

Morocco

Small Buttonquail

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Participants

Robert Busby
Gabi Drissner
Klaus Drissner
Brian Gregory
Lynsey McCann
Maurice McCann
Ingvar Torrson

Leader Peter Lansdown



Northern (Seebohm's) Wheatear

Day 1 Most of the party flew from Gatwick Airport and met the remaining participants in the airport at Marrakech. After introductions, exchanging currency, obtaining our minibus and a quick early lunch we loaded up and set off on the long journey to Ifrane via El-Kelaa-es-Sraghna, Beni-Mellal and Khenifra. The highlight of the drive was a hovering Black-shouldered Kite but we also saw Long-legged Buzzard, Little Swift, Eurasian Hoopoe, European Bee-eater and Southern Grey and Woodchat Shrikes on the journey. We arrived at our hotel in Ifrane in time for a late dinner. Cattle Egret, White Stork, Pallid Swift, Crested Lark, Common Bulbul, Zitting Cisticola, Spotless Starling and House Bunting were all seen on at least four of the five days and will not feature further in this report.

Day 2 After an early start and a short drive to some oak-rich woodland we began our search for the tour's first target species. It took a while to locate a settled pair of Atlas Flycatchers, which we all watched carrying food to the nest; several others were seen more fleetingly and the area also produced Black Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, Levillant's Woodpecker (heard only), European Roller, African Blue Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Moussier's Redstart, Rock and Cirl Buntings and Rock Petronia. After returning to the hotel for breakfast we loaded the luggage and visited a nearby stony plateau where we soon found our second target species: Northern (Seebohm's) Wheatear. A total of eight was logged and we also saw Black Kite, Booted Eagle, Alpine Swift, Eurasian Hoopoe and European Serin in the same area. Much of the rest of the day was spent travelling to our next hotel, in Oualidia, via Meknes, Rabat, Casablanca and El-Jadida. Lunch was taken on the journey, which gave us Black Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, Lesser Kestrel, Levillant's Woodpecker, European Bee-eater and Southern Grey Shrike, and we ate dinner at a restaurant in Oualidia, where we were to be based in a really good hotel for three nights.

Day 3 Following breakfast at the hotel we began in earnest our search for the tour's main target species: Small Buttonquail. We concentrated on mixed farmland in the geographical subdivision of Doukkala, which extends roughly from El Jadida in the north to Cap Bedouzza in the south. After obtaining

permission, we spent the morning walking along the edges of cultivated fields on the farm where we had seen a Small Buttonquail on last year's tour; the crops had been rotated since 2014. Just before noon we heard a female Small Buttonquail. It called for approximately ten seconds and did so every twenty-to-forty minutes during the next three hours. Our extreme patience was eventually rewarded when the bird flew and relocated to a different part of the same field – there were massive smiles all round followed by a very late picnic lunch. During the rest of the afternoon we scanned a few fresh water pools and visited some salt-pans. During the day, in addition to Small Buttonquail, we saw Black Kite, Common Quail, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Collared Pratincole, Audouin's Gull, Thekla Lark, Southern Grey Shrike and Sardinian Warbler. Reed-warblers were also seen and heard, though whether the breeding birds in this part of Morocco are Eurasian or African Reed-warblers has yet to be determined. Dinner at our hotel was a most joyous occasion!

Day 4 With the tour's target species all safely achieved, a leisurely breakfast was taken at our hotel then the day was spent birding in a mix of habitats: fresh water pools, salt-pans and farmland, although we chose not to revisit the fields where we had been successful with Small Buttonquail the previous day. The fresh water pools produced Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Marbled Duck, Black-winged Stilt and Gull-billed Tern; Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover and Audouin's Gull were seen at the salt-pans; and we found Common Quail (heard only), Laughing Dove, reed-warbler, Sardinian Warbler and European Serin in the farmland and Collared Pratincole flying over all three habitat-types. We had a picnic lunch and enjoyed a special final dinner at our hotel.

