

Morocco

5 – 17 March 2024

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INTRODUCTION

This short trip to Morocco was aimed at finding 20 target species. We were very pleased to see 15 of them. Key species missed included Scrub Warbler, Desert Warbler, Desert Sparrow, Spotted Sandgrouse and Egyptian Nightjar. We had no problems travelling around, English is not widely understood (except in hotels) so knowledge of French makes life easier. We found everyone to be extremely friendly and helpful. Part of the trip was during Ramadan, which had both advantages and disadvantages – the roads were relatively quiet, but opening hours of shops, banks etc were a bit erratic.

LOGISTICS

We flew Brisbane-Dubai-Casablanca-Marrakesh without any glitches. Pre-booked SUV hire from Avis in Marrakesh. We pre-booked all our hotels, but as it was outside the tourist season most places were either empty or close to it. For pre-trip planning and during the trip we used the two Gosney booklets and 'Where to find birds in Morocco' by Bergier. Google maps worked well, and as usual, ebird was indispensable!

ACCOMMODATION

5 – 7 March: Hotel Le Grand Savoy, Marrakesh. Close to the airport. Good free breakfast served early. Excellent restaurants. Wifi.

7 – 8 March: Ibis Hotel, Ouarzazate. Good free breakfast served early. Wifi.

8 - 10 March: L'Oiseau de Vallee, Boumalne-Dades. Good free breakfast served early. Wifi

10 – 12 March: The Rose of the Desert, Erfoud. Good free breakfast served early. Wifi

12 – 13 March: Ibis Hotel, Ouarzazate. Wifi

13 – 16 March: Atlantic Hotel, Agadir. Wifi

16 - 17 March: Hotel Le Grand Savoy, Marrakesh. Wifi

MAIN SITES VISITED WITH COMMENTS ON BIRDS

TOUFLIHT AREA

We spent a day exploring habitats along the N9 up as far as Toufliht. Here the main target was Levillant's Woodpecker, which we failed to find at the Forestry Station site. This site was relatively unproductive, just African Blue Tit, Great Tit, and other common species. Nevertheless, Road number P2016 off the N9 gave us Moussier's Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, Spotless Starling and Thekla Lark, and an unmarked track to a quarry produced Black Wheatear and White Wagtail. On the return trip on the outskirts of Marrakesh we saw our first Maghreb Magpies alongside the highway.

OUARZAZATE AREA

On our way to Ouarzazate on the N9 we stopped again at Toufliht, but to no avail. Further up the Tizi-n-Tichka pass we spent an hour or so exploring the site at 31.3334, -7.38065, where

there had been recent sightings of LeVaillant's Woodpecker, but again no luck. Rock Bunting was seen at this site.

The main site visited in this region was the Barrage Mansour Eddahi. The gravel plains on the access road were alive with wheatears: Northern, White-Crowned, Desert and one Atlas among the Northern. Tristram's Warbler was located in the scrubby bushes. Other notable species were Southern (Great) Grey Shrike, Pallid Swift, Collared Pratincole, Maghreb Lark, Crag Martin, Trumpeter Finch and Eurasian Hoopoe.

En route from Ouarzazate to Agadir on the N10 we stopped on the high plateau about 30 km south of the junction with the N9. Bar-tailed Larks were common, along with an abundance of Trumpeter Finches. Moussier's Redstart and Eurasian Kestrel were also common in this area.

BOUMALNE - DADES AREA & TAGDILT TRACK

Our hotel was ideally situated for quick access to the new and old Tagdilt roads. We spent two days exploring this region. At the dry depression close to the new (tar) track we found Black-bellied Sandgrouse and Crowned Sandgrouse, as well as Temminck's Lark and Black Redstart. The old Tagdilt road gave us Red-rumped and Isabelline Wheatears and more Temminck's Larks. We visited the Pharaoh Eagle Owl site at "Falcon's Nest", 16 km from B-Dades. Here we were lucky to encounter Khinit Elahcen (+212 678473369), a custodian of the site who was showing the owl to Belgian birders. Without his help we would not have seen this magnificent species as it was sitting on a nest in a large opening on a rocky hillside. Excellent scope views. Also seen in this area were Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and Lanner Falcon. Close to B-Dades in trees adjacent to the Shell petrol station we encountered a large flock of European Serin.

