



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Morocco Trip Report

20th February to 2nd March 2015



African Crimson-winged Finch by Keith Valentine

Tour Leaders: Mark Beevers and Keith Valentine

Trip Report Compiled by: Mark Beevers

Total species recorded: 174 (3 heard only)

Top 10 species as voted by the participants:

1. Egyptian Nightjar
2. Houbara Bustard
3. Northern Bald Ibis
4. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
5. Dupont's Lark
6. Cream Coloured Courser
7. Subalpine Warbler
8. Greater Hoopoe-Lark / Trumpeter Finch
10. Desert Sparrow

Day one and we were on our way out of Marrakech, heading for the snow-covered High Atlas that lay in front of us as dawn broke. It was immediately obvious that there had been heavy snowfall recently as the mountains were covered in the white stuff. Our first stop was at Ait Ourir where we sometimes find Western (Eurasian) Jackdaws, here at the southern end of their range. This wasn't to be the case this year but we did find two Moroccan Wagtails amongst the more common White Wagtails and four Grey Wagtails. Western Cattle Egrets were on the river along with our first Little Ringed Plovers. Two House Buntings proved to be Richard's final bunting species and a Cetti's Warbler was heard singing. Half an hour later and our second stop produced our first north-west African endemic in the form of a stunning male Moussier's Redstart, which gave excellent views. Other birds in this area included a flock of Eurasian Crag Martins, a few Serin Buntings and a fine male Cirl Bunting, whilst European Robin showed well for most of the group and became the nemesis of others. Another roadside stop a few kilometres up produced our first African Blue Tits and an uncooperative pair of Levaillant's Woodpeckers, although eventually they peeked out from behind the tree trunk to allow everyone 'scope views. Further along the road and a large falcon circling turned out to be our only Peregrine of the tour, which also gave great views. As we headed further up the valley towards Oukaimeden we came across Great-spotted Woodpecker, Northern Raven, Coal Tit, Mistle Thrush and Rock Bunting, amongst others. Five kilometres from the ski resort we enticed a pair of Short-toed Treecreepers to show themselves and, just before the gate, we found our expected White-throated Dippers and a real bonus in the form of four Alpine Accentors, which saved us the task of trying to find them later. Also in that area we came across a fine male Black Redstart and a pair of Black Wheatears.



High Atlas Mountain Scenery by Keith Valentine



We went to a local café for lunch but, given the chilly weather, we elected to eat our first tagines inside rather than outside. As lunch was finishing some small birds flitting around the food stalls attracted our attention and proved to be one of our main targets, about 40 African Crimson-winged Finches accompanied by several Horned Larks and Rock Sparrows. Alpine Choughs were present in good numbers but Red-billed Choughs were in short supply with just ten noted. We tried for Ring Ouzel but none responded; and then, as the snow started to fall, we decided to move down the mountain, making the occasional stop on the way. One of these stops was productive in that it produced two Hawfinches, which most of the group saw, and the only Song Thrushes of the tour. Not a bad start to the day – but there was one more target to try for, Tawny Owl. Unfortunately the steadily falling rain scuppered our chances of that species, though they are certainly still in residence as we saw one on our second tour in better weather. And so it was time to retire to the bar, a roaring fire and a beer!

Day two of the tour is always a long day as we relocate to Agadir some 450 kilometres away, but at least it allows for the tired traveller to catch up with some sleep. Still, it's not all driving and our day was to be punctuated with numerous roadside stops. We called briefly at the river at Ait Ourir where the two Moroccan Wagtails from the previous day were still present and the previous day's Common Sandpiper had been joined by a Green Sandpiper, while a Levaillant's Woodpecker was heard calling. A scheduled stop at Ourigane produced the hoped-for Hawfinch, allowing everyone 'scope views as it perched. Both Great-spotted and Levaillant's Woodpeckers were logged, and a male Blue Rock Thrush was added to the growing list. Plenty of Blackcaps were in the area and a couple of European Robins showed to those who had already seen this species, but continued to elude those who hadn't! We stayed too long at this site, which meant we had to make up some time if we were to get to Oued Souss before dark. We therefore cracked on with minimal stops, which produced African Blue Tit and Rock Bunting but little else. A quick look at Tinmal Mosque didn't produce Tawny Owl, which according to the mosque guardian don't roost there anymore due to the number of visitors. Just as we reached the top of Tiz-n-Test a distant speck turned out to be our first Eurasian Sparrowhawk, and then a stop to take photographs of the stunning scenery proved to be very successful as we saw more Ring Ouzels, a serious catch up as away from Oukaimeden we have only recorded this species at two other sites on single occasions.

Lunch was taken at the aptly named La Belle Vue Restaurant, perched high on the escarpment overlooking the distant Souss plain. The traditional Berber Tagine was pretty impressive and very tasty too. One of the group found another Ring Ouzel nearby, a distant flock of 40 Black Kites was picked up as they gained height over the mountain range and a Long-legged Buzzard came into view. After a hearty lunch we commenced our descent onto the Souss Plain, a former haunt of Dark-chanting Goshawk and Tawny Eagle, sadly no longer available in Morocco. As we headed west we picked up a Eurasian Hoopoe and saw several hundred White Storks. We arrived with some daylight to spare and quickly checked through the throng of gulls, finding four Audouin's Gulls, many Mediterranean Gulls and Sandwich Terns. As it was very windy we abandoned our attempt for Red-necked Nightjar and headed for our hotel.



Audouin's Gull by Keith Valentine



Day three saw another early start as we headed out of Agadir to Oued Massa, one of our favourite birding sites in Morocco. As we drove out of town Spotless Starlings and European Magpies were seen regularly, but we didn't stop as we wanted to be on site by 07:30 to try and see the Common Cranes that are usually there early in the day. We arrived on schedule but there was no sign of the cranes; perhaps due to too many people on their usual slope. We instead turned our attention to the river, finding a Western Osprey and then a female Western Marsh Harrier followed by a second Osprey. We slowly walked along towards the sea picking up birds typical of the area such as Eurasian Wryneck, Moussier's Redstart, Sardinian Warbler and a flock of Spanish Sparrows. We went off trail in pursuit of a male Subalpine Warbler, the first we have seen on a tour since 2010, disturbing a Barbary Partridge as we did so. We next stalked a Black-crowned Tchagra, which eventually gave itself up, allowing everyone great views. 20 Pallid Swifts flew overhead as a Caspian Tern flew upstream and, near a large flock of Northern Shoveler, we picked up four female Northern Pintail, whilst on a sandbar a lone Eurasian Curlew was accompanied by several Grey Plovers. Retracing our steps, a male European Greenfinch put on a great show as did a first summer Great-spotted Cuckoo, and we also saw a female Eurasian Sparrowhawk.

We next drove to a different, less saline area of the river, stopping briefly to look at a Cetti's Warbler, and then a Black-shouldered Kite. A quick stop by one bridge produced half a dozen Sedge Warblers and another Cetti's Warbler as well as our first Mediterranean Turtles, sunning themselves on the river bank. We approached the area of the river furthest from the sea, which has



Lanner Falcon by Keith Valentine

the freshest water and usually holds a few ducks. This was indeed the case and immediately obvious was a large flock of Tufted Ducks. Those who have travelled with me before know that I'm an avid counter of ducks, shorebirds and gulls; it's a good way of finding rarities so I set to counting the flock. Very quickly I got onto a bird that was clearly different and my excitement level rapidly increased. The reason was quickly cascaded to the group: the bird in question was a vagrant female Lesser Scaup, a mega for Morocco, provisionally the fifth record for the country and probably for mainland Africa, and yet the second to be found on a Rockjumper

Morocco tour! We spent the next half hour checking the salient features whilst the photographers took as many photos as they could. Eventually the bird flapped its wings revealing the diagnostic white secondaries contrasting with the grey primary bar, a feature that was captured in a photo. High fives all round!

