

# MOROCCO

## WITH FEATURES ON ANDALUCIAN HEMIPODE AND WHITE-RUMPED SWIFT

16<sup>st</sup> May – 26<sup>th</sup> May 2015

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### I. Introduction

This was the most intense of all my expeditions so far – an overwhelming, frenetic, stressful, vibrant and rewarding trip to one of the most remarkable countries in the Western Palearctic. As in 2010, the richness of experience was cultural as well as ornithological, with a tide of amazing encounters sustaining a manic trip that took me from the Atlantic Coast to the Sahara, High Atlas and almost everywhere in between. The contrast to my previous trip to Israel was particularly pronounced. Gone was the parade of easy birds in stunning sunshine, with short drives and first-world infrastructure. In came chaos, confusion, haggling with guardians, fraught drives, sandstorms and hard-fought-for species. It had been a birding aspiration, since first reading the Collins Guide, to set eyes on the mythical Andalusian Hemipode. This provided the driving force behind a trip that included some of the region's most enigmatic species in some of its most dramatic landscapes. This detailed report outlines approaches, background, species and sites complete with GPS coordinates.

### II. Target Species

Having visited Morocco twice before, I had a small list of what might be called quality target species left to see within the main country. It quickly became clear in planning that a separate trip to Western Sahara would be required and that combining the two would be unwise if not impossible within a scheduled week. As a result, my target list before was excellent views of the following species:

Eleonora's Falcon; Andalusian Hemipode; Double-spurred Francolin; Marsh Owl; White-rumped Swift; Egyptian Nightjar; Dupont's Lark; Iberian Chiffchaff; Moroccan Reed Warbler; Fulvous Babbler; Atlas Pied Flycatcher; Crimson-winged Finch.

I was successful with all target species but only heard Double-spurred Francolin whilst poor conditions allowed just the briefest glimpses of the equally notorious Dupont's Lark. That said, the trip was phenomenally successful with an enormous range of quality species, both expected and unexpected – such as Little Bustard – encountered in what turned into 9 full days birding after I missed a flight home. The following specialities or regionally rare species were recorded during the course of this trip:

White-headed Duck; Marbled Duck; Double-spurred Francolin; Bald Ibis; Lammergeier; Eleonora's Falcon; Lanner Falcon; Red-knobbed Coot; Andalusian Hemipode; Cream-coloured Courser; Spotted Sandgrouse; Pin-tailed Sandgrouse; Pharaoh Eagle Owl; Marsh Owl; Egyptian Nightjar; White-rumped Swift; Little Swift; Blue-cheeked Bee-eater; Levaillant's Woodpecker; Hoopoe Lark; Bar-tailed Lark; Desert Lark; Dupont's Lark; Temminck's Lark; Moussier's Redstart; Saharan Olivaceous Warbler; Moroccan Reed Warbler; Iberian Chiffchaff; Atlas Pied Flycatcher; African Blue Tit; Fulvous Babbler; Brown-necked Raven; Crimson-winged Finch; House Bunting.

### III. 2015 Species Updates

Whilst there is a wealth of information on many species in Morocco, some does tend towards being slightly general or out of date. This seeks to bring readers up to date with the latest information, including longer sections on Andalusian Hemipode and White-rumped Swift as well as site information on Moroccan Reed Warbler and the latest on Marsh Owl and Double-spurred Francolin.

#### White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*

A species readily encountered in North Moroccan wetlands, especially Oued Loukkos Marshes (35.152650, -6.097295) and the northern end of Lac de Sidi Boughaba (34.252610, -6.666935) where 15-20 birds were present during an evening visit, including at least 2 females with small broods. This population seems to be of great regional if not national importance.

#### Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*

A coastal wetland species of both North and South Morocco, encountered during my visit at the northern end of Lac de Sidi Boughaba (34.252610, -6.666935) where all birders have recently met with success for this species.

#### Double-spurred Francolin *Pternistis bicalcaratus*

This is a very difficult species. Calling peaks in March but falls away by May when females are established on nests. The well-known population at Forêt de Sidi Bettache comprises around 25 birds, according to the Royal Guards, and has recently been supplemented by the release of birds for conservation, and possibly hunting purposes. At present the best option at this traditional site is offered by the track running south from the white building off the R403 (33.711820, -6.929380). This offers a large wealth of marginal habitat in which to flush birds at dawn, and also excellent views over large areas of forest for calling birds in trees. Do *not* waste time with the traditional Gosney 'car park site'. I heard 2-4 birds on 2 dawn visits but, on both occasions, was unable to see the species. One method is to locate a 'guardian' at Forêt de Sidi Bettache. In the amusingly entitled 'We need to talk about Frank' article on Gwent Birding, the author outlines how forest guardians can show birders the francolins, but also raises the issue of their being released for hunting purposes and contained within fenced-off areas. In my case, I actively tried to find guardians for the francolins but, unusually, only found Royal Palace Guards who were not of any use at all. With the dual prospect of failing to see birds that are probably released each year, I would personally avoid this site completely and focus instead on the Ben Slimane forest track, off the P3331 (33.633198, -7.098862), where Josh Jones sighted 3 birds in 2012.

### **Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita***

In 2013, at the Tamri colony, the largest in the world, 60 pairs fledged 71 young, whilst three sub-colonies in Sous Massa numbered 55 pairs, which fledged 77 young. These four colonies form the only wild populations of the species remaining in the world. By May, especially, there are a large number of adult birds that should be viewable either at the Oued Tamri (30.711689, -9.854711) – where I saw 17 birds – or along the N1 coast road to the south, where I saw 7 birds, in 3 groups, in flight. There is no need to visit any nesting colony in order to obtain excellent views of this species.

### **Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora***

866 pairs of Eleonora's Falcon nest on the Essouira archipelago islands, primarily the Isle de Mogador, directly offshore of Essouira. As a result this really is an unmissable species here from May to October. I found several places to be excellent for observing this species on the mainland, particularly, in the evening, the P2201 bridge over the Oued Ksob (31.465750, -9.759948), where in excess of 30 birds showed superbly well passing to roost on Mogador at 20:00. Essouira Harbour (31.502503, -9.763489) also gave excellent views of birds hunting swifts from 20:30. In the morning, the seafront of Diabet (31.479468, -9.766308) gave excellent views of 20-30 birds as they headed inland at 09:30.

### **Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata***

Compared to Spain, the Red-knobbed Coot has a stronger population in Morocco. It can be encountered in small numbers at the northern causeway of Lac de Sidi Boughaba (34.252445, -6.666602) and sites like Oued Loukkos (35.074126, -5.992491) but a very large population can be found at the Dayet Aoua, Atlas (33.651431, -5.037528) where superb views of large numbers of breeding pairs are guaranteed.

### **Andalucian Hemipode *Turnix sylvaticus***

This ultimate enigma of the Western Palearctic has rightly taken on a mythical status in the minds of many birders from the early days of opening a field guide. For years the status of the species was shrouded in mystery. Since 2011, however, a definitive paper makes for essential reading on the Hemipode's current status. The species is well established as a breeding bird in Morocco, and the Exposito paper provides enterprising birders with all the clues needed to find the species today. Hemipodes nest in traditional coastal farmland between Cap Bedouzza and El-Jadida. They have, like many species, adapted well to a shift from native vegetation to heterogeneous strip-farming methods. As a result, this population was undiscovered for decades, probably as the result of scientists searching only in the pristine palmetto formerly associated with this species. The persistence of this species is an exciting testament to the benefits of traditional farming methods in Morocco and the extent of such cultivations also bodes well for the Hemipode's future in the Western Palearctic.

A growing number of determined ornithologists have encountered Andalucian Hemipode at farmland sites between El-Jadida and Oualidia. That said, this bird remains vulnerable to attritional disturbance, such as continued flushing at the same field. Therefore those who do see the species, often after months of preparation, make the sensible decision not to disclose exact sites. I will take the same approach here, for two reasons. Firstly, continued flushing of birds at the same site could be detrimental, so it's best birders find their own. Secondly, adventure has all but disappeared from much of the overseas birding scene. So it seems right that such a mythical species still has to be sought, and to provide great adventure along the way (see report below). That said, I am keen that people connect with this species, ideally raising its profile with local farmers as they do: accentuating its importance, rarity, and its difference from Common Quail with which most farmers confuse it. Farming is the key to this species' future, and we can all play a role in helping it survive – by searching for it in a responsible manner.

- First read 'History, Status & Distribution of Andalucian Buttonquail in the WP' by Carlos Gutierrez Exposito et al 2011 – viewable and downloadable online. This is the definitive paper on the species' current distribution.
- During the winter months, the population is believed to winter inland of Oualidia, in the relict areas of natural dwarf palmetto known as the Oued Rharg (central GPS reference for the region is 32.676502, -8.906932). Birds are not believed to breed here and are probably extremely difficult to locate, because they rarely call outside of the breeding season. Focus instead on mid April onwards.
- Females call from March to August. Though birds can call through the day, all the farmers I met north of Oualidia confirmed that birds call largely after sunrise, between 7am and 10am during May, but rarely during cold, foggy or windy conditions. Evenings and warm nights can be excellent. In my mind, the call perfectly resembles the blowing of a low note on a mouth organ.
- Birds have a nuanced use of the strip-farming systems along the Atlantic Coast, feeding or calling in cereals, maize, carrot, pumpkin, lucerne, tomato and potato. They also make extensive use of fallows. Speaking with local farmers, the presence of certain crops also dictates the presence of birds at different times of year. At Oualed Ghanem, my hosts confirmed that the birds only call at their farm from August, when their pumpkin crops mature. At Sidi El Abed, farmers confirmed birds to be present in cereal fields by May. At a confidential site 20km inland, the farmer confirmed that the birds here nest exclusively in lucerne from May. This is why there is no *one* site for Hemipodes. Birders must prepare themselves to visit a range of different farms and crops to succeed because sites and fields rotate from month to month.
- Liaison with farmers is not only useful and time-saving but has real conservation value. Most of the farmers I met spoke only Arabic; I was exceptionally fortunate in being invited to stay with a young fisherman, Kharim, who spoke English and French. He acted as my translator and guide for the next two days. All farmers I met were familiar with the sound of this species, but all believed it to be the *same* species as Quail. They acknowledged that the bird has 'two voices'. Make sure to first show them an image of the bird and then impersonate or play them the call. Farmers will then be able to point you towards areas to search, or listen, for a bird. If a farmer is cutting a field and young boys are catching birds, walking off in disgust will achieve little, but pointing out differences between any hemipodes and quail (which are common at all hemipode sites) could be vital. For those less fortunate than I was, the best intermediary between birders and farmers is probably one Khalid-El-Marjani, whose large pink farm is based south of Sidi El Abed (33.038546, -8.692272). Khalid is well known, speaks excellent French, and can provide insight and accommodation.
- Hemipodes are seen, quite simply, by walking fields. The most ethical way to do this without undue disturbance is to work closely with farmers, show great respect and friendliness, maybe some small gifts of food and water, and focus on lucerne, potato and pumpkin where furrows can be walked without any trampling risk. Avoid entering cereal crops as disturbance here is far greater and could negatively impact relations with farmers. Once located, birds flush only at short range, around 2m or less, compared to up to 5-10m for Quail. Birds rarely flush twice. Without wanting to patronise anyone with a view to identification, I was struck by a few features, and the absence of others. The 'demarcation' between pale and dark covers on the wing is *practically* invisible on flying birds in the strong African sunlight. What is striking is the departure sound - a distinctive rattle – followed by the impression of a tiny, weak, round-winged Quail, fluttering for around 10m before settling. When settling, the 'upright' posture and flutter of wings is also noticeable. Quail, by contrast, depart on powerful falcon-like wings, lifting silently and flying further, often 30-80m.

