



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Tunisia

The Jewel of North Africa

27th February to 9th March 2024 (12 days)



El Jem Coliseum by Adam Riley

Tunisia, the gem of North Africa, is an isle of tranquillity wedged between the turbulent countries of Algeria and Libya. Due to its strategic position, it has had its fair share of turmoil in times gone by. The Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Ottomans and French have all had their impact and contributed to a rich and varied culture. Tunisia is now one of Africa's most wealthy and developed countries and the epitome of a progressive Arab nation. Upon arrival at Tunis, one is immediately struck by the verdance of the landscape, which teems with birds. Tunisia's protected areas and agricultural fields support a large population of both resident species and wintering migrants.

On this tour we will visit several spectacular sites, ranging from towering mountains, desert oases and vast tidal salt pans. Some of the highlight species are the endangered White-headed and Marbled Duck, Yelkouan Shearwater, Bonelli's Eagle, Cream-colored Courser, Greater Hoopoe-Lark and Desert Sparrow. We will also get the opportunity to observe some really endangered North African mammals, including the spectacular Addax, Scimitar-horned Oryx, Dama and Dorcas Gazelle and the hamster-like Gundi. We cannot ignore the archaeological treasures of Tunisia, and we will also visit several world-famous sites, from the Punic City of Carthage, the Roman Empire's 3rd largest Coliseum and Muslim medinas (walled cities). With comfortable accommodations, great food, friendly people, impressive antiquities and abundant birds, time spent in Tunisia could not be more pleasurable!

For the intrepid birder or adventurer, we have added a very short extension into Algeria to find the endemic Algerian Nuthatch.

THE TOURS AT A GLANCE...

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	Arrival in Tunis
Day 2	Carthage & afternoon birding at Lake Sedjoumi
Day 3	Day trip to Cap Bon
Day 4	Tunis to Mahres via Zaghouan
Day 5	Day visit to Bou Hedma National Park
Day 6	Mahres to Jebil National Park via Douz
Day 7	Jebil National Park to Douz
Day 8	Douz to Mahres
Day 9	Mahres to Tunis via El Jem
Day 10	Visit Lake Ichkeul and return to Tunis
Day 11	Tunis to Tabarka via Sadjenane
Day 12	Tabarka to Tunis and depart



ROUTE MAP...



TOUR IN DETAIL...



White-headed Duck by Ignacio Yufera

Day 1: Arrival in Tunis. Today is set aside as an arrival day in Tunis. This evening we will meet at dinner to discuss our forthcoming adventure of North Africa.

Day 2: Carthage and afternoon birding at Lake Sedjoui. This morning we will commence with our explorations of Carthage.

Tunis the capital, lies on the corner of Tunisia and is home to 1.5 million of Tunisia's 8 million citizens. This morning after breakfast we visit the remains of ancient Carthage which will without doubt be a highlight of this tour. The Tophet or Sanctuary of Tanit is one of the only remaining sites from Punic Carthage.

This location is considered to have been the most sacred site of this vanished civilization. Small carved stele, each supposedly representing a child sacrifice, and many urns have been found here with the remains of small children. A visit to a dank cave-like structure where these practices are thought to have occurred is quite eerie. The Romans used the child-sacrificing practices of the Carthaginians as one of their main reasons for almost completely destroying the Carthaginian city. The outline of the Punic Ports, where the Carthaginians set sail to challenge Rome, can still be seen and are quite incredible structures. There were two harbours, the northern one was the naval base, with a central island being the naval headquarters. The entire harbour was surrounded by a high wall and was said to hold over 200 warships!

