

Wingspan Bird Tours

Trip Report

CENTRAL MOROCCO

MARCH 17TH - 27TH 2012

**DAY 1 - LONDON TO MARRAKECH - TRANSFER TO HOTEL OURIKA –
AFTERNOON VISIT TO OUKAIMEDAN (TOUBKAL NATIONAL PARK)**

LEADER: BOB BUCKLER – WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

Participants: 8 members of the Oxford RSPB Member's group

190 SPECIES RECORDED PLUS ANOTHER 2 HEARD BUT NOT SEEN

Everything went smoothly at the airport, our group of 9 all arrived on time and the flight was also on schedule. We arrived at Marrakech at 11am in a blaze of sunshine and summer warmth, our first sighting was a **House Bunting**, it was singing to us from the roof of the terminal building as we stepped off the plane. As we loaded the bus with our luggage we had a short time to look around the airport car park where we found **Common Bubul, White Wagtail & Pallid Swift**.



The group during our first outing of the tour near Toubkal National Park, High Atlas

During our drive to the hotel we saw **White Stork, Great Grey Shrike, Collared Dove, Barn Swallow** and plenty more **Pallid Swifts**. At the hotel we spent little time unpacking our optics and met up again in the hotel grounds some 15 minutes later. We spent a few

minutes looking around the grounds where we found more Bubuls and also **African Blue Tit, African Chaffinch, Serin, Cattle Egret, Common Kestrel, Cetti's Warbler (heard)** and **Levaillant's Woodpecker** also heard.

For the remainder of the day we drove the 30km up to Oukaimedan, the road winds its way up through some fantastic scenery with the snow covered peaks in the background. Stopping along the way we watched several new species, our first stop produced **Black Redstart, Moussier's Redstart** (at least 3 males), **Long-legged Buzzard, Rock Bunting** and more **African Chaffinches**.

ROCK BUNTING



Our next stop was in a small pine copse, there were still piles of snow on the ground and the air was a lot cooler up here. We found **Coal Tit**, **Mistle Thrush**, lots of **African Chaffinches** and more **African Blue Tits**. Another stop found us watching an obliging flock of **Red-billed Chough**; they were feeding on a grassy slope just below the road. The next stop was to survey a babbling brook, we were now above the snow-line and the temperature had plummeted, our target bird, the **Dipper**,

was soon located.

THE MOROCCAN ICONIC SPECIES - MOUSSIER'S REDSTART



At Oukaïmeden it began to snow, a small shower but it was very cold and the light wasn't too good either. We spent a couple of hours searching the area for the must-see **Crimson-winged Finch**, which proved to be elusive but we eventually got to grips with it. Other birds were easier to find: **Mistle Thrush**, **Black Redstart**, **White Wagtail** and we had a brief view of **Barbary Partridge**. More difficult species to find were; **Rock Sparrow**, **Atlas Horned**

lark and, of course, the **Crimson Winged Finch**. The latter two were the icing on the cake as they were our most wanted species, we found both of them in and around the car park near the ski-lift, both species were greatly appreciated by the group.

CRIMSON WINGED FINCH



Following that superb last hour during which we had close views of this little beauty, we set off back down the mountain to the hotel for a delicious dinner.

Day 2 - Ourika valley to Boumalne Dades via the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass and Quarzazate

We were up bright and early, gathering in the hotel foyer at 6:15am, just as it was getting light. A **Tawny Owl** had been calling for a while just before we got up.



The air was alive with bird song, mainly **Common Bubul** but also **African Chaffinch**, **Blackbird**, **Robin**, **Blackcap**, **Serin** and **Greenfinch**. Our walk took us down through some wet pasture and tree lined ditches to the River Ourika, along the way we either saw or heard **Cetti's Warbler**, **Great-spotted Woodpecker** (drumming), **Levaillant's Woodpecker** (calling from a perch on the trunk of a nearby tree), **Hawfinch**, several were feeding high up in the canopy. At the river we saw **Grey Wagtail**, **Cattle Egret** and heard our first **Common Nightingale** of the trip.

AFRICAN BLUE TIT

HOUSE BUNTING



On the return walk we saw **Common Nightingale, Cirl Bunting, Song Thrush** and many **African Blue Tits**. We spent another 30 minutes in the hotel ground and caught up with **House Bunting**, singing as it perched on the roof of the hotel, also **Rock Bunting** sitting on a wire, **Sardinian Warbler, Common Kestrel** and a pair of **Little swifts** were visiting their nest in the eaves of the hotel.

After breakfast we set off for the long journey to Boumalne Dades. We made frequent stops the first of which was just passed the town of Ourika. The road was high above the surrounding farmland and we could see the Atlas Mountains peppered in snow behind us. Before too long we had notched our fourth bunting of the day in the shape of a **Corn Bunting**, this was quickly followed by **Thekla Lark, Moroccan Magpie, Barbary Partridge** and **Sardinian Warbler**.

