

# Morocco

## Autumn Tour

Wednesday 20 October – Wednesday 27 October 2010

Principal Leader: David Walsh

2010 Cost **£1,699** single room supplement **£120**



**M**orocco is a country of startling contrasts, a long history, fascinating cultural traditions and a varied topography. For the bird watcher, there is a mixture of the familiar, the unfamiliar and the very rare. Our week-long holiday to this country will be based by the coast at Agadir, staying at a hotel we have used on numerous occasions where all rooms have a sea view. We have the opportunity to visit a variety of habitats from this base, seeing tidal lagoons, sandy estuaries, dry desert, palm oases, irrigated farmland and the green foothills of the Atlas Mountains. We also spend one night in an oasis hotel allowing us to explore the nearby desert with its sought-after birds. The bird life at this time of year is very varied and we hope to find many of the local specialities including: Northern Bald Ibis, Moussier's Redstart, Cream-coloured Courser, Barbary Partridge, Tristram's Warbler, Fulvous Chatterer, Black-crowned Tchagra, Marbled Teal, Thick-billed Lark, White-crowned Wheatear and Black-winged Kite to name a few.

We shall make sure we have time not only to birdwatch but also witness the daily lives of Moroccan villagers and visit a Kasbah (castle), and those who wish will also have a chance to visit a local souk (market). The main tour leader will be David Walsh and this will be his ninth visit to Morocco, a country he rates as his favourite destination!

### ITINERARY

#### Days 1 to 3

We leave on a direct flight from London to Agadir and make the 30 minute transfer to our hotel, where we stay for the first three nights. We start our birdwatching on Agadir Kasbah (Castle), a short drive from our hotel. Here we expect to find the delightful Moussier's Redstart along with Black Wheatear, Thekla Lark, Southern Grey Shrike and Blue Rock-thrush. We have our first chance of seeing an interesting raptor, with Barbary Falcon amongst the possibilities. We then head along the Atlantic coast north of Agadir, en route to Tamri, where we search roadside fields and cliffs hoping to find one of the world's rarest birds, the Northern Bald Ibis. Due to the efforts of Birdlife International, numbers of this species have increased, so nowadays there is more chance of seeing them. On the outskirts of Tamri we can enjoy our first picnic and take a walk at the lagoon, where we should find Zitting Cisticola, Eurasian Spoonbill, Ruddy Shelduck and Audouin's Gull and have the first of several

chances of finding Black-crowned Tchagra. Here, or at Agadir itself, if the winds are onshore we are likely to find Cory's Shearwater and Northern Gannet; other possibilities include Balearic Shearwater, Common Scoter and Arctic Skua.

The next day we drive south for about an hour to explore the riches of the Massa estuary, an exceptional place for birds with a wide variety of habitats. En route we will look for Little Swift, House Bunting and Spotless Starling in the towns. The Massa area is now a nature reserve, which befits its important status as a haven for migrants and indigenous birds. Our explorations will be by bus, then on foot, as we proceed westwards along the section of the river nearest the sea. We can expect Marbled Teal and Squacco Heron from the roadside, and Cetti's Warbler will be singing loudly in the reeds or small shrubs - spot one if you can! We can see Western Marsh-Harrier and Osprey, whilst other raptor possibilities include Tawny Eagle. Beyond the reserve entrance there will be large numbers

of Greater Flamingos as well as a variety of ducks and waders including Kentish Plover and Black-winged Stilt. After lunch in the shade we may take advantage of a new road to explore the nearby desert before heading upstream to a bridge near Massa village. Here Plain Martins should be seen in numbers, whilst there are likely to be formation fly-pasts of Glossy Ibis. If we are lucky, Black-winged Kite will be spotted hovering overhead. The spectacular Violet Dropwing is amongst the dragonfly possibilities here with African Grass Blue for the butterfly enthusiasts.

