

First record of Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) in the Moroccan Atlantic Sahara

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The Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) is a circumpolar species which breeds widely across Arctic and higher boreal zones (Snow & Perrins 1998). In Europe, its main wintering grounds are located over a wide belt ranging from Scotland to Bulgaria and Ukraine. It is an uncommon winter visitor along the French Atlantic coast; in mainland Spain, most records are concentrated on the coasts of Cantabria and Galicia and it is rare in Andalusia and in the East of the country (De Juana 2006). It is rare also in Portugal and Italy.

There are a few records on the Canary Islands of Tenerife, La Gomera and Lanzarote (Ramos 2008, García del Rey & García Vargas 2013).

Records in North Africa and Morocco

In North Africa, there is one single record in Algeria and Tunisia (Isenmann & Moali 2000, Isenmann *et al.* 2005) and five in Morocco: a dead female documented by Drake (1867) at Cape Spartel; a male and female Southwest of Oualidia on 24th February and 3rd March 1964 (Smith 1965); a female at Oualidia on 2nd April 1979 (Heinze 1979); and three birds near Anergui in High Atlas on 24th March 1982 (Thévenot *et al.* 2003).

The record on 10th February 2014

On 10th February 2014, while birding at Imlili (Oued Ad Deheb region near Dakhla, 23°15' N 15°55' W) we photographed a bird in winter plumage feeding on the remains of camel excrement along with various Thekla Larks *Galerida theklae*. This is the first known record of *Plectrophenax nivalis* in the Moroccan Atlantic Sahara. The presence of this bird could be caused by the arrival of several cold fronts from Northern Europe, that generated a sharp drop in temperature and abundant snowfall in the peaks of Morocco and the nearby Canary islands.

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The Snow Bunting at Imlili, 10th February 2014