



APEX
EXPEDITIONS



Morocco

March 25 – April 7, 2016





This image and cover © Ignacio Yllera

Expedition Overview

This southern Moroccan adventure begins in the bustling alleyways of Marrakesh, but moves quickly beyond the grip of civilization, to some of the most important ornithological areas in North Africa. The variety of habitats we cover during this 14-day tour is staggering, from the 8,500-foot alpine peaks of the High Atlas, to the spectacular red dunes of Erg Chebbi at the edge of the Sahara; from the seasonal desert Tamezguidat Lake to the windswept fishing ports of the Atlantic coast. Bird activity is at its height this time of year, with more than 600 resident and migrant species represented. We have the chance to see such rare and near-endemics as the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Moussier's Redstart, and Eleonora's Falcon; as well as a range of raptors, waterbirds, larks, wheatears and warblers that are difficult to find elsewhere. Join Apex as we scour Morocco's "Kasbah country" for bird specialties and soak up the country's scenic magnificence and cultural richness as we go.



Photos: (Cover) Thekla Lark, Eleonora's Falcon, Erg Chebbi





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Itinerary

Friday, March 25: Arrive Marrakesh

Touch down in Marrakesh, Morocco's legendary "pearl of the South," and experience the signature giddiness travelers often get driving through its labyrinthine streets. Rest up at your hotel, the elegant *Riad Slitine*, before a welcome dinner with your expedition team.

Saturday, March 26: Ourika Valley / Oukaïmeden / Imlil

This morning, we pack up for a journey to the Toubkal Massif of the High Atlas, due south of Marrakesh. We drive first through the cultivated plains of the Ourika Valley, especially resplendent this time of year, with almond and cherry blossoms, and wildflowers galore. Here, we encounter a good mix of resident and migrant bird species such as Woodchat Shrike, Rufous Bush Robin, Hawfinch, Nightingale, House, Rock and Cirl Buntings. As we climb into the foothills, Tristams, Spectacled, and Subalpine Warblers become commonplace, as well as Black Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrushes. Of special interest will be the endemic Levaillant's Woodpecker. Ascending ever higher, we make regular stops to ensure a good cross-section of bird species from each habitat. The road ends at the dramatically-landscaped, 8,700-foot Oukaïmeden, Morocco's premier ski resort. Here, some of the country's rarest breeding birds can be found, including the Crimson-winged Finch, Alpine Accentor, Alpine Chough, European Dipper and Lammergeier. We head to the village of Imlil for dinner and overnight at the beautiful riverside *Riad Dar Imlil*.

Sunday, March 27: Marrakesh / Casablanca / Rabat

After an early breakfast, we head back through Marrakesh, then north into the plains en route to Casablanca. Keep your eyes peeled for Montagu's Harrier; Crested, Thekla and Calandra Larks on the way. In Casablanca, we visit the Hassan II Mosque, the only mosque in Morocco open to non-Muslims. This imposing building is a stunning example of contemporary religious architecture—its 688-foot minaret is the tallest in the world, and visible for miles. Birds here include Eurasian Shag,



Photos: Northern Bald Ibis, Hassan II Mosque, Lammergeier



Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Late afternoon will find us traveling along the Atlantic coast of Morocco, surrounded by Juniper woodland and intermittent marshland. Migration will be at its peak during our visit and sightings could include Squacco and Purple Herons, Greater Flamingos, Great-crested Grebes, various waders, gulls and terns, and even (at dusk) African Marsh Owls. This evening, we head to Rabat for dinner and overnight at *Riad Kalaa*.

Monday, March 28: Rabat – The Zaers / Lac de Sidi Bourhaba

Rise before the sun this morning for a trip into the King's hunting forest—the Zaers—home to the highest concentration of cork-oak trees in the world. Over 100 bird species breed here, including such rare and sought-after species as the Black-shouldered Kite, Double-spurred Francolin, and Black-headed Bush Shrike. Sightings should also include European Bee-eater, Long-legged Buzzards, Booted and Bonelli's Eagles, Lesser Kestrels, Hobbies and Lanner Falcons. Small bird enthusiasts will revel in Cetti's and Olivaceous Warblers, Short-toed Treecreepers, Golden Orioles, and Great-spotted Cuckoos. After lunch, we visit the Atlantic coast area we passed through yesterday, but with more time to visit its lagoons and salt pans including the beautiful freshwater Lac de Sidi Bourhaba, which is known to provide some of the best birdwatching in the country. Look out for the Red-knobbed Coot, Western Marsh and Montagu's harriers, Marbled Teal, Black-winged Stilts, and possibly even the Fulvous Whistling Duck. We return to Rabat in the evening for dinner and overnight at *Riad Kalaa*.

