



## Southern Morocco

**Dates: 7th - 18th March 2020**

This classic tour takes in all the key sites of southern Morocco from the coast around Agadir, to the edge of the Sahara Desert at Merzouga and the High Atlas at Oukaimeden. Although this is not a photographic holiday there will be many opportunities to capture images of the superb birdlife and the stunning scenery.



We begin on the coast around Agadir where we'll explore around Tamri and Cape Rhir which is an excellent area to find the endangered Bald Ibis. The Moroccan population of this charismatic bird was until recently the only viable, wild population in the world although there is now a small introduced population in southern Spain. It still teeters precariously near to extinction and is one of the prize birds to be found in Morocco. The river running through the village of Tamri to the coast is also good for gulls and terns and you could expect to see various species including Audouin's Gull. On the southern side of Agadir lies the Souss-Massa National Park with the mouth of the Oued Souss entering the Atlantic just south of Agadir. The estuary here is excellent for waders, terns and gulls and a nice selection of species should be found including Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Slender-billed Gulls amongst many others. The Royal Palace nearby is also a site for Red-necked Nightjar which may be found on sandy tracks at dusk. A little further south lies the Oued Massa where we should be able to find more waterbirds as well as Black-crowned Tchagra, Moussier's Redstart, Barbary Partridge and various migrants. Other birds should include Black-shouldered Kite, Southern Grey Shrike and Little Swift amongst many others.



Leaving the coast we head inland along the Souss Valley towards Taliouine, passing throughout a variety of habitats including argana forest as well as orchards and cultivated areas that should provide a good selection of birds including Long-legged Buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, Booted Eagle, Hoopoe, Southern Grey Shrike, Black-eared Wheatear and Great Spotted Cuckoo. As we continue across the desert areas we're likely to pick up various larks including Desert Lark, Short-toed Lark and Thekla Lark, Wheatears will also feature including Desert Wheatear, Black-eared Wheatear and Seebohm's Wheatear whilst Cream-coloured Courser and Trumpeter Finch can also be found. Any wet areas are certainly worth a stop along our route as they provide a life line for north bound migrants. These could include many warblers such as Bonelli's Warbler, Orphean Warbler and Subalpine Warbler as well as Nightingale, Woodchat Shrike, Yellow Wagtails and various herons. Coming across terns, waders and maybe crakes along rivers in the midst of an inland desert region is incredibly exciting as we get an inclination of what these birds go through to reach Europe from their wintering grounds further south.



We pass through Ouarzazate and on to Boulmane du Dades where we'll explore the famous Tagdilt Track. The area is excellent for certain desert species such as Temminck's Horned Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Red-rumped Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Cream-coloured Courser as well as both Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. Lanner Falcon and Long-legged Buzzard may also be seen whilst a small orchard to the south often holds migrant warblers and chats. A little further east we'll visit the spectacular Todra Gorge where we should hopefully spot Bonelli's Eagle as well as the resident Blue Rock Thrush and Moussier's Redstart. Cultivated areas will also hold migrants such as Nightingale and various warblers whilst a walk along the gorge will provide us with opportunities to photograph House Bunting as well as various wheatears and larks. From here we'll make our way to the far south-east of the country and the stunning Erg Chebbi sand dune on the edge of the Sahara. The whole area between Merzouga - Rissani and Erfoud holds a mouth-watering array of birds

including Egyptian Nightjar, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater(possibly a little early for this), Crowned Sandgrouse, Spotted Sandgrouse, Barbary Falcon ( race of Peregrine), Desert Sparrow, Desert Warbler, Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Fulvous Babbler, Brown-necked Raven and many more larks and wheatears.



We leave the south-east and make our way back towards the High Atlas stopping at sites for Mahgreb Wheatear on route. We wind our way up to the Tizi-n-Tichka pass which lies at 2,260m and the high point on the way to Oukaimeden. Stops along the route should produce migrants as well as Levaillant's Woodpecker which is fairly common in the area along with the local race of Great Spotted Woodpecker. Continuing on we'll reach the ski resort at Oukaimeden which may well still hold plenty of snow at this time of year and is very busy at weekends with day trippers from Marrakech. This is our last hot spot for Moroccan specialities which should include Crimson-winged Finch and Atlas Horned Lark as well as Rock Sparrow, Rock Bunting, Alpine Accentor, Seebohm's Wheatear, Alpine Chough and Golden Eagle. Finally we'll end this exciting tour of southern Morocco with our last night in Marrakech before flying home.

