

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

MOROCCO

9th Feb - 2nd March 2013

TOUR REPORT

LEADERS: Chris Doughty and Mohammed Zaki

The North African Kingdom of Morocco is a wonderful destination; it has exotic birds, magnificent scenery, a huge range of habitats, which includes harsh deserts carpeted in wild flowers and magnificent snow-capped mountains, delightful food and very friendly and hospitable people. We saw almost all of the countries special birds and also enjoyed a fabulous display of mass migration, somewhat surprising for the month of February. We saw almost all the resident birds and a very good selection of both winter visitors and somewhat surprisingly, a good number of summer visitors and there were even a few surprises, in the form of rare visitors. The surprise finds included no less than three sightings of Great Egret, a rare vagrant to Morocco, a Great Bittern, possibly a very rare resident in Morocco, a Black Stork, a rare passage migrant in Morocco, a Pomarine Jaeger off Cape Rhir, a very uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, a close Razorbill sitting on the sea off Cape Rhir, another uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, a couple of male Bramblings, a very sporadic and scarce winter visitor and a small flock of Eurasian Siskins, another sporadic and scarce winter visitor to Morocco.

Following a long and tiring flight from Australia, we arrived at Casablanca Airport, in the early afternoon, where we met up with our local guide Mohammed. We drove to the outer suburbs of Casablanca, where we had lunch. In this area our first birds of the tour included huge numbers of Cattle Egrets, a couple of Little Egrets, lots of Eurasian Collared Doves, good numbers of Barn Swallows, a Common Blackbird, a couple of Common Chiffchaffs, dozens of Spotless Starlings, a good number of House Sparrows and a single European Greenfinch.

Following lunch we headed north along the coast towards Rabat, where we would stay for the next two nights. We broke the drive with a birding stop at a small swamp a little to the north of Mohammedia. Here we added a Eurasian Moorhen, a Eurasian Coot, several delightful Black-winged Stilts, a few wintering and decidedly uncommon Common Snipe, Feral Pigeon, a displaying pair of Common Wood-Pigeons, a couple of attractive Common Stonechats, a pair of Western Jackdaws, three European Goldfinch and a European Serin.

As we drove into Rabat, we found a couple of White Storks, roosting on the top of street lights and a single Common Kestrel flew above the outer wall of the city.

Following a very pleasant breakfast at our hotel, Michael and I saw a few Little Swifts flying around a nearby tall building. We then drove to the foreshore in Rabat to do a little birding. There were literally hundreds of gulls crowding the foreshore. Following careful examination in the scope, we concluded that the vast majority were Lesser Black-backed Gulls, in various stages of

plumage. We also picked out a few Yellow-legged Gulls and a good number of Black-headed Gulls. On a rocky part of the foreshore we observed a dozen or so Ruddy Turnstones and there was a single European Shag, which took off from the ocean and flew off to the south.

We then drove to the O Bou Regreg River, which divides the city of Rabat and here we added a Great Cormorant, a Grey Heron, a Common Ringed Plover, a couple of Common Sandpipers, a couple of Sanderling, a solitary Sandwich Tern and a couple of White Wagtails.

We then drove to nearby Lac di Sidi Boughabe, one of the best wetland areas in Morocco. Here we added a great many new birds, which included up to 20 Little Grebes, a couple of Great Crested Grebes, a large flock of Greater Flamingos, a single Great Egret, a very rare vagrant to Morocco. There were also literally hundreds of wintering European ducks, which included Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, a single Marbled Duck, an endangered species, Common Pochard, three Ferruginous Ducks, a very uncommon bird in Morocco, dozens of very striking Red-crested Pochards and almost 100 White-headed Ducks, yet another endangered species. We also saw a couple of Ospreys, lots of Western Marsh-Harriers, a single Purple Swamphen, a very uncommon bird in Morocco, Red-knobbed Coot, Green Sandpiper, flocks of Common Swifts, several Common Sand-Martins, several Common House-Martins, a couple of Zitting Cisticolas and a Sardinian Warbler.

In the afternoon we visited an area of maquis and cork oak forest, known as the Zaer. Here we added a flock of Black Kites, a single Great Tit, good numbers of the African Blue Tit and several Common Chaffinches.

The following morning we returned to the Zaer, where we saw two new birds for the tour, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Mistle Thrush. We began our journey inland to Ifrane, in the Middle Atlas Mountains, where we would overnight. During the early part of our journey, we drove through gently rolling countryside of vineyards and agricultural land, passing through one of the most fertile regions in Morocco. As we neared the mountains we passed through undulating fields carpeted with a large variety of wild flowers. Here we made a few roadside birding stops and we saw a single Little Ringed Plover, a solitary Common Greenshank, both Crested and Thekla Larks, a Black Redstart, several Southern Grey Shrikes, a few Common Magpies, a huge flock of Eurasian Linnets and a solitary Corn Bunting. However, the best sighting was a flock of six Spanish Sparrows, which we watched in the scope. We enjoyed a fine lunch in the foothills of the mountains, but while we were doing so, it started to rain, the mist descended and we could only see a short distance ahead of us, our only option was to drive to our hotel and hope the weather was fine in the morning.

We awoke the following morning to be greeted by clear skies and the temperature was just above freezing. In the grounds of the lodge we added two new birds, Common Raven and Cirl Bunting. We then visited Lake Aaoua, where we found large numbers of Black-necked Grebes, most were in non-breeding plumage, but there were a few in stunning full-breeding plumage. Around the edge of the lake we found a very handsome Tree Pipit and a Grey Wagtail. In one of the trees along the edge of the lake, we watched a very close Short-toed Treecreeper, as it climbed up the trunk. Moving on we drove through the grassland and rocky outcrops of the Middle Atlas and here we found large numbers of Ruddy Shelducks. We made a quick stop at the Forest of Cedars, where we enjoyed good close looks at a troop of Barbary Apes and while doing so, we also enjoyed good looks at a few Coal Tits.

Our next birding stop was on the edge of the village of Timahadite, where we birded along a small meandering stream. Here we found a small wintering flock of Eurasian Siskins, a very sporadic and

uncommon winter visitor to Morocco. We then played hide-and-seek with a Cetti's Warbler and Mohammed and myself saw a male Brambling, yet another very rare winter visitor to Morocco. We then drove to a high desert plateau, where we were rewarded with splendid looks at a few pairs of delightful Red-rumped Wheatears and we also watched a family party of rather uncommon Fat Sand Rats, which included a pair of adults and a few very cute and very young animals. We watched them for some time through the scopes and they performed very well for us.

