Morocco
Atlas to Sahara
22nd February to 4th March 2018 (11 days)
Trip Report

Day one, and before first light we were on our way out of Marrakech and heading for the snow-covered High Atlas that lay in front of us as dawn broke. It was immediately obvious that there had been heavy snowfall recently, as the High Atlas mountains were covered in the white stuff, and I immediately wondered how this would impact our chances of seeing some of our targets. Our first stop was at Ait
Ourir, where we sometimes find Western (Eurasian) Jackdaws, here at the southern end of their range. This wasn’t to be the case this year, but we did find 40 Cattle Egrets on the river, along with a female Common Stonechat. Our first stop on our ascent to Oukaimeden produced a lovely pair of Moussier’s Redstart, along with a mixed flock of Crag and House Martins and a pair of Cirl Buntings.

Continuing up the valley, our second roadside stop produced both Levaillant’s Woodpecker and Great Spotted Woodpecker, along with a female Moussier’s Redstart. I then picked up the call of a Firecrest, here at a new location for them. It wasn’t long before the group was having point-blank views of this gorgeous little species, which is always a favourite on the tour. As we neared the top of the road, a Bonelli’s Eagle flew over, followed shortly after by our first Long-legged Buzzard of the tour. Not much further on, and at our scheduled stop, we soon found a Mistle Thrush, several Coal Tits and a very elusive Hawfinch, which only gave itself up to a few. Moving on to the ski-resort, we quickly added Red-billed and Alpine Choughs to the list, as another Long-legged Buzzard appeared overhead.

We went to a local café for lunch, but despite the amount of snow it was warm in the sun, so we elected to eat our first tajines outside. After a very nice meal, we set about trying to find our targets; and as alluded to earlier, my concerns about the amount of snow were soon realised. Firstly, there was a lot of snow and the knock-on effect, given that it is a ski resort, is that there was an awful lot of people. Even so, both species of chough continued to put on a good show, and a couple of Long-legged Buzzards gave great perched views. All very nice, but what of the targets? African Crimson-winged Finches were soon notched up, but we couldn’t find any Horned Larks or any of the brown-backed migrant European race of Common Chaffinch – and I suspect the amount of the snow was the reason, rather than the number of people present. We decided to try for Ring Ouzel and Alpine Accentor, but failed with both. Though, on the walk up (too much snow to drive up), we did find a several Black Wheatears, three Black Redstarts and about ten Rock Sparrows. We bumped into another tour group who told us where they had seen a single Horned Lark, so we decided to go try for that. It wasn’t long before we were having great looks at our only one of the trip. The weather was getting worse, so it was time to start going down the hill, but not before we stopped for looks at the local pair of White-throated Dippers, which duly obliged, as did two pairs of Alpine Accentors, here much lower than usual. That was it, day one over. Reasonably
satisfied with our efforts given the weather and crowds, we dropped down the hill to our newly discovered and rather nice hotel for the night.

Day two of the tour is always a long day, as we relocate to Agadir some 450 kilometres away, but at least it allows for the tired traveller to catch up on some sleep. Still, it’s not all driving, and our day was to be punctuated with numerous roadside stops, the first of which was for a very showy male Levaillant’s Woodpecker that posed well for the assembled crowd below him. Continuing on our way, we soon started to see Crested Larks, and as we came into Asni we saw our first White Stork nests. We didn’t stop for either, as we were sure to see many more during the tour. Our first scheduled stop was at a derelict lodge (and overgrown garden) in the small town of Ouirgane. After a bit of searching, we found a cooperative pair of Hawfinches and a pair of rarely encountered Eurasian Siskins. A Grey Wagtail, male Blackcap, a couple of African Blue Tits and a couple of House Buntings kept us occupied whilst we searched for the Hawfinches, but once they were in the bag we were off heading towards the wonderfully scenic Tiz-n-Test pass.

As we travelled up the lower section of the pass, we encountered a Eurasian Sparrowhawk and some Eurasian Crag Martins; and then we stopped for a quick look at the 11th-century Tinmal Mosque. A quick stop shortly after leaving the mosque produced another sparrowhawk, and our only Song Thrushes of the trip. Onwards and upwards, we carried on, passing a female Blue Rock Thrush and then stopping for a distant view of an immature Golden Eagle – another species which is always great to get on the list. We used to stop at the top of the pass for one reason, to take photos of the winding road below us, but over recent tours the stop has become very relevant for other reasons, namely the opportunity to search for Ring Ouzel and Aoudad, which is the local name for Barbary Sheep. We quickly found three Ring Ouzels, which showed well, and also picked up Eurasian Jay, Coal Tit and a pair of Firecrests. It was the time to search the high peaks for the ever-elusive Aoudad. Before long, right on the highest ridge, we spotted five, including a shaggy-bearded male. Result, and for the third tour in a row we’d scored! As a bonus, we also saw three adult Wild Boars, plus five stripy piglets.

Lunch was taken at the aptly named La Belle Vue Restaurant, perched high on the escarpment at 2,100 metres, overlooking the distant Souss plain. The traditional Berber Tagine was pretty impressive, too, and very tasty indeed. Lunch over, and after looking at a displaying Long-legged Buzzard, we set off.
down the long series of switchbacks, heading for the Souss plain – a former haunt of Dark-chanting Goshawk and Tawny Eagle, sadly no longer available in Morocco. We pressed on, for we wanted to get to the fabulous Oued Souss with daylight to spare. So, along the way, we ignored Maghreb Magpie and Southern Grey Shrike. We arrived at the estuary with 90 minutes of daylight left, and quickly checked through the throng of gulls, finding 50 Mediterranean Gulls, three Slender-billed Gulls and 30 Sandwich Terns. As doing so, I soon found a far more interesting gull: a first winter Little Gull – a species that I only added to my Africa list last year at this very same site, but a different bird, as the last one was an adult. Now that was a bonus bird for the trip. Larger wading birds included a flock of 280 Greater Flamingos and three Eurasian Spoonbills; whilst amongst a selection of shorebirds, we found 20 Black-winged Stilts, ten Pied Avocets, and Grey, Ringed and Kentish Plovers. Amongst 20 Dunlin, we found six Little Stints and a solitary Knot; whilst Common Redshanks, six Common Greenshank, six Eurasian Curlews, and three Bar-tailed and 25 Black-tailed Godwits were also added. Overhead, we also had an Osprey. As dusk fell, it was time to turn our attention inland; but try as we might, we all had to make do with hearing Eurasian Stone-Curlew and Red-necked Nightjar before we headed for our hotel.

Day three, pelagic day! After a lie in (“What? On a Rockjumper tour?!?” I hear people say!), we assembled at the marina and after a few brief formalities, we were heading out to sea in the direction of America. Inshore, waters produced hundreds of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, fewer Yellow-legged Gulls and several each of Audouin’s and Mediterranean Gulls, plus a few Sandwich Terns. As we got further from the shore (and eventually we were 25 kilometres offshore), we started to pick up or first Northern Gannets and then we disturbed an immature pale-phase Pomarine Jaeger, which didn’t hang around. It seemed pretty quiet, but then the excitement kicked in as a first winter Black-legged Kittiwake flew past the boat – which certainly pleased yours truly, as it was an unexpected Africa tick. We started to pick up more maritime species, especially once we started to chum, and soon European Storm Petrel, Great Skua and our first Balearic Shearwater started to appear. After a lovely fish lunch, we headed back to shore, picking up more Balearic Shearwaters, then four Manx Shearwaters and a dark-phase adult Parasitic Jaeger, which attacked one of the Balearics.
After a quick pit stop at the hotel, we headed north to Tamri, home of the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis or Waldrapp. Before heading to the ibis area, we stopped at Oued Tamri, which at the end of the day proved to be a good decision, for we did see four ibis on the hillside opposite. Other birds on the estuary included, rather unexpectedly, five Ferruginous Ducks and a male Western Marsh Harrier. Heading to the ibis area, we searched and searched, to no avail for the feeding flock of the ibis. However, I did see a very distant flock of ten flying north over the sea. During the search, I flushed a Common Quail whilst the rest of the group found a Woodchat Shrike. A female Western Marsh Harrier and a flock of ten Spanish Sparrows were also seen, and then a flock of 80 Greater Flamingos migrating north and a Northern Raven rounded the day off.