Over the next 50 kilometers we stopped a couple of times to watch specific birds namely: **Black-winged Kite, Bonelli's Eagle** (being mobbed by a **Long-legged Buzzard**), **Common Cuckoo** and **Great Grey Shrike**. We drove up through the Tizi-n-Tichka pass where we saw our first **Black Wheatear** and then down towards Quarzazate stopping for lunch just passed Taddart. During lunch we searched a pine wood for **Crossbill** but found, instead, a flock of **Rock Sparrows**, and overhead a flock of some 50+ **European Bee-eaters** flew passed, later we stopped to watch a large flock of both **Red-billed** and **Alpine Chough**.

As we reached the drier desert-like terrain we stopped to look for **Magreb Wheatear**, no luck but we did see **Short-toed Larks** and a small flock of **Trumpeter Finches**, we also saw from the bus many **White-crowned Wheatears**.



THE GROUP LOOKING AT BIRDS ON THE QUARZAZATE RESERVOIR

During the late afternoon we made two stops near the huge reservoir at Quarzazate, the first stop produced our first

Woodchat Shrike and also many **Common Chiffchaffs**. The second stop was near the shoreline of the reservoir where we saw hundreds of birds. Waders included well over 100 **Common Ringed Plover**, also a flock of **Little Stint**, **Ruff**, **Kentish Plover**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Black-winged Stilts** and **Wood Sandpiper**. On the water we saw **Shoveler**, **Eurasian Teal**, **Great-crested Grebe**, **Little Grebe**, 50+ **Ruddy Shelduck** and there were numerous **Grey Herons**, **Great Cormorants** and **Little Egrets**, a single **Marsh Harrier** was perched on the muddy bank.

The water level of the reservoir was very low and large areas of wet mud were present, these areas were covered in both **Yellow** and **White Wagtails** they were joined by several **Water Pipits** a couple of **Tawny Pipits** and on the drier areas we found both **Northern** and **Desert Wheatears**.

It was now getting dark so we jumped back into the bus to finish the final leg of our journey, the last bird recorded was **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, a small group of them was seen in flight from the bus.

DAY 3 - BOUMALNE DADES THE TAGDILT TRACK AND GORGE DU DADES

Another early breakfast-call found us in the dining room at 6:30am and after consuming a lovely breakfast we set off on foot towards the Tagdilt Track. Our first bird of the day was a **House Bunting** which was on the roof of the hotel this was quickly followed by **Barn Swallow** and a single **House Martin**.



**SOME OF THE GROUP -
SOMEWHERE OUT ON THE
TAGDILT TRACK**

We walked out to the mini-dump a few hundred meters from the hotel entrance, we were hoping for a sighting of **Thick-billed Lark** but failed to find one, however we were happy to watch **Desert Lark**, **Thekla Lark**, **Trumpeter Finch**, **Red-rumped Wheatear** and **Northern Wheatear**. Our driver Ahmed brought the bus over to collect us

and as we were embarking a pair of **Barbary Falcons** flew over.

RED-RUMPED WHEATEAR (FEMALE)

Once inside the bus we set off for the 'new' Tagdilt track, which is in fact a tarmac road, several stops along this road produced more species, the best was a **Lanner Falcon** which flashed across the road in front of the bus. We saw a **Marsh Harrier** attack a couple of falcons that we perched on the ground near the road, they turned out to be **Barbary Falcons**, probably the two seen 10 minutes ago. We saw many



flocks of **Short-toed Larks**, our first **Temminck's Horned Lark**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Red-rumped Wheatear**, and a great find, a **Magreb Wheatear**.

A visit to a mini oasis provided more sightings; 2 **Hoopoes**, **Common Chiffchaff**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, another **Marsh Harrier**, **Great Grey Shrike**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Spectacled Warbler**, **Crested Lark**, **Thekla Lark**, lots more **Short-toed Larks**, **Northern Wheatear** and **Trumpeter Finches**.



DESERT WHEATEAR (MALE)

Back on the Tagdilt Track we turned west and headed out onto the 'hammada', this stony desert habitat is home to several sought after species. **Cream-coloured Coursers** gave themselves up quite easily when a flock of 25 flew over the bus, but the **Hoopoe Lark** took some finding, but what a great find, we actually found a bird

sitting on a nest of eggs! Further searching produced **Tawny Pipit**, several **Black Kites**, a flock of **White Storks**, a probable distant **Lanner Falcon**, **White Wagtail** and our last bird of the morning was a **Lesser Short-toed Lark**.

HOOPOE LARK



3 of them, one in particular showed very well.

At lunchtime we drove into Boumalne Dades to pick up picnic supplies before driving up through the Dades Gorge. Along the way to the head of the gorge we stopped to watch **Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Black Wheatear** and **Common Bubul**. Near the top of the gorge we walked along the road whilst searching the mountain scrub for warblers. The **Tristram's Warbler** was our main target and after a short while we found

For the last couple of hours we re-visited the Tagdilt track still searching for the **Thick-billed Lark**, without success. We find many of the species seen earlier and one nice find was a large number of **Short-toed Larks** feeding on what appeared to be a large spillage of salt, it was an incredible site.



