

# Morocco in Spring

## 8 - 18 March 2007

### Trip Report

**Leader:**

Tim Earl

**Driver:**

Rachid Dougram

### Introduction

Southern Morocco is a delightful destination in March. Besides a wide 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 full of interest.

We were here in an extraordinary year as the winter had been very wet. The deserts were in bloom, an amazing sight but which made finding birds difficult. They were absent in some cases – Desert Lark is normally common but had appeared to have deserted the region [appropriately? – Ed].

Our new Moroccan agents were good and we enjoyed a range of excellent hotels which combined Western standards with a distinctly local ambience (and menus), a minibus and an excellent driver in Rachid Dougram. This is the account of our adventure:

## Trip Diary

### Thursday 8 March

#### Heathrow to Ouarzazate

We met at Heathrow's terminal 2 at 2.30pm, eager for the off – so eager that Barry had been waiting since 10am... having flown in on the red-eye from Dublin. We bought water for our first night after reaching 'airside' and away the flight went on time at 5.20pm.

It was uneventful save for an absolutely delicious meal (our last of the day with a scheduled hotel arrival of half-past midnight) and the delight of flying over one's home in the Channel Islands.

Of all the bars in all the world... the one in Casablanca airport was not the best although it was a welcome refuge as we waited for the next flight which was delayed by 50mins as we waited for incoming passengers from another international flight. But our time went fairly swiftly and we arrived in the Hotel Perle du Sud, Ouarzazate, at 1.30am.

### Friday 9 March

#### Ouarzazate, Barage de Mansour el Edahbi, Boumalne, Tagdilt track, Tineghir [29°C sunny, cool wind, cold later]

We awoke to warm weather... and snow on the distant Atlas Mountains. In fact by the time we reached the Barage de Mansour el Edahbi it was a picture-book scene with blue water, red

hills and mountains glistening in the sunshine and white topped peaks beneath a deep blue sky. Wonderful scenery.

We left the hotel at 9am, bought water and were stopping to watch a distant pair of Black Storks and a Long-legged Buzzard by 9.25. A walk down to the water's edge at the reservoir was delightful with a steady stream of wildlife to watch. First up were a couple of Thekla Larks which looked confusing as the North African race has different identification marks from those in Spain.

A few Trumpeter Finches played hard to get until a little later in the morning when we all had super views as the birds perched on a wire fence. Black-headed Gulls, three Grey Heron, a little Egret and a few Great Crested Grebes were on the reservoir, a disappointing haul when the wonderful reputation of this site is considered.

Walking up to the fence to view Trumpeter Finches we were rewarded with great views of a Shaw's Jird and a male Subalpine Warbler. White-crowned Wheatears were obvious when perched on security lights but a Black Redstart was less obliging.

Among the amphibians, Thelma found a small African Toad and we all listened to a chorus of North African Water Frogs. Several large but dull dragonflies with translucent wings zoomed past and a beautiful blue beetle was found.

Some of the group saw a Black Wheatear as we left the area for a refreshing mint-tea and comfort stop at the Restaurant el Baraka in Skoura. A Short-toed Snake Eagle was seen by Pauline and me while we waited for the tea to be served.

The drive up the Vallee du Dades was super with lush orchards and stands of olive trees (we sampled their offspring at lunch). The road shoots up out of the valley as it leaves Boumalne and at the top the Restaurant Chems provides a stunning view from its terrace dining area. The birds are good too with House Bunting, Blue Rock Thrush and Goldfinches added to the list. A huge kettle of about 100 White Storks was found and watched for some time as they attempted to gain the height needed to escape the valley and head northwards for a summer in Europe.

Birding ended with a short walk down the new Tagdilt track on which we saw Greater Short-toed Lark, Desert and Mourning Wheatears and a Temminck's Horned Lark, all pretty badly. However, two or three gold-coloured Fat Sand Rats were busily collecting bedding material and looking quite enchanting, often standing on their hind legs like with front paws dropped on their chests.

The wind was cold and clock advancing so we piled into the minibus with the resolve to return tomorrow and explore new parts of this most promising plain.

Forty-five minutes saw us at the Hotel Bougafer in Tineghir by 5.30. Dinner after the 7pm call-over was a fun event with much discussion of a pleasant day spent in the foothills of the Atlas.

### **Saturday 10 March**

#### **Tagdilt again and Gorges du Todra [26°C sunny, cool wind, cold later]**

What a slave-driver. We left the hotel at 8am after an early breakfast and set off back towards the Tagdilt track, stopping at a place I had seen a Thick-billed Lark yesterday. The ploy paid off when a pair was found displaying. We had superb views of this extraordinary lark for almost half an hour and left in high spirits.

A cold wind was blowing on the Tagdilt plains and we donned extra clothing before setting off. Greater Short-toed Larks were common, some singing in display flights above our heads. A few Temminck's Horned larks were studied well and we came across our first Red-rumped Wheatears as we looked for other inhabitants. It was not to be, however, although I spotted one early-rising Fat Sand Rat (they are more usually seen in the afternoons) in an area riddled with burrows.

*Homo sapiens* (sub-species *parisienne*) earned a place on the trip report when a convoy of 12 4X4 vehicles pulled up in front of our parked minibus. Several men walked a yard or two off the road and proceeded to water the desert plants, swiftly followed by a couple of women who followed suit behind the vehicle nearest to us.

