

# Morocco

Atlas to Sahara (Small Group)

*29<sup>th</sup> November to 9<sup>th</sup> December 2023 (11 days)*

## Trip Report



Spotted Sandgrouse by Mark Beevers

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Mark Beevers



## Tour in Detail

Morocco, with its breath-taking scenery, delicious food, rich history, and fabulous birding, is an essential destination for all birders and travellers. As an independent country after French rule, few Muslim countries offer the combination of such a friendly atmosphere complimented with strong cultural beliefs and few restrictions on visitors. Interesting habitats are found in the various geo-physical regions and vary from the high snow-covered Atlas Mountains and low-lying woodlands to scrub-covered gravel plains, vegetated wadis, and the red sand dunes of the great Sahara Desert. Cities and towns bustle with activity, where mud-walled buildings line souks (long narrow alleyways) that are filled with bazaars selling carpets and crafts, and laden with exotic spices. What's more, Morocco is also home to numerous special birds with

several North African endemics including the beautiful Moussier's Redstart, Tristram's Warbler, Barbary Partridge, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Fulvous Babbler, African Blue Tit and African Crimson-winged Finch as well as several special desert species such as various Sandgrouse, Larks and Wheatears. Below is the account of our small group adventure to this wonderful part of the world.



Male & Female Crowned Sandgrouse by Mark Beevers

Day one saw us heading out pre-dawn from our starting point of Marrakech, heading towards the snow-covered High Atlas Mountains. Well, that's what the itinerary said, but it seems that the weather hadn't got a copy of our script for not a flake of snow had fallen yet this winter! We arrived at our first stop by an almost dry river at Ourika just as a freezing dawn was breaking and quickly located our first target, the local Moroccan *subpersonata* race of White Wagtail of which there were several. The site is pretty trashed, but it also delivered our only Little Ringed Plovers of the tour. We soon headed on our way heading for the ski resort at Oukaimeden which sits at 2,600 metres in the High Atlas. Our first stop low in the valley produced a calling Levaillant's Woodpecker in the distance and both European Robin and Eurasian Wren, neither of which were cooperative as well as our first African Chaffinches. Further up the valley and another stop gave us excellent looks at a couple of Common Firecrests as well as our first Rock Buntings and our first Cirl Buntings of the day.

We called briefly at our hotel for a pit stop where several of us saw some Common Crossbills as well as European Serins and Greenfinches and we also got good looks at African Blue Tit, Black Redstart and our first Sardinian Warblers. Onwards and upwards another stop produced two Ring Ouzels, here below 2,000 metres which is most unusual, as well as a gorgeous male Moussier's Redstart. As we neared the top of the pass we were treated to close views of a couple of Long-legged Buzzard as well as a female Sparrowhawk, a pair of Coal Tits, several more Common Firecrests and rather more unexpectedly a flock of 50 Eurasian Siskins. We settled outside a café for lunch where we sampled our first of many tagines and picked up our first Rock Sparrows whilst small numbers of Red-billed Choughs probed the ground in front of us. We then spent the rest of the afternoon searching around the ski lifts and beyond looking for African Crimson-winged Finch to no avail though we did find a large flock of 70-80 Horned Larks, a few more Black Redstarts, a couple of Black Wheatears and a flock of Common Linnets. The stream that runs out from the lake was almost dry so we elected to walk down-hill until we could find some fast-flowing water, which once located produced the hoped for White-throated Dipper. A couple of species had eluded us not least Alpine Chough and Alpine Accentor, which are snow dependant, but Levaillant's Woodpecker was also conspicuously absent from our list, so we tried some woodland just below



our hotel, which looked promising and indeed it was when we were rewarded with superb looks at a male, just as the light was fading.

Day 2 is a long travel day to Agadir, so we could have really done with not having to go back to the ski resort to find African Crimson-winged Finch, which is a big target on the tour. Fortunately, we were armed with information from a local Moroccan birder who kindly told us where he'd see some the previous day and it wasn't long after our arrival that we found a flock of 30 birds, exactly where he told us to look. A good result and as a bonus we had a loose flock of seven Ring Ouzels, which is the most I have ever encountered in Morocco and a few more Rock Sparrows. Setting off two hours later than normal we made our way back to Ourika and then up the Tiz-n-



**Male Desert Sparrow by Mark Beevers**

Test pass, which took us straight through the epicentre of the recent earthquake. It was very sobering as we drove through the devastation, passing many flattened houses on a badly damaged road. The progress was slow and there was little time for any birding. Our scheduled stop to view the Tinmal Mosque was passed over as the building had been severely damaged by the earthquake and was now supported by shuttering. It was a very quiet bus on that journey, and it was a relief to get to our lunch spot at the Belle Vue café, itself quite badly damaged but thankfully still functioning. We sat in the sun overlooking the valley below and enjoyed a Berber Tagine before continuing our way to Agadir. Our journey up the pass produced a male Moussier's Redstart but little else but on our descent, we saw a couple of cute Little Owls and a Black Wheatear. Once in the lowlands we started to see Great Grey Shrikes and as we got nearer to our destination we saw a flock of 50 White Storks, our first Maghreb Magpies, Spotless Starlings and one of only two Eurasian Hoopoes but unfortunately a Little Swift seen from the vehicle was a leader only bird.

Day three is our pelagic day and one that is eagerly awaited. We mustered for collection at 0830 and by 0900 we were on our way out of the harbour on our regular boat. Initially there was little to see save for thousands of Lesser Black-backed Gulls with lesser numbers of Yellow-legged Gulls but before long we started to encounter Razorbills, eventually tallying 21 birds, a Rockjumper record I believe. Northern Gannets started to appear too as well as half a dozen Sandwich Terns, a Cory's Shearwater and our first Balearic Shearwater whizzed past. I pointed the captain in the direction of America and said, "let's go" and we set off towards a distant string of small but active fishing boats. No trawlers this trip but that didn't matter for as we approached the small vessels, some 20 miles offshore, they were surrounded by birds with particularly notable in excess of 100 Balearic Shearwaters with ten or more Manx Shearwaters mingled amongst them. A couple of Great Skuas passed by as did a dark phase Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua), a Sooty Shearwater and the first of 25 European Storm Petrels. The activity around the boats seemed to wane so it was time to deploy the chum, which soon had the desired effect of luring in the storm petrels. Within minutes we were getting great looks this tiny seabird and then we noticed that two of the nearest birds feeding together but in a different manner. We quickly realised that one of the birds was a Wilson's Storm Petrel, an altogether rarer bird than its European cousin and indeed a new bird for Rockjumper in Morocco. Unfortunately, all too soon it was time to turn round and head for port, just as heavy rain started, so we all piled into the cabin where the crew had laid on a rather excellent lunch.

