

MOROCCO

'There are some birds in the world that are always going to be special, and then there are special circumstances that make seeing a bird even more special. Our encounter with Houbara Bustard ticked all the boxes. We left in 4x4s under the cover of darkness, and drove across seemingly featureless desert until our guide got us out of the vehicles to start scanning. It was a chilly morning, with the sun just starting to appear over the horizon, and there it was, stood on top of a small hill, a stunning Houbara Bustard. We watched for 15 minutes while it surveyed its territory from its elevated position...and then it started, the transformation, feathers ruffled, turned inside out, its head seemingly vanishing...a great mass of feathers with a pair of legs that suddenly started running backwards and forwards. A displaying Houbara Bustard! When the show was over the feathers dissolved back onto the body and the Bustard looked around, almost embarrassed that someone might have seen him! Over the next 15 minutes it did this again, and again and again, truly amazing. In fact it had to be something amazing to detract from all the Cream-coloured Coursers and Hoopoe Larks that we saw on the same morning!

A clear winner for bird of the trip maybe but it had some stiff competition from the close up encounters with Thick-billed Larks, to the day roosting Pharaoh Eagle Owl, perched Egyptian Nightjar, the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis sunning itself just meters from the road, both Spotted and Crowned Sandgrouse creeping about metres away from us, the comical coursers, displaying Hoopoe Larks, a family of Desert Sparrows, fighting African Desert Warblers, Moussier's Redstarts, the mixed flock of Blue-cheeked and European Bee-eaters, Levillant's Woodpecker or maybe the Alpine Accentor that showed down to a few metres in the snow (the visibility so poor that had it been further away we probably wouldn't have seen it!) As ever Morocco holds so many highlights and each year seems to get better and better. One thing that stands out above all is how the country sits at the cutting edge of species definition and identification. Taxonomically we made sure we noted every subspecies we could as several are already split and many others are set to follow. From this list we enjoyed 'new' and potentially new species including Long-billed Crested Lark, Ultramarine Tit, Atlas Chaffinch, Maghreb Magpie, Moroccan and Spanish Wagtails, Atlas Horned Lark, Western and Saharan Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, Atlas Long-legged Buzzard, Western Black-eared Wheatear and had brief encounters with a Maghreb Tawny Owl in Marrakech.

The scenery and weather is ever changing in Morocco and our first day at -7.2 in the snow covered High Atlas seemed like a distant memory as we enjoyed temperatures in the early 30's on the coast. As we turned every corner we saw more stunning sights, with palm lined gorges, sand dunes, oases, stoney 'hamada' desert and the long rolling waves of the Atlantic all adding atmosphere to an already atmospheric country.

Migration was low in numbers but variety was still present with Sylvia warblers such as Spectacled, Western Orphean and Sardinian alongside Wood and Western Bonelli's Warblers, numerous Woodchat Shrikes, European Turtle Doves, Tawny Pipits, Common Redstarts and Hoopoes.

The wetland areas of the coast only held 4 species of duck, but that included many Marbled and some Ferruginous! Greater Flamingos were seen at several sites, including in the Sahara! Raptors featured most days with stunning views of Lanner and Barbary Falcons, a couple of Golden, Booted, Short-toed Snake and Bonelli's Eagles. Arable land near the coast held hunting Montagu's Harriers, including 1 melanistic bird.

The desert specialities were all well represented with 7 species of wheatear (including Seebohm's and Red-rumped) and 12 species of lark (including Temminck's and Var-tailed).

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The list of highlights could be endless and it would be a shame not to mention Audouin's Gull, a brief Tristram's Warbler, Brown-throated Martins, Little Bittern, Purple Heron, Black-crowned Tchagra, Little and Pallid Swifts, Red-rumped Swallow, White-throated Dipper, Alpine Choughs, Eurasian Stone-curlew, nesting Brown-necked Ravens, Trumpeter Finch, Ortolan, Rock and House Buntings.

