



# ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## Tunisia Trip Report

*11<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> February 2015*



El Jem Coliseum by Adam Riley

**Trip Report Compiled by Tour Leader: Mark Beevers**

### **Top 10 birds as voted by participants:**

1. Thick-billed Lark
2. Moussier's Redstart
3. Cream-coloured Courser
4. Greater Hoopoe-Lark
5. Crowned Sandgrouse / Desert Warbler
7. Marbled Duck
8. Little Owl / Eurasian Spoonbill
10. Common Crane / Desert Sparrow

As all the tour participants had arrived the previous day, day one saw a change to the itinerary in that we were able to visit Carthage for the morning. Here we started off by visiting the museum in which there were many artefacts and models of how the area looked back in the day. Thereafter we visited the Roman Theatre, the remains of Roman Villas, the Antonine Baths, the former kings' house and the ancient port area, which was surprisingly small. Although this was a cultural morning



**Moussier's Redstart by Adam Riley**

that will never stop birders looking at birds and we started to pick up a few common Mediterranean species such as Mediterranean and Slender-billed Gulls, Black Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Spotless Starling, Southern Grey Shrike and African Blue Tit. After lunch it was time to get down to some serious birding at Sedjoui Lake, an internationally important wetland. Needless to say it was covered in birds with an estimation of about 10,000 each of Common Shelduck, Northern Shoveler and Greater Flamingo and lesser numbers of Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon and Eurasian Teal, among others. Shorebirds included impressive numbers of

Pied Avocet, Marsh Sandpipers and Ruff, while a Peregrine also flew over. All too soon it was dark and time to return to our hotel.

Day two saw us heading for Cap Bon in the north of the country. As we drove out of the capital we passed Lake Tunis where we saw a couple of Black-necked Grebes amongst many Little Grebes and several Great-crested Grebes. We then headed north through a lush green agricultural landscape seeing typical farmland species such as White Stork, Black-shouldered Kite, Crested Lark, the striking Eurasian Hoopoe, Southern Grey Shrike, Black Redstart and Corn Bunting. We stopped in an area of heathland and coniferous woodland and soon started hearing the calls of Red Crossbill. We had a couple of flyovers and one or two perched up briefly but the views weren't great. Sardinian Warblers were plentiful and in good voice and we soon had great views of this species, but a singing Eurasian Wren proved much harder to see although everyone succeeded in the end. Whilst chasing the wren our first Long-legged Buzzard flew over. While our first picnic of the tour was being prepared we explored a little, finding a few Thekla Larks, male Blue Rock Thrush and our first north-west African endemic in the form of a fine male Moussier's Redstart. A couple of large falcons flew over but were unidentifiable as they were in terrible light, but that wasn't to be the case with the two Long-legged Buzzards that we also saw over our picnic site.



**Blue Rock Thrush by Markus Lilje**

After lunch we headed to the coast for an hour's worth of sea watching which initially was a little slow, although we did find a smart pair of Audouin's Gulls. A few Northern Gannets passed by close inshore



but the real prizes needed a 'scope, and with careful scanning of the distant waves we started to get some success, first with a Scopoli's Shearwater that flew west before finding our second target of the afternoon, a feeding flock of 30 Yelkouan Shearwaters. Whilst waiting for the group to reassemble a party of Eurasian Crag Martins flew over and another male Blue Rock Thrush was found.



White-headed Duck by Ignacio Yufera

It was then time to start making our way back to Tunis, but on the way we also visited a couple of large lakes. The first was Lake Libna where a selection of wildfowl included Gadwall, Northern Pintail and a large flock of Common Pochard. A small group of ducks to the left of the main Pochard flocked caught our attention and a quick look through the 'scope confirmed that we had found eight White-headed Ducks including three males. As things panned out later in the tour that proved to be a very important discovery indeed! Shorebirds were in limited supply but we did find a few Common Snipe and single Green Sandpipers and Ruff. We moved on

to another lake, Laguna Korba, which held many Greater Flamingos, Western Cattle Egrets, several Glossy Ibis and a Eurasian Spoonbill. A female Western Marsh Harrier was quartering the grasslands, which looked as though they should have held dozens of harriers, a Spotted Redshank was the only wader of note and there was a healthy and hungry population of Mosquitoes.

Day three saw us at Zaghouan looking at its Roman temple, from where water from the spring travelled 70 kilometres to ancient Carthage. As we wandered around the area we scored some excellent looks at Red Crossbills perched atop conifer trees and a number of common garden birds including good looks at African Blue Tit, while a few of the group saw the only Great Tit of the tour. An adult Peregrine flew over and another male Blue Rock Thrush was seen. We then drove up the hill towards the radio mast making frequent birding stops en route. Song Thrushes were present in good numbers but seeing one perched proved impossible. We got higher and higher and near the radio tower we were very surprised to find an unexpected flock of Alpine Accentor. A little higher and we found a displaying pair of Black Wheatear before attracting the attention of three soldiers who said we had gone too far. Oops! But to be fair our local guide had the situation under control and we didn't get any grief.

