

Bald Ibis and Coursers

A trip to Agadir, Southern Morocco

15th-22nd March 2010

By Davis Bowman





Hotel Residence Rihab, Agadir

1. Participants: Colin Hume, Doug Hume and David Bowman

2. Introduction

This trip was organised to try and see some of the special birds of Southern Morocco. Personally, I wanted to catch up with four target species: Bald Ibis, Moussiers Redstart, Thick-billed Lark and Cream-coloured Courser. Although the driving distances in Morocco are huge, using Agadir as a base puts sites for all of these within relatively easy reach.

Flights were organised with Ryanair, Liverpool to Agadir and cost £107 per person, return, including all the inevitable add-ons. The Hotel, the Residence Rihab in Agadir, was booked via Expedia and cost £90 per person per week, in a four bedded “apartment”. We liked the hotel, which was clean and exceptionally friendly. It was sparsely occupied but sprang to life in the evenings, as the bar featured a kind of techno-ethnic music, played at loud volumes and which was magnetically attractive to the locals, who poured in to dance the nights away till six in the morning.....which is fine unless you want to be up and out pre-dawn on most days! We were lucky in being given a room at the back of the hotel, looking towards the sea. We spoke to some other guests who weren’t so fortunate and couldn’t sleep for the noise. Breakfast was not included, so we paid 50 Dirhams per day (£4.50) to avail ourselves of the all-you-can-eat buffet. We also regularly tipped Yusuf, the person in charge of the restaurant, who was happy to provide plastic bags and cling-film so that we could load up with food for lunch, as well as to fill all our flasks with hot coffee. Agadir is obviously a major tourist destination and has an expansive beach, backed by a wide promenade, lined with a good variety of restaurants. The Residence Rihab is a ten minute drive from the front, where we ate on most evenings, though the hotel food was also excellent.

Car hire is expensive in Morocco, due to the pot-holed state of the roads. We paid £360 for the week for a Toyota Corolla, booked via Alamo Cars but serviced via Europcar, which served us well. This was almost £100 per week less than we would have paid for a similar vehicle via Ryanair’s provider, Hertz. It is easily possible to find cheaper deals but given the

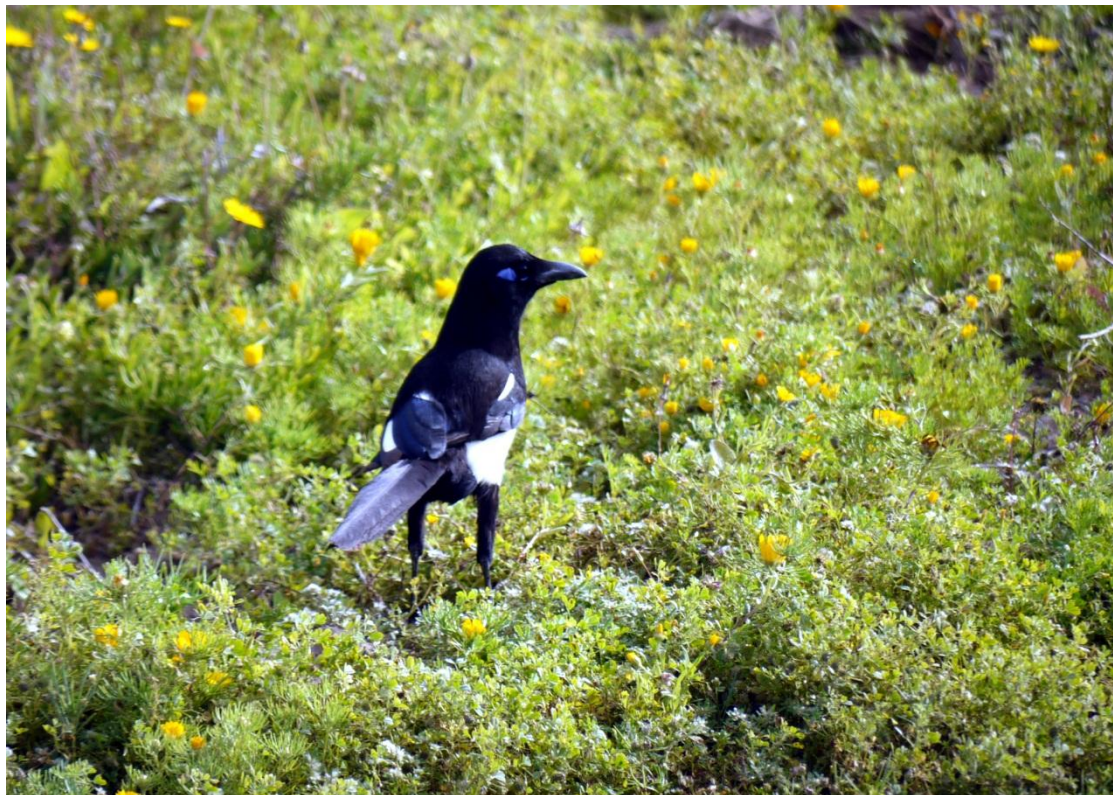
distance off the beaten track we were likely to travel, it just seemed better to have the back-up of a big, reputable (!) organisation.

