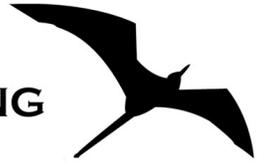




**TROPICAL
BIRDING**



**MOROCCO:
NORTH AFRICA IN A
NUTSHELL**
A Tropical Birding Set Departure

March 15—22, 2015
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Text by Cameron Cox

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noted otherwise.

TOUR SUMMARY

Morocco is study in both beauty and contrasts. The landscape is beautiful, often stunningly so, and ever varied. Contrast can be seen in both the landscape and in elements of Moroccan culture. There are snow-crowned High Atlas Mountains, with flocks of swirling Alpine Choughs, and the reddish dunes of the Sahara Desert, where the haunting song of Hoopoe Lark pierces the air. In the people, there is tremendous contrast between wealth and poverty, and between traditional and modern culture. One man in designer jeans and a starched oxford shirt might walk with another wearing what amounts to a long, brown sack with armholes and a hood. A mud hut that is hundreds of years old may have a satellite dish protruding from it.

The beauty and the contrasts are what make every moment in Morocco interesting, even when not looking at birds. But Morocco has some spectacular birds! It is home to the endangered Northern Bald Ibis and highly localized Crimson-winged Finch. Levaillant's Woodpecker and Moussier's Redstart will make your eyes pop. And the display song of the Greater Hoopoe-Lark is one of the most unique sounds to be found in the avian world. While the overall number of birds found in Morocco is small in comparison to destinations like Kenya and the New World tropics, the

quality of the avian experiences found in Morocco, along with the beautiful and ever-changing landscapes, and the culture and food, make this feel like a very rich tour. Morocco is much closer to North America than other destinations in Africa. Most Europeans and North Americans can reach the country with one or two flights. Finally, this short tour should be attractive to people with limited vacation time. For those who have the time for a longer trip, it can be combined with our short Spain tour, which immediately follows the Morocco tour.



African Desert Warbler is a cute little specialty of the Sahara Desert in northwestern Africa.

Day 1: March 15

Everyone had arrived in Marrakech in the previous day, so we got an early start on our first morning. Our plan was to bird several different elevations in the High Atlas Mountains, eventually working up to snow level near the ski village of Oukaïmeden. Our first few stops featured some of common garden birds of North Africa/Europe including Common Wood-Pigeon, African Blue Tit, Great Tit, the stunning European Goldfinch, Song Thrush, and Common Chiffchaff.

The heat turned up significantly at the next stop when we heard a distant Levillant's Woodpecker. After a few minutes it flew past us giving great looks at the green back and glowing yellow rump. After making several passes it finally landed in a spot where we could get a scope on it. All enjoyed views of this spectacular North African endemic; a candidate for bird of the trip right

off the bat! Up the road a bit we stopped and immediately located a very cooperative Cirl Bunting. The black-striped face and combination of yellow and soft pink plumage really made a splash when viewed in the scope as it sang loudly. Nearby Ken located a much more difficult endemic, an energetic Tristram's Warbler. Old World warblers in the genus *Sylvia* are typically denizens of scrubby habitat, and often difficult to see well, and this Tristram's Warbler was no exception, but



Tristram's Warbler, a NW African endemic that can be tricky to locate, but which we saw on the first day.

eventually we got everyone on this attractive skulker.

Up the road we made an unscheduled stop when a Great Spotted Woodpecker was spotted from the car. Halfway through the morning on the first day and we already had both the expected woodpeckers in Morocco, both stunners! While viewing the woodpecker we also located a Mistle Thrush, a huge, spot-breasted *Turdus* thrush. At our next stop we were viewing Eurasian Crag-Martins and Barn Swallows when a Red-rumped

Swallow joined the hirundid throng.

Next a Barbary Falcon streaked

across the other side of the valley and disappeared up a side canyon. Our first Black Redstart made an appearance down in the canyon below us while a Blue Rock-Thrush posed for views in the scope on a rock outcropping above. Continuing up the road we climbed into pine forest and were immediately greeted by a pair of displaying Eurasian Sparrowhawks. A stop in the forest produced Eurasian Wren, Coal Tit, and a number of Firecrests. White-throated Dipper was our next target and after some careful scanning we found, not just one, but a pair of these handsome aquatic songbirds! No one can resist the charm of a dipper, and we all enjoyed watching their antics. While watching the dippers we also added Gray Wagtail.



