

MAURITANIA 2nd – 10th DECEMBER 2006

By [Richard Bonser](#)

Trip Participants: Richard Bonser, Douglas Barr, Chris Bell, Andy Clifton, André Riis Ebbesen, James Hunter, Richard Klim, Christian Leth, Mark Lopez and Hugh Price.



Introduction

In recent years, Mauritania has attracted the attention of a few intrepid birders who have been keen to see several species that have restricted ranges in the Western Palearctic. Our trip was along these lines, focusing on the area of the country above 21°N and the maritime areas of the Banc D'Arguin NP (the WP definition in BWP).

Mauritania is a poor and sparsely populated country. The official language is French and people tend not to speak any English. Due to relatively low levels of tourism, locals were inquisitive about what we were doing but gave us no hassle at all (unlike what you'd expect in some neighbouring countries). There's an overwhelming sense of nothingness as you drive through the country – there's little vegetation, unvaried topography and everything that you own gets covered in dust. This said we did have an enjoyable time in Mauritania.

Useful Information

As this seems to be the first real birding trip report to the country (in English at least) I thought that I'd just expand on a few areas that may be useful for people considering visiting the country in the future.

Ground agents

From our understanding, it was not possible to hire a vehicle without a driver in Mauritania. The only options for self driving would be to enter the country from one

of its neighbours (Morocco, Senegal etc). Upon a recommendation from Richard Cruse, we used Hassan Maiga and his team from [Appel du Desert](#). Although now based in Senegal, Hassan knows Mauritania like the back of his hand (as he originates from the country) so there were very few issues when it came to navigating around the place. Hassan and his team (which included a cook and a mechanic) supplied all tents, mattresses, blankets etc and came equipped with three 4x4 vehicles. Though a couple of us spoke a bit of French, a Senegalese bloke named [Oumar Sall](#) was a godsend at times – without his English, it may not have been that easy to convey our ever-changing itinerary to Hassan and his drivers. Oumar does not work directly for Hassan but, if you're considering this trip, it could be worthwhile ensuring that Oumar comes along.

In general, they were pretty decent and, after a little persuasion, were willing to drive in the dark (other ground agents have been unwilling to do this on previous trips) and hence we were able to cover a fair bit of ground during the trip. Total cost for the ground agents worked out at circa £420 per person. Though you'd probably be able to knock a little bit off this total by using another ground agent, as with everything in life it seems that you get what you pay for even in Mauritania.

Food

Information from birders who'd visited the country earlier in the year painted a bleak picture with regard to the food situation. I was expecting to have to rely on the supplies that I'd brought from the UK but, remarkably, our ground agent brought along an extremely capable cook – with most of the group feasting on freshly prepared rice/pasta dishes each evening (with the meat content varying from chicken to camel). Some of us, however, erred on the side of caution and stuck to our supplies brought from home. Nobody was ill during or indeed after the trip – I'd say this proves testament to the cook's ability. Oumar, the English speaking guide, even managed to sneak in a load of booze from Senegal that we duly consumed.

Visas

Visas were easily obtained from the Mauritanian Embassy in London for a cost of £42 per applicant. The address is 8 Carlos Place, Mayfair, London W1K 3AS and they can be contacted by phone on 0207 4789323. Some of us visited the embassy in person and others sent their passports recorded delivery and received them back with the visa stamp within 7 working days. Just for clarity, there's no issue with Israeli stamped passports in Mauritania.

Maps

There's not too much choice in terms of maps of Mauritania – we did purchase both that were available from [Stanfords](#) and found the most useful to be the International Travel Map of Mauritania at a scale of 1:2,000,000.

GPS

A GPS is an essential bit of kit for anybody considering travelling to Mauritania. The reason for this is two-fold – to locate where previous birders saw certain species and, secondly, to navigate yourself to a specific point if you decide to drive off the main tracks (like we did). For clarity, all GPS readings within this report are detailed in degrees, minutes and seconds.

Acknowledgements

As there's no widely available information on birding sites in Mauritania, we're extremely grateful to everybody who provided us with information from their trips to the country over the last few years. Without this information, our trip probably wouldn't have happened, let alone have been as successful as it was.

We were very fortunate in our timing as Pierre-Andre Crochet had done an exhaustive trip of the country as recently as September 2006 - the information that he provided was invaluable to the success of our trip. Further useful information was kindly provided by Chris Batty, Kris de Rouck and Hugues Dufourny.

Richard Klim, James Hunter, Mark Lopez, Chris Bell and especially Christian Leth added valuable input in terms of proofing this report.

Special mention rightly to Richard Cruse - he was exceptionally useful in advising us about suitable ground agents and went beyond the call of duty acting as an email interpreter on at least one occasion.

And finally our GPS man Richard Klim did a sterling job accurately recording the key points where we saw interesting species. Without him, I don't think we'd have seen as much as we did and would still probably be lost somewhere in the desert between Atar and the coast...

Itinerary

2nd December – early evening flight from London Heathrow with Royal Air Maroc to Nouakchott, changing at Casablanca.

3rd December – arrival at Nouakchott early morning, followed by a long drive to the Atar region with stops at Akjoujt and Yeghref. Late afternoon spent birding to the north of Atar along the track to Choum. Camped at N21°12'41", W13°06'14".

4th December – spent the whole morning and early afternoon birding the wadis to the east of the track to Choum. Then we headed back through Atar and travelled in darkness to an oasis just east of Chinguetti (N20°28'37", W12°20'32") where we stayed the night in traditional huts.

5th December – early morning birding (outside of the WP) at Chinguetti before driving to Ouadane, arriving here early afternoon. Birded the rocky wadi to the NW of Ouadane (that leads into the WP) and camped at N20°58'47", W11°42'44".

6th December – early morning birding at Ouadane (outside of the WP) and then a whole day of driving, back through Atar and then using a cut through to the west of Akjoujt to the coast, arriving late night at Bou Lanouar where we camped at N21°16'29", W16°43'21".

7th December – the morning and early afternoon spent birding the desert around Bou Lanouar before we headed south along the coast to the Banc D'Arguin NP. Arrived at Iwik early evening and camped at N19°53'07", W16°18'24".

8th December – the morning spent birding the Banc D'Arguin NP from the village of Iwik. Early afternoon drive back north to the Bou Lanouar area with birding early evening, camping at N21°11'14", W16°26'06".