We retraced our steps back down the mountain and headed to Sidi Jdidi, our White-headed Duck stakeout, only to find that the lake had much reduced in size and no White-headed Ducks were present – thank goodness they were already in the bag! Apart from a drake Northern Pintail, some Pied Avocets and Little Stints there was little to keep us there so we elected to move to another wetland, Barrage Boufecha, where we had our picnic lunch. It was a good decision for the lake held a good



Red Crossbill by Adam Riley



selection of water birds, most impressive of which were the three groups of Common Cranes that flew over. Shorebirds were well represented with Pied Avocet, Northern Lapwing, Little Stint, Marsh Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Wood Sandpiper. 80 Common Teal was a reasonable count whilst raptors included a female Western Marsh Harrier and a Long-legged Buzzard. After lunch we moved on to the coast and the vast Thyna salt pans. As expected with salt pans Greater Flamingos were present along with many Black-necked Grebe. We didn't have a lot of time but managed nevertheless to find a few shorebirds including Black-tailed Godwit and Marsh Sandpiper, whilst we also saw the only Common Kingfisher of the tour.



**Desert Lark by Forrest Rowland**

Barbary Partridge and Moussier's Redstart were regularly encountered and we also found another party of Fulvous Babbler. A distant lark on a rocky hillside prompted closer examination and eventually we got exceptional views of two pairs of Desert Larks. Four Eurasian Hoopoes were found and several pairs of Black Wheatear were also seen. Mammals were well represented with many Dorcas Gazelles, Scimitar-horned Oryx and some cute Common Gundi. We had another picnic lunch in the park and made a short visit to the museum before heading back to the coast for a longer exploration of Thyna salt pans. En route we pulled in a quick pit stop at our hotel where we found a pair of Peregrines sitting on a radio mast. The salt pans produced good numbers of shorebirds including Eurasian Curlew, Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank, Grey Plover, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpipers, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint, along with Caspian Tern.

Day five was a bit of a travel day as we drove from the coast south towards the desert and our Berber camp experience. A quick pit stop at Hotel Merhala produced our first House Buntings and a short while later we visited a Troglodyte house, which again held House Buntings. Our drive southwards was uneventful although a roadside stop produced our first Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Temminck's Lark and a pair of Desert Larks. We stopped for lunch in Douz, picked up some supplies and then continued on our way towards J'bil (Jebil) National Park, seeing Brown-necked Raven,



**Fulvous Babbler by Ignacio Yufera**



Bar-tailed Lark, a wintering Tristram's Warbler, Northern Wheatear and our first White-crowned Black Wheatears along the way. We arrived in the Berber camp as darkness was falling but managed to find a fine male Desert Sparrow, which took the pressure off for the following morning.

The next morning we found a pair of Desert Sparrows pre-breakfast, after which we climbed the



**Desert Sparrow by Ignacio Yufera**

nearby sand dunes for a better view of the desert before exploring the J'bil National Park. We found the common desert species fairly easily and soon added Brown-necked Raven, Greater Hoopoe-Lark and Bar-tailed, Temminck's and migrant Greater Short-toed Larks. However some of the harder desert species were eluding us until suddenly everything dropped into place. Firstly we watched a dainty Desert Warbler nest-building and as usual a Desert Wheatear was nearby, then eight distant Cream-coloured Coursers were found and duly 'scoped. When a male Maghreb Wheatear jumped into view everyone was starting to feel that the place was finally delivering. This was followed by our next big find in the form of

a flock of 24 Dotterel on the ground. Not that they stayed there for long as they soon took flight, giving everyone decent flight views as well. More scanning of the desert produced another group of birds on the ground which, upon closer inspection, proved to be a group of 14 Crowned Sandgrouse, a very nice addition to the trip list, thank you very much!

Eventually it was time to leave J'bil as we had a long drive ahead of us. At the park gate we had some good close views of Temminck's Larks and found some more Greater Short-toed Larks along with a male Desert Sparrow. Our drive back towards Douz produced more Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Tristram's Warbler, Desert Wheatear and even a Common Chiffchaff in the desert.

Douz has a number of interesting wetlands and our plan for day seven was to explore a few of these. The first two were very productive and held plenty of birds, especially the first wetland where we found many Marbled Teal and Northern Pintail. There was also a good selection of shorebirds, the most notable being Kentish Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Little Stint, Green Sandpiper and Ruff. A small patch of reed with exposed mud at the base looked perfect for luring out a Water Rail, and so it proved to be as with a bit of playback one popped out to show itself off.

The second wetland held more waders including Little Ringed Plover, Wood and Green Sandpipers, Temminck's Stint and Common Snipe. Several Glossy Ibis flew over, two more Water Rails were seen, Water Pipit gave us the run-around and a couple of Eurasian Reed Warblers were also seen. The third Lake we visited was dry and



**Crowned Sandgrouse by Ignacio Yufera**



the fourth didn't hold much water, but we were nevertheless treated to many Common Cranes flying over and we found our only pair of Ruddy Shelduck for the tour.

