

# WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

## TRIP REPORT

Morocco 22nd Mar - 1st Apr 2010

Leader Bob Buckler + 6 participants

### Summary.

Despite a very wet winter the amount of ground water was very low and the snow on the mountains was surprising lacking which was a contrast to the last couple of years at this time. This year's rains had been followed by a hot, dry spell and consequently reduced the chances of finding the usually easy, high atlas, species. We also failed to find a couple of the desert species, no bustard nor any sandgrouse. Migrants were virtually non-existent with no visible raptor passage and only sparse scatterings of migrant warblers.

The group enjoyed great views of **Tristram's Warbler**, **Desert Warbler** and after some hard leg work **Scrub Warbler**. We had several sightings of **Egyptian Nightjar** including a daytime roosting bird and several birds coming to a pool to drink just after dusk. The **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** showed well as did **Levaillant's Woodpeckers**, **Thick-billed Lark**, **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** and the newly named **Magreb Wheatear**.

However, for me, the most impressive sight was the sheer number of birds on the seasonal lake at Merzouga, seeing a flotilla of over 1,000 **Marbled Duck** was a sight never to be forgotten.

### Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March

Morocco greeted us with bright sunshine and we were welcomed to this beautiful country by a singing **House Bunting** in the arrivals lounge! We passed through customs and baggage collection very quickly and soon we were on our way to our hotel in the Ourika valley en- route to Oukaimedan in the High Atlas Mountains. We noted a few species from the bus during the short trip to the hotel, namely, **White Storks**, **Little Swift**, **Common Bulbul**, **Spotless Starling** and a few **Collared Doves**. At the hotel we heard singing **Serins**, we saw more **Bulbuls**, **African Chaffinch**, **African Blue Tit** and several **Little Swifts** were visiting their nests in the eaves of the hotel roof.

We spent little time unpacking and settling into our rooms before setting off for the peaks of the High Atlas, on the way up we stopped at a stream to watch **Dipper** and **Grey Wagtail**, we also saw **Blackcap**, **Great Tit** and **Common Chaffinch**. We then found a place to eat our picnic lunch, it was a copse of pine trees and even before we left the bus we noted a **Mousierre's Redstart** sitting on a rock nearby, unfortunately it wasn't the colourful male. Over the next hour we sat and ate lunch and then wandered around the area, we notched up several **Firecrests**, **Coal Tits** with very large black bibs looking like **Great Tits**, a couple of **Mistle Thrushes** and a lovely female **Hawfinch** which was collecting nesting material. Before we climbed back into the bus we watched a couple **Long-legged Buzzards** circling below us and a distant flock of **Chough**.

As we drove higher and higher we realised that the snow line was very high and, in fact, there wasn't much snow at all, this did not bode well for finding our target species the **Crimson Winged Finch**. Even the lake at Oukaimedan was almost bereft of water and there wasn't a single bird on the grassy plains. We notched up plenty of **Black Redstarts**, **Rock Sparrows** and **Chaffinches** but not much else. We drove to the summit above the village near the TV aerials where we could only muster a **Blue Rock Thrush** and a couple of pairs of **Red-billed Chough**. The car park at the ski-lift was completely devoid of bird-life, we searched for an hour or so but only found several **Black Redstarts** and a pair of **Mistle Thrushes**. High up we saw a **Peregrine Falcon** and another huge flock of mixed **Chough**. The sun dropped and so did the temperature so we beat a hasty retreat very disappointed for having not seen our target species.

### Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> Ourika – Boumalne Dades

Before setting off on our long journey westward to Boumalne we got up early and met in the hotel foyer at 6:30am. Most of us had been woken up by the very loud calls of the **Common Bulbuls**, they were everywhere. In the hotel grounds we soon got to grips with the local **Serins**, **African Blue Tit**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Common Chiffchaff**, **Willow Warbler** and **House Bunting**. We took a track towards the river where we had great views of a male **Hawfinch**, **Common Nightingales** sang from the thickets and occasionally showed for us as did the **Cetti's Warblers**. We got excited on hearing the yaffle of the **Levaillant's Green Woodpecker**, it got louder and nearer and then we picked up the bird on a dead tree trunk within easy scoping distance. What a thrill, this was a must-see species for most of the group. At the river we had good views of 'Moroccan' **White Wagtail** with some excellent sightings of **Bonelli's Warbler**. As we returned to the hotel we saw the **Woodpecker** again and added **Little Swift**, **Subalpine Warbler** and another **Hawfinch** to the day list.

