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SANDGROUSE

VOLUME 34(1) 2012



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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, the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- To promote an interest in ornithology and bird conservation throughout the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- To develop productive working relationships with governmental and non-governmental organizations with an interest in conservation and/or natural history in the region.

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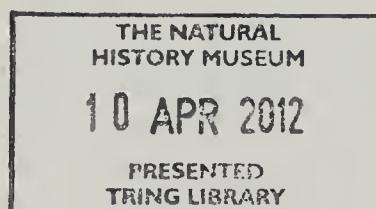
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Photo above: Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*, Bacha valley, Golan Heights, Israel, 4 May 2011. © Lior Kislev

Cover photo: Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* at nest, Central marshes (of the southern marshlands complex), Iraq, late April 2010.
© Mudhafar Salim



Editorial: expansion of *Sandgrouse's* area of interest

In April 1978 it was announced that the Ornithological Society of Turkey was enlarging the scope of its activities to cover what is loosely called the Middle East and, in consequence, was changing its name to the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, OSME. The first issue of *Sandgrouse* was published in 1980. The decision to expand the OSME region further to include the Caucasus and Central Asia (the now-independent former states of the Soviet Union east of the Caspian sea) was made in 2001. With increasing ornithological interest in, and accessibility to, countries bordering the OSME region, OSME Council has recently discussed expanding *Sandgrouse's* current remit to include certain countries and areas close to the OSME region.

In future, the editor of *Sandgrouse* will also give careful thought to the publication of manuscripts that concern three further areas. The OSME region (see inside back cover) includes Egypt, its only part of the Sahara and the largest desert on Earth. The Sahara has many similarities both faunal and topographic to the deserts of the Arabian peninsula. *Sandgrouse's* area of interest will now also include the eastern half of Libya and arid and semi-arid Sudan (the country, not the phytogeographical region).

The OSME region contains lands that border the Red sea and gulf of Aden. As well as the Sudanese Red sea region, both land and sea, *Sandgrouse* will now also accept material on Eritrea, Djibouti, the 'Republic of Somaliland' and the 'Puntland State of Somalia'. The Yemeni archipelago of Socotra (OSME region) completes the 'encirclement'. I'm sure *Sandgrouse's* readers will appreciate fuller consideration of these Afro-Arabian regions.

The third new area is again a straightforward inclusion. The OSME region ends in the east along the eastern borders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadzhikistan and Afghanistan and yet the mountains, high plateaus, forests and deserts continue eastwards. *Sandgrouse's* area of interest will now also include the geographical regions of Kashmir, Tibet and Sinkiang plus the western half of the state of Mongolia. 'Advice for Authors' on the inside back cover has been amended accordingly. Other OSME functions (www.osme.org) will still solely be concerned with the OSME region. The features 'News & Information' and 'Around the Region' will also only contain material about the OSME region.

These additional areas and countries can all be considered part of the greater Middle East (Culcasi 2010) or of central Asia proper (Cowan 2007) and indeed in the past *Sandgrouse* has had a wider coverage. As recently as 2005, 'Guidelines for Authors' stated that *Sandgrouse's* area of interest included Libya and east to the Palearctic fringes of Pakistan and south to Palearctic limits in Sudan and Ethiopia. A paper on changes in the status and distribution of birds in Libya was published in 2005 (Gaskell 2005). I look forward to



receiving manuscripts concerning the 'new territories'. Avifaunal lists and ornithological observations made in eg the Omdurman, Berbera, Leh, Kashgar and Urumqi areas or the Qaidam basin or the southern Altay Gobi nature reserve could well be of interest to *Sandgrouse* readers. Observations of interactions between Brown-necked Ravens *Corvus ruficollis* and Northern Ravens *C. corax* in the uplands of the Benghazi region, studies or observations of possible ecological or genetic replacement taxa eg the Kordofan Lark *Mirafrat cordofanica*, Somali Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus (socotranus) louiseae* and Xinjiang Ground Jay *Podoces biddulphi* are a few of many possibilities as well as descriptions of birding sites and photospots. Review articles are welcome. The addition of a new outlet in the literature should help to ensure that interesting information concerning these three further areas does not disappear but rather is formally published.

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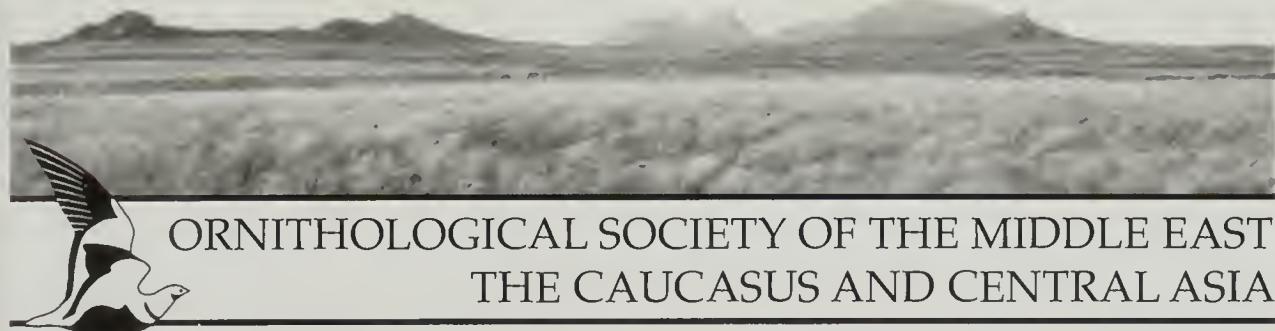
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PETER COWAN

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An annotated checklist of the birds of Iraq

MUDHAFAR A SALIM, OMAR FADHIL AL-SHEIKHY,
KORSH ARARAT MAJEED & RF PORTER

This checklist summarises the status of birds recorded in Iraq up to January 2012. It is based on an extensive review of the ornithological literature, the results of seven years of surveys throughout the country by Nature Iraq and comments received following the publication of our provisional checklist (Porter *et al* 2010). A further stimulus for the preparation of this checklist was the publication of a field guide to the birds of Iraq in Arabic (Salim *et al* 2006).

During the last century many of the ornithological advances were made by non-Iraqis visiting the country for relatively short periods. Much of this was captured in two classic publications by Bashir Allouse, *Avifauna of Iraq*, published in English in 1953, and *Birds of Iraq* in Arabic in three parts in 1960, 1961 and 1962. From the late 1970s few bird surveys were made until Nature Iraq started its extensive Key Biodiversity Areas programme in 2005 with the goal of identifying those sites that are important for their biological diversity. These systematic surveys, the first of their kind in Iraq, have been conducted in summer and winter in three main regions of the country: the Mesopotamian marshlands and coastal habitats of southern Iraq (2005–2010), the lakes, grasslands, woodlands and mountains of Kurdistan (2007–2011), and the desert region of central and western Iraq (2009–2011). The greatly increased knowledge of the country's breeding birds arising from this work appeared in Ararat *et al* (2011). Since that paper six further breeding species have been determined: Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*, Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus*, Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Hume's Wheatear *Oenanthe albouigra* (overlooked in Ararat *et al* 2011), Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* (ditto Ararat *et al* 2011) and Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*.

Little attempt has been made to include subspecies, though this will be an important action for future revisions. Furthermore, with ever-evolving taxonomy, we have been careful not to call this a *species* checklist. Whilst essentially that is what it is we are aware that it includes taxa where the subspecies of a 'parent species' have been recorded (eg Eastern Greylag Goose *Anser anser rubrirostris* and Baltic Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus*) or where there is continuing discussion on the merits of giving a taxon full species status (eg Turkestan *Lanius phoenicuroides* and Daurian *L. isabellinus* Shrikes or Hooded *Corvus cornix* and Mesopotamian *C. capellanus* Crows). We have followed Porter & Aspinall (2010) and the Ornithological Society of the Middle East Regional List (www.osme.org) for taxonomic order and nomenclature. For completeness, we conclude the checklist with records that are no longer considered acceptable (lack of supporting detail).

In 2009, the Nature Iraq Bird Records Committee was established in order to objectively assess claims of new bird taxa in Iraq and to examine past published records where doubt has been expressed over identification or provenance. All rarity records since 2005 have been considered by the NIBRC but the review of past observations will be an on-going process.

Generally Iraq can be divided into five major habitat regions (Figure 1):

- The mountainous region: located in the north and northeast of the country. Includes mountains of up to 3600 m asl with dense woods, valleys and cliffs.
- The undulating region: located southwest of the mountainous region and along the east of the country from south Sulaimaniya to east Missan along the Himeen foothills.

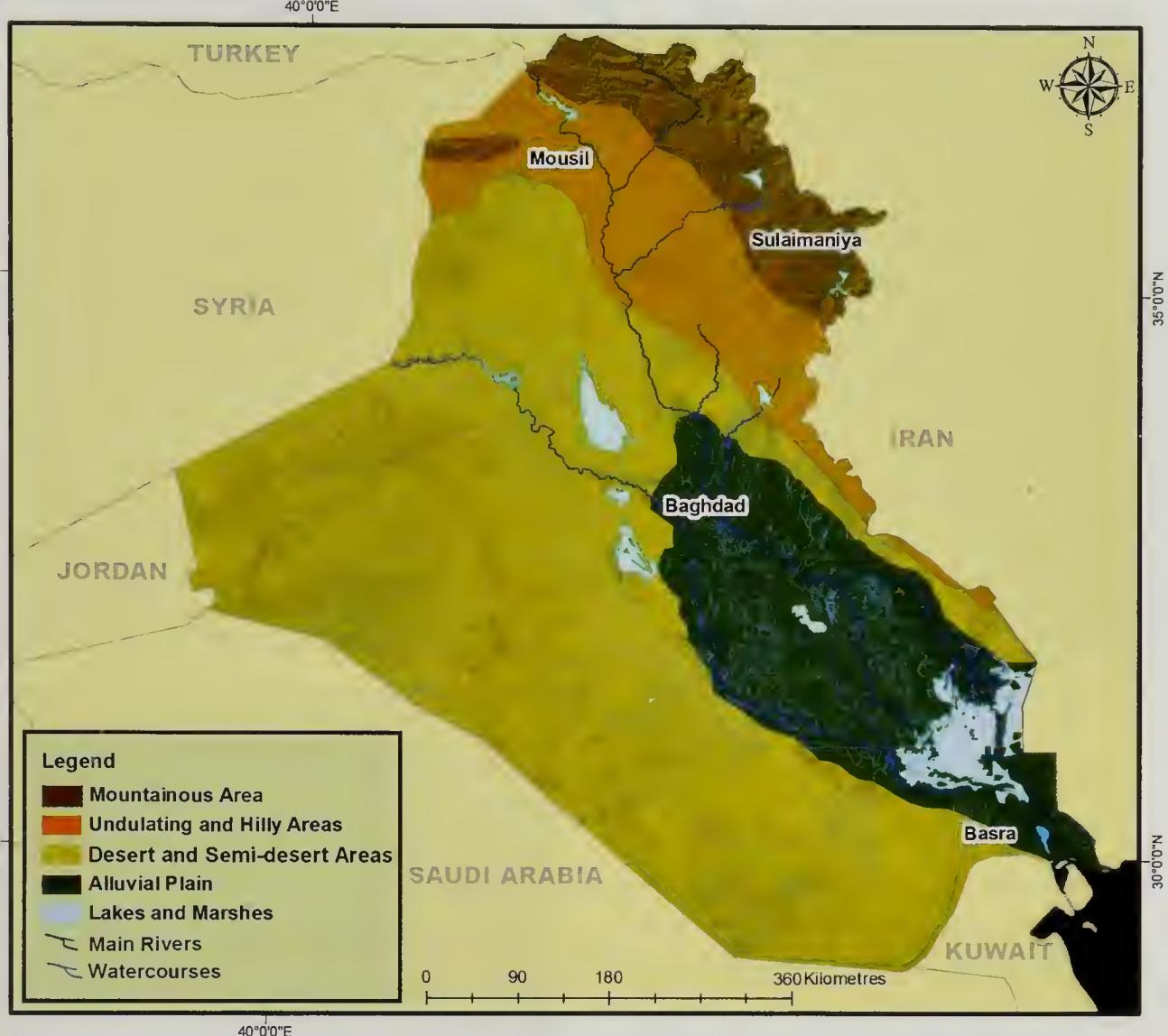


Figure 1. The major habitat regions of Iraq.

- The desert and semi-desert areas: this covers much of the country especially in the west and south and in some more northern areas between the Tigris and Euphrates. It includes some of the largest lakes in Iraq.
- Lower Mesopotamia and the marshlands: this includes the alluvial plain that extends from Baghdad southeastwards. It includes the largest marshland complex of Iraq and the Middle East.
- The Iraqi coastline: c55 km of seashore at the head of the Gulf.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Terminology and abbreviations

Vagrant: species recorded on three or less occasions. Details of vagrancy records are not given. Rare: used rather generally for species which appear to have been recorded on four to ten occasions. Uncommon: only occasionally seen even if the observer is in suitable habitat during the appropriate season. Local: used mostly for breeding birds to imply

a very scattered distribution. NIBRC: Nature Iraq Bird Records Committee. KBA: Key Biodiversity Areas programme in Iraq.

The references cited at the end of each species account are the main ones that support the status statement. As several are frequently repeated we have used the following abbreviations: A60–62 for Allouse (1960, 1961 & 1962); Ar11 for Ararat *et al* (2011); MB56, MB57 for Moore & Boswell (1956, 1957); NI for the Nature Iraq database (which houses all the records collected during the KBA and other surveys) and SC82 for Scott & Carp (1982). Allouse (1960, 1961 & 1962, incorrectly referred to as 'Allouse 1963' in Ararat 2011) are in Arabic and thus not accessible to many readers. We therefore recommend also referring to Allouse (1953). Whilst not as comprehensive as the Arabic volumes and it does not include new observations 1953–1960 it is, nevertheless, an important and helpful reference.

Species globally threatened with extinction or near threatened are indicated either as CE (critically endangered), E (endangered), V (vulnerable) or NT (near threatened) on the basis of BirdLife International (2011). All publications directly referred to in the present paper are listed in 'References consulted' as well as all publications used during this paper's preparation.

Caspian Snowcock *Tetraogallus caspius*.

Status uncertain; apparently a breeding resident in high mountains in extreme north (M&B 56, reports of hunters collected by Nature Iraq).

Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar*. Local breeding resident in hills and mountains in north and northeast (A60–62, NI).

See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*.

Fairly widespread breeding resident in hills and mountains in northern and eastern Iraq (A60–62, M&B 56, NI, Plate 1).

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*.

Breeding resident, mainly in the north, northeast and along the Tigris and Euphrates (A60–62, Sage 1960, NI).

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. Local breeding summer visitor to northern Iraq, reported breeding in south; widespread on passage, occasional in winter (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Eastern Greylag Goose *Anser anser rubrirostris*. Local breeding resident in small numbers in the southern marshes; widespread winter visitor to wetlands and agricultural land (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*. Winter visitor to northern wetlands and agricultural land, also southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).



Plate 1. See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*, Kurdistan, Iraq, April 2011. © RF Porter



Plate 2. Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus*, Kurdistan, Iraq, January 2010. © Korsh Ararat Majeed

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* V. Rather local winter visitor in northern Iraq, rare in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI, Plate 2).

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* E. Rare winter visitor to wetlands in northern and southern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*. Rare or uncommon winter visitor mainly to the southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*. Rare or uncommon winter visitor to the southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. Rare or uncommon winter visitor to southern marshes (Al-Robaae 1996, OFA-S, NI).

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*. Winter visitor to wetlands throughout Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*. Local breeding resident in wetlands in northwest and central Iraq; fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*. Vagrant (George & Vielliard 1970).

Gadwall *Anas strepera*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, especially frequent in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Falcated Duck *Anas falcata* NT. Vagrant (A60–62).

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor; some remain in summer (A60–62, SC82, NI).



Plate 3. Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, southern marshes, Iraq, May 2009. © Mudhafar Salim

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, especially frequent in southern marshes; some remain in summer (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, especially frequent in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Garganey *Anas querquedula*. Fairly widespread passage migrant, rare in winter; may breed (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, especially numerous in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* V. Local breeding resident in wetlands in central Iraq, more widespread in the southern marshes, where wintering population is probably largest in the world (A60–62, SC82, NI, Plate 3).

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*. Very local breeding resident in the southern marshes; fairly widespread but generally uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Ar11, NI).

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, especially frequent in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* NT. Local breeding resident in southern and central Iraq; uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Ar11, NI, Plate 4).



Plate 4. Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, middle Euphrates, Iraq, June 2009. © Mudhafar Salim

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, especially numerous in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*. Rare winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*. Uncommon winter visitor in northern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Smew *Mergus albellus*. Uncommon winter visitor to northern Iraq; also uncommon in the southern marshes but over 1000 recorded there in 1979 but not since (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Goosander *Mergus serrator*. Vagrant (A60–62, MB56).

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus merganser*. Vagrant (A60–62, MB56).

White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* E. Rare or uncommon winter visitor to central and southern marshes (A60–62, NI, Salim *et al* 2009).

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. Widespread breeding resident in the southern marshes and central wetlands; widespread winter visitor. Resident birds are of the endemic race *iraquensis* (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*. Very local breeding resident in marshes and lakes of southern Iraq; widespread winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*. Very local breeding resident in central Iraq wetlands; winter visitor in small numbers (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*. Passage migrant and winter visitor, especially to southern marshes, where also summers; formerly bred in the southern marshes but apparently not in recent years (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*. Rare or uncommon passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Western White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*. Breeding summer visitor to northern and eastern Iraq; passage migrant, occasional in winter (A60–62, SC82, NI).

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*. Very local breeding resident in dense reedbeds in the southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI, Plate 5). The southern marshes hold the only regular breeding colony in the Middle East, though there is a feral colony in the United Arab Emirates (Pedersen & Aspinall 2010).

Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* CE. Formerly very rare passage migrant or vagrant in central Iraq but only recorded in 1910s and early 1920s (Ticehurst *et al* 1922, 1926, A60–62); in 2006 satellite signals from tagged birds from the tiny Syrian



Plate 5. African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, southern marshes, Iraq, July 2005. © Mudhafar Salim

breeding colony suggest one bird may have passed close to, or through, extreme western Iraq on its southerly migration (Chris Bowden RSPB pers comm).

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*. Resident, breeding very locally in dense reed vegetation in the southern marshes; also a passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Ar11, NI).

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*. Resident, breeding locally in dense reed vegetation in the southern marshes; also a passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*. Passage migrant and winter visitor to the southern and central marshes, also occasionally in north Iraq; may breed in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*. Breeding summer visitor to many wetlands throughout Iraq, but rather local outside the southern marshes; also a passage migrant, with a few wintering (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Breeding summer visitor or resident in southern and central wetlands; local breeding summer visitor in north; passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*. Breeding summer visitor to southern marshes, more local in central and north Iraq; widespread passage migrant, occasional in winter (A60–62, SC82, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. Local breeding resident in central and southern wetlands; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor to southern and central Iraq; a few breed in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI, Salim 2004).

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*. Rare and very local breeding resident in dense reed beds of the southern marshes (A60–62, reports to Nature Iraq).

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*. Breeding summer visitor to southern marshes and probable breeder, very locally, in central and northern wetlands; passage migrant, a few in winter (A60–62, SC82, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Western Great Egret *Ardea alba*. Passage migrant and winter visitor, most common in southern marshes, where some remain in summer (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*. Resident or breeding summer visitor to the dense reed beds of the southern marshes, also to one site in northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*. Local resident in tidal areas on the Gulf coast, where probably breeds (A60–62, NI).

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. Fairly widespread passage migrant; also winter visitor to southern and central wetlands (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* V. Uncommon and possibly irregular winter visitor to the southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).



Plate 6. Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, Al-Qadissiya lake, Anbar province, Iraq, May 2011. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*. Breeding resident in dense reed vegetation in southern marshes; fairly widespread winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI, Plate 6).

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*. Vagrant (A60–62).

African Darter *Anhinga rufa*. Very local breeding resident in dense reed vegetation in the southern marshes; recorded twice in summer in wetlands of central Iraq (A60–62, NI, Plate 7). The southern marshes hold the only breeding colony in the Middle East (Porter & Aspinall 2010).

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*. Uncommon passage migrant, but probably overlooked (A60–62, NI).

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*. Uncommon and local breeding resident in central and southern Iraq; numbers increasing and recently recorded in northern Iraq. Breeds near cultivated fields nesting especially in *Eucalyptus* and date palms (Salim 2002, Ar11, NI).

Red Kite *Milvus milvus* NT. Vagrant (Harrison 1955, NI; see also MB56).



Plate 7. African Darter *Anhinga rufa*, southern marshes, Iraq, June 2010. © Mudhafar Salim

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Black-eared Kite *Milvus (migrans) lineatus*. Status uncertain; has been recorded in winter with flocks of Black Kites (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* V. Former rare or uncommon winter visitor, not recorded since 1940s (A60–62, MB56).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*. Former winter visitor in small numbers, not recorded since 1940s (A60–62, MB56).

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*. Very local breeding resident in the northern mountains; possibly also winter visitor there (A60–62, MB56, Ar11, NI).

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* E. Breeding summer visitor to the mountains and rocky hills in northern and western Iraq; also a passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*. Resident, breeding locally in the mountains of northern Iraq; more widespread winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* NT. Rare winter visitor to northern and central Iraq with one in summer in northeast (A60–62, George & Mahdi 1969, Sage 1960).

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*. Breeding summer visitor to the mountains of northern Iraq; also a passage migrant (MB56, Ar11, NI).

Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* NT. Vagrant (Harrison 1955).

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*.

Local breeding resident in southern marshes and possibly central wetlands; also a passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*. Rather uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* NT. Passage migrant and winter visitor, fairly widespread (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*. Fairly widespread passage migrant; some winter (A60–62, MB56, SC82, NI).

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*.

Very local breeding summer visitor to woodlands of northern Iraq; uncommon or rarely recorded passage migrant (Marchant 1962, Ar11, NI).

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*.

Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*.

Vagrant (Randel Rogers pers comm, Lahony *et al* 2008).

Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*. Local resident or breeding summer visitor in the hills and mountains of northern Iraq; more widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, Marchant & Macnab 1962, Ar11, NI, Plate 8). There is evidence to suggest that the breeding birds may be of the race *menetriesi* (see Ar11).

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*. Breeding resident in the mountains and hills of northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Ar11, NI).

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* V. Rather uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor, widespread but most frequent in the southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* V. Uncommon, but fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI, Plate 9).



Plate 8. Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, Kurdistan, Iraq, April 2009. © RF Porter



Plate 9. Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, southern marshes, Iraq, 2008. © Omar Fadhil Al-Sheikhly

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*. Local breeding resident in the mountains of north and northeast Iraq; probably also a winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Ar11, NI).

Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*. Very local breeding summer visitor in small numbers to the northern mountains of Iraq; also a passage migrant with birds occasionally wintering (A60–62, SC82, Ar11, NI).

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciatus*. Very local breeding resident in mountains and cliffs in northern Iraq; post breeding dispersal over a wider area (A60–62, NI).

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*. Rather local breeding summer visitor in colonies in northern cliffs and mountains; a few breed in central Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, Ar11, NI).

Common Kestrel *Falco tinunculus*. Widespread breeding resident; also winter visitor (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Merlin *Falco columbarius*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*. Fairly widespread passage migrant; there is no evidence of breeding, though this is likely as birds have been observed during the summer in northern Iraq, and the species breeds fairly commonly in southeast Turkey (A60–62, NI, Kirwan *et al* 2008).

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* NT. Rare passage migrant (Al-Sheikhly in press, NI).

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*. Rare visitor (A60–62, NI).

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* V. Apparently a rare resident in northwest Iraq; uncommon or rare winter visitor. Formerly much commoner, reported breeding in the northwestern mountains and eastern foothills and fairly widespread in winter. The big decline is probably linked to the development of trapping techniques that targeted this falcon so prized for falconry in Iraq and Arabia (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI, Al-Sheikhly 2011).

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*. Breeding proven at one site in northern mountains of Iraq; fairly widespread winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Ar11, NI).

Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*. Resident, breeding locally in the northern mountains, eastern foothills and central/western arid lands; more widespread in winter (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, Ar11, NI). No attempt has been made to distinguish between the very similar *F. p. pelegrinoides* and *F. p. babylonicus*. Both appear to breed in Iraq but their range, status and ecological separation requires critical study (see Ar11).

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*. Status uncertain; formerly bred in northwest Iraq; winter visitor in small numbers (A60–62, MB56, MS); hunted with falcons (Al-Sheikhly 2011).

Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* V. Winter visitor mainly in the dry grasslands and deserts of western and southern Iraq; breeding frequently reported by hunters in southern and western Iraq (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI, Reports by hunters to Nature Iraq, Plate 10). Heavily hunted with falcons (Salim 2011, Al-Sheikhly 2011).

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* NT. Rare or uncommon winter visitor to northern and western Iraq, probably not annually (A60–62, MB56, NI); hunted with falcons (Al-Sheikhly 2011).



Plate 10. Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*, central Iraq, October 2010. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Little Crake *Porzana parva*. Passage migrant and winter visitor; one breeding record from central Iraq (A60–62, SC82, Ar11, NI).

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*. Rare winter visitor and passage migrant (A60–62).

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*. Passage migrant, but rarely observed (A60–62, MB56).

Corncrake *Crex crex*. Scarcely observed passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*. Breeding resident in dense reed beds and dense aquatic vegetation along rivers in southern and central Iraq, very locally in wetlands in the north (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*. Widespread breeding resident in wetlands in southern and central Iraq, locally in north; also a passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*. Breeding resident in very small numbers mainly in the south; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor, especially in southern marshes (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor to wetlands and dry grasslands (A60–62, Marchant & Macnab 1962, NI).

Common Crane *Grus grus*. Fairly widespread passage migrant with few remaining in winter; found in wetland and dry grassland areas (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*. Fairly widespread breeding resident and breeding summer visitor, mainly in the dry grasslands and semi-desert of southern, western, northeastern and central Iraq; passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Sage 1960, NI).

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor; occasionally recorded in summer (A60–62, Marchant 1961, SC82, NI).

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola*. Breeding resident in coastal Gulf (A60–62, NI).

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*. Widespread breeding resident in southern, central and western wetlands; passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Breeding resident in the southern marshes; passage migrant and winter visitor, but rarely in northern Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. Winter visitor in small numbers, more common in the north (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vauellus spinosus*. Breeding resident in central and southern Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*. Widespread breeding resident in south, central, western and northeast Iraq in wetlands and farmland; may breed in north where present in summer (A60–62, SC82, Sage 1960, NI).

Sociable Lapwing *Vauellus gregarius* CE. Rare passage migrant, some may winter, formerly common (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

White-tailed Lapwing *Vauellus leucurus*. Local breeding resident in the wetlands of southern, central and western Iraq; more widespread passage migrant, including to northern Iraq where also found in summer and may breed (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*. Vagrant (A60–62, MB56).

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*. Status uncertain; probably a rare winter visitor (A60–62, MB56).

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*. Widespread breeding summer visitor mostly to northern and central Iraq, may breed in south; passage migrant with some remaining in winter (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*. Breeding resident in central and southern Iraq; passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius atrifrons*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor mostly in southern Iraq (A60–62, SC82).

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*. Passage migrant and winter visitor in southern and western Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor, formerly commonly observed in central Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, SC82, Salim *et al* 2006, NI).

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*. Uncommon winter visitor especially to northern Iraq but not recorded recently; also recorded on autumn passage (A60–62, SC82, Sage 1960, Salim *et al* 2006).

Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus*. Passage migrant and winter visitor but few recorded in recent years (A60–62, MB56, SC82, NI).

