

MOROCCO

[18th-29th March 2014]



This was the first time that I had been on an organised birding holiday [Oriole Birding]. After a 3hr flight to Agadir from Gatwick I met up with tour leader Dave Gosney and three other participants – Les Colley, Mike Bailey and Barry Batchelor at the airport in Morocco. We were then taken in a minibus to our first hotel in Agadir by our driver Zaid. After booking in and getting our first new birds in **Moroccan Magpie (**)**, **House Bunting (**)** and **Common Bulbul (**)** at the hotel and from the minibus, we were all keen to get back out and into the field and so at 1500hrs we set for the Oued Souss estuary.

18th March 2014

We parked next to the Souss and were straight into birding from the off, a kettle of 100+ White Storks was our first sighting which contained 4 Black Kites. We followed a nature trail through the scrub to the estuary, picking up our first scrub birds in 8 Sardinian Warbler, 5 Fan-tailed Warbler and 3 Woodchat Shrike. Passing over a small bridge we came to a number of pools teeming with birds, as we crept up on the pools we flushed not 1 but 2 Red-necked Nightjar a bird that is rarely seen in the daylight hours, they flew around us before going down in scrub 50mts away a great start. The pools themselves plus the estuary were full of herons, egrets and waders. 21 species of wader were seen in a little under 2hrs and included 36 Collared Pratincoles, 65 Avocet, 20 Black-winged Stilt, 4 Stone Curlew, 135 Oystercatcher, 6 Ringed Plover, 4 Little Plover, 25 Kentish Plover, 60 Grey Plover, 6 Redshank, 4 Greenshank, 4 Black-tailed Godwit, 7 Bar-tailed Godwit, 20 Curlew, 6 Whimbrel, 3 Ruff, 6 Dunlin, 3 Sanderling, 4 Little Stint, 3 Green Sandpiper and 1 Common Sandpiper. Amongst the host of Yellow Legged and Lesser Black Backed Gulls were 4 Audouin's Gull, 6 Slender-billed Gull, 3 Mediterranean Gull, 25 Black-headed Gull and surprisingly an immature Kittiwake, also present were 60 Sandwich Tern which were being harassed by an Arctic Skua again an unusual species here. Larger birds included 100+ Greater Flamingo, 9 Grey Heron, 8 Little Egret, 2 Great Egret, 15 Spoonbill as well as 60 Cormorant and we even managed to pick out 1 **Moroccan [White-breasted] Cormorant (**)**. Wildfowl were poorly represented but we did manage to find 4 Mallard, a pair of Shoveler and 1 Teal. Birds of Prey were only 1 perched Osprey and a Kestrel. Best of the ground birds were 5 Meadow Pipit, 40 White Wagtail, a male Spectacled Warbler, a male Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 Tree Pipit, 6 Crested Lark, a male Black-eared Wheatear and a male Northern Wheatear. Common birds seen were Common Bulbul, Rock/Feral Dove, Greenfinch, Spotless Starling, Swallow, Sand Martin, House Sparrow, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove and Serin. It was now starting to get dark, so we returned to the minibus and wrapped up from the mosquitos to listen for Red-necked Nightjar calling, a single male duly obliged. As we were leaving the car park another Red-necked Nightjar was seen sitting on the gravel 5mts away in the headlights of the minibus. We had now seen more Red-necked Nightjars in 4hrs than all the previous birding tours put together. We then returned to our hotel [Hotel Tivoli] to celebrate a fantastic afternoons birding with a few beers.

19th March 2014

Our first full day in Morocco had me up before breakfast and surveying the ample hotel grounds and undergrowth from the balcony. First up was a flock of 100+ Pallid Swift over the hotel followed quickly by a small colony of 8 **Little Swift (**)** a few streets away. Other new birds included the first Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and a pair of **Ultramarine Tit (**)** recently split from Blue Tit and Tenerife Blue Tit. Sardinian Warbler and House Bunting made up the best of the rest. After Breakfast our first stop was at Cap Hir, a headland north of Agadir. Here we had our first male **Moussier's Redstart (**)** showing very well indeed, Gannets were of shore but nothing else was passing. Around the lighthouse desert area were 1 Black Wheatear, 1 Black-eared Wheatear, 2 Woodchat Shrike, 5 House Bunting, 1 Turtle Dove, 2 Sardinian Warbler, 1 Thekla Lark, 1 Raven, 1 Hoopoe, 1 Long-legged Buzzard and 2 flyby Little Egret. From here we moved north to the Tamri Estuary, which is starting to become popular with surfers and beach bums, subsequently bird numbers had fallen over the last couple of years. We still managed to see a few good birds though in 2 Fan-tailed Warbler, Desert Grey Shrike [*ssp. Algeriensis*] (**), 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Audouin's Gull, 2 **Moroccan Wagtail (**)**, 4 Little Plover, 1 Kentish Plover, 1 Little Egret and 1 Yellow Wagtail [*ssp. Iberiae*].