Day four is often the day when we log the highest number of species on the tour; but it requires an early start, for we need to be at Oued Massa no later than 07:40. We were late, but not too late for our target birds, the wintering flock of 25 Common Cranes, which hadn’t walked over the ridge yet. They were still present, albeit rather distantly. Most unusually, by mid-morning they flew down to the estuary, giving me some of the best views I’ve ever had in Morocco. The reason we were late was because we stopped on the access road to Oued Massa to look at several Eurasian Stone-curlews. Still, with the early morning target in the bag, it was time to set about finding our other targets. Our first stop produced good views of Moussier’s Redstart, Sardinian Warbler and awesome views of a singing Cetti’s Warbler – a bird more often heard than seen.

Moving on to the main car park, we set off on our walk towards the river mouth and soon started picking up migrants, such as females of both Western Marsh and Montagu’s Harriers and our first Western Subalpine Warbler. Sardinian Warblers seemed to be everywhere, as did European Serins – the tinkling songs accompanying us most of the way, and we also had quite a few European Greenfinches and Common Linnets. We tried for several Eurasian Wrynecks. Although they came in, none showed well; and neither did several calling Black-crowned Tchagra, although we did see one displaying. On the river, we found three Ruddy Shelduck and 12 Eurasian Spoonbills – but the river is not what it used to be, and this was a disappointing return.

We continued towards the coast, picking up three Glossy Ibis and, in the distance, a flock of 50 Northern Bald Ibis. Unfortunately, they were lost to view as soon as I found them. Several Eurasian Hoopoes were seen on the walk, and as we neared the estuary mouth, we found a few Grey Plovers and Sanderlings but not the hoped-for Waldrapp – which I have seen in the past there. Almost 150 Audouin’s Gulls were roosting, with Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a couple of Slender-billed Gulls, along with 70 or more...
Sandwich Terns. Our walk back was fairly uneventful, though we did flush a pair of Barbary Partridge, had a flyover Osprey, and saw two European Robins and a Tree Pipit. On our way out, we had a look at a cute Little Owl before relocating to another site further upstream, where the target, Brown-throated Martin, put in an appearance along with a Sand Martin — which made for a nice comparison. We also found a Squacco Heron, which is a species rarely encountered at this time of year, and we heard several Common Quail and found another female Western Marsh Harrier. We went for lunch at the Paradise Berbere restaurant, where we were treated to another excellent lunch (excellent food was enjoyed throughout the tour), and then it was time for the drive back to Oued Souss for our late afternoon birding session. Arriving in good time, we had sufficient time to walk out to the distant pools near the estuary mouth, where we quickly located a flock of 30 Marbled Ducks — an increasingly hard to find species, given that various previous sites no longer produce the goods. Other species of wildfowl on these pools included 13 Common Shelduck and six Eurasian Teal, and there was a good selection of shorebirds, including plenty of Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilts and Ruffs and a couple of Spotted Redshanks. Indeed, our time on the estuary produced some very good totals, and hidden amongst the throng of regular species we found a few Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Red Knot and Little Stints. The plover flock held over 100 Ringed Plovers and at least 70 Kentish Plovers; and in and amongst the 100+ Dunlin, we found 40 or more Sanderling, along with 30 Oystercatchers.

Having searched through the shorebird flock, we returned to the car park for another gulling session as we waited for night to fall. 110 Greater Flamingos were still present, and a flock of 80 Eurasian Spoonbills flew over us several times, as did a flock of 40 Common Shelduck, a couple of Ospreys and three Glossy Ibis. Gull numbers were much reduced, with just a handful of Mediterranean Gulls present, but over 60 Sandwich Terns flew down the river. As dusk approached, 200 or more White Storks dropped in to roost on the opposite side of the river, and several hundred Black Kites in the air made an impressive sight. As soon as it got dark enough, we tried again for Red-necked Nightjar and this time we were successful, as one snuck in behind us. One of the group caught a glimpse of it and then we found eye-shine; but before we could get onto it properly, it took flight and sailed back towards the golf course. At least everyone

White-crowned Wheatear by Glen Valentine

Little Owl by Markus Lilje
got flight views of it. With our quarry in the bag, it was time to call it a day, and we returned to the hotel for dinner.

Day five is another long travel day, as we leave the coast and head east and inland. As we left town, we picked a few Eurasian Magpies and Spotless Starlings, and then an abrupt stop was called for as we found two Eurasian Thick-knees. A short while later another roadside stop was called for, as we scored our first Fulvous Babblers – although the views were a bit distant. Continuing inland, our rest stop at Auberge Saffron produced a pair of Blue Rock Thrushes and, shortly afterwards, we found an adult Peregrine beside the road with a nearby flock of thirty or so Spanish Sparrows. Our route to Ouarzazate, where we intended to lunch, takes us over a bleak windswept plateau, which normally produces very little. Not so today, as first we came across two groups of Cream-coloured Coursers, totalling 11 birds, followed shortly afterwards by a chunky bird showing a white triangle on the trailing edge of the wing. Immediately recognising it as a nomadic Thick-billed Lark, once more Abdulhak was given the instruction to “stop, stop, stop!” – which, of course, he did. We then set about trying to relocate the bird, which wasn’t that difficult, for we soon discovered that there was at least 70 present – and boy were they cooperative, allowing excellent close views. Whilst chasing them around, a pair of Trumpeter Finches was seen briefly, but only by a few of the group before they did a bunk. With three very good birds unexpectedly nailed, it was time to continue on our way to Ouarzazate, but even as we travelled we continued to pick up decent birds, with a flock of 150 Black Kites, some more Cream-coloured Coursers (ten in all), a Long-legged Buzzard, our first White-crowned Black and Red-rumped Wheatears and a couple of Thekla Larks.

Lunch was a reasonably swift affair (by Moroccan standards) at the Kasbah Café, but the inclement weather meant that we had to dine inside rather than overlooking the restored Kasbah that is opposite the restaurant. After lunch, we ventured down to what used to be a fantastic lake, but which now is very much reduced. Indeed, there has been so much water extracted that now we have to walk a good kilometre or more to get anywhere near the lake shore, and the latter part of that walk involves crossing some very tricky mudflats – as I found out to my cost on our second visit at the end of the tour. And even when we got there, the water’s edge was still a good distance

![Thick-billed Lark by Glen Valentine](image)

![Red-rumped Wheatear by Markus Lilje](image)
Plovers we found single Ringed and Kentish Plovers, along with two feeding Common Snipe. All too soon it was time to hit the road again, as we still had a two-hour drive to our base for the next two nights, the lovely Xaluca Hotel at Boumalne du Dades. En route we found three Short-toed Eagles sat on the top of electricity pylons, and as we approached our destination we drove past a Little Owl.

The Tagdilt track is a famous Moroccan birding site and holds some sought-after desert species. So, on day six, we were out at first light at the delightful rubbish dump, a place littered with millions of plastic bags, much broken glass and packs of rather ferocious looking feral dogs. Unfortunately, the mystique of the place is somewhat shattered by the debris of humanity that abounds, but amongst all this rubbish there were birds to be found. As usual, some of the first species we came across were Temminck’s Horned Lark and Red-rumped Wheatear, and we racked up good numbers of both during the morning. A few Lesser Short-toed Larks and slightly more Greater Short-toed Larks were seen, but the single fly-away Sky Lark was seen by just two of us. Although now no longer a worry, it was still nice to get views of a female Thick-billed Lark, which is one of the principal targets at this site.

