Naturetrek Tour Report

15th – 25th September 2025



Maghreb Fan-fingered Gecko



Mountain Viper



Sahara Sand Viper



Saw-scaled Viper

Tour report by Daniel Kane



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Tour participants: Daniel Kane and Stefano Doglio (leaders) with five Naturetrek clients

Pre-tour extension

Day 1

Monday 15th September

While some of the group had arrived in Morocco in days prior, the six of us who were visiting the Atlas Mountains met for the first time in Marrakech on Monday morning. Heading south from the city, we encountered early vehicle issues as the air conditioning and windows all stopped working: not ideal when the outside temperature was 40°C! As the guests had some lunch, a temporary vehicle which would see us up to the mountains was arranged. Dinner at the hotel was enjoyed outside, and shortly afterwards we had an hour or so to look around the grounds. Moorish Gecko, North African Water Frog, Berber Toad and Viperine Water Snake were all seen well this evening, and we were in bed ready for a fresh start the next day.

Day 2

Tuesday 16th September

A full Moroccan breakfast prepared us well for a productive morning's herping in the mountains in full sunshine: North African Water Frog, Vaucher's Wall Lizard, Moroccan Rock Lizard, Moroccan Ocellated Lizard, Atlas Day Gecko, Atlas Dwarf Lizard, Atlas Viper and Mountain Skink were all had by around 2.00pm, with fantastic behavioural observations of Rock and Ocellated Lizards feeding on ants.

Looking up, the skies were filled with Common Kestrel and migrant Northern Wheatears against a backdrop of light cloud. Shortly, the skies had darkened, but rain wasn't in the forecast; one guest returned to the car to rest. Fifteen minutes later the remaining five of us were sheltering behind any cover we could find as the hail stones beat down, which then turned to driving rain! Needless to say, reptiles were done for the day. A few hours drying out and warming up in the hotel was had while another new vehicle was arranged, before another fantastic dinner.

The rain died down just as we were finishing up our discussion on the intricacies of beaver reintroduction to the UK, and we were off out hoping to add some more amphibian sightings before the day was out. The gardens were alive with Berber Toads, but strangely no other amphibian species were seen to be making the most of the damp and humid conditions.

Day 3

Wednesday 17th September

We woke to clear skies and decided to have a morning by the lake, to give ourselves more of the enjoyable views of lizards we had ejoyed the day before. We saw the same species as yesterday, plus many Alpine and Red-billed Choughs, as well as seven snake skins from three different species. A lovely lunch at Chez Juju marked the end of our time in the mountains, and it was time to head on to Agadir. On the way down from the top, we had a roadside Bibron's Agama which, at 2300m, was not far off the maximum recorded elevation for the species. The drive to Agadir took around four hours, and we arrived at our hotel in time for a delicious dinner; highlights were tagine and pastilla. With a thunderstorm in the offing and a planned early start tomorrow, we called it a night.

Main tour

Day 4

Thursday 18th September

This morning we were up and out before breakfast so we could get in a few hours' herping before it was time for check out. Rock flipping at a site on the edge of town delivered some young Moorish Geckos and the trip's first few Harris's Geckos, but not the hoped-for skinks. We were back at the hotel for 9.00am for our breakfast and, between us, also came across Many-scaled Skink, Bibron's Agama and the resident Spur-thighed Tortoises.

We met our final guest for the main tour at the airport in Agadir, and were soon on our way to the beach. With temperatures up to 44°C on the way down south, we stocked up on cold drinks as we bought picnic supplies. In some arable farmland, we had a shorebird bonanza with at least ten species present, and in good numbers. Turtle Doves and more Moussier's Redstarts were also appreciated by all. Once we reached the beach it didn't take long to see our target species; both Golden and Margarita's Fringe-fingered Lizards, as well as a sloughed skin of Montpellier Snake. Another few hours' drive later, we were in Mirleft, which would be our base for the next few nights.

After getting dinner in Sidi Ifni, we checked out a site which has been productive over the years, and almost immediately one of the guests identified a sleeping Chameleon. We had some more Moorish Geckos and a sleeping Sand Snake before we drove back to bed. There was surprisingly little activity on the roads tonight, despite temperatures into the 30's all night long.