We finally caught up with our target species after 30mins when a party of **17 Bald Ibis (**)** flew overhead and landed further up the road, we followed in the minibus and got excellent views as they landed just 30mts from the road.

With our targets done for the day we visited the nearby "Paradise Valley" picking up lots of **African Chaffinch (**)**, 1 Blue Rock Thrush, 5 Red-rumped Swallow, 3 Sardinian Warbler, 3 male Moussier's Redstart, 1 Black Wheatear, 1 Black-eared Wheatear, 2 Woodchat Shrike, 20 Linnet and 2 Thekla Lark. As the minibus gears were playing up we were lucky to get back to our hotel for the night [Hotel Tivoli].

20th March 2014

Pre breakfast at the hotel produced the same birds as yesterday plus a flyby Barbary Falcon. Today was our trip to the famous "Massa Estuary", on route we spotted 3 Little Owl, 4 Cream-coloured Courser and 1 Desert Grey Shrike. Our first stop was at the upstream bridge which was a favourite spot of our tour Leader, a host of birds and species were seen including lots of Laughing Dove, 10 Bee-eater, 1 male Stonechat, 2 Fan-tailed Warbler, Yellow Wagtail [*ssp. Iberiae*], 30 Pallid Swift, 2 Red-rumped Swallow, 1 Little Swift, 148 Glossy Ibis, 2 Alpine Swift, 1 Common Sandpiper, 1 Kingfisher, 1 Green Sandpiper, 4 Cattle Egret, 3 Sardinian Warbler, 3 Blackcap, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Reed Warbler and a female Moussier's Redstart. After about an hour we travelled upstream to the next village bridge, this site was much quieter and held 3 singing **Black-crowned Tchagra (**)**, it only took us a minute to locate and have excellent close views of a male bird perched and then in

display flight. Other good birds included our first 3 Western Olivaceous Warbler, 1 Sedge Warbler, 5 Bee-eater, 2 Willow Warbler and a Quail calling from the nearby field.

Next stop was a secret isolated pool further upstream which held a pair of **Marbled Duck (**)** which showed extremely well at times, also present in the area were 1 Spoonbill, 22 Glossy Ibis, 4 male Moussier's Redstart, 10 Bee-eater, 2 Nightingale, 2 Yellow Wagtail [ssp. Iberiae], 3 Western Olivaceous Warbler, 1 male Cirl Bunting, 1 Black Wheatear, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Willow Warbler, 2 Chiffchaff and 4 Sardinian Warbler. We had yet to see Plain Martin and were running out of sites. Our last site look promising, which was just downstream from the previous one. After a 20 min reccy none were to be seen, but just as we were leaving a single **Plain Martin (**)** flew over my head and downstream to an area that held a lot more hirundines. Quickly we followed and flushed a male Little Bittern and Squacco Heron on the way. When we got to the area we realized we had stumbled over a breeding colony in the sandbank which held 8 birds. We had fabulous close views of birds in the air and perched and everybody was ecstatic. Other birds here were 2 Black-winged Stilt, 1 Kingfisher, 1 Tree Pipit and a male Stonechat.

