

WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

TRIP REPORT – MOROCCO 16TH – 26TH MARCH 2011

LEADER: BOB BUCKLER

PARTICIPANTS:

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DAY 1 – Wednesday March 16th

ARRIVAL AT MARRAKECH – DRIVE TO OURIKA VALLEY AND OUKAIMEDAN

The group assembled at Menara Airport at 11:30am, some had travelled the day before and spent the night in Marrakech whilst the rest of us arrived from Madrid with Easyjet at 11am.

We met our driver Ahmed who guided us to our bus but not before a torrential downpour had subsided. I can't believe it, I came away from Spain to enjoy some African sunshine all I get is cold miserable wet, weather!

Not a good start!

We loaded our luggage onto the bus and headed for the hills! The single species of bird that we found around the airport which started off our list was **Common Kestrel** and that was all. We noted **Barn Swallow** and a small flock of swift species on the way to our hotel but not much else other than **House Sparrows** and **Collared Doves** in Ourika when we stopped to buy supplies for lunch.

After checking in at the Ourika Hotel and unpacking our scopes, bins and cameras we set off for the High Atlas mountains at Oukaïmedan. A few stops were made along the way but rain prevented any prolonged exits from the bus, we noted **Cattle Egret** from the hotel car park and **Red-billed Chough, Grey Wagtail** and **Black Wheatear** on the way up the mountains. As we neared the top the rain turned to snow, it was soon apparent that the snow had fallen very heavily and a thick layer of over 40cm lay on the ground. This put paid to any excursions into the pine woods along the way and we only found **Blue** and **Coal Tits**. At Oukaïmedan the area

was almost completely devoid of birds! We found a large flock of **Alpine** and **Red-billed Chough** a single **White Wagtail** and a couple more **Black Wheatears** and that was it. Snow, sleet and small hail stones drove us away from the high mountains, we then spent a couple of hours stopping many times as we descended along the winding, narrow road back to Ourika.

Below the snowline we found a nice little flock of birds feeding by the roadside, the flock contained half a dozen **Cirl Buntings**, a single **Rock Bunting** (male), a couple of **Great Tits**, a **Serin**, an **African Chaffinch** and a couple of **House Sparrows**. We then found a good sized flock of **Atlas Horned Larks** feeding on a steep sided hill, about 40 birds in all. Several other stops produced **Blackcap**, **Common Bulbul**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Greenfinch**, **African Chaffinch** and several common species.

Our first day ended at 6:30pm back at the hotel, we were very cold by then. The first day was over and it was a very poor start to the trip as far as the weather was concerned and the number of species recorded was quite low because of it, however the fantastic scenery, the snow covered peaks and the pine trees laden with snow was a wonderful sight to behold.

Day 2 – Thursday March 17th - Pre-breakfast walk in Ourika Valley – drive to Boulmalne Dades via the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass & Quarzazate Reservoir

Well, what a complete contrast to the weather, we emerged from the hotel beneath a clear sky at 6:30am; it was quite chilly but no sign of rain, sleet or snow – a perfect, bright morning. We took a quick look at the **Little Swift's** nests under the eaves of the hotel roof but all we saw was a pair of squatting **House Sparrow**! Our first birds of the day were **Common Bubluls**, noisy as ever, a very obliging **House Bunting** and an **African Chaffinch**. We then spent the next 2 hours walking in the lush vegetation and farmland down to the river bank. Our main target bird was the **Levaillant's Woodpecker** and within minutes were heard one drumming. Then it flew from one tree to another not too far off. We scoped this Moroccan gem and in the same tree we found 2 **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** too!

As we followed the meandering pathway to the river we watched **African Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **Eurasian Robin**, **Blackcap** and we had excellent views of the vociferous **Cetti's Warbler**. At the river we found **White**, **Grey** and **Yellow Wagtails**, also seen were **Sedge Warbler**, **Chiffchaff** and a **Little-ringed Plover**. Further birds were added on the return walk which included, **Cirl Bunting**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, both **Crag** and **House Martin** and a small flock of **Little Swifts**, we also heard a **Common Cuckoo**.

After a lovely breakfast we set off on the long journey to Boumalne Dades and we planned to spend all day doing it. We had only travelled 1km when the bus was stopped with the call of 'raptor', this, the first bird of prey of the day, turned out to be a **Short-toed Eagle**. Next we stopped on the road to Ait Ourir where we saw **Thekla Lark**, **Great Grey Shrike** (*algeriensis*), **Little Owl**, **Moroccan Magpie**, **Linnet**, **Cattle Egret** and **Barbary Partridge**. A second stop on this road found us watching a superb male **Moussier's Redstart** and our first **Woodchat Shrike**, **Sardinian Warblers** and a flock of **Spanish Sparrow**.

