

# Morocco 'Classic' -

*Birdwatching from High Atlas to Sahara: 1) 1.th – 13.th March 2023 or 2) 14.th – 26.th March 2023*





## Morocco 'Classic' – 13-days birdwatching from High Atlas to Sahara, and the Atlantic Coast

*"Morocco, with its breath-taking scenery, delicious food, rich history and fabulous birding, is an essential destination for all birders"*

Morocco ranks as one of the top birding tour destinations in the Western Palearctic and has the richest avifauna in North Africa with its many specialities and North African endemics. During this exciting Morocco birding tour, which is the most comprehensive Moroccan birding tour itinerary available, we shall have the opportunity to see the full range of habitats that exist in Morocco. In particular we shall be concentrating on the many North African endemics and other regional specialities. The focus of this 13-day birding tour is to see as many of these Moroccan endemic, and near-endemic species as possible, and we will seek out many other special and sought-after species; and, in the course of this tour, we have the potential to rack up a very impressive bird list in terms of species numbers, and great sightings. This is a land of contrasts where in the course of a single day one can be watching Hawfinch and Firecrests in the forests of the Middle Atlas in the morning and Desert Lark and Cream Colored Courser on the edge of the Sahara in the afternoon.

Our Morocco itinerary is comprehensive and include a long range of sought after North African endemics. We have the opportunity to see the full range of habitats and we shall be concentrating on the many North African endemics and other regional specialities, including the Northern Bald Ibis, one of the world's most endangered birds that is now restricted to only two colonies in Morocco and a recently introduced breeding colony in Spain, Levallant's Woodpecker, African Crimson-winged Finch, Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, Cream-colored Courser, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Crowned – Spotted and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Desert Sparrow, African Desert Warbler, numerous larks e.g. Greater Hoopoe-Lark, as well as Temminck's, Maghreb and Thick-billed Larks and Dupont's Lark. Moussier's Redstart, Tristram's Warbler, Barbary Partridge, Fulvous Babbler, Saharan Scrub Warbler, House Bunting, Egyptian Nightjar, Houbara Bustard, Western Mourning Wheatear, Red-rumped Wheatears, Seeborn's Wheatear (formerly treated as a race of Northern), The Kingdom of Morocco, is a mountainous country located in the upper corner of northwestern Africa, close to the south coast of Spain, only 15 km across the Strait of Gibraltar, which connects the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean. It borders Algeria to the east and southeast, Western Sahara to the south, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north. It is the only African country with coastal exposure to both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Two small Spanish enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla, are situated on the country's northern coast. The country has approx. 36 million inhabitants. The capital Rabat is with its approx. 1.8 million citizens (only the country's second largest city).



*Northern Bald Ibis Geronticus eremita. Photo: © Hamid Mezane*

In Morocco, the Atlas Mountains stretch majestically from one end of the country to the other. At the foot of the mountain range there are green forests, beautiful olive groves and lush orange groves. The combination of wide beaches, beautiful mountains, a colorful culture and magnificent sights make Morocco an obvious destination. The Atlantic Ocean forms the Moroccan border in the west and the Sahara Desert in the east. Most of Morocco north of Western Sahara, particularly along the coasts, experiences a typical Mediterranean climate, with mild wet winters and hot dry summers. The rainy season generally extends from October to April. Rainfall levels are relatively low and gradually decrease from north to south, becoming more extreme in the interior and south. At the coast, the lovely Atlantic breeze airs and ensures comfortable temperatures both summer and winter. To the east, the nearby desert offers warmth inland, and here the sun shines from a cloudless sky 220 days a year. The climate is therefore different, depending on where in the country you are.

Most of Morocco lies at high elevations, averaging about 800 metres above sea level. Two chains of mountains divide eastern from Atlantic Morocco: the Rif Mountains in the north form a buffer along the Mediterranean coastline, whereas the Atlas Mountains create a barrier across the centre. The two parts of the country are connected by the narrow Taza Gap in the northeast as well as by roads that follow older traditional routes. Morocco consists of a northern coast and interior which are mountainous with large areas of bordering plateaus, intermontane valleys, semi-deserts, and rich coastal plains. Beyond the Anti-Atlas, semiarid conditions quickly fade into desert. Elevation strongly influences this prevailing pattern, however, with significantly greater amounts of precipitation occurring in the mountains. Snow is common at approximately 2,000 metres, and the snowpack lingers in the highest elevations until late spring or early summer. In winter the marine influence again moderates temperatures in the coastal regions. Average daily winter temperatures range from 8 to 17 °C. Away from the coast, temperatures drop significantly, occasionally dipping below the freezing point.

