

# Morocco in Spring

## 2 – 12 March 2006

### Trip Report

**Leader:**

Tim Earl

**Driver:**

Hassan el Akari

### Introduction

Southern Morocco is a delightful destination in March. Besides a great range of habitats – desert, mountain, plains, marsh and coastal – which produce great birds and animals, the scenery is terrific and people hospitable and friendly. Working the various desert habitats is novel and rewarding; the peaks of the High Atlas are magnificent, while the sand dunes and river-mouths on the coast are full of interest.

This was the earliest we have done the Southern Morocco trip but we were rewarded with wintering species not often seen on other dates. The group came together well and we all enjoyed each other's company – a typical Travelling Naturalist experience in that respect.

New agents in Morocco were good with a range of excellent hotels, a minibus which was far more versatile than the coaches we have used, and an excellent driver in Hassan el Akari.

This is the account of our adventure:

### The Diary

**Thursday 2 March**

**Heathrow to Ouarzazate**

An eager group met at Heathrow's Terminal 2 for the three-hour flight to Casablanca which left on time. We had our passports stamped at Casablanca and went out into the arrivals hall to cash money... a good move as it saved time and trouble at the hotels during the trip. After catching the Ouarzazate flight we arrived at 11.50pm to be met by our driver Hassan. We drove the short distance to La Perle du Sud Hotel where everyone headed for bed eager for the holiday ahead.

**Friday 3 March**

**Edahbi Barrage and the Tagdilt Track**

We were up bright and early for a pre-breakfast walk at 7 o'clock to be rewarded instantly by views of three Red-rumped Swallows, a Hoopoe and several House Buntings flitting around the hotel. With the Oued Ouarzazate as our goal, we explored a side road which took us down to a cliff which overlooked the river. Sadly, a digger was extracting gravel and, although birds did not seem disturbed, we decided to explore further.

A pair of Mallards, two Little Ringed Plovers and a couple of Green Sandpipers were noted before we left while a White Stork flew over minutes later. Barn Swallows were common and we were delighted when they were joined by a flock of House Martins. Britain's weather was cold, icy with some snow when we left and it was great to see birds on their way up to join us for the summer just a few hours after leaving.

Our walk took us up a hill to a wonderful look-out from which we could see the whole of this beautiful town. The buildings were mostly ochre-coloured and blended with the hillsides

beautifully. Snow-topped peaks in the wonderful Atlas Mountains formed a backdrop, the air clear and the scene was fabulous. We had wandered up to a Royal palace, however, and unable to give the guard a cigarette he asked for, we were given only a couple of minutes to admire the view before being moved on. A Blue Rock-thrush and a Common Kestrel were admired in that short time, however.

After a good breakfast we loaded the bus and set off for a huge lake on the outskirts of Ouarzazate, the Barrage de Mansour el Edahbi. Access to the barrage is prohibited but there is a fort which overlooks the lake and from there we wandered down to the water's edge. An Osprey was seen briefly (it gave better views later while eating a fish on the top of a derelict fort) and a White-crowned Black Wheatear was admired as it sang from a light standard.

Chiffchaffs were flitting through the Tamarisk bushes which also contained a small flock of Serins, one of which sang beautifully.

"What's that," gasped Malcolm suddenly drawing our attention to a stunning Moussier's Redstart which posed in its ochre, black and white plumage for minutes. A flock of hirundines contained Crag, Sand and Dark-throated Sand (Plain) martins many of which were hawking insects from the lake. Coots and Great Crested Grebes were common as was the Moroccan race of Cormorant *P.c. maroccanus*.

Walking back to the bus we stopped to admire a Changeable Agama and Tim got us on to a flock of Trumpeter Finches which lived up to their name by calling nasally. They were feeding on a hillside a few yards away and we had great views of their pink-touched plumage and extravagant red beaks.

A comfort and mint-tea break at a favourite café in Skoura was accompanied by great views of a White-crowned Black wheatear (and a visit to a rather nice non-touristy souvenir shop). An hour later we settled down to a super mixed omelette lunch during which three Pallid Swifts were spotted.

Our main afternoon activity was to walk the Tagdilt Track, but not before we had enjoyed excellent views of a Long-legged Buzzard which was perched on a pile of rubble when first spotted. The birds were scattered along the track but a pair of Red-rumped Wheatears were soon delighting their observers. They were quickly followed by excellent views of two Cream-coloured Coursers. A mixed party of Thekla and Temminck's Horned Larks gave good views, the latter looking like tiny Ringed Plovers when face-on. Malcolm found an obliging Fat Sand Rat (another was seen carrying bedding a little later) and a possible *Psammotomus* was seen scuttling away into a wadi.

We returned to the bus well pleased with our day and were soon checking in to the comfortable and friendly Hotel Bougafer where we enjoyed a good meal before turning in for an early night.

#### **Saturday 4 March**

##### **Tagdilt Plain and the Gorges du Todra**

Birding around Tineghir is not brilliant so we had an early breakfast and set off back to the Tagdilt Plain at 7.30am. Stopping about 10km from Tineghir, we found a Desert Lark close to the bus and had excellent views before it flew off and we disembarked. A search for wintering larks was unsuccessful but we finally found a small mixed flock of Lesser Short-toed Larks and Short-toed Larks feeding close to the road. They flushed every time a vehicle went past but always returned to the same spot giving us lots of time to sort them out. A pair of Crested Larks was also in the area as was a lone Desert Lark.

Moving on across the Tagdilt Plain, we stopped to watch a huge kettle of Black Kites soaring in a thermal before setting off in a north-easterly direction, presumably heading for the coast and Europe.

We drove on to Boumalne for a comfort and tea stop and were delighted to see firstly a female Sparrowhawk rise up out of the valley below us and then two White Storks which did the same. Finally, a Barbary Falcon shot past chasing a Rock Dove and seconds later passed over our heads (without prey) to perch on a nearby aerial. It was all great stuff.

