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## MOROCCO

### High Alas, Sahara and Agadir



*Greater Hoopoe-Lark – one of the highlights of our trip to Morocco © Fernando Enrique Navarrete*

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# MOROCCO

## High Alas, Sahara and Agadir

**15-25 March 2023**

**Leader: Fernando Enrique Navarrete**

### Trip Diary

#### 15 March

Our trip started with all group members meeting at the Arrivals Hall at Marrakech airport and with luggage collection completed, we hit the road and an hour later arrived at our lovely hotel in the Atlas Mountains where the first of many delicious tagines was waiting for us. Some of the most adventurous members of the group decided to stay up a little longer and look for the endemic Maghreb Owl, which eventually gave fantastic views for all members of the group during the two nights that we spent in the mountains, with the male calling for hours next to our rooms and keeping some of us awake!

#### 16 March

The formidable High Atlas was our destination today. This massive mountain range with peaks over 4000 metres is home to an interesting selection of birds and the road that connects our hotel with the ski station of Oukaimeden is probably the best place in the country to look for many of them.

We made several stops at different elevations where the slopes were covered with Aleppo Pines, Thujas and Junipers and full of forest species such as African Chaffinch, Atlas Coal Tit, African Blue Tit and Levillant's Woodpecker, while the more open habitat was home to Moussier's Redstart, Thekla's Lark, Rock Bunting, at least a dozen Ring Ouzels and a couple of Long-legged Buzzards.

Once we reached Oukaimeden (at an elevation of 2,800m) and due to the amount of snow at higher elevations, our most wanted bird, the African Crimson-winged Finch, was particularly numerous, providing great views and photo opportunities.

Alpine and Red-billed Choughs were also very common, and the noisy flocks of Rock Sparrows were everywhere. Scanning the boulders along the road, we found other birds such as Black Wheatear, Moussier's Redstart and Blue Rock Thrush.

We had to walk through several alpine meadows before we found our first Atlas Horned Lark, which eventually gave us some fantastic views, followed by a few more birds at the viewpoint near the top, where we enjoyed a stunning vista of the snow-capped mountains.

On the way down, we lucked into a few new birds including Red Crossbill, Brambling, Tawny Pipit and Cirl Bunting and as soon as it was dark, the local pair of Maghreb Owl performed really well for us.



*African Crimson-winged Finch © Fernando Enrique Navarrete*

### **17 March**

We had a long drive ahead of us, so we loaded the bus early in the morning and hit the road which took us over the Atlas Mountains and onto the high arid plateau.

We made several roadside stops along the way, the first of which was very productive with great views of our first Woodchat Shrike, several Booted Eagles, a pair of Bonelli's Eagles and Lanner.

Before stopping at the Tizi n'Tichka pass (which is the highest mountain pass in Morocco at 2,260m) for lunch, we found our first flock of Maghreb Magpies. From the terrace of our restaurant which overlooked a beautiful valley, we saw Levaillant's Woodpecker, Black Wheatear, Rock Bunting and a Long-legged Buzzard.

At some point on the way down towards the arid plateau, we crossed the invisible line where the ubiquitous White-crowned Wheatear replaces its cousin the Black Wheatear, and becomes one of the most common birds of the trip.

Another stop near Amerzgane gave us a first introduction to some of the desert species Morocco is famous for including birds such as Trumpeter Finch and Desert Wheatear, but the best find was two male Atlas Wheatears which were on their way to their breeding grounds up in the mountains. Migration was obvious with several Woodchat Shrikes, Hoopoes, Common Whitethroats and numerous swallows and martins.

We still had a long way ahead of us, so we left this wonderful area and headed towards Boumalne, adding Little Owl, Laughing Dove and House Bunting to our list before reaching our destination for the next two nights.

### **18 March**

A much-anticipated day as we planned to explore the famous Tagdilt Track. These immense plains, which are covered with wormwoods, are home to a surprising diversity of highly adapted fauna and as usual, 'the Track' did not disappoint.

