SANDGROUSE

Volume 18 (2) *1996*

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

OSME

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

OSME

OSME was founded in 1978 as the successor to the Ornithological Society of Turkey. Its primary aims are:

- To collect, collate, and publish data on all aspects of the birds of the Middle East.
- To promote an interest in ornithology and bird conservation throughout the Middle East.
- To develop productive working relationships with other governmental and non-governmental organisations with an interest in conservation and/or natural history in the region.

Membership

OSME is open to all, and its membership spans over 40 countries.

Annual membership

Individual £10
(£13 air mail outside Europe)

Family £15
(£18 air mail) for two, plus £3 for each additional family member.

Life Membership

Individual £200
(£100 if 60 or over)

Family £275
for 2 members.

Please add £3 if payment is made in non-sterling currency. For details of payment by banker's order, and for any other information on the Society, write to the Secretary at the address below.

Publications

OSME publishes a scientific journal, *Sandgrouse*, containing papers, news and features on all aspects of Middle Eastern ornithology. Published twice yearly, it is issued free to members. Further copies are available for sale from OSME.

Meetings

An Annual General Meeting is held in London at which guest speakers provide new perspectives on ornithology in the region. There are also occasional special meetings, some taking place outside the UK.

Projects

OSME organises field expeditions to collect data on birds in little-known parts of the region and in areas where OSME can assist by teaming up with local groups.

The Conservation & Research Committee grants funds to valuable field projects and desk studies which further knowledge and conservation of birds in the region. Grants have been awarded to over 30 projects since the Conservation & Research Fund was set up in 1982.

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SANDGROUSE
Volume 18 (2)

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2 OSME NEWS

5 NEWS AND INFORMATION

9 REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

FEATURES

10 Middle East Birding and Conservation Organisations R. F. PORTER AND F. E. WARR

14 Observations on breeding Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* in the Republic of Yemen DR M. M. AL-SAFADI

19 The birds of Barr Al Hikman, Sultanate of Oman J. ERIKSEN

30 PROFILE
Nergis Yazgan J. FENTON

33 PHOTOSPOT
Sinai Rosefinch I. J. ANDREWS

PAPERS AND NOTES

36 Preliminary data on raptor passage in Jordan I. J. ANDREWS

46 A baseline survey of White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* in central Turkey S. J. PARR, P. COLLIN, S. SILK, J. WILBRAHAM, N. P. WILLIAMS AND M. YARAR

52 Observations on the avifauna of the Azraq wetland, Jordan, June 1995 F. KHOURY

58 A short breeding bird survey of Kulu Gölü, Central Anatolia, Turkey in May 1995 S. KIRAÇ AND C KIRAÇ

61 Did Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos* formerly breed in Jordan? M. I. EVANS AND S. AL-MASHAQBAH

62 Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* breeding in north-west Syria G. R. MANNERS AND J. DIEKMANN

63 The first Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* in Egypt and the Western Palearctic A. ROSIER

64 The first Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* in Jordan M. I. EVANS

65 Winter status and distribution of Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* in Turkey R. & S. UHLIG, G. M. KIRWAN AND Y. SANCAR BARIŞ

66 Records of Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* in north-eastern Turkey V. DIERSCHKE, F. STÜHMER AND T. STÜHMER

67 Additional information on breeding biology of Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* P. CASTELL

68 Description of the nestlings of Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* P. CASTELL

68 Additional information on Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea* breeding biology in south-east Turkey P. CASTELL

69 The first Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* in Jordan B. C. MINSHULL

70 A new specimen record of Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* from Turkey G. M. KIRWAN

71 Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* breeding behaviour in Turkey P. CASTELL

72 REVIEWS & RECENT LITERATURE

76 AROUND THE REGION
P. DAVIDSON AND G. M. KIRWAN

COVER PHOTOGRAPH:
Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, male in Oman taken by Conrad Greaves

OSME is grateful for sponsorship from Bird Images Video Guides towards the cost of printing the colour photograph on the cover of this issue.

OSME News

CHANGES TO OSME COUNCIL

At this year's AGM the following Council members retired after 5 years service:

Stan Howe - having recently returned from the region Stan brought a valuable expatriate perspective to Council; he was also a source of current information through his links with many of OSME's members still in the Middle East. His experience proved especially useful in developing ideas of how OSME can best make use of its members resident in the region and identified the need for a person to coordinate OSME's contact with key members - a role which still needs to be filled.

Guy Kirwan - Guy has not so much left Council as moved to 'better things'! After two years as Turkey Information Officer, providing information on birding sites and work that could be done by visiting birders, he has assumed the role of *Sandgrouse* Editor allowing him to combine his writing and editorial skills with his regular contact with birders active in the region. The new-look *Sandgrouse* is fitting indication of Guy's ability to fill the new role and take OSME forward.

Two new members of Council were elected - **Andrew Grieve** and **Derek Harvey** - both have been assisting OSME in co-opted roles since autumn 1995. Andrew has assumed the Publicity Officer role and has done a splendid job selling advertising space in *Sandgrouse* - this income contributes considerably towards the journal's production costs. Derek has joined the *Sandgrouse* editorial team as Features Editor, obtaining and editing material which would formerly have gone in the OSME Bulletin.

CHANGE TO THE CONSTITUTION

The following change was made to Clause 6 of the Constitution: 'The Council shall not have less than six members. Members of Council can serve for up to five consecutive years. From among the members of Council the executive officers - Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer - shall be elected for periods not exceeding five years from the date of their election as executive officers. Additional executive officers can be elected as necessary. No member of the Council can be re-elected without a clear interval of one year, unless it be to become an executive officer.'

The change this effects is the removal of the Editor of *Sandgrouse* as an elected member of Council. This is necessary as Council now wishes to pay the Editor an honorarium in recognition of the amount of work taken in producing *Sandgrouse*, and under the current Constitution members of Council cannot be paid (clause 12). This is an administrative change to assist in the more efficient running of OSME.

SUBSCRIPTION RATE CHANGES

Due to increases in the running costs of the Society, subscription rates are being raised as of 1 January 1997. The new rates will be: Individual £12; Family £15; Institution £25; Life Member £225 and Family Life Member £300.

Council is also introducing a new category, Supporting Member £24. This will allow members to cover the cost of a year's subscription of a Middle Eastern national who would benefit from receiving OSME's publications but either cannot afford to pay the full rate or finds it impossible to pay because of currency exchange difficulties. This is a very simple but effective way of encouraging an interest in the study and conservation of birds in the region where the Society's presence is still comparatively small. All members are urged to consider upgrading to become Supporting Members.

SANDGROUSE SPECIAL OFFERS

Are you missing some of the early issues of *Sandgrouse* or have a special interest in Turkey or Yemen? Then this is your chance to fill those gaps and save money.

***Sandgrouse* 1-5** - there is now a small supply of these issues available for sale at just £3 each (£3.70 inc p&p or £5 airmail) but stocks are very low so it's strictly first come, first served.

Turkey Bird Reports 1976-1991 (*Sandgrouse* 8, 11 and 16[2]) - these three issues are available as a bundle at the reduced price of just £10, a saving of £3 (£11.20 inc p&p or £13.50 airmail). So if you're planning a visit to Turkey or just want to put your previous observations into perspective, don't miss this offer.

OSME in Yemen (*Sandgrouse* 9 and 17) - these two issues present the results of OSME's expeditions to northern Yemen in 1985 and southern Yemen and Socotra in 1993. Together they form the definitive work on the country's avifauna and alongside *Important bird areas in the Middle East* (also available from OSME price £22.50 inc p&p or £28.50 airmail) will be the main works of reference for birders and bird conservation in Yemen for many years to come. The two are currently available together at the discounted price of £12 (£14.50 inc p&p or £18.50 airmail).

SITUATIONS VACANT

With the continuing development of OSME, new opportunities for members to become more involved with the running of the Society are arising all the time. The following three posts have been identified by Council as priorities and OSME is seeking keen, committed members to fill them.

Sales Development Officer - OSME sales consist primarily of journals and reports plus a small range of membership items. Council seeks to develop a wider range of items to benefit members, promote the Society and generate income - the new T-shirt and baseball cap are examples. Council is not short of ideas to get you started but we are seeking someone with flair and initiative to develop our sales.

Events Officer - one of the key areas where Council wishes to expand OSME's activities is that of events and meetings both in the UK and overseas, to give members more opportunity to meet and to raise OSME's profile. Working closely with other Council members, the Events Officer will develop and organise OSME events; identify events at which OSME should be present; and liaise with overseas organisations, in Europe and the region, to identify opportunities for joint meetings. If you have sound organisational skills and are a good correspondent, you could enjoy this challenge.

Network Coordinator - OSME is keen to develop better contacts with those resident outside the UK and establish a network of corresponding members to keep OSME better informed of activities 'on the ground' and assist in the promotion of the Society. The Network Coordinator will establish regular contact with key OSME members, bird and natural history clubs, and set up a system for the regular exchange of information and literature. This post could suit someone who has lived in the region. You must be a good correspondent, ideally with access to computer and fax facilities.

All these posts run for five years; the ability to attend Council meetings regularly is desirable. Council currently meets four times per year at BirdLife International in Cambridge. Meetings are on Saturdays with the morning devoted to OSME business and afternoons taking the form of workshops on specific topics. OSME relies on the commitment and involvement of its members to function. If any of these posts appeal to you or you have another special skill to bring to OSME, then contact the Chairman, Geoff Welch (tel: 01728 648298; fax: 01728 648529 or write c/o OSME).

OSME ON THE INTERNET

The official OSME World Wide Web site was launched on 1 July and has already attracted considerable interest and at least 2 new members! Check the OSME site at: **http://www.netlink.co.uk/users/ag/osme/osmehome.html**, for *Sandgrouse* articles and latest news from the region.

OSME SUMMER MEETING 1996

OSME's second summer meeting to be held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, again coincided with one of the hottest days of the summer. An enthusiastic audience enjoyed the cool shade of the lecture theatre whilst being entertained by three highly engaging talks, preceded by Richard Porter's resumé of conservation news. The first, by Peter Symens provided a

fascinating insight into the pioneering research of the NCWCD in Saudi Arabia, hitherto little known to most OSME members. The eighteenth OSME AGM was followed by lunch, liberally spiced with Middle Eastern flavours. Next, Dr. Omar al-Saghier highlighted bird conservation issues in Yemen in his own endearing and inimitable style, before Ian Andrews spotlighted some of Jordan's birding treasures, complete with mouthwatering photographs - what further encouragement could members want to go and discover more? The meeting closed at 4pm, when a sizeable contingent discussed intriuging ideas and plans generated at the meeting, in the local hostelry. Next year's Summer Meeting will be on 12 July at SOAS.

Pete Davidson

OBITUARIES

Charles Bennett OBE MC

Cyprus Ornithological Society (1957) Secretary 1977-84 and 1986-92, editor of 19 Bird Reports and many newsletters between 1973-91, Charles Bennett died in Nicosia on 2nd February 1996. Widely respected, he brought long term stability and integrity to the Byzantine world of Cyprus ornithology. His extensive co-operation and assistance was invaluable to Peter Stewart and myself. An ex-prisoner of war, former merchant banker and deeply involved in charity work, Charles was an old-fashioned gentleman of great modesty and dry humour with a strong belief in doing the right thing. He will be greatly missed by his many friends.

Peter Flint

Sir William Wilkinson 1932-1996

William Wilkinson was the father of OSME. Not only was he its first chairman, but he was also one of the founders of the Ornithological Society of Turkey (OST), OSME's predecessor.

William's first involvement in the Middle East was in Turkey, where he was posted in 1961 to head the operations of Borax Consolidated. He spent his spare time engrossed in archaeology or watching birds. Geese had a particular fascination and he made regular winter counts, especially around Tuz Gölü. In 1967 a conference on wetland conservation was organised in Ankara by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the International Council for Bird Preservation and the International Wildfowl Research Bureau. At this William presented two papers covering wetland conservation issues in Turkey and from this stemmed his commitment to wildlife conservation. The first evidence of this was the formation of the OST, which was born of the Ankara conference.

On his return to England in 1970, he moved into the field of international banking and finance, becoming the finance director of Lonrho and later a director of Kleinwort Benson. He enjoyed his life in the City and was highly respected, but was becoming increasingly involved with voluntary conservation. He was elected onto the Council of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and became its Treasurer in 1971, a position he held for ten years (in two spells) until 1983, when he was head-hunted for the position of Chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council, probably the most important and demanding job in British conservation.

Meanwhile, his involvement with the OST continued and in 1977, ten years after its formation, it became OSME. The need for a Turkish society with a heavy foreign influence was no longer considered appropriate now that the Istanbul based DHKD was flourishing. William chaired OSME through its fledgling years and later became a vice-president.

Ornithologists will see his chairmanship of the Board of West Palearctic Birds Ltd. as one of his most important roles. He steered the financing of the project to produce the definitive 9-volume study and played a major part in seeing the ambitious but often troubled programme through to conclusion.

William was great company and a generous host as many a council meeting at his home bore witness. When blindness struck him a cruel blow it never affected his enthusiasm or spirit, though being a keen birdwatcher and botanist, close friends knew how much he pined for the wildlife sights that had been a source of inspiration to him from childhood. His knowledge matched that of most profes-

sionals over whom he presided but what set him apart was his understanding of how to get things done, his fairness and skills as an orator. He will be remembered as one of the great conservation statesmen of the 20th Century.

Richard Porter

Hans Kumerlove 1903-1995

Hans Kumerloeve's 318 page treatise Zur Kenntnis der Avifauna Kleinasiens published in a single volume of *Bonner Zoologische Beiträge* in 1961 remains the only Turkish avifauna, despite much attention by birdwatchers in the last three decades. Based on museum and field studies, this work is remarkably comprehensive and a tribute to the author's renowned thoroughness.

I never met him, but we corresponded regularly in the late 1960s and 1970s when every few months a reprint of one of his numerous papers on Turkish birds would land on my desk. He was a prolific author and the recently published *Songbirds of Turkey* by Cees Roselaar contained over 50 references to his papers. These spanned the 32 years from 1957 to 1989, although most of his writings date from the late 50s to mid-70s.

The esteem with which he was held as an ornithologist is reflected in Volume 3 of *Bonner Zoologische Beiträge* in 1973. This issue commemorated his 70th birthday and rightly acknowledged him as the expert on the birds of Turkey.

Richard Porter

NEWS & INFORMATION

compiled by Simon Albrecht

The aim of this section is to inform readers about events in the OSME region. It relies on members and others supplying relevant news and information. If you have anything concerning birds, conservation or development issues in the OSME area please send it to News and Information, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U.K.

This section is not intended as a definitive report or write up of the projects concerned. Many of the projects are sponsored; such support is appreciated but is not generally given acknowledgement here.

CYPRUS

Ecognosia Ltd is an environmental research and information centre in Cyprus which aims to fill a gap in the field of environmental studies and dissemination of information in Cyprus. It seeks to establish a better relationship between people and the environment. Its services are free to interested people. Ecognosia would welcome being sent relevant journals/reports. Ecognosia, PO Box 7510, 2430 Nicosia, Cyprus. Tel: 357-2-355560. Fax: 357-2-355822. (Source: *Urban Wildlife News* 13 (3).)

RAFOS Akamas Peninsula report - The full report of the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society expedition to the Akamas Peninsula that we reported in *Sandgrouse* 18 (1) is now available from Mr V. Cozens, 9 Dendys, Hemingford Grey, Cambs PE18 9EU, U.K. The price is £5.00. Cheques payable to: Akamas '95. Profits are going to The Cyprus Conservation Foundation. The report is also available from OSME Sales @ £5.75 including postage. A follow-up expedition is planned from 26 March to 7 May 1997. Further information on RAFOS can be obtained from Chf Tech John N. Wells, RAFOS, Chinook EDIT, RAF Odiham, Hook, Hampshire RG29 1QT, U.K.

IRAN

Siberian Cranes released Two male Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus*, captive bred by the International Crane Foundation in the USA, were released last winter to join up to 11 wild birds in the Caspian Lowlands. It is hoped that they will be tracked to their breeding grounds. (Source: *ICF Bugle* Feb 96 via *Oryx* 30 (3).)

JORDAN *(Contributed by Mike Evans)*

Management Plan for Mujib Nature Reserve Baseline surveys of the flora, fauna and socio-economic situation are now in progress to help prepare a five-year management plan for this Important Bird Area (IBA) by the end of 1996. The bird survey work (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1)) has produced some exciting discoveries including about 30 breeding pairs of the globally threatened Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* as well as a strong migration of Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* along the Dead Sea coast in March. A pair of displaying Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* and a pair of displaying Bonelli's Eagles *Hieraeetus fasciatus* indicate breeding. (Source: Mike Evans and *Network News* 4 (2).)

Egyptian Vulture
Neophron percnopterus

Syrian Serin research in Dana Reserve In *Bull.* 35 we reported that the largest world population of the Near East endemic Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* was breeding in the Dana Nature Reserve IBA (at least 800 pairs). Since November 1995, a Jordanian researcher has been carrying out a two-year field research project on the species in Dana. It is expected to yield valuable information in managing the reserve for this species.

Original Dead Sea Sparrow site re-discovered Ghor Safi, at the south end of the Dead Sea, was one of the sites where Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus* was discovered in the last century. The site was only revisited in March 1996 when a small breeding colony was found. The site is threatened by planned expansion of saltpans for the local potash works.

Badia bird survey The spring survey by Durham University, U.K. which included the Burqu' Nature Reserve IBA (*Bull.* 35) located several Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* nest sites. The survey was part of the Badia Research and Development Programme to improve the knowledge of the status of national biodiversity.

National Biodiversity Study UNDP/UNEP have provided the Department of the Environment and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) with $300,000 to prepare a National Biodiversity Study. This is required as part of Jordan's obligations to the Biodiversity Convention (ratified in 1994). Local experts will prepare the study, which will include a section on bird biodiversity, and conservation and research needs for the future.

Developments under the new Environment Law A new agency, the Environmental Protection Corporation (EPC), has been formed as coordinator and highest authority under the recently ratified Environment Law. The RSCN will advise the EPC on all nature conservation issues and, as required by the law, will draft a bye-law listing all species of flora and fauna needing special protection measures. The list includes about 70 bird species, based mainly on the priority-species lists developed during the Middle East IBA project. When completed the list will be presented to Parliament for approval.

International cooperation on birding centre RSCN is studying proposals to set up a centre for bird migration research and birding tourism in Wadi Araba in cooperation with neighbouring countries.

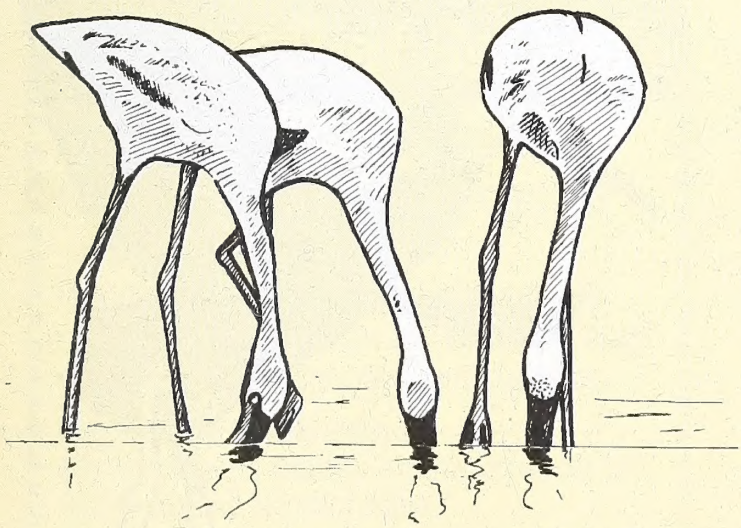
New bird book in Arabic Several Arabic books on birds of Jordan have appeared in recent years. The latest, *The birds of Jordan: status and distribution* by A. Sutari, is the most detailed and comprehensive so far. It has just been published with help from RSCN and UNDP.

The 183 pages describe and illustrate in colour all species known from Jordan. Much original, unpublished field-data are incorporated. To obtain a copy write to: A. Budieri, RSCN, P.O. Box 6354, Amman 11183, Jordan. Price is unknown.

Nubian Ibex in Dana Nature Reserve Last autumn (*Bull.* 35) we reported on the bird importance of this reserve in south-west Jordan. The rare Nubian Ibex *Capra nubiana* also occurs in the area but at very low levels – just two sightings between November 1994 and June 1995. Urgent conservation efforts are needed, including habitat improvements and the reduction of livestock grazing which has led to soil erosion and desertification. (Source: Catullo, G. *et al.* 1996. Nubian ibex in Southwest Jordan (Dana Nature Reserve). *Oryx* 30 (3) 222-224)

OMAN

ABBA Survey No. 18 to Dhofar Province, Oman in October/November 1995 has recently been published. Birds of interest include up to 270 Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor* at Khor Mughsail in early November and Hume's Tawny Owl *Strix butleri* calling at Jebel Qamar on 6 November. Further details from: Michael Jennings, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambs, PE17 3HW, U.K.



Lesser Flamingo
Phoenicopterus minor by S. M. Andrews

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Mangroves and Kingfishers The coastal mangroves in Sharjah hold a rare endemic subspecies of the White-collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris*. BirdLife International has written to the ruler of Sharjah expressing its concern over the recreational pressure at Khor Kalba which poses a threat to the kingfisher. (Source: *Network News* 4 (2).)

Survey of Arabian Leopard A 'Leopard Group of Arabia' based at the National Heritage Centre at Sharjah in the UAE has been founded to save the 100-200 Arabian Leopards *Panthera pardus nimr*. Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen and the UAE are involved. Each country will prepare action plans for leopard conservation including reviewing wildlife legislation, conducting surveys, proposing protected areas, increasing natural prey, reducing livestock and feral animals and promoting public awareness. (Source: *Cat News*, Autumn 1995 via *Oryx* 30 (2).)

YEMEN

Yemen Ornithological Society - new newsletter The YOS has expanded its newsletter which is now called *The Lammergeier*. Four issues have been produced with the fifth due in September. The newsletter includes noteworthy sightings, information on YOS activities, bird identification and gardening for birds. For further details contact Mr David Stanton, Secretary YOS, PO Box 2002 Sana'a, Republic of Yemen. Tel: 248 309. Fax: 234 438. E-mail: david.s@netqsi.com

Aden Wetlands This Important Bird Area (IBA) was visited by Dr Omar Al-Saghier and Richard Porter over eight days between 23 March and 3 April. About 80 species were seen including two birds new for Arabia. These were Black Egret *Egretta ardesaica* and African Spoonbill *Platalea alba*.

The wetlands have five main areas: 50 ha of marsh supporting over 10 000 waterfowl (including over 5000 Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*, which have built nests); sewage treatment works which provide freshwater run-off for the maintenance of the marshes; four large lagoons by the Aden Causeway which provide a disturbance-free feeding area for flamingoes and waders; inter-tidal mudflats (a rare habitat in Arabia) which provides important feeding for waders; Abyan beach which is used for roosting birds.

Unfortunately the marsh is threatened by a proposed port pavement extension to the port of Aden. No final decisions have been made at the time of writing. The various authorities have been made aware of the international importance of the area, it is hoped that any decisions will be consistent with the conservation of the wetlands. (*Contributed by Dr Omar Al-Saghier & Richard Porter*)

Socotra Dr Omar Al-Saghier supported by Richard Porter gave an important presentation at a conference in Aden to promote the conservation of the island of Socotra. The island has a unique and remarkable flora and fauna including six endemic bird species and at least 12 endemic sub-species. It is hoped that future developments on the island will protect the ecological requirements of the flora and fauna. (Source: *Network News* 4 (2).)

Book on Yemen birds The book (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1)) has now been distributed to Yemen schools together with a very attractive poster. A number of excess copies of book and poster were on sale at the OSME AGM. Anyone interested in copies should contact Richard Porter via OSME.

BALD IBIS

38 killed by mystery poison in Morocco 38 Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* were found dead at the Souss-Massa National Park in Morocco in mid-May, this included 11 at a tidal drinking pool. Some birds had vomited and others had haemorrhaged suggesting that the culprit is a toxin rather than an infectious micro-organism. Tests have found no pathogenic bacteria or viruses. Results of toxin tests are unknown at the time of writing. (Source: *New Scientist* 13 July 1996).

Bald Ibis
Geronticus eremita
by *S. M. Andrews*

Thinking of joining OSME?

Join before 31 December and you can enjoy your 1997 membership at the 1996 price - only £10!

OSME

- promotes the study and conservation of birds throughout the Middle East
- encourages the standardised recording of bird observations
- brings together knowledge of the region's birdlife
- maintains a conservation and research fund to support small-scale projects by members
- publishes *Sandgrouse* twice a year, sent to all members

This offer applies to new members only. Single membership from 1997 is £12.

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Simon Albrecht

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Raptor capture and ringing volunteers

The International Birding Center in Eilat, Israel is conducting a migrating raptor ringing project at Eilat from mid-February to mid-May 1997. The study aims to understand the status and physical condition of raptors migrating through the area. All potential volunteers are asked to apply as soon as possible. Volunteers are required to help build traps and assist in capturing raptors. Previous experience is preferred. Accomodation and basic subsistence are provided. **Details can be obtained from Dr Reuven Yosef, I.B.C.E., P.O. Box 774, Eilat, Israel (fax +972 7 6367002, tel. +972 7 6374276, e-mail shanik@BGUMAIL.BGU.AC.IL).**

Important Bird Areas in Greece

The Hellenic Ornithological Society is currently revising the Greek Important Bird Areas (IBA) list. All visiting birders are invited to submit their information on known or potential IBAs; data on wintering and migrant birds in wetlands, and all breeding observations are particularly valuable. Birdwatchers planning to visit Greece are welcome to contact Hellenic Ornithological Society in advance of their trip for advice on how they can most usefully assist the project. All contributions will be fully acknowledged. **For further information contact: Hellenic Ornithological Society, Em. Benaki 53, GR-106 81, Athens, Greece. Tel./Fax. +30 1 3811271.**

Desert habitats in Abu Dhabi

Ron Loughland is gathering information for a database on the past and present state of natural desert habitats in Abu Dhabi. The database will enable a rapid assessment of such habitat and assist with the future conservation and rehabilitation of these areas. All sources of information, e.g. video footage, maps, photographs, personal comments etc. are of interest. **If you can help please contact Ron Loughland, National Avian Research Centre, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Tel. +971 3 747555. Fax. +971 3 747607.**

Middle East Birding and Conservation Organisations

Compiled by Richard Porter & Effie Warr

There is now a wealth of ornithological activity in the Middle East, most of it organised on a national or local basis. This feature is designed to serve as an introduction for OSME members to the Middle Eastern birding and wildlife conservation community. Organisations and journals are presented in alphabetical order on a country-by-country basis. Hopefully by publicising the existence and publications of the relevant natural history societies it should allow anyone resident or planning to visit a given country to tap into the local birding community. Where possible the address and phone number of the local bird recorder is given. OSME members are encouraged to submit their bird records wherever possible to these individuals. Updates or corrections to this list are welcome and should be sent to Derek Harvey, c/o OSME, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL, U.K. Note: telephone and fax numbers are given in international format. The number represented by + is the international prefix (consult directory).

BAHRAIN

BAHRAIN BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
Recorder: Howard King.
Tel: +973 742739.

BAHRAIN NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
P.O.Box 1858, Bahrain.
Publication: Newsletter (monthly) & Report (*Wildlife in Bahrain*) (annual to irregular).
Meetings: Monthly.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR WILDLIFE PROTECTION
P.O. Box 28690, Bahrain.
Secretary General: Dr Saeed Mohamed.

CYPRUS

BIRDLINE CYPRUS
Run by Major J.J. Gordon, c/o Cyprus Ornithological Society (1957).
Tel: +357 6 652203 (24 hours).

CYPRUS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (1970)
4 Kanaris Street, Strovolos 154, Cyprus.
Publication: Bird Report (annual).

CYPRUS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (1957)
Hon Secretary: Jean Sadler, Yiangou Souroulla 6, 6037 Larnaka, Cyprus.
Tel: +357 4 651002. Fax: +357 4 651002.
Publication: Newsletter (monthly) & Report (annual).
Recorder: A. E. Sadler (address as secretary).
Meetings: monthly field meetings.
Information centre: at the Apollo Hotel, Paphos.

DJIBOUTI

REVUE DE L'ISERST (a journal)
Mr Nader Abdoulkarim, Centre de Documentation d'Information, BP 486 Djibouti, Djibouti.

