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ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST
THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

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Passerine migrants in Bahariya oasis, Western desert, Egypt: surveys and habitat associations

MATTHEW WHITE, KRZYSZTOF STĘPNIEWSKI & MARY MEGALLI

We report records of 83 species of birds in Bahariya oasis, the Western desert, Egypt, August–September 2010, including over 30 passerine migrant species and 36 species of water birds. Fifty-four species were recorded at Abu Yasser lake (El Heiz) and 74 at El Marun lake (Bawiti). Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (>210 birds) was the most abundant species recorded, followed by Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (>130) and Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (>112). 144 birds of 18 species were trapped in total. Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* was the most numerous trapped species (20.1%), followed by Spanish Sparrow (18%), Yellow Wagtail (14.5%) and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* (13.8%). 52.8% of the birds were trapped in tamarisk habitat, 39% in Alfalfa *Medicago sativa* crops, 4.8% in fruit trees and 3.2% in reeds/rushes. 100% (21) of the Yellow Wagtails were trapped in a mosaic of alfalfa crops as well as 75% (18) of the Willow Warblers at El Marun lake. This study confirms Bahariya oasis is a stopover area for passerine migrants, which are probably using an intermittent migration strategy on passage through the Western desert. A large number of passerine migrants with reasonably high fat scores were recorded actively foraging in a variety of habitats. The birds and wildlife of Bahariya oasis are threatened by development, overuse of water resources for agriculture, and illegal hunting. Protection is required through nature conservation designation and conservation management to protect, restore and maintain habitats for resident and migratory birds.

INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian Western desert or ‘Libyan’ desert (681 000 km²) is about two-thirds of Egypt’s total land area. From east to west the Western desert stretches from the Nile valley (31°E) to the Libyan border (25°E) and south to north from the Sudanese border (25°N) nearly to the coast of the Mediterranean (34°N). Bahariya oasis is located 180 km west of the Nile valley and has a maximum length of 95 km, width of 40 km and a total area of 1800 km². The oasis was formed by abundant rainfall widening ground floor fractures, which were weathered down to Nubian sandstone strata. It is located in a depression that rises up to 150 m asl and is partly surrounded by steep desert escarpments (Goodman *et al* 1986).

Agriculture dominates the Bahariya oasis landscape, which is supported by fertile soils and several shallow and deep-cased wells. Extensive date palm plantations, alfalfa crops and cash crops are all dependent on irrigation. Most crops are located around saline lake depressions, primarily formed by run-off irrigation water, that have small amounts of water through the year, such as El Marun lake, north of Bawiti, and Abu Yasser lake in El Heiz (Figure 1). Bawiti is the largest town, accessed by a good 370 km tarmac road from central Cairo. Bawiti has various shops, markets, museums and tourist hotels, which have been developed to cater for desert trips. El Heiz is a small bedouin town in southern Bahariya oasis, surrounded by the ‘Black’ desert.

Ornithological records from Bahariya oasis were obtained in 1925 when RE Moreau visited the area to collect specimens. Al Hussani also recorded birds in 1938 and 1958 (Goodman *et al* 1986). Several studies were conducted at Sadat farm, 15 km north of Bahariya oasis, in the 1980s by German ornithologists (Biebach *et al* 1986).

More than half a billion birds from Europe and Asia migrate through the Middle East (Shirihai 1996). Egypt is located in an extremely important strategic position along these migratory flyways, connecting the European and African continents (Baha El Din 1999). Biannually, passerines migrate and stopover at suitable sites throughout the country from locations as far as northern Europe (Fransson *et al* 2005, Hasseb *et al* 2006). However, many migrant species eg Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* and Red-backed Shrike

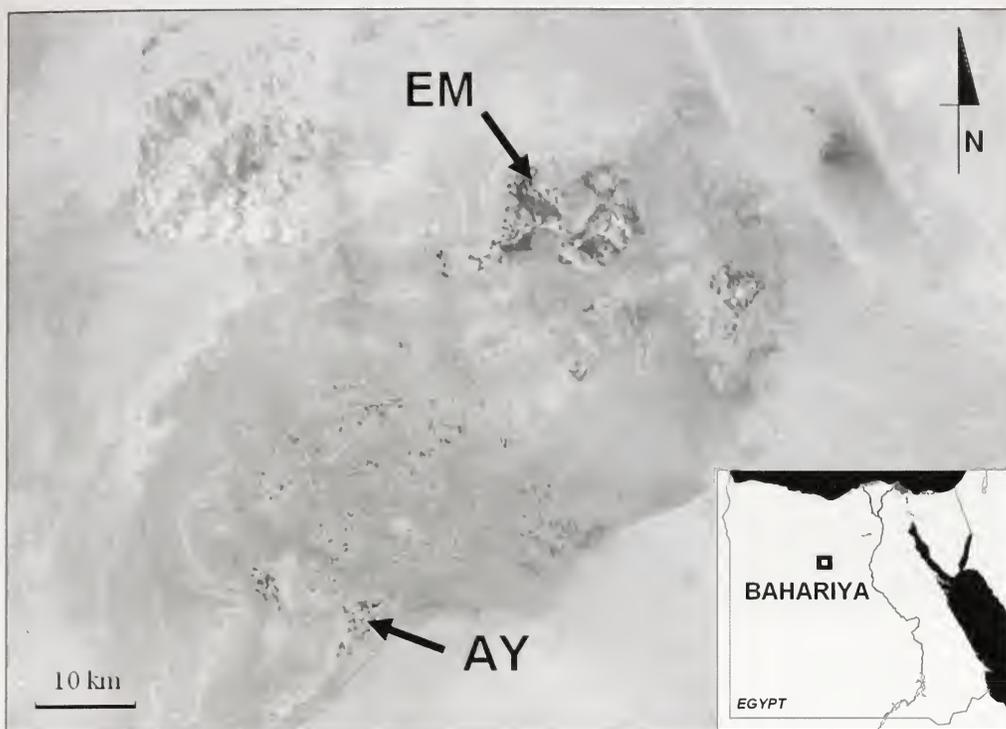


Figure 1. Bahariya oasis study sites, Western desert, Egypt. The main area of the oasis with El Marun lake is shown in the upper half of the photo, Abu Yasser lake in El Heiz in the lower. AY = Abu Yasser lake, EM = El Marun lake. Source of photograph: GoogleEarth.

Lanius collurio are experiencing declines in their breeding populations throughout Europe (BirdLife International 2004). One of the reasons is thought to be decreased survival on migration. Recently, it has been accepted that some migrant birds use an intermittent migration strategy, stopping over en route to rest and refuel (Schmaljohann *et al* 2007, Salewski *et al* 2010). Bahariya oasis could be an important stopover area for a variety of migrant birds.

An assessment of its avifauna was therefore commissioned and conducted by the Nature and Science Foundation, Egypt, in collaboration with the SE European Bird Migration Network (SEEN) based at University of Gdańsk, Poland, to provide baseline data on resident and migratory species, with a view to setting up a permanent ringing station in future years.

STUDY SITES AND METHODS

The Abu Yasser lake study site/ringing station was in operation 26–31 August and the El Marun lake study site/ringing station 1–15 September, 2010.

Abu Yasser lake (El Heiz)

Abu Yasser (28.01282° N, 28.71953° E) is a small saline lake, part of El Heiz, 3 km southeast of the Bahariya–Farafra oasis road. In August 2010 only a small area of the lake had standing water (Plate 1). The lake landscape is a mosaic of different habitats including mudflats, rushes, reeds, date palm plantations, cultivated land, tamarisk trees and scrub. Low-level agriculture has changed the desert landscape with date palm plantations as well as small patches of cash crops such as grass pasture and alfalfa feed for cattle.



Plate 1. Abu Yasser lake habitats, foreground grass and date palms, lake in background, August 2010, Bahariya oasis, Egypt. © Matthew White

Hunting is practised and several local bedouin people were observed shooting at ducks on the lake. At Abu Yasser 7 x 12 m and 3 x 7 m (105 m) of mist-nets with 4 pockets were erected in a variety of different habitats near the lake: grass pasture, alfalfa, rushes, reeds and tamarisk/scrub.

El Marun lake (Bawiti)

El Marun (28.41862° N, 28.88110° E) is a saline lake 6 km north of Bawiti town. El Marun is one of the largest lakes (over 10 km²) in Bahariya oasis and has an area of standing water, supplemented by runoff from irrigation channels. The lake (Plate 2) merges into a mosaic of different habitats such as mudflats, rushes, reeds, date palm plantations, cultivated land, tamarisk trees, scrub vegetation and fruit trees. Agriculture has changed the desert landscape in the form of large date palm plantations. There are also over 10 ha of irrigated alfalfa crops on the northeast side of the lake, where the ringing station was based, attracting considerable insect diversity and passerine birds. To the north and northeast the cultivated areas merge into desert habitats over steep sandstone escarpments. There are several small bedouin settlements dotted around the lake with livestock (cattle, goats, camels, horses and donkeys) and one small disused hotel complex on the northeast side of the lake. From south Bawiti several motorable tracks circle the lake. Bird hunting was observed in the date plantations and on the lake. At El Marun 11 x 12 m and 3 x 7 m (153 m) mist-nets were set up in habitats next to the lake: grass pasture, alfalfa, rushes, reeds, tamarisk/scrub and fruit trees.

After initially surveying each lake area nets were placed in a variety of habitats where birds were present in higher numbers. Nets were left open 05.30–10.00 h and 16.30–19.00 h each day. Temperatures were high throughout the midday period and nets were closed due to the potential risk of trapped birds being exposed to heat of over 40°C. Nets were closed in the evening to reduce the risk of birds being left, caught overnight. Each bird was processed using SEEN methods. A Polish or Egyptian coded metal ring was attached to the bird's tarsus—sex and age were assessed, fat deposition was estimated according



Plate 2. El Marun lake, alfalfa in foreground with mist-nets, lake and a more mature date palm, September 2010, Bahariya oasis, Egypt. © Matthew White

to a scale from 0 to 8 (Busse 2000), wing formula and wing and tail measurements were recorded, and weight. Selected birds were tested for directional preferences in a Busse orientation cage (Busse 1995; for results see Stepniewski *et al* 2011). Vantage point counts and casual bird observations were conducted each day for 30 minutes at strategic points around each lake, mainly to record water birds.

RESULTS

Eighty-three species of birds were recorded in the Bahariya oasis area: 54 species at Abu Yasser lake and 74 at El Marun lake (Table 1). Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* and Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*, classified as near threatened by IUCN (2008), were recorded. Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* was the most abundant species (>210 birds), followed by Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (>130) and Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (>112). At Abu Yasser Yellow Wagtail and Dunlin *Calidris alpina* were the most abundant species recorded (30), followed by Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* (20). The most abundant species at El Marun was Spanish Sparrow (>200) followed jointly by Yellow Wagtail (>100) and Western Cattle Egret (>100).

Over 30 species of passerine migrants were recorded including 50 Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Thirty-six species of water birds were noted including Dunlin (50), Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (40) and Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* (40).

Overall, 144 birds (18 species) were trapped. Willow Warbler was the most frequently trapped species (20.1%), followed by Spanish Sparrow (18.0%), Yellow Wagtail (14.5%) and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (13.8%) (Table 2).

Trapping results Abu Yasser lake

During 6 days at Abu Yasser, 21 birds (7 species) were trapped though none were re-trapped within this period. The most frequently-trapped species was Red-backed Shrike 33.3% (7 birds, Plate 3) followed by Willow Warbler 23.8% (5), Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and Spanish Sparrow 14.2% (3). The capture rate was very low,

reaching 0.04 birds/m of net/day. Most birds carried a substantial amount of fat (fat score >3, Table 2).

Trapping results El Marun lake

During 14 days of trapping at El Marun 123 individuals (17 species) were trapped (Table 2). The most frequently trapped species were: Willow Warbler 19.5% (24 birds, Plate 4), Spanish Sparrow 18.6% (23), Yellow Wagtail 17% (21, Plate 5) and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin 15.4% (19). These four species constituted almost 75% of all the birds caught and were also the most numerous passerines observed in the area. The Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins were of subspecies *galactotes*. Yellow Wagtail subspecies were difficult to determine, as most birds caught were immature; the single adult male and two adult females caught were probably *feldegg* hybrids. Other ringed birds included one Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and three Pied Kingfishers *Ceryle rudis*, caught in nets used for trapping bats by a small pond c600 m from the ringing site. The only re-traps were two Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins, the first ringed 5 September and caught again 7 Sept, the second ringed 7 Sept and re-caught 8 Sept, weight did not change significantly between trappings (22.6/21.1 g and 25.2/26.2 g respectively). Capture rate was higher at El Marun, but still low, reaching 0.06 bird/m of net/day, in spite of quite high numbers of birds observed daily in the ringing area.

Fat scores

The majority of migratory passerines had quite large amounts of fat (fat scores >3, Table 2). These included Willow Warblers (mean 3.6, 29 birds) from both ringing sites and Yellow Wagtails (3.7, 21) at El Marun. Birds with lower fat scores included, all at El Marun: Eurasian Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (1.7, 6), Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins (1.6, 19) and Spanish Sparrows (1.2, 23).

Habitat associations of birds at El Marun lake

Out of 123 birds trapped at El Marun, 52.8% were trapped in tamarisk habitat, 39% in alfalfa crops, 4.8% in fruit trees and 3.2% in reeds/rushes (Table 3). All (21) Yellow Wagtails were trapped in a mosaic of alfalfa crops as well as 75% (18) of Willow Warblers. The large majority of Yellow Wagtails and Willow Warblers were observed openly foraging



Plate 3. Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* trapped beside tamarisk bushes at Abu Yasser lake, August 2010, Bahariya oasis, Egypt. © Katherine Stewart



Plate 4. Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* trapped at El Marun lake, September 2010, Bahariya oasis, Egypt. © Matthew White



Plate 5. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* juvenile trapped in alfalfa crops at El Marun lake, September 2010, Bahariya oasis, Egypt. © Matthew White

in insect-rich alfalfa crops which were very patchy in distribution (average height 35.8 mm). All (100%) Eurasian Reed Warblers (6) and Lesser Whitethroats (6, Plate 6) were recorded in tamarisk habitats including 78.9% (15) of the Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins. Several other species were trapped alongside apricot fruit trees including a single Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*, Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* and Spotted Flycatcher and two Collared Flycatchers *Ficedula albicollis*.

DISCUSSION

This study confirms that Bahariya oasis is a stopover area for migratory birds. Passerine migrants were recorded actively foraging in a variety of habitats such as tamarisk bushes, alfalfa crops, reeds, fruit trees; with body mass and fat loads well above breeding levels. Willow Warbler and Yellow Wagtail were the two species trapped most frequently, mirroring a study conducted in autumn 1982/1983 (Biebach *et al* 1986), at the



Plate 6. Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* trapped beside tamarisk bushes at El Marun lake, September 2010, Bahariya oasis, Egypt. © Matthew White

Table 1. Bird species and numbers recorded at lakes Abu Yasser and El Marun, Bahariya oasis, August and September 2010. Status: MB = migrant breeder, RB = resident breeder, PV = passage visitor, WV = winter visitor (following Goodman *et al* 1986).

		Status	Abu Yasser	El Marun	Bahariya Total
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	PV	1	1	2
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	PV, WV	7		7
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	PV	1	10	11
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	PV	4	10	14
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	PV		2	2
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	PV, WV	1	1	2
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	RB?, PV, WV	12	100	112
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	PV, WV	10	30	40
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	PV, WV	2	15	17
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	PV		1	1
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	PV, WV, RB?		1	1
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	PV, WV		2	2
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	PV, WV	1	1	2
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	RB?, PV, WV	1		1
Sooty Falcon	<i>Falco concolor</i>	MB	4		4
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	RB, PV, WV	2	2	4
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	RB, PV, WV		1	1
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	RB? WV	20	2	22
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	PV, WV	2		2
Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>	RB, PV	2	12	14
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	PV, WV	1	2	3
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	(MB?), PV, WV	2	1	3
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	RB?, PV, WV	20	20	40
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	PV, WV	2	1	3
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	PV, WV		1	1
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	PV, WV	1		1
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	PV, WV	1	1	2
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	PV, WV	1	2	3
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	PV, WV	6	10	16
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	PV, WV	2	3	5
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	PV, WV	2	5	7
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	PV, WV	2	1	3
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	PV, WV	11	20	31
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	PV	2	1	3
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	PV, WV	30	20	50
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	PV, WV	8	10	18
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	MB?, PV		1	1
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	PV		4	4

Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	PV, (WV)	2	3	5
White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	PV	2	2	4
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	RB	10	10	20
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	MV, PV, WV		2	2
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	RB	2	5	7
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	RB	10	10	20
Pharaoh Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>	RB		1	1
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	PV		1	1
Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>	MB	2	2	4
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	PV		1	1
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	PV, WV		3	3
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	RB?, WV, PV		3	3
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>	MB?, PV	20	5	25
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	PV	1		1
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	RB, PV	1		1
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	PV (WV?)	10	3	13
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	PV		1	1
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix sardonius</i>	RB	1	1	2
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	RB	2	13	15
Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	RB		2	2
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	PV	1	5	6
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	PV		10	10
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	PV		1	1
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	PV, (WV?)	10	40	50
Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus orientalis</i>	PV	1		1
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	PV	3	6	9
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	PV		6	6
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	MB, PV	2	2	4
Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>	PV	1		1
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	PV		1	1
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	PV, WV		6	6
Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>	PV, WV		1	1
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	PV		1	1
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	WV		3	3
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	PV		1	1
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	MB, PV, (WV)	5	20	25
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	PV	1	2	3
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	PV, WV		1	1
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	PV		1	1
White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	RB	2	2	4
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	PV	1	10	11
Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	PV		2	2
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	PV, WV	10	200	210
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	RB?, PV	30	100	130
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	PV, WV		1	1

Table 2. Number, weight and fat deposition (\pm SD) of all birds at first capture in mist nets at lakes Abu Yasser and El Marun, Bahariya oasis, August and September 2010. If less than 4 birds were caught, the individual weights and fat scores are given (following Hilgerloh & Raddatz 2009).

		N	Weight (g)	Fat score
Abu Yasser				
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	7	29.20 \pm 2.06	4.0 \pm 0.0
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	5	8.24 \pm 0.61	3.6 \pm 0.6
Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus orientalis</i>	1	8.2	4
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	3	12.9, 12.5, 12.0	6, 4, 4
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	1	8.4	1
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	1	24.1	2
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	3	23.3, 23.8, 25.0	3, 2, 0
TOTAL		21		
El Marun				
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	1	99.9	-
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	3	31.9, 31.3, 28.0	-
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	3	81.4, 86.1, 82.4	-
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	3	28.6, 24.1, 27.4	4, 4, 4
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	24	8.61 \pm 0.81	3.6 \pm 0.6
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	6	11.72 \pm 1.44	4.5 \pm 1.2
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	6	10.30 \pm 0.70	1.7 \pm 0.8
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	2	9.2, 10.6	2, 3
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	1	15.3	3
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	6	11.50 \pm 0.92	3.7 \pm 1.5
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	1	22.3	3
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	19	23.13 \pm 2.21	1.6 \pm 1.6
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	1	18.9	5
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	1	15.3	4
Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	2	11.9, 12.9	3, 3
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	23	24.83 \pm 1.62	1.2 \pm 1.3
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	21	17.76 \pm 1.77	3.7 \pm 0.7
TOTAL		123		

now disused Sadat farm 15 km north of Bahariya. Willow Warblers (24 birds) trapped at El Marun had a mean weight of 8.61 \pm 0.81 g and mean fat scores of 3.6 \pm 0.6. Mean weight was similar in Willow Warblers at Sadat farm in autumn 1982/1983, 8.78 \pm 1.18 g (733) with median fat score in class 3. In comparison, Willow Warblers (73) trapped September/October 2006 at a sewage plant in the Eastern desert had a lower mean weight, 7.87 \pm 2.12 g and fat score 2 \pm 0.7 (Hilgerloh & Raddatz 2009). Mean body mass of Yellow Wagtails (21) at El Marun was 17.76 \pm 1.77 g and they had a mean fat score of 3.7 \pm 0.7, very similar to Sadat farm Yellow Wagtails (1212 birds) 17.5 \pm 1.2 g, with median fat score in class 4, well above lean body mass values of 14 g (Biebach *et al* 1986). Only 6 Lesser Whitethroats were trapped, the first on 5 September, and then 12–14 September—if the trapping period had been prolonged into late September more birds may have been ringed. Lesser Whitethroat (629 birds) was the third most abundant species caught at Sadat farm (Biebach *et al* 1986).

Birds of most species caught in Bahariya carried substantial amounts of fat, crucial for successful crossing of the desert (Biebach *et al* 1986). The exceptions require closer

Table 3. Habitat preferences of birds caught at El Marun lake, Bahariya oasis, September 2010.

		Habitat			
		Apricot Trees	Tamarisk	Lucerne crop	Reeds/rushes
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>		1		1
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		3		3
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>		3		3
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		3		3
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		5	18	1
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		1	5	6
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		6		6
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>		2		2
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	1			1
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>		6		6
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	1			1
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>		15	4	19
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	1			1
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	1			1
Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	2			2
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		20		3
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			21	21
TOTAL		6	65	48	4

consideration. The Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin breeds in Bahariya (Goodman *et al* 1986), so our sample may have included local birds, not prepared for migration, with probably lower fat scores. Spanish Sparrow is an abundant migrant and wintering species in Egypt (Goodman & Meininger 1989). The birds caught in Bahariya were in active moult of remiges and rectrices. As both moult and deposition of fat are energy consuming (Schaub & Jenni 2000), the birds probably stayed during the moult period in the oasis or overwintered and did not accumulate fat for migration. Eurasian Reed Warbler is a regular migrant wintering in the sub-Saharan zone (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1987). Its relatively low fat scores, in comparison to other trans-Saharan migrants in Bahariya, might be a little surprising. This species is not restricted to a particular source of food and can gain weight in many places en route (Bibby & Green 1981). Reed Warblers caught in autumn in the Nile delta, after flying over the Mediterranean, had mostly moderate fat scores (mean 2.6)—moving south along the Nile valley, the amount of fat increased as the birds refueled up to a mean of 3.9 in Aswan (Ożarowska *et al* 2011) before crossing the Sahara. It is therefore possible that Reed Warblers caught in Bahariya use the oasis as a stopover site to rest and refuel before continuing the journey (towards lake Chad perhaps, Śtepniewski *et al* 2011); however, since we caught no retraps of this species, there is no evidence so far for this hypothesis. By contrast, Sedge Warblers had very high fat scores (as high as 6 in the 0–8 scale). This species is more specialized, foraging mostly on reed aphids that have patchy and unpredictable inter-annual density. Sedge Warblers need to accumulate fuel in habitats with abundance of aphids, they then migrate long distances with few opportunities to deposit fat (Bibby & Green 1981). Consequently, the birds caught



Plate 7. Nets next to tamarisk (mid distance) at El Marun lake, northern desert escarpment in background, September 2010, Bahariya oasis, Egypt. © Matthew White

in Bahariya may have accumulated fat loads in the Nile delta or maybe even in Europe and probably used the oasis mainly as a place to rest without refueling. The reedbeds in Bahariya are poorly developed and maybe cannot supply the birds with the amounts of aphids needed for restoring the fat load.