As soon as we arrived, we found the first of many Red-rumped Wheatears, followed by more iconic species such as Temminck's Lark, Mediterranean Short-toed Lark, Greater Short-toed Lark, Desert Wheatear, Atlas Wheatear, Trumpeter Finch and Thick-billed Lark, the latter being one of the favourite birds of the trip for many of the group.

A visit to a nearby wadi paid off when we found a breeding pair of Long-legged Buzzards, followed by a female Lanner on her nest. She sat there for a few minutes, but when the male arrived with prey, she took off to share the meal with her partner on top of the cliff, allowing us excellent scope views. Other birds that we found along the wadi were Desert Lark, White-crowned Wheatear and Trumpeter Finch.

After lunch, we visited the scenic Dades Gorge in search of one of the most sought-after warblers in Morocco, the endemic Tristram's Warbler. It took us less than 2 minutes to find a stunning male singing close to the road with the beautiful background of the blooming almond trees. The warbler performed extremely well for several minutes, and we were about to go back to the vehicle when somebody shouted 'raptors'. The spectacle of a constant stream of hundreds of Black Kites and smaller numbers of Booted and Short-toed Eagles filling the sky and all heading north (on their way to their breeding grounds) was a perfect end to the day.

### **19 March**

After an excellent breakfast, we loaded the van and set off for our next destination, the dunes of Erg Chebbi. The first of a series of stops along the way took us to the same wadi we had visited the day before. This time, we found a beautiful Maghreb (Mourning) Wheatear and with this tricky species under our belts, we headed deeper into the wadi, where after a bit of scanning and searching we found a Pharaoh Eagle Owl roosting inside a small cave.

Migration was very evident, both on the ground with Common Redstart, Western Subalpine Warbler, Common Whitethroat and Hoopoe; whilst overhead, there was an almost constant stream of Bee-eaters, swallows and swifts all flying north over the wadi.



*Pharaoh Eagle Owl © Fernando Enrique Navarrete*

We continued driving East and not far from Erfoud made our next strategic stop. We were now at a lower elevation and the stony arid plateau had given way to a more Sahara-edge type of habitat. We explored a shallow wadi in search of one of the most sought-after desert specialties, the Scrub Warbler but despite our best efforts, we couldn't find this elusive target. The wadi was, however, alive with birds with Maghreb Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Bar-tailed Lark, Desert Wheatear, Western Black-eared Wheatear and Spectacled Warbler amongst those we found.

After another delicious lunch, we headed east making one last stop near Erfoud, where we found our first Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, several

Desert Grey Shrikes and a noisy flock of Fulvous Babblers.

After a long day, we arrived at our lovely hotel in the heart of the dunes for a well-deserved rest.

## **20 March**

Our local guide, Othman, and four jeeps were waiting for us outside of the hotel and we boarded our comfortable vehicles and headed deep into the desert. Erg Chebbi is an extensive dune complex which is 28km long and up to 7km wide, with dunes which are over 150m high. Although it can appear relatively lifeless, actually this couldn't be further from the truth as this area is home to a nice diversity of special species.

Thanks to the knowledge and skills of our local guide, we visited some of the different micro-habitats in the area and managed to find all our target species.

Our first stop was at a small water hole where we enjoyed amazing views of several flocks of Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse coming to drink.

Not far from there, we stopped at a small adobe building where three Desert Sparrows, two males and a female, performed really well for us, joined by a very cooperative Greater Hoopoe-Lark.



*Desert Sparrow © Fernando Enrique Navarrete*

A short walk through some vegetated dunes allowed us to connect with the localised African Desert Warbler, followed by several Greater Hoopoe-Larks, Bar-tailed Lark, Desert Wheatear and Western Black-eared Wheatear.

It had been a very successful morning, but it wasn't over just yet, as Othman had phoned his friend Mbarak, a local shepherd, who wakes up well before sunrise to locate the Egyptian Nightjars which live along the wadi near his house.

When we got there, the nightjar had moved but it was soon relocated by Mbarak and we had the bird to ourselves, enjoying amazing views of this superbly camouflaged bird at its day roost.

