Kaedi and spotted 10 new raptors. In 1973, L. Duhartois and his colleagues (Du - 1974) at the Banc d'Arguin added three species and Bortoli (Bo - personal communication via Morel) four more in the south. B. Treca and F. Roux (Tr - personal communication), in the course of an aerial survey of water birds in southwest Mauritania in 1975, added

another B. Lamarche (L - personal communication) made several visits to southeast Mauritania in 1973, 1974 and 1975 and added 43 species, mostly Afrotropical, to the list. From 1973 to 1979, Trotignon (T - 1976, 1980) and several collaborators were very active in the Nouadhibou-Banc d'Arguin area and added a further 20. My own observations (B) have been made entirely in southwest Mauritania (between 16° and 20°N, 12° and 17°W) during 1978 to 1981, with a total of 640 hours of fieldwork.

In the following list species previously recorded in eastern Mauritania are distinguished by the letters L or M according to whether the observer was Lamarche or Morel. The precise localities at which my observations were made are indicated by L01 to L43, the latitude and longitude of which will be found in Table 1.

Table 1 Latitude and longitude of localities at which I made observations

	N	W		N	W		N	W
L01	16°13'	16°25'	L15	16°34'	16°18'	L29	17°14'	16°06'
L02	16°15'	16°24'	L16	16°40'	16°02'	L30	17°21'	13°39'
L03	16°23'	16°20'	L17	16°44'	16°05'	L31	17°20'	16°05'
L04	16°31'	15°33'	L18	16°51'	16°06'	L32	17°21'	16°04'
L05	16°32'	15°31'	L19	16°57'	16°07'	L33	17°30'	16°02'
L06	16°32'	15°36'	L20	17°09'	12°12'	L34	17°32'	16°00'
L07	16°31'	15°44'	L21	17°02'	13°50'	L35	17°47'	15°59'
L08	16°31'	15°49'	L22	17°07'	14°04'	L36	17°56'	16°02'
L09	16°32'	15°48'	L23	17°00'	16°05'	L37	17°57'	12°14'
L10	16°33'	15°44'	L24	17°03'	16°05'	L38	18°00'	12°16'
L11	16°33'	15°46'	L25	17°04'	16°04'	L39	18°04'	15°59'
L12	16°33'	15°48'	L26	17°06'	16°04'	L40	18°05'	15°59'
L13	16°31'	15°50'	L27	17°18'	13°43'	L41	18°06'	15°59'
L14	16°36'	15°55'	L28	17°11'	13°52'	L42	18°03'	16°00'
						L43	18°05'	16°02'

BLACK-HEADED HERON *Ardea melanocephala* (L) Two on rice paddies near Rosso (L13) 20 January 1980. Distinguished from nearby Grey Heron *A. cinerea* by darker grey colouring and black from forehead right down back of neck, contrasting with white chin and front of neck - well photographed.

HAMMERKOP *Scopus umbretta* (L) Four nests in acacia forest on north bank of Senegal River 30 km east of Rosso (L05) on 22 June 1980. A Hammerkop flew out of one nest.

BEAUDOUIN'S HARRIER-EAGLE *Circaetus beaudouini* One or more observed at several places between 15 and 50 km north of Rosso (L16, L19) on 1 June 1979 and another 116 km south of Nouakchott (L26) on 7 October 1979.

WAHLBERG'S EAGLE *Aquila wahlbergi* (L) One over rice paddies (L13) on 20 January 1980 and another over well-bushed steppe some 60 km south of Nouakchott (L34) on 24 January 1981.

HONEY-BUZZARD *Pernis apivorus* One observed just south of Nouakchott (L42) on 28 May 1978. Two were captured in Nouakchott in June 1979. One taken on 4 June later escaped but was seen by me. The other, found on the beach near the town on 13 June, died the same day and I was able to send it to the ORSTOM ornithological station at Richard-Toll, Senegal, where the skin was preserved.

DOTTEREL *Eudromias morinellus* One was seen on the Fisherman's beach, Nouakchott (L43) on 30 October 1980. It was feeding among fish heads about ½ km from the ocean. It allowed very close approach and was identified by size somewhat greater than nearby Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, dark brown upperparts with buff edges to feathers and some rufous feathers on mantle, crown blackish-brown with whitish-buff eye stripes meeting on the nape. The breast was somewhat striped ending in a pale buff curved bar right across. Below this lower breast and flanks were a deep chestnut-buff, with white on belly and undertail coverts.

COMMON SNIBE *Gallinago gallinago* Observed at Nouakchott (L36, L39, L42), in the Senegal Valley near Rosso (LO9, L12) and by lakes near Aleg (L22, L28 and L30) on dates between 23 September and 20 January in 1978, 1979 and 1980 and also on 16 April 1978. These birds were known not to be Great Snipe *G. media* because of their erratic flight and loud call "skaap".

