



Egyptian Nightjar near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

MOROCCO

26 APRIL – 7 MAY 2017

LEADER: CHRIS KEHOE

Morocco has a reputation for offering some of the very best birding in the Western Palearctic and our recent tour certainly supported that view. We travelled from the snow-capped High Atlas Mountains to the fringes of the Sahara and from the verdant Middle Atlas to the Atlantic coast, covering a wide range of habitats in search of numerous local and regional specialities plus a fine array of more widespread species. Houbara Bustard was our bird of the trip, an individual showing at surprisingly close range at the unexpected location of Zaida Plain, but also popular were a very obliging Dupont's Lark (one of 11 species of lark seen), many gorgeous Cream-coloured Coursers, many Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse at point-blank range, a day roosting Egyptian Nightjar and a Red-necked Nightjar in the spotlight, African Crimson-winged Finches, sprightly Tristram's Warblers, eight species of Wheatear (including Seebohm's and the often elusive 'Maghreb'), Levaillant's Woodpeckers, the critically-endangered Northern Bald Ibis, ghostly Desert Sparrows and African Desert Warblers, sleepy Pharaoh Eagle Owls and many, many more. In fact, we managed to locate all of our major targets, not least the dapper and extremely localised Atlas Flycatcher which arrives very late to breed and thus influences the timing of our tour. It was a little breezy at times but overall the weather was very good and the tour ran smoothly as we watched a succession of fantastic birds in some epic landscapes, ate some delicious food and enjoyed some very comfortable accommodation.

Our tour began with a morning drive into the High Atlas Mountains south of Marrakech. We made a few stops on the way to our base at Oukaimeden, firstly in an area favoured by Tristram's Warbler, a male of which put on a fine show as Red-rumped Swallows and European Bee-eaters drifted overhead and European Serins and 'African' Chaffinches bounced about. In a nearby village we found a couple of showy Common Nightingales along with our first African Blue Tits, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Spotted Flycatcher and others. A final short stop below Oukaimeden gave us a fine Booted Eagle and several Choughs of both species. After lunch we set off on foot in search of Crimson-winged Finches near Oukaimeden Pass, eventually enjoying good scope views of four birds. Also seen this afternoon were several smart Seeborn's Wheatears, singing Woodlarks, a White-bellied Dipper and several Black Redstarts.



Seeborn's Wheatear at Oukaimeden (Chris Kehoe)

A short walk near our hotel before breakfast and departure on the long drive to Ifrane gave us fine views of several more Seeborn's Wheatears and also plenty of Rock Sparrows that had strangely eluded us yesterday. As we returned towards Marrakech we made a couple of short stops. At the first we watched Crag Martins and 'Atlas' Long-legged Buzzards while the second gave us Eurasian Wren and European Robin, the only ones we saw. Once well beyond Marrakech we stopped for lunch, seeing our only Garden Warbler in the process, before continuing towards the Middle Atlas Mountains. A few further stops along the way allowed us to add the likes of Thekla Lark and European Turtle Dove to our list and we eventually arrived at our comfortable hotel in Ifrane in time for a late dinner.

A short pre-breakfast birding session close to the hotel was productive, with Western Bonelli's and Melodious Warblers, Hawfinches, Common Redstart, Cirl Bunting and others on show. After breakfast we visited the beautiful oak forest along the road to El Hajeb. It didn't take long to find a Levallant's Woodpecker, though the views were rather disappointing; not so with our primary target, the extremely localised Atlas Flycatcher, a male of which posed beautifully for ages. Also here were our only Firecrests and a couple of Short-toed Treecreepers (of the taxonomically interesting Maghreb form). We tried a few more sites along the road, getting similarly brief views of Levallant's Woodpecker at each but adding European Roller and Black Kite to our list along with further Atlas Flycatchers. After lunch in Ifrane we visited Dayat Aoua, an attractive shallow lake bordered by mixed woodland. It was thronging with waterbirds, including

many Little and Great-crested Grebes and especially Black-necked Grebes, which numbered in the hundreds, all in exquisite breeding garb. Rather breezy and dusty conditions made looking for woodland birds difficult but we finally enjoyed great scope views of a Levaillant's Woodpecker and a fine male Cirl Bunting was seen very well. Little Ringed Plovers and Common Sandpipers were noted and amongst all the grebes we found several pairs of Gadwall, a male Common Pochard, a female Ferruginous Duck and a couple of Ruddy Shelducks. Evening birding near the hotel gave us repeat views of the likes of Melodious Warblers and Hawfinches plus several Lesser Kestrels while White Storks sat atop their nests, as did a pair of Common Ravens.

