

## MOROCCO

20<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010

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### I. Introduction

This was a ten-day trip to one of the Western Palearctic's finest birding countries. During this time, I aimed to combine a standard itinerary with a two-day search for Andalusian Hemipode: a search that at this time did not produce any positive findings. The remainder of the trip focused upon the set of target species usually sought in this country. I succeeded with the majority of these, missing Double-spurred Francolin in the north, and Spotted Sandgrouse and Fulvous Babbler in the south. I did not seek Crimson-winged Finch or Atlas Flycatcher at this time, nor did I search for Bald Ibis, Black-crowned Tchagra, Barbary Falcon, Barbary Partridge or Plain Martin - all seen well in 2007. In this report I aim to provide not only coverage of the species, in diary and list form, but also a review of logistics and guiding options as I found them during my stay.

### II. Logistics

#### (a) Preparatory Work

Close analysis of ten sample trip reports from the Travelling Birder database proved useful, especially when used in conjunction with Gosney's *Finding Birds in Northern Morocco* and his far better 2009 publication, *Morocco: The Deserts*. Particularly useful were Richard Bonser's April 2005 report, Fraser Simpson's April 2007 report, Chris Batty's 2004 report and Nigel Redman's 2007 and 2009 Birdquest trip reports. Additional thanks must go to a member of the Donana research team working out in Morocco and to Fraser Simpson for lending me Bergier's excellent guide. All sites were located using Google Maps, and their exact coordinates programmed into the Tom Tom. Aerial maps also proved useful in analysing patterns of habitat, especially for *Turnix sylvatica*. I did not book accommodation in advance, although I did secure a night at Temara through [www.couchsurfing.org](http://www.couchsurfing.org). Please note that all bracketed GPS references in this report express exact locations. These can be entered into Google Maps or any GPS software.

#### (b) Transport

I flew with Ryanair not only due to their low prices but their outstanding record for punctuality. A return flight from Bristol to Marrakech cost £90 with no baggage allowance, and an additional £70 for the inclusion of one 15kg bag. Both flights arrived ahead of schedule. I hired a car through AutoEurope, whose ground agent was Budget. A five-door hatchback with air conditioning and full excess cover insurance cost £335.00, with no young driver surcharge, for ten days of rental. The car was collected at Marrakech and I found the ground agents to be fast and efficient.

Toll highways in the north are very fast and clear of traffic, and the majority of 'N' roads throughout the country are in good condition. Unmarked roads are of variable condition and often a little too narrow for comfortable passage of two vehicles, but you adapt your driving style accordingly, and due to generally low speed limits in the country, there was very rarely any incidents that could be regarded as truly dangerous. Of the city centres, Marrakech and Ouarzazate provided no more than their usual share of bad driving, but I found driving in Rabat to be an altogether more stressful experience. Be exceptionally careful to obey speed limits as the police are both efficient and incorruptible, and the standard fine for any speeding violation is a significant 400 MAD (£31.60).

I navigated using a Tom Tom 750, programmed with GPS points using the excellent Tyre software, in conjunction with the Michelin map. This was by and large an excellent and efficient means of finding any site within radius of an accepted road system. The unit's performance within cities was surprising and excellent, although its failure to recognise small paved roads, i.e. between Oualidia and Tnine Gharbia, or the Iknioun road at Dades, was not so useful. The software has been newly developed and will within a few years be much improved so as to cover these rural road networks and tracks.

#### (c) Accommodation

Since Richard Bonser found the Kasbah Tombuctou in Merzouga to offer luxurious accommodation for £10/night, the Berber community and the Moroccans at large have, it seems, realised the potential for generating greater revenue from the many tourists who visit the country each year. Whilst the Tombuctou seemed happy to offer £50/night, the majority of accommodation for bed and board fell between 200-300 MAD (£15.80 - £23.70), though hotels around Dades and Ouarzazate were significantly cheaper, at around 70 MAD (£5.50). Accommodation and food in Morocco are generally excellent, with the cuisine being particularly good. Avoid salad, drink bottled water, and you will stay in good health. Accommodation was found with surprising ease, from small towns such as Oualidia to large cities like Ouarzazate, and patrons were generally understanding of both late arrivals and early dining times.

#### (d) Cultural Exchange

The Moroccan people are in general curious, welcoming and helpful, and speaking fluent French helped me enormously during this trip, from haggling a price with some Berbers to rescue my car from an impromptu dune, to discussing Nietzsche with a philosophy student in Rissani after I had wandered onto his land looking for Fulvous Babbler. The famed hospitality can be encountered throughout, but is particularly apparent in the desert regions.

Hotel patrons and local guides have an excellent understanding of foreign birders' needs. Guides are of variable standard, and many will be happy to take your money regardless of their birding capabilities. My only unpleasant negotiations of the trip took place following views of Pharaoh Eagle Owl at Rissani and these, along with my experiences of desert 4x4 trips in the Tafilalet, are detailed in the species list at the end of this report. Begging by children is a common practice: do not give money, but pens and paper are often welcomed and are a far more ethical substitute.