TEMMINCK'S STINT *Calidris temminckii* (L) One was photographed by a pool just north of the Senegal River near Rosso (LO8) on 5 October 1980 and another seen by a pool near Aleg (L21) on 14 December 1980.

TEMMINCK'S COURSER *Cursorius temminckii* (L) One on 10 September 1978 about 98 km south of Nouakchott (L29) on lightly bushed steppe.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus* One at Nouakchott in wooded gardens (L39) on 26 April 1981; seen at close quarters and photographed.

SPECKLED PIGEON *Columba guinea* (L) Two seen on the rice paddies near Rosso (L12) on 6 April 1980 and three in Rosso on 25 May 1980.

BLACK-BILLED WOOD DOVE *Turtur abyssinicus* (L, M) Common (e.g. eleven seen during one 3.7 hour walk) in acacia forest up to 30 km east of Rosso (LO4, LO5, L11) in May, June and November 1980.

GREY PLANTAIN-EATER *Crinifer piscator* (M) One observed closely and carefully described in wooded ravines 10 km west of Djouk (L20) on 21 January 1981 (Macfie, L., personal communication). I had glimpsed a bird believed to be this species on 18 January but did not have the opportunity to personally confirm the identification.

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO *Clamator jacobinus* Two seen on lightly treed steppe some 20 km WNW of Rosso (L14) on 22 June 1980. They were distinguished from both *C. glandarius* and *C. levaillantii* by black upperparts including crest and cheeks contrasting with white unspotted underparts.

WHITE-FACED SCOPS OWL *Otus leucotis* (L) Three in acacia forest some 10 km east of Rosso (L10) on 25 May 1980.

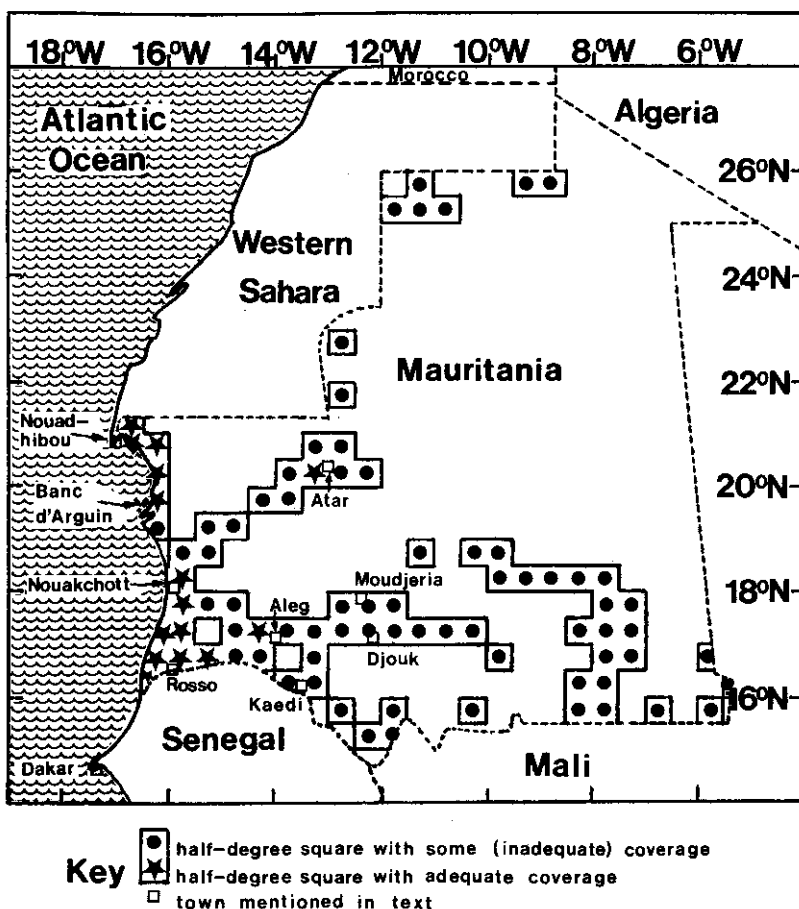


Figure 2 Localities named in the text and ornithological coverage per half-degree square of Mauritania.

RED-NECKED NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus ruficollis* Observed at Nouakchott (L39) on 26 October 1978 (1), 5 May (2 together) and 12 May (1) 1979: large size, tawny barring on neck and breast, rufous nape, grey line above eye contrasting with dark centre of crown, white line below eye, white throat and white spots on the end of the outer tail feathers and on the wing. The contrast of grey, white, black and tawny on and around the head distinguished these birds from the Afrotropical nightjars (*C. eximius*, *C. inornatus*, *C. climacurus* and *Macrodipteryx longipennis*) which are known to occur in Mauritania. The dates indicated Palearctic migrants. Several examples of

the European Nightjar *C. europaeus* were seen in the same area, but these invariably rested during the day on the higher branches of trees (8-12 metres above the ground) whereas the Red-necked Nightjars rested on the ground. This habit of European Nightjars is described in *Roberts Birds of South Africa* (McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). The European Nightjars were smaller and less tawny than the Red-necked Nightjars.