Leaving Midelt after breakfast, we continued southward and a little roadside birding produced two new birds, the stunning Temminck's Lark and the attractive Black Wheatear. A little later in the morning a walk through the desert, allowed us to enjoy great looks at a Eurasian Hoopoe and a particularly obliging Woodlark, which is always a difficult bird to find, anywhere in its range. In one or two of the roadside rocky gorges there were a few pairs of Eurasian Crag-Martins. We ate lunch in a very pleasant garden setting, where Common Bulbuls were numerous. During the afternoon drive roadside birds which were new for the list included Desert Lark, Blue Rock-Thrush and the very attractive White-crowned Wheatear. A walk along a dry wadi, produced the last two new birds of the day, we watched a beautiful male Spectacled Warbler and a pair of Brown-necked Ravens. We then drove to the edge of the Sahara, where we would spend the next four nights.

The following morning after breakfast we travelled by 4-wheel drive, with a local guide, deep into the Sahara Desert, in search of a large variety of desert specialities. Our number one target bird was the endangered and elusive Houbara Bustard. This is now an incredibly rare species in Morocco, or anywhere in fact, as Saudi falconers have hunted it to the brink of extinction. Although we tried very hard, all we found was a dead one, most likely killed by Saudi falconers. However, it was not all bad news, as we did see a fantastic variety of other desert specialities. We enjoyed super looks at up to a dozen Cream-coloured Coursers, half a dozen beautiful Crowned Sandgrouse feeding a little ahead of us, we saw numerous Bar-tailed Larks, several stunning Greater Hoopoe-Larks and six Thick-billed Larks, which allowed us prolonged scope views. We saw good numbers of splendid Desert Wheatears, half a dozen or so Fulvous Babbler, a delightful African Desert Warbler, a stunning pair of endangered Desert Sparrows, who were nesting in an old building and we also enjoyed watching a large flock of very striking Trumpeter Finches.

The following day was spent exploring the rocky cliffs and gorges around Rissani. Our main target bird here was the very uncommon Pharaoh Eagle-Owl. We met up with two local Berbers, who would act as our local guides. One rode a small motorbike and the other rode a bicycle, very quickly! At the first cliffs they took us to, we failed to find the owl, but we enjoyed super scope views of a splendid pair of Lanner Falcons, we even watched them mating. At a second set of cliffs, we also failed to find the owl. So we then walked a patch of nearby stony desert, where we enjoyed good scope views of half a dozen beautiful Spotted Sandgrouse. We then went for lunch. While we were enjoying lunch the two local guides continued searching for the elusive eagle-owl. While having lunch we received a call to tell us the local guides had found one. So following lunch we drove to yet another set of cliffs, following the guide on the motor bike and the guide on the bicycle, who was now peddling very fast indeed! On our arrival at the cliffs we enjoyed prolonged scope views of a superb Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, sitting inside a cleft in the cliffs. It was a fitting end to a wonderful day on the edge of the Sahara.

Another full day around Merzouga, on the edge of the Sahara Desert. As the day dawned, we had done so well in this area, I was not very confident that we would find a new bird for the tour, on this particular day! How wrong I was. Early in the morning in the grounds of our hotel we found an adult winter plumaged Tristram's Warbler and a wintering adult male Moussier's Redstart, in full breeding-plumage. What a start to the day, two North African endemics. We then drove south to

Taouz, on the border with Algeria. Here we added House Bunting, which was nesting inside a house which was being built. Just as we were leaving Taouz, we came to a screeching halt at a police road-block, not because of the police, who were very friendly, and fortunately for us, very understanding. We had stopped because there was an adult male Maghreb Wheatear right along the side of the road and the police allowed us to stop our bus and get out and enjoy good looks at this very uncommon North African endemic. Three cheers for the Moroccan Police force, try going birding at a police road block in Australia and see what happens! We then drove to the Mud Brick Pits at Merzouga, where there were a few large pools of water. Here we found two Red-throated Pipits in winter plumage. This was somewhat of a surprise, as this is a very early date for these birds to be already migrating northwards. Three Western Yellow Wagtails then flew in, all three were of the blue-headed race and all were in fresh breeding plumage. Once again this seemed a very early date for these birds to be already returning northwards. Our last birding stop for the day, was the oasis at Merzouga, where we saw several Laughing Doves, which gave us a total of seven new birds for the day.

After breakfast the following morning it was time to leave the sandy desert of the Sahara behind and head westwards towards the coast. We were still travelling through barren desert, but this was stony desert. Mid way through the morning our vehicle came to a screeching halt and perched on the top of a stunted tree was a superb Long-legged Buzzard, which we all saw very well. Following a picnic lunch, we broke the long drive with a birding stop at the spectacular Gorge du Todra. A narrow gorge with towering walls on either side, with a small stream running through the gorge. Along the stream we saw a single winter plumaged Water Pipit, which was extremely co-operative, allowing us to see it very well. We also watched a new mammal here, a very obliging and attractive Barbary Ground Squirrel. We then drove to Boulmane, for a two nights stay, at a very comfortable hotel.

We spent the following morning birding a stony plateau, on the Tagdilt track. Our first new bird of the day was a flock of three Black-bellied Sandgrouse, which we saw in flight. Later in the morning we found a pair on the ground, which we watched for some time. We also very much enjoyed watching a few Shaw's Jirds, a small species of desert inhabiting rodent, which we watched at the entrances of their burrows. We then checked out a line of bushes in a dry wadi, which somewhat surprisingly for this time of year, produced three Willow Warblers, who were busily feeding together, showing all the signs that they had recently flown across the Sahara, and were now busily regaining their body weight, before continuing northwards across the next large barrier, the Mediterranean Sea. Here we also enjoyed good looks at our only Cape Hare of the tour. As we were driving back to Boulmane for lunch, a large flock of larks flew alongside the bus and landed in the stony desert. Following careful examination in the scopes, we determined them to be Lesser Short-tailed Larks. We then drove to Boulmane for lunch and half way through lunch a Eurasian Sparrowhawk circled overhead a couple of times, before flying off. In the afternoon, we drove up the Dades Valley. The many Kazbahs and dramatic gorges provided a colourful contrast to the emerald-green palms and irrigated fields. Flying above the river that winds its way through the valley, we found a couple of Red-rumped Swallows, once again, very early migrants for this time of year. In one of the very narrow and steep gorges, we found two more new species for our ever growing list, half a dozen or so Rock Sparrows and a couple of attractive Rock Buntings.

The following morning we continued our journey westwards, to El-Kelaa-des-Mgouna, where we turned north and wound our way up a very scenically attractive valley, known as Rose Valley, where we went birding in the High Atlas Mountains. A small river ran through the valley and it was here that we found an adult male Moroccan Wagtail. Currently this bird is still treated as a race of White Wagtail, however, it is a good candidate for a split, in the near future. On reaching the high

mountains, we found an adult male Seebohm's Wheatear, in recently acquired full breeding-plumage. It must have just arrived here on its breeding grounds, from its wintering grounds in West Africa. Continuing our journey westwards, we made a prolonged birding stop at the huge Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, close to Ouarzazate. Here we added four new species to our list. A great Bittern which was a great surprise, this is a virtually unknown bird in Morocco, although it may be a resident bird. We also found a flock of six Northern Pintails, a Northern Wheatear and a Sedge Warbler. Four of the five new species today were migrants. The north bound migrants had now well and truly arrived in Morocco. We then drove to our hotel at nearby Ouarzazate.

