

Limosa & Travelling Naturalist Tour Report

Morocco:

Sahara, High Atlas & Atlantic Coast

March 25th - April 4th 2010



Moussier's Redstart (top left), *Hoopoe Lark* (top right), *Temminck's Lark* (middle left), *'Moroccan' Magpie* (middle right), *'Balearic' Woodchat Shrike* (bottom left), *Egyptian Nightjar* on nest (bottom right). All photographs © Arnaud B. van den Berg. For a more extensive selection of photos taken on our Morocco tours please visit our Gallery feature at www.limosaholidays.co.uk

Tour Report • Morocco: Sahara, High Atlas & Atlantic Coast, March 25th to April 4th, 2010

Report compiled by tour leader: **Arnoud B. van den Berg**

Itinerary:

25/03 London, Marrakech, Ait Ourir, Toufliht
26/03 Ourika valley, Oukaïmeden 2,500–2,800m (lunch)
27/03 Toufliht, Tizi-n-Tichka, Ouarzazate (lunch), Mansour lake, Boumalne hotel
28/03 Boumalne Iknouen road, Tinerhir, Todhra gorge (lunch), Tagdilt track
29/03 Boumalne, Goulmima wadi, Tinjdad (lunch), Rissani, Derkaoua hotel
30/03 Kasbah Said, Erg Chebbi, Merzouga, Derkaoua (lunch), Rissani
31/03 Derkaoua, Rissani oasis, Jorf, Touroug, Tinjdad, Tinerhir (lunch), Mansour lake, hotel Ouarzazate
01/04 Ouarzazate, Mansour lake, Iriri, Taznakht (lunch), Taliouine, Aoulouz, Taroudannt hotel
02/04 Taroudannt, Tamri, Agadir, Embouchure Oued Souss
03/04 Oued Massa at Sdi Rbat, Musee lunch, Tassila, Embouchure Oued Souss
04/04 Agadir, London.

Tour summary

Thursday 25th March

After we met at Marrakech airport in the late morning, where we watched some House Buntings inside the airport, we drove the 38 km east to the quiet and scenic riverside hotel at Ait Ourir, where we enjoyed a four-course lunch in the lush hotel garden. Having our first taste of Moroccan food, we were surrounded by singing Cuckoos and Nightingales and could look up at species in overhead trees like African Blue Tit, Western Olivaceous and Sardinian Warblers. The rest of the afternoon was spent at a mature pine wood east of our hotel where we enjoyed a leisurely birding walk, watching Grey Wagtails, Coal Tits, Hawfinches, 'African' Chaffinches and European Serins.

Friday 26th March

After the bright weather of the first day, we were surprised by the mist and low clouds in the morning. We first birded in the beautiful hotel gardens, with Cetti's Warblers giving a rare show. After breakfast we drove up through fields to the Ourika valley and, above the clouds, the ski resort of Oukaïmeden. In the agricultural lands no fewer than six Montagu's Harriers were flying about, presumably on migration, while Thekla Larks and Corn Buntings were singing. Lower down in the Ourika valley, we heard a calling Levaillant's Woodpecker calling. Carefully, we tried to approach the bird perched in a tree close to the road but it flew off before we had all seen it. Around midday, we arrived at the high mountain slopes of Oukaïmeden where it was sunny but also too windy for easy birding. After our lunch at the French Alpinists' Club, we found beautiful Atlas Horned Larks together with a few out-of-place Short-toed Larks. The first Moussier's Redstarts, a flock of Rock Sparrows, many Red-billed Choughs and a migratory Iberian Chiffchaff were equally exciting. We next found a female Seebohm's Wheatear, which was well photographed by David (Harris). Other high-elevation birds here included several Rock Doves, Black Redstarts and Mistle Thrushes. On the way down, we had time to look at the small Atlas subspecies of White-throated Dipper and some Black Wheatears, Blue Rock Thrushes and Rock Buntings. Mervyn, who was unable to follow us on a mountain track, remained by the bus and had a great view of our first Barbary Partridge.

Saturday 27th March

It was our last morning to enjoy the garden birds along the Zat river, where Nightingales and Western Olivaceous Warblers remained largely hidden in the dense bushes, and Little Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows flew overhead. We left shortly before 08:00 for a long but scenic day driving over the High Atlas and past Ouarzazate and the rose valley to Boumalne. Along the way we stopped at a mature pine stand where the Moroccan races of Short-toed Treecreeper and Common Crossbill showed well. North of the pass, Booted Eagles, Goshawks and Sparrowhawks were flying overhead. During our lunch stop at Palais de Tichka an 'Atlas' Long-legged Buzzard flew past and in a nearby plant some of us had excellent views of foraging Hoopoes. After descending into the desert near Ouarzazate, the wind had got up, making the birding difficult, so

