

# Wise Birding Holidays

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## Trip Report

SOUTHERN MOROCCO:

### Birders' Specialities Tour

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March - Tuesday 19th March 2013



**Tour Participants:** Sue Healey, Andrew Proudfoot, Darryl Spittle, Peter Alfrey, Neil Stocks & Lee Dingain **Leader:** Chris Townend

### HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

**Egyptian Nightjar:** Both day and night sightings, of up to five different birds!

**Pharaoh Eagle Owl:** Great scope views of an adult near Boumalne Dades.

**Desert Sparrow:** A total of eight birds, including males & females seen over two days.

**Thick-billed Lark:** Incredibly close views, on the Tagdilt Track and near Goulmima.

**Crowned & Spotted Sandgrouse:** Some fantastic encounters whilst in the desert, including over 130+ Spotted Sandgrouse and 30+ Crowned Sandgrouse.

**Northern Bald Ibis:** A wonderful flock of 30+ birds on our final day near Tamri.



**This Egyptian Nightjar was one of five sightings that we had during the tour!**

## Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March

The group met at a rather chilly Gatwick airport and after a slight flight delay, we arrived in a pleasantly warm Marrakech airport. Here, our two Moroccan drivers Youssef and Hassan awaited us, complete with two shiny 4X4 Toyota Landcruisers that would be our mode of transport for the duration of the tour. Due to our, late arrival we had little time for birding, but a few species were seen on our short journey to our central Marrakech hotel including **Spotless Starling**, **Crested Lark**, **Little Swift** and small groups of **Pallid Swifts** wheeling around above the hotel. We were soon checked in and relaxed in our new smart surroundings before enjoying some food and then heading out for a stroll around the city. The main purpose of the stroll was to maybe chance upon a **Maghreb Tawny Owl** in the leafier suburbs and parks close to our hotel. Unfortunately, for Sue her path happened to take her past some young Moroccan men in need of spending a penny, so to speak! Despite Chris's best efforts in coaxing an owl in, we were out of luck and so had to make do with taking in the sights and sounds of the city before heading for our beds ready for tomorrow's early start.

## Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March

As is normally the case when waking up in a new country, everyone was keen as mustard to start the new birding day! After a good breakfast and caffeine hit, both Youssef and Hassan were waiting for us outside the hotel where we enjoyed our first views of **Common Bulbuls** and more **Pallid Swifts**. We headed through the city, south towards our destination of the High Atlas Mountains and the ski resort at Oukaimeden at around, 2,600m.

As we passed through Marrakech, a few **Magpies** of the race *mauretanica*, also known as **Moroccan Magpie**, could be seen perched up on the street lamps and after a little while, we were winding our way up through the Ourika Valley where we made our first stop. Even before the vehicles had stopped, the first of the day's targets was calling and within seconds, we were face to face with a cracking male **Levaillant's Woodpecker**! We were treated to some great views of at least two of these great birds with their truly vivid green backs and scarlet caps shining out in the morning light. In addition, we enjoyed some excellent views of our first **House Bunting** sat on a village house (where else!?) and a beautiful **African Blue Tit** complete with deep blue back and a completely different beast to the birds we are familiar with back home. A singing male **Serin** posed nearby and we also enjoyed great views of the very common, but no less striking male *North African* **Chaffinch** complete with green back, powder blue head and very different call.

We were soon back in our Landcruisers and continuing our route onwards and upwards and despite some early cloud on the tops we were soon at around 2,600m and surrounded by beautiful snow capped peaks and sunshine! Once again, within seconds of leaving the vehicles we were soon enjoying our next target species with some first class views of a small feeding flock of *African* **Crimson-winged Finches** - *a different subspecies to those found further east in Turkey*. The males really were stunning as their fluorescent pink wing flashes gleamed amongst the backdrop of small snow patches that they frequented. Also on a snow patch was a noisy **Rock Sparrow** posing on a small stone. Nearby, groups of *Atlas* **Horned Larks** complete with bright yellow faces and tiny black horns shuffled about, and it soon became apparent that this was a very common bird here. We then took a walk along the main track where we had

some more views of the above species, before re-tracing our steps and some of the group added **Water Pipit** to the day's tally along with an impressive **Andalusian Wall Lizard**. As we slowly headed back towards the ski resort for our lunch, we added the *deisleri* race of **Mistle Thrush** and Darryl did well to find a **Brambling**, an unexpected bird to find here. On the short grassy banks both **Red-billed Chough** and **Yellow-billed Chough** were seen before we headed for what was to be the first of many tasty tagine lunches!

After lunch, we explored another track into the mountains where we had spectacular views of the High Atlas Mountains. New species in the area included a **Black Wheatear** and a **Long-legged Buzzard** as well as a few of the endemic **Atlas Day Gecko** before we slowly continued our journey back towards Marrakech. A couple of roadside stops on our return journey produced **White-throated Dipper** and **Green Sandpiper** in a mountain stream and then a little lower down some more excellent views of **Levaillant's Woodpecker** as well as *Atlas* **Coal Tit**, **Cirl Bunting**, **African Blue Tit** and **Rock Bunting**. The afternoon was rounded off nicely with a Moroccan tea stop and a timely **Hawfinch** found by Lee and all the better for being visible from our table where we sipped our tea!

### Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March

Today was mostly a day of travel, as we headed on our journey east to the edge of the desert plateau and the Dades river valley to our hotel at Boumalne Dades. We set off after a leisurely breakfast and took a few minutes to have a proper look at the **Moroccan Magpies** that are common on the outskirts of Marrakech. Here we had some good views of them, complete with blue facial skin behind the eye. We then continued our route eastward, stopping at some low hills near Toufliht. A **Common Cuckoo** was singing above us and then some nice views of a perched **Long-legged Buzzard** was followed by two migrant light phase **Booted Eagles** as they flapped low below a ridge. A perched falcon required closer scrutiny and the scope confirmed it to be a **Barbary Falcon**, with a second bird flying around nearby. Three **Barbary Partridges** high on the same ridge nearly escaped us, but luckily, everyone managed a reasonable scope view before they scuttled out of view. We then continued on our journey, before another brief stop in the cool pine woodlands where a short walk revealed a male *Atlas* **Crossbill** some more views of *Atlas* **Coal Tit** and a rather frustrating *Maghreb* **Short-toed Treecreeper** that was only glimpsed briefly by Chris and Neil. A **Levaillant's Woodpecker** was also heard nearby.

However, we still had a long way to go and so it was back into the vehicles and up and over the Tizi N Tichka Pass standing proud at an impressive 2,260m. The ever-vigilant Neil came up trumps as he spotted our only **Black Storks** of the trip. By the time we managed to find a safe place to pull over, the four birds were slowly gliding away from us, but **Black Storks** nonetheless, and a welcome addition to our day's tally. Once the other side of the Pass, we stopped for a much needed tea/coffee break where we sipped our drinks whilst enjoying the warm sunshine and some good views of **Sardinian Warbler**, **Serin** and **Rock Bunting** as well as a fine **Scarce Swallowtail** butterfly. We continued our journey towards Ouarzazate and had a pleasant lunch overlooking a dry wadi and rocky ridge. Here we enjoyed our kebabs as well as some of the more expected commoner species such as **Subalpine Warbler**, **Red-rumped Swallow** and **Black Redstart**.