EGYPT

EGYPTIAN BIRD REPORT
c/o Sherif Baha El Din, 4 Ismail El Mazni St., Apt.8, Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt.
Fax: +20 2 3457234.

EGYPTIAN WILDLIFE SERVICE
Giza Zoo, Cairo, Egypt

IRAN

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT
P.O. Box 15875-5181, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.

IRAQ

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF BASRAH
P.O. Box 432, Basrah, Iraq.

ISRAEL

BETH GORDON
A.D. Gordon Agriculture and Nature Study Institute, Deganya A 15-120, Israel.

ERETZ (Magazine) ISSN 0793-1514
P.O. Box 565, 53104 Givatayim, Israel.
Subscription: per year: NIS 160 or US$ 45.
Tel: +972 3 571 2681. Fax: +972 3 571 4184.
Published: in association with SPNI.

INTERNATIONAL BIRDWATCHING CENTRE, EILAT
P.O. Box 774, Eilat 88106, Israel
Publications: Irregular.

ISRAEL BIRD RINGIN
155 Herzl Street, Tel A
Publication: *Torgos* (w
sations).

ISRAEL JOURNAL OF
c/o Laser Pages Publi
Box 50257, Jerusalem
Tel: +972 2 370 625.
Published: Four issue
Subscription: $190 in
(institutions) or $95 by
Mastercard or Euroch

ISRAEL ORNITHOLO
155 Herzl Street, Tel A
Publication: *Torgos* (
sations) twice a year.
Tel: +972 3 6826802.

ISRAEL RAPTOR INF
Har Gilo, D.N. Zfon Y
Publication: *Torgos* (
sations) twice a year.

MINISTRY OF THE E
P.O. Box 34033, Jerusa

RARITIES AND DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE FOR ISRAELI BIRDS
c/o Hadoram Shirihai, P.O. Box 4168, Eilat 88102, Israel.

SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURE IN ISRAEL (SPNI)
3 Hashfela Street, 66183 Tel Aviv, Israel.
Tel: +972 3 375063. Fax: +972 3 377695.
Publication: Has a section in *Eretz* and (with other organisations) *Torgos*.

JORDAN

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE IN JORDAN (RSCN)
P.O.Box 6354, Amman 11183, Jordan.
Tel: + 962 6 811689. Fax: + 962 6 847411.
Publication: *El Reem* (quarterly magazine).

BIRD RECORDER (temporary)
Ian J. Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh, Lothian EH21 6UW, U.K.
Tel: +44 131 665 0236.

KUWAIT

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COUNCIL OF KUWAIT
General Secretary, P.O.Box 24395, Safat, Kuwait.

Sandgrouse 18 (2)

KING KHALID WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTRE, THUMAMAH
c/o NCWCD, P.O. Box 61681, 11575 Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (see below).

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NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT
P.O. Box 61681, 11575 Riyadh, Kingdom o
Saudi Arabia.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE RESEARC
P.O.Box 1086, Taif, Kingdom o

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c/o Andrew Thompson
Commercial Bank, P.
11673, Kingdom of
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BULLETIN OF THE AFRICAN BIRD CLUB
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African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, U.K.
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Sultanate of Oman.
Publication: *Oman Bird News* (twice a year).
Tel: +968 605400. Fax: +968 602735.

OMAN BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
P.O. Box 246, Muscat 113, Sultanate of Oman.
Recorder: Jens Eriksen.

OMAN NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
P.O. Box 668, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: +968 605400. Fax: +968 602735.

PALESTINE

CHILDREN FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURE (West Bank and Gaza)
P.O. Box 14076, Jerusalem 91140, Via Israel.

QATAR

QATAR NATURAL HISTORY GROUP
c/o R. Nation, ICS Department, QGPC, P.O. Box 3212, Doha, Qatar.

SAUDI ARABIA

FAUNA OF SAUDI ARABIA (Journal)
Subscription: Kager Libri AG, P.O.Box, CH-4009 Basel, Switzerland.
Price: Vol.14 was 159 Swiss Francs.

Middle East Birding and Conservation Organisations

Compiled by Richard Porter & Effie Warr

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Publication: *Journal of the Saudi Arabian Natural History Society.*

THE TRAVELLING NATURALISTS OF AL-KHOBAR
Secretary: (Carlos Maeztu), ARAMCO Box 5971, Dhahran 31311, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
Publication: Newsletter (monthly).

WILDLIFE SANCTUARY FOR THE GULF REGION
P.O. Box 11071, Jubail 31961, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

TURKEY

DOGAL HAYATI KORUMA DERNEGI (DHKD, the Society for the Protection of Nature)
P.K.18, Bebek 80810, Istanbul, Turkey.
Tel: +90 212 279 01 39/40. Fax: +90 212 279 55 44.
Publication: *Kelaynaktan Haberler* (a newsletter, six per year).

TURKISH JOURNAL OF ZOOLOGY
ISSN 1300-0179
Published: (for Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknik Arastirma Kurumu) by the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey, Ankara, Turkey.
Tel: +90 312 468 5300. Fax: +90 312 427 1336.
Editorial: Quarterly journal published in ıd English (with abstracts in the CYPRUSanguage).
4 Kan**cription:** Tübitak, P.O.Box 5, Kizilay **Pub**20, Ankara, Turkey.
Price: $100 per year.
Contains some bird material.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP
P.O.Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
Publication: *Gazelle* (newsletter).
Meetings: Monthly. Also field trips. Annual photographic competition.

EMIRATES BIRD GROUP & EMIRATES BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
Bird recorder: Colin Richardson, P.O. Box 50394, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
Tel: +971 4 313378. Fax: +971 4 31378.
Publication: *Emirates Bird Report* (annual).

EMIRATES NATURAL HISTORY GROUP (ABU DHABI)
P.O. Box 791, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
Publications: *Tribulus* (twice a year) & Bulletin.

EMIRATES NATURAL HISTORY GROUP (AL AIN)
P.O. Box 18057, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
Publication: newsletter (monthly).

FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY
P.O. Box 5951, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

NATIONAL AVIAN RESEARCH CENTER
P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
Tel: +971 2 319317. Fax: +971 2 349154.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
(Near Al Dhaid, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates).
Tel: +971 6 311411

YEMEN

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COUNCIL
P.O. Box 19719, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen.

YEMEN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
c/o David Stanton (Secretary), P.O. Box 2002, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen. Fax: +967 1 234438.
Publication: Newsletter (monthly).
Meetings: Monthly.

GENERAL

ARAB GULF JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ISSN 1015-4442.
Published: since 1983 by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
Bird content minimal.

ARABIAN WILDLIFE (MAGAZINE)
(twice yearly)
Subscriptions: Planet Publishing Ltd., 20 Berkeley Street, London W1X 5AE, UK.
Tel: +44 171 491 1799. Fax: +44 171 493 5524.
Price: £2.50 per issue.
Published in conjunction with the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD) - see Saudi Arabia.

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA (ABBA)
M.C. Jennings, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire, PE17 3HW, U.K.
Tel: +44 1487 841733. Fax: +44 1487 841733.
Publication: *The Phoenix* (annual)
ISSN 0268-487X.

BULLETIN OF THE AFRICAN BIRD CLUB
(twice yearly) ISSN 1352-481X
African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, U.K.
Membership: Individual £12.
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Established in 1994, the Bulletin of the African Bird Club is a forum for news, views and studies of African birds. Of particular interest to OSME members will be the regular recent bird reports from Egypt.

ZOOLOGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST
(Annual or twice yearly journal) ISSN 0939-7140
Max Kasparek Verlag, Bleichstr.1, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany.
Tel: +49 6221 475069 Fax: +49 6221 471858.
Subscription: DM27 (c£11) per volume.
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Observations on breeding Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* in the Republic of Yemen

DR M. M. AL-SAFADI

Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* is a common breeding resident in south-west Arabia (with escapes recorded breeding in Riyadh and noted in Dubai, UAE, Jennings 1995), and north-east Africa in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1960, Archer & Godman 1961). It is widely distributed through most of Yemen's habitats, except those bordering the Rub Al-Khali desert, principally below 1500 metres and most commonly in the Tihama from Harad south to Bab Al-Mandab and east to Mukallah (see map 1). Flocks of up to 60 are frequently encountered in and around the cultivated areas of the Tihama.

FOOD

It feeds principally on grain and seeds, causing damage to cereal crops such as millet, sorghum, maize, wheat and sesame. The birds settle on the heads of millet and sorghum picking off the seeds, or perch on the ripe maize cobs, tearing off the husk from the top to feed on the kernels.

PREDATORS

By placing its nest at the end of thin branches, Rüppell's Weaver escapes most predators except man. Village boys certainly try to destroy the nests of this species. A snake *Psammophis schokari* observed climbing an acacia tree in pursuit of a chamelion *Chamaeleo calyptratus* made no attempt to investigate the weavers' nests. It is unknown if the species has any avian predators in Yemen.

BREEDING SEASON

The species' breeding season is largely influenced by the availability of food, which is associated with the onset of the rains. Rainfall in the highlands is usually from late February to mid-May and again between July and September, but has been recorded in all months. On the Tihama there is some rainfall from October to December.

Egg-laying in Yemen is mainly between March and August, although it can occur in any month when rain falls. Barnes (1893) reported eggs in February, April, June, July, October and December, whilst Meinertzhagen (1954) stated that eggs could be found during every month, but usually between mid-March and late May. Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) recorded breeding in several different areas in north-east Africa and southern Arabia from January to August, Archer & Godman (1961) mention breeding and egg-laying in April, May and November, and Gallagher & Woodcock (1980) confirm the occurrence of nests from March to September. Jennings (1995) notes eggs in almost every month of the year.

NEST BUILDING

The males commence nest building prior to pair formation, mainly during, but occasionally outside, the breeding season. Nests are placed on trees, each nest suspended from the end (or near the end) of a branch or twig. Nesting trees include the thorn *Ziziphus spina-christi*, the acacias *Acacia ehrenbergiana*, *A. tortillis* and *A. oerfota*, balanites *Balanites aegyptiaca*, tamarind *Tamarindus indica*, guava *Psidium guayava*, henna *Lawsonia inermis*, fig *Ficus sycomorus*, citrus, banana and palms.

The nest is placed 2-6 metres above the ground and constructed entirely of fresh green bent-grasses e.g. *Setaria verticillata*, *Poa annua* and *Eragrostis* sp. which are intricately woven. The use of dried plant material for nest building reported by Meinertzhagen (1954) was not observed in this study. The nest is penduline and retort-shaped with a side entrance which is sometimes elongated and tubular.

The nest is lined with cotton down, small feathers and soft leaves, principally at the base. It is 15 cm in length and 10 cm wide,

Plate 1. Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*, Yemen (*S. Kennedy*)

and constructed almost solely by the male. Occasionally the female shares nest building, but the male typically rebuilds her work.

To start the nest, the male brings a fresh green bent-grass stem (20-30 cm long) and fixes it firmly at or near the end of a twig by twisting it round. He repeats this with 8-10 stems to form an initial loop. The frame of the nest is a circle, c. 7 cm in diameter, consisting of 15 green grass stems. The bird pushes one end of each stem into the initial loop, twists it into a circle and then twists the other end back onto the initial loop.

At this stage the side where the circle is attached to the initial loop will be at the rear of the nest; the opposite side will act as the entrance. The circle is located about a third of the way up the nest, so the upper and lower parts are constructed by fixing new stems to the existing structure. This work continues for approximately three successive days. Sometimes the male will construct a new nest on the same site before completing the first one, and may construct up to four nests in a breeding season, although only one will be occupied. Barnes (1893) reported that females will occasionally use old nests but no evidence of this was found during this study.

Rüppell's Weavers typically nest colonially in large trees but will occasionally nest singly or with one other pair. The number of nests in a colony ranges from four to at least 50 depending on tree size. Weaver colonies in acacia trees are sometimes asociated with House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Arabian Golden Sparrow *P. euchlorus* nests.

COURTSHIP AND PAIR FORMATION

At the start of the breeding season, males select potential nest sites. Usually the males establish a songpost, fly off a few metres, bring back nest material and busy themselves weaving a nest. Occasionally violent disputes ensue when one male trespasses on another's territory. The males flutter their wings and strike with their bills, mainly at their rival's head, until the intruder leaves. In many cases the defending male will chase the interloper for a few metres before returning to his nest to call and sing. Males preen vigorously, call loudly, fly a few metres and return to their nest in order to attract the attention of females. Often, when a female perches near the nest site, the male will burst into full song, hopping and shivering his wings. The female soon solicits the male by fluttering her wings.

Table 1. Mean dimensions and weights of Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* eggs from the Yemen.

Colour.	Pink	White	Brown	Green
Sample size	5	10	10	50
Max. diameter(mm)	23.6 x 14.1	23.5 x 15.0	22.2 x 14.0	21.5 x 14.5
Min. diameter(mm)	22.5 x 13.8	22.2 x 14.1	21.5 x 13.5	19.3 x 13.5
Mean (mm)	23.0 x 14.0	22.6 x 14.4	21.6 x 13.8	20.6 x 13.9
Mean weight(g)	21.6	21.8	21.4	21.2

The dimensions of the green eggs in this study are almost identical to those recorded by Archer & Godman (1961) - max. 21.0 x 14.5, min.19.0 x 13.5, mean 20.0 x 13.8.

EGGS AND EGG-LAYING

Over 200 occupied Rüppell's Weavers' nests were examined in Yemen between January 1989 and June 1993. Egg-laying occurred in all months but mainly from February-August. The clutch is usually two, sometimes three and rarely one or four eggs. Barnes (1893), Archer & Godman (1961), and Gallagher & Woodcock (1980) report the usual clutch size as three and occasionally two to four eggs, whilst Meinertzhagen (1954) and Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) record the number of eggs as two to four. It is possible that rainfall during previous decades was higher than recently, creating sufficient food resources to permit larger clutches.

The egg is oval and varies in colour. Pinkish, white, green and blue eggs have been recorded (Meinertzhagen 1954, Archer & Godman 1960, Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1960, Gallagher & Woodcock 1980). In the present study brown eggs were found but none were blue.

INCUBATION

The female alone incubates the eggs, commencing after the first egg is laid. The male perches near the nest, calling loudly, hopping from branch to branch and guarding the nest from intruders. The male makes short feeding forays of 2-3 minutes. The female leaves the nest to feed 3-4 times daily, for 4-10 minutes on each occasion. The incubation period is 14-15 days. Immediately after hatching, the female removes the egg shells. In a small number of instances one of the eggs fails to hatch (about one in 40-50 nests). This is not removed and remains in the nest.

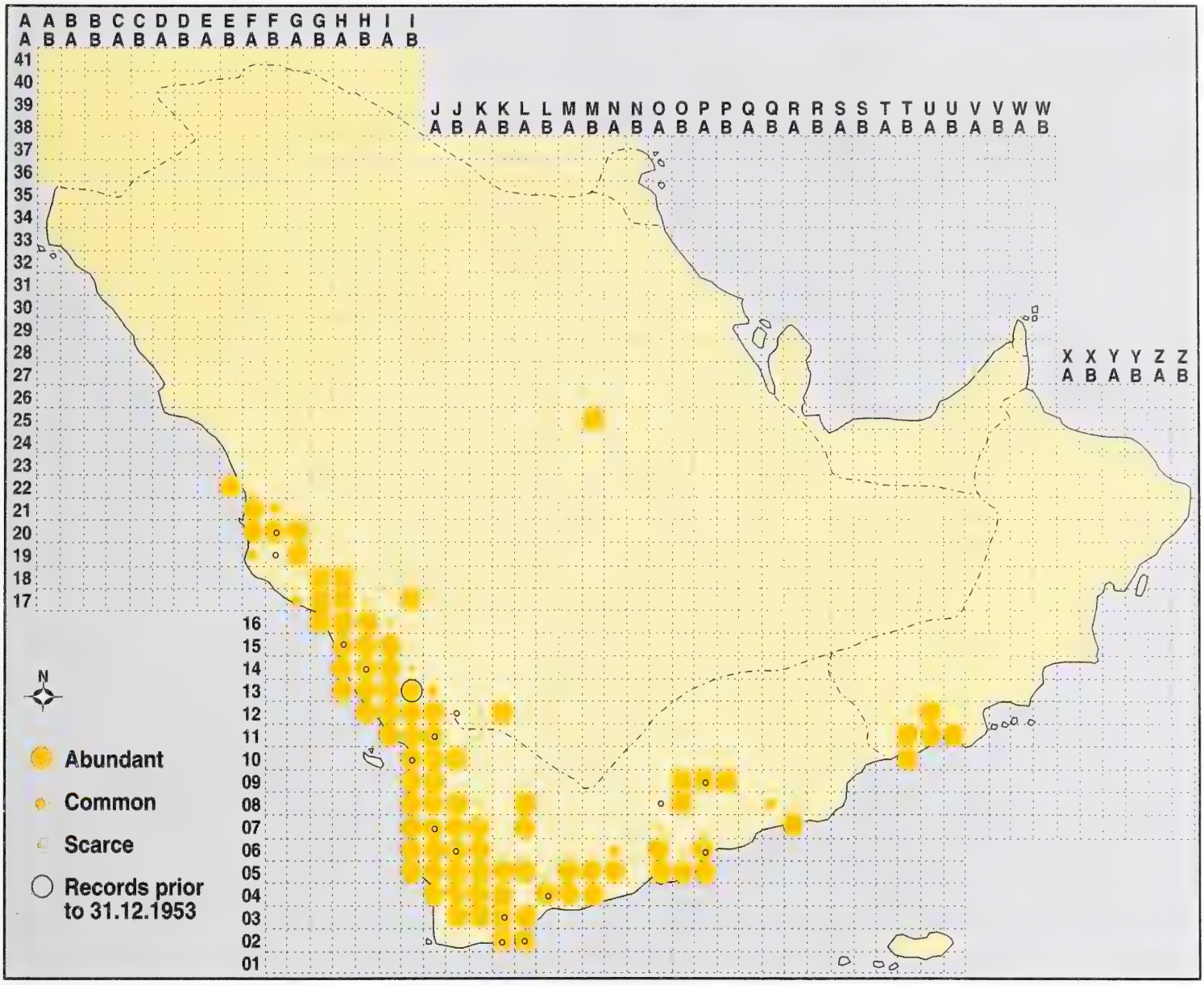
DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUNG

During February-March 1993, detailed observations were made on three nests, each with two young, in thorn trees at Wadi Surdud on the Tihama.

The growth period of the young can be considered in two stages. For the first six days growth is very rapid, varying from 10-85% per day (note the larger increase on day 4

Plate 2. Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* nests, west of Ta'izz, north Yemen (*R. F. Porter*)

Figure 1. Distribution and relative abundance of Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* in Arabia



when for the first time both parents fed the young). From day 7-17 the growth rate decreases to 2-5% per day.

Day 1: on hatching the chicks are blind, naked and weigh 3 g. The skin colour ranges from reddish to orange with a few scattered yellowish-white down feathers on the head and mantle. The gape is yellowish-white. They are able to raise their heads and open their mouths widely to encourage feeding. During the first three days the chicks are fed at intervals throughout the day by the male, by regurgitating food directly into the chick's throat. Usually the female spends most of the first three days brooding the chicks.

Day 2: the chicks are still blind and unable to change their position in the nest. They have large abdomens and weigh 5 g. The first black feathers appear on the wings.

Day 3: the chicks open their eyes but are still unable to move in the nest. The black wing feathers are larger, and the first sign of black feathering is visible on the head, mantle and tail. The rest of the body is naked with some yellowish-white down still present. The chicks call continuously to be fed. Weight c. 6.5 g.

Day 4: the female begins to leave the nest for long periods and takes a large share in feeding the young. The black feathers on the wings, head, mantle and tail are longer and denser. The bare skin on the abdomen and flanks is still reddish orange but most of the down has disappeared. The young are able to extend their necks and call loudly but unable to stand. On approaching the nest, the young crouch low and grab the nest with their claws. Weight c. 13.5 g.

Day 5: the chick's appearance is much as on day 4, but the black feathers are longer and denser. Weight c. 16 g.

Day 6-9: black feathers begin to emerge on the thighs. Weight c. 18-19 g.

Day 10: the body is covered with greenish-yellow feathers except on the inner thigh. The chicks try to balance on their tarsi and are quite capable of moving around the nest. Weight c. 20-21 g.

Day 12: the young are almost completely feathered with greenish-yellow plumage. The yellow is most distinct on the throat, thorax and inner margins of the wing feathers. Weight c. 21-22 g.

Day 15-17: the young acquire full juvenile plumage. The weight on fledging ranges between 23-25 g.

Plate 3. Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*, Oman (*H. & J. Eriksen*)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks are due to D.J. Brooks for commenting on the manuscript and providing relevant literature.

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BARNES, H. E. (1893) On the birds of Aden. *Ibis* (Series 6) 5: 57-84, 165-181.

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MEINERTZHAGEN, R. (1954) *Birds of Arabia*. Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh.

Dr M. M. Al-Safadi, Biology Departmment, Sana'a University, P.O. Box 13499, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen.

The birds of Barr Al Hikman, Sultanate of Oman

JENS ERIKSEN

Barr Al Hikman, a peninsula approximately 30 x 30 km, on the east coast of Oman is 350 km due south of the capital Muscat. Until a decade ago fewer than 10 birders had visited the area. The importance of Barr Al Hikman for waders and other birds was recognised in the early 1970s by Ralph Daly, and the mudflats were described as 'the most important wintering place for shore-birds in Oman' (Gallagher & Woodcock 1980). Since the mid-1980s Barr Al Hikman has been visited annually, notably during the mid-winter Asian Waterfowl Censuses. For three weeks in winter 1989-90, a West Asian Shorebird Survey was performed by a four-man team (Green *et al.* 1992). It is now clear that Barr Al Hikman is of major ornithological importance during migration and winter for the huge numbers of shorebirds, gulls and terns which congregate there. Over 1000 Great Knots *Calidris tenuirostris*, 5000 Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus* and 3 Slender-billed Curlews *Numenius tenuirostris* are examples of recent discoveries and the area undoubtedly holds yet more ornithological secrets.

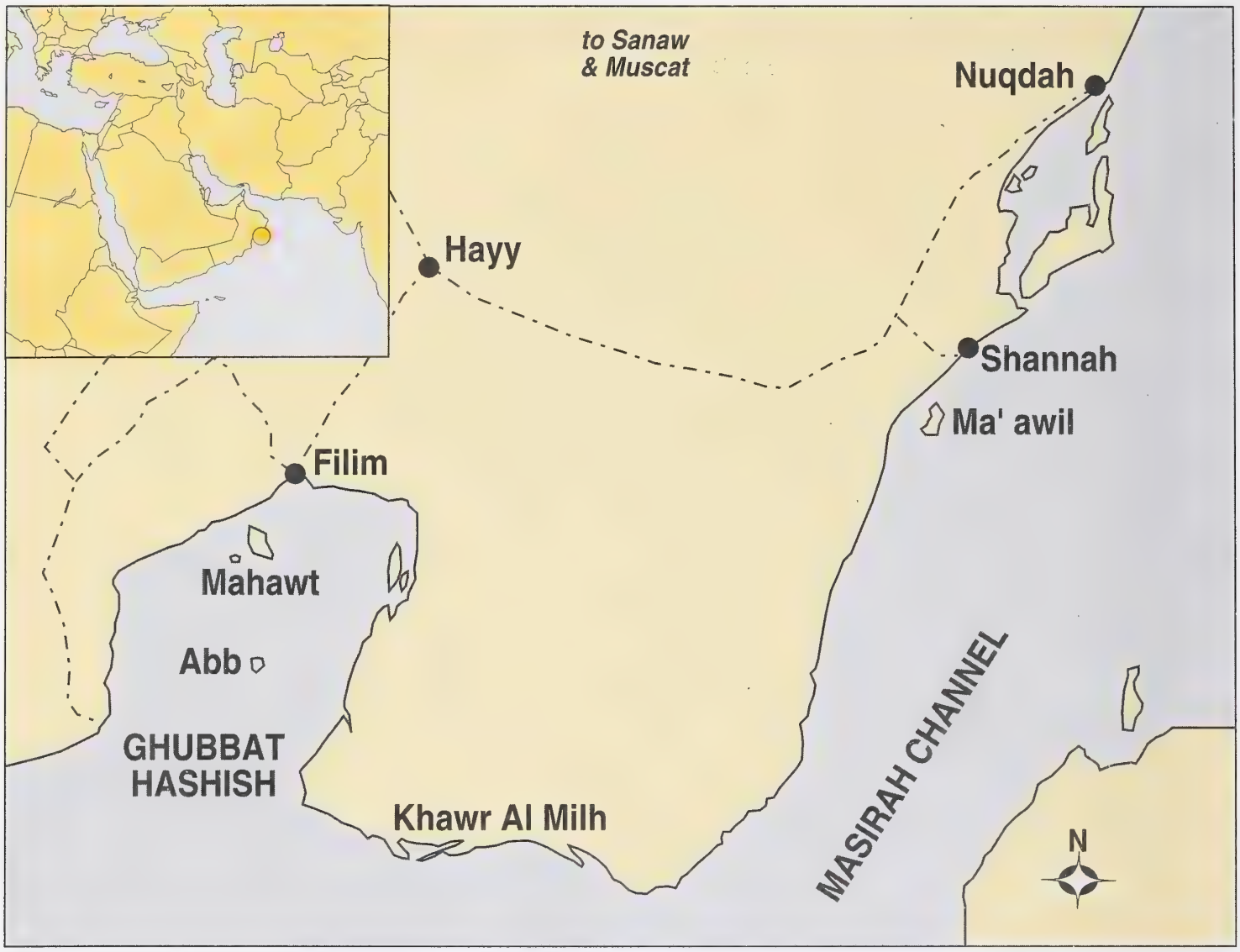
DESCRIPTION

Barr Al Hikman is an area of low gravel planes, *sabkha* (a mixture of sand, salt and mud) and sand surrounded by extensive tidal mudflats. To the north is the village of Hayy and beyond, the vast Wahiba Sands. The important bird areas begin in the north-east at the seasonal fishing village of Nuqdah and the mudflats stretch for 40 km through Khawr Barr Al Hikman and south along Masirah Channel, including the island of Ma'awil. The south coast largely consists of sandy beaches, but two lagoons, both known as Khawr Al Milh, are important for birds. The bay of Ghubbat Hashish, on the west coast has further large mudflats and two islands, Mahawt and Abb. The former has mangroves while the more remote Abb is an important breeding site for gulls and terns. The tidal mudflats cover at least 120 km^2. Except for small fishing villages at Nuqdah, Shannah, Filim and on Mahawt Island, Barr Al Hikman is uninhabited.

ACCESS

Access to many of the important birding areas on Barr Al Hikman is not straightforward. At present there are no legal restrictions, but the remoteness of the area and lack of roads make it difficult to reach several key places. A 4-WD is essential. From Muscat there are excellent paved roads as far as Sanaw. From here the journey is on a very rough graded road south towards Duqm along the west side of the Wahiba Sands. After 195 km there is an obvious turn to Hayy which lies 18 km from the Sanaw - Duqm road. From Hayy the graded road continues for 57 km to Nuqdah. Another graded road leads south from Hayy for 20 km to Filim continuing west and eventually joins up with the Sanaw - Duqm road. An elevated track leads through the *sabkha* from the Hayy - Nuqdah road 43 km from Hayy. It is signposted Shannah and ends after 12 km at the coast where several ferries take vehicles and passengers to and from Masirah Island. The roads shown on the accompanying map should be passable at all times and provide access to some good birding areas. There are several other tracks made by local fishermen that can be investigated, but great caution must be exercised.

From Filim it is possible to cover parts of the mudflats in Ghubbat Hashish. A



particularly good vantage point is a rocky outcrop about 5 km west of Filim. If the *sabkha* looks dry and the track seems well used, a 4-WD can be used. Otherwise walk! At low tide it is possible to walk to Mahawt Island, although the mud is knee-deep at the mangrove end of the island. Keep to the walkway used by the locals. At high tide it may be possible to hire a fishing boat at Filim.

At Shannah a track leads south along the high tide line for a few kilometres. Along this track birds can be seen at high tide roosts. At low tide one can walk to Ma'awil, but beware of the unpredictable tides. Although there should be two low tides during a 24-25 hour period, these can vary by as much as two metres in water level.

