

## Moroccan Bird Trip Report

### Spanish Nature – November 2006

#### Trip Report Leader / Author – Peter Jones

##### Day One – 31.10.06

After clearing the necessary customs at Tangier ferry terminal, we set-off for our first night's destination at Rabat. The journey, by toll road, took us close to the various marsh and estuarine habitats of the northern Atlantic coast. After a short while we left the toll road and headed north towards Larache. Our first visit was to head along the estuary towards Ras Rmel Beach, where we soon saw Slender-billed and Audouin's Gulls amongst many Lesser Blacked-backed and Yellow-legged Herring Gulls. Other birds seen along this route included Kentish, Grey, Little-ringed and Ringed Plovers, Redshank, Pochard, Cormorant, Black-headed Gull and smaller birds such as Stonechat, Crested Lark, White Wagtail and one Swallow. Back-tracking towards Larache, we then took the road for the Oued Loukkas and its associated marshes and small lakes. It wasn't long before we saw Green Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Squacco Heron, Little and Cattle Egrets, Grey Heron, White Stork, a flock of at least 300 Glossy Ibis, Red-knobbed Coot, Coot, Mallard, Ruff, Fan-tailed Warbler and star of this site was a good show by Moustached Warbler! Yellow Wagtail was also present together with Cetti's Warblers. We headed back towards our route westwards. Greater Flamingo, Common, Gull-billed and Sandwich Terns were seen on route, with at least 5 Marsh Harriers quartering the marsh areas. Soon we saw our first (2) Long-legged Buzzards. We again left the toll road for Merja Zerga, the area was very quiet with no new species until we saw 2 Black-shouldered Kites. Because of our schedule we had to head again for Rabat, with a stop to see the lagoon at Lac de Sidi Bourhaba. Here we soon had good shows of the African form of Magpie, but the wildfowl were the most impressive, 40+ Shoveler, 134+ Marbled Teal, 4 Pintail with 300+ Coot, 7 Red-knobbed Coot, 31 Little Grebe, Purple Heron and 400+ Cattle Egrets. We waited until dusk in hope of a show from Marsh Owl, but to no avail, we did however, see a late Hobby and counted over 30 Marsh Harrier coming to roost, plus a good male Hen Harrier and a dark form Booted Eagle. Swallow and House martin flew over, before we gave-up on the Marsh Owl and headed for Rabat!

##### Day Two – 01.11.06

We awoke early for our journey to Marrakech. Near the hotel were several Spotless Starling and near to the city's outskirts we saw a small party of Jackdaw! Almost as soon as the exit road turned into motorway, there were 2 Double-spurred Francolin on the roadside verge, a very lucky sighting we believed? The day was to start as a strange one for the unexpected, soon after our lucky sighting of the Double-spurred Francolin, we spotted a solitary Carrion Crow, surely a vagrant to this country, but perhaps stranger for the fact of being on its own? The area around Casablanca was well stocked with Cattle Egrets and Crested Larks, but apart from a Long-legged Buzzard, not much else was showing. We made good progress on the toll road as far as Settat, and then made slower time as we came to the old N9. Some kilometres before Mechra Benabbou, we took a turn right towards the reservoir at Imefoute and this journey proved a well-chosen route. Soon we had seen Northern Wheatears, Southern Grey Shrikes, Calandra, Crested and Short-toed Larks, Tawny and Meadow Pipit, with a single Marsh Harrier and several Little Owls. The road then sloped down towards the dam and here we had exceptional shows from Moussier's Redstart, Common Bulbul, Hybrid Spanish Sparrows, Blue Rock Thrush and again Little Owl. We drove across the Dam and scanned the lake, but only a few Grey Heron, Little and Cattle Egrets were present with a handful of Coot. On our return we stopped at the Dam to observe 4 Kestrel making a noisy overpass and then we had our day's prime time, spotting 2 small swifts circling with Crag Martins, we were able to easily identify them as Plain Swift, but as the birds came lower and started to skim the water's surface, at least 5 birds among the Crag Martins were smaller and white on the underside and not showing the darker wing tips of the Crag Martins, what a great find, 5 Rock Martins!! We had to depart as gentlemen from the adjoining Electricity Generating works became very agitated by our attempts to photograph birds within sight of the works!! A great shame we felt obliged to move on, but what a memorable site! The rest of our journey to Marrakech passed uneventfully until close to the city limits, where a number of Common Swift, House Martins, Swallows and White Stork greeted our arrival.