The weather had taken a turn for the worse, it clouded over, the wind picked up and the temperature dropped, so we made a hasty retreat back to the hotel where we had a relaxing couple of hours before dinner.

TRISTRAM'S WARBLER

DAY 4 – MARCH 20TH - BOUMALNE DADES TO MERZOUGA ERG CHEBBI SAND DUNES VIA GOULMIMA, ERFOUD AND RISSANI

Our hotel on the edge of Boumalne Dades



Today started just as yesterday did with an early breakfast and a quick visit to the small 'dump' near the hotel. This time we didn't return to the hotel but instead set off for our 3-day excursion to the desert region.

At the 'dump' we found all the species that we recorded yesterday with particularly good views of **Trumpeter Finch, Red-rumped Wheatear, Northern Wheatear,**

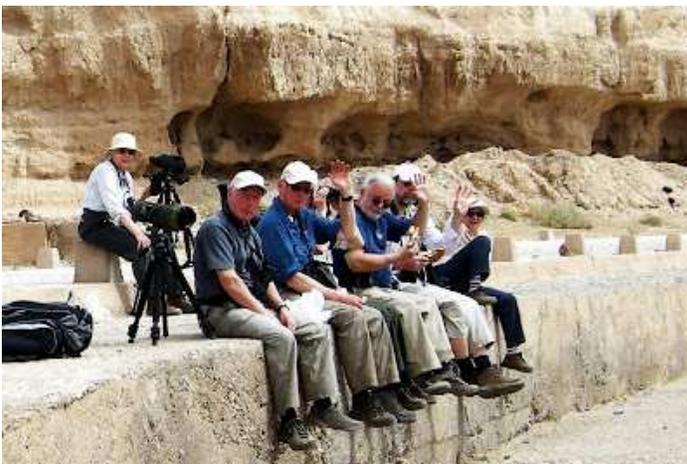
Desert Wheatear and Short-toed Lark.

RED-RUMPED WHEATEAR

After 40km of driving due east from Boumalne Dades we pulled over to look around a well known site for **Magreb Wheatear**. We didn't see the wheatear but many common species were present. Just after we loaded up the bus to leave a shout went up from the back of the bus "**THICK-BILLED LARK**". Using the bus as a hide two larks approached very close and well enjoyed fantastic views of this elusive species, what a great find for us.



Our good luck continued as we stopped east of Goulmima to search for the hard-to-find **Scrub Warbler**, after 30 minutes of searching in the midday heat we found two of these little beauties. We also recorded **Spectacled Warbler, Great Grey Shrike and Desert Wheatear.**



From there we set off back towards Goulmima, a brief stop at the river on the edge of town we found **Black-winged Stilt, Green Sandpiper, Little**

Ringed Plover, Little Egret and Cattle Egret. We then bought lunch in Goulmima and drove south towards Erfoud; we ate our picnic overlooking a river where we found a couple of **Moroccan Wagtails**, also a **Little Stint, Blue Rock Thrush, Moorhen, Sardinian Warbler and White Wagtails.**

The last leg of our journey took us across the desert on rough tracks, we could see the magnificent Erg Chebbi sand dunes in the distant, they looked like golden mountains in the light of the afternoon sun, and it was along these tracks we found our first **Bar-tailed Desert Larks.** We arrived at Kasbah Café Yasmina at 5pm with just enough time left for a quick walk around the grounds. Café Yasmina is situated directly below the Erg Chebbi sand dune system and it usually has a large seasonal lake adjacent to it. This dry winter has left the lake devoid of water but the surrounding tamarisk provides a good area for birding. It was in the tamarisk that we found a pair of **Desert Sparrows**, which was a great treat for the group; we also saw several **Subalpine Warblers** and a single **Whinchat.**



LONG-BILLED CRESTED LARK

Dinner was taken in the large dining room at café Yasmina and our last bird of the day was a **White-crowned Wheatear** which decided to roost in the cane-roof above our dining table!

Day 5 - All day in the Mergzouga area

Another early start saw most of the group assembling on the terrace of the Kasbah Café Yasmina at 6am. The visiting ringing group was putting out their nets and whilst they were doing that we went for a short walk outside of the Kasbah walls. It was dull and overcast but not too windy, we found several species before returning to the terrace. A high flying Harrier went by and a much lower **Brown-necked Raven**, we also saw a couple of **Northern Wheatears** but not much else.

Back on the terrace the ringing group let us follow them on their rounds of the mist nets, they caught 3 birds, a **House Sparrow** and 2 **Short-toed Larks**, we watched the larks being 'processed' and ringed before their release.

By 8am we were off in the minibus heading towards Merzouga, we stopped a few times to watch some desert species which included: **Hoopoe Lark, Bar-tailed Desert Lark, Desert Wheatear** and small flocks of **Short-toed Larks**. We took a walk in a dry river bed which had a lot of vegetation and it was there that we located a pair of **Desert Warblers**, they showed very well down to a few meters, a lovely sighting and another Moroccan must-see species in the bag.