We adjourned to a local restaurant where we were treated to another excellent lunch (excellent food was enjoyed throughout the tour) and then we relocated to Oued Souss for several hours' birding. The wind had dropped but being a Sunday the place was awash with people and the state of the tide didn't help us either. Some of the group elected to return to the hotel whilst the rest of us set off towards some pools that are hidden from view. A quick search through the gulls produced 13 Mediterranean Gulls and, more unusually, a first winter Common Gull, an infrequent bird for Morocco and indeed only the second we have seen. The pools were as productive as ever holding Eurasian Spoonbills, Greater Flamingos, a selection of wildfowl including a pair of Marbled Teal, Eurasian Teal and Northern Shoveler. We disturbed a Eurasian Stone-curlew, but it only flew a short distance before landing and allowing people good 'scope views before we turned our attention



to the shorebirds feeding on the pool. Pied Avocets were gracefully feeding along with Black-winged Stilts, Black-tailed Godwits, Common Greenshank, Ruff and Common Redshanks. A Caspian Tern flew over as we made our way back to the car park for a lesson in gull identification while we waited for dusk and the chance of Red-necked Nightjar. The nightjar failed to put in an appearance but we were treated to the eerie calls of several Eurasian Stone-curlews.

The next day was something different for a tour to Morocco: a pelagic trip, the fourth we have undertaken. Although we didn't go very far offshore we did eventually get excellent views of several seabird species including Balearic Shearwater, Eurasian Storm Petrel and Northern Gannet. Two Great Skuas, also known as Bonxie, spent some time around the boat providing excellent photographic opportunities and then, almost as we got back to port, a flock of Common Scoters flew past at close range. An Audouin's Gull also flew over the boat and as we entered the harbour we found a Turnstone and Common Sandpiper. Back on dry land we headed north towards Tamri, stopping for a quick look at the Tamri Estuary. Here we found many Audouin's Gulls along with Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a few Sandwich Terns. A pair of Southern Grey Shrikes put on a great show but we had to move on to search for our next target, the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis, or Waldrapp as it is also known.

We drove the length of road frequented by a good number of this species but couldn't find them. Then our driver indicated that two were flying some distance away – phew, relief! We walked towards them and soon found two flocks totalling 80 birds with one flock actually walking towards us. Cue more photographic activity, which was hardly surprising as it's always special to see a very rare bird, especially when it's also good to look at and this is certainly a good looking beast, with a bright red featherless face topped off with an outrageous punk crest and an iridescent sheen to the body. Everybody was impressed with this birding experience and it was a happy bus that returned to the hotel that evening.



Great Skua by Keith Valentine

Day five is another long travel day as we leave the coast and head east inland. As we left town we picked up a Little Owl, Eurasian Magpie and Spotless Starling, and then an abrupt stop was called for as two Fulvous Babblers were spotted by the side of the road. In the same area we discovered a Black-shouldered Kite, our first Thekla Larks and a male Moussier's Redstart. We set off again but only for a short distance before another stop, this time for singing Corn Buntings and Spanish Sparrow. We continued on our way stopping for coffee at Auberge Saffron, which held singing House Buntings. Continuing towards our lunchtime destination at Ouarzazate we stopped occasionally when birds demanded it and in doing so we connected with Bonelli's Eagle, plenty of Black Wheatears, a cracking pair of Red-rumped Wheatears and our first White-crowned Black Wheatears. A pair of Trumpeter Finches didn't hang around long enough for all the group to see them but compensation came in the shape of a pair of nest-building Desert Larks. Lunch was taken at the Kasbah Café in Ouarzazate, which overlooks the town's Kasbah. We then relocated to the nearby Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi and even as we approached it was obvious that the lake was much fuller than it has been for several years, almost back to its former glory. However, although the water levels had risen considerably since our last visit, wildfowl and shorebird numbers were



still well down. Careful scanning nevertheless produced Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck, a pair of Gadwall, Western Osprey, Western Marsh Harrier and a sleepy Little Owl, whilst nearby scrub held a female Moussier's Redstart and both Subalpine and Sardinian Warblers. Our allotted time for departure came far too quickly and soon we were on our way to Boumalne du Dades, another two hours' drive away where we checked into the lovely Xaluca Hotel.

The Tagdilt track is a famous Moroccan birding site and holds some sought-after desert species. So on day six we were out at first light at the delightful rubbish dump, a place littered with millions of plastic bags and packs of rather ferocious looking feral dogs. Unfortunately the mystique of the place is somewhat shattered by the debris of humanity that abounds, but amongst all this rubbish there were birds to be found. As usual some of the first species we came across were Temminck's Horned Lark and Red-rumped Wheatear and we racked up good numbers of both during the morning. Lesser Short-toed Lark and Sky Lark were added to the trip list but Thick-billed Lark eluded us, which was a bit worrying as this is the stakeout for this species. Time moved on and so



Cream-coloured Courser by Keith Valentine

did we out onto the gravel plain in search of our other targets, which seemed to be in short supply. Eventually another group of birders put us on to some distant Black-bellied Sandgrouse and we finally logged 40 birds, some of which showed reasonably well on the ground. We also finally found four Cream-coloured Coursers which gave superb views. A fine male Desert Wheatear was appreciated by all as was a Long-legged Buzzard, but we couldn't find any Greater Hoopoe-Larks, which was unusual. We returned to town for lunch and then made our way up the spectacular Dades Gorge, adding Blue Rock Thrush on the way. We stopped for a while opposite a cliff

face where we were very pleased to find a Barbary Falcon in residence before continuing to the top of the gorge, where we set about finding our two targets, one of which was mammalian. We couldn't find any Common Gundi but we did find the main target, the elusive Tristram's Warbler. The bird came in well but unfortunately kept going up the slope and over a ridge, providing brief views as it quickly moved through. We returned to the café and ordered coffees and were then able to compare House and Rock Buntings.

As we hadn't found Thick-billed Lark the previous day at dawn, on day seven we were back amongst the rubbish and dogs at the dump. The group split into two to maximise the ground we could cover and eventually one half of the group (unfortunately everyone had already seen this species in Tunisia the previous week) found a confiding pair. A dash of a couple of kilometres to collect the rest of the team was in vain as the birds flew off before we could get everyone together. We searched a wide area but couldn't relocate them, so returned to our vehicle where we met the birding group from the previous day, who informed us that there was a pair close to our vehicle. A short while later and the pair was found, right in front of us – but they quickly took flight and went some distance. At least everyone managed some sort of view, though the views were far from satisfactory for some. Other birds seen around the dump included more Temminck's, Thekla and Lesser Short-toed Larks and a single Desert Lark. This unscheduled return visit meant that we were behind schedule for the rest of the day but we still had time to admire the magnificent Todra Gorge. Although it was a shorter visit than normal we managed to pick up some good birds, most notably two Short-toed Eagles which were soon followed by a Bonelli's Eagle. We then had to set off



eastwards heading toward Midelt where we were to spend the night. En route we stopped at a site where in the past we have seen Fulvous Babbler and although none were there everyone was very impressed with the views we had of three Trumpeter Finches.

After lunch we headed towards our Streaked Scrub Warbler site near Errachidia, arriving there mid-afternoon. A number of Bedouin encampments and hordes of sheep and goats didn't bode well for our search for the Scrub Warbler but we nevertheless strung out across the wadi and set off through the low vegetation. A pair of European Stonechat, at least three Moussier's Redstarts and a male Sardinian Warbler were quickly located and eventually we flushed our elusive quarry, which then proceeded to do what Streaked Scrub Warblers do best – hide! The bird flitted from bush to bush and it took several attempts for everyone to get a reasonable view. Bird in the bag it was time to return to the bus as we still had a fair way to go. As we walked back two more scrub warblers were found and one of these performed admirably, even posing on top of a bush to allow photographs to be taken – very satisfying indeed! We stopped briefly at Barrage Hassan Addakhil, which like other lakes had seen a good rise in its water levels. There wasn't much to see however but we did find an African Crimson-winged Finch, here at an unusually low altitude, before heading for our hotel.