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we opted to have lunch at the large kasbah. Some 20km further east, we stopped at the barrage lake for our first true desert species. Here three Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were ample reward for our efforts before the wind forced us to move on. We next explored a tiny but sheltered garden at a petrol station near El Kelaa where we had close views of Willow and Subalpine Warblers, Trumpeter Finches and a migrant 'Balearic' Woodchat Shrike. It turned out that the shrike was only the fourth record for Morocco, so we photographed it from all sides (the three previous records were also found on Limosa tours as well!). Driving further east, we enjoyed the spectacular scenery of the 'valley of the 1000 kasbahs' in late-afternoon light. At our fancy Boumalne hotel some of us enjoyed migrants in the sheltered garden, including Melodious and Subalpine Warblers.

Sunday 28th March

At 05:30, we had an early breakfast and we left the hotel at 06:00 for desert birding along the Tagdilt track and Iknouen road at sunrise, before the wind rose and made birding difficult. The weather was excellent and we birded at these two sites which held a slightly different range of birds. At the first walk, we added many exciting birds to our list including quite a few Red-rumped and Desert Wheatears and watched the beautiful song flights of Hoopoe Larks. Thousands of Short-toed Larks seemed to be migrating through the area, while others were singing in display. At our second walk, a bit higher up the road in somewhat sandier habitat, we watched more than 20 Cream-coloured Coursers, a few pairs of Black-bellied Sandgrouse, our first Thick-billed Lark with its huge bill, the wonderful 'horns' of several Temminck's Larks, and yet more Desert Wheatears. The help of our bus driver was unprecedented as he drove us all the way to an old ruined wall where three species of wheatears breed. We quickly found two of these but before we could find the rare Mourning Wheatear it was time to retreat to the hotel and enjoy a second breakfast at 10:00. After a leisurely break, we drove east to Tinerhir where we had lunch at the scenic Todhra gorge. What a stunning, stark landscape! This being a Sunday, however, many hundreds of tourists filled the place, and we had to drive slightly further beyond the gorge to be birding again. Here it did not take long before we found one of the key species of the tour, a Tristram's Warbler, singing along the road. Later in the afternoon we drove back towards our hotel and returned to the old ruined wall along Tagdilt track to look again for the rare Mourning Wheatear. Eventually a female appeared but it was quite flighty and it took quite a while for all of us to see this exciting bird. Other species nesting in this extraordinary wall in a wide-open landscape included White-crowned Black and Desert Wheatears, Trumpeter Finches, and Thekla and Temminck's Larks. It was a fitting end to a brilliant day.

Monday 29th March

We left our comfortable Boumalne hotel at 07:00 and drove east towards Tinjdad. Along the way, we stopped at a cliff to watch a Lanner Falcon on its nest. Beyond Tinjdad, we had a fresh orange juice before going further east to Goulmima where some remote desert wadis were home to a few special desert species. First, we found a singing Bar-tailed Desert Lark in display. Next came a Spectacled Warbler which gave excellent views. Just when the wind suddenly increased, we found a Scrub Warbler, which we followed for quite some time as it ran from one small desert bush to another, the tail cocked-up. We returned to Tinjdad for an extended but simple lunch, then continued east past the oasis towns of Touroug and Jorf to our delightful auberge at Derkaoua in the middle of the Merzouga desert. Along the way, we had some beautiful roadside views of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. We arrived at our auberge in late afternoon, and some of us had a rest, others couldn't resist the lure of migrant birds in the garden, which included Whitethroat, Whinchat, and an odd House Martin x Barn Swallow hybrid that landed to roost.

Tuesday 30th March

Our three Land Rover drivers arrived at dawn to bring us to different corners of the Merzouga and Rissani desert. Before breakfast, we drove to a nearby sandy wadi where we walked a short distance to find a singing African Desert Warbler. After taking breakfast back at the auberge, we drove to the Yasmina cafe where we found more than a handful of the elusive Desert Sparrow. Moreover, quite a few migrants were present in the tamarisks around the dried-up lake area, including Wood and Western Bonelli's Warblers, and a male Common Redstart trapped by a bird-ringing team from Barcelona. We also had a special meeting with a nomad who had found a nesting Egyptian Nightjar. This amazing bird was sitting motionless, apparently with two chicks under its belly, its cryptic camouflage rendered it almost invisible and confident it was unseen, we enjoyed superb, close views. Other birds we encountered during our drive included several Cream-coloured Coursers, Hoopoe Larks, Bar-tailed Desert Larks and the desert form of Southern Grey Shrike. For lunch and a rest (or more birding), we returned to our auberge. In the afternoon, we headed for some cliffs west of Rissani where we met

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our local guide and his stone-selling friends who guarded a nest of Pharaoh Eagle Owl which held three chicks. In the end, we had good views of an adult bird sheltering in a cave next to the nest. On our return, our local guide also showed us some Brown-necked Raven nests.

