

Morocco Grand Tour from the Atlas to the Sahara Trip Report

2-10 March 2023



From left to right:

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Trip report and all images by tour leader Álvaro Peral / Wild Andalucía



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Introduction

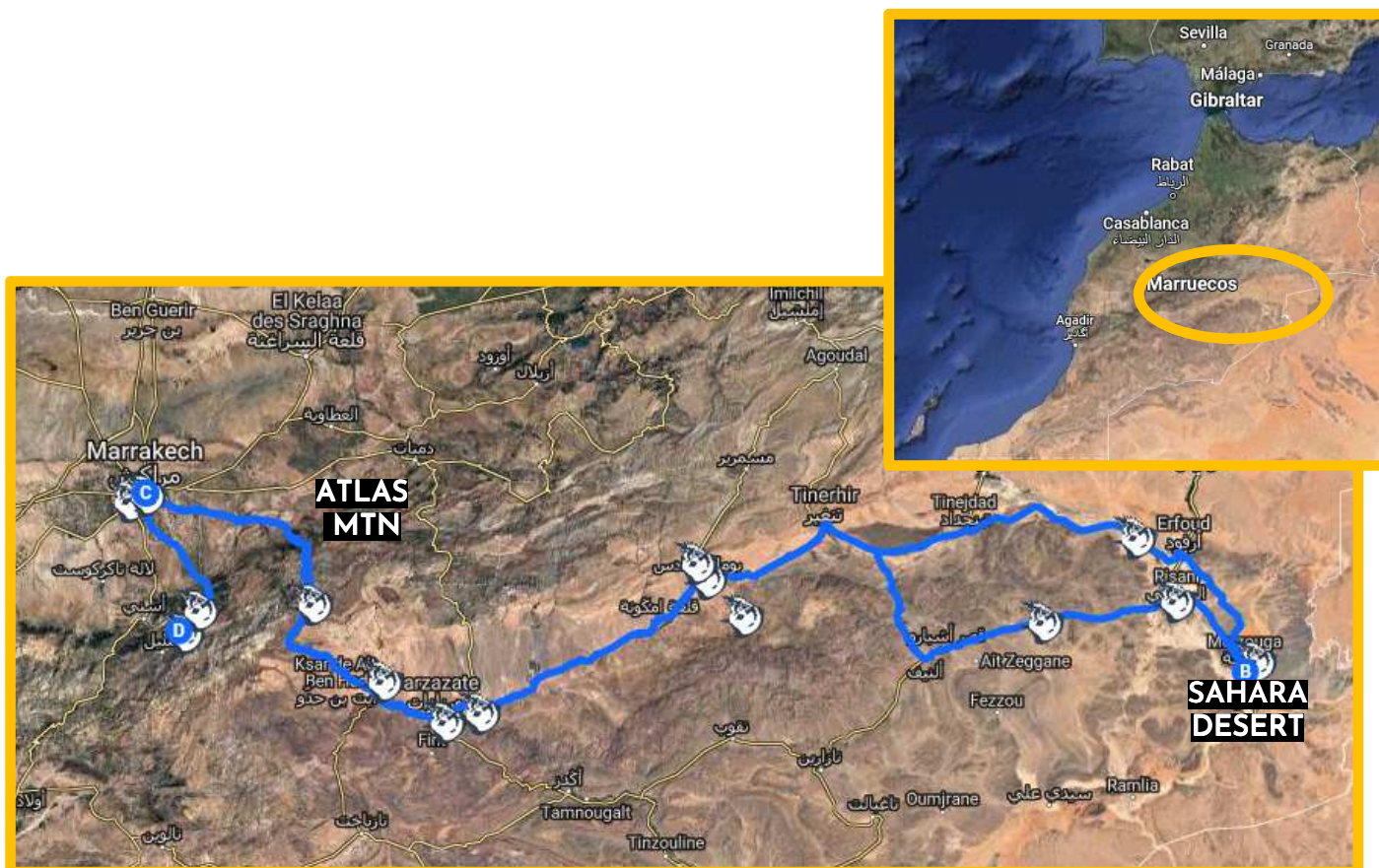
The Grand Morocco Bird Tour is a bird watching tour that starts in Marrakech and covers the Atlas mountains, the stone deserts south of the Atlas, the famous “gorges” and the Erg Chebi side of the Sahara desert. All this brings a fantastic mosaich of habitats and thus targets a varied array of Moroccan birds in about 9 days of intense touring. Full information can be found here:

<http://www.wildandalucia.com/birding-tours/morocco/>

This tour was cancelled twice due to Covid-19 travel restrictions and finally 2023 was the perfect moment to make it happen –not without risks though-.

The fantastic crew describen in the cover picture was formed by 9 trippers, most of them already familiar with our wildlife trips, and Álvaro Peral as the tour leader and guide.

A total of 119 bird taxons were identified, which are recorded in a taxonomical daily checklist at the end of this document, including numbers of individuals and relevant *subspecies*.



IMPORTANT: please note that the itinerary here described is not necessarily exactly the same one on upcoming tours. Your guide will make all the necessary changes according to weather, latest bird sightings, schedule and other planning-related reasons.



Logistics

Mohammed, our local bus driver was employed throughout the tour, he was an excellent driver and our 15 pax Mercedes minibus was fully air conditioned –when needed- and offered a lot of storage space available for the use of the trippers.

Weather

The weather couldn't possibly have been any better. All the rain fell previously to the tour start, giving bright and sunny days throughout. Minimum temperatures never came below 5 °C, whereas maximums were around 24 °C in the high plateau and 30 °C in the Sahara. The snow was still plentiful in the Atlas, but no passes were blocked because of this –they were during the previous week though!-. We only experienced 10 min of light rain at arrival in Marrakech. A light haze was present on a few days but it was never too much. No sandstorms.