“Mais oui !” we exclaimed and went off in search of tamer wildlife.

After a more conventional comfort stop in a super new Boumalne hotel with a panoramic view over the Dades Valley we returned to Tineghir and up into the stunning Gorges du Todra, driving past enticing views knowing the photo-opportunities would be better on the way back.

The gorge was busy with trippers but we enjoyed our couscous chicken lunch in a replica Bedouin tent before taking a walk up the valley beyond the narrows. Although the trippers were left behind there were lots of young men on some sort of [military?] exercise who were making a great deal of noise. A pair of Black Wheatears, several Crag Martins and a male House Bunting [of the sub-species *sahari*] were seen well and we enjoyed the magnificent setting.

Several stops for photos were taken on the way back down, once producing good views of singing Serin and a Laughing Dove as a bonus. The hotel was much busier with new guests but we enjoyed a delicious meal, nevertheless.

### **Sunday 11 March**

#### **Tineghir to Erfoud**

**[26°C sunny, cool wind, lovely]**

Another 8am start saw us on the short 160km journey early so that we could enjoy stopping along the way. Our major surprise was that the desert was in bloom, washed green with a yellow tinge from flowers everywhere we looked. Even dry hillsides had a greenish hue. They were dotted also with hundreds of bee-hives brought in to capitalise on the great profusion of white and yellow flowers. These were on bushes, prostrate plants and even brilliant Broomrape stems.

The whole of our journey from Ouarzazate had been in stony desert which had received substantial amounts of rain and this continued to Erfoud. It is this profusion of flowers (and thus fallen seed later) which stocks the desert ‘larder’ until the next rains. Birds and animals live on the seeds and dried foliage for years between the occasional wet winters.

Our first stop was at a nomad house outside Tineghir where we tried to pin down calling larks which were mostly Short-toed. A Kestrel was seen briefly but we did get good views of several Trumpeter Finches which were common.

A woman looking after a camel and two calves was happy for us to take pictures and, indeed, recognising me invited us into her home for tea and bread. Her two daughters also made us welcome and we were able to inspect their bedroom, tiny kitchen with its warm bread just cooked and the shelter under which goat-hair rugs are woven by one of the girls. There were lots of bees around and it was clear that they had honey in storage. After a happy visit (on both sides) we left with the three women waving goodbye.

A few kilometres down the road a stop to photograph dramatic rock formations led us to a wadi which we walked for some time. A male Spectacled Warbler put on a great show singing from prominent perches and constantly visiting a distant bush where we assumed there was a nest. Further up the wadi we teased out Black-eared and Northern Wheatears, a female Common Redstart and lots more Trumpeter Finches. Mike found a super Southern Grey Shrike while Thelma did her bit spotting an extraordinary wingless grass-hopper which had the most cryptic camouflage.

Our tea break was at the Café Oued Eddaheb on the far side of Tinejdad where we enjoyed a pleasant half-hour in the shady garden drinking freshly squeezed orange juice (some of us at least). This was followed by a walk around the cool irrigated gardens of a nearby village in

which we saw a Shaw's Jird which posed beautifully for us, a nesting Black Wheatear, Chiffchaff and lots of Blackbirds. There were few migrants this year,

After our picnic lunch, eaten in a nearby café for the price of a few soft drinks, we set off towards Erfoud making our last stop at a stretch of featureless stony desert which was in full bloom – plants up to our waists in places, some smothered in Hawkmoth caterpillars. One long strip had even been ploughed and sown with wheat. This left me with a problem: would the birds I normally see here be around in the changed habitat and could we find them? Well, the answer was yes but with difficulty. A singing male Spectacled Warbler showed well, there were scores of singing Short-toed Larks but Hoopoe Larks were in short supply or well hidden. Eventually on flushed and led us across the wheat strip (on a path) where we found one bird and a large chick. The chick hunkered down near a convenient blue rock while the adult proceeded to bash a froglet to death. It ran backwards and forwards and eventually hid or ate the prey. We realised that it was worried by our presence (distant – we were watching through scopes) and returned to the bus.

Our reward for persistence and consideration for the larks was started when Barry shouted. He had spotted a flock of birds in flight just after we had set off. These were Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, a prized find, and we stopped to watch as they zoomed around, coming over our heads once or twice before settling a short distance away. We stalked them and gained super views for a few minutes before they again took to the wing.

Well pleased with our day, we arrived at the hotel in Erfoud in time for a leisurely shower before the call-over and delicious dinner. So far all our hotels have been Moroccan rather than international and we've enjoyed the contact with this fascinating country.

### **Monday 12 March**

#### **Oued Derkoua, Café Jasmine, Auberge du Sud, Lak du Merzouga [25°C sunny, cool wind, comfortable]**

Bitterns are the last bird one would expect when visiting a mock French Foreign Legion fort, complete with camels, nestled under a vast ochre sand dune. However, the extensive rain had turned Café Jasmine into an island. It was surrounded by water with access over a causeway. One lake forms regularly every five years or so but the other was a new phenomenon and, indeed, had undermined a building which had collapsed. Thus it was we added wonderful views of a Bittern, skilfully found by Pauline in swamped Tamarisks, to our list of amazing experiences. It was kept company by a Moorhen and two Little Grebes. A pair of Ruddy Shelducks had even hatched a brood of shelducklings.