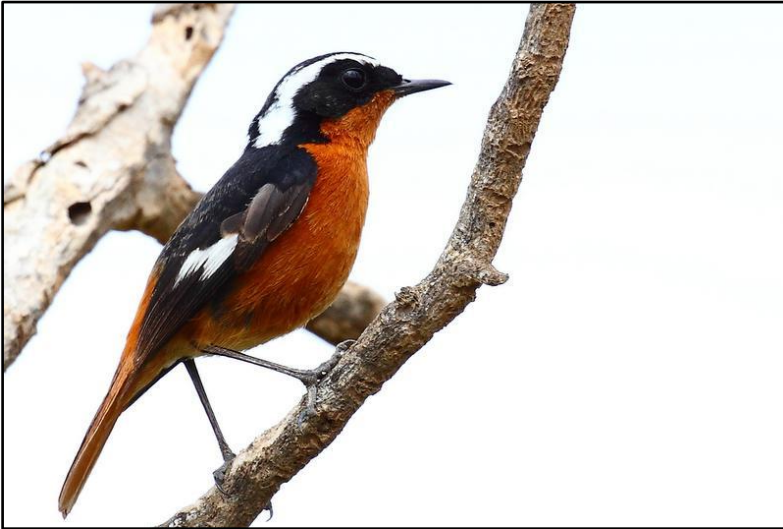
We will also take time out to enjoy the expansive view of Carthage and Tunis from Bursa Hill. The national museum also resides here, and the Punic displays are especially good. Some amazing Roman mosaics and statues are also on display. Another highlight of Carthage is the vast Antonine Baths. Water sourced from the Zaghouan Mountain, 70km away, was delivered by aqueduct in large volumes and heated here for the public baths. The immense scale of the operation is still evident in the extensive ruins, indicating what a vital part these baths played in the Roman society.

Whilst exploring these ruins of Carthage, we should also find some interesting birds in these well-wooded areas. Species recorded here in the past include Eurasian Collared Dove,



Fulvous Babbler by Clayton Burne





Moussier's Redstart by Glen Valentine

Dunnock – a rare winter migrant to Africa, European Greenfinch and European Serin.

After lunch we will make a visit to the fabulous Lake Sidjoumi which is an IBA (Important Bird Area) often teeming with waterfowl.

Day 3: Day trip to Cap Bon. We will have a full day to explore the Cap Bon area. This area offers us a chance for some sea-watching as well as a number of species we are unlikely to see elsewhere. Our sea-watching possibilities include Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwater, European Storm

Petrel, Audouin's, Mediterranean, Great Black-backed Gull and Little Gulls, Eurasian Shag, Great Skua and even Red-breasted Merganser. In the surrounding countryside we will keep a watch for Western Swamphen, Eurasian Stone-curlew, Calandra and Thekla Lark, Rock Pipit, Southern Grey Shrike, Black-crowned Tchagra, African Blue Tit, Moussier's Redstart and Dunnock. Moustached, Grasshopper and Marmora's Warbler, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Barbary Falcon, Short-eared Owl and Reed Bunting have all been recorded in this area, so there is good potential for something unusual.

Day 4: Tunis to Mahres via Zaghuan. Today we travel south towards the coastal resort of Mahres via Sfax, (the second largest city in the country). Once we leave Tunis, we pass through lush fields and expansive olive groves. Tunisia boasts more olive trees than any other country in the world! Birds occur in good numbers and we will make regular stops as we find species of interest. A common feature of the countryside is the massive White Stork nests balanced atop the roofs of buildings.

Our first scheduled stop will be Zaghuan Mountain. The town of Zaghuan nestles at the base of the mountain and is famous for the Roman temple at the source of the spring that supplied ancient Carthage with its entire water supply. In those days an aqueduct stretched for an incredible 70km to Carthage and parts of it can be seen today. The architectural design of the aqueduct is a superb example of Roman ingenuity as it ran a constant downhill the entire route, through hills and valleys. Birds we will search for here include Barbary Partridge, Little Owl which are usually found sunning themselves on rock walls, Ring Ouzel,



Scimitar-horned Oryx by Phil Perry





Egyptian Nightjar by Clayton Burne

the beautiful Moussier's Redstart (a North African endemic), Common Blackbird, Blue Rock Thrush, African Blue Tit, Red Crossbill and Rock Sparrow. Raptors are prevalent, and we hope to see Egyptian Vulture, Bonelli's and Booted Eagle, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Black and Red Kite, and the dashing Barbary Falcon.