##### Day Three – 02.11.06

House Buntings, awaiting offerings from the table, accompanied breakfast in Marrakech. Again a few Common Swift and several House Martins were seen overhead. White Storks were seen aplenty as we circled the city centre and took the road towards Ouarzazate. We stopped shortly after Touama and found Barbary Partridge, Cirl and Rock Bunting, Moussier's Redstart, Common Bulbul, Chaffinch, Stonechat, Robin, Coal, Blue and Great Tit, 6 Kestrels and Sparrowhawk. At our coffee stop in Toufliat, we added Blue Rock Thrush, Hawfinch, Nuthatch, Woodpigeon, Wren, Jay, Sardinian Warbler and Levillant's Woodpecker. The route from Marrakech to

Ouarzazate is scenically stunning and varied. Before reaching Taddert we had seen Black Wheatear and Raven. Also along the way we spotted a number of Long-legged Buzzards and on reaching the famous Tizi-n-Tichka pass, we also had Northern Wheatear, Shore Lark and a group of Rock Sparrows. As we descended the High Atlas towards Ouarzazate we saw Desert Lark, House Buntings and White-crowned Wheatear. Near to the city we saw many Rock Doves and a few Stock Doves.

#### **Day Four – 03.11.06**

A breakfast welcome was given by a Peregrine Falcon and shortly after, a Kestrel. House Bunting and Common Bulbul were amongst the visitors to our hotel. Stocking-up on supplies of Red Wine, we headed to our next (dry) destination in Boumalne de Dades. Stopping, as one has to, at Mansour reservoir (I have always been disappointed in this area, but I am ever the optimist) we saw very little and so yet again I was disappointed! Onwards and taking a few well known tracks later, we had added Tree Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Fulvous Chatterer, Desert Lark, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Moussier's, Black and Common Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, White-crowned Wheatear, Crag Martin, Swallow, White Wagtail and Rock Dove to our daily list. After lunch and several Desert and Short-toed Larks later, we arrived at our night's accommodation in Boumalne de Dades.

#### **Day Five – 04.11.06**

After an early breakfast, we made our way to the infamous Tagdilt Track and surrounding areas. We were keen for an early start as the week before 2 Houbara Bustards had been seen in the area. Despite traversing the desert area on and off track, we had no joy with Houbaras, but we did manage Red-rumped Wheatears, Temminck's Horned Larks, Greater Hoopoe Larks, Desert Larks, Thick-billed Lark, Black-bellied Sandgrouse 50+, Trumpeter Finches, Tree and Tawny Pipit, Short-toed and Calandra Larks, Long-legged Buzzard and a solitary Desert and Northern Wheatear. We departed the area and headed towards our next night's accommodation at Merzouga. Shortly after leaving the Tagdilt Track we stopped at our normal site for Mourning Wheatear and soon had a good show from a female, photographs aplenty!! Moving-on we headed towards Erfoud and noted more Desert and Temminck's Horned Larks, with several of the desert form of Crested Larks now in evidence. We saw a couple of Ravens near to the site for Mourning Wheatears. Arriving in Merzouga, we unloaded our luggage and set-off for the lake nearby, which had water in good quantity for the first time since 2003. Here we had 200+ Greater Flamingo, 400+ Ruddy Shelduck, 1 Common Shelduck, 48+ Marbled Teal, 4 Pintail, 30+ Shoveler, 200+ Coot, 25 Little Egret, 5 Glossy Ibis, 18 Ruff and 14 Black-winged Stilts. With fading light, we reluctantly headed back to our hotel.

#### **Day Six – 05.11.06**

Encouraged by our success of the previous afternoon, we made an early start to again visit the lake at Merzouga. After driving a short distance we found over 30 Brown-necked Ravens feeding on a rubbish tip that gave several good photo opportunities. Arriving at the lake it was clear the numbers of wildfowl had decreased considerably, but Greater Flamingo, Ruddy Shelduck and Coot were at about the same number as the previous day. We disturbed a flock of 23 Black-winged Stilt, which then wheeled their way back and forth over the lake, where after about five minutes they were attacked 4 times (unsuccessfully) by a fine Barbary Falcon. The falcon gave up on its attempts to secure a stilt and alighted on the bank of the lake, allowing good views through our scopes. The falcon was both paler and more slender in appearance from Peregrine, also we were able to get good views of the rusty nape and very pale underside. Before departing we had a pair of Desert Wheatears that showed well, together with Northern Wheatear. We made our way to the normal site for Pharaoh's Eagle Owl, but on our way stopped at our usual site for Fulvous Chatterer. We walked a short way into the wadi and soon had a group of between 10 – 14 individuals. Arriving later in search of the Pharaoh's Eagle Owl, we scanned the area, walked the cliff edge, played tape recordings, but without success!! We gave-up after spending well over an hour in our vain search. We set-off for our lunch stop at Alnif, seeing Trumpeter Finches, many White-crowned Wheatears, Common Buntings and of course Desert Larks! After a late lunch we did not waste time making for our next night stop at Tazerine. Before having dinner, we had time enough to explore the local wadis and had great views of Southern Grey Shrike and Moussier's Redstart.

