SANDGROUSE

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OSME

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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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 £12
(£15 air mail outside Europe)

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

Supporting £24
Cover the subscription of a national birdwatcher in the region (£27 air mail).

Life Membership

Individual £225
(£100 if 60 or over)

Family £300
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.

c/o THE LODGE, SANDY, BEDFORDSHIRE SG19 2DL, UK
OSME Web site - http://www.netlink.co.uk/users/ag/osme/osmehome.html

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH:
White-collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris*, taken by *Dave Robinson*

OSME is grateful for sponsorship from Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd. towards the cost of printing the colour photographs inside this issue.

OSME News

OSME SITUATIONS VACANT

In July 1998, the roles of Treasurer and Membership Secretary fall vacant. OSME is looking for committed and enthusiastic people to fill these roles for the next five years.

The Treasurer is required to provide accurate information on finances for the day-to-day running of the Society and ensure that Council's ideas are not beyond the Society's means. Experience of accountancy would be an advantage. Please contact the current Treasurer, Adrian Colston, for further information (tel. 01780 470778, e-mail <acolston@cix.compulink.co.uk> or write c/o OSME).

The Membership Secretary organises mailings, membership renewals and deals with membership enquiries. Must be able to operate membership database on own computer. Contact Rosemary Parslow (tel. 01780 470778 or write c/o OSME) for details.

OSME SUMMER MEETING 1997

OSME's summer meeting was again held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Richard Porter started proceedings with an update of conservation news from the region which highlighted the recent publication of the new Turkey IBA book. Colin Richardson followed with a discussion of the delights of birding in the United Arab Emirates. The 19th AGM saw the retirement of Geoff Welch as Chairman and the announcement that membership had reached 1000 for the first time. After lunch, Nigel Cleere's mystery photographs competition challenged the audience's identification abilities but was won with an excellent 20 out of 20 by Dave Farrow. Chris Bowden then gave a fascinating insight into the work being carried out on Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* in Morocco, as well as detailing the historical and current distribution and status of the species. David Cottridge concluded the afternoon with some outstanding and amusing tales of his efforts to photograph birds in the Negev Desert. Following the close, a sizeable contingent headed to the local hostelry, where discussion of future trips to the region continued into the night.

Chris Bradshaw

OSME WEB COMPETITION

The OSME web site was established in 1996 and has already been visited over 3000 times. Now there is an even better reason to visit each month between November 1997–October 1998. A monthly mystery bird competition will be run on the web site; the prize is an all inclusive birding holiday to Israel, courtesy of Sunbird.

Each month there will be four birds to identify and also the Middle East country where each photograph was taken. Each correct species is worth two points with one point for each correct country. Thus a total of 12 points will be possible each month and over the 12 months the person with the most points will win the free birding holiday to Israel. To give everybody a chance to win right up to the last month, the number of points will be doubled during the final three months. A league table will be maintained on the OSME web site each month to show relative positions and this table will also be posted to various e-mail newsgroups. The contest is open to everyone on the internet, and multiple e-mail entries, provided they are from different people using the same e-mail address. The decision of the OSME judges will be final, although discussion may take place of the identification of the species used.

Fuller details are on the OSME web site, where you can find a link to the competition web page at: <http://www.netlink.co.uk/users/ag/osme/>. OSME is grateful to Sunbird for providing an all inclusive birdwatching tour to Israel as the first prize in this competition.

OSME/SUNBIRD TRIP TO YEMEN

Yemen has remained a mysterious country for decades and yet it is known to hold a wide range of south-west Arabian bird specialities. Now is your chance to participate in a birding visit to view some of these endemic birds of Arabia and a host of more familiar Palearctic waders, raptors and passerines. Yemen embraces one of two 'Afrotropical enclaves' within Arabia and several species typical of the north-east African bushlands will further enliven the birding.

In a cooperative venture between Sunbird and OSME, a birding trip will be made to Yemen between 8–26 April 1998 and OSME members qualify for a 10% reduction on the cost of the tour. In addition, Sunbird will make a contribution to the OSME Conservation Fund for each booking, so your participation in this tour will also help OSME in the promotion of birdwatching and conservation in the Middle East. What better way is there to visit this exciting and remarkable country?.

For further information please contact Jennifer Thomas, Sunbird, P. O. Box 76, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1DF, U. K. Tel. + 44 1767 682969. Fax. + 44 1767 692481.

RETIRING CHAIRMAN

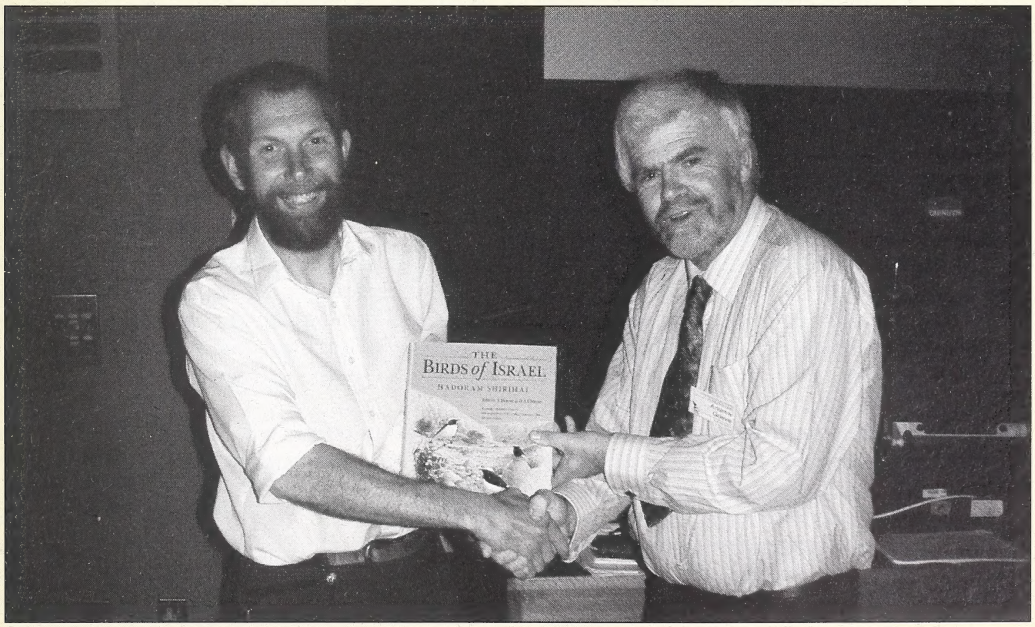
This year's AGM saw the retirement from Council of Geoff Welch, after 11 years of very close association with OSME, first as Publicity Officer, then joint Honorary Secretary and, since 1992, Chairman of Council.

In his five years as Chairman, Geoff instituted some very important changes which will stand OSME in good stead for the future. The OSME journal, *Sandgrouse*, has been 'upgraded' without losing any of its vitality, scientific standing and appeal. Geoff, together with Hilary, his significant other half, organised the tenth anniversary celebration held at the Friends' House in London in 1988; a major OSME expedition to Yemen and Socotra was undertaken during his tenure as Chairman and closer links were forged with the Turkish conservation organisation DHKD. When Geoff first came on to Council in 1986, OSME had c. 550 members and it is a fitting tribute to Geoff's professionalism, forward-thinking and drive that for the first time OSME has established a core membership which exceeds 1000.

Although Geoff is taking a well earned rest from the rigours of Council, I am sure he will retain strong links with OSME in the years to come and will continue to be at the forefront in the promotion of birdwatching and conservation of birds in the Middle East, as well as the U. K.

Andrew Grieve

Plate 1. Geoff Welch (left) receiving Birds of Israel as retiring Chairman of OSME at the AGM on 12 July 1997.



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.

BAHRAIN

New reserve for Bahrain The government of Bahrain has designated the Hawar Islands, in the Arabian Gulf, a nature reserve. The 16 islands are home to the world's largest breeding colony of Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*, and Dugong *Dugong dugon* and Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* feed on the surrounding seagrass beds. (Source: *BBC Wildlife*, May 1997 in *Oryx* 31 (3))

EGYPT

Egyptian markets raided The Egyptian authorities have conducted their first raids on markets under the 1994 Egyptian Environmental Law. The tourist bazaar in Kerdassa, west of Cairo, which sells skins and stuffed animals, was targetted at the end of 1996 and the animal market at Tunsi, south of the capital, was raided in January 1997. Large quantities of illegal merchandise were confiscated including skins and horns from endangered species such as the Dorcas Gazelle *Gazella dorcas* and Nubian Ibex *Capra ibex*, as well as large numbers of stuffed animals, many protected under Egyptian law. The raid on Tunsi yielded numerous live animals and birds including owls, raptors, snakes and lizards. 230 live Egyptian Tortoises *Testudo kleinmanni* – a species listed on the Appendix 1 of the CITES – were confiscated. All healthy animals were released into suitable habitat and those requiring treatment were sent to a rehabilitation centre. It is hoped that the tortoises, which were in a poor condition, will be used as part of a captive breeding and reintroduction programme in the Zaranik Protected Area in north Sinai. Further targets are being discussed as part of a continuous process of enforcement. (Source: *BBC Wildlife*, April 1997 in *Oryx* 31 (3))

IRAN

Siberian Cranes in Iran Only 10 Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* wintered in Iran in the 1996–97 winter. This included three juveniles and an adult male to which a satellite radio was attached in 1996. (Source: *The ICF Bugle*, February 1997 in *Oryx* 31 (3))

SAUDI ARABIA

Reintroduction of wild Ostrich The National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) have been breeding Ostriches in captivity for release into the wild. In February and March 1997, Ostrich chicks hatched within the *Acacia* savannah of the 2200 km^2 Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area in central Saudi Arabia. These chicks represent the first breeding by free-ranging Ostriches in the Arabian Peninsula since the last Arabian Ostrich *Struthio camelus syriacus* was shot in northern Saudi Arabia, perhaps as recently as the 1950s.

Unfortunately the Arabian subspecies was not represented in any captive collection and so it was decided to use the nearest relative, namely the Sudanese Red-necked Ostrich *S. c. camelus*, to fill the vacant niche.

Captive breeding was carried out near the city of Taif and captive bred Ostriches were released between June 1994 and December 1996. 13 adults became established in the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected area – a site where Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata macqueenii*, Arabian Oryx *Oryx leucoryx* and

Sand Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa* have also been reintroduced. Good winter rainfall and a flush of new plant growth allowed the free-ranging Ostriches to produce a total of four nests by March 1997. Hatching at two of these nests produced four and nine chicks from clutches of 13 and 33 eggs.

New release sites are being prepared in the north of Saudi Arabia in the large protected areas of Harrat al-Harrah and 'Uruq Bani Ma'arid. Further information is available from NWRC at P. O. Box 1086, Taif, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Fax: +966-2-745-5176.

Plate 1. Ostrich *Struthio camelus* chicks, less than one week old, with parents (male with black plumage) in the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area, central Saudi Arabia. The first ostriches to hatch in the wild in the Arabian Peninsula in over 40 years, and the first natural breeding by reintroduced individuals from the captive breeding programme at the National Wildlife Research Center, Taif. (*NWRC*)

TURKEY

Important Bird Areas in Turkey This book by Gernant Magnin and Murat Yarar describes the ornithological importance of, and the conservation threats to, the country's 97 most valued bird areas. Some are being lost or damaged due to Turkey's rapid economic development. About two-thirds of the sites are designated for protection but a lot of effort will be needed to achieve this. The book costs US$35 and is obtainable from the publishers: DHKD, P. O. Box 18, 80810 Bebek, Istanbul, Turkey. (Source: *Oryx* 31 (3) and RSPB *Birds* magazine Autumn 1997)

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency ERWDA In *Sandgrouse* 19 (1) we incorrectly said that the ERWDA was part of the UAE's Federal Environment Agency (FEA). We apologise for this error. The ERWDA is a local Abu Dhabi based Government Agency, whilst the FEA is a Federal Government Agency. The two agencies do collaborate on environmental issues but they are totally separate entities.

The ERWDA aims to enhance the sustainable development of Abu Dhabi Emirate's environment and wildlife. Its major functions include terrestrial and marine environmental research, wildlife veterinary research, and forecasting, policy research and environmental impact assessment. The National Avian Research Center, established in 1989, is now part of the ERWDA.

Further information is available from Theresa Bailey, Press and Information Officer, National Avian Research Center, P. O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Falcons returned to the wild Traditionally falcons have been taken from the wild for use in falconry during the winter and then released in the spring. For the last three years an effort has been made to ensure that the released falcons are integrated back into the wild. In previous years the falcons have been released in the mountains of Pakistan but this year they have been released in the Central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan.

59 falcons (24 Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and 35 Saker *F. cherrug*) were released at the end of April following exhaustive veterinary checks and fitting with a ring and a microchip. Three Peregrine and a Saker also carried a small satellite transmitter so that their movements can be followed for several months using the NOAA weather satellites.

It is hoped that the information gathered will throw further light on the migration of these birds of prey and improve the success of their release back into the wild.

Further information from the National Avian Research Center, address above.

Desert ecology of Abu Dhabi The National Avian Research Centre has published the first comprehensive review of the wildlife and the ecology of the deserts of Abu Dhabi. It is available for 120 Dhs from the National Avian Research Center, address above. (Source: *Oryx* 31 (3))

YEMEN

Socotra success BirdLife International and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh are to receive £158,000 of UK government funding for a joint conservation project in the Socotra Archipelago, Yemen.

The money, given under the Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species, will allow a biodiversity inventory in Socotra to be completed. It will also allow two books on the area's flora and birds to be published.

Socotra is one of the best preserved dry islands in the world and has many endemic plants and birds. Over a third of its 850 plants are endemic. Of six endemic birds, three are threatened: Socotra Cisticola *Cisticola haesitata*, Socotra Starling *Onychognathus frater* and Socotra Bunting *Emberiza socotrana*. In addition, Socotra probably holds the highest concentration of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* in the world.

The four-year project is timely because Socotra is on the verge of major development with potentailly catastrophic effects on the environment and the island's biodiversity.

The Darwin Initiative was launched by the UK Government following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It applies British scientific, educational and technical strengths to the conservation of the world's species.

Socotra: Forbes-Watson's 1964 report to the Smithsonian Institution OSME, through the good offices of Mike Jennings, has obtained a copy of the original report that A. D. Forbes-Watson prepared for the Smithsonian Institution following his expedition to Socotra in the spring of 1964. We understand that a precis of the report will be published in the *Phoenix* 14. *Phoenix* is published each year. Nos. 14 to 18 inclusive are available for a £20 subscription payment for those not involved in the ABBA project. Contact Michael Jennings, Co-ordinator ABBA, 1 Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire PE17 3HW, U.K.

Bald Ibis Speculation continues on the survival of the eastern population of Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* since the demise of the wild Bald Ibis colony at Birecik, Turkey in 1989 (see *Orn. Soc. Middle East Bull.* 24: 22). There have been a number of sightings in Saudi Arabia and Yemen but with no evidence of breeding. Mike Jennings in *Phoenix* 13 concludes that it is unlikely that there is a Bald Ibis colony in the part of Arabia covered by the ABBA survey.

The Yemen Ornithological Society report in their newsletter *The Lammergeier* (nos. 11 & 13, 1997) of a sighting in Somalia in 1920 and of an unsubstantiated report of nesting in northern Somalia as recently as 1993, whilst five adults were apparently seen at Massawa, in Eritrea in February 1997 (*Dutch Birding* 19 (3): 131).

We understand that a paper on the subject is in preparation so hope to be able to report more fully in due course. In the meantime any observations, recent or historical, will be forwarded by OSME to the appropriate authorities.

REQUESTS *for* INFORMATION

Turkey bird report 1992–1996

The Turkey bird report, covering the above period, is now being compiled. If you have unpublished observations from 1992–1996, or significant records from prior to 1991, which have not previously been submitted to either OSME or DHKD, please forward these, as soon as possible, to the editors: **Guy Kirwan & Rod Martins, 6 Connaught Road, Norwich NR2 3BP, U. K. (e-mail GMKirwan@aol.com)**. All observers will be credited in the finished report. Reprints of published work which clarify our knowledge of Turkish bird distribution and status are also welcomed and will be acknowledged.

Experienced birdwatchers and bird ringers required

The Israel Ornithological Center (IOC) and the Israel Bird Ringing Center (IBRC) are recruiting experienced bird ringers to volunteer at a ringing station participating in the European–African Songbird Migration network in autumn 1997 (August–December) and spring 1998. The IOC is also inviting experienced birdwatchers to participate in the annual autumn Migration Survey of Soaring Birds (August–October), and will fund food and accommodation for volunteers able to participate in either survey for a minimum of four weeks. Travel expenses to and from Israel must be covered by the participant. Interested parties should apply, enclosing their CV, to the **IOC, SPNI, 155 Herzel St., Tel Aviv 68101, Israel (fax. +972 35182644, e-mail: ioc@netvision.net.il).**

Cuckoos and Turacos

Johannes Erritzoe and Richard Fuller are working on a new monograph, *Cuckoos and Turacos of the world* (including Anis, Roadrunners, Couas and Coucals). This work will summarise all published and unpublished information for each species in this surprisingly little-known order, never before monographed. Colour plates will depict each species and a bibliography of the group will be compiled. An inventory, in electronic format, of museum holdings of type specimens and study skins will be released with the work. The authors would welcome any published or unpublished information, trip reports or field observations of e.g. habitat preferences, identification tips, vagrancy, mortality, vocalisations, breeding records, descriptions of parasitic behaviour, eggs, nests and their sites, information on juvenile plumages, behaviour and diet. Particularly useful is information on the current status of cuckoo populations throughout the world and threats to their continued survival. Details of captive birds are also welcome. Photographs loaned for reference will be returned in due course and all contributions will be gratefully acknowledged in the work. Please send any information to: **Johannes Erritzoe, Taps Old Rectory, House of Bird Research, DK-6070 Christiansfield, Denmark (fax. 00 45 7557 3255, e-mail erritzoe@cybernet.dk) or Richard Fuller, 33 Plough Road, Epsom, Surrey KT19 9RA, U. K. (e-mail fuller02@premier.co.uk).**

Observations of Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei* in central Iran

DR AKBAR HAMEDANIAN

The four species of ground jays in the genus *Podoces* occur in deserts and semi-deserts of Central Asia: Henderson's Ground Jay *P. hendersoni* in south Mongolia, north-west China south to Kansu and extreme east Kazakhstan; Biddulph's Ground Jay *P. biddulphi* which is endemic to the Tarim Basin of Sinkiang (Xinjiang), west China; Pander's Ground Jay *P. panderi* in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan with a disjunct population in south-east Kazakhstan, and Pleske's Ground Jay *P. pleskei*, which replaces the previous species south of the Kopet Dag in east Iran, from east Kerman south to Iranian Baluchistan (Madge & Burn 1994) and extreme west Afghanistan, where found by D. A. Scott (*in litt.* to G. M. Kirwan) in the Namakazar Basin in June 1973. Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei* and Pander's Ground Jay *P. panderi* form a species pair (as do *hendersoni* and *biddulphi* whose ranges overlap whilst apparently not sharing the same habitat, see Grimmett 1991), being noticeably smaller in size than the other two species of *Podoces* with shorter uppertail coverts, black breast patches and pale crowns. Plumage pattern is similar but the ground colour differs; Pleske's is sandy-brown and Pander's silver-grey. The former has a marginally larger and more decurved bill than Pander's, which suggests an adapation to different soil types. Their ranges do not overlap, although Cowan (1987) and Madge & Burn (1994) speculate that Pleske's range could conceivably include north-west Pakistani Baluchistan, where stated to occur by Evans (1995).

STUDY METHODS

In common with other species of ground jays, much remains to be discovered of the basic biology of Pleske's Ground Jay, e.g. Madge & Burn (1994) consider its nesting habits to be virtually undocumented with the exception of the observations of Zarudny (1911, see below) and Farnsworth (1992), who noted a juvenile in early July. Similarly, little information is available on status, although it may be declining due to increasing desert habitat degradation, a factor which may also be affecting Biddulph's Ground Jay (Grimmett 1991). Here, new information and

Table 1. Stomach contents of ten Pleske's Ground Jays *Podoces pleskei* collected at two study sites in central Iran.

Locality: Chah Torosh (five birds)

	Animal						Plant				
	unknown	Locanidae	Tehebrionidae	Curculionidae	Myrmeleonidae	lizard	Zygophylum seed	unknown	melon seed	barley	wheat
1	2	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
2	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
3	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	4
4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	2
5	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	1

Locality: Gonbad Dalmeh (five birds)

	Animal						Plant				
	unknown	Locanidae	Tehebrionidae	Curculionidae	Myrmeleonidae	lizard	Zygophylum seed	unknown	melon seed	barley	wheat
1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	1	-
2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-
3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	4	1

a resumé of existing knowledge of the species' ecology and behaviour is presented. Two areas in the central Iranian desert in Yazd province, Chah Torosh (1950 metres a.s.l.) and Gonbad Dalmeh (1550 metres a.s.l.) were selected to study the species' habitat, food and breeding behaviour. Quadrats were used to identify plants (based on importance value) of the study areas and analysis charts were prepared showing the dominant plant species of Chah Torosh to be *Artemisia herba alba* and *Salsola incanescens* and at Gonbad Dalmeh, *Ephedra* sp. and *Salsala aurantiaca*.

Five birds at each site were collected and their upper digestive tracts fixed in formalin for further laboratory studies and the food analysis chart (table 1).

PLUMAGE

Black bill slender and distinctly curved. Legs greyish white. Head sandy buff, streaked black and buff with inconspicuous nasal tuft. Black loral stripe extending just behind the eye and black patch on upper breast. Ground colour of body sandy buff tinged pink, becoming whitish on face and throat. Primaries black with broad white bases narrowing on outermost feathers. Secondaries black with white tips. Greater coverts black with broad white tips. Tail glossy blue-black. Biometrics are presented in table 2.

Plate 1. Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei*, Islamic Republic of Iran. (*A. Hamedanian*)

Plate 2. Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei*, Islamic Republic of Iran. (*A. Hamedanian*)

Table 2. Biometrics of ten Pleske's Ground Jays *Podoces pleskei* from central Iran with comparison of data presented by Madge & Burn (1994), based on birds in the British Museum (Natural History), Tring. No birds in the present study were sexed.

	weight (g)	tarsus (mm)	bill (mm)	tail (mm)	wing (mm)
Locality: Chah Torosh (five birds)					
1	100	40	32	87	165
2	78.5	39	30	74	130
3	98	42	31	85	140
4	98.5	42	34	95	160
5	84.5	40	31	82	140
Locality: Gonbad Dalmeh (five birds)					
	weight (g)	tarsus (mm)	bill (mm)	tail (mm)	wing (mm)
1	85.7	41	34	75	155
2	98.4	41	32	80	160
3	87.7	42	34	90	142
4	98.5	42	32	90	150
5	85.5	42	33	90	140
Range	84.5–100	39–42	30–34	74–95	130–165
(mean)	(91.53)	(41.1)	(32.3)	(84.8)	(148.2)
Range as given in Madge & Burn					
	85–90	45–47	36–41	91–92	120–121

DIET

The stomach contents from birds collected in August were weighed: the bulk consisted of grains of wheat, barley, *Zygophyllum*, melon seeds, beetle parts and small lizard bones. All unknown materials were identified at the Institute of Plant and Animal Pest Research, Ministry of Agriculture. Most insects belonged to the family *Curculionidae* which are important plant pests. The majority of the species' diet in autumn consists of plant food; during the breeding season (May) almost 90% is animal. It was observed feeding on dry wood termites from holes in the stems and roots of dry *Zygophyllum* sp. and *Haloxylon* sp., but none were found in the stomach contents. In common with other members of the Corvidae, this species holds some extra food in its throat sac before burying it in holes in the ground.