After about an hour, we moved on to a different part of the plain, following up a tip that I’d been given the night before about a flock of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. I wasn’t really expecting them to still be where they had been the previous day, but the birding Gods were smiling on us, and we soon found the flock of 40 feeding quietly a hundred metres away. On the opposite side of the road, we found several Cream-coloured Coursers, and as we moved deeper onto the barren plain we found our first Greater Hoopoe-Larks and a couple of Desert Larks. After a long, circular walk searching for Black-bellied Sandgrouse, we eventually found away, making viewing very difficult indeed. A definite ‘scope job, and for much of the time on 60X. Some birds were easy enough to pick out, and we soon counted 40 Ruddy Shelduck, 20 or more Eurasian Teal and 100+ Northern Shoveler, but the female Northern Pintail proved far too difficult for the group to pull out. 200 White Storks and a few Greater Flamingos were also easy to see, but doing anything meaningful with the distant shorebirds was always going to be difficult. We did see Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Black-tailed Godwits and some Greenshank, though. A flock of plovers was nearer; and in and amongst 40 or more Little Ringed

Fulvous Babbler by Clayton Burne

Short-toed Eagle by Adam Riley
four almost back at the vehicle. It was then time for lunch, taken this time on the roof terrace of a hotel in town, during which we saw a Eurasian Sparrowhawk and listened to singing House Buntings.

Suitably refreshed, we then set off for the spectacular Dades Gorge, where we were to search for the north-west African endemic Tristram’s Warbler. On the way up the gorge, we found a Long-legged Buzzard, several Crag Martins, Black Wheatears and a male Blue Rock Thrush. After negotiating a number of sharp hairpin bends, we finally reached the top and set about searching for our quarry, which took more time than usual. But, eventually, our perseverance paid off and we were rewarded with reasonable views of a pair of Tristram’s Warblers at the foot of the slope, after which we returned to base.

On day seven, we headed out along the road and across the Tagdilt Track, seeing both Red-rumped and Desert Wheatears on the way, but without stopping – for our destination was another scenic gorge, this time the Todra Gorge. The magnificent Todra Gorge is a backup site for a couple of species which we had already seen, so we just enjoyed the scenery; although we did find three pairs of Rock Bunting. After a quick coffee, we were on our way again, heading for the town of Errachidia and then Midelt, and the rest of the day was mainly a travel day. However, we did have a couple of scheduled stops. At our first, seemingly random location, we found both Desert and Bar-tailed Larks – which is unusual, as they prefer different habitats. Also in the area, we had excellent looks at Moussier’s Redstart, a couple of male Desert Wheatears, White-crowned Black Wheatears, Southern Grey Shrike and a confiding pair of Trumpeter Finches that were collecting nest material.

After lunch at the Reda restaurant, we headed towards our Streaked Scrub Warbler site near Errachidia, arriving there mid-afternoon. Once again, having primed the group for a long walk in quite hot temperatures, the birding Gods were on our side, for we’d only walked a hundred metres before we found the first pair, which gave good views, as did a male Spectacled Warbler that loosely associated with them. They were a bit mobile, so we still got to do some walking, but in doing so we came across a second pair that showed very well, allowing some pretty stunning photographs to be taken. In the same
area there was about 30 Greater Short-toed Larks; but then a pale, upright wheatear caught our attention and everyone was instructed to “get on this bird”, and in Niall’s case to “get me some photos”. The reason was that this was no ordinary wheatear, but a much rarer Isabelline Wheatear – which at the time I thought was a national description species (for it was the previous year when we found one), but it transpired that it was taken off the list on 1st January this year. Still, a very good bird to find in Morocco, though, as there are less than a hundred records for the country. A brief stop at Barrage Hassan Addakhil was very disappointing due to low water levels, but we did see a dozen Great-crested Grebes there. We continued on our way to Midelt, arriving before seven, for a change.

We had to be up very early the following day, and after a quick coffee we were out before first light, which was necessary if we were to stand any chance of seeing Dupont’s Lark – one of the hardest breeding birds to see in the Western Palearctic. We arrived at the Zeida Plain – which some of our drivers have called Morocco’s Alaska – well before first light, and we soon heard several singing. That was the easy bit; but after a bit of running around (a lot in my case!), we found one. Unusually for this species, we had long, good views of it. The only other lark species we saw were several singing Lesser Short-toed Larks; but we did well for raptors, with four Short-toed Eagles, a male Western Marsh Harrier and about ten Black Kites. A pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse also flew over.

After breakfast we set off south, heading towards the great Sahara Desert. Between Midelt and Barrage Hassan Addakhil, we saw a distant pair of Bonelli’s Eagles, two Little Swifts and a couple of Desert Larks. Another brief stop at Barrage Hassan Addakhil produced a few Greater Short-toed Larks and a female Northern Wheatear, but little else of interest, so we headed off for lunch. We lunched at a café overlooking a wide gorge and then continued on our way south to Erfoud. On the outskirts of Erfoud, we encountered our first Maghreb Larks (formerly considered to be a long-billed race of Crested Lark) right at the side of the road, as well as another Long-legged Buzzard and a couple of Northern Ravens.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse by Glen Valentine

Trumpeter Finch by Glen Valentine
We checked into our hotel, the fabulous Chergui, mid-afternoon and then continued on our way to our next target species, African Desert Warbler. This we saw at one of our backup sites with ease and, as ever, the bird provided great views. With this in the bag, we headed south to Rissani, where in the past we have seen Pharaoh Eagle-Owl. Here we were joined by a local guy, Ali the Nomad – as he calls himself, who knows exactly where the owls are roosting, but we were informed that the birds at this, our usual site, were not present, so we called it a day and returned to our hotel.

There are certain days on this tour that are truly memorable. The high altitude birding at Oukaimeden, the day at Oued Massa and Oued Souss and the special birds of the Tagdilt Track, for instance. However, day nine is always a fabulous day, and this year it turned out to be pretty good. As usual, we were out at dawn in 4x4s, and we set off into the true desert, the sort of stuff that reminds you of Lawrence of Arabia or Beau Gest. Our first port of call was a narrow strip of low sand-dune, where we would normally find African Desert Warbler; but this year none responded. However, a group of five Fulvous Babblers was heard calling, and they responded very well, giving us excellent views.

We then set off across the desert, passing an adult Peregrine and eventually reaching a couple of drinking troughs near to the tiniest of patches of water. Already sandgrouse were in attendance, and in our hour there we counted 60 Spotted Sandgrouse and 26 Crowned Sandgrouse – wrapping up the four species of sandgrouse that we could possibly get on the tour for only the second time. Time to move on for our meeting with another nomad who was waiting at his place for us. A short drive and an even shorter walk later, and we were soon having point-blank views of an Egyptian Nightjar, which had only recently arrived back from its wintering grounds. In the same area, we found three more African Desert Warblers, a Tristram’s Warbler and a singing male Spectacled Warbler, as well as a male Western Marsh Harrier and a number of displaying Greater Hoopoe-Larks.

Having had our fill of the nightjar, we set off again for our final target of the morning. As we drove across the desert, we found several Brown-necked Ravens, Desert Wheatears and half a dozen Bar-tailed Larks; until, in the distance, we spotted a small encampment, which was our intended destination. Upon
our arrival, one of the camp residents spoke to our drivers and then led us to the back of the camp, where we quickly found a pair of smart Desert Sparrows, a species which is getting more and more difficult to find each year, owing to increasing House Sparrow numbers. We also found a migrant Subalpine Warbler, which was a bonus, and then it was lunchtime, so we set off for Auberge du Sud for a leisurely lunch. After lunch, given that there was no water at Merzouga, our only target was Pharaoh Eagle-Owl. We headed to a site near Rissani, where we knew a bird had been seen the previous day. The directions were to view from the top of a sand dune along the cliff face, but that drew a blank. However, as I’d been to this site a couple of times previously, I knew other holes and crevices that it had used in the past, and it wasn’t long before I found the bird sat in a hole at the top of a cliff. We set the ‘scopes up and everyone had repeated long looks at the bird as it sat blinking in its chosen hole. In the same area, we also found 40 vocal Brown-necked Ravens and several of the recently split (from Crested Lark) Maghreb Lark. With all the targets nailed, we headed back to our hotel, getting in at six!