We completed breakfast in a merry mood and we were soon on the road to Boumalne. We made many stops along the way the first being just 20km from the hotel. There we notched up the 'Moroccan' **Magpie** with its strange blue facial patch, we also added **Thekla** and **Crested Lark**, **Corn Bunting**, **Woodchat** & **Great Grey Shrike** and **Common Stonechat**. Along the approach to the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass we stopped to look at a superb **Bonelli's Eagle** and whilst out of the bus we saw **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Bee-eater**, **White Stork**, **Booted Eagle** and a distant **Short-toed Eagle**. After driving through the pass the terrain changed and so did the birds. We stopped to look at **Black Wheatear**, then we stopped for **White Crowned Wheatear**, more **Bee-eaters** and some of us saw a flock of **Trumpeter Finches**. We ate lunch in a restaurant at Taddart before driving on to Quarzazate where we stopped to view the huge reservoir found on the eastern outskirts of the town. We quickly added several species to our tally. A couple of **Ospreys** were found, one with a fish, a pair of **Ruddy Shelducks** fed on the shoreline, we also saw **Great Crested Grebe**, **Mallard**, **Common Coot** & **Moorhen**. On land we were treated to great views of our first **Desert Wheatear**, what a beauty.

Approaching Boumalne during the early evening our last new bird was **Cattle Egret**, seen in the water-logged crop fields near the town.

### Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> Tagdilt Track & Gorge du Dades

We were up and out at 6 am for our exciting visit to the stoney plains around Boumalne. We drove along the 'new' Tagdilt track, which is now a tarmac road! Our first stop was at the road-side pools which were now almost dry with just one tiny area holding water. Nevertheless a small flock of some 15 **Trumpeter Finches** came down to drink and showed very well for a brief time. Then a couple of **Greater Short-toed Larks** appeared and as we emerged from the bus we noticed a singing **Red-rumped Wheatear**, what a bizarre sound!

Moving on we turned onto the stoney plain proper and began to log numerous species, there were many **Desert Wheatears**, **Temminck's Horned Larks**, **Hoopoe Larks** and over 30 **Cream-coloured Coursers**, what a beautiful sight. The air was very misty so visibility was not too good, as a consequence long-distant sightings were not possible. We drove across to the traditional 'Wheatear wall', a derelict building in reality, and after about 20 minutes we got onto our target species the newly named **Magreb Wheatear**. A pair of them

performed well, eventually posing on the wall as they were supposed to! We also had good views of **House Bunting**, **Northern Wheatear**, **White-crowned Wheatear**, **Black-eared Wheatear** and **Thekla Lark**. There were many flocks of migrating **Greater Short-toed Larks**, in all, we saw over 200. We walked a short distance hoping to see other new species but failed to log anything new, a **Hoopoe Lark** performed its display flight, above us about 30 **Bee-eaters** went by and a **Common Kestrel** flew across our bow.

We retired for breakfast at 8:30am and returned for more birding in the area by 10am. We returned to the 'pools' but had no luck in finding anything new so we moved onto to a small cultivated area which was supplied with water by a small stream still in flow. The wind had picked up and was quite strong so we looked for the sheltered areas for birds. A perched **Long-legged Buzzard** posed for a while, several **Chiffchaffs**, **Bonelli's** and **Willow Warblers** were present, we also had brief views of **Hoopoe**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Common Bulbul** and **Common Redstart**. Some of the group picked up a couple of **Meadow Pipits**, whilst others photographed a very showy **House Bunting** and just before we left we watched a couple of **Trumpeter Finches**.

Our next place to visit on the itinerary was the Gorge to north of Boumalne Dades, we made a couple of stops to view the lush valley below the road as we made our way to the gorge proper. One stop produced a superb and very showy **Subalpine Warbler**, we also saw **Black Wheatear**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Crag Martin**, **Rock Dove**, **White Storks** (at the nest) and **Common Kestrel**. At the head of the gorge the scenery was truly stunning and the views into the gorge were breath-taking, we ate our picnic lunch overlooking the magnificent views in bright and warm sunshine and from there we notched up **Barbary Partridge**, **Grey Wagtail** and more **Crag Martins**.