The weather in mid-March was superb, warm and pleasant in the mornings and evenings, while soaring into the high eighties by mid-afternoon.

3. Day 1 15th March Agadir

We flew from Liverpool at 3.00 pm, arriving punctually in Agadir at 6.45 pm. Pick up of the car went smoothly. We then had trouble changing as much money as we wanted, as the bureau de change was closing as we arrived. This proved not to be a problem as the hotel was happy to change money for us the following morning. There was then the usual, slightly tired but excited attempt to find the hotel in the dark. Agadir Al Massria Airport is some way out of the town and we drove cautiously, having heard and read much about the dangers of Moroccan roads. In retrospect and having driven on various continents, I would say that the reports are somewhat exaggerated. Traffic volume is low, with almost completely empty roads away from the towns, though you do have to keep a wary eye open for cyclists and pedestrians, who are casually suicidal.

Anyway, after circling the town several times and familiarising ourselves with both the commercial and residential areas of Agadir, we finally stumbled on our hotel at around 9.00pm. We were made very welcome, fed and watered and then fell into bed.



Moroccan Magpie in scrub outside the hotel

4. Day 2 16th March Agadir and Oued Souss

I woke just before dawn to see, from the balcony, a clear blue sky and groups of Pallid Swifts swirling round the hotel, while Yellow-legged Gulls streamed over. Grabbing the bins I picked out a singing male House Bunting, perched on the building opposite, while a Common Bulbul sang from an adjacent palm tree.



Common Bulbuls feeding outside hotel balcony

A quick shower and I was outside, discovering that the hotel backed onto a large area of scrub. Lots of common birds were feeding round the edges, including Crested Larks, Spotless Starlings, Common Bulbuls, Collared Doves and Woodpigeons. Best birds found were two more House Buntings, two Woodchat Shrikes and two Moroccan Magpies *mauritanica*. The latter looked very different to our own birds, piratical, with a dashing blue diamond behind the eye.

An hour later, I joined Colin and Doug for an excellent breakfast before we headed off for the Oued Souss. This is one of the top sites in Southern Morocco and is well described in all the guides and field reports. Basically, you turn off the main road south from Agadir a few kilometres out of town, where there is a right turn signed “Golf du Soleil”. This leads to a small junction, with the left turn following the Oued (river) Souss to the east and the main site and the river mouth reached by carrying on to the right. There was a lot of work being done on the track when we arrived, presumably to repair the massive damage done by the unprecedented flooding in the previous weeks.

Initially we parked at the junction to explore the riverside track to the east. We soon met an English birder, who explained that the bridge across a tributary of the Souss, which the track crosses, had been washed away in the rains and that he hadn't been able to get across. Undeterred, we pressed on and scrambled across the stagnant, evil-smelling stream to explore a lovely area of riverside marsh, grassland and scrub. Waders were the main feature, flushing from the damp marshy areas to either side of the track. Little Ringed Plover, Avocet, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilt were some of those seen. In the scrub along the river's edge, warblers were moving through, including Orphean, Iberian Chiffchaff, Sardinian and Isabelline, plus a few Woodchats.

Returning to the car we drove along the very rutted track, stopping only to watch a pair of Moussiers Redstarts giving very close views. Eventually, we reached the guard post by the Royal Palace. We parked there, in the shade and chatted to the Captain of the Guard and his men, which was worth doing as they were very accommodating when we returned, later in the week, to look for red-necked nightjars. Wandering along the track, with the Royal Palace on our right and the marsh on our left, we had great views of a wide range of water-birds. flamingos, Little Egrets and Grey Herons were numerous, with Spoonbills, a wide variety of waders, Zitting Cisticolas and gulls also common. Overhead, 15 Lesser Kestrels drifted northwards, while a few Shoveler and ten Snipe flushed, along with a single Great White Egret.



Stone Curlew at the mouth of the Oued Souss

Carrying on down the track, we reached an area of sand workings, guarded by some soldiers. We spoke to them and were told that we couldn't carry on but could cut across to the shoreline and follow this back to the guard-post. This suited us just fine, as it enabled us to overlook the many wader pools with the sun behind us. As we walked through the sand

workings, towards the beach, we started to flush stone curlews by the dozen. When you reach the river's edge, through the scrub, you see a colossal area of plastic and other debris, thrown up by the tide onto the shore. This was favoured by the Stone Curlews and by the time we reached the edge of the beach, we had flushed more than fifty. Heading back, parallel to the beach, we were able to scrutinise the many wader pools. Greenshank, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Knot, Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Curlew, Dunlin, Kentish Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling and a single Marsh Sandpiper were present.

Returning to the car, we drove back a short distance to where there is a platform over-looking a sandbar in the Souss. Here we had some food and cracked our flasks, while fifty Common Terns crossed the river mouth and 270 White Storks spiralled down to rest on their journey north. Scanning the river and sandbar, we saw many of the species already noted, while a few Swallows passed over, along with four Common Swifts. On the golf-course behind our vantage point, three Moroccan White Wagtails of the sub-species *subpersonata*, fed actively before flying away across the river as dusk approached and we headed back to the hotel.

