

BUCKBIRD JOURNEYS Ltd

TUNISIA and ALGERIA

Birds and Mammals of North Africa from the Mediterranean to the Sahara

Tuesday 20 – Saturday 31 October 2009

Participants

Hugh Buck (HB), Elaine Nye (EN), Betty Power (BP), Dorothy Suter (DS), Werner Suter (WS)

This trip was designed to cover all the major biotypes in Tunisia to search out the endemic and other special birds of North Africa with the added bonus of a fine selection of mammals both big and small, including several brought to the edge of extinction. A unique extra was a foray into neighbouring Algeria to seek out the endemic Algerian Nuthatch, only described to science in 1975. It necessitated some long drives, some late nights, some considerable “downtime” in Algeria but the rewards were plentiful. Thank you for sharing this experience with me, for accepting the hardships cheerfully and for contributions in finding our target species. We managed a near clean sweep of North Africa’s endemic birds and a good collection of her mammals.

Thanks also to Tarek Nafeez and Hassiba of Beccase Ecology for arranging everything, showing great patience and adaptability and being great company throughout,

Day by Day

Tuesday 20 October

All are gathered at the sprawling Hotel El Mouradi Gammarth in Tunis’ “tourist” sector in time for a first buffet dinner and Tunisian beers. Early to bed

Wednesday 21 October

Tarek arrives at 0615 and what will prove to be a huge day starts with a 2 hour delay to our flight to Gabes and it is not until 1145 that we finally board our Pahero 4 x 4 for the journey south to the Grand Erg Oriental, the dunes at the northern edge of the mighty Sahara. We meet our trusty driver Waleed and somehow all cram into our vehicle for the drive through the “troglodyte” town of Matmata and our first stop in a patch of stony hammada desert. Here are our first Red-rumped Wheatears and, outstandingly, a flock of 11 Thick-billed Larks. They are rather flighty but a good find as they are nomadic in winter and difficult to locate at the best of times. Other more predictable desert species such as Desert, an occasional Mourning and White-tailed (White-crowned Black) Wheatear as well as the ubiquitous Spotless Starling are all on our lists before we take a late lunch at Douz.

The country now becomes drier and sandier as we take the track south to the Djebil National Park, only stopping for Desert and Greater Hoopoe Larks before the park HQ where, in the dusk, the first of several African Desert Sparrows are spotted. Then on, in the gathering dark, to our simple tented camp situated in huge evocative sand dunes and our first Couscous dinner. Even now our day is by no means over as we all pile back into the Pahero for 3 hours spotlighting both at the edge and inside the National Park. We soon find the first of several Lesser Egyptian Jerboas, these long legged hopping rodents being a new family for all. We also see individual Lesser Egyptian Gerbils and a single Sundevall's Jird as well several Cape Hares before entering the park proper. Our target is the much wanted Fennec Fox but it proves frustrating. We soon locate a fox and it remains stationary enough for a reasonable look in the spotlight. Although our driver (the owner of the tented camp) insists it is our quarry it looks too big, too short eared and rusty tinged for our liking and reference at the Park's museum indicates it is a Ruppell's Fox, also a characteristic species of sandy scrub desert.

A pair of Temminck's Horned Larks caught in the spotlight keep us alert as does a spectacular display of lighting which eventually culminates in several heavy showers of rain – not quite what we expected in the Sahara! Finally we catch a skittish fox in the beam, it looks small and grey with a red eye-shine but no one really gets it in the binoculars before it is gone. Again our driver insists it is a Fennec and he is almost certainly right but no-one obtains a good view and some do not see it at all. Disappointing but we are glad to finish the day and get back to our simple accommodation at midnight.

