



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Morocco Trip Report

14th to 24th February 2016



Egyptian Nightjar by Markus Lilje

Tour Leaders: Mark Beevers and Markus Lilje

Trip Report Compiled by: Markus Lilje

Top 10 species as voted by the participants:

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Northern Bald Ibis | 6. Dupont's Lark |
| 2. Egyptian Nightjar | 7. African Blue Tit |
| 3. Pharaoh Eagle-Owl | 8. Greater Hoopoe-Lark |
| 4. Moussier's Redstart | 9. Common Firecrest |
| 5. Cream-coloured Courser | 10. Spotted Sandgrouse |

Tour Summary

We headed off on day one in some fairly unpleasant conditions, with dark clouds overhead and some cold drizzle in the air. This did not stop us though, as we began our birding at a small roadside stream as it was growing light. This unlikely-looking birding site at Ait Ourir gave us our first views of a number of more common species and great looks at the *subpersonata* race of White Wagtail. Other birds we did manage to find here included a flock of White Stork, Grey and Western Yellow Wagtails, Western Cattle and Little Egrets as well as a number of Little Ringed Plover. We continued heading for the usually snow-covered High Atlas that lay in front of us as it gradually got lighter. It was clear that there was a decided lack of snow and that this might influence our chance for some of our hoped-for species for the day. At our next few stops we spent some time looking for a number of species that were maybe most likely here during the tour and are good birds for Africa. We were well-rewarded with our first north-west African endemic in the form of a stunning male Moussier's Redstart, which gave excellent views. Other birds in this area included a few European Serin, fine Cirl and Rock Buntings, European Robin and first Eurasian Wren. As we headed further up the mountain we continued adding birds in the form of Levillant's



Moussier's Redstart by Markus Lilje



Common Firecrest by Markus Lilje

Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and more common birds like Great Tit and Eurasian Blackbird while a Red Fox showed very well too. Before reaching the ski resort we spent some time in a small patch of conifers, where we had a great time, finding fantastic Common Firecrest, Hawfinch, scarce Brambling and Eurasian Siskin, while also enticed a Short-toed Treecreeper to show itself.

After a good lunch in the village of Oukaimeden, where we had good views of both Red-billed and Alpine Chough, we had to work hard for a few of the high-altitude specials due to the lack of snow. We did finally manage to come up trumps with great views of a handful of African Crimson-winged Finch, relaxed and distinctive Horned Lark, Alpine Accentor, Mistle Thrush and a

few very distant Ringed Ouzel. Seeing the state of the stream where the White-throated Dipper usually hangs out, we were not very hopeful of finding it due to the very low water level, but after a bit of walking, we all managed to find the bird and enjoyed good scope views. We ended the day at our hotel at lower altitude, where we managed to see a Tawny Owl fly overhead quickly, before turning in after an eventful first day!

The second day of the tour is always a long day as we relocate to Agadir some 450 kilometres away. Still, it's not all driving and our day was to be punctuated with numerous roadside stops although we did skip a few of them due to bad weather. We enjoyed a little time at the ancient Tinmal Mosque, around which we had first Thekla Lark and good Eurasian Blackcap and Sardinian Warbler. Driving over the Tiz-n-Test Pass we had better views of Ringed Ouzel at a viewpoint. A



short walk around our lunch restaurant gave us very good views of male Blue Rock Thrush and the lovely African Blue Tit. Great views overlooking the distant Souss plain were complimented by some tasty traditional Berber Tagines, before we made our way down the water coastal plain and the town of Agadir for 3 nights.



Northern Bald Ibis by Markus Lilje

Slender-billed Gulls among the abundant Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed birds. Shorebirds were quite common too as we found a number of Black-tailed Godwit, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Dunlin and a single Red Knot along with Eurasian Oystercatcher and Grey, Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers. At a small nearby pond we also picked up some good birds after negotiating the king's security. Here we added Eurasian Spoonbill, Eurasian Teal, Common Shelduck, Common Snipe, Western Osprey, Black-winged Stilt and Greater Flamingo. On our second attempt we also managed to get good flight and perched views of the special Red-necked Nightjar as it grew dark, while hearing Long-eared Owl nearby.



Balearic Shearwater by Markus Lilje



Todra Gorge by Markus Lilje

of the estuary we found a large flock of beautiful Audouin's Gull, while a distant Razorbill was a great surprise. Trying to get closer views of the Razorbill, we stumbled onto a resting flock of 95



Northern bald Ibis! What a great bonus finding them here a day earlier than we had planned. We spent some time watching these critically endangered birds, before heading back to the bus and onwards towards lunch nearby. A less saline area of the river produced Eurasian Wigeon and Common Pochard, while we had some Black-winged Kite over fields nearby.

Our last full day in the area was something different for a tour to Morocco: a pelagic trip off



Thick-billed Lark by Markus Lilje

the Agadir coast, the fifth we have undertaken here. Although we didn't go very far offshore we did eventually enjoy excellent views of several seabird species including Balearic and Manx Shearwaters, European Storm Petrel and Northern Gannet. A few Great Skua were seen from the boat and we found a number of Parasitic Jaeger that showed particularly well! The big surprise though, was finding around 8 Razorbill during the trip – the first already in the harbour, with most showing very well indeed! We enjoyed a grilled fish lunch on board before again negotiating the other boats and many gulls towards the jetty. Back on dry land we headed north towards Tamri, stopping for a quick look at the rather unproductive Tamri Estuary. While searching for the Northern Bald Ibis, or Waldrapp as it is also known, in this area near their northern breeding colony, we found resting Eurasian Stone-curlew on day roost. Finally we were also rewarded with incredible fly-by views of over 80

Ibises as they headed towards their cliffs to roost for the night.