Time of the year

This is an early March tour, which benefits from nicer (fresher) temperatures. On the other hand, charismatic migrant species such as Blue-cheeked Bee Eaters, Atlas Flycatchers, etc were not yet present. Juggling comfort and bird species will make you decide you taking this itinerary from late February till early or mid April latest, not beyond these.



Day 1 (March 2) - Arrival to Marrakech

This first day was all about welcoming the trippers, who will arrived to our hotel in Marrakech at different moments of the day, thus allowing some time to make currency exchange, birding locally in the nearby parks or tasting the first local teas.

Having arrived a day earlier I managed a couple of walks on the day into the Cyberpark, the old town and also the El Hrati park, all of them providing nice urban birding, first close encounters with **House Bunting**, **Common Bulbul** and around 20 more species including a pair of **Booted Eagles** with nesting behaviour.

The official meeting was at 19:00 at the rooftop, where we were delighted by scores of passing **White Wagtails**, **Pallid Swifts** and even a few **Little Swifts**. Having sorted our arrival packages everybody introduced into the group and we enjoyed a couple of drinks prior to our buffet dinner.

Day 2 (March 3) - Across the High Atlas

After a nice breakfast we were met at the hotel by Mohamed on his minibus and went directly to the outskirts of Marrakech to come across the beautiful –and declining!- **Maghreb Magpies**. A further stop near the Zat river gave us the first views of **White Storks** nesting on top of a mosque. **Northern Ravens** and **Cattle Egrets** were also seen, alongside the very common **African Chaffinch**. A further quick stopover to admire the snowed hills of the Atlas produced **Hoopoe** and **Sardinian Warbler**.

A nice stop at the Toufliht pine forest turned out to be highly productive. The first species that showed up was a **Common Firecrest**, and not far we got the first views of several **Atlas Coal Tit** – endemic to Morocco- (below, left). The *minor* subspecies of **Eurasian Jay** was also well seen as a bird landed in front of us. However, just a few of us managed to get good views of a couple of female **Red Crossbills** ssp *poliogyna* -endemic to North Africa-.

Rosmarin was in full flower and attracted a few butterfly species, we made out a Painted Lady, a Speckled Wood and several Small Whites. Another further stop over a bridge near Tazlida produced the first **Crag Martins**, **Black Wheatear**, **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Grey Wagtails**.

We enjoyed our lunch near the main pass Tizi n'Tichka. With such a nice weather we chose to eat outdoors, which brought us a few **Mistle Thrushes** and a few active Andalusian Wall Lizards. An **African Blue Tit** was also very active near us.



Next stop was in a valley near Amerzgane, which turned very productive on previous tours. It didn't take us long to find the two targets we were looking for: **Barbary Ground Squirrel** and **Desert Lark**. I have to say none of them were as cooperative as last time, but we managed to see several of each. Dragonflies were active and the Desert Larks were chasing them. Our first **Blue Rock Thrush** put in an appearance, and so did an early **Melodious Warbler**, the only one of the tour.

After a comfort stop near Ouarzazate we visited Álvaro's favourite spot near the Al-Mansour reservoir. It also turned out to be highly productive. On the way we had to stop several times to see our first flock of **Trumpeter Finches** and the first **Desert Wheatears**. The light was quite spectacular as it was getting late. Closer to the water we were delighted by an interesting interspecific fight between a stunning migrant male **Nothorn Wheatear**, a male **Desert Wheatear** and a **Desert Lark**.



At the reservoir, which was pretty low in water, a flock of +40 **Greater Flamingos** and another of +20 **Pied Avocets** were seen. A few **Black-tailed Godwits** and a couple of **Ruddy Shelducks** were well seen in flight. Mark M also picked up a distant **Western Marsh Harrier** and Mark H delighted us with an **Oudri's Fan-footed Gecko**. Detailed information on all the reptile species seen is provided in a separate checklist at the end of the report.

We reached our charming riad near Boumalne Dades by 8 pm as this was our longest drive in the tour. Moustafa welcomed us with some tea and pastries, and we enjoyed our first Tajin of the tour for dinner. It was also nice to meet my friend Brahim Mezane there, we exchanged some presents after three years without having seen each other. He needs no introduction in the local bird sector.





Day 3 (March 4) - The High Plateaux

A pair of **Little Owls** ssp *saharae* waved us goodbye from our Riad, which was also going to be our base for this day. A first stop took us to explore the beautiful orchards of Boumalne Dades. Walking these is a pure delight, an oasis of Poplars, Olive Trees and Palms in an otherwise noisy town. Here we added a couple of new species for the tour, first a **Laughing Dove** and secondly an active pair of **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** ssp *mauritanus*. Blackcaps and African Chaffinches were nearly everywhere, while the riverbank produced displaying **Grey Wagtails**.

We were then picked up by our driver and headed towards the Tagdilt Track. In just a few minutes driving we spotted the first **Red-rumped Wheatears**. This species is particularly easy to find here. A couple of **Black Kites** were very active, and also a flock of **Trumpeter Finches** showed up nearby. The so called *Tagdilt Track* is a renown hotspot for visiting birdwatchers and, as usual, it is because some tricky bird species are easier to be found here due to waste. I had my first close encounters with Temminck Larks here back in 2017 and have always included a short visit to this place ever since.

A new fence has been built there where the waste is concentrated and packs of dogs seemed to survive there. Anyway, as shown in the picture below we headed right to the core of the place and were soon surrounded by good numbers of **White Wagtails** –all ssp *alba*- and a few **Greater Short-toed Larks**. One of the highlights there is the impressive **Thick-billed Lark**, this time we managed to see 5 individuals, mostly through the scope as they were not quite cooperative this time. Robert spotted a male with beautiful dark breeding plumage.

