Southern Morocco

Naturetrek Tour Report

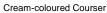
20 - 29 September 2018



Barbary Partridge

Bonelli's Eagle







Egyptian Nightjar

Report compiled by Reg Thorpe Images courtesy of Phil Aylen



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Tour Report Southern Morocco

Tour participants: Reg Thorpe & James Harding-Morris (Leaders) with 14 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Thursday 20th September

The majority of the group flew from Gatwick on a slightly delayed flight and after a very speedy passport check, but prolonged money-changing, we met the other tour members outside Terminal 3. Some of the group then headed into Marrakech for a tour of the old part of the city with the remainder joining Mohammed Zaki for a trip the ski resort of Oukaimeden in the High Atlas. After crossing the plain between the city and the mountains we began climbing up through the beautiful Ouriaka valley. We had a short walk, to stretch the legs, and found a pair of Moussier's Redstarts and another short stop where several Blue Rock Thrushes showed well. On reaching the ski resort we had lunch enjoying the large flocks of Alpine and Red-billed Chough overhead and a flock of over 200 Serins feeding nearby.

After lunch a couple of Crimson-winged Finches showed briefly. We moved on towards the base of the ski lifts, but soon stopped for a pair of Seebohm's Wheatears on a wall. These showed well and while watching them a group of 30 Crimson-winged Finches were located and these gave excellent views. After this excitement we had two walks appreciating the scenery and finding more Moussier's Redstarts and Seebohm's Wheatears, a couple of Black Wheatears and several Black Redstarts. It was already getting late so we began our journey back to Marrakech, stopping to look at a pair of Peregrines and also having a short walk when we saw a flock of Alpine Swifts and our first 'North African' Blue Tit. We arrived at our hotel, checked-in and after a pleasant meal, had an early night.

Day 2

Friday 21st September

Today was a day of travel up and over the High Atlas to Ouarzazate. We left the hotel at around 0830 and after leaving the city and crossing the plain we began our ascent into the mountains, seeing several White Storks and Cattle Egrets along the way. Our first stop was for a walk through an area of pines where Cirl Buntings and 'North African' Chaffinches were seen and a pale phase Booted Eagle and a Lesser Kestrel were seen overhead. Our next stop was at Toufilhte for coffee and a walk along the road. Despite many trees being removed as part of the road improvement scheme we were still able to find 'Atlas' Coal Tit, Crossbill and Cirl Bunting. We also had much better views of the Chaffinches, including some nice males. We continued further towards the Tizi n Tichka pass, stopping at Taddart for a Taggine lunch before crossing the pass and then descending down towards Ouarzazate, stopping to admire a very close overhead Bonelli's Eagle and a Black-eared Wheatear. We reached our hotel around 1700 and most of the group headed out to the Barrage nearby, but a thunder storm and heavy rain showers made this difficult and we couldn't access any water areas, but we did have good views of Little Owl and our first White-crowned Wheatears.

Day 3

Saturday 22nd September

Today we left the hotel at around 0830 and drove about 20km to access the Ouarzazate Barrage at another location. After an initial scan that produced a perched Osprey we began a walk across the stony ground finding a couple of skulking Spectacled Warblers and then a smart Reed Warbler in some reeds (appropriately enough). The next birds of note were two 'Desert' Grey Shrikes, fly-by Bee-eaters and a super Purple Heron close overhead. On the barrage the conditions were poor and only distant views of a group of Black Terns were had.

A group of flying Greater Flamingos against the far hillsides were nice, but two Honey Buzzards, found when looking at the Flamingos, remained unfortunately as distant specks. We continued our walk and found Common Sandpipers and a Little Ringed Plover on the shore with Blue-headed Wagtails and Black-eared Wheatears nearby. On leaving the barrage we travelled further east, stopping for coffee in El Keela, and reached out hotel in Boumlane early afternoon.

We checked-in and explored the hotel grounds while Siad and Hamid prepared our picnic lunch. After lunch we drove up the Dades Gorge, stopping for two Bonelli's Eagles and photographs on the way up. On reaching the top we soon located an obliging Subalpine Warbler followed soon after by our main target species, a fine Tristram's Warbler that showed well to all. We then walked down the gorge road enjoying the spectacular views and Crag Martins, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatears and several groups of Rock Doves. Next on the agenda was a visit to the Tagdilt plain close to Boumalne where in the excellent evening light we had good views of Redrumped Wheatear and a group of Trumpeter Finches.