As we pulled into the road outside the hotel, a Stone Curlew flushed from the road and flew into an adjacent, fenced compound. A few beers and a good meal later and we were falling into bed, looking forward to what the next day would hold.



Female Moussiers Redstart, Oued Souss

5. Day 3 17th March Oued Massa and Oued Souss

We made an early start to try and get to the Oued Massa soon after daybreak, taking with us a hefty packed breakfast and lunch. This area forms the southern boundary of the Souss-Massa National Park, the premier birding site in Morocco. It is a tidal creek, set amongst low, rolling flower-strewn hills and semi-desert. It holds some very special birds. It is a leisurely couple of hours south of Agadir and we soon found ourselves leaving the main road south and cutting coastward towards Massa village. En route we saw several Great Grey Shrikes, Stone Curlew and a heavy northward movement of Swallows. Eventually, the road narrows into a winding narrow but drivable track. To the left the land falls down towards the River Massa, which is bordered on both sides by a patchwork of small-holdings, scrub and reed-beds. Stopping at a convenient pull-off, we jumped out to scan the river and scrub. Immediately, a Cirl Bunting broke into song behind us, while Cetti's and Moustached Warblers were both visible in the reed fringed scrub. Two Marsh Sandpipers flushed from the river's edge and both Turtle and Laughing doves flew by. While we were having a cup of coffee a car stopped and the driver told us that he was a warden at the Massa reserve and urged us to use his services as a guide, guaranteeing us sightings of Cream-coloured Courser, Bald Ibis and Black-headed Bush Shrike. Ever reluctant to use guides, we declined, though in a way which kept our options open (I really didn't want to miss out on the courser again!).

Eventually we wound our way down to the entrance to the reserve, where our friend was waiting for us. A quick chat with Doug and Colin led to a decision to ask him to take us to see the coursers.....bird in the hand etc! In the end it was well worth the money (I think we were so pleased we gave him the equivalent of £10 each, which he was delighted with). He jumped into our car with us and we drove back out the reserve gates and turned immediately left up a steepish, sandy track. I think we then took a right fork, carrying on till we met a narrow metalled road. We couldn't have gone more than a mile or so and were in an area of high, rolling, stony plains, interspersed with wildflowers. He said that coursers were numerous here in winter and that several pairs stayed to breed. After a half hour or so, I saw movement in the distance and as we stalked closer, a pair of coursers flushed and flew back across the road. We weren't able to relocate them and eventually worked our way back up the hill till I saw two birds running ahead of us. This was another pair of coursers and we were able to get brilliant 'scope views of them feeding. At one point we had three birds in the scope at the same time and could see every feather detail. Brilliant!



Doug, Colin and our guide celebrating a successful courser hunt

Returning to the entrance to the reserve, we sat at a picnic table, in the shade of some trees and had our breakfast, while watching a Marsh Harrier hunting over the river bank. Hard-boiled eggs, bread, cheese and sweet cakes with coffee never tasted so good. Eventually, though and despite the rising heat, we set off to walk down the track to the river mouth. This is a wonderful walk in spring, with the smell and colour of wildflowers in profusion and bird-song everywhere.



Wildflower meadow at the Oued Massa

We hadn't gone fifty metres when I heard some swallows alarming. Looking up, a Lanner Falcon was spiralling overhead, before drifting away across the river in pursuit of larger prey. A couple of Glossy Ibis, Woodchats, Linnets, Stonechats, Blackbirds, Common Kestrels, Shoveler, Corn Bunting, Chaffinch, Spectacled Warbler, Goldfinch, Great Tit and Moorhen were among the birds seen. Then a Quail started to call from the flowery slope above the track, so we diverted into this wonderful habitat in the forlorn hope of getting a glimpse. Naturally, we didn't but were rewarded with Subalpine Warbler, and Black-eared Wheatear. Returning to the track we were immediately struck by a once-familiar, mellifluous, fluting call. The bird sang incessantly from some tall bushes on the river side of the track. With patience, Doug eventually got onto it and it sat and sang its heart out for us – a beautiful Black-headed Bush Shrike. Pressing on, we finally came to a semi-abandoned building which serves well as a hide for over-looking the river mouth.

Settling in to this watch-point we set up our scopes to see what we could find. The warden had said that, due to the unprecedented heavy rains in the previous weeks, the water levels in the river were currently unsuited to the large flocks of waders, gulls and terns, which were usually present. While this was undoubtedly true, there was still plenty to see. Three Audouin's Gulls flew up-river. A single Squacco Heron and a Great White Egret were both statuesque on the shoreline, while a Montague's Harrier worked the far bank. Away in the heat haze, towards the river mouth, a large, heavy eagle spooked the Greater Flamingo flock. It was impossible to see any detail but shape and general jizz suggested Tawny Eagle, a bird known to regularly hunt the area. Another Subalpine Warbler passed through the scrub and

Zitting Cisticolas and Cetti's Warblers were both in song. Perhaps most interestingly, a flock of fifty larks, picked up high to the south, dropped down near us and proved to be Lesser Short-toed. With the day drawing on and the bird movement reducing as the mercury rose, we decided to head homewards, aiming to make a stop at the Oued Souss, en route.



