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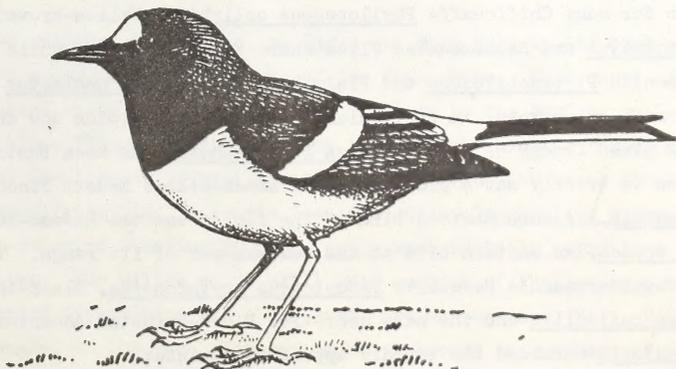
BULLETIN N^o 7

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An increasing number of ornithologists are now regularly visiting the Middle East and there is a demand for information about the avifauna of each country. There is little published literature available about many countries and the only recent sources of information come from privately circulated trip reports. As one of the aims of OSME is "to collect, collate and publish ornithological data on the birds of the Middle East" it would be extremely useful if copies of any relevant reports could be sent to us. The more interesting records could be published in the Bulletin, perhaps as a regular 'Recent Reports' section.

All records in this and subsequent Bulletins are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee of the country concerned.



BIRDS IN CENTRAL AFGHANISTAN

Nigel Redman

A large area of Afghanistan is comprised of high rugged mountains. The Himalayas extend westwards to form the Hindu Kush which rise to over 20,000 feet and continue into central Afghanistan, becoming known as the Koh-i-Baba. During October and November 1978 Chris Murphy and I spent two weeks visiting this area.

We first visited Bamiyan, a seven hour bus ride west of Kabul, following the Bamiyan river along a rough dusty track for much of the journey. Neatly filled fields and clumps of trees on the valley floor contrasted sharply with the surrounding bare but colourful peaks of the Koh-i-Baba. The journey provided few opportunities for birding but Great Rock Nuthatches Sitta tephronota and Wallcreepers Tichodroma muraria were not uncommon. During a stop for 'chai', a vivid male Scarlet Rosefinch Carpodacus erythrinus, showing characteristics of the subspecies ferghanensis appeared strikingly different from the drab individuals which occur in Britain.

In Bamiyan, a cheap hotel in the single main street was our base for a few days and our excursions into the fertile valley revealed a small but interesting selection of birds. A Lammergeier Gypaetus barbatus soared regularly over the giant Buddha carved centuries ago in the soft yellow cliffs which dominate the north side of the town. Ravens Corvus corax and Magpies Pica pica were common birds and all of the sparrows living around the mud buildings of the town were Tree Sparrows Passer montanus. The less common House Sparrows Passer domesticus preferred the fields and bushes where they frequently hybridised with Spanish Sparrows Passer hispaniolensis.

The numerous autumnal trees and willow scrub alongside the winding river provided cover for many Chiffchaffs Phylloscopus collybita, Yellow-browed Warblers P. inornatus and Red-breasted Flycatchers Ficedula parva, while the occasional Greenish P. trochiloides and Plain Leaf Warblers P. neglectus added variety. The more open areas, in particular the bare dusty fields now devoid of crops, held mixed flocks of Pine Emberiza leucocephalos and Rock Buntings E. cia and once we briefly saw a group of three Black-billed Desert Finches Rhodospiza obsoleta. A more obvious bird of the fields was the Rufous-backed Shrike Lanius schach, an eastern bird at the western end of its range. The arrival of a few Eversmann's Redstarts Phoenicurus erythronotus, Black-throated Thrushes Turdus ruficollis and the more secretive Black-throated Accentors Prunella atrogularis heralded the rapidly approaching winter.

From Bamiyan, another bus ride took us further west and out of the valley to the famed lakes of Band-i-Amir. The series of seven naturally dammed lakes are set at 10,000 feet in a deep gorge surrounded by arid terrain. The crystal clear water supported water weeds and fish, but other vegetation was limited to a small patch of weeds and a few bushes around a couple of the lakes.

