

# WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

**TRIP REPORT – MOROCCO 26<sup>TH</sup> MARCH – APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup> 2011**

**LEADER: BOB BUCKLER**

**PARTICIPANTS:**

**10 TEN MEMBERS OF THE CHELTENHAM BIRD CLUB**

**TREVOR MAYNARD, ROB WILLS, HARVEY BERRY, JOHN CASSWELL, SHIRLEY AND GEORGE HODGES, JOHN CHESBROUGH, DAVID COSH, GEOFFREY PRATT, STEPHEN PALMER**

**DAY 1 – Saturday March 26<sup>th</sup> – Arrival at Marrakech – drive to Ourika Valley.**

The group assembled at Menara Airport at 8pm and after visiting the bureau de change we met our driver Ahmed who guided us to our bus, we then set off for our hotel in the Ourika Valley. It was dark so no birds were recorded on this first day. We sat down for dinner at 9pm and enjoyed our first meal of chicken tajine, it was delicious.

**Day 2 – Sunday March 27<sup>th</sup> - Pre-breakfast walk in Ourika Valley – drive to Oukaimedan**

We awoke to a glorious day with a clear blue sky, no wind and a cool temperature but not too cold! As we left the hotel foyer we discovered what a fabulous position the hotel was in, we could see right up the valley to the snow covered peaks of the High Atlas. A morning mist enshrouded the peaks and a bright half-moon peaked through the mist to add a touch of mysticism to the scene. As a Nightingale sang we savoured the wonderful Moroccan ambiance, then Harvey shouted out “I’ve got a Great Tit here” and the magical spell was broken!

The dawn chorus was wonderful, the air filled with new sounds; the loud **Common Bubul**, feeding on Palm dates, it gave spontaneous bouts of song every few seconds, whilst **Common Nightingales** and **Cetti’s Warblers** sang from deep in the scrub. There were **African Chaffinches** pinking, **Greenfinches** trilling and wheezing, **Goldfinches** were twittering whilst **Serins** gave their buzzing trill as they performed their acrobatic flying display. We listed many species before we even got out of the hotel garden.

The hotel faces a flood plain with hedgerows, mature trees, small fields of crops, hedges with dense thickets and a fast flowing river filled with boulders and stone-clad islands. We walked along a track that led us to the river, we heard the plaintive yaffle of the **Moroccan Green Woodpecker, AKA Leviaillant's Woodpecker** (to give it the official name) and before long we were all watching the bird, It was perched and calling from a tree just a few meters in front of us, Harvey kept his mouth closed this time but the bird still flew off after a couple of minutes.

Trevor (grumpy since he gave up pipe-smoking) lagged behind to watch a pale warbler in the trees and we discovered that it was, in fact, a **Western Olivaceous Warbler**, a very good find and Mr. Grumpy produced an uncharacteristic smile!

At the river we had a terrific time, watching wagtails near the water, warblers in the trees and a good number of **Hawfinches** were eating the newly opened buds near the canopy. Stephen got us all onto a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** just as we found a couple of **Bonelli's Warblers**.

The rest of the day was spent working our way up to the Toubkal Nature Reserve, which is found at Oukaimedan some 30 kilometers from the hotel; from there we then searched the high peaks. We stopped many times to admire the view and look for some Moroccan avian specialties, one such character was the **Moroccan Redstart**, what a beauty, and Mr. Moussier was a very lucky man to have such a gem named after him. A pine copse provided a nice distraction in the form of the tiny **Firecrest**, several were found and the super-hearing of Steve led us to straight to them.

Oukaimedan was busy! It seemed that most of Marrakech had turned out for a Sunday afternoon stroll, I can't blame them! The whole area is absolutely beautiful, the snow-line drops right into the village, people were dotted everywhere, the ski slopes looked like a scene from a Lowry painting, little black dots all over the place.

We escaped the masses by driving higher and looking down on the whole area from a track, we ate our lunch in peace – except for one vender who had followed the bus, still trying to sell us fake minerals, fossils and jewellery whilst we ate. The views were amazing, we were at 3,000 meters and the mountain scenery was just wonderful, so was a superb male **Blue Rock Thrush** that sang from a nearby rock.

