

**ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO MOROCCO**  
*Autumn Tour*

**28 October – 04 November 2012**



**Leader: David Walsh**

## ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO MOROCCO

### *Autumn Tour*

28 October – 04 November 2012

### A Personal Diary

#### **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October**

Shortly before 8am we met at the gate for what was in fact the first ever BA flight to Agadir from Heathrow's Terminal 5; having heard that I was a regular visitor to Morocco, the stewardess, presumably 'on debut', came to ask me if we needed landing cards as she didn't know! Our flight took just over three hours and we landed five minutes early, at 11.45am, Agadir being on GMT, the same time zone as the UK. Passport control and baggage reclaim were surprisingly quick, but we were unable to use the 'bureau de change' as it had run out of money (again!). I managed, however, to successfully use the ATM before meeting up with Houari, our driver for the third year running. We then made the 35 minute journey to our hotel, noting a flock of 100 Cattle Egrets en route. At our newly rebranded hotel, but with the same staff, check in was efficient, with the receptionist speaking good English. We were soon enjoying a light lunch outside in warm sunshine before heading for a siesta in our rooms, some of which faced south, others north, but all with sea views.

At 3pm we headed off to Oued Souss, just 15 minutes from the hotel. This estuary is traditionally an important stop-over for large numbers of migrating birds, and home for the winter to many others; on arrival it was obvious that there were still plenty of gulls, but I was surprised to find that wader numbers were well down, perhaps because of the construction of a new road towards the sea. Nevertheless we were soon enjoying close views of Black-winged Stilts and Eurasian Spoonbills, one of which was colour-ringed; we also noted our first Greater Flamingos. We were able to compare the two species of godwit at close range, and patient scanning produced a number of first-winter Mediterranean Gulls as well as our 'bird of the day' - a superb Lesser Crested Tern. A little further along the road we watched Common Terns feeding over the golf course pond and a group of European Serins in a roadside bush. The Moroccan Magpies became the first species of the week to entertain the photographers, setting the tone for the stunning views we were to enjoy of most target species. Eight Little Ringed Plovers were found by the wreck of a bridge before we located both Crested and Thekla Larks and discussed the structural and plumage differences between the two species.

It was really great to have done a couple of hours birding on the first day; at 7pm we met to enjoy our first Flag beers in the bar, impressed that the prices of both beer and wine had been reduced since 2011! In the restaurant Hassan and Larbi were on hand to serve us, just two of a number of friendly faces to greet me on my tenth visit to this hotel.

#### **Monday 29<sup>th</sup> October**

We met on the roof outside the restaurant shortly after 6.45am, but it was still pretty dark, partly due to the fact that this year's trip was running later than last year's, and partly due to the cloudy skies. Nevertheless by 7am birds were beginning to appear in the hedge and trees looking towards the sea, and we had a riveting 15 minutes birding. Migrants were in evidence, with European Reed Warbler, Pied Flycatcher and Willow Warbler trumped by a cracking Eurasian Wryneck! It responded to playback by calling from an exposed perch for ages. Then my attention was drawn to a small bird just below me: Yellow-browed Warbler! Unfortunately it was soon chased off by a Common Chiffchaff and flew into one of the bigger trees; it was heard to call, but it wasn't seen again. This represented only the sixth record for Morocco. Eventually it was time to enjoy breakfast. Omelettes were popular, but a wide selection of salads, cereals, breads, jams, cheese and meat were also on offer, whilst mint tea was available as an alternative to coffee.

We left just after 8am for the short trip to the Kasbah, a hill just to the north of Agadir overlooking the port, with a sixteenth century building on top which had survived the earthquake that had devastated so much of

the city 50 years ago. With rain threatening, we decided to stop at a layby halfway up which had proved productive in the past, and enjoyed excellent views of a party of Barbary Partridges as well as a close Blue Rock Thrush. Subalpine Warbler and Whinchat were further evidence of migration. We headed to the top, but the heavens opened, so we retreated to our hotel for a pit stop and coffee: it was clearly going to be important not to get wet unnecessarily in this most unusually unsettled weather. At this point the rain looked very much 'set in'.

At 10am we headed up the coast road with, encouragingly, the rain gradually giving way to brighter skies. On one of the roadside beaches we counted several hundred Audouin's Gulls, all facing into the wind; on another we compared two races of Lesser Black-backed Gull as well as noting our first '*tingitanus*' Common Raven. Then it was onto Tamri. We donned our waterproofs just in case the rain returned and set off along the track to the lagoon (we were unable to take the bus 'off road' due to the soft ground). It was muddy and slippery but we persevered and arrived at a spot with a good view over the lagoon. On the opposite slope were two Northern Bald Ibises! They were a bit distant but distinctive through the telescope. On an island a Great Egret was noted amongst the Grey Herons and Little Egrets, then a group of 21 Slender-billed Gulls flew in to wash. We were on good form and now feeling buoyant, the mid-morning rain seemingly a distant memory. We studied our first 'White-breasted' Cormorants as well as locating four Northern Shoveler and 25 Eurasian Coots before gingerly setting off back towards the bus, enjoying two Western Marsh Harriers overhead en route. We had chosen to have a tagine lunch at a super restaurant with a panoramic view and it proved to be very tasty as well as substantial! We assumed the two tagines which arrived first were for six, but in fact four more appeared! After lunch I took drinks orders; white or black coffee, mint tea or cold drinks. Whilst we were waiting, we found several Laughing Doves as well as a fleeting Barbary Falcon and, high in the sky, a group of Alpine Swifts.