Habitat associations of Palearctic migrants trapped in the Bahariya oases indicate species-specific habitat preferences. All Yellow Wagtails and the majority of Willow Warblers were caught in an irrigated patchy mosaic of alfalfa crops teeming with insects. Yellow Wagtails were observed running through bare areas of open alfalfa crops and catching insects. Willow Warblers were observed using low perches and foraging in alfalfa crops on the ground taking small insects and caterpillars. Reed Warblers and Lesser Whitethroats (foliage-gleaning species) were all caught alongside tamarisk bushes providing food and cover. The rough structural mosaic of crops and habitats at El Marun lake clearly provide several factors intrinsic to migrant stopover habitat suitability including foraging opportunities and shelter against predators and heat (Moore & Woodrey 1993).

An intermittent migration strategy is now assumed in trans-Saharan passerine migrants (Biebach *et al* 2000, Schmaljohann *et al* 2007, Salewski *et al* 2010). Most trans-Saharan migrants fly nocturnally over the desert and rest in shade during the day, implying the birds have enough fat to continue without refueling (Biebach *et al* 2000, Schmaljohann *et al* 2007). Only a few birds were re-trapped in this study, Yellow Wagtails and Willow Warblers possibly only stopped for one day with reasonable fat loads, foraging intensively to increase fat load, then continuing passage the following evening. Over 100 Yellow Wagtails were regularly observed running and foraging in alfalfa crops but they probably could see the nets against the sky, especially when the wind was blowing. If walk-in traps are used in the future there may be a higher number of Yellow Wagtails trapped and re-trapped.

The birds and wildlife of Bahariya oasis are threatened by development, overuse of water resources for agriculture, and hunting. Protection is required through nature

conservation designation and conservation management to protect, restore and maintain habitats for resident and migratory birds. Further research is required involving a permanent ringing station near El Marun lake and using a variety of trapping methods for passerines and water birds. Long-term ringing of passerine migrants, together with analyses of fat score and retrap rate, would enable study of the strategies of bird migration across the desert and further determine the importance of Bahariya oasis as a stopover place. Monitoring and trapping should also take place in spring migration periods and water bird counts on the lakes could take place in winter when water levels are higher.

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Recent records and status of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in Iran

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The Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* has undergone a recent population decline and has been up-listed to critically endangered (BirdLife International 2008). The species breeds in the central steppes of Kazakhstan, with very small numbers in southern Russia (Sheldon *et al* in press). The bulk of the population migrates west from the breeding grounds, before heading southwest through Turkey and the Middle East to wintering grounds in northeast Africa, where they arrive from late October onward (Sheldon *et al* 2011). A small number of birds winter in the Arabian peninsula, in countries such as Oman and the United Arab Emirates (Sheldon *et al* in press). Some migrate south from the breeding grounds, to Pakistan and northwest India (Sheldon *et al* in press). The species is classified as a scarce and irregular passage migrant in Iran according to Scott & Adhami (2006). Roselaar & Aliabadian (2009) noted a record from 1886. Tohidifar & Zarei (2007) summarized known Iranian records 1950–2007. In the present paper we collate published information on Sociable Lapwing sightings in Iran with the latest observations and update the species' status in Iran.

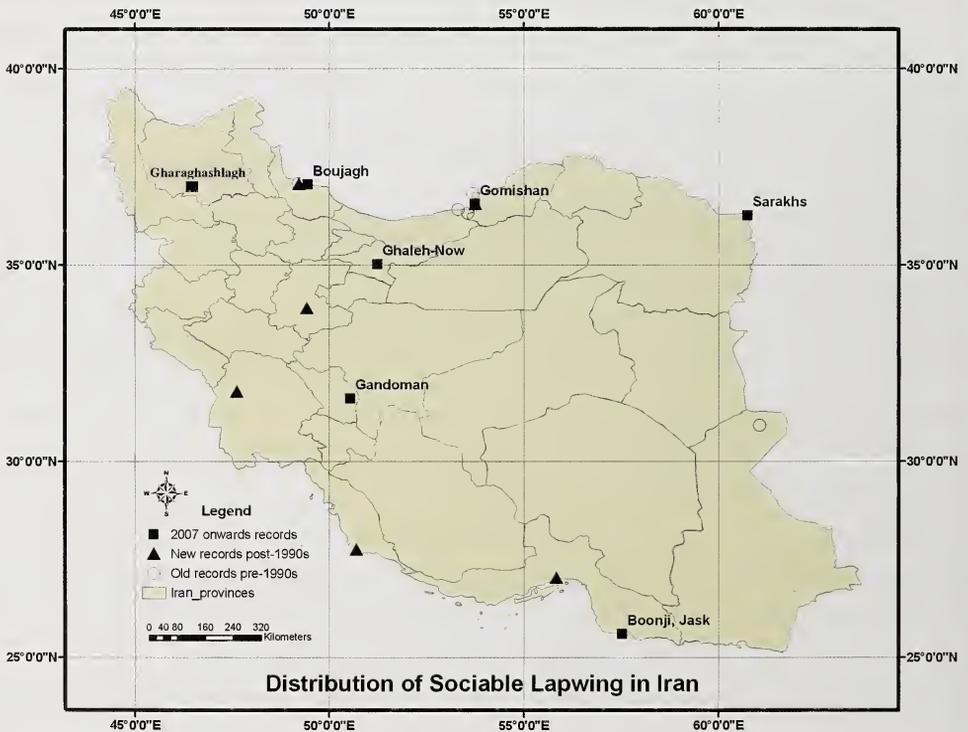


Figure 1. Distribution of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in Iran since 1950.

RECENT SIGHTINGS AND HABITAT ASSOCIATIONS

Monthly bird surveys of the Boujagh national park (37° 25' 44.5" N, 49° 56' 10.1" E, Gilan province, Figure 1) have been undertaken 2004–2011. In autumn of the years 2004–2007 and 2009–2010, 1–3 Sociable Lapwings were observed by AA (Table 1). In addition, two individuals were observed there 23–27 January 2009 by MD Bont, N Noordhof and AA (Table 1). All of these birds were observed on grassland, used as pasture, within the Boujagh NP (Plate 1) and in association with Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*. The birds were always in close proximity though to wetland habitats (usually c50–100 m away). On 21 November 2011 in the Boujagh NP two individuals were observed roosting in close proximity to the Caspian sea, before moving c150 m to forage on grassland (Plate 2). Previously there were several observations, 1967–1998, of Sociable Lapwings from what became the Boujagh NP (Table 1, Tohidifar & Zarei 2007). In 2002, the Boujagh wetland area was designated a national park and thus has been protected by the Iranian department of the environment. Future management of the national park should take into account the regular occurrence of this critically endangered species, and suitable conservation measures implemented.

The Sociable Lapwing was recorded at the nearby Anzali wetland area, 40 km west of Boujagh NP, on at least four occasions 1967–1998 (Table 1). Far to the east of Boujagh NP, between the two wetlands of Miankaleh and Gomishan, two Sociable Lapwings were observed by KR 15 November 2007. The birds were observed foraging in ploughed farmland adjacent to Khajeh-Nafas village (37° 02' 26" N, 54° 03' 35" E). The feeding behaviour of the birds was observed for about one hour, and the main prey item appeared to be Mole Crickets *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*. On 10 March 2009, a Sociable Lapwing in summer plumage was observed by KR and MG in Miankaleh wildlife refuge (36° 50' 23.5" N, 53° 27' 48.7" E, Plate 3). Also one individual was photographed at the same area 16



Plate 1. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* at Boujagh NP, Iran, 27 November 2010. © Abbas Ashoori

Table 1. Records of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in Iran since 1950. T&Z07 = refer to Table 1 in Tohidifar & Zarei (2007).

Site	Date	No. birds	Observer	Source
Gorgan bay, Bandar Gaz, Mazandaran	30 Nov 1952	1 male		T&Z07
Gorgan bay, Mazandaran	end Nov 1952	Small flock		T&Z07
Gorgan bay, Bandar Gaz, Mazandaran	end Nov 1953	Small flock		T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	13 Apr 1963	1		T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	16 Feb 1963	12		T&Z07
Near Bandar Anzali, Gilan	2 Apr 1967	1		T&Z07
Bandar Anzali, Gilan	25 Mar 1968	1	DA Ferguson	T&Z07
Bandar Anzali, Gilan	25 Apr 1969	8	DA Ferguson	T&Z07
Hamoun lake, Seistan & Baluchistan	2 Oct 1970	1 juv		T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	29 Oct 1971	1	DA Scott	T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	19 Nov 1971	2	DA Scott	T&Z07
Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan	8 Sep 1998	1 ad		T&Z07
Kolvir, Bandar Anzali, Gilan	12 Sep 1998	2		T&Z07
Gomishan wetland, Golestan	April 1999	4		Ghaemi 2006
Gomishan, southern Caspian, Mazandaran	2 March 2001	1		T&Z07
Bamdej wetland, Khuzestan	Oct 2004	3		T&Z07
Boujagh NP, Gilan	autumn 2004–2006	2–3		Ashoori <i>et al</i> 2008
Mond protected area, Bushehr	13 Feb 2006	3	M Jamadi	T&Z07
Meyghan wetland, northeast of Arak, Markazi	1 Dec 2006	4		Tohidifar & Zarei 2007
Mond protected area, Bushehr	20 Jan 2007	1		T&Z07
Boujagh NP, Gilan	autumn 2007, 2009–2010 and 21 Nov 2011	1–2	AA	Gilan DoE files, AA
Boujagh NP, Gilan	23–27 Jan 2009	2	MD Bont, N Noordhof & AA	Gilan DoE files, AA
Khajeh-Nafas village, Mazandran	15 Nov 2007	2		KR
Miankaleh wildlife refuge, Mazandran	10 Mar 2009	1		KR, MG
Miankaleh wildlife refuge, Mazandran	16 Nov 2011	1		photographed by Gharabaghdoost 2011
around Sarakhs, near Iran/Turkmenistan border	13, 14 Oct 2010	7		AK, SBM
around Eshq-Abad, Ghaleh-Now wetland, SE Tehran	Feb 2009	1		FE
Gandoman wetland, Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari	14 Nov 2007	2		MM
Boonji coast, Jask area, Hormozgan	8 Jan 2008	1	MG	Hormozgan DoE files, MG
Around Ghareh Gheslugh wetland, East Azarbaijan	5 Apr 2011	1		AH



Plate 2. Two Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*, Boujagh NP coast, Iran, 21 November 2011. © Abbas Ashoori

November 2011 by Gharabaghdost. Ghaemi (2006) reported 4 individuals in Gomishan wetlands in April 1999 (Table 1).

The regular records of Sociable Lapwing on pastoral land in close proximity to wetland areas suggests that such habitats may be important for the species as they migrate through, and/or winter within Iran. This juxtaposition of habitats has been found to be important for migrating Sociable Lapwings in southwest Russia (Field *et al* 2007).

The species was recorded for the first time in extreme northeast Iran 13 and 14 October 2010, when seven adult Sociable Lapwings in winter plumage were observed by AK and SBM in alfalfa fields around the village of Sarakhs, near the border of Iran and Turkmenistan (37° 36' 22" N, 61° 70' 29.8" E). The use of cropped fields *eg* alfalfa on migration has been recorded in other countries, such as Turkey (Sheldon *et al* in press).

In February 2009 a single bird was observed by FE around Eshq-Abad, Ghaleh-Now wetland (Figure 1), southeast of Tehran. On 14 November 2007, two Sociable Lapwings were observed by MM in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province in a grassland habitat 100 m north of the Gandoman wetland (31° 50' 53.7" N, 51° 07' 53.1" E, Figure 1). On 8 January 2008, during the mid-winter waterbirds census at Boonji coast, Jask area, Hormozgan province (25° 54' 39" N, 57° 16' 59" E, Figure 1), a Sociable Lapwing was observed by MG in



Plate 3. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Miankaleh wildlife refuge, Iran, 10 March 2009. © Meysam Ghasemi



Figure 2. Number of observations by month of Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* (October–April) in Iran, based on Table 1.

a sandy habitat. On 5 April 2011, AH observed a single Sociable Lapwing within a flock of 5 White-tailed Plovers *Vanellus leucurus* near Gharaghashlagh wetland in East Azarbaijan province in shallow water (c10–15 cm deep, 37° 12' 50" N, 45° 56' 11" E, Figure 1).

POTENTIAL KEY THREATS

Many of the observations of Sociable Lapwings within Iran have been associated with grassland habitats close to wetlands. As such, any changes in management such as increased agricultural production may reduce the amount of habitat available for the species. For example, the observed conversion of riverside grassland of the Tajan river (northeast Iran) to arable farmland and the associated disturbance from farming activities could be a significant threat to the species. The species is often seen with Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* in the unprotected grasslands and farmlands of northern Iran and might be under threat by hunters perhaps using nets at the edge of wetlands and farmlands. Although the Sociable Lapwing is a protected species in Iran and their hunting and capture is banned (Ashoori 2009) there is perhaps a lack of awareness amongst local hunters. Hunting has been identified in other range states as a key threat to the species (Sheldon *et al* in press) and this issue warrants further attention in Iran.

STATUS AND SUMMARY

Scott & Adhami (2006) categorised the Sociable Lapwing as a scarce and irregular passage migrant in Iran. Based on our inspection of records since 1950 we recommend that the species be treated rather as an irregular passage migrant with occasional over-wintering (Table 1, Figure 2). The records from November may suggest late birds migrating further south, but the December and January observations imply that small numbers are over-

wintering. Further studies and an increase in survey effort are required to confirm this, and also to assess the importance of Iran as a range state for this critically endangered migratory species.

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Documenting status of the European Roller *Coracias garrulus* in western Cyprus

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Recent counts of birds in western Cyprus have included data on the European Roller *Coracias garrulus*. Each of several different methods of counting, some beginning in 2003, suggested a rapid decline in the number of breeding Rollers in recent years, averaging around 50%. The birds were most abundant in upland grassland areas, but this habitat showed the steepest rate of decline, whereas in uncultivated areas, such as machis, numbers remained quite high. A preliminary estimate of 3000 birds was made for the average numbers of Rollers in western Cyprus during this period.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

The European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (hereafter Roller) is widespread in southern Europe as a breeding species, arriving in Europe from tropical Africa in April and May, and leaving in September and October. The species has been declining since at least the 19th century (Cramp 1985). Various more recent reports indicate that this trend is widespread and continuing. Rollers are currently listed by IUCN as near threatened (www.iucnredlist.org, accessed 3 October 2012). Their European population was estimated by BirdLife International (2004) as between 100 000 and 220 000 individuals, with a global population of from 100 000–500 000, although it is not common enough to feature in the most recent trend analysis of European birds, by the Pan European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS 2012). Cyprus is at the southern fringe of its breeding range (Cramp 1985), which is probably moving northwards; but it is also contracting inwards at the northern fringes



Figure 1. Map of Cyprus showing places mentioned in the text. Large towns in capitals, villages in lower case and other named areas in white. The black dotted line indicates the study area in western Cyprus.

(Snow & Perrins 1998). A decline in Cyprus might be attributed to climate change, leading to global warming, and a drying of the climate, and could serve as an indicator as to what to expect further north.

Flint & Stewart (1992) reported the species in Cyprus as a “Scarce to fairly common migrant breeder...below c800 m in open, usually cultivated, lightly wooded country, nesting in holes in isolated, often ruined buildings, and in cliffs and banks. Apparently more numerous in the past: Lilford (1889) described it as breeding abundantly, and Wilson (1925) saw many breeding in holes in walls in Famagusta”. Thus the global decline has apparently applied to Cyprus for a good many years; in this paper, we attempt to document and quantify the recent decline.

Roller densities on Cyprus are generally low, but the birds are amongst the most conspicuous of species, being very easily seen as well as frequently heard. We used data based on three different methods to census this species in western Cyprus, one being part of our overall bird monitoring programme, in which breeding birds were censused 2006–2011 along 38 transects covering the full altitudinal range and main land-use types in western Cyprus (Pomeroy & Walsh 2006). The sites were scattered through Pafos administrative district, south to the northern outskirts of the Pafos conurbation, and east into part of Lemesos District as far north as the Omodos area, and south to Alektora (Figure 1). Each transect was c1 km long, and birds of all species were allocated to one of 13 distance bands for density estimates by the program Distance (Thomas *et al* 2010). Between one and three rounds were completed annually, with counts along each transect in April and May (see Table 1A), with counts at higher altitudes being made later. The majority of counts were made by the time that most pairs of Rollers were expected to have established territories, although some earlier counts may have been too soon for some pairs. Nevertheless, the method was the same each year, so that comparisons between years should be valid.

Secondly, since the species is sparsely distributed and numbers recorded on foot transects were relatively small, from 2003–2011 we undertook six road transects in the Akamas-Laona area, where sightings of Rollers are quite frequent. These transects covered a total distance of some 1500 km over nine years, and were intended to provide estimates of numbers of Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* and Little Owls *Athene noctua*, as well as Rollers. Three of the routes regularly had Rollers, but they were only occasional on the other three. Again, perpendicular distances of the birds from the road were recorded in most years but we have not used these in this paper because the Rollers’ fondness of perching on wires biases the distance estimates. Several counts were made along each transect each year (to allow for the generally low numbers).

Finally, we used a territory-mapping method based on the Common Bird Census of the British Trust for Ornithology (Marchant 1983). In an area of c4.5 km² around the village of Kritou Terra, Pafos District, where at least one of us was living in each breeding season 2003–2011, all records of Rollers, visual and auditory, were registered on large scale maps. Territories were delineated as in the CBC. As the data were not as comprehensive as those usually available to the CBC, results were expressed as estimates of the maximum and minimum numbers of breeding pairs in each season.

As well as our own data, we had access to two other sets of data. The first was the preliminary analyses of Cyprus data by PECBMS for 2006–2010, courtesy of Jana Škorpilová, using two sets of transect data (ours, above, combined with additional counts from other parts of the island provided by Birdlife Cyprus). Secondly CR, BirdLife Cyprus bird recorder and editor of the annual Cyprus Bird Reports, extracted spring data for our area from contributors for 2005–2011 (Richardson 2006–2011). These come from an average

Table 1. Roller *Coracias garrulus* count data for western Cyprus. The methods used for each data set are described in the text. Fieldwork in 2003 and 2011 was for a shorter period than in other years, so results may be less reliable. Data set B is from the whole island, whilst the others are from western Cyprus only. Counts in brackets were made fairly early, before 5 May, and could therefore have been under-estimates.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	
A FOOT TRANSECTS - numbers of birds per round counted, arranged by land-use type (as described by Pomeroy & Walsh 2006)										
Forest				0	0	0	0	0	0	
Uncultivated				5.0	3.3	2.7	2.5	3.5	(1.5)	
Grass/phrygana ^a				3.5	4.0	2.0	1.0	0.5	(0.0)	
Arable				4.5	7.0	1.7	2.5	1.5	(1.0)	
Permanent crops				1.5	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.5	(0.0)	
Built-up				1.0	1.3	2.0	2.5	1.0	(1.5)	
Number of rounds				2	3	3	2	2	1	
Total per round				15.5	16.9	9.4	9.5	8.0	(4.0)	
B PECBMS INDEX (includes data from A)										
Index (2006 = 100)				100	80	68	71	65	-	
SE				-	19	14	16	15	-	
C ROAD TRANSECTS - number of birds counted from a slow-moving vehicle										
R01	Terra	17	36	18	15	23	11	7	11	3
R02	Ay Katerina	17	24	20	10	14	14	4	3	1
R03	Akamas	13	12	13	8	6	5	3	3	1
R04	Lara	-	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	1
R05	Akoursos	-	4	0	2	1	0	1	0	0
R06	Kato Akourdhalia	-	19	9	2	8	7	0	5	1
Totals	- birds	(47)	96	60	38	52	39	15	22	7
	- km	125	225	198	198	198	198	99	198	99
Bird/100 km ^b		(0.38)	0.43	0.30	0.19	0.26	0.20	0.16	0.11	0.07
D KRITOU TERRA VILLAGE - estimated number of breeding pairs										
	Minimum	9	9	10	9	9	6	4	4	(2)
	Maximum	12	12	12	11	11	7	7	6	(4)
E BIRDLIFE CYPRUS RECORDS^c										
	Numbers of birds at breeding sites			33	34	24	24	22	23	
	Number of migrant birds counted			32	34	50	41	56	28	

^a phrygana consists largely of low spiny plants

^b based on the 3 highest-scoring routes

^c as extracted by CR from records submitted to BirdLife Cyprus, for the months of April and May. Data are 3-point running means of numbers of individuals considered to be breeding, and passage migrants, respectively

of c40 contributors per year (less in 2005) who recorded sites where Rollers were present. These records were then divided into passage migrants and breeding birds after analysing behaviour, circumstances and locations of birds, relative to previously used nest sites and territories known by CR.

Table 2. Population estimates for Rollers *Coracias garrulus* in Pafos District, averaged over the period 2006–2011, based upon the data in Table 1A. Transect length is the combined total for all transects in their land-use type (n = number of transects in that type).

Land-use type (n)	Transect data			Mean count (Table 1A)	Density (birds km ⁻²)	Area in Pafos District ^c (km ²)	Population estimate
	Length (km)	ESW ^a (m)	Area ^b (km ²)				
Uncultivated (9)	9.90	61.6	1.22	3.1	2.54	345	877
Grass/phrygana (7)	6.05	44.0	0.532	1.8	3.38	475	1605
Arable (8)	9.11	67.1	1.22	3.0	2.46	101	248
Permanent crops (6)	6.41	(47.8) ^d	0.61	1.1	1.80	107	193
Built-up (4)	7.14	(47.8) ^d	0.68	1.6	2.35	40	94
TOTALS	38.61	–	–	–	–	1068^e	3017

^a estimated strip width (ie area within which birds were detected)

^b length × (ESW × 2)

^c from Pomeroy & Walsh (2006)

^d overall strip width, as sample is small

^e excluding forest (328 km²) where Rollers are absent

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 summarizes our main findings for the period 2003–2011, using the methods described above, and which includes one nationwide data set (Table 1B). It is clear that all methods showed similar trends, with the population falling by a third or more between the earlier counts and 2011 (Table 1A–D), although the BirdLife Cyprus data (Table 1E) show a smaller decline in the numbers of breeding records than the other methods. In contrast, records of migrants are more notable for considerable year-to-year variations, perhaps reflecting weather patterns as much as actual numbers.

In Table 2, we estimate the average numbers of Rollers in each land-use type (Table 1A) and thus suggest an average of c3000 for Pafos District as a whole 2006–2011. If our observations on the rate of decline are correct, these numbers will now be substantially lower. In any case, our estimates are approximate and Roller numbers need further study. For example, the numbers in built-up areas are likely to be below the estimate given here, which largely derives from our observations in Kritou Terra village, where Rollers nested every year of our study; but they are not common in villages, and are absent from larger towns.

