Morocco

June 2014

go Morocco in late spring!

Spotted Sandgrouse, Erg Chebbi, June 2014

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Introduction
Since this was not our first time in Morocco, this trip had a different itinerary than most other trips. We had been on the coast before, so we skipped that part. And we like to hike in the mountains, so we stayed longer in the mountains than would be necessary to see the target birds. Also within the mountains and desert we concentrated on the species missed previous trip. According the statistics on www.cloudbirders.com, most birdwatchers visit Morocco in the period of February-April. I did that before as well, but I can come up with several good reasons to go only as late as May or June:
1) Atlas Pied Flycatcher
2) Seebohm’s Wheatear
3) Saharan Olivaceous Warbler
4) all species that can be seen in winter are also present in spring and summer
5) many dragonflies and butterflies
6) it is low season from May onwards, which means that all hotels have plenty of space
I can come up with only one disadvantage of going after April: it can be quite hot in the desert. But for me, that did clearly not outweigh the three (sub)species I would have missed otherwise!

Logistics
Flying to Morocco is cheap: we paid €165 for a return flight from Amsterdam to Marrakesh. Car rental is cheap as well: we paid around €15 per day for renting a Dacia Logan with Thrifty. The car came without power steering and air-condition though, but we drove 2657km with the car without major problems.

Literature
- We used the Rough Guide to Morocco for finding hotels etc., I found the guide very good.
- The thin old fashioned paper books by Dave Gosney are still indispensable, and we used both books extensively: Dave Gosney, Finding Birds in Morocco, coast and mountains & Dave Gosney, Finding Birds in Morocco, the deserts.
- For navigation on the road we used a 1:1 000 000 map of Morocco and for hiking in the High Atlas we used a 1:40 000 map of the Toubkal region by Editorial Piolet, both maps were bought in advance.
- There are many trip reports available on internet, and we found the following two very useful: http://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/repository/VLOT_MoroccoW_Sahara_0203_2014.pdf http://joshrjones.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/morocco-trip-report-junejuly-2012.html
- Garry Bakker, Arnoud van den Berg, Thijs Feijen and Jorrit Vlot were very helpful and gave us valuable information for finding our targets, thanks! Much of their information is incorporated in this report.
- www.observado.org has many sightings for Morocco.
Daily Log

June 4 Amsterdam – Marrakesh – Asni
We arrived in the early evening at Marrakesh airport. We collected our pre-booked rental car without problems, did some shopping in the Carrefour and drove to Asni, arriving there only at 10PM. The only hotel given for this place in the Rough Guide seemed to be closed, but we soon met a local who offered a homestay for 150dh. We accepted his offer, so we slept in a very basic place, but the family was very friendly. I was a bit too tired to try for mauritanica Tawny Owl which occurs in the village (http://observado.org/waarneming/view/80867015).

June 5 Asni – Kik Plateau – Imlil
This morning we explored the Kik Plateau. Since we are interested in insects as well we were curious whether the plateau would have flowers, attracting butterflies. To reach the Kik Plateau, follow the R203 south out of Asni in the direction of Ouirgane. After only 1 km there is a dirt road to the right at GPS 31.2458, -7.9947. Follow this road for some 2 km, and you reach the plateau. We were seemingly already a bit late in the year: grain was harvested and many plants had flowered. Never mind, we still saw some butterflies like Southern Brown Argus, False Mallow Skipper and Spanish Marbled White. We also had our first introduction of Moroccan birds, including some interesting ones: 2 patrolling Bonelli’s Eagles showed well, Western Orphean Warbler and the plateau itself hosted Black Wheatears, Western Black-eared Wheatears and most interestingly 3 hunting Eleonora’s Falcons! The latter were clearly out of range, late migrants? We ate our late lunch at the car and drove towards Imlil. The road from Asni to Imlil follows a nice river, somewhere half way we saw a subpersonata White Wagtail. Imlil itself is a small village with plenty of accommodation. We picked one of the many hotels and paid 350dh per night for a spacious double room. Next to our hotel we soon found the first lifer of the trip: Levaillant’s Green Woodpecker (31.137, -7.913). Ultramarine Blue Tit was around as well and Turtle Dove and Spotted Flycatchers were remarkably common.