We returned to the Tagdilt Track which we walked for an hour getting good views of Temminck's Horned Larks, Desert and Black-eared wheatears.

Our lunch was booked at the top of the Todra Gorge and after a short stop at the hotel in Tineghir we drove up the valley, resisting the urge to stop for pictures which would be better later in the day. After chicken tadgene we walked up the valley which was surprisingly empty of birds. A pair of Black Wheatears was at the narrow part of the gorge and there were many Crag Martins and a few House Martins. But the hoped-for Rock Buntings, Ring Ouzels and raptors were not to be seen.

We stopped for pictures on our descent and were delighted to get great views of Red-rumped Swallows as they hawked flies just below us. A flock of wading Cattle Egrets were the only other birds of note.

### **Sunday 5 March Tineghir to Erfoud**

Travelling days can be difficult but with just 160km to drive we could spend lots of time exploring likely habitats. This paid handsomely with super larks, wheatears and a few migrants for good measure. The days started well with Southern Grey Shrike in a tree outside the hotel before we set off.

Our first stop was at a wadi about 30km from Tineghir where we found a pair of Desert Larks almost immediately. We were distracted, however, by the offer of visiting a Bedouin camp which proved fascinating. Wool from their own goats was dyed and woven on a loom; we saw grain being ground and the gruel it produced cooked in a smoky stone room. Their bedroom was also a store for a few possessions. The Desert Larks were chasing off one of five Short-toed Larks when we returned to birding.

A stop at a second wadi produced another Southern Grey Shrike, three Trumpeter Finches and great views of our first Desert Wheatear for the day. A small desert Asphodel and a bush with blue flowers were admired.

Our tea stop was at a café in Tinejdad where Tim was recognised by the owner and a great fuss made. A palm grove 2km down the road was investigated and turned out to be home to a delightful village. We explored the fields and water courses but found getting onto birds difficult although lots of Blackcaps, a couple of Bonelli's Warblers, several Chiffchaffs, Serins and two Tree Pipits were seen. A colony of Shaw's Jirds provided great views for everyone, however.

Our visit was accompanied by lots of children who, although charming and impeccably behaved, did nothing to make finding birds easy. They were forgiven as we enjoyed the visit so much.

A water culvert ran through the fields and gardens and was used by about 20 women and girls who were washing clothes. Several people tried to point out birds to us and we were even invited into a house for tea, which sadly we declined due to time.

A good picnic lunch was eaten in a café at El Gfifate where Tim proceeded to waste more time by nodding off for 20 minutes. He made up for it a little later by stopping the bus at a piece of scrubby desert which looked the same as any other and starting a purple patch of birding.

"Our main quarry is Hoopoe Lark," Tim explained as we set off across the plain and promptly found... a Hoopoe which flopped away in a characteristic flight, black and white wings flashing. Next to pop up was a pair of Bar-tailed Desert Larks which, like all the birds of the afternoon, gave good views. We were able to compare them with Desert Larks seen earlier in the day.

Gaye found a small pale bird flitting through some low bushes. It was a Desert Warbler which we saw really well thanks to its habit of often standing on the ground.

The search continued when Tim suddenly announced that he had found a Hoopoe Lark. It was a super bird which worked its way towards us, running like a miniature Houbara Bustard,

pouncing on luckless insects which it devoured before finally stopping to preen. We all studied it in great detail through scopes before it finally flopped off in a characteristic Hoopoe-like flight, black and white wings flashing.

“If we could only find Thick-billed Lark I would be a happy man,” the leader muttered out loud. The group heard his plea and a few minutes later Louise said: “What’s this then?”

There was the first of three Thick-billed Larks we saw in the next 15 minutes, its heavily streaked chest and weird fat beak clearly visible. What an event... except that Malcolm was not watching that bird; he had found a pale-looking Hoopoe Lark. Two more were seen by the end of the afternoon.

We were surprised to note that a sand storm had blown up while we were birding – so great was the concentration that the loss of horizons was not noticed. It blew up worse in the next few minutes giving a long line of wells a rather eerie look, especially as there were signs inviting us to rest in wind-swept sandy Berber tents.

We continued towards Erfoud stopping briefly at a palm grove which produced nothing of note due to the sand storm and strong wind.

It had blown out by the time we reached the hotel where we enjoyed a semolina soup, chicken tagene and date pie supper.

### **Monday 6 March**

#### **The sand dunes of the Sahara**

Erg Chebbi, the largest sand-dune formation in Morocco is a real taste of the Sahara Desert... as portrayed in numerous French Foreign Legion films... and was a highlight of this extraordinary trip. True, we did not see Fulvous Babbler or Desert Sparrow but that did not seem to matter; the experience was thrilling.

Our two Landrovers were waiting for us at 7am and we soon left the tarmac road south of Erfoud and headed out into the desert. Our lead driver Hmad Noughou demonstrated his knowledge of the desert by pointing out a Hoopoe Lark which was performing its dramatic display flight. We piled out and listened as the bird sang quite quietly before soaring 30m into the air and diving back to the ground, pulling out of the plunge just a few millimetres above the ground. It repeated this several times to our great delight.

Our next stop was to look at a plastic bag in a palm tree, as we thought. The bird took off and settled a short distance away for us to investigate. Controversially, it was identified as Short-toed Eagle by us but Bonelli’s Eagle by another bird group some distance away and three Dutchmen who believed their conclusion. We said nothing but remained convinced of our identification which was supported further when two more Short-toed Eagles drifted past in the next 10 minutes. A Lesser Kestrel also went past giving us excellent views for identification.

Moving on to the Café Yasmina, where Desert Sparrow failed to show up for the second year running, we were met by a dozen Brown-necked Ravens at a nearby rubbish tip. The search for Desert Sparrow was enjoyed in the weird tamarisk and desert habitat. Mint tea was drunk while admiring the sand dunes which threaten to swamp the establishment. A Subalpine Warbler was compensation for those who managed to see it.

