

Yasmina 2019 – Information sheet

General information about the project

The ringing station in Yasmina is operating within a cooperation project between the Catalan Institute of Ornithology (ICO, <http://ornitologia.org/ca/>) and the Konrad-Lorenz Institute of Ethology of Vienna (<https://www.vetmeduni.ac.at/en/konrad-lorenz-institute-of-ethology/>). The general aims of the project are: 1. to identify the strategies used by birds to successfully cross the desert during their northward migrations; and 2. to assess whether the condition of the birds arriving at the site can help inform about events and conditions during the wintering period in the Sahel. The methods used integrate a standardized effort of bird capture and recapture to assess phenology, abundance, body condition and stopover site use and duration, with more detailed projects including radiotelemetry to describe the birds' behavior, the collection of several physiological and biochemical samples, and direct observations of the birds' behavior. Several students are active at the site and usually 2-4 are present throughout the season. One head ringer is present throughout the season as well (Marc Illa Llobet, marc.illa400d@gmail.com). Information from the spring season in 2018 and previous campaigns can be found at <https://yasminaprimavera.wordpress.com>.

Location

The ringing station is located in the lake adjacent to Hotel Kasbah Yasmina (<http://www.hotelyasminamerzouga.com/>), in the vicinity of the village of Merzouga, Tafilalt, Morocco (Google Maps coordinates: 31.212948, -3.988638). The lake is usually dry but can fill at any time when abundant rains occur in the adjacent mountains on the Algerian side. It is therefore not predictable whether there will be water in the lake or not (though it is most commonly dry). Surrounding the lake there are a few bushes, mainly tamarisks (*Tamarix* sp.) that attract good numbers of birds during migration. The mist-nets for catching birds are placed in this area, though the position of the nets might change if there is water in the lake. Ringing takes place on the terrace of the hotel.

Participating

Since the students are usually busy with their projects, volunteers are needed to run the standard routine of bird capture. The season 2019 will begin on **25.2.2019** and end on **10.5.2019**. It is possible to participate at any time during the season. There are no restrictions of duration (though stays of at least one week are preferred) and number of volunteers, as long as the number of participants is not too high to guarantee a satisfactory experience to everyone. Marc Illa takes over the organization of



turns and details should be arranged with him (marc.illa400d@gmail.com). Please send an e-mail to Marc Illa at least two weeks before your intended visit so that he can organize your accommodation at the hotel.

Previous experience with bird ringing and operating mist-nets is helpful but not mandatory. Let Marc Illa know what your level of experience is at the time of your reservation.

We accept proposals for BSc and MSc projects if not interfering with the projects that are already operating in Yasmina. Applicants for a scientific project should come with their own budget, though this can be discussed in a case-by-case fashion. Please contact Ivan Maggini (ivan.maggini@vetmeduni.ac.at) if you are interested in performing research in Yasmina.



Daily routine

There are around 20 mist-nets in the lake. These are operated from dawn until the temperatures become too high (depending on the date, the nets will be closed between 11:30 and 12:30 for the lunch break). The nets are re-opened for a few hours before dusk (depending on the date, 16:00 to 17:00). Net rounds are every 30 to 60 minutes depending on the conditions. During this time, the volunteers take over the net checks, extract the birds from the net and bring them to the hotel for ringing. In the free time, volunteers are free to relax, visit the area, or support the students with their additional project tasks if needed.

Accommodation and food

All volunteers are accommodated at the Hotel Yasmina. Marc Illa is taking care of the reservations and will communicate directly with the hotel. We have a special price for all volunteers. Be aware that **only reservations made through Marc Illa will be profiting from the reduced rates!** Two types of accommodation are available:

Tuareg tent (khaima): comfortable beds but no chance to lock the room and no wardrobe. Price 200 MAD (~18 €) per person/night.

Regular room: same beds as in tents, but you can lock the door and possibly have a wardrobe. Price 250 MAD (~23 €) per person/night.

Prices **include two meals per day** (breakfast buffet and dinner). Usually people are fine with these meals. You can buy lunch at your own cost at the hotel or shop in the nearby city of Erfoud and eat your own meals for lunch. There is no difference in price if you prefer to provide your own food also for breakfast and dinner. **Vegetarian meals** can be arranged with the hotel kitchen.

Getting there

There are several options to fly to Morocco, but unfortunately no airport is very close to Yasmina. The best option is to fly to either Casablanca, Marrakech or Fez (the latest two cities are served by some low-cost companies such as Ryanair). There are domestic flights from Casablanca to Errachidia (Royal Air Maroc) which are usually rather expensive. A taxi service can be organized to and from Errachidia with the hotel, which costs around 100 € each way. Other options include taking a bus from either one of the arrival cities. Bus operators are Supratours (<https://www.oncf.ma/en/>) and CTM (<http://www.ctm.ma/>). CTM probably has more options, but check both. The buses are reliable and safe. You should book a bus ride to Erfoud, and a pick-up can be organized there (check with Marc Illa at the time of your reservation). The last option is renting a car. All major airports host

several car rental companies which offer quite affordable rates (around 25 €/day is possible if booking in advance). No 4x4 is needed to reach Yasmina. Having a car is advantageous if you would like to invest the spare time around lunchtime to explore the area or if you want to stop along the road between your arrival airport and Yasmina. Be aware that the team will have a rental car at Yasmina throughout the season, which might be available from time to time. If you are not planning to drive around too much, except for shopping in Erfoud, this might be feasible without renting your own car.

Equipment

The climate is usually dry and warm, though temperatures can still be quite low (even around 0°C) in the early morning and during the night in March. Sunscreen is a must, and eventually moisturizing balm could be helpful. Trekking shoes are necessary for checking the nets (no flip-flops!). Binoculars are helpful. Bird guides will be available at the station. Make sure you have enough drinking water (can be purchased at the hotel).

Contacts

Marc Illa – station manager and head ringer

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Ivan Maggini – scientific advisor and project leader

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