Day 4

Sunday 23rd September

We left the hotel in Boumalne in good time, but stopped just after leaving the town for an adult and juvenile Cream-coloured Courser by the roadside. After enjoying these we travelled a further 10km before stopping at a small flooded area on the Tagdilt plain. Surprisingly there were several Little Ringed Plover, a Ringed Plover, Green Sandpiper and Snipe here rather than the expected Sandgrouse. However, there was a pair of Red-rumped Wheatear, a single Desert Wheatear and Temminck's Larks which were more expected. After this we drove a short distance before walking out across the plain finding Thekla's Lark, a group of 60 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse that showed well in flight and on the ground, and a single Long-legged Buzzard. We left the plain late morning and drove east to Tinghir where we stopped for coffee and some fine dragonfly watching before heading further east for our picnic lunch stop.

Over lunch we had good views of a Western Olivaceous Warbler, a couple of Subalpine Warblers and a fine Black-eared Wheatear. Lunch ended slightly abruptly as a rain shower arrived and we headed further east into darkening and sand-laden skies. We stopped on the Maharra Plain and watched a singing Desert Grey Shrike before the sand storm arrived so we then continued on to Erfoud where we arrived in good time.

Day 5

Monday 24th September

A pre-dawn start today at 0600 saw us on the way south out of Erfoud and into the desert. Our first stop to see the sun rise provided a memorable experience. It was a still, calm morning, with the rolling low dunes, the sound of singing Hoopoe Lark and obliging African Desert Warblers creating a real desert-feel as we walked across the dune system. Next was a stop to enjoy three Cream-coloured Coursers and then a succession of Hoopoe Larks, Bar-tailed Larks, Spotted Sandgrouse and, for some, a fine perched Barbary Falcon. We then went in search of Egyptian Nightjar which had been located by a local, stopping on the way for a male Desert Sparrow. We were soon watching this stone-impersonating species which gave fantastic views.

Moving on to another group of trees and tents we located a pair of Desert Sparrows which showed well. It was then a welcome coffee stop at the café Yasmina and some relaxation out of the heat. We then moved on seeing more larks, wheatears and sandgrouse until we reached Merzouga. Here we walked through the oasis, but it was

relatively quiet. Lunch was had in the Berber Depot in the village and after this we visited a large lake created by the recent down pours, but apart from c60 Ruddy Shelduck it was empty of birds. It was then time to head back towards Erfoud with one detour to try and find Fulvous Babbler. We failed to find the babbler, but a Redstart and Woodchat Shrike were seen. We arrived back in Erfoud soon after 1700.

Day 6

Tuesday 25th September

On leaving the hotel at around 0815 we went for a short walk along the Oued Zizz in Erfoud. Although there was plenty of water there were few birds so we soon began our long journey westwards. Our first stop was an escarpment west of Rissani where a walk beneath the cliffs produced excellent views of a pair of Lanner Falcons, briefly in flight and then prolonged views perched on the cliffs. Also here were our first Desert Larks of the trip.

After this we drove to Alnif for a coffee stop and then continued on to just past Tazzarine for our picnic beneath some large Accacia trees. This proved a good choice of picnic site with a group of eight Fulvous Babblers, two Western Olivaceous and a Western Orphean Warbler on show. It was then a long drive up the Draa Valley, stopping to admire perched, then low-flying, Short-toed Eagle and then up ad over the Tizi n Tinififft Pass and down into Ouarzazate arriving around 1800.

Day 7

Wednesday 26th September

We left the hotel Fint in Ouarzazate and travelled a short distance to the Barrage on the outside of town, but again, like yesterday, we encountered few birds so moved on quickly.

Out next stop was on the road from Amerzegan to Taroudannt looking unsuccessfully for Mourning Wheatear.

Next on the agenda was a drive west up and over the Tizi n Bachkoum pass and down into Taznakht for coffee before continuing to the Saffron shop in Tinfat for lunch. Here rain set in for a spell accompanied by impressive thunder and lightning.