A further stop was made for our lunch starter – French fries, olives and salted nuts negotiated to avoid another tagine. The omelettes we ordered were packed into half-loaves of “pocket-bread” with tomato and potato. With oranges and dates for dessert we set off carrying the picnics.

The drivers told us that Dayet Sjiri, an ephemeral lake near Merzouga, was flooded for the first time in five years. This was great news as its reputation under such circumstances is tremendous. We arrived to see scores of Ruddy Shelducks, a beautiful bird, and 22 Greater Flamingos... but little else. A search teased out one Avocet and a single Greenshank. A little disappointed we settled down close to the lake to eat our delicious picnics to the sound of crooning shelducks and the occasional croon of a flamingo. Our pleasure heightened when a Yellow Wagtail of the Spanish race *iberiae* dropped in at our feet.

A search for warblers produced great views of more Hoopoe Larks, five Cream-coloured Coursers and two Northern Wheatears before a male Marsh Harrier was found hunting over the lake on which four White Storks had appeared. We returned to Merzouga to look for Fulvous Babblers at a stake-out site, without success. One of the highlight birds of the day turned up in the form of a Woodchat Shrike which posed beautifully for us. Common and Black redstarts were seen and a Bonelli's Warbler gave reasonable views as we walked yet another verdant oasis.

Driving back to the hotel we watched the sun set having illuminated this special part of the world for more than 12 hours as we explored its delights.

### **Tuesday 7 March Back to Ouarzazate**

A pre-breakfast walk behind the hotel gave Tim a glimpse of a Fulvous Babbler but neither he nor anyone else could find it when we returned on our way out of Erfoud.

The trip back to Ouarzazate was terrific.

A walk down a wadi about 45km out of the town produced good views of a pair of Southern Grey Shrikes and two Tristram's Warblers. The first was a tricky identification problem as it appeared to be a first winter male, but the second was spot-on and a delight as we ended the hike. A pair of Bar-tailed Desert Larks showed well and sang a fine ditty for us.

Driving on, we had morning tea on the terrace of a café in Alnif where a Subalpine Warbler was seen in the trees behind. The journey down to the Drâa valley was uneventful with a few White-crowned Black Wheatears, Desert Larks and a Hoopoe for entertainment. The flat stony desert scenery was terrific until we reached a lush green valley which runs up into the Jbel Rhart range ending at N'Kob. From there we passed through mountain scenery until we reached Tansikht.

Our lunch stop in a restaurant near the River Drâa was super. We ordered omelettes and chips and then went for a walk down to the river while waiting for the food to be prepared. Rosemary found a Moussier's Redstart and a female House bunting gave us some fun trying to identify it. There was little on the river but we did see our first Stripe-necked Terrapin.

We had just sat down for lunch in the restaurant garden when a stunning Bonelli's Eagle passed low overhead, wheeling around giving superb views. This was the final clincher on yesterday's controversy... the raptor we saw in the desert was definitely a Short-toed Eagle.

The final drive to Ouarzazate was punctuated by stops to see views more than birds although a Thekla Lark was examined closely at the top of the Tiz n'Tinifit pass through the Jbel Sarhro. Here, as last year, a man offered us picture opportunities with a Spiny-tailed Lizard but he pocketed it and looked worried when we threatened to set the police on him. He was going to let it go later, we were assured. This practice should surely be banned in a civilised country like Morocco.

Our journey ended at the warm and friendly Hotel Perle du Sud where the evening had something of a party atmosphere.

### **Wednesday 8 March To Marrakech**

A short walk before breakfast added Grey Wagtail to our ever-growing list but the highlight was a fly-past by a pair of Ruddy Shelducks which settled on a pool in the river below us. A male Blackcap and a Black Redstart were also seen.

Setting off for Marrakech after getting a picnic lunch, we stopped at Oued Ignissi to look for European Bee-eaters but there was no sign. Five Hoopoes were seen flitting around nearby orchards. It is always a puzzle when we see so many at one time; could they be migrating up into Europe?

Just down the road at Oued Tifouldtoud a Common Sandpiper was found on a shingle bank in the river but only a few Chiffchaffs, a female Blue Rock-thrush and three Black Redstarts could be found in nearby fields. A man with two Horned Vipers tried to use them as props in our pictures for a few dirhams but we got cross with him and refused.

Driving the main road to Marrakech we managed to re-locate a Mourning Wheatear territory found last year but could see only the female. A pair of Desert Wheatears and a Northern Wheatear was also in the area along with a couple of Trumpeter Finches.

A Black Kite was seen when we stopped for a coffee but generally raptors were in short supply until later in the afternoon. A Peregrine was seen at the Tizi-n-Tichka pass but it dived before we could get a scope onto it. It was probably one of two birds we found a couple of minutes later wheeling around beneath us at first and then over our heads, a superb sight. We had pulled into a lay-by and there were many *ohs* and *ahs* as first one, an adult male, and then the second, an immature male, went past us.

A couple of Linnets were seen at a quick comfort stop which was followed by a longer pause at the pass where flocks of Alpine Choughs were seen above nearby peaks and against the alpine snowfields. In fairness, the views were distant and we left hoping for better up at Ouakaimeden tomorrow. A few Common Ravens were seen before we headed onwards.

Our delicious picnic lunch was eaten in the gardens of a roadside café on a hillside in the high Atlas Mountains, where we watched the distinctive North-African blue-headed race of Chaffinch and “blue-cheeked” Magpies. A Wren sang for us briefly and our first Great Tit put in an appearance.

Stopping among Juniper trees and scrub on the way down the other side, we heard Dartford Warblers rattling out their songs, a couple of Song Thrushes flew past and two Barbary Partridges broke cover and flew down the slope in front of us.

