

Northern Morocco

19.01. – 02.02.2011

I spent two weeks in Rabat for work. The job wasn't very stressful, so I was able spent some mornings and the weekends on birdwatching.

It rained daily except for the first three days. Temperatures were around 15°C at day and 10° or less at night, so it was not necessary to bring a swimsuit along. Be aware that Morocco despite being in Africa is a fairly cold country, at least from October to March. And many hotels do not have a heating.

There are many police controls on the roads, so it is a good idea to stick to speed limits. According to the new regulation, the standard fee is now 700 DH. In the last ten years I have been stopped by the police for at least ten times, particularly in and around towns. Traffic there is sometimes confusing and you do easily something wrong they can blame you for. And sometimes there was even no obvious reason. The best tactic in these situations is to play the stupid tourist, and in 5 out of 10 times they let you go. If they don't do, give them 100 DH and tell them you don't need the ticket ("procès-verbal"). That's the way everybody does in Morocco.

I eat (almost) everything in Morocco, even salad, and never had any problem. But I don't drink tapped water. For professional reasons I know about the problems of moroccan water supply facilities. By the way, if you're hungry and tired of traditional moroccan food, maybe you should try the experimental italo-moroccan cuisine at "Pizzagheti" in Témara-Plage (coastal road, opposite Hotel Yasmine). They do not only serve "Pizzagheti" but also "Keftagheti", "Merguezgheti" and "Pizzalade". Guess what it is!

Atlantic coast between Skhirat and Témara (19.01.-02.02.2011)

Most observations were made from the terrace of my hotel room near Skhirat (Hotel Kasbah Skhirat). Especially at low tide and in the morning, when the beach is still quiet, the lagoons between beach and sea proved to be very productive. Seawatching from the terrace produced a lot of Gannets, some skuas and a distant Cory's Shearwater.

The most interesting bird was what I considered at first glance to be some kind of "Snowy Ibis". It turned out to be a completely leucistic curlew with pink feet and bill. It was probably a Whimbrel, but it's quite hard to assess when plumage features are completely absent and no reasonable-sized bird is available for comparison. A "Moroccan Wagtail" was sometimes inspecting my backyard. Up to 6 Audouin's Gulls were seen roosting among other gulls almost every morning at the small estuary between Hotel and slip road to the highway Rabat-Casablanca.

Travel time (by car) from Rabat (via highway to Casablanca, Exit Aïn Atiq): 20 minutes (~30 km), but can be more during rush hours.

Species seen, among others:

c. 30 Shelducks, up to 50 Gannets, 1 Cory's Shearwater, c. 5 Cormorants, up to 5 Oystercatcher, up to 50 Common Ringed Plovers, 20 Little Ringed Plovers, up to 5 Kentish Plovers, up to 10 Grey Plovers, c. 300 Golden Plovers, 1 Ruff, up to 10 Sanderlings, up to 30 Dunlins, c. 20 Knots, 5 Bar-tailed Godwits, up to 5 Whimbrels, up to 20 Great Curlews, 1 Spotted Redshank, c. 20 Redshanks, up to 10 Ruddy Turnstones, 2 Arctic Skuas, some undetermined skuas, up to 6 Audouin's Gulls (probably always the same), 1 Slender-billed Gull, several 100 Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls, few Herring Gulls, up to 10 Sandwich Terns, 1 White Wagtail ssp. *subpersonata*, c. 5 Spotless Starlings.

Marais de Larache (22.01.2011)

A very nice place. It didn't change much since I have been there for the first time in 2000, except for the road which is getting worse day by day. Unfortunately things might change soon. I heard the Moroccan government is planning a high-speed train from Rabat to Tanger and the line is supposed to cross the swamp. As a result of the hefty promotion of Monsieur Sarkozy during his last visit, the trains will be supplied by the French.

However, in January 2011 the area was quite wet. I have never seen there so much water. Even parts of the agricultural land near the dam were under water.

Travel time (by car) from Rabat about 2 hours (~150 km). If you go later in the year, look out from the highway for Collared Pratincoles in the plain N of Kénitra, where the highway crosses the Oued Sebou.