After spending an entire day staying with a farming family around Oualed Ghanem, and also visiting Sidi El Abed and other farms where locals had recently heard birds, it became apparent that this species can be exceptionally difficult to see even where present. Ironically, it was my failure to hear or see the birds between Oualidia and El-Jadida that led me to another site, 20km inland, where a farmer was able to show me 2 Andalusian Hemipodes in Lucerne. Even better, this site turned out to be entirely 'new' in terms of the Hemipode's known distribution and I have since reported it to Carlos Gutierrez. The farmers at this site described, in great detail, the Hemipode's call and nesting cycle. Their claims that it was common here rung true, and offer further hope that this bird is greatly under-recorded in rural Doukkala farmland. Overall, searching for Hemipodes can be a great adventure that I'd highly recommend – and with time and effort, they are possible to see.

### **Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*

This species is readily encountered in the Merzouga Desert on 4x4 trips. During our visit several families were seen with young. For those avoiding 4x4 excursions they can be easily seen in suitable habitat in the Meknes-Tafilalt region between Erfoud and Merzouga.

### **Spotted Sandgrouse** *Pterocles senegallus*

One of the trip highlights was superb views of three adults with three dependent chicks in the Merzouga Desert, whilst another bird was seen flying over the N13 south of Rissani (31.265750, -4.158084). It was considered by guides to be a good breeding year for this species.

### **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** *Bubo ascalaphus*

This striking desert species is usually located with some degree of luck and persistence on the long line of cliffs west of Rissani (31.278794, -4.355229). We were fortunate to quickly locate an adult roosting in a traditional cavity here. Henry May, who visited a week earlier, reports that the pair had fledged three young. This is an annual site for this species.

### **African Marsh Owl** *Asio capensis*

This species has become exceptionally rare in Morocco and faces extinction in the region in the near future. There are 3 sites retaining birds. There remains a single pair north of the causeway at Lac de Sidi Boughaba (34.252610, -6.666935) but in 2010 and 2015 I failed to see the species before nightfall, whilst Henry May, in 2015, saw just a silhouette of a bird at dusk. This is also an unsettling site in a generally friendly country, with cars cruising slowly around on full beam lights, pulling up silently beside you. For these reasons I would avoid Lac de Sidi Boughaba. A second site is the Oued Loukkos Marshes (35.074126, -5.992491) where 1-2 pairs still bred at least until 2013.

The prime site is still the lagoon of Merja Zerga. In 2015, local guardians said that due to farming encroachments, the areas of suitable dry marsh for the owls had been greatly reduced and they were aware of just 2 breeding pairs. There is absolutely no way I would have found these myself in this vast area. The trick is to ensure you time any visits for the evening and use the official 'guardian', who can be contacted via the campsite at Moulay Bousellham. This way you keep the locals involved with the owls (i.e. they are worth more alive than dead) but avoid the inevitable offers of flushing, because birds can be watched naturally hunting from 5.30pm onwards. Although recent reports have advocated bypassing the guardians, I am not so convinced. They are one of few people who know where the birds nest and liaise closely with farmers to keep fragments of habitat intact. If the owls cease to be useful to local guides as a source of income, the species will surely vanish as agriculture takes their last tracts of habitat. By using the local guardian for 300 Dirhams (£20), I gained superb views of 2 pairs of birds hunting at dusk over the marshes at 34.806260, -6.282571, accessed via tracks N of Douar Mghayet on the P4214. Young were audible in the marsh but it seems this is the last stronghold now for this rapidly vanishing and extraordinarily beautiful owl.

### **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

This classic Saharan speciality is best searched for in localised areas of dry desert riverbed with sand, stony soils and tamarisks. Prime sites are the dry wadis north of the Auberge Tresor near Rissani (31.296870, -4.195089) and the wadi around Kasbah Said (31.319925, -4.102192). In addition, the swimming pool at the Auberge Kasbah Derkaoua (31.290395, -4.092182) often attracts hawking birds breeding in the surrounding desert. I chose instead, with limited time, to use the services of Gayuin Bird Tours, as people often fail to locate birds at these sites and can inadvertently flush females off nests, leading to the overheating of eggs. Gayuin are exceptionally good (see tour guides) and drove me to the Douar Derkaoua Wadi (31.291623, -4.102024) where a local Berber shepherd had set up watch on a roosting male close to his farm. We obtained superb views of an off-duty male Nightjar, in flight and then roosting in the shadow of a tamarisk.

### **White-rumped Swift** *Apus caffer*

This extremely enigmatic species breeds in small numbers in Spain, Portugal and Morocco and appears to have a rather asymmetrical and poorly understood distribution in the Western Palearctic. Predominantly a cave nester, it is almost always associated with nesting Little Swifts and also Red-rumped Swallows. Sites to see this species in Spain are well documented around Castillo de Monfrague (Extremadura) and Cerro Gordo & Bolonia (Andalucia), but the Moroccan situation in the Atlas Mountains has been shrouded in some mystery in recent decades. In reality, it has probably changed little since the 1960s and, with understanding of the two key sites – the Ourika and Asni Valleys – Morocco is probably one of the best places to see this species in the Western Palearctic. Birds are present in the Atlas Mountains from early May.

- The key to seeing birds in the **Asni Valley**, in the High Atlas, is to understand weather conditions and where the nesting colony is. Birds appear in different parts of the valley at different times of day, exiting from a colony high in the mountains before dispersal. 9-11am, and 6-7.30pm, are prime.
- In 1969, K.A.Chapman first documented a population of around 30 White-rumped Swifts using a cave above the grotto of Sidi Chamharouch, a 3-hour hike from Imlil (31.098840, -7.914172). It seemed probable to me that this colony remained extant and still 'fed' the Asni Valley. At 10am on 19 May, I observed at least 6 White-rumped Swift, closely flying with Red-rumped Swallows, as they flew from the direction of Sidi Chamharouch downstream along the montane river south of Aroumd (31.121312, -7.921562), affording superb views. In my view, intercepting the passage of birds close to the colony as they leave is the best recipe for success. Aroumd is arguably one of the very best sites in the whole region to see this species.
- K.A.Chapman also described the swifts' movements in the heat of the day, drifting high above the Toubkal Massif. I'd strongly recommend avoiding the heat of the day to search. Instead, use the 9-11am window to find birds as they move down the Asni Valley. The closer to the colony the better, but if you prefer not to reach Aroumd, search above the radio masts at Imlil (scan from 31.140495, -7.921424) and further down, near Asni, on the river by Tamsrat (31.224464, -7.970662). *Always* stop when you see Red-rumped Swallows – the swifts follow in their wake. Search again from 6pm, when, again, the swifts appear with red-rumped swallows over Imlil itself. I saw 3 birds over the radio masts here at 5:30pm on 18 May.

- The **Ourika Valley** is another good site for swifts but in my view, they are harder here and more enigmatic. Essentially, success comes of driving the valley between the Kasbah Bab Ourika (31.358051, -7.764540) and the bridge south of here (31.341364, -7.754203) between 5pm and 7pm, looking closely for gatherings of red-rumped swallows and little swifts. Henry May was successful at 6pm at the bridge, locating a bird with little swifts. Gayuin were successful, a week later, just south of Bab Ourika, where birds flew with red-rumped swallows. As always, weather plays a role – stormy, sunny weather seems to bring birds down.
- A 2006 trip report by John J Borg tantalisingly documents 6 pairs nesting in the ‘Hotel Ourika’. This is, as far as myself and Henry Cook – on 2 separate visits – determined, *not* the Kasbah Bab Ourika. This would seem to be an excellent way of pursuing the swifts without driving all the way to Imlil if the exact location could be confirmed. Certainly the swifts nesting in the Ourika Valley emanate from a breeding colony here, probably just the one given their dispersive abilities, as do those in the Imlil Valley. Overall, between these 2 valleys, birders should have no problem seeing this species in good weather. For me, a riverside stop at Aroumd provides one of the best combinations of a spectacular bird and breath-taking scenery anywhere.

### **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus*

This species becomes relatively common in the palm groves of desert valleys. I noted it on this occasion coming into Rissani on the N13 (31.291999, -4.225260) but would recommend anyone to focus on the plantations around the dry river beds north of Erfoud (31.477244, -4.21669) north to Errachidia on the N13.

### **Levaillant’s Woodpecker** *Picus vaillantii*

It’s worth noting that this near-endemic, usually encountered at sites like Dayet Aoua (33.651431, -5.037528) and Ben Smin Forest (33.489828, -5.147657) is also easy to see in the High Atlas Valleys. I had 1-2 territories around Hotel Dar Tighoula in Imlil (31.137401, -7.913084) and the species seemed common in the olive groves of the Ourika Valley (general 31.358051, -7.764540).