BREEDING

No detailed studies exist on the species' breeding biology and no photographs of its nest or chicks have previously been published. Some ornithologists have assumed a clutch size of 2–3 eggs with nests in *Zygophyllum* sp. or Tamarisk *Tamarix* sp. scrub, although Zarudny (1911) records clutches of four and six eggs in nests c. one metre above ground, occasionally higher in large bushes. *Contra* Porter *et al.* (1996) the nest was not previously undescribed, as Zarudny further noted that the nests resembled those of Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*, although presumably larger.

Two unused nests were found in the study areas but a nest with five chicks was observed in Touran Wildlife Reserve and Protected Area, Semnan province at 900–1050 metres, where the species is common. Some information on breeding and behaviour was collected from local people. The active nest was found on 9 April 1995, near a minor road and within the branches of a *Calligonum* sp. The outer part was constructed from thin branches of the same tree species and the cup lined with some cotton-like soft materials. It was positioned 80 cm above the ground and skilfully hidden in the centre of the bush, as defence against predators. The diameter of the nest opening was 12 cm and its depth eight cm. The five chicks were c. 5–7 days old with naked bodies and closed eyes. The primaries had started to grow, as a white line of feathers had emerged at the tip of the wings and they had short, conical bills with white gape flanges; their size was similar to a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Both parents fed the young, principally on small vertebrates and insects. Their behaviour was studied at a distance of less than ten metres from the nest; upon closer approach the female would adopt a defensive posture, making loud calls and erecting the crown feathers. The vegetation surrounding the nest was dominated by *Calligonum comosum*, *Zygophyllum* sp., *Seiditzia rosmarinus*, *Ferulla* sp., *Artemisia herba alba* and one-year *Terophytes*.

The chicks left the nest c. 15–18 days after hatching, despite being unable to fly. The body feathers were fully grown and the white gape flanges had disappeared. They followed their parents up to 500 metres from the nest, begging for food. When the parents were alarmed, the chicks would immediately lie flat on the ground. They fledged 24–28 days after hatching, longer than the 17–18 days given by Sopyev (1964) for *panderi*, the only other ground jay species for which such data is available. Assuming the incubation period to be 16–18 days, the entire nidification period is c. 40 days.

OTHER RESULTS

Some researchers believed that there was a biological relationship between the species and *Zygophyllum* sp. or Tamarisk scrub but I found no such relationship, or between the species and any other species of plant. More research is required to establish the ecological niche of the bird. As hiding the food is a habit of members of the family and Pleske's Ground Jay feed almost entirely on plant seeds in the autumn, so the bird can play an important role in planting different scrubs and borage plants of its desert habitat.

Birds were observed in early morning and late afternoon running in search of barley and wheat grains on gravel roads between villages and near farms. Although it feeds largely on animal food during spring and plants in autumn, more data are required to determine their diet at other seasons. The species is approachable and can be fed by hand, but upon perceiving danger will escape quickly and can be almost impossible to approach closely. Birds occur in singles or pairs. Local people call it "cock of the herds".

Plate 3. Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei*, Islamic Republic of Iran. (*A. Hamedanian*)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Al Mahwit: a rich Yemen avifauna

DAVID STANTON

Until recently, the birds of Yemen had been little studied. Inaccessibility due to rough terrain, a lack of roads, suspicious officials and hostile tribesmen all hampered early workers. Lately, many of these obstacles have vanished and observations of Yemen's birds have increased. In the past 20 years more than 100 birds have been added to the national checklist, which now numbers 360 species. Apart from coastal areas which hold large concentrations of wintering waders, and the Bab al-Mandab with its spectacular autumn flocks of migrating raptors, a site of prime birding interest is the Governorate of Al Mahwit. Relatively dense populations of most south-west Arabian endemic bird species, accessibility, and a diversity of habitats make this region particularly attractive. Two comfortable and reasonably priced hotels in the town of Mahwit mean that it is no longer necessary to write up field notes by candlelight in the confines of a stuffy tent!

TOPOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

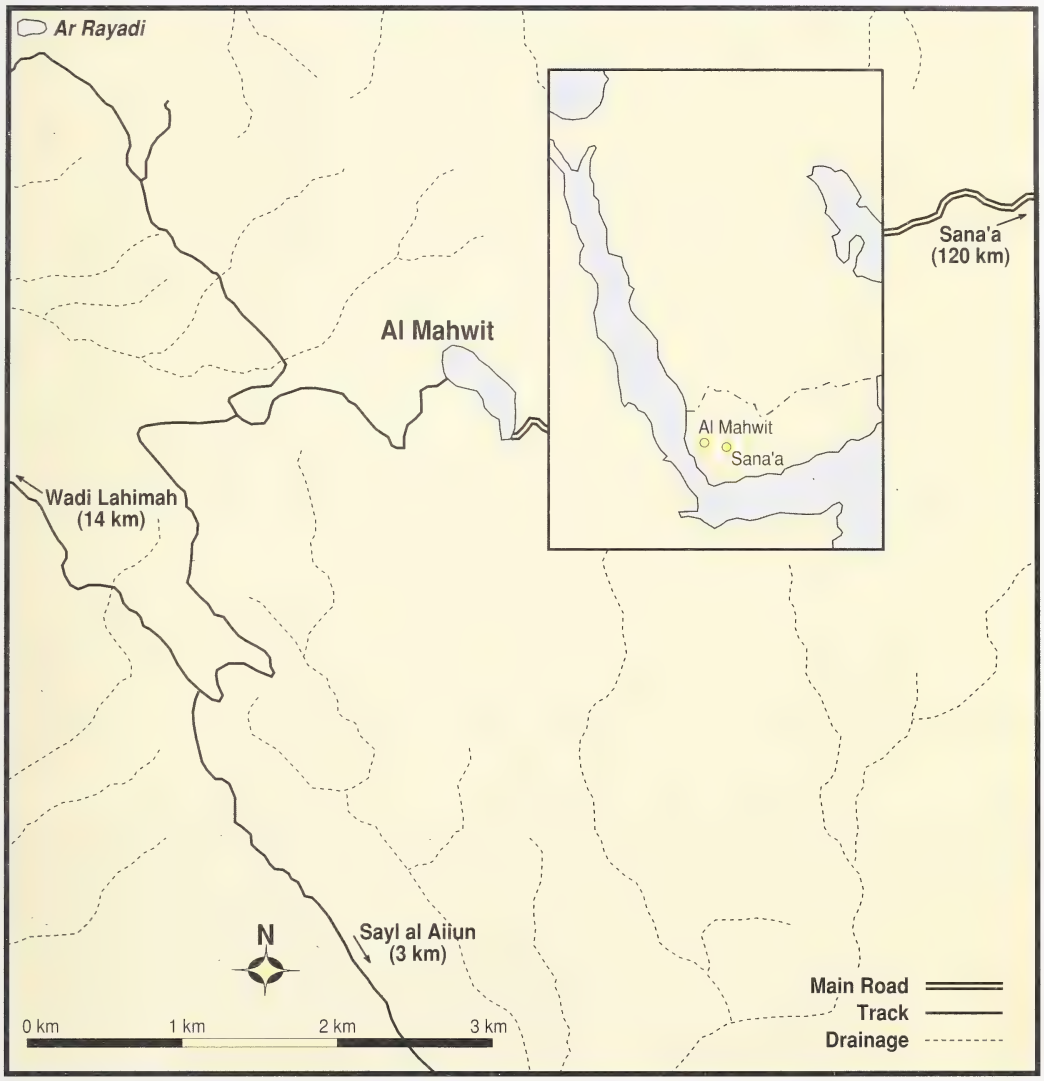
Muhafazat al Mahwit encompasses some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in Yemen. Situated west of Sana'a, it shares its northern border, and many topographic features with Hajjah. The western border with Muhafazat al Hodeidah approximately marks the limit of the Red Sea Escarpment and includes both Tihama plain and foothill habitats. Altitudes within the governorate range from below 500 metres at the mouth of Wadi Hatab to 2,759 metres at Jebel Mayfa'ah. Numerous wadis, with intermittent and perennial streams drain into the Tihamah from the well-watered highlands of Mahwit. Due to the Tihama's extreme aridity, and the porous nature of its alluvial substrates, none of these streams actually discharge into the Red Sea, except during occasional floods.

Plate 1. Al Mahwit, Republic of Yemen. (*David Stanton*)

Plate 2. Al Mahwit, Republic of Yemen. (*David Stanton*)

Annual rainfall is relatively high, up to 800 mm, and occurs predominantly during two periods. From July to September, the south-west monsoon produces significant precipitation, whilst lighter rains, associated with cyclones from the Mediterranean, peak in spring. Orographic mists may form during the afternoon at almost any time of the year.

Mahwit offers a wide range of habitats within close proximity to each other. Ar Rayadi, 200 metres above Mahwit, is a bleak, windswept area where rocky soil supports grassy tussocks and little else. Mahwit itself lies at c. 2,100 metres. The slopes surrounding the town are densely terraced with mature stands of *Acacia origena* shading wide areas. Draining Jebel Mahwit are a number of small wadis which converge on Wadi Lahimah and Wadi Mawr, both of which harbour permanent streams. The sparse, arid slopes contrast sharply with the densely vegetated wadi bottoms.



Map 1. The surroundings of Al Mahwit, and its position in Yemen.

MAHWIT'S NATURAL REGIONS

Highlands, above 2,200 metres, are characterized by low temperatures and humidity, with scant vegetation other than short grasses (*Aristida adscensionis, Hyparrhenia hirta*) and dwarf shrubs (*Lavandula pubescens, Helichrysum fruticosum*). Birds include the endemic Yemen Serin *Serinus menachensis* and South Arabian Wheatear *Oenanthe lugentoides*. Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*, another endemic, is often seen in small flocks, and while there have not been any reports of Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi*, this is certainly suitable habitat for this endemic. Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* occurs here, as do a number of large raptors: Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* and Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides* are all resident breeders.

Autumn migrants include Steppe *Aquila nipalensis*, the globally threatened Imperial *A. heliaca*, Booted *Hieraaetus pennatus* and Short-toed Eagles *Circaetus gallicus*, and Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*.

Highland Terraces on the slopes surrounding Mahwit are either planted with sorghum, or left fallow; the naturally seeding grasses being harvested as fodder. Many are extensively wooded with stands of *Acacia origena* up to eight metres tall. On some terraces the canopy comprises as much as 80% cover, even denser woods occurr in the drainages which scar the slopes. Here the

flora includes Wild Fig *Ficus vasta*, *Cordia abyssinica*, *Ziziphus spina-christi* and a variety of herbaceous species attractive to breeding and migrant birds, including several endemics.

Confirmed and probable breeding birds include Arabian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos dorae*, Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis*, Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi*, Yemen Warbler *Parisoma buryi* and Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*. Recent reports of Arabian Accentor *Prunella fagani* are unconfirmed but not unexpected.

Other noteworthy breeding species, confirmed or probable, include Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*, Didric *Chrysococcyx caprius* and Klaas's Cuckoos *Chrysococcyx klaas*, African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*, Gambage Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae* and White-breasted White-eye *Zosterops abyssinica*. Among migrants recorded is Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea*, one of only four Yemeni locations.

At lower elevations coffee is planted, which is shaded by huge *Cordia abyssinica* trees. Olive Pigeon *Columba arquatrix* is suspected to breed in these groves; Mahwit is the only Yemeni locality for the species. Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus* reaches its maximum density here, although it occurs throughout the region.

Lower escarpment and Tihama foothills are found west of Mahwit. Good motorable tracks, to Wadi Lahimah and Wadi Nawiyah, drop rapidly in elevation and access habitats from dry wadi slopes to the riparian wadi floors. Among many plants are the hydrophilic *Kahania laniflora* and *Colocasia esculenta*. Two endemics commonly seen are Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*, on the dry wadi slopes, and Arabian Waxbill *Estrilda rufibarba* which favours streamside vegetation. Both also occur at higher altitudes in the area.

In the wadis, Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*, African Silverbill *Euodice cantans*, Hammerkop *Scopus umbretta*, White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus* and Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia* are common.

Plate 3. African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*, Republic of Yemen, 1993. (*Chris G. Bradshaw*)

Plate 4. Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*, Republic of Yemen, 1993. (*Chris G. Bradshaw*)

THREATS TO THE AREA

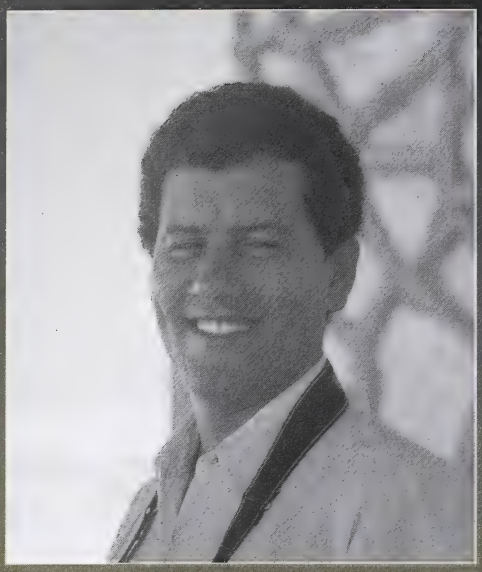
To a large extent, the livelihood of Mahwit's human population depends on maintaining the highland terraces which have sustained them for centuries. As these are crucial habitat, particularly for the endemics, their preservation is essential. Generally, the terraces appear in good repair. Untended terraces deteriorate rapidly, but there appears little danger of this happening on a significant scale here.

Of more immediate concern is the degradation of woodland through harvesting for fuel. Whilst pollarding is long established, destructive woodcutting is becoming widespread, and major habitat losses in the future can be expected. Subsidies on bottled gas and other fuels are to be lifted in July 1997, increasing pressure on natural fuel sources with potentially dire consequences for the area's birds.

David Stanton, Sana'a International School, P. O. Box 2002, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen.

Plate 5. Arabian Accentor *Prunella fagani*, Sumarah Pass, Republic of Yemen, December 1996. This species is suspected to occur at Al Mahwit. (*Dr Scott Kennedy*)

PROFILE



Sherif M.Baha El Din

Birds, Egypt and Sherif have been synonymous for many years. In the past year, he has completed the Important Bird Areas in Egypt inventory for BirdLife International and is currently surveying existing and potential Protected Areas throughout the country. He is the principle ornithological advisor to the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency. Importantly, Sherif acts as a focus for the collation of ornithological records and dissemination of information to visiting birdwatchers. This barely covers the demands that befall those who wear the environmental cloak for a country with no tradition of nature conservation.

Perhaps his early years by the Gulf of Suez, where he was born in 1960, provided the impetus to watch wildlife. It seems the sight of migrating White Storks at the age of seven triggered his abiding interest in birds. The family then moved to Cairo and, as his passion for birds increased, he scoured bookshops for bird books before launching a new interest: breeding Egyptian Tortoises in his bedroom! His artistic ability enabled Sherif to become professionally involved with wildlife when he was encouraged to write and illustrate *The common birds of Egypt* (1982), followed by illustrative work in an Arabic book on birds of prey. Sherif gained an international reputation for his art and was becoming known as the first modern birdwatcher of Egypt.

Since then, he has published over 40 papers and articles and was one of the main contributors and illustrator to *The birds of Egypt* (1989). He was instrumental in establishing, the far-sighted and authoritative Ornithological Society of Egypt and its publication *Courser*. Sadly, political problems brought it to a premature end.

Sherif prefers the field to the office. He has that artist's eye which seems to instantly recognise the salient field characteristics for identifying any bird. This rare natural talent has been used to develop expertise in a wide range of disciplines, including herpetology. In 1989 Sherif married Mindy Rosenzweig, forming an impressive husband and wife team that contributes significantly to environmental awareness in Egypt.

Andrew Grieve

PHOTO spot

Painted Snipe

In the Arabian Peninsula, Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* is a rare visitor, unsurprising given that this species is generally rather sedentary (see Kirwan 1996). There are four records in Oman between October 1983 and November 1993 (OBRC 1994) and two or three in Yemen: one at Abyan, north-east of Aden on 26 June and 17 July 1960 (Gallagher 1986), and unsubstantiated reports by M. Siering (no details) and Mache, who claimed one at Medinat Al Habît on 7 April 1985 (Warr unpubl. ms.). In Israel there is one breeding record, two adults and four young at Hadera in October 1995 (see *Dutch Birding* 17 (6): 263); otherwise the species is known as an irregular spring and summer visitor to northern and western Israel with 23 records, involving 27 individuals, between 1979 and 1990 (Shirihai 1996). Contrary to Hartert (1910–22), there are no records from Turkey, Iraq or Iran (Vaurie 1965).

Most OSME members will have encountered this species, within our region, in the Nile valley and its delta, or the Western Desert oasis of Wadi el Natrun, Egypt. It is relatively common at the latter; in recent years the species has also been seen regularly at Suez and Ismailiya, in the Nile delta, and at Lake Qarun and various localities near Cairo. There are two records from north Sinai, both at Zaranik in September 1986 (Goodman & Meininger 1989).

Painted Snipe exhibits strong sexual dimorphism in plumage and size. As demonstrated in the photographs presented here, males have a golden eye-patch, crown stripe and mantle V, with extensive golden-buff spotting and barring on the rest of the upperparts, particularly the wing coverts. In contrast, the female is longer-winged with brighter and more boldly contrasting plumage: dark rufous head and neck, clean white eye surround and largely bronze-green upperparts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to L. A. P. Gonzaga and Rod Martins for allowing access to some references.

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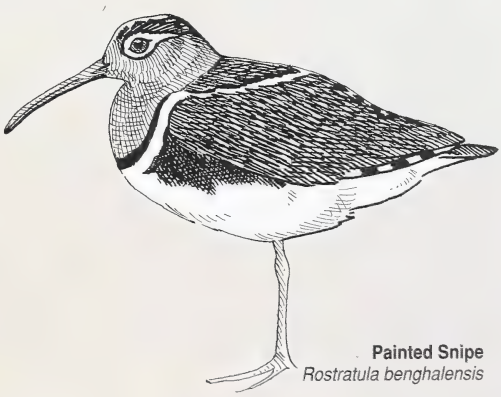


Painted Snipe
Rostratula benghalensis

 The inclusion of colour in this Photospot has been subsidised by **Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd**

Plate 1. Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, adult male and juvenile, Birket Qarun, Egypt, May 1985. (*Joe Sultana*)

Plate 2. Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, male, Bharatpur, India, January 1990. (*David Tipling*)

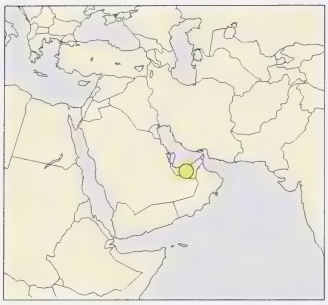
Plate 3. Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, female, Al Ansab lagoons, Oman. (*Hanne & Jens Eriksen*)

Plate 4. Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, male, Oman. (*Conrad Greaves*)

Sandgrouse 19 (2): 102–110 1997

A Red Data List for the birds of the United Arab Emirates

RICHARD HORNBY AND SIMON ASPINALL



A Red Data List for the birds of the United Arab Emirates is presented. The country has an essentially Palearctic avifauna with a small Indo-Malayan component which is shared with neighbouring Oman. Internationally adopted criteria for prioritising the combined relative importance and level of threat i.e. risk to each species, have been rigorously applied with stated exceptions. The greatest threats are posed to species inhabiting islands and coastal areas. This list highlights those species at greatest risk and allows clear conservation goals to be established.

INTRODUCTION

THE STATUS OF BIRDS in the UAE is reviewed under criteria used in other recent publications which assess the status of threatened birds, particularly for Turkey (Porter 1991), Yemen (Porter 1993) and the U.K. (Gibbons *et al.* in press). Although it is desirable to standardise criteria to achieve uniformity of threat assessment, it is advisable to tailor these to the requirements of each national Red Data list, while still remaining objective, if it is going to prove useful to best direct future attention among conservationists to species under greatest threat within the country.

Level of threat within the UAE has been assessed with respect to species, and in some cases subspecies status, in the Arabian Peninsula. We have therefore found it necessary to slightly modify otherwise internationally recognised criteria for the status of threatened birds. Near-threatened and threatened species have been combined in the highest category; threatened in Arabia is preferred to the Middle East, the former being a clearer biogeographical unit, and restricted-range subspecies are treated in the same manner as species. There is relatively little information on the current status of birds in Arabia and we suspect that several other breeding species – Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*, Saker *F. cherrug*, Barbary Falcon *F. pelegrinoides*, Swift Tern *Sterna bergii* and some social or gregarious insectivores e.g. harrier *Circus* sp. – should be added under Criterion 3: threatened in Arabia. Certain passerines and near-passerines may also qualify e.g. Pale Rock Sparrow *Petronia brachydactyla*. For the purpose of this paper we consider Arabia north to the southern borders of Iraq and Jordan.

Plate 1. Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*. (*Xavier Eichacker*)

The criteria under which species are categorised are as follows, in declining order for nature conservation priority in an international context (and which differ from national priorities, whereby maintenance of national biodiversity is the main goal):

1. **Threatened or near-threatened globally**
   Species facing a high risk of global extinction in the wild in the medium term future, as defined in Collar *et al.* (1994).

2. **Small world range ('restricted-range').**
   Species or subspecies whose breeding range is confined to the Middle East or the coasts of the north-west Indian Ocean, and with threatened or declining populations.

3. **Threatened in Arabia.**
   V: vulnerable – species considered vulnerable are those dependant on a very small number of sites known to be threatened in some way. D: declining – thought to have suffered a decline in range or numbers, in Arabia, of over 50% in the last 25 years.

4. **Threatened in the UAE**
   Species vulnerable (V) in the UAE because of their dependence on a small number of sites or on a habitat type known to be threatened in some way. Species declining (D) are thought to have suffered a decline in range or numbers, in the UAE, of over 50% in the last 25 years.

5. **Rare breeder within the UAE**
   Species believed to have an established UAE breeding population of less than 100 pairs.

6. **Important rare birds of the UAE**
   Species threatened or declining in all or a large part of their range in Arabia, or which have a small world range and important populations in Arabia. However, most occur in small numbers in the UAE and it seems improbable that any action in this country would make a significant contribution to their conservation.

7. **Not threatened**
   Species which occur in significant numbers in the UAE, either on passage, wintering or as breeders, whose conservation status, in the UAE, Arabia and globally, is not considered at risk.

8. **Pioneer Species**
   Species presently establishing breeding populations, usually in response to the creation of man-made habitat in the UAE.

COVERAGE OF THE LISTS

We have not listed species which: (a) occur in the UAE only as vagrants or in minimal numbers on migration, (b) have established breeding populations in the UAE as a result of introductions, or (c) are associated with man and have breeding populations of at least 10,000 pairs.

Species status in the UAE is indicated thus: P: passage. W: winter. B: breeding and threat as: V: vulnerable in the UAE and D: declining in the UAE.

Figures refer to estimated number of breeding pairs in the UAE (Aspinall 1996). Categories are not mutually exclusive but a species is listed only in the highest category in which it might appear, except when differentiating between breeding and non-breeding (passage/winter) populations.

The lists

Restricted-range species in all categories, except 2, are denoted †. Three species denoted * in category 6 probably occur in significant numbers within the country, either wintering or on passage and their conservation may require attention.