Wednesday 31st March

In the early morning, we enjoyed more than an hour birding at the auberge garden. Here we watched a large number of European Bee-eaters catching bees at hives placed near an alfalfa field. Also, two pairs of Long-billed Crested Larks were singing on the garden walls; a new species illustrated but misnamed in the plates of the new Collins Guide. A few Spotted Sandgrouse were calling as they flew overhead but remained unseen. Shortly after leaving Derkaoua we spotted five Spotted Sandgrouse on the roadside gravel which stayed for long enough for us to get out of the bus and even get a telescope view. Next, we stopped at the Rissani oasis where we spent some time at a huge tamarisk where a singing Saharan (Eastern) Olivaceous Warbler led us on a merry dance. The bird was sound-recorded at close range but was not easy to see. A long day of driving lay ahead of us, and we left Rissani via Erfoud and through a very busy town of Jorf. Along the way we had a brief walk in the Touroug oasis which produced Turtle and Laughing Doves, at Tinjdad for our orange juice man, and had an impressive lunch at the kasbah restaurant in Tinerhir. We continued beyond Boumalne and the '1000 kasbahs road' via the rose valley and Skoura to the Mansour lake. This was the same site we visited on 27th March, but now without excessive wind we were able to enjoy the scenery and birds. In beautiful light, just before sunset, we found a flock of eight babblers (Fulvous Chatterers), while on the lake, Great Crested Grebes and Grey Herons were breeding, and we watched our first Gull-billed Tern. Just before dark, we arrived at our comfortable Ouarzazate hotel for a fine end to the day.

Thursday 1st April

Before breakfast, a few of us got up early to watch the roosting Night Herons in a pine tree by the hotel. Later, we went to the lakeshore at the eastern edge of town, which was full of birds. Purple Herons, Night Herons and Collared Pratincoles flew around in flocks, huge numbers of White Storks, Flamingos, Coots and Cormorants were foraging, and quite a few Ruddy Shelducks and Marbled Ducks sat out on the water. We also found many wagtails, including the Moroccan race of White Wagtail, and some waders. Nearby bushes held another singing 'Saharan' Eastern Olivaceous Warbler. Our next stop was the bridge of Iriri where Western Olivaceous, Melodious and Sardinian Warblers were conspicuous, together with a Pied Flycatcher and a Tawny Pipit. After we had lunch at the restaurant of the carpet village of Taznakht, we continued across mountainous habitat with high passes and beautiful scenery with only a few stops, before we descended into the Argana forests of the upper Souss valley. At Taliouline, we explored the river where we had close encounters with various warblers and wagtails, including 'Moroccan' White Wagtail and several Little Ringed Plovers. In the afternoon, we had a brief stop at the Aoulouz bridge where a singing Black-crowned Tchagra lured us into an olive orchard and offered stunning views. At dusk, we reached the exuberant Palais de Salam hotel where we had dinner. Some of us then did a spot of post-dinner owling where a torchlight view of a singing Desert Little Owl was an unexpected bonus.

Friday 2nd April

Before breakfast we went up the hotel's observation platform (i.e. the roof!) to watch Pallid and Little Swifts screaming over the rooftops, and a Peregrine which made a brief appearance. In the garden's treetops, several Western Olivaceous Warblers were singing, and Spotless Starlings nested in the roof. In the high palm trees, there were several pairs of noisy Kestrels. Leaving Taroudannt across agricultural fields, we soon Just to the north is the only place where Bald Ibis, the rarest species of the tour, still occurs. From a high vantage point, we watched birds flying along the sea cliffs to and from the out-of-bounds breeding colony. Driving back, we came across several wandering slowly in the well-vegetated dunes, picking at insects, flowers and other food items, and these gave stunning views. After an excellent tajine meal, we went down to a flock of gulls at the river mouth and picked out more than 30 Audouin's Gulls amidst numerous Sandwich Terns, Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls. In the late afternoon we visited the mouth of the Oued Souss. Unfortunately, a recent river flush had washed away the road to the palace and reconstruction work had only just started. It meant that we had to walk the entire length of the river to see a magnificent flocks of Gull-billed Terns, 200+ White Storks, some 20 Spoonbills. Here we also found several Marbled Ducks flying overhead, a nice selection of migratory waders including Avocet and Kentish Plover, some Caspian and Little Terns, and a surprising ten first-winter Mediterranean Gulls, while a pair of Stone-curlews was standing on the shore. In the riverine bushes we had

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excellent views of Moussier's Redstart, Sardinian Warbler and Zitting Cisticola, and a few Barbary Partridges showed very nicely. And remember the confiding 'Moroccan' Magpies here.