Our last stop of the day was at the King’s hunting estate where a Booted Eagle was seen immediately migrating past. A family of Crossbills was located but views were not the best. Walking down a path through the pines we found a Coal Tit and another Crossbill was located as we returned. A Nightingale was singing some distance away and as we watched (open-mouthed) a Booted Eagle doing its display flight, Tim found two more migrating overhead. One was a dark morph bird.

The hustle and bustle of Marrakech soon enveloped us and we were glad to arrive at the comfortable hotel which was to be home for the next two nights.

### **Thursday 9 March Ouakaimeden and the Souk**

Ouakaimeden was teeming with birds when we arrived at 9.45 after a non-stop journey from Marrakech. Huge flocks of Alpine Choughs were swirling about with lots of Red-billed among them, and every piece of snow-less grass had a few Horned Larks on it. Gaye had seen a Barbary Partridge in the gorge below the ski-centre and a number of Black Redstarts were singing from trees and rooftops.

The setting was brilliant too with snow fields on ever neighbouring mountain top. Only the detritus of a season’s skiing spoiled the ambiance.

After a quick comfort stop we headed off towards the ski-lifts where small birds were visible. Lots of Horned Larks were admired close to us as they picked about in what little grass was available, giving us splendid views at the same time.

Tim had spotted a few Crimson-winged Finches and we pushed on until these were at our feet also. This remarkable bird is also found in a lone area of Tunisia and then nowhere else until one reaches the eastern Turkish mountains and Azerbaijan. We had great views of them and were thrilled by the subtle colours on such a bulky finch.

As the group set off towards the inn where we hoped to celebrate with coffee or mint tea, a few Rock Sparrows appeared and we had good views of them before carrying on. Some

people could see the yellow spot under the chin on one or two birds, always a difficult feature. A pair of Mistle Thrushes was seen before we reached the café.

We walked slowly down the valley after our tea and coffee, finding many more Horned Larks (hardly Shore Larks this far from the sea) and choughs but no Water Pipits or Golden Eagles. A pair of Kestrels received a hard time from the choughs which mobbed them unmercifully. Descending below a dam, a pair of Dippers was found feeding in the near-freezing melt water. We watched them for some time as Tim scoured the hillsides looking for Barbary Partridges without success. Both Long-legged Buzzards seen were of the north African race *B. r. cirtensis*.

Several stops were made on the way down, including the famous 17km post, and although Levillant's Woodpecker was heard several times, we could not find one. Cirl and Rock buntings turned up over lunch, the former found and identified by Heather. A Wren perched up and sang for us too.

Descending towards the plains, Tim spotted a Hawfinch flying up out of a valley. Happily, several others followed it and we all had good views of this reclusive bird in flight. A Cetti's Warbler objected to our presence and gave us a burst of song

The Hawfinches were not the last of the day's finches. On a whim, we walked across fields just outside Marrakech and found a flock of Siskins in a stand of young eucalyptus trees. As they were hanging upside down and singing so distinctively, a Quail started calling 'wet-your-lips, wet-your-lips'. Another Tree Pipit and a Southern Grey Shrike were also found before we returned to the city.

Arriving in Marrakech at about 5pm we went straight to the D'jemma el F'na Square from where we dived into the souk for a session of bargain hunting and haggling. We were lucky to have Louise with us as her knowledge of the souk took us into places off the tourist-track. Afterwards we wandered around the square watching the entertainment and hosts of stalls from which food could be purchased. Water-sellers in their red costumes with brass adornments, herbalists, story-tellers, troops of tumblers, snake-charmers (sadly) and street theatres provided something for everyone. All agreed that the visit was too short as we returned to the hotel for showers and supper.

### **Friday 10 March Agadir and Bald Ibis**

The journey down from Marrakech started under overcast skies which sadly kept singing Calandra Larks on the ground. The minibus shot past several Corn Buntings but as we were keen to get to the coast no stops were made for birds.

We arrived just south of Tamri at 12.30 and after a lunch of omelettes headed for sand dunes just north of the town to search for Bald Ibises. Success was relatively easy. A single bird found us after 45 minutes and three stops, flying around in front of us and landing just out of sight. We were down a track past fields when the bird appeared and were delighted when two more followed it. They were the out-runners for several more and soon we had recorded 21 birds dropping out of sight. Suddenly a flock of 10 appeared and joined their pals. Views were good in flight but we never saw one on the ground.

A few minutes passed and the flock rose and moved a short distance, still settling out of sight. We counted 33 in the flock, five short of last year's record.

Knowing that people are not allowed to roam the sand dunes any more we returned to the bus where one of three wardens was chatting to Hassan. As we approached the vehicle another five Bald Ibises rose from a field on the right of the road and flew down to join the rest of the flock, equalling the record. The warden was pleasant and told us that the birds were nesting on a sea cliff in a different part of what is now a reserve. His wage is paid by Birdlife International, a fact that pleased us.

We drove back to Tamri and after a short stop to look at a roost of gulls (Audouin's, Yellow-legged, a few Mediterranean and Lesser Black-backed gulls, and several Sandwich Terns) we drove around the point and there on the bank was a flock of 43 largely juvenile Bald Ibises.

We drove past, stopped and studied them through scopes in perfect light. Their faces were largely black or grey but some had the start of a red breeding flush. Spiky plumes gave a halo effect and the sun caught on their deep burgundy wing patches. We were thrilled.

Rosemary said that the views were a reward for responsible behaviour early... who knows? Whatever, we were amazed to have seen 81 birds, one quarter of the world population, in flight and on the ground in perfect light. It was a great end to the day and we returned to Agadir in stunned silence.

After checking in and showers, we met to do the call-over before an excellent dinner. Breakfast at 6.30am or a 7.15am start was arranged and we turned in.

