

Trip report to Skoura, Morocco 23rd to 30th of April 2024

Trip members: Dougy Wright, Steve Kolodziejski Steve Bury and Greg Adams.



[Tristram's Warbler](#) – seen in The High Atlas near Amzeri

This was a rerun of a similar holiday in March 2021. We had enjoyed the birds, the location and the whole experience so we decided to repeat it a month later in the year in the hope (which was largely realised) of encountering more migrants.



[The Kasbah Elmahdaoui](#)

Day one – 23d April.

We flew, with Tui, from Bristol to Marrakech. We had arranged a one-night stop, which included parking and transfers, at Tall Pines Golf Club which we commend for efficiency as well as its proximity to the airport. This enabled us to catch an early flight that gave us most of the day on the ground in Morocco.

We are accustomed to booking all the elements of our birding holidays separately. However, when we had made our booking with the Kasbah Elmahdaoui, Dougy's correspondence with his contact, Soufaine Fawz, developed from inquiries about transport and car hire into Soufiane taking on the role of a de facto bespoke travel agent. He arranged all our travel and accommodation, in Morocco from the taxi ride from Marrakech to Skoura, car hire and our accommodation near Skoura. Soufiane also ensured that we had a driver for all trips that we required (to collect hire cars and airport transfers). To anyone contemplating a holiday based south of The Atlas, we recommend the same arrangement of a taxi from the airport then hiring a car in Ouarzazete. This arises from our poor experience in 2021 of hiring a vehicle from Hertz; our nightmare experience of driving and navigating through Marrakesh; and our tedious experience of the long journey over the Atlas. Soufiane was a superb host and tour operator – we thoroughly recommend using his services – www.skoura360.com.

We were met at the airport by our driver, Idir, a charming and humorous gentleman who was very willing to fall in with our various requests to stop and look briefly at potential birding locations on the way. In the course of the journey we saw **House Bunting, Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Raven, Kestrel, Pallid Swift, Red-rumped Swallow, Barn Swallow, Rock Bunting, Pied Flycatcher, House Sparrow, Sparrowhawk, Levillant's Green Woodpecker, Black Wheatear, White-crowned Black Wheatear, Common Redstart, African Chaffinch, Cettis warbler, Western Subalpine Warbler, Eurasian Blackbird, Cattle Egret, Melodious Warbler, Nightingale, European Bee Eater, Hoopoe, Great Tit, White Stork, Coal Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Woodchat Shrike, Common Bulbul, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Rock Dove and Spotless Starling.**



[White Crowned Black Wheatear and Pied Flycatcher](#)

We were made very welcome at the Kasbah by Muhammad, the young manager of the Kasbah, (Kasbah El Mehdaoui – best to book via Soufiane by emailing Kasbah.elmehdaoui@gmail.com). We were provided with an ample meal despite our late arrival. Muhammad was reliable, cheerful and attentive throughout our stay. When

serving us and other guests he switched effortlessly between English and French, though his native tongue is the Berber dialect and his second language is Arabic. He also has some Spanish and aspires to learn more languages. Great reviews of the Kasbah are readily available on Trip Advisor.



Madame Najate, Muhammed and us and breakfast!!

Day two - 24 April.

We began the day with a pre- breakfast walk along the Dades River. The Kasbah is right alongside the river beside a footbridge and a ford. During the walk of a couple of hours duration, new birds that we saw were ***Laughing Dove, African Collared Dove, Turtle Dove, Desert Lark, Mahgreb Lark, Little Ringed Plover, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Serin, Yellow Wagtail, Moroccan Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Bonelli's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Spectacled Warbler.***

The location of the Kasbah was perfect for birding as the River Dades runs right past it – therefore there is a plenty of lush vegetation and water to attract birds.



Western Olivaceous Warbler and Laughing Dove



Bonelli's Warbler

Post breakfast Idir picked us up to collect hire cars – Berebere Voyages (in Ouarzazete) arranged by Soufiane (<https://maps.app.goo.gl/d64qnV9FbmCrHr659>).