Saturday 3rd April

We spent our final day of birding at the beautiful Oued Massa reserve. Along the way, we watched several Little Owls and found six Barbary Ground Squirrels sitting on garden walls. In the morning, we walked along the end of the river by the Sdi Rbat hamlet at the reserve entrance. The recent heavy rains had also caused severe damage to Oued Massa as well, and the sandbank separating the river from the sea had disappeared. This happens only once in seven years, on average, and this meant that the tide came in, changing the water quality from fresh to saline, and had completely changing the ecology of the lower river. It also meant that migrant birds that prefer freshwater, such as Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern and Squacco Heron were no longer present, presumably remaining further upstream. However, Zitting Cisticolas remained abundant and we watched several Black-crowned Tchagras, Black-eared Wheatears and also a Wild Boar. But there were only a few ducks on the lower river, including Ruddy Shelduck and a male Pintail, but a flock of 20 Spoonbills and a few Purple Herons flew past, giving us a most enjoyable morning. After lunch at the little artefacts museum of Tassila, we walked in riverside fields to find yet more flood damage, with many uprooted trees and bushes. In late afternoon we returned to the hotel, although a few of us continued on to the Oued Souss and were pleased to find two pairs of Brown-throated Martins along the river bank.

Sunday 4th April

After breakfast at our Anezi hotel, it was time to head to the airport for the return flight to London.

Arnoud B. van den Berg

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(Total 172 species recorded by the group)

Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara*

On 26/03, Mervyn watched one below Oukaimeden. On 2/04, a total of five were found at Oued Souss, of which two were perched low in a tree.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

On 1/04, one was calling at Ouarzazate lake.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

On 1/04, six presumed immature birds were swimming at Ouarzazate lake.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

On 1/04, up to 50 were flying and swimming at the lake in Ouarzazate. On 2/04, two were present at Tamri. On 3/04, a total of four at Oued Massa.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

On 1/04, c. 100 at Ouarzazate lake.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

On 3/04, a male was roosting at Oued Massa.

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*

On 1/04, 30 at Ouarzazate lake, mostly distant. On 2/04, a total of nine in flight above Oued Souss.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

On 3/04, two at Oued Massa.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

On 27/03 and 1/04, pairs were seen at Mansour lake east of Ouarzazate, with up to 30 on the latter date.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

On 1/04, a flock of ten was present at Ouarzazate lake.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Seen on most days, but not on 28–30/03. Quite a few nests were seen at Marrakech and Ouarzazate. A huge flock totalling 1000+ was present at the Ouarzazate lake on 1/04, and at least 200 at Oued Souss on 2/04.

Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*

On 2/04, at least 19 were foraging alongside the road north of Tamri.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

20 were present at Oued Souss on 2/04 and 3/04, plus a further 20 at Oued Massa on 3/04.

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Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

On 3/04, two in flight at Oued Massa.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

On 1/04, 40 roosting in a large fir tree at Ouarzazate, and a further 40 were circling above the Ouarzazate lake.

On 2/04, seven in flight over Oued Souss.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Seen every day except 30/03. Noted nesting in trees at Boumalne and Tinerhir.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Common at Mansour lake east of Ouarzazate on 31/03 and 1/04 where many 100s were present. Also numerous at Tamri, Oued Souss and Oued Massa on 2/04 and 3/04.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

On 1/04, a flock of 40 landed at Ouarzazate lake. On 2/04, one was at Tamri. On 3/04, four were watched in flight at Oued Massa.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Seen most days, being particularly numerous in the last three days of the tour.

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Five off Tamri on 2/04.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

On 27/03, one was swimming at Mansour lake. On 1/04, many 100s were present at Ouarzazate lake. On 2/04 and 3/04, several were at Oued Tamri, Oued Souss and Oued Massa.

White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus/lucidus*

On 27/03, one was seen.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Widespread throughout, with small numbers seen almost daily. The species was breeding at most hotels.

Lanner *Falco biarmicus*

On 29/03, one was sitting on its nest in a cliff near Imiter.

Peregrine *Falco biarmicus*

In the early morning of 2/04, one flew over the Taroudannt hotel.

Barbary Falcon *Falco biarmicus*

On 2/04, one was briefly in flight, chasing a Bald Ibis above the cliffs north of Tamri.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

On 27/03, one was at Mansour lake. On 1/04, two present at Ouarzazate lake.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

One was at Tinerhir on 29/03, and two at Ouarzazate lake and Iriri on 1/04; the latter was unusual in being a first-year bird without a tail-fork.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

On 29/03, one was perched on a distant pylon.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

A total of eight migrants, mostly males, were seen during the tour, with three at Ouarzazate lake on 1/04 but also several in the middle of the desert, including Erg Chebbi on 30/03.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

A total of eight migrants were seen during the tour, of which six were between Ait Ourir and Ourika on 26/03.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

On 27/03, one flew past Toufliht.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

On 27/03, three were seen along the northern side of Tichka road.

