

The Reptiles & Amphibians of Morocco

Naturetrek Tour Report

1st – 11th May 2025



Mediterranean Chameleon



Sahara Sand Viper



Saw-scaled Viper



Helmethead Gecko

Tour report by Jesse Erens



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Day 1

Thursday 1st May

After the group convened in Agadir, we headed south towards Souss-Massa National Park in search of our first amphibians and reptiles. Stopping at a lagoon on our way in, we set out under near-cloudless skies, with the mid-afternoon sun shining bright above our heads. In spite of the heat, we soon encountered the first species of the trip in the form of a beautiful Golden Fringe-fingered Lizard, leaving distinctive tracks in the sand as it spurred into the distance. We also found our first Moorish Geckos basking on top of a well where, soon after, we also encountered a gorgeous subadult Horseshoe Whip Snake. A large Algerian Skink was seen poking its orange-dotted head out from under its hiding.

Moving on to have lunch at the coast, we were treated to one of the birding highlights of the trip, as various flocks of endangered Northern Bald Ibises flew over, totalling around thirty birds. We also found Margarita's Fringe-fingered Lizard, which occurs in syntopy with in these regions of the national park. After reaching Sidi Ifni, we still made a small evening and night hike in the outskirts of town and found our first Harris's Gecko and Bibron's Agama.

Day 2

Friday 2nd May

Having woken up to the sound of Atlantic waves breaking on the shore, we continued south across the wide coastal plains. Stopping at several promising sites, we found a Many-scaled Skink hiding in the shade of an abandoned building. Several stunning, brightly-coloured Bibron's Agamas and numerous Moorish Geckos were seen sitting on the nearby rocks. Mammals also showed themselves in numbers, and we closely observed several Fat Sand Rats and Barbary Ground Squirrels along the road.

We then made our way to Foum Assake, only to find that an unfortunate upstream deviation of the Noun River had turned the local valley into a barren wasteland, with only the scattered remains of terrapins reminding us of the former rich waters. Exploring a narrow valley east of Sidi Ifni, we found our first Schokari Sand Snake, riled up and active in the afternoon sun. Several more Harris's Geckos, as well as an amazing huntsman spider, were spotted after sunset.

Day 3

Saturday 3rd May

Getting off to an early start, we headed into a nearby wadi to catch the first rays of the rising sun crawl up the east-facing slopes, and saw several Moroccan Day Geckos awakening and frolicking across the rock slabs. Exploring more of the inland areas to the south-east, we observed more Bibron's Agamas and Moorish Geckos. While the heat soon supercharged any reptile, we still encountered a Moroccan Hare sprinting across the plains, and a majestic Conehead Mantis waiting in ambush in a dry river bed. After helping out a Schokari Sand Snake trapped in a well, we stumbled upon the first permanent water body, with Spanish Terrapins basking around its edges.

Moving further towards Guelmim, we went for a night walk in an oued east of the Tighmert oasis, where we found our first Northern Elegant Gecko, its mesmerizing eyes glaring back at us. The first Algerian Dwarf Geckos were

also seen here, as well as a pretty North African Green Toad. Finally, when admiring a trapdoor spider, she decided to run back to her burrow and quite literally shut the door on us. We followed her example and called it a night.

Day 4

Sunday 4th May

Going deeper into the desert, we spent the morning hiking in the increasingly barren and wonderful, undulating *hamada* landscape, where we found Bosk's Fringe-fingered Lizards, Small-spotted Lizards, more Algerian Dwarf Geckos, a Schokari Sand Snake hurtling across the sand, as well as Böhme's Gecko among the rocky outcrops. Heading further down into the Drâa valley, a large and colourful array of Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizards was seen basking in the desert sun, with orange, yellow and green individuals seen along the way. At an area of more open water, Sahara Frogs were seen calling from the edges.

In the gathering darkness, we set out to search in a wadi further east, where we encountered two Saw-scaled Vipers within several meters of one another, in a seeming competition over who had the more striking dorsal pattern. Soon after, we also found Maghreb Fan-fingered Gecko and several Moorish Sand Geckos close to an oasis. A Jerboa jumping along the road closed off another amazing day.

Day 5

Monday 5th May

Rising under another deep blue sky, we left the Tighmert oasis behind to make a slow return to the coast. The last Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard showed up to say their goodbyes to us, and we were fortunate to find no more animals trapped in cisterns. Arriving in El Ouatia, we headed out for a small sunset walk and found a colourful Busack's Fringe-fingered Lizard out on the coastal plains, as well as an incredibly cryptic desert mantis (*Eremiaphila* sp.), challenging us to be able to observe it again after even briefly taking our eyes away from it.

Returning at dusk to scan the nearby dune areas, we were fortunate to find a Mediterranean Chameleon, gently going about its business in the shrubland. Soon after we were treated to more delightful lizards, as we saw our first Helmethead Gecko and another very handsome Northern Elegant Gecko, to send us happy on our way back home.