A **Temminck's Lark** flew to land nearby and all the group was delighted with the sighting. The nearby stepic areas provide a prime habitat of stony "reg" with low bushes for this species and it is hard to miss. Heading back to the bus a male **Desert Wheatear** landed at just 5-6 m from us and everybody took wonderful pictures of this species.



Time to jump in the bus and patrol the erg plateau for a while to try to cover a bigger area. Further stops provided a bit of leisure time to self explore the habitat, allowing Mark H to find a **Yellow Scorpion** and a couple of **Small Spotted Lizards**. The temperature reached a maximum of 27 °C and for this part of the road we didn't get any other bird. The vast plains made up wonderful views though!

Time for one of my favourite sightings, the so-called **Fat Sand Rat**, which actually is a gerbil. We reached the spot for this species right on time to see a few individuals busy gathering spiny branches into their burrows. Everybody enjoyed the sightings! On the way to get some food we scanned a *dayet* –temporary puddle- and made out a few **Little Ringed Plovers**. Lunch was in form of delicious brochettes for most of us and tajin/berber omelette for others.

On our next birding site I warned everybody NOT to report any potential sensitive species into eBird or any other online platform unless they could pick a location at least 5 miles away from where the birds actually were. This does not only protect local guides business but more importantly, it helps to keep the birds safe from a variety of potential hazards. Unfortunately, eBird does not yet consider many birds of prey to be sensitive and birders could really be threatening the future of these species when reporting them online, as using precise GPS coordinates is the common way to do it.

It would not surprise me that egg-robbers or chick-poachers would find in these platforms a helpful tool to access the nests of birds of preys to rob them. I hope this little remark helps think twice what the consequences of reporting sightings could be. We all need to be reminded.

This said, we walked across a beautiful escarpment where we were –unexpectedly- met by a local shepherd. He kindly helped us to find a **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** (below, right). I found it quite a satisfaction to see this Owl here after three years without checking the spot. We kept a very reasonable distance and looked at it through the scope as the female was most probably incubating eggs on these dates.



Delighted with this great sighting, the excitement grew even bigger when we saw a **Lanner** perched not far from the Owl. We all had a chance to observe it through the scope and decided not to walk any further. The reward didn't take time to arrive: the Lanner, which turned to be the male, flew towards another one, offered some food and we were treated to see them mating. This is definitely something so difficult to witness. We were really happy about it.

Another not-to-forget sighting included a beautiful –although distant- male **Maghreb Wheatear** continuously chasing dragonflies from a clifftop.

Other sightings included 4 **Trumpeter Finches**, 4 **Desert Larks** and several Antlion larvae. We tipped our helpful shepherd and decided to call it a day and go back to the riad to relax, getting there by 17:30. Some of the crew decided to walk around the orchards near the hotel and they got a **Woodchat Shrike**. As I wrote this at their nice rooftop terrace I could hear the calls of a **Scops Owl**. A delicious dinner followed our checklist updates, this time starring a typical Jarira soup and kefta meatballs.



Day 4 (March 5) - From the Todra Gorges to the Erg Chebbi

This morning we had not 2 but 3 **Little Owls** roosting near our Riad. Who can't resist another picture of these? A **Laughing Dove** was also seen by the hotel entrance and we hit the tarmac road soon after heading East towards the Todra Gorges. As we passed Boumalne a flock of birds took us by surprise flying over the road and landing later on, they were some 10 **Black-bellied Sandgrouses**! We then pulled off and tried to approach them to manage scope views. We did manage views of their heads through the scope –they were very well concealed in the low shrub- and just David S caught them in flight with his camera. A good sighting anyway!

We soon arrived to Tinerhir, a city that mixes historical mud fortress –actually built by the Jews- with an enormous construction of house development and hospitals.

The road turned northwards and we were soon entering the very scenic Todra gorges. We parked at 11:30 and went ready to explore some side track. There we had a main target: the **Tristram's Warbler**. It took us a long 30 min to locate them but it was really worth it as the pair was quite active and I'd even say approachable. The male was displaying opening both wings and shaking them at the same time while remaining static on top of the gorges, a real delight of yet another Maghreb endemic!

The second target was unfortunately only seen for 4 of us and it was single **Rock Martin** -aka Pale Crag Martin-. A couple of distant flights but it was enough to perceive its very light colour, that shined white over the dark side of the gorge. The walk also included views of a **Blue Rock Thrush**, a **Black Redstart** and a few **Black Wheatears**.



It was time to leave the gorge and make a comfort stop on the way, which allowed time for a quick coffee as a big group of **White Storks** were seen roosting from the place, presumably attracted to another rubbish tip. We kept traveling until we decided to make another delicious lunch break at a restaurant on route. We had by then pulled off the national road to head to a location looking for our next target: the **African Scrub Warbler**. After 10 min of search Robert picked the first one. We all had nice views of up to 2 individuals, constantly on the move. It was fun to see this species way of moving jumping on the ground like a kangaroo to suddenly plunge into a shrub and disappear. Just Liza managed a decent image of this bird and we all enjoyed them for more than 20 min. The reptile community was active in this new sandy environment and we were delighted to see Spiny-footed, Bosc's Fringe-toed and Dumeril's Fringe-toed Lizards. The plant community included the conspicuous *anabasis aretioides*. By the bus we saw a **Greenish Black Tip** butterfly.



Our next stop brought us to a place by the national road near El Jorf where I had always had some nice sightings. This time, being late afternoon not much was seen, but still we picked up a **Desert Wheatear**, a single **Trumpeter Finch**, a **Maghreb Lark** and a flock of 5 **Spanish Sparrows**. We then passed Erfoud and had to stop on route to see a **Bar-tailed Lark** walkin along the road. This was a new species for the tour and we all enjoyed the stop as we could also see the impressive Erch Chebbi dunes closer and closer.