Plate 2. Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*, colony. (*Dr Mike Hill*)

Plate 3. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*. (*Dr Scott Kennedy*)

1. Threatened or near-threatened

†	Socotra Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*	B	D	32,085–34,285
	Greater Spotted Eagle	*Aquila clanga*	P		
	Lesser Kestrel	*Falco naumanni*	P		

Ferruginous Duck *Athya nyroca*, Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, Corncrake *Crex crex*, Sociable Plover *Chettusia gregaria* and Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea*, also regarded as Globally Threatened (Collar *et al.* 1994), all occur within the UAE in minimal numbers on passage or in winter.

2. Small world range

Red-billed Tropicbird	*Phaethon aethereus indicus*	B	DV	70–90
Crab Plover	*Dromas ardeola*	B	V	335–400+
Sooty Gull	*Larus hemprichii*	B	DV	235
Saunders's Tern	*Sterna saundersi*	B	V	500–1000
White-collared Kingfisher	*Halcyon chloris kalbaensis*	B	V	44–55
Arabian Babbler	*Turdoides squamiceps*	B	D	2,000–3000+

3. Threatened in Arabia

Egyptian Vulture	*Neophron percnopterus*	B	V	?10–50
Lappet-faced Vulture	*Torgos tracheliotos*	B	V	?0–1
Houbara Bustard	*Chlamydotis undulata*	WB	D	?0
Booted Warbler	*Hippolais caligata rama*	B	V	5–20

4. Threatened in the UAE

	Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	B	D	70+
	Sooty Falcon	*Falco concolor*	B	V	14–25
	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	B	V	100–300
	Cream-coloured Courser	*Cursorius cursor*	B	D	10–100
	Broad-billed Sandpiper	*Limicola falcinellus*	PW	V	
	Swift Tern	*Sterna bergii*	B	V	1,326
	Lesser Crested Tern	*Sterna bengalensis*	PB	V	23,000–24,500
†	White-cheeked Tern	*Sterna repressa*	PB	V	23,500–25,000
	Bridled Tern	*Sterna anaethetus*	PB	V	42,000–45,000
	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	*Pterocles exustus*	B	D	100–1000

	Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*	B	D	<10
	Eagle Owl	*Bubo bubo ascalaphus*	B	D	10–50
	Lesser Short-toed Lark	*Calandrella rufescens*	B	V	10–100
†	Pale Rock Sparrow	*Petronia brachydactyla*	P	V	

5. Rare breeder in the UAE

	Long-legged Buzzard	*Buteo rufinus*	1–5
	Bonelli's Eagle	*Hieraaetus fasciatus*	10–50+
	Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	50–100
	Barbary Falcon	*Falco pelegrinoides*	10–100
	Caspian Tern	*Sterna caspia*	1+
	Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*	10+
†	Striated Scops Owl	*Otus brucei*	10–100
	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	*Merops superciliosus*	20–100
	European Bee-eater	*Merops apiaster*	10–50
	Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	10–100
	Bar-tailed Desert Lark	*Ammomanes cincturus*	5-10+
	Rufous Bush Robin	*Cercotrichas galactotes*	50–100
†	Hooded Wheatear	*Oenanthe monacha*	10–50
†	Pale Rock Sparrow	*Petronia brachydactyla*	10–100
	Trumpeter Finch	*Bucanetes githagineus*	10–100

6. Important rare birds within the UAE

	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	W
	Honey Buzzard	*Pernis apivorus*	PW
	Griffon Vulture	*Gyps fulvus*	PW
	Lanner Falcon	*Falco biarmicus*	P / ?resident
	Saker	*Falco cherrug*	PW
	Great Knot	*Calidris tenuirostris*	PW
	Great Snipe	*Gallinago media*	P
	Pintail Snipe	*Gallinago stenura*	W
†	Grey Hypocolius	*Hypocolius ampelinus*	P
†	White-throated Robin	*Irania gutturalis*	P
†	Finsch's Wheatear	*Oenanthe finschii*	P
†	Eastern Pied Wheatear	*Oenanthe picata*	W
†	Upcher's Warbler*	*Hippolais languida*	P
†	Ménétries's Warbler*	*Sylvia mystacea*	PW
†	Desert Lesser Whitethroat*	*Sylvia (curruca) minula*	W
†	Plain Leaf Warbler	*Phylloscopus neglectus*	W
	Lesser Grey Shrike	*Lanius minor*	P
	Masked Shrike	*Lanius nubicus*	P
	Black-headed Bunting	*Emberiza melanocephala*	P

7. Not threatened

	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	B	10–100
	Black-necked Grebe	*Podiceps nigricollis*	W	
	Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	W	
	Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	W	
	Striated Heron	*Butorides striatus*	B	200–500
	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	W	
	Western Reef Heron	*Egretta gularis*	B	300–1000
	Great White Egret	*Egretta alba*	W	
	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	PW	
	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	PW	
	Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*	W	
	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus ruber*	PW	
	Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	W	

	Pallid Harrier	*Circus macrourus*	PW	
	Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygargus*	P	
	Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	PW	
	Chukar	*Alectoris chukar*	B	100–1000
†	Sand Partridge	*Ammoperdix heyi*	B	1000–10,000+
	Collared Pratincole	*Glareola pratincola*	P	
	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	PB	50–300
	Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*	PW	
	Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	PWB	1000–3000
	Lesser Sand Plover	*Charadrius mongolus*	PW	
	Greater Sand Plover	*Charadrius leschenaultii*	PW	
	Pacific Golden Plover	*Pluvialis fulva*	PW	
	Grey Plover	*Pluvialis squatarola*	PW	
	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Hoplopterus indicus*	B	100–500
	Sanderling	*Calidris alba*	PW	
	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	PW	
	Curlew Sandpiper	*Calidris ferruginea*	PW	
	Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*	PW	
	Bar-tailed Godwit	*Limosa lapponica*	PW	
	Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*	P	
	Curlew	*Numenius arquata*	PW	
	Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	PW	
	Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	PW	
	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	PW	
	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	PW	
	Terek Sandpiper	*Tringa cinereus*	PW	
	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	PW	
	Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*	PW	
	Red-necked Phalarope	*Phalaropus lobatus*	PW	
	Pomarine Skua	*Stercorarius pomarinus*	PW	
	Arctic Skua	*Stercorarius parasiticus*	P	
	Great Black-headed Gull	*Larus ichthyaetus*	W	
	Black-headed Gull	*Larus ridibundus*	W	
	Slender-billed Gull	*Larus genei*	PW	
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	*Larus fuscus*	PW	
	Yellow-legged Gull	*Larus cachinnans*	PW	
	Gull-billed Tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*	P	
	Sandwich Tern	*Sterna sandvicensis*	PW	
	Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*	P	
	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*	P	
	White-winged Black Tern	*Chlidonias leucopterus*	P	
	Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse	*Pterocles lichtensteinii*	B	100–1000+
	Turtle Dove	*Streptopelia turtur*	B	100–1000
	Little Owl	*Athene noctua*	B	300–1000+
	Common Swift	*Apus apus*	P	
	Pallid Swift	*Apus pallidus*	PB	1000–10,000
	Little Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	B	1000–5000
	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	*Merops superciliosus*	P	
	European Bee-eater	*Merops apiaster*	P	
	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*	B	1000–5000
	Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	P	
	Black-crowned Finch Lark	*Eremopterix nigriceps*	B	5000–10,000+
	Desert Lark	*Ammomanes deserti*	B	5000–10,000+
	Hoopoe Lark	*Alaemon alaudipes*	B	10,000–25,000+
	Short-toed Lark	*Calandrella brachydactyla*	P	5–50
	Sand Martin	*Riparia riparia*	P	
	Pale Crag Martin	*Hirundo obsoleta*	B	1000–10,000

	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	P	
	Tawny Pipit	*Anthus campestris*	PW	
	Long-billed Pipit	*Anthus similis*	B	100–1000
	Red-throated Pipit	*Anthus cervinus*	PW	
	Water Pipit	*Anthus spinoletta*	W	
	Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	P	
	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	W	
†	Yellow-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus xanthopygos*	B	5000–10,000
	Rufous Bush Robin	*Cercotrichas galactotes*	P	
	Bluethroat	*Luscinia svecica*	PW	
	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	W	
	Common Redstart	*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*	PW	
	Isabelline Wheatear	*Oenanthe isabellina*	PW	
	Pied Wheatear	*Oenanthe pleschanka*	W	
	Desert Wheatear	*Oenanthe deserti*	W	
†	Red-tailed Wheatear	*Oenanthe xanthoprymna*	W	
†	Hume's Wheatear	*Oenanthe alboniger*	B	1000–10,000
	Graceful Warbler	*Prinia gracilis*	B	10,000+
	Scrub Prinia	*Scotocerca inquieta*	B	100–1000+
	Marsh Warbler	*Acrocephalus palustris*	P	
	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*	PB	250–750+
	Olivaceous Warbler	*Hippolais pallida*	P	
	Desert Warbler	*Sylvia nana*	W	
	Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*	PW	
	Purple Sunbird	*Nectarinia asiatica*	B	5000–10,000+
	Isabelline Shrike	*Lanius isabellinus*	PW	
	Great Grey Shrike	*Lanius excubitor*	PWB	5000–10,000+
	Brown-necked Raven	*Corvus ruficollis*	B	500–1500+
	Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	P	1–10+
	Yellow-throated Sparrow	*Petronia xanthocollis*	B	1000–5000+
	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*	B	1000–10,000
	House Bunting	*Emberiza striolata*	B	1000–5000+
	Ortolan Bunting	*Emberiza hortulana*	P	

8. Pioneer Species

Little Bittern	*Ixobrychus minutus*	1+
Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	1–2
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	?0
Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus ruber*	22+ (in 1993)
Quail	*Coturnix coturnix*	10–50+
Water Rail	*Rallus aquaticus*	1–2
Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	50–100
Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*	2+
White-tailed Plover	*Chettusia leucura*	1+
European Roller	*Coracias garrulus*	1–3
Short-toed Lark	*Calandrella brachydactyla*	5–50
Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*	25–50+
Olivaceous Warbler	*Hippolais pallida*	20–100+
Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	1–10+
Spanish Sparrow	*Passer hispaniolensis*	10–100
Corn Bunting	*Miliaria calandra*	2–10+

Table 1. Threatened birds of the UAE and their habitats.

Species	Criterion	Habitat
Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*	2, 4	Islands
Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*	1, 3, 4	Islands
Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*	3	Mountains
Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*	3	Mountains
Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*	1	Coast
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*	4	Islands
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*	1	Farmland and plantation
Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*	4	Islands
Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*	3, 4	Desert
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*	4	Inland wetland
Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*	2, 3	Islands, intertidal – mangroves
Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*	4	Desert
Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*	4	Coast – intertidal
Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii*	2, 4	Islands
Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*	4	Islands
Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*	4	Islands
White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*	4	Islands
Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*	4	Islands
Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi*	2, 4	Islands
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*	4	Desert
Barn Owl *Tyto alba*	4	Farmland and plantation
Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo ascalaphus*	4	Desert
White-collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris kalbaensis*	2, 4	Coast – mangroves
Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata rama*	4	Coast – mangroves
Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*	2	Acacia savanna
Pale Rock Sparrow *Petronia brachydactyla*	4	Mountains

MISCELLANEOUS REMARKS

We have been guided by information presented in relevant publications in our categorisation of species within the context of the UAE, and have had to make very few alterations as a result of recent developments. One exception is Socotra Cormorant, the most threatened colonially nesting seabird on Gulf islands. This species breeds in only 13 or 14 colonies worldwide. Experience has shown that breeding populations on islands are very susceptible to disturbance or large-scale development. None of the UAE's Gulf islands have been afforded formal protection and the significance of these breeding colonies is poorly recognised. Construction work on islands continues in the UAE, as does off-road use of four-wheel drive vehicles.

At least five major colonies of Socotra Cormorant have been extirpated in recent decades, as a result of development (mostly oil-related) and persecution. The Socotra Cormorant is the only species breeding in the UAE not to have been afforded legal protection from hunting. It would appear that the colony of Socotra Cormorants on Sinaiya Island, which was the largest in the UAE, failed to breed in 1995, reportedly as a result of people driving through the colony at a critical time in the breeding cycle. Dependance on a very small number of sites makes this species especially vulnerable and we recommend it is upgraded to the highest threat category by IUCN/BirdLife International.

Pale Rock Sparrow is listed as not threatened as a breeder but threatened as a passage bird because breeding habitat in mountain wadis does not appear to be limiting, however passage birds feed on fields treated with pesticides which are not subject to strict control. Other insectivores are also at risk and are useful as environmental indicators.

HABITATS

The 26 species listed in the first four categories, i.e. those which experience a degree of threat other than that derived from rarity alone, are listed in Table 1 which shows the main habitat type utilised within the UAE. Major threats, in no hierarchy of importance, are: development and reclamation; human disturbance; land use changes; overgrazing (by camels, goats and sheep) and rangeland mismanagement; lowering of the water table by groundwater abstraction; oil or other pollution; introduction of mammalian ground predators (particularly cats on islands); competition with alien species; persecution and non-sustainable harvesting.

The distribution between habitats of the species in the first four threat categories may be summarised as follows:

Islands	11
Coast (including mangroves and intertidal mud)	4
Desert	4
Mountains	3
Farmland and plantation	2
Inland wetland	1
Acacia savannah	1

This clearly supports the view that it is a priority for bird conservation measures in the UAE to concentrate on islands and coastal habitats. These habitats support the largest numbers of threatened species and it is also there that development is most pronounced. Several islands and coastal mangroves receive a measure of protection, but this is generally informal and non-statutory. Sooty Falcons typically breed on uninhabited islands or remote parts of large islands; several breeding sites having been lost because of development or disturbance.

There is a need for a review of key sites for nature conservation with a view to developing a network of Protected Areas, as recommended by Scott (1995) and Aspinall (1996). At present the responsibility for nature conservation lies to a large extent with the individual Emirates. Clearly the coast and islands would merit a high priority in any federal review.

Inaccessibility of mountains confers a degree of protection, although persecution is locally a threat to all predators, and species such as Sand Partridge and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse which are particularly vulnerable at drinking sites. The continuing movement of people from the mountains to the coast and the abandonment of some high altitude seasonal villages, should prove beneficial to some birds. The reduction of the, currently very high, numbers of goats in the mountains would be beneficial to virtually all the threatened bird species occurring there. The biomass of vegetation would increase, making it reasonable to expect the restoration of populations and even increases in diversity of mammals, reptiles and invertebrates, thus increasing food resources for birds.

Development is rapid in both desert and Acacia savannah. These habitats are impacted by new roads, pipelines, power lines, boreholes and agricultural and forestry projects. The area of 'wilderness' is steadily being reduced to the detriment of

species which are intolerant of human disturbance e.g. Houbara Bustard and Eagle Owl. Overgrazing, lack of regeneration and habitat deterioration are believed to be responsible for declines in Yellow-throated Sparrow and Arabian Babbler.

It may be that the mountain foothills and Acacia savannah are more important for passage and wintering species than is currently recognised, because large areas are difficult of access and poorly studied. The three warblers marked * in category 6, which are all classified as restricted-range species (Evans 1994), typically found in the Acacia zone, may be present in internationally important numbers. Many of the species in category 7, e.g. at least 25 species of waterfowl, occur at levels greater than 1% of the Middle East population which merits their safeguarding. This could also apply to some widespread wintering passerines, e.g Desert Warbler and Desert Wheatear (see Osborne *et al.* 1996). Future research and monitoring effort aims to target passerines to a greater extent.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the listings presented here will focus the attention of conservationists in the UAE to those species and habitats most under threat. The Red Data List for birds allows for clear goals to be set and, furthermore, will input into plans presently being developed for the conservation of the national flora and fauna.

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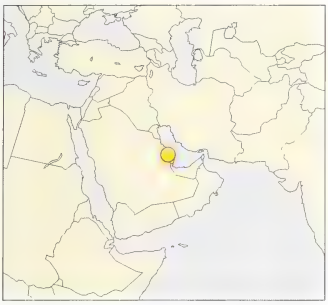
Which large gulls from the *Larus fuscus–cachinnans–argentatus* complex of (sub)species occur in Bahrain?



PIERRE YÉSOU AND ERIK HIRSCHFELD

The identification and systematics of large white- headed gulls have been widely discussed and disputed over the years, especially forms which occur in the Arabian Gulf. This paper describes the forms recorded by the authors in Bahrain, principally in November–December 1992. New advances in field identification of these forms are discussed and comparisons with occurrences in other parts of the Gulf made.

INTRODUCTION

BAHRAIN, SITUATED IN THE ARABIAN GULF, is an archipelago of c. 35 islands and, through the efforts of a number of ornithologists, its avifauna is comparatively well-known (Nightingale & Hill 1993, Hirschfeld 1995). Less attention has been paid to the many large gulls visiting the islands. Birds of the Herring Gull complex (hereafter referred to as "large white-headed gulls (LWG)") in Bahrain theoretically belong to the following forms (the term 'form' is used here to represent both species and subspecies): *cachinnans, fuscus, heuglini, taimyrensis* (distributions as defined by Dementiev 1951, Cramp & Simmons 1983, Kilpi & Saurola 1984, Grant 1986) and possibly *armenicus* (Bundy 1986, Bourne 1988, Richardson 1990, T. Stawarczyk *in litt.*), as well as the poorly known *barabensis* (Bourne 1992, 1996, Garner 1997a,b).

EH identified with reasonable confidence some of the birds he observed in 1990–1992 in Bahrain, but had particular problems with the identification of *heuglini/taimyrensis/barabensis* forms and non-adult birds (Hirschfeld 1995). He invited PY, who had previous experience of all Asian forms, either from the breeding grounds or the extensive Russian collections, to study the LWG complex in Bahrain during 29 November–13 December 1992.

This paper includes: (i) a description of the forms which theoretically occur in Bahrain; (ii) information on forms identified by PY; and, when data permit, (iii) a summary of status in Bahrain by EH.

THE FORMS LIKELY TO OCCUR IN BAHRAIN: taxonomy and field characters

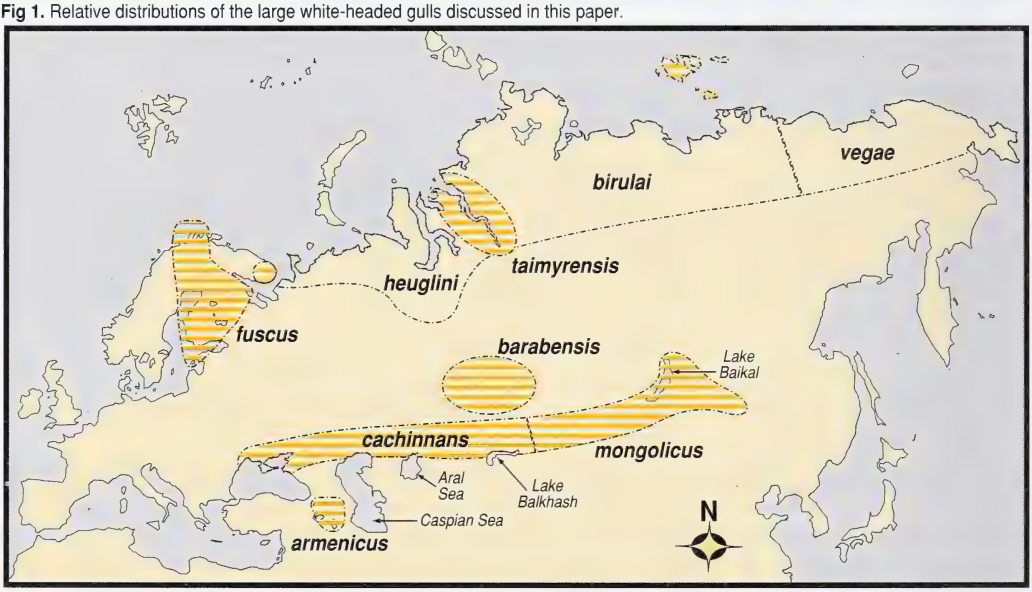
Lesser Black-backed Gull of the nominate subspecies *L. fuscus fuscus* breeds in northern Europe. Other forms presumed to occur in Bahrain are, for at least the main part of their range, Asian breeders. For the sake of completeness and better understanding of their disputed relationships, we present information for all 'Herring Gull' forms breeding in Asia. Five forms under consideration principally breed north of the taiga forest, whilst another four occur along inland seas and lakes from south-east Europe to central Siberia. They are presented according to a north–south and west–east sequence, with information on the distribution and field marks of adults (immature plumages of most forms are poorly known). Biometric data are summarised in table 1.

Table 1. Measurements of forms reputed to occur in Bahrain.

	wing (in mm)	weight (in g)	bill (in mm)	tarsus (in mm)	primaries with black	reference(s)
fuscus	377–462	545–945	40–58	54–67	7–9	1
heuglini	405–469	830–1220	44–61	62–74	7–8	1
heuglini	406–466		49–63	62–75		2
'taimyrensis'	419–452		50–55	63–65	6–7	3
'taimyrensis'	421–467	930–1360	49–63	61–79	6–7	4
'taimyrensis'	425–485	880–1270	51–68	57–69	6–7	5
cachinnans	410–464	680–1190	47–64	61–73	6–8	1,6
cachinnans	395–462		50–66	62–76		2
armenicus	390–456	850–900	42–51	60–73	6–7	1,7
barabensis	387–435	680–1170	50–58	59–73	7–8	8

1. Cramp & Simmons (1983). 2. Yudin & Firsova (1988); 3. Institute of Zoology, St-Petersburg (PY unpub.); 4. north-west Taimyr (A. V. Filchagov & PY unpubl.); 5. south-east Taimyr (A. V. Filchagov & PY unpubl.); 6. Mierauskas *et al.* (1991); 7. Satat & Laird (1992);

Fig 1. Relative distributions of the large white-headed gulls discussed in this paper.



Much of the information presented here results from on-going field and museum studies by PY and Dr A. V. Filchagov (Institute of Animal Ecology and Evolution, Russian Academy of Sciences) of Eurasian forms of large white-headed gulls (Filchagov & Semashko 1987, Yésou 1991, Filchagov 1992, 1993 & 1994, Filchagov *et al.* 1992a, 1992b, Yésou & Filchagov 1993, Yésou *et al.* 1994, and work in progress). Details of winter plumage and bare part coloration, which have been comparatively little studied, are discussed with reference to published data (excluding Kennerley *et al.* (1995) and Hoogendoorn *et al.* (1996) who provided somewhat erroneous guidelines) and available photographic material. Information on moult timing is also provided and can help separate some birds in winter. When attempting to identify gull forms in winter, observers must also realise that seasonal changes often occur in bare part coloration. As a general tendency among Palearctic large gulls, a larger proportion of individuals show dark irises in winter than in breeding colonies (it remains unclear whether this is due to physiological seasonal change, or to a higher proportion of near-adults on the wintering grounds); leg colour can become duller or paler and sometimes loose any yellow pigment, and dark markings can develop around the bill to the extent that a band is formed on the mandible. There is a wide range of

individual variation among any population (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Grant 1986, Madge 1992, Hirschfeld 1992, Garner 1997a,b, Yésou & Filchagov unpubl.) and overlap between forms is important for plumage characters such as the size and shape of black and white areas at the tip of the outer two primaries (e.g. Mierauskas *et al.* 1991 for *cachinnans*; similar variations are found in other forms) and width of the white scapular and tertial crescents.