Moving on, we passed a wetland that looked interesting and decided to check it out. 'Klebia wetland' as we christened it held more Marbled and Common Teals and a few waders, but more



**Thick-billed Lark** by Chris Tenney

interesting were the three pipits that were in front of us: one each of Red-throated (complete with red throat), Water and Meadow Pipit, which allowed for instructive comparison. We eventually found Jemma wetland except that it wasn't wet but bone dry, so we decided instead to head off to Douz for lunch. Thereafter we continued on our way to the coast and our hotel at Mahres. As we drove along the Gafsa / Gabes road we spotted a small flock of larks and decided to check them out. Good thing we did for, whilst searching for these birds, we also found a pair of Thick-billed Larks and a pair of Red-rumped Wheatears, two species we had missed in the desert and welcome additions to our list. We then continued on our way and

spent the rest of the day looking out for Little Owls, eventually racking up a total of at least 12 individuals.

Day eight was largely a travel day as we relocated from Mahres to Tunis, having changed our destination from Hammamet to allow us more time on the last day of the tour to try a new location. We decided to start at the mudflats north of Mahres, which were teeming with birds. We stopped at a couple of places and our first stop produced Great-crested and Black-necked Grebes, Greater Flamingo and a host of shorebirds including Ringed and Grey Plovers, Curlew Sandpipers and Common Greenshank. Most interesting was an egret which appeared to be a hybrid between Western Reef Egret and Little Egret. Our next viewpoint produced little different apart from a flock of Eurasian Spoonbills and a Turnstone. Probably the most outstanding record however concerned Slender-billed Gulls and we estimated that there were in excess of 1,250, the most ever seen on a Rockjumper tour to North Africa.

We then decided to revisit the saltpans at Thyna, which was a bad move since a tremendous downpour overnight meant the tracks around the pans were treacherous and it took a while to extricate ourselves from the predicament that we had got ourselves into! Our tricky situation meant that our attention was focused on getting the vehicle out safely so little birding was done, while the species seen were the same as on our previous visits. From here we travelled up to El Jem, a stunning Roman amphitheatre and the third largest Coliseum ever built. It has been carefully renovated and preserved and it was eerie walking through the dungeons where, centuries before, gladiators awaited their fate either at the hands of other gladiators or Lions. An impressive place indeed and a worthy component of the itinerary. We also



**Slender-billed Gull** by Adam Riley



saw a few birds including a singing male Black Redstart.

After an excellent lunch in a beautiful restaurant we had to carry on northwards towards Tunis, but on the way we stopped at Hergla fishponds where it was immediately apparent that the place was popular with local herons, with about 180 Little Egrets and 160 Grey Herons. Numerous Slender-billed Gulls were also loafing on the pools and on the opposite side of the road a large stretch of water held an impressive flock of Pied Avocet. We then continued to our hotel in Tunis for our final night's stay.

The last day of the tour saw a change to the itinerary and we drove north to Lake Ichkeul, a site not previously visited by Rockjumper. Our quest was to find Greylag Goose but, despite circumnavigating the lake, we failed to find a single bird. We did however find a few interesting species including many Eurasian Golden Plover, Northern Lapwing, Sky Lark and Corn Bunting. Moving to another area of the lake we then found an unexpected pale phase Booted Eagle, Black-shouldered and Black Kites, as well as a couple of Long-legged Buzzards and a flock of Eurasian Starling. A brief Spectacled Warbler was a leader only sighting but the Cetti's Warbler we saw later provided everyone with good views. Most unexpected were the brief views of a Eurasian Bittern seen twice in flight and by some briefly on the ground as it walked into the reeds, only the second record of this species on a Rockjumper tour to north Africa. Of the rest, Western Marsh Harriers numbered ten and we had a fly past by four Common Cranes. It was a short but productive visit and one which we will hopefully do again.

And that was it, time to head back to Tunis and our flights to Marrakech as everyone was continuing on the standard Morocco tour. During our short visit to Tunisia we had visited some interesting and famous archaeological sites, viewed exquisite marbles and marvelled at Zaghouan, the source of water for Carthage 70 kilometres away. We had also visited some internationally important bird areas (wetlands), two interesting national parks and the great Sahara Desert, where we experienced the delights of our Berber camp. The variety of habitats ensured that we saw a good number of birds and the trip total of 143 exceeded our first tour by 12, setting the benchmark for future tours to this fascinating country.

### **Annotated list of birds recorded: 143 species (1 leader only, 2 client only)**

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC List 5.1. 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*

On our first day we visited Sedjoumi Lake which we found covered with wildfowl amongst which we estimated 10,000 of this species. Other counts paled into insignificance with day totals of 500 split between Lake Tunis, Lake Libna and Laguna Korba on our second day and 500 on our first visit to Thyna. Elsewhere we recorded between 35 and 100 on four other dates. Impressive numbers of this species.

##### **Ruddy Shelduck**

*Tadorna ferruginea*

We found a pair as we toured the Douz wetlands on the fourth un-named lake we visited.

