

MOROCCO IN WINTER

“An early flight from Gatwick allowed lunch at our hotel and a full afternoon in the Sous estuary, providing an excellent introduction to Morocco and its birds, with Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Bonelli’s Eagle, Barbary Falcon, Osprey, Black-winged Stilt, Lesser Crested Tern, and Mediterranean, Slender-billed, and Audouin’s Gulls. The following day the Massa estuary yielded both more of the same and many exciting extras (Squacco Heron, White Stork, Glossy Ibis, Ferruginous Duck, Black-shouldered Kite, Lanner, Laughing Dove, Little Owl, Little Swift, Wryneck, Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Bluethroat, and Black-headed Bush-shrike – plus our first tasty tagine) whilst sunset in the desert rounded off a satisfying day with Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Desert Wheatear, and Trumpeter Finch.

A change of habitat on Day 3 brought a completely different selection of birds and an Osama bin Laden look-alike who was very happy to be part of the group at last. Paradise Valley and the wonderfully scenic Imouzzer circuit did us proud with every speciality performing on cue: Barbary Partridge, Black Wheatear, Tristram’s Warbler, Ultramarine Tit, and Cirl and Rock Buntings. And after a relaxed lunch on the terrace of the Hotel des Cascades the most westerly Atlas Crossbill in the world completed our set of higher-altitude birds by flying from the last tree possible and perching on the wire above our bus. On reaching the coast at Tamri our final target species flew by to greet us even before we had checked out all the black plastic bags in the coastal scrub – a considerable percentage of the world population of Bald Ibis, with a supporting cast of several Long-legged Buzzards and over a hundred Audouin’s Gulls.

Changing pace again, most of the following day was spent on a most comfortable pelagic with a calm sea and a succession of interesting and instructive seabird sightings – five species of shearwater (including invaluable comparisons of Cory’s and Scopoli’s and Manx and Balearic, plus a couple of Sooties), all four skuas (involving 76 birds – a good tally by any seawatching standards), and a Grey Phalarope. Our lunch was the finest we have had at sea. A return visit to the Sous estuary rounded off the day with more egrets, storks, spoonbills, flamingos, and assorted waders and a classic sunset.

Now well and truly in our stride we headed south for the ultimate desert experience. En route a leg stretch in a mountain pass provided more Black Wheatears and Rock Buntings and our first Desert Lark. But our first desert stop near Asrir was even more rewarding with Rufous Bush-chat, Cream-coloured Courser, Short-toed and Bar-tailed Desert Larks, Desert and Red-rumped Wheatears, Spectacled Warbler, and more Trumpeter Finches. Fulvous Babbler was instantly obliging (together with White-crowned Black Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush) and our final desert walk added the rare and elusive Streaked Scrub Warbler of the endemic *theresae* race – a pending split – and the charismatic Hoopoe Lark.

Despite this unprecedented desert selection the following morning in the desert south of Goulimime was by no means an anti-climax, with 250 Trumpeter Finches, 96 Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Temminck’s Horned Lark, Lesser Short-toed Lark, and the magnificent Thick-billed Lark. This desert clean-sweep left us time to call at the Massa again on our return journey and add yet more new species (Turtle Dave and Pintail) and some welcome second helpings (Cirl Bunting and Little Owl).

This daily 100% success rate on all our target species meant that we did not have to return to Tamri or Imouzzer and left our final day free to enjoy the dramatic Taфраoute circuit – in the words of travel writer Barnaby Rogerson ‘one of the most classically beautiful journeys that you can make in Morocco’. The adventure started with ‘scope views of perched Black-shouldered Kite and more looks at desert species (over a hundred Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Trumpeter Finches, Desert Wheatear, Black and White-crowned Black Wheatears, and Desert, Short-toed, and Lesser Short-toed Larks) but the avian highlights were undoubtedly 180 Red-billed Choughs and close overhead views of Golden Eagle. Equally memorable, however, were the endlessly (one might almost say

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relentlessly) breathtaking and gasp-inducing views of mountain scenery and the tastiest tagines in a Berber ceremonial tent. Our route took us across the Tiznit desert, through the valley which was once the long-impregnable sanctuary of El Hiba the Blue Sultan, winding up past Col-du-Kerdous (once a kasbah, then an Islamic school, now a hotel), through the territory of the Ammeln (a tribal sub-division of the Cheleuh Berbers and the best known of the six tribes of the Anti-Atlas mountains), to the amphitheatre of Tafraoute itself where the bizarre and massive red rock formations have been compared to meteorite showers on Mars. Then over the passes of Tizi-Mlil (1662m) and Tizi-n'Tarakatine with Adrar-Mqorn towering above at 2344m and down to the fortress village of Tioulit, a spectacular example of the homeland of the Illalen, a confederation of 18 tribes who occupy the mountain plateau between Tafraoute and Ait-Baha. The agadirs of the Illalen are known to have contained as many as 300 compartments, in several storeys either side of a central isle. We even added two new species (Pochard and Black-necked Grebe) at dusk on our descent.

