

MOROCCO in spring

"Morocco is one of those countries where I always wonder if this year's tour will live up to the standard set by last year - and in 2011 I needn't have worried! After a couple of hours seeing the chaos of Marrakech and in particular Djema el Fna square, with its hundreds of Pallid and Little Swifts and breeding White Storks we set off early for the High Atlas. On the journey we enjoyed our first Levaillant's Woodpeckers, Black-shouldered Kites, Ultramarine Tits, Atlas Chaffinches and Cirl Buntings before reaching the more sparsely-vegetated higher ground, where both Alpine and Red-billed Choughs were easily seen, along with Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Sparrow, Black Wheatear, Black Redstart and Long-legged Buzzards. After one of many delicious tajines we walked uphill to the radar tower, seeing Moussier's Redstarts, Atlas Horned Larks and Woodlarks before the grand finale of Crimson-winged Finches feeding at our feet! This species can be very difficult some years so seeing them on the first afternoon meant that we could enjoy dinner and a beer before an early night and another early start.

The following morning the finches had increased in number and then it was time for us to leave, seeing Little Owl and Desert Grey Shrikes along the journey, followed by another Maghreb endemic, Tristram's Warbler, our only Rock Buntings, raptors in the form of Booted, Bonelli's and Short-toed Snake Eagles. Shortly before our hotel we had both Fulvous Babbler and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, all very rewarding in ever increasing windy conditions.

A full day around Tagdilt offered us all the hoped for larks including Thick-billed, Hoopoe, Bar-tailed, Temminck's, Thekla and both Lesser and Greater Short-toed. Nearby were both Desert and Red-rumped Wheatears, Trumpeter Finches, Cream-coloured Coursers, Crowned Sandgrouse, Melodious Warbler, Common Redstart and small groups of Barn Swallows on migration.

From here we continued south east towards the Sahara and the beautiful Erg Chebbi dunes. The species list continued to grow with Brown-necked Raven, Lanner Falcons, Ruddy Shelduck, Long-billed Crested Lark, Rufous Bush Robin, Spectacled, African Desert, Saharan Olivaceous and Scrub Warblers, Desert Sparrows, not to mention more Thick-billed Larks! We were treated to a couple of Egyptian Nightjars sat on the ground before our days excursion in 4x4's and later that day even saw an adult sat on the nest in broad daylight, déjà vu from 2010!

Our hotel in the Sahara is one of the finest around, with great food and so much atmosphere. It's also a great migrant trap and over the course of two days produced Rufous Bush Robin, Western Orphean, Western Olivaceous, Western Subalpine, Garden, Willow and Western Bonelli's Warblers, Nightingale, Spotted and Pied Flycatchers (sadly not an Atlas), European Turtle Dove, European Bee-eater, Yellow and Iberian Wagtails, Woodchat Shrikes and of course the resident White-crowned Wheatears. Nearby a female Montagu's Harrier floating across sandy dunes was a highlight for many as it so epitomised desert migration, spine-tingling stuff!

As we left the Sahara we saw lots (hundreds) of Brown-necked Ravens, a Black-winged Stilt sharing a sandy pool with Little Ringed Plovers and having found 'Ali the Nomad' he kindly took us to the new nesting site for Pharaoh Eagle Owl. The fact that he could see the bird with his small pair of bins, when only its ear tufts and eyes were visible was quite remarkable.

Back around Ouarzazate we enjoyed the Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and Fulvous Babblers again, and early morning saw us record Marbled Ducks, Night and Squacco Herons, and Collared Pratincoles before continuing to the coast.

The strong winds were a feature of most afternoons and by the time we reached the Souss, having stopped for Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Lanner Falcons, coffee and lunch, it was probably up to a force 7. Over two visits to the Souss, one to Massa and one to Tamri we recorded a superb selection from almost touchable Bald Ibis (always a privilege), Black-crowned Tchagras, Laughing Doves, Stone-curlew, Brown-throated Sand Martin, Red-rumped Swallows, Lesser-crested and

MOROCCO in spring: Bird List...2

Black Terns, Audouin's and Mediterranean Gulls, Little Owls, Moroccan Cormorant, Eurasian Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern, Red Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Eurasian Whimbrel, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, European Kingfisher, Moussier's Redstarts, Sardinian Warblers, Moroccan Wagtail, Serin, and more and more and more.

