

A new species for Algeria, White-throated Bee-eater (*Merops albicollis*), observations of probably escaped individuals of Cut-throat Finch (*Amadina fasciata*) and Village Indigobird (*Vidua chalybeata*) and a checklist of southern Sahara birds

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Abstract In this paper we present a report about the birds of the southern part of the Algerian Sahara. A total of 62 species were recorded with direct observations in nine different localities of two regions (from Tamanrasset city to In Guezzam city), belonging to 29 families and 12 orders in 2021. Three species were recorded for the first time in Algeria, White-throated Bee-eater (*Merops albicollis*), Cut-throat Finch (*Amadina fasciata*) and Village Indigobird (*Vidua chalybeata*). The latter two were probably escaped from captivity. The House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) were observed for the first time in this region.

Keywords: Algeria, bird species diversity, *Merops albicollis*, *Amadina fasciata*, *Vidua chalybeata*, North Africa, Palearctic Region, new records

Összefoglalás A szerzők a Szahara dél-algériai részéről közölnek madártani adatokat. Kilenc területen – Tamanrassettől In Guezzamig – 12 rendbe, 29 családba tartozó 62 madárfajt figyeltek meg 2021-ben, amelyek közül egy – fehértorkú gyurgyalag (*Merops albicollis*) – a területre új volt. A megfigyelt fajok között volt két olyan is, amelyeket korábban szintén nem láttak még a területen, viszont ezek – szalagpinty (*Amadina fasciata*), piros lábú vidapinty (*Vidua chalybeata*) – nagy valószínűséggel fogságból szökött példányok voltak. Egy új területen kimutatták a házi verebet (*Passer domesticus*) is.

Kulcsszavak: Algéria, madárfajok diverzitása, fehértorkú gyurgyalag, szalagpinty, piros lábú vidapinty, Észak-Afrika, Palearktikum, új megfigyelés

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Introduction

Given its vast area in Africa with more than 2 million km² and considered as the largest country in the Mediterranean basin, Algeria has an ecosystem unit classified biogeographically among the richest and most diverse countries of the Palearctic region. The Sahara is located in the south of the country and covers almost 90% of its area.

Several studies were carried out focusing on the diversity of birds in the Algerian Sahara, mostly in the northern part, such as in Ziban region (Farhi & Belhamra 2012) in Ghardaia (Chedad *et al.* 2020a, 2020b) and in three oases of the Northern Algerian Sahara (Biskra, Oued Souf and Ouargla, Guezoul *et al.* 2013).

A few studies were conducted on the diversity of the southern part of the Algerian Sahara. This part is the boundary between two biogeographic regions Palearctic and Afrotropical. In the last decades, the newest records of species were observed in the southern part such as the Moltoni's Warbler (*Curruca subalpina*) in El Borma (Viechec & Haddad 2019), Rüppell's Warbler (*Curruca rupelli*) in Djanet (Haddad & Afoutni 2019), Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) in Tamanrasset (Haddad & Afoutni 2020a), African Crake (*Crecoptis egregia*) at Kerzaz (Haddad *et al.* 2021b), White-rumped Seedeater (*Crithagra leucopygia*) in Tamanrasset (Boulaouad *et al.* 2021), Blue-naped Mousebird (*Urocolius macrourus*) in Tinzaouten (Haddad & Bekkouche 2021), Dunn's Lark (*Eremalauda dunnii*) in Djanet (Harzallah *et al.* 2021) and African Grey Woodpecker (*Dendropicos goertae*) in municipality of Tin Zaouatine, region of In Guezzam (Haddad & Afoutni 2022).

The objectives of the present work are to enrich the bibliography of the birds of the southern part of the Algerian Sahara and to describe the new observations of the White-throated Bee-eater (*Merops albicollis*), and the probably escaped Cut-throat Finch (*Amadina fasciata*) and Village Indigobird (*Vidua chalybeata*) for the birds of Algeria.

Material and Methods

Study area

This study was conducted in the region of Tamanrasset, located in the south of Algeria, at about 2,000 km southeast from Algiers (*Figure 1*). The region is characterized by a Saharan climate with mild winter (Chenoune 2005). It is located at 1,400 m above the sea level and has a super-dry climate with temperature ranging between 12 °C and 40 °C (Hamdi 2013).

A field survey was conducted during the last week of December 2021 to collect data about the diversity of birds in nine localities from the region of Tamanrasset to the region of In Guezzam for about 400 km. Localities were chosen with dependence on vegetal cover, four in Tamanrasset and five in In Guezzam. Birds were surveyed in each locality all the day by a group of naturalists from Algerian Wildlife Watchers Association (AWWA).