'Atlas' Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus cirtensis*

A total of ten individuals were seen during the tour, most of which (seven) were seen from 27/03 to 29/03.

Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*

A total of eight individuals seen, seven in the first two days and one at Aoulouz on 1/04.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Present at Mansour lake on 31/03 and 1/04, and at Oued Massa on 3/04.

Coot *Fulica atra*

On 1/04, 100+ at Ouarzazate lake. Several were present at Oued Massa on 3/04.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*

On 2/04, two by a wooden trunk on the shore of Oued Souss and several were also heard here. On 3/04, we found a bird incubating eggs along the main road near Oued Massa.

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Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

On 2/04, a flock of 50 was migrating north over the sea past Tamri. Also on 2/04, five were at Oued Souss.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Several at flooded fields of Rissani on 29/03. On 1/04, two noted at Ouarzazate lake. It was numerous at Oued Souss and Oued Massa on 2/04 and 3/04.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

On 2/04, a total of 13 were seen at Oued Souss.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

On 2/04 and 3/04, at least ten at Oued Souss.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

On 2/04 and 3/04, at least 30 at Oued Souss.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

On 1/04, several displaying at the eastern edge of Ouarzazate and a few were present at the Taliouine riverbed.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

On 2/04, 20 were foraging at Oued Souss. On 3/04, three at Oued Massa.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

On 2/04 and 3/04, two at Oued Souss.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

On 1/04, two flew over Ouarzazate lake. On 2/04 and 3/04, up to three at Oued Souss.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

On 2/04 and 3/04, one at Oued Souss.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

On 1/04, at least three at Ouarzazate lake. On 2/04 and 3/04, c 10 present at Oued Souss.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

On 2/04 and 3/04, up to 50 at Oued Souss.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*

On 28/03, more than 20 running over a sandy area of Iknouen road, including some with juveniles. On 30/03, a few were seen from the Land Rovers at Merzouga.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

On 1/04, a flock of 70 flew over Ouarzazate lake.

Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*

On 2/04, 30+ were roosting at Tamri.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Numerous on 2/04 and 3/04 along the Atlantic coast.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Numerous on 2/04 and 4/04 along the Atlantic coast.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

On 2/04 and 3/04, up to 50 at Oued Souss.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

On 2/04 and 3/04, up to ten first-winter birds at Oued Souss.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

On 2/04, one at Oued Tamri. At Oued Souss, up to five present on 2/04 and 3/04.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

On 31/03, one flew over Mansour lake. In the morning of 1/04, seven were present at Ouarzazate lake. It was numerous at Oued Souss on 2/04 and 3/04, where at least 400 individuals were roosting and foraging in flocks.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

On 2/04 and 3/04, up to three were seen at Oued Souss.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

On 2/04, more than 100 were found at Tamri, at sea north of Agadir, and at Oued Souss. On 3/04, 30 were noted at Oued Souss.

Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*

In the morning of 31/03, several were calling heard in flight above Derkaoua, and later a flock of five was standing on the gravel road in front of the bus between Derkaoua and the Rissani road before flying off.

Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*

On 28/03, heard in flight over the Tagdilt track near Boumalne.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*

On 28/03, calling birds heard over Tagdilt track near Boumalne, and a couple in flight there on three occasions.

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Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen on almost every day. Those at Oukaimeden on 26/03 appeared to be of wild origin, while most of the many others birds we saw elsewhere were probably feral pigeons.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Common and seen on five days.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Numerous from 31/03 onwards, particularly in oases in the southeast including Touroug, and also at Oued Massa.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Numerous and seen on every day, in every settlement.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Common to numerous and seen daily except 26/03, 1/04 and 2/04, being most numerous at Oued Massa.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Present around Ait Ourir and in the Ourika valley from 25/03 to 27/03, with a few singing by the hotel.

Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*

On 30/03, one adult with three chicks were present at a rocky ledge near Rissani.

'Desert' Little Owl *Athene (noctua) glaux*

On 29/3, one was perched along the main Tinerhir road. On 31/03, one was found in a roadside cave at Mansour lake. On 1/04, we spotlighted a bird at the Taroudannt city wall. On 3/04, a total of eight were found at Oued Massa.

Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

On 30/03, a nest with an adult sitting on (invisible) chicks was shown to us by a local near Merzouga.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Common at the coast on 2/04 and 3/04.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*

Numerous on most days in all towns but not noted from 29/03 to 31/03.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

Several foraging above the Ait Ourir hotel on 25/03 and 27/03. Also numerous at Taroudannt in the morning of 2/04.

