

Moroccan Bird Trip Report

Spanish Nature – 14th to 24th March 2007

Morocco – High Atlas and Sahara regions

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Marrakech

Our tour began with some of our party visiting the slopes of the Anti Atlas, whilst others either visited the famous Souk or took an exploratory drive to one of the valleys which supplies Marrakech with its water.

John, Geoff, Liz and Pieter visited Oukaimeden. Bird wise they had by far the best day seeing Crimson-winged Finch, Alpine Accentor, Alpine Chough, Rock Bunting and others!

Jenny, Sheila, David and Peter visited the famous Souk in the heart of Marrakech. My concern was how much would they be cajoled into buying? I needn't have worried, only Peter fell prey to negotiations and returned with 2 kilos of Kidney Beans!!

Mick, Roger and I took an excursion into the river valley Oued Issil, part of several river systems that supplies Marrakech with its water. We had Cirl Bunting and N. African sub. species of Blue and Great Tit!!

Marrakech – Ouarzazate

The 1st part of our journey was, for the largest part, an overcast drive into the Anti Atlas mountains. Although a lunch stop at Taddert gave us Moussier's Redstart, the morning's weather beat us! We made-up for our morning lack of birds as soon as we made our decent from the Tizi-n-Tichka pass. Long-legged Buzzard, Barbary Falcon (2), Desert, White-crowned and Northern Wheatear, Desert and Crested Lark, House Buntings and Marsh Harrier! The under belly white feathers of the White-crowned Wheatear extending further than its close cousin the Black Wheatear. Shortly before Ouarzazate, the day ended very well as we spotted a juvenile Golden Eagle, which gave good sightings for fully ten minutes.

Ouarzazate – Zagora

At last Barbary Partridge! Thanks to the persistence of David, we were able to enjoy this fine bird. Fruitless searches of the previous day made the discovery all the more satisfying. The same area produced Lanner Falcon, Desert Lark, Tristram's Warbler and many Trumpeter Finches. We made our way to our lunch stop near to Agdz and saw our first Laughing Doves and Woodchat Shrike. Departing from lunch we were treated to the sight of 4 Blue-cheeked Bee Eaters mobbing a female Sparrowhawk. Our next stop at the barrage near to Tansikht produced perhaps the greatest surprise of the whole tour. We were quietly watching Little-ringed Plovers, when Liz gave excited yells of seeing a Crake. Pointing to the bird, quietly feeding out in the open, we were able to scope and have the best views possible of Ballion's Crake!! I have never seen this bird so far from any cover and we were all able to enjoy the most unbeatable views ever of this colourful Crake. Such an unexpected

and fantastic surprise was always going to make the rest of our journey pale in comparison. However, we did see Sub-Alpine, Bonelli and Willow Warbler!

Zagora – M'Hamid

We depart for our night's camping adventure near to M'Hamid!! Stocked with wine aplenty we ventured south. The first stop produced yet another surprise, Iseballine Wheatear! The bird gave us excellent views for the duration of our stop. Trumpeter Finches were abundant.

We next stopped at a bridge near to Tizi-Beni-Selmane where we had good views of Blue-cheeked Bee Eaters and Sub-alpine Warbler. Around the bridge we also had House, Sand Martin, Red-rumped and Barn Swallow. On the river we saw Little-ringed Plover. After our tea stop at M'Hamid, we made our way into the desert and our Bedouin Camp. More or less as soon as we arrived Desert Sparrows made an appearance and both Brown necked Raven and Black Kite were spotted. A camp fire sing-along and wine ensured a good night's sleep!

M'Hamid (Zagora)

Before heading into the desert, we had good views of Desert Warbler around the camp. The wine of the previous evening took its toll as we departed a little later than planned!! But what a day.

Our first stop was induced by the sighting of several Lesser Kestrels perched and hawking over extensive Tamerisks. Soon we spotted a male Merlin and later a female. Overhead we had flights of Spotted, Crowned and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Also here we saw many Brown-necked Raven, Marsh Harrier, Black Kite and Fulvous Babbler. Our next stop produced many more of the same Sandgrouse and Bar-tailed Desert Larks, only this time we were able to get close to a flock of Spotted Sandgrouse who were reluctant to fly. Hoopoe Lark also gave good views, but the star of the day had to be our first Cream-coloured Courser (a pair), well spotted by Jenny, also a lifer for many on this trip.

Zagora – Tazerine – Merzouga

Probably our most gruelling day of the tour. Certainly our journey across the sand and stone desert to Tazerine was entertaining. The occasional Hoopoe Lark was seen and several Desert Larks. With each stop we managed to find good numbers of Sub-alpine Warblers. Desert Wheatear was common en route and we again saw Trumpeter Finch throughout our journey. Woodchat Shrike were seen and the more common Southern Grey Shrike noted at most stops. Before reaching our lunch break at Tazerine, we stopped at a wadi and here we managed several species, including our first Meadow Pipits of the tour. Moussier's Redstart and Common Redstart gave excellent views. Serin, Corn Bunting, House Bunting and Blue Rock Thrush also showed.

