

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



3rd to 10th March 2018 (1 week)

MOROCCO

Natural history, mountains and coast

"the Atlas Kasbah is fabulous!"

"stunning scenery"

"interesting landscapes, flora and fauna"

Morocco 2014

An introduction to the natural history of southern Morocco.

Based for the week at the wonderful Atlas Kasbah in **southern Morocco**, our holiday is an excellent introduction to the flora, fauna and culture of this fascinating country. The short flight to Agadir, 30 minute transfer to the hotel and relaxed pace of the week make this trip ideal for anyone wanting a taste of Morocco in the company of expert leaders whilst enjoying a high standard of accommodation and **easy, comfortable travel**.

March is the best time for enjoying many of the flowers, both on the coast and in the mountains. With Mediterranean, Macaronesian and African influences, this area has a **fascinating mix of plants** including succulent euphorbias, colourful composites, toadflaxes and lavenders and interesting shrubs, including the endemic Argan tree. The birdlife is very interesting and we should see most of the local specialties, including House Bunting, Moussier's Redstart, Black-crowned Tchagra and, with luck, the critically endangered **Northern Bald Ibis**. We will visit the Sous Massa National Park, where as well as a variety of birds, we will also look for several species of antelope that have been reintroduced here, including Addax, Dorcas Gazelle and the graceful Scimitar-horned Oryx.

Our traditionally and sustainably-built and run hotel, the Atlas Kasbah, has spacious rooms with lovely views of the surrounding countryside, attractive patios and a swimming pool. It is situated within the protected argan forest and we will have time to enjoy this area and grounds of the hotel as well as excursions to the coast, mountains, oases, small villages and the attractive town of Taroudant, a 'mini Marrakech', to experience the local **Berber culture**.



Price
£1545

Single Room Supplement
£150

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Agadir
- Day 2** Tighanimine El Baz
- Day 3** Cap Rhir, Oued Tamri
- Day 4** Taroudant, Tioute
- Day 5** Sous Massa
- Day 6** Anti Atlas
- Day 7** western High Atlas
- Day 8** return to UK

Leaders

Charlie Rugeroni and
Mike Symes

wild flowers,
natural history,
culture

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



Morocco is a country of great contrasts. Situated on the edge of Europe, its culture and people are a fascinating **mix of European, African and Arab** influences. From the Mediterranean coast in the north, through the snow covered Atlas mountains to the arid Saharan desert these diverse habitats make Morocco a top destination for wildlife. This holiday is intended to give an introduction to the plants, culture and wildlife including some of the many birding highlights. Based in the Atlas Kasbah **eco-hotel** located amongst the **Argan forests** we will explore an area that is a melting pot of culture, plants and birds. Here the influence of the Mediterranean meets the desert floras of the south creating a unique transition zone. The Argan tree, *Argania spinosa* is a remnant of a once tropical flora and a key tree in the local economy, exploited for its health-giving oil extracted from the seeds. Our itinerary offers the chance to relax and enjoy the kasbah itself, to see the unique succulent Euphorbias along the coast, to visit the High Atlas and to experience the sights, smells and sounds of the traditional medina of Taroudant.

ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 Sat 3rd Flight to Agadir and transfer to the Atlas Kasbah (c30 minutes).

Day 2 Sun 4th Today we will explore the lanes and hillsides around the hotel and the nearby village. We walk from the hotel through the **Argan woodland** and discover why the tree is so valuable. The oval fruits sustain the local community and there is an increasing commercial activity selling the sweet rich oil – not too dissimilar to olive oil and widely used in Moroccan cooking. Cultivated and colourful annuals are a feature particularly along field edges and include local specialities such as the orange-flowered *Cladanthus arabicus*, the pretty blue *Volutaria crupinoides* and the bugloss *Echium horridum*. The local birdlife includes local specialities including Common Bulbul, House Bunting and Moussier's Redstart, species we will become familiar with during the week.

Day 3 Mon 5th The Atlantic coast south to the Sahara is well known for its unique communities of succulents *Euphorbia officinarum*, *E. regis-jubae* and *Kleinia anteuphorbia* mixed with shrubs such as *Nauplius imbricatus*, *Searsia pentaphylla* and the desert-dwelling *Warionia saharae*. We will visit **Cap Rhir** to explore these communities and visit nearby Oued Tamri, where we hope to see the critically endangered **Northern Bald Ibis**: the total world population is only around 400 birds, with one of the main nesting colonies nearby. We will end the day with a visit to the old Kasbah of Agadir, with its views over the city.

Day 4 Tue 6th Today we visit the attractive town of **Taroudant**, described as a 'mini Marrakech' but with a character of its own reflecting its rich Berber culture. We will enjoy views from ancient city walls and explore the labyrinthine market - full of spices and herbs and traditional furnishings such as rugs and teapots, House Buntings singing from the buildings and Little Swift overhead. We also visit a women's **Argan oil co-operative** and visit the oasis at Tioute, the natural habitat of the date palm *Phoenix dactylifera*.