Drifting back, we stopped by the river at Tamri, noting six Mallard, 25 Eurasian Teal and three Northern Pintail on the lagoon, and seven Sanderling on the beach. Near Cap Rhir we made an emergency stop as there were 15 Northern Bald Ibises feeding right by the road. It was awe-inspiring to get amazing point-blank views of one of the world's rarest birds, seemingly oblivious to our presence! After a seawatch just south of the lighthouse, with Northern Gannets and Cory's Shearwaters passing by not far offshore and a Lesser Crested Tern lingering, we headed back to the hotel, with the sunshine allowing us to enjoy the coastal drive. In the hotel garden my 'pishing' amused some of the other residents and brought in the sparrows.

Meeting up in the bar, we reflected on a day in which we had seen some wonderful birds and not allowed the weather to put us off our stride. We shrugged off the bureaucracy of needing a second 'room card' to pay for our bar bills and began to make inroads into the wine list in the restaurant. Would we be so lucky with the birds tomorrow?

## **Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> October**

Heavy rain overnight was beginning to clear as we enjoyed our breakfast. The Wryneck was still present and the Yellow-legged Gulls were watched taking their morning bath in the hotel pool! The Common Bulbuls were as inquisitive as ever, and we discussed whether the female 'Moroccan' Common Blackbirds were darker than those in the UK.

At 8.15am we headed south along the ever-improving main road, stopping after about half an hour in the town of Sidi Bibi. In 2006 I had found a colony of Little Swifts in an open-fronted garage, and it was encouraging that the birds were still present, and in increased numbers, despite the fact that there had been a change of owner and the blue had been replaced with red. The new nests (of mud and feathers) had all been built in the last two months. We saw movement inside one nest, before seeing no fewer than nine birds in flight. I gave the garage attendant a small reward and encouraged him to continue to show an interest in the birds' welfare.

I decided to explore the inland section of the Massa valley today, not only because I thought it would be more productive but also because that would allow us to remain close to the bus in case of further showers. The birding was excellent. First off we stopped at a section of river alongside the old main road. Here we had super views of several Brown-throated Martins as well as a pair of Black-crowned Tchagras which perched up right in front of us! We noted our first dragonflies, Sahara Bluetail and Red-veined Darter, as well as a

number of butterflies including Greenish Black-tip and Clouded Yellow. Some of us were able to study the newly described Moroccan Reed Warblers.

A little further north we parked up and walked across a field and down to the river. Three Glossy Ibises in flight were distant but we were thrilled when a Western Marsh Harrier spooked a group of duck and they flew overhead: six Marbled Duck! This species has become very hit and miss at Massa so this was a real stroke of luck. Back at the bus we continued on before seeing that a large number of Glossy Ibises were roosting in trees in the middle of the river. We walked down a track towards them and counted 120, with the photographers having a field day once again.

At our final morning site, we stopped by some eucalyptus trees and walked along a short stretch of river. Water levels were high, so there was little exposed mud for passerines or waders, but we added Black Tern and Green Sandpiper to our trip list and found another colour-ringed Eurasian Spoonbill. Seventy Northern Pintail and an Osprey overhead and a distant Black-winged Kite were noted as we walked back for lunch, but the highlight was another dragonfly. Banded Groundling, with its black stripes across the wings, was a new species for me, and we counted at least 10. In the shelter of the trees we had our picnic lunch prepared by Houari: fresh bread, sardines, tuna, cheese, tomatoes, bananas and oranges. I showed the group a Lang's Short-tailed Blue, the numerous small butterfly we had seen throughout the morning.

We made one more stop by the river, finding six Ferruginous Ducks which were excellent through the scopes. There is no doubt that the way to birdwatch this part of the valley is to look at as many sections of water as time allows. An Egyptian Mongoose was unfortunately 'leader-only' as we drifted across the valley to a café for tea where the locals were amused by our presence and a power cut made it difficult to make use of the 'facilities'! To the north of the town two 'Desert' Little Owls perched on a roadside wall were simply glorious! A juvenile Bonelli's Eagle was a little distant but imposing as it was mobbed by Common Kestrels, whilst a ringtail harrier was tantalising. Our attempt to end the day at the 'village bridge' was thwarted by rain so we headed back to Agadir and another relatively early finish. In fact, we had barely been inconvenienced by the weather, although we were glad we had come to Morocco for birds not sun! It had rained all day in Agadir. Houari drove splendidly on the return journey in the conditions. Over dinner we reflected on a wonderful day seeing virtually all the Massa specialities.