'Saharan' Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus chrysocercus*

On 27/03 and 31/03, up to 20 were noted at Mansour lake. On 29/03, an estimated six breeding pairs were noted along the Jorf-Erfoud road. On 30/03, eight were foraging at Yasmina, Merzouga.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Common, noted every day and frequently heard. A migrating flock numbering 100+ was foraging at Derkaoua in the early morning of 31/03.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

More than ten individuals were seen on five dates.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major numida*

On 25/03 and 27/03, one or two visited a nest hole along the Tizi-n-Tichka road. On 2/04, one was calling at the Royal Palace of Oued Souss.

Levaillant's Woodpecker *Picus vaillantii*

On 26/03, one was calling and photographed in the lower stretch of the Ourika valley.

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus cucullatus*

On 1/04, two were singing and showing well at Aoulouz river. On 3/04, two seen and five heard at Oued Massa.

Desert Grey Shrike *Lanius elegans*

Common and seen on almost every day, except on 27/03 and 28/03, with highest numbers being 30+ on 31/03 and 1/04. This taxon is now treated as a species distinct from Southern Grey and Great Grey Shrikes.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

Birds of the nominate form were common to numerous and seen every day. Highest number was 30 on 1/04.

'Balearic' Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator badius*

One was photographed in a small garden behind a petrol station, 41km west of El Kelaa, on 27/03. This was only the fourth record for Morocco. Incidentally, the previous three were also found on Limosa Holidays tours...

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

One was noted at Toufliht on 27/04.

'Moroccan' Magpie *Pica pica mauritanica*

Up to three in the Ait Ourir-Marrakech area from 25/03 to 27/03. On 2/04 and 3/04, several 10s were found between Taroudannt, Tamri and Oued Massa, with some giving close views at Oued Souss.

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Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*

On 26/03, it was numerous at Oukaimeden with 100s present.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*

On 30/03, a total of 20 were seen at Merzouga and Rissani.

'North African' Raven *Corvus corax tingitanus*

On 26/03, ten at Oukaimeden and, on 2/04, one at Tamri. The *tingitanus* subspecies occurs in the Canary Islands and Morocco and can be distinguished by its small size, oily plumage colours and different vocal repertoire, and the Canarian birds have recently been shown to be genetically distinct (*Ibis* 148: 174–178, 2006), possibly warranting species status.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

From 26/03 to 28/03, several singing in pine trees in the Ourika valley and along the Tichka road.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Noted on five days: from 25/03 to 27/03, and also at Iriri and Taliouine on 1/04, and Oued Massa on 3/04.

African Blue Tit *Cyanistes (teneriffae) ultramarinus*

Noted on four days: daily in the Ourika, Oukaimeden and Tichka areas from 26/03 to 28/03, and also at Oued Souss on 2/04. North African birds may be split from those in the Canary Islands.

Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola mauritanica*

In the late afternoon of 3/04, two pairs were found going to roost in the bank of Oued Souss.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Common at Mansour lake on 27/03, and a few were seen at Rissani on 30/03.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris theresae*

Abundant at Todhra gorge on 28/03.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common to numerous, and seen daily.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

On 31/03, two were foraging at Derkaoua. On 1/04, several were nesting at the Iriri bridge. On 29/03, a hybrid with Barn Swallow was roosting at Derkaoua.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

Numerous at Ait Ourir and in the Ourika valley on 25/03 and 26/03. Also common at Taliouine on 1/04 and west of Taroudannt on 2/04.

Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*

Common in the desert from 28/03 to 30/03, with several performing their extraordinary display songs along the Ikniouen road near Boumalne on 28/03.

Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cinctura*

On 29/03, two were singing near Goulmima. On 30/03, a total of ten were seen from the Merzouga Land Rovers.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*

On 27/03, pairs noted on two occasions along the Skoura road. On 29/03 and 30/03, pairs were seen along the Tinerhir road and near Merzouga. On 1/04 several were seen.

Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*

On 28/03, a total of eight along the Ikniouen road.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Four foraging with 'Atlas' Horned Larks at Oukaimeden on 26/03. Abundant at the Tagdilt track and Ikniouen road on 28/03, with 1000s flying past and some singing. It was also numerous the following days with, e.g. several 10s at Goulmima on 29/03, 20 near Merzouga on 30/03 and 20 at Iriri on 1/04.

'Atlas' Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris atlas*

On 26/03, a total of c. 50 was seen at two places at Oukaimeden.

Temminck's Lark *Eremophila temminckii*

On 28/03 and 29/03, common in the desert with up to 50 at Boumalne.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

On 1/04, up to ten at Ouarzazate lake.