Early birding at the hotel produced a similar cast of characters to yesterday with Common Redstart, Hawfinches, Lesser Kestrels, Melodious Warbler all seen very well again. After breakfast we returned to Dayat Aoua where, in much less windy conditions, we found our only Wood Warbler while Levaillant's Woodpecker showed well again and a male Ferruginous Ducks had joined yesterday's female. We spent the rest of the morning driving south with several stops for roadside birding that gave us further Seebohm's Wheatears and our first stunning Moussier's Redstart plus a small group of Barbary Apes. A final stop before lunch produced our first Blue Rock Thrushes. Continuing southward we halted to view Black Wheatears at the roadside before descending onto the vast plain that divides the Middle from the High Atlas in this region. The wind had returned during the morning and it was still very breezy when we reached Zaida Plain, hardly ideal conditions for locating the notoriously elusive Dupont's Lark. Nevertheless, we set off to see if we could locate anything. After a while a couple of Cream-coloured Coursers were seen in flight and as we tried to track them down on the ground a small group of Lesser Short-toed Larks were found, watching them was tricky though as when they took flight the wind carried them hundreds of metres away but we eventually managed some decent scope views. Dupont's Lark seemed a lost cause in such conditions and it was now threatening to rain as well so we began to make our way back towards the bus. When almost there however we were amazed to see a superb Houbara Bustard strutting around close to the track right in front of us about 100 metres away! It was rather mobile but we all enjoyed fine views over several minutes before the bird crouched down and vanished behind a bush where we decided to leave it in peace. Before continuing our journey to nearby Midelt for an overnight stay we checked another nearby site for Dupont's Lark and were rewarded with improved views of Cream-coloured Courser instead which was a fine way to end the day.



Dupont's Lark (phonescoped) near Zaida and Melodious Warbler at Ifrane (Chris Kehoe)

We were back at Zaida Plain shortly after first light and in thankfully still conditions soon heard a Dupont's Lark singing not too far away. We edged slowly towards the sound and just as the sun came up found the

bird singing from the top of a small bush. We then went on to enjoy splendid scope views of the bird, even seeing it perform a couple of song-flights, before returning to the hotel for breakfast. After loading the bus we set off southwards into the high Atlas and the fringes of the Sahara Desert beyond. Several short stops as we crossed the mountains gave us the likes of migrant European Honey Buzzard, European Pied Flycatcher, Western Olivaceous Warblers and several others plus further Black Wheatears and Moussier's Redstarts. After lunch in Errachidia, where migrant Western Bonelli's and Willow Warblers, Spotted Flycatchers and others were in the restaurant trees, we visited an unremarkable looking shallow wadi near Goulmima where we set off in search of the scarce Saharan Scrub Warbler. It didn't take too long to see some interesting birds as a couple of Bar-tailed Larks, a Woodchat Shrike, Thekla Larks and a furtive Fulvous Babbler were found within a few hundred metres of the bus. Next up was a fabulous male Thick-billed Lark that sat nicely for the scope. Despite an extensive search there was no sight or sound of Scrub Warblers. We returned to the bus to replenish our water supplies before exploring the wadi on the opposite side of the road where we finally found our quarry, eventually seeing three perky Scrub Warblers bouncing around and waving their tails wildly. Once again we rounded off the day's birding with great views of Cream-coloured Coursers. The rest of the evening was spent driving into an increasingly wild and barren looking landscape, the trees of the oasis of Auberge Derkaoua finally appeared on the horizon and we reached there for a three night stay just as the sun was setting.



Crowned Sandgrouse near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

Early risers gathered well before sunrise but in rather breezy conditions it was little surprise that we neither saw nor heard any of the Egyptian Nightjars which are sometimes present in the area. Once it was light enough to see, we did find a few common migrants around the hotel plus a couple of dazzling Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters but it was soon time for breakfast and an excursion into the depths of the desert using 4x4's. Our 4x4 drivers knew exactly where we needed to be and we quite soon reached a tiny puddle in the centre of a desolate plain where unusually large numbers of Crowned and somewhat fewer Spotted Sandgrouse showed superbly. Moving on we stopped to view our first Hoopoe Larks, including a fabulous song-fighting individual, and plenty of Bar-tailed Larks. Our next stop was at a small group of date palms where after a short wait a pair of stunningly pallid Desert Sparrows showed very well. A migrant Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin lurked in a sheltered corner. As we pulled up at our next stop a local gentleman came cycling up having already located our next target for us, a cracking Egyptian Nightjar that was slumbering in the lee of a small

shrub and giving stellar views through the scope. An outstanding morning's birding was then rounded off with reasonable views of an African Desert Warbler before we returned to the hotel for lunch and a rest in the heat of the day. Those with enough energy to scour the hotel trees for migrants found a surprise Atlas Flycatcher, several Western Olivaceous Warblers, a singing Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, at least 10 Melodious Warblers, Common Redstart and Spotted Flycatchers. Our afternoon 4x4 excursion took us in search of a few additional species though we also stopped to enjoy great views of further Hoopoe and Bar-tailed Larks and had outstanding looks at a hunting male Montagu's Harrier. A lost looking Tree Pipit was seen plodding about in some sand dunes and a small group of Greater Short-toed Larks showed well. We tried a couple of sites for Fulvous Babblers without success, though we did see further Desert Sparrows and had superb views of African Desert Warblers in the process, before finally locating a small group of Babblers in a small village. Our final stop was at a large cliff face but the hoped-for Pharaoh Eagle Owls were not at home so we returned to Auberge Derkaoua with an obvious target in mind for the next day.