George, ironically our only non-birder in the group, came up trumps with a superb find of an **Atlas Horned Lark** and Dave nearly kissed him because it was his most wanted sighting – Harvey kept out of the way!

In order to see 'the bird' of the mountains we had to endure the thriving mass of people in the upper car park, what an experience! As we located the birds a hoard of venders followed us around plying their wares. You could buy herbs, spices, minerals, fossils, nuts, pottery, jewellery, trinkets and you could have donkey rides, and you could also hire skis, snowboards and sledges. The main attraction was the ski lift which would take you to the high peak of Toubkal; it also attracted our target bird the **Crimson-winged Finch**. The birds would perch on the ski-lift cable and hitch a free ride as it travels up the mountainside, it was a very amusing sight to see a row of finches moving along with the cable.

The return journey down the mountain found us watching **White-throated Dippers**, they were dipping and bobbing in the clear mountain stream and a boulder strewn valley gave us our last excitement in the form of several **Moussier's Redstarts**, a **Levaillant's Woodpecker** and a distance **Ring Ouzel**.

The main course at dinner was my favourite Moroccan dish – lamb tajine with prunes and almonds, fantastic. Harvey revealed that he had bought 3 necklaces, but he wasn't wearing one at dinner!

Day two was over, 54 species were in the bag and many of the group had enjoyed adding new birds to their life list – onwards and upwards.

### **Day 3 – Monday March 28<sup>th</sup> - Ourika Valley - Boulmalne Dades via Quarzazate**

After consuming a breakfast of eggs, toast, pancake and croissants we set off for the long journey to Boumalne Dades. Our itinerary took us through some wonderful scenic passes, river valleys and open farmland and everywhere we went we had a fantastic backdrop of snow covered mountain peaks. Despite driving all day we made many stops and filled our note books with some great sightings.

The Tizi-n-Tichkna pass was spectacular and a thrilling experience, passing high peaks and deep ravines the winding road led us up to 2240 meters. From the top we had superb views of the High Atlas Mountains peppered with a light covering of snow.

The first of our numerous stops was made not far after Ourika village where we found **Moroccan Magpie**, **Thekla Lark**, **Spanish Sparrow** and **Linnet**. Next we stopped just east of Ait Ourir where we watched **Booted Eagles** lifting on the thermals from a wooded hillside, we also found a pair of **Long-legged Buzzards**, a **Eurasian Hobby** and a **Black Kite**. Several butterflies we also noted including a **Provence Hairstreak**.

Our lunch stop was fairly brief, it was very hot and we sat in the shade of a tree overlooking some farmland interspersed with bushes and scrub. We found **Common Redstart**, **Woodchat Shrike** and we had brief views of **Bonelli's Eagle** over the far ridge.

A small feeder-river that supplied the huge reservoir just east of Quarzazate still held pools of water and provided some good birding as we walked along its the river bank. A pipit was located which caused some excitement but it turned out to be a **Meadow Pipit**, then we found a **Common Whitethroat**, several **Chiffchaffs**, **Subalpine Warbler** and a small flock of **Yellow Wagtails** which proved to be of both the *Iberiae* and the *Flavissima* races. We then discovered a **Western Olivaceous Warbler** which gave small bursts of song and a **Common Nightingale** which was giving a very uncharacteristic sub-song.

Our best stop of all was at the huge Quarzazate Reservoir itself, we drove across the 'hammada' to view the water from a high ridge and at some distance. The light was excellent so we could pick out even the most distant of birds, the lake was covered in **Common Coot**, **Great Cormorant**, **Great crested Grebe**, **Little Grebe**, **Ruddy Shelduck**, a few pairs of **Marbled Duck**, and **Mallard**. A few waders included **Black Winged Stilt**, **Greenshank**, **Little Ringed Plover** and we found a couple of **Ospreys**. There were hundreds of **Yellow Wagtails**, we estimated 400-500 of them scattered across the surface, which was covered with a layer of a thick weed. Amongst the Wagtails we found a few **Water Pipits**, then 3 **Greater Flamingos** dropped in and Trevor, Mr Grumpy found some very distant **Blue Cheeked Bee-eaters**, another smile escaped the stone-like face.

