

Western Sahara's Rare Mammals

Destination: Western Sahara **Duration:** 8 Days **Dates:** 3rd Dec – 10th Dec 2025

-  Having two amazing **Sand Cat** sightings, which were exceptional, close and long
-  Finding Pharoah Eagle Owls and many of the Saharan endemic bird species
-  All 3 canid species seen; **Fennec & Ruppell's Fox** and **African Golden Wolf**
-  Getting out and close to various species including several **Jerboas & Gerbils**
-  Exploring the sand dunes and desert landscape of the Western Sahara
-  Good views of five rodent species including nice views of **Pygmy Gerbils**
-  Extra long night drives to find all of the rare nocturnal mammals and birds
-  Spotting a total of 65 different species of birds despite a large nocturnal based trip
-  Camping in remote desert sites and & witnessing the night sky in all its glory
-  Sightings of 11 species of mammal including all major targets for the trip

Tour Leader / Guides

Royle Safaris (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
Nico & Ottman (Guide & Drivers)
Michele (Guide)
Manuel (Camp Assistant)
Asma (Assouard Cook)
Martina (Logistics manager)

Participants

Mr. Chris Daniels
Mr. Nick Cox
Mr. Stuart Chapman
Mr. Kristjan Chapman

Overview

Day 1:	Dakhla
Days 2-4:	Saharan Desert Campsite
Days 5-6:	Saharan Desert House
Day 7:	Dakhla
Day 8:	Home





Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

Over the last few years the desert roads and wildernesses of the Western Sahara (an autonomous part of Morocco) has become a mammalwatching hotspot. The reason being that certain species which had been difficult to find and observe in the past were getting seen with reliability and the quality of the sightings were good. For the first time ever species such as Fennec Foxes, Sand Cats, African Wolves, Ruppell's Fox and other desert mammals were being seen frequently and we may have even found places where sightings could be close to guaranteed.

Following the success of our first trip to the region in 2022 we ran two trips in 2023 and a further two trips in 2024 and two more in 2025 (this being the second one).

This trip was led by Martin Royle who had guided here many times and this whole trip was a special one for clients who had all been here at least twice before and failed to see sand cat (well all expect for Kristjan who was the son one of the returning clients).

All of these trips have been successful in seeing nearly all of our targets (with 100% success for Fennec Foxes, Ruppell's Fox, African Golden Wolf and African Wild Cats), the only one of the main species which has eluded us on a couple of the trips is the amazing Sand Cat (it just happened that these three cat questers (Chris, Nick and Stuart) were all on trips which failed to see one!). We do have a good success rate in seeing this species, but it is more elusive than the other targeted species; however on this trip we had some unbelievable success.

What we have had great success in seeing are even more elusive species of the Sahara, we have seen the very rare Honey Badger on a couple of occasions (this species is due to be split from the Sub-Saharan honey badger in the next few years) and the very highly sought after Libyan Striped Polecats, however both of these species eluded us on this particular tour.

Along with the stunning and rare wildlife (often many of the species are only seen along these routes in the Western Sahara) another hero of this trip is the desert landscape itself. The vast expanses of sand and gravel, the high orange dunes and the clear blue skies are mesmerising and then after dark the lack of light pollution leaves people agog with stars upon stars as far as the skies stretch into the distance.

The success of our trips to this part of the world are largely down to a couple of facets, firstly we arrive after the locations of this seasons dens (for Sand Cats and Fennec Foxes) have been located, which dramatically increases the chances of seeing these animals and also the quality of our guides and drivers is exceptional. With high powered spotlights and thermal scopes we have the best chances possible of seeing a range of rare wildlife and on this trip we not only got our targeted species but many other species which are very rarely encountered in the northern Sahara.

All in all this week long expedition into the wilds of the Sahara Desert was very successful and any mammalwatching enthusiast will enjoy reading the below trip report.

