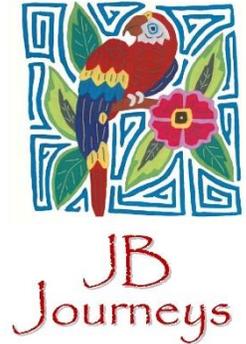


# 2021 Birding Southern Morocco

## Feb 25-Mar 7



*Our Morocco tour is more than just birding. The culture and history of the region will amaze you, and the landscape will take your breath away. We will be covering most of the southern part of Morocco, in and out of Marrakesh, and we include all the most amazing and incredible places: the Atlantic wetlands, the dunes and oases of the Sahara, and the Atlas Mountains. All of these are of great importance to millions of birds during the spectacle of spring migration from Africa to Europe. Northern Africa has a number of bird specialties and near endemics found only in the southern part of the Western Palearctic, and Morocco is the only safe area to see these birds. On this list we can expect to see Moussier's Redstart, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Atlas and*

*Maghreb wheatear, Tristram's Warbler, and Northern Bald Ibis, the only wild population of this species in the world.*

*Morocco has an extremely interesting avifauna, and many of the resident bird species have adapted to the great rigor of the desert climate - think of the Hoopoe Lark with its amazing bill and song, just to mention one. The birdlife is complemented by "cracking" rocky landscapes of incredible colors that makes travelling around a very picturesque pleasure. From mid-February to late March, many birds are migrating towards Europe, and the beautiful Moroccan landscape comes into bloom, providing food and shelter for birds such as nightingales, warblers, and buntings, which add an extra dimension to our tour. By fully exploring all these habitats we should end up with a mouth-watering list of species. The rural lifestyle of Morocco, lost in nearly all European countries, has benefitted the birdlife for centuries.*

### **Feb 25 – Thursday - Day 1: Welcome to Morocco**

Fly to Marrakesh, where our agents will pick you up and drive you to our hotel for the next two nights. The drive is about 15 minutes away and there is time for a rest from the flight. Depending on flight arrivals, we may have time before dinner for a short walk around the nearby gardens, which will produce interesting birding. House Bunting and Laughing Dove are likely to be seen here.

*Overnight in Marrakesh (D)*

### **Feb 26 – Friday - Day 2: Visit to the high Atlas mountains (Cold!!)**

This morning we drive up into the High Atlas Mountains and visit Oukaimeden. As we drive along the cultivated valley, we should find a good mix of resident and migrant species, such as Woodchat Shrike, Common Crossbill, Hawfinch, Brambling, House, Rock, and Cirl buntings, and we may see the stunning Moussier's Redstart. Slightly higher up among the rocky slopes, we will search for Barbary Partridge, Blue Rock Thrush, and the Levaillant's Woodpecker. When we finally reach the ski resort of Oukaimeden, we will take some time to admire the stunning scenery before beginning our search of the snowline for the handsome Crimson-winged Finch. Other species here include Alpine Accentor, Rock Sparrow, Water Pipit, Atlas Wheatear, Red-billed and Alpine (or Yellow-bellied) chough, and Shore Lark *spp atlae*. Raptors to keep an eye out for include Golden, Bonelli's, and Booted eagles, and possibly Long-legged Buzzard.

*Overnight in Marrakesh (B,L,D)*



### **Feb 27 – Saturday - Day 3: Transfer from Marrakesh to Boulmane.**



We will drive through the High Atlas Mountains where snowy peaks visible from miles away decorate the landscape through an unexpected series of different habitats. We have our own raptor watch point, from where we search the blue Moroccan skies for resident and migrant birds including Lanner and Barbary falcons, Lesser Kestrel, Black Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, and Short-toed and Booted eagles. We will stop at the scenic and impressive Tizi 'n' Tichka pass to admire its fabulous geological rock formations before continuing on our journey to the stony desert. The road through the mountains is extremely winding and we take our time (total drive is about 5 hours), stopping at a few convenient locations for exciting birds such as Levaillant's Woodpecker, Mourning Wheatear, and Trumpeter Finch. We stay for two nights in Boulmane, which has an impressive views of the Dades river.

*Overnight in Boulmane (B,L,D)*

**Feb 28 – Sunday - Day 4: Steppes of Boulmane-Tagdilt**

After a good night's sleep, we will make an early morning visit to the famous Tagdilt Track. Despite the nearby rubbish heap, this is still an excellent spot for some very special birds. Careful searching could reveal Cream-colored Courser, Black-bellied and Crowned sandgrouse, Thick-billed, Bar-tailed, Desert and Temminck's lark, as well as Red-rumped and Desert Wheatear and Trumpeter Finch. We also keep searching overhead for Lanner Falcon, Long-legged Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Montagu's Harrier and other migrants. In the afternoon we will head to the spectacular Dades Gorge, where the towering pink rock walls are home to Crag Martin, Pale Crag Martin, Alpine Swift, Blue Rock Thrush, Barbary Partridge, Rock Bunting, and Bonelli's Eagle. In the open areas we'll look for Mourning Wheatear and Desert Lark, and here we have our first chance of a Northwest African endemic - Tristram's Warbler.



