

Field report on migration counts at Ras Siyyan -Bab el Manded strait, Djibouti, 2-10 March 2013 and fitting of GPS PTT to Egyptian vulture at Tadjoura, Djibouti, 11-12 March 2013.

M. McGrady (MM), International Avian Research, Am Rosenhügel 59, 3500 Krems, Austria (mikejmcgrady@aol.com).

H. Rayaleh (HR), Djibouti Nature, P. O. Box 3088 -Djibouti, Djibouti (natureddjibouti@gmail.com).

E. O. Abdillahi (EA), Djibouti Nature, Djibouti, Djibouti (eleyehomar1@gmail.com).

A. M. Darar (AD), Djibouti Nature, Djibouti, Djibouti (mouhoumed.ali@hotmail.com).

Schedule

25-26 Feb	MM travels to Djibouti.
26-28 Feb	HR, EA and MM prepare for field work.
1 March	HR, EA, MM leave Djibouti, pick up AD at Arta and travel on to Ras Siyyan.
2 -10 March	Observation of migration in vicinity of Ras Siyyan.
10 March	HR, EA, AD and MM travel to Tadjoura.
11 March	Trap EV at Tadjoura abattoir. Fit with solar powered GPS PTT.
12 March	Attempt to trap EV at Tadjoura abattoir. Travel to Djibouti.
13 March	In Djibouti
14 March	MM leaves Djibouti

Field notes

25-26 February, Travel to Djibouti

Trip was long, but connections were good. No problems. All flights to Djibouti go through Addis Ababa, and are relatively expensive (\$1500). Flight went Vienna-Frankfurt-Addis Ababa-Djibouti. Djibouti is two hours ahead of Central European Time. Visa is available at the airport (\$90). Stand in line, then go to office to pay, then go through border control. Pick up bags on other side. Many people trying to “help” with bags and will try to extort too much in tips. Travel into city takes about 10 minutes.

26-27 February, Preparing for field work

Stay at Hotel Menelik. About \$90/night including all taxes and breakfast. Clean. Friendly staff. Internet works. Directly on one of the central squares, but still relatively quiet. Good

restaurants nearby that sell beer, wine and spirits. Easy to get almost everything we need for field work. Good hardware store nearby and sports store with fishing tackle.

We visit (twice over the two days in Djibouti city) the large municipal dump at Douda, just outside town. There are large amounts of biological waste from the Djibouti city's abattoir, but no scavenging raptors. Many Abdim's storks were seen. Despite their number, only a single pair nests in Djibouti city, because Indian house crows (an invasive bird species) have driven the storks and other native breeding bird species away. It is unknown where the nearest Abdim's stork breeding concentrations are. Many dogs were at the dump site. There is a new high voltage power line connecting with Ethiopia that passes near the dump, but this does not appear to be dangerous in terms of risk of electrocution because power pylons are very large (In travelling around Djibouti it seems that most medium voltage power lines do not appear dangerous. However, pylons at locations where the path of the line changes are different than others, and appear to be dangerous). A new dump site, located nearby, is to be brought into service. We make short tours to the south of the city towards the Somalia border, and along the coast south of the city. There is a large mudflat that is exposed at low tide, where we saw a small number of shorebird and seabird species. Mudflats are important during migration and wintering. In the evening of the 27th we shop for provisions for the field work.

