



*Algerian Nuthatch, May 2023*

## **Algeria 2023**

28-30 May 2023

[Lieven De Temmerman](#) (text and pictures)

### **Introduction**

The focus of this Tour was to get quality views of one of the most isolated and scarce endemics in the West Palearctic, Algerian Nuthatch. Given the occurrence of some restricted subspecies, often surprisingly distinctive and potential future splits, and a support cast of Western Mediterranean specialties, Algeria in late Spring is a wonderful destination, even if it's still not on the radar of most birders. We managed to see 99 sp. in the course of 2.5 days, with every weather type from drizzle to to very rainy, even at the edge of the Sahara desert!

## 28th of May

After a fairly short night in a hotel near the airport, we arrived very early morning in Paris-Orly as we were checked in for a direct flight to Constantine, or so we thought. A shortage of airplanes resulted in a cancelled flight, and the next plane went 3 days later! Our visa were only valid for a 3-day period, so we quickly assessed our options, and boarded a flight to Bejaia. Only 2.5 hours after departure and still before noon, our plane aligned with the Algerian coast and we had a smooth landing next to the Mediterranean. Our support crew was waiting in Constantine, some 5 odd hours further inland. So we quickly got into 2 taxis and got our first impressions of the Algerian landscape, going from the coast into the mountains, with the first roadside birds appearing.



### *Somewhere in the Algerian Atlas*

From the car, we saw or heard species like Zitting Cisticola, Long-legged Buzzard, Bonelli's and Booted Eagle, the first of many European Turtle doves, Egyptian Vulture, great looking Atlas Chaffinch (*ssp. africana*), Cirl Bunting and Western Bonelli's Warbler, all reminding us that we were definitely into the Mediterranean.

We enjoyed our first of many excellent meals somewhere en route, and before long we arrived on the outskirts of Constantine, where we met Karim and Larbi, who smoothly took over transport duties and logistics. As we were a bit late on our first day, and with unusual wet weather in and around Constantine, we opted for a site North-East of Constantine where we could connect with a number of specialty subspecies.

Even though the weather didn't help and we had to use the cars as shelters during rain showers, we saw plenty of good birds: Western Bonelli's Warbler was seen well by all, more Atlas Chaffinches were confiding, African Blue Tit (*ssp. ultramarinus*), Short-toed Treecreeper (*ssp. mauretana*), European

Robin (endemic ssp. *Witherbyi*) and Northern Raven quickly gave themselves up. Even species like Common Blackbird (regional ssp. *mauretanicus*) got our attention, as we weren't willing to give up on every single (sub)species!



*Atlas Chaffinch ssp. africana*



*Western bonelli's warbler*

The birding in this area was our first introduction into birding without binoculars, and while we had 2 pairs available, most of the group carried a camera which was very handy to check birds being further away.

After a short but intense rain shower, we didn't give up and continued birding the area carefully. Soon some of the more sought-after prize birds revealed themselves: A wonderful Eurasian Jay (endemic ssp. *cervicalis*), a Common Cuckoo was a nice distraction, and before long we connected with Levillant's Woodpecker and Great Spotted Woodpecker (endemic ssp. *numidus*). Levillant's is a much-wanted bird that most people see (or sometimes miss) in Morocco, while *numidus* is probably the best looking ssp. of Great Spotted Woodpecker, and maybe worthy of more than just a ssp.



*Eurasian Jay ssp. cervicalis*



*Great Spotted Woodpecker ssp. numidus*

After our success, and with the weather not really improving going into dusk, we opted to bird the more open country side closeby. Besides omnipresent Corn Buntings, Common Quails (HO), Crested Larks and Eurasian Turtle Doves, we saw our first gorgeous Moussier's Redstarts, some Rock Sparrows (ssp. *barbara*), a very nice and confiding Red Crossbill (ssp. *poliogyne*), Western Subalpine Warbler and the star bird of the area in terms of aesthetic beauty: a spectacular male Western Back-eared Wheatear.





*A good variety of seeds and flowers bordering the grain fields is all Corn Buntings want*



*Corn Bunting*



*Western Black-eared Wheatear*

The weather got worse and the day was giving way to the night, but we got one last stop at the spectacular gorge bordering the old city centre of Constantine. This was the place-to-be for Peregrine Falcon, many Common and one Lesser Kestrel, Alpine, Common and Pallid Swifts and the very localized ssp. *cirtensis* of Western Jackdaw, which is confined to Constantine and the near surroundings.





