

Birding in Somaliland, November 2019

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I visited Somaliland for work between 3rd and 15th November 2019. I spent several days in Hargeisa, shuffling between the Hotel Ambassador and the UNICEF Office located on the high plateau not far from the airport. I managed to do some birding in the garden of the hotel and spotted few additional species during the drives to/from the office.

Between 6th and 11th November, I went on a field trip to Tog Wajaale, Boroma and Lughaya, stopping at several small villages and hamlets for work reasons. I managed to do some birding early in the mornings and in between meetings and project visits.

Lughaya, a small town (~6-8,000 pp.) on the Aden Gulf coast, is bordered on the east and the west by two brackish water lagoons. A small military garrison is located close to the western lagoon, which makes the place far from ideal for birding, as jittery soldiers consider binoculars as suspicious equipment. However, I managed to spend about one hour birding part of the eastern lagoon and the beach separating it from the ocean, with some nice records. A large (several hundred birds) terns and gulls roost was present on the far side of the lagoon, but without a spotting scope it was impossible to investigate it thoroughly.

Finally, following the advice of the always resourceful and helpful Bram Piot (merci!), I managed to organize a daily excursion to the Tuuyo plain with Abdi Jama. We left at 5:45am and with several stops along the road, we reached Tuuyo plain around 1pm; indeed a very long road. We spent about two hours birding the plain, made greener than usual by good rains in the past weeks, and we got Somali and Blanford's (Red-capped) Larks. Unfortunately, we missed the main target there – the Lesser Hoopoe-lark. Abdi was surprised, as it was the first time he could not find it in this location where it is normally showing well and in good numbers. Possibly, the unusual rains induced it to move. The trip back to Hargeisa was again very long – with some good records though – and we were back at the hotel at 7:45pm. Long day!

Annotated Species List

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

1. Sacred Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*): 3-4 birds in Tog Wajaale

ARDEIDAE

2. Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*): 4-6 individuals close to livestock outside Tog Wajaale

3. Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*): 2 birds, both dark morph, in Lughaya
4. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*): 1 at the western lagoon in Lughaya
5. Black-headed Heron (*A. melanocephala*): one in flight outside Hargeisa

ACCIPITRIDAE

6. Hooded Vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*): a flock of ~10 individuals in flight over the Ambassador Hotel, plus 2 more individuals perching on a communication antenna in town.
7. Yellow-billed Kite (*Milvus migrans aegyptius*): several individuals in Tog Wajaale and Boroma
8. Booted Eagle (*Hieraeetus pennatus*): 1 pale morph close to Lughaya
9. Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*): 6-8 individuals in flight over hill close to Boroma; three immature got very low, showing well the sharp white line on the underwings and the white rump
10. Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*): one in flight just outside Hargeisa
11. Easter Chanting Goshawk (*Melierax poliopterus*): 4-5 individuals in flight and perching in different locations close to Hargeisa, on the way to Tuuyo

FALCONIDAE

12. Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*): 1 in Boroma, and 1 along the road to Lughaya
13. Lesser Kestrel (*F. naumanni*): ~15 birds in flight and then perching in Lughaya
14. Saker Falcon (*F. cherrug*): 1 very low in flight over Lughaya, close to the western lagoon. Initially I thought it was a juvenile Lanner – for the heavily mottled underwing coverts – but when it approached, its very large size (the biggest Falconidae I've ever seen!) and the smudged, not sharp face mask, allowed to properly ID it. It is given as vagrant in Somalia and the Birds of the Horn of Africa (Redman et al.) indicates some records for western Somaliland. HBW also indicates the possibility to have it in coastal areas.
15. Pygmy Falcon (*Polihierax semitorquatus*): 1 along the Boroma-Lughaya road and 2 more along the road to Tuuyo.

OTIDIDAE

16. Kori Bustard (*Ardeotis kori*): one on the way back from Tuuyo

17. Buff-breasted Bustard (*Lophotis gindiana*): 5 birds, in pairs or single, along the way to Tuuyo
18. Little Brown Bustard (*Eupodotis humilis*): 6-7 birds, in pairs or single, along the way to Tuuyo

CICONIIDAE

19. Abdim's Stork (*Ciconia abdimii*): a group of ~8-10 individual in flight over the Ambassador Hotel in the evening
20. Black Stork (*C. nigra*): 2 birds (1 adult, 1 immature) along the Kabrir Bahar river on the road between Boroma and Lughaya, and a flock of ~20 birds flying over Boroma in the late afternoon.