It was then off once again, back on the road and this time through the city of Ouarzazate, often referred to as "The Door to the Desert". Here we once again took time to sample the local tea and Andrew demonstrated his clear skill as a professional "Moroccan Tea Pourer!" With the afternoon sun behind us, we continued the last leg of our long journey and the habitat began to change as we entered the start of the stony desert known as the Hammada. A brief roadside stop at a known **Maghreb Wheatear** site unfortunately failed to produce the main target but was rewarded with our first **Desert Lark** and a **Northern Wheatear**. As we neared our night stop of Boumalne Dades, we just had time for a short wander in some true Hammada before dusk. Here, we were treated to a taste of what avian gems can be found in this exciting habitat. Highlights included a pair of **Desert Wheatear**, a small group of colourful **Trumpeter Finches**, a very obliging **Spectacled Warbler** remaining low to the desert floor and giving its diagnostic dry rattling call and a **Southern Grey Shrike** of the very pallid form *elegans*, also known as **Desert Grey Shrike**. Lee struck lucky with a male **Moussier's Redstart** that clearly did not want to show itself to the rest of us! It was a fitting end to the day and we had to drag ourselves away for our final journey of the day. We soon arrived at our wonderful hotel in Boumalne Dades, perched high above the Dades river where we were very much pampered and enjoyed some wonderful food and a good night's sleep!

## Tuesday 12th March

Everyone was up early this morning, as this was sure to be an exciting day as we explored the famous Tagdilt Track! After an early breakfast fit for a king, we were off, on Operation Pharaoh! Chris was keen for us all to bag the highly sought after **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** - *This species was previously, just a desert race of European Eagle Owl, but is now considered a species in its own right.* So we headed off in the glimmers of first light and after a while, we were in one of the areas that this bird sometimes uses. A quick scan of the ridge and bingo, Chris had it in the scope for all to enjoy. The weight on his shoulders lightened (ever so slightly) knowing this bird is not always so easy and very pleased that the first of the desert specialities was in the bag! The bird was face on, allowing the diagnostic dark facial lines and fine sandy barring across the belly to be clearly seen, as well as the much smaller size compared to its European cousin. Once everyone was happy, we headed on to try and find some more key species before the glare of the sun became too harsh. We took full advantage of our 4X4 vehicles today, covering as much habitat as we could. The species began to fall slowly but surely, with the first of many **Temminck's Larks** scuttling along the desert floor just meters from us, soon to be followed by two **Bar-tailed Larks** complete with sandy coloured plumage and small pink bills. This allowed some good comparisons to be made with the commoner **Desert Lark** that we were to see later in the morning. Whilst walking for a short distance, Darryl's sharp ears picked up a calling **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flying overhead. We then slowly drove around in search of new species and the first **Red-rumped Wheatear** for the whole group was very much appreciated. This is a very common bird in this area and we saw many birds throughout the day, both sexes having the orange toned rump and tail, from where the bird gets its name. We also had plenty of opportunity to enjoy the much smaller but still striking **Desert Wheatear**. Happy with our tally, we continued in search of more specialities and our attention was distracted from birds for a short while, as we watched our first and rather appropriately named, **Fat Sand Rats** basking in the morning sunshine.

Then a small flock of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flew up from our vehicle and as we headed to the area they landed, it soon became apparent that there were a number of small groups amounting to at least 30 birds in total. Probably the easiest of the Sandgrouse to find in Morocco, but one of the most striking with its mass of vivid colours and certainly a welcome site and still all before 9am! Once again, we continued in search of another key species synonymous with desert habitats, in both appearance and song. It did not take long, as soon we were watching two beautiful **Greater Hoopoe Larks** as they ran around our vehicles and even gave a burst of their song display flights. A truly stunning bird and one that was well and truly lapped up by all. We then spread ourselves out covering different areas in the two vehicles and rather frustratingly, a flock of about six **Thick-billed Larks** were picked up in flight by just Chris and Lee. However, they continued way into the distance, never to be re-found! So, with a good morning's haul we headed back towards civilisation, taking in some more larks en route which allowed some good direct comparisons to be made of both **Crested Lark** and **Thekla Lark**. Lee's careful scrutiny also added **Skylark** to the morning's tally, before retiring for a late morning coffee break in the near company of some pink posing **Trumpeter Finches**!

After our break from the sun and with thirst quenched, we headed back to explore another area of the extensive Tagdilt Track, taking in a superb **Little Ringed Plover** at a roadside pool en route. Chris was very aware that we were still missing some first class desert specialties and he had not given up just yet! Our drivers took us back out into the stony desert and we all stretched our legs whilst they arranged our lunch. No new bird species were added to the list, but a presumed **African Savannah Hare** burst from cover and disappeared from view very quickly as we enjoyed more views of some of the commoner desert species seen previously. Andrew showed us what was now becoming his familiar botany pose, on all fours and head down at ground level with some diagnostic calls of "wow" to be heard every now and again – and fully justified as the botany in Morocco is impressive.

We were soon back at our vehicles, and as if by magic our drivers had produced an amazing picnic spread out on a small table consisting of lovely bread, olives, cheese, salad and meat, not forgetting the Berber Omelette! Truly fantastic, in such a wonderful landscape and totally undisturbed with only the odd camel and Berber for company!

After our lunch, we continued searching an area to the west of Boumalne Dades, but still within the Tagdilt Track complex and thanks to our driver Hassan, we were soon eyeballing three superb **Cream-coloured Coursers**! These beautiful waders are always a treat to see and at such close range from our vehicles was a real pleasure. We continued with our originally planned route and then finally, there they were, two cracking **Thick-billed Larks** at close range on the desert floor by one of our vehicles and within seconds the other vehicle was onto them. These really are impressive birds and a highly nomadic species, so we spent the next hour simply watching these two birds and really immersing ourselves in the moment! The male bird was more distinctly marked and the bill really was impressive. Once again, we were happy with our afternoon of Tagdilt specialties and so headed to an irrigated area that is often good for migrants.

We were not to be disappointed as we soon racked up some nice species that included: **Tree Pipit**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Common Bluethroat** and **Common Redstart**. We then headed back towards a seasonal pool, where more new species awaited us including a brief **Tawny Pipit** and a single **Lesser Short-toed Lark**, found by Pete. (The latter species is extremely numerous earlier in the winter). There was no sign of any hoped for sandgrouse, so we headed back to Boumalne Dades and our hotel where we enjoyed a great meal and reminisced about the day's great birding in the Hammada.

### Wednesday 13th March

Once again, we left our hotel early and continued our long journey east to the edge of the Sahara Desert. Of course, there were a number of stops on the way, the first being a deep gorge where after a little searching and some perseverance, sharp eyed Darryl called us on the radio and we were rewarded with some excellent views of the very localised **Maghreb Wheatear** - *This species is closely related to the Mourning Wheatear which breeds further east in the Middle East region. The endemic race in Morocco halophila is considered separate enough from Mourning Wheatear, to be justified a full species.*

It can often be a tricky species to find, so to have such close views of both male and female with a second male further up the gorge, was quite a treat. Some of the group also enjoyed "seconds" of the nearby **Pharaoh Eagle Owl**, still roosting in its same hole. Time was ticking as always, so we were soon back on the road and headed a little further east to the nearby Todra Gorge. It was still relatively early and the tourist buses had not yet arrived in great numbers as we wound our way through the narrow roads and out to an impressive gorge. A little further up the road, we stopped in some suitable habitat and within seconds of leaving the vehicles, we had our target in our sights, the unmistakable **Tristram's Warbler** - *a North African endemic that winters in the lowland desert habitats before returning to higher altitudes to breed.*

The bird showed relatively well at the start, but then moved a little higher up the scree slope, but with perseverance, reasonable views were had by all and it was time for some refreshment! We relaxed in the shade of a cafe at the edge of the main gorge where we sipped tea and had the added bonus of watching two **Bonelli's Eagles** circling above us! Excellent scope views were had whilst the side show of **Blue Rock Thrush**, **House Bunting** and a "shouting" **Cetti's Warbler** all added to the pleasant ambience of this great site.

