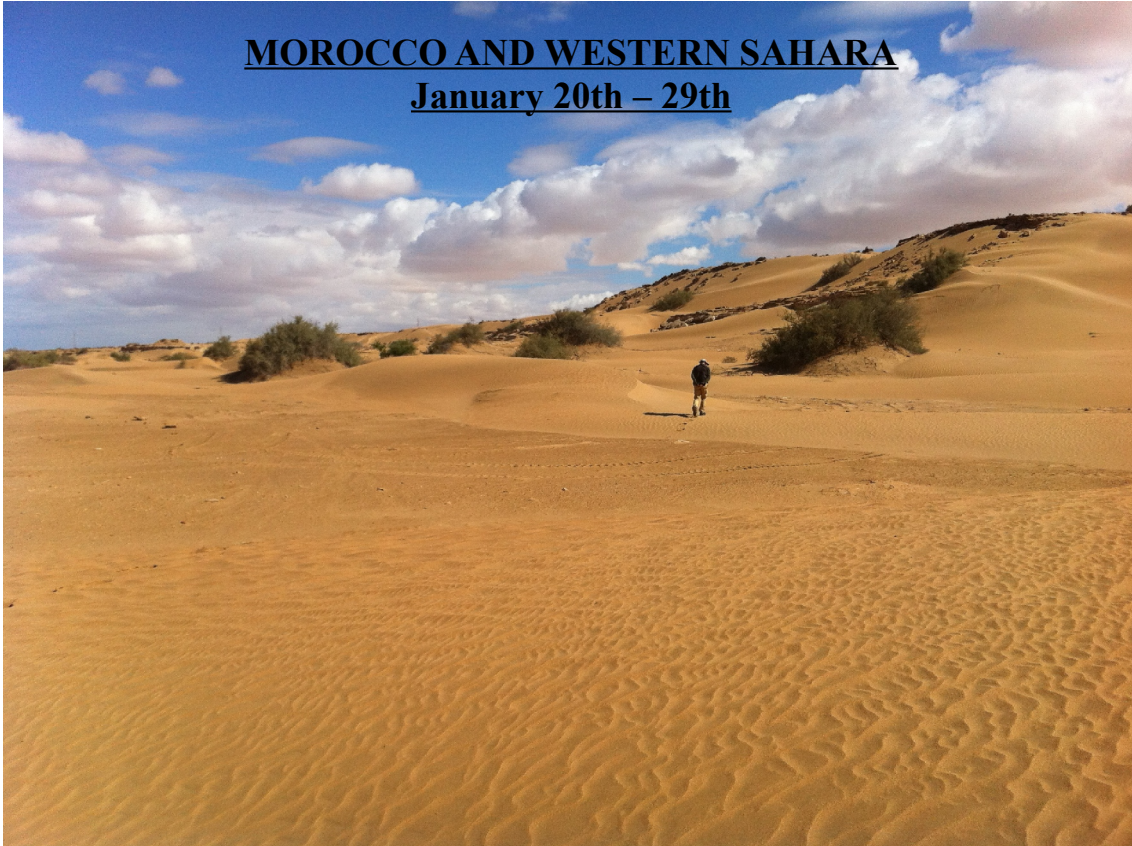


MOROCCO AND WESTERN SAHARA

January 20th – 29th



Text: David González Ortega / Translation: César Bermejo

From 20th to 29th January 2012, César Bermejo, David González Ortega, Iván Sarabia y José Pedro Portillo undertook a journey across Morocco, with the only aim to watch and photograph its birds.

Morocco is usually thought to be a country of arid landscapes, poorly fertile and with almost no vegetation, being this idea far from reality. Actually, it is a country of strong contrasts, where greens, yellows and browns coexist harmoniously. It's true that the desert is well present in the south of the country, but we can't forget that we can also find many different habitats like wetlands, argan forests, high mountain, steppe plains..., etc. The north of the country can look similar to Andalusia, although there are subtle differences. However, the south remains unfamiliar, hence attractive for European birdwatchers.



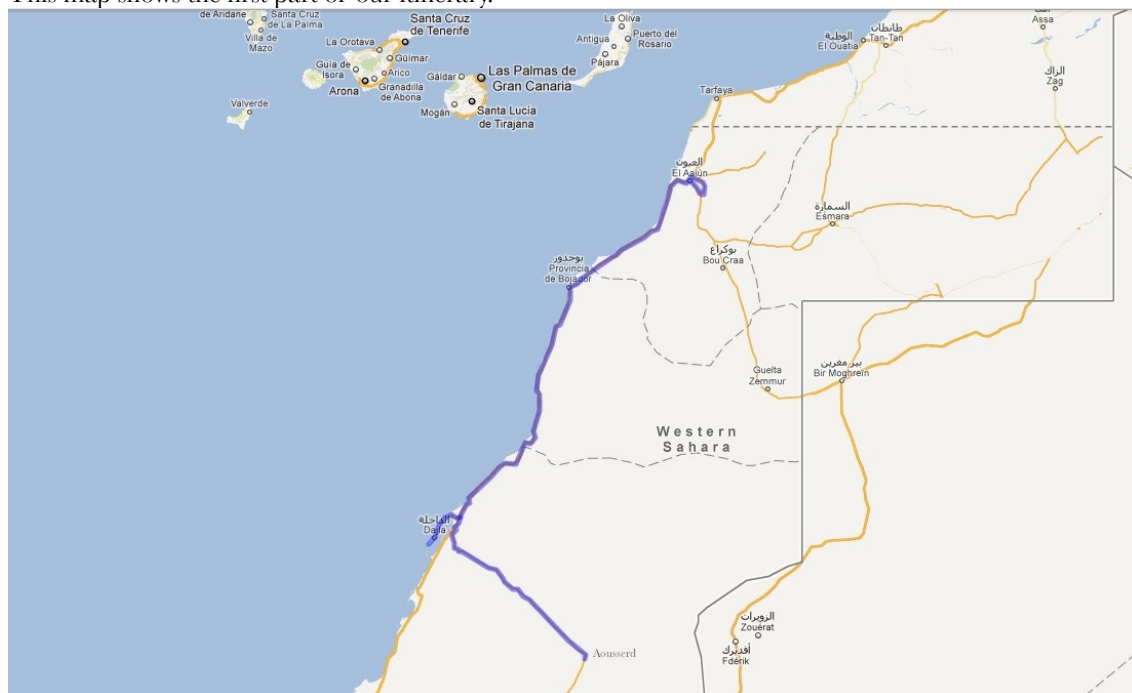
Moroccan people are kind and welcoming, even a little annoying sometimes, although polite. Roads are not excellent, the surface is not always well kept and sometimes they are too narrow, so you have to drive carefully. Accommodation facilities were unequal in the different localities visited, and usually scarce. One day we stayed at a nice hotel, next one in a shabby lodging.