June 6 Imlil
We did a strenuous day hike today. From Imlil (1740m) we walked to the Tizi n’Tzikert pass (2930m, 31.1034, -7.9421) and back to Imlil. That was a demanding trek, especially because it took us quite a while to find the right track. The walk was very nice, with some neat scenery and lots of birds: 1 Golden Eagle, Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, 10 Moussier’s Redstarts, several Black Wheatears, Red-rumped Swallows, 1 Levaillant’s Green Woodpecker and 2 Barbary Partridges. At the pass itself we saw a male Rock Thrush and 7 Horned Larks but not the hoped for Seebohm’s Wheatear. On the way down we crossed a stream where we found an Atlas Goldenring Cordulegaster princeps, a spectacular dragonfly. Noteworthy butterflies for today: Spanish Marbled White, Giant Grayling, Vaucher’s Heath and Cleopatra.
June 7 Imlil
I got a little concerned: why did we not see Seebohm’s Wheatear yesterday? It should be a common bird in the High Atlas. Thanks to Jorrit Vlot I knew however a spot where they were seen before, at the Tizi n’ Tamatert pass at 31.1482, -7.8889. We drove to the pass and walked the piste north from the main road at the pass. Soon we bumped in a flock of African Crimson-winged Finches (31.152, -7.889, http://observado.org/waarneming/view/85718954). They were nog shy at all, allowing us great views. Other birds around here included Rock Bunting, Black Wheatear, a heard only Barbary Partridge and a Tristram’s Warbler (31.149, -7.881), but no Seebohm’s Wheatear... In the afternoon we relaxed along the river just north of Imlil, seeing another Atlas Goldenring. In the evening we saw our first Short-toed Treecreepers (subspecies mauritanica) of the trip at 31.137, -7.913.
June 8 Imlil – Azrou

Today we drove to the Middle Atlas. Quite a long drive, first to Marrakesh, then northeast all the way to Azrou. We arrived in Azrou around 3 PM. Not many birds seen along the drive, only Roller and Southern Grey Shrike are worth mentioning. In Azrou we stayed in hotel Beau-Sejour. It is a basic but cheap hotel, we took the triple room in order to get a small balcony overlooking the square, we paid 130dh per night. Azrou is a pleasant town, and we saw some birds in the town as well: Pallid Swifts and Lesser Kestrels are flying over the square and there is a buzzy Cattle Egret colony in the centre of town. Anyway, still some hours of daylight left, we went straight to the spot for Atlas Pied Flycatcher mentioned in the Gosney guide (coast and mountains, page 32, spot 3): turn right to the dirt road along the N5 between Azrou and Ifrane, just past the km post saying ‘Fez 71, Marrakech 411’. The forest here (33.487, -5.144) is indeed packed with Atlas Pied Flycatchers, one of the most common birds in that forest. If you get here in May of June it should be impossible to miss this beautiful bird. Also Levaillant’s Green Woodpecker is pleasantly common here. In the evening we tried to find Tawny Owl near Azrou. We tried this site: http://observado.org/waarneming/view/82637786, but without luck. It also did not help that the speaker broke down, so we could not tape it in.

June 9 Azrou

This morning we went back to the above mentioned spot for Atlas Pied Flycatcher. Many flycatchers showed well again and we also added Bonelli’s Warbler, Rock Sparrow, Roller, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Booted Eagle, Stock Dove and Long-legged Buzzard to the list. Upon leaving the spot we met a group of Spanish researchers working on Atlas Pied Flycatchers. Since Janne is working on Pied Flycatchers in the Netherlands, it was a great surprise to meet colleagues, and we joined the rest of the morning with trapping the Atlas Pied Flycatchers in the meanwhile exchanging information about the Spanish and Dutch populations of Pied Flycatchers. After saying goodbye we had a late lunch in the unappealing town of Ifrane (Lesser Kestrels in town though), where after we took the road towards Meknes. From Ifrane the road goes soon through alpine habitat, and as promised by the Spanish bird ringers we indeed finally found Seebohm’s Wheatear (33.547, -5.166), although it was only one individual, a male. In the same heath habitat we saw a family party of Spectacled Warblers and a male European Stonechat. In the evening we were back at the Atlas Pied Flycatcher spot because the researchers heard Tawny Owl here the night before. We listened for half an hour, but no luck.