*Gorges du Rhumel, Constantine*



*Western Jackdaw ssp. cirtensis*



*Red Crossbill ssp. poliogyna*

After an excellent meal we checked in in our comfortable hotel South of Constantine, dreaming of the star bird of the trip which was on the menu for the next day...



## 29th of May

An early start in rainy weather had us a bit worried, but some hours later, when we stopped for breakfast, the rain already stopped. The spirits were high and without any delays we entered a dirt road that climbed into the mountains. Soon we were surrounded by oak forest mixed with pines, and our hopes grew as high as our patience dropped to climb high enough into the zone where Algerian Nuthatch occurs. Our first stop almost immediately produced Atlas Flycatcher for some. A most-wanted species, and we decided to go for a little walk to enjoy the morning song in the forest.



### *Searching for Algerian Nuthatch*

Soon we all had great views of this N-African endemic, and for some it was the last Flycatcher on their WP list. A Mistle Thrush (ssp. *deichleri*) and Hawfinch (ssp. *buvryi*) provided some distraction, but after this good first hour in the forest, the focus was again on finding the Nuthatch.



*Atlasflycatcher*



*Eurasian Treecreeper ssp. mauretanica*



We carefully checked every movement and every sound, but despite our vigilance, we didn't hear much more than singing Atlas Flycatchers rain dripping from the trees in the wet forest. After an hour of searching, we didn't get worried too much, but even Karim thought it took us rather long. In the seemingly homogenous forest, we rounded a hairpin curve and all of a sudden we got response from a pair of Nuthatches! They were calling (not singing), and they weren't very far. We carefully climbed down the slope and took position in a more open area. Soon the Nuthatches came down investigating the (probably rare) human visitors in their high-altitude Oak forest. It was for sure a neat little bird full of character, and more confiding than most Eurasian Nuthatches back in Europe. We got virtually as long as we wanted to carefully observe the bird and study it's behavior, climbing up-and-down the trees and mostly sticking to the trunk and the bigger branches.



*Algerian nuthatch from every possible corner!*





*A moment of celebration with a group pic after seeing the Nuthatch*

With the Nuthatch firmly in the bag, we weren't done yet scraping every possible ssp. out of the forest habitat. So we duly added more Levillant's and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, but also our only Coal Tit (ssp. ledouci, a striking bird with a yellow base colour instead of white) and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (ssp. ledouci), another smart endemic ssp. that's a bit trickier to connect with.



*Great Spotted Woodpecker ssp. numidus*



*Levillants' Woodpecker*



On the (long) way back to Constantine we saw more Moussier's Redstarts, a single European Bee-eater and, in an area close to Constantine, Western Orphee Warbler and Melodious Warbler. We further checked a location with recent sightings of Maghreb Owl, but the weather again didn't really support our search, so we called it a day and had another very tasty couscous meal in a local restaurant.



*Great Mosque, Constantine*

### **30th of May**

The third day of the trip is usually a spare day for when things go wrong, but if things go right, this is an extra day that is either spent near the coast (e.g. to see Barbary Macaque and White-headed Duck) or in the direction of the desert. After the long day in the forest with some rain, we had a sleep-in and only departed around 6.30 towards the South.



#### *Driving towards the Sahara*

On the menu was an area near Tazoult for Tristram's Warbler, and the marvelous Roman ruins of Timgad. On the way we saw Calandra Larks, a group of around 20 Flamingos, and at our first stop near the Mausoleum of Medghassen, our first Mediterranean Short-toed Larks, Rufous Scrub Robin, Great Grey Sphrike and Black Wheatears.





*Mausoleum of Medghassen*



*Great Grey Shrike*



*Black Wheatear*

Tazoult duly delivered with Tristram's Warbler and a support cast of Moussier's Redstart, Cirl Bunting, Barbary Partridge, Thekla's Lark and a HO Maghreb Magpie.



*Surroundings of Tazoult*



*Moussier's Redstart*



*Tristram's Warbler*

Our last stop was at the world-class ruins of the old Roman city of Timgad. Besides the ruins and the beautiful mosaics in the museum, we saw more Black Wheatears, added Little Owl, Crested Lark and a Eurasian Hoopoe to our ever growing list.