Our final morning saw us back at the Sous once more – very much our local patch for this week – with great looks at perched Bluethroats and Ultramarine Tit and the usual suspects, plus our final target bird: Moroccan Wagtail.

Once more Morocco, long known in the Muslim world as *Maghreb el Aksa*, the land of the furthest west, literally the edge of the world and a place notorious for its powerful magicians and demon-like jinn, had worked its magic.” – *Bryan Bland*

Bird List:

Column A = Number of tours on which this species has been recorded.

Column B = Number of days this species was seen on the last tour.

Column C = Maximum daily count for this species on the last tour.

H = Heard only

A		B	C	
2	Black-necked Grebe	1	1	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
14	Little Grebe	3	7	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
5	Great Crested Grebe			<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
1	Bulwer's Petrel			<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>
12	Cory's Shearwater	2	65	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
1	Scopoli's Shearwater	1	2	<i>Calonectris diomedea borealis</i>
1	Great Shearwater			<i>Puffinus gravis</i>
6	Sooty Shearwater	1	2	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>
8	Manx Shearwater	1	2	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>
8	Balearic Shearwater	2	250	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>
3	Wilson's Storm-petrel			<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
3	British (European) Storm-petrel			<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>
3	Leach's Storm-petrel			<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>
2	Madeiran Storm-petrel			<i>Oceanodroma castro</i>
1	storm petrel species	1	2	<i>Hydrobates/Oceanodroma sp.</i>
14	Gannet	3	185	<i>Sula bassana</i>
6	Continental Cormorant	4	4	<i>Phalacrocorax (carbo) sinensis</i>
14	(Moroccan) Cormorant	7	22	<i>Phalacrocorax (carbo) maroccanus</i>
5	(Moroccan) Shag			<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis riggenbachi</i>
3	Night Heron			<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
9	Squacco Heron	1	3	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>

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14	Cattle Egret	5	70	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
14	Little Egret	7	30	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
8	Great Egret	2	1	<i>Egretta alba</i>
14	Grey Heron	8	25	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
14	White Stork	2	11	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
13	Glossy Ibis	1	82	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
14	Bald Ibis	1	55	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>
13	Spoonbill	5	20	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
14	Greater Flamingo	3	197	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
7	Ruddy Shelduck			<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
4	Shelduck	2	10	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
8	Wigeon			<i>Anas penelope</i>
8	Gadwall			<i>Anas strepera</i>
10	Teal	1	1	<i>Anas crecca</i>
12	Mallard	1	3	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
14	Pintail	1	1	<i>Anas acuta</i>
5	Garganey			<i>Anas querquedula</i>
14	Shoveler	2	2	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
12	Marbled Duck			<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
2	Red-crested Pochard			<i>Netta rufina</i>
13	Pochard	1	2	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
6	Ferruginous Duck	2	3	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
9	Tufted Duck	1	4	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
1	Greater Scaup			<i>Aythya marila</i>
7	Common Scoter			<i>Melanitta nigra</i>
1	Griffon Vulture			<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
12	Black-shouldered Kite	2	1	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
2	Black Kite			<i>Milvus migrans</i>
1	Short-toed Eagle			<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
13	Marsh Harrier	1	1	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
3	Dark Chanting Goshawk			<i>Melierax metabates</i>
3	Goshawk			<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
13	Sparrowhawk	2	2	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
3	Common Buzzard			<i>Buteo buteo</i>
13	Long-legged Buzzard	3	4	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
2	Tawny Eagle			<i>Aquila rapax</i>
8	Golden Eagle	1	2	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
3	Booted Eagle			<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
13	Bonelli's Eagle	2	2	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>
14	Osprey	4	1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
2	Lesser Kestrel			<i>Falco naumanni</i>
14	Kestrel	8	10	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
12	Lanner	3	3	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
7	Peregrine	1	2	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
9	Barbary Falcon	4	2	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>
13	Barbary Partridge	1	21	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>
3	Quail			<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
1	Water Rail			<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
14	Moorhen	4	10	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>