Atlas Pied Flycatcher, male, Middle Atlas, June 9 2014
June 10 Azrou – Erg Chebbi

Tuesday is an important day in Azrou: market day! Today is Tuesday, and we strolled for a few hours on the huge market. Interesting experience, lots of cattle, goods etc being sold. By the end of the morning we started the long drive to the desert. Going southeast from Azrou the N13 soon crosses treeless alpine habitat. Despite I was speeding we saw some male Seebohm’s Wheatears from the car. In the same habitat we passed a roadside marsh. We stopped and scored our only Red-knobbed Coots of the trip (http://observado.org/waarneming/view/85719283). Here we also found the dragonflies Iberian Bluetail, Mediterranean Bluet and Barbary Featherleg. Time to move on, a long drive to go. Next stop was a brief one at the Zeida Plains. Thank God I saw Dupont’s Lark before, so we didn’t have to stay here and get up extremely early etc etc. The midday stop did off course not produce Dupont’s Lark, but we saw 10 Cream-coloured Coursers and our only Short-toed Larks of the trip. Around dinner time we arrived in Rissani. But before heading for dinner we went to a few single tamarisk trees at the start of the ‘circuit touristique’, exact coordinates at http://observado.org/waarneming/view/85719342, where we immediately found two Saharan Olivaceous Warblers. They were not too actively singing anymore, but also morphologically they are different from Western Olivaceous Warblers: smaller in all respects, bill shorter, slimmer and more pointed and the wing has a hint of a light wing panel (this info is based on Dutch Birding 27:302-307, Olivaceous warblers in the western Mediterranean and their identification by A. B. van den Berg. These differences seemed to work well in the field). We had dinner in a restaurant in Rissani, where after we drove to Hassi Labiad, close to Merzouga. According the Rough Guide Auberge l’Oasis is a good place to stay (31.1291, -4.0124, http://www.aubergeoasis.net/anglais/index.html) and we were not disappointed. We were welcomed by two very friendly brothers and got a nice room with air-condition including breakfast and dinner for only 350 dh per night.
June 11 Erg Chebbi

An important day today. It is well known now that Desert Sparrows are not easily seen anymore at Kasbah Yasmina. They are nowadays only reliable at the Bedouin camps IN the Erg Chebbi sand dunes. So one has to take an overnight camel ride or rent a four-wheel drive in order to see these not-an-option-to-leave-Morocco-without Desert Sparrows. However, one of the closest Bedouin camps in Erg Chebbi can simply be reached by foot. It was Garry Bakker who gave this valuable tip (thanks a lot!) and I tried to give it a go early this morning. I parked the car at (31.2131, -3.9749) and with a GPS I walked exactly 2 km to the northeast to the Bedouin camp at (31.2203, -3.9548, see map below). When approaching the camp a barking dog ran to me, but it appeared to be a friendly one, and I immediately found a male Desert Sparrow with 3 juveniles! Just amazing, what a fantastic birds! It sounds a bit stupid to just walk into the sand dunes but it is not. First, the walk is only 2 km, in my case only half an hour walk. Secondly, after only crossing a few dunes one can already see the camp in the distance, so getting lost is really difficult and last, if you leave early you are back well before the heat starts (and even before breakfast in my case). Just bring your GPS. See the Google Earth screenshot below which will help you finding the spot. At the camp there were also some House Sparrows around, so if it is the competition with this species that makes the Desert Sparrows retreat, I don’t know how long they will be present at this spot...