Tuesday, March 29: Meknes / Ifrane / Midelt

This morning, we drive southeast, stopping on the way to search for the tiny Plain Martin before ascending the Middle Atlas, where we have a chance to spot Levaillant's Woodpecker and Ruddy Shelduck. Cedar forests blanket the foothills, and in them we may see Wood Lark, Firecrest and the local races of Great Spotted Woodpecker, Coal Tit and Atlas Flycatcher. We'll stop for the night in tiny Midelt, which offers breathtaking views of the eastern High Atlas as they rise seemingly out of thin air. Dinner and overnight at *Hotel Taddart*, just outside of Midelt.

Wednesday, March 30: Zeida Plain / Rissani / Merzouga

We head out early toward the Zeida Plain, known as *the* place in Morocco to find Dupont's Lark. This species is notoriously elusive, and is infamous for disappearing amongst the tussocks. During our walk we may see Thekla and Lesser Short-toed Larks, Red-rumped and Desert Wheatears, and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Afterwards we head south to the edge of the Sahara. En route, we may see Eurasian Crag-martin, Desert Lark and Black Wheatear while, in a spectacular gorge, Rock Bunting and Blue Rock Thrush can be found. Arrive in the evening in Merzouga, the gateway to the ethereal Erg Chebbi sand dunes, where we stay for the next two nights. Dinner and overnight at *Kanz Erremal*, at the edge of the dunes.

Thursday, March 31: Merzouga – Rissani / Erg Chebbi Dunes

We dedicate all of today to exploring Erg Chebbi, the largest dune system in Morocco. Spanning 17 miles from north to south and reaching heights of 525 feet, Erg Chebbi may not be the largest sand sea in Africa, but it is extraordinarily scenic. The dunes rise dramatically above the flat, black hammada and glow stunning shades of orange, pink and purple in the afternoon sun. Brown-necked Raven, Hoopoe Lark, Desert Sparrow, African Desert Warbler, Desert and Bar-tailed Desert Lark, Fulvous Babbler, Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse, Barbary and Lanner Falcon and different migrant passerines all reside here. In addition, if rains have been plentiful, the seasonal lake of Tamezguidat, or Lac de Merzouga, at the southern end of Erg Chebbi, is one of the best areas in Morocco for spotting desert



Photos: Atlantic Coast, Desert Sparrow, Erg Chebbi Dunes, Hoopoe Lark

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birds, including Desert Warblers, Fulvous Babblers, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, and possibly even Egyptian Nightjars. Sometimes, in good years, the lake even attracts flocks of flamingos. Dinner and overnight at *Kanz Erremal*.

Friday, April 1: Tagdilt Track / Boumalne Dades

This morning we head west, about an hour outside of Ouarzazate, where lies a rocky stretch of road called Tagdilt Track, likely our best bet to tick off as many desert birds as possible in one go. We will stop en route to search for Scrub and Spectacled Warbler and Trumpeter Finch. The desert through which Tagdilt Track runs is at quite a high altitude, and larks are well represented, including Desert, Lesser Short-toed, Thick-billed and Temminck's Larks and Greater Hoopoe-Lark. Desert and Red-rumped Wheatears also occur. With luck, we may see sandgrouse—most likely Black-bellied, but sometimes Crowned Sandgrouse are also spotted. Cream-colored Coursers may also be present. We head to Boumalne Dades at the very spine of the Atlas range for dinner and overnight at the exquisite *Hotel Xaluca Dades*, with panoramic views of the Dades Valley.

Saturday, April 2: Tagdilt Track / Skoura

We begin the day with another visit to the Tagdilt Track to look for any species we may have missed yesterday, then head west to search the stone-desert roadsides for the Maghreb Wheatear. A visit to the huge El Mansour Eddahbi Dam on the Oued Drâa, Morocco's longest river, promises some good finds—Spoonbills, Greater Flamingos, Black-winged Stilts and Avocets are all residents here. Migrants include raptors such as Short-toed and Booted eagles, Osprey, Western Marsh Harrier, Barbary and Lanner Falcons. For small-bird enthusiasts there are Desert and Thick-billed Larks, White-crowned Black Wheatears, Trumpeter Finches, and Bar-tailed, Desert and Hoopoe Larks. After a search along the dam, we will head to the once-powerful, mudbrick castle-dotted city of Skoura, where we have dinner and overnight at *Kasbah Ait Ben Damiette*.