After lunch we decided to journey on to our hotel the Kasbah Derkaoua. Here we had options for the next couple of days to either go birding or relax. The gardens gave good value birds and not least Egyptian Nightjar on our first evening

Auberge Derkaoua / Merzouga

I am sure we all appreciated the ambience of our hotel and the fact that we could settle in one place for a few nights. With the desert literally on our doorstep, early morning and evening walks were always worthwhile. Quail, Red-throated Pipit and other birds were only a stroll away! The water outfall from the hotel provided good species such as Bluethroat.

The hotel gardens produced many migrants including Sub-alpine, Bonelli's and Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat and Red rumped Swallow. Whilst the desert area and the lagoon near Merzouga provided some great finds. As soon as we set out on our day's excursion we found Hoopoe Lark, Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse. The most common bird of the area was Short toed Lark and at the lagoon we had the bizarre sight of Sanderling, Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Greenshank, Redshank, Green and Wood Sandpiper all in the middle of a desert! White Stork, Spoonbill, Little and Cattle Egret added to the occasion.

Auberge Derkaoua / Merzouga

We had some real surprises during our visits to the lagoon at nearby Merzouga, probably the least expected was Red-necked Phalarope and also Sanderling. To observe these species so far into the desert was bizarre and extraordinary. Peter Thorpe took the photo to the left which shows both birds sharing the same patch of shoreline. Among notables for the lagoon were Marbled Teal, Ruddy Shelduck, Black-winged Stilt, Wood and Green Sandpiper, Eurasian Shelduck, Shoveler, Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenshank and Sandgrouses!

Our visits to the surrounding deserts were somewhat marred by being accompanied on one day by the official guardian for the Saudi Arabian's hunting party. These barbarians will no doubt eventually

hunt Houbara's Bustard to virtual extinction in Morocco. Though with all their money, I cannot understand why they do not operate a captive and release program for this species and make their slaughter more of a sustainable operation! Great birds seen included young Hoopoe Lark and Cream-coloured Courser, Desert Warbler, Red-throated Pipit, Quail, Sandgrouse sp., our first Montagu's Harrier, Booted Eagle, Tawny Pipit, a glimpse of Egyptian Nightjar and Nightingale in the middle of the desert!

Merzouga / Boumalne de Dades

At last, our first good sightings of Bee Eater! We also had our second and much better views of Montagu's Harrier and also saw Booted Eagle at the same stop. Corn Bunting, Desert Lark and Trumpeter Finch were aplenty during our morning drive to our lunch stop near Todra Gorge. We stopped during the afternoon to find Mourning Wheatear, but alas only Jenny and David had decent views! Shortly after this stop, members of the group were able to get excellent views of Temminck's Lark. Later, after we checked-in to our hotel we had time to visit the Tagdilt Track and one of our prime target species, Thick-billed Lark, showed well for one and all! We also had Tawny Pipit and many lark species.

Boumalne de Dades / Ouarzazate

We set-off at a reasonable hour to spend the morning searching the near-by Tagdilt Track. The morning began well with Lanner Falcon making abortive attempts at catching Black-bellied Sandgrouse! Soon we spotted Stone Curlew and later on our route we had good views of both male and female Mourning Wheatear. Apart from Red-rumped Wheatears, the local desert only produced more Trumpeter Finch and many Short-toed Larks. After giving up on our search to rediscover Thick-billed Lark, we made our way towards El Mansaar Lake near to our final destination in Ouarzazate. The lake always disappoints for me, but at least on this occasion we found Whiskered Tern! Later, after checking into the hotel, Peregrine was seen twice over the hotel.

Ouarzazate / Marrakech

With all day to cover the 200 kms to Marrakech, we again were able to set-off at a civilised hour. En route to our lunch stop at Taddert, we saw a pair of Golden Eagles and the odd Rough-legged Buzzard. We also decided to go off road in search of Horned Lark and headed up mountain on a service track for a radio relay station. On prior visits I had always seen these larks on the higher areas of this track, but on this occasion we spent a long and fruitless time walking the hill tops! However, and with not a little relief on my part, we did eventually find them on our way down, together with a scattering of Rock Sparrows. At a brief stop on the river pass we managed Tree Pipit. After lunch we made for a mid-afternoon break at Toufliht. Just prior to our stop, we investigated a spring from a closed café roof and were rewarded with Hawfinch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Wren, Robin and Great-spotted Woodpecker. With mint teas in our hands we were able to spot Levillant's Green Woodpecker, made even more rewarding by the fact we had heard this bird on our outward journey, but had failed to actually see it! From here we made our way to our journey's end at Marrakech, seeing a few other species along the way including Sparrowhawk, Blue Rock Thrush and more.