### **Greater Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes*

This species becomes quite apparent in the true desert habitat and was readily encountered around the Merzouga and Erfoud Deserts during my 4x4 excursion. It would not be difficult to encounter in suitable habitat along roads from Rissani towards the Kasbah Said or the road from Rissani south to Merzouga. Bar-tailed Lark was likewise present in good numbers across true desert here.

### **Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti*

This does not seem to be a sand desert species in Morocco, rather becoming commoner in the Ouarzazate region characterised by stone desert with bushes. I readily found 3 pairs without searching for the species along the P1505 Amerzgame Road (general 31.026138, -7.222970) but would imagine it to be common throughout this elevated ‘red’ desert habitat.

### **Dupont’s Lark** *Chersophilus duponti*

The recent success of many people at the Ermita Track, in Spain, and Zaida Plains, in Morocco, can sometimes obscure the truth that this can be a fiendishly hard bird to see. There are two different experiences of this species: one that, at dawn, sits up eventually on tussocks. The other, a bird that is simply a sound, which drifts away eerily as you approach. Mine was the second - and I only saw one in flight at the Zaida Tracks at 6:30am. There is a well-established territory that has shifted little from 2012 to 2015, and this is located 200m E of the N13 at 32.793902, -4.932983. A second is at 32.792333, -4.937083 and this, or another, was also heard during my visit at 32.792107, -4.939723. It is best to use the car as a hide and drive the tracks slowly from 5:30am or an hour before sunrise. Birds respond to playback but an approach on foot should only be undertaken if necessary.

### **Moroccan Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus sp.*

The Moroccan population of Reed Warblers breeding along the African coast has been the subject of much recent scrutiny. Amezian et al (2010) documented a partly sedentary population of an undescribed taxon of Reed Warblers in the Smir Marshes, northern Morocco, which sits between European and African Reed Warblers and could belong to either, or be an entirely new species. These birds, with a strikingly different song, rich in excitable high notes, and a noticeable grey nape patch, were observed in the coastal stretch between Oualidia and El-Jadida. They can be found at a number of sites where reeds are used by local farmers as windbreaks. I saw 2 birds, both vocal, in reeds on farmland south of Oualed Ghanem (32.826035, -8.911140) where they showed briefly as the wind abated early morning.

### **Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus*

This is a rare breeder in northern Morocco but the population does seem to extend south, if only just, to the Foret de Sidi-Bettache. Henry Cook heard a bird singing at the traditional ‘Gosney’ car park (33.709725, -6.925908) a week before my arrival. I located a pair near a probable nest site – a typically high stand of tangled pampas and bushes – along the ‘francolin’ track at 33.705386, -6.931045.

### **Atlas Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula speculigera*

This is a common breeding species of deciduous woodland in the Atlas Mountains in summer. The arrival date for this species is the only key to success – on average, birds do *not* arrive before 28-30 April, but as a certainty, the end of the first week in May. Two prime sites in the Ilfrane region are the Ben Smin Forest (33.489828, -5.147657), home to at least 6 pairs in 2015, and Dayet Aoua. The latter site has fewer pairs, but these nest along the road itself and can generally be seen far lower to the ground, affording superb views. I was privileged to watch a nesting pair visiting the old hole of a Levaillant’s Woodpecker in a dead tree north of the slipway at 33.656078, -5.044473. However, this is a common species, and, to illustrate this, a further 2 were heard singing on the boundary of Ilfrane itself, at 33.538497, -5.101649.

### **Fulvous Babbler** *Turdoides fulva*

Together with Egyptian Nightjar, these were my 2 main targets in the Sahara and I hired Gayuin (see tour guides) to find me what can be an exceptionally tricky species. This proved worthwhile as, at the same site as the Egyptian Nightjar, my Berber guide soon located me a pair of these birds keeping an ultra-low profile under palms, in 40 degrees heat, at the Douar Derkaoua Wadi (31.291623, -4.102024). Ironically, the following day, my drive from Rissani towards Zagora took me through a series of prime wadis for this species, and I gained superb views of a party of 6 birds from a bridge over a dry river on the N12, just S of the small village of Msissi (31.212913, -4.831335).

## African Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys alienus*

Now split as a species from the Eurasian Crimson-winged Finch, this montane species can only be found in the Aures Massif of Algeria and the High Atlas in Morocco, where it is, inevitably, encountered around the ski resort of Oukaimden. During my visit I was unlucky with the species, and the combination of distracting fossil sellers, fog and an enormous thunderstorm resulted in a brief view of a pair, perched on the second set of ski lifts (31.193283, -7.856013). Generally success in summer is encountered by gaining even more height in the valley, continuing by car, then foot, along the degrading valley track (31.188011, -7.845461) until birds are found. Locals also say that birds frequently come down to drink around the stream beside the wooded garden (31.194399, -7.853723) in the morning, which seems the best time for this species.

## IV. Time Planning

Time-planning in Morocco is especially vital given the long distances between sites, something I certainly noticed all the more after the incredibly cosy birding of Israel where most key sites are clustered in a few key regions. Most of the trip was well-timed except I routinely underestimated driving time in mountains, arriving too late at most hotels, leaving me fatigued and often stressed after intense night drives. Missing a flight, ironically, allowed more time to focus on remaining species by adding three extra days to the trip.

Date	Site	Target First Seen / Notable Species
<b>17 May 2015 (Sunday)</b> <i>Night Oualed-Ghanem (Atlantic Coast)</i>	Atlantic Coast: Safi to Oualidia (09:00-10:30)	House Bunting, Common Bulbul, Bee-eater, Zitting Cisticola
	Atlantic Coast: Oualed Ghanem (11:00-15:00)	Collared Pratincole, White Stork, saltpan waders, farmland passerines, Laughing Dove
	Atlantic Coast: Sidi El Abed (16:00-17:30) Atlantic Coast: Oualed Ghanem (17:30-20:30)	
<b>18 May 2015 (Monday)</b> <i>Night Hotel Darna, Rabat (Atlantic Coast)</i>	Atlantic Coast: Oualed Ghanem (06:00-09:00)	<b>Moroccan Reed Warbler</b> , Collared Pratincole, saltpan species, farmland passerines
	Atlantic Coast: Confidential Site (10:00-12:00)	<b>Andalucian Hemipode</b> , Quail, Collared Pratincole, Calandra Lark, Lillith's Owl
	Atlantic Coast: Oualidia to Kenitra (14:30 – 19:30)	
	Atlantic Coast: Lac de Sidi Boughaba (19:45-21:00)	White-headed Duck, Marbled Duck, Ferruginous Duck, Crested Coot, Great Reed Warbler
<b>19 May 2015 (Tuesday)</b> <i>Night Ksar Timnay, Zaida (Middle-Atlas)</i>	Zaer Forest: Sidi Bettache (06:00-09:30)	<b>Double-spurred Francolin (H)</b> , Short-toed Eagle, Western Bonelli's Warbler, African Blue Tit
	Middle Atlas: Dayet Aoua (13:00-14:00)	<b>Atlas Pied Flycatcher</b> , Golden Oriole, Roller, Crested Coot, vast colony of Black-necked Grebe
	Middle Atlas: Ilfrane to Zaida (14:00-17:30)	Lesser Kestrel, White Stork
	Middle Atlas: Zaida Plains (18:30-20:30)	Bar-tailed Lark, Short-toed Lark
<b>20 May 2015 (Wednesday)</b> <i>Night Merzouga (Sahara)</i>	Middle Atlas: Zaida Plains (06:00-07:30)	<b>Dupont's Lark</b>
	Middle Atlas to Merzouga, Sahara (07:30-12:45)	Lesser Kestrel, White Stork
	Sahara: Merzouga Deserts (13:00-17:00)	<b>Egyptian Nightjar</b> , <b>Fulvous Babbler</b> , Cream-coloured Courser, Spotted Sandgrouse, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Temminck's Lark, Bar-tailed Lark, Hoopoe Lark, White-crowned Wheatear, Rufous Bush-chat, Spectacled Warbler
	Sahara: Rissani Cliffs (17:00-18:30)	Pharaoh Eagle-owl, Brown-necked Raven
<b>21 May 2015 (Thursday)</b> <i>Night Demnat (Marrakech)</i>	Sahara: Merzouga to Rissani (08:30-09:30)	Spotted Sandgrouse, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, White-crowned Wheatear, Brown-necked Raven
	Draa: N12 Rissani to Ouarzazate (09:30-16:30)	Fulvous Babbler, Rock Sparrow, Saharan Olivaceous Warbler, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
	Ouarzazate: N10 Amerzgane Road (17:00-18:00)	<b>Maghreb Wheatear</b> , Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Desert Lark, Desert Wheatear, Melodious Warbler, Rock Sparrow, Trumpeter Finch
	Ouarzazate to Imlil, Marrakech (18:30 – 23:00)	Red-necked Nightjar, Moussier's Redstart, Rufous Bush-chat, Black Wheatear, Rock Bunting