We had to be up very early the following day and after a quick coffee we were out before first light, which was necessary if we were to stand any chance of seeing Dupont's Lark, one of the hardest birds to see in the Western Palaearctic. We arrived at the Zeida Plain, which some of our drivers have called Morocco's Alaska, well before first light and we soon heard the first of three Dupont's Larks singing. That was the easy bit; finding one to look at was going to be a lot harder. We first concentrated on a bird to our left but try as we might we couldn't find it, so we changed tack and tried a second bird singing to our right. We were looking



Desert Wheatear by Keith Valentine

slightly downhill rather than uphill and this tactic paid off as our quarry was soon in the 'scopes and in the improving light everyone had good views of what is usually a very hard bird to connect with. By 7 a.m. we were back in the warmth of the vehicle, though to be fair this year it was almost tropical rather than the usual freezing conditions. The only other notable species we saw consisted of several singing Lesser Short-toed Larks, so we returned to the hotel for a late breakfast.

After breakfast we set off south heading towards the great Sahara Desert, and between Midelt and Barrage Hassan Addakhil we saw Long-legged Buzzard, Blue Rock Thrush, Moussier's Redstart and a pair of Black Wheatears. Once at the lake we made an impressive count of 200 Great-crested Grebes, found two pairs of Ruddy Shelduck and watched a Bonelli's Eagle soaring over a nearby escarpment. A small bird some distance away turned out to be a male Spectacled Warbler, which soon performed admirably for the group. We lunched at a café overlooking a wide gorge and then continued on our way south to Erfoud. On the outskirts of Erfoud we encountered our first Maghreb Larks (formerly considered to be a long billed race of Crested Lark) right at the side of the road.

We checked into our hotel, the fabulous Chergui, mid-afternoon and then continued to our next target species, Pharaoh (Desert) Eagle-Owl. We were joined by a local guy, Ali the Nomad as he calls himself, who knows exactly where the owls are roosting and were informed that the birds at



our usual site were not available as they were nesting deep in the cliff. He instead took us to another site where he had seen them recently, but all we saw was an immature Lanner Falcon. It was obvious that no owls were present so we decided to take our chances at the usual site. As soon as we arrived a small Red Fox cub was seen peeking out from under a rock, where in previous years the owls had nested. It soon disappeared back into its den, but then a short while later one of the adults came out and ran up the scree slope. Clearly the fox and owl are not harmonious neighbours for as soon as the fox appeared so did the Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, which swooped down on the fox with its talons extended! The fox escaped and the owl perched up on the cliff face where it remained until dark. The views weren't great as it was starting to get dark and as four of the group had gone further along the cliff face, they didn't even see the bird, but at least we knew it could be seen and we could try again the following evening. As we drove back to the hotel some of the group glimpsed an Egyptian Mongoose as it dashed across the road in front of the bus.

There are certain days on this tour that are truly memorable. The high altitude birding at Oukaiimeden, the day at Oued Massa and Oued Souss and the special birds of the Tagdilt Track for instance, but day nine is always a fabulous day and this year it turned out to be absolutely fantastic.

As usual we were out at dawn in 4x4s and we set off into the true desert, the sort of stuff that reminds you of *Lawrence of Arabia* or *Beau Geste*. Our first port of call was a narrow strip of low sand-dune where we quickly found a singing African Desert Warbler, a rather attractive Sylvia warbler even though it's basically brown. Other birds in this patch of desert included displaying Greater Hoopoe-Larks. We then set off into the desert and soon had some interesting information to work on. A quick phone call and we set off to a Berber camp to await the arrival of another local guy, who we learnt had seen Houbara Bustard the previous afternoon. En route some of the group came across a Lanner Falcon and



Greater Hoopoe-Lark by Keith Valentine

a group of six Cream-coloured Coursers, but far more exciting was the appearance of a flock of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, the first time we have recorded this species on a Rockjumper tour to Morocco! Another group of 35 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse flew over and a wintering Tristram's Warbler put in an appearance. Not a bad start to the day – but it was about to get a whole lot better!

We negotiated a deal with the local guy who then set off like a train across the sand dunes, searching for Egyptian Nightjar. We trailed after him for a couple of kilometres but found nothing apart from a pair of Bar-tailed Larks and many Greater Short-toed Larks. Four Thick-billed Larks flew past us but never settled and a couple of Trumpeter Finches were also seen. We drew a blank on the nightjar so instead moved on to a recently formed lake that sandgrouse use for drinking. It wasn't to be and the lake just held a pair of Ruddy Shelduck and male Western Marsh Harrier. But what of the bustards I queried? This prompted a long drive across the desert but, as time passed and with no sign of anything remotely resembling a Houbara Bustard, I was starting to think that we were on a wild goose chase and that perhaps the local guy had conned us. After what seemed an age (actually about an hour) we came to an abrupt halt on a featureless stretch of gravel plain and our friend decamped from the vehicle and set off walking into the wilderness. We remained with the vehicles, watching the guy, wondering what he was up to. He'd only gone a hundred metres when he suddenly turned and started to wave. He'd just found a male Houbara Bustard, nowadays a



difficult species in Morocco thanks to over-hunting by Arab falconers. We watched this magnificent bird from a distance until it disappeared into the haze and then we decided to move closer, but where was the bird, it had disappeared. We drove slowly towards where we thought we had last seen it but found nothing, then turned round to see it walking away from us towards a well-vegetated gully. We set off in pursuit forgetting to pick up our guide and followed the bird into the gully. Leaving three of the vehicles at the gully, my car returned to collect the guide and the rest of the group saw that the male Houbara had joined a female. However, in our absence, the local guy had nailed a real bonus bird: an Egyptian Nightjar sat quietly roosting under a bush. Amazingly this is the second year in succession that we have scored this species and on the same date!



Egyptian Nightjar by Keith Valentine

Everybody thoroughly enjoyed this bird but time was pressing on and we still had a couple of targets to locate. Brown-necked Ravens are easy enough to find but in recent years Desert Sparrow has become increasingly difficult. However our drivers knew of a place where they had been seen recently so after an adventurous drive across the sand dunes we arrived at a small camp where two pairs of this dapper sparrow duly obliged. Lunchtime was approaching but we couldn't drive past the recently formed lakes by Auberge Yasmina, the first time for a number of years that they had held water. They didn't hold much in the way of birdlife though

with just a few Ruddy Shelduck and Kentish Plovers. We had a fabulous lunch at Auberge du Sud and then set off towards a great wetland at Merzouga, again one which had been dry for a number of years. As we approached the lake the lead vehicle almost ran over a group of 19 Spotted Sandgrouse and after a bit of a runround we eventually got 'scope views of them. The number of birds present at Merzouga wasn't as high as on previous visits but the variety was good and we quickly found a selection of ducks including Marbled Teal, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, Ferruginous Duck and Common Pochard, amongst which was our only Black-necked Grebe of the tour. There was also a good selection of shorebirds including our only Dunlin. As afternoon wore on it was time to return to Rissani to try again for the Pharaoh Eagle-Owl. We arrived in good time and once again the Red Fox appeared briefly before scampering up the slope, but on this occasion it didn't attract the attention of the owl, which unfortunately never showed at all. A pair of Lanner Falcons provided some small compensation.

Our penultimate day was a bit of a travel day as we retraced our steps back to Ouarzazate where we were to spend our final night. We made one stop at a spot where we have seen good numbers of Spotted Sandgrouse in the past and we weren't to be disappointed, for not only did we find 50 or more Spotted Sandgrouse but nearby 30 plus Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were feeding and we managed awesome views, particularly of one male. This area was fairly green and held a number of birds including several Spectacled Warblers and two Fulvous Babblers. Several species of lark were found including a few displaying Greater Hoopoe-, Lesser Short-toed, Thekla and a single Greater Short-toed Lark, while we also heard a singing Bar-tailed Lark. We continued on our way to Boumalne du Dades seeing more Cream-coloured Courser, Desert Lark, Temminck's Horned Lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Desert Wheatear and Moussier's Redstart, among other species. A brief visit to the Tagdilt Track resulted in our only puncture of the trip but also gave us two skittish Fat Sand Rats. After lunch we continued on our way towards Ouarzazate where we checked into our hotel



mid-afternoon. Some of the ladies elected to go for some retail therapy but the rest of us returned to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi for the remainder of the day. A Squacco Heron was new for the trip, several Western Marsh Harriers quartered the reeds and a distant Western Osprey was seen. Sedge, Sardinian and Subalpine Warblers all showed well as did a Little Owl, whilst amongst the waders we found two Ruff and a Black-tailed Godwit.

