

# Wildlife of the Moroccan Sahara

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

---

### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Outbound flights to Agadir. Overnight Zguid/Taroudant
<b>Day 2 – 6</b>	Iriqui National Park
<b>Day 7</b>	Overnight Zguid/Taroudant
<b>Day 8</b>	Inbound flights

### Focus

Desert birds & other wildlife

### Grading

Grade B. See notes at end of document.

### Dates and Prices

Visit [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) (tour code MAR11) or see the current Naturetrek brochure

### Highlights:

- Nocturnal search for Fennec Fox
- A wealth of desert larks including Thick-billed, Greater Hoopoe, Desert and Bar-tailed
- The critically endangered Addax
- Other desert birds such as Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse, Cream-coloured Courser, African Desert, Spectacled & Tristram's Warbler
- Possibility of Houbara Bustard
- The magnificent Desert Monitor Lizard and Desert Horned Viper
- A wealth of palearctic birds on migration
- Desert camping under an incredible night sky



Erg Chigaga, Crowned Sandgrouse © Chris Griffin, Addax © Dan Lay



Naturetrek    Mingledown Barn    Wolf's Lane    Chawton    Alton    Hampshire    GU34 3HJ    UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)



## Introduction

Iriqui National Park, located in southern Morocco, spans approximately 123,000 hectares across the provinces of Tata and Zagora. Positioned at the transition between the vast Sahara Desert and the Draa Valley, the park boasts a strikingly diverse landscape of sand dunes, dry riverbeds, rocky plateaus, and seasonal salt flats. Dominated by the arid Saharan climate, the region experiences scorching summer temperatures, cool winter nights, and minimal, unpredictable rainfall.

A defining feature of the park is Lake Iriqui, a large seasonal wetland that comes to life following rare rainfall events. When filled, the lake forms a temporary oasis that attracts a wide array of wildlife. Even when dry, the lakebed remains an ecologically vital zone, supporting both migratory and resident bird species such as flamingoes, herons, and various wildfowl. The surrounding desert also hosts a rich variety of birdlife, including Houbara Bustard, Cream-coloured Courser, larks, wheatears, sandgrouse, and warblers.

The park's vegetation is well adapted to extreme aridity, with hardy species such as tamarisk, acacia, and other drought-resistant shrubs. These plants provide essential shelter and food for the park's wildlife, which includes Fennec Fox, Dorcas Gazelle, Addax, and a variety of reptiles.

Ecologically, Iriqui National Park plays a crucial role in preserving Morocco's fragile desert ecosystems. It also serves as a protected area for nomadic communities, supporting their traditional ways of life. Conservation efforts in the park focus on combating desertification, protecting biodiversity, and promoting sustainable ecotourism.

Despite its remote location, Iriqui National Park is an important natural reserve that highlights the unique geographical and ecological diversity of Morocco's desert landscapes.



Desert camp, Erg Chigaga

## Itinerary

*NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, 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

### Agadir to Taroudant or Zguid

We're scheduled to depart from London Gatwick on a morning flight to Agadir. Upon arrival, we'll journey southeast to spend the first night at a comfortable hotel in Taroudant or Zguid.

### Day 2 – 6

### Desert Campsite, Iriqui National Park

We'll depart early from our hotel and travel to our comfortable campsite in the Sahara. Upon arrival, we'll settle into our well-appointed tents before heading out for our first exploration of the desert.

This tour does not follow a fixed daily itinerary. Instead, our experienced guides—well-connected with park rangers, local tribespeople, and other experts—will plan each day based on the latest wildlife sightings. Their local knowledge ensures we'll be taken to the best locations across the park to encounter the region's remarkable fauna.

The landscapes here are truly iconic: vast horizons, big skies, and endless open spaces offer exceptional opportunities for landscape photography. At night, the crystal-clear skies are breathtaking—ideal for astronomy enthusiasts, and a telescope is highly recommended.

This desert landscape consists of subtly different habitat types that support a range of species adapted to each. They can be described as:

#### **Sandy Dunes and Erg Landscapes**

One of the most iconic habitats in Iriqui National Park is its vast stretches of sand dunes, part of the greater Sahara Desert. These rolling dunes, or ergs, shift continuously due to the wind and create a stunning, ever-changing landscape. The dunes host specialized desert-adapted species such as the fennec fox, sandfish lizard, and various insects that have evolved to survive extreme heat and scarce water. Vegetation in this area is sparse,



consisting mainly of drought-resistant plants like tamarisks and desert grasses.

### Reg and Hamada (Stony Deserts and Rocky Plateaus)



Beyond the dunes, much of the park is covered by reg and hamada—stony desert landscapes with little to no vegetation. These rocky expanses consist of gravel plains and plateaus, shaped by ancient geological processes. While they appear barren, these habitats support resilient species such as the Dorcas Gazelle and North African Hedgehog. Larks and wheatears are commonly seen, using rock formations for nesting and shelter.

