

Winter Birding in Morocco

Last Updated on Thursday, 10 December 2009 11:21

Morocco Birding in winter, a four day and three night bird watching excursion to the northwest coast of Morocco

Tour Dates 2nd to 5th December 2009

Birding Tour organised by Spanish Nature (www.spanishnature.com) for and on behalf of the Andalucia Bird Society.

Participants: Geoff Binks, Hilary Briffa, John Brooks, Steve Cheshire, Stephen Daly (2 photographs), Janet Dixon, Frank Hair, David Hird, Peter Jones (Tour Leader and Author of Trip Report), Amanda Kusmidrowicz, Mick Kusmidrowicz, Arni Lindholm, Andrew Mountford, Elli Wallbank, Liz Young.

Itinerary: Day One; Tarifa – Tanger – Asilah. Day Two; Asilah – Larache – Asilah. Day Three; Asilah – Moulay Bouselham – Asilah. Day Four; Asilah – Tanger – Tarifa.

Day One. Our group met-up in Tarifa for departure to Tanger. The sea crossing was an easy affair and the only drawback was queuing on the ferry to have our entry stamps inserted in our passports. On the sea crossing some of the group saw Cory's Shearwater and Northern Gannet with the more usual gull species plus a few Sandwich Tern near to the port of Tanger. We met our transport at the port and were soon bouncing our way through the maze of streets leading out of the main ferry port. The route to Asilah was the inland road to Had Gharbia, which transverses the Tangier Peninsula and gave us an opportunity to do some serious bird watching. The west the large plains of the peninsula is separated from the Atlantic by the salt marshes of the Oued Tahadart. Here we saw around 200 Common Crane scattered in small and large flocks, a juvenile (1st winter) Long-legged Buzzard and several Marsh Harriers. Little Owl and Blue Rock Thrush plus other small birds soon added to a reasonable start to our tour. The lateness of our departure from Spain meant lunch soon bade us leave the peninsula and head for Asilah and seek a suitable restaurant!! The rest of the day was spent enjoying the old port of Asilah.

Day Two. We awoke to dark skies and scattered showers! Our journey to Larache was slow and not encouraging given the drizzle and low cloud. Yet when we approached the salt pans skirting the roadside banks of the Oued Loukos, the skies broke, the sun shone, the temperature felt comfortable and the birds showed well. We soon had 2 Great White Egrets (3 were seen later on the lower Loukos marshes), large flocks of Greater Flamingo and several White Stork. A fine male Hen Harrier flew close as did a fleeting Bluethroat, but the marshes were soon capturing our attention with many wader species including Spotted Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Sanderling, Grey and Golden Plover all showing extremely well. We made our way to the lower Loukos marshes and had literally hundreds of Crested Coot, Marbled Teal, Northern Shoveler, Pintail, Teal and large flocks of Glossy Ibis, the smaller birds such as Yellow and White Wagtail, Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and a solitary Sand Martin added to the growing list of great birds, although a calling Moustached Warbler refused to show. Huge flocks of Black-tailed Godwit occupied the higher end of the marsh together with other waders including good numbers of Lapwing. Our thrill for the day was to witness a female Lanner take a Eurasian Teal, possibly the highlight for all, though I guess the Teal was none too happy! 3 Osprey entertained overhead, whilst Night Herons were seen roosting in Tamarisk on the main river bank near to the dam. After lunch we made our way to the Ras Rmel beach and found a solitary Audouin's Gull. Both Lesser and Common Kestrel were seen and a distant raptor with white body and dark underwing looked good for a Bonelli's Eagle, but a closer view was not to be had and therefore we did not add this species to our list! A couple of Black-winged Kites did come close and helped to make-up for our earlier frustration. The weather had been kind and the birds exceptional.

Day Three. Bit of a presentation day as well as bird watching day. We set-off early for Moulay Bouselham and the lagoon Merja Zerga, where we planned to take a tour around the lagoon by boat and also view the surrounding marshes, whilst also presenting a local guardian and guide with a donation of a second-hand telescope. Our journey to Moulay Bouselham was brightened by the sunshine and a large flock of Stone Curlew near to Barga. To get over the point of our birding day we saw Curlew Sandpiper, Whimbrel and Curlew, but no Slender-billed Curlew! Having said that, we did have a great day with Slender-billed Gull, Audouin's Gull, Black, Little, Caspian and Sandwich Tern and several new wader species for the tour including Ruff, Knot, Turnstone, Dunlin, Kentish Plover and Oystercatcher. Ospreys and Marsh Harrier were seen frequently and Common Kestrel seemed to appear everywhere. Common Bulbul showed very well near the port and we had our star turn of the day with around 13+ Marsh Owl before our lunch break. Marsh Owl is the rarest of the owl family in the western Palearctic and so our excellent stop at the fishing port was made even more remarkable by the number of birds and great sightings of birds displaying and one individual sitting out exposed on a tree top.

Very soon this Marsh Owl roost will disperse with paired birds taking up territories, mostly at the southern and eastern end of the lagoon.

Day Four. Today we set-off on our homeward leg of the tour, but not before everyone had good views of Common Bulbul near to our hotel. Because of our rather hurried schedule on day one, we again visited the plains of the Tanger Peninsula and this time we were able to take a very leisurely drive, making several stops along the way. It was a perfect morning for bird watching and very soon we added Spanish Sparrow and several finches to our bird list. Skylarks were evident with both Corn Bunting and Southern Grey Shrike numerous along the first part of our route. Southern Grey Shrikes hereabouts seem to be intermediate between the Spanish race and more southerly race of Morocco. They are dark on the mantle, but do not display any pinkish tone to their grey breast. Little Owl again gave good views, with a 2cy Long-legged Buzzard showing well for the group. Large numbers of Common Crane were still in the area, probably numbering around the 200 mark. We were fortunate to spot a large female Peregrine Falcon sat sunning herself on the ground and together with her large size, prominent white cheeks, pale blue mantle and narrow moustache she showed all the characteristics of the *calidus* subspecies. Marsh Harriers performed well for us and were seen displaying near to a small lagoon. We spent some time elevated on a hillside to get good views across the plains, we hoped to find Great Bustard, but had no luck. It had been a great trip and one to repeat very soon.

Winter Birding in Morocco - Species List

Moroccan Bird List – Andalusia Bird Society 2nd to the 5th December 2009

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
Gadwall *Anas strepera*
Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*
Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*
Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*
Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Great Egret *Ardea alba*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*
White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*
Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*
Common Crane *Grus grus*
Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
Eurasian Golden-Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
(Red) Knot *Calidris canutus*
Sanderling *Calidris alba*
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Audouin's Gull *Ichthyophaga audouinii*
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*
Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*
Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*
Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Little Owl *Athene noctua*
Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*
Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*
Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*
Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
African Blue Tit *Cyanistes teneriffae*
Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*
Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Eurasian Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*
Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*
Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
European Serin *Serinus serinus*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

Total Species 111