

Morocco

[18th-29th March 2014]



rst time that I had been on an organised birding holiday [Oriole Birding]. After a 3hr flight to Agadir from Gatwick I ve Gosney and three other participants – Les Colley, Mike Bailey and Barry Batchelor at the airport in Morocco. We ibus to our first hotel in Agadir by our driver Zaid. After booking in and getting our first new birds in **Moroccan Mag 3 (**)** and **Common Bulbul (**)** at the hotel and from the minibus, we were all keen to get back out and into the fi t for the Oued Souss estuary.

ch 2014

xt to the Souss and were straight into birding from the off, a kettle of 100+ White Storks was our first sighting which e followed a nature trail through the scrub to the estuary, picking up our first scrub birds in 8 Sardinian Warbler, 5 f Woodchat Shrike. Passing over a small bridge we came to a number of pools teeming with birds, as we crept up or out 2 Red-necked Nightjar a bird that is rarely seen in the daylight hours, they flew around us before going down in tart. The pools themselves plus the estuary were full of herons, egrets and waders. 21 species of wader were seen d included 36 Collared Pratincoles, 65 Avocet, 20 Black-winged Stilt, 4 Stone Curlew, 135 Oystercatcher, 6 Ringed Pl tish Plover, 60 Grey Plover, 6 Redshank, 4 Greenshank, 4 Black-tailed Godwit, 7 Bar-tailed Godwit, 20 Curlew, 6 Wh 3 Sanderling, 4 Little Stint, 3 Green Sandpiper and 1 Common Sandpiper. Amongst the host of Yellow Legged and L vere 4 Audouin's Gull, 6 Slender-billed Gull, 3 Mediterranean Gull, 25 Black-headed Gull and surprisingly an immatu vere 60 Sandwich Tern which were being harassed by an Arctic Skua again an unusual species here. Larger birds incl ngo, 9 Grey Heron, 8 Little Egret, 2 Great Egret, 15 Spoonbill as well as 60 Cormorant and we even managed to pick hite-breasted] **Cormorant (**)**. Wildfowl were poorly represented but we did manage to find 4 Mallard, a pair of S prey were only 1 perched Osprey and a Kestrel. Best of the ground birds were 5 Meadow Pipit, 40 White Wagtail, a arbler, a male Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 Tree Pipit, 6 Crested Lark, a male Black-eared Wheatear and a male Northern V ; seen were Common Bulbul, Rock/Feral Dove, Greenfinch, Spotless Starling, Swallow, Sand Martin, House Sparrow Collared Dove and Serin. It was now starting to get dark, so we returned to the minibus and wrapped up from the r necked Nightjar calling, a single male duly obliged. As we were leaving the car park another Red-necked Nightjar wa 5mts away in the headlights of the minibus. We had now seen more Red-necked Nightjars in 4hrs than all the previ ther. We then returned to our hotel [Hotel Tivoli] to celebrate a fantastic afternoons birding with a few beers.

March 2014

Day in Morocco had me up before breakfast and surveying the ample hotel grounds and undergrowth from the balcony. 100+ Pallid Swift over the hotel followed quickly by a small colony of 8 **Little Swift (**)** a few streets away. Other birds included first Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and a pair of **Ultramarine Tit (**)** recently split from Blue Tit and Tenerife Blue Tit. Sardinian Warbler made up the best of the rest. After Breakfast our first stop was at Cap Hir, a headland north of Agadir. Here we saw **Redstart (**)** showing very well indeed, Gannets were offshore but nothing else was passing. Around the lighthouse 1 Black-eared Wheatear, 1 Black-eared Wheatear, 2 Woodchat Shrike, 5 House Bunting, 1 Turtle Dove, 2 Sardinian Warbler, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 Long-legged Buzzard and 2 flyby Little Egret. From here we moved north to the Tamri Estuary, which is starting to get busy with surfers and beach bums, subsequently bird numbers had fallen over the last couple of years. We still managed to see 2 Fan-tailed Warbler, **Desert Grey Shrike** [*ssp. Algeriensis*] (******), 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Audouin's Gull, 2 Little Plover, 1 Kentish Plover, 1 Little Egret and 1 Yellow Wagtail [*ssp. Iberiae*].