### **Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> October**

At breakfast we were unimpressed by the queue-jumping of some of the new guests this morning! Having paid our room bills we headed south again, passports safely in hand, this time packed for our one-night stay away from Agadir. We noticed for the first time that everyone in the group was using Swarovski binoculars! The overnight downpours meant that the Souss river was in flash flood as we drove across the bridge between Inezgane and Ait Melloul, a spectacular sight! We stopped just before the Massa river crossing having spotted a party of Black-bellied Sandgrouse, and the birds fed obligingly close to the road allowing us to distinguish males and females. This represented a great start to our desert birding! We paused in Tiznit for a comfort stop and morning coffee prior to driving up from the plains into the Anti-Atlas Mountains. The cacti, red soil and rock formations were impressive. Descending through the hairpins, we made our planned stop in a convenient pull-in for lunch. Black Redstart, 'North African' Chaffinch and our first pair of Moussier's Redstart all showed well, but there was no sign of our main target species, Rock Bunting. It was actually pretty cold as we drove onwards, with torrential rain flooding the desert.

The days of repeated police checkpoints are now a thing of the past and we were soon in Guelmim, the 'Gateway to the Sahara'. We checked in at "Au Rendez-vous des Hommes Bleus". There was no need to escape the heat this year, so we set off again before 2pm ready to start our desert birding 'proper', and the good news was that it was brightening up. Yet again we were fortunate in that the rain had come only at night or whilst we were travelling. We headed south-east of Guelmim for about 10 minutes and turned off the main road onto a quieter one. As usual, I asked Houari to slow down, and asked the group to shout 'stop' if they spotted anything. This worked perfectly. Almost immediately we found a superb male Red-rumped Wheatear, the first of 11 seen during the afternoon. In the desert a stop for one species nearly always produces others, and this was the case again as we located a group of 20 Trumpeter Finches right by the road as well as three more Black-bellied Sandgrouse, a Long-legged Buzzard, two Great Grey Shrikes and a photogenic Corn Bunting! We headed on towards the village of Asrir, where we saw our first House Bunting

and another Laughing Dove. Nearby we saw three close adult White-crowned Wheatears, all with white crowns. A Sand Rat showed to some of the group but most of us saw only their holes!

A little further on, just before an oasis, we stopped at a set of large bushes and scanned. This was a planned stop, and it didn't take long before we found our target: Fulvous Babbler! We advanced and found seven confiding birds although they were curiously disinterested in playback. They eventually flew one behind the other and showed well both perched up and feeding on the ground.

A shower threatened to disrupt proceedings so there was little choice for us but to get back in the bus and head to a stony hillside by a 'pyramidal' hill. Fortunately it soon stopped raining, but it was ages before we finally located a Desert Lark shortly before dusk. Those who persevered enjoyed respectable scope views. The Spectacled Warbler was much more obliging.

It didn't take long to drive back to a bustling Guelmim for a shower, and we were soon enjoying the local brew, having ordered beers and a couple of bottles of wine (courtesy of Ornitholidays) from the supermarket. The splendid camel tagine was one of the real highlights of the trip! We did our bird list and noted that we had seen seven of our 15 desert target species, mostly very well. The weather would hold the key to further success in the morning. Chelsea-Man United was a cracker on the TV and delayed bedtime for some!

### **Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November**

Keen to make the most of our remaining time in the desert, we met at 6.45am for breakfast. The fresh orange juice was wonderful and the bread was splendidly warm, accompanied by apricot jam and, more unusually, olive oil. We were soon on our way and parked up 12 kilometres out of town. Leaving the scopes behind to make sure we were ready to use our bins, we walked slowly towards a set of small bushes to the left of a wadi. Three Ruddy Shelduck flew over before we did a smart about turn with heavy rain on the way. We managed two Long-legged Buzzards a little further down the main road before the heavens opened once again, so we headed to the 'great plains' where I had had much success in the past.

At km 30, by the famous "Tan-Tan 100" sign, we located our first Bar-tailed Lark as well as a flyover Lesser Short-toed Lark. At km 32 we really scored! Eight Temminck's Larks and a further four Bar-tailed Larks were simply stunning in good light, and I located two Thick-billed Larks on the other side of the road which also showed extremely well after a little perseverance. This was desert birding at its very best. Feeling pleased with ourselves, we drove on across an agricultural area to km 38 before heading back towards Guelmim. At km 34 Houari slowed down and we found a male Desert Wheatear, surprisingly our only one of the day. At km 33, probably my favourite desert spot, we walked away from the road towards some 'fields'. Twenty Thick-billed Larks was a high count, and we found two more Bar-tailed Larks as well as another Temminck's Lark, but it was the two 'sand specialists' we were after. Two Cream-coloured Coursers were much enjoyed before we discovered a pair of Greater Hoopoe Larks. They ran as fast as we could walk but, eventually, stalking paid off and they were yet another species to tick the 'well-photographed' box! What a morning we were having; one after another the most sought-after specialities were being enjoyed at close range.

We headed back to km 12, Oued Boukila, and tried again for Scrub Warbler, but to no avail. We found the last of 12 Red-rumped Wheatears, a pair of Moussier's Redstarts, a Vagrant Emperor and even three Northern Pintails, but not our quarry. Had they disappeared because the laying of new pipes had caused disturbance, or were we too late in the day? We tried to enjoy our picnic despite the flies, and I fended off the somewhat officious police, before, via a pit stop at the hotel, we headed to the gateway in Guelmim for the obligatory photo stop. We then paused briefly in the hills, with nothing doing, before Houari drove us to Tiznit where we broke our journey to enjoy a cup of tea. Then it was time to continue to Agadir; we arrived well before 6pm, and thus had plenty of time to unwind prior to convening for the list and dinner. The cards were swapped by the barmen but we were undeterred and, in fact, we were seriously impressed by Hassan in the restaurant who had wine on the table! Despite the rain, our mission in the desert had been well and truly accomplished with some of the best views ever of the larks in particular!