The day started inauspiciously when our Land Rovers booked for one of the highlight days of the tour failed to appear at 7am. Several phone calls later extradited two which arrived at 7.45 and we were away 10 minutes later. A stop in the first wadi we reached was excellent with lots of migrants in the Tamarisk trees.

Sadly the extra water had resulted in extremely dense foliage and the warblers – Sardinian, Subalpine with possible Sedge and Bonelli's – were difficult to get decent views. However, Woodchat Shrike, Redstart, Northern Wheatear and White Wagtail were a little easier and the local Broomrape (this time bright yellow and in huge clumps) blindingly obvious. A few fossils (one or two scallop-shells and a chicken-leg, supposedly) were also found.

Cream-coloured Coursers started showing soon after we set off for the Café Jasmine and we massed a total of 19 by the end of the morning. It was while stopping to watch one group that Mike spotted a Hoopoe Lark performing its dramatic display flight. We piled out and listened as the bird sang quite quietly before soaring 10m 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.

We had mint tea or coffee at the café, photographed the impressive sand dunes, with their watery foreground, a Bedouin camp and camel train. The lakes had attracted Little Ringed and lots of Kentish plovers, Black-winged Stilts and several Little Stints. These were

searched well before driving to the Auberge du Sud for lunch. A delicious meal was followed by a visit to another lake... the dry bed at Merzouga was also flooded, and true to reputation held masses of birds. What the books do not say is that they are distant and jumpy. However, with persistence we built up an impressive list of common (to us) waders and ducks with Tree Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, 20 White Storks, a Spoonbill and eight Avocets. Singleton Black-tailed Godwit and Green Sandpiper were also found along with four Greenshanks.

A visit to Merzouga village was frustrating as I could not find the café used in previous years and after mint teas in another we returned to Erfoud well pleased with the desert experience.

**Tuesday 13 March**  
**Erfoud to Ouarzazate**  
**[23°C sunny, hazy sun, cool]**

The trip back to Ouarzazate was fascinating. Once again we encountered blooming desert steppe – what to me had been vast areas of gravel, shimmering in hues of brown, were now great swathes of greens and yellows. This clearly affected the birdlife as we saw just a couple of raptors and the road-side Desert Larks were totally absent.

A walk down a wadi about 45km out of the town produced good views of at least eight Spectacled Warblers, a Southern Grey Shrike and a pair of Tristram's Warblers. Two or three Bar-tailed Desert Larks were seen, one singing in its display flight.

Driving on, we had morning tea on the terrace of the Café Gazelle du Sud in Alnif where a female Blackcap and a lone Chiffchaff were seen in the trees behind. The journey down to the Drâa Valley was uneventful with a lots of White-crowned and Black wheatears on the corners of buildings and roadside posts and mounds. The flat stony desert scenery was terrific until we reached a lush green valley which runs up into the Jbel Sarhro range ending at N'Kob. Here we hunted for the Café Juju for which Rachid had a voucher for lunch, but unable to find it we continued through mountain scenery until we reached Tansikht. Our eventual lunch stop at the Restaurant des Palmeraie near the River Drâa was super. We ordered Berber omelettes and a dessert of sliced orange and dates.

A walk down to the river was quiet although Mike saw a Hoopoe as it flew between him and the rest of us (it crossed the river a little later). A young lad who volunteered to carry my scope was delighted to receive a small tip and produced two palm-leaf camels for us as souvenirs. I bought two boxes of the local dates to take home.

The final drive to Ouarzazate was without stops as time was pressing. We stretched legs at the top of the Tiz n'Tinifit pass through the Jbel Sarhro.

Our journey ended at the warm and friendly Hotel Perle du Sud where the evening had something of a party atmosphere as we celebrated my 50<sup>th</sup> tour leading for the Travelling Naturalist.

**Wednesday 14 March**  
**Oued Ignissi, Oued Tifouldtoud, Tiz n'Tichka, King's hunting estate, Marrakech**  
**[23°C overcast, some sun, cool]**

An 8.30 start made up for yesterday's long drive and wild party [surely a just a couple of drinks and bottle of wine? – Ed]. Setting off for Marrakech, we stopped at Oued Ignissi where five European Bee-eaters were seen in flight but they did not settle, sadly.

A large flock of Short-toed Larks was feeding on some rough ground giving us our best views yet and a Hoopoe looked as if it might excavate a hole in a sand bank but gave up the idea.

Just down the road at Oued Tifouldtoud a Green Sandpiper and one Little Ringed Plover were found on a shingle bank in the river while a Chiffchaff, male Blue Rock-thrush and a female Black Redstart were seen almost immediately. Two Northern and a Black wheatear were

found in nearby fields. A man with two snakes tried to use them as props in our pictures for a few dirams but we got cross with him and refused.

Driving the main road to Marrakech we searched a site in which I had found a Mourning Wheatear territory in previous years but could locate them. A pair of stunning Cream-coloured Coursers, several Spectacled Warblers and a female Whitethroat were also admired.

A flock of Red-billed Choughs were found just after we stopped for a coffee. These included some yellow-billed young birds which caused some confusion at first. We had lunch of omelettes and chips at the Agremac du Tichka.

We stopped again at the Col du Tichka (2,260m) where a pair of distant displaying Golden Eagles was seen high in the peaks and against the alpine snowfields. In fairness, the views were distant and we left hoping for better up at Oukaimeden tomorrow. A pair of Common Ravens were seen before we headed onwards.

