

Records of doves *Streptopelia* at Awserd, Oued Ad-Deheb

Patrick BERGIER ⁽¹⁾, Benoit MAIRE ⁽²⁾ and Alain MATHURIN ⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Go-South – 4 Avenue Folco de Baroncelli – 13210 Saint Rémy de Provence (France)
www.go-south.org pbergier@yahoo.fr

⁽²⁾ GOMAC – 16 rue Ain Harrouda – Casablanca (Maroc)

⁽³⁾ GOMAC – Témara (Maroc)

Disponible en ligne (Available online) : 7 janvier 2012

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

The Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* is well known by European birdwatchers but is a newcomer to Morocco where the first records are only from the early 1970s. It is now widespread throughout the country (see Bergier *et al.* 1999 and Bergier 2000 for a history of the settlement).

The first sighting in the Oued Ad-Deheb region dates from 1998 and for ten years it has only be known from Dakhla city, the villages and human settlements near the coast (e.g. El Argoub, Gleb Jdiane) and large farms.

This species has recently colonized the Awserd region: the first record is from February 2008 (a bird singing in an acacia between Dakhla and Awserd at 23°15'N-15°10'W – Bergier & Thévenot 2008), a bird was recorded at Awserd city a year later (February 2009 – Dantheman *et al.* in Bergier *et al.* 2010b), another was singing at downtown Awserd on 3 March 2010 (G. Bodor *in* Bergier *et al.* 2012) and others were seen in late October and December 2010 (A. Qninba *et al.*, F. Verdonckt *in* Bergier *et al.* 2011).

On 16 and 18 February 2011, one of us (PB) explored a little savannah-like forest of Acacias located on the north side of the road, 8 kilometers to the west of Awserd in front of a pumping station at 22°34'N-14°31'W.

On 16 February winter visitors and/or migrant species included a Sardinian and a Subalpine Warbler, hundreds of Short-toed Larks, and at least 3 Great Spotted Cuckoos. Two days later, there were still many Short-toed Larks, two Sardinian and two Subalpine Warblers and one Great Spotted Cuckoo, but also a Quail, a Hoopoe, and a Grasshopper Warbler.

Resident species included many Black-crowned Finch-Lark (one bird building nest on 16 Feb), a pair of Southern Grey Shrike *elegans* and a dozen of both Cricket Warbler and Desert Sparrow.

Six **Collared Doves** were also present and a bird was sitting on its nest built at a height of c. 2.5 meters on an acacia (18 Feb).



Photo 1. A Collared Dove sitting on its nest, Awserd, 18 February 2011 (P. Bergier)

Streptopelia sp.

That same 18 February in this acacia forest, PB also noticed two very peculiar, clear, fairly small doves flying by with the common, darker, Collared Doves. These two birds were very shy and he could hardly get more than a few glimpses and two poor pictures. None of them were singing.

The info was quickly passed to Benoit Maire and Alain Mathurin who had planned a trip there a few days later. On 2 March 2011, Benoit and Alain managed to take a whole set of pictures.

These birds were first thought to be African Collared Doves *Streptopelia roseogrisea*.



Photo 2. *Streptopelia sp.*, Awserd, 18 February 2011 (P. Bergier)







Photo 3-7. *Streptopelia sp.*, Awserd, 2 March 2011 (B. Maire)

The same day, Benoit and Alain alerted a group of Finnish bir watchers led by Janne Aalto who also thought they were African Collared Doves *Streptopelia roseogrisea*:

'We stopped the car and walked to the acacias and immediately 3 doves were flushed from the closest trees - and 2 of them were clearly Collared Doves but one was smaller and paler! We walked after them and flushed them again and now managed to see that this smallest bird clearly had white under-tail coverts - an African Collared Dove! We still wanted to see it better and maybe get some pictures as we wanted to make sure that it wasn't anything rarer or a feral version from the Canary Islands. But we walked through the forest many times but could find only one Collared Dove. There were also plenty of Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks and Desert Sparrows and at least one Savannah Hare, a Great Spotted Cuckoo and finally one Cricket Warbler that let us watch it....'
(<http://koti.mbnet.fi/caligata/morocco8.html>, accessed 3 June 2011)

Lee G.R. Evans and his team have also seen these birds on 2 March and comment:

'... of most interest was a pair of apparent AFRICAN COLLARED DOVES accompanying the 9 Eurasian Collared Doves roosting in the Acacia trees here. These birds were slightly smaller, much paler, gleaming white on the undertail-coverts and particularly rosy-pink flushed on the breast. One visiting birder from Europe photographed one of the pair, as well as an odd leucistic or albinistic bird. There were also other Collared Doves present in the area which showed intermediate characters'
(www.go-south.org/09_TripReports/R253_2011_02_Part3_LGRE.pdf, accessed 3 June 2011)

This record has been analysed by Pierre-André Crochet (mail dtd 10 April 2011):

'For me, these look exactly like the domestic form: the plumage (especially the back) is pale sandy (dark grey on the wild form), the primaries are paler than decaocto (darker in the wild form) and the upper tail is very pale (darker brown on the wild form). The wild form has colours very like decaocto but for the white undertail coverts and belly, with darker remiges and tail feathers from above than decaocto. These pale sandy birds are just like domestic birds (the "barbary dove").

.....

