

MOROCCO

BIRDS OF MOROCCO

Thick-billed Lark (Al McNee)



TOUR A: Saturday March 20th – Tuesday March 30th
TOUR B: Saturday May 1st – Tuesday May 4th
Leaders: Mohamed Zaki (A & B) and Simon Papps (A)
Birds: 170-200 (A) 90-110 (B)

Although Morocco is mainly known for tourism, it is possibly one of the best birding areas in North Africa and holds many sought after Western Palearctic species that cannot be readily found elsewhere. Our tour takes us into the Atlas Mountains, across high altitude plateaux to the Anti Atlas Mountains, south into the Sahara Desert and west to the Atlantic coast. Tour B is for breeding birds of the High Atlas

Mohamed Zaki is a skilled ornithologist and tracker who has led many tours within Morocco.

TOUR A:

Day 1: We leave London and fly to Marrakech, arriving in late morning. From Marrakech we travel to Oukaimeden checking the Ourika Valley for Barbary Partridge, Red-rumped Swallow, White-throated Dipper and Hawfinch. Two nights at the ski village of Oukaimeden.

Day 2: Today we explore the forests and mountain regions around Oukaimeden. In the village itself we should encounter Alpine Accentor, Horned Lark, Black Redstart, Rock Petronia, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Choughs. A walk in the mountains may reveal Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Crimson-winged Finch and Seebohm's Wheatear. In the afternoon we visit orchards and juniper forests for Levaillant's Woodpecker, Subalpine Warbler, Firecrest, African Blue Tit, and the North African races of Common Chaffinch and White Wagtail.

Day 3: Today we leave Oukaimeden and cross the High Atlas Mountains. Our first stop in the Tawha Forest is a reliable area for the North African race of Long-legged Buzzard and Booted Eagles. On the descent towards Ouarzazate we start to find White-tailed Wheatears and with luck, the localised Mourning Wheatear. Transfer to Boulmane Dades for a two-night stay.

Day 4: An early start as we visit the Plateau d'Anved a large area of stony desert interspersed with areas used for agriculture and farm buildings. The plateau is an important region for desert species - Cream-coloured Courser, Black-bellied



An oasis in the Sahara Desert (Al McNee)

Sandgrouse, Greater and Lesser Short-toed, Desert, Hoopoe, Thick-billed, Thekla and Temminck's Larks. Wheatears in the area include Desert and Red-rumped. In the afternoon, we return to Boulmane Dades and explore an oasis adjacent to the Dades River for migrants.

Day 5: From Boulmane Dades we head towards the impressive Todra Gorge where the steep valley sides attract Bonelli's Eagle, Blue Rock Thrush and Eurasian Crag Martins. As we travel south the scenery changes to a distinct desert habitat. One area with a spring often attracts Spectacled Warbler and family parties of Trumpeter Finches. After passing through the desert town of Erfoud, we check in at an auberge situated within the Sahara Desert for two nights.

Day 6: We leave the auberge this morning and continue into the true Sahara. Our main objective is to locate Houbara

Bustard, Spotted Sandgrouse and African Desert Warblers. Adjacent to the desert are several small villages and seasonal lagoons, the former attracting Brown-necked Ravens and Desert Sparrows. Stands of acacia trees attract numerous migrants here - Black-eared Wheatear, Tawny Pipit, Subalpine, Western Bonelli's and Western Olivaceous Warblers. We end the day at Mgouna Lake, an important area for Greater Flamingo, Black-necked Stilt, Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit and possibly lingering winter ducks. Later in the evening we try for Egyptian Nightjar which occasionally occurs in the auberge grounds.

Day 7: An early start this morning as we head towards Ouarzazate via the town of Rossini. The many oases here attract migrants, Fulvous Babbler and a small population of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. Beyond Rossini we re-enter the desert and visit a cliff face for Desert Eagle Owl

White-crowned Wheatear (Al McNee)



and the localised Brown-necked Raven. One night stay in Ouarzazate.