Heading inland, we had another long travel day as we drove east into the drier parts of the tour. During a short roadside stop, we found a number of calling Corn Bunting, a large flock of Spanish Sparrow and another Woodchat Shrike. A small group of Fulvous Babbler also showed, although they never came very close to the group. A pair of Trumpeter Finch didn't hang around long enough for all the group to see, but we did all really enjoy the stunning scenery during the drive. We then had our lunch at the Kasbah Café in Ouarzazate, which overlooks the towns Kasbah. We then relocated to the nearby Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi for a while to scan for any species hanging out on and near the water. We found our first Little Owl on the crumbling walls of an abandoned building before carefully scanning the large waterbody. The biggest target we found here was Marbled Duck, which was around in very good numbers; other birds included Ruddy and Common Shelducks, many Northern Shoveler, a few Gadwall, Western Marsh Harrier and a Bluethroat along the shoreline. Our departure time came and we headed further east, to our next base at Boumalne du Dades, another two hours' drive away where we checked into the lovely Xaluca Hotel.



Tristram's Warbler by Markus Lilje

The Tagdilt track is a famous Moroccan birding site and holds some of the most sought-after desert species. We were here at first light at the delightful rubbish dump, a place littered with millions of plastic bags and packs of rather ferocious looking feral dogs. What this area lacks in scenic pristine beauty, it makes up for in birding potential. Some of the first species we came across were Lesser Short-toed and Temminck's Larks, Long-legged Buzzard and Red-rumped Wheatear. We needed more time to find some of the other birds we were looking for and eventually managed



to find Eurasian Skylark and the sought-after Thick-billed Lark that eventually showed well. In a different area we then found some distant Black-bellied Sandgrouse that finally gave good flight views, before we continued on and enjoyed great views of 4 very relaxed Cream-coloured Courser. We returned to town for lunch and then made our way up the spectacular Dades Gorge for the afternoon. After some scanning we managed to find a pair of Peregrine on a large cliff face. A little later during a walk in the stunning gorge we managed to find and enjoy decent views of a few of the elusive Tristram's Warbler. Before calling it a day we also managed some great scope and flight views of Bonelli's Eagle overhead.

Early the next morning, we headed to the spectacular Todra Gorge, where we spent a few



Dupont's Lark by Markus Lilje

hours enjoying the area. On the way we had fantastic Cetti's Warbler, Common House Martin, Black Wheatear and colourful European Goldfinch. In addition to the beautiful scenery we had great views of Tristram's and Sardinian Warblers as well as our first Desert Lark. We then set off eastwards heading toward Midelt where we were to spend the night. En route we stopped and walked in search of Streaked Scrub Warbler. During our time here, we had great views of this sought-after species when we eventually managed to circle-it and we also found Lesser Short-toed Lark and our first Bar-tailed Lark. We stopped briefly at Barrage Hassan Addakhil, which did not really produce much in addition to a number of grebes and distant waterfowl on the open water.

We had to be up very early the following day and after a quick coffee we were out before first light, which was necessary to give us a good chance of seeing Dupont's Lark, one of the hardest birds to see in the

Western Palearctic. We arrived at the Zeida Plain well before first light and we soon heard the first few Dupont's Lark singing. That was the easy bit and we spent a long time trying to locate a bird that could be seen. Again and again we had birds calling that would then be quiet when we got too close. Finally though, we were able to circle a bird that then gave us incredible views for an extended period of time. Other birds we saw in this area included many Northern Raven, Cream-coloured Courser and Crested Lark. Back in the warmth of the vehicle and after a good breakfast we headed south and towards the desert.

In the afternoon we arrived at our base of Erfoud, from where we explored the area over the next day and a half. Our first destination was an area of mixed shale and sand desert that provided fantastic views of Desert Wheatear as well as our first Greater Hoopoe-Lark and great looks at African Desert Warbler which is often very tough to find. Next we headed to a known site for Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, but although we put in a lot of scanning effort, we were unable to find this species, but we did pick up Maghreb Lark along the way.



Moussier's Redstart by Markus Lilje



One of the best days of this tour is always the day in the desert, which we spent around



Erg Chebbi dunes by Markus Lilje

these birds to arrive, we had other birds here, including a flock of unexpected Thick-billed Lark, Trumpeter Finch and Bar-tailed Lark. Nearby a local Berber man had found a pair of Egyptian Nightjar – very early in the season for them to have arrived! We spent a good amount of time watching this incredible bird blending in to its dry rocky riverbed surroundings that it took a while for everyone to even find the bird, despite it just sitting 15m away from us in the open! The next big target we found was a pair of



Pharaoh Eagle-Owl by Markus Lilje

light on the bird – what a great way to end a wonderful day in these grand surroundings.