We picked up with our target species after 30mins when a party of **17 Bald Ibis (**)** flew overhead and landed further up the road. We got in a minibus and got excellent views as they landed just 30mts from the road.

After lunch for the day we visited the nearby "Paradise Valley" picking up lots of **African Chaffinch (**)**, 1 Blue Rock Thrush, 3 Sardinian Warbler, 3 male Moussier's Redstart, 1 Black Wheatear, 1 Black-eared Wheatear, 2 Woodchat Shrike. As the minibus gears were playing up we were lucky to get back to our hotel for the night [Hotel Tivoli].

March 2014

Day at the hotel produced the same birds as yesterday plus a flyby Barbary Falcon. Today was our trip to the famous "Moussier's Redstart" route we spotted 3 Little Owl, 4 Cream-coloured Courser and 1 Desert Grey Shrike. Our first stop was at the upstream favourite spot of our tour leader, a host of birds and species were seen including lots of Laughing Dove, 10 Bee-eater, 1 Fan-tailed Warbler, Yellow Wagtail [*ssp. Iberiae*], 30 Pallid Swift, 2 Red-rumped Swallow, 1 Little Swift, 148 Glossy Ibis, 1 Kingfisher, 1 Green Sandpiper, 4 Cattle Egret, 3 Sardinian Warbler, 3 Blackcap, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Moussier's Redstart. After about an hour we travelled upstream to the next village bridge, this site was much quieter.

Crowned Tchagra ()**, it only took us a minute to locate and have excellent close views of a male bird perched and other good birds included our first 3 Western Olivaceous Warbler, 1 Sedge Warbler, 5 Bee-eater, 2 Willow Warbler in the nearby field.

In a secret isolated pool further upstream which held a pair of **Marbled Duck (**)** which showed extremely well at this area were 1 Spoonbill, 22 Glossy Ibis, 4 male Moussier's Redstart, 10 Bee-eater, 2 Nightingale, 2 Yellow Wagtail [Sardinian Olivaceous Warbler, 1 male Cirl Bunting, 1 Black Wheatear, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Willow Warbler, 2 Chiffchaff and 4 Sardinian Plain Martin and were running out of sites. Our last site look promising, which was just downstream from the previous one were to be seen, but just as we were leaving a single **Plain Martin (**)** flew over my head and downstruck a lot more hirundines. Quickly we followed and flushed a male Little Bittern and Squacco Heron on the way. When we had stumbled over a breeding colony in the sandbank which held 8 birds. We had fabulous close views of birds and everybody was ecstatic. Other birds here were 2 Black-winged Stilt, 1 Kingfisher, 1 Tree Pipit and a male Stonecress.

After the targets seen we set off for our next destination, which was Taroudant as we started our journey inland towards the coastal targets. We arrived at our hotel 2hrs later [Riad l'Arganier D'or], we had just enough time for an evening walk. Our leader took us to an area of Argan woodland just across the road. This area proved to be very rich in birdlife and it is slowly being eroded away by "progress". 2 Barbary Partridge were seen in flight and briefly on the ground, a Black Kite was perched on an Argan tree 30mts in front of us, a Barbary Falcon came swooping in at a flock of finches and sparrowhawks in front of us. Other species seen were 20 African Chaffinch, 30 Linnet, 83 Bee-eater, 4 Woodchat Shrike, 2 male Black Kite, 1 Tree Pipit, 1 male Moussier's Redstart and 2 Chiffchaff. The light was fading so we returned to our hotel for another great day's birding.

