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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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Short Notes — Notes Courtes

Western Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, a new addition to the Republic of Benin list

On 10 April 1996 at about 15h30, I encountered a group of *c.* 50 raptors circling at some height, just south of Bembéréké (10°12'N, 2°40'E). It included *c.* 20 Black Kites *Milvus migrans* and *c.* 30 birds of apparently three or four different species of Falconidae, including grey and brown individuals, but which were not identified. The group was similar in size and composition to one seen at Bétérou (9°12'N, 2°16'E) in April 1990.

At 18h20 the same day I encountered a similar group, this time composed entirely of Falconidae, at a reservoir on the Parakou–Bétérou road (9°19'N, 2°34'E). This group contained up to 70 birds, apparently of three different species. Almost immediately most of the birds flew away to the north, leaving, however, a group of *c.* 10 sallying to water level from trees overlooking the reservoir. This group contained male, female and immature Western Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus*. The two males were easily identified by the bright orange-red bill and feet and the striking, chestnut lower belly, thighs and under-tail coverts. There was no white on the underwing coverts, eliminating Eastern Red-footed Falcon *F. amurensis*. The immature had very strong dark moustachial streaks. Western Red-footed Falcon is known to be gregarious and to mix on passage with other species of Falconidae.

The text of Brown *et al.* (1982) mentions no record of Western Red-footed Falcon further west than Zaire, although the accompanying distribution map extends west to central Nigeria. Dowsett & Forbes-Watson include the species as a Palaearctic migrant as far west as Senegal, although there are only sparse records. Thiollay (1985) includes six records of 2–10 birds, all on spring passage, in Ivory Coast. In Ghana there is only one certain record, an adult at Elmina in April 1993 (Helsens 1996). In Togo, one bird was seen in a mixed group of 300 in June 1987 (Cheke & Walsh 1996). The species is commoner from Nigeria (Elgood *et al.* 1994) eastwards (Brown *et al.* 1982, Dowsett & Forbes-Watson 1993). Though hardly unexpected, the species has not previously been recorded in the Republic of Benin.

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Some interesting bird observations in Mauritania and Senegal

I visited Mauritania in Nov-Dec 1992, and Senegal Nov-Dec 1994, as a member of two expeditions organized by the Danish Ornithological Society; the tour leader was in both cases Anette Sonne. The following notes are from my personal observations.

In Mauritania, we travelled south from Nouakchott, to Rosso on the Senegal river, and we visited the surrounding area. After unusual heavy rains earlier in the year, the vegetation was more luxuriant than usual. We also travelled north from Nouakchott to the Banc d'Arguin, through desert or semi-desert close to the Atlantic ocean.

***Porphyrio porphyrio* Purple Swamphen.** We recorded 11 birds, of which three were not fully grown, in reeds along the Senegal river at the wharf of Rosso, 24 Nov. This is of course very close to Senegal but the young birds were surely hatched in Mauritania. Dowsett *et al.* (1993) do not mention this species for Mauritania, although Lamarche (1988) mentions a breeding record from Aleg in November.

***Phoenicurus ochruros* Black Redstart.** Two female-plumaged birds were observed in the Sabbah Hotel garden just outside Nouakchott, a little green oasis in a semidesert area, 2 Dec. Rodwell *et al.* (1996) claim it to be a rare winter visitor in Mauritania. Browne (1982) and Lamarche (1988) mention a few records from Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

***Passer simplex* Desert Sparrow.** We found three males and two females in Tiouilt, a very small fishing settlement at the shore of the Atlantic ocean, c. 100 km north of Nouakchott, 25 Nov. When we returned on 30 Nov, two males and a female were still present. Coastal records are few, although Lamarche (1988) mentions it as found from the Atlantic Ocean (Iouik, Tanandert) to the east of the country.

***P. domesticus* House Sparrow.** In Tiouilt we recorded 12 birds together with the Desert Sparrows, 25 Nov. According to J.D. Summers-Smith (*in litt.* 1992) this might be an extension of range northwards of c. 100 km.

In Senegal, we visited the Keur Momar-Sar area of Lac de Guier, Djoudj National Park, the Fatala region of Parc National du Delta du Saloum, and Palmarin (Ngoullu,