We had booked two Dacia Dusters to allow for splitting up, Greg in particular being less adventurous than the other members of the party. Having picked up the vehicles and seen **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** on the outskirts of Ouarzazete, we accessed the Barrage El Mansour Eddabbi from several vantage points seeing **Ruddy Shelduck, Sand Martin, Sardinian Warbler, Reed Warbler, Desert Wheatear, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Gull-billed Tern, Mallard, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Booted Eagle, Thekla Lark, Kentish Plover, Common Sandpiper and Lesser Kestrel.**



Desert Wheatear and Blue Cheeked Bee Eater

We returned to the Kasbah and met our wonderful host Madame Najate – a lovely lady who also looked after us whilst there. After a mid-afternoon rest, bathe and sunbathe we visited an area of stony plain on the western outskirts of Sidi Abdelhaq (about 5 miles west of Skoura enroute to Ouazazarete). This had been one of the highlights of our previous visit, when it produced many of the larks and wheatears among other records. This year's visit was disappointing as we were beset at our first stop by lots of exuberant lads (our previous visit having been during school hours). Even when we drove a little further on, the resulting bird count was a shadow of what we had in 2021 but we did add **Rufous Bushchat** and **Great Grey Shrike** to the list. This experience in the semi- desert set the scene for all birding in the desert areas – there were a lot fewer desert species

than when we visited in early March of 2021.



Rufous Bushchat

Day three – 25th April.

We had a pre-breakfast walk along the Dades, picking up some additional species from the previous day – **Wood Warbler**, **Little Swift** and **Northern Wheatear**.



Moroccan Pied Wagtail and Common Bulbul

After that, things went to pieces a little because Steve K became unwell so he and Greg stayed around the Kasbah while Dougy and Steve B went to the Tagdilt Track. Their experience in this productive but unlovely location was less successful than the last visit. It produced only two new trip birds – **Red-rumped Wheatear** and **Black Kite**. They did stop at a lovely oasis, on the Dades river, where they added **Golden Oriole** and **African Blue Tit**.



Red Rumped Wheatear and African Blue Tit

Day 4 – 26th April.

By today, Steve K was restored to health and strength but Greg was similarly afflicted. The early morning walk produced one of the star birds of the trip – a very confiding **Western Orphean Warbler**. **Barbary Partridge** was also added to the list. Later in the morning the other three visited our patch previously described. This time (during school hours) the area was less disturbed and produced **Trumpeter Finch** to add to the trip list birds.



Western Orphean Warbler

Then they moved on to another of our favourite locations near Sidi Flah (south of Skoura) which is an oasis of green alongside the Dades river. This is a cracking site for many migrants and passerines with nesting European and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters in the area. There is a lot of small-scale cultivation under the trees and a lot of human activity in the mornings. We learned later that it is not worked during the heat of the afternoons because of the danger from a population of Egyptian Cobras and other venomous snakes; so we would recommend watching at treetop level from a wide area at the roadside, rather than going into the trees and onto obviously private land which is intensively used and irrigated (there are unmade roads/tracks that traverse Sidi Flah). There the new birds seen were **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Black Redstart** and **Brown-throated Martin**.



Pastures inside Sidi Flah

They then drove further through Sidi Flah village and out onto the open arid area of low hills and gullies where we had previously seen (in 2021) Moussier's Redstarts, Scrub Warbler and some of the other desert species. This time all we saw were Desert Wheatears, Desert Larks and White-crowned Wheatear. Steve B and Dougy got brief views of an unknown lark that we suspected to be Dupont's – but we could not be sure as it went to ground and never re-appeared. Of interest in this area were the families of nomadic Berbers – a truly amazing way of life in 2024!

In the evening we popped out to listen for Nightjars – hoping for Egyptian – but had no luck. On our return to the Kasbah there was a **European Nightjar** churring by the river.

Day five – 27th April.

With Greg now rejoining the others, we revisited the Sidi Flah area, both examining the lush cultivated area and driving further into the arid land beyond. This produced more additions to our list as follows – **Greenfinch**, **Goldfinch**, **Whitethroat** and **Common Swift**. Just south of Sidi Flah Steve K found a cracking **Tawny Pipit** and on the return to Skoura (from Sidi Flah) we saw a **Barbary Falcon**.



Tawny Pipit and Spotted Flycatcher

We also had a couple of hours in the river valley in the afternoon.

Day six – 28th April.

We took both vehicles on a very long and cautious drive north from Skoura into the Atlas Mountains, reaching an altitude of 10000 feet and descended a couple of thousand feet into a Berber village called Amezri. This is a must-see area whether travelling to Amezri from the north or south – the scenery is amazing. On the way we added to our list: **Tristram's Warbler** (located by a piece of inspired habitat spotting by Steve B who is acquainted with this species); **Crag Martin**; **Seebohm's Wheatear**; a pair of rather unexpected **Griffon Vultures**; **Wood Pigeon** and **Rock Sparrow**.



Rock Bunting and Seebohm's Wheatear



Rock Sparrow

On the return journey from Amezri Steve B spotted a Black Eared Wheater – we saw a further individual on the journey back across the Atlas on the way home.