Day 5 Breakfast and loading our luggage onto the minibus were quickly followed by a visit to a local fresh water pool where we saw Marbled and Ferruginous Ducks, a superb Eleonora's Falcon, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Gull-billed Tern and European Bee-eater. We then left the area heading, via Sidi-Bennour, to the airport at Marrakech. Birding was not finished, however, with Black Kite, Common Quail, Collared Pratincole, Little Swift, Thekla Lark and Black-eared Wheatear being recorded on the way as well as, at a random comfort stop by a cactus hedge, Rufous Scrub-robin, which showed well to one and all! A picnic lunch was to be our final meal in Morocco as we all caught early-evening flights home.

We drove a total of 1264km and recorded 108 species, which are listed here with the number of days recorded (out of five) in brackets: Mallard (4), Marbled Duck (2), Red-crested Pochard (1), Ferruginous Duck (1), Common Quail (3), Little Grebe (3), Greater Flamingo (1), White Stork (5), Great Cormorant (3), Grey Heron (1), Little Egret (3), Cattle Egret (5), Glossy Ibis (1), Eurasian Spoonbill (1), Black-shouldered Kite (1), Booted Eagle (1), Western Marsh-harrier (1), Black Kite (3), Long-legged Buzzard (2), Eurasian Moorhen (2), Common Coot (4), Eurasian Thick-knee (1), Black-winged Stilt (3), Pied Avocet (1), Eurasian Oystercatcher (2), Grey Plover (2), Golden Plover (1), Kentish Plover (3), Common Ringed Plover (2), Common Redshank (1), Whimbrel (1), Black-tailed Godwit (1), Ruddy Turnstone (2), Ruff (1), Curlew Sandpiper (1), Sanderling (3), Dunlin (2), Small Buttonquail (1), Collared Pratincole (3), Black-headed Gull (2), Mediterranean Gull (1), Audouin's Gull (2), Yellow-legged Gull (4), Lesser Black-backed Gull (4), Little Tern (2), Gull-billed Tern (2), Rock Dove (5), Common Wood-pigeon (1), Eurasian Turtle-dove (5), Eurasian Collared-dove (5), Laughing Dove (1), Common Cuckoo (1), Little Owl (5), Alpine Swift (1), Common Swift (3), Pallid Swift (4), Little Swift (2), European Bee-eater (3), European Roller (1), Eurasian Hoopoe (2), Great Spotted Woodpecker (1), Levillant's Woodpecker (1), Lesser Kestrel (1), Common Kestrel (4), Eleonora's Falcon (1), Southern Grey Shrike (2), Woodchat Shrike (1), Eurasian Jay (1), Red-billed Chough (1), Eurasian Jackdaw (1), Common Raven (2), Crested Lark (5), Thekla Lark (3), Wood Lark

(1), Eurasian Swallow (5), Common House-martin (4), Coal Tit (1), Great Tit (3), African Blue Tit (1), Eurasian Nuthatch (1), Short-toed Treecreeper (1), Common Bulbul (5), Firecrest (1), reed-warbler sp. (2), Zitting Cisticola (4), Sardinian Warbler (2), Spotted Flycatcher (1), Rufous Scrub-robin (1), Atlas Flycatcher (1), Moussier's Redstart (1), Northern (Seebohm's) Wheatear (1), Black-eared Wheatear (1), Eurasian Blackbird (5), Mistle Thrush (1), Spotless Starling (5), Yellow (Spanish) Wagtail (3), Cirl Bunting (1), Rock Bunting (1), House Bunting (5), Corn Bunting (3), Common (African) Chaffinch (1), European Greenfinch (3), European Goldfinch (1), Eurasian Linnet (3), European Serin (2), Hawfinch (1), House Sparrow (5) and Rock Petronia (1).

Birdfinders will be repeating this specialist tour in June 2016.