Our penultimate day was a bit of a travel day, as we retraced our steps back to Ouarzazate, where we were to spend our final night. We made one stop at a spot where we have seen good numbers of Spotted Sandgrouse in the past, but we were to be disappointed, for I only heard a distant call. This area held a number of birds, including a distant Short-toed Eagle sat on a sand dune, several Greater Short-toed Larks that flew past, and other larks in the area included three Bar-tailed Larks and a couple of Greater Spotted Sandgrouse by Glen Valentine
Hoopoe-Larks. A male Spectacled Warbler showed very well, but a Subalpine Warbler was a single observer sighting. At the well, at least eight Trumpeter Finches showed exceptionally well, as did some of the Desert Wheatears in the area.

We decided to revisit the Tagdilt track again, which produced similar species as our previous visit, including 16 Cream-coloured Courser and a Northern Wheatear. We then went for lunch on the same roof-top terrace as previously. We arrived in Ouarzazate during the afternoon, and after a short rest five of us went back to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi to see what we could find. Nothing had changed in respect of the water levels or indeed the species present, but we did find 15 Common Shelduck amongst over 100 Ruddy Shelduck, a couple of Black Storks, two Peregrines and increased numbers of plovers – with 60 Little Ringed and 20 Kentish Plovers noted. Careful searching through the wagtail flock also produced the hoped-for Moroccan (subpersonata) race of White Wagtail, and then as we walked back to the bus we noted hundreds of hirundines – mainly swallows, but including a few Sand Martins heading off to roost.

Our last day of the tour saw us climb over Tiz-n-Tichka pass – the highest pass in North Africa passable in a vehicle – but before we did that, we tried a new site for me south of Amerzgane, which had in the past apparently been a reliable site for Maghreb (Mourning) Wheatear. We searched the area hard, finding good numbers of Desert Larks, Blue Rock Thrush and Moussier’s Redstart, but no sign of the ever-elusive wheatear. As we continued on our way, we found our second Woodchat Shrike of the tour and as we climbed higher, we found a flock of 20 Red-billed Choughs and more Northern Ravens, plus another Short-toed Eagle. We pre-ordered our lunch at a restaurant in Toufliht and then set about finding our final targets of the tour. Short-toed Treecreeper and a male Firecrest gave themselves up easily, but the only Common Crossbill we had was a flyover identified on call. A couple of Eurasian Sparrowhawks were overhead, and we also had our final looks at African Blue Tit and Coal Tit. After lunch it was time to head to the airport, but we still had enough time to pay a short visit to a women’s cooperative, where they gave us a demonstration of how Argan Nuts are transformed into cooking and cosmetic oils. Our
run into Marrakech was fairly unproductive, save for a couple more Eurasian Sparrowhawks and more Magpies and Spotless Starlings, although some of us managed to see a couple of Wild Boar as we passed the king’s hunting preserve.

And that was it, the end of our very productive 11-day classic Morocco tour, during which we’d seen all of our expected targets. Besides seeing some very good birds on our route, we’d also seen ancient Kasbahs and Medinas, enjoyed wonderful vistas, stayed in some charismatic and comfortable accommodations and eaten far too much excellent local food.

The trip took us from the highest snow-covered mountains to rugged Atlantic cliffs via stoney desert, the magnificent Sahara and the Atlantic Ocean. It gave us a good cross-section of North African species, including the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis and, for the third tour running, the formerly elusive Aoudad. All in all, it was a thoroughly enjoyable tour with great birding and great company.

---

**Annotated List of Birds Recorded**

(Total species recorded: 181)


**Swans, Geese & Ducks Anatidae**

**Common Shelduck**

*Tadorna tadorna*

Good numbers were seen at Oued Souss where we saw two groups totalling 53 and we had another 15 at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

**Ruddy Shelduck**

*Tadorna ferruginea*

On our visit to Oued Massa, we found three but our only other sightings were at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate, where the water level was very low but where we saw 50 on our first visit and 100+ on our second.

**Mallard**

*Anas platyrhynchos*

Recorded on just three dates during the tour in low numbers with a peak count of ten at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our first visit.

**Northern Shoveler**

*Anas clypeata*

Only seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we saw 100+ on each visit but they were very distant.

**Northern Pintail**

*Anas acuta*

A very difficult to see female was seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our first visit.

**Eurasian Teal**

*Anas crecca*

Two were seen on Oued Souss as we drove into Agadir, six were on the pools at the seaward end of Oued Souss and ten were found 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 recognised by Clements.*

**Marbled Duck**

*Marmaronetta augustirostris*
In the last couple of years this species has become a little difficult to find and we never located any at Oued Massa, one of our regular stakeouts. We were therefore well pleased to find 25 on the seaward pools at Oued Souss. Once again we couldn’t find any at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we normally record this species.

**Ferruginous Duck**  
*Aythya nyroca*

Five of this scarce species were seen at Oued Tamri.

**Pheasants & Quails Phasianidae**

**Barbary Partridge**  
*Alectoris barbara*

We flushed a pair during our walk at Oued Massa but unfortunately, this proved to be the only ones on the tour.

**Common Quail**  
*Coturnix coturnix*

One bird that was flushed near the Bald Ibis site at Tamri was a leader only bird but then two more were flushed at Oued Massa the following day.

**Northern Storm Petrels Hydrobatidae**

**European Storm Petrel**  
*Hydrobates pelagicus*

We enjoyed excellent looks at three or four of this species during our pelagic trip.

**Petrels and Shearwaters Procellariidae**

**Balearic Shearwater**  
*Puffinus mauretanicus*

We had a total of four during our pelagic out of Agadir, a couple of which gave close views.

**Manx Shearwater**  
*Puffinus puffinus*

Like the above species we had a total of four during our pelagic out of Agadir, a couple of which gave close views and we also recorded another five or so which were one or the other species.

**Grebes Podicipedidae**

**Little Grebe**  
*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Single birds were seen at Oued Tamri, Oued Massa and at Barrage Hassan Addakhil.

**Great Crested Grebe**  
*Podiceps cristatus*

At Barrage Hassan Addakhil we saw 11 whilst at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi three or four distant birds were seen on both of our visits.

**Flamingos Phoenicopteridae**

**Greater Flamingo**  
*Phoenicopterus ruber*

Recorded on five dates with Oued Souss producing the largest numbers with up to 300 seen on our two visits. A flock of 70 was seen flying north at sea near Tamri and up to 80 were seen distantly at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on both our visits.

**Storks Ciconidae**

**White Stork**  
*Ciconia ciconia*

Recorded on eight dates during the tour with birds on nests in many towns with three-figure counts on four dates. The largest numbers were as usual at Oued Souss and Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we recorded up to 250.

**Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae**

**Northern Bald Ibis**  
*Geronticus eremita*
We had distant views of four at Oued Tamri, which was just as well for we couldn’t find the feeding flock, although we did see a group of ten flying back towards the colony along the coast. The following day a distant flock of circa 50 was seen very briefly by one of the leaders but they disappeared before the group could connect with them. This species, which is also known as Waldrapp, is critically endangered but had an excellent breeding season during 2017 with a record number of 122 breeding pairs recorded which produced 155 chicks. Additionally, two new colonies, albeit very small, were discovered in 2017 30-32km north of Tamri. The population in the Souss-Massa region was estimated at 599 at the end of 2017.

**Glossy Ibis**  
*Plegadis falcinellus*

Eight were seen at Oued Souss on our first visit with three there on our second whilst at Oued Massa we found a total of four.

**Eurasian Spoonbill**  
*Platalea leucorodia*

Three were seen at Oued Souss on our first visit but on our second a total of 95 were seen including an impressive flock of 80 overhead.

**Herons, Egrets & Bitterns Ardeidae**

**Squacco Heron**  
*Ardeola ralloides*

One was seen at Oued Mass, the first on tour since 2015.