Further stops at Ait Ourir produced **White Stork**, at least 80 were circling over the dump, **Cattle Egret** (50+) were on the dump, a **White-throated Dipper** was seen as we crossed a river. We then spent the next few hours driving up to, and through, the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass stopping several times for birding breaks. Again the scenery was magical and the snow capped peaks in the background provided a lovely contrast to the barren hills around us. We listed **Red-billed** and **Alpine Chough**, **Booted Eagle**, **Rock Bunting**, **Black Redstart**, **Black Wheatear**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Crested** and **Thekla Larks** and **Common Kestrel**.

As we left the snow capped mountains the terrain changed dramatically, now we were passing rolling hills and stony plains and the bird life changed accordingly. We stopped to look at **Desert Lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-eared** and **Seebohm's Wheatear**, a **Eurasian Hoopoe** flew in front of the bus and many **Northern Wheatears** were found.

At Quarzazate reservoir we made our last stop, the light was superb, we had the sun behind us and the water was like a mill pond. We could see for miles from our high position overlooking the water, and because the water level was so low we listed many species, including lots of waders and dabbling ducks. We found many **Great Cormorants**, an **Osprey**, **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Marbled Duck** (40+), **Eurasian Teal**, **Mallard**, **Shoveler** (100+), **Northern Pintail**, **Great-crested** and **Little Grebes**, **Common Coot**, **Grey Heron**, **Marsh Harrier**, **Sand Martin** and **Common Kestrel**. Many species of waders were present, some were too far away to identify but we noted **Pied Avocet**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Common** and **Green Sandpiper**, **Dunlin** and **Ruff**. The banks and shallows were covered with hundreds of Wagtails, the majority of which were **Yellow Wagtails** but there was also **White** and a couple of the **Grey** varieties too. Several **Water Pipits** were found on the water's edge and a couple of **Desert Larks** were the last birds listed before we jumped back into the bus for our final leg of the journey.

We arrived at our hotel on the edge of Boumalne Dades at 7:30pm, it had been a very long day but the journey was very enjoyable because the scenery was magical throughout, the birds we stopped for were greatly appreciated and the weather was just superb, let's hope tomorrow is similar to today!!

Day 3 – Friday March 18th Boumalne Dades

Early morning - Tagdilt Track – afternoon in the Boumalne du Dades Gorge & Tagdilt track.

An absolute cracker of a day, superb sunny weather, fantastic scenery and great birding – what more could you ask for? Three of us ventured out for a short walk at 6:30am just outside the hotel grounds. It was a chilly morning with a cloudless sky and a beautiful sunrise. We found **Northern Wheatear**, **Short-toed Larks**, **Thekla Larks** and a lively male **Seebohm's Wheatear**. We joined the rest of the group for a 7am breakfast before setting off for Tagdilt Track at 8am.

Full of anticipation we arrived at the roadside pool along the 'new' Tagdilt Track where we encountered a number of new species for the trip and a few lifers for most of the group. The enigmatic **Hoopoe Lark** showed up first, it sang the 'national anthem' to us and then performed its death defying display flight! **Red-rumped Wheatear**, **Desert Wheatear** and **Northern Wheatear** were quickly followed by **Lesser Short-toed Lark** and **Short-toed Lark** onto the list. We then spent an hour looking for **Sandgrouse**, we found a single of the **Crowned** variety which flew over us, sneaking up from behind. **Temminck's Horned Lark** and **Thekla Lark** performed well as did a small flock of **Trumpeter Finches**.

We then drove a further 8km to a small plantation which sat in a small valley holding many fruit trees and a small stream. Both the **Great Grey Shrike (Elegans)** and the **Woodchat Shrikes** were found there and also **Common Redstart**, **Eurasian Chiffchaff**, **White Wagtail**, **Common Bulbul**, **Trumpeter Finch** and a female **Moussier's Redstart**.

Back on the Tagdilt trail we searched for **Mourning (Maghreb) Wheatear**, but only found more **Red-rumped, Northern** and **Desert Wheatears**. Driving back toward Boumalne we found several **Cream Coloured Coursers, Hoopoe Lark**, lots of **Short-toed Larks** and a **Long-legged Buzzard**. At the rubbish tip we found a **Common Whitethroat** and a **Spectacled Warbler** side by side, a great sighting and ideal for pointing out the differences in these two look-a-like species. Near the main road at the hospital we found a **White-crowned Wheatear** (without its White Crown!).

After a quick stop back at the hotel we drove through the picturesque Dades Gorge noting **Crag Martin, Sparrowhawk, House Bunting** and **Black Wheatear**. At the head of the Gorge we looked for, and found **Tristram's Warbler**, an excellent bird and another lifer for everyone.

