

SOUTHERN MOROCCO



A short holiday and bird tour

February 2–10, 2024

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Introduction

This report contains short notes on our 8 days trip to Southern Morocco with a list of the species of birds that we saw.

We chose Morocco because we wanted to combine an easily accessible destination in Africa with the opportunity to drive part of the trip ourselves. After contact with a couple of guides, we arranged to have an introduction tour with Gayuin Birding Tours starting in Marrakech with one day in the high Atlas Mountains at Oukaimeden and ending in Ouarzazate the next day (2-4 Feb). Hamid was driving and guiding us to the target birds in a very competent manner. We picked up a rented car at Ouarzazate Airport and the rest of the trip we drove ourselves.

Itinerary

(Map showing travel route in the Species List section)

Friday Feb 2. We arrived in Marrakech Airport in the evening. Our guide Hamid greeted us and drove us to Hotel Palais Albahja in a newer part of town for the night. A new species here was the House Bunting.

Saturday Feb 3. In the morning, we left Marrakech and headed for the Atlas Mountains. On the way up to Oukaimeden we stopped to find the Levillant's Woodpecker in a valley with trees and small fields. At Oukaimeden we were met with a big flock of Red-billed and Alpine Chough and on the slopes above the village we found the African Crimson-winged Finch after some search. Moussier's and Black Redstart, Black Wheatear and Rock Sparrow were seen around the houses. On a big stony plateau many Horned Lark were feeding.



African Crimson-winged Finch

The night was spent in Hotel Maqui in Ourika halfway down the mountains.

Sunday Feb 4. After leaving Ourika, we stopped at some places on the north side of the Atlas Mountains, where we saw Thekla's Lark, Desert Lark and White-crowned Wheatear. In the open semi-desert, we had Long-legged Buzzard and Barbary Falcon along the road.



Tizi-n-Tichka, Atlas Mountains

We crossed the Atlas Mountains at Tizi-n-Tichka and followed the main road to Ouarzazate Airport where we got the rented car and said goodbye to Hamid. The next three nights, we stayed in Riad Tama and Spa in the southwestern part of the town.

Monday Feb 5. In a nearly dry river south of the town, 120 White Storks were roosting. We headed for the dam at Barrage el Mansour Eddhabi, but found access closed with guards at the end. So, we turned back and were lucky to find a flock of Trumpeter Finch and Desert Lark mid-way back to the main road.



White Storks



Ruddy Shelduck



Desert Lark

Then we drove through Ouarzazate to the north side of the reservoir. Here, we could get to the shore of the big lake and observe the many waterbirds. Some of them were quite far away, so our telescope was necessary. 95 Greater Flamingo, 100 Great Crested Grebe, 2 Marbled Duck, 9 Ferruginous Duck, 1 Black Stork and 1 Montagu's Harrier are worth mentioning among many others.



Barrage el Mansour Eddhabi

At the riad situated on the edge of the river valley, a big flock of Cattle Egret roosted. Around in the town, we had House Bunting, White-crowned and Black Wheatear, Spanish and House Sparrow, Kestrel and a few pairs of White Stork.

Tuesday Feb 6. We decided to visit the plains of Boumalne Dades, although it is a long drive. This vast area of gravel plain is very impressive when you first turn your back on the horrible landfill with plastic waste everywhere in the area closest to the town. The entire plain is extremely dry, and at first glance it is difficult

to spot any birds. However, during a long drive with many stops along dirt roads, we saw Red-rumped Wheatear, several White-crowned Wheatear and Thekla Lark. Sand Rats were common. We didn't see many birds, but perhaps the reason was an unfortunate combination of winter season and extreme drought.



The plains near Boumalne Dades

Wednesday Feb 7. Today, we had a long drive to Sidi R'bat on the Atlantic coast. The first part was a very scenic route through semi-desert and low mountains. For lunch we stopped at a little stream near Aoulouz. The cliff near-by was nest-site for Barbary Falcon and Blue Rock Thrush, and Grey Wagtail feed in the stream.

Closer to the coast, the landscape became more and more cultivated and more densely populated. Driving became more difficult and slower, but before dark we arrived at Ksar Massa, our stay for the last three nights. We realized that it was out of season – we were the only guests in this big resort right on the beach near the Oued Massa estuary.

Thursday-Friday Feb 8-9. Two days were spend walking the beach and the river and relaxing. The river mouth was closed by big sand dunes, behind which the river formed lagoons and swamps. This area holds a lot of birds, wetland species especially, but also many others.