The line transect method has been used in this study. This technique consists of walk in the study locality, a well-defined route several times, while advancing at a steady speed (1 to 2 km/h), marking a stop every 20 meters, and noting and photographing all birds seen and

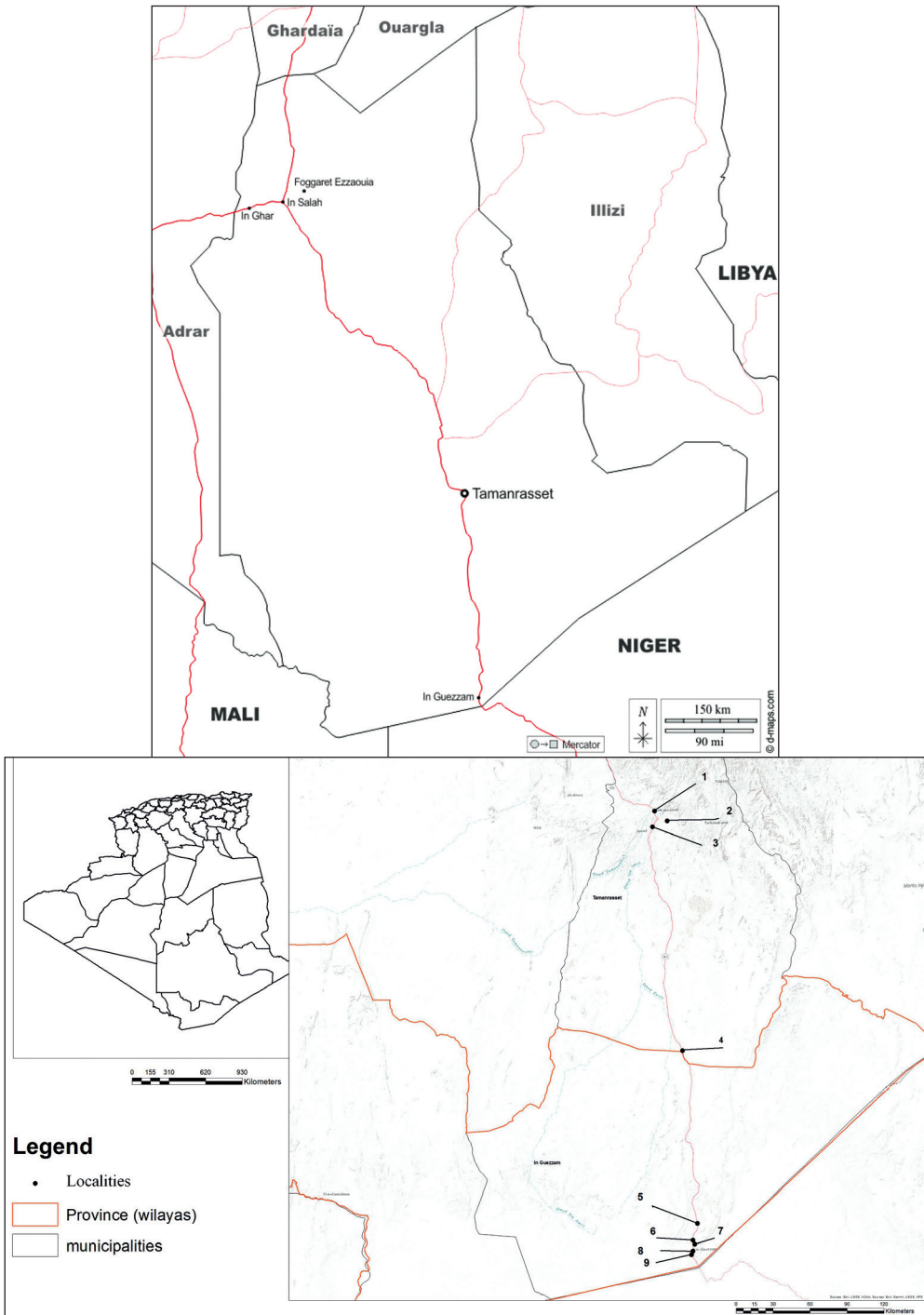


Figure 1. Geographical location of the study area (d-maps.com)
1. ábra A vizsgálati helyek földrajzi elhelyezkedése

heard by locating them in the course. Bird species were identified using standard field guides (Heinzel *et al.* 2004, Svensson 2012). We were using information from Isenmann and Moali (2000), for the geographical distribution of birds of Algeria.