### Lake Iriqui and Seasonal Wetlands

At the heart of the park lies Lake Iriqui, a vast salt flat that transforms into a shallow lake during rare seasonal rains. When water is present, the lake becomes a crucial wetland, attracting migratory birds, including flamingoes, and wildfowl. It serves as a temporary but vital oasis for wildlife in the arid environment. The lakebed is composed of mudflats and saline soils, supporting unique halophytic (salt-tolerant) vegetation.

### Oases and Riverbeds (Oueds)

Dry riverbeds, known as oueds, snake through the park and occasionally fill with water during flash floods. These areas create microhabitats that support richer vegetation, including date palms, acacias, and other water-seeking plants. The shade and moisture provided by these riverbeds make them crucial refuges for wildlife such as Rüppell's Fox, rodents and reptiles. Nomadic herders also use these seasonal water sources to sustain their livestock.

### Steppe and Scrubland

Scattered throughout the park are patches of steppe and desert scrubland, dominated by hardy shrubs like *Artemisia* and *Ziziphus*. These semi-arid zones act as transitional habitats between the dunes and rocky areas, providing food and shelter for herbivores. Predators such as Golden Wolf are elusive but can be found here, preying on smaller animals.

Iriqui National Park's diverse habitats create a mosaic of life in an otherwise harsh desert environment. From shifting dunes and barren plateaus to seasonal wetlands and scrubland, each ecosystem plays a vital role in supporting a unique array of desert wildlife. Despite its aridity, the park is an essential refuge for many species.

Your guides will endeavour to visit each of these habitat types during your stay, maximising your chances of seeing a high diversity of wildlife. Particular effort will be made to see the declining African Houbara Bustard which maintains a reasonable population in the park. The birds of the desert vary by habitat type with species such as Thick-billed Lark favouring stony deserts while Bar-tailed Lark favours sand. Sandgrouse may occur anywhere and are often seen in the morning and evening in flight as they commute to and from distant water sources so keep your eyes on the skies. African Desert Warbler prefers

very low vegetation and can be surprisingly elusive in this sparse habitat while Greater Hoopoe Lark is highly visible with their impressive displays. With so much time spent in arid habitats many desert species will be seen. Cream-coloured Courser, Spectacled and Tristram's Warblers, White-crowned, Desert, Red-tailed and Western Black-eared Wheatear, Fulvous Chatterer, Trumpeter Finch and Desert Lark may all be encountered. Raptors will be much in evidence with likely species



Tristram's Warbler © Chris Griffin

including falcons, buzzards and even perhaps vultures. As night falls, we'll look and listen for Egyptian Nightjar as we will be in prime habitat for them.

Should there be any water in the seasonal lake, there will be an abundance of birdlife including Greater Flamingo and Marbled Duck. The water body will attract many migrants at this time of year and many waterbirds, hirundines, warblers, chats, bee-eaters and swifts will use the site as a stopover on their journey northwards. If a good fall is encountered, an impressive range of Western Palearctic species may be recorded, and attention should be paid to any cover as it could hold grounded migrants.

Reptiles are represented in this habitat and special effort will be made to find Desert Monitor and Desert Horned Viper amongst many others.



Fennec Fox near the camp © Brahim Elbarbouchi, 2025

Mammals of these habitats are at low density but are present and rare and attractive species such as Addax and Dorcas Gazelle may be encountered in daylight hours while the diminutive Fennec Fox will be our main target during our night drive.

Each day will be different and each one will have its highlights and surprises.

## Day 7

## Taroudant or Zguid

After our unforgettable desert adventure, we'll make our way back to our hotel in either Taroudant or Zguid. That evening, we'll come together for a final dinner—a chance to reflect on and celebrate the incredible array of wildlife encounters and the stunning desert landscapes we've experienced throughout.

## Day 8

## Inbound flights

This morning, we will have breakfast at the hotel, before departing for Agadir in time for our inbound flights.

---

## Tour grading

This tour is graded B. While there is no strenuous walking on the tour, the substrate will often be sandy, rocky, or uneven and therefore this tour would unfortunately not be suitable for anybody with reduced mobility. Once away from the bitumen roads, the four-wheel-drive journeys will be bumpy. These journeys are of course essential to get away from the tourist trail and into prime desert habitat. The 4x4 journey into and out of the desert is 150km.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday starting with dinner on Day 1 and ending with breakfast on Day 8. For the first and last night, meals will be taken at the hotel or in local restaurants, while in the desert, tasty local food will be served at the campsite. Accommodation for two nights will be in a comfortable tourist hotel in Taroudant or Zguid.

At the desert camp, the fixed sleeping tents are furnished with king-size or twin beds, and equipped with linens, blankets, and a separate shower and toilet facility with hot water. To conserve the desert's precious water, the facilities are in a bathroom block instead of private facilities for each tent. There are three hot water showers, three toilets, and two hand basins. Guests can relax in the spacious dining tent or enjoy meals under the stars. Electricity is available in each sleeping tent.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Camp and Milky Way © Brahim Elbarbouchi