Fully refreshed and with another two key species in the bag, we continued our long journey east towards the desert and the small town of Merzouga. The journey was entertaining as always with the ever changing dramatic scenery. The larger stone boulders and stones had begun to break up into finer material and sand became a more common sight. Our next stop was a sandy wadi close to the town of Tourong that was well worth an exploration. Here we enjoyed some good general birding with views of more **Desert Wheatears**, **Spectacled Warbler**, **Desert Grey Shrike** and best of all, a fine **Isabelline Wheatear** found by Darryl. *In recent years, Isabelline Wheatear has been considered a rarity in Morocco, but it seems accepted now, that small numbers pass through Morocco on a regular basis.*

Therefore, feeling pleased with our good work, we continued eastward and Chris felt that we deserved some relaxation, so we stopped for lunch at a Nomad Relaxation Tent for lunch – well where else would you relax!?

Whilst lunch was being prepared, those that were incapable of relaxing (pretty much all of us!) ventured for a stroll into the searing heat and desert landscape! Perhaps, unsurprisingly it was not well rewarded in avian terms, but some haughty looking **Camels** a **Dumeril's Fringe-toed /Long Fringe-fingered Lizard** and some new botany interest were the main prizes. So we returned to the Relaxation Tent for a lunch of fresh salad, bread and a great Berber Tagine!

Before long we had arrived in the town of Erfoud, where we took a short stroll by the river Ziz. Here we added a few new trip species to the list, in particular **Moroccan Wagtail** - This endemic race of Pied Wagtail "*subpersonata*" is strikingly different to that of Pied Wagtail and considered by most to be a full species. We also enjoyed another good view of **Bonelli's Eagle**, three birds in a day being an impressive tally!

Continuing east, we soon found ourselves nearing our desert accommodation for the next three nights and as if we needed confirmation that we were in a desert, a sandstorm appeared as we went in search of our final birding destination, the seasonal lake, known as Dayet Srji. As we continued through the sand tracks and poor visibility created by the sandstorm, there were a few disbelieving comments about a there being a lake nearby! However, after a few more disorientating twists and turns, our drivers produced the goods and there in front of us was a lake! Here, we took time to scan the edge of the lake hampered by strong wind and horizontal sand grains, but we still managed to eke out a few new species, many of which were a novelty to see in the desert surrounds. Species here included: **Ruddy Shelduck, Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Little Stint, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Little Egret** and a group of five **Gull-billed Terns** looking about as impressed with the weather conditions as we were! We headed for our desert hotel, watched the sun disappear behind the sand dunes whilst enjoying a drink, and discussed what tomorrow may bring!

### Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March

Once again, everyone was up early, keen for some breakfast and to get going! The cool morning temperature was very pleasant indeed, as we tucked into coffee, orange juice and some lovely crepes! This morning our main task was to find **Desert Sparrow**! We spent the morning driving around the various *Auberges* checking the small groups of **House Sparrows** for their pallid cousin. As we birded amongst a spectacular backdrop of orange sand dunes and camels, we came across many **White-crowned Wheatears** as well as migrants such as **Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike, Subalpine Warbler, Common Redstart, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler** and **Greater Short-toed Larks**. The birds were in what seemed like an alien habitat, highlighting just what a tough journey these migrant passerines have to endure.

We then turned our search to a nearby Nomad Camp and it was here that we had a double whammy of success, with at least four **Desert Sparrows** and a singing **African Desert Warbler** all within a short stroll from each other!

*In recent years, Desert Sparrows appear to have declined in number, ousted from the various Sparrow nest boxes at Auberges by the seemingly increasing*



*numbers of House Sparrows.* These two species really are iconic species of the desert habitat and we took time to savour the views before once again, enjoying refreshment and celebration!

Once happy with our desert haul, we continued further into the desert where we had arranged a meeting with one of the nomads. We were soon in the middle of nowhere, greeted by our nomad contact and welcomed with more tea and nuts. Our man was very confident that our major target would soon be delivered, and within a few minutes, we were soon watching two exquisite **Egyptian Nightjars** roosting under a tiny bush. It was great to be able to study these beautiful birds in the scope just metres away from us and quite unperturbed by our presence.

*The subspecies in Morocco is **saharae**, believed to be the largest of all the subspecies and probably one of the most sought after desert specialities in Morocco. Thanks to good communication with local nomads, this species is now regularly found roosting during the day. In previous years, it has always been more difficult to find when trying to locate calling birds at night.*

Whilst watching the **Egyptian Nightjars**, an added distraction came in the form of a superb **Lanner Falcon** that circled above us and it was smiles all round!

Once we had thanked our new nomad best friend we headed towards the town of Rissani and the river Ziz. Here, we enjoyed some more birding where two gorgeous **Blue-cheeked Bee-Eaters** were the highlight, along with the brief singing of a nearby **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** that remained in cover - *The race in Morocco is **reiseri** sometimes referred to as Saharan Olivaceous Warbler.*

On returning to our vehicles, our drivers had produced yet another great picnic lunch, this time some great Moroccan beef burgers served as a type of pizza!

It was then time to phone another nomad! Before too long, we had met our man and were following him across the desert on his moped and within minutes, we were greeted by a superb flock of around sixty **Spotted Sandgrouse!**

Sandgrouse are always great to see, and **Spotted Sandgrouse** is no exception with their vivid yellow throats showing superbly in the late afternoon sunshine.

Whilst we enjoyed these beauties, we seemed to have attracted a small gathering of local fossil sellers and we enjoyed some local bartering to the sound of calling sandgrouse! We then took a leisurely drive back to our hotel where we had time to freshen up, before another great evening of banter and food.

## **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March**

Today was our birding adventure into the real desert as we ventured behind the Erg Chebbi dunes that so dominate the landscape in this region. Once again, we were up early and keen to make the most of our day and everyone was keen to return to the **Desert Sparrows** that we saw the previous day. Once again, we had great views of both male and female **Desert Sparrows** as well as a single **African Desert Warbler**. So, we headed on our journey eastward towards the Algerian border and had a brief stop around some date palms, where we were soon looking at a noisy group of **Fulvous Babblers** along with a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** and **Desert Grey Shrike**. Closer scrutiny of a calling **Crested Lark**, revealed it to have a ridiculously long bill and hence we added this race and potential split to the trip list, **Long-billed Crested Lark**. Once again, we were back in our 4X4 Landcruisers and in radio contact as always, as we spread our net, hoping to find some new species. As expected, birds were few and far between, but what we did see was of top quality. More great views