Our penultimate day was a bit of a travel day as we headed back to Ouarzazate where we were to spend our final night. We made one stop at a site, where we spent some time searching for anything interesting and finding Spectacled Warbler, Desert Wheatear, Bar-tailed and Greater

Erfoud, Erg Chebbi and Rissani in a number of 4x4s looking for a number of great desert specials in an area that reminds you of *Lawrence of Arabia* or *Beau Geste*. Our first port of call was a narrow strip of low sand-dune where we quickly found another African Desert Warbler, a rather attractive Sylvia warbler even though it's basically brown. We set off again, searching for a number of species, including Spotted Sandgrouse. We were not disappointed near a very small pool which attracted many of these sandgrouse over the course of an hour or so. As we waited for



African Desert Warbler by Markus Lilje

Desert Sparrow that showed very well at a small settlement, where we watched them working around their nest site. Moving on, we headed to Erg Chebbi for lunch with views onto the fantastic huge dunes. After lunch we had good views of a number of Brown-necked Raven that prefer the very dry areas in this region. This afternoon was spent in the area around Rissani, searching in a few areas for anything new for our list. After a lot of time with no success, we scanned some cracks in a cliff-face again and were thrilled to find the huge target Pharaoh Eagle-Owl! We enjoyed extended views of this stunning bird the sun set and we lost



Hoopoe-Larks as well as a number of fairly relaxed gerbelline rodents. We continued on our way to Boumalne du Dades seeing more Blue Rock Thrush and White-crowned Wheater on the way. After



Greater Hoopoe-Lark by Markus Lilje

lunch here, we headed to Ouarzazate where some of the participants elected to go for some retail therapy, while the rest of us returned to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi for the late afternoon. At our hotel we had a mixed flock of Pallid, Little and Alpine Swifts as well as a surprise Barbary Falcon that briefly showed well! The lake produced a distant juvenile Black Stork in addition to Bluethroat, Pied Avocet, Spotted Redshank, Temminck's Stint and a number of species that we had already seen here almost a week before. During a short visit here on our last morning, we again had similar species in addition to good views of Little Owl, Eurasian Hoopoe and Sedge Warbler.

Our last stretch of the tour saw us climb over Tiz-n-Tichka Pass, which had been closed due to heavy snow just a week before. Our drive over the pass was relatively uneventful, although the scenery was wonderful to enjoy. We stopped for lunch at Toufliht but before entering the café, we checked the nearby woodland for anything interesting. Other than Common Firecrest and Great-spotted and Levaillant's Woodpeckers we did not find

much in a small group of conifers nearby. After lunch, we dropped down into Marrakech, stopping briefly at a ladies' cooperative where they explained how Argan nuts are processed into cooking or perfume oils. Needless to say, the chance for some shopping wasn't missed by some of the group.

And that was it; the end of our very productive 11-day classic Morocco tour. Besides seeing some very good birds, we had seen diverse and spectacular scenery, seen ancient Kasbahs and Medinas, stayed in some wonderful accommodations and eaten far too much interesting local food. The trip, which took us from the highest snow-covered mountains to rugged Atlantic cliffs via stony desert, the magnificent Sahara and the Atlantic Ocean, gave us a good cross section of North African species including the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis, majestic Pharaoh Eagle-Owl and camouflaged Egyptian Nightjar. All in all, a thoroughly enjoyable tour with great birding and great company.



Trumpeter Finch by Markus Lilje

Annotated List of Birds Recorded 178 species (3 heard only)

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC List. Please cite: Gill, F. and M. Wright. 2006. Birds of the World: Recommended English Names. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Swans, Geese & Ducks Anatidae

Common Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

Some of these large birds were seen first near the Oued Souss estuary and later at the Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate.



Ruddy Shelduck*Tadorna ferruginea*

Our visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate gave us sightings of many birds. First views at the Oued Souss in Agadir.

Gadwall*Anas strepera*

We found two pairs at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate.

Eurasian Wigeon*Anas penelope*

A single female was scoped in Oued Massa during our morning there.

Mallard*Anas platyrhynchos*

Recorded on five days during the tour in low numbers at various sites.

Northern Shoveler*Anas clypeata*

Many birds were seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on all 3 of our visits there.

Northern Pintail*Anas acuta*

A single male was scoped at Oued Massa during our second afternoon there.

Eurasian Teal*Anas crecca*

At a small wetland near Oued Souss we had 15; later another 4 birds were seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

NOTE: This species has been split into 2 species, the nominate Eurasian Teal (which is the one we recorded in Morocco) and Green-winged Teal *A. carolinensis*. This split is not recognized by Clements.

Marbled Duck*Marmaronetta angustirostris*

In the last couple of years this species has become a little difficult to find. We were very pleased to find many birds at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi, where we had over 100 birds on the water.

Common Pochard*Aythya ferina*

We recorded 4 birds at a large waterbody at Oued Massa and later another 4 birds at Barrage Mansur El Adabi.

Pheasants & Quails Phasianidae**Common Quail***Coturnix coturnix*

We heard a few birds in the Oued Massa area and in wheat fields on the drive to the Tamri estuary.

Petrels and Shearwaters Procellariidae**Manx Shearwater***Puffinus puffinus*

We had at least 2 birds during our pelagic out of Agadir - we enjoyed great views for long times.

Balearic Shearwater*Puffinus mauretanicus*

We had around 6 birds during our pelagic out of Agadir, including some very close individuals.

Northern Storm Petrels Hydrobatidae**European Storm Petrel***Hydrobates pelagicus*

We enjoyed excellent looks at around 40 birds during our pelagic trip from Agadir.

Grebes Podicipedidae**Little Grebe***Tachybaptus ruficollis*

We found a number of these birds at many of the wetlands during our tour.

Great Crested Grebe*Podiceps cristatus*

At Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi and Barrage Hassan Addakhil we saw good numbers on the open water, including some closer views.

Flamingos Phoenicopteridae**Greater Flamingo***Phoenicopterus ruber*

We had good numbers at Oued Souss and later a further sighting at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Storks Ciconidae

Black Stork*Ciconia nigra*

A single young bird was scoped in the distance at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi during our second afternoon there.