**Western Cattle Egret**  
*Bubulcus ibis*

Recorded on nine dates during the tour with 40 on the first day at Ait Ourir, which usually produces the highest count of the tour and 37 were seen whilst travelling on our last day, mainly at Ouarzazate. Otherwise up to 15 seen at various sites mainly whilst travelling.

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

**Grey Heron**  
*Ardea cinerea*

Recorded on five dates during the tour with the highest count made at Oued Souss where we had an impressive total of 80 on our second visit. Otherwise up to six a day recorded.

**Little Egret**  
*Egretta garzetta*

Recorded on four dates during the first half of the tour with the highest counts being ten seen at Oued Souss. Otherwise up to four a day noted.

**Gannets Sulidae**

**Northern Gannet**  
*Morus bassanus*

About 50 were seen during the pelagic trip and a few showed well as they passed close to the boat.

**Cormorants & Shags Phalacrocoracidae**

**Great Cormorant**  
*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Recorded on five dates during the tour but no more than 30 a day noted mainly at Oued Souss and Oued Massa. One was seen flying over Erfoud, which was unusual as was seeing none at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

**Ospreys Pandionidae**

**Western Osprey**  
*Pandion haliaetus*

A single bird was seen at Oued Massa whilst at Oued Souss one was seen on our first visit with two on our second.

*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 recognised by Clements.*
Hawks, Kites, Eagles & Vultures *Accipitridae*

**Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*
We had great looks at three birds perched on Pylons as we drove towards Boumalne du Dades, four more flew over the Zeida Plain and single birds were logged as we drove back from Erfoud and as we drove towards Toufliht. Nine was a good total for so early in the season.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*
An immature was seen as we neared the top of Tiz-n-Test.

**Bonelli’s Eagle** *Aquila fasciata*
We continued Rockjumpers 100% record for this species on a Morocco tour with sightings on two dates. Our first was as we approached the ski resort at Oukaiimeden and then we had a pair as we drove south towards Errachidia from Midelt.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*
We did quite well for this species with sightings on five dates. Usually one or two birds logged but four were seen on our last day with two above Toufliht and two more as we drove towards Marrakech.

**Western Marsh-Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*
This species was logged on six dates at a number of locations but with no more than two a day noted. The usual favoured sites were Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate, Oueds Souss and Massa although did have a male in the desert near Erg Chebbi.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*
We only saw this species on four dates but on two days counts were in excess of 100 with 400 or more seen at dusk at Oued Souss.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*
Five were seen in the Oukaiimeden area on our first day with one or two noted on five more dates at various locations, usually whilst travelling.

Rails, Gallinules & Coots *Rallidae*

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*
Up to four birds were seen on four dates with most seen at Oued Massa.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*
This species was seen on five dates during the tour with the highest numbers, up to 50, at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on both our visits. We also found 32 at Oued Tamri, far fewer than we normally record on the tour.

Cranes *Gruidae*

**Common Crane** *Grus grus*
Our early start for Oued Massa paid off as we connected with a flock of 25 as soon as we arrived on site. Normally these birds walk over the ridge but on this visit they surprised me by coming down to the river mid-morning.

Stone-Curlews, Thick-knees *Burhinidae*

**Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicnemus*
We heard several on both our visits to Oued Souss, saw five on the way to Oued Massa, two were seen as we headed inland from Agadir and somebody saw a single bird whilst we travelling towards Ouarzazate.

**Oystercatchers** *Haematopodidae*

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*
15 were seen at Oued Souss.

**Stilts & Avocets Recurvirostridae**

### Black-winged Stilt
*Himantopus himantopus*

We found 120 at Oued Souss during our second visit there and had up to 20 on three other dates either at Oued Souss or at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

### Pied Avocet
*Recurvirostra avosetta*

A flock of 66 was seen at Oued Souss on our second visit with ten there on our first one. We also saw up to 20 at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on both our visits.

**Plovers & Lapwings Charadriidae**

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

This species was only seen at Oued Souss where we saw 40 our first visit and 55 on our second visit.

### Common Ringed Plover
*Charadrius hiaticula*

We had a very good count of 120 on our second visit to Oued Souss with 31 seen on our first visit. Single birds were seen on both our visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

### Little Ringed Plover
*Charadrius dubius*

Only seen on our two visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we had 40 on our first day and 60 on our second.

### Kentish Plover
*Charadrius alexandrinus*

80 were counted at Oued Souss on our second visit and 20 were seen on our last visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi, otherwise one or two on three more dates.

**Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae**

### Common Snipe
*Gallinago gallinago*

Two birds were found at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on both of our visits there.

### Black-tailed Godwit
*Limosa limosa*

Up to 30 were seen on both of our visits to Oued Souss and birds were present at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi but they were too far off to get a count.

### Bar-tailed Godwit
*Limosa lapponica*

Up to four were found at Oued Souss on both of our visits.

### Whimbrel
*Numenius phaeopus*

One was seen at Oued Souss.

### Eurasian Curlew
*Numenius arquata*

Six birds were seen at Oued Souss on our first visit with 30 there during our second excursion.

### Common Redshank
*Tringa totanus*

40 were seen at Oued Souss on our first visit with 100 or more noted on our second visit.

### Common Greenshank
*Tringa nebularia*

Up to six were seen at Oued Souss on both our visits and two were seen at Oued Massa whilst another was seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

### Green Sandpiper
*Tringa ochropus*

We flushed one from the very polluted stream at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

### Common Sandpiper
*Actitis hypoleucos*

Not common at all this year indeed we only recorded birds on three dates with a maximum of five when we visited Oued Souss and Oued Massa.

### Red Knot
*Calidris canutus*

Only seen at Oued Souss where we saw one on our first visit and six on our second.
Sanderling  *Calidris alba*
We found a flock of 40 at Oued Souss on our second visit.

Little Stint  *Calidris minuta*
Up to six were seen on both our visits to Oued Souss.

Dunlin  *Calidris alpina*
20 were seen on our first visit to Oued Souss with 100 or more on our second visit.

Ruff  *Philomachus pugnax*
Ten were seen at Oued Souss on our first visit there with 20 on our second visit.

**Coursers & Pratincoles**  *Glaerolidae*

Cream-coloured Courser  *Cursorius cursor*
We found at c20 as we crossed a high plateau on the way to Ouarzazate and the following day found another 11 on the Tagdilt Track with 16 seen there on our second visit. Five more were seen as we headed towards Errachidia and another was seen from the vehicle whilst travelling across the desert at Erg Chebbi.

**Gulls, Terns and Skimmers**  *Laridae*

Black-leged Kittiwake  *Rissa tridactyla*
A first winter was seen on the pelagic out of Agadir and it made a certain leader very happy indeed! This species has only been recorded once before by Rockjumper in Morocco, way back in 2009.

Slender-billed Gull  *Chroicocephalus genei*
Three were seen on our first visit to Oued Souss with one present on our second visit.

Black-headed Gull  *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Recorded on just five dates with by far the highest numbers at Oued Souss where we saw “lots” on both our visits, well that’s what it says in the checklist. Up to 50 were logged on three other dates.

Little Gull  *Hydrocoloeus minutus*
Recorded for the second year in succession on this tour but this was a different bird as it was a first winter, the last being an adult, a good bird for Morocco.

Audouin’s Gull  *Ichthyaetus audouinii*
20 were seen on the pelagic out of Agadir with 80 at Oued Tamri later the same day. 100 or more were seen at Oued Massa the following day.

Mediterranean Gull  *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*
On our first visit to Oued Souss at least 50 were counted on a sand bank but on our second visit numbers were well down with perhaps just ten birds present. As is often the case most were first winter birds but a second winter was seen on both visits. About four were seen on the Pelagic also.

Yellow-legged Gull  *Larus michahellis*
Only recorded at the coast where small numbers were seen around Agadir, at Oued Souss and at Oued Tamri with no more than 40 logged on any of the three days that this species was seen.