A stop to examine the bus wheels as we descended from the mountains gave the opportunity to examine a distinctive North-African blue-headed race of Chaffinch.

Our last stop of the day was at the King's hunting estate where a Booted Eagle was seen immediately. Suddenly others appeared with a few Short-toed Eagles. It was clear that there was a movement of raptors and we finished watching a few minutes later after seeing a party of four Lesser Kestrels, at least 10 Booted and three short-toed eagles.

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 15 March**

#### **Oukaimeden and snow in Africa**

**[4 – 20°C sunny early, snowing on the tops, rain lower altitudes]**

Oukaimeden was teeming with birds when we arrived at 10 after a superb journey from Marrakech. A flock of Rock Sparrows, the first of more than 100 seen in the morning, flew into trees near the bus while people were still donning warm clothing. Some people could see the yellow spot under the chin on one or two birds, always a difficult feature. The clothing was needed as a huge cloud moved in seconds after we arrived and by the time we left it was snowing – in Africa...

We were parked opposite the Café Juju, three days late according to the voucher we had (initially refused by the owners until they had a call from our agents) where a comfort stop was made before we set off

Birds made up for the increasing cold with large numbers of Horned Larks (which we were able to compare with Temminck's Horned Larks seen in the deserts a few days ago) and Rock Sparrows feeding on the recently uncovered grassy areas. There was no sign of our main target species in any of their usual haunts and I became increasingly worried, although the sight of one bird whizzing past us gave a glimmer of hope.

At 2,600m (8,600ft) we were high enough for the altitude to affect people a little and a lad was recruited to carry belongings. We explored a track leading to the upper ski lift where I spotted the birds – about six Crimson-winged Finches picking around on a track 100m still further up the mountain. As we were walking slowly towards the spot, another flock, this time with more than 30 birds, was found and reasonable views obtained until they flew to join the others. Off we went in pursuit and eventually the biggest flock of these rare finches. They are 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.

We were amazed to find that the time was noon, later than I had wanted to be eating lunch. Rachid was summoned and we rode back down to the café where a Mistle Thrush and several Alpine Choughs were waiting for us. A delicious meal was consumed and we were able to warm up a little.

We stepped it out down the valley looking for other birds but recording only Rock Bunting. Once again Rachid picked us up, by now quite chilly and we headed back to Marrakech in snow which turned to rain lower down. The showers stopped as we crossed the fertile plain back to the hotel for a short break before setting off for Marrakech's famous souk at 5pm.

We wandered around the D'jemma el F'na 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 and hedgehog handlers (sadly) and street theatres provided something for everyone. Eventually we dived into the souk for a session of gazing and bargain hunting.

Rachid arrived at our pick up spot as arranged at 6.30 and we returned to the hotel for showers and a slightly earlier dinner. The call-over was shelved until the next day.

### **Friday 16 March**

#### **Agadir and the coastal dunes**

**[30°C sunny, hot, fresh wind on the coast]**

A new route to Agadir was used and worked well. Instead of taking the narrow, busy and extremely dangerous direct route we went via Essaouira which was scenic but a little longer. We stopped for a comfort break at Chichaoua followed shortly afterwards on the stony, cultivated plains to watch and listen to Calandra Larks which were in full display. Those found in flight showed their long-winged silhouette with dark underwings and white trailing edge while the one seen perched on a stone had the distinctive black collar. Our search also turned up a Tawny Pipit, Northern Wheatear and a few Crested Larks.

South-western Morocco is the only place where an oak/olive like tree called an Argana grows. Goats eat it avidly, spreading the seeds in their droppings. The fruit is like a cross between an olive and an acorn (and oozes sticky latex-like sap). When ripe the kernels can be extracted by hand, a laborious job, and ground into a paste from which oil is extracted. If roasted, first the kernels produce a delicate oil used in cosmetics, while the rougher product is used in cooking. We stopped at a women's cooperative to watch this process (and buy the products). The cosmetic oil is supposed to make one irresistible but when I applied some all that happened was that a herd of goats followed me down the road. [Sounds as though you did well for once! – Ed]

Driving on through extensive areas of Argane trees we stopped for a good omelette lunch (followed by brief views of a Short-toed Eagle and a Bee-eater) before arriving at the extensive dune system north of Tamri where our search for Bald Ibis began and ended unsuccessfully. A strong wind was blowing and our only compensation was a superb male Montagu's Harrier.

A stop at the mouth of the River Tamri gave quite good scope views of Audouin's, Yellow-legged and Black-headed gulls roosting with a few Sandwich Terns and a lone Sanderling.

We arrived at our hotel at 5.30 and after a rather chaotic check-in retired for showers before dinner.

### **Saturday 17 March**

#### **The Massa and Souss wadis**

**[32°C sunny, hot, cool breeze late afternoon]**

We had great difficulty finding a favourite bridge near Sidi Rabat on the Oued Massa but finally found a good substitute. A small flock of Glossy Ibis and a Grey Heron flew past immediately but a Black-shouldered Kite put on a good show for some minutes. It returned a

while later to be joined by a second bird which could have been a mate or competitor. Four female Tufted Ducks were found in the reeds along with Little Grebe and several Coots.