Outside the desert areas, the vegetation of Morocco resembles that of the Iberian Peninsula. Extensive forests are still found in the more humid mountainous areas, with cork oak, evergreen oak, and deciduous oak on the lower slopes and fir and cedar at higher elevations, particularly in the Middle Atlas. In drier mountain areas open forests of thuja, juniper, and Aleppo (*Pinus halepensis*) and maritime pine are common. East of Rabat is the extensive cork oak Mamora Forest. Eucalyptus, originally from Australia, was introduced by French authorities during the colonial period for reforestation. Since independence, the Moroccan government has established several large plantations of this tree surrounding the Mamora Forest. In the rugged highlands south of Essaouira, vast open forests of argan (*Argania spinosa*) are found. Unique to southwestern Morocco, this tree has a hard fruit that produces a prized cooking oil.

In Morocco, as is common throughout the western Mediterranean region, centuries of human activity have considerably altered the natural vegetation. On many lower mountain slopes, cutting, grazing, and burning the original vegetation have produced an often dense cover of maquis, or scrub growth, characterized by various associations of wild olive, mastic tree, kermes oak (*Quercus coccinea*), arbutus, heather, myrtle, artemisia, cytisus (*Medicago arborea*), broom, and rosemary. In the arid interior plains, the dwarf palm, jujube tree, esparto, and Barbary fig (introduced from the Americas by way of Spain in the 16th century) cover vast areas. There is little natural vegetation in the desert areas east of the mountains, although the date palm, introduced to Morocco at a very early period, is extensively cultivated in the desert oases.

Large game have long since disappeared. Gazelles are still seen occasionally in the south, as are mouflons (wild sheep) and fennecs (a type of fox) in the Atlas region. With government protection, the Barbary macaque now flourishes in the forests of the Middle Atlas. However, the richest fauna in Morocco today is the [bird](#) life.

### **Day 1. Copenhagen – Marrakech**

This morning from Copenhagen Zurich to Marrakesh, where we land in the afternoon. After arriving in Marrakesh, we make a transfer to the hotel where we have two nights. A stroll around the hotel can provide Common Bulbul, Little Swift, House Bunting and maybe Maghreb Owl *Strix mauritanica* - split from Tawny Owl.

Marrakech, chief city of central Morocco. The first of Morocco's four imperial cities, it lies in the centre of the fertile, irrigated Haouz Plain, south of the Tensift River. Marrakech gave its name to the kingdom of which it was long the capital. In 1912 Marrakech was captured by the religious leader Aḥmad al-Ḥībah, who was defeated and driven out by French forces commanded by Col. Charles M.E. Mangin. It was French protectorate (1912–56). Surrounded by a vast palm grove, the medina in Marrakech is called the "red city" because of its buildings and ramparts of beaten clay. The heart of the medina is Jamaa el-Fna square, a vibrant marketplace. Nearby is the 12th-century Kutubiyyah (Koutoubia) Mosque with its 77-metre minaret, built by Spanish captives. The 16th-century Sa'dī Mausoleum, the 18th-century Dar el-Beida Palace (now a hospital), and the 19th-century Bahia royal residence reflect the city's historical growth. Much of the medina is still surrounded by 12th-century walls; among the surviving gates to the medina, the stone Bab Agnaou is particularly notable. The modern quarter, called Gueliz, to the west of the medina developed under the French protectorate. Marrakech is famous for its parks, especially the Menara olive grove and the walled 405-hectare Agdal gardens. An irrigation system built under the Almoravids is still used to water the city's gardens. The city may seem chaotic with its bazaars and winding streets, but it is colorful, exciting and adventurous. You must not miss the old town either. It is called the Median and is very charming and has a sea of small alleys and squares. Everywhere in Marrakech you will also notice all the different scents of food from the Streetfood stalls, spices and perfumes. The senses come to work overtime in this beautiful city. The bazaars are of course a must, but also a walk in

the old town with the artists and jokers and give yourself time to enjoy a cup of coffee at one of the many cafes. The beautiful old buildings are very different from anything we see in Scandinavia. O/N hotel in Marrakech.

## **Day 2. Marrakech - Oukaimeden – North African endemics**

Our Morocco tour explores the magnificent High Atlas at Oukaimeden above the historic city of Marrakech. Here, with a backdrop of towering, snow-capped peaks and green alpine meadows, we will search for our first North African endemics.