Great Snipe *Gallinago media* NT. Rare passage migrant (A60–62, MB56).

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* NT. Passage migrant and winter visitor mostly to southern and central Iraq; some remain in summer (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*. Passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers mainly in southern Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor to southern Iraq (A60–62, MB56).

Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* CE. Historically very rare or vagrant, latest record 1979 (A60–62, SC82).

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* NT. Passage migrant and winter visitor to wetlands in the south especially in coastal areas (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*. Passage migrant and uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*. Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor; some remain in summer (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*. Passage migrant and winter visitor mainly in the south and east (A60–62, SC82, Sage 1960, NI).

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*. Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*. Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. Passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers mainly to the south (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*. Passage migrant and winter visitor mainly to southern Iraq (A60–62, MB56, SC82, NI).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor; a few remaining in summer; may breed in the mountains of northern Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*. Passage migrant and winter visitor to southern and central Iraq with some remaining in summer in extreme south (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*. Vagrant (Cramp & Simmons 1983). The Iraq information in this BWP volume was supplied by PV George Kainady.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*. Passage migrant mainly in the southern tidal areas, some remaining in winter (A60–62, MB56, Salim *et al* 2006).

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*. Passage migrant and winter visitor to southern and central Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*. Passage migrant and winter visitor to southern and central Iraq in smaller numbers than Little Stint (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*. Passage migrant and winter visitor mainly to central and southern Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. Passage migrant and winter visitor mainly in the south and east; some remain in summer (A60–62, SC82, Sage 1960, NI).

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*. Rare or uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, SC82, NI).

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*. Passage migrant in small numbers (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Vagrant (MB56).

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*. Breeding resident in the desert and semi-desert areas of northwest, central and southern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*. Fairly widespread breeding summer visitor to dry grassland areas near wetlands; passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* NT. Reported breeding in 1920s in southern Iraq but not recorded since (see A60–62).

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*. Breeding resident in central and southern Iraq; breeding resident or summer visitor to the north; passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI, Plate 11).

Common Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*. Local breeding resident or summer visitor in northern Iraq; widespread winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Ar11, NI).

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*. Vagrant (A60–62).

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*. Fairly widespread winter visitor generally in small numbers (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Common Gull *Larus canus*. Uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

The large white-headed gulls.

The status of the large white-headed gulls in Iraq is not fully understood. There has been no detailed study and the situation is further confused by changes in taxonomy and nomenclature in the last two decades. All records until the time of the Nature Iraq surveys



Plate 11. Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*, Razzaza lake, Karbala province, Iraq, January 2009. © Mudhafar Salim

placed all grey-backed gulls in the taxon *Larus argentatus* Herring Gull. Furthermore, Ticehurst *et al* (1922, 1926) listed *Larus fuscus taimyrensis* and *Larus argentatus vegae*, taxa that are now known not to occur in the Middle East; furthermore Allouse (1953) mentioned *Larus argentatus heuglini*, giving Ticehurst *et al* (1922) as the reference; however Ticehurst did not include it.

The accounts given below should therefore be regarded as provisional. It is likely that further study will reveal that other taxa in this genetically closely-linked group occur in Iraq, some probably regularly. Detailed discussion and examination of photographs taken by OFA-S and MS show birds in autumn and winter in southern Iraq that are possibly Steppe Gulls *Larus barabensis*; indeed that taxon and Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini* will surely pass through Iraq as both occur in the Gulf in winter. It is also likely that Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus michahellis* will occur though none have been positively identified in photographs taken by OFA-S and MS.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*. Passage migrant and winter visitor (Ticehurst *et al* 1922, A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*. Widespread winter visitor and passage migrant (OFA-S, NI).

Baltic (Lesser Black-backed) Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus*. Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant (Ticehurst *et al* 1922, A60–62, NI).

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*. Local breeding summer visitor in the extreme south; passage migrant, a few in winter (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*. Local breeding resident in small numbers in south and central Iraq; passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*. Local breeding summer visitor in small numbers on Gulf coast (A60–62, NI).

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*. Local breeding summer visitor on Gulf coast, but no records there since 1940s; a single summer bird in northeast Iraq (A60–62, Sage 1960).

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*. Fairly widespread breeding summer visitor and passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Saunders's Tern *Sternula saundersi*. Known from birds collected on or near the Gulf coast of Iraq in 19th century (Ticehurst *et al* 1922, see also Harrison 1983) but more recent status uncertain due to difficulty of separation from Little Tern, though it has been suspected to occur (NI).

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*. Status uncertain; breeding summer visitor to islands at the head of the Gulf (A60–62) but not recorded in recent years (NI).

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*. Local breeding summer visitor to inland wetlands; passage migrant with a few remaining in winter (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*. Status uncertain; breeding summer visitor to islands at the head of the Gulf (A60–62) but not recorded in recent years (NI).

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*. Resident and breeding summer visitor in central and southern Iraq, also possibly northeast; fairly widespread passage migrant; winter visitor, but not in north (A60–62, SC82, Sage 1960, NI).

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*. Local breeding summer visitor to wetlands in southern Iraq; fairly widespread passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*. Vagrant (A60–62, NI).

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*.
Vagrant (A60–62).

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*. Vagrant (Rolf Williams *in litt*).

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*. Widespread but local breeding resident in dry grasslands (A60–62, SC82, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI, Plate 12).

Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*. Very local breeding resident in deserts and semi-deserts in southern and western Iraq (A60–62, SC82, NI).



Plate 12. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*, central Iraq, March 2011. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*. Passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers (A60–62, SC82, NI).

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*. Status uncertain; probably a rare winter visitor in 1920s (A60–62), none recorded since (NI).

Rock Dove *Columba livia*. Fairly widespread breeding resident; domesticated form common in cities (A60–62, NI).

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*. Uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, MB56).

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*. Widespread breeding resident in woodlands, orchards and date palms; winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, NI).

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*. Local breeding summer visitor to woodlands in north and central Iraq; passage migrant. There has been a noticeable decline in numbers over the past few decades (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Rufous Turtle Dove *Streptopelia meena*. Vagrant (Bunni 1988).

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*. Widespread breeding resident (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*. Fairly widespread breeding resident. Contrary to Ar11, breeding was first recorded in 1988 (Al-Dabbagh *et al* 1992); until at least 1960s it was a rare winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*. Vagrant (Salim 2008).

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*. Very local breeding resident, most found in the dense date-palm orchards of central Iraq (A60–62, MB56, NI). A few birds in northeast Iraq March 2011 (MS) and January 2012 (Sarbagh Salih pers comm). The Iraq population originated from escapes (Salim *et al* 2006).

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*. Very local breeding summer visitor in open woodland in northern Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI, Marchant 1961, 1962).

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*. Fairly widespread passage migrant; recorded in summer in northern open woodland and farmland, in pairs and singing, which suggests it also breeds (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. Local, but fairly widespread breeding resident (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei*. Local resident or breeding summer visitor (A60–62, Marchant 1961, 1962, SC82, Plate 13).

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops*. Fairly widespread breeding summer visitor and passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*. Breeding resident in northern, eastern and southern Iraq mainly in the wooded mountains and hills (A60–62, MB56, Marchant 1962, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*. A rare breeding resident in the deserts of western Iraq where one specimen was collected by R Clawson (Vaurie 1960), and a young bird (age c40 days), which had been taken from a local nest, was discovered in a market cage in 2009 (NI, Balmer & Harrison 2011, Al-Sheikhly 2012).



Plate 13. Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei*, central Iraq, October 2010. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly

Brown Fish Owl *Bubo zeylonensis*. Not recorded since 1920s but could still occur as a very rare resident (Salim *et al* 2006, A60–62).

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*. Status uncertain; possibly a rare breeding resident in northern wooded hills as birds heard singing February–April; also a rare winter visitor (A60–62, Ticehurst *et al* 1926, NI).

Little Owl *Athene noctua*. Fairly widespread breeding resident in north and central Iraq, uncommon in south (A60–62, NI). All identified have been of the race *bactriana* (but see Lilith Owl text).

Lilith Owl *Athene (noctua) lilith*. Status uncertain; a pair photographed at a nest site in June 2010 by MS in the southeastern desert showed characters typical of *lilith* (Claus Konig pers comm) and indicates that this taxon breeds in Iraq.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*. Rare breeding resident (one site) in northern pine woodland; winter visitor to north in small numbers and historically to southern Iraq (Ticehurst *et al* 1922, A60–62, MB56, Marchant 1961, Ar11).

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*. Uncommon but widespread winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Marchant 1961, 1962, NI).

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*. Uncommon breeding summer visitor to open woodlands in northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, Marchant 1961, 1962, NI).



Plate 14. Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*, middle Euphrates, Iraq, July 2011. © Mudhafar Salim

Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*. Breeding summer visitor to semi-deserts and arid areas of southern and central Iraq, and possibly northeast; passage migrant in south and central Iraq (A60–62, MB56, Marchant 1961, 1962, Sage 1960, NI, Plate 14).

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*. Very local breeding summer visitor to mountains in northern Iraq; passage migrant throughout (A60–62, Ar11).

Common Swift *Apus apus*. Widespread breeding summer visitor to towns and villages in north and central Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*. Uncommon breeding summer visitor to central and southern Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Little Swift *Apus affinus*. Breeding summer visitor to two known colonies in north Iraq; also probably a rare passage migrant (MB56, Ar11).

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*. Breeding resident and breeding summer visitor to southern and central Iraq, with post-breeding dispersal (A60–62, NI, Plate 15).

European Roller *Coracias garrulus* NT. Uncommon breeding summer visitor, but absent western Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*. Breeding resident on rivers and in wetlands of southern, central and northeast Iraq, very local elsewhere (A60–62, MB56, Sage 1960, NI, Plate 16).



Plate 15. Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*, middle Euphrates, Iraq, February 2010. © Mudhafar Salim



Plate 16. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*, southern marshes, Iraq, January 2010. © Mudhafar Salim

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*. Uncommon breeding resident in southern and central Iraq possibly also in northern Iraq; winter visitor and passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*. Widespread breeding resident on wetlands and water courses (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*. Vagrant (A60–62).

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*. Breeding summer visitor to southern and central Iraq, locally in northern Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI).

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. Breeding summer visitor to northern and eastern Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*. Breeding summer visitor to north, northeast and central Iraq; widespread passage migrant with some wintering in south (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbah 1998, NI).

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*. Passage migrant in small numbers (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*. Very local breeding resident in northeastern montane woodland (Ar11).

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*. Very local breeding resident in montane oak woodlands in northeast (Ar11).

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*. Fairly widespread breeding resident in northern woodland (A60–62, MB56, NI).

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*.

Very local breeding resident in northern woodlands (MB56, NI).

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*.

Widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Daurian Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*.

Passage migrant and winter visitor, more frequent in south and central Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Turkestan Isabelline Shrike *Lanius phoenicuroides*.

Uncommon passage migrant (A60–62).

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*.

Fairly widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Plate 17).

Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris*.

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor to eastern Iraq (see A60–62, MB57, NI). Recently separated from *L. excubitor* (Great Grey Shrike) and subsequently from *L. meridionalis* (see eg Gonzales et al 2008, Bannikova 2010, Olsson et al 2010, Porter & Aspinall 2010). Most migrant ‘great grey’ shrikes in Iraq will be *pallidirostris*.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*.

Local resident in central Iraq and possibly a passage migrant (see A60–62, MB57, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Recently separated from *L excubitor* and recorded as such in early literature

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*. Widespread breeding summer visitor to north and parts of central Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*. Breeding summer visitor to north and parts of central Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, McGeoch 1963, NI, Plate 18).

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*. Breeding summer visitor to woodlands of northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).



Plate 17. Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*, Al Habbaniya lake, Anbar province, Iraq, May 2011. © Omar Fadhil Al-Sheikhly



Plate 18. Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*, Kurdistan, Iraq, May 2009. © Korsh Ararat Majeed

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*. Breeding resident in wooded hills of northern Iraq; where also winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*. Widespread breeding resident; less frequent in southern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*. Fairly local breeding resident in the high mountains in north Iraq; much commoner than Yellow-billed Chough (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*. Very local breeding resident in the high mountains of north Iraq (Ar11).

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*. Uncommon breeding resident in northern Iraq; widespread in winter when range extends to southern and central Iraq (A60–62, MB57, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*. Fairly widespread winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*. Uncommon breeding resident in northern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus capellanus*. Breeding resident of the plains and date orchards of southern and central Iraq;



Plate 19. Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus capellanus*, central Iraq, December 2009. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly



Plate 20. Hypocoliuses *Hypocolius ampelinus*, southern Iraq, June 2010. © Mudhafar Salim



Plate 21. Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris*, Kurdistan, Iraq, May 2009. © Korsh Ararat Majeed

also found in the stable and floating reedbeds of the southeastern marshes (A60–62, NI, Plate 19).

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*. Uncommon breeding resident in desert and arid grasslands of southern and western Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*. Breeding resident in the mountains of northern Iraq, very local in the eastern hills (A60–62, NI).

Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*. Breeding summer visitor to southern and central Iraq where especially found in oases, date orchards, *Tamarix* and thorny woodlands, usually near water (A60–62, NI, Plate 20).

Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris*. Widespread and not uncommon breeding resident in the northern woodlands, especially *Quercus* (Ar11, Plate 21).

Great Tit *Parus major*. Breeding resident in the woodlands of northern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*. Rather local breeding resident in the woodlands of northern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*. Uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*. Widespread breeding resident in the western, central and southern deserts (A60–62, MB57, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).



Plate 22. Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*, southern Iraq, June 2010. © Mudhafar Salim

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*. Breeding resident in the agricultural lands and plains of central and northern Iraq; also winter visitor central to south Iraq (A60–62, MB57, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*. Status uncertain; appears to be an uncommon or perhaps irregular passage migrant and winter visitor; but there is some indication of breeding (birds singing in April) in central Iraq, in early 20th century (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998).

Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cinctura*. Breeding resident in western deserts (A60–62, NI).

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*. Fairly widespread breeding resident but absent from the extreme north (A60–62, MB57, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI, Plate 22).

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*. Breeding resident in fields and arid grasslands of northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB57, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*. Resident and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*. Widespread breeding resident (A60–62, NI).

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*. Fairly widespread breeding resident in open woodland in the northern foothills; more widespread winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Ar11).

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*. Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Marchant 61, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Black-crowned Sparrow-lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*. Breeding resident in extreme southern Iraq (Ticehurst *et al* 1922, 1926, A60–62), but no records since 1920s.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*. Very local breeding resident in high mountains of north Iraq (A63, Ar11).

Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilophia*. Breeding resident in western and southern deserts and arid grasslands (A60–62, Marchant 1961, NI).

White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis*. Widespread breeding resident in woodland groves, especially palm, in central, western, southern and northeast Iraq; appears to be spreading north as now found in northern areas where absent in 1940s (A60–62, MB56, Sage 1960, NI, Plate 23).

White-spectacled Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*. Status uncertain, probably a rare resident on the Euphrates in western Iraq. The only record is that in Rasmussen (1992). The observer considered the possibility of the birds being escapes from captivity and concluded they were wild. The NIBRC reconsidered the evidence and also came to this conclusion, especially as it has since been discovered this species occurs on the Euphrates in Syria, fairly close to the site where Rasmussen observed his birds (David Murdoch *in litt*, Porter & Aspinall 2010).

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*. Breeding summer visitor, mainly along major river courses; passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Fairly widespread breeding summer visitor; widespread passage migrant; very few winter in southern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*. Breeding summer visitor to northern Iraq; very local in central and southeast Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*. Rather local breeding summer visitor or resident in hills and mountains of northern and eastern Iraq; also passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI; see also MB56).

Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*. Breeding recorded at two mountain sites in north Iraq; otherwise status uncertain, passage bird recorded in the south (A60–62, Ar11).



Plate 23. White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis*, Kurdistan, Iraq, May 2010. © RF Porter

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*. Breeding summer visitor to northern and central Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*. Breeding resident in northern Iraq, mostly in dense vegetation near water courses; winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*. Very local breeding resident in mountain woodland in northern Iraq (A60–62, Ar11).

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*. Widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Caucasian Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus (siudianus) loreuzii*. Status uncertain; probably a rare passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus ueglectus*. Breeding summer visitor recorded at one mountain site in 2011 in northeast Iraq, where nest was found in *Artemesia* scrub on the edge of a rocky cliff at c2400 m (NI, Balmer & Harrison 2011).

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*. Probably rare passage migrant with singing birds May 2010 and 2011 in woodland in extreme north (NI). These records under review.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*. Vagrant (A60–62).

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus luhuei*. Vagrant or rare winter visitor (SC82).

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* E.

Breeding summer visitor to the extensive reedbeds of the southern marshes and recently discovered further north in the marshes of central Iraq and at one site in western Iraq (A60–62, NI, Plate 24). Endemic, though now recorded breeding outside Iraq in Kuwait and Israel (Porter & Aspinall 2010).

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus aruudiaceus*. Rather local breeding summer visitor to wetlands and water courses with reedbeds throughout Iraq; also a widespread passage migrant; birds recorded in the southern marshes in early February may be overwintering or early migrants (A60–62, NI, MS).

Indian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus (steutoreus) bruijnseceus*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor to the southern marshes and possibly rare or uncommon breeding resident. All birds identified, including those trapped and photographed, have been of the race *bruijnseceus* (Kainady 1977, SC82, NI, OFA-S).



Plate 24. Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*, southern marshes, Iraq, June 2008. © Mudhafar Salim

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*. Status uncertain; recorded as probably breeding in the southern marshes in 1920s, but not since; present, very locally, in breeding season in suitable breeding habitat on rivers in northern Iraq; otherwise observed irregularly during migration periods in north and central Iraq, and occasionally in winter (A60–62, Marchant & Macnab 1962, SC82, NI).

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Passage migrant; found at one riverine site in breeding season in northern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. Passage migrant with one proven record of breeding in the southern marshes (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, Ar11, NI). The status of this species has been complicated by the earlier confusion with Basra Reed Warbler. Many early references to 'reed warblers' probably referred to Basra Reed Warbler (see eg MB56)

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*. Passage migrant (A60–62) but recent status unclear as rarely observed during NI KBA surveys which have taken place outside the main periods of this warbler's migration.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*. Widespread breeding summer visitor to open woodland and scrub in northern, central and southern Iraq; also a fairly widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*. Fairly widespread breeding summer visitor to scrub and wooded hills in northern Iraq, where less frequent than Eastern Olivaceous Warbler; passage migrant (A60–62, Ar11).

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*. Vagrant or rare passage migrant (A60–62, Kainady 1977, NI).

Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*. Vagrant (Kainady & Al-Joborae 1975).

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinoides*. Rare or uncommon passage migrant, but probably overlooked (Kainady & Al-Joborae 1975, Kainady 1977, Ctyroky 1987).

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*. Vagrant or rare passage migrant, but undoubtedly overlooked (A60–62, NI).

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*. Rather local breeding resident at and near wetlands in southern and central Iraq; apparently absent from northern Iraq. Some suggestion of dispersal outside breeding season (A60–62, MB56, NI).

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*. Widespread breeding resident in central and southern Iraq, very local in north and northeast Iraq (A60–62, MB56, Marchant & Macnab 1962, Sage 1960, NI).

Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*. Breeding resident in reedbeds, mainly along the Tigris and Euphrates, and extending its range northwards along the latter (A60–62, NI, Plate 25). Endemic, though now recorded along the Euphrates in Syria and southern Turkey (Porter & Aspinall 2010).

Afghan Babbler *Turdoides huttoni*. Breeding resident in southern, western and central Iraq, mainly in arid areas with scrub (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*. Passage migrant; some may winter (A60–62, MB56, NI).



Plate 25. Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*, southern Iraq. © KF Drweesh

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*. Passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, Marchant & Macnab 1962, NI).

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*. Passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*. Passage migrant (A60–62, MB56, Marchant & Macnab 1962, NI).

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*. Breeding summer visitor to several areas of open woodland in northern Iraq; rarely recorded on passage (A60–62, Ar11, NI).

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*. Uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, SC82, Ali Nema pers comm).

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*. Recorded breeding in western Iraq (2011) and probably breeds in north Iraq as birds present in suitable habitat in summer; otherwise a passage migrant (A60–62, NI, OFA-S).

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*. Vagrant (A60–62, Sage 1958).

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*. Status uncertain; a not uncommon winter visitor to northern Iraq, with specimens obtained (Ticehurst *et al* 1926) but none seen since 1920s.

Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*. Fairly widespread breeding summer visitor to scrub, especially riverine, in northern Iraq, and locally elsewhere; passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*. Winter visitor to northern Iraq, recorded south to Baghdad; breeds very locally (only one proven record) in the northern mountains (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*. Fairly widespread breeding resident in the wooded hills and mountain slopes of northern Iraq (MB56, Ar11).

Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*. Widespread breeding resident in the mountains and foothills, often with woodland, of northern Iraq (A60–62, NI, Plate 26).

Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*. Widespread breeding resident of the rocky hills with open woodland of northern Iraq (A60–62, NI, Plate 27).

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*. Uncommon winter visitor to northern and central Iraq (A60–62, MB56, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*. Local, non-native, resident, found in date-palm orchards in southern Iraq (Salim 1998).

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*. An irregular passage migrant recorded only in April and May (A60–62, NI).



Plate 26. Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*, Kurdistan, Iraq, April 2010. © Khalid Faik



Plate 27. Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*, Kurdistan, Iraq, March 2008. © Khalid Faik

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. Very local breeding resident in open woodland in north Iraq. Contrary to Ar11, breeding was first recorded in 1988 (Al-Dabbagh *et al* 1992); widespread winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*. Apparently a rare or irregular winter visitor (A60–62, Marchant 1960).

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*. Widespread breeding resident in northern wooded hills, occasional in central Iraq; widespread winter visitor (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 98, NI).

Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis*. Uncommon winter visitor to central and southern Iraq (A60–62, MB57).

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*. Uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, Marchant 1961, 1962, Marchant & Macnab 1962).

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*. Rare winter visitor or vagrant (Marchant & Macnab 62).

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*. Irregular winter visitor (A60–62, MB56).

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*. Thinly distributed breeding resident in woodland in northern mountains and foothills; also an uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, MB56, Ar11).

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. Fairly widespread winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*. Fairly widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*. Breeding summer visitor to woodland, especially riparian and scrubby habitats in northern, eastern and central Iraq; also passage migrant (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI). Observations, both recent and previously, appear to suggest that most (all?) nightingales in Iraq are not *L. (megarhynchos) golzii* (Eastern Nightingale); however this requires further study.

White-throated Robin *Irruia gutturalis*. Fairly local breeding summer visitor to open woodlands in hills and mountains in northern Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Ar11, Ctyroky 1972, Plate 28).

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*. Fairly widespread breeding summer visitor, but absent from western Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, NI)

Eversmann's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythronotus*. Vagrant (A60–62).

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*. Rare, local, resident breeder in mountains in north Iraq; birds identified as being of the race *ochrurus*, but one pair possibly *semirufus* (see Ar11); otherwise a widespread winter visitor with races *ochrurus* and eastern *phoenicurooides* recorded (A60–62, NI).

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Local breeding summer visitor to woodlands in north Iraq with both *phoenicurus* and *samanisicus* recorded; otherwise a widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Ar11, Ctyroky 1986).

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*. Passage migrant; reference to past winter records have not been confirmed in recent surveys (see Ticehurst *et al* 1922, A60–62, NI)



Plate 28. White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis*, Kurdistan, Iraq, April 2009. © RF Porter

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*. Fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*. Local breeding summer visitor (race *armenica*) to northeastern hills and mountains; fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta*. Status uncertain; no reports since 1920s (A60–62).

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*. Breeding summer visitor to hilly country in northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Very local breeding summer visitor to mountain slopes and foothills in northeast; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

Kurdistan Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrrhoa*. Very local breeding summer visitor to mountain slopes in northeast Iraq; uncommon passage migrant, mainly in north and central Iraq (A60–62, MB56, Ar11, NI, Plate 29).



Plate 29. Kurdistan Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrrna*, Kurdistan, Iraq, March 2010. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly

Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*. Uncommon passage migrant; pairs present in spring in suitable habitat in mountains of northeast Iraq may suggest breeding (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*. Passage migrant mainly in central, southern and eastern Iraq (A60–62, MB56, Sage 1960, NI).

Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe melanoleuca*. Breeding summer visitor to northern hilly country; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*. Passage migrant and winter visitor, but rarely in north (A60–62, NI).

Eastern Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*. Local and uncommon resident or summer visitor to mountain foothills in northeast and central Iraq; also a rare passage migrant or winter visitor, including to central and southern Iraq (A60–62, Harrison 1959, MB56, Marchant 1961, NI, Ar11, Plate 30). Ar11 states that this wheatear had not been recorded in Iraq prior to NI surveys; this requires correction as the observations of Harrison (1959), Marchant (1961) and MB56 indicate it is also a rare passage migrant or winter visitor.

Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii*. Resident breeder in northern foothills; winter visitor (A60–62, NI, Ar11).



Plate 30. Eastern Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*, Kurdistan, Iraq, May 2011. © RF Porter



Plate 31. Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*, Kurdistan, Iraq, April 2009. © Korsh Ararat Majeed

Hume's Wheatear *Oenanthe albonigra*. Rare resident in rocky valleys in hills of extreme east (NI, Sage 1960).

White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*. Vagrant (Salim 2010).

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*. Local breeding summer visitor to mountains in northern Iraq, with first proven record in 2009; rather uncommon passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Plate 31).

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*. Breeding resident and also probably breeding summer visitor to mountains in north; fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*. Breeding summer visitor to northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*. There are no confirmed records and most past claims clearly refer to Semi-collared Flycatcher (see A60–62, MB57, Marchant 1962).

Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* NT. Passage migrant, mostly observed in spring in northern Iraq (A60–62, MB57, NI, Plate 32). Previously this taxon was regarded as a race of Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* and appeared as such in older literature (see eg MB57).

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*. Rare or uncommon passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*. Very local breeding resident on streams in the northern mountains (A60–62, MB57, NI, Ar11).

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Widespread breeding resident (A60–62, NI).

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*. Local breeding resident in north and central Iraq; widespread winter visitor (A60–62, NI, Ar11).



Plate 32. Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*, Kurdistan, Iraq, April 2009. © Mudhafar Salim

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*. Local breeding resident found especially along major watercourses; widespread in winter (A60–62, Al-Dabbagh 1998, NI).

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*. Rare winter visitor to north and central Iraq (A60–62, MB57, NI).

Pale Rockfinch *Carpospiza brachydactyla*. Local breeding summer visitor in the northern hills; passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*. Local breeding resident in northern hills and mountains (A60–62, MB57, NI, Ar11).

Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*. Local breeding summer visitor in montane oak woodland in northern Iraq and in willow, tamarix and date palms in southern Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, MB57, NI).

White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*. Very local breeding resident in high mountains of northern Iraq; winter visitor (MB57, NI, Ar11).

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*. Local winter visitor to northern Iraq where may breed (A60–62, MB57, NI, Ar11).

Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*. May breed in high mountains in north Iraq where singing birds seen in May; also recorded in October and January, possibly wintering birds from Turkey (MacKenzie *in litt* to MI Evans 2007, NI, Laith Ali pers comm, OFA-S, MS).

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*. Rare winter visitor to northern Iraq (A60–62, MB57, NI).

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*. Widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI). The following races have been observed on migration: *lutea*, *superciliaris*, *dombrowski*, *flava*, *beema*, *thunbergi*. Of these the most regular appear to be *lutea*, *dombrowski* and *thunbergi* (A60–62, NI).

Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) feldegg*. Widespread passage migrant; may breed in the southern wetlands (A60–62, MB57, NI, Ar11). The race *melanogrisea* (Eastern Black-headed Wagtail) has also been recorded and photographed (NI).