Species seen, among others:

c. 20 Red-crested Pochards, 2 Gadwalls, c. 5 Shovelers, 1 Squacco Heron among many Cattle and Little Egrets, c. 200 Glossy Ibis (at least 2 ringed, but too distant to read the code), c. 50 Spoonbills, c. 5 Marsh Harriers, 1 Black-winged Kite, c. 50 Red-knobbed Coots, c. 5 Purple Swampheens (1 seen and several heard), c. 20 Lapwings, several hundred Black-winged Stilts, c. 10 Common Snipes, 3 Black-tailed Godwits, several Greenshanks, 2 Spotted Redshanks, several 100 Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls, 1-2 Kingfisher, c. 20 Brown-throated Sand Martins among many Barn Swallows and House Martins, at least 20 Stonechats, c. 15 Yellow Wagtails *ssp. iberiae*, 1 very showy Moustached Warbler, 2 Cetti's Warbler, 1 Fan-tailed Warbler.

Merja Zerga (22.01.2011)

The area was quite birdless due to generally high water levels and high tide at the time of my visit. To improve my chance to see Marsh Owl I exceptionally hired a guide for half the day. This proved to be a good idea, as we saw two owls in a small grove in the marsh at the SE corner of the lake. Within my limited time budget I would never have found the owls on my own. The traditional roosting site in the trees at the campsite at Moulay Bouselham seems to be more or less abandoned due to the logging of the owl's favourite trees. Well done, guys.

I was really impressed by the reserve's mismanagement. There was shooting in the protected zone and large strips of the marsh land close to the lake have been recently plugged. Fortunately they were completely under water at the time of my visit, so no further agricultural activities could be undertaken. Nature strikes back.

The guide was ok, he has good knowledge about local birds, a sharp eye and, most important, knows where to find the owls (contact: Khalil Fachkhir, Tel. 00212-663095358). The fee was 300 DH (around 27 EUR), which seems to be much. But if you consider that he hangs around for days in his office opposite the camp site waiting for clients it is not that much. And if we generate an owl-related income for local people, the probability increases that we still can see these birds in 20 years. To be honest I am not very confident, I think Marsh Owl is probably the next to go the way moroccan populations of Tawny Eagle, Dark-chanting Goshawk, Arabian Bustard etc. already went.

Travel time (by car) from Rabat about 1,5 hours (~110 km).

Species seen, among others:

c. 20 Spoonbills, c. 20 Flamingos, 5 Audouin's Gulls, c. 10 Sandwich Terns, 2-3 Ospreys, 2 Marsh Harriers, 2 Marsh Owls.

“Car park” before km 17 between Sidi Yahya and Sidi Bettache (19.+23.+26.+30.01.2011)

As I had some work to do close to this site I visited it several times. The first visit was in the early afternoon. Not the best time for Double-spurred Francolin, but nevertheless I heard one calling for a second or two. Five minutes later I happened to bump into my first Black-crowned Tchagra perching in a tree, although brief and in bad light. The next visit was some days later at dawn. I heard about 5 Double-spurred Francolins and 2 Black-crowned Tchagras, but saw none. A third visit on a cloudy morning gave the same result, except for a pair of Bonelli's Eagles flying over the “car park”. On the fourth morning I finally managed to have some decent views of a calling bird perched in a dead tree and I flushed another one on my way back. The francolins were really hard work. At least in this time of the year they call only very sporadically and it is very difficult to locate the birds. The same is true for the Black-crowned Tchagras.

There were a lot of beautiful temporary lakes on both sides of the road from Sidi Yahya to Sidi Bettache, full of egrets, ducks, coots and grebes.

Depending on where you spend the night, access might be faster (due to less traffic) and easier to find from Skhirat than from Témara. From my hotel (Kasbah) between Skhirat and Témara I just had to drive about 1 km north along the coastal road to the entrance of the highway (Aïn Atiq), cross the highway and then head straight on for several kilometres until the very end of the road. You will pass the new urbanisation of Tamesna on your left hand. At the T-junction turn left, follow the road for about one kilometre, turn right at another T-junction, cross a slum area of Sidi Yahya (small and bad road, but only about 200 m) and you'll directly reach the sign-posted crossing to Sidi Bettache. From there it is straight on and easy to find.

Travel time (by car) from Rabat: about 45 minutes (~40 km).