Amongst the scattered scrub of the 'hammada' we found **Desert Wheatear**, **Desert Lark** and a **Woodchat Shrike**. Soon it was time to leave for last leg of the journey, so we set off at 6pm and arrived at our hotel at 7pm in time for a delicious dinner and a couple of beers.

### **Day 4 - Tuesday March 29<sup>th</sup> - Early morning - Tadilt Track – afternoon in the Boulmalne du Dades Gorge & Tagdilt track.**

We started early today having breakfasted at 6:30am – 7:30am, we set off on foot towards the Tagdilt Track. Our walking took us to a mini-rubbish tip about 500 meters from the hotel where we found **Desert & Red-rumped Wheatear, Temminck's Horned Lark, Trumpeter Finch**, a single **Bar-tailed Desert Lark, Thekla Lark** and lots of **Short-toed Larks**.

We then spent the next 3 hours exploring the 'hammada' or stony regs of this semi-desert habitat, you could see for miles in every direction across flat stony ground with hardly any vegetation except short 'barbed-wire' scrub. Several species eked out a living in this harsh environment which included **Hoopoe Lark, Red-rumped Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Temminck's Horned Lark, desert Lark, Cream Coloured Courser** and **Black Bellied Sandgrouse** all of which we saw very well. Dave pulled out a rare wheatear in the form of **Magreb Wheatear** (formerly Mourning ) and we had exceptional views of **Lanner Falcon** perched on the ground.

The afternoon was spent travelling up the picturesque Gorge du Dades, we ate our lunch from a high vantage point overlooking the river Dades and some very strange rock formation that looked like bulging mushroom heads sprouting from the cliff face. Shirley found us a **Eurasian Hoopoe** to look at whilst Geoff called out **Crag Martin** and a **Blue Rock Thrush**.

At the head of the gorge the mountains rose higher but the slopes were not so steep which gave rise to a growth of mountain scrub and, of course, birds breed there too. One particular warbler prefers this habitat, the **Tristram's Warbler**. We spent an hour walking, looking and listening without a sighting then as we returned to the bus there they were! Typical, a pair was feeding in the scrub down below where we had parked the bus, they showed very well.

We also found **Cetti's Warblers**, the male was displaying to the female by fanning out its impressive tail, a pair of **Black Redstarts** were found near them as was a **Woodchat Shrike**. At a cafe, where we stopped to take photographs of the terrific gorge, there were several very tame **House Buntings** and the good numbers of **Crag Martins** were joined by a single **Pallid Swift** and a couple of **House Martins**.

We left the gorge and arrived back at the hotel at 5pm leaving ourselves a nice relaxing time before we enjoyed a lovely vegetable and meat tajine dinner.

## **Day 5 - Wednesday March 30<sup>th</sup> – Boulmalne Dades to Auberge Derkaoua via Er-rachida and Erfoud**

The early morning walk at 6:30am was eventful with some good sightings, most of group turned up, 'Chezzer' (John Chesbrough) turned up a tad late and gave up trying to catch us up as we walked away from the hotel up the slopes. It was quite windy but we had a clear sky and a lovely colourful sunrise. We walked in a wide circle in order to approach a small rubbish tip with sun behind us so that if any birds were present we would see them in good light. Our first sighting was a good one, it was a **Stone Curlew**, we inadvertently flushed it but the bird didn't fly far and we had great views of it. Next we found **Desert Wheatear, Desert Lark, Thekla Lark** and a few **Barn Swallows**. At the rubbish tip more larks were found with a pair of **Red-rumped Wheatears**, but the bird of day was found by Geoff, who picked out a superb male **Thick-billed Lark**, it was very confiding, we got very close-up views of it, smashing!

At 8:30am we emerged from the hotel as a flock of some 50 **European Bee-eaters** flew over and then, just after we all had loaded onto the bus, a **Eurasian Hoopoe** flew passed the gate and perched on the wall, two nice sightings and a parting gift as we said goodbye to the hotel staff.