GOULMIMA

En route from Ouarzazate to Erfoud we diverted to Goulmima to search the Scrub Warbler site northeast of the town (explained in Gosney). We had no trouble locating the site and the various bushes shown on the map, but despite two hours searching failed to find Scrub Warbler. There were lots of Spectacled Warblers and Trumpeter Finches, as well as Temminck's Lark and Isabelline Wheatear.

ERFOUD AREA

We spent time exploring the various sites listed in Gosney along the R702 towards Merzouga.

6.3 km site – just Desert Wheatear; 9.9 km site – Desert Lark, Brown-necked Raven, Woodchat Shrike and White-crowned Wheatear (a subsequent visit the next day added Western Sub-Alpine Warbler and Northern Wheatear); 12 km - Greater Hoopoe Lark. Just past Dar Kaqua more Greater Hoopoe Larks.

RISSANI AREA

The first site visited here was the extensive palm grove on the right side of the N13 road just past the where the N12 starts at a 90 degree turn towards Ouarzazate, but before the left turn of the N13 to Rissani. The main target here was Fulvous Babbler and after an hour's search we located a group of four. The next site was "Champs de Beni Mimoune" on the circuit touristique out of Rissani – birding here was quite lively with another group of Fulvous Bblers, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Desert and Isabelline Wbeaters, Woodchat Shrike and

Maghreb larks. Further along the N13 we spent an hour searching for Egyptian Nightjar at the site detailed in Gosney, just past Auberge Tresor, but to no avail.

DESERT NORTH OF MERZOUGA

Here we concentrated on the road to Yasmina Auberge and the adjacent hotel areas and camel camps. No luck with Desert Sparrow, but the isolated thorn trees along the road were alive with migrant warblers: Western Sub-Alpine, Western Orphean, Western Bonelli's were noted, as well as Moussier's Redstart and Desert and White-crowned Wheatears.

COASTAL AREA NORTH OF AGADIR

Our target species here were Audouin's Gull and Northern Bald Ibis. The former we found first at Camel Beach along with many Yellow-legged Gulls. Three birds were scoped, one of which was ringed and leg-flagged. We stopped at the Tamri estuary, but it was in a sad state with much pollution and large numbers of aggressive stray dogs. Following ebird information, at 2.5 km north of Tamri, we took a dirt road inland that leads to a water treatment plant. About 300 m from the main road we found two Northern Bald Ibis feeding and had excellent close-up views.

IMOZZER

Having seen the target species along the coast we decided to explore the hills on the road to Imouzzer. Excellent mixed scrub habitat on the way up to Imouzzer and pine forests at the top. Siskin was added to the list in the pine forest, but otherwise nothing notable.

OUED SOUS, AGADIR

We followed the directions in Gosney and spent a couple of hours birding the estuary and adjacent bush. We parked in the main car park, but could not walk on down the road as it was closed off by the police, guarding the royal palace. They told us we could only walk on the path next to the estuary. Nothing particularly notable – Greater Flamingo, Sandwich Tern, several waders including Eurasian Curlew, Grey Plover, Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Kentish Plover and Eurasian Oystercatcher – several gulls – Black-headed, Slender-billed, and Lesser Black-backed. In the low bushes we found Whitethroat, Sardinian Warbler, Western Sub-Alpine Warbler and Zitting Cisticola. Maghreb Magpies were common.

OUED MASSA (SOUTH OF AGADIR)

This site was visited after the previous one and we again followed the directions in Gosney. This was a quite productive site although yielded nothing particularly noteworthy. Several waders including Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper and Stilt. Other water birds included Glossy Ibis, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Little Egret and Eurasian Spoonbill. Yellow Wagtail was also recorded. The reed beds had Moustached Warbler and Zitting Cisticola, and the scrubland Stonechat, Western Olivaceous Warbler and Moussier's Redstart.