Thursday 22 October

Breakfast at 0615 and we are off again for our daylight visit to the park proper. At the entrance there are several more Desert Sparrows and we spy a pair of Dorcas Gazelles trotting past. The extensive park is a mixture of scrub and stony desert with rocky outcrops and sand dunes and is the haunt of many elusive bird and mammal species. Top bird want is the Houbara Bustard, still critically endangered and only slightly recovering in protected areas. This is one such and they are reported regularly here but, despite much eye popping scanning, we draw a blank. There are numerous Cream-coloured Coursers, more Temminck's and several Bar-tailed Desert Larks, Brown-necked Ravens, a flock of some 40+ Trumpeter Finches and, at our first stop in suitable grassy habitat, we get a responsive African Desert Warbler even doing its song flight for us. Prime mammal is the spectacular lyre horned Addax and they present a magnificent sight against this desert background. Probably extinct in the true wild these animals were released in the park some 8 years ago and the presence of young is an encouraging testament to the success of this. We search long and hard for the Rhim or Slender-horned Gazelle, also regularly seen here, but no luck.

Lunch back at the tented camp (where sand has blown in copiously over some peoples' luggage) and we are off again, backtracking towards Douz. More Desert Warblers, a trio of Scrub Warblers and a nice Long-legged Buzzard and we are into the palm circled tourist trap of Douz and the comfortable Hotel El Mouradi for beer and buffet before bed.

Friday 23 October

No long rest for us however and, now with Hassiba in charge, 0545 sees us away again for a long 4 hour push to Bouhedma National Park. Here we soon find several coveys of Barbary Partridges, a small flock of Fulvous Chatterers and later on our first Moussier's Redstarts – a good trio of endemic North African specials. Addax are here as is the handsome Scimitar-horned Oryx, like the Addax probably now extinct in the true wild but thriving in this protected area. For some reason, which I still find hard to accept, we cannot locate the third endangered special, the striking Dama Gazelle despite the fact that they were monitored earlier in the morning and the search area is open and not so big. We have to be content with rather skittish views of 3 individual Common Gundis, a rather hamster like denizen of rocky places and again endemic to North Africa.

We leave the park at 1600 and the 5 ½ hours to Tunis are best forgotten. The El Mouradi Gammarth is welcome although we are getting rather satiated with their buffet!

Saturday 24 October

We allow ourselves the luxury of a 0830 start away through the edge of Tunis to the waterbird sanctuary of Ichkeul National Park. Our day is however blighted by a ferocious wind which makes scope using difficult, although in a longish walk up to the museum on Mount Ichkeul and a circuit round the headland we do rack up a reasonable list of birds. Amongst these we encounter our first black-capped African Blue Tits, now split, along with those on the Canary Islands, from European and Asian forms. We leave at 1600 for the drive via Tabarka up into the edge of the Kroumerie “Mountains”, the once again large El Mouradi hotel at Hamman Bourguiba and another buffet!

Sunday 25 October

It is 2 hours through the mountains and plateau to El Feidja National Park along the Algerian border and our principal target, Levaillant's Green Woodpecker, is soon on the list when the lead car flushes one from the roadside. The tape brings in the pair for views, two of about a dozen sightings today. They are refreshingly common, by sight and by voice in the National Park where other highlights include the black capped *cervicalis* form of the Eurasian Jay, Great and (for WS only) Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, more African Blue Tits, the yellow cheeked *ledouci* form of Coal Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper and a nice singing male Cirl Bunting. The special mammal is the Barbary Deer, the endemic form of the widespread Red Deer which we see in their enclosure pending release into the park. Down to an estimated 50 animals from the ravages of the Algeria – Tunisia war the captive herd was built up to some 400 before releases were made into the park. They are now thriving and will probably cross the free border back into Algeria before too long.

We break our return with a bit of searching for Warblers in the scrub. Several Dartford and Sardinian oblige as does another pair of Levaillant's Woodpeckers flushed from the roadside as we make our way back to Hamman Bourguiba and for once an arrival before dark. Some (or one anyway) continue and such as Cetti's Warbler and Corn Bunting further augment the day's list.