Back in port mid-afternoon enabled a quick pitstop at the hotel then we set off north to Tamri, where there is a colony of the endangered Northern Bald Ibis. As it happened, we picked up a feeding flock of ibises at the side of the road as we passed Cap Rhir, where we got excellent views of about 40. This enabled us to rethink the rest





of the afternoon, so after a quick visit to Oued Tamri, where the gull roost held a couple of hundred Audouin's Gull amongst the more abundant Lesser Black-backed Gulls, we decided to pay a quick visit to Oued Souss, a site we intended to visit the previous evening. We got there in fading light but in time to see a couple of hundred Greater Flamingos, a selection of waders that included Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwits, Dunlin, Little Stint and Common Greenshank and several Mediterranean Gulls of various ages but it was too cold and windy to stay till dark for Red-necked Nightjar, so we opted to return to the hotel I good time.



**Male Desert Wheatear by Mark Beevers**

Day four meant an early start to drive to Oued Massa, a famous birding location in Morocco, seventy-five minutes south of Agadir. We arrived pre-dawn and waited for it to get light. Birds coming out of roost included some Glossy Ibis and larger numbers of Western Cattle Egrets, and we soon heard our first Cetti's Warblers and Black-crowned Tchagra, both of which were on the opposite side of the river. Two Ruddy Shelduck and two Eurasian Spoonbills were on the river, party of 15 Ruff flew over the farmland, a Common Kingfisher flew downstream as did three Plain Martins and European Stonechats were fairly common. A selection of shorebirds on the river included a Black-tailed Godwit, 34 Dunlin, a couple of Common Snipe whilst the small fields held, Zitting Cisticola, European Serins and Greenfinches, a flock of 70 Spanish Sparrows and a House Bunting. We relocated to the car park and then started a walk towards the river mouth. As we progressed, we were picking up more birds with two Little Owls, Crested Larks, Sardinian Warblers, Moussier's Redstarts, Great Grey Shrikes and eventually, after the fifth attempt, a Black-crowned Tchagra all being added to the days tally. We didn't ignore the river over which we saw two Ospreys and a female Western Marsh Harrier whilst on the river itself a selection of wildfowl included two Common Shelduck, more Ruddy Shelduck, 50 Eurasian Teal, six Northern Pintail and some Northern Shoveler. Long legged waders included another 35 Glossy Ibis and 13 Eurasian Spoonbills whilst new shorebirds included four Pied Avocets, a scarce Spotted Redshank, three Green Sandpipers and ten Sanderlings. All too soon it was time to turn back as we had another part of the river to visit but when we got to the car park a local birder asked if we wanted to see a nightjar. Well, it would have been rude not to take him up on his offer, so we walked fifty metres or so to where we were confronted with brilliant views of a roosting Red-necked Nightjar, which subsequently was to be voted the second best bird of the trip.

After a delicious traditional lunch in our favourite restaurant in the area we relocated for the remainder of the afternoon to Oued Souss. Here we found good numbers of shorebirds including five Pied Avocets, 41 Grey Plover, four Black-tailed and 25 Bar-tailed Godwits, a solitary Ruff, 50 Knot, ten Dunlin and ten Common Greenshank. At the river mouth, where because of the very low high tide there was a vast expanse of mud on which we found our only Kentish Plover of the trip and an adult Slender-billed Gull which was a bit of a bonus. The small pools that occasionally hold good numbers of duck, waders and egrets were bone dry, so we took a steady walk back to the car park to finish our birding there. 33 Common Shelduck (with three Ruddy Shelduck) was a good count and we also counted 20 Mediterranean Gull and 80 Sandwich Terns. An Osprey was sat on a sandbar, a Common Kingfisher flashed past, and a Zitting Cisticola perched up nicely but as we had already had mind blowing looks at a Red-necked Nightjar in the morning we decided to head to the hotel in an effort to get in before seven.



Day five is a long travel day but it's not one without some decent birding en route which started when we pulled up to admire a perched Long-legged Buzzard on a telegraph pole. As usual general scanning around the vicinity produced a lone and distant Fulvous Babbler, a Great Grey Shrike, and a closer flock of Spanish Sparrow. Just before a major junction a pale bird atop a bush merited a closer look and soon everyone was enjoying 'scope views of a Black-winged Kite with a second bird noticed a couple of kilometres further on.

A coffee stop in Taliouine greatly improved the proprietors saffron sales as just about every one buying some. It must have been a good deal because the drive bought 10 grammes! Refreshed we continued on our way towards Ouarzazate, our lunch destination, but on the drive, we picked up our first

Thekla's Larks and a male, White-crowned Wheatear along with more Long-legged Buzzards and Black Wheatears. An abrupt stop enabled close views of our first Desert Larks and an hour later, another sharp halt gave us our first looks at a pair of Trumpeter Finches. 20 Western Cattle Egrets and an adult male Marsh Harrier as we drove into Ouarzazate slightly delayed us but the service at The Kasbah restaurant is swift and we departed just ten minutes after our scheduled time. Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi used to be a fantastic wetland but several years of drought and water extraction have seen the lake contract so much that it is impossible (and unsafe due to very soft mud) now to walk to the water's edge but I knew that there was a filthy, putrid, polluted (don't worry I can think of many more words to describe the place) stream that might just be worth a quick look. And it was for here in just a few minutes we found four Common Moorhens, several Green Sandpipers, a couple of Snipe and our only Western Yellow Wagtail of the trip. Bread and butter birds as we say in the UK, but the prize was a couple of Bluethroats, which seem to love this place. Initially flushed by me and missed by almost everyone eventually one came to the top of a Tamarisk Bush and gave reasonable views. Can't say we were sad to leave the smelly stream, but it was time to head on to Boumalne du Dades, our destination for the next two nights at the wonderful Xuluca Hotel. I knew there was a way down to the Barrage but so did our driver and it wasn't my route. Nevertheless, he took us to a viewpoint which at least allowed distant views westwards into the sun. There wasn't much to see but a Grey Lag Goose was only the second I have seen in Morocco, so a worthwhile 20 minutes.



Pharaoh Eagle-Owl by Mark Beevers

Day 6 is one of the good days of the trip if all falls into place and at first light we were at another select location on the famous, nay legendary Tagdilt Track, the town rubbish dump with its packs of ferocious looking dogs. The dump is famous for its selection of larks and wheatears and almost immediately we were having great views of Red-rumped Wheatears and Temminck's Horned Larks, the latter at point blank range. One of the principal targets here is Thick-billed Lark, which can be difficult, but we soon found five and they too great views as did a Mediterranean Short-toed Lark that dropped onto the path in front of us. This is also one of the few places where you can see Crested and Thekla's Lark which were both ticked off and then the surprise of the morning in the form of a Red-throated Pipit that was still in summer plumage. We also had a good look at a pair of Trumpeter Finches before it was time to slowly drive the plain.