The last hour was spent looking at the pool on the Tagdilt Track, we found plenty of birds that we had seen before but we did get some added excitement when a **Lanner Falcon** began to mob a **Long-legged Buzzard**, both birds showed exceptional flying skills as they tried to out manoeuvre one another. We also found several **Black Kites**, a smaller unidentified Falcon (possibly Barbary) and a **Short-toed Eagle**. This rounded off a superb day in the most idyllic of surroundings.

Day 4 Saturday March 19th - Boumalne Dades to Erfoud on to Auberge Derkaoua

We decided to take an early morning walk before breakfast along the Tagdilt Track, near the rubbish tip, to look for more larks and wheatears. It was a fantastic morning, no wind, no clouds and a beautiful colourful sunrise. We spent an hour scanning in and around the tip from 6:30am – 7:30am, during which time we found nothing new, except a small party of **Skylarks** (3) which was an unusual find considering the habitat. During our search we found the usual crowd of **Red-rumped, Desert, White-crowned** and **Northern Wheatears, Short-toed, Lesser Short-toed, Temminck's, Crested** and **Thekla Larks**. We also located a perched **Long-legged Buzzard** and not much else.

A quick visit to the road side pool on the 'new' Tagdilt track produced a **Tawny Pipit** but during the drive there and back we saw **Cream Coloured Courser** and a **Seebohm's Wheatear**.

Breakfast was well appreciated back at the hotel and soon after we were back on the road heading towards Erfoud. We made several stops along the way but the most productive was our lunchtime stop at a wadi on road to Er-rachidia. We parked on the roadside and ate our picnic lunch before walking off into the wadi which stretched some 4-5km inland from the road. The terrain was flat, sandy underfoot with low thorny scrub and clumps of grass. We walked in the heat of the day but fortunately there was a cooling breeze. Several good birding sightings were made which included **Great Grey Shrike (*elegans*), Woodchat Shrike, Tawny Pipit, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Desert Wheatear, Spectacled Warbler, Sardinian Warbler** and **Crested Lark**. We walked about 2km and turned around to head back to the bus, we were quite despondent that we hadn't seen any of our target species. It was when we were $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way back we latched onto a small flock of **Thick-billed Larks**, a result at last. Then when we were nearly back at the bus we found 3 **Scrub Warblers** flitting about on the ground. What a great find and our most wanted bird, we watched them for 15 minutes before getting back on the bus, tired but happy.

The next stop was almost a complete disaster, the bus got stuck in loose sand and it took quite a while to get it out, but we did. Just outside of Erfoud we stopped to look at a flock of **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters**, what a lovely sight, the most beautiful of birds seen in perfect afternoon light.

We arrived at Auberge Derkaoua at 6pm which lies just south of Erfoud, our arrival gave us enough time to wash and shower before walking to view the wadi adjacent to the auberge. We looked for **Egyptian Nightjar** as it got dark, without luck. But the sunset was magical, the colours exquisite and the full moon looked gigantic in the African sky.

Day 5 Sunday March 20th – Merzouga - Erg Chebbi – Cafe Yasmina – Rissani

This was our first full day in the ‘desert section’ of our tour, it began at 6:30am with a walk around the grounds of the Auberge. This large area of trees, shrubs, open grassland and gardens is a magnet for migrants when the conditions are good. Today was not such a day but we did spend 90 minutes observing some good local birds as well as a couple of migrant species. We began by finding a very confident **White-crowned Wheatear** and a small flock of **Common Bubuls** were seen feeding in the eucalyptus trees. We located several **Chiffchaff** before chasing round after a small ‘sylvia’ warbler that was most probably a **Spectacled Warbler** but it failed to show enough of itself for a confident ID. Good numbers of **Trumpeters Finches** were feeding on the flowering thorny scrub and many **Short-toed Larks** were joined by **Tawny Pipits** and **Crested Larks** in the open areas. Our best birds were found in the tall tamarisk trees at the back of the swimming pool, we had good views of both **Subalpine** and **Western Olivaceous Warblers** as they fed in the canopy.

Our lovely breakfast was taken with copious amounts of strong Moroccan coffee before we set off for the day’s birding. We headed southward towards Merzouga but didn’t get too far before we stopped the bus to watch a **Bar-tailed Lark** that was found not too far off the track, this was our first sighting of this species and a very good find. We then drove to Merzouga and crossed the arid black-shale hills to view the seasonal pool that is usually found there, but alas, the rumours were true and the pool had dried up. So we back-tracked a little and set off for Cafe Yasmina which is found alongside of the very impressive Erg Chebbi sand dune system. En-route we watch a small flock of **Brown-necked Ravens**, two of which alighted not too far away, we also saw a couple of distant **Black Kites**. On the track to Yasmina we searched a wadi for **Desert Warbler** which, when found, was extremely obliging and allowed us to approach within 5 meters. At cafe Yasmina we spent some time searching for **Desert Sparrow** and not long after locating a pair, a young guy approached us and produced a **Desert Sparrow** from a small sack he was holding. He was the ringer-in-residence and thought we might like to see the sparrow in the hand. It was superb and a great opportunity to see the sparrow so close, we rewarded Ivan, the ringer, by buying him lunch!