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*. Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor (SC82, NI).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*. Local breeding resident on streams in northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB57, NI).

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*. Local breeding resident in northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*. Fairly widespread passage migrant, a few remaining in winter (A60–62, NI).

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*. Vagrant (A60–62).

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*. Passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB57, NI).

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*. Passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*. Passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*. Probably breeds as found in suitable breeding habitat at a mountain site in northeast Iraq in June 2011 (Mariwan Qadir pers comm); fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, MB57, NI).

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*. Local breeding resident in wooded hills in northern Iraq; fairly widespread winter visitor but uncommon in south (A60–62, MB57, NI, Ar11).

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*. Uncommon winter visitor to northern Iraq (A60–62, MB57).

Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*. Very local breeding resident in the northern mountains; winter visitor to northern Iraq (A60–62, NI, Ar11).

European Serin *Serinus serinus*. Uncommon winter visitor to northern Iraq (A60–62, MB57).

Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus*. Status uncertain. Ticehurst *et al* (1926) wrote: "Appeared at Dohuk at the latter half of December in fairly large numbers, feeding on the seeds of reeds and became common". These observations are not dated but probably refer to the mid 1910s/early 1920s. In addition a male collected by La Personne from Dohuk, in northern Iraq, on 22 December 1922 (Unnithan 2004) is in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society. Despite coverage of this area by other observers, notably Moore & Boswell and Nature Iraq in their KBA surveys, no others have been observed. The feeding on reed seeds is unknown in the Syrian Serin, but there are *Artemisia* shrublands in the Dohuk region, a plant which Syrian Serins are known to feed on (Khoury 1998, 2003). It is possible that there is a yet to be discovered colony in north Iraq.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*. Uncommon winter visitor to north and central Iraq; birds seen in summer in open woodland in hills of northern Iraq may indicate breeding (A60–62, Ctyroky 1988, NI).

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*. Winter visitor but uncommon in southern Iraq (A60–62, NI).

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*. Breeding resident in open woodland in north Iraq; passage migrant and winter visitor to north and central Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*. Rare winter visitor or vagrant (A60–62).

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*. Rather local breeding resident in the northern hills; winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Eurasian Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus*. Vagrant (A60–62).

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*. Uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, MB57, NI).

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*. Fairly widespread winter visitor; may breed (A60–62, MB57, Ar11, NI).

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*. Vagrant (Kainady 1977).

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. Uncommon winter visitor in the north (A60–62, MB57, NI).

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*. Breeding resident in northern farmland and open woodland; fairly widespread passage migrant and winter visitor (A60–62, NI).

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*. Uncommon winter visitor to northern and central Iraq (A60–62, MB57, NI).

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*. Uncommon winter visitor to northern and central Iraq (A60–62, NI).

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*. Winter visitor to the hills in northern Iraq where may breed (A60–62, MB57, NI, Ar11).

Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*. Rare summer visitor to mountains in northeast Iraq, where breeding recorded at one site in 2011 (NI; see also Ar11).

Eastern Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza semenowi* NT. Widespread and not uncommon breeding summer visitor to the northern open woodland and rocky hills; passage migrant (A60–62, NI, Ar11, Plate 33).

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*. Breeding summer visitor to the hills of northern Iraq; widespread passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*. Vagrant (A60–62, George & Mahdi 69).

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*. Widespread breeding summer visitor to open woodlands in northern Iraq; passage migrant (A60–62, NI).

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*. Uncommon winter visitor (A60–62, Kainady 77, NI).



Plate 33. Eastern Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza semenowi*, Kurdistan, Iraq, April 2009. © RF Porter

Records cited in the literature but no longer considered acceptable (lack of supporting detail)

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*. Past occasional winter records (see Allouse 1953) almost certainly refer to Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*.

Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*. See Allouse (1953).

Desert Whitethroat *Sylvia minula*. Given in Al-Dabbagh (1998) but no supporting evidence.

The following species have been mentioned in past publications but no references to the original records have been found: **Shikra** *Accipiter badius*, **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*, **Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis*, **Asian Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella cheleensis*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following for helping with our questions and requests for information: Simon Aspinall, AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan, Peter Castell, Alan Dean, Mike Evans, Chris Gibbins, Fares Koury, Mary Hennen, Dick Newell, Robert Prys-Jones, Bryan Sage and David Willard. Our sincere thanks go to the staff of the Iraqi Ministry of Environment: Dr Kamal Latif (Technical Deputy) and Dr Ali Al-Lami (Ministerial Advisor) and their kind staff who helped in the surveys.

We would also like to thank the following colleagues in Nature Iraq for helping with fieldwork and giving their help, advice and support in the checklist's production: Laith Ali, Mariwan Qadir, Anna Bachmann and Azzam Alwash.

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The Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* on Socotra, Yemen: population, ecology, conservation and ethno-ornithology

RF PORTER & AHMED SAEED SULEIMAN

Detailed surveys of Socotra's breeding birds 1999–2011 estimate the population of the Globally Endangered Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* to be c1900 individuals, probably the highest concentration in the world. The paper also covers habitat, general ecology and behaviour as well as population history. Threats and future conservation are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The resident Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* (Plate 1) are widespread, rather tame and in places the most obvious birds on the island of Socotra. As soon as you arrive at the small airport Egyptian Vultures are there to greet you and by the time you have driven the 12 km to the capital Hadibu you may have seen over 50. It breeds on the limestone cliffs and is a familiar bird in and around the towns of Hadibu and Qalansiya as well as the island's numerous villages at all altitudes.

The vultures are often tame—and if food is offered they will venture to within a few metres: a picnic will soon produce a gathering awaiting the leftovers of eg a tasty goat. The Socotri are benign to the vulture and this together with a rapidly increasing human population, little in the way of garbage control and nesting sites aplenty in the limestone hills, has doubtless helped to maintain a large population of a species that elsewhere in the world is seriously declining. Thus in 2007, as a result of prolonged and catastrophic declines in Europe, India and Africa (Cuthbert *et al* 2006), this long-lived species was given the status of Globally Endangered (BirdLife International 2011).

There are no other vulture species on Socotra and the only other birds of prey breeding on Socotra are the Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Socotra Buzzard *Buteo socotraensis*,



Plate 1. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, east of Hadibu, Socotra, February 2006. © RF Porter

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

Breeding distribution on Socotra

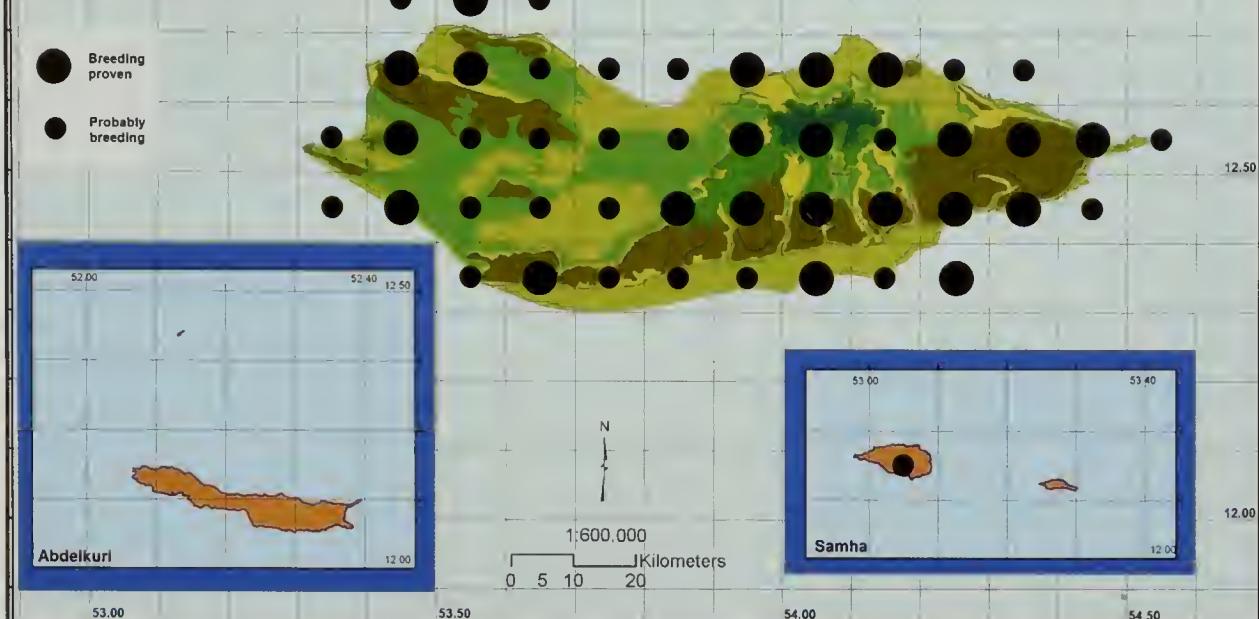


Figure 1. Breeding distribution of the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* on Socotra, 1999–2011 (from Porter & Suleiman in prep.).

- Legend
- Croton shrubland on the coastal plains
 - Montane mosaic of shrubland woodland and grassland in the granite mountains
 - Open and woody-based herb communities on the limestone plateau
 - Semi-evergreen woodland on limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines
 - Submontane shrubland on the slopes and cliffs of the granite mountains
 - Succulent shrubland on limestone cliffs and slopes

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* (Porter & Suleiman 2011).

The Socotra archipelago (12.30° N, 54.00° E) is part of the Republic of Yemen. It is situated in the Arabian sea c350 km south of the Yemen mainland and comprises the main island of Socotra (area 3579 km^2 and just 230 km east of the Horn of Africa) and three satellite islands and several sea stacks. It rises to 1500 m asl in the granite Haggier mountains though much of the higher areas of the island (500–1000 m) are limestone (Figure 1, which shows the main habitat types). The human population of Socotra is c50 000.

The archipelago is famed for its unique flora and fauna, with over 350 species of endemic plants, at least 21 endemic reptiles and ten species of endemic birds (Cheung & DeVantier 2006, Porter & Suleiman in prep.). For plant endemism per km^2 alone it is ranked in the top ten islands in the world (Banfield *et al* 2011). This biological richness of the islands encouraged UNESCO to declare the Socotra archipelago as a World Heritage Site in 2008.

Other than livestock (sheep, goats, camels and miniature cattle), which were introduced by man, there are no larger mammals on Socotra other than the introduced Lesser Indian Civet *Viverricula indica*. Furthermore there is no evidence of large-bodied mammals ever having been part of the Socotran fauna (Van Damme & Banfield 2011).

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION

The population of Socotra's birds has been studied since 1993 when RFP first visited the island as a member of the OSME team surveying southern Yemen and Socotra (Porter *et al* 1996, Kirwan *et al* 1996). Then, between 1999 and 2011, nine surveys were undertaken by

Socotra breeding bird atlas: recording squares

(to be read in conjunction with atlas data spreadsheets)



Together for birds and people

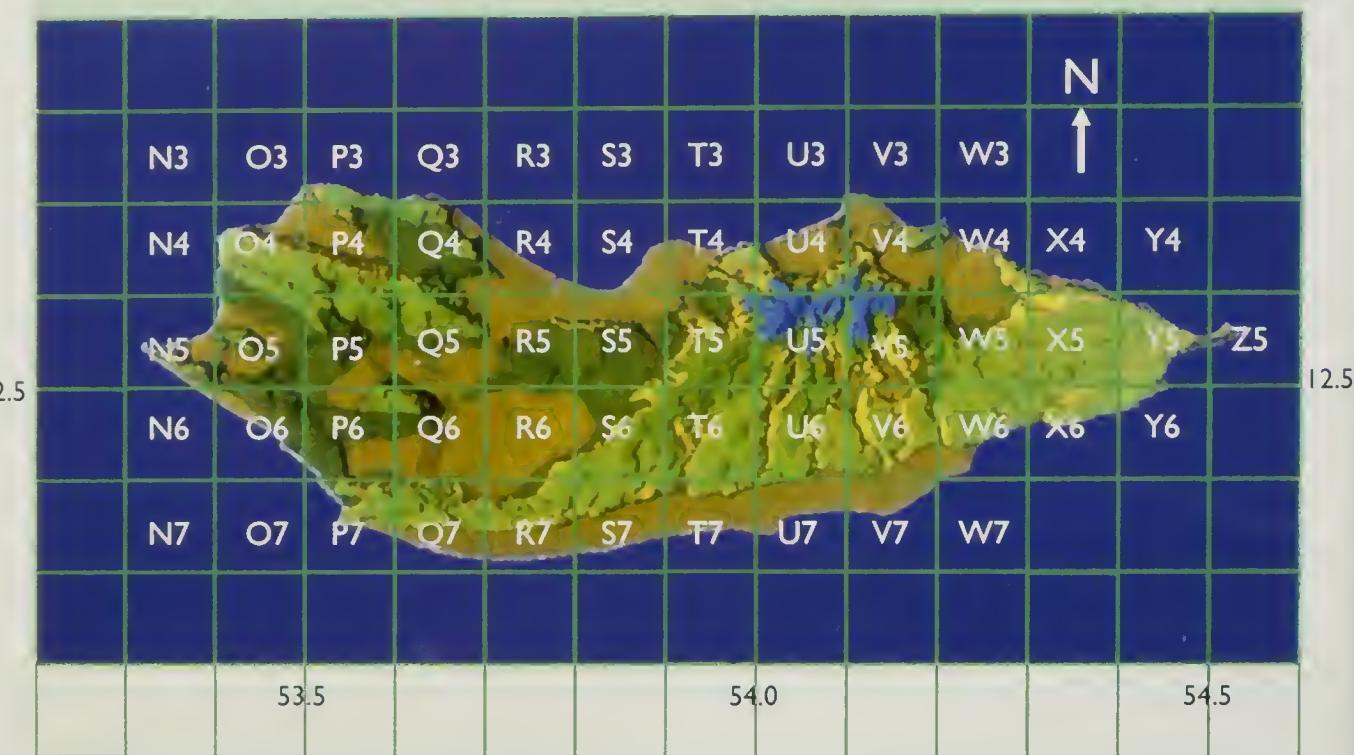


Figure 2. Socotra breeding bird atlas: recording squares.

BirdLife International and the then Socotra Conservation and Development Programme (SCDP) to study the distribution and population of the breeding birds of the archipelago.

Assessing the population of a highly mobile species is not easy, especially on a large island where travel is very difficult to the many remote areas. Thus several methods were employed to help build up a picture and a population estimate: total numbers recorded each visit, counts in the 1/10th degree recording squares, counts at settlements and line transects. We soon discovered that a pattern emerged for vulture distribution with much fidelity to towns, villages and settlements during daytime, and to roost sites at night. All observations were made from the ground and travel was by vehicle, camel or on foot.

Distribution

For recording purposes the islands were divided into 1/10th degree 'squares' ($c120\text{ km}^2$)—see Figure 2, which shows those for the main island. From 1999–2011 each square was visited at least twice (and at least half on over ten occasions) to search for proof of breeding of all species. For Egyptian Vulture the evidence was nest building, nests with eggs or young and birds carrying food to nest. In a number of squares actual proof was not obtained but strongly suspected—pairs copulating, birds entering likely nesting caves on cliffs; the latter were recorded as probably breeding. The results are shown in Figure 1. Note that apart from one area on Samba, vultures were only found on Socotra.

All surveys were undertaken during October–April and not during the dry monsoon period of May–September. This latter period might result in spatial changes, with vultures following the regular patterns of transhumance (up in hot weather, down in the cooler weather, Miranda Morris pers comm) though it is unlikely to affect the distribution shown in Figure 1. See also the 'Food' section below. It can be noticed that the proven breeding

Table 1. Total number of Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* recorded during each study visit (2–4 weeks) to Socotra, 1999–2011. Where counts were made on several dates at one general locality, the highest has been used.

1999	2000	2001	2004	2006	2007	2007	2008	2011	Mean
580	609	479	533	311	333	400	447	452	460

distribution correlates closely with the distribution of the limestone plateau, escarpments and cliffs.

Numbers recorded per visit: total of daily counts

On each visit to Socotra, 1999–2011, daily counts of vultures were made, attempting to avoid duplication and the totals are shown in Table 1. Coverage was not comprehensive with probably c15–20% of the viewable area of the island covered during a visit. The numbers at and around Hadibu were always the highest count and ranged from 80–340 individuals depending on how comprehensively counts were made; the second highest counts were around Qalansiya, the other town on Socotra. If the mean of the daytime counts in Hadibu (135) and Qalansiya (32) is subtracted from the mean of all the counts in Table 1 (460) and the resulting figure (210) is divided by the estimate of the percentage area of the island covered during a visit (say 20%) then an estimate of 1465 individuals is reached. To this should be added the Hadibu and Qalansiya mean counts, thus arriving at an island population estimate of 1630. If a 15% coverage is assumed then this estimate increases to 2120. During each visit we believe that the areas covered were representative of the whole island thus removing a possible source of bias, nevertheless some duplication of counts will undoubtedly have occurred.

Other observers visiting Socotra have aggregated their daily counts. In spring 1993, the OSME team recorded 618 in a week-long survey which covered parts of the northeast, central and southern plain (Kirwan *et al* 1996). In a seven-day period in September 2007, a total of 820 were counted along 224 km of different roads or tracks (J-M & F Thiollay *in litt* to SCDP). In a 13-day period in December 2009/January 2010 a total of 704 were counted (Colin Richardson pers comm). It is likely that these counts will, like ours, include duplications, but the extent is unknown.

Counts in the 1/10th degree recording squares

During each visit to a 1/10th degree square, 1999–2011, all vultures seen were counted and the highest count, irrespective of year, is shown in Table 2. Because of the mobility of vultures, and the fact they can travel up to 70 km/day for food (Cramp & Simmons 1980), these data must be treated with caution. However, as mentioned previously, we discovered much fidelity to sites and areas and the two squares with towns (O4, Qalansiya and U4, Hadibu) consistently held the largest

Table 2. Highest count of Egyptian Vultures, 1999–2011, in each of the 1/10th degree recording squares on Socotra.

Recording square	Highest count
N6	10
O4	115
O5	31
O6	6
P3	10
P4	5
P5	30
P6	10
P7	17
Q4	35
Q5	8
Q6	10
Q7	26
R4	35
R5	40
R6	10
R7	37
S4	41
S5	20
S6	28
S7	6
T4	50
T5	90
T6	40
T7	42
U4	341
U5	27
U6	28
U7	30
V4	68
V5	64
V6	20
V7	21
W4	20
W5	35
W6	45
X5	31
X6	13
Y5	36
Y6	23
Z5	21
Total	1575

Table 3. Summary of daytime counts of Egyptian Vultures in towns and larger settlements, 1999–2011.

Settlement location	Recording square(s)	Range of counts *	Mean count
Hadibu	U4	82–175	135
Qalansiya	O4	20–55	32
North coast settlements to east of Hadibu	V4, W4, X4 & Y5		90
North coast settlements to the west of Hadibu	R4, S4, S5 & T4	45–95	70
Western Skand/Zirag/Firmhen settlements	T5	40–80	60
Nogid plain settlements	Q7, R7, S7, T7, U7, V7 & W7	75–125	110
Ma'alah plain settlements	O5		40
Wadi Ayhaft settlement		35–90	40
Wadi Denegehen settlement	U4	15–25	20
SW coastal settlements	X6 & Y6		30
Total			627

* not always possible to calculate as comprehensive counts not always made.

numbers. Despite obvious biases the total of the highest numbers recorded in each square (1600) is close to that reached by the previous method.

Settlement counts

During 1999–2011 regular daytime counts of Egyptian Vultures were made in Hadibu and Qalansiya and in many larger villages and small settlements throughout the island. We soon found that a pattern emerged and that counts at any one town or village (and even small settlements of 2–10 houses) were surprisingly similar on each visit over the 13-year period. Table 3 summarises the counts made at the larger settlements and settlement groups in named areas and the town counts.

The total in Table 3 does not include counts made at the smaller settlements and their immediate environs, many of which were in the more remote areas of the island. Because of their remoteness probably less than 100 settlements were visited and at these, daytime counts of vultures varied from none to c10 with an average of about three per settlement. The number of such small settlements (with populations of less than 100 people) is given as 565, according to a census in 2004 (Elie 2007) thus giving a small settlement total of c1700 birds and a total for all settlement counts, including towns, of over 2300.

Line transects

For determining the populations of passerines and near passerines a system of recording using line transects of 60 m band width was developed. However, so that data could also be captured for large birds observed flying over (notably Egyptian Vulture, Socotra Buzzard and Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*) the band width for these was extended to 1 km. This we determined would provide a systematic method of collecting some population data that otherwise would have been difficult to obtain.

A total of 385 km of transects were undertaken 1999–2008 throughout the main island of Socotra. Because of the difficulties of access to many parts of the island it was not possible to randomly select the location for transects but, nevertheless, all squares, habitats and altitudes were surveyed. The analysis we adopted for determining the numbers of Egyptian Vultures is based upon summing the average sample density in each habitat type multiplied by the total area of that habitat type across the whole island. Thus for each habitat type the mean density of birds per km^2 is equal to total birds counted divided by total transect length multiplied by transect width: $\sum n_i / (w \times \sum l_i)$ where n_i is number of

birds counted in transect i , w is the width of the transect and l_i is number of km walked in transect i .

Knowledge of the area of the habitat in which vultures were observed (including 'fly-overs') enables a calculation of the population size for that habitat. So: population estimate for habitat X is the area of habitat X multiplied by the sample mean density of vultures in habitat X. The total island population estimate is the aggregation of the above for each habitat, giving a total of 2021 individuals. Because of the mobility of vultures and the fact that transects are not designed for estimating the population of fly-over birds, this method and calculations should be treated with caution as there is likely to be a bias to over-counting.

The population estimates reached by each method are given in Table 4. From this we suggest that a quotable figure for the population of Egyptian Vultures on Socotra, 1999–2011, is 1900, probably equating to 800 pairs, a figure determined with the help of age ratio counts below.

Age ratio counts

The only information we have on clutch size is that depicted in Plate 2, which shows an egg and a recently hatched chick, thus a clutch of two. Although over 30 nests were located most were very difficult to reach and just sitting birds could be observed. Three nests inspected each had one young (Plate 3), but whether these originated from a clutch of two is unknown. From 2006–2011 sample age counts were made of Egyptian vulture groups and the results are

Table 4. Population assessments of Egyptian Vultures on Socotra, by different methods, 1999–2011.

Totals of daily counts	1630–2120, mean 1875
Recording square counts	1600
Settlement calculation	2300
Line transects	2021



Plate 2. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* nest with egg and young, Socotra, 19 March 2009. © AS Suleiman



Plate 3. Videograb. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* at nest with nearly fledged young, Wadi Zirage, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter

Table 5. Sample age counts of Egyptian Vultures, 2006–2011.

	Total	adults	non adults	juvs only	% non adults	% juvs only
Feb/Mar 06	229	204	25	15	9.5	6.5
Feb/Mar 07	122	107	15	11	12	9
Feb/Mar 11	393	343	40	37	12.5	9.5
Oct/Nov 07	260	217	43	30	16.5	11.5
Oct/Nov 08	189	141	48	37	25	19.5

presented in Table 5. In addition, 820 vultures were aged during a week in September 2007 and a surprising 29.8% were first and second year birds (J-M & F Thiollay *in litt* to SCDP). In Dec 2009/Jan 2010 Colin Richardson (pers comm) estimated the number of juveniles in 704 birds seen to be 10–15%. The data in Table 5 broadly suggest that 85% of the vulture population are adults. Given a population of c1900 birds on Socotra this would suggest c800 pairs. (We have been careful not to interpret this as breeding pairs as the age of first breeding of Egyptian Vultures on Socotra is not known, but in some populations it can be as late as eight years old (Donazar *et al* 2002)). Whilst these data suggest good productivity for a species with an average lifespan of 14 years (BirdLife International 2011) they require more careful interpretation and comparison with other populations than we feel able to give here.

The population in a global context

The current estimate puts the world population of Egyptian Vultures at 21 400–67 200 individuals (BirdLife International 2011) with 10 500–16 800 individuals in Europe and 2500 individuals in the Middle East, though Jennings (2010) puts the Arabian population alone at 2000 pairs (over 4000 individuals). Thus the Socotra population of c1900 individuals (c800 pairs) represents c3–9% of the global population and over 45% of that in Arabia (including Socotra) using the figure in Jennings (2010). Clearly Socotra is of international importance for the conservation of this vulture, more so because the population appears to be healthy, whereas all others throughout its range are in serious, even catastrophic, decline.

Population history on Socotra

The Egyptian Vulture has been common on Socotra at least since ornithologists first visited the island over 100 years ago. Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes (1903) described it as 'very common at all our campsites' and in 1964 Forbes-Watson said it was 'one of the most obvious birds on Socotra' (Ripley & Bond 1966). Whilst they did not provide quantitative data, it is a reasonable assumption, given the current population, that there had been no major change over this period. Furthermore data collected over the last five years suggests healthy recruitment—see Table 5.

Why does Socotra have such a high population?

Over the last few decades, Egyptian Vulture populations have been seriously declining worldwide as a consequence of poisoning, human disturbance or the reduction in food availability (Cuthbert *et al* 2006). None of these are a problem on Socotra and that is probably the clue to the vultures' healthy population.

There is no persecution or disturbance of vultures, no evidence of direct poisoning, and no persistent pesticides are used in farming practices. There is a ready supply of food

thrown out by households as well as carcasses from feasts. Socotra has no dogs, which might compete for food (and which could cause poisons to be used at rubbish dumps to control feral animals) and the only other predator or scavenger (apart from the domestic cat which is sometimes found living ferally) are the introduced Lesser Indian Civets, which are nocturnal. Although rats are poisoned in towns (see 'Threats and conservation' and 'Education') there is no evidence that this is causing the poisoning of non-target species, such as Egyptian Vultures. However we are conscious of the fact that dead vultures are rarely found and there has been no tissue analysis of such birds.

The other highest populations in the Middle East are also on islands: c12 pairs on Masirah, Oman, and c30 pairs on the Farasans, Saudi Arabia (Jennings 2010). It is worthy of note that on Masirah there are no dogs other than possibly two feral individuals (Chris Hillman & Salim Al Saadi *in litt* to Jens & Hanne Eriksen) or other canids. However on the Farasans there are serious problems of predation by feral cats, White-tailed Mongooses *Ichneumia albicauda* and, to a lesser extent, dogs (Mohammed Shobrak pers comm) but it is unclear as to whether these impact the vulture population.

In the past it is unlikely that Socotra supported such a high population of vultures as there is no fossil evidence of large wild vertebrates ever existing on the island (Van Damme & Banfield 2011). Historically, therefore, their diet must have relied heavily on dead marine life such as beached cetaceans, turtles and seabird chicks, but this is speculation. Certainly there could not have been a large population.

On Socotra, whilst there was early human colonisation some 11 000 years ago, the first expansion of settlers occurred c3000 years ago (Cerny *et al* 2009, Van Damme & Banfield 2011). During this period the climate, being wetter, was more favourable for human population expansion (De Geest *et al* 2006). Furthermore, this was the time that settlers appeared to be introducing and experimenting with the best cattle and sheep to form domesticated herds and when these became a major component of the island's grazers (Van Damme & Banfield 2011). So it is likely that this was the time of a large increase in the Egyptian Vulture population, a situation parallel to that of the Canary islands, off



Plate 4. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* with white bill, a characteristic of race *gingianus* (but see text for discussion), Socotra, February 2009. © Rob Felix

northwest Africa, where it has been shown that colonization by Egyptian Vultures was able to take place after the arrival of human settlers along with their cattle (Agudo *et al* 2010).

Evidence of migration?

