

Tunisia - Winter Sun Birding

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 21st February 2026



Greater Hoopoe-Lark



Atlas Long-legged Buzzard



Black Wheatear



Thick-billed Lark

Tour report by Martin Pitt



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Summary

This tour 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*, sandy plains and 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 Gabes.



Ras al Ouedi

We arrived after a dry winter and a period of unprecedented southerly winds, which had left the desert with little of the greenery that had been a feature of the trip twelve months previously. The weather was sunny and bright, with clear blue skies and warm temperatures, although the winds continued. We managed to see the majority of the targets, with the first day being dominated by the wheatears including Maghreb, Red-rumped and Desert. The second day focused on finding the lark species, and we had great views of Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Thick-billed and Temminck's in particular, although for the group the Desert Sparrows, Cream-colored Coursers and especially the Pharaoh Eagle-Owls were perhaps the trip highlights. We all had good views of multiple Moussier's Redstarts and Marmora's Warblers, birds which make this part of the Maghreb so special in winter.

Another highlight was to witness at first hand the efforts to reintroduce large ungulates into the desert, and we had close view of Scimitar-horned Oryx, Dorcas Gazelle and Aoudad. We also found the strange (and Maghreb endemic) Common Gundi. Among the reptiles, the undoubted highlight was the Sahara Horned Viper, its bluish markings showing that it was a young animal; the temperature was low enough that it sat still, giving all remarkable views, although we kept our distance!

We recorded ninety-two species of birds, four species of mammals, three species of reptiles, three species of dragonfly and four species of butterfly. The tour was a great introduction to the wonderful landscapes and wildlife of the Maghreb Sahara.

Day 1

Tuesday 17th February

Luton to Djerba

Our flight left a chilly Luton slightly early for the three-hour flight to Djerba. We flew over France, crossing the south coast as the sun set, and arrived in Djerba as the sun set, thirty minutes ahead of schedule at 7.00pm. Passport control was quick, and we made the short journey to our comfortable hotel on the island.

Day 2

Wednesday 18th February

Tataouine – PN Oued Edkoug – Ras el Ouedi – D'Ouiret – 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 Gulls gave our first coastal species; we soon added Spoonbills, Greater Flamingoes, egrets and a Caspian Tern. After a bread stop in Tataouine, we continued on to the Parc National Oued Edkoug.

The park is at the centre of the reintroduction of large ungulates to southern Tunisia; 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. After a brief introduction, we crossed into the park itself and were soon watching all three species. Due to the minimal rain over the winter, there were few flowers this spring, and birds were at a premium. However, we soon found some showy White-crowned Wheatears, and then a male Maghreb Wheatear, recently split from Mourning Wheatear.



Aoudads



Common Gundi

We moved to the pen used to protect the new born oryxes; they had lost eleven calves to wolf attacks the previous year. The mothers and young were still using the area, but our attention was drawn by our first Hoopoe and then a party of Trumpeter Finches, attracted to a water trough and overflow.

We found the surrounding area surprisingly quiet, but with diligent searching we added classic desert species: a Bar-tailed Lark and later a pair of Desert Wheatears. Whilst watching some Kestrels, a larger raptor came into view, heading northwards. This was readily identified as a Short-toed Snake Wagle, an early spring migrant. At the entrance we had our picnic lunch, our last before the holy month of Ramadan began.

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 male and female Maghreb Wheatears, and then a little further on we repeated the trick, but this time with male and female Red-rumped Wheatears. At the next road junction, we flushed a roadside Atlas Long-legged Buzzard, but fortunately it landed in a nearby tree and gave us good views.

From here we headed towards Chenini. A roadside stop for our first Black Wheatear, our fifth species from that family already, turned into a longer stop as we added a gorgeous male Moussier's Redstart, being tracked by a pair of Marmora's Warblers. On the scrubby hillside, there was a close call, and we were soon enjoying close views of a young Sahara Horned Viper, which seemed docile enough; we still kept our distance!



Sahara Horned Viper

We moved on to the *oued* near Guermassa, and again things seemed quiet. Another 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 19th February

Zammour – Ksar Ghilane – Bir Soltane

After a 7.00am breakfast, we loaded the 4x4s and headed west, following a *oued* line that progressively became more sandy and less inhabited. We kept our eyes open for activity, and brief stop at a small sandy area gave us views of a territorial pair of Red-rumped Wheatears and a female Moussier's Redstart. We stopped at another couple of places with seemingly good habitat, but as it turned out there were few birds save for the ubiquitous Thekla's Lark. However, we found our first *Nidua* Fringe-fingered Lizard. We stopped a bit further on and watched a couple of Greater Hoopoe-Larks foraging close to the road. Then, a few Bar-tailed Larks appeared and foraged on the road itself, until chased off by the infrequent traffic.

We moved on to a well site, but it was strangely lacking in drinking birds, so we moved further west to another well near numerous 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 means the birds are habituated and allow close approach. Temminck's were the most numerous lark species; they are always a treat

with their well-marked faces. However, it was the Thick-billed Larks that gave the most delight as these charismatic birds fed close by. Other larks were present, including first a Desert Lark, and then more Bar-tailed Larks. A brightly-plumaged male Trumpeter Finch joined the throng as a parting gift; we moved on.

We stopped at a café, and as on previous trips we were welcomed by the by now-expected Greater Hoopoe-Lark, but the drive westwards was really marked by the increasing amount of wind-blown sand across the roads, and the strengthening of the wind as the morning progressed. Brown-necked Ravens became commonplace; however, the wind was obviously keeping other species hidden.

