



Short communication

A new locality reported in winter for the Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* (Scopoli, 1769) in Algeria (Aves: Prunellidae)

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ARTICLE INFOR

Article history:

Received 14 March 2023

Revised 18 Mai 2023

Accepted 16 June 2023

Keywords:

Alpine Accentor;
expansion;
new locality;
Tessala Mountains;
Algeria.

ABSTRACT

Alpine Accentor, *Prunella collaris* (Scopoli, 1769), is one of Algeria's rare birds. During the monitoring campaign, which was run between 2020 and 2023 using direct observation, a pair of Alpine Accentor was spotted in the Tessala mountains (North of Sidi Bel Abbes, western Algeria) on November 12, 2022. This newly documented locality is important because it likely expands the currently known range of this rare species in Algeria

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1. Introduction

Prunella Vieillot, 1816, is the genus of the family Prunellidae, which contains 12 species, among them is *Prunella collaris* (Scopoli, 1769), which includes nine subspecies [1]. It has an essentially Palearctic distribution and is present in most of the large mountain massifs of Europe and Asia, from Spain to Japan [2]. In Algeria, we have two species of *Prunella* (*P. prunella* and *P. collaris*) [3].

This species is represented in Algeria by the subspecies *P. c. collaris*, which was observed at Annaba in Djebel Edough, Blida in Chiffa gorges, in the Ouarsenis mountains, in the Djurdjura Mountains at Akouker, Tala Guilef, Lake Goulmine, etc. (its nesting is known only in this region), with other isolated observations in the west of the country, in the Tlemcen

mountains [1, 3, 4]. Other recent observations have been mentioned in Jijel (Djebel Bouazza), Tizi Ouzou (Djurdjura National Park) [5] and in Tissemsilt in January 2023 (Ouarsenis Mountains) (Chedad, pers. obs.).

This note documents the presence of Alpine Accentor in Algeria in a new locality (Sidi Bel Abbès region, western Algeria), indicating the possible range expansion in winter of this rare species as well.

2. Materials and methods

This study was carried out in western Algeria at the Tessala Mountains, Sidi Bel Abbes, which is part of the semi-arid bioclimatic zone with an annual rainfall (~250–50 mm). It is a rocky area characterized by an important floristic procession

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Peer review under responsibility of University of Echahid Hamma Lakhdar..

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.57056/ajb.v4i1.105>

of herbaceous plants and trees such as Kermes oak, *Quercus coccifera* and Holly oak, *Quercus ilex* (Fig. 01).

Bird surveys were conducted during the period wanting (October 2022 to March 2023) along the main part of Sidi Bel Abbès. The inventories were conducted by direct observation using a bridge camera (Nikon Coolpix P600), and surveys were performed on a regular basis. Identification of bird species was facilitated by ornithological guidebooks [6].

Finally, using version 3.16.14-Hanover of the QGIS software, create a geographical location map and a distribution map with the old and new observations.

3. Results and Discussion

Two individuals of the Alpine Accentor species were observed on November 12, 2022, in the Tessala forest, in the northern part of Sidi Bel Abbès (Northwest of Algeria), a mountainous area with a northern exposure and a remarkable floristic procession (35° 17' 07" N; 0° 48' 00" W; 939 m a.s.l.) (Fig. 02, 03). This habitat is home to other passerine species such as the Sardinian Warbler, *Curruca melanocephala*, the Common Blackbird, *Turdus merula*, the European Robin, *Erithacus rubecula*, the European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*.



Fig. 1. General view of the biotope at Tessala mountains (Sidi Bel Abbès, Algeria).



Fig. 2. Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* in Tessala Mountains (Sidi Bel Abbès, Algeria).

Globally, the Alpine Accentor is categorized as a species of least concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List [7] and at the national level, it is protected by Algerian Fiat Executive 12-235 of 24 May 2012, establishing the list of protected non-domestic animal species. This species is protected because its distribution range is restricted and threatened by several factors.

Our observation is considered to be a recent one in Western Algeria with a new locality, where it has never been mentioned before [3, 8, 9,], except for a single isolated observation in Tlemcen on November 27, 1979 which was not spotted in the recent observations [4,5]. In the same region in Sidi Bel Abbès, an avifaunistic study was carried out between 2019 and 2021 in the Merine forest, where 71 species belonging to 17 orders and 28 families were counted, but the presence of *Prunella collaris* in the list of birds is not addressed [10].

Alpine Accentor is a passerine bird subservient to the rocky areas of the Palearctic Mountain massifs, from Japan and Taiwan to the Moroccan Atlas [2], and in Algeria, where all the old and new observations have been recorded in rocky areas in the north, on an altitude varying between 500 and 1900 m a.s.l.