There is no accommodation available at or near Barr Al Hikman so camping (well above the tideline!) is necessary. In this flat area a 10 cm rise in water level can result in several kilometres of land being inundated. Some have found themselves on a small sand hill in the morning with no land visible in any direction! All supplies must be brought, although some very basic items may be obtained in Hayy. Petrol is available 125 km south of Sanaw and at Hayy. Water is obtainable free of charge from the desalination plant in Filim.

ORNITHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

A total of 140 species of birds has been recorded at Barr Al Hikman; only a few are known to breed. It is during passage and winter that the area is of special importance. Some measure of this importance on a local, regional and continental scale can be calculated from the annual winter Asian Waterfowl Census results. Barr Al Hikman was visited during the five counts in 1989 - 1993. Although such an area is very difficult to cover in detail, the results give some indication of its importance. During the 1990 count, the area was covered in the West Asian Shorebird

Plate 1. Coastline, Barr Al Hikman, Oman (*H. & J. Eriksen*)

Plate 2. Khawr Milh, Barr Al Hikman, Oman (*H. & J. Eriksen*)

Survey (Green *et al.* 1992). The data obtained in this extensive three-week survey agreed closely with those from other winter counts indicating that the data are reasonably reliable. Table 1 presents the average counts for 33 species for which Barr Al Hikman is considered to be most important. These data are also expressed as percentages of average totals for Oman, south-west Asia (principally Iran and the Arabian peninsula) as well as for all of Asia. It is clear that for many species Barr Al Hikman is by far the most important wintering area, not only in Oman, but for south-west Asia as well. For several species (Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*, Great Knot, Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Dunlin *C. alpina*, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii*, Slender-billed Gull *L. genei* and Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*) Barr Al Hikman may hold up to a third of the entire Asian wintering population and for Bar-tailed Godwit, Slender-billed Gull and Sandwich Tern numbers approach a staggering two-thirds. If one included the west coast of Masirah Island, just across the Masirah Channel, the totals would be even more impressive. Of course, there is much uncertainty in this type of calculation, but the area is undoubtedly of critical importance to many wintering waterbirds.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

The following list provides status details of all species recorded at Barr Al Hikman. Species recorded once are regarded as vagrants if they have been recorded on fewer than 10 occasions in Oman, but rare if recorded regularly elsewhere in the country. Abbreviations used are as follows: N, S, E, W indicate north, south, east and west, whilst pm = passage migrant and wv = winter visitor. All records have been approved by the Oman Bird Records Committee.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
Vagrant: one at Ma'awil 4 Nov 1974 (the first record in Oman).

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*
Rare: one near Ras Shajrit at the SW corner of Barr Al Hikman 28 Nov 1995 is the only record.

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaeton aethereus*
Rare: one flew north at Nuqdah 27 Dec 1989.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Common wv. Roosts at Khawr Barr Al Hikman.

Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*
Uncommon, but one huge flock estimated at 15,000 in Ghubbat Hashish 3 Jan 1992.

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
Rare: two at Filim 5 Sep 1987 may indicate breeding in the mangroves or at Mahawt Island.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*
Rare: five at Ma'awil on 4 Nov 1974.

Squacco/Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola ralloides/grayii* Rare: seven in Ghubbat Hashish 3-12 Jan 1990.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*
Abundant wv to all coasts. Both phases occur, with the dark form usually commoner. Maximum was 1023 on E coast 23 Dec 1989-2 Jan 1990. Breeds on Abb Island where c. 79 nests found (Jensen & Salm 1991).

Plate 3. Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*, Barr Al Hikman, Oman (*H. & J. Eriksen*)

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Uncommon wv. Difficult to separate from white phase of more common Western Reef Heron.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*
Vagrant: one at Khawr Al Milh 8 Jan 1989 (the seventh record in Oman).

Great White Egret *Egretta alba*
Common pm and wv, especially in Ghubbat Hashish.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Rare: one in Ghubbat Hashish 3-12 Jan 1990.

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*
Vagrant: one at Ma'awil 29 Jul 1979 was the first record in Oman.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*
Common pm and wv. Roosts at Khawr Barr Al Hikman and Ghubbat Hashish.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv. Three ringed birds, found dead, originated in Iran.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*
Rare: three on E coast 30 Nov 1995 is the only record from the coast.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Rare: one at Ma'awil 4 Nov 1974.

Pintail *Anas acuta*
Rare: one near Nuqdah 24 Oct 1989 is the only coastal record.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*
Vagrant: an unconfirmed sighting 13 Oct 1985.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Rare: one on E coast 28 Nov 1991.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*
Rare: two at Filim 9 Jan 1989.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Common pm and wv in small numbers along all coasts. Females/immatures outnumber adult males by at least 10:1.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*
Uncommon pm and wv. Several records of adult males.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
Rare: singles along E coast.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
Rare pm: one at Khawr Al Milh 23-26 Mar 1993.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*
Rare: adult on E coast 31 Dec 1989.

Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*
Rare: adult at Filim 9 Jan 1989.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
Rare: three singles at E, S and W coasts.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Common and widespread wv especially at coastal lagoons.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Uncommon pm in Oct-Nov and Mar.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*
Rare pm: male at Nuqdah 23 Sep 1995.

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*
Rare pm: one at Ras Shajrit 29 Nov 1995.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*
Rare wv: one at Filim 9 Jan 1989.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
Regular wv in small numbers in Nov-Mar. An apparently territorial pair on cliffs at Filim 4-10 Jan 1990 may indicate breeding.

Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*
Rare: one at Khawr Al Milh 31 May 1995.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*
Rare pm: one near Khawr Al Milh 25 Oct 1989.

Coot *Fulica atra*
Rare: one at Ma'awil 4 Nov 1979 is the only coastal record.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv. The annual mid-winter waterfowl censuses 1989-1993 suggest that Barr Al Hikman is perhaps the most important wintering area for this species in all of Asia, see Table 1. Most numerous on E coast.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Uncommon pm and wv, usually near Filim.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Uncommon wv Dec-Jan especially in Ghubbat Hashish near Filim where 64 counted 9 Jan 1989 and 46 3-13 Jan 1990. Only one record, of two, from E coast.

Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*
Abundant wv, small numbers summer. Barr Al Hikman and W side of Masirah Island form a core wintering area for this species, see Table 1. Some birds may breed on nearby Shaghaf Island off the W coast of Masirah.

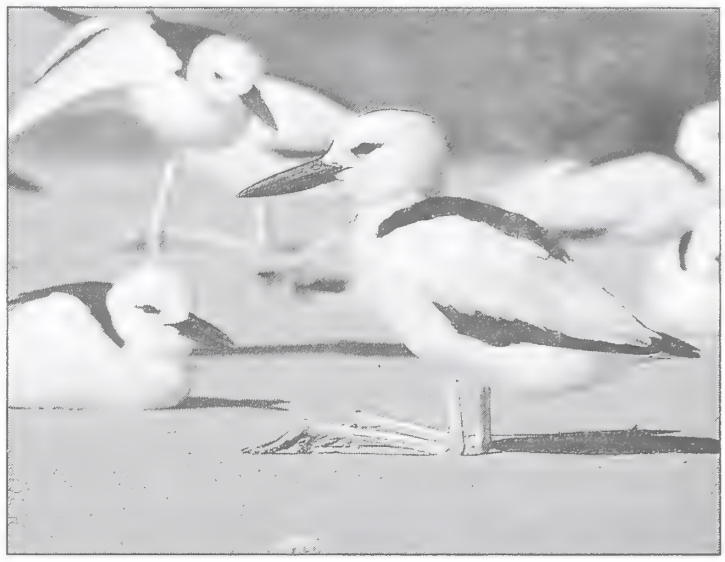


Plate 4. Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*, Barr Al Hikman, Oman (*H. & J. Eriksen*)

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*
Rare pm: three at Khawr Al Milh 23-26 Mar 1993.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
Rare: one at Ma'awil 4 Nov 1974 is the only coastal record, where the habitat does not suit this species.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
Regular and widespread pm and wv especially along E coast.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Abundant pm and wv especially along E coast, where also a breeding resident.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv, but much less numerous than previous species.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
Uncommon pm and wv in irregular numbers.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv from late Jul to late May.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*
Regular pm and wv. First discovered at Barr al Hikman in Jan 1989 this species is now known to winter in numbers exceeding 1000. It associates with Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica* at high tide roosts where it can be quite difficult to separate the two species. Results from Asian Waterfowl Censuses indicate that Barr Al Hikman is the species' main wintering area in Arabia (see Table 1). These birds may originate from a different breeding population to those in north-eastern Siberia which largely winter in north-west Australia.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*
Abundant pm and wv late Jul to late May, especially along E coast. Barr Al Hikman may hold a large proportion of the entire Asian wintering population (see Table 1).

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv. Records from early Aug to late May.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*
Rare: one near Ras Al Shajrit 21 Feb 1996.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Abundant pm and wv from late Jul to late May. Not easy to separate from next species in non-breeding plumage.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
Abundant pm and wv and with Bar-tailed Godwit the most numerous wader. Recorded from early Sep to early Jun. Estimates of up to 50,000 make Barr Al Hikman one of the most important wintering areas in all of Asia for this species.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*
Common pm and wv especially in the muddiest areas of Ghubbat Hashish where a flock of 5000 was recorded 3 Jan 1992. Recorded from mid-Aug to mid-Mar. Barr Al Hikman is a major wintering area for the species (see Table 1).

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
Rare spring pm: one at Khawr Al Milh 23-26 Mar 1993.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
Rare pm: recorded only from Khawr Al Milh 20 Nov 1987 and 23-26 Mar 1993.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*
Abundant pm and wv. Asian waterfowl counts indicate that Barr Al Hikman may be the most important wintering area in Asia for this species. Most are of the nominate race but the larger eastern race, *L. l. baueri*, has also been recorded.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Common autumn pm and wv, rare in spring.

Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*
Vagrant: one at Abb Island 5 Jan 1990, one at Filim 6 Jan 1990 and one at the SW corner on 8 Jan 1990 are the second to fourth records in Oman of this globally threatened species. These records hint at the surprises Barr Al Hikman may hold and are perhaps linked to recent winter records of up to 50 on the Iranian Gulf coast.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Abundant and widespread pm and wv late Jul to late May. Much more common than Whimbrel.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Abundant pm and wv late Jul to late May, especially on E coast. Barr Al Hikman is an important wintering area for this species (see Table 1).

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*
Uncommon autumn pm and wv. Records from early Oct to late Jan.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Abundant pm and wv, but much less numerous than Redshank, especially in spring.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Rare: one at Khawr Al Milh 20 Nov 1987.

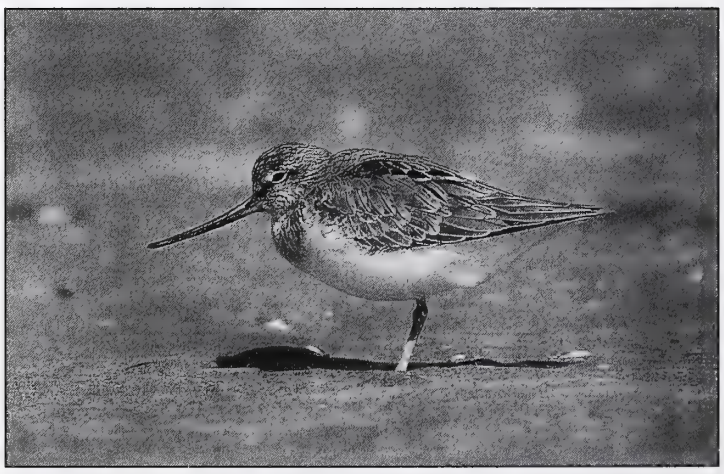


Plate 5. Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Barr Al Hikman, Oman (*H. & J. Eriksen*)

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*
Very common pm and wv. Probably most numerous during autumn (500 on 5 Sep 1987) but few visits at this season.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Regular pm and wv in small numbers. Most records are from Filim and Khawr Al Milh.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Abundant pm and wv from late Jul to early May. Barr Al Hikman is an important wintering area for this species (see Table 1).

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*
Rare pm: 30 on E coast 21 May 1992 and one at Khawr Al Milh 31 Aug 1995.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*
Rare wv: records from late Dec to early Feb.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*
Uncommon pm and wv; more frequent than previous species.

Great skua sp *Catharacta* sp.
Skull of one long dead at Khawr Al Milh 20 Nov 1987.

Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii*
Abundant pm and wv. Breeds on Abb Island where 75-100 nests found (Jensen & Salm 1991). A very large colony of at least 10,000 pairs breed at Shaghaf Island off the west coast of Masirah Jul-Oct.

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
Common wv late Dec to late Mar, rare at other times. One ringed as juv in north Caspian Sea was recovered at Mahawt 21 Jan 1990.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Irregular wv in varying numbers mid-Dec to late Mar. Only two recorded during the West Asian Shorebird Survey (Green *et al.* 1992).

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*
Abundant pm and wv early Sep to early Jun, especially along SE and S coasts. Barr Al Hikman may hold more than half of the total Asian wintering population (see Table 1).

Yellow-legged Gull group *Larus cachinnans, fuscus*
Abundant pm and wv. Due to unresolved taxonomic difficulties, the group has been lumped together here. Probably 90% are Yellow-legged Gulls (*L. cachinnans*), but very dark *L.f.fuscus* are also encountered. A wintering population of at least 100,000 birds estimated.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*
Regular pm and wv, in small numbers, but 69 at Ghubbat Hashish 3-12 Jan 1990.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*
Common pm and wv. Records from late Jul to early Jun. A total of 1208 in Ghubbat Hashish 3-12 Jan 1990.

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*
Common to abundant pm and wv, recorded early Sep to early Jun. Largest flock 3000 on E coast 11 Apr 1975.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*
Regular pm and wv but much less common than previous species.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
Common to abundant pm and wv. A winter population of 45,000 in 1991 appears an overestimate, but it is undoubted that the area is very important for this species (see Table 1).

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*
Rare summer visitor. A breeding colony of c. 10 nests recorded on Abb (Jensen & Salm 1991). Three on E coast 31 Aug 1995.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
Uncommon or irregular pm and, rarely, wv. Difficult to separate in non-breeding plumage from following species.

White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*
Uncommon pm and rare wv. A colony of 20-30 nests on Abb Island (Jensen & Salm 1991) and a flock of 500 on E coast 11 Apr 1995.

Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*
Rarely recorded from land. A breeding colony on Abb Island held an estimated 1500-2500 nests (Jensen & Salm 1991). A colony on Shaghaf Island off the west coast of Masirah holds at least 10,000 pairs in summer.

Saunders' Tern *Sterna saundersi*
Common pm and wv. Also breeds in loose colonies on E coast and perhaps elsewhere in spring and early summer. During migration the similar Little Tern *S. albifrons* may occur, but confirmation required.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*
Rare early spring and late autumn pm. A flock of 60 over mudflats on 13 Feb 1987 is noteworthy.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Rare wv: two on E coast late Dec 1989.

Common Noddy *Anous stolidus*
Rare: a pair nesting on Abb Island is the only record (Jensen & Salm 1991).

Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*
Rare: 12 in a flock 27 Nov 1991.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*
Rare: two 23 Feb 1985 and 30 at Filim 3 Jan 1992 are the only records.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
Resident at Filim in small numbers.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
Rare autumn pm: one at Filim 5 Sep 1987.

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*
Rare autumn pm: one at Khawr Al Milh 14 Oct 1993.

Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*
Rare wv: one 7 Jan 1975 is the only record.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*
Rare: one calling at Filim 6 Jan 1990.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*
Rare: one 12 Dec 1989 and one dead on rocks 5 km W of Filim 6 Jan 1990.

Common Swift *Apus apus*
Rare spring pm: two at Khawr Al Milh 23-26 Mar 1993. A record of five swifts during 30 May-5 Jun 1986 may also relate to this species.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*
Rare: three at Filim 7 Jan 1989.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Uncommon wv in the mangroves. Recorded early Nov to mid-Jan.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*
Rare pm: heard near Filim 2 Nov 1979 and two at Khawr Al Milh 23-26 Mar 1993.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*
Uncommon pm. Recorded Apr, May, Aug and Oct.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Rare autumn pm: one E coast 6 Sep 1990 and one at Khawr Al Milh 14 Oct 1993.

Black-crowned Finch Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*
Probably a breeding resident near Filim with seasonal movements. Perhaps also an uncommon pm and wv.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*
Rare: two in hills near Filim 2 Nov 1979.

Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*
Probably a resident breeder with seasonal movements in coastal dunes and near Filim. A total of 60 estimated near Khawr Al Milh 23-26 Mar 1993.

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*
Rare autumn pm: one near Nuqdah 24 Oct 1989 is the only record.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Probably a regular resident breeder with seasonal movements and possibly wv in small numbers.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
Uncommon pm in Mar and late Sep-late Dec.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Regular pm in small numbers late Jul to late Dec and late Jan to early May.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*
Rare autumn pm: one at Nuqdah 24 Oct 1989.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*
Uncommon wv in very small numbers between early Nov-early Jan.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*
Rare: two at Ma'awil 4 Nov 1974.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*
Rare: two in coastal scrub near Khawr Barr Al Hikman 2 Nov 1979.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Uncommon pm: recorded early Sep to mid-Dec.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Regular wv in small numbers. Recorded mid-Oct to late Mar.

Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*
Rare autumn pm: one on E coast near Shannah 6 Sep 1990 is the the only record.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
Rare pm: one on S coast 25 Oct 1989 and one at Khawr Al Milh 23-26 Mar 1993.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
Rare wv: male on rocky outcrop 5 km W of Filim 2 Jan 1990.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*
Rare: one at Ma'awil 4 Nov 1974.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*
Common and widespread wv on coastal dunes and near Filim. Recorded early Sep to late Mar.

Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthoprymna*
Rare wv, recorded mid-Nov to early Jan.

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*
Rare wv to mangroves at Filim, recorded mid-Dec to early Jan.

Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*
Uncommon wv, recorded early Nov to late Dec. Often seen with Desert Wheatears.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
Rare pm: recorded in late Apr to early May and in early Nov.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*
Rare autumn pm: one near Shannah 6 Sep 1990 is the only record.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Uncommon wv or pm: recorded Jan, Mar and Nov.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*
Probably a regular pm in early May and early Sep to early Nov.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*
Rare autumn pm and wv. Recorded at Khawr Al Milh 20 Nov 1987 and 2 Jan 1992.

Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*
Rare: recorded at Filim 1 Nov 1979 and 9 Jan 1989.

White-eye sp. *Zosterops* sp.
Status unknown. A white-eye has been recorded in the mangrove of Mahawt Island (R. A. C. Jensen pers. comm.), over 500 km from the resident White-breasted White-eye *Z. abyssinica* population in Dhofar, South Oman. The Mahawt bird may represent a different (sub)species but further research is required.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*
Uncommon autumn pm early Sep to early Nov.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*
Rare spring pm: male near Shannah 9 May 1991.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*
Uncommon wv in late Oct to mid-Feb.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*
Uncommon visitor largely to Filim in winter. More common inland near Hayy.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Uncommon late autumn pm early Nov to mid-Dec.

FURTHER STUDIES

The ornithological importance of Barr Al Hikman is principally based on mid-winter surveys. There has been no attempt to quantify the number of birds utilising the area during migration. We do not know whether most of waders winter in Africa or if Barr Al Hikman is their final destination. In addition to it being a very important wintering area, Barr Al Hikman is presumably a crucial migration stopover site. For Terek Sandpipers at least, this is almost certainly true, as this species appears most common in early September, rather than mid-winter. A West Asian Shorebird Survey during spring and/or autumn migration would be most welcome.

We have noted problems in estimating wader numbers by counting high tide roosts. Massive flocks have been seen flying inland as high tide approaches, presumably to roost on the dry *sabkha*. After high tide they return to the

exposed mudflats. High tide roost counts could therefore lead to an underestimate of true numbers. Attempts should be made to locate these inland roosts.

CONSERVATION

The remoteness and low human population of Barr Al Hikman have ensured that the area is not under particular threat at the moment. In recent years there has been an increase in traffic to and from Masirah Island with several ferries operating from Shannah. Furthermore, a project to pave the Sanaw-Duqm road has now begun. Although this is welcome it will make access to Barr Al Hikman considerably easier and bring more visitors. The Omani government now encourages tourism including bird tours, which may include Barr Al Hikman in their itinerary. Clearly, an area of international ornithological importance should be protected. A consultancy firm has proposed that the area should be preserved as the Barr Al Hikman National Nature Reserve. The Omani government is now giving urgent consideration to formal protection of the area.

Table 1. Importance of Barr Al Hikman as a wintering ground for selected species of waterbirds. Mean of five annual winter counts during 1989-1993 (calculated from data in *Asian Waterfowl Census 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992* and *1993*, see references).

Species	Barr Al Hikman mean totals[a]	Percentage of mean Oman totals	Percentage of mean South-west Asia totals	Percentage of mean Asia totals	Species with > 1% of world population[b]
Cormorant	3046	93	13	7	
Western Reef Heron	851	43	28	21	x
Great White Egret	94	64	2	<1	
Grey Heron	348	28	8	1	
Spoonbill	97	27	7	1	
Greater Flamingo	4159	85	4	2	
Oystercatcher	3797	71	62	49	
Crab Plover	1175	66	38	34	x
Kentish Plover	1152	54	16	3	
Lesser Sand Plover	3391	43	33	6	x
Greater Sand Plover	619	52	27	8	
Grey Plover	1031	56	25	10	
Great Knot	276	100	99	37	
Sanderling	4796	78	76	55	
Little Stint	11457	90	66	11	
Curlew Sandpiper	10528	95	82	21	
Dunlin	30432	93	77	40	x
Broad-billed Sandpiper	2283	98	72	43	x
Bar-tailed Godwit	26378	92	80	69	x
Whimbrel	427	67	35	2	
Curlew	799	44	17	5	
Redshank	8074	92	53	24	
Greenshank	841	70	47	7	
Terek Sandpiper	341	80	23	5	
Ruddy Turnstone	1389	68	43	31	
Sooty Gull	7291	41	35	34	x
Great Black-headed Gull	562	15	8	5	
Slender-billed Gull	19287	75	72	64	x
Herring Gull group[c]	27181	58	42	31	
Caspian Tern	385	53	31	8	x
Crested Tern	1386	27	26	18	x
Sandwich Tern	13451	72	69	65	x
Saunders' Tern	79	40	15	15	

[a]Data from Oman Bird Records as part of the annual *Asian Waterfowl Census*. [b]By comparison with data in Waterfowl population estimates (Rose & Scott 1994). [c]Includes Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* and Yellow-legged Gull *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Matt Cummins for help with the maps and for valuable statistical data and all those observers who, have submitted the observations from Barr Al Hikman on which this article is based, to the Oman Bird Records Committee.

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PROFILE

Nergis Yazgan

To OSME members, Turkey's Society for the Protection of Nature (DHKD) represents all that is best and most successful in current conservation. An NGO with permanent professional staff and a formidable track record, DHKD provides a fine example of what can be achieved by forethought and planning, and the force of a determined visionary.

Since its inception, that force has been Nergis Yazgan, its Director-General. A leading figure in Turkey's nature conservation programmes, Nergis first became involved in conservation 20 years ago. Influential in the formation of DHKD and the Turkish Nature Conservation Foundation (TDKV), in 1985 Nergis became DHKD's first president. At that time it had no premises, no staff, and no funds. Together with Belpis Balpinar and Salih Acar, both founders of DHKD, Nergis set out to change all that, and approached BirdLife International, (then ICBP) for help. Together they organised the XVII meeting of the European Continental Section in Adana in 1989, and their association has been close ever since. BirdLife funded a Dutchman, Gernant Magnin, to assist Nergis with the increasing workload. This proved to be the greatest contribution, for Gernant and Nergis married, and together became a strong conservation force in Turkey.

Nergis has always been a powerful advocate of good international relations and views nature conservation as a global issue. She studied in America and Paris in the 1960s, speaks five languages, and has used her international experience as the base on which to build a strong, outward looking DHKD.

In 1990, Nergis became the first Director-General of DHKD and now heads a dedicated staff of 28 professionals, including geomorphologists, fishery engineers, business administrators, ornithologists and botanists, demonstrating what is possible for an NGO and the levels of excellence that can be achieved by a professionally administered organisation. DHKD has already won a number of important battles, and is currently involved in twelve major projects in Turkey. Their success seems set to continue and this is in large measure due to the vision and hard-headed determination of Nergis Yazgan.

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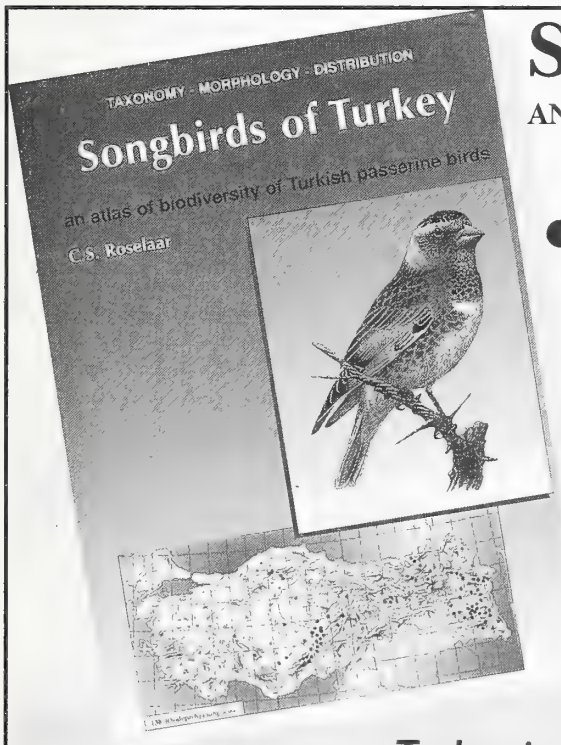

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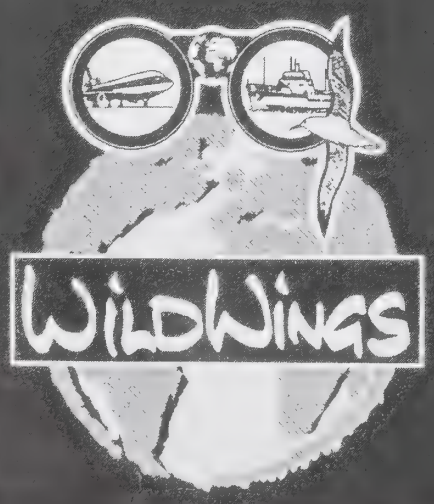

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PHOTO spot

Sinai Rosefinch

Two young Middle East explorer-naturalists, Friedrich Hemprich and Christian Ehrenberg, discovered the Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus* at St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Egypt, over 170 years ago. Although isolated populations were later found thousands of kilometres to the east in Afghanistan and China, it is in the Middle East that most people get to see this beautiful finch. Even here it is rather localised, its range being restricted to the sandstone deserts of the Sinai Peninsula, southern Israel, south-west Jordan and the extreme north-west corner of adjoining Saudi Arabia. In Israel it is uncommon and numbers fluctuate markedly from year to year; it is most likely to be encountered in the mountains behind Eilat or when the birds move to lower ground in winter. However, it is more abundant in the higher mountains of Sinai and Jordan/Arabia, where it can be most easily seen in the spectacular surroundings of St Catherine's Monastery (Sinai) and Petra, Wadi Dana and Wadi Rum (Jordan). There can be no more evocative place to see this bird than amongst the rock-hewn monuments of Petra, where its pink coloration so closely matches the red sandstone bedrock. It is fitting therefore that Jordan should have recently designated the Sinai Rosefinch its national bird.

The species' main habitat requirement is rocky, highland desert with a permanent source of water. This reliance on water often brings it into contact with human habitation, where they become less timid and even forage amongst refuse left by tourists. Several of the accompanying photographs were taken at an artificially-constructed drinking pool above Wadi Dana in part of Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature's wildlands reserve. In spring, the birds easily find natural supplies of water, but in October several hundreds of birds made constant use of this pool along with Yellow-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*, Tristram's Grackles *Onychognathus tristramii*, Rock Sparrows *Petronia petronia*, Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* and Great Tits *Parus major*.

The Middle Eastern (nominate) race is the smallest of the four described races, but the males are distinctively brighter than their larger eastern counterparts. Particularly after their post-breeding (July-September) moult the males are almost wholly drenched carmine-red and pink - as well-illustrated in the photographs here. Other published photographs and several field guides show altogether duller birds in more worn plumage, with the red restricted to the face and pink (not silvery-white) feathers on the crown. Females and first-winter birds are the palest and least marked of the West Palearctic *Carpodacus* rosefinches, with a rather unremarkable pale buffish-grey or sandy-brown hue. First-summer males, which do not usually breed, sometimes have a pinkish tinge to the breast and crown, but do not attain their full red coloration until after their moult into second-winter plumage.