Janne was a bit tired and she didn’t join, so I drove back to the hotel to have breakfast with her. After breakfast we went to the well-known spot for Desert Warbler. It is a wadi that runs parallel to the piste from the N13 to Kasbah Yasmina. The spot is well described in Gosney, the deserts, page 14, site 4. The wadi starts at 31.2407, -4.0781 and continuous westwards all the way to the N13. We started to walk the wadi from the mentioned spot onwards, but a very strong wind did not make bird watching easy. After walking for over an hour through the wadi without seeing much we gave up. We did see some Hoopoe-Larks and Bar-tailed Desert Larks, but no Desert Warblers. We also briefly checked the wadi close to the N13 where Vlot et al. were lucky (http://observado.org/waarneming/view/82638222), but no success. Maybe more luck tomorrow, and hopefully with less wind. During the afternoon we stayed in the hotel since it was very hot. Around 3:30PM we woke up and went to the spot for Egyptian Nightjar as mentioned by Gosney as site 4 on page 10. I was hopeful since I got GSP coordinates where Garry Bakker saw them a few months earlier. All went very smooth: we walked to the very exact spot and when the GPS informed me that I had arrived indeed two Egyptian Nightjars flew from under my feet! This are the coordinates: 31.298, -4.193, it is 8km east of Rissani, close to Auberge Tresor. Since we were close to Rissani now, we checked some places around this town. First we got the coordinates where ’Ali the nomad’ shows people the Desert Eagle Owl. We tried to find the place without Ali, but failed since all the roads in that direction seemed to end before you reach the place. Maybe better support the local economy and hire Ali the Nomad to see this species here (see Gosney and http://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/repository/VLOT_MoroccoW Sahara_0203_2014.pdf for details on finding Ali). We did find however some Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and a splendid Barbary Falcon perched on an electricity pole. I also regularly taped for Fulvous Babbler, but to response. We visited the dry riverbed just west of Rissani, as mentioned in Gosney as site 1 on page 8 (31.2781, -4.2798). We checked the tamarisks bordering the riverbed south of the bridge. Saharan Olivaceous Warblers were remarkably common here. Just before dark we arrived back at the hotel in Hassi Labiad. Between the village and Erg Chebbi there is an extensive oasis (hence the name of the Auberge) and here I tried to find Fulvous Babbler in last light. Sure enough, after walking for a while in the oasis (31.140, -4.020), a Babbler responded to the tape and gave good views, what a relief, this can really be a tricky species to come by. Other birds in the oasis included Laughing Dove, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and House Sparrow.
Map on how to find Desert Sparrow at Erg Chebbi.

