

**ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO MOROCCO**  
*High Atlas & Sahara*

**06 – 15 April 2013**



**Leader: David Walsh**

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### A Personal Diary

#### **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April**

Our various afternoon flights from Manchester and Gatwick arrived on time at Marrakech. With the whole group now together, we changed money with the minimum of fuss before meeting up with our driver, Houari: I was delighted to see him for our fourth trip together! The fine, warm weather was most welcome and a stark contrast to the gloomy, cold conditions we had left behind in the UK. A roadside motor racing event, which I discovered later was the Marrakech Grand Prix, provided enough interest to compensate for slowing us down somewhat. As we left the suburbs, we noted our first Spotless Starlings, before we headed south into the plains, with barley fields and olive groves on both sides. Ahead we could see snow covered peaks in the Atlas Mountains. It wasn't long before we entered the Ourika Valley, each village having several shops selling tagine pots. We arrived at our hotel shortly after 6.30pm and the helpful and efficient staff ensured that we were soon in our rooms. Cetti's Warblers were singing outside! At 7.30pm we met for our first Flag beers before enjoying a splendid dinner of Moroccan salad and beef tagine washed down with the President's red wine. All in all, it had been a very smooth start to our holiday.

#### **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April**

We gathered at 7am on the terrace; the views along the valley were impressive and there were plenty of birds to look at including Little Swifts, Common Bulbuls, House Buntings, Blackcaps and Sardinian Warblers as well as our first African Blue Tit. We enjoyed a typical rural Moroccan breakfast consisting of bread, jam, omelettes, orange juice and coffee.

At 8am we set off down the valley, noting the splendid wisterias and ubiquitous Nightingales and Serins as we drove along. A short stop gave us fine views of Red-rumped Swallows and the distinctive 'North African' Chaffinches. It had obviously rained fairly recently as, in places, the road showed evidence of having been part of the river! Just ten minutes after leaving the hotel we turned left onto the mountain road. At first we were in a lush valley with a mix of trees and small fields. A singing male Cirl Bunting sat up right next to the bus so we made an unplanned stop. As so often, one bird led to another and we had super views of our first Moussier's Redstart, always one of the highlights of a visit to Morocco. A Scarce Swallowtail was our first good butterfly, then a Levaillant's Green Woodpecker called not far away. I asked everyone to concentrate on this bird, our first real target species, and we soon located it. It gave splendid scope views both in the trees and when feeding on the ground. What a start!

We climbed through the pines and above the tree line, soon stopping again for a cracking sub-adult Bonelli's Eagle soaring overhead. Then it was onwards to the ski resort of Oukaimeden. It was cool but beautifully sunny, and to our surprise there was a considerable quantity of snow, even around the village. We gingerly drove a mile or so beyond the village to the car park by the ski lift and parked up. Our first 'Atlas' Horned Larks and Common Rock Sparrows gave excellent views. We walked a little way up the valley; it was still frosty underfoot at this stage of the morning. Seebom's Wheatears, the males with their diagnostic dark throats, proved very obliging; a Water Pipit was more distant. Houari managed to turn the bus round despite the ice and we headed back down into the village for a tagine lunch at one of the numerous restaurants. We removed our coats, woolly hats and fleeces and sought shade: it was actually getting very warm! There were large numbers of Red-billed and Alpine Choughs as we strolled below the village before heading back towards the ski lift. The species we had seen in the morning gave even better views in increased numbers (there were at least 40 Horned Larks) but, despite our best efforts and the lure of peanuts brought out from the UK, we couldn't find any Crimson-winged Finches. Perhaps it was simply the unexpectedly high number of people taking advantage of the late winter opportunity to ski on a Sunday afternoon.

We drifted slowly down the valley, stopping below the reservoir where a White-throated Dipper gave only fleeting views but a Blue Rock Thrush, a Grey Wagtail and several Black Redstarts were well-watched. A photo stop produced four Common Ravens. Further down, in the pines, we stopped at a convenient pull-in

and had a superb half an hour. First we had point blank looks at a showy Firecrest before several Coal Tits of the local race responded to my 'pishing'. A Rock Bunting was found on call, and perched up nicely. The star bird here was 'Atlas' Common Crossbill and we watched a female feeding a juvenile at close range.

Eventually it was time to return to the hotel. Mixed salad and a chicken tagine rounded off a very good day's birding, with the woodpecker unsurprisingly voted our first 'bird of the day.'

### **Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April**

A group of Hawfinches were found near the hotel before breakfast and we enjoyed amazing views of this normally elusive species. Our first Western Olivaceous Warbler was seen at close range from the terrace itself and we finally saw a Nightingale having heard several. Cetti's Warbler remained 'heard only'!

We bade farewell to the friendly staff, our hotel having proved an excellent choice, before heading off. There was time for one 'planned' stop in the valley, and we were rewarded with another photogenic Moussier's Redstart and a Moroccan Orange Tip. A little further on, a village market was fascinating although it slowed our progress, then we crossed the plains with a number of Corn Buntings noted on the wires. Shortly after we turned south-east on the main road a European Roller was seen from the bus, but it was right by one of umpteen police checkpoints so, frustratingly, we were unable to stop and enjoy it.

We made good progress on our ascent, passing through a splendid pine forest before stopping at a lay-by close to some interesting habitat of juniper trees and bushes. We walked a short way from the road, and almost immediately I heard the song of a Tristram's Warbler. It soon gave outstanding views to the group, a real 'champagne moment' for me with one of my favourite Moroccan species: bird of the day! We debated the identity of a Green Hairstreak butterfly before ascending, then descending, to our chosen restaurant, Houari coping well with some seriously bad driving by others. Tagines were, again, popular for many whilst others decided on couscous. The sit-down lunches became a really popular feature of this tour, with excellent food, a chance to chat, and an opportunity for the driver to rest.