With all our targets seen we set off for our next destination, which was Taroudant as we started our journey inland towards the deserts having cleaned up on all coastal targets. We arrived at our hotel 2hrs later [Riad l'Arganier D'or], we had just enough time for an evening walk before dinner, so our leader took us to an area of Argan woodland just across the road. This area proved to be very rich in birdlife and it's a shame that this habitat is slowly being eroded away by "progress". 2 Barbary Partridge were seen in flight and briefly on the ground, a Black-shouldered Kite perched on an Argan tree 30mts in front of us, a Barbary Falcon came swooping in at a flock of finches and sparrows spectacularly right in front of us. Other species seen were 20 African Chaffinch, 30 Linnet, 83 Bee-eater, 4 Woodchat Shrike, 2 male Cirl Bunting, 1 Black Kite, 1 Tree Pipit, 1 male Moussier's Redstart and 2 Chiffchaff. The light was fading so we returned to our hotel more than contented on another great days birding.

21st March 2014

The day started with an organised pre breakfast walk, this time around the tracks near the hotel. Again a lot of species were seen, the best being 20+ Bee-eater, 1 Nightingale, 15 Red-rumped Swallow, 2 Hoopoe, 5 Woodchat Shrike, 50+ Spanish Sparrow, 10 Laughing Dove, 4 Desert Grey Shrike, 1 Chiffchaff, 5 Sardinian Warbler, **3 Fulvous Babbler (**)**, 2 Turtle Dove, 5 Short-toed Lark and a male Marsh Harrier.

Today was our first day of travel but a number of good birds were seen from the minibus. Black Kite, 50 Cattle Egret and a Little Egret were seen around Aoulouz. 60+ Bee-eater and Desert Wheatear were between Aoulouz and Taliouine, a toilet stop near Tizi-Ikhsane had a Blue Rock Thrush in the tree above us and 12 Short-toed Lark at a viewpoint near Tizi-n-Bachkoum. We reached our first stop after 2hrs on the

Aremzguna plateau just outside Ouarzazate, here we had a pair of **Magrheb Wheatear ((*)**) nest prospecting which we watched for over an hour. This species can be very rare some years and we later heard a number of birding tours had failed to see them but our leader was probably the foremost authority in this species distribution in Morocco.

A little further on was our big stop for the day – at the El Mansour Reservoir although the water levels were low and distant we did manage to see a number of good species. The list included 6 Wood Sandpiper, 3 Green Sandpiper, 1 Stone Curlew, 100+ Black-winged Stilt, 2 Little Plover, a flock of 208 Ruddy Shelduck, 5 Yellow Wagtail [*ssp. flavissima, Iberiae*], 10 Short-toed Lark, 20 Trumpeter finch, 2 Isabelline Wheatear [a rarity for Morocco], **3 Magrheb** [long-bill crested] **Lark ((*)**), 1 Desert Wheatear, 1 Northern Wheatear, 1 White-crowned Black Wheatear, 1 Black Wheatear, 1 Spectacled Warbler and 4 species of hirundines and Common Swift. The last hour of daylight was spent travelling to our hotel at Boumaine de Dades the Kasbah Tizzarouine, which was an excellent and thoroughly recommended hotel.

22nd March 2014

An early morning walk before breakfast amongst the palm groves below the Kasbah again proved fruitful with sightings of 10 Hoopoe, 6 Turtle Dove, 3 House Bunting, 1 Cirl Bunting, 3 Sardinian Warbler, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Western Olivaceous Warbler, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 1 Nightingale, 1 Night Heron and 1 Little Egret.

After breakfast we visited the mythical Tagdilt Track made famous by our very own tour leader, so who better to show us around. Our first stop was a dried up water hole that was teeming with birds and included 8 Short-toed Lark, 1 male Montagu's Harrier, 4 Desert Wheatear, 4 Red-rumped Wheatear, **10+ Temminck's Lark ((*)**), 12 Cream-coloured Courser and a displaying male Hoopoe Lark. Next stop was a little further on at the Wheatear Wall and adjacent cultivation fields. Again a lot of desert birds were present including 4 Hoopoe Lark, 2 Black-bellied Sandgrouse, 2 Red-rumped Wheatear, 4 Desert Wheatear, 4 Cream-coloured Courser, a male **Thick-billed Lark ((*)**) and 2 Thekla Lark. Our last stop at the "Tagdilt" was at the down dump, for some reason birds like this off putting area, birds present were 2 Desert Wheatear, 2 Red-rumped Wheatear, 1 Bar-tailed Desert Lark [rare here], 3 Cream-coloured Courser and a Long-legged Buzzard.