A lunch and siesta break at the hotel was followed by a visit to the palmeries around Merzouga in search of migrants. Fortunately, the weather conditions during the previous night had forced many birds to stay in the area and when we got there, the bushes were teeming with migrants. We saw dozens of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Western Subalpine Warbler, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Common Redstart, Sedge Warbler, Yellow Wagtail, Woodchat Shrike, Northern Wheatear, Western Black-eared Wheatear and a few resident species such as Maghreb Lark, Brown-necked Raven and Fulvous Babbler.

After what was undoubtedly one of the best days of the trip, we went back to the hotel with shoes full of sand and huge smiles on our faces.

## **21 March**

We awoke to a calmer and warmer morning than the previous day. We loaded up into our jeeps and went back to the desert. This time our main target was Scrub Warbler, a bird that had eluded us several times during the previous few days. We arrived at our destination, a

flat sandy area with scattered bushes, which looked like very promising habitat, but we had failed before.....

Greater Short-toed Larks were everywhere and we also found a displaying Greater Hoopoe-Lark and a flock of more than 40 Crowned Sandgrouse but there was still no sign of the Scrub Warbler..... That was, however, until Carol spotted some birds moving rapidly between the bushes. Success! We followed the family party of 3-4 birds for nearly half an hour and saw them interacting, calling and feeding. What a treat!



*Scrub Warbler © Fernando Enrique Navarrete*

We then found a set of interesting footprints which we followed, soon finding the culprits, a pair of Cream-coloured Coursers, one of which gave us excellent views.

A quick visit to the famous Café Yasmina wasn't as productive as we had hoped, only adding Ruddy Shelduck to our list, but thanks to that detour we found an Isabelline Warbler, a rare bird in Morocco and a very unexpected find.

We reached our hotel before lunch and spent the hottest part of the day around the swimming pool. We then visited the palmeries near Merzouga one last time, although it was evident that the calm conditions on the previous night were perfect for all the migrants in the area and there were very few left.

Nevertheless, we saw some interesting birds including two groups of Fulvous Babblers, Maghreb Lark, Desert Grey Shrike, a couple of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and even a "Desert" Red Fox.

## **22 March**

Today we had a long drive ahead of us, so after a filling breakfast, we loaded into the bus and took the scenic N12, with the Anti Atlas in the background, towards Ouarzazate.

This part of the country is much more sparsely populated, and the extensive plains were dotted with flat-topped Acacias which gave this area a very African Savannah feel. Indeed, it

is in this beautiful area that a very ambitious reintroduction programme is trying to reintroduce some of the locally extinct megafauna, including Ostrich, of which we saw a couple of individuals.

We made several stops along the way exploring promising patches of habitat, finding birds such as Long-legged Buzzard, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Desert Lark, Greater Short-toed Lark, Woodchat Shrike, European Bee-eater, Western Black-eared Wheatear and dozens of White-crowned Wheatears.

Near Alnif, we stopped at one of the palmeries hoping to find some migrants with European Turtle Dove, Tree Pipit, Common Redstart and Red-rumped Swallow all seen.

Then, Oussama took us to a lovely restaurant at the Dades Gorge where we enjoyed a delicious lunch surrounded by House Buntings.

We were running out of time, so we didn't stop until we reached the Ouarzazate reservoir an hour before sunset. After a few days in the desert, the sight of a large body of water was certainly a change and we found several new birds for the trip including Northern Shoveler, Great Crested Grebe, Great Cormorant, Osprey, Common Sandpiper, Kentish Plover, a small flock of Collared Pratincoles and hundreds of Sand Martins and Barn Swallows looking for a place to roost on the way to their breeding grounds further north.

### **23 March**

We left our hotel in the early morning heading for our next destination, the coastal city of Agadir. As usual, we made several stops along the way, the first of which was after just 20 minutes at a small wetland on the outskirts of Ouarzazate.