### III. Daily Notes

#### 20<sup>th</sup> March 2010

I arrived in Marrakech at 4:30, noting at least two African House Bunting (*Emberiza sahari*) at the airport, then drove north-west towards Oualidia where I spent the night at the Hotel L'Araignee.

#### 21<sup>st</sup> March 2010

I started the day at a sensitive locality inland from Oualidia, where an assortment of regular species included a Lanner Falcon (*F.b. erlangi*), nesting Common Bulbul (*Pycnonotus barbatus*), Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*), Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*), Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*), Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*), Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), Crested Lark (*G. c. riggenbachi*), Serin (*Serinus serinus*) and the first flocks of Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*). A Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*) sang on the Gharbia-Oualidia road (32.724151,-9.017501).

In the afternoon, I drove from Oualidia towards Khemis Zhemamra. At farmland between here and Tnine Gharbia, I discovered Lilith's Owl (*A.n.glaux*) nesting in a wall on the track to Boujmada (32.635427,-8.963481) and several Common Quail (*Corturnix corturnix*) calling in lush fields before Gharbia (32.586489,-8.874207) as well as White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*). At the Khemis Lagoons (32.630692,-8.79138), mentioned by Bergier, high water levels had reduced the potential for wading birds, although I did note two Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), several Blue-headed Wagtail (*M.f.flava*), a Moroccan Wagtail (*M. a. subpersonata*) and a Thekla Lark (*Galerida theklae*). Flashes between here and Tnine Gharbia held Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*).

I then drove north from Oualidia to inspect some of the salt-pans. Access here is not intuitive but I did find a good track leading to the second set of pans (32.835363,-8.902198) and this site produced a range of saltpan regulars including 25 Slender-billed Gull (*Chroicocephalus genei*), 1 Mediterranean Gull (*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*), 10 Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and common wader species. I returned to the Hotel L'Araignee for the night.

#### 22<sup>nd</sup> March

After a leisurely start, I drove north through Oualidia where I parked adjacent to the orange school building to survey the first set of pans (32.7771,-8.978384). A rich variety of species were present, including 32 Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), 22 Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), over 1000 Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), 3 Slender-billed Gull (*Chroicocephalus genei*), Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), calling Common Quail (*Corturnix corturnix*) and Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*). The next set of pans, south of Jorf Lasfar (33.031234,-8.69952) held over 50 Audouin's Gull (*Ichthyaetus audouini*) before I drove north towards Rabat.

Once within the chaos of the city, my carefully-programmed sat nav run became instantly obsolete with the closure of a key road, and there followed three hours of driving hell, with no space - amid the taxis, buses, bikes and horns - to stop and ask for directions. Eventually I located the road towards Kenitra and arrived at the causeway at Lac de Sidi Boughaba (34.252947,-6.668015) in the early evening. Here, two pairs of Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*), a pair of Crested Coot (*Fulica cristata*), three Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*), a Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*), a pair of Marsh Harrier and Cetti's Warbler (*Cetti cetti*) were recorded prior to dusk. At this point, I was due to meet someone in Temara, who was awaiting my arrival, and, as a result, I left the site before it became pitch black, locating only a single Marsh Owl (*Asio capensis*) as it flushed from the tarmac and floated off into the gloom. After another stressful drive, I spent the night in Temara, near Rabat.

#### 23<sup>rd</sup> March

It was evident by now that a second visit to the north coastal regions of Morocco would be needed and, being in bed at 12:30am the previous night, a pre-dawn drive to the Zaer Forest was not advisable if I was to drive on that day. As a result, I made no effort on this trip for Double-spurred Francolin but drove instead towards Ilfrane. At a fertile grove outside El-Hajeb (33.690366,-5.380645), I located singing Western Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais opaca*), Spotless Starling (*Sturnus unicolor*) and Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), whilst on the stony plateau south-east of the town (33.607793,-5.297084), four Calandra Larks (*Melanocorypha calandra*), several Lesser Kestrels (*Falco naumanni*) and a male Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) were seen well. Then, at a sharp bend in the road through the Ilfrane National Park (33.563479,-5.205631), I gained excellent views of a drumming and calling male Levaillant's Woodpecker (*Picus vaillantii*) in semi-open ancient woodland. I drove through Ilfrane to Dayet Aoua (33.653334,-5.044055) where at least twenty Crested Coot (*Fulica cristata*), including five females on nests, were joined by eight Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) as well as migrant Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) and other common wetland species, though I failed to locate the Rock Sparrow colony, or indeed the site, mentioned by Gosney. African Blue Tit (*Cyanistes teneriffae*) and Chaffinch (*F.c.africana*) were seen well here, before I drove to Ilfrane for the night.