You can see pictures of wild roseogrisea here:

- www.osme.org/tripreports/egtrip30.shtml (scrol down)
- http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_x4ZClK0ymPQ/TOONitL2PrI/AAAAAAAAAHs/E9LN7DZKY_Q/s1600/African+Collared+Dove.jpg
- www.netfugl.dk/pictures.php?id=showpicture&picture_id=1684

note especially the contrast between grey head and browner back, very typical of roseogrisea'

and by Arnoud B. van den Berg (mail dtd 11 May 2011):

'Thanks for giving me the opportunity to look at these intriguing pictures. I always thought that the only safe way to separate decaocto and roseogrisea was by voice, since the latter has a bisyllabic song. However, if seen in the same view next to each other, one could perhaps argue that the identification is possible by direct comparison of shape, size and colour. As you know, according to the text books, decaocto is slightly larger with slightly greyer undertail coverts than roseogrisea, and both these differences can be seen in the pictures. Perhaps we have to consider plumage anomalies, eg, individuals with paler plumage; however, it would be quite a coincidence when paler decaocto individuals are smaller as well'

The song is characteristic is the best way to tell apart *decaocto* from *roseogrisea*: a trisyllabic "cou-COÛH-cou" accented on the 2nd syllable in *decaocto*, a bisyllabic "KOUK r-r-r-r-OUOU ouououou" which begins and ends abruptly in *roseogrisea*. Unfortunately, none of these two birds were heard singing.

A feral origin of these birds is very unlikely as human settlements are scarce in the region – Awserd lies at some 250 km from Dakhla, the closest city...

The species these two doves refer to remain unclear.

The status of the African Collared Dove in Morocco

The African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea* is a very common and widespread species in the Sahel from north Senegambia and Mauritania to the Red Sea coast (see e.g. Urban *et al.* 1986). It occurs locally but regularly as far north as 20°-21°N in Saharan Mauritania (Isenmann *et al.* 2010).

In Morocco, Thévenot *et al.* (2003) described this species as a 'Possible accidental visitor or occasional breeder in the extreme south of Oued Ad-Deheb because of its breeding in the palmerie at Atar in Mauritania, just south of the Moroccan border...'.

Later on, the Moroccan Rare Birds Committee (MRBC) has analysed two records, one from the Middle Draa (20 km East of Akka, 17 May 2006) and another from Oued Ad-Deheb (Bir Gandouz, 24 October 2006). Both records were judged to not have enough detail and were not accepted (Bergier *et al.* 2007 & 2010a).

There is no definite record of African Collared Doves so far in Morocco and we urge all teams travelling to Awserd to pay a special attention to the doves they may encounter.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Strangely, we do not know any record of European Turtle Dove at or near Awserd.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

We have been aware of only two records at Awserd: one on 4 March 2010 (G. Bodor *in* Bergier *et al.* 2011) and another one 4 km before the town on 14 February 2011 (T.A. Olsen *in* Bergier *et al.* 2012).

Bergier, P. 2000. De nouvelles informations sur les Tourterelles turque et maillée *Streptopelia decaocto* et *senegalensis* dans le Sud marocain. *Porphyrio* 12 : 10-15.

Bergier, P. & Thévenot, M. 2008. Notes naturalistes au Sahara Atlantique marocain, février-mars 2008. *Go-South Bull.* 5 : 78-97.

Bergier, P. ; Franchimont, J. & Thévenot, M. 1999. Implantation et expansion géographique de deux espèces de Columbides au Maroc : la Tourterelle turque *Streptopelia decaocto* et la Tourterelle maillée *Streptopelia senegalensis*. *Alauda* 67 : 23-36.

Bergier, P. ; Franchimont, J. ; Thévenot, M. & CHM 2007. Les oiseaux rares au Maroc. Rapport de la Commission d'Homologation Marocaine numéro 12. *Go-South Bull.* 4 : 77-97.

Bergier, P. ; Franchimont, J. ; Thévenot, M. & CHM 2010a. Les oiseaux rares au Maroc. Rapport de la Commission d'Homologation Marocaine numéro 15. *Go-South Bull.* 7 : 1-14.

Bergier, P. ; Qninba, A. ; El Agbani, M.A. & Dakki, M. 2010b. Notes naturalistes au Sahara Atlantique marocain - 2. *Go-South Bull.* 7 : 56-88.

Bergier, P. ; Qninba, A. & Thévenot, M. 2011. Notes naturalistes au Sahara Atlantique marocain - 3. *Go-South Bull.* 8 : 67-103.

Bergier, P. ; Qninba, A. & Thévenot, M. 2012. Notes naturalistes au Sahara Atlantique marocain - 4. *Go-South Bull.* 9 : to be published.

Isenman, P. ; Benmergui, M. ; Browne, P. ; Diam Ba, A. ; Diagana, C.H. ; Diawara, Y. & Ould Sidati, Z.E. 2010. *Oiseaux de Mauritanie*. SEOF (Edit.). 408 pp.

Thévenot, M. ; Vernon, J.D.R. & Bergier, P. 2003. *The Birds of Morocco*. British Ornithologist Union Checklist Series: 20. 594 pp.

Urban, E.K. ; Fry, C.H. & Keith, S. 1986. *The Birds of Africa. Volume II*. Academic Press.

Acknowledgement

We thank Janne Aalto, Gábor Bodor, Lee G.R. Evans, Tor A. Olsen for their trip report, Pierre-André Crochet and Arnoud B. van den Berg for their comments and Ken Newland for reviewing the English.