Sunday 25 October

Our big adventure is delayed by the late arrival of Tarek (back from an unsuccessful bid for a Green Party seat in Tunis) and further by the two hours it takes to complete the formalities to get into Algeria. But get in we do, binoculars, scopes and all and immediately pick up our gendarme escort vehicles who diligently accompany us for the rest of the day, occasionally augmented by the city police whenever we enter any township. We case the extensive El Kala National Park and the adjacent Lac des Oiseaux for a plethora of water and other birds but the two key ducks we search for elude us. A Water Rail, brought in by the tape, and what seems to be a juvenile Penduline Tit are interesting birds for Africa.

We lunch in El Kala town and early evening finds us at the comfortable enough Hotel Rhim el Djamid on the coast at Annaba.

Monday 26 October

Algeria commences a pattern of frustration and down time when 0830 brings no sign of our police escort and we wait until 1000 before setting off without them. We are supposed to meet them en route outside of town but there is remains no sign so we carry on regardless on the long, busy road west to Jijel. No one seems to mind, the numerous road blocks wave us through and we reach our destination and the HQ of the Taza National Park by 1600. We have stopped for a circling Griffon Vulture and excellent kebabs en route.

As we await mixed messages from the park we spy a very yellow looking Chiffchaff by the park gates. This would seem to fit everything for an Iberian Chiffchaff which is the resident species here and in Spain. After an hour or so we learn that the Park is off limits (army and terrorist activity the "excuse") but we will be allowed to visit the forests at Tamantut where our quarry, the endemic Algerian Nuthatch, has also been found. We finish the day along the coast where a habituated troupe of Barbary Macaques along the highway belie their endangered status in Algeria and Morocco (they are already extinct in Tunisia). The simple Hotel En Nassim Jijel is comfortable enough, the food is reasonable and we are ready for the big one tomorrow.

Tuesday 27 October

Our big day does not get off to a particularly auspicious start as we commence a long and frustrating wait for our permit to be altered (by the Governor's Office no less) and for our gendarme escort to arrive. It is 1100 before it does but perhaps it is worth waiting for as it consists of no less than 8 jeeps each with 4 well armed policemen! Off we go and are soon joined by an armoured car, shoot past the turn off to the forest, eventually get turned round, are joined by another jeep with two forest rangers (one of whom at least seems knowledgeable) and finally reach the forest edge. Out fan our escort (probably to the surprise of a local shepherd who is the only person around!) and glory be it is not more than 20 minutes and not even in the true forest before the tape brings in 3 Nuthatches, one male hanging (literally) around for some sensational views. It is just as well, our escort only allow us a few more minutes before we are ordered down again for the long , escorted drive back and east to Constantine. What we would have done had we not located our bird in the hour we eventually had we know not!

One car "illegally" stops at a duck rich patch of water just east of Ježil where several hundred Ferruginous Ducks dot the surface but the drake White-headed Duck which HB sees as we arrive cannot be relocated in the few minutes we are allowed. A reprimand from the head policeman and we are away again, more kebabs en route, for an after dark arrival at historic Constantine and dinner and bed at the indeed grand Grand Hotel. The whole day casts an air of unreality but somehow we have succeeded in our major objective!

Thursday 29 October

At daybreak we admire the French architecture of Constantine and its spectacular gorge (and its Jackdaws, a rare breeding bird in North Africa!) before we are off again, escortless once more, retracing our steps on the busy road to Annaba and the crossing into Tunisia once more. We are relieved to be through by 1330, the faithful Waleed is waiting and we make good time south through the Kroumerie range onto the central plateau to historic El Kef and a visit to its old Kasbah atop a hill. Our destination of Kasserine is reached by 1700 and we find accommodation at the modest Hotel Pinus. The food is OK though and the wine much enjoyed.