In just a few minutes, we connected with several Ruddy Shelducks, Little Ringed Plover, Laughing Dove, Common Bulbul, Thekla's Lark and 'Moroccan Wagtail'. Two Barbary Partridges were the first ones seen by the whole group and a Wryneck gave us excellent scope views while calling in the open. Unfortunately, the hoped-for Marbled Duck was nowhere to be found and Derek was starting to worry.....

Travelling along the N10, we stopped near Tiouiyine, a small town along the Asif Tidili river, which is a tributary of the Drâa. The irrigated fields and the river valley usually attract good numbers of migrants and this was certainly the case this morning. As soon as we stepped out of the bus, we were welcomed by a Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, followed by several Western Orphean Warblers, good numbers of Common Redstart, two very vocal Wrynecks, dozens of Bee-eaters, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Blackcap, Cetti's Warbler, Common Reed Warbler and one of the local Bonelli's Eagles. With the clock ticking, we loaded the bus and descended towards the Souss Valley.

The Souss Valley is sandwiched between the High Atlas and the Anti Atlas and is one of the most important diversity hotspots in Morocco. It is here that the remaining Argan forest is



found, and this endemic species plays a significant role in the local economy and is also important for a very rich and diverse fauna. It is also where all the Painted Lady butterflies we see in Europe are from.

The upper part of the valley is also world-renowned for its saffron, so after lunch, we stopped to buy some for a fraction of what it would cost back at home.

We made a couple of roadside stops that didn't produce much, although the scenery was breath-taking, before we arrived in Agadir just before sunset.

## **24 March**

Undoubtedly, one of the highlights of any birding trip to Morocco is the opportunity to see one the rarest birds in the world, the Northern Bald Ibis. This unique bird was once widespread across Morocco but is now restricted to the Atlantic coast of the Souss-Massa National Park and the coastal village of Tamri is home to the last truly wild birds in the world.

We took the N1 towards Tamri, stopping a couple of times along the way to check a big flock of gulls on the beach, where we found our first Audouin's Gulls and then to buy some of the Tamri's famous bananas. Soon after that, we were scanning the coastal sandy plains in search of our main target and it didn't take long before someone shouted "Bald Ibis!"

We spent the next hour or so with a flock of 25-30 birds feeding not far from the road. At one point, some people just sat down on the sand and the ibis walked past them, allowing great views and photo opportunities.



*Bald Ibis © Fernando Enrique Navarrete*

Some other birds noted were Moussier's Redstart, "Algeriensis" Grey Shrike, Thekla's Lark and Sardinian Warbler.

After this incredible experience, we drove south towards Cap Rhir which is the westernmost point of mainland Morocco north of Agadir and one of the best seawatching spots in the country.

Reaching the rocky coast, we found a very cooperative Stone Curlew just a few metres away and looking out to sea, Northern Gannets seemed to be everywhere. We also saw smaller numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Audouin's Gull, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Oystercatcher, Razorbill and a very unexpected Short-eared Owl, which was flying along the coast and is a very rare bird in this part of the country.

After enjoying the local seafood, we drove back to Agadir where we spent the last couple of hours exploring the Souss estuary. Unfortunately, the tide was very high and most of the waders were resting out of sight, so we decided to drive for a bit and then walk along the riverbank. This move paid off and we managed to find some good birds including lots of Mediterranean Gulls, Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill, Osprey, Maghreb Magpie, the first Brown-throated Martins of the trip and our only Great Spotted Cuckoo

### **25 March**

With only limited time this morning, we left our hotel and drove the 60kms or so to the Oued Massa National Park. The good diversity of habitats within a relatively small area is the reason why this is one of the best birding spots in the country.

We left the bus near the visitor centre and took the path that goes to the river mouth. The orchards, small agricultural fields and maquis were teeming with birds and we soon found several species which were new for the trip with birds such as Glossy Ibis, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Dunlin, Melodious Warbler, European Stonechat and Corn Bunting.



*Black-crowned Tchagra* © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

The star of the show, however, was definitely a Black-crowned Tchagra that landed in front of us carrying nesting material and showing extremely well, which is very unusual for this secretive species.

