

Trip Report — Morocco 2024

September 3-17, 2024 with Jay VanderGaast



The gorgeous Moussier's Redstart is one of the most sought-after of the North African specialties on this tour. Photo by guide Jay VanderGaast.

Though it is part of the African continent, Morocco, as we found, resembles more the Mediterranean regions of southern Europe than it does anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa. With its excellent system of highways, decent hotels, and Mediterranean influenced cuisine (think lots of olives!), not to mention the fact that French is widely spoken, it was easy to forget that we were actually in Africa. Even the avifauna is very European, evidenced by the fact that the main field guides for Europe include North Africa. That said, North Africa does have plenty of local specialties that make this a must-visit destination for any world birder. And the fact that Morocco is a safe, friendly country makes it that much more appealing!



Torrential rains in the southeast of Morocco gave our group the rare experience of flooding in the Sahara, such as this newly-formed lake at Erg Chebbi. Photo by guide Jay VanderGaast.

Our tour started off along the northern coast with a couple of nights near the capital city of Rabat. From our charming coastal hotel (with great shorebirding right from the courtyard!), we explored surrounding areas like the Zaer hunting grounds, where the local Double-spurred Francolin, one of several species with a curiously disjunct population in Morocco, was one of our main targets. Though they were pretty elusive, most folks did come away with a decent look at them, and we tallied a bunch of other more widespread species as well, including our first North African specialties in the form of the delightful African Blue Tit and African Chaffinch. In this region, we also visited Lac Sidi Boughaba, where we enjoyed a couple of pleasant hours scoping White-headed and Marbled ducks on the water, Red-knobbed Coot (another disjunct population), Purple Heron, and Eurasian Spoonbill along the shore, and tracking down songbirds like Cetti's and Sardinian warblers in the scrub. From here we moved on to the anomalous Swiss-style village of Ifrane, from where we tracked down the local Levillant's Woodpecker in the (now dry) lakes region, and met up with our first wheatears (Black and Atlas wheatears) and our first larks (Thekla's) along with one of the birds near the top of everyone's want list, the stunning Moussier's Redstart!



Wheatears are well-represented in North Africa, and we tallied 7 species on this year's tour, including the handsome Desert Wheatear in this portrait by guide Jay VanderGaast.

Moving south, we stopped in the high, barren plains near Zaida to search for the very local, very difficult Dupont's Lark. Sadly, we were unable to turn up a Dupont's, but both Greater and Mediterranean short-toed larks, as well as the lovely Desert Wheatear, made the effort worthwhile. Still further south, we picked up another NA specialty, Tristram's Warbler, in the High Atlas juniper scrub, then dropped into the desert regions near Errachidia, where we found the elusive Scrub Warbler, Bar-tailed Lark, and the impressive Greater Hoopoe-Lark in a surprisingly wet, muddy wadi, a sign of things to come. We were already behind schedule as we hurried on to try to make it to Merzouga before dark, only to discover that two days of exceptionally heavy rainfall (exceeding the normal yearly average!) had caused rivers to flood, leaving the main road to Merzouga under water. Luckily, the water was going down, and after a lengthy wait in a small village, we were finally back on track just before dusk, departing to the cheers and waves from hordes of local children, a truly endearing and memorable scene! The next morning, we marveled at the sight of the soggy Sahara, with temporary lakes filling every low area, and a long-dry river bed a virtual torrent that was suddenly treacherous to cross! Where we thought we'd be dealing with extreme heat and clouds of dust, we instead were met with more pleasant (though still hot) temperatures and mud galore, making the act of walking the wadis in search of local specialties a difficult and dirty task! But we persevered, adding great local

specialties like Egyptian Nightjar, Cream-coloured Courser, Spotted Sandgrouse, and the very local Desert Sparrow to our lists.



After seeing our first, a distant bird along the Oued Massa, we were thrilled to come across a much closer group of 90+ Northern Bald Ibis that afternoon! Photo by guide Jay VanderGaast.

Leaving the Sahara Desert behind, we turned west, heading for the town of Boumalne Dades, with a stop for the delightfully-named Fulvous Chatterer on the way. Based in a beautiful hotel in Dades, we scoured the surrounding rocky deserts for more dry-country specialties, finding Crowned Sandgrouse, Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, Temminck's and Desert larks, and Red-rumped Wheatear among others. A side trip into the spectacular Daded Gorge was mainly for the scenery, though a Bonelli's Eagle was a nice addition for those that managed to spot it before it dove behind the mountains. All too soon it was time to leave, and we moved on to the coastal city of Agadir. Here we explored the birdy Oued Massa region where migration was very much in evidence, with plenty of birds on the move through the riverside scrub, including our first Eurasian Hoopoes and Western Olivaceous Warblers. Our main quarry however, was the Endangered Northern Bald Ibis, and while we did see a distant bird along the river thanks to Lisa, we later came face to beak with a large group of them near one of the remaining nesting colonies, with a dozen or so Eurasian Thick-knees hiding in plain sight nearby. That evening, a nightbird excursion failed to turn up any owls, but a Red-necked Nightjar and excellent looks at a trio of Barbary Partridge going to roost. Our Agadir pelagic trip the next morning was a little lighter on birds than we'd hoped, but