of **Greater Hoopoe Larks, Desert Larks and Bar-tailed Larks** as we ventured further into the amazing landscape, totally in the hands of our drivers and hoping that they did really know exactly where we were! The landscape was truly impressive, as the almost lunar landscape continued, changing in colour as the sun began to get higher in the sky. A quick leg stretch allowed us to have a good scan around, whilst Andrew just adopted his usual position, head down at ground level, uttering his diagnostic "wows" as yet more desert plants wrestled with his passion for birds. However, there was not a great deal to see in avian terms, so we continued to search some other areas and before long Andrew had spotted some Sandgrouse. These were a fantastic group of **Spotted Sandgrouse** and although seen the previous day, the views today were on a different level, as our drivers carefully positioned us right beside them! This group of at least 30+ birds shuffled along on the ground calling every now and again and the light was just perfect! We then continued along a sandy gully with some vegetation and saw smaller groups of **Spotted Sandgrouse**. Lee then mentioned that he had seen a darker looking Sandgrouse in with the **Spotted Sandgrouse** a little further back. At which point Chris immediately, quizzed Lee as to the exact whereabouts and we were very quickly heading back! Within a few minutes, we were soon enjoying some fabulous views of our third species of Sandgrouse, the beautiful **Crowned Sandgrouse**, both males and females! *The Crowned Sandgrouse is often the trickiest of the Sandgrouse to find and is normally found further west around the Tagdilt Track, so to have birds this far east was a little unusual, albeit very much welcomed!*

Once again, we all enjoyed first class views of these birds, thanks to Lee's sharp eyes and we were soon continuing our journey south along the eastern edge of the Erg Chebbi. Before too long, we arrived at a more fertile area with a number of trees and bushes running along a low-lying dry wadi and irrigation area near Begaa. Here we spent some time birding, whilst once again our drivers were busy preparing our lunch.

The tamarisks and trees were alive with **Subalpine Warblers** and the odd **Common Redstart** and **Bonelli's Warbler**, but nothing else of note as the heat was quite intense by now, so we returned to the shade of the trees and enjoyed another tasty picnic lunch. Whilst refuelling and enjoying the cool shade, Andrew casually pointed out a small group of distant hirundines hawking above the trees. A little time passed and these hirundines came nearer and although initially looking like **Eurasian Crag Martins**, the plumage of this small group of birds seemed wrong, with more grey/blue tones to the upperparts. No sooner had our tea been poured than it became apparent that we needed to get some better views of these birds as they were slowly moving further away from us! A brisk march later and we were able to confirm our suspicions as the pale throat and darker underwing coverts with paler axillaries seemed to be conclusive from our pooled photographs and enough to confirm their identity as **Rock Martins**. *Rock Martin or the old descriptive name, Pale Crag Martin, has always had a slightly hazy history in Morocco, with a previous records possibly being confused with the paler race "theresae" of the much commoner Eurasian Crag Martin. Rock Martin in Morocco is of the "presaharica" race in Morocco and is currently considered a rarity worthy of full description.*

Very happy with our work, we headed back to our drivers and our tea! On our return walk, we found our second group of **Desert Sparrows** for the trip and on returning to our vehicles, we soon realised that we were not alone, and a

number of children had set up their fossil stalls for us! After a little banter, we were back on our journey and soon back on a tarmac road, proving our drivers really did know their way around this amazing desert! We arrived back at our accommodation and enjoyed a couple of hours to relax and recharge the batteries in the heat of the day, before heading out in the cool of the evening.

In the evening we returned to the lake at Srji and it seemed that many of the migrants from the day before had moved on, but we still had some good views of **Kentish Plover, Little Stint, Common Sandpiper, Common Redshank** and **Ruddy Shelduck** as well as small flocks of **Yellow Wagtails** and a few **Greater Short-toed Larks**. As the sun began to drop, we headed back to the road where we enjoyed a great perched view of a **Barbary Falcon** and of course another coffee stop for the caffeine addicts amongst us, of which there were many! We then headed off for a night drive in the hope of some mammals. An unsuspecting **African Savannah Hare** was the first mammal we saw and this did cause some hilarity as our driver seemed fixated on its path as we sped through the desert in total darkness! However, composure and professionalism was soon re-gained by our leader! We then met with a nomad in the pitch black desert, in the hope of connecting with a **Fennec Fox**. Our fox mission was sadly, unsuccessful, albeit good fun but it was the two **Egyptian Nightjars** that were the real highlight, hawking in the torchlight and a very different experience to the birds at their day roost!

### Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March

Sadly, it was time to leave the tranquillity of the desert and we had another long journey ahead of us, as we retraced our steps west, to Ouarzazate. A later breakfast this morning, allowed people a lie in, or for the keener ones, some birding around the garden where a few **Subalpine Warbler** and **Bonelli's Warbler** were to be found.

As we neared Rissani for a second time, a couple of **Blue-cheeked Bee-Eaters** were visible on wires and we continued our journey in the hope of finding another of Morocco's specialities. Within a couple of hours we were in a pre-saharan Steppes habitat near Goulmima with numerous small bushes and no sooner were we out of the vehicle than Chris had sniffed out a pair of **Thick-billed Larks** and although not a new species, these fantastic birds were once again very well appreciated by all. A little further investigation of the nearby habitat revealed our main target species, a singing **Scrub Warbler** - *Scrub Warbler has a large distribution area that extends from western Asia through the Arabian Peninsula and into the Atlantic coast of North Africa. There are eight subspecies - two in southern Morocco, "theresae" in the west and the species we saw "saharae" in the east.*

However, the bird was typically elusive, staying very low to the ground, but we remained vigilant and followed the bird's movements only to be distracted by a male **Seebohm's Wheatear**! This species breeds at high altitude and is usually found around Oukaïmeden, but our visit to this site on our first full day just missed the first returning birds. Therefore, to find this migrant male en route to higher altitude was a real bonus! Bringing our Wheatear species tally, to a very impressive nine species! *Most often considered conspecific with Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, the Moroccan and Algerian race, "seebohmi" or Seebohm's Wheatear, is actually a very different looking bird.*

This surprise species showed very well, but we were still on the scent of the **Scrub Warbler**, for better views! Therefore, we continued our pursuit and with a little patience, everyone managed some brief views of this tricky bird whilst it fed on the ground, before quickly disappearing to the next tiny bush! Other species in this area included: **Greater Hoopoe Lark**, **Temminck's Lark**, **Hoopoe** and **Long-billed Crested Lark**.

With everyone very happy with our tally and yet another couple of targets under the belt, our thoughts turned to our journey and we were soon back on the road. Of course the group were allowing no let up for the leader, as there were still more specialities to be seen! Our lunch stop was just outside the town of Tinejdad, where once again we had time for some birding before lunch in a nearby dry wadi. The wadi seemed pretty devoid of life at first but as we slowly walked across it, an **Egyptian Nightjar** flew up from Pete's feet! This was a total surprise and amazingly our fifth sighting of the trip! Unfortunately, at the time, Andrew was head down and in botany mode and therefore unaware that the bird had flown over his head! We watched where it landed and left the bird in peace to settle, before continuing our birding down the wadi. We had some good views of **Bar-tailed Lark** and a group of eight **Fulvous Babbler** sat together in an Acacia tree! Time was ticking once again and we began heading back to the vehicles, but we wanted to see if we could locate the **Egyptian Nightjar** on the deck – well it would have been rude to just ignore it! So, we very slowly walked to the area it landed, scanning every now and again and then "Pin Point Pete" picked it up only a short distance from us and we then all enjoyed some point blank views as it sat incredibly well camouflaged on a raised area of sandy ground – just magic! We left it undisturbed and returned to our vehicles (albeit a little later than planned!) and enjoyed another tasty lunch rustled up by our drivers. This time a delicious egg and vegetable Berber Tagine, tasting all the better after our **Egyptian Nightjar** views!