There were scores of Zitting Cisticolas displaying vigorously almost masking the sounds of other species in the area. Happily, I heard a singing Black-crowned Tchagra and instigated a walk in search of it. It was slow going as we stopped for firstly a male Orphean Warbler, soon followed by a Subalpine Warbler. Concentration on that was broken when Jane spotted our first (and very late) Moussier's Redstart. There was much ooohing and ahhhhing as we admired this stunning Moroccan speciality. It posed beautifully and as the area was busy with people clearly did not mind our presence. The bird eventually skipped off leaving us to admire a super male Yellow Wagtail of the British race.

Setting off again we stopped to look at Corn Bunting and a pair of Stonechats. Again I reminded the group about the Tchagra, describing its whistled call. Immediately, one popped up, flew past us and perched obligingly in a dead bush nearby, singing happily in duet with my whistles.

"How did you do that," someone asked. I failed to show the remote controller tucked into my trouser pocket. [Pure luck – Ed] Mouths dropped when a second joined it. There was so much excitement that a Cetti's Warbler popped up to investigate but few people noticed.

A coffee stop proved interesting as there was a flock of Spotless Starlings feeding in a field opposite the café. They were joined by two Moustached Warblers which blogged around in some sedges before a cat flushed them.

Moving on to the Oued Massa reserve we walked slowly along the north bank but saw little new. A Spoonbill flew past along with a few Little Egrets, another Black-crowned Tchagra sang sweetly but failed to respond to my secret remote-controller. We found another Moussier's Redstart and saw a stunning Woodchat Shrike at the same time – the chestnut colour in both birds was almost identical.

Eventually the heat got to us and we boarded the minibus and returned towards Agadir. I was presented with something of a problem: Rachid's wife had made a superb picnic for us, complete with soft drinks, but where could we find somewhere with a loo which was prepared to let us eat. This being Morocco (as opposed to Britain) we were welcomed into a smart restaurant where we ate our meal in exchange for the purchase of a few bottles of water (at my suggestion, not as a requirement). The meal was super and we returned to the hotel well pleased with our morning.

Five of us ventured out at 5pm to visit the Oued Souss, close to the hotel and onto which the King's palace backs. The river was full of birds – 97 Flamingos, scores of waders and gulls including Spotted Redshank, Mediterranean Gull and a few Curlew Sandpipers. Mike found a red-breasted Merganser, a rare bird for Morocco, closer to the palace where we waited for dusk in the hope of seeing Red-necked Nightjars. Our vigil was not in vain and three were seen as darkness fell. We left well pleased with a super end to a varied and fascinating trip.

## ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

### BIRDS

	<b>WILDFOWL</b>	<b>Family Anatidae</b>	
1	<b>Common Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Three at the Lak du Merzouga (flooded this

			year) on our day in the desert.
2	<b>Ruddy Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Sixty at Lak du Merzouga.
3	<b>Gadwall</b>	<i>Anas strepera</i>	About 24 at Lak du Merzouga.
4	<b>Mallard</b>	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	One on the Barage de Mansour el Edahbi near Ouarzazate.
5	<b>Northern Shoveler</b>	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	About 50 at Lak du Merzouga.
6	<b>Northern Pintail</b>	<i>Anas acuta</i>	About 30 at Lak du Merzouga.
7	<b>Tufted Duck</b>	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Four females at Oued Massa.
8	<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b>	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	One at Oued Souss.
	<b>GREBES</b>	<b>Family Podicipedidae</b>	
9	<b>Little Grebe</b>	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Two at the temporary lake around Cafe Jasmine.
10	<b>Great Crested Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Ten on the Barage de Mansour el Edahbi.
	<b>FLAMINGOS</b>	<b>Family Phoenicopteridae</b>	
11	<b>Greater Flamingo</b>	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	A total of 97 at the Oued Souss.
	<b>STORKS</b>	<b>Family Ciconiidae</b>	
12	<b>Black Stork</b>	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Two in flight just outside Ouarzazate.
13	<b>White Stork</b>	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Common - flocks of up to 100 recorded on at least six days. Some nesting including one in Ouarzazate which was at least 2m high.
	<b>IBISES, SPOONBILLS</b>	<b>Family Threskiornithidae</b>	
14	<b>Glossy Ibis</b>	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	A flock of eight flew down the Oued Massa on our arrival.
15	<b>Eurasian Spoonbill</b>	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Singles at Lak du Merzouga and Oued Souss.
	<b>HERONS, BITTERNES</b>	<b>Family Ardeidae</b>	
16	<b>Eurasian Bittern</b>	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	Amazingly, one at the temporary lake around Cafe Jasmine.
17	<b>Cattle Egret</b>	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Common, a few daily.
18	<b>Grey Heron</b>	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Three at the Barage de Mansour el Edahbi ; two at the Oued Massa and 25 at Oued Souss.
19	<b>Little Egret</b>	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	A few recorded on five days.
	<b>CORMORANTS</b>	<b>Family Phalacrocoracidae</b>	
20	<b>Great Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	A flock of eight at the Barage de Mansour el Edahbi , three at coastal sites.
	<b>FALCONS</b>	<b>Family Falconidae</b>	