It was pretty bird less (early December is not the best time for here) but we picked up a couple of Long-legged Buzzard, three more Thick-billed Larks as well as more Temminck's Horned Larks and Red-rumped Wheatears but try as we might we could not find any Cream-coloured Coursers, Black-bellied Sandgrouse or Greater Hoopoe Larks so cutting our losses we moved on to a well-known Maghreb Wheatear site, where we found our



friendly Moroccan birder from earlier in the tour and day. He was with a local so with his negotiations we hired Youssif and he quickly took us a few hundred metres where we found a magnificent Pharaoh Eagle-Owl sat in a hole high up the cliff-face with six Desert Larks, Black Wheatear and a couple of Trumpeter Finches below. We then moved a couple of kilometres and with his help quickly located a nice male Maghreb Wheatear. Brilliant, why can't all targets be as easy as that? Later than anticipated we relocated to a local restaurant where all seven of us enjoyed a tasty lamb tagine but en route we encountered a flock of eight first year Mediterranean Gulls struggling west into the strong headwind, a most unusual sighting. Refreshed we moved on to the impressive Dades Gorge picking up a couple of Blue Rock Thrushes en route, where fingers crossed, we hoped to find Tristram's Warbler.

Fingers were crossed because this species is an altitudinal migrant with many leaving the breeding grounds for the desert. We tried a spot to no avail so returned to the café area where immediately one was coaxed into view and eventually all had great views. We also had Black Wheatear and both Hose and Rock Bunting in the area too and on the way back down the gorge at dusk a couple of Little Owls were seen.



**Long-legged Buzzard by Mark Beevers**

Day seven is a bit of a long travel day but again not without a few stops on the way starting first with a brief but futile look at the Tagdilt Track for Black-bellied Sandgrouse though we did see a couple of Long-legged Buzzard and four Desert Larks as well as a Pharaoh Eagle Owl that flushed from the roadside. Next stop was Todra Gorge, which is probably more impressive than Dades Gorge where we flushed a pair of Barbary Partridge that flew across the road in front of us. We found a group of six House Buntings and picked up other expected species such as Black Wheatear and Black Redstart before returning to take Photographs of the gorge. Here unexpectedly we found another male Tristram's Warbler, which allowed us to return the earlier favours of our Moroccan friend. Leaving the gorge, we set off for our lunch stop near Errachidia but on the way we stopped at another site that in the past has proved productive for Sahara Scrub Warbler. We walked the wadi and indeed flushed two birds, but they were totally uncooperative such that only a couple of us got fleeting views. After lunch we pressed on towards Midelt with one more planned stop at a traditional site for Sahara Scrub Warbler. Here sometimes they can be straight forward at other times they can be pigs to find, trust us to fall for the second option. Still, we set off in a line searching for them and soon found a family party of Fulvous Babbler that sat up nicely. We also flushed a male Spectacled Warbler and found our first Bar-tailed Lark of the trip. We walked much further than intended to no avail but then as we retraced our steps, we found a Greater Hoopoe-Lark and shortly afterwards a Greater Short-toed Lark flew over calling. Then the call went up "Scrub Warbler" and finally one had been found but it too was uncooperative and was only seen fleetingly as it flitted from the base of bushes and eventually disappeared after which another Spectacled Warbler was found, one which gave better looks. That was it for the day as we had three hours to drive to Midelt where we arrived just about on time.

Day 8 and the freezing Zeida Plain beckoned for a pre-dawn visit to look for Dupont's Lark which is generally considered to be the hardest West Palearctic passerine to see. We only saw four birds there, three Mediterranean Short-toed Larks and a singing male Red-rumped Wheatear, my it was bleak. We made a leisurely day of it as we made our way to Erfoud, arriving mid-afternoon and then after a break went out to a site I know for African Desert Warbler which performed brilliantly and then we moved south to Rissani to check out one of several Pharaoh Eagle-Owl sites we know to no avail though we did see the only Crag Martins of the



trip and a Red Fox nestled high up on the cliff. A quiet day but the follow day was always going to make up for it.

Day 9 and we were collected by the four-by-four guys from Auberge du Sud, where we were to spend the night but before then we were to have our desert experience. As we drove out to Erg Chebbi we saw our first Brown-necked Ravens and five Mediterranean Short-toed Larks and then we made our way to the leaking pipe site where a pair of Spotted Sandgrouse showed well. Before settling down to await the sandgrouse spectacle we visited a nearby garden for good looks at three Fulvous Babblers and then we heard “kuitt-o” call that alerted us to the first incoming flocks of Spotted Sandgrouse, so we repositioned our vehicles so we could watch a minimum of 70 and more probably nearer 100 fly in to drink. A short while an a more guttural, chicken like call told us that a flock of Crowned Sandgrouse was also coming and 20 landed close by, both species allowing great views. We stayed to enjoy the spectacle until the last birds departed and then moved to a small family encampment where four Greater Hoopoe Larks were very tame and five Desert Sparrows fed oblivious to our presence, great views of both. We had an outside chance of a lingering Cream Coloured Courser so we cruised the desert in the vain hope of finding one (or better still a Houbara, but the local guys said the latter had all been eaten) but it wasn’t to be though we did find more Bar-tailed Larks, Desert Warblers and some Desert Wheatears before we went for lunch at Auberge du Sud. After a siesta we resumed our fruitless search for the Coursers finding a flock of 25 Trumpeter Finches and more male desert Wheatears before we pitched up at another of our Pharaoh Eagle Owl sites and this time one was home, which allowed those that wanted to practice the art of digi-scoping, there were plenty of brown-necked Ravens in that area too.



**Red-necked Nightjar by Ann Olson**

Our penultimate day (day ten) and it was time to start heading back towards Ouarzazate and then on to Marrakech. Brown-necked Ravens and Desert Wheatears watched as we left the desert and then once in Erfoud we took time out to visit a fossil preparation workshop, where the staff gave us a short but interesting presentation before a few indulged in some retail therapy; you must take advantages of shopping chances on a birding tour. We hadn’t finished with birding and on the way out of Erfoud we stopped to look at the recently split (well ten years ago) Maghreb Lark, which used to be called Long-billed Crested Lark, four of which gave good views and then we continued to a roadside well, passing small numbers of Laughing Doves on the way where we found another obliging Spectacled Warbler. Continuing our way we passed Long-legged Buzzards and Great Grey Shrikes amongst other things, but I wanted to press on for a final appointment with the Tagdilt Track, which did not disappoint. As soon as we drove onto the track access road our driver spotted a flock of eight Black-bellied Sandgrouse but unfortunately, they were flying away. We drove on to the track itself but couldn’t find them again so after a look round we retraced our steps and drove back towards the main road where we found two more flocks of nine and ten which came down in a shallow depression to feed. A good result which also gave us our final looks at Temminck’s Horned Larks and Red-rumped Wheatears.

Our final stop of the day was at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi where a short walk from the newly discovered viewpoint took us to an area where we could view a shallow bay. Here 14 Eurasian Spoonbills were sleeping and amongst the wildfowl we counted 34 Ruddy Shelduck, 13 Common Shelduck, 20 Northern Shoveler and three Northern Pintail whilst more unusual species were the grey Lag Goose again, a drake Gadwall and a distant Great White Egret, the latter a national rarity until 2012. A selection of shorebirds included a couple of Pied

Avocets, a few Black-winged Stilts, a couple of Common Ringed Plovers, Green Sandpiper and five Common Greenshanks although the more unusual shorebird, given the location was a Red Knot, normally a bird of the estuaries.