Crimson-winged Finch, a high-elevation species found around Oukaïmeden.

Coming into the village of Oukaïmeden we began to see swirling masses of choughs, both Red-billed and Yellow-billed Choughs. These glossy little crows were all over the town, calling and forming dark balls that soared high above the snow-capped peaks. Our primary target in Oukaïmeden was Crimson-winged Finch so we immediately went to the ski area where we could most easily reach the snow line. The scene in the parking lot of the ski area was beyond description. To call it organized chaos is an insult both to organization and to chaos! Both semi-official and volunteer (and unnecessary) parking lot attendants were motioning madly at passing cars. Their directions were largely ignored, which was fine since they all seemed to be giving



Atlas Mountains landscape. Photo by Neal Miller.

contradictory directions! A small army of street vendors waited to shove their fake fossils, cheap necklaces, and other junk in the faces of anyone exiting a vehicle. We managed to get parked and headed towards the snow line. Before we could get to the normal area for the finches we found a flock of Crimson-winged Finches foraging amid the chaos near a group of hawkers and several small donkeys! They flew up onto the roof of a small building where we had ridiculous views of this Atlas Mountains endemic. Extracting ourselves from the parking lot actually took longer than finding the bird! Although Morocco used to be famous for hawkers and other kinds of hasslers, this was really the only place on this trip where we experienced this, providing a taste of the Morocco of old! Thankfully it only took 10 minutes to find our target bird, and we spent the rest of the day away from the teeming masses!



Black Wheatear (left) and Black Redstart (right) in the High Atlas Mountains.

After a morning of successes it was time for lunch at an incredible French restaurant in the village. Plates of fine meat and cheese started us off, main dishes like caramelized pork and duck breast filled us up, and wonderful espresso capped the meal. After lunch we had a few more birds to locate near the town. We started with Black Wheatear and Black Redstart while looking for Rock Petronia on the edge of an ancient ruin. Up the slope we finally located a few Rock Petronias hopping along a rocky cliff face. On the backside of the mountain we enjoyed a confiding Moussier's Redstart. We had seen several earlier in the day but this was our first close view of this

striking bird. It's a fun bird to see, particularly if you always say its name with an exaggerated French accent! A local endemic race of Horned Lark that is particularly pallid, the "Atlas" Horned Lark, was common near the snow line here. With all our high mountain targets located, we headed back down the mountain.

We checked into our castle-like hotel on the floor of the valley and headed out into the adjacent village. Since we already had all our targets in the area, we had time to take a cultural tour. We took in a traditional tea ceremony at the home of a local family, and enjoyed a tour of the town, which included a skilled potter at work. The blend of modern and ancient in Morocco is seductive and fascinating. Even the more hardcore birders in the group were grateful for a chance to glimpse into life in a small Moroccan village.

Day 2: March 16

Our second day was primarily a driving day as we relocated from the Atlas Mountains to the edge of the Sahara Desert. Birding was limited, but we stopped for a few key species and made some opportunistic spots and ended with one of the longest day lists of the trip. Even the driving wasn't too torturous, as the Moroccan landscape is so varied and beautiful. We headed up through a high mountain pass, dropped down into high desert, crossed into the pre-Sahara, then followed a long oasis valley full of date palms before arriving at our



Levillant's Woodpecker, a hefty, good-looking woodpecker found in the montane forests of NW Africa.

destination. It was a good day for people-watching in the numerous little towns we passed through, noting subtle changes in dress and culture as we moved into the more remote southeastern portion of Morocco.



The landscapes on our drive to the edge of the Sahara in southeastern Morocco were spectacular. Photo by Neal Miller.

Right off the bat we located a few Barbary Partridges along the road and turned back to view them. Climbing up into the mountains we made a stop in the pine forest where we got good looks at Short-toed Treecreeper. We enjoyed our first encounter with the iconic European Robin, singing up a storm high in a pine tree.

