

## **Sterling Birds**

### **Grand Morocco Tour**

Come and enjoy with us lots of great birds, scenery, food and good times!

Link to my photos <https://sterlingbirds.smugmug.com/Foreign-Birds/Sterlings-Morocco/>

Lacy's Wittman's landscape/people/cultural photos from my last tour at [https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPXGMYsZCiHIUpOjXOgyuwLHUzbejhJSs60cn\\_TPdPENeF6DaHF0xEmCYT3EIMU2A?key=QWE1ZVdZS2FITGVyc1hIaEVmRFNYaG5ZX0g2SkR3](https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPXGMYsZCiHIUpOjXOgyuwLHUzbejhJSs60cn_TPdPENeF6DaHF0xEmCYT3EIMU2A?key=QWE1ZVdZS2FITGVyc1hIaEVmRFNYaG5ZX0g2SkR3)

Link to my 2022 eBird tour report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/68741>

#### **16-Day Birding and Photography Spring Migration Tour to Morocco**

From High Atlas Mountains to Atlantic Coast to Sahara Desert to High Desert and the lovely Marrakech, this trip will sample all of the habitats and many of the top birding areas in Morocco during spring migration. We will have ample photographic opportunities (great looks!) at most of the sought-after species. Come and enjoy the birds, famous cuisine and local hospitality of this fascinating and beautiful country.

Leader John Sterling and with Brahim Mezane and driver.

April 20 – May 5, 2024

\$3,500 per person: not including international airfare

Plan to arrive in Marrakech at least day or two before tour starts to acclimate to time change and be ready for early start on Day 1 of tour. If you do plan to arrive on April 30th or earlier, then let us know and we can help you get reservations at a hotel and arrange transportation from airport. The cost of the hotel and meals prior to May 1st are not included in the tour price. Also, if you arrive earlier, we can arrange for cultural guide and activities in Marrakech. I usually arrive two days prior to a tour.

Cost includes:

- \* Comfortable transport in air-conditioned minibus.
- \* 15 Nights hotel accommodation
- \* All meals
- \* Travel in 4x4 vehicles in the Sahara Desert

\* Guiding services and general assistance where and when required.

Cost excludes:

\* International airfare

\* alcoholic drinks

\* Travel insurance

\* Items of a personal nature

Tour starting/ending: Marrakech airport, Morocco

April 20. Day 1: Marrakech - High Atlas Mountains - Oukaimeden

We will meet you at your hotel in Marrakech in morning after breakfast with White Stork, Pallid Swift and House Bunting to entertain us. We will head to the High Atlas Mountains and visit the high elevation town of Oukaimeden (2600m). As we drive along the cultivated fields towards the mountains, we should find a good mix of resident species such as Southern Grey Shrike, Little Owl, Sardinian Warbler, Spotless Starling, Maghreb Magpie, Crested Lark, Moussier's Redstart, Spanish Sparrow and perhaps Cream-colored Courser and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Slightly higher up, among the rocky slopes, we will search for Blue Rock Thrush and the endemic Levaillant's Green Woodpecker. When we reach the ski resort at Oukaimeden, we will check the snowline for the handsome African Crimson-winged Finch. Other species here include Rock Sparrow, Black Wheatear, Atlas Wheatear, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Chough, Mistle Thrush and Atlas Horned Lark.

Dinner and accommodation in the foothill of the Atlas Mountains.

April 21. Day 2: High Atlas Mountains - drive Agadir Coast

After an early breakfast we will look for birds in the mountains that we missed the previous day such as White-throated Dipper, Barbary Partridge, Atlas subspecies of Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nightingale, Firecrest, Hawfinch, Cetti's Warbler, Red Crossbill and other mid-elevation species. From the flat plains of Marrakech, we will turn to Agadir area for 3 nights. Enroute we will make some birding stops for lowland birds that we missed the previous day.

Dinner and accommodation near Agadir.