The northern forms

fuscus (northern Scandinavia, part of the Baltic region, White Sea archipelago) is the darkest form, with black primary tips hardly contrasting with blackish-brown mantle. Head remains almost unmarked in winter (often thin streaking around eye and dark marking on lower neck), when most individuals show pale yellow legs. A small proportion of adult plumaged birds show fleshy pink legs (see e.g. Grant 1986, who provides an accurate description of this form). It is a small slender form, more so than all forms studied here, except *barabensis* which is only marginally larger on average.

heuglini (Kola peninsula to Gydan peninsula) has a slate-grey mantle similar in tone to average British Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus graellsii* or slightly darker (and can even look much darker under strong light in winter quarters), i.e. much paler than nominate *fuscus*. It is obviously bulkier than the latter form. The usually yellow iris can be speckled brown in breeding birds (Yésou & Filchagov 1993 and in prep.) and may appear very dark in winter according to photos from Kenya (per D. A. Turner *in litt.*). A bill band can develop in winter, as illustrated by J. & H. Eriksen in Hirschfeld (1992). Birds finish their wing moult in the winter quarters, with outer primaries still growing in January–February and sometimes March (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Harris *et al.* 1996, Garner 1997a,b, L. Jonsson *in litt.*). Head and neck speckled brownish-grey in autumn, but can be, as other forms, almost white by January as in a photo from Kenya (per D. A. Turner *in litt.*). Harris *et al.* (1996) describe the adult plumage of this form which winters from the Middle East to East Africa, and east to at least Hong Kong (Dementiev 1951, Cramp & Simmons 1983, Grant 1986, Kennerley *et al.* 1995, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).

Three subspecies occurring east of *heuglini* have been described, forming a continuum from *taimyrensis* to *vegae* through *birulai* (the correct spelling as originally given by Pleske (1928) honours Birula, sailor and Arctic explorer, hence the male gender, but is often erroneously written *birulae*, e.g. Yudin & Firsova 1988, Garner 1997b). In some cases they are almost impossible to separate, the taxonomic relevance of *taimyrensis* and *vegae* is disputed: *taimyrensis* may represent an intergrade between *heuglini* and birds from the east, while *birulai* is often treated as a synonym of *vegae*. All these birds complete their moult in winter quarters.

taimyrensis was described by Buturlin (1911) from a restricted area (the lower Yenisei river and south-west Taimyr peninsula) as a polymorphic yellow-legged population with mantle coloration varying from slate-grey, as in palest *heuglini*, to medium/neutral grey similar to most other Asian forms (i.e. a shade darker than *cachinnans*). Recent field study on the breeding grounds confirmed this and showed most birds were on the palest side of the range, with only a minority of dark individuals and some intermediates suggesting limited intergradation with *heuglini* (Filchagov *et al.* 1992, A. V. Filchagov and PY unpubl.). Their iris shows a variable amount of yellow and brown pigment, and may appear pale yellow to wholly dark. Moult timing similar to that of *heuglini* (Filchagov *et al.* 1992, A.V. Filchagov *in litt.*)

birulai was described by Pleske (1928) from that area of the Taimyr peninsula not allocated to *taimyrensis* by Buturlin (1911) and northern Siberia east of Taimyr to the New Siberia archipelago. Their divide remains unclear in Taimyr, and their taxonomic relevance requires confirmation (Filchagov *et al.* 1992). *Birulai*-range birds are similar to most from *taimyrensis* range in their mid-grey mantle, measurements, wing-tip pattern and bare part coloration (*contra* Kennerley *et al.* 1995, Hoogendoorn *et al.* 1996). The only obvious difference is that within the

range of *birulai* many birds have pink legs (others are yellow as in *taimyrensis*). *Birulai* shows slight variation in mantle colour, and tends to be paler in the north-east.

vegae (east of *birulai* to Chukotka and Anadyr) has mantle colour similar to darkest *birulai* and most *taimyrensis*, always shows pink legs, has variable eye colour (although pale irises are far commoner than dark ones), and moults as late as other northern forms.

Vegae, which winters on the north-west coast of the Pacific Ocean (Kennerley *et al.* 1995), is highly unlikely in the Arabian Gulf. Both *birulai* and *taimyrensis* principally migrate east to Pacific coasts (Filchagov 1992), but birds showing the characters of these forms have been recorded in East Africa, where they have usually been referred to *taimyrensis* (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Grant 1986, D. A. Turner *in litt.*, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). Given our present knowledge, *taimyrensis* and *birulai* cannot be safely separated: a minority of dark birds within the range of *taimyrensis* cannot be separated from *heuglini*, while the others are similar to *birulai* in mantle colour and, in some cases, bare part coloration; the only difference being that on breeding grounds all *taimyrensis* have yellow legs whereas *birulai* has either yellow or pinkish legs. It is suspected that, as in other yellow-legged forms, individuals from *taimyrensis*-range may attain paler, pinker legs in winter. Therefore, and contrary to Kennerley *et al.* (1995), Hoogendoorn *et al.* (1996) and Garner (1997b), who never studied these forms on their breeding grounds nor accessed large museum series', it seems unwise to try to separate *taimyrensis* and *birulai* in the field in winter. They are therefore grouped here under '*taimyrensis*': by this we do not infer that they come from the range described by Buturlin (1911) for *taimyrensis*; they may come from the western range of *birulai* as well.

The southern forms

cachinnans (Black Sea to Lake Balkash) is, due to its abundance, the archetypal gull with a medium/neutral grey mantle in the Middle East. Although its mantle is a shade paler than any form considered in this paper, the difference is often marginal and cannot always be objectively appreciated in the field. In *cachinnans*, which is well described by Harris *et al.* (1996) and Garner (1997a), moult is early and all primaries are usually fully grown by December, and the head and neck show little or no dark speckling. The iris is usually yellow but sometimes peppered with brown pigment (seemingly more frequent in the west of the breeding range) and can be dark in some individuals, the usually yellow legs can turn pinkish and dark bill markings are not uncommon. Stegmann (1934) proposed to separate birds from the west part of *cachinnans* range under a distinct form, *ponticus*, now considered invalid as the variation within *cachinnans* appears clinal (e.g. Cramp & Simmons 1983). The separation of western and eastern *cachinnans* on wintering areas (Garner 1997b) remains speculative, lacking evidence from breeding areas.

armenicus (limited to some lakes in Armenia, east Turkey and north-west Iran) principally differs from *cachinnans* in structure (rounder head and shorter bill), slightly darker mantle (still mid-grey), usually dark iris and well defined large bill band. Wing moult is completed by December and it has a white head in winter plumage. Although clarification of *armenicus* field characters has benefitted from more detailed descriptions than other forms considered here (e.g. Satat & Laird 1992, Filchagov 1993, Buzun 1993, Harris *et al.* 1996), its identification remains debatable when observers believe that a dark bill band is enough to identify it: this is an erroneous oversimplification.

barabensis is a poorly known form described from steppe lakes near Barabinsk in Novosibirsk Oblast, south-west Siberia (Johansen 1960). Most descriptive data comes from A. V. Filchagov, the only ornithologist to have recently studied this form on the breeding grounds. *Barabensis* is similar to *cachinnans* in bare part coloration, but has a slightly darker mid-grey mantle (close to *armenicus*) and is smaller, slender and more elegant. Some birds within western *cachinnans* resemble *barabensis* in overall appearance (e.g. plate 18 in Gruber 1995), relationships between *barabensis* and neighbouring *cachinnans* are unclear and the two possibly intergrade. Moult

timing is unknown and winter distribution uncertain, although it presumably occurs in the Middle East (Bourne 1992, 1996, Garner 1997a,b). According to A. V. Filchagov (*in litt.*) a pair photographed by J. & H. Eriksen in the Arabian Gulf (in Madge 1992) appear to be *barabensis*.

mongolicus (Altai mountains to Transbaikalia, northern Mongolia and Hulun Lake, China) has a mid-grey mantle with variable leg and iris colour as in *birulai* (Madge 1982, 1985, Pyzhianov & Tupitsyn 1992, PY unpubl.). Moult timing is uncertain; records of late migrants with white heads on Lake Baikal in November (S. Pyzhianov pers. comm.) suggest it shows a white head in winter plumage. This form is listed from Pakistan (Roberts 1991) but these claims are based on an erroneous interpretation of the variability of bare part coloration (Kennerley *et al.* 1995). Moreover, no *mongolicus* ringed in Baikal have been recovered west of Indochina (S. Pyzhianov pers. comm.), making its occurrence in the Arabian Gulf unlikely.

BAHRAIN OBSERVATIONS IN DECEMBER 1992

Racial identification, attempted on c. 2500 individuals, was successful for c. 1300 birds. Failure was usually due to unfavourable viewing conditions (distance, light, duration, position of bird), although in some cases the observer was unable to decide between two forms (usually '*taimyrensis*' versus *cachinnans* in the case of lone medium-sized and mid-grey individuals in an unknown stage of wing moult), and immatures were more often left unidentified. Bare part coloration and head and wing moult pattern were precisely recorded in tens of adults, but field conditions typically allowed the objective determination of only some of these parameters in any one bird. Table 2 summarises information relating to development and frequency of dark bill markings. Iris and leg colour is addressed in the text. The following forms were identified:

Table 2. Variability of dark markings on the bill (no. of individuals). I: no dark at all. II: small dark spot on lower mandible; no dark marking on upper mandible. III: dark spot, usually large, on upper mandible; dark spot small or absent on lower mandible. IV: dark spot on both mandibles, well separated from each other. V: dark marks well developed on both mandibles, often joining or nearly so in a more or less defined bill band; the most marked individuals also had darkish marks behind a large bill band.

Type	I	II	III	IV	V
fuscus	1	-	-	1	2
heuglini	8	-	-	2	10
'taimyrensis'	3	-	1	3	9
cachinnans	3	5	8	21	3

fuscus: five or six different adults, one subadult and one old immature recorded in coastal locations. Leg colour of adults varied from rosy with yellow suffusion (one bird), to pale yellow (two) and bright yellow (two). Eyes pale yellowish. *Contra* Grant (1986), only one had a purely white head, the others some fine brown speckling.

heuglini: 35 (19 adults, four subadults, one first-winter, and a group of 11 adult and subadult birds in an unrecorded proportion) seen singly, or in small groups, usually on the coast; only three inland (two at Askar rubbish dump, one at Nakhl Lawzi inland lake). Leg colour usually pinkish with or without yellow tinge in the field (24), but also pale yellow (three), and even bright orange-yellow (one). Irises either pale yellow (two) or greyish brown (three), but also clearly showed a mixture of these two colours (one). Variable amounts of bold brown streaking on head and neck, and unfinished primary moult.

'taimyrensis' (possibly including *birulai*): c. 80 (c. 10% subadults, the rest adult except one immature), all on the coast except three at Nakhl Lawzi. All were actively moulting their outer primaries (1–3 feathers growing) and usually showed distinct grey-brown large speckles on head and neck (a minority had as pale a head as in *cachinnans*, see below). Legs appeared either pinkish (11), suffused pale yellow (three), or bright yellow (two).

cachinnans: nearly 1,000 were identified, including c. 650 adult/subadults. A sample of 291

immatures accompanying definitely identified *cachinnans* included 55% first-winters. This form occurred in various coastal habitats, including mangrove, and was very abundant at Askar rubbish dump. Most adults had finished their wing moult (it was estimated that the outermost primary was still growing in only 1–3% of adults). *Contra* to the literature (e.g. Grant 1986, Kennerley *et al.* 1995: table 2), adult plumaged birds rarely showed a purely white head: they usually had very thin but quite dense grey streaks on the crown and upper nape (not obvious at distance), merging into bolder, browner spots on lower nape and side of neck. Legs varied from flesh pink without visible yellow pigment (12) or with a slight yellow tinge (three) to pale yellow (33) and bright yellow (six). Although many looked dark-eyed at distance, adults observed at close range invariably showed a pale iris.

(armenicus?): an adult at Askar rubbish dump on 2 December showed many characters of this form. Smaller, more gracile than nearby *cachinnans* with round head, beady brown eye (iris paler than pupil) and rather short but thick greenish-yellow bill with a well demarcated black bill band obscuring the red spot. Only the outermost primary had a white mirror (moult completed). Its legs were pinkish and its mantle did not appear to differ from nearby *cachinnans*, thus it was possibly an atypical individual of that form.

barabensis: lone individuals apparently of this form were occasionally encountered in groups of *cachinnans* or *taimyrensis* but not recorded as such, as the possibility of them being extreme variations of other forms was not eliminated. The details below refer to two groups on the shore consisting of birds showing homogeneous characters compatible with *barabensis*, and apparently only with this form: 56 (35 adult/subadult, 14 first-winter and seven older immatures) on 8 December at the southern tip of Sitra island, and c. 110 (mostly adult/subadult, only 15 immature) at Al Muharraq on 12 December. Compared to *cachinnans*, they appeared smaller (no direct comparison) and were obviously slender with an elegant head, rather long neck and long wing giving an attenuated rear. Adult plumaged birds had 6–9 primaries with black (usually 7–8, white mirror on outer two) and were still in active moult (1–3 outer primaries growing). Head pattern similar to *cachinnans*. Iris colour varied from pale yellow (three) to grey-brown (six), with pied iris (dark spots on pale ground) in three birds. The legs occasionally looked pink (four), more often yellowish pink (25), but also clearly yellow, either pale (two) or bright (one).

GENERAL STATUS IN BAHRAIN

Plate 1. Three adult *heuglini* (front), Nafoon, Oman, December. Note the variable leg colour. (*Hanne & Jens Eriksen*)

Plate 2. Adult *barabensis*, Nafoon, Oman, December. (*Hanne & Jens Eriksen*)

Plate 3. Subadult (probably third-winter) *barabensis*, Ras Al Hadd, Oman, October. (*Hanne & Jens Eriksen*)

Plate 4. Adult *barabensis*, Oman, October. (*Hanne & Jens Eriksen*)

Plate 5. Two adult *taimyrensis*, Bahrain, December 1992. (*Pierre Yésou*)

Plate 6. Subadult *taimyrensis* (on left) and subadult *cachinnans* (right), Bahrain, December 1992. Note the yellowish legs but pinkish webs of the latter bird. (*Pierre Yésou*)

Plate 7. Adult *heuglini*, Bahrain, December 1992. (*Pierre Yésou*)

Plate 8. Two adult *heuglini* and one subadult *cachinnans* (front bird) with a Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Bahrain, December 1992. The bird on the extreme left is unidentified, as mantle colour uncertain. (*Pierre Yésou*)

The following is based on field observations by EH during late 1989–early 1993 and is based on estimates, not actual counts.

cachinnans: this form appears relatively early in Bahrain, from early July with groups of adult birds and accompanying juveniles, and the form becomes very common in August and September. This might be expected as the breeding areas of *cachinnans* lie comparatively close to Bahrain. The form was also recorded during winter months and there were few records after March. The majority were found in sheltered bays, such as Tubli bay, and at inland sites, especially the Askar rubbish dump (see the observations above).

heuglini: a few individuals oversummered, but the majority appeared in November, with a few in October. Most had left by March. The form usually occurred on more exposed shores, especially around Muharraq island.

'taimyrensis': this form followed *heuglini*'s occurrence pattern but could not always be safely separated from *barabensis*, the field characters of which EH was unsure of at the time.

DISCUSSION

Important advances in the field identification of large gull (sub)species were made recently, dating back only to Grant's (1982, 1986) pioneering work (initiated in the late 1970s in a series of papers in *British Birds*), and progress remains slow, with the identification of even the better known European forms still debated (e.g. Golley 1993, Chylarecki 1993a,b Yésou *et al.* 1994). Considering Asian forms, despite the work of Harris *et al.* (1996), it is clear that field identification remains a challenge for both birdwatchers and trained ornithologists (e.g. Garner 1997b). The difficulty is demonstrable: PY, one of very few non-Russian gull researchers with sufficient experience of Asian forms on their breeding grounds, remained unable to identify nearly 50% of birds he saw in Bahrain.

Of significance in the present study is the observed abundance of *cachinnans* in Bahrain; Cramp & Simmons (1983) considered that this form did not reach the Gulf (although one ringed in Azerbaijan was recovered at Basra, Dementiev 1951), and L. Jonsson (*in litt.*) saw a few in Bahrain in winter 1995–96. Conversely, Bourne (1996), who confirmed his identification from specimens, found *cachinnans* to predominate in the upper Gulf during winters 1987–88 and 1990–91, although he saw few further south; he considered that this form arrived in the Gulf towards the end of December.

Garner (1997b) estimated that *cachinnans* accounted for 50–60% of the large white-headed gulls he saw in UAE in late February–early March 1996, but no *cachinnans* were identified in Oman in November 1996 (EH and L. Svensson unpubl.). It appears that the timing and abundance of *cachinnans* in Bahrain and further south may vary markedly from year to year, if identification problems are not hampering the comparison of different observers' reports.

Regarding *armenicus*, the absence of any observations by PY reinforces its status of a great rarity in Bahrain (only three acceptable records up to 1996: Hirschfeld (1995), L. Jonsson and M. Skakuj pers. comm.), in sharp contrast with the many reports from UAE, mainly by foreign tour groups (C. Richardson pers. comm.). The latter records may not be valid (Richardson & Aspinall 1997, Garner 1997b).

Three other recorded forms (*fuscus, heuglini, 'taimyrensis'*) were expected in the area. Particularly interesting are those relating to two groups of gulls showing characters which, given present knowledge of variability in Asian large white-headed gulls, agree only with *barabensis*, whose winter distribution is unclear. One feature differed from the available but limited phenotypical description of *barabensis*: although most had 7–8 black-tipped primaries as in A. V. Filchagov's observations on the breeding grounds, a few had 6–9 black-tipped primaries. A possible explanation is that the large Bahrain sample provided a better illustration of population variability than the Russian sample of c. 25 specimens (A.V. Filchagov *in litt.*, Table 1). These were in a similar stage of wing moult as '*taimyrensis*'; *barabensis* has long been considered a small, southern and isolated variant of *taimyrensis*, and classified under this name (Buturlin 1934). This cannot be accorded much taxonomic value, as nothing is known of the moult strategy of eastern *cachinnans* which breed near *barabensis*: the cold springs in Central Asia could induce late breeding and subsequent moult in eastern *cachinnans*. Interestingly, observers undertaking winter field study of gulls further south considered that *barabensis* often predominated along the UAE coast in 1987–88 and 1990–91 (Bourne 1996) and early 1996 (Garner 1997a,b), and Oman in November 1996 (EH and L. Svensson, unpubl.), while L. Jonsson (*in litt.*) found *barabensis* the commonest form in Bahrain in winter 1995–96. Thus, there is strong evidence that the southern Arabian Gulf and northern shores of the Arabian Sea could be the main wintering area of this enigmatic population: specimen confirmation, further to those taken by Bourne (1996), is required.

The various forms differed not only in their abundance but also in their population structure and habitat choice. Immature *cachinnans* were numerous, particularly first-winters which accounted for 17% of all birds and 55% of immatures. Conversely, few immatures of other forms were recorded, with the exception of *barabensis* (first-winters accounting for 8%). *Cachinnans* occurred in various habitats, although scarce at exposed coastal sites, and appeared to be virtually the only form exploiting the rubbish dump, where it was particularly abundant. Other forms occurred almost exclusively on the coast and were seen coming in off the sea on a number of occasions.

Differences in population structure may be subject to various explanations: sample size, the difficulty of identifying immatures particularly in their first two years (PY was unable to assess the racial identity of some first-winters e.g. in *heuglini* and '*taimyrensis*' mixed groups), or migration strategy varying with age-class (see e.g. Kilpi & Saurola 1984 for *fuscus*). Nevertheless, we are tempted to consider that observed differences largely reflect the current dynamics of each form, with northern forms producing fewer young due to the harsher conditions on their breeding grounds (e.g.

Filchagov *et al.* 1992). These conditions were particularly severe in spring and summer 1992, leading to a poor breeding season in virtually all Eurasian tundras (Tomkovich & Lebedeva 1994). *Cachinnans* breeds in more favourable conditions, those breeding from the Black to the Caspian Seas obtain ample food from human waste, permitting higher breeding success. That they continue to use such sources in winter probably also helps increase their survival rate, accentuating the differences with northern and steppe forms, which mostly rely on natural food.

Occurrences of LWG in Bahrain and the Arabian Gulf may vary annually, at least among northern forms. Until more is known of field characters and their variation, great care should be taken by visiting, less experienced ornithologists when identifying LWG forms of all ages in the region. *Armenicus* is highly unlikely to occur regularly, identification of this form in the Arabian Gulf by inexperienced observers should be undertaken with great care. Only future and longer-term studies, showing annual variations and perhaps migration timing differences among different forms, coupled with advances in field identification will show the true status of these forms in the Arabian Gulf.

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Notes on some breeding birds in Lebanon

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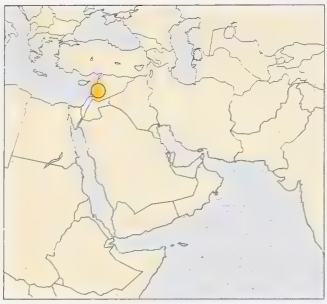

Major changes in breeding status and distribution are provided for 26 species, based on fieldwork in 1995–96. Three breeding species were new to the Lebanon bird list (Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca*, Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* and Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*). Eleven new breeding species are listed (Booted *Hieraaetus pennatus* and Bonelli's Eagles *H. fasciatus*, Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*, Rock Dove *Columba livia*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*), eight are the first breeding records for a number of years and one (Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*) successfully bred for the first time. Notes are provided for three other species.

INTRODUCTION

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA COVERED by Lebanon is ornithologically little-known (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974, Macfarlane 1978, Tohmé & Tohmé 1986, Vere Benson 1970). The present work follows a hiatus during the mid-1970s to early 1990s, when factors associated with political instability resulted in extremely limited observer activity. This paper is based on observations between February 1995–July 1996 when data was collected (by GR-J) for the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon. During the fieldwork, new information on breeding bird distribution and new breeding species were discovered.

Lebanon is a mountainous country: the topography consists of a narrow coastal plain and two imposing, parallel mountain ranges reaching 3150 metres, separated by the Beqaa Valley, which lies at 800–1000 metres.

SPECIES LIST

MB = migrant breeding species, RB = resident breeding species

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* (RB)
Only one, incomplete, breeding attempt, in 1971 (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974). Two pairs bred successfully in 1995: one in a small oak *Quercus* sp. on the east slope of Jabal Barouk at c. 1200 metres; the other on a steep slope one km from the protected forest of Ehden at 1350 metres. The latter was reused in 1996.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* (MB)
No previous documented breeding records, although Vere Benson (1970) lists it as having perhaps bred. In 1996, a pair nested in a solitary tree above the Al Maanyeh ravine in Iqleem El Harroub (Schouf), 34 km south-east of Beirut. The pair was first seen on 25 April, and the nest with an incubating/brooding adult was found on 23 May.

Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* (MB)
No previous documented breeding records, although Vere Benson (1970) notes a nest "recorded years ago in the Anti-Lebanon" and that pairs are "reported many times, apparently breeding, in one of the river valleys on the west side of the Lebanon". An occupied nest in March 1996 on a cliff at Ijbeh on Jabal Aitou (north Lebanon). Another pair observed regularly throughout the 1995 breeding season at Multaqa Al Nahrein, two km east of Damour but no proof of breeding.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (RB)
The most common and widespread breeding raptor in Lebanon. Approximately 63 breeding pairs were recorded in 1995 and 1996 in a variety of habitats from sea level to 2600 metres.

Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca* (RB)
No previous records. Considerable numbers introduced by the National Council for Hunting in Lebanon in 1994 and 1995. It breeds in very small numbers near cedar at Maasser El Schouf, at c. 1800 metres. If this species continues to colonise this area, it will compete with and threaten the indigenous Chukar *Alectoris chukar*.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* (RB)
No previous records in Lebanon. Many have escaped or been introduced into the wild during 1993 and 1994, principally by the National Council for Hunting in Lebanon. A nest was found in April 1995 in an olive grove at Darayya (Iqleem El Kharroub). The future of this species in Lebanon may be limited due to illegal hunting pressure.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans michahellis* (RB)
Possibly breeds (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974, Macfarlane 1978) and recorded as breeding on the islands off Tripoli, without details, by Vere Benson (1970). In May 1996, 50+ birds, mainly adults, on Palm, Ramkeen and Sanani islands off Tripoli. Eight pairs were found breeding on the rocky coasts of Palm Island (four nests), Ramkeen Island (three nests) and Sanani Island (one nest). Eggs, downy young and a juvenile seen.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* (MB)
No previous breeding records in Lebanon. A colony of 10–12 pairs in May 1995 and 1996, nesting in a flood plain of the Oronte (Al Assi) River, between Dirdara and the Syrian border.