The expected montane species were present in large numbers with flocks of up to 120 Snow Finches Montifringilla nivalis and 80 Shore Larks Eremophila alpestris. Trumpeter Finches Bucantes githagineus and Water Pipits Anthus spinoletta were common but we only saw a few Crimson-winged Finches Rhodopechys sanguinea. Band-i-Amir is one of the best places to see Afghanistan's only endemic bird, Theresa's Snowfinch Montifringilla theresae, which was present in flocks of up to 70 and it was distinctly smaller and drabber than its more cosmopolitan relative. Unfortunately all lacked the black bib and face of breeding plumage.

Very few water birds were seen here. Two Whiskered Terns Chlidonias hybridus fed over some shallow pools, a solitary Red-necked Phalarope Phalaropus lobatus and a Great White Egret Egretta alba were found on two other lakes and 37 Black-headed Gulls Larus ridibundus flew west. A single Moustached Warbler Acrocephalus melanopogon and two Reed Buntings Emberiza schoeniclus had found the only patch of reeds and a Quail Coturnix coturnix was found floating in the water. A pair of Sakers Falco cherrug and a flock of 91 Choughs Pyrhhoracorax pyrrhoracorax demonstrated their aerobatic skills above us.

The most unexpected bird at Band-i Amir was a male Blue-headed Redstart Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus, a Himalayan species which breeds in the Safed Koh in Eastern Afghanistan. Other interesting species included Red-tailed Wheatears Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna, Citrine Wagtail Motacilla citreola and Bimaculated Lark Melanocorypha bimaculata.

As we returned to Bamiyan, an Eagle Owl Bubo bubo sailed over a gorge and the first snows fell on the peaks of the Koh-i-Baba. This onset of cold weather had resulted in an increase of winter visitors to the Bamiyan valley. Flocks of Starlings Sturnus vulgaris and up to 40 Black-throated Thrushes were seen daily. A few Chaffinches Fringilla coelebs associated with small flocks of Bramblings F. montifringilla. A single female Nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus and an adult Rose-coloured Starling Sturnus roseus were probably regretting they had not left earlier. The willow scrub still held numbers of Phyllosiopus warblers and Red-breasted Flycatchers and a new bird here was an Azure Tit. Parus cyanus, belonging to the race flavipectus which breeds in northern Afghanistan and differs from other races in having a large yellow patch on the breast and a greyer head and throat. Its tail was noticeably longer than that of a Blue Tit

Parus caeruleus and had white outer tail feathers and white tips to the others.

Black-throated Accentors were more numerous and one field held a flock of thirteen of these as well as a winter male Rustic Bunting Emberiza rustica, the second record for Afghanistan. In an irrigation ditch we found an immature Spotted Crake Porzana porzana. On our last afternoon we found about 20 Guldenstadt's Redstarts Phoenicurus erythrogaster which had been forced down to lower altitudes by the cold spell. These huge, striking redstarts remained restless and performed a superb aerial display, their flight somewhat reminiscent of a Wallcreeper.

On returning to Kabul, a fast flowing boulder-strewn river provided the habitat for another Himalayan species, the Little Forktail Enicurus scouleri. These small black and white birds are related to redstarts and live exclusively on mountain rivers. The journey was brightened further by a total of 6 Wallcreepers in five hours, all seen from the bus.

Central Afghanistan has a great deal to offer the ornithologist and I hope that one day soon it will be possible to visit this impressive area again.

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NOTES ON A JOURNEY THROUGH TURKEY, SPRING 1981

Don Parr

As part of an ICBP project to study the current status and distribution of bustards in the Middle East, Paul Goriup, the secretary of the Bustard Group, and myself travelled 7,500 miles in Turkey over the period 22 March to 8 May, 1981 in a search for bustards. The full results of this search will be written up elsewhere and the following is a selected summary of some of the more interesting ornithological observations made.

Great Northern Diver Gavia immer

One R. Serefi (Thrace) on 27.3.

White-tailed Eagle Haliaeetus albicilla

One Lake Cildir on 18.4.

Pheasant Phasianus colchicus

One at Sariyer (Thrace) on 7.5.

Demoiselle Crane Anthropoides virgo

Two near Agri on 17.4., 21 near Patnos on 20.4.