The journey to the desert took us through some very sparse landscapes, wide open plains with no vegetation, only stones, rocks and sand. Occasionally we would pass through villages and over wadis but generally it looked inhospitable habitat.

After collecting our lunch supplies in Goulmima we headed for Er-rachida and along the road we stopped at a wadi which had some good vegetation consisting of small bushes, a kind of marram grass and the ever present 'barbed wire' bush. A pair of **Great Grey Shrikes** sat on top of the larger bushes and in the centre of the same bush sat a beautiful male **Moussier's Redstart**. Several *phylloscopus* warblers, in the form of **Chiffchaff**, **Bonelli's** and **Willow Warbler** flitted about in the scrub. We then found a superb male **Spectacled Warbler** just as a flock of 9 **Fulvous Babblers** burst from the cover of the nearest large bush.

We followed the babblers trying to get better views of them and whilst doing so we found a small party of 3 **Barbary Partridges**, this led us out of the wadi and onto the stony reg where we also found **Desert Wheatear** and **Desert Lark**.

Our next stop was for lunch, it was in another wadi which supported far more grassy tussocks and scrub and fewer bushes. After eating we walked along the wadi away from the road, where we found the now ubiquitous, **Great Grey Shrike**. AS we were watching a **Desert Wheatear** Geoff called out a small warbler a little nearer to us – it turned out to be a **Scrub Warbler** our target bird. We followed this little chap for 30 minutes trying to get better views, it was like watching a long-tailed Wren with spring loaded shoes on! A superb little fellow, it burst into song at one point, but eventually showed well to those of us that had the patience to wait.

We made a couple of other brief stops where we logged Common **Raven**, **Laughing Dove**, **Serin** and we heard more **Blue Cheeked Bee-eaters** but failed to locate them. We followed the Valley of River Ziz down to Erfoud where at times the scenery was stunning, we stopped at the famous gorge to take pictures of the views and whilst doing so we found some large lizards.

From Erfoud we crossed the desert to our Auberge which was to be our home for 3 days, after our arrival we had time for a walk in the grounds which turned out to be terrific. The walled compound of the Auberge had many trees and shrubs and some cultivated land which held a growth of alfalfa. It was around this area that we discovered a plethora of species which included many **Subalpine Warblers** (at least 20 in one small area), **Whinchat**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Melodious Warbler**, **Common Restarts** (5), **Willow Warblers**, **Chiffchaff**, **Bonelli's Warbler**, **Short-toed Larks** and **White Crowned Wheatear**. Many of the birds were feeding out in the open on a patch of recently cropped alfalfa but we also found many birds in the tamarisk which included a tail-less **Western Olivaceous Warbler**. The sun began to sink in the sky and the light diminished so we gave up and headed for our rooms in order to prepare for dinner which we ate outside in the beautiful courtyard of the Auberge.

## Day 6 Thursday March 31<sup>st</sup> – Erg Chebbi – Cafe Yasmina - Rissani

We made an early start at 6:30am and walked the grounds once more and one of the first birds we encountered was a **Stone Curlew** which burst from the cover of a tamarisk in front of us! Many of the species we saw the previous night were still present but we added **Trumpeter Finch**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Sand Martin** and a

**Common Quail** which flew across our line of sight after being flushed, amazingly many of the group had never seen a Quail before!

After our Al Fresco breakfast we headed off south towards Merzouga stopping along the way to watch **Hoopoe Lark** and **Temminck's Lark**. We turned off the main road eastward to the Erg Chebbi sand-dune system, but first we visited a large wadi sited to our left just after leaving the main road. We watched a pair of **Desert Wheatear** for a while before we located our target bird the **Desert Warbler**, this very tiny, straw-coloured, bird showed very well and even burst into song a couple of times, it was much admired by the group.

We continued eastward and after 14km we arrived at Cafe Yasmina where we found many **Brown-necked Ravens**, at least 20 were loafing near a small rubbish tip. At the Cafe we sat on a terrace which overlooked the magnificent dunes and a large open area (which obviously held water during the wet season), the dry lake bed was surrounded by thick tamarisk cover of bushes and mature trees.