Black Eared Wheater

A feature of the day was the massive passage of Common Swifts, which gave some cause for optimism despite the tumbling numbers seen at home. There were plenty of them over the foothills of the Atlas enroute back to Skoura; then huge numbers over the

Dades river back at the Kasbah. There were literally hundreds of thousands passing through - what a sight! The swifts were accompanied by thousands of European Bee-eaters and the odd other species of hirundine. The passage continued the following day. Whilst relaxing in the Kasbah pool, Dougy added **Alpine Swift** to the list.

On each night of our stay at the Kasbah, Dougy set up his light trap finding, and of course releasing, a variety of moths including Death's Head and Striped Hawk-moths and others as listed below. There were quite a few other species not identified particularly the micro moths.



Deaths Head Hawk Moth

Day 7 – 29th April.

After a final look at the river valley, and breakfast, we took the cars back to Ouarzazete and were met by Idir, who drove us over the Atlas to our one-night destination, the **Riad Bledna** (www.riadbledna.com). Unfortunately, Dougy was now taking his turn with a similar malady. We were all mentally scarred by a piece of lunatic driving by a van driver coming from the opposite direction who overtook right in our path and ran us off the road. Once again, Idir was very willing to make occasional short stops and we saw on the journey: a very large mixed gathering of **Yellow-billed** and **Red-billed Choughs**.

We were made to feel very welcome at Riad Bledna by Mohamed Nour and his family. He is a very genial, articulate and informative character whose main activity is running mountain trekking tours and who is featured in the Lonely Planet guides to Marrakech and Morocco (see www.riadbledna.com for details).

In and around the Riad gardens we saw **Cirl Bunting**, **Moroccan Magpie** and **Garden Warbler**. Steve K also found 2 Western Orphean Warblers in the garden – which was great as he had missed the one at the Kasbah and was a life tick.



An Obliging Sardinian Warbler in the gardens at Riad Bledna

Day eight – 30th April.

Idir collected us from the Riad and delivered us to Marrakech Airport for our homebound flight to Bristol. What a great trip! Thanks again to Soufiane; we recommend if you fancy a trip to Morocco that you contact him (www.skoura360.ma)!

Full species list – Birds:

House Bunting
Collared Dove
Wood Pigeon
Raven
Kestrel
Pallid Swift
Red-rumped Swallow
Barn Swallow
Rock Bunting
Pied Fly
House Sparrow
Sparrowhawk
Levaillant's Green Woodpecker
Black Wheatear
White-crowned Black Wheatear
Redstart
African Chaffinch

Cettis
Western Subalpine Warbler
Blackbird
Cattle Egret
Melodious Warbler
Nightingale
Bee-eater
Hoopoe
Great Tit
White Stork
Coal Tit
Spotted Flycatcher
Woodchat Shrike
Common Bulbul
Carrion Crow
Jackdaw
Rock Dove
Spotless Starling
Laughing Dove
African Collared Dove
Turtle Dove
Desert Lark
Mahgreb Lark
Little Ringed Plover
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler
Western Olivaceous Warbler
Serin
Spectacled Warbler
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
Yellow Wagtail
Moroccan Pied Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Bonelli's Warbler
Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler
Ruddy Shelduck
Sand Martin
Sardinian Warbler
Reed Warbler
Desert Wheatear
Great Crested Grebe
Little Grebe
Gull-billed Tern
Mallard
Grey Heron
Little Egret
Booted Eagle

Thekla Lark
Kentish Plover
Common Sandpiper
Lesser Kestrel
Rufous Bush Chat
Great Grey Shrike
Wood Warbler
Golden Oriole
Red-rumped Wheatear
Black Kite
Temminck's Lark
Little Swift
African Blue Tit
Northern Wheatear
Western Orphean Warbler
Long-legged Buzzard
Black Redstart
Brown-throated Martin
Barbary Partridge
Trumpeter Finch
European Nightjar
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Whitethroat
Common Swift
Tawny Pipit
Barbary Falcon
Seebohm's Wheatear
Rock Sparrow
Tristram's Warbler
Linnet
House Martin
Blue Rock Thrush
Griffon Vulture
Marsh Harrier
Blackcap
Crag Martin
Alpine Chough
Chough
Cirl Bunting
Moroccan Magpie
Garden Warbler

Full species list (identified so far!) – Moths:

Death's Head Hawkmoth
Striped Hawk Moth

Scarce Bordered Straw
Bordered Straw
The Vestal
Gregson's Dart
The Passenger
Rusty Dot Pearl
Water Betony
Portland Ribbon Wave
Tytroca dispar
L-album Wainscot
Amata Cerbera
Nodaria nodolsalis
Gem
Thalerastria lehmanni