9th December – early morning spent birding the desert south of Bou Lanouar (where we finally managed to see Dunn's Lark, the sole reason for us returning to this area)

and then the drive south to Nouakchott. Birding mid afternoon until dusk at Nouakchott.

10th December – flight back to Casablanca in the early hours, followed by several hours wait in Casablanca before our Royal Air Maroc flight back to London Heathrow. Early evening arrival at London Heathrow.



The team. Back row (left to right) Andre Riis Ebbesen, Hugh Price, Christian Leth, James Hunter, Richard Bonser, Mark Lopez, Richard Klim. Front row (left to right) Andy Clifton, Douglas Barr and Chris Bell.

Sites

This section outlines the sites that we visited during our trip (in no particular order) and details what we saw, strategy etc. Due to the short duration of our visit, we inevitably could not visit sites where others have been previously – brief details of some of these are also included. For more details of the species recorded at the sites below, please refer to the species list section.

AGHMAKOU OASIS (inside the WP)

N21°12, W11°53

A desert oasis that we did not visit. Previous records from this site have included 10 Blue-naped Mousebird and 3 Cricket Longtails in January 2005 (De Rouck, Dufourny & Colin) although the last couple of birding teams to visit the area have failed to find either of these species. Dunn's Lark, Tristram's Warbler, Namaqua Dove, Desert Sparrow, Crowned and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse have also reliably been recorded in the area in the last couple of years.

Nearby, the area around El Beyyed could worth exploring if you have the time. Nubian Bustard may still occur in this area and also in the area near El Ghallaouiya (per [Birdlife International](#)). Due to the nomadic nature of several species in Mauritania, future visits to these sites could produce very interesting records.

ATAR (outside of the WP)

The town of Atar is the capital of the Adrar region. We visited it on a couple of occasions, primarily to buy supplies before heading elsewhere.

Observations from the petrol station on the southern side of the town included 3 Lanners on pylons as well as Rock Martin and Collared Dove. Other groups of birders have recorded Black Bush Robin within the confines of the town. Unfortunately for people interested in WP birding, the Azarane plateau – an area of arid, dry rock – lies immediately to the north of the town and presumably provides a major obstacle for any species thinking of dispersing north.

BANC D'ARGUIN NATIONAL PARK (inside the WP)

N19°52'39, W16°18'17

Although this national park extends along the coast from Cap Timiris in the south to Pointe Minou in the north (with an isolated extension at Cap Blanc), we only visited the village of Iwik to gain views of the adjacent Zira islet. The GPS coordinate noted above is the location where we stood at Iwik village to look out over Zira islet. Using the BWP definition of the Western Palearctic, the maritime areas (the islands, birds located over the water etc) of this national park are within the confines of the WP whereas birds seen for example in Iwik village are not.

This is the only reliable WP location for three species currently – Long-tailed Cormorant, Grey-headed Gull and the resident Kelp Gull. The first two species are easily observed whilst locating the Kelp Gull can take a bit of time (see the species accounts for full details). Other interesting species that can be seen from Iwik include Royal Tern, *monicae* Grey Heron, *lucidus* (White-breasted) Cormorant, Western Reef

Heron, White Pelican and large numbers of Slender-billed Gulls. *Balsaci* Spoonbills and Lesser Flamingo reportedly breed on islands further offshore within the confines of the national park.

BOU LANOUAR

N21°16'29, W16°43'21 (where we camped to the west of the town)

N21°11'14, W16°26'06 (where we camped to the south of the town)

A desert area in the north-west of the country, centred on the town of Bou Lanouar. Sandy desert predominates to the south of the town whilst to the west, the desert becomes stony. The key reason for visiting this area is that it appears, at least recently, to be the best place to locate Dunn's Lark in Mauritania. It also seems to be a decent area to find Desert Sparrow, a species that is seemingly in decline to the north in Morocco, and we managed to find 65+ in isolated bushes at N21°11'17, W16°26'02. A party of 3 Cricket Longtails seen by one of our group to the east of the main road, south of Bou Lanouar appear to be a range extension for this species.

We spent a day and a half birding the area, eventually locating one Dunn's Lark on an area of slightly stony desert interspersed with grassy tussocks at N21°11'38, W16°24'45. Hoopoe Lark, Brown-necked Raven, Desert Wheatear and Cream-coloured Courser typify the common species of the area whilst other species noted included White-crowned Black Wheatear, Southern Grey Shrike, Bar-tailed Lark, Short-toed Lark and Long-legged Buzzard.

CANSADO, CAP BLANC (inside the WP)

N20°85, W17°03

The settlement of Cansado has long been regarded as the site to see Sudan Golden Sparrow in the WP. However, birders visiting Cansado in the last couple of years have either been able to locate a single male Sudan Golden Sparrow or have come away failing to find this species. With the discovery of this species south of Choum in September 2006, Cansado may be a site of the past. Despite this the Cap Blanc peninsular is apparently an excellent place to find Royal Terns (we did not visit this site on our trip).

CHINGUETTI OASIS (outside of the WP)

N20°28'37, W12°20'32

A small oasis isolated amongst extensive sand dunes to the east of the town of Chinguetti, with accommodation available on site. This area would prove a magnet to birds crossing the Sahara in migration.

The best bird we recorded here was a Great Spotted Cuckoo along with other more common species such as Subalpine Warbler, Chiffchaff, Southern Grey Shrike, Brown-necked Raven, Laughing Dove and White-crowned Black Wheatear.

CHOUM (inside the WP)

Wadi immediately east of the small hillock at N21°12'41, W13°06'14

We spent a very productive evening and morning birding this area; highlights being 13 Cricket Longtails and 50+ Sudan Golden Sparrows. The fact that we were so successful in this area was in no small part due to Pierre-Andre Crochet who found this site in September 2006 (recording a similar array of species to ourselves).



Cricket Longtail, Choum

The site is a fairly green, wide wadi that is bordered by a rocky plateau to the east and sandy desert to the west. We camped at the GPS coordinates noted above, and walked in line north/north-eastwards through the wadi. Black-crowned Finch Lark was fairly common and a small flock of Fulvous Babblers were seen. Other species noted here included Desert Wheatear, Southern Grey Shrike, African Desert Warbler, Black-eared Wheatear, Spectacled, Sardinian and Subalpine Warbler.