21	<b>Lesser Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Four at the King's hunting estate in the Atlas mountains.
22	<b>Common Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common, a few daily.
	<b>KITES, HAWKS, EAGLES</b>	<b>Family Accipitridae</b>	
23	<b>Osprey</b>	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	One at the Barage de Mansour el Edahbi .
24	<b>Black-shouldered Kite</b>	<i>Elanus axillaris</i>	Two at Oued Souss.
25	<b>Black Kite</b>	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	One near Ouarzazate. No migration seen this year.
26	<b>Short-toed Snake Eagle</b>	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	Five seen on three days, three at the King's hunting estate.
27	<b>Western Marsh Harrier</b>	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	One male at the Oued Souss.
28	<b>Montagu's Harrier</b>	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	One male quartering over the dunes at Tamri.
29	<b>Long-legged Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Three between Ouarzazate and Tineghir, singles on two other days.
30	<b>Golden Eagle</b>	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	A pair courting high above the Tiz n' Tichka pass in the Atlas mountains.
31	<b>Booted Eagle</b>	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	Seen on only one day - 12 at the King's hunting estate.
	<b>RAILS, CRAKES, COOTS</b>	<b>Family Rallidae</b>	
32	<b>Common Moorhen</b>	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	One at the temporary lake around Cafe Jasmine; two at Oued Massa and the same at Oued Souss.
33	<b>Eurasian Coot</b>	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Six at Lak du Merzouga and 20 in the Oued Massa.
	<b>OYSTERCATCHERS</b>	<b>Family Haematopidae</b>	
34	<b>Eurasian Oystercatcher</b>	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	About 40 in the Oued Souss.
	<b>STILTS, AVOCETS</b>	<b>Family Recurvirostridae</b>	
35	<b>Black-winged Stilt</b>	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	About 50 in the temporary desert lakes,, 20 in the Oued Souss.
36	<b>Pied Avocet</b>	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	We counted 25 at Lak du Merzouga and five in the Oued Souss.
	<b>PLOVERS</b>	<b>Family Charadriidae</b>	
37	<b>Grey Plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Ten in the Oued Souss.
38	<b>Common Ringed Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Forty in the Oued Souss.
39	<b>Little Ringed Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Six in the Lak du Merzouga and one in the Oued de Ouarzazate.
40	<b>Kentish Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Twenty in the temporary lake at Cafe Jasmine, six in the Oued Souss.
	<b>SANDPIPERS, SNIPES</b>	<b>Family Scolopacidae</b>	
41	<b>Black-tailed Godwit</b>	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	One at the Lak du Merzouga.
42	<b>Bar-tailed Godwit</b>	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Twelve in the Oued Souss.

43	<b>Whimbrel</b>	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Three in the Oued Souss.
44	<b>Eurasian Curlew</b>	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Two in the Oued Souss.
45	<b>Spotted Redshank</b>	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	One in the Oued Souss.
46	<b>Common Redshank</b>	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Ten in the Oued Souss.
47	<b>Common Greenshank</b>	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Four at the Lak du Merzouga, one in the Oued Souss.
48	<b>Green Sandpiper</b>	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	One at Lak du Merzouga, another in the Oued Ouarzazate.
49	<b>Common Sandpiper</b>	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Two in the Oued Souss.
50	<b>Sanderling</b>	<i>Calidris alba</i>	One at Lak du Merzouga, a single on the coast and 12 in the Oued Souss.
51	<b>Little Stint</b>	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Three in the temporary lake at Cafe Jasmine, two in the Oued Souss.
52	<b>Curlew Sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Five in the Oued Souss.
	<b>COURSERS</b>	<b>Family Glareolidae</b>	
53	<b>Cream-coloured Courser</b>	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	A total of 19 on our desert trip, two on the road from Ouarzazate to the Atlas mountains.
	<b>GULLS, TERNS</b>	<b>Family Laridae</b>	
54	<b>Audouin's Gull</b>	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	Forty at a gull roost at Tamri.
55	<b>Yellow-legged Gull</b>	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	About 200 at a gull roost at Tamri, lots along the coast and in Oued Souss.
56	<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b>	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	A few in the Oued Souss.
57	<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Three at the Barage de Mansour el Edahbi , one at Tamri, 10 in the Oued Souss.
58	<b>Slender-billed Gull</b>	<i>Larus genei</i>	Ten in the Oued Souss.
59	<b>Mediterranean Gull</b>	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	One in the Oued Souss.
60	<b>Sandwich Tern</b>	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Five at Tamri, 25 in the Oued Souss.
	<b>SANDGROUSE</b>	<b>Family Pteroclididae</b>	
61	<b>Pin-tailed Sandgrouse</b>	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>	Great views of 27 near Erfoud and 20 in the Drâa Valley.
	<b>PIGEONS, DOVES</b>	<b>Family Columbidae</b>	
62	<b>Common Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba livia</i>	Abundant daily.
63	<b>Common Wood Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Seen on four days in the Atlas and on the coast, maximum of 14 on the Oukaimeden trip.
64	<b>Eurasian Collared Dove</b>	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Common daily.
65	<b>Laughing Dove</b>	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Common daily in desert areas, two at the Oued Souss.
	<b>OWLS</b>	<b>Family Strigidae</b>	
66	<b>Little Owl</b>	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Three near the Oued Massa.
	<b>NIGHTJARS</b>	<b>Family Caprimulgidae</b>	
67	<b>Red-necked Nightjar</b>	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	Three in the Oued Souss.