We depart Marrakech early, after breakfast heading for Oukaimeden, situated at an elevation of 2,600 m in the High Atlas. The road winds through impressive scenic passes and breath-taking views of the surrounding valleys and villages. Stunning scenery and excellent opportunities for photographs. One of the reasons to come in March is that the lower the snow is, the easier it is to get the finch and the lark there. If you wait till April or May it becomes a serious shlep up the mountains to see these birds. En route we will enjoy some birding stops. In particular the distinctive African Crimson-winged Finch, as well as Barbary Partridge, the localized Levaillant's Green Woodpecker, the stunning Moussier's Redstart, the very distinctive Seebohm's Wheatear (formerly treated as a race of Northern) and the smart North African Blue Tit. The unique Moroccan subspecies (subpersonata) of White Wagtail, House Bunting and various egrets and herons. Among more common European species like Hawfinch, Pallid Swift, Western Jackdaws (here at its southern limit), Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Meadow Pipit, Winter Wren, Mistle Thrush, Eurasian Jay, European Robin, Common Wood Pigeon, Cirl Bunting and Great Spotted Woodpecker, etc. The White-throated Dippers reside along the region's fast flowing mountain-streams.

Oukaimeden is Morocco's best ski resort and Africa's highest, surrounded by snow-capped mountains and conifer-covered slopes. In winter, it can be quite chilly! As we 'climb' higher, small groups of Horned Larks occurs here in good numbers. On the Pass we'll try for yet another endemic "Tristram's Warbler". This species has very specific habitat requirements away from its wintering grounds and is not always easy to find. At ski resort, we should see flocks of Red-billed and Yellow-billed Chough. In addition, Ring Ouzel, Alpine Accentor, Black Redstart, Rock Buntings, Rock Sparrow and raptors including Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Bonelli's Eagle. At the snowline another target species: African Crimson-winged Finch. Mammals: Barbary Ground Squirrel *Atlantoxerus getulus*, Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*, Fat Sand Rat *Psammomys obesus*, etc. O/N in the mountains. BD

## **Day 3. High Atlas Mountains - Ouarzazate - Boumalne du Dades**

After an early breakfast we leave the mountains behind. From the flat plains, we drive to Boumalne du Dades heading uphill via the Tizi-n-Tichka pass (2,260 meters), a spectacular and long drive. On the Pass we'll try for yet another endemic "Tristram's Warbler". This species has very specific habitat requirements away from its wintering grounds and is not always easy to



*Crimson-winged Finch Rhodopechys sanguineus*  
Photo: © Hamid Mezane

find. As the road climbs into the hills, we may start to see some raptors such as Long-legged Buzzard and Bonelli's Eagle both possible. Before reaching the rocky deserts around Boumalne du Dades where specialities are likely to include Black-bellied Sandgrouse (and perhaps Crowned Sandgrouse), the impressive Thick-billed Lark, Temminck's Lark and Western Mourning and Red-rumped Wheatears, we'll stop in Amerzgane to look for the rare Wheatear "Maghreb Wheatear". Dinner and accommodation in Boumalne du Dades. BD

## **Day 4. Boumalne du Dades - Tagdilt Track**

Today we will start early, to head to the Tagdilt Track ("The Lark Trek"). This is without doubt one of the top areas for birding in the Southern of Morocco. Excellent chances for seeing Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Crowned Sandgrouse, and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse (uncommon), White-crowned Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Red-rumped Wheatear, Thekla Lark, Great Grey Shrike, Trumpeter Finch, Temminck's Lark, Greater Hoopoe Lark, Desert Lark, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Cream-coloured Courser and the highly nomadic Thick-billed Lark. If the heat allows, we will dedicate most of our day to exploring this area, then we visit a rocky canyon searching for Maghreb (former Mourning) Wheatear, Lanner Falcon and our first chance of "GAYUIN" Pharaoh Eagle Owl where the people live in caves here with flocks of sheep and goats. The Dades Gorge, scarred by bizarre limestone erosion, decorated with impressive fortified villages and a stunning 1,000m deep cutting flanked by pink cliffs, is where we will spend the afternoon hours: Bonelli's Eagle, Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Grey Wagtail, Barbary Falcon, Tristram's Warbler and Little Owl are all possible here. Large diurnal gerbils called Fat Sand Rats are fairly common here, often seen scuttling to their burrows, mouths stuffed with vegetation. Dinner and accommodation in Boumalne du Dades at Lodge Riad Dades Birds. BD

## **Day 5. Boumalne du Dades - Todra Gorge - Goulmima - Merzouga**

First we visit a Todra gorge for Tristram's Warbler, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock-thrush, Rock Dove, Crag Martin and possible Bonelli's Eagle! Next we travel