Species seen, among others:

c. 30 Red-crested Pochards, c. 30 Shovelers, 2 Barbary Partridges (and several heard), 2 Double-spurred Francolins (but up to 5 heard), 8 Little Grebes, 1 Great Crested Grebe, 2 Bonelli's Eagles, 2 Long-legged Buzzards, 1 Sparrowhawk, 2 Lapwings, 1 Little Owl, c. 20 Skylarks, c. 20 Meadow Pipits, up to 10 Song Thrushes, many Sardinian Warblers, 2 Fan-tailed Warblers, 2 Great Grey Shrikes, up to 2 Black-crowned Tchagras (only 1 seen), c. 20 Spotless Starlings, up to 10 Common Bulbuls, c. 100 Linnets, c. 10 Serins, 2 Corn Buntings.

Oukaïmeden (28.01.2011)

I arrived on a very rainy day and, as it could have been suspected, it started to snow 5 km before Oukaïmeden. Certainly not the best conditions. However, at my arrival just before dusk I still managed to spot several Horned Larks just opposite the hotel. Despite -5° C in the night and complete snow cover, the next morning was much better. I saw an adult Bearded Vulture overflying the village, at close range and in perfect light. Crimson-winged Finches were fairly everywhere.

Birding at Oukaïmeden is easy; you just have to walk around the village. Levillant's Woodpecker, Alpine Accentor and Rock Bunting were seen in the area about 7 km before Oukaïmeden (meadows, scrubs and gardens just before the road enters the pine forest).

Travel time (by car) from Marrakech: about 1,5 hours (~75 km).

Species seen, among others:

1 ad. Bearded Vulture, 2 ad. Peregrine Falcons ssp. *brookei*, 1 female Levillant's Green Woodpecker, c. 30 Horned Larks, 4 Alpine Accentors, c. 5 Mistle Thrushes, c. 5 African Blue Tits, c. 3 Coal Tits, c. 50 Choughs, c. 50 Alpine Choughs, 2 Ravens, several Chaffinches ssp. *africana*, c. 40 Crimson-winged Finches, 3 Rock Buntings.

Lac de Sidi Bourhaba, S of Kénitra (29.01.2011)

It seems that this site has become a reliable spot for White-headed Duck. I saw a total of 20 birds on both lakes, but only 2 adult males. One female bird looked a bit as if there was some genetic influence of Ruddy Duck, but I have no experience with those hybrids. On the northern lake I found 3 male hybrids *Aythya ferina* x *A. nyroca*. There were only 2 Marbled Ducks on the southern lake. I didn't look for Marsh Owls in the evening, but apparently there are only 1 or 2 pairs left.

The reserve is well protected in comparison to others, although it seems to be frequented as a picnic-site, too. The park's management even constructed a hut for observation on the east side of the lake. Unfortunately it was dimensioned for pygmies, the windows are in a height of 1,5 m and there are no seats. So I stayed outside.

Too bad that the about 10 Helmeted Guineafowls on the roadside before Mehdy-Plage were certainly not wild birds.

Travel time (by car) from Rabat (via Salé and coastal road): about 45 minutes (~35 km).

Species seen, among others:

c. 100 Shovelers, 2 Marbled Ducks, c. 5 Teals, c. 40 Pochards, c. 15 Red-crested Pochards, c. 10 Ferruginous Ducks, 3 male Hybrids Pochard x Ferruginous Duck, 1 Tufted Duck, c. 20 White-headed Ducks, 4 Great Crested Grebes, c. 20 Little Grebes, 20 Cormorants, 1 Purple Heron, 1 Booted Eagle, c. 3 Marsh Harriers, 1 Black-winged Kite, c. 50 Red-knobbed Coots, 3 Purple Swamphens, 5 Stonechats, many Chiffchaffs, 2 Cetti's Warbler, 1 Fan-tailed Warbler, c. 25 Magpies ssp. *mauritanica*, 1 Raven.

Feel free to contact me if you need more information.

Viel Spaß in Marokko!