	<b>SWIFTS</b>	<b>Family Apodidae</b>	
68	<b>Common Swift</b>	<i>Apus apus</i>	Small flocks outside Marrakech and Agadir.
69	<b>Pallid Swift</b>	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	Large flocks in Marrakech, smaller number in Agadir.
70	<b>Little Swift</b>	<i>Apus affinis</i>	Flocks in Marrakech and Agadir.
	<b>BEE-EATERS</b>	<b>Family Meropidae</b>	
71	<b>European Bee-eater</b>	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Five at Oued Tifouldtoud, about 20 in the Oued Massa.
	<b>HOOPOES</b>	<b>Family Upupidae</b>	
72	<b>Eurasian Hoopoe</b>	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Singles recoded daily, two at the Argane oil site.
	<b>BUSHSHRIKES</b>	<b>Family Malaconotidae</b>	
73	<b>Black-crowned Tchagra</b>	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	Two at Oued Massa seen and heard well, one other heard.
	<b>SHRIKES</b>	<b>Family Laniidae</b>	
74	<b>Southern Grey Shrike</b>	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Twelve seen over six days.
75	<b>Woodchat Shrike</b>	<i>Lanius senator</i>	Four seen over three days
	<b>CROWS, JAYS</b>	<b>Family Corvidae</b>	
76	<b>Eurasian Magpie</b>	<i>Pica pica</i>	The beautiful 'blue-eared' North African race <i>P.p. mauritanicus</i> was common around Marrakech and Agadir.
77	<b>Red-billed Chough</b>	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	A total of 150 seen on our two days in the Atlas Mountains.
78	<b>Alpine Chough</b>	<i>Pyrhocorax graculus</i>	Seen in large numbers but only around Oukaïmeden.
79	<b>Northern Raven</b>	<i>Corvus corax</i>	A total of 6 seen in the mountains.
	<b>TITS, CHICKADEES</b>	<b>Family Paridae</b>	
80	<b>Blue Tit</b>	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	One at Oukaïmeden, another at the Oued Souss.
	<b>SWALLOWS, MARTINS</b>	<b>Family Hirundinidae</b>	
81	<b>Sand Martin</b>	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Seen only at Oued Massa.
82	<b>Barn Swallow</b>	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Common, seen migrating north most days.
83	<b>Eurasian Crag Martin</b>	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Seen only in the Gorge du Todra (10).
84	<b>Common House Martin</b>	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Three seen at Boumalne.
85	<b>Red-rumped Swallow</b>	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Two near Erfoud, six on the road to Agadir.
	<b>LARKS</b>	<b>Family Alaudidae</b>	
86	<b>Greater Hoopoe-Lark</b>	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	Brilliant bird: one seen with a chick near Erfoud; three in the Sahara, one displaying constantly.
87	<b>Thick-billed Lark</b>	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>	Two seen displaying near the Tagdilt track.
88	<b>Calandra Lark</b>	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Several seen near Chichaoua.

89	<b>Bar-tailed Lark</b>	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	Three seen in the Drâa Valley.
91	<b>Greater Short-toed Lark</b>	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Abundant in the desert areas, holding territory and in flocks.
92	<b>Crested Lark</b>	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	A few on five days.
93	<b>Thekla Lark</b>	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	Six on the Tagdilt track, lots on the road to Oued Massa.
94	<b>Horned Lark</b>	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Big flocks at Oukaimeden.
95	<b>Temminck's Lark</b>	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	Four seen in the desert areas.
	<b>CISTICOLAS &amp; ALLIES</b>	<b>Family Cisticolidae</b>	
96	<b>Zitting Cisticola</b>	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Heard at Tamri, lots in the Oued Massa.
	<b>BULBULS</b>	<b>Family Pycnonotidae</b>	
97	<b>Common Bulbul</b>	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Lived up to its name.
	<b>OLD WORLD WARBLERS</b>	<b>Family Sylviidae</b>	
98	<b>Cetti's Warbler</b>	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Heard in the Atlas valleys and in Oued Massa.
99	<b>Moustached Warbler</b>	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	Two at Sidi Rabat, near the Oued Massa.
100	<b>Sedge Warbler</b>	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	A bird seen briefly in the Oued Derkoua was probably this species.
101	<b>Common Chiffchaff</b>	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	A few seen on migration but hardly common.
102	<b>Eurasian Blackcap</b>	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Just two females seen in the Drâa Valley.
103	<b>Orphean Warbler</b>	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	A male at Oued Massa.
104	<b>Common Whitethroat</b>	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	A female with four spectacled Warblers in roadside bush outside Ouarzazate.
105	<b>Tristram's Warbler</b>	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	A pair in a wadi near Erfoud.
106	<b>Spectacled Warbler</b>	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	Quite common in the desert areas - 12 in three days.
107	<b>Subalpine Warbler</b>	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	A few seen in Tamarisk scrub.
108	<b>Sardinian Warbler</b>	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	A few seen and heard north of the Atlas mountains.
	<b>KINGLETS</b>	<b>Family Regulidae</b>	
109	<b>Firecrest</b>	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	One seen briefly at Km17 on the road to Oukaimeden.
	<b>STARLINGS</b>	<b>Family Sturnidae</b>	
110	<b>Spotless Starling</b>	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Common north of the Atlas mountains, especially in Marrakech and Agadir.
	<b>THRUSHES</b>	<b>Family Turdidae</b>	
111	<b>Common Blackbird</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i>	A few everywhere we went.