Desert Sparrow, Erg Chebbi, June 11 2014
June 12 Erg Chebbi

Only one lifer to go in the desert: African Desert Warbler. We started early in the morning at the same spot as yesterday and this time we found one within minutes! A fine male flew from one clump of grass to the other and continued to do so for a while (31.2406, -4.0778). We could follow it easily and obtained good views of this remarkable Sylvia-warbler. Mission accomplished, and since it was still early, we decided to try the Desert Sparrows once more because Janne did not join yesterday. While driving past Kasbah Yasmina we saw 3 Spotted Sandgrouse in flight. They flew from a small pit at 31.2145, -3.9852, and waiting there soon resulted in another Spotted Sandgrouse landing at the pit, clearly for drinking. Near Yasmina is a temporary lake, that lake was dried out, but at the just mentioned GPS coordinates is a small pit with water, I think this pit is there because they collect clay there to make bricks. After watching the bird for a while we continued the last couple of 100 metres to the parking spot for the Desert Sparrows (see yesterday). When we started to walk to the Bedouin camp another 15 Spotted Sandgrouse flew past, clearly to the direction of the pit. All these birds were seen between 8:30 and 8:45AM. No idea whether this pit holds water during the winter, but if so, this might be a good spot to observe this species for upcoming trips and tours. We walked to the Bedouin camp again, and found the same 4 Desert Sparrows with ease. A Turtle Dove and Woodchat Shrike were around as well, just like yesterday. We were back at the car before midday and on our way back to the hotel we found a flock of c. 30 Brown-necked Ravens just west of Kasbah Yasmina. What a morning! Desert Warbler, Desert Sparrow and Spotted Sandgrouse almost within an hour! Anyway, after a deserved siesta we drove in the afternoon to the lake Dayet Srji, west of Merzouga. This is a temporary lake, but the hotel owners assured us that there was water in the lake. Drive to Merzouga on the N13 and take a piste to the west (31.1043, -4.0203) and after 3km you are at the lake. The spot is also well explained in Gosney, page 14. The lake held water indeed, and we saw good numbers of Ruddy Shelduck (104), Flamingo (83) and Brown-necked Raven (200). A Maghreb Lark along the shore showed its remarkable long bill. We were only 15 minutes at the lake when we saw a dust storm coming from the north, we were just in time at the car when a fierce wind and dust made any bird watching impossible. We slowly drove back to the hotel since visibility was very low in the storm. Quite an event, never experienced a true dust storm before. But we didn’t care about the storm, it felt great to have all the desert specialties in the pocket already!
June 13 Erg Chebbi – Goulimine – Boumalne du Dadès
After a final breakfast at the auberge we drove to Boumalne via Goulimine. We took the little detour via Goulimine because of the reliable Scrub Warbler spot there. If you have seen Scrub Warbler before in Israel, you still better visit this spot as well, because the subspecies in Morocco are quite different from the subspecies in Asia. Gosney gives a reliable site on page 16 of his desert book. I got coordinates from Garry which differ slightly from the coordinates from Gosney: 31,7565,-4,8381. This is in a wadi crossing the road, the coordinates are only a few 100 metres from the road. We walked to the spot and found our noisy bold energetic friends within minutes. They were not in the few larger bushes near the coordinates, but in the small bushes covering large parts of the wadi. Here two Desert Wheatears were present as well. So far so good, but the rest of the day we managed to not see any of the other targets. We were entering Maghreb/Western Mourning Wheatear habitat from now on. This is a tricky species to come by, they have low densities and there are few reliable spots. We first wanted to check the site at signpost ‘Tinghir 14’ 14 km west of Tinerhir, as described in Gosney. However, from Tinerhir onwards, up to Ouarzazate the km markers got fresh new white and red paint, but not yet the distances! how convenient! Every km there stood another bright red and white marker without text! Annoying, since Gosney explains quite some spots by using the km markers. Fortunately most of these spots were in our GPS already, but still we had an extra obstacle for some spots. It’s another reason to come prepared, eg, with all relevant points already in your GPS. Anyway, we did not know which marker was the right one, so we could not check the ‘Tinghir 14’ marker. Next target was Pharaoh Eagle Owl, we got GPS coordinates where they should be ‘virtually guaranteed’. It is just west of the village Imiter, not far east of Boumalne du Dadès. Turn left of the main road if coming from Imiter (31.3790, -5.8122) and after 500m you see some cliffs. The birds should be simply there, but they were not. After a while we gave up and decided to come back later. Although it was midday we just gave the famous Tagdilt track a try in the hope to find Thick-billed Lark. A short drive through the ugliest place in Morocco drew a blank. After a late lunch in Boumalne du Dadès we checked in at the first hotel we found on the way into the Dadès Gorge. This appeared to be Auberge Café Restaurant Tighzoutine. Decent room, nice balcony and friendly owners. We paid 250dh per night for a double. In the afternoon we drove into the Dadès Gorge. A very scenic route, but no noteworthy birds. In the early evening we checked a site for Maghreb Wheatear, but again no luck. At 8 PM we were back at the hotel, just in time to watch the World Champions soccer game in Brasil, The Netherlands against Spain. Together with half of the village we witnessed how our team won from Spain with an incredible 5-1!