If we accept that there has been a decline, perhaps a steep one, in the breeding population of Rollers in Cyprus, particularly in the western parts of the island, where all of our more detailed studies were made, then what might be the cause? Cyprus has experienced many environmental changes in this time, particularly in coastal areas, but much less so in our study areas which were predominantly inland and rural. Even there, new houses have appeared on hill tops in recent years. However, these will have affected less than 1% of Roller territories and since, in Kritou Terra, two pairs are known to have nested in buildings (which, although abandoned, lie beside a narrow, regularly-used, village road), on which they often perched, buildings *per se* were not necessarily 'bad'. We noted a number of nesting sites; apart from abandoned dwellings, a church, tree holes, and especially holes in roadside banks and chalk cliffs. In southern Spain, nesting sites are in short supply, as shown by the beneficial effects of providing boxes (Rodriguez *et al* 2011), but there is no evidence of a shortage of natural sites in the area where we worked. In the spring of 2011 there was an ongoing severe drought in East and Central Africa, which

caused unusual movements of many late spring passage migrants. Although several species of chat, warbler and shrike were affected negatively there appears to have been minimal effect on both migrant and breeding Roller populations in Cyprus (Richardson 2006–2011).

Although the reasons for the species' decline are currently unknown, Rollers are sometimes shot in Cyprus (illegally: *M. Hellicar pers comm*); and hunting has been suggested by Flint (2011) as being a factor in the wintering areas of trans-Saharan migrants; however, in East Africa, where the species is mainly a passage migrant, birds are less often killed for food than they used to be, according to an authority on bush meat (*W. Olupot pers comm*). There are less data from the main wintering areas in southern Africa. Flint (2011) also documents drying of the Cyprus climate, which must reduce plant growth and therefore reduce the food of the insects on which Rollers and many other Cyprus birds feed. Clearly this is a subject about which we currently lack information and, at present, can only speculate.

It is evident from Table 1A that the declines have been greatest in grass/phrygana and arable areas, which are the most open habitats. Land-use changes in these places may have been important, although these are not thought to have been great during our study period. The uncultivated areas, mainly machis and similar types, now seem to be the most important for Rollers. About a quarter of Pafos District belongs to this category (Pomeroy & Walsh 2006) and with an average density of c2.5 birds per square kilometre (see above), would have supported over 800 during our study period.

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Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* breeding in Israel

YOAV PERLMAN & NADAV ISRAELI

The Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* is a widespread raptor, breeding from southwest Europe, south through most of Africa, east through the southern Middle East across southern Asia to the Orient (del Hoyo *et al* 1994). Within its wide distribution it is mostly resident. Several races have been described and most relevant to the Western Palearctic region are *caeruleus*, breeding in Africa and southwest Europe, and *vociferus* breeding from Pakistan east across Asia (del Hoyo *et al* 1994, Forsman in prep). Asian birds belonging to the form *vociferus* can be separated from nominate birds by colour of underwing secondaries (grey on those of *vociferus*, Forsman in prep, Plate 1). Until 1998, Black-shouldered Kite was a major rarity in Israel, with only five records (Shirihai 1996). Since 1998, Black-shouldered Kites have been recorded more often in Israel, and in 2010 and 2011 this trend increased with at least 30 records during this period. All individuals assigned to subspecies involved *vociferus*, indicating the birds are of Asian origin. In 2011 and 2012 five pairs attempted or succeeded in breeding in Israel (Table 1). All nest monitoring was done by observation using optical aids.

The nests were located on trees of several species, at a height of 6–10 m above the ground. At least two pairs (Hula valley and Migdal Oz) performed consecutive breeding cycles, often mating and nest building while still feeding young of the previous cycle (NI pers obs, Dudu Raved pers obs, Plate 2). All breeding pairs defended their territory with great aggression against birds of prey and crows. Periodic sightings of prey delivery at the



Plate I. Adult Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus vociferus* mating, Hula valley, Israel, November 2011. Note grey on secondaries. © Rony Livne

Table 1. Breeding Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus* in Israel, 2011–2012.

Location	Coordinates	Start of breeding	Number breeding cycles till October 2012	Total number fledglings	Observers	Remarks
Nizzana	30.84° N 34.45° E	April 2011	?	?	YP <i>et al</i>	Breeding unconfirmed
Hula valley	33.10° N 35.61° E	September 2011	3	7	NI <i>et al</i>	
Migdal Oz, Dan region	32.04° N 34.94° E	April 2012	3	4	Rafi Paz, Dudu Raved <i>et al</i>	
Yavne'el valley, E Galilee	32.73° N 35.50° E	July 2012	1	2	S Adi <i>et al</i>	
Afula, Jizre'el valley	32.62° N 35.30° E	August 2012	1	2	E Haviv <i>et al</i>	



Plate 2. Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus vociferus*, recently fledged juveniles, Hula valley, Israel, November 2011. © Rony Livne

Hula site revealed that their food was based on the Social Vole *Microtus socialis guentheri* (NI pers obs, Plate 3).

This range expansion of the Black-shouldered Kite to Israel corresponds with recent expansion in Iraq. After the first breeding in 2001 (Salim 2002), it now breeds more regularly in Iraq (Ararat *et al* 2011). It also seems to be spreading in eastern Arabia (Jennings 2010), but is unrecorded in Syria (David Murdoch pers comm) and Jordan (Fares Khoury pers comm). There are two old records in Lebanon (Richard Prior pers comm).



Plate 3. Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus vociferus* feeding on Social Vole *Microtus socialis guentheri*, Hula valley, Israel, September 2011. © Yoav Perlman

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The soaring bird spring migration bottleneck at Ayn Sokhna, northern gulf of Suez, Egypt

MARY MEGALLI & GUDRUN HILGERLOH

Results of the first spring migration count of soaring birds at Ayn Sokhna, 60 km south of Suez on the west coast of the gulf of Suez, are presented. Significant numbers of raptors can be observed from this one observation site throughout the migration season regardless of each day's wind direction and speed. Observations were recorded 5 hours daily 1 March–2 May 2012. A total of 183 275 migratory soaring birds were identified and counted, of which 154 276 were raptors (18 985 eagles), and 28 999 were storks, pelicans and cranes.

The timing of the passage of the following species was documented: Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Steppe Buzzard *Buteo b. vulpinus*, Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*. Totals and timing are compared to results of the study done in the Suez area 30 years ago.

INTRODUCTION

Over one and a half million soaring birds are expected to migrate annually along the Red sea/Levant rift valley portion of the Africa/Eurasia flyway (Porter 2006). Most of them depend upon thermal air currents to help them cross this large area. Their routes have developed to favour areas producing thermals and updrafts along mountainous topography, and also to avoid areas lacking thermals, such as large bodies of water (Newton 2008). The East African flyway continues northwards along the mountains of Egypt's Eastern desert west of the gulf of Suez, and many soaring birds continue north all the way to the head of the gulf of Suez, completely avoiding a sea crossing. Studies of spring migratory soaring-bird passage have described in broad terms the flight paths of birds reaching the Ayn Sokhna and Suez areas of Egypt (Baha El Din & Bruun 1981, Wimpfheimer *et al* 1983, Christensen & Jensen 2002), and extensive work has been carried out in central and northern Israel tracking their passage northward (Shirihai *et al* 2000). The importance of the southern gulf of Suez crossing near Gebel el Zeit (Figure 1) has long been recognized (Grieve 1996, Christensen & Jensen 2002), and recent studies have recorded the migration volume, phenology and flight directions of soaring birds at that latitude, many of which cross the Red sea to south Sinai, while others continue north along the west coast of the gulf of Suez (Hilgerloh 2009, 2011, Hilgerloh *et al* 2009, 2011, Megalli 2011). The first migration counts

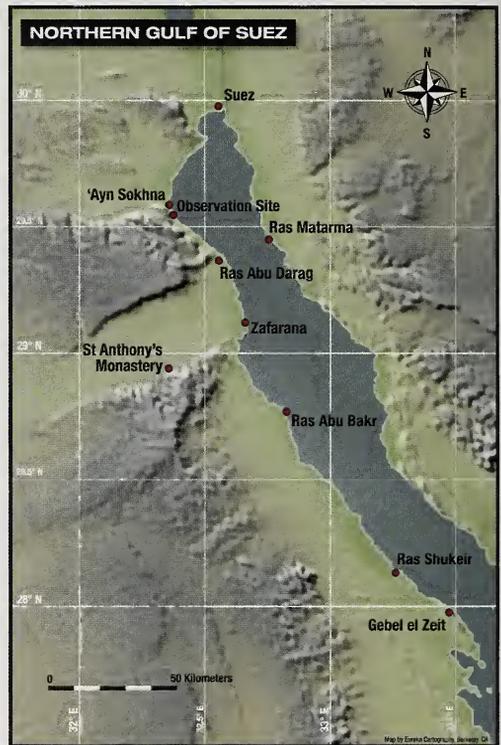


Figure 1. The gulf of Suez area, Egypt. Ayn Sokhna is at the northern foot of the North Galala plateau, St Antony's monastery is at the north face of the South Galala plateau. The two plateaus are separated by the wide Wadi Araba.

in the northern gulf of Suez area were done 30 years ago (Wimpfheimer *et al* 1983) at sites in and near Suez. The present study records spring soaring bird migration passage in the northern gulf of Suez area at the 'bottleneck' of Ayn Sokhna, 48 km (direct line) south of Suez (Figure 1).

METHODS

Observation site

The observation site (29.554° N, 32.361° E, Figure 1) is 60 km south of Suez by road. It is 4 km south of the hot spring (Arabic 'ayn sokhna') that gives the local area its name, an artesian brackish spring and reedbeds at the northern foot of the North Galala plateau. Migrating soaring birds concentrate here and are visible from the coastal highway. The observation site used for the present migration count was a shaded roof terrace allowing unobstructed views in all directions and located just above sea level c50 m from the gulf of Suez coastline to the east and c200 m from the rocky unvegetated slopes of the North Galala plateau to the west. The elevations of the plateau here are 500–530 m asl. Observers face the rocky slopes and view birds arriving from their left (from SW–SE) or birds that come into view from SW–W from behind the peaks (Plates 1, 2). Birds flying above these heights will be able to see the bay of Suez, Suez canal, and the gently rising sandy slopes of the western Sinai peninsula. Prevailing winds here are N–NW, meaning that birds fly into headwinds, or quartering winds, but thermal currents and topography-induced updrafts help them gain altitude before soaring and gliding above the sea-level plain north of the North Galala plateau.

Observations

Twenty-two experienced observers, in teams of two plus a recorder per day, identified and counted birds with the aid of 10× binoculars and 20–60× telescopes. Each team spent five hours a day for seven consecutive days at the observation site. Bird species and numbers were recorded immediately on a large chart. The observer teams worked 63 consecutive days, 1 March–2 May 2012. On 5 days bad weather reduced observation time by one hour.

Observations were made 09.00–14.00 h 1–22 March and 08.00–13.00 h 23 March–2 May, for a total of 310 observation hours. Steppe Buzzards *Buteo b. vulpinus*, the most numerous species, were counted with a handheld clicker.

Weather

Conditions were noted hourly during observation times: wind direction (N, NNE, NE, ENE *etc*) and speed (Beaufort scale), cloud cover (%), visibility (excellent, some impairment, strong impairment). Of the 63 days spent at the site, 36 (57%) had optimum visibility, 20 (32%) had some impairment of visibility and 7 (11%) had badly impaired visibility. Grey clouds greatly reduced observers' ability to detect colour and markings on birds, while a similar effect due to haziness, was caused by dust or particulate pollution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

183 275 migratory soaring birds of 28 species were observed during the 310 hours of observation (Table 1). The 24 raptor species totalled 154 276, while storks, pelicans and cranes totalled 28 999. Of the raptors, 116 560 or 75.6% were Steppe Buzzards, while 18 985 or 12.3% of the raptors were eagles of 7 species. Passage of most migrant species had begun by 1 March, but Common Cranes *Grus grus*, Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni* and Eurasian Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* were first recorded after March 20 (Figure 2). The first Levant Sparrowhawks *Accipiter brevipes*, European Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus* and Great White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* arrived in April (Figure 2).

The Ayn Sokhna site

Clearly a rather compact 'bottleneck' or concentration point exists at the northeast corner of the North Galala plateau. Bird passage was concentrated at our Ayn Sokhna observation site in all wind conditions, although some wind directions limited the observers' ability to see all migrants. On days with N-NW winds (even of very low wind speed), conditions that predominated during the entire observation period, birds soared within range of vision. From c11.00 h, after gaining height in well developed thermals, birds glided N-NE at greater height and speed. On a very few days during the survey, winds with a strong SW-W component may have drifted birds eastward as they approached the Ayn Sokhna site from the south, and in this case, they appeared over our heads, or even from over the sea. Unless already gliding very high and fast, they invariably worked back west to pass over and gain thermal lift from the North Galala plateau. In mid March, in such winds, a large flock of White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* approached the site from half a kilometre out to sea, some flying low over the water, flew directly W-NW towards the mountains and stopped to rest on the small hill directly in front of us. The entire group tried flying north, but then flew 1 km south to 'Sara' peak (Plate 1), found updrafts there, gained altitude, and continued north over the peaks. At other migratory bottleneck areas, such as Gibraltar (Bernis 1980) or at

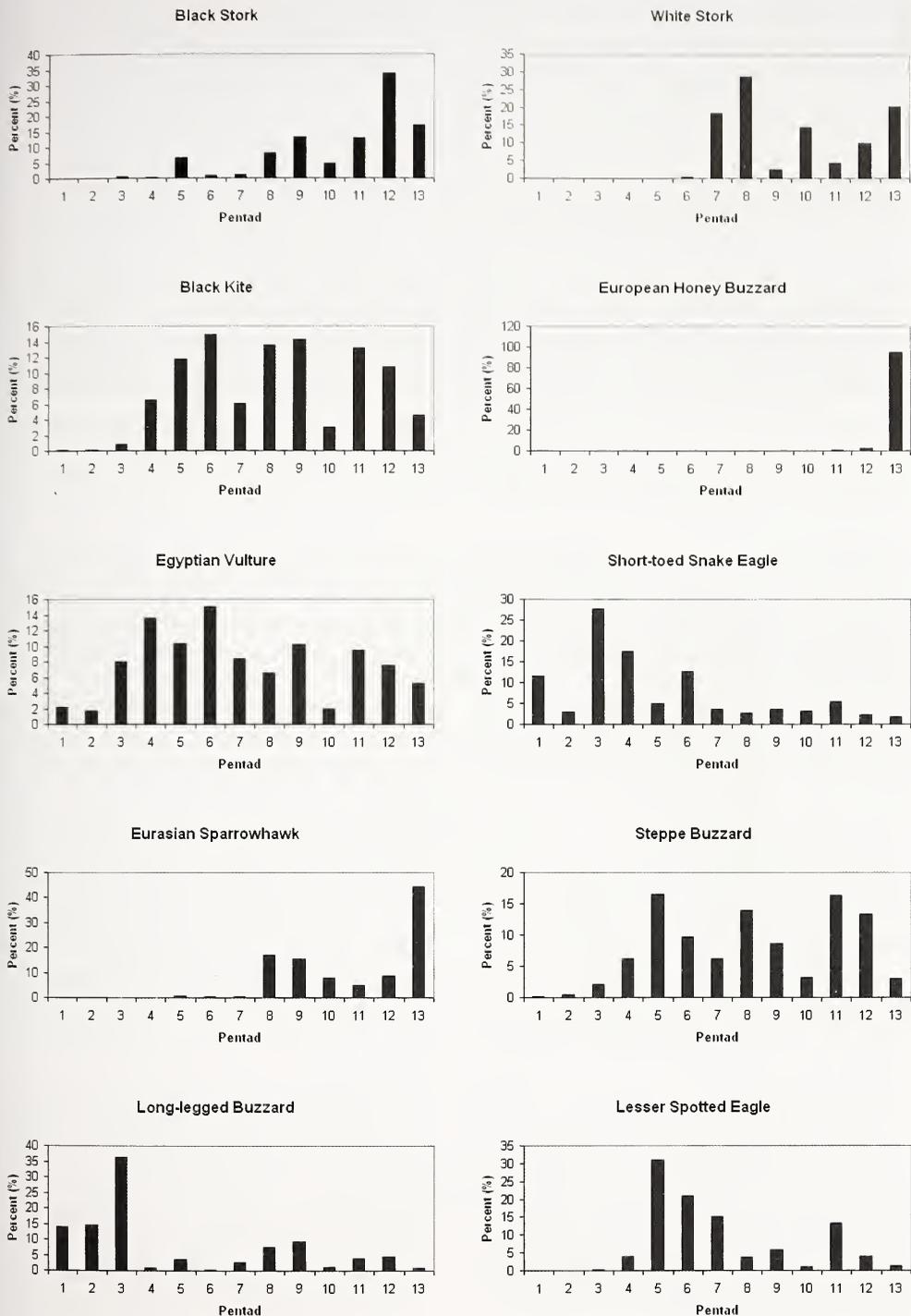
Table 1. Number of migratory soaring birds observed at Ayn Sokhna, Egypt, 1 March–2 May 2012.

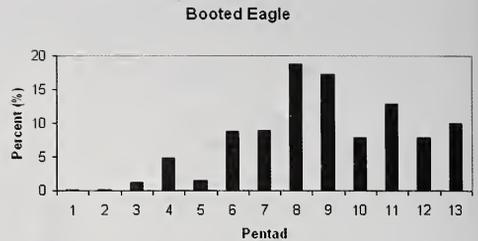
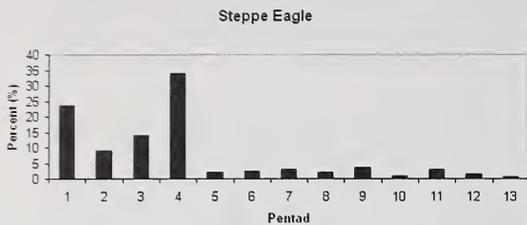
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	1438
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	27 030
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	500
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	9
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	106
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	2
Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonorae</i>	19
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	2
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	1
<i>Falco</i> species		3
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	34
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivoris</i>	595
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	10 024
Egyptian Black Kite	<i>Milvus m. egyptius</i>	1
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	1
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	1128
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	5
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	5301
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	24
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	15
Harrier species		6
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	67
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	512
Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo b. vulpinus</i>	116 560
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	322
<i>Buteo</i> species		588
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	6536
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>	57
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	8837
Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	43
Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>	1177
Eagle species		2301
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	31
Total soaring birds		183 275
Total raptors		154 276
Total storks pelicans cranes		28 999
Total eagles		18985
Eagles % of raptors		12.3%
Eagles % of soaring birds		10.3%
Steppe Buzzards % of raptors		75.6%

and near Suez (Bijlsma 1983, Wimpfheimer *et al* 1983), concentration points vary according to wind conditions.

Birds passed either over the summits of the plateau, or below the summits across the face of the rocky slopes. Flying below these east-facing slopes invariably caused birds to lose elevation, but after circling and soaring on updrafts, they left our sight to the north after regaining the elevation of the long ridge on the right. Birds of some species, notably

Figure 2. Passage of migratory soaring birds at Ayn Sokhna, Egypt, as percentage of total birds of the species, 1 March–2 May 2012 (for species totals see Table 1). Pentads: 1, 1–5 Mar; 2, 6–10 Mar; 3, 11–15 Mar; 4, 16–20 Mar; 5, 21–25 Mar; 6, 26–30 Mar; 7, 31 Mar–4 Apr; 8, 5–9 Apr; 9, 10–14 Apr; 10, 15–19 Apr; 11, 20–24 Apr; 12, 25–29 Apr; 13, 30 Apr–4 May (3–4 May extrapolated).





harriers, sparrowhawks and falcons, usually flew at low elevations. In very light winds, or winds with an easterly component, birds may remain well to the west of the peaks below which our observation site is situated. Though the area's prevailing N–NW wind direction predominated, this wind direction was often too light to bring any birds from the west into closer view.

Flight patterns south and north of Ayn Sokhna

On spring migration, soaring birds more or less follow the Red sea mountains in the Eastern desert of Egypt (Figure 1), which up to 100 km north of the Gebel El Zeit area are steep granitic mountains lying well to the west of the sea (c30 km). The coastline trends SE–NW and in the vicinity of Ras Abu Bakr (28.731° N, 32.831° E), the granite mountains give way to the limestone South Galala plateau of much lower elevations. The South Galala plateau is separated from the North Galala plateau by the wide Wadi Araba, with the small town/lighthouse of Zafarana situated on the coast to the east (29.111° N, 32.656° E, Figure 1). At this point, soaring birds are rarely seen closer to the sea than about 10 km inland, but at St Anthony's Monastery (28.929° N, 32.350° E), 36 km inland and nestled in the E–W extending north face of the South Galala plateau, large numbers of soaring birds can be seen until sunset attempting to cross the Wadi Araba floor, about 20 km wide at this point, or descending to roost overnight on the ground.

After crossing Wadi Araba well inland of the sea, birds encounter the low elevations of the North Galala plateau. Raptors are never seen from the shore along which the highway runs north, although north of Zafarana, higher elevations, attracting soaring birds by their high thermals, are situated nearer the coast. Up to just 2 km south of our Ayn Sokhna observation site, the plateau heights are considerable, but birds are not seen from the highway either east of, or even over, these heights, though of course, very strong west winds may occasionally drift them toward the sea. Soaring or gliding birds appear in front of observers at our site from not more than 2 km to the S–SE, or from the S–SW. To birds at this point, the head of the gulf of Suez must be visible to the north. The NW facing escarpment of the North Galala plateau, with prevailing N–NW winds, creates updrafts that help birds gain height and cross the short water distance flying NE, or continue north toward Suez, eventually to enter Asia via the Sinai peninsula.

Migratory passage at the Ayn Sokhna site generally declined around 12.00–13.00 h. This is probably due to the greater elevation of thermals from this time and accordingly the higher flight level of birds (Bruderer *et al* 1994, Leshem & Yom-Tov 1996, Meyburg *et al* 2012). As industrial installations, power lines, and air pollution to the north of the site have increased considerably since the 1980s, birds might avoid that area for roosting and prefer to stay in the mountains of the North Galala plateau for the night. At four sites between Ayn Sokhna and Suez, raptors used to be observed, 1981–2006, in some numbers roosting in late afternoon or early morning, whereas few birds are now, 2007–2012, observed at these sites (MM pers obs).



Plate 1. Northeast corner of the North Galala plateau at Ayn Sokhna, Egypt, as seen from the observation site. The 3 peaks, left to right, are nicknamed Tom, Fawzy and Mary to aid counting and identification between observers. A fourth peak 0.5 km southwest of Tom, 'Sara', is not shown in this photo. © Yasemin Öztürk

Comparison with other migration counts

The 1982 spring migration counts (Wimpfheimer *et al* 1983) are the only comparable ones in the northern gulf of Suez. That survey was done at various sites 40–60 km north of our Ayn Sokhna site. There is a general agreement between the temporal migration patterns in both surveys (Figure 2, Wimpfheimer *et al* 1983). However, Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, did not show much similarity in seasonal patterns in the two studies. Instead, in our count the main passage of Lesser Spotted Eagles was observed mid March–mid April, similar to that in northern Israel (Shirihai *et al* 2000). The pattern of passage of Steppe Eagles with large numbers up to mid March and low numbers in the later part of our count period resembles more the pattern at Gebel El Zeit and Eilat than that of the Suez study (Wimpfheimer *et al* 1983, Bruun 1985, Shirihai *et al* 2000, Hilgerloh *et al* 2009). The timing of passage of adult and subadult Steppe Eagles is consistent with the notion that adults are the first to migrate (peaking end of February/beginning of March), followed by subadults during March and April (Forsman 2003). Satellite telemetry studies have revealed that Steppe Eagles continue migration towards the area of the Caspian sea and do not pass northern Israel (Meyburg *et al* 2012).