We used Michelin and Freytag & Berndt maps, but they turned out outdated because of general and quick development all around the country, being advisable to bring an up-to-date one. We took information from the typical books on “Where to birdwatch in...”, but little is found on them about West Saharan Morocco, so we used too trip reports and articles from webs like go-south.org and others.

We arrived at Dakhla airport from Madrid on 20th January at 11:00 pm (local time) via Casablanca and Laayoune. We had pre-booked a car (Peugeot Partner or similar) with Laargoub-car, a local rent-a-car company, so they were diligently waiting for us at our arrival. The total amount payed was 9000 dH (825 €), high price for country levels, but we would return it at Casablanca airport, 2000 Km far. They gave us a Toyota Prado 4x4 instead of the Partner booked, cause this was not available, but the 4x4 didn't work well in non-asphalted tracks, as we could realize later, and we were owed to change it for the Partner at Agadir, which made us loose two hours. We covered 3900 km in total.

Once given general aspects of our trip, below we make a detailed report of eight and a half intense birdwatching days.

This map shows the first part of our itinerary.



Day 1: 21/01/2012 (Dakhla-Gleb Jdiane-Dakhla)

We had breakfast just in time to leave Dakhla towards Aswerd road at dawn. Our aim was to reach a little pool at Gleb Jdiane by 09:00 am and try to see the sandgrouses that usually go for drinking there. We were lucky to find and photograph at close distance five males and seven females Crowned Sandgrouses (*Pterocles coronatus*) and several flocks of Spotted Sandgrouses (*Pterocles senegallus*) flew over us, counting 100 birds.



Crowned Sandgrouse (*Pterocles coronatus*) near Gleb Jdiane (© Iván Sarabia)

At 201 Km. to Aswerd we drove out of the road towards another pit where we could enjoy lots of birds, we saw quite a lot of Thick-Billed and Temminck's Larks (*Ramphocoris clotbey* and *Eremophila bilopha*), Trumpeter Finches (*Bucanethes githagineus*), Thekla Larks (*Galerida theklae*), ten Bar-Tailed Larks (*Ammomanes cincturus*) and one Deser Lark (*Ammomanes deserti*). We also saw two Read-throated Pipits (*Anthus cervinus*) and two Cream Coloured Coursers (*Cursorius cursor*) with a Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) running among the camel dung.



Thick-billed Lark (*Ramphocoris clotbey*) near Gleb Jdiane (© Iván Sarabia)

After a tasty tea offered by a spanish-speaking native, we drove back towards Daklha Bay, by midday, finding in the way the only Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) of all the trip.

We explored the bay viewing from several suitable points, but due to its huge size, we were not able to do it exhaustively, despite working hard. Even so, we realized the great numbers of waders, gulls and European waterbirds wintering there, as well as the target species: Royal tern (*Sterna maxima*). Nevertheless, we were more impressed by great numbers of Lesser Black-Backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) and Caspian Terns (*Sterna caspia*), about 8000 and 500 of them, respectively. We made some seawatching at Punta La Sarga, giving it us some European Storm Petrels (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) and a Leach's /Madeiran one (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa/castro*).



Punta de La Sarga, near Dakhla (© David González Ortega). From the left to the right: José Pedro Portillo, Iván Sarabia and César Bermejo.

We had a good dinner at Casa Luis Restaurant, and stayed in basic Palais Touareg hotel (570 dH per twin room/night).

Day 2: 22/01/2012 (Dakhla-Aswerd-Dakhla)

We awake up early in order to reach the hottest spots of Aswerd Road at dawn. With first lights we stopped to see an adult Lanner (*Falco biarmicus*) perching on a acacia tree, near the 150 Km. to Aswerd. Next stop, at Caserne, where Brown-necked Ravens (*Corvus ruficollis*) and Desert Sparrows (*Passer simplex ssp saharæ*) were common. Another short stop at Km. 70 gave us poor benefits.