##### **Gadwall**

*Anas strepera*

We counted 100 at Sedjoumi Lake, 50 split between Lake Libna and Laguna Korba with 40 the following day at Barrage Boufecha.

##### **Eurasian Wigeon**

*Anas penelope*

100 were present at Lake Sedjoumi, 100 split between Lake Libna and Laguna Korba and 40 at Barrage Boufecha. 50 were seen on our last morning at Lake Ichkeul.



**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

20 were recorded at Sedjoumi Lake, 50 split between Lake Libna and Laguna Korba with 80 the following day split between Sidi Jdidi and Barrage Boufecha. Four were seen at the Douz wetlands and 20 were at Lake Ichkeul.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

Like Common Shelduck this species was also present in very large numbers thought to be in excess of 10,000 at Sedjoumi Lake. 1000 were split between Lake Libna and Laguna Korba and 100 were split between Sidi Jdidi and Barrage Boufecha. 20 were found at the Douz wetlands and birds were also logged at Lake Ichkeul.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*

20 were present at Lake Libna, a male was at Sidi Jdidi with ten more at Barrage Boufecha and 55 were counted at the Douz wetlands.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*

50 were at Sedjoumi Lake, 100 were split between Lake Libna and Laguna Korba, 80 split between Sidi Jdidi and Barrage Boufecha, 50 around the Douz wetlands and some were also seen at Lake Ichkeul.

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

**Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta augustirostris*

We found good numbers at the Douz wetlands where a total of 125 were seen on the first lake we visited and we found a further ten at a wetland near Klebia.

**Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

Our only sighting was at Barrage Boufecha where there was a flock of 300.

**White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala*

We were very fortunate that we saw eight (three males) distantly at Lake Libna. I say very fortunate because we saw none at our expected site at Sidi Jdidi. Well picked out Real.

**Pheasants & Quails Phasianidae****Barbary Partridge** *Alectoris barbara*

We found several coveys totalling at least 50 birds at Bou Hedma National Park.

**Petrels and Shearwaters Procellariidae****Scopoli's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea*

We saw one fly west past Cap Bon during our sea watch there.

*NOTE: This species has been split into 2 species by IOC, the nominate Scopoli's Shearwater which we saw in Tunisia and Cory's Shearwater Calonectris borealis, which breeds in the Western Mediterranean and Canary Islands. This split is not recognized by Clements.*

**Yelkouan Shearwater** *Puffinus yelkouan*

We saw about 35 during our sea watch at Cap Bon, which looked like it was a feeding flock.

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

60 were seen on Lake Tunis, twenty were at Lake Ichkeul and one or two were seen on two further dates.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

Ten were seen split between Lake Libna and Laguna Korba, 30 were seen at Thyna on our second visit with 45 seen on the sea near Mahres. Single figures were logged for two other dates.

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*

We saw our first two from the moving bus on Lake Tunis but Thyna was the place for this species with 60 logged on our first two visits. We only saw five there on our last short visit but found another 20 on the sea near Mahres.





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

Another species we recorded in very large numbers with an estimate of 10,000 at Sedjoui Lake, 2,000 at Laguna Korba, up to 2,000 on our three visits to Thyna with 300 along the coast at Mahres and 50 at Lake Ichkeul.

**Storks Ciconidae****White Stork***Ciconia ciconia*

Recorded on four dates during the tour including 13 near Sfax, 15 as we drove north towards Hammamet and 15 around Lake Ichkeul on our last morning.

**Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae****Glossy Ibis***Plegadis falcinellus*

A flock of 15 was seen at Laguna Korba and another eight were found at one of the Douz wetlands.

**Eurasian Spoonbill***Platalea leucorodia*

12 were seen at Lake Libna with another at Laguna Korba, up to 20 were seen at Thyna on our three visits and 30 were on the coast near Mahres.

**Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns Ardeidae****Eurasian Bittern***Botaurus stellaris*

One was seen briefly in flight twice and then for a short while on the ground at Lake Ichkeul but not all the group managed to connect with it.

**Squacco Heron***Ardeola ralloides*

One was seen by some of the group from the moving vehicle as were travelling in the Sidi Jdidi / Barrage Boufecha area.

**Western Cattle Egret***Bubulcus ibis*

Recorded on five dates during the tour with up to 50 on three dates and higher numbers on the first two days of the tour with 100 at Sedjoui and 500 split between Lake Libna (200) and Laguna Korba (300).

*NOTE: This group has been split into 2 species by IOC, the nominate Common Cattle Egret (which is what we recorded in Tunisia) and the Asian / Australasian Eastern Cattle Egret E. coromanda. This split is as yet not recognized by Clements.*

**Grey Heron***Ardea cinerea*

Up to 30 on five dates at various wetlands but by far the largest number came from Hergla fishponds where we counted an impressive 160.

**Great Egret***Ardea alba*

Five recorded at Lake Libna with six seen at Thyna and ten at Lake Ichkeul whilst single birds were seen on two other dates.