Day 5

Friday 19th September

This morning was another warm one on the coast, so we headed into the hills and checked out a reservoir. From a nice vantage point, we could see many Spanish Terrapins of the *saharica* subspecies. Birds were plentiful and included species such as Ruddy Shelduck, Little Grebe, great views of North African Buzzard, both expected species of flycatcher, yet more Moussier's Redstarts, Willow and Common Reed Warblers, roosting Black-crowned Night Herons, Common Sandpiper, Yellow Wagtail and Greenfinch.

After midday, we left and had our lunch in the local market, before driving slowly south during the heat of the day. Activity was low, probably on account of the high temperatures, but we saw a few Barbary Ground Squirrels. At our afternoon search site, we had a fairly quiet walk towards the coast, and saw some hyper-saline pools which had turned a vivid pink colour. Back near the vehicle, in some low bushes, a Mediterranean Chameleon was found, which received much admiration.

Dinner was in Mirleft, after which some of us returned to the reservoir to see which additional amphibian species might be active. With an air temperature of 35°C and a warm wind blowing, we had a great many Berber Toads, North African Water Frogs, several of the trip's first Stripeless Tree Frogs, Spanish Terrapin and a Viperine Water Snake. We were home for around midnight, no doubt all dreaming of a cool breeze.

Day 6

Saturday 20th September

This morning's aim was to see the Moroccan Day Gecko during a stop-off inland. It took a little while, but we saw several young-of-the-year scattered around the valley we chose to explore. Several Moorish Geckos were basking on the same rocky faces, and a Bibron's Agama darted between bushes. More Moussier's Redstarts and a Blue Rock Thrush added avian interest.

By the time we reached our lunch stop, a section of river with permanent water, we were looking at around 40°C in the shade, so we didn't expect much herp activity; it was simply warmer than the preferred body temperature of these animals, not to mention ourselves! A single Spanish Terrapin bucked this trend and was basking just above the water line, while a few Moorish Geckos were seen deep in cracks in the rocky faces. Some eclipse Shovelers were joined by a single Marbled Duck, and plenty of Common and Green Sandpipers flew from pool to pool as we explored the water's edge. Northern Wheatears standing in the shade, mouths open, wings spread, said it all.

This afternoon we drove to an oasis where we would stay for the next two nights. As ever, the welcome and the experience was incredible, and we spent a few hours resting, reading, and keeping an eye out for anything of interest passing among the palm trees. Dinner was a three-course showstopper and set us up well for a night hike in a wadi not far away. An unexpected Helmeted Gecko, the first for this area on these trips, was found by one of the group, while others had several Northern Elegant Geckos and scorpions.

Day 7

Sunday 21st September

Our day at Assa was set to be another hot one. A few hours after setting off, we briefly explored an old greater Mouse-tailed Bat roost, but there was no activity. Small-spotted Lizard was our only herp of the morning as we sat in the shade (at around 40°C!) for our lunch. A surprise small group of Black-crowned Night Herons added interest to the barren, waterless terrain.

After lunch, our afternoon consisted of driving west and checking each cistern we could feasibly reach. Our first stop had Böhme's Agama, two Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizards, Leaf-nosed Snake and Böhme's Gecko. The trapped animals were safely moved to the closest wadi where they could find shelter and perhaps food when they were ready, though all retreated underground at the first chance as the thermometer had climbed to 45°C by now. Additional checks for the rest of the afternoon yielded more of the same, plus a live adult Sand Snake. No fewer than eight Greater Hoopoe-larks were seen at different times this afternoon, either from the car or while we walked or ran between cisterns.

We had dinner in Assa, and then made our way south into the Sahara. Fox Hill was our first site of the night; immediately a Boulenger's Wedge-snouted Skink was active on the surface of the sand and, while we were photographing that, Oudri's Fan-footed Gecko and many Böhme's Geckos were seen active on the rocky sections of this hill. An additional Leaf-nosed Snake was found active on the summit, which was a good record for the area. We cruised back north, and had a third Leaf-nosed Snake for the day en route to our final site for the night.