We headed on through the hairpins before pausing briefly at the top of the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass at 2,260 metres, with a Barbary Ground Squirrel seen by some. No purchases were made despite the pushy sellers wanting us to buy their gems and fossils, products apparently of the local mountainsides and valleys. A little further on, we found our first perched European Bee-Eaters on the roadside wires so made an 'unplanned' stop to stretch our legs. New birds came thick and fast. We scrutinised a Thekla Lark, studied our first Northern Wheatear, simply enjoyed a Black Wheatear and confirmed the race of a Woodchat Shrike before two wonderful Short-toed Eagles passed right overhead!

Having reached our first proper bit of desert we took the loop south of Amerzgane. Birds were in short supply but we did see our first White-crowned Wheatear. Then we made haste to our hotel in the bustling town of Ouarzazate with a population of 40,000. Dinner tonight was a fine buffet, and some took advantage of the hotel's wifi to check on the result of the Manchester derby, of significant interest to some of our group!

### **Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> April**

The itinerary for this tour was carefully designed to allow us to spend more time birding and less time driving, and today we benefited hugely from this planning. After a splendid buffet breakfast we were able to spend the whole morning exploring two areas near Lake Mansour, close to Ouarzazate. First up was an area of scrub and channels at the west end. Singing 'Saharan' Olivaceous Warblers perched up nicely in the tamarisks, whilst nearby we compared Kentish, Little Ringed and Common Ringed Plovers. Two Curlew Sandpipers and three Black-winged Stilts were the pick of the other waders on show, and the birds on the lake itself included a large flock of Ruddy Shelducks. A female Black-eared Wheatear, three Greater Short-toed and four 'Maghreb' (Long-billed) Crested Larks were well studied in the drier areas; a 'Moroccan' White Wagtail showed well in good light, whilst those scrutinising the 'yellow' wagtails found three different races including Grey-headed. Shortly before it was time to depart, over a hundred White Storks took advantage of the thermals whilst a spectacular Plain Tiger butterfly flew past the bus.

We drove round to a site on the north shore. Two Great Egrets were an unexpected bonus in the lakeside vegetation, but soon the passerines captured our attention. Three Fulvous Babbler were found perched close

to the bus: another North African speciality seen superbly! A Western Orphean Warbler showed respectably, a good find for those searching the bushes. Four colourful Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters gave wonderful views both in flight and on the wires.

With the temperature rising, we headed along the main road for an hour or so to a restaurant known to Houari. The food took ages to arrive, but it wasn't an issue as the birding from our shaded terrace by the river was excellent. A male Pied Flycatcher, a Eurasian Hoopoe and our first Western Bonelli's Warbler all showed splendidly. We saw a roadside 'Desert' Little Owl, as we drove parallel to the Dadès River. This area is known both as the 'Valley of a thousand Kasbahs' and the 'Valley of Roses', with the beautiful pink roses harvested annually to make scented rose water.

At Boumalne, we were welcomed by a song from Moroccans in costume at our hotel and had time to check in and relax for a while before spending a couple of hours birding at the famous Tagdilt Track. The usual tactic, driving along slowly and stopping when something was spotted, paid dividends. Male and female Desert and Red-rumped Wheatears were enjoyed before a superb Temminck's Lark, our bird of the day, was found singing on its favoured rock. A Greater Hoopoe Lark was noted close by, 20 Black-bellied Sandgrouse sped past, a ringtail Montagu's Harrier drifted across the desert and gerbil-like creatures which we presumed were Fat Sand Rats scurried from their burrows. We headed back very happy for a superb buffet dinner with wine half the price of elsewhere!

### **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> April**

This morning a few of the group decided to take advantage of the opportunity of a later start; others headed off at 6am for another visit to the Tagdilt Track. The early morning light was superb and we enjoyed a Long-legged Buzzard, perched in the desert, and our first Bar-tailed Lark, as well as repeat views of the species seen the previous evening. The highlight was undoubtedly a total of six Cream-coloured Coursers. This species had been in extremely short supply this year so we were very fortunate to get scope views of this most wanted species! The birds eventually flew off, so we drove back towards the hotel, stopping once more at a convenient pull-off. Here we had incredible views of a point blank male Thick-billed Lark from the bus, another truly magical moment. There was time to stroll into the desert, and we hadn't gone far when a bird flew off from my feet: it turned out to be the female lark, from its nest! We quickly retreated, seeing a pair of Trumpeter Finches, before returning to the hotel for a 9am breakfast, in awe of everything we had seen.

An hour later we left again, heading east along the main road and then north into the famous Todra Gorge. The scenery was wonderful, and we had super views of Crag Martins as they flew low over the river. Then it was time for another splendid lunch, the restaurant staff especially helpful in ensuring we had tables in the shade. Afterwards we strolled a little further up the valley. Migrants were in short supply but we did find our only Melodious Warbler of the trip as well as a Peregrine and our first Desert Lark. A resplendent male Blue Rock Thrush accompanied another Eurasian Hoopoe between various palm trees; some of the group also saw colourful lizards. Eventually we drifted back down the valley, via a number of photo stops, for tea in Tineghir. Revived, and with the temperature now spot on for birding, we headed west. An area of trees and bushes by the road looked inviting so we decided to investigate it, and we had a truly magical half an hour. A Rufous Bush Robin strutted around for ages right in front of us, cocking its tail: truly a bird with 'attitude', and today's bird of the day. As elsewhere, Woodchat Shrikes were prominent, whilst a Tawny Pipit also showed well, as did another pair of Bar-tailed Larks.

We stopped by the road for one of several attempts at Maghreb Wheatear before returning to Xaluca. It was great to have had the chance of a second successive day of minimal driving, and we had lots to talk about as we sat down for another excellent dinner in the fine restaurant.