Our driver, drove superbly, laid out some terrific fresh picnics and our evening meals were also superb, getting to sample many traditional Moroccan specialities from tagines, couscous, harira soup and pastille. Morocco remains as friendly as ever, and there can be few better ways of seeing this for ourselves than when enjoying a mint tea at the side of the road, or haggling for a fossil purchase!' – *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.

H = Heard only

* = Additional species seen during our visit to the Agadir region.

A		B	C	
5	Little Grebe	1	20	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
5	Black-necked Grebe			<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
5	Great Crested Grebe	2	4	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
3	Gannet	2	30	<i>Sula bassanus</i>
5	Moroccan Cormorant	3	3	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus</i>
5	Great Cormorant	2	6	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
5	Squacco Heron	2	2	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
1	Little Bittern	1	2	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
5	Cattle Egret	6	75	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
5	Little Egret	3	20	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
5	Grey Heron	3	20	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
2	Purple Heron	1	2	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
1	Black-crowned Night Heron	3	6	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
5	White Stork	7	18	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
1	Black Stork			<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
5	Eurasian Spoonbill	1	15	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
1	Glossy Ibis *	1	45	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
1	Northern Bald Ibis *	1	34	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>
5	Greater Flamingo	3	117	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
5	Ruddy Shelduck	3	30	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
1	Common Shelduck			<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
1	Gadwall			<i>Anas strepera</i>
5	Mallard	2	10	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
5	Northern Pintail	1	2	<i>Anas acuta</i>
3	Garganey			<i>Anas querquedula</i>
5	Common Teal	1	3	<i>Anas crecca</i>
5	Northern Shoveler	2	4	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
5	Marbled Duck	1	50	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
5	Common Pochard	2	2	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
3	Ferruginous Duck	1	2	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
4	Red-crested Pochard			<i>Netta rufina</i>
1	Ruddy Duck			<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>

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4	Black-shouldered Kite				<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
5	Black Kite	2	2		<i>Milvus migrans</i>
5	Short-toed Snake-Eagle	1	2		<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
5	Montagu's Harrier	3	7		<i>Circus pygargus</i>
5	Western Marsh Harrier	4	3		<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
3	Eurasian Sparrowhawk				<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
5	Atlas Long-legged Buzzard	4	10		<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>
2	Egyptian Vulture				<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
2	Golden Eagle	3	2		<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
5	Booted Eagle	4	2		<i>Aquila pennata</i>
5	Bonelli's Eagle	2	1		<i>Aquila fasciata</i>
5	Osprey	1	1		<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
4	Lesser Kestrel				<i>Falco naumanni</i>
5	Common Kestrel	10	10		<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
4	Lanner Falcon	2	2		<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
3	Barbary Falcon	2	2		<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>
4	Common Quail	2	2	H	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
5	Barbary Partridge	1	2		<i>Alectoris barbara</i>
4	Common Moorhen	3	15		<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
5	Eurasian Coot	3	30		<i>Fulica atra</i>
1	Houbara Bustard	1	1		<i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>
5	Eurasian Oystercatcher	1	10		<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
5	Black-winged Stilt	3	30		<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
4	Pied Avocet	2	48		<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
4	Eurasian Stone-curlew	3	3		<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
5	Cream-coloured Courser	1	30		<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
2	Collared Pratincole	3	85		<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
5	Little Ringed Plover	4	4		<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
5	Ringed Plover	2	50		<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
3	Kentish Plover	3	5		<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
5	Grey Plover	1	20		<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
5	Sanderling	1	4		<i>Calidris alba</i>
4	Little Stint	3	20		<i>Calidris minuta</i>
1	Curlew Sandpiper	3	20		<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
5	Dunlin	1	10		<i>Calidris alpina</i>
1	Red Knot	1	2		<i>Calidris canutus</i>
2	Ruff				<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
2	Common Snipe				<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
5	Black-tailed Godwit	1	1		<i>Limosa limosa</i>
3	Bar-tailed Godwit				<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
5	Eurasian Whimbrel	1	1		<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
3	Eurasian Curlew	2	4		<i>Numenius arquata</i>
3	Spotted Redshank				<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
5	Common Redshank	3	2		<i>Tringa totanus</i>
5	Common Greenshank	2	10		<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
5	Green Sandpiper	1	2		<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
3	Wood Sandpiper	1	1		<i>Tringa glareola</i>
4	Common Sandpiper	4	6		<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
4	Ruddy Turnstone				<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
1	Great Skua				<i>Catharacta skua</i>
2	Arctic Skua				<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
1	Little Gull				<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>
3	Mediterranean Gull				<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
5	Black-headed Gull	1	20		<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
4	Slender-billed Gull				<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>