2026 and 2027 Western Sahara's Rare Mammals Small Group Tour

We have already sold our first winter 2026-2027 group tours and so the next scheduled group tours we have would be for autumn / winter time 2027 and then springtime 2028. For anyone interested in these trips please contact us at info@royle-safaris.co.uk or visit our website (<https://www.royle-safaris.co.uk/itineraries/morocco-rare-wildlife-tour/>) for more information and how to make a booking.



Day 1 **Dakhla**

Arrival

The first day was a relaxed affair, as everyone had been on the tour before and knew the area, there was no need for a formal get together. The group all arrived over the course of the day and chilled out until the evening when we met up at a nice restaurant in the town and had dinner with Nico (who had been the guide / driver) on previous trips and was enjoying his retirement from the long night drives as he had Michele who was excellent in the desert.



Day 2 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

Traveling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we left Dakhla at 10:30am with Michele and Otman and headed to the desert camp location; along the way we stopped at a couple of lagoon locations for some birding. There were some nice birds around including greater flamingos and other smaller shore birds. But it was pretty windy and there were many kite surfers around and possibly disturbing the birds. In fact this was the first time we had seen kite surfers in this area before (it was usually just oyster farms here) and it is a sign of increasing recreational activities around the coast here which will no doubt have a negative impact on the birds here.

We then arrived at the camp around 2pm, settled in and had lunch. Afterwards Chris and Kristian walked around Ouadi and found a resting **Saharan hare** a nice and unexpected diurnal encounter.

Then after our dinner we headed out for the first night drive at 7:45pm. Quickly we got into the rhythm of **hares a jerboas** as normal. The first predator we saw was a nice Pharaoh eagle owl, followed by various **jerboas**, **hares** and small number of **gerbils**. These were mostly **lesser Egyptian jerboas**, **Saharan hares** and **lesser Egyptian gerbils**.

It was very bright tonight, we were casting shadows in the desert in the light of the full moon and as a result we were worried about how lucky we would be with sand cat on such a bright night.

We shouldn't have been concerned as around midnight (amongst a flurry of **hare** sightings), Chris spotted a **sand cat** in some vegetation.

It moved from its hiding place and we followed it until it settled down once again under a bush and allowed us to have excellent close views. It was so relaxed it even fell asleep in front of us. Not just a good sighting, but as good as it can get and well deserved for this particular group after so many hours in the desert over the years.

It was also very good to get it so early in the trip, so we could all relax, the pressure on this particular trip was pretty high!



Day 3 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

Wildlife Watching

At breakfast this morning the mood was very happy after such a good start to the trip. There were also some nice birds around including great grey shrike, desert sparrow, greater hoopoe larks flitting around the ouadi and campsite.

In the mid morning we went looking for colonies of fat sand rats which can sometimes be found around here, but we didn't find any. However we did have great views of a desert agama.

We then spent the heat of the day resting and then went out before sunset into dune area. Pair of brown necked ravens on dune, then flock of 14 ravens flew overhead (was unusual to see so many large birds together in the desert).

After dark we started spotlighting around the sand dune area and quickly found a **fennec fox**. But it was on the move and so didn't allow for pictures, it did stop a couple of times but stayed very distant.

We then found a second **fennec fox**, seen closer and better and allowed for views as it listened to us all squeaking, trying to get its attention. There were also some **saharan hares** around as normal as well as **lesser Egyptian jerboas** posing well for us.

Then all of a sudden it went very quiet, no sightings of anything for a while, we stopped for coffee break and did some meteorite finding instead – with the sand cat in the bag, looking for meteorites would become quite an activity on this trip.

We saw very little after the break, was a warmer night tonight lots of cloud cover and so we returned to the camp for some rest.

Day 4 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

Wildlife Watching

This morning the cloud cover was still around, so maybe it wouldn't be as hot and sunny today. In the morning Stuart found a pharaoh's eagle owl on a walk around the ouadi.