### **Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> April**

The ever-flexible staff at Xaluca organised a 6.30am breakfast for us this morning so we were able to set off on our long journey in good time. Our first Brown-necked Raven was noted before we headed beyond Tinerhir for the first time. Having picked up water in Tinejdad we turned left, through Goulmima, and reached our planned stop at a roadside wadi. Our early departure from the hotel was to allow us to reach this spot before it got too hot, and the decision proved very worthwhile. A few migrants detained us briefly before we began our search for Scrub Warbler, and almost instantly our quarry was located. For the next few

minutes we had incredible views of this normally difficult species as it fed on the ground near to the low bushes, cocking its tail all the while.

Elated, we headed east to Ar-Rachidia for an early lunch, the restaurant owner keen to practise his French as well as show us how to pour tea Moroccan style! A roadside Great Grey Shrike showed all too briefly en route. There was time for a snooze as we drifted south along the Ziz valley before we made a photo stop at a well-placed viewpoint. The scenery was superb, the palm tree filled valley below us providing such a contrast to the desert above. We had super looks at both Long-legged Buzzard and Brown-necked Raven.

Having passed through the desert towns of Erfoud and Rissani, we headed on the new road to Merzouga before turning left onto a well-marked track which took us to our home for the next two nights. Right in the heart of the desert, it was a real oasis, the grounds full of trees as well as places for us to relax in the shade. Some chose to spend an hour birding before dinner, and we found both Western and Saharan Olivaceous Warblers, comparing the structure of the two species and their behaviour, with only the latter pumping its tail. We had our first really good looks at Subalpine Warbler, whilst our first European Turtle Dove purred nearby, a sound all too rarely heard at home nowadays. Both European and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters perched on the wires, both species I could watch for hours!

Dinner was a splendid affair under the stars, with some sort of colourful toad joining us for the bird log, after which we adjourned for an early night, with an exciting and 'different' day ahead of us.

### **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> April**

After an early breakfast, we boarded 4x4 vehicles for our 'desert day': because we had three of them, there was plenty of space for everyone, a huge bonus. We met up with Brahim, our guide for the day, in Rissani, before heading west to a long section of cliffs. Our target here was Pharaoh Eagle Owl, but we knew it might be difficult to see it because the resident pair was, unfortunately, not breeding this year. We searched three sections and had stunning views of a pair of Lanner Falcons both perched and in flight. It looked as though we were going to miss the owls, but Brahim and one of the drivers decided to try one further area, despite the slightly difficult terrain to reach it. When the phone rang just minutes later it could only mean one thing! We got into the remaining vehicles and sped off. There, on a ledge half way up the cliff, was a female Pharaoh Eagle Owl, ignoring the mobbing ravens, and the views through the telescopes were awesome! Inside a nearby crevice was the male, partially hidden but exciting for us nonetheless.

One of the vehicles got temporarily stuck as we exited the area, but it gave us the chance to watch a Vagrant Emperor dragonfly. Eventually we were able to move on; there was no sign of the nesting Barbary Falcons so we left the cliff area and headed for the plains. There, right on cue, was a party of Spotted Sandgrouse. At first we watched them from a distance, but it wasn't long before the drivers moved towards the birds which were seemingly oblivious of our presence. We had staggering views, and it was also super to hear the birds calling. The second magical moment of the day!

Brahim made a couple of phone calls, the first to pass our lunch orders to the restaurant, the second to a friend of his. The reason soon became clear as, having passed Rissani and our auberge, we drove into the back of beyond; there, standing near an area of bushes, was his friend. He had staked out a roosting pair of Egyptian Nightjars for us, and there they were, motionless in the shade of a small tree. It was hard to believe that we were seeing these birds so close: we would clearly never have found them without Brahim and his contact.

It was hotting up, but we had two further targets for the morning, and we were successful with both. Even as recently as last year, Desert Sparrows were relatively reliable close to the various desert auberges, often in nest boxes, but the arrival of House Sparrows seems to be pushing them further and further into the desert. Brahim took us to an isolated tree where a pair was nesting, and we had incredible views from an appropriate distance as, in turn, the male and female arrived with food. The Western Bonelli's Warbler and Common Redstart in the same tree provided us with further entertainment when the main attraction wasn't around. Desert Sparrow was chosen by the group as Bird of the Trip, an amazing accolade given the other birds we had seen on the same day let alone during the rest of the trip. The fine African Desert Warbler, which we found very quickly having walked a short distance into an area of dunes, became the fifth and last of our five targets achieved. What an incredible morning!

We drove via the famous Café Yasmina to lunch at Café Dunes d'Or. A mammal thought to have been a Fennec Fox was seen en route. It was good that we had time to just sit, cool down, and think through all we'd seen, before our drinks and tagines arrived. After lunch we had a further rest before looking for a few migrants right next to the café, including our first Spotted Flycatcher. More significantly for most of us, we had the chance to take some close up pictures of the fabulous Erg Chebbi dunes, certainly a 'must-see' landscape on any visit to inland Morocco.

Rejuvenated, we drove into Merzouga and located some Laughing Doves in the palm trees. Then we headed west to a large desert lake, driving round to the far side to get the light behind us. It was full of birds including 80 Marbled Ducks, over 100 Ruddy Shelducks, 120 Greater Flamingos, 50 Black-winged Stilts and 20 Gull-billed Terns. Perhaps the groups of summer plumage Little Grebes totalling 50 individuals were the most noteworthy.

We returned to our hotel at 5.15pm and said goodbye to Brahim and our drivers. Some of the group went for a stroll and found several more migrants including a Wryneck and two Whinchats. Others were happy to rest. A wonderful dinner in the courtyard rounded off one of the most exciting birding days any of us had experienced in the Western Palaearctic, with both real quality and quantity on offer.

### **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April**

We decided to have a leisurely start, which allowed some of the group to have a lie-in after the exertions of the previous day, and others to have a little longer to explore the grounds of Derkaoua and search for more migrants. In the event it was less birdy than expected, but we enjoyed looking at the phylloscopus warblers, with Willow Warbler, Iberian and Common Chiffchaffs all present in and around the alfalfa field; the differences between them were subtle! Tree Pipit and Common Whitethroats were trip ticks (and easier to identify!). There was a hirundine passage which included a small number of Common Sand Martins.