We stopped off for lunch at a local Orchard seeing a Nightingale, a female Redstart, 1 Meadow Pipit, 1 Chiffchaff and a White Wagtail. Our final stop for the day was at the Gorges de Torda, an awe inspiring piece of natural beauty, birds included 13 Cattle Egret, 1 Bonelli's Eagle, 3 Grey Wagtail, 20+ Crag Martin, 2 Blue Rock Thrush and 20+ House Bunting. Tonight we all slept soundly at the Kasbah Tizzarouine, how much longer we would be able to see every bird we had targeted?

23rd March 2014

Early morning walk around the Kasbah grounds saw us find 1 male Black Redstart, 22 Cattle Egret, 1 Alpine Swift and 2 Crag Martin.

Before we started our long journey to Merzouga we stopped off again at the dried up watering hole on the Tagdilt Track for another look, birds seen were 2 Hoopoe Lark, 2 Red-rumped Wheatear, 2 Desert Wheatear, 8 Temminck's Lark, 3 Lesser Short-toed Lark and 2 Trumpeter Finch.

Our first stop was about half way near the town of Goulmima, a famous site for the recently split Streak Scrub Warbler. After about 20mins a pair of **Streaked Scrub Warbler (**)** duly obliged by bouncing and running along the ground between bushes no more than 20mts away. Other birds at the site included 2male Spectacled Warbler, 6 Thekla Lark, 5 Desert Wheatear, 6 Fulvous Babbler, 1 Desert Grey Shrike [*ssp. elegans*], 5 Cream-coloured Courser and a little further on a pair of Brown-necked Raven. A brief rest stop 100kms short of Merzouga at the Gorges de Ziz viewpoint produced 1 House Bunting, 1 White-crowned Black Wheatear, 1 Blue Rock Thrush and 1 Brown-necked Raven.

Arriving at Merzouga we still had about 2hrs light left, so the leader suggested we stop at one of his favourite sites – Kasbah Yasmina 9km post, an area of small sand dunes in the otherwise barren desert. This turned out to be a good idea, one of our first birds as we left the minibus was the newly split **African Desert Warbler(**)**, a difficult target species easily found, then within a few minutes a flock of 25 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse landed briefly 200mts away giving good views in flight. Also seen here were 1 Desert Wheatear, 3 Bar-tailed Desert Lark and 1 Hoopoe Lark. Another very successful day with all targets seen we retired to our hotel the Riad Nezha for the next three nights.

24th March 2014

Every trip has a special day and this was ours, this was the 4x4 day in the desert with a specialist guide for the area. We were up and in the Toyota Landcruiser by 0600hrs, shooting off into the desert around Erg Chebbi, our first stop was at the tent of a local Bedouin who had **Desert Sparrow (**)** breeding in an out building. There were 2 pairs present and showed very well, other birds of note were a pair of White-crowned Black Wheatear, 1 Brown-necked Raven, 2 Hoopoe Lark, 1 passing Marsh Harrier, 2 Desert Grey Shrike, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 Hoopoe and 2 Bar-tailed Desert Lark. We had breakfast here with a prepared meal from the hotel with a set of table and chairs on top of a sand dune. The next site took us further into the desert eastwards, here we easily found African Desert Warbler, Hoopoe Lark and another male Desert Sparrow. We now had no idea where in the desert we were but later found that we had done a complete circuit of the "Chebbi". Site 3 - 20mins later had us getting fantastic views of a **Pharoah's Eagle Owl (**)** sitting in a tree and in flight between trees, we just couldn't pull ourselves away, supporting cast included Hoopoe Lark and Bar-tailed Desert Lark. We were now spotting birds between sites and included