The following day we spent a very productive morning at a different part of the huge Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi. There had been a huge fall of migrants overnight, dozens of White Storks were on the move and there had been a particularly massive fall, numbering many hundreds, of Western Yellow Wagtails, with smaller numbers of Black Kites, Little Ringed Plovers, Common Greenshanks, Common House-Martins, Water Pipits and White Wagtails. We also found smaller numbers of migrants which were new for the tour, amongst the dozens of White Storks, Rob pointed out a single Black Stork, which is a rare passage migrant in Morocco. Amongst a large circling flock of White Storks, Michael pointed out a single Common Crane, another uncommon winter visitor to Morocco. We also saw half a dozen stunning Pied Avocets, over a dozen Kentish Plovers, half a dozen Black-tailed Godwits, some in freshly acquired breeding plumage, a single Common Redshank, a single Wood Sandpiper, up to a dozen Little Stints and a solitary Dunlin, in non-breeding plumage. It had been a tremendous morning's birding. Following a very pleasant lunch we drove to the nearby Oasis du Fint, where we also found a new bird for the tour, a single male Blackcap.

Leaving Ouarzazate, the following morning, we continued our journey westwards. About mid-morning we came to a screeching halt, as I had spotted an African Rock Martin from the bus. We jumped out and enjoyed very close looks at one of the least common birds in Morocco. Shortly afterwards, we came to a second screeching halt, Robert had seen a covey of Barbary Partridges along the side of the road. Soon we were enjoying great scope views of this North African endemic. Following lunch, we continued westwards and once again, we found a new bird along the roadside, this time we watched a small group of migrating Woodchat Shrikes, surely one of the most beautiful species of shrikes in the world. A little later in the afternoon, we stopped to do some birding along the upper reaches of the Sous River and here we enjoyed surprisingly good looks at a delightful pair of Egyptian Mongoose. We then left the Sahara behind and dropped down into the Sous Valley and the desert gave way to large stands of Argan woodland and extensive citrus groves, before arriving at the beautiful walled city of Taradant, where we spent the night at a former Sultans Palace!

The following morning we found plenty of Pallid Swifts flying around the old palace, which gave us a great start to the day. We then drove to the world famous Oued Massa National Park, to the south of Agadir. We began our exploration of the river several kilometres inland and here we added two new species, 20 or so Glossy Ibis and five Tufted Ducks. We then drove to the mouth of the river where a large gale was blowing in off the Atlantic Ocean. The wind was so strong that it was very difficult to keep our scopes still enough to use them. Even so, we found a large flock of Eurasian Spoonbills, 30 or so Audouin's Gulls, a single Caspian Tern and a single Little Tern. While walking back to our bus, we also enjoyed good scope views of the attractive Black-crowned Tchagra.

We awoke the following morning to find a calm sunny day, ideal conditions for birding. We returned to the Oued Massa National Park where we spent a very enjoyable morning. We carefully scrutinised the many birds in the park. This careful scrutiny paid dividends and produced three new

species for the tour. Offshore, we had a rather distant Northern Gannet and along the river we found a couple of Eurasian Curlews and four Common Terns. In the afternoon we birded a little before driving north along the coast, to Agadir, where we stayed in a very pleasant seaside hotel.

We spent the following morning in the Sous Estuary National Park, which is famous for its flocks of waders, gulls and terns. We were not to be disappointed, new birds for the tour included half a dozen Eurasian Oystercatchers, some in non-breeding plumage and some in full breeding-plumage. There was also almost 50 Grey Plovers, a single Red Knot, half a dozen Bar-tailed Godwits and a solitary Gull-billed Tern. We then did some birding at the mouth of the Tamri River, near Tamri. Here we found a singing European Reed-Warbler, which may have been on migration, or it may have been establishing a breeding territory, as small numbers of this species breed in this part of Morocco. On one occasion we came to a screeching halt in the bus and we very much enjoyed prolonged looks at a flock of 13 Northern Bald Ibis, one of the world's most endangered birds. Little wonder it was voted bird of the tour by tour participants. Our final birding destination of the day, was an hours sea-watch at Cape Rhir. There was a large passage of Northern Gannets moving north and smaller numbers of other birds. We saw half a dozen Balearic Shearwaters, nine Common Scoters, a single Great Skua and a single Pomarine Jaeger. Robert also pointed out a pair of Eurasian Thick-knees roosting behind the dunes.

The next day we returned to Cape Rhir, for a second session of sea-watching and we added a single new bird for the tour, plus a new mammal. We saw a Razorbill flying south quite close inshore, then it landed on the sea and we were able to observe it well in the scope. We also watched a pod of approximately 12 Common Bottlenose Dolphins, not far offshore. We then had a long drive to Ouirgane, in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. In the middle of the afternoon, not far from Had-des-Mjatt, we watched a beautiful pair of Lesser Kestrels, in a roadside eucalypt. On arriving at our hotel at Ouirgane, late in the afternoon, we found a Short-toed Eagle flying overhead.

We spent the whole of the following day birding in the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains. Much of our time was centred around the ski-resort of Oukaimeden, which is ringed by snow-capped mountain peaks, at almost 3,000 metres. On the lower slopes of North Africa's highest peak, Jebel Toubkal, we enjoyed watching the distinctive Atlas race of Horned Lark, large numbers of both Red-billed and Yellow-billed Choughs and the poorly known African race of the beautiful Crimson-winged Finch. At lower altitude in the park, new birds for the tour included Little Owl, the splendid White-throated Dipper and Eurasian Wren. We also found two uncommon species in Morocco, a wintering flock of approximately 20 Song Thrushes and a single male Common Crossbill.

On our last morning of the tour we did some birding in the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains. Our main target bird was the Levaillant's Green Woodpecker, which is endemic to North Africa. In no time at all, we soon located a bird and while enjoying good scope views we also found a European Robin, which was also a new bird for the tour. In the afternoon we drove to Casablanca, for an overnight stay.

The following morning we drove to the airport and flew back to Australia after a very enjoyable and rewarding tour of the ancient Kingdom of Morocco.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

GREBES *PODICIPEDIDAE*

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* A common resident, we observed good numbers at most wetlands we visited.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Small numbers of this winter visitor were present at a number of the wetlands we visited.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* Large numbers of this uncommon, predominantly winter visitor, were present at Lake Aaoua, in Ifrane National Park, in the Middle Atlas Mountains. Most were in non-breeding plumage, but a handful, were in magnificent full-breeding plumage. In the last few years, large numbers of these birds have stayed and nested at the lake, rather than returning to Europe to breed.