Rock Dove *Columba livia* (RB)
Vere Benson (1970) considered it apparently resident in montane Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon but breeding not proven. A small colony in late March 1995, on the high ledges of a steep rocky slope near the Yammouneh ponds at c. 1500 metres, where breeding confirmed.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (RB)
Formerly bred in Beirut (Cramp & Simmons 1985) but subsequently considered to have become extinct (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974). Several pairs found during 1995 and 1996 in a wooded garden at the American University of Beirut. Several hundred birds resident and breeding in pine groves in Beirut, especially near the racecourse.

Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (RB)
No previous records in Lebanon. A small colony of c. 18 birds, originating from escapes, was found breeding at the American University of Beirut campus. Copulation observed in mid-April 1995 and early May 1996.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* (MB)
One breeding record in 1956 (Kumerloeve 1968). Regularly recorded during 1995 and 1996 breeding seasons when three colonies discovered. Up to 16 birds in a building next to a pine grove in Beirut, were nesting in holes caused by bombing and gunfire during the last civil war. In 1996, seven pairs found in the ceiling of an abandoned storey of the Al Amlieh Mehania School in Beirut. Chicks heard in late May. A third colony of c. six pairs was on the rocky, west coast of Ramkeen Island, off Tripoli. In addition, c. 20 birds were regularly recorded between late April and mid-June 1995 and 1996 over palms near Al Bohsas beach, Tripoli.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (MB?)
Perhaps bred formerly but no recent evidence (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974, Cramp & Simmons 1985). On 7 May 1996, some were inspecting holes in a sandy cliff above Joueet Spring at Ehden. None seen on 6 June. A breeding attempt is possible.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops* (MB or RB)
Breeding previously unconfirmed, but one seen and heard at Qammouha on 11 May (Macfarlane 1978) and listed as formerly being probably a regular breeder which now perhaps nests only occasionally (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974). During 1995 and 1996 breeding seasons, common in *Abies cilicica* forest near Qammouha, and in *Quercus pseudocerris* forest at Al Houah, between Qammouha and Fneideq. Several nests found in April and May, usually on the forest edge, and a pair seen carrying food to a hole in a dead tree in cedar forest at Bscharri. Further data needed before it can be ascertained whether breeding birds are resident.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* (RB)
Formerly bred, especially in the north, but no recent records (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974, Macfarlane 1978). One heard in fir groves at Qammouha on 28 April 1995. On 26 May 1996, an adult was feeding three nearly fledged young in *Quercus pseudocerris* forest at Al Houah, near Qammouha, at c. 1800 metres.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (MB)
A single breeding record of *M. f. feldegg* in 1974 (Macfarlane 1978). The race *M. f. feldegg* is a relatively common breeder, principally at high altitudes and especially by the Bscharri streams. A few nests containing eggs or recently fledged young found between early May and mid-June 1995 and 1996 there. A pair of *M. f. flava* x *M. f. feldegg* bred for the first time in 1996, the nest was on the ground close to Joueet stream and in the same area as Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea* mentioned below.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (MB or RB)
No previous breeding records, although Vere Benson (1970) states "appears to breed very locally in the mountains". Small numbers breeding at Joueet Spring, near Ehden in mid-May to late June 1996. Two nests located between large, loose stones beside a small waterfall. The nearest breeding areas are in south and south-east Turkey, and north Iraq (Porter *et al.* 1996).

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* (MB)
No previous breeding records. Common and widespread at low altitudes from mid-April, especially in maquis and garrigue. On 7 May 1996, a nest containing four eggs was found in degraded maquis on a hillside at Dalhoun, at 450 metres.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (MB)
Has bred (Vere Benson 1970) but no recent records. Not uncommon around the cedar forest of Bscharri (c. 1850 metres). On 4 June 1996, an adult seen carrying food at this locality.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (RB or MB)
There are no previous breeding records of this passage migrant and winter visitor (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974). A common breeding resident in a wide variety of habitats at low and mid-altitudes, and on Palm Island, off Tripoli. Breeding well advanced in early May 1995 and 1996 when nine nests found, five with eggs, two with food-carrying by parents and two with young c. seven days old on 2 June 1996. The nearest breeding is in north Israel (Shirihai 1996).

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (MB)
A single breeding record in 1972 (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974). Recorded breeding at several localities in undergrowth of pine groves, orchards, woodlands and cultivation with trees. Principally found at Kfar Hatta, Bjiro, Ainbal, Marj Bisri, Saraal, Horj Ehden and with a very

high density in olive groves at Zgharta, eight km east of Tripoli. The species arrives in mid-April, with most appearing in the last week of April.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* (MB)
No previous breeding records. A fairly common summer visitor, breeding principally at mid- and high altitudes north of the Beirut–Damascus road. Most common at 600–1500 metres in north Lebanon with concentrations at Fneideq, Qammouha, Arbat Kozhaya, Ijbeh Ehden, Horj Ehden and Ban, where copulation observed on 4 June 1996. Arrives from mid-April with a peak in late April and nests from mid-May.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* (RB)
Cramp & Perrins (1993) map two breeding areas in Lebanon whilst Tohmé & Neuschwander (1978) record fledged young in July. In May 1996, a large colony in the cliffs at Ayoun El Siman, at c. 2200 metres. On 9 June 1996, 150 birds, adults and juveniles, were counted there.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (MB or RB)
Last recorded breeding in Lebanon in 1960 (Tohmé & Neuschwander 1974). On 4 June 1996, five nests were located in two adjacent *Robinia* trees at Bscharri, at c. 1850 metres.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia* (RB)
No previous records of confirmed breeding, although a common resident in higher arid areas, and reputed to breed at ruins in the Bekaa (Vere Benson 1970). Found to be very common in rocky areas around high altitude forests, and in the subalpine and alpine zones above the cedar limit.

Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* (RB)
Not recorded breeding in the last 25 years. A fairly common resident above 1500 metres and down to 700 metres in north Lebanon. Highest densities at Qammouha, Bscharri, Ain Zhalta, Barouk and Masser El Schouf.

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A baseline survey of the Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* in western Turkey

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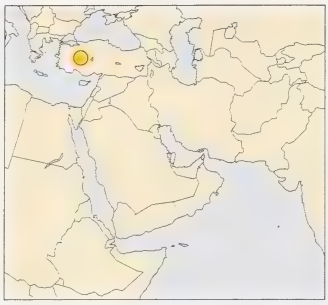


26 areas north and west of the Turkish Central Plateau, were checked for breeding Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* in 1995 and 1996. A total of 17 pairs at five sites was found. One previously known site supporting six pairs and another holding up to ten pairs are essential to the maintenance of a viable population in western Turkey, where the estimated population is less than 50 pairs. There is evidence that populations, particularly in the south, are declining due to disturbance from forestry activities. Conservation measures are outlined to safeguard and possibly recover the population, as has been achieved in Spain. Data on other raptors of conservation concern are also presented. The lack of evidence of breeding Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* suggests that indiscriminate use of poison baits to control livestock predators may be widespread.

INTRODUCTION

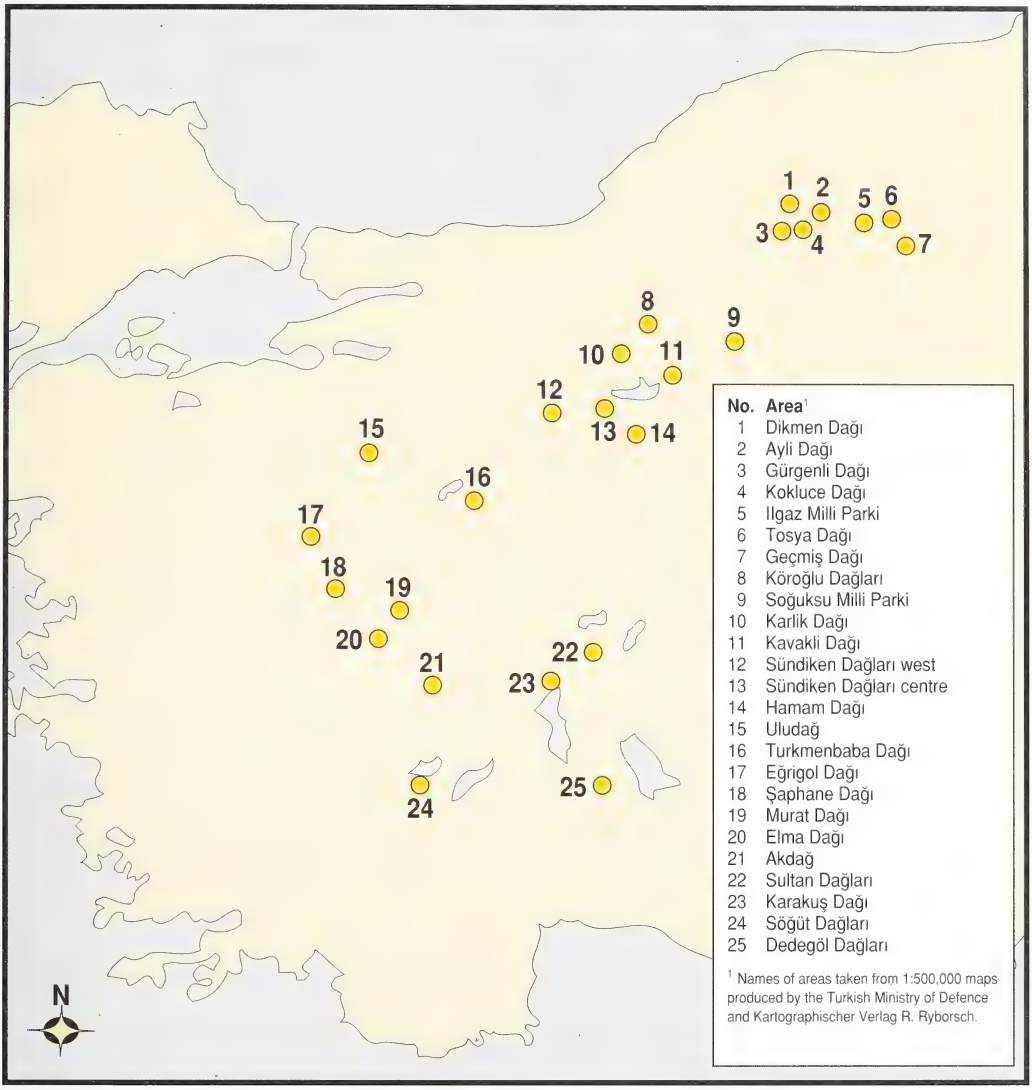
THE BLACK VULTURE *Aegypius monachus* is classified as globally near-threatened (Collar *et al.* 1994) and vulnerable in Europe (Tucker & Heath 1994). Its strongholds are in Spain (1000 pairs) and Turkey (Heredia 1996), although Kasparek (1992) put the Turkish population at possibly less than 50 pairs, breeding in large forests of north, north-east and east Anatolia with other breeding season records from the south, in the Taurus mountains. Declines have occurred across Europe, except Spain but including Turkey (where it was formerly more widespread in the Taurus), principally due to poisoned baits laid to control foxes *Vulpes vulpes* and wolves *Canis lupus* but forestry operations have caused habitat loss and nest disturbance. In Turkey a baseline breeding survey was considered an urgent priority by Heredia (1996). Thus surveys in 1995 and 1996, in montane western Turkey, sought to locate breeding areas, estimate population size and identify threats. Here we present their results with recommendations for future monitoring and conservation action. Data on other upland raptors of conservation concern (Tucker & Heath 1994) are also presented. All information is held in the Important Bird Areas (IBA) database of Doğal Hayatı Koruma Derneği (DHKD).

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The surveyed area comprised an arc of mountain ranges at 1000–2400 metres which form the northern and western borders of Central Anatolia (Fig. 1). The seven discrete ranges in the north form the west end of the Ilgaz Dağları. The centre is dominated by the Köroğlu and Sündiken Dağları. In the south the mountain ranges are small and discrete, except Dedegöl Dağları adjacent to the western Taurus. The mountains are covered with extensive, often managed *Pinus nigra* and *P. sylvestris* forests with *Abies nordmanniana* at higher altitudes. In the south *P. brutia* occurred at lower elevations. Based on OSME's regional classification of Turkey (see Beaman 1986), it includes parts of the Black Sea Coastlands region (western inland sub-region), Western Anatolia (Marmara and Izmir), Southern Coastlands (western Taurus) and Central Plateau (Sakarya basin and enclosed basins).

Recent unpublished records of Black Vulture (Williams 1993, Parr 1994) and DHKD information assisted in locating breeding sites, whilst US Air Force 1:500,000 Tactical Pilotage Charts (1963) and the 1:500,000 map produced by the Turkish Ministry of Defence and Kartographischer Verlag R. Ryborsch (1994) were used to identify

Figure 1. Location of 25 areas searched in western Turkey for breeding Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* in 1995 and 1996



upland areas. The latter map showed forested areas. The study area was visited between 7–21 May 1995 and 27 April–18 May 1996. 25 localities, including two protected sites (Milli Parki), were searched for breeding Black Vulture (Table 1); 14 were checked in both years. In 1995, the survey commenced in the central mountain ranges and moved north-west. In 1996, it again started in the centre, moved south and returned to the centre to re-check sites found the previous year.

Between a half and two days were spent in each area, depending on its size, extent of forest and whether Black Vultures were observed. The daily routine consisted of driving through an area and, where possible, climbing to high points to evaluate surrounding habitat and search for flying or perched birds. If seen, all potential breeding valleys were checked for occupied nests and adult birds 'parachuting' down to nests on closed wings and with outstretched feet. If not seen after two to three hours, the species was presumed absent, based on experience at Soğuksu Milli Parki where flying birds were usually seen within an hour. However, it was difficult to

standardise effort because of the varying topography and availability of forest roads in each area. The large mountain ranges were also difficult to cover consistently. If nests were difficult to locate, the maximum number of breeding pairs in the area was estimated, based on the number of flying birds (excluding immatures), the number 'parachuting' to occupied but unlocated nests and the number of occupied nests.

Breeding evidence at sites was classified either as 'possible', bird(s) recorded in suitable habitat but no other indication of breeding, or 'definite', nest(s) located with attendant adult bird(s). In addition, villagers and herdsmen were shown photographs and interviewed as to the species' presence. They were also asked about any animal carcasses which might attract feeding vultures.

RESULTS

Five 'definite' and five 'possible' breeding sites were identified, the minimum number of occupied nests was 17 (Table 1). The maximum total number of pairs was estimated from the number of flying birds and immatures appearing to frequent each site. This was estimated at 42 pairs if, in addition, all possible sites were assumed to hold two pairs. Large areas, especially in the Ilgaz Dağları and south of Akdağ, were apparently unoccupied despite possessing suitable breeding habitat. Indiscriminate poisoning of wolves is reportedly widespread and interviewees in Uludağ, Şaphane and Eğrigöl Dağı all thought that declines in both wolves and raptors had resulted. Details of all ten sites where Black Vultures were observed are given below.

Table 1. Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* status in western Turkey based on the results of surveys in spring 1995 and 1996.

Area	1995	1996	Possible site	Definite site	Max. number flying birds	Number of immatures	Min. pairs	Max. pairs
Dikmen Dağı	*		*		1	0		2
Ayli Dağı	*							
Gürgenli Dağı	*							
Kokluce Dağı	*							
Ilgaz Milli Parki	*							
Tosya Dağı	*							
Geçmiş Dağı	*							
Köroğlu Dağı	*		*					2
Soğusku Milli Parki	*			*	4	2	6	8
Karlik Dağı	*							
Kavakli Dağı	*			*	4	0	1	5
Sündiken Dağları west		*	*			4		2
Sündiken Dağları centre	*	*	*		10	3		2
Haman Dağı	*	*		*	7	3	2	5
Uludağ		*						
Turkmenbaba Dağı	*	*		*	18	4	6	10
Eğrigol Dağı		*						
Şaphane Dağı		*						
Murat Dağı		*		*	0	0	2	4
Elma Dağı		*						
Akdağ		*	*		2	2		2
Sultan Dağları		*						
Karakuş Dağı		*						
Söğüt Dağı		*						
Dedegöl Dağları		*						
26	**14**	**15**	**5**	**5**	**46**	**18**	**17**	**42**

DEFINITE SITES

Yazılıkaya Yaylası (6–10 pairs)

An extensive mountain range (max. 1829 metres) south of Eskişehir, densely covered in pine forest. In 1995 birds were 'parachuting' into the forest. Up to 18 Black and two Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* were on the edge of the forest, feeding on a horse carcass of which only the backbone and ribs remained. A search of east-facing valleys revealed no nests. In 1996, six nests were found in the west-facing valleys, together with two empty platforms. In addition, up to four non-breeding Black and seven Griffon Vultures roosted in tall pines at the head of the main breeding valley. The forest is large, parts are intensively managed but several patches of relatively undisturbed old forest with mature trees remain. The area is surrounded by extensive plains grazed by livestock.

Soğuksu Milli Parki (6–8 pairs)

This well-known breeding site near Kızılcahamam, lies in a small mountain range (max. 1800 metres) covered in pine forest. In July 1994, four occupied nests with large, fully feathered young were found (Parr 1994). In 1995, the same nests were occupied and two additional active and three unused nests found. Five of the nests were in one valley, near a small tributary stream at 1500 metres, facing east and south-east. A number of forest tracks run nearby but sitting birds were undisturbed by passing vehicles. Approximately half of the forest lies within the protected area boundary and is unmanaged.

Haman Dağı (2–5 pairs)

A small, low-lying mountain range (max. 1540 metres) extensively covered with pine forest and intensively managed for forestry. On 11 May 1995 two occupied nests containing c. 14 day old young were located in pines in a small south-facing valley at 1300 metres. There were also two unused nest platforms, which were also unoccupied on 13 May 1996, when seven to nine birds including at least four immatures were present. 'Parachuting' birds were descending to two definite and two possible nests. Disturbance may be a serious problem as nests were within 100 metres of forest tracks and one abandoned platform was adjacent to a new track. In 1995, a chain-saw was heard 400 metres from an occupied nest and recent clear-fells were found, the following year extraction was evident adjacent to the breeding valley.

Murat Dağı (2–4 pairs)

A mountain range east of Gediz (max. 2312 metres) visited on 1–2 May 1996, when two occupied nests at 1400–1600 metres were in pine trees in a long north-facing valley, intensively managed for forestry. In addition three empty platforms were seen. No flying birds were seen. Shepherds reported that although wolves were present in the area poison was not being used.

Kavakli Dağı (1–5 pairs)

This site comprises mountains on the south-east edge of the Köroğlu range, reaching 2400 metres. Relief is very abrupt with narrow gorges covered in dense forest. On 13 May 1995 four flying birds, a huge nest and sitting adult on the top of an old pine tree on a very steep slope, were located. The nest was oriented south-east at 1500 metres. Local villagers reported that they annually came across three to four 'stick nests' on pine tops whilst working in the forest. The area is managed for forestry but activity on the steep valley sides where the nests are most probably located appeared minimal.

POSSIBLE SITES

Dikmen Dağı (0–2 pairs)

This site is at the western edge of the Ilgaz Dağları, north of Kurşunlu. One bird on 17 May 1995 was over a small patch of old forest in a steep-sided valley which had been extensively clear-felled and replanted; the remnant forest was probably not sufficiently large to have sustained breeding vultures.

Köroğlu Dağları (0–2 pairs)

This is a huge mountain range south of Bolu. One bird on 13 May 1995 but no nests found. The area appears very suitable but locals reported that vultures had disappeared since forestry commenced and mature pines cut. They knew the species and its nests very well. However, this mountain range requires further checking since the north and north-east parts were not adequately checked.

Sündiken Dağları Centre (0–2 pairs)

On 13 May 1996, three immatures headed west from the direction of Sündiken Dağları East. After a thunderstorm had passed, c. 10 were over a mountain 15 km west of the known site. Observed behaviour, possibly involving the same three immatures, included 'chasing' with adults and 'formation flying'. A rainstorm precluded further observations but no nests were found on 15 June by Turkish ornithologists. The habitat was suitable and further checking is required, but it is possible that the observation related to feeding birds.

Sündiken Dağları West (0–2 pairs)

Part of the mountain range north of Eskişehir. On 12 May 1996, four immatures were at a rubbish dump 10 km north of Eskişehir at Muttalip, together with an immature Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, 14 Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* and six Black Kite *Milvus migrans*. The area to the north had many suitable breeding valleys but no nests were located.

Akdağ Dağı (0–2 pairs)

This site, north of Dinar and near Işıklı Gölü, consists of extensive pine forests on long, steep-sided valleys above a narrow gorge surrounded by high cliffs. Up to two birds flying low over the forest on 4 May 1996 and a single leaving the area may have been adult but no nests located. A forest warden reported vultures breeding on stick nests on the top of pine trees below the gorge.

OTHER RAPTORS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

The status of all upland raptors of conservation concern is summarised in Table 2. The most widespread species was Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*: at Akdağ Dağı c. 10 were displaying. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* and Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* were widespread in the Köroğlu and Sündiken Dağları but only five possible Griffon Vulture colonies were located and breeding was not confirmed at any. A pair of White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* was nesting on a tall pine in a long inaccessible valley at Akdağ Dağı. Three mountain ranges held possible pairs of Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, including Akdağ Dağı.

DISCUSSION

The minimum population size within the study area was 17 pairs at five sites. Prior to the survey, only one site – Soğuksu Milli Parki, where in 1994 four occupied nests were located (Parr 1994) – was known. A realistic estimate of the true population in western Turkey would be less than 50 pairs, as not all potential breeding areas were exhaustively searched, but suggesting that the 100–500 breeding pairs estimated in Turkey by Heredia (1996) was optimistic; the upper limit is possibly nearer 200 pairs. The 18 birds at Yazılıkaya Yaylası is one of the largest gatherings recorded in Turkey; 25 were at Balıkdamı, south of Sivrihisar on 21 May 1974 (OST 1978). The two largest breeding sites were Yazılıkaya Yaylası and Soğuksu Milli Parki, their conservation is essential to the maintenance of a viable population in western Turkey. The two pairs at Murat Dağı are perhaps a remnant population in a traditional breeding valley since there were three unused nests and most forest in this valley has been clear-felled. There was also no evidence of breeding at Akdağ Dağı which was formerly probably an important site. Breeding records exist from Söğut Dağı (Dijksen & Kasparek 1988, unpubl. data) but none were found in 1995–96. The survey by Hartasánchez (1994) in

Table 2. Status of upland raptors of conservation concern in western Turkey based on results of 1995 and 1996 surveys (P = possible breeding; numbers refer to numbers of pairs).

