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First Record of (Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* Linnaeus, 1766) in Libya

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ABSTRACT

The Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* (Linnaeus, 1766) is a widespread Afrotropical species whose distribution has expanded northwards across North Africa during recent decades, with breeding populations now established in southern Egypt and recent records from Algeria and Western Sahara. Despite this expansion, the species had not previously been recorded in Libya. We report the first documented record of *O. capensis* in the country, based on photographs of a single adult male observed at Al-Jaghub Oasis in eastern Libya on 9 May 2026. The bird was identified from its distinctive plumage, including the black head and throat, grey body, elongated pointed tail, and reddish bill. Local observations indicated that a similar individual had been seen at the same locality in September 2024 and September 2025, although these earlier sightings lacked photographic documentation. The 2026 individual remained in the oasis for three days and was observed using power lines, old buildings, and open ground. Al-Jaghub Oasis, located close to the Libyan Egyptian border, provides permanent water and cultivated habitats that likely function as ecological stepping stones across the Sahara. This record fills an important gap in the known distribution of *O. capensis* in North Africa and is consistent with the species' ongoing natural range expansion from Egypt westwards. The finding also highlights the importance of continued ornithological monitoring of Libyan desert oases, which remain insufficiently surveyed and may support additional previously unrecorded bird species.

التسجيل الأول لليمامة الناماكوية (*Oena capensis* Linnaeus, 1766) في ليبيا

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تعتبر اليمامة طويلة الذيل (*Oena capensis* (Linnaeus, 1766) من الأنواع الأفريقية واسعة الانتشار، وقد شهد نطاق توزيعها توسعاً ملحوظاً نحو شمال أفريقيا خلال العقود الأخيرة، مع استقرار مجموعات معيشة في جنوب مصر وكذلك تسجيلات حديثة في الجزائر والصحراء الغربية، وعلى الرغم من هذا التوسع، لم يتم تسجيل هذا النوع في ليبيا سابقاً. تعرض هذه الدراسة أول تسجيل موثق لـ *O. capensis* في ليبيا، استناداً إلى صور فوتوغرافية للذكر بالغ شوهد في واحة الجغبوب بشرق ليبيا بتاريخ 9 مايو 2026. وقد جرى التعرف على الطائر اعتماداً على صفاته التشخيصية المميزة، بما في ذلك الرأس والحلق الأسودان، والجسم الرمادي، والذيل الطويل المدبب، والمنقار المحمر. كما أشارت ملاحظات محلية إلى مشاهدة طائر مماثل في الموقع نفسه خلال شهري سبتمبر من عامي 2024 و2025، إلا أن تلك المشاهدات لم تؤثّق بالصور. الفرد الذي تم تسجيله في سنة 2026 مكث في الواحة لمدة ثلاثة أيام، وشوهد على خطوط الكهرباء، وجدران المباني القديمة، والأرض المفتوحة. وتقع واحة الجغبوب بالقرب من الحدود الليبية المصرية، وتوفر مصادر مياه دائمة وموائل زراعية يحتمل أن تؤدي دور محطات توقف وراحة بيئية تساعد الطيور في عبور الصحراء الكبرى. هذا التسجيل يسد فجوة مهمة في المعرفة المتعلقة بتوزيع *O. capensis* في شمال أفريقيا، ويتوافق مع التوسع الطبيعي المستمر للنوع غرباً انطلاقاً من مصر. كما تؤكد هذه النتيجة أهمية مواصلة الرصد والدراسات الميدانية للطيور في الواحات الصحراوية الليبية، التي لا تزال غير مستكشفة بصورة كافية وقد تكشف عن أنواع أخرى لم تسجل سابقاً في البلاد.

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INTRODUCTION

Libya occupies a strategic position along the central Mediterranean flyway, forming an important bridge between Africa and Europe for migratory birds. The country's diverse habitats, including coastal wetlands, desert oases, mountains and extensive Saharan landscapes, support a rich avifauna of more than 350 recorded species, including resident, migratory and wintering birds. Although the Libyan avifauna has been extensively documented, new national records continue to emerge as ornithological surveys increase, particularly in underexplored regions, highlighting the need for continued monitoring and documentation of the country's bird diversity (Isenmann *et al.*, 2016).

The Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* (Linnaeus, 1766) is the only species of the genus *Oena* (Columbidae) and is widely distributed throughout sub-Saharan Africa, extending into the Arabian Peninsula and Madagascar. It inhabits a variety of arid and semi-arid environments, including open savannas, scrublands, dry river valleys, cultivated areas and oases. Although generally regarded as a resident species, some populations exhibit seasonal or nomadic movements in response to rainfall and food availability (Hering *et al.*, 2015; Ławicki, 2020).

During recent decades, *O. capensis* has undergone a marked northward range expansion across the Western Palearctic and North Africa. Breeding populations have become established in southern Egypt, while recent records from Western Sahara and Algeria suggest continued natural colonisation of previously unoccupied areas (Hering *et al.*, 2015; Ławicki, 2020; Haddad *et al.*, 2023).

Despite this expansion, the species has not previously been recorded in Libya, and recent reviews of its distribution specifically noted the absence of confirmed records from the country (Ławicki, 2020; Haddad *et al.*, 2023).

Here, we report the first documented record of the Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* in Libya, based on a photographed adult male observed in Al-Jaghbug Oasis, eastern Libya, in May 2026, and discuss its significance in the context of the species' ongoing range expansion in North Africa.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

Al-Jaghbug Oasis is located in the southeastern part of Cyrenaica, eastern Libya, approximately 290 km south of Tobruk and about 25 km west of the Libyan–Egyptian border (29°44,864N 24°31,231E). Situated within the Libyan Desert (Fig. 1), the oasis is characterized by an arid climate with extremely low annual rainfall, high summer temperatures and sparse desert vegetation. Despite these harsh conditions, Al-Jaghbug supports

permanent groundwater-fed date palm groves, small agricultural fields and scattered trees, creating an important ecological refuge for resident and migratory birds. Owing to its strategic location near the Egyptian border and within the Saharan desert, the oasis represents a significant stopover habitat for birds crossing or inhabiting the eastern Sahara (Azafzaf *et al.*, 2005; Smart *et al.*, 2006).

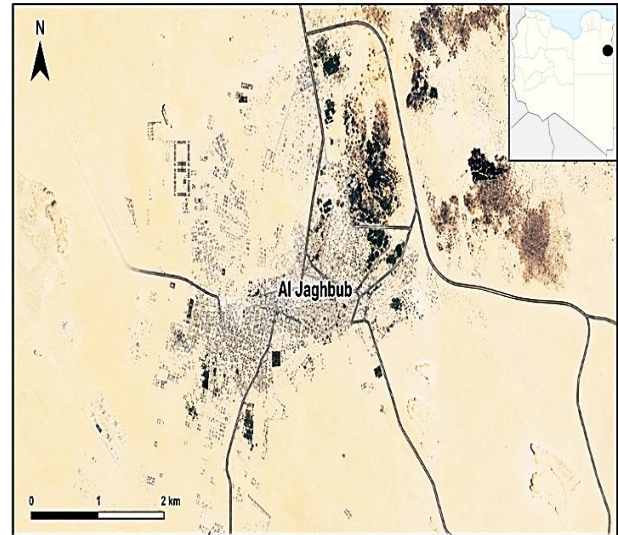


Fig. 1. Map of Al-Jaghbug Oasis and its location.

Methods:

It was done through direct observation and documentation with a digital camera, but the zoom power was weak (18-55 mm).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A single long-tailed dove (*Oena capensis*) was spotted in Al-Jaghbug oasis in eastern Libya. It was captured on 9th May 2026, by a local hunter and documented with a digital camera. The hunter then contacted the Libyan Society for Birds, sending photographs of the bird for identification. The images clearly show that the bird is an adult male perching on electric wires, distinguished by its black head and throat, gray body, long, pointed tail, and reddish beak all characteristics that match the species (fig. 2 and 3). The same bird had previously been sighted in the same location in September of 2024 and 2025, but it was not photographed on those occasions. The bird recorded in 2026 remained in the area for three days. It was seen on the ground, on the walls of old buildings near the Zawiya Senussi (a landmark in Jaghbug), and on power lines. In all sightings, only a solitary bird was seen.



Fig. 2. lateral view of long-tailed dove (*Oena capensis*).