A resident bird ringer Ivan was busy at work catching and ringing migrant birds and we were fortunate enough to see a few nice species passing through his hands. A couple of **Woodchat Shrikes** were followed by the diminutive **Subalpine Warbler** then a **Common Nightingale** came next. It got better, a **Bonelli's Warbler** preceded the catch of the morning, a stunning **Wryneck!** This beautifully marked creature looked fantastic in the hand with its intricate cryptic markings, what a stunner!

The group then moved onto the sand to view the tamarisk trees and after a while we found a lovely **Orphean Warbler** and our target bird the **Desert Sparrow**. One final bird that we saw in the hand was a **Sardinian Warbler**, a superb male, we all admired this little gem before returning to the terrace for a long lunch in the bright sunshine. During lunch we noticed a large gathering of **Brown-necked Ravens**, they circled in the sky and we counted over 80 birds, an amazing number, we wondered how such a number survived in these harsh desert conditions?

The rest of the afternoon was spent at Rissani and during our drive there we stopped to look at a pair of **Bar-tailed Desert Larks**. At Rissani we drove around the cultivated areas of palm groves where we found many **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** and the enigmatic **Long-billed Crested Lark**. We met Abriham, a local lad and a regular contact of Wingspan Birds Tours who took us to see a **Pharaoh Eagle Owl**, this beautiful owl looked like a cute tabby cat stuffed into a mountain crag.

It was now late afternoon and we spent another hour trying to get good views of **Laughing Dove** in the palm groves without success and our final hour was spent looking for the elusive **Egyptian Nightjar**, again without a sighting.

### **Day 7 – Friday April 1st Derkaoua to Rissani – Alnif Rd - Qued Ghris**

There was no official morning walk today, however several of the group ventured into the grounds to do some quiet bird watching. A good selection of species was located, the first of which was new for the trip in the form of **Black-crowned Night Heron** as 5 of them were flushed from the trees in the entrance drive-way, they circled overhead for a few minutes before drifting off. **Common Redstart**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Tree Pipit**, **Western Olivaceous Warbler**, **Willow Warbler**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Woodchat Shrike** and lots of **Subalpine Warblers** were added to the day list, all found within the grounds of the Auberge, but **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** and **Trumpeter Finch** were additions from just outside the perimeter wall.

We set off after our al fresco breakfast to Rissani where we spent the rest of the day visiting various locations. The wadi of the river Ziz was first on the list, a known location of the sub-species of **Olivaceous Warbler**, the *Saharae*. We quickly located two of these birds in the tamarisk trees as they sang repeatedly. We also had great views of **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** as several of these beauties perched a few meters from us.

Next we visited the wadi of the river Ghris where there was still plenty of water and lots of birds were present. **Moroccan Wagtail** and **White Wagtail** fed along the sandy banks whilst **Little Grebe** (2), **Grey Heron** (10), **Little Egret** (2) and **Ruddy Shelduck** (2) were found in the water. A couple of **Little Ringed Plover** were joined by a single **Kentish Plover** and a few pairs of **Blue-cheeked bee-eaters** were nesting in the sandy banks. The tamarisk scrub that lined the river banks held several warblers, we found **Bonelli's, Willow, Subalpine** and **Chiffchaff**. In the reeds we also found **Sedge Warbler** (2).

We then drove further along the Alnif road to a regular site known to be good for sandgrouse, we were not disappointed. A long walk culminated in great views of both **Spotted Sandgoruse** (66) and two groups of **Crowned Sandgrouse** (15) and (12). WE also found **Desert Lark, Brown-necked Raven** and a falcon species which was probably **Barbary Falcon**.

We ate our lunch in the shade of a rocky crag and then spent an hour looking for **Barbary Falcon** in a site that we usually find them but we dipped on this occasion. It was now very hot so we decided to call it day and set off for the shelter of the auberge, we spent a couple of hours recuperating before taking a short walk to the wadi adjacent to the grounds of the auberge. We intended to stay until dark to look for **Egyptian Nightjar** and just as we got to the viewing place we found a **Bluethroat** feeding on the edge of a very small pool, a great find for the trip list. We waited for nearly an hour to see the nightjar and when one did appear it was very distant and only 3 of the group saw it, a bit disappointing, however we had a lovely dinner sitting in the courtyard underneath a magnificent sky of twinkling stars.