Day 2014

Started with an organised pre breakfast walk, this time around the tracks near the hotel. Again a lot of species were seen including 1 Bee-eater, 1 Nightingale, 15 Red-rumped Swallow, 2 Hoopoe, 5 Woodchat Shrike, 50+ Spanish Sparrow, 10 Laughing Duck, 1 Chiffchaff, 5 Sardinian Warbler, **3 Fulvous Babbler (**)**, 2 Turtle Dove, 5 Short-toed Lark and a male Marsh Harrier. On the first day of travel but a number of good birds were seen from the minibus. Black Kite, 50 Cattle Egret and a Little Egret at Aoulouz. 60+ Bee-eater and Desert Wheatear were between Aoulouz and Taliouine, a toilet stop near Tizi-Ikhsane h.

in the tree above us and 12 Short-toed Lark at a viewpoint near Tizi-n-Bachkoum. We reached our first stop after 2 hours at plateau just outside Ouarzazate, here we had a pair of **Magrheb Wheatear ((*)**) nest prospecting which we watched for hours. These species can be very rare some years and we later heard a number of birding tours had failed to see them but our leader is the foremost authority in this species distribution in Morocco.

Our second stop was our big stop for the day – at the El Mansour Reservoir although the water levels were low and distant we did see a lot of good species. The list included 6 Wood Sandpiper, 3 Green Sandpiper, 1 Stone Curlew, 100+ Black-winged Stilt, 2 Ruddy Shelduck, 5 Yellow Wagtail [*ssp. flavissima, Iberiae*], 10 Short-toed Lark, 20 Trumpeter finch, 2 Isabelline Warbler (Morocco), **3 Maghreb** [long-bill crested] **Lark ((*)**), 1 Desert Wheatear, 1 Northern Wheatear, 1 White-crowned Black Warbler, 1 Spectacled Warbler and 4 species of hirundines and Common Swift. The last hour of daylight was spent travelling along the Dades the Kasbah Tizzarouine, which was an excellent and thoroughly recommended hotel.

March 2014

Our morning walk before breakfast amongst the palm groves below the Kasbah again proved fruitful with sightings of 10 House Martin, 1 Bunting, 1 Cirl Bunting, 3 Sardinian Warbler, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Western Olivaceous Warbler, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 1 Little Egret and 1 Little Egret.

After lunch we visited the mythical Tagdilt Track made famous by our very own tour leader, so who better to show us around to a dead up water hole that was teeming with birds and included 8 Short-toed Lark, 1 male Montagu's Harrier, 4 Desert Wheatear, **10+ Temminck's Lark ((*)**), 12 Cream-coloured Courser and a displaying male Hoopoe Lark. Next stop was the Wheatear Wall and adjacent cultivation fields. Again a lot of desert birds were present including 4 Hoopoe Lark, 1 House Martin, 2 Red-rumped Wheatear, 4 Desert Wheatear, 4 Cream-coloured Courser, a male **Thick-billed Lark ((*)**) and 2 at the "Tagdilt" was at the down dump, for some reason birds like this off putting area, birds present were 2 Desert Wheatear, 1 Bar-tailed Desert Lark [rare here], 3 Cream-coloured Courser and a Long-legged Buzzard.

After lunch at a local Orchard seeing a Nightingale, a female Redstart, 1 Meadow Pipit, 1 Chiffchaff and a White Warbler the day was at the Gorges de Torda, an awe inspiring piece of natural beauty, birds included 13 Cattle Egret, 1 Bone Brant, 20+ Crag Martin, 2 Blue Rock Thrush and 20+ House Bunting. Tonight we all slept soundly at the Kasbah Tizzarouine. Would we be able to see every bird we had targeted?

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walk around the Kasbah grounds saw us find 1 male Black Redstart, 22 Cattle Egret, 1 Alpine Swift and 2 Crag Martin. On our long journey to Merzouga we stopped off again at the dried up watering hole on the Tagdilt Track for another Hoopoe Lark, 2 Red-rumped Wheatear, 2 Desert Wheatear, 8 Temminck's Lark, 3 Lesser Short-toed Lark and 2 Trumpet Finch. About half way near the town of Goulmima, a famous site for the recently split Streak Scrub Warbler. After about 200m the **Scrub Warbler (**)** duly obliged by bouncing and running along the ground between bushes no more than 20m away. The birds included 2 male Spectacled Warbler, 6 Thekla Lark, 5 Desert Wheatear, 6 Fulvous Babbler, 1 Desert Grey Shrike [seen], 1 Hoopoe Lark and a little further on a pair of Brown-necked Raven. A brief rest stop 100kms short of Merzouga at the Kasbah Yasmou produced 1 House Bunting, 1 White-crowned Black Wheatear, 1 Blue Rock Thrush and 1 Brown-necked Raven.