April 22. Day 3: Agadir - Cap Rhir - Tamri Estuary- Oued Souss

We will start Cap Rhir for a morning seawatch, primarily for Northern Gannets, Cory's and the

endangered Balearic shearwaters and Great Skua. We will continue north to Tamri to search in the scrub and fields adjacent to the coast for the Northern Bald Ibis and landbirds such as Spectacled Warbler, Linnet, Eurasian Hoopoe, and Mediterranean Short-toed Lark. Afterwards, we will return to Agadir to visit Oued Souss, an estuary with lots of gulls including Lesser Black-backed Gulls of two subspecies, Mediterranean Gulls and Yellow-legged Gulls, shorebirds and other waterbirds.

Dinner and accommodation in town near Oued Massa.

April 23. Day 4: Oued Massa

South of Agadir is the famous Oued Massa. We have an early start to Oued Massa on the Atlantic Coast. Target birds: the secretive Black-crowned Tchagra, Marbled Duck, Moussier's Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, Little Owl, Ruddy Shelduck, Moroccan Cormorant, Laughing Dove and Brown-throated Martin. Last time we visited, we saw 45 species from the small bridge over the river! This is a birdy place indeed.

Dinner and accommodation in nearby town.

April 24. Day 5: Morning at Oued Massa – afternoon drive to Quarzazate

Morning in Oued Massa looking for birds that we've been missing. Long drive to Quarzate with stops at the town noted as the birthplace of Saffron and another stop a rosewater factory. We'll check the orchards in town for migrant and summering birds such as Western Orphean Warbler, Eurasian Hoopoe, and other goodies. Time permitting, we'll stop to explore the Barrage (reservoir) at Mansour Eddahbi. Here we have the chance of seeing Marbled Duck, Greater Flamingos, Ruddy Shelduck, Black winged Stilts and Maghreb Lark, as well as cormorants, herons and a selection of shorebirds.

Dinner and accommodation in Ouarzazate.

April 25. Day 6: Ouarzazate - Tagdilt Track - Boumalne du Dades

We will begin at the Tagdilt Track, to look for the many lark species found here including; Thick-billed, Temminck's, Greater Short-toed, and Thekla's, then head east, searching the roadside stone-deserts for the rare Maghreb Wheatear. We will go to a special spot for Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Lanner Falcon, Desert Lark, Trumpeter Finch, and other desert birds. Time permitting, we'll take a walk in the riparian area near the hotel for the many migrant songbirds that occur there. We will take a short night walk for Eurasian Scops-Owl.

Dinner and accommodation in Boumalne du Dades

April 26. Day 7: Boumalne du Dades - Rissani - Merzouga

After an early look for missing species at the Tagdilt Track, we will head east and stop at Todra Gorge for Tristram's Warbler, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock-thrush, Rock Dove, Crag Martin and possibly Bonelli's Eagle. Afterward, we proceed to the Saharan Desert and the largest sand dune complex in Morocco, made famous by the many Hollywood movies film there.

Dinner and accommodation in Merzouga.

April 27. Day 8: Exploring the Sahara Deserts

One of the highlights of the trip will be the full day spent into the Sahara deserts to Erg Chebbi; the largest dune system in Morocco, which makes for a spectacular backdrop for some high-quality birding. Brown-necked Raven, Greater Hoopoe Lark, Desert Sparrow, African Desert Warbler, Fulvous Babbler, Bar-tailed Lark, Spotted Sandgrouse, Crowned Sandgrouse, Cream-colored Courser, Lanner Falcon, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Saharan Olivaceous Warbler and many migrant passerines are all possible. In addition, if rains have been plentiful a seasonal lake near Merzouga can be very interesting, with ducks, waders and their attendant raptors. Chances also exist for seeing the Pharaoh Eagle Owl and Egyptian Nightjar roosting at daytime.

Dinner and accommodation in Merzouga.

April 28. Day 9: Merzouga – Zaida

After checking for migrants and breakfast, we will say good-bye to the Saharan desert and search the palm riparian area for Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, Fulvous Chatterer and other goodies, including migrants. We will proceed north to Zaida Plains while stopping enroute for Scrub Warbler, Tristram's Warbler and other desert and juniper woodland birds.

