

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

9th-21st March 2019 (13 days)

SOUTHERN MOROCCO

Easy birding and natural history: coast, desert and mountains



"excellent birding
botany and culture
holiday"
Morocco 2018

A birding exploration of the varied habitats of southern Morocco.

March is a very pleasant time to visit Morocco, with good weather, large numbers of **migrating birds** heading northwards to Europe and plenty of plants in flower, both on the coast and in the mountains.

We will start our tour on the Atlantic Coast, seeking out local specialties, including Moussier's Redstart, Black-crowned Tchagra and, with luck, the critically endangered **Northern Bald Ibis**. We will visit the Sous Massa National Park where we will look for several species of antelope that have been reintroduced here, including Addax, Dorcas Gazelle and the graceful **Scimitar-horned Oryx**.

Heading inland we will pass through the argan forest of the Sous Valley to the arid rocky steppe of the Tagdilt Track, home to **larks and wheatears**. We will explore rock gorges in search of Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Maghreb Wheatear and the endearing Gundi, before reaching the stony desert of the Tafilalet and the **sand dunes of Erg Chebbi**, home to desert specialties including Desert Sparrows, Egyptian Nightjar, Cream-coloured Courser and various sandgrouse

Heading back westwards, we will travel through the spectacular Anti-Atlas mountains, before finally climbing the **High Atlas** to the snow line, where we hope to find African Crimson-winged Finches, Seeböhm's Wheatear and Levaillant's Woodpecker.

As well as Morocco's birdlife, we will find reptiles, butterflies, spring flowers and some amazing scenery. This holiday will be **our 15th visit** to southern Morocco, and our second to explore further into the eastern desert.



Price
£2265

Single Room Supplement
£250

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Agadir
- Day 2** Atlantic Coast
- Day 3** Sous Massa NP
- Day 4** travel to Taroudant
- Day 5** Ouarzazate
- Day 6/7** Boumalne des Dades
- Day 8** Tagdilt Track
- Day 9/10** Merzouga
- Day 11** Ouarzazate
- Day 12** Tiz'n'Tichka
- Day 13** Oukaimeden, return to UK

Leaders

Laurie Jackson and Phil Saunders

Atlantic coast, High Atlas mountains and the eastern desert

Wildlife and culture holidays



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



FOCUS OF INTEREST

This is one of our 'Easy birding and wildlife' trips which means that the itinerary is based mainly on birds and/or other animals (rather than plants or general wildlife) and this also reflects the knowledge of the leaders and guides. However, as with all of our trips, the pace is comfortable with time to enjoy other aspects of the natural history, rather than rushing from one place to another for specific species.



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 9th Fly to Agadir and transfer to Atlas Kasbah (c30 minutes). After lunch, we explore the local countryside for our first North African specialities, with Common Bulbul and House Bunting common around the hotel and Moussier's Redstart in the Argan trees.

Day 2 Sun 10th This morning we head to the Atlantic coast, travelling up to Cap Rhir and Oued Tamri, where we hope to see the critically endangered **Northern Bald Ibis**. This coastline is also well known for its unique communities of succulent Euphorbias, and we will stop to explore this interesting habitat, hoping to find Spectacled Warbler and Black Wheatear along with endemic geckos and interesting plants. o/n Atlas Kasbah

Day 3 Mon 11th We head to the famous **Sous Massa National Park** to learn about the important conservation work going on here; 're-wilding' of a variety of Saharan antelopes including Dorcas Gazelle, **Scimitar-horned Oryx** and Addax, and the Red-necked Ostrich, all of which have become extinct across much of their range. We visit the reintroduction area, enjoying close encounters along the way. We spend the afternoon at Oued Massa, hoping to hear the fluting song of **Black-crowned Tchagra**. o/n Atlas Kasbah

Day 4 Tue 12th We start today with a visit to the river-mouth at Oued Sous, where **flamingos** gather on the estuary and feed alongside various waders, gulls and terns. From here we strike inland, travelling through the famous argan forests of the Sous valley, towards Oulad Berhil, where we spend the night. o/n L'Aganier d'Or

Day 5 Wed 13th We continue our journey eastwards, travelling through increasingly arid, **rocky landscapes** as we head towards Ouarzazate. Along the way we will start to see White-crowned and Desert Wheatears and a variety of larks along the roadside, and keep our eyes open for Barbary Falcon, Lanner and Long-legged Buzzard. o/n Dar Amouddou

Day 6 Thu 14th Our morning will start with a visit to the nearby **Ouarzazate Reservoir**. Various migrants rest here on their journey northwards, and could include a variety of waders and wildfowl, warblers and wagtails. From here we travel eastwards to **Boumalne des Dades** where we will explore the **Tagdilt Track**, an area famous for its desert steppe birds: we hope to find a **variety of larks** including Thick-billed, Hoopoe, Desert and Temminck's Larks, Red-rumped Wheatear, Cream-coloured Courser and Trumpeter Finch. Burrows in the steppe are home to abundant Fat Sand Rat. o/n Soleil Bleu.