<b>22 May 2015 (Friday)</b> <i>Night Hotel Darna, Rabat (Atlantic Coast)</i>	High Atlas: Ourika Valley (10:00-12:00)	Western Olivaceous Warbler, Booted Eagle, Red-rumped Swallow, African Chaffinch
	High Atlas: Imlil, Asni Valley (13:00-15:00)	Lammergeier, Long-legged Buzzard, Moussier's Redstart, Alpine Chough
	High Atlas: Oukaimden (16:00 – 18:00)	<b>African Crimson-winged Finch</b> , Seebohm's Wheatear, Woodlark, Rock Sparrow, Alpine Chough
	High Atlas to Rabat (18:00 – 23:30)	
<b>23 May 2015 (Saturday)</b> <i>Night Dar Tighoula, Imlil (High Atlas)</i>	Zaer Forest: Sidi Bettache (06:00-09:30)	<b>Iberian Chiffchaff</b> , Stone-curlew, Western Orphean Warbler, Black-eared Wheatear, Balearic Woodchat Shrike
	Atlantic Coast: Merja Zerga (11:00 – 17:30)	<b>Marsh Owl</b> , Montagu's Harrier, farmland species
	Atlantic Coast to High Atlas (17:30 – 23:00)	
<b>24 May 2015 (Sunday)</b> <i>Night Dar Tighoula, Imlil (High Atlas)</i>	High Atlas: Imlil, Asni Valley (10:00-16:00)	<b>White-rumped Swift</b> , Levaillant's Woodpecker
	High Atlas: Central Asni Valley (16:45)	Little Swift
	High Atlas: Ourika Valley (17:30 – 19:30)	Alpine Swift, Eleonora's Falcon, Levaillant's Woodpecker
<b>25 May 2015 (Monday)</b> <i>Night Hotel Hendrix, Essaouira (A. Coast)</i>	High Atlas: Aroumd, Asni Valley (10:00-11:30)	<b>White-rumped Swift</b> , Black Wheatear
	High Atlas: Imlil to Oukaimden (12:00-15:00)	Lanner Falcon, Long-legged Buzzard, Black Wheatear
	High Atlas to Essaouira (15:00-20:00)	Little Bustard
	Atlantic Coast: Essaouira (20:00-21:00)	<b>Eleonora's Falcon</b> spectacle, Audouin's Gull
<b>26 May 2015 (Tuesday)</b> <i>Flight Marrakech to Bristol</i>	Atlantic Coast: Essaouira (09:00-10:00)	Eleonora's Falcon
	Atlantic Coast: Tamri (11:30- 13:30)	Bald Ibis, Pallid Swift, Audouin's Gull
	Tamri to Marrakech (13:30 – 17:30)	

## V. Transport, Navigation & Policing

I flew from Bristol Airport to Marrakech Menara International with return flights, with no hold baggage, for £187. Car hire was booked in advance with Budget at Marrakech. Credit cards are necessary for reservations here, and I chose to pay around £70 to waive the enormous £800 deposit that can be withdrawn from your card in case of damage, which, in Morocco, is quite likely, especially to tyres.

For navigation, I used the TomTom 750 and, as in 2010, downloaded their excellent Morocco map software for an additional £50. I then navigated to precise pre-planned GPS points across the country. The unit only failed when it encountered new road systems or, in one case, took me to the wrong Imlil and made for a very stressful drive; a reminder never to trust in-built mapping. Using the TomTom in conjunction with the Michelin 1:250,000 Map was useful. I also printed off satellite views of all key locations from Google Maps. Finally, I again used the excellent "Maps.Me" App and downloaded offline maps for Morocco, to which I added the KML file from Google with all of my sites and hotels. I was therefore able to use my phone to check locations and routes whilst on the road.

Driving in Morocco is an intense and often chaotic experience. City driving requires total focus with rapidly changing or vanishing lanes, horses and carts, and bicycles everywhere – niceties like indicating and lane discipline rarely exist. After a day or so, you become accustomed to driving with a mixture of caution and aggression and things normalise. Motorways function relatively normally, with sensible speed limits of up to 120 kmph and toll sections; these result in very little congestion except on the edges of large cities. Night driving is far more stressful; for three successive nights I was flashed by every car I passed and yet, when stopping, my lights appeared to be working fine. Sat navs tend to greatly underestimate the tortuous montane roads of the Atlas and many of these underestimates led to late and fatigued arrivals at hotels. Road quality on motorways and in most larger towns is excellent. The worst roads are rarely the sand tracks or even mud roads in the High Atlas, but those tarmac roads that have fallen into disrepair, such as that circuiting Merja Zerga. Expect the worst and you'll be fine. Petrol costs are reasonable and stations abundant but these can be very sparse in the mountains so tank up, especially before the High Atlas.

The presence of road policing cannot be overstated in this country. *Anywhere* with a 60 kilometre speed limit, especially on the outskirts of towns, is extremely likely to have two policemen operating speed cameras but also stopping people randomly. The Atlantic Coast and tourist areas of Ifrane and the Sahara are particular haunts of police checkpoints. In my view, almost any 60 kilometre limit is best obeyed. You will often be flashed by cars ahead of arriving at these. Police checkpoints have two signs – *slow* and *stop*. Always obey these minutely. I twice bypassed a stop sign by a few feet and the police attempted to fine me. In spite of this, I would strongly advise feigning *total* ignorance and speak only in English. The moment you engage in French, even if you speak the language, you will be fair game for fines. Generally, in spite of this, the police seem to welcome English tourists and generally appear a little more lenient than towards those in their own country.

## VI. Accommodation & Food

Accommodation was booked largely in advance, via the excellent Booking.com, following a pre-planned itinerary. As this changed, I phoned ahead to make changes and was usually assured the same rate, in country, as found via the website. This led to accommodation as cheap as £5 / night at Imlil (High Atlas) and as expensive as £28 for Atlantic Coast hotels in Safi and Rabat. Given the intense itinerary I did not consider camping on my own or trying to find accommodation on site.

Compared to Israel, finding restaurants and cafes serving a wide range of excellent food was very easy. The Moroccan culture of always serving more food than you can reasonably eat is a wonderful thing after a long hot day in the desert. The overall quality of tagines, fresh juices, fruit, coffee and breakfast omelettes and fresh bread was superb across the country. You will struggle to find alcohol away from the larger hotels and it is invariably expensive. Best to commit to mint-tea and coffee.

## VII. Culture

Of all my trips this was the most intense in terms of the sheer diversity of human experience during my 10 days. Almost *anything* can happen to a solitary traveller in Morocco, but most often these experiences are extraordinarily memorable, friendly and often downright strange. This is a country with an deep-seated tradition of hospitality that exists, most strongly, in rural communities along the Atlantic Coast and, especially, among the Berber people. Of the numerous cultural highlights during my trip, the best, or most surreal, included:

- Being invited to spend a day and night on a farm near Qualidia with my host Kharim, a fisherman who I'd met just minutes earlier. It was not only through Kharim's conversations with farmers that I finally saw the Andalusian Hemipode, but we spent a day exploring his traditional farm, teeming with pratincoles, stilts and arable passerines, and lunched with his family. In the evening, we went cast-fishing in the Atlantic Ocean for dorado, or golden fish, which we took home across the salt pans to cook in a tagine.
- A brief stand-off with the unbelievably snobbish French owner of the Kasbah Bab Ourika, in the High Atlas, who insisted that his hotel was exclusively booked out for a 'sacred' wedding. At this point, the bride arrived, absolutely pissed, ordered him to serve me tea, and assured me it was absolutely fine for me to wander round the wedding in my khakis - looking for white-rumped swifts.
- An amazing drive through the Sahara with Brahim, one of the Gayuin guides. Brahim was excellent except he had a real obsession with chasing the small chicks of Cream-coloured Coursers to prove how fast they could run, so I had to grab the steering wheel on a few occasions. He also ate and drank nothing until 5 in the evening, when we arrived at an outhouse in the very heart of the desert. Here, we were greeted by his friend, the Egyptian Nightjar 'guardian', who brought out a bucket of yak's milk – his meal of the day.

## VIII. Guardians & Guides

There are various species in Morocco that can be extremely difficult without guides or local knowledge. Many of these depend on how much time you have in a particular area. It is perfectly possible, for example, to locate Egyptian Nightjar in the dry riverbeds north of the Auberge Tresor at Rissani, but guides can often guarantee certain species and there is also an ethical dimension to using them, bolstering the 'value' of local birds and ecotourism in the country as a whole.

I would very highly recommend Gayuin Bird Tours, who have come to be *the* Sahara tour guiding specialists. Their website can be viewed at [www.gayuין.com](http://www.gayuין.com) but I would also read their glowing reviews on Trip Advisor. Their guide Brahim is exceptionally good, familiar with every nuance of the desert. I contracted Gayuin for ½ birding to guarantee Egyptian Nightjar and Fulvous Babbler, both difficult species, and saw a wealth of other superb species including most of the Merzouga desert specialities in just a few hours (see diary). Gayuin can of course be very useful in providing the latest on finding other rare birds around Morocco, and they also offer whole-country tours with high success rates. They are friendly and courteous and negotiated me an excellent hotel deal at Merzouga. Gayuin are best contacted well in advance of arrival in the country and I cannot recommend them highly enough. For other guardians, please see the Species Accounts.

## IX. Daily Accounts

### 17<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Sunday)

I awoke at the Riad de Cheval Blanch in Safi, having driven over four hours at night from Marrakech Menara the previous evening. Having various admin to do, including repairing my sat-nav, I spent a few hours here, where the accommodation provided singing House Bunting, Common Bulbul and Yellow-legged Gull. I then drove north towards Qualidia. In sandy habitat north of Safi on the R301 (32.430001, -9.237150) I noted a pair of European Bee-eater, Zitting Cisticola, Spotless Starling and White Stork.

Driving north through Qualidia, I made my first stop at a farm south of the small coastal village of Oulad Ghanem (32.823594, -8.910457). Almost immediately, I was very fortunate to encounter Khalid, a local fisherman who lived at the small farmstead here. We spoke in French and English about Hemipodes, and I soon learned that Khalid was familiar with the sound of the species. In typical Moroccan fashion, I was invited to wander around his farm. The tiny strip fields here teemed with birds – an amazing testament to the beneficial power of traditional agriculture. Quail and Zitting Cisticola were common, as were Crested Lark, Turtle Dove, Spanish Sparrow, Corn Bunting and broods of Iberian Yellow Wagtail. The salt pans behind the farm held fishing Little Terns, Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers, Black-winged Stilts, Turnstone and Common Sandpiper. The tilled fields were alive with Collared Pratincoles, perhaps as many as 20 nesting pairs. As we walked, Khalid explained to me that he had not heard Hemipodes at his farm since 2014, when they often moved in to sing in pumpkin fields from August.