The surrounding desert held good numbers of Cream-coloured Courser, Brown-necked Raven and Bar-tailed Lark whilst just to the south (in another smaller wadi at approximately N21'10, W13'07) we located a further 2 Cricket Longtails and 7 Sudan Golden Sparrows.

NOUAKCHOTT (outside the WP)

We spent our final afternoon here, concentrating on a small bit of scrub immediately inland of the beach and near the rubbish tip. In between beating the locals at football, we managed to record some interesting species that we did not see elsewhere. These included a couple of Speckled Pigeons, a Spotted Flycatcher, a pair of Namaqua Doves, a couple of dozen Little Swifts and a Griffon Vulture.

The scrub/derelict area between a small hotel and the beach was the most productive and, in addition to the species above, Sudan Golden Sparrow was common in amongst flocks of House Sparrow. Birds noted from the beach (mainly distantly) included a handful of Brown Boobies, Great Skua and many Sandwich Terns. This stretch of coast is also a probable wintering site for Plain Swift with Kris De Rouck and Hugues Dufourny recording 20+ at Nouakchott in March 2004.

OUADANE (inside and outside the WP)

The settlement of Ouadane is an oasis of greenery in an otherwise barren landscape to the east of Atar. Though the settlement lies to the south of the WP boundary, its greenery leads northwards in the form of two wadis. On our visit we only had time to visit the rocky wadi that runs NW from Ouadane – it was difficult to reach and required some good off road driving by our ground agents. The WP boundary of this wadi is N21, W11'43"29 and we walked as far north as N21'00"56, W11'44"04 encountering a number of small pools surrounded by scattered bushes in the process. Trumpeter Finch, Blue Rock Thrush Desert Lark, White-crowned Black Wheatear, House Bunting and Rock Martin were all common whilst other species we noted included Great Spotted Cuckoo, Spectacled Warbler, Red-throated Pipit, Hoopoe, Golden Eagle, Common Sandpiper, Grey Heron and Moorhen.

Another wadi extends to the ENE of Ouadane but we did not visit this. Judging from Google Earth images, this seems to be a wide sandy wadi with some vegetation and could certainly be worth exploring by birders in the future.

YEGHREF (outside of the WP)

N20'15"06, W13'30"05

An area of savannah-type scrub adjacent to the main road between Nouakchott and Atar (about an hour and a half from Atar). We spent a couple of hours here in the middle of the day, recording some fairly interesting species. As this was a random stop, it is probable that other sites in similar habitat will reap similar reward.

Our most interesting observation here was a flock of at least 35 Chestnut-bellied Starlings. Several Sudan Golden Sparrows were also present along with 2+ Blue-naped Mousebirds and an African Collared Dove. Other species seen here included Southern Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Tawny Pipit, Rock Martin, White Stork and Brown-necked Raven.

Daily Diary

2nd December 2006

The group gathered together at Heathrow mid afternoon. After the usual waiting around in the airport, we boarded our Royal Air Maroc flight to Casablanca early evening. The flight was extremely quiet so we all had the opportunity to spread ourselves about the plane and get some sleep. After a wait of a couple of hours in Morocco, our second Royal Air Maroc flight of the day – this time to the capital of Mauritania Nouakchott – remarkably departed on time. Realising that the plane food could well have been the last decent scoff for a week, we made the most of it and duly landed in Nouakchott in the early hours.

3rd December 2006

For those who've not been to a developing country before, the pandemonium on arrival at Nouakchott airport could be rather disconcerting. One thing we learnt from the start was that Mauritians appear to have no concept of queuing and the process of getting our passports and visas stamped was a bit of an ordeal. Nevertheless we managed to escape the airport and get to our ground agent by 4am. Three 4x4's awaited us – all packed full of tents, food and supplies for the next week.

We journeyed north-east from Nouakchott, with the first bit of light occurring at about 7am. Several **Hoopoe Larks**, the odd **Laughing Dove** and **White-crowned Black Wheatear** were seen by the roadside between the airport and our first stop (for petrol) at Akjoujt at about 8am. A couple of **Seebohm's Wheatears** and 3 **Black Kites** were present around where we filled the cars up with fuel. Although we'd had a bit of hassle at the airport, this stop set a rather nice precedent for the trip – no hassle from the locals (which is more than can be said for the likes of countries I've recently visited such as Morocco and Egypt).

We were all very keen to head north, get past Atar, and get into the Western Palearctic and so we hastily continued the drive north-eastwards. **Cream-coloured Coursers** were noted quite frequently in the arid roadside landscape. At the suggestion of our driver, we stopped in a small village with scattered bushes with the intention of having a bit of lunch. We explored this area, named Yeghref – located at N20°15'06, W13°30'05 – and managed to locate a few quality birds that included 35+ **Chestnut-bellied Starlings**, ten or so **Sudan Golden Sparrows**, a couple of **Blue-naped Mousebirds** along with **Southern Grey Shrike**, **African Collared Dove**, **Spectacled Warbler**, **Rock Martin**, **White Stork**, **Brown-necked Raven** and **Subalpine Warbler**. Shame we hadn't quite reached the WP. And it was also transpiring that we weren't going to get there as quickly as we thought...

After this decent bit of birding, we were confronted by Hassan and Oumar with the news that there was meant to be a 4th 4x4 in our party and we should have met it in Nouakchott. This was news to us – and it was meant to have all of our food – so Oumar said it would be along in 20 minutes. Well, to cut a long story short, 20 minutes became 2 and a half very frustrating hours. And, when the other car did arrive it had a couple of French tourists in it (and possibly some food!). It was obvious what these ground agents were trying to do... wrap our trip and the French's trip into one. Well, they'd got another thing coming if they thought this would work effectively.

Anyway we continued along the asphalt road to Atar where we stopped and gathered supplies before heading north out of this rather dusty town and along the track to Choum. The road quickly deteriorated into nothing more than a sandy track – this seemed to suit our drivers who seemed to prefer off-road driving. As they sped up and drove faster on the sand than the asphalt (!), this day of no food and little sleep duly caught up with one of the team who proceeded to vomit (into a plastic bag) whilst the vehicle was still moving. A couple of **Cream-coloured Coursers** were more appreciated.