A couple of hundred metres down the path, we saw a big flock of dark birds circling on the opposite side of the river. We couldn't believe our eyes, as it was a flock of 59 Bald Ibis!

Almost simultaneously, we spotted a couple of pale ducks in the river that definitely required further inspection. Once we got closer we could confirm, much to Derek's relief, that they were indeed Marbled Ducks!

The walk back to the vehicle was nearly as productive with great views of Booted Eagle, Little Owl, Common Kingfisher, African Blue Tit, African Chaffinch, Brown-throated Martin, Moussier's Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush and the only European Roller of the trip which was just a few metres away from the path.

One last stop along the coast produced the only Ruddy Turnstone and Whimbrel of the trip and one last Northern Bald Ibis flying to its breeding colony. It had been a very productive morning and we ended up with nearly 90 species before lunch.

Successfully navigating Agadir, we arrived at the airport with ample time to say our farewells and relax before the flight back to the UK and the end of a very enjoyable and successful trip to Morocco.

## Systematic List

### Birds

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*

Small numbers noted on four dates.

**Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*

Two on 22/3 and another pair at Oued Massa.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

Small numbers noted on four dates.

**Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*

Two birds at Oued Massa.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*

Half a dozen at Oued Massa.

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

Two birds in flight at Cap Rhir.

**Barbary Partridge** *Alectoris Barbara*

One bird on route on 17/3 and two birds at Tarmigt Lake.

**Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

Amazing views of a roosting bird on 20/3.

**Common Swift** *Apus apus*

Small numbers noted on three dates.

**Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus*

Common and seen on most days.

**Little Swift** *Apus affinis*

Small numbers on four dates, especially along the coast.

**Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius*

One bird showed really well at Oued Souss.

**Spotted Sandgrouse** *Pterocles senegallus*

At least 30+ birds coming to drink on 20/3.

**Crowned Sandgrouse** *Pterocles coronatus*

Great views of 60+ birds on 20/3 and at least 40 on 21/3.



Crowned Sandgrouse © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis*

Several flocks in flight on 19/3.

**Rock Dove** *Columba livia*

Seen daily, including some “wild types” in remote wadis and gorges.

**Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*

Common in the mountains and along the coast.

**European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*

One bird seen on 22/3 and another one heard at Oued Massa.

**Eurasia Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

Very common and seen daily.

**Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Small numbers noted on six dates.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

Single birds noted on two dates.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*

A couple at Oukaimeden and small numbers at Oued Massa.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

Good numbers at Ouarzazate reservoir.

**Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus*

A flock of 50+ birds at Oued Souss.

**Eurasian Stone-Curlew** *Burhinus oedichnemus*

One at Cap Rhir and two at Oued Massa.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

A flock of 17 birds was seen migrating along the coast at Cap Rhir.

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus Himantopus*

Small numbers noted on most wetlands along the coast.

**Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Small numbers noted on most wetlands along the coast.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

Small numbers noted on four dates.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrines*

Two at Ourzazate reservoir and several on most wetlands along the coast.

**Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*

A single bird along the coast at Sidi R'bat.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata*

One bird heard at Oued Massa.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

A bird seen feeding on the rocks at Sidi Rbat.

**Ruff** *Calidris pugnax*

A couple of birds seen at Oued Massa.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

Two birds at Oued Massa.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

Single birds on two dates.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

One to three birds noted on four dates.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

One to four birds were found on three dates.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa tetanus*

Several birds at Oued Souss.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

Noted on most wetlands along the coast.

**Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*

After a bit of searching, we managed to get really good views of two adults near Merzouga.

**Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincole*

No less than 17 birds were seen at Ouarzazate reservoir.

**Slender-billed Gull** *Chroicocephalus genei*

Common along the coast.

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common along the coast.

**Audouin's Gull** *Ichthyaetus audouinii*

Several flocks were found along the coast north of Agadir.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

Especially common at Oued Souss.

**Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*

Common along the coast.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus*

Very common along the coast.

**Sandwich Tern** *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Good numbers along the coast.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

A few migrating along the coast from Cap Rhir.