Bird “hide” at the Oued Massa

The journey back to the Oued Souss went smoothly and we arrived with a couple of hours of warm, golden light left. We planted ourselves on the lay-by, overlooking the marshy pools and river and squeezed the last dregs from our flasks. An amazing 68 Grey Herons were feeding together, with a spotted redshank stalking through the forest of legs. An Osprey, beating its way north, stopped to catch a large fish and two groups of Black Kites, totalling 45, also passed over. Sparrowhawk and Long-legged Buzzard were other good sightings before hunger drove us home.

6. Day 4 18th March Taroudant and Taliouine

Today we planned to drive inland, down the valley of the River Souss, aiming to stay near Taliouine to search for some of the key desert species. The valley itself is really impressive – a forty mile drive eastward to Taroudant, across a huge alluvial plain, with the High Atlas rising to the north and the Anti Atlas to the south. We pressed on and then stopped for a coffee on the banks of the Oued Souss, just outside Taroudant. Several European Bee-eaters

were hawking over the river, among a cloud of sixty Common Swifts and Great Grey Shrikes were dotted around the scrubby heathland. We had a look at the Gosney guide and identified a rocky hill, on the minor road to Taliouine which forks off to the right just before Taroudant, as a potentially good raptor watch-point. We found it easily enough, a high, rocky flower-strewn outcrop on the right-hand side of the road and were soon striding out for the top. Birds were plentiful, with small groups of Trumpeter Finches feeding among the commoner finches and larks. As we crested the ridge a medium sized falcon drifted alongside at eye level – a really stunning Barbary Falcon, which proceeded to actively hunt the slopes around us. Eventually, we set our scopes to look out over the steppe-like countryside with its scattered Argan dehesa. Black-shouldered Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, Marsh Harrier and numerous Black Kites were the main sightings, while more Trumpeter Finches fed around us and Woodchat Shrikes were ever-present. The views were so stunning and the setting so pretty that it was hard to tear ourselves away but eventually we did, as we were keen to get to the deserts around Taliouine.



Colin, scanning for raptors from our hilltop vantage point near Taroudant

Eventually, the minor road rejoined the N10 to Taliouine and we started thinking about somewhere to stop for the night. A few kilometres short of Taliouine we saw a sign, off to the right, for the Auberge de Targa. It looked an interesting track, down towards a river through stony desert, so we decided to give it a try. The birding was immediately good, with Black Wheatear and best of all, a pair of Thick-billed Larks right at the side of the track. The hotel turned out to be a splendid place to stay, over-looking the Oued Targa and the oasis beyond, with clean and comfortable rooms and great food. We were made very welcome by the manager, Said and were the only guests staying there. The room cost us 60 Euros for a triple with breakfast included. I would highly recommend it as a base for exploring the deserts around Taliouine and contact can be made via the website: www.auberge-targa.tk. Only problem was that the hotel wasn't licensed and we were more than ready for a beer. Said immediately offered to take us to a place where we could buy in some stocks of beer,

jumped in our car and directed us through Taliouine, up beyond the old casbah (castle) and into another, modern, moorish-styled hotel, over-looking the town, the Hotel Ibn Toumert. Having bought our beer, Doug and I sat on the terrace, sipping a cold one, while Colin kindly ran Said back to the Auberge. The birding was good, too, with Blue Rock Thrush in the gardens, alongside hoopoe and house bunting with black wheatear up on the casbah walls. Eventually, Colin returned and we went back to the Auberge and enjoyed a leisurely stroll along the river. While the others were then chilling out, I went for a long walk through the surrounding desert, finding several Desert Larks, lots of Short-toed Larks and Trumpeter Finches. I was back in time to get cleaned up for dinner, which was a superb chicken tagine, washed down by some of our cold beer.



Auberge de Targa, near Taliouine

7. Day 5 19th March Auberge de Targa, Aoulouz Gorge and the High Atlas

Doug and I were up and out early, with Doug heading for a walk along the river, while I tried the stony desert in front of the hotel. I again saw plenty of Trumpeter Finches and Short-toed Larks. Eventually our paths crossed on the river bank where, amongst the many common birds, more Blue Rock Thrushes and Laughing Doves were present. The village across the river was starting to come to life, too, typified by an elderly woman who scampered down the rocky slope, waded the fast-flowing river, filled her pannier with freshly-cut vegetation and made the return journey without pausing for breath.

A few Black Kites were rising early and a single Bonelli's Eagle slid from a ridge, to the north-east and arrowed its way towards us, no doubt intent on hunting the bird-rich oasis across the river. Eventually, we returned to the hotel to pack our things, noting black wheatear and hoopoe along the way.



Old woman crossing the Oued Targa

After a good breakfast we set off to look for the Aoulouz Gorge, which is a known site for both Lanner and Barbary Falcons. Somehow, even though it is a colossal, riverine gorge at the side of the road at Aoulouz, we managed to miss it. Must have been a good bird on the other side of the road when we drove past! As it turned out, this was fortuitous. We ended up driving all the way through Aoulouz and then taking the road up towards Askaou and the reservoirs beyond. Some way up this road we noticed a rough, signed track leading off to the left, which looked interesting. We followed it till it led into an enclosed valley, over-looking a small, picturesque village. We parked and walked up to a small knoll, with pylons on top, which looked like a perfect vantage point. No sooner had we settled ourselves, scopes, food and flasks at the ready, than raptors began to stream through. In an hour and a half, we counted 18 Short-toed Eagles, 13 Booted Eagles, 2 Marsh Harriers, 29 Black Kites, 6 Long-legged Buzzards, 1 Montague's Harrier and 1 Barbary Falcon. In addition, a single large accipiter, crossing the valley away in the distance, was probably a Northern Goshawk.