The list of areas contains the name of locality, coordinates, short descriptions of the habitat, altitude

1. Tamanrasset: Tamanrasset city (22°46'56"N 5°31'47"E), with approx. 37 km², is the most visited place in this locality, gardens and green space, 1,370 m.
2. Tamanrasset: Agricultural zone (22°42'33"N 5°37'38"E) is located 20 km in the east of Tamanrasset with about 0.13 km², this locality is consisted of orchards and characterized by palm and citrus and vineyards, 1,340 m.
3. Tamanrasset: Agricultural zone in Amsel with about 0.4 km² (22°40'03"N 5°30'33"E) is located 20 km in the south of Tamanrasset city and is characterized by palm, citrus and grapes and a line of *Acacia* sp., 1,240 m.
4. Tamanrasset: Base of life (21°01'37" N 5°42'53"E) is located 200 km in the south of Tamanrasset and characterized by small construction and some ornamental trees, 620 m.
5. In Guezzam: Agricultural zone (19°45'37"N 5°48'31"E) is located about 40 km north of Ain Guezzam, this area occupies 1.1 km² which contains olive trees, palm trees and cereal farming, and the surround with common reed, 410 m.
6. In Guezzam: *Acacia* trees (19°38'20"N 5°46'23"E) is located 10 km north of In Guezzam city, this locality is an orchards, characterized by *Acacia* sp. trees, 405 m.
7. In Guezzam: Agricultural zone (19°36'38"N 5°47'06"E) located on the north of In Guezzam city. It is characterized by palm trees, olive trees and mango trees with 0.8 km², 410 m.
8. In Guezzam: In Guezzam city (19°33'31"N 5°46'13"E), with a surface of about 12 km² where we visited green space and trees in the village, 400 m.
9. In Guezzam: Sewage treatment station (19°31'57.9"N 5°45'29.4"E) is located 2.8 km southwest of In Guezzam city and it is characterized by common reed and some grace, 410 m.

Results

A total of 62 bird species belonging to 29 families and 12 orders were recorded in the southern part of the Algerian Sahara (*Table 1*). The richest order in species was Passeriformes with 37 species, followed by Charadriiformes and Pelecaniformes with six species, Columbiformes with three species and Bucerotiformes and Falconiformes with two species. The rest of the orders were represented by one species.

The number of species observed at different localities are varied between 5 and 34, as follows (*Figure 2*): a total of 34 species were observed in the agricultural area near In Guezzam city, 30 species were observed in wetland, 29 were observed in Amsel region, 21 species in the 5. locality which is an agricultural area, 14 species were observed in the 2. and 8. localities, 13 species were recorded in Tamanrasset city, 12 species were observed in *Acacia* trees and the lowest richness was observed in the 4. locality with five species.

Table 1. Checklist of birds identified in the Tamanrasset region, Algeria. Numbers corresponds to the list of localities in Materiel and Methods (* probably escaped from captivity) (IOC World Checklist version 11.2, Gill *et al.* 2021)

1. táblázat Az algériai Tamanrasset régióban talált madarak fajlistája. A helységek listája a Material and Methods fejezetben található (* valószínűleg fogságból szökött) (IOC World Checklist version 11.2, Gill *et al.* 2021)

Order	Family	Species	Common name	Localities
Anseriformes	Anatidae	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Eurasian Teal	9
Pterocliiformes	Pteroclididae	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>	Crowned Sandgrouse	5
Columbiformes	Columbidae	<i>Columba livia</i>	Rock Dove	1,2,3,6,7,8,9
		<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Eurasian Collared Dove	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9
		<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	Laughing Dove	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9
Gruiformes	Rallidae	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Eurasian Coot	9
Charadriiformes	Recurvirostridae	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Black-winged Stilt	9
	Charadriidae	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Little Ringed Plover	9
	Scolopacidae	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	Temminck's Stint	9
		<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Little Stint	9
		<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Green Sandpiper	9
<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Common Greenshank	9		
Ciconiiformes	Ciconiidae	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	White Stork	9
Pelecaniformes	Threskiornithidae	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Eurasian Spoonbill	9
	Ardeidae	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Black-crowned Night Heron	7
		<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Western Cattle Egret	5,7,9
		<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Grey Heron	7
		<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Purple Heron	7
<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Little Egret	9		
Accipitriformes	Accipitridae	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Egyptian Vulture	1,4,5
Strigiformes	Strigidae	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Short-eared Owl	7
Bucerotiformes	Upupidae	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Eurasian Hoopoe	2,3,7
Coraciiformes	Meropidae	<i>Merops albicollis</i>	White-throated Bee-eater	3
Falconiformes	Falconidae	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common Kestrel	3,7,9
		<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	Lanner Falcon	3,7
Passeriformes	Laniidae	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Great Grey Shrike	2,3,5,6,7,9
	Corvidae	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	Brown-necked Raven	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9
	Alaudidae	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	Greater Hoopoe-lark	3,4,6
		<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	Desert Lark	3,4,5,6,7
<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Crested Lark	7		

