



My Big Cat Year – Visit to Morocco and Western Sahara for the Sand Cat – 21/02/26 to 02/03/26

As part of The Big Cat Year a trip was made to Morocco and Western Sahara. It was a 10-day trip during which we covered several different habitats in Morocco. In Western Sahara we focused on the famous road towards Aousserd. The trip reports in Mammalwatching.com were as always very useful in defining the right area's.



In brief, our itinerary: we flew out to **Casablanca** on the 21st of February, picked up the car and drove 4 hours in the evening to **Marrakech**. In the car we booked a budget hotel (something we kept doing every day). Next day we drove to **Oukaïmeden** for some special birds and drove to **Ouarzazate**. Following morning to the **Tagdilt Track** and **Falcon Nest** for some great birds and we continued our drive that day to **Ouzina**, the last place in the northeast of Morocco in the Sahara, with a place to stay. Next

day **Merzouga** and surroundings, we slept in Merzouga. Next day with a local guide and 4wd in the desert in the morning. After lunch we continued to **Immlich** and stayed there a night. Thereafter we went to **Ifrane** and to **Casablanca**, dropped the car and took the flight to **Dakhla** in Western Sahara. There we stayed for 3 nights, of which 2 of them we slept in the car, along the **Aousserd road**, approximately 250 km from Dakhla. In all we travelled close to 4,000 km (which I compensated via Trees for All). Hostels we booked on the way and all in all it went very smoothly and met some nice people.

Highlights were the sightings of the [African Wild Cat](#), [Fennec Fox](#), [Ruppels Fox](#), [Barbary Macaque](#) and many special Birds.





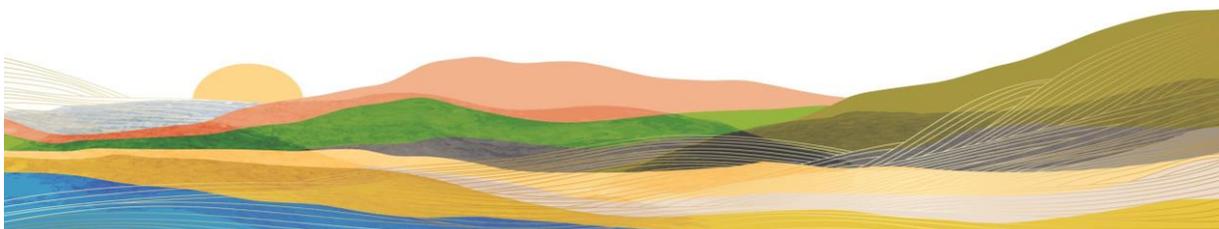
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Sleeping a few nights in the car in Western Sahara for a chance to spot the Sand Cat!

One of the most difficult species to see in Africa is the Sand Cat, a species well adapted for the Sahara Desert. One of the best places in the world to find it is along the Aousserd road in Western Sahara. A truly empty place with only desert and very few mammals and birds. One of the operators that runs a yearly trip there with good results is Royle Safaris. I tried to book it, but the trip carries very few people (in most cases 4 to 5 people) and it was already fully booked. I then tried Naturetrek, but it turned out I was the only person interested, so the trip was cancelled.



But as so often happens, suddenly another opportunity arose. When I was in South Africa in January I posted some pictures from the trip on Facebook. One person, whom I was not even connected with, posted a remark underneath my post saying "Did you see this one already?", and he included a great close-up of a Sand Cat picture he took in Kuwait. I reacted to his remark and to make a long story short, I called him and we agreed to make a trip together to Morocco and Western Sahara towards the end of February. I had never met Pieter so I went to meet him in his apartment in Weesp on the 2nd of February. We agreed on the dates, the itinerary and booked the flights to both Morocco and Western Sahara. At home I booked the cars for both countries and that was all we did for preparation together.