Montagu's Harrier near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

A short pre-breakfast search for migrants produced a Willow Warbler and a few Western Bonelli's Warblers plus previously seen species such as Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and displaying White-crowned Wheatears. Once aboard our 4x4's we set off through a series of small villages, stopping to watch a couple of Maghreb Larks and a bustling group of Fulvous Babblers as we went. We eventually reached a vast amphitheatre of towering cliffs and began searching for Eagle Owls. It took quite a while to find one but once we had, and walked closer, we had fabulous scope views of two Pharaoh Eagle Owls roosting high on the cliffs. Happy with this we drove to Rissani for a quick coffee before visiting the nearby Ziz River crossing where a group of Marbled Ducks were most welcome and we saw our first Moroccan Wagtails, a couple of Iberian Yellow Wagtails, more Maghreb Larks, a brief Temminck's Stint and lots of nesting Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. Breezy conditions made it hard to see small birds in the tamarisks here but our only Squacco Heron was found. A final stop at a small out of the way fossil stall gave us excellent views of a group of Desert Larks that the friendly stall holder was feeding with breadcrumbs. Migrants that had gathered at the hotel during

the morning, having just crossed the Sahara, including a couple of Eurasian Reed Warblers, a Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, a smart male Western Subalpine Warbler, a couple of European Pied Flycatchers and a Tree Pipit. Back out in the 4x4's we crossed the desert plain and dried out lake beds near Merzouga seeing several Desert Wheatears and Bar-tailed Larks but nothing new before spending a while watching many migrant European Pied Flycatchers, Willow Warblers, a few Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins and our first Laughing Doves at Merzouga oasis. We stopped for photos of the spectacular Erg Chebbi sand dunes as we returned northwards and admired a smart *elegans* Southern Grey Shrike atop a small tree. More larks and a couple of fleeting African Desert Warblers were our final birds of the day.

There was nothing new amongst the migrants gathered at the hotel in the morning so straight after breakfast we set off towards our next base at Boumalne Dades. After a few hours we reached Todra Gorge where we scanned in vain for Bonelli's Eagle but did see lots of Pallid Swifts and Crag Martins, Black Wheatears, House Buntings, Common House Martins and Grey Wagtails. After a bite to eat we drove beyond the gorge but in the midday heat it was rather quiet, though a migrating Western Marsh Harrier was seen and we had reasonable views of a skulky Tristram's Warbler. Pressing on we made a first attempt for the often-tricky Maghreb Wheatear but drew a blank so proceeded to the Tagdilt Track where several Red-rumped Wheatears showed well, a Trumpeter Finch less so, and we went on to find a couple of smart Temminck's Horned Larks and Cream-coloured Coursers. From here our comfortable hotel was just a short drive away.



Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters (courtship feeding) near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

We were back at the Tagdilt Track for sunrise and soon found the first of many Red-rumped Wheatears and further Temminck's and Bar-tailed Larks while a singing Greater Short-toed Lark was overhead. A single Thick-billed Lark was seen briefly, as were a few Cream-coloured Coursers but our first new bird was Black-bellied Sandgrouse, a few of which flew by calling. Several Desert Wheatears and a couple of Long-legged Buzzards were seen but no Maghreb Wheatears were found despite checking three potential sites. However, we struck gold at a further site where a female Maghreb Wheatear showed very well and a male more briefly, there were also several Trumpeter Finches on show at the same place. After lunch and a short rest we visited an area of cliffs where we found a Pharaoh Eagle Owl, several Long-legged Buzzards and a pair of Lanner Falcons attending a nest with a well grown chick. We made a final stop at a small oasis where a Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and both European Pied and Spotted Flycatchers showed well.

After an early breakfast, we commenced the long drive to Agadir a little before sunrise. Scanning power poles as we went proved worthwhile when a Short-toed Snake Eagle was spotted and hung around long enough for scope views. After a couple of hours we reached Ouarzazate where we drove down to the large reservoir below the town. The water level was rather low so we had to walk a fair way before finding a nice gathering of Little Stints, Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers plus many Ruddy Shelducks. Iberian Yellow Wagtails were common here and a Red-throated Pipit was a surprise find as were a couple of late Sand Martins. Wood Sandpiper and Common Greenshank were added to our list before we continued westward. We reached Oued Sous on the southern outskirts of Agadir in time for a couple of hours of evening birding. Large numbers of Sandwich Terns were roosting out on a sandbank and mixed in with them were a few Gull-billed, Little, Common and Black Terns plus a single Whiskered Tern. There were plenty of Yellow-legged and a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls too and amongst them we found a couple of immature Audouin's Gulls. Smaller gulls were represented by a few Black-headed, a single Mediterranean and two Slender-billed Gulls. A Eurasian Spoonbill flew over with a group of Little Egrets while the shorebirds present included numerous Sanderling and Common Ringed Plovers, plenty of Grey Plovers, a couple of Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, a Whimbrel and a few Eurasian Curlews, all overseen by a perched Western Osprey. We searched an area of dry saltmarsh sometimes favoured by Barbary Partridges but instead found a couple of Eurasian Stone Curlews and our first Sardinian Warblers and Zitting Cisticolas.



