

Moroccan Bird Trip Report

Spanish Nature – February 2007

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Day One February 15th – Tangier – Marrakech

Our first day was the unusually tough drive from Tangier to Marrakech, normally our tour allows for a night in or near to Rabat, but not this time!! I am looking forward to March when we will allow two days for the same journey. Around Tangier we had several Sandwich Tern and one distant view of one showing signs of a red bill! No guesses, but shame it didn't come closer for a positive id. We also had Gannet and Black Kites near the port. Setting off from the port and out of Tangier we saw several more Black Kites, Barn Swallow, House Martin and singleton Booted Eagles. Around 25 kms from Tangier we saw our first large flock of White Storks 200+, during the days journey we saw several more flocks indicating the northern migration for this species was well underway. I must admit, from our vehicle we saw a wide range of species on our journey west and south. Many species of waders, Greater Flamingo, Long-legged Buzzard (2), Common Buzzard (1), Black-shouldered Kite (4), Marsh Harrier (14) and many small passerines. Probably the highlight, but sadly a road kill near Rabat, was Double-spurred Franklin.

Day Two February 16th – Marrakech

With other tour members joining from their flights into Marrakech, the day was divided into two parts, the visit to the water catchment area for the city and a cultural tour including the Seuk, great experience. We managed several species over and in the gardens of the hotel including Little Swift (1) 12 over the Seuk, Common Swift, Hoopoe, Blackcap, Common Bulbul, Sardinian Warbler, Chiffchaff, White Stork (00), Kestrel and Robin. At the catchment area, we added Cetti's Warbler, Grey Wagtail, Southern Grey Shrike, Serin, Nuthatch, Chaffinch, Great and Blue Tit (the last 3 all N.African race).

Day Three February 17th – Marrakech – Boumalne de Dades

The scenery and change of vegetation during this journey never fails to impress. Very soon after leaving the outskirts of Marrakech we added Sparrowhawk to our list (3), House Buntings were common on the route and soon we saw Black-shouldered Kite along with Long-legged Buzzard. Heading into the mountains we saw our first Barbary Partridge (30+) and quickly arrived for our tea stop at Toufliat. From the Auberge roof terrace we saw Coal Tit, Great and Blue Tit, Raven, Short-toed Treecreeper, Firecrest, Blue Rock Thrush, Common Bulbul, Chaffinch, Hawfinch and luckily a Levaillant's Green Woodpecker. Later in the river valley we had the African sub-species of Magpie and approaching the high pass a flock of Alpine Chough (17). On our descent we also had a very large flock of Red-billed Chough (40+) and Bonelli's Eagle. We saw many Crag Martin and later Ravens. Rock Doves were in good numbers and we spotted a small flock of Rock Sparrow. Half way to Ouarzazate we added White-tailed Wheatear to the Black Wheatears we had already seen on the northern approaches. Blue Rock Thrush was common and more so near to the villages. Shortly before Ouarzazate we had our first Mourning Wheatear, a fine female. On our road to Boumalne we had Desert Lark and Red-rumped Wheatear. Southern Grey Shrike was very common on this stretch of road.

Day Four February 18th – Boumalne de Dades – Merzouga

In spite of mixing scenic excursions with birding we had some good species. Black-bellied and Crowned Sandgrouse were in good numbers at SN site 2 together with at least 3 prs of Thick-billed Larks. We also picked up the usual Temminck's Horned, Crested, Short-toed and Hoopoe Larks, Trumpeter Finch, Red-rumped and Desert Wheatears. Here we also had Meadow and unusually Tree Pipit. Driving on towards Erfoud we stopped at our normal site to see both male and female Mourning Wheatear, very smart birds! Moussier's Redstart were seen at several points along our route. A very unusual record so far south, at least for me, was a Black-shouldered Kite. Near to Mellaab we saw

Long-legged Buzzard, more White Storks and good numbers of Barn Swallow with a handful of House Martins.