White Stork*Ciconia ciconia*

Recorded on around 8 dates during the tour with birds on nests in many towns. Larger numbers were as usual at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi and near Agadir.

Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae**Northern Bald Ibis***Geronticus eremita*

Despite a positive change in this population over the last few years, the estimate is still of under 250 mature adults in Morocco! We had sightings in two different areas, finding birds from both colonies. First views were at the Oued Massa estuary where we had 95 birds sitting and preening, before we found a further 80 birds on the following day – all in flight – in the Tamri area.

Glossy Ibis*Platalea leucorodia*

Seen well during our visits at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi also on our second visit.

Eurasian Spoonbill*Platalea leucorodia*

A number of birds were seen well around Oued Souss and Oued Massa on the coast near Agadir. Other birds were seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi during our visits here.

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns Ardeidae**Western Cattle Egret***Bubulcus ibis*

Recorded on nine dates during the tour, with some of the best numbers on the first morning, which usually produces the highest count of the tour.

Grey Heron*Ardea cinerea*

Recorded on 7 dates during the tour with sightings at most of the larger waterbodies.

Great Egret*Egretta alba*

Recorded on seven days during the tour with the highest counts around the Agadir area and at the Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Little Egret*Egretta garzetta*

This bird was recorded on a few days of the tour, including in good numbers on the first morning and later at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Gannets Sulidae**Northern Gannet***Morus bassanus*

About 50 were seen, some very well and at close range during the pelagic trip after a few were seen from Oued Massa estuary over the ocean.

Cormorants & Shags Phalacrocoracidae**Great Cormorant***Phalacrocorax carbo*

Recorded on eight days during the tour with three-figure counts on three days around Agadir and at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi, with smaller numbers around other waterbodies.

Ospreys Pandionidae**Western Osprey***Pandion haliaetus*

Two were seen at Oued Souss, with another on the second-last day at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Note. IOC splits Osprey into two species Western Osprey Pandion haliaetus, which we saw and Eastern Osprey Pandion cristatus. This split is as yet not recognized by Clements.

Hawks, Kites, Eagles & Vultures Accipitridae**Black-winged Kite***Elanus caeruleus*

We had good views of around 4 birds in the Oued Souss area, another on our drive east from Agadir.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*

We continued Rockjumper's 100% record for this species on a Morocco tour with sightings on three days. Our first was our best sighting in Dades Gorge, Where we first enjoyed scope and then flight views. Later we had distant views near Erfoud and on the way to the pass on the final day.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

One was seen in flight at Oued Souss on our second afternoon there.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

This species was logged on 5 days at a number of locations with up to four present at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate. Oued Souss and Oued Massa near Agadir.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

This species is considered a national rarity, so we consider ourselves particularly fortunate to enjoy good views of a stunning male flying over the edge of the water at Oued Massa.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

We only saw this species on a single occasion, when we had one bird in flight near Boumalne Dades.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Seen on 5 days of the tour, including some good views. All sightings were in the drier eastern parts of the tour, around Boumalde Dades, Erfoud and Ouarzazate.

Rails, Gallinules & Coots Rallidae

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

This species was seen on six days during the tour, with the highest numbers, up to 300, at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Cranes Gruidae

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Always a special bird to see! We found these birds in the early morning near Oued Massa, where 11 birds were seen and scoped as they walked around in the sparse vegetation.

Stone-Curlews, Thick-knees Burhinidae

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

After seeing a bird fly over at dusk at Oued Souss, we had good views of 2 birds near Tamri, where they were resting under a bush in the late afternoon.

Oystercatchers Haematopidae

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

20 were seen on a single day between Oued Massa and later Oued Souss on our second visit.

Stilts & Avocets Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

We found around 25 at Oued Souss, before we had a few more birds at the end of the tour at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A single bird was seen and scoped near some flamingos at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Plovers & Lapwings Charadriidae

Grey (Black-bellied) Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*



This species was only seen at Oued Souss on both days and Oued Massa where they were in mixed shorebird flocks.

Common Ringed Plover*Charadrius hiaticula*

This species was seen on both days we visited Oued Souss, where they were seen fairly well, although some were distant.

Little Ringed Plover*Charadrius dubius*

Our first were three at Ait Ourir on the first morning after which we saw good numbers around Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on one or two occasions during the final days of the tour.

Kentish Plover*Charadrius alexandrinus*

We had great close-up views of these birds on the sand in the Oued Souss area near Agadir.

Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae**Common Snipe***Gallinago gallinago*

2 birds were scoped distantly in a small waterbody near Oued Souss.

Black-tailed Godwit*Limosa limosa*

A number of birds were seen well in the area around Agadir and later at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Eurasian Curlew*Numenius arquata*

These large shorebirds were seen on consecutive days in the Oued Souss area.

Spotted Redshank*Tringa erythropus*

We had 4 birds late one afternoon at the Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Common Redshank*Tringa totanus*

Good numbers were seen on 2 consecutive days along Oued Souss and Oued Massa banks.

Common Greenshank*Tringa nebularia*

A few birds were seen at Oued Massa, Oued Souss and later at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos*

A few birds were seen at different locations on the first 3 days of the tour, including at Ait Ourir.

Red Knot*Calidris canutus*

A single bird was seen on 2 consecutive days along the Oued Souss.

Sanderling*Calidris alba*

We saw around 6 birds at the Oued Massa estuary.