SHEARWATERS and PETRELS *PROCELLARIIDAE*

Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* Small numbers of this non-breeding visitor were observed during both sea-watches at Cape Rhir.

GANNETS and BOOBIES *SULIDAE*

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* On both of our sea-watches at Cape Rhir, dozens of this common winter visitor were heading northwards on migration, back to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.

CORMORANTS *PHALACROCORACIDAE*

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Good numbers of this common resident and winter visitor were present at most of the wetlands we visited, including the distinctive subspecies *maroccanus*.

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* Our first sighting of this uncommon resident was of a single bird along the Rabat Foreshore and this was followed by a second sighting, also of a single bird, off Cape Rhir.

HERONS, EGRETS and BITTERN *ARDEIDAE*

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Good numbers of this common winter visitor were observed at most of the wetlands we visited.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* This species is an extremely rare vagrant to Morocco, from breeding grounds in Europe. Somewhat surprisingly, we observed a single bird at Lac di Sidi Boughaba and then two birds together in the Oued Massa National Park.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers of this common winter visitor were present along the coast and at most of the wetlands and rivers we visited.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* This is a common and widespread resident and winter visitor throughout Morocco.

Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* Almost nothing is known about the status of Great Bittern in Morocco, it is thought to be a very rare resident. Therefore, we were exceptionally fortunate to find a bird no more than a few metres in front of us at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate.

STORKS *CICONIIDAE*

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* Unlike the following species, whose numbers are increasing in

Europe, the number of Black Stork has declined rapidly throughout Europe in the last 50 years. The few birds that are hanging on in western Europe winter in sub-Saharan Africa and it is a rare passage migrant in Morocco. On their northward migration the vast majority of Black Storks migrate the whole way non-stop. Each year a tiny proportion of these birds use Morocco as a staging post, before continuing on to Europe. It was very fortunate for us that Robert picked out a bird amongst a large number of White Storks congregating along the shore of the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* The White Stork is a common resident, summer breeding species and passage migrant in Morocco. We found many birds nesting in towns and villages, particularly on the towers of the mosques and we found a very large migrating flock at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazarte.

IBIS and SPOONBILLS *THRESKIORNITHIDAE*

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* This species is an uncommon resident in Morocco, we found a small breeding colony of 30 or so birds in the upper reaches of the Oued Massa National Park.

Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* It was a real treat to be able to watch and photograph a flock of 13 of these very endangered birds, during our time in the area of Tamri. This species is classified as Critically Endangered by Birdlife International and it is estimated that it has an adult population of between 500 – 550 individuals. The historical range of this species probably extended throughout North Africa and into the Middle East. Since the beginning of the 20th century, however, the species has only been known from two disjunct populations; a western population in Morocco and an eastern population in Turkey and Syria. In Morocco there is a small colony in the Oued Massa National Park and the main breeding colony is at nearby Tamri and there is some movement of birds between the two. The eastern population was believed to have died out, however, in 2002, a tiny colony, consisting of just seven individuals, was rediscovered at Palmyra in Syria. Since this initial discovery breeding at this site has been largely unsuccessful and currently only four adult birds remain. The current Moroccan population is estimated to be approximately 500 adult birds. A semi-wild population numbering 91 individuals exists at Birecik, in Turkey, where birds are free-flying for five months, breeding on natural nest sites and nest-boxes on cliffs, but are taken into captivity after the breeding season to prevent them from migrating. The recent rapid decline of this species in Morocco, is due to illegal building and disturbance close to the breeding cliffs and changes in farming on the feeding grounds. Hunting is the main threat to the tiny Syrian population.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Small flocks of this uncommon winter visitor were present at both the Oued Massa and Sous Estuary National Parks.

FLAMINGOS *PHOENICOPTERIDAE*

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* We saw small flocks of this uncommon resident at Lac di Sidi Boughaba and both the Oued Massa and Sous Estuary National Parks.

DUCKS, GEESE and SWANS *ANATIDAE*

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Good numbers of this fairly common resident were observed at several wetlands we visited.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Up to a dozen or so birds were present amongst the hundreds of ducks wintering at Lac di Sidi Boughaba.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* A few pairs were present amongst the hundreds of ducks wintering at Lac di Sidi Boughaba.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Small numbers of this species were wintering at Lac di Sidi Boughaba, at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi and in the Oued Massa National Park.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* A fairly widespread resident in Morocco, which we saw in small numbers, at a number of wetlands.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Four pairs of this beautiful duck were wintering at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* This was by far the commonest wintering duck in Morocco, we observed hundreds of birds at Lac di Sidi Boughaba, Lake Aaoua and at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi.

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* We found half a dozen or so of these resident ducks at Lac di Sidi Boughaba and a few birds in the Oued Massa National Park. This species is classified as Vulnerable by Birdlife International. It is estimated that the total population is between 50,000 and 55,000 individuals and declining. This is based on population estimates of 3,000-5,000 in the western Mediterranean and West Africa, 1,000 in the eastern Mediterranean, 5,000 in south Asia and at least 44,000 individuals in south-western Asia. It is estimated that over 50% of suitable habitat may have been destroyed during the 20th century. Wetland drainage for agriculture occurs across its range, most significantly in Iraq where the species remains threatened by fluctuating water levels and local water shortages. Hydrological work has severely affected breeding sites in Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco and Spain. In Iraq, the species is also threatened by illegal hunting and persecution, exacerbated by it being the principal wildfowl target for hunters during the summer months. Reed-cutting, reed-burning and grazing commonly reduce the amount of habitat for nesting. Pollution from agricultural, industrial and domestic sources is a threat at many sites. When breeding, it is vulnerable to shooting and egg collection. Further mortality results from birds caught in fishing nets and the ingestion of lead shot.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* We saw approximately 200 birds at Lac di Sidi Boughaba, this uncommon and very beautiful species has only recently colonised Morocco and it is obviously breeding very successfully at this site.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* We observed about 40 birds wintering at Lac di Sidi Boughaba and a further 50 birds at Lake Aaoua.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* We observed four wintering birds at Lac di Sidi Boughaba and approximately six birds at Lake Aaoua. This species is classified as Near Threatened by Birdlife International. The total population is estimated to number 2,400-2,600 in North Africa, 36,000-54,000 in eastern Europe, 25,000-100,000 in south-west Asia and north-east Africa and over 100,000 in the rest of Asia. The overall population is declining.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* We found a total of five birds wintering in the upper reaches of the Oued Massa National Park.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* During our first sea-watch at Cape Rhir, a total of nine of these winter visitors flew past us.