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14	Coot	5	280	<i>Fulica atra</i>
1	Common Crane			<i>Grus grus</i>
14	Oystercatcher	1	8	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
14	Black-winged Stilt	4	68	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
8	Avocet			<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
11	Stone-curlew	1	3	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>
12	Cream-coloured Courser	1	7	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
1	Collared Pratincole			<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
13	Little Ringed Plover	2	30	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
14	Ringed Plover	2	6	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
14	Kentish Plover	1	1	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
7	Golden Plover	2	3	<i>Pluvialis apricara</i>
13	Grey Plover	2	10	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
1	Eurasian Dotterel			<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>
7	Lapwing			<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
13	Knot	2	9	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
14	Sanderling	1	5	<i>Calidris alba</i>
14	Little Stint	1	2	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
2	Temminck's Stint			<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
11	Curlew Sandpiper			<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
14	Dunlin	4	140	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
13	Ruff	1	1	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
12	Common Snipe	2	2	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
14	Black-tailed Godwit	1	1	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
14	Bar-tailed Godwit	3	104	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
5	Whimbrel			H <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
13	Curlew	3	23	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
8	Spotted Redshank			<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
14	Redshank	4	40	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
14	Greenshank	4	6	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
14	Green Sandpiper	5	2	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
1	Wood Sandpiper			<i>Tringa glareola</i>
14	Common Sandpiper	5	8	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
3	Turnstone			<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
5	Grey Phalarope	1	1	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>
8	Pomarine Skua	1	5	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>
11	Arctic Skua	1	50	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
2	Long-tailed Skua	1	1	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>
9	Great Skua	1	21	<i>Catharacta skua</i>
13	Mediterranean Gull	3	63	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
2	Little Gull			<i>Larus minutus</i>
1	Sabine's Gull			<i>Larus sabini</i>
14	Black-headed Gull	5	150	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
13	Slender-billed Gull	2	3	<i>Larus genei</i>
14	Audouin's Gull	4	100	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
1	Ring-billed Gull			<i>Larus delawarensis</i>
1	Franklin's Gull			<i>Larus pipixcan</i>
4	Common Gull			<i>Larus canus</i>
14	Lesser Black-backed Gull	4	1000	<i>Larus fuscus</i>

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7	Herring Gull			<i>Larus argentatus</i>
14	Yellow-legged Gull	8	100	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
1	Iceland Gull			<i>Larus glaucoides</i>
2	Great Black-backed Gull			<i>Larus marinus</i>
9	Gull-billed Tern			<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
1	Little Tern			<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
1	Caspian Tern			<i>Sterna caspia</i>
4	Royal Tern			<i>Sterna maxima</i>
9	Lesser Crested Tern	1	1	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
14	Sandwich Tern	4	18	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
9	Common Tern			<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
3	Arctic Tern			<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>
5	Whiskered Tern			<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
7	Black Tern			<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
1	White-winged Black Tern			<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
1	Razorbill			<i>Alca torda</i>
1	Crowned Sandgrouse			<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>
14	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	3	100	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
14	Rock Dove	1	10	<i>Columba livia</i>
14	Feral Pigeon	8	10	<i>Columba livia</i>
2	Stock Dove			<i>Columba oenas</i>
12	Woodpigeon	4	2	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
13	Collared Dove	8	30	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
4	Turtle Dove	1	1	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
12	Laughing Dove	4	20	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
5	Barn Owl			<i>Tyto alba</i>
13	Little Owl	2	3	<i>Athene noctua</i>
3	Short-eared Owl			<i>Asio flammeus</i>
5	Red-necked Nightjar			<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>
1	Plain Swift			<i>Apus unicolor</i>
3	Pallid Swift			<i>Apus pallidus</i>
7	Little Swift	1	5	<i>Apus affinis</i>
14	Kingfisher	6	6	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
1	European Bee-eater			<i>Merops apiaster</i>
8	Hoopoe			<i>Upupa epops</i>
3	Wryneck	1	1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
1	Great Spotted Cuckoo			<i>Clamator glandarius</i>
14	Bar-tailed Desert Lark	2	8	<i>Ammomanes cincturus</i>
11	Desert Lark	2	5	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
13	Hoopoe Lark	1	1	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
11	Thick-billed Lark	1	85	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>
14	Short-toed Lark	3	20	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
14	Lesser Short-toed Lark	2	3	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>
14	Crested Lark	6	10	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
14	Thekla Lark	4	50	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
14	Crested/Thekla Lark	5	100	<i>Galerida cristata/theklae</i>
4	Skylark			<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
13	Temminck's Horned Lark	1	9	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
14	Brown-throated Sand Martin	3	3	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>