*Roman ruins of Timgad*



*Crested Lark*



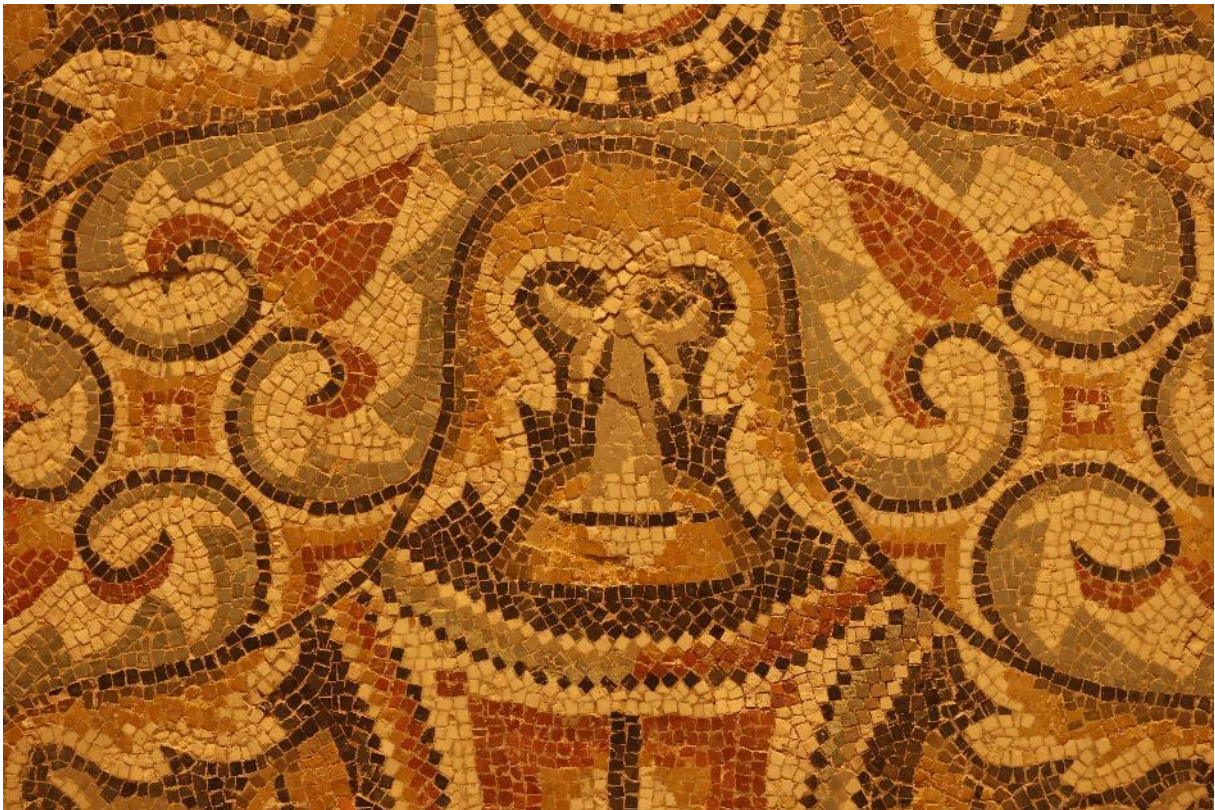
*Little Owl*

With an evening flight back to Paris, we said goodbye to Timgad with its tasty food and beautiful ruins, and headed straight to the airport. While we added some more birds to the trip list (e.g. Western Marsh Harrier), we couldn't believe Karim when he told us the small marsh near the airport was totally dry while it was raining cats and dogs for the whole trip. Only when we made a quick, last stop, we were sadly convinced... The number of waterbirds that could be seen on previous trips has thus dropped significantly with few good places around Constantine to search for ducks and birds in the reeds.

In any way, the trip was a success, and good fun as well. Algeria is a special place only a few hours flying from Europe but yet a world apart, with hardly any tourist, friendly people, very nice food, plenty of Turtle doves and (generally!) nice weather... Warmly recommended and more straightforward than ever.