White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* We enjoyed really close looks at over 60 birds at Lac di Sidi Boughaba. This species was formerly extinct in Morocco, but fortunately,

recolonisation appears to be gathering pace. This species is classified as Endangered by Birdlife International and declining. It is estimated that the population is between 5,300 – 8,700 individuals. The greatest long-term threat to the species survival is thought to be competition and introgressive hybridisation (i.e. genetic swamping) with the non-native North American Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*. Both male Ruddy Ducks and male hybrids are socially dominant over male White-headed Ducks during courtship. The threat from the Ruddy Duck is extremely serious, given that, if allowed to proceed beyond a certain point, the Ruddy Duck's spread across the Palearctic will become unstoppable, especially if the species was allowed to become established in White-headed Duck range-states such as Algeria, Turkey or the Russian Federation, where the huge size and area of the wetlands and their infrequent monitoring would make control impossible. Climate change is thought to be causing more frequent droughts and the drying out of many lakes in central Asia, which may be a great threat to the survival of the species. Approximately 50% of breeding habitat has been drained during the 20th century. Remaining sites are vulnerable to drainage, filling, pollution and disturbance. Further threats include drowning in fishing-nets, hunting and ingestion of lead shot.

OSPREY *PANDIONIDAE*

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* We observed several Palearctic winter visitors throughout the tour.

HAWKS, EAGLES and KITES *ACCIPITRIDAE*

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* In Morocco this species is a summer breeding bird and a passage migrant. We saw small numbers throughout the tour and some flocks were moving north on migration.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* The Short-toed Eagle is also a summer breeding bird and a passage migrant. We observed a solitary bird circling above our hotel at Ouirgane, in the High Atlas Mountains.

Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* In Morocco this species is resident and a passage migrant. Probably all the birds we saw were resident birds. We saw a large number at Lac di Sidi Boughaba, with smaller numbers at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* A resident species in Morocco, we saw it very well, on three separate occasions.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* This species is both a resident and winter visitor to Morocco, we enjoyed many good sightings throughout the tour, especially in the desert east of Boumalme and in the Atlas Mountains.

FALCONS and CARACARAS *FALCONIDAE*

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* The Lesser Kestrel is an uncommon resident in Morocco, we were fortunate to watch a pair in a roadside eucalypt, close to the town of Hab-des-Mjatt.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* In Morocco the Common Kestrel is indeed a common and widespread resident, which we saw on all but one day of the tour.

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* This species is an uncommon resident, we were very fortunate to watch a pair very well at their nesting cliffs near Rissani.

PHEASANTS and PARTRIDGES *PHASIANIDAE*

Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara* We saw a few pairs of this North African endemic throughout the tour.

CRANES *GRUIDAE*

Common Crane *Grus grus* The Common Crane is a very uncommon winter visitor to Morocco.

We were very fortunate that Michael picked out an individual amongst a large spiralling flock of White Storks at Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate

RAILS, GALLINULES and COOTS *RALLIDAE*

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* A very uncommon resident of Morocco, we were fortunate to see a bird very well, in the reeds at Lac di Sidi Boughaba.

Eurasian Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Small numbers of this resident species were observed at a number of wetlands we visited.

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata* This uncommon species of coot only occurs in one small area in the far south of Spain and one small area in northern Morocco. We saw a number of birds very well at Lac di Sidi Boughaba and at Lake Aaoua.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* A fairly common resident of Morocco, which we saw well in most of the wetland areas we visited.

OYSTERCATCHERS *HAEMATOPODIDAE*

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* This species is an uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we saw half a dozen birds very well, in the Sous Estuary National Park.

AVOCETS AND STILTS *RECURVIROSTRIDAE*

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* An uncommon resident of Morocco, we saw small flocks at a few of the wetlands we visited.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* An uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we found small numbers, at a number of the wetlands we visited.

THICK-KNEES *BURHINIDAE*

Eurasian Thick-knee *Burhinus oedicnemus* A fairly common resident of Morocco, Robert found a pair at their daytime roost, behind the sand dunes at Cape Rhir.

PRATINCOLES and COURSERS *GLAREOLIDAE*

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* This species is both a resident and a summer visitor to Morocco, we saw up to 10 individuals in the Sahara Desert, near Merzouga.

PLOVERS and LAPWINGS *CHARADRIIDAE*

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* An uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we saw 50 birds, all in non-breeding plumage, in the Sous Estuary National Park.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* This species is a fairly common resident and winter visitor to Morocco. We saw over a dozen individuals at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate, plus the same number at the Sous Estuary National Park.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* A common winter visitor to Morocco, we saw a single bird along the O Bou Regreg River, at Rabat and then we saw approximately 50 birds in the Sous Estuary National Park.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* This species is both a summer breeding visitor and a resident in Morocco. We observed small numbers at most of the wetlands we visited.

SANDPIPERS and ALLIES *SCOLOPACIDAE*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* An uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we observed small numbers at widely scattered localities.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* A fairly common winter visitor to Morocco, we saw it well on many occasions along the rivers and in the wetlands.

- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* An uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, once again we observed small numbers on several occasions along the rivers and in the wetlands.
- Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* This species is only a passage migrant in Morocco, once again, Robert pointed out a bird at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate.
- Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* This species is an uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we found a single individual at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate and a couple of birds in the Oued Massa National Park.
- Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* This species is also an uncommon winter visitor to Morocco. We saw a couple of birds in the Oued Massa National Park, up to 10 birds in the Sous Estuary National Park and a single bird flew south at Cape Rhir.
- Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* Another uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we found a flock of half a dozen birds at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate. Some were in non-breeding plumage, but a couple were in gorgeous full breeding-plumage.
- Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* This species is also a winter visitor to Morocco, we observed a flock of a dozen or so birds, in the Sous Estuary National Park.
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* This species is a fairly common winter visitor to Morocco, we observed a dozen or so birds along a rocky area of foreshore, at Rabat. We saw a second flock, of 10 or so birds along a rocky stretch of coastline, in Essaouira Harbour.
- Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* An uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we observed a single individual in the Sous Estuary National Park.
- Sanderling** *Calidris alba* A fairly common winter visitor to Morocco, we observed a single bird along the O Bou Regreg River, at Rabat and then we saw a flock of 20 or so birds at the Oued Massa National Park and up to 50 birds in the Sous Estuary National Park.
- Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* A fairly common winter visitor to Morocco, we found small flocks at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate, the Oued Massa National Park and in the Sous Estuary National Park.
- Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* A fairly common winter visitor to Morocco, mainly along the coast. We saw a solitary bird at the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate.
- Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* An uncommon winter visitor to Morocco, we saw small groups at a few of the wetlands we visited.

