

Tunisia - Winter Sun Birding

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th – 22nd November 2025



Caspian Terns



Desert Sparrow



Thick-billed Lark



Pharaoh Eagle-Owl

Tour report by Martin Pitt



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Martin Pitt (leader), Mohamed-Ali Dakhli (local Guide) with four Naturetrek clients



Douiret

Summary

Naturetrek's trip to Tunisia was focused on the desert south of the country and the special birds of this hot and arid land. The circuit from the island of Djerba took us to the rocky oueds, the sandy plains and the mountains that form a diverse set of habitats in this starkly beautiful landscape. We also took in the palm oasis of Ksar Ghilane on the edge of the sand sea, and then coastal areas in the shallow seas of the Gulf of Gabès.

We arrived after an especially dry summer, and the period of winter rains had yet to set in. Although we saw a few showers and were informed of snow further north in the country, we managed to dodge the showers, and in the main it was warm and sunny, although we were subjected to a cool wind. The desert is often quiet at this time of year, but we managed to find our targets, with regional endemics in Moussier's Redstart, Tristram's Warbler and Maghreb Wheatear being joined by the desert specials of Desert Sparrow, Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Lanner Falcon, and a mix of larks and wheatears.

Overall, we recorded 93 species of birds, five dragonfly species and three species of mammal. One highlight was to witness at first hand the efforts to reintroduce large ungulates into the desert, and we had close views of Scimitar-horned Oryx, Dorcas Gazelle and Aoudad (Barbary Sheep). Overall, the tour was a great introduction to the Maghreb Sahara.

Day 1

Tuesday 18th November

Flight – Luton to Djerba

The flight left a chilly Luton slightly early for the three-hour flight to Djerba. We flew over France, leaving the south coast as the sun set, arriving in Djerba shortly before 7.00pm local time. Passport control was quick, but we got stuck with the importation of binoculars for one of the group. We had to leave them until our return, thankful for a spare pair being carried by Mohamed-Ali, and we made the short journey to our comfortable hotel on the island.

Day 2**Wednesday 19th November****Tataouine – PN Oued Edkouk – Ras el Ouedi – Douiret – Guermassa – Zammour**

After our buffet breakfast, we left the hotel at 7.15am and headed south. We crossed the causeway that joins the island to the mainland, where Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls gave our first coastal species, before a bread stop in Tataouine, continuing on to the Parque National de Oued Edkouk.

The park is at the centre for the reintroduction of large ungulates to southern Tunisia, and over the last twenty years they have focused on Aoudad (Barbary Sheep), Dorcas Gazelle and Scimitar-horned Oryx, and have free ranging herds of each. The head ranger gave us an introduction to the park and their work. We crossed into the park itself, and were soon watching all three species. Due to the lack of rain, they have been supplementarily feeding the animals, and this had made them much easier to see. In the same area, a young White-crowned Wheatear followed us around, and hundreds of sparrows, both Spanish and the Tunisian version of House Sparrow were present. However, it was the larks that were demanding our attention. Thekla's were the most numerous, although it was the Thick-billed and Bar-tailed species that were our most wanted. We moved deeper into the park and stopped at an enclosure where the park rangers had brought in the pregnant Oryx for protection. We learned that in the previous year they had lost six Oryx calves to Golden Wolf attack, so they were now taking precautions.

**Scimitar-horned Oryxes**

We then headed back towards Tataouine, before turning west towards the barren hills that form the natural barrier before the coastal plains. These hills, with their dry oueds and escarpments of sedimentary rocks, are an important habitat for a different range of species. Before climbing very far, we found a male of the Maghreb form of

Mourning Wheatear, and then a little further on we flushed an Atlas Long-legged Buzzard from a roadside pylon. We continued to Douiret, one of the ancient hilltop troglodyte villages, where we had our lunch. Blue Rock Thrush, House Bunting and Black Wheatears were all added during our stop, and just down the road we stopped for a party of Desert Larks.

We moved on to the oued near Guermassa, and again things seemed quiet. A male Moussier's Redstart was some compensation. With the sun starting to set we headed to our traditional 'cave hotel' for the next couple of nights at Zammour.

