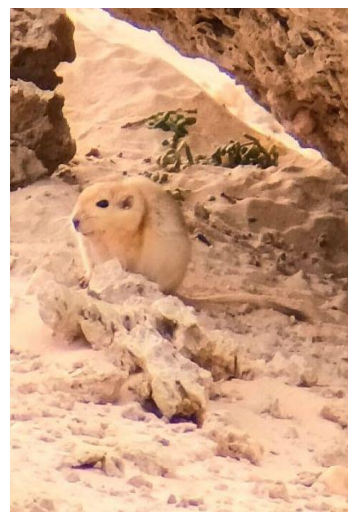
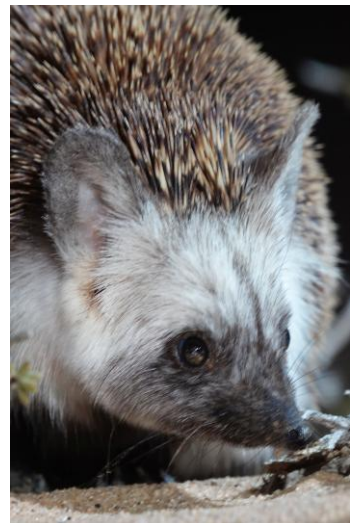


Western Sahara's Rare Mammals

Destination: Western Sahara **Duration:** 8 Days **Dates:** 20th Jan – 27th Jan 2026

-  Having a **Sand Cat** sighting nearby the road, however not everyone saw it.
-  Spotting a Pharoah Eagle Owl 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 five **Desert Hedgehogs**
-  Exploring the sand dunes and desert landscape of the Western Sahara
-  Good views of seven rodent species including nice views of **Fat Sand Rats**
-  Extra long night drives to find all of the rare nocturnal mammals and birds
-  Spotting a total of 58 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 16 species of mammal including all major targets for the trip



Tour Leader / Guides

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

Participants

Mrs. Sandra Stewart
 Mr. Barry Stewart
 Ms. Adrianna Dinu
 Mr. Jack Wright

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 is the first of 3 trips scheduled to run in 2026.

This trip was led by Martin Royle who had guided here many times and the trip was booked as a private tour for two couples, the special focus on the cat species but all mammals, birds and other life was of interest to the group.

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. 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 great past 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.

2027 and 2028 Western Sahara's Rare Mammals Small Group Tour

We have already sold our winter season 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

Everyone arrived as planned without issues into Dakhla and the group went out to look for seabirds before everyone met up with Martin for dinner in the town. The birding was very good with great sea birds showing over these days, including European storm petrels near the shore and in even in the bay; around the peninsula. We all met up for dinner tonight.



Day 2 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

Traveling & Wildlife Watching

We left the hotel in Dakhla at 10:30am with Michele and Otman (our guide and driver for the trip) and headed to the desert camp location.

Along the way we made a couple of stops, first we stopped at a site which Martin and Michele had scouted out the day before for the only diurnal mammal species around here, the fat sand rat. We quickly found a pair of **fat sand rats** being pretty active around a burrow. Very nice views and then behind their burrow a juvenile Barbary falcon (subspecies of peregrine) came and flew low and landed and then no less than 6 kestrels (some common and lesser) mobbing it until it took off. A nice interaction and a flurry of activity. Then we found a third **fat sand rat** which came out and allowed ice views. A very nice start to the trip.

We then stopped at a lagoon for some birding. Some birds around including greater flamingos, bar-tailed godwit, grey plover and other smaller shore birds. Unlike many times we have stopped here, there were no kite surfers here today, as there was low wind which was very good for birds.

The shorebirds were disturbed as a Lanner falcon flew overhead. Watching further we had a flock of spoonbills flying in and then a Thekla's lark came and landed on our car door and gave us some amazing views. We then heard a spotted crane and tried to find it in the marshy grass but couldn't locate the species.

We had a field lunch around the lagoon area, before heading into the desert and to camp.

Arriving at the camp around 5pm settled in and rested before the first spotlighting session this evening. Before dinner the group walked around Ouadi and found a nice scorpion and a couple of four-spotted geckos.

We were then out at 8pm and the first mammal we found was a **Saharan hare**. Then an unidentified **jerboa** briefly seen. Before some birds were found, including a bar-tailed desert lark near vehicle and a roosting long-legged buzzard perched in a tree seen well. We then had a very nice close posing **African Hamada jerboa**.