Arriving around 10.00pm at a wadi south of Assa, the eight of us searched for ninety minutes or so, and came across several Algerian Dwarf Gecko hatchlings and perhaps thirty roosting Barbary Partridges. Thinking we were

about to go home without the target species for this site, 'one last check' revealed a gorgeous adult Saw-scaled Viper waiting in ambush. After ample admiration, we were home for 2.15am; the ensuing lie-in was well-earned.

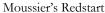
Day 8

Monday 22nd September

There was no rush to get up early today, unless you wanted to watch the sunrise and see some birds. Before leaving the oasis, one of the group saw a Wryneck, which could not be relocated after disappearing round the back of some palm trees. We drove south to El Ouatia today, stopping for ice creams and a picnic lunch on the way. We removed a Many-scaled Skink from a cistern, but generally activity was low, as were temperatures, less than half what they had been twenty-four hours earlier.

Once we reached our hotel, we had a quick turn around and were out at it again in some coastal flats. Herping here produced a Bibron's Agama, a really nice male. Several Streaked Scrub Warbler provided good views, as well as dozens of Western Subalpine Warbler and a single Stone-curlew. We had dinner watching the sun set, and were then out again on a quiet stretch of road. Perhaps two hours of cruising in temperatures around 20°C rewarded us with five Helmeted Geckos and three Northern Elegant Geckos, in addition to several large scorpions. Bedtime was around midnight.







Moila Snake

Day 9

Tuesday 23rd September

This morning, we made our way south to Akhfennir. Stopping at yesterday afternoon's site, we added Busack's Fringe-fingered Lizard, Harris's Gecko and Many-scaled Skink to the site tally for this trip. A sloughed skin from an adult Puff Adder provided intrigue, but the snake itself could not be located; no doubt it was underground in a complex of rodent burrows.

Our lunch was some delicious fried fish and, while permissions were arranged for tonight's activity, the guests enjoyed views of Hoopoe and several gull species. Mid-afternoon was spent having a stroll in Khenifiss NP, where we saw plenty of Greater Flamingoes, Turtle Doves, Black Stork and a few Desert Wheatears. A mother Beautiful Scorpion brooding her young was found under a flipped rock. and Audouin's and Yellow-legged Gulls flew by.

Dinner in our hotel was, as usual, excellent. and filled us up ready for an exciting night tracking in the dunes. Dumeril's Wedge-snouted Skinks were seen, located by following their tracks and quickly seeing if anyone was underground at the end. A few Helmeted Geckos were also seen before we crossed over a large dune and into

prime sand viper habitat. Not long after, we came across fresh tracks and the target for the night, the Sahara Sand Viper. Ample admiration ensued, and it was smiles all round as we returned to the vehicle. After dropping off most guests around midnight, a few of us headed out again to see what was happening at a spring inland. Surprisingly, herp activity was low, with just a single, tailless, Moorish Gecko of the subspecies *pallida* active on the rocks. We did, however, see several Wildcats and a Rüppell's Fox. Bedtime was another post-2.00am one.

Day 10

Wednesday 24th September

We were in no rush this morning, as we had a bit of a drive to get back to Mirleft, so we watched shearwaters and Gannets before beginning the drive north. Stopping to check some cisterns between Tan Tan and Guelmim, we had ourselves a lovely, quick, False Cobra, which was a real highlight of the trip. Later, in some more cisterns near Guelmim, we rescued a young Sand Snake and another Many-scaled Skink. Our hotel and meal tonight were fantastic, and so good we wanted to stay longer, but we had a final night of herping, so we were off out at sunset, back to the reservoir from earlier in the week, so that everyone could appreciate the tree frogs. We saw the same species as last time, including likely the same Viperine Snake, and were on our way back to bed not long after 11.00pm.

Day 11

Thursday 25th September

Today's early start got most of the group to Agadir airport for 9.00am; some were flying home later that day and opted to stay longer in Mirleft, putting their time to good use spotting seabirds and enjoying a leisurely wind down from their trip. Dan and Stefano drove from Agadir back to Marrakech for evening flights to the UK and to Italy respectively, and were both home in the early hours of Friday morning.