Day 3

Thursday 20th November

Zammour – Ksar Ghilane – Guermassa



Maghreb Wheatear

After a 7.00am breakfast, we loaded the 4x4s, but not before adding Robin and Black Redstart to our hotel list. We headed west, following a oued line that progressively became more sandy and less inhabited. We kept our eyes open for activity, and a brief stop at a small sandy area gave us views of a couple of Hoopoe, and a female Maghreb Wheatear which turned out to be one of the little-documented form intermediate between dark-throated and pale-throated. The walk in a sandy oued showed little evidence of the hoped-for Greater Hoopoe-Lark, but we could track other footprints including two sizes of fox (probably Rüppell's and Fennec), gerbils (or jirds) and a Cape Hare.

We moved on to a well site, and were delighted to find a party of Temminck's Larks happily drinking with the plentiful sparrows, and joined by some Trumpeter Finches. We moved further west to another well with penned sheep and goats. Here, supplementary feeding with barley attracted a range of larks to the spilt grain around the feeding troughs, and the constant movement of herders and animals meant the birds were habituated and allowed a close approach. Although Temminck's was again the most numerous species, it was the Thick-billed Lark that gave the most delight as these charismatic birds fed close by. After much searching, a couple of Mediterranean Short-toed Larks were also found, and so with our targets located, we moved on.

The desert plains here were a mix of sand and gravel, and the associated species are highly nomadic. We stopped frequently at signs of activity, finding more wheatears and larks, but it was only at our planned coffee stop that we found a Hoopoe-Lark, apparently waiting for us in the car park. Although it quickly disappeared, a quick search after our drinks gave stellar views of this desert 'must see'. We crossed to our most westerly point at Ksar Ghislaine, an oasis on the edge of a sand sea. The date crop is normally irresistible to Desert Sparrows, and so it proved, it taking us no time to add this iconic species to our lists.

We followed a more northerly route back to Zammour. The weather threatened to intervene, but the duststorm and rain were short-lived, and there were no issues when we arrived at our first stop at the well-vegetated oued around Ksar Tarcine. A Lanner Falcon, flew over and the surrounding scrub eventually yielded both Tristram's and Spectacled Warbler, the former even giving us some brief snatches of song on top of the bushes, after initially playing hide and seek. Our next stops were for Little Owls which seemed to be making good use of the roadside rock piles, and then at last a gorgeous male Desert Wheatear glowed in the light of the setting evening sun.

Day 4

Friday 21st November

Matmata – Boughrara

The day started with low cloud over the hills, but promised sun later. We headed initially to the troglodyte village at Beni Kheddache, where House Buntings were common and there was a flyover Serin. We headed further north and tried a rocky mountain oued that was a known wintering site for Marmora's Warbler; although the temperature was against us, it soon became clear that half a dozen birds were present. But seeing them was a different matter as they dashed from scrubby bush to scrubby bush. Finally, a male seemed to prefer a wild olive tree, and at last showed well. That was more than could be said of the Streaked Scrub Warblers, whose trilling calls could also be heard; the birds stayed resolutely hidden. We stopped briefly close by at a traditional olive press, before abandoning the hills and dropping down to the coastal plain.

We headed to Boughrara, picking up Nabil, our owl man, at a local cafe. We then drove into the kilometre after kilometre of olive groves, and in a seemingly identical patch of olives were treated to a stunning Pharaoh Eagle Owl, having learned that four pairs nested in this area in the summer.



Roman port at Boughrara

We returned to the port and watched the numerous egrets, Spoonbills and Flamingoes while having our picnic lunch. As was to be the norm, flocks of Slender-billed Gulls were plentiful and were the most numerous birds by the coast. By the fishing jetty, groups of Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes bobbed on the sea at close range. We had our picnic overlooking the sea with flocks of Kentish Plovers and Curlew Sandpipers, and wandered around the Roman ruins of the ancient port and temple, adding a mix of dragonflies (Vagrant Emperor, Orange-winged Dropwing and Red-veined Darter).