Temminck's Stint*Calidris temminckii*

A single bird was scoped for a while at around sunset at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Dunlin*Calidris alpina*

A number of birds were seen feeding on the edge of Oued Souss.

Ruff*Philomachus pugnax*

A good number of these birds were seen at Oued Massa, where we had a single flock in flight.

Coursers & Pratincoles Glareolidae**Cream-coloured Courser***Cursorius cursor*

We found four eventually on the Tagdilt Track obtaining awesome looks, later five were seen on the Zeida Plain and then in the Erg Chebbi area.

Gulls, Terns and Skimmers Laridae**Slender-billed Gull***Chroicocephalus genei*

A single bird was seen well on the water at Oued Souss.

Black-headed Gull*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Recorded on seven days, with highest numbers at Oued Souss, Oued Massa and inland at Barrage Hassan Addakhil.

Audouin's Gull*Ichthyaeetus audouinii*

We had a large resting flock at Oued Massa, while we had a few birds during our pelagic out of Agadir.

Mediterranean Gull

Ichthyaetus melanocephalus

We had good numbers during our first visit to Oued Souss, where we had 20 birds and later found more during our second visit here, at Oued Massa and during our pelagic near Agadir.

Mew Gull

Larus canus

A first winter bird was found at Oued Souss, where we found it during both visits to the area.

Yellow-legged Gull

Larus michahellis

A number of birds were seen at scattered sites around Agadir during the 3 days we had in the area.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Larus fuscus

This species was abundant around all birding sites in the Agadir area, including during our pelagic.

Sandwich Tern

Thalasseus sandvicensis

Our first bird was seen at Oued Souss, while we had very large numbers at Oued Massa and during our pelagic off Agadir.

Skuas Sternidae

Great Skua

Stercorarius skua

We had views of 3 birds during our pelagic off Agadir, one came close to the boat.

Parasitic Jaeger

Stercorarius parasiticus

We had some great close-up views of this species during our pelagic; we have not often seen this species on our Morocco tours.

Auks Alcidae

Razorbill

Alca torda

A first for our tours in Morocco – we had distant scope views at Oued Massa before enjoying some great looks as we left the harbour at Agadir and during our pelagic trip.

Sandgrouse Pteroclididae

Spotted Sandgrouse

Pterocles senegallus

We enjoyed watching a few hundred birds coming in to drink during the mid-morning near Erg Chebbi, where we enjoyed great scope and flight views.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse

Pterocles orientalis

Around 14 birds were scoped and then seen closer in flight on the Tagdilt track. Another 7 were seen briefly as they flew off on the Zaida Plain.

Doves & Pigeons Columbidae

Rock Dove

Columba livia

Recorded every day in all towns with birds in wild plumage noted at Oukaiimeden, Todra and Dades Gorges.

Common Wood Pigeon

Columba palumbus

Recorded on four days in small numbers; mainly around Marrakech and Agadir.

Eurasian Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

A common resident that was recorded almost daily in and around most towns.

Laughing Dove

Spilopelia senegalensis

We had numerous sightings of these small doves in many locations, with largest numbers around the Erfoud area.

Owls Strigidae

Pharaoh Eagle-Owl

Bubo ascalaphus



We had great scope views of one in the late afternoon near Rissani after spending much time scanning cliffs and ledges at a variety of potential sites in the region. One of the most sought-after species in North Africa and always a great bird to see!

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Unfortunately we only had a brief view of this bird as it flew overhead near our accommodations near Oukaimeden.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

This bird was seen on 4 days of the tour in areas near Ouarzazate and Rissani.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

A scarce bird in Morocco that was heard only near the Palacae near Oued Souss.

Nightjars Caprimulgidae

Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

Undoubtedly one of the star birds of the trip. A local Berber man that keeps his eye out for any interesting species came up trumps when he showed us a pair of birds roosting in a dry riverbed in the dry desert near Erg Chebbi. We were treated to long unobstructed views of the bird and many photographs were taken. A very fortunate sighting as this species generally doesn't arrive until March.

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis*

This large nightjar was seen both in flight and on the ground in an area around Oued Souss.

Swifts Apodidae

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

At least a single bird was seen over the town of Ouarzazate in a mixed flock of swifts.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

2 birds were seen near Tamri, to the north of Agadir as they flew quickly overhead.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*

We recorded large numbers around Agadir and later over the town of Ouarzazate.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

We struggled to connect with this species and indeed only managed to see a few in the mixed flock with the above species over Ouarzazate.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

We had some very good birds of at least 4 birds around the water in the Oued Massa area.

Hoopoes Upupidae

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Unusually scarce this year as we only recorded a handful of species at various locations, including near Ouarzazate.

Clements only recognizes two species of Hoopoe; Eurasian U. epops and Madagascar U. marginata. One further species, is widely recognized namely African U. africana and a 4th is sometime recognized, West/Central African U. senegalensis. We only recorded the nominate Palaearctic form U. e. epops.

Woodpeckers & Allies Picidae

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

One was seen very well on our first day of the tour as we drove up to Oukaimeden, we also had birds on the final day in the large trees near lunch at Toufliht.

Levaillant's Woodpecker *Picus vaillantii*

We had sightings in similar areas as the above species, with good views on the drive to Oukaimeden and later in the Toufliht area. A north-west African endemic.



Falcons & Caracaras Falconidae

Common Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Many birds were recorded during the trip in a wide variety of areas, with records on almost every day on our route.

NOTE: Some authorities including IOC split this species into Common Kestrel, F. tinnunculus which we observed (occurring in East Africa and the Palearctic region) and Rock Kestrel, F. rupicolus that occurs in Southern Africa. Clements does not as yet recognize these splits.