**Little Egret***Egretta garzetta*

Up to ten recorded on five dates but a very large congregation of 180 at Hergla fishponds.

**Little Egret / Western Reef Heron** *Egretta garzetta / Egretta gularis*

An apparent hybrid was seen at Thyna salt pans on our second visit.

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

Five were seen off Cap Bon and two were offshore from Mahres.

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

Recorded on six dates during the tour 200 logged on our tour of Cap Bon, Lake Libna and Laguna Korba. 70 was our highest count at Thyna with ten noted at Lake Ichkeul.



### Hawks, Kites, Eagles & Vultures Accipitridae

**Black-shouldered Kite** *Elanus caeruleus*

Four were seen as we toured Cap Bon, one was seen from the vehicle whilst travelling the following day and one was seen at Lake Ichkeul on our last morning.

**Booted Eagle** *Hieraetus pennatus*

We had great looks at a pale phase bird over Lake Ichkeul.

**Western Marsh-Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

We saw 30 birds during the tour over six dates with pretty much every wetland producing one but the highest counts were ten on our first day at Lake Sedjoumi with ten on our last day at Lake Ichkeul.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

Rather surprisingly we only saw this species once (and then only briefly) at Lake Ichkeul.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*

Recorded on all but two dates on the tour with single birds on five dates and higher counts of the three in the Cap Bon area and five around Lake Ichkeul.

### Rails, Gallinules & Coots Rallidae

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

Three birds were seen around the Douz wetlands with other birds heard calling.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

Two were seen at Sedjoumi, one was seen at Laguna Korba and three were found around the Douz wetlands.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*

This species was only seen on three dates but the counts were quite high with 400 at Lake Sedjoumi, 1000 split between Lake Libna and Laguna Korba and 2000 at Lake Ichkeul.

### Cranes Gruidae

**Common Crane** *Grus grus*

We had flocks of 50, 19 and three at Barrage Boufecha, a total of 107 flew over the Douz wetlands and four were found near Lake Ichkeul.

### Oystercatchers Haematopidae

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

12 were seen at on the coast north of Mahres.

### Stilts & Avocets Recurvirostridae

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

We found this species on a number of wetlands such as Sedjoumi where the highest count for the tour was 50. Otherwise up to 30 a day recorded at places such as Lake Libna, Laguna Korba, Barrage Boufecha, the Douz wetlands, Hergla fishponds and Lake Ichkeul.

**Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Three large flocks were seen with 250 at Lake Sedjoumi, 420 at Barrage Boufecha and 240 at Hergla fishponds with one or two on two other dates.

### Plovers & Lapwings Charadriidae

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

30 at Lake Sedjoumi, 20 at Lake Libna, 30 at Laguna Korba, 50 at Barrage Boufecha but the highest count was 100 at Lake Ichkeul.

**Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*

Our decision to go to Lake Ichkeul on our last day paid off when we found a flock of 100 at Lake Ichkeul.

**Black-bellied (Grey) Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*



This species was only seen twice with one at Thyna saltpans and 70 counted on the coast north of Mahres.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

Our first were two at Lake Sedjoui, then we had ten at Barrage Boufecha and two were seen at one of the Douz wetlands.

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*

Two were at Barrage Boufecha and 20 were on the coastal mudflats north of Mahres.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Six were seen at Lake Sedjoui, two were seen at Barrage Boufecha, 15 were found at the various Douz wetlands and 20 present on the mudflats north of Mahres.

**Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus*

The group was extremely pleased to come across a flock of 24 at J'bil National Park.

### Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

The highest count was 20 from around the Douz wetlands and up to ten were seen on four other dates during the tour.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

The first of the tour was a singleton at Lake Sedjoui, followed by three at Barrage Boufecha. A flock of 28 was seen on our first visit to the Thyna saltpans and five were seen there the following day.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata*

30 at Thyna saltpans on our first visit with ten on the coast north of Mahres otherwise single birds on two dates early on in the tour.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

One was seen at Laguna Korba after which ten were seen at Barrage Boufecha, 20 on our first visit to Thyna saltpans with one and four on our subsequent visits and one heard at Lake Ichkeul.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*

One was at Lake Sedjoui, 30 were found at Thyna saltpans on our first visit with 50 on the coast north of Mahres whilst some birds were seen at Lake Ichkeul.

**Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis*

This species was seen in good numbers particularly at Lake Sedjoui where we saw at least 30. Ten were counted at Barrage Boufecha and ten more were seen on our first visit to Thyna saltpans. One to six was seen on three other dates.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

30 were seen at Thyna saltpans on our first visit with 30 on the mudflats north of Mahres. One or two were logged at three other wetlands.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

We saw four at Sedjoui Lake and 15 at the Douz wetlands with singles noted at three other sites.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

Two were found at Sedjoui Lake, eight were around Barrage Boufecha and 15 were scattered around the Douz wetlands.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Two at Barrage Boufecha, ten at Thyna saltpans and two at Hergla fishponds.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

We found four on the rocks at Thyna saltpans and one was seen on the mudflats north of Mahres.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*

This was the commonest small shorebird we encountered with 150 at Sedjoui Lake, 500 at Barrage Boufecha, 200 around the Douz wetlands and 180 at Hergla fishponds with 20 to 50 at three other sites during the tour.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii*



We found eight at one of the Douz wetlands.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

One was found at Thyna saltpans and four were seen on the mudflats north of Mahres.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*

One to four were seen at Lake Libna, Laguna Korba, Barrage Boufecha, Thyna saltpans and the Douz wetlands but by far the highest count was from Sedjoui Lake where we found at least 250.