Order	Family	Species	Common name	Localities
Passeriformes	Hirundinidae	<i>Ptyonoprogne obsoleta</i>	Pale Crag Martin	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9
		<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	5
	Phylloscopidae	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	Western Bonelli's Warbler	7
		<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	3,5,7
		<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Common Chiffchaff	1,2,3,5,7,8,9
	Sylviidae	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Garden Warbler	2
		<i>Curruca hortensis</i>	Western Orphean Warbler	3
		<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	Sardinian Warbler	1,2,3,5,6,7,8
		<i>Curruca iberiae</i>	Western Subalpine Warbler	2,3,7
	Leiotherichidae	<i>Argya fulva</i>	Fulvous Babbler	2,3
	Muscicapidae	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	7
		<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Bluethroat	5
		<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	European Pied Flycatcher	7
		<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Black Redstart	3
		<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Blue Rock Thrush	3
		<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Northern Wheatear	3,7
		<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	Desert Wheatear	3,5,6,7,8,9
		<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	White-crowned Wheatear	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9
	Passeridae	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	5,7,8
		<i>Passer simplex</i>	Desert Sparrow	3,
		<i>Passer luteus</i>	Sudan Golden Sparrow	7,8,9
	Estrildidae	<i>Euodice cantans</i>	African Silverbill	1,3,5,7,8,9
		<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>	Red-billed Firefinch	1,3,8
		* <i>Amadina fasciata</i>	* Cut-throat Finch	7
	Viduidae	* <i>Vidua chalybeata</i>	* Village Indigobird	1
	Motacillidae	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Western Yellow Wagtail	9
		<i>Motacilla alba</i>	White Wagtail	3,5,7,9
<i>Anthus campestris</i>		Tawny Pipit	7	
<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		Tree Pipit	9	
<i>Anthus cervinus</i>		Red-throated Pipit	9	
Fringillidae	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	Trumpeter Finch	3,5,7,9	
Emberizidae	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	House Bunting	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9	
13	29	62		

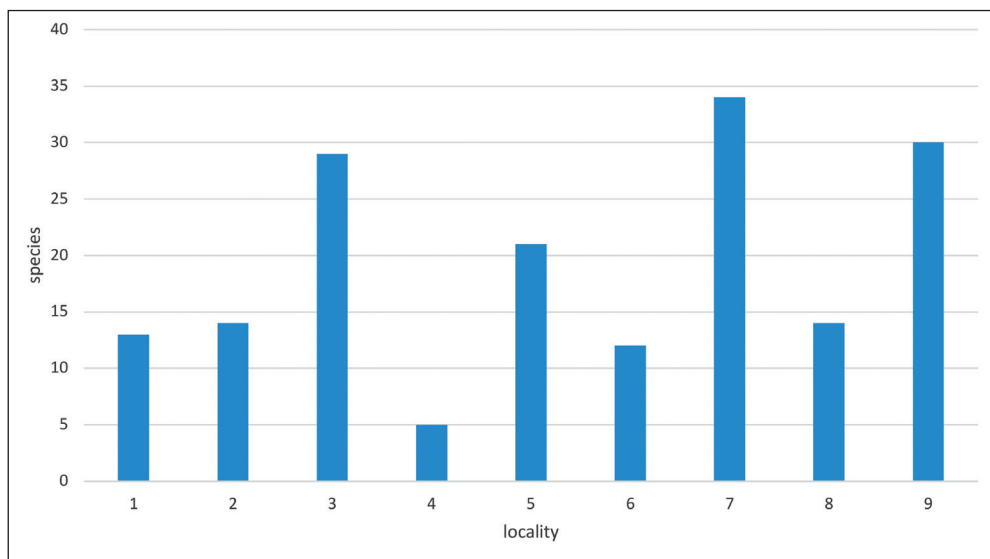


Figure 2. Distribution of the number of species per locality
2. ábra A vizsgált területek fajszámeloszlása

During this study, a new species were observed for the first time in Algeria (Figure 3) White-throated Bee-eater, and two probably escaped species: Cut-throat Finch, Village Indigobird and a new locality of distribution for the House Sparrow.