Eleonora's Falcon at Essaouira (Chris Kehoe) and Northern Bald Ibis near Tamri (Linda Cherepow)

We were on our way south to Oued Massa before first light and arrived at a small river crossing there shortly after sunrise. Our first target here was Black-crowned Tchagra and it didn't take too long for everyone to have satisfactory views of a pair of these striking birds. The whole area was decidedly birdy and we went on to see several European Stonechats, a fine male Cirl Bunting, a very showy Cetti's Warbler, a perched Eurasian Hoopoe, a couple of obliging Eurasian Stone-curlews, our first Black-eared Wheatear, a couple of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins, Glossy Ibises and a Common Kingfisher. We then visited another section of the river where our first striking 'Moroccan' Cormorant was found along with several more Scrub Robins, European Stonechats, Moussier's Redstarts and a Purple Heron while a single European Bee-eater flew past. After a short drive we arrived at another section of the Massa River where it was a little quiet though a distant flock of hawking falcons contained at least one Eurasian Hobby and a Purple Heron lurked under some bushes. After lunch in a delightful little restaurant we returned to Oued Sous, today visiting the outer part of the estuary where Eurasian Oystercatchers were found, a few Greater Flamingos shared a sandbar with many large gulls amongst which were a few Audouin's. From a nearby dune we scanned some saltmarsh lagoons where Common Redshank and Ruddy Turnstone were added to our list, several Marbled

Ducks showed distantly along with about 15 Eurasian Spoonbills. Back at the bus a couple of Barbary Partridges were spotted mooching about but quickly disappeared though we vowed to return later when there were likely to be more obliging. So, after an early dinner, we were back at Oued Sous in time to see the Barbary Partridges wandering around in the failing light. However, our main reason for being here was Red-necked Nightjar and we went on to have a couple of good flight views and very close views of a perched bird in the spotlight.

Our final day began with a pre-dawn departure from Agadir. Shortly after sunrise we reached the lighthouse at Cap Rhir, the southernmost stretch of feeding habitat for the northern flock of critically endangered Northern Bald Ibises. No ibises were here but many Northern Gannets were flying past and a few Cory's Shearwaters were also noted as Thekla Larks sang away. We stopped to scan the coastal plain a few kilometres to the north and managed to persuade a dapper male Spectacled Warbler to show nicely. After a few more stops we finally connected with some Bald Ibises and after a bit of toing and froing managed to get excellent close views of one individual. Happy with this we continued north towards Essaouira and not long after reaching the southern part of town stopped to admire a small group of Eleonora's Falcons hawking overhead. After a hearty lunch in a nearby seafood restaurant we visited the Oued Ksob crossing where we had further views of several Eleonora's Falcons and, after quite a wait, managed to confirm the presence of a handful of very localised Brown-throated Martins, a species conspicuous by its absence at Oued Massa the day before. We then set off back to Marrakech, via a stop for coffee and ice cream, where a most enjoyable tour ended in the evening.

Bird of the trip

1 - Houbara Bustard	14 points
2 - Dupont's Lark	9 points
3 - Northern Bald Ibis	6 points
4 = Eleonora's Falcon	5 points
4 = Greater Hoopoe Lark	5 points
4 = Egyptian Nightjar	5 points



Cream-coloured Courser near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)



Oukaimeden from the ski lifts (Chris Kehoe)



Watching Cream-coloured Coursers and Temminck's Horned Larks at the Tagdilt Track (Chris Kehoe)



Tristram's Warbler below Oukaimeden (Chris Kehoe)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Numerous near Ouarzazate, smaller numbers elsewhere.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Several at Dayat Aoua.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Occasional encounters.

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* Twelve at Oued Ziz near Rissani and about 30 more at Oued Sous.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* A male at Dayat Aoua.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* Two or three at Dayat Aoua.

Barbary Partridge ◊ *Alectoris barbara* Eventually seen well at Oued Sous.

Cory's Shearwater ◊ *Calonectris borealis* A handful flew past Cap Rhir as we scanned for Bald Ibises, see note.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Numerous at Dayat Aoua where nesting..

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Many nesting at Dayat Aoua.

Black-necked Grebe (Eared G) *Podiceps nigricollis* Several hundred at Dayat Aoua, quite a sight!

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* About 20 at Oued Sous.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Widespread encounters inland away from the most arid areas, often on nests.

Northern Bald Ibis ◊ *Geronticus eremita* Great views of one near Tamri and several more distantly there.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Several at Oued Massa.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* About 20 at Oued Sous.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Singles at Ifrane and Oued Massa.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* One near Rissani.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Widespread encounters.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* About 50 at Oued Sous, a few elsewhere.



Red-knobbed Coot and Black-necked Grebes at Dayat Aoua (Chris Kehoe)

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* A handful at the coast.

Great Egret (G White E) *Ardea alba* (NL) One at Oued Sous, quite a rarity in Morocco.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Present in mostly small numbers at many wetland sites.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* Over 100 flying north past Cap Rhir.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Small numbers of Moroccan and Atlantic birds were at the coast. See note

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* Singles noted on three dates.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* One in the foothills south of Midelt.

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* One west of Boumalne Dades.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* Noted on seven dates.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* One below Oukaimeden.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* One migrating over Todra Gorge.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* Fantastic views of a male near Erfoud.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* A handful near Ifrane and Ouarzazate.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo [rufinus] cirtensis* About 10 in total after the first near Oukaimeden.

Houbara Bustard ♦ *Chlamydotis undulata* Fabulous views of one at Zaida, most unexpected there!