DESERT WARBLER



We continued along the track to Merzouga and onto the main tarmac road, along this road we found two **Brown-necked Ravens** feeding on a rubbish tip; everyone had good views in the scope. To finish off this excursion we drove over to the lake, (we knew it had evaporated but we wanted to check out the surrounding area). By the time we arrived at the 'lake' the

wind had picked up and it was very strong so we decided to call it a day, we drove back to Café Yasmina and had lunch at 1pm. The rest of the afternoon was 'free time' but most of the group took a walk into the tamarisks and spent a couple of hours watching migrant birds.

In the sheltered area of the dry lake we found many **Chiffchaffs, Willow Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Subalpine & Sardinian Warblers, Common Redstart** and **Woodchat Shrike**. A lovely dinner was taken at 7:30pm.

Day 6 - Café Yasmina to several areas around Rissani

Another early start found us in the dry lake area of the grounds of Café Yasmina where we watched the **Desert Sparrows** for a while and then watched



the ringing group handle several species that they had captured in their mist nets. These birds included **Common Nightingale**, **Common Redstart**, **Woodchat Shrike** and **Eurasian Chiffchaff**.

The rest of the day was spent visiting several areas in and around Rissani, along the way we saw **Bar-tailed Desert Lark**, many **Brown-necked Ravens**, **Short-toed Larks** and **Trumpeter Finches**.

The first area we visited at Rissani had small cultivated fields surrounded by palm groves and as we passed through this area we saw a group of **Fulvous Babblers**! After jumping out of the bus we all had prolonged views of this special bird, another prize in the bag.

FULVUS BABBLER



The next landscape we encountered consisted of large sections of sloping rock stretching up to over 50 meters in height, these rocky slopes were surrounded by areas of open sand areas. It was in this rock face that we located our second target bird, the **Pharaoh Eagle Owl**, this was a great find and one enjoyed by all. In this area we also found **Long-billed Crested Lark**, **White-crowned Wheatear** and **Short-toed Lark**.

We drove back through the centre of Rissani where we picked up our supplies for lunch, after we drove to the river Ghreiz for a picnic. Unfortunately the river was almost dry so not many birds were found there.

We did see **Little Egret**, **Little Grebe**, **Grey Heron**, **Moroccan Wagtail**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Willow Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler**, **Reed Warbler** and over 40 **Brown-necked Ravens** were circling over the nearby rubbish dump. The rest of the afternoon was spent searching other rocky areas for **Barbary** and **Lanner Falcons** but we only found **Peregrine Falcon**, the falcon was eating what looked like a



Blue Rock Thrush. We also spent some time searching the open scrub areas for sandgrouse, in this aspect we had more success, and we saw both **Spotted** and **Crowned Sandgrouse**. The Spotted variety numbered 13 and required quite a walk in the heat of the afternoon, they wouldn't allow close approach. However the **Crowned Sandgrouse** was so much easier on our feet.



We drove to another area of scrub and as we arrived we found 9 **Crowned Sandgrouse** by the side of the track, they were within 10 meters of the bus and we all enjoyed superb views of them. We even crept out of the bus and took some good close pictures of them.

CROWNED SANDGROUSE -
SEE THE CROWN ON THE MALE
UPPER PICTURE RIGHT

It was now getting late so we set off back to Café Yasmina and as we passed through Rissani we added **Little Owl** to our list as we saw 3 of them perched on old buildings.



Day 7 - Café Yasmina to Taliouine

We were on the road by 7:30am after we had consumed a lovely breakfast at Café Yasmina, our first stop was along the Alnif road in the area of rocky cliffs and desert valleys. We drove straight to the **Lanner Falcon's** nest that we visited yesterday hoping to see an adult bird. Unfortunately



neither of them showed up, in the meantime, we found another **PHAROAH EAGLE OWL** sitting in a rocky crag. Other birds of note were Brown-necked Raven, White-crowned Wheatear, Thekla Lark and Trumpeter Finch.

A BAD PICTURE OF A **PHAROAH EAGLE OWL** - IT WAS DISTANT AND IN THE DARK



AN UNEXPECTED FIND ON THE CLIFFS -**RUDDY SHELDUCK**, THEY DO BREED IN THIS HABITAT!

During the next 4-5 hours we drove across the country heading towards the west coast at Agadir making several stops along the way. We bought lunch in Agdz and sat to eat it just 5km west of the town. **Laughing Dove** was a new addition to our list which

was seen whilst we ate our picnic, we also saw **Black-eared Wheatear, Woodchat Shrike** and **European Bee-eater**.