Khalid kindly invited me for lunch at the farm, which led to a siesta following an enormously hearty meal. In exchange, his elderly father asked me to change a light-bulb and I played hide and seek with Khalid's little sister and pretended to be a lion. Afterwards, with no hemipodes to be found on site, we drove north to the cereal fields and fallows south of Sidi El-Abed (33.042512, -8.690191). In the heat of the day, we did not hear any Hemipodes but noted Quail, Laughing Dove and Sardinian Warbler. We also met a farmer who was familiar with the species. He offered to drive us to a site inland, tomorrow at 9am. Khalid fortunately took the man's number and we continued south. Back at Khalid's farm, we spent a very memorable evening crossing the salt pans to fish in the Atlantic Ocean. Khalid was able to cast a hook 200 metres into the sea, and that evening we cooked fresh dorado with potatoes and vegetables from the farm. It was great to be back in Morocco.

### 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Monday)

I awoke well before 6am. The cockerels outside didn't know the rules, crowing well before dawn, so we were already filled with bread and mint tea before first light. At sunrise, a small wind-break of reeds (32.826035, -8.911140) provided excellent views of Moroccan Reed Warbler. To me, the very distinctive grey nape and song make this a good candidate for African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus* but the matter is still subject to complex debate. By 7:30am, Khalid and myself headed south to a complex of fallows, cereals and lucerne fields where Khalid had heard hemipodes earlier in the year (32.804485, -8.947898). Here we again failed to find the species. Fortunately, at the last minute, we remembered the farmer we had met at Sidi El Abed and drove quickly there.

After a coffee, the farmer flagged us down and hopped in. Given that the coastal strip between Qualidia and El-Jadida is, presently, the only confirmed range of Andalucian Hemipode in Morocco, I was surprised to find that we were embarking on a long journey inland. The farmer however remained confident, and further translated conversations suggested that both quail and hemipode were common at his farm. An hour later, we arrived 20km inland in rural Doukkala-Abda. The farmland here comprised a typical small-scale mosaic of cereals, fallows, tilled fields and lucerne. It was this latter crop that our guide began searching. The care with which he looked for nesting birds was admirable and we followed in the furrows of the crop to avoid disturbance. Suddenly a loud rattle preceded the appearance of a tiny Andalucian Hemipode as it fluttered up on rounded wings, crossed a cereal field for 10 metres, then settled with its characteristic upright 'stand'. It took several minutes to realise what had taken place.

Over the next two hours, we slowly searched further areas of the farmland. The fields were alive with Collared Pratincoles, Iberian Yellow Wagtails, Crested Larks, Corn Buntings and Turtle Doves as well as a pair of Calandra Lark. As we moved, we flushed no fewer than three Quail, which immediately banished any doubts of mistaken identity as they got up silently and sped away on powerful, pointed wings with long glides. As Kharim and I moved along the margin between cereals and lucerne, a second Andalucian Hemipode whirred right past me at point blank range and settled into the cereals. Again the bird had come from lucerne and wasn't nesting, though males doubtless were nearby. We met with other local farmers during our stay, and all were familiar with the species – particularly its call and habit of laying around 4 eggs, rather than the 12-18 eggs laid by Common Quail. At one point, four men around me all starting 'mooing' at the same time – a truly surreal sight. They also confirmed that the females were more silent now that males were nesting. I explained to them the rarity of the species, and gave them a few pointers, like the rounded wings and breast markings, to distinguish them from Quail. The farmers undertook to release any hemipodes caught at the end of the season, when the boys of the farm often catch Quail for the pot – a perfectly sustainable activity.

Had I had a few more days, it would have been wonderful to traverse the vast tracts of farm here and see how many more hemipodes could be found. But the discovery of an entirely new site for the species was incredibly exciting, and I will report this to Carlos Gutierrez. I drove north extremely happy, arriving at the causeway, at the north of Lac de Sidi Boughaba (34.252610, -6.666935), by 7:30pm. Here, superb views were gained of over 15 White-headed Ducks, including females with broods of 1-2 young, as well as 2 pairs of Marbled Ducks, Red-crested Pochard, Northern Shoveler and a female Ferruginous Duck with a brood of 7 crossing the road. By dusk, Great Reed Warblers were calling but, as in 2010, I was unable to locate the single Marsh Owl here and found the atmosphere unsettling, with cars driving by slowly on full beam, pulling up beside. I therefore drove to Rabat to spend the night at the Hotel Darna.

### 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Tuesday)

By 6:00am I had reached the Foret de Sidi-Bettache to search for Double-spurred Francolin. It was cool, overcast and slightly windy, depressing activity. In fact, I heard just one Double-spurred Francolin in prime habitat south of the 'car park', east of the R403 (33.698291, -6.912645). No birds were seen, but Western Bonelli's Warbler was heard here. With no possible 'edge' on finding francolins, I took a few hours rest at the car park (33.709725, -6.925908) and awoke to a Short-toed Eagle flying over with nest material as well as excellent views of African Blue Tit.

I drove straight towards the Middle Atlas, noting Lesser Kestrel and Black Kite. Arriving at the Dayet Aoua, I stopped beside large deciduous trees lining the lake on the concrete causeway (33.656078, -5.044473). Here a superb pair of Atlas Flycatcher were visiting a nest-hole – formerly drilled out by Levaillant's Woodpecker - with the male feeding the female and showing the salient large white patch on the forehead. The lake teemed with birds – hundreds of Crested Coots, mostly building and incubating, and vast rafts of Black-necked Grebes, mostly with small chicks. Serins and Golden Orioles were vocal here and a female oriole flew across the road. Further along, the wooded savannah margins (33.647712, -5.028498) yielded superb views of a male Roller egesting a pellet of invertebrate shells.

Heading south, I passed through Ilfrane, hearing a further two Atlas Flycatcher singing on the eastern outskirts in tall poplar forest (33.538497, -5.101649). Over the town were some White Stork and Lesser Kestrels. By 5.30pm I reached the Ksar Timnay Hotel, south of Zaida, and, after a most welcome tagine and coffee, headed north to the Zaida tracks to attempt the notorious Dupont's Lark. The cool blowing wind killed activity, and I noted just a large number of Short-toed Larks and smaller number of Lesser Short-toed Larks around the 2015 Dupont's territory here (32.793902, -4.932983), 200m E of the N13.



## 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Wednesday)

I returned to the Zaida Tracks before 6am. Immediately I located singing Dupont's Lark at the territory where most people have seen this species in 2014-15 (32.793902, -4.932983). However I had to leave the car, as the birds were singing on a slight rise. As I moved, the dreaded Dupont syndrome kicked in, with the song drifting eerily away from me. I concealed myself and used playback, but even this resulted in just a fleeting flight view of a bird. A cool, strong wind still blew and my feeling was that this was best left for a future trip to Spain. I did locate a second bird, singing on the other side of the road (32.792107, -4.939723) before driving south towards Merzouga by 7.15am.

By 12:45 I finally arrived at a petrol station north of Merzouga where I met with Brahim of Gayuin Tours. Having pushed myself to the limit over the last few days, it was exciting for someone else to talk the wheel and head off into their own back yard – the sands of the Sahara. We set off towards the Auberge Café du Sud in a massive 4x4, across a blend of basalt sand and orange dunes. Our first stop yielded a smart male Temminck's Lark, fanning its wings in the heat, a Bar-tailed Lark and the surreal sight of a Spectacled Warbler bouncing around in a tiny wadi as if blown by the wind. A superb pair of Cream-coloured Courser and 2 displaying Hoopoe Lark made for a very enjoyable ride.

After lunch in the Auberge du Sud, we emerged into the blowing heat and headed off across the dunes. Brahim was quite a guide, an enigmatic Berber in flowing white robes with the kind of spatial memory of the landscape I could only dream of. We headed towards the Algerian border where our 'guardian' was waiting for us. Before we reached our destination, we came across another female Cream-coloured Course with an adorable chick in tow, which Brahim attempted to chase in his 4x4 before I closed him down.

We arrived then at the Douar Derkaoua Wadi (31.291623, -4.102024). By this time the heat of the day was probably over 40 Celcius. A man was waiting for us at a small house and farm in the middle of the desert. Brahim, who appeared not to eat or drink, was then given an enormous vat of goat's milk, perhaps 3 litres, which he drank in one. We headed through the house, where a nest of White-crowned Black Wheatear, with chicks, was wedged in some rafters. Then, in the palm oasis behind, we entered the typical dry-riverbed habitat of the Egyptian Nightjar. The 'watcher' took us to a small stretch of sand and pointed. I literally couldn't see the bird until a stunning male Egyptian Nightjar sailed up at point blank range, then settled 20 feet away under a palm. An amazing encounter with a true desert icon.

We proceeded to search the oasis here. Even in this harsh environment a Rufous Bush-chat was carrying food for its young. In a blowing Saharan gale, birds were keeping low, but a Cuckoo, Spotted Flycatcher and Turtle Dove made for a typically surreal sight as they migrated through the palms, perhaps even headed for England. A Plain Tiger Butterfly was on the wing. Finally, Brahim closed in on his target and, at long last, I enjoyed excellent views of a pair of Fulvous Babblers as they hopped around unobtrusively below the palms.

As we headed back to Merzouga, the superb run of Saharan birding continued. One stop yielded two pairs of Cream-coloured Courser, one again with chicks. The second yielded the most intricately-marked female Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, behaving as if a nest was nearby. This must be one of the most ornate birds in our region. The intimate encounters continued with a group of three male Spotted Sandgrouse, at point-blank range, escorting three large chicks across the barren dark sands. Having seen more with Brahim in three hours than I had previously done in a week in 2010, I was extremely happy, but we headed north to Rissani.

A massive dust storm was getting up, so we drove along the cliff faces famous for their Pharaoh Eagle Owls. In one small nook along the cliff, I picked up the female roosting in a small cave (31.276095, -4.363205); my second encounter with the species at this site. By this stage, a dramatic wall of sand was marching towards us and scouring our faces, so Brahim drove me south to Merzouga, where he found me a hotel – the Expedition Sahara – to spend the night. By far my best day's birding in the Moroccan Sahara.

## 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Thursday)

Having been low on sleep, I left Merzouga after a typically filling breakfast, coffee and mint tea, then began the long drive towards the Atlas Mountains. On the N13 south of Rissani (31.263674, -4.154023), a Spotted Sandgrouse crossed the road. In typical cultivated palm habitat as I entered the village, I noted 2 Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters (31.291754, -4.224899). Brown-necked Raven became typically common just west of Rissani (31.287852, -4.304739).