Booted Eagle, 3 Bar-tailed Desert Lark and 2 Hoopoe Lark. Our next stop was at the home and orchard of another Bedouin tribesman, this place turned out to be a bit of a bird trap amongst his small vegetable patch and orange trees. He took us to a part of the desert just behind his home and pointed at a rock under a bush that turned out to be a sitting **Egyptian Nightjar (**)** only 5mts away, cameras were clicking for some time and even I managed a half decent photo. Amongst his fields and orchard birds seen were 3 Fulvous Babbler, 2 very obliging Thick-billed Lark, 2 Hoopoe Lark, 6 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 7 Magrheb Lark, 1 Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 Tree Pipit, a pair of both White-crowned Black and Desert Wheatear and another passing Booted Eagle. By now we were to the south of the "Chebbi" in a small wadi, the driver stopped the vehicle as Les pointed 10mts away to a flock of 4 **Spotted Sandgrouse (**)**, sitting quietly out in the open. Time for another picnic lunch in the shade of a large tree, while eating we picked out 1 Desert Grey Shrike, 2 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 1 Sardinian Warbler, 1 male Sub-alpine Warbler, our first Western Orphean Warbler, a pair of Northern Wheatear and another pair of Desert Sparrow which had come to our picnic scraps and came within 2mts of us.

With our circuit of the Chebbi done we still had one species left to get, so the driver took us over the main road and past the dried up lake and into another area of wadi's here we easily caught up with our last species in the form of small groups of **Crowned Sandgrouse (**)** totalling 16 birds at close range, amongst them also were another 4 Spotted Sandgrouse, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 3 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 2 Short-toed Lark and a Woodchat Shrike. On our way back to the hotel we stopped at another small wadi for a toilet break and had another 5 Spotted Sandgrouse [found by Barry] and 2 Brown-necked Raven. The only bird we didn't get was Houbara Bustard but that was down to Qatari falconers hunting them into extinction over the winter.

Final birds of the day were 2 Red-rumped Swallow swooping in and drinking from the Riads swimming pool. A great way to finish a superb day.

25th March 2014

Another pre breakfast walk in the palm groves behind our hotel provided dividends in the first Wryneck of the trip. Other goodies were 1 Barbary Falcon, 2 Hoopoe and 2 Red-rumped Swallow. Today was a much more relaxing day with a few species still to get. From the minibus between Merzouga and Rissani we spotted 2 male Marsh Harrier, a flock of 30 Short-toed Lark flying alongside the minibus for 30 seconds and on a small pool by the side of the road 10 Black-winged Stilt and 2 Ruddy Shelduck. First stop was at a Rissani valley where we had 1 Orphean Warbler, 1 Woodchat Shrike, a very showy and recently split **Saharan [eastern] Olivaceous Warbler (**)**, 4 White Crowned Black Wheatear, 3 Little Plover, 1 Spectacled Warbler, 2 Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 male Marsh Harrier, 1 Green Sandpiper, 1 Booted Eagle, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 2 Desert Lark, 1 Crag Martin and 2 Black Kite. In a nearby valley to this one on a rocky outcrop we had Barbary Falcon around its nest site. After

Lunch in Rissani we visited the river and found a pair of **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater ((*)**), 2 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, 12 Little Plover and 3 Green Sandpiper. With all target species again accounted for we stopped off at Kasbah Yasmina to see what passage migrants were on the move and found 3 Western Bonelli's Warbler, 6 Sub-alpine Warbler, 1 Willow Warbler and 1 Desert Grey Shrike. With plenty of daylight left we returned to our hotel for another walk around the palm groves with new birds located in 4 Tree Pipit, 3 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, 2 Willow Warbler, 4 Hoopoe, 30 House Martin, 1 female Northern Wheatear and Woodchat Shrike. We even managed time for a dip in the pool much to the annoyance of the Red-rumped Swallows waiting to drink.

26th March 2014

Our stint in the desert was over and now we had to begin our journey back to greener pastures, today's journey was about 300kms to the town of Ouarzazate halfway to Marrakech. We again stopped off at the Rissani valley we visited yesterday and found some new species from yesterday in 1 Lanner, 1 Desert Lark, 2 Ruddy Shelduck, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 6 Brown Necked Raven and 8 small flocks of Spotted Sandgrouse totalling 75 birds flying overhead calling in brilliant morning sunshine. We then began our journey to Ouarzazate seeing lots of birds on the way in the form of 4 Brown Necked Raven, 2 Northern Wheatear, 7 White Crowned Black Wheatear, 1 Desert Grey Shrike, 8 Bee-eater, 1 Desert Wheatear, 6 House Bunting and 1 Black Kite. We made a stop over half way at a small dam in the Draa valley near El Harte and found 4 Barbary Partridge, Cetti's Warbler and 6 Bee-eater but not much else.