Day Five February 19th – Merzouga

A desert day. Can't resist it, yep we had Houbara's Bustard again on SN site 4, this makes it 4 times out of 5!! Fantastic day. Cream-coloured Coursers paired and at least 50 seen during the day. Hoopoe Lark, Temminck's Horned Lark, Short-toed Lark and 6 pairs of Thick-billed lark, Bar-tailed Desert Lark, Desert Lark, Crested Lark and Skylark (33+ a first for me in this area), made it a very special Lark day. Several Desert Wheatear and White-tailed Wheatear (a ridiculous name) plus good numbers of migrant Northern Wheatear and a solitary male Black-eared Wheatear. We later walked some dunes with scrub and found another pair of Thick-billed Larks, Desert Warbler, Trumpeter Finch and Scrub Warbler. Over a packed lunch we were joined by 6 Desert Sparrows, so it was reluctantly that we made our way to look at the lake near Merzouga. Some way before Merzouga we saw a flock (20+) of Brown-necked Raven and 2 Black Kite. At the lake we had Marsh Harrier, Marbled Teal (2), Shoveler (38), Eurasian Shelduck (2), Ruddy Shelduck (46), Coot (4), Greenshank (4), Redshank (5), Black-tailed Godwit (5), Green Sandpiper (1), Hoopoe and several White Wagtails. On arriving back at our hotel we had our first Laughing Dove of the tour. A very good day!!

Day Six February 20th – Merzouga – Tazerine

We set-off for our next night's stay in Tazerine. Shortly after leaving Rissani we stopped to walk a nearby wadi to search for Fulvous Chatterer and after only a few minutes we found a gang of these comical birds who entertained us for several minutes. After a further 7kms we stopped to scan the nearby cliffs and after finding some tell tale white staining were able to scope Pharaoh Eagle Owl, I was unable to locate this bird in November so it was satisfying to find it in a new site. We were also able to add Thekla Lark to our list and for good measure we had Crested Lark to illustrate the difference between these similar species. As the stone desert became broken by exceptional coverings of flowers, we saw Moussier's Redstart at 3 sites and on more sandy spaces spotted Bar-tailed Desert Larks. Raven and Lanner Falcon were seen overhead. Our journey took us to more cultivated areas and the green wadi which runs to Tazerine and beyond. Southern Grey Shrike was very common and we saw more Barn Swallow and a small number of Red-rumped Swallow as we approached the town. Our plan was to have lunch at our hotel and then explore the surrounding desert and wadi, but my first experience of heavy rain in the area put paid to the rest of the day! Revenge perhaps for such a successful day yesterday?

Day Seven February 21st – Tazerine – Zagora

We experimented with a new route to Zagora, taking weaving tracks across open desert and through spectacular mountain terrain. Our first stop was in a ravine. The area had good covers of vegetation and tree cover. On this trip I witnessed for the first time the harvest of heavy autumn rains. The flowers were incredible, forming carpets of colour everywhere. We found the ravine teeming with bird life. Trumpeter Finch (00), Black Redstart, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Serin, Goldfinch, Moussier's Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, Desert Lark and even Linnet were in good numbers, but the highlight was seeing a fine male Mourning Wheatear chasing a Black Redstart, great views and another new site! We had Barbary Falcon perched high on one side of the ravine allowing good views for several minutes. Several stops produced yet more Trumpeter Finch and also Sardinian Warblers, plus Hoopoe, White-tailed Wheatear, House Bunting, Crag Martin, Barn Swallow, Thekla Lark, Crested Lark, Grey Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, White Wagtail (Moroccan form), Meadow Pipit, Raven, Southern Grey Shrike, Desert Wheatear (30), Tristram's Warbler, Bar-tailed Desert Lark, Rock Dove and Laughing Dove. Excellent new sites and route!!