After our lunch we began to search the scrub along the sloping hill-sides for **Tristram's Warbler** and within a few minutes we found a couple. The views were distance and not all of us saw them well, so we continued our search. The next pair we saw appeared just a few meters below us. They kept appearing near one particular bush and we soon found out why. They were nest building, one incident made us laugh, the female appeared with a feather in her beak and stood on a rock, a gust of wind took the feather from its beak and the pursuit to regain the feather was comical. Having bagged our target species we set off back down the gorge to our hotel, we arrived late afternoon and a few of us went for a walk onto the plain found directly outside the hotel. We found several wheatears already listed but we did find our first **Desert Larks**, satisfied by that, we retired for the day.

#### **Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> – Boumalne Dades - Erfoud**

All of us made it to the 6:30am excursion, we ventured on foot from the hotel, walking left uphill along the escarpment. The early morning was exquisite, the light was fantastic and the scenery superb, you could see the snow covered peaks of the high Atlas rising above the surrounding hillside. The colours of the hill sides were beautiful, the air was still and crystal clear, it was one of those mornings when you felt glad and privileged to be there. The warm and pleasant conditions made the birding that much more enjoyable.

It took a while before we were onto our first birds which were **Northern** and **Black-eared Wheatears**, then very soon we found **Desert Larks** near a make-shift football pitch, they were supported by a **Hoopoe**. Other birds of note were small groups of **Short-toed Larks**, **Temmick's Horned Lark**, a beautiful **Red-rumped Swallow** passing overhead and a **Short-toed Eagle**, perched on a pylon, waiting patiently for the air temperature to rise so that it could catch a thermal and continue on its' northerly migration.

After an enjoyable breakfast we set off for the desert section of the tour, making many short stops to break the journey, Erfoud was our next destination. But before we hit the main road we popped onto the Tagdilt road to have one more look at the 'pools'. We had many sightings of the regular birds but failed to discover anything new.

Every few miles we made scheduled stops to search the road-side scrub for larks, namely the **Thick-billed Lark** but we didn't locate any. Unscheduled stops were made to look at passing or perched raptors, quite early on we watched small groups of **Black Kites** catching the thermals, they were joined by several **Booted Eagles**, a fly-pass by a male **Montagu's Harrier** was, surprisingly, the first sighting of that species.

A quick stop in Goulmima to pick up lunch supplies and water was followed by a picnic stop on the road to Er-rachidia. Whilst eating lunch we watched a lovely **Bonelli's Warbler** and we disturbed a **Common Redstart**. During our walk, in warm sunshine with a trailing breeze we found a large flock of **Greater Short-toed Larks**, they were joined by a dozen or so **Tawny Pipits**. We also logged several **Great Grey Shrikes** (and later found a nest containing their eggs), also a party of **Trumpeter Finches** was found. After about 2 kilometers we stopped to search some low lying bushes and came across a small party of **Fulvous Babblers** which were very flighty as usual. Having not found our target species we set off back towards the road and our awaiting bus, it was quite early on during the return journey when we disturbed a tiny warbler and it took quite a search to relocate it, but when we did we had very good views of our first **Scrub Warbler**, a new bird for most of the group and a great find.

**White-crowned Wheatears** became very noticeable as we ventured south eastward towards the desert region, but other birds seemed to be hiding well. One shout from the front of the bus produced an unscheduled stop and resulted in great views of a several **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters**, most of the birds were perched on the ground because of the strong windy conditions. We also noted a **Blue Rock Thrush** and further down the road several brief views were had of **Laughing Dove**.

We arrived at dusk in very windy condition at our Auberge south of Erfoud and had very little time to bird the gardens, we did manage to see **Common Bulbul**, **Bonelli's Warbler**, **Common Chiffchaff** and **Willow Warbler**. Our dinner was taken al fresco in the lovely courtyard in a nice balmy temperature.

### **Friday 26<sup>th</sup> Auberge Derkaoua – Merzouga – Erg Chebbi**

Our first early morning excursion in our new desert home produced a full turn-out of the group and a lot of birds. Many of the previous evening's birds were still around which included 2 pairs of **White-crowned Wheatears**, one pair were nesting near the entrance way and had 4 chicks in the nest ready to fledge! A party of **Blue-checked Bee-eaters** dropped into the gardens for a few minutes, allowing just enough time to photograph them before they continued north. The tree and scrub held many **Subalpine**, **Willow** and **Bonelli's Warblers**, we also noted several **Common Redstarts** and **Woodchat Shrikes** but not much else. After a lovely breakfast of pancakes, bread and pastries with plenty of tea, coffee and freshly squeezed orange juice we set off for the lake at Merzouga.

