

MOROCCO – AGADIR & THE SOUTHERN DESERT

2nd to 16th NOVEMBER 2007

by Alan Miller

A fortnight in the sun enjoying the sights and sounds of Agadir, including a hire car to head south in search of desert species.

General details

Anne and I booked a two-week package holiday through Eclipse Direct staying in Agadir at the Riu Hotel Le Tikida Beach on an 'all-inclusive' basis. We flew direct from Manchester to Agadir with First Choice Airways with good flight times, departing Manchester at 14.25hrs on 2nd, and Agadir at 20.00hrs (25 mins. late) on 16th. The flights were less than 4 hours long and there was no time difference between the UK and Morocco.

The hotel was excellent with a beach-front location and good-sized gardens. During the day it was fairly quiet as many guests were golfers, playing on a nearby golf course (6kms away) owned by the hotel group. Guests had unlimited access and a free courtesy bus. Two visits to walk through the course proved very fruitful.

We hired a car for two days through Euro Souss Cars. The car, a small Kia with air-conditioning, proved adequate and very economical (500+kms for £20 fuel) and the hire charge was reasonable at £16 per day.

The weather for our stay was good. We had a sea mist on one day, but the rest was clear blue skies and sunshine with little wind. Throughout, even on the day mentioned, the temperature in Agadir during the day was in the high 20's and reached the high 30's a couple of times. For an evening walk after dinner it was 20-22 degrees. In Guelmim it was considerably warmer with daytime temperatures in the desert at 38 degrees.

Information was obtained from the Rough Guide to Morocco, A Birdwatching Guide to Morocco by Combridge and Snook, and the Moroccan birding website '<http://www.go-south.org>'

Highlights

The Hotel

The grounds were worth checking regularly, even from the sun-loungers. **Common Bulbul** was the noisiest resident with a supporting cast of **Spotless Starlings**, **White Wagtail**, **Collared Dove**, **Chiffchaff**, **Sardinian Warbler**, and **Cetti's Warbler**. On 11th we were treated to a flyover of four **Bald Ibis** whilst having lunch. Looking out to sea there was a regular passage of **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and **Western Yellow-legged**

gulls between the fish quay to our right and a beach roost near the Kings Palace to our left. Also seen over the sea were **Gannet, Moroccan Cormorant, Shag, Sandwich Tern, Gull-billed Tern** and on one occasion a **Spoonbill**.

Throughout our stay butterflies were in flight with many **Painted Lady**, even on the beach, and **Small Whites**. Garden circuits with my net produced **African Grass Blue**, and **Speckled Wood**.

Agadir

On the journey from the airport to our hotel we had crossed the Oued (River) Sous, which had been productive on our 2006 visit. The river was dry and we learnt that there hadn't been any rain (other than an odd short shower) in Agadir since January 2007. Whilst wading birds were in short supply, there was plenty of other interest in the area.

Whilst walks along the beach were fabulous, it was slightly disappointing not to be able to walk more than a kilometre to the south because guards prevented tourists from walking past the Kings Palace into the mouth of the Oued Sous. The main gull roost was on the undisturbed stretch of beach near the Palace and could be viewed with binoculars when a friendly guard was on duty!

There were a few beach-front hotels to the south of us with more under construction. There is a huge programme of landscaping on the landside of these hotels with lovely gardens with named plants, shrubs and cacti, many in flower. There we regularly saw the local race of **Magpie** together with **Willow Warbler, Stonechat, House Bunting, Meadow Pipit, Laughing Dove** and **African Chaffinch**

At the northern end of the bay between the end of the beach and the harbour and fish quays the new marina complex was almost complete. Some of the flats were occupied, as were some of the shop units with exclusive outlets. A couple of pavement café's proved useful for sitting with a Moroccan mint tea and watching **Sandwich Tern** fishing just yards away. Also around the marina were **Grey Heron, Little Egret** and on 13th a **Lesser Crested Tern**.

Golf du Soleil

The private, gated and walled Golf Course was a green oasis, reached by a courtesy bus from our hotel in 15 minutes. There is a path through the middle of the course allowing safe walking away from wayward balls, leading to a five-star hotel (also owned by the same hotel group and good for loos and a drink). Two **White Storks** had taken up residence in a palm tree next to the driving range and could be seen walking over the range whilst golfers practiced their drives. Seen on the course were **Little Grebe, Coot, Moorhen, Serin, Pied Flycatcher, House Bunting, Stonechat, Laughing Dove, Squacco Heron, Common Sandpiper, Black Redstart, Grey Wagtail** and **White Wagtail**.