Pomarine Jaeger, and Cory's and Manx shearwaters were nice additions and the large group of dolphins that rode the bow wave with us was a wonderful experience, not to mention the scrumptious lunch of fresh-caught fish! Then it was on to Marrakesh, and our final birding venue in the high mountains southeast of the city. Here we tracked down a fair number of very local Crimson-winged Finches, as well as Rock Bunting, Iberian Chiffchaff, Blue Rock-Thrush, Red-billed and Yellow-billed choughs, and White-throated Dipper before heading back to the city. We finished off the trip with a visit to downtown Marrakesh, where we enjoyed the sights, sounds, and smells of the lively, and confusing souk, a fascinating experience to say the least!

Thanks to all of you for joining me on this Moroccan adventure! It was such a fun trip, and I look forward to seeing you all on another sometime soon! And thanks, also, to our incredible driver, Oussama, who I truly could not have done this without!



An even dozen species of lark are possible on this tour, including the subtly beautiful Mediterranean Short-toed Lark in this photo by guide Jay VanderGaast.

In addition to the birds, we also saw the following mammals:

Barbary Macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*)- seen mainly around Ifrane

Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis*)-one was seen by several folks at the Zaer hunting area.

Barbary Ground Squirrel (*Atlantoxerus getulus*)-these striped ground-squirrels were seen at the Dades Gorge and in the mountains at Oukaïmeden.

Atlantic White-sided Dolphin (*Leucopleurus acutus*)-a pod of dolphins that joined us on our Agadir pelagic trip were probably this species.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)- one on the clifftop as we walked down into the gorge to search for the eagle-owl.

Shaw's Jird (*Meriones shawii*)-super views of one digging next to the road in the Vallee des Roches near Ifrane. Another jird was seen in the wadi west of Errachidia, but that might well have been a different species, perhaps Moroccan Jird (*Meriones grandis*)

We also had the following reptiles:

Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard (*Uromastix nigriventis*): the large colourful lizards seen around Boumalne Dades.

Bosc's Fringe-toed Lizard (*Acanthodactylus boskianus*): the racerunner type lizard in the wadi west of Errachidia.

Bibron's Agama (*Agama bibronii*): the lizards sunning on the rocks near Ait Benhaddou.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/272846>

Jay

Morocco 2024

3 – 16 Sep 2024 (14 days) Link-only



Morocco

Gharb-Chrarda-Beni Hssen | Meknès-Tafilalet | Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaer | Chaouia-Ouardigha | Marrakech-Tensift-Al Haouz | Sous-Massa-Draa

Jay VanderGaast



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...

170

Species Observed

62

Checklists



36

Species with Photos







































LIFERS  42  34 

Species Observed

Show all details

- 188 **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*   4
- 7 **Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*  2
- 237 **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*  4
- 12 **Green-winged Teal** *Anas crecca*  3
- 14 **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*   1  3
- 12 **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*  1
- 14 **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala*  1
- 11 **Barbary Partridge** *Alectoris barbara*   3
- 7 **Double-spurred Spurfowl** *Pternistis bicalcaratus*   3
- 157 **Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia*  14
- 68 **Common Wood-Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*  4
- 9 **European Turtle-Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*  4
- 14 **Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*  6
- 2 **Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis*  2
- 4 **Spotted Sandgrouse** *Pterocles senegallus*   1
- 4 **Crowned Sandgrouse** *Pterocles coronatus*   1
- 1 **Red-necked Nightjar** *Caprimulgus ruficollis*   1
- 1 **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius*    1  1
- 1 **Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba*  1
- 20 **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus*   1