112	<b>Song Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	One seen on the way up to Oukaimeden.
113	<b>Mistle Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Two in the ski resort at Oukaimeden.
	<b>CHATS, OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS</b>		<b>Family Muscicapidae</b>
114	<b>Black Redstart</b>	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Quite common - seen on five days; maximum of 10 at Oukaimeden.
115	<b>Common Redstart</b>	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Two females seen in the Atlas.
116	<b>Moussier's Redstart</b>	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	Surprisingly sparse; three seen near Oued Massa.
117	<b>Eurasian Stonechat</b>	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	A pair at Oued Massa.
118	<b>Red-rumped Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	A pair on the Tagdilt track.
119	<b>Northern Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Quite common; seen on six days.
120	<b>Black-eared Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	One male at the Tagdilt track only.
121	<b>Desert Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	Two pairs: one at the Tagdilt track, the other in the Draa Valley.
122	<b>Mourning Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe lugens</i>	One at the Tagdilt track.
123	<b>White-crowned Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	Common in the desert areas.
124	<b>Black Wheatear</b>	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	Likewise common in the desert areas.
125	<b>Blue Rock Thrush</b>	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Nine seen over four days.
	<b>OLD WORLD SPARROWS, SNOWFINCHES</b>		<b>Family Passeridae</b>
126	<b>House Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Abundant in towns and villages.
127	<b>Rock Sparrow</b>	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	A good number (100) at Oukaimeden.
	<b>WAGTAILS, PIPITS</b>		<b>Family Motacillidae</b>
128	<b>Western Yellow Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Four in the desert around ephemeral lakes (one of the Spanish race), a male of the British race at the Oued Massa.
129	<b>Grey Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	One on the way up to Oukaimeden.
130	<b>White Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Ten seen over four days.
131	<b>Tawny Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	One with Calandra Larks near Chichaoua.
132	<b>Tree Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	One at the Lak du Merzouga.
	<b>FINCHES</b>		<b>Family Fringillidae</b>
133	<b>Common Chaffinch</b>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Quite a few of the striking blue-headed North African race north of the Atlas.
134	<b>European Serin</b>	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Common, heard and seen almost daily.
135	<b>European Greenfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	A few seen north of the Atlas.
136	<b>European Goldfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Quite common north of then Atlas.

137	<b>Common Linnet</b>	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Just two at a high pass in the Atlas.
138	<b>Crimson-winged Finch</b>	<i>Rhodopechys sanguineus</i>	<b>Voted bird of the trip:</b> a flock of at least 50 near the ski-lifts in Oukaimeden.
139	<b>Trumpeter Finch</b>	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	Common this year in the desert areas.
<b>BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS &amp; ALLIES</b>			
140	<b>Corn Bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	<b>Family Emberizidae</b> A surprise party of four in the Draá Valley, a few north of the Atlas.
141	<b>Rock Bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	One at Oukaimeden.
142	<b>House Bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza striolata sahari</i>	Common in towns and villages.

## MAMMALS

<b>SQUIRRELS</b>		<b>Family Scuridae</b>	
1	<b>Barbary Ground Squirrel</b>	<i>Atlantoxeros getulus</i>	Three near Oukaimeden.
<b>MICE, RATS, VOLES &amp; GERBILS</b>			
2	<b>Shaw's Jird</b>	<i>Meriones shawi</i>	<b>Family Muridae</b> One performed for us in front of an audience of scores (children) in irrigated gardens near Tinejdad.
3	<b>Fat Sand Rat</b>	<i>Psammomys obesus</i>	<b>Voted mammal of the trip:</b> seen on the Tagdilt track.
<b>APES</b>		<b>Family Hominidae</b>	
4	<b>Human</b>	<i>Homo sapiens</i>	A herd of about 50, sub species H. s. parisienne stopped to 'water the desert' on the Tagdilt track.

## REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

<b>FROGS</b>		<b>Family Ranidae</b>	
1	<b>North African Water Frog</b>	<i>Rana saharica</i>	Heard occasionally and a few seen.
<b>TOADS</b>		<b>Family Bufonidae</b>	
2	<b>African Toad</b>	<i>Bufo regularis</i>	One in the desert at the Tagdilt track.
<b>TERRAPINS</b>		<b>Family Emydidae</b>	
3	<b>Stripe-necked Terrapin</b>	<i>Mauremys caspica</i>	Two seen in the Oued Massa.
<b>TYPICAL LIZARDS</b>		<b>Lacertidae</b>	
4	<b>Lizard sp</b>		Several seen in the desert.
5	<b>Spiny-tailed Lizard</b>	<i>Uromastix acanthinurus</i>	One dried specimen at the café in Alnif.
<b>TORTOISES</b>		<b>Family Testudinidae</b>	
6	<b>Spur-thighed tortoise</b>	<i>Testudo graeca</i>	Singles seen at an Atlas roadside and on the bank at Oued Souss.

## FLUTS

1	<b>Large White</b>	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Seen almost daily.
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2	<b>Small White</b>	<i>Artogeia rapae.</i>	Common daily.
3	<b>Clouded Yellow</b>	<i>Colias croceus</i>	Seen on four days.
4	<b>Painted Lady</b>	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Common daily.
5	<b>Monarch</b>	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	One seen at Oued Souss.

### **OTHER TAXA**

1	<b>Dung Beetle</b>	<i>Scarabaeus semipunctatus</i>	Seen on several days in the desert and at Oued Massa.
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### **HEAVENLY BODIES**

1	<b>Venus</b>	Showing well just on dusk several nights.
2	<b>Orion</b>	One of the most distinguishable constellations, seen well during the desert section of the trip.

Tim Earl, Guernsey, March 2007

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