GULLS *LARIDAE*

- Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* A common winter visitor to Morocco which we saw at all the wetland sites we visited.
- Audouin's Gull** *Ichthyaetus audouinii* This species only breeds along the coast and on small islands of the Mediterranean Sea. The main wintering ground of this species is Morocco; and we saw a few large wintering groups along the coast. Jean Victoire Audouin (1797-1841) was a French naturalist, born in Paris, where he studied medicine, natural history and pharmacy. He was appointed assistant at the Musee National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris in 1825 and in 1833 became professor of entomology there.
- Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis* A common winter visitor along the coast of Morocco, however, it was greatly outnumbered by the following species.
- Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* This species is an abundant winter visitor, many thousands of birds winter along the coast of Morocco.

TERNs *STERNIDAE*

- Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons* We saw a solitary bird in the Oued Massa National Park, where this species breeds in very small numbers.
- Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* This species is a rare passage migrant in Morocco, we observed a single bird in the Sous Estuary National Park.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* This species is also a rare passage migrant in Morocco, we observed a single bird in the Oued Massa National Park.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Once again, this species is a passage migrant in Morocco, we saw a small flock of four birds in the Oued Massa National Park.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* This species is a fairly common winter visitor along the coast of Morocco, we saw flocks of 50 or so birds in the Oued Massa and Sous Estuary National Parks.

JAEGERS and SKUAS *STERCORARIIDAE*

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* Small numbers of this species winter off the coast of Morocco, during two hours of sea-watching at Cape Rhir, we observed two single birds.

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus* Small numbers of this species, predominately immatures, winter along the coast of Morocco. We observed a single bird while sea-watching at Cape Rhir.

AUKIS, GUILLEMOTS and PUFFINS *ALCIDAE*

Razorbill *Alca torda* This species winters off the coast of Morocco, mainly well out to sea. Fortunately for us, we were able to observe a single bird in the scope, just offshore, at Cape Rhir.

SANDGROUSE *PTEROCLIDAE*

Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus* We very much enjoyed watching a flock of approximately a dozen or so of these resident birds in the desert, close to Rissani.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* Our first sighting of this resident species was of three birds along the Tagdilt Track near Boulmane and this was followed by a second sighting of a pair of birds, not far from Ouarzazate.

Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus* We observed a flock of half a dozen of these resident birds in the Sahara Desert, near Merzouga and then the following day we saw a dozen or so in the desert not far from Rissani.

PIGEONS and DOVES *COLUMBIDAE*

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* A common resident, we saw many feral birds in the towns and villages, however, we also saw many genuine Rock Doves, mainly in rocky gorges, or high in the mountains.

Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus* We enjoyed many good sightings of this common resident, it was particularly common in the Atlas Mountains.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* An abundant resident throughout Morocco, it was particularly common in the towns and villages.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* A resident species, with a patchy distribution throughout Morocco. We saw it well on several occasions.

OWLS *STRIGIDAE*

Pharaoh Eagle-Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* Two local guides worked extremely hard to find one of these very uncommon residents, which we were able to see extremely well through the scope, as it sat in a cleft in the rock face, of a large cliff, close to Rissani. This species occurs across North Africa into Egypt and parts of the Middle East. It is illustrated in ancient Egyptian glyphs, hence the common name, there is no evidence of it being named after any particular Pharaoh.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* We enjoyed tremendous scope views of this uncommon resident, at its daytime roost in the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains.

SWIFTS *APODIDAE*

Common Swift *Apus apus* In Morocco this species is a common passage migrant and summer breeding species, we saw it very well on many occasions.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* The Pallid Swift is an uncommon summer breeding species to Morocco. We observed large numbers flying around our hotel in Taroudannt.

Little Swift *Apus affinis* A fairly common resident of Morocco, they nest mainly in tall city buildings, we saw small numbers in Rabat and in Taroudannt.

HOOPOES *UPUPIDAE*

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* We enjoyed several widespread sightings of this fairly common but very beautiful resident.

WOODPECKERS and ALLIES *PICIDAE*

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* A fairly common resident of Morocco, we saw a few individuals very well in the Zaer, near Rabat and we also saw it very well in the Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.

Levaillant's Green Woodpecker *Picus vaillantii* This highly localised resident is endemic to northern Morocco, northern Algeria and northern Tunisia. We enjoyed tremendous close looks at a very obliging individual in the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains. Francois Le Vaillant (1753-1824) was a French traveller, explorer, collector and naturalist. He was born in Dutch Guiana (Suriname), the son of the French consul there. Birds attracted his interest from an early age and he spent a lot of his time collecting specimens. As a result, he became acquainted with many of Europe's private collectors. He went to the Cape Province of South Africa, in 1781, in the employ of the Dutch East India Company, the first real ornithologist to visit the area. There he both explored and collected specimens, eventually publishing, a six volume book, *Historie Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Africa*, which is a classic of African ornithology. This work was published between the years 1801 and 1806, in Paris, and contained 144 colour-printed engravings. Le Vaillant sent over 2,000 skins of birds to Jacob Temminck, who financed his expeditions

LARKS *ALAUDIDAE*

Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* A locally common resident of open sandy desert, it is a spectacularly plumaged bird, particularly when seen in flight, we enjoyed several good sightings in the desert areas of the tour.

Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cinctura* A fairly common resident of the desert areas of the southeast, where we enjoyed many good sightings.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* A fairly common resident of barren desert, particularly areas with rocky gullies and stony wadis. We enjoyed many good sightings throughout the tour.

Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey* An uncommon resident that favours flat, stony desert and rocky plateaus. On the day we spent the whole day birding in the Sahara Desert, near Merzouga, we saw a flock of six of these beautiful birds, which we saw extremely well.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens* A locally common resident, which breeds in loose colonies, in arid plains and foothills of semi-desert country. We enjoyed scope views of a few flocks during our time in the more arid areas of Morocco.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* An abundant resident throughout the whole of Morocco, seen almost daily. It is the common roadside lark in Morocco.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae* This species is a locally common resident in Morocco. It seems to prefer more rocky habitats than the Crested Lark and we saw it well on many occasions. It

is named after Thekla Brehm (1832-1858) who was the daughter of the German ornithologist Christian Ludwig Brehm. Brehm wrote the description of the lark in 1858 and named it in honour of his daughter, who died earlier that year of heart disease.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* A highly localised and scarce resident of Morocco. We very much enjoyed great scope views of an individual who sang persistently from the top of a small bush, close to Tizi-n-Talrhemt.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* The only country in Africa where this species occurs is Morocco, where it is a resident altitudinal migrant in the High Atlas Mountains. We enjoyed really close looks at this distinctive race, high in the Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.

Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilopha* A locally common resident of Morocco where it inhabits barren, stony desert, where we saw it very well on many occasions. Coenraad Jacob Temminck (1778-1858) was a Dutch ornithologist, illustrator and collector. He was appointed the first Director of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, in Leiden, in 1820 and held that post until his death. He was a wealthy man who had a very large collection of specimens and live birds. His first task as an ornithologist was to catalogue his father's very extensive collection. His father was Jacob Temminck, for whom Le Vaillant collected specimens.