Outside the breeding season Sinai Rosefinch are gregarious and form flocks of 10-50 birds centred on water sources. There is also evidence that in winter, especially colder winters, small parties descend up to a few tens of kilometres to lower lying areas.

A Sinai Rosefinch is most likely to be located by its characteristic call, variously described as "chig" and "tsweet". In most field guides the song is only vaguely described as "varied and melodious", but during its display the male also gives a distinctive "buzzing sound" rather reminiscent of a Wood Warbler's trill.

Ian J. Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh, Midlothian EH21 6UW, U.K.

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Plate 1. Wadi Dana Wildlife Reserve, Jordan (*T. Loseby*)

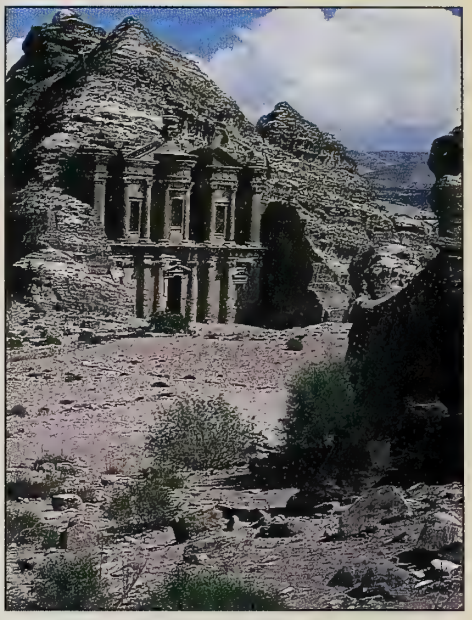


Plate 2. Wadi Dana Wildlife Reserve, Jordan (*T. Loseby*)

Plate 3. Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus* (*T. Loseby*)

Plate 4. Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus*, Eilat, Israel (*P. Doherty*)

Plate 5. Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus*, adult male, Jordan (*T. Loseby*)

Plate 6. Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus*, adult female, Jordan (*T. Loseby*)

Sandgrouse 18 (2): 36-45

Preliminary data on raptor passage in Jordan

IAN J. ANDREWS

A total of 17,644 migrating raptors was counted in Jordan in 1989-92, as part of a regional reconnaissance study. Details of more intensive counting at Wadi Dana in 1994 and 1995 are also given. In spring, few birds were seen at Aqaba, the majority following the mountains of the rift margin at Petra and Wadi Dana. Further north, some followed tributary wadis to the north-east and east, away from the rift valley. Species composition showed many similarities with that found in Israel with Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*, Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus* and Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* dominating spring passage. In autumn, raptor passage was less concentrated and exhibited a great attraction to water. Honey Buzzard, Black Kite, Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Montagu's Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Levant Sparrowhawk, and Steppe Buzzard were the most numerous species.

INTRODUCTION

LIMITED DATA ON raptor passage in Jordan have been published, despite its location, which is aligned with one of the Western Palearctic's most significant and well-documented routes passing through neighbouring Israel and strengthening evidence that large numbers cross into Jordan.

Christensen *et al.* (1981) first suggested that in spring raptors cross from Eilat into Jordan at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba in a north-easterly direction. Shirihai & Christie (1992) provided additional information and reported that most raptors at Eilat head north-east and, under normal weather conditions, cross onto the eastern side of Wadi Araba north of Aqaba. Only during a period in the afternoon (when birds pass at high altitude) and during strong westerly winds does the main passage overfly the Gulf of Aqaba and Aqaba town. Interestingly, during Israeli observations Levant Sparrowhawks *Accipter brevipes* were not seen to cross Wadi Araba or the Gulf of Aqaba and it is postulated that this was due to the more westerly breeding range of this species (Shirihai & Yekutiel 1991, Shirihai & Christie 1992). In autumn, observers in Israel have reported large flocks of Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* soaring over the mountains behind Aqaba (Shirihai 1982). These then headed north-north-west, 6 km north of the coast, before passing to the north or north-west of Eilat. It was suggested that they were crossing the rift valley into the prevailing wind before continuing on a south-westerly route on the western side of the Gulf of Aqaba (Shirihai 1982, Shirihai & Christie 1992).

PREVIOUS DATA FROM JORDAN

Wallace (1984) recorded 354 large raptors during 12 April-11 May 1963 including 200 over Ras an Naqab on 6 May. At Azraq, few raptors were recorded until 1965-66, when a total of about 1320 were counted (Wallace 1982). This was the first indication that passage extended this far east of the rift. Nelson (1973) who also reported considerable passage over Azraq in spring and autumn considered it part of a broad front, rather than a narrow flyway.

Twenty-five years later Flaxman (1982) recorded passage at new sites: 60 Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* at Mount Nebo on 10 May 1982 and 200-300 probable Honey Buzzards west of Na'ur on 11 May. At Aqaba during 14-18 May he also saw a small number of raptors, mostly Honey Buzzards, moving east or north-east.

Few migrating raptors were reported over Petra by early visitors (see Wittenberg 1987), and the first indication that sigificant numbers passed over this site came in spring 1983, when over 1000 were recorded (Wittenberg 1983). Most were flying north over Petra and north-north-east over nearby Al Bayda with peaks of 200 Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus* on 21 April and 650 Honey Buzzard in one hour on 10 May. A large north-easterly passage was also noted at Petra on 4 April 1988 including 2000+ Steppe Buzzard, 200 Black Kite *Milvus migrans* and 10 Steppe Eagle (J. Wittenberg pers. comm.). On 24 March 1989, the same observer reported the following numbers at Fidan in only 30 minutes: 30 Black Kite, 2 Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, 1 Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, 3 Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, 3 Marsh Harrier, 3 Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, 800 Steppe Buzzard and 20 Steppe Eagle.

METHODS

During 1989-1992 the author made extensive bird observations throughout Jordan (see Andrews 1995), although it should be noted that raptor sightings were incidental and no sustained systematic observations were attempted. Since systematic counts could not be undertaken it was decided to attempt extensive coverage to locate sites for possible future study (Figures 2 and 3). Observations from Wadi Araba and the Jordan Valley were limited due to military presence.

SPRING PASSAGE

Spring passage was evident from 6 February to 10 June, peaking from late March to mid-April and during early May (Figure 1). The first peak consisted mainly of Steppe Buzzard, Steppe Eagle and Black Kite, whilst the second included many Honey Buzzard and huge flocks of Levant Sparrowhawk. Other species recorded in spring were Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* and Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* with small numbers of Egyptian Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* and Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* (Table 1).

Table 1. Total numbers of migratory raptors recorded by the author in Jordan during July 1989 to June 1992. [Note: Resident raptors are not included in this list (except where clearly related to passage), for the purposes of this study these are: Griffon Vulture, Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*, Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*, Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* and Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*. In addition winter records of Marsh and Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*, Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Imperial Eagle and Merlin *Falco columbarius* are excluded (see Andrews 1995) as are records of Lesser Kestrel, Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Short-toed Eagle, Egyptian Vulture and Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* in breeding habitat.]

		Spring	Autumn
Honey Buzzard	*Pernis apivorus*	607	44
Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	227	65
Egyptian Vulture	*Neophron percnopterus*	54	8
Short-toed Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*	42	24
Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	56	70
Pallid Harrier	*Circus macrourus*	10	18
Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygargus*	29	237
harrier sp.	*Circus* sp.	11	11
Levant Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter brevipes*	9697	100
Steppe Buzzard	*Buteo buteo vulpinus*	4896	1052
Lesser Spotted Eagle	*Aquila pomarina*	16	3
Steppe Eagle	*Aquila nipalensis*	147	22
Imperial Eagle	*Aquila heliaca*	2	0
eagle sp.	*Aquila* sp.	11	12
Booted Eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*	22	3
Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	6	15
Lesser Kestrel	*Falco naumanni*	87	1
Hobby	*Falco subbuteo*	20	19
Total		**15,940**	**1704**

Table 2. Sites with more than 100 migrating raptors counted in Jordan, spring 1990-92.

	number of raptors	main direction of flight
1. Azraq	182	?
2. Qa' al Hibabiya	102	NW
3. Kafrayn	281	NE
4. Na'ur hill	1805	?NE
5. Ash Shuna Janubiyya	129	NE
6. Wadi Shu'ayb	140	NE
7. west Amman, including the Amman National Park	268	E
8. Wadi al Hidan	8191	N
9. Wadi Dana	1205	N
10. Petra	2257	N
11. Ras an Naqab	304	N
12. Jabals Rum and Umm Ishrin	261	N
13. Aqaba	159	N

Few raptors were seen at Aqaba despite the presence of an estimated three million birds using the 'Eilat migration route' which passes nearby. Initially it was thought that birds were being missed, but the relative lack of birds supports the supposition that most passage follows the west side of Wadi Araba until some distance north of Aqaba, except in mid-afternoon and certain weather conditions (Shirihai & Christie 1992). Flaxman (1982) reported small numbers of raptors heading north-east or east at Aqaba, and in April 1992 a few Montagu's Harrier, Steppe Buzzard and Booted Eagle were seen coming in off the sea and heading north. Large numbers have been recorded at Aqaba just once: during light northerly winds on 27-28 March 1994, when passage was recorded between 09.45-12.45 and 10.30-12.15 respectively. Birds crossed the Gulf from the direction of Taba (the Egypt-Israel border), passing high over Aqaba town and continuing north along the rift margin mountains. Between 27 March and 8 April, 22 Black Kites, 3931 Steppe Buzzards, 21 Spotted *Aquila clanga* or Lesser Spotted Eagle and 175 Steppe Eagles were counted (Dr R. D. Oades pers. comm.).

North of Aqaba, along the southern part of the rift margin, large numbers of raptors were observed at Fidan, Wadi Dana and Petra, confirming the importance of this area for raptor passage. At Petra, Wittenberg's counts are supplemented by maxima of 200 Steppe Buzzards on 7 April 1990, 50 Honey Buzzards on 10 May 1991 and 1900 Steppe Buzzards on 27-28 March 1992 (pers. obs.).

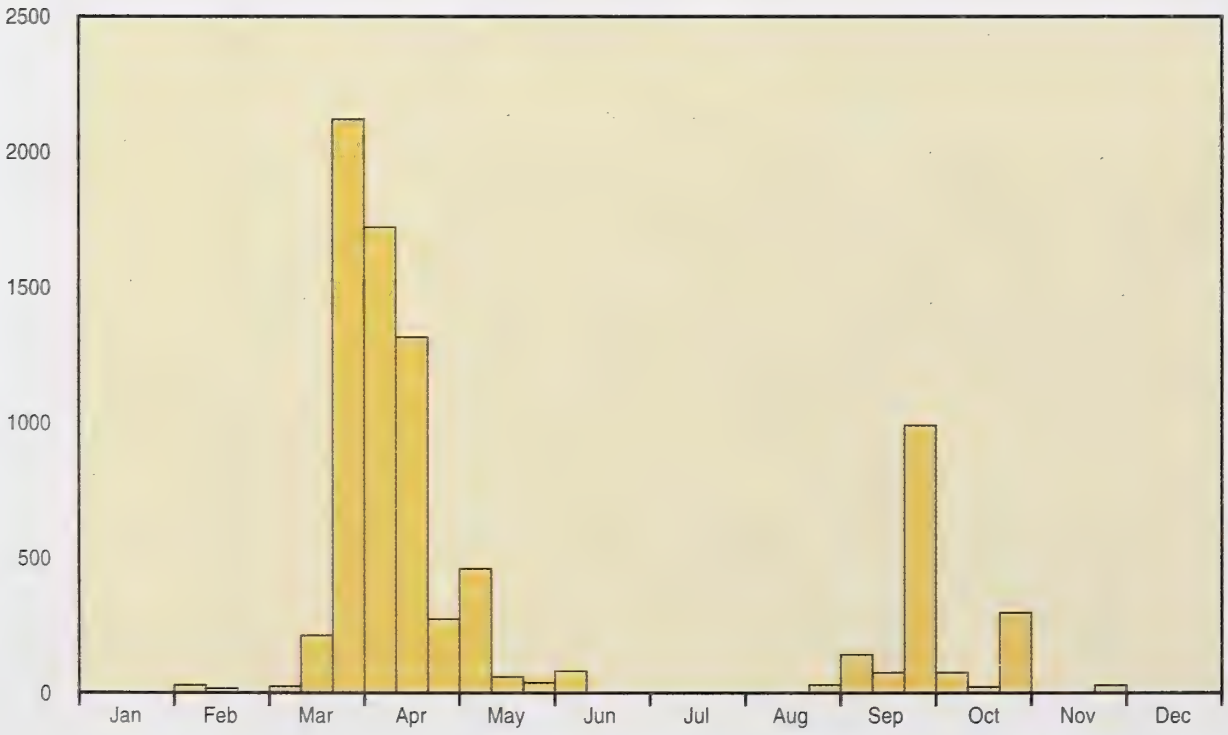


Figure 1: Counts of migratory raptors by 10-day periods, Jordan 1989-92 (excluding 8000 Levant Sparrowhawks on 24 April and 1680 on 1 May)

Further north at Wadi Dana, large numbers of migrating birds were seen during both days the site was visited during 1989-92. They used the entire escarpment, which is 10-20 km wide, with the lines of flight possibly dependant on the time of day or wind direction. On 13 April 1990, 700 Steppe Buzzards, 35 Steppe Eagles and fewer than five individuals of seven other species were seen. On 10 April 1992, 400 Steppe Buzzards, 21 Steppe Eagles and fewer than five individuals of six other species were seen. Additional data from spring 1995 confirm the importance of the rift margin route, with daily maxima at Wadi Dana of 1973 Steppe Buzzards on 1 April, and 490 Honey Buzzards and 500 Levant Sparrowhawks on 28 April (RSCN 1995b, Table 3). Black Kite, Egyptian Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Steppe Eagle were also well represented.

Table 3. Totals of migrating raptors seen at Wadi Dana, Jordan, March-May 1995 (RSCN 1995b; R.F. Porter pers. comm.). Any passage of Short-toed Eagles and Lesser Kestrels was obscured by the presence of local breeding birds; only obvious passage counts are given for the former and bird-day totals for the latter have been omitted.

	March 1995			April 1995			May 1995		
	1-10	11-20	21-31	1-10	11-20	21-30	1-10	11-20	21-31
Number of observation days	**3**	**10**	**7**	**7**	**8**	**10**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Honey Buzzard	0	0	0	0	0	1243	190	733	2
Black Kite	0	0	49	32	8	14	0	1	1
Egyptian Vulture	0	0	10	11	4	25	0	1	0
Short-toed Eagle	0	15	30	-	-	-	-	-	-
Marsh Harrier	0	0	1	0	0	6	2	1	1
Pallid Harrier	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
harrier sp.	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Goshawk	1	0	0	2?	0	0	0	0	0
Sparrowhawk	1	2	2	2	10	14	2	0	0
Levant Sparrowhawk	0	0	0	0	0	649	16	0	0
sparrowhawk sp.	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Steppe Buzzard	34	359	1493	2742	227	397	36	2	0
Lesser Spotted Eagle	0	0	6	0	5	21	1	1	0
Spotted Eagle	0	0	0	1?	0	0	0	0	0
Steppe Eagle	0	4	24	46	64	71	0	0	0
Imperial Eagle	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Booted Eagle	0	0	3	2	0	7	2	0	0
Hobby	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0

Further east, a moderate number of raptors were seen flying north over the Rum Desert jabals of Rum and Umm Ishrin and subsequently heading north over the Ras an Naqab escarpment. Birds were seen gaining height over the jabals from early morning having presumably roosted nearby. It seems likely that these birds had crossed the Red Sea south of Eilat, presumably at the Bab al Mandab, before moving north through Arabia. Raptor migration, particularly of Black Kites and harriers *Circus* sp. occurs on a broad front across north-central Saudi Arabia in spring (S. Newton pers. comm.), and some birds may have arrived in Jordan via this route.

Along the scarp east of the Dead Sea, raptors were seen flying north at several sites, the largest numbers being seen at the mouth of Wadi al Karak and from a vantage point above the confluence of Wadi al Mujib and Wadi al Hidan. At this site, an estimated 8000 Levant Sparrowhawks were seen migrating rapidly north on 24 April 1992, accompanied by smaller numbers of Honey Buzzards and other species.

More extensive coverage north of the Dead Sea and in the vicinity of Amman has identified a tendency for birds to veer east and north-east following the tributary wadis of the Jordan Valley. At Kafrayn (at the mouth of the Wadi Na'ur) and a few

kilometres further north at Ash Shuna Janubiyya (at the mouth of Wadi Shu'ayb) large numbers of raptors were observed migrating north-east, following valleys. Observations along the length of both these valleys and their tributaries demonstrated that passage was continuing on an east to north-east axis (depending on the orientation of the wadi). Black Kite, Steppe Buzzard and Steppe Eagle used this route early in the season, whilst at dusk on 1 May 1990 a single spiral of 1680 Levant Sparrowhawks and 160 Honey Buzzards was over the wadi west of Na'ur.

On the plateau above these wadis large numbers of raptors were observed at As Suwayfiyya (a western suburb of Amman) confirming that birds were continuing in a north-easterly direction from Wadi Na'ur. At this urban site, a total of 1424 birds followed the course of an eastward draining wadi (Dr M. Griffin and pers. obs.) and the true total was probably much greater.

Further north there are fewer observations, but notable passage was noted at Ajlun and Umm Qays (pers. obs.). Large numbers have also been reported from the Dibbin area (Ornitholidays) but I have no details of the precise site or direction of movement.

At Azraq, relatively small numbers of raptors were recorded in spring. During the three years reviewed here, there were only four days when raptor counts exceeded 10 Steppe Buzzards (on 18 and 19 April) and Honey Buzzards (on 16 and 25 May). A few Levant Sparrowhawks were also seen. To the north-west of Azraq, at Qa' al Hibabiya, 100 Honey Buzzards were seen travelling ahead of a storm on 1 May 1991; their direction of flight was predominantly north-west. At Wadi al Butm, four Lesser Spotted Eagles flew north-east on 20 April 1992 – the highest count of this species in the period. Larger numbers of birds clearly do pass over Azraq: Nelson (1973) reported very large northward movements of Steppe Buzzards with smaller numbers of Black Kites, Egyptian Vultures, Lesser Spotted Eagles and Lesser Kestrels. In the 1960s, Wallace (1982) also reported a wide variety of raptors, including 18 Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus* (and a Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*) at Azraq.

Unfortunately, spring coverage in the eastern desert areas was less comprehensive than in autumn and there would appear to be no evidence of broad front migration at this time of the year. Thus fewer raptors were seen from the Amman to Azraq road in spring than in autumn.

AUTUMN PASSAGE

In autumn, raptor passage was evident from 22 July to 17 November with peaks in late September and late October (Figure 1). Numbers were lower than in spring and the most common species was Steppe Buzzard. In autumn there was an increased proportion of Montagu's, Marsh and Pallid Harriers and Osprey (Table 1).

Table 4. Sites with more than 100 migrating raptors counted in Jordan, autumn 1989-91.

	number of raptors
1. Amman National Park	570
2. Ghadir Burqu'	102
3. Azraq	563
4. Aqaba	103

Plate 1. Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, Burqu' (Jordan), September 1991. (*Ian J. Andrews*)

The only raptors seen at Aqaba in autumn were 75 Levant Sparrowhawks roosting in palms behind the beach on the night of 30 September/1 October 1990. Passage was also insignificant at Wadi Rum, Petra and Ras an Naqab, compared to that in spring.

In autumn 1994, more intensive raptor watching was undertaken at Wadi Dana by a Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature team (RSCN 1995a). Unfortunately the survey was too late to cover the main autumn passage of Honey Buzzard, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers and Lesser Spotted Eagle, all of which peak in September (Andrews 1995) and it remains to be discovered whether large numbers of these species use this route in autumn. Significant numbers of Steppe Buzzards were recorded in early October 1994 (Table 5), including a peak of 1966 on 7 October 1994 (RSCN 1995a). Dana is relatively well-wooded and undisturbed, and has numerous cliffs and water sources, but although on occasions large numbers of Steppe Buzzards roosted there, they did not appear to specifically select this as a traditional roost site (RSCN 1995a). Relatively low numbers of Steppe Eagles were observed (Table 5), confirming the view that the large numbers which pass through Eilat in autumn cross Wadi Araba further south (Shirihai 1982), having presumably crossed the interior desert. Migrant Lesser Kestrels and Sparrowhawks were also recorded in relatively large numbers during this survey (Table 5).

Table 5. Totals of migrating raptors seen at Wadi Dana, Jordan, October-November 1994 (RSCN 1995a; R.F. Porter pers. comm.). () = presumed resident birds.

	October 1994			November 1994		
	1-10	11-20	21-31	1-10	11-20	21-30
Number of observation days	**10**	**10**	**7**	**6**	**9**	**3**
Honey Buzzard	2	0	0	0	0	0
Black Kite	8	1	1	2	0	0
Egyptian Vulture	3	0	1	0	0	0
Short-toed Eagle	(10)	(2)	0	1	0	1
Marsh Harrier	25	2	3	0	0	0
Pallid Harrier	1	4	1	0	0	0
Montagu's Harrier	4	1	0	0	0	0
harrier sp.	9	0	1	1	1	0
Sparrowhawk	50	60	6	6	8	4
Levant Sparrowhawk	15	1	0	0	0	0
sparrowhawk sp.	8	4	0	4	0	1
Steppe Buzzard	4841	179	1060	88	5	0
Long-legged Buzzard	(3)	(17)	(2)	20	(4)	0
Lesser Spotted Eagle	20	2	0	0	0	0
Spotted Eagle	1	0	0	0	0	0
Steppe Eagle	31	43	2	14	1	0
Imperial Eagle	2	1	0	0	1	0
Booted Eagle	5	0	0	0	0	0
Osprey	1	1	0	0	0	0
Lesser Kestrel	31	15	0	0	0	0
kestrel sp.	114	74	6	10	0	0
Red-footed Falcon	0	1	0	0	0	0
Hobby	7	18	0	0	0	0

Further north light passage of Steppe Buzzards was noted at Mukawir and low numbers were also seen at Wadi ash Shita and As Salt. At the Amman National Park (15 km south-west of Amman) large numbers of Steppe Buzzards were seen at dusk on 30 September 1991 (300 birds) and 22 October 1990 (250, all of the grey-brown morph discussed in Shirihai & Doherty 1990). On both dates the birds appeared from the north-east or east, descending over the pines of the park, before continuing south-west.

In contrast to the pattern of observations in spring, the largest numbers of raptors was seen in the interior desert and in particular at Azraq. In part this reflected a clear attraction to water with birds at Azraq, Ghadir Burqu', Al Khirba as Samra sewage works (Az Zarqa), even gathering around an isolated bedouin water well in the desert south-west of Ar Ruwayshid (Figure 3). At Azraq this habit probably originated when the area was a true oasis, but the marshes were virtually dry during the investigation period and the majority of birds were seen at a small area of fish pools. Birds often whiffled out of the sky, cautiously alighting to drink. The main passage period was 1-29 September and the more common of the 15 species involved were Honey Buzzard, Black Kite, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, Steppe and Booted Eagles. Most notable were 66 drinking Montagu's Harriers on 8 September 1990 and 14 Honey Buzzards on 15 September 1990 (Andrews 1991). In 1991, this pool was dry and very few raptors were seen that autumn. On only one occasion were spiralling Steppe Buzzards seen at Azraq (300 on 22 September 1989). The direction the birds take from Azraq is unknown, but it is possible that they may follow the topographical trend of Wadi as Sarhan to the south or south-east, rather than cutting across country to Aqaba.

A few raptors were seen in autumn at Al Khirba as Samra sewage works, the only permanent water in much of Jordan at this season: 6 Marsh Harriers, 6 Honey Buzzards, 5 Black Kites, 4 Montagu's Harriers and single Short-toed Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Steppe Buzzard, Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* and Hobby were seen.

Plate 2. Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Azraq (Jordan), April 1990. (*Ian J. Andrews*)

Plate 3. Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Samra (Jordan), October 1990. (*Ian J. Andrews*)

Ghadir Burqu' is an isolated and almost permanent spring-fed pool north-west of Ar Ruwayshid (see Andrews 1995). A large number of raptors are known to visit this site to drink (J. Chitham and several archaeologists pers. comm.), and it is also widely known amongst the local bedouin for the raptors it attracts in autumn. Ar Ruwayshid has a thriving local industry selling the necessary paraphernalia for falcon catching, and people travel there from far afield using doves as lures. At times there is also excessive shooting at this site (archaeologists pers. comm.). Al Jafr acts as a similar centre for falconers in southern Jordan. Ghadir Burqu' was briefly visited on two occasions (Table 6): in 1991 many raptors were drinking there, whilst in 1994, many were flying over, only descending at dusk ahead of a storm.

Table 6. Numbers of raptors seen at Ghadir Burqu', north-east Jordan in 1991 and 1994.

	21-22 September 1991	29-30 September 1994
Honey Buzzard	1	0
Black Kite	1	1
Short-toed Eagle	0	1
Marsh Harrier	8	2
Pallid Harrier	2	15
Montagu's Harrier	85	2
harrier sp.	0	17
Steppe Buzzard	1	2130
Lesser Spotted Eagle	1	1
Steppe Eagle	3	2
Sparrowhawk	1	0

Elsewhere in the southern and eastern desert, in arid areas, small numbers of birds were seen along broad, north-south trending wadis but away from any prominent geographical features. They were normally seen at dusk as they descended to roost and again as they rose in the morning. For example Steppe Buzzard, Black Kite and three species of harrier were seen at Bani Murra (on the border with Saudi Arabia) on 25/26 September 1989; 35 Steppe Buzzards and a few Marsh and Pallid Harriers were seen at Wadi al Hasa on 5/6 October 1990 and Honey Buzzard, Steppe Buzzard, Hobby, Black Kite, Egyptian Vulture and all three harriers were seen at Jabal Qattafi (east of Azraq) on 20/21 September 1991. Along the Amman to Azraq road it was normal to see a few raptors perched on the high-tension pylons at dusk. Egyptian Vulture and Short-toed Eagle were the most frequent, but two perched Ospreys and migrating harriers were also seen along this route.

CONCLUSIONS

From personal observations during 1989-92 and previously published records it is possible to make some preliminary conclusions regarding the numbers, route and composition of raptors migrating through Jordan:

- In spring, a major proportion of the birds using the well-described 'Eilat migration route' cross into Jordan to the north of Aqaba. These birds continue north along the mountainous rift margin over-flying Petra, Wadi Dana and the mountains east of the Dead Sea. North of the Dead Sea, birds disperse to follow north-east or east-trending wadis, some passing over Amman.
- Contrary to previous ideas (Shirihai & Yekutiel 1991, Shirihai & Christie 1992), Levant Sparrowhawks do cross the rift and can occur in Jordan in considerable numbers in spring.
- In autumn, raptor passage occurs on a broader front than in spring, and (due to the relative slow pace of migration at this season) there is strong reliance on water. This is not apparent in spring. There is an urgent need to preserve and protect the few remaining watering sites.
- There is considerable scope for systematic raptor watching in Jordan to advance knowledge of this major Middle Eastern raptor migration route. In spring, further study could contribute data from sites such as Wadi Dana, plus the tributary wadis of the rift valley (e.g. at Kafrayn and Wadi Shu'ayb) and also further north near Umm Qays. In autumn, more extensive data is urgently needed from Ghadir Burqu' and other possible foci in the interior desert. Study of the Steppe Eagle passage through Aqaba in September would also be of interest.