On our final morning some of us decided to return to the sewage laden stream close to the town where we again recorded Common Moorhen and two each of Common Sandpiper. A Cetti's Warbler sang occasionally, the first time I think I have recorded that species here and a Bluethroat called from deep inside a bush, but the birds of the morning were a Little Owl and a perched Hoopoe (only the second of the trip) both of which gave good views. After collecting our bags from the hotel, we set off towards Marrakech climbing the scenic Tiz-n-Tichka Pass picking up on the way a party of six Northern Ravens, four Blue Rock Thrushes, a couple of House Buntings and some more African Chaffinches. Lunch was taken on the terrace of Auberge Toufliht after an unproductive short walk in the pine forest where the only birds of note were calling Common Crossbills that were joined by another that dropped in. As we lunched a male Eurasian Sparrowhawk zipped overhead and then it was time to go. A brief stop at the Argan Ladies Cooperative saw us receive a short talk on the preparation of the Argan nut for either cosmetics or cooking oil after which we made some time for more retail therapy. On our way into Marrakech a rubbish dump held a couple of hundred each of White Stork and Western Cattle Egrets and bang on schedule we arrived back at our hotel at 1530. And that was it, our trundle round Morocco was at an end. Although we missed a few species for various reasons we scored most of the major regional targets. After a little bit of maths, the top five was decided and by a clear margin Pharaoh Eagle-Owl was voted bird of the trip with Red-necked Nightjar a clear second. Levillant's Woodpecker was a clear third, Greater Hoopoe Lark came fourth and fifth was Spectacled Warbler.

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## Annotated List of species recorded

### Birds (157 in total: 155 seen, 2 heard)

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Gill F, D Donsker & P Rasmussen (Eds). 2023. IOC World Bird List (v13.2).

**Status codes:** E = Endemic, NE = Near-endemic, I = Introduced. **IUCN codes:** CR = Critically endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, EW = Extinct in the Wild, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient

#### Ducks, Geese, Swans *Anitidae*

##### Grey Lag Goose

*Anser anser*

A single bird was seen on 3rd and 8th at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi.

##### Common Shelduck

*Tadorna tadorna*

We found a pair at Oued Massa on 2nd with later the same day 33 counted at Oued Souss, a pair was seen at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd and 13 were counted there on 8th.

##### Ruddy Shelduck

*Tadorna ferruginea*

Ten were seen at Oued Massa on 2nd with later the same day three at Oued Souss. 30 were at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd with 34 counted there on 8th.

##### Northern Shoveler

*Spatula clypeata*



Nine were seen at Oued Massa on 2nd, c50 were at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd with 24 counted there on 8th.

**Gadwall** *Mareca strepera*

A male was found by John at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th, a good bird for the tour.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

20 were at Oued Massa on 2nd and 11 were seen at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*

Six were seen at the far end of Oued Massa on 2nd and three more were found at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*

50 were seen at Oued Massa on 2nd, six were seen at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd with 15 there on 8th.

### Pheasants and allies Phasianidae

**Barbary Partridge** *Alectoris barbara*

We disturbed a pair from the side of the road in Todra Gorge, which flew across the valley floor before landing at the base of the cliff where most people got good looks before they disappeared into the undergrowth.

### Nightjars Caprimulgidae

**Red-necked Nightjar NT** *Caprimulgus ruficollis*

Voted the second best bird of the tour and with good reason for we had mind blowing views of one at a day roost at Oued Massa on 3rd.

### Swifts Apodidae

**Little Swift** *Apus affinis*

One as we drove towards Agadir on 30th was unfortunately a leader only bird.

### Sandgrouse Pteroclididae

**Spotted Sandgrouse** *Pterocoles senegallus*

One of the highlights of the tour (it always is) was when we visited a leaking pipe in the desert at Erg Chebbi on 7th were following our first pair, which gave great views, we witnessed the arrival of 80 or more that flew in to take on water, a wonderful sight.

**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocoles orientalis*

OK so it took us three attempts but our perseverance paid off on 8th when three flocks totalling 26 birds were seen at a dried up drinking hole on the Tagdilt Track. The views weren't as good as those of the other two species of Sandgrouse but they were greatly appreciated by the group.

**Crowned Sandgrouse**

*Ptercoles coronatus*

A flock of 20 came into the water pipe at Erg Chebbi on 7th and gave just as good looks as the Spotted Sandgrouse.

**Pigeons, Doves Columbidae**

**Rock Dove**

*Columba livia*

Ubiquitous! But birds in wild plumage were seen at Oukaiimeden on 29th – 30th where there was a flock of 60 and in both Dardes Gorge on 4th and Todra Gorge on 5th.

**Wood Pigeon**

*Columba palumbus*

We encountered ten as were drove up to Oukaiimeden on 29th, with two there the following day, two flew over Oued Souss on 2nd and one was seen over Toufliht on 9th, a lot scarcer than later in the winter.

**Eurasian Collared Dove**

*Streptopelia decaocto*

Common, this species was seen every day in almost every small town and village we went through.

**Laughing Dove**

*Spilopelia senegalensis*

Our first two were seen at Oued Massa on 2nd, 15 were seen between Ouarzazate and Boumalne du Dades on 4th with up to three noted around Erfoud on 7th-8th.

**Rails, crakes and Coots Rallidae**

**Common Moorhen**

*Gallinula chloropus*

Four seen in a putrid stream at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd were leader only birds and one was seen there briefly on 8th.

**Eurasian Coot**

*Fulica atra*

Three were seen at the unlikely location of the lake at Oukaiimeden on 29th-30th, ten were at Oued Massa on 2nd, with ten the following day at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi where 30 were counted on 8th.

**Grebes Podicipididae**

**Little Grebe**

*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Two were seen at the mouth of Oued Massa on 2nd and two were found at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Great-crested Grebe**

*Podiceps cristatus*

As you can no longer view Barrage Hassan Addakhil we only saw this species at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi where we found five on 3rd and eight on 8th.

**Flamingos Phoenicopteridae**

**Greater Flamingo**

*Phoenicopterus roseus*

Oued Sous produced the best counts with 200 on 1st and 300 the following day but the only other birds we saw were two at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd.

### Oystercatchers *Haematopidae*

#### **Eurasian Oystercatcher**

*Haematopus ostralegus*

We found nine on our brief visit to Oued Souss on 1st with 31 counted the following day as we walked back from the river mouth at the same site.

### Stilts, Avocets *Recurvirostridae*

#### **Black-winged Stilt**

*Himantopus himantopus*

Four were seen on 1st May at Oued Souss with eight there on 2nd as well as two at Oued Massa earlier in the morning. Five were found on our first visit to Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd with 11 counted there on 8th.

