

Moroccan Bird Trip Report

Spanish Nature – 12th to 21st October 2007

Morocco – Atlantic Seaboard and Souss / Anti Atlas Regions

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Although the trip was initially designed to investigate the north and western Atlantic side of Morocco with a view to organising future tours to Morocco, a number of clients accompanied this trip and we managed to locate several good species and sites. Despite a pre-occupation with discovering accommodation and routes, we nevertheless had several opportunities to relax and spend time locating target species i.e. Bald Ibis etc.

As is the policy of Spanish Nature, we always visit new destinations/routes at least two times, so a further trip is imminent to finalise routes, birding sites and accommodation (November 2007). However, we are able to present a few details of our initial trip and make some observations which we hope will be of value to others planning to visit this part of Morocco.

12.10 Tangier – El Jadida

Spanish Nature being based of course in Spain and because this was first and foremost an exploratory tour, we set-off from Tarifa and landed in Tangier. The first day 12th October was spent trying to make as great a distance as possible towards Agadir. Our first night was spent at El Jadida and due to the time travelling we had little opportunity to go birding. We did observe Golden Plover, Turnstone immediately in front of our beachside Hotel.

13.10 El Jadida – Agadir

Today we were able to spend more time and visit various sites along the coastal road from El Jadida to Agadir and in particular between El Jadida and Essaouira. Most of the salt lakes/lagoons produced good numbers of waders including Little Stint, Whimbrel, Grey Plover and of course Black-winged Stilts. Also gull roosts were evident with very good numbers of Audouin's Gull with a surprise of a solitary Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* among Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls. Sandwich Tern was also present in high numbers. Raptors were seen well along the cliff tops on this journey and Lanner, Peregrine and Barbary Falcon all showed extremely well. The beach and lagoon at Tamri was fruitful and gave Garganey, Marbled Teal, Red-knobbed and Eurasian Coot, Shoveler, Crested and Common Pochard, Teal, Mallard, Spoonbill, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Peregrine, Reed Warbler, Whinchat, Ring Ouzel, Little Tern and Royal Tern etc.

14.10 Agadir – Tiznit

We found very little to recommend a return to Agadir as a place to stay, but it did have the compensation of being well placed to explore the Souss and Souss Masa reserve. Here we found Skylark, Thekla Lark, Crested Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Bonelli's Eagle (2 adults and 1 juv), Short-toed Eagle, Osprey, Barbary Falcon, Marsh Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Stone Curlew, Whimbrel, Bluethroat, Pied and Spotted Flycatcher, Willow, Orphean, Reed, Cetti's, Fan-tailed, Spectacled Warblers and 00's Chiffchaff, Yellow, White Wagtails, Moussier's Redstarts and of course our target Bald Ibis! We found a good number of other species and these are contained within the listing at the end of this report.

15.10 Tiznit – Cap Draa (Tafnidilt)

Apart from one stop between Tiznit and Guelmim (producing Spanish Sparrow), we made time to stop several times south of Guelmim. Very soon we found Fulvous Babbler, Thick-billed Lark, Temminck's Horned Lark, Theklas and Crested Lark, Yellow Wagtails, Trumpeter Finches, Long-legged Buzzards, Lanner Falcon, Lesser and Common Kestrels, but the real bonus was a new and undisclosed site for Pharaoh Eagle Owl (no requests please after the swamping of the site at Rissani). Soon after arriving at Cap Draa we had time for a short walk in the surrounding desert and soon found Desert Warbler!

16.10 Cap Draa – La Ayoune

Intending to return and further explore the Oued Draa we set off for the long journey to La Ayoune. Before reaching Tan Tan we had an adult and juvenile Bonelli's Eagle and some kilometres later we had another adult! South of Tan Tan and turning left to join the coastal road for La Ayoune before El Ouatia (Tan Tan Plage) we soon spotted Osprey and several Long-legged Buzzards, but surprisingly we also found Common Buzzard. Here we saw Common Kestrel frequently and less commonly Lanner Falcon and a solitary Peregrine. All the Oueds are worth a look here and large gull and tern roosts were seen at all of these outlets including Lesser Crested, Sandwich, Common and Little Terns. Knot and other waders were present in good numbers and large southerly movements noted for Gannet and a single Arctic Skua! Feature birds for me since travelling south of Agadir were the Wheatears Black, Red-rumped and Desert all common, with Northern clearly following the western seaboard for the southerly journey in large numbers.