Little Bustard Tetrax tetrax

Two males seen (one in display) at Ceylanpinar on 8.4.

Great Bustard Otis tarda

A total of 145 birds was seen in 11 separate areas, this indicative of a valuable, albeit well scattered, breeding population.

Greater Sandplover Charadrius leschenaultii

One near Tuz Golu on 3.4. and four (display flighting) near Bor (Central Plateau) on 4.4.

Dotterel Charadrius morinellus

Very large numbers on migration in steppe lands on the western shore of Tuz Golu; in places the terrain was literally covered with scattered birds and groups of birds. At least 1,000+ estimated on 2.4. and 200+ on 3.4.

Lesser Golden Plover Pluvialis dominica

Three birds seen well on marshland near Karatas (Adana area) with Golden Plover (P. apricaria). (PG is familiar with this species from Pakistan.)

Great Snipe Gallinago media

One flushed from mountainside west of Bingol on 23.4. and one flushed from pool near Saray (Thrace) on 5.5.

Eagle Owl Bubo bubo

One heard calling from rocky crag north of Lake Van on the evening of 14.4.; bird seen and pellets collected the following morning.

Long-eared Owl Asio otus

One heard at Saray (Thrace) 26.3. and one heard and seen during the night in pine woodland near Ardahan (Eastern Turkey) on 17/18.4.

Citrine Wagtail Motacilla citreola

One (with M. flava) on 16.4. near Patnos (Central Plateau), one near Agri on 20.4. and a third also near Patnos on 20.4.

Radde's Accentor Prunella ocularis

Two in mountains south of Kars on 16.4. and at least four, obviously in territory, on scree slope west of Bingol. Song: a somewhat staccato warble phonetically 'Char di di di di char' - on ascending and descending scale delivered from ground vegetation or stone.

Sombre Tit Parus lugubris

The OST Bird Report 1974-75 states that this species is 'apparently absent from most of the Central Plateau and the East'. It is of interest to record therefore that the only birds we saw were two on 11th and three on 12th Apr. in mountains south of Sirt in SE Turkey.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch Sitta tephronota

One near Uludere (SE Turkey) and two in mountains south of Sirt. Compared to the Rock Nuthatch (*S. neumayer*), a larger and lighter coloured bird with very noticeable broad black eye stripes, broadening and going well down behind and below the eye.

Twite Carduelis flavirostris

Six near Erceis in snow on mountain pass north of Lake Van on 15.4. On the snowline feeding on the edge of melting snow in the mountains near Cumacay north of Agri, large numbers (100+) were feeding with Shore Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) and Water Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*). Ten near Agri on 20.4.

Desert Finch Rhodospiza obsoleta

Two near Urfa on 8.4.

Snow Bunting Plectrophenax nivalis

Five or six on roadside in mountains near Eleskirt (west of Agri) on 17.4.

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SURREY

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF SOUTH LEBANON

Sjoerd Mayer

From June 4th 1980 until January 21st 1981 I was a conscript in the Dutch Battalion of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon. During this period I made what notes I could of the birds I saw or heard. The following is a selection of those notes.

The area I was present in stretched from Ras-al-Bayaddah, on the coast south of Tyre, eastwards to Haris. The hills were treeless and overgrown with scrub; oliveyards could be found around villages and rich vegetation was found on north facing slopes and in most wadis.

White Stork Ciconia ciconia

c2000 on 10.6. flying north between Haris and Tibnin

Chukar Alectoris chukar

Heard and seen regularly from 26.6 to 25.10. in regions north and south of Kafra with 12 on 9.7. A few were observed between Zibquin and Kafra on 12.8. and 20 were seen between Ras-al-Bayaddah and Shama on 2.10. Lebanon population described as 'probably under 10 pairs' in 'The Birds of The Western Palearctic'.

Barn Owl Tyto alba

One near Ras-al-Bayaddah on 18.6. and 20.6.

Tawny Owl Strix aluco

One heard north of Kafra on 24.9. and 16.1.

Masked Shrike Lanius nubicus

One pair breeding in olives near Kafra.

Finsch's Wheatear Oenanthe finschii

At least one pair north of Kafra.

Northern Orange-tufted Sunbird Nectarinia orea

Many birds seen at Ras-al-Bayaddah.