The long drive towards Zagora took me through a strange landscape of wooded semi-desert, dry wadis and low mountains. The possibility of Tawny Eagle breeding in such areas seemed high, even now, given the vast extent of continuous argana woodland. I was not so lucky, but typical birds of this road included Southern Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike and Maghreb Lark.

Passing through the small town of M'ssici, on the R12 (31.212664, -4.831427), I stopped at a small and promising looking wadi. Immediately I located a family group of six Fulvous Babblers glowing in the sunshine. It seemed to be that perhaps the best areas in Morocco for this species might not be the true desert but these dry river bed oases. In addition to two Turtle Doves and two Spotted Flycatchers, a colony of 8-10 Rock Sparrows were nesting by the bridge here – another extremely enigmatic bird I had almost never seen before.

After miles of sparse desert, a small oasis of farmland sprang up just west of Ksar Achbarou on the N12 (31.146653, -5.090323). Here I found an alert Hoopoe near its nest tree, a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Nightingales, Turtle Doves, a singing Great Reed Warbler and a smart tail-flicking Saharan Olivaceous Warbler in full song.

The long drive continued, and birding between Zagora and Ouarzazate was quiet, with just one Lesser Kestrel, nesting White Storks and Black Kite. 3km west of Ouarzazate I noted a European Bee-eater. I then headed towards the best-known area for Maghreb Wheatear Here the P1505 leads due south from the N9 into an area of productive semi-desert. A line of trees beyond the dry riverside (31.039024, -7.214465) held another colony of around 12 Rock Sparrow.

I then made four stops along this road, trying to find the Maghreb Wheatears my colleague Henry Cook had located a week or so before. In a steep valley (31.032589, -7.220337), 20 juvenile Trumpeter Finches, all with comical peeved expressions, were trumpeting away – a smart pair of Desert Lark and a White-crowned Black Wheatear also showed well. Further south, scouring of two rocky gulleys, the prime sites for Maghreb Wheatear (31.024682, -7.224011), yielded a pair of Desert Wheatear with one fledged young. Then, east of the road, I picked up the very distinctive female Maghreb Wheatear (31.023862, -7.224370) – she was carrying food.

A final stop at a lush riverbed further south again (31.016048, -7.229848) flushed a male wheatear from the road that was almost certainly a second Maghreb Wheatear. I also encountered a Thekla Lark, a migrant Melodious Warbler, a Spotted Flycatcher, a pair of Desert Lark and 4-5 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse bubbled overhead in the evening light.

What followed was a stressful drive. My sat-nav, programmed to take me to Imlil, in the High Atlas, instead took me on a tortuous drive towards another Imlil near Marrakech. Freewheeling with virtually no petrol down dirt tracks in the Atlas, at night, is not remotely fun. A few birds were noted as I tried to make the trip before the tank ran out. 2km south of the Barrage Moulay Youssuf, on the P2016 (31.632920, -7.289399), the scrubby hillsides yielded a Rufous Bush Robin and a singing male Moussier's Redstart. A little further towards Imlil, on the P3108, a surprise bird of the trip was a Red-necked Nightjar that hawked over the car (31.641359, -7.220500). The habitat looks extremely suitable for the species and this may well be an extension of the species' known range in Morocco. After midnight, I hit the seediest hotel in the country and couldn't want to get out of this unattractive town the following day.

## **21<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Friday)**

I drove out of Imlil as quickly as possible and headed towards the High Atlas. I drove towards Ourika, noting Corn Bunting, Bee-eater and Crested Larks en-route. The landscape changed yet again, becoming lush and verdant with extensive olive groves and cultivations in the shadow of the Atlas Mountains. Arriving in Ourika, I began my search for White-rumped Swift, one of Morocco's most enigmatic birds. I drove the track towards the Kasbah Bab Ourika (31.364843, -7.772325), noting 1-2 Western Olivaceous Warbler, Nightingale and many Common Bulbul. The Kasbah itself, which I checked for nesting White-rumped Swift, was relatively quiet, but I did have a tame African Chaffinch and a pale-phase adult Booted Eagle over (31.358473, -7.763248). My invitation into this prestigious hilltop hotel was as surreal as any on my trip. On arrival, the snotty French proprietor claimed that an 'exclusive wedding' was taking place. At this point, a very drunk but friendly lady at the wedding in question shouted down the owner, invited me in, and ordered tea on my behalf.

I headed towards the Ourika Bridge (31.341375, -7.754208) where, following my advice, Henry Cook had seen White-rumped Swift the previous week. Just north of here I found two pairs of Red-rumped Swallow and a Sardinian Warbler. The bridge was quiet but held a single Grey Wagtail. I then drove towards the village of Imlil – the correct one. I arrived in cloud that would become typical of my time here. Watching from the P2005 below the village (31.140519, -7.921561), I carefully watched a party of Red-rumped Swallow, as these are often the heralds and carriers for white-rumped swifts. I noted only Long-legged Buzzard. I then drove right through Imlil and climbed towards the village of Tamatert (31.139331, -7.908006). Again I saw no swifts but did enjoy 6 Alpine Chough, a Short-toed Eagle, an alarming Moussier's Redstart and the spectacular Dark Giant Grayling butterfly flying in good numbers.

Taking lunch in Imlil Town (31.136603, -7.917461) provided, in Moroccan terms, one of the rarest birds of the trip in the form of a Lammergeier. Always an epic species and invariably in an epic landscape. I then drove towards the summit of Oukaimden, a journey that took me back via Ourika. I arrived at the grotty, run-down ski site in the rain, swiftly chased by some incredibly annoying and persistent fossil hunters who dogged me for hours. Thin, altitudinal air, their sitting close to my car, and the massive storm breaking overhead didn't make for ideal birding. The high slopes here were productive (31.196071, -7.857932). I noted 2 Woodlark, 20 Alpine Chough, 2 nesting pairs of Black Redstart, 4 Rock Sparrows and 2 singing male Seebohm's Wheatear afforded great views. Not happy with leaving sight of my car, or driving on the breaking road, I didn't reach the best sites for the endemic specialities.

Instead, I paid the fossil hunter, not for fossils, but to show me African Crimson-winged Finch. I hopped aboard his motorbike and we sped downhill back to the ski lifts. Here, as the storm broke, I gained brief views of a pair atop wires on the first lift (31.199069, -7.860484) – probably my least inspiring encounter of the trip. I couldn't wait to leave Oukaimden so began my next long journey – north to Rabat. Again it took far longer than expected – and now low petrol was replaced with a new jeopardy. Though I couldn't see anything wrong, I was flashed by every car for 3 hours as I drove, never knowing what was wrong – and it wasn't the lights. I arrived back at Rabat just before midnight, snatching 5 hours sleep before returning towards the Zaer Forest.

## **22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015 (Saturday)**

I returned for a second time, before dawn, towards the Forêt de Sidi Bettache, noting my only Barbary Partridge of the trip around 1km before the site (33.792915, -6.929175). This time I really tackled the site, working the track running NW from the R403 (33.710401, -6.930570). It was a glorious morning but after a single haunting call by the francolin, what was becoming a nemesis bird failed to show. That said, the pristine marginal forests here teemed with birds. Turtle Doves and Nightingales were extremely common and I also noted a pair of alarming Western Orphean Warbler, 2 pale-phase male Western Black-eared Wheatears, 2 Lesser Whitethroat, 1 Stone-curlew right beside the car, 3 Sardinian Warbler, 3 Crested Lark, a Balearic Woodchat Shrike and 2 Night Heron. I also found a pair of nesting Iberian Chiffchaff in typical tall pampas bushes (33.705299, -6.930917).

Determined that I would not go a second trip without seeing either francolins or marsh owls, and aware that the Marsh Owl sadly has just a few years left as a species in Morocco, I headed north towards the lagoon of Merja Zerga, noting just Marsh Harrier, Black Kite and Cattle Egrets en-route. What followed next was a real winging-it effort that would ultimately pay off. I arrived at the well-known camp-site – formally known as the Camping Flamants Loisirs (34.876238, -6.280787). After puzzling the owner, he eventually understood that I was after the 'ibu', and called his colleague at Izaguirre (34.876274, -6.290460).

I drove over and picked up a man in a large Mexican hat. He in turn explained that we needed 'Le Guardian'. The guardian, it turned out, was at a wedding. So we drove off to collect him. Merja Zerga is a vast area that was once home to many pairs of Marsh Owl. Numbers have in recent years enormously reduced as agriculture encroaches into the dry junctus marshes the owls call home – finding them without guides looked impossible. We bumped along the P4214 south along the lagoon and collected the Guardian, still wearing a suit, just south of Douar Mghayetan. Half an hour later, we arrived at one of the last sites in the Western Palearctic to hold breeding Marsh Owls (34.806260, -6.282571). After failing in 2010 and earlier on this trip around Sidi Boughaba, it was an enormous privilege to watch 2 adult owls hunting over the marsh, with their dark Pharaoh eyes and furry faces - perhaps one of the last seasons this species will breed in the country. There was also a small colony of Montagu's Harriers here, Blue-headed Wagtails, Zitting Cisticolas, Corn Buntings and White Storks. A rather manic mood has taken me on this trip, and spurred by my success here I drove south again – back to Imlil, in the High Atlas.

### **23<sup>rd</sup> May 2015 (Monday)**

I woke up at the Hotel Dar Tighoula, in Imlil (31.137373, -7.912652), to a pretty spectacular view. Immediately outside I found Garden Warbler, Great-spotted Woodpecker and a territorial male Levaillant's Woodpecker was an excellent bonus. Having returned to the Atlas with a few extra days, I now had the leisure to really pursue White-rumped Swifts. Most of the morning I spent resting, catching up on emails and reading through historical accounts of the swifts around Imlil.

At 4pm, I returned to the car park, below the radio masts (31.140519, -7.921561). Immediately a passage of 6 Red-rumped Swallow moved through. It felt like a very long shot but I waited – and almost immediately, to my amazement, 3 White-rumped Swifts appeared and joined them. They then headed off rapidly down the valley. Buoyed up, I decided to make further attempts to see the species, so I headed back down the valley. At Ouasoft (31.181996, -7.943641), another party of 4 Red-rumped Swallow passed over, this time joined by 3 Little Swift.