At Merzouga we still had about 2hrs light left, so the leader suggested we stop at one of his favourite sites – Kasbah Yasmou on the sand dunes in the otherwise barren desert. This turned out to be a good idea, one of our first birds as we left the Kasbah was the **African Desert Warbler(**)**, a difficult target species easily found, then within a few minutes a flock of 25 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse 200mts away giving good views in flight. Also seen here were 1 Desert Wheatear, 3 Bar-tailed Desert Lark and 1 Hoopoe Lark. A successful day with all targets seen we retired to our hotel the Riad Nezha for the next three nights.

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A special day and this was ours, this was the 4x4 day in the desert with a specialist guide for the area. We were up at Merzouga by 0600hrs, shooting off into the desert around Erg Chebbi, our first stop was at the tent of a local Bedouin who was breeding in an out building. There were 2 pairs present and showed very well, other birds of note were a pair of White-rumped Sandgrouse, 1 Brown-necked Raven, 2 Hoopoe Lark, 1 passing Marsh Harrier, 2 Desert Grey Shrike, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 Hoopoe Lark. We had breakfast here with a prepared meal from the hotel with a set of table and chairs on top of a sand dune. We went further into the desert eastwards, here we easily found African Desert Warbler, Hoopoe Lark and another male White-rumped Sandgrouse. Now had no idea where in the desert we were but later found that we had done a complete circuit of the "Chebbi". We had us getting fantastic views of a **Pharaoh's Eagle Owl (**)** sitting in a tree and in flight between trees, we just couldn't see it, supporting cast included Hoopoe Lark and Bar-tailed Desert Lark. We were now spotting birds between sites and

3 Bar-tailed Desert Lark and 2 Hoopoe Lark. Our next stop was at the home and orchard of another Bedouin tribesman. It turned out to be a bit of a bird trap amongst his small vegetable patch and orange trees. He took us to a part of the desert just a few meters from a rock under a bush that turned out to be a sitting **Egyptian Nightjar (**)** only 5mts away, cameras were clicked and even I managed a half decent photo. Amongst his fields and orchard birds seen were 3 Fulvous Babbler, 2 very obvious Hoopoe Lark, 6 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 7 Magrheb Lark, 1 Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 Tree Pipit, a pair of both White-crowned Wheatear and another passing Booted Eagle. By now we were to the south of the "Chebbi" in a small wadi, the driver pointed 10mts away to a flock of 4 **Spotted Sandgrouse (**)**, sitting quietly out in the open. Time for another picnic under a tree, while eating we picked out 1 Desert Grey Shrike, 2 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 1 Sardinian Warbler, 1 male Sub-alpine Warbler, a pair of Northern Wheatear and another pair of Desert Sparrow which had come to us within 2mts of us.

With the Chebbi done we still had one species left to get, so the driver took us over the main road and past the dried area of wadi's here we easily caught up with our last species in the form of small groups of **Crowned Sandgrouse (**)**. In the range, amongst them also were another 4 Spotted Sandgrouse, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 3 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 2 Short-toed Lark. On our way back to the hotel we stopped at another small wadi for a toilet break and had another 5 Spotted Sandgrouse and 2 Brown-necked Raven. The only bird we didn't get was Houbara Bustard but that was down to Qatari falconry over the winter.

The day were 2 Red-rumped Swallow swooping in and drinking from the Riads swimming pool. A great way to finish the day.