Friday 30 October

And one last big day to finish with. Dawn at last finds us in the field at the base of the Djebel Chambi National Park, the highest "mountain" in Tunisia and an extensive oasis of pine clad rocky slopes. These we scan and the bionic WS soon has us onto a fine ewe Barbary Sheep with her active but wobbly legged lamb. This is another prime endemic North African mammal and some get views of a further small group of 8 in a clearing before they move out of sight. Another rare mammal, Cuvier's Gazelle, also occurs here but, try as we might, and with the help of a forest ranger, our "Gazelle dip" continues and only fresh droppings are our reward. A few birds add interest – a pair of soaring Bonelli's Eagles, a few Woodlarks, a flock of Ring Ouzels, a trio of Mistle Thrush, Rock Bunting and plenty of Red Crossbills.

Outside the park we stop at a good looking wadi which produces Thekla Larks and, glory be, a responsive pair of the endemic Tristram's Warbler. Chambi is the main breeding area for this bird in Tunisia but they move lower in winter and this sighting rounds off a clean sweep of the available North Africa endemic birds. We lunch on "brik" at the historic Roman town of Sbeitla then it is a long fast grind back to Tunis but not before a final bit of birding madness finishes our day. Tarek is determined to show us the White-headed Duck but it is almost dark and bats are out as we arrive at Lac Chididi. Serendipity remains with us however and in the gloom we are able to pick out the distinctive silhouettes of our quarry before giving up and regaining Tunis and our last buffet dinner. The duck is a lifer for EN but perhaps she would like a little more colour on it next time!

Saturday 31 October

We breakfast together one last time before going our various ways after a hectic 10 days which have shown us much of the best that North Africa can offer

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Tarek Nafeez, Hassiba

Annotated Checklist

Birds

In bold Species endemic or near endemic to North Africa

* Species of limited range in Africa

1. Somali Ostrich (*Struthio (camelus) molybdophanes*)
3 introduced birds in Bouhedma National Park on 23/10 looked right at home. The endemic ssp *camelus* of North Africa and the Sudan may now be extinct in the wild
2. Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)
3. Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)
3 birds picked out on the expanse of Lac Tonga, Algeria on 26/10
4. Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)
Large numbers at El Kala NP and Lac Tonga on 26/10
5. Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomeda*)
"Several thousand" picked out at long range by WS off Jijel, Algeria on 28/10. The ssp *diomeda* which breeds on the Balearic Islands
6. Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)
A single bird off Jijel on 28/10
7. Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)
8. European Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)
4 off Jijel on 28/10. The Mediterranean race *desmarestii*
9. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
10. Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)
11. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
12. Cattle Egret (*bubulcus ibis*)
13. Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*)
3 at El Kala NP on 26/10
14. White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)
Breeds in large numbers in North Tunisia and Algeria but most are gone by October. A few around Annaba, Algeria 27 and 29/10
15. Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)
5 birds at El Kala NP on 26/10
16. Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)
Around 80 at Lac Ichkeul National Park on 24/10
17. Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)
A flock of around 30 at Lac Ichkeul NP on 24/10
18. Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)
A small flock of around 30 at Lac Ichkeul NP on 24/10. This is a major wintering area for this bird later in the year
19. Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*)
20. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
21. Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)
A few at the "forbidden" lake outside of Annaba on 28/10
22. Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)
23. Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

24. Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)
25. Ferruginous Pochard (*Aythya nyroca*)
A few at El Kala NP on 26/10 and more than 200 on the “forbidden” lake near Annaba on 28/10. Often rare, Algeria would seem to be a major stronghold for this species.
- 26*. White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*)
A drake spotted on the “forbidden” lake near Annaba could not be relocated with the police pressure to move on. Thanks to Tarek’s persistence we reached Lac Chididi near Tunis at dusk on 30/10 but in time to at least pick out the silhouettes of 9 birds. Rare and declining throughout its wide range, in Spain not least due to hybridisation with the wretched introduced Ruddy Duck
27. Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)
3 at Lac Tonga on 26/10. These were the nominate ssp *haliaetus* in a proposed 4 way split for this species.
28. Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*)
29. Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*)
One bird circling round the crags near our kebab lunch spot between Constantine and Ježil
30. Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)
Several around El Kala NP and elsewhere in Algeria
31. Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)
Singles spotted by WS from the car on 25 and 27/10.
32. Eurasian Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)
Regularly encountered. Both the nominate *buteo* and the rufous tailed *vulpinus* ssp were noted
33. Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*)
One watched closely on the road between Djebil NP and Douz on 22/10
34. Bonelli’s Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*)
2 at Bouhedma NP on 30/10
35. Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
36. **Barbary Partridge (*Alectoris barbara*)**
Two large coveys totalling up to 50 birds at Bouhedma NP on 23/10. Endemic to the Maghreb countries and Libya
37. Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*)
2 birds flushed in Bouhedma NP on 23/10
- 38*. Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)
1 bird responding to tape at El Kala NP on 26/10. Restricted to north of the Sahara in Africa
39. Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)
3 at El Kala NP on 26/10. The nominate ssp *porphyrio* in a possible multiple split of this species
40. Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)
41. Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*)
42. Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
43. Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)
Around 60 birds at Lac Ichkeul NP on 24/10
44. Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*)
Up to 40 birds at Djebil NP on 22/10. Two distant birds on a sand dune looked huge and gave brief hopes of something rarer!

45. Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)
Only a winter visitor to North Africa. Our few birds were early arrivals
46. Snowy (Kentish) Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)
The ssp *alexandrinus*
47. Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)
48. Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)
49. Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
50. Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)
51. Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)
52. Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*)
53. Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)
- (54. Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)
The “pot bellied” Skua seen by WS off Annaba on 27/10 was probably this species. Rare but probably under recorded in the Mediterranean)
55. Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)
56. Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)
57. Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*)
Distant views of around 30 at Lake Ichkeul NP on 24/10, a few off Annaba on 26/10
58. Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)
59. Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybridus*)
3 partially plumaged birds at Lac Tonga on 26/10
60. Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)
A few at Lac Tonga on 26/10
61. Black-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles orientalis*)
A small flock of 4 at Bouhedma NP on 23/10. The absence of other species was a rare disappointment on this trip
62. Rock Dove (*Columba livia*)
Plenty of the rubbish but genuine wild birds were recorded on several occasions notably the two that rocketed out of the Roman well at Bouhedma NP on 23/10
- 63*. Common Wood Pigeon (*Columba palumbus*)
A few at El Feidja NP on 25/10 and many at Djebel Chambi NP on 30/10. The ssp *excelsa*, confined to the Maghreb countries in Africa.
64. Eurasian Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)
2 from the car near Gafsa on 23/10
65. Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
66. Laughing Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*)
67. Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)
Singles near and at Bouhedma NP on 23/10 and one near El Kef on 29/10. The ssp *saharae*, confined to North Africa
68. Alpine Swift (*Tachymarptis melba*)
Small flocks at El Feidja NP on 25/10 and Djebel Chambi NP on 30/10
69. Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)
1 at Bouhedma NP on 23/10 and 2 at El Kef on 29/10
- 70*. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)
A single by WS in a mixed species flock at El Feidja NP on 25/10. The ssp *ledouci* confined to the mountains of the Mahgreb