Our last day of the tour saw us climb over Tiz-n-Tichka pass, but before we did that we returned for one last visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi. The birds were similar to the previous evening though we did find a male Ferruginous Duck, a Wood Sandpiper and a very welcome male Bluethroat. Our drive over Tiz-n-Tichka pass was uneventful apart from a Long-legged Buzzard, but then as we

approached our lunchtime rendezvous we came to a sharp stop and yet another decamp from the bus. The reason for this was a juvenile Golden Eagle that was soaring over the road allowing excellent views, a fortunate sighting as this was just the second time this species has been recorded on a Rockjumper tour to Morocco. We stopped for lunch at Toufliht but before entering the café we checked the nearby woodland where we found Great-spotted and Levillant's Woodpeckers, Short-toed Treecreeper and a very showy male Firecrest. The European Robin continued to elude those that needed it as did a Common Crossbill that was heard calling from the top of a conifer. Lunch



Little Owl by Keith Valentine

was interrupted briefly as a pair of Northern Goshawks started to display and then, after lunch, we dropped down into Marrakech, stopping briefly at a ladies cooperative where they explained how Argan nuts are processed into cooking or perfume oils. Needless to say, the chance for some shopping wasn't missed by some of the group.

And that was it, the end of our very productive 11-day classic Morocco tour, possibly the best ever in terms of the special target birds seen. Besides seeing some very good birds, we'd also seen ancient Kasbahs and Medinas, stayed in some charismatic comfortable accommodation and eaten far too much excellent local food. The trip, which took us from the highest snow-covered mountains to rugged Atlantic cliffs via stony desert, the magnificent Sahara and the Atlantic Ocean, gave us a good cross section of North African species including the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis; but, as in 2014, the bird that stole the show was the Egyptian Nightjar, which was again voted bird of the trip, displacing even Northern Bald Ibis! All in all a thoroughly enjoyable tour with great birding and great company.

Annotated List of Birds Recorded 174 species (3 heard only)

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC List. Please cite: Gill, F. and M. Wright. 2006. Birds of the World: Recommended English Names. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Swans, Geese & Ducks Anatidae

Ruddy Shelduck

Tadorna ferruginea

On our first visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate, where the water level had risen considerably since our last visit, we saw about twenty birds with similar numbers on our two further visits. The only other place where we recorded this species in any numbers was in the desert with



80 at the reformed Merzouga and 20 at Auberge Yasmina the same day. Elsewhere we saw four on our second visit to Barrage Hassan Addakhil near Errachidia.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

We found a pair at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our first visit and five were seen at Merzouga.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Recorded on five dates during the tour in low numbers with a peak count of 30 at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our first visit.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

A flock of 45 was seen at Oued Massa with another 30 the same day at Oued Souss, 30 were seen on our first visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi with seven there on our second visit whilst 30 were also found at Merzouga.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Four females were seen at Oued Massa and ten were seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our second visit.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Five were seen on pools at Oued Souss and 20 were seen on our second visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

NOTE: This species has been split into 2 species, the nominate Eurasian Teal (which is the one we recorded in Morocco) and Green-winged Teal A. Carolinensis. This split is not recognized by Clements.

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta augustirostris*

In the last couple of years this species has become a little difficult to find and we never located any at Oued Massa, one of our regular stakeouts. We were therefore well pleased to find a pair at Oued Massa, although not all of the group saw these. We also found 20 at Merzouga, which allowed everyone to catch up with this species. For the second year in a row we couldn't find any at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we normally record this species.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Our only sighting was at Merzouga where we counted 70.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Seven at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our first visit with a single drake on subsequent visits. We also saw 15 at Merzouga. These were the first on tour since 2010.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Our only records were of a flock of 40 at Oued Massa and 11 at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*.

Amazingly we found a female amongst the Tufted Duck flock at Oued Massa. This is the second time that this species has been found on a Rockjumper tour to Morocco and yet provisionally, subject to acceptance by the Moroccan Rarity Committee, it is just the fifth record for the country. An exciting find indeed.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*.

We were fortunate to see a flock of eleven as we returned to port from our pelagic out of Agadir.

Pheasants & Quails Phasianidae

Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara*

We flushed a single bird during our walk at Oued Massa but unfortunately this proved to be the only one on the tour.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

At least one bird was heard giving its distinctive call at Oued Massa.

Petrels and Shearwaters Procellariidae

Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*

We had a group of three and two singletons during our pelagic out of Agadir a couple of which gave close views.



European Storm Petrel*Hydrobates pelagicus*

We enjoyed excellent looks at ten or more of this species during our pelagic trip.

Grebes Podicipedidae**Little Grebe***Tachybaptus ruficollis*

One was found at Oued Massa, at least six were counted at Barrage Hassan Addakhil whilst one or two were seen on our last two visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Great Crested Grebe*Podiceps cristatus*

At Barrage Hassan Addakhil we saw an impressive number with 200 counted on our second visit, whilst up to fifty were seen on all three visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Black-necked Grebe*Podiceps nigricollis*

We saw just a single bird during the tour, in amongst the Common Pochard at Merzouga. The first since 2010 and only the third tour we've seen these species.

Flamingos Phoenicopteridae**Greater Flamingo***Phoenicopterus ruber*

27 were found at Oued Souss on our second visit, mainly immature birds and a further ten were seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our first visit.

Storks Ciconidae**White Stork***Ciconia ciconia*

Recorded on nine dates during the tour with birds on nests in many towns but generally 15 or less recorded during a day. Larger numbers were as usual at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we recorded up to 200 with 300 noted around Taroudant.

Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae**Northern Bald Ibis***Geronticus eremita*

After a fair bit of searching the fields along this species favoured stretch of road near Tamri we eventually found two flocks totalling 80 birds, the most we have ever seen on a tour. We were treated to excellent close looks at this species which is also known as the Waldrapp. This species is critically endangered but had an excellent breeding season during 2014 with a record number of 115 breeding pairs recorded which produced 192 chicks. The population in the Souss-Massa region was estimated at 512 at the end of 2014.

Eurasian Spoonbill*Platalea leucorodia*

Nine were seen at Oued Souss on our second visit and a single bird was seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi also on our second visit.

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns Ardeidae**Squacco Heron***Ardeola ralloides*

One was seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our second and third visits, the first on tour since 2011.

Western Cattle Egret*Bubulcus ibis*

Recorded on eight dates during the tour with 150 on the first day at Ait Ourir, which usually produces the highest count of the tour. Otherwise up to 70 seen at various sites mainly whilst travelling.

NOTE: This group may be split into 2 species, the nominate Common Cattle Egret (which is what we recorded in Morocco) and the Asian / Australasian Eastern Cattle Egret E. coromanda. This split is as yet not recognized by Clements.

Grey Heron*Ardea cinerea*

Recorded on ten dates during the tour with the highest count made at Oued Souss where we had 20 on our second visit. Otherwise up to ten a day recorded.



Little Egret*Egretta garzetta*

Recorded on seven dates during the tour with the highest counts being 20 seen at Oued Souss and at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi. Otherwise up to ten a day noted.

Gannets Sulidae**Northern Gannet***Morus bassanus*

About 40 were seen during the pelagic trip and a few showed well as they passed close to the boat.