**Razorbill** *Alca torda*

At least eight birds flying north at Cap Rhir and a group of nine close to the coast at lunch time. One bird at Sidi Rbat during our last morning.

**White Stork** *Ciconia Ciconia*

Common. Seen daily.

**Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus*

Good numbers migrating along the coast on two dates.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common at Ouarzazate reservoir and along the coast.

**Northern Bald Ibis** *Geronticus eremita*

One of the highlights of the trip. We had a close encounter with a flock of 25-30 birds near Tamri. At least 60 birds were also found at Oued Massa.

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*

Several small flocks at Oued Massa.

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*

Small numbers at Oued Souss and Oued Massa.

**Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*

Common and noted on most days.



**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerera*

Small numbers were seen on four dates.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

Small numbers on five dates.

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

Two birds at Ouarzazate reservoir, one at Oued Souss and two at Oued Massa.

**Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*

One to four individuals noted on four dates.

**Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennatus*

The commonest eagle and found on six dates.

**Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata*

A pair at Escale Forest and one adult near Ouarzazate.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

Single birds on three dates.

**Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

One to three individuals seen on four dates, including some in the middle of the desert.



*Long-legged Buzzard* © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

Common throughout the trip with good numbers noted on six dates.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*

Single birds or pairs were found on five dates, including great views of nesting birds.

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*

Three birds on route to Boumalne and a single bird at Oued Massa.

**Pharaoh Eagle-Owl** *Bubo ascalaphus*

Great views of a bird roosting near Boumalne.

**Maghreb Owl** *Strix mauritanica*

Male and female at our first hotel in the Atlas Mountains with the male providing absolutely amazing views.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*

An unexpected find, a bird migrating along the coast at Cap Rhir.

**Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*

Common and noted on seven dates.

**Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*

A couple of birds at Oued Massa.

**Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus*

Seen daily in the desert.

*Blue-cheeked Bee-eater* © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster*

Common migrant with good numbers seen on six dates.

**European Roller** *Coracias garrulus*

One bird showed really well at Oued Massa.

**Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*

One bird seen well near Ouarzazate and two more heard on the way to the Sous valley.



**Levaillant's Woodpecker** *Picus vaillantii*

Common in the Atlas Mountains, with no less than eight different birds.

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

Seen daily.

**Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus*

One bird as Escale Forest and excellent views of a nesting pair near Boumalne.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*

One bird at Oukaimeden.

**Black-crowned Tchagra** *Tchagra senegalus*

One bird seen really well carrying nesting material and a couple more heard at Oued Massa.

**Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor*

A common sighting throughout the trip with small numbers noted on nine dates.

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator*

Very common migrant. Seen daily.

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

One bird near Oukaimeden on the first day.



Maghreb Magpie © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**Maghreb Magpie** *Pica mauritanica*

A small flock on the way to Tizi n' Tichka pass and seen daily along the coast.

**Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Dozens at Oukaimeden.

**Alpine Chough** *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

100+ birds at Oukaimeden.

**Brown-necked Raven** *Corvus ruficollis*

Seen daily in the desert.

**Northern Raven** *Corvus corax*

Small numbers in the Atlas Mountains and along the coast.

**“Atlas” Coal Tit** *Periparus ater atlas*

Several birds seen around between our hotel and Oukaimeden on the first couple of days.

**African Blue Tit** *Cyanistes teneriffae*

Common in the Atlas Mountains and Oued Massa.

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

Small numbers in the mountains.

**Greater Hoopoe-Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes*

One of the best birds of the trip. Common during our stay in the Merzouga area, with seven birds on the first day and at least 10 different birds on the second, some of them displaying.

**Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey*

Another highlight of the trip. Great views of at least four birds near Boumalne and even better views of two pairs near Goulmima.

**Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti*

A total of four birds on two dates.

**Bar-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes cinctura*

Relatively common in sandy habitats.

**Thekla's Lark** *Galerida theklae*

Very common and widespread. Noted on eight dates.

**Maghreb Lark** *Galerida macrorhyncha*

Common between Ouarzazate and Merzouga.