The oasis at Ksar Ghislaine marked the furthest point west for the trip, and we searched the palmerie for early migrants and Desert Sparrows, but failed to find either. After lunch, we headed back to the main Douz road and headed north to Bir Soltane. The wind was now becoming uncomfortable, given the amount of sand being thrown up. The drive into the *oued* here crossed gravel plains, and we were lucky to find two Cream-colored Coursers here, and another Greater Hoopoe-Lark as well. Dropping into the *oued* at least gave some respite from the worst of wind, but the conditions put paid to any hopes of warblers. At least we managed to find the expected Desert Sparrows. We followed the more northerly route back to Zammour; close to our hotel, a dry *oued* looked promising, and it was sufficiently in the lee of the wind that Vagrant Emperors were on the wing. We walked the *oued*, not picking up much until we inadvertently flushed two Pharaoh Eagle-Owls from the nearby cliff face, giving all of us clear views as they moved away! This was a surprise, as we knew of no local records. Elated, we returned to the hotel.

Day 4

Friday 20th February

Ksar Hallouf – Toujane – Boughrara

The day started with low cloud over the hills, but sun was promised later. We headed initially back to the owl location of the previous evening, but there was no sign of them, so we returned to Ksar Hallouf, which gave us the opportunity of seeing lots of House Buntings at close range. We then headed further north across the plains, where we stopped for Little Owls and soon also found three Common Gundis, a strange tailless rodent, endemic to this part of Africa.

Next, we tried a rocky mountain *oued* near Toujane, a known wintering site for Marmora's Warbler; by this time the skies had cleared and we soon found a few active birds, but it was hard going. A male Black Redstart and a flyover Long-legged Buzzard were some compensation for our efforts.

We then headed to the coast at Boughrara, picking up Nabil, our owl man. We 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 on her nest. Apparently, she was sitting on four eggs, although we obviously kept our distance to minimise disturbance.

We returned to the port and watched the numerous egrets, Spoonbills and Flamingos while eating 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 Plover and Little Stint. We then tracked along the

coast opposite Djerba Island, finding Spoonbills, more Flamingoes and more waders. We also found three species of tern: Sandwich, Gull-billed and Caspian.

We crossed back to Djerba via the causeway and stopped at the water treatment plant. Strangely there were few ducks, but the enormous gull flock included our first Mediterranean Gulls, and the surrounding scrub held Zitting Cisticola and Red-throated Pipits. We were concerned to find a number of recently-deceased Spoonbills, all apparently unmarked but highly emaciated. We notified the authorities, fearing that bird flu might be impacting birds here; one corpse was bearing a Zagreb ring, suggesting an eastern European connection. As the sun dipped, we headed back to our hotel on Djerba, and prepared for the final night together.

Day 5

Saturday 21st February

Djerba Island

By 8.00am, we were breakfasted and packed; for our last day, the plan was to circumnavigate Djerba Island, stopping to bird as we went. The day was bright and sunny, albeit with a strong northerly wind that was pushing the shallow seas to unprecedented heights. This reduced the habitat for shorebirds, and we noticed this immediately at our first stop that the Flamingo Island sand bar was underwater. As expected, Flamingoes were the most numerous species, although Slender-billed Gulls were also everywhere. We found a few rosy-breasted birds, and then summer-plumaged Mediterranean and a single Black-headed Gull. With little shoreline available, waders were tricky; however, we added new species such as Golden Plover and Whimbrel. On one foray inland, we found a Little Owl, and here the Great Grey Shrikes were of the coastal subspecies *algeriensis*, rather than the desert form *elegans* that we had seen previously.



Djerba coast

We had our last picnic overlooking the sea, next to its historic mosque at Sidi Yati, before returning to the water treatment pools. Most of the species from the previous day were still present, but we added a flock of Pintail offshore, and a single male Ferruginous Duck hung around so all could see it. Our first House Martin flew over, and we had good views of the Red-throated Pipits. 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 promptly, and after an uneventful flight we got through the airport quickly and said our goodbyes.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I = introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026			
			18	19	20	21
	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓	
	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</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>	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</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 Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			✓	✓
	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓	✓
	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>				✓
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓	
	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>			H	✓
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓		✓	✓
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			✓	✓
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓	✓
	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			✓	✓
	Cream-colored Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>		✓		
	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</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>			✓	✓
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		✓	✓
	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	✓			

I = introduced		February 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</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 Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</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>				H
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓		✓	✓
Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>		✓		
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓			✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			✓	✓
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marmora's Warbler	<i>Curruca sarda</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>	✓	✓		
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>				H
Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>			✓	✓
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	✓	✓		
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓	
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	✓		✓	

Mammals

I - introduced		February 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21
Dorcas Gazelle - I	<i>Gazella dorcas</i>	✓			
Scimitar-horned Oryx - I	<i>Oryx dammah</i>	✓			
Aoudad - I	<i>Ammotragus lervia</i>	✓			
Common Gundi	<i>Ctenodactylus gundi</i>			✓	

Reptiles

		February 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21
Nidua Fringe-fingered Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus scutellatus</i>		✓		
Small-spotted Desert Racer	<i>Mesalina guttulata</i>	✓			
Sahara Horned Viper	<i>Cerastes cerastes</i>	✓			

Butterflies

		February 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21
Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>			✓	✓
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>		✓		
Greenish Black Tip	<i>Euchloe charlonia</i>			✓	✓
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>				✓

Dragonflies

		February 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21
Vagrant Emperor	<i>Anax ephippiger</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>		✓		
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓		