









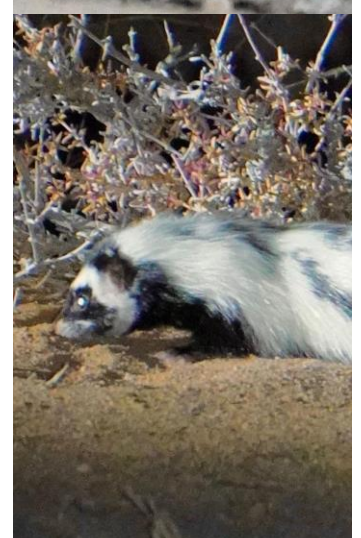
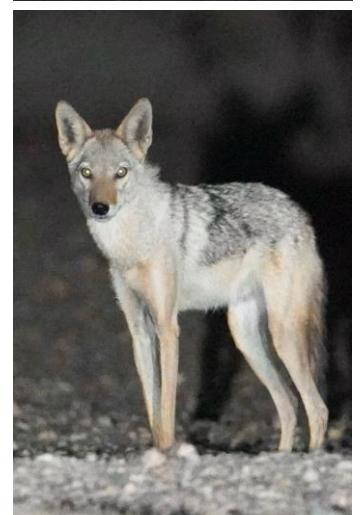


## Western Sahara's Rare Mammals

**Destination:** Western Sahara **Duration:** 8 Days **Dates:** 22<sup>th</sup> Mar – 19<sup>th</sup> Mar 2024

-  Amazing views of a very relaxed Honey Badger just off the road and then close.
-  Close views of the stunning a day roosting Pharaoh Eagle Owl in a tree.
-  Multiple Fennec Fox, Ruppell's Fox and African Golden Wolf sightings.
-  Great sighting of a Desert Hedgehog on foot nearby the desert campsite.
-  Exploring the sand dunes and desert landscape of the Western Sahara
-  Nice prolonged views of several rodent species including Hammada Jerboas.
-  Extra long night drives to find all of the rare nocturnal mammals and birds
-  Spotting a total of 47 different species of birds despite a large nocturnal based trip
-  Camping in remote desert sites and & witnessing several amazing meteorites.
-  Close up views of not one but two of the wonderfully bold Libyan Striped Weasels



### Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)  
Nico & Ottman (Guide & Drivers)  
Michele & Peter (Guides)

### Participants

Mr. Daniel Dahan  
Mr. Chris Daniels  
Mrs. Ruth Turner  
Mr. Steve White

### Overview

<b>Day 1:</b>	Dakhla
<b>Days 2-4:</b>	Saharan Desert Campsite
<b>Days 5-6:</b>	Saharan Desert House
<b>Day 7:</b>	Dakhla
<b>Day 8:</b>	Home



# Day by Day Breakdown

## Overview

Over the last few years the desert roads and wildernesses of the Western Sahara (an autonomous part of Morocco) has become a mammalwatching hotspot. The reason being that certain species which had been difficult to find and observe in the past were getting seen with reliability and the quality of the sightings were good. For the first time ever species such as Fennec Foxes, Sand Cats, African Wolves, Ruppell's Fox and other desert mammals were being seen frequently and we may have even found places where sightings could be close to guaranteed.

Following the success of our first trip to the region in 2022 we ran two trips in 2023 and a further trip in spring 2024. All of these trips have been successful in seeing nearly all of our targets (with 100% success for Fennec Foxes, Ruppell's Fox, African Golden Wolf and African Wild Cats), the only one of the main species which has eluded us on a couple of the trips is the amazing Sand Cat. We do have a good success rate in seeing this species, but it is more elusive than the other targeted species.

What we have had great success in seeing are even more elusive species of the Sahara, we have seen the very rare Honey Badger on a couple of occasions (this species is due to be split from the Sub-Saharan honey badger in the next few years) and the very highly sought after Libyan Striped Polecats.

Along with the stunning and rare wildlife (often many of the species are only seen along these routes in the Western Sahara) another hero of this trip is the desert landscape itself. The vast expanses of sand and gravel, the high orange dunes and the clear blue skies are mesmerising and then after dark the lack of light pollution leaves people agog with stars upon stars as far as the skies stretch into the distance.

