

and the dark 'hood' is rather straight and the white gently curves upwards towards the nape.

Distribution and vagrancy

White-throated Swallow breeds in the southern part of the African continent. It is mainly a migratory species, wintering further north. It is an uncommon to locally common breeding visitor to uplands from Angola and Zambia to the south, arriving late July–September and with peak breeding activity in October–December. The species has benefited from the increased nesting opportunities presented by the construction of bridges and dams (Turner & Rose 1989). Birds depart in mid-April and May, moving north and north-west to Angola, Zambia, south-eastern Congo-Kinshasa

and, possibly, Tanzania (cf Allport et al 2021). In Mozambique, it is a regular but scarce visitor (Allport et al 2021). There is a record in Malindi, Kenya, and there are several winter records from Malawi. A few occasionally overwinter in Zimbabwe (Turner & Rose 1989).

The observation at Sakaka represents the most northerly record and the first for Saudi Arabia, Asia, the WP and the Northern Hemisphere.

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Northern Grey-headed Sparrows in southern Algeria in October 2022

On 13 October 2022, during a birdwatching trip in the extreme south of Algeria, Belkacem Aïmene Boulouad, Khaled Ayyach, Bachir Harzallah and Mohamed Missoum (members of the Algerian Wildlife Watchers Association, AWWA) discovered a Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* in the village of Timiaouine, Bordj Baji Mokhtar province (20°26'14"N, 1°48'29"E). The bird entered a hole in an unfinished house and its nest was found; we observed it entering and exiting the nest many times. We returned after three days to the same place and observed the same behaviour and, based on its behaviour, assumed the bird to be a male. Only one nest was found in the area, which was characterized by its fresh climate after the rainy season. On 15 October 2022, we discovered another individual 60 km to the south-east in a valley with *Acacia* and *Salvadora* trees at Tawendert, Tamanrasset province (20°21'46"N, 2°26'23"E).

Both birds were identified as adult Northern Grey-headed Sparrows by their dark grey head contrasting with dark rufous mantle, small white wing-bar, white throat (difficult to see from certain angles), grey upperbreast contrasting with pale underparts and rather heavy grey bill (cf Sinclair & Ryan 2003). Sexes show similar plumages in this species. Juveniles differ from adults by being browner, with some dusky streaks on the mantle,

no white on the wing-coverts and horn-coloured bill (Borrow & Demey 2014).

Northern Grey-headed Sparrow forms a 'super-species' with four look-alike species distributed further south in Africa: Swainson's *P swainsonii*, Swahili *P suahelicus*, Parrot-billed *P gongonensis* and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *P diffusus*. Northern Grey-headed Sparrow differs from all these species by its well-defined white throat and small size of its white wing-bar (larger and more conspicuous in the other species while always being reduced or even absent in Northern Grey-headed). The dark grey head, dark rufous mantle, grey breast and heavy bill of our birds also rule out Southern Grey-headed, which is a much paler species. Swainson's, Swahili and Parrot-billed have quite a restricted range and differ from Northern Grey-headed (and our birds) in darker grey underparts and greyish instead of rufous mantle (especially in Swainson's and Swahili), while Parrot-billed is also substantially larger, with a more heavy and rounded bill (Sinclair & Ryan 2003, Fry & Keith 2004).

The range of Northern Grey-headed Sparrow hardly overlaps with that of the four look-alike species and stretches across the centre of Africa, from Mauritania, Senegal and Angola in the west to Sudan, Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Malawi in the east. From west to east, three subspecies are recognised: nominate *P g griseus*, *P g laeneni* and *P g ugandae*. The Algerian birds are considered to be the nominate since *laeneni* is paler and *ugandae*



216 Northern Grey-headed Sparrow / *Grijskopmus Passer griseus*, adult, Timiaouine, Bordj Baji Mokhtar, Algeria, 13 October 2022 (*Bachir Harzallah*) **217** Nest site of Northern Grey-headed Sparrow / *Grijskopmus Passer griseus*, Timiaouine, Bordj Baji Mokhtar, Algeria, 13 October 2022 (*Belkacem Aimene Boulaouad*) **218** Northern Grey-headed Sparrow / *Grijskopmus Passer griseus*, adult, Tawendert, Tamanrasset, Algeria, 15 October 2022 (*Belkacem Aimene Boulaouad*)

is darker overall, while the range of the nominate (reaching east to western Central African Republic and Chad) is nearest to the southern tip of Algeria (Fry & Keith 2004).

Both sightings of Northern Grey-headed Sparrow in Algeria were in habitat described for this afrotropical species: a variety of open and wood-

ed habitats, though mainly in towns and villages (Fry & Keith 2004, Borrow & Demey 2014).

These are the first records of Northern Grey-headed Sparrow for Algeria, North Africa and the Western Palearctic (Isenmann & Moali 2000, Isenmann et al 2005, 2016, Shirihai & Svensson 2018, Bergier et al 2022). We did not locate a female

and could not inspect the content of the nest. The observation of a male entering and exiting the nest multiple times, however, strongly suggests that the bird was actively breeding. We found no indications to treat the records as referring to escaped cage birds, which can be a problem with some passerine species observed in southernmost Algeria (cf Boulaouad et al 2022).

In Algeria, the sparrows *Passeridae* are now represented by seven species and a hybrid population: Northern Grey-headed, Tree *P montanus*, Spanish *P hispaniolensis*, House *P domesticus*, Spanish x House *P hispaniolensis x domesticus*, Desert *P simplex*, Sudan Golden *P luteus* and Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia* (Ledant et al 1981, Isenmann & Moali 2000, Djemadi et al 2017, Haddad & Afoutni 2022a).

In the previous five years, several other sub-Saharan species were found for the first time in southernmost Algeria, eg, Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*, Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus*, African Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicos goertae* and White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis* (Haddad & Afoutni 2020, 2022b, Haddad & Bekhouche 2021, Boulaouad et al 2022). Like Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, the nearest area where all these species occur is c 100 km to the south in northern Mali, ie, further south in the Adrar des Iforas massif that reaches north into southern Algeria, encompassing Timiaouine (Clouet & Joachim 2013).

Other afrotropical birds of this massif that might be expected as new species in the extreme south of Algeria in the future are, eg, Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini*, Vieillot's Barbet *Lybius vieilloti*, Yellow-breasted Barbet *Trachyphonus margaritatus*, Chestnut-bellied Starling *Lamproloris pulcher*, Pygmy Sunbird *Hedydipna platura* and Speckle-fronted *Sporopipes frontalis*, Little *Ploceus luteolus* and Southern Masked Weaver *P velatus* (Clouet & Joachim 2013, Borrow & Demey 2014).

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