After an excellent couple of hours, the raptor stream gradually dwindled and we decided to try again for the Aoulouz Gorge. Retracing our steps back down into Aoulouz we drove back

through the small town to the river bridge, which offers great views of the gorge. As we parked and paused for a moment, I noticed movement just ahead of the car and as I lifted my bins an Egyptian Mongoose emerged from cover and bounced jauntily across the road. We all managed to get great views and for Colin and Doug it was a mammal tick. After some scanning of the gorge we decided to take a walk down the riverside track into the gorge itself. Even though it was right in the heat of the day, a few birds were still active, with Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs common, several Common Kestrels overhead, Goldfinches feeding in the little plantations and two Barbary Partridges flushed from close by. Part-way down the track we met a local family, who urged us to climb up the steep river bank, onto their “allotment” where there were “many birds”. Indeed there were and after much socialising and taking of photographs, we eventually ambled back towards the bridge to quench our growing thirsts. En route we managed to add a single Great-spotted Woodpecker to our list, among many common warblers.



Exploring the Aoulouz Gorge

Having missed out on seeing the old town of Taroudant on our way here, we decided to set off and have a break in the town on our return. On the way, movements of Black Kites were regular, with the odd Short-toed Eagle, too. We then saw a sign for the Tizi-n-Test, the dramatic, high mountain pass to Marrakech and were unable to resist a dash up into the High Atlas. The drive was amazing and when we eventually stopped we were rewarded with an unexpected male ring ouzel. With time pressing, we set off homewards, stopping in Taroudant, for coffee and were back in Agadir not long after sunset for another enjoyable walk along the promenade and an excellent meal.

8. Day 6 20th March Cap Rhir and Tamri

The drive north, from Agadir to Tamri, via Cap Rhir, is spectacular and takes a very leisurely couple of hours. It is about thirty miles to the Cap and maybe another twenty to Tamri. The

N1 hugs the coast and offers splendid views of the Atlantic, with the coastal scrub, wind-blown trees and low sea-cliffs offering a stark contrast with the desert landscapes to the south. After a pleasant drive, with a few over-head raptors and roadside camel herds, we pulled in at Cap Rhir for a sea-watch. Unfortunately a fresh, easterly was blowing, carrying any passing seabirds well off-shore. Nevertheless, we were able to pick up a few Cory's and Manx Shearwaters among the more common Gannets. Before long we were ready to head north to Tamri, in search of the enigmatic Bald Ibis. Briefly delayed by a puncture, it was still relatively early when we rolled into Tamri, a ramshackle, one-horse town, built on the Oued Tinkert. We were soon in the safe hands of the little local garage, which quickly sourced an inner-tube and had the tyre fixed in no time. We then headed beyond Tamri, as the Gosney Guide indicated that Bald Ibis were regularly seen from the road, just beyond the town. The road rises and winds beyond Tamri, with the Oued Tinkert dropping away below, on the left, and the Atlantic beyond. After a couple of miles we came to a low, white building on the right, signed as a water treatment centre. Opposite this was a track heading towards the sea. We chose to follow this and were well-rewarded. It leads to a car park, high above a saline lagoon, with the sea beyond. As we reached the car park we saw some large birds stalking round the tussocky vegetation at its margins. Sure enough, they were Bald Ibis! We managed to cruise close enough to get photos of some of the nine individuals which were feeding together.



Bald Ibis at Tamri

After enjoying such great views of the ibis, we decide to head for a viewpoint overlooking the lagoon. A number of wagtails were feeding on the short sward, including White, Yellow (of the Blue-headed variety) and two Moroccan *subpersonata*. We set up our scopes, next to a

little white building which gave some shade from the sun and offered panoramic views over the lagoon. More than fifty Bald Ibis were feeding on the slopes below us and on the lagoon itself we counted: 51 Audouins Gulls, 300 Yellow-legged Gulls, 200 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 2 Ruddy Shelduck and 30 Gull-billed Terns. Overhead, twenty Little Swifts were feeding, alongside six Lesser Kestrels, while a single Raven chased a Common Kestrel all the way across the estuary and seemed to be making a genuine effort to catch it. Over in the distance, a herd of camels were making their way across the dunes, flushing more ibis as they went.