The success of our trips to this part of the world are largely down to a couple of facets, firstly we arrive after the locations of this seasons dens (for Sand Cats and Fennec Foxes) have been located, which dramatically increases the chances of seeing these animals and also the quality of our guides and drivers is exceptional. With high powered spotlights and thermal scopes we have the best chances possible of seeing a range of rare wildlife and on this trip we not only got our targeted species but many other species which are very rarely encountered in the northern Sahara.

All in all this week long expedition into the wilds of the Sahara Desert was very successful and any mammalwatching enthusiast will enjoy reading the below trip report.

### 2025 and 2026 Western Sahara's Rare Mammals Small Group Tour

We have already sold our first 2025 group tour but if there is enough interested we can look to set up a second set of dates for 2025. However the next scheduled group tour we have would be for springtime 2026. For anyone interested in these trips please contact us at [info@royle-safaris.co.uk](mailto:info@royle-safaris.co.uk) or visit our website (<https://www.royle-safaris.co.uk/itineraries/morocco-rare-wildlife-tour/>) for more information and how to make a booking.



## Day 1 **Dakhla**

*Arrival*

Most of the group arrived early and spent the extra time in the hotel or around Dakhla and then at 8pm we met for dinner in the rooftop restaurant of the hotel.

Other than this arrival meal there were no activities planned today. There was some birding around the town and hotel, including the resident house buntings which seem to make the hotel restaurant their home.

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## Day 2 **Sahara Desert (Campsite)**

*Traveling & Wildlife Watching*

This morning we met the final member of the group (Chris) who arrived overnight and we all had breakfast together in the hotel, before checking out and meeting the vehicles at the reception. Here we met Nico (who runs the logistics here along with his wife) as well as his main driver Ottman and one of the guides / camp assistants Peter who would be with us throughout the trip.



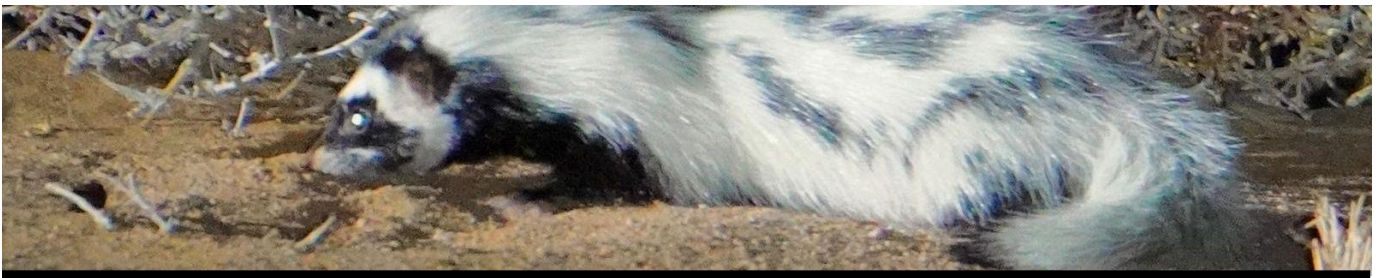


Fiest we drove north along the bay of Dakhla with several stops for birding (one of the few opportunities for daylight birding).

Species seen this morning along the coast of Dakhla Bay included greater flamingos, whimbrels, Thekla's larks (including a displaying one which turned out to be Chris's 3,000<sup>th</sup> species of bird seen in the wild), Eurasian spoonbills, ringer plovers, little egrets, lesser black-backed gulls, green shanks and black wheatears. Following on from the coast we departed inland and along the Bir Anzaranne road for about 100km before off-roading for about one hour to reach our campsite in the dunes.

The camping team set the tents up in advance and lunch was prepared by the final member of our team (Michele – who would also drive and guide for us). We settled into the camp, Chris and Daniel went for a walk to a nearby acacia stand in a ouadi and found a very nice roosting pharaoh eagle-owl as well as other desert specialist bird species such as desert wheatear, greater short-toed lark and Temminck's lark and some migratory species such as western sub-alpine warbler and western orphean warbler.