GREY-HEADED KINGFISHER *Halcyon leucocephala* Single birds seen on bushy steppe about 40 km NW of Rosso (L17) on 11 July 1979, in acacia forest 10 km east of Rosso (L10) on 23 November 1980 and in a similar habitat 50 km NE of Aleg (L27) on 9 November 1980.

FINE-SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Campethera punctuligera* (L) About five seen in patches of acacia forest 10 and 30 km east of Rosso (LO4, L10) in May, June and November 1980.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea* Observed at Nouakchott (L39) 26 February and 4 March 1978, 25 November 1978, 6 December 1979 to 10 February 1980. All were single birds except for two together on 6 December 1979. They kept to irrigated market gardens, mostly by running channels of sewage water. Trotignon (1980) saw the species at Nouadhibou on 18 January 1979.

GOONLEK *Laniarius barbarus* (L) Quite common in acacia forest up to 30 km east of Rosso in May, June and November 1980 (LO4, LO5, LO6, LO7). As many as five pairs heard (one pair seen) during a 3.7 hour walk. Also heard in thick *Salvadora persica* cover about 35 km NW of Rosso (L16) on 9 April 1979 and one seen about 50 km west of Rosso (L15) on 12 February 1978.

YELLOW-BILLED SHRIKE *Corvinella corvina* (M) Two about 50 km west of Rosso (L15) on 12 February 1978.

DRONGO *Dicrurus adsimilis* (M) On 22 June 1980, about seven seen during a 3.7 hour walk in acacia forest 30 km east of Rosso (LO5); another nearer Rosso (L10) on 23 November 1980.

RED-WING STARLING *Onychognathus morio* At least four (singles and in pairs) in wooded ravines with water holes at the north end of the Assaba escarpment about 10 km west of Djouk (L20) on 18 January 1981. Macfie, L. and Tyack, B. in a personal communication reported seeing flocks of up to thirty in the same area in March and early April 1981.

LONG-TAILED GLOSSY STARLING *Lamprolornis caudatus* (M) Very common (34 seen in parties of 1-9 in a 3 hour walk) in acacia forest up to 30 km east of Rosso (LO4, LO5, L10) in May, June and November 1980

STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata* Observed in market gardens at Nouakchott (L39) 20 January, 4 February, 29 October, 25 November 1978 and 1 February 1981. Trotignon (1980) reported this species at Nouadhibou from November 1978 to January 1979.

CLIFF CHAT *Myrmecocichla cinnamomeiventris* Three were seen in the same ravines as the Red-wing Starlings on 18 January 1981.

RING OUZEL *Turdus torquatus* A single bird seen in flight in the market gardens at Nouakchott (L39) on 4 February 1978. This is a species I know well from Europe. It was a black, thrush-sized bird with a white gorget and light coloured flight feathers.

GREAT REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Observed at Nouakchott (L39) on 30 September 1978 and 27 May 1979; distinguished by large size compared with *A. scirpaceus*, round tail, brown unstreaked plumage.

RUFOUS GRASS WARBLER *Cisticola galactotes* About four in rushes beside Tambas (L11) approximately 5 km NE of Rosso, 4 May 1980.

COMMON FANTAIL WARBLER *Cisticola juncidis* Very common October and November 1979 and 1980 on rice paddies and marshes near Rosso, e.g. about 12 seen in song during one 2.2 hour walk (LO8, L13). One also in song near a lake about 15 km NE of Moudjeria (L38) on 2 November 1980 and about 6 in song beside Lake Aleg (20 km west of Aleg - L22) on 16 November 1980.

CROMBEC *Sylvietta brachyura* (L) Seen during practically all months at 14 locations (LO1, LO2, LO3, L14, L16, L17, L18, L19, L23, L25, L31, L32, L33, L35) on acacia steppe north and west of Rosso to within 34 km of Nouakchott. They were also present in acacia forest east of Rosso in May, June and November 1980 (LO4, LO5, L10) and in acacia trees by springs 10 km west of Djouk (L20) on 18 January 1981.

SENEGAL PUFF-BACK FLYCATCHER *Batis senegalensis* (M) Quite a common bird on well-bushed steppe throughout the year, observed in groups of 1-4 at eight localities (L10, L15, L18, L19, L20, L24, L32, L33) as far north as 17°30'N.

SENNAR PENDULINE TIT *Remiz punctifrons* One or two together about 50 km NNW of Rosso (L18) on 24 September 1978, 25 November 1979 and 17 February 1980. Another some 15 km further south (L17) on 2 March 1980.