We then moved on to the mainland opposite Djerba Island, finding more Flamingoes and more waders, including Golden Plover, Turnstone and Greenshank. As the sun set, we headed back to our initial hotel on Djerba and, prepared for the final night together.

Day 5

Saturday 22nd November

Djerba Island

By 8.00am, we were breakfasted and packed and for our last day. The plan was to circumnavigate Djerba Island, stopping to bird as we went. The day was bright and sunny, albeit a bit windy and cool, and we would be focusing on the waterbirds that winter in great numbers along the coast. Our first stop was along the sand bar known as Flamingo Island, and we crossed the saltmarsh to reach it. The shallow sea between the sandbar and the mainland was full of birds; Flamingoes, Spoonbills, herons, egrets, and the now expected hundreds of Slender-billed Gulls. We scanned the wader flock, finding Ringed Plovers, Sanderlings and Bar-tailed Godwits, together with Sandwich and Gull-billed Terns among the numerous Caspian Terns. Further around the lagoon, we spotted our first Marsh Harrier, and this was soon joined by a hunting juvenile Barbary Falcon, which tried its luck with a Greenshank. We watched astounded as the falcon stunned the unfortunate wader and then had its prey stolen by one of the many Grey Herons.

We had our last picnic overlooking the sea, next to the historic mosque at Sidi Yati, before heading to the pools that serve as the water supply for the whole island. In such an arid area, this fresh water is attractive, especially to ducks. Ferruginous Ducks were plentiful, and were joined by a mix of more familiar species such as Pintail and Shoveler. All too soon, our time came to an end, and we headed back to the hotel to pick up our luggage, freshen up and then head to the airport for our flight home. The Easyjet flight left early, and after an uneventful flight we got through the airport quickly, and said our goodbyes.



Desert sunset

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Species lists

Birds

I=introduced	Scientific name	19	20	21	22
Common name					
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>				✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>				✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>				✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				✓
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>				✓
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓		✓	
Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia 'domestica'</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>		✓		✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			✓	✓
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			✓	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			✓	✓
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			✓	✓
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			✓	✓
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>			✓	✓
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			✓	✓
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				✓
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>				✓
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓	✓
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓	✓
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			✓	✓
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			✓	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				✓
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓	✓
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			✓	
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			✓	✓
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				✓
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>			✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>				✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓		✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓			✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓	✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			✓	✓
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓		✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓	✓
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>				✓

I=introduced		November 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓
(Atlas) Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>	✓		✓	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓	
Pharaoh Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>			✓	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		✓	
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>		✓		
Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus peregrinoides</i>				✓
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓		
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓		✓	✓
Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>		✓		
Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>	✓	✓		
Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	✓	✓		
Bar-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	✓	✓		
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓	✓
Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila bilophata</i>		✓		
Mediterranean Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala rufescens</i>		✓		
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓		✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓
Tristram's Warbler	<i>Curruca deserticola</i>		✓		
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Curruca conspicillata</i>		✓		✓
Marmora's Warbler	<i>Curruca sarda</i>			✓	
Fulvous Babbler	<i>Argya fulva</i>		✓		
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓			✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>			✓	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓		
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓		
Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	✓			
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>		✓		
Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	✓	✓		
Maghreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe halophila</i>	✓	✓		
White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	✓	✓		
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>		✓		
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>				✓
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>		✓		
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			✓	
House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	✓		✓	

Mammals

I=introduced		November 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22
Dorcas Gazelle - I	<i>Gazella dorcas</i>	✓			
Scimitar-horned Oryx - I	<i>Oryx dammah</i>	✓			
Aoudad - I	<i>Ammotragus lervia</i>	✓			

Dragonflies

		November 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22
Vagrant Emperor	<i>Anax ephippiger</i>			✓	
Epaulet Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>		✓		
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>			✓	✓
Orange-winged Dropwing	<i>Trithemis kirbyi</i>			✓	
Red-veined Dropwing	<i>Trithemis arteriosa</i>		✓		

Other insects

		November 2025			
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>			✓	✓
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>				✓
Silent Slant-faced Grasshopper	<i>Acrida ungarica</i>			✓	
Dimpled' Beetle	<i>Nebria</i> sp.		✓		