PLACE OF WHEATEAR SPECIES WITHIN THE AVIFAUNA OF GHARDAÏA (ALGERIAN SAHARA)

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Abstract
The wheatears occupy a special place within the avifauna of the Ghardaïa region (Northern Algerian Sahara), with eight species. The range mapping and phenological status were studied in the Ghardaïa region between 2017 and 2021 on the basis of monthly sampling using Progressive Frequency Sampling (Echantillonnage Fréquentiel Progressif “EFP”) method. Eight species of the genus Oenanthe were reported, two of which have a resident breeder phenological status (White-crowned Wheatear Oenanthe leucopyga, Desert Wheatear Oenanthe deserti), four species (Isabelline Wheatear Oenanthe isabellina, Northern Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe, Black-eared Wheatear Oenanthe hispanica, and Mourning Wheatear Oenanthe lugens), having a passage visitor status. Buff-rumped Wheatear Oenanthe moesta with probably winter visitor status. Finally, a dubious sighting of Seebohm's wheatear Oenanthe seebohmi. Globally, all reported species are categorized as a species of the least concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List of threatened species.

Keywords: Algerian Sahara, cartography, EFP, Ghardaïa, phenological status, wheatears.

1. INTRODUCTION
Algeria belongs to the Western Palearctic, borders the Mediterranean Sea to the north, and Countries of the Sahel to the south. It has a great diversity of climates (subtropical, Mediterranean, semi-arid, and arid) (Stevenson et al., 1988; Samraoui & De Belair, 1998). Its geographical location, with all its features, makes it play a very important role in biological diversity (faunistic and floristic), ecological, landscape, and cultural (Chedad et al., 2020a).
The desert of Algerian Sahara covers an area of nearly 2 million Km², about 85% (Mediouni, 1997). Its climate characterized in particular by low and irregular rainfall, as well as by the pronounced thermal amplitudes between day and night and between months (Doumandji & Doumandji-Mitiche, 1994).
The wheatears occupy a special place among the avifauna of North Africa (Arnault, 1931). They constitute a wide range of genus among the Muscicapidae with nine species reported in Algeria, of which eight species cited by Isenmann & Moali, (2000) and Shirihai & Svensson (2018) (Isabelline Wheatear Oenanthe isabellina, Northern Wheatear Oenanthe Oenanthe, Black-eared Wheatear Oenanthe hispanica, Desert Wheatear Oenanthe deserti, Buff-rumped Wheatear Oenanthe moesta, Mourning Wheatear Oenanthe lugens, and White-crowned Wheatear Oenanthe

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leucopyga) and one species cited by Shirihai & Svensson (2018), this is Seebohm’s Wheatear *Oenanthe seebohmi*. The purpose of this study is to update the species of wheatears (sedentary and migratory), show their place within the avifauna of the northern Algerian Sahara in Ghardaia, to map their geographical range and to identify their phenological status.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS
This study was carried out in Ghardaia, located in the central part of the northern Algerian Sahara (Heim De Balsac & Mayaud, 1962), which is part of the Saharan bioclimatic. It is characterized by very low and irregular annual precipitation.

For monitoring and mapping the range of certain wheatears species and define the phenological status of each of them, we adopted to the Progressive Frequency Sampling (*Echantillonnage Fréquentiel Progressif “EFP”*) method, which is a point-sampling technique (Blondel, 1975), have already been using in Algeria with authors such as Moali (1999), Bendjoudi et al. (2013), Farhi (2014), Souttou et al. (2018), Chedad et al. (2020a and b) and Chedad et al. (2021).

In the present study, the surveys were carried out during the period from 2017 to 2020, where the observer remains motionless mentioned all the species of the genus wheatears, visually or acoustically contacted in an imaginary circle of 100 m in diameter. The recorded species will be noted in the absence/presence, for each station visited throughout the territory of the Ghardaia region (Ochando, 1988; Fonderflick, 2006).