Our next stop will be the Sidi Jdidi Wetland. Here we will be looking for the enigmatic White-headed Duck whose numbers have plummeted in the last few decades. Other good birds that we

will be on the lookout for include Little Crake, Water Rail, Western Marsh and Montagu's Harrier, Wood and Common Sandpiper, Ruff, Eurasian Hoopoe, Pallid Swift, Crested Lark, Southern Grey Shrike, Zitting Cisticola, Spotless Starling, Yellow and White Wagtail, beautiful Bluethroat and Red-throated Pipit. If there is time we will make a stop at Mahres Harbour and scan for roosting gulls and terns. In the evening after a full day, we will arrive in Mahres for a two night stay.

Day 5: Day visit to Bou Hedma National Park. We will depart early for Bou Hedma. This National Park was set up to protect the endangered mammals that occur in the deserts of North Africa. Large mammals we will search for include the regal and endangered Addax, Scimitar-horned Oryx and Dorcas and Dama Gazelles. This area is excellent for birds and we will be on the lookout for Common Ostrich (which have been reintroduced here), Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, coveys of attractive Barbary Partridge, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Red-necked Nightjar (at a day roost if we are fortunate), Common Bulbul, Sedge and Spectacled Warbler, Southern Grey and Woodchat Shrike, family groups of the uncommon Fulvous Babbler, Chaffinch (of the green-backed North African race), House Bunting and Gundi – an unusual and rather endearing rodent. Gundis belong to a family endemic to northern Africa.

In the late afternoon we will return to Mahres and, time-permitting, we will bird the expansive Thyna Salinas (saltworks) for roosting gulls and terns. Wading birds and waterfowl also occur in good numbers and we can expect to find Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Stone-curlew, Eurasian Spoonbill, Common Shelduck,



Tristram's Warbler by Adam Riley





Greater Hoopoe-Lark by Clayton Burne

Pied Avocet, Common Ringed and Kentish Plover, Sanderling, Dunlin, Curlew and Marsh Sandpiper, Slender-billed and Yellow-legged Gull as well as Caspian and Little Tern.

Day 6: Mahres to Jebil National Park via Douz. An early start today will have us driving south-west to the vast Jebil National Park for an adventurous night spent at a Bedouin-style tented camp deep in the desert. From our remote base we will explore the park for such desert specials as the endangered Houbara Bustard (now very rare), Cream-colored Courser, Eurasian Dotterel (seen on all previous tours), Egyptian Nightjar, Thick-billed, Desert, Greater Hoopoe and Temminck's Larks, Mourning and Red-rumped Wheatear, African Desert Warbler, the beautiful Desert Sparrow and Brown-necked Raven. Several species of sandgrouse occur and we will be on the lookout for Black-bellied, Spotted, Crowned and Pin-tailed. Mammals including gazelles, the cute Fennec Fox and lightning fast Jerboas occur. An evening star-gazing in the pristine solitude of the desert promises to be very special indeed.

Day 7: Jebil National Park to Douz. We will spend this morning enjoying the beauty of the Sahara Desert (allowing for excellent photo opportunities) and its avian specialties. After lunch we will then make our way back to Douz for a nights stay. En route to Douz we will bird amongst tamarisk bushes growing alongside temporary pools to look for Fulvous Babbler, Tristram's and Sardinian Warbler and House Bunting. These pools (depending on water levels) often hold various duck and wader species and in particular we will be on the lookout for the globally threatened Marbled Duck.

Day 8: Douz to Mahres. Today we will have the opportunity to bird various wetlands in search of any species we may not yet have seen. This will include time to scan the Thyne Saltpans where we have opportunities for a number of waders including Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone and Dunlin. Other species we may see here include Eurasian Spoonbill, Caspian Tern, Mediterranean Gull, Common Shelduck and wintering Water Pipits.



Crowned Sandgrouse by David Hoddinott





Red-rumped Wheatear by Markus Lilje

Day 9: Mahres to Tunis via El Jem.

We will have some time for birding stops *en route* this morning. Later in the day we will spend time at the awe-inspiring Roman Amphitheatre at El Jem. This remarkably well-preserved monument is the third largest amphitheatre ever built by the Romans and not much smaller than the Colosseum in Rome. It is recognised as the greatest Roman building in the whole of North Africa and it seated 30,000 spectators in its heyday! Exploring its dungeons and high look-outs is an enjoyable and fascinating experience. We will overnight at a comfortable hotel in

Tunis.