As we mounted the last rise above the lake we could see a vast number of birds on and around the water, it looked good. The numbers of wildfowl was staggering, we counted the following just in the northern section of the lake: 642 **Marbled Duck**, 2,140 **Common Coot**, 241 **Ruddy Shelduck**, 1550 **Greater Flamingos**, 82 **Little Egrets**, 65 **Common Pochard**, 43 **Shoveler**, 8 **Ferruginous Ducks**, 192 **Little Grebes**, 54 **Greater Cormorants**, 19 **Grey Heron** and 14 **Pintail**. Other birds seen were **Great Crested Grebes**, **Squacco Heron**, **Purple Heron**, several **Marsh Harriers**, **Kentish Plover**, **Greenshank**, **Little-ringed Plover** and a distant raptor was a good candidate for a **Lanner Falcon**. Several raptors flew over during our visit, these were mainly **Booted Eagles** but we did note a couple of **Montagu's Harriers**.

Dragging ourselves away from the lake we set off for the group of small auberges found alongside the Erg Chebbi sand dunes, but before reaching them we stopped at a wadi to search for more desert species our target being the **Desert Warbler**. Previous years had proved successful and this year was no exception, it took a while but we manage to locate two birds, a pair holding territories and giving wonderful displays. We also found **Hoopoe Lark**, **Great Grey Shrike** and **Desert Wheatear**. At Cafe Caravanne we located a small party of **Brown-necked Ravens**, we even managed to photograph these shy birds. The **Desert Sparrow** was another

story, their usual nesting place in a disused goat shed was gone, the shed had been renovated and all the nesting holes had been filled in. A pair of **White Crowned Wheatear** remained but the sparrows had gone.

We took lunch at cafe Yasmina, (a Berber omelette is recommended), sitting on a terrace overlooking the area where a seasonal pool usually forms, the pool had dried up. However several warblers fed in the tamarisk, **Bonelli's, Subalpine** and **Willow** all joined the plentiful **Chiffchaff**. After eating our lunch we began to search in earnest and eventually located a pair of **Desert Sparrows** in the distant trees. The next hour was spent trying to relocate them for a better look but we failed to find them again, the wind had picked up, the heat was causing a lot of haze making it difficult to see anything further than 50 meters away.

Arriving back at our auberge around 5 pm some of us regrouped about 6:45pm for an evening stroll to the nearby wadi to look for nightjars. We arrived in almost darkness and met a couple of birdwatchers coming back from the wadi who told us that they had seen the **Egyptian Nightjars** in fairly good light over the nearest pool. When we arrived there we got the briefest of views but it was really too late and too dark, so we made plans to return the following evening.

### Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> – Desert drive – Rissani – nightjars

An early rise found us in the car park loading up into 4 wheeled drive vehicles at 6am ready for our search for **Houbara Bustard** in the surrounding desert. We headed off south eastward towards the Algerian border and made our first stop just as the sun rose over the distant hills. It was a magical morning, the still, silent air, the colours of the desert being brought alive by the increasing light created a beautiful ambience never to be forgotten. The birds began to appear and the sounds of their morning chorus reached our ears, the song of the **Hoopoe Lark** carries far and wide and its flight display is remarkable. Groups of **Greater Short-toed Larks** passed by, we noted several other species as we made many stops during our search, these included **Cream Coloured Courser, Bar-tailed Lark, Trumpeter Finch, Desert** and **black-eared Wheatears**. We stopped to eat our pre-packed breakfast and whilst scanning the surrounding area we found a couple of raptors perched on the ground in the distance and after careful approach work we identified them as a **Lanner Falcon** and a **Marsh Harrier**.

For the next couple of hours we continued our search and as the sun rose higher the temperature rose with it, we realised that our chances of finding the bustard was rapidly diminishing. We stopped to ask a local camel herdsman if he had seen any, the answer was negative but he did take us to a place we could see an **Egyptian Nightjar** roosting on the ground. This was a wonderful sight, the colours and camouflage of the bird were truly amazing. After that excitement we drove into some nearby hills and made several sightings of larger larks which had a distinctive white wing bar and then we found one alongside the lead vehicle which refused to fly off. It was a **Thick-billed Lark**, we got out and still the bird just ran a few meters from us, then another one flew up as one of the group almost trod on it! It was female of the same species and we had inadvertently discovered its nest which held three chicks, we beat a hasty retreat and the parent bird soon returned to the nest to cover the chicks from the searing sunlight. Over the next hour we discovered several more of these strange larks, we also added **Chiffchaff, Turtle Dove, White-crowned Wheatear, Red-rumped Swallow** and **Brown-necked Raven** to our day list but we failed to find the elusive bustard.