There is no evidence of migrant Egyptian Vultures on Socotra. No immigration has been observed and there is no apparent increase in numbers during spring, autumn or winter. Broad-winged soaring birds shun long sea crossings so migration to, or through, Socotra is highly unlikely. Whilst this is supported by the fact that other migrant soaring raptors are very rare or vagrant (Porter & Suleiman 2011), we are mindful that historically Egyptian Vultures and the Socotra Buzzard must have been able to reach the islands and only genetic studies such as those undertaken on the Canary islands (Agudo *et al* 2010) will be able to show the likely origin of the Socotran population.

An interesting observation was made in February 2009 when Rob Felix photographed a bird that superficially showed the characteristics of *gingianus*, the subspecies occurring in India (Plate 4). However, subsequent examination and discussion suggest this bird is of the nominate race and that the white bill resulted from abnormal pigmentation, especially as some toe nails were white and others had a black base. But it is a potential pitfall that could lead to misinterpretation of possible vagrancy.

ROOSTS

Egyptian Vultures leave their roosting sites at first light and return at dusk. A number of roosts were discovered throughout the island, birds typically spending the night on a cliff or in large trees near to a ready food supply. We counted these roosts as birds departed from very first light for one hour; most left their roost in the first 20 minutes. The largest roost was at Hadibu, on the cliffs, and especially *Sterculia africana socotranica* trees near Ras Hebak just to the west of the capital (Plate 5). The highest Hadibu count was on 26 October 2008 when RFP observed 341, counting from a rooftop, as birds flew in to the town from



Plate 5. Videogram. Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* roosting at dusk on *Sterculia africana* trees, near Ras Hebak, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter

their roost sites, at first light, from the south and west. Many would have been missed as they start to leave roosts before it is light enough to count easily and also areas to the east of Hadibu, where birds also roost, could not be observed from the observation spot. On 10 August 2011 (during the dry monsoon) ASS and colleagues made a comprehensive count of birds roosting at the three main sites around Hadibu and these totalled 266.

Roost counts at Hadibu in February and March were lower (112 in Feb 2004, 142 in Feb 2007 and 208 in Feb 2011), possibly due to this being the height of the breeding season with many adults remaining at their nest sites. At sunset on 24 December 2009, 210 birds were counted crossing to the west of Hadibu from their daytime feeding places in the town, spiralling up and disappearing towards escarpments to the west of town to roost (Colin Richardson pers comm). Away from Hadibu, roosts were much smaller with the highest count being up to 60 in *Sterculia africana* trees at Wadi Denegehen (also in recording square U4). Other roosts discovered never exceeded 26 (at Sero February 2007) and all observed were on limestone cliffs.

THE BREEDING SEASON

An Egyptian Vulture has a long breeding season with up to c4.5 months from when the first egg is laid to the young flying (Cramp & Simmons 1980); this includes a fledging period of up to 80 days (Donazar & Ceballos 1989). With the dry monsoon sweeping the island May–September, with winds of up to 100 km/h, we were curious as to the effect this might have on the timing of the breeding season on Socotra. The summary of our observations is given in Table 6. This suggests that Egyptian Vultures can be actively involved with breeding from October for eight months at least and that some young will be fledging at the start of the monsoon period. Indeed the young bird and egg in Plate 2 would, if they survived, have fledged at the very end of May. There is then a further period until it is able to soar which Donazar & Ceballos (1989) showed could be up to 28 days, which, if the case on Socotra, could be right in the heart of the monsoon

HABITAT AND NEST SITE

The Egyptian Vulture breeds typically on the widespread limestone cliffs and escarpments which provide a host of nesting caves (Figure 1, Plates 6 & 7). Availability of nesting sites seems not to be a factor that limits the population, nor is competition from other cliff-nesting birds such as the Socotra Buzzard and Peregrine Falcon.

Nests are built in the highest available location on cliffs; we have never observed nests on trees. The same nest site can be used for many years and the nest structure made from a variety of materials including wool from sheep and goats, fish bones, animal skin, sticks and even animal (including human) excrement. Nests have a bad smell and old nests can be large in size—up to one metre diameter.

Vultures can be found feeding anywhere where food is available and thus can be encountered throughout the island, but especially near towns, villages and settlements.

Table 6. Summary of observed breeding activities of Egyptian Vultures on Socotra, 1993–2011.

Display	Oct–Mar, with no obvious peak period
Copulation	End Oct–end Feb, with no obvious peak period
Nests with eggs	Feb–late Mar
Nests with young	Feb–late Mar
Nests with incubating birds (eggs or young)	End Oct–May, with most observed in Feb and Mar
Very recently fledged juveniles	Most observed Feb



Plate 6. Limestone cliffs, typical breeding site for Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus*, southeast Socotra, February 2007. © RF Porter



Plate 7. Typical highland landscape where Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* nest, Haggier mountains, Socotra, October 2008. © RF Porter

Even a picnic or overnight camp will quickly attract vultures. The beach at the fish souk at Hadibu sees large gatherings as can the remains of goat and cattle carcasses after a feast.

FOOD

We observed vultures feeding on any edible organic garbage, especially meat or fish, discarded in towns and villages and after picnics. The Socotri usually throw out their food remains (including cooked food) for the goats and the vultures take advantage of this. Road kill victims are also eaten (Plate 8).

At first light vultures arrive at any settlement to await food remains and in Hadibū a count of vultures that are actually visible sitting on walls, roof tops and high perches can easily top 100, and there are probably three times that number present. On the occasion of a wedding festival the remains of the slaughtered goats and cattle can result in very large gatherings. The largest we recorded was 175 on 3 March 2011 on the outskirts of Hadibū, when 3 cows and 20 goats were the vultures' menu (Plate 9). On that occasion there was a constant procession of birds arriving and leaving, so the actual number taking advantage of the feast would have been much higher. It was also interesting to note that within c10 km from Hadibū on this and the following day few vultures were seen; normally there would have been several around all settlements and lunch in the field would always attract 10–20 birds.



Plate 8. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* feeding on Lesser Indian Civet *Viverricula indica* roadkill, Socotra, October 2008. © RF Porter



Plate 9. Videograb. Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* feeding on remains of wedding feast, Hadibū, Socotra, March 2011. © RF Porter



Plate 10. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* feeding on dead fish on beach at Hadibu, February 2006.
© RF Porter



Plate 11. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* with dead rat *Rattus rattus* (for young in nest), Wadi Zirage, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter



Plate 12. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* drinking, Socotra, February 2007. © RF Porter

Vultures also congregate on the beach near a fish souk or where boats were arriving after the morning catch, to feed on fish remains (Plate 10). The beach at Hadibu near the fish souk rarely had less than 20 vultures at any one time. Other items of food included cattle and human dung (which may explain why Socotra is marvellously free of human excrement), dead crabs and dead rats (Plate 11). For the significance of the latter see 'Threats and conservation'. Gatherings at sources of fresh water, such as wadi estuaries, were frequently observed and drinking seemed to be a regular requirement (Plate 12).

BEHAVIOUR AND DISPLAY

The most commonly observed display, October–March, is the formation-flying pair: one bird slightly above the other and tilting gently as they fly in formation. This sequence may be broken by suddenly tumbling together and occasionally talon-grappling. This display has been well described and interpreted in the Egyptian Vulture (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Mundy *et al* 1992). Two forms of behaviour that seem specific to the birds on Socotra



Plate 13. Mutual preening by Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* is common and will often involve three birds, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter



Plate 14. Threesomes are not uncommon, Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus*, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter



Plate 15. Two Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* adopt the 'fallen-angel' position, Socotra, October 2008. © RF Porter

were described in Porter & Quiroz (2010). The first involves the establishment of social gatherings at which there is much mutual preening and apparent pair-bonding interactions, which could also involve three birds (Plate 13). Such mutual preening was also observed in feeding groups and was often a precursor to copulation, again sometimes a third bird would try to join in (Plate 14). A second behaviour was the 'fallen-angel' display (Plate 15) which is probably a 'threat display and response' by two males (Porter & Quiroz 2010).

It will be noted in the photographs that many birds are stained rusty-orange, some very heavily; this is a feature that is well known in the Egyptian Vulture as a result of iron staining from the soil (Cramp & Simmons 1980). However on Socotra the degree of staining seems unusually high (higher than RFP has ever seen before), no doubt because on Socotra soils formed in red clay-loams with high iron contents resulting from chemical weathering of granite and limestone are widely distributed (Pietsch & Kuhn 2009). Vultures can frequently be observed on the island sunning themselves, to maintain feather care, spreading their wings in a curve around them on the ground and laying still for several minutes at a time.

THREATS AND CONSERVATION

There seems to be no immediate threat to the Egyptian Vulture population on Socotra. The Socotri do not persecute it, nor is it trapped for selling (as we have observed with Socotra Buzzard and Common Kestrel). In the future, urbanisation and greater hygiene and sanitation are likely to have the most profound effect.

The building of metalled roads in the last ten years (before that there were none) has resulted in faster driving and this has resulted in roadkills (Plate 16), probably of vultures that have come to the road to feed on a previous roadkill of a civet or occasionally a goat. In autumn 2008, for example, we counted eight vulture roadkills in three weeks. However, since 2008, crudely built speedbumps to slow traffic to protect goats may result in fewer vulture deaths.

Zinc phosphide rat killer (Plate 17) is commonly used to kill rats in the towns of Hadibu and Qalansiya where there are large numbers (Abduljameel Abdullah pers comm). Provided it is correctly used according to the instructions the risk of secondary poisoning by zinc phosphide is minimal (Marsh 1987) and thus would not appear to be a threat to scavenging birds such as Egyptian Vultures. It should also be mentioned in this context that Temephros used for malaria control on Socotra is a very dangerous toxic substance through the food chain (Van Damme & Banfield 2011), but again there is no evidence that this has caused the death of any vulture. There are no dogs on Socotra and thus the vulture is the top scavenger at rubbish dumps, and animal carcasses. But more importantly there is no need to put out poison at rubbish dumps to control feral dogs as has been the case in other countries.

The veterinary drug diclofenac is not used on Socotra (Abdul Rahman Al-Iryani pers comm). In Asia, and more recently Africa, diclofenac has been shown to be one of the



Plate 16. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* roadkill, near Qalansiya, Socotra, February 2006. © RF Porter



Plate 17. The rat poison used on Socotra. © Abduljameel Abdullah

main threats to *Gyps* vultures (Woodford *et al* 2008) with birds feeding on the carcasses of cattle that have been treated with the drug. Until we know whether the Egyptian Vulture is also susceptible, this and any other untested veterinary drugs may well pose threats. It is known, for example, from other studies (see Blanco *et al* 2007, 2009, Blanco & Lemus 2010) that other veterinary drugs, mainly antibiotics, are affecting vulture populations in Europe. It is therefore essential that any veterinary product or chemical used in the environment on Socotra is appropriately tested and screened.

The main conservation measure should be to continue to monitor the use of any veterinary products used in sheep, goat and cattle husbandry. The impact of eg diclofenac on *Gyps* vulture populations elsewhere in the world must not be repeated on Socotra. It is also important that the tissues of any dead vultures are collected for chemical analysis. In addition the national laws protecting wildlife and controlling the use of poisons, pesticides and veterinary products should be strengthened, in line with international legislation.

Although we are unaware of any vultures, nor indeed any other scavengers such as Brown-necked Ravens, having been found dead in circumstances that might suggest they had been poisoned, it is essential that the risk of direct or secondary poisoning is never underestimated. This is a subject that requires further study

EDUCATION

Environmental education on Socotra should include specific mention of the unique wildlife of the archipelago and the internationally important populations of birds such as the Egyptian Vulture. This should be aimed not only at schools, but also tourists and decision-makers, the latter through appropriate national and international workshops and conferences.

The school syllabus should encourage wildlife projects for students and in this respect the Egyptian Vulture being common and easily seen would be ideal for study. It has already been included in the popular and widely available *Birds & Plants of Socotra* (in Arabic and English) and introduced to children in the form of a 'build-a-bird' model (Plate 18). This model was used as part of a trial for a Darwin Initiative project (that was never completed) to promote an understanding amongst children of the importance of their natural heritage. Amongst the communities on Socotra, education about the safe use of poisons for rat control should be instigated.



Plate 18. 'Build a bird' Egyptian Vulture used in schools to teach conservation, Socotra. © RF Porter

VULTURES IN THE LIVES OF THE SOCOTRI: USES, MYTHOLOGY, SORCERY, MEDICINE AND POETRY

This paper would not be complete if we failed to mention the Egyptian Vulture's place in the actions, hearts and minds of the Socotri, and we wish to thank Miranda Morris for her

assistance with this. Her knowledge of the Socotran language and the way of life of the people of the islands, past and present, is second to none.

The Socotri treat the bird with respect. Not only does it help clean up settlements by eating all kinds of refuse (indeed the bird is often now referred to as the 'Soqotran municipality'), but it also acts as a guide to shepherds when an animal is dying, or when a lamb or kid is born as it flies to feed on the placenta. Vultures also reveal when people have butchered for a special meal by flying to congregate around the carcass. Vultures are never trapped, nor the nestlings taken as food, as is the case with several other bird species on the island.

A Socotran view of the Egyptian Vulture

Here is a literal translation of a text recorded by a Socotri from the eastern highlands, the late Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki, for Miranda Morris: "The vulture here on Soqatra: we teach our children never to harm them, never to kill them and never to play around with them. They are a great help to us and we like them. If anything has died, or if something has given birth to dead young, the vultures clear this up for us. They clear up excreta from both humans and animals. They remove anything unpleasant from us so that there is never an unpleasant smell. The dung of the vulture is used as medicine to rub on sores in children. We are fond of them and we protect and look after them. We feel no dislike of them and would never harm them. It is thanks to them that the island has such a sweet smell and is so clean. If you see vultures circling in the air anywhere, in a valley, over a rock, above a pit, you know that there is something there for them to work on."

"Like cats and some reptiles, a vulture can also be the familiar of a witch, or can be the witch herself in disguise, come to spy on us and cause harm. This is another reason that these creatures are not harmed, since to harm them might arouse the anger of a witch and cause her to seek revenge. Those who have a 'spirit' or 'special powers' of their own are always able to tell when one of these creatures (*ie* vulture, wild cat, reptile) is involved in sorcery."

The Egyptian Vulture in traditional medicine

Vulture droppings, dried to a powder and smeared over the body, were formerly regarded as a cure for a variety of skin diseases and conditions, and especially those believed to be a result of sorcery or of having angered the underground spirits (by having excreted, urinated or washed in a place special to them). Multiple sores on the scalp were treated by shaving the hair and applying a paste of vulture droppings mixed with water, or water and salt. The same mixture was rubbed into the skin of a child with a fever. Fever was also treated with vulture feathers: the wing of a vulture or a handful of vulture feathers were placed beside the fire until they began to smoulder and then the patient was placed in the smoke to be fumigated; at the same time he/she also inhaled the smoke. A vulture feather was burned under the patient's nose to treat fainting and dizziness. Swellings were treated with dried vulture droppings: they were put at the side of the fire and the patient was bathed in the smoke. Mastitis in goats and sheep was treated by smearing the inflamed udder with a paste of droppings and water, or water and salt.

There are reports (as yet unconfirmed) of vulture leg-bones having once been adapted to make a simple pipe or flute, much in the same way as were stems of the iconic tree of the island, the 'dragon's blood' tree *Dracaena cinnabari*.

The Egyptian Vulture in stories, songs and poems

Miranda Morris collected and translated the following delightful stories and songs from Socotra.

The vulture as a witch: the vulture used to be considered to be the familiar of witches or even a witch herself, flying here and there and perching on buildings, observing what was going on below.

There is a poem in which a woman says: "Would I could be a vulture, a young grey one circling above you! Snatching strips of the fillet meat from along the backbone, and grabbing at the ribcage meat too!" (The relevance is that these two desirable cuts of meat were customarily eaten by men and not usually offered to women.)

The vulture as a 'bride': these lines are an example of the use Socotri poets made of 'code-language': that is, words or phrases with more than one meaning, the true intention of the poet only being intelligible to those in the know, who share some secret knowledge with the poet, or to people of superior intellect and insight.

In this poem the joke turns on the fact that the popular women's names 'Sa'ida', 'Sa'adiya' are from the same root (*s'd*) as the Socotri term for the Egyptian vulture, 'sow'iydo'. A man posed this riddle to his nephew, claiming to offer him a bride called Sa'ida: "Wouldn't you like me to arrange a marriage between you and the young girl called 'Sa'ida', one always busily on the move, never still? So that she can sweep out your home for you, and bring the butter-churning to a successful conclusion?"

But the nephew was not taken in by his uncle, and understood the riddle—the offered 'bride' was in fact a vulture. He composed this couplet in reply: "She (*ie* the bride you pretend to offer me) is famous for her clumsiness and stupidity: she pours out the buttermilk from the butter-skin at midday! But you have not yet seen how passionate she is in her devotion to her father-in law (*ie* you, uncle)! She swears that every morning the two of you will greet each other warmly on the nose!" (the traditional Socotri greeting). The uncle had been well and truly beaten. Furious at the suggestion that he might embrace a vulture, he stalked off. (The relevance of the first line is firstly that no woman would do her butter-churning at midday, and secondly that vultures were well known for pecking at the leather skins which were used to hold milk, making holes in them and spilling the contents.)

A story about the wild cat and the vulture. There are two versions of this story. In one version the wild cat accuses the vulture of stinking of carrion and excrement, and tells her that it is because of her terrible smell that people chase her away. The other version has the wild cat coming across a goat which has just given birth in the wild. She starts to feed on the placenta, and when the vulture arrives to share in the feast, the wild cat tells it to go away: her smell is unbearable.

In both versions, the vulture retorts in a poem: "You, wild cat, do not smell as sweet as the *fegehun* plant (the name given to various sweet-smelling plants in the Socotra highlands)! Nor as sweet as the (meat) of the green pigeon. Nor as enticing as the smell of the pale-coloured goats when they shake out their coats." The vulture then criticises the wild cat, and says: "As for you, wild cat, why do you go for the necks of the goats? They hate you for it!"

The wild cat composes a couplet in reply: "It is not me they blame, but their owner. The one who didn't take the trouble to calculate carefully the five months (*ie* of their pregnancy, and bring the goat down to the settlement to give birth)!"

A story about the vulture and the raven. A raven found a vulture sitting beside a sick cow, waiting for it to die so that it could pluck out its eyes and tongue. The sun went down and it began to grow dark, but still the cow had not died. The raven sensed rain in the air, and said to the vulture: "Let's go and find shelter for the night", for he was unwilling to leave

the vulture alone with the cow in case the cow died and the vulture got all the meat. But the vulture was very hungry and unwilling to leave the cow, and she replied with this couplet:

"It won't rain when the moon is shining.

It won't rain at night when the sky is so clear."

But the raven composed a couplet in reply, and said: "It can indeed rain even though the moon is shining. Nightfall can indeed bring rain, even if the skies are clear: rain strong enough to cause a roofed building to collapse, despite the strong columns supporting it." The raven then flew off and sought shelter on its own. It rained heavily in the night. The next morning, when it flew back to where it had left the vulture and the cow, the prescient raven got four eyes to eat — the two of the dead cow and the two of the vulture which had died in the rain.

FUTURE RESEARCH ON EGYPTIAN VULTURES OF SOCOTRA

The following are considered to be priorities for future research and undertaken under the aegis of Yemen's Environment Protection Agency.

1. Undertake a more refined population assessment. The methodology for this should build on that described in this paper and should incorporate mapping of territorial breeding pairs (ideally in randomly selected squares) together with systematic counts at roosting sites.
2. Establish a long-term population monitoring programme. This should preferably be conducted by Socotrans who have been appropriately trained. Several areas with a good population of breeding pairs should be chosen for regular (say 5 yearly) monitoring of occupancy and breeding performance; the roost sites in the environs of Hadibu should be counted twice yearly.
3. Consider a banding programme within the routine monitoring to establish longevity and movements.
4. Research the fossil/sub-fossil bank and conduct genetic studies in an attempt to determine how long Egyptian Vultures have been on Socotra and from where they might have originated.
5. Introduce a system to measure the level of poisons/pesticides and veterinary drugs in vulture tissues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the UK Darwin Initiative for funding the visits made in 1999–2004 and 2007. Other visits were privately funded but with support from BirdLife International and the Wetland Trust. During the surveys, we wish to acknowledge the support of team members who joined us, namely Simon Aspinall, Mike Evans, David Flumm, Rod Martins, Omar Al Saghir and Nadim Taleb; also Yohei Suzuki and Tatsou Mori for companionship in the field in 2011 while they were filming vultures and other wildlife on Socotra for Japanese NHK.

Dick Newell gave valuable advice on methodology for measuring vulture populations and we would like to thank the following for answering questions so clearly and promptly: Abduljameel Abdullah, Peter Castell, Serge Elie, Jens and Hanne Eriksen, Rob Felix, Ian Harrison and Colin Richardson.

We would especially like to thank Miranda Morris for her comments and valuable contribution to the section on vultures in the lives of the Socotri. The stories and poems chosen are from the forthcoming *Island Voices: The Oral Art of Soqotra* by Miranda Morris and Tanuf Salim Nuh Di-Kishin. We wish to thank Abdulraqeab Al-Okaishi, Ivaylo Angelov and Kay Van Damme for reading an early draft of the paper and making many helpful suggestions and comments. Last, but not least, we thank Laura Gangoso for her help with references and meticulous and incisive comments on our final draft, which we have tried to faithfully reflect.

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The first record of Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis* in Jordan

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The breeding range of the Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis* extends from eastern Turkey and Iraq eastwards to central Asia (Clements *et al* 1993). The Middle Eastern breeding populations are migratory and winter mainly in India. Vagrants have been recorded in Kuwait and Israel (Shirihai 1996, Snow & Perrins 1998). Recent records of breeding birds along the Euphrates, in Syria in 2003 (Murdoch 2005) and in southeast Turkey since 1977 (Snow & Perrins 1998), indicate a possible westward range expansion within the Middle East. We document here the first record of this species for Jordan, at Al-Shaumari reserve ($31^{\circ} 45' 11''$ N, $36^{\circ} 45' 22''$ E), which is located near Azraq in the eastern desert. On 1st June 2011 while carrying out a ringing training-session at the reserve, two small sparrows were trapped in the same mist net during the 08.00 h morning round. The first bird to be inspected, the female, was a small sparrow with a conical, pointed beak. The bases of the throat feathers were yellow, but this feature could not be seen unless they were parted. After checking the bird guides, the bird was identified as a female Yellow-throated Sparrow (see following description). The male was handled after the female and was immediately identified as of this species. Both were measured, ringed and photographed, and then released on site. The record has been accepted by the Jordan Bird Records Committee (JBRC).

Female (Plate 1): small sparrow-like bird; crown feathers were erected by the bird while being handled; bill was long, conical and pointed; wing length 77 mm, tail length 50 mm; weight 19.3 g. Upperparts were generally pale brown and featureless, with two pale wing-bars, the upper bar (on the tips of the median coverts) being more distinct. The underparts were featureless off-white, paler towards the belly. The bases of the central throat feathers were yellow (a feature usually not seen in the field). The head markings included a pale (off-white) supercilium and a narrow dark eye-stripe. The iris was black, the tarsus pale brown and the bill pale brown-pinkish, darker towards the tip. This bird did not have an obvious brood patch or juvenile feathers.

Male (Plate 2): Same shape as female; wing length 81 mm, tail 53 mm, weight 19.2 g. The upper-parts were uniform pale brown, with two pale wing-bars, the upper (median covert bar) being very distinct; the lesser coverts were partly chestnut-brown. The breast was



Plate 1. Female Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*, Shaumari reserve, Jordan, 1 June 2011. © Lou'ai Azzam RSCN



Plate 2. Male Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*, Shaumari reserve, Jordan, 1 June 2011. © Lou'ai Azzam RSCN

pale brown-greyish with a well-defined yellow patch on the throat; the belly was much paler. The head was generally pale grayish-beige with a narrow, dark grey eye-stripe and indistinct pale supercilium. The iris and bill were black.

Subsequent field visits carried out by YS to Shaumari in June 2011 did not produce further records. However, the site holds a large population of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* and a few pairs of Spanish Sparrows *Passer hispaniolensis*, so a small breeding population of Yellow-throated Sparrows could easily be overlooked. They were caught in the same mist nest, and thus appeared to be associated, and were recorded during the breeding season/near the end of the spring migration period for this species (Snow & Perrins 1998, Kirwan *et al* 2008). The small patch of habitat where they were caught is unusual for Shaumari reserve and the Azraq area; it consists of irrigated plantations of tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp) and large eucalyptus trees near small buildings. The surroundings of Azraq also include potentially suitable agricultural habitat. Given the well-documented spread in Turkey (Kirwan *et al* 2008) and possible expansion into Syria, the colonization of Shaumari and Azraq by Yellow-throated Sparrows seems a strong possibility.

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Greater Spotted Eagles *Aquila clanga* summering in Saudi Arabia?

JEM BABBINGTON & PHILIP ROBERTS

The Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* is on the IUCN Red List and is classed as vulnerable (BirdLife International 2011). It is a regular passage migrant and winter visitor to the Arabian peninsula, with most records coming from the better recorded countries of the United Arab Emirates and Oman. The number of sightings of the species in the United Arab Emirates has increased in recent years (UAE Bird Database), which is also the case in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia (Meadows 2011, PR pers obs) suggesting the wintering population in the Arabian peninsula is increasing. Birds winter in all Arabian peninsula countries and are generally present from late September until late April or early May (Pedersen & Aspinall 2010, Al-Sirhan 2011, Eriksen *et al* 2003 updated 2011, King 2006, 2011).

Winter records are now well documented with detailed reports by Harbard & Wolstencroft (1992), Symens & Alsuhaiman (1996), Loble (2007) and Meadows (2011). The birds recorded in late April are quite late for migrants but Dick Forsman (pers comm) mentioned young birds often linger in spring unlike adults, and late April is not too late for juvenile Great Spotted Eagles to be seen on their wintering grounds.

Whilst bird watching in the early morning of 21 July 2011 at Sabkhat Al Fasl (Jubail), Eastern province, Saudi Arabia, we saw a second calendar year Greater Spotted Eagle (Plate 1). This is a very early record for the species and could well relate to a bird that had spent the summer there. The same bird was seen again by us at the same site 18 August 2011. It looked in good health, appeared to be able to fly normally and was moulting some feathers including its flight feathers.

The only published information we could find regarding summer records of the species in Saudi Arabia was a mention of immature birds being present at Qatif (70 km south of Jubail) in May and June (Bundy *et al* 1989). These records involved three birds (Graham Bundy pers comm) with one seen on 26 and 27 June 1980 that was thought to be a second summer (3rd calendar year) individual. The other two records were immatures seen in Qatif where one was seen 30 May 1980 and the other 15 May 1982. It was thought likely that a few non-breeding immature birds summered in the area when the habitat was more favourable, unfortunately the site was developed from late 1981 (Graham Bundy pers comm).



Plate 1. Second calendar year Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Eastern province, Saudi Arabia, 21 July 2011. © Philip Roberts

PR has three previous records of Greater Spotted Eagles in the summer at Sabkhat Al Fasl, all of which were 2nd calendar year birds. Specifically: one seen 29 June, 13 July, 27 July, 10 August and 17 August 2007; one 28 August 2009 and one 12 August 2010. Sabkhat Al Fasl is a man-made wetland site that is located in the central coastal lowlands on the southwest border of Jubail industrial city. It consists of a large sabkha (salt flat) area surrounded by landfill and divided up by sand dams, fed by excess treated organic waste water from Jubail industrial city (Symens & Alsuhaiibany 1996). Some water is present at this site all year and some parts are vegetated by large stands of *Phragmites* reeds and *Tamarix* scrub. This habitat is the favoured site for the wintering birds and would presumably be attractive to summering Greater Spotted Eagles.