- 71*. Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)
Several at El Feidja NP on 25/10. The ssp *numidus* confined to the mountains of N Algeria and Tunisia
72. **Levaillant's Woodpecker (*Picus vaillanti*)**
Refreshingly common in the Kroumerie and El Feidja Forests on 25/10 with at least a dozen sightings and more heard. A now well recognised split from the Green Woodpecker and endemic to cork and other forests in the Mahgreb
731. Bar-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes cincturus*)
There were many "Desert" Larks in the south of Tunisia but we only solidly identified this species once. There were probably many, especially in Djebil NP
74. Desert Lark (*Ammomanes deserti*)
Common in the south
75. Greater Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*)
Several of these handsome birds in and around Djebil NP 20 and 21/10
76. Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*)
A few in cultivated fields in north Tunisia but we did not do them much justice in our pursuit for bigger fish
77. **Thick-billed Lark (*Ramphocoris clotbey*)**
Our first coup of the trip when we stopped to look at a Wheatear in probably the only patch of stony hammada desert we encountered. A flock of 11 gave good views on the ground and in flight but were nervous and could not be pursued. Endemic to stony deserts in North Africa with an outpost in Jordan
78. Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)
79. Lesser Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella rufescens*)
Again there were many flocks of Short-toed Larks in cultivation throughout with this species seen near Gafsa on 23/10 and near El Feidja on 25/10
80. Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)
Two subspecies, *carthaginis* on the coast and *arenicola* in the south, were probable in this common species
81. Thekla Lark (*Galerida theklae*)
Only positively identified below Djebel Chambi on 30/10 where there were several
- 82*. Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*)
Several in the open areas of Djebel Chambi NP on 30/10
83. Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)
- 84*. Temminck's Lark (*Eremophila bilopha*)
Relatively common in Djebil NP 20 and 21/10. Restricted to deserts in North Africa and the Middle East
85. Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)
86. House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)
87. Crag Martin (*Ptyonoprogne epestris*)
88. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
89. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
90. Common Bulbul (*Pycnonotus barbatus*)
Regularly encountered and very noisy
- 91*. Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)
One on Mt Ichkeul by HB on 24/10. The endemic ssp *juniperi*
92. Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)
A single male at our hotel at Annaba on 27/10

- 93*. Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)
1 then a flock of 14 on Djebel Chambi on 30/10. The ssp *alpestris* of Central Europe winters to Tunisia but birds so early were a surprise
- 94*. Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)
Probably the endemic ssp *mauritanicus*
95. Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)
A single bird near our hotel at Jijel on 27/10
- 96*. Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)
3 birds at Djebel Chambi NP on 30/10. The ssp *deichleri*, confined to N Africa, Corsica and Sardinia
- 97*. Streaked Scrub-Warbler (*Scotocerca inquieta*)
2 along the Djebil NP – Douz road on 22/10
98. Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola jundicis*)
99. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*)
Heard by all and seen by WS around our hotel at Hamman Bourguiba 25 and 26/10
100. Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)
1 by HB on Mt Ichkeul on 24/10
101. Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)
102. Iberian Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus ibericus*)
Whilst all our other Chiffchaffs were standard *collybita* the very yellow individual at the entrance to the Taza National Park near Jejl on 27/10 was perfect for this species which breeds in north Algeria and north Morocco
103. Western Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais opaca*)
Individuals by HB and WS near the hotel at Hamman Bourguiba 26/10
104. Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)
105. Greater Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)
106. **African Desert Warbler (*Sylvia deserti*)**
A single responsive individual in Djebil NP on 22/10 even gave a song flight display. 4 more in similar grassy habitat along the road to Douz the same afternoon. Endemic to North Africa and a lifer for all, it is now recognised as split from the greyer *S. nana* of Asia
- 107*. Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*)
Fairly common and noisy in scrub along the coasts in both Tunisia and Algeria
108. **Tristram's Warbler (*Sylvia deserticola*)**
A nice semi responsive pair in a wadi below Djebel Chambi on 30/10. Endemic to mountains in the Maghreb wintering lower along the edge of the Sahara.
- 109*. Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*)
Up to 4 birds in low scrub below El Feidja NP on 25/10
- 110*. European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)
111. Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)
1 briefly by HB at Tamantut 28/10
112. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
113. **Moussier's Redstart (*Phoenicurus moussieri*)**
Up to 6 at Bouhedma NP on 23/10 but only one watched closely by some. Not encountered as frequently as expected. Endemic to North Africa
114. Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)
1 El Kala NP 26/10