BURHINIDAE

21. Spotted Thick-knee (*Burhinus capensis*): 1 under a bush close to UNICEF office in Hargeisa

CHARADRIDAE

22. Spur-winged Lapwing (*Vanellus spinosus*): 1 along the road outside Tog Wajaale
23. Crowned Lapwing (*V. coronatus*): several individuals (6-8) in the outskirts of Tog Wajaale, and several small groups (3-12 ind.) along the road to Tuuyo
24. Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*): 1 along the Lughaya beach
25. Kentish Plover (*C. alexandrinus*): 4-6 along the Lughaya beach
26. Lesser Sand-plover (*C. mongolus*): 3 along the Lughaya beach
27. Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*): 1 along the Lughaya beach

SCOLOPACIDAE

28. Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*): 2 birds along the Lughaya beach
29. Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*): 3 birds along the Lughaya beach
30. Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*): 1 at the eastern lagoon in Lughaya
31. Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*): 2 at the eastern lagoon in Lughaya
32. Sanderling (*C. alba*): 6-8 birds along the Lughaya beach
33. Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*): 1 birds along the Lughaya beach

DROMADIDAE

34. Crab-plover (*Dromas ardeola*): 12 birds along the Lughaya beach

GLAREOLIDAE

35. Somali Courser (*Cursorius somalensis*): 2 birds along the road outside Tog Wajaale, and 2 in a field just outside Boroma. One large group (12-15 ind.) at our breakfast stop along the road to Tuuyo, plus few more birds along the same road.

36. Double-banded Courser (*Rhinoptilus africanus*): two separate individuals along the road back from Tuuyo

LARIDAE

37. Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus fuscus*): ~10 birds along the Lughaya beach

38. Heuglin's Gull (*L. fuscus heuglini*): ~20 birds along the Lughaya beach

39. White-eyed Gull (*L. leucopthalmus*): 3 birds along the Lughaya beach

40. Lesser Crested Tern (*Sterna bengalensis*): Hundreds; the most common Tern in Lughaya; the large roost on the far away side of the eastern lagoon probably composed mainly by this species (too far for bins).

41. Greater Crested Tern (*S. bergi*): counted ~20 immature birds. Probably more in the large roost

42. Caspian Tern (*S. caspia*): ~6 birds in flight or on the beach in Lughaya

43. Gull-billed Tern (*S. nilotica*): ~10 in flight over the beach in Lughaya

44. Saunders's Tern (*Sternula saundersi*): one single bird fishing in the eastern lagoon in Lughaya

TYTONIDAE

45. Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*): 1 inside the pumping station shed in Tog Wajaale

PTEROCLIDAE

46. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*): several flocks (2-30 ind.) in flight and on the ground in different locations along the road to Tuuyo

COLUMBIDAE

47. African Mourning Dove (*Streptopelia decipiens*): 2 in the Hotel garden in Hargeisa and one in town in Boroma

48. Laughing Dove (*S. senegalensis*): common in all towns visited

49. Ring-necked Dove (*S. capicola*): common in rural areas and small villages

50. Speckled Pigeon (*Columba guinea*): common in nearly all locations visited

51. Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*): common both in urban and rural areas

PSITTACIDAE

52. African Orange-bellied Parrot (*Poicephalus rufiventris*): one single bird on top of a tree along the road to Tuuyo

MUSOPHAGIDAE

53. White-bellied Go-away-bird (*Corythaixoides leucogaster*): common close to Boroma, plus few birds along the road to Tuuyo

CUCULIDAE

54. Diederik Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx caprius*): one immature bird being fed by a Lesser Masked Weaver in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel in Hargeisa

APODIDAE

55. Little Swift (*Apus affinis*): groups of up to 20-30 individuals in flight over Hargeisa and Boroma

COLIIDAE

56. Blue-naped Mousebird (*Urocolius macrourus*): small groups of 3-4 ind. in the garden of the hotel in Hargeisa and in Boroma, plus few birds along the road to Tuuyo

MEROPIDAE

57. Somali Bee-eater (*Merops revoilii*): 1 in flight outside Tog Wajaale, plus numerous single birds along the road to Tuuyo

58. *Merops* sp.: a small flock (4-5 birds) of large-size Bee-eaters flew over against the bright sky in Gargaara (one the way back from Lughaya). When I tried to look at them with the binoculars, people started shouting at me, so I had to stop. Very poor view of shapes only: mid-length of central tail feathers made me think of Blue-cheeked (*M. persicus*) or Madagascar/Olive (*M. superciliosus*), both apparently possible in this area and in this season.

CORACIIDAE

59. Purple Roller (*Coracias naevius*): 2 along the Boroma-Lughaya road

60. European Roller (*C. garrulous*): one close to Boroma

61. Lilac-breasted Roller (*C. caudatus*): one just outside Boroma

PHOENICULIDAE

62. Black-billed Wood-hoopoe (*Phoeniculus somaliensis*): one outside Tog Wajaale

63. Abyssinian Scimitarbill (*Rhinopomastus minor*): 2 in different location along the road between Boroma and Lughaya, plus one birds in flight along the road to Tuuyo

UPUPIDAE

64. Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*): 2 individuals close to UNICEF office in Hargeisa and one along the road south of Boroma. Several more birds along the road to Tuuyo

BUCEROTIDAE

65. Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill (*Tockus flavirostris*): one along the Boroma – Lughaya road, and one along the road to Tuuyo
66. Red-billed Hornbill (*T. erythrorhynchus*): two separate individuals along the Boroma – Lughaya road.