White-throated Bee-eater was observed at Oued Azerzi in the locality of Amsel in December 25th, 2021. Unfortunately, we could not spot this species after three days when we returned back to the same region.

Cut-throat Finch was recorded in an agriculture area situated in In Guezzam in December 28th, 2021 with a group of African Silverbill (*Euodice cantans*) perched on reed beds.

Village Indigobird was observed in Tamanrasset city in December 31st, 2021. This species was noted with the company of a group of Red-billed Firefinch (*Lagonosticta senegala*).

House Sparrow was observed in three localities. Two groups was recorded in an agricultural zone (5. and 7. locality). The third group was in In Guezzam city.

Discussion

A total of 62 species were observed in the localities of the study area. The observed bird species represent 18.45% of the avifauna cited by Ledant *et al.* (1981) and 15.27% recorded by Isenmann and Moali (2000). A similar number of species (56) was observed in Tamanrasset (Boulaouad *et al.* 2021). For the northern part of the Algerian Sahara, Farhi and Belhamra (2012) counted 124 species belonging to 15 orders and 29 families and the most represented order was Passeriformes with 58 species. Guezoul *et al.* (2013) counted 59 species in the palm of Northern Algerian Sahara. Chedad *et al.* (2020) reported 55 species at Kef Doukhane. The southern part of the Algerian Sahara is a compulsory stopover point



Figure 3. New species for the avifauna of Algeria: White-throated Bee-eater, 25th December 2021, Oued Azerzi (photo Djamel Hadj Aissa)

3. ábra Új faj Algéria madárfaunájában: fehértorkú gyurgyalag, 2021. december 25., Oued Azerzi (fotó: Hamza Faidi és Djamel Hadj Aissa)

for all the birds on the trans-Saharan migratory pathway and it is considered as an important area for research of Afrotropical birds.

White-throated Bee-eater (*Merops albicollis*)

Two species of bee-eater are present in Algeria: the European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) and the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*) (Isenmann & Moali 2000). The European Bee-eater is a widespread breeder from the coast to the northern edge of the Sahara and is present from April to September (Isenmann & Moali 2000). At Tassili, the White-throated

Bee-eater was observed both during post-breeding passage from August 25th to October 9th and eventually during pre-breeding passage from April 13th to May 11th in 1960. The Blue-cheeked Bee-eater present in the northern Sahara, stems its reproduction in three distinct regions (Biskra, Mزاب and Figuig). Our observation of the White-throated Bee-eater is the first for Algeria. Its distribution ranges from southern Mauritania and Senegal in the west to south-western Saudi Arabia and western Yemen in the east (Jacobs *et al.* 2018). In the Western Sahara, this sub-Saharan species has recently occurred in two mentions Dakhla: a bird recorded in Gleib Jédiane on 5th and 6th December 2013 and another in Dakhla from 28th February to 1st May 2017 (Jacobs *et al.* 2018, Bergier & Thevenot 2019). According to the observations quoted above in Western Sahara, the species can be considered as accidental in the country.

Cut-throat Finch (*Amadina fasciata*)

The Estrildidae family is represented in Algeria by two species: the Red-billed Firefinch and African Silverbill (Belbachir 2000, Haddad & Afoutni 2020b). A third species, the Cut-throat Finch was observed in agricultural zones at In Guezzam. According to Borrow and Demey (2020), this is a sub-Saharan species which can be found particularly in the Sahel. Clouet and Joachim 2013 observed this species in Adrar of the Iforas, which is located in 150 km southwest of our study site in In Guezzam.