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Species List

No.	English	Deutsch	Scientific	Observed in...
1	Common Shelduck	Brandgans	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Skhirat
2	Gadwall	Schnatterente	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Larache
3	Common Teal	Krickente	<i>Anas crecca</i>	LSB
4	Mallard	Stockente	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Larache, LSB
5	Northern Shoveler	Löffelente	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Larache, LSB, SY
6	Marbled Duck	Marmelente	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	LSB
7	Red-crested Pochard	Kolbenente	<i>Netta rufina</i>	Larache, LSB, SY
8	Common Pochard	Tafelente	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	LSB
9	Ferruginous Duck	Moorente	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	LSB
10	Tufted Duck	Reiherente	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Larache, LSB
11	White-headed Duck	Weißkopfruderente	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	LSB
12	Barbary Partridge	Felsenhuhn	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	SY
13	Double-spurred Francolin	Doppelspornfrankolin	<i>Francolinus bicalcaratus</i>	SY
14	Little Grebe	Zwergtaucher	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Larache, LSB, SY
15	Great Crested Grebe	Haubentaucher	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	LSB, SY
16	Greater Flamingo	Rosaflamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	MZ
17	Cory's Shearwater	Gelbschnabelsturmtaucher	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	Skhirat
18	Northern Gannet	Basstölpel	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	Skhirat
19	Great Cormorant	Kormoran	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Skhirat, LSB

No.	English	Deutsch	Scientific	Observed in...
20	Grey Heron	Graureiher	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	+
21	Purple Heron	Purpureiher	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	LSB
22	Little Egret	Seidenreiher	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	+
23	Squacco Heron	Rallenreiher	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	Larache
24	Cattle Egret	Kuhreiher	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	++
25	Glossy Ibis	Sichler	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Larache
26	Eurasian Spoonbill	Löffler	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Larache, MZ
27	White Stork	Weißstorch	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Larache, SY
28	Osprey	Fischadler	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	MZ
29	Black-winged Kite	Gleitaar	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Larache, LSB
30	Bearded Vulture	Bartgeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Oukaïmeden
31	Western Marsh Harrier	Rohrweihe	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Larache, MZ
32	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Sperber	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	SY
33	Long-legged Buzzard	Adlerbussard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	SY
34	Bonelli's Eagle	Habichtsadler	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>	SY
35	Booted Eagle	Zwergadler	<i>Aquila pennata</i>	LSB
36	Common Kestrel	Turmfalke	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	+
37	Peregrine Falcon	Wanderfalke	<i>Falco peregrinus brookei</i>	Oukaïmeden
38	Purple Swampphen	Purpurhuhn	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	Larache, LSB
39	Common Moorhen	Teichhuhn	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	+
40	Red-knobbed Coot	Kammblässhuhn	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	Larache, LSB
41	Eurasian Coot	Blässhuhn	<i>Fulica atra</i>	+
42	Northern Lapwing	Kiebitz	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Larache, SY
43	European Golden Plover	Goldregenpfeifer	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Skhirat
44	Grey Plover	Kiebitzregenpfeifer	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Skhirat
45	Common Ringed Plover	Sandregenpfeifer	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Skhirat
46	Little Ringed Plover	Flussregenpfeifer	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Skhirat
47	Kentish Plover	Seeregenpfeifer	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Skhirat
48	Eurasian Oystercatcher	Austernfischer	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Skhirat
49	Black-winged Stilt	Stelzenläufer	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Larache
50	Common Snipe	Bekassine	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Larache
51	Black-tailed Godwit	Uferschnepfe	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Larache
52	Bar-tailed Godwit	Pfuhschnepfe	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Skhirat
53	Whimbrel	Regenbrachvogel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Skhirat
54	Eurasian Curlew	Großer Brachvogel	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Skhirat
55	Spotted Redshank	Dunkler Wasserläufer	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Skhirat, Lar.
56	Common Redshank	Rotschenkel	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Skhirat
57	Common Greenshank	Grünschenkel	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Larache
58	Common Sandpiper	Flussuferläufer	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Larache
59	Ruddy Turnstone	Steinwälzer	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Skhirat
60	Red Knot	Knutt	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Skhirat
61	Sanderling	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Skhirat
62	Dunlin	Alpenstrandläufer	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Skhirat
63	Ruff	Kampfläufer	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	Skhirat
64	Audouin's Gull	Korallenmöwe	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	Skhirat, MZ
65	Herring Gull	Silbermöwe	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Skhirat
66	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Heringsmöwe	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	+
67	Yellow-legged Gull	Mittelmeermöwe	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	+
68	Black-headed Gull	Lachmöwe	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	+
69	Slender-billed Gull	Dünnschnabelmöwe	<i>Larus genei</i>	Skhirat
70	Sandwich Tern	Brandseeschwalbe	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Skhirat, MZ
71	Arctic Skua	Schmarotzerraubmöwe	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Skhirat
72	Common Pigeon	Felsentaube	<i>Columba livia</i>	+
73	Common Wood Pigeon	Ringeltaube	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	SY
74	European Turtle Dove	Turteltaube	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	SY
75	Little Owl	Steinkauz	<i>Athene noctua</i>	SY
76	Marsh Owl	Kapohreule	<i>Asio capensis</i>	MZ
77	Common Kingfisher	Eisvogel	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Larache
78	Levaillant's Woodpecker	Atlasgrünspecht	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	Oukaïmeden
79	Black-crowned Tchagra	Senegaltschagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>	SY
80	Great Grey Shrike	Raubwürger	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	SY
81	Magpie	Elster	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>	LSB
82	Red-billed Chough	Alpenkrähe	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Oukaïmeden
83	Alpine Chough	Alpendohle	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	Oukaïmeden
84	Western Jackdaw	Dohle	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Skhirat