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Noted on four dates

Red-knobbed Coot (Crested C) *Fulica cristata* Numerous at Dayat Aoua.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Noted on seven dates at widespread sites.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus* Great views at Oued Massa and Oued Sous.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* About 25 at Oued Sous.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Widespread encounters.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola* Common at Oued Sous.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* Hundreds at Oued Sous, smaller numbers near Ouarzazate.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Small numbers at a few inland wetlands.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Small numbers near Ouarzazate and at Oued Sous.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* A handful at Oued Sous

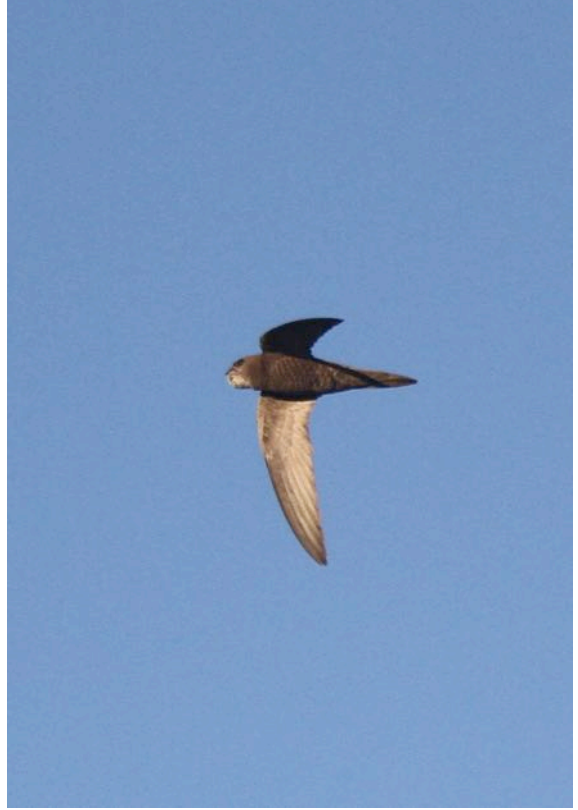
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* About 15 at Oued Sous.
Whimbrel (European W) *Numenius [phaeopus] phaeopus* (NL) One at Oued Sous.
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* About 10 at Oued Sous.
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Three at Oued Sous.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Singles near Ouarzazate and at Oued Sous.
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Three near Ouarzazate.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Noted on six dates at widespread sites.
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* About 10 at Oued Sous.
Sanderling *Calidris alba* Several hundred at Oued Sous
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Over 30 near Ouarzazate.
Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* One flushed from the River Ziz near Rissani.
Dunlin *Calidris alpina* A handful near Ouarzazate and at Oued Sous.
Cream-colored Courser *Cursorius cursor* Seen daily in desert areas after the first near Zaida.
Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei* Two at Oued Sous.
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* A handful at Oued Sous.
Audouin's Gull ♦ *Ichthyaetus audouinii* About 10 at Oued Sous and 150 at Tamri.
Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus* A couple of immatures at Oued Sous.
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* Common at the coast.
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* Several at the coast.
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Up to 20 at Oued Sous.
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* A handful at Oued Sous
Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* About 250 at Oued Sous.
Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* About eight at Oued Sous.
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Three at Oued Sous.
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* One at Oued Sous.
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* About six at Oued Sous.



Spotted Sandgrouse near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus* Up to 50 near Erfoud.
Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* Four in flight at the Tagdilt Track.

Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus* Up to 150 near Erfoud formed a fine spectacle.
Rock Dove (incl. Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia* Wild looking individuals were at several sites.
Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* Several at Oued Sous.
European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* Widespread encounters, locally quite common.
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Very widespread, often common.
Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* Several at Merzouga, heard at Oued Sous.
Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* One flew over the bus on the outskirts of Marrakech.



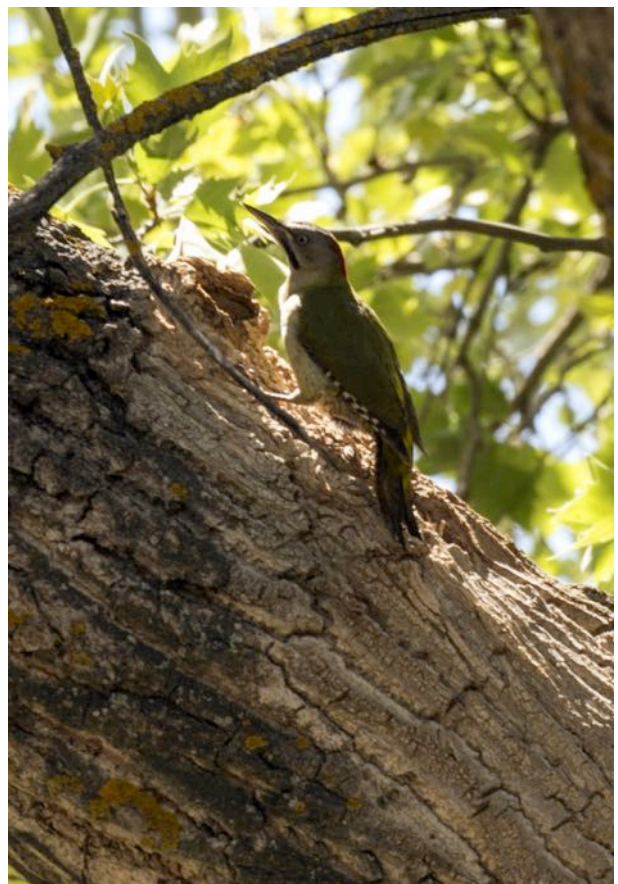
European Roller near Ifrane and Pallid Swift in Agadir (Chris Kehoe)



Pharaoh Eagle Owl near Rissani (Chris Kehoe)

Pharaoh Eagle-Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* Great views of roosting birds near Rissani and east of Boumalne Dades.
Red-necked Nightjar ♦ *Caprimulgus ruficollis* Excellent spotlight views at Oued Sous.
Egyptian Nightjar ♦ *Caprimulgus aegyptius* Wonderful looks at a roosting bird near Erfoud.