Lanner Falcon

Falco biarmicus

2 birds were seen and scoped mating along a long rock wall near Risanni.

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

Seen on 5 separate days, including views of a hunting bird at Oued Souss and Oukaïmeden.

Barbary Falcon

Falco pelegrinoides

We had close but fairly brief views of this sought-after species as it flew and briefly circled overhead in the town of Ouarzazate.

Bushshrikes Malaconotidae

Black-crowned Tchagra

Tchagra senegalus

Heard only around Oued Massa.

Shrikes Laniidae

Southern Grey Shrike

Lanius meridionalis

A common bird with up to ten seen on almost every day, we had some good scope views.

NOTE: This complex, which used to be lumped with Northern Shrike L. excubitor, is being considered for further splitting. Saharan Shrike (L. leucopygos) is the form we recorded in Morocco during our tour. Further compounding the confusion the Collins Field Guide lumps Southern Grey Shrike with Northern Shrike (Lanius excubitor) but splits off Lanius Meridionalis as a separate species Iberian Grey Shrike. There is clearly much work to be done with this group of birds.

Woodchat Shrike

Lanius senator

A bird we were not really expecting to see on the tour because they usually arrive later during the migration season. Nonetheless we recorded birds at Oued Massa and later during our drive inland from Agadir to Boumalne Dades.

Crows, Jays & Magpies Corvidae

Eurasian Magpie

Pica pica

Common around Agadir, where we recorded the species many times. This distinctive race has a striking area of blue around the eye.

NOTE: There is a possibility that this species could be considered for splitting into several species and if this is the case then the subspecies we recorded could be elevated to a full species known as Maghreb Magpie Pica mauritanica. This possible split is accepted by neither the IOC nor Clements.

Red-billed Chough

Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax

A few birds were seen around the ski resort at Oukaïmeden on our first day, which is an unusually low count for this area. They were seen in a flock of the below species.

Alpine Chough

Pyrrhocorax graculus

We had a large number of birds around the buildings at Oukaïmeden when we arrived in the late morning.

Brown-necked Raven

Corvus ruficollis

This is a true desert loving species and we saw fairly good numbers in the desert, particularly around Erg Chebbi's dunes.

Northern Raven

Corvus corax

We had huge numbers on two afternoons in the Rissani area after first views near Oukaïmeden.



Tits Paridae

Coal Tit

Periparus ater

Ten birds were found as we made our way towards Oukaïmeden and we had at least 5 on the following day on the Tiz-n-Test Pass.

African Blue Tit

Cyanistes teneriffae

Our best views were at our lunch site on the Tiz-n-Test Pass, while we had a few others on the first day and in Agadir.

Great Tit

Paris major

A number of birds were seen at the higher altitude sites on the first 2 days of the tour, including good views as we travelled to Oukaïmeden.

Larks Alaudidae

Greater Hoopoe-Lark

Alaemon alaudipes

The area around Erfoud and Erg Chebbi produced the goods and we found at least 2 pairs of these large, handsome larks, some of which gave great views and one or two of which performed their distinctive display. The following day we found two more between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Thick-billed Lark

Ramphocoris clotbey

Our first birds were in the unsavoury surroundings of the rubbish dump at the Tagdilt Track, where one in particular showed quite well. We had a few more flight views of this sought-after species before we enjoyed great looks at drinking birds in the Erg Chebbi area. What a great bird!

Desert Lark

Ammomanes deserti

This is not really a lark of the sand deserts in these parts as they prefer more rocky terrain. Our first two were seen in Todra Gorge and more were found later during our day in the desert near Rissani.

Bar-tailed Lark

Ammomanes cincturus

This is a true desert-loving species and we found our birds near Errichidia and later near Erg Chebbi and between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Eurasian Skylark

Alauda arvensis

We recorded around a dozen birds in the trash on the Tagdilt Track.

Thekla Lark

Galerida theklae

This lark is more common at higher levels than Crested Lark and we recorded it on four days with our first four being found at the Tinmal Mosque, with others around Ouarzazate and the Midelt area.

Crested Lark

Galerida cristata

A common & widespread lark except in the true desert areas. We saw up to 20 of this species on nine days at many roadside stops.

Maghreb Lark

Galerida macrorhyncha

We had great looks at this recently split species as we drove around the Erfoud region.

NOTE: Clements lumps this species with Crested Lark but the IOC accepts it as a valid species.

Horned Lark

Eremophila alpestris

We had awesome looks at this species with some down to almost point blank range at Oukaïmeden, where a total of around 16 birds were seen.

Temminck's Lark

Eremophila bilopha

The Tagdilt Track is the place to see this species in Morocco and we weren't disappointed. As usual it was one of the first species we saw on our arrival and by the time we left we'd logged about 20 of this attractive species.

Greater Short-toed Lark

Calandrella brachydactyla

A species that is fairly uncommon in the area – we were fortunate to find 2 birds that showed fairly well before flying off as we left the trash site on the Tagdilt track.

Dupont's Lark

Chersophilus duponti

Often considered one of the hardest birds to see in the Western Palearctic area. Soon after arriving at our site before daybreak on the Zeida Plain we heard a few birds calling around us. After some



time and effort we managed to all get very good views of this skulking species at fairly close range. Justifiably one of the top 10 birds of the tour.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens*

Another lark that was seen well in on the Tagdilt track, before we had a few further sightings later on near Errichidia and Erfoud.

Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*

Recorded throughout Morocco in many places, we recorded up to 20 daily and it was often the first species to be logged for the day.

NOTE: Another very confusing polytypic species complex. Several Asian and African forms have already been recognized as distinct species within the super-species. Several other forms may be recognized as distinct once genetic analysis and further study is completed.

Swallows Hirundinidae

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*

A few birds were seen at Oued Souss, before we had a few in a huge flock of Barn Swallows at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Recorded on every day of the tour at scattered locations.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Recorded on seven days at widely scattered locations. Largest numbers were at various rocky slope and gorge sites during the tour.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

A single bird showed very well just before we entered Dades Gorge.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

We saw one that showed well, flying over the far side of the Oued Massa.

Cettia Bush Warblers and allies Cettidae

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

After we heard this bird at Oued Massa, we managed to get fantastic views of this skulker in riverine thickets near the Dades Gorge.

Streaked Scrub Warbler Scotocercidae

Streaked Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*

Many tours fail to see this species, but with a bit of effort we managed to get everyone good views of this very shy species in some bushes during our first drive to Ouarzazate. We walked the usual area and circled a pair, allowing everyone to see this tough bird very well.

Leaf Warblers and allies Phylloscopidae

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Good numbers were seen during the tour, with records on every day. Big numbers were seen along the banks of Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

NOTE: Most authorities split; including Clements have split the Chiffchaff complex into 4 full species. The nominate form which we recorded is known as Common Chiffchaff P. collybita.

Reed Warblers and allies Cisticolidae

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

We were very lucky to find a few of these this year along the banks of Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Cisticolas and allies Acrocephalidae



Zitting Cisticola*Cisticola juncidis*

We saw a number of these birds in the Oued Massa area and later during our drive east towards Ouarzazate.

Babblers, Parrotbills Timaliidae**Fulvous Babbler***Turdoides fulva*

We found an uncooperative group during our drive from Agadir to Ouarzazate, finally we had some great views towards the end of the tour in the Tinejdad area when a flock of 4 showed well. These charming, gregarious birds are endemic to north-west Africa and they are always good fun.

Sylviid Babblers Sylviidae**Eurasian Blackcap***Sylvia atricapilla*

A few birds were seen, mainly on the first few days, with some good views of male and female birds at Tinmal Mosque.

African Desert Warbler*Sylvia deserti*

A very sought-after species that was seen well on 2 consecutive days in the Erg Chebbi area. Both birds were very cooperative and we all enjoyed great views.

Tristram's Warbler*Sylvia deserticol*

We found a few birds on 4 consecutive days between Dades Gorge and the desert in the Erg Chebbi area. Most birds were seen around Todra Gorge in small bushes along the valley floor.

Spectacled Warbler*Sylvia conspicillata*

We saw a first bird in the Errichidia area, with a few more later on during our drive towards Tinejdad from Erfoud.

Sardinian Warbler*Sylvia melanocephala*

Fairly common particularly during the first few days of the tour, where we had particularly good numbers in the Oued Massa area.

Kinglets Regulidae**Common Firecrest***Regulus ignicapillus*

We had crippling views of a calling male on the way up to Oukaïmeden. Another was seen on the last day at Toufliht. Always a favourite on the tour.

Wrens Troglodytidae**Eurasian Wren***Troglodytes troglodytes*

One was seen very well on a wall near the highest point at Oukaïmeden after we had views of another bird early that morning.

Creepers Certhiidae**Short-toed Treecreeper***Certhia brachydactyla*

A single bird was seen flying overhead a number of times, although it was much harder to see it perched in a patch of conifers near Oukaïmeden.

Starlings Sturnidae**Spotless Starling***Sturnus unicolor*

Seen in very good numbers particularly around Agadir and Oued Massa areas.

Thrushes & Allies Turdidae**Ring Ouzel***Turdus torquatus*

Around 6 birds were seen – all very distantly from an observation point at Oukaïmeden, before we had good views of at least one bird near the top of Tiz-n-Test Pass the following day. Of the high



altitude species we target this is probably the hardest to connect with so a good bird to get as we don't always see them.

Common (Eurasian) Blackbird *Turdus merula*

A common species that was seen daily throughout the tour with big numbers seen on some days.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

3 of these large birds were found at Oukaïmeden where they gave good close views.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

We saw this familiar Christmas card bird near the start of our ascent to Oukaïmeden on the first morning.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

We all had great views of some of the 4 birds that we recorded around the edges of Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi, with one or 2 birds showing good colour in their plumage.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Seen on at least 7 days. Biggest numbers were seen during the first days and later around the Boumalde Dades area.

Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri*

This beautiful north-west African endemic was first seen as we started our climb to Oukaïmeden. Other birds were seen at various sites throughout, mostly in dry bushy habitats.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

Our first was a male at Tiz-n-Test Pass, while we had numerous other birds, including numerous birds around Erfoud and Tinejdad.

European (Common) Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

We saw many of these smart looking birds on the day we visited Oued Massa and Oued Souss with good numbers also at other locations, including Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi and around Midelt.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Scarcer than some of the other wheatears on this route. We had a few birds, with first views on the Tagdilt track and others between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

Usually at the time of our visit this species is quite difficult to find. This year we found a few around Boumalne Dades and Erg Chebbi, with final good views at the roadside stop we made heading towards Tinejdad.

Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta*

We had very good views of around 20 of these sought-after birds on the Tagdilt track, with a few other sightings in the region.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*

After first high-altitude views on the first 2 days these birds were fairly common around the Tagdilt Track and Dades Gorge.