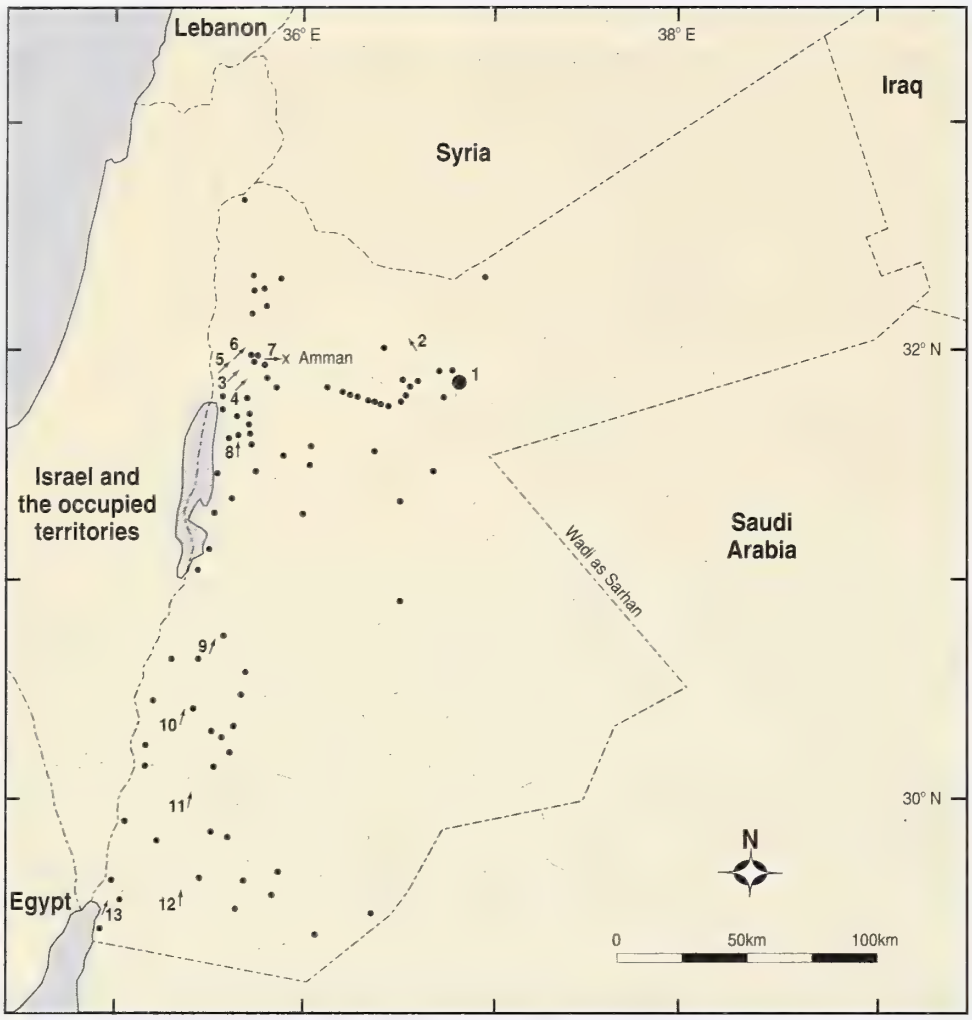


Figure 2: Location of migratory raptors in spring, Jordan 1990-92.

KEY TO SITES:

1 = Azraq
2 = Qa' al Hibabiya
3 = Kafrayn
4 = west of Na'ur
5 = Ash Shuna al Janubiyya
6 = Wadi Shu'ayb
7 = west Amman including Amman National Park
8 = confluence of Wadi al Mujib and Wadi al Hidan
9 = Wadi Dana
10 = Petra (and Al Bayda)
11 = Ras an Naqab
12 = Jabals Rum and Umm Ishrin
13 = Aqaba

KEY TO SYMBOLS:

large spot:
site with over 100 raptors counted
(*with arrow, if direction of flight known*)

small spot:
other sites where raptors were seen

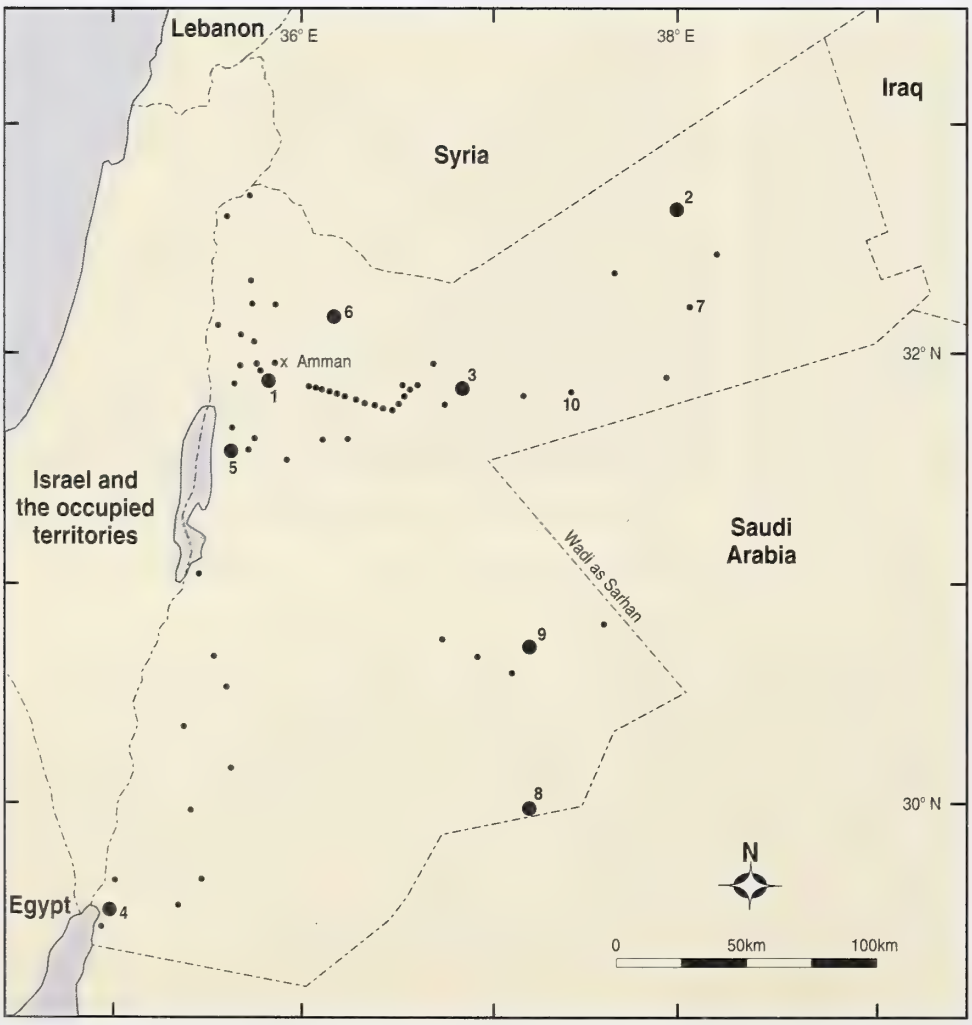


Figure 3: Location of migratory raptors in autumn, Jordan 1989-91.

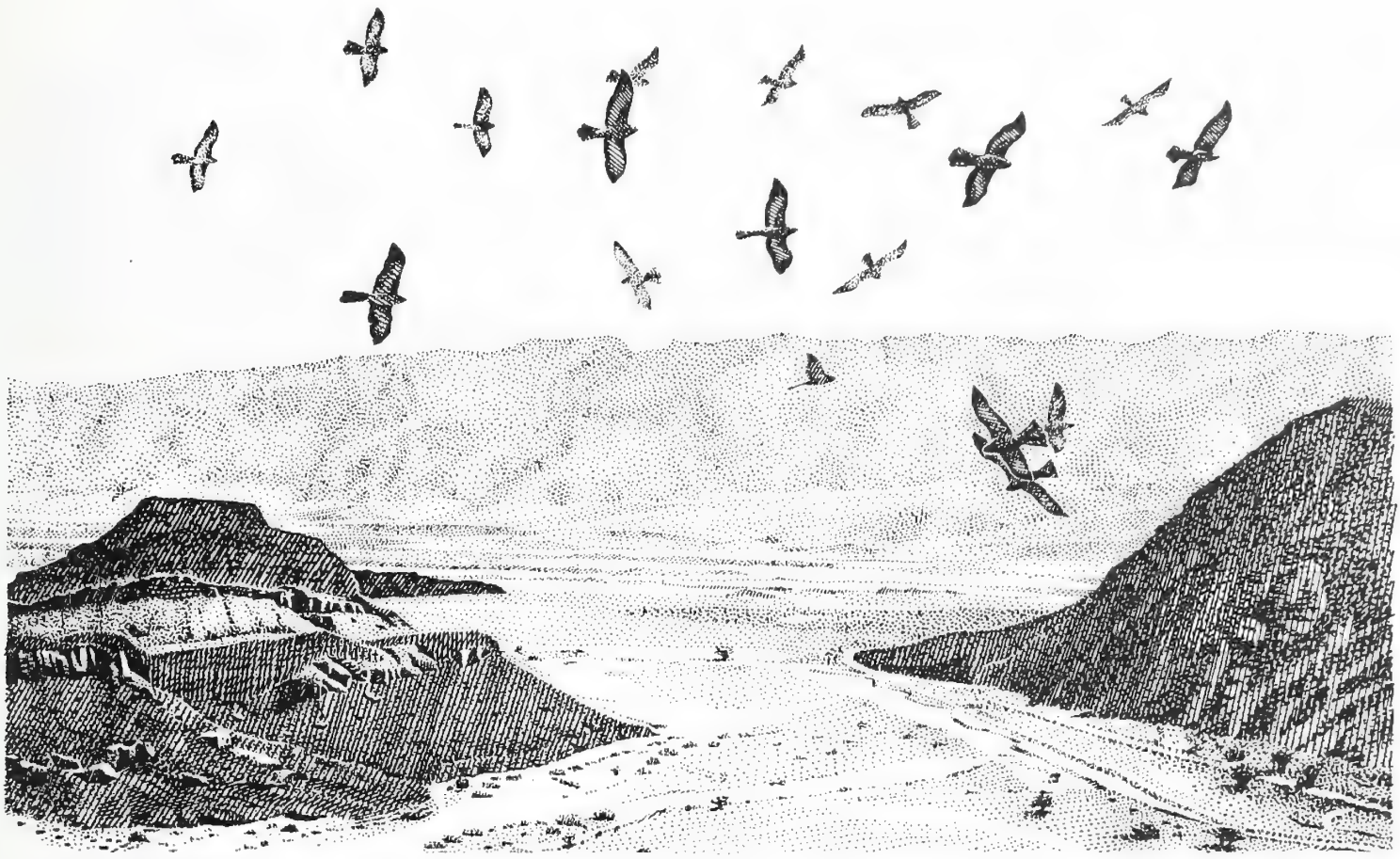
KEY TO SITES:

1 = Amman National Park
2 = Ghadir Burqu'
3 = Azraq
4 = Aqaba
5 = Mukawir
6 = Al Khirba as Samra sewage works
7 = water well SW of Ar Ruwayshid
8 = Bani Murra
9 = Wadi al Hasa
10 = Jabal Qattafi
11 = Amman to Azraq road.

KEY TO SYMBOLS:

large spot:
site with over 25 raptors counted

small spot:
other sites where raptors were seen



Levant Sparrowhawks *Accipiter brevipes* by *J. P. Smith*

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A baseline survey of White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* in central Turkey

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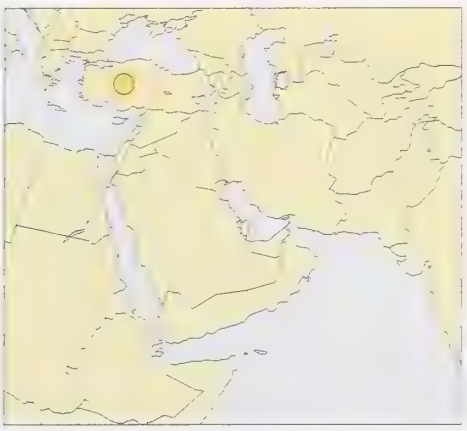


White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* were surveyed, using repeatable methods, in central Turkey in spring 1993. A population of 1,200-3,200 pairs was estimated for central Turkey. Presence of nests was correlated with the amount of wet grassland within 1km of the nest site. The distribution of occupied nests was not uniform within the censused area. Some 100-km squares with a low ratio of occupied nests had been subject to apparently unfavourable land-use changes, including drainage of wet pastures and burning of reed-beds; the conservation of such areas is required. This may be best achieved through wider countryside measures similar to those in use within the European Union such as Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Agri-Environment Regulations. A repeat survey of the 20 10-km squares which held occupied or recently occupied nests should be conducted in 5 years.

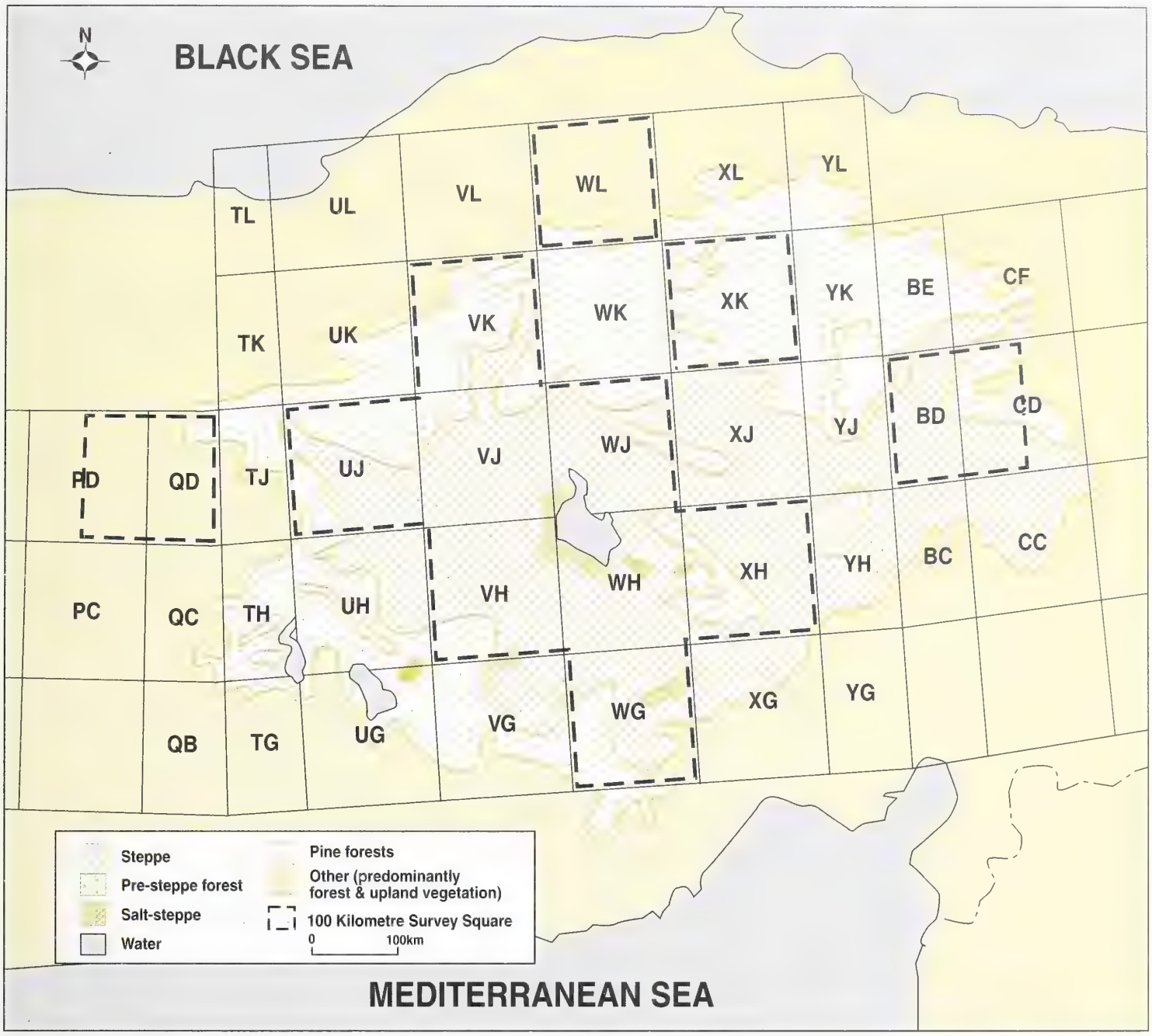
INTRODUCTION

THE TURKISH BREEDING population of White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* is estimated to be between 15,000 and 35,000 pairs and is considered to have declined by over 50% between 1970 and 1990. The species has been classified as a Species of European Concern (SPEC) Category 2 because of large and widespread population declines (Tucker & Heath 1994). It is a widely dispersed species and has been shown to be adversely affected by habitat change, particularly agricultural intensification (Goriup & Schulz 1991). In addition, the decline of northwest European populations which migrate to west Africa has been associated with winter mortality due to variable rainfall within the Sahel region causing increased winter mortality; breeding habitat changes have been shown to be less important (Kanyamibwa *et al.* 1993). The eastern populations which migrate to east Africa are more stable because traditional agricultural practices have been maintained (Dallinga & Schoenmakers 1989) and possibly because the species is opportunistic and has adapted to breeding habitat changes, particularly by making increasing use of man-made habitats such as refuse tips and waste ground.

Historical data on distribution and abundance within Turkey indicate that a widespread decline has probably occurred since the 1950s. Kumerloeve (1989) undertook three long distance transects (>10,000km) across Turkey and counted the number of White Storks and the number of occupied nests. However, none of the routes taken were the same and comparative analyses are therefore impossible. Kasparek & Kılıç (1989) provide an inventory of sites checked within Turkey. They also suggest that numbers are declining because the mean number of occupied nests within settlements has declined between 1958 and 1986. The data do not show whether the same settlements were checked in each year for which data are presented or whether a random survey of settlements was made in each of the 16 years. In contrast, monitoring of populations within three coastal areas, the Büyük Menderes valley and Göksu and Kızılırmak deltas, over the last 30 years (V. van den Berk *in litt.* in Tucker & Heath 1994) suggested that the population of approximately 600 pairs in these three areas had remained stable or even increased locally.

A survey of the 'globally threatened' Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in central Turkey in spring 1993 (Parr *et al.* 1995), provided an opportunity to count occupied and

Fig. 1. The natural vegetation of central Turkey from Noirfalise (1987). The Universal Transverse Mercator 100-km grid is shown and the 12 100-km survey squares are indicated



unoccupied White Stork nests. The objective for both species was to provide both a population estimate for the region and, more importantly, baseline data against which future trends might be measured.

METHODS

Twelve 100 x 100 km squares were selected from the Series GSGS 4380 1:500,000 map (1957) to cover 70% of the central steppe habitats as shown in Noirfalise (1987) (Fig. 1), and also to sample open country habitats to the west and east and uplands to the north (Table 1). The natural vegetation types mapped by Noirfalise (1987) have all been severely modified by a long history of agriculture. Remnant and modified forests occur in much of the uplands but most lower ground has been converted to cereal agriculture or sheep-grazed grassland. Five randomly selected 10 x 10 km were surveyed within each 100-km square. Hence this was a repeatable 5% sample survey. Additional data were collected in a non-random way by checking 10-km squares adjacent to the randomly selected square, if time permitted, and also on journeys between the random squares.

Three teams using hire cars, undertook the survey between 11 April 1993 and 15 May 1993. Survey teams attempted to visit all the settlements in the 10-km square and record the number of occupied and unoccupied nests. These data were collected

whilst counting Lesser Kestrels and a proportion of vacant nests may have been misclassified. However unoccupied nests often appeared old with no fresh sticks and were relatively easy to distinguish. Coverage of the random 10-km squares was only limited by impassable roads during periods of wet weather; only nine squares contained unvisited areas and only three with areas greater than 20%.

Each of the random 10-km squares was mapped to provide data on habitat areas, number of human settlements, and abundance of all bird species seen. Nine broad habitat types were identified:

1 Lowland dry grassland: uncultivated grasslands, heavily grazed by sheep. This often included a band of uncultivated pasture surrounding towns and villages used for sheep flocks in winter.

2 Arable agriculture: often large areas of cereal fields, mainly Wheat *Triticum aestivum.*

3 Wet grassland: poorly drained grazed land, associated with streams, rivers and ponds, often found close to settlements.

4 Mixed agriculture: in upland areas, small fields predominated with shrub/woodland margins and a mixture of arable and root crops, vineyards and orchards.

5 Upland grassland and scrub: hills and mountains either covered by grazed grasslands or shrubs.

6 Woodland: upland forests dominated by managed *Pinus* spp. and *Abies* spp.

7 Marsh: low-lying areas of wetland with vegetation dominated by *Phragmites australis* and *Juncus* spp.

8 Open water: lakes and flooded lowlands, the latter to improve the surrounding grazing land.

9 Built-up areas: towns, villages and industrial areas.

Altitude and topography were also measured in each 10-km square. Data were taken from the 1:500,000 Tactical Pilotage Charts produced by the US Air Force (1963). These maps, like the GSGS series, also have the Universal Transverse Mercator grid, but only show the major towns and highways. An altitude measure was calculated by taking the mean altitude, given in feet above sea level, of the four corners of the 10-km square. A topography score (TS) was measured by counting the number of contour intersections with the 10-km square boundary (0 = flat).

RESULTS

A total of 361 settlements in 154 10-km squares within the 12 selected 100-km squares were checked for the presence of White Stork nests in central Turkey. In addition, eight other settlements were checked in four other 100-km squares (Table 2). Appendix 1 (available on request from the senior author) summarises the habitat and White Stork breeding data collected for each random 10-km square. Appendix 2 (available on request from the senior author) is an inventory for each settlement visited for the random 10-km square sample. The mean visit time per settlement was 21 minutes. A total of 231 settlements were checked within the 60 randomly selected 10-km squares, which was a significantly greater number per square than in the non-randomly selected 10-km squares visited ($\varkappa^2 = 25.7$, d.f.=11, $p < 0.01$).

An approximate 100(1-α)% confidence interval for the total population estimate (r) was calculated using the following equation from Thompson (1992):

$$r = \pm t \sqrt{N(n\text{-}1) \times n^2}$$

where t is the upper $\alpha/2$ point of Student's t distribution with n-1 degrees of freedom. This gives a population estimate with 95% confidence intervals of 1,260 ± 610 occupied White Stork nests within the 1200 km^2 survey area. The distribution of White Stork nests and occupied nests within 100-km squares was not uniform (Table 2). Squares VK, WG, WH and XK held the highest numbers of occupied nests representing 54% of the total population estimate. Squares VJ and VK had the highest ratio of unoccupied to occupied nests (33% and 83% respectively), suggesting that recent declines in numbers were most marked in these areas. Drainage of one area of wet grassland through ditch deepening was recorded in one random 10-km square in square VK and both the adjacent villages held abandoned White Stork nests that were last occupied in 1992. Data from all the 10 km squares visited (Table 2) suggested a similar ranking of importance for the 100 km squares .

The largest number of occupied White Stork nests was 10 in WH84 (Appendix 1). The mean number of occupied nests per random 10-km square was 1.1 and the mean number per occupied 10-km square was 3.2. If the area of central Turkish steppe habitats is estimated at 20,000km^2 then the extrapolated population estimate is 2,200 ± 1,000 occupied nests. The frequency of occupied nests per settlement is shown in Table 3. Two settlements held five occupied nests, but approximately 75% of occupied nests were single nests within settlements. Two nests were on telegraph poles outside of settlements (Appendix 2). Most nests were located on buildings. The largest colony in central Turkey was 12 occupied nests found in July 1994 in WH33 in the village of Eşmekaya adjacent to a large wetland (S. Parr and M. Naveso pers. obs).

A step-wise multiple logistic regression analysis of habitats on the presence of occupied White Stork nests found no significant relationships with any habitat or measures of altitude and topography. Alonso *et al.* (1991) showed that breeding White Storks in Spain foraged within 1km of the nest. Hence a similar analysis was performed on habitats measured within the 1-km square of each settlement and those in the surrounding 8 1-km squares. Habitats were only measured for the 130 settlements for which complete habitat data was available. 29 (22%) contained occupied White Stork nests. The results (Table 4 available on request from the senior author) show a significant positive relationship with wet grassland and a significant negative relationship with upland grasslands and scrub. These data suggest, taking into account the close inter-correlation of habitats (Table 5 available on request from the senior author), that breeding White Storks tend to occur more often in settlements adjacent to low-lying, flat areas containing wet grassland and marsh.

DISCUSSION

Extrapolation from the 5% random sample survey of 10-km squares within 12 selected 100-km squares provided an estimate of 1,200 ± 610 occupied White Stork nests. By further extrapolation the central Turkish population can be conservatively estimated at between 1,200 and 3,200 pairs. A significant correlation between the presence of an occupied nest and the presence of wet grassland within 1 km of the nest was demonstrated. This concurs with an analysis of the White Stork population in Spain (Carrascal *et al.* 1993) which showed that habitat selection was geographically very "constant", and that short to medium sward grasslands holding high prey densities were important. Hence conservation measures in both Spain and Turkey (and elsewhere) must be focused on ensuring that wide scale drainage of wetlands and the use of farming practices that decrease prey biomass are restricted. 'Wider countryside' prescriptions devised by the European Union including Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and Agri-Environment Regulations are probably the best

means of maintaining widely dispersed but locally important habitats. ESAs have been successfully established and operated in Spain (de Juana *et al.* 1993) and provide a useful model.

The use of remote sensing, especially the Landsat TM images, have proved valuable for determining Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* (Hodgson *et al.* 1988) habitat requirements. This technique might be useful for mapping wet grasslands and marshes over large areas. A measure of agricultural intensification might also be gained from an analysis of local agricultural production statistics collected by the Turkish Government's Department of Statistics. Increases in production might be correlated with habitat improvements, especially the funding of irrigation and drainage schemes. There will be a need to repeat the survey in at least five years time in order to measure population changes within the survey area. Repeat surveys should concentrate on the 20 10-km squares which held recently occupied nests.

Table 1. Natural vegetation of 100-km survey squares summarised from Noirfalise (1987)

100-km square	Percentage cover of natural vegetation			
XK	Pre-steppe forest 90%	Pine forest 10%		
XH	Steppe 75%	Pre-steppe forest 20%	Upland grassland 5%	
WL	Subpontic forest 80%	Oak forest 10%	Pre-steppe forest 10%	
WJ	Steppe 80%	Pre-steppe forest 20%		
WH	Steppe 75%	Open water 15%	Salt steppe 5%	Shrub-steppe 5%
WG	Steppe 55%	Pre-steppe forest 25%	Montane scrub 15%	Salt steppe 5%
VK	Pre-steppe forest 70%	Steppe 20%	Pine forest 10%	
VJ	Steppe 80%	Pre-steppe forest 20%		
VH	Steppe 80%	Pre-steppe forest 15%	Salt steppe 5%	
UJ	Steppe 50%	Pre-steppe forest 45%	Pine forest 5%	
PD/QD	Pine forest 50%	Oak forest 30%	Oak-pine forest 20%	
BD/CD	Steppe 65%	Pre-steppe forest 20%	Subpontic forest 15%	

Table 2. Summary of White Stork data collected in central Turkey, April-May 1993 and extrapolated population estimate

	RANDOM SAMPLE					NON-RANDOM SAMPLE			
100-km square	Number of squares visited	Number of settlements	WS nest number	WS occupied nest number	WS occupied nest estimate	Number of population	Number of squares visited	WS nest settlements number	WS occupied nest number
XK 5	15	11	9	180	2	2	2	2	
XH 5	11	2	2	40	3	3	2	1	
WL 5	51	5	5	100	1	1	1	1	
WJ 5	11	2	1	20	3	4	5	4	
WH 5	24	11	10	200	9	12	11	9	
WG 5	14	13	12	240	7	9	6	5	
VK 5	29	15	13	260	10	21	6	6	
VJ 5	16	6	2	40	11	13	3	1	
VH 5	9	2	2	40	20	25	3	3	
UJ 5	17	7	7	140	9	12	2	2	
PD/QD	5	22	0	0	0	19	28	0	0
BD/CD	5	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1260	231	74	63	1260		94	130	41	34
XJ 0						1	1	0	0
VG 0						2	1	1	1
UH 0						1	3	3	1
TJ 0						2	3	1	0
4 0						6	8	5	2

Table 3. Frequency of occupied White Stork nests within settlements within 60 random 10-km squares in central Turkey, April - May 1993

Number of occupied nests/settlement	0	1	2	3	4	5
Frequency	149	48	4	2	1	2

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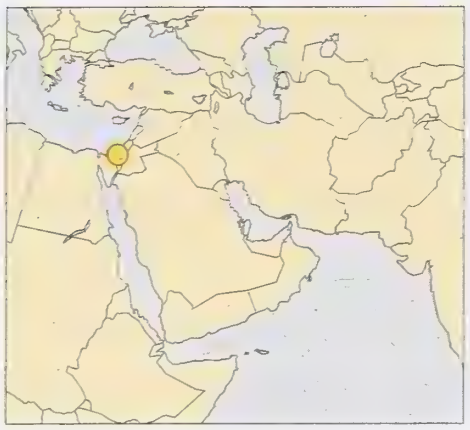
Observations on the avifauna of the Azraq wetland, Jordan, June 1995

FARES KHOURY



In June 1995, Qa' al Azraq was covered with saline water and held large numbers of waterbirds, especially waders. The marshes of the Azraq Wetland Reserve, dry since 1988, were also partially inundated. Several species, dependant on wet habitats were present (some apparently breeding), in this area. 50 species were recorded in the wetland reserve, flooded qa' and silt dunes. Some appear to have been beneficiaries of man-made developments (settlements, agriculture, ponds) in the area, although others, which breed in unprotected areas e.g. White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura*, are threatened by agricultural expansion.