Day 6

Tuesday 6th May

Before going back herping, we began the day with a pelagic bird intermezzo, and watched large aggregations of birds flying, skimming, waddling and strolling along the coast. Among the various species we observed were West African Crested Tern, Arctic Skua and Northern Gannet. A morning search gave us more views of Busack's Fringe-fingered Lizard and a Schokari Sand Snake. We explored in south-westerly direction, before descending into a stunningly beautiful wadi, its sheer rock cliffs overlooking a green river bed.

We immersed ourselves in the marvellous Saharan atmosphere, with a herd of camels serenely grazing around us, and we encountered a North African Elephant Shrew that allowed us lengthy views as it foraged at the base of the rocks in the orange glow of the setting sun: another absolute highlight of our journey. We proceeded towards the southernmost regions of the trip, and embarked on a night hike in the large, undulating, wind-ribbed sand dunes. Aided by the myriad animal tracks around us, we found two Duméril's Wedge-snouted Skinks and several

Helmethead Geckos, before we finally stumbled upon and followed the most distinctive track of all, which led us to a gorgeous Sahara Sand Viper sidewinding across the sand.

Day 7

Wednesday 7th May

On our final day together with the whole group, we went for a hike in the sand dunes to watch the sun rise over the vast inland stretches of the Sahara: we were all grateful for the time we had spent in the desert. With soaring temperatures, we were able to see one last Helmethead Gecko before departing on our journey back north. Driving back across the coastal plains, we settled in Mirleft for a luxuriant goodbye dinner and a night hike at the coast, with several Moorish Geckos and Harris's Geckos coming out to see us off.

Departure / post-tour extension

Day 8

Thursday 8th May

Passing through Marrakesh to drop off part of our company, we faced the bustling city traffic to make way for the Atlas Mountains peeking out at the horizon. Slowly ascending into the mountains, we slipped back into tranquillity amid the steep, mist-shrouded rock faces, and set up base in the surroundings of Oukaïmeden. On a night walk in a nearby gorge, we soon profited from the wealth of water, and Moroccan Painted Frogs, Berber Toads and many Sahara Frogs were able to quench our amphibian thirst.

Day 9

Friday 9th May

During a morning search in the higher mountain reaches, we left the treeline behind as we climbed up to above 2500m. Searching along a wide east-facing mountainside, we found the first Atlas Dwarf Lizards basking in the dim, late-morning sun. Heading higher onto the slope, we found a second species endemic to the Moroccan Atlas mountains: the Atlas Day Gecko. With temperatures slowly rising, we encountered a lovely subadult Mountain Viper active around the base of the rocks, followed by another subadult, as well as a larger adult shortly after.

Throughout the day, we found a large and colourful variety of Vaucher's Wall Lizards, both on the mountainside and further down near habitation. Searching among the outskirts of a small lake, we found more exquisite lizard diversity in the form of several gorgeous, mottled, yellow-red Moroccan Rock Lizards occasionally emerging from the cracks in the surrounding stone formations, as well as a Mediterranean Tree Frog and more Sahara Frogs.

Day 10

Saturday 10th May

With mostly sunny skies, we went for a morning search in the valley adjacent to our accommodation, staying at a medium elevation (c.1500m). With temperatures rapidly rising, we caught a glimpse of the endemic Mountain Skink running downhill, and observed several more Vaucher's Wall Lizards and Moorish Geckos during the remainder of the hike. Heading back up for some last magnificent views over the highest peaks of the Atlas, we encountered several Large Psammomys in a rock outcrop on the way, a place where we also observed several more Atlas Day Geckos.

With the weather being more overcast in the afternoon, no more snakes were found today, but we still had the good fortune to see more beautiful bird diversity in the mountains, including Moussier's Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, and Crimson Finch of the North African endemic subspecies. On our final night excursion in the Atlas, we found several more Berber Toads and Sahara Frogs in the local valley.

Day 11

Sunday 11th May

Determined to close off the end of an amazing trip with a last herping effort on our way back to Marrakesh, we stopped at several places along the Ourika river. After finding a Schokari Sand Snake close to the road, we found several Many-scaled Skinks close to several nearby houses. Our last stop of the trip was another pure delight, with several Moroccan Painted Frogs, a very handsome Berber Toad, and a bale of Spanish Terrapins piling up on top of one another to catch some sun along the edges of the river. The sighting of several Moroccan Ocellated Lizards proved to be the cherry on the top of a wonderful trip.