We arrived at Ouarzazate with 4hrs light left so we made another visit to the El Mansour reservoir, but this time from another point which our driver new about being from the town himself. The reservoir shores were still distant but we were able to walk up to the waters' edge from here and there were a lot more birds on this side of the reservoir. A long list of species included 100+ Short-toed Lark, 1 Ruddy Shelduck, 1 Lanner, 25 Yellow Wagtail [*ssp. Iberiae, flava & flavissima*], a pair of Marsh Harrier, 1 Greater Flamingo, 4 Montagu's Harrier, 25 Black-winged Stilt, a pair of Great Crested Grebe, 1 lonely Yellow-legged Gull, 1 Osprey, 1 Little Plover 10 Meadow Pipit and best of all a migrating flock of 69 Black Kite looking for a place to roost for the night.

We arrived at our again splendid accommodation for the night at the Hotel Zitoune just before dark.

27th March 2014

Our journey today was a little shorter at about 250kms punctured with quite a few stops on the way which made it feel like a short hop. But first birds around our hotel before breakfast included 1 White Stork, 1 Hoopoe, 1 Chiffchaff, 1 Sub-alpine Warbler, 29 Short-toed Lark, 2 House Bunting and 2 flyby Cattle Egret. At the edge of town there was a flock of 16 Bee-eater.

Our first stop was on the mountain road to Marrakech near Agouim 70kms into our journey. Here we had panoramic views of the valley below, birds seen here included 1 Booted Eagle, 1 Nightingale, 3 Redstart, 30 Bee-eater, 1 Willow Warbler, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 5 African Chaffinch, 20+ Crag Martin, 1 Hoopoe, 1 Chiffchaff, 1 Cetti's Warbler and to our great surprise a male **Seebohm's Wheatear (**)** recently split from Northern Wheatear. We passed over the high pass of Tizi-n-Tainant [2600mts] and stopped at the first Alpine meadow shortly after the pass. Here we had 40+ Chough, **7 Atlas [Horned] Lark (**)**, 4 Pallid Swift, 10 Bee-eater, 2 Yellow Wagtail and migrating male Marsh and female Montagu's Harriers. Next stop was a small café near Immouzer-des-Glaoua where there were 2 male Moussier's Redstart and a Booted Eagle. Next stop was at Taddert where we caught up with a pair of **Levaillant's Woodpecker (**)** along with a supporting cast of Great Spotted Woodpecker, 2 House Bunting, 4 Crossbill, 1 Cirl Bunting, 2 Cuckoo, 1 Goshawk and 1 Firecrest.

We were finally out of the mountains and we made a stop at some farm fields before going to the Ourika Valley where there were 60 White Stork, 28 Cattle Egret, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 male Montagu's Harrier, 4 Corn Bunting, 1 Short-toed Lark, 1 Little Owl and 1 Little Egret. Final stop of the day was just short of our hotel at the Asni 7km post, famous for **Tristram's Warbler (**)** and after 15mins a male and female revealed themselves, spotted by our tour leader. Other species here were 1 Levaillant's Woodpecker, 2 Barbary Partridge, 1 Western Bonelli's Warbler and 1 Willow Warbler. We arrived at our hotel [Hotel Tatfi L'Atlas] near Ouirgane just as it was going dark, like all our stop overs the hotel and food were excellent.

28th March 2014

Sadly this was our last full day in Morocco but also our day up the Atlas Mountain Range. We had seen all our targets to date but still had 2 to go – would our luck hold?

As usual I was up well before breakfast and a stroll around the dried up riverbed next to the hotel saw me clocking up another Levaillant's Woodpecker, 1 Nightingale, 4 Cirl Bunting, 1 Cuckoo, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 Red-rumped Swallow, 1 Great Spotted Woodpecker, 1 Sardinian Warbler and 1 Hawfinch.