INTRODUCTION

AZRAQ IS THE only permanent, natural wetland in the eastern desert of Jordan, and one of very few such sites in the Arabian peninsula (Evans 1994). The study area comprises the spring-fed freshwater marsh and pools (Shishan Marsh/Wetland Reserve, protected), and Qa' al Azraq (unprotected): a huge drainage basin which is seasonally flooded by rain. In wet years, the qa' is transformed into a huge, shallow saline lake. The silt dunes covered with *Nitraria* and *Tamarix* surrounding the qa' were also included in this study. Over the past 30 years, such flooding has occurred on a moderately frequent basis, but it is rare for the floods to be sufficiently extensive to delay complete evaporation until the summer, and hence allow waterbirds to breed. Winter rains in 1990/91 led to a productive breeding season in May-June 1991 (Andrews 1991), but subsequent floods have been short-lived or absent.

In June 1995, large parts of Qa' al Azraq and the nearby silt dunes were still flooded due to local and unusually heavy rainfall in November 1994. The water was especially rich in fish and insect larvae. In contrast to the qa', years of misuse and over-exploitation (water pumping) have led to the marsh completely drying out, with the consequent loss of its rich wetland avifauna (Conder 1981, Andrews 1991). In 1995, the flood reached a sufficient height to inundate the outer limits of the marsh, bringing back life to previously parched areas. This was a significant development, since water had not flowed into the marsh from the springs since c.1988. Concurrently, the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature and Azraq Oasis Project are attempting to protect and rehabilitate the marsh, concentrating on the Shishan pools area (approximately one hectare). Largely sparse and young stands of *Phragmites* and *Typha*, sedge and others (e.g. *Juncus, Carex, Scirpus, Tamarix*) now cover an area of over 30% of the Azraq Wetland Reserve (approximately 55 ha).

Although Azraq was the subject of a considerable amount of research in the 1960s (Mountford 1965, Nelson 1973, Wallace 1983), this important site has not been adequately monitored during the rapid developments of the last decade. Data are essential to document the avifauna's response to fundamental habitat changes caused by human exploitation, such as water extraction and agricultural expansion. The observations presented here provide an up-to-date supplement to the only other bird data available for this period (Andrews 1991, 1995).

SYSTEMATIC LIST

The following 50 species were recorded in and around the Azraq Wetland Reserve on five days during the 1995 breeding season. Observations were conducted on the following days: 12 May and 4, 8, 14 and 15 June. In May, many migrants were also recorded, but these are not detailed here; birds of the surrounding desert are also omitted.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* One pair in the freshwater marsh throughout the period of observation in reedbeds and tamarisks surrounding a freshwater pool. Breeding may have been attempted in 1995, but there has been no definite proof of nesting since 1969 (Nelson 1973).

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Three second-year birds were at the marsh.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* Two to five pairs until mid-June and then 20 immatures in the marsh and on silt dunes surrounded by water. There was a small colony in the marshes in the 1960s (Nelson 1973), and breeding may have been attempted in 1995.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* 25 in the marsh and on mud flats at the beginning of the period, declining to three on 15 June, were probably non-breeders.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Two or three in flooded areas and in the marsh throughout the observation period, were presumed to be non-breeding birds.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* A pair probably bred in the sedge marsh and reed beds. Present throughout the period, with a juvenile later seen in the reeds. This would be the first recorded instance of breeding since 1969 (Nelson 1973).

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Two apparently summered on the northern edge of the qa'.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Four on 8 June among flooded tamarisks on the northern edge of the qa', were presumed to be a non-breeders.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* One on the northern edge of the flooded qa' on 8 June. Breeding was suspected in the 1960s (Wallace 1983), and a family party was seen on the flooded qa' in 1990 (Andrews 1991).

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Four, probably a female with juveniles, throughout the observation period in a pool in the centre of the marsh. A male was seen on the flooded qa' on 14 June.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata* A male at the southern end of the flooded qa' on 15 June, was probably a non-breeding bird.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* One flew west on 14 June, pursued by Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, Collared Pratincoles *Glareola pratincola* and a Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*. A very rare migrant to Azraq.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* One, presumably an adult, at a freshwater pool on 4 June, and at least two calling in the marsh on 15 June. Breeding may have been attempted in 1995, although the species was not recorded as having bred since the 1960s (Andrews 1995).

Coot *Fulica atra* Between eight and 15 pairs, each accompanied by four or five young, were on the flooded qa'. This is apparently the first confirmed breeding record for Azraq, although nesting was suspected in the 1960s (Wallace 1983). Breeding probably occurred very locally in flooded, dense vegetation on the edges of the qa'.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* 150-300 pairs present in June (a few pairs with chicks were seen in May) and behaved rather aggressively (flying over in groups and giving alarm calls) when approached in June, and on one occasion in May mobbing and chasing a

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* 100 juveniles were counted in June, scattered or together with adults in flocks in areas covered by shallow water. The status of the this species at Azraq in 1995 is similar to that reported in 1991 (Andrews 1991) and depends mainly on the water level in the qa'.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* At least four pairs probably bred on islands on the edges of the qa' in June, and many more may have bred earlier in the year. Flocks of up to 60, including juveniles, were present at the qa'. Breeding was last recorded at Azraq in 1991 (Andrews 1991). At Burqu', in eastern Jordan, a small breeding population was discovered in spring 1995 (R. F. Porter *in litt.*).

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* 15-30 pairs on the western and southern fringes of the qa' throughout the period. A colony of c. 10 pairs presumably attempted to breed on the western edge of the qa' close to the marsh, whilst other pairs were scattered throughout the area. A colony of 200+ pairs was recorded in 1969 (Nelson 1973), but only 10 pairs in 1991 (Andrews 1991).

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* At least one territorial pair was present on a dry open area in the marsh throughout the period. A few pairs have bred at Azraq since 1991 (Andrews 1995).

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* The most common wader other than Black-winged Stilt in June 1995. Between 100 to 300 pairs breeding on islands and the edges of the qa'. Its status is apparently similar to that reported in 1960s (Nelson 1973, Wallace 1983) and 1991(Andrews 1991).

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* Twelve, including juveniles, on mud flats in the southern part of the qa'. Two at the northern end of the qa'. This is the first evidence of breeding at Azraq since the 1960s (Wallace 1983).

Spur-winged Plover *Chettusia spinosus* Four pairs in the marsh and the vegetated edges of the qa' acted as if nesting (being alert and noisy on approach): one pair with a chick was seen on the northern edge of the qa'. Eight pairs were at Azraq in 1963, but numbers are now reduced (Andrews 1995).

White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura* At least three pairs were present from May to at least mid-June in the well-vegetated, flooded silt dunes south of Azraq. They were alert and flew, whilst alarm-calling, upon approach. One pair was accompanied by a single fledged young, which had dark brown, mottled upperparts, on 15 June. It must have bred at Azraq, since the nearest regular breeding sites are 600 km away in Iraq and Turkey. It has been suspected for many years that small numbers of White-tailed Plover bred at Azraq (e.g. Wallace 1983). This record provides the first proof.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Three feeding on the northern edge of the qa' on 8 June were late migrants.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Two, probably non-breeding summer visitors, were in the flooded silt dunes south of Azraq throughout the period.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* 45 non-breeders remained throughout the period at Azraq North.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* Up to 20 adults throughout the period, some sitting on silt islands in the qa', but no eggs or young birds seen. 110 adults appeared, over and around the flooded qa', on 8 June. Breeding may have occurred, as it did in 1991 (Andrews 1991).

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* 12 over the northern part of the flooded qa' on 8 June. Non - breeders have been recorded at Azraq as late as the end of June (Andrews 1995).

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* Between four and ten, hunting over the flooded areas and pools throughout the period. One pair nested on an island in the flooded qa' south of Azraq. Although the species bred at Azraq in 1991 (Andrews 1991) this is the first nest to be discovered in Jordan.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* A total of 180, including juveniles, on 8 June in large flocks over the qa'. Small groups of 5-20 in all parts of the flooded qa' in June, and a few may have bred this year at Azraq due to suitable conditions.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Recorded throughout the area. Although breeding was not proven, the species is presumably a resident breeder at Azraq, although it was not present in the 1960s.

Palm Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* A few around the Shishan pools and inhabited areas with trees. This species was not present in the 1960s.

Namaqua Dove *Oenas capensis* One pair throughout the period, and according to a local worker had been present since April. They frequented a dry area, with a few reeds and tamarisks, in the marsh. A male was twice seen north of the marsh. These are the first summer records in Jordan. The species possibly breeds at Azraq, the most northerly site known.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* Recorded twice at the pools of the marsh, and once at the fish ponds, south of Azraq. These are the first summer records at the locality, where it was regarded solely as an autumn/winter visitor (Nelson 1973).

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* One of the pale morph in silt dunes between the eastern edge of the qa' and a stony basalt area further east.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* One in the cultivated area east of the qa'. There have been few breeding season records at Azraq since the 1960s, although nesting may still occur. It is regular in autumn at this locality. In Jordan, the species is largely confined to the western highlands during the breeding season, although singing birds were recorded near Burqu on 17 April 1995 (R. F. Porter/BirdLife International *in litt.*).

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens* 300-600 pairs were estimated in the area. This species was heard singing everywhere around the qa' and in dry parts of the marsh.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* A very common resident, recorded throughout the area, especially common in the marsh and rural areas around the qa'.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* Small numbers over the marsh throughout the period. 16 on a wire at the fish ponds on 15 June, where it may have bred.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica* A few in the village (Azraq South) and around the fish ponds were probably non-breeding birds.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* 10-20 pairs were estimated. The black-headed subspecies *feldegg* occurred locally in the marsh and flooded silt dunes until at least mid-June. Males were singing and behaving territorially. The species bred in 1991 (Andrews 1991).

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* Up to ten in the marsh throughout the period, with most in an area of sparse reeds on muddy ground, together with Yellow Wagtails. The presence of this species as late as mid-June suggests breeding, some distance from the nearest known breeding sites in Turkey. This record follows a pair at Khirba as Samra sewage works on 7 June 1990 (Andrews 1995). There was also a June record in Syria in 1994 (*Orn. Soc. Middle East Bull.* 33:42)

Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* Common in the marsh, silt dunes and vegetated areas around the qa'. Perhaps 50 pairs bred. Adults carrying food to nests in *Tamarix* and *Nitraria* bushes, and fledged juveniles were observed. Apparently more abundant than in the 1960s, when Wallace (1983) reported up to 14 territorial males at Shishan.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* Up to 20, mostly juveniles, on the edge of the qa' and on

dunes covered by *Nitraria*. In Jordan the species frequents well vegetated sand or silt dunes, e.g. Wadi Araba and Azraq, as well as sparsely vegetated, flat and stony deserts, e.g. the basalt desert, north-east of Azraq.

Graceful Warbler *Prinia gracilis* Two to five pairs in the marsh.

Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta* More common in the marsh than the last species, occurring principally in the drier parts and the silt dunes.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* 15-40 pairs. At least 15 males were singing throughout the marsh, even in small areas of reed. One fledgling on 15 June, in a dense reedbed on the edge of a pool. Andrews (1995) noted that the species now breeds in much reduced numbers: in the 1960s the population may have numbered 400 pairs.

Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* Three males singing between the marsh and the edge of the qa' in a flooded *Tamarix*-sedge complex on 14 and 15 June. This species has not been proven to breed at Azraq.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* Three records in open bushy areas, in and around the marsh.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common in inhabited and cultivated areas, as well as in the marsh.

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta* Recorded in the marsh and on the eastern edge of the qa', where a group of six were feeding on the ground and two were drinking in fields flooded by farmers. This species is probably a recent addition to the area's avifauna, due to increasing agriculture (Andrews 1995).

DISCUSSION

As a result of the flooding of the qa', which remained wet until at least mid-June in 1995, several species dependant on shallow, brackish water were common and/or bred on the qa' edges and islands. These included opportunists such as Black-winged Stilt, Greater Sand Plover and Little Tern.

Species dependant on open freshwater, reedbeds, dense *Tamarix* complexes and other tall, dense vegetation have decreased in number and diversity since the 1960s, as a result of habitat loss, caused by water extraction from the marsh springs during the 1970s and 1980s. Up to 28 species formerly bred or possibly bred in the wet parts of the marsh (Nelson 1973, Wallace 1983). In 1995, a maximum of 13 possibly bred or bred, in small numbers, in the marsh. These included Little Bittern, Purple Heron, Moorhen, Citrine Wagtail and Reed Warbler. On the positive side some species have been attracted by the increasing cultivation and development of man-made pools, including some which are not known to breed, e.g. Sand Martin, or are rare in Jordan, e.g. Pied Kingfisher, but may nest at the fish ponds which were established in the 1980s. Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, of which one pair bred at the ponds in 1990 (Andrews 1991), is another recent addition to the avifauna.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* may still occur in winter, but a breeding population has not been re-established, whilst Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* possibly still breeds (a possible record of a pair on 8 June), but no evidence of this was obtained in 1995.

Non-aquatic species recorded in the marsh also occur in dry areas around Azraq. Several species which are expanding their range were absent in the 1960s e.g. Collared, Palm and Namaqua Doves and Desert Finch. The rapid development, especially of agriculture, around the wetland continues to indirectly threaten

important and unprotected areas for rare breeding species in Jordan, e.g. Coot, White-tailed Plover and Little Tern. Others e.g. Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* have already been lost.

Both Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* and Moustached Warbler *A. melanopogon* were seen and heard in May 1995 in the last mature reedbeds adjoining the Shishan pools. In June, the pools were artificially enlarged and the reedbeds destroyed. Given adequate protection of the marsh and its freshwater sources, these species as well as other former breeders could perhaps re-establish breeding populations in the future.

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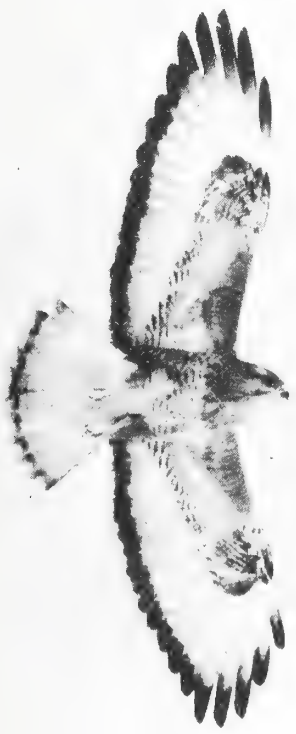

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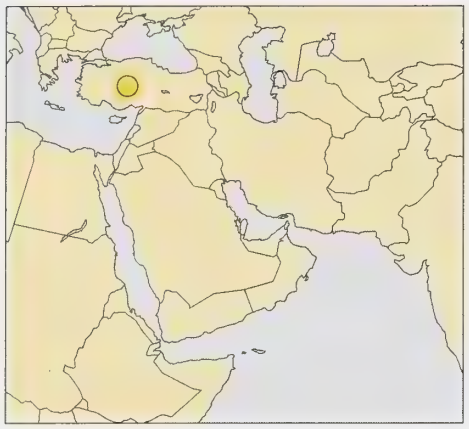
A short breeding bird survey of Kulu Gölü, Central Anatolia, Turkey in May 1995

SÜHENDAN KARAUZ KIRAÇ AND CEM KIRAÇ



Seven islands in Kulu Gölü were surveyed for breeding waterbirds in May 1995. Compared to the results of previous surveys and casual observations, breeding populations of most species had remained stable or declined, but significant increases were noted for Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* and Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*.

INTRODUCTION

KULU GÖLÜ IS a typical Central Anatolian steppe lake. It was selected as one of 78 Important Bird Areas (IBA) by Ertan *et al.* (1989) and remains an important waterbird breeding site. On the basis of a brief survey in May 1995 a significant increase in the numbers of breeding Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* and Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* has occurred while most other species have remained stable or declined.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

Kulu Gölü (39° 05′ N 33° 09′E) is 110 km south of Ankara and surrounded by dry semi-steppe and agriculture except on the southern and western shores where there are small stands of *Phragmites* reed. It is fed by Kulu River which rises to the west and springs at its northern and southern margins (EFT 1993). Water level varies according to seasonal rains. Maximum depth of the lake is two metres and its area is 800 ha. (Ertan *et al.* 1989). The altitude of the lake is 930 metres. It was declared a First Degree Natural Site in July 1992 by the Turkish Ministry of Culture.

There are four small islands in the east and three islands in the northern part of the lake: sand island I, sand island II, Büyük island and Topak island on the eastern shore and Yassı, Arka and Esentepe islands on the northern shore. Sand island I and II are the authors names alone but the other island names are in widespread local use.

The islands are all between 50 and 300 metres across their longest axis. Most have sandy or stony perimeters and several are partly vegetated. On Topak island this is 1.5 metres high. Arka and Esentepe islands are rarely utilised by breeding birds as they are connected to the shore by sandbanks, enabling humans and cattle to reach them.

METHODS

The area was visited twice during the breeding season. On 7 May 1995 waders, gulls and terns were observed incubating on two of the islands, thus a more thorough breeding census of these was attempted on 19 May.

All nests were counted during the incubation period. Sand island II, Topak island and Yassı island were counted from the mainland, using telescopes. The numbers of nests which were deemed 'apparently occupied' were assessed during visits to sand island I and Büyük island which were reached on foot and using an inflatable boat respectively.

PREVIOUS ORNITHOLOGICAL STUDIES

At least 184 species have been recorded at Kulu Gölü of which 21 have bred (Kasparek 1987). Breeding bird totals found by Kasparek (1987), Ertan *et al.* (1989) and G. Magnin and M. Yarar (pers. comm.) on 10 June 1994 are compared in Table 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In May 1995 breeding waterbirds were almost wholly confined to the small islands at the eastern and northern shores of the lake where they were free of predation. The complete results of our survey are presented in Table 1 alongside all other available data from the site. It should be noted that data presented in Kasparek (1987) are a summary of the observations of many observers, most of whom visited the area on an incidental basis, whilst that in Magnin and Yarar (1994) and the present study are the result of more organised surveys.

Table 1. Numbers of breeding waterbirds at Kulu Gölü, Central Anatolia, Turkey in May1994 with comparative numbers from previous surveys.

	Kasparek (1987)	IBA (1989)	Magnin & Yarar (1994)	Present study (total)	Sand I	Sand II	Büyük	Topak	Yassı	Arka
Black-necked Grebe	100-150	220								
Greylag Goose	+			2				2 pr + broods		
Ruddy Shelduck	50	50								
Common Shelduck	10-15		5							
Mallard				2			pr (6 eggs) pr (14 eggs)			
White-headed Duck	30			22 ♂+ 16 ♀						
Oystercatcher	10	10	8	3 (inc 1 on mainland)			2			
Black-winged Stilt	80	100	60	8	4				4	
Avocet	150-200	200-400	280	143	6	44	20	14	53	6
Collared Pratincole				3					3	
Kentish Plover	10-20									
Greater Sand Plover	5	5		1 (mainland)						
Lapwing	50		30	5						
Mediterranean Gull	<30	389	400	180			92 (3 colonies)	87	1	
Black-headed Gull	50		c. 750	270			45	183	42	
Slender-billed Gull	100	100	100	326			325 (3 colonies)	1		
Gull-billed Tern	200	200	195	473			251	36	166	20

Plate 1. Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* colony on Büyük island, Kulu Gölü. (*Cem Kiraç*)

Plate 2. Mixed colony of Slender-billed *L. genei* and Mediterranean Gulls *L. melanocephalus* on Büyük island, Kulu Gölü. (*Cem Kiraç*)

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* Three colonies totalling 92 pairs were found on Büyük island: 50 pairs with Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus;* 27 pairs and 15 pairs with Slender-billed Gulls. 87 pairs were incubating on Topak island and one pair was on Yassı island. Goutner & Isenmann (1993) reported just 50 pairs in 1987 whilst G. Magnin and M. Yarar (pers. comm.) estimated 400 pairs in 1994.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* On Büyük island, 3 separate colonies were identified: the first of 140 pairs was monospecific while the second was of 140 pairs and the third consisted of 45 pairs with Mediterranean Gulls. The 1995 breeding numbers are considerably higher than

previous counts (see Table 1). The Central Anatolian lakes, especially Seyfe Gölü and Kulu Gölü, are important breeding centres for this species in the Mediterranean basin (Isenmann & Goutner 1993).

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* Both 1994 and 1995 estimates of breeding numbers were considerably higher than previous studies but the 1994 figure was a rough estimate (G. Magnin & M. Yarar pers. comm.).

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* A total of 475 pairs was found. Highest numbers were on Büyük island which had 251 pairs, where nests were scattered throughout the short vegetation on the sand surrounding the island, or in the centre of the island. The number of Gull-billed Terns in 1995 was more than double previous estimates. The species is subject to a widespread decline in Europe and is considered Endangered (Tucker & Heath 1994), a trend mirrored in Turkey (Biber 1993).

Although Kulu Gölü has been designated a First Degree Natural Site, it receives no effective protection. The principal threats are from over- and illegal hunting, together with the discharge of sewage effluent from the town into Kulu River (EFT 1993).

This study confirms the importance of Kulu Gölü for breeding waterbirds in Central Anatolia and further monitoring should be undertaken, especially for White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, gulls and terns. Strict conservation regulations should also be applied by the appropriate government department.

Plate 3. Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* colony on Büyük island, Kulu Gölü. (*Cem Kiraç*)

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We thank Murat Yarar and Gernant Magnin for providing their unpublished data from 1994 and their assistance with previous information, Okan Arıhan for providing an inflatable boat and other equipment and Ece Soydam for his help in the field. Special thanks to Dr Sancar Barış, Dr Stephen Newton and Guy Kirwan for helping with the preparation of the final manuscript.

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Did Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos* formerly breed in Jordan?

M. I. EVANS AND SULTAN AL-MASHAQBAH

THE LAPPET-FACED VULTURE *Torgos tracheliotos* is a vagrant in Jordan with just one documented record: one near Azraq in April 1963 (Wallace 1984) and some unpublished sightings in recent years in Wadi Araba (Sutari 1996). These are considered to be wanderers from the tiny remnant Israeli population (just two birds are known in the wild, Shirihai 1996) which until 1989 bred on the west side of Wadi Araba. It is plausible that the species formerly bred on the Jordanian side of Wadi Araba, as habitat and human pressures were presumably similar in both countries until recently. Here we record anecdotal evidence to support this supposition.

Whilst surveying Dana Nature Reserve for birds in April 1995, we interviewed Abu Mohamed, a local man in his early fifties. He had lived here all his life, working as a shepherd and was knowledgeable and interested in wildlife. After discussing the nearby colony of Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* we asked if he knew of any tree-nesting vultures. It transpired he had observed this once, when about 12 years old, i.e. between 1953-1955. Whilst in Wadi al Khrayjiyah (30° 34'N 35° 24'E), a flat, sandy area on the outwash plain of Wadi an Nummalah bordering Wadi Araba, about seven km south of the recently established village of Qurayqira and outside Dana Nature Reserve, he noticed a smell akin to rotting meat, coming from a huge mass of twigs, possibly a nest, atop a nine metre *Acacia raddiana* ('seyal') tree. He scaled the tree to establish if there were eggs but could not climb into the nest and was forced to construct a hole upwards through it. By sticking his head through the hole he could see a small, naked raptor chick. The nest was thick and flat topped with a very shallow cup (where the nestling lay), constructed of twigs with some rags and other "rubbish" and was large enough for two boys of his size to have sat on top of it. Both adults then appeared, swooping at him with outstretched talons and he claimed to have been cut by one of them. He saw that they were huge vultures ("nisr") with naked heads, notably hooked bills and large talons, the size of a man's fist. Terrified, he descended and ran away.

According to Abu Mohamed, eight years later (in 1961-1963) the largest acacias in Wadi al Khrayjiyah (including the nest tree) were chopped down by itinerant charcoal-burners from At Tafila. He never saw or heard of any more such nests. The Twisted Acacia *A. raddiana* tends to have a single trunk and be taller than the only other acacia common in Wadi Araba, the multi-stemmed Umbrella Acacia *A. tortilis*. It is possible that *A. raddiana* was targeted by the charcoal-burners. The outwash plain of Wadi an Nummulah still supports one of the most impressive stands of *Acacia tortilis* in Jordanian Wadi Araba, despite there being many more people, mostly semi-nomadic pastoralists, than in the 1950s.

There is little doubt that Abu Mohamed found a Lappet-faced Vulture nest. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* is the only other large breeding raptor in Wadi Araba which would build such a nest but the description precludes this identification. Tree-nesting by Golden Eagles has not been recorded in Wadi Araba and apparently only occurs in areas devoid of suitable cliffs (e.g. the fringes of Rub al Khali desert, Saudi Arabia) which are plentiful in this part of Jordan.

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Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* breeding in north-west Syria

GUY R. MANNERS AND JÜRGEN DIEKMANN

ONE DAY IN spring 1995, Osama Denny brought an owlet to the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) research farm at Tel Hadya, south of Aleppo, Syria. The bird had been found at Dana village, near Bab Al Hawa west of Aleppo on the Syrian-Turkish border. ICARDA operates a policy of encouraging raptors and owls as biological control agents for pest rodents on the farm, hence the reason for bringing the owl to Tel Hadya.

GRM, who was familiar with the habitat in the region of its capture, assumed the owlet would be an Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* but subsequent perusal of photographs taken at ICARDA proved it to be a Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*, the diagnostic orange eyes and facial markings being clearly visible.

The owlet was kept in a cardboard box at the farm buildings for a couple of days, before being placed in a rocky crevice above a quarry wall on the farm. It was fed on raw beef which it took readily, but about a week after its arrival it died of unknown causes.

Neither Cramp (1985) nor Baumgart *et al.* (1995) list Long-eared Owl as a Syrian breeding bird. The breeding range map in Hollom *et al.* (1988), which includes northern Syria, is probably in error. Given its range in Turkey, where the species is a locally common breeder in parts of South-east Anatolia adjacent to Syria e.g. at Birecik, this first confirmed breeding record in Syria is relatively unsurprising.

Plate 1. Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* chick, Syria 1995

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The first Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* in Egypt and the Western Palearctic

ASHLEIGH ROSIER

ON 30 MARCH 1995, during a two week birding trip to Egypt with several colleagues, I visited Wadi Hagul, between Cairo and Suez. The wind was north-westerly, force two to three with bright sunshine and clear skies. On arrival the rest of the party headed east whilst I proceeded in the opposite direction.

I noticed two swallows flying low towards me at approximately 100 yards range, one of which was immediately registered as being unusual. It was flying in the manner of a swallow but appeared to have a square ended tail. The birds then deviated from their direct flight and started feeding. It was obvious that one was a Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* but the second bird had electric blue upperparts, much brighter and paler than the more familiar congener. Being unsure if it was a swallow or martin I continued watching it for about two minutes as it approached still feeding. Striking white underparts and a black and white underwing pattern were noted. Attempting to attract the attention of my colleagues, who had now returned to the vehicles, I watched the bird to within ten metres. In addition to the principal features already noted I was able to add the rusty-tan crown and the extremely long and fine tail streamers. Something was familiar about this strange bird although it was obviously a species I had not seen previously. Thoughts of Wire-tailed Swallow *H. smithii* came to mind and fruitlessly I again tried to attract the rest of the group but I was too far away and downwind of the cars. At this point the two birds started to fly away from me and I observed them until they had almost disappeared. I returned as swiftly as possible, only to see two cars pull away before I could arrive. Upon reaching the remaining car I hurriedly relayed a description of the mystery bird to John Randall who confirmed my suspicions (having observed the species on several trips to Gambia). We therefore set off in pursuit of our colleagues. Despite catching them up after six kilometres, it was decided not to attempt to relocate the bird due to a puncture which required repair and the fact I had watched the bird until it was almost lost to sight.