Common Swift *Apus apus* A couple of migrating flocks in the Middle Atlas and one north at Tamri.
Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* Locally common in some towns,
Little Swift *Apus affinis* A few over Marrakech and a couple elsewhere.
European Roller *Coracias garrulus* Three or four near Ifrane.
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* One at Oued Massa.
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* Fairly numerous near Erfoud and around Ouarzazate.
European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* A handful below Oukaimeden and one over Oued Massa
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* A handful at four widespread sites.
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* A few near Ifrane and below Oukaimeden.
Levaillant's Woodpecker ♦ (L Green W) *Picus vaillantii* Up to 10 in the Ifrane area, a couple showed very well.



Lanner Falcon near Boumalne Dades (Chris Kehoe) and Levaillant's Woodpecker at Dayat Aoua (Linda Cherepow)

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* Seen first on top of our hotel in Ifrane.
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Widespread.
Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* Great views of about 10 at Essaouira
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* A distant bird at Oued Massa.
Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* Two attending a nest with a a large downy chick near Boumalne Dades.
Black-crowned Tchagra (B-h Bush Shrike) *Tchagra senegalus* Good views of two at Oued Massa.
Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* Seen best near Erfoud, others mostly as we travelled. See note.
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* A total of 11 spread over six dates.
Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* One seen briefly near Ifrane, heard in the the Atlas foothills.
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* A handful near Ifrane.
Eurasian Magpie (Maghreb M) *Pica [pica] mauritanica* Prominent at Oued Sous, a few elsewhere.
Red-billed Chough *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Numerous at Oukaimeden.
Alpine Chough (Yellow-billed C) *Pyrhocorax graculus* Several at Oukaimeden.
Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula* Two at Dayat Aoua.
Brown-necked Raven ♦ *Corvus ruficollis* Up to 20 in the desert near Erfoud, some good views.
Northern Raven *Corvus corax* Several in highland areas, nesting near our hotel in Ifrane.
African Blue Tit ♦ (North A B T) *Cyanistes teneriffae* Common around Oukaimeden, several elsewhere. See note.

Great Tit *Parus major* Widespread in small numbers.

Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* Several near Erfoud and a few more at the Tagdilt Track.

Thick-billed Lark ♦ *Ramphocoris clotbey* One showed well near Goulmima, another briefly at the Tagdilt Track.



Thick-billed Lark near Goulmima and Maghreb Lark near Rissani (Chris Kehoe)



Greater Hoopoe Lark near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* A few near Erfoud and two near Goulmima.

Bar-tailed Lark (B-t Desert L) *Ammomanes cinctura* Widespread in desert areas.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* Noted a couple of times after the first at Oukaimeden.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae* Widespread away from the driest deserts and highest elevations.

Maghreb Lark ♦ *Galerida macrorhyncha* Several near Erfoud and Rissani.

Temminck's Lark ♦ *Eremophila bilopha* Small numbers in the Tagdilt Track area, some great views.
Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* Several near Erfoud and a couple at the Tagdilt Track.
Dupont's Lark ♦ *Chersophilus duponti* Great views of one on Zaida Plain, one or two more heard there. See note.
Lesser Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens* Several at Zaida Plain.
Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* Common in most towns and some villages.
Brown-throated Martin (Plain M) *Riparia paludicola* A handful at Oued Ksob.
Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia* Two near Ouarzazate.
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Widespread encounters, mostly of migrating birds.
Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Several encounters at higher elevations.
Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* Noted on six dates at widespread sites.
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Occasional encounters after the first near Marrakech.
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* Great views at Oued Massa, heard elsewhere.
Streaked Scrub Warbler (Scrub W) *Scotocerca inquieta* Three near Goulmima after a long search.
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* A few migrants at scattered sites.
Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* Several after the first in Ifrane
Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* One at Dayat Aoua.
Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (H,NL) Singles at Rissani and Ouarzazate, others heard.
Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* A couple near Erfoud and several at Oued Massa.
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* A couple of singing birds in tamarisks at Auberge Derkaoua.
Western Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna opaca* Rather widespread in the lowlands throughout.
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* Several around Ifrane and 10 at Auberge Derkaoua on one date only.
Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) *Cisticola juncidis* Common in the coastal lowlands.
Fulvous Babbler ♦ *Turdoides fulva* Great views of groups near Erfoud and Rissani.



Fulvous Babbler and African Desert Warbler near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (NL) A couple south of Midelt, a few others heard.
Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* One at our lunch stop east of Marrakech.
African Desert Warbler ♦ *Sylvia deserti* A total of six near Erfoud.
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* A couple of migrants noted in the east.
Tristram's Warbler ♦ *Sylvia deserticola* Great views south of Marrakech, another at Todra Gorge.
Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* A showy male near Tamri.
Subalpine Warbler ♦ (Western S W) *Sylvia [cantillans] inornata* A single male at Auberge Derkaoua. See note.
Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* Common in coastal scrub.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* Two near Ifrane.
Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* One below Oukaimeden.
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Several near Ifrane.
Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* A handful near Ifrane.
Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor* Fairly widespread in towns and villages.