We arrived to our hotel at the foot of the sand dunes in Merzouga by sunset and enjoyed the views of three **Brown-necked Ravens** right at the hotel entrance. Another wonderful day!





Day 5 (March 6) - The Sahara Desert

This is a day spent entirely in the desert. We'll swap our bus for three 4x4's that'd allow us reach stranded locations in the sand where some of the desert specialities live. We met our new cars by 0730 and witnessed a wonderful sunrise as we headed towards the border with Algeria. Sunrise in the desert is an unforgettable experience!

It took us some 30 min drive to get to a bereber house where **Hoopoe Lark** displayed briefly. It was our first sighting of this species so far and we could hear its very own song for several minutes. The family that occupied this house provides some water for the birds and hence they can be quite approachable –if they want to-.

Besides our 4x4 drivers we also had another young man named Mohammed that knew where to locate all the affordable desert species. Although communication was not very easy, we did manage to find all our targets. It took a few more minutes to wait for the **Desert Sparrows** to come. Another treat! We had three of these together with the Hoopoe Lark for over 10 minutes, offering very good photography opportunities.

All persons who helped mainting the birds or getting us to them were always generously tipped. In a country like Morocco, tipping for a service is done commonly and makes things work well.

It was time to head to look for **Sandgrouses**, the Sun had been up for some time and presumably they were on their way to the drinkholes. This time we just needed to drive for a few more minutes to get there. It took some 15 min till I could hear some of them, and they happened to land cautiously at a few hundred meters from the water, to approach it in other small flights or walks.



I let the drivers and guide proceed as they were used to, which meant approaching them some 30 m distance, so every vehicle could watch them. The birds didn't seem to bother it. These were all **Spotted Sandgrouses** and we got around 45 individuals in several smaller flocks.

A more difficult species to see is the **Crowned Sandgrouse**, which looks very similar. We were lucky enough to see a final flock of 12 of these, whose different sound is also diagnostic. The below pictures show both sexes in both species as seen from the vehicles:



A short spotting-scope stop followed, where we could look at these two birds into detail and also found a very distant **Great Grey Shrike**. Excited with these nice species, I decided to move on to look for **Desert Warbler**. We just drove for another 15 min and found ourselves in a magnificent environment where a few low bushes provided all this species needed. It wasn't an easy task though! Mohammed did great to encourage us follow him on a long walk till we finally got two of these -the cars tailed us in case someone needed a lift-. The walk provided a few other birds, including a pair of **Desert Wheatears** and a small flock of **Bar-tailed Larks**. Thomas enjoyed yet another wonderful display of a Hoopoe Lark, whereas our Australian party in the tour was amused with a Böhme's Agama.

Those who know me well are familiar with my passion for the family of *sylvia* warblers. The **Desert Warbler** –see next page-, with its bright yellow eyes is a wonderful species adapted to the desert, to be enjoyed without a clock on! But with the temperatures rising quickly and after having wonderful views of this species we agreed to move towards the other side of the dunes in search of another of the emblematic birds of the tour, the **Egyptian Nightjar**.

There's nothing like local knowledge to locate any Nightjar in its dayroost. We had the invaluable help of a local shepherd -who only speaks Bereber- and that uses just his eyes and field experience to locate them. His name is Moubarak and you can see him in the cover of this report. He took us to one of these, roosting in the shade of a low shrub, thus looking like a dark rock (pict below). We could not get great pictures as a big safety distance was respected, but the views



through the scope were simply spectacular! Great service, great tip and great joy for everyone! Time to head to a nearby luxurious hotel for a fresh meal, a variety of tajinis and salads and we were ready to explore the surrounding *tamarix* trees –much bigger than those in Spain- for more birds! We did get a pair of **Desset Sparrows** and a single **Tristram's Warbler**, constantly on the move though! **Desert Hyacinth** *cistanche tubulosa* added a nice yellow contrast to the landscape.

A further stopover was planned in the surroundings of Rissani, where it didn't take Mohammed long to attract a few **Fulvous Chatterers**, to the joy of all of us. This is an interesting species in its behaviour, like all gregarious species. A **Maghreb Lark** was very obliging and we were very happy to walk into the palm trees to find them. Back to our hotel by 17:00 we waved bye our local crew for the day and relaxed at the hotel for a couple of hours.

I planned a little night walk in the desert with Mark H, headlights on, to see if we could find any reptile. Everybody was invited to join and everyone came, so we enjoyed a beautiful sunset (and full moon rise) as we waited atop some boulders to the night. It was fantastic to learn about reptiles and we all were very grateful to Mark for sharing his knowledge. We came across 2 different gecko species, including **Anderson's Short-fingered Gecko**. Back to the hotel by 21:00 enjoyed a fantastic buffet dinner. Those grilled auvergines will be hard to forget!



Day 6 (March 7) - Coursing after the Coursers

Till now there was only one species missing in our desert list, the Cream-coloured Courser. These were missing for many other bird watchers as well, maybe due to movements originated by the last drought, bringing them to Agadir. Who knows. I decided to start the day checking a track off the road along a dry riverbed where I saw them in previous visits. We drove and walked along it, getting several **Hoopoe Larks** and around a dozen **Bar-tailed Larks**, which we observed very well.

Being this a transfer day, we allowed what could be allowed and kept our drive westwards. The drive produced many species during the first hour on tarmac: **Brown-necked Raven**, **White-crowned Wheatear**, a single **Black Kite** and even a migrating **Red Kite**. The landscape added more and more acacias, giving it a real African taste. We made a coffee break in Alnif, where we also walked along its orchards and got very good views of several Hoopoes and a low-flying **North-African Buzzard** –*buteo cirtensis*–.