After an enjoyable breakfast in the gardens of our hotel, it was time to depart. We left just after 10am. Houari carefully took us back to the main road, before we passed through Rissani and turned left, taking us along a different route through the village of Jorf, noting the numerous wells. Spectacled Warbler was a surprising gap in our list, so when we reached what looked like a suitable wadi we stopped and searched. We didn't hit our target, but it was a very productive half hour, with both Bar-tailed Lark and White-crowned Wheatear nests located, obliging Maghreb and Hoopoe Larks enjoyed and another Scrub Warbler noted, this one proving typically elusive. Bath White was an addition to our butterfly list.

We lunched at yet another super restaurant; some branched out and went for a Berber omelette which was very different from any sort of omelette we'd seen before: a sizzling dish which came in a tagine pot (I have since googled it for the recipe!). Then it was time for the long haul west; we encountered our first precipitation of the trip, albeit just a light shower, but there was little to cause us to stop until we reached our familiar Maghreb Wheatear spot where, again, we had no joy, but were glad to stretch our legs.

We passed Boumalne and made haste for Ouarzazate where our hotel was busy with marathon runners. They had just completed the six day ultra-marathon (see <http://www.marathondessables.co.uk/>: I later discovered that there were 1,017 competitors, so no wonder Ouarzazate was busy that night!).

### **Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April**

On yet another fine morning we found well over a hundred Cattle Egrets from our panoramic terrace. After breakfast we returned to the western shores of Lake Mansour, and we had a simply wonderful hour and a half. A succession of raptors showed well, with a ringtail Montagu's Harrier followed in turn by a Western Marsh Harrier and a Black Kite. Positioning ourselves with the sun behind us, the waders showed beautifully. We found two Pied Avocets, a Wood Sandpiper, a Spotted Redshank, a Common Greenshank, over 50 Little Stints and finally a Temminck's Stint, behaving typically as it fed alone slightly away from the water's edge. All these were eclipsed by the stars of the show, 21 Collared Pratincoles which gave excellent views both in flight and perched on the ground in front of us. The site was definitely worth a second visit! Right by the bus both Spanish and Blue-headed Wagtails showed well before, finally, we had to head off.

We had one more chance of Maghreb Wheatear, on the Amerzgane loop, and spent 45 minutes scouring the area. This species often has a large territory so we decided to spread out; despite our best efforts, we had no confirmed sightings, but Whinchat, Desert Lark, Desert Wheatear, White-crowned Wheatear, Woodchat Shrike, Vagrant Emperor dragonfly were just some of the species noted during our search.

Today we were retracing our steps over the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass but, with the light behind us, the scenery seemed totally different, particularly in the lovely valley on our ascent, so it actually felt like a new journey. We lunched in the same restaurant as on the way, and were warmly welcomed. Outside we were delighted to find another African Blue Tit, and there were plenty of butterflies including Clouded Yellow and various unidentified blues. Purchases were made in the shop next door before we headed on, this time passing the junipers and stopping in the pines near Toufliht. A roadside stroll produced a number of interesting birds including three singing Firecrests, a Mistle Thrush and a Great Spotted Woodpecker. We were pleased to find a Short-toed Treecreeper of the Moroccan race with its distinctive song: some of us managed good views, although it proved very mobile. By contrast, a Levaillant's Green Woodpecker sat right out in the open just above us: an even better view than we'd had previously.

We stopped again shortly afterwards to watch a Common Cuckoo sitting on roadside wires. Then we quickly descended into the plains, pausing by an open area which looked birdy. Here we saw our first 'Moroccan' Magpies, each with its distinctive blue spot behind the eye, and then a Crested Lark of a different, shorter-billed, race. A Red-veined Darter dragonfly flew swiftly across the road.

We arrived in good time at our hotel in Marrakech; settling into our rooms as dusk fell we were thrilled when a 'Maghreb' Tawny Owl called right outside our rooms! It was seen by a lucky few. At 7.30pm we met up for our final evening bird log before heading to the spacious restaurant for dinner. Collared Pratincole was our last 'bird of the day' and I asked the group to consider their top five birds of the trip. There were plenty of candidates!

### **Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April**

After a leisurely breakfast, some of the group spent part of the morning at Koutoubia Park, just a short drive away. Others enjoyed the spacious grounds of the hotel, with European Turtle Doves and both Spotted and Pied Flycatchers for company. Those venturing to the park had close up views of nesting White Storks as well as the numerous Pallid and Little Swifts, whilst two pale phase Booted Eagles drifted low overhead. We also walked around the outside of Koutoubia Mosque itself. Given the unusually hot weather, we decided to leave further sightseeing for another time, instead returning to the hotel where we all met up for our last meal together, a relaxing barbecue/buffet lunch on the terrace. At 2pm we said our goodbyes as the first of us travelled to the airport, just 20 minutes away, for our flight home at the end of a truly memorable trip. Morocco is only three hours away from the UK but genuinely feels a world away. I am looking forward to returning in the not too distant future.

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

- 1<sup>st</sup> Desert Sparrow
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Levaillant's Green Woodpecker
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Egyptian Nightjar
- 4<sup>th</sup> Pharaoh Eagle Owl
- 5<sup>th</sup> Thick-billed Lark
- 6<sup>th</sup> Scrub Warbler
- 7<sup>th</sup> Moussier's Redstart
- 8<sup>th</sup> Lanner Falcon
- 9<sup>th</sup> Cream-coloured Courser
- 10<sup>th</sup> Rufous Bush Robin

### **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to Brian Small, James Lidster and David Bradnum for their help and encouragement both before and during the tour: it was great to have bird news which was bang up to date. Thanks, too, to Lesley and the rest of the team from our ground agents particularly in regard to the choice of our hotel in the Ourika Valley. Houari, our driver, was a key feature in making the trip such a success: he drove carefully, was

unfailingly courteous and a massive help in finding such good places for lunch. Thanks to all of you for being such a splendid group, helping each other see the birds, having such an amazing variety of interests and being so enthusiastic not just about the birds but also about the food and the scenery. I look forward to travelling with you again. Special thanks to Bill Cheney for allowing us to use his photographs in this report.