And then the mythical hotspots came: Km. 43, 41 and 25, where we enjoyed most of the specialities of this route, with close views of about 30 Dunn Larks (*Eremalauda dunni*), accompanied by the commoner Bar-Tailed Larks (*Ammomanes cincturus*). The acacia trees didn't yet hold the Cricket Warblers (*Spiloptila clamans*), but we found Chiffchaffs (*Phylloscopus collybita*), Spectacled Warblers (*Sylvia conspicillata*) and Desert Sparrows (*Passer simplex ssp saharæ*), although never many of them. We stopped to have a light meal at Oued Jenna, that was interrupted by the only African Rock Martin (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula*) of the trip. A little flock of five or six Fulvous Babbler (*Turdoides fulvus*) and one Great Spotted Cucko (*Clamator glandarius*) livened a restless lunch.



Dunn Lark (*Eremalauda dunni*) near Aswerd (© Iván Sarabia)



Fulvous Babbler (*Turdoides fulvus*) near Aswerd (© Iván Sarabia)

A few hundreds meters before the military settlement at Aswerd, we stopped to scan a little group of acacia trees where we found a male Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia cantillans*), and the first Black Wheatear (*Oenanthe leucura*) of the trip. And another warbler, most probably being a Desert one (*Sylvia deserti*) flew deep into a bush, but we couldn't relocate it. To cap it all, an African Savanna Hare (*Lepus microtis*) ran away, not allowing us to take a photograph.

In our way back we made brief stops to see the commonest species, like Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*), Great Grey Shrikes (*Lanius excubitor ssp. elegans*) and Hoopoe Larks (*Alaemon alaudipes*). The silhouette of an eagle on the top of a acacia tree made us slam on the brakes. After checking it carefully, we confirmed it was a subadult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), but what a fright! We also had this Spined-Tail Lizzard (*Uromastix dispar ssp. favifasciata*) within reach of our cameras.



Subadult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in Aswerd road (C Iván Sarabia)



Spinned-Tail Lizzard (*Uromastyx dispar ssp. favifasciata*) near Aousserd (© Iván Sarabia)

Night fallen as we drove back, but unfortunately no mammals crossed the road in front of us. We repeated dinner at Casa Luis and Hotel Palais Touareg.

Day 3: 23/01/2012 (Dakhla-Boujadour-Laayoune)

We didn't want to miss having a look at the gulls of the fishing port. So, we spent the early morning of our third day checking the numerous groups of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, finding at least three Baltic Gulls (*Larus fuscus ssp. fuscus*) among them.

It was time to leave the South and we started our migration towards north, as we saw from several seawatching spots Great Skuas (*Stercorarius skua*) and Gannets (*Morus bassanus*) did. We made a short technical stop at Chtoukan petrol station, where Brown-necked ravens (*Corvus ruficollis*) were abundant, but no Pied Crows (*Corvus albus*) were present. We added there a Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) to our list, drinking from a contaminated stream, so contaminated that there was the corpse of a Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) on it. There was, too, a flock of forty Trumpeter Finches (*Bucanetes githagineus*).



Brown-necked ravens (*Corvus ruficollis*) were common in Chtoukan petrol station (© Iván Sarabia)



Trumpeter Finch (*Bucanetes githagineus*) in Chtoukan petrol station (© Iván Sarabia).

The N1 road runs close to the coast in this part of the journey, and the desertic landscape is very monotonous, so we advanced quickly, only stopping to watch three or four Long-legged Buzzards (*Buteo rufinus ssp cirtensis*) and a Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) on electric posts. Heading north as we made, we saw a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) and several Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), Red-rumped (*Oenanthe moesta*), and White-crowned Wheatears (*Oenanthe leucopyga*), as well as Thekla (*Galerida theklae*) and Hoopoe Larks (*Alaemon alaudipes*) were frequent by the road.

We made several stops in accurate habitat for Scrub Warbler (*Scotocerca inquieta ssp. theresae*) and in the last one, 84 Km. far from Laayoune, we managed to find and see closely four of them, along with the first Sardinian Warblers (*Sylvia melanocephala*) of the trip. There were too several Bosc's Fringe-Toed Lizards (*Acanthodactylus boskianus*).



Scrub Warbler (*Scotocerca inquieta ssp. theresae*) at Km. 84 far from Laayoune (© Iván Sarabia).

We stayed at Sahara Line hotel in Laayoune, (500 dH per room) and had dinner in the fantastic (and expensive for the country levels) “La Perla” restaurant.

The map below shows the second part of our itinerary.



Day 4: 24/01/2012 (Laayoune-Tan-Tan-Gouelmine)

With the first lights we were ready to explore the Lamseyed Oasis, where we got surprised by the density and quantity of birds, among them a group of Ring Ouzels (*Turdus toquatus*) and Song Thrushes (*Turdus philomelos*), and a apparently lost Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) at the edge of a little pool. A pair of Blue Rock Thrushes (*Monticola solitarius*) were singing and many Chiffchafs (*Phylloscopus collybita*), Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and Robins (*Erithacus rubecula*) were moving in the tamarinds. In the palm grove we saw a Grashooper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*), a Fulvous Babbler (*Turdoides fulvus*) and a pair (first of the trip) of Moussier's Redstars (*Phoenicurus moussieri*). At the edge of it we found a group of Lesser Short-Toed Larks (*Calandrella rufescens* ssp *minor*), and in the adjacent dry watercourse a Desert Lark (*Ammomanes deserti*), a little flock of southern Serins (*Serinus serenus*), a Redstar (*Phoenicurus ochrurus*), and a warbler that we thought could be a Tristram's (*Sylvia deserticola*) flew away, not allowing us to confirm it.



Lamseyed Oasis near Laayoune (© David González Ortega).