Starling goes to Algeria since 2019, and is going back in 2024:

<https://www.starlingreizen.be/reizen/vogelreis-naar-algerijnse-boomklever-2024/>



*May the force be with you! Detail of a Roman mosaic in the museum of Timgad*



**Bird list (IOC)**

#	ENG naam	Latijnse naam	Nederlandse naam
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Wilde Eend
2	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Kwartel
3	Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	Barbarijse Patrijs
4	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	Alpengierzwaluw
5	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Gierzwaluw
6	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	Vale Gierzwaluw
7	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Koekoek
8	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Houtduif
9	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	Waterhoen
10	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Zomertortel
11	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Turkse Tortel
12	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	Flamingo
13	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Geelpootmeeuw
14	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Ooievaar
15	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Koereiger
16	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Purperreiger
17	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Kleine Zilverreiger
18	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Aasgier
19	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Vale Gier
20	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	Slangenarend
21	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	Dwergarend
22	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>	Havikarend
23	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Bruine Kiekendief
24	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Zwarte Wouw
25	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Arendbuizerd
26	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Steenuil
27	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hop
28	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Bijeneter
29	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	Kleine Bonte Specht
30	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Grote Bonte Specht
31	Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	Levaillants Specht
32	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Kleine Torenvalk
33	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Torenvalk
34	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Slechtvalk
35	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	Wielewaal
36	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Klapekster
37	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	Roodkopklauwier
38	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Gaai
39	Maghreb Magpie	<i>Pica mauritanica</i>	Maghrebekster
40	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	Kauw
41	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Raaf
42	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	Zwarte Mees

43	African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	Afrikaanse Pimpelmees
44	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Koolmees
45	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Boomleeuwerik
46	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Veldleeuwerik
47	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	Thekla's Leeuwerik
48	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Kuifleeuwerik
49	Greater Short-toed lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Kortteenleeuwerik
50	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Kalanderleeuwerik
51	Mediterranean Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala rufescens</i>	Kleine Kortteenleeuwerik
52	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Boerenzwaluw
53	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Rotszwaluw
54	Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Huiszwaluw
55	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Roodstuitzwaluw
56	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Cetti's Zanger
57	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	Bergfluitier
58	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	Iberische Tjiftjaf
59	Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna opaca</i>	Westelijke Vale Spotvogel
60	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	Orpheusspotvogel
61	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Graszanger
62	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Zwartkop
63	Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Curruca hortensis</i>	Westelijke Orpheusgrasmus
64	Tristram's Warbler	<i>Curruca deserticola</i>	Atlasgrasmus
65	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	Kleine Zwartkop
66	Western Subalpine Warbler	<i>Curruca iberiae</i>	Westelijke Baardgrasmus
67	Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	Grasmus
68	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Winterkoning
69	Algerian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta ledanti</i>	Algerijnse Boomklever
70	Short-Toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Boomkruiper
71	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Zwarte Spreeuw
72	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Merel
73	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Grote Lijster
74	Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	Rosse Waaiersaart
75	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Grauwe Vliegenvanger
76	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Roodborst
77	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Nachtegaal
78	Atlas Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula speculigera</i>	Atlasvliegenvanger
79	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Zwarte Roodstaart
80	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	Diadeemroodstaart
81	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Roodborsttapuit
82	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Tapuit
83	Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	Westelijke Blonde Tapuit
84	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	Zwarte Tapuit
85	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Rotsmus
86	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Spaanse Mus
87	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Huismus



88	Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava	Gele Kwikstaart
89	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	Grote Gele Kwikstaart
90	Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris	Duinpieper
91	African Chaffinch	Fringilla spodiogenys	Afrikaanse Vink
92	Hawfinch	Coccothraustes coccothraustes	Appelvink
93	European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	Groenling
94	Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina	Kneu
95	Red Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra	Kruisbek
96	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	Putter
97	European Serin	Serinus serinus	Europese Kanarie
98	Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra	Grauwe Gors
99	Cirl Bunting	Emberiza cirlus	Cirlgors