### Courser & Pratincoles Glareolidae

**Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*

We found 14 of these charismatic waders at J'bil National Park.

### Gulls, Terns and Skimmers Laridae

**Slender-billed Gull** *Chroicocephalus genei*

Our first were two at Sedjoui Lake and we saw no more until we found a massive 1,250 along the coast north of Mahres.

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Recorded on five dates with 50 at Sedjoui Lake, 40 along the coast north of Mahres, 20 at Thyna saltpans and 20 at Lake Ichkeul being the most notable counts.

**Audouin's Gull** *Ichthyaetus audouinii*

Two adults were sat on rocks as we did our sea watch at Cap Bon.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

We found three first winter birds at Lake Sedjoui, which pleased me as this is one of my favourite gulls.

**Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*

Up to 50 recorded on five dates but at Thyna saltpans over 100 were present on our first visit.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus*

Seen at similar locations to the above species with up to 50 on five dates.

**Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia*

Thyna saltpans was the site for this species with 25 on our first visit, 15 on our second and five on our 3rd whilst the only other place we saw any was at Hergla fishponds where we found two.

**Sandwich Tern** *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Two were seen at Sedjoui wetland on our first day, one was picked up during our sea watch at Cap Bon and one was seen north of Mahres on the coast.

### Sandgrouse Pteroclididae

**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis*

We saw two in flight and briefly on the ground at Bou Hedma National Park, which was rather disappointing.

**Crowned Sandgrouse** *Pterocles coronatus*

We had far better views of this species than the above at J'bil National Park. They were first seen just after the Dotterel had flown and initially in the haze we thought this was the Dotterel flock so we went over for a closer look only to be rewarded with a flock of 14 birds, seven males and seven females.

### Doves & Pigeons Columbidae

**Rock Dove** *Columba livia*

Recorded every day in all towns.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

A common resident that was recorded daily.

**Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis*

Another common resident that was recorded daily.



### Owls Strigidae

#### Little Owl

*Athene noctua*

All our birds were seen whilst travelling with one to four on three dates and a very impressive total of a minimum of 12 as we drove towards Mahres from the south at dusk.

### Kingfishers Alcedinidae

#### Common Kingfisher

*Alcedo atthis*

We had a brief view of one at Thyna salt pans but it was pretty flighty.

### Hoopoes Upupidae

#### Eurasian Hoopoe

*Upupa epops*

We saw one or two birds on five dates during the tour but saw about ten during our visit to Bou Hedma National Park.

*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.*

### Falcons & Caracaras Falconidae

#### Eurasian Kestrel

*Falco tinnunculus*

Not uncommon with up to four on all bar one date during the tour with birds often picked up whilst travelling.

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

#### Peregrine Falcon

*Falco peregrinus*

An adult was seen at Sedjoumi Lake, an adult was above Zaghouan and a pair was on a radio mast outside our hotel at Mahres. A bird that was either a Peregrine or Barbary Falcon flew over Cap Bon and two other birds too distant to identify to species level were seen at Zaghouan.

### Shrikes Laniidae

#### Southern Grey Shrike

*Lanius meridionalis*

A common bird with up to ten seen on eight dates but mainly whilst travelling.

*NOTE: This complex, which used to be lumped with Northern Shrike L. excubitor, is being considered for further splitting. These splits would include the nominate Southern Grey Shrike, the migrant Steppe Shrike (L. pallidirostris) and Saharan Shrike (L. leucopygos) which is the form we recorded in Tunisia during our tour. Clements recognizes the split from Northern Shrike but not the further splits of the Southern Grey Shrike group. 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.*

### Crows, Jays & Magpies Corvidae

#### Brown-necked Raven

*Corvus ruficollis*

This is a true desert loving species and we saw our first two as we drove towards J'bil National Park with 15 in the park the following day.

#### Northern (Common) Raven

*Corvus corax*

We saw six above Zaghouan, which proved to be our highest day total. Otherwise two or three were seen on four of the last five days of the tour, usually whilst travelling.

### Tits Paridae

#### Great Tit

*Parus major*

One was seen by a few of the group at Zaghouan.

#### African Blue Tit

*Cyanistes teneriffae*



Our first were two in the grounds of our hotel in Tunis and these were followed by four at Cap Bon, two at Zaghouan and one at Lake Ichkeul.