Anticipation grew as the GPS let us know that we'd hit 21°N. The first birds of note within this zone, along with the ubiquitous **Brown-necked Ravens**, were half a dozen **Bar-tailed Desert Larks** scurrying around on the sandy desert. With only an hour or so of light left, we decided to head towards a GPS point where Pierre-Andre Crochet had seen both Sudan Golden Sparrows and Cricket Longtail little over a couple of months ago. Despite suffering our second puncture of the day, we all piled out (and let the ground agents sort the puncture out and pitch the tents) and commenced birding.

Whilst doing our trip research we'd been told that birds favour the 'green' wadis and, fortunately in this area, most of the low-lying vegetation seemed to be relatively green. We decided on a wadi immediately to the east of N21°12'41", W13°06'14" (this GPS position is where we camped and immediately adjacent to an obvious hillock). As there were 10 of us, we quickly developed a 'sweeping' routine where we all walked in a line through the wadi and found whatever decided to reveal itself in front of us. **Subalpine Warblers** were aplenty along with a few **Spectacled Warblers** and a couple of **Chiffchaffs**, whilst **Desert Wheatears**, **Southern Grey Shrikes** and **White-crowned Black Wheatears** featured heavily. Pride of place went to a flock of c.20 **Black-crowned Sparrow Larks** that included the odd smart male. A couple of the group were also fortunate to see a male **Western Black-eared Wheatear** and a **Hoopoe**.

Failing light came all too quickly and, despite the fact that we had yet to register either of the 2 target species in the limited time available, we walked back to our camp for the night pretty satisfied with what we had seen. This was also to be the first night under canvass and we quickly became impressed with the ingenuity of our ground agents and the way in which they were able to pitch the tents in the dark, cook the food and generally look after us pretty well.

4th December 2006

After a windy night, we awoke just prior to first light full of anticipation. After assembling everybody we headed off the short distance to the wadi. Within no time at all, in fact within the first 10 minutes of birding, we'd located one of our target birds – **Cricket Longtail**. Our first observation of this species was a family party of 7 birds, busily working their way through the wadi scrub (at N21°12'34", W13°05'59"). During the course of the morning, we were lucky to observe a further 6 birds – a group of 3, a couple and a single bird. Despite the wind, the combination of bird activity and scant vegetation meant that this site was productive and it was not too long until we found a group of c.10 **Sudan Golden Sparrows** (at N21°12'53", W13°05'47"). This flock was far less obliging than our first target bird and it took a while before all of us had had

satisfactory views of this species – most of the flocks contained female/immature birds but a few smart males were present. By the end of our time in the wadi, we'd observed at least 50 of this highly prized WP species.



It certainly paid to keep together and, although we did spread out, walking in a line through the wadi probably meant that we didn't miss too much. A group of 8 **Fulvous Babblers** were as active and as vocal as you'd expect whilst **Southern Grey Shrikes** were seemingly perched on every bush. **Brown-necked Raven** was common, whilst warblers that frequented the acacia scrub included several **Chiffchaffs**, **Subalpine**, **Spectacled** and **Sardinian Warblers** and one of the group was fortunate enough to locate an **African Desert Warbler** briefly. Walking back across the desert a recently fledged **Black-crowned Sparrow Lark** seemed fearless of our presence whilst a couple of **Bar-tailed Larks** showed well nearby.

Returning to camp, our ground agents seemed insistent on feeding us up despite our views that it was probably time to move on. Despite letting them know what we wanted to do and where we wanted to be at nightfall, we got fed and headed off back south in the direction of Atar. Keen to do a bit more birding before we headed back south of 21°, we stopped at a smallish wadi near an obvious building (N21'10, W13'07) and proceeded to find a further 2 **Cricket Longtails** and 7 **Sudan Golden Sparrows** – illustrating that we'd either struck it very lucky or these two species are relatively common in this area. Being less well vegetated than the larger wadi we'd birded all morning, other species noted were more that of the open desert – namely **Desert Wheatear**, **Cream-coloured Courser** and **Bar-tailed Lark**.

After a rather bumpy, dusty ride (we were going to have to get used to this!) back to Atar we stopped at the petrol station in the middle of town and waited here whilst Hassan and the crew stocked up on supplies. Fortunately, 3 **Lanners** perched on the nearby pylon kept us occupied whilst a couple of **Rock Martins** flew over. Pretty satisfied with our first full day, we headed east and further into the desolate Adrar region as night fell. It was at this point that the French tourists who'd spent the day basically sitting around waiting for us got up and went their separate way – who knows where but they'd obviously got a bit hacked off. Anyway, we reached the village of Chinguetti late evening and were rather amazed by our accommodation (at N20'28"37, W12'20"32) – little mud huts in a quality, isolated desert oasis. After the beer rations ran out and all the food was gone (and after we'd all had to wait for

Lopez to spend his usual hour in the shower making himself look pretty again), we got a bit of shut eye ready for the next day.

5th December

It was predictably cold as we awoke under clear blue skies though, unlike the previous morning, there was little wind. We thought the previous evening where we were staying was decent location wise but as we awoke and the sun lit the surrounding desert, it was even more impressive – a small group of trees and a subsistence farm in the midst of the desert. The undoubted highlight bird wise was an obliging **Great Spotted Cuckoo** whilst, amongst the abundant **Laughing Doves**, other birdlife included a **Subalpine Warbler**, a **Southern Grey Shrike** and a couple of **White-crowned Black Wheatears**.

After packing up our stuff, we headed north-east along dusty tracks through the arid interior of the country for about three hours until we reached the settlement of Ouadane with the only highlight en-route being a flock of 9 **White Storks**. Upon arrival in Ouadane itself we were all pretty impressed with the amount of vegetation and greenery and it was with excitement that we headed north-west towards that all important 21°. It was slow going with tracks petering out and vegetation becoming ever sparser. But, with some pretty skilled off-road driving, we got as far as we could and it was only a matter of walking a couple of kilometres along the dry, rocky wadi floor to our destination – the WP border. We were evidently disappointed that there was now little vegetation – just a scattering of acacia scrub – compared to the rich pickings only a few kilometres south in Ouadane. That said we did manage to see a nice adult **Golden Eagle** whilst we were driving along with a **Hoopoe**, a **Little Egret**, a **Little Ringed Plover** and a **Red-throated Pipit**.