Many of the birds were winter guests, like the 100 Audouins Gulls roosting on the shore. 7 of these, I could later identify as ringed in Spain (Ebro Delta and Barcelona), the oldest 7 years old. We had impressive 17 species of waders, and 6 species of ducks. Other highlights were Black-crowned Tchagra seen and heard, Red-necked Nightjar sitting under a bush, and 6 Ospreys counted at one time.

We also planned to look for Bald Ibis on the coast north of Sidi R-bat Friday afternoon, but at that time heavy rain hit the area for the rest of the day and we gave up.

Saturday Feb 10. We left Ksar Massa and drove to Agadir Airport, and from there we flew to Copenhagen and home.



Ksar Massa, view from our room



Oued Massa



Audouin's Gulls with Lesser Black-backed Gulls behind



Moussier's Redstart
White-crowned Wheatear

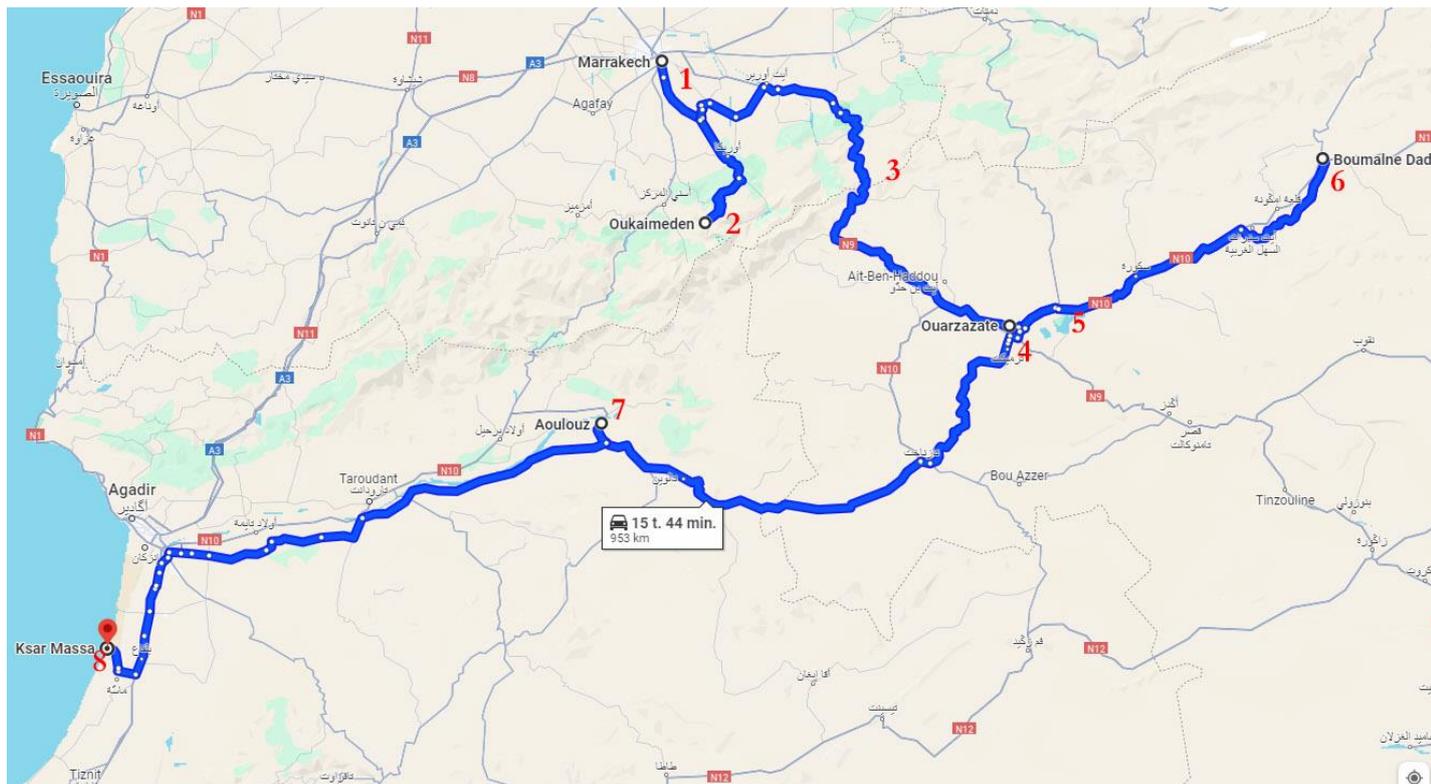


Practical Information

- Air tickets were booked directly at KLM and SAS. Car was rented through Europcar.
- Bird Guide: Gayuin Birding Tours www.gayuin.com
- Riad Tama was booked through Booking.com. Ksar Massa was booked by email (www.ksarmassahotel.com)
- The weather was cool in the high Atlas and else mostly warm and sunny. Only rain one day. Everywhere the landscape was very dry, also in the mountains. The ski-lift at Oukaimeden seem not to have been used for many years.
- We used the Crossbill guidebook “Southern Morocco” by Martin Pitt in planning the trip and it was a great help.
- We used the map from freytag & berndt: Marokko 1:2.000.000 for driving and Google Maps for details.
- Handbook used was Svensson L, Mullarney K and Zetterström D (2012): Fugle i Felten.
- Photos from this tour can be seen here: www.natur-foto.dk , click “Rejser”.
- Contact: bisschop@post6.tele.dk .

Species list

The route in Morocco with locations numbered 1 – 8:



(Google Maps)

1. Marrakech and along the route to Oukaimeden 3 Feb
2. Oukaimeden and surroundings 3 Feb
3. Ourika to Ouarzazate 4 Feb
4. Ouarzazate and surroundings 4-7 Feb
5. Barrage El Mansour Eddahbi, northern shore 5 Feb
6. Tagdilt, Boumalne Dades 6 Feb
7. Aoulouz 7 Feb
8. Ksar Massa and Oued Massa 7-10 Feb

Birds observed in Southern Morocco 2-10 February 2024

English name	Scientific name	Danish name	Location number								
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Curlew	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Krumnæbbet Ryle									4
Sandpiper											
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Sandløber									20
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Almindelig Ryle									20
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Dværgryle									2
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	Splitterne									40
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Hættemåge						50			1
Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaeus audouinii</i>	Audouinmåge									100
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Middelhavssølv måge									50
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Sildemåge									200
Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Almindelig Kjove									2
Pomarine Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	Mellemkjove									?
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Sort Stork						1			
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Hvid Stork				123		1		+	
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	Sule									7
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Skarv						20			30
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Skestork						3			30
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Silkehejre						3			
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Kohejre				25					20
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Sølvhejre						1			
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Fiskehejre									4
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Fiskeørn						1			6
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Rørhøg						1			
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	Hedehøg						1			