Cormorants & Shags Phalacrocoracidae**Great Cormorant***Phalacrocorax carbo*

Recorded on eight dates during the tour with three-figure counts on two dates including 300 split between Oued Souss and Oued Massa. 100 at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi and double-figure counts on six other dates.

Ospreys Pandionidae**Western Osprey***Pandion haliaetus*

Two were seen at Oued Massa, with another the same day at Oued Souss whilst a single bird was seen at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our first two visits.

Note. IOC splits Osprey into two species Western Osprey Pandion haliaetus, which we saw and Eastern Osprey Pandion cristatus. This split is as yet not recognized by Clements.

Hawks, Kites, Eagles & Vultures Accipitridae**Black-winged Kite***Elanus caeruleus*

We had good views of one at Oued Massa and another as we travelled between Taroudant and Ouarzazate.

Short-toed Snake Eagle*Circaetus gallicus*

We had great looks at two birds high over Todra Gorge.

Golden Eagle*Aquila chrysaetos*

A real surprise was a first year bird that we saw as we approached Toufliht, which was just the second to be seen on a Rockjumper tour to Morocco (the last one was in 2010). Given the views and had it had been seen earlier in the tour I think this bird may have crept on to a few people top ten birds of the tour.

Bonelli's Eagle*Aquila fasciata*

We continued Rockjumpers 100% record for this species on a Morocco tour with sightings on three dates. Our first was about 40 kilometres from Ouarzazate and our second flew over Todra Gorge, shortly after the two Short-toed Eagles as we sipped our morning coffee. The third bird was seen high above Barrage Hassan Addakhil.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk*Accipiter nisus*

One was high above Tiz-n-Tichka, two were seen at Oued Massa and our last was seen at Toufliht on our final day.

Northern Goshawk*Accipiter gentilis*

We had our lunch on the final day interrupted by a displaying pair at Toufliht. The manner of the sighting was pretty amazing, if I say so myself, given that the birds were first noticed as a reflection in the window of the café!

Western Marsh Harrier*Circus aeruginosus*

This species was logged on six dates at a number of locations with up to five present on our three visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi near Ouarzazate. Other locations included the desert near Erg Chebbi, Merzouga, Barrage Hassan Addakhil and Oued Massa.

Black Kite*Milvus migrans*

We only saw this species on five dates with just one or two on four of them but we did see a migrating flock of fifty high above Tiz-n-Tichka.



Long-legged Buzzard*Buteo rufinus*

Five were seen during the tour with one above Tiz-n-Tichka, one on the Tagdilt Track, one near Barrage Hassan Addakhil with another the same day near Ouarzazate and one over Toufliht.

Bustards Otididae**Houbara Bustard***Chlamydotis undulata*

With the help of a local man we found a pair in the desert south of Auberge Jasmina. A difficult bird to connect with nowadays.

Rails, Gallinules & Coots Rallidae**Common Moorhen***Gallinula chloropus*

One to three birds were seen on six dates during the tour at sites such as Oued Massa, Tamri Estuary, Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi and Merzouga.

Eurasian Coot*Fulica atra*

This species was seen on seven dates during the tour with the highest numbers, up to 300, at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi. We also found 100 or more at Barrage Hassan Addakhil on our two visits.

Stone-Curlews, Thick-knees Burhinidae**Eurasian Stone-curlew***Burhinus oedicnemus*

We heard several on our second visit to Oued Souss and saw a single bird on this date.

Oystercatchers Haematopidae**Eurasian Oystercatcher***Haematopus ostralegus*

15 were seen at Oued Souss on our second visit.

Stilts & Avocets Recurvirostridae**Black-winged Stilt***Himantopus himantopus*

We found 20 at Oued Souss during our second visit and another 20 at Merzouga with three at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi on our second excursion there.

Pied Avocet*Recurvirostra avosetta*

A flock of six was seen on the hidden pools at Oued Souss.

Plovers & Lapwings Charadriidae**Black-bellied (Grey) Plover***Pluvialis squatarola*

This species was only seen at Oued Massa where on our second visit we saw about 13.

Little Ringed Plover*Charadrius dubius*

Our first were three at Ait Ourir after which we saw one or two on four dates. Larger counts were six at Merzouga with up to 17 on our last two visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Kentish Plover*Charadrius alexandrinus*

Two were seen at Oued Souss, a couple were at Auberge Yasmina, 20 were found at Merzouga with three on each of our last two visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae**Black-tailed Godwit***Limosa limosa*

Nine were seen at Oued Souss and one was found at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi but these proved to be the only birds of the trip.

Eurasian Curlew*Numenius arquata*

One was at Oued Massa and 17 birds were seen at Oued Souss during our second excursion there.

Common Redshank*Tringa totanus*

Twenty were seen at Oued Souss on our second visit with single birds noted on three other dates.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

One was heard at Oued Massa and five were seen at Oued Souss on our second visit.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

We saw one on the river at Ait Ourir, heard one calling at Oued Souss and found two at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

We saw one at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Not common at all this year indeed we only recorded single birds on six dates at various localities.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

We saw one on the harbour wall at Agadir as we returned from our pelagic, the first on tour since 2010.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

We saw twenty at Merzouga but could only find one at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi, where shorebirds were well down on previous years.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

One was found amongst Little Stints at Merzouga.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Four were seen at Oued Souss on our second visit there, ten were seen at Merzouga and two were seen on our second visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Coursers & Pratincoles Glareolidae

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*

We found at four eventually on the Tagdilt Track obtaining awesome looks, six were seen at Erg Chebbi and one was seen a few kilometres from Boumalne du Dades.

Gulls, Terns and Skimmers Laridae

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Recorded on just four dates with by far the highest numbers at Oued Souss where we saw in excess of 100 flying on our second visit with fifty on our first. Elsewhere two were seen at Oued Massa, two were seen on the pelagic out of Agadir and 12 were seen at Barrage Hassan Addakhil.

Audouin's Gull *Ichthyaetus audouinii*

Nine were seen at Oued Souss and one was seen on the pelagic but as usual the largest count came from Oued Tamri we saw 100 plus.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

On our first visit to Oued Souss at least 30 were counted on a sand bank but on our second visit numbers were well down with perhaps just 13 birds present. As is often the case most were first winter birds but a second winter was seen on both visits.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

A first winter bird was found at Oued Souss, just the second we have seen on a Rockjumper tour to Morocco.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Only recorded at the coast where small numbers were seen around Agadir, at Oued Souss and at Oued Tamri with no more than thirty logged on any of the three days that this species was seen.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Like the above species only seen on the coast with up to 500 at Oued Souss on both visits and 300 at Oued Tamri.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

One was seen at Oued Massa and another was seen on Oued Souss during our second visit. Only the third tour that we have recorded this species.



Sandwich Tern*Thalasseus sandvicensis*

60 were found on Oued Souss on our first visit with 30 there on our second but other than these the only ones seen were about two around Agadir Marina and five at Oued Tamri.

Skuas Sternidae**Great Skua***Stercorarius skua*

Two gave outstanding views on the pelagic.

Sandgrouse Pteroclididae**Spotted Sandgrouse***Pterocles senegallus*

We almost ran over a flock of 19 as we approached Merzouga and saw about 50 at another site between Erfoud and Tinejdad where we have regularly encountered this species in the past.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse*Pterocles orientalis*

We saw several flocks at the Tagdilt Track totalling about 40 birds.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse*Pterocles alchata*

We had never recorded this species on a Rockjumper tour to Morocco so we were overjoyed when a flock of 55 flew over us as we waited in the desert for our Houbara man to arrive and these were soon followed by a second flock of 35 birds (and a further group of distant Sandgrouse were also likely to be this species). The following day we found another 30 between Erfoud and Tinejdad and these we managed to see on the ground, with a male in particular providing the group with stunning views.

Doves & Pigeons Columbidae**Rock Dove***Columba livia*

Recorded every day in all towns with birds in wild plumage noted at Oukaiimedden, Todra and Dades Gorges.