Lesser Black-backed Gull  *Larus fuscus*
Like the above species only seen on the coast with up to 50 at Oued Souss on both visits and many following trawlers on the Pelagic.

Sandwich Tern  *Thalasseus sandvicensis*
30 were found on Oued Souss on our first visit with 62 counted there on our second but other than these the only ones seen were about ten on the pelagic.

**Skuas**  *Sternidae*

Great Skua  *Stercorarius skua*
Six to eight gave outstanding views on the pelagic.

**Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus*
A pale phased immature was disturbed from the sea on the pelagic but unfortunately it didn’t hang around very long. Only the third to be seen on this tour.

**Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua)** *Stercorarius parasiticus*
A dark phased adult came in to the boat and then attacked a Balearic Shearwater.

**Sandgrouse Pteroclidae**

**Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** *Pterocles alchata*
We saw a flock of 40 on the Tagdilt Track. This is the hardest to see of the four regular sandgrouse on this tour, this being just the third time that we have recorded the species.

**Spotted Sandgrouse** *Pterocles senegallus*
We had excellent views of a total of 60 birds at Erg Chebbi and birds were heard calling as we made our way back from Erfoud on our penultimate day.

**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis*
This species was difficult this year but we saw four on the Tagdilt Track and two more flew over us when we were on the Zeida Plain.

**Crowned Sandgrouse** *Pterocles coronatus*
26 were alongside the Spotted Sandgrouse at Erg Chebbi, again giving excellent views.

**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 dates in small numbers (less than ten) apart from on our first date when 40 were seen on the way up to Oukaiimeden.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*
A common resident that was recorded daily in all towns below 6000 feet.

**Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis*
This species seems to be increasing and we certainly saw more than I remember on any previous tour with up to ten a day noted on nine dates.

**Owls Strigidae**

**Pharaoh Eagle Owl** *Bubo ascalaphus*
After a bit of hard work eventually one was found at our newish stakeout and everyone had great looks through the ‘scope.

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*
Our first was found at Oued Massa and another was seen as we travelled towards Boumalne du Dades.

**Nightjars Caprimulgidae**

**Red-necked Nightjar** *Caprimulgus ruficollis*
One was heard calling on our first visit to Oued Souss and then on our second visit it came in behind us but didn’t hang around too long and it was only seen in flight.

**Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius*
We were treated to long unobstructed views of a bird in the desert and many photographs were taken. A very fortunate sighting as this species generally doesn’t arrive until March.
**Swifts Apodidae**  
*Apus pallidus*

**Pallid Swift**  
Up to 20 were recorded on ten dates.

**Apus affinis**

**Little Swift**  
We struggled to connect with this species but we saw two as we drove from Midelt towards Errachidia and singles at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi and as we drove back into Marrakech.

**Kingfishers Alcedinidae**  
*Alcedo atthis*

**Common Kingfisher**  
We had a brief view of one in flight at Oued Massa.

**Hoopoes Upupidae**  
*Upupa epops*

**Eurasian Hoopoe**  
We saw up to three birds on six dates during the tour.  
*NOTE: Clements only recognises two species of Hoopoe; Eurasian U. epops and Madagascar U. marginata. One further species, is widely recognised namely African U. africana and a 4th is sometime recognised. West/Central African U. senegalensis. We only recorded the nominate Palaearctic form U. e. epops.*

**Woodpeckers & Allies Picidae**  
*Jynx torquilla*

**Eurasian Wryneck**  
We saw three at Oued Massa and heard another calling but the views were not very good.

**Dendrocopus major**

**Great Spotted Woodpecker**  
A female was seen well on our first day of the tour as we drove up to Oukaimeden.

**Picus vaillanti**

**Levaillant’s Woodpecker**  
One was seen on the way up to Oukaiimeden on our first day and the following day, what was probably the same bird gave excellent roadside views.

**Falcons & Caracaras Falconidae**  
*Falco tinnunculus*

**Eurasian Kestrel**  
Up to ten recorded on ten dates throughout the tour from many locations.  
*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 recognise these splits.*

**Falco peregrinus**

**Peregrine Falcon**  
Our first was an adult on a telegraph pole as we drove towards Ouarzazate after which we saw an adult in the desert at Erg Chebbi and an adult and an immature bird at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

**Bushshrikes Malaconotidae**  
*Tchagra senegalus*

**Black-crowned Tchagra**  
One showed very well at Oued Massa and five more were heard calling at the same site.

**Laniidae**

**Southern Grey Shrike**  
*Lanius meridionalis*

A common bird with up to four seen on eight dates but mainly whilst travelling. Most birds were of the coastal algeriensis race but five birds over two dates in the eastern part of the tour proved to be of the interior race elegans.
**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 Morocco during our tour. Clements recognises 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 (*L. 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*  
One was seen near the Bald Ibis colony and another was seen as we drove towards Tiz-n-Tichka.

**Crows, Jays & Magpies Corvidae**

**Eurasian Jay**  
*Garrulus glandarius*  
One was seen at the top of Tiz-n-Test.

**Eurasian Magpie**  
*Pica pica*  
Common around the Marrakech and Agadir areas where we recorded the species on five dates with a peak count of ten as we drove from Agadir towards Taroudant. This 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*  
About 200 were seen around the ski resort at Oukaimeden on our first day, which is an unusually high count for this area and 20 more were seen at Tiz-n-Test.

**Alpine (Yellow-billed) Chough**  
*Pyrrhocorax graculus*  
300 were around the buildings at Oukaimeden when we arrived and some were very confiding. Their call is more reminiscent of a passerine than a corvid.

**Brown-necked Raven**  
*Corvus ruficollis*  
This is a true desert-loving species and we saw 40 plus around Erg Chebbi and Rissani.

**Northern (Common) Raven**  
*Corvus corax*  
We saw this species on three dates with our first as we drove back from Tamri towards Agadir. Then ten a day were seen at the Zeida Plain and as we drove up Tiz-n-Tichka.

**Tits Paridae**

**Coal Tit**  
*Periparus ater*  
Five birds were found as we made our way towards Oukaimeden, with two at the top of Tiz-n-Test and two more at Toufliht.

**African Blue Tit**  
*Cyanistes teneriffae*  
About eight birds were seen as we travelled up to Oukaimeden with six found as we drove up Tiz-n-Test, otherwise up to two on four dates. IOC is currently looking at the African Blue Tit complex and looks like it will be recommending some splitting.

**Great Tit**  
*Parus major*  
Two birds were seen as we travelled to Oukaimeden, two were seen at Tiz-n-Test and one was seen at Oued Massa.

**Larks Alaudidae**

**Greater Hoopoe-Lark**  
*Alaemon alaudipes*  
Our first were three on the Tagdilt Track but as usual Erg Chebbi produced more and we found six 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 heard three more between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

**Thick-billed Lark**  
*Ramphocoris clotbey*
As we crossed the high plateau en route to Ouarzazate we flushed one from the side of the road, which caused an abrupt stop. Little did we know the bird was one of a flock of 70, which is the most we have ever seen on this tour. Excellent views were obtained judging by the noise coming from the cameras! The following day two of us found a pair on at the rubbish dump at the Tagdilt Track but the rest of the group missed them.

**Desert Lark**  
*Ammomanes deserti*

This is not really a lark of the sand deserts as they prefer more rocky terrain and this year’s tour was rather productive for them with sightings of one or two on five dates during the second half of the tour plus at least ten near Amerzgane.

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

This is a true desert-loving species but on our route to Errachidia, we have a site where this species occurs alongside the above, which is unusual. Here we found our first two birds and then at Erg Chebbi we located about six obtaining good views of some of them. The following day four were seen at our regular stop between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

**Sky Lark**  
*Alauda arvensis*

Two of us flushed one at the Tagdilt Track but it was only seen in flight and quickly disappeared.