At noon we returned to the auberge to take lunch and spend some R & R time before setting off at 3pm to drive the 30km to the Alnif road on the outskirts of Rissani to look for the **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** which nests in a cliff face some 1.5km from the road. The walk to the owl was very uncomfortable as we headed into a strong head wind whilst being blasted by flying sand. We stopped to look at more **Brown-necked Ravens, White-crowned Wheatears** and we also had brief views of a couple of **Subalpine Warblers** which we found in the tamarisk scrub. At the owl nesting site we were delighted to find both the adult owls sitting out in the open in full view, this cheered the group and made the long walk worthwhile. Our return journey was uneventful but we arrived in good time for a walk around the wadi next to the auberge and we made sure that our timing to see the nightjars was right this evening!

Just before dusk we noted **Common Redstart**, **Willow Warbler** and the usual **White-crowned Wheatear** then as it was getting dark we settled by a roadside pool to wait for the nightjars. It was almost dark when the first bats appeared and the chorus of frogs began but we waited and sure enough the first **Egyptian Nightjar** flew in and skimmed the water for a drink. What a great sight, a first for all of us, over the next 15 minutes several of these silent ghost-like creatures visited the pool, to the delight of the group. We set off for the short walk back to the auberge with plenty to talk about at the dinner table.

### Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> Efroud- Taliouine via Alnif & Taznakct

An early morning walk along the wadi next to the auberge was made by just 3 of the group, it was quite dull and there was a chill in the air but we enjoyed an hour or so watching some good birds. A party of 4 **Fulvous Babblers** were unusually very showy, we also saw a couple of **European Bee-eaters**, **Hoopoe**, **Common Redstart**, **Subalpine** and **Willow Warblers**, **Chifchaff** and a flock of **Greater Short-toed Larks** came to the pool to drink.

We ate our breakfast in the beautiful courtyard of the auberge and then set off for the long trip to Taliouine. We made good time and by 1pm we were at Agnz buying our lunch, birds of note seen along the way included **Laughing Dove**, **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** and a party of **Fulvous Babblers**. We ate our lunch just outside Agnz on the road to Zagora where we noted our only **Water Pipit**, we also saw a single **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**, **Woodchat Shrike** and a couple of **Thekla Larks**.

Moving further westward the obvious birds along the route were Shrikes and Wheatears with high counts of **Woodchats** and **White-crowned**. As we approached the Sous Valley the landscape changed, Argan trees began to appear and grass covered the ground. We stopped to visit a small copse where we found a few **Bonelli's** and **Willow Warblers** we had brief views of an **Olivaceous Warbler** and also noted our one and only **Tree Pipit** but no raptors were in the sky.

We arrived at Taliouine at 5pm and after settling into our rooms at the Auberge/Camping ground we went for a short walk down to the river through some scrubland. We amassed a fairly good list of common birds and a few migrants but nothing new. We had reasonable views of a pair of **Moroccan Wagtails** on the pebble banks along the river and also had better sightings of **Laughing Dove**. Several other species were noted which included **Woodchat Shrike**, **Thekla Lark**, **Serin**, **Corn** and **House Buntings**.

### Monday 29<sup>th</sup> Taliouine - Agadir

Another early morning walk to the wasteland behind the Auberge didn't produce anything new except for a lone **Black Kite** that drifted up the valley. We ate a really nice breakfast and then set off for the second leg of our journey to the coast. We stopped a couple of times briefly to watch roadside birds but spent a couple of hours in the gorge at Aoulouz. After taking a wrong turn we ended up in a wide valley and noted a pair of **Short-toed Eagles** which were displaying, calling and generally frolicking about, they kept us amused for a while.

The walk into the gorge was quite exciting, we walked below a colony of **Lesser Kestrels** counting 8 in the sky at the same time. We also heard **Common Nightingale**, **Cetti's Warbler** and our first **Black-crowned Tchagra**. Whilst looking for the Tchagra we found a couple of **Black-crowned Night Herons** that were roosting in the woods. Next we searched the cliff face of the gorge for raptors and soon a perched **Barbary Falcon** was found, unfortunately the bird flew off and out of sight before many of the group got a good look at it. Then we found a pair of **Peregrine Falcons** that appeared to have a nesting site on the cliff and also a **Long-legged Buzzard** with the same. Other birds noted were **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Common Raven**, **Rock Dove** and a **Little Egret** in the river.