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7	Sand Martin	3	1		<i>Riparia riparia</i>
2	Rock Martin				<i>Hirundo fuligula</i>
14	Crag Martin	3	5		<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>
14	Swallow	6	30		<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
5	Red-rumped Swallow	1	2		<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
8	House Martin				<i>Delichon urbica</i>
3	Tree Pipit				<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
12	Meadow Pipit	5	6		<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
8	Red-throated Pipit				<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
2	Water Pipit				<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
1	Rock Pipit				<i>Anthus petrosus</i>
13	Yellow Wagtail	2	2		<i>Motacilla flava cinerocapilla</i>
12	Grey Wagtail	4	3		<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
14	White Wagtail	8	50		<i>Motacilla (alba) alba</i>
11	Moroccan White Wagtail	1	2		<i>Motacilla (alba) subpersonata</i>
14	Common Bulbul	8	30	H	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
4	Wren				<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
14	Robin	3	3		<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
1	Rufous Bush Robin	1	1		<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>
9	Bluethroat	2	3		<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
13	Black Redstart	3	2		<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
9	Redstart	1	2		<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
14	Moussier's Redstart	5	12		<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
5	Whinchat				<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
14	Stonechat	8	5		<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
13	Northern Wheatear	4	2		<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
14	Desert Wheatear	4	7		<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
14	Red-rumped Wheatear	2	12		<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
14	White-crowned Black Wheatear	2	5		<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
14	Black Wheatear	4	8		<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
12	Blue Rock Thrush	4	2		<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
14	Blackbird	8	10		<i>Turdus merula</i>
11	Song Thrush				<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
14	Cetti's Warbler	3	2	H	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
14	Fan-tailed Warbler	6	50		<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
7	Scrub Warbler	1	2		<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>
1	Sedge Warbler				<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
7	Reed Warbler	1	2		<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
5	(Western) Olivaceous Warbler				<i>Hippolais opaca</i>
2	Melodious Warbler				<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
3	Dartford Warbler				<i>Sylvia undata</i>
13	Tristram's Warbler	1	8		<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
12	Spectacled Warbler	2	2		<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
1	Subalpine Warbler				<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
14	Sardinian Warbler	8	20		<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
2	Lesser Whitethroat				<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
14	Blackcap	2	4		<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
14	Chiffchaff	7	30		<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
5	Willow Warbler				<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>

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6	Spotted Flycatcher	1	2	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
6	Pied Flycatcher			<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
11	Fulvous Babbler	1	7	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>
4	Coal Tit			<i>Parus ater</i>
11	African Blue Tit	2	4	<i>Parus caeruleus ultramarinus</i>
14	Great Tit	3	8	<i>Parus major</i>
1	Short-toed Treecreeper			<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
1	Ring Ouzel			<i>Turdus torquatus</i>
1	Golden Oriole			<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
13	Black-headed Bush Shrike	1	2	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>
1	Isabelline Shrike			<i>Lanius (isabellinus) isabellinus</i>
13	Southern Grey Shrike	7	18	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
2	Woodchat Shrike			<i>Lanius senator</i>
4	Jay			<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
14	Magpie	7	20	<i>Pica pica</i>
6	Red-billed Chough	1	180	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
14	Raven	1	1	<i>Corvus corax</i>
4	Starling			<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
14	Spotless Starling	6	10	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
14	House Sparrow	8	10	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
14	Spanish Sparrow	4	200	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
3	Rock Sparrow			<i>Petronia petronia</i>
14	Chaffinch	6	10	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
1	Brambling			<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
14	Serín	7	6	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
14	Greenfinch	2	1	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
14	Goldfinch	7	30	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
3	Siskin			<i>Carduelis spinus</i>
13	Linnet			<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
10	Atlas Crossbill	1	2	<i>Loxia curvirostra polioygna</i>
14	Trumpeter Finch	4	250	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
1	Hawfinch			<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
14	Cirl Bunting	2	2	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
11	Rock Bunting	2	1	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
14	House Bunting	5	10	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>
14	Corn Bunting	4	400	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>