The rest of the afternoon was spent travelling with the usual banter, occasional coffee(!) and of course the fantastic and ever changing scenery. We arrived at our wonderful hotel at around dusk, greeted with Moroccan tea and everyone relaxed into the ambience that they were now, very much accustomed to!

### Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March

Today was mostly another day of travel, but we were right on the doorstep of a great birding site, so after a very full breakfast we were birding the Mansour Reservoir within minutes. As we approached the reservoir, a large flock of around 100+ **Trumpeter Finch** flew low over the barren land, soon to be followed by an **Osprey** heading up the edge of the reservoir complete with fish! A scan of the reservoir edge revealed hundreds of **White Storks** and also bumped our wildfowl tally up with new additions being, **Mallard**, **Gadwall**, **Northern Pintail**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Eurasian Teal** and best of all, two beautiful **Marbled Duck**. These two birds were only visible for a few seconds and sharp-eyed Sue was on them quickly before they disappeared out of view. The expected leg pulling of "questionable identification" ensued from certain other members of the group, but vigilance paid off, when these cracking birds swam back into view – leader's honour regained once again!

It was a very pleasant morning as we all just sifted through the waders on the shoreline, adding species such as **Dunlin**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper** and **Spotted Redshank** to the trip list, as well as a smart group of

10+ **Eurasian Spoonbill**. Raptors were also on the agenda, with our first **Western Marsh Harriers** of the trip and a falcon then whizzed past and perched up to give good views of yet another **Barbary Falcon**, but **Peregrine** still eluded us! Two distant **Cream-coloured Coursers** were a good find by Pete, as they ran along a sandy area of wasteland along with the odd **Meadow Pipit** flushed from the Tamarisks. The grand finale was when at least forty **European Bee-Eaters** called overhead, enabling us to follow them in the rather threatening sky and prompting us to return to our vehicles. On driving out through one of the villages, our first **Laughing Dove** of the trip was seen as it perched on a roadside wire.

We continued our journey west and to the lush fertile Souss Valley and the coast of Agadir. Another day of travel, taking in the ever changing scenery and odd coffee stop and we soon found ourselves in a very different habitat to the last few days. The landscape was green and lush as we stopped amongst the famous Argan Trees, endemic to this part of the world and harvested for the nuts they produce, which is pulped into an oil, known for its medicinal properties. Here, we headed out for our now familiar routine of birding before lunch. A stroll along this vegetated area revealed some good views of a cracking male **Moussier's Redstart**, **Common Redstart**, **Common Nightingale**, **Sardinian Warbler**, and a singing male **Orphean Warbler** that showed very well indeed.

After lunch, we continued our journey westward deeper into the Souss Valley, where the only new species from the vehicle was a hunting **Black-shouldered Kite**, that was rather more interested in hunting than showing itself to us! By early evening, we arrived into the hustle and bustle of Agadir where, a familiar friend, the **Moroccan Magpie**, greeted us, a species we had not seen since leaving Marrakech. It was then onto the famous birding spot of the Souss Estuary where we spent the last couple of hours birding and waiting until dusk, for our next target species.

We spent the evening birding a small pool opposite the King's Palace, always keeping one eye on the birds and the other on the Palace guards, who sometimes get a little edgy! We survived though, and added another group of **Marbled Duck** to the day list as well as another nice selection of waders that included **Green Sandpiper**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Avocet** and **Black-winged Stilts**. A group of **Sandwich Tern** were heading out to the estuary mouth and we added our first gulls of the trip with **Black-headed Gull**, **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and **Yellow-legged Gull**. A few **Zitting Cisticolas** sang overhead as they typically bounced through the sky and one bird even allowing scope views as it landed on some nearby vegetation. Then our first **Peregrine** was added to the trip list as it soared above us and landed on a dead tree. As the light slowly began to fade, we tried to remain focused on listening for **Red-necked Nightjar**, despite the rather feisty mosquitoes! Luckily, we did not have to wait long and we were soon rewarded with some great views and sounds from at least two birds as they hawked around our torchlight, providing a fitting end to the day.

## Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March

Well, I guess it had to arrive at some point, and today was our last full day in Morocco and everyone was eager to spend a full day in the field, as there were still plenty of target species to find! Our first destination was to be the Oued Massa Estuary about an hour to the south of Agadir and part of the combined Souss-Massa National Park. Here we were back in the land of the commoner species such as **Spotless Starlings** and **Pallid Swifts**, but our first stop was for a special hirundine, the **Plain Martin or Brown-throated Martin**. Stopping at a small bridge over the Oued Massa we were soon straight onto a bird that quickly became eclipsed by another of our targets that was singing close by! It was a case of not knowing where to look first as at least two **Plain Martins** hawked over the river and a **Black-crowned Tchagra** sang out its cheerful whistling song and slowly revealed itself in a nearby tree. Literally, both birds in the bag within five minutes! *Both species have a wide distribution throughout Africa, but both have specific races in Morocco. The Plain Martin in Morocco is of the endemic race *maurentinica* and the Black-crowned Tchagra is of the race *cucullata*.*

Also on the river were a few **Cormorants** of the highly distinctive *White-breasted form* and the *maroccanus* subspecies, a few **Sedge Warblers** and a number of **Stripe-necked Terrapins**. As luck was clearly on our side, we decided to venture towards the main park entrance where we spent the next few hours birding the length of the Massa, to the mouth of the estuary and the sand bar. This is a great reserve and full of a diverse number of species, including some great botany, highlighted by Andrew's diagnostic "wow" calls as once again he was torn between feathers and flowers! As we ambled along the sandy path, we were treated to some great views of **Moussier's Redstarts**, **Little Owl**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Cirl Bunting**, **Linnet**, as well as **Wryneck**, **Montagu's Harrier** and a single **Alpine Swift** for Lee. On nearing the mouth of the estuary, a **Caspian Tern** gave us a close flyby and two **Great Egrets** were visible on the sandy edge, previously a rare bird in Morocco, but seemingly regular at this site now. It was getting quite hot, so we retreated to some shade, which gave us a good view over to a large sand bank at the mouth of the estuary. Here we were able to scan through a large mass of mostly **Lesser Black-backed** and **Yellow-legged Gulls**, but with some careful searching a number of beautiful **Audouin's Gulls** were clearly visible and of various ages. A number of **Northern Gannets** were visible feeding offshore, **Black-crowned Tchagras** were in full song around us, and we had more excellent views of this attractive member of the Bush-Shrike family. We then slowly ambled back to our vehicles and of course our last picnic lunch, which once again was a tasty tagine with the usual fresh bread and vegetables. Nearby, a couple of **Barbary Partridges** scuttled across an arable plot, being much closer than the birds seen earlier in the week and even allowing time for scope views of this attractive game bird. With stomachs full, there was no time to waste, as we had one very big target species left and the rarest of the lot! Therefore, we headed back towards Agadir and this time to the north of the city, and the beautiful coastline of Tamri. Of course, there was still time to squeeze in a coffee stop during the hot afternoon and we relaxed for a little while, before starting once again on another quest, that was, Operation **Northern Bald Ibis**. *The Critically Endangered Northern Bald Ibis was once widespread across much of Southern and Central Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. However, it has undergone a huge decline over the last 400 to 500 years and there are now just two populations, a migratory*

population in Turkey, and another, resident population, in coastal Morocco. Good numbers remained in Turkey up until the mid 1900s, but became extinct in 1992 leaving just the Moroccan population, until 2002 when a tiny number were re-discovered in Syria. Urbanisation, disturbance and changes in farming practices are the main threats faced by the Moroccan birds. The National Park has successfully blocked building on their breeding and feeding areas. This, together with local wardens, employed by SEO/BirdLife, monitoring and raising local awareness of the bird's plight, has led to a slow increase in the Moroccan population, believed to be just over 100 breeding pairs.