- 115*. Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)
- 116*. Black Wheatear (*Oenanthe leucura*).
3 at Bouhedma NP on 23/10, 1 at El Kef on 29/10
117. White-tailed Wheatear (*Oenanthe leucopyga*)
Several en route to and in Djebil NP 21 and 22/10
- 118*. Mourning Wheatear (*Oenanthe lugens*)
Only from the car between Gabes and Douz on 21/10. The spp *halophila*
- 119*. Red-rumped Wheatear (*Oenanthe moesta*)
3 en route to Djebil NP on 21/10 and 1 at Bouhedma NP 23/10. ssp *moesta*
120. Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*)
Common in and around Djebil NP 21 and 22/10
121. **Fulvous Chatterer (*Turdoides fulvus*)**
4 birds watched closely at Bouhedma NP on 23/10. Endemic to north Africa south to ne Ethiopia
- 122*. Coal Tit (*Pariparus ater*)
We saw several of the distinctly yellow ssp *ledouci* at El Feidja NP on 25/10. This ssp is confined to the mountains of north Tunisia and ne Algeria
- 123*. Great Tit (*Parus major*)
ssp *excelsus*
124. **African Blue Tit (*Parus ultramarinus*)**
Common. This black-capped form is now split although linked by some with those on the Canary Islands
125. **Algerian Nuthatch (*Sitta ledanti*)**
Wow what a saga but what joy and relief to find them so quickly in our well escorted and time restricted foray into the forest of Tamantut on 28/10. Who will ever forget that bright male (one of three birds and much more rufous than the books suggest) hanging upside down and calling at us for many minutes. Only discovered in 1975 and still only known from 4 sites in les Montagnes Petite Kabyle in NE Algeria. Some protection in the Taza NP but an area apparently infested with Algerian / El Quaeda guerrillas
- 126*. Short-toed Treecreeper (*Certhia brachydactyla*)
1 in a mixed flock at El Feidja NP on 25/10. The ssp *mauritanica* restricted to the Maghreb
- 127*. Eurasian Penduline-Tit (*Remiz pendulinus*)
A young bird at El Kala NP on 26/10 seemed to be this species. Little known in North Africa
128. Southern Grey Shrike (*Lanius meridionalis*)
Common in the south of Tunisia
- 129*. Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus gladius*)
Around 10 birds at El Feidja NP on 25/10. One in the Kroumerie range on 29/10. The endemic black crowned ssp *cervicalis*
- 130*. Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)
Several at Constantine on 29/10. The ssp *cirtensis* confined to Algeria and Morocco
- 131*. Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*)
Several in and around Djebil NP 22/10 and several between Annaba and Jijel on 27/10. Nominate ssp *ruficollis*
- 132*. Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)
Common in north Algeria. ssp *tingitanus*

- 133*. European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)
Some huge flocks of this winter visitor
- 134*. Spotless Starling (*Sturnus unicolor*)
The common resident Starling of North Africa
135. **African Desert Sparrow (*Passer (simplex) saharae*)**
Up to 30 around buildings in Djebil NP 21 and 22/10. This form is endemic to north Africa and is a long discussed potential split from disjunct populations in Asia
136. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
- 137*. Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*)
These two species proved a real dog's dinner ranging from pure House to pure Spanish with all sorts of combinations in between. Common throughout
138. Trumpeter Finch (*Rhodopectus githaginea*)
A nice flock of around 40 at the Ranger Post in Djebil NP on 22/10 and several flushed by the vehicle in Bouhedma NP on 23/10
- 139*. Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)
The pale bellied ssp *africana* was common throughout the north
- 140*. Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)
Common in the pine forests of Djebel Chambi NP. The resident ssp *poliogyne* – another potential split if ever certain wild proposals come through
- 141*. European Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)
ssp *aurantiventris*
- 142*. European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)
Only brief flight views in the wind at Mt Ichkeul on 24/10
- 143*. European Serin (*Serinus serinus*)
- 144*. Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*)
A fine singing male at El Feidja NP on 25/10
- 145*. Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*)
A couple at Djebel Chambi NP on 30/10
- 146*. Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*)
Several by WS near our hotel at Hamman Bourguiba on 25/10
147. House Bunting (*Emberiza striolata*)
3 at Gafsa on 23/10 and 2 at El Kef on 29/10. ssp *sahari* and again a potential split from the Asian *striolata*