As normal the major part of the day was spent resting, walking around (looking for meteorites – in fact the most valuable thing in the camp quickly became Ottman's torch as it had a magnet on it and we would all bring heavy black rocks back to him to test if they were magnetic (not a fool-proof way, but a pretty reliable indicator of whether a rock is a meteorite)) the ouadi until nightfall.



After dark, we were out again and found couple of **lesser Egyptian jerboas** and a mystery **gerbil** we couldn't identify but it was not one of the more commonly found ones around here. Around a grassy area were some **lesser Egyptian gerbils** and then a nice **fat-tailed gerbil** which posed for us as they often do this was followed by a pair of **African Hamada jerboas** one of which was seen very well.

We then found a **lesser Egyptian gerbil** next to the car and allowed nice views as it burrowed away from us. There were many **jerboas** around today and we also had great views of an elegant fingered gecko.

There were a couple of **hares** around but in general quiet night for non rodents.

We checked an area which was a thick grassy ouadi and found something that was very likely a cat, but distant and fleeting views. We continued to scan and search the area and then all of a sudden got it again. Another beautiful **sand cat** under a bush. Seen just as well and close the first one! What a trip we were having.

In our way back to the camp, we had brief views of an **African golden wolf**

Day 5 Sahara Desert (Homestay)

Traveling & Wildlife Watching

Today we left camp after brunch, broking the camp down, packing up and headed to Assouard and our homestay for the last couple of nights in the desert. Along the way we found a lanner falcon and also a basking uromastyx lizard on way to the town. There were a couple of bird lifers for Chris too, including black-crowned sparrow lark.

We got to the house in good time, had nice cold drinks and a shower before a great dinner from Fatima prepared for us.

Then after sunset we were off out to see what the road and trails around Assouard would produce. Very brief **pygmy gerbil** sighting. Very recent road killed Ruppell's fox. Then another **pygmy gerbil** in the vegetated verges of the road followed by a very distant pair of **African golden wolves**, we couldn't get closer to them, they always stayed very far from us.

We then found a close **African wild cat**, very nice views walking parallel to road and through scrub habitat before going deeper into the scrub. We played some rodent distress calls and the **cat** came back out and right towards us. Have amazing views, sat down in front of us, so relaxed and close.

Couple of **jerboas** around the Oued Jenna area and then a very accommodating Red-necked nightjar. There were then more **hares** and **pygmy gerbils** around.

The on the way back we found a **Ruppell's fox**, but running away, but lost it pretty quickly and then a second very nice **wild cat**, but didn't stay close or visible for long. Then a third **wild cat** in thick Oued Jenna vegetation. Close to the town we found several **Saharan hares**. One of which was a very likely **Schlomberger's hare**.



Day 6 Sahara Desert (Homestay)

Wildlife Watching

This morning Chris and Michele went out early for birding and had some nice species seen this morning and they also found a confirmed **Schlomberger's hare**.

In the late evening, Chris, Michele and Martin went birding and would meet up with the rest of the group around sunset for a field dinner. Nice birds including one of Chris's big target a pair of Dunn's lark and several cream coloured coursers.

Went after dinner for a walk around some rocky outcrop formations. Usually good for foxes and geckos and other wildlife.

However it was quiet around the rocks, we had an eagle owl calling and a couple of distant **African wild cats** seen. **Jerboas** and **hares** were found in good numbers around the gravel pan areas. And then we found an **African wild cat** patrolling edge of Ouadi and gravel, nice periodic views as it moved along the border of habitats. We managed to call the **cat** really close to the vehicles, very nice.

Our next sighting was a very nice **African golden wolf** next to the road. Trotting along, giving very good views. Then a second came along following the same route. Close to the side of the road a **lesser Egyptian gerbil**. Then shortly afterwards a **pygmy gerbil** on the side of the road. another **African wild cat** crossed road in front of us, more good views.

Near the town another **African golden wolf** next crossed the road.



Day 7 **Dakhla**

Travelling

Chris and Michele visited a nearby dam which was full of water for birding. The dam had created a lake of several hectares and there was a good variety of waterfowl around on their European - West African migration routes. It was a nice morning birding.