The rest of the afternoon was spent birding on foot along the wadi (its WP boundary is N21, W11°43'29") and as there was a fair amount of water here, a good number of birds were recorded. Though we didn't see anything too out of the ordinary, species such as **Trumpeter Finch**, **Desert Lark**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **House Bunting**, **White-crowned Black Wheatear** and **Rock Martin** were all common and other species noted included **Southern Grey Shrike**, **Spectacled Warbler**, **Swallow** and **White Wagtail**. The pools themselves harboured 3 **Moorhen**, a couple of **Little Grebes** as well as a **Grey Heron** and a **Common Sandpiper**.

We managed to find our way back to camp (N20°58'47", W11°42'44") in the dark somehow and as per usual were treated to some decent yet simple grub and a customary beer. It was at this point that we sat down with Hassan and discussed our rather 'out of leftfield' plans – basically we wanted to get to the coast by the end of the next day. After initially thinking that we were having a laugh Hassan eventually realised the seriousness of our request and with a bit of sweet talking and us volunteering to do a bit of the driving as well, the way ahead was carved.

6th December

We all knew when we woke up that today would basically be a day in transit. Despite this we made the most of the surroundings near camp in the wadi near Ouadane and were rewarded with some excellent views of an adult **Golden Eagle** along with a few

Rock Martins, Desert Larks and a couple of **House Buntings**. Setting off early morning, we seemed to navigate our way back to the settlement of Ouadane with extreme ease compared to the previous day despite the bumpy terrain, so much so one of us was asleep within a couple of minutes of the journey commencing. Back in Ouadane we saw a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** during a brief loo stop, before we headed back to Atar.



It was a familiar scene in Atar – we all waited at the petrol station whilst Hassan and his troops hurried around the town trying to find whatever supplies they could for our onward journey. It was whilst waiting that a car pulled up that was full of falcons and, disturbingly, a Houbara that was apparently caught near the Western Sahara/Moroccan border. This situation was extremely depressing, illustrating the fact that Arab falconers have now penetrated into regions that one would not consider as ‘mainstream’. We journeyed on though and it was without event (except for another **Golden Eagle** sighting) that we retraced our steps south-west along the asphalt road towards Nouakchott. We stopped at Akjoujt to fuel up and most of the group decided to eat what seemed like a baguette with chips, curry-type sauce and a bit of meat. Others, including myself, decided to pass. By now it was late afternoon and the light was starting to fade but with several hundred kilometres still to conquer, we knew we’d be doing a bit of driving during the evening. Not nearly as much as occurred in reality though...

Just to the west of Akjoujt we veered off the tarmac and onto a cut through that would bring us out on the coast about 100km to the north of Nouakchott. The last hour of light produced a few birds by the track including 200+ **Short-toed Larks**, at least 3 **Tawny Pipit**, 3 **Desert Sparrow** and a **Fulvous Babbler**. Though we were obviously pleased to see these birds, as night fell and the tracks became less and less obvious we really did start to question why we’d deviated from the main road. Going up and down on sand dunes was all a bit of fun in the beginning but after a couple of hours of slow progress (combined with one of the group regurgitating his earlier sandwich) things became a little tedious. It was not too much shy of midnight by the time we had got to the coast road but at this point we realised (due to our GPS) that the ground agents had lost their bearings. To cut a long story short, we overshot the subtle entrance to the Banc D’Arguin NP and decided to head right up to Bou Lanouar where managed to get our head down at about two in the morning – after a total of 18 or so hours on the road.

7th December

Bou Lanouar, in the north-west of the country, is surrounded by desert and it was here that we had camped overnight (at N21°16'29", W16°43'21"). The desert due west of the town was pretty stony and in an early morning walk in an unsuccessful quest for Dunn's Lark we managed to see a couple of **Long-legged Buzzards** along with typical desert birds of the region including **Hoopoe Lark**, **Bar-tailed Lark**, **Southern Grey Shrike**, **Desert Wheatear** and **Brown-necked Raven**. After packing up here and saying goodbye to the locals we'd seemingly turfed out of their nomad camp overnight, we headed back south through Bou Lanouar (noting a **Laughing Dove** in the process) to the sandier desert to the south of the town.



This sandy area interspersed with grassy tufts and stone was where previous birding groups had located Dunn's Lark – our target species. We also used a recent article in *British Birds* to help us locate suitable habitat but despite searching extensively until mid afternoon all of our efforts were in vain. We weren't short of things to see though with the highlight for us all being an isolated bush that contained at least 65 **Desert Sparrows** (N21°11'17", W16°26'02"). One of us was lucky enough to locate a group of 3 **Cricket Longtails** in a small area of scrub directly east of the main road at N21°11'37", W16°26'36", this seemingly a range extension westwards of this species. **Hoopoe Larks** were common as were **Brown-necked Ravens** and **Cream-coloured Coursers**. Disappointed with the lack of Dunn's Larks despite all the ground we covered it was decided to call it quits and head south along the coast in order to get to the Banc D'Arguin NP at a reasonable hour.

We arrived at the park entrance gates and Hassan and the team sorted the fees out. Though we were all a bit disappointed with the day, we were still pretty upbeat looking forward to a good night's sleep and some productive birding the next morning. After a couple of **Osprey** flew over the desert adjacent to the coast just prior to dusk, we spent the night in tented accommodation at Iwik (N19°53'07", W16°18'24") and feasted on what was presumably some local caught fish before getting some well deserved sleep.

8th December

Grey headed Gull, Banc D'Arguin NP



Today was probably the day that everybody had been looking forward to the most. We all awoke in time to be at the beach at Iwik for first light, a short walk from our tents. Though we'd managed to get the layout of the land the previous evening, we were quite happy that the islet of Zira was scope-able from the mainland (we watched from N19°52'39", W16°18'17"). The nearby beach was filled with **Slender-billed Gulls** whilst **White Pelicans** made the most of the rich pickings just offshore. Hundreds of **Cormorants** (*lucidus*) made their way north and at least a handful of pallid looking *monicae* race of **Grey Heron** scattered the shoreline with the more numerous **Western Reef Herons**.