## 24<sup>th</sup> March

The view from my window in the morning yielded at least 9 Lesser Kestrels (*Falco naumanni*) and several nesting White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*). I drove south from Azrou on the N13 and, where the forest ends (33.405794,-5.184603), located the first of several male Seeborn's Wheatears (*O.o. Seebornii*). The next stop on barren plateau between Azrou and Timahdte (33.277373,-5.075254) produced a single Lesser Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella rufescens*) whilst a gorge south of Timahdte (33.152302,-5.064268) produced Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*) and a temporary oasis (33.064284,-5.030451) held 40 Ruddy Shelduck. I then drove straight to the Zeida tracks (32.792614,-4.939728) to search for Dupont's Lark. How Nigel Redman repeatedly locates this bird in the middle of the day I don't know, but I neither saw nor heard this species, noting only four Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) and two Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*).

I drove south through Midelt, noting Thekla Lark (*Galerida theklae*) as the road began to rise towards the Col Taghomt (32.627286,-4.541152). At a regular site, well-described by Richard Bonser, I parked on a hairpin bend 114km from Errachidia (32.608634,-4.526668) and walked down into the bushy valley to my right. Here, in addition to at least three Moussier's Redstart (*Phoenicurus moussieri*), I called up a very showy and vocal Tristram's Warbler (*Sylvia deserticola*), a far smarter species that I had anticipated, with particularly striking rufous primaries. After excellent views, I drove to Errachidia where I spent the night at the Hotel Tiznit.

## 25<sup>th</sup> March

With shorter distances to drive, warmer weather and welcoming people, the entire dynamic of the trip changed from today, and the birding certainly improved as well. Outside the Hotel Tiznit, a flock of fifty European Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) put a smile on my face that then broadened considerably with the discovery of a pair of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*) showing down to five feet, as well as first of many migrant Subalpine Warblers (*Sylvia cantillans*). I then drove south towards Erfoud, where further Bee-eater passage was underway around the oases at Aufouss (31.712726,-4.183731). Heading quickly through Erfoud towards the Hotel Said, a stop at roadside diggings 6km from the town (31.389903,-4.183184) failed to produce African Desert Warbler in spite of an extensive search, but the site yielded the first of very many White-crowned Black Wheatears (*Oenanthe leucopyga*) with nesting material, Long-billed Crested Lark (*G.c. macrorhyncha*), a pair of Trumpeter Finch (*Rhodopechys githaginea*) and a pair of Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*). As would become a trend over the next four days, a vicious Saharan wind began to blow, making for very difficult birding conditions, so I headed south to Merzouga where, on the track towards Kasbah Tombuctou (31.12172,-4.040067) I located three Brown-necked Ravens (*Corvus ruficollis*). Discovering the prices at Tombuctou, I fled to the Nomad Palace (31.046059,-3.996277) where I spent a very enjoyable and entertaining night.

## 26<sup>th</sup> March

I took a dawn trip out into the deserts between Merzouga and the Algerian Border today with Ali Mouni. Ali is highly-regarded for his bustard-finding skills but as of 2010, there are far better guides who also have a greater understanding of the region's birdlife; these are detailed in the species notes later in this report. Nonetheless, the trip was an exciting one, and in the next two hours we located nine Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*) including two displaying males, two Bar-tailed Larks (*Ammomanes cinctura*), a magnificent pair of Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*), three Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*), a Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*), a migrant pale-phase Booted Eagle (*Aquila pennata*), a female Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*) and the first of many Southern Grey Shrike (*Lanius meridionalis*), whilst desert migrants included Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) and Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*). Ali then chose to explain that the Saudis, who had passed a doubtless enjoyable month at Merzouga, had all but decimated the Houbara population.

With this news, we headed north towards Erfoud in search of further desert species, making a memorable stop for tea with a Nomad family, adjacent to the Erg Chebbi, where a pair of Desert Sparrow (*Passer simplex*) were nesting in a stand of brushwood. After visiting the bank in Erfoud to pay Ali, I then asked him to stop at a traditional wadi 1km south of Kasbah Said (31.307554,-4.09833) where I immediately located a ghostly African Desert Warbler (*Sylvia deserti*) within 150m of the prominent radar mast. We then headed due south towards Kasbah Derkaoua, where a pair of unobtrusive Desert Larks (*Ammomanes deserti*), with their prominent bills and diffuse tail bands, fed on a steep rocky bank (31.294963,-4.092085). Returning to the Nomad Palace, the little garden here was alive with migrants, mainly Western Bonelli's Warbler (*P.b. bonelli*), Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) and Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*).