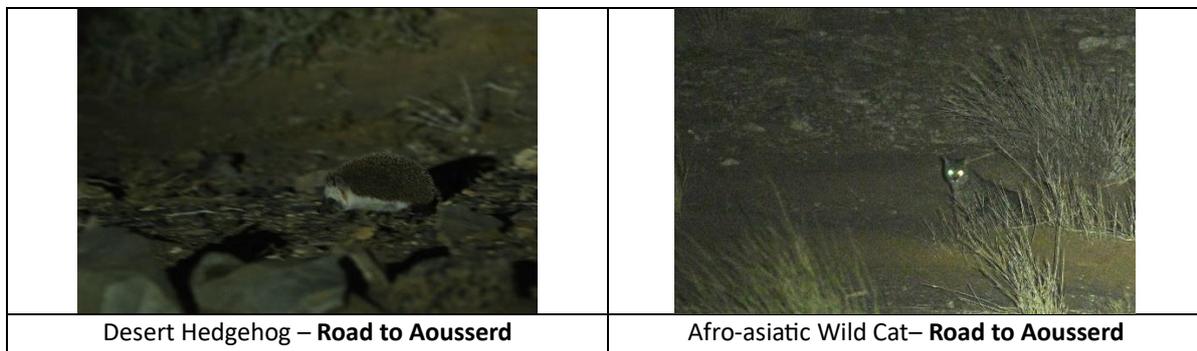




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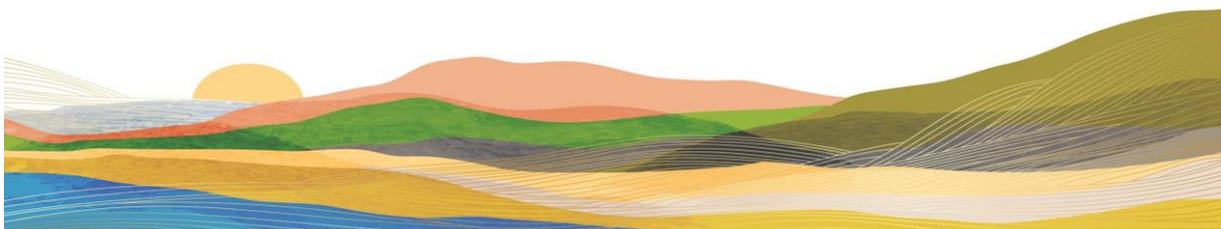
Pieter is a biology teacher at a secondary school in Amsterdam and is a very keen mammal and bird watcher. He is excellent at finding out all GPS locations of the recent sightings of all the unique wildlife. Also, he is a nice guy to travel with, he puts in long hours and goes to the limit to see all the wildlife out there. What a great companion!

Time was short because I returned from South Africa towards the end of January and in February I went with one of my sons for a long weekend to London to watch two games in the Premier League (something I had promised him a long time ago) and I went with Bea for 4 days to the Olympic Games in Milan to watch the heroic success of the Dutch participants! While we were in Milan, we suddenly had to go home as Bea's mother was transported by ambulance to a hospital and the situation seemed very critical. Pleased that I could go through this together with Bea and support her. Luckily her mother recovered, is stable and returned home recently. That left me little time to make the necessary arrangements for Western Sahara and the other upcoming trips.



In brief, our itinerary: Casablanca – Marrakech - Oukaïmeden - Ouarzazate - Tagdilt Track -nd Falcon Nest – Ouzina - Merzouga and surroundings - Immlich - Ifrane – Casablanca - Dakhla (Western Sahara) - Aousserd road

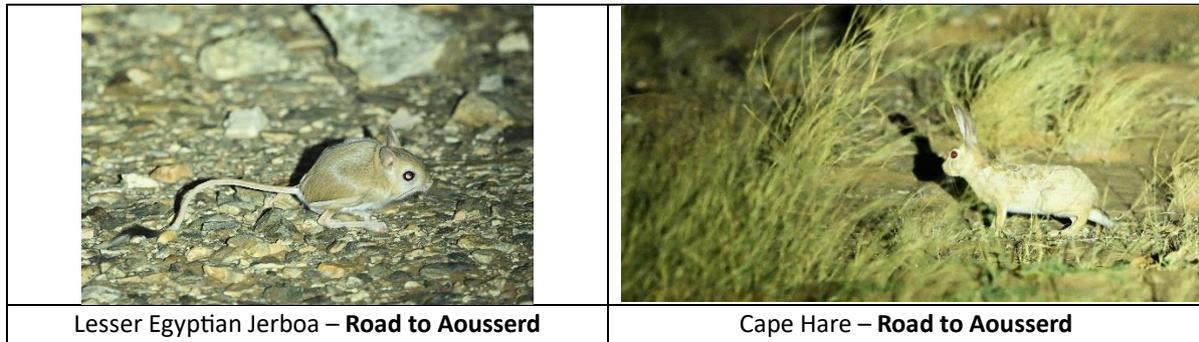
Especially the time in the Western Sahara was exciting! Leaving at around 4pm to drive for 3 hours to the road close to Aousserd. A road totally deserted and only a few cars we encountered on the road, arriving at 7pm for spotlighting and using the thermal to spot Saharan Wildlife with a great focus on the Sand Cat. We stopped each night at around 1am, slept in the car for 5 hours and got up at 6am to search for wildlife until 10am. We then drove back for 3 hours to Dakhla, arriving at 1pm for 3 hours of sleep in the hostel and then back again to Aousserd. It sounds strange but I really enjoyed it tremendously, to be in such a wild place with no people and little but amazing wildlife!





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We had a great trip with some excellent wildlife. Unfortunately and despite the hard work and long hours, we missed the Sand Cat!! Hopefully I get another chance later in the year. Mammal highlights were the Fennec Foxes, Rüppell's Fox, Barbary Macaques, Desert Hedgehog, Jerboas, Gerbils, Cape and Moroccan hares, Barbary Ground Squirrel. Bird highlights Golden Nightjar, Sudan Golden Sparrow, Thick-billed Lark, Dunn's Lark, Desert Sparrow, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Crimson-winged Finch, Lanner Falcon, Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, Cricket Longtail, Tristram's Warbler, African Desert Warbler.



We made a donation to the [Sahara Conservation Foundation](#) We received a very encouraging email from them expressing their thanks and their fascination and respect for the Big Year challenge. It really helps me!

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the funding page, <https://mybigcatyear.com/funding>.

All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by buying the projects a coffee, <https://buymeacoffee.com/mybigcatyear>

Contact: Marc Bozon – marc.bozon@gmail.com - +31654272075

All images can be seen on the Gallery page of [Wild Cat Big Year](#)

