

## Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*): a new breeding species in the Massa River, Southern Morocco

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Disponible en ligne (Available online) : 27 July 2013

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The Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) is a cosmopolitan species from the family Ardeidae that can be found in America, Europe, Asia and Africa. The *nycticorax* nominal subspecies breeds in Southern and Central Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Japan, Africa and Madagascar, except in the Saharan region.

It has recently been cited as a nesting species in the Canary Islands archipelago, where one colony has been discovered in a palm grove in Gran Canaria, and two colonies inside ravines of northeastern and southern areas of Tenerife, among the vegetation of *Arundo donax* (Lorenzo 2007).

In Morocco, this species breeds in the Tangier Peninsula, the Middle Atlas and the Central Plateau. In the rest of the country, Black-crowned Night Herons are common during migration, especially in spring. Some birds winter in southern wetlands as well (Thevenot *et al.* 2003).

In the Souss-Massa National Park, it is regular during the migration periods and birds can be seen throughout the year, although there are no records of birds nesting so far (Rousseau 2000). During the prenuptial migration, several parties have been observed, the most prominent being a group of 20 birds on May 13th, flying North along the coastline near the town of Sidi R'bat (Ramos Melo & González del Campo 2013).

During the breeding season (March to June) of 2013, we surveyed a nesting pair that bred on the southern side of the River Massa, West of the village of Ait Lyass UTM 29 R 04366-33190. These birds placed their nest in the riparian vegetation, mainly composed of *Tamarix glauca*, *Tamarix africana*, *Anea sp.* and *Phragmites sp.*

On March 27<sup>th</sup> we observed for the first time an adult perched among the vegetation, and it was again there on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, two adults were closely linked to a breeding site.

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, an adult was seen with a few week-old young, hidden among the vegetation. On May 25<sup>th</sup> we observed two adults, and finally an adult accompanied by a young on June 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The presence of a few week-old young and the attachment of the adults to this location throughout the breeding season are indicators of this species' reproduction at the site. It is likely that this chick was born in April after some 21 days of incubation, and has remained in the nest and its surroundings for approximately 30 days, as it occurs in the breeding colonies in Southern Europe (Parejo *et al.* 2001).

This is probably the first breeding data record of Black-crowned Night Heron in the Massa River and the whole region of Souss-Massa.

*Black-crowned Night Heron at Massa*



Photo 1. An adult Black-crowned Night Heron in the breeding area. 2nd April 2013.



Photo 2. A young in the breeding area. June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013.

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## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Yeray Seminario for his important and useful suggestions that greatly improved the manuscript.