June 14 Tagdilt Track – Ouarzazate
At first light we saw ourselves at the famous Tagdilt Track. As you probably know, this dirt road starts southeast of Boumalne du Dadès and goes through the local rubbish dump, so plastic everywhere. To reach the Tagdilt Track, go east out of town on the main road, and take a dirt road to the right at 31.366, -5.960. Follow this track for 1,5km and turn left. Start searching from here. We soon found Red-rumped Wheatear, Long-legged Buzzard and Temminck’s Lark. When crossing the ‘second wadi’ (31.329, -5.946, see also Gosney page 18) Janne found our main target for this morning: a group of 6 Thick-billed Larks. After having a good look we decided to leave the dirty place, and try for the Pharaoh Eagle Owl at Imiter. Again we took our time to thoroughly check all the cliffs (see yesterday for the exact spot) but again no owls... something happened to the pair? We did see a nice first summer Great Crested Cuckoo though. The remaining afternoon we saw ourselves driving to Ouarzazate. We stopped at one spot which should be good for Maghreb Wheatear (31.1067, -6.4226), but failed, the afternoon heath probably didn’t help. In Ouarzazate we stayed at the centrally located Bab Sahara Hotel. Descend rooms, friendly staff, double 240dh without, 320dh including AC. Nice to be back in a civilized world. Quite a pleasant city with some good restaurants.
June 15 Ouarzazate – Ijoukak
A bit nervous this morning: our final attempt for Maghreb Wheatear, before leaving to the mountains. I got coordinates from Garry Bakker where he saw a male a few months ago (31.024, -7.225), just west of Amerzgane. The spot was scenic again, but held remarkably few birds. After searching in vain for over an hour we gave up and walked back to the car. Back at the car Janne noticed a bird, which was of course a fine male Maghreb Wheatear! Relief. In a good mood we drove to the High Atlas. We decided to not take the usual route via the N9, but to take the Tizi n’Test pass more west. So we drove via Taliouine and Aoulouz. West of Aoulouz we noticed two *algeriensis* Southern Grey Shrikes in the wires. The route into the High Atlas to the Tizi n’Test pass was truly amazing. The road was narrow in many places, but there was very few traffic on the road. The views were absolutely breath taking. When we were nearly on the top we had a short break (30.8556,-8.3800) and walked along the road: African Crimson-winged Finch (heard only) and Tristram’s Warbler, but also insects like Atlas Goldenring, Desert Orange Tip and Lang’s Short-tailed Blue. After crossing the pass we continued to the village of Ijoukak and went to the hotel named Tigmi n’Tmazirte. It is 1.5km east of town. Friendly staff as usual and we paid 250dh for a double. The last hour of daylight was spent along the river in front of the hotel (30.990, -8.151), where Western Olivaceous Warbler was common and I photographed an African Babul Blue. We had dinner in one of the restaurants in Ijoukak. It is a small but nice village. When walking back to the hotel at dusk we saw and heard some European Nightjars.

June 16 Ijoukak
Today we explored the Agoundis Valley. To reach the valley From Ijoukak, turn of the main road here (30.9984, -8.1570) and just follow the road. At the junction at 30.9654, -8.1067 take a left turn. The road follows the valley and becomes very narrow soon. After two or three villages we parked the car and walked the road up and down for a few km. It was a pleasant walk but we did not see many interesting birds: 2 Levallant’s Green woodpeckers, 1 Booted Eagle and 1 Blue Rock Thrush. The butterfly Desert Orange Tip was remarkably common and we also saw False Ilex Hairstreak and again the several Atlas Goldenrings.
June 17 Iljoukak
Another day in the surroundings of Iljoukak. We explored another valley this time, the old road to Taliouine. We drove into the same valley as yesterday, but at the junction at 30.9654, -8.1067 we took a right turn. The road is good for a few km, from where it is abruptly very narrow again. After some 2 km we parked the car and walked the road further. Although being very close to the valley of yesterday the vegetation and animal diversity was quite different. At the first part (30.9280, -8.0771) we saw 2 Tristram’s Warblers and 1 male Western Subalpine Warbler. After 5 km walking we crossed a stream (30.938, -8.043) which was very productive for dragonflies: both Large Pincertail and Atlas Goldenring were common but also Mediterranean Bluet was around. Also two Levaillant’s Green Woodpeckers were around. From the stream we walked back to the car. We passed some villages, and most kids stared to us, seemingly not many people get here. You could drive this road, but it is very narrow, without places to pass each other. But the only traffic that day were donkeys anyway. Halfway the walk there is a colony of Red-billed Choughs and we also saw Long-legged Buzzard, Rock Bunting, Moussier’s Redstart, Short-toed Eagle, Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow and Blue Rock Thrush during the hike.
June 18 Ijoukak – Oukaïmeden
After breakfast we went to Oukaïmeden. We drove to Asni and at Tahanaoute we took the shortcut to Oukaïmeden. I know Oukaïmeden is especially popular for skiing, but still I expected a bit more activity in town in June. There were very few shops and hotels open. The only hotel we could find was ridiculously expensive (650dh per night) but fortunately Club Alpine Francais (C.A.F) is also open for non-members, and we got a basic room for 140dh per person. We had been in Oukaïmeden before in winter but getting here back in June was just amazing: all the fields surrounding Oukaïmeden were green and full of flowers, which attracted many insects. All places we had been before this trip were on a clearly lower altitude, and only here, at 2700m the fields are still fresh green with many flowering plants, a paradise for the entomologist. And since I saw all the mountain bird species already I focused on the insects instead. So this afternoon we didn’t get far, only to the lake (31.2073, -7.8522) and surroundings. The few birds I did see in between studying insects: Common Quail (heard only of course), Peregrine, Red-billed Chough, Rock Sparrow (very common in the village) and Seebohm’s Wheatear. The latter is common in the alpine habitat of Oukaïmeden. If you can’t find the species here you must be too early in the year, at least in June they are really common here. We did not find them in the surroundings of Imlil, Asni and Ijoukak, although these places are close to Oukaïmeden. I think the reason is the habitat: at Oukaïmeden are the real treeless meadows and boulders, the other places are dryer, have a lower altitude (but not in the Middle Atlas) and hold more bushes on the slopes. Once in the right habitat Seebohm’s Wheatear is common. Around the lake there were hundreds of Common Bluets, the ones I checked were all this species and unfortunately not Desert Bluet. Also Blue Emperor and Four-spotted Chaser around. Most interesting butterflies concerned Martin’s Blue and Aetherie Fritillary.
June 19 Oukaïmeden
Our last full day in Morocco. We intended to make a long day hike in the mountains, but too many insects around to prevent us from proper hiking. In the end we did not get further than 31.205, -7.832. An interesting spot was a small village some 3km from Oukaïmeden at 31.195, -7.831, which can also be reached by car. Here we saw our only Little Owl and Corn Bunting of the trip, we heard Common Quail and Rock Sparrow was abundant at the houses, Seebohm’s Wheatear was around and not far from the village (3009, -7.839) an African Crimson-winged Finch flew past and a Tawny Pipit was singing. Close to Oukaïmeden itself we found Horned Lark feeding on the meadows. For us most interesting were the butterflies though: Atlas Blue, Moroccan Meadow Brown, Purple-shot Copper, Aetherie Fritillary, Rosy Grizzled Skipper, Moroccan Grayling and Vaucher’s Heath. Amongst the many dragonflies one Atlas Goldenring was seen briefly (31.2103, -7.8510), clearly less common here (maybe too high?) than elsewhere in the High Atlas. Another nice insect common here is *Lebelloides ictericus*.

