

Observations of Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* at Oukaimeden (High Atlas, Morocco)

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The Eleonora's Falcon is a long-migrant species that breeds in scattered colonies over the Mediterranean region, with small colonies located in some Atlantic and Mediterranean islands and the Moroccan coast (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Mayol 1996). Two breeding colonies are known in Morocco: one on islets near the coast at Essaouira and the other one on mainland sea cliff North of Salé. Eleonora's Falcons breeding in these areas winter in Madagascar and return to the Atlantic coast of Morocco for mating between late April and early June (Bergier 1987, Thévenot *et al.* 2003).

Migratory routes followed by this falcon species have been a mystery for long. The main hypothesis has proposed a route across the Mediterranean towards Suez, down the Red Sea coast, around the Horn of Africa and along the East Africa coast to reach wintering areas in Madagascar (Walter 1979). Other studies, however, have fuelled speculation that the species may also migrate via African continent (Delgado & Quilis 1990, Ristow & Wink 1992). Recent studies with satellite telemetry methods showed birds that followed inland route across the African continent in migration (Gschweng *et al.* 2008, López-López *et al.* 2009).

We present three different observations of Eleonora's Falcon in late June in the Western High Atlas: three birds (30 June 2008) and two individuals (22 June 2009) flying over Oukaimeden village (31°13'N-7°52'W, altitude 2600 m), and other group of seven falcons hunting in alpine grassland habitat, one kilometre to the South-East of Oukaimeden (23 June 2009).

There has been no previous information about this falcon in this high mountain area (Barreau & Bergier 2000, Barreau & Bergier 2001, Barreau *et al.* 1987).

These observations may correspond to birds in their spring migration and agree with the hypothesis that this species migrate through inland Africa (Delgado & Quilis 1990, Ristow & Wink 1992, Gschweng *et al.* 2008, López-López *et al.* 2009). Although these observations could also correspond to juveniles or non-breeding individuals spending the summer in areas with low intra-specific competence (see Ristow & Wink 1992), the fact that all observed individuals displayed fully-adult plumages support the first idea. In conclusion, the abovementioned field observations support the idea that a migratory route through mainland Africa exists in the pre-breeding migration of the Eleonora's Falcon.

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Note (Redac): additional records from mainland Morocco include a bird in active Northward migration at Agdz, 30°42'N-6°26'W, on 28 March 1999 (B. Maire *et al.*) and another one at Dayet Srij, Merzouga, 31°05'N-4°02'W, on 30 March 2007 (A.B. van den Berg)



Faucon d'Eléonore. Essaouira, août 2009 (Photo Sébastien Durand)