*Overnight in Boulmane (B,L,D)*

**Mar 1 – Monday - Day 5: Transfer from Boumalne to Merzouga.**



After a last look at the Tagdilt Track, we drive on towards our secluded hotel at Merzouga, situated right on the edge of the Chebbi dunes. The drive east will no doubt be punctuated with stops to check out the numerous *wadis* (or valleys), and palm-fringed oases, as we look for Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Lanner Falcon, and migrants such as Subalpine Warbler, and European Bee-eater. A short walk before Merzouga will give us the chance to see the magnificent desert race of Eagle Owl in one of two places. We stay for three nights in Merzouga/Rissani area.

*Overnight in Merzouga (B,L,D)*

**Mar 2, 3 – Tuesday, Wednesday - Days 6, 7: 4x4 in the DESERT!! – Hamada and sandy deserts**

Our hotel is set in attractive gardens with surrounding palm trees which attract a good variety of migrants, and the immediate area is worth checking at every opportunity for species such as Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike, Wryneck, Rufous Bush Robin and Nightingale. We will spend a whole day checking various sites around the edge of the red sand dunes of the Erg Chebbi - the largest dune system in Morocco. Our major prize should be found around the various cafes that are dotted about the landscape, the elusive Desert Sparrow. Other species include Fulvous Babbler, Hoopoe Lark, African Desert Warbler, and Brown-necked Raven. There are sometimes seasonal lakes, which attract numerous wildfowl and waders - an amazing sight out here in the desert! It is also worth scanning the skies for migration, and as the day warms up it is possible to see good numbers of storks and raptors rising on the thermals, heading north towards their breeding grounds. We will also spend some time at dawn or dusk searching for the rather unpredictable Egyptian Nightjar, which sometimes breeds in nearby *wadis*. Other species in this area include Short-toed, Bar-tailed, and Desert larks, Desert and Black-eared wheatears, Dartford and Spectacled warbler, Trumpeter Finch,



Southern Grey Shrike, and, possibly, Spotted Sandgrouse. One early morning we drive through the desert areas near the Algerian border in search of the scarce Houbara Bustard.

*Overnights in Merzouga (B,L,D)*

#### **Mar 4 – Thursday - Day 8: From Merzouga to Ouarzazate**

We will drive through the Anti-Atlas, the second Moroccan mountain range in importance; a series of rocky hills, cliffs, and deep gorges of volcanic geological formations. Roadside birding will produce migrants and lots of wheatears, and perhaps Bonelli's Eagle. Total drive time is about 5 hours. We walk around Ouarzazate reservoir with a tremendous selection of birds that may include Moussiers Redstart, Wryneck, and warblers such as Western Bonelli's, Western Orphean, Subalpine and Olivaceous, Desert, Northern and Black-eared wheatears, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Rock and House buntings, among other migrants. Birding around Ouarzazate gives us chances of water birds such as Osprey, Black Stork, Night Heron, Little and Cattle egrets, Ruddy Shelduck, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, and White Wagtail of the Moroccan race.

*Overnight in Ouarzazate (B,L,D)*

#### **Mar 5 – Friday - Day 9: From Ouarzazate to Agadir**

After breakfast we head towards Agadir on the Atlantic coast, where we spend two nights. We will stop in the famous medieval Kasbah Ait Benhadou, where birding is first class, and may include local specialties like Desert Lark, Trumpeter Finch, and Mourning Wheatear. After lunch in the scenic Tzin Izhsane we continue to the fertile Sous Valley, through scrub thickets and citrus groves where we could find European Roller, Black-shouldered Kite, and Western Orphean Warbler. We could also find anything from Black Kite migrating overhead, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater resting on roadside wires, to skulking Subalpine Warblers, or a Lanner Falcon in a roadside promontory. Several stops will produce interesting migrant passerines, raptors, waders and storks. Total drive time is about 5 hours.