Compared to the rest of our trip, the Banc D'Arguin NP was full of birds – species that were observed in good numbers included **Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Black-backed Gull** and **Sandwich Tern**. This list gives you the picture that it wasn't half bad for shorebirds and, amongst the common species, we successfully located 3 cracking **Grey-headed Gulls**, about 8 **Royal Terns** and 150+ **Long-tailed Cormorants**. From a pure listing perspective the Banc D'Arguin produces a bit of a bizarre (most would say downright ridiculous) situation as the Western Palearctic (per BWP) includes 'maritime areas of the Banc D'Arguin NP'. Therefore if the bird is on Iwik beach, then this is the mainland and as it is south of 21° it isn't within the WP. As soon as that bird takes off and flies over the adjacent water then this is obviously a maritime area, hence it's in the WP... anyway this is just an aside as we enjoyed the birds on both sides of the boundary.

Although we had been scanning Zira since first light it took us until mid morning for the adult **Kelp Gull** to fly in. Initially picking the bird up sat at the back of the island, this long-staying rarity put on a good show and eventually flew pretty close before landing in the channel between Iwik beach and Zira. Thoroughly satisfied we spent the next couple of hours chilling out watching the waders and gulls on the foreshore. As the morning progressed local fishing increased and it was a pretty good sight to see hundreds of **Slender-billed Gulls** squabbling on the scraps within yards of us. Other interesting species seen included **Gull-billed** and **Caspian Terns** whilst a small flock of **Pallid Swifts** flew overhead.



The busy morning of birding meant that we'd worked up an appetite and lunch took the form of a load of fresh fish and rice – rounding off a quality morning. The serenity and chilling out didn't last too long and buoyed by our success we decided to head north and drive through the afternoon back to the Bou Lanouar area. After packing up and driving swiftly north, we only had an hour of light left when we reached the sandy desert to the south of the town. Despite renewed hopes, Dunn's Lark sightings failed to materialise and we would have to wait until our final morning in the country

to see whether or not we'd have any better luck. We camped at 21°11'14", W16°26'06", ate a load of camel meat and then headed off to sleep.

9th December

Our final morning in the country. We all awoke with the view that we'd walk south from camp until mid to late morning scouring the desert for that elusive lark that we had failed to locate a couple of days ago. It was all predictably quiet as we set off, though the flock of **Desert Sparrows** that we'd seen a couple of days ago were present once again near our campsite. **Hoopoe Larks** brightened up the desert with their fluty calls whilst **Brown-necked Ravens** were as common as usual.

We had all spread out to cover as much ground but just as the first real rays of sun shone down on the desert, at one end of the group, there appeared to be a bit of a commotion. A couple of the lads had found a **Dunn's Lark** (at N21°11'38", W16°24'45") but waited for everybody else to arrive before approaching closer. Although it was never continually on view due to the small tussocks it favoured, we all got decent views of this notoriously difficult species to observe and watched it intermittently for about 20 minutes until it disappeared and we failed to relocate it. A flock of **Short-toed Larks** were present in the same area whilst **Desert Wheatears** and **Cream-coloured Coursers** were also noted in the desert.

As we succeeded in locating Dunn's Lark rather earlier than expected (we didn't really expect to see them this morning in all honesty), we headed back to camp and grabbed some breakfast before heading south. We had all decided to drive all the way back to Nouakchott during the heat of the day and then spend the final few hours of light birding on the coast near the city. As we were that little bit further south (though outside of the WP), there were species here that we'd not recorded elsewhere. A couple of **Speckled Pigeons** were the highlight whilst **Sudan Golden Sparrows** were present in good numbers. We birded an area of scrub near the rubbish dump immediately west of the city and found a pair of **Namaqua Doves**, a **Woodchat** and a **Spotted Flycatcher** amongst commoner species such as **Crested Lark**, **Laughing Dove** and **House Sparrow**. Though a fair amount of the afternoon was spent playing football with the locals (and beating them), a handful of very distant **Brown Boobies** passed offshore along with a continuous stream of **Sandwich Terns**. A **Great Skua** was present on the beach as we departed whilst overhead a **Griffon Vulture** and 20 or so **Little Swifts** were good value.

The evening was spent in Nouakchott – getting fed, washing and generally chilling out at Hassan's sister's house. Some of us journeyed into Nouakchott to sample the nightlife. We were only there for an hour, by which time there'd been approaches by 'ladies of the night', somebody trying to rip us off and the smallest member of our team getting rather irate with a fellow westerner in the bar. It was obviously time to depart... and we going to be doing exactly that in just a few hours.

10th December

We said our goodbyes to Hassan who'd really looked after us well throughout our stay in Mauritania. The fact that we had all eaten well, nobody had been ill and we'd had a good laugh together played testament to the job he and his team did for us.

Although there was typical chaos in the airport in Nouakchott where nobody really did anything and wanted cash for doing nothing, we got on our Royal Air Maroc flight and enjoyed a rather turbulent flight back to Casablanca. A long wait ensued before our scheduled flight back to London but by the end of the day we had all arrived safely back in Denmark, England or Scotland.

SPECIES LIST

This section of the report is split into two sections: -

- Species recorded within the Western Palearctic boundary (BWP definition) – to the north of 21°N and the maritime areas of the Banc D'Arguin National Park
- Other species recorded on the trip outside of the Western Palearctic

Netfugl.dk taxonomy has been used when compiling this list.

Species recorded within the Western Palearctic boundary (as defined by BWP)

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

2 on a small pool in the wadi NW of Ouadane (N21°00'56, W11°44'04) on 5th December.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Hundreds of the white-breasted race *lucidus* were seen at the Banc D'Arguin NP on the morning of 8th December, all flying north. A couple of all dark birds were also seen, these birds potentially of the nominate race.

Long-tailed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus*

c.150 seen at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December – most flying north but a couple of birds present on Zira islet and on the beach at Iwik. We watched this species from Iwik beach (N19°52'39, W16°18'17).