AFRICAN CHAFFINCH



We arrived at Taliouine at 4:30pm, our accommodation was at the Toubkal Auberge on the edge of town. The auberge overlooks an area of woodland, cultivated land and the Oued Zagmouzen (which was virtually dry). Before dinner we took a walk down towards the river and despite the very windy conditions we saw quite a number of birds. **Spanish Sparrow** was the only new species but we did see a good variety of common

woodland species. There were many **Laughing Doves, Hoopoe, European Bee-eaters, African Chaffinches, Subalpine Warblers, Woodchat Shrikes, Common Bubuls** and several other species.

Day 8 - Taliouine to Agadir via the 'Sous Plain' passing through Aoulouz and Taroudant.



THEY DON'T LOOK TOO HAPPY ABOUT BEING OUT AT 6AM DO THEY?

A similar walk was taken down towards the river at 6:15am just as it was getting light. We didn't find any new species for the list but we did get better views of

everything because the wind had died down. **Common Nightingales** were singing sporadically, we found **Common Redstart** along with all species seen yesterday.

The second leg on the journey to the coast was commenced at 7:30am and it wasn't long before we stopped for a spot of birding. It was the Gorge at Aoulouz that was our destination. From the bridge just outside the town we look over a good stretch of the almost dry Oued Sous we could see into the mouth of the gorge. From our high vantage point we located a good number of species, new birds included **Great White Egret and Squacco Heron**, they were joined by **Little & Cattle Egrets, Green Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plovers, Moroccan Wagtails, Water Pipits, Greenshank and Grey Herons.**



We then walked into the gorge and watched a few falcons on the cliffs; they were **Common Kestrel** and **Peregrines**. Hundreds of **European Bee-eaters** flew over us and higher up we found **Marsh Harrier**, our first **Montagu's Harrier**, **Griffon Vulture, Black Kite** and another 'first' **Short-toed Eagle.**

ONE OF THE FEW LIZARDS SEEN ON THE TRIP SO FAR - AS YET UNIDENTIFIED

As we walked further into the gorge we looked down over small cultivated fields surrounded by a variety of shrubs and trees. In this vegetation we found **Common Nightingale, Sardinian Warbler, many Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers and Chaffinches**. High up in one of the trees we found a dozen or so of **Black-crowned Night Herons**, many were juveniles and they gave us superb views.

A few kilometers further along the sous plains we stopped again and took a short walk, we were hoping to find cuckoos but all we managed were a few **Black Kites, Marsh Harriers, lots of Woodchat Shrikes and Black-eared Wheatears** and hundreds of **European Bee-eaters**. Over the next 50km we must have seen over 500 Bee-eaters!! Also many **Barn Swallows and House Martins, Spotless Starlings, Common Bubul** and we did get a glimpse of two **Fulvous Babblers** that were perched in a roadside tree. As we descended into the sous valley and the Argan Forest we noticed our first tree climbing Goats, they were incredible and some were really high up in the trees, no I hadn't been drinking!!!

We arrived at our hotel at 2pm, we checked into our rooms and had a quick wash and change before setting off for the nearby Oued Sous. Great disappointment greeted us as we approached the river, hundreds of cars were parked along the road and we soon found out that a major golf tournament was taking place on the new golf course next to the King's Palace, much worse news was to come, the track to the Oued Sous nature trail was closed for security purposes so we couldn't even see the river mouth.

Nevertheless we stayed upriver and spent a couple of hours finding several species of waders, as the tide went out more mud appeared and hence more birds. We logged **Redshank, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Black-tailed Godwit, Little, Ringed, Kentish and Grey Plovers, Green and Common Sandpipers and Black-winged Stilt**. We also found **Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill, White stork (150+), Little and Cattle Egrets, Grey Heron and Moroccan Cormorant**.

HOUSE BUNTING

In the salt marsh scrub we saw **Zitting Cisticola** and **Sardinian Warblers** and our best find was **Stone Curlew (5)**. It wasn't so bad after all but as the sun went down the breeze became a cold wind so we beat a hasty retreat





and headed for the hotel and a nice hot dinner (not tajine for a change).

Day 9 - Souss Massa National Park

This was our best birding day so far, the weather was gorgeous, the birds superb and the group saw several new birds, our total for the day was 86 species. We ate breakfast at 6:30am and set off for the hour-long journey southward to Souss Massa. **Common Bubuls** were calling loudly in the hotel grounds as we left and along the way we noted **Great Grey Shrike, Spotless Starling, Moroccan Magpie, Little Swift, Laughing Dove** and **Crested Lark**.

