

Moroccan Bird Trip Report

Spanish Nature – 8th to 15th November 2007

**Morocco- Atlantic Seaboard and Sous
/ Anti Atlas Regions**

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We set-off on a bit of a busman's holiday to discover final destinations for our planned autumn migration birding tour for 2008. Also we had it in mind to finalise long standing plans to run away-breaks for weekend trips from Spain to Morocco. Lots to do and little time to fit everything in! My last couple of visits to this side of Morocco had seen me dip most seriously on a lifer for me, Black-crowned Tchagra, so I was harbouring a sneaky desire to score at least this bird during the coming days. Of course I pretended that sites and accommodation were my sole purpose for this tour.

Its never a problem for the first stage of our journey if we manage a stopover instead of heading straight for Marrakech, but on this occasion we decided, due to lack of days, we would travel non-stop for Marrakech. It can be a long and boring journey, broken only by a continuing contest between Pieter and I to see who can spot the most Black-shouldered Kites. A dangerous business if you happen to be the one driving. By way of compensating for my trepidation we also had a couple of 'new' places and sites to look at during this trip, so I was greatly looking forward to next few days.

Tanger – Marrakech



A glorious sunny day and calm seas made for a pleasant crossing from Tarifa to Tanger, though only managed a few Cory's Shearwater and N.Gannets among the multitude of Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Arriving at Tanger we did see a flock of 30+ Bal.Shearwaters, plus the odd Sandwich Tern off the harbour pier. Customs clearance provided the usual test of patience and a House Bunting helped to pass the time, a first for me in the harbour area. At least, as mentioned in our last trip report, we knew the new section of motorway between Settat and Marrakech had been completed, so journey time would be greatly reduced. Pieter managed the greater count of Black-shouldered Kites, my only claim to glory was avoiding a speeding ticket whilst driving (not quite a first,

but almost). We also managed Long-legged Buzzard, Marsh Harrier, Heron, Cattle Egret, Spotless Starling, Raven, Jackdaw, Moorhen, Coot, White Stork, Kestrel, Booted Eagle, Crested and Thekla Lark. We arrived at our 'new' discovery of a hotel in Marrakech around 1700, a real gem, where drinks and fine food went down particularly well!

Marrakech – Essaouira

We had never taken this route to Essaouira before, so we left our hotel early to give ourselves time to explore. The countryside between Marrakech and Chichaoua (roughly halfway) was largely made up of Banana plantations, Grape production and then small cultivated areas interspersed by open desert. Marsh Harrier in the drier parts was surprising and perhaps the bird of the day due to the date must have been a solitary Woodchat Shrike.

House Bunting was very common near habitation and Spanish Sparrow were seen in mixed flocks of the more common House Sparrow. The numbers of Northern Wheatear suggested migration was still in evidence. Occasional Swallow and House Martin served to underline how protracted autumn migration can be in Morocco. Long-legged Buzzard, Lanner Falcon, Black Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Trumpeter Finch, Moussier's Redstart, Short-toed Lark, Thekla Lark and a single Hoopoe Lark were seen during the second half of our journey to Essaouira. We had time to explore the area around the mouth of the Oued Ksob. Here we added a number of species to our tour/daily list Audouin's, Yellow-legged, Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Sandwich and Common Tern, Cattle and Little Egret, Grey Heron, Greenshank, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Dunlin, Knot, Grey Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Osprey, Kestrel and Lesser Kestrel, Peregrine, Bluethroat, Fantailed and Cetti's Warbler. Of course the time of year meant we were too late for Eleonora's Falcon!!



Essaouira – Imouzzzer



We set-off from our hotel aiming for Tamri and intending to spend a couple of hours around the lagoon. Just north of Tamri we were surprised to find 5 Bald Ibis in the dune area as we reached the bottom of our steep descent into Tamri. Naturally enough we spent a good hour taking in these obliging birds! We also tried a little sea watching here, but apart from a good number of Northern Gannet were short on expected numbers of other species. The lagoon at Tamri was a lot quieter than our visit in October, but we still managed Shoveler, Teal, Pintail, Garganey, Mallard, Marbled Teal, Red-knobbed and Coot, Moorhen, Lapwing, Dunlin, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Kentish and Little-ringed Plover, Dunlin, Sanderling, Spoonbill, Barbary Falcon, Sand Martin and Spectacled Warbler. Our lunch stop was in Tamrhakh and was to prepare us for the journey through paradise valley to Imouzzzer. The valley is scenically stunning and did produce some extra goodies for the day namely Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Bluethroat, Fan-tailed Warbler, Robin, Mistle Thrush and Rock Bunting. Around Imouzzzer itself we managed Hawfinch, Firecrest, Crag Martin, Common Swift, Bonelli's Eagle, Barbary Partridge, Reed Warbler and Crossbill. The evening also provided Tawny and Little Owl.