### **Day 8 – Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April Erfoud – Taliouine via Rissani-Alnif-Adgz and Tazanakht**

We spent the whole day travelling from our Auberge just south of Erfoud to Taliouine in the west, a distance of some 450 kilometers. We stopped a few times especially to watch parties of **Fulvous Babblers** and during our lunch stop we also listed this species. We bought our lunch in Adgz and ate under the shade of acacia trees just west of the town. A number of species were seen during this time which included **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Laughing Dove, Desert Wheatear, Woodchat Shrike** and a party of 6 **Fulvous Babblers**.

We arrived at Taliouine around 5pm and had just enough time for a walk around the auberge which was situated about a kilometre from the town itself. The weather had changed dramatically, it was humid with a heavy layer of cloud above us. We walked around the perimeter of our camping-auberge and discovered several species, namely: **Sardinian Warbler, African Chaffinch, Laughing Dove, European Bee-eater, House Bunting, Crested & Thekla Larks**, a distant **Montagu's Harrier** and several common species.

### **Day 9 – Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> April Taliouine – Agadir – Souss Massa National Park**

Another day of travelling but not so far this time, only 200 kilometers. Before we set off we took a walk down towards the river and into some scrub and small-holding farmland. It was dull and overcast so the light was not too good. Many of the species that we recorded the previous evening we found with the addition of **Eurasian Hoopoe** (2), **Red-rumped Swallow, Common Nightingale** (heard) and we watched a **Bonelli's Eagle** displaying above a distant ridge, the eagle was mobbed by 3 or 4 small falcons which were probably **Lesser Kestrels**.

Back on the road towards Agadir we travelled to Aoulouz where we made our first stop. The magnificent gorge, just west of the town, is very good for falcons and includes a small colony of **Lesser Kestrels**. The river Sous runs through the gorge and it held several **Cattle** and **Little Egrets**, a pair of **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Cetti's Warbler** and hundreds of hirundines fed above it. We watched the kestrels for a while and then our attention was drawn to the sky as a small scale migration passage was taking place. A good number of **Black Kites** were joined by **Booted** and **Short-toed Eagles**, **Montagu's** and **Marsh Harriers**, an **Osprey** and hundreds of **European Bee-eaters**. I'm pretty sure that a **Peregrine Falcon** took one of the Bee-eaters and then flew onto a pylon to eat it.

Our next stop at the side of road some 20 kilometers further on proved to be very fruitful, we parked in an area of open grassland, with large fields of crops and some scattered shrubs. The wild flowers here were superb with many poppies in flower. We spent an hour scanning for harriers and were rewarded with good views of **Marsh** (2) and **Montagu's Harriers** (3 including a male), but the star sighting was a **Black-winged Kite**, the bird performed well gliding from perch to perch with occasional bouts of hovering.

The fields were covered with flocks of birds, thousands of **Spanish Sparrows** roamed the area in sizable flocks whilst **Great Grey Shrikes**, **Woodchat Shrikes**, **Corn Buntings**, **Crested Larks** and **Zitting Cisticolas** seemed abundant. We also found **Whinchat**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Sardinian** and **Spectacled Warblers** and a **Lanner Falcon** flew over us.

Our lunch stop was uneventful, the thick cloud was threatening rain as we sat to eat our tajine sandwiches, we noted **Little Swifts** flying above us but not much else, however, not long after recommencing our journey a **Rufous Bush Robin** flew across the road in front of the bus and the first two rows of passengers had clear views of its distinctive tail pattern! We eventually arrived at The Souss Massa National Park at 4pm which is some 50 kilometers south of Agadir. It was sunny but very windy which made bird watching very difficult, however we found **Little Owl**, **Laughing Dove**, **Moussier's Redstart**, **House Bunting**, **Common Bulbul** and **Common Redstart** along the entrance track to the reserve.