BLACK-CROWNED TCHAGRA

We stopped just before the entrance to the national park to scan the heathland and found **Moussier's Redstart, European Bee-eater, Little Owl, House Bunting, Sardinian Warbler** and **Common Kestrel**. Our first walk began just inside the reserve perimeter, we were situated on a track high above the river and we could see for miles across fields and farmland. The birding was so good that it took us 1 ½ hours to walk a few hundred meters. We added several new species to our trip list: **Marbled Duck** (a flock of about 20 birds), **Purple Heron, Common Coot** and **Glossy Ibis** were amongst the first. After about 100 meters we heard our first **Black-crowned Tchagra**, it moved very close to us and we all had superb views of this must-see species. Other birds entertaining us were **House Bunting, Black-eared Wheatear, Cetti's Warbler**, our first **Garden Warbler, Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Blackcaps, Sardinian Warblers, Subalpine Warblers** and a very showy **Common Nightingale** which was perched on the ground out in the open. Further along the track we could see the mouth of the river and the sand bar across it. On and near the sandbar we could see, **Eurasian Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingos**, a huge flock of (150+) **Sandwich Terns, Caspian Tern (5), Audouin's Gull (35), Yellow-legged, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls**. In the water we found **Little Grebe, Little Egret, Moroccan Cormorant** and along the shore we saw **Oystercatcher, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Sanderling, Ringed Plover** and **Kentish Plover**. The sea was very misty so we couldn't see off shore but the track itself was superb for flowers butterflies and birds. There were **Linnets**, many in bright red summer plumage, **Stonechats, Moussier's Redstarts, Goldfinches** and *sylvia* warblers mainly **Sardinian** and **Subalpine**.

BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR



At lunchtime we walked north along the coast and met Ahmed with the minibus who then drove us back into Massa to buy lunch. We ate our picnic by the side of the river where we found our first **Plain Martin** which was feeding over the water with many **Red-rumped Swallows, Barn Swallows, House and Sand Martins**. For the next 2 hours we walked along a track that ran

parallel to the river and passed through many fields where *Lucerne* was being harvested. These fields held many species too, we found **Meadow Pipit, Water Pipit, Tawny Pipit, Green Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, Spotless Staring**, lots of **Zitting Cisticolas**, a **Western Olivaceous Warbler** was a nice find as was two **Great Spotted Cuckoos**, bird of the day for many of the group. Above us we watched a **Black**



Kite which was being attacked by a **Black-winged Kite** and several parties of **Glossy Ibis** flew over. Most of the fields held good numbers of **Yellow Wagtails** the majority of which were the subspecies, *Iberiae*.

Tiredness eventually caught up with us so we walked back to the bus, but before we set off back to Agadir and the hotel, we spent 30 minutes looking over the river trying to get a better sighting of the **Plain Martin** but all we got was another brief glimpse. We ended the day early as pulled into the hotel car park at 5pm. We ate a peppered steak at 7:30pm before retiring at 10pm for a well earned rest.

Day 10 - Agadir – Oued Sous – Tamri – Oued Ksob – Essaouira

The Group birding in the fog at Oued Sous



This was our last full day birding, we needed to see a few more species, especially waders, gulls and terns as well as the **Bald Ibis**. At 7:30am we arrived at Oued Sous the tide was low with a large area of exposed mudflats along the river, the air was very still and there was a thick mist shrouding the river. From the nearest viewpoints on the approach road we listed many of the waders seen

yesterday as well as **Greater Flamingo, Grey Heron, Little and Cattle Egrets** and also our first new bird of the day, **Common Shelduck**. Towards the river mouth we found **Avocets**, a party of 12 birds was new for the list and just after that we saw our first **Common Snipe** as it flew in front of us.

A pool on the salt marsh held quite a selection of birds with **Eurasian Spoonbill, Little Egret, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Redshank, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Little Stint, Black Winged Stilts** and another new bird for the list, **Whiskered Tern**. Other birds of note were: **Stone Curlew, Curlew, Audouin's Gull, Sandwich Tern** and lots of plovers of four different species.

On the return trip we added a distant **Black-crowned Tchagra, European Bee-eater, Osprey** and our one and only **Slender-billed Gull!**

After 3 ½ hours at Oued Sous and some great birding we drove north through Agadir heading for Tamri, the mist was slowly lifting although it was thick in places. At cape Rhir we stopped to look for **Bald Ibis** and before the minibus had come to a standstill we had located half a dozen birds. We had very close views of them as they fed on the mountainside, ugly, but nice to see. As the mist was lifting we decided to try some sea-watching, it was very quiet out there and apart from the usual gulls we saw about 10 **Northern Gannets**. Along the beach we could see a **Little Egret** and whilst 'scoping' the bird we discovered **Greenshank, Turnstone, Whimbrel and Sanderling**.

BALD IBIS – easily seen along the roadside near Cape Rhir



At Tamri we bought lunch and drove to the river just outside the town where we ate our picnic. The large brackish pool held many **Common Coot**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Moroccan Wagtail**, **Audouin's Gull**, **Spoonbill**, **Little Egret** and whilst we were there about 20 **Bald Ibis** dropped in to wash. A **Marsh Harrier** sat in the reeds and during a

short walk we found **Sedge Warbler**, **Tree Pipit**, **Robin**, **Subalpine Warbler**, lots of **Chiffchaffs** and **Willow Warblers**, **Serins** and **Sardinian Warblers**.