Figure 4. Probably escaped Cut-throat Finch with African Silverbill, 28th December 2021, In Guezzam (photo Karim Attouche)

4. ábra Valószínűleg fogságból szökött szalagpinty afrikai ezüstsőrúpinty mellett, 2021. december 28., In Guezzam (fotó: Karim Attouche)

Village Indigobird (*Vidua chalybeata*)

The Village Indigobird is a breeding bird in most of Africa south of the Sahara Desert. According to Payne *et al.* (2000), the species is a host-specific brood parasite which deposits its eggs exclusively in the nest of an estrildid finch, the Red-billed Firefinch. The observation of Village Indigobird with a group of Red-billed Firefinch (*Figure 5*) in Tamanrasset city can lead to a new breeding bird for the avifauna of Algeria. Clouet and Joachim 2013 observed the Village Indigobird, in Aïr in the north of Niger. According to several observers of the Algerian avifauna, this species was found for sale (nearly 200 individuals for sale at 4.5 and 15 euros for one individual) in pet stores in the city of Tamanrasset.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

According to Isenmann and Moali (2000), the House Sparrow is still absent from Tamanrasset and its surrounding (Ahaggar), and recall a potential overall competition with House Bunting (*Emberiza sahari*). Haddad *et al.* (2021a) was recorded the species in the south-western part of the Algerian Sahara, exactly in Tindouf and its surroundings. The observation of these birds in In Guezzam are considered as new locality for Algeria.

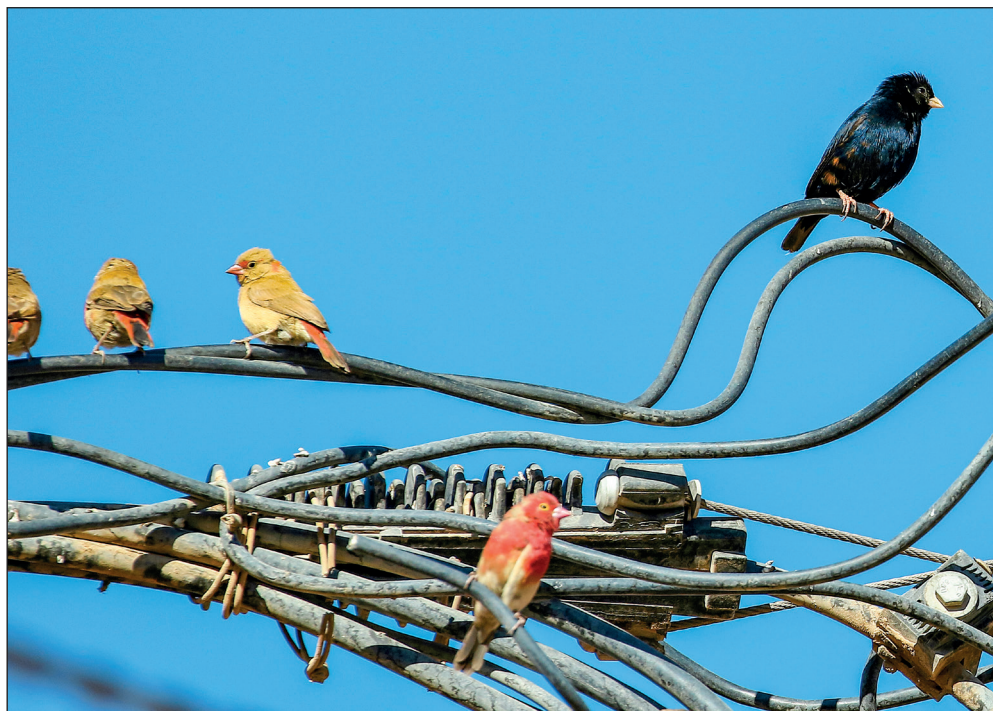


Figure 5. Probably escaped male Village Indigobird with two females and a male of Red-billed Firefinch, 31st December 2021, Tamanrasset city (photo Khaled Ayyach)

5. *ábra* Valószínűleg fogságból szökött hím piroslábú vidapinty két tojó és egy hím vörös amarant társaságában, 2021. december 31., Tamanrasset (fotó: Khaled Ayyach)



Figure 6. Male House Sparrow, 28th December 2021, Agricultural zone at In Guezzam (photo Bachir Harzallah)

6. ábra Hím házi veréb, 2021. December 28. In Guezzam (Fotó: Bachir Harzallah)

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed the presence of 3 new species for the Algerian avifauna and a new location of the House Sparrow. Note that the White-throated Bee-eater can be considered as an accidental species in Algeria. We must also note and conclude that Cut-throat Finch and Village Indigobird can be considered as cage releases and not migratory or accidental visitors in the region. They are indeed species introduced voluntarily, based on the big number of individuals sold in pet stores.

We would like this area to be a center of interest of specialists in the upcoming years in order to update our data on vertebrate fauna and find out whether the populations are in a phase of progression or regression.

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