A further stop in a well provided the **Trumpeter Finches** we were expecting, but not only that, **Bribon's Agamas** were commonly seen, moving their heads up and down to communicate. **Greenish Black Tip** butterflies were common here and in Alnif.



Our driver was already infected by our birding fever and didn't hesitate to slow down and brake each time he saw some relevant find. This turned out to be fantastic as he knew the territory like the palm of his hand. One of these stops brought us a couple of **Great Grey Shrikes**. The scope views were ok, but we little by little the allowed us to approach them, improving the views and, as usual, Liza got the best pictures.

We crossed the Draa at Tinerhir, resulting into many dozen **Cattle Egrets** by the riverbank and made a lunch stop in a local bar. House Buntings were coming in and out the building at ease. We then continued our route till I indicated a nice pullout into a valley to look for a further **Maghreb Wheatear**. We did find one of these, quite far I must say. A female **Tristram's Warbler** was also seen and photographed. But it was probably David H sight that put the largest smile on our faces: he made out up to three impressively sized **Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizards** basking in front of their burrows.



I then decided to give a last chance to the Tagdilt track to look for Cream-coloured Coursors, which after 20 min didn't bring any remarkable sighting and we then kept our course towards Ouarzazate, where we would be based for that night. We reached Ouarzazate right before sunset in a beautiful light and could see our lodge in the distance.

I haven't mentioned that over the days we'd created a general joke about mixing up bird names, which always had a *Courser* in our minds and there were some funny moments, specially when a couple of days before Thomas pointed a *Lark with bars in the tail* which actually was our first Bar-tailed Lark of the tour. No one could take Thomas seriously when we were about to get to our hotel and a Hoopoe Lark crossed the track right in front of our bus. He claimed (in a very relaxed way) that was a Coursor, which I took as yet another Hoopoe Lark in a naked eye glimpse. I must say we were a bit exhausted after a long transfer day but being our last Hoopoe Lark I decided to enjoy a last view through binoculars, why not! Someone said my face changed colours when I confirmed it was actually a **Cream-cloured Coursor** in front of us!

Everybody jumped out of the bus and we managed a fantastic view of four of them through the scope, and the below digiscoping picture. What a long-awaited surprise! A fantastic moonrise followed, which made up another remarkable view in the scope –including many bats in between-.



Checking-in we were invited to a glass of tea in the garden and a few of us heard an **Egyptian Nightjar** calling in the distance. We were far from the desert by now but a little walk in the night proved us right! We also picked a calling **Eurasian Stone Curlew** and a **Little Owl**.



Day 7 (March 8) - Again across the Atlas

We agreed on having a relaxed breakfast and a later start of the tour, by 09:00. We enjoyed the early morning birds in the gardens of our lodge, with the **Egyptian Nightjar** now calling from near the swimming-pool! A pair of **White-crowned Wheatears** showed well for us as we jumped in the bus again.

Today we headed towards the beautiful and historical town of Ait Ben Hadu. There we visited the fortress (Ksar) and were welcomed by an old friend into his little shop, where we enjoyed a bit of shade and a delicious tea. Even if temperatures were just 23 °C the heat started to be quite noticeable! In the town we got the typical birds we had been seem, such as **White Wagtails**, **House Buntings**, **Common Bulbuls**, a **Black Restart** and a pair of **White Storks**, this time nesting atop a mosque minaret.

After adding this nice cultural stop we hit the road again and took just minor quick stops when encountered **Barbary Ground Squirrels** or –very much appreciated- a **Mediterranean Chamaeleon**, again thanks to our wonderful Mohammed.

Another stop was planned at the *Sources du Tichka*, where we added the only true frog in Morocco, the **North-African Water Frog**. No birds were seen besides **Northern Ravens**, although I must say I'd have loved to find a Seeböhm's Wheatear –still a bit early for those!-.

We stopped not far from there for lunch, and we added a wintering European Chaffinch to our tour list. Andalusian Wall Lizards were very active at the restaurant.



We reached the beautiful Toufliht forest again by 16:00, so even if bird activity was too low, we took a small stroll up a track along the pine forest. Getting closer to Marrakech we stopped on the road as a very large male **Spur-thighed Tortoise** was trying to cross it. Another enjoyable find! After taking a few pictures we released it in a side valley where nobody could see it being dropped off. We reached our hotel in the charming *Hivernage* quarter of Marrakech on time to unpack and relax a bit before meeting for dinner.

Day 8 (March 9) - Oukaimeden daytrip

Today we hit the road at 07:45 towards the beautiful *Ourika* valley. Our first stop was a charming track into a Juniper forest where we hoped to find **Girl & Rock Buntings** and **Moussier Redstart**. Everyone seemed to enjoy this nice walk into the forest, and we did see all the three birds above. It was probably the beautiful male of Moussier Redstart found by Mark H that we loved the most:



Another nice sighting was a female **Brambling** that landed nearby. This is a species that reaches here its southernmost wintering range. **Little Swifts** were also seen, flying high over the mountains. **Eurasian Serins** were active and numerous, reminding us of spring.

Driving up the mighty Ourika valley we made a couple of stops to look for Levillant Green Woodpecker. Unfortunately we had to get by with its nesting holes, we tried hard but missed this species. We did see a pair of **Sparrowhawks** in display flight, a few **Hawfinches**, **Grey Wagtails** and **African Blue Tits**.

We reached Oukaimeden plateau by 11:15 and were quickly overwhelmed by the beauty of the place and the numbers of **Yellow-billed** and **Red-billed Choughs**. I had been warned that the **African Crimson-winged Finches** were lately active by the car park, so luckily as soon as I stepped out of the bus I located a few of them just as predicted. We all enjoyed these extremely localized birds feeding in the ground and took some nice pictures.