Back in the Ourika Valley, by 6pm, a storm had just subsided and the whole valley was lit up. East of Kasbah Ourika (31.355561, -7.759110), 2 Red-rumped Swallows showed and a Levaillant's Woodpecker flew across the car between olive groves. In the vicinity of the Ourika Bridge (31.342382, -7.753857), another Levaillant's Woodpecker was seen in flight – obviously the species is common here – and I also recorded Western Olivaceous Warbler and Short-toed Eagle. I then returned towards the Kasbah. Here in the evening light, birds were brought low by the storm, and I got stunning views of 3 Alpine Swift close overhead – the first time I've ever had more than a brief glimpse of this powerful swift. There were House and Crag Martins here too – and at the Mosque nearby (31.356656, -7.762428), two House Bunting and a rather lost Eleonora's Falcon drifted overhead. After a coffee at the Kasbah, I drove home.

### **24<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Tuesday)**

I woke again at the Hotel Dar Tighoula, and after a hello from the local Levaillant's Woodpecker, was clear where I had to go. Having poured at length over Chapman's account from the 1960s, describing the swifts leaving their probable breeding cave above the shrine of Sidi Chamharouch, I set off towards the site. I drove the tortuous road from Imlil up towards Around. I stopped here at the base of the spectacular valley, being told by local walkers that to reach the cave near the shrine would take at least 3 hours. It was 11am and instead I just waited, having some vague inkling that the swifts should funnel down the valley. I was standing here (31.121312, -7.921562) when 2 Red-rumped Swallows arrive. Hopeful, I waited just a few minutes and there, in the glorious alpine sunshine, were at least 6 White-rumped Swifts close overhead, their navy blue colouration glistening in the sun. Discovering that the colony around Sidi Chamharouch was still active, nearly 50 years after its discovery in 1968, was really quite special – an example of how a little pioneering can go a long way. There were 3 Crag Martin and 6 Alpine Chough here, and on the way back to Imlil, a Black Wheatear.

I drove then again to Oukaimden in an attempt to gain better views of African Crimson-winged Finch and to find Atlas Horned Lark. The Imlil Valley held Red-rumped Swallow and the road between Ourika and Oukaimden held a Rock Bunting. As I approached Oukaimden on the P2030, a small stop provided productive (31.231079, -7.819364) when I found a Lanner Falcon mobbing a pair of Long-legged Buzzard. There was also a Sparrowhawk here and a Black Wheatear. Luck soon ran out however – a blanket of fog covered Oukaimden, too impenetrable to offer any meaningful chance of seeing anything. I headed for the coast, stopping near Ourika for a Cirl Bunting.

En-route towards the Atlantic Coast once again, my trip had covered every conceivable biome from Saharan orange desert to oases, deciduous forests, olive groves, alpine mountains, farmland and coastal lagoons. It seemed fitting to end at the coast. Around 57km E of Essouira, on the R207, near Ouled Mrabet (31.592093, -9.189855), a Little Bustard crossed the road. Together with the Red-necked Nightjar, it was another good encounter of a species rarely noted on Moroccan trips. As with the former, the habitat here – low intensity, vast, arid fields with fallows – looked suitable for the species.

It was a warm, Mediterranean evening as I arrived at the Oued Ksob near Essouira (31.483328, -9.765667). Finally, after years of distant or brief views, I was rewarded with not one but at least 25 Eleonora's Falcon as they flew overhead to roost, out on their island fortress of the Isle de Mogador. Most were pale-phase birds, but a few striking dark ones were in there too. Here too was a Squacco Heron, Yellow-legged Gulls and a single Audouin's Gull. I then drove down to the seafront of Essouira (31.494902, -9.764078), where more birds were hawking for common swifts as the light faded. Completing the cultural journey from Berbers to Bedouins, I stayed at the Hotel Jimi Hendrix, with its extremely odd French hosts.

### **25<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (Wednesday)**

I awoke to another passage of Eleonora's Falcon overhead, and with a little time to spare, decided to reacquaint myself with one of the world's rarest and most prehistoric-looking birds. I drove south towards the Plage Tamri, on the Atlantic Coast. Here, at the estuary where I first encountered them in 2007 (30.708574, -9.859137), I noted several groups of Bald Ibis flying overhead as they commuted between their breeding colony, on cliffs to the north, and feeding sites along the coast. Several Pallid Swift over here and it was time to head back. One final chaotic drive, with an emergency stop in a mountain village for petrol, saw me to Marrakech where, after 10 days of intense overdrive, I flew home – with many memories, and hemipodes, in the bag.

## Species List

For GPS references and further site information, please refer back to main report.

Species	Recorded
<b>Common Shelduck</b> <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	
<b>Mallard</b> <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	
<b>Northern Shoveler</b> <i>Anas clypeata</i>	
<b>Marbled Duck</b> <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	2 pairs at Lac de Sidi Boughaba (Atlantic Coast)
<b>White-headed Duck</b> <i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	20+ birds at Lac de Sidi Boughaba (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Barbary Partridge</b> <i>Alectoris barbara</i>	1 at Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Double-spurred Francolin</b> <i>Francolinus bicalcaratus</i>	1-3 heard only at Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Quail</b> <i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	3-4 heard at Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast) 2-3 heard at Sidi-el-Abed, El Jadida (Atlantic Coast) 3 seen at Confidential Site, El Jadida Region (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Little Grebe</b> <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	
<b>Black-necked Grebe</b> <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	800-1000 in vast colony at Dayet Aoua (Middle Atlas)
<b>Cormorant</b> <i>Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus</i>	
<b>Night Heron</b> <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	2 over Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Squacco Heron</b> <i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	1 at Oued Ksob, Esssouira (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Cattle Egret</b> <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	20+ at Dayet Aoua (Middle Atlas) 10+ at Merja Zerga (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Little Egret</b> <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	
<b>Grey Heron</b> <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
<b>White Stork</b> <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	5+ over Ifrane Town (Middle Atlas) 4-5 Ifrane Town to Zaida (Middle Atlas) 4-5 Zaida to Merzouga (Middle Atlas, Sahara) 2-3 Merzouga to Zagora (Sahara, Draa) Several at Merja Zerga (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Bald Ibis</b> <i>Geronticus eremita</i>	20+ total at Plage Tamri (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Black Kite</b> <i>Milvus migrans</i>	1-2 Zagora to Ouarzazate (Draa) 1+ Merja Zerga (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Lammergeier</b> <i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	1 adult over Imlil (High Atlas)
<b>Short-toed Eagle</b> <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1 carrying nest material, Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat) 1 Imlil to Tamatert (High Atlas) 1 Ourika Valley (High Atlas)
<b>Marsh Harrier</b> <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1 female with food, Moulay Bouselhoum (Atlantic Coast) 2 pairs South Merja Zerga (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Montagu's Harrier</b> <i>Circus pygargus</i>	3 females, 2 males breeding – South Merja Zerga (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Sparrowhawk</b> <i>Accipiter nisus punicus</i>	1 2km below Oukaimeden (High Atlas)
<b>Long-legged Buzzard</b> <i>Buteo rufinus</i>	1 Imlil (High Atlas) Pair, 2km below Oukaimeden (High Atlas)
<b>Booted Eagle</b> <i>Aquila pennata</i>	1 over Ourika Valley (High Atlas)
<b>Lesser Kestrel</b> <i>Falco naumanni</i>	Several over Ifrane Town (Middle Atlas) 1-2 Zagora to Ouarzazate (Draa)
<b>Kestrel</b> <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	

<b>Eleonora's Falcon</b> <i>Falco eleonora</i>	25+ Oued Ksob, Essouira (Atlantic Coast) 10-15 Essouira Harbour (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Lanner Falcon</b> <i>Falco biarmicus</i>	1 2km below Oukaimden (High Atlas)
<b>Moorhen</b> <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	
<b>Red-knobbed Coot</b> <i>Fulica cristata</i>	5+ Lac de Sidi Boughaba (Atlantic Coast) 100s nesting at Dayet Aoua (Middle Atlas)
<b>Andalucian Hemipode</b> <i>Turnix sylvaticus sylvaticus</i>	2 in flight, Confidential Site, El Jadida Region (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Little Bustard</b> <i>Tetrax tetrax</i>	1 Ouled Mrabet, 57km E of Essouira (Marrakech) – <i>notable record</i>
<b>Black-winged Stilt</b> <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Common around Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Stone-curlew</b> <i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>	1 at Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Cream-coloured Courser</b> <i>Cursorius cursor</i>	4 females, 2 with chicks – Merzouga Desert (Sahara)
<b>Collared Pratincole</b> <i>Glareola pratincola</i>	Thriving colony at Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast) Colony, Confidential Site, El-Jadida Region (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Ringed Plover</b> <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	
<b>Kentish Plover</b> <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	2-3 pairs Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Grey Plover</b> <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	
<b>Common Sandpiper</b> <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1 Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Green Sandpiper</b> <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	1 Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Turnstone</b> <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	1 Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Black-headed Gull</b> <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	
<b>Audouin's Gull</b> <i>Larus audouinii</i>	1 Oued Ksob, Essouira (Atlantic Coast) 1+ at Plage Tamri (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Yellow-legged Gull</b> <i>Larus michahellis</i>	
<b>Great Black-backed Gull</b> <i>Larus marinus</i>	1 Ouled Ghanem (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Little Tern</b> <i>Sternula albifrons</i>	4-5 fishing off Ouled Ghanem (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Spotted Sandgrouse</b> <i>Pterocles senegallus</i>	3 males with 3 mature chicks, Merzouga Desert (Sahara) 1 5km S of Rissani (Sahara)
<b>Pin-tailed Sandgrouse</b> <i>Pterocles alonata</i>	Superb views of female, Merzouga Desert (Sahara) 4-5 overhead, Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Feral Pigeon</b> <i>Columba livia</i>	
<b>Woodpigeon</b> <i>Columba palumbus</i>	
<b>Collared Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	
<b>Turtle Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	Common, Oualidia to El Jadida (Atlantic Coast) Common, Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat) 1 Douar Derkaoua Wadi, Merzouga (Sahara) 2 M'ssici Wadi, R12 (Draa) 1 Ksar Achabou Oasis, R12 (Draa)
<b>Laughing Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	1 Sidi-el-Abed, El-Jadida (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Cuckoo</b> <i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1 Douar Derkaoua Wadi, Merzouga (Sahara)
<b>Pharaoh Eagle Owl</b> <i>Bubo ascalphus</i>	1 female at nest hole, Rissani Cliffs (Sahara)
<b>Desert Little Owl</b> <i>Athene noctua saharae</i>	2 birds inland of El-Jadida (Atlantic Coast)
<b>African Marsh Owl</b> <i>Asio capensis</i>	2 territories at South Merja Zerga (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Red-necked Nightjar</b> <i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	1 near Barrage Mansour-Youssuf (Marrakech) – <i>notable record</i>