Moussier's Redstars (*Phoenicurus moussieri*) in Lamseyed Oasis (© Iván Sarabia).

Later we moved to Sequiat al Hamra, at the entry of Laayoune, where we were again delighted with the diversity of birds. Many Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and a little flock of Sand Martins (*Riparia riparia*) flying over us. Not many wildfowl, but several Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and Marbled ducks (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*), among the waders, some Wood Sandpipers (*Tringa glareola*) and a solitary Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*). In the reed beds, many Chiffchaffs (*Phylloscopus collybita*) and some Iberian Warblers (*Phylloscopus ibericus*), and the only Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) of the trip.



Sequiat al Hamra near Laayoune (© David González Ortega).

Next spot planned was Khnifiss Lagoon, but we couldn't held stopping at a charming dunes zone, we didn't add there any new species, but in exchange we heard clearly the miaowing of an African Wild Cat (*Felis lybica*) in heat.



Khniffis dunes (© José Pedro Portillo). From the left to the right: Iván Sarabia, César Bermejo, David González Ortega and José Pedro Portillo.

We enjoyed very much the Lagoon, but without getting previously a special permit -and we didn't- you only can have a general view from the parking by the warden's house, and birds are usually far from it. We saw two or three big black-backed gulls, but no way to separate Great Black-Backed or Kelp Gulls (*Larus marinus/dominicanus*). We had one of the nicest encounters of the trip, a Jacksnipe (*Lymnocryptes minimus*) scoped by Ivan just as it took off, and flew directly towards us!! Three Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) and a Great Egret (*Egretta alba*) were the most outstanding views, among the many birds in the lagoon.

After a light lunch, we sadly leaved the place, cause we had good places to visit ahead, such as El Ouaar, Fatma and Chebeika Oueds. Oued El Ouaar, that gave us a Scrub Warbler (*Scotocerca inquieta ssp theresae*) and a Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*).

After that we made short stops at another sites along the road, for example near El Ouattia, where we saw a flock of more than one hundred Sandwich Terns (*Sterna sandvicensis*), or the Tan Tan Oued, where we added House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) to the trip list.

We arrived at the renowned Oued Draa, that used to hold wintering Tawny Eagles (*Aquila rapax*), in the past, near sunset, and during our walk around the place, we didn't find anything more exciting than the first six Oriental Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia senegalensis*). Red-rumped Wheatears (*Oenanthe moesta*) **were common, males had started singing.**



Female Red-rumped Wheatears (*Oenanthe moesta*) in Oued Draa (© Iván Sarabia).

We had to continue our way to Gouelmine, where we stayed at the Adil Moussafir hotel (370 dH per room, breakfast included), undoubtedly the best hotel of the trip, even for European standards, although dinner was not so good.

The map below shows the third part of our itinerary.



Day 5: 25/01/2012 (Gouelmine-Agadir-Tamri-Marrakech-Oukaimeden)

Sunrise in Goulimine was foggy, lived up by Common Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus barbatus*) and Oriental Turtle Dove's (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) songs. We had left back some very interesting sites to explore, such as the so-called “Sandy Plains”, and Sayed and Boukila Oueds. But we had no time to turn back, we had a long day ahead.

Not far from Gouelmine, after crossing the Anti-Atlas, and the Tizi-Mighert, landscape changes a lot, we can say goodbye to the Great South, and House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) and Spotless Starlings (*Sturnus unicolor*) will be common onwards.

We reached Massa and went down to Oued Massa near Sidi-Binzaren, where House Buntings (*Emberiza sahari*) are frequent, to look for (and see) the Brown-Throated Martins (*Riparia paludicola*), as well as a Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and a Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*). Little Owls (*Athene noctua ssp saharae*) and Magpies (*Pica pica ssp mauretanica*) were not uncommon by the road. A few meters from the parking at the Sous-Massa National Park we met a tame Black-Crowned Tchagra (*Tchagra senegala*) allowing Ivan to take some fantastic photographs. Some more males were singing around us. We just made a short visit here, cause we had made an appointment at Agadir to make a car exchange. Although we couldn't go until the observatory, we saw different species of waders, several pairs of Moussier's Redstars (*Phoenicurus moussieri*), and a flock of about 15 Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*), four Great Spotted Cuckos (*Clamator glandarius*) and a Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*).



Black-Crowned Tchagra (*Tchagra senegala*) in N. P. Oued Massa (© Iván Sarabia).

After waiting in Agadir for the car exchange and wasting a precious time, we departed towards Tamri under heavy rains, and an hour and a half later, we stopped at a vantage point a few kilometers before the town, with splendid view over the mouth of the oued and Tamri itself. There we found the first Bald Ibises (*Geronticus eremita*), and added a Crag Martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) and a Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) to the list.



Bald Ibises (*Geronticus eremita*) feeding near Tamri (© Iván Sarabia).

Later, in the plains to the north of Tamri, we saw a flock of about 130 Bald Ibises (*Geronticus eremita*), flying over the road and feeding close to it. A Barbary Falcon (*Falco pelegrinoides*) flew too over us, and a little group of Pallid Swifts (*Apus pallidus*) was feeding around. Back to Tamri, we stopped at the cliff just before the town, and saw a Lanner (*Falco biarmicus*) trying unsuccessfully to fire the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) which is now the owner of the site. In the surrounding fields we enjoyed the local subspecies of common European birds, such as Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis* ssp *parva*), Greenfinches (*Carduelis chloris* ssp *voousi*), Blackbirds (*Turdus merula* ssp *mauritanicus*) and Great Tits (*Parus major* ssp *excelsus*).

