

Western Sahara's Desert Wildlife (Mammals)

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly London to Dakhla.</u>
Day 2/3	<u>Desert Campsite.</u>
Day 4/6	<u>Desert House.</u>
Day 7	<u>Dakhla.</u>
Day 8	<u>Depart Dakhla for London.</u>

Departs

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code MAR08).

Dates and prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code MAR08) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Focus

Elusive desert wildlife, with a focus on nocturnal mammals.

Grading

Grade B. Please note that this tour will involve very long nights spotlighting.

Highlights

- Search for exciting & elusive nocturnal creatures.
- Sand Cat, Fennec & Ruppell's Foxes, African Wolf, Saharan Striped Polecat & Desert Hedgehog possible.
- Chance of Pharaoh Eagle-Owl.
- Other desert birds including Crowned Sandgrouse, Cream-coloured Courser, Cricket Warbler & Dunn's Lark.
- Flocks of Desert Sparrow sometimes contain the beautiful Sudan Golden Sparrow.
- Spectacular starry skies from our remote campsite.



*From top: Fennec Fox, Crowned Sandgrouse and Western Sahara landscape.
Images courtesy of Shutterstock Images and Javi Elorriaga.*



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Introduction

The territory of Western Sahara may have a chequered history, but it is home to a remarkable collection of mouth-watering birds and mammals, many of which are almost impossible to see elsewhere, including Sand Cat and Fennec Fox. On this adventurous new tour, we'll venture deep into these windswept north-west African deserts in search of their elusive wildlife.

We'll fly into the coastal town of Dakhla, where we'll stay in a comfortable tourist hotel. The shores

of Dakhla Bay support abundant migrant waders, as well as Audouin's Gull and West African Crested Tern, while the critically endangered Atlantic Humpback Dolphin can occasionally be seen offshore.

Moving inland, we'll scour the deserts for such exciting birds as Crowned Sandgrouse, Cricket Warbler, Cream-coloured Courser and Dunn's Lark, while a flock of Desert Sparrows could contain one or two gorgeous Sudan Golden Sparrows. However, it's at night that the landscape truly comes alive; after darkness falls, we'll head out with spotlights in an attempt to find some of the Western Palearctic's most rarely seen animals. Hoped for mammals will include Sand Cat, Ruppell's and Fennec Fox, African Golden Wolf, Saharan Striped Polecat, Desert Hedgehog and African Wildcat. This tour is predominantly focused on locating elusive nocturnal mammals, so it's important to note that the tour will involve long nights of spotlighting; we will consequently not start each day's activities until the early afternoon, in order to give guides and clients sufficient time to rest.



West African Crested Tern



Sand Cat

We'll base ourselves for three nights in a basic but comfortable desert house, but we will also have the opportunity to spend two nights out in a remote campsite, specially set up for our visit. While basic, this campsite will take us close to the wildlife, and will also provide an intimate experience of this vast landscape, and magnificent views of an unadulterated night sky.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart London

We will depart from London's Heathrow Airport, first for Casablanca, and then on to the Western Saharan coastal town of Dakhla. We will arrive in Dakhla in the early hours of the next morning, and will immediately transfer to a comfortable tourist hotel nearby.

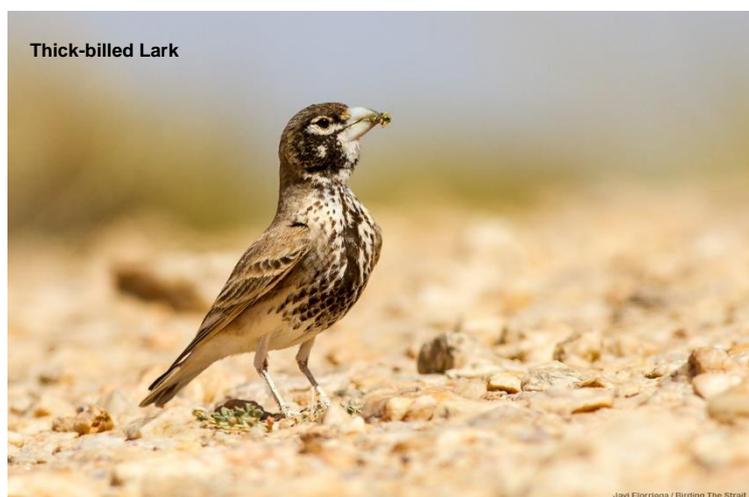
Day 2/3

Desert Campsite

On our first morning, we will spend time exploring the nearby coastline; the shores of Dakhla Bay support abundant migrant waders, as well as Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls, Osprey, Greater Flamingo and West African Crested Tern (recently split from Royal Tern), while several species of cetacean are occasionally seen offshore. Pelagic bird species are often drawn into the lagoon, so we may encounter species such as Pomarine Skua, European Storm Petrel or even Razorbill.