We then drove to Rissani to look for the **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** and with the help of Briham (a local lad and bird guide) we attempted to locate the bird. We failed but we did see a perched **Barbary Falcon**. Just before we set off back to our auberge we stopped at a river crossing where we found **Moroccan Wagtail, Little Ringed Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Little Grebe, Grey Heron** and **White Stork**. Our very last stop was at dusk at a site just south of Rissani where we waited until dark to look for **Egyptian Nightjars**, but we dipped on that species and set off back to the auberge for a late dinner.

Day 6 Monday March 21st – Auberge Derkaoua – Rissani

Our early morning, pre-breakfast, sortie found us at the wadi which lies adjacent to the auberge, there is never much water in the wadi and this year there was even less than normal. We search the scrub and a palm grove for **Fulvous Babbler** but we couldn’t find any, our list was small as there were very few migrant warblers to see.

We inadvertently disturbed 3 **Black-crowned Night Herons**, we also found a few **Subalpine Warblers**, **chiffchaffs** and the **White Crowned Wheatears** were plentiful.

For the rest of the day we spent our time in and around Rissani, we walked along the bed of the river Ziz where we enjoyed good views of **Bonelli's Warbler**, lots of **Chiffchaffs** and good numbers of **Subalpine Warblers**. We also found our first **Willow Warblers**, 2 **Hoopoes** (one in song) and several **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters**.

In the alfalfa fields there were a lot more **Willow Warblers** and **Chiffchaffs** and we had in-the-scope views of **Laughing Dove**. A pair of **Long-billed Crested Larks** was a bonus and a most- wanted bird for some of the group.

After lunch we walked along another stretch of the river Ziz where there was much more water to be found. During this time we located **Grey heron (9)**, **Avocet (1)**, **Ruddy Shelduck (7)**, **Little Grebe (2)**, **Moroccan Wagtail (2)**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Desert Lark** and more warblers in the shape of **Bonelli's** and **Chiffchaff**. A very brief encounter was had with a **Common Kingfisher** and a nice **Marsh Harrier** flew up from a clump of reeds.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent looking for the elusive **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** without success but we were compensated with a perched **Lanner Falcon** and later a pair of **Barbary Falcons** was seen hunting, and later, they perched along a cliff face giving excellent views.

Our journey back to the auberge was uneventful and we arrived early so we had 3 hour break from birding as a group. I went out for a walk in the grounds and enjoyed digi-scoping **Trumpeter Finch**, **Subalpine Warbler**, **White Crowned Wheatear** and **Bonelli's Warbler**. I also found **Common Redstart**, **Barn Swallow** and **Short-toed Lark** whilst I was out.

Finally two of us wandered down to the edge of the wadi at dusk to look for nightjars, after about 30 minutes we both had a brief glimpse of an **Egyptian Nightjar** which was ample reward for our patience.

Day 7 Tuesday March 22nd – Auberge Derkaoua to Taliouine via Rissani, Alnif, Agze & Tazenakht

A brief walk in the gardens before our 7am breakfast was refreshing and included in a few sightings of overnight migrant arrivals. There were a few more **Chiffchaffs** and **Subalpine Warblers** and we found a couple of **Common Redstarts**, a pipit gave rise to some excitement but it turned out to be a **Meadow Pipit** not the hoped for **Red-throated** variety.

We hit the road at 8am on the dot, saying goodbye to the tranquil Auberge Derkaoua, we travelled the short distance to Rissani and turned onto the road to Alnif just north of the town. We noted **Laughing Dove**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and lots of **White Crowned Wheatears** along the way. We stopped to make a final attempt to locate the resident **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** but it was not to be on this trip, however we met a young lad, a local bird guide, who led us to a lovely hidden plateau which held many sandgrouse. It was a wonderful and fitting farewell to this fascinating place, the walk was quite strenuous but it was worth it to see **Spotted Sandgrouse (80+)**, **Crowned Sandgrouse (15)** and a couple of **Brown-necked Ravens**. Back at the bus we watched a **Peregrine Falcon** and logged a **Desert Lark** and **Desert Wheatear** before we piled back into the bus to continue our journey.