Carrying on we had a Pharaoh eagle owl in a tree seen well but quite distant before another nice **African Hamada jerboa** seen well and then a very brief **lesser Egyptian gerbil** as it darted into a hole.

In a grassy area we found a **desert hedgehog**, nice views of it running fast away and then stopped under a bush and allowed good views.

This was followed by a **fat-tailed gerbil** in open area, which then dug hole and disappeared instead of their usual reaction to the spotlight, which is to freeze and allow for very close views, close to where the gerbil burrowed away there was a *Stenodactylus stenodactylus* nicely spotted and photographed.

In a large ouadi we found a second **fat-tailed gerbil**, gave us better views this time and more **African Hamada jerboas** too. Then in a more grassy area we found several **lesser Egyptian gerbils**. Finally the last mammal of the night was a **Saharan hare** posing for us. Good mammal diversity for the first night, but none of the key carnivore targets.



Day 3 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

Wildlife Watching

Pre and during breakfast there were a few birds around the camp (on a little birdbath and feeding station Michele had set up) including great grey shrike, desert sparrows with a couple of greater hoopoe larks flitting around also.

During the heat of the day spent resting, watching for birds on the feeder outside the tents, some more desert sparrows being the main birds seen. There was also a brown necked raven around the ouadi.

Then we were out again just after sunset. Would try an area further to the north tonight where we had had sand cat sightings on our last trip. Brief **jerboa** and then we had some eyeshine, but only had it a couple of times, as it was running through the grass and away from us. Couldn't get an ID or close to it and so carried on. Then a nice **desert hedgehog** in middle of the track, it ran under our car and gave us very close views, we were two for two with **desert hedgehogs** at least.

Further along we had a different species of stenodactylus gecko (*Stenodactylus petrii*) again posing for great pictures.

And we had another ground roosting bar-tailed lark just after promising eyeshine which disappeared over a rise and away very quickly. We then had a the kind of quiet hour that only spotlighting in the desert can give you. For some reason sometimes, everything seems to disappear,

We had just an **African Hamada jerboa**, otherwise it was very quiet. There were a couple more distant eye shines but couldn't get views.



On some of the more gravelly areas the **hare** was decent and then we started to see some more wildlife, including **lesser Egyptian gerbils** and then a large *pulcherrimis* spider which we watched for a while as we had our midnight coffee break. As we were watching it amazingly flopped onto its back to get into its hole and place the trapdoor back in place. Carrying on we found several more **lesser Egyptian gerbils** around in grassy areas, including one possible **lesser Egyptian jerboa** seen close by car, but it didn't show its tail flag very well to have an idea on which of the two species it was.

After yet another very quiet hour or more we went to the oaudi near our campsite and it was very alive with **jerboas** as well as **hares**, **gerbils** and a long-legged buzzard roosting in an acacia.

Then back at the camp, a couple of **lesser Egyptian gerbils** in the camp, literally, one eating the bread in the kitchen tent and one underneath Jack & Adrianna's tent. Also a camera trap set up by Barry and Sandra had a **Ruppell's fox** and at the little waterhole a **Saharan hare** was drinking, nice to know the wildlife was all at the camp, whilst we were out driving around.

Day 4 Sahara Desert (Campsite)

Wildlife Watching

This morning followed the same routine as the previous days, with some more birds around the camp at breakfast including western subalpine warbler, barn swallows, desert wheatear and greater hoopoe larks.

The group went out with Michele to look for other birds again after breakfast, they wanted to get closer looks at the greater hoopoe-lark, but couldn't re-find the greater hoopoe lark which Barry and Sandra had seen well earlier in the morning.

In the rest of the day around the camp there were more desert sparrows, as well as smaller numbers of Sardinian warbler, sub-alpine warbler and common chiffchaff around.

We went out a little earlier today to head further along to a more sandy area with some dunes, often this is a good place for fennec fox, so would try this area first thing tonight. As we arrived in the dune area there were a couple of brown-necked ravens on a tall dune. We walked up the dune to get great views out over the desert.

Then after dark we started spotlighting. It was incredibly quiet for quite a long time, just one **lesser Egyptian jerboa** and one **desert hedgehog**. Then all of a sudden we had a wonderful **fennec fox**. It was spotted running through a grassy area and stopped a couple of times to give us some nice views. It then ran up and over a dune, nice views of it on the dune looking back at us.