White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*

This is the common Wheatear of the lowland desert areas and we recorded the species on six consecutive days, with greatest numbers when we were in the Erfoud region.

Dippers Cinclidae

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

After a bit of searching we located a single bird in seemingly not ideal habitat near Oukaïmeden, where the lack of rain and snow had really dropped the flow rate of the little stream it frequents.

Old World Sparrows Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

As to be expected a common species that was seen on all dates during the tour.



Spanish Sparrow*Passer hispaniolensis*

A flock of 4 birds was found at Oued Massa, before we had a large but more distant flock in a wheat field during our drive to Boumalne Dades.

Desert Sparrow*Passer simplex*

A major target of the tour and one that can sometimes prove to be tricky to locate. After a bit of searching near a small settlement we enjoyed great and extended views of this dapper species. Unfortunately they keep getting pushed further into the desert as House Sparrow follows the settlements deeper.

Accentors Prunellidae**Alpine Accentor***Prunella collaris*

One of the principal targets at Oukaïmeden. As it was getting very cold we were about to give up finding them when we had a flock of 5 that showed well.

Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae**Western Yellow Wagtail***Motacilla flava*

Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi had well over 100 birds feeding around the edges! Earlier we had a few at Ait Ourir on the first morning. All birds were of the *iberiae* race.

Grey Wagtail*Motacilla cinerea*

A number of birds were seen on our first day split between Ait Ourir and the road to Oukaïmeden, then we had a few more at Todra Gorge.

White Wagtail*Motacilla alba*

This species was a very common bird during the tour with many hundred seen feeding around Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Moroccan Wagtail*Motacilla alba subpersonata*

We found a few during our visit to Ait Ourir.

Meadow Pipit*Anthus pratensis*

One or two were seen on six days with a count of 12 at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Water Pipit*Anthus spinoletta*

One was seen and scoped near the top of Oukaïmeden.

Siskins, Crossbills & Allies Fringillidae**Common Chaffinch***Fringilla coelebs*

We recorded this species on around 6 days of the tour, with biggest numbers in the higher areas on the first 2 days.

Brambling*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

A single stunning male was seen very well in a forest patch near Oukaïmeden on the first day.

Hawfinch*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

We found twenty on the way to Oukaïmeden, some of which we were able to see well.

African Crimson-winged Finch*Rhodopechys alienus*

Due to the lack of snow during our time there, we had to put in an unusual amount of effort to find this sought-after species. We finally had very good views of 5 birds high up on a slope in the Oukaïmeden area.

Trumpeter Finch*Rhodopechys githagineus*

A bird that was seen well on a few days of the tour, in different dry areas. Best views probably when they came to a water trough between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

European Greenfinch*Chloris chloris*

We saw these birds on 4 days of the tour, with most seen on the second day around the Tiz-n-Test Pass.

Common Linnet*Linaria cannabina*

After first views at Oukaïmeden, this bird was seen regularly throughout much of the tour.



European Goldfinch*Carduelis carduelis*

This gorgeous species was encountered on seven days at various locations, with best views of a number of birds recorded near Todra Gorge.

European Serin*Serinus serinus*

Most sightings were of small numbers recorded on the first 3 days of the tour, including good views on the way up to Oukaimeden.

Eurasian Siskin*Spinus spinus*

This species is a scarce bird in this part of Morocco. We were able to find a number of birds on the first day as we headed up towards Oukaimeden.

Buntings Emberizidae**Corn Bunting***Emberiza calandra*

We had a roadside stop between Agadir and Ouarzazate, where we found a number of singing individuals that we scoped.

Rock Bunting*Emberiza cia*

We found good numbers at roadside stops on our way up to Oukaimeden. A few other individuals were seen at scattered locations later on the tour, including on the Tiz-n-Tichka Pass on the last day.

Cirl Bunting*Emberiza cirlus*

A beautiful bird that was seen very well during the first day when we recorded a few close birds during our drive up to Oukaimeden. Another showed well east of Agadir in some wheat fields.

House Bunting*Emberiza sahari*

This species was commonly recorded at many different sites on the tour, including good views at Oued Massa and on some old buildings at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Annotated List of Mammals Recorded

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows J. Kingdon, *The Kingdon Field guide to African Mammals* (1997) Academic Press.

Ground Squirrels Rodentia**Barbary Ground Squirrel***Alantocerus getulus*

This species was recorded on at least 3 days, with good views being enjoyed near the Ring Ouzel site at Oukaimeden, near Oued Massa and in Todra Gorge.

True Mice and Rats Gerbils, Spiny Mice, Crested Rat Muridae**North African Gerbil***Psammomys obesis*

This is a group of rodents that has a wide variety of very similar species that can be very hard to distinguish. At least some of the animals we recorded along the Tagdilt Track were this species, whereas some of the similar animals around Erfoud and Erg Chebbi may have been a similar animal.

Wolves, Coyote, Foxes, Jackals Canidae**Red Fox***Vulpes vulpes*

We saw a fantastic adult briefly during our drive up towards Oukaimeden.

Annotated List of Reptile Recorded**Mediterranean Turtle***Mauremys leprosa*

We found a few at Oued Massa.



Rockjumper Birding Ltd
c/o Summit Trust Mauritius Limited
Labourdonnais Village
Mapou
Mauritius
Tel (USA & Canada) toll free: 1-888-990-5552
Email: info@rockjumperbirding.com
Alternative email: rockjumperbirding@yahoo.com
Website: www.rockjumperbirding.com