Most of the day was spent travelling with various brief stops for short breaks and lunch, one impromptu stop was made when a loud call of “**Babbler! Babbler!**” came from the back of bus, the shout was so loud it shocked us all out of our slumber! However, we did stop and sure enough the call was correct, we all enjoyed viewing a party of some 10 **Fulvous Babblers**, they were feeding in wadi and perching in Acacia Trees. This enigmatic species had eluded us thus far and was a must-see species for all of us so it was an extra special find by Duncan our American birding companion.

Other birds of note during the journey were **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** and **Laughing Doves** at lunchtime, **Bonelli's** and **Short-toed Eagle** in the mountains above Tazenakht. A party of **European Bee-eaters**, our first for the trip, were found near Taliouine and when we stopped to look at them we also discovered a party of lovely **Trumpeter Finches**, a **Green Sandpiper**, **Chiffchaff** (5), **Short-toed Larks** and a couple of **Crested Larks**.

At last we arrived at our auberge on the outskirts of Taliouine with plenty of time to stretch our legs before dinner. A short walk towards the river in the farmland and surrounding scrub produced a nice variety of species which included our first **Common Nightingale**, also **Laughing Dove**, **Greenfinch**, **Goldfinch**, **African Chaffinch**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Chiffchaff**, **Common Bulbul**, **Thekla Lark**, **Crested Lark** and a party of some 50 **European Bee-eaters**.

A lovely tajine dinner was gratefully consumed by a hungry group before retiring for the night in preparation for our second leg of the journey to the coast at Agadir.

Day 8 – Wednesday 23rd March - Taliouine – Agadir – Tamri - Oued Sous

An early morning walk around the camp produced a number of interesting species including great views of a **Maghreb Tawny Owl**. The owl had been calling during the night and we located it as it went to roost in the trees of the top car park near the entrance to the auberge.

Following that excitement we set off for our walk down by the river where many birds were calling from the scrub. A **Common Nightingale** sat out in full view singing as did **Serin** and **Sardinian Warbler**; other sightings including a large flock of **European Bee-eaters**, **Spanish Sparrow**, **Thekla Lark**, **White Stork**, **Moussier's Redstart**, lots of **Chiffchaffs** and **Willow Warblers**. A **House Bunting** joined us for breakfast this very confiding little fellow came right onto the tables in the restaurant.

Our journey to the south west coast at Agadir took us along the Sous Valley, the lush green open fields and Argana Forests were a complete contrast to the desert plains of the previous few days. Our mid-morning stop was at the picturesque Gorge at Alaouz. It was a very windy day but the gorge offered some shelter and it warmed up quite nicely. A colony of **Lesser Kestrels** entertained us for a while and raptors seemed to be the flavour of the day as our next few sightings included an **Osprey** fishing over the river, a high flying **Bonelli's Eagle**, a **Sparrowhawk**, **Black Kite**, **Montagu's Harrier** and we had a glimpse of a falcon which flashed over the gorge, probably a **Peregrine**.

Passerines and butterflies were numerous but the only new bird species were **Common Swift** and **Spotless Starling**. Butterflies included, Moroccan Orange Tip, Orange Tip, Cleopatra, Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady and lots of Speckled Wood.

A stop in a small town near Tarroudant gave us the opportunity to buy lunch which we ate at a road side pull-in a few kilometres nearer to Tarroudant. We had noticed a fair few raptors in the sky flying up the valley as we

travelled along but now whilst we were stationary it was obvious that there was something of a migration passage going on. The more we looked up the more birds we saw, there were hundreds of birds flying very high, drifting passed. We logged several hundred birds just in the 30 minutes we watched the passage, which included **Black Kites (200+)**, **White Stork (150+)**, **Booted Eagle (50)**, **Short-toed Eagle (10)**, **Montagu's** and **Marsh Harrier (50)**, **Bee-eaters (100+)** and a single **Griffon Vulture** was seen very much higher than the main passage birds. We also noted **Chiffchaff** and **Bonelli's Warbler** in the near olive trees.

The next two hours was spent driving passed Tarroudant and through Agadir, we then travelled north along the coast road to Tamri hoping to see the very rare **Bald Ibis**. Just before we got to Tamri we noticed two flocks of large black birds flying towards us high along the cliff edge. We stopped the vehicle and quickly jumped out to view the birds which turned out to be our target species, the **Bald ibis!** That was all we got, now further sightings made so we vowed to search again the next day. Other birds noted in the shallow lagoon just outside of Tamri were **Audouin's**, **Yellow-legged** and **Lesser-black-backed Gulls**, **Grey Heron**, **Little Ringed Plover**, an **Osprey**, **White Wagtail** and a few **Northern Gannets** out at sea.