After lunch we dropped down into the Argan woodland and then stopped for a walk across the bridge at Aoulouz where we enjoyed Spotless Starlings, Red-rumped Swallows, Cetti's Warbler and a close fly-over Bonelli's Eagle. Further on down the Souss Valley we found a fine Barbary Falcon perched of a pole close to the road. After this we moved on along the valley to our Rhiad accommodation in Taroudannt.

Day 8

Thursday 27th September

We had a slightly later than usual departure time to give us a little time to relax and enjoy the Riad Dar Tourkia guest house and grounds. Once we left we drove down the Souss Valley to the urban sprawl of Agadir and left our luggage and filled in registration forms at the hotel. We then drove north along the coast road to Tamri where a flock of more than 60 Northern Bald Ibis greeted us on the beach and gave excellent views in good light without too much haze. Also here was single Black-winged Kite, a Marsh Harrier and the first Moroccan Wagtail of the trip.

After our picnic we headed back into Agadir and spent an hour or so at the hotel in the heat of the day before heading to the Oued Souss to the south of the town. Despite it being high tide we had a good selection of waders, plus terms as well as plenty of Greater Flamingos and White Storks. An Osprey and three Marsh Harriers were also present and Maghreb Magpies showed well for the first time on the trip. A heavy rain shower ended our visit slightly prematurely and we headed back to the hotel.

Day 9

Friday 28th September

Today was a day on the Oued Massa about an hour south of Agadir. We stopped as we approached the river valley and a short walk provided over 60 Stone Curlew which gave exceptional views. A rubbish-filled hollow was also good with Spectacled and Subalpine Warbler showing well as well as a smart Black-eared Wheatear.

Moving on to the river we had good views of male Moussier's Redstarts as soon as we got out of the bus. The walk along the track above the river and then through the cultivated field was excellent with many warblers, a few Cirl Buntings and Woodchat Shrike, but best of all a showy (eventually) Black-crowned Tchagra. After this we moved on to have our picnic beneath some trees, but not before we had good views of a perched Blackwinged Kite.

Over lunch we watched Pied and Spotted Flycatchers and a small group of Brown-throated Martins and, for some, another Tchagra. It was then a drive back into busy Agadir and the hotel after an excellent day.

Day 10

Saturday 29th September

On our final morning in Morocco we walked along the Oued Souss to get closer to the distant roosting birds which we had seen on our previous visit. There were many Greater Flamingos and White Storks and in the small wader flock we located a couple of Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints. We also found our first Greenshank and Ruff. A fine adult Peregrine was seen sitting in a dead tree and a superb juvenile Bonelli's Eagle flew low overhead, as did a single Brown-throated Sand Martin, accompanied by two Sand Martins, which provided a really useful comparison.

It was then back to the hotel to pack and have a coffee before departing for a final Taggine lunch and then on to the airport for flights home after an enjoyable and interesting tour of this fascinating and wildlife-rich part of North Africa.

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Tour Report Southern Morocco

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; h = heard only; E = Endemic)

							Septe	mber				
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
1	Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea		4	8		60					
2	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos		1								
3	Barbary Partridge	Alectoris barbara	5								6	
4	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis						2	1	1	1	
5	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus			4							
6	Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus			36					✓		✓
7	White Stork	Ciconia ciconia	60	6					5	✓		✓
8	Northern Bald Ibis	Geronticus eremita								67		
9	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus									60	
10	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia								15		26
11	Western Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	8	30	20	8		6	6	2	2	3
12	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		2	4			2		✓		12
13	Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea			1							
14	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta			6	6		3	2	✓		5
15	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis								2	1	
16	Western Osprey	Pandion haliaetus			2					2		1
17	Black-winged Kite	Elanus caeruleus								1	1	
18	Honey Buzzard	Pernis apeivoris			2							
19	Short-toed Snake Eagle	Circaetus gallicus						2				
20	Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus		3								
21	Bonelli's Eagle	Aquila fasciata		1	3				1			1
22	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus		2						1		2
23	Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus								4		1
24	Long-legged Buzzard	Buteo rufinus				1		1				
25	Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus						3	12	1		
26	Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra	1						1	80		
27	Eurasian Stone-curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus									60	
28	Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus								40		20
29	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus								20		✓