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June 2013

## Itinerary and Weather

- 6<sup>th</sup> April Early afternoon flights from London Gatwick to Marrakech; transfer to Ourika Valley. Overnight at Aghbalou, elevation 1,100m.
- 7<sup>th</sup> April Ourika Valley and en route to/from Oukaïmeden (ski resort, elevation 2,650m). Lunch at Oukaïmeden. Overnight at Aghbalou, elevation 1,100m.  
Sunny, mild & calm.
- 8<sup>th</sup> April Drive via Tizi-n-Tichka Pass (elevation 2,260m) and Amerzgane desert 'loop' to Ouarzazate. Lunch en route north of the pass.  
Overnight at Ouarzazate, elevation 1,150m.  
Sunny, warm, calm.
- 9<sup>th</sup> April Morning west and north of Lake Mansour, Ouarzazate. Lunch at Kelaï Mgouna. Afternoon drive to Boumalne. Short break at hotel, then late afternoon at the Tagdilt Track. Overnight at Boumalne, elevation 1,600m.  
Sunny, very warm, light winds.
- 10<sup>th</sup> April Pre-breakfast drive to the Tagdilt Track. Afternoon in Todra Gorge, tea in Tineghir.  
Overnight at Boumalne, elevation 1,600m.  
Sunny spells, very warm, calm.
- 11<sup>th</sup> April Drive via Tinejda and the desert near Goulmima to Ar-Rachidia.  
Afternoon drive down the Ziz valley to Erfoud, then Rissani and onwards to Derkaoua.  
Overnight at Derkaoua, elevation 750m.  
Sunny, very warm with light winds.
- 12<sup>th</sup> April Desert drive in 4x4 vehicles west of Rissani, south-east of Derkaoua, and east of Erg Chebbi. Afternoon at Merzouga Lake. Overnight at Derkaoua, elevation 750m.  
Sunny, very hot, light winds.
- 13<sup>th</sup> April Pre-breakfast walk around hotel. Drive via Jorf road to Tinejda and onwards via Boumalne to Ouarzazate. Lunch en route east of Tinejda. Overnight at Ouarzazate.  
Sunny am, sunny spells / light showers pm, very warm, light winds.
- 14<sup>th</sup> April Morning at west end of Lake Mansour, Ouarzazate. Drive via Amerzgane 'loop' and Tizi-n-Tichka Pass to Marrakech. Overnight at Marrakech, elevation 450m.  
Sunny, very warm at lower elevations, calm.
- 15<sup>th</sup> April Morning walk around Koutoubia Park in Marrakech. Lunch at hotel. Early afternoon transfer to Marrakech Airport.  
Sunny, hot & calm.

## 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	M = Marrakech and lowlands A = Atlas Mountains/Ourika Valley O = Ouarzazate area inc Mansour lake B = Boumalne area inc Tagdilt/Todra D = Eastern Deserts	1 = 1-4 2 = 5-9 3 = 10-99 4 = 100-999 5 = 1,000+

Species	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale	Scientific Name
Ruddy Shelduck	3	O	D	4 <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Mallard	2	O		2 <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Shoveler	2	O		2 <i>Anas clypeata</i>
Marbled Duck	1		D	3 <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
Common Pochard	1		D	1 <i>Aythya ferina</i>
Great Crested Grebe	2	O	D	3 <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Little Grebe	2	O	D	3 <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Cattle Egret	7	A	O B	4 <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Little Egret	3	O	B D	1 <i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Great Egret	1	O		1 <i>Casmerodius albus</i>
Grey Heron	2	O		2 <i>Ardea cinerea</i>
White Stork	5	M	O	4 <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Greater Flamingo	1		D	4 <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Booted Eagle	4	M A		1 <i>Aquila pennata</i>
Bonelli's Eagle	1	A		1 <i>Aquila fasciata</i>
Short-toed Eagle	1	A		1 <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Black Kite	3	M	O B	1 <i>Milvus migrans</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	1	O		1 <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	2	O	B	1 <i>Circus pygargus</i>
"Atlas" Long-legged Buzzard*	5	O	B D	1 <i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	1	A		1 <i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Common Kestrel	9	M A	O B D	2 <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Peregrine Falcon	1		B	1 <i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Lanner Falcon*	1		D	1 <i>Falco biarmicus erlangeri</i>
Eurasian Coot	3	O	D	4 <i>Fulica atra</i>
Pied Avocet	1	O		1 <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Black-winged Stilt	3	O	D	3 <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Cream-coloured Courser	1		B	2 <i>Cursorius cursor</i>
Collared Pratincole	1	O		3 <i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Little Ringed Plover	3	O	D	2 <i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Common Ringed Plover	3	O	D	1 <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Kentish Plover	2	O		3 <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	2	O		1 <i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Temminck's Stint	1	O		1 <i>Calidris temminckii</i>
Little Stint	2	O		3 <i>Calidris minuta</i>
Common Sandpiper	1	O		1 <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Green Sandpiper	1	M		1 <i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	1	O		1 <i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Redshank	1		D	1 <i>Tringa totanus</i>
Spotted Redshank	1	O		1 <i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Greenshank	1	O		1 <i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Gull-billed Tern	1		D	3 <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	2		B	3 <i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
Spotted Sandgrouse	1		D	3 <i>Pterocles senegallus</i>
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	10	M A	O B D	3 <i>Columba livia</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	5	M A		2 <i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	10	M A	O B D	3 <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
European Turtle Dove	4	1h M	D	1 <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Laughing Dove	3	O	B D	1 <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>