We packed in plenty of birding in our 10 days, ate some great food, saw some of the most impressive scenery that I have witness during tours and were constantly amazed at the warmth and friendliness of the local people. One of the highlights for the leader was our driver, one of the finest I have met, with a very comfortable bus, but especially the patience to deal with a group of birders! Once again as soon as my feet landed at home I'm already looking forward to next year's tour." – *James Lidster*.

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.

Species marked with an * have only been possible since we added Agadir to the tour in 2009, and therefore not respective.

A		B	C
7	Little Grebe	2	8 <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
5	Black-necked Grebe		<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
7	Great Crested Grebe	3	5 <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
5	Gannet	1	600 <i>Sula bassanus</i>
4	Cory's Shearwater		<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
7	Moroccan Cormorant	2	10 <i>Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus</i>
7	Great Cormorant	1	2 <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
7	Squacco Heron	2	5 <i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
3	Little Bittern	1	1 <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
7	Cattle Egret	6	20 <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
7	Little Egret	5	10 <i>Egretta garzetta</i>
1	Great Egret		<i>Egretta alba</i>
7	Grey Heron	4	10 <i>Ardea cinerea</i>
4	Purple Heron	1	1 <i>Ardea purpurea</i>
2	Black-crowned Night Heron	2	3 <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
7	White Stork	8	30 <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
1	Black Stork		<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
7	Eurasian Spoonbill	2	7 <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
3	Glossy Ibis *	1	1 <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
3	Northern Bald Ibis *	1	40 <i>Geronticus eremita</i>
7	Greater Flamingo	2	15 <i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
7	Ruddy Shelduck	2	8 <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
1	Common Shelduck		<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
1	Gadwall		<i>Anas strepera</i>
7	Mallard	3	6 <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
5	Northern Pintail		<i>Anas acuta</i>

MOROCCO in spring: Bird List...3

3	Garganey			<i>Anas querquedula</i>
5	Common Teal			<i>Anas crecca</i>
6	Northern Shoveler			<i>Anas clypeata</i>
7	Marbled Duck	2	30	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
6	Common Pochard			<i>Aythya ferina</i>
3	Ferruginous Duck			<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
4	Red-crested Pochard			<i>Netta rufina</i>
1	Ruddy Duck			<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>
5	Black-shouldered Kite	1	2	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
6	Black Kite			<i>Milvus migrans</i>
7	Short-toed Snake-Eagle	3	3	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
7	Montagu's Harrier	1	1	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
6	Western Marsh Harrier			<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
3	Eurasian Sparrowhawk			<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
7	Atlas Long-legged Buzzard	7	3	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>
2	Egyptian Vulture			<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
2	Golden Eagle			<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
7	Booted Eagle	1	5	<i>Aquila pennata</i>
7	Bonelli's Eagle	2	2	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>
7	Osprey	1	1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
4	Lesser Kestrel			<i>Falco naumanni</i>
7	Common Kestrel	9	10	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
1	Eleonora's Falcon	1	1	<i>Falco eleonora</i>
6	Lanner Falcon	2	3	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
4	Barbary Falcon			<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>
5	Common Quail			<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
7	Barbary Partridge	1	2	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>
6	Common Moorhen	4	10	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
7	Eurasian Coot	2	20	<i>Fulica atra</i>
1	Water Rail			<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
1	Baillon's Crake			<i>Porzana pusilla</i>
1	Spotted Crake			<i>Porzana porzana</i>
1	Houbara Bustard			<i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>
7	Eurasian Oystercatcher	3	20	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
7	Black-winged Stilt	4	10	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
5	Pied Avocet	2	6	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
6	Eurasian Stone-curlew	3	5	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>
7	Cream-coloured Courser	2	20	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
4	Collared Pratincole	1	3	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
7	Little Ringed Plover	3	5	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
6	Ringed Plover	3	20	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
5	Kentish Plover	1	2	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
6	Grey Plover	2	20	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
7	Sanderling	1	3	<i>Calidris alba</i>
5	Little Stint			<i>Calidris minuta</i>
2	Curlew Sandpiper	2	5	<i>Calidrid ferruginea</i>