Common Wood-Pigeon*Columba palumbus*

Recorded on five dates in small numbers (less than ten) apart from on our last date when 20 were seen in the Toufliht area.

Eurasian Collared-Dove*Streptopelia decaocto*

A common resident that was recorded daily in all towns below 6000 feet.

Laughing Dove*Spilopelia senegalensis*

About six were around Oued Massa but unusually these were the only ones we encountered.

Cuckoos Cuculidae**Great Spotted Cuckoo***Clamator glandarius*

We had great views of a first summer bird at Oued Massa.

Owls Strigidae**Pharaoh Eagle-Owl***Bubo ascalaphus*

We had scope views of one at dusk at our usual site near Rissani but the views weren't great and indeed four of the group didn't see the bird as by the time they got back to us it was dark and the bird couldn't be made out. The bird was first seen as it swooped down on a Red Fox that ran up the slope from its earth and then it sat on the cliff face. Given the disappointing views on our first visit we elected to return to the site again the following evening in the hope that the owl would have another go at the Red Fox but the fox left its earth early and the owl failed to show.

Little Owl*Athene noctua*

Our first was found whilst travelling towards Taroudant, whilst our other sightings were from Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we saw a single bird on two dates and a pair on our final morning.



Nightjars Caprimulgidae

Egyptian Nightjar

Caprimulgus aegyptius

Undoubtedly the star bird of the trip. For the second year in a row (and on the same date!) our local Berber friend came up trumps when he found a bird roosting under a bush, just after he had found our Houbara Bustards. We were treated to long unobstructed views of the bird and many photographs were taken. A very fortunate sighting as this species generally doesn't arrive until March. Voted bird of the trip by a good margin.

Swifts Apodidae

Pallid Swift

Apus pallidus

Recorded on two dates only during the tour with 20 over Oued Massa and eight at Ouarzazate on our last day.

Little Swift

Apus affinis

We struggled to connect with this species and indeed only managed to see one and that wasn't seen by everyone as it flew in to roost at our hotel at Ourika.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher

Alcedo atthis

We had a brief view of one at Oued Massa both in flight and perched.

Hoopoes Upupidae

Eurasian Hoopoe

Upupa epops

We saw one or two birds on eight dates during the tour.

Clements only recognizes two species of Hoopoe; Eurasian U. epops and Madagascar U. marginata. One further species, is widely recognized namely African U. africana and a 4th is sometime recognized, West/Central African U. senegalensis. We only recorded the nominate Palaearctic form U. e. epops.

Woodpeckers & Allies Picidae

Eurasian Wryneck

Jynx torquilla

We saw one well at Oued Massa.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopus major

Two were seen on our first day of the tour as we drove up to Oukaiimeden, we had one the following day at Ouirgane and the last of the trip was found just before lunch at Toufliht.

Levaillant's Woodpecker

Picus vaillantii

Four birds were seen on the way up to Oukaiimeden and two more were heard calling the following day at Ouirgane. Finally one was seen at Toufliht. A north-west African endemic.

Falcons & Caracaras Falconidae

Eurasian Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Up to six recorded daily throughout the tour from many locations.

NOTE: Some authorities split including IOC this species into Common Kestrel, F. tinnunculus which we observed (occurring in East Africa and the Palaearctic region) and Rock Kestrel, F. rupicolus that occurs in Southern Africa. Clements does not as yet recognize these splits.

Lanner Falcon

Falco biarmicus

Our first bird was a juvenile that we saw on the way to Risanni and the following day we saw a pair at Rissani which gave prolonged close views. Some of the group also saw an adult at Erg Chebbi.

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

Our only bird was a female that flew over Oued Souss.

Barbary Falcon

Falco pelegrinoides

We had scope views of one at a regular stakeout for this species.



Bushshrikes Malaconotidae

Black-crowned Tchagra

Tchagra senegalus

One showed very well at Oued Massa and three more were heard calling at the same site.

Shrikes Laniidae

Southern Grey Shrike

Lanius meridionalis

A common bird with up to ten seen on eight dates but mainly whilst travelling. Most birds were of the coastal *algeriensis* race but one bird photographed at Erg Chebbi showed a bird of the interior race *elegans* and the others seen at Erg Chebbi were most likely this race too.

NOTE: This complex, which used to be lumped with Northern Shrike L. excubitor, is being considered for further splitting. These splits would include the nominate Southern Grey Shrike, the migrant Steppe Shrike (L. pallidirostris) and Saharan Shrike (L. leucopygos) which is the form we recorded in Morocco during our tour. Clements recognizes the split from Northern Shrike but not the further splits of the Southern Grey Shrike group. Further compounding the confusion the Collins Field Guide lumps Southern Grey Shrike with Northern Shrike (Lanius excubitor) but splits off Lanius Meridionalis as a separate species Iberian Grey Shrike. There is clearly much work to be done with this group of birds.

Crows, Jays & Magpies Corvidae

Eurasian Jay

Garrulus glandarius

Two were found as we drove up to Oukaiimeden.

Eurasian Magpie

Pica pica

Common around the Marrakech and Agadir areas where we recorded the species on five dates with a peak count of twenty as we drove from Agadir towards Taroudant. This race has a striking area of blue around the eye.

NOTE: There is a possibility that this species could be considered for splitting into several species and if this is the case then the subspecies we recorded could be elevated to a full species known as Maghreb Magpie Pica mauritanica. This possible split is accepted by neither the IOC nor Clements.

Red-billed Chough

Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax

About ten were seen around the ski resort at Oukaiimeden on our first day, which is an unusually low count for this area.

Alpine (Yellow-billed) Chough

Pyrhacorax graculus

150 were around the buildings at Oukaiimeden when we arrived and some were very confiding. Their call is more reminiscent of a passerine than a corvid.

Brown-necked Raven

Corvus ruficollis

This is a true desert loving species and we saw our first one near Rissani whilst at least six were seen around Erg Chebbi.

Northern (Common) Raven

Corvus corax

We saw this species on three dates with our first three noted at Oukaiimeden. Two were over Todra Gorge and 25 were found near Erfoud.

Tits Paridae

Coal Tit

Periparus ater

Ten birds were found as we made our way towards Oukaiimeden and we had at least one just before our lunch at Toufliht.

Great Tit

Paris major

Two birds were seen as we travelled to Oukaiimeden, two were seen at Oued Massa, two were seen at Toufliht and single birds were logged on two further dates.

African Blue Tit

Cyanistes teneriffae

About eight birds were seen as we travelled up to Oukaiimeden with four found at Toufliht. Otherwise one or two birds were logged on three more dates during the tour.

Larks Alaudidae



Greater Hoopoe-Lark*Alaemon alaudipes*

For the first time ever we failed to find this species on the Tagdilt Track but as usual Erg Chebbi produced the goods and we found six of these large, handsome larks some of which gave great views and one or two of which performed their distinctive display. The following day we found three more between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Thick-billed Lark*Ramphocoris clotbey*

Our first birds (two) were in the unsavoury surroundings of the rubbish dump at the Tagdilt Track but boy did we have to work for them. We failed to find any on our morning there which necessitated a return the following morning before we set off for Todra Gorge. Here we walked miles (ok not miles but a fair distance) before half of the group found a pair only for them to fly off before the remainder of the group arrived. We searched far and wide to try and relocate this pair but were unable to do so. Looking like some of us had dipped we returned to our vehicle to be informed by another group that there was a pair close to our van. Unfortunately these birds flushed as soon as we found them and some people only saw them as they flew. A party of four flew past us at Erg Chebbi as we were watching a couple of Bar-tailed Larks.

Desert Lark*Ammomanes deserti*

This is not really a lark of the sand deserts as they prefer more rocky terrain. Our first two were seen near Ouarzazate and they were carrying nest material. We found another pair in Todra Gorge and our last bird was seen as we travelled towards Boumalne du Dades.