We have only been able to find one summer record of the species from other Arabian peninsula countries and this came from Bahrain, where one was recorded throughout June 1984 at Al-Areen and what was presumed to be the same bird again present from August 1984–March 1985 in a small grove by Ra's Tubli (Nightingale & Hill 1993). It is perhaps worth mentioning that c15 pairs of Greater Spotted Eagles formerly bred in northern Israel but this population is now extinct; last nests were recorded in the 1960s (Shirihai 1996).

This note documents seven summer records of the Greater Spotted Eagle in Saudi Arabia. This suggests that a very small number may spend the summer and perhaps other instances may come to light enabling us to get a clearer picture of the status of this species in the Arabian peninsula during the summer months.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Graham Bundy for supplying details of the Qatif summer records and Brian Meadows for information on the Bahrain birds and informing us of the Israeli breeding records. We also acknowledge the help of Dick Forsman and Mike Evans. Chris Harbard and James Wolstencroft supplied a copy of their report and Tommy Pedersen supplied all records of Greater Spotted Eagle on the United Arab Emirates database.

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The first record for Cyprus of Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus*

BIRTAN GÖKERİ & WAYNE J FULLER

The Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus* is a pale-brown stocky finch with a heavy, pale yellowish bill and as the name suggests pink in the primaries. The nominate subspecies is found from Turkey to northern Pakistan (Porter & Aspinall 2010, Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The other subspecies *alienus* is found in the Atlas mountains of northwest Africa. This species is found inhabiting mountain slopes of semi-arid regions, often at high altitude in areas of sparse vegetation and sometimes nests in rock crevices. It feeds on seeds, and during the winter months descends in flocks to lower altitudes to feed in agricultural fields. In Turkey, the breeding population appears to be increasing (Kirwan *et al* 2008).

On 27 November 2010 at 11.30 h a group of five individuals were seen briefly in trees by BG and one photographed (Plate 1a, b), at a water tank near the village of Sadrazamkoy (GPS 35.387810° N, 32.948460° E). This area is a well known bird watching location particularly during spring and autumn migration. The habitat surrounding the site is a patchwork of agricultural fields and aborescent matorral juniper type habitat (Fuller *et al* 2009). The species was not immediately identified; however, after consultation and via Kuşkor's sightings committee it was clear from the photographic evidence that the species concerned was in fact Crimson-winged Finch. Pink in the wings was seen when the birds flew away. The pink loral region and dark cap are visible in Plate 1. This is the first record of Crimson-winged Finch for the island of Cyprus (Richardson 2011).



Plate 1a, b. A Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus* 27 November 2010, Cyprus. © Birtan Gökeri

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Two Shikra *Accipiter badius* records from Turkey

LUKE (DOĞAN) SMITH

With Shikras *Accipiter badius* recorded recently from Azerbaijan (Heiss & Gauger 2009) and Armenia (Ananian *et al* 2010), I am reporting two records of this species from Turkey. Northeast Turkey, along the Black sea coast and Çoruh river valley, contains one of the largest raptor migration bottlenecks in the OSME region. In September 2009, I conducted a sparrowhawk *Accipiter* ringing project in cooperation with local falconers along this bottleneck. During the project I continually questioned falconers about rare raptor species they had captured, especially whether they had caught Shikras.

Several falconers told me of a man, Oğuz Balmumcu, near the city of Hopa (Artvin province, Turkey), who a few years before had trapped a sparrowhawk that met the description. Upon meeting Oğuz, I was excited to see that he had even had the bird photographed with himself from various angles (Plates 1, 2a–d). In the photos it can be seen that it was indeed an immature Shikra. The bird was trapped in early September 2006 when it was travelling in the same migration path as the majority of other raptor species that day. The trapping location was c4 km east of Hopa. At first, all the falconers thought it was a hybrid between a Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* and Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*. Immature Shikras have yellow eyes like a Eurasian Sparrowhawk, but



Plate 1. Oğuz Balmumcu with Shikra *Accipiter badius* near Hopa, Turkey, September 2006 (photo of a photo). © Luke (Doğan) Smith



Plate 2a-d. Further photos of photos of the Shikra *Accipiter badius* of Plate 1. © Luke (Doğan) Smith

vertical streaking on the breast as a Levant Sparrowhawk. Oğuz also described the nature of the bird as being much calmer than a Eurasian Sparrowhawk. After feeding, watering, and showing the bird to many other falconers, he released it back onto the migration path at the same location it had been trapped.

While discussing this photographed bird many other falconers had gathered at Oğuz's house. After seeing the photos of this bird and hearing the stories about its nature, I asked if they had seen any other birds like this one. I also described to them the adult form. Oğuz and the other falconers living near his home had never seen an adult before. Oğuz remembered that he had seen an immature just like this one about forty years ago. During the late 1960s another man had trapped it three km north of where he had trapped this one. Oğuz explained that, after he trapped this Shikra, immediately the memory of the one he had seen before came into his mind. After observing this second one he remembered that the behavior of that first Shikra was just the same. Another older falconer confirmed that he had also seen this first Shikra and that it had been kept in captivity for some time. These two birds are the only records I have found of Shikra in Turkey, obtained after questioning over 500 sparrowhawk falconers who have been trapping raptors since childhood. All of the falconers were of middle to elderly age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my sincere gratitude to Ahmet Şenyürek for taking the time to listen to my raptor descriptions and for introducing me to Oğuz Balmumcu. Oğuz Balmumcu (Tepedeki market, Kuledibi Mahalesi, Hopa, Artvin) is my hero, for not only having seen the only two known Shikras in Turkey, but for taking good care of his and releasing it in great health.

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Breeding of Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* in Iraq

OMAR F AL-SHEIKHLY

In 2005 Nature Iraq started field surveys to establish Iraq's Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). Starting in the southern marshes, the programme extended to Kurdistan in 2007 and then, when the political situation had improved in summer 2009, surveys commenced in the arid rangelands and deserts of central and western Iraq which hitherto had been rather neglected (see eg Evans 1994). Further surveys aimed at finding the migratory stop-over sites for the critically-endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* began in these western areas in 2010. These seasonal field surveys, from 2009, in central and western Iraq covered 33 sites in a wide variety of habitats: desert, semi-desert, open grassland, low mountains and rocky hills, as well as marshlands and permanent wetlands.

During the surveys regular visits were also made to the local animal market in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province and c17 km west of Baghdad (Figure 1). Here, on 15 May 2009, an owlet (Plate 1) was found in a cage, waiting to be sold. It was identified as a juvenile Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*, later confirmed from my photos and description by Simon Aspinall, Richard Porter and Mohammad Shobrak. It was c40 days old (Peter Castell pers comm). The owlet showed a distinctive facial disc, creamy-sandy plumage and very pale, newly-developed flight-feathers; the breast markings were still developing. The eyes were large with yellow iris and the legs pale with medium length dark claws.

Enquiries revealed that the owlet was one of two chicks (the other had died) that had been collected by a hunter from a nest at Wadi Al Ubayiadh ($33^{\circ} 04' 34.38''$ N, $42^{\circ} 48' 53.47''$ E, Figure 1, Plate 2), an arid area of rocky hills between Al Rahaliya and Nekheab districts in Anbar province. The hunter indicated to me where to locate the nest site. The nest was in a hole in a cliff of moderate elevation, fecal droppings indicating where the adults had been roosting. I later observed the adults: they had a pale, rusty plumage with the lower breast and belly distinctly barred; the dark-lined facial disc surrounded orange eyes. The following year, on 10 June 2011, two



Plate 1. Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* c40 days old, 15 May 2009, animal market, Ramadi, Anbar province, Iraq. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly



Plate 2. Wadi Al Ubayiadh, between Al Rahaliya and Nekheab districts, Anbar province, Iraq. © Omar Fadil Al-Sheikhly



Figure 1. Map of Iraq. The open red circle shows the location of Ramadi. Further southwest, the red disc indicates Al-Raoudha area and southwest again the next red disc Wadi Al Ubayiadh, all Anbar province.

full-sized but young Pharaoh Eagle Owls (Plate 3) and an adult (Plate 4) were found in the market. They had been trapped at Al-Raoudha area ($32^{\circ} 59' 12.70''$ N, $43^{\circ} 18' 43.65''$ E, Figure 1) of Anbar province. These two records clearly indicate that the species is breeding in the western deserts of Iraq.

Vaurie (1960) listed a specimen of *Bubo bubo* that he had seen in the Chicago Natural History Museum that was collected in November 1937 at Al-Hadithah on the Euphrates in western Iraq. He noted that its wing measured 364 mm and its colour pattern was typical of *ascalaphus*. Further investigation located this skin at the now Field Museum in Chicago. It was photographed (Plate 5) and measured by the collection assistant, Mary Hennen. The total length was 48 cm; wing 364 mm and tail 195 mm. These are perfect for *ascalaphus*. She confirmed that the collector was R Clawson who, according to the Field Museum database, collected 15–20 birds of different species in Oct–Nov 1937 from Iraq and Syria.

Allouse (1953) indicated that the Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* breeds fairly commonly, mainly in northern Iraq, but with specimens recorded from Baghdad and Babylon. All were ascribed to the race *nikolskii* and he did not mention *ascalaphus*. Eagle Owls were also observed by Al-Dabbagh (1998) in the semi-deserts of central Iraq, but without indicating which taxon. Nature Iraq KBA surveys had hitherto only observed Eurasian Eagle Owls *Bubo bubo*, in the northern woody mountains and eastern hills of Iraq. The Pharaoh Eagle Owl is resident in Arabia with a patchy distribution with the nearest breeding in Kuwait, northern Saudi Arabia and one area in northeast Syria (Porter & Aspinall 2010).



Plate 3. (left) Two full-sized but young Pharaoh Eagle Owls *Bubo ascalaphus*, 10 June 2011, animal market, Ramadi, Anbar province, Iraq. © Omar Fadhl Al-Sheikhly

Plate 4. (right) Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*, 10 June 2011, animal market, Ramadi, Anbar province, Iraq. © Omar Fadhl Al-Sheikhly



Plate 5. Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* skin at the Field Museum, Chicago. Specimen collected November 1937 at Al-Hadithah on the Euphrates in western Iraq by R Clawson. © Mary Hennen/ Field Museum Chicago

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my colleagues in Nature Iraq for their continuing support and advice, Dave Willard and Mary Hennen for locating and measuring the specimen in the Field Museum, Chicago, Robert Prys-Jones and Peter Castell for helpful advice and Richard Porter for commenting on my first draft.

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REVIEWS

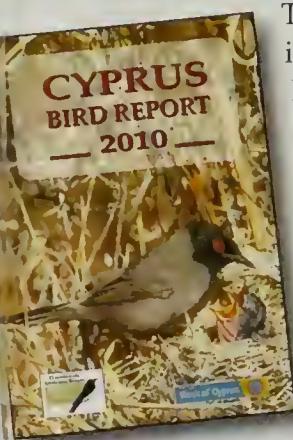
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This, in many ways bumper, issue of the Cyprus Bird Report not only includes the exhaustively detailed and *de rigueur* systematic list, but also has editor Colin Richardson's month-by-month overview of the birding year, as well as a series of short articles. These latter cover three additions to the island's bird list made during the year under review, a Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*, a White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis* and a group of five Crimson-winged Finches *Rhodopechys sanguineus*. Contrary to popular belief that might consider the peaks of spring and autumn migration to be the times to search for vagrants new to Cyprus's list, all of these were found in winter (in late November to early January). The remainder of the articles presented here cover autumn migration of waterbirds along the island's northern coast, the status of Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* on Cyprus since the early 1990s, and disturbing reports on the effects of the recent drought in Africa on Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* and other sub-Saharan migrants, as well as the apparent decline in one of the island's two breeding endemics, the Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*. A nice series of colour photographs, the annual ringing report, and colour maps showing the location of some of Cyprus's best birding sites, which adorn the inside front and back covers, round off this volume. Cyprus 'regulars' will already be confirmed readers of the annual report, but even potential one-off visitors will find something of interest herein.

Guy M Kirwan

Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsula: Zoology in the Middle East Suppl 3

Kasperek Verlag. 2011.

Hardback. 208 pages, colour and black-and-white photos, tables, maps and graphs.

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This special issue of *Zoology in the Middle East* is edited by Mike Knight, David Mallon and Philip Seddon, and comprises a series of specially invited contributions covering themes from a conference devoted to biodiversity conservation in Arabia held in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, in February 2010. The papers (all of which are also available for free .pdf download at the Kasperek Verlag website) are broken into three sections: 'regional approaches' (three contributions), 'species approaches' (six) and 'methodologies' (five). Three papers, one in the first and two in the second category, focus explicitly on birds (avian flyways in Arabia, satellite tracking of a Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, and population structure and migratory connectivity of MacQueen's Bustard *Chlamydota undulata* populations). However, it is a paper in the first section, the longest indeed of the entire volume at 57 pages, which is of greatest personal interest and whose contents will occupy the rest of this review.

Entitled "Past and present human impacts on the biodiversity of Socotra Island (Yemen): implications for future conservation", the contribution by Kay Van Damme and Lisa Banfield is a wide-ranging yet detailed but in parts dispiriting review of the prospects for wildlife conservation on this, the largest island in the Arabian sea region. Following



an introduction to the biodiversity of the archipelago, the authors go on to separately describe pre-21st century and current century human impacts on wildlife. They highlight how such impacts have been surprisingly limited until very recently, largely as the result of traditional practices (including transhumance) having been maintained until around the 1970s, if not later, and how some equilibrium between introduced and exotic animals and plants, including goats, a frequently very harmful presence for island biota, has been achieved, in part through their length of occupancy. Van Damme and Banfield emphasise throughout their communication that no extinctions have yet been recorded among well-studied taxonomic groups such as birds, molluscs and reptiles. While the authors repeat that many other groups still require much basic research, including the description of taxa, it might also be noted that a serious reappraisal of alpha taxonomy in birds has only been attempted within the course of the last decade and is still ongoing.

Thereafter, the two authors go on to quantify the major individual threats to the archipelago's biodiversity as of today, unleashed as the result of "an anthropogenic tsunami [that] currently seems to be sweeping over Socotra"; frightening words indeed. They describe and discuss the impacts, sometimes intertwined, of pollution/waste, tourism (a major threat that could scarcely have been envisaged until recently, even in 1993 when I visited the island as part of the OSME survey), the illegal trade in biota, habitat degradation, agriculture, habitat fragmentation, natural factors such as climate change, and species introductions (which already number about 100, despite examples of firm action in the face of such arrivals, most notably the recent eradication of the House Crow *Corvus splendens*). Perhaps surprisingly, climate change could wreak amazing havoc on an already largely arid ecosystem, in large part because the few 'wet refugia' on the islands, which are mini islands of endemism, could easily be eliminated as a result.

Before they close, with an overall appraisal of the possibilities for ecosystem-level conservation, which they consider essential and to depend on harnessing and developing traditional Socotri values and

traditions, Van Damme and Banfield provide a couple of examples of encouraging work to preserve the environment, and a comparison with the study, conservation and threats to biodiversity on Ecuador's Galápagos islands. Rather selfishly, I rather hope that at least one comparison between these two island groups—in the number of tourist visitors—never comes to pass. Long may Socotra remain (almost) as magnificent and wild as it was just 17 years ago at the time of the OSME survey, never mind at the time of first human arrivals (in the Lower Stone Age, c1.4–2.5 mya), though time for such delight in the islands' relatively near-virgin state is unfortunately rapidly running out.

Guy M Kirwan

Priority! The dating of scientific names in ornithology: a directory to the literature and its reviewers

Edward C Dickinson, Leslie K Overstreet, Robert J Dowsett & Murray D Bruce (eds). 2011

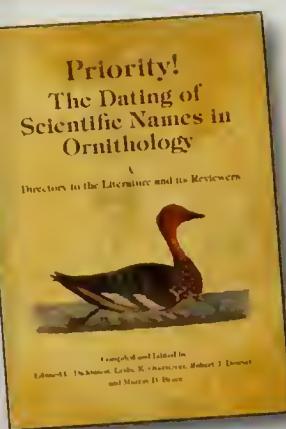
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This book is an important contribution to the literature on what most readers of *Sandgrouse* will consider to be, I suspect, a relatively esoteric subject of fundamentally marginal interest. In contrast, for some researchers, be they studying ornithological taxonomy, nomenclature or bibliography, *Priority!* should be viewed as nigh-on essential. It also serves, as the work's principal compilers explain, as the detailed underpinning to the dating of many scientific names in the forthcoming fourth edition of the Howard & Moore world checklist (which is likely to succeed the Peters checklist among academic ornithologists).

In addition to the book, which comprises three main sections, there is also a CD-ROM of supplementary material. The first part of the book includes an introduction to the ICZN Code's stipulations concerning the priority of scientific names, followed by an apparently exhaustive discussion of printing processes and the keynote terms that will



be used throughout the rest of the work, as well as a résumé of the compilers' sources and resources. There follows the directory itself, in two parts, books and journals, of which 148 and 121, respectively, are covered herein. Each publication is subject to a discussion of the rationale for considering that dates of some issues or volumes might prove problematic, with a code signalling whether the compilers consider the issues to be wholly resolved, a best-case solution, or to be unresolved. Significant space is afforded to the commentaries of previous authorities, which point alone makes this directory of inestimable value in drawing together so much information from disparate sources, even without the countless hours of additional research that have been devoted afresh to this effort. A list of references and an extensive glossary complete the book. Fifty-six main collaborators (of which this reviewer was one) assisted the endeavour, and at least twice as many additional researchers proffered further information.

The CD-ROM contains 66 .pdf files, of which all but two present detailed data concerning volumes, issues, pagination, authorship (for books) and their dating for a range of periodicals and books. The other two files provide (1) a résumé of date changes to 1503 avian taxa (genera, species, and subspecies) that will be implemented in the fourth edition of the Howard & Moore list, and (2) 28 pages of notes to the table in (1).

As stated at the outset, most people with only a passing interest in ornithological taxonomy and nomenclature will not require this book, but some researchers will not only find it invaluable, but almost certainly owe Messrs Dickinson, Overstreet, Dowsett and Bruce a considerable debt of gratitude for their labours.

Guy M Kirwan

The Urban Birder

David Lindo

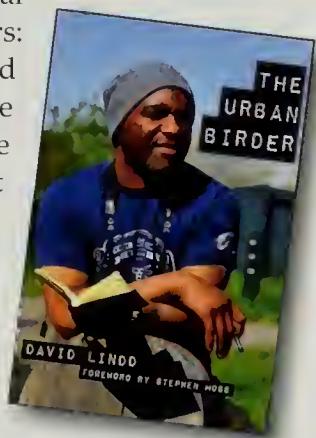
New Holland. 2011.

Hardback. 224 pp, 0 colour photographs.

£9.99.

ISBN 978-1-847739-50-6

Istanbul, Eilat and Dubai: the OSME region is rich in urban locations with fantastic birding opportunities. David Lindo's first book, *The Urban Birder*, charts his own development as a connoisseur of city-based birding, whilst simultaneously exploring his childhood as a black birdwatcher in London in the 1960s and 1970s. David's matter-of-fact, relaxed writing style makes it easy to acquire a flavour of what will be an unfamiliar experience to many readers: dealing with racism and social stereotyping in the pursuit of a hobby. At the same time, his evident passion ensures that David effectively evangelises the merits of exploring your local surroundings, however unlikely a birding location they might appear.



Seven years in Shanghai and Abu Dhabi make it easy for me to empathise with the author's enthusiasm for birding patches of wasteland and oases of green space amid the world's concrete jungles. Most of David's urban birding has been in London and the USA, but it is easy to find parallels with the wealth of similar prospects available to Middle Eastern city-dwellers. I quickly found myself reminiscing about a few memorable discoveries in atypical birding 'hotspots', including a stunning male Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii* at a building site in Abu Dhabi.

You will probably have realised that I count myself an urban birding convert. Will this book inspire the potential urban birder to check that patch of waste ground on the way home from the office? Well, the uninitiated among you will just have to read it and find out!

Nick Moran

OSME NEWS

Geoff Welch

OSME Summer Meeting, Saturday 16 July 2011

After last year's Middle Eastern weather, things were 'back to normal' for this year's Summer Meeting and AGM with overcast skies and torrential downpours! However, the programme of talks took the audience of 44 members and guests to the four corners of the OSME region. The first speaker was Phil Cannings (Plate 1) who gave an overview of his work advising on the development of a protected areas network in northern Cyprus. This has involved everything from identifying sites and developing the relevant legislation to preparing management plans and increasing local capacity through training staff and providing facilities and equipment. Seven priority sites have been identified and six are now officially protected. All bar one are coastal areas, the exception being the Kyrenia mountains site which is important for breeding raptors and is the only site in the EU where Egyptian Fruit Bats *Rousettus aegyptiacus* are found. Compared with most other coastal areas in the Mediterranean, the beaches of northern Cyprus are still

little developed and so most are very rich botanically and three of the selected sites are important turtle nesting areas. Because of its location, northern Cyprus is very important for migrating birds, especially in autumn, and the island has two endemic species, Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* and Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*, both of which are relatively common and widespread. Phil's work is ongoing with the next stages being the recruitment and training of additional staff, implementation of management plans and legislation and the integration of the plans into the wider planning process to ensure that Cyprus's important species and habitats are protected for future generations to enjoy.

From the Mediterranean, the focus shifted to the north with a talk by Jeff Gordon on the Manych wetlands and Caucasus area of Russia. Technically speaking, the Manych wetlands are just outside the OSME region but the area is of outstanding importance as a migration stopover site and wintering area for many birds either breeding or passing through the region. The wetlands are best known as an important stopover site for



Plate 1. Speakers at the 2011 OSME Summer Meeting, left to right: Geoff Welch, Phil Cannings, Guy Kirwan, Sal Cooke, Jeff Gordon and Andrew Lassey. © Ian Harrison/OSME

Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*, with over 2000 birds recorded in 2009. However, Jeff also gave the audience a taste of the many other species using the site. Wintering wildfowl include 30 000 Greater White-fronted Anser albifrons and 1000 Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*, 4000 Scaup *Aythya marila* and up to 5000 White-headed Ducks *Oxyura leucocephala*, while breeding species include 2000 pairs of Red-crested Pochards *Netta rufina*, 200 pairs of Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo*, Little Bustards *Tetrax tetrax*, Pallas's *Larus ichthyaetus*, Slender-billed Chroicocephalus *genei* and Mediterranean Gulls *L. melanocephalus* (20 000+) and over 100 000 Rose-coloured Starlings *Pastor roseus*! Very large numbers of waders pass through in spring and autumn and Black-winged Pratincoles *Glareola nordmanni* can be very numerous with, on one occasion, a flock of 22 000 birds. In contrast to the wetlands, Jeff also spoke briefly about the Caucasus region which includes the Elbruz mountains, the highest in Europe. Specialities of the region include Caucasian Grouse *Lyrurus mlokosiewiczi*, Caspian Tetraogallus *caspicus* and Caucasian Snowcocks *T. caucasicus*, Guldenstadt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus* and Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*. Four species of vulture and five of eagle breed and the area is important for raptor migration. For the visiting birdwatcher, accessing the high tops is relatively straightforward thanks to a ski lift which takes you to over 3000 m.

The first speaker of the afternoon was Guy Kirwan who gave a fascinating presentation on the taxonomy of Socotran birds. Because of its extreme age, over 37 million years, Socotra has a very high level of endemism, with almost 50% of the island's 825 species of plant being unique, and its avifauna has a pronounced Afrotropical influence. Prior to the OSME expedition to the island in 1993, Socotra was little known and, of its birds, 6 species and 12, possibly 13, subspecies were considered endemic with the status of the Socotran Buzzard unclear. Nowadays, thanks to a combination of studies looking at morphology, vocalisations and genetics, it is accepted that Socotra has at least 10 endemic species and 4 endemic sub-species. The major changes as the result of these studies are that Socotra Buzzard *Buteo socotraensis*, Socotra

Scops Owl *Otus socotranus*, Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus* and Abd al Kuri Sparrow *Passer hemileucus* are all now confirmed as valid species. The precise taxonomy of Socotra Cisticola *Cisticola haematocephalus*, and the subspecies (?) of Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii* and Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* on the island have still to be finalised. Many questions remain to be answered though. For instance what are the precise affinities of the scops owl? It sounds very similar to Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* from India but genetically is close to Seychelles Scops Owl *O. insularis*.

The fourth speaker of the day was Geoff Welch who stood in at very short notice for Rob Sheldon who was unable to attend. Geoff gave a brief account of the work of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) in promoting the hima protected area concept as a viable alternative to official protected areas. The hima approach is based around sustainable management of natural resources by local communities. The approach dates back more than 1500 years and was widespread in the Arabian peninsula and lands bordering the Red sea. SPNL is promoting the hima approach at six Important Bird Areas (IBAs) covering a range of habitats from mountain forests to marine areas. An important element of the approach is the direct involvement of local community members throughout the process, from planning to implementation. Because community members have a direct stake in the site and receive direct benefits from successful management both protection and management should be sustainable. As the resources for the management of official protected areas become scarcer, it is important that conservationists develop alternative means of financing and managing sites and the hima approach has great potential for achieving this.

The final presentation of the day was a double act by Sal Cooke and Andrew Lassey on ornithological research in Kazakhstan. Andrew gave a resume of ornithology in the country and the important role played by the Institute of Zoology in Almaty. Many of the great names associated with species found in the region worked there—Peter Simon Pallas (gull, sandgrouse, warbler), EA

Eversmann (redstart, pale-backed pigeon), Nikolai Zarudny (numerous sub-species) and NA Severtzov (tit warbler) to name but a few. In 1946 over 300 scientists were employed in the Zoological Section of the Institute, today there are less than 10 many of whom are working in a voluntary capacity as there is no money to pay them and facilities are either totally lacking or extremely basic. The skins collection is in a particularly poor condition with no suitable storage facilities. Despite these hardships, research is continuing and the skins collection has played a key role in unravelling the Turkestan/ Daurian Shrike *Lanius isabellinus/phoenicuroides* complex, splitting Booted Warbler *Idea caligata/raua* into two species, separating Pale Martin from Sand Martin *Riparia diluta/riparia* and ongoing studies of the Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* and Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis* complexes. OSME has recently coordinated an international effort to provide the Institute with suitable specimen boxes which were surplus to requirements at the Natural History Museum, Tring; a small but significant start to safeguarding this unique resource. Sal then took over and gave a characteristically enthusiastic and humorous account of the practicalities of participating in an ornithological expedition to Kazakhstan. The hardships—a bed, privacy, ensuite facilities—dream on! The opportunity to see and compare *Phylloscopus* warblers such as Greenish *P. viridanus* and Hume's *P. humei* side by side. The stunning Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis* makes Siberian *L. calliope* look dull! But most importantly, the breathtaking landscapes, the sheer number of birds at some sites and the camaraderie and dedication of the other expedition members.

During the AGM, held immediately after lunch, the following changes to the Society's Council were noted and approved. Richard Prior and Chris Lamsdell ended their terms of office and Richard Bonser resigned during the year due to pressure of work. All were thanked for their contributions to the running of OSME. After being co-opted in February, Helen Demopoulos was elected on to Council.

OSME would like to thank the British Trust for Ornithology, and especially staff members Dawn Balmer and Nick Moran, for

allowing the Society use of the facilities of The Nunnery for the day's meeting.

The social dinner after the meeting was a great success and OSME seemed to have taken over the Dolphin for the evening. It was good to see so many people there taking the opportunity of renewing old friendships and making new ones. Nick Moran's bird walk on the following day, Sunday, was a new departure and again was very successful. Those who participated had good views of Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*, Breckland specialities, although the weather was a little too windy to get good views of Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*.