#### **Itinerary:**

7<sup>th</sup> March: Arrive Agadir and head to hotel.

8<sup>th</sup> March: Conservation initiatives have helped bring Bald Ibis back from the brink of extinction and although they're not common we should be able to locate this rare bird on our first full day at the mouth of the Oued Tinkert in Tamri. This is an excellent site for the latter species but also a number of other birds including Stone Curlew, Audouin's Gull and terns whilst the surrounding scrub should hold various migrant warblers and chats. Later in the day we'll head to the Sous-Massa National Park and concentrate on the mouth of the Oued Souss which lies just south of Agadir. This is a great site for waders, gulls and terns and you could expect to see Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Slender-billed Gull, Gull-billed Tern and Whiskered Tern amongst many others. We may also find Red-necked Nightjar in the area around dusk.

9<sup>th</sup> March: We'll spend the day exploring the Sous-Massa National Park, starting along the Oued Massa where we we'll be looking for Black-crowned Tchagra and Plain Martin (2 specialities of the area). Neither is guaranteed but with patience and some persistence we should be able to locate them. Other birds here include the Moroccan race of Cormorant, Quail, Barbary Partridge, Black-shouldered Kite, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Western Subalpine Warbler, Moussier's Redstart as

well as various herons, terns and waders. We should also pick up Little Swift, Pallid Swift and Red-rumped Swallow during the day on our way to and from Agadir.

10<sup>th</sup> March: This will be the biggest travel day as we make our way to Ouarzazate although we will have quite a few stops on route where we'll explore any rivers for migrants which could include a diverse array of birds such as Little Crake, Nightingale, Hoopoe, Turtle Dove, Western Bonelli's Warbler and Western Subalpine Warbler amongst many other northbound birds. We'll also stop in desert regions where we have a good chance of locating Cream-coloured Courser, Desert Wheatear, Seebohm's Wheatear, Desert Lark, Short-toed Lark, Trumpeter Finch and Lanner Falcon. We may also encounter north bound raptors such as Black Kite and Montagu's Harrier as we make our way to Ouarzazate (the 'door to the desert').

11<sup>th</sup> March: A much shorter day of travel today will see us birding on the edge of Ouarzazate at Barrage el Mansour which is just east of town. We'll take a look down various tracks leading towards the water's edge where we should find a variety of waders, herons and small numbers of wildfowl. The scrub could hold migrants such as Orphean Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, Black-eared Wheatear and possibly crakes on the edge of small wadis. We'll continue east to Boulmane du Dades where we'll be staying overnight. On the edge of town is the famous Tagdilt Track which crosses an area of stony desert / steppe and is good for desert birds, in particular larks and wheatears which may include Red-rumped Wheatear, White-crowned Black Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Thick-billed Lark, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Temminck's Lark, Hoopoe Lark and Bar-tailed Lark. We've also got a chance of picking up Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse as well as Cream-coloured Courser and Lanner Falcon.

12<sup>th</sup> March: We'll have an early morning look along the Tagdilt Track for sandgrouse and anything we may have missed the previous evening before moving on to the Todra Gorge. The approach from Tinerhir passes some of the most scenic date palm groves in the whole country and offers a superb backdrop as we wind our way to the start of the gorge. Bonelli's Eagle is a strong possibility here whilst Crag Martin, Black Wheatear, Desert Lark and Trsimtram's Warbler are all possible. Any cover should also hold early migrants including various warblers and chats. After a walk along the road through the most dramatic part of the gorge we'll continue on to Merzouga, perched on the edge of the Sahara Desert.

13<sup>th</sup> March: Merzouga is an area of sand dunes, stone desert and palm groves with the latter habitat attracting tired migrants although many of the specialities of the region require us to venture off road. To get into the sandy desert properly we'll hire 4-wheel drive vehicles. This will allow us to catch up with Desert Sparrow, Egyptian Nightjar, Spotted Sandgrouse, Crowned Sandgrouse and Pharaoh Eagle Owl. We'll also have a chance of seeing Blue-cheeked Bee-eater ( a little early in the year for this species) and Scrub Warbler although both can be tricky. There's also an outside chance of Houbara Bustard although due to intense hunting from visiting falconers the numbers have declined almost to the verge of extinction in the area.