<b>Egyptian Nightjar</b> <i>Caprimulgus nubicus</i>	Superb male, Douar Derkaoua Wadi, Merzouga (Sahara)
<b>Common Swift</b> <i>Apus apus</i>	
<b>Pallid Swift</b> <i>Apus pallidus</i>	2-3 over Plage Tamri (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Alpine Swift</b> <i>Apus melba</i>	3 over Ourika Valley (High Atlas)
<b>White-rumped Swift</b> <i>Apus caffer</i>	3 over Imlil (High Atlas) 6+ over Aroumd Valley, Imlil (High Atlas)
<b>Little Swift</b> <i>Apus melba</i>	2, Ouaosaf, Imlil Valley (High Atlas)
<b>Blue-cheeked Bee-eater</b> <i>Merops persicus</i>	2, 2km W of Rissani (Sahara) 1 Ksar Achbarou Oasis, R12 (Draa)
<b>Bee-eater</b> <i>Merops apiaster</i>	2+ breeding N of Safi (Atlantic Coast) 1 3km W of Ouarzazate 1+ Imlil to Ourika (Marrakech to Atlas)
<b>Roller</b> <i>Coracias garrulous</i>	Superb views male at Dayet Aoua (Middle Atlas)
<b>Hoopoe</b> <i>Upupa epops</i>	1 near nest, Ksar Achbarou Oasis, R12 (Draa)
<b>Levaillant's Woodpecker</b> <i>Picus vaillantii</i>	1 Imlil Town (High Atlas) 2+ Ourika Valley (High Atlas)
<b>Great-spotted Woodpecker</b> <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1 Imlil Town (High Atlas)
<b>Bar-tailed Lark</b> <i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	1 Merzouga Desert (Sahara)
<b>Desert Lark</b> <i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	2 pairs, Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Hoopoe Lark</b> <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	2 displaying males, Merzouga Desert (Sahara)
<b>Dupont's Lark</b> <i>Chersophilus duponti</i>	2 singing, 1 in flight – Zaida Plains (Middle Atlas)
<b>Calandra Lark</b> <i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Pair at Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast) 2 pairs Confidential Site, El-Jadida Region (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Short-toed Lark</b> <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	10+ Zaida Plains (Middle Atlas)
<b>Lesser Short-toed Lark</b> <i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	5+ Zaida Plains (Middle Atlas)
<b>Crested Lark</b> <i>Galerida cristata</i>	Common, Oualidia to El-Jadida (Atlantic Coast) Seen between Imlil and Ourika (Marrakech to Atlas)
<b>Maghreb Lark</b> <i>Galerida macrorhyncha</i>	Common, Rissani to M'ssici (Sahara to Draa)
<b>Thekla Lark</b> <i>Galerida theklae aguirrei</i>	1 Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Woodlark</b> <i>Lullula arborea</i>	2 Oukaimeden (High Atlas)
<b>Skylark</b> <i>Alauda arvensis</i>	
<b>Temminck's Lark</b> <i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	1 male Merzouga Desert (Sahara)
<b>Sand Martin</b> <i>Riparia riparia</i>	
<b>Crag Martin</b> <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	2-3 Ourika Valley (High Atlas) 2 Aroumd Valley, Imlil (High Atlas)
<b>Swallow</b> <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
<b>House Martin</b> <i>Delichon urbicum</i>	
<b>Red-rumped Swallow</b> <i>Cecropis daurica</i>	2 pairs Ourika Valley (High Atlas) 3-6 Imlil Valley (High Atlas) 3+ Aroumd Valley, Imlil (High Atlas)
<b>Iberian Yellow Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla flava flava</i>	Common, with broods, Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast) Common, Confidential Site, El-Jadida Region (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Grey Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1, Ourika Valley (High Atlas) 1, Imlil (High Atlas)

<b>White Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	
<b>Rufous Bush Chat</b> <i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	1 carrying food, Douar Derkaoua Wadi, Merzouga (Sahara) 1 2km S of Barrage Moulay-Youssef (Marrakech)
<b>Nightingale</b> <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Common, Ksar Achbarou Oasis, R12 (Draa) Common, Ourika Valley (High Atlas) Very common, Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Black Redstart</b> <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	2 pairs Oukaimeden (High Atlas)
<b>Moussier's Redstart</b> <i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	1 2km S of Barrage Moulay-Youssef (Marrakech) 1 male alarming, Imlil to Tamatert (High Atlas)
<b>Seebohm's Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>	2 territorial males, Oukaimeden (High Atlas)
<b>Western Black-eared Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	2 territorial males, Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Desert Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	Pair with mature young, Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Maghreb Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe halophila</i>	1 female carrying food, Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Black Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	1 male alarming, Imlil to Tamatert (High Atlas) 1 male Around Valley, Imlil (High Atlas) 1 km below Oukaimden (High Atlas)
<b>White-crowned Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	Pair, with nest of three young in house – Douar Derkaoua Wadi (Sahara)
<b>Blue Rock Thrush</b> <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	1 male, Imlil to Tamatert (High Atlas)
<b>Blackbird</b> <i>Turdus merula</i>	
<b>Cetti's Warbler</b> <i>Cettia cetti</i>	1+ heard Lac de Sigi Boughaba (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Western Olivaceous Warbler</b> <i>Iduna opaca</i>	3+ singing males, Ourika Valley (High Atlas)
<b>Saharan Olivaceous Warbler</b> <i>Iduna pallida saharae</i>	1 singing male, Ksar Achbarou Oasis, R12 (Draa)
<b>Melodious Warbler</b> <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	1 migrant, Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Moroccan Reed Warbler</b> <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus / baeticus --</i>	2 singing, 1 seen well at Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Great Reed Warbler</b> <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	1 singing, Lac de Sidi Boughaba (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Spectacled Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	1 Merzouga Desert (Sahara)
<b>Sardinian Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	1 male Sidi-el-Abed, El-Jadida (Atlantic Coast) 1+ Ourika Valley (High Atlas) 3 Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Western Orphean Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	Pair alarming at Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Lesser Whitethroat</b> <i>Sylvia curruca</i>	2 at Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Garden Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia borin</i>	2 singing at Imlil Town (High Atlas)
<b>Bonelli's Warbler</b> <i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	1-2 singing at Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Iberian Chiffchaff</b> <i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	Pair at Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Goldcrest</b> <i>Regulus regulus</i>	
<b>Spotted Flycatcher</b> <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	1-2 Douar Derkaoua Wadi, Merzouga (Sahara) 2 M'ssici Wadi, on the R12 (Draa) 1 Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Atlas Pied Flycatcher</b> <i>Ficedula speculigera</i>	Pair at nest-site, Dayet Aoua (Middle Atlas) 1-2 males heard, Ilfrane Town (Middle Atlas)
<b>Fulvous Babbler</b> <i>Turdoides squamiceps</i>	Pair at Douar Derkaoua Wadi, Merzouga (Sahara) Family party of 6 birds at M'ssici Wadi, on the R12 (Draa)
<b>African Blue Tit</b> <i>Parus teneriffae</i>	1 Foret de Sidi Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)
<b>Golden Oriole</b> <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	1 singing, seen in flight at Dayet Aoua (Middle Atlas)
<b>Southern Grey Shrike</b> <i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	3-4 Rissani to M'ssici, R12 (Draa)
<b>Balearic Woodchat Shrike</b> <i>Lanius senator badius</i>	1 Foret de Sidi-Bettache, Zaer (Rabat)

<b>Eurasian Jay</b> <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	
<b>Brown-necked Raven</b> <i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	Locally common, W of Rissani (Sahara)
<b>Northern Raven</b> <i>Corvus corax</i>	1 Ben Smin Forest (Middle Atlas)
<b>Spotless Starling</b> <i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	
<b>House Sparrow</b> <i>Passer domesticus</i>	
<b>Spanish Sparrow</b> <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	10+ Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast)
<b>Rock Sparrow</b> <i>Petronia petronia</i>	Colony of 8-10, M'ssici Wadi, on the R12 (Draa) Colony of 12+ Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate) Flock of 4+, Ouakaimeden (High Atlas)
<b>African Chaffinch</b> <i>Fringila coelebs africana</i>	2+ Dayet Aoua (Middle Atlas) 1 tame male at Ourika Valley (High Atlas)
<b>Greenfinch</b> <i>Carduelis chloris</i>	
<b>Goldfinch</b> <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	
<b>Linnet</b> <i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	
<b>African Crimson-winged Finch</b> <i>Rhodopechys alienus</i>	Pair at Oukaimden (High Atlas)
<b>Trumpeter Finch</b> <i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	20+ in family groups, Amerzgane Road P1505 (Ouarzazate)
<b>Cirl Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	1 Ourika Town (High Atlas)
<b>Rock Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza cia</i>	1 Ourika to Oukaimeden Road (High Atlas)
<b>House Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza sahari</i>	1-2 heard Central Safi (Atlantic Coast) 1-2 Ourika Valley (High Atlas)
<b>Reed Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	
<b>Corn Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza calandra</i>	10+ Ouled Ghanem, Oualidia (Atlantic Coast) 10+ and abandoned nest, Confidential Site, El-Jadida Region (Atlantic Coast) 1+ Imlil Marakech to Ourika (Marrakech to High Atlas) 3+ Merja Zerga (Atlantic Coast)