However, this species is known to extend its range considerably in winter, and part of the population migrates regularly [11]. The wintering

ecology of these migrating Alpine Accentors is poorly known [12,13].

Phenological status of this species varies between sedentary in the Djurdjura mountains and wintering in the remaining regions, but in our study area, it is probably an accidental visitor.

Recently, many new species have been observed in Sidi Bel Abbès and in its neighboring regions in Tiaret, Saida and Tlemcen, such as the Greater Hoopoe-lark, *Alaemon alaudipes*, the Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti* and the House Bunting *Emberiza sahari* [14-18].

The presence of the Alpine Accentor in Tessala Mountains (north of Sidi Bel Abbès, western Algeria) is interesting, and it is necessary to intensify monitoring in the future in order to clarify the origin and the enology status of this species.

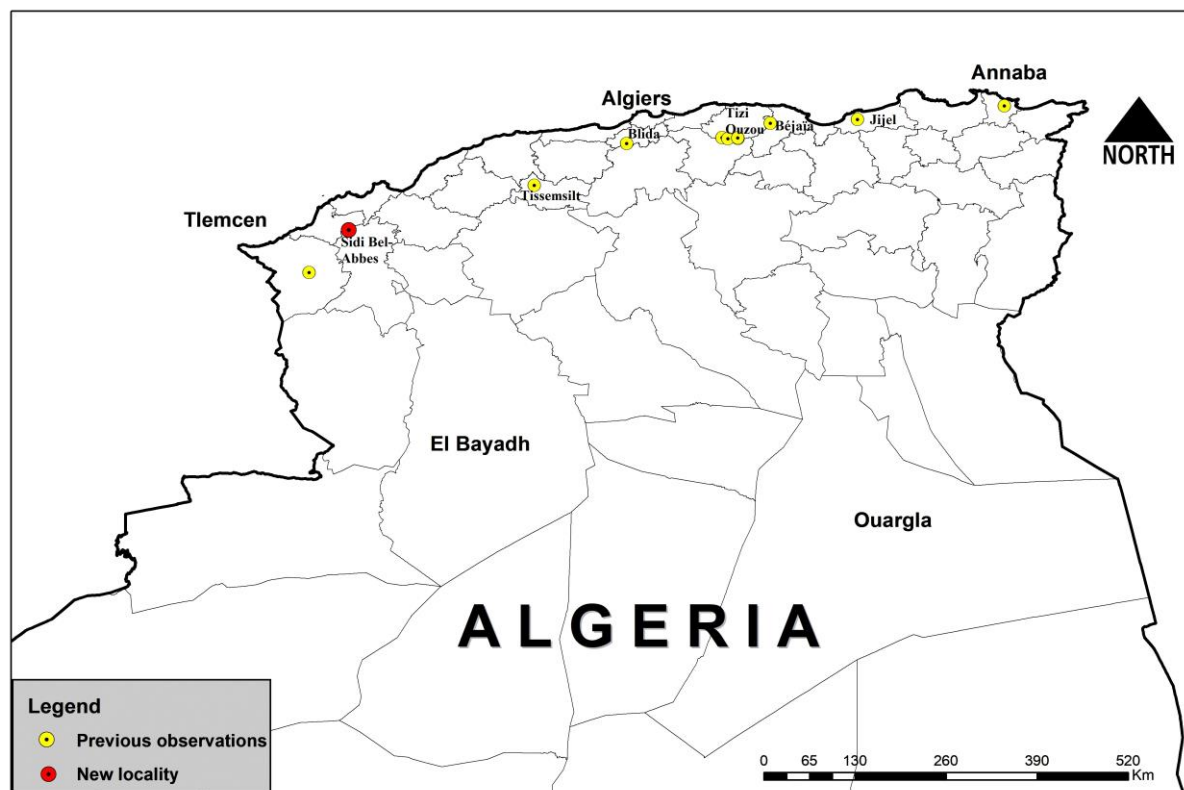


Fig. 3. Observation site of the Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* in Sidi Bel Abbès, Algeria, on November 12, 2022 (Mayssara El Bouhissi, red dot). All previous observations of the species (yellow dot).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the General Directorate of Forests and the members of the National Network of Algerian Ornithologist Watchers “R.N.O.O.A.”. We also thank the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and reviewers of this paper.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Recommended Citation

El Bouhissi M, Chedad A, H. A. Benhamou A. new locality reported in winter for the Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* (Scopoli, 1769) in Algeria (Aves: Prunellidae). *Alger. j. biosciences*. 2023, 04;01:017-020.



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