During the drive back to Agadir we stopped to look at a large flock of **Sandwich Terns** on a beach pool. Before we checked into our hotel we decided to visit the Oued Sous estuary and despite it being high tide we noted a fair few shore birds. We started with **Little** and **Cattle Egrets**, **Marbled Duck (2)**, **Ringed Plover**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Black-winged Stilt** and **Moroccan Cormorants**. Moving further along the river towards the mouth we walked through the heath and discovered a couple of **Bluethroats**, **Sardinian Warbler** and we heard a **Dartford Warbler** but it didn't show. The heath was muddy and held pools of water so we couldn't venture too far and we had the added restriction of being adjacent to the King of Morocco's Palace. We were watched by armed guards and so couldn't look in the direction of the palace with our bins' or telescopes. A couple of birds called from the trees in the palace and we noted **Turtle Dove**, **Wood Pigeon**, **Lesser Kestrel** and **Moroccan Magpie**.

Further along the heath we scanned a few pools and listed a fair few species, small groups of **Common Snipe** and a couple of **Eurasian Spoonbills** flew over us and settled in the pools were **Greater Flamingo**, **Black-tailed** and **Bar-tailed Godwits**, **Curlew Sandpipers**, **Avocets**, **Redshank**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Eurasian Curlew** and **Common Ringed Plover**.

We watched the setting sun disappear over a fabulous, colourful, horizon as we walked back inland to a small copse of trees at the entrance to the heath. We decided to wait until dark to try to see **Red-necked Nightjar** and during the wait we saw another **Maghreb Tawny Owl**. Several **Stone Curlew** came screaming over the top of us, making their shrill-warble, quite an erie sound. Just after dark the nightjars began to call, we heard 3 or 4 of them and one landed on the track some distance away from us, it stayed for a minute and that was all we got. After waiting all that time we only managed to get our binoculars focused on the bird just at it flew off! Another very brief sighting was made as we walked back to the bus but not very satisfactory for most of the group.

We drove the very short distance to the hotel and checked in, we had time to shower before a delicious dinner was consumed washed down with a very welcomed cold beer.

Day 9 – Thursday 24th March - Souss Massa – Oued Souss

The group's number was depleted today as only 3 of us climbed into the bus for the 1 hour journey to the Sous Massa National Park. We set off in dull overcast conditions but we arrived in nice hazy sunshine and a perfect temperature for bird-watching. The reserve itself consists of riparian scrub, rocky hillside, open desert-type heath, the river itself and the beach area. However, during last winter's storms, the sea had breached the river mouth's sand-bar and flooded most of the reserve rendering it saline and diminishing its' value for bird life. It was because of this that we concentrated on looking for passerines in the scrub and not wildfowl and waders.

We quickly found several warblers in the form of **Sardinian** and **Willow Warbler**, **Chiffchaff** and a **Subalpine Warbler**. Then a female **Moussier's Redstart** was followed by a male **Common Redstart** onto the list. A couple of **Little Owls** sat out in the morning sunlight and several **House Buntings** flitted about whilst two males of that species delivered their chaffinch-like song.

We then found a most-wanted species in the shape of a female **Orphean Warbler**, also lots of **Laughing Doves** and some very well marked Linnets. At the entrance gate to the park we found the target bird of the day, a **Black Crowned Tchagra**, what a beauty. It sang first of all, then it flew towards us and began searching for food near ground level in shrub just 5 meters from us, it gave exquisite views, it was even too close to digi-scope.

With the 'biggy' in the bag we drove back through the village of Massa and turned off onto a track that led us to open farmland and a bridge over the river. Our next target bird was the **Brown-throated Martin** and this was place I had seen the bird on previous trips. We searched the sky over all this flat fertile, valley and found plenty of **Barn Swallows**, **Crag Martin**, **House Martin**, **Sand Martin** a few **Pallid Swifts** but not the bird we wanted. We spent the next 3 hours visiting various sites in the valley and eventually we ended up at the place we had first started the search just passed the bridge over the river. In the meantime we had found many **Yellow Wagtails**, **Common Bubuls**, a **Common Kingfisher**, a **Common Sandpiper**, **Crested Larks** and we heard a couple of **Quail** calling from the crop fields.

Finally, just before we were about to leave, a single martin flew towards us and, as if it was giving us a reward for our efforts, it flew directly over us, around us and back again giving us a great show. **Brown-throated Martin** in the bag at last, we set off back to Agadir arriving at 2pm.

The group then all took the afternoon off for rest and rehabilitation whilst I went for a walk along the nearby Qued Sous. The tide was high again so there wasn't any exposed mudflat, but I walked right up the river mouth to look at the gull and terns roost on a sand bank. It was disappointing, I found only **Sandwich Terns (85)**, **Oystercatcher (9)**, **Sandering (3)** and a couple of **Yellow-legged Gulls**.