We then had some dinner before heading out for first spotlighting session. Shortly after setting off we had some very good views of a couple of **Sahara hares** and multiple sightings of **African hammad**, **lesser Egyptian** and **Tarabul's gerbils** and then the real highlight of the night as we had amazing views of a **Libyan striped weasel** which was very close to the vehicle. After leaving the **weasel** we had a great sighting of a **Tarabul's gerbil** and **African golden wolf** (a distant wolf) before an elegant gecko crossed the road and a **Ruppell's fox** completed the night nearby our camp.



### Day 3 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

#### Wildlife Watching

Today the daylight hours were spent with a combination of resting around the camp and enjoying some birding nearby. The walks were productive with several nice birds being seen along with some lizards, including Dumeril's fringe-toed lizards and Olivier's lizards. Common birds around the camp included fulvous babblers, greater short-toed larks, Bonelli's warbler, European bee-eaters and western sub-alpine warblers with the occasional brown-necked raven soaring overhead.

After dark and dinner we went out again on a drive and found many of the same species of rodents including **African hammad & lesser Egyptian jerboas**, **lesser Egyptian gerbils** as well as a **fat-tailed gerbil** (which allowed us to get out and have nice close views). There were also many of the ubiquitous **Saharan hares** as well as hares which looked different and may be **Schlumberger's hares** (the Lepus taxonomy in Morocco is confusing to say the least, but there appears to be two species of hare around here (like the jerboas) and we can see several individuals which look different to the more abundant species).

The best sighting was of an **African wild cat** which we originally found up a tree, we watched as it climbed down and disappeared into the long grass. We then had a brief view of another **Libyan striped weasel** before things went a little quiet and for a couple of hours we didn't see very much. Things then picked up again with the **fat-tailed gerbil** as described above and a **Tarabul's gerbil** near camp and when we got back Michele (who had stayed at camp) told us of two **Desert hedgehogs** he had found near camp whilst we were out. We went and tried to find them, but we couldn't find either tonight.

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### Day 4 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

#### Wildlife Watching

The day time was once again taken up with resting and walks around the acacia scrub and as usual lots of birds and lizards were seen. The highlight birds today being Eurasian hoopoe and a nice roosting short-eared owl.

Then after dark we went out spotlighting again, early on we found another **African wild cat** and that was followed by a very nice view of a **fennec fox** and we stopped for a sighting of an elegant gecko on the trail.

Driving around further we came across an second **fennec fox** in an area with many **hares** of both species. We arrived back at the camp location and on the way through we saw a **desert hedgehog** and then as we carried on further into more gravel scrub and less sand desert we found another **Libyan striped weasel** which stopped its usual endless running around and gave us fantastic views before we had a sighting of a **Ruppell's fox** at the end of the night and pretty close to the camp.

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### Day 5 Sahara Desert (Homestay)

#### Traveling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we had a late start before packing up the campsite around midday. Before leaving we met with Mart-



ina (Nico's wife and logistics extraordinaire), who swapped out fresh food and water for the camping equipment before she went back to the city and we carried on to our next location.

This location is the small village of Assouard and we would have to drive for 2-3 hours to reach the location. This is the Bougoufa Trail area and where we would spend the next couple of nights looking for wildlife. We would drive along the road back towards Dakhla and at intervals head off road and explore some of the sand and gravel dunes around here. We had much of the usual species around here including several **Sahara hares**, **lesser Egyptian gerbils** and both **African hammada** & **lesser Egyptian jerboas**. We also had a couple of cat sightings, one of which was definitely a **African wild cat** and the second very likely one, but it ran off so fast that we couldn't get clear enough views before it disappeared into some grass. But the highlight today was undeniably a **honey badger** that Martin spotted crouched down in some vegetation around 50m off the road. We stopped and went slowly towards it and watched for several minutes as it moved around the vehicle and gave us nice unobstructed views.

On the way back to house in Assouard we had another **African wild cat** which was acting very relaxed as it walked parallel to the road and in between some trees and large bushes, before eventually going out of site.



## Day 6 Sahara Desert (Homestay)

### Wildlife Watching

Today would be our night in the desert and this morning started with some relaxing around the house, just outside the house was a large basking male Sudan uromastyx, these large territorial lizards live in holes and come out to bask and feed in the bright and hot morning sun.