**“Atlas” Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris atlas*

Half a dozen at Oukaimeden.

**Temminck’s Horned Lark** *Eremophila bilopha*

Several birds along the Tagdilt Track and a couple near Goulmima.



Greater Short-toed Lark © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

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

Noted on five dates.

**Mediterranean Short-toed Lark** *Alaudala rufescens*

Small flocks seen along the Tagdilt Track.

**Common Bulbul** *Pycnonotus barbatus*

Very common and seen or heard on a daily basis.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

Common migrant and noted on four dates.

**Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola*

Two birds at Oued Souss and 4-5 birds at Oued Massa.

**Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

A single bird at Oukaimeden.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Very common and seen daily.

**Common House Martin** *Delichon urbicum*

Very common with daily sightings.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica*

Small numbers noted on seven dates.

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

Seen well around our hotel in the Atlas Mountains and heard elsewhere.

**Streaked Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta*

It took some extra effort, but we managed to find 3-4 birds near Erg Chebbi.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A few migrants were seen on three dates.

**Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

Quite common throughout the trip, with birds noted on six dates.

**Western Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli*

Surprisingly scarce with just a couple of birds seen.

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Single birds noted on two dates.

**Common Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Just a few birds near Ouarzazate.

**Western Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna opaca*

Common, with good numbers noted on five dates.

**Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis*

Several birds were seen along the coast on the last couple of days.

**Eurasian Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Very common migrant in most habitats. Seen almost daily.

**Western Orphean Warbler** *Curruca ortensis*

Several birds seen well near Ouarzazate and along the Souss Valley.

**African Desert Warbler** *Curruca deserti*

Great views of this localized species near Erg Chebbi.



*Tristram's Warbler* © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**Tristram's Warbler** *Curruca deserticola*

Fantastic views of a singing male defending its territory along the Dades Gorge and 2-3 birds on their wintering grounds around Merzouga.

**Sardinian Warbler** *Curruca melanocephala*

Common and widespread. Seen on most days.

**Western Subalpine Warbler** *Curruca iberiae*

One of the most common migrants. Dozens were seen on most days, especially around Merzouga.

**Common Whitethroat** *Curruca communis*

Small numbers on three dates.

**Spectacled Warbler** *Curruca conspicillata*

Single birds on three dates.



*Fulvous Babbler* © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**Fulvous Babbler** *Argya fulva*

Very common, with several flocks seen daily in the desert.

**Common Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapilla*

A common sighting in the Atlas Mountains.

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen or heard every morning around our hotel in the Atlas Mountains.

**Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla mauritanica*

A potential split. Several were seen during our first two days in the Atlas Mountains.

**Spotless Starling** *Sturnus unicolor*

Seen on five dates and especially common along the coast.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*

Several individuals of the local subspecies were seen during our first two days in the Atlas Mountains.

**Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*

At least 8-10 birds were seen on the junipers on the way up to Oukaimeden.



**Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

Seen daily.

**Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas galactotes*

A bird was briefly seen at a roadside stop on the way to the Souss Valley.

**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

Only seen during our first full day.

**Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

More often heard than seen, although a couple of birds showed well at Todra Gorge and Oued Massa.

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Common in the Atlas Mountains.

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A common migrant and seen on five dates.

**Moussier's Redstart** *Phoenicurus moussieri*

One of the most attractive Maghreb endemics. We saw no less than eight birds on the way up to Oukaimeden, a couple near Tizi n' Tichka, three near Tamri and at least a dozen individuals at Oued Massa, including a female attending a nest with very tiny chicks.

**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius*

Single birds noted on four dates.

**European Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola*

Only seen on our last day at Oued Massa, where it was common.

**Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabelline*

A rare bird in Morocco, most of the records come from the south east corner of the country, around Merzouga, where we found a bird that showed really well.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A common migrant and noted on seven dates.

**Atlas Wheatear** *Oenanthe seebohmi*

This breeding endemic usually arrives on the breeding grounds at the end of March or beginning of April. We were lucky to find four different males at lower elevations on two consecutive days on their way up to the Atlas Mountains.