The pressure was well and truly on as all eyes were eager to see these interesting birds. Every now and again, we would stop and scan for birds along the coast road, but with no luck, until our last stop. Here, at a high point overlooking the sea cliffs, we located a flock of around 20+ **Northern Bald Ibis** circling fairly high above us! We patiently waited to see what the birds were going to do, just as a rain shower came in! Luckily, the birds decided to drop right in front of us and we remained in our vehicles and slowly approached them where we were treated to some fantastic close views, as they fed unperturbed by our presence. Clearly, not the most beautiful of birds, but impressive creatures nonetheless and a subtle beauty as their flowing head plumes caught the wind and the purple/green sheen to their feathers was really striking in the afternoon light. We spent some time just watching their feeding habits and just took in the great scene with the Atlantic Coast as an impressive backdrop, knowing we had cleaned up on all the specialities! Once everyone was happy with studying these almost prehistoric looking birds, we headed a little further along the coast for some final birding on the beach and associated Tamri River. Here, we had some good views of **Moroccan Wagtail, Ringed Plover, Audouin's Gull** and a few distant **Northern Gannet**, before we headed back to Agadir for a final group meal, beers and banter.

## Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March

Today was our final day, so we enjoyed a leisurely breakfast at our hotel, before packing the vehicles and taking the drive of just under 3 hours back to where our adventure started, the city of Marrakech. We made good time, enabling yet more coffee and some final birding at some suitable looking habitat. Here we had our last views of species like **Moussier's Redstart, Laughing Dove** and **Desert Grey Shrike** before we arrived back to the hustle and bustle of Marrakech. Here we enjoyed our last tagine before heading for the airport, weary, but full of great mental images of the fantastic birding adventure that is Morocco!

Many thanks to Andrew Proudfoot, Peter Alfrey, Lee Dingain and Darryl Spittle for allowing the use of some of their photos in this report.

**Andrew Proudfoot:** All botany photos

**Peter Alfrey:** Maghreb Wheatear and People in Desert

**Lee Dingain:** Rock Martin, Seebohm's Wheatear and Migratory Locust

**Darryl Spittle:** All reptile photos

**Conservation Donation** – Following the successful conclusion of this tour, a £250 donation from Wise Birding Holidays was made to the Northern Bald Ibis Conservation Program:

**The Northern Bald Ibis** is critically endangered with an adult population believed to be little over 100 breeding pairs therefore making it one of the rarest birds in the world, with 95% of the population found in Morocco. Our tours here donate money to an ongoing research project between SEO (Sociedad Española de Ornitología) and the local conservation authorities, particularly the Souss-Massa National Park, with strong support from the RSPB. The project has been running for around 15 years supporting a dedicated team of local wardens who are deeply involved in the protection and scientific monitoring of the species. Knowledge on seasonal movements outside the National Park and neighbouring areas is very limited with known sightings recorded regularly at places as far as 700 km north in Tetuan or 1200 km down South in Mauritania.

**The main known threats for the species** are the increase in the construction of hotels and vacation homes close to the breeding and feeding areas as well as increased levels of disturbance. Therefore, improving knowledge on the species' range and movements is essential for its survival. Our donation will go directly to help with GPS satellite tagging and wardening of sites to reduce disturbance.



*One of three Cream-coloured Coursers that we saw on the Tagdilt Track. Numbers seemed low this year.*



*The beautiful Blue-cheeked Bee-Eater was seen near Rissani.*



**Some bird highlights from the High Atlas Mountains.....**



Male Levillant's  
Woodpecker,  
Ourika Valley.



A Male "Atlas"  
Crimson-winged  
Finch, Oukaïmeden.



One of the many  
"Atlas" Horned Larks,  
Oukaïmeden.



## Some bird highlights from the Hammada and Desert.....



Male and Female  
Crowned Sandgrouse,  
Erg Chebbi.  
Over 30 birds were  
seen on our desert day!



A superb male  
Thick-billed Lark,  
near Goulmima.



Male and Female  
Spotted Sandgrouse,  
Erg Chebbi.  
We saw over 130 birds,  
in just two days!



**Some bird highlights from the Hammada and Desert continued.....**



This male Desert Sparrow seen near Cafe Yasmina, was one of the highlights of the tour.



This male Maghreb Wheatear near Boumalne Dades was one of three birds seen.



Pharaoh Eagle Owl, near Boumalne Dades.

Some bird highlights from the Hammada and Desert continued....



African Desert  
Warbler, near  
Cafe Yasmina.



We found up to ten  
Rock Martins whist on  
our desert day!  
Now considered a  
Moroccan rarity.



After failing to find  
any at Oukaimeden -  
This male Seebohm's  
Wheatear was a real  
bonus near Goulmima.



*Some bird highlights from the Souss-Massa NP....*



Male Moussier's Redstart, Massa Estuary. A common but stunning bird.



One of many Black-crowned Tchagras seen well at the Massa Estuary.



The grand finale to our tour was seeing a small group of Northern Bald Ibis, near Tamri.



Some of the amazing landscapes.....



The High Atlas Mountains, viewed from Oukaïmeden.



The Erg Chebbi sand dunes are an impressive backdrop for birding.



The famous Tagdilt Track is a great place to see many desert specialities.



*Some of the people and landscapes.....*





Some of the reptiles.....



Andalusian  
Wall Lizard



Atlas Day  
Gecko



Dumeril's  
Fringe-  
toed /Long  
Fringe-  
fingered  
Lizard



Some of the plants and other wildlife.....



## WISE BIRDING HOLIDAYS

### BIRD LIST: Southern Morocco: Birders' Specialities Tour

9<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> March 2013 **185 Species Recorded**

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
1	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	-	Recorded on five days: max. count of 40+ at Dayet Srji
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	-	Recorded on two days
3	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	-	Recorded on two days
4	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	-	Recorded only at Mansour Reservoir (MR)
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	-	Recorded only at (MR)
6	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	-	A total of 12 birds: 2 at (MR) and 10 on the Souss Estuary (SE)
7	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	-	Recorded only at (MR)
8	Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	-	Two groups of three: one group near Toufliht and the other at the Massa Estuary
9	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	-	Heard only near the Massa Estuary (ME)
10	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	-	Recorded on two days
11	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	-	A group of 10+ birds at (MR)
12	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	-	Recorded on the coast near Agadir
13	<b>Great Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Two forms are found in Morocco: <i>sinensis</i> and <i>maroccanus</i>	Recorded on two days
	"White-breasted" Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Distinctive <i>maroccanus</i> subsp. is common on the coast	Recorded on three days with the best views at (ME)
14	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	-	Recorded on eight days
15	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	-	Recorded on three days
16	Great Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	-	A scarce bird in Morocco with just 2 birds at (ME)
17	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	-	Recorded on four days
18	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	-	Recorded on four days : max. count of 150+ at (MR)
19	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	-	Neil spotted the only 4 birds of the trip whilst crossing the Tizi N Tichka Pass
20	Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>	-	A total of 30 birds recorded on the coast at Tamri
21	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	-	Recorded on two days: max. count of 10 birds at (MR)