Top 5 herps of the trip:

- 1. Saw-scaled Viper (Echis leucogaster)
- 2. Sahara Sand Viper (Cerastes vipera)
- 3. Fan-footed Gecko (Ptyodactylus oudrii)
- 4. False Cobra (Rhagerhis moilensis)
- 5. Helmeted Gecko (Tarentola chazaliae)

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Species lists

Reptiles

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic, D=dead						Sep	tember	2025				
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Spur-thighed Tortoise	Testudo graeca soussensis				✓							
Spanish Terrapin	Mauremys leprosa leprosa											
Spanish Terrapin	Mauremys leprosa saharica					✓	✓				✓	
Moroccan Day Gecko - E	Quedenfeldtia moerens						✓					
Atlas Day Gecko - E	Quedenfeldtia trachyblepharus		✓	✓								
Harris's Gecko - E	Saurodactylus harrisii				✓					✓		
Northern Elegant Gecko	Stenodactylus mauritanicus						✓		✓			
Algerian Dwarf Gecko	Tropiocolotes algericus						✓	✓				
Maghreb Fan-fingered Gecko	Ptyodactylus oudrii							✓				
Böhme's Gecko - E	Tarentola boehmei							✓				
Helmethead Gecko	Tarentola chazaliae						✓		✓	✓		
Moorish Gecko	Tarentola mauritanica mauritanica	✓	✓	✓								
Moorish Gecko	Tarentola mauritanica juliae				✓	✓	✓		✓			
Moorish Gecko	Tarentola mauritanica pallida									✓		
Western Sand Skink	Chalcides boulengeri							✓				
Mountain Skink - E	Chalcides montanus		✓									
Many-scaled Skink - E	Chalcides polylepis				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Duméril's Wedge-snouted Skink	Chalcides sphenopsiformis									✓		
Golden Fringe-fingered Lizard	Acanthodactylus aureus				✓							
Bosk's Fringe-fingered Lizard	Acanthodactylus boskianus							✓				
Busack's Fringe-fingered Lizard - N	Acanthodactylus busacki								✓			
Margarita's Fringe-fingered Lizard - E	Acanthodactylus margaritae				✓							
Atlas Dwarf Lizard - E	Atlantolacerta andreanskyi		✓									
Small-spotted Lizard	Mesalina guttulata							✓				
Vaucher's Wall Lizard	Podarcis vaucheri		✓	✓								
Moroccan Rock Lizard	Scelarcis perspicillata		✓	✓								
Moroccan Ocellated Lizard	Timon tangitanus		✓	√								
Bibron's Agama	Agama bibronii			√	√	√			√			

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic, D=dead						Sep	tember	2025				
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Böhme's Agama	Trapelus boehmei							✓				
Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard	Uromastyx nigriventris							✓				
Mediterranean Chameleon	Chamaeleo chamaeleon				✓	✓						
Algerian Whip Snake	Hemorrhois algirus intermedius							D				
Horseshoe Whip Snake	Hemorrhois hippocrepis				D							
Crowned Leafnose Snake	Lytorhynchus diadema							✓				
Viperine Snake	Natrix maura	✓				✓					✓	
Schokari Sand Snake	Psammophis schokari				✓	✓		✓			✓	
Moila Snake	Rhagerhis moilensis										✓	
Sahara Sand Viper	Cerastes vipera									✓		
Saw-scaled Viper	Echis pyramidum leucogaster							✓				
Mountain Viper - N	Vipera monticola monticola		√									

Amphibians

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic, D=dead	d, L=larvae		September 2025												
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
Amphibians															
North African Green Toad	Bufotes boulengeri							D							
Berber Toad	Sclerophrys mauritanica	✓	✓	L	✓	✓	✓				✓				
Mediterranean Tree Frog	Hyla meridionalis					✓					✓				
North African Water Frog	Pelophylax saharica	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓				