**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*

Common in arid areas, seen on six dates.

**Western Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica*

A common migrant and noted on six dates.

**Red-rumped Wheatear** *Oenanthe moesta*

At least 6 birds, mostly males, along the Tagdilt Track and a few more on route the following day.

**Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucura*

A common sighting during the first four days of the trip, especially in more mountainous areas. Replaced by White-crowned Wheatear at lower elevations and around towns.

**White-crowned Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga*

Very common. Noted on seven dates.

**Maghreb (Mourning) Wheatear** *Oenanthe halophila*

Arguably the most elusive of the wheatears. We found three birds, including great views of a female near Boumalne.

**White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus*

A bird was heard by some members of the group.

**Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia*

Very common at Oukaimeden and around Tizi n'Tichka.

**Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*

Common with big flocks noted on four dates.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

Very common around towns and seen daily.

**Desert Sparrow** *Passer simplex*

Another highlight of the trip was seeing two males and a female at close range around Erg Chebbi.



Desert Sparrow © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

Bird of several subspecies, including *iberiae*, *flava* and *cinereocapilla* were noted on five dates.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

One bird near Tizi n'Tichka and another one at Todra Gorge.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

A common sighting throughout the trip and noted on most days. Our sightings included a few birds of the local race *subpersonata*.

**Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris*

Single birds noted on two dates.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

Single birds were found on two dates.

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*

Surprisingly scarce, with only one bird seen near Alnif.

**Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

A few birds of the European race were seen near Oukaimeden.

**Atlas Chaffinch** *Fringilla (coelebs) africana*

This distinctive “subspecies” was very common in the Atlas Mountains and was also noted in smaller numbers at the Sous Valley and Oued Massa.

It is worth noting that in February 2023, the IOC recognised a five-way split of “Common Chaffinch” into Eurasian, African, Azores, Madeira and Canary Islands Chaffinches.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

A flock of six birds was seen in flight on the way up to Oukaimeden and then we found two more feeding on the ground with a group of Atlas Chaffinch.

**African Crimson-winged Finch** *Rhodopechys alienus*

This localised species was seen extremely well at Oukaimeden, where 15 or so birds were feeding just a few metres away from us.

**Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus*

Common and noted on seven dates.

**European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*

Common and found on six dates.

**Common Linnet** *Linaria cannabina*

Small numbers noted on five dates.

**Red Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*

Seen on both days in the Atlas Mountains.

**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

Surprisingly scarce during most of the trip, with birds seen only along the Souss Valley and Oued Massa.

**Eurasian Siskin** *Spinus spinus*

A couple of birds in flight around our hotel in the mountains.

**European Serin** *Serinus serinus*

Very common and seen on most days.

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra*

A few on the way to Tizi n’Tichka and common at Oued Massa.

**Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia*

Seen on both days in the Atlas Mountains.

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*

Seen on both days in the Atlas Mountains.



*House Bunting* © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**House Bunting** *Emberiza sahari*

A common sighting in most towns.

## **Mammals**

**Barbary Ground Squirrel** *Atlantoxerus getulus*

**Fat Sand Rat** *Psammomys obesus*

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*

## **Reptiles and Amphibians**

**Moroccan Toad** *Sclerophrys mauritanica*

**Spanish Terrapin** *Mauremys capsica*

**Moorish Gecko** *Tarentola mauritanica*

**High Atlas Day Gecko** *Quedenfeldtia trachyblepharus*

**Vaucher's Wall Lizard** *Podarcis vaucheri*

**Dumeril's Fringe-fingered Lizard** *Acanthodactylus dumerilii*

**Margarita's Fringe-fingered Lizard** *Acanthodactylus margaritae*

**Bosc's Fringe-fingered Lizard** *Acanthodactylus boskianus*

**Spiny-tailed Lizard Boehme's Agama** *Trapelus bohemei*

**Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard** *Uromastyx nigriventris*

**Schokati Sand Racer** *Psammophis schokari*



*Greater Hoopoe-Lark © Fernando Enrique Navarrete*