Common Cuckoo	1	1h		A				1	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		
Pharaoh Eagle Owl*	1							D	1	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>	
"Maghreb" Tawny Owl*	1	1h	M						1	<i>Strix aluco mauritanica</i>	
"Desert" Little Owl*	1			A	O				1	<i>Athene noctua glaux</i>	
Egyptian Nightjar	1							D	1	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius saharae</i>	
Pallid Swift	6		M		O	B			4	<i>Apus pallidus brehmorum</i>	
Little Swift	3		M	A					3	<i>Apus affinis galilejensis</i>	
Eurasian Hoopoe	3				O	B	D		1	<i>Upupa epops</i>	
European Bee-eater	9		M	A	O	B	D		3	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	2				O		D		1	<i>Merops persicus chrysocercus</i>	
European Roller	1			A					1	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	
Levaillant's Green Woodpecker	2	1h		A					1	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2			A					1	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	
Eurasian Wryneck	2							D	1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	
Crested Lark*	1		M						1	<i>Galerida cristata riggenbachi</i>	
"Maghreb" Crested Lark*	2				O		D		1	<i>Galerida cristata macrorhyncha</i>	
Thekla Lark	6			A	O	B	D		2	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	
Greater Short-toed Lark	2				O				2	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	
Desert Lark*	5				O	B	D		2	<i>Ammomanes deserti payni</i>	
Bar-tailed Lark	3					B	D		1	<i>Ammomanes cinctura arenicolor</i>	
Thick-billed Lark	1						B		1	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>	
"Atlas" Horned Lark*	1			A					3	<i>Eremophila alpestris atlas</i>	
Temminck's Lark	2						B		3	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	
Greater Hoopoe Lark	3						B	D	1	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	
Common Sand Martin	2							B	D	2	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Eurasian Crag Martin	2					O	B		3	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	
Barn Swallow	9		M	A	O	B	D		4	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
Red-rumped Swallow	3			A	O				3	<i>Cecropis daurica rufula</i>	
Common House Martin	4			A	O		D		1	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	
Tawny Pipit	1						B		1	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	
Water Pipit	1			A					1	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	
Meadow Pipit	1				O				1	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	
Tree Pipit	1							D	1	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	
White Wagtail*	1			A	O				1	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	
"Moroccan" White Wagtail*	2				O				1	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	
"Blue-headed" Yellow Wagtail*	2				O				1	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>	
"Grey-headed" Yellow Wagtail*	1				O				1	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergi</i>	
"Spanish" Yellow Wagtail*	3				O		D		1	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	
Grey Wagtail	2			A					1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	
White-throated Dipper	1			A					1	<i>Cinclus cinclus minor</i>	
European Robin	-	1h		A					1	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	
Rufous Bush Robin	2						B	D	1	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	
Common Nightingale	4	4h	M	A	O	B	D		3	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	
Common Redstart	2							D	1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	
Black Redstart*	2			A					2	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis</i>	
Moussier's Redstart	2			A					1	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	
Northern Wheatear	7		M	A	O	B	D		2	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	
Seebohm's Wheatear*	1			A					3	<i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>	
Black-eared Wheatear*	2				O		D		1	<i>Oenanthe hispanica hispanica</i>	
White-crowned Wheatear	6				O		D		3	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	
Black Wheatear	4			A	O	B	D		1	<i>Oenanthe leucura syenitica</i>	
Desert Wheatear	7				O	B	D		3	<i>Oenanthe deserti homochroa</i>	
Red-rumped Wheatear	3				O	B			2	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	
Whinchat	3				O		D		1	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	
Mistle Thrush	2			A					1	<i>Turdus viscivorus deichleri</i>	
"Moroccan" Common Blackbird*	9		M	A	O	B	D		3	<i>Turdus merula mauritanicus</i>	
Blue Rock Thrush	2			A		B			1	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	
Scrub Warbler*	2							D	1	<i>Scotocerca inquieta saharae</i>	
Blackcap	2	1h		A					1	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	
Common Whitethroat	1							D	1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	
Western Orphean Warbler*	1				O				1	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	
Sardinian Warbler	5		M	A		B			1	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	
Subalpine Warbler	6				O	B	D		2	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	

African Desert Warbler*	1						D	1	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>
Tristram's Warbler	1		A					1	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
Cetti's Warbler	-	3h	A					1	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Melodious Warbler	1					B		1	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
"Saharan" Eastern Olivaceous Warbler*	2				O		D	1	<i>Hippolais pallida reiseri</i>
Isabelline (Western Olivaceous) Warbler*	5		M	A			D	1	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>
Willow Warbler	4		M				D	2	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Western Bonelli's Warbler*	2				O		D	1	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>
Common Chiffchaff	3						D	1	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Iberian Chiffchaff*	1						D	1	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>
Firecrest	1	1h	A					1	<i>Regulus ignicapilla balearicus</i>
Winter Wren	-	2h	A					1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	2		M				D	1	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Pied Flycatcher	5		M			O	D	1	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Great Tit	2	1h	A					1	<i>Parus major excelsus</i>
Coal Tit*	2	1h	A					2	<i>Periparus ater atlas</i>
African Blue Tit*	4		A		O			1	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae ultramarinus</i>
"Moroccan" Short-toed Treecreeper*	1		A					1	<i>Certhia brachydactyla mauritanica</i>
"Desert" Great Grey Shrike*	3				O	B	D	1	<i>Lanius excubitor elegans</i>
Woodchat Shrike	7		M	A	O	B	D	3	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Common Bulbul	9		M	A	O	B	D	3	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Fulvous Babbler	1				O			1	<i>Turdoides fulva maroccanus</i>
"Maghreb" Common Magpie*	1		M					1	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>
Red-billed Chough	1			A				3	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax barbarus</i>
Alpine Chough	1			A				4	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>
"North African" Common Raven*	2			A				1	<i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i>
Brown-necked Raven	2					B	D	2	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
Spotless Starling	3		M					3	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
House Sparrow*	10		M	A	O	B	D	4	<i>Passer domesticus tingitanus</i>
Desert Sparrow	1						D	1	<i>Passer simplex saharae</i>
Common Rock Sparrow	1			A				3	<i>Petronia petronia barbara</i>
"North African" Common Chaffinch*	4			A	O			3	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>
Common Linnet	1			A				1	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	5			A	O	B		2	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>
European Greenfinch	2		M	A				1	<i>Chloris chloris voousi</i>
European Serin	6	1h	M	A	O		D	3	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Hawfinch*	1	1h		A				1	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes buvryi</i>
"Atlas" Common Crossbill*	2			A				1	<i>Loxia curvirostra poliogyna</i>
Trumpeter Finch*	1					B		2	<i>Bucanetes githagineus zedlitzi</i>
Cirl Bunting	2			A				1	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
Rock Bunting	2			A				1	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
House Bunting*	8		M	A	O	B	D	3	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>
Corn Bunting	2		M					1	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>