Light was falling and started raining again, so we couldn't do anything better than beginning our long way till Oukaïmeden Ski Resort, without stopping at Cape Rhir, however we saw in our way a Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) with its prey.

We arrived at Oukaïmeden at 11:15 pm, the way up had being long and tiring due to very dense fog, but good conversation made journey nicer. After a good and well-gained dinner, we went to sleep at the Courchevel Hotel (930 dH per room, breakfast included).

The map below shows the fourth part of our itinerary.



Day 6: 26/01/2012 (Oukaïmeden-Marrakech-Chemaïa-Saf-Oualidia)

It has been softly snowing during the night, and the morning was very cold. What a country of contrasts!! Chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs ssp africana*) are the first birds to appear, followed by one of the target species of the spot, the Shorelark (*Eremophila alpestris ssp atlas*). We started a walk up the valley, weather got worse, with heavy snowing, and after one hour walk we turned back, and being again in the proximity of the ski lifts, we found the sought-after Crimson-winged Finches (*Rhodopechys sanguinea*) just next to the path, more or less 30 of them. We made some good photos, but with poor light. There were too more tan 50 Shorelarks. We wondered through the plain before going back to the car, and saw a mixed flock of Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax ssp barbarus*), and Alpine Chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), a Raven (*Corvus corax ssp tingitanus*), ten Water Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*) and a Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus ssp minor*), and some commoner species such as Black Redstarts (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), Blackbirds (*Turdus merula ssp mauritanicus*) and a couple of Black Wheatears (*Oenanthe leucura*).



Snowing and foggy in Oukaimeden (© José Pedro Portillo).



Crimson-winged Finch (*Rhodopechys sanguinea*) in Oukaimeden (© Iván Sarabia).

We began our daily journey, but before going down we met a great mixed flock with Chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*), some of them African subspecies (*Fringilla coelebs ssp africana*), Linnets (*Carduelis cannabina*), Rock Sparrows (*Petronia petronia*), one Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*), and one Crimson-winged Finch (*Rhodopechys sanguinea*), and a male Levaillant's Green Woodpecker (*Picus vaillantii*) on a wooden post, giving us a superb view, was the icing on the cake!!

With a persistent rain and the fog getting denser, we began to go down, only stopping to see the only Rock Buntings (*Emberiza cia*), and Mistle Thrushes (*Turdus viscivorus*) of the trip.

Near Ourika we stopped at the entry of a little village where bird's activity was amazing, and saw three or four Levaillant Green Woodpeckers, two Great Spotted Woodpeckers (*Dendrocopus major ssp mauretanicus*), and a Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus ssp cirtensis*), some Short-toed Treecreepers (*Certhia brachydactyla ssp mauritanica*), Great Tits (*Parus major ssp excelsus*), a flock of Wood Pigeons (*Columba palumbus*), some Turtle doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*), Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and plenty of Crag Martins (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*).



A village south of Ourika (© David González Ortega).



Singing male Levaillant's Green Woodpecker (*Picus vaillantii*) near Ourika (© Iván Sarabia).

We rapidly crossed without problems Marrakech, but had time enough to see a Little Swift (*Apus affinis*) and some Laughing Doves (*Streptopelia senegalensis*).

Last stop was a late lunch by the road near Oulad-Nejim, where shy rays of light went through the cloudy sky illuminating the steppe covered by a thin green mantle, made the site an idyllic place. There we enjoyed a mixed flock of Lesser Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella rufescens ssp minor*), Corn Buntings (*Emberiza calandra*), Linnets (*Carduelis cannabina*), Greenfinches (*Carduelis chloris*), one Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*), and some Grey Northern Shrikes (*Lanius excubitor ssp algeriensis*).

We arrived without sun light to Oualidia, and stayed at Hotel L'Initiale (450 dH, breakfast included) whose owner spoke perfectly Spanish and French.

Day 7: 27/01/2012 (Oualidia-Khemis des Zemamra-El Jadida-Temara)

The day was again cool, but we began in the early morning exploring some crop fields. In this area a Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) and a House Bunting (*Emberiza sahari*) were outstanding sightseeings. The song of Zitting Cisticolas (*Cisticola juncidis*) sounded everywhere, and Chiffchaffs (*Phylloscopus collybita*) and Sardinian Warblers (*Sylvia melanocephala*) were common, as well, even some male were singing. We heard too a Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) and some Water Rails (*Rallus aquaticus*). Ruffs (*Philomachus pugnax*) were the best in the nearby salt plans.