### **Saturday 11 March**

#### **The Massa and Sous wadis**

Fog greeted our arrival at Oued Massa reducing visibility to a few yards so we retired for a cuppa in the village and started birding once the sun began to burn it off. We went south of Massa to a spot where the river is crossed by a bridge and there had a wonderful time with all sorts of great birds, among them two or three Moustached Warblers and at least two singing Black-crowned Tchagras. One of these flew into a high eucalyptus and posed for some time as we admired it.

Several Laughing Doves were around, one of which joined a singing Turtle Dove in the same tree. Reed and Cetti's warblers showed well and among the many Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps we found single Willow and Bonelli's warblers. Zitting Cisticolas were everywhere buzzing like insects over the reed beds and a Yellow Wagtail of the Iberian race *M. f. iberiae* sat up for us in a bush. Purple Heron, Stonechat and Brown-throated Sand-martin completed the excitement.

Moving down the river, we entered the Oued Massa Reserve on foot and worked down towards Sidi Rabat. Coots dominated the river but we also found seven Tufted Ducks, a pair of Ferruginous Ducks and a lone male Gadwall. Glossy Ibis were nesting in reed beds some distance away but one flew past us showing its feet behind the tail.

The bushes had lots of migrant Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps with the occasional Common and Moussier's redstarts. The day was heating up by now and we were glad to get back to the bus. A search was made in nearby desert areas for sandgrouse and coursers but the recent rains had produced high grass and we could find only a couple of Northern Wheatears.

After a meal of omelettes we returned to the hotel for a rest before going out again at 4.30. We worked all three observation points along the Oued Sous onto which the King's palace backs. The site was teeming with waders and we saw lots of the common western European species including Ruff, Bar- and Black-tailed godwits, Kentish and Ringed plovers, Turnstone, Sanderling, Curlew and Marsh sandpipers and Little Stint.

Mediterranean Gulls were among the roosting Lesser Black-backed, Yellow-legged and Black-headed gulls and a single Slender-billed gull flew past but gave poor views. Bird of the afternoon was a Garganey which Malcolm found, a super male in full breeding plumage. Roosting Spoonbills, Flamingos and Black-winged Stilts were a delight although their lack of activity was a bit frustrating. One of the Godwits had coloured rings on its legs and we hope to trace its origin.

The day and trip ended with a vigil for Red-necked Nightjar as dusk fell. We had listened to a recording of the species at the hotel the previous evening and we thus delighted to hear at least three calling. On this high note we returned for our final dinner together well pleased with what had been a delightful trip.

## **ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES**

### **BIRDS**

	<b>GREBES</b>	<b>Podicipediformes</b>	<b>Podicipedidae</b>
1	Little grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	
		About 10 at Oued Massa.	
2	Great crested grebe	Podiceps cristatus	
		About 20 on the Barrage de Mansour el Edahbi.	
	<b>CORMORANTS</b>	<b>Pelecaniformes</b>	<b>Phalacrocoracidae</b>
3	Great cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus	
		Seen on three days; lots at Oued Sous.	
	<b>HERONS, EGRETS &amp; BITTERNs</b>	<b>Ciconiiformes</b>	<b>Ardeidae</b>
4	Grey heron	Ardea cinerea	
		One or two seen on four days.	
5	Purple heron	Ardea purpurea	
		Singles at Oued Massa and Oued Sous.	
6	Little egret	Egretta garzetta	
		Seen on five days, maximum 20 on the 3rd.	
7	Cattle egret	Bubulcus ibis	
		Seen almost daily; about 22 used the road at Ouarzazate for navigation.	
	<b>STORKS</b>	<b>Ciconiiformes</b>	<b>Ciconiidae</b>
8	White stork	Ciconia ciconia	
		About 25 soaring near Boumalne on the 3rd; one or two daily.	
	<b>IBIS &amp; SPOONBILLS</b>	<b>Ciconiiformes</b>	<b>Threskiornithidae</b>
9	Waldrapp (Bald ibis)	Geronticus eremita	
		A record number of 81 seen on either side of Tamri. These were one of the trip highlights	
10	Glossy ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	
		About 20 nesting in reeds at Oued Massa.	
11	Eurasian spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia	
		Eight at Oued Sous.	
	<b>FLAMINGOS</b>	<b>Phoenicopteriformes</b>	<b>Phoenicopterid</b>
12	Greater flamingo	Phoenicopterus ruber	
		About 22 on Dayet Sjiri (Merzouga) and 14 at Oued Sous.	
	<b>WILDFOWL</b>	<b>Anseriformes</b>	<b>Anatidae</b>

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| 13 | Ruddy shelduck                   | Tadorna ferruginea      |   |
|    |                                  |                         | A total of 161 at Dayet Sjiri and two in the river in Ouarzazate.           |
| 14 | Common shelduck                  | Tadorna tadorna         |   |
|    |                                  |                         | Ten at Oued Sous.   |
| 15 | Gadwall                          | Anas strepera           |   |
|    |                                  |                         | One at Oued Massa.  |
| 16 | Mallard                          | Anas platyrhynchos      |   |
|    |                                  |                         | A pair in the river at Ouarzazate, another at Oued Massa.                   |
| 17 | Garganey                         | Anas querquedula        |   |
|    |                                  |                         | A drake at Oued Sous was one of the highlight birds.                        |
| 18 | Ferruginous duck (pochard)       | Aythya nyroca           |   |
|    |                                  |                         | A pair at Oued Massa.   |
| 19 | Tufted duck                      | Aythya fuligula         |   |
|    |                                  |                         | Two drakes and five ducks at Oued Massa.                                    |
|    | <b>OSPREY</b>                    | <b>Falconiformes</b>    | <b>Pandionidae</b>  |
| 20 | Osprey                           | Pandion haliaetus       |   |
|    |                                  |                         | One at the Barrage de Mansour el Edahbi.                                    |
|    | <b>HAWKS, EAGLES &amp; KITES</b> | <b>Falconiformes</b>    | <b>Accipitridae</b>   |
| 21 | Black kite                       | Milvus migrans          |   |
|    |                                  |                         | Seen on three days: maximum 70 at the Tagdilt Plain.                        |
| 22 | Short-toed eagle                 | Circaetus gallicus      |   |
|    |                                  |                         | Three seen in the desert on the 6th; one in the high Atlas 9th.             |
| 23 | Western (Eurasian) marsh-harrier | Circus aeruginosus      |   |
|    |                                  |                         | Males seen on two days.   |
| 24 | Eurasian sparrowhawk             | Accipiter nisus         |   |
|    |                                  |                         | Singles recorded on two days.   |
| 25 | Long-legged buzzard              | Buteo rufinus cirtensis |   |
|    |                                  |                         | Singles near Boumalne on the 3rd; and in the High Atlas on the 8th and 9th. |
| 26 | Bonelli's eagle                  | Hieraetus fasciatus     |   |
|    |                                  |                         | One in the Dades Valley on the 7th.   |
| 27 | Booted eagle                     | Hieraetus pennatus      |   |