*Overnight in Agadir (B,L,D)*



#### **Mar 6 – Saturday - Day 10: Visit to Souss-Massa National Park**



An early start will take us to the Atlantic Coast where we spend the morning in the Sous Massa National Park. We walk here to see the endangered **Bald Ibis**, one of the rarest birds on the planet, with an important population here. We search the vegetation along the water's edge for skulking Squacco Heron, while the distinctive call of Black-crowned Tchagra rings out from dense cover. More easily observed birds can include Marbled Duck, Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Black-shouldered Kite, Glossy Ibis,

Purple Heron, Ruddy Shelduck, Plain Martin, and, possibly, Tawny Eagle. Other possibilities include Savi's, Western Olivaceous, and Moustached warblers, Zitting Cisticola, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Pallid Swift, Red-rumped Swallow, Common Bulbul, and Spotless Starling. After lunch, we drive along the semi-arid steppes of the Sous Valley with good chances for Lesser Short-toed Lark, Cream-colored Courser, Stone Curlew, or Sandgrouse. Later in the afternoon we will visit the Oued Sous - a delightful area very good for waders, terns, and large flocks of roosting gulls, including Slender-billed, Audouin's, and Mediterranean. Other species here include Greater Flamingo, Zitting Cisticola, and Sardinian Warbler. At dusk we will check a nearby site for Red-necked Nightjar.

*Overnight in Agadir (B,L,D)*

#### **Mar 7 – Sunday - Day 11: Tamri and Departure.**

Time permitting, we head to Tamri, to look again for Bald Ibis. We may also see Audouin's Gull, Zitting Cisticola, Barbary Partridge, Moussier's Redstart, and Sardinian Warbler, before returning to Marrakesh for afternoon flights. Total drive time is about 3 hours.

*Note: The order and sites visited may vary due to weather, road conditions, and other factors beyond our control.*

*JB Journeys is happy to offer our services in planning a pre or post visit to other areas of Morocco. After a week of early mornings and dramatic weather, we'd recommend visiting one of the beautiful old riads in Marrakesh or Fes, taking in a hammam, the Arabic-style ritual of soaking in healing waters and scrubbing off a layer of skin! Or go deeper into the desert, ride a camel, and stay in a camp. Not 5-star lodging, but one with thousands of stars!*

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*About your leaders:*

**Eric Stager** grew up on the Upper Texas Coast where he was bitten by the birding bug in 1981 at the age of 13. Although detrimental to his teenage social life, his obsession with birds was spurred on by kind mentors and nourished by the excitement of growing up in one of North America's top birding locations. While still in high school, Eric was leading field trips for the local bird club, compiling his local Christmas Bird Count, and operating the Texas Coast Rare Bird Alert (in the days of cassette tape answering machines). Eric left the coast to attend the University of Texas and has lived in Austin ever since. He has expanded his sights with birding trips in South America, Africa, Asia and Australia.



In Austin, Eric leads field trips and teaches birding classes for Travis Audubon Society, and serves as president of the board of directors. He works as a Senior Environmental Scientist for the City of Austin.

**Cristian Jensen Marcet** lives in a little village on the edge of the Ebro Delta in northeastern Spain. He grew up in Barcelona with a Danish father and a Catalan mother, which helped him become a fluent linguist. He has been an enthusiastic birder



since the age of 12 and now specializes in guiding tours in Spain and its Islands, Morocco, Turkey, Jordan and Georgia. Cristian has worked professionally in different aspects of bird life for many years. In Barcelona he was involved with the reintroduction of the Peregrine Falcon. He is a member of SEO/Birdlife and the Ornithological Catalan Institut (ICO). Cristian is a qualified forest ranger and environmental educator. He speaks Spanish, Catalan and English, plus basic Danish and French.

**NOTE REGARDING FLIGHTS:** The itinerary is based on flights in and out of Marrakesh. Some schedules may require an overnight in Europe. We can arrange an airport hotel at an extra expense.

#### **COST:**

- \$2695 per person in double occupancy with 9 travelers. (\$2995 with 7). (AS OF PUBLISH DATE, OCT 2019)
- Single supplement \$300. *A single is either a smaller room for one or a double room at single rate. Limited in number.*
- Minimum 7 to operate, maximum 9 participants.
- To confirm your spot, complete this [reservation form on-line](#).
- Deposit \$500 to hold space; final payment will due November 1, 2020.
- Cancellation policy – Deposit non-refundable after 30 days. 90 days before departure-25%; 60 days prior to departure-50%; inside 60 days – non-refundable. Name change may be permitted.
- No refund for unused parts of itinerary.

#### **INCLUDED:**

- All local transportation by van or 4X4
- 10 nights lodging with taxes included
- Escorted by Eric Stager of JB Journeys
- Local bird guide Cristian Jensen Marcet
- Entry fees to parks, etc
- Meals as listed
- Basic gratuities for meals and drivers

#### **NOT INCLUDED:**

- International airfare to/from Marrakesh
- Drinks during meals
- Gratuities to local guide (*suggestions: guides-\$10-15/day*)
- Gratuities for hotels (*suggestion: 10-20 Dirham per day per room*)
- Personal expenses
- Travel Insurance – *we recommend a comprehensive insurance policy including medical evacuation coverage.*