Cromson-winged Finch Rhodopechys sanguinea

One on 26.6. and two on 10.7. north of Kafra.

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REVIEWS

The Birds of Saudi Arabia : A check-list - Michael C Jennings. 112 pages with four line drawings. Obtainable from the author at 10 Mill Lane, Whittlesford, Cambridge. £6.50 post paid (£7.30 airmail).

For too long now ornithologists visiting or interested in Saudi Arabia have been dependent on Meinertzhagen's Birds of Arabia (1954), privately circulated lists and what few publications that were available from local societies. Much of the published information was misleading and even erroneous. Michael Jennings has made a commendably brave attempt to plug this gap by a privately published check list of the birds of Saudi Arabia.

The check list is supported by notes on sources (which bring out clearly the importance of and Meinertzhagen's reliance on G L Bate's work : Birds of Arabia); a suggested division of the country into seven ornithological regions; a lengthy and comprehensive bibliography; a gazeteer and 117 maps of 'suggested' breeding ranges. The list itself contains some 413 species that have been reported in Saudi Arabia and includes a brief status description with brief comments qualifying or elucidating the status and occurrences.

One problem relative to the compilation of a list of this nature concerns the substantiation of many of the records which may or may not have been published in the literature. Jennings has cautiously and courageously rejected 42 such species where he regards the evidence for acceptance as unsatisfactory, these are listed in the main list and detailed, with appropriate comments, in an appendix.

Not all ornithologists will agree with the suggested distribution maps, many of which will have to be redrawn when knowledge of the area improves, and no doubt many of the 'rejected' species will also eventually find an honourable place in the list but, despite these qualifications, Jennings is to be congratulated on this first attempt to bring order out of chaos.

Don Parr

KIZIROGLU, I (1981) Biologische, ökologische und ethologische Untersuchungen an vier Meisenarten (Parus spp.) im Beynamer Wald bei Ankara 1978 bis 1980. 1. Qualitative und quantitative Analyse der Vogelfauna des Untersuchungsgebiets. Anz. Schadlings-kunde, Pflanzenschutz, Umweltschutz 54:56-57.

In this paper (the first of a series) the author studies the composition of the bird population of Beynan Forest. The number of birds per hectare is listed for

each species, providing perhaps the first quantitative information about the density of breeding birds in Turkey.

M Kasperek

REQUESTS

White-cheeked Tern - *Sterna repressa*

A colour ringing and colour-dyeing programme is being carried out this year on the breeding White-cheeked Terns of the State of Bahrain.

Colour Ringing

Up to 500 birds will be colour ringed with a yellow celluloid ring on the right leg and a numbered BPO monel ring on the left leg. The yellow colour ring tends to fade to white with age.

The majority of these birds will be hatched this summer but a few adult birds will also be colour-ringed.

Colour-Dyeing

Adult and newly fledged birds will be colour dyed this summer in an attempt to discover movements within Bahrain and also migrational routes and wintering grounds. All colour-dyed birds will also be ringed.

I will be very grateful for records of sightings of any colour-ringed or colour dyed White-cheeked Terns.

All replies will be acknowledge.

T J Hallam
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Sudan

Would anyone who has notes on the birds of Sudan or who is aware of any literature published since 'The Birds of Sudan' by Cave and MacDonald, please write to Dave North, 161 Pickersleigh Road, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 2LH, England.

ANNOUNCEMENTRaptor Migration at Suez

Bertel Bruun hopes to organise a migration watch in Spring 1982 at Suez to record the northward passage of birds of prey bound for their breeding grounds in Europe and Asia. Very few observations have been made at Suez in recent years and non have covered more than a few days. To attempt to catalogue the whole Spring passage would be an exciting and extremely useful project.

Anyone who is interested in assisting with this survey should write to:
Dr Bertel Bruun, 52 East 73rd Street, New York, NY 10021 USA.

ERRATUM

On page 11 of OSME Bulletin 6 the following reference was not printed correctly.

PETRETTI, A and F PETRETTI (1980) Observations ornithologiques dans le milieu desertiques et semidesertiques de la Turquie centrale et sud-orientale. Le Gerfaut 70:273-278.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank Rob Hume for his drawing of a Little Forktail
Enicurus scouleri.