#### BUTTERFLIES

Scarce Swallowtail  
 Large White  
 Small White  
 Bath White  
 Moroccan Orange Tip  
 Clouded Yellow  
 Green Hairstreak  
 Plain Tiger  
 Red Admiral  
 Speckled Wood

*Iphiclides podalirius*  
*Pieris brassicae*  
*Artogeia rapae*  
*Pontia daplidice*  
*Anthocharis belia*  
*Colias crocea*  
*Callophrys rubi*  
*Danaus chrysippus*  
*Vanessa atalanta*  
*Pararge aegeria aegeria*

#### DRAGONFLIES

Vagrant Emperor  
 Red-veined Darter

*Anax ephippiger*  
*Sympetrum fonscolombii*

### Notes on the bird list

The bird list broadly follows the order, nomenclature and taxonomy of the Collins Bird Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Svensson et al) which we used throughout the week, with a number of additions to English names where appropriate to reflect the numerous subspecies which are found on this tour.

The following gives some background notes on taxonomy/plumage for the species marked \* on the list.

#### 'Atlas' Long-legged Buzzard

Both editions of the Collins Guide list the North African subspecies *cirtensis*, sometimes known as Atlas Long-legged Buzzard, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition having additional plates of this race. Perhaps our best sightings were on the Tagdilt Track (perched) and over the Ziz valley viewpoint (in flight).

#### Lanner Falcon

The North African subspecies *erlangeri* is illustrated in both editions of the Collins Guide. We had incredible views of a pair both perched and in flight west of Rissani.

#### Pharaoh Eagle Owl

In the Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, two subspecies of Eurasian Eagle Owl were illustrated. They look very different, and the Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits them into distinct species, the smaller desert form Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* (North Africa and Middle East) and the larger and darker Eurasian Eagle Owl *B. bubo* (Europe south to northern Middle East). We were thrilled to see a roosting pair west of Rissani.

#### 'Maghreb' Tawny Owl

The race in Morocco is *mauritunica*; we enjoyed hearing (and in some cases seeing!) it at close range in the grounds of our Marrakech hotel. The call is subtly different from the UK race of Tawny Owl.

#### 'Desert' Little Owl

The race in Morocco is *glauca*, one of the pale forms sometimes known as Desert Little Owl; other, similar, subspecies are illustrated in the Collins Guide. We saw just one, by the roadside west of Boumalne.

#### Crested Lark

There are a number of races of Crested Lark in Morocco; the Collins Guide has illustrations of one of the North African subspecies, showing the ground colour and bill shape. We saw two races of Crested Lark during the tour, *riggenbachi* (which occurs mainly west of the Atlas mountains) by the roadside near Marrakech, and *macrorhyncha* (which mainly occurs further east) at Lake Mansour and in a wadi west of Jorf. The latter is referred to as Long-billed Crested Lark (for obvious reasons) or Maghreb Crested Lark, and is given specific status by some authorities.

#### Desert Lark

The Moroccan race *payni* is illustrated in the Collins Guide as an example of the geographical variation in this species. We first saw this species in the Todra Gorge, and had several further sightings particularly when we were searching for Maghreb Wheatear.

#### 'Atlas' Horned Lark

The race *atlas* is endemic to the Atlas mountains. We saw at least 40 at close range at Oukaïmeden.

#### White Wagtail

The nominate race *alba* is a winter visitor from Europe whilst *subpersonata*, known as Moroccan White Wagtail, is an uncommon breeding race. We had great views of the latter both at Mansour Lake and at our lunch spot by the river en route to Boumalne.

#### Yellow Wagtail

There are numerous races of Yellow Wagtail, many of which are illustrated in the Collins Guides. We all saw both Spanish (*iberiae*) and Blue-headed (*flava*) Wagtails at Lake Mansour, and some also saw Grey-headed (*thunbergi*).

#### Black Redstart

The race seen in Morocco is *gibraltariensis*; it is illustrated in the Collins Guide, and is the same race which occurs in the UK. We had good views in the Atlas mountains.

#### Seebohm's Wheatear

In Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition this is illustrated, but only as a race of Northern Wheatear. In Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition it is treated as a full species *Oenanthe seebohmi*; it breeds on the mountains of north-west Africa, wintering in West Africa. We had splendid views of 10+ at Oukaïmeden.

#### Black-eared Wheatear

The race seen in Morocco (and south-west Europe) is *hispanica* and is illustrated in the Collins Guide. We saw two, both females, during the tour, first at Mansour Lake and then at the Scrub Warbler wadi.

#### 'Moroccan' Common Blackbird

Compared with UK birds, the female of the race *mauritanicus*, Moroccan Blackbird, is much greyer and has a yellower bill. It is not illustrated in the Collins Guide. We specifically discussed the plumage of the females during our walk in Koutoubia Park.

#### Scrub Warbler

The race in eastern and southern Morocco is *saharae* and is illustrated in the Collins Guide. It is paler than the race *theresae* which is endemic to south-western Morocco (eg near Guelmim). The views north-east of Goulmima was unbeatable, whilst it was good to find one at a new site west of Jorf.