#### **Pied Avocet**

*Recurvisrostra avosetta*

On 2nd four were found at Oued Souss with another five later the same day at Oued Souss, whilst the only others encountered were two at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

### Plovers *Charadriidae*

#### **Grey Plover**

*Pluvialis squatarola*

Our first brief visit to Oued Souss on 2nd produced ten bird but 41 were counted there on 2nd when we also found one at Oued Massa.

#### **Common Ringed Plover**

*Charadrius hiaticula*

Far from Common we found three each at Oued Souss and Oued Massa on 2nd with two more located at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

#### **Little Ringed Plover**

*Charadrius dubious*

Most unusually the only ones we encountered were five on the river at Ourika on 29th. We normally encounter this species in large numbers at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi but frustratingly you can no longer access the lake on foot from Ouarzazate where the plovers hang out.

#### **Kentish Plover**

*Charadrius alexandrinus*

We were fortunate to find a single bird at Oued Souss on 2nd.

### Sandpipers, Snipes *Scolopacidae*

#### **Eurasian Curlew NT**

*Numenius arquata*

A flock of 20 was present on both of our visits to Oued Souss on 1st-2nd.

#### **Bar-tailed Godwit NT**

*Limosa lapponica*

We found four on our brief visit on 1st with 25 present there the following afternoon.

#### **Black-tailed Godwit NT**

*Limosa limosa*

13 were found at Oued Massa on 2nd with four at Oued Souss later the same day.

#### **Red Knot NT**

*Calidris canutus*



50 at Oued Souss on 2nd was a good count for that site though more unusual was a single bird at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Ruff** *Calidris pugnax*

A flock of 15 flew over farmland at Oued Massa on 2nd and later in the afternoon one was found at Oued Souss.

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba*

Seven were seen at Oued Souss on 1st with 40 at the estuary mouth there on 2nd.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

Two were seen on our first visit to Oued Souss on 1st with ten seen there on 2nd but 34 were counted at Oued Massa on 2nd with a further 11 seen at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*

One was found on Oued Souss on 1st and two flew past some of the group at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi. Another species that was affected by our inability to access the lake shore at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

Five were seen at Oued Massa on 2nd, one was flushed by the leader from the horrible stream at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd with two there on 8th.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Three were seen at Oued Souss on 1st with five seen the following day split between Oued Massa and Oued Souss. One was also found at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

Ten were encountered along Oued Massa on 2nd with three the following day at the stream at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi where two were also seen on 9th with another bird noted at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi (lake) on 8th.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*

Three were seen on our first visit to Oued Souss on 1st but c150 were present there the following afternoon whilst another was found at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

One at Oued Souss on 1st was a leader only bird I'm afraid.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

Single birds were seen at Oued Massa and Oued Souss on 2nd, a species not often encountered on the tour.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

One was seen on 1st at Oued Souss with 15 split between Oued Massa and Oued Souss on 2nd, whilst our afternoon visit to Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi produced five on 8th.

### **Gulls, Terns, Skimmers Larididae**

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

We were fortunate to find an adult at Oued Souss on 2nd.

**Black-headed Gull**

*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

C200 were present at Oued Souss on 1st and 2nd with 30 at Barrage El Mansoor Eddhabi on 3rd and 8th.

**Audouin's Gull**

*Ichthyaetus audouinii*

We found c200 roosting at Oued Tamri on 1st.

**Mediterranean Gull**

*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

We saw five on 1st at Oued Souss with c25 there the following afternoon but a most unexpected sighting was that of a flock eight first winter (1st CY) birds battling low into the wind west over the Tagdilt Track on 7th.

**Yellow-legged Gull**

*Larus Michahellis*

We encountered c100 on the pelagic and at Oued Tamri on 1st with c500 at Oued Souss on 2nd.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull**

*Larus fuscus*

1,000's were seen on the Pelagic and along the coast up to Oued Tamri on 1st and at Oued Souss on 2nd.

**Sandwich Tern**

*Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Disappointingly this was the only species of tern encountered with six at Oued Souss on 1st and 80 there on 2nd.

**Skuas *Stercoraridae***

**Great Skua**

*Stercorarius skua*

Also known by the Shetland name of Bonxie we saw two of these powerful birds on our pelagic on 1st.

**Parasitic Jaeger**

*Stercorarius parsiticus*

Known as Arctic Skua on this side of the pond we had a brief fly-by of one on the pelagic on 1st.

**Auks *Alcidae***

**Razorbill**

*Alca Todra*

We encountered this species in good numbers on the pelagic when we logged at least 21, which I believe is the most we have ever seen on a pelagic out of Agadir.

**Storm Petrels *Hydrobatidae***

**European Storm Petrel**

*Hydrobates pelagicus*

We encountered at least 25 on our pelagic off Agadir on 1st.

**Wilson's Storm Petrel**

*Oceanites oceanicus*

The most unexpected bird of the trip, one was seen feeding just off the stern of the boat on the pelagic on 1st. It was seen side by side with a Storm Petrel which allowed direct comparison between two which assisted in the identification of the bird, which is a species that is considered by the national rarity committee, so more paperwork to do! Needless to say this is the first time that this species has been record by RBT in Morocco.

**Petrels, Shearwaters, Diving Petrels *Procellariidae***

**Cory's Shearwater**

*Calonectris diomedea*

One was seen on the Pelagic on 1st.

**Sooty Shearwater NT**

*Ardenna grisea*

One was seen on the pelagic on 1st.

**Balearic Shearwater CR**

*Puffinus mauretanicus*

We encountered well over 100 once we reached some small fishing boats about 20 miles offshore from Agadir on the 1st.

**Storks Ciconiidae**

**White Stork**

*Ciconia ciconia*

We encountered this species on six dates even seeing some atop of their bulky nests but the largest numbers were 50 as we drove towards Agadir on 30th and c200 as we drove into Marrakech on 9th.

**Gannets, Boobies Sulidae**

**Northern Gannet**

*Sula bassanus*

We encountered at least 100 on the pelagic off Agadir on 1st.

**Cormorants, Shags Phalacrocoracidae**

**Great Cormorant**

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

We had a couple in Agadir harbour on 1st with another eight or so at Oued Souss that evening with 100 there the following afternoon with ten in the morning of 2nd at Oued Massa. At Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi 20 were present on 3rd with one on 8th.

**Ibises, Spoonbills, Threskiornithidae**

**Northern Bald Ibis EN**

*Geronticus eremita*

We saw c50 of these endangered beasts on 1st, not at our usual site of Tamri (where they breed) but further south at Cap Rhir.

**Glossy Ibis**

*Plegadis falcinellus*

We counted a total of 54 in two groups at Oued Massa on 1st.

**Eurasian Spoonbill**

*Platalea leucorodia*

We had four at Oued Massa and two at Oued Souss on 2nd with 20 at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd, 14 of which were still there on 8th.