	Common name		September										
		Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
30	Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta								50		12	
31	Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatarola								2			
32	Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula				1				30		50	
33	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius			1	9					2		
34	Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago				1							
35	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa										150	
36	Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica								20		20	
37	Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus								4	1	1	
38	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata								15		2	
39	Common Redshank	Tringa totanus		1h						4		50	
40	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia										10	
41	Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus				1			1			3	
42	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos			3					8	2	6	
43	Red Knot	Calidris canutus								10		6	
44	Ruff	Calidris pugnax										2	
45	Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea										2	
46	Sanderling	Calidris alba								6		6	
47	Dunlin	Calidris alpina								70		200	
48	Little Stint	Calidris minuta										2	
49	Cream-colored Courser	Cursorius cursor				2	7	1					
50	Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus								✓		✓	
51	Audouin's Gull	Ichthyaetus audouinii								25			
52	Mediterranean Gull	Ichthyaetus melanocephalus								6			
53	Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis michahellis								✓	✓	✓	
54	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus graellsii								✓	✓		
55	Lesser Crested Tern	Thalasseus bengalensis								2			
56	Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandvicensis								30			
57	Little Tern	Sternula albifrons								20	1	6	
58	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo			6					12			
59	Black Tern	Chlidonias niger			12								
60	Pomarine Jaeger	Stercorarius pomarinus								1			
61	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	Pterocles alchata				60							

			September										
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
62	Spotted Sandgrouse	Pterocles senegallus					50						
63	Rock Dove	Columba livia		20	20				50				
	Feral Pigeon - I	Columba livia var. domestica	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	50	40	1			1	3		1	10	
65	European Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur	6				2	1	2	1	7		
66	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	Laughing Dove	Spilopelia senegalensis		3			6	20	1	2	3		
68	Little Owl	Athene noctua		1	1				2				
69	Egyptian Nightjar	Caprimulgus aegyptius					1						
70	Alpine Swift	Tachymarptis melba	30										
	Swift Sp	Apus sp	10										
71	Little Swift	Apus affinis		6					16	30			
72	Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis									3		
	Bee-eater sp	Merops sp		20									
73	European Bee-eater	Merops apiaster			5								
74	Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops		5									
75	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major							1				
76	Lesser Kestrel	Falco naumanni		1									
77	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	12	12	6				2	4	5	2	
78	Lanner Falcon	Falco biarmicus				3							
79	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus	2									1	
80	Barbary Falcon	Falco pelegrinoides					1		1				
81	Black-crowned Tchagra	Tchagra senegalus									5		
82	Great Grey Shrike	Lanius excubitor	1	2									
	"Algerian" Grey Shrike	Lanius excubitor algeriensis							6	6	4	1	
	"Desert" Grey Shrike	Lanius excubitor elegans			2	2	4	5	3				
83	Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator					1				3		
84	Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius		1									
85	Maghreb Magpie	Pica mauritanica		20					2	12	35	12	
86	Red-billed Chough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax	400										
87	Alpine Chough	Pyrrhocorax graculus	250										
88	Brown-necked Raven	Corvus ruficollis					6	30					

			September										
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
89	Northern Raven	Corvus corax tingitanus	2	1									
90	Atlas Coal Tit - E	Periparus ater atlas		2									
91	African Blue Tit	Cyanistes teneriffae	1	2									
92	Great Tit	Parus major	2	2							2		
93	Greater Hoopoe-Lark	Alaemon alaudipes					20	1					
94	Desert Lark	Ammomanes deserti						5	4				
95	Bar-tailed Lark	Ammomanes cinctura					8						
96	Thekla's Lark	Galerida theklae			1	6			20	20	30	20	
97	Maghreb Lark	Galerida macrorhyncha		12	10		4	1	6				
98	Temminck's Lark	Eremophila bilopha			2	6							
99	Greater Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla			3	20	2						
100	Common Bulbul	Pycnonotus barbatus	✓	✓	✓	3	2	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	
101	Brown-throated Martin	Riparia paludicola									6	1	
102	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia		2					4		1	2	
103	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica		40	120		40	30	15	10	3	12	
104	Eurasian Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne rupestris	6		25			9					
105	Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum				40		12					
106	Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica	3						30	20	2		
107	Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti			1h				1		5		
108	Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus										2	
109	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita								2	6		
110	Iberian Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus ibericus	1h										
111	Eurasian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus			1				1		12		
112	Western Olivaceous Warbler	Iduna opaca				1		2					
113	Melodious Warbler	Hippolais polyglotta		1									
114	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis									2	12	
115	Fulvous Babbler	Turdoides fulva						8					
116	Garden Warbler	Sylvia borin									6	1	
117	Western Orphean Warbler	Sylvia hortensis						1					
118	African Desert Warbler	Sylvia deserti					7						
119	Tristram's Warbler	Sylvia deserticola			1								
120	Spectacled Warbler	Sylvia conspicillata			2	3					1		