Bar-tailed Lark*Ammomanes cincturus*

This is a true desert loving species and needless to say we found our first birds at Erg Chebbi where we located about six obtaining good views of some of them. The following day one was heard at our regular stop between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Sky Lark*Alauda arvensis*

Our first was seen near Ouarzazate and this was followed by six at the Tagdilt Track on our first visit with four there the following morning.

Thekla Lark*Galerida theklae*

This lark is more common at higher levels than Crested Lark and we recorded it on five dates with our first four being found as we crossed a high pass on the way to Ouarzazate with 20 being logged on that date. The over the following days we found at least ten on the Tagdilt Track with single birds on two more dates towards the end of the tour.

Crested Lark*Galerida cristata*

A common & widespread lark except in the true desert areas we saw up to 20 of this species on nine dates mainly whilst travelling.

Maghreb Lark*Galerida macrorhyncha*

We had great looks at this recently split species (from Crested Lark) as we drove south towards Erfoud with two more the following day at Merzouga.

NOTE: Clements lumps this species with Crested Lark but the IOC accepts it as a valid species.

Horned (Shore) Lark*Eremophila alpestris*

We had awesome looks at this species with some down to almost point blank range at Oukaiimeden and at least eight birds were seen.

Temminck's Lark*Eremophila bilopha*

The Tagdilt Track is the place to see this species in Morocco and we weren't disappointed. As usual it was one of the first species we saw on our arrival and by the time we left we'd logged about 40 of this attractive species. We had ten the following morning without even trying but the only other one we saw was on the Zeida Plains.

Greater Short-toed Lark*Calandrella brachydactyla*

A flock of 18 was seen at Erg Chebbi and another flock of 30 was found between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Dupont's Lark*Chersophilus duponti*

We heard at least three individuals singing at daybreak on the Zeida Plain and one showed very well (for this species!). Honestly guys the views we had were great compared to the usual views



you get of this very hard to see species. This is one of the hardest birds to see in the Western Palearctic and justifiably made it into the top ten birds of the trip.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens*

Normally this species is replaced by its larger cousin but this year they too were around in reasonable numbers including thirty at the Tagdilt Track and twenty at Zeida Plain where birds were heard singing and watched displaying. One also came to the dripping pipe between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*

Recorded throughout Morocco in many places, we recorded up to 20 daily and it was often the first species to be logged for the day.

NOTE: Another very confusing polytypic species complex. Several Asian and African forms have already been recognized as distinct species within the super-species. Several other forms may be recognized as distinct once genetic analysis and further study is completed.

Swallows Hirundinidae

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*

Only seen on one day this year with ten on our last visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Recorded on nine dates in generally low numbers with a peak count of 20 on three dates.

Eurasian Crag-Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Recorded on eight dates with double-figure counts on three. The highest count was 50 as we drove up Tiz-n-Tichka. Small numbers were seen in both Dades Gorge and Todra Gorge and at a number of other sites.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

We saw one as we started our ascent towards Oukaimeden and found four more near Ouarzazate.

Cettia Bush Warblers and allies Cettidae

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Two were heard singing at Ait Ourir on our first day but we managed to see three of this skulker at Oued Massa. We also heard another at Dades Gorge.

Streaked Scrub Warbler Scotocercidae

Streaked Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*

Many tours fail to see this species but we have a good stakeout for it. We walked the usual area and it looked as though we were going to miss them. That was until one was flushed as we were about to return to the vehicle. Then we found a pair and boy did one of them pose, allowing some stunning photographs to be taken.

Leaf Warblers and allies Phylloscopidae

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Small numbers were seen on seven dates with most at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi where we logged 20.

NOTE: Most authorities split; including Clements have split the Chiffchaff complex into 4 full species. The nominate form which we recorded is known as Common Chiffchaff P. collybita.

Reed Warblers and allies Cisticolidae

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*



We were very lucky to find a few of these this year with our first being seen at Ait Ourir. Six or more were seen at Oued Massa and up to six were seen on our three visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Cisticolas and allies Acrocephalidae

Zitting Cisticola

Cisticola juncidis

We saw six on our second visit to Oued Souss and a couple more as we travelled towards Ouarzazate.

Babblers, Parrotbills Timaliidae

Fulvous Babbler (Chatter)

Turdoides fulva

We found two near Taroudant and saw two more between Erfoud and Tinejdad which was rather fortunate as these were the only ones we came across. They did however show very well and everyone had great views. These charming, gregarious birds are endemic to north-west Africa and they are always good fun.

Sylviid Babblers Sylviidae

Eurasian Blackcap

Sylvia atricapilla

Up to ten were seen on the first two days of the tour as we travelled up to Oukaiimeden and as we drove up Tiz-n-Tichka pass with six at Oued Massa and a female at Ouirgane.

African Desert Warbler

Sylvia deserti

We quickly found a responsive singing male in small sand dunes at our usual stakeout and everybody enjoyed great looks at this dainty warbler. Knowing the preferred habitat is key to finding this species, it's doesn't like any old desert but a specific type.

Tristram's Warbler

Sylvia deserticol

We found a very uncooperative singing male at our usual spot in Dades Gorge and saw another at Erg Chebbi. Another species endemic to north-west Africa.

Spectacled Warbler

Sylvia conspicillata

We saw a singing male at Barrage Hassan Addakhil which gave awesome views and found up to four between Erfoud and Tinejdad.

Subalpine Warbler

Sylvia cantillans

Our first was a rather flighty and elusive individual at Oued Massa and we saw up to three on our three visits to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi. Only the third time that we have encountered this species on a Rockjumper tour to Morocco and the first since 2010.

Sardinian Warbler

Sylvia melanocephala

We recorded this species on eight dates during the tour at various locations but our best views and highest count (ten) was at Oued Massa. Oued Souss and Oued Tamri were other sites where we saw this species and it certainly seems to be a species that favours the coastal areas.

Kinglets Regulidae

Common Firecrest

Regulus ignicapillus

We had crippling views of male at Toufliht. Always a favourite on the tour.

Wrens Troglodytidae

Eurasian Wren

Troglodytes troglodytes

One seen very well by everyone on the way up to Oukaiimeden with at least one more singing nearby and another was seen at Tiz-n-Test again with more birds singing.

Creepers Certhiidae

Short-toed Treecreeper

Certhia brachydactyla



A pair was seen at Oukaiimeden and we saw another bird at Toufliht.

Starlings Sturnidae

Spotless Starling

Sturnus unicolor

Up to 40 were seen on four dates around the Agadir and Oued Massa areas.

Thrushes & Allies Turdidae

Ring Ouzel

Turdus torquatus

Two or three were seen at the top of Tiz-n-Test and another was a single observer sighting at near the Belle Vue Restaurant, which is a new site for this species on our Morocco tour. Of the high altitude species we target this is probably the hardest to connect with so a good bird to get as we don't always see them.

Common (Eurasian) Blackbird

Turdus merula

A common species that was seen daily throughout the tour with up to 50 a day recorded.

Song Thrush

Turdus philomelos

Two were seen as we travelled up to Oukaiimeden.

Mistle Thrush

Turdus viscivorus

Two were found at Oukaiimeden where they gave good close views.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

European Robin

Erithacus rubecula

We saw this familiar Christmas card bird at the start of our ascent to Oukaiimeden and found two more at Ouirgane with another on the last day of the tour at Toufliht. Unfortunately despite our best efforts not all the group managed to catch up with this species.

Bluethroat

Luscinia svecica

We saw a male at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi but it was only seen well by the original observer after which it only gave flight views or at best brief glimpses as it landed.

Black Redstart

Phoenicurus ochruros

We found a smart male as we approached Oukaiimeden, a female at Dades Gorge, a female between Erfoud and Tinejdad and a pair at Barrage Hassan Addakhil. Not as many on this tour as we have seen on previous tours.