Views over the lagoon at Tamri

After a jaunt down to the lagoon itself – Colin on foot, down the steep, rocky hillside, Doug and I by car, down an attractive, camel strewn track – we headed back to the bridge over the Oued Tinkert at Tamri, to look for the Lanners, which are said to breed on the crags. After a good long watch, we were rewarded with a pair of Barbary Falcons, which displayed over the crag before flying across the river to hunt. Our last stop, before heading back, was to try a site mentioned in Gosney, to the south of the lagoon, just before the road bends to the south. This was an area of boggy ground and scrubby bushes. Although it was now pretty hot, there were still a few birds moving, mainly common warblers with two orpheans among them. Our peaceful wanderings were eventually interrupted by a convoy of off-road vehicles, which roared down the track, throwing up a mushroom cloud of dust. This seemed an appropriate moment to pack in and head for a hot shower, a cold beer, a mountain of couscous and a soft bed.

9. Day 7 21st March Oued Souss

This was our last full day and after a late night and a beer or two more than usual, we decided to have a lazy morning, with lunch on the front in Agadir, before an evening jaunt for red-necked nightjars at the Oued Souss.

We arrived at the watch-point over the river just as the heat of the day was easing and the light was perfect. An unbelievable 68 Grey Herons were feeding in the shallow water, with 40 Redshank moving among them. A minimum of 45 White Storks, 35 Black-winged Stilts, 6 Spotted Redshank, 38 Little Egrets and hundreds of Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were also present. With at least a couple of hours left before dusk, we headed for the track adjacent to the Royal Palace, had a chat with the guards and set off to bird the wetlands at the side of the track. Two Marbled Teal on a small pool were alongside small numbers of Pintail and Mallard. Several Common Snipe and a single Squacco Heron were then flushed with many common waders and Greater Flamingos also moving over the marsh. Away in the distance a flock of 240 Gull-billed Terns came in to roost and we started to notice the first of many Woodchat Shrikes perched prominently. It soon became obvious that there had been a major fall of Woodchats as our tally began to rise. By the time we'd reached the end of the track, where the sand-dunes start, we had counted an amazing 54 of these stunning migrants. Pressing on into the dunes, a number of Stone Curlews and Northern Wheatears were flushed but best of all, a single vagrant Isabelline Wheatear, no doubt drifted across by the persistent easterlies of the past few days, was standing, upright and alert in an area of disturbed ground.

With the light starting to fade and the muezzin starting to call evocatively from the Palace grounds, it was time to go looking for Nightjars. As we passed the sentry post at the end of the track the soldiers were prostrated on their prayer mats, engrossed in their devotions. We knew that Red-necked Nightjars regularly fed on moths attracted to the security lights spaced along the Palace walls. We also knew that, though the guards were fine with us birding the marsh, we had been instructed not to look in the direction of the Palace. As surreptitiously as possible, we casually started to scan the various pools of light. After twenty minutes or so without any luck, I heard the unmistakable sound, like a car's starter motor struggling on a cold day, of a singing male Red-necked Nightjar. Focussing on the direction of the sound we soon saw one swooping through the lights and then flitting back over the Palace wall. Soon several were in song and two were feeding in the lights. After watching them for as long as we thought we could get away with, it was time to head back, for our last night out in Agadir.



Flamingos rising from the Royal Palace marsh at the Oued Souss

10. Day 8 22nd March**The Anti-Atlas Mountains and home**

This was our last day and our flight was due to leave at 7-15 pm. After a bit of a lie-in, a good breakfast and doing our packing, we still had a good part of the day left to enjoy. With all our target species under our belts we decided to have a leisurely cruise through the Anti-Atlas mountains to see what we might find. The answer was some gorgeous scenery, lots of common raptors and migrants and a serene end to a wonderful trip. Best of all was the sight of two Barbary Ground-squirrels at the side of the road, a nice mammal tick to end on. The flight back went smoothly and we all agreed that this was definitely a place to add to our growing list of “places to return to”.