March 2014

Breakfast walk in the palm groves behind our hotel provided dividends in the first Wryneck of the trip. Other goodies were 1 Hoopoe and 2 Red-rumped Swallow. Today was a much more relaxing day with a few species still to get. From Matruh and Rissani we spotted 2 male Marsh Harrier, a flock of 30 Short-toed Lark flying alongside the minibus for 30 minutes by the side of the road 10 Black-winged Stilt and 2 Ruddy Shelduck. First stop was at a Rissani valley where we had a Redstart Shrike, a very showy and recently split **Saharan [eastern] Olivaceous Warbler (**)**, 4 White Crowned Black Spectacled Warbler, 2 Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 male Marsh Harrier, 1 Green Sandpiper, 1 Booted Eagle, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 1 Crag Martin and 2 Black Kite. In a nearby valley to this one on a rocky outcrop we had Barbary Falcon around its nest.

When we visited the river and found a pair of **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (**)**, 2 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, 12 Little Plover. With all target species again accounted for we stopped off at Kasbah Yasmina to see what passage migrants we had 3 Western Bonelli's Warbler, 6 Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 Willow Warbler and 1 Desert Grey Shrike. With plenty of time at our hotel for another walk around the palm groves with new birds located in 4 Tree Pipit, 3 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, 1 Spotted Thrush, 30 House Martin, 1 female Northern Wheatear and Woodchat Shrike. We even managed time for a dip in the pool of the Red-rumped Swallows waiting to drink.

March 2014

The desert was over and now we had to begin our journey back to greener pastures, today's journey was about 300km from Ouarzazate halfway to Marrakech. We again stopped off at the Rissani valley we visited yesterday and found some new species: 1 Lanner, 1 Desert Lark, 2 Ruddy Shelduck, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 6 Brown Necked Raven and 8 small flocks of Spotted Thrushes flying overhead calling in brilliant morning sunshine. We then began our journey to Ouarzazate seeing lots of birds in the morning of 4 Brown Necked Raven, 2 Northern Wheatear, 7 White Crowned Black Wheatear, 1 Desert Grey Shrike, 8 Bee-eater, 6 House Bunting and 1 Black Kite. We made a stop over half way at a small dam in the Draa valley near El Hartage, Cetti's Warbler and 6 Bee-eater but not much else.

Ouarzazate with 4hrs light left so we made another visit to the El Mansour reservoir, but this time from another point of view being from the town himself. The reservoir shores were still distant but we were able to walk up to the waters' edge where there were a lot more birds on this side of the reservoir. A long list of species included 100+ Short-toed Lark, 1 Ruddy Shelduck, 1 Slow Wagtail [*ssp. Iberiae, flava & flavissima*], a pair of Marsh Harrier, 1 Greater Flamingo, 4 Montagu's Harrier, 25 Egyptian Great Crested Grebe, 1 Lonely Yellow-legged Gull, 1 Osprey, 1 Little Plover 10 Meadow Pipit and best of all a migratory bird waiting for a place to roost for the night.

We found our again splendid accommodation for the night at the Hotel Zitoune just before dark.

ch 2014

day was a little shorter at about 250kms punctured with quite a few stops on the way which made it feel like a short drive. Our hotel before breakfast included 1 White Stork, 1 Hoopoe, 1 Chiffchaff, 1 Sub-alpine Warbler, 29 Short-toed Woodpecker, 1 Cattle Egret. At the edge of town there was a flock of 16 Bee-eater.

was on the mountain road to Marrakech near Agouim 70kms into our journey. Here we had panoramic views of the mountains. The birds included 1 Booted Eagle, 1 Nightingale, 3 Redstart, 30 Bee-eater, 1 Willow Warbler, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 5 African Kingfisher, 1 Hoopoe, 1 Chiffchaff, 1 Cetti's Warbler and to our great surprise a male **Seebohm's Wheatear (**)** recently spotted. We passed over the high pass of Tizi-n-Tainant [2600mts] and stopped at the first Alpine meadow shortly after. 10+ Chough, **7 Atlas [Horned] Lark (**)**, 4 Pallid Swift, 10 Bee-eater, 2 Yellow Wagtail and migrating male Marsh Harrier. Next stop was a small café near Immouzer-des-Glaoua where there were 2 male Moussier's Redstart and a Black Redstart at Taddert where we caught up with a pair of **Levaillant's Woodpecker (**)** along with a supporting cast of Great Spotted Woodpecker, 2 House Bunting, 4 Crossbill, 1 Cirl Bunting, 2 Cuckoo, 1 Goshawk and 1 Firecrest.