With respect to numbers three groups of species can be distinguished: species with similar numbers in 1982 and 2012 (Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, European Honey Buzzard and Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*), species with far higher numbers in 2012 (White Stork, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Steppe Buzzard and Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*) and species with lower numbers in the Ayn Sokhna count compared to the Suez study (Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Steppe Eagle). A few Spotted Eagles *Aquila clanga* were recorded in both surveys. Of the 20 recorded in 1982, most were seen 26 February–28 March, while all 43 recorded at Ayn Sokhna were seen 5 April–2 May.

While the primary Red sea crossing of White Storks is at the southern end of the gulf of Suez (Berthold *et al* 2001, Hilgerloh 2009), at Ayn Sokhna a remarkable number of 26 950 White Storks were counted compared to 15 500 in the Suez study and >118 000 at Gebel El



Plate 2. The observation site roof terrace, 4 km south of Ayn Sokhna, Egypt. © Mary Megalli

Zeit. 1424 Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* were recorded at Ayn Sokhna and only 265 in the Suez study, while at Gebel El Zeit 1709 were observed (Wimpfheimer *et al* 1983, Hilgerloh 2009). Apparently, Black Storks do not concentrate as White Storks do at Gebel El Zeit.

Several flocks of Great White Pelicans were observed 24 April–2 May, totaling 500 birds, a similar number as in the Suez study, while >1700 were counted at Gebel El Zeit. The Common Crane travels in quite large groups, and is a strong flier not adverse to crossing water up to 100 km in width (Alerstam & Bauer 1973). In the Ayn Sokhna count in 2012 just 263 cranes were counted, while those recorded from the Suez sites in 1982 totaled 668. Cranes are seen approaching or crossing the gulf of Suez at many latitudes, and are sometimes observed, due to their calls, migrating at night (MM pers obs). However, the most numerous passage takes place at Gebel El Zeit, where more than 15 000 cranes were observed during the systematic counts (Hilgerloh *et al* 2009).

The Ayn Sokhna totals emphasize our conclusion that the northeast corner of the North Galala plateau is an important concentration point in spring migration at the northern end

of the gulf of Suez, and that the Ayn Sokhna observation site is a very convenient location for viewing spring migration passage there.

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White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* in the United Arab Emirates: the first record for the Arabian peninsula

OSCAR CAMPBELL & DERMOT O'MAHONY

Whilst birdwatching at Al Ain water treatment plant, Abu Dhabi emirate, United Arab Emirates on 18 May 2012 at 12.30 h, we were perplexed to discover a wader with an appearance that we could not fit to any of the expected candidates. Being rather late in the migration season, only small numbers of waterbirds were present on a recently re-flooded lagoon but, despite the distance (c100 m) and a strong heat haze, this individual was immediately interesting. Conveniently, it was alongside a Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, which provided a prolonged and valuable comparison. After some consideration of plumage and, particularly, structure, we concluded that the bird showed a suite of characters that were compatible only with White-rumped Sandpiper *C. fuscicollis*. One issue was that the bird was in full breeding dress, a plumage of this species that neither of us was especially familiar with. Eventually, the bird made several short flights allowing us to see the rump and uppertail pattern and so confirm the identification. We contacted other UAE birders, many of whom saw the bird that afternoon. Huw Roberts was able to arrange access to that part of the water treatment plant closest to the bird's preferred feeding area and some important documentary images were obtained (Plates 1–3). OC returned with HR and Andrew Ward on 26 May and was able to view the bird at close range. It was not seen again after this date.

FIELD CHARACTERS AND ELIMINATION OF SIMILAR SPECIES

The key plumage features that supported the identification (*eg* Hayman *et al* 1987, Harris *et al* 1996) were the rather heavily and coarsely spotted breast (with this spotting extending in lines along the flanks and contrasting with the clean, unmarked white belly), a white supercilium (strongest before the eye where quite obvious when the bird tilted its head but somewhat obscured by streaking behind eye) and an obvious but rather narrow white band across the lower rump and uppertail coverts contrasting with a dark grey tail.



Plates 1 & 2. White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, Al Ain water treatment plant, United Arab Emirates, 18 May 2012. © Huw Roberts



Plate 3. White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, Al Ain water treatment plant, United Arab Emirates, 18 May 2012 (and two Terek Sandpipers *Xenus cinereus* and a Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*). © Huw Roberts

At medium range and/or in awkward lighting, the bird's structure and shape was actually much more distinctive than its plumage: although bill and legs scarcely appeared longer than the Little Stint's, its body was certainly much (estimated as 50%) bigger, due mainly to a deeper keel and much longer, tapered rear end: the primaries extended beyond the tail and this extension, coupled with rather flat tertials made for a very attenuated, distinctive shape. Observed from behind, the primary tips actually crossed as the feeding bird leaned forward and the rear was generally held raised high as the bird fed, mainly by pecking in very shallow water.

The bird's distinctive shape eliminates all other *Calidris* sandpipers with the exception of the closely related Baird's Sandpiper *C. bairdii*. This, however, is easily separated on plumage features as it typically exhibits a more finely streaked breast, clean flanks and a shorter supercilium, whilst in flight would show a predominately dark rump and uppertail coverts.

DISCUSSION

This record was accepted as the first for the UAE by the Emirates Bird Records Committee and constitutes the third for the OSME region; previous individuals have occurred in Turkey, in May 1996 (Browne 1997) and Israel, in April 2004 (Perlman & Meyrav 2009). White-rumped Sandpiper is a long-distance migrant, breeding in the Canadian Arctic and wintering commonly in southeastern South America, mainly from southern Brazil southwards to Tierra del Feugo and the Falklands (Cramp & Simmons 1983). As well as being an annual autumn vagrant to western Europe, it has occurred as an accidental

to South Africa and Namibia (ABC 2011), Australia and New Zealand (Pizzey & Knight 1997). Only a very small proportion (2.3% of 173 recorded in Great Britain up until 1979) came from the spring period March–June (Cramp & Simmons 1983) and this extremely low percentage (in comparison to *eg* Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*) has continued in recent decades (Wallace in Fraser & Rogers 2007). However, it has been recorded in mid summer from latitudes similar to its Nearctic breeding range (*eg* Spitsbergen and Franz-Josef Land, Cramp & Simmons 1983). A particularly interesting such record is that outlined by Grønningaeter (2005); this involved two White-rumped Sandpipers observed (including one display-flighting) in late June on Bjørnøya, a Norwegian island in the Arctic sea at 74°N. This is believed to be the first record of White-rumped Sandpiper exhibiting behaviour potentially indicative of breeding in the Palearctic. All spring and summer records may be attributable to birds that, having crossed the Atlantic in autumn, then successfully overwinter, presumably in southern Africa, before migrating north in the ‘wrong’ hemisphere in spring. The timing of the UAE record and those from Turkey and Israel fit well with this pattern, as the species is a very late migrant in North America, passing through the United States in late April–May and not arriving on the breeding grounds until early June (Hayman *et al* 1987, Cramp & Simmons 1983).

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Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: a new species for Azerbaijan

MICHAEL HEISS

I observed a Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* on 5 September 2011 during a bird migration study beside the Caspian sea in Azerbaijan. This is the first Azerbaijan record. The Spotted Nutcracker was watched in the narrow coastal plain between Besh Barmag mountain (40° 59' N, 49° 13' E, c80 km northwest of Baku), in the foothills of the Greater Caucasus, and the Caspian sea, an important bottleneck for migrating birds (Heiss & Gauger 2011). The region has few natural structures and is dominated by settlements, grazed steppes and oil production. There is a small strip of shrubby woodland that stretches along the coast.

At 11.50 h on 5 September, during a bird migration count of migrating passerines in the coastal plain, a medium-sized dark bird came from the north and flew c30 m above the ground towards the south. I used my binoculars to help identify the bird, which passed me c350 m away in poor light conditions due to complete cloud cover. At first sight, the bird reminded me of a Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* that was migrating through in fair numbers, but it was too dark and too heavily built to be this species.

Suddenly, the bird dropped down to land on the top of a Russian Olive tree *Elaeagnus angustifolia*. While landing the bird showed striking white tips on the tail feathers, which immediately brought Spotted Nutcracker to mind. This conjecture was confirmed by inspection through a spotting scope. The typical white spotting of the dark body and the large black bill were now visible and there was no further doubt about the identification. I



Plate I. Distant view of the Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* (centre of yellow circle) on top of a Russian Olive tree, Caspian sea coast near Besh Barmag, Azerbaijan, 5 September 2011. Caspian sea in the background. © Michael Heiss



Plate 2. Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* in flight, Caspian sea coast near Besh Barmag, Azerbaijan, 5 September 2011. © Michael Heiss

asked Meike Schlienzy to keep an eye on the bird while I tried to get within photographing distance (Plate 1).

When I first approached the Spotted Nutcracker, it was quite shy and flew to the next tree where it hid in the dense foliage of the treetop. After a few minutes it re-emerged and I obtained a good view of it perched on top of a small dead shrub. By now it was unexpectedly tame and I took several photographs from distances down to c6 m (Plates 2 & 3). At 12.30 h I broke off the observation and left the bird in the shrubs. I phoned Dr Hartmut Müller, who came at 13.45 h, but the bird was not relocated.

The breeding area of this species ranges throughout Eurasia from the European Alps in the west to Japan in the east. The distribution correlates with the occurrence of the main food plants eg hazel and conifer species. Within the Western Palearctic two subspecies occur. *Nucifraga c. macrorhynchos* breeds in the taiga of Siberia and regular irruptions into Europe have been recorded, whereas the nominate subspecies is mainly resident (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1993).

On account of the slender bill I identified the bird as *macrorhynchos*. *N. c. caryocatactes* has a thicker bill, especially at the base. Another character that helps differentiate the two subspecies is the extent of the white tips of the tail feathers. This is larger in *macrorhynchos* than *caryocatactes* (Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1993). This feature is clearly visible in Plates 2 and 3 though the amount of white is clearly commensurate with both subspecies, albeit less than in a typical *macrorhynchos*. Both subspecies show variation in this feature (Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1993), it is certainly within the range of *macrorhynchos*. Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer (1993) stated that *macrorhynchos* is not as shy as *caryocatactes*. I was able to approach very close to the bird (Plate 3), though vagrants are often exhausted and therefore tame. Tame behaviour was also observed during a Spotted Nutcracker invasion in southern Russia (Belik *et al* 2009).



Plate 3. Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* at close range, Caspian sea coast near Besh Barmag, Azerbaijan, 5 September 2011. © Michael Heiss

Spotted Nutcracker is not listed by Patrikeev (2004) for Azerbaijan and this observation must therefore be treated as the first record. The eruptive migratory character of *macrorhynchos* makes its occurrence in Azerbaijan far from implausible. The species is a known vagrant in Iran with two recent records: March 2005 (Sehhatiasabet *et al* 2006, Khaleghizadeh *et al* 2011) and February 2006 (Khaleghizadeh *et al* 2011). All Iranian records previous to these were rejected by Roselaar & Aliabadian (2009). There are two records for Turkey: November 1966 and October 2006 (Kirwan *et al* 2008a, Kirwan *et al* 2008b) and for Syria a possible record from 2006 (Ottelin 2008). In 2009 Spotted Nutcrackers were also observed at several sites in Georgia (A Gavashelishvili pers comm).

North of Azerbaijan, Spotted Nutcrackers are common during some irruptions along the Ural valley as far south as the northern coast of the Caspian in Kazakhstan (Gavrilov & Gavrilov 2005, Wassink & Oreeel 2007). In Russia, Spotted Nutcrackers occur in invasion years south to the Greater Caucasus (Madge & Burn 1994, Belik *et al* 2009). A well documented invasion in 2008/2009 led to several observations in southern Russia *eg* Volga delta (Reutskiy 2009), steppes of Kalmykia (Muzaev *et al* 2009), Stavropol region (Fedosov & Gordon 2009), North Ossetia (Komarov 2009), southeast Rostov-on-Don (Lipkovich 2009), Sochi and Krasnodar region (Belik *et al* 2009). A maximum of c100 individuals (in several small flocks) were observed in southern Kalmykia (Muzaev *et al* 2009). Other observations ranged from single birds to flocks of up to 15 individuals (Belik *et al* 2009). During such invasions it is likely that a few birds will move further and it is therefore not a huge surprise to find this boreal bird species in Azerbaijan east of the Greater Caucasus.

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The populations and distribution of the breeding birds of the Socotra archipelago, Yemen: I. Sandgrouse to Buntings

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This is the first of two papers on the distribution and population of the breeding birds of the Socotra archipelago, that have been studied in detail since 1999. It covers all the passerines and some non-passerines, including nine species that are endemic to the archipelago. A second paper will cover the remaining non-passerines. For each species there is a map showing breeding distribution, an estimate of the population based on a comprehensive series of transects, and brief notes on habitat and breeding biology. Of the 25 species covered many are widespread and occur in a variety of habitats, with the five most abundant being Socotra Sparrow *Passer insularis*, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*, Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*, Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii* and Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*. All 25 are resident, except for Forbes-Watson's Swift *Apus berliozii*. The only globally threatened species covered in this paper are the Abd Al Kuri Sparrow *Passer hemileucus* and Socotra Bunting *Emberiza socotrana* (both vulnerable), whilst the Socotra Cisticola *Cisticola haesitatus* is classified as near threatened.

INTRODUCTION

The Socotra archipelago (Figure 1) 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 2011). For plant endemism per square kilometre alone Socotra island 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 a World Heritage Site in 2008.

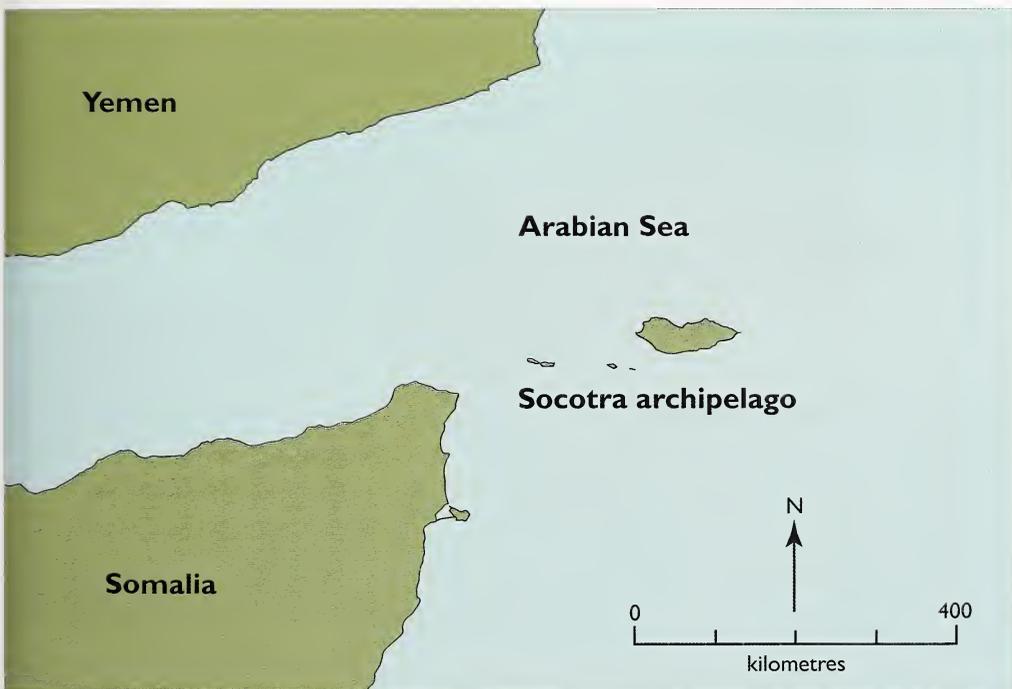


Figure 1. The Socotra archipelago. The archipelago consists of the main island, Socotra, and three satellite islands (Abd Al Kuri is about halfway between Socotra and the Horn of Africa) and several sea stacks.

Table 1. The breeding birds of the Socotra archipelago, Yemen. Species endemic to the archipelago and also those that have been classified as globally threatened (VU vulnerable, EN endangered) or near threatened (NT) by IUCN (BirdLife 2011) are indicated.

Persian Shearwater <i>Puffinus persicus</i>	Feral Rock Dove <i>Columba livia</i> forma <i>domestica</i> (introduced)
Jouanin's Petrel <i>Bulweria fallax</i> (endemic breeder, NT)	Laughing Dove <i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> (probably has bred)	Bruce's Green Pigeon <i>Treron waalia</i>
Red-billed Tropicbird <i>Phaethon aethereus</i>	White-browed Coucal <i>Centropus superciliosus</i>
Yellow Bittern <i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i> (probably breeds).	Socotra Scops Owl <i>Otus socotranus</i> (endemic, taxonomy under review).
Striated Heron <i>Butorides striata</i> (probably breeds)	Nubian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus nubicus</i>
Indian Pond Heron <i>Ardeola grayii</i> (may breed as present throughout year).	Forbes-Watson's Swift <i>Apus berliozii</i> (near endemic)
Western Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> (may breed as present throughout year).	Southern Grey Shrike <i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
Masked Booby <i>Sula dactylatra</i>	House Crow <i>Corvus splendens</i> (accidentally introduced, bred, now eradicated)
Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown-necked Raven <i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
Socotra Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax nigrogularis</i> (VU)	Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark <i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>
Western Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Pale Crag Martin <i>Ptyonoprogne obsoleta</i>
Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> (EN)	Socotra Cisticola <i>Cisticola haesitatus</i> (endemic, NT)
Socotra Buzzard <i>Buteo socotraensis</i> (endemic, VU)	Socotra Warbler <i>Cisticola incanus</i> (endemic)
Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Abyssinian White-eye <i>Zosterops abyssinicus</i>
Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Somali Starling <i>Onychognathus blythii</i>
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> (has bred at least once)	Socotra Starling <i>Onychognathus frater</i> (endemic)
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Socotra Sunbird <i>Chalcomitra balfouri</i> (endemic)
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Socotra Sparrow <i>Passer insularis</i> (endemic)
Cream-coloured Courser <i>Cursorius cursor</i>	Abd Al Kuri Sparrow <i>Passer hemileucus</i> (endemic, VU)
Brown Noddy <i>Anous stolidus</i>	Long-billed Pipit <i>Anthus similis</i>
Sooty Gull <i>Larus hemprichii</i>	Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak <i>Rhynchostruthus socotranus</i> (endemic)
Saunders's Tern <i>Sternula saundersi</i>	Cinnamon-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza tahapisi</i>
Bridled Tern <i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>	Socotra Bunting <i>Emberiza socotrana</i> (endemic, VU)
Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles lichtensteinii</i>	

However, the archipelago has a rather species-poor avifauna. Of the 221 species recorded (Porter & Suleiman 2011) only 42 breed regularly (one of which, the feral form of the Rock Dove *Columba livia*, is introduced and domesticated), four others may breed or may have bred, one has bred at least once and one, accidentally introduced and a potential pest species, has now been eradicated. The full list is given in Table 1. Historically there have been claims of Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* having been recorded, as well as an owl sounding like Hume's Owl *Strix butleri* (Forbes 1903, Jennings 2010). However during the extensive surveys of the last two decades neither has even been suspected.

Several dedicated visits to study the avifauna of Socotra have been made since the late 19th century: see *eg* Sclater & Hartlaub (1881), Forbes (1903) and Ripley & Bond (1966). However the first population studies were attempted during the OSME survey of 1993 (Davidson 1996, Kirwan *et al* 1996, Porter *et al* 1996). Then between 1999 and 2011 nine surveys (all between October and March) were undertaken by BirdLife International together with the then Socotra Conservation and Development Programme and Yemen's Environment Protection Authority to assess the distribution and population of the breeding birds of the archipelago. The first three of these visits were supported by UK's Darwin Initiative programme.

In this, the first of two papers that catalogue the populations and distributions of the breeding species, we cover 25 species: sandgrouse (Pteroclididae) to buntings (Emberizidae). We provided provisional population estimates for Jennings (2010). However we have since re-worked these data and, in several cases, have revised our estimates. Therefore the population data given in this paper supersedes those in Jennings (2010). We also give details, including the methodology used to determine our population estimates. For the endemics, habitat requirements and ecology have been adequately summarised in the species papers in Porter & Martins (1996) and for all species in the accounts in Jennings (2010).

THE ARCHIPELAGO, HABITATS AND CLIMATE

The Socotra archipelago (12.30° N, 54.00° E) is part of the Republic of Yemen. Situated east of the Horn of Africa and c350 km south of the Yemen mainland in the Arabian sea (Figure 1), it comprises the main island (Socotra, c3700 km²), three satellite islands (Abd Al Kuri, Samha and Darsa) and several sea stacks. Rising to 1500 m asl in the granite Haggier mountains, much of the higher areas (500–1000 m asl) of Socotra are limestone. The main habitats of Socotra, adopted from Miller & Morris (2004), are mapped in Figure 2 and listed below.

- habitat type A: Semi-evergreen woodland of limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines (yellow in Figure 2, Plate 1)
- habitat type B: Open and woody-based herb communities on the limestone plateau (Figure 2 brown, Plates 2 & 3)
- habitat type C: Succulent shrubland on limestone cliffs and slopes (Figure 2 light green, Plates 4 & 5)
- habitat type D: *Croton* shrubland on the coastal plains (Figure 2 olive, Plates 6 & 7)

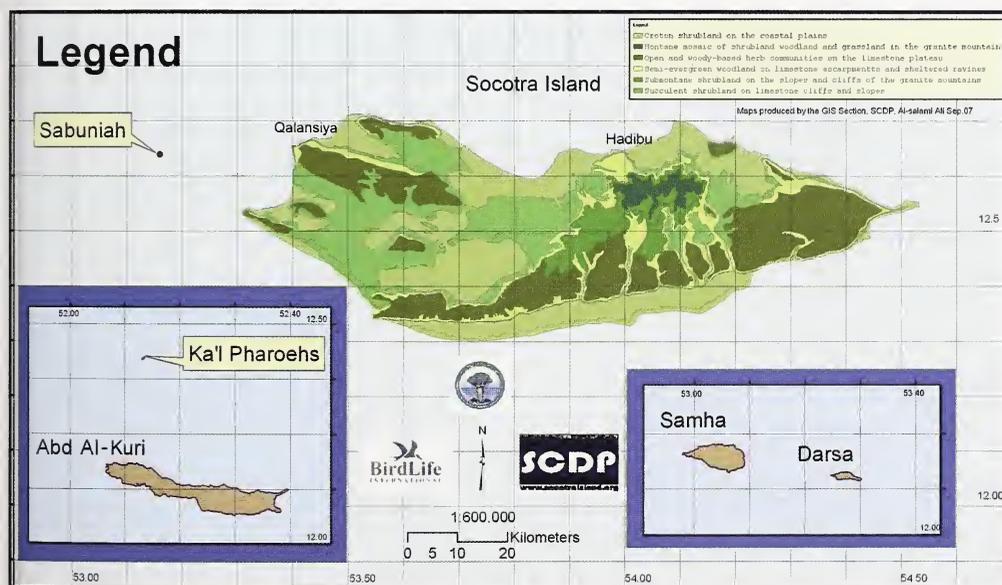


Figure 2. The Socotra archipelago showing the islands and the main habitat types on Socotra island. The habitat types are presented in the text (yellow on the map, habitat type A; brown, habitat type B; light green, habitat type C; olive, habitat type D; mid green, habitat type E; dark green, habitat type F). See also Table 3 which lists area in km² and % cover of each habitat.