Levaillant's Woodpecker put on another good show. We chased and finally got good views of Eurasian Jay, quite a scarce bird on this itinerary. We heard many "Atlas" Red Crossbills and finally managed views of a female. At a reservoir on the edge of the town of Ourzazate, we stopped for a picnic lunch. Here views of Great Crested Grebe and Ruddy Shelduck were a delight. A cooperative Woodchat Shrike was another big hit and hinted at the potential of this area as a migrant trap. Both Gray Heron and Little Egret stalked the edges of the lake. Water levels were unusually high, and shorebirds were limited to Little Ringed Plover and Common Greenshank. A distant Eurasian Marsh-Harrier created panic in the Spotless Starlings. A local form of Crested Lark, the "Long-billed" Crested Lark, was also present. A few more migrants were seen, in the form of a few Sedge Warblers and a Eurasian Hoopoe. Our pack lunch was set off by some excellent olives, a staple food in Morocco which is delicious and cheap.

As we passed through Ourzazate we got our first views of White Storks perched on their nests atop the spires of several mosques. Descending into the pre-Sahara we found an area that had recently received rain, expansive green fields awash in yellow flowers. Here we located Desert Lark and Greater Short-toed Lark, but the real show was flock after flock of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse exploded out of the field as far as we could see. In the late afternoon sun, the colors of this gorgeous bird really popped on the birds that flew close to us, some right over our heads. It was dark when we finally arrived at our quaint hotel, on an island in a reservoir on the edge of the Sahara. We all enjoyed the national dish: meat and vegetables cooked in a special dome-shaped crock called a tagine, and gratefully when to bed.



The tagine, Morocco's national dish.
Photo by Neal Miller.



Pin-tailed Sandgrouse on the edge of the Sahara.

Day 3: March 17

Our third morning started by birding some of the trees around our hotel, a well-known migrant trap, before breakfast. Despite strong winds, we scored Common Chiffchaff, Western Bonelli's Warbler, and Willow Warbler, a nice haul of drab greenish birds. After breakfast we headed out with a local guide in a couple of 4x4s to explore the Sahara. The small lake that surrounds the hotel held Kentish, Common

Ringed, and Little Ringed plovers, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, and more Ruddy Shelducks. A bit farther into the desert we stopped to look for sandgrouse but instead found a Tawny Pipit, a large pipit that makes up for its drab coloration with a regal bearing. Our next sandgrouse search was more productive; we found a small group of Spotted Sandgrouse that allowed close approach. We all marveled at the complexity and beauty of their plumage, while the photographers in the group clicked happily. Next we tracked down one of the major highlight birds of the trip, the elegantly beautiful Cream-colored Courser. This pale shorebird has a delicate curved bill, upright and alert posture, and is supremely adapted to life in the desert. We watched a pair for a while until they tired of us and took to the air.



The Sahara Desert is on most travellers' "bucket list", and for good reason.

We had already heard distantly and briefly seen Greater Hoopoe-Lark, but now we got the full experience. Hoopoe-larks look like fairly unassuming birds, but when they take off they flash black and white wings, similar in pattern to those of a Willet. Those wings are shown off in an

awesome flight display where they fly straight up, flip upside down, then dive back to the desert floor. While this is going on, the bird is uttering a ringing song made up of a clear note on varying pitch that is certainly a contender for most unique bird song on earth. The whole group watched in awe as we enjoyed a Greater Hoopoe-Lark doing its best to impress.



Greater Hoopoe-Lark, both in its aerial display flight and on the ground.

After the lark, our next target, African Desert Warbler, might seem drab and boring from its representation in a field guide. It is, however, one of those birds that field guides really don't capture well, but which carries its own charm. For this reason we were eager to find it, and after several attempts we did find a highly cooperative African Desert Warbler. Everyone enjoyed the antics of this tiny desert specialist, but we had more to see so we loaded back up on the 4x4s and continued. We quickly were sidetracked by an attractive male Desert Wheatear that was singing up a storm from atop a small bush. Soon after, one of the jeeps got stuck in the sand but we pushed it out quickly and drove on. In the distance a figure loomed on the side of the road, a turban-wrapped Bedouin standing patiently in the desert. It turned out that our local guide had enlisted the help of a Bedouin friend to track down a special bird for us. He had come out into the desert predawn and followed an Egyptian Nightjar to its daytime roost, then waited for our group to show up. He led us off into the desert and commandeered a scope to put on the nightjar. There it was! Egyptian Nightjar in the flesh and so camouflaged that if we hadn't had someone with us who