ly out of the mountains and we made a stop at some farm fields before going to the Ourika Valley where there were 1 Cattle Egret, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 male Montagu's Harrier, 4 Corn Bunting, 1 Short-toed Lark, 1 Little Owl and 1 Little Egret. Our hotel was just short of our hotel at the Asni 7km post, famous for **Tristram's Warbler (**)** and after 15mins a male and female were spotted by our tour leader. Other species here were 1 Levaillant's Woodpecker, 2 Barbary Partridge, 1 Western Kingbird, 1 Willow Warbler. We arrived at our hotel [Hotel Tatfi L'Atlas] near Ouirgane just as it was going dark, like all our stops the birds were excellent.

ch 2014

our last full day in Morocco but also our day up the Atlas Mountain Range. We had seen all our targets to date but our luck hold?

up well before breakfast and a stroll around the dried up riverbed next to the hotel saw me clocking up another Le 1 Nightingale, 4 Cirl Bunting, 1 Cuckoo, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 Red-rumped Swallow, 1 Great Spotted Woodpecker, 1 Hawfinch.

Today was about 2kms from the hotel at the Asni 9km post where we again had a fine male Tristram's Warbler as well as a Cuckoo and yet another Levillant's Woodpecker. On our 40km journey up the atlas we stopped about half way to a point where we had 2 Levillant's Woodpecker and a Short-toed Treecreeper in a small wood. As we approached the peaks a fine cloud cover and a beautiful clear day greeted us as we arrived at Oukaimeden ski resort. The first birds seen was an **Alpine Chough (*)** within the army barracks supported by 40 Chough. We parked at one of the resorts main car parks and walked up past the lifts into Alpine meadow, very quickly we were onto a fine male Seebohm's Wheatear and about 7 Atlas wheatear an **African Crimson-Winged Finch (*)** appeared to the great delight of all involved, this was our final target on a 100% "got it" list. Other birds in this small meadow below the peaks included 5 Black Redstart, 2 Mistle Thrush and 10 Redstart. When we returned to the bus loop and behold 5 Crimson-winged Finch were sitting on the wall 2mts from our bus, the photo load. Time for lunch and when we left the café an hour later we realized that the weather had taken a turn for the worse and went straight out into a Blizzard. A last look at the car parks before we left proved fruitful, with all the birds of the area now snow covered. These included another 2 Levillant's Woodpecker [in the trees not the car park], 100+ Chough, 10 Atlas Lark and 50 Crimson-winged Finch. Having seen everything possible we decided to call it a day and retreated to Marrakech. We were at about 3000mts and it didn't stop snowing until we got below 1500mts. On the way down we saw more Great Shearwater. We decided that having seen everything we would call it a day and travel the 40kms to Marrakech and to our hotel to warm up.

March 2014

Flight to Gatwick only gave us time to see our final Spotless Starlings, Moroccan Magpies and House Buntings on the way.

We saw 192 species, which was the highest count to date for Oriole Birding Tours and our leader Dave Gosney. I saw all the birds and one participant [Mike] had over 70 lifers. A fantastic trip and I thoroughly recommend it to anyone who has the chance.

re. I think the smaller size of the group [4 + tour leader and driver] really paid dividends giving everyone time to wa
id explore areas away from the beaten track. The standard of the hotels and food were excellent and the scenery b
eratures near the coast were between 24-27C and in the deserts up to 32c. We had 10 days of clear skies, one day
very last day - snow in the mountains and some light rain back down on the plains. As with all foreign countries the
ellers on most of the tourist routes but they were few and far between on most of our days away from the popular
xtremely friendly and helpful, with the pace of life much more relaxing than our own rat race.

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