#### Western Orphean Warbler

Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* from Eastern Orphean Warbler *S. crassirostris* mainly on account of its different morphology and song. We found one in the tamarisks along the north shore of Mansour Lake.

#### African Desert Warbler

In the Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, two subspecies of Desert Warbler were illustrated. They look very different, and the Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits them into distinct species, African Desert Warbler *Sylvia deserti* (North Africa) and Asian Desert Warbler *S. nana* (Middle East and Asia). It was great to find one relatively quickly east of Erg Chebbi.

#### "Olivaceous Warbler"

The Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition only listed one species of Olivaceous Warbler, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits it. Western Olivaceous Warbler, actually called Isabelline Warbler in Collins, was seen in several localities on our tour, including from our Ourika Valley hotel terrace. We saw the race *reiseri* of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, often called 'Saharan' Eastern Olivaceous, both singing in the bushes at Lake Mansour and also in the grounds of Auberge Derkaoua. It is clearly different, being smaller and constantly pumping its tail.

#### Western Bonelli's Warbler

In the Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, two subspecies of Bonelli's Warbler were illustrated. The Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits them into distinct species, Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *P. orientalis*. The breeding ranges don't overlap; the calls are totally different. Our best view was in the Desert Sparrow tree!

#### Iberian Chiffchaff

This was treated as a race of Common Chiffchaff in Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, but it is treated as a full species in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition on account of its different songs/calls as well as migration habits (it winters in tropical West Africa). We did our best to tentatively identify this species amongst the warblers around Auberge Derkaoua.

#### Coal Tit

The race *atlas* is endemic to Morocco, and we had excellent views in the Atlas Mountains, especially at the roadside stop on the way down from Oukaïmeden.

#### African Blue Tit

The Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits African Blue Tit *Cyanistes teneriffae* from European Blue Tit *C. caeruleus* to include the Canary Island races in the former. In Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition the Canary 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. The race of African Blue Tit in Morocco is *ultramarinus* which has a wing-bar (unlike the race on Tenerife). All races have a grey-blue, not green, back and a dark, blackish-blue crown. Between us we had several sightings during the tour.

#### 'Moroccan' Short-toed Treecreeper

The uncommon resident race *mauritanica* is restricted to north-west Africa; it is darker than the nominate race and has a distinctive song which we heard in the pines near Toufliht on our return drive to Marrakech.

#### 'Desert' 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*. 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 in Morocco will actually be split further as Desert Grey Shrike *L. elegans*; this split has already been proposed. It has a somewhat bigger white wing patch and whiter underparts, making it distinctly different from the birds seen occasionally in winter in the UK. Surprisingly, we never really had a close enough view to properly study it during this tour.

#### ‘Maghreb’ Common Magpie

The north-west African race *mauritanica* is clearly identifiable by the blue spot behind the eye and the very long tail, and is illustrated in the Collins Guide. It has been suggested that this form may warrant specific status as Maghreb Magpie. We saw two shortly before arriving back in Marrakech.

#### ‘North African’ Common Raven

Like *canariensis* of the Canary Islands, *tingitanus* which occurs in Morocco is smaller than the nominate race and its call is not as deep. We saw four near Oukaimeden and another on our return trip over the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass.

#### House Sparrow

Birds breeding in North African are of the race *tingitanus*. The male has pronounced black streaking on the cap, and the entire cap is sometimes mottled dark grey and black. The species was very common and confiding on this tour.

#### ‘North African’ Common Chaffinch

North African Chaffinch (*F. c. africana*) is very distinctive, with the male having crown/nape blue-grey, mantle bright green and the breast/belly pale pink. We had wonderful views near our Ourika Valley hotel in particular.

#### Hawfinch

The race *buvryi* is endemic to north-west Africa and is distinguished by its slightly paler head and body and less white in the tail. Having the opportunity to photograph one of my favourite species whilst having breakfast (in the Ourika Valley) was a first!

#### ‘Atlas’ Common Crossbill

Common Crossbills gradually become paler from northern Europe down to north-west Africa. The subspecies in Morocco is *poliogyna*, sometimes known as Atlas Common Crossbill; the ground colour of the plumage is ash-grey, the feather tips of the head and body of adult males are pink-red, the rump is uniform rosy-pink, the belly is rosy-red with some white spots/streaks. The song and call are, to the trained ear, different from those of UK birds. It was fun watching a female feeding a stripy juvenile near Oukaimeden.

#### Trumpeter Finch

One of four races, *zedlitzii* of southern Spain and North Africa is larger and paler than the race *amantum* seen on the Canary Islands. The pair near Boumalne showed well if not for very long.

#### House Bunting

In the Collins 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, two subspecies of House Bunting were illustrated. They look very different, and the Collins 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition splits them into distinct species, House Bunting *Emberiza sahari* (North Africa) and Striolated Bunting *E. striolata* (Middle East). This was one of the most common and widespread passerines on the tour.

#### 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. Mullaney and D. Zetterstrom (HarperCollins 2009)
- Collins Bird Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Edition by L. Svensson, K. Mullaney, D. Zetterstrom and P. Grant (HarperCollins 1999)
- A Birdwatchers’ Guide to Morocco by P. & F. Bergier (Prion 2003)
- The Birds of the Western Palearctic Concise Edition by Snow and Perrins (OUP 1998)

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



**Moussier's Redstart**



**Tristram's Warbler**



**Ruddy Shelduck**



**White Storks**



**Fulvous Babbler**



**Temminck's Lark**



**Thick-billed Lark**



**Rufous Bush Robin**



**Desert Sparrow**



**Greater Hoopoe Lark**



**'Atlas' Horned Lark**



**'Atlas' Common Crossbill**



**Atlas Mountains**



**Todra Valley**



**Erg Chebbi**



**Moroccan tagine**

**Front cover: Egyptian Nightjar**

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