Day 7 Fri 15th After the travelling day yesterday, we will spend the day locally, travelling up the **Dades Gorge**, where the Gundi, an endearing rodent sunbathes on the boulders. Birds might include Tristram's Warbler and Rock Bunting. We may return to the Tagdilt Track, depending on our success yesterday, or relax during the afternoon. o/n Soleil Bleu.

Day 8 Fri 16th This morning we continue our journey eastwards. Along the way we will check cliff faces for a chance to find **Pharoah Eagle Owl** at its roost site. Nearby we hope to find Maghreb Wheatear. Further eastwards, depending on time available, we may look for Saharan Scrub Warbler before finally arriving in the **desert proper of the Tafilalt**, at Merzouga. o/n Auberge Derkaoua

Days 9/10 Sat 17th/Sun 18th We spend two days exploring the Tafilalt, taking a four-wheel drive 'safari' one day in search of some of the **special birds of the desert**: Egyptian Nightjar, Houbara Bustard and **Desert Sparrow**, as well as Spotted Sandgrouse, Bar-tailed Desert Lark and African Desert Warbler. We will visit the sand dunes of the **Erg Chebbi** and explore the oasis gardens in search of migrant birds. We may also visit traditional Gnawa musicians and learn about their interesting history. o/n Auberge Derkaoua

Day 11 Mon 19th Today we head back to Ouarzazate through the Anti Atlas mountains, with one or two stops along the way amongst the stunning scenery. o/n Dar Amouddou

Day 12 Tue 20th Up until now we have been south of the High Atlas: today we cross the mountains, via the Tiz n Tichka pass at an altitude of 2,260 metres. From these heady heights we drop back down into the plains near Marrakech, before climbing again up towards the ski resort of Oukaïmeden. o/n Chez Juju

Day 13 Wed 21st An early start takes us in search of one of the stars of the mountains; **African Crimson-winged Finches** that feed around the base of the Oukaïmeden ski lifts. Atlas Horned Lark and both Alpine and Red-billed Chough should also be found, and we may be lucky and find an early returning Seebohm's Wheatear. Nearby we will look for Levallant's Woodpecker. After lunch, we head down to Marrakech for our flights home.

Accommodation, meals and transport

Our hotels and guesthouses will have en-suite accommodation: dinner and breakfast will be taken in the hotels, with lunches a mixture of picnics and 'sit down' meals in hotels and local restaurants. We will travel by minibus. Our excursions in Sous Massa National Park and into the desert beyond Merzouga will be by comfortable four-wheel drive vehicles.

Health and fitness

Please see the General Information leaflet for health and fitness requirements. This is not a strenuous holiday. The main fitness consideration is likely to be long distances travelled by bus. There will be some walking, including on sand dunes/sandy beaches, and on rocky/uneven tracks, 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. The hotel rooms may be on the first or second floor, with no lift available.



Leaders

Laurie Jackson is an experienced Wildlife Travel leader, having led many of our trips in recent years, from France and Lesvos to Romania and Svalbard. This will be her fourth trip to Morocco. Laurie will be joined by **Phil Saunders**, an excellent all-round naturalist currently based in Norwich. Our driver and local guide is Mohammed Belfakir, who has helped us with all our recent trips to Morocco. Our leaders will ensure you enjoy all aspects of the wildlife we encounter.



Weather

In March, the weather is usually sunny but not too hot. If we get hot weather we will adapt the itinerary as much as possible. There may be cooler weather, particularly in the mountains.



Flights

Group flights are with Easyjet from Gatwick to Agadir, returning from Marrakech:

9th March depart London Gatwick 14.25, arrive Agadir 18.20
21st March depart Marrakech 18.10, arrive Gatwick 21.45

It is also possible to fly with Easyjet from Manchester as follows:

9th March depart Manchester 14.35, arrive Agadir 18.35
21st March depart Marrakech 19.55, arrive Manchester 23.50
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 £750 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 08/12/2018
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flight from UK to Morocco. Local transport as specified in itinerary. 12 nights' accommodation, all meals from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 13. Services of leaders and guide. **NOT INCLUDED:** Refreshments. Gratuities. Insurance. Dinner Day 13.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Front (clockwise): Erg Chebbi dunes, Moussier's Redstart, Addax, Thick-billed Lark, Merzouga oasis
Inside (left to right): scenery near Ouarzazate, *Narcissus jeanmonodii*, African Crimson-winged Finch, Northern Bald Ibis, Egyptian Nightjar and Desert Sparrow **Above:** Hotel Atlas Kasbah, White-crowned Wheatear, *Cistanche violacea*.