Five migrating over the King's hunting estate on the 8th.

	<b>FALCONS</b>	<b>Falconiformes</b>	<b>Falconidae</b>
28	Lesser kestrel	Falco naumanni	
		Single males seen on the 5th and 9th.	
29	Eurasian kestrel	<b>Falco tinnunculus</b>	
		Seen most days.	
30	Barbary falcon	Falco pelegrinoides	
		One over the lunch stop at Boumalne.	
31	Peregrine	Falco peregrinus	
		Three in the High Atlas.	
	<b>PHEASANTS &amp; PARTRIDGES</b>	<b>Galliformes</b>	<b>Phasianidae</b>
32	Barbary partridge	Alectoris barbara	
		Pairs and a single seen on three days.	
33	Common quail	Coturnix coturnix	
		Heard outside Marrakech and in Oued Massa.	
	<b>RAILS, GALLINULES &amp; COOTS</b>	<b>Gruiformes</b>	<b>Rallidae</b>
34	Common moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	
		About four seen on Oued Massa.	
35	Eurasian coot	Fulica atra	
		Ten at the Barrage de Mansour el Edahbi; more than 100 in Oued Massa.	
	<b>OYSTERCATCHERS</b>	<b>Charadriiformes</b>	<b>Haematopodidae</b>
36	Eurasian oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	
		Six at Oued Sous.	
	<b>AVOCETS &amp; STILTS</b>	<b>Charadriiformes</b>	<b>Recurvirostridae</b>
37	Black-winged stilt	Himantopus himantopus	
		Twenty at Oued Sous.	
38	Pied avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta	
		One at Dayet Sjiri (Merzouga).	
	<b>COURSERS &amp; PRATINCOLES</b>	<b>Charadriiformes</b>	<b>Glareolidae</b>
39	Cream-coloured courser	Cursorius cursor	
		Two near Boumalne on the 3rd; five at Dayet Sjiri on the 6th.	

<b>LAPWINGS &amp; PLOVERS</b>		<b>Charadriiformes</b>	<b>Charadriidae</b>
40	Grey (Black-bellied) plover	Pluvialis squatarola	Six at Oued Sous.
41	Greater ringed plover	Charadrius hiaticula	Six at Oued Sous.
42	Little ringed plover	Charadrius dubius	Two at Ouarzazate on the 3rd, one at the Café Yasmina 6th; two on the 8th.
43	Kentish (Snowy) plover	Charadrius alexandrinus	About five pairs at Oued Sous.
<b>SANDPIPERS</b>		<b>Charadriiformes</b>	<b>Scolopacidae</b>
44	Black-tailed godwit	Limosa limosa	Five at Oued Sous.
45	Bar-tailed godwit	Limosa lapponica	Eight at Oued Sous; one was carrying colour rings which showed it to be an Icelandic bird.
46	Eurasian curlew	Numenius arquata	Five at Oued Sous.
47	Common redshank	Tringa totanus	At least 10 at Oued Sous.
48	Marsh sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis	A single bird at Oued Sous.
49	Common greenshank	Tringa nebularia	Singles at Dayet Sjiri (Merzouga).on the 5th and at Oued Sous.
50	Green sandpiper	Tringa ochropus	Two at Oued Ouarzazate and two at Oued Sous.
51	Common sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	One at Oued Tifouldtoud, six at Oued Sous.
52	Ruddy turnstone	Arenaria interpres	Singleton at Oued Sous.
53	Sanderling	Calidris alba	About 25 at Oued Sous.
54	Little stint	Calidris minuta	

		At least eight at Oued Sous.	
55	Curlew sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	
		Three at Oued Sous.	
56	Dunlin	Calidris alpina	
		Two at Oued Sous.	
57	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax	
		Two at Oued Sous.	
	<b>GULLS</b>	<b>Charadriiformes</b>	<b>Laridae</b>
58	Audouin's gull	Larus audouinii	
		About 40 at Tamri.	
59	Yellow-legged gull	Larus cachinnans	
		Hundreds along the coastal sites.	
60	Lesser black-backed gull	Larus fuscus	
		Lots along the coastal sites.	
61	Black-headed gull	Larus ridibundus	
		About 30 at Oued Sous.	
62	Slender-billed gull	Larus genei	
		One at Oued Sous.	
63	Mediterranean gull	Larus melanocephalus	
		A flock of 20 at Tamri, similar numbers at Oued Sous (a 1st-winter bird showed extremely well).	
	<b>TERNs</b>	<b>Charadriiformes</b>	<b>Sternidae</b>
64	Sandwich tern	Sterna sandvicensis	
		A few at Tamri and Oued Sous.	
	<b>PIGEONS &amp; DOVES</b>	<b>Columbiformes</b>	<b>Columbidae</b>
65	Rock dove (feral pigeon)	Columba livia	
		Common daily in towns.	
66	Common wood-pigeon	Columba palumbus	
		Seen on four days in low numbers.	
67	Eurasian turtle-dove	Streptopelia turtur	
		One seen singing at Oued Massa.	
68	Eurasian collared-dove	Streptopelia decaocto	
		Common daily in towns.	
69	Laughing (Palm) Dove	Streptopelia senegalensis	