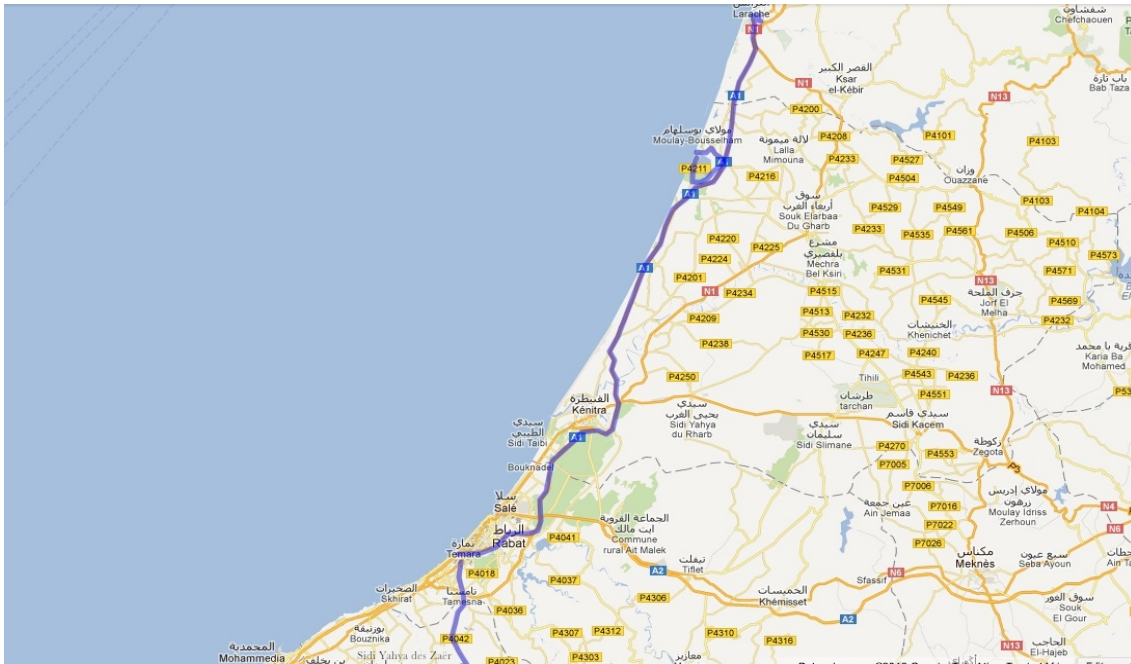
Crops fields near salt plans in Oualidia region (© David González Ortega).

Then we moved to another area with fallow fields and tomato and pumpkin cultivations, where we were welcomed by a male Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*). A strange voice for us called our attention, so we got closer to a plantation, and I was so lucky to see an Andalusian Hemipode (*Turnix sylvatica*), running through undergrowth!! I saw it only a few seconds, but time enough to distinguish its back and body structure. So, all of us explored the field trying to see it, and we were lucky to flush not one, but two birds!!! What a delight for all, of course. We tried other fields, and made a stay without result, before leaving the site where we met this mythic and elusive species, that seemed an impossible dream at the beginning of our trip.

Lunch time is gone so we prepare a quick sandwich on the way to the next site, stopping only when we see a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) and a Great Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor ssp algeriensis*). After a short rainfall we arrive at a wonderful area of dwarf palms, where soon we find a Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) in a little pool by the road. At dusk we listen to a couple of female Andalusian Hemipode (*Turnix sylvatica*) singing timidly, for our enjoy, what a delightful day!! The night had already fallen when we saw a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) flying in front of our car, to finish a complete day.

We arrived at Temara, our nest destination, near midnight, and stayed at the Panorama Hotel (400 dH per room). It had not improved from my first visit two years ago, and still was a grotty and dirty hotel.

The map below shows the last part of our itinerary.



Day 8: 28/01/2012 (Temara-Rabat-Moulay Bousselham-Larache-Temara)

We wake up very early, given that we would leave the country in two days, we couldn't be lazy remembering the day before's joy. Our aim was to be at Merdja Zerga with first lights, but the scheduled two hours became in three hours, due to the horrible road that leads to the south part of the lagoon, worsened by recent rains. We had a look to the mouth of the river, nothing special there. Then we drove the path that runs close to the Nador channel. As we parked we had a visit, a young man offering us to show us the "hibou": We accepted and after some work, a Marsh Owl (*Asio capensis ssp tingitanus*) is flying twice at close range. A Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) flies from a group of trees, too. It was a big one, probably being a *Falco peregrinus ssp calidus*. We made a tour around the lagoon, and saw many birds, raptors were specially numerous. For example, a Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), several Long-legged Buzzards (*Buteo rufinus ssp cirtensis*), many Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*), and Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*), and two Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*).



Marsh Owl (*Asio capensis ssp tingitanus*) in Merdja Zerga (© Iván Sarabia).

Given that target species of the site were already found, we decided not to arrange a boat visit to the lagoon, but visiting the Oued Loukkos marshes, near Larache. The journey was not so long, and by 02:00 pm we got there. Exploring the area we enjoyed close and numerous birds, took good photos of Crested Coots (*Fulica cristata*), saw two or three Purple Swampheens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), and a couple of Moustached Warblers (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*) in a *Scirpus sp* area. We reached the dam, and found about 80 Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) resting, besides some Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), and Little (*Egretta garzetta*) and Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*).



Oued Loukkos marshes near Larache (© David González Ortega).



Crested Coot (*Fulica cristata*) in Oued Loukkos (© Iván Sarabia).

To put the end to the birding day we went back to Merdja Zerga in order to try again the Marsh Owls leaving their roosting sites. We arrived by a little lagoon just at dusk and with last lights, and thanks to Ivan and Cesar persistence, we saw another Marsh Owl (*Asio capensis ssp tingitanus*) flying and perching for some minutes on a fence post.

Happy with this superb view, without interferences, we considered this the day's end, cause we had a long way back to Temara. We stayed and had dinner at La Felouque hotel, (400dH per room), caused we

obviously didn't like the hotel “enjoyed” the day before. Dinner was quite expensive for country levels, but we didn't mind, being the last one in the country.

Day 9: 29/01/2012 (Temara-Sidi Yahya des Zaër-Casablanca)

In a few hours our plane would take off from Casablanca airport, where we had to return the car, too. We wanted to be at dawn in the Royal Hunting Lodge area near Sidi Yahya to try the Double-spurred Francolin (*Francolinus bicalcaratus* ssp *ayesha*), and soon after parking we heard the first male singing not far from us, but didn't see it. We walked exploring the area for two hours, and only saw two of them flying away, but starting our way back to the car, Ivan located one male sitting and singing on a branch of a holm oak.