### **Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> November**

Hassan had reserved us a table at breakfast this morning! We also had time for some leisurely birding in the garden, and the birds were singing contently, happy (as we were) with the sunshine! A pair of African Blue Tits was a welcome addition to the list.

We headed up via Aourir into the western fringes of the Atlas Mountains. We marvelled at the superb scenery, but were somewhat taken aback to find several signs saying "road closed". Fortunately, we were able to get as far as the aptly-named Paradise Valley, with its amazing rock formations, pools along the river bed and palm trees which provided stark contrast to the surrounding hills. Here we had to stop due to mud on the road and a landslide a little further on. The rain had finally had a significant impact on our progress. We had no choice but to continue on foot, and in fact we had a thoroughly productive and enjoyable couple of hours. Both Moroccan White Wagtail and Grey Wagtail were photographed along the river, and the bushes were heaving with passerines. A pair of Cirl Bunting was obliging, a Rock Bunting a little less so, whilst both Spotted and Pied Flycatchers were seen perching up. Blackcaps were everywhere, Robin, Great Tit and House Martin trip ticks. A Northern Goshawk overhead gave excellent views, but the Black Wheatear was perhaps the ornithological highlight of the morning. This part of the trip is noted for its dragonflies and this year was no exception, with black and yellow Ringed Cascaders patrolling the river and Orange-winged Dropwings sunning themselves.

Tristram's Warbler was our main target species today. It is a widespread breeder in the hills above 1000m, but we were unable to reach my normal site. We needed a plan B. I remembered that we had on more than one occasion seen it next to a beautifully positioned roadside stall selling a variety of gifts including ammonites. I suggested that we had a look prior to shopping and at least some of us were in luck. I heard the tell-tale call of a Tristram's, so gathered the group together. At least one perched up, albeit distantly. Then we headed back to the hotel, a splendid Long-legged Buzzard detaining us only briefly. Lunch the hotel was taken indoors with a House Bunting joining us!

After a short break at the hotel we headed again to Oued Souss. The tide was dropping and the light was excellent which made for perfect viewing conditions. A group of 13 Ruff was surprising, a Slender-billed Gull a typical record and the count of 31 Black-winged Stilts about as expected. Wader numbers were no higher than on our first visit so we headed again for the bridge. A large falcon, either Barbary or Peregrine, gave a pale phase Arctic Skua some serious grief and us very good entertainment! Ten feeding Eurasian Spoonbills and several roosting terns (14 Common and nine Black) were seen as the sun began to go down; we had seen the terns previously over the golf course pond. My plan to stay till dark for Red-necked Nightjars was scuppered as the guards were stopping traffic going along the palace track, so we headed back. Although things hadn't turned out quite as we had expected, we had still had a very good day's birding both in the hills and on the estuary.

### **Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November**

Today was our last full day. Those gathering before breakfast were treated to some unexpected visible migration, with groups of Spanish Sparrows, Chaffinches, Goldfinches, Linnets, Greenfinches, Serins and even a Skylark noted heading south. This was the first time I had ever witnessed such a spectacle in Morocco. The birds had clearly taken advantage of the first clear night for a while. Little Swifts were noted above the hotel, even visible from the queue for omelettes!

We headed back to Massa: there was still much to see along the valley. We chose to spend the morning having a leisurely one-way walk along the river with the sun behind us, and sent the driver to meet us at the far end. Black-crowned Tchagras were singing on both sides of the river, and one was encouraged to come closer. It gave ridiculously good views! Birds were actually in short supply, although we noted six Tufted Ducks, a flighty Squacco Heron, another Brown-throated Martin and our first Common Snipe. The dragonflies were simply amazing. Long Skimmer was a lifer for me, and on one tiny pool it was possible to see it at point blank range alongside Epaulet Skimmer, Lesser and Blue Emperors, Red-veined Darter, Broad Scarlet, Orange-winged and Violet Dropwings and Sahara Bluetail. The rain had had some benefits for us! Blue-eyes were noted floating on bits of vegetation, just like the field guide said they did, before it was time to have our picnic in the shade of the eucalyptus trees. What we didn't finish was demolished by some very polite local children.

It was a hot Morocco day today so we took advantage of a new road to head across the desert to a restaurant called Ksar Massa in the village of Sidi R'bat, for tea in the shade. We were able to seawatch and were thrilled when a group of 16 Northern Bald Ibis flew along the coast! The loos were perhaps the best I'd ever found in the country! Some rested and enjoyed the sea view from the restaurant, whilst others walked down to the seaward end of the river. The sand bar had made it a lagoon, and it was reasonably birdy, with a Lesser Crested Tern, our first Common Ringed Plover and Little Stint and 40 Greater Flamingos amongst the species on offer. In the village trees we found a Common Redstart as well as a Garden Warbler. Back by the bus a Blue Rock Thrush was photographed.

