

AN OBSERVATION OF BATELEUR *TERATHOPIUS ECAUDATUS* IN  
NORTHERN TUNISIA

During a study of migration strategies of passerines carried out in Tunisia during the springs of 1989 and 1990 by the Ottenby Ornithological Research Centre, I spent six weeks in April and May 1990 at Sidi Ali el Mekki (37°10'N, 10°14'E), 40 km north of Tunis, in Tunisia. The daily activities included mist-netting, line transects and orientation tests in Emlen-funnels. The study site was situated close to the sea, south of an east-west ridge that rises to about 100 m a.s.l. Almost every day small to high numbers of raptors, storks and other birds were seen on migration eastwards along the ridge.

On 8 May 1990 the weather was relatively calm with some overcast but alternating with sun and some small rain-showers. During the day a moderate number of raptors were seen moving NE (130 Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, 1 subadult Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, 2 Pallid/Montagu's Harriers *Circus macrourus/pygargus*). At about 2.30 p.m. I discovered a large dark raptor (larger than a Honey Buzzard), with a relatively short tail, among a flock of soaring Honey Buzzards. I immediately realised that, from its V-shaped wings, short tail and the buoyant and jerking soaring flight, the bird resembled a Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*, a species that I am familiar with from several trips to tropical Africa. I observed it for about 5 minutes (10 × 40 binoculars) in fairly good light at distances between 500 m and 2 km, and concluded that it was a Bateleur, in second plumage.

### Description

A large short-tailed raptor, larger than the accompanying Honey Buzzards but smaller than Short-toed Eagle *Circoetus gallicus*. The bird appeared almost totally dark brown. The underside, which I saw best, was evenly dark brown apart from a pale band along the whole wing between the underwing coverts and the remiges (probably caused by a pale base of the remiges). There was also a pale patch on the underside of the head and/or the throat. The upperside, which I did not see very well, seemed to be totally dark brown.

The bird used very few wing-beats during an observation time of about 5 min. During the soaring and gliding flight, which were very light and buoyant, the bird seemed unsteady, jerking or tipping from side to side like a paper-swallow. In flapping flight the wing beats were deep and relatively fast for a bird of its size. Both gliding and soaring flight were on highly raised V-shaped wings with an extra bend on the outermost part of the primaries, like the cross-section of an old Viking ship. The whole wing was relatively broad except for the primaries which were held together making the wing-tip pointed and the trailing edge almost S-shaped. The trailing edge was smooth without any traces of moult. The tail was short and rounded or slightly wedge-shaped, just protruding behind the trailing edge of the wing, almost like the tail of a Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*. The head was rather conspicuous and seemed to be bent downwards, giving a hooklike impression.

The Bateleur is a widespread species in various habitats in Africa south of the Sahara. It shows no strong evidence of migration but there are records of north to south movements in West Africa in response to wet and dry seasons, and irregular stragglers cross the Red Sea to southern Arabia (Brown *et al.* 1982, *The Birds of Africa*, vol. 1). There are also some accidental records from Iraq (Harrison 1955, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 75: 60–61) and Israel (Shirihai & Yekutieli 1988, *Raptors in Israel: passage and wintering populations*. Birdwatching Center Eilat, Israel).

As far as I know this record is the first observation of the Bateleur in Tunisia and possibly also in this part of North Africa.

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Department of Ecology, University of Lund,  
Ecology Building,  
S-223 62 Lund,  
Sweden.

ULF OTTOSSON

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