'Long-billed' Crested Lark *Galerida (cristata) macrorhyncha*

On 31/03, several at Derkaoua, Rissani and Mansour. On 1/04, two were present at Ouarzazate lake. This potential split is restricted to desert regions.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*

Numerous and seen daily. On 26/03, a nest was found by the roadside near Ait Ourir.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Seen on five days, mostly singles but several at Oued Souss on 2/04 and many at Oued Massa on 3/04.

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Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta saharae*

On 29/03, one was seen at close range during windy conditions in a wadi 15 km east of Goulmima.

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*

Numerous, seen (and heard) every day.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Several singing and well seen at the Ait Ourir hotel on 26/03 and 27/03. Also heard at Oued Massa on 3/04.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

One watched at close range along the Tassila road on 3/04.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

On 30/03, two at Yasmina, Merzouga.

'Saharan' Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida reiseri*

On 31/03, one was singing (and sound-recorded) in a large tamarisk south of Rissani. On 1/04, at least one was singing in tamarisks at Ouarzazate lake.

Western Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna opaca*

Common and seen on six days, and was present in the hotel gardens in Marrakech, Derkaoua and Taroudannt.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

On 28/03 and 29/03, one was seen at the Boumalne hotel garden. On 1/04, 2/04 and 3/04, singles noted at Iriri, Oued Souss and Oued Massa.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Common to numerous, with two at the El Kelaa petrol station on 27/03, two at Todhra on 28/03, up to five at Derkaoua on 30/03 and 31/03, c. 20 at Iriri and Taliouine on 1/04, and many at Oued Massa on 3/04.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Noted on just two days: on 31/03 at Derkaoua and on 1/04 at Iriri.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*

On 26/03, one was at the Oukaïmeden ski lift. On 29/03, one was identified at Derkaoua.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*

In total, 19 birds noted on seven days, including one singing at Toufliht on 27/03, and maxima of five at Derkaoua on 30/03 and five at Iriri on 1/04.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

On 30/03, two at Yasmina, Merzouga, and on 1/04 one at Ouarzazate lake.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

In total, six were seen on six days, in the Ait Ourir/Ourika areas and the Derkaoua area. In addition, one was present at the Ouarzazate hotel garden.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

One was present at Iriri on 1/04.

African Desert Warbler *Sylvia deserti*

In the early morning of 30/03, one at Derkaoua and another heard nearby.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

On 29/03 and 30/03, a total of three were found at Derkaoua. On 3/04, two were noted at Oued Massa.

Tristram's Warbler *Sylvia deserticola*

On 28/03, one was seen and heard in song at Todhra.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*

On 29/03, one at Goulmima wadi.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

In total, more than 35 were seen. Recorded daily from 27/03 to 1/04, with ten on 30/03 and ten on 1/04 at Iriri.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

On 25/03, a male showed well in the hotel garden at Ait Ourir. On 1/04, a male was singing (just at arm's length but remained unseen) in a dense bush at Taliouine. It was common to numerous at Oued Souss and Oued Massa on 2/04 and 3/04.

Fulvous Chatterer (Babbler) *Turdoides fulva*

On 31/03, eight were found at the shore of Mansour lake, east of Oukaïmeden.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla balearica*

From 25/03 to 27/03, several in song at the Ourika valley and northern Tichka roads.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

From 25/03 to 27/03, several were singing at the Ourika valley, Oukaïmeden and Tichka road.

'Moroccan' Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla mauritanica*

On 25/03 and 27/03, one or two were singing at Toufliht and seen by a few of our group.

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Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*

Common to numerous on 25/03 and 27/03 at Ait Ourir, on 1/04 at Taroudannt, and on 2/04 and 3/04 in the Souss valley and Oued Massa areas.

'Moroccan' Blackbird *Turdus merula mauritanicus*

This distinctive subspecies, in which the female has a yellow bill and greyish plumage, was numerous and seen on almost every day.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus deisleri*

On 26/03, two noted at Oukaïmeden.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

On 26/03, two were singing at Toufliht.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Numerous, and regularly heard in song on seven days (not 29/03 and 30/03).

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis*

On 26/03, c. 10 at Oukaïmeden.

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Singles noted at Toufliht on 27/03, Yasmina on 30/03 and Iriri on 1/04.

Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri*

On 26/03 and 27/03, four males and two males were seen at Oukaïmeden and Tichka respectively (plus a few females). On 2/04 and 3/04 it was numerous at Tamri, Oued Souss and Oued Massa.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

On 29/03, a male showed well in the field at Derkaoua. On 1/04, one at Iriri.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

On 26/03, one at Ait Ourir. On 3/04, a total of six at Oued Massa.

Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta*

On 28/03, 60+ were seen at the Tagdilt track and along the Ikiouen road east of Boumalne. A few were noted there the next day and again on 31/03 when passing through this area.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Three at Boumalne on 28/03 and four on 29/03.