**Thekla Lark**  
*Galerida theklae*

This lark is more common at higher levels than Crested Lark and we recorded it on three dates with our first four being found as we crossed a high plateau on the way to Ouarzazate with three being logged on that date. Then over the next two days, we found at least six on the Tagdilt Track with a single bird the following day.

**Crested Lark**  
*Galerida cristata*

A common & widespread lark except in the true desert areas we saw up to eight of this species on eight dates mainly whilst travelling.

**Maghreb Lark**  
*Galerida macrorhyncha*

We had great looks at this recently split species (from Crested Lark) as we drove south towards Erfoud with six more the following day in the Rissani area. Four more were seen as we drove from Erfoud towards Tinejdad.  

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

**Horned (Shore) Lark**  
*Eremophila alepstris*

We had awesome looks at this species at Oukaiimeden but we only saw the one and we left that until late in the day. Thankfully another tour group gave us some gen which enabled us to score. Heavy snow a couple of weeks early had probably moved the birds lower down.

**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. We had one the following morning as we drove past the Tagdilt Track and found three more between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

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

We found 20 on the Tagdilt Track and a flock of 30 at our scrub-Warbler stakeout. Six were discovered at Barrage Hassan Addakhil and nine more were seen between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

**Dupont’s Lark**  
*Chersophilus duponti*

We heard at least three individuals singing at daybreak on the Zeida Plain and one showed very well (for this species!) although it did give us the runaround. This is one of the hardest breeding birds to see in the Western Palearctic.

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

We found five at the Tagdilt Track and six on the Zeida Plain where birds were heard singing and watched displaying. More scarce than usual on this tour.
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 recognised as distinct species within the super-species. Several other forms may be recognised as distinct once genetic analysis and further study is completed.*

Swallows *Hirundinidae*

**Brown-throated Martin**

*Riparia paludicola*

One was found at Oued Massa, which was fortunate for they are not a common bird on this tour.

**Sand Martin (Bank Swallow)**

*Riparia riparia*

Our first was seen at Oued Massa where we could compare it with the above species, then we had three at Barrage Hassan Addakhil but most were seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we had 20 flying to roost on our second visit.

**Barn Swallow**

*Hirundo rustica*

Recorded daily in generally low numbers but with hundreds noted on our two visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

**Eurasian Crag-Martin**

*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Recorded on eight dates mainly in single figures at places such as Tiz-n-Test, Tiz-n-Tichka and Todra Gorge but with 20 noted in Dades Gorge.

**House Martin**

*Delichon urbicum*

Unusually common this tour with up to 20 logged on ten dates.

**Red-rumped Swallow**

*Cecropis daurica*

Recorded on ten dates during the tour but only in single figures with a maximum day count of six.

Cettia Bush Warblers and allies *Cettidae*

**Cetti’s Warbler**

*Cettia cetti*

During the first part of the tour, birds were heard at several sites with plenty singing at Oued Massa where one performed admirably for once allowing all guests to have great views. Normally we struggle to get everyone decent views of this species because of their skulking behaviour.

Streaked Scrub Warbler *Scotocercidae*

**Streaked Scrub Warbler**

*Scotocerca inquieta*

Many tours fail to see this species but we have a good stakeout for it although sometimes we have to cover a fair bit of ground before we find one. Not this year, we’d gone 100 metres before the first two were seen and eventually saw a total of four, with everyone getting great views and photographs.

Leaf Warblers and allies *Phylloscopidae*

**Common Chiffchaff**

*Phylloscopus collybita*

Small numbers were seen on seven dates with most at Oued Massa where we logged ten or more.

*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.*

Cisticolas and allies *Acrocephalidae*

**Zitting Cisticola**

*Cisticola juncidis*

We heard a few singing at Oued Souss and Oued Tamri and had good views of a couple at Oued Massa.
Babblers, Parrotbills *Timaliidae*

**Fulvous Babbler (Chatter)** *Turdoides fulva*
We found six near Taliouine on route to Ouarzazate but the views were a bit distant but then found another five near Erg Chebbi that gave much closer views. These charming, gregarious birds are endemic to north-west Africa and they are always good fun.

**Sylviid Babblers *Sylviidae***

**Eurasian Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*
One or two were seen on five dates during the tour.

**African Desert Warbler** *Sylvia deserti*
We quickly found a responsive singing male in small sand dunes at our backup stakeout and everybody enjoyed great looks at this dainty warbler. Knowing the preferred habitat is key to finding this species, it’s doesn’t like any old desert but a specific type and the following day during our desert trip we found three more, one at our usual stakeout plus two more just by checking the habitat.

**Tristram’s Warbler** *Sylvia deserticola*
We found a very uncooperative pair at our usual spot in Dades Gorge and saw another at Erg Chebbi. Another species endemic to north-west Africa.

**Spectacled Warbler** *Sylvia conspicillata*
We saw a total of three males during the tour, at our Scrub-Warbler site, at Erg Chebbi and one which gave awesome views between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

**Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans*
We found three at Oued Massa at the start of the tour and then single males at Erg Chebbi and between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

**Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala*
We recorded this species on the first four dates of the tour but by far the best views and highest count (ten) was at Oued Massa. Oued Souss and Oued Tamri were other sites where we saw this species and it certainly seems to be a species that favours the coastal areas.

**Kinglets *Regulidae***

**Common Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapillus*
We had crippling views of a male at Oukaiimeden with two the following day at Tiz-n-Test and then as usual found another singing male at Toufliht. Always a favourite on the tour.

**Wrens *Troglodytidae***

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglydytes troglodytes*
One seen very well by everyone on the way up to Oukaiimeden.

**Creepers *Certhiidae***

**Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla*
A pair was seen well at Toufliht which was fortunate as we missed them on the first day at Oukaiimeden.

**Starlings *Sturnidae***

**Spotless Starling** *Sturnus unicolor*
Up to 20 were seen on four dates around the Marrakech, Agadir and Oued Massa areas.

**Thrushes & Allies *Turdidae***
Ring Ouzel \textit{Turdus torquatus}
Two males and a female were seen at the top of Tiz-n-Test, which is now our most reliable site for this sometimes difficult species. 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 \textit{Turdus merula}
A common species that was seen daily throughout the tour with up to 50 a day recorded.

Song Thrush \textit{Turdus philomelos}
Four were seen as we travelled up Tiz-n-Test in the vicinity of the Tinmal Mosque.

Mistle Thrush \textit{Turdus viscivorus}
Two were found at Oukaiimeden where they gave good close views.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers \textit{Muscicapidae}

European Robin \textit{Erithacus rubecula}
We heard this familiar Christmas card bird at the start of our ascent to Oukaiimeden but they wouldn’t respond. Fortunately, two at Oued Massa were more cooperative and allowed reasonable views, provided you were quick. We also heard one at Toufliht.

Black Redstart \textit{Phoenicurus ochruros}
We found two smart males at Oukaiimeden and single males at The Tagdilt Track and Dades Gorge. Not as many on this tour as we have seen on previous tours.

Moussier’s Redstart \textit{Phoenicurus moussieri}
This beautiful north-west African endemic was first seen as we started our climb to Oukaiimeden where we found two males and a female. As usual, they were very cooperative birds, often coming into within a few metres of the group. Thereafter we saw eight at Oued Massa with one or two on three more dates whilst travelling.

Blue Rock-Thrush \textit{Monticola solitarius}
Our first was a male near the Tinmal Mosque and this was followed by two pairs as we travelled towards Ouarzazate, a male in Dades Gorge, a male as we travelled from Midelt towards Barrage Hassan Addakhil, a male at near Rissani, a male between Erfoud and Tinejdad with four seen as we started to ascend Tiz-n-Tichka.

European (Common) Stonechat \textit{Saxicola rubicola}
We saw six of these smart looking (well at least the male is) chats on the day we visited Oued Massa and Oued Souss with up to two at other locations such as Oued Tamri and whilst travelling near Ouarzazate.

Northern Wheatear \textit{Oenanthe oenanthe}
Three were seen on the Tagdilt Track on our first visit with a female on our brief second visit, a male was seen as we travelled towards Errachidia and a female was seen at Barrage Hassan Addakhil.