Day Eight February 22nd – Zagora – M'Hamed – Zagora

Another desert day. Almost immediately after leaving Zagora we had several large flocks of White Stork resting from their travels. They were on the ground in large groups and inactive, so I assume they had roosted overnight on the ground? On route to M'Hamed we saw Desert Lark, Barn Swallow, Hoopoe Lark, Crested Lark, and a solitary Sand Martin. A stop by a river also produced Little Ringed Plover, White, Grey and Yellow Wagtail, Raven, House Martin and a rare sighting of Kestrel this far south. Before reaching M'Hamed we found a flock of over 30 Brown-necked Raven. In the palmery we found Fulvous Chatterer, Chiffchaff, Sardinian Warbler, Common Bulbul, Hoopoe, Laughing Dove, Blackbird, Robin, House Bunting, Blackcap, very pale Collared Doves (also around the town, are these African Collared Dove?), Serin, Goldfinch, Rock Dove and Northern Wheatear. Our desert trip

produced a pair of Thick-billed Lark, several Bar-tailed Desert Lark, Crested Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Trumpeter Finch, White Wagtail, Desert Sparrow (18) at our normal site, Cream-coloured Courser, Desert Wheatear, White-tailed Wheatear, Fulvous Chatterer, Desert Warbler, Scrub Warbler, Chiffchaff and yet more Brown-necked Raven. Our journey back took us over small mountains and here we had Desert Lark in very good numbers, yet another lucky sighting of a fine male Mourning Wheatear, Peregrine, Long-legged Buzzard, Crag Martin and Trumpeter Finch.

Day Nine February 23rd – Zagora – Marrakech

Our next two days were fairly harsh in terms of distance, so an early start was required! Plenty of water filled the Draa for the journey north and our first stop, just past the turning for Erfoud gave us Moorhen, Little Ringed Plover, Red-rumped Swallow, Barn Swallow, Crag Martin, Sardinian Warbler, Chiffchaff, White and Grey Wagtail, Crested Lark, Mallard, Grey Heron, White-tailed Wheatear (very common along the Draa and throughout until some 40km after Ouarzazate), Chaffinch and Blue Rock Thrush. Over the high mountain pass before Ouarzazate we had Bonelli's Eagle and Peregrine. Not so far north of Ouarzazate rocky slopes reach the roadside and the road runs close to a dry riverbed, here we had good views of both male and female Mourning Wheatear (another new site for me). Blue Rock Thrush, House Bunting and of course White-tailed Wheatear were common along this part of our journey. Before reaching the high Atlas pass we had Shore Lark, Rock Sparrow, Kestrel (now common) and Red-billed Chough (73) among snow patches which were not present on our inward journey (snow that is). Raven and Long-legged Buzzard were seen overhead. On our decent we soon had Black Wheatear, Magpie, Chaffinch, Grey Wagtail, Barbary Partridge, Sparrowhawk and the now very common House Bunting. Cetti' Warbler were heard on several occasions along the river and Common Bulbuls, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Goldfinch, Cattle Egret and Grey Wagtail were seen more frequently as we headed north.

Day Ten February 24th – Marrakech – Tangier

Those of us that had to journey back to Tangier set-off early! The drive produced very much the same species as our 1st day with the addition of Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush and Red-legged Partridge.

Summary

Everyone had a great trip and some wonderful experiences, not least our success with Houbara's Bustard. I think we were all expecting more in the way of migrants, but a species total of 133 was a fair return considering we spent no time on the North Coast. I am off again leading a group from 12th to the 24th of March, so with time to search various marshland areas in the North and expectations much higher for more migrant, it will be interesting to see how many more species we can see.

Species List

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*
Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
Booted Eagle *Aquila pennatus*

Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*
Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*
Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*
Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara*
Double-spurred Francolin *Francolinus bicalcaratus*
Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
Snowy Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*
Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*
Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*
Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*
Little Owl *Athene noctua*
Common Swift *Apus apus*
Little Swift *Apus affinis*
Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Levaillant's Woodpecker *Picus vaillantii*
Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cincturus*
Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*
Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*
Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*
Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*
Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*
Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilopha*
Eurasian Crag-Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*
Common House-Martin *Delichon urbica*
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*
Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
Streaked Scrub-Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*
Tristram's Warbler *Sylvia deserticola*
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri*
White-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*
Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*
Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta*
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*
Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*
European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*
Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
Fulvous Chatterer *Turdoides fulvus*
Coal Tit *Parus ater*
Great Tit *Parus major*
Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*
Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*
Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*
Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*
Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*
Common Raven *Corvus corax*
European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*
Desert Sparrow *Passer simplex*
Rock Petronia *Petronia petronia*
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
European Serin *Serinus serinus*
Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githaginea*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*
Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*
House Bunting *Emberiza striolata*