Day 5 Wed 7th We head south along the coast to the famous **Sous Massa National Park**. We will meet up with a guide from the National Park, who will tell us more about the important conservation work going on here, especially the reintroduction of a variety of **Saharan 'megafauna'** to the reserve; antelopes including Dorcas Gazelle, Scimitar-horned Oryx and Addax, and the North African Ostrich, all of which have become almost extinct across much of their range due to overhunting. We will have a guided visit to the area where these animals have been reintroduced, and with luck get to see some of them.

We will finish our day by visiting the Oued Sous, where Greater Flamingos gather on the estuary and feed alongside various waders, gulls and terns.

Day 6 Thu 8th This morning we head south to the **Anti Atlas**, a low range of very old mountains, which form much of the landscape in the south east of the country. We will travel to Ait Baha and beyond, with stunning views and interesting plants along the way: local endemic specialities include the toadflax *Linaria ventricosa* and *Hesperolaburnum platycarpum*. Barbary Ground Squirrel and the large lizard Bibron's Agama may appear along the roadside, while Bonelli's Eagle soar overhead.

Day 7 Fri 9th Today we head in the opposite direction, for the slopes of the **High Atlas**, making a circuit via the aptly-named Paradise Valley and the Cascades du Immouzer. We will find the Berber Thuya *Tetraclinis articulata*, an interesting conifer, as well as hillsides covered in Dwarf Fan Palm mixed in with *Lavandula dentata* and the beautiful shrubby milkwort, *Polygala balansae*, with contrasting petals of deep purple and yellow. Nearby we will look for the wonderful *Fritillaria lusitanica*.

Day 8 Sat 10th Our last morning will be spent exploring more of the local area, or just enjoying the relaxing grounds and pool! Transfer to Agadir and flight to UK.

Accommodation, meals and transport

We will stay for the whole week at the wonderful **Atlas Kasbah**, a new hotel in a traditional design situated amongst the Argan trees in the Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve. The rooms are very spacious, the local culture reflected in the furnishings, and there are lovely views from the rooms and roof terrace. It has an attractive patio, gardens and swimming pool. It has been designed sustainably and is run in an environmentally friendly way. All food is included.

We will travel by coach/minibus.

Health and fitness

Please see the General Information leaflet for health and fitness requirements. This is not a strenuous holiday but on some days we will be walking for much of the day, sometimes gently uphill. We will adapt our walking to the weather but we will no doubt be walking in the sun on some days, albeit not for very long walks. All excursions are optional and you can choose to spend more time in the pleasant grounds and rooms of the hotel if you wish. The hotel rooms are on the first or second floor and reached by stairs.



Leaders

Charlie Rugeroni is a landscape and garden designer from Dorset. His knowledge and interest in plants, and wildlife generally, stem from his previous work with English Nature, Butterfly Conservation and Marinelife. Charlie has led for us in Morocco five times over recent years. **Mike Symes** is an excellent all-round naturalist who has worked for Devon Wildlife Trust for ten years. Mike will help you enjoy all aspects of the wildlife of Morocco.

Our leaders will be accompanied by Mohammed Belfakir, our local **Moroccan guide**, together with the assistance of Hassan and Helene, the owners of the Atlas Kasbah.

Weather

At this time of year the weather is usually sunny but not too hot. If we do get hotter weather we will adapt the itinerary as much as possible. There may be some cooler weather and some rain.

Eco tourism

Southern Morocco is under threat from both urban and agricultural development. The demand by visitors such as ourselves, for areas managed for natural history and as a resource for real 'eco tourism' is vitally important for preserving biodiversity. We have chosen the Atlas Kasbah for its environmental sustainability.

Flights

Group flights are with Easyjet from Gatwick to Agadir:

3rd March depart London Gatwick 14.25, arrive Agadir 18.20

10th March depart Agadir 19.05, arrive Gatwick 22.55

Morocco local time is the same as in the UK.

Passport and visas

If you hold a British passport, you do not need a visa to travel to Morocco. If you do not have a UK passport, please check with your local consulate. Your passport will need to be valid **for at least six months** after your entry into Morocco.

TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT £500 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 3/12/2017
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flight from UK to Agadir. Local transport as specified in itinerary. 7 nights accommodation, all meals. Services of leaders.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Gratuities. Insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Front (clockwise): Atlas Kasbah, Scimitar-horned Oryx, Moussier's Redstart, *Ismelia versicolor*, Atlas Kasbah gardens **Inside:** *Polygala balansae*, *Cistanche phelypaea*, *Linaria ventricosa*, *Fritillaria lusitanica*, *Euphorbia officinarum*, Northern Bald Ibis, Black-crowned Tchagra, local in Taroudant medina.