			September										
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
121	Subalpine Warbler	Sylvia cantillans			1		5	12			12		
122	Sardinian Warbler	Sylvia melanocephala	2	4				1	3	6	15	20	
123	Common Firecrest	Regulus ignicapilla		1h									
124	Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		2h									
125	Spotless Starling	Sturnus unicolor	✓	✓		1			15	50	✓	20	
126	Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	4	12		1	3		✓	✓	✓	6	
127	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata	1						2		6		
128	European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	1h										
129	Bluethroat	Luscinia svecica								1			
130	European Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca									6		
131	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros	6		1								
132	Common Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus					1			1			
133	Moussier's Redstart	Phoenicurus moussieri	4								10		
134	Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitarius	4		6			3			1		
135	Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra					1					1	
136	European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola									6		
137	Seebohm's Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe seebohmi	4										
138	Desert Wheatear	Oenanthe deserti				3	12						
139	Black-eared Wheatear	Oenanthe hispanica		1	4	2	4	2	3		2		
140	Red-rumped Wheatear	Oenanthe moesta			3	10							
141	Black Wheatear	Oenanthe leucura	2	1	1								
142	White-crowned Wheatear	Oenanthe leucopyga		10	12	12	20	40	15	6			
143	White-throated Dipper	Cinclus cinclus	1										
144	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
145	Spanish Sparrow	Passer hispaniolensis							3				
146	Desert Sparrow	Passer simplex					3						
147	Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava	3	250	30		6		6		2	2	
148	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	3	1	2				1				
149	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba								1			
	"Moroccan" Wagtail	Motacilla alba subpersonata								2			
150	Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris				1							
151	Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs africana	6	15	1				6		6		

	Common name		September										
		Scientific name	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
152	African Crimson-winged Finch	Rhodopechys alienus	30										
153	Trumpeter Finch	Bucanetes githagineus			10	1							
154	European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris				1		1	12		2	1	
155	Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina	40								2		
156	Red Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra		8									
157	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis									4		
158	European Serin	Serinus serinus	200							1	6		
159	Cirl Bunting	Emberiza cirlus		3							4		
160	House Bunting	Emberiza sahari	6	6	6	12	6	3	6	12	6	2	

Mammals

Barbary Squirrel, *Atlantoxerus getulus*Leisler's Bat, *Nyctalus leisleri*Nathusier's Bat, *Pipistrellus nathusi*Common Pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*Natterer's Bat, *Myotis nattereri*Brown Long-eared Bat, *Plecotus auritus*

Misc Insects

Small Copper, Lycaena phlaeasClouded Yellow, Colias croceaSwallowtail, Papilio machaonWall Brown, Lasiommata megeraLarge White, Pieris brassicaeMoroccan Orange-tip, Anthocharis beliaPainted Lady, Vanessa carduiCrimson Speckled Moth, Utetheisa pulchellaHummingbird Hawkmoth, Macroglossum stellatarumLesser Emperor, Anax parthenopeScarlet Darter, Crocothemis erythreaPraying Mantis, Mantis religiosa

Reptiles and Amphibians

Terrapin sp, *Emydidae sp* Agama Lizard, *Agama sp* Mauritanian Toad, *Sclerophrys mauritanica*Moroccan Painted Frog, *Discoglossus scovazzi*



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