**Western Cattle Egret**

*Bubulcus ibis*

This species was very common with records for all bar on day with 50 at Oued Massa on 2nd, 70 at Ouarzazate on 3rd and 200 as we entered Marrakech on 9th.



**Grey Heron**

*Ardea cinerea*

Ten were on the river at Ourika on 29th, with ten at Oued Souss on 1st and 2nd whilst at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi we found one on 3rd and three on 8th.

**Great Egret**

*Ardea alba*

One at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi was a good find as up until 2012 this species was a national rarity for Morocco.

**Little Egret**

*Egretta garzetta*

Three were at Oued Souss on 1st with ten split between there and Oued Massa on 2nd, whilst at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi one was seen on 3rd with three noted on 8th.

**Ospreys Pandionidae**

**Osprey**

*Pandion haliaetus*

The found two at Oued Massa and another at Oued Souss on 2nd.

**Kites, Hawks, Eagles Accipitridae**

**Black-winged Kite**

*Elanus caeruleus*

We were lucky to spot two of these gorgeous raptors on 3rd as we travelled between Taroudant and Taliouine.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk**

*Accipiter nisus*

A female was seen by most of the group 5km before the gate at Oukaiimeden on 29th and a male was seen as we ate lunch at Toufliht on 9th.

**Western Marsh Harrier**

*Circus aeruginosus*

We found a female at Oued Massa on 2nd, had a male as we drove into Ouarzazate on 3rd and had another female on 8th at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi.

**Long-legged Buzzard**

*Buteo rufinus*

Our first two were as we climbed up to Oukaiimeden on 29th after which we had five on 3rd as we travelled from Agadir to Boumalne du Dades, two on the Tagdilt Track on 4th and 5th and one on 8th en route to Tinijdad.

*Taxonomic note. IOC classes the birds in North Africa as this species yet the Collins Bird Guide considers the birds in this area as a race of Common Buzzard, which they call North African Buzzard Buteo buteo cirtensis. There is nothing in IOC taxonomic updates, sub-species updates or proposed lumps / splits to suggest that the Collins treatment of the North African birds is going to be adopted anytime soon.*

**Owls Strigidae**

**Little Owl**

*Athene noctua*

Always a favourite on tour we saw two of these cute owls near Oukaiimeden on 29th, with two more at Oued Massa on 2nd, one at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd and 9th and two in Dades Gorge on 4th.

**Pharaoh Eagle Owl**

*Bubo ascalaphus*

Our first was sat in a hole east of the Tagdilt Track on 4th and we then flushed one from the side of the road on the Tagdilt Track on 5th. Finally we had more great looks at one sat in a hole at our regular site near Rissani on 7th.

### Hoopoes *Upupidae*

#### **Eurasian Hoopoe**

*Upupa epops*

This species was surprisingly scarce with just two sightings on the tour, one as we headed towards Agadir on 30th and one on the 9th, which perched nicely in a tree at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi.

### Kingfishers *Alcedinidae*

#### **Common Kingfisher**

*Alcedo atthis*

Single birds were seen at Oued Massa and Oued Souss on 2nd.

### Woodpeckers *Picidae*

#### **Great-spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos major*

One was heard calling as we drove up Tiz-n-Test but traffic conditions at the time meant that we were unable to stop.

#### **Levaillant's Woodpecker**

*Picus vaillantii*

We had excellent looks at a male just below Au Rocher hotel on 29th, which was a relief as earlier in the day we got no response at a number of places.

### Caracaras, Falcons *Falconidae*

#### **Common Kestrel**

*Falco tinnunculus*

This species was seen on seven dates during the tour usually whilst travelling with ten on 3rd as we travelled from Agadir to Boumalne du Dades being the best tally.

### Bushshrikes *Malaconotidae*

#### **Black-crowned Tchagra**

*Tchagra senegalus*

Having heard four calling on the opposite side of the river at Oued Souss on 2nd one was finally coaxed into view on our side of the river and eventually it gave great views.

### Shrikes *Laniidae*

#### **Great Grey Shrike**

*Lanius excubitor*

We saw three as we drove towards Agadir on 30th, three as we left Oued Massa on 2nd, one as we drove toward Errachidia from Midelt on 6th and four on the drive from Erfoud to Ouarzazate but the highest day count was 15 as we travelled from Agadir to Boumalne du Dades on 3rd.

### Crows, Jays *Corvidae*

#### **Eurasian Jay**

*Garrulus glandarius*

We heard one calling deep in woodland at the top of Tiz-n-Test on 30th but it couldn't be encouraged into view.

#### **Maghreb Magpie**

*Pica mauritanica*

Four were seen as we drove towards Agadir on 30th with ten on each of the next two days at places such as Oued Massa, Oued Souss and around Agadir.

#### **Red-billed Chough**

*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

We had over 100 at Oukaiimeden on 29th but only two there the following day and then as we drove down Tiz-n-Tichka on 9th 200 or more were swirling over the mountain side.

#### **Brown-necked Raven**

*Corvus ruficollis*

20 or more were around Erg Chebbi / Rissani area on 7th with four seen the following day as we left Auberge du Sud heading back to Erfoud.

#### **Northern Raven**

*Corvus corax*

A pair was seen on 29th and 30th at Oukaiimeden and a party of six was seen as we down Tiz-n-Tichka on 9th.

### Tits, Chickadees *Paridae*

#### **Coal Tit**

*Periparus ater*

Two were seen at Oukaiimeden on 29th and two more were found at Toufliht on 9th.

#### **African Blue Tit**

*Cyanistes teneriffae*

At least six were seen as we made our way to Oukaiimeden.

*Taxonomic note. IOC has the North African Blue Tit as a candidate for a proposed four way split with Canary Island Blue Tit retaining the scientific name Cyanistes teneriffae and new species created namely North African Blue Tit Cyanistes ultramarinus, Cyrenaican Blue Tit (found in Libya) Cyanistes cyrenaicae and La Palma Blue Tit Cyanistes palmensis. That said it has been on the proposed split and lump list for over ten years so don't hold your breath.*

#### **Great Tit**

*Parus Major*

Three were found on the way up to Oukaiimeden on 29th and one was heard singing at Ouirgane on 30th.

### Larks *Alaudidae*

#### **Greater Hoopoe Lark**

*Alaemon alaudipes*

Some of us saw one at our Sahara Scrub Warbler site as we drove towards Errachidia on 5th and we had excellent views of six at Erg Chebbi on 7th.

#### **Thick-billed Lark**

*Ramphocoris clotbey*

I was a bit concerned that as we were visiting early in the winter that this species might prove tricky to find but actually it was one of the first birds we encountered at the delightful Tagdilt Track rubbish dump where we saw five on 4th with three more out on the gravel plain later that morning.



**Desert Lark**
*Ammomanes deserti*

This species was more common than in some past trips as we saw our first as we drove towards Ouarzazate on 3rd. On 4th we found ten around the Tagdilt Track and the following day we had two in Todra Gorge and eight at the Scrub Warbler site. Six were seen south of Rissani on 6th and one was seen on 8th as we drove towards Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi.