Just south of Essaouira we turned off the main road to pay a visit to Oued Ksob and despite huge development in the area, including a new bridge, there were lots of birds to see. The shrubby tobacco plants held lots of **Willow Warblers**, **Chiffchaffs**, **Serins** and a **Moussier's Redstart**. Down by the river we had a terrific n hour watching many species



coming to drink and bathe, the number of **Blackcaps** was astounding, we often counted ten at a time coming to drink, a conservative estimate would have been 50 – 100 in this small area.

Many other species joined the **Blackcaps** at the water, at ant one time you could see: **Greenfinch**, **Blackcap**, **Goldfinch**, **African Chaffinch**,

Linnet, **Chiffchaff**, **Song Thrush**, **Blackbird**, also **Laughing & Collared Doves**.

Our target species the **Plain Martin** turned up in good numbers throughout our stay, there was probably a dozen birds in all, we could see their nest holes in the sandy bank, we also found our second target bird, **Common Kingfisher**, two of them graced us with their presence. A group of **Cattle Egrets** sat in the trees above the water, they were looking good in summer plumage, a **Little Egret** joined them, we also found several waders in the river: **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Wood**, **Common & Green Sandpipers**, **Little Ringed Plover** and lots of wagtails, **Yellow**, **White** and **Moroccan**.

A 'good find' turned up whilst we scanned the row of rushes along the far bank in the form of a **Moustached Warbler**, it was good to compare it to **Sedge Warbler** that was also present. Further sightings included: a **Spotted Flycatcher** which is a very early record for this species, also lots of **Moorhens**, **Spotless Starling**, **Yellow-legged** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and **Grey Heron**.

We had about an hour left before the sun went down so we walked down river from the new bridge to its mouth where a huge roost of Gulls could be seen. We added our first **Mediterranean Gull** there, but also saw lots of **Audouin's Gulls**, a single **Black-headed Gull**, in a roost of over 1,000 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, we saw a **Shoveler** in the river, **Sanderling**, **Ringed** and **Kentish Plover** and lots more waders mentioned above, feeding along the river bank.

In all in all it was a superb day-out, we recorded several new species in a total of 101 species, our best day-tally of the trip and a very enjoyable day.

Day 11

Essaouira – Marrakech with a visit to N'FISS RESERVOIR (Lalla Takerkoust Barrage)



Our final day had arrived, we decided to have a lie-in and took breakfast at 7:30am. What a luxury!! We set off at 8:30am for Marrakech, we planned a couple of stops along the way to look for larks. The first stop was some 30km west of Essaouira in open farmland. Our walk produced some interesting species, **Stone Curlew**, **Cream-coloured Courser**, **Hoopoe**, **Thekla lark**,

Marsh Harrier, **Little Owl** and many **Yellow Wagtails**. The second stop produced very little because it was now very hot and heat haze restricted our viewing.

We decided to head for the large reservoir 30km south of Marrakech, as we approached the area we found **Black-winged Kite**, **Woodchat** and **Great Grey Shrikes**, we heard several **Common Nightingales** and also saw **Red-rumped Swallow**. At the reservoir we found **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Osprey**, **Common**

Sandpiper and **Moroccan Cormorant**. A **Common Cuckoo** had us on the run, we searched but failed to locate it, and during lunch, which was taken on the terrace of a restaurant that overlooked the water, we were entertained by **Common Bubuls** that were coming to tit-bits from the table.

Well that was that, the end of the tour, we drove to the Airport with no further sightings to add. Over the last 10-days we had recorded 190 species, heard two more (**Wren & Tawny Owl**) and seen two subspecies that are likely to be split in the future, **Moroccan Wagtail** and **Long-billed Crested Lark**. A great time was had by all and some special memories are going home with us!!!

Thanks for reading this - next year's tour will commence Monday 18th March 2013 if you are interested in joining us book early as this trip is very popular!

SPECIES LIST FOR FEBRUARY 7TH – 17TH AND MARCH 17TH – 27TH 2012

SPECIES		SCIENTIFIC NAME	FEB	MAR
1.	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	√	√
2.	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	√	√
3.	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	√	√
4.	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax c. moroccanus</i>	√	√
5.	Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>	√	
6.	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	√	√
7.	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	√	√
8.	Great Egret	<i>Casmerodius ablus</i>	√	√
9.	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	√	√
10.	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	√	√
11.	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		√
12.	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	√	√
13.	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	√	√
14.	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	√	
15.	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	√	√
16.	Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>	√	√

17.	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	√	√
18.	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	√	√
19.	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	√	√
20.	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	√	√
21.	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	√	√
22.	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	√	
23.	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	√	
24.	Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	√	√
25.	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	√	√
26.	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	√	√
27.	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		√
28.	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	√	√
29.	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	√	√
30.	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	√	√
31.	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		√
32.	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	√	
33.	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	√	
34.	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>	√	√
35.	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	√	
36.	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		√
37.	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		√
38.	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>	√	√
39.	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	√	√
40.	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		√
41.	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	√	√
42.	Lanner	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	√	√
43.	Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	√	√
44.	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	√	√
45.	Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	√	√
46.	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	H	
47.	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	√	√
48.	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	√	√
49.	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	√	√
50.	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	√	√
51.	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	√	√
52.	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	√	√
53.	Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	√	√
54.	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	√	√
55.	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	√	√
56.	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	√	√
57.	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	√	√
58.	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	√	√
59.	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	√	√
60.	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	√	√
61.	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	√	√