LYBIIDAE

67. Yellow-breasted Barbet (*Trachyphonus margaritatus*): 1 along the Boroma-Lughaya road, and one just outside Boroma
68. Red-and-yellow Barbet (*T. erythrocephalus*): two birds at the lunch spot in the woodland along the road to Tuuyo

ALAUDIDAE

69. Thekla Lark (*Galerida theklae*): several individuals, normally in pairs, around UNICEF office, close to the airport and one birds at Tuuyo plain
70. Somali Lark (*Mirafra somalica*): 3 confiding birds seen very well, plus a single one at Tuuyo plain. Very long bill and pale coloration make it match well with image of nominate Ssp. on Redman et al.
71. Gillet's Lark (*M. gilletti*): 2 birds singing from top of bushes at the lunch stop in the wooded area before Tuuyo plain.
72. Blanford's (Rufous-capped, as per HBW) Lark (*Calandrella blanfordi doroodensis*): 1 single bird well seen on Tuuyo plain.
73. Desert Lark (*Ammomanes deserti*): 2 birds not far from Hargeisa and a few more (2-3) separately along the road to Tuuyo
74. Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark (*Eremopterix leucotis*): 1 along the road close to Boroma
75. Black-crowned Sparrow-lark (*E. nigriceps*): 2 along the road outside Tog Wajaale
76. Chestnut-headed Sparrow-lark (*E. signatus*): common along the road to Tuuyo plain, with a large group at the breakfast stop, and literally dozens of birds at Tuuyo plain.

HIRUNDINIDAE

77. Ethiopian Swallow (*Hirundo aethiopica*): common in all towns visited and in some of the smaller villages
78. Barn Swallow (*H. rustica*): several individuals in Tog Wajaale

MOTACILLIDAE

79. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*): at least 15 individuals in and around Gargaara, along the Boroma – Lughaya road, and one more in a small village along the road to Tuuyo

PYCNONOTIDAE

80. Somali Bulbul (*Pycnonotus somaliensis*): common in all towns visited, and a few on the way to Tuuyo

SYLVIIDAE

81. European Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*): 1 female in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel
82. Banded Parisoma (*Parisoma boehmi*): one seen and several heard in the wooded area before Tuuyo

CISTICOLIDAE

83. Desert Cisticola (*Cisticola aridulus*): 1 bird well seen and several heard on Tuuyo plain
84. Graceful Prinia (*Prinia gracilis*): 1 bird singing from the top of a mangrove bush on the eastern lagoon in Lughaya
85. Pale Prinia (*P. somalica*): 1 adult and one juvenile in the garden of the Saw Hotel in Boroma
86. Grey Wren-warbler (*Calamonastes simplex*): 1 well seen and several heard at the lunch spot in the wooded area before Tuuyo
87. Red-fronted Warbler: 3 well seen and singing at the lunch spot in the wooded area before Tuuyo
88. Yellow-bellied Eremomela (*Eremomela icteropygialis*): one birds in close to a village outside Hargeisa and one in the wooded area before Tuuyo

MUSCICAPIDAE

89. Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*): most common Wheatear, seen around the edges of every town and villages visited and along the road.
90. Northern Wheatear (*O. oenanthe*): few individuals seen close to UNICEF office in Hargeisa and along the road to Boroma.

91. Somali Wheatear (*O. phillipsi*): at least four individuals in different locations along the Boroma-Lughaya road
92. Pied Wheatear (*O. pleaschanka*): 3 birds in different location along the road to Tuuyo
93. Blackstart (*Cercomela melanura*): 2 in different locations along the Boroma-Lughaya road
94. Common Rock-thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*): one female close to UNICEF office in Hargeisa
95. African Grey Flycatcher (*Bradornis microrhynchus*): 1 in Tog Wajaale
96. Rufous Scrub-robin (*Cercotrichas galctotes*): one bird in the scrubs along the Boroma-Lughaya road
97. White-browed Scrub-robin (*C. leucophrys*): 2 birds at the breakfast stop along the road to Tuuyo
98. Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*): 1 female/immature on a tree in Lughaya

PLATYSTEIRIDAE

99. Grey-headed Batis (*Batis orientalis*): one close to Tog Wajaale

NECTARINIDAE

100. Shining Sunbird (*Cinnyris habessinicus*): male and female at Ambassador Hotel and one female at Saw Hotel in Boroma
101. Marico Sunbird (*C. mariquensis*): male and female in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel and several individuals in the gardens of the Rays and Saw hotels in Boroma