Species List – Birds

No.	Species	Comment
1	<i>Ruddy Shelduck</i>	2 on the lagoon at Tamri
2	<i>Mallard</i>	Small numbers at Massa and Souss
3	<i>Pintail</i>	Small numbers at Massa and Souss
4	<i>Shoveler</i>	2 at Souss
5	<i>Marbled Duck</i>	2 at Souss
6	<i>Barbary Partridge</i>	2 at Aoulouz Gorge, calling at Souss
7	<i>Quail</i>	1 calling at Massa
8	<i>Little Grebe</i>	3 at Massa
9	<i>Manx Shearwater</i>	6 at Cap Rhir
10	<i>Cory's Shearwater</i>	5 at Cap Rhir
11	<i>Northern Gannet</i>	Common at Cap Rhir
12	<i>Moroccan Cormorant</i>	Common at Souss and Massa
13	<i>Moroccan Shag</i>	2 at Cap Rhir
14	<i>Squacco Heron</i>	Singles at Souss and Massa
15	<i>Little Egret</i>	Up to 50 at Souss, fewer at Massa
16	<i>Great Egret</i>	Singles at Souss and Massa
17	<i>Grey Heron</i>	Common at wetlands – max 68 at Souss
18	<i>White Stork</i>	Up to 50 regularly at Souss
19	<i>Glossy Ibis</i>	2 at Massa
20	<i>Bald Ibis</i>	Max 70 at Tamri
21	<i>Eurasian Spoonbill</i>	19 at Souss, 8 at Massa
22	<i>Greater Flamingo</i>	200 at Massa, 50 at Souss
23	<i>Osprey</i>	A single at Massa
24	<i>Tawny Eagle</i>	One, hunting flamingos at Massa
25	<i>Short-toed Eagle</i>	Regular throughout with max 18 near Alououz
26	<i>Booted Eagle</i>	Regular throughout with max 13 near Alououz
27	<i>Bonelli's Eagle</i>	One, hunting the oasis at the Auberge de Targa
28	<i>Black Kite</i>	Common throughout – hundreds daily at most sites
29	<i>Marsh Harrier</i>	Singles at Souss, Mass, Taroudant and Aoulouz
30	<i>Montagu's Harrier</i>	Several in the Souss Valley, one at Massa
31	<i>Long-legged Buzzard</i>	6 at Aoulouz, singles Massa and Souss
32	<i>Sparrowhawk</i>	One at Souss
33	<i>Goshawk</i>	One near Aoulouz
34	<i>Black-winged Kite</i>	One from hilltop near Taroudant
35	<i>Common Kestrel</i>	Common throughout e.g. 6 at Cap Rhir, 8 at Massa
36	<i>Lesser Kestrel</i>	Small flocks most days e.g. 16 at Souss
37	<i>Barbary Falcon</i>	1 hunting near Taroudant, pair at Tamri
38	<i>Lanner Falcon</i>	One mobbed by hirundines at Massa
39	<i>Moorhen</i>	Several at Massa
40	<i>Coot</i>	Small numbers at Massa
41	<i>Oystercatcher</i>	Fairly common at Souss
42	<i>Avocet</i>	Max 14 at Souss
43	<i>Black-winged Stilt</i>	Max 35 at Souss
44	<i>Stone Curlew</i>	Common at Souss – max 50 at Souss
45	<i>Cream-coloured Courser</i>	3 at Massa
46	<i>Little Ringed Plover</i>	Small numbers at Souss
47	<i>Ringed Plover</i>	Max 10 at Souss
48	<i>Kentish Plover</i>	Several at Souss
49	<i>Grey Plover</i>	5 at Souss
50	<i>Lapwing</i>	2 at Souss
51	<i>Knot</i>	3 at Souss
52	<i>Sanderling</i>	Common at Souss
53	<i>Turnstone</i>	10 at Souss

54	<i>Dunlin</i>	<i>Common at Souss, few at Massa</i>
55	<i>Curlew Sandpiper</i>	<i>3 at Souss</i>
56	<i>Wood Sandpiper</i>	<i>Several daily at Souss</i>
57	<i>Green Sandpiper</i>	<i>Up to 3 at Souss</i>
58	<i>Common Sandpiper</i>	<i>Singles at Souss and Massa</i>
59	<i>Redshank</i>	<i>Very common at Souss, few at Massa</i>
60	<i>Spotted Redshank</i>	<i>Max 6 at Souss</i>
61	<i>Greenshank</i>	<i>Small numbers Massa and Souss</i>
62	<i>Marsh Sandpiper</i>	<i>2 at Massa and 1 at Souss</i>
63	<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	<i>35 at Massa</i>
64	<i>Curlew</i>	<i>20 at Souss</i>
65	<i>Whimbrel</i>	<i>6 at Souss</i>
66	<i>Common Snipe</i>	<i>Max 10 at Souss</i>
67	<i>Ruff</i>	<i>50 at Souss and a few at Massa</i>
68	<i>Black-headed Gull</i>	<i>Hundreds at Souss, Massa and Tamri</i>
69	<i>Yellow-legged Gull</i>	<i>Very common at all wetlands</i>
70	<i>Audouin's Gull</i>	<i>51 at Tamri</i>
71	<i>Lesser Black-backed Gull</i>	<i>Common at all wetlands</i>
72	<i>Gull-billed Tern</i>	<i>250 at Souss, 50 at Massa</i>
73	<i>Common Tern</i>	<i>20 at Cap Rhir</i>
74	<i>Rock Dove</i>	<i>Common at Massa and near Tarodant</i>
75	<i>Feral Pigeon</i>	<i>Common in Agadir</i>
76	<i>Stock Dove</i>	<i>Small numbers in High Atlas</i>
77	<i>Wood Pigeon</i>	<i>Max 5 Valley of the Souss</i>
78	<i>Collared Dove</i>	<i>Uncommon throughout</i>
79	<i>Turtle Dove</i>	<i>Passing through in good numbers at coast</i>
80	<i>Laughing Dove</i>	<i>6 at Massa and similar number at Taliouine</i>
81	<i>Great Spotted Cuckoo</i>	<i>One, Valley of the Souss</i>
82	<i>Red-necked Nightjar</i>	<i>4 calling, 2 hawking at Royal Palace, Souss</i>
83	<i>Common Swift</i>	<i>Arriving in large numbers by end of the week</i>
84	<i>Pallid Swift</i>	<i>Hundreds daily around Agadir</i>
85	<i>Little Swift</i>	<i>20 at Tamri</i>
86	<i>Hoopoe</i>	<i>3 at Taliouine, 2 at Massa</i>
87	<i>Bee-eater</i>	<i>Small numbers passing through at Tarodant and Souss</i>
88	<i>Great Spotted Woodpecker</i>	<i>Singles at Alououz and Valley of Souss</i>
89	<i>Crested Lark</i>	<i>Small numbers at Souss, Tamri and Massa</i>
90	<i>Thekla Lark</i>	<i>Fairly common in mountains</i>
91	<i>Short-toed lark</i>	<i>Common at Oued Targa and Massa eg 50 at latter</i>
93	<i>Barn Swallow</i>	<i>Very large numbers passing through</i>
94	<i>House Martin</i>	<i>Small numbers daily</i>
95	<i>White Wagtail</i>	<i>Fairly common at the coast</i>
96	<i>Moroccan Wagtail subpersonata</i>	<i>Two at Souss and two at Tamri</i>
97	<i>Yellow Wagtail</i>	<i>A few near Tamri</i>
98	<i>Grey Wagtail</i>	<i>A single at Souss</i>
99	<i>Robin</i>	<i>Two at Souss</i>
100	<i>Black Redstart</i>	<i>One at Massa, two at Taliouine</i>
101	<i>Moussiers Redstart</i>	<i>Fairly common at Souss and Massa</i>
102	<i>Northern Wheatear</i>	<i>Small falls at Souss, odd ones elsewhere</i>
103	<i>Isabelline Wheatear</i>	<i>One at Souss on 21st March, after Easterly winds</i>
104	<i>Black-eared Wheatear</i>	<i>Uncommon throughout</i>
105	<i>Black Wheatear</i>	<i>Three at Taliouine</i>
106	<i>Whinchat</i>	<i>One at Souss</i>
107	<i>Stonechat</i>	<i>A few daily at Souss and Massa</i>
108	<i>Blackbird</i>	<i>Small numbers daily at the coast</i>
109	<i>Ring Ouzel</i>	<i>One on the road up to the Tizi-n-Test</i>
110	<i>Blue Rock Thrush</i>	<i>Three at Taliouine</i>
111	<i>Blackcap</i>	<i>Common throughout</i>
112	<i>Western Orphean Warbler</i>	<i>Two near Tamri and two at Souss</i>