The **Atlas Shore Larks** were a bit more tricky to find, but after some 20 min of easy walking along the lower hills we managed to see a few of them. They were actively feeding on the snow, and just one of them was kind enough to walk at some 15 m from us.

I was glad to briefly meet some colleagues there, Hamid and Javi, who were also guiding bird trips.

We had a lift to the higher peaks above the village and we had nice views of **Rock Sparrows** and a pair of **Moussier Redstarts**. It was nice to see both male and female together. David H & Mark H found several High Atlas Day Gecko. After enjoying a last view of Toubkal peak (highest of North Africa) we descended to the village to enjoy a well deserved meal.

On the way down to Marrakech we saw a few **Mistle Thrush** *ssp deichleri*, and picked a **Zitting Cisticola** calling. Back to our hotel in Marrakech by 17:15, we waved goodbye to Mohammed, who made an excellent service. We had a short hour to relax in the hotel before updating our checklists and walking down to the *medina*, where we enjoyed walking and the rhythms of the Djema El Fnaa, the main square of the town.

Our last dinner took place while we enjoyed fantastic views over the Djema El Fnaa square and we even picked a few **Little Swifts** flying overhead.



Day 9 (March 10) - À la prochaine!

Today we met for a relaxed breakfast at 08:00 and we shared our last moments of the tour together as people were heading back to the airport. Some of us decided to stay one more day and catch a better flight connection.

Tour impressions

This has been a fantastic tour. The crew was always happy and seemed to enjoy the tour very much daily. We had fantastic weather and enjoyed the local food very much.

With a total of **119 bird taxons** recorded, we can say we managed all the targets except Levillant Woodpecker. We can say the tour was highly successful in term of bird sightings. In years of rains, a visit to the Dayet Srij near Merzouga would have added a few more birds to the list. We only counted a couple of waders, whereas we managed 10 species of larks and 6 species of Wheatears.

Close views of Tristram's Warbler, Dessert Sparrow and Hoopoe Lark were highly appreciated. Watching a pair of Lanners mating was also a tour highlight.

We also did very well in **herps**, with 15 species recorded.

Although a bit early for **butterflies**, we've also included a checklist for these.

It was commonly agreed that adding one extra day or two to the tour itinerary would have helped cutting the driving times. Likewise, an optional tour **extension** to the coastal areas would sound appealing to some travellers.

Thank you for your time and interest while reading this tour report. You can have a look at our natural history tours on www.wildandalucia.com

All the best,

Alvaro Peral – **Wild Andalucía**



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BUTTERFLY CHECKLIST

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Lycaenidae	Polyommatae	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>	Lang's Short-tailed Blue								X
Nymphalidae	Nymphalinae	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Painted Lady		X		X				
Nymphalidae	Satyrinae	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Speckled Wood		X						
Pieridae	Pierinae	<i>Euchloe charltonia</i>	Greenish Black Tip			X		X	X		
Pieridae	Pierinae	<i>Anthocharis belia</i>	Moroccan Orange Tip	X	X	X		X	X		
Pieridae	Pierinae	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	Small White		X						

BIRD CHECKLIST

See next page →

CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF MOROCCO & WESTERN SAHARA

LISTADO DE LAS AVES DE MARRUECOS Y SÁHARA

N.	Name / Nombre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
ANSERIFORMES: ANATIDAE										
1	Ruddy Shelduck <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i> / Tarro canelo		2			2				
CAPRIMULGIFORMES: CAPRIMULGIDAE										
2	Egyptian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i> / Chotacabras egipcio					1	H	H		
APODIFORMES: APODIDAE										
3	Common Swift <i>Apus apus</i> / Vencejo común	X								
4	Pallid Swift <i>Apus pallidus</i> / Vencejo pálido	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
5	Little Swift <i>Apus affinis</i> / Vencejo moro	X							X	X
PTEROCLIFORMES: PTEROCLIDAE										
6	Black-bellied Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles orientalis</i> / Ganga ortega				10					
7	Spotted Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles senegallus</i> / Ganga moteada					45				
8	Crowned Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles coronatus</i> / Ganga coronada					12				
COLUMBIFORMES: COLUMBIDAE										
9	Rock Dove <i>Columba livia</i> / Paloma bravía	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	Common Wood Pigeon <i>Columba palumbus</i> / Paloma torcaz	X	X		H	X		X	X	
11	Eurasian Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> / Tórtola turca	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> / Tórtola senegalesa			1	2					
GRUIFORMES: RALLIDAE										
13	Eurasian Coot <i>Fulica atra</i> / Focha común								X	
PODICIPEDIFORMES: PODICIPEDIDAE										
14	Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> / Zampullín común		X							
15	Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> / Somormujo lavanco		X							
PHOENICOPTERIFORMES: PHOENICOPTERIDAE										
16	Greater Flamingo <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i> / Flamenco común		X							
CHARADRIIFORMES: BURHINIDAE										
17	Eurasian Stone-curlew <i>Burhinus oediconemus saharae</i> / Alcaraván común					H				
CHARADRIIFORMES: RECURVIROSTRIDAE										
18	Pied Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> / Avoceta común		X							
CHARADRIIFORMES: CHARADRIIDAE										
19	Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i> / Chorlitejo chico			X			X			
20	Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> / Chorlitejo patinegro		X							
CHARADRIIFORMES: SCOLOPACIDAE										
21	Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i> / Aguja colinegra		4							
22	Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i> / Andarríos grande			1						
23	Common Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i> / Archibebe claro		1							