Habitat of Double-spurred Francolin (*Francolinus bicalcaratus*) near Sidi Yahya des Zaër (© David González Ortega).



African Tit (*Cyanistes ultramarinus*) near Sidi Yahya des Zaër (© Iván Sarabia).

Besides this, we found a Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), a Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), two Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*), and two Barbary Partridges (*Alectoris barbara*). We also heard two singing Thrushes (*Thchagra senegalus*) and to complete the trip list, we saw a Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) and a Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*).

21	Nycticorax nycticorax	Night Heron							X	
22	Bubulcus ibis	Cattle Egret	x				x	x	x	x
23	Egretta garzetta	Little Egret	x		x	x		x	x	
24	Egretta alba	Great Egret				x				x
25	Ardea cinerea	Grey Heron	x		x	x	x	x	x	
26	Ciconia ciconia	White Stork						x	x	x
27	Plegadis falcinellus	Glossy Ibis				x	x			x
28	Geronticus eremita	Bald Ibis					x			
29	Platalea leucorodia	Spoonbill	x				x			x
30	Phoenicopterus roseus	Flamingo	x			x	x			x
31	Pandion haliaetus	Osprey				x	x			x
32	Elanus caeruleus	Black-shouldered Kite							x	x
33	Gyps fulvus	Griffon vulture			x					
34	Milvus migrans	Black Kite		x	x				x	
35	Circus aureginosus	Marsh Harrier	x						x	x
36	Accipiter nissus punicus	Sparrowhawk								x
37	Buteo rufinus cirtensis	Long-legged Buzzard		x	x	x		x		x
38	Aquila chrysaetos	Golden Eagle		x						
39	Falco naumanni	Lesser Kestrel			x					
40	Falco tinnunculus	Kestrel	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
41	Falco biarmicus erlangeri	Lanner Falcon		x			x			
42	Falco peregrinus	Peregrine Falcon					x			x
43	Falco pelegrinoides	Barbary Falcon					x			
44	Rallus aquaticus	Water Rail							x	

45	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Moorhen				x	x		x	x	
46	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	Purple Swamp-Hen								x	
47	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Coot				x	x			x	
48	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	Red-knobbed Coot								x	
49	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Black-winged Stilt				x			x	x	
50	<i>Recurvirostra avosseta</i>	Avocet	x			x					
51	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>	Cream-coloured Courser	x								
52	<i>Charadrius dubius curonicus</i>	Little Ringed Plover				x				x	
53	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover	x			x			x	x	
54	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Kentish Plover	x							x	
55	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	Dotterel	x								
56	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Grey Plover	x			x				x	
57	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Lapwing	x							x	
58	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Sanderling	x			x			x	x	
59	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Little Stint							x	x	
60	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Dunlin	x			x			x	x	
61	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Knot	x								
62	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	Ruff				x			x		
63	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Snipe				x	x		x	x	
64	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>	Jack Snipe				x					
65	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Bar-tailed Godwit	x			x					
66	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Black-tailed Godwit				x			x	x	
67	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Whimbrel	x								
68	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Curlew	x			x	x			x	

69	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Redshank	x			x			x	x	
70	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Greenshank	x			x	x		x		
71	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Green Sandpiper							x	x	
72	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Wood Sandpiper				x					
73	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Common Sandpiper				x			x		
74	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher	x			x					
75	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Turnstone	x								
76	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	Great Skua	x		x						
77	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	x			x			x	x	
78	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Yellow-legged Gull				x	x		x	x	
79	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	Audouin's Gull	x		x	x	x				
80	<i>Larus fuscus graellsii e intermedius</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull	x		x	x	x			x	
81	<i>Larus fuscus fuscus</i>	Baltic Gull	x								
82	<i>Larus dominicanus / marinus</i>	Kelp / Greater BB Gull				x					
83	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Mediterranean Gull	x								
84	<i>Larus genei</i>	Slender-billed Gull	x							x	
85	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	Caspian Tern	x			x	x			x	
86	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Sandwich Tern	x			x	x		x	x	
87	<i>Sterna maxima</i>	Royal Tern	x								
88	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>	Crowned Sandgrouse	x								
89	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>	Spotted Sandgrouse	x								
90	<i>Columba livia livia</i>	Rock Dove				x					
91	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood Pigeon						x			x
92	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Collared Dove	x				x	x	x	x	

93	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis phoenicophila</i>	Laughing Dove	x			x	x	x		x	x
94	<i>Athene noctua saharae</i>	African Little Owl					x				
95	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Little Owl							x	x	x
96	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Barn Owl							x		
97	<i>Asio capensis tingitanus</i>	Marsh Owl								x	
98	<i>Apus pallidus brehmorum</i>	Pallid Swift					x				
99	<i>Apus affinis galilejensis</i>	Little Swift						x			
100	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>	Great Spotted Cuckoo		x			x				
101	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hoopoe			x						
102	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Kingfisher					x				
103	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>	Levaillant's Woodpecker						x			
104	<i>Dendrocopos major mauritanicus</i>	Great Spotted Woodpecker						x			x
105	<i>Ammomanes cinctura arenicolor</i>	Bar-tailed Lark	x	x							
106	<i>Ammomanes deserti pauni</i>	Desert Lark	x			x					
107	<i>Alaemon alaudipes alaudipes</i>	Hoopoe Lark	x	x	x	x					
108	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>	Thick-billed Lark	x								
109	<i>Emeralauda dunni</i>	Dunn's Lark		x							
110	<i>Calandrella rufescens minor</i>	Lesser Short-toed Lark				x		x			
111	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Crested Lark					x	x	x		
112	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	Thekla Lark	x		x	x					x
113	<i>Eremophila alpestris atlas</i>	Horned Lark						x			
114	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	Temminck's Lark	x								