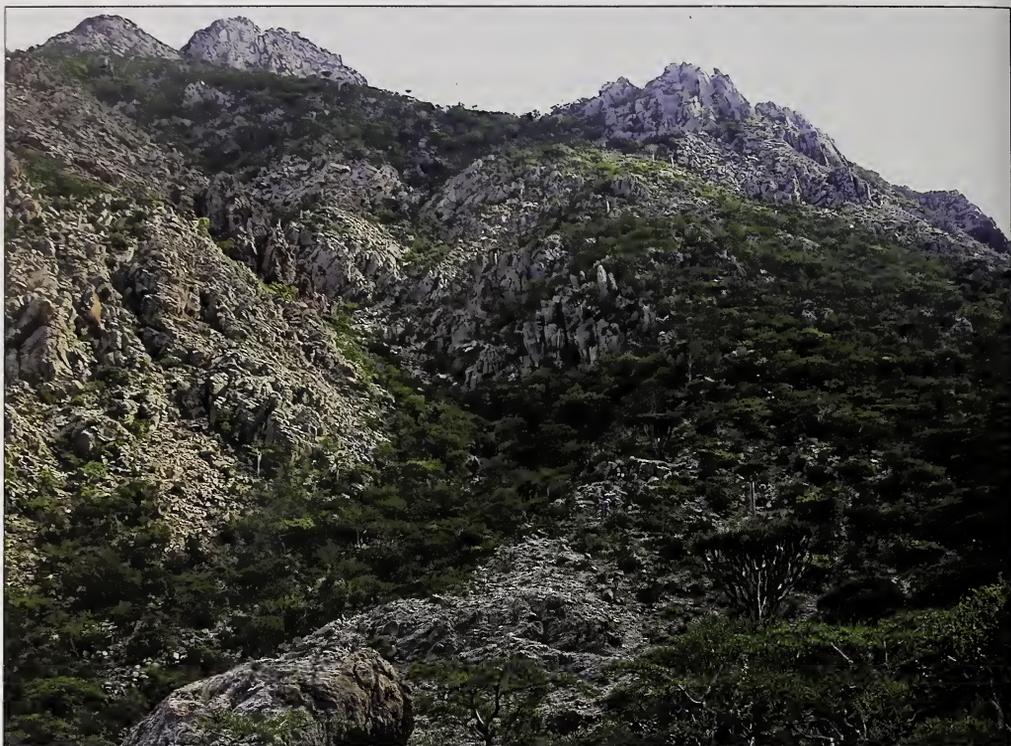


Plate 1. Semi-evergreen woodland, Maqadrihon pass, Socotra, November 2008. © Lisa Banfield



Plate 2. Open and woody-based herb community on limestone, western Socotra, October 2007. © Lisa Banfield



Plate 3. Open and woody-based herb community on limestone, Qatariyah, Socotra, February 2007. © Lisa Banfield



Plate 4. Succulent shrubland on limestone cliffs and slopes, Dibini, Socotra, December 2007. © Lisa Banfield



Clockwise from left

Plate 5. Succulent shrubland, Qaysoh, Socotra, November 2007. © Lisa Banfield

Plate 6. *Croton* shrubland near Hadiboh, Socotra, February 2006. © RF Porter

Plate 7. *Croton* shrubland with mix of other trees, near Qalansiya, Socotra, October 2007. © RF Porter

- habitat type E: Submontane shrubland on the slopes and cliffs of the granite mountains (Figure 2 mid green, Plate 8)
- habitat type F: Montane mosaic of shrubland and woodland and grassland in the granite mountains (Figure 2 dark green, Plate 9)
- habitat type G: Dwarf coastal vegetation: mosaic of low succulent shrubs and woody-based herbs; species composition varying but variably dominated by *Limonium*, *Zygophyllum*, *Suaeda*, *Indigofera*, *Pulicaria* and *Atriplex* species (not shown in Figure 2, Plate 10)
- Palm groves, also not mapped in Figure 2, deserve mention. This planted habitat, which covers a very small area of c8 km² (Lisa Banfield *in litt*), is mainly confined to areas close to the main towns of Habibu and Qalansiya and the edges of the larger wadis. It is an important breeding habitat for Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia* and Socotra Scops Owl *Otus socotranus*.

Other than coastal waters, creeks and a coastal lagoon at Qalansiya, wetlands are not a feature of the Socotran landscape.

The climate of the archipelago is monsoonal (see Miller & Morris 2004). During the hot dry southwest summer monsoon, which lasts May–September, winds reach an average of over 60 km/h for 50% of the time. The winds of the northeast monsoon (November–March) are much milder and bring the winter rains, which can be torrential. The spring transitional period March–May, between the monsoons, brings more gentle rains



Plate 8. Submontane shrubland, Wadi Di Negehan, Socotra, February 2010. © Lisa Banfield



Plate 9. Montane mosaic, Skand, Socotra, January 2008. © Lisa Banfield



Plate 10. Dwarf coastal vegetation, Noged plain, Socotra, February 2004. © RF Porter

though this can be the hottest period of the year; whilst the autumn transitional period (September–October) is very dry before the autumn rains start. Our studies have shown that the breeding season for land birds starts at the end of the latter period, in October. For most species the breeding season continues until March/April, just before the onset of the southwest monsoon.

Other than livestock (sheep, goats 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 any historical extinctions nor of large mammals ever having been part of the Socotran fauna. Rats have been introduced and are evident in Hadiboh and Qalansiya towns (Van Damme & Banfield 2011).

METHODS

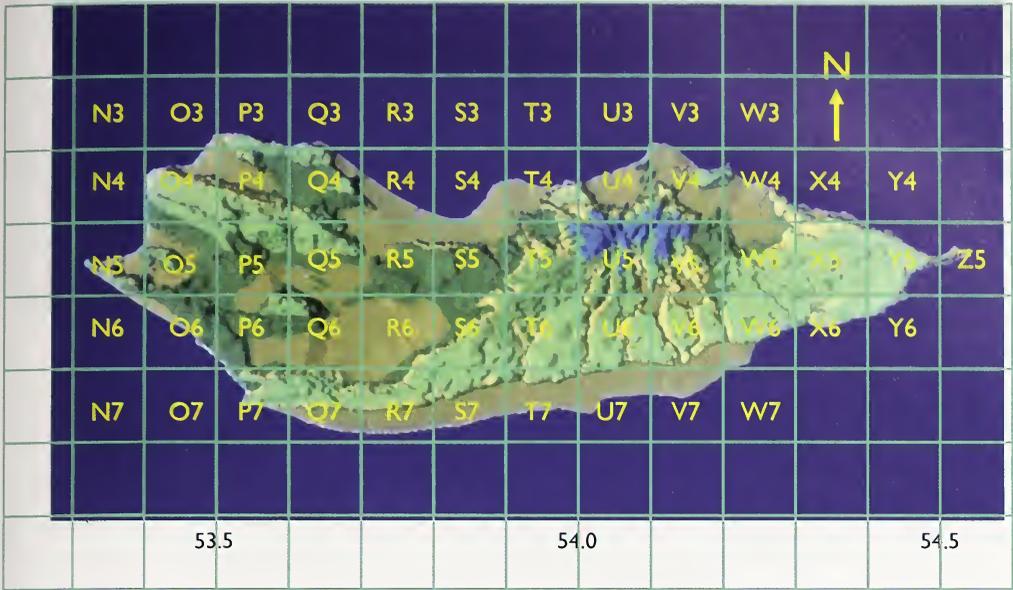
Breeding distribution

The islands were divided into 1/10th degree recording ‘squares’, each ≈ 120 km². Figure 3 shows the recording squares for the main island of Socotra. 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. All visits were made between October and April, the main breeding period, and none during the dry monsoon season May–September. The observers who helped with these surveys are named in the acknowledgements.

Eight of the main island’s recording squares are >95% sea and thus few or no visits were made to squares N4, N6, O3, Q3, W7 and X4 which have little terrestrial vegetation cover. Much of the fieldwork was carried out in week-long camping expeditions away from the capital Hadiboh. Location of the 10 km recording squares was determined by GPS. In addition to establishing proof of breeding all squares visited were the subject

Socotra breeding bird atlas: recording squares

(to be read in conjunction with atlas data spreadsheets)



12.5

Figure 3. Socotra showing recording squares (see text).

of timed transects to obtain population estimates (see below). Three visits were made to each of Abd Al Kuri, Samha and Darsa islands (Figures 1, 2) whilst undertaking seabird censuses.

Following Gibbons *et al* (1993) two categories of breeding were adopted and are shown on the distribution maps, Figures 4–26, as: (1) large dots, breeding proven, that indicate evidence of breeding was obtained, including both ‘confirmed’ and ‘probable’ and (2) small dots, probably breeding, where birds were present in potential breeding habitat but without more direct evidence of breeding. A summary of breeding definitions under these categories is given in Table 2. It was considered sensible to combine the two categories ‘confirmed’ and ‘probable’ used separately by others *eg* Sharrock (1976) to reflect *proof* of breeding for reasons outlined in Gibbons *et al* (1993). A breeding distribution map is given for each species except feral Rock Dove *Columba livia* and House Crow *Corvus splendens*. Maps for Abd Al Kuri, Samha and Darsa islands are included only when breeding has been proven or is probable on at least one of these islands. On the map for Forbes-Watson’s Swift *Apus berliozii* (Figure 10), unlike all the other distribution maps, small dots indicate squares where the species was observed but breeding was not suspected.

Population size assessments

A second aim was to assess the populations of breeding birds. It will be seen from the distribution maps that many species are widespread or fairly widespread. For these we recorded birds along transects of a fixed band width as the basis for estimating their populations. Transects were undertaken throughout the island covering nearly all recording squares, all habitat types and all altitude ranges (see Tables 3 and 4). The band

Table 2. Breeding distribution on Socotra: categories used to determine breeding proven (large dots in Figures 4–26) and probably breeding (small dots) (adapted from British Trust for Ornithology guidelines, see BTO 2012). Breeding proven = BTO categories 'Probable breeding' and 'Confirmed breeding'. Probably breeding = BTO category 'Possible breeding'. See Methods for rationale.

'Possible breeding'

Species observed in breeding season in suitable nesting habitat

Singing male present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season in suitable breeding habitat

'Probable breeding'

Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season

Permanent territory presumed through territorial behaviour and song on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place or many individuals on one day

Courtship and display (in potential breeding habitat)

Visiting probable nest site

Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults, suggesting probable presence of nest or young nearby

Brood patch on adult examined in the hand, suggesting incubation

Nest building

'Confirmed breeding'

Distraction display

Used nest or eggshells found

Recently fledged young/adults feeding fledged young.

Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest

Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young

Nest containing eggs

Nest with young seen or heard

width chosen was 60 m (*ie* 30 m each side of the transect line) with the exception of Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* where a 200 m band width was chosen. For some species the transect census technique was not appropriate. Thus more targeted methods were used for domesticated Rock Dove, Socotra Scops Owl, Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*, Forbes-Watson's Swift, Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne (fuligula) obsoleta*, Socotra Cisticola *Cisticola haesitatus* and Abd Al Kuri Sparrow *Passer hemileucus*, details of which are given in the species accounts.

Transect methodology

Transect sites were chosen randomly, while at the same time attempting to ensure that all habitat types were represented. Some parts of the island were difficult to access. Table 3 shows the coverage achieved. For each transect, an observer would walk a measured distance of a minimum of one km in as straight a line as possible recording all birds of all species seen or heard within the defined band width. If terrain permitted, distances of two or more kilometres were covered. Species that were known migrants and birds flying overhead were ignored. To assist with analysis, transects were only conducted within a particular habitat type, and not through mixed habitat types. Determination of the length surveyed was checked by GPS. Usually, one km would be covered during c20 minutes of walking, in all habitats types and in most terrains; on steeper slopes this was nearer 30 minutes. Where two or more observers were undertaking transects, care was taken to ensure their counts did not overlap. This was best achieved by radiating out from a central point.

At each transect site the following were noted: atlas recording square, date, GPS co-ordinates, locality, altitude, length of transect and habitat. This information was

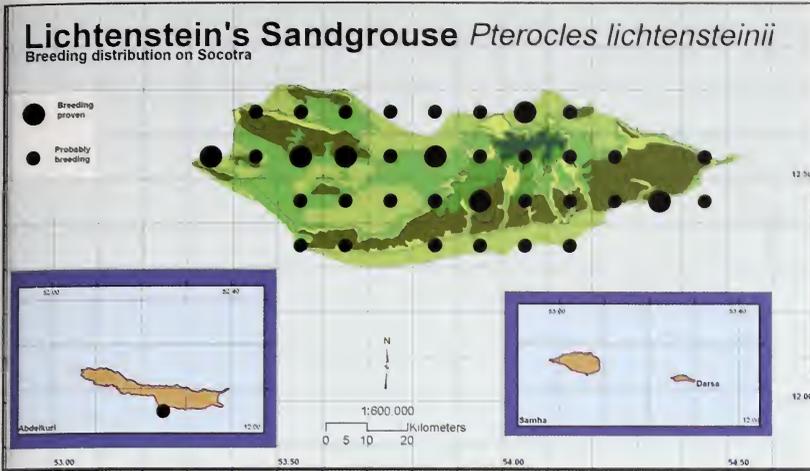


Figure 4.
Lichtenstein's
Sandgrouse:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

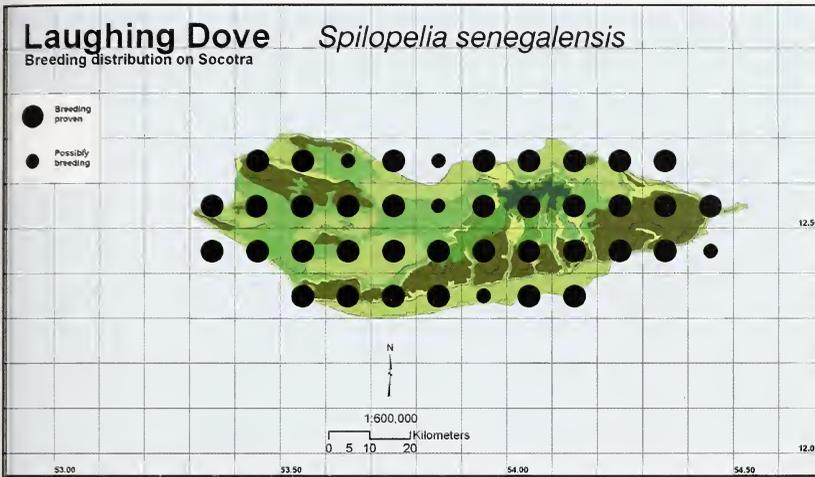


Figure 5.
Laughing Dove:
Socotran breeding
distribution. The
small dots indicate
probably breeding
(see Methods)
contrary to the
in-map key.

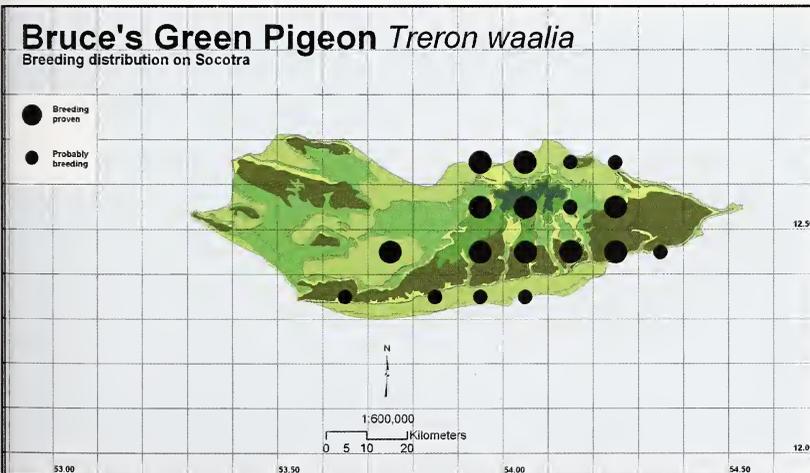


Figure 6. Bruce's
Green Pigeon:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

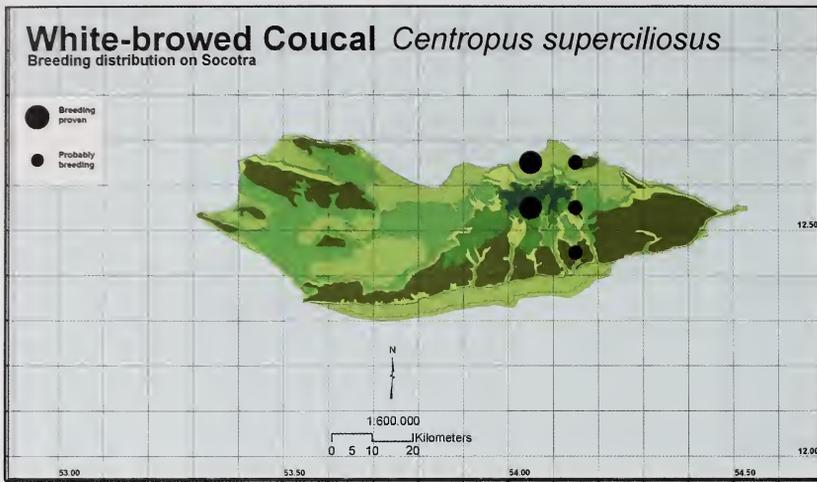


Figure 7. White-browed Coucal: Socotran breeding distribution.

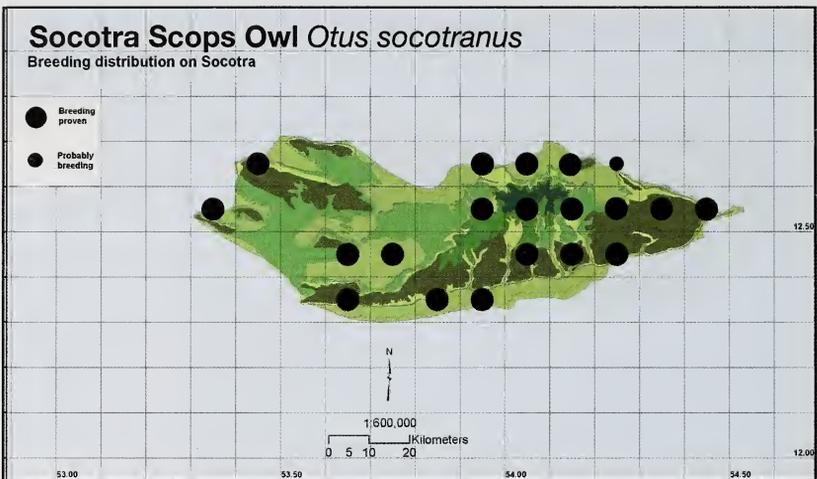


Figure 8. Socotra Scops Owl: Socotran breeding distribution.

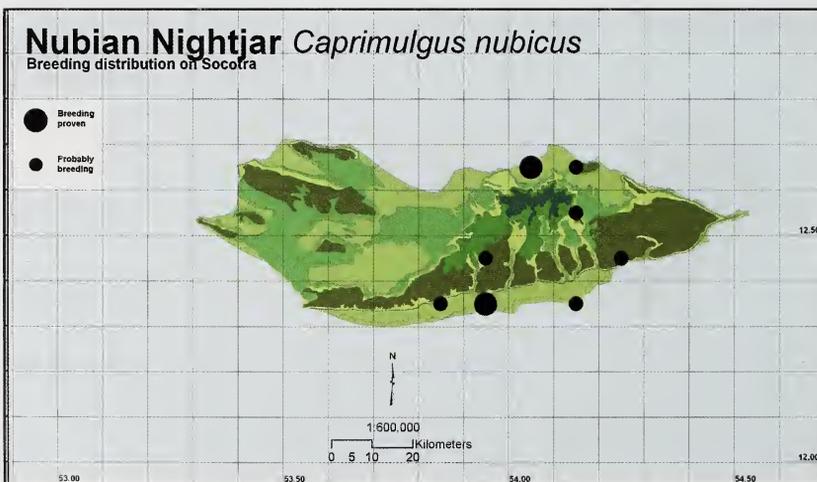


Figure 9. Nubian Nightjar: Socotran breeding distribution.

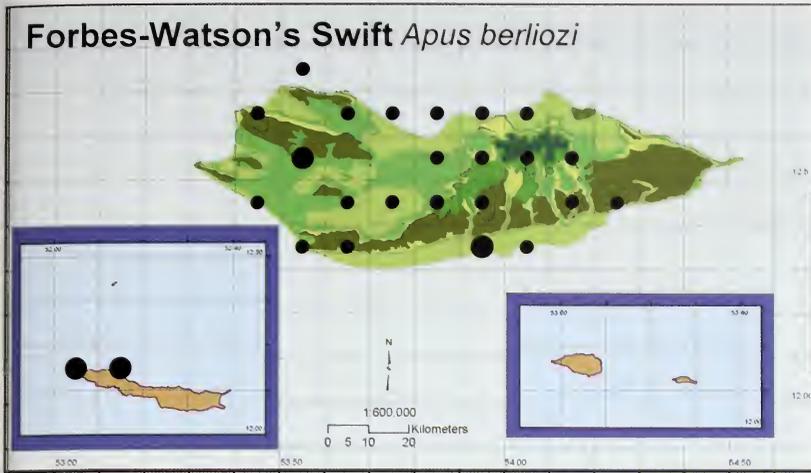


Figure 10. Forbes-Watson's Swift: Socotran breeding distribution. Large dots: breeding proven, small dots (a different meaning for this map only): squares where observed, but breeding was not suspected.