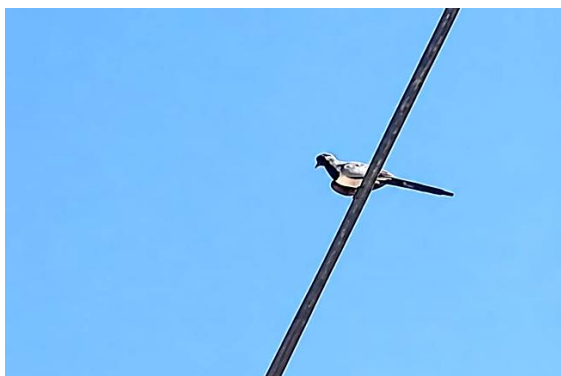


Fig. 3. Ventral view of long-tailed dove (*Oena capensis*).

Discussion

The present observation represents the first documented record of the Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* in Libya and fills an important geographical gap in the known distribution of the species across North Africa. Although *O. capensis* is widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa and occurs in the Arabian Peninsula and Madagascar (Baptista *et al.*, 2020), its occurrence in the central Mediterranean region has historically been limited. During the last two decades, however, the species has exhibited a progressive northward expansion, with breeding populations becoming established in southern Egypt and increasing numbers of records from Algeria and Western Sahara (Hering *et al.*, 2015; Ławicki, 2020; Haddad *et al.*, 2023). The Libyan record reported here is consistent with this broader pattern of range expansion.

The nearest established populations are currently known from the Nile Valley and oases of southern Egypt, where the species has expanded considerably since the late twentieth century (Hering *et al.*, 2015). Al-Jaghbug Oasis lies only about 25 km west of the Egyptian border and is ecologically connected to the chain of desert oases extending across the Libyan and Egyptian deserts. Such oases provide permanent water, cultivated areas, scattered trees and abundant seed resources that are known to be favoured by *O. capensis* (Baptista *et al.*, 2020). The appearance of the species at Al-Jaghbug therefore

represents a plausible westward extension from Egyptian populations rather than an isolated long-distance vagrancy.

The observation also illustrates the importance of desert oases as ecological stepping stones facilitating bird movements across the Sahara. Although the surrounding landscape consists largely of hyper-arid desert, oasis habitats provide essential resources that allow both resident and dispersing birds to survive in otherwise inhospitable environments (Azafzaf *et al.*, 2005; Smart *et al.*, 2006). Several bird species have expanded their distributions across North Africa by exploiting networks of irrigated agricultural land and oasis habitats, and *O. capensis* appears to follow a similar ecological pattern (Hering *et al.*, 2015; Ławicki, 2020).

An intriguing aspect of the present record is the reported occurrence of the same species at the same locality during September 2024 and September 2025, although these earlier observations were not documented photographically. While these sightings cannot be considered formal records, they suggest that *O. capensis* may have visited Al-Jaghbug repeatedly before its photographic confirmation in 2026. Repeated observations over successive years may indicate regular seasonal dispersal or exploratory movements rather than a single accidental occurrence. Similar patterns have preceded the establishment of breeding populations elsewhere in North Africa, where isolated records were followed by increasingly frequent observations and, ultimately, successful breeding (Hering *et al.*, 2015; Haddad *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, additional evidence is required before any conclusions can be drawn regarding the establishment of the species in Libya.

Only a single adult male was observed during all documented encounters, and no female, juvenile or evidence of breeding was detected. Consequently, the present record should be interpreted as documenting the occurrence of the species in Libya rather than demonstrating the existence of a resident or breeding population. Continued ornithological monitoring of Al-Jaghbug and neighbouring desert oases, particularly during spring and autumn, will be essential to determine whether the species occurs regularly, overwinters, or eventually establishes breeding populations in eastern Libya.

More broadly, this discovery emphasizes that the Libyan avifauna remains incompletely documented despite recent comprehensive reviews (Isenmann *et al.*, 2016). Increasing observer coverage, the growing use of digital photography, and collaboration between local observers and organizations such as the Libyan Society for Birds are contributing to the detection of previously overlooked or newly arriving species. Recent years have witnessed several additions to the Libyan bird list, many involving species undergoing range expansions or changes in distribution (Elsowayeb and Etayeb, 2022; Eisa and Etayeb, 2022, 2024; Eisa *et al.*, 2025; Etayeb and Elkrew, 2025; Etayeb *et al.*, 2025a, b; Buirzayqah and Etayeb,

2025; Buirzayqah *et al.*, 2026; Nuwayji *et al.*, 2026). The first documented record of *Oena capensis* therefore contributes not only to the national checklist but also to the understanding of contemporary biogeographical changes affecting North African birds under changing environmental and climatic conditions.

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