We finished the day on the village bridge. African Grass Blues were noted, as expected, and we were pleased to find our first European Turtle Dove. Moroccan Reed Warblers were calling from the reeds, and another Banded Grounding was welcome. It looked as if we weren't going to get a grandstand finish until, at the eleventh hour, a pair of Black-winged Kites flew over and perched in a dead tree. A perfect end to our week's birding!

We headed back to base for a thoroughly enjoyable last meal in the restaurant, where Hassan was thanked for his excellent service.

### **Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> November**

After a relaxing final breakfast, the addition of Song Thrush to our list and a spot of shopping for some, we paid our room bills before it was time to bid farewell to the waiters, porters and other staff with whom we'd spent the week, and head for the airport. I publicly thanked Houari for his splendid driving and help with lunch and gave him a well-deserved tip. Check-in was quick and easy and we relaxed over coffee before boarding our British Airways flight back to the Heathrow where we said our goodbyes at the end of a thoroughly enjoyable week in Morocco. The percentage of 'good birds' which had been well-photographed was certainly the highest ever!

### **Colour-ringed Spoonbills**

The bird we saw at Oued Souss on our first evening was ringed as a nestling in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008. It has been seen in Morocco every winter, either at Oued Massa or Oued Souss. The bird we saw at close range at Oued Massa, and which allowed very close approach, was also ringed as a nestling, at Vlieland in the Netherlands, on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012. Ours is the first report since it was first ringed.

### **Birds of the Trip** (voted by the group)

- 1<sup>st</sup> Northern Bald Ibis
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Black-crowned Tchagra
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Temminck's Lark
- 4<sup>th</sup> House Bunting
- =5<sup>th</sup> Fulvous Babbler
- =5<sup>th</sup> Thick-billed Lark
- =5<sup>th</sup> Greater Hoopoe Lark
- 8<sup>th</sup> Eurasian Wryneck
- 9<sup>th</sup> Black-winged Kite

### **Acknowledgements**

My first visit to Morocco, in 1995, seems a very long time ago now. Gone are the days of proceeding through endless checkpoints in the desert, and travelling on poor surfaces. The ground arrangements on our 2012 tour went very smoothly. Houari, our driver, was always punctual and helpful; he drove very safely and sorted out our lunches efficiently which took a lot of pressure off the leader! Thanks to everyone in the group for finding so many wonderful birds, and for being so positive throughout the week even when the weather was inclement. We had lots of fun, not only 'in the field', but also over dinner. From a personal point of view, it was as interesting and enjoyable a trip to Morocco as I can ever remember, not just because of the birds and dragonflies but due to the company. Special thanks to Peter Mayes and Nigel and Di Hardcastle for allowing us to include some of their photos in this report.

David Walsh  
Ornitholidays  
29 Straight Mile  
Romsey  
Hants  
SO51 9BB  
Tel: 01794 519445  
Email: info@ornitholidays.co.uk

November 2012

### **Itinerary and Weather**

- 28<sup>th</sup> October am flight from London Heathrow to Agadir;  
transfer to our hotel (lunch and siesta); pm Oued Souss.  
Sunny then cloudy, max 26°C.
- 29<sup>th</sup> October am Agadir Kasbah, coffee at hotel, then north along coast to Tamri (birding around lagoon  
and along river, restaurant lunch in village);  
pm Cap Rhir (roadside for Bald Ibises then seawatching);  
Rain, then sunny intervals, windy, min 20°C, max 24°C.
- 30<sup>th</sup> October am Sidi Bibi and Oued Massa (several riverside sites to south of village, picnic lunch);  
pm tea in village, drive to 'village bridge'.  
Heavy rain early and late, otherwise cloudy and windy, min 19°C, max 22°C.
- 31<sup>st</sup> October am Agadir (via tea in Tiznit) to Anti-Atlas mountains (picnic lunch);  
pm desert south-east of Guelmim near Asrir as far as Tighmert Oasis;  
overnight Hotel "Au Rendez-vous des Hommes Bleus" in Guelmim.  
Very heavy rain overnight, then sunny intervals and showers, min 20°C, max 24°C.
- 1<sup>st</sup> November am desert south-west of Guelmim along Tan-Tan road; significant stops at km 30, km 32,  
km 34, km 33, Oued Boukila (km 12, picnic lunch), driving as far as km 38;  
pm Anti-Atlas mountains; tea in Tiznit, return to Agadir.  
Heavy showers, then very warm and sunny, min 21°C, max 26°C.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> November am Immouzzer road in Atlas mountains as far as Paradise Valley;  
pm hotel (lunch and siesta), Oued Souss.  
Mostly hot and sunny, min 20°C, max 28°C.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> November am riverside walk from 'football pitch bridge' to 'Café de la Poste bridge' (picnic lunch);  
pm tea/seawatching in Sidi R'bat, optional walk to seaward end of lagoon, 'village bridge'.  
Very hot and sunny, min 23°C, max 31°C.
- 4<sup>th</sup> November Transfer to airport for early afternoon flight from Agadir to London Heathrow.

## CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING THE TOUR

No of days recorded	Location	Abundance scale
		Maximum seen(on one day)
1 2h means seen on 1 day and heard on 2 other days	A = Agadir (north to Tamri)	1 = 1-4
	I = Immouzzar road	2 = 5-9
	S = Souss estuary	3 = 10-99
	M = Massa valley area	4 = 100-999
	G = Guelmim & Anti-Atlas	5 = 1,000+

Species	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundanc e Scale	Scientific Name
Ruddy Shelduck	1	G	1	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Mallard	2	A, M	3	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Pintail	4	A, M, G	3	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Northern Shoveler	1	A	1	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Marbled Duck	1	M	2	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
Eurasian Teal	2	A, M	3	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Ferruginous Duck	1	M	2	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
Tufted Duck	1	M	2	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Barbary Partridge	-	1h A, I	1	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>
Little Grebe	4	S, M	2	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Cory's Shearwater <sup>1</sup>	3	A, M	3	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
Northern Gannet	6	A, M	4	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
Great Cormorant <sup>2</sup>	5	A, S, M	2	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>
White-breasted Cormorant <sup>2</sup>	2	A, M	2	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus/lucidus</i>
Cattle Egret	4	A, M, G	4	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Squacco Heron	1	M	1	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Little Egret	6	A, S, M, G	3	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Great Egret	1	A	1	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
Grey Heron	5	A, S, M	3	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Glossy Ibis	1	M	4	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Northern Bald Ibis	2	A, M	3	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	4	S, M	3	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Greater Flamingo	3	S, M	4	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Osprey	3	S, M	1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Bonelli's Eagle	1	M	1	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	4	A, S, M	1	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Long-legged Buzzard <sup>3</sup>	3	G, I	1	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	2	M	1	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Northern Goshawk	1	I	1	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Black-winged Kite	2	M	1	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Common Kestrel	8	A, S, M, G, I	2	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Barbary Falcon	2	A, M	1	<i>Falco peregrinoides</i>
Common Moorhen	2	M	3	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	5	A, S, M	3	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	2	S, M	3	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	3	S, M	3	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Cream-coloured Courser	1	G	1	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
Little Ringed Plover	1	S	2	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Common Ringed Plover	1	M	1	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Kentish Plover	2	S, M	3	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Grey Plover	2	S	1	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Red Knot	2	S	1	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
Sanderling	2	A, M	2	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	1	A	2	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Dunlin	3	A, S, M	3	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Little Stint	1	M	1	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Green Sandpiper	1	M	1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Common Sandpiper	5	A, S, M	2	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Common Redshank	2	S	3	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Common Greenshank	3	A, S	1	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>

Black-tailed Godwit	2	S	3	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	2	S	2	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Eurasian Curlew	3	A, S	1	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Common Snipe	1	M	1	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Ruff	1	S	3	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Arctic Skua	2	A, S	1	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
Black-headed Gull	4	A, S, M	3	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Slender-billed Gull	2	A, S	3	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
Mediterranean Gull	3	A, S	2	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull <sup>4</sup>	8	A, S, M	4	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Audouin's Gull	4	A, S, M	5	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull <sup>5</sup>	8	A, S, M	5	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Sandwich Tern	6	A, S, M	3	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
Common Tern	3	A, S, M	3	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Lesser Crested Tern	3	A, S, M	1	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
Black Tern	2	A, S, M	2	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	1	M, G	3	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	8	A, S, M, G, I	3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	4	S, M	3	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	7	A, M, G, I	3	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
European Turtle Dove	1	M	1	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Laughing Dove	5	A, M, G	2	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Little Owl <sup>6</sup>	1	M	1	<i>Athene noctua glaux</i>
Alpine Swift	1	A	3	<i>Apus melba</i>
Little Swift	4	A, M	3	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Common Kingfisher	3	A, M	1	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Eurasian Wryneck	2	A, M	1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
Common Skylark	1	A	1	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Crested Lark <sup>7</sup>	1	S	1	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Thekla Lark <sup>7</sup>	8	A, S, M, G, I	3	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
Lesser Short-toed Lark	1	G	1	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>
Desert Lark <sup>8</sup>	1	G	1	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
Bar-tailed Lark	1	G	2	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>
Thick-billed Lark	1	G	3	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>
Temminck's Lark	1	G	2	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
Greater Hoopoe Lark	1	G	1	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
Brown-throated Martin	2	M	3	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
Barn Swallow	6	A, S, M, G	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	1	I	1	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Meadow Pipit	2	1h A, S, M	2	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
White Wagtail <sup>9</sup>	7	A, S, M, G	3	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>
Moroccan White Wagtail <sup>9</sup>	1	I	1	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>
Yellow Wagtail	1	A	1	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail	1	I	1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
European Robin	1	I	1	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Common Redstart	1	M	1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Black Redstart <sup>10</sup>	2	S, G	1	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis</i>
Moussier's Redstart	6	A, M, G, I	1	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
Northern Wheatear	5	A, M, G	3	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
White-crowned Wheatear	1	G	1	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
Black Wheatear	1	I	1	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
Desert Wheatear	1	G	1	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Red-rumped Wheatear	2	G	3	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
Whinchat	1	A	1	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Common Stonechat	6	A, S, M, G, I	2	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Song Thrush	1	A	1	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Common Blackbird <sup>11</sup>	7	A, M, G, I	3	<i>Turdus merula mauritanicus</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	3	A, M, I	1	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Garden Warbler	1	M	1	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
Blackcap	1	A, I	3	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Sardinian Warbler	6	A, S, M, I	3	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Spectacled Warbler	1	G	1	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
Subalpine Warbler	1	A	1	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>