*Greater Hoopoe-Lark Alaemon alaudipes. Photo: © Hamid Mezane*

eastwards and stop at a scrubby wadi to seek out the elusive Scrub Warbler, maybe also rewarded with Thick-billed Lark and Trumpeter Finch. Finally after another exciting stop we continue to the northern edge of the Sahara and arrive at our Desert Hotel for three nights. Dinner and accommodation in Merzouga. BD

**Day 6. and 7. Merzouga - Erg Chebbi Dunes – Rissani. Sahara; desert birds**

A full two days to explore this fantastic area. We explore several different locations around the desert city of Merzouga. Today we will dedicate the whole day to exploring the sandy dunes and the nearby stony desert of Erg Chebbi - the largest dune system in Morocco by 4x4 vehicles. Here we explore the stony expanses of the 'hamada', the spectacular sand dunes of Erg Chebbi and the numerous green oases hidden in deep valleys. Amongst the desert specialists found in this area are such North African endemics as the recently-recognized Maghreb Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Desert Lark, Bar-tailed Lark, Fulvous Babbler, Brown-necked Raven, Spotted Sandgrouse, Crowned Sandgrouse, African Desert Warbler, Saharan Scrub Warbler, the rare and localized Desert Sparrow and House Bunting, as well as the impressive Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, the elusive Egyptian Nightjar and, with luck, the endangered Houbara Bustard. Dinner and accommodation in Merzouga. BD

**Day 8. Merzouga - Tazzarine - Draa Valley - Anti Atlas Mountains - Ouarzazate**

Long day. Transfer day from Merzouga to Ouarzazate.



*Tristram's Warbler Sylvia deserticola, Berbersanger. © Hamid Mezane*

Drive through the Anti-Atlas Mountains, a series of rocky hills, cliffs and deep gorges of volcanic formations. Roadside birding could produce plenty of White-crowned Wheatear and Southern Gray Shrike. Before reaching our hotel in Ouarzazate we'll stop to explore the Barrage at Mansour Eddahbi. Here we have the chance of seeing Ruddy Shelduck, Black winged Stilts and Maghreb Lark, as well as Cormorants and Herons and a selection of waders. In the rocky areas, look for the Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), also known as aoudad. A species of caprine native to rocky mountains in North Africa. Although it is rare in its





*Cream-coloured Courser Cursorius cursor.* © Hamid Mezane



*Pharaoh Eagle Owl Bubo ascalaphus.* © Hamid Mezane

native North Africa, it has been introduced to North America, southern Europe, and elsewhere. It is also known in the Berber language as waddan or arwi, and in former French territories as the Moufflon. Barbary sheep stand 75 to 110 cm tall at the shoulder, with a length around 1.5 m, and weigh 30 to 145 kg. They are sandy-brown, darkening with age, with a slightly lighter underbelly and a darker line along the back. Upper parts and the outer parts of the legs are a uniform reddish- or grayish-brown. Some shaggy hair is on the throat (extending down to the chest in males) with a sparse mane. Their horns have a triangular cross-section. The horns curve outward, backward, then inward, and can exceed 76 cm in length. The horns are fairly smooth, with slight wrinkles evident at the base as the animal matures. Dinner and accommodation in Ouarzazate. BD

#### **Day 9. Ouarzazate - Anti Atlas Mountains - Souss Valley - Agadir**

A long drive to the west will take us over the Anti Atlas mountains, into the Souss Valley and on to Agadir at the Atlantic coast. Initially we will keep our eyes open



for various larks by the roadside and for wheatears. The Souss valley west to the Atlantic coast at Agadir goes through the lush Souss Valley, where much of Morocco's fruit and vegetables are grown. We make a number of stops along the way and have to look for Black-winged Kite, Black-crowned Tchagra, Little Swift, Pallid Swift, Southern Grey Shrike, Woodchat, Spanish sparrow, etc. During our stay in the Agadir region we will explore the nearby estuaries of the Oued Souss and Oued Massa, which at this time of year are packed full of migrating waders, gulls and terns. Finally after another exciting stop we arrive at our Hotel in Agadir for two nights. Dinner and accommodation in Agadir. BD

#### **Day 10. Oued Massa**

South of Agadir is the famous Oued Massa. We have an early start to Oued Massa on the rugged Atlantic coastline. Target birds: the secretive Black-crowned Tchagra, Moussier's Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, Little Owl, Stone Curlew, Glossy Ibis, Moroccan Cormorant, Laughing Dove and Brown-throated Martin. Dinner and accommodation in Agadir. BD

#### **Day 11. Agadir - Tamri Estuary - Essaouira**

Early in the morning we will head north, stopping firstly at a beach where there will be Lesser Black-backed Gulls of two races, Audouin's Gulls and a few Yellow-legged Gulls. We will continue north to Tamri in search of one of the rarest birds in the world – the Bald Ibis. Morocco supports a colony of about 250 pairs that breed in this coastal area. Late in the afternoon we drive back to Agadir. Dinner and accommodation in Essaouira. BD