In a series of small pools on the beach area and on the heath I found a good selection of waders which included, **Kentish**, **Little**, **Little Ringed** and **Grey Plovers**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Common Snipe**, **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Ruff**, **Dunlin**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Pied Avocet**, **Black-winged Stilt** and a party of **Red Knot** flew around me. Some of the bigger birds seen were **Greater Flamingo**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Little Egret**, **Grey Heron** and good numbers of **Cattle Egret**.

As I walked back upriver I ventured onto the heath to look for warblers, I also tried to relocate the **Bluethroats** that we had seen yesterday, without success. I did find a healthy population of **Sardinian Warblers**, there were plenty of **Moroccan Magpies**, I also flushed a couple of **Barbary Partridges** but not much else was seen. I returned to the hotel at 6pm and joined the others for dinner at 7:30pm.

Day 10 – Friday 25th March -Agadir – Oukaimendan

Our last full day was spent travelling back to Marrakech with stops to search for target birds still on our wanted list. Our main aim was to return to Oukaimedan in the High Atlas Mountains to try to locate **Crimson-winged Finch**. We set off at 8am and headed north from Agadir on the newly opened motorway, by 11am we had reached the outskirts of Marrakech where stopped a couple times to look for **Calandra Lark** but only found **Crested** and **Short-toed Larks**, we also logged **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Great Grey Shrike**, **Moroccan Magpie** and several common species.

It was 2pm by the time we reached the higher reaches of the Atlas mountains, we stopped at a pine copse which had been covered in snow when visited on our first day. Now all the snow had gone and several species of birds were located, we found at least 3 **Firecrests** and a couple of **Hawfinches** along with **African Chaffinch**, **Coal Tit**, **African Blue Tit**, **Common Raven** and **Moussier's Redstart**. Our next stop was along the babbling brook found near to the entrance of the Toubkal Nature Reserve. We quickly found a **White-throated Dipper**, **Black Redstart**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and a **Common Kestrel**.

Oukaimedan finally came up trumps for us and delivered all of the target birds over the next hour or so. Near the lake we watched a flock of about 100 chough, both the **Alpine** and the **Red-billed Chough** were seen. At the upper car park we got to grips with a flock of some 30 **Crimson-winged Finches**, they were super and even came down to feed around our feet, what delightful little bird and most confiding. We then went on to see **Atlas Horned Lark**, **Seeborn's Wheatear**, **Rock Sparrow**, **Rock Bunting**, **Mistle Thrush** and a couple more **Moussier's Redstarts**. We had a great time and a well satisfied group left the area and set off back down the mountain. We stopped again to look for better views of **Hawfinch**, which some of the group obtained, we also saw **Coal Tit**, more **Firecrests**, another male **Moussier's Redstart** and lots of **African Chaffinches**.

The drive down to Ourika was uneventful but at the hotel a small flock of **Little Swifts** were seen circling around and a couple of **Short-toed Eagles** drifted over. As it got dark we heard **Common Nightingale**, **Cetti's Warbler** and the very noisy **Common Bulbuls**.

Our last dinner together was superb, my favourite tajine, beef with almonds, prunes and vegetables, it was delicious. After dinner a **Tawny Owl** called outside the hotel and could be seen in the pine tree near the entrance driveway, a fitting end to an excellent day.

Day 11 – Saturday 26th March - Oukaimedan– Marrakech

Our last morning was a leisurely affair, most of us took a late breakfast and then made various strolls around the hotel grounds and across the road into the river valley. Despite such a relaxed morning we located many species. A pair of **Hawfinches** flew around, they were seen two or three times, also a pair of **Levaillant's Woodpeckers** were calling and drumming and one landed on the side of the large pine tree in the hotel garden! Other birds of note seen around the hotel were: **Melodious Warbler**, **Common Bubul**, **Blackcap**, **Bonelli's Warbler**, **Little Swift (20+)**, **Cirl Bunting**, **House Bunting**, **Cattle Egret**. **Cetti's Warbler** and **Common Nightingale** were both singing loudly and many common garden species were seen.

We left the hotel just after noon to arrive at the airport for our early evening flights home.

SPECIES LISTED

TOUR 1 - 16TH MARCH – 26TH MARCH 2011

TOUR 2 - 26TH MARCH – APRIL 5TH 2011

SPECIES RECORDED			1	2
1	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓
2	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓
3	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓
4	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓
5	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax c. moroccanus</i>	✓	✓
6	Great White Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>		✓
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓
8	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓
10	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		✓
11	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓	✓
12	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia negra</i>		✓
13	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓
14	Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>	✓	✓
15	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓
16	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	✓	✓
17	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	✓	✓
18	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
19	Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓
20	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	
21	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	
22	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	✓	✓
23	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	
24	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		✓
25	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓
26	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓

27	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓
28	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	✓	✓
29	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓
30	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>	✓	✓
31	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	✓	✓
32	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓
33	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>	✓	✓
34	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓	✓
35	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	✓	✓
36	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓
37	Lanner	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	✓	✓
38	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓
39	Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	✓	
40	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓	✓
41	Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	✓	✓
42	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	✓	✓
43	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
44	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
45	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓
46	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓
47	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓
48	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	✓	✓
49	Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	✓	✓
50	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓
51	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓	✓
52	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	✓	✓
53	Grey or Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓	✓
54	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓	✓
55	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		✓
56	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>		✓
57	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	✓	✓
58	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓	✓
59	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	✓	
60	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	✓	
61	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓
62	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	
63	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓	✓
64	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓
65	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	
66	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓
67	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	✓
68	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>		✓
69	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓
70	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓
71	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓
72	Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	✓	✓
73	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓
74	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓	✓
75	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sternus nilotica</i>	✓	✓
76	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		✓

77	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓
78	Crowned Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>	✓	✓
79	Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>	✓	✓
80	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		✓
81	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓
82	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	✓	✓
83	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓
84	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus excelsa</i>	✓	✓
85	Laughing Dove	<i>S. senegalensis phoenicophila</i>	✓	✓
86	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	H	✓
87	'Pharaoh' Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>		✓
88	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	✓	✓
89	Tawny (Magreb) Owl	<i>Aleuco mauritanica</i>	✓	
90	Red-necked nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	✓	
91	Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>	✓	✓
92	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>		✓
93	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓
94	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓
95	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinus</i>	✓	✓
96	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓	✓
97	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓
98	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus chrysocercus</i>	✓	✓
99	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓
100	Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	✓	✓
101	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major mauritanus</i>	✓	✓
102	Bar-tailed desert Lark	<i>Ammonanes cincturus arenicola</i>	✓	✓
103	Desert lark	<i>Ammonanes deserti payne</i>	✓	✓
104	Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	✓	✓
105	Thick-billed Lark	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>	✓	✓
106	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	✓	✓
107	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	✓	
108	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓
109	Long-billed Crested Lark	<i>Galarida c. riggenbachi</i>	✓	✓
110	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae aguirrei</i>	✓	✓
111	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	
112	Horned (Shore) Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris atlas</i>	✓	✓
113	Temminck's Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	✓	✓
114	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓
115	Crag Martin	<i>Pryonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓	✓
116	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓
117	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	✓	✓
118	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓
119	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	
120	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	✓
121	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus prtaensis</i>	✓	✓
122	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	✓	✓
123	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓
124	(Spanish)Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	✓	✓
125	Pied/White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓
126	Moroccan Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	✓	✓

127	Common Bubul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	✓	✓
128	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	✓	✓
129	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
130	Eurasian Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
131	Rufous Bush Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>		✓
132	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	✓	✓
133	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	✓	✓
134	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓
135	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓	✓
136	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	✓	✓
137	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓
138	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓
139	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓
140	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	✓	✓
141	Seebohm's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>	✓	
142	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	✓	✓
143	Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oesta</i>	✓	✓
144	Magreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe halophila</i>		✓
145	White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	✓	✓
146	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	✓	✓
147	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Montacilla solitarius</i>	✓	✓
148	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>		✓
149	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
150	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus deichleri</i>	✓	✓
151	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓
152	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓
153	Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>	✓	✓
154	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	✓	✓
155	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	H	H
156	Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>	✓	✓
157	Sahara Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais opaca reiseri</i>		✓
158	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	✓	✓
159	Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	✓	✓
160	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	✓	✓
161	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓
162	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	✓	✓
163	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	H	
164	African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>	✓	✓
165	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓	✓
166	Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	✓	✓
167	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla mauritanicus</i>	✓	✓
168	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	✓	✓
169	Eurasian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓
170	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓
171	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	✓	✓
172	Fulvus Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>	✓	✓
173	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓
174	African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	✓	✓
175	Great Tit	<i>Parus major excelsus</i>	✓	✓
176	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>	✓	✓

177	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius elegans</i>	✓	✓
178	Great Grey shrike	<i>Lanius algeriensis</i>	✓	✓
179	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓
180	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>	✓	✓
181	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	✓	✓
182	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	✓	✓
183	Common or Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
184	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓
185	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓
186	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
187	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓	✓
188	Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>	✓	✓
189	Rock (Petronia) Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	✓	✓
190	African Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>	✓	✓
191	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓
192	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris voousi</i>	✓	✓
193	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>	✓	✓
194	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	✓	✓
195	Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	✓	✓
196	Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea</i>	✓	✓
197	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	✓	✓
198	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	✓	✓
199	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓	
200	House Bunting	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>	✓	✓
201	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	✓	✓
TOTAL COUNT			182	185
This includes 3 sub-species in the tour 2 list:			+	+
Great Grey Shrike (<i>elegans</i>), Moroccan Wagtail and Sahara Olivaceous Warbler			3H	1H