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Ørnevåge			1				2		1
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Kirkeugle		1						1	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hærfugl				1					1
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Isfugl									1
Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	Berbergrønspætte	1								
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Tårnfalk	1		2	1				1	2
Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	Berberfalk			1					1	
Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	Krattornskade									3
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Stor Tornskade								1	2
Maghreb Magpie	<i>Pica mauritanica</i>	Maghreb Husskade	+								+
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Alpekrage		+							

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Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax graculus</i>	Alpeallike		+						
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Ravn		2						
Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	Ørkenlærke			+	10				
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	Theklalærke			+			2		1
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Toplærke			+	+10				+
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Bjerglærke		100						
Mediterranean Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala rufescens</i>	Dværglærke								6
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Berber-bulbul	+							+
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Klippesvale						++		+
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Landsvale						++		+
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Bysvale						+		
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Cettisanger								+
Warbler sp	<i>Phylloscopus sp</i>	Sanger sp	+							+
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Cistussanger								+
Warbler sp	<i>Sylvia sp</i>	Sanger sp								+
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	Sorthovedet Sanger								+
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Ensfarvet Stær	+							+
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Solsort	+							+
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Husrødstjert		+	+					
Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	Diademrødstjert		+					2	+
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Blådrossel							3	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Bynkefugl								1
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Sortstrubet Bynkefugl								+
Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>	Berberstenpikker							3	
White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	Hvidkronet Stenpikker			+	4		6		
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	Sørgestenpikker		+	+	2			2	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Stenspurv		+						
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Spansk Spurv				100				+
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Gråspurv				+				+
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Gul Vipstjert						+		+
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Bjergvipstjert							1	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Hvid Vipstjert		1		+	+			+
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Bogfinke	+	1						
African Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys alienus</i>	Atlas-karmoisinfinke		9						
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	Ørkendompap				20				
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Grønirisk	2							

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			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	Tornirisk		+							+
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Gulirisk									4
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Klippeværting		?							
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Gærdeværting	1								
House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	Husværting	2		1	10					+