Spotless Starling at Oued Massa and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Fairly common and very widespread.
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* Fairly common at higher elevations.
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (R Bush R) *Cercotrichas galactotes* Prominent at Oued Massa, a few elsewhere.



Atlas Flycatcher and Spotted Flycatcher near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* Migrants noted on seven dates.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* One below Oukaïmeden

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Seen south of Marrakech, others heard or glimpsed elsewhere.

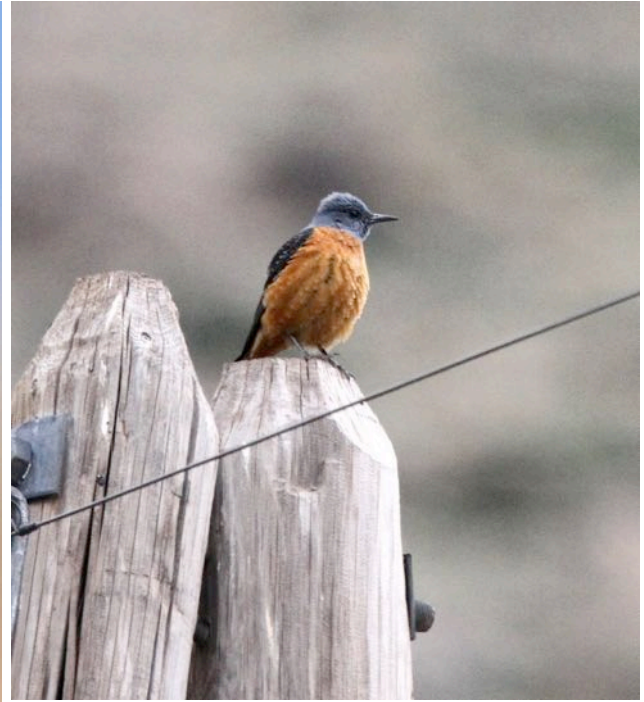
European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* A few migrants at scattered sites, mainly near Erfoud.

Atlas Pied Flycatcher ♦ *Ficedula speculigera* Four near Ifrane and a migrant at Auberge Derkaoua.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Several around Oukaïmeden.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* A singing male at Ifrane and a smattering of migrants.

Moussier's Redstart ♦ *Phoenicurus moussieri* Several encounters with this gem after the first near Ifrane.



Moussier's Redstart at Oued Massa and Common Rock Thrush at Oukaïmeden (Chris Kehoe)

Common Rock Thrush (Rufous-tailed R T) *Monticola saxatilis* A fine male at Oukaïmeden.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* Occasional encounters in the hills.



Desert Wheatear near Goulmima and Red-rumped Wheatear at the Tagdilt Track (Chris Kehoe)

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* A few at the coast.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* A migrant female near Goulmima.

Northern Wheatear ♦ (Seebohm's W) *Oenanthe [oenanthe] seebohmi* Several at the highest elevations. See note.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* Quite common in the deserts of the east.

Black-eared Wheatear ♦ (Western B-e W) *Oenanthe [hispanica] hispanica* Three at the coast

Red-rumped Wheatear ♦ *Oenanthe moesta* Common at the Tagdilt Track, a couple elsewhere.

Black Wheatear ♦ *Oenanthe leucura* Several encounters, mainly in the Atlas foothills.

White-crowned Wheatear ♦ (W-c Black W) *Oenanthe leucopyga* Common near Erfoud in particular.

Mourning Wheatear ♦ (Maghreb W, Western M W) *Oenanthe [lugens] halophila* A pair near the Tagdilt Track.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* One near Oukaimeden Pass.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common in towns and villages in particular but also at some desert oases.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* About 50 flew by at a stop *en route* to Ifrane.

Desert Sparrow ♦ *Passer simplex* Great views of six or more in the desert east of Erfoud.



Desert Sparrow near Erfoud (Chris Kehoe)

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia* Several at Oukaimeden, a couple elsewhere.

Western Yellow Wagtail (Spanish W) *Motacilla [flava] iberiae* Locally common in wetter areas.

Western Yellow Wagtail (Grey-headed W) *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi* One at Merzouga.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Noted near Ifrane and at Todra Gorge.

White Wagtail ♦ (Moroccan W) *Motacilla [alba] subpersonata* Noted on six dates.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* A couple of migrants near Erfoud.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* One near Ouarzazate.

Common Chaffinch (African C) *Fringilla [coelebs] africana* Common in more wooded areas. See note

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Several in and around Ifrane.

African Crimson-winged Finch ♦ *Rhodopechys alienus* Up to four near Oukaimeden Pass.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* Small numbers in the Tagdilt track area.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* Noted at Oukaimeden, near Ifrane and at Oued Massa.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina* Several at Oukaimeden and near Ifrane, a few others.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* A handful near Ifrane.

European Serin *Serinus serinus* Fairly common and widespread.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* Good views at and around Ifrane and at Oued Massa.

House Bunting ♦ *Emberiza sahari* Common in some towns and villages.