knew exactly where it was, we would have had no hope of finding it! It was wonderful to get fantastic looks at this scarce, nearly mythical species. The next bird we sought was another of these drab, desert adapted species that looks underwhelming in the field guide, but with African Desert Warbler and Greater Hoopoe-Lark so far exceeding expectation, much was expected of Bar-tailed Lark. It turned out that the Bar-tailed Lark is exactly as advertised: it's a dull tan lark with a bar on its tail! We had great looks at it but in comparison to some of the sexier Sahara species it was a bit of a letdown.



Cream-coloured Courser doing some coursing.

We had one more desert species to track down before lunch so we were back in the 4x4s headed to a nearby settlement. Desert Sparrow was the object of our desire, a frosty gray relative of the House Sparrow that dwells in the desert. It was formerly common in this region, but is now quite scarce because of an incursion of House Sparrows that are out-competing them for food and nest sites. Soon after arriving at our stakeout location a male flew over. We chased it but only managed looks at the oh-so-drab female. Our next stop was a bit more successful and everyone

saw both male and female, though the male was a bit shy and didn't spend much time in the open. It was time for lunch and a short break before our afternoon session.



Desert Sparrow in a classically Saharan landscape.

Fed and slightly rested we ventured back out in the afternoon to track down a short list of targets. Our first stop on the edge of a nearby town required some patience and searching, but Ken located our prize, a small band of noisy Fulvous Chatterers. Once located, they put on a show, posing in the open for us. Our next stop was a rock formation famous for its nesting Pharaoh Eagle-Owls. A bit smaller than their northern cousin the Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Pharaoh Eagle-Owl is a much sought-after North African specialty that shares a baleful orange-eyed stare with its better-known congener. A Lanner Falcon pair was also nesting on the same rock formation and we were eager to see them as well. Initially we saw a formidable cliff face, a few White-tailed Wheatears, and dozens of cracks and crevasses that could hide an owl looking to escape the afternoon sun. We could see the whitewash under the ledge that the Lanner Falcons were using, and suspected that the female was sitting on eggs, but she was hidden as well. After a lengthy wait the male Lanner



Fulvous Babbler in a date palm oasis.

Falcon came screaming in to the cliff with prey and, sure enough, the female popped into view and landed on the top of the cliff next to the male and began consuming his offering. We all enjoyed scope views of both birds as feathers from some unlucky and unidentified bird rained down. At this point the shadows were lengthening and we had a choice to make; should we stay and wait to see if the eagle-owl would make an appearance at dusk or try another spot for it. We decided to try another spot, so off we went. The alternate spot was another towering cliff face, even more imposing than the one we had just left. Our local guide almost immediately spotted a Pharaoh Eagle-Owl guarding the entrance to a deep black crevasse. Viewing this regal bird as its haughty orange eyes evaluated the growing darkness was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip. The sun sinking into distant sand dunes lined with spreading palms added the final touch of “Sahara” to a near-perfect day in the desert.



Male Desert Wheatear, a migrant that had recently returned to Morocco.

Day 4: March 18

After three days of going pretty hard we started the fourth day of the tour a bit more casually, birding the scrubby trees and the lake that surrounds our hotel. We saw many of the same warblers as the day before but new were a number of Subalpine Warblers, along with a few Sedge Warblers, and a single Eurasian Reed-Warbler. We also saw a few Eurasian Hoopoes, a species that never fails to delight. We also spent more time looking at the lake than on the prior day and were able to add Little Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Eurasian Moorhen, Eurasian



Ruddy Shelducks are found on desert lakes.