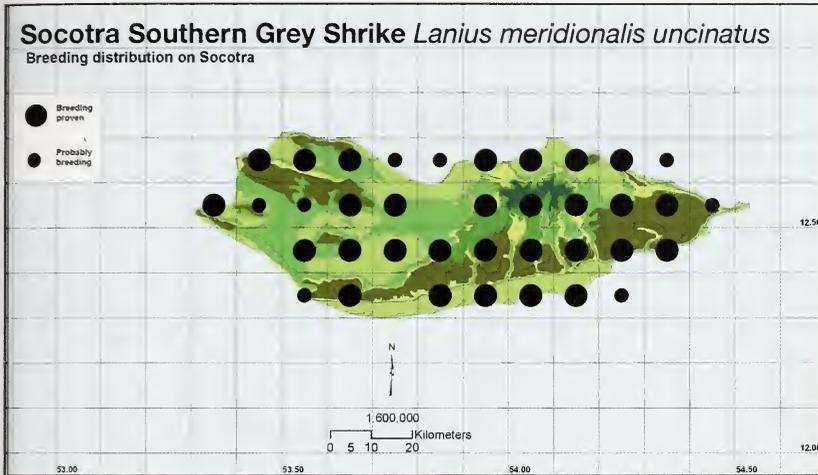


Figure 11. Socotra Southern Grey Shrike: Socotran breeding distribution.

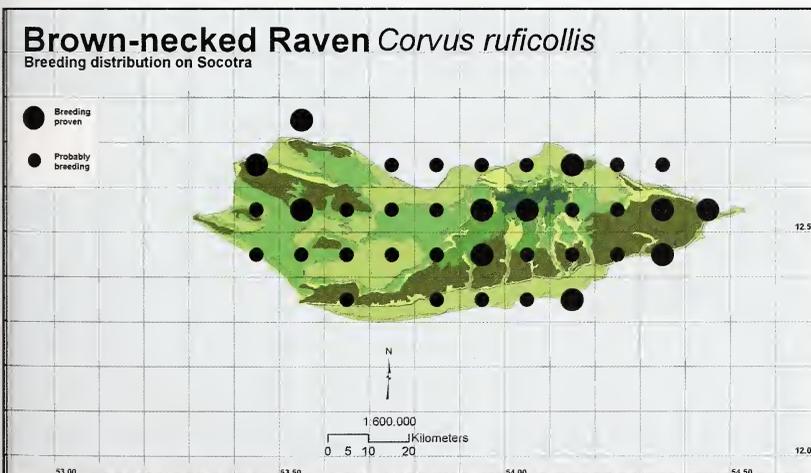


Figure 12. Brown-necked Raven: Socotran breeding distribution.

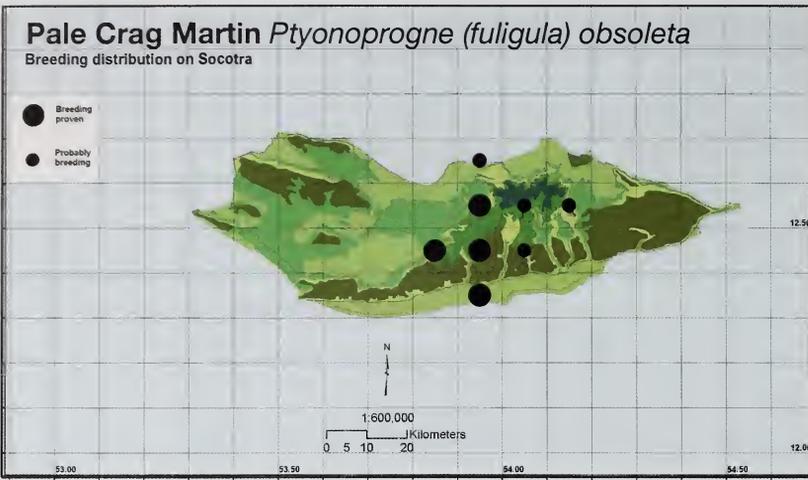


Figure 13. Pale Crag Martin: Socotran breeding distribution.

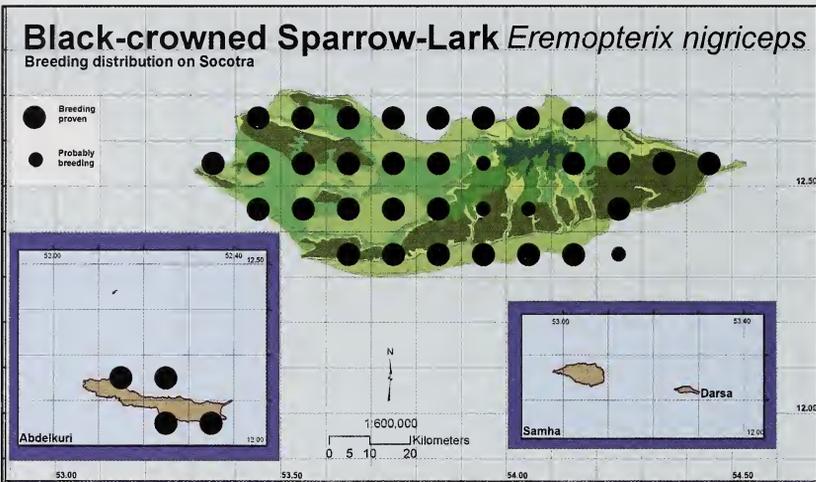


Figure 14. Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark: Socotran breeding distribution.

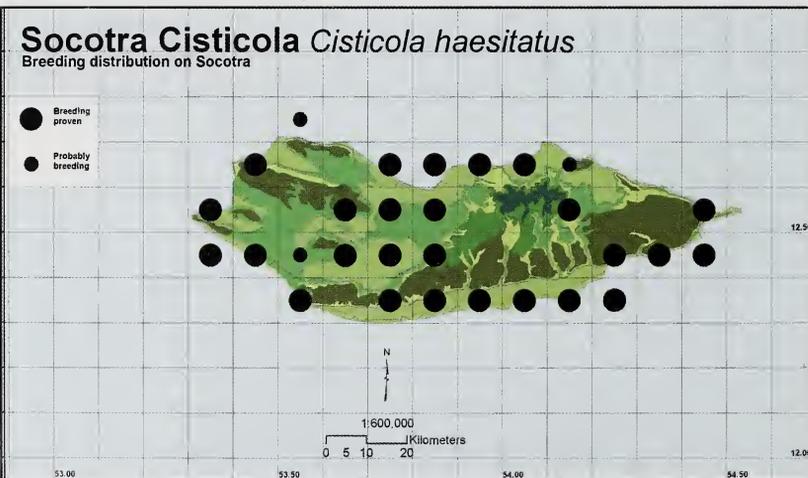


Figure 15. Socotra Cisticola: Socotran breeding distribution.

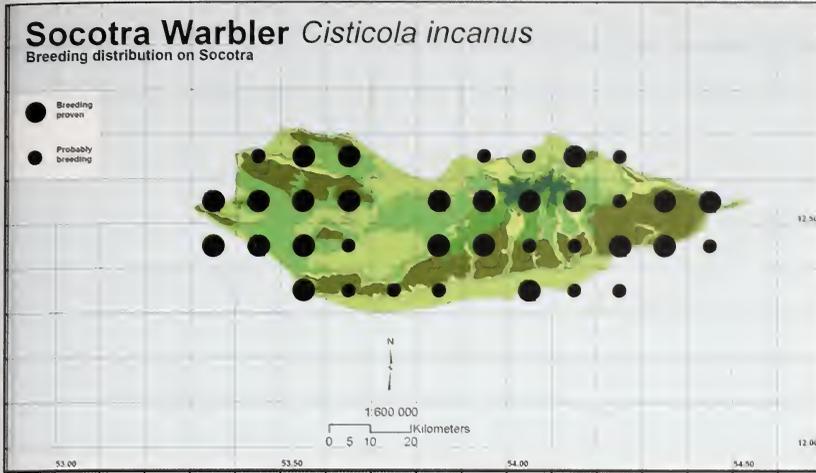


Figure 16.
Socotra Warbler:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

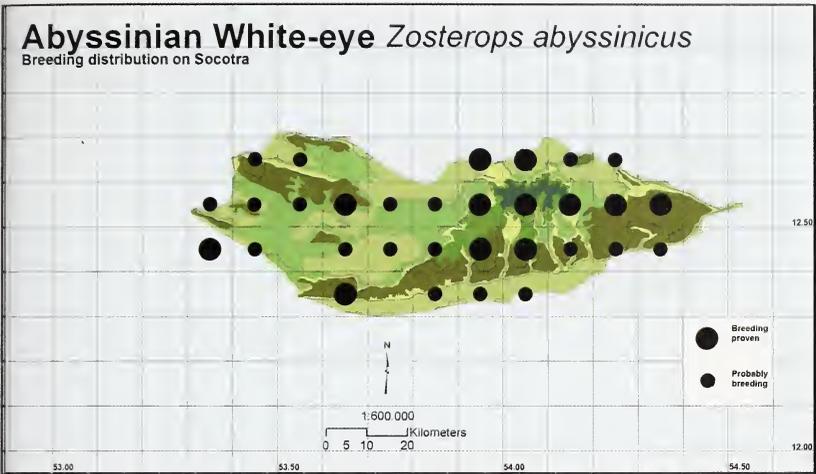


Figure 17.
Abyssinian
White-eye:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

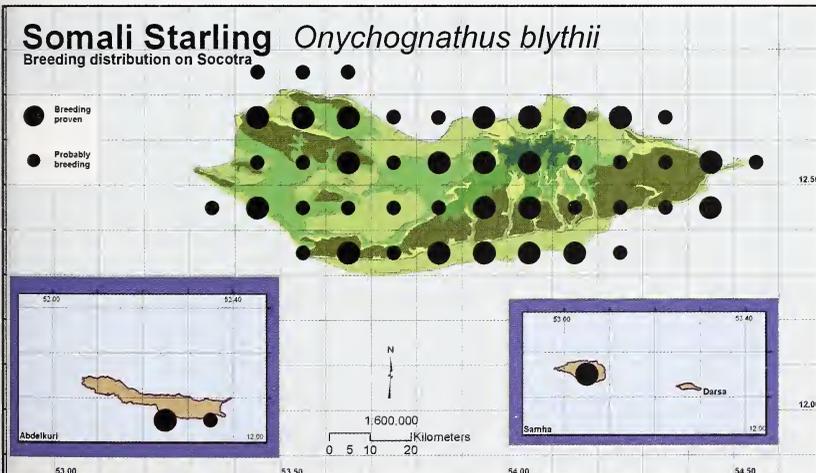


Figure 18.
Somali Starling:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

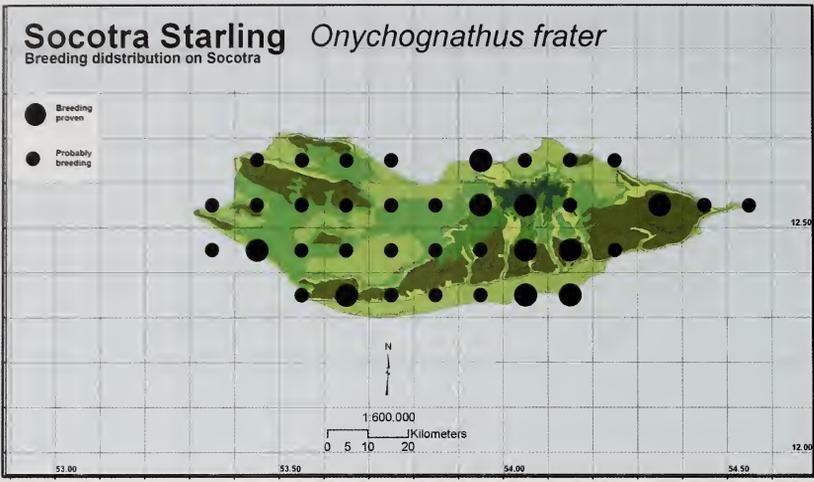


Figure 19.
Socotra Starling:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

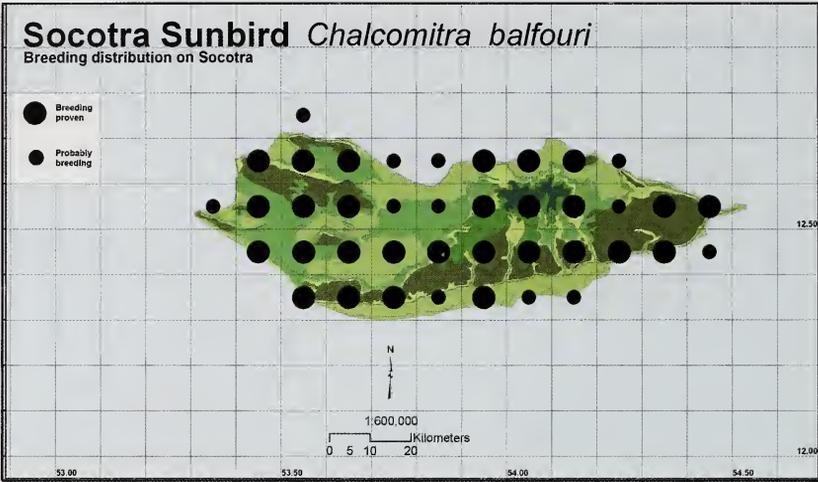


Figure 20.
Socotra Sunbird:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

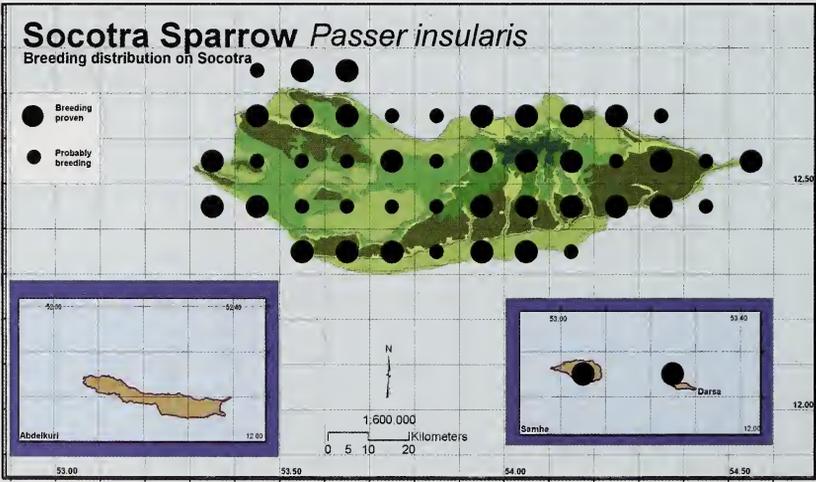


Figure 21.
Socotra Sparrow:
Socotran breeding
distribution.

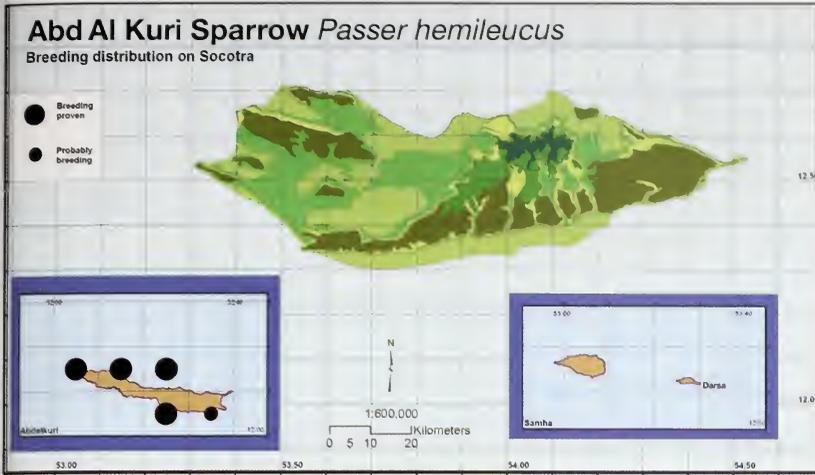


Figure 22. Abd Al Kuri Sparrow: Socotran breeding distribution.

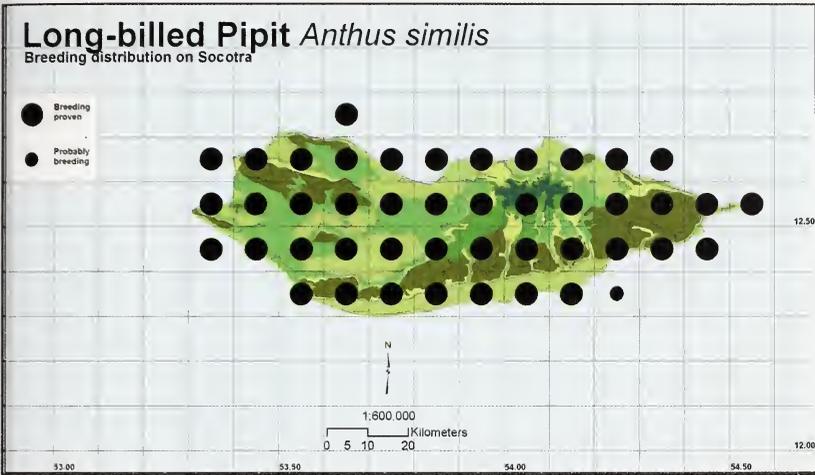


Figure 23. Long-billed Pipit: Socotran breeding distribution.

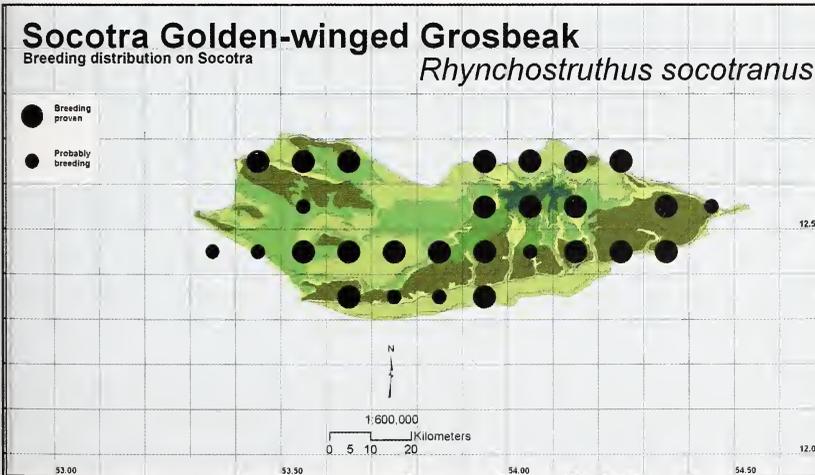


Figure 24. Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak: Socotran breeding distribution.

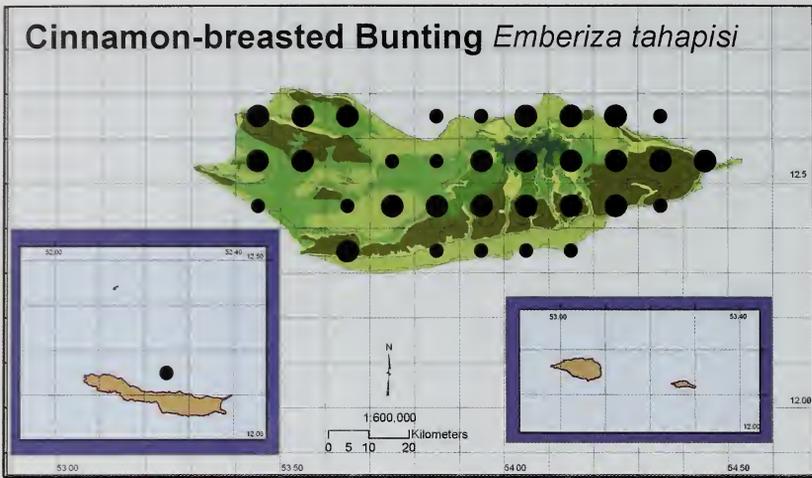


Figure 25. Cinnamon-breasted Bunting; Socotran breeding distribution. Large dots indicate breeding proven, small dots probably breeding.

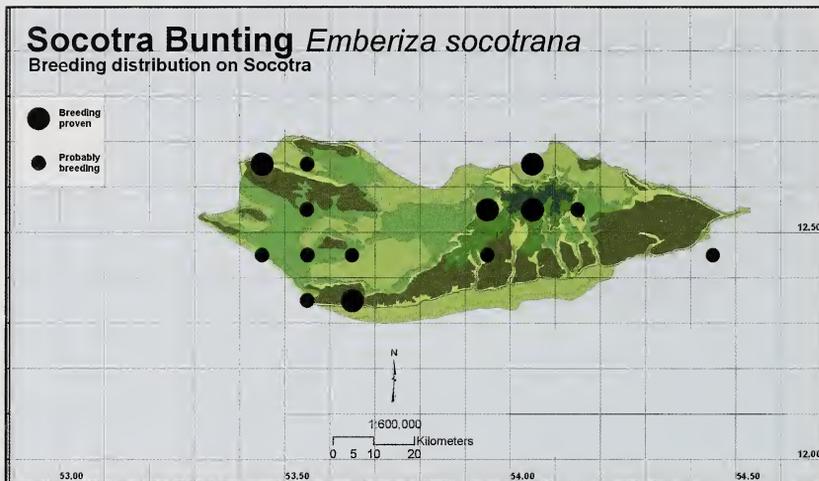


Figure 26. Socotra Bunting; Socotran breeding distribution

recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. A total of 385.5 km of transects were undertaken 1999–2008 throughout Socotra island as follows: 79 km in 10 recording squares November 1999, 130.75 km in 17 recording squares February and March 2000, 6 km in 4 recording squares April 2000, 38.5 km in 9 recording squares February 2001, 47.5 km in 6 recording squares February 2004, 10.5 km in 3 recording squares February and March 2006, 20 km in 4 recording squares February and March 2007, 22.5 km in 8 recording squares October and November 2007, 30.75 km in 6 recording squares October and November 2008. Transects were undertaken in 36 of the 43 recording squares that were over 90% land, and, as comprehensively as possible, in the seven main habitats (Table 3) and at all altitude ranges (Table 4), though we are aware from the coverage that habitats A and C were probably under sampled.

The results from line transects will inevitably contain biases, notably those caused by observer ability (see *eg* Porter 2012), measurement of transect length and band width, assigning a transect to a habitat type (as there is sometimes a ‘grey area’ between types), and species’ detectability. In the case of the latter, this could be influenced by

Table 3. The main habitats on Socotra, their area and length of transects undertaken in each.

HABITAT	Approx % of island	Area of island km ²	Total length of transects undertaken km	% of habitat sampled
A. Semi-evergreen woodland of limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines (mostly c500–700 m)	8%	293	14	0.3
B. Open and woody-based herb communities on the limestone plateau (c500–720 m)	27%	1003	114.5	0.7
C. Succulent shrubland on limestone cliffs and slopes (0–550 m)	28%	1041	66.5	0.4
D. Croton shrubland on the coastal plains (mostly <50 m)	29%	1087	108.5	0.6
E. Submontane shrubland on the slopes and cliffs of the granite mountains (c380–750 m)	5%	190	27	0.9
F. Montane mosaic of shrubland woodland and grassland in the granite mountains (> 750 m)	2%	73	13	1.0
G. Dwarf coastal vegetation: mosaic of low succulent shrubs and woody-based herbs, variously dominated by <i>Limonium</i> , <i>Zygophyllum</i> , <i>Suaeda</i> and <i>Pulicaria</i> (<50 m)	<1%	30	42	8.4

vegetation density as well as behavioural and vocal activity of species. The use of distance estimation has become standard practice in most transect surveys which can also be used to correct for attenuation of song/calls which differ between habitats and species (eg Newson *et al* 2005). However, a more straightforward approach was adopted here which we felt was more easily replicated across the habitat types present with different observers. Furthermore the habitats on the islands generally show a rather open structure, the number of breeding species is low (compared *eg* with a European woodland habitat) and none of the species is secretive in behaviour. We felt confident, therefore, that detectability rates of most species were high. We are aware that the detectability of species may vary through the breeding season, but without knowing the behaviour of the species concerned, it is difficult to correct for this but this might be a bias as counts in different places were conducted at different stages of the breeding season. However, we believe that the spread of transects throughout the season will have helped to cushion this.