Day 10: Visit Lake Ichkeul and departure. After an early breakfast, we will pay a visit to the impressive Lake Ichkeul. Here we will again have the opportunity to see many species of waterbirds. Amongst the rarer species we have found here are Eurasian Bittern, Water Rail and Greylag Goose. After lunch we will head back to Tunis for the night.

Day 11: Tunis to Tabarka via Sadjenane. We'll spend the day birding very close to the Algerian border, searching for the elusive Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper, Great-spotted Woodpecker (of the very attractive *numidus* race) and the regional endemic, Levallant's Woodpecker.

The Cork Oak forests are also host to Common Firecrest, Great, Coal and African Blue Tits, Corn and Cirl Buntings, Eurasian Siskin, Eurasian Wryneck, Black-crowned Tchagra, Common Wood Pigeon and Sardinian Warbler. We'll spend the evening in the town of Sadjenane.



Levallant's Woodpecker by David Hoddinott

Day 12: Tabarka to Tunis and depart. We have another morning to bird the Tabarka area before making our way back to Tunis Airport in the afternoon where the tour will conclude.



Optional Extension. Guests wishing to search for Algerian Nuthatch - can contact our Tailor-made team to arrange a short extension to Algeria. This extension can be arranged before or after our scheduled tour to the Tunisia tour, or as a stand-alone tour. Below is a sample itinerary of a typical trip.

Day 1: Tunis to Tabarka. This afternoon is primarily set aside for travel. We expect to reach the border town of Tabarka early this evening.

Day 2: Tabarka to Djimla Forest. We cross into Algeria shortly after breakfast this morning and continue the drive to Djimla Forest (also known as Bouafrane Forest). On arrival, we shall head for the base of Djimla Forest. After a short, steep hike we will enter virgin Oak forest, home of our much-desired quarry. It shouldn't be too long before we find our first Algerian Nuthatch, in fact the species can be considered quite common here. Other species we come across in this quite stunning forest include Short-toed Tree-creeper, African Blue Tit, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and a trio of woodpeckers; Levillant's, Greater Spotted and Lesser Spotted.

Day 3: Djimla Forest to Tunis and depart. We have another morning to bird the forests of Djimla for more views of Algerian Nuthatch, or any other species of interest. By mid-day we shall depart the forest and start the journey back to Tunisia. We make luck out and find Barbary Ape, Barbary Partridge or Moussier's Redstart en route. We expect to arrive at Tunis Airport in the late evening where the tour will conclude.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 12;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings as per the itinerary;
- Ground transportation;
- All entrance fees;
- All guiding services; and
- Tips for local guides and services.

The tour fee does not include:

- **ANY** flights (see above);
- Visa fees;
- Any drinks;
- Telephone calls, laundry and items of a personal nature; and
- Special gratuities.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.



IMPORTANT NOTES:

- a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.
- b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.
- c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
- d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tippling: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Special Notes:

- It is important for you to be aware that it can get very hot in the far south of the country, where temperatures could reach around 43°C (110°F). Since we do not have any strenuous walks on this tour, it is however manageable. It can also get very cold at night and plummet to freezing.
- Most of the historic sites that we will visit on this tour are extremely popular tourist attractions and we will share the area with multitudes of other people. Patience will be required at times.
- There may be times at historical sites when many tourist police will be clearly visible.
- While this is a tour with a dual focus on birds as well as antiquities, we may not be able to provide alternative activities as options for non-birders on some days when the focus is more on birding in remote areas. On other days the focus is very much on antiquities, with very little birding possible. Furthermore, while we will have a specialist bird tour leader from Rockjumper on the tour, we will rely on local leaders for the historical aspects of the tour.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include ANY airfares. The Tunisia begins with an arrival dinner on day 1 and will conclude by late afternoon on day 1. International departure flights should not be made before **18:00**.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Tunis Carthage International Airport, Tunis (IATA: TUN), is the main port of entry for this tour and is well serviced by several airlines. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