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
22	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	-	Recorded on two days : max. count of 33 birds at Dayet Srji
23	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	-	Recorded on two days: maximum count 3 birds at (MR)
24	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>	-	2 birds seen migrating near Toufliht on the 11th
25	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>	-	3 birds on 13 <sup>th</sup> : Two at Todra Gorge & one near Erfoud
26	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	-	A single bird near Merzouga on the 16 <sup>th</sup>
27	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	-	Recorded on two days with the largest counts at (MR)
28	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	-	A single bird whilst travelling on 17 <sup>th</sup> & Lee had a bird at the Massa Estuary
29	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>cirtensis</i> , sometimes referred to as "Atlas" LLB	Recorded on the first four full days of the trip
30	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	The resident subspecies is <i>punicus</i>	Recorded on four days
31	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	-	2 birds seen from the vehicles when en route to Agadir
32	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	-	Recorded on nine days
33	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	-	Two single birds on the 11 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup>
34	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>brookei</i> , sometimes referred to as <i>Mediterranean Peregrine</i>	Our only sighting was of a bird at the Souss Estuary
35	Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	-	Some good views of 4 birds over three days
36	Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is the very pale <i>erlangeri</i> form	A single bird soared above us whilst watching a couple of day roosting Egyptian Nightjars!
37	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	-	Recorded on two days
38	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	-	Recorded on three days
39	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	-	Only recorded on the Souss Estuary
40	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	-	Recorded on three days with a max. count of 25 at Dayet Srji
41	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	-	Recorded on three days



	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
42	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>saharae</i>	A single bird near the Souss Estuary
43	Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	-	Low numbers this year: 3 birds on the Tagdilt Track plus a good find of 2 birds at Mansour Reservoir
44	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	-	Recorded on four days
45	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	-	Recorded on two days
46	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	-	Recorded on four days
47	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	The most numerous subspecies found in Morocco is <i>schinzii</i>	Recorded on the Souss and Massa Estuaries
48	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	-	The only sighting was of 4 birds at Mansour Reservoir
49	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	-	Recorded on three days: max. count of 13+ at Dayet Srji
50	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	-	A single bird on the Souss Estuary
51	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	-	Recorded on five days
52	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	-	Recorded on two days
53	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	-	Recorded on two days
54	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	-	A single bird at Mansour Reservoir
55	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	-	Recorded on two days: max. count of 3 birds at Dayet Srji
56	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	-	Just 2 birds on the Souss Estuary
57	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	-	Recorded at the Souss Estuary
58	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	-	Numerous on the coast
59	Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	-	Small numbers on two days with the best views at (ME)
60	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Both <i>grasellsii</i> and <i>intermedius</i> forms occur in Morocco	Numerous birds on the coast
61	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	-	Recorded on two days on the coast: max. count 20+ (SE)
62	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	-	5 birds at Dayet Srji was the only sighting
63	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	-	A single bird on the Massa Estuary
64	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	-	Great views of 30+ birds on the Tagdilt Track

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
65	Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>	-	Recorded on two days: Two flocks of 60+ and 70+
66	Crowned Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>	-	Recorded on just one day with a total of 35 birds. These birds were unusually, much further east in the desert than expected
67	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	-	Recorded on nine days
68	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>excels</i>	Recorded on three days
69	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	-	Recorded on ten days
70	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>phoenicophila</i>	Recorded on three days with the best views at (ME)
71	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	-	A single bird singing near Toufliht
72	Pharaoh Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>	-	A single adult on two occasions near Boumalne Dades
73	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	The subspecies is <i>glauca</i> , sometimes referred to as " <i>Desert</i> " Little Owl	Recorded on three days with a max. count of 5 birds on the 17th
74	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	-	Good views in torchlight of 2 birds on the Souss Estuary
75	Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>saharae</i>	Fantastic sightings of up to 5 different birds over three days: 3 day roosting birds and 2 birds seen at night
76	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	-	Recorded on four days
77	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>brehmorum</i>	Recorded on six days mostly around Marrakech/Agadir
78	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	-	Lee had a single bird over the Massa Estuary
79	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	-	Recorded on four days around towns/cities
80	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	-	Recorded on seven days
81	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	-	Recorded on two days: max. count of 40+ birds flying over (MR)
82	Blue-cheeked Bee-Eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>	The subspecies breeding in Morocco is <i>chrysocercus</i>	Recorded on two days in the desert areas totalling 4 birds

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
83	Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	-	At least 4 birds in the High Atlas and 1 heard near Toufliht
84	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	The race in Morocco is <i>mauritanus</i>	Recorded only in the High Atlas
85	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	-	Lee had a bird at the Massa Estuary
86	Common Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	-	A small group on the Tagdilt track
87	<b>Crested Lark</b>	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Five races occur in Morocco, including 2 "Long-billed" races.	Various races recorded on six days, including the Long-billed form on three days
	"Common" Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	The <i>riggenbachi</i> race, found in the Souss Valley is the race most likely to be encountered on this tour.	
	"Long-billed" Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	<i>macrorhyncha</i> (TAFILALT REGION)	
			<i>randonii</i> (HIGH & MIDDLE ATLAS)	
88	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	Three races occur: <i>erlangeri</i> in the north, <i>aguirrei</i> in the south and <i>ruficolor</i> in the west.	Recorded on at least three days
89	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	-	Recorded on five days: max. count of 8 birds
90	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	The resident subspecies is <i>minor</i>	A single bird on the Tagdilt Track was a late bird. This species is very common earlier in the winter
91	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>payni</i>	Recorded on three days
92	Bar-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>arenicolor</i>	Recorded on five days
93	Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>	-	A total of 16 birds recorded on 2 days: 10 on the Tagdilt Track, including 8 flying over and 6 near Goulmima
94	Horned Lark (Shore Lark)	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	The <i>atlas</i> race is endemic to the Atlas Mountains, sometimes referred to as " <i>Atlas</i> " Horned Lark	Recorded only at Oukaïmeden with a minimum count of 40+ birds
95	Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	-	This species was very common on the Tagdilt Track
96	Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	-	Great views over five days



	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
97	Common Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	-	Recorded on eight days
98	Plain Martin (Brown-throated )	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>mauretanica</i>	At least 2 birds seen well as they hawked over the Massa
99	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>theresae</i>	Recorded on four days
100	Rock Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>	-	A group of at least 10 birds was a great find near Begaa
101	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	-	Recorded on all but one day
102	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>rufula</i>	Recorded on eight days
103	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	The subspecies breeding in Morocco is <i>meridionalis</i>	Recorded on four days
104	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	-	Single birds recorded on three days
105	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	-	Recorded only at Oukaimeden
106	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	-	Recorded on three days
107	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	-	Recorded on three days with a max. count of 8 on the 12 <sup>th</sup>
108	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	-	Recorded on eight days
	Moroccan Wagtail	<i>Motacilla subpersonata</i>	-	This highly distinctive race was recorded on three days
109	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Numerous races occur in Morocco	Recorded on six days, but only assigned to race on two days as below.
	Blue-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	-	Recorded on two days
110	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	-	Recorded on three days
111	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus minor</i>	-	Two birds on a stream near Oukaimeden
112	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	-	Recorded on two days
113	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	-	Recorded on two days, but only seen on one
114	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	-	A single migrant near the Tagdilt Track
115	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	-	Recorded on five days
116	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	-	Recorded on three days
117	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	-	Recorded on four days with the best views at (ME)
118	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	-	Recorded on eight days