We then spent the next couple of hours searching for the elusive **Black-crowned Tchagra** along the track which ran towards the beach area parallel to the river. The scrub was thick and the wind was strong so it was very difficult birding. Eventually the bird showed well for a short period but not all of the group saw it, Harvey (the suppressor ) had found his own bird and photographed it!

We added **Stonechat**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Turtle Dove**, **Moroccan Cormorant**, **Olivaceous** and **Melodious Warblers** to our list before being driven off by the windy conditions. There wasn't time for further exploration of the area so we drove back to our hotel in Agadir arriving at 7pm.

### **Day 10 – Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April - Oued Sous - Tamri**

This was our final day and the group intended to go out with bang, they needed 26 new species to break the Wingspan record of 182 for the tour.

After an early breakfast we made the short trip to the Oued Sous nature reserve, it was low tide, the huge tidal mud / sand flats of the river were fully exposed and were covered with birds. We began about 2 miles upstream by looking over the river from a viewing area where we quickly notched up some new sightings. **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Grey Heron**, **Little Egret**, **Pied Avocet**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Oystercatcher**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Marsh Sandpiper** (2) and a **Peregrine Falcon** were the first. Along the bank

and in the scrub we found **African Blue Tit, Moroccan Magpie, Subalpine Warbler, Sardinian Warbler** and several **Zitting Cisticola** were seen whilst many **Turtle Doves** could be heard in the woods behind us.

As we made our way downstream across a heath-land we found a superb, and unexpected, pair of **Black-crowned Tchagras**, they were very obliging and allowed close approach especially from the photographers, one of them flushed a 'crake' species in doing so!

Nearer to the river mouth the species kept on coming with **Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Green Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Little Stint, Sanderling, Stone Curlew, Gull-billed and Sandwich Tern, Lesser Black-backed and Audouin's Gull, Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Common Kestrel.**

After two hours we had amassed some 50 species, twenty of which were new to our list! On returning to the bus we found our only **Tortoise** of the trip and a couple of butterfly species new for us. We then travelled northward along the coast road to Tamri and as we did so the cloud dispersed but the wind increased dramatically, so much so that it was blowing a gale by the time we reached our destination.

At Tamri we parked near to the beach in a bay that held a large lagoon, a huge area of reed and tamarisk with both sand and shingle banks. As we ate our picnic lunch in the leeward side of the bus we watched an **Osprey** fishing in the river channels, it was barely coping with the wind and sand storm. A large number of gulls were present on the sand-bar, they were mainly **Lesser Black-backed** but also **Audouin's, Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gulls**. We also noted a party of 9 **Eurasian Spoonbills**, 12 **Pied Avocets**, 4 **Gull Billed Terns**, 4 **Grey Herons**, 2 **Ringed Plovers** and a **Moroccan Wagtail**. After scanning the hillside for an hour or so we eventually got brief views of our main target bird the **Bald Ibis**. At last we had seen the main bird of the tour and rarest on our list, but the view was all too brief and distant.

We drove into the hills above Tamri to look for more ibis but we were almost blown off our feet before giving up. After giving up the search we travelled back southward along the coast and before long we saw a group of **Bald Ibis** feeding in the scrub on the side of the road. We braved the strong wind to scope the birds, satisfied with our views and photographs we jumped back onto the bus.

One further stop produced one of those magical experiences in birding life, when you find many species in a small area and in a short space in time, birds just kept on appearing! We noticed a beach pool was full of birds as we passed in the bus, so we stopped and on closer investigation found 3 new species for our tally and a total 15 species in and around this very small pool. The wind had obviously played a role in 'dropping' many birds into the area which included over 100 wagtails, 60+ **White Wagtails** and 40-50 bright **Yellow Wagtails**. In the water there were 25 **Black-winged Stilts**, 15 **Pied Avocets**, a **Common Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ringed, Little-ringed and Kentish Plovers, Curlew Sandpiper, a Temminck's Stint, 2 Little Egrets, a Squacco Heron, 4 Sandwich Terns** and a **Yellow-legged Gull** with a broken wing. What a great tally in 30 minutes of birding!