### Annex I: restricted / endemic (sub) species

ENG naam	NL naam	status	subspecies	verspreiding
White-headed Duck - <i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	Witkopeend	restricted range		
Barbary Partridge - <i>Alectoris barbara</i>	Barbarijse patrijs	restricted range		
Western Swamphen - <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	Purperkoet	restricted range		
Long-legged Buzzard - <i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Arendbuizerd	regional ssp	cirtensis	N Africa
Little Owl - <i>Athene noctua</i>	Steenuil		glaux	N African coast, and coastal Israel S from Haifa.
Maghreb Owl - <i>Strix mauritanica</i>	Maghrebbosuil	restricted range		
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - <i>Dryobates minor</i>	Kleine bonte specht	ENDEMIC ssp	ledouci	NW Africa (NE Algeria, NW Tunisia)
Great Spotted Woodpecker - <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Grote bonte specht	ENDEMIC ssp	numidus	N Algeria and Tunisia
Levaillant's Woodpecker - <i>Picus vaillantii</i>	Levaillants Specht	restricted range		
Peregrine Falcon - <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Slechtvalk		brookei	
Great Grey Shrike - <i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Klapekster		algeriensis	
Eurasian Jay - <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Gaai	ENDEMIC ssp	cervicalis	N and NE Algeria and NW Tunisia
Maghreb Magpie - <i>Pica mauritanica</i>	Maghrebekster	restricted range		
Western Jackdaw - <i>Coloeus monedula</i>	Kauw	ENDEMIC ssp	cirtensis	NE Algeria
Coal Tit - <i>Pariparus ater</i>	Zwarte mees	ENDEMIC ssp	ledouci	N Algeria and NW Tunisia
African Blue Tit - <i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	Afrikaanse pimpelmees	restricted range	ultramarinus	
Great Tit - <i>Parus major</i>	Koolmees	regional ssp	excelsus	NW Africa (Morocco E to N Tunisia)
Woodlark - <i>Lullula arborea</i>	Boomleeuwerik		pallida	
Thekla's Lark - <i>Galerida theklae</i>	Theklaleeuwerik	regional ssp	ruficolor	NE and C Morocco, coastal Algeria and N Tunisia
Crested Lark - <i>Galerida cristata</i>	Kuifleeuwerik	regional ssp	carthaginis	Coastal: northeast Morocco to northern Tunisia
Common Reed Warbler - <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Kleine karekiet		ambiguus	Iberia and NW Africa
Western Olivaceous Warbler - <i>Iduna opaca</i>	Westelijke vale spotvogel	restricted range		
Mistle Thrush - <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Grote lijster	regional ssp	deichleri	NW Africa, Corsica and Sardinia
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin - <i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	Rosse waaierstaart	restricted range		
Eurasian Blackcap - <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Zwartkop		pauluccii	Iberia to Tunisia



Tristram's Warbler - <i>Curruca deserticola</i>	Atlasgrasmus	restricted range		
Common Firecrest - <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	Goudhaan	regional ssp	balearicus	Balearic Is and N Africa.
Eurasian Wren - <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Winterkoning	regional ssp	kabylorum	Balearic Is and N Africa (Morocco E to Tunisia)
Algerian Nuthatch - <i>Sitta ledanti</i>	Algerijnse boomklever	ENDEMIC		
Short-toed Treecreeper - <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Boomkruiper	regional ssp	mauritanica	Morocco, Algeria and NW Tunisia
Common Blackbird - <i>Turdus merula</i>	Merel	regional ssp	mauretanicus	NW Africa
Hawfinch - <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Appelvink	regional ssp	buvryi	N and NC Morocco, N Algeria and N Tunisia.
European Robin - <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Roodborst	ENDEMIC ssp	witherbyi	N Algeria and N Tunisia
Red Crossbill - <i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Kruisbek	ENDEMIC ssp	poliogyna	NW Africa, Atlas mtns
Atlas Pied Flycatcher - <i>Ficedula speculigera</i>	Atlasvliegenvanger	restricted range		
Moussier's Redstart - <i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	Diadeemroodstaart	restricted range		
Western Black-eared Wheatear - <i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	Westelijke blonde tapuit	restricted range		
Black Wheatear - <i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	Zwarte Tapuit	restricted range		
Rock Sparrow - <i>Petronia petronia</i>	Rotsmus	regional ssp	barbara	Morocco E to NW Libya
Common Chaffinch - <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Vink	regional ssp	africana	Morocco to nw Tunisia
European Greenfinch - <i>Chloris chloris</i>	Groenling	regional ssp	voousi	C Morocco E to N Algeria