Imouzzzer – Bou Jerif (Guelmim)

Our hotel gardens were productive in the early morning, giving good numbers of Bulbul, House Bunting, Blackcap, Firecrest and probably the most common bird Chiffchaff. We saw Peregrine stooping, unsuccessfully, on a flock of feral pigeons over the head of the famous cascades. Our road was the link from Imouzzzer to the inland route for Agadir. We soon had Kestrel and Raven. Chaffinch and Linnets tended to be common until we reached the Agadir road. We made good progress to the small town north of Guelmim, here we made a couple of stops and found White-crowned Wheatear, Thick-billed, Short-toed, Crested, Thekla and Temminck's Horned Lark. Heading for Bou Jerif we stopped at a normal river site and had several waders including Snipe. Reed Warbler, Spectacled and Sardinian Warbler were here in good numbers. Before going to our desert camp we took a look at Plage Blanche and had Osprey, Long-legged Buzzard (5), Trumpeter Finch, Hoopoe, Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed Lark, Sparrowhawk, Little Owl and near a small pool several Thick-billed Lark and Corn Bunting. The desert route to the camp produced Red-rumped and Desert Wheatear, Merlin, Southern Grey Shrike and Magpie (Mauritanus).



Bou Jerif (Guelmim) – Taroudant



We took the route from the camp towards the Gorges. Here we saw a resident pair of Bonelli's Eagle, the female the most pale coloured I have ever seen of this species. We searched the sand desert after the village hoping to find Hoopoe Lark and Cream-coloured Courser, but after an hour we only had Red-rumped and Desert Wheatear also Thekla Lark. We needed to make our way to Taroudant and we wanted time to visit Oued Masa, so we proceeded without further delay! At last time for a little self indulgence on my part and search the Masa area for Black-crowned Tchagra. Another bird that we wanted to find if possible was Moustached Warbler. We had several Laughing Dove and a number of water birds, these included Glossy Ibis, White Stork, Squacco Heron, Purple Gallinule, Spoonbill and Flamingo. Well after spending much time walking up and down the wadi, we eventually managed to turn-up my principle and personal target species Black-crowned Tchagra! Yes and what a beauty, the photo here being my memorial for a lifer.

Of course as is often the case, we soon found another sat boldly at the top of a dead tree!! I deserved to dip on Moustached Warbler after such a great afternoon.

Taroudant – Marrakech

Our road towards Taliouine was pretty uneventful and we added Blue Tit and had our best views of Lanner Falcon. We also had Greenfinch, Serin, Goldfinch and a few Linnets in large mixed flocks. Its worth mentioning the Argana Forests on this road are in good order and so much better than the now virtually destroyed forest near Tafingout, where I would recommend people give a big miss! We only had Blue Tit, Moussier's Redstart, Southern Grey Shrike and Long-legged Buzzard here, but I am sure at the right time of year these forested sites could prove very worthwhile. The road from Taliouine was much better and the scenery improved by the high mountains and rock outcrops a change after the flat and featureless road of early morning. We found Hoopoe Lark before the mountain road and saw Long-legged Buzzard, plus the bizarre sight of a Grey Heron in the middle of open desert! In the mountain area we had Desert Lark, Black Wheatear, Short-toed and Thekla Larks. Our journey over the Tizi-n-Tichka pass proved successful and we found Shore Lark and Rock Sparrow, plus we had distant views of Golden Eagle and much closer views of a large flock of Chough. We had intended to make time and try to visit Oukalmeden, but too long over lunch (a newly discovered and opened cafe) meant we had enough time to cover the long descent to Marrakech before it was dark. Good advice is not to drive on Moroccan roads after dark, mopeds and even cars take to the roads hereabouts without thinking to use lights!



Marrakech – Asilah



We decided from the offset to leave time enough on our homeward journey to make an effort to explore a route which could be accessed for weekend trips from Spain. We also wanted time to look at a known site for Marsh Owls shortly after passing Rabat. We arrived at our site around Mid-day and were soon looking at around 20 roosting Marsh Owls in their copse roosting site. It was good to still find them there as around this time they tend to drift off to establish breeding territories, Marsh Owls breeding season begins early! We just about had time to also look at Larache and the nearby marshes. Here we had Lesser-crested Terns on the beach along with a large number of Sandwich Terns, also we were able to pick out 2 Slender-billed Gulls a first for the current trip. The marshes produced the normal selection of Marbled Teal and good numbers of Red-knobbed Coot etc., but we still dipped on Moustached Warbler, still we did manage good views of Black-shouldered Kite. The normally wet marshes before approaching the largest lagoon were dry and this made the area less productive than normal, but we still managed a good number of birds including a large flock (200) of Glossy Ibis.

Asilah – Tanger

Our final day was to proceed to the mouth of the Oued Tahadart and inland marshes. Here we found several target species including Great Bustard, Common Crane, Black-shouldered Kite, a Booted Eagle and a large flock of Skylark. Large numbers of waders were around the mouth of the Oued and a flock in excess of 100 White Stork, but the birds for the day were 4 Caspian Tern, incredible birds and always a special bird for me. Happy with our finds we made off to the ferry in Tanger and passed through customs in record time, only 20 minutes!!! Shearwaters and Gannets helped the crossing go quicker and we arrived in Tarifa mid-afternoon. Great trip.



SPECIES LIST

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Black-necked 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>
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>
Western Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</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>
Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
European Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Kentish 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>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>
Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</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>
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Marsh Owl	<i>Asio capensis</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</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>
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</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>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</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>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>

White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Fulvous Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhcorax pyrrhcorax</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>
Crossbill <i>Loxia</i>	<i>curvirostra</i>
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githaginea</i>
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>