Tristram's Warbler	1		I	1	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
Zitting Cisticola	4		A, S, M	1	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Cetti's Warbler	1	2h	A, M	2	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
European Reed Warbler <sup>12</sup>	5		A	1	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Moroccan (African) Reed Warbler <sup>12</sup>	2		M	1	<i>Acrocephalus cf baeticatus</i>
Willow Warbler	3		A, M	1	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	4		A, S, M, I	2	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Yellow-browed Warbler	1		A	1	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	1		I	1	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Pied Flycatcher	4		A, M, I	1	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Great Tit	1		A, I	1	<i>Parus major</i>
African Blue Tit <sup>13</sup>	2		A, S, I	1	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>
Great Grey Shrike <sup>14</sup>	5		A, M, G, I	1	<i>Lanius excubitor algeriensis</i>
Black-crowned Tchagra	2	1h	M, I	1	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>
Common Bulbul	8		A, M, G, I	3	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Fulvous Babbler	1		G	2	<i>Turdoides fulva</i>
Common Magpie <sup>15</sup>	8		A, S, M, G	3	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>
Common Raven <sup>16</sup>	1		A	1	<i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i>
Spotless Starling	8		A, M, G	3	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
House Sparrow	8		A, S, M, G, I	3	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Spanish Sparrow	7		A, M, G	4	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
Common Chaffinch <sup>17</sup>	4		A, M, G, I	3	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Common Linnet	2		A, I	1	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	2		A, M, G	3	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
European Greenfinch	2		A	1	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
European Serin	2		A, S, M, I	2	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Trumpeter Finch	2		G	3	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
Cirl Bunting	2	1h	M, I	1	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
Corn Bunting	2		G	2	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Rock Bunting	1		I	1	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
House Bunting <sup>18</sup>	4		A, G, I	2	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>

### Notes on the bird list

The bird list uses the order, nomenclature and taxonomy of the Collins Bird Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Svensson et al); we used that book throughout the week. The following notes mainly relate to species where there is updated information on taxonomy in the Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition or where we noted clearly identifiable subspecies during the trip.

#### 1. Cory's Shearwater

Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition has plates of two distinct subspecies, Cory's Shearwater (*C.d.borealis*) and Scopoli's Shearwater (*C.d.diomedea*); this distinction was not mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. They are considered different species by some other authorities. Cory's breeds mainly on islands in the Atlantic (eg the Canaries and the Azores), whilst Scopoli's breeds mainly on islands in the Mediterranean. Both can be observed off Morocco in October/November, but excellent views are needed to separate them.

#### 2. Cormorant

The all dark birds seen at various locations were of the race *P.c.sinensis* which breeds in mainland Europe and is an increasingly common winter visitor in Morocco. We also saw adults with white breasts and dark bellies (eg at Massa); this form is depicted in the Collins Guide and is colloquially known as 'White-breasted Cormorant', birds being of one of the African races: *P.c.maroccanus* (which breeds in Morocco) or *P.c.lucidus* (which breeds further south). We didn't try to distinguish between these two 'white-breasted' subspecies. We also saw immatures with completely white underparts (eg at Souss).

#### 3. Long-legged Buzzard

Both editions of the Collins Guide list the North African subspecies *B.r.cirtensis*, sometimes known as 'Atlas Long-legged Buzzard', with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition having additional plates of this race. We had good flight views on the return journey from Paradise Valley.

#### 4. Yellow-legged Gull

Older bird guides considered this as a race of Herring Gull. The Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition listed it as a separate species *L.cachinnans*, but in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition it is split further as *L.michahellis*, with *L.cachinnans* now listed as Caspian Gull, the latter occurring mainly in the east of the region. Yellow-legged is darker on the back than Herring, although not as dark as Lesser Black-backed Gull. We had excellent views, not least in the Agadir hotel garden and swimming pool as birds washed early each morning.

5. Lesser Black-backed Gull

We saw birds of two races, *L.f.graellsii* and *L.f.intermedius* (both of which are illustrated in Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition); the latter has a darker back.

6. Little Owl

The two birds seen superbly on a wall north of Massa village were of the race *A.n.glaux*, colloquially known as 'Desert Little Owl'.

7. Crested Lark/Thekla Lark

There are a number of races of both species in Morocco; for each, the Collins Guide has illustrations of one of the North African subspecies, showing the ground colour and bill shape. We had excellent views of Thekla at a number of sites and of Crested at Oued Souss near the destroyed bridge across the river, allowing us to note the structural and plumage differences between the two species.

8. Desert Lark

The Moroccan race is illustrated in the Collins Guide as an example of the geographical variation in this species.

9. White Wagtail

Most of the birds we saw were winter visitors from Europe of the nominate race *M.a.alba*, but in Paradise Valley we had great views of two adults of the uncommon breeding race *M.a.subpersonata* known as 'Moroccan White Wagtail'.

10. Black Redstart

In the Anti-Atlas mountains, and at Oued Souss, we saw female types of the race *P.o.gibraltariensis* which is illustrated in the Collins Guide. It is the same race which occurs in the UK.

11. Common Blackbird

Compared to UK birds, the female of the race we saw (*T.m.mauritanicus*, 'Moroccan Blackbird') is much greyer and has a yellower bill. It is not illustrated in the Collins Guide.