Sunday, April 3: Taroudant / Agadir

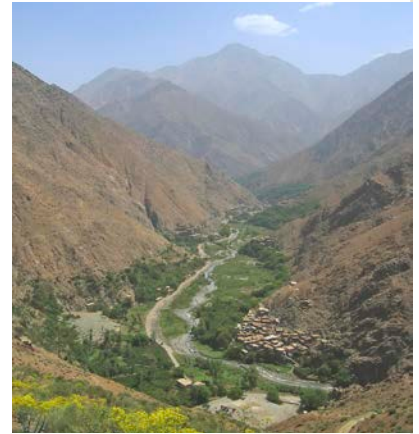
We begin our day in the dry desert and end on the Atlantic coast at Agadir. Our route west takes us over the Anti Atlas into the Souss Valley. This area of fruit orchards and frizzy argana forests is one of the most famous ornithological regions of the country. Species here include Stone Curlew, Little Owl, and Red-necked Nightjar. Tree-climbing goats are a common sight in the argana woodlands here, as are Rufous Bush Robins, Olivaceous and Sardinian warblers. Egyptian and Griffon vultures are also sometimes seen, as well as Pallid and Little Swifts. We arrive in the busy port city of Agadir, our home for the next two nights. Dinner and overnight at *Riad Imourane*.

Monday, April 4: Agadir – Oued Massa / Oued Souss

We have an early start this morning to visit Oued Massa, another of Morocco's famous bird areas. It is the most northerly Saharan wadi in Morocco. Towering sand dunes run along the southern edge to form a coastal lagoon that is linked to the ocean only at the highest tides. The area has been a biological reserve since 1980. Target birds include the secretive Black-crowned Bush Shrike, Marbled Duck, Moussier's Redstart, Little Owl, Ruddy Shelduck, Purple Heron, Laughing Dove, Little Bittern, and Brown-throated Martin. Later, we visit the Oued Souss—an excellent area for flamingos, Stone Curlew, shorebirds and large numbers of roosting gulls and terns. Dinner and overnight *Riad Imourane*.



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Photos: African Desert Warbler, Ourika Valley, Tree-climbing Goats, Moussier's Redstart



Tuesday, April 5: Cap Rhir / Tamri Estuary / Oued Ksob / Essaouira

We head north this morning on a coastal route to Essaouira, stopping first at Arghoud Beach to see Lesser Black-backed Gulls of two races—Audouin's and a few Yellow-legged Gulls. We have also often seen a skua or two offshore here. At Cap Rhir, we will have a chance to spot more skuas, and shearwaters. Further north, Tamri Estuary is a breeding area for half the remaining African population of Northern Bald Ibis (there are now only about 500 in the wild). Unlike other members of the ibis family, the Northern Bald Ibis is non-wading and prefers semi-arid conditions to wetlands. We will scour the scrub and fields near the estuary for a glimpse of them. Further north, the Ksob Wadi and nearby Mogador Island, with its crumbling old prison, are now an ornithological preserve sheltering the rare Eleonora's Falcon. A walk along the riverbed this time of year will often furnish views of the graceful birds as they hunt overhead. Others to look for here are Barbary Partridge, Rufous Bush Robin, Moussier's Redstart and Olivaceous and Sardinian Warblers. This afternoon, we arrive in intoxicating Essaouira, with its mix of Breton-like seaside quaintness and decidedly Moroccan palm-lined alleyways. Dinner and overnight at *Dar L'Oussia*, situated on the ramparts of the old medina.

Wednesday, April 6: Essaouira / Marrakesh

We return to Oued Ksob early this morning to view flocks of roosting gulls, terns and other migrating water birds including egrets, spoonbills, and herons. Then, we bid farewell to the Atlantic coast and turn inland for the drive back to Marrakesh. We arrive in time for a visit to the old quarter of Marrakesh and the impressive Jemaa el-Fna Square, an unbelievable experience for any visitor, replete with snake charmers, water sellers and spice stalls, plus the charm of bargaining in the souk. Farewell dinner and overnight at *Riad Slitine*.

Thursday, April 7: Depart Marrakesh

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for international flights home.