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris* One seen and heard several times in well-treed gardens at Nouakchott between 26 May and 4 June 1980. It was a large finch with a big beak, greenish-grey unstreaked plumage with a yellow line along wing and yellow in tail. The call (which I know well from Europe) was "tswee" and a musical trill.

BLACK-HEADED WEAVER *Ploceus melanocephalus* Two small breeding colonies 3-5 km north of Rosso (L12) among bushes in swamps, September-December 1978 and 1979.

YELLOW-CROWNED BISHOP *Euplectes afer* This was quite common in the rice paddies and swamps up to 3 km west (LO8) and 5 km north of Rosso (L11) in Sept and October 1978, 1979 and 1980. One was also seen near Lake Aleg (L22) on 16 November 1980. Most were displaying males in breeding plumage.

RED BISHOP *Euplectes orix* (L) One male at Nouakchott (L39) on 2 October 1978.

SENEGAL INDIGO FINCH *Vidua chalybeata* (L) Seen at five locations in the vicinity of the Senegal River west and east of Rosso (LO1, LO2, LO5, L10, L14) in groups of 1-5 birds on 23 September 1979, 25 May, 22 June and 7 December 1980.

BLACK-RUMPED WAXBILL *Estrilda troglodytes* (L, M) Single birds at Nouakchott (L41) on 15 November 1978 and among trees by a lake NE of Moudjeria (L37) on 2 November 1980.

QUAIL-FINCH *Ortygospiza atricollis* This species was observed on 17 February, 2 March and 4 April 1980 on the rice paddies just west of Rosso (L13) and on 7 December 1980 by the north bank of the Senegal River about 50 km further west (L03).

DISCUSSION

Regarding first my own observations, of the 40 species 11 are Palaearctic migrants and 29 are Afrotropical birds. Four of the Palaearctic migrants (*Gallinago gallinago*, *Calidris temminckii*, *Motacilla cinerea* and *Saxicola torquata*) spend the winter in Mauritania while for the other seven (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*, *Eudromias morinellus*, *Columba palumbus*, *Caprimulgus ruficollis*, *Turdus torquatus*, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* and *Carduelis chloris*) that has not been proved. As far as I have been able to discover, these are the first records south of the Sahara of *Eudromias morinellus*, *Columba palumbus*, *Turdus torquatus* and *Carduelis chloris* that has not been proved. As far as I have been able to discover, these are the first records south of the Sahara of *Eudromias morinellus*, *Columba palumbus*, *Turdus torquatus* and *Carduelis chloris*; the other seven Palaearctic species have been recorded in Senegal (Morel 1972, 1980).

Of the 29 Afrotropical species, only two (*Onychognathus morio* and *Myrmecocichla cinnameiventris*) appear not to have been recorded in Senegal. They are rock-loving species recorded as near as Mali. The other 27 species are well known in the north of Senegal, along or near the Senegal River, not far south of many of my observations. *Campethera punctuligera*, *Sylvietta brachyura*, *Ploceus melanoccephalus* and *Vidua chalybeata* are cited by Serle & Morel (1979) as occurring in southern Mauritania, evidently without documentary evidence. Such is now provided.

Looking at the wider picture, is it reasonable to assume that with 405 species the Mauritanian list is nearly complete? A glance at Figure 2 will demonstrate that this is hardly likely to be the case. Only 20% of the half-degree squares in Mauritania have had any ornithological exploration at all and only 4% a coverage which is in any way adequate. Even in the south (south of 19°N) only 41% have had any observations, and in the north only 9%.

Another indication that many species remain to be discovered in Mauritania, especially in the south, derives from the fact that the southernmost point of the country lies at approximately 14°43'N, just level with Dakar. Examination of Morel's checklists (1972, 1980) of Senegalese birds, reveals that, in Senegal north of 14°43'N, 82 species have been recorded which are unknown in Mauritania (66 Afrotropical, 13 Palaearctic, 3 Nearctic). Consequently we can foresee that, with continued exploration, the graph presented in Figure 1 will continue to climb, especially the line representing breeding and Afrotropical species.

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I wish to thank Dr G. Morel and Mr B. Lamarche for permission to refer to their unpublished notes on Mauritanian birds, to Messrs Tréca and Roux for allowing me access to their aerial survey observations on water birds and to Miss L. Macfie and Miss B. Tyack for supplying me with observations made in Mauritania in 1981.

RESUME

Vingt-et-un nouvelles espèces ont été identifiées en Mauritanie et dix-neuf espèces en Mauritanie occidentale entre janvier 1978 et avril 1981, dont onze étaient des migrateurs paléarctiques et vingt-neuf étaient des espèces afrotropicales. Ceci porte à 405 le nombre d'espèces d'oiseaux connues en Mauritanie.

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