**Bar-tailed Lark**
*Ammomanes cincture*

Our first was at the Scrub Warbler site on 5th and five were located in the desert at Erg Chebbi on 7th.

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

We saw about 20 as we drove over the high ground towards Ouarzazate on 3rd with a couple at the Tagdilt Track on 4th and further sightings on 5th as we drove to Midelt.

**Crested Lark**
*Galerida cristata*

This is the common Lark of the lowlands and we encountered the species on eight dates with good views of the species obtained at Oued Massa and Oued Souss on 2nd and on our two visits to Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd and 8th.

**Maghreb Lark**
*Galerida macrorhyncha*

We saw four of this recently split (from Crested Lark) as we drove out of Erfoud on 8th.

**Horned Lark**
*Eremophila alpestris*

After a bit of searching we eventually found a flock of 70-80 beyond the ski lifts at Oukaimenden on 29th. This is probably the largest flock ever encountered in Morocco on a Rockjumper tour.

**Temminck's Lark**
*Eremophila alpestris*

We saw about 15 on our first visit to the Tagdilt Track on 4th with four seen there the following day and we found to more on our third visit on 8th.

**Greater Short-toed Lark**
*Callandrella bilopha*

One flew over the Scrub Warbler site on 5th.

**Mediterranean Short-toed Lark**
*Callandrella rufescens*

Two showed well at Tagdilt Track on 4th, three were seen at the Zeida plain on 6th, five were seen at Erg Chebbi on 7th and one was seen on the way Tinijdad on 8th.

**Bulbuls Pycnonotidae**
**Common Bulbul**
*Pycnonotus barbatus*

Common, seen daily in many places.

**Swallows, Martins Hirundinidae**
**Brown-throated Martin**
*Riparia paludicola*

We saw a total of four at Oued Massa on 2nd, three on the main river and one a couple of miles inland.

**Eurasian Crag Martin**
*Ptyonoprogne rupsestris*

We saw five distant birds at a cliff face south of Rissani.

**Barn Swallow**

*Hirundo rustica*

We recorded this species in very numbers on five dates with 20 split between Oued Massa and Oued Souss being the highest number seen.

**Cettia Bush Warblers and Allies Cettiidae**

**Cetti's Warbler**

*Cettia cetti*

We heard three singing at Oued Massa on 2nd but all were on the wrong side of the river and another was heard at the stream at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi, which is the first time I have recorded this species there.

**Scrub Warblers Scotocercidae**

**Saharan Scrub Warbler**

*Scotocerca saharae*

We saw two very briefly as they flew out of one bush to the base of another before promptly disappearing whilst travelling towards Errachidia on 5th and later that day at our regular stakeout we managed marginally better views of another. They really didn't want to show this year.

**Leaf Warblers Phylloscopidae**

**Common Chiffchaff**

*Phyllsopus Collybita*

Generally less than five a day recorded over eight dates during the tour with the highest count coming from Oued Massa on 2nd.

**Cisticolas and Allies Cisticolidae**

**Zitting Cisticola**

*Cisticola juncidis*

In early spring this species is easy to pick up but early in winter they proved to be a lot more difficult with single birds seen at Oued Massa and Oued Souss on 2nd.

**Sylviid Babblers Sylviidae**

**Blackcap**

*Sylvia atricapilla*

Rather surprisingly the only bird we saw was a female on our way up to Oukaiimeden on 29th. I suspect that the wintering birds had not arrived as Europe had been so mild so far this winter.

**African Desert Warbler**

*Curruca deserti*

We had awesome point blank looks at our first at my back up site near Erfoud on 6th when unfortunately I'd left my camera in the vehicle and the following day we found three more in the desert at Erg Chebbi.

**Tristram's Warbler**

*Curcuroa deserticola*

This species is an altitudinal migrant and as such I didn't expect to see them on the breeding grounds but rather expected to have to work for them in the desert. It was therefore a great surprise when I played the song just below the café at the top of Dades Gorge on 4th and one immediately popped into view, which eventually after giving us a run around gave great views. The following day without even resorting to playback we found another at the top of Todra Gorge the following day.

**Spectacled Warbler**

*Curcuroa conspicillat*

Two males were seen at the Scrub Warbler site on 5th and another showed really well on our way to Tinijdad on 8th.

**LaughingThurshes and Allies *Leiothrichidae***

**Fulvous Babbler**

*Argya fulva*

Our first was a lonesome bird at a roadside stop as we drove towards Taliouine on 3rd whilst more conventional family groups (five) were seen at the Scrub Warbler site on 5th and at Erg Chebbi (three) on 7th, with both groups performing well for the group.

**Firecrests, Kinglets *Regulidae***

**Common Firecrest**

*Regulus ignicapilla*

Five of these little gems showed brilliantly as Oukaiimeden on 29th, one of my favourite birds.

**Wrens *Troglodytidae***

**Eurasian Wren**

*Troglodytes troglodytes*

Unlike the previous species this one was far more uncooperative though most people managed to get views of one skulking individual on the way up to Oukaiimeden on 29th.

**Starlings, Rhabdornises *Sturnidae***

**Spotless Starling**

*Sternus unicolor*

We saw 15 as we drove towards Agadir on 30th and had five at Oued Massa on 2nd with a final bird as we drove into Marrakech on 9th.

**Thrushes *Turdidae***

**Common Blackbird**

*Turdus merula*

As the name implies this species was quite common sightings daily during the first week and again as we approached Marrakech on 9th.

**Ring Ouzel**

*Turdus torquatus*

Our first two were as we drove up to Oukaimeden on 29th and they were unusual as they were below 2,000 metres. The following day at the ski resort at Oukaimeden we found another seven. I was surprised to see this species in these numbers given that there had been no snow. Alternative names are Water ouzel and mountain Blackbird.

### Chats, Old World Flycatchers *Muscicapidae*

#### **European Robin**

*Erithacus rubecula*

We found two on our way up to Oukaimeden on 29th. This species in the UK is very confiding yet in Europe and North Africa they are very secretive.

#### **Bluethroat**

*Luscinia svecica*

There was a reason why the group had to visit the foul smelling stream at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi and it was this species that was the target there. Two were flushed inadvertently on 3rd although with a bit of coaxing one did return to show for the group and in the same spot on 8th, I saw a bird briefly which then just called from deep in cover.

#### **Black Redstart**

*Phoenicurus ochruros*

This species was particularly common at Oukaimeden where we saw 15 on 29th and two the following day. Elsewhere we found a female at Todra Gorge on 5th with two at Erfoud on 8th.

#### **Moussier's Redstart**

*Phoenicurus moussieri*

We found two males as we drove up to Oukaimeden on 29th and another male on 30th as we went up Tiz-n-Test pass. Four were seen at Oued Massa on 2nd and a male was near Tinijdad on 8th.