Moussier's Redstart

Phoenicurus moussieri

This beautiful north-west African endemic was first seen as we started our climb to Oukaiimeden where we found two males. As usual they were very cooperative birds, often coming into within a few metres of the group. Thereafter we saw three at Oued Massa, three as we travelled from Agadir to Ouarzazate, with another the same day at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi. Another three were found as we travelled between Errachidia and Midelt with a male the following day on our return along the same route, three were seen as we travelled between Erfoud and Ouarzazate and another male was seen as came down Tiz-n-Tichka.

Blue Rock-Thrush

Monticola solitarius

Our first was a male at Ouirgane, and this was followed by one at Dades Gorge, a male as we travelled from Midelt towards Barrage Hassan Addakhil, two between Erfoud and Tinejdad with our last was seen as we started to ascend Tiz-n-Tichka.

European (Common) Stonechat

Saxicola rubicola

We saw four of these smart looking (well at least the male is) chats on the day we visited Oued Massa and Oued Souss with up to two at other locations such as Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi, at our Streaked Scrub Warbler site between Tinejdad and Errachidia and as we travelled between Midelt and Barrage Hassan Addakhil.

Desert Wheatear

Oenanthe isabellina

Usually at the time of our visit this species is quite difficult to find. This year we found a few as we got further south and east with two on the Tagdilt Track, one at our Streaked Scrub Warbler site,



one at Barrage Hassan Addakhil, one at Erg Chebbi, two on our brief visit to the Tagdilt Track as we headed back to Ouarzazate with another closer to Ouarzazate. All were smart males.

Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta*

Our first birds were a pair as we travelled towards Ouarzazate and then as expected this was one of the first birds we saw on our morning trip to the Tagdilt Track where our eventual tally for the day was about 15 with six there the following morning.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*

Unlike the next species this species favours higher altitudes and also more rocky terrain. Small numbers were seen on seven dates during the tour at amongst other places Oukaimeden, Tagdilt Track, Dades Gorge and Tiz-n-Tichka pass and we logged up to six a day.

White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*

This is the common Wheatear of the lowland desert areas and we recorded the species on seven dates with our first 100 kilometres west of Ouarzazate. We then logged up to 20 a day although as usual the highest daily count was 30 between Erfoud and Tinejdad. This species is very often found in close proximity to dwellings.

Dippers Cinclidae

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

A pair was seen well on the stream below the dam at Oukaimeden at our regular stakeout.

Old World Sparrows Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

As to be expected a common species that was seen on all dates during the tour.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

A flock of 20 was found at Oued Massa amongst which there were several striking males, 20 more were seen as we travelled towards Ouarzazate whilst at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi we had a male on our second visit.

Desert Sparrow *Passer simplex*

A major target of the tour and one that can sometimes prove to be tricky to locate. Last year we found a new site for them and this year we were taken to another site further south where we found two pairs with ease. Everyone had great views of this dapper species.

Rock Petronia *Petronia petronia*

We found a flock of 30 at the ski resort at Oukaimeden where we obtained good views.

Accentors Prunellidae

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*

One of the principal targets at Oukaimeden and this year we located a group of four before we even got to the gate of the ski resort. These birds gave us awesome views.

Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Our first bird was seen in flight over Ourigane after which we logged birds on seven dates, usually one to five but with higher counts of 20 at Merzouga and ten on our last visit to Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi. All birds were of the *iberiae* race.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Eight were seen on our first day split between Ait Ourir and the road to Oukaimeden, then singletons were seen or heard at Ourika, Ourigane, Auberge Le Saffron and Tiz-n-Tichka whilst three were seen in Todra Gorge.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

This species was a very common bird during the tour with up to 20 birds seen daily.

Moroccan Wagtail *Motacilla alba subpersonata*



We found two males on both our visits to Ait Ourir.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

One or two were seen on six dates with a count of ten at Barrage Hassan Addakhil.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

One was heard calling at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi but I think it was a leader only record.

Siskins, Crossbills & Allies Fringillidae

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

We recorded this species on four dates with birds frequently encountered around Marrakech, Oued Massa and Toufliht whilst our highest count was 50 on our first day as we travelled up towards Oukaiimeden. This year we recorded birds of the green backed African race as well as a few of the brown backed European race.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

We found two birds at Oukaiimeden which didn't perform very well for the group as they were only present briefly before flying off, ensuring that not all the group saw them. Not to worry, we have a very good standby site, where we have seen this species a few times, no problem! So the following day we visited Ouirgane expecting to find a few. Clearly they had not read the script, for there was just a single bird perched high in a tree and that only stayed long enough for the all group to get 'scope views.

Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys alienus*

There had been quite a lot of snow at Oukaiimeden which ensured that we connected with this species easily, indeed they were first seen from the restaurant as we lunched and eventually counted 40 birds. A more unusual sighting came from Barrage Hassan Addakhil where we found a male.

IOC splits this species from the Asiatic form giving African Crimson Winged Finch the scientific name Rhodopechys alienus. This split is as yet not recognized by Clements.

Trumpeter Finch *Rhodopechys githagineus*

Our first birds were two as we travelled towards Ouarzazate although they didn't hang around for the whole group to see them. Next we found three as we travelled towards Tinejdad and these gave great views for everyone. The only other ones we saw were two at Erg Chebbi. A poor tour for this species this year as they can be reasonably common. It may be that the amount of rainfall that the country had recently received had affected the distribution of this and a few other species.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Four were seen at the bottom of the road to Oukaiimeden with two the following day at Ait Ourir, a male put on a great display at Oued Massa and two were seen as we left the Agadir area.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

A flock of 15 was seen at Oued Massa and one was found at Barrage el Mansoor Eddahbi.

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Unfortunately we only heard this species calling at Toufliht but as I said in last year's trip report it can sometimes be a difficult bird to find.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

This gorgeous species was encountered on four dates at various locations during the first few days of the tour with no more than three logged on any date.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Small numbers recorded on nine dates usually ten or less but 15 were scattered around Oued Massa. Birds could often be heard singing at roadside stops.

Buntings Emberizidae

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Oued Massa is our usual stakeout for this species but just one bird was heard singing and that was a leader only record. Fortunately as we travelled towards Ouarzazate we came across an area of arable land where many birds were singing and we had great looks at two birds.



Rock Bunting*Emberiza cia*

We found three in the Oukaimeden area and four as we drove up Tiz-n-Test but we had our best looks at Dades Gorge where we saw one bird and Todra Gorge where we found another. On our last day two more were seen as we travelled up Tiz-n-Tichka.

Cirl Bunting*Emberiza cirlus*

A found three including two males as we travelled up to Oukaimeden and another was seen as we drove up Tiz-n-Test.

House Bunting*Emberiza sahari*

This species was recorded on nine dates and was even seen inside the airport at Marrakech. Up to ten a day were logged and this species proved to be one of the groups' last species of Bunting.

Annotated List of Mammals Recorded

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows J. Kingdon, *The Kingdon Field guide to African Mammals* (1997) Academic Press.

Ground Squirrels Rodentia**Barbary Ground-Squirrel***Alantocerus getulus*

We saw our first at a roadside stop as we drove up Tiz-n-Test and another was seen as we travelled towards Ouarzazate.

True Mice and Rats Gerbils, Spiny Mice, Crested Rat Muridae**North African Gerbil***Psammomys obesis*

Also known as Fat Sand Rat we saw three at the Tagdilt Track and eventually we all had great views of these endearing but very shy creatures.

Mongoose Herpestidae**Egyptian Mongoose***Herpestes ichneumon*

One was seen very briefly by both of the leaders as we drove through the outskirts of Erfoud.

Wolves, Coyote, Foxes, Jackals Canidae**Red Fox***Vulpes vulpes*

We saw a Fox cub peeking out from under a rock at the Rissani Pharaoh Eagle Owl site and when an adult left the earth it was attacked by the owl. The same adult was seen the following evening.

Annotated List of Reptiles Recorded**Mediterranean Turtle***Mauremys leprosa*

We found 15 at Oued Massa.

Moroccan Green Toad*Bufo brongersmai*

Some of the ground found a couple at Auberge Yasmina.

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