		A few seen on five days; maximum eight on the 6th.
	<b>NIGHTJARS</b>	<b>Caprimulgiformes</b> <b>Caprimulgidae</b>
70	Red-necked nightjar	Caprimulgus ruficollis
		Three heard at Oued Sous.
	<b>SWIFTS</b>	<b>Apodiformes</b> <b>Apodidae</b>
71	Pallid swift	Apus pallidus
		Abundant over Marrakech and Agadir
72	Little swift	Apus affinis
		Lots over Marrakech, a few at Agadir.
	<b>HOOPOES</b>	<b>Coraciiformes</b> <b>Upupidae</b>
73	Eurasian hoopoe	Upupa epops
		A few almost daily.
	<b>WOODPECKERS</b>	<b>Piciformes</b> <b>Picidae</b>
74	Levaillant's woodpecker	Picus vaillantii
		Heard several times in the valleys below Ouakaimeden.
	<b>LARKS</b>	<b>Passeriformes</b> <b>Alaudidae</b>
75	Bar-tailed lark	Ammomanes cincturus
		Two seen on three days.
76	Desert lark	Ammomanes deserti
		Up to five seen on four days.
77	Greater hoopoe-lark	Alaemon alaudipes
		A total of eight seen in the desert on three days. A displaying male was one of the highlight birds of the trip providing the group with a brilliant "Attenborough moment".
78	Thick-billed lark	Ramphocoris clotbey
		Three seen outside Erfoud.
79	Greater short-toed lark	Calandrella brachydactyla
		Seen on three days, maximum five on the 4th.
80	Lesser short-toed lark	Calandrella rufescens
		Two with Greater Short-toed on the 4th.
81	Crested lark	Galerida cristata
		A few days on desert roadsides.
82	Thekla lark	Galerida theklae

Two at the Barrage de Mansour el Edahbi; one at the top of the Tiz n'Tiniff pass on the 7th.

83    Horned lark

*Eremophila alpestris*

Lots at Ouakaimeden, some associating with Crimson-winged Finches.

84    Temminck's lark

*Eremophila bilopha*

Seen on three days with a maximum of six on the Tagdilt Plain.

**SWALLOWS**

**Passeriformes**

**Hirundinidae**

85    Sand martin (Bank swallow)

*Riparia riparia*

Five on the 3rd.

86    Plain (Brown-throated sand) martin

*Riparia paludicola*

Two at Oued Ouarzazate, two more at Oued Massa.

87    Eurasian crag-martin

*Hirundo rupestris*

Seen on three days with a maximum of 20 in the Todra Gorge.

88    Barn swallow

*Hirundo rustica*

Seen in small parties daily, many on migration to Britain.

89    Red-rumped swallow

*Hirundo daurica*

Seen on three days with a maximum of six at our feet in the Todra Gorge.

90    House martin

*Delichon urbica*

Good numbers migrating through the desert, ones and two elsewhere.

**WAGTAILS & PIPITS**

**Passeriformes**

**Motacillidae**

91    White wagtail

*Motacilla alba*

Seen daily with a maximum of 10 on the 9th; sadly, the only "Black-faced" wagtail, *M. a. subpersonata*, flew into Oued Sous chasing another bird and the pair flew off before the group could get onto them.

92    Yellow wagtail

*Motacilla flava*

Total of three birds, all of the Iberian race *M. f. iberiae* - one at Dayet Sjiri (Merzouga) and two in the Oued Massa.

93    Grey wagtail

*Motacilla cinerea*

		Three seen on two days in the High Atlas.
94	Tree pipit	Anthus trivialis
		Four recorded on three days.
	<b>BULBULS</b>	<b>Passeriformes</b> <b>Pycnonotidae</b>
95	Common bulbul	Pycnonotus barbatus
		Common daily - providing one of the sounds of Morocco.
	<b>DIPPERS</b>	<b>Passeriformes</b> <b>Cinclidae</b>
96	White-throated dipper	Cinclus cinclus
		A pair below the reservoir at Ouakaimeden.
	<b>WRENS</b>	<b>Passeriformes</b> <b>Troglodytidae</b>
97	Winter wren	Troglodytes troglodytes
		Singing in several High Atlas valleys; one seen well at the lunch stop on the 9th.
	<b>THRUSHES</b>	<b>Passeriformes</b> <b>Turdidae</b>
98	Blue rock-thrush	Monticola solitarius
		Common: seen on all but one day.
99	Eurasian blackbird	Turdus merula
		Common: seen daily.
100	Song thrush	Turdus philomelos
		About five seen in the High Atlas on two days.
101	Mistle thrush	Turdus viscivorus
		A pair seen at Ouakaimeden.
	<b>CISTICOLAS &amp; ALLIES</b>	<b>Passeriformes</b> <b>Cisticolidae</b>
102	Zitting cisticola	Cisticola juncidis
		Abundant in the Oued Massa
	<b>OLD WORLD WARBLERS</b>	<b>Passeriformes</b> <b>Sylviidae</b>
103	Cetti's warbler	Cettia cetti
		Heard in the High Atlas, several seen well in Oued Massa: identified by counting only 10 tail feathers.
104	Moustached warbler	Acrocephalus melanopogon
		Three seen in the Oued Massa.
105	Eurasian reed-warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus
		Two seen in the Oued Massa, others heard singing.