We ate lunch along the banks of the river Sous just outside of Taroudant where we looked for **Black Winged Kite** without success. We got into Agadir about 3pm and quickly found our hotel on the outskirts in Inezgane. We checked in, had a short relaxation period, a quick cuppa and then set off to Oued Sous nature reserve just a few minutes away. The road way entrance to the reserve was under repair and it had obviously been damaged during winter flooding, as a consequence we could not drive into the park so we walked. The river was its usual smelly self but also full of birds, **Greater Flamingos** were joined by **Eurasian Spoonbills, Cattle & Little Egrets, Grey Herons** and **White Storks**. Several waders were also present, **Whimbrel, Ruff, Redshank, Avocet, Dunlin, Sanderling, Ringed, Kentish** and **Grey Plovers**. A gull roost produced two goodies, **Slender-billed** and **Audouin's Gulls**, along with **Sandwich Terns, Lesser Black-backed, Black-headed** and **Yellow-legged Gulls**.

Moving further into the reserve and nearer to the river mouth we added **Greenshank, Little-ringed Plover, Little Stint** and **Knot** to our list of waders. Some of us decided to wait for sun down and try to locate **Red-necked Nightjars** on the adjacent heath, we had already seen and heard **Dartford Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Mousierre's Redstart** (both male and female this time) and **Zitting Cisticola**. The sunset was magical, the colours in the sky were bright orange and yellow, fading into a crimson red as the sun sank below the horizon. We walked back across the heath towards the entrance and it wasn't until we almost gave up when the first nightjar began to call. We looked back and waited, the call came from quite close to us and we had the advantage of looking back into the dying light of the day. The nightjar flew out from the woods and crossed the track behind us onto the heath. A lovely site but better was to come. A full moon lit the track ahead and soon we heard very strange calls coming from up ahead, then full blown calls came from 3 **Stone Curlews**, it looked as though two males were vying for the attention of one female, they looked very comical as they danced around, holding their heads high and posturing up to one another. The last sign of bird life was the drumming of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** in complete darkness, how strange is that?

### Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> – Sous Massa

We ate an early breakfast and set out southward for a full day at the Sous Massa Nature Reserve. The journey took about an hour and we arrived in pleasant sunshine with a cool breeze. Our first walk was from the gatehouse along a track that overlooked the river and surrounding fields. Not many birds were on the river but we did get reasonable views of a single **Brown-throated Martin**, better views of another **Mousierre's Redstart** and a beautiful **Black-eared Wheatear** posed well for us. A little further along we heard the melodic call of the **Tchagra** and soon the bird came out in full view for all of the group to admire, a fine show, a small party of **Common Bulbuls** tried to get in on the act but were over shadowed by this Moroccan gem.

Our walk continued to the river mouth, we listed a party of **Eurasian Spoonbills**, a wild boar and a few **Chiffchaffs, Willow** and **Sardinian Warblers** but not much else. Very disappointing for bird life in the area, we walked to the beach and into a small village where we were collected by our driver and the bus. We then drove into Massa to buy some lunch before heading out into fields below the village.

The next couple of hours were spent eating lunch and searching the flooded fields and tracks just south of the village where we logged several **Yellow Wagtails** and a couple of **Purple Herons** but not much else. Another few stops in the general area helped us add **Glossy Ibis**, (our only sighting of this species), a couple more **Brown-throated Martins**, a **Moustached Warbler** (singing) was an excellent find, **Bee-eaters, Egrets, Herons, Swifts** and **Swallows**. We completed the day with a drive back to Agadir having seen very little for the amount of walking that we did, but that's birding for you.

### Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> Oued Sous, Tamri and Essasouira

An early morning start found us on the edge of the Oued Sous waiting for the light to improve before we started birding. A walk to the heath overlooking the estuary first produced a **Little Owl** and then the usual array of waders, egrets, terns and gulls. We spent the next hour or so searching the huge expanse of mudflats

for new species to add to our list. A couple of **Red Knot** were new birds for some of the group, as was **Little Stint**, but **Common Tern**, **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Ruddy Turnstone** were all new for the group's list. We got back for our breakfast at 8 am. after which we set off along the coast heading north for Tamri passing through the centre of Agadir. We made a brief stop to watch the sea for passing migrants but only logged a few **Northern Gannets**, **Sandwich Terns** and the usual gulls. A similar experience was had when we stopped to scan a gull roost at the end of a long sandy beach. At Tamri we stopped just before the town to look at the lagoon at the river mouth, the winter storms had caused a lot of damage and the sea had breached the sandy banks to flood the lagoon with salt water, consequently there were not many waders or wildfowl on the lagoon.