Day 8: The Iri Valley is our first birding stop and is an important area for raptors and migrants. Raptors regularly seen include Lanner Falcon, Eurasian Hobby, Bonelli's Eagle, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers. Our journey eventually takes us towards the Sousse Valley where we may find Black-shouldered Kite, Common Quail, Thekla Lark, Yellow Wagtail and the attractive North African race of Eurasian Magpie. Transfer to Taroudant for an overnight stay where the city walls harbour colonies of Pallid and Little Swifts.

Day 9: We revisit the Souss Valley and check a hillside for roosting Red-necked Nightjars, Eurasian Thick-knee and migrants using the olive trees. Afterwards, we head northwards along the coast towards Tamri, an area famous for Northern Bald Ibis. In the afternoon, we visit the Sousse River in Agadir, an excellent stop-over point for Collared Pratincole, Kentish Plover, migrant shorebirds, gulls and terns.

Overnight stay in Agadir.

Day 10: An early start this morning as we head to Oued Massa an important wetland south of Agadir. The walk adjacent to Oued Massa may produce Purple and Squacco Herons, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Marbled Duck and a wide range of northward-bound waders. Bushes and scrub attract Black-crowned Tchagra, Eurasian Wryneck and migrant warblers.

Day 11: This morning we do some local birding if time allows before transferring to the airport for our flight back to the UK.

TOUR B:

Day 1: We leave London and fly to Marrakech, arriving in late morning. From Marrakech we drive towards the beautiful Bougmez Valley looking for Southern Grey and Woodchat Shrikes. On the plains we should encounter Montagu's Harrier, European Bee-eater, European Roller, Common Quail, Thekla and Crested Larks and Corn Buntings. As we pass through

woodland habitats near Azilal, Moussier's Redstart and Black Wheatears occur on rocky slopes with bushes. Transfer to an auberge situated within the Bougmez Valley for two nights.

Day 2: A whole day exploring the Bougmez valley with the lower sections dominated by walnut trees. Careful exploration of the walnut orchards should reveal Levaillant's Woodpecker and Eurasian Wryneck whilst White Storks and Rock Petronias breed in and on village buildings. Raptors using the valley include Booted and Golden Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, Lanner, Peregrine and Barbary Falcons and, on occasions, Lammergeier. The orchards attract finches including European Serin. Open areas of fields are used by Red-billed and Yellow-billed Choughs, and rocky slopes and walls host Barbary Partridge, Blue Rock Thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Rock and Cirl Buntings. Fast-flowing streams have Grey Wagtail and White-throated Dippers. Within the gardens and bushes, we may locate Eurasian Hoopoe, Tristram's Warbler, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Common Nightingale and other species. Higher up in the oak and juniper forest, we look for the North African race of Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Nuthatch, Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Spotted and Atlas Flycatchers, the latter being a recent split from Pied Flycatcher.

Day 3: After breakfast we return to Marrakech via the Tirghist Pass home to Crimson-winged Finch, Horned Lark, Seebohm's Wheatear and Common Raven. Transfer to a hotel in Marrakech for the night. After dinner a walk around the old quarter, with its bustling markets and atmosphere, is planned.

Day 4: Transfer to the airport for our morning flight back to London.

Tour Price A: London/London: £1765

Tour Price B: London/London: £945

Tour Price A: Marrakech/Marrakech: £1565

Tour Price B: Marrakech/Marrakech: £795

Single room: £180

Single room: £90

Deposit: £200

Deposit: £150

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation and meals, transport and permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: insurance, baggage and credit card charges (airlines), drinks and items of a personal nature.

Good accommodation throughout Morocco with en-suite facilities. Picnic lunches. Evening meals based on Moroccan cuisine.

Transport by minibus and 4x4 vehicles in the south. Short walks over hilly terrain in the Atlas Mountain range. In the south it is undulating and rocky with sand dunes and scrub. It can be cool in the High Atlas Mountains.