Calculating population estimates

To establish population estimates, the range and density of each species were determined. First, as described under 'Breeding distribution' all recording squares were visited to establish whether a species was probably or proven to be breeding. These squares were used to represent the 'breeding range' of each species. Second, based on the transect methodology previously described, the density of each species, in each habitat within the species range was calculated.

Table 4. Length of transects (km) undertaken in each quarter (NW quarter = W of 53.80° E, N of 12.50° N etc) and altitude range (asl) on Socotra.

	below 250 m	250–750 m	above 750 m
NW quarter	53	64	7
NE quarter	41	44	13.5
SW quarter	54	8	-
SE quarter	65	32	5

Table 5. Densities (birds/km²) in each of the seven habitat types on Socotra (see Table 3 for definitions) for those species whose population was determined by transects. The 95% confidence intervals are given in parenthesis.

		Habitat type						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles lichtensteinii</i>	0	0	1.50 (0.41–5.54)	1.16 (0.45–2.95)	0	0	0.48 (0.06–3.78)
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	108 (52.8–222)	34.2 (22.3–52.4)	48.9 (32.7–73.0)	43.2 (26.9–69.3)	46.3 (27.9–76.9)	30.8 (13.3–71.2)	9.72 (4.91–19.2)
Bruce's Green Pigeon	<i>Treron waalia</i>	20.2 (8.30–49.3)	3.01 (0.54–16.9)	7.21 (2.38–21.9)	1.39 (0.20–9.69)	2.00 (0.37–10.9)	5.13 (1.31–20.1)	0
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	17.9 (14.2–22.4)	6.40 (4.22–9.73)	5.60 (3.16–9.92)	8.62 (6.16–12.1)	8.02 (4.02–16.0)	12.8 (3.05–53.8)	5.16 (3.40–7.85)
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	1.43 (0.36–5.69)	0.24 (0.08–0.74)	0.49 (0.15–1.56)	0.27 (0.11–0.70)	0.93 (0.22–3.99)	1.15 (0.25–5.38)	0.67 (0.11–4.19)
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>	0	34.9 (11.9–102)	48.0 (18.0–128)	114 (67.5–193)	4.86 (0.56–42.0)	0	76.3 (32.8–177)
Socotra Warbler	<i>Cisticola incanus</i>	0	7.71 (4.11–14.5)	13.5 (7.74–23.7)	2.73 (1.15–6.49)	19.1 (10.7–34.4)	16.7 (7.46–37.2)	7.76 (3.00–20.1)
Abyssinian White-eye	<i>Zosterops abyssinicus</i>	53.6 (32.0–89.8)	2.99 (1.22–7.28)	6.25 (2.84–13.8)	1.72 (0.42–7.08)	17.3 (7.15–41.8)	24.4 (6.34–93.6)	2.61 (0.27–25.2)
Somali Starling	<i>Onychognathus blythii</i>	114 (27.4–476)	31.3 (18.8–52.1)	10.3 (4.98–21.2)	17.8 (11.8–26.9)	45.7 (28.6–73.1)	32.1 (18.2–56.5)	3.17 (0.58–17.3)
Socotra Starling	<i>Onychognathus frater</i>	8.33 (0.55–125)	5.41 (2.97–9.85)	6.77 (2.82–16.2)	7.22 (2.80–18.6)	20.4 (7.83–53.0)	10.3 (3.76–27.9)	0
Socotra Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra balfouri</i>	28.6 (13.0–62.6)	22.1 (13.9–35.3)	22.3 (12.4–40.2)	11.0 (6.09–19.8)	24.1 (9.66–60.0)	1.28 (0.15–11.1)	1.28 (0.15–10.8)
Socotra Sparrow	<i>Passer insularis</i>	92.9 (23.2–372)	134 (65.6–274)	100 (74.3–135)	50.7 (32.4–79.2)	95.1 (53.1–170)	39.7 (16.2–97.4)	28.7 (7.62–108)
Long-billed Pipit	<i>Anthus similis</i>	7.14 (0.95–53.6)	39.7 (28.9–54.6)	17.3 (11.8–25.4)	31.3 (23.4–42.0)	14.8 (4.19–52.3)	14.1 (7.04–28.3)	20.6 (12.4–34.2)
Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak	<i>Rhynchostruthus socotranus</i>	15.5 (2.19–109)	2.13 (0.97–4.72)	6.55 (2.13–20.2)	5.67 (2.65–12.1)	9.88 (4.22–23.1)	11.5 (5.82–22.9)	2.08 (0.15–29.4)
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting	<i>Emberiza tahapisi</i>	17.9 (1.44–221)	30.0 (18.6–48.2)	6.00 (1.52–23.7)	3.31 (1.06–10.3)	13.6 (6.32–29.2)	0	0
Socotra Bunting	<i>Emberiza socotrana</i>	0	4.55 (1.41–14.7)	1.10 (0.18–6.64)	0	12.0 (1.96–73.4)	0	0

Data analysis

Estimates of density and abundance and associated 95% confidence intervals were estimated within the program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al* 2010). Here abundance in each habitat is estimated by:

$$\hat{N} = A \frac{n}{2wL}$$

Where, for each habitat, A is the total habitat area within the species range, $2w$ is the strip width (band width, corresponding to a distance, w , each side of the transect line), L is the total transect length and n the number of individuals counted. Confidence intervals (CI) are lognormal confidence intervals based on equations 3.71–3.74 in Buckland *et al* (2001), except that the normal distribution percentile is replaced with a t -distribution percentile,

where the degrees of freedom are based on a method due to Satterthwaite (1946). The methodology for determining the populations of species where a transect-based analysis is inappropriate is given in the specific species' account.

We have not attempted to translate number of individuals into pairs because of lack of data on the territorial behaviour and breeding biology of the species included in this paper. It is considered safest by many modern day workers to present transect results as density of individuals rather than convert into 'pairs'. This avoids having to make assumptions about non breeders, or whether individuals actually are paired and it also circumvents problems concerned with species-specific detectability (Rob Fuller pers comm). We have also given, in Table 5, densities (in birds/km²) in each of the seven habitat types (these are listed in Table 3) for those species whose populations were determined by transects, together with the 95% confidence intervals. In the species accounts below we have indicated which species are endemic to the archipelago and also those that have been classified as globally threatened (VU vulnerable) or near threatened (NT) by IUCN (BirdLife 2011).

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii* (Figure 4, Plate 11). This, the only sandgrouse to occur in the archipelago, is widespread on Socotra below 200 m asl. The highest counts at three drinking pools at dusk were 100, 50 and 30. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 2226 individuals (95% CI 970–5109, Table 5 gives density in each habitat type). Song has been recorded 15 November–19 March, nests with eggs (2 × c/2, 1 × c/3) 28 November–11 March, nest with chicks (2 chicks) on 29 February and



Plate 11. Male Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*, Socotra, March 2006. © RF Porter

adults with young 13 March–23 April. Thus the breeding season would appear to be mid November–late April. Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse has also been recorded on Abd Al Kuri.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*. Up to eleven 'domesticated' birds were recorded in Hadiboh town 1999–2011; they could frequently be seen flying around together as a group and had presumably been brought over from the mainland of Yemen. In addition, what appeared to be pure Rock Doves were seen and photographed at the coastal cliffs of Ras Hebak, 5 km west of Hadiboh, in 1999, 2000 and 2008, with up to six birds present.

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* (Figure 5, Plate 12). Laughing Dove has the widest breeding distribution of any species on Socotra, but it is not found on the other islands in the archipelago. After the Socotra Sparrow and Black-crowned breeding bird it is the third commonest breeding bird. It occurs in all main habitat types (see Table 3) except for dwarf coastal vegetation, and at altitudes 0–1000 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 166 690 individuals (95% CI 135 870–204 500). Table 5 gives the density in each habitat type and shows that the highest density, 108 birds/km², was recorded in the semi-evergreen woodland of limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines (habitat type A). Song has been recorded November–April, nests with eggs (4 × c/2; 1 × c/1) 17 November–14 June and recently fledged young until June. Thus the known breeding season is November–June, one of the longest of any bird on Socotra.



Plate 12. Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*, Socotra, February 2004. © RF Porter



Plate 13. Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia* nest, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter

Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia* (Figure 6, Plate 13). This pigeon is only recorded in the archipelago on Socotra where it occurs mainly in the eastern part, especially favouring stands and groves of palms at lower altitudes but also up to 1100 m asl in the Haggier mountains in montane thickets. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 7947 individuals (95% CI 4787–13 192). Although no dedicated surveys were made in palm woodland, which totals <8 km², even a density of 50 birds/km², would only add a further 400 individuals. Thus a better population estimate would be c8350. Song and display has been recorded 13 November–16 March, a nest with two eggs was found in December and another, with two eggs, early March. A nest with one young was found in February and another, again with one young, in March.

White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus* (Figure 7, Plate 14). This species only occurs on the main island. Because of the low density, highly secretive behaviour and localised distribution it is very difficult to census. Analysis based on transects indicate a



Plate 14. White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus*, Socotra, February 2009. © Rob Felix

population of c550 individuals, however this should be treated with great caution as only two encounters were made, both of singing birds—presumably males on territory. In our opinion the population of this rarely seen bird is probably less than 100 pairs. During transects and the atlas surveys White-browed Coucals were located in five of the recording squares (12% of the island) and were confined to areas of overgrown date palm groves at low altitude and to the wooded sub-montane slopes of the Haggier mountains at c1000 m asl. Song was recorded 20 November–23 February, fledged young in December and adults carrying food to young in a nest in February. The breeding season therefore would appear to be November–February.

Socotra Scops Owl *Otus socotranus* (endemic, Figure 8, Plates 15, 16). This species is found in c45% of the area of Socotra and is the only breeding owl. Unsurprisingly none were encountered



Plate 15. Young Socotra Scops Owls *Otus socotranus*, Socotra, February 2011. © AS Suleiman

during transects but night time surveys showed it could be quite common in areas where there were good stands of mature trees, especially palms. They were recorded up to 850 m asl. Birds appeared to be most numerous in recording squares T5, U4, V5 and W5 where night surveys suggested a density of up to three birds singing/km². Extrapolation is perhaps unwise but it would not be unreasonable to suggest each recording square where birds were present held over 50 pairs, indicating a Socotra population of c1000 pairs. Song was recorded 26 October–3 April; two young in a nest on 19 February (estimated at c20 days old suggesting a laying date of 4/5 January) and recently fledged young (brood sizes of 1, 3 and 4) were found 16 February–mid April. The taxonomic position and affinities of this owl are currently under investigation (Pons *et al* in prep).



Plate 16. Recently fledged Socotra Scops Owl *Otus socotranus*, Socotra, March 2011. © RF Porter

Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus* (Figure 9, Plate 17). This nightjar occurs on Socotra, where birds were observed in eight of the recording squares (c20% of the island) mostly on sparsely vegetated sandy and gravelly plains, often with *Croton*, below 100 m asl. However only one bird was encountered on transects and it clearly would be unsafe to use this in an analysis to determine the population. Targeted dusk surveys in areas that it occurs show that it is not uncommon and it would not be unreasonable to assume a population of <100 pairs. There is very little information on the duration of the breeding season but birds have been recorded in territorial display and singing November–February.



Plate 17. Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*, Socotra, November 1999. © Simon Aspinall

Forbes-Watson's Swift *Apus berliozi* (near-endemic, Figure 10, Plate 18). This is the only migrant 'land bird' that breeds in the archipelago and is difficult to census meaningfully. It can be seen over much of Socotra but somewhat unpredictably; in some years it is much commoner than others with 600 the largest flock observed. Birds have been recorded flying over 23 (c60%) of the recording squares on Socotra, but breeding was suspected in only two squares, where birds were watched repeatedly entering caves in the limestone cliffs—at sea level and at c500 m asl. During transects flying birds were counted using a 200 m band width and whilst the interpretation of such observations of a mobile bird is unwise, analysis indicates a population in excess of 2400 birds. However, it would be safer to say

the breeding population is unknown and that the number of individuals in any one year is unlikely to exceed 1000 on the main island. It has also been recorded breeding on Abd Al Kuri.

The migration pattern and breeding biology of this swift are difficult to interpret. Screaming and display flights have been regularly observed in February and March and birds have been seen entering nesting caves late February–May, which is presumably the breeding season. None have been recorded June–September when the monsoon is at its height, but this may be because of the difficulty of observations during that time; none have been seen 20 December–19 February when it is probably genuinely absent from the archipelago.



Plate 18. Forbes-Watson's Swift *Apus berliozi*, Samha, March 2007. © Peter Ryan

Socotra Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis uncinatus* (endemic race, Figure 11, Plate 19). This shrike only breeds on the main island where it is widespread in all habitats with trees from 0–1500 m asl. Its breeding distribution encompassed 37 of the recording squares (c90% of Socotra). Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 25 993 individuals (95% CI 21 734–31 087). Table 5 shows that the highest density, c18 birds/km², was recorded in the semi-evergreen woodland of limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines (habitat



Plate 19. Juvenile Socotra Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter

type A). Song has only been recorded in October and November, copulation on 24 February, nest building from 30 October, nests with eggs in November (c/4) and 18 February (c/2) and nests with young 14 November (c/2), adults feeding recently-fledged young have been observed 11 December–23 April, with most activity during February. Thus the known breeding season is October–April.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*. Hopefully the highly invasive House Crow has only a brief history in the annals of breeding birds on Socotra. Two adults, apparently with a nest with eggs or young, arrived on a boat from Aden in the mid 1990s. A small colony established in the palms near Hadiboh and reached a population of at least 15 individuals. This was successfully controlled and in 2009 the birds were finally eradicated (Suleiman & Taleb 2010). Fortunately the population did not spread to other areas of the island.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* (Figure 12, Plate 20). In the archipelago this corvid only breeds on Socotra where it is widespread in a variety of habitats from 0–1050 m asl, but breeding was only proven in eleven (c27%) of the recording squares. For this species birds were counted on transects using a 200 m band width and many encounters were of birds flying overhead. The veracity of the calculations may thus be open to error but nevertheless show a population of 1511 individuals (95% CI 935–2441), which we believe to be a fair indication of the number on the island. Little information has been gathered on breeding biology but nests with eggs have been recorded 25 January–3 March with adults feeding two young in nest (age c10 days) on 27 February; adults also observed carrying food 22–28 November, indicating a breeding season November–March.



Plate 20. Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* at nest, February 2011, Socotra. © RF Porter

Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne (fuligula) obsoleta* (Figure 13). This, the only martin that breeds on Socotra, is uncommon in the ravines and wadis of the Haggier mountains and their environs c200–600 m asl. Birds appeared to be resident in their breeding areas and none were seen away from these. The population was assessed by counting individual birds whenever a potential breeding area was visited and taking the highest count over the period 1999–2011: at ten sites a total of 60 birds was counted. Because it was not possible to visit all potential breeding areas in the difficult terrain of the Haggier mountains, it would not be unreasonable to assume that 60 birds represented less than half the population, which we would conservatively put at 50–100 pairs. Little data was gathered on breeding biology, but a pair was seen entering a nest on 22 February and aerial display in early March.

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps* (Figure 14, Plate 21). This is the second commonest breeding bird, after the Socotra Sparrow and breeds widely on Socotra and Abd Al Kuri in open lowland habitats, often with scattered *Croton* on the main island; it rarely occurs above c200 m, though it has been recorded up to 520 m asl. On the main island it has been recorded in 35 squares (c87.5% of the island). Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 190 602 individuals (95% CI 126 270–287 720) on Socotra. Table 5 shows that the highest density, 114 birds/km², was recorded in the *Croton* shrubland on the coastal plains (habitat type D). Song and aerial display has been recorded November–March, copulation in December, nest building 15 November–28 February, nests with eggs (all c/2) 18 November–5 March, two nests with two young each to 27 February and newly fledged young in February, March and early April. Thus the known breeding season is November–March/April.



Plate 21. Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*, Socotra, January 2006. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

Socotra Cisticola *Cisticola haesitatus* (endemic, NT, Figure 15, Plate 22). Whilst the distribution map suggests a fairly widespread distribution on Socotra, this rather colonial species (pers obs) has rather specific habitat requirements and thus a fragmented distribution in each of the squares recorded. For this reason we did not employ the same methods used to determine the population of the other widespread passerines and near passerines which had less specific habitat requirements. Instead, through the breeding distribution surveys, we identified and measured the size of all *C. haesitatus* breeding areas and calculated the population in each using the same transect technique described above. The results are shown in Table 6.

As can be seen from Table 6 the Socotra Cisticola occurs in a variety of habitats and altitudes from coastal plains dominated by dwarf shrubland (Plate 23) to dwarf *Acacia edgeworthii* and to upland areas, notably the Ma'lih plateau at c650 m asl (Plate 24). In addition to the populations given in the table, this species was observed in very small numbers in a few isolated localities and thus it would not be unreasonable to assume a total Socotra population of 9000 individuals. This is similar to the population assessments of 3–4000



Plate 22. Socotra *Cisticola Cisticola haesitatus*, Socotra, January 2006. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

Table 6. The breeding areas, habitats and populations of Socotra *Cisticola Cisticola haesitatus* on Socotra determined by surveys 1999–2008.

Locality (recording squares)	Area (km ²) of suitable habitat	Habitat	Population (individuals)
Noged plain (Q7, R7, S7, T7, U7, V7 W6, W7, X6) 10 m asl	24.25	Open coastal plain with patches of dwarf shrubland dominated by <i>Indigofera</i> , <i>Limonium</i> , <i>Zygophyllum</i> and <i>Suaeda</i> and scattered trees in places	2150
Shu'ub, Neet and area (N5, N6, O6) 0 m asl	5.3	Dwarf shrubland dominated by <i>Zygophyllum</i> , <i>Limonium</i> , <i>Atriplex</i> and <i>Suaeda</i> .	1515
North coastal plain: airport to Di Selmeho/Ghubbah (R4, R5, S4, S5, T4) 5 m asl	30.15	Dwarf shrubland dominated by <i>Zygophyllum</i> , <i>Suaeda</i> and <i>Pulicaria</i> .	2510
Ma'alalah plateau (O4) 650 m asl	20	Rich mosaic: mainly <i>Lycium</i> woodland with grasses and woody herbs, especially <i>Pulcaria</i> ; some <i>Tamarix</i> .	1080
East of Hadiboh port (U4) 30 m asl	5.45	Dwarf <i>Acacia edgeworthii</i> shrubland	260
Interior plains (Q5, Q6, R6, S6) 30 m asl	14.5	Silty plain with <i>Pulicaria</i> shrub-steppe.	900
Momi plateau (Y5) 450 m asl	8	Limestone hills sparsely vegetated with grass and <i>Lycium</i> tussocks	220
Qariyah (W4) 5 m asl	0.5	<i>Zygophyllum</i> & <i>Croton</i> shrubland	40
Total	107.65		8675



Plate 23. Socotra *Cisticola Cisticola haesitatus* habitat at Shu'ub, Socotra, January 2007. © Lisa Banfield



Plate 24. Socotra *Cisticola Cisticola haesitatus* habitat, Ma'alah plateau, Socotra, February 2007. © RF Porter

pairs given by Stastny & Bejcek (2002) and Nadim Taleb (*in litt*), even though their surveys were less comprehensive. Song and display has been recorded 18 November–5 April (and probably into May), nest building 18 November–27 February, nests with eggs in February (c/3 & c/4), nests with young 31 October (surprisingly early)–28 February (with most in February) and recently-fledged young 12 December–23 April. Thus the known breeding season is mid October–late April. See also Stastny & Bejcek (2002).

Socotra Warbler *Cisticola incanus* (endemic, Figure 16, Plate 25). This, the second *Cisticola* species found on Socotra, is fairly widespread (36 squares—c90% of land area) in a variety of habitats with trees and shrubs from 0–1000 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 26 685 individuals (95% CI 19 509–36 501). Table 5 shows that the highest density, c19 birds/km², was recorded in the submontane shrubland on the slopes and cliffs of the granite mountains (habitat type E). Song has been recorded November–April (and display-fighting, previously unrecorded, on 1 March 2011), nest building 20 November–1 March, nest with eggs in February (c/3), nests with young in February, but adults feeding fledged young 15 November–4 April. Thus the known breeding season is November–April.

Abyssinian White-eye *Zosterops abyssinicus* (Figure 17, Plate 26). Only found on Socotra in the archipelago. It is fairly widespread (over c75% of the main island), occurring anywhere with flowering trees and shrubs from 0–1000 m asl including town gardens, and may undertake local movements to follow the flowering periods of favoured plants. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 27 567 individuals (95% CI 20 834–36 487). Table 5 shows that the highest density, c54 birds/km², was recorded in the semi-evergreen woodland of limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines (habitat type A). Song and display (including mutual preening in February) have been recorded 15 November–17 March, nest building late October–22 May, adults feeding fledged young and fledged young 23 November–2 March. Thus the known breeding season is late October–late May, one of the most extensive of the breeding birds on Socotra.



Plate 25. Socotra Warbler *Cisticola incanus*, Socotra, November 2007. © RF Porter



Plate 26. Abyssinian White-eyes *Zosterops abyssinicus*, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter

Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii* (Figure 18, Plates 27, 28). This, the fourth commonest breeding bird is widespread and familiar throughout Socotra. It is found in a wide variety of habitats, including town gardens, with fruiting trees for feeding and cliffs with holes for nesting from 0–1050 m asl. Analysis of the transect data gave a population of 102 167 individuals on Socotra island (95% CI 66 434–157 120). Table 5 shows that the highest density, 114 birds/km², was in the semi-evergreen woodland of limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines (habitat type A). Nest building (carrying nesting material to holes in cliffs) has been recorded 15 November–18 February, egg shell remains were seen below nest holes on 23 November and adults recorded feeding recently fledged young 11 December–early April. Thus known breeding season is November–April. For further information see Gedeon & Neumann (2004). It also occurs on Abd Al Kuri and Samha.



Plate 27. Male Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii*, Socotra, October 2007. © RF Porter



Plate 28. Female Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii*, Socotra, January 2006. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

Socotra Starling *Onychognathus frater* (endemic, Figure 19, Plate 29). This starling only occurs on the main island where it is most frequently encountered in the uplands



Plate 29. Socotra Starling *Onychognathus frater* feeding young, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter

200–1000 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 25 187 individuals (95% CI 16 342–38 820). Table 5 shows that the highest density, $c20$ birds/km², was in the submontane shrubland on the slopes and cliffs of the granite mountains (habitat type E). Song has been recorded November–March, males displaying to females in February, nest building 15 November–12 December, adults incubating eggs or young 15–20 November and adults feeding young 1 December–4 April. Thus known breeding season is November–April. For further information see Gedeon & Neumann (2004).