I then drove to Lac Merzouga, otherwise referred to as Lac Srij (31.099486,-4.046552), where over 3000 Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), 20 Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), 50 Crested Coot (*Fulica cristata*) and 20 Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) were noted, but there was little in the way of migrant terns, and the conditions were too hot and windy for sandgrouse. I then drove north towards the magical Cafe Yasmina, where the piste (31.238637,-4.082022) offered Bar-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes cinctura*) and the gardens held at least 5 Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*), a fly-over Desert Sparrow (*Passer simplex*) and several Western Bonelli's Warbler (*P.b. Bonelli*). In the evening, I met Raul Caal, the Catilan bird ringer, and his wife and daughter. In spite of our total inability to speak the other's language, we arranged a ringing session for the following dawn.

## 27<sup>th</sup> March

I was up at dawn to witness bird ringing first hand. Having never taken to this branch of ornithology in the UK, the next few hours were unforgettable, as Raul kindly allowed me to study, in the hand, 1 Western Orphean Warbler (*S.h.hortensis*), 4 Western Bonelli's Warbler (*P.b. bonelli*), at least 10 Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia cantillans*), 1 Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*), 3 Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), 3 Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) and 3 Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*). In addition, the garden held Black-eared Wheatear (*Oenanthe hispanica*) and, when we returned after breakfast, the final addition to the morning's tally was a superb Desert Sparrow (*Passer simplex*), studied down to the last feathered spine on its head.

I then drove straight through Rissani and parked at the foot of the cliffs (31.274791,-4.336638) where I was met by some local 'guardians' who had created a very organised set-up. Whilst one watched the car and another walked me to the site, two lads sprung up out of the sand and put me straight onto a female Pharaoh Eagle Owl (*B.b. Ascalaphus*) roosting on the cliff. The bird was striking, but asleep, and a far more impressive individual was a fledged juvenile of sandier colouration located farther down the cliff. Following these views there ensued some less than friendly negotiations regarding pay, detailed later in this report.

I then drove back to Cafe Yasmina where I had negotiated a second safari through the owner of the Kasbah, who had promised that I pay nothing if Houbara were not seen. I met with Hassan, a considerably more knowledgeable guide, and we headed due north from Cafe Yasmina in the direction of Erfoud. 2km north of Cafe Yasmina, we stopped at an area of black desert where, solely on one, isolated ridge, a party of at least twelve Thick-billed Larks (*Rhamphocoris clotbey*), a truly magnificent species, afforded excellent views. Soon these birds will head from the Tafilalt towards Boulemane to breed.

Heading north, several Bar-tailed Larks (*Ammomanes cinctura*), a Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*) and three Cream-coloured Coursers (*Cursorius cursor*) all performed beside the vehicle. Suddenly, running at our side - comical, bizarre and fragile - was a Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*). It was a female, watched closely by a little Berber boy and his mother, a survivor of the Saudi blitz. It afforded magnificent views as Hassan drove alongside. At a shallow wadi, in the evening light, four sandgrouse could be discerned crouching in the sand. Expecting spotted, I approached the birds to within feet and realised they were Crowned Sandgrouse (*Pterocles coronatus*). Being able to study every feather of this elusive, ornate species as the birds fed at our feed was possibly the highlight of the trip. Further south again, an African Desert Warbler (*Sylvia desertica*) sang furiously from its low habitat then, in fading light, a pair of Desert Sparrows (*Passer simplex*) graced an isolated palm, some 1km north of Yasmina, before we returned there for the night.

## 28<sup>th</sup> March

A second dawn with Raul proved even better than the first, with the aesthetic highlight being a ferociously cute Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) trapped in the mist nets, fixing us with its yellow-green eyes. Its intricate lichen-colourations, seen in the strong light of the Sahara, were just phenomenal. Then I was offered the rare chance to compare Western Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais opaca*) to the species that breeds alongside it in the Tafilalt, Saharan Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (*H.p.reiseri*), with its pale tertials, browner tone and distinctively shorter, thinner bill, starting from a narrower base. The tour group who had arrived with their armoury of cameras, glasses, sticks and crass remarks, somewhat detracted from any taxonomical study, though we subsequently netted a range of good species, including male Spectacled Warbler (*Sylvia conspicillata*), Melodious Warbler (*Hippolais polyglotta*), 6 Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia cantillans*), 3 Western Bonelli's Warbler (*P.b. bonelli*), 2 Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) and 3 Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*). I thanked Raul then drove to Rissani, noting Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) near Yasmina.

A search of the oases along the Route Touristique (31.264328,-4.285505) failed to produce Fulvous Babbler, although I heard Laughing Dove (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*) here and three Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters (*Merops persicus*) calling overhead. Heading north through Erfoud, I noted singing Western Olivaceous Warbler in groves on the northern outskirts (31.470757,-4.217044), then, along a dry river-bank (31.477244,-4.21669), up to four pairs of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters (*Merops persicus*) showed superbly as they prospected for nest sites. The Oued Ziz north of Aufouss produced yet more Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters (*Merops persicus*), clearly part of an impressive movement, whilst a Oued between here and Errachidia (31.849219,-4.256129) held a colony of over 50 Spanish Sparrows (*Passer hispaniolensis*) and was, as far as I know, one of few 'new' sites discovered during my standard itinerary. Another Oued south of Errachidia (31.89738,-4.334407) produced tail-flicking Saharan Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (*H.p.reiseri*), Moroccan Wagtail (*M. a. subpersonata*), Blue-headed Wagtail (*M.f.flava*) & Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*).