113	<i>Sardinian Warbler</i>	<i>Common at the coast</i>
114	<i>Spectacled Warbler</i>	<i>One at Tamri and two at Massa</i>
115	<i>Subalpine Warbler</i>	<i>Two at Massa</i>
116	<i>Moustached Warbler</i>	<i>Two at Massa</i>
117	<i>Sedge Warbler</i>	<i>At least ten at Massa</i>
118	<i>Zitting Cisticola</i>	<i>A few at Massa</i>
119	<i>Cetti's Warbler</i>	<i>Common at Massa and Souss</i>
120	<i>Isabelline Warbler</i>	<i>Several at Souss and Tamri</i>
121	<i>Common Chiffchaff</i>	<i>Common at the coast</i>
122	<i>Iberian Chiffchaff</i>	<i>Common at the coast and near Taliouine</i>
123	<i>African Blue Tit</i>	<i>Two at Massa with noticeable dark caps</i>
124	<i>Great Tit</i>	<i>Small numbers at Massa</i>
125	<i>Common Bulbul</i>	<i>Common throughout</i>
126	<i>Great Grey Shrike elegans</i>	<i>Fairly common at Massa, odd ones at Souss</i>
127	<i>Woodchat Shrike</i>	<i>Strong passage at coast, max of 54 at Souss on 21st</i>
128	<i>Black-crowned Tchagra</i>	<i>Excellent views of a singing male at Massa</i>
129	<i>Moroccan Magpie mauritannica ssp</i>	<i>Common at the coast</i>
130	<i>Jay</i>	<i>A few in the Souss Valley</i>
131	<i>Common Raven</i>	<i>One at Tamri trying to catch a common kestrel</i>
132	<i>Spottless Starling</i>	<i>Common throughout</i>
133	<i>Chaffinch africana ssp</i>	<i>Common throughout</i>
134	<i>Linnet</i>	<i>Small numbers daily</i>
135	<i>Goldfinch</i>	<i>Fairly common</i>
136	<i>Greenfinch</i>	<i>Scarce at the coast</i>
137	<i>Serin</i>	<i>Very common</i>
138	<i>Trumpeter Finch</i>	<i>Fairly common near Taroudant and Taliouine</i>
139	<i>Reed Bunting</i>	<i>Uncommon at Souss and Massa</i>
140	<i>Cirl Bunting</i>	<i>Three at Massa</i>
141	<i>Corn Bunting</i>	<i>Scarce</i>
142	<i>Rock Bunting</i>	<i>Several near Taliouine</i>
143	<i>House Bunting</i>	<i>Common in all urban areas</i>

Other Fauna

1	<i>Barbary Ground Squirrel</i>	<i>Two at the roadside in the Anti-Atlas Mountains</i>
2	<i>Barbary Red Fox</i>	<i>One at the roadside near Tamri</i>
3	<i>Egyptian Mongoose</i>	<i>One at the river bridge at the Aoulouz Gorge</i>
4	<i>Painted Frog</i>	<i>One on the front in Agadir, several at Souss</i>

David Bowman



Young Camels browsing, near Tamri



Hotel Residence Rihab at night