Desert Wheatear \textit{Oenanthe isabellina}
Usually at the time of our visit to Morocco this species is quite difficult to find. This year we found a few as we got further south and east with at least six on the Tagdilt Track and one to four daily thereafter at a variety of sites. Most were very smart males.

Red-rumped Wheatear \textit{Oenanthe moesta}
Our first birds was a male as we travelled towards Ouarzazate and then as expected this was one of the first birds we saw on our morning trip to the Tagdilt Track where we found at least ten on our first visit with three pairs on our second visit with three more being seen as we travelled east from Boumalne du Dades.

Black Wheatear \textit{Oenanthe leucura}
Unlike the next species this species favours higher altitudes and also more rocky terrain. Small numbers were seen on five dates during the tour at amongst other places Oukaiimeden, Tagdilt Track, Dades Gorge and Tiz–n-Tichka pass and we logged up to eight a day.

White-crowned Black Wheatear \textit{Oenanthe leucopyga}
This is the common Wheatear of the lowland desert areas and we recorded the species on seven dates with our first 100 kilometres west of Ouarzazate. We then logged up to 20 a day until the end of the tour. This species is very often found in close proximity to dwellings.

**Dippers Cinclidae**

*White-throated Dipper*  
*Cinclus cinclus*  
A pair was seen well on the stream below the dam at Oukaiimedan at our regular stakeout.

**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 ten was found above Tamri and 30 were seen at Oued Massa amongst which there were several striking males.

*Desert Sparrow*  
*Passer simplex*  
A major target of the tour and one that can sometimes prove to be tricky to locate. Last year we found another new site for them and this year we returned to it where we were then treated to great views of a pair collecting nest material. Everyone had great views of this dapper species but how long they will be available at this site remains to be seen for House Sparrows are becoming very common there.

*Rock Petronia*  
*Petronia petronia*  
We found a flock of ten at the ski resort at Oukaiimedan where we obtained good views.

**Accentors Prunellidae**

*Alpine Accentor*  
*Prunella collaris*  
One of the principal targets at Oukaiimedan but this year heavy snow had forced them down from their normal spot and we were struggling to locate them. Three were found by a single observer actually in the village and then we found two more pairs near where we look for White-throated Dipper.

**Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae**

*Yellow Wagtail*  
*Motacilla flava*  
Our first bird was seen at Oued Massa after which we had 20 on our first visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi with 30 there on our second visit. All birds were of the *iberiae* race.

*Grey Wagtail*  
*Motacilla cinerea*  
Two were seen on our first day at Ait Ourir and one was seen at Oued Souss.

*White Wagtail*  
*Motacilla alba*  
This species was a very common bird during the tour with up to 50 birds seen daily.

*Moroccan Wagtail*  
*Motacilla alba subpersonata*  
We found two males on our second visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

*Meadow Pipit*  
*Anthus pratensis*  
20 flew over Oued Souss at dusk whilst at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi ten were present on our first visit with 20 on our second visit.

*Tree Pipit*  
*Anthus trivialis*  
Two were seen at Oued Massa, one of which we ‘scoped.

**Siskins, Crossbills & Allies Fringillidae**

*Common Chaffinch*  
*Fringilla coelebs*  

---

Rockjumper Birding Tours  
[View more tours to Morocco](#)
We recorded this species on six dates with birds frequently encountered around Marrakech, Oued Massa and Toufliht whilst our highest count was ten on our first day as we travelled up towards Oukaimeden. All birds were of the African race.

**Hawfinch**  
*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
We found one bird at Oukaimeden which didn’t perform very well for the group as it was very uncooperative. No worries, we have a very good standby site, where we have seen this species a few times and the following day we had great ‘scope views of a pair at Ouirgane.

**Crimson-winged Finch**  
*Rhodopechys alienus*
Earlier in February, there had been quite a lot of snow at Oukaimeden, which had forced many birds down from the high ski resort. Thankfully although numbers were lower than usual we still managed great looks at 20 birds amongst the throngs of people.  
*NOTE: IOC splits this species from the Asiatic form giving African Crimson Winged Finch the scientific name Rhodopechys alienus. This split is as yet not recognised by Clements.*

**Trumpeter Finch**  
*Rhodopechys githagineus*
Our first birds were a pair we disturbed as we were following the Thick-billed Lark flock as we travelled towards Ouarzazate although they didn’t hang around for the whole group to see them. We then found a pair collecting nest material at a roadside stop on the way to Errachidia, which allowed everyone good views. 20 are in the log for 1st March but for the life of me I can’t remember where they were and unusually I have no record in my trusty red notebook whilst eight showed very well as they came to drink at a leaking pipe between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

**European Greenfinch**  
*Chloris chloris*
Recorded on five dates during the tour with a maximum of ten on two dates with most birds seen whilst travelling. Best views though were at Oued Massa where we saw several very bright males.

**Common Linnet**  
*Linaria cannabina*
A flock of 40 was seen at Oued Massa with one or two noted, mainly as calling flyovers on four more dates.

**Red Crossbill**  
*Loxia curvirostra*
Unfortunately, this species can be very hard to pin down and on this trip we only had the briefest of views at Toufliht as one flew into the forest calling.

**European Goldfinch**  
*Carduelis carduelis*
This gorgeous species is usually found at Oued Massa or Oued Souss but not this year. In fact, the only birds we saw was a flock of 11 that dropped in very briefly in front of the bus at Rissani. If you didn’t get out of the vehicle or were sat on the wrong side of the vehicle you missed these birds.

**European Serin**  
*Serinus serinus*
Small numbers recorded on four dates usually ten or less but 30 were scattered around Oued Massa. Birds could often be heard singing at roadside stops.

---

**Bunttings Emberizidae**

**Rock Bunting**  
*Emberiza cia*
We found a pair in the Oukaiimeden area, two pairs in Dades Gorge and three pairs in Todra Gorge whilst on our last day one more were seen as we travelled up Tiz-n-Tichka.

**Cirl Bunting**  
*Emberiza cirlus*
We found a pair as we travelled up to Oukaiimeden and a female was seen as we drove at Oued Massa.

**House Bunting**  
*Emberiza sahari*
This species was recorded on ten dates with up to four a day logged and it was even seen inside the airport at Marrakech and in the dining room at Chergui Hotel.
Annotated List of Mammals Recorded


**Rabbits, Hares *Leporidae***

*Cape Hare*  
*Lepus capensis*
We flushed one during a roadside stop on the way to Errachidia.

**True Mice and Rats *Gerbils, Spiny Mice, Crested Rat*** *Muridae*

*North African Gerbil*  
*Psammomys obesus*
Also known as Fat Sand Rat we saw six on our first visit to the Tagdilt Track with three on our second short visit and we all had great views of these endearing but very shy creatures.

**Ground Squirrels *Rodentia***

*Barbary Ground-Squirrel*  
*Alantocerus getulus*
We saw our six as we drove up Tiz-n-Test followed by singles at Oued Massa, Dades Gorge and on the way south from Midelt.

**Wolves, Coyote, Foxes, Jackals *Canidae***

*Red Fox*  
*Vulpes vulpes*
We saw one enjoying the afternoon sun at the radio masts at Oukaimeden.

**Pigs *Suidae***

*Wild Boar*  
*Sus Scofra*
We saw three adults and together with five very small piglets at the top of Tiz-n-Test and then on our last afternoon we found an adult with a half grown youngster in an area of woodland as we returned to Marrakech.

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

*Aoudad (Barbary Sheep)*  
*Ammotragus lervia*
We finally seemed to have got this species sussed out in terms of actually seeing them and for the third tour in succession once again we got them on the list when we saw five distantly on a high ridge at the top of Tiz-n-Test.

**Annotated List of Reptiles Recorded**

*Mediterranean Turtle*  
*Maureemys leprosa*
We found 15 at Oued Massa.