It was a superb day of birding to finish off the tour, the first two hours and this last one were the best, we logged 80 species during the day, a fitting tribute the wonderful bird life of Morocco.

## **Day 11 – Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April - Agadir – Marrakech**

We all had early flights to catch so we had to leave Agadir in the dark to arrive at Marrakech at 9am. There had been torrential rain just before we arrived but we were not delayed and everyone boarded on time.

The tour total was 182 species, a great effort from the group and it could have been a lot higher if the desert area had held any water. We missed several species of duck and some usually easy birds such as Cirl Bunting, Barbary Falcon, Alpine Swift and Calandra Lark to name just a few. Well done to the Cheltenham Bird Club.

## SPECIES RECORDED

SPECIES	LATIN NAMES
1. Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
2. Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
3. Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
4. Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
5. Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris graeca</i>
6. Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
7. Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
8. Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
9. Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
10. Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
11. Great Cormorant	<i>Phal. Carbo moroccanus</i>
12. Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
13. Cattle Egret	<i>Bulbulcus ibis</i>
14. Great White Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
15. Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
16. Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
17. Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
18. Black Stork	<i>Ciconianegra</i>
19. White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
20. (Northern) Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>
21. Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
22. Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
23. Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
24. Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
25. Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennatus</i>
26. Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>
27. Black-Winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
31. Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
32. Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
33. Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
34. Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
35. Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
36. Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
37. Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanii</i>
38. Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
38. Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrines</i>
39. Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>
40. Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
41. Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
42. Common or Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>

43. Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
44. Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
45. Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
46. Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>
47. Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
48. Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
49. Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
50. Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
51. Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
52. Grey or Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
53. Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
54. Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
55. Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
56. Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
57. Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
58. Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
59. Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
59. Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
60. Common Sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>
61. Common Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>
62. Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
63. Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
64. Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
64. Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponicus</i>
65. Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
66. Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
67. Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
68. Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
69. Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
70. Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cahinnians</i>
71. Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
72. Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
73. Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
74. Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>
75. Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
76. Rock Dove	<i>Columbus livia</i>
77. Rock Dove (domestic)	<i>Columbus livia</i>
78. Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
79. Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
80. European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
81. Laughing Dove	<i>Strep. Senegalensis arenicola</i>
82. Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus conorus</i>
83. Pharaoh Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>
84. Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
85. Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>
86. Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptus</i>
87. Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
88. Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
89. Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>
90. Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>

91. Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
92. European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
93. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus chrysocerus</i>
94. Levaillant's Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus vallantii</i>
95. Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
96. Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
97. Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae aguirrei</i>
98. Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
99. Desert lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti payne</i>
100. Bar-tailed Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes c. arenicola</i>
101. Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>
102. Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotheby</i>
103. Temminck's Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
104. Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
105. Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
106. Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>
107. Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
108. Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
109. House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
110. Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
111. Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
112. Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
113. Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
114. Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla f. iberiae</i>
115. White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
116. Moroccan White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>
117. Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
118. White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
118. Eurasian Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
119. Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
120. Rufous Bush Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>
120. Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
120. Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
121. Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
122. Mousierre's Restart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
123. Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
124. Black-Eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
125. Magreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe halophilo</i>
126. White Crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
127. Black wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
128. Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
129. Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oesta</i>
130. European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata rubicola</i>
131. Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
132. Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
133. Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola salitarius</i>
134. Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>
135. Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
136. Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
137. Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>

138. Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
139. Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
140. African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>
141. Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>
142. Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
143. Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus shoenobaenus</i>
144. Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>
145. Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
146. Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
147. Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais elaeica</i>
148. Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
149. Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>
150. Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus colybita</i>
151. Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
152. Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
153. Great Tit	<i>Parus major excelsus</i>
154. Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
155. African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>
156. Great Grey Shrike	<i>Larius excubitor elegans</i>
157. Great Grey Shrike	<i>Larius excubitor algeriensis</i>
158. Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
159. Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>
160. Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
161. Fulvous Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>
162. Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>
163. Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhcorax pyrrhcorax</i>
164. Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhcorax graculus</i>
165. Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
166. Browned-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
167. Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
168. House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
169. Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
170. Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>
171. Rock (Petronia) Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
172. Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelops</i>
173. African Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>
174. Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
175. European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>
176. European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris voousi</i>
177. European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
178. Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
179. Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
181. House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>
182. Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>