'Seebohm's' Wheatear *Oenanthe (oenanthe) seebohmi*

On 26/03, a female was seen and photographed (by David) at Oukaïmeden.

'Western' Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica hispanica*

In total, seven individuals were seen, including singles on 29/03, 30/03, 1/04 and four at Oued Massa on 3/04.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Apart from White-crowned Black, this was probably the most numerous wheatear. Seen on 27/03, 28/03 and 31/03, and 1/04, with a maximum of 30 at Boumalne on 28/03.

'Western' Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe (lugens) halophila*

A nesting female was present at Tagdilt track on 28/03.

White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*

Numerous from 27/03 to 1/04, mostly from Ouarzazate eastwards.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*

Just a few seen on 26/03 at Oukaïmeden. On 28/03, we had good views of several singing males at Todhra. On 1/04, several were present at Tizi-n-Taghatine pass.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

On 26/03, two were found at Oukaïmeden. On 28/03, four were seen at Todhra.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca hypoleuca*

A male was foraging at Iriri on 1/04.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus minor*

On 26/03, two along the mountain stream below Oukaïmeden.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Common to numerous and seen daily.

Desert Sparrow *Passer simplex*

On 30/03, eight, mostly males, were seen at close range in the tamarisks at Yasmina, Merzouga.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

On 26/03, a flock of c. 30 foraging at Oukaïmeden. On 27/03, several present at Palais de Tichka.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) flava*

Migrants were seen from 30/03 at Derkaoua to 1/04 at Taliouine.

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Ashy-headed Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) cinereocapilla*

On 1/04, one was photographed at Taliouine river.

Spanish Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) iberiae*

Common at Ouarzazate lake and at Taliouine, with up to ten noted on 31/03 and 1/04.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Daily seen from 25/03 to 28/03 at Ourika, Oukaimeden, Ait Ourir, northern Tichka and Todhra (more than five).

One was foraging at Taliouine on 1/04.

'Moroccan' White Wagtail *Motacilla (alba) subpersonata*

On 1/04, this scarce form was seen at three sites: Ouarzazate lake, Taliouine river and Aoulouz river. On 3/04, one was present at Oued Souss. Treated as a full species by some authorities.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

On 31/03, two were reported at Derkaoua. On 1/04, one was watched at close range at Iriri before flying off.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

On 30/03, one was found at the Derkaoua field. On 1/04, one was perched in a tree at Taliouine.

'African' Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs africana*

Numerous from 25/03 to 27/03 at Marrakech, Ourika and Tizi-n-Tichka. Also common from 1/04 to 3/04 at Taliouine, Agadir and Oued Massa.

Serin *Serinus serinus*

Numerous and seen daily from 25/03 to 27/03, and again from 31/03 to 3/04.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris voousi*

Numerous and seen on seven days.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis parva*

Numerous and seen on six days.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

On 27/03, two were seen in the Ourika valley. On 3/04, more than ten were foraging and singing at Oued Massa.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*

On 27/03, pairs were seen twice, including one at the El Kelaa petrol station. On 28/03, 11 perched at Tagdilt track. On 30/03, two present at the Rissani owl spot. On 1/04, two were found at Iriri.

'Moroccan' Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra poliogyna*

From 25/03 to 27/03, several heard and seen in pine stands in the Ourika valley and northern Tichka road, with ten noted on the last day.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes buvryi*

On 25/03, six foraging in trees at Toufliht, Tizi-n-Tichka. On 27/03, two flew past at this site.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Numerous in song on 26/03 at Ait Ourir, 1/04 between Aoulouz and Taroudannt, and 2/04 between Taroudannt and Tamri and onto Agadir.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

On 26/03, three below Oukaimeden, and on 27/03 one was perched in a bush at the Tichka pass.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Singing males were seen 25/03 at Toufliht, 26/03 at Ourika, 1/04 at Taliouine and 3/04 at Oued Massa.

House Bunting *Emberiza (striolata) sahari*

Numerous and seen daily, and at each hotel we stayed at.

MAMMALS

Barbary Ground Squirrel *Atlantoxerus getulus*

Noted on four days: 26/03, 27/03, 1/04 and 3/04. On the latter day, six watched on a stonewall at Oued Massa.

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*

On 3/04, three walking over the mud at Oued Massa.

Fat Sand Rat *Psammomys obesus*

Numerous east of Boumalne.

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis*

On 31/03, one was flushed at the Mansour lake.

REPTILES

Changeable Agama *Trapelus mutabilis*

Common to numerous, particularly on 30/03 and 1/04.

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BUTTERFLIES

Southern Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides feisthamelii* (26/03 and 27/03),

Monarch *Danaus plexippus* (eg, 3/04)

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* (photographed at Oued Massa on 3/04).