N.	Name / Nombre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
CHARADRIIFORMES: GLAREOLIDAE										
24	Cream-colored Courser <i>Cursorius cursor</i> / Corredor sahariano						4			
CHARADRIIFORMES: LARIDAE										
25	Black-headed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> / Gaviota reidora		X							
CICONIIFORMES: CICONIIDAE										
26	White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> / Cigüeña blanca	X	X		X		X	X	X	
SULIFORMES: PHALACROCORACIDAE										
27	Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> / Cormorán grande		X					X		
PELECANIFORMES: ARDEIDAE										
28	Western Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> / Garcilla bueyera		X		X		X	X	X	
29	Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i> / Garceta común		X				X	X		
ACCIPITRIFORMES: ACCIPITRIDAE										
30	Booted Eagle <i>Hieraetus pennatus</i> / Águila calzada	2								3
31	Eurasian Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i> / Gavilán común	1			1				2	
32	Western Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> / Aguilucho lagunero occidental		1							
33	Red Kite <i>Milvus milvus</i> / Milano real						1			
34	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i> / Milano negro			2			1	50+		
35	North African Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo cirtensis</i> / Busardo moro		1	2			1			
STRIGIFORMES: STRIGIDAE										
36	Little Owl <i>Athene noctua</i> / Mochuelo europeo		H	2	3		H			
37	Eurasian Scops Owl <i>Otus scops</i> / Autillo europeo			H						
38	Pharaoh Eagle-Owl <i>Bubo ascalaphus</i> / Búho desértico			1						
BUCEROTIFORMES: UPUPIDAE										
39	Eurasian Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i> / Abubilla		1	1	2		6	3	1	
PICIFORMES: PICIDAE										
40	Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major mauritanus</i> / Pico picapinos		H	2						
FALCONIFORMES: FALCONIDAE										
41	Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i> / Cernícalo primilla		5							
42	Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> / Cernícalo vulgar	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
43	Lanner Falcon <i>Falco biarmicus</i> / Halcón borní			2						
PASSERIFORMES: LANIIDAE										
44	Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor algeriensis</i> / Alcaudón norteño					1	3	1		
45	Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i> / Alcaudón común			1						
PASSERIFORMES: CORVIDAE										
46	Eurasian Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius minor</i> / Arrendajo euroasiático		X						X	
47	Maghreb Magpie <i>Pica mauritanica</i> / Urraca magrebí		X					X	X	
48	Red-billed Chough <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> / Chova piquirroja		30					H	100+	
49	Alpine Chough <i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i> / Chova piquigualda								100+	
50	Brown-necked Raven <i>Corvus ruficollis</i> / Cuervo desertícola				X	X	X			

N.	Name / Nombre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
51	Northern Raven <i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i> / Cuervo grande		X					X	X	
PASSERIFORMES: PARIDAE										
52	Great Tit <i>Parus major excelsus</i> / Carbonero común	H	X	X				X	X	X
53	African Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i> / Herrerillo canario		X	X	X			H	X	
54	Atlas Coal Tit <i>Periparus ater atlas</i> / Carbonero garrapinos		X					H	X	
PASSERIFORMES: ALAUDIDAE										
55	Crested Lark <i>Galerida cristata</i> / Cogujada común		X							
56	Maghreb Lark <i>Galerida macrorhyncha</i> / Cogujada magrebí				1	2	3			
57	Thekla's Lark <i>Galerida theklae</i> / Cogujada montesina		X	X	X	X	X	X		
58	Greater Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i> / Terrera común			7						
59	Horned Lark (Atlas Shore Lark) <i>Eremophila alpestris</i> / Alondra cornuda								5	
60	Temminck's Lark <i>Eremophila bilopha</i> / Alondra sahariana			6	1					
61	Bar-tailed Lark <i>Ammomanes cinctura</i> / Terrera colinegra				1	2	14			
62	Desert Lark <i>Ammomanes deserti</i> / Terrera sahariana		5	5	1		1	1		
63	Thick-billed Lark <i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i> / Calandria picogorda			4						
64	Greater Hoopoe-Lark <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i> / Alondra ibis					6	6			
PASSERIFORMES: PYCNONOTIDAE										
65	Common Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i> / Bulbul naranjero	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
PASSERIFORMES: HIRUNDINIDAE										
66	Sand Martin <i>Riparia riparia</i> / Avión zapador		X	X		X				
67	Eurasian Crag Martin <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i> / Avión roquero		X	X					X	
68	Rock Martin (Pale Crag Martin) <i>Ptyonoprogne obsoleta (fuligula)</i> / Avión isabel				1					
69	Common House Martin <i>Delichon urbicum</i> / Avión común		X	X	X		X	X		
70	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i> / Golondrina común	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
71	Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i> / Golondrina dáurica		X						X	
PASSERIFORMES: SCOTOCERCIDAE										
72	Saharan Scrub Warbler (Streaked Scrub Warbler) <i>Scotocerca saharae (inquieta)</i> / Prinia desértica				2					
PASSERIFORMES: PHYLLOSCOPIDAE										
73	Common Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> / Mosquero común		X	X		X		X	X	
PASSERIFORMES: ACROCEPHALIDAE										
74	Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i> / Zarcero políglota			X						
PASSERIFORMES: CISTICOLIDAE										
75	Zitting Cisticola <i>Cisticola juncidis</i> / Cisticola buitrón								H	
PASSERIFORMES: SYLVIIDAE										
76	Eurasian Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> / Curruca capirota	X	X	X				X	X	
77	African Desert Warbler <i>Curruca deserti</i> / Curruca sahariana					2				
78	Tristram's Warbler <i>Curruca deserticola</i> / Curruca del Atlas				2	2	1			
79	Sardinian Warbler <i>Curruca melanocephala</i> / Curruca cabecinegra	2	1			2	1		1	