14<sup>th</sup> March: Today we'll explore the Merzouga area under our own steam. An early start will allow us to avoid the heat of the day when the bird activity is reduced and heat haze can be a problem. We'll be searching a variety of habitats from the open, stoney desert to wadis and palm groves which will enable us to pick up a wide variety of migrant and resident species. These should include Cream-coloured Courser, Lanner Falcon, Desert Warbler, Tristram's Warbler, Hoopoe Lark, Bar-tailed Lark,

Desert Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Temminck's Lark, White-crowned Black Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Fulvous Babbler and Brown-necked Raven amongst many others.

15<sup>th</sup> March: We'll be leaving Merzouga this morning and heading back towards the High Atlas with an overnight in Ouarzazate. The route takes us through some spectacular scenery and eventually along the upper reaches of the Draa Valley. Palms line the edge of the river and offer shelter to tired migrant birds whilst the river is home to the Moroccan White Wagtail; a very distinctive and attractive sub-species. We also have a chance of locating Rock Martin that breed in a mountain pass shortly before Ouarzazate. We're also likely to see Moussier's Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush and Desert Lark amongst others.

16<sup>th</sup> March: We leave Ouarzazate this morning and begin to wind our way up into the High Atlas although we'll check a number of sites on route including an area not far from our start point where we'll search for Maghreb Wheatear. As we head up into the mountains we'll stop at various roadside locations where there is some cover and cultivation as we're likely to find migrants such as Nightingale, Wryneck, Hoopoe, Bluethroat, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Orphean Warbler as well as various form of Yellow Wagtail and Tree Pipits. We pass over the Tizi-n-Tichka pass leaving the drier south behind to the lush, northern slopes of the Atlas Mountains which will be rich in flowers at this time of year. More migrants will be found on these slopes as well as the Moroccan race of Crossbill and Great Spotted Woodpecker. We overnight in the Atlas Mountains.

17<sup>th</sup> March: We explore the area around the ski resort at Oukaimeden in the High Atlas where area target species include African Crimson-winged Finch, Seebohms Wheatear, Atlas Horned Lark, Rock Sparrow and Alpine Accentor. Other goodies include Rock Bunting, Alpine Chough, Chough and Golden Eagle. On the lower slopes we'll search for Levaillant's Woodpecker, Barbary Partridge, Ultramine Tit and African Chaffinch as well as any migrants that might be around. In the afternoon we'll travel the on to Marrakech for our final evening in Morocco.

18<sup>th</sup> March: After a leisurely breakfast in Marrakech we'll make our way to the airport for flights back to the UK.

**Short list of species:** Bald Ibis, Black-winged Kite, Barbary Falcon, Lanner Falcon, Cream-coloured Courser, Spotted Sandgrouse, Crowned Sandgrouse, Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Red-necked Nightjar, Egyptian Nightjar, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater(possible), Levaillant's Woodpecker, Desert Lark, Bar-tailed Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Moussier's Redstart, Seebohm's Wheatear. Maghreb Wheatear, White-crowned Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Red-rumped Wheatear, Scrub Warbler, African Desert Warbler, Trsitram's Warbler, African Blue Tit, Black-crowned Tchagra, Brown-necked Raven, Desert Sparrow and Crimson-winged Finch.

**Cost:** £1,500 (not including flights). Please note that we fly to Agadir but return from Marrakech.

**Price includes** 11 nights' accommodation, all meals and transport throughout the tour.

**Accommodation:** En-suite rooms provided by a local tour company.

**Transport:** This is provided in an 8-seater minibus with a local, professional driver. 4x4's and a local guide will be used in the desert region around Merzouga.

**Group size:** 7 (maximum)

**Booking:** Please email: [steveduffield70@gmail.com](mailto:steveduffield70@gmail.com) or call Steve on 07867 555971 / 01876 580619

**Where to meet:** If you are leaving from London Gatwick I'll be there to meet you for the flight; otherwise I'll see you in the airport at Agadir where the tour starts. We return to the UK from Marrakech.