Further changes to Around the Region compilers

Dawn Balmer has recently stood down as co-compiler of Around the Region, a role she has carried out since 2001. OSME would like to take this opportunity to thank Dawn for the tremendous amount of time and effort that she has put into compiling this important feature of each issue of *Sandgrouse*. Andrew Grieve has taken over the A-K section. Luckily we will not be losing Dawn's knowledge and enthusiasm completely as she has kindly agreed to continue to compile News & Information.

News from the Bird Fair 2011

The 2011 Bird Fair was a great success for OSME, giving us a chance to catch up with members, many of whom are resident outside of the UK, promote OSME's work, give talks on recent bird research and take part in the annual Bird Brain of Britain quiz. This year the OSME stand was situated next to Birdwatch Turkey in Marquee 6, giving us a chance to talk more with our Turkish colleagues. Amongst new people visiting the stand was David Lindo, author of *The Urban Birder*, who decided to join (Plate 2).

There were several important talks given at the Bird Fair based on work carried out within the OSME region: the first by Dr Azzam Alwash from Nature Iraq about the fantastic work to restore the marshes of southern Iraq; the second on 'Visiting the Celestial Mountains', a talk on the birds and



Plate 2. Nick Moran (left) with David Lindo, new OSME member, at Bird Fair 2011. © John Warr

culture of Kazakhstan by Andrew Lassey and Sal Cooke (OSME members); and the third by Rob Sheldon from RSPB (and OSME Council member) on the migration journeys of Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*. All of these talks were informative and inspirational, showing the importance of this region for bird conservation.

OSME came a very close second in the annual Bird Brain of Britain quiz, winning £500 thanks to Oscar Campbell, a long-standing member of OSME. His specialist subject was 'Breeding Birds in the UAE'. There was also a game where members of the public could win an OSME wrist-band by correctly matching a selection of the special birds of the OSME region with the countries they breed in—a fun way of making people aware just how important the OSME region is for bird conservation.

If you would like to help at the OSME stand at the 2012 Bird Fair, please contact events@osme.org. (Contributed by Helen Demopoulos)

OSME Raffle 2011 and 2012

The winners of the 2011 raffle to raise funds for the Conservation and Research Fund were:

- 1st prize H Brown—Opticron Imagic BGA SE 8x42 binoculars (value £419)
- 2nd prize D Marshall—Naturetrek voucher for £250
- 3rd prize John Warr—Country Innovations New Venture Waistcoat (value £65)
- 4th prize Andy Musgrove—Birdguides Breeding Birds of the Western Palearctic (value £75)
- 5th prize G Ridley—Birdguides BBi: British Birds interactive (value £75)
- 6th prize A Cotton—Helm Reed and Bush Warblers (value £65)

Congratulations to all of the winners, thanks to the sponsors for generously donating the prizes and thanks to everyone who purchased tickets.

We are running the raffle again this year and the proceeds will go towards conservation work on White-headed Ducks *Oxyura leucocephala* in Central Asia. Tickets are enclosed—so try your luck and support OSME!

OSME Summer Meeting and AGM 2012

Following the success of last year's Summer Meeting, the 2012 meeting and AGM will again be held at the BTO Headquarters, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU on Saturday 7 July. There is ample free parking. The bus station is about 10 minutes walk away, and the railway station 15 minutes. Road access is via the A11 London–Norwich road, connecting with the A14 from the north and Midlands. Trains operate regular services on the Birmingham–Norwich line, and also to Cambridge and London Kings Cross. Full details of the day are given in the enclosed programme.

NEWS & INFORMATION

Dawn Balmer (compiler)

CYPRUS

BirdLife Cyprus reveals online bird trapping death toll count for 2011 autumn migration

BirdLife Cyprus has published online (www.birdlifecyprus.org) an estimated death toll from the illegal bird trapping taking place in Cyprus during the 2011 autumn migration season. The toll has been estimated on the basis of field data from BirdLife's ongoing field monitoring of trapping activity with mist nets and limesticks, part of a systematic surveillance programme. The first weekly estimate, 89 225 birds, represents the number of birds killed between Thursday 1 September and Sunday 11 September 2011. The estimate was updated every Monday until the end of October by which time it had reached 1 447 308 birds. BirdLife Cyprus posted this death toll on its website to highlight the urgency of the situation and as a call for action to halt this slaughter. In July 2011, the 'European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds', that took place in Larnaca, concluded with a clear 'zero tolerance' message and an urgent call for appropriate measures to stop the bird slaughter. BirdLife Cyprus is now calling for words to be turned into action by all competent authorities at all levels. BirdLife Cyprus is once again calling for decisive action against the restaurants serving the trapped birds, for targeted enforcement against big, organised trapping operations and for tougher sentences for convicted trappers. In autumn 2010 BirdLife Cyprus estimated that 1.4 million birds were killed by trappers in the Famagusta and Larnaca districts, an unprecedented death toll resulting in the highest trapping levels recorded since 2002, when BirdLife Cyprus began its systematic monitoring of trapping activity.

DVD launched

In July 2011, BirdLife Cyprus launched the DVD documentary *Important areas for birds and other wildlife in Cyprus* (Plate 1). This

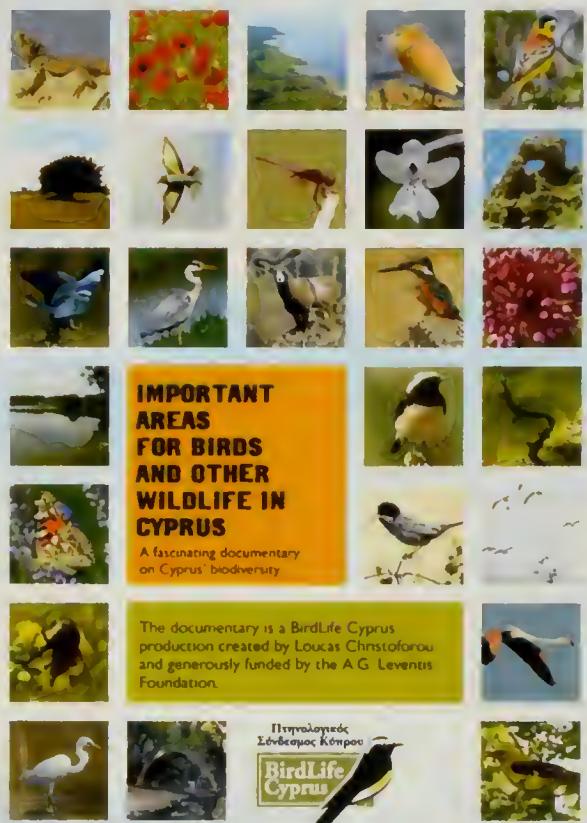


Plate 1. BirdLife Cyprus launched the DVD *Important areas for birds and other wildlife in Cyprus* in July 2011. © BirdLife Cyprus

presents unique images of Cyprus's wildlife and natural landscapes. It covers the diversity of landscapes, rich wildlife and endemic and other special species found on the island, with a simple and informative narrative accessible to all ages. The documentary is a reminder of the natural heritage of the island and also a wake-up call on the urgent need to protect the island's wild places and creatures at a time when the natural environment is threatened as never before. The DVD runs for 55 minutes and consists of 30 chapters, one for each area described. The price is €7 for BirdLife Cyprus members and €10 for non-members with all proceeds going to conservation. Further information is available at: www.birdlifecyprus.org.

EGYPT

Spring raptor survey planned

A survey of spring raptor migration at Ayn Sokhna on the Egyptian Red sea coast is planned from 1 March to 5 May 2012. There is no published data on raptor migration from this location, and the only comparable survey (run some 60 km north, in and around Suez city) is that of Wimpfheimer carried out in 1982. Observers with experience in raptor identification and censusing, are invited to travel to Egypt and be in charge of the survey for periods of seven consecutive days, from 08.30 to 15.00 h, and record data. Accommodation will be provided in a private home nearby. Please contact Mary Megalli (mary.megalli@gmail.com) or see www.calfree.com/SokhnaInvitation.pdf for more details.

IRAN

Iranian Birding Day

The first Iranian Birding Day was held on 24 November 2011. Several organizations and institutions gathered at the Iranian House of Artists in Tehran for a day about bird watching and the birds of Iran. More information can be found in Farsi at wwwiranbirdingday.ir. (Contributed by Amir Behzad Eslami/'Avaye Tabiate Paydar')

Papers on rare birds in Iran

Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh, editor of *Podoces*, recently circulated three papers on rare birds in Iran: Scott DA. 2008. Rare birds in Iran in the late 1960s and 1970s. *Podoces* 3(1/2): 1–30, Roselaar CS & M Aliabadian. 2009. Review of rare birds in Iran, 1860s–1960s. *Podoces* 4(1): 1–27. Khaleghizadeh A et al. 2011. Rare Birds in Iran in 1980–2010. *Podoces* 6(1): 1–48. These articles can be accessed on the OSME website (under ORL/Trip Reports) or directly from Abolghasem at akhaleghizadeh@gmail.com.

IRAQ

Nature Iraq Bird Records Committee

Intensive field studies by Nature Iraq since 2004 have resulted in the discovery of several new bird species for Iraq. The Arabic *Field*

Guide to the Birds of Iraq published in 2006 contains the latest bird checklist but many new birds were found by the NI bird team after its publication. In view of the recent 'firsts', a records committee was required to review and assess these new claims so they could have scientific credibility and so in 2009 the Nature Iraq Bird Records Committee (NIBRC) was founded. Although NIBRC was established to assess its own records of new species, the committee will be happy to use its experience and expertise to assess any records by other observers. The NIBRC examines the claim carefully, consulting with external experts when necessary. The final judgment on whether the record is acceptable for the Iraq list is made by voting. For a record to be accepted only one rejection is permitted. If more than one then the record is not accepted. All new species will be announced on the NI website: www.natureiraq.com. NIBRC currently has six members: Laith Ali (Iraq), Korsh Ararat (Iraq), Sancar Baris (Turkey), Omar Fadhl (Iraq), Richard Porter (UK) and Mudhafar Salim (Iraq). The late Simon Aspinall (UK) was also a member. To make a submission of a new bird record to NIBRC or if you have questions, please contact Mudhafar Salim, NIBRC coordinator, at mudhafar.salim@natureiraq.org. (Source Richard Porter)

Nature Iraq attends third International Falconry Festival

Omar Fadhl attended the third International Falconry Festival in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, UAE, from 10–18 December 2011 as a representative of Nature Iraq. This was the first participation for Iraq and NI hoped to get the message across that falconry has a long history in Iraq but it is carried out in balance with nature (Plates 2–4). Iraqi falconers are restricted in what species can be targeted and are fully aware of the endangered species in the country. The NI stand focussed on conservation of birds of prey and other endangered species and falconry, and how the two issues are linked. NI aimed to show how it has been working closely with falconers to help conserve endemic and rare species and how to control their trapping, trade and traffic.

The conservation of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was one of the main issues



Plate 2. Haj Saeed Al Zirgani, head of Iraq falconry society, informing visitors to the Iraq stand about status and conservation of Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*.
© Omar Fadhil



Plate 3. Iraq stand: International Falconry Association member with Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* leaflet.
© Omar Fadhil



Plate 4. "Yes, falconry is carried out in Iraq but in balance with nature, conservation and protection." © Omar Fadhil

raised during the festival as its decline has been related to falconry. NI was able to demonstrate the role of conservation to an international audience. On the NI stand were a range of pictures, posters, leaflets and also oil paintings. These were well received by visitors. Attending the conference was an excellent opportunity to spread the work of NI and to meet representatives from other organisations such as the Hawk Conservancy Trust (UK) and the Wildlife in the Middle East Group. (Contributed by Omar Fadhil)

JORDAN

New staff for the Migratory Soaring Project

Two new members are joining the Regional Flyway Facility (RFF) team in the Amman office. Osama Al-Nouri, is appointed as the regional project manager (RFF coordinator)—he previously worked for the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife, the Birdlife affiliate in Syria. The second new appointment

is Julien Jreissati who will act as the project communication officer. Julien has previously volunteered and worked with the BirdLife partner in Lebanon. (Source: Ibrahim Khader, Regional Director, BirdLife International)

First CEPF Workshop in the Arabian peninsula

At BirdLife International's Middle East office on the banks of the Dead sea in Jordan, representatives of the Saudi Authority for Wild Animals (SAWA), Yemen's Ministry of the Environment, as well as biologists from the region and representatives from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and Conservation International convened on 28–29 July 2011. The meeting focused on the advancement of the ecosystem profile for the 'Eastern Afromontane Hotspot', which includes critical ecosystems in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Though these two countries are recognized as being very different from each other politically and economically, they both have extremely valuable ecosystems in common, and face similar environmental threats. Traditional hunting and agricultural abandonment are two key issues. In Yemen, this abandonment is due to a lack of water or to make way for the planting of khat, a flowering plant that has mild stimulant properties when chewed. In Saudi Arabia, however, this abandonment is linked to rural exodus and growing urbanization. Particularly in the mountainous regions of the country, these trends threaten biodiversity, which is closely linked to tree cover or to fragile areas with particular microclimates.

Through CEPF's ecosystem profile, these issues, and many other concerns and opportunities for conservation, are being analyzed across the eastern afromontane hotspot, which stretches through eastern Africa from Zimbabwe in the south to Saudi Arabia in the north. Many other topics were addressed during the two days of the workshop, providing CEPF and partners with new information and perspectives on the important ecosystems of Saudi Arabia and Yemen. This exchange marks the first steps in a future long and fruitful collaboration with Saudi and Yemeni partners to protect their critical natural areas. (Source: Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund)

KAZAKHSTAN

Important Bird Areas recognised officially

New additions to Kazakhstan's legislation have recently been published and the term 'Important Bird Area (IBA)' was included in the law 'On Specially Protected Nature Areas' of Kazakhstan for the first time. IBAs are now considered as 'objects of state nature-reserved fund' (in Russian 'prirodonazapovedniy fond'). Such objects are not a direct component of the national Specially Protected Areas (SPA) network but the Kazakhstan government now has an obligation for their protection and control. Official recognition provides a good basis for 'upgrading' IBAs to SPA status in the future. Lobbying for inclusion of IBAs in the legislation has been led by the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK—BirdLife Affiliate in Kazakhstan) with the support of the Committee of Forestry and Hunting. The next step is to get all confirmed IBAs (121 at present) included in the list of 'objects' approved by the Kazakhstan government. New lists should be prepared in the near future to take into account the new legislation. (Contributed by Dr Sergey Sklyarenko, Head of the Centre for Conservation Biology/Science Director, ACBK)

OMAN

Sultanate of Oman hosts an international conference on migratory shorebirds

An international conference "Oman as a Gravitational Center in the Global Flyway Network of Migratory Shorebirds" was recently organised by the Centre for Environmental Studies and Research (CESAR) at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, under the auspices of Dr Khalifa al Jabri, member of the Majlis Addawla. The three-day conference, 14–16 November 2011, was organised in association with the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, the Ministry of Environmental and Climate Affairs, Shell Development Oman, and the Centre for Field Research on the Environment (Diwan of the Royal Court). In his opening remarks, Dr Mushtaque Ahmed, director of CESAR, said

that an important aim of the conference was to raise awareness about wetlands and to stress their international importance for the world's biodiversity. More specifically, the conference had a focus on the West Asian-East African flyway, in which Barr al Hikman, a large pristine coastal wetland in Oman, is a key wintering and stopover site. In the opening ceremony, Dr Jens Eriksen, gave the keynote speech about bird migration in Oman. He observed that some species have declined dramatically during the last few decades and are now seen only sparingly in Oman. He emphasised that in order to preserve biodiversity, it is important to protect not only the breeding sites, but also the wintering areas and migratory bird stop-over sites. These include the many khawrs and wetlands along the coast of Oman and in particular Barr al Hikman. He further added that although much had been learned from intensive observations, we still have little knowledge about local movements of birds during their time in Oman and the actual migration routes. Thus, much research is still needed and modern techniques of fitting satellite transmitters to migratory birds opens up new possibilities. Papers by speakers from Oman and abroad included 'Connectivity of Bird Populations', 'Shorebird Populations: Middle East stop-over & wintering grounds', 'Both ends of the flyway', 'Ecological research & conservation', 'Ecological Research in marine habitats'.

Research period on Sooty Falcons extended

The Office for Conservation of Environment (OCE), Diwan of Royal Court, which started research on Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* in 2007 along with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs and Sultan Qaboos University has extended the commitment till 2013. Oman is considered to be one of the most important breeding grounds for the 'near-threatened' Sooty Falcon, with perhaps 4% of the global population being found on Fahal island alone. But since 1978, when the first survey was done, (initial survey was done for a year only in 1978) the population has declined by about 15% and it is estimated that annual mortality among adult birds is about 20% and about 70% among juveniles. "From 2011 onwards, we

are the main authority to conduct a detailed study of population dynamics and ecology of sooty falcons," said Dr Mansoor al Jahdhami, senior specialist, environmental studies, OCE. The authority carried out field visits to the Damaniyat and Fahal islands in September and October 2011 and ringed about 50 chicks. Since 2007, 300 birds have been ringed. Dr Mike McGrady, from Natural Research (Scotland-based research charity), who is working with OCE as the chief researcher, was in Oman for the 2011 survey. Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, he said that there were three main initiatives that OCE has started from this year. "Firstly, to track more birds with help of satellite transmitters. Secondly, to look into migration and the study of wintering grounds with a possible collaborative venture with Madagascar where Sooty Falcons winter. Thirdly, to make a documentary film on the ongoing research." With such a high mortality rate, McGrady feels there is a need to urgently raise awareness and embark on better and detailed researches on the ecology of these falcons. "There is no proper data on the population demographics of these birds in Oman except for the Fahal and Damaniyat islands. There is a possibility of its presence in places along the coast, like south of Duqm, Musandam and Jebel Akhdar. It may be that the population in Musandam can be globally significant," said McGrady. Thanks to Simon Tull, OSME Country Contact and Zahran Al Abdulasalam, who works at the Al Ansab Wetlands, Muscat. (Source: www.muscatdaily.com)

Wildlife rangers to be trained in anti-smuggling skills.

Oman has launched a programme to develop the skills of its frontline staff engaged in combating illegal trades in wild flora and fauna. The fight against wildlife smugglers is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs which in September 2011 hosted a training course for officials from a number of enforcement agencies. The training programme was organised in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund. Poachers supported by cross-border smuggling networks continue to prey on elements of Oman's diverse wildlife, notably its endangered Arabian Oryx *Oryx*

leucoryx, as well as Arabian Gazelles *Gazella arabica*, Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas*, and other species. The mammals are targeted either for their meat or end up in the private zoos of wealthy farm-owners around the Arabian peninsula. Around 60 wildlife rangers and other personnel attended the training course which was aimed at building the capacities of national enforcement staff in meeting Oman's obligations under CITES which the Sultanate signed in November 2007. (Source: *Gulf News*)

UAE

Abu Dhabi environmental atlas released

An environmental atlas of the Abu Dhabi emirate was launched at the 'Eye on Earth Abu Dhabi 2011 Summit' recently. The 200-page colour book was released by the Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi and highlights the unique natural heritage of the emirate. It presents information in an engaging narrative and is interwoven with stories, case studies, facts and statistics, illustrative figures, anecdotes, photographs and thematic maps. Through the atlas, it is hoped to promote a better understanding and greater appreciation for the unique natural heritage of the emirate of Abu Dhabi and the Arabian gulf region. Developed by a team of experts, the atlas is the result of thousands of hours of research over a period of two years. It includes the most up-to-date information along with rich visuals ranging from oil paintings to futuristic digital renderings. The first half is filled with graphical and artistic depictions of geological and cultural history, status and the future of Abu Dhabi.

The second half of the atlas is dedicated to cartography. These maps feature the results of studies carried out by the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative, its partners and other organisations. Published in English and Arabic, the *Environmental Atlas of Abu Dhabi Emirate* is priced at Dh270 and is available in all Gulf and international leading outlets and online at www.booksarabia.com and www.ead.ae. (Source: *Gulf News*)

Collared Kingfisher threatened by demise of mangroves

The *kalbaensis* subspecies of Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris* is only found on the UAE's east coast, and at two sites in Oman. They inhabit the coastal mangrove forests of Kalba, an enclave of Sharjah. A new study of the population has shown that the birds are still present but their numbers have fallen since 1995, the first time the population was studied. The first survey was carried out by the late Simon Aspinall, who estimated between 44 and 55 breeding pairs lived in the Kalba mangroves. In spring 2011, a survey of the area was carried out by Oscar Campbell, Ahmed Al Ali and Neil Tovey and they estimated the number of pairs was between 26 and 35. The research was supported by a grant from the Emirates Natural History Group. The reason the numbers of Collared Kingfishers are declining is that the condition of the mangrove trees supporting it is also declining. Development and the construction of the corniche have been harming the forest. Oscar Campbell commented "Some mangroves were destroyed to make room for villas and a new road and the development of the corniche limits the amount of seawater reaching the trees. Mangroves need to be submerged twice a day". The birds nest between February and June, using holes and cracks in aged mangroves to build their nests and it is possible the lack of suitable nest sites is restricting the population. (Source: *The National* www.thenational.ae)

OTHER NEWS & INFORMATION

Experts reach agreements on mainstreaming migratory soaring birds' conservation into the hunting sector in the Rift Valley/Red sea region

BirdLife International and its Partners concluded a productive three day regional workshop which brought together representatives from governments and NGOs on mainstreaming the conservation of migratory soaring birds (MSBs) into the hunting sector along the Rift Valley/Red sea flyway. Major achievements accomplished

include a regional declaration on hunting, guidelines for mainstreaming MSBs considerations into the hunting sector and a five year regional action plan. The guidelines as well as the regional action plan agreed upon by the participants will show the way forward to achieve mainstreaming of MSBs considerations into the hunting sector along the flyway. This regional workshop, held in cooperation with SPNL (BirdLife in Lebanon) is part of the BirdLife International/UNDP-GEF Migratory Soaring Birds project.

The Rift Valley/Red sea flyway is the second most important flyway for migratory soaring birds (raptors, storks, pelicans and some ibis) in the world, with 37 different soaring bird species, including five globally-threatened species. The Migratory Soaring Birds project aims to mainstream migratory soaring bird considerations into the productive sectors along the flyway that pose the greatest risk to the safe migration of these birds—principally hunting, energy, agriculture and waste management—while promoting activities in sectors which could benefit from these birds, such as ecotourism. (Source: BirdLife International, Migratory Soaring Birds Project)

Hima Fund now available for Middle East IBAs

The launch of the Hima Fund, which enables BirdLife Partners and allied organisations to apply online for funding to manage Important Bird Areas (IBAs) as himas, took place in Doha, Qatar, on 6 October 2011, in the presence of Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher Bint Hamad Bin Sahim Al-Thani. The Hima Fund was established with a \$1 million donation from Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher, with the aim of re-establishing hima, a traditional approach to conserving biodiversity and managing natural resources, throughout the Middle East and beyond. Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher announced the donation at BirdLife's 31st Global Council Meeting at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar. During the meeting, Qatar's Friends of Environment Centre joined the BirdLife Partnership as the BirdLife Affiliate in Qatar.

The hima was established within the Arabian peninsula and adjacent areas before Islam. The Prophet Mohammed laid down

general guidelines that transformed hima to become one of the essential instruments of conservation in Islamic Law. He abolished the pre-Islamic practice of making private reserves for the exclusive use of powerful individuals, and ruled instead that they should be used for public welfare. He further ordered that in hima, plants and grass should be allowed to grow, flourish and regenerate abundantly 'for the benefit of all animals', wild as well as domestic.

The hima system promotes responsibility and equity. It is community-based, recognises the role, rights and values of local communities, and offers opportunities to link conservation and livelihoods development. It is culturally appropriate, values traditional practices and local knowledge, and is socially and economically adaptable. It is complementary to nationally designated protected areas.

Details of the Hima Fund and how to apply can be found on the new website www.himafund.org. The fund is managed by the regional members of the Hima Fund board, who will consider applications based on advice from the Fund's technical committee. Sites eligible for funding must be IBAs. At this stage, the Hima Fund is available for IBAs in the following countries: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait and Palestine.

Proposals must recognise the interests of the local communities who depend on natural resources within or around the sites. There is a need to demonstrate that protected areas are for the public good, and to ensure their benefits remain greater than their costs. This can only be done through close collaboration with local people.

Since 2004, BirdLife Partner the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) has taken the lead in the revival of the hima concept for the conservation of IBAs, in collaboration with locally elected authorities. So far, six IBAs have been declared as himas in Lebanon. Traditional himas already exist in Saudi Arabia and Oman, and more himas have been proposed recently in Syria and Yemen. Dr Assad Serhal, director general of SPNL and chair of the regional committee, added: "The Hima Fund is a window of opportunity for saving the Middle East's

Globally Threatened Species, and to conserve our top priority IBAs by reviving Himas, a way of life for local communities, fishermen, Bedouins, farmers and others who depend on the sustainability of the natural resources for their survival, together with Birdlife Partners and Local Conservation Groups." (Source: BirdLife International)

New bird conservation fund welcomes applications

A new conservation funding initiative, the Sound Approach Bird Fund, offers grants of up to £10 000 sterling (cUS\$15 800) to bird conservation projects around the world. They are looking for projects that will have a significant conservation benefit, making a real impact on the survival of globally or nationally threatened species or globally important sites. They are particularly looking for small, grassroots groups, rather than large national or international organisations, and projects

which are difficult to raise funds for. There are no deadlines; applications are reviewed on a rolling basis. For further details, guidelines for applicants including eligibility criteria, and a downloadable application form, please visit www.soundapproach.co.uk/funding.php or email birdfund@soundapproach.co.uk. (Contributed by James Lowen on behalf of the Sound Approach Bird Fund)

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

The OSME Library has received two reports from Mike Jennings, ABBA co-ordinator, on recent ABBA surveys conducted in southwest Saudi Arabia (ABBA 42) and northwest Saudi Arabia (ABBA 45). Subscribers to *Phoenix* can obtain an electronic copy from Mike Jennings (arabianbirds@dsl.pipex.com). Hard copies cost £10.00 including postage.

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OBITUARY

Professor Edward Ivanovich Gavrilov

Edward Gavrilov was born on 8 October 1933 at Veronezsh, Russia. It was here that he graduated from the Department of Zoology in 1956. After graduation his interest in birds began and his first studies were based in the Volga-Ural region. Edward moved to Almaty, Kazakhstan in 1959 where until 1964 he worked at the Institute of Botany. He then moved to the Institute of Zoology where he worked under the eminent ornithologist Dalgushin studying in particular high-altitude species. Whilst participating in this study he found the first ever recorded nest of Red-breasted Rosefinch *Carpodacus puniceus*, in the Zailiyskiy Alatau in June 1967. Following the death of Dalgushin in 1966, Edward became head of the Laboratory of Ornithology at Almaty a post he held until 1990. With this post came the responsibility of completing the five volume work *The Birds of Kazakhstan* which was still in progress. This work went on to receive a state prize following its publication in 1974. In addition to this major publication over 400 scientific papers bear his name.

Edward had developed a keen interest in the migration of birds through Kazakhstan and was instrumental in the establishment of the now famous Chokpak ringing station in 1968; to date over 1.6 million migrating birds have been ringed there in the huge Heligoland traps. It was here Edward was to be found every spring and autumn.

Edward was very conscious of Kazakhstan's ornithological 'isolation' under Soviet times; he made serious efforts to improve his English which he learned at school with a view to helping communication with other ornithological communities. He was delighted when OSME expanded its boundaries to include the Caucasus and Central Asia, with *Sandgrouse* providing a vehicle for his protégés to publish the most important aspects of their studies.