#### **Day Seven – 06.11.06**

We set-off, after a leisurely breakfast, towards our next stopover at Zagora, where we were scheduled to stay for 2 nights. Soon after Tazerine, we stopped to take a look at a wadi with dramatic mountains in the background. The stop produced our first Hoopoe and Serin, plus high numbers of Chiffchaff. We headed for the Draa Valley, soon producing Moussier's, Black and Common Redstart, along with Sparrowhawk, Long-legged Buzzard, Kestrel, Laughing Dove and many Blue Rock Thrushes. Crested Lark, White-crowned Wheatears and Common Bulbul were present at every stop. We also had good shows by House Bunting, Southern Grey Shrike, White and Yellow Wagtail. Cattle and Little Egrets, Grey Heron and Grey Wagtail were found throughout by standing water. Zagora itself produced only a few House Martins and many Spotless Starlings. Immediately after Zagora, the bridge area produced Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, Short-toed Lark and Kestrel.

## **Day Eight – 07.11.06**

Best intentions of an early start, took second place to a very good breakfast! Reluctantly departing the food of our hotel, we set-off towards our desert run. Reaching Tagounite we took the rough track west and towards an oasis some 40 kilometres away! Soon we found Fulvous Chatterer, Desert, Crested and Thekla Lark. Later in our journey we came across, Bar-tailed, Hoopoe and yet more Desert Larks, together with Northern and Desert Wheatears. Southern Grey Shrike and more Fulvous Chatterers marked our way. When we reached the oasis, we were horrified to find it surrounded by a wall, thereby stopping any chance of animals being able to use the oasis for water! Apart from a few Crag Martins, 1 Swallow, Fulvous Chatterer and 1 dead Barn Owl, we were hugely disappointed with the almost total lack of birds. We later found White Wagtail, but a hopeful of Desert Sparrow was not to be. We decided to head further into the desert and towards a known Nomad Camp. We saw a few species on route Hoopoe being notable, but on reaching the camp we were rewarded with Desert Sparrow, many White Wagtail, Brown-necked Raven, Sparrowhawk, Southern Grey Shrike and Trumpeter Finch. Departing due to lack of time, we headed home, but very soon had to stop for a large group of Hoopoe Lark, some 8 individuals, possibly more! Looking at the larks we spotted a group of 6 Cream-coloured Coursers and soon we were able to approach at close quarters with our vehicles! An excellent end to our day, especially after the disappointment of the oasis!

## **Day Nine – 08.11.06**

Leaving Zagora we went back up the Draa Valley and made a few stops on route. A stop near to the junction for Erfoud gave Greenshank, Yellow and White Wagtail, Scrub and Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Crested and Short-toed Lark. Before Agdz, we stopped at the bridge and found Greenshank, Green and Common Sandpiper, the later the first for the tour! After Ouarzazate, we were going back into the high Atlas. We soon saw Long-legged Buzzard and were to see more on this road, but the star stop was for a group of 70+ Chough. We very quickly spotted an Alpine Chough amidst the group and heard another. Nearby there were flocks of Trumpeter Finch and Rock Dove. After watching the Chough for some 5 minutes, all birds in the area suddenly took-off sounding alarm calls, even a passing Kestrel was giving it's keekee alarm. Looking behind us we spotted a pair of Goshawk circling very close to our position. The female compared well later to a passing Long-legged Buzzard. Soon the Chough started to mob the Goshawks and being successful in driving them away, they then proceed to mob and chase the Long-legged Buzzard. Great stop! Later we approached Toufliat and a covey of Barbary Partridge flew across our path, comprising some 12 individuals. After checking-in our hotel in Marrakech, we sat having a well earned beer, when we were treated to 4 attacks on a House Sparrow roost by a Kestrel, on a 5<sup>th</sup> attempt the female Kestrel was successful and flew over our heads with her reward!

## **Day Ten – 09.11.06**

A day of partings and for our last journey towards Tangier and our ferry.

**See below:** Table of Species 'seen' List = 147 species

Species		Species	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	Plain Swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	Bar-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes cincturus</i>
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Marbled Teal	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Western Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Rock Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Common House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennatus</i>	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Double-spurred Francolin	<i>Francolinus bicalcaratus</i>	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Streaked Scrub-Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	White-tailed Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Mourning Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe lugens</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>	Fulvous Chatterer	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>
Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
Stock Pigeon	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>

Species		Species	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax</i>	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Yellow-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax graculus</i>	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githaginea</i>
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Rock Petronia	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
House Bunting	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>		