Area	*Haliaeetus albicilla*	*Gypaetus barbatus*	*Gyps fulvus*	*Aegypius monachus*	*Aquila pomarina*	*Aquila heliaca*	*Aquila chrysaetos*	*Hieraaetus pennatus*
Dikmen Dağı				P				
Ayli Dağı								
Gürgenli Dağı								P
Kokluce Dağı							P	
Ilgaz Milli Parki								
Tosya Dağı								
Geçmiş Dağı								
Köroğlu Dağı				P			P	P
Soıusku Milli Parki		P	P	6				P
Karlik Dağı		P					P	P
Kavakli Dağı				1		P	P	
Sündiken Dağları west		P	P	P		P	P	P
Sündiken Dağları centre		P		P				P
Haman Dağı		P		2	P	P	P	P
Uludağ		P			P	P		
Turkmenbaba Dağı		1	P	6				P
Eğrigol Dağı							P	
Şaphane Dağı								
Murat Dağı		P		2			P	P
Elma Dağı							P	P
Gatma Dagi								P
Akdağ	1	1	P	P	P		P	P
Sultan Dağları								
Karakuş Dağı								
Söğüt Dağı								P
Dedegöl Dağları			P					
26	**1**	**9**	**5**	**10**	**3**	**4**	**10**	**13**

the Taurus also found very few vultures. Thus evidence from the south of the survey area suggests its breeding range is contracting and the population declining. All five definite sites and Akdağ Dağı, which also holds a pair of White-tailed Eagle, should be included in BirdLife International's IBA inventory and afforded statutory protection status. Annual monitoring of these sites is essential and should record breeding success, from visits in April and July.

The study area was selected because it is probably the only area in western Turkey with breeding Black Vulture, except the mountains on the Bulgarian and Greek borders, although Milchev (1994) found none in the Strandja mountains, south-east Bulgaria in 1988–90. They are absent from Black Sea coastal forests; forests in extreme western Turkey are heavily managed and provide no recent records; records from the well-watched Taurus are few. Future surveys should concentrate on the the eastern two-thirds of the country as well as re-checking the extensive Köroğlu and Sündiken Dağları.

The small western Turkey breeding population requires urgent conservation to halt the loss of vulnerable sites from disturbance by forestry operations, especially in the Murat Dağı and Haman Dagi. Parallel actions to improve awareness of the presence of breeding Black Vulture, should be undertaken to create 'safe havens' around breeding valleys. Equally important is a national publicity campaign against indiscriminate fox, wolf and jackal *Canis aureus* poisoning. The assistance or partnership of hunting and forestry organisations could prove useful.

The evidence collected on other raptors indicates that this area of Turkey is important for its apparently healthy populations of Lammergeier, Golden and Booted Eagles. Most apparently suitable breeding cliffs, especially in the Köroğlu and Sündiken Dağları, appeared to be tenanted by Lammergeiers, in contrast to the lack of active Griffon Vulture colonies. All birds appeared to be immatures and non-breeders. This may indicate a serious level of poisoning since food supplies did not appear limiting. The small number of Imperial Eagle records, all immatures, is of concern, it being the only globally threatened large raptor in Turkey (Collar *et al.* 1994). Surveys in the early spring pre-breeding period are desirable to determine its status and distribution. Breeding White-tailed Eagle and three records of Lesser Spotted Eagle were encouraging. Repeat surveys of the more important areas surveyed in 1995–96 for these species every 5–10 years would be valuable.

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A review of claimed records of Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* from Cyprus and Turkey

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All 25 published claims of Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* from Cyprus, and five from Turkey are reviewed and the reasons for their rejection stated. Two claims (1958 and 1991) from Cyprus have proved to relate to Kittlitz's Plover *C. pecuarius*. Chronic confusion between Greater Sand Plovers *C. leschenaultii* of the race *columbinus*, which is common on passage through Cyprus and Turkey, and Lesser Sand Plover still exists, and most, if not all of the other claims are a result of such problems.

INTRODUCTION

IN FLINT & STEWART (1992) records of Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* from Cyprus were reviewed; none were considered acceptable. However, in view of the increasing frequency with which records of the species are reported from Cyprus in popular journals and magazines, identification problems and confusion over some records, we here review all 25 published records (as well as five published from Turkey), discussing the identification problems in greater detail.

Flint & Stewart (1992) state that descriptions of Lesser Sand Plover from Cyprus have generally concentrated upon the wide breast bands and small bills to distinguish them from Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*. However, they also state that the race of Greater Sand Plover which regularly migrates through Cyprus (and Turkey), *C. l. columbinus*, shows both of these characters and thus resembles typical field guide illustrations of Lesser Sand Plover. Since 1992 new field guides have correctly shown the extensive rufous breast and flanks of *columbinus* but the shortness of its bill still does not seem to be fully appreciated, it being frequently stated that the bill length of Greater Sand Plover is equal to or greater than the distance from the base of the bill to the rear of the eye, whereas that of Lesser Sand Plover is equal to or less than that distance. Measurements from photographs of 11 *columbinus* from Cyprus show that eight had bills shorter (by an average of 9%) than the distance from the base of the bill to the rear of the eye (Flint 1996). An additional complication is that Greater Sand Plovers of the longer-billed race *crassirostris* are now known to occur in Cyprus (Flint & Stewart 1995), and if compared with the shorter-billed *columbinus* might easily lead observers to conclude that the former were Greater and the latter Lesser Sand Plovers. This has already happened. As in Israel (Shirihai 1996), some birds seen in Cyprus also appear to be intermediate between the two races. Other claims of Lesser Sand Plover from Cyprus have also relied on the apparently black forehead or feet not projecting beyond the tail in flight, but both these features may also be shown by Greater Sand Plover (Cramp & Simmons 1983 and see below).

Plate 1. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Turkey, 24 August 1989. Typically long and pointed bill, pale yellow legs, large head with the eye situated in the middle of the head when seen in profile and the attenuated rear making the bird appear well-balanced in weight before and behind the legs. This bird was previously identified as a Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus* (Kirwan & Martins 1994) (*Dave Gosney*)

Finally, two birds claimed as Lesser Sand Plover in Cyprus have proved to be Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius* (see below). There have been two further records of this species (Sadler 1993, 1995a), bringing the total number of accepted records to four, compared with none for Lesser Sand Plover. On those criteria, as well as the relatively close proximity of Kittlitz's Plover's Egyptian breeding range, opposed to the central Asian breeding range of Lesser Sand Plover (Cramp & Simmons 1983) and the 30:1 ratio of their occurrences in Israel (Shirihai 1996), any small unidentified 'sand plovers' seen in Cyprus would appear more likely to be Kittlitz's Plover than Lesser Sand Plover. The former has not yet occurred in Turkey but, given the Cyprus occurrences, can clearly be expected.

THE CYPRUS RECORDS

All claimed records of Lesser Sand Plover are given by year below.

1958 One at Akrotiri 9 April (Bourne 1958 and 1959) was also listed by Bannerman & Bannerman (1971) and Stewart & Christensen (1971). However, in 1973 Haim Hovel asked PFS for a copy of the description and after comparing it with skins responded (*in litt.*) that he did not believe that Greater Sand Plover could be fully excluded. Subsequently, after examining the description in Bourne (1959) and a copy of the original field notes and sketch (*per* W. R. P. Bourne), PRF and PFS came to the same conclusion and omitted the record from Flint & Stewart (1983). However when re-examining the record, in early 1996, they realised that the description and sketch were of a Kittlitz's Plover, an opinion subsequently confirmed by John Marchant (verbally). This becomes the first record of Kittlitz's Plover from Cyprus, pre-dating the earliest accepted record (see below) by 33 years.

A further complication is that in Bourne *et al.* (1964) the date is given as 4 April 1957 but it is clear from Bourne (1957, 1958 and 1959) that there is no such 1957 record and that the correct date is 9 April 1958. Unfortunately Glutz *et al.* (1975) incorrectly listed the 1957 record as valid and subsequently (as the 1957 record was not amongst those rejected by Flint & Stewart 1983) it was quoted by Bezzel (1986) as a definite record in support of his claim of a sighting at the Gösku delta on the south coast of Turkey, 100 km north of Cyprus (see below). More recently it has also been included in a summary of records from the Western Palearctic by Thauront

(1995) in support of his claimed sighting from Cyprus (see below). Bezzel (1986) also wrongly attributed the 1957 record to Stewart & Christensen (1971) who do not mention it. In conclusion we re-emphasise that there is no 1957 record of Lesser Sand Plover from Cyprus.

1973 One at Paralimni 15 August, no description (Brownsward *et al.* 1974).

1977 c.10 at Ayios Nikolaos 11 April (Dimitriou 1977). Identification was based on breast band width.

1978 One at Akrotiri 30 March (J. Petersson *in litt.*, Sweeney & Sweeney 1978). Perhaps the most interesting of all the records of Lesser Sand Plover from Cyprus: the bird, seen at long distance, had not only a broad rusty orange breast band extending down onto the belly but also a broad black mask extending across the forehead with no trace of white, the latter a character of the *atrifrons* group of Lessers. However the description also mentioned long, light coloured yellow-beige legs and a very large size (estimated at 25 cm) in comparison with adjacent stints, both of which suggest that it was a Greater rather than a Lesser Sand Plover.

1980 Seven near Ayia Napa 7 March and one at Kato Paphos in March (Whiter & Bennett 1980). Both of the identifications were based on the very wide breast bands.

1982 Eight at Moni beach 14 March (G. W. Rayner *in litt.*). The identification was based primarily on the short bills.

1983 Six at Kermia beach 26 June, no description (Wilson-Whitford 1983).

1984 One at Ayios Yeoryios (Peyia) 4 March, four at Akrotiri 1 April, two there 2 April and one at Larnaca 7 April (Bennett 1984). The brief description of the Ayios Yeoryios bird did not fit either sand plover species particularly well. The sightings from 1, 2 and 7 April were made by members of a birdwatching expedition and the descriptions in each case were very brief; the only bird photographed proved to be a Greater Sand Plover.

Plate 2. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii columbinus*, Cyprus, late March 1994. Bill of moderate length with a typical pointed tip. The advanced state of summer plumage in March also rules out Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus* (see Hirschfeld & Shirihai in prep.). (*L. Christophorou*)

Plate 3. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii crassirostris*, Cyprus, 29 July 1994. Bill much longer than any Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus*, the bird's body is well-balanced in front of and behind the legs. The eye is situated in the middle of the large head. (*L. Christophorou*)

1988 One at Paphos, date and observer unknown, description unseen (Williams 1988).

1991 Two at Akhna Dam 10–20 November and one at Larnaca 27 November (Whaley 1991). The description of the Larnaca bird was brief and inconclusive. The Akhna record was supported by a very detailed description but photographs of one bird showed it to have extremely long legs, which did not seem correct for Lesser Sand Plover. Erik Hirschfeld (*in litt.*) identified the bird as a Kittlitz's Plover from the photographs, an opinion subsequently endorsed by Peter Colston, John Marchant and Richard Porter (all *in litt.*). At the time this was the first record of the species from Cyprus.

1993 One at Larnaca 10 April, claimed as 'the first authenticated record' from Cyprus (Thauront 1995). The published description is very brief, the identification based on the apparently black forehead. No further details or photographs are available (M. Thauront *in litt.*).

1994 Up to 20 at Potamos Liopetri 9–19 March, three at Larnaca 24 March, one at Ayia Thekla 31 March, two at Akrotiri 5 April, 10 at Ayia Thekla 30 July, four there 21 August and five there 28 August (Sadler 1994). Few of these records were supported by descriptions and those which were could equally be Greater Sand Plover. Photographs of the birds seen at Potamos Liopetri and Ayia Thekla in March showed Greater Sand Plovers. Photographs of the 10 at Ayia Thekla in July showed them to be shorter-legged and shorter-billed than a sand plover photographed there on 29 July, and in-flight that the feet and toes did not project beyond the tail tip on at least some birds, purportedly an important field character of Lesser Sand Plover, but in all other respects, particularly leg colour and bill shape, they appeared to be typical Greaters. The photographs were sent to John Marchant and Peter Colston, who also showed them to Hadoram Shirihai, and all three were of the opinion (*in litt.*) that all were Greater Sand Plovers; the longer-billed and longer-legged bird being *C. l. crassirostris* (the first record in Cyprus) and the others *C. l. columbinus*.

1995 One or more at Akrotiri 1–2 April, no description (Sadler 1995b).

1996 One at Paphos 4–5 January (Anon 1996a), the description (*per* J. Laber) lacks sufficient detail (E. Hirschfeld *in litt.*). One at Larnaca 24 February (Anon 1996b), description not seen.

THE TURKEY RECORDS

Kasparek (1992) considers the 1876 and 1980 occurrences acceptable, but on the evidence available we do not agree and suggest that the species is removed from the list of Turkish birds (see Kirwan, Martins & Davidson in prep.). In addition to the records presented below there have been a small number of unpublished and largely unsubstantiated claims e.g. a summer plumaged bird at Kulu Gölü on 6 June 1987 and nine in the Iğdir Ovası on 7 June 1986, but the only photograph supporting an undated claim, which lacked locality details, was clearly a Greater Sand Plover based on leg length and colour, bill length and size, and overall body structure (Erik Hirschfeld *in litt.*).

Plate 4. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* (probably *crassirostris*), Bahrain. Heavy bill with pointed tip, not as long as Plate 3 but still too long for Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus*. Pale legs. (*Mike Hill*)

1856 One specimen taken in this year (Kumerloeve 1966). The source of this record is unclear, given that Kumerloeve (1961) had previously mentioned the 1876 specimen it appears unlikely to be a misprint but without further information and substantiative details the record is unacceptable.

1865 One specimen taken in this year (Hollom 1971). The source of this record is unclear, but it is most likely a misprint for the 1876 specimen (see below) and without further information and substantiative details is inadmissable.

Plate 5. Greater Sand Plovers *Charadrius leschenaultii columbinus*, Cyprus, 30 July 1994. The bill can be even shorter than on these birds. The bill and head shape of the bird on the extreme right point to *columbinus*. Yellow legs and eye situated in the middle of the head (*L. Christophorou*)

1876 One collected in Central Anatolia 11 May, probably between Kayseri and Çorum (Danford 1878). The specimen cannot be traced and was not mentioned by Dresser (1878) who reported the occurrence of several other rarities in Turkey, but regarded as acceptable by Kumerloeve (1961). These facts, coupled with the difficulties in sand plover identification which persist to the present, lead us to regard this record as unproven.

1980 Two at the Göksu delta 11 April, one winter and one summer plumage (Bezzel 1986). Brief details but no photographs were presented for the summer plumaged bird: black (or dark) forehead without any trace of white, size marginally larger than nearby Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, both the legs and bill were considered to be shorter than Greater Sand Plover, with the bill also appearing relatively slim. However, the latter species was not available for direct comparison.

Plate 6. Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*, Khawr Taqah, Oman. (*Hanne & Jens Eriksen*)

1989 One in partial summer plumage at the Göksu delta 24 August (Kirwan & Martins 1994). This bird was originally accepted by the editors of the Turkey Bird Report based on the comments of Tony Prater and John Marchant (*in litt.* to Rod Martins), although neither were 100% certain of the identification. However in 1996, GMK sent the photographs and other material in this file to Erik Hirschfeld for reappraisal; the latter considered the bird to be a *columbinus* Greater Sand Plover based on leg length and colour (only rarely pale in *mongolus*), bill length (small but within the range of *columbinus*) and shape and overall structure.

CONCLUSION

The majority of claimed sightings of Lesser Sand Plover from Cyprus and Turkey are supported by little or no evidence, but where detailed descriptions or photographs are available they are referrable to Greater Sand Plover or, in two cases from Cyprus, Kittlitz's Plover. The difficulties of separating Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers are well known, Harris *et al.* (1996) describing them as one of the most difficult species pairs in Europe and the Middle East, and the extent to which their field characters overlap is emphasised by the history of their records from Cyprus and Turkey. The possibility of confusion between sand plovers and Kittlitz's Plover is not usually mentioned in the literature, but some birds are very similar and the risk of confusion is great (Taylor 1983), which has been the case in Cyprus. Whilst there are no accepted records of Lesser Sand Plover from Cyprus or Turkey it could occur in either country, but future claims should be supported by good quality photographs.

Flint & Stewart (1992) cast doubt on other records from the eastern Mediterranean region and with one exception all such records still appear erroneous or worthy of reassessment. A 1993 record from Libya (Meininger *et al.* 1996) has recently been withdrawn (Peter L. Meininger & Pim A. Wolf *in litt.*) and a total of c. 30 records from Israel have been rejected and just one (from Eilat) accepted (Shirihai 1996). The dates and numbers of birds involved in three records from the Mediterranean coast of Egypt (Goodman & Meininger 1989) correspond with the pattern of Greater Sand Plover migration through Cyprus. Efforts by PRF and PFS to certainly establish the identity of a male taken in Syria in May 1904, apparently held in the American University in Beirut collection (Baumgart *et al.* 1995) were unsuccessful.

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Striated Heron *Butorides striatus* breeding in the Egyptian Nile Valley

KLAAS-DOUWE DIJKSTRA

Hoath *et al.* (1997) remark for the Striated Heron *Butorides striatus* that "along with small numbers in the mangroves of South Sinai, the [Red Sea] islands hold the only breeding population in the Western Palearctic". Here, proof of breeding at Aswan in the southern Egyptian Nile Valley is presented.

In the evening of 29 July 1993, three recently fledged Striated Herons, with their parents, were photographed on the floating trunk of a Date Palm *Phoenix dactylifera* in willows *Salix* sp. on the west bank of Geziret el Nabatat (Kitchener's Island). The young were estimated to have been four weeks old, retaining some down among the otherwise normal feathers. This constitutes the first Western Palearctic breeding record outside the Red Sea basin. Other immatures observed in this area in July 1993 were perhaps also raised locally. The species is widespread in Africa but is not mapped in the Sudanese Nile Valley north of Khartoum, more than 800 km south of Aswan (Brown *et al.* 1982), although sightings are now commonplace throughout the year from Nag Hamadi barrage (north of Qena) south to Aswan, and breeding is suspected along this whole stretch of the Nile (A. Grieve *in litt.* to G. M. Kirwan, 1997). The Red Sea Striated Herons belong to the subspecies *brevipes*, whereas the Nile Valley records probably involve the paler *atricapilla* (Goodman & Meininger 1989).

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The first Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* in Yemen

DR OMAR AL-SAGHIER AND R. F. PORTER

BETWEEN 23 March–3 April 1996, OA-S and RFP surveyed the lagoons and marshes at Aden, one of Arabia's most ornithologically important wetlands. On 30 March, a Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* was flushed with Cattle Egrets *Bulbulcus ibis* from a small pool of treated sewage effluent, bordered by *Prosopis juliflora.* It was not seen again until 31 March, when it was feeding in nearby flooded grassland where two photographs were taken (see *Sandgrouse* 18 (2): 77). The bird was also seen on 26 April (David Stanton, Gideon & Gerda Kruseman), fishing the low-tide mudflats by shading the pools with its unfolded wings. When OA-S and RFP returned to the Aden marshes on 23 January 1997, a breeding plumaged Black Heron (the same bird?) was in the same place as 1996.

Description. A small heron, c. Cattle Egret size. Plumage black with a near oily-green gloss when seen close; it sported a mane of nape plumes and fine plumes cloaked its back. Relatively slim, perceptively downcurved bill, black with a grey base; legs grey-black with conspicuous orange-yellow feet.

This is the first Yemeni and third Middle Eastern record, previous occurrences were in Israel in October 1982 (Shirihai 1996) and Oman in September–October 1994 (*Oman Bird News* 18). Black Heron is resident in Africa south of the Sahara, principally in the east half of the continent (Brown *et al.* 1982).

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The first African Spoonbill *Platalea alba* in Yemen

DR OMAR AL-SAGHIER AND R. F. PORTER

THE FIRST authenticated record of African Spoonbill *Platalea alba* in Yemen was an adult on 26 March 1996 at Aden wetlands, south Yemen. It was still present on 30 March, and on 31 March three adults were there, declining to one on 2 April. Several photographs were taken (see *Sandgrouse* 18 (2): 76). Up to five were seen on 26 April (Max & David Stanton). In 1997, two adults were in the same area on 23–25 January, suggesting the species is resident and a possible candidate for breeding.

Description. Size, shape and colour of Spoonbill *P. leucorodia*, but immediately identified by its grey bill rimmed with red, bare skin at bill base, and red legs.

There is one previous report from Yemen of a bird or birds seen near Aden in the 1960s by H. P. Medhurst, but it has not been possible to obtain further details (Porter *et al.* 1996). There are two records in Oman: March–October 1986 and January 1994–November 1995 (two adults) (Oman Birds Records Committee 1994; *Oman Bird News* 18). African Spoonbill is widespread in Africa, being resident from Senegal to Ethiopia, and south to South Africa; its distribution is thus similar to that of Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* (Brown *et al.* 1982), also recorded at Aden in 1996–1997 (Al-Saghier & Porter 1997).

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The first White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* in Yemen

DR OMAR AL-SAGHIER, R. F. PORTER AND D. B. STANTON

WHILST COUNTING waterbirds at the Hodeidah marshes effluent discharge in the pre-dusk period of 15 January 1997, we noticed a small goose fly in from the north. Although only seen briefly, we were confident it was either a juvenile White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* or Lesser White-fronted Goose *A. erythropus*. The next day it was seen twice, once in flight at the sewage lagoons and later grazing on the grassy edge of a pool of treated effluent at a range of 100 metres with x20 telescope. The bird was a juvenile White-fronted Goose; it subsequently flew off north and was not seen again despite searching adjacent areas.

Description. A small goose with brownish-grey upperparts with no appreciably paler forewing visible in flight. Underparts unmarked grey. Bill orange, triangular-shaped but not large. No white on forehead and no pale eye-ring. When feeding the wing tips were noted as reaching the tail-tip.

In the Middle East, the species winters in large numbers in Turkey, Iran, north Syria and Iraq; it is scarce in the Gulf States and Oman, and a vagrant to Saudi Arabia (Porter *et al.* 1996). The Yemen observation is probably the most southerly record ever.

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The first Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus* in Jordan

RICHARD BASHFORD

ON THE MORNING of 9 April 1997, I was leading a Naturetrek tour at Aqaba sewage works when my attention was drawn to a small greyish bird amongst Garganey *Anas querquedula* and Teal *Anas crecca*. The bird was asleep but soon raised its head to reveal a short stubby goose-like bill. Since the bird was smaller than the adjacent Teal, I realised it was something unexpected. The bird was shown to the group before I concluded that it was a female Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus*, the first record in Jordan (Andrews 1995). It was observed for c. 30 minutes before it flew, with four Teal, to an adjacent pool. It was later seen feeding in the open with other wildfowl and was still present the next day.

Description. Smaller than neighbouring Teal, with greyish underparts and dark back. Small squarish head with stubby dark bill. Dark crown and forehead with obvious dark eye-line. Compact when swimming with greyish underparts becoming darker towards breast where more marked. Similarly, silvery neck and head darkening from nape down. Wings and back appeared relatively dark in flight, with white trailing edge on secondaries only.

Cotton Teal is a vagrant to eastern Arabia, in Bahrain and UAE, is scarce but regular in Oman, and has been recorded in Iran (Porter 1996). There is one previous Western Palearctic record: two females in Ashar market, Iraq in 1976 caught in Hawr al Hammar marshes the previous day (Kainady 1976).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Derek Scott tracked down the previous Western Palearctic record of the species.

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The first Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* in Oman

JENS ERIKSEN

ON 24 MAY 1996, JE and Hanne Eriksen were at Sun Farms, Sohar, north Oman studying the first country breeding record of Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* (*Sandgrouse* 18 (2): 77). In mid-morning, we noticed a Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* gliding north-east and grabbed the camera with 300 mm lens. There was no time to change lenses as the bird was drifting swiftly away but one pecularity was noted, a striking tail pattern consisting of a broad black terminal band and alternate white and black subterminal bands, all of equal width. The jizz was unmistakeably Honey Buzzard-like: long tail, rounded wings and smallish, pigeon-like head. The developed slides confirmed the tail pattern and, unhappy with the identification, the slides were sent to Richard Porter who congratulated us on our discovery of an adult male Crested Honey Buzzard *P. ptilyrhynchus*! This conclusion was reached independantly by Steve Madge, whilst our own perusal of the literature convinced us of the identification. Forsman (1994) provided a thorough review of the two species' separation. From the slides all the important characters, in addition to the tail pattern, were evident: six separate 'fingers' as opposed to five in Honey Buzzard, dark lines on the underwing reaching the body, buffy wing coverts, very small carpal patch and relatively broader tail.