Mammals

1. **Barbary Macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*)**
Around 15 of all ages by the roadside east of Jejl on 27/10. The ease with which we found this habituated troupe belies the true status of this north African endemic – it is extinct in Tunisia, rare in Algeria and the bulk of the population is found in the Middle Atlas of Morocco
2. **Kuhl's Pipistrelle ? (*Pipistrellus kuhli*)**
On range this is the most likely candidate for the small bats we saw flying around the houses at Lac Chindidi on 30/10 and almost certainly the species seen by WS around the Djebil NP gate on 21/10

3. **Blasius' Horseshoe Bat? (*Rhinolophus blasii*)**
And this is a candidate for the larger bats hunting over the water at Lac Chimdidi on 30/10. Information from Tarek following recent work by a French scientist on the bats of the area.
4. **Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis*)**
4 on our night drive at Djebil NP on 21/10 and 1 at Bouhedma NP on 23/10
5. **Common Gundi (*Ctenodactylus gundi*)**
It was not the ideal time of day but most got some sort of view of 3 of these hamster like creatures in their rocky habitat at Bouhedma NP on 23/10. Part of family endemic to north and north east Africa
6. **Lesser Egyptian Jerboa (*Jaculus jaculus*)**
A trip highlight was views of several of these mini Kangaroos on our night drive in Djebil NP on 21/10. A new family for all
7. **Lesser Egyptian Gerbil (*Gerbillus gerbillus*)**
Shortly after our first Jerboa we found one of these more rusty rodents, still a hopper but with shorter legs and tail
8. **Sundevall's Jird (*Meriones crassus*)**
The park museum confirmed the identity of this smaller scurrying rodent seen by a few on our night drive
9. **Ruppell's Fox (*Vulpes rueppelli*)**
We wanted a Fennec but the first fox we found on our night drive seemed too big, small eared and rusty tinged. The park museum would seem to confirm this as a Ruppell's which occurs in similar habitat
10. **Fennec Fox (*Vulpes zerda*)**
This was probably the most wanted mammal for all but it was not to be. Our second and very skittish fox did seem small and grey but no one really got binoculars on it. Our driver / guide insisted it was a Fennec and he is probably right but no one saw it well and some did not see it at all
11. **Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*)**
2 by DS when the rest of us were chasing Quail in Bouhedma NP on 23/10
12. **Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)**
2 by WS at Djebel Chambi NP on 30/10
13. **Dorcas Gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*)**
2 at Djebil NP on 22/10 and many at Bouhedma NP on 23/10
14. **Scimitar-horned Oryx (*Oryx dammah*)**
Now probably extinct in the true wild but subject to a re-introduction programme especially at Bouhedma NP. Around 10 there on 23/10. Tunisia is probably the only place where this superb animal is viewable in the semi wild
15. **Addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*)**
Like the above probably extinct in the true wild but now re-introduced into Djebil NP and Bouhedma NP. Superb views of several with those against the desert backdrop in Djebil likely to live long in the memory
16. **Barbary Sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*)**
WS quickly got us onto a mother with a wobbly legged lamb on the cliffs at Djebel Chambi NP and we enjoyed prolonged scope views. A further 8 in a small clearing moved off into the pines before all could get onto them. Perhaps the classic north African mammal these once ranged as far south as Sudan but now probably less than 30000 exist in the wild

17 **Barbary Deer (Cervus elaphus barbarus)**

This form of Red Deer is confined to El Feidja NP in NW Tunisia following its extermination in Algeria. The world population was down to some 50 individuals but a captive breeding programme has now raised this total to several hundred and the species has now been re-released in the Park and is thriving. Around 20 seen in their release enclosure on 25/10

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