Coot, and had a Common House-Martin flashing its white rump as it picked off insects attracted to the lake. By mid-morning we were packed and on the road again. We drove several hours but stopped to view the spectacular Todra Gorge and have lunch. A road parallels the rushing stream that cuts through the middle of this gorge, which is dark and cool, with bastions of solid rock



Little Ringed Plover is another common species of desert lakes, among other habitats in Morocco.

looming 1500 feet above you. It is at least as spectacular as the most impressive canyons in the American southwest. “Breathtaking” barely does justice to this stunning work of geology and time. We had lunch on the patio of a quiet café near the entrance to the gorge. From here we could see REAL Rock Pigeons nesting on ledges of the gorge. Not your typical park

pigeon, but real wild stock whose ancestors have probably nested on the same ledges for thousands of years. What do they look like? Like a pigeon. We also got much better looks at a male Blue Rock-Thrush sitting in the open. In keeping with the low-key theme of the day we then went to our hotel near Boumalne de Dades and rested for a bit before heading out to explore the famous Tadjilt Track.



The Tondra oasis is beautiful, and the gorge of the same name is truly spectacular.

The Tadjilt Track is an inconspicuous dirt two-track road that runs through a productive stretch of high desert in a valley surrounded by snow-capped peaks. It is hallowed ground for European birders who have come here for years to seek scarce larks. It would be quite beautiful if it didn't also serve as the dump for the city. In places, every bush is draped with one or more plastic bags! Apparently larks like trash though, since some of the toughest birds are found in the

midst of the worst of the trash. Arriving at the Tadmilt Track we immediately found several Red-rumped Wheatears and got great looks at Temminck's Lark, a Tadmilt specialty which looks like a Horned Lark with a gingery wash and longer horns. We also turned up a few Thekla Larks, a near-twin of Crested Lark. Those were destined to be the only birds we added that evening, though we also had the next morning to look for more.

Day 5: March 19

This day was another driving day as we relocated from Bourmalne de Dades to the coastal city of Agadir, but first we had a few more birds to locate at the Tadmilt Track. Morning dawned quite chilly. It took a while but finally we teased out a pair of Thick-billed Larks,



A pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse on the Tadmilt Track.

another highly sought-after specialty. Black-bellied Sandgrouse also eventually showed itself, and a Long-legged Buzzard joined the mix as well. Our targets acquired, we launched into the long haul to the coast. By and large, the drive consisted of few birds and lots of watching the Moroccan countryside pass by, but we did stop to view a large flock of swifts and swallows that were feeding right alongside the road. Hundreds of Common Swifts along with a few Pallid Swifts and even a couple jaw-dropping Alpine Swifts fed in a huge ball, some just above our heads, with Barn Swallows and Common House-Martins mixed in as well. Closer to Agadir we stopped and picked up Western Orphean Warbler, a species that had only recently returned to its breeding grounds. Arriving in the coastal resort city of Agadir, we saw Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls before dinner and some well-deserved rest.



Black-crowned Tchagra is the only member of the bush-shrike family in northern Africa.

Day 6: March 20

For fans of shorebirds and waterbirds, day six began with one of the most fun locations of the entire tour, a site just outside the Sous-Massa National Park. This spot is a flooded farm field that draws shorebirds and ducks like a magnet. When we arrived it was hard to know where to look first... there were Black-winged Stilts

walking all about on their long pink legs... both Common and Spotted Redshank fed side-by-side with Wood and Green Sandpipers, and hulking Ruffs and trimmer Reeves (female Ruffs) trotted through marsh grasses, picking at any exposed mud they could find. Then one of the key species broke from cover, a whole flock of 80+ Marbled Ducks took to the air then landed again! A fantastic number for a species that is often tough to find. They were not the only duck; Mallard, Northern Shoveler, and Gadwall were also in attendance. A Water Rail periodically stepped from cover and could be viewed in the scope by those who were lucky and fast. A Squacco Heron took flight on the other side of the pond showing its white wings before disappearing back into the marsh. Eurasian Spoonbills were sweeping the water with their spatulate bills, their shaggy, punk rock crests waving. A Common Sandpiper shook and shimmered as it flushed from its favorite island. A bit farther away Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers fed on a muddy bar. A few Common Snipe emerged from their grassy hiding place to give good views in the scope. The bonanza wasn't limited to waterbirds either: Zittings Cisticolas zitted from atop many of the small bushes. Ken and the sharp-eyed few that were with him saw a migrant Common Cuckoo zip past while

Cameron had a Common Kingfisher do the same. Black-crowned Tchagra was heard and eventually tracked down. Our first Corn Buntings of the trip serenaded us. It was an onslaught of new birds that left your head spinning! This was the icing though, and next it was time to go find our cake...