General appearance. Barn Swallow-like with brighter upperparts and striking underwing pattern (see Figure 1). Slightly smaller than the accompanying Barn Swallow, being also marginally slimmer and sometimes appearing longer-bodied. At close quarters the long thin tail streamers, white tail spots (when fanned) and rusty-tan crown were obvious.
Upperparts. In bright sunlight appeared electric blue, much brighter and paler than the blackish-blue of the nearby Barn Swallow.
Underparts. White underwing coverts with contrasting black primaries and secondaries. Rest of underparts white.
Flight. Not unlike Barn Swallow, perhaps slightly more fluttering but usually fast and direct and never higher than 30 feet from the ground. Fanned tail occasionally when banking.

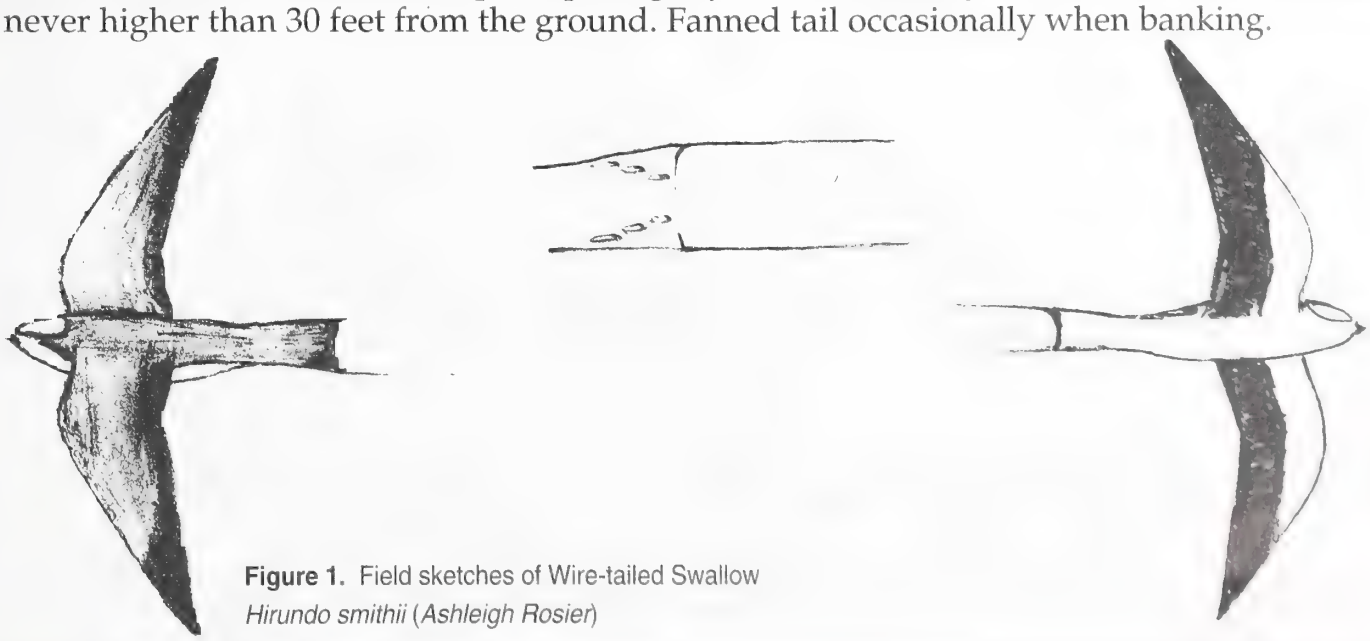

Figure 1. Field sketches of Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* (*Ashleigh Rosier*)

Wire-tailed Swallow is widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa from Senegal east to Somalia and south to northern Namibia, Botswana and South Africa, and lowlands in southern Asia from Tadzhikistan east to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam (Sibley & Monroe 1990). This is the first record for the Western Palearctic. One was reported at Al Ghar, United Arab Emirates on 20 February 1996 (*Birding World* 9 (2): 51) but there no other records in the Middle East.

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The first Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* in Jordan

M. I. EVANS

AT DUSK ON 26 February 1995 I was birdwatching from the asphalt road at the base of the white chalk cliff above the terraced orchards at Dana village (30° 41′N 35° 37′E), at c. 1,300 metres in the Sharra Highlands of southern Jordan. The site was particularly sheltered. There was a slight breeze and conditions were cloudless and cold with only weak sunlight from the setting sun. I noticed two birds progressing (by hopping or shuffling) quite rapidly up the exposed, tilted rock strata of the cliff. They were approximately 10 metres south of the main spring at the base of the cliff and I was able watch them unobscured at 20 metres range with 10 x 40 binoculars for 20-30 seconds before they flew out of sight. Throughout I concentrated on one of the birds, although the two kept within one metre of each other, behaving as if paired and preparing to roost.

Plumage A notably large, dark-looking accentor with thin bill and dark eye. Overall plumage coloration dark grey with thick, well-defined, rich rufous streaking on the puffed-out flanks being the most obvious feature. Pink-orange legs.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* is the only large accentor with rufous flank streaking found in the Middle East. As they were viewed from below and their flanks were puffed out, I did not positively note the streaked mantle and characteristic wing pattern. However, I had previously seen the species in Pakistan in 1991 and was thus confident of the identification. The next morning I found a Dunnock *P. modularis*, the only possible confusion species (with which I am familiar), among the large bramble thickets of the lower Dana orchards - itself a notable record, being the southernmost sighting in Jordan by more than 100 km of this scarce winter visitor.

This is the first documented record of Alpine Accentor in Jordan. Andrews (1995) predicted its occurrence, it being a scarce but regular winter visitor in very small numbers to three localities in northern Israel (Shirihai 1996). Snowfall in Jordan during winter 1994/95 was significantly above average and in the Dana area resulted in over a month's snow-cover in some places in December and January, although there was no snow nearby at the time of this observation. It is unsurprising that the first record should be so far south, as the Sharra Highlands is the largest block of montane habitat in Jordan and is regularly snow-covered in winter.

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Winter status and distribution of Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* in Turkey

ROLF & SABINE UHLIG, GUY M. KIRWAN AND Y. SANCAR BARIŞ

TWO RACES OF Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* breed in Turkey: *subalpina* in the Taurus mountains, between 2400 and 3500 metres, and nominate *montana* in the east from 2400 to 4200 metres at least (Roselaar 1995). Kumerloeve (1961) mentions records in the Taurus at 1400-1600 metres and isolated populations (of which the subspecific identity is unclear) occur on Uludağ, Bursa province above 1900 metres (Jetz 1995) and at an unknown altitude in the Ilğaz Dağları, Kastamonu/Bolu provinces (Schweiger 1965). Occurrence on Boz Dağ, Izmir province requires confirmation.

In winter the species descends from most Western Palearctic breeding areas: in Iberia and the Balkans it commonly occurs in lowland rocky habitats and even around buildings away from montane areas (Cramp 1988). Due to an extreme lack of winter birdwatching activity, other than at wetlands, there are very few records of Alpine Accentors in Turkey between November and March and its movements at this season, if any, remain virtually unknown. Kasparek (1992) knew of no winter records and the OST Bird Reports list a single November occurrence: one at Bazargan (locality untraced), East Anatolia (OST 1975). Several were in the Kaçkar mountains, north-east Turkey on 1 November 1994 (B. Günes *per* G. Magnin).

Two winter records from southern Turkey are both recent: three at Alahan monastery, south of Sertavul Geçidi, Içel province at 1889 metres on 1 December 1995 (N. Shelton *per* H. Welch) and one at Oymapınar reservoir, north of Manavgat, Antalya province at 200 metres on 6 January 1995 consorting with Rock Nuthatches *Sitta neumayer* (R & SU). Interestingly, YSB who has spent considerable time in eastern Turkey during winter (whilst on military service) has no records of Alpine Accentor and N. Shelton (*per* H. Welch) was unable to find the species at the snowline on Demirkazik, Niğde province on 14 February 1996.

It is unclear how frequently Alpine Accentors descend to the coastal foothills of the Taurus in winter. Its status in eastern Turkey at this season is wholly unknown. Some may emigrate. Since the 1980s small numbers have been discovered at three localities in northern Israel (Shirihai 1996) and there are single records from Jordan, in February 1995 (Evans 1996) and Syria, in November 1983 (Baumgart *et al.* 1995). There are also winter records from Iraq (Hollom *et al.* 1988).

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Records of Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* in north-eastern Turkey

VOLKER DIERSCHKE, FRANK STÜHMER AND THORSTEN STÜHMER

THE TOWN OF Rize on the Black Sea coast of eastern Turkey, presents excellent opportunities to study migrating passerines. During autumn migration, newly arrived migrants may be encountered anywhere along the coast. In August 1988, 1990, 1991 and 1993 we found not only good numbers of buntings, warblers and wheatears, but also scarcer species, e.g. up to ten Citrine Wagtails *Motacilla citreola*, four Barred Warblers *Sylvia nisoria*, seven Rose-coloured Starlings *Sturnus roseus*, 20 Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis* and 20 Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana*. During each visit (lasting one to three days) we also found Booted Warblers *Hippolais caligata* as follows: one or two on 20 August 1988 (VD), two or three on 15 August 1990 (FS), one on 29 August 1991 (TS) and one on 5 August 1993 (FS, TS, R. Muheim).

As structure, colouration and behaviour were similar in all birds, we give a short composite description based upon all birds. All exhibited light brown upperparts and whitish underparts, lacking any greenish or yellowish tones. The striking head pattern included dark lores and a pale supercilium, most pronounced before and above the eye, contrasting with the warmish brown ear-coverts and crown and whitish throat. The mantle, most wing coverts and tail were uniform brown, while the tertials and greater coverts were narrowly fringed off white. The latter formed a diffuse, but obvious sickle-shaped wing panel. The outer webs of the outermost tail feathers were whitish. The tail was square-ended, but the innermost pair of tail feathers appeared slightly shorter. All birds showed little primary projection, giving rise to a clumsy appearance compared to nearby Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus*, which were approximately the same size. The legs appeared flesh to greyish-brown in colouration, depending on light conditions. The toes were apparently slightly darker than the tarsus. Calls were only heard in 1990: a harsh "check".

Plate 1. Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*, Rize, 20 August 1988. (*Volker Dierschke*)

Plate 2. Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*, Rize, 5 August 1993. (*Frank Stühmer*)

Booted Warblers were often conspicious, being encountered at the edge of small bushes and on boulders, often exhibiting flycatcher-like behaviour. Approach to within five metres was possible and permitted photography in 1988, 1991 and 1993. Based on more detailed descriptions than presented here, the 1988 and 1990 records were submitted to and accepted by the German Rarities Commitee.

Despite the proximity to the breeding and wintering ranges (west to the Caspian Sea and west to the Arabian Gulf region respectively, Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1991) there are just four

other records of the species in Turkey. The only previous record was at Ardeşen on 9 September 1976 (Beaman 1986) with more recent spring records being of singletons at Birecik on 24 May 1992 (Anon 1992), Mersin on 25-26 April 1993 (P. Collin in Kirwan 1994), and Erçek Gölü on 20 May 1993 (Kirwan 1994). The fact that the species was recorded during all our short visits to Rize suggests regular migration of small numbers through eastern Turkey.

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Additional information on breeding biology of Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*

PETER CASTELL

BWP (Cramp 1988) states that the nesting site of Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* is a thick bush or low tree, often close to the trunk and that the mean height above ground is 2.12 metres (1.7-2.5 metres). The main laying period in North Africa, Iberia and Greece is given as the second half of May and early June. Incubation lasts 13 days, commencing upon the clutch's completion.

During the breeding seasons in 1992 and 1993 I spent several weeks in Turkey. A total of three weeks were spent in the Göksu Delta, Southern Coastlands. Inland of the delta a number of nests were found in conventional sites in low bushes. Additionally six occupied and 20 abandoned or old nests were discovered in the coastal sand dunes on the west side of the delta near the town of Taşucu. This area has been used by locals as a refuse tip and piles of rubble, household refuse and tin cans are scattered over the dunes. Despite the availability of suitable bushes for nesting, the birds nest in oil drums, under tin cans and in the cavities of discarded breeze blocks. Two occupied nests were sited at the bottom of upright cans without lids; the cans were approximately 30 cm high with a diameter of 25 cm. The nests filled the base area with the cup closest to one edge. In common with other nests located in the area, the nest cup was always sited at the furthest point from the entrance of the relevant container.

The breeding season in the Göksu Delta is exactly as described in *BWP* above with eggs being laid at daily intervals and the incubation period (at the only nest studied) lasting 14 days. Upon leaving the nest the young swiftly disperse over a wide area. Fledged young which had just left the nest and were being fed by their parents remained at least 20 metres from each other.

Subsequently, on 18 May 1994 in southern Morocco, I found a nest containing a single newly hatched chick (no eggs were present) at five metres in a tree. Not only was this nest exceptionally high it was also significantly earlier than might be expected from the laying dates quoted in *BWP*.

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Description of the nestlings of Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*

PETER CASTELL

BWP (Cramp 1992) does not include a description of the nestlings of Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*. A nest of this species was found near Silifke, Southern Coastlands, Turkey in mid-June 1992. The young were naked upon hatching with skin, legs and feet all flesh-pink. The mouth was yellow with two black spots at the base of the tongue and the gape flanges were pale yellow. The eyes were still not open five or six days after the young had hatched.

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Additional information on Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea* breeding biology in south-eastern Turkey

PETER CASTELL

THE VARIOUS HABITATS mentioned in *BWP* (Cramp 1992) for Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea* include tamarisks on the banks of the River Euphrates, South-east Antolia, Turkey as well as scrub along river banks, palm groves and gardens. The nest site is situated in low scrub or grassy vegetation from near ground level to about 90 cm, with the mean height being 29 cm. The usual clutch contains four or five eggs and the nestling is described as having a lemon-yellow mouth with no tongue spots.

In May and June 1993 together with four colleagues, I spent a total of nine days (over the course of two visits) in the Birecik area on the River Euphrates. Ten occupied nests of Ménétries's Warbler were found: six were in brambles and four were in *phragmites* or other waterside vegetation not mentioned in Cramp (1992). Most nests were low (between 30-60 cm above the ground) but two (in bramble) were at approximately 230 cm and 130 cm. Clutch size was four in eight of the nests and five eggs in another with the final nest containing just a single egg although this site was not revisited subsequently. Nine of these were discovered on 18-19 May at which time eight contained eggs and the other newly hatched young. These have two indistinct marks on the tongue, which become more noticeable with age. The fledglings leave the nest after approximately 11-12 days.

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The first Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* in Jordan

B. C. MINSHULL

WHILST DRIVING ALONG the King's Highway (south-west Jordan) on 14 December 1995, Gillian Isherwood and I paused 15 km north of Wadi Musa to obtain better views of a male Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii*. In the same stony, cultivated field we disturbed various birds including Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs*, Corn Buntings *Miliaria calandra* and three other buntings which called like flushed Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* and showed red-brown rumps in flight. They alighted in an isolated bush and I observed them through a telescope over the next 10 minutes at a range of less than 100 metres. One clearly exhibited the distinctive head pattern of a male Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*; the others were female or first-winter Pine Buntings.

The following description is based on my clear recollection of the sighting.

Size and structure. Typical bunting appearance and approximately the same size as the accompanying Chaffinches, but slightly more bulky and longer-tailed.
Plumage of male. Striking head pattern: steely white crown with dark streaking, brown-red mask and bib with faint narrow white-grey flecks, darker eyestripe and ear coverts surrounding white-grey cheek patch. Grey nape and neck, giving collared effect. Upperparts typical pattern of buntings with dark red-brown centres and pale fringes to the mantle, scapulars and coverts and similarly coloured flight feathers. Rump red-brown, as in Yellowhammer. Underparts whitish with slightly diffuse but comparatively heavy dark red-brown flank streaking. This bird was considered to be a first-winter male.
Plumage of female/first-winter birds. Relatively nondescript, their plumage being typical of female-type buntings. The overall appearance was of a much subdued version of the male. Both had almost purplish, red-brown rumps and flank streaking, and the faintest impression of the male's head pattern. No trace of yellow was evident in either bird's plumage (see Shirihai *et al.* 1995).
Bare parts. Bills steely grey, eyes dark.
Call. As the birds flew, they gave a soft, slightly rippling "tsuk", strongly reminiscent of the call given by Yellowhammers in similar circumstances.

The site is at 1400-1500 metres in the Sharra Highlands of south-west Jordan, one of the highest hill ranges in the region. The species is regularly recorded in similar habitats in three areas of neighbouring Israel: Mount Hermon (1300-1700 metres), near Zefat (900 metres) and in the Jerusalem Hills (600-750 metres) (Shirihai 1996). This is the first published record of Pine Bunting in Jordan, although it was recently predicted as a possible winter visitor (Andrews 1995) and listed by Shirihai (1996) for Jordan without details.

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A new specimen record of Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* from Turkey

GUY M. KIRWAN

ON 13-14 FEBRUARY 1996 Kerem Boyla and I completed an inventory of the remaining bird specimens in the Robert's College, Bebek (Istanbul) collection. We were surprised to discover an immature, possibly male, Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, as neither Kasparek (1990) or Mathey-Dupraz (1920-24) list any specimens as being held there. Byers *et al.* (1995) consider sexing of immature birds problematic. The skin is poorly mounted and badly damaged but clearly identifiable. Despite this the specimen was mislabelled as Pine Bunting *E. leucocephalos;* it is unclear how and when this mistake originated. A male and female Pine Bunting, fully described by Kasparek (1986) are housed in the collection. As with the vast majority of skins (246 of 248) retained at the college the original label is unavailable. Its provenance is therefore unclear, although it was presumably taken within the environs of Istanbul in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

Kumerloeve (1961) erroneously omitted the species from the Turkish list. It was admitted by Kasparek (1990, 1992) on the basis of two untraced specimens obtained by T. Robson between 1861 and 1871 in the Istanbul area as well as an immature male collected by Schrader at Mersin, Içel province on 12 December (between 1882 and 1884). Robson sent an immature female taken at Büyükdere on 24 October 1871 to Dresser (1871) who reidentified the skin as a Rustic Bunting and another, unattributable to year, was apparently shot to the north of the city on 14 February (Kasparek 1990). Kumerloeve (1975) mentions a Rustic Bunting collected by I. C. Parrot (1905) at Pirgos (locality perhaps present day Yuvacık, Çanakkale province, 40° 05′ N 25° 45′E but probably Kemerburgaz, Istanbul province, 41° 09′N 28° 54′E) in north-western Turkey on 24 February 1904.

Neither Schrader or Parrot's specimens were donated to the Robert's College collection, whilst Robson furnished Dresser and several other leading European ornithologists with skins, in addition to maintaining his own collection. It seems unlikely that the less well documented of his two specimens is that discovered by KB and myself. This new specimen therefore brings the number of records in Turkey to five.

It is surprising that there are no modern records from Turkey. In Israel it is a rare but regular autumn migrant (annual maximum nine at Eilat in 1980) with single winter and spring records (Shirihai 1996). There are single records in Syria in October 1974 (Baumgart *et al.* 1995) and Kuwait in May 1953 (F. E. Warr unpubl.), one or two in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in December 1981-January 1982, five in the United Arab Emirates, all since 1985 (Richardson & Aspinall 1996) and three on Masirah Island, Oman between 1974 and 1979 (OBRC 1994). Scott (unpubl.) treated it as a rare and irregular (less than annual) passage migrant through Iran.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Derek Scott and Effie Warr for providing me with their unpublished data and assistance with references, Ruth Bimson for her patience, Kerem Boyla for assistance in cataloguing the collection and Gernant Magnin and Murat Yarar for organising our visit to the Robert's College.

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Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* breeding behaviour in Turkey

PETER CASTELL

BWP (Cramp & Perrins 1994) does not provide a description of Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* nestlings but offers the following information on the incubation period: usually 14 days (14-16 days in Israel and ten days recorded in Cyprus) and commencing once the final or penultimate egg has been laid. The fledging period is stated as 13-16 days (Israel) but ten days in Bulgaria and there is a record of young leaving a nest (possibly disturbed by the observer) after eight or nine days. There appears to have been no significant study of the species' mating system and there are conflicting reports as to the role of the male in the care of the young from observations in Croatia and Bulgaria: fed and cared for by the female only, by both parents throughout, and there is also mention of a male which cared for his offspring only after they had left the nest (see Cramp & Perrins 1994).

In Turkey I have found two nests of the species, one approximately 20 km north of Pozantı, Southern Coastlands in May 1992 and another five km north of Tarsus, Southern Coastlands in May 1993. The first contained two eggs on 27 May 1992 and four on my next visit on 8 June. Both adults were feeding their fledglings on 18 June. One was caught; it showed scarcely any trace of down. If incubation commenced on 29 May and lasted for 14 days, then the eggs would have hatched on 12 June meaning that the chicks would have fledged within six days. However it seems more likely that the fledgling was approximately 9-10 days old, meaning that incubation lasted only 10-11 days. A second nest containing four eggs was discovered on 27 May 1993, these were still present four days later. On 10 June the nest was empty, the chicks had now fledged and both adults were alarming in the immediate vicinity of the nest.

Newly hatched Black-headed Buntings have flesh-coloured skin with pale grey down; the mouth is pink (deepening to red with age) with two paler spots at the base of the tongue and another at its tip. The gape flanges are yellow. A fledgling of this species, age unknown but unable to fly, had a pale brown crown, unstreaked breast, white underparts and pink legs and feet.

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REVIEWS & Recent Literature

Harrap,S. & Quinn,D. (1995) *Tits, Nuthatches & Treecreepers*. A. & C. Black (Helm), London (U.K.), pp. 464, 36 colour plates, £27.99.

This volume forms the latest addition to the highly respected Helm Identification Guide series. The scope of these titles continues to increase and improve, this volume has 12% more pages than the familiar *Shorebirds* but covers only 50% of the number of species (110 in all). As well as identification and plumage descriptions, the text has detailed information on sexing/ageing characteristics, voice, distribution and movements, habitat, population, habits, breeding biology, geographical variation and taxonomic relationships. These accounts reflect the evolutionary characteristics of this group of non-migratory passerines, many of which have vast ranges leading to a large amount of subspecific variation and a certain amount of taxonomic confusion. This problem is demonstrated by the recognition of 57 species of true tits by Harrap, compared to anything between 32 and 53 species in other recent works (this work contains more species than Sibley & Monroe!). The justification for acceptance of specific status for some controversial species is well presented, both in the introductory chapters and the individual species accounts, although in some cases the arguments appear to be somewhat contradictory. A relevant example for the OSME region being the acceptance of Caspian Tit *Parus hyrcanus* as a full species, which is described as "on balance... fully justified" when the arguments presented for and against do not appear to provide full justification for a decision to be made on present knowledge. Of additional interest to students of Middle Eastern ornithology is the recognition of three species of Penduline Tit *Remiz* spp. occurring in Iran.

The book is exceptionally well researched, with a 14 page bibliography listing over 1200 references and relevant texts referenced in or at the end of each species account. This reflects the numerous studies which have been undertaken on some members of the group, for example 700 papers were published about Great Tits *Parus major* during 1979 - 93 which has led to a 14 page account of the species.

The plates continue David Quinn's high standards, with the acrobatic qualities of many species captured well. Subspecific, sex and age related plumage variation are well represented, with Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* receiving a whole plate and Great Tit a plate and a half. Distribution maps continue the established pattern of colour maps opposite the plates, with an important new innovation incorporating country, state and provincial boundaries where necessary. Accompanied by the extremely detailed distribution accounts these fulfil the author's stated intention of allowing the observer to identify the importance of observations within any region.

Potential areas for research are identified in the text, with requirements for further studies of Eastern *Sitta tephronota* and Western Rock Nuthatches *S.neumayer* all in areas of overlap in Turkey and Iran, and the possibility of the occurrence of Krüper's Nuthatch *S. krüeperi* in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq in areas of outlying Turkish Pine *Pinus brutia* of particular importance to OSME members.

Don't let the incorrect caption for the Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* on the front put you off, as this is an excellent book. It presents a mine of valuable information and certainly represents reasonable value for money in comparison to some other recent titles.

Adam Rowlands

Jetz, W. (1995) *The birds of Uludağ.* Birds of Turkey 11. Max Kasparek Verlag, Heidelberg, pp 44, DM 7.

Accessible within a couple of hours from Istanbul, the Uludağ massif has long been popular with birders visiting Turkey. This booklet summarises the area's ornithology from the 190 days of data analysed. Introductory sections cover general geography, history, ornithological importance, altitudinal zonation of vegetation and bird fauna, human activity and nature conservation, non-avian fauna, birdwatching activity and hints for birdwatchers. The systematic list provides a detailed statement of current ornithological knowledge, although gaps are readily apparent. Anyone contemplating a visit will find much useful information contained within its pages.

Chris Bradshaw

Jonsson, L. (1996) *Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East.* A. & C. Black (Helm), London (UK), pp 559, 2500 colour illustrations, 500 distribution maps, £15.99.

This paperback edition of a now standard work will doubtless encourage its even wider ownership and in-the-field use. Few accolades have escaped Lars Jonsson's work in this splendid guide but it is disappointing that the opportunity was not taken with this new publication to update a few more of the older plates. Nevertheless, still highly recommened for use in the Near East.

Guy M. Kirwan

Roselaar, C.S. (1995) *Taxonomy, morphology, and distribution of the songbirds of Turkey: an atlas of biodiversity of Turkish passerine birds.* GMB, Haarlem/NL & Pica Press, Mountfield/UK, pp 240, 149 distribution maps, £24.00.

The title of this remarkable book is a bit confusing and suggests treatment of the Turkish passerines. Of course, the main part of the book covers the true songbirds, but only the 156 breeding passerines are treated. On the other hand the 167 breeding non-passerines are listed in an appendix, and information on neighbouring countries has been included too. Non-passerines don't receive full treatment because 1. geographical variation occurs in only 16% of the species (53% for the passerines); 2. only few specimens are available; 3. much published information is out-of-date. Nevertheless, the subspecies in Turkey and their respective ranges are listed, but peculiarities are the (random) treatment of former and possible breeders, and the occurence of *Haematopus ostralegus longipes* (not *ostralegus*) and *Tringa totanus britannica* (not *totanus*).

Nine introductory chapters describe the methods used for collecting and presenting the information. Data have been collected during the last 20 years, with the Leiden and Amsterdam collections completely measured. As a result, three new subspecies have been described from specimens collected in 1863 (Leiden), 1876 (Tring) and 1934 (Bonn). Furthermore, subjects like speciation, zoogeography and endemism are included, but are unfortunately very brief and superficial, e.g. the influence of natural barriers (in Turkey) on geographical variation and development of clines has largely been omitted. Four general maps show habitats, Turkish 'sub-regions', density of published breeding sites, and relative height, but a detailed map showing all localities mentioned in the text or a gazetteer are missing. The author mainly follows Voous' list (1977), although differences (passerines: six, non-passerines: four) are not mentioned or explained.

The 145 species maps show breeding records by two kinds of red dots of c. 20 km across, plotted from published and collected material, representing 'possible' and 'probable/certain' breeding records, but a third symbol to distinguish 'probable' and 'certain' records could have been useful. Based on a period of 100 years or more, they show great resemblance to Hollom *et al.* (1988) and *BWP*, and differences generally point to errors in the latter two (e.g. Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* & Raven *Corvus corax*).

Each account gives scientific and English names, and for all but seven the Turkish name (based on a 1989 Turkish publication),

like Cif Caf (for Chiffchaff, with *lorenzii* considered specifically distinct) and Bülbül (for Nightingale!). Main information is divided into four headings: 1. 'Habitat' with brief notes on the species' requirements; 2. 'Distribution' summarizing information on population, status and movements; 3. 'Geographical variation'; and 4. 'References'.

For polytypic species the third (and most important) heading is divided into: 'Subspecies described or recorded in the region' and 'Subspecies recognized in Turkey'. The first lists all subspecies (valid or not) described from Turkey and surrounding countries, and gives details on author, year, type, locality, distinguishing morphological characters and measurements. Unfortunately, details on biological characters and differences in songs and calls are not included. It also leans heavily on Hartert's somewhat outdated *Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna (1903-1938)*, but this has been made up for in the second part, presenting the authors opinion on the aforementioned treatment with extensive discussions on the validity, differences, measurements and distribution in Turkey, resulting in the (sometimes provisional) lines on the maps to indicate subspecific boundaries and ranges of overlap or (supposed) intergradation.

A new Western Palearctic breeding species is presented by treating the Turkish Lesser Short-toed Lark population as a part of the *Calandrella cheleensis*-complex (*contra* Mild in Beaman *Palearctic Birds*, 1994).

