

Although Red-breasted Flycatchers have not so far been recorded from Taiwan (King *et al.* 1975) it would be wrong to conclude that the birds from Borneo and Palawan must therefore have crossed the South China Sea. It remains a possibility that migration through Taiwan, Palawan and Borneo takes place, albeit on a small scale.

The increased observer effort in the Philippines over the past few years (e.g. Kennedy *et al.* 1986) has resulted in an increase in the number of species recorded in these islands; further investigations could well show that some of the species currently classed as rare migrants and vagrants do, in fact, occur regularly in small numbers. As pointed out by White (*in* White & Bruce 1986) for Wallacea, Palaearctic migrants have generally been neglected, since collectors have concentrated on indigenous and montane birds, and few residents study the birds or make field observations.

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## On the possible former breeding of the Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* in Algeria

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Based on his examination of eggs originally in the Tristram Collection and now in the British Museum (Natural History), Walters (1988) lends support to the statement by Loche (1867) that the Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* bred in Algeria in the mid-19th century, an assertion dismissed by Heim de Balsac & Mayaud (1962) and ignored by recent authors other than Ledant *et al.* (1981) who draw attention to the formers' opinion.

While we cannot contribute positive evidence of former breeding we can, however, provide supplementary recent information on the data accompanying Tristram's specimens for the 2 locations concerned—"forest south of Lac Halloula" and "neighbourhood of Air Oosera. Lac (illegible)"—adding further circumstantial evidence that the species bred in Algeria in the past.

Lac Halloula was drained for cultivation probably before the end of the 19th century but is still indicated on some recent maps as "Ancien Lac Halloula". It was situated some 65 km SW of Algiers and c. 2 km SE of Sidi Rached (*ex Montebello*) at an altitude of c. 58 m. The lake is not mentioned by Rothschild & Hartert (1912), nor by Ticehurst & Whistler (1938). The surroundings of the former lake are described by Thos Cook (1926) as "miles of well cultivated farms and vineyards". S.J.F. visited the area in 1982, vineyards and orchards still being abundant there. Modern maps show some forest on the northern slopes of Djebel Guerrouat, c. 20 km S of the former lake, but our recent inspection of the Djebel shows that the area is now only lightly wooded. Tristram's nesting site (ref "W.a." "in the forest south of Lac Halloula") would thus be 36°35'N, 2°30'E if located on the N slope of Djebel Guerrouat.

"Air Oosera. Lac (illegible)" undoubtedly refers to Aïn Oussera, a town some 30 km S of Lac Bougzoul (referred to as Lac Boughzoul by some authors) and at an elevation of about 687 m. At 35°27'N, 2°55'E the town would be on the route of Tristram's journeys between Algiers and Laghouat. The lake and its immediate surroundings are described by Francois (1975) and Jacob & Jacob (1980). We have visited the area many times before and after those publication dates. The lake's artificial limits are augmented to the south by a series of *daiet* (temporary flood zones). Today the area is treeless except for a few *Tamarix* sp. on some islets and the extensive reedbeds surrounding the artificial lake are of recent origin. The adjacent steppe between and beyond the *daiet* supports a scattered low herbaceous vegetation partly under nomad or permanent cultivation and pasture. It is probable that climatic conditions were more humid in Tristram's time.

Our field notes (notably 1968–69) show that halfa *Stipa tenacissima* steppe begins just S of Aïn Oussera, varied by a number of scattered *daias* (shallow depressions containing loose moisture-retaining soil but never flooded) (see Plate 2). They support Pistachio *Pistachia atlantica* trees up to 10 m in height, clumps of Jujube *Ziziphus lotus* and low scrub. Here as elsewhere the *Pistachia* are nesting sites of Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* and Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*. Varying in width from 50 to 150 m, these *daias* and surrounding steppe have probably remained substantially unchanged for a very long time.

The locations of Lac Halloula and Aïn Oussera (Lac Bougzoul) would have provided at least some of the habitat requirements of *Falco vespertinus* as listed by Cramp & Simmons (1980) (e.g. open terrain fringed or interspersed with trees, fens or bogs, steppe and forest clearings) together with a readily available food supply (insects, small amphibians, reptiles and rodents) and old nests of e.g. Ardeidae at Lac Halloula and Corvidae near Aïn Oussera for breeding.

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## Remarks on the osteology of the Madagascan warblers *Dromaeocercus* and *Amphilais* (Sylviidae)

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On the basis of external morphology, and to some extent behaviour, Parker (1984) considered that the two Madagascan warblers *Dromaeocercus brunneus* and *D. seebohmi* were only convergently similar in possessing long, decomposed tail feathers. He regarded the type species of *D. brunneus* as belonging to the genus *Bradypterus*, whereas *D. seebohmi* was said to belong with the megalurine warblers and was made the type of a new genus, *Amphilais*. Traylor (1986) evidently was not convinced by Parker's arguments and listed *Amphilais* as a synonym of *Dromaeocercus*.

Examination of the cranial osteology of these 2 species fully supports Parker's contention that they are not congeneric. Compared to *Dromaeocercus brunneus*, the skull in *Amphilais seebohmi* is markedly narrower, the cranium not nearly so broad, and in dorsal view the frontals are much less laterally expanded, in part reflecting the much smaller ectethmoid plates. The bill in *Amphilais* is more slender, with the osseous nares proportionately longer; the transpalatine processes are also much longer and more slender than in *D. brunneus*. Unfortunately, the post-cranial skeleton was rather badly damaged in the single available skeleton of *Amphilais seebohmi* examined, so no useful comparison could be made there. Nevertheless, the cranial differences are greater than would be expected among congeneric species of Sylviidae.



Johnson, E D H and Farnsworth, S. John. 1990. "ON THE POSSIBLE FORMER BREEDING OF THE RED-FOOTED FALCON *FALCO-VESPERTINUS* IN ALGERIA." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 110, 7-9.

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