Many stops between Rissani and Errachidia had failed to produce either Fulvous Babbler or Laughing Dove, although I fortunately gained excellent views of Laughing Dove (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*) in a grove just north of Errachidia (31.915951,-4.457231). I then drove up to 29km west of Errachidia (31.803768,-4.69496) where, in spite of Fraser Simpson's positive experiences, I located only a pair of Black-eared Wheatear (*Oenanthe hispanicus*) and eight Trumpeter Finch (*Rhodopechys githaginea*). The next stop of note was the well-known wadi 43km west of Errachidia (31.751817,-4.839907) where the strong desert heat made for difficult birding. Several Bar-tailed Larks (*Ammomanes cinctura*) were song-fighting and a Spectacled Warbler (*Sylvia conspicillata*) showed briefly but Scrub Warbler proved elusive so I took an early hotel at Goulmina so as to return at dawn.

## 29<sup>th</sup> March

I arrived at dawn 43km west of Errachidia (31.751817,-4.839907) and immediately gained superb views of male Scrub Warbler (*S.i.saharae*) singing from a low bush in the *second* verdant line of bushes, c. 10m to the left of the obvious track and 400m north of the road. Quite why this site has become 'unique' is probably a reflection of the way in which most birders behave, and this includes myself. The species must almost certainly have loosely continuous distribution along this natural corridor and given time, new sites must surely be established. I noted Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*) and Trumpeter Finch (*Rhodopechys githaginea*) before driving west towards Boulemane. I noted three Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*) in the village of Imiter (31.371337,-5.795245) and two Cream-coloured Coursers (*Cursorius cursor*) around 8km east of Boulemane (31.375184,-5.884981), before arriving at the Iknouen road (31.348414,-5.904894). Here I noted roadside Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*) and Red-rumped Wheatear (*Oenanthe moesta*), whilst a prominent piste running west from the road (31.313645,-5.879874) produced several ornate Temminck's Larks (*Eremophila bilopha*). I then walked down towards the rural oases (31.303617,-5.881999) where at least five Red-rumped Wheatear (*Oenanthe moesta*) and eight Cream-coloured Coursers (*Cursorius cursor*) showed well. After an interesting chat with Josele Saiz of Boletas, I headed towards a disused outbuilding (31.310015,-5.900688) where I immediately gained excellent views of a very interesting and aberrant male Western Mourning Wheatear (*Oenanthe halophila*), of which more is written in the species notes. The female, a classic-type bird, was also seen as well. With a howling gale now blowing, I drove swiftly towards Ouarzazate for the night.

## 30<sup>th</sup> March

I drove before sunrise to the Barrage El Mansour via the Avenue al Maghred al Arabi (30.926571,-6.873161) where a single Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Western Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais opaca*) and several Pallid Swift (*Apus pallidus*) were noted. I then drove slowly towards Marrakech on a journey of almost fairy-tale colours and contrasts, with the red hills, blue skies, green oases and yellow meadows that make Morocco such a magnet for painters and photographers. At a Oued c.12km west of Ouarzazate (30.975199,-7.099743), I noted White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) and a pair of Laughing Dove (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*), then two Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) at Amerzgane (31.042961,-7.20731), then Black-eared Wheatear c.50km west of Ouarzazate (31.091686,-7.298355). Climbing into the high Atlas, I noted female Black Wheatear in suitable 'landslide' habitat (31.261916,-7.40309) before scaling the high passes. I found these relatively birdless in the short time I allotted to them, though the descent provided Rock Bunting at various points. After a few hours, I was within reach of Marrakech and in verdant farmland (31.578371,-7.806956), several Little Swifts (*Apus affinis*) and two pairs of Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*) showed well.

## IV. SPECIES LIST

All sites mentioned are described in the main report, where they are each attributed digital GPS references.

1. Common Shellduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	
2. Ruddy Shellduck <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	4 breeding pairs seen at Dayet Aoua, with at least 40 on a temporary oasis between Azrou and Zeida and at least 20 on Lac Merzouga.
3. Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	
4. Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i>	
4. Marbled Duck <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	Two pairs seen extremely well at Lac de Sidi Boughaba.
5. Red-crested Pochard <i>Netti rufina</i>	Two pairs and a female seen in flight at Lac de Sidi Boughaba.
6. Common Quail <i>Corturnix corturnix</i>	At least 4 heard in lush fields 2km north of Tnine Gharbia, 1-2 at the Khemis Lagoons, 1 at the first Oualidia pans, and also in lush fields some 30km south-east of Marrakesh on the N9.
7. Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	
8. Great-crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	
9. Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Widespread, gregarious resident seen in greatest numbers around the north coast. Observed colonially in Azrou, with sightings as far south as the Cafe Yasmina near Merzouga.
10. Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	
11. Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
12. Purple Heron <i>Ardrea pupurea</i>	Single bird seen in flight at the Barrage el Mansour, Ouarzazate.
13. White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Commonly seen, especially in the north of the country, with colonial nesting observed at Ilfrane and Azrou, and south to Zeida.
14. Spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Flock of 32 seen at the first Oualidia salt-pans.