The protection status of bird species was assessed internationally according to the IUCN Red List (IUCN 2020). Finally, we have mapped and updated maps of geographical distribution. Using species occurrence data from the current study, complemented with additional occurrence data derived from BirdLife International and GBIF between the year 2001 - 2021 (www.gbif.org). ArcGIS (version 10.2.2 for Desktop: Esri®) was used to produce species distribution maps.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
In the Ghardaia region, eight species of wheatears have reported of the 09 species recorded nationally, of which two species have a resident breeder phenological status (White-crowned Wheatear, Desert Wheatear), four species having a passage visitor status (Isabelline Wheatear, Northern Wheatear, Black-eared Wheatear, and Mourning Wheatear), Buff-rumped Wheatear is in principle winter visitor status. Finally, a dubious sighting of Seebohm’s wheatear, where probably this species crosses the Ghardaia region (Table 1).

A- White-crowned Wheatear
This species characterize the Saharan regions, notably Ghardaia, where we observe it on the whole territory, in the Chebka of M’zab (Oued Ntissa, Oued M’zab, El Atteuf, Nomuréat, Oued Netchou, Béni-Isguen, Mélika, Bounoura…); in the region of Guerrara and Berriane in the North to El Ménéa and Hassi El Gara in the South, as already cited by Chedad et al., (2018). This Wheatear can live far from man and frequents rocky places, Dayas, wetlands, or next to the man in Oases, palm groves, and urban agglomerations (Figure 1A and 1B). It should be remembered that the first case of leucism in the White-crowned Wheatear was reported in Ghardaia on December 8, 2018 (Chedad et al., 2019).

In Algeria, there is the subspecies *Oenanthe leucopyga leucopyga* (Shirihai & Svensson, 2018); its phenological status is a resident breeder. The range of this species extends from Algerian northern Sahara to the extreme limit of southern Algeria [Shirihai & Svensson (2018), Isenmann & Moali (2000), gbif.org (2021a)], with an expansion towards the Tellian Atlas and a little further north.
In Northern Sahara, this species is reported in Biskra, Ghardaïa, and Ouargla [(Guezoul et al. (2012 and 2017); Farhi and Belhamra (2012); Ababsa et al. (2013)]. Our observations confirm the nesting and sedentarization of the subspecies *O. l. leucopyga* in the different ecosystems of the territory of Ghardaïa.

**Table 1 Checklist of wheatear species inventoried in the Ghardaïa region**

| N° | Species & Monthly chart | Annual Chart | Phenological status |
|----|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 01 | **White-crowned Wheatear Oenanthe leucopyga** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | RB |
| 02 | **Buff-rumped Wheatear Oenanthe moesta** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | WV |
| 03 | **Desert Wheatear Oenanthe deserti** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | RB |
| 04 | **Mourning Wheatear Oenanthe lugens** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | PV |
| 05 | **Isabelline Wheatear Oenanthe isabellina** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | PV |
| 06 | **Northern Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | PV |
| 07 | **Black-eared Wheatear Oenanthe hispanica** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | PV |
| 08 | **Seebohm's Wheatear Oenanthe seebohmi** | 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 | PV |

Phenological status [WV: Winter Visitor, PV: Passage Visitor, RB: Resident Breeder].

**B- Buff-rumped Wheatear**

This species reported in winter in 2017 and 2020 in wetlands in Metlili and Berriane, subsequently another observation in Berriane in May 2020. The Buff-rumped Wheatear has a winter visitor status and is probably a passage visitor in some cases (Figure 2A and 2B). In Algeria, the phenological status of this species is resident breeder, and appears in the lower areas Aures between Batna and El Kantra, occupies the chott El Hodna and overflows largely to the north of the Highlands. It is abundant in the plateaus (Barika, Ain Oussera, Mechria), in the steppes between Djelfa and Laghouat. The Buff-rumped Wheatear is also reported in Ain Sefra, Touggourt, Mohrhar, Beni Ounif, Ghardaïa, and El Golea (Isenmann & Moali, 2000). According to recent publications by BirdLife International (2018), Shirihai & Svensson (2018), and gbif.org (2021b), the Buff-rumped Wheatear is distributed mainly between the northern part of the Tellian Atlas and the Northern Sahara, where Farhi & Belhamra (2012) report it in Biskra. Our observations in Ghardaïa granted as a recent observation.
C- Desert Wheatear

It is a species that characterize semi-desert and desert regions, especially in Ghardaïa, where this species often observes throughout the territory of this region, in the Dayas, the Chebka, wetlands..., but it does not get too close to urban agglomeration. In Ghardaïa, the Desert Wheatear is a resident breeder (Figures 3A and 3B). In Algeria, there is the subspecies *Oenanthe deserti homochroa*, which is a resident breeder, and inhabits the steppe regions and extended towards the extreme south [Isenmann & Moali, (2000); Shirihai & Svensson, (2018); BirdLife International, (2016b) and gbif.org (2021c)]. In Northern Sahara, this species reported in Biskra, Ghardaïa, and Ouargla [Guezoul et al. (2012 and 2017); Farhi & Belhamra (2012)].
Current Trends in Natural Sciences
Vol. 10, Issue 1, pp. 25-35, 2021
https://doi.org/10.47068/ctns.2021.v10i19.003

ISSN: 2284-953X
ISSN-L: 2284-9521

ISSN: 2284-9521
ISSN-L: 2284-9521

Figure 2A. Maps showing previous and updated distributions of the Red-rumped Wheatear (Oenanthe moesta) in Algeria

Figure 2B. Red-rumped Wheatear (Oenanthe moesta), Oued Metlili, Ghardaïa, Algeria 27/12/2017 © A. Chedad

Figure 3A. Maps showing previous and updated distributions of the Desert Wheatear (Oenanthe deserti) in Algeria.

Figure 3B. Desert Wheatear (Oenanthe deserti), Oued El Bir, Ghardaïa, Algeria 02/11/2018 © A. Chedad

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D- Mourning Wheatear
In Ghardaïa, this species encountered only once, in January 2017 in Oued El Bir (Berriane). The Mourning Wheatear is a non-regular visitor and probably non-regular wintering (Figures 4A and 4B). In Algeria, there is the subspecies *Oenanthe lugens halophila*, a resident breeder species that prefer rocky biotopes, as well as clay slopes and banks of wadis, the northern limit of its distribution follows the Saharan Atlas (El Kantra, Messad, and Figuig, with observations at T’kout in the Aures, Chaiba in the Zab Mountains). To the south, the Mourning Wheatear reaches Ouargla, Zirara in M’zab and El Goléa, Hoggar, Tassili, and Beni Abbès [Isenmann & Moali (2000) and BirdLife International, (2019a)]. According to Shirihai & Svensson (2018), the range of the Mourning Wheatear confines mainly to the Saharan Atlas, with an isolated observation reported in Boussaâda by gbif.org (2021d). Our observations in Ghardaïa considered as recent records for the Algerian Sahara.

![Figure 4A](image1.png)

*Figure 4A. Maps showing previous and updated distributions of the Mourning Wheatear (*Oenanthe lugens halophila*) in Algeria*

*Figure 4B. Mourning Wheatear (*Oenanthe lugens*), Oued El Bir à Berriane, Ghardaïa, Algeria 16/01/2017 © A. Chedad*

E- Isabelline Wheatear
It is a species that carries a passage visitor status, where we met her twice, during the prenuptial passage, during two successive years (2019 and 2020) in February and March in Kef Doukhane and Noumèrate (Figure 5A and 5B). In Algeria, the phenological status of the Isabelline Wheatear is a passage visitor, it observed in several regions: Tamanrasset, In Guezzam, Dj Basket, Tassili, Hoggar Tiout, Béni Abbès, and Timimoun [Isenmann & Moali, 2000], with an old mention on the presence of the species in Ghardaïa cited by Heim De Balsac & Mayaud (1962) In Isenmann & Moali (2000).

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Recent observations between 2001 and 2021 were reported at Naama, Hoggar, Ouargla, and Khouchla (gbif.org, 2021e). Our present observations in Ghardaïa considered recent and constitute new data on the migratory passage of the Isabelline Wheatear in Algeria.