Species List * After a species denotes birds seen by members of the group during travels to and from Tangier / Marrakech.

- 001 Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
- 002 Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
- 003 Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* *
- 004 Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* *
- 005 Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
- 006 Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
- 007 Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
- 008 Great Egret *Ardea alba* *
- 009 Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
- 010 Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
- 011 White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
- 012 Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* *
- 013 Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*
- 014 Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
- 015 Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

- 016 Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
- 017 Gadwall *Anas strepera*
- 018 Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
- 019 Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
- 020 Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
- 021 Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* *
- 022 Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*
- 023 Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca* *
- 024 Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* *
- 025 Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
- 026 Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
- 027 Short-toed Eagle *Circus gallicus*
- 028 Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
- 029 Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
- 030 Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
- 031 Eurasian Buzzard *Buteo buteo* *
- 032 Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
- 033 Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
- 034 Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciatus*
- 035 Booted Eagle *Aquila pennatus*
- 036 Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*
- 037 Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
- 038 Merlin *Falco columbarius*
- 039 Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*
- 040 Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*
- 041 Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
- 042 Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara*
- 043 Double-spurred Francolin *Francolinus bicalcaratus* *
- 044 Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*
- 045 Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*
- 046 Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
- 047 Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*
- 048 Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*
- 049 Great Bustard *Otis tarda* *
- 050 Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* *
- 051 Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
- 052 Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
- 053 Eurasian Thick-knee *Burhinus oedicephalus*
- 054 Cream-colored Courser *Cursorius cursor*
- 055 Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* *
- 056 Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* *
- 057 Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
- 058 Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
- 059 Snowy Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
- 060 Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
- 061 Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
- 062 Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* *
- 063 Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*
- 064 Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
- 065 Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
- 066 Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
- 067 Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
- 068 Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
- 069 Sanderling *Calidris alba*
- 070 Little Stint *Calidris minuta* *
- 071 Dunlin *Calidris alpina* *
- 072 Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
- 073 Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*
- 074 Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* *
- 075 Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

- 076 Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* *
- 077 Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
- 078 Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* *
- 079 Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* *
- 080 Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* *
- 081 Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* *
- 082 Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*
- 083 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*
- 084 Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*
- 085 Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*
- 086 Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*
- 087 Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*
- 088 Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
- 089 Eurasian Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia turtur*
- 090 Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
- 091 Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
- 092 Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
- 093 Little Owl *Athene noctua*
- 094 Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*
- 095 Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
- 096 Common Swift *Apus apus*
- 097 Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*
- 098 Little Swift *Apus affinis*
- 099 Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
- 100 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*
- 101 European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*
- 102 Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
- 103 Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
- 104 Levallant's Woodpecker *Picus vaillantii*
- 105 Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cincturus*
- 106 Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*
- 107 Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*
- 108 Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*
- 109 Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*
- 110 Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
- 111 Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*
- 112 Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
- 113 Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*
- 114 Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
- 115 Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*
- 116 Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilopha*
- 117 Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*
- 118 Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola* *
- 119 Eurasian Crag-Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
- 120 Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
- 121 Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
- 122 Common House-Martin *Delichon urbica*
- 123 White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
- 124 Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
- 125 Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
- 126 Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*
- 127 Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*
- 128 Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
- 129 Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*
- 130 Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*
- 131 Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*
- 132 White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*
- 133 Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
- 134 Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*
- 135 Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

- 136 Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*
- 137 Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
- 138 Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
- 139 Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* *
- 140 Streaked Scrub-Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*
- 141 Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
- 142 Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
- 143 Eurasian Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* *
- 144 Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
- 145 Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*
- 146 Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
- 147 Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*
- 148 Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*
- 149 Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
- 150 Greater Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
- 151 African Desert Warbler *Sylvia deserti*
- 152 Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*
- 153 Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
- 154 Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*
- 155 Tristram's Warbler *Sylvia deserticola*
- 156 Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*
- 157 European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*
- 158 European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
- 159 Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
- 160 Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*
- 161 Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
- 162 Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*
- 163 Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri*
- 164 European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*
- 165 White-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*
- 166 Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*
- 167 Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
- 168 Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*
- 169 Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta*
- 170 Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*
- 171 Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*
- 172 Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
- 173 Fulvous Chatterer *Turdoides fulvus*
- 174 Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
- 175 Coal Tit *Parus ater*
- 176 Great Tit *Parus major*
- 177 African Blue Tit *Cyanistes teneriffae*
- 178 Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
- 179 Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*
- 180 Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*
- 181 Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*
- 182 Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
- 183 Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
- 184 Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*
- 185 Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
- 186 Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*
- 187 Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*
- 188 Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*
- 189 Common Raven *Corvus corax*
- 190 Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*
- 191 Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
- 192 Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*
- 193 House Bunting *Emberiza striolata*
- 194 Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*
- 195 Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

- 196 European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
- 197 European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
- 198 Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
- 199 European Serin *Serinus serinus*
- 200 Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
- 201 Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguinea*
- 202 Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githaginea*
- 203 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
- 204 Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*
- 205 Desert Sparrow *Passer simplex*
- 206 Rock Petronia *Petronia petronia*

Peter Jones