15. Greater Flamingo <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	Flock of 22 seen at the first Oualidia salt-pans.
16. Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	11 birds seen at the village of Amerzgane, west of Ouarzazate.
17. Red Kite <i>Milvus milvus</i>	A single bird seen at Lac de Sidi Boughaba.
18. Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	
19. Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>	Male seen between El-Hajeb and Ilfrane.
20. Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	
21. Common Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>	
22. Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Two birds noted between Azrou and Midelt, with a third seen in deserts between Merzouga and the Algerian border.
23. Booted Eagle <i>Aquila pennata</i>	Single pale-phase adult on passage at Merzouga.
24. Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i>	Excellent views of this colonial species in the middle Atlas, with 3 at El-Hajeb, 4 between El Hajeb and Ilfrane, at least 9 in Ilfrane and a further 6 at Azrou, with a single bird near the Tizi-n-Tichza pass on the N9.
25. Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	
26. Lanner Falcon <i>Falco biarmicus</i>	A relatively poor showing for this species, with one seen in Doukkala-Abda and a second bird seen hunting over Temara, near Rabat.
27. Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	
28. Eurasian Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	
29. Crested Coot <i>Fulica cristata</i>	At least one pair at Lac de Sidi Boughaba, north of the causeway, with at least 20 birds at Dayet Aoua, including five on nests, and a further flock of 50 or more at Lac Merzouga.
30. Houbara Bustard <i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>	Superb views of a female in deserts c.8km N of Cafe Yasmina, nr Erfoud. Note that Ali Mouni, of the Nomad Palace, does not take readily to the double-price scheme, whereby you pay a lesser amount if Houbara is not seen, nor does he have any significant knowledge of the region's birds. Hassan, who can be contacted through the Hotel Yasmina, speaks daily with nomads living south of Erfoud, and you pay him nothing if you do not see Houbara. He charges 1500MAD (£125) per trip.
31. Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	
32. Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	An impressive count of over 1000 on the first Oualidia pans.
33. Stone Curlew <i>Burhinus senegalensis</i>	One heard at dawn in farmland in Doukkala-Abda.
34. Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	
35. Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Up to ten seen at the second Oualidia pans.
36. Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	
37. Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	
38. Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	One on the second Oualidia pans.
39. Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	
40. Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	
41. Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>	
42. Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	
43. Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	
44. Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Seen at Dayet Aoua and at a Oued south of Errachidia.
45. Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	
46. Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	
47. Mediterranean Gull <i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	One on the second Oualidia pans.
48. Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	
49. Slender-billed Gull <i>Larus genei</i>	3 on the first Oualidia pans, 25 on the second Oualidia pans, and a further 30 on pans south of Jorf Lasfar.