N.	Name / Nombre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
80	Western Subalpine Warbler <i>Curruca iberiae</i> / Curruca carrasqueña occidental					1		1		
PASSERIFORMES: LEIOTHRICHIDAE										
81	Fulvous Babbler (Fulvous Chatterer) <i>Argya fulva</i> / Turdoide rojizo					15				
PASSERIFORMES: REGULIDAE										
82	Common Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i> / Reyzeuelo listado		X							
PASSERIFORMES: TROGLODYTIDAE										
83	Eurasian Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> / Chochín paleártico		H						H	
PASSERIFORMES: STURNIDAE										
84	Spotless Starling <i>Sturnus unicolor</i> / Estornino negro	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
PASSERIFORMES: TURDIDAE										
85	Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus deichleri</i> / Zorzal charlo		4		1				3	
86	Common Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i> / Mirlo común	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
PASSERIFORMES: MUSCICAPIDAE										
87	European Robin <i>Erithacus rubecola</i> / Petirrojo europeo					X			X	
88	Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> / Colirrojo tizón				X			X	X	
89	Moussier's Redstart <i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i> / Colirrojo diademado								4	
90	Blue Rock Thrush <i>Monticola solitarius</i> / Roquero solitario		1		1	1	1	2		
91	Northern Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> / Collalba gris		1							
92	Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti</i> / Collalba desertica		2	6	3	3	10	2		
93	Red-rumped Wheatear <i>Oenanthe moesta</i> / Collalba culirroja			6						
94	Black Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucura</i> / Collalba negra		X	X			X	X	X	
95	White-crowned Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i> / Collalba yebélica			X	X	X	X	X		
96	Maghreb Wheatear (Mourning Wheatear) <i>Oenanthe halophila (lugens h.)</i> / Collalba núbica			1			1			
PASSERIFORMES: PASSERIDAE										
97	Rock Sparrow <i>Petronia petronia</i> / Gorrión chillón		X	H			H	X	X	
98	Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> / Gorrión moruno	X			X					
99	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> / Gorrión común	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
100	Desert Sparrow <i>Passer simplex</i> / Gorrión sahariano					5				
PASSERIFORMES: MOTACILLIDAE										
101	Western Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava</i> / Lavandera boyera		1	H						
102	Grey Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i> / Lavandera cascadeña		X	X	X	X			X	
103	White wagtail <i>Motacilla alba alba</i> / Lavandera blanca	X		X	X	X		X		
104	Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i> / Bisbita pratense			X						
PASSERIFORMES: FRINGILIDAE										
105	Common Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs coelebs</i> / Pinzón vulgar							X		
106	African Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i> / Pinzón africano	X	X	X				X	X	
107	African Crimson-winged finch <i>Rhodopechys alienus</i> / Camachuelo alirrojo bereber								10	
108	Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i> / Pinzón real								X	

N.	Name / Nombre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
109	Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothr. buvryi</i> / Picogordo común		X						X	
110	Trumpeter Finch <i>Bucanetes githagineus</i> / Camachuelo trompetero		4				2			
111	European Greenfinch <i>Chloris chloris</i> / Verderón común	X	X	X			H		H	
112	Common Linnet <i>Linaria cannabina</i> / Pardillo común			H						
113	Red Crossbill <i>Loxia curvirostra polygona</i> / Piquituerto común		X	X					H	
114	European Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> / Jilguero europeo		X					X		
115	European Serin <i>Serinus serinus</i> / Serín verdecillo	X	X	X	X			X	X	
116	Eurasian Siskin <i>Spinus spinus</i> / Jilguero lúgano	H	H	H				H		X
PASSERIFORMES: EMBERIZIDAE										
117	Rock Bunting <i>Emberiza cia</i> / Escribano montesino								X	
118	Cirl Bunting <i>Emberiza cirlus</i> / Escribano soteño								X	
119	House Bunting <i>Emberiza sahari</i> / Escribano sahariano	X		X	X		X	X	X	

LIST OF THE AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

LISTADO DE LOS ANFIBIOS Y REPTILES

N.	Name / Nombre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
ANURA: RANIDAE										
13	North-African Water Frog <i>Pelophylax saharicus</i> / Rana verde norteafricana							X		
CHELONII: TESTUDINIDAE										
1	Spur-thighed Tortoise <i>Testudo graeca</i> / Tortuga mora							X		
SQUAMATA: GEKKOTA: SPHAERODACTYLIDAE										
11	High Atlas Day Gecko <i>Saurodactylus trachyblepharus</i> / Geco diurno del Gran Atlas								X	
SQUAMATA: GEKKOTA: GEKKONIDAE										
17	Anderson's Short-fingered Gecko <i>Stenodactylus petrii</i> / Geco de Petrie					X				
SQUAMATA: GEKKOTA: PHYLLODACTYLIDAE										
27	Oudri's Fan-footed Gecko <i>Ptyodactylus oudrii</i> / Salamanguesa magrebí		X			X				
SQUAMATA: LACERTOIDEA: LACERTIDAE										
51	Vaucher's Wall Lizard <i>Podarcis vaucheri</i> / Lagartija de Vaucher		X					X		
54	Small Spotted Lizard <i>Mesalina guttulata</i> / Mesalina de anteojos			X						
60	Spiny-footed Lizard <i>Acanthodactylus erythrurus</i> / Lagartija colirroja				X					
66	Bosc's Fringe-toed Lizard <i>Acanthodactylus boskianus</i> / Lagartija rugosa				X					
67	Dumeril's Fringe-toed Lizard <i>Acanthodactylus dumerilii</i> / Lagartija de Duméril				X					
72	Large Psammmodromus <i>Psammmodromus alqirus</i> / Lagartija colilarga							X		
SQUAMATA: IGUANIA: AGAMIDAE										
77	Bribon's Agama <i>Agama briboni</i> / Agama marroquí						X	X		
80	Böhme's Agama <i>Trapelus boehmei</i> / Agama variable marroquí					X				
82	Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard <i>Uromastix nigriventris</i> / Dob marroquí						X			
SQUAMATA: IGUANIA: CHAMAELEONIDAE										
84	Mediterranean Chameleon <i>Chamaeleo chamaeleon</i> / Camaleón común									