We then started to head back towards the camp area, on the way we found a roosting long-legged buzzard as well as **Sahara hare** and **lesser Egyptian jerboas** around potential sand cat habitat. But no cat.

In general it was another quiet night and to finish off we had some more **Sahara hares** and both **jerboas** around.

Day 5 Sahara Desert (Homestay)

Traveling & Wildlife Watching

Overnight Barry checked his camera trap which showed a **lesser Egyptian gerbil** and **Saharan hare** coming to drink at the bird bath Michele had set up.

Adriana, Jack and Michele went for a pre breakfast walk and this time they found their target of the greater hoopoe larks.

Back at camp around breakfast, it was overcast and even some rain in the air this morning (very unusual) but the high winds quickly blew most of the low cloud and rain away. The wind lessened the birdlife around but we still had some desert sorrows around the camp whilst the team dismantling it and packed it up into the vehicles.

Then around 12:30pm we left for Assouad and our second destination in the Western Saharan desert. Along the way we spotted a Sudan masticate basking outside its hole just off the main road. We then also stopped in small wooded area along the road, for some birding. There were lots of birds around including black-crowned sparrow-lark, Sudan golden sparrow and bar-tailed larks. Michele set up a bird feed bucket and water bowl here overnight and would come and check tomorrow and hopefully have a wealth of birdlife to see. Whilst walking around here we also found a pair of sleeping **Schlomberger's hares** in the vegetation.

We then arrived at Assoaurd at 4pm, settled into our homestay and had dinner before heading out for more spotlighting.

Headed out to Ouad Jenna first off (often a very good area for wildlife), and found a red-necked nightjar which was seen reasonably well flying low over vegetation. Then a 4th **desert hedgehog** of the trip! One per night, has to be a kind or record. There were also some **jerboas** around all moving fast so no great ID and a couple of **hares** before we had an **African wild cat** in thick grass. It was seen well at first and then disappeared, we tried to call it back with some squeaks. But it wouldn't come back out into the open and then close by the road we had another **hedgehog**.

On the way back it was very quiet again with just some **jerboas** and a brief **fat-tailed gerbil** crossing road but as we were approaching the end of the road where we were allowed to spotlight (there is a buffer-zone a few kilometres around the town and military base where we are not allowed to spotlight); Barry spotted a **sand cat**, just off the road in the open, amazing views as it slunk down into a bush, then away. However very frustrating for half of the group, the first car didn't see it, only Barry and Sandra in the second vehicle saw it very well. We searched the area afterwards spotlighting and scanning with a thermal, but with no luck.

Not a bad night – having the two species of cat, but a real shame that not everyone saw it.



Day 6 Sahara Desert (Homestay)

Wildlife Watching

Michele took the group out very early this morning for a half day birding trip. With some great birding including sandgrouse, many lark species, cricket long-tail and some very nice Sudan golden sparrows despite it being very windy again.

The rest of the day was spent resting and then we were out again around 5pm for birding in a good lark habitat before the final night of spotlighting. This evening we found a nice targets - thick-billed larks and Dunn's lark as well as many black-crowned sparrow-larks. We then had great views of cream coloured coursers in great light for photography.

Just before sunset we went to a rocky area for a picnic dinner and walk around. Before sunset around the rocks some plain rock martins were flying around catching the last of the evenings insects. Then on the rocks in its usual roosting spot there was a pharaoh eagle owl and flying overhead a long-legged buzzard with a bird in its talons (possibly a rock martin).

Then after sunset we went for a walk around the rocks but once again it was very quiet. In large open plain area beyond the rocky canyon there was a **Ruppell's fox** moving across (fast), seen well in binoculars but not for long, Adriana did manage to get a record shot though.

We then heading back to the vehicle and tried hard in the best habitat for sand cat nearby where it was seen yesterday. We had a very nice **African wild cat**. Seen well intermittently as it moved in and out of vegetation, this was followed by **hares** and **jerboas**. In the distance we had a **African golden wolf**, but it was moving away from us and the terrain wouldn't allow us to get any closer for proper views.