28 Feb, Djibouti city to Ras Siyyan/Bab el Mandeb strait

HR, EA and MM leave Djibouti city around 1100, after picking up a few final supplies (drinking water and bread). HR has packed the vehicle with camping gear and the food purchased the night before. We drive west to Arta (40 km outside Djibouti), where we pick up AD, and continue around the Goubet al Karab Bay, the southwest end of the Gulf of Tadjoura. We arrive at Tadjoura town at about 1500. We have a beer, coffee and then dinner at the Le Golfe hotel and restaurant, a clean, friendly staff and internet. This is a nice, useful place to get a decent meal, beer, showers, accommodation, etc., and was used by us as a base station during the days of trapping. We see EGVU and Booted eagle along the way. EGVU often seen near settlements either singly or in "pairs". It was unclear whether "pairs" of EGVU are breeders or overwintering birds or if they are breeding pairs. We camp about 2 km east of Tadjoura (take road signed to Sable Blanc). Our original plans were to try to capture EGVU at the abattoir in Tadjoura during 2-3 March, but we decided against it. We push on towards Ras Siyyan to commence migration counts, and aim to spend two mornings on the return trip to attempt to capture vultures at Tadjoura and fit them with solar GPS PTTs. 60+ vultures of a variety of ages are seen at the abattoir.

1 March, Tadjoura to Ras Siyyan

Travel to Ras Siyyan. See EGVUs at settlements along the way, including at Oroboro. Pass through Obock, the regional capital of Obock region. Obock is the nearest town to Ras Siyyan (about 60 km distant). Drive to Ras Siyyan, first trying a more coastal approach toward Godoria, a large area of mangrove about 25 km North of Obock. Sabkha stops us at Godoria, and we take a more inland route. We pick up a local guide, Ahmed Ali Hamadou, at Khor Angar, the nearest human settlement to our final destination, and get permission from

the local Djibouti military presence to travel on to and camp at Ras Siyyan. Khor Angar has bottled water, brackish water for washing, and a clinic. Set up camp on the beach of the Ras Siyyan lagoon, about 300 m from the volcanic cone at Ras Siyyan. The lagoon is a base for a few fishermen and some camel herders. Very windy and no significant migration observed during the afternoon of the 1st day at Ras Siyyan, but observations were not formally made. Table 1 are results of the migration counts.

Table 1. Counts of migrating raptors in the vicinity of Ras Siyyan, 2-10 March 2013.

	02-Mar	03-Mar	04-Mar	05-Mar	06-Mar	07-Mar	08-Mar	09-Mar	10-Mar	TOTAL	%
Egyptian Vulture	29	84	233	15	73	71	309	158	195	1167	25.58
Booted Eagle	37	166	271	67	55	315	276	369	217	1773	38.86
Short toed eagle	0	0	5	11	5	6	66	64	69	226	4.95
Steppe Eagle	2	2	4	7	0	8	17	29	7	76	1.67
Imperial Eagle	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	0	2	8	0.18
Honey Buzzard	1	1	4	4	0	4	5	0	2	21	0.46
Long-legged Buzzard	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.04
Lanner Falcon	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0.04
Kestrel	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0.07
Lesser spotted eagle	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.07
Shikra	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0.04
Bonelli's eagle	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	4	0.09
Pallid Harrier	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.02
Marsh Harrier	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.02
Unidentified falcon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.02
Unidentified raptor (likely eagle)	3	21	105	50	3	81	526	311	172	1272	27.88
TOTAL	78	277	625	155	136	490	1205	931	665	4562	

2- 5 March, Ras Siyyan

Observations were made from beach (VP1:12°, 28.757'; 43°, 18.779') and from two locations (VP2: 12°, 28.567'; 43°, 19.075'; VP3 12°, 28.391'; 43°, 19.371') on the volcanic cone at Ras Siyyan. The initial purpose was to monitor migration, and see if our results correspond to those of Welch and Welch (1991), which were made over a very limited number of days under unusual weather conditions. Weather conditions during our observations were also “unusual” in that abnormally strong east and northeast winds predominated (especially during 2-4 March). We were told that these winds were unusually strong by local fishermen who could not go to sea because of them.