Plate 1. Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, adult male, Sohar, Oman, May 1996. (*Hanne & Jens Eriksen*)

The record has been accepted by the Oman Bird Records Committee. The occurrence of Crested Honey Buzzard in Oman was not unexpected; there are records from Egypt (one), Israel (three), Saudi Arabia (two), Turkey (two) and United Arab Emirates (two). Care should be exercised in the identification of honey buzzards in the region and the possibility of Crested Honey Buzzard borne in mind. Our experience confirms that of other observers: even a less-than-perfect photo can be more valuable than time spent with a telescope.

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I wish to thank Richard Porter and Steve Madge for their help with the identification.

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Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* breeding in central Turkey

BERNARD PLEASANCE

ON 11 MAY 1993, during a visit to Turkey, myself and four colleagues visited a freshwater lake in central Anatolia just south of Tuz Gölü. In a marsh adjacent to the lake, a female harrier *Circus* sp. was flushed and immediately joined by a male, both birds calling overhead. The male was easily identified as a Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* and the female was considered to be the same species, based on its face pattern which was studied at relatively close range. A nest with four eggs was located where the female had flushed. The next day another Pallid Harrier nest with three eggs was discovered, c. 300 metres from the first pair.

The marsh, dominated by *Carex* sp., was surrounded by dry cultivation, orchards and rough grazing. The water was up to 100 mm deep. Birds in the dry ground included Great Bustard *Otis tarda* and Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, in the marsh c. three pairs of Crane and a pair of Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* were present (a pair nested at this site in 1992, pers. obs.), whilst at least ten pairs of Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* and four pairs of Marsh Harrier *C. aeruginosus* were breeding.

The first nest (1) containing four eggs was composed of a thick pad of dried grasses and sedges, 100 mm deep with a pronounced central depression, indistinguishable from the nest of Montagu's Harrier. The second nest (2) was similar but had a thinner pad of material. No sticks were present in either nest. The eggs were not measured. On 11 and 16 May, nest 1 held three white unmarked eggs, the other being well marked with brownish blotches; a newly hatched chick on 27 May whilst two of the other eggs had hatched on 30 May. On our final visit on 15 June, three young were present, the largest of which was c. 20 days old. Assuming an incubation period of 30 days (Cramp & Simmons 1980), the first egg would have been laid on 25–26 April, c. 2 weeks prior to the two Montagu's Harrier nests found at the same locality, which held one and two eggs on 11 May. Nest 2 contained three eggs on 12 May (all an unmarked bluish colour and probably fresh), increasing to four on 16 May but all had been predated by 27 May. This nest was synchronous with the Montagu's Harrier nests. The eggs (except the marked egg in nest 1) and chicks were indistinguishable from those of Montagu's Harrier.

In the mid-1970s, A. Limbrummer and P. Zeininger (pers. comm.) located two nests of Pallid Harrier in the same marsh. More recently in the same area, an adult male Pallid Harrier was seen food-passing with a female Montagu's Harrier on 2 June 1996 (*Birding World* 9 (7): 263), where it had been present since at least 11 May (I. A. Green *in litt.* to G. M. Kirwan), suggesting

the species may have bred on several other occasions south of Tuz Gölü. In addition there have been several records from east Anatolia in late May and June between the early 1970s and 1990s but without proof of breeding. Pallid Harrier regularly breeds along the east coast of the Black Sea in the Caucasus and lower Volga regions (Cramp & Simmons 1980), 600 km north-east of our observations. No previous breeding records in Turkey have been documented (Kasparek 1992).

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Plate 1. Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* nest with four eggs, Eşmekaya, Turkey, 11 May 1993. (*Peter Castell*)

Plate 2. Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* with four young, oldest 20 days, Eşmekaya, Turkey, 15 June 1993. (*Peter Castell*)

Corncrake *Crex crex* breeding in north-east Turkey

IAN A. GREEN

ON 3 AUGUST 1996, together with a Greentours Natural History Holidays group, I was exploring the botanically rich hay meadows c. 11km east of Şavşat (c. 3km west of Çam Geçidi – the pass over the Yalnizçam Dağları), when I flushed a Corncrake *Crex crex* beside a small channel in some sedges. The bird flew a few metres and disappeared into the base of a bush. As I moved towards the bird, two young Corncrakes ran off through the sedges. I was joined by the group and a farmer who proceeded to poke around with a pitchfork where the young Corncrakes had been. We engaged him in conversation and found that he was familiar with the species and even did a passable impersonation of their rasping call.

Description. Both the adult and young were seen very briefly but sufficiently to recognise such a distinctive species. **Adult:** approximately size of a Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* with chestnut upperwing coverts and long, pale trailing legs as it flew; wings quite broad and rounded, tail and bill short, general coloration mottled light brown. **Juveniles:** Quail-sized *Coturnix coturnix* and essentially black downy with some rufous coloration on the upperside/head, although difficult to see precisely where, barely audible high-pitched 'chip' sounds emitted on a couple of occasions.

Habitat

The birds were in an uncut sedge-dominated area by a small stream. Similar vegetation was scattered throughout the hay meadows. The habitat structure was remarkably reminiscent of the herb-rich machair interlaced with narrow iris beds in which the species occurs on South Uist and Balranald, Outer Hebrides, Scotland. The dominant species in the damp areas were sedges, *Carex acutiformis* and *C. panicea*, rush, *Juncus inflexus*, and grass, *Glyceria notata*. These were c. 30–40 cm tall and comprised c. 90% of the cover. The remainder was largely orchids, *Dactylorhiza iberica*, *D. umbrosa* and *Epipactis veratrifolia*, and spike-rush, *Eleocharis palustris*. Drier areas were either being cut or had just been so.

Habitat use and protection

The hay meadows west of Çam Geçidi are currently harvested by hand-scything in late July and early August, which suits breeding Corncrakes. There appears to be little immediate prospect of this changing. Tractors were being used for collecting hay on trailers but no mechanical mowing was noted.

Status in Turkey

Corncrake has long been suspected of breeding in north Turkey, although the provenance of Pasquali's (1991) statement of confirmed breeding is unclear. Maas Geesteranus (1959) heard one in corn at Mengen, Bolu province on 9 June 1951, which is late for a migrant. Kirwan & Martins (1994) list a record of one calling between Ispir and Erzurum on 21–22 July 1990, which is suggestive of breeding, and describe the species as "Status uncertain. Rarely but widely recorded on passage across Turkey but probably more common than records suggest. There are a number of recent records suggestive of breeding". More work is required to ascertain whether this is an isolated nesting record or whether there is a breeding population in the area.

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The first White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* in Turkey and the Middle East

SEAN BROWNE

IN THE EVENING of 19 May 1996, SB and Paul Ganney were birding a small pool at Akgöl marsh, Göksu delta, south Turkey. Amongst a dozen Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, seven Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* and several Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, some with young, I noticed a *Calidris* which being unable to identify I drew PG's attention to. It was watched for c. 30 mins at very close range through both binoculars and telescopes.

Description. Larger than Little Stint but only marginally bigger than adjacent Broad-billed Sandpiper, although longer-bodied than both species. Rufous crown with darker streaks giving capped appearance, prominent whitish supercilium extending to rear of ear coverts. Black bill, straight and relatively short. Throat and breast relatively heavily streaked, forming reasonably prominent pectoral band, although heavy streaking extended along the flanks, becoming more indistinct nearer the tail. Streaks appeared very dark against pale or off-white ground colour to the underparts. Mantle streaked black on buff ground with some rufous fringing to dark-centred scapulars. Primaries extended beyond tail-tip and tertials fell just short of this, giving the bird a long-bodied appearance. Legs black.

After consulting a field guide we were still not 100% sure of the bird's identity and we flushed it a few metres at very close range. A thin white wingbar and strikingly white uppertail coverts contrasting with the black tail were noted by both observers. A second flush convinced us that the bird was an adult White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* in summer plumage. The record was subsequently accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee, the first record in the Middle East. This is the fourth species of Nearctic wader to be recorded in Turkey, the others are: American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* (one sight record), Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* (one photograped and three nineteenth century specimens) and Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* (two sight records) (Porter *et al.* 1996). The first two-named species have also been recorded at the Göksu delta.

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Regular wintering by Scops Owl *Otus scops* in Turkey, at Havran Delta

GÜVEN EKEN

SCOPS OWL *Otus scops* is considered a migrant breeder in Turkey (Kasparek & Bilgin 1996). Small populations regularly winter in southern areas of many north Mediterranean countries, including Greece (Cramp 1985) but there are no dated wintering records in Turkey. Kiziroğlu & Kiziroğlu (1987) state that the species is resident at Manyas Gölü but provide no evidence for this, other than records in April.

Recently, a small wintering population of up to ten birds has been found on the central Aegean coast of Turkey. During three consecutive winters, in January 1995, February 1996 and January 1997, Scops Owl was heard near Burhaniye in the Havran Delta (39°33'N, 26°57'E) by the author and/or by E. Özer. Details are presented in Table 1. Birds were heard in large gardens, near the Havran river mouth; an area dominanted by old Eucalyptus *Eucalyptus* sp. trees.

Table 1. Winter records of Scops Owl *Otus scops* at Havran Delta, Turkey

Date	12.01.1995	13.01.1995	24.02.1996	16.01.1997	17.01.1997
Number	8	6	7	9	10

The species also breeds in the delta when present in higher numbers (E. Özer pers. comm.). The area holds the only known resident population of Scops Owl in Turkey but the occurrence of other resident populations, along the Turkish south and west coasts, is clearly probable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Dr E. Özer for his support during the preparation of this article.

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Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* status in Syria

THE EDITORS

SANDGROUSE 18 (2): 62 reported the first breeding record of Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* in Syria. The following features confirm that the young owl was actually an Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*: the large broad head, generally uniform pale facial disk with darker borders and eyebrows, and pale throat. The large legs and feet also eliminate *Asio otus*. Thus Long-eared Owl breeding in Syria remains to be proven. The editors would like to thank Dr Robert Williams, Oscar van Rootselaar and Dick Forsman for their comments and assistance in preparing this short corrective note.

The Editors, Sandgrouse, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL, U.K.

Diet of Long-eared Owls *Asio otus* wintering in the Khula valley, Israel

REUVEN YOSEF

CRAMP (1985) STATES that Long-eared Owls *Asio otus* in Fenno-Scandia and Russia north of 50°N are largely migratory and those further south in Europe mainly resident. The species principally winters in the southern two-thirds of its breeding range, with fewer reaching Israel (where several small breeding populations are known), Egypt and from Iraq to south Iran (Porter *et al.* 1996). Here, diet data from the Khula valley, north Israel is presented. The main food of many raptors using this region is the very common Field Vole *Microtus socialis guentheri* (Mendelson & Yom-Tov 1987), a rodent which, in Israel (especially in reclaimed areas), is classified as a pest.

Study area and methods

In the Khula Valley, three ornamental trees (*Casuarina cunninghamiana, Grevillea robusta, Schinus terebinthifolius*) on a collective-farming settlement called Yesod HaMaala have for many years served as a diurnal roost for 15–50 Long-eared Owls (Yossi Lev-Ari, pers. comm.). I visited it on three occasions during January (and once in March) 1995 and collected pellets. The number of owls present on each visit was noted and all pellets in good condition were collected from the base of the three roosting trees. A total of 279 pellets was taken during three consecutive weeks during January 1995 (111 on 17 January, 95 on 24 January, and 73 on 31 January). None were found on my final visit on 25 March. The pellets were dry-separated and the contents analysed for prey content.

Results and discussion

Pellets are pale grey in colour, and fresh ones were covered with mucus which dried to hard film. The average length of 167 pellets considered complete was 43.75 mm ± 12.9 SD (range 24.69–73.81), and breadth 26.55 mm ± 3.8 SD (range 22.68–30.60). These dimensions are within the range mentioned by Mikkola (1983). On 17 January, 43 owls were at the roost, 38 were present on 24 January, 31 on 31 January, and two on 25 March. At dusk, when the owls left to hunt, over 100 other owls from nearby areas flew over the roost. The owner of the garden in which the owls roost mentioned that the owls' departure always coincided with the first heatwave of spring. The final visit was 48 hours after such a heatwave.

A total of 438 prey items were in the 279 pellets, an average 1.57 (range 1–4) prey per pellet. Remains of 434 (99.1%) Field Voles, three (0.7%) Green Toads *Bufo viridis*, and one (0.2%) unidentified passerine were found. No pellets contained leaves or soil as reported by Cramp (1985). The diet was similar to diets in Europe, with small mammals constituting the majority

of prey, although the percentage of microtines is the highest of 179 diet studies reviewed in Williams (1996). In Europe, the species is considered a restricted feeder which specialises in hunting voles and, in some areas, mice or birds (see Williams 1996). Mikkola (1983) concluded that pellet analysis provided reliable information on the species' diet. The fact that wintering owls in the Khula Valley heavily depend on voles means that eradicating vole populations in winter could negatively affect the survival of wintering Long-eared Owls and diurnal raptors. Voles are presently considered a serious threat to agricultural practices. Farmers are encouraged to plough fields in winter in order to uncover vole dens, before watering them with aerial sprinklers so that voles die of exposure and cold. It is important that the authorities do not continue such eradication schemes without appropriate environmental impact studies.

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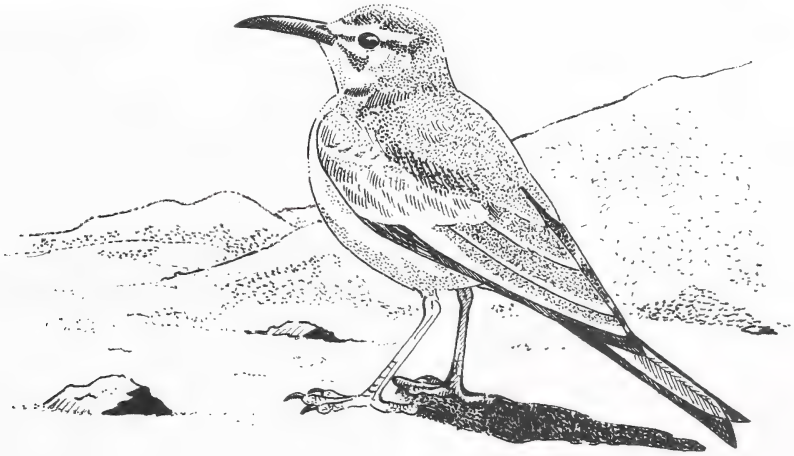
The first Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* in Turkey

NAPIER SHELTON

On 2 May 1997, whilst driving through a sandy area at the southern edge of the Göksu Delta, south Turkey, a courser-like bird flushed from the roadside c. 500 metres west of the light tower. Further observation, at 20–50 metres range, using 8 x 23 binoculars in good light with the sun from behind, proved it to be a Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*, the first Turkish record. It was watched for 3–5 minutes and followed for c. 200 metres as it usually ran but twice flew onto low bushes. Once it performed a song-flight, flying straight up c. three metres, before flipping over and dropping to the ground, leading to the conclusion that it was probably an adult male, as females only sing occasionally (Cramp 1988). Eventually, it disappeared behind a bush and was not relocated. The habitat of this area is largely flat sand with a few low mounds and scattered small bushes up to 50 cm high. A search the next day, in company of two other birders, also failed to relocate the bird.



Hoopoe Lark
Alaemon alaudipes

Description. Skylark *Alauda arvensis* body size but with longer legs and long decurved bill held above the horizontal, pale sandy brown upperparts, white underparts, black moustachial, black streaking on throat, and upper surface of tail black with brown inverted V in centre. In flight showed striking black and white bands on the wings, appearing largely white with black central stripe when viewed from behind.

Hoopoe Lark occurs from the Cape Verde islands through North Africa, south of the Atlas mountains, east to Arabia, Pakistan and north-west India. Its northernmost breeding areas are in south Syria and central Iraq. The species principally occurs in flat or gently undulating lowlands down to sea-level, but requiring sand or soft soil to probe for food (Cramp 1988). Although usually resident, there is evidence of seasonal movement e.g. in Oman, and some, largely extralimital, dispersal to Italy, Lebanon (where collected in the Bekaa Valley, Vere Benson 1970) and Malta (recorded on at least 26 occasions, Cramp 1988).

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The first Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* in Yemen

DR OMAR AL-SAGHIER AND R. F. PORTER

DURING A five-day breeding bird survey of some Yemeni Red Sea islands, we landed on Jizarat Bawared on 21 March 1995. This small sand and coral island, c. 3 km by 1.5 km, lies c. 10 km west of Al Luhayah, the nearest point on the Yemen coast , and is sparsely covered with *Suaeda* sp. It was somewhat devoid of breeding birds, and migrant passerines were also scarce. At 10.30 a small passerine was flushed at close range from a tiny clump of *Suaeda*; it landed on the ground before running into another *Suaeda* bush and was immediately identified as a Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia.* It was watched at ranges down to one metre for over five minutes. Two photographs were taken.

Structure and size. Warbler size; graduated tail and long undertail coverts.
Plumage. Upperparts dull olive with dark streaks on the mantle and coverts, and, when seen close, fine dark streaks on the crown; faint supercilium. Underparts yellowish buff with fine dark streaks on the breast and more prominent dark edges to the undertail coverts.
Soft parts. Bill and eye dark; legs orange.
Behaviour. Skulking in low vegetation, occasionally running on bare ground with tail slightly raised; or flying low and rather weakly between isolated patches of cover.

Grasshopper Warbler is uncommonly recorded on passage in the Middle East (Porter *et al.* 1996), probably because of its secretiveness rather than its rarity. It breeds in the Palearctic from Britain to north-west China, and winters in Africa (distribution poorly known) and the Indian Subcontinent (Cramp 1992).

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REVIEWS & Recent Literature

Handrinos, G. & Akriotis, T. (1997) *The birds of Greece.* A. & C. Black, London. pp 336, 44 black-and-white photographs, numerous line drawings and range maps, £25.

This attractively produced and authoritative volume will surely prove a 'must' purchase for all visitors to Greece. The now usual introductory chapters, covering ornithological history, geography, climate, vegetation, bird habitats, conservation problems, legislation, birdwatching in Greece and a section of photographs illustrating habitats, conservation issues and the country's avifauna (including a number of rarity portraits), precede the species accounts, which comprise, as expected, the majority of the book. A series of appendices present: a country checklist with status codes, omitted species, introduced and escaped species, species for which Greece is the southernmost limit of their Western Palearctic or European breeding range, ringing recoveries, the country's Red Data birds within global and national contexts, species which are legitimate hunting quarry, and useful addresses. Finally, a bibliography and index of bird species completes the work.

Researchers working in adjacent regions, particularly Cyprus and Turkey, will also find this book of great interest: whilst the occurrence of many species in Greece mirrors that in Turkey, others provide fascinating comparisons which should provoke further fieldwork. For instance, Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* is known to breed in Greece but not in Turkey, whilst vagrants to the former, thus far unrecorded in Turkey include: Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*, Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri* and Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*. In contrast, Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* has been recorded just 16 times in Greece but is a regular and not uncommon winter visitor to the western two-thirds of Turkey and, whereas there are just three plausible breeding records of Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* in Greece, the species is seemingly a well established resident in a number of areas of Turkey.

This work is a goldmine of similar and related information, and is a worthy addition to the library of any birder interested in European or Middle Eastern avifaunas, whether or not they have visited Greece.

Guy M. Kirwan

van Heezik, Y. M. & Seddon, P. J. (eds.) (1996) *Restoration of bustard populations.* NCWCD Publication No 27, Riyadh. pp 111,12 plates, 22 papers. No price provided.

This publication covers the status of bustards; managing wild populations and their habitats; and captive rearing, release and post-release monitoring. It draws on experience from a range of bird species, but with half of the papers on various aspects of work on Houbara Bustards *Chlamydotis undulata.*

These very readable proceedings discuss the relative problems and merits of captive rearing and release, and habitat protection and management. The detailed species studies do much to highlight the problems still to be resolved for the successful reintroduction of any bird species. The question of whether predators should be controlled at release sites is raised (captive bred birds appear to have inadequate knowledge of how best to avoid predators), whilst inherent physiological differences between captive bred and wild birds are discussed (captive bred birds may have less well developed wing muscles, so be less able to out-fly predators, and have a gut insufficiently developed for surviving on naturally available food). On the subjects of field

research, habitat protection and conservation there is clearly still a great deal of work needing to be done.

Hilary Welch

del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Sargatal, J. (eds.) (1996) *Handbook of the birds of the world* Vol. 3, Hoatzin to Auks. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. pp 821, 60 colour plates, numerous photographs, £105

In the wake of *Birds of the Western Palearctic*, many British publishers seem to be careering down a blind alley. The plethora of new titles devoted to individual bird families may be academically competent, but they are also largely unreadable. If we would only admit it, these books are useless to all but a tiny number of people. Museum workers and customs and excise officers are among the very few who could make full use of such an indiscriminate approach to bird identification.

The Handbook of Birds of the World purges this stuffy atmosphere. Many people have expressed surprise that such an original and authoritative work in the English language should come from Spain, but I suspect it needed to be produced away from the UK's current publishing myopia.

Volume three, Hoatzin to Auks, builds on the success of the previous two. This is a truly stunning encyclopaedia to be used in many ways. The artwork is attractive for a casual browser, but accurate enough for the editors to have dispensed with most of the identification text. The photographs are a brave mixture that helps to lighten the whole work – some are deliberately evocative (e.g. the Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* on p. 469) or downright comic (the Lesser Florican *Eupodotis indica* on p. 261), but none the worse for that. In short, they are pleasing and their captions inform.

The introductory text to each family provides a good, readable overview of everything from systematics to conservation status. The species accounts themselves include distribution maps, fairly brief descriptive notes, information on food and feeding, breeding, movements and specific conservation information, which adds to the book's value and justifies the BirdLife International logo on the cover. There is much in this volume to interest the reader in the Middle East: bustards, waders, gulls and terns, for example, even if Kagu *Rhynochetos jubatus* and sheathbills *Chionis* sp. have less obvious relevance. I am kicking myself for not subscribing from volume one – the prospect of a £300 catch-up does not appeal. The true home of the *The Handbook of the Birds of the World* is, however, in reference libraries throughout the world – including the Middle East. If your nearest library hasn't got it yet, badger them to do so.

Mark Boyd

Porter, R. F., Christensen, S. & Schiermacker-Hansen, P. (1996) *A field guide to the birds of the Middle East.* T. & A. D. Poyser, London. pp 460, 112 colour plates, numerous distribution maps, £29.95.

For some time birders travelling in the Middle East have had to rely on at least two field guides to identify species they see. *The birds of the Middle East and North Africa*, or Desert Guide as it has become affectionately known, has usually been the first point of reference. However, that book frustratingly forced observers to refer to one of the European field guides in order to identify the commoner European species; a particularly significant drawback for beginners resident in the Middle East. This new publication, which the authors see as a natural evolution from the Desert Guide, solves that problem by comprehensively treating every species occurring in the Middle East. From the commonest species to the rarest of vagrants, it includes some species whose occurrence has not yet been formally accepted by the relevant assessment committees and some whose occurrence is now considered doubtful, but are certainly potential visitors to the region. The geographical scope has been altered from the Desert Guide with the North African countries and Sinai now excluded but Socotra included. The exclusion of North Africa will doubtless disappoint some people.