62.	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	√	
63.	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	√	√
64.	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	√	√
65.	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	√	
66.	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	√	√
67.	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	√	√
68.	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		√
69.	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	√	√
70.	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	√	√
71.	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	√	√
72.	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	√	√
73.	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	√	√
74.	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>		√
75.	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	√	√
76.	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	√	√
77.	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	√	√
78.	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	√	√
79.	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>	√	√
80.	Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	√	√
81.	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus f. graellsii/intermedius</i>	√	√
82.	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	√	√
83.	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>		√
84.	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		√
85.	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	√	√
86.	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		√
87.	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>		√
88.	Crowned Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>		√
89.	Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>		√
90.	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	√	√
91.	Rock Dove /Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	√	√
92.	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	√	√
93.	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus excelsa</i>	√	√
94.	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	√	√
95.	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>	√	√
96.	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		√
97.	'Pharaoh' Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>	√	√
98.	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	√	√
99.	Magreb Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco mauritanica</i>		H
100.	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	√	
101.	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	√	
102.	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	√	√
103.	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		√
104.	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	√	√
105.	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinus</i>	√	√
106.	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	√	√

107.	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		√
108.	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	√	√
109.	Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	√	√
110.	Great Sp. Woodpecker	<i>D. major mauritanus</i>	√	√
111.	Bar-tailed desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	√	√
112.	Desert lark	<i>Ammonanes deserti</i>	√	√
113.	Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	√	√
114.	Thick-billed Lark	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>		√
115.	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>		√
116.	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Candrella rufescens minor</i>	√	√
117.	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	√	√
118.	Long-billed Crested Lark	<i>Galarida c. riggenbachi</i>	√	√
119.	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae aguirrei</i>	√	√
120.	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	√	√
121.	Horned (Shore) Lark	<i>Eremophila alpesris atlas</i>	√	√
122.	Temminck's Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	√	√
123.	Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	√	√
124.	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	√	√
125.	Crag Martin	<i>Pryonoprogne rupestris</i>	√	√
126.	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	√	√
127.	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	√	√
128.	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	√	√
129.	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>		√
130.	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	√	√
131.	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus prtaensis</i>	√	√
132.	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	√	√
133.	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	√	√
134.	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae/flava</i>	√	√
135.	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	√	√
136.	Moroccan Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	√	√
137.	Common Bubul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	√	√
138.	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	√	√
139.	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	√	H
140.	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	√	√
141.	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>	√	
142.	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	√	
143.	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	√	√
144.	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	√	√
145.	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		√
146.	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	√	√
147.	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		√
148.	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	√	√
149.	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		√
150.	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		√
151.	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	√	√

152.	Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oesta</i>	√	√
153.	Magreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe halophila</i>	√	√
154.	White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	√	√
155.	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	√	√
156.	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Montacilla solitarius</i>	√	√
157.	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	√	√
158.	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus deichleri</i>	√	√
159.	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	√	√
160.	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	√	√
161.	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	√	√
162.	Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>	√	√
163.	Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>		√
164.	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		√
165.	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		√
166.	W. Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>		√
167.	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	√	
168.	Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	√	√
169.	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	√	√
170.	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	√	√
171.	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	√	√
172.	African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>	√	√
173.	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		√
174.	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	√	√
175.	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>		√
176.	Eurasian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	√	√
177.	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	√	√
178.	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		√
179.	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	√	
180.	Fulvous Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>	√	√
181.	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		√
182.	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	√	√
183.	African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i> <i>ultramarinus</i>	√	√
184.	Great Tit	<i>Parus major excelsus</i>	√	√
185.	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>	√	√
186.	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius e. elegans</i>	√	√
187.	Great Grey shrike	<i>Lanius e. algeriensis</i>	√	√
188.	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	√	√
189.	Magreb Magpie	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>	√	√
190.	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	√	√
191.	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	√	√
192.	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	√	√
193.	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	√	√
194.	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	√	√
195.	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	√	

196.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	√	√
197.	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	√	√
198.	Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>	√	√
199.	Rock (Petronia) Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	√	√
200.	African Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>	√	√
201.	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	√	√
202.	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris voousi</i>	√	√
203.	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>	√	√
204.	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	√	√
205.	Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	√	√
206.	Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea</i>	√	√
207.	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	√	√
208.	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	√	
209.	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	√	√
210.	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	√	√
211.	House Bunting	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>	√	√
212.	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	√	√
	TOTALS		179*	193*
	<p>*This total includes 3 subspecies not yet split from the nominate species:</p> <p>Great Grey Shrike (<i>Lanius e. elegans</i>) Moroccan Wagtail: (<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>) Long-billed Crested Lark: (<i>Galerida c. riggenbachi</i>)</p>			