June 20 Oukaïmeden – Marrakesh – Amsterdam
In the morning we drove down from mountains to Marrakesh to do the necessary shopping on the souk. In Marrakesh we added the last new bird to the imaginary (we didn’t count) trip list: Little Swift. That was it, in the early evening we flew back to Amsterdam.
Triplist

Only the more interesting species are mentioned. All my individual sightings are also available at the great website www.observado.org, including GPS coordinates: http://observado.org/user/view/12654

**Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus*
The species should still be around in the Atlas, but despite spending quite some time in the Atlas we did not see one.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*
6: 1 during our walk from Imlil to the Tizi n’Tzikert pass.

**Bonelli’s Eagle** *Aquila fasciata*
5: A patrolling pair showed well near the Kik Plateau.

**Barbary Falcon** *Falco pelegrinoides*
11: 1 individual photographed close to Rissani
Eleonora's Flacon *Falco eleonorae*
5: Maybe the most unexpected bird of the trip. 3 Individuals hunting over the Kik Plateau.

Eleonora’s Flacon, Kik Plateau, 5 June 2014

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*
10: Several birds on a lake in the Middle Atlas, along the N13, 33.029, -5.070.

Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*
12: several birds came to drink near Kasbah Yasmina, see daily log for more details.

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*
14: Surprised to find a second calendar year bird just west of Imiter.

Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubu ascalaphus*
We went for the spot near Imiter but could not find them there. Better try the one near Rissani, we didn’t so we missed it.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*
In Morocco the distinctive subspecies *mauritanica* occurs. We tried at a few places but failed. June is probably not the best time of the year.

Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*
11: Easily found near Rissani, see daily log for more info.

Levaillant’s Green Woodpecker *Picus vaillantii*
Common in both the High Atlas and Middle Atlas. In the High Atlas it occurs everywhere where there are trees, and these trees only have to be small.
Maghreb Lark *Galerida macrorhyncha*
The ‘crested larks’ south of the Atlas truly have long bills!
10: 1 near Rissani
12: 1 near lake Dayet Srji, Merzouga
14: 1 Tagdilt Track

**Maghreb Lark, Merzouga, June 12 2014**

**Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey*
14: a flock of 6 seen well at the Tagdilt Track (31.329, -5.946).