White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

Common early morning at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December with several fishing in the channel between Iwik (N19°52'39, W16°18'17) and Zira islet. As the morning progressed numbers decreased.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*

The nominate race (comprising of mainly dark morphs) was common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December with over a dozen located on Zira islet and on Iwik beach (N19°52'39, W16°18'17).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

1 present in the wadi NW of Ouadane on 5th December and 1 at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

1 flushed from a small pool in the wadi NW of Ouadane (N21°00'56, W11°44'04) on 5th December. The endemic, pallid subspecies *monicae* was present in small numbers at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December with a handful of birds seen on Iwik beach and Zira islet.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Over 30 present at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December. Despite careful scrutiny all seemed to be of the nominate race rather than the smaller, endemic race *balsaci*.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

Over a hundred of this species present at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December. Admittedly this is only a minute proportion of the flamingos present in the area, but our half-hearted search for Lesser Flamingo reflects the current take that previous records may in fact relate to immature Greater Flamingos. We hope to be proved wrong in the future though...

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

1 flying over Zira islet, Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

2 of the African race *cirtensis* were seen to the west of Bou Lanouar, in the stony desert to the south of where we camped at N21°16'29", W16°43'21" early morning on 7th December.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

The odd bird seen in the maritime area of the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

1 bird seen to the west of Bou Lanouar early morning on 7th December.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

3 on a small pool in the wadi NW of Ouadane (N21°00'56", W11°44'04") on 5th December.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*

One of the most frequently seen species in the interior desert area. Several seen in the WP on the track to Choum, and frequently seen by the main road between Nouakchott and Atar (outside the WP).

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December and, outside of the WP, 5 at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Several present on Zira islet at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Knot *Calidris canuta*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December and, outside of the WP, 25 on the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

A handful seen on Zira islet at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December. Outside the WP, 3 were at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

A couple present at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

5 at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

c.20 present at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Several at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Present in small numbers at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

A couple present at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

1 on a small pool in the wadi NW of Ouadane (within the WP) on 5th December.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December and, outside of the WP, 1 at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Present in small numbers on the beach at Iwik and Zira islet, Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Grey-headed Gull *Larus cirrocephalus*

The only reliable site to see this species within the Western Palearctic is the Banc D'Arguin NP. At least 3 birds were present on the beach at Iwik (N19°52'39, W16°18'17) on 8th December. To see this species in the WP you must wait until they fly over the sea or land on the adjacent Zira islet – the beach at Iwik is not within the WP (as defined by BWP).

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*

Extremely common on the beach at Iwik (N19°52'39, W16°18'17) and adjacent maritime areas of the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Kelp Gull (Cape Gull) *Larus dominicanus vetula*

The adult, one of the longest staying vagrants within the whole of the Western Palearctic having been first located in April 1997, was easily located on the morning of 8th December. Initially seen distantly on the far side of Zira islet from Iwik beach

(viewed from N19°52'39", W16°18'17") it then came closer and eventually landed on the water mid channel between the north end of Zira islet and where we were viewing from Iwik beach. It was the only large gull present, except for the numerous Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and was not present with the usual Yellow-legged Gull it was previously paired with. Previous teams searching for this bird have generally succeeded in locating the bird but with differing ease – some have strolled up and it has been present on the beach at Iwik and others have had to get a boat around to the far side of Zira islet where they found this bird.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*

c.10 present at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

A handful seen at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*

c.8 were seen at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December viewable from the beach at Iwik (N19°52'39", W16°18'17"). Several were seen resting on Zira islet in between fishing sessions in the channel between Iwik and Zira.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Common at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

50+ at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December. Outside of the WP, 5 at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

c.12 at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

A common bird outside the WP being seen in good numbers around villages and towns such as Atar and Nouakchott. Only recorded inside the WP at Bou Lanouar on 7th December.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallida*

At least 30 birds seen just to the north of Iwik, Banc D'Arguin NP coming in off the sea late morning on 8th December.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

1 seen in Choum wadi immediately to the east of our campsite (N21°12'41", W13°06'14") on 3rd December. Outside of the WP, 1 in the wadi to the NW of Ouadane on 5th December.

Black-crowned Finch Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*

c.20 located on the evening of 3rd December south of Choum on the western fringe of the wadi immediately due east of where we camped at N21°12'41", W13°06'14". A

further 5 birds were seen the next morning in the same area, including an exceptionally confiding juvenile.

Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunni*

This proved to be the most difficult species to locate. In September 2006 Pierre-Andre Crochet described this species as 'common' with sightings from all over the country including Bou Lanouar, Choum, Aghmakou and El Beyyed. Having failed to see any in the Choum area on 3rd – 4th December we spent a whole day searching the Bou Lanouar area on 7th December to no avail (this species was seen by Chris Batty *et al* here in January 2006 as well as by Crochet in September 2006). Being notoriously nomadic, a second attempt on the morning of 9th December produced good views of a single bird in an area of sandy desert interspersed with grassy tussocks to the south of Bou Lanouar at N21°11'38", W16°24'45". It is interesting to note that this species has been found by the majority of teams that have visited WP Mauritania in recent years – despite BWP mentioning that Kordofan Lark *Mirafra cordofanica* 'is a localised resident in Mauritania', nobody has been able to locate this species. Interestingly, there is no mention of Dunn's Lark occurring in Mauritania in BWP.

Bar-tailed Desert Lark *Ammomanes cincturus*

15+ seen to the south of Choum on 3rd – 4th December and a further bird seen near Bou Lanouar on 7th December.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*

Common in the wadi NW of Ouadane (within the WP) on 5th December.

Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*

Common in the desert near Bou Lanouar on 7th and 9th December. Outside of the WP, several seen in desert areas between Nouakchott and Atar.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

A flock of c.20 seen to the south of Bou Lanouar on 9th December and, outside of the WP, 200+ noted to the west of Akjoujt on 6th December.

Rock Martin (Pale Crag Martin) *Hirundo fuligula obsoleta*

Birds of the *presaharica* race were seen over the campsite (N21°12'41", W13°06'14") to the south of Choum on 4th December and common in the wadi to the NW of Ouadane (inside WP) on 5th December. Outside of the WP, seen in small numbers at Yeghref (N20°15'06", W13°30'05") and Atar.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

1 seen in the wadi NW of Ouadane (within the WP) on 5th December.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

2 in the wadi NW of Ouadane (within the WP) on 5th December and 5 seen at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

1 seen in Choum wadi immediately to the east of our campsite (N21°12'41", W13°06'14") on 4th December.