Morocco trip report species checklist

(*=lifer)

Great Cormorant: Oued Sous

European Shag: coast N of Agadir

Cattle Egret: widespread

Little Egret: widespread

Purple Heron: Oued Massa

Grey Heron: Oued Massa, Oued Sous
White Stork: near Marrakesh
Glossy Ibis: Oued Massa
*Northern Bald Ibis: 2.5 km N of Tamri
Eurasian Spoonbill: Oued Sous, Oued Massa
Greater Flamingo: Oued Sous
Mallard: Oued Sous
Black Kite: Boumalne Dades
Common Kestrel: widespread in hills
Lanner Falcon: "Falcon's Nest" 16 km from Boumalne-Dades
Eurasian Oystercatcher: Oued Sous
Black-winged Stilt: Oued Massa
Collared Pratincole: Barrage Mansour Eddahi
Kentish Plover: Oued Sous
Grey Plover: Oued Sous
Curlew Sandpiper: Oued Massa
Ruff: Oued Massa
Black-tailed Godwit: Oued Massa
Eurasian Curlew: Oued Sous
Common Redshank: Oued Sous
Marsh Sandpiper: Oued Sous
Green Sandpiper: Oued Massa
Common Black-headed Gull: Oued Sous
Slender-billed Gull: Oued Sous
*Audouin's Gull: Camel Beach near Agadir
Lesser Black-backed Gull: Oued Sous
Yellow-legged Gull: widespread
Sandwich Tern: Oued Sous
Black-bellied Sandgrouse: Tagdilt Track
*Crowned Sandgrouse: Tagdilt Track, road cutting near Tazzarine
Common Wood Pigeon: common
Rock Dove: common
Eurasian Collared Dove: common
*Pharaoh Eagle Owl: "Falcon's Nest" 16 km from Boumalne-Dades
Pallid Swift: Barrage Mansour Eddahi
Common Swift: widespread
Little Swift: Agadir
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater: Champs de Beni Mimoune Rissani
Hoopoe: near Boumalne-Dades
*Levaillant's Woodpecker: Hills on highway between Agadir and Marrakesh
Greater Hoopoe Lark: various sites along R702 out of Erfoud
*Bar-tailed Lark: high plateau on N10 30 km S of N9
Desert Lark; widespread in the south
Lesser Short-toed Lark: widespread
*Maghreb Lark: common
Thekla Lark: widespread in hills
*Temminck's Lark: Tagdilt Track, NE of Goulmima,
Eurasian Crag Martin: Barrage Mansour Eddahi
Barn Swallow: widespread
Common House Martin: Barrage Mansour Eddahi
Yellow Wagtail: Oued Massa

White Wagtail: common
Common Bulbul: widespread
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin: Falcon's Nest area 16 km from B-Dades
Black Redstart: widespread
*Moussier's Redstart: widespread
Common Stonechat: Oued Massa
*White-crowned Black Wheatear: widespread
Black Wheatear: widespread in hills
*Atlas Wheatear: Barrage Mansour Eddahi - single
Northern Wheatear: widespread
Black-eared Wheatear: Tagdilt Track
*Red-rumped Wheatear: Tagdilt Track
Desert Wheatear: widespread
Isabelline Wheatear: Tagdilt Track, NE of Goulmima, Champs de Beni Mimoune Rissani
Eurasian Blackbird: common
Moustached Warbler: Oued Massa
Western Bonelli's Warbler: Auberge Yasmina road
Western Orphean Warbler: Auberge Yasmina road
Common Whitethroat: Oued Sous
Sardinian Warbler: widespread
Western Sub-alpine Warbler: Auberge Yasmina road, R702 9.9 km from Erfoud, Oued Sous
Spectacled Warbler: NE of Goulmima, Taroudannt and Argan forests
*Tristram's Warbler: singles at Barrage Mansour Eddahi
Zitting Cisticola: Oued Sous, Oued Massa
*Fulvous Babbler: Champs de Beni Mimoune Rissani, Rissani palm groves
African Blue Tit: widespread
Great Tit: widespread
Southern Grey Shrike: Barrage Mansour Eddahi
Woodchat Shrike: near Erfoud, Champs de Beni Mimoune Rissani
Common Raven: widespread
Brown-necked Raven: Erfoud and Merzouga areas
*Maghreb Magpie: near Marrakesh and common near Agadir
Red-billed Chough: common at top of Tizi-n-Tichka pass
Spotless Starling: common
House Sparrow: common
Spanish Sparrow: Oued Massa, Auberge Yasmina
Chaffinch: common
European Serin: Boumalne-Dades
Eurasian Siskin: Imouzzet in pines
Trumpeter Finch: widespread in hills and high mountains
House Bunting: Erfoud
Rock Bunting: Tizi-n-Tichka pass