'African' Common Chaffinch at Ifrane and African Crimson-winged Finches near Oukaimeden (Chris Kehoe)

MAMMALS

Algerian Hedgehog *Atelerix algirus* One dead at Dayat Aoua.

Barbary Ground Squirrel (North African G S) *Atlantoxerus getulus* Noted a couple of times.

Shaw's Jird *Meriones shawi* Several along the Tagdilt Track.

Fat Sand Ra *Psammomys obesus* (NL) One or more near Goulmima.

Red Fox *Vulpes Vulpes* Noted on three dates.

Barbary Macaque (B Ape) *Macaca sylvanus* Several at Michlefin.

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Additional to or updating the notes in the tour checklist

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

Many past authors lump this species (which breeds in the Atlantic) in Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea* (which breeds in the Mediterranean) using the name Cory's Shearwater for the enlarged species. Separation of the two species at sea is difficult unless views are excellent but as most adult Scopoli's Shearwaters have already returned to their Mediterranean breeding sites before April it is highly likely that at least most of the birds encountered off the coast of Morocco during the dates of our tour will be this species and we have yet to identify a certain Scopoli's during our tours.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Some wintering birds and non-breeding birds in summer are of the race *sinensis* (and perhaps also nominate *carbo*) but resident breeders are of the form *moroccanus* which is markedly different, having a prominent white foreneck (of variable extent). These birds closely resemble White-breasted Cormorants *P. lucidus* of sub-Saharan Africa which is now often recognised as a separate species *P. lucidus*. Moroccan Cormorants are thought to meet *lucidus* in West Africa (Mauretania) but separating them is not always straightforward as some *moroccanus* (such as the bird below, photographed at Oued Massa during the tour) have white extending to the mid-breast just as in *lucidus*, though many *moroccanus* have less extensive white. In breeding condition *moroccanus* has yellow gular colouring whereas *lucidus* is said to be grey (though many photographs of *lucidus* from various parts of the range clearly show yellow colouring). Some have suggested that *moroccanus* is worthy of species status though clarification of what is happening where it meets supposed *lucidus* in Mauretania is desirable. As a group, the white-breasted birds of Morocco to Senegambia are

geographically isolated from white-breasted birds elsewhere but many seem indistinguishable. Continued inclusion of *moroccanus* as a subspecies of *P. carbo* seems untenable, inclusion within White-breasted Cormorant *P. lucidus* or separate species status is a much more sensible option though the former seems the most likely outcome.



'Moroccan' Cormorant at Oued Massa (Chris Kehoe)

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*

The forms concerned are *elegans* (inland, especially desert areas) and the darker *algeriensis* (coastal). This species (which includes all the large grey shrikes from southern Europe, North Africa and southern Asia) was until recently lumped in Great Grey (or Northern) Shrike *L. excubitor*. Further splits within this complex seem likely but extensive genetic studies have so far proved inconclusive and confusing as there is presently a mismatch between some of the morphological and molecular evidence.

African Blue Tit (North A B T) *Cyanistes teneriffae*

The form concerned is *ultramarinus*. Some authors lump this species in Eurasian Blue Tit *C. caeruleus* using the name Blue Tit for the enlarged species. More recently it has been suggested that some of the Canarian forms, including nominate *teneriffae*, are worthy of species status, in which case African Blue Tit would become *Cyanistes ultramarinus*.

Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti*

Traditional taxonomy recognises two subspecies, nominate *duponti* in Spain and coastal Morocco and the longer-billed and foxier-coloured *margaritae* further east in North Africa. As such the birds in high plains of Central Morocco are unaccounted for. Individuals on the plains near Zaida at 1500m are much foxier-coloured than Spanish birds but, as revealed in a recent extensive study of trapped birds in Spain, Morocco and Tunisia, are intermediate in bill length between *duponti* and *margaritae*. They should either be considered part of *margaritae* or, as suggested by the authors of the study, as a presently unnamed form. It has sometimes been suggested that *margaritae* differs significantly enough from *duponti* to be considered a separate species but the somewhat intermediate (though closer to *margaritae*) appearance of high plains Moroccan may undermine this view. As far as is known all vocalisations are similar between the three discrete populations though *margaritae* is a little-studied form.

(Western) Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia [cantillans] inornata*

A recent taxonomic paper treated Subalpine Warbler as three different species, Western Subalpine, Eastern Subalpine and Moltoni's Warblers. IOC currently accept the split of the vocally distinct Moltoni's Warbler but not yet that of Eastern and Western. Subalpine Warblers in Morocco can be either migrant *iberiae* or breeding *inornata*, both of which belong to the 'Western' group but Moltoni's could also occur on migration though we have yet to record it in Morocco.

(Western) Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe [lugens] halophila*

Some authors have proposed that this form and the nominate eastern form (Eastern Mourning Wheatear) merit specific status. The name Maghreb Wheatear is then used for *halophila* which differs most obviously in having a distinct female plumage whereas male and female *lugens* are essentially similar.

Northern Wheatear (Seebohm's W) *Oenanthe [oenanthe] seebohmi*

Several recent authors consider this distinctive form to be better treated as a separate species.

Common Chaffinch (African C) *Fringilla [coelebs] africana*

These distinctive birds, both in appearance and voice, are a potential split from northern populations, the name African Chaffinch has been suggested.