Western Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica hispanica*

A male was seen in Choum wadi immediately to the east of our campsite (N21°12'41, W13°06'14) on 3rd December.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

A common desert species noted in locations such as Choum wadi and the Bou Lanouar area.

White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*

A common species, noted at most sites visited (within and outside of the WP).

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

c.5 in the wadi NW of Ouadane (within the WP) on 5th December.

Cricket Longtail *Spiloptila clamans*

This species has an extremely restricted and erratic range within the WP. However, we found it to be much commoner than we had anticipated. Prior to our trip, we were only aware of 3 being seen near Aghmakou on 2nd-3rd January 2005 (Kris De Rouck, Hugues Dufourny and Dirk Colin) and the discovery of several by Pierre-Andre Crochet near Choum in September 2006. During our visit we recorded 13 birds in the wadi by the track to Choum (7 at N21°12'34, W13°05'59, 3 at N21°13'23, W13°05'28, 2 at N21°13'24, W13°05'25 and 1 at N21°13'21, W13°05'29) on 4th December with a further 2 birds just south of here at approximately N21°10, W13°07. Most remarkably 3 were observed just south of Bou Lanouar about 1km east of the road GPS points N21°11'37, W16°26'36 on 7th December representing a westward expansion from previous records.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*

A handful noted in the wadi by the track to Choum (inside the WP) on 4th December. Outside of the WP, 2 at Yeghref (N20°15'06, W13°30'05) on 3rd December.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

One of the most common species in the wadi by the track to Choum on 3rd and 4th December. Also noted outside the WP at Chinguetti oasis.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

5 noted in the wadi by the track to Choum (inside the WP) on 4th December with a further individual noted outside the WP at Yeghref on 3rd December.

African Desert Warbler *Sylvia deserti*

One bird seen in the wadi by the track to Choum on 4th December at N21°12'53, W13°05'47.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

A handful of birds seen in the wadi by the track to Choum (inside the WP) on 4th December and 1 south of Bou Lanouar on 7th December. Outside of the WP, 3 seen in the oasis just east of Chinguetti on 5th December.

Fulvous Babbler *Turdoides fulvus*

c.8 birds present in the wadi by the track to Choum on 4th December with most of these birds seen at N21'14''02, W13'05''02. Outside of the WP one bird was seen to the west of Akjoujt on 6th December.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*

The race *elegans* is a common sight in desert terrain throughout the areas that we visited (both inside and outside of the WP).

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*

The most widely distributed bird on the trip with good numbers seen in all areas (both inside and outside the WP).

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Small numbers seen at Bou Lanouar on 7th December whilst outside of the WP, noted at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Desert Sparrow *Passer simplex simplex*

65+ were seen in a small area of bushes in the desert to the south of Bou Lanouar (N21'11''17, W16'26''02) on 7th December and when we revisited the area on 9th December 50+ were seen again. Outside of the WP, at least 3 were noted to the west of Akjoujt on 6th December.

Sudan Golden Sparrow *Passer luteus*

Up until the discovery by Pierre-Andre Crochet of large numbers near Choum in September 2006, observers had relied on a site at Cansado (N20'85''25, W17'03''17) on the Cap Blanc peninsular. This latter site has become more difficult as time has progressed with teams within the last couple of years recording only a single male – and Crochet was unable to find any in a thorough search of the area in September 2006. Within the WP, we recorded several small, mobile flocks in the area to the south of Choum on the 4th December – c.10 at N21'12''53, W13'05''47, 20+ at N21'14''02, W13'05''02, c.10 at N21'13''53, W13'05''09, c.8 at N21'13''40, W13'05''18 and 7 at approximately N21'10, W13'07. Outside of the WP this species is much more numerous and on a couple of random stops we saw c.10 at Yeghref (N20'15''06, W13'30''05) and c.30 in coastal scrub at Nouakchott.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*

c.50 present in the wadi NW of Oudane (within the WP) on 5th December.

House Bunting *Emberiza sahari*

Commonly seen in the wadi NW of Oudane (within the WP) on 5th December.

Species only recorded outside of the Western Palearctic

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

c.5 birds distantly from the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

1 at Nouakchott on 9th December.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

1 at Yeghref on 3rd December and 9 over the track between Chinguetti and Ouadane on 5th December.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
3 over Akjoujt on 3rd December.

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*
1 over the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
An adult seen at N20°58'47", W11°42'44" in the wadi to the NW of Ouadane on 5th and 6th December, with an immature seen south of Atar on 6th December.

Lanner *Falco biarmicus*
3 birds seen in the centre of Atar on 4th December, with a further adult south of Atar on 6th December.

Barbary Falcon/Peregrine *Falco peregrinoides/Falco peregrinus*
2 over the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December were seen for too brief a period for a wholly conclusive identification.

(Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*
A sad sight of 1 bird in a falconer's car in Atar – said to have been caught in southern Morocco/Western Sahara.)

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus*
3 birds seen at the Banc D'Arguin NP (outside of the WP) on 8th December and also one noted at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
1 in the wadi to the NW of Ouadane on 5th December (outside of the WP).

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*
1 seen on the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*
2 in scrub near the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December.

African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*
1 at Yeghref (N20°15'06", W13°30'05") on 3rd December.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
2 seen in Atar on 6th December.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*
A pair seen in coastal scrub at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*
One in the oasis just east of Chinguetti (N20°28'37", W12°20'32") on 5th December and one in Ouadane village on the same date.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

c.20 over the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus*

2+ seen at Yeghref (N20°15'06, W13°30'05) on 3rd December.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

c.10 seen near the beach at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

1 at Yeghref (N20°15'06, W13°30'05) on 3rd December and 3+ to the west of Akjoujt on 6th December.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

1 seen in the wadi NW of Ouadane (outside the WP) on 5th December and 1 at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

A *flava*-type bird present on pools by the rubbish tip at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

2 *seebohmi* seen at Akjoujt on 3rd December and c.4 (of the nominate race) seen to the west of Akjoujt on 6th December. A further nominate race bird was at the Banc D'Arguin NP on 8th December.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

1 present in coastal scrub at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Woodchat *Lanius senator*

A first-winter bird present in coastal scrub at Nouakchott on 9th December.

Chestnut-bellied Starling *Lamprotornis pulcher*

35+ seen at Yeghref (N20°15'06, W13°30'05) on 3rd December.