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5	Audouin's Gull	2	7	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
5	Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	10	<i>Larus fuscus graellsii/intermedius</i>
5	Yellow-legged Gull	3	100	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
3	Gull-billed Tern	3	30	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
5	Sandwich Tern	2	100	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
1	Common Tern	1	30	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
4	Caspian Tern			<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
4	Whiskered Tern	1	3	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
2	Black Tern	1	1	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
3	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	2	12	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
2	Crowned Sandgrouse	1	27	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>
2	Spotted Sandgrouse	1	9	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>
1	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse			<i>Pterocles alchata</i>
5	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	10	10	<i>Columba livia</i>
5	Woodpigeon	6	40	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
2	Stock Dove	0	0	<i>Columba oenas</i>
5	Eurasian Collared Dove	10	10	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
4	European Turtle Dove	4	20	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
5	Laughing Dove	5	3	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
4	Common Cuckoo	1	1	H <i>Cuculus canorus</i>
3	Pharaoh Eagle Owl	1	3	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>
1	Maghreb' Tawny Owl	1	1	<i>Strix aluco mauritanica</i>
1	Scops Owl			<i>Otus scops</i>
5	Little Owl	2	2	<i>Athene noctua</i>
1	Red-necked Nightjar *	1	1	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>
4	Egyptian Nightjar	2	3	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>
4	Alpine Swift			<i>Apus melba</i>
5	Pallid Swift	7	800	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
1	Common Swift	4	20	<i>Apus apus</i>
5	Little Swift	6	200	<i>Apus affinis</i>
5	Eurasian Hoopoe	6	3	<i>Upupa epops</i>
3	Common Kingfisher			<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
5	European Bee-eater	9	200	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
4	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	2	5	<i>Merops persicus</i>
5	Eurasian Wryneck	2	1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
5	Levaillant's Woodpecker	1	1	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>
5	Great spotted Woodpecker	1	1	<i>Dendrocops major</i>
5	Bar-tailed Lark	3	5	<i>Ammomanes cincturus</i>
5	Desert Lark	1	10	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
5	Greater Hoopoe Lark	2	10	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
4	Thick-billed Lark	3	5	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>
5	Greater Short-toed Lark	4	60	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
5	Lesser Short-toed Lark	1	10	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>
5	Crested Lark	1	2	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
5	Long-billed Crested Lark	3	2	<i>Galerida macrorhyncha</i>
5	Thekla Lark	4	10	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
4	Woodlark			<i>Galerida theklae</i>
2	Skylark	1	1	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
5	'Atlas' Horned Lark	2	30	<i>Eremophila alpestris atlas</i>
5	Temminck's Lark	1	20	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
5	Sand Martin	4	6	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
1	Brown-throated Martin *	1	3	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
4	Eurasian Crag Martin	1	2	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
5	Barn Swallow	9	50	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
5	Red-rumped Swallow	4	4	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>