Then left the house and headed back to Dakhla around midday.

We arrived back in the city around 3:30pm. We just rested and refreshed this afternoon and then had a farewell dinner.

Day 8 **Home**

Departure

This morning after breakfast the clients were taken to the airport to catch their return flights home.

Species List

Western Sahara's Rare Mammals Tour - Dec 2025

Mammals (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	African golden wolf	<i>Canis anthus</i>
2	African wild cat	<i>Felis lybica</i>
3	Sand cat	<i>Felis margarita</i>
4	Lesser Egyptian gerbil	<i>Gerbillus gerbillus</i>
5	Pygmy gerbil	<i>Gerbillus henleyi</i>
6	African Hamada jerboa	<i>Jaculus hirtipes</i>
7	Sahara hare	<i>Lepus saharea</i>
8	Schlumberger's hare	<i>Lepus schlumberger</i>
9	Fat-tailed gerbil	<i>Psammomys obesus</i>
10	Fennec fox	<i>Vulpes zerda</i>
11	Ruppell's fox	<i>Vulpus rueppellii</i>

December						
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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5	4	2	8	1	11	
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7	6	4	2	4	6	
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	1		1			
		2				
				1		

CT = Camera trap, D = Dead

*Where very similar/cryptic species occurred for common types, once we had confirmed each of the species. We did not stop to make a species level identification in each instance and have recorded them as the commoner of the two.

Birds (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
2	Greater hoopoe lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
3	Bar-tailed lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>
4	Desert lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
5	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
6	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
7	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
8	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
9	Fulvous chattering	<i>Argya fulva</i>
10	Pharaohs eagle owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>
11	Stone curlew	<i>Burhinus Oedichnemus</i>

December						
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1	1		1			
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12	Rough-legged buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>
13	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
14	Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
15	Red-necked nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>
16	Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
17	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
18	Slender-billed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
19	Great spotted cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>
20	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
21	Brown-necked raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
22	Sardinian warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>
23	Cream coloured courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
24	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
25	House bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>
26	Dunn's lark	<i>Eremalauda dunni</i>
27	Black-crowned sparrow lark	<i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>
28	Lanner falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
29	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
30	Crested lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
31	Thekla's lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
32	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
33	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
34	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
35	Caspian tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
36	Audouin's gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>
37	Great grey shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
38	Lesser black backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
39	Yellow-legged gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
40	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
41	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
42	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
43	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
44	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
45	Desert wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
46	White-crowned wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
47	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
48	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
49	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
50	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
51	Desert sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>

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2				1	4	
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1						2
2						
9	2	1				
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~10						
2	1					
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	3	1	2	1	1	
~64						~10
21						
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	1			1		
					1	
1						
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2	6	1	~10	~16	7	

52	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
53	Greater flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
54	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
55	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
56	Thick-billed Lark	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>
57	Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
58	Northern shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
59	Cricket longtail	<i>Spiloptila clamans</i>
60	Arctic skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
61	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
62	Spectacled warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
63	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>
64	Common redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
65	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
66	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>

11						
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~108						
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1						
5					~10	3
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4						
~10						
6						

Reptiles (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Elegant fingered gecko	<i>Stenodactylus sthenodactylus</i>
2	Desert agama	<i>Trapelus mutabilis</i>
3	Sudan masticate	<i>Uromastyx dispar</i>

December						
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
			1			
		1				
				1		



Sand Cat (first sighting)



Sand Cat (second sighting)



African Wild Cat



Pygmy Gerbil



African Hammada Jerboa



Eurasian Whimbrel



Little Egret



Sanderling



Eurasian Oystercatcher & Bar-tailed Godwits



Caspian Tern & Bar-tailed Godwits



Grey Heron



Greater Hoopoe-lark



Cream-coloured Cusser



Dunn's Lark



Thick-billed Lark



Red-necked Nightjar



Elegant Fingered Gecko



Desert Agama