No.	English	Deutsch	Scientific	Observed in...
85	Northern Raven	Kolkrabe	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Oukaïmeden, LSB
86	Crested Lark	Haubenlerche	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	<i>Galerida</i> sp. ++, only few determined
87	Thekla Lark	Theklalerche	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	
88	Eurasian Skylark	Feldlerche	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	SY
89	Horned Lark	Ohrenlerche	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Oukaïmeden
90	Brown-throated Martin	Braunkehluferschwabe	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	Larache
91	Barn Swallow	Rauchschwalbe	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	+
92	Common House Martin	Mehlschwalbe	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Larache
93	Coal Tit	Tannenmeise	<i>Parus ater</i>	Oukaïmeden
94	Great Tit	Kohlmeise	<i>Parus major</i>	SY
95	African Blue Tit	Afrikanische Blaumeise	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	+
96	Cetti's Warbler	Seidensänger	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	+
97	Wren	Zaunkönig	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Oukaïmeden
98	Common Bulbul	Graubülbül	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	+
99	Common Chiffchaff	Zilpzalp	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	+
100	Moustached Warbler	Mariskensänger	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	Larache
101	Fan-tailed Warbler	Cistensänger	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	+
102	Eurasian Blackcap	Mönchsgrasmücke	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	SY
103	Sardinian Warbler	Samtkopfgrasmücke	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	++
104	European Robin	Rotkehlchen	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	SY
105	Black Redstart	Hausrotschwanz	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Oukaïmeden
106	Eurasian Stonechat	Schwarzkehlchen	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	+
107	Common Blackbird	Amsel	<i>Turdus merula</i>	+
108	Song Thrush	Singdrossel	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	SY
109	Mistle Thrush	Misteldrossel	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Oukaïmeden
110	Spotless Starling	Einfarbstar	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	+
111	Alpine Accentor	Alpenbraunelle	<i>Prunella collaris</i>	Oukaïmeden
112	White Wagtail	Bachstelze	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	+
	„Moroccan Wagtail“		<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	Skhirat
113	Western Yellow Wagtail	Schafstelze	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	Larache
114	Meadow Pipit	Wiesenpieper	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Skhirat, SY
115	Rock Bunting	Zippammer	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Oukaïmeden
116	Corn Bunting	Graumammer	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	SY
117	Common Chaffinch	Buchfink	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>	Oukaïmeden, SY
118	European Greenfinch	Grünfink	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	+
119	European Goldfinch	Stieglitz	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	SY
120	Common Linnet	Bluthänfling	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	SY
121	European Serin	Girlitz	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	+
122	Crimson-winged Finch	Rotflügelgimpel	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea al.</i>	Oukaïmeden
123	House Sparrow	Hausperling	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	++
124	Spanish Sparrow	Weidensperling	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	1 male near Settat

LSB = Lac de Sidi Bourhaba MZ = Merja Zerga SY = Sidi Yahya + = regularly seen ++ = abundant