**Temminck’s Lark** *Eremophilila bilopha*
14: few individuals including a singing male at the Tagdilt Track.

**Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris*
6: Small group at the Tizi n’Tzikert pass (2930m, 31.1034, -7.9421).
19: 2 Individuals at the large meadow in front of Oukaïmeden.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba subpersonata*
5: Along the river between Asni and Imlil.

**Rufous Bush Robin** *Cercotrichas galactotes*
Very common around Rissani.

**Moussier’s Redstart** *Phoenicurus moussieri*
Common in the Atlas, but at some places markedly more common than at others. Many birds seen on the walk to the Tizi n’Tzikert pass on the 6th.

**Seebohm’s Wheatear** *Oenanthe (oenanthe) seebohmi*
9: 1 male near Ifrane
10: several roadside birds when travelling from Azrou to Zeida.
18, 19: Common at Oukaïmeden.
**Maghreb Wheatear** *Oenanthe halophile*
One of the most tricky species to come by. There are several spots where the species is possible, but really reliable spots are rare. We were lucky at Amerzgane (31.024, -7.225).

![Maghreb Wheatear, Amerzgane, June 15 2014](image)

**Streaked Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta*
13: Seen well near Goulimine. See daily log for more details.
This is apparently also a good spot for the species:
[http://observado.org/waarneming/view/82638408](http://observado.org/waarneming/view/82638408)

**Western Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia hortensis*
5: Only once, on the track to the Kik Plateau.

**African Desert Warbler** *Sylvia deserti*
12: after missing it on the 11th (strong wind), we found it the 12th at the well-known spot for this species, see daily log for more details.

**Tristram's Warbler** *Sylvia deserticola*
We had seen it before so we were not really looking for it, but still found it on several places in the High Atlas, see daily log. This is apparently also a good spot, which we didn’t check ourselves:
[http://observado.org/waarneming/view/82844048](http://observado.org/waarneming/view/82844048)
**Saharan Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida reiseri*

Still a subspecies of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, but soon to be split on basis of DNA, morphology and sound. In Morocco mainly found in tamarisks in the southeast. Song differs from Western Olivaceous Warbler as described by Gosney, the deserts, page 8, place 1. Consult Dutch Birding 27:302-307, Olivaceous warblers in the western Mediterranean and their identification by A. B. van den Berg, for more information on how to separate the two.

10: 2 at the few tamarisks at 31.273, -4.284 near Rissani.
11: common along the Oued Ziz in Rissani, see daily log.

**Western Bonelli’s Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli*

9: Several singing birds at the spot of the Atlas Pied Flycatcher.

**Atlas Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula speculigera*

8, 9: Common in the oak forest between Azrou and Ifrane, see daily log for more details.

**Fulvous Babbler** *Turdoides fulva*

11,12: At the oasis in front of Hassi Labiad (31.140, -4.020). This can be a difficult species. What doesn’t help is that it occurs in habitat otherwise not interesting for other desert specialities: palm groves around Rissani. Playing tape helps finding this species.

**Desert Sparrow** *Passer simplex*

11, 12: 1 male and 3 juveniles at Erg Chebbi. See the daily log of June 11 for a detailed description in how to find these birds. According to Gosney, Desert Sparrow occurs also M’Hamid and indeed, there are recent sightings for this area: [http://observado.org/waarneming/view/84558010](http://observado.org/waarneming/view/84558010). This can be a good backup place outside the Western Sahara if you fail at Erg Chebbi.
African Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys alienus*

7: A flock seen well at the Tizi n’Tamatert pass (31.1482, -7.8889).
15: Heard only (but call very distinctive) near the Tizi n’Test pass at 30.8556, -8.3800.
19: 1 flying by at Oukaimeden (31.2009, -7.8339). Gosney gives also some specific sites for this species around Oukaïmeden, which we did not check since we saw them well on the 7th and on a previous trip.

Butterflies & Dragonflies

See [http://observado.org/user/view/12654](http://observado.org/user/view/12654)

For any questions feel free to email me at sanderbot at yahoo.co.uk.

Sander Bot, June 2014
The Netherlands