### Larks Alaudidae

**Greater Hoopoe-Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes*

We found our first as we drove into J'bil National Park and then the following day we found about ten more as we drove around the park, some of which were singing and displaying.

**Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey*

We were really fortunate with this species for unlike Morocco there is no reliable site for them in Tunisia. A chance stop to check out a small flock of larks resulted in stellar views of a pair and they were justifiably voted birds of the tour.

**Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti*

This is not really a lark of the sand deserts as they prefer more rocky terrain and Bou Hedma National Park proved to be perfect for them as we found six there. The following day we found two as we were travelling towards Douz and found another near Douz as we returned from the desert.

**Bar-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes cincturus*

This is a true desert loving species and as expected we found our first birds as we drove into J'bil National Park with ten there the following morning.

**Sky Lark** *Alauda arvensis*

Eight were found at Lake Sedjoui, followed by 40 as we approached Bou Hedma National Park. The small flock of larks that produced our chance sighting of Thick-billed Lark turned out to be 15 of this species and our last were 40 at Lake Ichkeul.

**Thekla Lark** *Galerida theklae*

This lark is more common at higher levels than Crested Lark and we recorded four at our picnic site at Cap Bon with two the following day above Zaghouan. We also saw about ten as we crossed high lands as we travelled south towards J'bil National Park.

**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*

A common & widespread lark which we saw on nine dates with 100 or more seen whilst travelling to Bou Hedma National Park, otherwise up to 20 seen.

**Temminck's Lark** *Eremophila bilopha*

Ten were found as we travelled into J'bil National Park and another 20 as we drove round the park, some of which gave great views.

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*

A total of 18 were seen in J'bil National Park.

**Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Alaudala rufescens*

We only saw his species at Thyna salt pans where a flock of ten was present on our first two visits here with another flock of ten seen in J'bil National Park.

### Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

**Common Bulbul** *Pycnonotus barbatus*

Recorded daily on the first four days north of Mahres and again on the last day around our hotel in Tunis.

*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

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Two were seen at Barrage Boufecha, one was seen a Bou Hedma National Park and another was seen as we travelled towards Douz.

**Eurasian Crag-Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*



Recorded a Cap Bon where we found eight after we had completed our sea watch and saw two at Bou Hedma National Park.

**House Martin***Delichon urbicum*

We saw one at Barrage Boufecha, two more were at the Douz wetlands and six were over Lake Ichkeul.

**Cettia Bush Warblers and allies Cettidae****Cetti's Warbler***Cettia cetti*

The decision to go to Lake Ichkeul paid off for this species too as we had good views of a singing male.

**Leaf Warblers and allies Phylloscopidae****Common Chiffchaff***Phylloscopus collybita*

Small numbers were seen on seven daily with up to 20 a day.

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****Eurasian Reed Warbler***Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

We saw two birds singing at one of the Douz wetlands.

**Cisticolas and allies Acrocephalidae****Zitting Cisticola***Cisticola juncidis*

We saw two at Sedjoumi Lake, ten scattered around Cap Bon, Lake Libna and Laguna Korba, two at the Douz wetlands with others heard at Lake Ichkeul.

**Babblers, Parrotbills Timaliidae****Fulvous Babbler (Chatter)***Turdoides fulva*

This species has the potential to be tricky to find as there are no stakeouts for it so we were very pleased to come across a group of six as we approached Bou Hedma National Park with another group of four in the park. We saw three more as we travelled between Douz and Mahres.

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

A female was found at Sedjoumi Lake and a male was seen at one of our stops en route to Cap Bon, with at least three at Zaghuan. More birds were seen at Bou Hedma National Park, a male was seen somewhere as we were travelling on our penultimate day and three were seen a Lake Ichkeul.

**African Desert Warbler***Sylvia deserti*

We had lovely looks at a singing male in J'bil National Park. For what is a basically brown bird this is an attractive species.

**Tristram's Warbler***Sylvia deserticol*

We found our first during a chance stop on the outskirts of Douz and then found four more during stops on our way out of J'bil National Park. A species endemic to north-west Africa.

**Spectacled Warbler***Sylvia conspicillata*

A leader only record of a brief male at Lake Ichkeul.

**Sardinian Warbler***Sylvia melanocephala*

This was a fairly common species away from the south of the country with birds logged on six dates and a peak count of 20 in the Cap Bon area where we had excellent views of many singing males.

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

One was eventually seen very well by everyone at Cap Bon with another seen by a few the same day. One was seen at Zaghouan with others heard singing at both sites and another heard singing a Lake Ichkeul.

### Starlings Sturnidae

**Spotless Starling** *Sturnus unicolor*

A very common species that was seen every day apart from when we were in the far south with up to 200 a day recorded.

**Eurasian Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

Our visit to Lake Ichkeul produced an unexpected flock of 50.

### Thrushes & Allies Turdidae

**Common (Eurasian) Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

A common species that was seen daily except on the two days that we were in the far south with up to 40 a day recorded.

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*

Three were seen at Cap Bon and at least 30 were seen at Zaghouan with another at Lake Ichkeul but trying to see one on the ground was impossible and all were seen in flight.

### Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

This species was surprisingly common and unlike the birds in Morocco refreshingly obliging. We logged this species on all dates apart for the two days when we were in the far south with 20 logged at Cap Bon.

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Four were seen around Sedjoumi Lake with two the following day at Cap Bon and two at Zaghouan. A male was singing at El Jem and a female was seen at Lake Ichkeul.

**Moussier's Redstart** *Phoenicurus moussieri*

This beautiful north-west African endemic was first seen at Cap Bon where Michelle found a male. Our next was another male at Sidi Jdidi but then the following day as we drove round Bou Hedma National Park we found about 15. Another male was seen on our last morning at Lake Ichkeul.

**Blue Rock-Thrush** *Monticola solitarius*

We found a male just before our picnic at Cap Bon and another male as we resumed from our sea-watching later that day but the only other bird we saw was a male at Zaghouan the following day.

**European (Common) Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola*

This was another fairly common species with records on five dates including 20 around Cap Bon and up to ten at various places on the remaining dates.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe Oenanthe*

We found one as we drove towards J'bil National Park and found another in the park itself the following day.

**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*

A male was found in Bou Hedma National Park, four were seen as we drove down to J'bil National Park the following day with another seven in J'bil National Park on our morning drive around the park.

**Red-rumped Wheatear** *Oenanthe moesta*

This was another bonus species for us that came about during a stop to check a flock of larks for whilst we were searching for the larks a fine pair popped up in front of us. A most productive short stop.

**Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucura*

Unlike the next species this species favours higher altitudes and also more rocky terrain so it was expected that we would find some above Zaghouan where indeed we found three. Similarly Bou





Hedma National Park was also expected to produce a few and it delivered ten. One was seen as we drove over a high pass on the way to Douz and another was seen on the way back to Mahres.

**White-crowned Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga*

Three males were seen on the way into J'bil National Park and another male was seen in the park the following day.

**Maghreb Wheatear** *Oenanthe lugens*

A smart male was seen in J'bil National Park, although it quickly disappeared. This can be a tricky species to find so this bird was well received.

### Old World Sparrows Passeridae

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

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

**Desert Sparrow** *Passer simplex*

A major target of the tour and one we found with ease at our Berber camp where we had great views of a male on our arrival with a pair there the following morning and another male at the entrance gate to J'bil National Park later the same day.

### Accentors Prunellidae

**Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris*

Probably the real surprise of the tour was when we went up to the radio station above Zaghouan. Here we disturbed a flock of six to eight, one of which was very cooperative and provided us with excellent views.

### Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

This species was a very common bird during the tour with up to ten birds seen daily.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

20 were seen at Sedjoui Lake and ten were seen the following day at Laguna Korba with one or two on four more dates.

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*

One, complete with red throat, was an unexpected find by Derrick at a wetland near Klebia. It was accompanying singletons of both the above and below species.

**Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta*

Another unexpected find was the bird that we saw at the wetland near Klebia as the only other ones we have seen previously in Tunisia were on the coast.

### Siskins, Crossbills & Allies Fringillidae

**Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

Ten were found at Cap Bon and a further ten were seen at Zaghouan, otherwise two at Lake Ichkeul.

**Trumpeter Finch** *Rhodopechys githagineus*

A pair gave good views as we approached Bou Hedma National Park.

**European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*

A reasonably common bird with up to ten logged on five dates from various sites.

**Common Linnet** *Linaria cannabina*

30 were seen at Lake Ichkeul with ten noted at Cap Bon and Zaghouan and two were seen near Douz.

**Red Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*

We had great looks at two pairs at Zaghouan, which made up for the flighty views we had the day before of three males and four females at Cap Bon.

**European Serin** *Serinus serinus*



The commonest finch on the tour with daily records apart from when in the far south with 30 at Cap Bon and Lake Ichkeul. Otherwise up to 20 on five other dates.

### **Buntings Emberizidae**

#### **Corn Bunting**

*Emberiza calandra*

Four were seen at Cap Bon and another was heard at Lake Libna. But Lake Ichkeul provided us with the highest numbers and the best views with 30 logged during the morning.

#### **House Bunting**

*Emberiza sahari*

We found two at a hotel that we stopped at briefly, one during a visit to the Troglodyte House and had another in the Douz wetlands.

## **Annotated List of Mammals Recorded**

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

### **Cattle, Antelope, Sheep, Goats Bovidae**

#### **Addax**

*Addax nasomaculatus*

We couldn't find any at Bou Hedma National Park but that was compensated for at J'bil National Park where we found two.

#### **Dorcas Gazelle**

*Gazella dorcas*

50 were seen in small groups at Bou Hedma National Park.

#### **Scimitar-horned Oryx**

*Oryx dammas*

We had good views of 25 in Bou Hedma National Park.

### **Gundis Ctenodactylus**

#### **Gundi**

*Ctenodactylus gundi*

We had some good looks a seven of these cute critters, which look a bit like a Hyrax in Bou Hedma National Park.

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