SWALLOWS HIRUNDINIDAE

Common Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* This species is a common passage migrant in Morocco, we enjoyed observing several large flocks of this species, usually around water.

Eurasian Crag-Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* This species is both a resident and a winter visitor to Morocco. We saw it very well on many occasions.

African Rock-Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* A very uncommon resident, which occurs mainly in the south of Morocco. We were very fortunate to find a solitary individual flying around a rocky cliff side, close to Anezal.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* An abundant passage migrant and breeding summer visitor, which we saw on most days of the tour.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* This species is a fairly common passage migrant and breeding summer visitor. Although nowhere near as common as the Barn Swallow, we did see it well on many occasions.

Common House-Martin *Delichon urbicum* A common passage migrant and breeding summer visitor, we saw several large flocks, at scattered localities throughout the tour.

WAGTAILS and PIPITS MOTACILLIDAE

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* In Morocco the Western Yellow Wagtail is a resident, a passage migrant and a breeding summer visitor. All the birds we saw were of the race *flava*, which breed in central Europe and were passing through Morocco. On one occasion, at the Barrage El-Monsour- Eddahbi near Ouarzazate, there had been a large fall of this species overnight and there were literally hundreds of birds busily feeding around the edge of the lake.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* In Morocco this species is both a resident and a winter visitor, we saw a small number of birds, usually alongside small streams.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* The White Wagtail is also a resident and winter visitor, which we saw on a daily basis. We saw the Moroccan race *subpersonata*, on a few occasions and this race may one day be elevated to full species status.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* This species is a fairly common passage migrant in Morocco, we saw a single bird very well, along the shore of Lake Aaoua, in Ifrane National Park, in the Middle

Atlas Mountains.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* This species is a very uncommon passage migrant in Morocco, so we were very fortunate to observe a pair of birds at the Mud Brick Pits at Merzouga.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* This species is a fairly common winter visitor to Morocco, we saw a single individual along a stream that runs through the Gorge du Todra and then we saw a very large flock, numbering 50 or so birds, along the edge of the Barrage El-Monsour-Eddahbi near Ouarzazate.

BULBULS *PYCNONOTIDAE*

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* A common and widespread resident throughout Morocco, which we observed on many occasions.

DIPPERS *CINCLIDAE*

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* We enjoyed two sightings of this fairly common resident, during our time in the Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.

WRENS *TROGLODYTIAE*

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* This species is also a fairly common resident of the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. We saw a couple of individuals very well in Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.

THRUSHES and ALLIES *TURDIDAE*

Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* A fairly common resident, which we saw well on a few occasions.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* A common resident, which we saw on most days of the tour.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* A fairly common winter visitor to the northern half of Morocco. We only observed it in the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains, where we found a few large flocks.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* A fairly common resident of northern Morocco, which we saw very well, on several occasions.

CISTICOLAS and ALLIES *CISTICOLIDEAE*

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* A fairly common resident in Morocco, we saw it very well on numerous occasions.

OLD WORLD WARBERLS *SYLVIIDAE*

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* A locally common resident in Morocco, we heard it on several occasions, however, we only saw it on one occasion, along a small stream in the village of Timahadite, in the Middle Atlas Mountains. Father Francesco Cetti (1726-1778) was an Italian Jesuit priest, zoologist and mathematician who wrote the *Storia Naturale di Sardegna*. The second volume (1776) deals with birds in Sardinia.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* This species is a common passage migrant throughout Morocco. We watched three birds together in a dry wadi on the Tagdilt Track, near Boulmane.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* An abundant winter visitor throughout Morocco, which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* The delightful Sedge Warbler is a common passage migrant in Morocco. We saw one bird in flimsy vegetation along the edge of the Barrage El-

Monsour-Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate.

European Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* In Morocco this species is a common passage migrant and an uncommon summer breeding visitor. We saw a single individual in full song, in a reedbed, at the mouth of the Tamri River, near Tamri.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* In Morocco this species is a uncommon resident and a very common winter visitor. We saw solitary individuals, all males, on four separate occasions.

African Desert Warbler *Sylvia deserti* An uncommon resident of the Sahara Desert in Morocco. We watched an individual very well, deep inside the Sahara Desert, near Merzouga.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* In Morocco this species is a fairly common resident and winter visitor, we enjoyed a few good sightings scattered throughout the tour.

Tristram's Warbler *Sylvia deserticola* In Morocco this species is an uncommon resident and winter visitor. We found a single adult in non-breeding plumage, in the grounds of our hotel at Merzouga, on the edge of the Sahara Desert. The Reverend Henry Baker Tristram FRS (1822-1906) was canon of Durham cathedral and a traveller, archaeologist, naturalist and antiquarian, who assembled a large collection of museum skins. Despite being a churchman he was an early supporter of Darwin. He wrote a number of accounts of his explorations including *A journal of Travels in Palestine* and *The Great Sahara Wanderings South of the Atlas Mountains*, in 1860. In the latter he describes how he penetrated far into the desert and made an ornithological collection in the course of gathering materials for his work. He actually went there because of ill health.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* In Morocco this species is a common resident and winter visitor, we enjoyed many good sightings of this attractive species.

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS *MUSCICAPIDAE*

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* In Morocco this species is an uncommon resident and winter visitor. On the last day of the tour we enjoyed two sightings of individuals of this species in the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* This species is also an uncommon resident and winter visitor, we observed mainly wintering birds, on most days of the tour.

Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri* This species is endemic to northern Morocco, northern Algeria and northern Tunisia. It is a stunning looking bird and we saw it on many occasions throughout the tour. Jean Moussier (1795-1850) was a surgeon in the French army during the Napoleonic Wars and an amateur naturalist.

White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* This species is a very common resident of Morocco, which we saw very well, on many occasions.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura* This species is also a common resident which occurs at higher altitude and in rockier habitats than the previous species. We saw it very well, on many occasions.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* In Morocco this species is a common passage migrant and we observed a trickle of migrants, towards the end of the tour.

Seebohm's Wheatear *Oenanthe seebohmi* Formerly considered a race of Northern Wheatear, this species is an uncommon summer breeding bird of the Atlas Mountains. We were very

fortunate to observe an adult male, close to Bou Thrarar, in the High Atlas Mountains. Henry Seebohm (1832-1895) was a British businessman and an amateur ornithologist, oologist and traveller, who explored the Yenisey tundra of Siberia. He wrote *A History of British Birds*, published in 1883, *The Geographical Distribution of the Family Charadriidae*, published in 1887, *The Birds of the Japanese Empire*, published in 1890, *A Monograph of the Turdidae*, published in 1898 and *The Birds of Siberia*, published in 1901. Seebohm died of influenza in 1895.