During the 1990s the government funding for the Institute at Almaty almost dried up, Edward and his colleagues saw the only



Plate 1. Edward Gavrilov (right) with Lars Svensson, Almaty, 2006. © Andrew Lassey

way forward being to plan and participate in accompanying Western ornithologists on expeditions. It would have been in these circumstances that many OSME members will have had the privilege of meeting Edward. All who met him found him both warm and helpful whether trapping accentors in the mountains or marshalling the helpers at Chokpak. Many of us will remember with affection Edward's expressions such as when describing a resident species it would be 'he live here'. Edward became a close friend to many OSME members and time spent in his company will long remain a treasured memory for many of us.

Following a debilitating illness, Edward died on 15 September 2011. To the end he was working on his theories of migration in relation to the wing loading of birds. I was exceptionally pleased to be able to visit him in hospital in what turned out to be the last few months of his life. Amazingly even having been seriously ill, Edward and I shared a good hour of conversation (in English remarkably) covering a range of topics—all of course bird related. It is a true measure of the man when his closing remarks to me were "My friend we have shared many times and many ringing experiences but in my opinion ringing is finished—the way forward is satellite tagging, we should work on this together".

Our hearts go out to his wife Jane and his son Andrei of whom he was so rightly proud. Andrei is thankfully perpetuating his father's work at the Almaty Institute and Chokpak.

Andrew Lassey, with assistance from Mike Pearson and Anatoly Kovshar

OBITUARY

Simon Aspinall

Every now and again someone comes along who touches our lives and makes a difference. Simon Aspinall was one such person. When he died in October 2011, after bravely living with motor neurone disease for four years, the Middle East, and its birds, lost a true friend. He was 53.

Simon's passion for birds started as a schoolboy in England. Graduating in environmental science from the University of East Anglia, he first visited the Middle East in 1991, stopping off in the United Arab Emirates during one of his world birding trips. Later he was to work there for over 15 years, first for the then National Avian Research Centre and later as an environmental consultant, bringing a wealth of experience from his time with the RSPB and NCC, much of it in Scotland. He had a love affair with the famous Fair Isle bird observatory and his last paper, with his brother, was in *British Birds* on the Fair Isle Wren.

In the UAE Simon helped establish the Emirates Bird Records Committee, chaired the Emirates Natural History Group, became environmental editor at *Emirates News* and undertook studies for the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey. Detailed surveys of breeding seabirds, Sooty Falcons and other wildlife on the offshore islands led to the identification of those of conservation importance and to QarNein island being given full protection.

Simon made a major contribution to the UAE chapter in BirdLife International's *Important Bird Areas in the Middle East* and later wrote the UAE section for *A Directory of Wetlands in the Middle East*—seminal works for wildlife conservation. He was as proud of receiving the UAE's premier environmental award, the Sheikh Mubarak Award, for his contributions to knowledge of the country's natural history, as he was of his Emirates bird list being an unmatched 411, 23 of which he added, and of accompanying Sir Wilfred Thesiger on a journey through the edge of the Empty Quarter and showing Sir Wilfred his first Golden Eagle nest in Arabia.



Plate 1. Simon measuring a Socotra Scops Owl, 2004.
© RF Porter

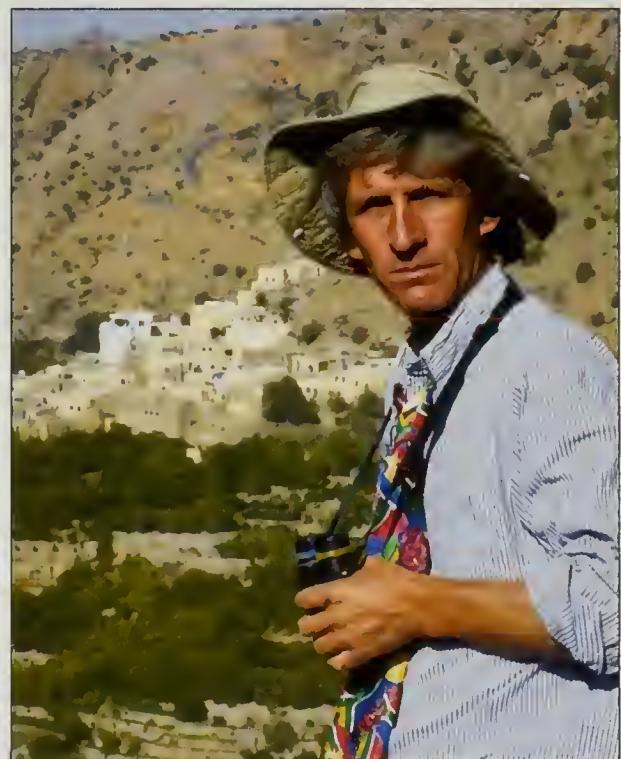


Plate 2. "I found this picture of Simon, which I took on Jebel Akhdar, near Nizwa, Oman in 2005. We were both part of the UNESCO biosphere selection team in Oman, which resulted in Jebel Samhan being designated. Simon was at the forefront of the necessary documentation work. He is wearing the tie, because we were informed that we would be giving our presentations to the Ministry of Environment in Muscat that morning after rushing from the mountain." © Gary Brown



Plate 3. "Simon walking in the Liwa dunes, Abu Dhabi, 2010, when we searched for breeding Golden Eagles." © Tommy Pedersen

Simon lived for travel. In the Middle East and Central Asia he journeyed to most countries, studying birds, working with UNESCO on plans for nature reserves and taking part in BirdLife International's surveys on Socotra and helping their programme in Syria training young biologists from Nature Iraq.

He was a prolific writer, authoring or co-authoring over 100 papers and books, notably on the Middle East, its birds and ecology. The following only gives a flavour: *Birds of the United Arab Emirates* (2011, Helm Field Guides), *Birds of the Middle East* (2010, Helm FGs), *Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates* (2010, Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi), *Important Bird Areas of the United Arab Emirates* (2006, British Birds), *Important Marine Areas for Birds in Abu Dhabi Emirate, United Arab Emirates* (2004, in *Marine Atlas of Abu Dhabi*), *Saline Wetland Reserve Management: A Case Study from the United Arab Emirates* (2002, in *Sabkha Environments*, Kluwer), *Environment Development and Protection in the UAE* (2001, in *The United Arab Emirates: A New Perspective*, Trident), *The Shell Birdwatching Guide to the United Arab Emirates* (1998, Hobby), *Status and Conservation*

of the Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates (1996, Hobby).

For the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* he supplied over 1100 records and wrote several of the species accounts. He was an editorial adviser for *Sandgrouse* and was on the team that produced the OSME Regional List.

Whilst his main interest was birds, 'our feathered friends' he called them, Simon (Plates 1–3) took a keen interest in all of natural history and enjoyed nothing more than 'scratching around' to see what he could find. That helped to make him such a great and knowledgeable companion in the field. Charming with dashing good looks, he had a wry, witty repartee and people were easily attracted to his charisma and natural warmth. His eyesight and hearing were remarkable and his fieldcraft second to none. But most of all he was courageous, continuing to travel, latterly with sticks and wheelchair, to the Middle East and far-flung corners of the world, never once complaining. That spirit and his contribution to ornithology and conservation is the legacy he leaves.

Richard Porter

AROUND THE REGION

Ian Harrison & Andrew Grieve (compilers)

Records in *Around the Region* are published for interest only; their inclusion does not imply acceptance by the records committee of the relevant country. All records refer to 2011 unless stated otherwise.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 34 (2) should be sent by 15 June to atr@osme.org.

AFGHANISTAN

A **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* at Delaram, Nimroz province, 7 Jun–8 Sep, was in an area where it is a scarce breeding species. **Painted Sandgrouse** *Pterocles indicus* has never been recorded in Afghanistan before so one reported at Delaram 18 Jun would be notable if substantiated. A **Snow Pigeon** *Lerwa lerwa* at Bagram 29 May was of interest though within the restricted range of this species in northern Afghanistan. A **Black Drongo** *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*, which is a scarce summer visitor, was at Jalalabad 22–24 May whereas the **Variable Wheatear** *Oenanthe picata* at Jalalabad 25 May was perhaps a more expected passage migrant.

AZERBAIJAN

A stunning migration of **Little Bustards** *Tetrax tetrax* was noted at Besh Barmag 7 Nov when 60 000 were counted while a total of over 15 **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius* were counted there late Sep/early Oct. 400 **Great Black-headed Gulls** *Larus ichthyaetus* were on Mingechevir reservoir and in the Alazan delta area 5 Nov with a single **Baltic Gull** *Larus fuscus* at Besh Barmag 23 Oct although this species is not uncommon. A **Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor* on the steppes near Alazan delta 5 Nov showed characteristics of the form *L. e. homeyeri*. The first record of **Eurasian Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* for the Besh Barmag area was seen 3 Oct. Some 10 000 **Calandra Larks** *Melanocorypha calandra* were counted on the steppes near Mingechevir reservoir 5 Nov while six **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* at Besh Barmag 28 Sep was a notable record. A **Radde's Accentor** *Prunella ocularis* at Kizil Agach 3 Nov was unusual, being away from the localised breeding area in the Talsh mountains. A single **Richard's**

Pipit *Anthus richardi* and **Buff-bellied Pipit** *A. (rubescens) japonicus* were at Besh Barmag 7 Nov and 30 Oct respectively.

BAHRAIN

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* is not a common bird in Bahrain so one at A'Ali farm 16 Oct is of interest while an early juvenile **Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* at Refinery pond on 20 Aug was some distance from the nearest breeding area in Turkey or Azerbaijan. A **Lesser Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bengalensis* ringed on Al Jarim island 19 Jun 2009 was found dead at Jaffna, Sri Lanka, 24 May. There were several records of **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* including singles at Hamala research station 18 Jun and 4 Jul, Buhair 1 Jul and in fields in the north of the island 16 Oct. The arrival and build up of **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* numbers continued through the autumn to peak at over 200 at the main roost at Jasra 18 Nov.

CYPRUS

17 **Ruddy Shelducks** *Tadorna ferruginea* at Asprokremmos dam 28 Nov was a good count while a **Goosander** *Mergus merganser* on Kanlikoy pond, near Nicosia, 29 Dec was only the fifth occurrence for the island. A **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* at Larnaca sewage works 24–28 Nov was the tenth record since 1995. The sighting of a **Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis* on Meneou pools, near Larnaca, 20 Dec to year end constitutes the first record for Cyprus and the Middle East. A total of 327 **Scopoli's Shearwaters** *Calonectris (diomedea) diomedea* were noted flying west off Essentepe 11 Oct. **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* is rare in winter so one at Phassouri reed beds 1 Dec is of note. Also noteworthy were two **Eurasian Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus*

at Mandria 7–11 Oct and another at Spiros pool 24 Oct. **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* is not quite an annual visitor so singles at Akrotiri 15–16 Sep and Bishop pool 24–29 Sep were interesting records. The second and third records of **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* were singles at Larnaca sewage works 4 Jun and Phasouri reed beds 7 Oct. **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* is another scarce visitor but there were two at Akhna dam 29 Sep with another at Akrotiri salt lake 11 Nov.

The **Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis* on the Karpas peninsula 8–9 Oct was only the third record whilst the largest flock of **Alpine Swifts** *Tachymarptis melba* to be recorded were the 500 over Polis beach 3 Aug. Single **Steppe Grey Shrikes** *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris* at Paphos lighthouse 17 Nov and Mandria 26 Nov were the ninth and tenth records for the island whilst the appearance of a **House Crow** *Corvus splendens* at Apostolos Andreas, Karpas peninsula, 19 Sep was perhaps an unwelcome addition to the Cyprus avifauna. The **Bearded Reedling** *Panurus biarmicus* at Zakaki marsh 11 Nov was only the second record since 2004. **Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* is a rare winter visitor so one at Avagas gorge 4–17 Nov was of note. The **Asian Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana* at Larnaca sewage works 23 Nov was the 15th occurrence. There was an immature **Rose-coloured Starling** *Pastor roseus* at Bishop pool 10 Sep. An **Eastern Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus (ochruros) phoenicurooides* at Mandria 24 Nov was the first occurrence of this form while a **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* at Armou 22–23 Oct was only the second record. Further interesting migrants were a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* at Agia Napa sewage works 11 Sep and a **Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* at Larnaca sewage works 30 Oct with up to 15 **Rock Sparrows** *Petronia petronia* at Marathounta from 30 Dec. A good series of **Richard's Pipits** *Anthus richardi* at Mandria saw two 20–25 Sep, up to five 30 Sep–15 Oct and up to two 9 Nov–2 Dec. A **Blyth's Pipit** *A. godlewskii* on 10 Dec, also at Mandria, will constitute the second record if accepted. Eleven **Yellowhammers** *Emberiza citronella* around the Troodos weather station 26 Nov was only the sixth record since 2000.

EGYPT

Abu Simbel remains the main site to see **Yellow-billed Stork** *Mycteria ibis* with five there 21 Sep while the usual Red sea mangroves held **Goliath Heron** *Ardea goliath* with singles at Hamata 30 Sep and Wadi Lahami 1 Oct. **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster* is a species not often seen from land but one was off Marsa Alam 9 Oct. A **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* was at Sharm el Sheikh 10 Sep where there have been many recent sightings. **Lappet-faced Vultures** *Torgos tracheliotus* continue to be found at Shelatein, where there were 20 on 2 Oct.

The best autumn site for **Crab-plovers** *Dromas ardeola* continues to be Hamata mangroves where there were 110 on 30 Sep. Small numbers of **White-tailed Lapwings** *Vanellus leucurus* at less usual Red sea locations included two at Shams Alam 28 Sep and two Marsa Alam 11 Oct. Three **Terek Sandpipers** *Xenus cinereus* were at Hamata 29 Sep, a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* was noted at Wadi Natrun 17 Sep and a **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* was on El Gouna sewage lagoons 28 Sep.

There have been fewer **African Skimmers** *Rynchops flavirostris* in recent autumns so 21 at Abu Simbel 21 Sep was a good count. **African Collared Doves** *Streptopelia risoria* have now been found in an additional area away from the Red sea with three at Sheikh Shazly 25 Sep while one of the two **Mourning Doves** *S. decipiens* recorded at Abu Simbel since 2010 was still present to 20 Sep at least. **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* continues to increase and spread north along the Nile with two at Qift 10 Oct while the camel market at Darauw held 41 on 27 Nov, a record count. Three **Hume's Owls** *Strix butleri* were heard calling in Wadi Feiran 5 Oct while 17 **Alpine Swifts** *Tachymarptis melba* were reported from Aswan 21 Oct, an unusually large number. Two **Isabelline Shrikes** *Lanius isabellinus* were at Marsa Alam 12 Oct; this species now appears to be regular in small numbers along the Red sea. A potential first record for Egypt was the **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis* photographed at Shams Alam hotel 22 Sep. A **Cyprus Wheatear** *Oenanthe cypriaca* was at New Kalabsha, Lake Nasser, 27 Oct and a **Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii* was reported from a less usual area in the Western

desert, Bur al Nuss, 17 Oct. There was a notable count of 1410 **Spanish Sparrows** *Passer hispaniolensis* at Aswan 11 Nov. A **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* was a good sighting at St Catherine 6 Oct while a more rarely recorded **Striolated Bunting** *Emberiza striolata* was at Wadi Feiran 4 Oct.

IRAN

Two **Black-winged Kites** *Elanus caeruleus* at Karun fish ponds, Shushtar, Khuzestan province, 18 Dec continues the run of records there since 22 Jan 2004 and this species now seems well established as a breeding species further south in Iran. A **Pallas's Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* at Khoor-e Tiab 27 Dec was the 14th record for Iran. The last surviving **Siberian White Crane** *Grus leucogeranus* of the former western population arrived at the wintering site of Ezbaran 24 Oct. 12 **White-tailed Lapwings** *Vanellus leucurus* were at Amir, Shushtar, 19 Dec where it is scarce in winter. The first **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* in Iran, reported previously in June, remained on Sheedvar island to at least 12 July. A pair of **Black Drongos** *Dicrurus macrocercus* at Minab 27 Dec was the fifth record for Iran

ISRAEL

The second record of a Bean Goose for Israel involved a **Tundra Bean Goose** *Anser fabalis rossicus* at Kfar Baruch reservoir 8–31 Dec which preceded an influx of **Greater White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* 9 Dec when two were at Kfar Makabi ponds, eight at Tishlovet reservoir and two at Kfar Baruch reservoir. To add to these, the fifth record of **Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* involved nine at Dan fishponds and fields southwest of Kfar Szold 4 Dec–year end. There were up to 11 **Cory's Shearwaters** *Calonectris diomedea* off Eilat North Beach in July and about ten individual **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Perissoptilothynchus* recorded on migration through the northern valleys in Aug/Sep. A pair of **Black-winged Kites** *Elanus caeruleus* reared four young at Agamon Hula, the first breeding record for Israel.

A **Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax* was at Agamon Hula 11 Dec while a **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* was at the same site 28 Sep. 13 **Sociable Lapwings** *Vaniellus gregarinus* at Urim 12 Nov was a notable gathering.

Although an occasional breeder, **Greater Painted Snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* remains scarce with one at Hama'apil fishponds, Hefer valley, 24–26 Sep and one at Ein Hamifratz fishponds 4 Nov. A **Pin-tailed Snipe** *Gallinago stenura* trapped at Tsor'a 10 Nov may prove to be the third confirmed record; there are another 6–7 claims for birds seen in the field (Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala* could not be ruled out). There was a single **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* at Ma'agan Michael 19 Sep and two single **Grey Phalaropes** *Phalaropus fulicarius* at Revadim reservoir 10–12 Aug and Kmehin sewage ponds 12 Oct.

Up to 16 **Bridled Terns** *Onychoprion anaethetus* were off Eilat North Beach July/August but more notable was one inland at Ma'agan Michael 19 Aug and also unusual was the **White-cheeked Tern** *Sterna repressa* on the Mediterranean at Ashod 13 Jun. An **Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* was off Eilat beach 15 Jun followed by a **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* off there 24 Jun. Two sightings of **Steppe Grey Shrike** *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris* at Sde Eliyahu, Bet She'an valley, 16 Sep and 18 Oct may have referred to the same bird with others at Nir Oz 8 Nov and Yotvata 17 Nov. A **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* remained at the IBRCE birdwatching park, Eilat, 27–30 Nov and two **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* were at Yotvata 17 Nov with a **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix nigriceps* in the central Arava 16 Dec.

The fifth record of **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, at Ein Afek nature reserve 25 Oct, preceded an influx of at least eight **Yellow-browed Warblers** *Phylloscopus inornatus* 30 Oct–30 Nov and three **Hume's Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus humei* though the first of the latter at Kibbutz Matsuva 5 Oct seems early and the second at Nafha in the central Negev 25 Oct may possibly belong to the form *P. h. mandellii*; a potential split and a possible first record of this form in the Middle East. The third **Hume's Leaf Warbler** was at Mitzpe Ramon sewage lagoons 17 Nov. A **Common Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapilla* at Mount Bar'on, north Golan Heights, 17 Dec–year end is a first for Israel whilst the **Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* in Eilat cemetery 19 Nov is the second record. The first claim of **Taiga Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicilla*, a

bird trapped at Jerusalem bird observatory in April 2007, has not been accepted by the Israel Rarities and Distribution Committee so the potential first is now a bird at Midreshet Ben Gurion 16 Oct. An **Alpine Accentor** *Pruinella collaris* was at Kiryat Shmona geological park 25 Nov but more notable were the two **Radde's Accentors** *P. ocularis* at Elrom in the Golan Heights 11 Dec—year end. The **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii* at Bet Kama alfalfa field 1 Oct will be the fourth record if accepted and there were three **Olive-backed Pipits** *A. hodgsoni* in the Eilat date plantations 19 Nov and also a **Buff-bellied Pipit** *A. (rubescens) japoicus* at Ma'agan Michael 23 Nov. A **Little Bunting** *Eupheriza pusilla* was at Yotvata 23 Nov and a **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *E. aureola* at Wadi Ashborn, near Sapir, 19 Sep was the 13th record.

KAZAKHSTAN

Pallas's Fish Eagles *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* are occasionally recorded in southern/eastern areas and one at Aktogai 21 May is of interest. There are increasing records of summering **Upland Buzzard** *Buteo hemilasius* in southern areas, which this year included one at Bartogai reservoir 24 Jul which may have been the same bird as the one at the nearby Bogutu mountains also 24 Jul. The largest ever recorded post-breeding gathering of **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius* was the 650 counted at Arykty 16 Aug though this is a traditional area for them. **Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* is still a vagrant with two further singles at Temrastau lake, Korgalzhyn, 22 May and Sorbulak 24 May while also of interest was a **Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta* at Konchengal 16 Jul. A possible new breeding area for **Relict Gull** *Larus relictus* could be Aksor lake, Lebyazhinsky region, where two pairs were present 27 Apr while at least two juveniles were noted at lake Alakol 7 Aug.

Daurian Jackdaw *Coloeus dauuricus* is mainly a winter visitor so a sighting 31 May at Karazhar, Korgalzhyn, was notable. Also not often seen in southern areas is **Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus*—one was at Sorbulak 2 Oct. A record of **Plumbeous Water Redstart** *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* at Aktogay, Ayagoz region, 9 Jun would be a first record if found acceptable. There was a

single **White-headed Wagtail** *Motacilla (flava) leucocephala* in the vicinity of Tarlauly, Ayagoz region, 7 May and an **East Siberian Wagtail** *Motacilla (alba) ocularis* at Tarlauly 30 Apr.

KUWAIT

The largest number of **Eastern Greylag Geese** *Anser auser rubrirostris* recorded for the country was the 11 at Jahra Pools reserve (JPR) 26 Nov. The group of nine **Red-crested Pochards** *Netta rufina* at JPR 29 Dec was the first record while a **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* 18 Oct at the same location was the eighth record. JPR also hosted the fifteenth sighting of **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* 22 Oct while the first record of **Striated Heron** *Butorides striata* for Kuwait was at Sulaibikhat bay 31 Jul–1 Aug. **Socotra Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* seem to have had a good breeding year as the second highest count ever, of 21 juveniles, was made from Sabah Al Ahmad sea city 9 Jul.

The **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* at Al Abraq Al Khabari 12–15 Nov was the fifteenth record while the third-fifth records of **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* involved one at Jahra pivot fields (JPF) 18 Sep, one at Al Abraq 20 Oct and one at JPF 10 Nov (Plate 1). **Shikras** *Accipiter badius* were noted at Tulha (Sabah Al-Ahmad nature reserve, SAANR) 8 Oct (Plate 2) and at Al Abraq Al Khabari 22–29 Sep. Four



Plate 1. Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, 10 November 2011, Jahra pivot fields, Kuwait. © AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan



Plate 2. Shikra *Accipiter badius*, 8 October 2011, Tulha (Sabah Al-Ahmad nature reserve), Kuwait. © AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan



Plate 4. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, 20 October 2011, Al Abraq Al Khabari, Kuwait. © AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan



Plate 3. Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, 6 October 2011, Jahra Pools, Kuwait. © AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan

Common Cranes *Grus grus* at SAANR 6 Dec was the ninth record.

A **Eurasian Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* at JPF and Jahra East outfall 15 Jul was the ninth record and one at JPF 4 Dec the tenth. A **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* at JPR 2–4 Jun was only the second record and the **Pectoral Sandpiper** *C. melanotos* 5–8 Oct (Plate 3) was the first record for the country.

An **Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* at Jahra East outfall 3 Jun was the fifth record and a **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* at JPR 31 May the third record. 14 **Namaqua Doves** *Oena capensis* at JPF 4 Dec was a

particularly large gathering. There were two **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* at Sulaibikhat bay 25 Oct with one at Al Abraq Al Khabari 20 Oct (Plate 4). Along with several other countries there were arrivals of **Yellow-browed Warblers** *Phylloscopus inornatus* with one at Al Abraq Al Khabari 15 Nov and one at Rawdatain bottling plant 10 Dec while a **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *P. humei* at Rawdatain 3–10 Dec constitutes the fourth record. A juvenile **Savi's Warbler** *Locustella lusciniooides* at Jahra East outfall 22 Jul may have indicated breeding but some dispersal may have occurred to Kuwait by this date. An addition to the Kuwait list was provided by the **Pied Stonechat** *Saxicola caprata* at JPR 26 May whilst 141 **Tawny Pipits** *Anthus campestris* at JPF 27 Oct was the highest ever count for the country. Since the first in 2005 there have now been over ten records of **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* with further singles at Al Abraq Al Khabari 9 Dec–year end and at JPF 11 Dec. The **Grey-necked Bunting** *Emberiza buchanani* recorded at SAANR 16 Sep will be the third record if accepted.

LEBANON

Six **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* were at Aammiq wetland 14 Aug. Improved water levels there also led to the over summering of a **Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*. The highlight of the autumn raptor migration was the sighting of two **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* south over Aley 25 Sep.

A Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris* was photographed at Dalhoun 28 Aug. Finally, a male Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus* was well seen at Kfar Zabad 8 Oct. This is the first record for Lebanon and was perhaps long overdue, given the species' presence in all the neighbouring countries.

OMAN

The highlight was a first for the region, an adult female Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis* at Thumrait 7 Dec. In addition, the period included second records for Oman of the following species: a Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus* at East Khawr 4 Nov, a Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* at Sun farm, Sohar, 25–26 Dec (the first record being 47 years ago), a Lesser Moorhen *Gallinula angulata* at Barr al Hickman 23 Nov and a Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* at Sun farm 18–21 Nov. A Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* at Al Mughsayl 24–25 Nov was the third country record.

Greater White-Fronted Geese *Anser albifrons* occurred widely during November and December; in addition to more usual sightings on the farms and khawrs around Salalah, single birds were present at Sun farm, Al Ansab wetlands, Muscat and at Haima in the central desert. The maximum count was of 37 at East Khawr, Salalah, 15 Dec. Common Shelducks *Tadorna tadorna* occur irregularly during the winter and so a count of nine at East Khawr 13 Nov was of note. Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* is an uncommon winter visitor, mainly to the Dhofar region, and there were single birds at Al Mughsayl, East Khawr and Sahnawt farm during the first half of November. There were eight Red-crested Pochards *Netta rufina* at Qitbit 10 Dec. A Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* at Al Ansab wetlands 3 Dec was only the fourth record for the country and the first since 1998.

Ras Mirbat, 60 km east of Salalah, is one of Oman's most important sea watching sites. A count there on 13 Nov yielded three Jouanin's Petrels *Bulweria fallax*, one Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*, 50 Persian Shearwaters *Puffinus persicus*, two Wilson's Storm Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*, five Swinhoe's Storm Petrels *Oceanodroma monorhis*, six Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*, one Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* and 20 Bridled Terns *Onychoprion anaethetus*.

There were 200+ Wilson's Storm Petrels *Oceanodroma monorhis* seen off Salalah 2 Nov while a pelagic trip off Muscat 5 Sep produced 20 Jouanin's Petrels *Bulweria fallax*, one Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus*, 100 Wilson's Storm Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*, four Swinhoe's Storm Petrels *Oceanodroma monorhis* and one Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*. An unusually high count of eight of the latter species was recorded off Al Mughsayl 14 Nov.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* is one species to benefit from the management of Al Ansab wetlands as a nature reserve; maximum count for the period was 46 on 8 Oct. After a long absence, Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* have started to make an appearance there too, with a maximum count of seven on 3 Dec. There were three Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* at Wadi Darbat 17 Nov and five Khawr Rouri 28 Dec. The occurrence of 600 Western White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* at Raysut 28 Nov was the highest count for some time. Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* is a much sought after species by visiting birders; single birds were at East Khawr, the best known site for the species, 4 Sep, at Ayn Hamran 6 Nov and Al Mughsayl 12 Nov. There are relatively few winter records for this species, which is usually seen Jun–Aug. There were three juvenile Great White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at East Khawr 12–15 Dec, the eighth record.

Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* is now recognized as a rare winter visitor to Oman, especially in the Salalah area. Up to three birds were present from the end of Oct and throughout Nov variously at Khawr Taqah, Salalah nature reserve, Al Mughsayl, Raysut and East Khawr. A somewhat more unexpected record was of two birds seen and photographed at Qurm park, Muscat, 13 Nov. A European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* was at Ayn Tobruk 25 Sep. A Shikra *Accipiter badius* was at Sun farm 1 Dec. The most significant count of large eagles during the period was at Raysut 28 Nov; 900 Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis*—a new maximum count—were present along with 10 Greater Spotted Eagles *Aquila clanga* and 10 Eastern Imperial Eagles *Aquila heliaca*. There was a single Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* at Wadi Darbat 8 Nov, and two to

three at Al Mughsayl 11 and 12 Nov. The last sighting of **Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor* for the year was on 6 Nov at Al Sawadi, when three birds were present.

A **Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica cristata* at West Khawr 18–25 Nov was the seventh record. Two records of **African Swamphen** *Porphyrrio madagascariensis*, one at West Khawr 22 Sep and one Qurm park mid Oct–early Dec, have prompted a re-examination of earlier records which were accepted as Purple Gallinules *Porphyrio porphyrio*, now known as Purple Swamphen. Two of these records, one at East Khawr, 1983, and one at Qurm park, 1995, are most likely African Swamphens and would therefore be the first and second records and thus this year's records would be the third and fourth records.

There were single **White-breasted Waterhens** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* at Ayn Razat 15 Nov and at Muntasar 29 Oct–3 Nov. Two **Spotted Thick-knees** *Burhinus capensis* were at Jarziz farm 17 Nov. Small numbers of **Caspian Plovers** *Charadrius asiaticus* were present at East Khawr and Sahnawt farm in the south and at Sohar Sun farm in the north, Sep–Nov, with a maximum of three at Sun farm 6–12 Sep. **Spur-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus spinosus* is a rare winter visitor to Oman; there were four at Sahnawt farm 6 Nov and five 14–18 Nov. Oman is an important winter site for **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius*; there were seven at Sahnawt farm 15 Nov, rising to 29 on 25 Nov and three birds were present 26–27 Nov at Sun farm with five on 3 Dec and three on 26 Dec. There were 1–2 **Cream-coloured Courfers** *Cursorius cursor* at Sun farm 20–27 Oct and, more unusually, one at Qitbit 3 Nov. There was a **Small Pratincole** *Glareola lactea* at Khawr Taqah 25 Nov. **Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subrufa* is an uncommon winter visitor to Oman with very few records in recent years and thus single birds seen at Sun farm 24 Nov and at Al Ansab wetlands during the week beginning 31 Jul and the week beginning 3 Dec are of note. Single **Pectoral Sandpipers** *Calidris melanotos* were present at Sur sewage farm 9 Oct and 11–15 Oct at Qurm park, Muscat—the 10th and 11th records respectively. A count of 600 **Ruffs** *Philomachus pugnax* at Sahnawt farm 19 Nov was a new maximum. A **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* was seen at Sun farm 11 Oct.

Pied Cuckoo *Oxylophus jacobinus* is regarded as a rare passage migrant, but this autumn saw birds at numerous sites in the Salalah area during Nov (Dawkah, Sahnawt and Al Balid farms, Al Mughsayl, Tawi Atayr, East Khawr, Ayn Hamran, Thumrait, Raysut) and at Muntasar and nearby Qibit in the central desert. The maximum count was at Muntasar 3 Nov, when 9 were seen. The influx may due to a period of cyclonic weather, which affected the south of the country especially. A single bird was also seen in the north at Al Ghubrah bowl 12 Dec. A **Grey-bellied Cuckoo** *Cacomantis passerinus* seen north of Duqm 28 Oct was the fourth record. An **Asian Koel** *Eudynamys scolopaceus* was at Qitbit 26 Nov. Two **Hume's Owls** *Strix butleri* were at Al Mughsayl 14 Nov. A single **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* was seen, at Shannah 26 Oct. Liwa, on the Batinah coast, is the stronghold of **Collared Kingfisher** *Todiramphus chloris* in Oman; there were single sightings there 5 Sep and 15–18 Nov.

A **Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach* was seen at Al Ghaftayn resthouse 16 Sep. A **Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus* was at Dawkah farm 18–27 Sept; it was first sighted with 30 **Isabelline Shrikes** *Lanius isabellinus* sl, eight **Daurian Shrikes** *Lanius isabellinus* ss, 20 **Turkestan Shrikes** *Lanius (isabellinus) phoenicuroides*, two **Red-backed Shrikes** *Lanius collurio* and one **Steppe Grey Shrike** *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris* as well as 40 **Eurasian Golden Orioles** *Oriolus oriolus*, a new high count. The first sighting for the winter of **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* was of an individual 8 Nov at Qitbit; single birds were seen thereafter at Dawkah farm (10 Nov) and, unusually, in the north at Liwa (15 Nov).

Single **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* were seen at Sun farm 20 Oct and 27 Nov, relatively early occurrences since the species is generally seen Dec–Feb. A **Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola* was at the same site 20 Oct, the seventh record for Oman. Apart from Musandam, Khatmat Milahah is one of the best places in Oman for **Plain Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus neglectus* and there were three there 24 Oct and two on 18 Nov. One was also at Sun farm 3 Dec. A **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* at

Film 26 October was the fourth record for Oman. A **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* was at Qitbit 15 Dec, while a **Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus nitidus* was there 27 Oct. A **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* was at Dawkah farm 18 Sep. There were two **Blyth's Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* at Sahnawt farm 6 Nov, the fourth record for Oman. There was a **Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* at Qitbit 10 Dec. A **Brahminy Starling** *Sturnia pagodarum* at Raysut 1 Nov and another at Qitbit 9–10 Nov, were the eighth and ninth records for Oman. There were three **Wattled Starlings** *Creatophora cinerea* at Jarziz farm 7 Nov and a **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* at Dawkah farm 18 Sep. A **Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* (ssp *variegata*) was seen at Sun farm 1 Dec. A **Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* was at Qurm park 26 Nov with two present at Qitbit 10–15 Dec.

Sun farm is the premier site for pipits in Oman; for example a count on 5 Nov yielded four **Richard's Pipits** *Anthus (novaseelandiae) richardi*, 250+ **Tawny Pipits** *Anthus campestris*, 60 **Water Pipits** *Anthus spinoletta* and 30 **Red-throated Pipits** *Anthus cervinus*. The seventh record of **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* was seen there 26 Dec. On 27 Nov, there were 50 **Yemen Serin**

Crithagra menachensis at Tawi Atayr, equal to the record count for the species from the same site. A **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* was at al Ghaftayn 16 Nov and another at Qitbit 28 Nov. A **Pale Rockfinch** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* was at Qitbit 17 Sep. There were three **Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeaks** *Rhynchostruthus percivali* at Ayn Hamran 27 Nov, an excellent record as the birds can be difficult to locate other than when male birds are singing in the spring. There were two **Black-headed Buntings** *Emberiza melanocephala* at Sun farm 5 Sep and one 12 Nov. One was seen at Dawkah farm 18 Sep and another at Qitbit 17 Nov.

QATAR

(All records are from Irkayya farm unless otherwise stated.)

12 **Greater White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* (ten juveniles and two adults), a rare winter visitor, 19 Nov–3 Dec and ten adults 25 Dec. The second record of **Cotton Pygmy Goose** *Nettapus coromandelianus*, an adult female, was present 2–3 Dec (Plate 5). The third record of **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus*, an adult, stayed 5 Aug–2 Oct (Plate 6). Omitted from previous *Around the Region* reports was the first record for Qatar of Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, a



Plate 5. Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*, 3 December 2011, Irkayya farm, Qatar. © Sameh Odeh



Plate 6. Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, 3 September 2011, Irkayya farm, Qatar. © Sameh Odeh



Plate 7. Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, 23 November 2011, Irkayya farm, Qatar. © Sameh Odeh

juvenile showing features of ssp *buteoides*, on 4 Dec 2009. One juvenile **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*, a rare visitor, 6 Aug, was the fourth record. Other rare winter visitors included a single **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius* 8–31 Dec and two juvenile **Eurasian**

Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* 19 Nov–9 Dec (Plate 7). One adult **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus*, a rare passage migrant, on 26 Nov. The first confirmed record of **Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* was present 23–26 Nov (Plate 8).



Plate 8. Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, 23 November 2011, Irkayya farm, Qatar. © Sameh Odeh



Plate 9. Pied Cuckoo *Oxylophus jacobinus*, 19 November 2011, Irkayya farm, Qatar. © Sameh Odeh

Another first record for the country was a juvenile **Pied Cuckoo** *Oxylophus jacobinus* 18–21 Nov (Plate 9), part of the influx into Arabia this autumn. Normally a rare winter visitor, **Short-eared Owls** *Asio flammeus* were seen at Al Wakrah 26 Oct (one, Plate 10) and Irkayya farm 28 Oct–31 Dec (at least five).

Egyptian Nightjars *Caprimulgus aegyptius* were seen 31 Jul and 26 Aug. An adult female **Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis*, a rare winter visitor, was at Abu Nakhla 21 Oct. **Bimaculated Larks** *Melanocorypha bimaculata* were seen at Irkayya farm 25 Nov and 10 Dec. A **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola*



Plate 10. Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, 26 October 2011, Al Wakrah, Qatar. © Sameh Odeh



Plate 11. Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, 31 December 2011, Irkayya farm, Qatar. © Ahmad Ammar Kazal

was there 31 Dec (Plate 11), the first record for Qatar.

SAUDI ARABIA

(All records are from the Eastern province. Jabal Nayriyyah is a desert site 70 km north of Jubail.)

Three adult Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* were at Sabkhat Al Fasl (SAF) 21 Jul and 4 Aug with a single juvenile there 28 Jul. An adult male Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* was seen perched and in flight

over Dhahran 30 Jul—this is a very unusual summer record. An immature was present in the trees surrounding the percolation pond at Dhahran Hills 27–28 Sep. Two juvenile Short-toed Snake Eagles *Circaetus gallicus* were seen perched together on a sand mound, as well in flight over Dhahran on 22 Oct. A second calendar year Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* was at SAF 21 Jul, the same bird being seen there again 18 Aug. This record indicates that some birds may spend the summer in Saudi Arabia. An immature bird was seen at SAF 15 and 29 Sep and 6 Oct. Three birds including a single adult were at the same site 27 Oct with five adults and four juveniles (first calendar year) 13 Nov and four juveniles 24 Nov. Seven birds (four juveniles and three adults) were again at the same site 1 Dec with nine there (four adults and five juveniles) 8 Dec. A juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* was seen perched on a telegraph pole and in flight at Dhahran 22 Oct. A juvenile bird was at SAF 27 Oct with possibly the same bird there 12 Dec. Five birds (one juvenile, three subadults and one adult) were seen at or near Jabal Nayriyyah 10 Nov.



Plate 12. White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*, 29 September 2011, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Bobbington



Plate 13. Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, 29 July 2011, Dammam-Al Khobar wader roost, Tarut bay, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Bobbington

A Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* was caught by local falconers 10 Nov in an area just south of Jubail. An immature Little Crake *Porzana parva* was seen in the reeds at SAF 24 Nov. Two Crab Plovers *Dromas ardeola* were seen at the Dammam-Al Khobar wader roost in Tarut bay 22 Jul. A juvenile was seen there begging for food from two adults 10–15 Aug. Numbers then varied on every subsequent visit until 20 Oct, with the maximum count being 20. A White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* was at SAF 29 Sep (Plate 12) and 6 Oct. An adult summer plumaged Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* was seen at Saihat mangrove high-tide wader roost in Tarut bay 29 Jul while a winter-plumaged adult was at SAF 24 Nov.

Two Pin-tailed Snipes *Gallinago stenura* were seen feeding in the damp vegetation at the edge of the main lagoon at SAF 15 Sep. Two further birds were seen 19 Sep at the percolation pond at Dhahran camp, Dhahran. This species is very rarely seen in Saudi Arabia, although possibly overlooked. A Great Snipe *Gallinago media* was seen well at the edge of the percolation pond in Dhahran 22 Oct. This species is a vagrant to Saudi Arabia. This same location produced another vagrant to the country, Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*, 4 Oct. 150 Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus* were seen at the Dammam-Al Khobar wader roost in Tarut bay 29 Jul (Plate 13) reducing to 125 on 4 Aug. Nine Cream-coloured Courser



Plate 14. Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*, 10 November 2011, Jabal Nayriyyah, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Bobbington

Cursorius cursor were seen at Dammam airport pools 8 Jul. A moulting adult Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* was seen on an inland pool in Dammam 4 Aug; this species is much scarcer in autumn than in spring. 173 Caspian Terns *Hydroprogne caspia* were seen at SAF 29 Sep which is an exceptionally high count for a single site.

Two Pharaoh Eagle Owls *Bubo ascalaphus* were seen at day break at Jabal Nayriyyah 10 Nov (Plate 14). Two Egyptian Nightjars *Caprimulgus aegyptius* were found roosting at SAF 21 Jul. Although birds have been regularly seen at this site in August for the past six years, this is an early record. Singles were

seen there 11 and 18 Aug and two 25 Aug. A single was seen in flight at Dhahran Hills 10 Nov. **Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* is a rare visitor to Saudi Arabia but one was present at SAF 6 Nov and what was presumably the same bird was also there 1 Dec. Three different first year **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* were seen feeding on insects at the percolation pond in Dhahran 5, 13 and 19 Sep. An adult was seen at SAF 24 Nov with probably the same bird also there 12 Dec.

SYRIA

One pair of **Northern Bald Ibises** *Geronticus eremita* successfully fledged two young near Palmyra this year. Three adults are now wintering in Ethiopia but the whereabouts of the young birds is unknown.

TURKEY

Spring observations omitted from the previous *Arouiid the Region* report were 18590 **Western White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* at Subaşı, Hatay, 25 Mar and a **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* at Milleyha, Hatay, 13 Mar with two 23 Apr. Four **Mute Swans** *Cygnus olor* at Nizip, Gaziantep, 10 Dec were of note. Autumn migration counts included 8045 **Great White Pelicans** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* in the Subaşı and Samandağ area 30 Sep–10 Oct, and 364 **Levant Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter brevipes* at Belen pass 15 Sep and 646 at Subaşı 1 Oct. The recent run of **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* records continued with two

in Urfa 12 Aug and one at Subaşı 12 and 14 Dec (first record for the province). Two **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *Aquila pomarina* at Nizip 27 Nov–4 Dec was a late record. A **Bonelli's Eagle** *Hieraetus fasciatus* was observed in the Amanos mountains 15 Sep and a **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* at Erzin 29 Oct. A **Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax* was at Filyos, Zonguldak, 7 Nov.

Waders of interest included the third record of **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*, in the Kızılırmak Delta, 26 and 27 Sep (Plate 15) closely followed by the fourth record, at Kuyucuk lake, Kars, 8 Oct. A **Jack Snipe** *Lymnocryptes minimus* was at Samandağ 27 Nov, while a **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* was at Milleyha 13 Aug (first record for the province) and a **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* was at Milleyha 20 Aug. An adult **Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* at Haydarpaşa railway station, Kadıköy, Istanbul, 12 Sep continued the trend of regular records of this once rare species.

A **Eurasian Eagle Owl** *Bubo bubo* at Ciğdem, Ankara, 12 Sep was a notable record. The third Turkish **Steppe Grey Shrike** *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris* was seen and photographed at Trabzon 11 Sep. Single **Pallas's Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus proregulus* at the Kızılırmak delta 23 (Plate 16) and 24 Oct and Riva, İstanbul, 2 Nov, were the second and third records. There were several records of **Yellow-browed Warblers** *Phylloscopus inornatus* with singles at Moda, İstanbul, 22 Oct, Riva 2 Nov and six at the Kızılırmak delta



Plate 15. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, 27 September 2011, Kızılırmak delta, Turkey. © Nizamettin Yavuz



Plate 16. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, 23 October 2011, Kızılırmak delta, Turkey. © Nizamettin Yavuz



Plate 17. Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*, 30 October 2011, Filyos delta, Turkey. © Mustafa Erturhan

25–27 Nov. The second Turkish record of **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* was a single in Samsun 19 Nov. Single **Common Grasshopper Warblers** *Locustella naevia* were recorded at Kırıkhan, Hatay, 3 Apr and Balık Gölü, Hatay, 28 Aug and 10 Sep. An **Asian Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana* at the Filyos delta 30 Oct (Plate 17) was the second record. A **Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* was at Subası, 14 Mar, together with a **Cyprus Wheatear** *Oenanthe cypriaca*, and a **Siberian Stonechat** was also recorded at Nizip 13 Nov. A **Pale Rock Finch** *Petronia brachydactyla* was at Kırıkhan 28 May. A **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* at Nizip 10 Dec was of note. The Samandağ-Milleyha area continued to attract rare pipits with four **Richard's Pipits** *Anthus (nowaseelaudiae) richardi* 22 Oct and one 1 Nov and one **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubesceus) japonicus* 13 Mar, three 13 Nov and two 27 Nov (third–fifth records). A **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* at Subası 5 Nov was exceptionally late though there are two previous mid-winter records. At least five **Cinereous Buntings** *Emberiza cineracea* at Balık Gölü 10 Sep were the first record for the province. Single **Snow Buntings** *Plectrophenax*

nivalis were recorded at Kefken, Kocaeli, 13 Nov and at Bartın 18 Nov.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

There were records of Greater White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons* at a number of sites from 12 Nov onwards, with a maximum count of 45 birds at Wamm farms. Pelagic trips off Khor Kalba on the east coast continued to produce some excellent records. The UAE's third **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris (diomedea) borealis* was seen 1 Jul (the first and second



Plate 18. Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, 12 August 2011, off Khor Kalba, UAE. © Tommy Pedersen



Plate 19. Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*, 24 August 2011, Wamm farms, UAE. © Tommy Pedersen

records were off the same location 12 May and 22 Jun). Another trip on 12 Aug produced a Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* (Plate 18), the second record for the UAE and the first since 2004; one or two birds were then seen on each of five subsequent trips until 17 Sep, the third to seventh UAE records. With only one previous record (2010), this has been an exceptional year for Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes* in the UAE, being recorded from 15 Apr onwards with a maximum of 21 being recorded 1 Jul–26 Aug. A maximum of 950 Persian Shearwaters *Puffinus persicus* were seen on 1 Jul, with lower numbers occurring until late Dec, some pelagic trips recording only single birds. Two Swinhoe's Storm Petrels *Oceanodroma monorhis* were seen and photographed 12 Aug, a new species for the UAE. Up to five birds were seen on four subsequent pelagic trips until 9 Sep. Wilson's Storm Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* were recorded 20 May–7 Oct with a maximum of 60 birds on this last date. A Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* was spotted off Fujairah 30 Oct, only the 15th record.

Up to 10 Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotus* showed well at a camel carcass

inside the Dubai Desert conservation reserve 10–22 Nov. A Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* was present at Al Qua'a fodder field 27 Oct–7 Dec, only the fifth record of this rare harrier in the UAE since 1999 and the first since 2006. A Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* 16 Aug in the Dubai Desert conservation reserve was an unusual record.

A White-breasted Waterhen *Auwauornis phoenicurus* was seen in Sharjah university city 2–3 Dec. Single Baillon's Crakes *Porzana pusilla* were at Wadi Al Ain, one 27–29 Sep and another on 29 Oct, the 15th and 16th records.

A Great Stone-curlew *Esacus recurvirostris* at the Bu Al Siaief marine protected area 27 Sep was the first record for the UAE while a Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* at Al Ain water treatment plant 4–26 Nov was only the sixth record. A Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* was present on Sila'a peninsula 9 Dec, the 17th record. Single Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* were recorded at Mirfa water treatment plant, an adult 6–9 Oct and an immature 15–19 Nov; these were the fourth and fifth records. The fourth UAE record of Oriental Pratincole



Plate 20. 'Western' Black Redstart *Phoenicurus (ochruros) gibraltariensis*, 12 January 2012, Jebel Dhanna, UAE. © Khalifa Al Dhaheri

Glareola maldivarum was at Wamm farms 24–31 Aug (Plate 19).

An adult **Mediterranean Gull** *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus* on Lulu island 19 Nov was the eighth record and the first adult bird seen. Pelagic trips off Khor Kalba produced records of **Brown Noddies** *Auous stolidus* until 1 Dec, with a maximum of 19 on 6 Aug, while the fourth UAE record of **Lesser Noddy** *Auous tenuirostris* was photographed 22 Sep. This was another good year for **Sooty Terns** *Ouychopriion fuscatus* with up to two birds being seen 12 Aug–14 Oct, the 10th, 11th and 12th records. Finally, a **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* on the 6 Aug pelagic trip was the 12th record.

The invasion of **Pied Cuckoos** *Clamator jacobinus* in Oman was reflected in two birds together at Wamm farms 4–6 Nov, only the third record for the UAE. An **Asian Koel** *Eudynamys scolopaceus* was present on Sila'a peninsula 9 Dec, the 13th record. Two **Alpine Swifts** *Apus melba* were seen over Samaya hotel in Dubai 17 Nov, only the 23rd record of this scarce swift in the UAE. The tenth record of **White-throated Kingfisher**

Halcyon smyrneensis, at Wamm farms 5–30 Nov, was the source of much delight as well as frustration as it played hide-and-seek with many a visiting birder. A lone **Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra* was with a flock of **Bimaculated Larks** *Melanocorypha bimaculata* at the Al Qua'a fodder field 9 Dec, the sixth record. An **Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus* in Safa park, 27–28 Oct, was the fourth record, but the biggest surprise of this autumn was an **Asian Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone paradisi* on Dalma island 27 Oct, the first for the UAE and Arabia.

A male **Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula* was seen briefly on Jebel Dhanna 19 Nov, while a **Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* made a brief appearance on Sila'a peninsula 9 Dec, the 8th record. The first record of 'Western' **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus (ochruros) gibraltariensis* occurred at Jebel Dhanna 27–28 Dec and was photographed 12 Jan 2012 (Plate 20). A lone **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampekius* was seen on Lulu island 21 Oct and was a very early record for the UAE. Maximum counts were 30 at the same location 25 Nov and 21 on Sila'a peninsula 18 Nov. A single **Buff-bellied Pipit**

Authus (rubescens) japonicus at Emirates Palace hotel 10 Dec was the 20th UAE record and only the second for Abu Dhabi island.

UZBEKISTAN

Single Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* were recorded in the Kattasay river valley (southwestern slopes of the Chatkal range, Tashkent region) 15 May and 11 Aug. This species has been lost as a breeding species in recent years in the mountains of the Tashkent region. A flock of 900 Great White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* was recorded 9 Sep at Solenoë lake, Jeyran ecocenter (Bukhara region). The lake is a traditional stopping place for many migratory birds, but this year it was dry.

Other autumn migrants at the Jeyran ecocenter included Western Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* (two 10 Sep and one 21 Oct, Plate 21), Cinereous Vultures *Aegypius monachus* (two 9 Sep and one 12 Nov), and Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (one 21 Oct). A Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, a rare visitor, was recorded on migration 25 Sep in the vicinity of Khodjikent (Chatkal ridge, Tashkent region). A single Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* was recorded 2 Oct during a vehicle count along the Amu-Bukhara canal (Bukhara region).

A migratory flock of 70 Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* was recorded 2 Oct in the upper part of the Chirchik river valley in the foothills of the Chatkal range (Tashkent region), an unusual location for this species. Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* is a rare migrant in Uzbekistan so a single bird recorded 2 Oct at lake Khadicha (Bukhara region) was of note. Also seen on the same day at this location was a small flock of seven Marsh Sandpipers *Tringa stagnatilis*, a late autumn record.

A breeding pair of Egyptian Nightjars *Caprimulgus aegyptius* was photographed in April in the northern part of the Jeyran ecocenter at the foot of the Kagan hills—breeding at this location had been previously suspected but this is the first confirmation (Plate 22). An unusually high number of Asian Paradise Flycatchers *Terpsiphone paradisi* was recorded 2 Jul in Nurata reserve (Djizzak region, Plate 23) when 17 individuals were observed during a walked count of 3 hours 50 minutes. In early October in



Plate 21. Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, 21 October 2011, Solenoë lake, Jeyran ecocenter, Uzbekistan. © Valentin Soldatov



Plate 22. Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*, April 2011, Kagan hills, Jeyran ecocenter, Uzbekistan. © Valentin Soldatov



Plate 23. Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, 2 July 2011, Nurata reserve, Uzbekistan. © Lidia Shinas

Tashkent, a pair of Eurasian Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* occupied the nest of a pair of Laughing Doves *Spilopelia senegalensis* on a maple tree and brooded the latter's nestlings. From the second half of October, the adults continued to feed their adopted young despite heavy rains and a snowfall. The young birds finally left the nest 11 Nov although they were ready to fly as early as 5 Nov. Two nesting

pairs of Blue-headed Redstarts *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus* were recorded 3 Apr in the Kattasay valley and birds were still present until 8 Nov. Breeding of these rare birds has been observed here regularly since 2003.

YEMEN

Two Arabian Bustards *Ardeotis arabs* were for sale in Sana'a livestock market on 26 Aug (Plate 24). Two Hume's Owl *Strix butleri* chicks were successfully raised at a nest in Sana village, on the outskirts of Sana'a, one of which was photographed 7 Oct. This is an unusually urban setting for this species. An Eastern Nightingale *Luscinia (megarhynchos) golzii* was photographed in a camera trap 13 Oct at Kharoabit in Hawf, Al Mahrah—this may be the first authenticated record of this race in Yemen.



Plate 24. Two Arabian Bustards *Ardeotis arabs* at Nuqum animal market in Sana'a, Yemen, 26 August 2011. © David Stanton

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following assisted in the compilation of this review:

S Alterman, M Altianni, Vaughan & Svetlana Ashby, L Azzam, Jem Babington, Oudah al-Bathaly, Oleg Beliov, Jamie Buchan, Darren Burns, Paul Chapman, Mike Chalmers, Max Dettori, Amir Ben Dov, Gennady Dyakin, Pekka Fågel, Manfred Fleischer, Brian Foster, G Galili, Haim Ganzer, Kai Gauger, Khaled Al-Ghanem, Meysam Ghasemi, Hillary Gilbert, M Goren, Fahimeh Goudarzi, Barak Granit, Mehmet Günel, Rashed Al Hajji, R Haran, Michael Heisse, Dick Hoek, O Horine, Simon Ingram, Moldovan Istvan, Askar Isabekov, Tuvia Kahn, J Kamp, Roman Kashkarov, Brendan Kavanagh, Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh, Fares Khoury, András Kovács, Yotam Lenhardt, Oleg Lyakhov, Igor Maiorano, M Mandel, Mary Megalli, Frank Moffat, David Murdoch, Bagher Nezami, Gabor Papp, Richard Patient, Tommy Pedersen, Yoav Perlman, Thomas Pettersson, Mike Pope, David Porat, Richard Porter, T Qaneer, F Rahahleh, Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi, Colin Richardson, A Rinot, Jon Rouse, R Segali, R Shaish, Malcolm Shakespeare, Itai Shanni, Y Shishani, E Shochat, AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan, James P Smith, Jos Stafford, D Standing, David Stanton, Ellen V Tavakoli, Simon Tull, Magnus Ullman, Ruslan Urazaliyev, Martin Wolinski, D Yosha, R Juliusburger, Geoff Welch, Sander Willems, Nizamettin Yavuz and Emin Yogurtcuoglu.

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OSME region

ISSN 0260-4736



OSME region map design
by Ian Fisher and
colleagues at the RSPB

Typesetting & layout
by Eng-Li Green
engli@egreenworks.us

Printed by
Swallowtail Print of
Norwich, UK
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