- 106 Willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*  
One seen in the Oued Massa.
- 107 Common chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybeta*  
Common: recorded on seven days with more than 20 in the Oued Massa.
- 108 Western Bonelli's warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*  
Four birds seen on three days. Best view was in the palm grove village just outside Tinejdad.
- 109 Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*  
Quite common: recorded on five days with more than 20 in the Oued Massa.
- 110 Desert warbler *Sylvia nana*  
One seen well close to Erfoud.
- 111 Subalpine warbler *Sylvia cantillans*  
Single males on two days.
- 112 Sardinian warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*  
Heard or seen on three days with more than 10 in the Oued Sous.
- 113 Tristram's warbler *Sylvia deserticola*  
Great views of a male and a sub-adult male near Erfoud.
- 114 Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*  
Seen or heard on three days.
- OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS**      **Passeriformes**      **Muscicapidae**
- 115 European robin *Erithacus rubecula*  
Heard only in the High Atlas.
- 116 Black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*  
Common: seen most days.
- 117 Common redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*  
A male in the desert on the 6th; female in the Oued Massa.
- 118 Moussier's redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri*  
This star bird was seen on four days with a maximum of five on the 11th.
- 119 European stonechat *Saxicola torquata*



<b>JAYS &amp; CROWS</b>		<b>Passeriformes</b>	<b>Corvidae</b>
133	Eurasian jay	Garrulus glandarius	
		One bird seen in the Atlas.	
134	Eurasian magpie	Pica pica mauritanica	
		These "blue-cheeked" birds were a popular sight on three days.	
135	Red-billed chough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax	
		Common in Ouakaimeden.	
136	Yellow-billed (Alpine) chough	Pyrrhocorax graculus	
		Abundant in Ouakaimeden.	
137	Brown-necked raven	Corvus ruficollis	
		Seen on two days in the desert with a maximum of 16 on the 5th.	
138	Common raven	Corvus corax	
		A few seen in the High Atlas.	
<b>STARLINGS</b>		<b>Passeriformes</b>	<b>Sturnidae</b>
139	Spotless starling	Sturnus unicolor	
		Common on the northern side of the Atlas.	
<b>OLD WORLD SPARROWS</b>		<b>Passeriformes</b>	<b>Passeridae</b>
140	House sparrow	Passer domesticus	
		Abundant daily.	
141	Rock petronia (sparrow)	Petronia petronia	
		A few at Ouakaimeden where one showed its yellow breast-spot, one in Oued Massa.	
<b>FINCHES</b>		<b>Passeriformes</b>	<b>Fringillidae</b>
142	Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	
		Common in and north of the Atlas.	
143	Red crossbill	Loxia curvirostra	
		A few at the King's hunting estate.	
144	European greenfinch	Carduelis chloris	
		Common in and north of the Atlas.	
145	Eurasian siskin	Carduelis spinus	
		A party of about 10 near Marrakech.	
146	European goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	

- A few in and north of the Atlas.
- 147 Eurasian linnet *Carduelis cannabina*  
Two at a comfort stop near the Tizi-n-Tichka pass.
- 148 European serin *Serinus serinus*  
Common almost daily.
- 149 Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*  
A party of five seen in flight as we dropped down from Ouakaimeden.
- 150 Crimson-winged finch *Rhodopechys sanguinea*  
At least six of these dramatic finches at Ouakaimeden.
- 151 Trumpeter finch *Rhodopechys githaginea*  
Twenty-five at the Barrage de Mansour el Edahbi; a few daily in the desert.

**TRUE BUNTINGS**

**Passeriformes**

**Emberizidae**

- 152 Cirl bunting *Emberiza cirrus*  
One only seen at lunch after visiting Ouakaimeden.
- 153 Rock bunting *Emberiza cia*  
One only seen at lunch after visiting Ouakaimeden.
- 154 House bunting *Emberiza striolata*  
Common in towns and villages
- 155 Corn bunting *Emberiza calandra*  
A few seen on wires as we drove from Marrakech to Agadir.

**MAMMALS**

**SQUIRRELS**

**Rodentia**

**Scuridae**

- 1 Barbary ground squirrel *Atlantoxeros getulus*

One at Oued Massa.

<b>MICE, RATS, VOLES &amp; GERBILS</b>		<b>Rodentia</b>	<b>Muridae</b>
2	Shaw's jird	Meriones shawi	
		Colony in a palm grove near Tinejdad.	
3	Fat sand rat	Psammomys obesus	
		Two on the Tagdilt Plain.	
4	Brown rat	Rattus norvegicus	
		One seen in Agadir.	
<b>VESPER BATS</b>		<b>Chiroptera</b>	<b>Vespertilionidae</b>
5	Common pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pipistrellus	
		One or two at Oued Sous.	

### **REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS**

1	North African Water Frog	Rana saharica	
		A few adults.	
2	African Toad	Bufo regularis	
		Masses of spawn on the 6th.	
3	Stripe-necked Terrapin	Mauremys caspica	
		Seen on two dates; maximum six in the Oued Massa.	
4	Nose-horned viper	Vipera ammodytes	
		Two seen captive on the 8th.	
5	Spiny-footed Lizard	Acanthodactylus erythrurus	
		One seen captive on the 7th.	
	Lizard sp	Several seen in the desert.	
6	Changeable Agama	Agama ??	One on the 3rd.

### **FLUTS**

1	Large white	Pieris brassicae	
		Seen almost daily.	

2	Small white	<i>Artogeia rapae</i> . Recorded on seven dates.
3	Clouded yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i> . Seen on three days.
4	Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i> . Observed on three days.
5	Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i> . Seen on the 8th and 11th.
6	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i> Two on the 11th.
7	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i> Three seen on two days: the 3rd and the 8th.

#### **OTHER TAXA**

Dung Beetle	<i>Scarabaeus semipunctatus</i> Seen on several days in the desert and at Oued Massa.
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