Our first stop today was about 2kms from the hotel at the Asni 9km post where we again had a fine male Tristram's Warbler as well as 1 Short-toed Eagle, 1 Cuckoo and yet another Levaillant's Woodpecker. On our 40km journey up the atlas we stopped about half way to acclimatize and in thick mist we had 2 Levaillant's Woodpecker and a Short-toed Treecreeper in a small wood. As we approached the peaks we had driven through the cloud cover and a beautiful clear day greeted us as we arrived at Oukaimeden ski resort. The first birds seen was an incredible flock of **300+ Alpine Swift (**)** within the army barracks supported by 40 Chough. We parked at one of the resorts main car parks and started to walk up past the lifts into Alpine meadow, very quickly we were onto a fine male Seebohm's Wheatear and about 7 Atlas Lark. While looking at the wheatear an **African Crimson-Winged Finch (**)** appeared to the great delight of all involved, this was our final target and we finished with a 100% "got it" list. Other birds in this small meadow below the peaks included 5 Black Redstart, 2 Mistle Thrush and finally 1 Peregrine. As we returned to the bus lo and behold 5 Crimson-winged Finch were sitting on the wall 2mts from our bus, the photographers went into overload. Time for lunch and when we left the café an hour later we realized that the weather had taken a turn for the worse and we had walked out straight out into a Blizzard. A last look at the car parks before we left proved fruitful, with all the birds of the area gathering here as the peaks became snow covered. These included another 2 Levaillant's Woodpecker [in the trees not the car park], 100+ Rock Sparrow, 3 Rock Bunting, 10 Atlas Lark and 50 Crimson-winged Finch. Having seen everything possible we decided to call it a day and retreat from the mountain. We were at about 3000mts and it didn't stop snowing until we got below 1500mts. On the way down we saw more Grey Wagtails and Black Wheatear. We decided that having seen everything we would call it a day and travel the 40kms to Marrakech and to our hotel [Hotel Opera Mogador] to warm up.

29th March 2014

Our morning flight to Gatwick only gave us time to see our final Spotless Starlings, Moroccan Magpies and House Buntings on the way to the airport.

Our trip total was 192 species, which was the highest count to date for Oriole Birding Tours and our leader Dave Gosney. I saw all the 32 species I needed and one participant [Mike] had over 70 lifers. A fantastic trip and I thoroughly recommend it to anyone who hasn't been to Morocco before. I think the smaller size of the group [4 + tour leader and driver] really paid dividends giving everyone time to wander from the main group and explore areas away from the beaten track. The standard of the hotels and food were excellent and the scenery breath-taking at times. Temperatures near the coast were between 24-27C and in the deserts up to 32c. We had 10 days of clear skies, one day of cloud

cover and the very last day - snow in the mountains and some light rain back down on the plains. As with all foreign countries there were many “lucky lucky” sellers on most of the tourist routes but they were few and far between on most of our days away from the popular areas. The people were extremely friendly and helpful, with the pace of life much more relaxing than our own rat race.

Tour List

1. Barbary Partridge
2. Quail [H]
3. Ruddy Shelduck
4. Mallard
5. Shoveler
6. Teal
7. **Marbled Duck**
8. Tufted Duck
9. Little Grebe
10. Great Crested Grebe
11. Greater Flamingo
12. White Stork
13. **Bald Ibis**
14. Glossy Ibis
15. Spoonbill
16. Little Bittern
17. Night Heron

18. Squacco Heron
19. Cattle Egret
20. Grey Heron
21. Great Egret
22. Little Egret
23. Gannet
24. Cormorant
25. **White-breasted Cormorant**
26. Osprey
27. Black-winged Kite
28. Short-toed Eagle
29. Booted Eagle
30. Bonelli's Eagle
31. Sparrowhawk
32. Goshawk
33. Marsh Harrier
34. Montagu's Harrier
35. Black Kite
36. Long-legged Buzzard
37. Kestrel
38. Lanner
39. Peregrine
40. Barbary Falcon
41. Moorhen
42. Coot
43. Stone Curlew
44. Oystercatcher
45. Black-winged Stilt

46. Avocet
47. Grey Plover
48. Ringed Plover
49. Kentish Plover
50. Little Plover
51. Black-tailed Godwit
52. Bar-tailed Godwit
53. Whimbrel
54. Curlew
55. Redshank
56. Greenshank
57. Green Sandpiper
58. Wood Sandpiper
59. Common Sandpiper
60. Sanderling
61. Little Stint
62. Curlew Sandpiper
63. Dunlin
64. Ruff
65. Cream-coloured Courser
66. Collared Pratincole
67. Kittiwake
68. Slender-billed Gull
69. Black-headed Gull
70. Audouin's Gull
71. Mediterranean Gull
72. Yellow-legged Gull
73. Lesser Black-backed Gull