Waldrapp or Northern Bald Ibis, perhaps the top bird of any Morocco birding tour.

More than the food, the incredible scenery, the Crimson-winged Finches, the Hoopoe-Larks, one bird drives birders to Morocco, the endangered Waldrapp (also known as Northern Bald-Ibis). It nests on sheer coastal cliffs, but in the daytime can be found foraging in dry, low desert habitat near the coast. We ventured out into this sparse, scrubby habitat keeping our eye peeled for distant dark shapes. Eventually, after climbing several hills to scan the horizon, we spotted a pair and hurried down the road to get closer. We managed to sneak close enough for excellent views in the scope. Northern Bald Ibis is one of those birds that is so bizarre that it is hard to believe they exist! They are short and squat but quite large with a bald pink head and dark plumage that shows iridescent purple in the right light. Perhaps the oddest feature is the long, loose feathers on



We spotted this Little Owl in broad daylight – always a treat.

fortunate to spot a Little Owl sitting on a fence post: great looks at this small, charming, largely diurnal owl.

A local restaurant was grilling some fresh-caught fish for us, but as we waited for lunch we had time to do some seawatching. Sandwich Terns were migrating north in a steady trickle, rarely were there fewer than 5-10 visible at one time. Farther out a number of Northern Gannets were doing the same, and eventually we had a few come in close enough that all could see them well. A few distant Cory's Shearwaters added to our tally. Carefully scanning from Ken eventually netted a Great Skua powering its way north. After seeing the skua, the Pomarine Jaeger that passed next seemed but a child's toy! Plenty of Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls patrolled that coast and a few Audouin's Gulls were seen as well. The sea-watching was fun, but no one complained much about having to give it up as we were sitting down to fresh-grilled fish and vegetables! After lunch we headed to a riparian spot nearby where we were able to draw the notoriously skulky Cetti's Warbler out into the open where all could see it well. European

the nape that are constantly bobbing and waving as the birds vigorously dig at the ground with their long, curved bills. There is a lot to take in when viewing a bald ibis, and we made sure everyone had time to see it all before heading out. The habitat preferred by the ibis is also loaded with Lesser Short-toed Larks, and while we had seen them before, here they were singing and displaying everywhere, and good looks were easily had. Leaving this area we were

Stonechat teed up for good views next. Then we had knee-weakening views of another Black-crowned Tchagra, a bird that can be tough in Morocco. Our clean up of “better view desired” birds continued when we got a Eurasian Reed-Warbler to come in. Once again we had tallied all our target birds earlier than expected and headed back to Agadir for a bit of a break.



Coastal birding in Morocco is excellent for a bounty of gulls, terns, shorebirds, and migrating passerines. Here a small flock of Audouin's Gulls takes to the wing.

In the late afternoon we ventured out to the Sous River Estuary. We began sorting through the flocks of gulls and terns that included hoards of Old World Sandwich Terns and a few new species as well. More than a hundred Mediterranean Gulls in a variety of plumages were loafing on the sand on the opposite side of the river, occasionally taking flight and showing nearly white wings. Several Gull-billed Terns stood amid a group of Sandwich Terns. Ken picked out two rare gulls: an immature Little Gull and a Mew Gull. There were large numbers of loafing Great Cormorants including several of the highly ornate Moroccan subspecies. Here we also got our first views of the striking Pied Avocet. Many Eurasian Curlews strutted along the banks of the river, and we had stunning looks at Eurasian Oystercatcher as well. A Peregrine Falcon was patrolling, looking for its chance to nab one of these tasty shorebirds for dinner. A walk onto a mudflat

yielded the unique “Moroccan” White Wagtail and a single female Bar-tailed Godwit, as well as more familiar shorebirds like Sanderling, Dunlin, and Ruddy Turnstone. Back near the parking lot we waited in the growing darkness hoping to encounter Red-necked Nightjar. Suddenly a large dark bird flashed past us! A quickly wielded flashlight showed it to be a Long-eared Owl, an unexpected bonus bird. We heard the nightjar very distantly but we could not entice it to come closer.