#### **Day 12. Oued Souss - Marrakech**

After breakfast at the hotel, we visit the Oued Souss – an excellent area for Flamingos, shorebirds and large numbers of roosting gulls and terns. Then after lunch driving from Agadir to Marrakech through the Atlas mountains with some stops along the road. Late in the afternoon we arrive to Marrakech. Free evening to visit the old quarter of Marrakech and the impressive Jemaa el-fna square which is an unbelievable experience for any visitor - snake charmers, water sellers and spice stalls plus the charm of bargaining in the Souk. Dinner and accommodation in Marrakech. BD

#### **Day 13. Departure home. Marrakech - Airport**

If time allows some more birding in the Marrakech area, then transfer to the airport where the trip ends.



**Price per person (in shared double-room.**

Max. 10 participants: **14.500 DKK (Easter-offer 13.04 – 18.04.2022; from 19.04.2022 14.995 DKK.**

To book a seat on this tour a deposit on 3.000 DKK per person should be paid (if Miksture cancel 100% this deposit will be returned, of course) – You are not reserved a seat before the deposit is paid. The remaining amount per person should be paid latest 1.th December 2022.

**Price include:** Guiding by Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen and his team • International flight Copenhagen – Marrakech, Morocco via European airport • Local (English-speaking) ornithological guides • Transportation according program in Morocco in comfortable vehicles • All accommodation in Morocco, 3\*\*/4\*\*\* in Marrakech and Agadir – guesthouse in the desert • All breakfasts (B) and dinners (D) in Morocco • Necessary permits sites and other paperwork • Services of tour leader • Administration from Miksture • 2 full day birding in the Sahara Desert by 4x4

**Price does NOT include:** Alcoholic beverages & drinks • Lunches • Personal expenses for eventual extra arrangements not mentioned in the program • Tips to drivers and local guides • Travelinsurance – mandatory! • Money for own expenses • and anything strictly personal (e g laundry, phone calls, any excess luggage charges, snacks).

**Single room: 1.998 DKK**

**Booking procedure:**

To book a seat on “Morocco Classic” – birdwatching, March 2023, pls insert deposit 3.000 DKK per person to Miksture – your seat is booked when deposit is agreed. As soon Miksture registries deposit, we mail a receipt and you seat is booked. If Miksture cancel the tour, the deposit will be refunded 100%

**IMPORTANT:** Pls inform whether its 1) or 2) You wish to join.

The remaining amount of tour price is paid latest 1.th December 2022

Two months before departure Miksture mail an updated program, Practical Information and Birdlist.



*Temminck's Lark Eremophila bilopha* © Hamid Mezane



*Maghreb ssp of Mourning Wheatear (halophila ssp).* © Hamid Mezane



*Desert Lark Ammomanes deserti.* Photo: MWA



Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*. Photo: © Hamid Mezane

Prices quoted are based on group participation and no refunds will be made for any part of the program you choose not to participate. It is understood that refunds cannot be made to passengers who do not complete the tour for any reason whatsoever. No refunds will be issued for failure of passenger to obtain proper documentation for entering countries visited, lost travel time or substitution of facilities, for itineraries amended after departure, for circumstances arising beyond the company's control, necessitating alternative arrangements being made to ensure the safety and/or further participation and enjoyment of the program, passenger not appearing for any accommodation, service, sightseeing or trip segment without notifying the company, or passenger leaving program after it has begun, or missing any scheduled sightseeing, activities, meals or accommodations. If Miksture fails to run the trip due to its own mistakes or circumstances (management problems, financial problems, bankruptcy), or decides to cancel it for reasons within its own reach and reasons, all deposits and payments will be refunded. Personal Travel Insurance is MANDATORY for Each participant in Morocco.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to Miksture by its vendors and suppliers.

**RESERVATIONS AND PAYMENT:** Remaining balances are due no later than 1.th December 2022. Any reservation made within 90 days of commencement of a program may be accepted provided space is available and payment in full is received. Miksture does not accept responsibility for bank wire fees or rush mail delivery.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Full payment of the tour fee is due no later than 1.th December 2022. If the balance has not been received latest 1.th December 2022, Miksture might treat your reservation as cancelled, and the deposit shall be forfeited. All requests for cancellations must be received in writing. If you cancel: Fewer than 40 days before departure date - No refund available.

**Contact information:** Pls always feel welcome to contact me if you have questions.

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Brgds/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen,  
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