This evening we went out earlier than usual, we went out to enjoy sunset at some large granite boulders just off the road and a few kilometres from the town. Walking around here we found several ringed wall geckos on the rocks, soaking up the last few rays of sun and then we found a pair of **African wild cats**, they must have a den nearby and perhaps kittens, they were perched high on the rocks, watching us intently, but relax enough to stay in view and just watch us.

As the sun started to descend and the light fade we walked back towards the car and found another pair of animals in the rocks. A breeding pair of **Ruppell's foxes**, again they possibly had pups in their den.

Once we hit the road again we found several of the common rodents (**lesser Egyptian**, **Tarabul's** and **pygmy gerbils**) but for most of the night it was reptiles that were the sightings of note. In fact it was two stunning sightings of different viper species which were unexpected highlights of the night. These were a wonderful desert horned viper and then towards the end of the night a Sahara sand viper. The only other sighting of note after that was a very close **African golden wolf**, just walking next to the road and stopping to look at us.

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## Day 7 Dakhla

### Travelling

Today we left Aousserd in the late morning and spent the day driving back to Dakhla. In the heat of the day there were many uromastyx lizards basking outside their burrows. We got back to our hotel in Dakhla by mid afternoon, and met up for our final dinner at the roof-top restaurant.

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## Day 8 Home

### Departure

This morning after breakfast the clients were taken to the airport to catch their return flights home.

# Species List

Western Sahara's Rare Mammals Tour / Mar 2024

## Mammals (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Golden Wolf	<i>Canis anthus</i>
2	African Wild Cat	<i>Felis lybica</i>
3	Lesser Egyptian Gerbil	<i>Gerbillus gerbillus</i>
4	Pygmy Gerbil	<i>Gerbillus henleyi</i>
5	Tarabul's Gerbil	<i>Gerbillus tarabuli</i>
6	Libyan Striped Weasel	<i>Ictonyx libycus</i>
7	African Hammada jerboa	<i>Jaculus hirtipes</i>
8	Lesser Egyptian jerboa	<i>Jaculus jaculus</i>
9	Sahara Hare	<i>Lepus saharaea</i>
10	Schlumberger's Hare	<i>Lepus schlumberger</i>
11	Honey Badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>
12	Fat-tailed Gerbil	<i>Pachyuromys duprasi</i>
13	Desert hedgehog	<i>Paraechinus aethiopicus</i>
14	Ruppell's Fox	<i>Vulpus rueppellii</i>
15	Fennec Fox	<i>Vulpus zerda</i>

## Birds (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
2	Bar-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>
3	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
4	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
5	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
6	Fulvous Babbler	<i>Argya fulva</i>
7	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>
8	Pharoah Eagle-owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>
9	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
10	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>

11	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
12	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
13	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
14	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
15	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
16	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
17	Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Curruca hortensis</i>
18	Cream-colored Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
19	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
20	House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>
21	Dunn's Lark	<i>Eremalauda dunni</i>
22	Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
23	Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>

24	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
25	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
26	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
27	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
28	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
29	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
30	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
31	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
32	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
34	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
35	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
36	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>

37	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
38	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
39	Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>
40	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
41	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>
42	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
43	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
44	Western Sub-alpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
45	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
46	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
47	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>

## **Reptiles** (\* = heard or signs only)

	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Binominal Name</b>
1	Dumeril's Fringe-toed Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus dumerilii</i>
2	Desert Horned Viper	<i>Cerastes cerastes</i>
3	Sahara Sand Viper	<i>Cerastes vipera</i>
4	Olivier's Sand Lizard	<i>Mesalina olivieri</i>
5		<i>Stenodactylus mauritanicus</i>
6	Anderson's Short-fingered Gecko	<i>Stenodactylus petrii</i>
7	Elegant Gecko	<i>Stenodactylus sthenodactylus</i>
8	Ringed Wall Gecko	<i>Tarentola annularis</i>
9	Sudan Mastigure	<i>Uromastyx dispar</i>





African Golden Wolf



African Wild Cat



Honey Badger



Libyan Striped Polecat





African Hammada Jerboa



Fat-tailed Gerbil



Desert Hedgehog



Pharaoh Eagle Owl





Short-eared Owl



European Bee-eater



Dumeril's Fringe-toed Lizard



Elegant Gecko





Desert Horned Viper



Sahara Sand Viper