Photos: Northern Bald Ibis, Essaouira, Marrakesh, Spice Market



Your Expedition Leaders

Peter Harrison

Peter Harrison has led expeditions throughout the world, from the Arctic to the Antarctic and everywhere in between. Peter has written and illustrated over a dozen books, of which *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, is considered the bible of seabird identification. Peter is only one of a handful of authors to both write and illustrate bird books, but Peter Harrison is so much more than just a “bird man.” In addition to being a professional birder, entrepreneur, artist, author and screenwriter, Peter has devoted much of his time to conservation efforts. In recognition of his outstanding work in natural history and his dedication to conservation projects, Peter was invited to Buckingham Palace and honored with the title, Member of the British Empire by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. More recently, Peter was invited to Westminster by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to receive their prestigious Conservation Gold Medal Award. This honor is bestowed upon one individual each year in recognition of their support and dedication to wild bird protection and global habitat conservation. Past recipients have included Prince Charles and Sir David Attenborough. Exploration and discovery remain a driving force for Peter and during a recent expedition to Chile he led a six-person team to locate, catch and describe the first completely new storm petrel species to be discovered in nearly 100 years, the Pincoya Storm Petrel. It is safe to say that with Peter leading the charge, adventure always abounds.



Shirley Metz

Shirley Metz’s careers and accomplishments have spanned the globe. Born in Minnesota, she grew up in Europe and Hawaii, graduating from the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. Shirley became a certified diver at age 16 and while at UH did shark research earning her degrees in Marine Biology and Communications. She met her first husband in Hawaii with whom she founded Hobie Sports. She also developed several active clothing lines and consulted to companies such as The North Face.

In early 1988 Shirley visited Antarctica and became inspired to work in Antarctic conservation. To raise awareness, Shirley became a member of an international expedition that would attempt to ski 800 miles from the edge of Antarctica to the South Pole. On January 17, 1989, the nine-member expedition arrived at world’s end; Shirley made history and her way into the Guinness Book of Records as the first woman to ski overland to the South Pole. A member of the Explorers Club and The Society of Woman Geographers, Shirley continues to raise awareness and support for international environmental and cultural projects. Following a chance meeting in Antarctica in 1990 Shirley married Peter Harrison and together formed the successful travel firm, Eco-Expeditions. Together with four partners, they also founded Zegrahm Expeditions, a small-ship expedition company.

Shirley continues to lead expeditions, both private and commercial. As a professional photographer Shirley documents her travels and lectures on various topics, including her South Pole expedition.



“Our lives have been enriched by the 17 journeys we have undertaken with the Apex team leaders. Simply put, no one does expedition travel better.”

– Jim M., California



Expedition Details

MOROCCO March 25 – April 7, 2016

\$8,970 Per Person Rate

\$9,780 Solo Rate

14 Days Trip Length

16 Guests Group Size

Marrakesh / Marrakesh Start/End

Included

Apex Expeditions' rates include all accommodations; all meals, activities and excursions as described in the itinerary; services of an Apex Expeditions leader per eight participants, plus an expert local birding guide throughout the itinerary; all gratuities, local beer and wines at lunch & dinner; airport transfers, permits and entrance fees; all taxes.

Not Included

Costs not included in the price of your Apex expedition include travel to and from start and end point of trip; premium brand drinks and liquor; travel insurance (Trip Cancellation and Interruption, as well as Emergency Medical and Evacuation insurance, are highly recommended); airport departure taxes; excess baggage fees; passport and/or visa fees; items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, souvenirs, etc.); and independent travel arrangements pre- or post-trip.

Payments & Terms

20% of the trip cost will confirm your place on the expedition. The final balance is due 150 days prior to departure. All prices are quoted in U.S. dollars and must be paid in U.S. dollars. Per person pricing is based on double occupancy. The solo rate is paid by participants who specifically request single accommodations and is subject to availability. If you are traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we will try to match you with a roommate of the same gender. However, if a roommate is not available, the published solo rate will be charged. Upon confirming your reservation you will be required to pay the published Solo Rate, if we are able to pair you with a roommate, the applicable difference will be refunded at the time that the final trip payment is due for all participants. Please note that solo accommodations are limited and cannot always be guaranteed throughout. For our full set of Terms & Conditions, please visit our web site at www.apex-expeditions.com.

One-of-a-kind adventures to the world's most fascinating places. Join us.



Reservation Form

Morocco March 25 – April 7, 2016

Person 1: (Primary Contact)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Mailing Details:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP Code: _____ Country: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Double Solo

Person 2: (If applicable and at same address, otherwise please submit a second Reservation Form.)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Deposit Information:

My deposit check is enclosed (20% of total tour fare)

Charge my deposit to my: VISA MasterCard American Express

Card #: _____ Expires: _____ CCV Code: _____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

**Please return this completed form to Apex Expeditions.
E-mail: info@apex-expeditions.com or Mail: 3275 36th Ave SW, Seattle, WA 98126**