- 6 **Eurasian Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* ▶  2
- 9 **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra* ▶  4
- 26 **Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica cristata*  ▶  3  1
- 20 **Eurasian Thick-knee** *Burhinus oediconemus*  ▶  3  3
- 63 **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* ▶  4
- 2 **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* ▶  2
- 47 **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* ▶  3
- 4 **Black-bellied Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* ▶  2
- 21 **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* ▶  5
- 5 **Little Ringed Plover** *Thinornis dubius* ▶  1
- 2 **Kentish Plover** *Anarhynchus alexandrinus*  ▶  1  2
- 23 **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* ▶  4
- 1 **Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* ▶  1
- 8 **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* ▶  4
- 6 **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* ▶  4
- 21 **Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* ▶  6
- 5 **Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* ▶  3
- 60 **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* ▶  3
- 6 **Ruff** *Calidris pugnax*  ▶  1  3
- 15 **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* ▶  2
- 65 **Sanderling** *Calidris alba* ▶  3
- 2 **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* ▶  2
- 14 **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*  ▶  1  5
- 5 **Cream-colored Courser** *Cursorius cursor*  ▶  1

1	Pomarine Jaeger <i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	▶  1
82	Black-headed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	▶  3
25	Audouin's Gull <i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i> ✓ 	▶  1  2
30	Mediterranean Gull <i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i> 	▶  2  4
48	Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i> 	▶  1  9
3	Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	▶  1  4
4	Little Tern <i>Sternula albifrons</i>	▶  2
1	Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	▶  1
3	Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i>	▶  1
66	Sandwich Tern <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i> 	▶  1  3
2	Lesser Crested Tern <i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i> 	▶  1  1
55	Greater Flamingo <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	▶  3
46	Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	▶  3
8	Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	▶  1
1	Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	▶  1
1	White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	▶  1
2	Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	▶  1
95	Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	▶  4
93	Northern Bald Ibis <i>Geronticus eremita</i> ✓ 	▶  2  2
23	Eurasian Spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	▶  3
48	Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	▶  9
1	Squacco Heron <i>Ardeola ralloides</i> 	▶  1  1
4	Western Cattle-Egret <i>Ardea ibis</i>	▶  3

51	Gray Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	▶ 📄 6
3	Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	▶ 📄 1
3	Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶ 📄 3
2	Booted Eagle <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	▶ 📄 2
2	Bonelli's Eagle <i>Aquila fasciata</i> ✓	▶ 📄 1
1	Western Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	▶ 📄 1
1	Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	▶ 📄 1
12	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	▶ 📄 1
10	Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus</i>	▶ 📄 6
1	Pharaoh Eagle-Owl <i>Bubo ascalaphus</i> ✓ 📷	▶ 📄 1 📄 1
2	Little Owl <i>Athene noctua</i> 📷	▶ 📄 2 📄 2
3	Eurasian Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	▶ 📄 1
120	European Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i>	▶ 📄 8
1	Common Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	▶ 📄 1
1	Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	▶ 📄 1
2	Levaillant's Woodpecker <i>Picus vaillantii</i> ✓ 📷	▶ 📄 2 📄 2
12	Eurasian Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	▶ 📄 9
1	Eurasian Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo</i>	▶ 📄 1
1	Eurasian Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	▶ 📄 1
7	Black-crowned Tchagra <i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	▶ 📄 5
1	Great Gray Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>	▶ 📄 1
1	Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>	▶ 📄 1
12	Eurasian Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	▶ 📄 5

- 29 **Maghreb Magpie** *Pica mauritanica* ✓ 📷 ▶ 📷 3 📷 4
- 158 **Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* ▶ 📷 1 📷 7
- 9 **Yellow-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax graculus* ▶ 📷 2
- 1 **Eurasian Jackdaw** *Coloeus monedula* ▶ 📷 1
- 21 **Brown-necked Raven** *Corvus ruficollis* ▶ 📷 3
- 40 **Common Raven** *Corvus corax* ▶ 📷 4
- 12 **Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* ▶ 📷 2
- 50 **African Blue Tit** *Cyanistes teneriffae* ✓ ▶ 📷 12
- 14 **Great Tit** *Parus major* ▶ 📷 4
- 12 **Greater Hoopoe-Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes* ✓ 📷 ▶ 📷 4 📷 5
- 1 **Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey* ✓ ▶ 📷 1
- 5 **Bar-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes cinctura* ✓ 📷 ▶ 📷 1 📷 2
- 11 **Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti* ✓ ▶ 📷 4
- 8 **Thekla's Lark** *Galerida theklae* ✓ ▶ 📷 3
- 28 **Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* ▶ 📷 9
- 1 **Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* ▶ 📷 1
- 10 **Temminck's Lark** *Eremophila bilopha* ✓ 📷 ▶ 📷 2 📷 4
- 17 **Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* ▶ 📷 3
- 22 **Mediterranean Short-toed Lark** *Alaudala rufescens* ✓ 📷 ▶ 📷 2 📷 2
- 13 **Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis* ▶ 📷 2
- 2 **Western Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna opaca* ✓ ▶ 📷 1
- 4 **Bank Swallow** *Riparia riparia* ▶ 📷 2
- 5 **Eurasian Crag-Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* ▶ 📷 2