In a gravel area, there were a few more **African hammada** and **lesser Egyptian jerboas**. Otman then found a **pygmy gerbil**. Great close views of this tiny species just off the road and a short while after we disturbed a pair of **European stone curlew** which were seen very well. Then on our way back to the house we had a nice **Tarabul's gerbil** which crossed the road and went into nearby burrow. Seen well as it filled in a hole in front of us and our final sighting of the night was just near the military base when a pair of **African golden wolves** crossed the road close to the vehicle and allowing for the best views so far and possibly the best views that Royle Safaris had in all our trips here.

Day 7 Dakhla

Travelling

This morning we packed up and had breakfast at 9am before the team cleaned the house and we left to head back to Dakhla around midday. We stopped along the way for some birding, with some nice lark species around.

We arrived back in the city around 3:30pm and rested and freshened up before we all met up and 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 or continued their time in Dakhla.

Species List

Western Sahara's Rare Mammals Tour - Jan 2026

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	Gerbil	<i>Gerbillus</i> sp.
7	Tarabul's gerbil	<i>Gerbillus tarabuli</i>
9	African Hamada jerboa	<i>Jaculus hirtipes</i>
9	Jerboa	<i>Jaculus</i> sp.
10	Sahara hare	<i>Lepus saharea</i>
11	Schlomberger's hare	<i>Lepus schlumberger</i>
12	Fat-tailed gerbil	<i>Pachyuromys duprasi</i>
13	Desert hedgehog	<i>Paraechinus aethiopicus</i>
14	Fat Sand Rat	<i>Psammomys obesus</i>
15	Fennec fox	<i>Vulpes zerda</i>
16	Ruppell's fox	<i>Vulpus rueppellii</i>

January						
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
				1	2	
				1	1	
				1		
		4	3	4	3	
					1	
	3	1			1	
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	5	2	3			
	2	~10	9	~11		
	4	9	3	4	1	
					2	
	2			1		
	1	1	1	2		
	3					
			1			
		CT			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 desert lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>
4	Desert lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
5	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
6	Pharaoh eagle owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>

January						
20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	2					
	2	2	2	3	1	
	1				4	
					4	
	8					
	1				1	

7	Europe stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>
8	Long legged buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
9	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
10	Curlew sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
11	Red-necked nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>
12	Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
13	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
14	Slender-billed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
15	Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
16	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
17	Brown-necked raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
18	Sardinian warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>
19	Cream coloured courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
20	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
21	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
22	Dunn's lark	<i>Eremalauda dunni</i>
23	Black-capped sparrow-lark	<i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>
24	Lanner falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
25	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
26	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
27	Thekla's lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
28	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
29	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
30	Caspian tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
31	Audoin's gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>
32	Great grey shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
33	Lesser black backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
34	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
35	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
36	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
37	Desert wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
38	White-crowned wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
39	Black wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
40	Red-rumped wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
41	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
42	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
43	Sudan golden sparrow	<i>Passer luteus</i>
44	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
45	Desert sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>
46	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>

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	2					
	1					
				1		
	16					
	6					
	~200					
	2					
~200	~100					~20
	1	2	4	6		
			1	1		
					2	
				3	3	3
	~10					
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				~10	4	3
	1				1	
	1					
	6					
	1					
	7					
	3		8	~15	8	2
	1					
	~50					
		1	2	1		
~25	~15					
	16					
	3					
	3					
	2		4			
					1	2
	1					
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					1	
	1					
					2	
~10						
		3	12	6		~10
	4					

47	Greater flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
48	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
49	Iberian chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>
50	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
51	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
52	Thick-billed lark	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>
53	Plain rock Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
54	European collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
55	Western subalpine warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
56	Common shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
57	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
58	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>

	~30					
	1		1			
	1					
	17					
	8					
					2	
					4	
5						3
			2			
	2					
	1					
	4					

Reptiles (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Elegant short-fingered gecko	<i>Stenodactylus stenodactylus</i>
2	Anderson's Short-fingered Gecko	<i>Stenodactylus petrii</i>
3	Ringed Wall Gecko	<i>Tarentola annularis</i>
4	Sudan Mastigure	<i>Uromastyx dispar</i>

January						
20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	1		1			
		1				
	1					
				1		



Lesser Egyptian Jerboa



Fat Sand Rat



Desert Hedgehog



Sahara Hare



Pharoah Eagle Owl



Dunn's Lark



Cream-coloured Courser



Anderson's Short-fingered Gecko