115	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Sand Martin				x				x	
116	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	Plain Martin					x				
117	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>	African Martin		x							
118	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Crag Martin		x			x	x			
119	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
120	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	House Martin				x			x	x	
121	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	Red-throated pipit	x			x					
122	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow Pipit					x	x	x	x	x
123	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Rock Pipit						x			
124	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	White Wagtail	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
125	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	Yellow Wagtail								x	
126	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail					x				
127	<i>Cinclus cinclus ssp minor</i>	Dipper						x			
128	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren									x
129	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Common Bulbul					x	x	x	x	x
130	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin				x	x	x	x		x
131	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Nightingale				x					
132	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Bluethroat							x		
133	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Black Redstart				x		x			
134	<i>Phoenichurus moussieri</i>	Moussier's Redstart				x	x				
135	<i>Saxicola torquatus rubicola</i>	Stonechat	x			x	x	x	x	x	x
136	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Wheatear	x								
137	<i>Oenanthe deserti homochroa</i>	Desert Wheatear	x	x	x	x	x				
138	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga aegra</i>	White-crowned Wheatear		x	x	x					

139	<i>Oenanthe moesta moesta</i>	Red-rumped Wheatear	x	x	x	x					
140	<i>Oenanthe leucura syenitica</i>	Black Wheatear			x	x		x			
141	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Blue Rock Thrush				x					
142	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush				x					x
143	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	Ring Ouzel				x					
144	<i>Turdus viscivorus deichleri</i>	Mistle Thrush						x			
145	<i>Turdus merula mauritanicus</i>	Blackbird					x	x		x	x
146	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Cetti's Warbler					x				
147	<i>Scotocerca inquieta theresae</i>	Scrub Warbler			x	x					
148	<i>Cisticola jundicis</i>	Zitting Cisticola							x	x	
149	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Grasshopper Warbler				x					
150	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Reed Warbler				x					
151	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	Moustached Warbler								x	
152	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Sedge Warbler				x					
153	<i>Sylvia atricapilla heineken</i>	Blackcap				x	x				
154	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Sardinian Warbler			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
155	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	Spectacled Warbler	x	x	x	x					
156	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	Subalpine Warbler		x							
157	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>	African Desert Warbler		x							
158	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	Tristram's Warbler				x					
159	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Chiffchaff	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
160	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	Iberian Chiffchaff		x		x					
161	<i>Parus major excelsus</i>	Great Tit					x	x	x		x

162	<i>Cyanistes ultramarinus</i>	African Blue Tit								x	
163	<i>Certhia brachydactyla mauritanica</i>	Treecreeper						x			
164	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	Black-crowned Tchagra					x				x
165	<i>Lanius meridionalis algeriensis</i>	African Northern Shrike					x	x	x		
166	<i>Lanius meridionalis elegans</i>	Saharian Northern Shrike	x	x	x	x					
167	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>	Magpie					x				
168	<i>Corvus monedula spermologus</i>	Jackdaw								x	
169	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhcorax barbarus</i>	Choug						x			
170	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	Alpine Choug						x			
171	<i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i>	Raven						x			
172	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	Brown-necked Raven		x	x						
173	<i>Turdoides fulva</i>	Fulvous Babbler		x		x					
174	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Spotless Starling					x	x	x	x	
175	<i>Passer domesticus tingitanus</i>	House Sparrow	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
176	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Spanish Sparrow	x			x	x	x			
177	<i>Petronia petronia barbara</i>	Rock Sparrow						x			
178	<i>Passer simplex saharae</i>	Desert Sparrow	x	x							
179	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>	African Chaffinch					x	x		x	
180	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch						x			x
181	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Brambling						x			
182	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Linnet					x		x	x	x
183	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Goldfinch					x			x	x

184	<i>Carduelis chloris vanmarli</i>	Greenfinch						x	x	x	x
185	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Serin				x			x	x	x
186	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea ssp alinea</i>	Crimson-winged Finch						x			
187	<i>Bucanetes githagineus zedlitzi</i>	Trumpeter Finch	x		x						
188	<i>Emberiza cirius</i>	Cirl Bunting									x
189	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Rock Bunting						x			
190	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	Corn Bunting					x	x	x	x	x
191	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	House Bunting					x		x		
DIARY SPOTS			62	25	27	81	59	47	52	76	35

MAMMALS

1	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	European Rabbit									x
2	<i>Lepus microtis</i>	African Savanna Hare		x							
3	<i>Felis lybica</i>	African Wildcat				x					
4	<i>Psammomys obesus</i>	Sand Rat	x	x	x						
5	<i>Jaculus jaculus</i>	Lesser Egyptian Jerboa		x							
6	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Wild Boar									x

REPTILES

1	<i>Acanthodactylus aureus</i>	Golden Fringe-fingered Lizzard	x	x							
2	<i>Acanthodactylus boskianus</i>	Bosc's Fringe-toed Lizzard			x						
3	<i>Uromastys dispar ssp flavifasciata</i>	Spined-tail Lizzard		x							

Species not confirmed by all members of the trip

Species or subspecies not present in Iberian Penninsula.