April 29. Day 10: Zaida Plains – Ifran

Early morning start to look for the Dupont's Lark, a tricky species to find. As we walk through the desert, we will look for Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, various other larks and Desert Wheatear.

After we return to hotel, we will bird the hotel grounds for Red Crossbill and any migrants that stop at this oasis.

Dinner and accommodation in Ifran.

April 30. Day 11: Middle Atlas Mountains

We will explore several beautiful forest sites with the endemic Atlas Flycatcher, Barbary Apes, and many European forest species such as Short-toed Treecreeper, Hawfinch, Eurasian Nuthatch, Common Redstart, Wood Lark and others. Evening search for the endemic Maghreb Owl and Eurasian Scops-Owl.

Dinner and accommodation in Ifran.

May 1. Day 12: drive to Volubilis in morning, visit ruins, drive to Fez

Leaving the Middle Atlas Mountains after early morning birding, we will drive to the ancient Roman city of Volubilis for a visit to this famous site, then drive to Fez with potential birding stops along the way.

May 2. Day 13: Fez

Cultural day in this fascinating royal city with so much to see.

May 3. Day 14: Fez - Merdja Zerga - Boat Trip - Marsh Owl

After breakfast we head west to Merdja Zerga, which means “Blue Lagoon”. We'll take a boat trip out into this amazing wetland. A local guide will take us through the shallow waters and channels to the best spots at the heart of this fantastic lagoon which teems with thousands of shorebirds including godwits, greenshank, and redshank, as well as ducks and flamingoes. This is the last place where the extinct Slender-billed Curlew was seen about thirty years ago. The marshes are one of the few places to find the African Marsh Owl, an endemic subspecies. We will also scan the beach and Atlantic Ocean for terns, gulls, and migrant Great Skuas and Balearic Shearwaters.

Night in Rabat

May 4. Day 15: The Zaers (the King's Forest) - Sidi Bourhaba - Casablanca

An early start today is essential for a trip southeast of Rabat into the King's hunting forest, the Zaers, to hear and see Double-spurred Francolin, a secretive game bird that calls from the tops of tree stumps. Other woodland species possible include Black-crowned Tchagra, Black-shouldered Kite, Woodpigeon, Greenfinch, Serin, Pied Flycatcher, Common Redstart and Barbary Partridge. We'll spend the afternoon along the Atlantic coast, visiting lagoons and salt pans including an excellent freshwater lake, Lac de Sidi Bourhaba. Good numbers of Red-knobbed Coots should be on the lake as well as Marbled Duck and White-headed Duck, while Western Marsh Harriers hunt over the reed beds. After birding, we will drive to our small hotel near Casablanca airport.

Dinner and accommodation near Casablanca airport.

May 5: Day 16: Departure from Casablanca airport for flights home! Optional tour of Casablanca if you arrange for flights in the evening or following day.

Some of the many target birds of this private birding tour include: Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Double-spurred Francolin, African Marsh Owl, Dupont's Lark, Marbled Duck, Lanner Falcon, Northern Bald Ibis, Long-legged Buzzard, Brown-necked Raven, Bonelli's Eagle, Cream-colored Courser, Spotted Sandgrouse, Crowned Sandgrouse, Laughing Dove, African Blue Tit, Little Swift,

Levaillant's Green Woodpecker, Desert Lark, Bar-tailed Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Temminck's Lark, Egyptian Nightjar, Black-crowned Tchagra, Desert Wheatear, Desert Sparrow, Red-rumped Wheatear, Maghreb Wheatear, White-crowned Wheatear, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Saharan Olivaceous Warbler, Scrub Warbler, Tristram's Warbler, African Desert Warbler, Moussier's Redstart, Fulvous Babbler, Alpine Chough, Seebohm's Wheatear, Trumpeter Finch, African Crimson-winged Finch, House Bunting, Black Wheatear, Red-knobbed Coot, Audouin's Gull and many European migrants!