#### **Blue Rock Thrush**

*Monticola solitarius*

We found two as we drove up Dades Gorge on 4th, one was seen as we drove towards Ouarzazate on 8th and four were seen as we drove up Tiz-n-Tichka on 9th.

#### **European Stonechat**

*Saxicola rubicola*

This species was particularly common at Oued Massa on 2nd where we probably saw in excess of a ten whilst one was seen on 3rd as we drove into Ouarzazate and another was seen as we headed towards Erfoud on 6th.

#### **Desert Wheatear**

*Oenanthe deserti*

We found six males, some of which were in breeding plumage, around Erg Chebbi on 7th and a male was on the outskirts of Erfoud on 8th.

#### **Red-rumped Wheatear**

*Oenanthe moesta*

We had five on the Tagdilt Track (mainly in the vicinity of the rubbish dump) on 4th and a male at Zeida Plain on 6th.

#### **White-crowned Wheatear**

*Oenanthe leucogypia*

This species was a common roadside sight from a few kilometres west of Ouarzazate on 3rd until the last day with up to 25 a day noted whilst travelling.

#### **Black Wheatear**

*Oenanthe leucura*

Although not as common as the previous species, nevertheless we recorded this species on seven dates at places such as Oukaimeden, Tiz-n-Test, Dades and Todra Gorges, on the drive to Ouarzazate (ten on this day) and at Tiz-n-Tichka.

### Dippers *Cinclidae*

**White-throated Dipper**

*Cinclus cinclus*

The stream at Oukaiimeden is a well-known site for this species but the water needs to be fast flowing. On our visit on 29th it wasn't which meant we had to take a gentle stroll downhill until we found some flowing water, where right on cue a bird appeared.

**Old World Sparrow, Snowfinches *Passeridae***

**Rock Sparrow**

*Petronia petronia*

Only seen at Oukaiimeden where we found three whilst having lunch on 29th with five there the following day.

**Spanish Sparrow**

*Passer hispaniolensis*

Our first was a male at Oued Tamri, which flew off before the whole group could get on to it but not to worry for we saw 80 at Oued Massa on 2nd and 100 on 3rd as we drove towards Taliouine.

**House Sparrow**

*Passer domesticus*

Another common species that we saw in most towns on most dates.

**Desert Sparrow**

*Passer simplex*

These are cute dudes and we saw a male and four females in the desert at Erg Chebbi on 7th, where it seems that every year we need to go deeper into the desert to find them.

**Wagtails, Pipis *Motacillidae***

**Western Yellow Wagtail**

*Motacilla flava*

Amazingly we saw just one of these in the stream at Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 3rd. This is another species where the inaccessibility of the barrage impacts the number of birds seen.

**Grey Wagtail**

*Motacilla cinerea*

One was seen in the river at Ourika on 29th with another the same day at Oukaiimeden, three flew off the road as we drove up Tiz-n-Test on 30th and two flew over Oued Souss on 2nd. Thereafter single birds in Dades Gorge on 4th, Todra Gorge on 5th and at Tiz-n-Tichka on 9th.

**White Wagtail**

*Motacilla cinerea*

A common species with sightings on nine dates, with double-figures recorded on three dates including 20 at Ourika on 29th and 30 at the Tagdilt Track on 4th.

**Meadow Pipit**

*Anthus pratensis*

Four were on the river at Ourika on 29th and 15 were at Oued Souss on 2nd with one or two noted at Oued Tamri on 1st, near Taliouine on 3rd, Tagdilt Track on 4th and Barrage El Mansoor Eddahbi on 8th.

**Red-throated Pipit**

*Anthus cervinus*

One, that was still in breeding plumage, was found on the Tagdilt Track on 4th. A scarce bird on the tour.

**Finches *Fringillidae***

**African Chaffinch**

*Fringilla spodiogenys*



We saw 20 of this recently split species (split from Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*) at Oukaiimeden on 29th and 30th with one or two noted on four dates whilst travelling.

**Hawfinch**

*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

One of the group saw one at Oukaiimeden on 29th but our regular and best site had been taken over by people displaced by the recent earthquake so that remained the only sighting.

**African Crimson-winged Finch**

*Rhodopechys alienus*

Having failed to locate any on our first visit to the ski lifts at Oukaiimeden on 29th we returned the following morning and quickly located a flock of 30.

**Trumpeter Finch**

*Bucanetes githagineus*

Our first two were spotted as we headed towards Ouarzazate on 3rd and we found five at the rubbish dump on the 4th and two were seen at the Scrub Warbler site on 5th. However the largest number was 25 that we flushed whilst searching in vain for Cream-coloured Courser near Erg Chebbi on 7th.

**European Greenfinch**

*Chloris chloris*

Three were seen on the way up to Oukaiimeden on 29th with two more the following day as we went up Tiz-n-Test whilst two more were found at Oued Massa on 2nd.

**Common Linnet**

*Linaria cannabina*

Up to 50 were around the ski resort at Oukaiimeden on 29th and 30th with 50 near Cap Rhir on 1st. Ten were at Oued Massa on 2nd with two the following day near Ouarzazate.

**Red Crossbill**

*Loxia curvirostra*

A male was singing and at least three females were seen at Au Rocher on 29th and birds were heard calling at Toufliht where one female type flew to join the calling birds on 9th.

**European Serin**

*Serinus Serinus*

15 were seen on the way to Oukaiimeden on 29th with two seen at Tiz-n-Test on 30th and two more at Oued Massa on 2nd.

**Eurasian Siskin**

*Serinus spinus*

A flock of 50 about five kilometres from the ski resort at Oukaiimeden on 29th was rather unexpected but perhaps reflected the exceptional numbers recorded in north-west Europe during the autumn. Two were also logged in Dades Gorge on 4th.

**Buntings *Emberizidae***

**Rock Bunting**

*Emberiza cia*

We saw five as we made our way up to Oukaiimeden on 29th, one was seen as we drove up Tiz-n-Test and another was seen in Dades Gorge on 4th.

**Cirl Bunting**

*Emberiza cirlus*

Two males and a female were seen on our way to Oukaiimeden on 29th.

**House Bunting**

*Emberiza sahari*

Recorded on eight dates, there was even one in the airport building on 9th but the largest number was six at Todra Gorge on 5th.

### MAMMALS RECORDED

#### Wolves, Coyote, Foxes and Jackals *Canidae*

##### Red Fox

*Vulpes vulpes*

We saw one watching us from high on a cliff face south on Rissani on 6th.

#### Squirrels *Sciuridae*

##### Barbary Ground Squirrel

*Atlantoxerus getulus*

We saw six as we travelled up Tiz-n-Test on 30th, three In dades Gorge on 4th and four in Todra Gorge on 5th.

#### True Mice and Rats, Gerbils, Spiney Mice, Crested Rat *Muridae*

##### Fat Sand Rat

*Psammomys obesus*

We saw three of these plump, endearing rodents on the Tagdilt Track on 4th with another there on 8th.

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