12. Reed Warbler

The birds seen in the hotel grounds were migrant European Reed Warblers *A.scirpaceus*. Those seen at two sites along the Massa river were of a currently undescribed taxon, Moroccan (or African) Reed Warbler *A.cf.baeticatus*, resident in that area. They showed very short wings, blackish flight feathers, dark grey legs and generally darker underparts.

13. African Blue Tit

The Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits African Blue Tit *C.teneriffae* from Blue Tit *C.caeruleus* to include the Canary Island races in the former. In Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition the Canaries birds and North African birds were both listed (and illustrated) only as subspecies of Blue Tit. Other authorities split this 'complex' further into at least four species. We had good views in the hotel garden which allowed us to note the main features of African Blue Tit.

14. Great Grey Shrike

In Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition the Moroccan birds were illustrated as *L.e.algeriensis*, a race of Great Grey Shrike, with birds of various races throughout Europe and beyond also considered subspecies of Great Grey. Subsequent to its publication, some other authorities split the birds in North Africa, Iberia and Southern France, calling them Southern Grey Shrike *L.meridionalis*; on previous trips we followed this decision, thus treating *algeriensis* as a race of Southern Grey rather than Great Grey Shrike. However, the Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition doesn't use the name Southern Grey at all; it has split only the birds from Iberia and Southern France, calling them Iberian Grey Shrike *L.meridionalis*, and leaving the North African birds as subspecies of Great Grey Shrike as in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition. In the future, it seems likely that the birds we saw in Morocco will actually be split further as Desert Grey Shrike *L.elegans*; this split has already been proposed. Whatever the taxonomy, the birds we saw near the Agadir coast with dingy underparts, and those in the desert areas with a somewhat bigger white wing patch and whiter underparts, were distinctly different from the ones seen occasionally in winter in the UK.

15. Common Magpie

The North-west African race *P.p.mauritanica* ('Moroccan Magpie') is clearly identifiable by the blue spot behind the eye and the very long tail, and is illustrated in the Collins Guide.

16. Common Raven

The race *C.c.tingitanus* which occurs in Morocco is said to be smaller than the nominate. It certainly has a less 'bass' voice.

### 17. Common Chaffinch

In the Anti-Atlas mountains (at our lunch stop), and in Paradise Valley, we could clearly see the features of the distinctive 'North African Chaffinch' (*F.c.africana*) with the male having crown/nape blue-grey, mantle bright green, breast/belly pale pink, etc. The small flocks of migrating birds at our hotel on our last full day were probably also *F.c.africana* but might possibly have been the nominate race *F.c.colebs* which is the one we see in the UK.

### 18. House Bunting

In the Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, House Bunting was listed with two races, North African birds as *E.s.sahari* and the Middle East birds as *E.s.striolata*. They look very different, and the Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits them into distinct species.

### References

- **The Birds of Morocco** by M. Thevenot, R. Vernon and P. Bergier (BOU 2003)
- **Collins Bird Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition** by L. Svensson, K. Mullarney and D. Zetterstrom (HarperCollins 2009)
- **Collins Bird Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Edition** by L. Svensson, K. Mullarney, D. Zetterstrom and P. Grant (HarperCollins 1999)
- **A Birdwatchers' Guide to Morocco** by P. & F. Bergier (Prion 2003)
- **Peregrines and Barbary Falcons in Morocco** ([www.go-south.org](http://www.go-south.org))
- **New England Seabirds – the Cory's Shearwater complex** (<http://www.neseabirds.com/shearcory.htm>)
- **New treatment of the Grey Shrike complex** (<http://www.uk400clubonline.co.uk/grey-shrike-changes/>)

### BUTTERFLIES

Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Small White	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>
Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>
Greenish Black-tip	<i>Elphinstonia charlonia</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>
African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>

### DRAGONFLIES

Sahara Bluetail	<i>Ischnura saharenis</i>
Blue-eye	<i>Erythromma lindenii</i>
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>
Vagrant Emperor	<i>Anax ephippiger</i>
Epaulet Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>
Long Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum trinacria</i>
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>
Broad Scarlet	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>
Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>
Orange-winged Dropwing	<i>Trithemis kirbyi ardens</i>
Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>
Ringed Cascader	<i>Zygonyx torridus</i>

### MAMMALS

Barbary Ground Squirrel	<i>Atlantoxerus getulus</i>
Sand Rat	<i>Psammomys obesus</i>

### REPTILES

Spanish Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>
------------------	-------------------------

(Other lizards, snakes, toads/frogs, etc remained unidentified)

These lists represent the birds, butterflies, dragonflies, mammals and reptiles seen by the group members on this tour.



**Trumpeter Finch**



**Moussier's Redstart**



**Red-rumped Wheatear**



**Temminck's Lark**



**House Bunting**



**Black-crowned Tchagra**



**Hoopoe Lark**



**Fulvous Babbler**



**Great Grey Shrike**



**Thick-billed Lark**



**Little Owl**



**White-crowned Wheatear**



**Desert Wheatear**



**Eurasian Wryneck**



**Orange-winged Dropwing**



**Greenish Black-tip**

**Front Cover: Bald Ibis**

**All photographs © Nigel Hardcastle, Di Hardcastle and Peter Mayes**