MOROCCO in spring: Bird List...4

7	Dunlin	2	3	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
2	Red Knot	1	3	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
2	Ruff			<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
3	Common Snipe			<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
7	Black-tailed Godwit	2	2	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
4	Bar-tailed Godwit	3	10	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
6	Eurasian Whimbrel	3	100	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
3	Eurasian Curlew			<i>Numenius arquata</i>
3	Spotted Redshank			<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
7	Common Redshank	3	1	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
7	Common Greenshank	3	4	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
6	Green Sandpiper	1	1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
4	Wood Sandpiper			<i>Tringa glareola</i>
6	Common Sandpiper	2	2	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
5	Ruddy Turnstone	1	8	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
2	Great Skua			<i>Catharacta skua</i>
2	Arctic Skua			<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
1	Little Gull			<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>
5	Mediterranean Gull	2	10	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
7	Black-headed Gull	2	15	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
4	Slender-billed Gull			<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
7	Audouin's Gull	2	10	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
7	Lesser Black-backed Gull	3	300	<i>Larus fuscus graellsii/intermedius</i>
7	Yellow-legged Gull	3	500	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
5	Gull-billed Tern	2	1	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
7	Sandwich Tern	3	20	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
1	Lesser-crested Tern	1	1	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
2	Common Tern	1	2	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
1	Little Tern			<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
6	Caspian Tern	2	1	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
4	Whiskered Tern			<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
3	Black Tern	1	2	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
5	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	1	15	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
4	Crowned Sandgrouse	2	25	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>
2	Spotted Sandgrouse			<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>
1	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse			<i>Pterocles alchata</i>
7	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	1	18	<i>Columba livia</i>
7	Woodpigeon	6	20	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
2	Stock Dove			<i>Columba oenas</i>
7	Eurasian Collared Dove	10	10	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
6	European Turtle Dove	8	40	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
7	Laughing Dove	1	10	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
4	Common Cuckoo			<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
4	Pharaoh Eagle Owl	1	1	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>
1	Maghreb Tawny Owl			<i>Strix aluco mauritanica</i>
1	Scops Owl			<i>Otus scops</i>

MOROCCO in spring: Bird List...5

7	Little Owl	3	3	<i>Athene noctua</i>
1	Red-necked Nightjar *			<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>
6	Egyptian Nightjar	1	3	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>
4	Alpine Swift			<i>Apus melba</i>
7	Pallid Swift	8	1000	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
2	Common Swift	1	200	<i>Apus apus</i>
7	Little Swift	5	250	<i>Apus affinis</i>
7	Eurasian Hoopoe	3	2	<i>Upupa epops</i>
4	Common Kingfisher	1	2	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
7	European Bee-eater	7	100	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
6	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	4	8	<i>Merops persicus</i>
7	Eurasian Wryneck	2	1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
7	Levaillant's Woodpecker	1	3	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>
5	Great spotted Woodpecker			<i>Dendrocops major</i>
7	Bar-tailed Lark	4	20	<i>Ammomanes cincturus</i>
7	Desert Lark	2	2	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
7	Greater Hoopoe Lark	3	10	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
6	Thick-billed Lark	2	4	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>
7	Greater Short-toed Lark	4	150	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
6	Lesser Short-toed Lark	1	20	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>
7	Crested Lark	1	2	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
7	Long-billed Crested Lark	2	4	<i>Galerida macrorhyncha</i>
7	Thekla Lark	3	2	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
5	Woodlark	2	2	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
2	Skylark			<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
7	'Atlas' Horned Lark	2	3	<i>Eremophila alpestris atlas</i>
7	Temminck's Lark	2	30	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
7	Sand Martin	2	3	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
3	Brown-throated Martin *	1	20	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
4	Eurasian Crag Martin	4	6	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
7	Barn Swallow	10	200	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
7	Red-rumped Swallow	5	8	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
6	House Martin	4	6	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
1	Red-throated Pipit			<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
6	Tree Pipit			<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
5	Meadow Pipit			<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
3	Water Pipit			<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
3	Tawny Pipit			<i>Anthus campestris</i>
7	Yellow Wagtail	5	7	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
7	Spanish Wagtail	3	6	<i>Motacilla iberiae</i>
7	Grey Wagtail	1	3	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
6	White Wagtail			<i>Motacilla alba</i>
6	Moroccan Wagtail	1	1	<i>Motacilla subpersonata</i>
7	Common Bulbul	10	30	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
7	Winter Wren	2	1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
7	White-throated Dipper	1	1	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>