The book has a hard cover and binding which will probably wear well. It follows the typical field guide format, with a brief introduction followed by the colour plates which are grouped together and accompanied by distribution maps, habitat descriptions and status notes. The species accounts follow with a

reference list, species list and indexes of English and scientific names concluding the book. The taxonomy adopted is that of *BWP* and where necessary Sibley & Monroe. English names are sensibly generally those currently in common usage.

Four artists have produced the illustrations. This has inevitably resulted in some variations in style and overall success between plates. I particularly like the raptors, nightjars, pipits and wheatears. I was however disappointed by most of the warblers; some of the *Acrocephalus* seem rather overweight, whilst many of the *Phylloscopus* are very stylised and lack life. Some of the colours of the waders (e.g. Sanderling *Calidris alba*) are a little too intense, whilst the gulls and terns are rather cramped. Nevertheless these are an attractive and accurate set of plates that are a great improvement on the rather washed out, often very cramped plates in the previous book.

Breeding ranges are mapped for all species that breed in the region, whilst passage and winter distributions are described in captions beside the maps. I would have preferred to see winter ranges mapped for species that occur in the region exclusively as winter visitors. In mapping ranges of rare and less common species the authors have relied on proven breeding records, whilst for commoner species, presence during the breeding season has been used. The maps and captions are clear and up-to-date with much of the new knowledge gained since the Desert Guide's publication being incorporated. Extensive use has been made of information obtained through the ABBA project.

The species texts have been extensively revised since the Desert Guide to include many of the more recent identification advancements. As one would expect in a field guide, the species accounts are concise and usually highlight only the most useful identification features. I did detect a few errors, with the myth that Blyth's Pipits *Anthus godlewskii* do not hover before landing being perpetuated for example. In general though, they are well written, accurate and represent a substantial improvement on the previous guide.

In conclusion then, this is an excellent book which will serve beginners and experienced birders in the Middle East well. If you live in or plan to visit the Middle East then you will not want to be without this publication. I thoroughly recommend it.

Chris Bradshaw

ALSO RECEIVED

Barré, N., Barau, A. & Jouanin, C. (1996) *Oiseaux de la Réunion.* Les Éditions du Pacifique, Paris. pp 207, 10 colour plates, 18 colour photographs, no price provided.

Comprehensively revised edition of the birds of Réunion, which provides identification notes to the birds of this French colony in the southern Indian Ocean, as well as information on climate, vegetation and ornithological history of the island. Entirely in French, this attractive and well-designed volume will be essential to those intending to visit.

Harrison, P. (1996) *Seabirds of the world. A photographic guide.* A. & C. Black, London. pp 317, 764 colour photographs, 24 pages of line drawings, £15.99.

The latest reprint of this standard work for in-the-field identification of the world's seabirds. Given recent advances in our taxonomic understanding of some groups, e.g. *Puffinus* shearwaters, a completely revised edition would not go amiss, and would provide the opportunity to update some of the weaker photographs presented here.

Kinzelbach, R. & Kasparek, M. (ed.) (1996) *Zoology in the Middle East Volume 13.* Kasparek Verlag, Heidelberg (£12.50 from OSME Sales).

The latest volume, comprising 119 pages, features two ornithological papers: status of Knot *Calidris canutus* in the Middle East and a nesting record of Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis* from Ankara, Turkey. Other papers of interest include carnivores of Dana Nature Reserve, Jordan, and Green *Chelonia mydas* and Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta* population and nesting ecology in Cyprus.

Richardson, C. (ed.) (1997) *Emirates bird*

report no. 19. Emirates Bird Records Committee, Dubai. pp 136, 27 colour photographs, several line drawings, £8 (available from OSME Sales or Colin Richardson, P. O. Box 50394 Dubai, United Arab Emirates).

The latest Emirates bird report covers 1994, a record-breaking year in the country, with 324 species recorded including 10 new species and five that were second records. Lists of recently accepted significant records (up to May 1996), species for which descriptions are required by the EBRC, recording localities and additions to the UAE list between 1990–96 precede the main species list. This is followed by papers discussing, among others, the 1995 international waterfowl census, the identification of large white-headed gulls in the Emirates, a breeding bird survey of Abu Dhabi islands, the birds of Balghelam and several first records. The report concludes with a light-hearted but quite detailed survey of UAE's top listers, and reviews of recent publications of relevance to Emirates birders. Thoroughly recommended to all Middle Eastern birders.

Around the Region

compiled by
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 have been authenticated, including all those from Bahrain, Cyprus and Oman, and these are indicated. All dates refer to 1997 unless otherwise stated.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 20 (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 **Black-throated Diver** *Gavia arctica* was off Eilat on 26 December 1996; Shirihai (1996) lists 15 previous records in Israel, the majority at this locality, and 16 **Red-throated Diver** *G. stellata* were recorded during a transect of the Turkish Black Sea coast between 16 January–7 February. Five **Wedge-tailed** *Puffinus pacificus* and 1000 **Persian Shearwaters** *P. persicus* were off Taqah, Oman on 3 November 1996, nearby two **Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra* were off Ras Al Hadd on 1 November 1996 and single **Brown Boobies** *S. leucogaster* at Khawr Qarm on 21 March and 1 May 1996. More impressive was a **Soft-plumaged/Fea's Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis/feae* off Eilat, Israel on 25 March; there is one previous record of the latter species, a specimen in February 1963 (Shirihai 1996). Off Beirut, there was a **European Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus* on 10 April, the second Lebanese and one of the few east Mediterranean records (*Birding World* 10 (4): 135, where incorrectly described as the first record), and up to 1000 **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea* and three **Gannet** *Sula bassana* daily on 8–11 April. Further reports of the latter species from Turkey involved 2–3 immatures off Tarsus beach on 11 February and a single immature off Tuzla beach on 23 February, whilst the 12th Egyptian record was of one at Zaranik on 9 May.

The eighth **Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia* in Oman was at Khawr Taqah on 3 October 1996, whilst 14 **Abdim's Stork** *Ciconia abdimii* at Aden on 25 January was the first winter record in south Yemen and up to 21 **Black Stork** *C. nigra* near Khamis Bani Said on 15–31 January the first January record. Other observations from the Yemeni 'hotspot' of Aden marshes included an immature **Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* on 23 January (fourth record from the southern governorates) and one **Black-headed Heron** *Ardea melanocephala* on 31 December 1996 (*The Lammergeier* 9: 8) which was again joined by a second on 23–26 January, when two **African Spoonbill** *Platalea alba* and four adult and four juvenile (suggestive of local breeding?) **Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* were also present. Both species were still there on 9 February and 5–6 June; on the latter dates the two adult Black-headed Heron were still present. Four Sacred Ibis were at Hodeidah, Yemen on 16–17 January (where there was an

African Spoonbill on 8 April), and three were still at Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia on 29 November 1996. A juvenile **Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* at Wadi Matruh on 21–22 December 1996 was the first Socotran record (*The Lammergeier* 9: 7) and two **Squacco Herons** *Ardeola ralloides*, the second record, were at Wadi Di Fa'rhoh on 15–18 March (*The Lammergeier* 12: 9). In Egypt, single **Goliath Herons** *Ardea goliath* were at Shelatine on 1 April and Lake Nasser on 21 April. A **White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at Dibab on 2 August 1996 was the fifth Omani record, a Black Stork at Salalah on 23 Janaury the second record; the second country breeding record of Little Bittern involved a male with two downy young at East Khor on 31 May, and the two African Spoonbills at West Khor were still present on 13 March.

Plate 2. Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, adult female, north-west Negev, Israel, December 1996. 15 individuals wintered in this area in 1996/97. (*Hadoram Shirihai*)

A juvenile **White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons* at Hodeidah on 15–16 January was the first Yemeni record. In Turkey, eight **Red-breasted Geese** *Branta ruficollis* were at Yedıker Baraji on 14 January and six were seen to arrive off the sea at Terkos Gölü on 5 February. At Aqaba, Jordan a female **Cotton Teal** *Nettapus coromandelianus* was present on 9–10 April, the first country and only the second Western Palearctic record (Bashford 1997). Three **Marbled Teal** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* were at Eilat, Israel from October 1996, the first record from this locality, whilst one at Janabiyah, Bahrain on 14 May 1995 was the second island record. Other significant records from this Arabian Gulf archipelago include: the fourth **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* at U.B.F. stream on 4 December 1995 and the second to fourth **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* in June 1994 and November 1995 (three birds) (King 1997). In Egypt a concentration of 730 Ferruginous Duck in the Nile valley between Dendera and Edfu on 3 March was a significant count. The fourth record of **Eider** *Somateria mollissima* in Turkey involved a first winter male and two adult females off Kefken on 1 February. In Syria, at least eight **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* were at Jabbul saltlake on 4 October 1996.

An adult male **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* which passed over Borçka on 25 September 1996 (*Birdquest Newsletter* 26: 24), follows hot-on-the-heels of the first Turkish record, which has only recently come to light (see *Sandgrouse* 19 (1): 77). A significant gathering of at least 40 **Lappet-faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotos* was near Ibra, Oman on 31 October 1996. The fifth–ninth Bahrain records of **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*, between March 1994–December 1996, have recently been accepted (King 1997). A **Goshawk** *Accipter gentilis* at Petra on 20 March was the eighth Jordanian record and **Sparrowhawk** *A. nisus* bred for the first time on Cyprus in August 1996. An immature female **Shikra** *A. badius* in Kuwait in November 1996 was the second record (*Birding World* 9: 466). In Israel, the second **Tawny Eagle** *Aquila rapax* was seen in the north-west Negev on 22 November 1996 and a pair of **Verreaux's Eagle** *A. verreauxii* were in the Eilat mountains from 21 February–26 March at least. A **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *A. pomarina* at Ain Hamran on 3 November 1996 was the seventh Omani record. The sixth **Spotted Eagle** *A. clanga* in Bahrain, on 28 October–9 December 1994, has recently been accepted (King 1997). A **Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* at Hodeidah on 16 January was the first winter record in Yemen and a **Lanner** *F. biarmicus* at Phasouri reedbeds on 23 September 1996 the second Cyprus record.

Plate 1. Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, immature, north-west Negev, Israel, January 1997. 35 individuals wintered in this area in 1996/97. (*Hadoram Shirihai*)

At Ain Hamran, Oman there was a **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis pheonicurus* on 19 April. A **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* at Hodeidah on 16 January was only the c. sixth

Yemen record, whilst 56 **Common Crane** *Grus grus* at the same locality on the same day was the largest ever flock in this country. Approximately 4500 **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* passed over Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on 24–25 March (*Birdwatch* 59: 57). Of relevance to Middle Eastern birders were two adult and an immature **Siberian White Crane** *G. leucogeranus* photographed in the Volga Delta, Russia on 10–14 October 1996 (Barthel 1996). Full details are awaited of a **Lesser Moorhen** *Gallinula angulata*, potentially the first Western Palearctic record, reportedly photographed at Abu Simbel on 6 May. This species is a vagrant in Oman (Porter *et al.* 1996). **Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio porphyrio* has been added to the Arabian breeding bird list: a pair raised three young at Jahra pool, Kuwait in 1996 (*The Phoenix* 13: 2), but a previously accepted record on Cyprus on 24 November 1995 (see *Sandgrouse* 18 (2): 77) is now rejected (*Brit. Birds* 90 (6): 241). In Oman, a **Great Stone Plover** *Esacus recurvirostris* at Shnass on 20 January was the fifth record, whilst a **Spur-winged Plover** *Hoplopterus spinosus* at Sun Farms from 31 October–13 December 1996 was the fourth record. Two **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* at Aqaba on 7 December 1996 was the first winter record in Jordan, and a **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* at Dana and a **Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* at Petra both on 18 March were both fifth records. A flock of 15 **Lesser Sand Plovers** *Charadrius mongolus* was at Shelatine, on the Egyptian Red Sea on 1 April. A **European Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* on 1 January 1995 was the fifth record in Bahrain and a **Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* on 2 October 1995 the fourth (King 1997). A **White-tailed Plover** *C. leucura* photographed at Miletus marsh, Büyük Menderes delta on 3 April is only the third published record in western Turkey (Kasparek 1992, Kiziroğlu & Kiziroğlu 1987) but more significant was the discovery of a potential breeding population in the Göksu delta. Here, up to six were noted in courtship and showing territorial behaviour between 12 May–11 June. Two White-tailed Plovers at Abu Grida, in the Nile Delta on 13 May was only the second summer record in Egypt. In Saudi Arabia, a male **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* was at Dhahran on 21 February and one was at Sun Farms, Sohar, Oman on 1 November 1996. A **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochrupos* was belatedly reported from Wadi Mutreh, Socotra on 22 December 1996 (*The Lammergeier* 10: 6), the first island record. Four **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucus* at Kızılırmak Delta on 19 December 1996, was an unusual winter record in north Turkey. A **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* was moulting into summer plumage at Khor Rouri, Oman on 25 February.

The first Omani record of **South Polar Skua** *Catharacta maccormicki*, at Masirah on 10 October 1995, has recently been accepted. At least 219 **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* were at Yedıker Baraji on 14 January, the highest ever single day count in Turkey. King (1997) documents the second **Common Gull** *Larus canus* in Bahrain, on 4 March 1996. In Egypt, there was a first-summer **Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* at Hurghada on 9 April and three, then two **African Skimmer** *Rynchops flavirostris* at Kom Ombo on 19 February and 2 March with seven of the latter species at Abu Simbel on 28 April. A total of 20 immature Kittiwakes, most in harbours, were recorded between Sarp to just west of the Bosphorus during a count of the Turkish Black Sea coast in January–February, whilst a first winter was in Foca harbour on 10 February. A seawatch off Beirut, Lebanon on 10 April produced one or two **Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* and four **Arctic Skua** *S. parasiticus*; there are few previous records of either species.

Two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis* at Ain el Gedeirat, north Sinai on 9 May was a significant recent record, although the species occurs in neighbouring Israel, whilst the first breeding by **Spotted Sandgrouse** *P. senegallus* in Oman involved a pair with three tiny chicks by the Muscat–Salalah road on 28 May. The first proven breeding by **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* in Egypt involved a pair nesting with a second female present near Aswan on 30 April, and a **European Scops Owl** *Otus scops* heard calling at Ain el Gedeirat, Sinai on 8–9 May would also constitute a new breeding species, if proven. On Bahrain, the fifth **Striated Scops Owl** *O. brucei* was photographed on 14 March 1995 and the second **Eagle Owl** *Bubo bubo was* on Eastern Rim Rock on 5 August 1994 (King 1997). The sixth **Hume's Tawny Owl** *Strix butleri* in Oman was heard calling in Wadi Mughsayl on 7 November 1996, whilst two in wadis around Gebel Elba, south-east Egypt on 30–31 March were well to the south of the species' known breeding range in Egypt. The second **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* in Yemen was at Hais on 19 January. A **Syke's Nightjar** *C. mahrattensis* claimed at Madah on 20 January (*Birding World* 10 (1): 10) is subject to confirmation as the first Omani record. A **European Nightjar** *C.*

Plate 3. Striated Scops Owl *Otus brucei*, Eilat, Israel, December 1996. Three individuals remained in this area between November 1996–February 1997. (*Hadoram Shirihai*)

europaeus at Sultan marshes on 26 December 1996 was the first winter record in Turkey and, together with occasional records in Oman, one of the few Middle Eastern records at this season. First Bahrain records recently documented include: **Indian Roller** *Coracias benghalensis* (at Maharraq on 15 September 1994–9 February 1995) and **Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* (80 at Badaan Farm on 10 November 1995) (King 1997). A **Koel** *Eudynamus scolopacea* was at Nimr, Oman on 13 February. The fifth **Abyssinian Roller** *Coracias abyssinicus* in Egypt was photographed at Abu Simbel on 4–5 May (see *Birding World* 10: 181). On Cyprus, a **Hooded Crow** *Corvus corone sardonius* nest found at Phasouri contained two **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* eggs, the first recorded instance of brood parasitism of this host on the island.

Up to 10 **Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey* and a single **Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunni* were at km 33, north of Eilat, Israel in late March, with another of the latter in the central Negev. Two **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** *Ammomanes cincturus* at Jebel Ad Dukhan on an unknown date are the fifth Bahrain record (King 1997), and the species was proven to breed for the first time in Kuwait in May 1996 (*The Phoenix* 13: 3). A **Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes* reported from the Göksu delta on 2 May is the first record in Turkey. In fields between Al Khawkah and Hais, Yemen a flock of c. 200 **Bimaculated Lark** *Melanocorypha bimaculata* on 19–20 January was the second country record, whilst three **Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* in the same area showed some evidence of breeding. Three **Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra* were near Ismailliya, Egypt on 15 March. Nation (1996) reports four observations of territorial **Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* in Qatar since March 1990; the first Omani record of **Small Skylark** *A. gulgula* was of two at Sun Farms, Sohar on 31 October–1 November 1996. A **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* at Aden was the first winter record in the southern Yemeni governorates. Nine **Long-billed Pipit** *Anthus similis* singing and displaying at Wadi Aideib, Gebel Elba on 1 April constitutes the first confirmed Egyptian record, suggests breeding in this area and is a significant northerly extension of the species' breeding range in Africa. At Jahra Gardens, Kuwait an **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* was overwintering for the third consecutive year on 13 December 1996 (*Birding World* 10 (1): 10). In south Israel, there were up to four **Buff-bellied Pipit** *A. rubescens* between 14–24 March, with another trapped at Kfar Ruppin on 22 March, and the second record in Egypt was of two at Zaranik on 21 March.

Jordan's second **White-cheeked Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucogenys* was at Azraq on 14 April. In Israel, the fifth record of **Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* was a male at km 20 north of Eilat on 13–30 March, and the fifth in Yemen was at Zamakh on 11 February (*The Lammergeier* 12: 7). The first island record of **Blue Rock Thrush** *Saxatilis solitarius* on Socotra was a female at Ras Momi on 23–25 December 1996 (*The Lammergeier* 9: 7). Accepted records from Bahrain include the second **Blackbird** *Turdus merula* (February 1994), eighth **Fieldfare** *T. pilaris* (March 1994), first **Black Bush Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* (April 1994), seventh **Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii* (November 1995), fourth **White-crowned Black Wheatear** *O. leucopyga* (February 1994), 7–8th **Grasshopper Warblers** *Locustella naevia* (April 1994 and March 1995) and fifth **Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* (November 1995) (all King 1997). In Jordan, a male **Red-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* was at Wadi Musa on 27 March, and in Lebanon the first record of **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* has been recently reported without details (*Birding World* 10 (4): 135); the tenth record of the latter in Oman was at Fahud on 23 October 1996. At Mount Hermon, Israel in May–June 1996, the first breeding **Olive-tree Warbler** *Hippolais olivetorum* were found at two sites, 480 and 1400 mètres a.s.l., whilst the second winter record of **Ménétries's Warbler** *Sylvia mystacea* was found at Hameshar, south Negev on 19 January and the second Israeli record of **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* was at Kibbutz Lotan on 30 October; the first was in March 1989 (Shirihai 1996). In May–June 1995, **Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* was suspected to be breeding in mangroves near Jubail, Saudi Arabia (*The Phoenix* 13: 3); a small population is known from the eastern United Arab Emirates. In Jordan, there was a male **Rüppell's Warbler** *Sylvia rueppelli* at Azraq on 14 March, with two more at Aqaba on 23 March and five there the next day, and the fifth Ménétries's Warbler was at Wadi Dana on 17 March, with further records being a male at Wadi ar Rattani on 14 April and six at Wadi al Butm on 15 April. Other significant *Sylvia* records in Jordan included claims of the first **Desert Lesser Whitethroat** *S. curruca minula*, at Aqaba on 20 March, a possible **Hume's Lesser Whitethroat** *S. c. althaea* at Wadi Mujib on 16 March, also previously unrecorded in the country and a **Subalpine Warbler** *S. cantillans* at Aqaba on 9 April. An overwintering **Cyprus Warbler** *S. melanothorax* at Wadi Zalaga on 12 January was c. seventh Egyptian record (see Robel 1996) and single **Lesser Whitethroats** *S. curruca* at Çukurova University campus, Adana on 19 December 1996 and the Menderes delta on 24 December 1996 were the second and third winter records in Turkey (OST 1975). The first Egyptian record of **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei*, on 18 October 1992, has recently been accepted (*Brit. Birds* 90 (6): 248).

A male **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* was photographed 50 km north of Marsha Alam, Egypt on 8 May (see *Birding World* 10: 181) and two **Fulvous Babbler** *Turdoides fulvus* were at Abu Ramad, south Egypt on 30 March, a significant northerly range extension. Two **Raven** *Corvus corax* at Ar Rashadiyya on 6 October 1996 followed other Jordanian records earlier in the year, and single pairs were at Shobak in early April–late May and near Mt. Nebo on 29 April. The third and fourth Yemen records of **Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* were singles (perhaps the same individual) at Aden on 1–2 and 23 January, and adult **Rose-coloured Starlings** *S. roseus* (also perhaps the same bird) were at Khobar, Saudi Arabia on 1 January, 28 February and 7 March (photographed). Bilgin (1996) reports the first documented Turkish record of **Common Mynah** *Acridotheres tristis*, presumably originating from escapes, a pair which fledged three young in Ankara between 12 May–21 July 1996; there is one previous but undocumented report from north-east Turkey (Sperl 1992). In Saudi Arabia, a flock of 15 **Bank Mynah** *A. ginginianus* was at Hofuf on 13 February (there are no previous reports from Saudi Arabia, although established in UAE) and a small colony of **Rüppell's Weaver** *Ploceus glabula* was discovered at Rabigh on 19 February, the northernmost breeding site in Arabia.

A Bank Mynah at Riyam Park, near Muscat on 24 January and 7 February has been accepted as the first Omani record but is considered to relate to an escape. Seven **Dead Sea Sparrow** *Passer moabiticus* at Jahra Pool, Kuwait on 1 November 1996 was the first confirmed country record (*Birding World* 9: 466). The third breeding record of **Spanish Sparrow** *P. hispaniolensis* in Egypt involved birds nestbuilding at Dakhla Oasis on 17 February and 8–10 **Syrian Serin** *Serinus syriacus* were near Ras El Nakab on 11 January; there are c. eight previous records (Goodman & Meininger 1989). Single **Siskins** *Carduelis spinus* at Saiq on 30 December 1993 and in Wadi Jizzi on 29 November 1996 have been accepted as the fourth and sixth records in Oman. More recently accepted records from Bahrain include the 11th **Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* (November 1995), first and second **Linnets** *Carduelis cannabina* (December 1994 and January 1995) and first **Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella* (November 1995), which has already been mentioned in these reports (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 80). At El Arish, north Sinai there were two **Desert Finch** *Rhodospiza obsoleta* on 8 May, there are still fewer than ten Egyptian records. A male **Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus* at Işıklı, Turkey on 18 May was the 13th country record. In Yemen, the second documented record of **Pale Rock Sparrow** *Petronia brachdactyla* involved 70 between Al Khawkhah and Hais on 19–20 January; the first was in October 1992 (Morris 1992), and the second (and the first this century) **Cretzschmar's Bunting** *Emberiza caesia* was a male at Wadi Mawr on 18 January. Pale Rock Sparrow was proven to breed for the first time in Kuwait in 1996 (*The Phoenix* 13: 3). A **Cinereous Bunting** *E. cineracea* was at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia on 8 March and at Jubail, three **Reed Bunting** *E. schoeniclus* on 28 December 1996 were the first Eastern Province record since 1985 and a male **Black-headed Bunting** *E. melanocephala* at Dhahran on 13 April was the third spring Saudi record. A **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *E. aureola* at Al Beed Farm on 20 September 1996 was the tenth Omani record.

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