17.10 La Ayoune – Tafnidilt Oued Draa

We found the surrounding area of La Ayoune very poor for birds and the high profile of the local military made exploration difficult. Here we decided to head back North and what we considered richer birding. South of Tah was quiet and uneventful, but certain areas seemed like they might produce good returns, but apart from Tawny Pipit we found the next best area was the desert area around Tarfaya with good numbers of Hoopoe Lark providing entertainment (always a welcome and favourite bird). Fom Agoutir was an area rich in seabirds and waders, here we had Caspian, Black, Little, Gull-billed, Common and Sandwich Tern. We repeated our stops at all the Oueds south of El Ouatia and again were rewarded with more seabird and wader numbers including Lesser-crested Tern yet again. We also noted a Lesser Black-backed Gull with a Blue colour ring on its left leg coded in Black Y040 so any ideas?

18.10 Tafnidilt Oued Draa

A day to relax and lunch in the wilds of the lower Oued Draa. We were hopeful of finding Streaked Scrub Warbler, but sad to say we dipped, but we found Tristram's, Spectacled, Sub-alpine and other warblers. Also a number of Bluethroats, Redstarts and Turtle Dove were here. Montagu's and Marsh Harrier also were seen throughout the day. Also rather late in the year we found Bush Chat Robin! Whinchat along with Northern Wheatear were common through the valley and on the more arid areas we found more Hoopoe Lark.

19.10 Tafnidilt – Taroudant

Very soon into our journey north we spotted a juvenile Golden Eagle and it showed well for 15 minutes. In the same area we had Temminck's Horned Lark and Thick-billed Lark. After Guelmim we made a side journey to Bou Jerif and here we had excellent views of Montagu's Harrier and discovered a very promising river site, here we added Pallid and Common Swift, Wood Sandpiper and Black-eared Wheatear to our day list. In the open desert we had Whinchat and many warblers, together with the African sub species of Magpie near a camp site. We regretted we had to leave this area as the journey to Taroudant involved many more kilometres. Definitely a site we will visit again!

20.10 Taroudant – Marrakech

Our journey to Marrakech is probably one of the most scenic routes you can take in Morocco, crossing the Atlas Mountains via the Tiz-n-Test pass. The landscape was breathtaking and here we were able to add Crag Martin, Rock Bunting and Chough to our growing species list. Descending to Marrakech we managed Sparrowhawk, Black Shouldered Kite and several Blue Rock Thrushes. Coal Tit and later in the villages House Buntings were to make our list for the day respectable.

21.10 Marrakech – Tangier

The greatest surprise of the day was to discover the completion of the motorway link between Marrakech to Settat. The opening reducing our time for the journey to Tangier by over an hour and perhaps nearer to two hours! Very early into our journey we added Cream-coloured Courser, Calandra Lark and Black Kite to our tour list.

Impressions and summary

Our exploratory journey involved a round trip of some 4,000kms and of course we would not intend to repeat such an arduous route for future tours. Travelling such large distances necessarily reduced actual time spent looking for birds but, as our species listing shows, we managed a reasonable total.

Our objectives of identifying and discounting birding sites, plus finding good accommodation were for the largest part achieved. We intend to visit the area/s again during November 2007 to finalise the route and further investigate some potentially attractive birding sites.

For those planning a visit to Morocco and intending to visit some of the above areas, then we can at least give you an idea of where not to waste time! Sadly some past recommended sites have either been destroyed or have degenerated to such an extent as to make further visits practically worthless. We saw nothing that would encourage us to explore further south than Tarfaya, but of course there may be sites further south of La Ayoune where it might be possible to see rare species. Our reasons for restricting our journey further south were because of time and fatigue! A very big disappointment for us was the area surrounding Taroudant. The raptor sites and especially the Argana forest area in and around Tafingoult were devoid of many species and the forest area looks to be a mere remnant of what must have previously been a prime site! Goat grazing and felling have left this area a shadow of its former self.

Upon further investigation and exploration, planned for this year, we will post another report and more accurately detail those areas we feel can be given a 'miss'.

SPECIES LIST

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Eared Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Waldrapp	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Marbled Teal	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Western Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Eurasian Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciatus</i>
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>

Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Eurasian Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>
Cream-colored Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
European Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>
Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>
Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
Royal Tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
Pharaoh Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>

Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Eurasian Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Greater Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>
Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
White-tailed Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Fulvous Chatterer	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>

Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
House Bunting	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githaginea</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>