Our observations during this time were in close concurrence with those by Welch and Welch

(1991). Migration started after 0800, with the arrival of EGVUs flying low over the lagoon from the west and northwest. Migration would build until about 0930-1100, during which time most birds arriving at Ras Siyyan would gain height and embark across the sea toward Yemen. As the morning progressed more and more birds arriving at Ras Siyyan would gain height and then drift south and south east over land and not make the crossing within sight of our vantage points. Also, the composition of the visible migration from Ras Siyyan changed during the mornings with booted eagles becoming more common later and numbers of EGVUs declining. During 0930 -1130 sometimes large mixed flocks comprised almost entirely of booted eagles and EGVUs could be seen gaining altitude to the south and disappearing upwards or southwards. No obvious point of embarkation was identified. Some, maybe most, continued to soar over land and drift south out of sight. Visible migration at Ras Siyyan after 1100 was very small, and almost no migration was seen after 1200 until dark. The strong east and north east winds continued throughout the period.

On the afternoon of 5 March we moved camp to a location west of Khor Angar (12°, 23.854'; 43°, 17.04.6') to enable us to better observe the migration as it moved south each morning.

6-10 March, Ras Siyyan and Khor Angar

We made observations from a site near the volcanic cone (Herkalou) over which raptors were seen to soar during late morning (VP3: 12°25.413'; 43°17.007') and the new campsite (VP4: 12°, 23.854'; 43°, 17.04.6'), and VP2 at Ras Siyyan. Because we were seeing no substantial numbers of migrants in the afternoon, we used the afternoons to search other areas to the south and west to try to locate the flow of migrating birds. The strong winds moderated slightly, but continued throughout the period, shifting toward the ESE during 8-10 March.

The results of the observations are included in Table 1. On the afternoon of 8 March we explored to the south of our camp as far as the plateaus "Kada –Gueini" or "Tables of Godoria" (200+ m) at the coast (approx. 12°, 14.348'; 43°, 22.998') and inland to a distance of about 5 km. We explored to the east of our camp on 9 March, following the large wadi to the village of Lahassa, located about 20 km inland. Some individual birds were seen during these exploratory journeys, but no concentration of the migration was seen. On 10 March, as we were leaving the study area we did observe a significant migration of eagles over the plateaus. Twenty four booted and short toed eagles were seen migrating over the plateaus, heading south along the coast and out of site. None were seen to embark toward Yemen.

After noon, 10 March was spent driving to Obock, then to Tadjoura, where we cleaned up, and prepared for trapping of Egyptian vultures at the abattoir the next morning.

11-12 Mar, Tadjoura and trip to Djibouti

On 11 March we set up pandem noose traps at the local abattoir, using hen's eggs and offal as bait. Trapping began at about 0730. About 24 nooses were set up. Up to 16 EGVUs were at the abattoir, significantly fewer than the 60+ we observed here on 1 March. We captured an adult Egyptian vulture at 0845, and closed down the trap site to fit the bird with a Northstar solar powered GPS-PTT (Duty cycle: Acquire 8 GPS locations/day, Transmit 8 hours ON/58

hours OFF). Vultures were very cautious and mostly avoided the nooses. We may need to redesign them for better effect. Fit vulture with satellite tag, measure and ring with Bulgarian ring (K5092). Released the bird by 1000. It flew well and disappeared. Rest of afternoon spent catching up with administration and resting, as we did not want to disturb the vultures at the abattoir again on that day.

On 12 March set up pandem traps again. About 35 nooses were used. Trapping started at 0730. We had one bird trapped at around 1000, but it slipped the noose. We continued to trap, but without success, although vultures continued to visit the bait. We stopped at 1145, due to increased interest by cattle and local people and decreased interest being shown by the vultures. The satellite tagged bird was not observed. Possibilities seem to exist for other trapping methods including nets and bow nets. Birds are very wary, and the site is where people and cattle walk, so always the possibility of disturbance. It is not known whether any of these birds are resident.

After lunch we travel back to Djibouti, dropping AD off at Arta. Arrive in Djibouti at about 1430. Check into hotel Menelik.

13-14 March, Djibouti

Work on reports, project accounts, and discuss possibilities for further work on migration and Djibouti francolin.

Literature cited

Welch, G., and Welch H. 1991. Spring raptor observations from Djibouti. *OSME Bull.* 26: 25-27.