

Libya

Trip Report

27 Dec 2007 – 3 Jan 2008

Mark Easterbrook



References

Collins Guide to the *Birds of Britain & Europe with N. Africa & The Middle East*.

INTRODUCTION

My wife and I visited Libya for the 2007 New Year. The intention was to visit the Greco Roman sites and see a country that is not visited by many British tourists, whilst birding where possible within the tour itinerary. 52 species were seen without much effort with Fulvous Babbler or Greater Sand Plover being the stars.

DAILY ITINEARIES

Day One

We arrived in Tripoli at about 4 pm. We quickly met our guide and headed for our hotel in the centre of Tripoli. Hoopoe, Southern Grey Shrike and Palm Dover were seen along the road but nothing remarkable.

Later that evening we walked in to Tripoli centre and found a local restaurant; the roasted chicken with lots of harissa was excellent.

Day Two

A quick walk before breakfast revealed that Sardinian Warbler was the most common bird around the hotel area. After breakfast we headed east out of Tripoli towards the ruins at Sebratha. The harbour held a Little Egret, several Cormorants and a few Baltic Gulls. During the journey many Southern Grey Shrikes were seen, closer inspection revealed a mixture of *elegans* and *algeriensis* sub species.

The ruins at Sebratha were impressive and a little birding time produced Serins, good numbers of Black Redstarts, a Hoopoe, Little Owl and two Blue Rock Thrushes. A quick look at the sea brought several Sandwich Terns, a loafing Gannet and a Cory's Shearwater, presumably Scipoli's. A Blackcap was seen later at the catacombs near Janzour.

Day Three

A visit to the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli started the day followed by visits to the museum and the souk. Southern Grey Shrike was a surprisingly common bird in the centre of Tripoli and later a walk along the harbour road produced a Common Sandpiper, Kingfisher, several Baltic Gulls, 2 Audouin's Gulls and a Pallid Swift drifted over the city.

Day Four

We travelled west today to the fantastic ruins at Lepcis Magna. A Chiffchaff was noted with Blue Rock Thrush and Black Redstarts being fairly common. Two Green Sandpipers and an Osprey put in an appearance whilst Sardinian Warblers scolded from most bushes. The birds of the trip were a group of nine Fulvous Babblers working their way along the acacias and tamarisk in the wadi. A little patience was rewarded with fantastic view of these birds as they fed under a bush.

Day Five

An internal flight from Tripoli to Benghazi at a cost of £40 was excellent value. We arrived at about 1400 and began to travel to our hotel in Appolonia via the ruins at Potalamais, Here I connected with the North African race of Chaffinch, several Goldfinches and a few Crested Larks, with numerous Corn Buntings lining the wires adjacent to the fields. We arrived at Appolonia in the late evening after having added Cattle Egret and Starling to the list.

Day Six

We initially visited Cyrene and the Temple of Zeus with the only new bird being several Meadow Pipits. Later at the town ruins a Long-legged Buzzard was seen and another Blue Rock Thrush.

During the afternoon we returned to the site at Appolonia near the coast. After becoming "all ruined out", I detached myself from the main body of the group and headed off to the harbour where some birds on the rocks had caught my attention earlier that morning.

A productive half and hour ensued where another two Kingfishers were seen, three Common Sandpipers, a Redshank, three Kentish Plover, two Ringed Plover, a Grey Plover and the star of the show a Greater Sand Plover of the *columbinus* race; which I had previously experienced in Cyprus.

Day Seven

During the return trip to Benghazi for our evening flight we stopped at Qasr Libya to view many well preserved mosaics. Three Ravens were noted near here along with several more Starlings, a Southern Grey Shrike and in fields adjoining the site about sixty Golden Plover. Approximately 80Km east of Benghazi in coastal lagoons a flock of Greater Flamingo were noted.

Day Eight

Before flying home another Southern Grey Shrike, Palm Dove and two House Sparrows were seen from the coach. I usually conclude with a comment about an uneventful flight. Unfortunately on this occasion I am unable to end in the familiar way. A gentleman sitting next to my wife caused a bit of a stir and a little amusement when his glass eye fell out and a search around the floor took place. Several tasteless/amusing (depending on your point of view) comments were heard and of course, I contributed a few.

SUMMARY

Libya was completely safe with no trouble at all. People we met, even in the Tripoli medina, exploring by ourselves, were very friendly, helpful and polite. There are some excellent restaurants serving both local and international cuisine that are reasonably priced. The archaeological sites are fantastic and

birding in and around them produced some good birds. The country is worthy of further exploration, although travelling alone and not as part of an organised tour appears very problematic.