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4	House Martin	5	10	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
1	Red-throated Pipit			<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
5	Tree Pipit	3	4	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
5	Meadow Pipit	1	4	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
3	Water Pipit	2	5	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
3	Tawny Pipit	5	15	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
5	Yellow Wagtail	1	2	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
5	Spanish Wagtail	8	6	<i>Motacilla iberiae</i>
5	Grey Wagtail	3	2	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
5	White Wagtail	1	1	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
4	Moroccan Wagtail	2	1	<i>Motacilla subpersonata</i>
5	Common Bulbul	8	30	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
5	Winter Wren	1	1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
5	White-throated Dipper	2	6	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
3	Alpine Accentor	1	1	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
5	European Robin	1	1	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
5	Common Nightingale	5	2	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
4	Bluethroat			<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
5	Black Redstart	2	10	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
5	Common Redstart	5	5	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
5	Moussier's Redstart	5	10	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
3	Whinchat	3	2	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
3	European Stonechat	1	4	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
5	Northern Wheatear	8	20	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
5	Seebom's Wheatear	4	4	<i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>
5	Desert Wheatear	6	20	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
5	Western Black-eared Wheatear	6	4	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
2	Western Mourning Wheatear			<i>Oenanthe halophila</i>
5	Red-rumped Wheatear	2	20	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
5	White-crowned Wheatear	6	50	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
5	Black Wheatear	2	2	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
4	Blue Rock Thrush			<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
5	Common Blackbird	10	20	<i>Turdus merula</i>
2	Song Thrush			<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
5	Mistle Thrush	2	2	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
5	Cetti's Warbler	1	1	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
5	Zitting Cisticola	2	10	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
4	Sedge Warbler			<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
3	Eurasian Reed Warbler			<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
3	Grasshopper Warbler	1	1	<i>Locustella naevia</i>
1	Melodious Warbler	3	3	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
4	Western Olivaceous Warbler	4	5	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>
1	'Saharan"Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	1	1	<i>Hippolais pallidus reiseri</i>
1	olivaceous warbler sp	1	2	<i>Hippolais opaca/pallidus</i>
4	Tristram's Warbler	1	1	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
5	Spectacled Warbler	2	10	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
4	Common Whitethroat	4	1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
5	Subalpine Warbler	6	15	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
5	Sardinian Warbler	4	10	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
3	African Desert Warbler	1	2	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>
5	Blackcap	6	2	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
1	Garden Warbler	1	2	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
1	Western Orphean Warbler	1	1	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>
5	Western Bonelli's Warbler	5	5	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>
4	Common Chiffchaff			<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>

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5	Willow Warbler	5	2	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
1	Wood Warbler	1	1	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
1	Spotted Flycatcher	2	1	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
1	European Pied Flycatcher	1	2	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
5	Fulvous Babbler	2	3	<i>Turdoides fulvus</i>
5	Coal Tit	2	2	<i>Periparus ater</i>
5	Ultramarine Tit	4	2	<i>Cyanistes ultramarinus</i>
5	Great Tit	3	2	<i>Parus major</i>
4	Black-crowned Tchagra	1	3	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>
5	Southern Grey Shrike	8	10	<i>Lanius meridionalis legans/algeriensis</i>
5	Woodchat Shrike	8	70	<i>Lanius senator</i>
5	Maghreb Magpie	3	10	<i>Pica mauritanica</i>
5	Alpine Chough	2	350	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>
5	Red-billed Chough	2	40	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
5	Northern Raven	4	20	<i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i>
5	Brown-necked Raven	1	6	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
5	Spotless Starling	5	20	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
2	Common Starling			<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
5	House Sparrow	10	30	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
1	Eurasian Tree Sparrow			<i>Passer montanus</i>
4	Spanish Sparrow	1	20	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
5	Desert Sparrow	1	4	<i>Passer simplex</i>
5	Rock Sparrow	2	25	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
1	European Chaffinch			<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
5	Atlas' Chaffinch	6	6	<i>Fringilla africana</i>
1	Brambling			<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
5	European Serin	5	6	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
5	European Greenfinch	5	2	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
5	European Goldfinch	3	40	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
5	Common Linnet	1	10	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
2	'Atlas" Crossbill			<i>Loxia curvirostra poliogyna</i>
3	African Crimson-winged Finch			<i>Rhodopechys alienus</i>
5	Trumpeter Finch	1	6	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
2	Hawfinch			<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
5	Cirl Bunting	1	1	<i>Emberiza cirrus</i>
5	Rock Bunting	1	2	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
5	House Bunting	8	10	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>
1	Ortolan Bunting	1	1	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
5	Corn Bunting	2	1	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>