Birds

		September 2025											
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea					✓							
Northern Shoveler	Spatula clypeata						✓						
Marbled Duck	Marmaronetta angustirostris						✓						
Barbary Partridge	Alectoris barbara							✓					
Rock Dove	Columba livia			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus			✓									
European Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur				✓		✓			✓	✓		
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Laughing Dove	Spilopelia senegalensis						✓	✓					
Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus					✓	✓						
Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra		✓	√		✓	✓						
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis					✓	✓						
Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus									✓	✓		
Eurasian Stone-curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus								✓				
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus									✓			
Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus				✓		✓						
Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta				✓								
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula				✓		✓			✓			
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius				✓								
Eurasian Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus									✓			
Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa									✓			
Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos				✓	✓	✓			✓			
Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus						✓						
Common Redshank	Tringa totanus				✓		✓				✓		
Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia				✓								
Ruff	Calidris pugnax				✓								
Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea				✓								
Sanderling	Calidris alba									✓			
Little Stint	Calidris minuta				√								

		September 2025												
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
Caspian Tern	Hydroprogne caspia									✓				
Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandvicensis									✓	✓			
Audouin's Gull	Ichthyaetus audouinii									✓				
Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis				√	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus									✓	✓			
Arctic Skua	Stercorarius parasiticus										✓			
Cory's Shearwater	Calonectris borealis									✓	✓			
Black Stork	Ciconia nigra									✓				
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus										✓			
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo									✓	✓			
Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus						✓							
Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia				√					✓	✓			
Black-crowned Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax					✓		✓						
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta			√	✓	√	✓			✓	✓			
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea					√				✓	✓			
Osprey	Pandion haliaetus											✓		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus		✓											
Black Kite	Milvus migrans										✓			
Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo					✓	✓		✓					
Maghreb Owl	Strix mauritanica	✓												
Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops						✓			✓	✓			
Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis				√									
Eurasian Wryneck	Jynx torquilla								✓					
Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		✓	√	√	✓	✓			✓				
Lanner Falcon	Falco biarmicus			✓										
Great Grey Shrike	Lanius excubitor			√	√	✓		✓	✓					
Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator					√								
Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius		✓			✓								
Maghreb Magpie	Pica mauritanica			✓	√							✓		
Red-billed Chough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax		✓	✓										
Alpine Chough	Pyrrhocorax graculus		√	√										

		September 2025												
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
Great Tit	Parus major		✓											
Greater Hoopoe-Lark	Alaemon alaudipes							✓						
Crested Lark	Galerida cristata			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Common Bulbul	Pycnonotus barbatus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Western House Martin	Delichon urbicum			✓		✓								
Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti				✓									
Streaked Scrub Warbler	Scotocerca inquieta								✓	✓				
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus				√	✓					✓			
Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita										√			
Common Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus					✓	√							
Sardinian Warbler	Curruca melanocephala				√									
Western Subalpine Warbler	Curruca iberiae							✓	✓					
Common Whitethroat	Curruca communis							✓	√	✓	√			
Spotless Starling	Sturnus unicolor				√	✓					√			
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula		√	✓	√		√							
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	Cercotrichas galactotes								√					
Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata					✓	✓		√		✓			
European Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca					✓	√		√					
Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros		✓	✓	√	✓	✓		√					
Common Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus									✓				
Moussier's Redstart	Phoenicurus moussieri				✓	✓	✓							
Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitarius		✓				✓							
European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola				✓	✓								
Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe		√				✓	✓						
Atlas Wheatear	Oenanthe seebohmi		✓											
Desert Wheatear	Oenanthe deserti								✓	✓				
Red-rumped Wheatear	Oenanthe moesta			√		√								
White-crowned Wheatear	Oenanthe leucopyga						√	✓	√		√			
Black Wheatear	Oenanthe leucura		√		√	✓	√							
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus		√		√	√		√	√	√	√	/		

			September 2025												
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava					✓				✓	✓				
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea		✓	✓	✓					✓					
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris					✓									
Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina		✓	✓											
House Bunting	Emberiza sahari	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓			✓			

Mammals

			September 2025											
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
Barbary Ground Squirrel	Atlantoxerus getulus		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
A jerboa	Dipodidae sp.							✓						
Rüppell's Fox	Vulpes rueppellii								✓					
African Wildcat	Felis lybica								√		√			

Invertebrates

			September 2025										
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
Beautiful Scorpion	Buthus bonito								✓				
a fat-tailed scorpion	Androctonus sp.							✓			✓		
a nomad scorpion	Hottentotta sp.						✓	✓					
a camel spider	Solifugae sp.							✓					