74. Sandwich Tern
75. Arctic Skua
76. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
77. Black-bellied Sandgrouse
78. **Spotted Sandgrouse**
79. **Crowned Sandgrouse**
80. Rock/feral Dove
81. Woodpigeon
82. Turtle Dove
83. Collared Dove
84. Laughing Dove
85. Cuckoo
86. **Pharoah's Eagle Owl**
87. Little Owl
88. Red-necked Nightjar
89. **Egyptian Nightjar**
90. Alpine Swift
91. Common Swift
92. Pallid Swift
93. **Little Swift**
94. Kingfisher
95. **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**
96. Bee-eater
97. Hoopoe
98. Great-spotted Woodpecker
99. **Levaillant's Woodpecker**
100. Wryneck
101. **Black-crowned Tchagra**

- 102. Desert Grey Shrike
- 103. Woodchat Shrike
- 104. Jay
- 105. **Moroccan Magpie**
- 106. Chough
- 107. **Alpine Chough**
- 108. Raven
- 109. Brown-necked Raven
- 110. Coal Tit
- 111. **African Blue Tit**
- 112. Great Tit
- 113. Hoopoe Lark
- 114. **Thick-billed Lark**
- 115. Desert Lark
- 116. Bar-tailed Desert Lark
- 117. Short-toed Lark
- 118. Lesser Short-toed Lark
- 119. Crested Lark
- 120. **Magrheb Lark**
- 121. Thekla Lark
- 122. **Atlas Lark**
- 123. **Temminck's Lark**
- 124. **Common Bulbul**
- 125. **Plain Martin**
- 126. Sand Martin
- 127. Swallow
- 128. Crag Martin
- 129. House Martin

130. Red-rumped Swallow
131. Cetti's Warbler
132. **Streaked Scrub Warbler**
133. Willow Warbler
134. Chiffchaff
135. Western Bonelli's Warbler
136. Sedge Warbler
137. Reed Warbler
138. **Saharan Olivaceous Warbler**
139. Western Olivaceous Warbler
140. Zitting cisticola
141. Blackcap
142. **Tristram's Warbler**
143. Spectacled Warbler
144. Sub-alpine Warbler
145. Sardinian Warbler
146. Western Orphean Warbler
147. **African Desert Warbler**
148. **Fulvous Babbler**
149. Firecrest
150. Wren
151. Short-toed Treecreeper
152. Spotless Starling
153. Blackbird
154. Mistle Thrush
155. Nightingale
156. Black Redstart
157. Redstart

- 158. **Moussier's Redstart**
- 159. Stonechat
- 160. Red-rumped Wheatear
- 161. Northern Wheatear
- 162. Isabelline Wheatear
- 163. **Seebohm's Wheatear**
- 164. **Magrheb Wheatear**
- 165. Black-eared Wheatear
- 166. Desert Wheatear
- 167. White-crowned Black Wheatear
- 168. Black Wheatear
- 169. Blue Rock Thrush
- 170. House Sparrow
- 171. Spanish Sparrow
- 172. **Desert Sparrow**
- 173. Rock Sparrow
- 174. Yellow Wagtail
- 175. Grey Wagtail
- 176. White Wagtail
- 177. **Moroccan Wagtail**
- 178. Meadow Pipit
- 179. Tree Pipit
- 180. **African Chaffinch**
- 181. Hawfinch
- 182. **African Crimson-winged Finch**
- 183. Trumpeter Finch
- 184. Goldfinch
- 185. Linnet

- 186. Greenfinch
- 187. Crossbill
- 188. Serin
- 189. Corn Bunting
- 190. Rock Bunting
- 191. Cirl Bunting
- 192. **House Bunting**

Other Wildlife

Butterflies:-

Aethrie Fritillary
Moroccan Speckled Wood
Camberwell Beauty
Red Admiral
Painted Lady
Clouded Yellow

Mammals:-

Fennec Fox

Reptiles:-

Spanish Terrapin

Spiny-tailed Agama Lizard

Leopard Fringe-fingered Lizard

Beetles:-

Spiny Desert Darkling Beetle