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Species lists

Amphibians

N=Near-endemic		May 2025										
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Moroccan Painted Frog - N	<i>Discoglossus scovazzi</i>								✓			✓
North African Green Toad	<i>Bufo b. boulengeri</i>			✓								
Berber Toad	<i>Sclerophrys mauritanica</i>								✓		✓	✓
Mediterranean Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>									✓		
Sahara Frog	<i>Pelophylax saharicus</i>				✓				✓	✓	✓	✓

Reptiles

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic, D=Dead		May 2025										
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Spanish Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>			✓								✓
Moroccan Day Gecko - E	<i>Quedenfeldtia moerens</i>			✓								
Atlas Day Gecko - E	<i>Quedenfeldtia trachyblepharus</i>									✓	✓	
Harris's Gecko - E	<i>Saurodactylus harrisii</i>	✓	✓					✓				
Northern Elegant Gecko	<i>Stenodactylus mauritanicus</i>			✓		✓						
Algerian Dwarf Gecko	<i>Tropicolotes algericus</i>			✓	✓							
Maghreb Fan-fingered Gecko	<i>Ptyodactylus oudrii</i>				✓							
Böhme's Gecko - E	<i>Tarentola boehmei</i>				✓							
Helmethead Gecko	<i>Tarentola chazaliae</i>					✓	✓	✓				
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Coastal Skink - E	<i>Chalcides mionecton trifasciatus</i>	D										
Mountain Skink - E	<i>Chalcides montanus</i>										✓	
Many-scaled Skink - E	<i>Chalcides polylepis</i>		✓									✓
Duméril's Wedge-snouted Skink	<i>Chalcides spheopsiformis</i>						✓					
Algerian Orange Skink	<i>Eumeces algeriensis algeriensis</i>	✓										
Golden Fringe-fingered Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus aureus</i>	✓										
Bosk's Fringe-fingered Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus boskianus</i>				✓							
Busack's Fringe-fingered Lizard - N	<i>Acanthodactylus busacki</i>					✓	✓					
Margarita's Fringe-fingered Lizard - E	<i>Acanthodactylus margaritae</i>	✓										
Atlas Dwarf Lizard - E	<i>Atlantolacerta andreanskyi</i>									✓		
Small-spotted Lizard	<i>Mesalina guttulata</i>				✓							
Vaucher's Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis vaucheri</i>									✓	✓	
Large Psammmodromus	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>										✓	
Moroccan Rock Lizard	<i>Scelarcis perspicillata</i>									✓		
Moroccan Ocellated Lizard	<i>Timon tangitanus</i>											✓
Bibron's Agama	<i>Agama bibronii</i>	✓	✓									
Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard	<i>Uromastix nigriventris</i>				✓	✓						
Mediterranean Chameleon	<i>Chamaeleo chamaeleon</i>					✓						
Checkerboard Worm Lizard	<i>Trogonophis wiegmanni elegans</i>			D								
Horseshoe Whip Snake	<i>Hemorrhois hippocrepis</i>	✓										
Schokari Sand Snake	<i>Psammophis schokari</i>		✓		✓		✓				D	✓

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic, D=Dead		May 2025										
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sahara Sand Viper	<i>Cerastes vipera</i>						✓					
Saw-scaled Viper	<i>Echis pyramidum leucogaster</i>				✓							
Mountain Viper - N	<i>Vipera monticola monticola</i>									✓		

Birds

		May 2025										
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>				✓		✓	✓				
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓										
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓						✓	✓			
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓										
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	✓										
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓									✓	
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓						
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓										
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>										✓	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>						✓	✓				
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>			✓								
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓					✓				
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓			✓		✓					
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>							✓				
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓					✓					
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>						✓					
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>							✓				
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>							✓				
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓										
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>							✓				
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>					✓	✓	✓				
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>						✓	✓				
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>						✓	✓	✓			
Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>						✓					
West African Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus albidorsalis</i>						✓					
Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaeus audouinii</i>								✓			
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>						✓	✓	✓			
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>						✓					
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>						✓					
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓										
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>						✓					
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓				✓					
Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>	✓										
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓										
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>						✓	✓				
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓						✓				

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓			✓			✓				
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>						✓					
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓							
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>						✓	✓				
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>		✓	✓								
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓									
Pharaoh Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>				✓							
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>										✓	
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓										
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓			✓	
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>		✓	✓								
Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	✓										
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>			✓							✓	
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓			✓							
Maghreb Magpie	<i>Pica mauritanica</i>	✓										
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>										✓	
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>										✓	
African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>										✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓								
Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>						✓					
Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>				✓	✓		✓				
Bar-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>				✓							
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓					
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓										
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>						✓	✓			✓	
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>										✓	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓										
Streaked Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>											
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓										
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>		✓									
Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna opaca</i>	✓				✓						
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>				✓							
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓										
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>										✓	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Currucula melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>										✓	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>										✓	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓					✓			
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>										✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	✓			✓	✓						
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓	✓							✓	
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>										✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>										✓	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓										

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>			✓							✓	
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>										✓	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓				✓	✓			
Atlas Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe seebohmii</i>										✓	
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>						✓					
Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>			✓								
Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓				
White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>			✓	✓	✓						
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>										✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>						✓	✓				
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>										✓	
White (Moroccan) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	✓	✓									
African Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla spodiogenys</i>										✓	
Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguineus</i>										✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>					✓					✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓										
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓							
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓						✓			✓	
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>										✓	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>										✓	
House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			