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	Seebohm's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>	This high altitude and distinctive dark-throated Wheatear was previously lumped with N. Wheatear	After failing to find any early arrivals at Oukaimeden, we had a bonus migrant male near Goulmima!
119	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	-	A single bird was seen well near Tourong
120	Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	-	Recorded on six days
121	White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	-	A common bird of the desert regions recorded on five days
122	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	The subsp. in Morocco is <i>syenitica</i> and is duller than in Europe	Recorded on five days
123	Maghreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe lugens</i>	Closely related to Mourning Wheatear. The race <i>halophila</i> is endemic to NW Africa and is considered a separate species to birds found further East. Hence the recently suggested name of " <i>Maghreb</i> " Wheatear	A total of three birds, 2 males and a female, seen very well near Boumalne Dades
124	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>homochroa</i>	This great looking wheatear was recorded on five days
125	Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	-	This strikingly large wheatear was a common sight on the Tagdilt Track
126	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	-	5 birds were recorded on the coast on the 18th
127	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	-	Recorded on our first two days
128	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>deisleri</i>	A total of 3 birds recorded at Oukaimeden
129	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>mauritanicus</i> sometimes referred to as " <i>Moroccan</i> " Blackbird. Females are very dark in colour.	Recorded on seven days

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130	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	The striking pale scaled <i>alpestris</i> race occurs in Morocco as well as the nominate form.	Lee had a single migrant near the Tagdilt Track
131	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	-	Recorded on two days with the best views near Todra Gorge
132	Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>	The race in SE Morocco is <i>saharae</i> sometimes referred to as " <i>Maghreb</i> " <i>Scrub Warbler</i>	With a little patience we had some good views of a single bird near Goulmima
133	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	-	Recorded on three days
134	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	-	Recorded on three days
135	Western Orphean warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	-	A singing male showed very well en route to Agadir
136	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	-	Recorded on four days
137	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	-	Single birds recorded in the stony desert areas on two days
138	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	-	The commonest migrant warbler recorded on eight days
139	African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>	-	Recorded on two days: max. count of 5 birds on one day!
140	Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>maroccana</i>	A pair in the Todra Gorge and Darryl had a late migrant in the desert
141	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	-	Recorded only at the Massa River
142	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>cisticola</i>	Recorded on both the Massa and Souss Estuaries
143	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	-	Recorded on three days, but only seen on one day
144	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	-	Recorded on two days
145	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus pallidus</i>	The race in SE Morocco is <i>reiseri</i> , sometimes referred to as " <i>Saharan</i> " <i>Olivaceous Warbler</i>	This species was heard singing along the river Ziz

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
146	Isabelline Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus opacus</i>	The alternative name for this species is, <b>Western Olivaceous Warbler</b>	Lee photographed a bird at Cafe Yasmina
147	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	-	Recorded on two days in the desert
148	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	-	Recorded on four days
149	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	-	Recorded on six days
150	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <b>balearica</b>	Recorded near Toufliht in the Pine forests
151	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		Recorded on two days
152	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <b>excelsus</b>	Recorded on three days
153	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	The <b>atlas</b> subspecies is endemic to Morocco and is sometimes referred to as <b>"Atlas" Coal Tit</b>	Recorded on the first two full days
154	African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <b>ultramarines</b>	Recorded on four days
155	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <b>mauritanica</b> , sometimes referred to as <b>"Maghreb" Short-toed Treecreeper</b>	Heard by all and glimpsed by Neil and Chris near Toufliht
156	<b>Southern Grey Shrike</b>	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	There are 2 forms in Morocco sometimes referred to as <b>"Desert Grey Shrike"</b>	Recorded on nine days
	"Desert" Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	<b>elegans</b> (INLAND)	
			<b>algeriensis</b> (COASTAL/SOUSS VALLEY)	
157	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	-	A seemingly common migrant recorded on seven days

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
158	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>cucullata</i>	At least 4 birds seen well and heard singing on the Massa Estuary
159	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>		Recorded on eight days
160	Fulvous Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulva</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>maroccanus</i>	Recorded on two days: max. count at least 8 birds near Tinejdad
161	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>mauretanica</i> , sometimes referred to as " <i>Moroccan</i> " <i>Magpie</i> and has distinctive blue bare skin behind eye.	Recorded on four days in Marrakech and Agadir
162	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>barbarus</i>	Recorded in the High Atlas and one other day
163	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	-	Recorded in the High Atlas
164	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>tingitanus</i> , sometimes referred to as " <i>North African</i> " <i>Raven</i>	Recorded on three days
165	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	-	Recorded on three days, exclusively in the desert; max. count 30+
166	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	-	Recorded on five days
167	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	-	Recorded on ten days
168	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	-	Recorded en route to Agadir at our lunch stop in the Argan Trees
169	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>barbara</i>	Recorded at Oukaimeden
170	Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>saharae</i>	Recorded on two days with two groups of 4 birds
171	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	The distinct "green-backed" subspecies in Morocco is <i>africana</i> , sometimes referred to as " <i>North African</i> " <i>Chaffinch</i>	The <i>africana</i> race was recorded on six days, with both the <i>nominata</i> and <i>africana</i> race recorded at Oukaimeden
172	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	-	Darryl found a single bird at Oukaimeden

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SUBSPECIES and RACE NOTES	NOTES
173	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	The resident race in Morocco is <i>mediterranea</i>	Recorded on three days
174	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	The resident subspecies in Morocco is <i>parva</i>	Recorded on seven days
175	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris voousi</i>	Two resident subspecies occur in Morocco: <i>vanmarli</i> in the north-west and <i>voousi</i> in the Atlas Mountains	Recorded on five days
176	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	-	Recorded on one day
177	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	-	Recorded on seven days
178	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	The resident subspecies is <i>buvryi</i>	Recorded on the first two full days
179	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>poliogyna</i> , sometimes referred to as " <i>Moroccan</i> " Crossbill	Recorded in the High Atlas and near Toufliht
180	Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	The subspecies in Morocco is <i>zedlidzi</i>	Recorded on six days: max. count 100+ at (MR)
181	Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea</i>	The local race <i>aliena</i> is endemic to Morocco and Algeria	A group of at least 30 birds seen very well at Oukaimeden
182	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	-	Recorded on four days
183	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	-	Recorded on one day
184	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	-	Recorded on two days
185	House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	-	Recorded on six days

## WISE BIRDING HOLIDAYS

### SPECIES OTHER THAN BIRDS: Southern Morocco: Birders' Specialities Tour

9<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> March 2013

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
African Savannah Hare	<i>Lepus microtis</i>
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Barbary Ground Squirrel	<i>Atlantoxerus getulus</i>
Fat Sand Rat	<i>Psammomys obesus</i>
Andalusian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis vaucheri</i>
Dumeril's Fringe-toed/Long Fringe-fingered Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus dumerilii/longipes</i>
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauretanica</i>
Atlas Day Gecko	<i>Quedenfeldtia trachyblepharus</i>
Stripe-necked Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>
Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>
Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous,</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
Crimson Speckled	<i>Uthetheisa pulchella</i>
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Vagrant Emperor	<i>Anax ephippiger</i>
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>



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