We scanned the gulls and terns, the best being **Audouin's Gull** then we had brief views of 3 flyover **Bald Ibis**, our target bird but the sighting was all too brief. We walked through the sandy dunes and scanned the reed beds for migrants, the only species of note was a singing **Sedge Warbler**, a few **Pallid Swifts** flew overhead but as it was very quiet we decided to drive into Tamri to pick up lunch. We ate our food on the northern hill side overlooking the lagoon, we flushed a single **Bald Ibis** by mistake and found 4 more as they came down to bathe. Over the next couple of hours we had sighting of up to 6 birds the best being when 4 of them landed on the hillside just below us. We also had our best views of a **Spectacled Warbler**, a species we had found difficult to observe this year, probably due to the windy conditions most days.

Our next destination was the Oued Ksob just south of Essaouira which was to be our last night's stop over before leaving for home the next day. First we checked into our hotel on the edge of town before walking down to the beach to look at the gull roost usually found at the mouth of the river. The wind had picked up and was extremely strong as we struggled along the beach to the mouth of the river to where the gulls were. It was an impressive number of birds, over 1,000, they consisted of **Yellow-legged**, **Lesser Black-backed** and **Audouin's Gulls**. Along the river we found a little shelter from the wind, there we found **Sanderling**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Moroccan Wagtail**, **Cattle** and **Little Egret** plus a brief sighting of a **Brown-throated Martin**. The wind eventually drove us away and we headed back to the hotel with the intention of returning in the morning.

#### **Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> April. Essaouira - Marrakech**

The wind was still blowing as we emerged from our hotel but not nearly as bad as the previous day, so we set off in the reverse direction keeping the rising sun behind us. At the new bridge over the river we got reasonable views of **Brown Throated Martin** as one flew down river and over our heads. We also had distant views of a **Kentish**, **Little Ringed** and **Ringed Plover**, a single **Redshank** was noted on a shingle bank and as we were viewing it we noted a resting **Collared Pratincole**. Walking out on the sand flats we approached the river mouth and made an excellent find, a dark morph **Western Reef Heron!** The bird was loosely associating with a **Little Egret** and was seen to chase **Moroccan Cormorants** as they fished in the tidal shallow waters of the river. Each time a cormorant came up with a fish the heron tried to snatch it away, a behaviour I had never seen before. After the excitement of the find everything else paled somewhat, we walked back to the hotel along the beach with not much to report, we kept scanning the offshore islands in the hope of seeing an early **Eleanora's Falcon** but the search was futile.

Our journey back to Marrakech was littered with stops the best of which was about half-way. We walked across a fallow field to view a distant flock of birds which turned out to be **Spanish Sparrows**, there must have been over 500 of them. During the walk we also had brief views of **Calandra Lark**, **Short-toed Lark** and **Crested Lark**. A couple of covered haystacks held nesting **Common Kestrel** and a **Little Owl** sat in full view nonchalantly peering down at us.

We completed the journey to the airport by 2:45pm and finished the tour in high spirits having completed a very successful and enjoyable trip. My thanks go out to the group who put in a lot of leg work to find some of the most elusive species and kept vigilant throughout.

SPECIES	LATIN NAMES	NUMBER OF BIRDING DAYS RECORDED	HIGHEST COUNT C=common H=heard
1. Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	4	341
2. Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1	10+
3. Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	1	14
4. Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	1	40+
5. Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	2	1000+
6. Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	1	50+
7. Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	1	6
8. Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	2	2
9. Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	2	Heard only
10. Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	1	20+
11. Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	3	191
12. Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectrics diomedea sp.?</i>	1	10+
13. Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	2	10+
14. Great Cormorant	<i>Phal. Carbo moroccanus</i>	6	50+
15. Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	2	1
16. Cattle Egret	<i>Bulbulcus ibis</i>	7	C
17. Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	2	3
18. Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	7	C
19. Western Reef Egret	<i>Egretta gularis</i>	1	1
20. Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	6	C
21. Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	2	3
22. White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	9	C
23. Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	1	1
24. (Northern) Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>	1	7
25. Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	4	32
26. Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	3	1134
27. Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1	3
28. Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	4	2
29. Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennatus</i>	4	6
30. Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>	1	1
31. Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	4	16
32. Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	4	5
33. Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3	8
34. Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>	5	3
35. Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	1
36. Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	9	2
37. Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumani</i>	2	8
38. Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrines</i>	2	2
39. Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	1	1
40. Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	2	1
41. Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	4	4
42. Common or Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	3	2115
43. Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	1	3
44. Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	2	5
45. Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	5	20+