MOROCCO in spring: Bird List...6

3	Alpine Accentor			<i>Prunella collaris</i>
7	European Robin	1	1	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
1	Rufous Bush Robin	4	6	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>
7	Common Nightingale	2	2	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
4	Bluethroat			<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
7	Black Redstart	2	10	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
7	Common Redstart	3	3	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
7	Moussier's Redstart	4	10	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
4	Whinchat			<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
5	European Stonechat	1	8	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
7	Northern Wheatear	2	2	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
7	Seebohm's Wheatear	2	4	<i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>
7	Desert Wheatear	6	20	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
7	Western Black-eared Wheatear	3	3	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
3	Maghreb Wheatear			<i>Oenanthe halophila</i>
7	Red-rumped Wheatear	2	15	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
7	White-crowned Wheatear	4	20	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
7	Black Wheatear	7	6	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
6	Blue Rock Thrush	3	7	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
1	Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush			<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>
7	Common Blackbird	9	10	<i>Turdus merula</i>
2	Song Thrush			<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
7	Mistle Thrush	2	4	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
7	Cetti's Warbler	1	1	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
7	Zitting Cisticola	5	12	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
3	Scrub Warbler	1	1	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>
5	Sedge Warbler			<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
5	Eurasian Reed Warbler	2	2	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
3	Grasshopper Warbler			<i>Locustella naevia</i>
2	Melodious Warbler	5	3	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
6	Western Olivaceous Warbler	5	5	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>
3	'Saharan' Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	1	3	<i>Hippolais pallidus reiseri</i>
2	Olivaceous Warbler sp.	2	10	<i>Hippolais opaca/pallidus</i>
6	Tristram's Warbler	1	1	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
7	Spectacled Warbler	2	4	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
6	Common Whitethroat	1	1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
7	'Western' Subalpine Warbler	3	7	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
7	Sardinian Warbler	4	15	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
5	African Desert Warbler	1	3	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>
6	Blackcap			<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
2	Garden Warbler	1	1	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
3	Western Orphean Warbler	2	3	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>
7	Western Bonelli's Warbler	1	1	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>
5	Common Chiffchaff			<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
1	Iberian Chiffchaff			<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>
7	Willow Warbler	1	1	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>

MOROCCO in spring: Bird List...7

1	Wood Warbler			<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
3	Spotted Flycatcher	3	5	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
2	European Pied Flycatcher	2	1	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
7	Fulvous Babbler	2	4	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>
7	Coal Tit	1	1	<i>Periparus ater</i>
7	African Blue Tit	3	6	<i>Cyanistes ultramarinus</i>
7	Great Tit	2	2	<i>Parus major</i>
6	Black-crowned Tchagra	1	2	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>
7	Desert Grey Shrike	7	10	<i>Lanius elegans/algeriensis</i>
7	Woodchat Shrike	9	15	<i>Lanius senator</i>
7	Maghreb Magpie	4	20	<i>Pica mauritanica</i>
7	Alpine Chough	2	300	<i>Pyrrhonorax graculus</i>
7	Red-billed Chough	2	100	<i>Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax</i>
7	Northern Raven	4	6	<i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i>
7	Brown-necked Raven	3	500	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
7	Spotless Starling	5	40	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
2	Common Starling			<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
7	House Sparrow	10	100	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
1	Eurasian Tree Sparrow			<i>Passer montanus</i>
5	Spanish Sparrow	3	100	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
7	Desert Sparrow	1	2	<i>Passer simplex</i>
6	Rock Sparrow	2	20	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
1	European Chaffinch			<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
7	'Atlas' Chaffinch	5	12	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>
1	Brambling			<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
7	European Serin	7	10	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
7	European Greenfinch	4	2	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
7	European Goldfinch	5	20	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
7	Common Linnet	1	10	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
2	'Atlas' Common Crossbill			<i>Loxia curvirostra poliolegyna</i>
5	'African' Crimson-winged Finch	2	11	<i>Rhodopechys alienus</i>
7	Trumpeter Finch	6	200	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
2	Hawfinch	1	15	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
7	Cirl Bunting	3	3	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
6	Rock Bunting	1	1	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
7	House Bunting	9	5	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>
1	Ortolan Bunting			<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
7	Corn Bunting	3	4	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>