After lunch, we will begin to move inland, scouring the deserts along the way for such exciting birds as Spotted and Crowned Sandgrouse, Cricket Warbler, Cream-coloured Courser, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark and Dunn's Lark, while a flock of Desert Sparrows could contain one or two gorgeous Sudan Golden Sparrows. We will stay for two nights at a campsite in the heart of the desert, set up specially for our visit. Our tents will be fairly basic in style, but any lack of luxury will be more than made up for by the vast wildness of the landscape, and by the spectacular, unadulterated views of perfectly starry skies once darkness falls. It is at night that the desert comes truly alive, and after dark we'll head out with spotlights in an attempt to find some of the Western Palaearctic's most rarely seen animals. Night drives will be the major feature of this tour, and we may continue spotlighting most nights until well into the early hours. To compensate for this, on most days our activities will not begin until the early afternoon, in order to give clients and guides sufficient time to rest. This is consequently a tour specifically for keen wildlife enthusiasts, who are prepared to endure remote and basic conditions for the chance to see some of this region's least known mammals.

The remainder of the daylight hours will be spent relaxing or birding in the vicinity of the camp. Possible species here include Golden Eagle, Pale Rock Martin, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Houbara Bustard, Fulvous Chatterer, Lanner Falcon, Desert and Red-rumped Wheatears, and the Saharan subspecies of Little Owl, amongst many others.



Day 4/6

Desert House

After leaving our camp, we'll stay for three nights in a permanent desert house, which will offer more in the way of facilities than our previous tented accommodation (while still being rustic and remote). Please do not expect luxurious accommodation – this house is the only permanent accommodation option in the area and, while comfortable, is still very basic. The desert house will provide similar access to wonderful areas for nocturnal creatures, and we will continue to embark upon long night drives



Cream-coloured Courser

in search of wildlife. Both here and at our campsite, hoped for mammals will include Sand Cat, Ruppell's and Fennec Foxes, African Golden Wolf, Saharan Striped Polecat (Libyan Striped Weasel), Desert Hedgehog and African Wildcat. Nocturnal birds should also feature, and we will stand a good chance of finding Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, either at night or at a day roost. Please note that we will use the journey from the camp to the desert house as a spotlighting drive (the area in between is one of the very best for Sand Cat in particular), and therefore we will not arrive at the desert house until approximately 0200 on Day 5.

Day 7

Dakhla

On our last full day, we will make our way back to Dakhla. In the evening, we will enjoy a final dinner, during which we will celebrate what are sure to have been a superb selection of encounters with exciting and little-known creatures.

Day 8

Depart Dakhla

This morning, we will have breakfast at the hotel, before departing for Dakhla Airport in time for our flights back to London, again via Casablanca.

Tour grading

Grade B. No particular level of fitness is required, and there will only be short walks over even terrain within the vicinity of our camps. However, this tour involves long nights of spotlighting, and consequently late starts (to allow sufficient rest), and a very limited amount of daytime activity while in the desert. Therefore, this is a tour for keen mammal-watchers, who are prepared to endure long nights and basic conditions in exchange for the chance to observe rare and exciting wildlife.

Weather

Western Sahara has a hot desert climate, with very little rainfall. Daytime temperatures (especially inland) are likely to peak at between 20°C and 35°C depending on the time of year, while the nightly minimum could drop to around 7°C.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of the holiday. In Dakhla, meals will be taken at the hotel or in local restaurants, while we will bring a cook with us into the desert to prepare simple but tasty local food. Accommodation will be in a comfortable tourist hotel in Dakhla, and a combination of camping and a basic but comfortable house in the desert. Please note that conditions at the camp and the desert house are very basic, especially at the desert camp, where facilities are very limited. In particular, there are no toilets at the desert campsite, and group members must be prepared to go to the loo behind nearby dunes. At the desert campsite, you will need to provide your own towel.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of your holiday: alcoholic drinks, tips to local guides, and all items of a personal nature such as souvenirs, telephone calls etc.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Western Sahara. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/western-sahara) or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.