80	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶ 📄 16
6	Western House-Martin <i>Delichon urbicum</i>	▶ 📄 1
25	Common Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	▶ 📄 7
2	Western Bonelli's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i> ✓	▶ 📄 1
2	Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	▶ 📄 2
5	Common Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	▶ 📄 3
2	Iberian Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i> ✓	▶ 📄 1
2	Scrub Warbler <i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>	▶ 📄 1
9	Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>	▶ 📄 3
2	Garden Warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i>	▶ 📄 2
1	Western Orphean Warbler <i>Curruca hortensis</i> ✓	▶ 📄 1
3	Tristram's Warbler <i>Curruca deserticola</i> ✓	▶ 📄 1
51	Sardinian Warbler <i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	▶ 📄 8
6	Western Subalpine Warbler <i>Curruca iberiae</i> ✓	▶ 📄 3
5	Spectacled Warbler <i>Curruca conspicillata</i>	▶ 📄 2
7	Fulvous Chatterer <i>Argya fulva</i> ✓ 📄	▶ 📄 4 📄 1
6	Common Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	▶ 📄 3
5	Eurasian Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>	▶ 📄 2
3	Short-toed Treecreeper <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	▶ 📄 3
2	Eurasian Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	▶ 📄 1
2	White-throated Dipper <i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	▶ 📄 1
33	Spotless Starling <i>Sturnus unicolor</i> ✓ 📄	▶ 📄 2 📄 6
15	Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> 📄	▶ 📄 2 📄 1

12	Eurasian Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	▶ 📄 8
9	Spotted Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	▶ 📄 5
8	European Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	▶ 📄 4
19	Moussier's Redstart <i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i> ✓ 📄	▶ 📄 6 📄 9
1	Common Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	▶ 📄 1
11	Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> 📄	▶ 📄 3 📄 4
10	Blue Rock-Thrush <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	▶ 📄 3
2	Whinchat <i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	▶ 📄 2
8	European Stonechat <i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	▶ 📄 2
4	Northern Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	▶ 📄 4
8	Atlas Wheatear <i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i> ✓	▶ 📄 4
16	Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti</i> 📄	▶ 📄 4 📄 11
4	Western Black-eared Wheatear <i>Oenanthe hispanica</i> ✓ 📄	▶ 📄 3 📄 1
12	Red-rumped Wheatear <i>Oenanthe moesta</i> ✓	▶ 📄 4
15	Black Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucura</i> ✓ 📄	▶ 📄 1 📄 9
14	White-crowned Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i> ✓	▶ 📄 7
51	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	▶ 📄 8
2	Desert Sparrow <i>Passer simplex</i> ✓	▶ 📄 1
159	Rock Sparrow <i>Petronia petronia</i> 📄	▶ 📄 2 📄 7
4	Gray Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	▶ 📄 3
7	Western Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava</i>	▶ 📄 3
3	White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	▶ 📄 2
81	African Chaffinch <i>Fringilla spodiogenys</i> ✓	▶ 📄 12

- 2 **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* ✓ ▶ 📄 1
- 18 **Crimson-winged Finch** *Rhodopechys sanguineus* ✓ 📄 ▶ 📄 2 📄 3
- 4 **European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris* 📄 ▶ 📄 2 📄 2
- 64 **Eurasian Linnet** *Linaria cannabina* ▶ 📄 4
- 6 **Red Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra* ▶ 📄 2
- 4 **European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* ▶ 📄 1
- 5 **European Serin** *Serinus serinus* ▶ 📄 2
- 2 **Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* ▶ 📄 2
- 16 **Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia* 📄 ▶ 📄 2 📄 4
- 3 **Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus* ✓ ▶ 📄 2
- 12 **House Bunting** *Emberiza sahari* ✓ ▶ 📄 7

ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 46 **Common/Pallid Swift** *Apus apus/pallidus* ▶ 📄 4
- 300 **Eurasian/Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica atra/cristata* ▶ 📄 1
- 9 **small plover sp.** *Charadrius/Thinornis/Anarhynchus sp.* ▶ 📄 3
- 1 **Parasitic/Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius parasiticus/pomarinus* ▶ 📄 1
- 30 **Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater** *Calonectris borealis/diomedea* ▶ 📄 1
- 4 **hawk sp.** *Accipitridae sp. (hawk sp.)* ▶ 📄 3
- 2 **falcon sp.** *Falco sp.* ▶ 📄 2
- 8 **Thekla's/Crested Lark** *Galerida theklae/cristata* ▶ 📄 1
- 2 **Willow Warbler/Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus trochilus/collybita* ▶ 📄 2
- 2 **Common/Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita/ibericus* ▶ 📄 1
- 1 **Sylvia/Curruca sp.** *Sylvia/Curruca sp.* ▶ 📄 1