50. Audouin's Gull <i>Larus audouinii</i>	50 on pans south of Jorf Lasfar.
51. Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	
52. Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>	
53. Sandwich Tern <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	
54. Crowned Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles coronatus</i>	Superb views of two pairs in deserts north of Cafe Yasmina, nr Erfoud.
55. Rock Dove <i>Columba livia</i>	
56. Stock Dove <i>Columba oenas</i>	
57. Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	
58. Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	
59. Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	An unobtrusive breeder in groves and palms, often in proximity of cultivation. Single birds noted at Erfoud, north of Errachidia, and c.10km west of Ouarzazate, but by no means common on this trip.
60. Scops Owl <i>Otus scops</i>	Superb views of a bird ringed in the hand at Cafe Yasmina.
61. Pharaoh Eagle Owl <i>B.b.ascalphus</i>	Excellent views of an adult and fledged juvenile on cliffs at Rissani. The two guardians here offered guidance to these birds for the sum of 300MAD, which I negotiated to 200 (£15), a very good price for them, which they assured me included full guidance and protection of the parked car. However, it soon became apparent that the real work here was being done by two young lads who had staked out the birds, and on return to the car, the initial guardian feigned ignorance of any agreement and demanded that I pay these people as well. These are the two who deserve payment; the man who 'walks you to the site' essentially does nothing. Their turn-around was however not pleasant, nor the fact that they virtually barricaded me from entering my car. I did not pay them further, partly because I do not carry surplus money. Birders visiting the site should be aware of potential complications.
62. Little Owl <i>A.n.glaux</i>	Adult seen in a wall on track to Boujmada, near Tnine Gharbia.
63. Marsh Owl <i>Asio capensis</i>	Single bird seen at dusk at the causeway on Lac de Sidi Boughaba. This is not the best site for this species and I would, in hindsight, have allowed time to visit Merja Zerga, with its higher breeding population.
64. Common Swift <i>Apus apus</i>	
65. Pallid Swift <i>Apus pallidus</i>	Four birds seen over Barrage el Mansour, Ouarzazate.
66. Little Swift <i>Apus affinis</i>	Several birds seen over fertile farmland c.30km SE of Marrakech.
67. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater <i>Merops persicus</i>	Outstanding passage of birds along the Oued Ziz between Rissani and Errachidia, with 3 at Rissani, 8 north of Erfoud, 3 north of Aufouss, 2 at Errachidia and also 2 between Tinerhir and Boumalne.
68. Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i>	Flock of 40 birds passing through Errachidia, subsequently seen along the Oued Ziz, at Source Bleu de Meski and north of Aufouss. Two birds seen outside the village of Amerzgane, west of Ouarzazate.
69. Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	Four single birds, one in Doukkala-Abda, one in the Oued Ziz, and two between Ouarzazate and Marrakesh along the N9.
70. Levaillant's Woodpecker <i>Picus vaillantii</i>	Excellent views of a male in the Ifrane National Park - see report.
71. Great-sp.- Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	
72. Bar-tailed Lark <i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	Common in south-eastern vegetated dunes and sparse wadi habitats. 2 in deserts around Merzouga, 2 on the piste to Cafe Yasmina, several pairs in deserts north of Yasmina, near Erfoud, 3 song-fighting males 43km west of Errachidia, and a pair at the Iknioun road, Boumalne.
73. Desert Lark <i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	Only one pair seen, on a rocky bank adjacent to Derkaoua, near Erfoud.
74. Hoopoe Lark <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	Locally very common, with 9 seen in deserts between Merzouga and the Algerian border, 2 in deserts north of Cafe Yasmina, near Erfoud, and another 2 found without searching along the Ikniouen road, Boumalne.
75. Calandra Lark <i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Four birds seen in stony grass plain habitat south-east of El-Hajeb.

76. Thick-billed Lark <i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>	At least 12 seen exceptionally well in deserts 2km N of Cafe Yasmina.
77. Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Very common in sparsely-vegetated deserts. 4 seen at the Zeida tracks; 4 near Cafe Yasmina, several seen in deserts north of Cafe Yasmina and also around Merzouga, and flocks of 80+ at the Iknouen road.
78. Lesser Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	One seen in stone plain habitat between Azrou and Itzer.
79. Crested Lark <i>Galerida cristata</i>	Very common roadside lark, with at least two races observed well, <i>riggenbachi</i> in Doukkala-Abda, and a 'Long-billed' form, <i>macrorhyncha</i> , in the Tafilalt between Errachidia and Merzouga.
80. Thekla Lark <i>Galerida theklae</i>	Small numbers seen in diverse habitat from the Khemis Lagonns, near Oualidia, to rocky steppe habitat south of Midelt.
81. Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>	
82. Temminck's Lark <i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	Locally common along the Iknouen road, Boumalne.
83. Sand Martin <i>Riparia riparia</i>	
84. Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
85. Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Two pairs seen over fertile farmland c. 30km SE of Marrakech.
86. House Martin <i>Delichon urbicum</i>	
87. Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>	Two on passage at the Khemis Lagoons, near Oualidia.
88. Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	
89. Yellow Wagtail <i>M.f.flava</i>	
90. White Wagtail <i>M.a.subpersonate</i>	'Moroccan Wagtail' seen well in proximity to fresh water at the Khemis Lagoons, near Oualidia, and a Oued south of Errachidia.
91. Common Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Locally very common throughout, especially in Doukkala-Abda, with high densities along the Oued Ziz in the Tafilalt and at oases, groves and orchards between Ouarzazate and Marrakech.
92. Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Heard in Doukkala-Abda, along the Oued Ziz, and commonly between Ouarzazate and Marrakech. 3 ringed in the hand at Cafe Yasmina.
93. Common Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	
94. Moussier's Redstart <i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	1 seen in vegetated farmland north of Zeida. 3 seen south of Midelt, 114km from Errachidia. Also between Ouarzazate and Marrakech.
95. Stonechat <i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	
96. Northern Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Excellent views of male <i>seebohmi</i> on the rocky steppe just south of Azrou, after clearing the forest, with 3 further males before Zeida. Nominant race noted commonly on passage in the Tafilalt.
97. Black-eared Wheatear <i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	Migrant male at Cafe Yasmina, with birds on territory noted 29km west of Errachidia and in bushy hills c.50km east of Ouarzazate.
98. Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	Common in sparsely vegetated semi-desert. Noted on road from Erfoud to Kasbah Said, in deserts at Merzouga, at the Zeida tracks, 43km west of Errachidia and along the Iknouen road, Boumalne.
99. Mourning Wheatear <i>Oenanthe lugens</i>	Western race ( <i>halophila</i> ) pair noted at a disused outbuilding at Iknouen-Tagdilt. The male showed some very interesting aberrations, namely a partially dark crown and also, a tail where the black did not only stop short of the edges, which were fringed with white (cp. <i>O.leucopyga</i> ), but also, short of the tail-base, which lacked the diagnostic band. The female, seen adjacent to a nest here, showed no such complications, but it would be tempting to guess that the male might be the product of a pairing with White-crowned Black Wheatear and not a pure bird.
100. Red-rumped Wheatear <i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	Locally very common along the Iknouen road, Boumalne.
101. White-crowned Black Wheatear <i>O. leucopyga</i>	Extremely common in the Tafilalt and seen as far north as Ouarzazate. Two birds have become a regular fixture in the Cafe Yasmina restaurant where they roost each night on wooden beams above the diners.
102. Black Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	Single female seen on the ascent into the atlas, west of Ouarzazate.



103. Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	
104. Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	
105. Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	
106. Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>	
107. Zitting Cisticola <i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	
108. Scrub Warbler <i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>	Excellent views of a singing male 43km W of Errachidia in the second green wadi, 400m N of the road and 10m W of the obvious track.
109. Eastern Olivaceous Warbler <i>Hippolais pallida</i>	Excellent views of 'Saharan' <i>riseiri</i> ringed in the hand at the Cafe Yasmina, and subsequently at a Oued south of Errachidia.
110. Western Olivaceous Warbler <i>Hippolais opaca</i>	Single birds singing at El Hajeb, at Errachidia, along the Oued Ziz and at the Barrage el Mansour, Ouarzazate, and ringed in the hand at Yasmina.
111. Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	One trapped at Cafe Yasmina.
112. Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	
113. Western Orphean Warbler <i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	One trapped and ringed at Cafe Yasmina.
114. Whitethroat <i>Sylvia communis</i>	
115. African Desert Warbler <i>Sylvia deserti</i>	Males seen well in the wadi 1km S of Kasbah Said, near Erfoud, and in similar sandy desert habitat north of Cafe Yasmina, near Erfoud.
116. Spectacled Warbler <i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	One ringed in the hand at Cafe Yasmina, and one 43km W of Errachidia.
117. Tristram's Warbler <i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	Singing male south of Midelt, 114km from Errachidia - see report.
118. Sardinian Warbler <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Seen only in scrub habitat in Doukkala-Abda.
119. Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	Impressive passage of birds through the Tafilalt, with over 30 ringed between 6:00 and 9:00 over two mornings at Cafe Yasmina, and birds seen in seemingly every bush from Merzouga to Errachidia.
120. Western Bonelli's Warbler <i>P. bonelli</i>	A good passage of birds in the Tafilalt, with 3-4 seen daily in the field and several ringed at Cafe Yasmina over two days.
121. Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	
122. Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	
123. African Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	Considered a separate species by AERC, this smart taxa was noted between Azrou and Ilfrane and seen well at Dayet Aoua.
124. Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>	
125. Southern Grey Shrike <i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Common in the Tafilalt and between Errachidia and Ouarzazate.
126. Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>	Commonly in fertile areas, especially Oualidia, Oued Ziz, and between Ouarzazate and Marrakech. Three birds ringed at the Cafe Yasmina.
127. Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>	
128. Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>	
129. Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>	
130. Brown-necked Raven <i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	Readily encountered in true desert areas, with 3 seen on the piste to Kasbah Tombuctou, Merzouga, 3 in deserts around Merzouga, up to 5 over the Cafe Yasmina and 3 over the cliffs at Rissani.
131. Spotless Starling <i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	
132. House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	
133. Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Colony of c.50 birds noted at a Oued south of Errachidia.
134. Desert Sparrow <i>Passer simplex</i>	Pair noted at a nomad settlement along the Erg Chebbi, Merzouga, with a further pair in palms c.1km N of Cafe Yasmina. 1-2 birds flying over the Cafe Yasmina with a superb male ringed in the hand here one morning.
135. Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	The distinctive <i>africana</i> noted at Dayet Aoua and also in the Lower Atlas within 50km of Marrakech on the N9.
136. Serin <i>Serinus serinus</i>	

137. Greenfinch <i>Carduelis chloris</i>	
138. Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	
139. Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	
140. Trumpeter Finch <i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	A good year for this species, with 2 birds noted between Erfoud and Kasbah Said, several in deserts north of Cafe Yasmina, near Erfoud, 8 seen 29km W of Errachidia and 2 seen 43km W of Errachidia.
141. Rock Bunting <i>Emberiza cia</i>	1-2 noted on descent from High Atlas towards Marrakech on the N9.
142. House Bunting <i>Emberiza sahari</i>	Noted at Marrakech Airport and subsequently on buildings in Merzouga and Ouarzazate.
143. Corn Bunting <i>Emberiza calandra</i>	