Maghreb Wheatear *Oenanthe halophila* A recent split from the Mourning Wheatear, this species is an uncommon resident of semi-arid areas and desert country. We were very fortunate to enjoy very close looks at an adult male at a police roadblock at Taouz, on the border with Algeria.

Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta* This species is an uncommon resident of flat, stony desert. We saw a few birds very well at Zerda, in the Middle Atlas Mountains and we also saw a few birds along the Tagdilt Track, near Boulmane.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* This species is a locally common breeding summer visitor to Morocco. We saw recently arrived birds on several occasions, throughout the tour.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* In Morocco this species is a common resident and winter visitor. We regularly encountered wintering birds, throughout the tour.

BABBLERS *TIMALIIDAE*

Fulvous Babbler *Turdoides fulva* This species is an uncommon resident, which we saw well in the Sahara Desert, near Merzouga and again, in desert country at Taouz, on the border with Algeria.

CHICKADEES and TITS *PARIDAE*

Coal Tit *Pariparus ater* A fairly common resident, which in Morocco is restricted to the Atlas Mountains. We saw a few birds very well in the Ifrane National Park, in the Middle Atlas Mountains.

Great Tit *Parus major* A common resident which we saw very well on several occasions.

African Blue Tit *Parus ultramarinus* A common resident which we saw well on many occasions.

CREEPERS *CERTHIIDAE*

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* An uncommon resident in Morocco, we saw it very well on one occasion, at Lake Aaoua, in the Ifrane National Park, in the Middle Atlas Mountains.

SHRIKES *LANIIDAE*

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus* A locally fairly common resident in Morocco, we enjoyed many good looks at this species, while birding in the Oued Massa National Park.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* A common resident in Morocco, which we saw very well on many occasions.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* A common passage migrant and summer breeding visitor to Morocco. We enjoyed several good sightings throughout the tour, at what must surely be one of the most beautiful species of shrikes in the world.

CROWS, JAYS and MAGPIES *CORVIDAE*

Common Magpie *Pica pica* A common resident of Morocco, which avoids the more arid parts of

the country. We saw it very well on many occasions. The subspecies involved is *mauritanica*, which is smaller than the nominate form and has an area of bare blue skin around the eye. This subspecies may be elevated to full species status at a future date and become known as the Maghreb Magpie.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* A common resident in the highest parts of the High Atlas Mountains. We saw a flock numbering in excess of 100 individuals in the Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.

Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* A locally common resident in the highest parts of the High Atlas Mountains. We saw large numbers often with the above species, during our time in the Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* A fairly common resident in parts of Morocco, we saw it well on a number of occasions.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* A locally common resident of open desert and semi-desert country, which we saw well on many occasions in and around the Sahara.

Common Raven *Corvus corax* We saw small numbers of this fairly common resident at widely scattered localities throughout the tour.

STARLINGS *STURNIDAE*

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor* A very common resident of Morocco, which we saw very well on numerous occasions.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS *PASSERIDAE*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* An abundant resident throughout Morocco, we saw it on every day of the tour.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* This species is an uncommon resident and an uncommon winter visitor to Morocco. We were very fortunate to enjoy very close looks at a small flock of six birds, close to Khemisset.

Desert Sparrow *Passer simplex* A highly localised and uncommon resident of sandy desert, which is endemic to North Africa. We enjoyed really good looks at birds in and around the Sahara Desert, close to Merzouga.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia* A locally common resident in Morocco, which prefers rocky ravines and gullies, exactly the habitat where we saw this species very well, on a few occasions.

SISKINS, CROSSBILLS and ALLIES *FRINGILLIDAE*

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* This species is an abundant resident in Morocco, where we saw it very well, on numerous occasions. The distinctive grey-hooded and green-backed subspecies in Morocco is *africana*.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* This species is a sporadic and very rare winter visitor to Morocco. We were extremely fortunate to observe an adult male in full breeding-plumage on the edge of Timahadite, in the Middle Atlas Mountains. This sighting was followed by a second, also of a single male in full-breeding plumage, in the Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.

Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus* This species is an uncommon resident in the High Atlas Mountains. We enjoyed very close looks of half a dozen or so birds at Oukaineden, in Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* This species is a fairly common resident in Morocco, we saw small flocks on numerous occasions throughout the tour.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* A common resident of Morocco, which we saw well on many occasions.

- Red Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra* The Red Crossbill is an uncommon resident in Morocco, frequenting the Atlas Mountains. Michael and I saw an adult male on one occasion, in the grounds of our splendid hotel at Ouirgane, in the High Atlas Mountains.
- Eurasian Siskin** *Spinus spinus* This species is a sporadic and very uncommon winter visitor to northern Morocco. We were very fortunate to observe a small flock of half a dozen or so birds at Timahadite, in the Middle Atlas Mountains.
- European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* We observed small numbers of this common resident, at widely scattered localities throughout the tour.
- Eurasian Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina* We also observed good numbers of this common resident, at widely scattered localities throughout the tour.
- European Serin** *Serinus serinus* A common and widespread resident, which we saw very well on many occasions.

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS, SEEDEATERS and ALLIES *EMBERIZIDAE*

- Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this fairly common resident.
- Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia* This species is a fairly common resident, we saw it very well at the Gorges du Dades, near Boulmane and again in the Toubkal National Park, in the High Atlas Mountains.
- House Bunting** *Emberiza sahari* This species is a locally common resident in Morocco and is endemic to North Africa. We enjoyed many good sightings, mainly in the south of the country.
- Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* A common and widespread resident in Morocco, we enjoyed many good sightings scattered throughout the tour.

MAMMALS

- Cape Hare** *Lepus capensis* We only observed this mammal on one occasion. However, we did see it very well, while walking in a dry wadi on the Tagdilt Track, near Boulmane.
- Barbary Ground Squirrel** *Altantoxerus getulus* We enjoyed several sightings of this attractively marked squirrel, during the tour.
- Shaw's Jird** *Meriones shawii* We enjoyed watching a few Shaw's Jirds at the entrance to their burrows, in stony desert country along the Tagdilt track. This species is largely diurnal.
- Fat Sand Rat** *Psammomys obesus* We were indeed fortunate to observe a family party of this very seldom seen mammal, while birding in the desert, not far from Zerda.
- Egyptian Mongoose** *Herpestes ichneumon* We were very fortunate to observe a pair of these very large mongoose, on the upper reaches of the Sous River, not far from Taroudannt.
- Barbary Ape** *Macaca sylvanus* We enjoyed watching a large troop in the Cedar Forest, in the Ifrane National Park, in the Middle Atlas Mountains.
- Common Bottlenose Dolphin** *Tursiops truncatus* While doing a sea-watch off Cape Rhir, we saw a pod of approximately 12 Common Bottlenose Dolphins, close inshore.