Lang's Short-tailed Blue butterfly was found feeding on rosemary bushes beside the path, and a superb **Plain Tiger** was on flowers near the reception building.

Thursday 8th November

This was our first day with the car so after an early breakfast we headed south along the N1 towards the Sahara desert. Driving in Morocco is interesting but the most important thing is to keep to speed limits and carry documentation as there are many police road checks, often entering a town or village, and often with a speed camera. Consequently one should expect to average about 50kms an hour. Just over 200kms and four hours away from Agadir we reached the town of Guelmim. Our first job was to look for accommodation and we secured a room at the Hotel Au Rendez vous des Hommes Bleus for £20. Then it was south again into the desert.

About 9kms south of Guelmim near Oued Boukila we saw our first **Desert Wheatear** and nearby on a pylon a **Lanner Falcon**. Along the roadside were white concrete blocks with blue hatch and pipe on top (to do with the water supply) and wheatears favoured these as perches. It wasn't long before we added **Red-rumped Wheatear**. We went as far as the mileposts indicating Agadir 240kms and TanTan 96kms and turned off the road onto a track to the west. We only drove 150 yards from the main road and parked the car. We were in an area that had cropped earlier in the year. There was some stubble and a few weeds. A flock of nomadic sheep and goats was feeding in the area. After some easy searching we located **Lesser Short-toed Lark, Desert Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Thekla Lark and Cream-coloured Courser**. Back to the car and we moved back to the area signed TanTan 100kms and added **Hoopoe Lark, Stone Curlew and Spanish Sparrow**.

As the light was fading we headed back to Guelmim and spent a very pleasant evening taking in the sights and sounds.

Friday 9th November

After breakfast we headed south again but this time only as far as Oued Sayad, 6kms from Guelmim. This was the only river we had found since leaving Agadir with water in it (albeit only a trickle but with plenty of bank-side vegetation).

As we started our search a flock of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flew over. Soon we added **Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Turtle Dove, Laughing Dove, Collared Dove, Southern Grey Shrike** and one **Fulvous Babbler**.

In the afternoon we headed back towards Agadir. We stopped seeing **Desert and Red-rumped Wheatear** by the roadside about 20kms north of Geulmim.

As we approached Boulzakam we saw a showy **White-crowned Black Wheatear**. Shortly after that the road rises over a set of hills midway between Guelmim and Tiznit. On the higher pass we saw **Black Wheatear** and at our picnic stop a pair of **Moussier's Redstart**.

Further details are available from the author who can be contacted on anne.alan.miller@btinternet.com

SIGHTINGS

1. **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – 8 at Golf du Soleil on 5th and 12th.
2. **Northern Gannet** *Sula bassana* – regular off Agadir beach. Max 8 on 10th
3. **Moroccan (Great) Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus* – regular off Agadir beach. Max 5 on 13th.
4. **Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* – 1 off Agadir beach on 10th
5. **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* – 1 at Golf du Soleil on 5th
6. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* – seen regularly, max 9 at Guelmim on 9th
7. **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* – seen regularly, max 3 at Agadir Marina on 13th
8. **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* – seen regularly, max 8 at Agadir Marina on 3rd
9. **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* – 17 on 5th, 2 on 12th at Golf du Soleil
10. **Bald Ibis** *Geronticus eremita* – 4 at Agadir on 11th
11. **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* – 1 at Agadir on 13th
12. **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* – 2 at Golf du Soleil on 5th and 12th
13. **Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* – 1 or 2 seen almost daily (Agadir and Guelmim)
14. **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* – 3 on 8th, 1 on 9th south of Guelmim
15. **Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* – 2 at Golf du Soleil on 5th and 12th,
3 at Oued Sayad on 9th
16. **Coot** *Fulica atra* – 6 at Golf du Soleil on 5th and 12th
17. **Stone Curlew** *Burhinus oedicephalus* – 2 near km100, Guelmim on 8th
18. **Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor* – 9 near km96, Guelmim on 8th
19. **Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* – 2 at Oued Sayad on 9th
20. **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* – 5 at Oued Sayad on 9th
21. **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* – 4 at Golf du Soleil on 5th and 12th,
1 at Oued Sayad on 9th
22. **Western Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis* – up to 1000 seen daily

23. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* – up to 1000 seen daily
24. **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* – 4 on 4th and 1 on 10th off Agadir beach
25. **Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis* – 1 in Agadir Marina on 13th
26. **Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis* – Regularly seen off Agadir Beach and in the Marina. Max. 22 on 13th.
27. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis* – 9 at Oued Sayad on 9th
28. **Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia (domest.)* – Good numbers daily.
29. **Woodpigeon** *Columba palumbus* – 2 on 5th and 1 on 12th at Golf du Soleil
30. **Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur* –n 6 at Oued Sayad on 9th
31. **Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* – seen almost daily
32. **Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis* – 4 at Oued Sayad on 9th,
5 at Golf du Soleil on 12th, and 1 in Agadir on 14th and 16th
33. **Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti* – 2 at km96, Guelmim on 8th
34. **Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes* – 1 at km100, Guelmim on 8th
35. **Thick-billed Lark** *Rhamphocoris clotbey* – 2 at km96, Guelmim on 8th
36. **Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens* – 300 at km96, Guelmim on 8th
37. **Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* – 1 at Agadir on 2nd & 13th. Many enroute Guelmim
38. **Thekla Lark** *Galerida theklae* – 4 on 8th and 2 on 9th south of Guelmim
39. **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* – Seen regularly. Max. 7 on 4th & 12th at Agadir and
5 on 8th at Guelmim
40. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* – 1 at Oued Sayad on 9th
41. **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* – 1 at Golf du Soleil on 12th
42. **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* – seen daily
43. **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* – 3 on 13th & 4 on 16th at Agadir
44. **Common Bulbul** *Pycnonotus barbatus* – seen daily
45. **Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* – 3 at Golf du Soleil on 12th, 1 at Agadir on 15th.

46. **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* – 1 at Golf du Soleil on 12th,
1 at Agadir on 14th.
47. **Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* – 1 at Golf du Soleil on 12th
48. **Moussier's Redstart** *Phoenicurus moussieri* – 3 between Guelmim and Tiznit on 9th
49. **Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* – seen regularly
50. **Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* – 1 on 6th, 11th & 15th at Agadir.
6 on 8th and 2 on 9th south of Guelmim
51. **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* – 12 near Guelmim on 8th, 4 on 9th
52. **Red-rumped Wheatear** *Oenanthe moesta* – 4 on 8th and 2 on 9th near Guelmim
53. **White-crowned Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga* – 1 on 9th near Boulzakam
54. **Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucura* – 3 between Guelmim and Tiznit on 9th
55. **Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* – Seen daily
56. **Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* – Almost daily in hotel grounds. 1 at Oued Sayad on 9th
57. **Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala* – rec. daily. Max 6 on 5th at Golf du Soleil
58. **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* – 1 at Golf du Soleil on 5th & 12th.
2 at Agadir on 16th.
59. **Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* – seen daily. Max 30 on 12th at Golf du Soleil
60. **Melodious Warbler** *Hippolais polyglotta* – 1 on 9th at Oued Sayad
61. **Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* – 1 on 5th and 12th at Golf du Soleil
62. **Fulvous Babbler** *Turdoides fulvus* – 1 on 9th at Oued Sayad
63. **Great Tit** *Parus major* – 1 on 5th at Golf du Soleil
64. **African Blue Tit** *Parus caeruleus ultramarinus* – 1 on 5th, 2 on 12th at Golf du Soleil
65. **Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis elegans* – 8 on 8th and 4 on 9th south of
Agadir.
66. **Common Magpie** *Pica pica mauritanica* – Seen regularly. Max 24 at Golf du Soleil
67. **Spotless Starling** *Sturnus unicolor* – seen daily. High count 43 on 14th at Agadir
68. **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* – Seen daily

- 69. Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* – 1 on 8th at km100, Guelmim
2 on 9th at Oued Sayad
- 70. African Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs africana* – 1 at Golf du Soleil on 12th,
1 at Agadir on 14th
- 71. Serin** *Serinus serinus* – 6 on 5th and 15 on 12th at Golf du Soleil.
- 72. Goldfinch** *Carduelis Carduelis* – 3 at Oued Sayad on 9th. 4 at Agadir on 12th
- 73. House Bunting** *Emberiza striolata sahari* – 6 on 5th and 8 on 12th at Golf du Soleil.
1 at Guelmim on 9th. 2 on 14th & 16th at Agadir

BUTTERFLIES

Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Iberian Bluetail	<i>Ischnura graellsii</i>
Keeled Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	
Migratory Locust	
Egyptian Grasshopper	
Cockroach	
Ground Beetle sp.	
Stick Insect sp.	
North African Water Frog	<i>Rana saharica</i>
Brown Rat	
Barbary Ground Squirrel	
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>