Moussier's Redstart is a northwestern African endemic, and a great-looking bird.

Day 7: March 21

On our last full day in Morocco we once again spent some time at the Sous River Estuary. Many of the birds we had seen on the previous day were still present, but we found a group of over 25 Eurasian Thick-knees. The group enjoyed the staring yellow eyes and haunting cries of this group of odd shorebirds. We birded the estuary for a while longer, enjoying our last views of

Old World birds, but soon we were preparing to head back to Marrakesh for the final evening of the tour. However, as we were leaving, Cameron and the last few members of the group spotted three Slender-billed Gulls, a scarce species in Morocco, flying up the river. The rest of the group was alerted, and a concentrated search amid a light drizzle commenced. Finally the Slender-billed Gulls were seen distantly by most of the group. Unfortunately they were headed back out to the ocean and the search came to an end. We had a date with the night markets in Marrakesh so we headed for the capital city via a beautiful new toll road.



Piles of delicious sweets in the souks of Marrakesh. Photo by Neal Miller.

The street markets of Marrakesh are world-famous, filled with street performers, food stalls, snake charmers, and goods of every kind from the cheap and cheesy to the the ornate and beautiful. The flow of people and traffic is unbelievable, and crossing streets is an act of faith and courage! Our group worked into the main square and and watched several musicians before exploring some of the narrow alleys lined with small shops. Moroccan spices, traditional clothing,

ornamental daggers, and other trinkets to catch the eye of tourists fill these tiny shops from floor to ceiling. People from all over the world were here to take in the spectacle, and numerous languages could be heard. While we were in the Souk the evening call to pray sounded from the speakers mounted on the outside of every mosque. As the sonorous chant echoed through the alleys, a stream of people headed immediately towards the entrance of every mosque. Suddenly the market seemed half empty and most of those that remained were clearly not locals. We ended our evening at a restaurant overlooking the main square where people milled and gathered in knots around various street performers.

Day 8: March 22

The plan for our last morning in Morocco was to relax before heading to the airport, but we did manage to locate a European Linnet, a common finch that had somehow eluded us to this point. The linnet capped an exciting, colorful, and bird-filled jaunt through Morocco.



Marrakesh night market. One of Morocco's most famous landmarks. Photo by Neal Miller.

PHOTO GALLERY



"Long-billed" Crested Lark may be split in the future.



Eurasian Collared-Dove is abundant in Morocco.



Yellow-billed or Alpine (left) and Red-billed (right) Choughs are common around Oukaïmeden.



Ancient terracing scores the Atlas Mountains.



African Desert Warbler in the dunes of Erg Chebbi.



Moussier's Redstart. It's just fun to say "Moussier"!



Intense scanning for sandgrouse on the Tagdilt Track. Photo by Neal Miller.



Sardinian Warbler (left) and Spotless Starling (right), both common birds along the coast around Agadir.



Birds of the Atlas Mountains: Levaillant's Woodpecker (left) and Firecrest (right).



Greater Hoopoe-Lark showing off its spectacular wing pattern.



House Bunting is one of the most common birds in Morocco.



Atlas Mountains scenery. Photo by Neal Miller.



Rock Petronia is a high-elevation specialist.



Greater Short-toed Lark was abundant south of the Atlas Mountains.



Cirl Bunting (left) and Lesser Short-toed Lark with a bouffant (right)!



Just driving around Morocco is a rich cultural experience. Photo by Neal Miller.



Zitting Cisticola is the most widespread member of this mainly African bird family.



Lush valley in the High Atlas Mountains. Photo by Neal Miller.



"Atlas" Horned Lark feeding on a snow drift.



The incredibly cryptic Egyptian Nightjar.



The elegant Cream-coloured Courser.



A whole flock of the rare Marbled Duck, on the coast south of Agadir.



Thick-billed Lark is a specialty bird of the Tagdilt Track.