#### Day 4

We depart for the desert today for a one-night stop in an oasis hotel near Guelmim. Our drive south will take about four hours - en route we will stop in the rugged Anti-atlas Mountains to look for Long-legged Buzzard, Golden Eagle and Rock Bunting before descending towards Guelmim, a wonderful north African town dubbed the Gateway to the Sahara. After lunch, our desert exploration begins a few miles south-



Lanner Falcon



Cream-coloured Courser

east at Asrir, where we hope to find White-crowned Wheatear and Spanish Sparrow in the village and perhaps Fulvous Chatterer (Babbler) amongst the Prickly Pears. Walking in and around a nearby shallow wadi we will look for Desert and Buff-rumped (Red-rumped) Wheatears, Spectacled and Streaked Scrub Warblers, whilst lark possibilities here include Thick-billed and Bar-tailed.

#### Days 5 to 7

The following morning we will explore the fields near our oasis and search a rocky area for Desert Lark if we haven't been successful the previous day, before heading south-west of Guelmim along the Tan-Tan road which leads all the way to Mauritania. Whilst the most sought-after desert species can occur almost anywhere, we have a number of specific sites to visit and hope to find Cream-coloured Courser, Temminck's Lark and Greater Hoopoe-lark in the sandier areas, Lanner Falcon and Lesser Short-toed Lark in the cultivated plains and Trumpeter Finch coming to drink at an oasis pool. Eventually it will be time to reluctantly leave the desert and return to our hotel in Agadir where we stay for a further three nights.

After a leisurely breakfast, we will board our minibuses and set off north-east along the mountain road towards Imouzzer. This road passes through some awe-inspiring mountainous scenery. We will head first to the furthest spot, just over an hour from the coast, where in the bushes and pines we may be lucky and find Tristram's Warbler in its breeding habitat as well as Crossbill (of the distinctive Atlas race) and Cirl Bunting. We drift back and have a tagine lunch in a restaurant with a panoramic view, before descending into the aptly named Paradise Valley, a truly beautiful spot. Here we can expect Eurasian Crag Martin and perhaps Bonelli's Eagle. It is a wonderful spot for dragonflies including the exotic Ringed

Cascader, Orange-winged Dropwing and Epulet Skimmer, whilst on several occasions we have found the Two-tailed Pasha butterfly. Striped-necked Terrapin and Barbary Ground Squirrel add to the variety on offer. After a short break at the hotel, in the late afternoon those who wish to continue birding will head to the fabulous Souss estuary with its large numbers of gulls, terns, waders and flamingos. There will be plenty for everyone to look at and we will patiently scan the flocks hoping for Lesser Crested and Black Terns alongside Slender-billed and Mediterranean Gulls. Barbary Partridge, African Blue Tit and the Moroccan race of Magpie are all possibilities in the eucalyptus trees, whilst we have the option of waiting till dusk in the hope of hearing and seeing Red-necked Nightjar in the floodlights of the Royal Palace.

On our final full day we will either look again for Northern Bald Ibis or, if we have seen it already, head south towards Massa once more. Our first destination today is the area around Barrage Youssef-ben-Tachfine, which is south-east of Massa. Having turned off the main southbound road, we start scanning the fields by an irrigation channel and have a good chance of seeing Black-bellied Sandgrouse at close range. At the barrage itself, the views will be spectacular and Alpine Swift is a possibility. We will then return to Massa and explore a different area to the south of the village where the long-billed race of Crested Lark is likely in the small fields; at the river itself we may find Purple Heron and Ferruginous Duck. Some will doubtless continue to scan for raptors, others for more dragonflies and butterflies. There may be time to briefly revisit the parts of the Massa estuary we have seen previously.

#### Day 8

If there is time, we shall take one last look at the Souss Estuary, just to see if there is anything new for us, before we catch the return flight to London.



Northern Bald Ibis

#### Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Agadir
Days 2-3	Agadir
Day 4	Guelmim
Days 5-7	Agadir
Day 8	Depart Agadir

#### Party Size

Maximum of 12 clients (two leaders with more than eight clients).

#### Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin-bedded and single rooms, with private facilities.

#### Transport

By minibus or small coach.

#### Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

#### Gradings

	Good/Basic
	140
	Warm/Hot
	Low
	Normal
	Relaxed
	Good
	Easy
	Charter



White-crowned Wheatear