The bibliography (covering ±400 items ranging from 1877 to 1994, mainly since ±1960) is presented in a rather cumbersome way, with abbreviated entries pointing to two separate bibliographies in the introductory chapters (chronological and country-wise) and to the species accounts, but no page numbers are included. Main sources I missed are Hüe & Etchécopar, *Les oiseaux du Proche et du Moyen Orient* (1970), Sibley & Monroe, Howard & Moore, Wolters' *Vogelarten der Erde*, and Peters' checklist (of which all passerine volumes have been published since Vaurie's treatment).

The Turkish and scientific/English indices only cover the passerines, thus not being usable as a complete list for the country, and subspecific names have not been included.

Errors are few, but the page numbering in 'contents' is incorrect, *Melanocorypha rufescens rufescens* (p. 26) should of course be *Melanocorypha bimaculata rufescens*, and Thick-billed Lark has been omitted from the indices. Therefore the only serious criticisms concern the brief introduction, the lack of a gazetteer/map & glossary, and the poor bibliography & indices. Nevertheless, both as the completion of a major task as well as a starting point for further study and conservation this book is a must for every serious palearctic ornithologist (amateur or professionals alike) at the friendly price of only £0.10/page.

Oscar van Rootselaar

Shirihai, H. (1996) *The birds of Israel.* Academic Press, London & New York, 692pp, £65.

Books with the title *The Birds of . . .* hide a multitude of sins. They may be site guides, field guides, basic bird books or detailed country avifauna. None of these notions fully prepares the reader for Hadoram Shirihai's monumental *The birds of Israel*. It is a huge work of great detail and scholarship, heavier than most volumes of *BWP* and sure to appear as excess baggage of well-prepared travellers to Israel. I hope the binding proves more robust than it seems.

Israel is a rich country, with a sophisticated system of protected areas and a strong interest in birds and nature conservation. It has varied habitats, from wetlands to deserts and mountains and, of course, is a famous land bridge for migrating birds. The country is very well watched, both by native birdwatchers and by huge numbers of tourists. So the task facing Shirihai was much larger than would be expected from the size of the country alone. Indeed, just looking through the references shows how extensively the author searched for his data. Just as telling is the number of times Shirihai himself is listed as an author or observer. He has undoubtedly put his field experience to excellent effect.

The book starts with a historical and general overview of ornithology in Israel, including, of course references to birds in *The Bible*. It would be a brave author who rejected records

in that book! The bulk of *The birds of Israel* - and I do mean bulk - is the species accounts. They are organised under the headings of subspecies in Israel; status, habitat & general occurrence; distribution, numbers & annual cycle; as well as a paragraph on the world range. The accounts are accurate, well-researched and authoritative. With so many records being from foreign visitors (and trippers are notorious for not submitting records for scrutiny by local records committees), it is a wonder that they are so comprehensive.

Although the text is condensed, it is not so truncated as to be unreadable. The language is quirky in some of the more narrative sections, such as the introductions (having both 'general' and 'relevant' introductions may raise a wry smile), but this never inhibits understanding. The species accounts are well organised, with a sensible hierarchy of consistent headings.

I found some of the figures and illustrations a little disappointing. There is just the one scale of map, different versions of which show major towns, habitats, rainfall and topography. Larger versions showing greater detail would have been clearer, especially for habitats. I was also expecting rather more Alan Harris artwork, and had high hopes of seeing some of his excellent colour paintings other than on the cover. Most of the line drawings used are to his usual high standards – and I wish others would also paint their passerines as the delicate creatures many are - but they are a little dwarfed by the text. Curiously, his cover illustrations, the only ones in colour, are a little weak.

The colour photographs, by contrast, offer a mouth-watering selection of some of Israel's finest birds. Some will be familiar to birders in the UK because they have been published before, but others are certainly new. Only some of the pictures of birds in the hand leave something to be desired.

Unusually for a book of this kind, a great deal of care has been taken with the habitat shots. Most are far more evocative of the landscape than might be expected in such a volume, but they lose none of their scientific value for looking attractive.

This book could not contain everything a reader may wish to know about the birds of Israel. For example, it does not deal with identification of the races of species mentioned, even though much of that information has been out of print for some years. Nor is it quite so useful as might be first thought for a casual visiting birder who just wants sites for particular birds. A site guide and the excellent new edition of Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow's *Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East* will still be enough for many people. This is the book by which all other country avifaunas will be judged, not just those within the OSME region. I can imagine other authors kicking themselves for not finishing their typescripts before Hadoram Shirihai raised the stakes so high. The author, publisher and team of collaborators should be congratulated on such a magnificent volume.

Mark Boyd

ALSO RECEIVED

Zoology in the Middle East. Volume 13 is now available from OSME Sales. Within its 117 pages are several items of interest to OSME members. Ornithological papers include descriptions of the first Red-fronted Serin and Hawfinch in Arabia, winter records from southern Sinai, the ecology and behaviour of Arabian Woodpecker and a breeding record of Imperial Eagle in Turkey. It is typically well produced, the front cover being enlivened by a photograph of the enigmatic Monk Seal, and for DM27 represents value for money.

Around the Region

compiled by
Pete Davidson and Guy M. Kirwan

Records in *Around the Region* are published for interest only; their inclusion does not imply acceptance by the records committee of the relevant country. Some records, including all those from Cyprus and Oman have been authenticated and these are indicated. All dates refer to 1996 unless otherwise stated.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 19 (1) should be sent, by January 15, to Around the Region, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U.K.

Bee-eaters
Merops apiaster
by D. Powell

A **diver** sp. *Gavia* sp. at Paphos on 14 May was unusual, there are no previous records of any divers off Cyprus, although all three species recorded in the Middle East have been found on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. Two immature **Gannets** *Sula bassana* off Yumurtalık, Çukurova on 10 January (only the third winter record in Turkey) and four immatures off the Göksu Delta on 25 March were only about 20-21st records.

There was an exceptional count of 1450 **Pygmy Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* in the Meriç Delta, Turkey on 22 February. A whole series of significant records comes from Aden Marshes, Yemen in late March-early April, the highlights being one to three adult **Black-headed Herons** *Ardea melanocephala* between 26 March-3 April (two to four previous records, most in the early 1980s), with two still present on 26-28 April, and an adult **Black Heron** *Egretta ardesiaca* on 30 March-26 April (*The Lammergeier* 1 (3): 3). The latter was the first Yemeni and second Middle Eastern record; the previous occurrence being near Eilat, Israel in October 1982 (Shirihai 1996). Also at the same locality were four displaying adult **Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* on 26 March-3 April, up to three adult **African Spoonbills** *Platalea alba* (the first documented record) and c. 9160

Plate 1. African Spoonbills *Platalea alba* (*R. F. Porter*)

Lesser Flamingos *Phoenicopterus minor* (the highest ever numbers in Yemen) on the same dates. One, then five African Spoonbills were present in late April (*The Lammergeier* 1 (3): 3). Additional records of Lesser Flamingo were of c. 1200 at Hodeidah lagoons and 180 at Taizz lagoons, unprecedented numbers in former North Yemen and 50 (of the 300 in late October 1995) were still at Salalah khawrs, Oman in May. The first

Plate 1. Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* (*R. F. Porter*)

record of **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* on Socotra was four at Hadibu marsh in late March.

Wintering waterfowl in northern Israel during early January included eight **Lesser White-fronted Geese** *Anser erythropus* in the Hula Valley and four **Bewick's Swans** *Cygnus columbianus* in the Jezreel Valley. A flock of 214 **Whooper Swans** *Cygnus cygnus* in the Meriç Delta on 22 February was not only the largest ever in Turkey but exceeded all previous total winter counts; the international waterfowl census performed the previous month produced 209 at four sites, along with 17 **Bewick's Swans** *C. bewickii* at Eğirdir Gölü on 26 January, the ninth record in Turkey (DHKD 1996). A **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* at Al Ghar Lake, UAE on 22 January was the 15th record whilst three were near Taizz on 17 February-22 March (*The Lammergeier* 1 (1): 1). There are fewer than ten previous records in Yemen, most from the Aden area. Two flocks, totalling c. 80 **Red-breasted Geese** *Branta ruficollis* were at Büyükçekmece, west of Istanbul on 11 February, the largest ever flock in Turkey, along with two **Goosanders** *Mergus merganser*, also a significant record. At Jabbul salt lake, Syria there were at least eight **Marbled Teals** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and a drake **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* on 6 October 1995 but even more significant was a drake **Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* at the same locality on 3 February. Baumgart *et al.* (1995) list just one previous record, in February 1977. A total of 1300 White-headed Ducks were counted at Turkish wetlands in January, including just 1037 at Burdur Gölü (DHKD 1996 – although earlier in the month 1273 had been counted, *TWSG News*), the lowest winter total for many years, concern for the future of this species is mounting (Green & Hunter 1996).

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* passage in Israel peaked on 5 May when 41,000 passed Mt. Yoash. Further records of **Crested Honey Buzzard** *P. ptilorhynchus* included up to two in UAE: at Zabeel from 16 January-5 March (the only previous record was identified in hindsight; one photographed over Hamraniyah fields in December 1992), and in Egypt an adult male reported at Bir El Ambagi, near Quseir on 9 May (*Birding World* 9 (5): 178), which would be the first record if accepted. In Israel a single **Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* was overwintering at En Gedi with three more in the Golan/Hula area; the species remains very rare in winter (Shirihai 1996). In Saudi Arabia three **Lappet-faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotus* nests were at Mahazat as Sayd on 4 January, when up to 30 birds were roosting at the same locality. A juvenile **Bateleur** *Teratopius ecaudatus* at Eilat in the latter half of March was the sixth record in Israel, and the first since 1989. All of the previous records were in the period 1982-89 (Shirihai 1996). A **Northern Goshawk** *Accipter gentilis* at Qarn Nazwa, UAE in late January was the third record whilst an immature male at Jahra Gardens, Kuwait on 15 February appears to be the first county record (*Birding World* 9 (3): 92). A male **Levant Sparrowhawk** *A. brevipes* (fewer than five previous records) remained in the same place from 5 January-23 February at least. Another first for UAE, if accepted, involved two **Shikras** *A. badius* near Dubai on 27-28 June. Three **Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga* at Wadi Dana and one in the Shaubak area of Jordan on 7-8 February are the fifth and sixth country records and very early assuming they were migrants. The eighth record of **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *A. pomarina* in UAE was at Khor Dubai on 1 March; all records have been since 1990 (Richardson & Aspinall 1996), whilst the fifth **Golden Eagle** *A. chrysaetos* was near Ruwais on 12 May.

In UAE there were two **Little Crakes** *Porzana parva* at Ruwais on 9 March, followed by singles at the Emirates Golf Course on 17 March and near Ruwais on 8 May; the 15th-17th records (all have been since 1990, Richardson & Aspinall 1996). In Turkey counts of at least 42 Little Crakes at Kozanli Saz Gölü on 19 April, 39 at Gavur Gölü on 22-24 April with 1-4 at three other localities this spring were exceptional. The third **Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio porphyrio* on Cyprus was east of Evretou on 24 November 1995. A single **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* at Balıkdamı on 17 April was unusual; passage records from central and western Turkey are rare. However, totals of 7728 and 653 Demoiselle Cranes over Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on 21-22 March were more significant. The 17 **Little Bustards** *Tetrax tetrax* previously reported in the Bet She'an Valley of northern Israel in December 1995 (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 77) increased to 23 in January.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* bred for the first time in UAE, where 20 including four juveniles were at Al Ghar on 22 June. Two **Stone Curlews** *Burhinus oedicnemus* at the mouth of Wadi al Mujib, Jordan on 5 January constituted the first winter record. The second Arabian and first Omani breeding record of **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* was at Sun Farms, Sohar in May, when six-eight pairs were found along with a nest containing two eggs, a tiny chick, a half-grown chick and a fledgling. A

Black-winged Pratincole *G. nordmanni* reported near Ruwais in early May would be only the third record for UAE if accepted. Two, perhaps nine, Black-winged Pratincoles by the Euphrates in Syria on 7 October 1995 were only the second record (the first was in July 1963, Baumgart *et al.* 1995), whilst two at Mekkah, Saudi Arabia on 22 March were also an unusual record. Further unsubstaniated reports of **Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* in Cyprus involved a single at Paphos on 4-5 January and a non-breeding adult at Larnaca salt lake on 24 February (*Birding World* 9 (2): 51). Another record, recently published in *Alauda* (Thauront 1995) is poorly documented. There is a previous February record of **White-tailed Plover** *Chettusia leucura* in Syria (Macfarlane 1978) but nonetheless one at Jabbul salt lake on 3 February was distinctly unseasonal. Two White-tailed Plovers, which were perhaps breeding, at Sultan Marshes on 9 July are the first published Turkish record since 1992. Flocks of 62 and 109 **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* in the Izmir area, Turkey on 18-19 January and 17 February along with at least six at Deveciuşağı on 10 January provided further evidence that this species overwinters in small numbers in southern and western coastal areas of the country (Kirwan in press). Also in Turkey, the first Middle Eastern record of **White-rumped Sandpiper** *C. fuscicollis* was at the Göksu Delta on 17 May. There are records of three other species of Nearctic wader in Turkey: American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* and Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*; the two former have also been observed at the Göksu. In Israel there was a **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* at Eilat on 29 March-5 April; only c. 23rd record ever and fifth in spring (Shirihai 1996).

There are fewer than 20 Turkish records of **Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus*, thus at least three off Kulak beach, south of Tarsus on 22 March was significant. The largest ever concentration in Egypt of the globally threatened **White-eyed Gull** *Larus leucopthalmus* involved 6500 adults at Hurghada rubbish dump on 7 May. If accepted a **Mediterranean Gull** *L. melanocephalus* reported at Ramtha tip on 22 January will be the first record for UAE. Among a spate of extreme rarities in UAE this spring came the first national record of **Little Gull** *L. minutus*, at Khor Kalba on 15-28 March, with a second reported at Sila in May, and the sixth **Common Gull** *L. canus*, a first winter, at Rams dump on 27 March. A first winter Common Gull at Rawal Lake, Islamabad on 22 and 24 January was a vagrant in Pakistan. Roberts (1992) lists seven records by 1992. An immature Little Gull at Jabbul salt lake on 6 October appears to be the first Syrian record since 1980 and one of only six since the 1940s (Baumgart *et al.* 1995). In Turkey an adult **Great Black-backed Gull** *L. marinus*, where the species is very rare, was at Üsküdar on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus on 13 February, while the sixth record in Cyprus was at Larnaca salt lake on 10 March. A first winter **Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* was at Karabiga, west of Bandırma on 21 February; the ninth record in Turkey. A five day cruise in the northern Red Sea between 13-18 July produced a number of interesting records. **White-cheeked Tern** *Sterna repressa* was numerous between Shadwan and Tawila islands with a colony of 1150 pairs found on a small island off Tawila, whilst nearby two first-summer **Arctic Terns** *S. paradisea* were photgraphed among a large flock of other terns; apparently the first Egyptian record. A colony of 150 pairs of **Bridled Terns** *S. anaethetus* was located on Tawila island with an additional 20 pairs nesting on one of its smaller satellites.

Up to three **Alexandrine Parakeets** *Psittacula eupatria* were present in Dhahran in early June (and may have been present there for a year); the first record for Saudi Arabia, although populations are now known in Bahrain and UAE (Jennings 1995). There were two separate reports of **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* chicks being fed by Hooded Crows *Corvus corone cornix* at Aswan on 28 and 29 March; the first breeding record since 1970. In Yemen two males and a female **Klaas's Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx klaas* were at Wadi Namash, south of Taizz on 3-4 April with another two males at Al Mahwit on 8 April. There are only about five previous records. Other interesting Afrotropical cuckoos in Yemen involved single **Jacobin Cuckoos** *Clamator jacobinus* near Jebel Bura (*The Lammergeier* 1 (2): 1) in early spring (exact date unavailable) and at the base of Jebel an Nabi Shu'ayb on 1 June (*The Lammergeier* 1 (4): 9) and two singing **Didric Cuckoos** *Chrysococcyx caprius* at Al Mahwit on 17-18 May; the latter was the c. 8th record. A Jacobin Cuckoo was at Al Ansab lagoons, Oman on 11 January. In addition to the now regular overwintering **Striated Scops Owl** *Otus brucei* at Eilat, Israel, another was discovered at Yotvata on 7 January. The fifth record of **Hume's Tawny Owl** *Strix butleri* in Oman involved one calling west of Mughsayl on 6 November 1995. Two **Nubian Nightjars** *Caprimulgus nubicus* 50 km south of En Gedi on at least 21 January was a significant record; the Israeli population has declined to near extinction since the mid-1980s (Shirihai 1996). Two **Palm Swifts** *Cypsiurus parvus* or *C. balasiensis* at Al Ain on 20 February would be yet another first for UAE (and the Gulf States), if accepted. A flock of 15 **Common Swifts** *Apus apus* in Wadi Dana, Jordan on 1 February was a very early record, which was followed closely by 12 **Alpine Swifts** *A. melba* at the same locality on 7 February. The 12th UAE record of the latter species was at Qarn Nazwa on 12 March, where it was acccompanying the 11th **Little Swift** *A. affinis* to be found in the Emirates. Another of the latter species was at Ras al Khaimah, UAE on 8 June.

In UAE a **Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunni* was claimed at Umm al Quwain on 27 March; there have been several recent records in neighbouring Qatar (Nation *et al.* in press). Numbers of **Small Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* in the Arava Valley, Israel during January peaked at five with nine in the Bet She'an Valley on 18 February. Two **Shore Larks** *Eremophila alpestris* at Cape Andreas on 9 March were the second record in Cyprus. In UAE a **Wire-tailed Swallow** *Hirundo smithii* reported at Al Ghar on 20 February was yet another national first and the second in the Middle East; following one in Wadi Hagul, Egypt in March 1995 (Rosier 1996), whilst a **Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* at Qarn Nazwa on 30 March was also a scarce record. Additional to December 1995 reports from the north of the country (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 79) were ten **Buff-bellied Pipits** *Anthus rubescens* at Eilat during February and March and 2-8 in the Bet Shean valley in January and February. Four **Olive-backed Pipits** *Anthus hodgsoni* present in Jahra Gardens during January (*Birding World* 9 (2): 51) were only the second Kuwaiti record; the first having recently come to light through video

evidence, and a flock of up to 15 in southern Islamabad from 29 January-8 March appears to be the first Pakistani record (Roberts 1992). A **Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus* in Mushrif Park, Dubai on 5 March was the eighth ever and first spring record in the UAE; it follows the seventh, also in Dubai, in October 1995 (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 79). Six **African Pied Wagtails** *Motacilla aguimp* were at the usual locality of Abu Simbel on 18 March and single **Citrine Wagtails** *M. citreola* were at Nuweiba on 30 March and Sharm el Sheikh sewage farm on 6 May. The species is scarce on passage through Egypt.

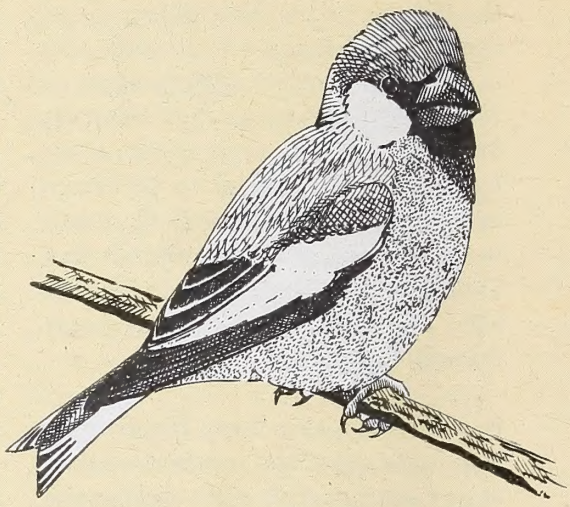
In UAE wintering **Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* numbers peaked at an exceptional 80 at the regular site of Al Ain on 12-14 January with 32 remaining at Al Wathba throughout March and at least 25 at Al Shati in late March. Following a report in Jordan last autumn of a **Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* of one of the eastern races *maura* or *stejnegeri* (see *Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 79), a male of the race *variegata* was at Azraq on 7 April. Recent DNA research indicates that *S.t. maura*, the so-called 'Siberian' or (better named) 'Eastern Stonechat', may warrant specific status (see Wittmann *et al.* 1996. *J. Zoo. Syst. Evol. Research* 33: 116-122). A male **Pied Stonechat** *S. caprata* was at the Emirates Golf Course on 22-23 March, the second record for UAE (and fourth in Arabia), following one at the same locality in May 1994 (*Orn. Soc. Middle East Bull.* 33: 44). Five **Redwings** *Turdus iliacus* at Dana, Jordan on 12 January was the third country record. Israel's first **Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* was at Zefat for most of January. Elsewhere in the Middle East there are records from Lebanon (one) and Cyprus (two). A **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* of one of the orange-bellied subspecies – the *phoenicuroides* group - at the mouth of Wadi al Mujib on 3 January was the first winter record in Jordan, whilst there was a flurry of interesting wheatear reports from the same country. A male **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* was claimed at Shaumari on 7 April; potentially the first record (see *Dutch Birding* 18 (2): 96, Andrews 1995), a pair of **Hooded Wheatears** *Oenanthe monacha* on the Lissan peninsula was a new Jordanian locality for the species and three **White-crowned Black Wheatears** *O. leucopygia* in Wadi Selma on 1 January were the first confirmation of its long-suspected presence in the eastern Basalt Desert. The fifth and sixth records of Hooded Wheatear on Cyprus involved one at Xeros Potamos ford on 16 April and a male at Mazotos on 12 May. A White-crowned Black Wheatear at Sila on 20 February was the third record in UAE, the most recent was in February 1994 (Richardson & Aspinall 1996) and the second record in Turkey was at Yumurtalık, Çukurova on 9 March. Previously unknown in winter from the southern Jordanian highlands, **Finsch's Wheatear** *O. finschii* was found to be common between Busseria and Shaubak between late November 1995 and late February. A total of 37 **Yemen Thrushes** *Turdus menachensis* recorded at five sites in late March and early April, all in the former North Yemen, was unusual, as was a single at Wadi al Murwani, Saudi Arabia on 24 April. The latter locality is just 200 metres above sea level. The second and third records in Cyprus of **Dusky Thrush** *T. naumanni*, at Cape Greco on 25 April 1993 and Akhna Dam on 28 December 1994, have been accepted but not previously mentioned in these reports.

The following counts of **Rufous-vented Prinia** *Prinia burnesii* along the Indus floodplain: five at Chashma Barrage on 19 February, 10 at Dhup Shumali on 18 February and at least 16 at three sites just south-east of Dera Ismail Khan on 17-18 February confirm its continued presence in this little watched region of North West Frontier Province, Pakistan. Egypt recorded its first **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis*, a single claimed in mangroves 46 km south of Safaga on 8 May (see *Birding World* 9 (5): 178). The third record of **Cyprus Warbler** *Sylvia melanothorax* in Jordan involved a male at the entrance to Wadi al Mujib on 7 January with at least two in the same place on 30 January. Nearby the fourth record of **Ménétries' Warbler** *S. mystacea* in Jordan was at Qasr Amra on 6 April; the third was at the same locality on 7 April 1995 (*Orn. Soc. Middle East Bull.* 35: 71), whilst a male Cyprus Warbler north of Zafarana on 8 April (*Dutch Birding* 18 (3): 143) was about the seventh record in Egypt. On Cyprus the first confirmed breeding records of **Sardinian Warbler** *S. melanocephala* were in 1992 and 1993 (*Brit. Birds* 89 (1): 41), and it appears to be already expanding its range. A **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus humei* was in Jahra Gardens, Kuwait on 12 January and 23 February (probably the first record of this (sub) species, although there are apparently recent (and historical) records of Yellow-browed Warblers (see Wright 1995).

A relatively small northerly range extension of **Jerdon's Babbler** *Chrysomma altirostre* in Pakistan was made, with five at Chashma Barrage on 19 February and a total of 19-24 at two sites just sout-east of Dera Ismail Khan on 17 February. There have been very few records of this species along the northern section of the Indus floodplain since its discovery there in 1932. A possible **Bearded Tit** *Panurus biarmicus* was at Jabbul salt lake on 11 May 1995; there are no certain records from Syria (Baumgart *et al.* 1995). In south-west Saudi Arabia a pair of **Black-crowned Tchagra** *Tchagra senegala* at Jabal Sharda on 28 April is thought to represent the northernmost record of this species in Arabia. An **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* at Wadi Kid near Nabaq was followed by a male at Quseir on 9 May; the third and fourth Egyptian records since 1984 (cf. *Orn. Soc. Middle East Bull.* 35: 68) but a probable female at Tel Hadya on 8 May 1995 was the first in Syria. The third and fourth Isabelline Shrikes in Cyprus have recently been accepted: a first winter at Akhna Dam on 8-9 February 1994 and a male at Paphos on 5 May 1995, which predate a female at Paphos on 6 May 1995 (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 79), which becomes the fifth. Another **Raven** *Corvus corax* in Jordan was seen in the Karak area on 30 January; the first since the 1960s remained in the Shaubak area until at least mid-February (see *Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 80).

The fourth **Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* in Egypt was at Zaranik on 28 April-1 May (*Birding World* 9 (5); 178). More spectacular were the 1200 **Pale Rock Sparrows** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* which passed Qarn Nazwa, UAE on 12 March; in Kuwait one was in potential breeding habitat at Subiah in March. In addition 12 at Sun Farms, Sohar, Oman on 23 May were very late spring migrants. A **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* at Wadi Dana, Jordan on 20 February was the first in the southern half of the country whilst the first national record of **Red-fronted Serin** *Serinus pusillus* involved a male with **Syrian Serins** *S. syriacus* in the Shaubak area on 21 February. The first records in Arabia of both Hawfinch (which remained at Jubail al-Sinaiyah industrial park until 18

March 1995, see *Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 80) and Red-fronted Serin have recently been documented (Meadows 1996, Symens 1996, see also *Orn. Soc. Middle East Bull.* 35: 73). At Rafah, north Sinai at least 12 pairs of **Serin** *S. serinus*, some with young, were found on 30 April, the second Egyptian breeding locality. The 12th record of **Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus* in Turkey involved a singing male above Işıklı on 14 June with two, probably additional, singing males nearby the following day. This is the first record since 1993 (Kirwan 1995). Despite the political situation in eastern Turkey **Mongolian Trumpeter Finch** *B. mongolicus* continues to be seen at the usual site by Doğubayazıt; the most recent sighting, of 20-42 birds (the largest ever numbers), many in pairs, being in early June (Hadoram Shirihai *per* Steve Gantlett). Up to two **Golden-winged Grosbeaks** *Rhynchostruthus socotanus* at Al Hara, 80 km south of Taif on 26-27 April is thought to be the northernmost locality for this species. The largest flock of **Rock Buntings** *Emberiza cia* to be recorded in Jordan, where it is a scarce winter visitor, totalled at least 48 birds in Wadi Hamra on 21 January and **Yellowhammer** *E. citrinella* was found wintering further south in Jordan than previously known; a flock of up to 30 were in the Alqadissiah, Jabal Sarab and Dana Nature Reserve area until late February. There were also c 20 of the latter species along with five **Reed Buntings** *E. schoeniclus* at Tel Hadya, Syria on 14 December 1995 where both are only occasional. A male **Pine Bunting** *E. leucocephala* at Cape Andreas on 8-9 March was the fourth Cypriot record. In UAE there was a **Cinereous Bunting** *E. cineracea* at Jazeerah on 28 March, the 17th record (and 15th in spring, with most in late March and early April) whilst one at Asprokremnos Dam, Cyprus on 18 April 1994 has been accepted as the c. 16th island record.



Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotanus* by *S. M. Andrews*

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It will be highly advantageous if authors prepare text on word processor. Final typesetting is done directly from disk. A disk (as well as typescript) should be supplied with the first submission. Disks should be 3 inch, DD or HD; if you are using an Apple Mac it is essential that you format the disk, and save the file, in PC format. Ideally, provide your file in WordPerfect (preferably) or Word format (even if your word processor is not one of these it may be able to produce files in one of these formats); if this is not possible, then as a simple ASCII text file, i.e. without word processor formatting codes. Please state the name and version number of your word processing program. In laying out tables on disk, data columns should be separated by hard space, not tab commands (i.e. use your space bar, not your tab key). For text, hyphenation should be turned off. In case of any doubt or difficulty, please contact the Editor.

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