LANIIDAE

102. Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*): 1 outside Tog Wajaale
103. Red-tailed (Turkestan) Shrike (*L. phoenicuroides*): 2 along the Boroma-Lughaya road and 1 along the road to Tuuyo
104. Somali Fiscal (*L. somalicus*): a few birds along the road to Lughaya, and several more along the road to Tuuyo
105. Northern White-crowned Shrike: one on the outskirts of Hargeisa and 2 birds at the lunch stop in the wooded area before Tuuyo
106. Brubru (*Nilaus afer*): one bird heard and seen close to village on the way to Tuuyo

MALACONOTIDAE

107. Rosy-patched Bush-shrike (*Rhodophoneus cruentus*): 3 birds well seen and more heard in a small hamlet not from from Hargeisa, on the road to Tuuyo

DICRURIDAE

108. Fork-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*): several bird (15-20), single or in pairs in different locations outside of towns.

CORVIDAE

109. Somali Crow (Dwarf Raven) (*Corvus edithae*): several individuals in Hargeisa, Boroma, Lughaya and along the road to Lughaya.
110. Hybrids Somali/Pied Crows in two small villages along the road to Lughaya.
111. House Crow (*C. splendens*): a colony of more than 100 birds in Lughaya; several nests

STURNIDAE

112. Superb Starling (*Lamprotornis superbus*): common outside Tog Wajaale and Boroma
113. Wattled Starling (*Creatophora cinerea*): a flogk of ~8 birds over the Rays hotel in Boroma
114. Greater Blue-eared Starling (*Lamprotornis chalybaeus*): two birds on a hill just outside Boroma
115. Golden-breasted Starling (*Cosmopsarus regius*): one bird well seen on the road back from Tuuyo
116. White-crowned Starling (*Spreo albicapillus*): small groups in Lughaya (4-6 birds each) and some more along the road to Tuuyo.
117. Violet-backed Starling (*Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*): one female feeding an immature, on the way to Tuuyo

BUPHAGIDAE

118. Red-billed Oxpecker (*Buphagus erythrorhynchus*): 6-8 birds on a single camel close to the village of Old Baki, along the road to Lughaya

PASSERIDAE

119. Swainson's Sparrow (*Passer swainsonii*): common in all towns and villages visited
120. Shelley's Rufous Sparrow (*P. shelleyi*): 2 outside Tog Wajaale
121. Somali Sparrow (*P. castanopterus*): ~8-10 in Lughaya

122. Yellow-spotted Petronia (*Petronia pyrgita*): one pair at the nest (in a acacia tree hole) in a small hamlet outside Hergeisa, on the road to Tuuyo

PLOCEIDAE

123. Lesser Masked Weaver (*Ploceus intermedius*): a small colony (~20-30 birds) in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel
124. Ruppell's Weaver (*P. galbula*): a small colony (~10-15 birds) in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel, plus other colonies in several villages visited during the trip to Lughaya
125. Chestnut Weaver (*P. rubiginosus*): 4 males and 2 females in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel
126. Vitelline Masked Weaver (*P. vitellinus*): small colony of ~20 birds on a tree in one of the small villages along the Boroma-Lughaya road
127. White-headed Buffalo-weaver (*Dinemellia dinemelli*): few individuals outside Tog Wajaale and several individuals along the way to Tuuyo
128. Red-billed Buffalo Weaver (*Bubalornis niger*): one individual along on the way back from Tuuyo
129. Red-billed Quelea (*Quelea quelea*): a couple of birds outside Tog Wajaale
130. Northern Red Bishop (*Euplectes franciscanus*): 2 in and outside Boroma

ESTRILDIDAE

131. Red-billed Firefinch (*Lagonosticta senegala*): a small group (10-12) in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel
132. Cut-throat Finch (*Amandina fasciata*): a small colony (~10-12 birds) in the garden of the Ambassador Hotel
133. Black-cheeked Waxbill (*Estrilda chamosyna*): two birds in at the lunch stop in the woods before Tuuyo
134. Red-cheeked Cordonbleu (*Uraeginthus bengalus*): two birds at the breakfast stop, and another one in a small village on the way to Tuuyo. Distribution map of this species on 'Redman et al.' does not extend into Somaliland, and all birds I saw did not show the red spot. I reckon though, they should be anyway female and/or immature from this species, and not from the similar Blue-capped CB (*U. cyanocephalus*), whose distribution stops in the extreme south of Somalia.

VIDUIDAE

135. Eastern Paradise Whydah (*Vidua paradisaea*): several birds (6-8) in full breeding plumage (very long, beautiful tails) in different sections of the way to Tuuyo.

FRINGILLIDAE

136. White-bellied Canary (*Serinus dorsostriatus*): common in the countryside around Tog Wajaale