SPECIES	LATIN NAMES	NUMBER OF BIRDING DAYS RECORDED	HIGHEST COUNT C=common H=heard
46. Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	1	3
47. Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	3	22
48. Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	2	33
49. Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	3	10+
50. Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	2	3
51. Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	5	4
52. Grey or Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	2	25
53. Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	2	2
54. Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	3	25+
55. Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	1	3
56. Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	3	50+
57. Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	1	6
58. Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	2	2
59. Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	3	2
60. Common Sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	3	9
61. Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	3	6
62. Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	1	1
63. Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	3	3
64. Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	2	12
65. Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	1	1
66. Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	2	5
67. Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	1	3
68. Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	5	NC
69. Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	1	1
70. Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	5	C
71. Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	2	15
72. Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	4	20+
73. Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	3	44
74. Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	4	5
75. Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	1	1
76. Rock Dove	<i>Columbus livia</i>	4	10+
77. Rock Dove (domestic)	<i>Columbus livia</i>	11	20+
78. Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	4	6
79. Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	11	C
80. European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	5	2
81. Laughing Dove	<i>Strep. Senegalensis arenicola</i>	5	2
82. Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus conorvs</i>	1	H
83. Pharaoh Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>	1	2
84. Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	2	1
85. Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	1	1
86. Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>	2	2-3
87. Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	2	10+
88. Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	4	20+
89. Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	1	3
90. Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	3	15
91. Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	3	6

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91 Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	3	6
92. European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	8+1H	28
93. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus chrysocerus</i>	4	11
94. Levallant's Green Wpk	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	1	1
95. Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>	2	H
96. Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	9	4
97. Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	8	5
98. Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella b. rubiginosa</i>	8	50
99. Desert lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti payne</i>	4	2
100. Bar-tailed Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes c. arenicola</i>	3	2
101. Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	1	2
102. Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>	1	4
103. Temminck's Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	2	4
104. Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	5	3
105. Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	2	1
106. Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	2	3
107. Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	10	C
108. Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	5	4
109. House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	4	10+
110. Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	3	2
111. Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	1	1
112. Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	1	1
113. Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	1	1
114. Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla .f. iberiae</i>	4	5
115. White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	5	3
116. Moroccan White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	3	2
117. Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	3	2
118. White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	1	2
119. Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	1+3H	1
120. Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	6	3
121. Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	1	2
122. Mousierre's Restart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	4	2
123. Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	6	4
124. Black-Eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	7	3
125. Magreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe halophilo</i>	1	2
126. White Crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	6	6
127. Black wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	2	2
128. Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	5	5
129. Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	2	3
130. European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata rubicola</i>	2	4
131. Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	1	2
132. Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	11	4
133. Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	4	2
134. Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>	1	1
135. Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	6+1H	4
136. Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	2	1

137. Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	5	2
<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>LATIN NAMES</b>	<b>NUMBER OF BIRDING DAYS RECORDED</b>	<b>HIGHEST COUNT C=common H=heard</b>
138. Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	2	1
139. Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	7	4
140. African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>	1	2
141. Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	1	1
142. Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	1	2
143. Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	1	1
144. Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	1	1
145. Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	3	2
146. Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	2+2H	2
147. Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>	2	1
148. Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	7	5+
149. Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	5	20+
150. Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus colybita</i>	8	10+
151. Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	1	2
152. Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	1
153. Great Tit	<i>Parus major excelsus</i>	5	3
154. Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	1	4
155. African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	3	2
156. Great Grey Shrike	<i>Larius excubitor elegans</i>	5	3
157. Great Grey Shrike	<i>Larius excubitor algeriensis</i>	2	2
158. Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	8	4
159. Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	1+1H	1
160. Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	10	11
161. Fulvous Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulva</i>	3	4
162. Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>	5	5
163. Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	1	30+
164. Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	1	10+
165. Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	5	4
166. Browned-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	2	18
167. Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	6	40+
168. House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	11	C
169. Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	1	500+
170. Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>	1	2
171. Rock (Petronia) Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	1	5
172. Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelops</i>	5	8
173. African Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>	4	5
174. Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	2	5+
175. European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>	8	30+
176. European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris voousi</i>	7	6
177. European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	8	8
178. Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	6	15
179. Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	2	2
180. Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza circlus</i>	1	2
181. House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	6	5
182. Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	5	4