Comfortable hotels with lots of character are typical of this Morocco tour. Photo by Neal Miller.

BIRD LIST

Taxonomy and nomenclature follow *The Clements Checklist of the Birds of the World 6.9* (including updates through October, 2014).

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae			
	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	
V	Marbled Teal	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	
GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae			
	Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>	
	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	H
PODICIPEDIFORMES: Podicipedidae			
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	
PROCELLARIIFORMES: Procellariidae			
	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	
CICONIIFORMES: Ciconiidae			
	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	
SULIFORMES: Sulidae			
	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	
SULIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae			
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
PELECANIFORMES: Ardeidae			
	Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	
	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	
	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	
PELECANIFORMES: Threskiornithidae			
	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	
BE CR	Waldrapp (Northern Bald Ibis)	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>	
	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	
ACCIPITRIFORMES: Accipitridae			
	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	NL
	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	
	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>	G
	Eurasian Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	
	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	
	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	
GRUIFORMES: Rallidae			
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	
	Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	

	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Burhinidae			
	Eurasian Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Recurvirostridae			
	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Haematopodidae			
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae			
	Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	
	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	
	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	
	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae			
	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	
	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	
	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	
	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	
NT	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	
	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	
	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	
	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	
	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Glareolidae			
	Cream-colored Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Stercorariidae			
	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	
	Pomarine Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	
CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae			
	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	
	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	
	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	
NT	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>	
	Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	
	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	
	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	
	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	
	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	

	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	
PTEROCLIFORMES: Pteroclididae			
	Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>	
	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	
	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>	
COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae			
	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	
	Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	
	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	
	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	
CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae			
	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	
STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae			
	Pharaoh Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>	
	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	
	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	
CAPRIMULGIFORMES: Caprimulgidae			
	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	H
	Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>	
APODIFORMES: Apodidae			
	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	
	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	
	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	
	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	
CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae			
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	G
CORACIIFORMES: Upupidae			
	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	
PICIFORMES: Picidae			
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	
	Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	
FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae			
	Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	
	Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	
	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	
	Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Malaconotidae			
	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae			
	Southern Gray Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	
	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae			
	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	
	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	
	Yellow-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	
	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	

	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Alaudidae			
	Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	
	Bar-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	
	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	
	Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>	
	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	
	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	
	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	
	["Long-billed" Crested Lark]	<i>Galarida c. riggenbachi</i>	
	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	
	"Atlas" Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris atlas</i>	
	Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae			
	Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	
	Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	
	Common House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Paridae			
	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>	
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	
	African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Certhiidae			
	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Troglodytidae			
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Cinclidae			
	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Pycnonotidae			
	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Regulidae			
	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Cettiidae			
	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Phylloscopidae			
	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	
	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Acrocephalidae			
	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	
	Eurasian Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Cisticolidae			
	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Sylviidae			
	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	
	Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	
	Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	

	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	
	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	
	African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>	
	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Leiothrichidae			
	Fulvous Chatterer	<i>Turdoides fulva</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Muscicapidae			
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	
	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	
	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	
	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	
	Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	
	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	
	White-tailed (White-crowned) Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	
	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	
	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	
	Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	
	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae			
	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae			
	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Prunellidae			
	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae			
	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	
	Gray Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	
	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
	["Moroccan" White Wagtail]	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	
	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae			
	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	
	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	
	House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	
	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae			
	"African" Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>	
	Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguineus</i>	
	Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	
	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	
	"Atlas" Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra polioygna</i>	
	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	
	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	
	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae			

	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	
	Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>	
	Rock Petronia	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	

CR - Critically endangered

BE - Breeding endemic

NT - Near-threatened

VU – Vulnerable

[brackets] = a taxon not split in the Clements list

MAMMAL LIST

Barbary Ground Squirrel	<i>Atlantoxerus getulus</i>
Lesser Egyptian Jerboa	<i>Jaculus jaculus</i>

REPTILE LIST

Andalusian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis vaucheri</i>
Fringe-fingered Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus longipes / dumerilii</i>
Atlas Day Gecko	<i>Quedenfeldtia trachyblepharus</i>
Stripe-necked Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>



Sunset in the Sahara.