Figure 5A. Maps showing previous and updated distributions of the Isabelline Wheatear (Oenanthe isabellina) in Algeria

Figure 5B. Isabelline Wheatear (Oenanthe isabellina), Kef Doukhane, Ghardaïa, Algeria 02/03/2019 © A. Chedad

F- Northern Wheatear
This species is very abundant in the different ecosystems of the Ghardaïa region; it is recorded every year during the two migratory passages, prenuptial between March-May and postnuptial between September-November (Figure 6A and 6B). In Algeria, the Northern Wheatear is a resident breeder and a passage visitor. These species cross the Algerian Sahara to go and nesting there in the north (Isenmann & Moali, 2000). In Northern Sahara, this species reported in Biskra, Ghardaïa, and Ouargla [Guezoul et al. (2012 and 2017); Farhi & Belhamra (2012)].

G- Black-eared Wheatear
This species recorded each year with numbers such as that of the Northern Wheatear, it observed during the two migration passages, prenuptial between March-May and postnuptial between September-October (Figure 7A and 7B). In Algeria, the Northern Wheatear is a resident breeder and a passage visitor. The Black-eared Wheateat crosses the Algerian Sahara to go and Nesting there to the north between the sea and the Saharan border (Biskra, Laghouat and Ain Sefra) [Isenmann & Moali (2000), BirdLife International, (2019b) and Shirihai & Svensson, (2018)]. Our observation shows the dates of annual migratory passage and reflects the place of the Ghardaïa region in the migratory flows of this species.
Figure 6A. Maps showing previous and updated distributions of the Northern Wheatear (Oenanthe Oenanthe) in Algeria

Figure 6B. Northern Wheatear (Oenanthe Oenanthe), Kef Doukhane, Ghardaïa, Algeria 26/03/2018 © A. Chedad

Figure 7A. Maps showing previous and updated distributions of the Western Black-eared Wheatear (Oenanthe hispanica) in Algeria

Figure 7B. Black-eared Wheatear (Oenanthe hispanica), Kef Doukhane, Ghardaïa, Algeria 27/03/2018 © A. Chedad

G- Black-throated Wheatear

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This species observed only once in May 2020, with a dubious observation, given the reason for the great similarity with the female of the Northern Wheatear. In Algeria, its phenological status is migrant breeder and passage visitor. The Black-throated Wheatear crosses the southwest of Algeria to go and nestled in the northeast [BirdLife International, (2016c) and Shirihai & Svensson, (2018)]. Our observation remains doubtful, although we will be confirmed in the future by other observations.

Figure 8. Maps showing previous and updated distributions of the Black-throated Wheatear (Oenanthe seebohmi) in Algeria

Eight Wheatear species reported in Ghardaïa out of 09 nationally were reported species (Algeria). These results show the importance of this region at the national level, where Ghardaïa considers a nesting and resident site, as well as a must-see site for migration in both directions, prenuptial in spring and postnuptial passage in autumn, where Ghardaïa region has already been confirmed for several waterbird species (Chedad et al. 2020c). At the international level, all species identified are of minor Concern according to the IUCN red list. At the international level, all species identified have a status of Least Concern in the IUCN Red List.

4. CONCLUSIONS
In The Algerian Sahara, especially the region of Ghardaïa, which contains an important avifaunistic diversity, sometimes a particular diversity, this fauna exploits this region as an essential stopover site, as well as resident and nest sites. The data collected so far on the wheatears are considered recent and preliminary and this could open the way for further research on the territory of Ghardaïa and its surroundings, in order to update the list of avifauna, to map the range, and set the phenological status of each species. Also, the continuation of the tracking of wheatears in this region given the recent climate
changes which certainly contribute to a change in the phenological status of wheatears species and on their reproduction.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
First, we would like to thank the authorities of the General Directorate of Forests (Forest conservation, Ghardata) for facilitating our work on the ground. We also thank the members of the National Network of Algerian Ornithologist Observes “R.N.O.O.A.” especially Ms. Oulmane K., Guechi R., Mezzi M., Horo A., Bendjoudi L., Ben Abderrahmane A, Ben Ahmed Z., Bendjedidi O., and Hadj Mhammed T. for their support and accompaniment during the study. We would like to thank Mr. Eisa A. for reading the paper before its submission, and our ornithologist Mr. Geuchi R. for the identification of certain species of birds.

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