Socotra Sunbird *Chalcomitra balfouri* (endemic, Figure 20, Plate 30). This, the sixth commonest breeding bird in the archipelago, is only found on Socotra where it is widespread, especially where trees, shrubs and nectar producing plants are in flower 0–1000 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 65 876 individuals (95% CI 50 362–86 169). Table 5 shows that the highest density, $c29$ birds/km², was recorded in the semi-evergreen woodland of limestone escarpments and sheltered ravines (habitat type A). Song and display have been recorded 30 October–5 April, copulation 23 February, nest building 30 October–16 March, nests with eggs ($2 \times c/2$) 1–3 March and nests with young 30 March ($c/3$)–1 May. Recently fledged (but still dependent) young have also been seen on 27 October (see Plate 30) and thus eggs would have been laid in about mid September. Thus the known breeding season is September–May.

Socotra Sparrow *Passer insularis* (endemic, Figure 21, Plate 31). This, the commonest breeding bird on Socotra is widespread in a variety of habitats with trees, including towns and villages, 0–1000 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 328 992 individuals (95% CI 239 540–451 840) on Socotra. Table 5 shows that the highest density, $c135$ birds/km², was recorded in the open and woody-based herb communities on the limestone plateau (habitat type B). Song has been recorded 27 October–April, copulation in February and March, nest building 20 November–20 March and nests with young 23 November–June (when recently fledged young also seen, especially in February). Thus the known breeding season is November–June.

Abd Al Kuri Sparrow *Passer hemileucus* (endemic, VU, Figure 22, Plate 32). This sparrow has recently been split from *Passer insularis* (Kirwan 2008, Ryan *et al* 2010) and only occurs on Abd Al Kuri where ASS estimates the population to be $c400$ pairs, mostly in and around the villages.



Plate 30. Juvenile Socotra Sunbirds *Chalcomitra balfouri*, Socotra, October 2007. © RF Porter



Plate 31. Socotra Sparrow *Passer insularis*, Socotra, February 2011. © RF Porter



Plate 32. Abd Al Kuri Sparrow *Passer hemileucus*, Abd Al Kuri, April 2007. © Peter Ryan

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* (Figure 23, Plate 33). This pipit only occurs on Socotra where it is the fifth commonest breeding bird and widespread in a variety of open habitats, often with trees, 0–1000 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 94 528 individuals (95% CI 79 059–113 020). Table 5 shows that the highest density, *c*40 birds/km², was recorded in the open and woody-based herb communities on the limestone plateau (habitat type B). Song has been recorded 28 October–3 April, nest building and nests with eggs ($2 \times c/3$) 17 November–4 March, nests (both with 2 young) on 18 November and 13 March, and recently fledged young November–23 April, with most seen in February. Thus known breeding season is November–April.



Plate 33. Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* dust-bathing, Socotra, October 2007. © RF Porter

Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus* (endemic, Figure 24, Plate 34). Recently the golden-winged grosbeaks in Arabia and on Socotra have been split into two species (Kirwan & Grieve 2007). The Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak is fairly widespread on Socotra (occurring over *c*70% of the island) in all areas with trees 0–1050 m asl, but with most in the altitude range 200–800 m. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 16 802 individuals (95% CI 10 065–28 050). Table 5 shows that the highest densities, 15.5 birds/km², were in the submontane shrubland on the slopes and cliffs of the granite mountains (habitat type E) and the montane mosaic of shrubland and woodland and grassland in the granite mountains (habitat type F). Song has been recorded 30 October–16 March and recently-fledged young (being fed by adults) 21 December–16 March. Thus the known breeding season would appear to be October–March.



Plate 34. Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*, Socotra, October 2008. © RF Porter

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi* (Figure 25, Plate 35). A widespread breeder in the higher elevations on Socotra, notably *c*500–800 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 38 233 individuals (95% CI 25 097–58 246). Table 5 shows that the highest density, 30 birds/km², was recorded in the open and woody-based herb communities on the limestone plateau (habitat type B). Song has been recorded 13 November–17 March, copulation in November and December, nest building and nests with eggs ($2 \times c/3$) 23 November–11 February and recently fledged young in February (adult with 3 young



Plate 35. Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi*, Socotra, April 2007. © Peter Ryan

on 27 February). Thus known breeding season appears to be November–March. Also recorded on Abd Al Kuri but breeding not proven.

Socotra Bunting *Emberiza socotrana* (endemic, VU, Figure 26, Plates 36, 37). This endemic bunting only breeds on the main island where it has been found breeding typically at c600 m asl. Analysis of the transect data shows a population of 3770 individuals (95% CI 1258–11 300), thus making it the rarest of the archipelago's endemic birds. Table 5 shows that the highest density, c12 birds/km², was in the submontane shrubland on the slopes and cliffs of the granite mountains (habitat type E, see Table 3). A small population was found on the limestone slopes at the extreme west of the island, and this may be more extensive than recorded due to the difficulty of access for surveying. The nest and eggs of this bunting are yet to



Plate 36. Socotra Buntings *Emberiza socotrana*, Socotra, October 2007. © RF Porter



Plate 37. Socotra Bunting *Emberiza socotrana*, Socotra, January 2006. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

be described. Song recorded 20 November–29 February, adult incubating (nest contents unknown) in January, female with brood patch in February and recently fledged young (being fed by adults) 9–27 February. Thus the known breeding season would appear to be November–February, the shortest of any of the breeding birds on Socotra.

COMPARISON WITH ESTIMATES FROM 1993 SURVEYS

During the OSME survey of Socotra in March/April 1993 (Porter & Martins 1996) a total of 47.2 km of transects, recording all birds, was undertaken in a variety of habitats in the coastal plain (<100 m), foothills (100–400 m) and highlands (>450 m). These were used to determine the relative abundance and density (individuals/km²) in the three altitudinal zones (Davidson 1996). Davidson's density value was calculated using the formula in Bibby *et al* (1992) and thus differed from ours as those calculations were based on a transect band width of 50 m and the formula included birds seen beyond this band width. Our more extensive transects systematically covered all altitudes and habitat types across the entire island and our calculations took into account the range and area of habitat each species occupied.

From Davidson's densities we calculated a total Socotra population for each species, estimating that the areas of coastal plain, foothills and highlands were roughly similar (c1230 km² each). We then compared with our population estimates and the data is presented in Table 7. Because of the paucity of data in Davidson (1996) and the fact that those observations were over a period of just one week and geographic coverage was limited, it would be dangerous to draw comparisons with ours. Certainly the data should not be used to draw any conclusions about population change. Our data supersedes that of Davidson (1996) and should be used to determine any future conservation actions or Red Listing assessments.

Table 7. Comparison of population estimates based on 1999–2008 transects with those made in 1993. This table only includes those species recorded on transects in 1993. Estimates rounded to nearest 50.

	Our estimate which surveyed 385.5 km of transects 1999–2008.	Estimate based on Davidson (1996) which surveyed 47.2 km of transects in March 1993
Laughing Dove	166 700	415 000
Bruce's Green Pigeon	7950	12 800
Socotra Southern Grey Shrike	26 000	109 000
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark	190 600	99 800
Socotra Warbler	26 700	36 000
Abyssinian White-eye	27 550	17 400
Somali Starling	102 150	317 800
Socotra Starling	25 200	26 700
Socotra Sunbird	65 900	22 000
Socotra Sparrow	329 000	481 400
Long-billed Pipit	94 550	112 500
Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak	16 800	3 500
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting	38 250	24 800

THREATS AND CONSERVATION

There have been no 'cause and effect' studies of the threats to birds on Socotra and thus all suppositions are based on personal knowledge of the systems concerned and a knowledge of specific actions on Socotra that are likely to impact bird populations. For passerines and near-passerines the main threats are considered to be from continuing over-grazing of grass, herbs and shrubs (Plate 38), the harvesting of live wood (Plate 39) and habitat fragmentation and destruction especially from road and building development (Plate 40). Looking to the future, large scale use of herbicides and pesticides could reduce seed and invertebrate food supplies. Intensification of agriculture, involving such factors, has been implicated in large declines of bird populations on farmland in western Europe in the latter part of the 20th century (Chamberlain *et al* 2000, Fuller 2000). The most immediate threats to the species covered in this paper are judged to be from building development on the coastal plains, which is likely to reduce the nesting area and habitats



Plate 38. Grazing goats on Socotra, November 2007. © RF Porter



Plate 39. Harvested live wood, Socotra 2007. © RF Porter

Plate 40. Unsympathetic road building, Socotra, October 2007. © RF Porter

of the near threatened Socotra Cisticola and rare (on Socotra) Nubian Nightjar, as well as Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark. In addition there is concern that road building across the limestone plateau in the west of Socotra could damage important breeding areas of the globally vulnerable Socotra Bunting (Miller *et al* 2007). The data gathered during this survey will be used extensively in reviewing and revising the Socotra IBAs catalogued in Evans (1994).

FUTURE SURVEYS

Although extensive, this survey at best provides provisional population estimates. In the future, techniques could be more refined and ideally any survey should be undertaken in one breeding season (say, over a two month period) by teams of observers covering the island comprehensively, though in reality this could be very difficult to achieve. Working more closely with botanists to ensure the correct identification of habitat types would be advantageous. Repeat samples of this survey (same periods, habitats, even transects) should also be considered for population monitoring. In this respect all raw data is available for study and interrogation and has been deposited with OSME, the Foundation for Endangered Wildlife (Yemen) and the Friends of Socotra.

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FROM THE RARITIES COMMITTEES

Ian Harrison (compiler)

EGYPT

The second report of the Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee (EORC) was published online (www.chn-france.org/eorc/eorc.php?id_content=5). The following is a summary. Claims should be sent to eorc.secretary@gmail.com for species recorded fewer than ten times (details on EORC website). In 2011 26 records were considered. 19 of these were accepted, three were considered as not proven and four are still pending. The updated checklist of the birds of Egypt now includes 452 species: 435 (category A), 11 (cat B), 6 (cat C).

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*. One male found at a Port Said market 11 March 1990 had according to the merchant been shot at lake Burullus (31° 30' N, 30° 50' E) the previous week (G Nikolaus, R van Westrienen; Nikolaus & van Westrienen 1991 *Dutch Birding* 13: 93–94). First record.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*. One lake Zagam (30° 15' N, 30° 20' E), Wadi el Natrun, 14 May 1990 (F Schepers, O Pineau, R Geene, AI Abdelsamad; Schepers *et al* 1991 *Dutch Birding* 13: 95). First record.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*. An adult, Crocodile island, Luxor, 12 March 2011 (M Dennis). First record.

Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*. A winter survey of Egyptian wetlands along the Mediterranean coast in December 1989/January 1990 recorded a minimum of 442 individuals (P Meininger, UG Sørensen). This species has now been proved to be regular in winter in northern Egypt and is no longer considered by EORC.

Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens*. Two Abu Simbel 28 December 2010 (K de Rouck, D Colin *et al*; de Rouck 2011 *Birding World* 24: 24, de Rouck & Colin 2012 *Dutch Birding* 34: 104–107). Last reported 11 May 2012 (G Joynt). First record, apparently of wild origin.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*. One Abu Simbel 20 October 1990 (SC Madge; Madge 1992 *Courser* 3: 50–51). First record.

Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*. One Luxor 3 January 2011 (SR van der Veen; van der Veen 2011 *Dutch Birding* 33: 121–122). First record, apparently of wild origin.

Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris*. A first-winter Marsa Alam 5–11 December 2010 (A, P & G Bujanowicz). First record.

Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*. One Wadi Gemal 2 March 2009 (J Sykes *et al*). Third record.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*. Two Naama Bay (Sharm el Sheikh), Sinai, 14 October 1990 (SC Madge; Madge 1992 *Courser* 3: 48–49). First record.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. One Naama Bay 12 October 1988 (M Baha el Din; Baha el Din 1996 *Sandgrouse* 18: 69). First record.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*. One Gebel Afsar sewage site (northeast of Cairo) 5 January 1990 (SM Lister, MC Hall; Lister & Hall 1992 *Courser* 3: 57). First record.

Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*. One Marsa Alam 5–11 December 2010 (A, P & G Bujanowicz). Fifth record.

Red-Tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*. One male Wadi Aidieb, Gebel Elba, 22° 13' 40" N, 36° 24' 21" E, 1 December 2010 (S Baha el Din, A Badry Sayed). First record.

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*. One male Abu Simbel 1 May 2006 (P-A Crochet, E Didner, P Geniez). First record, apparently of wild origin.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*. One first winter Sharm el Sheikh, 24 September 2007 (Anon). First record. Two Sharm el Sheikh 24 October 2010 (N Scatassi, M Biasioli, M Gagliardone, A Corso *et al*). Second record.

Buff-Bellied Pipit *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus*. One Naama Bay 11–13 January 2009 (S Skaarup). First record. One Naama Bay 30 December 2010–3 January 2011 (J & V Mazenauer, W Wind). Second record.

Records considered not proven: Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* (Quseir, 24 Nov 1983), Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* (Hamata mangroves, 20 Mar 2004),

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* (Hamata, Red sea, 18 Sep 2005).

ISRAEL

The following information is from Bulletin 8:01 Rare Birds in Israel, December 2012 published by the Israel Rarities and Distribution Committee (IRDC). Records of rare species for adjudication by IRDC should be sent to Avner Cohen (israbirding@gmail.com). See also www.israbirding.com/irdc.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*. Two Acre old port 23 December 2009 (A Ben-Dov). One remained to 16 January 2010. Fifth record.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*. One off Jaffa 3 February 2010 (B Granit, E Shochat). Fifth record. One off Shikmona 28 January 2012 (T Kahn). Sixth record.

Swinhoe's Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma mouorhis*. One moribund at Eilat 24 January 2008 (N Weiss). Fifth record.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. Nine (five adults, four immatures) first found at Tel Anafa fields, eastern Hula valley, 4 December 2011 (YL Ari). Seen throughout winter. Fourth record.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*. One Eilat's North Beach 14 March 2007 (JP Smith). Remained to 27 March. First record. One Kefar Baruch reservoir 8 December 2011 (T Khan). Seen until late February 2012. Second record.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*. One male Kefar Rupin fish ponds 14 January 2005 (B Dvir). Eighth record.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*. Two females Metzger reservoir, Golan Heights, 8 February 2008 (T Simantov *et al.*). Remained for some time. 26th record. A 2nd year female K19 ponds, Eilat, 13–19 May 2012 (N Weiss *et al.*). 27th record.

Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*. One juvenile Eilat 28 March 2008 (N Weiss, R Mizrahi, A Cohen). Seventh record.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*. One Ma'ale Gamla, Golan Heights, 24 January 2008 (A Boldo *et al.*). Seventh record.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*. One Ma'agan Michael 21 November 2008 (A Mayrose, S Agmon). First identified as *P. fulva* but re-identified by JP Smith from photographs. Remained to mid December

2008. First record. One Acre beach 24 January 2009 (S Hacham). Seen until late February. Possibly same individual as first record.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*. One Yotvata sewage ponds 30 April–3 May 2008 (M Kraig *et al.*). Sixth record. One Gesher ponds, Beit She'an valley, 7 May 2008 (A Ben-Dov, O Horine, S Alterman). Seventh record. One Samar sewage ponds 1–4 December 2010 (I Shanni *et al.*). Eighth record.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Triinga flavipes*. One Neve Eitan ponds, Beit Shean valley, 25 September 2008 (P Kinsella, L Gregory, Northern Valleys raptor survey team). Second record.

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*. This species normally occurs March–August so two 8 December 2007 at North Beach, Eilat (R Mizrahi, T Kahn) is an exceptional winter record.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*. One adult 23 October 2007 re-flooded area Hula valley western canal (A Balaban *et al.*). Fourth record.

Black-crowned Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*. One male Yotvata fields 3–15 November 2010 (I Shanni *et al.*). 15th record.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*. One Rishpon beach, central coastal plains 13 March 2008 (B Granit, T Kahn). Fourth record

Masked White Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata*. One Ma'agan Michael 18 March 2011 (A Ben-Dov). Second record.

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*. One Netiv Halamed Hei reservoir 8–19 November 2011 (R Haran *et al.*). Second record.

Basal Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens warriarum*. One Kefar Baruch reservoir, Jezreel valley, 19 January 2010 (U Mackover). Fifth record. One Uvda valley, southern Negev, 1–30 March 2012 (D Berkovitch). Sixth record.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*. One Eilat cemetery 19 November 2011 (M Wolinski, S Ingram *et al.*). Second record.

Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis*. A 1st winter male Kerem Ben-zimra, upper Galilee, 26 January 2011 (R Segali, S Luria). 13th record.

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*. One Lehavot Habashan ponds, Hula valley, 23 May 2012 (E Rimon). One Hula 2 June 2012 (F Argyle). Neither had brood patch or cloacal protuberance. 15th record.

Green Warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus*. One Midreshet Ben Gurion, central Negev, 1 May 2008 (D Burns, E Makover). Third record. One Netiv Halamed Hae reservoir 14 October 2009 (R Haran). Fourth record. One upper Wadi Shanni, Eilat mountains, 29 October 2010 (R Shaish). Fifth record. One Ashdod, southern coastal plains, 4 June 2011 (Y Perlman). Sixth record.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. One Ein Afek 25 October 2011 (I Shimshon). Fourth record.

Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*. One female Kibutz Samar 20/21 May 2011 (E Sadan). 13th record. One male Eilat 28 November 2011 (B Granit). 14th record.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*. One Nafcha, central Negev ridge, 14 November 2009 (B Granit, S Alterman). One Kmahin, Nitzana, 5 November 2010 (Y Koren, U Arad). This species has become much rarer during the last two decades with less than one record a year—descriptions/photographs required for all sightings.

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*. One adult male Ezuz, Nitzana, 15 May 2010 (A Ben-Dov). Second record.

The following claims were rejected: European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* (Ashdod, 28 Jan 2012, withdrawn by observer), Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus* (Jerusalem BO, 27 Apr 2008). Both a Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata opistholeuca* (Eilat, Feb 1986) and a Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura* (Eilat, Dec 1982) have been re-identified as **Basalt Wheatear** *Oenanthe lugens warriac*.

JORDAN

The decisions of the 15th meeting of the Jordan Bird Records Committee (JBRC) are as follows. All claims and records should be sent to the secretary Dr Fares Khoury (avijordan2000@yahoo.com).

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*. One Aqaba bird observatory 2 April 2011 (K Mild). 11th record.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*. One immature Aqaba BO 19 December 2011 (F Rahahleh). Seen subsequently to February 2012. First record.

Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*. One Burqu' 10 February 2005 (M Amano, L Moghrabi, N Hamidan, K Omari). Second record.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*. One Azraq 23 April 2004 (A Halah, C Hewson, L Moghrabi, K Omari) was the first record for ten years.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*. One Mudawwara 16 December 2003 (P Ellis, A Halah, K Omari). Second record.

Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*. Two Aqaba BO 2 April 2011 (K Mild, T Pettersson). 12th record. This species occurs regularly in small numbers at Aqaba in winter and spring and there are now over twelve confirmed records for Jordan (1500 recorded near Irbid, northwest Jordan, 5 December 2012). This species does not now require a claim to be submitted to JBRC.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*. Five adults Aqaba BO 2 April 2011 (K Mild, T Pettersson). This species may prove to be a regular winter visitor and spring migrant at Aqaba. Until this is proved to be the case, descriptions should continue to be submitted.

Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*. One Tassan springs and five Fifa, 20–21 March 2011 (K Mild, T Pettersson, P Waern). Seventh and eighth records. JBRC notes that a survey in spring 2012 confirmed the presence of a small population of this species at Fifa. Descriptions of this species are therefore only required for sightings at locations other than the Fifa area.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*. One Mudawwara 23 March 2011 (K Mild, T Pettersson, P Waern). First record.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*. One Aqaba 26 March 2011 (P Waern). Fourth record.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*. One Azraq 1 May 2007 (J Azar). First record.

KUWAIT

The Kuwait Ornithological Records Committee meets quarterly each year to review and adjudicate submitted rarity forms for species that are considered accidental, vagrant, rare and scarce, as well as other specified species that have low and infrequent abundance. Claims should be sent to the secretary AbdulRahman Al Sirhan (alsirhan@alsirhan.com).

New species for Kuwait:

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*. Four Jahra pools reserve (JPR) 7 November 2012 (O Al-Bathali). First record.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*. One Jahra East outfall (JEO) 5 June 2012 (R Al Hajji). First record.

Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus cornix capellanus*. One 23 October 2012 JPR (K Al Ghanem). First record.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*. One JPR 26 August 2012 (R Al Hajji).

Exclamatory Paradise Whydah *Vidua interjecta*. One Al-Abraq 23 October 2012 (M Pope). First record (category E).

Other accepted records:

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*. One JPR 7 November 2012 (M Pope). Ninth record.

Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*. One Kuwait city (west) 6 February 2012 (Swiss group). Third record.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*. One Sulaibikhat bay 5 May 2012 (M Pope). 16th record.

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*. Two Boubyan island 1 May 2012 (K Al Nasrallah). Seventh record.

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*. One JEO 13 May 2012 (R Al Hajji). Second record.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*. Three JPR 6 October 2012 (H Al Shaygi). Eighth record.

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*. One JEO 8 November 2012 (R Al Hajji). 11th record.

Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*. One Pivot fields 26 February 2012 (K Al Ghanem). 11th record.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*. One Green island 2 February 2012 (P Fagel, R Swan). Sixth record.

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*. One JPR 31 August 2012 (R Al Hajji). Second record.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*. One Sabah Al Ahmad nature reserve (SAANR) 15 September 2012 (R Al Hajji). Third record.

Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata*. One JEO 27 August 2012 (R Al Hajji). Second record. One SAANR 28 August 2012 (R Al Hajji). Third record.

Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*. One JEO 22 November 2012 (R Al Hajji). Eighth record.

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*. Four Al-Abraq 16 February 2012 (P Fagel). 13th record. Three JPR 14 November 2012 (R Al Hajji). 14th record.

Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*. One SAANR 15 March 2012 (R Al-Hajji). Second record. One Sabriya 6 April 2012 (T Pepper). Third record.

Masked Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata*. One Wafra 10 February 2012 (Swiss group). Second record.

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*. One Khiran 17 March 2012 (R Al Hajji). Ninth record.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*. One SAANR 16 March 2012 (K Al Ghanem). Second record.

Record considered not proven: Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* (SAANR, 16 Sep 2012).

OMAN

The Oman Bird Records Committee (hjoman@gmail.com) has accepted the following claims. As of December 2012, the Oman list stands at 512.

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. Three East Khawr 12 December 2011–22 March 2012 (C Cooper *et al.*). Eighth record.

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*. One adult Qatbit 20 September 2012 (S Tibbett). Second record.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*. One juvenile Wave, Muscat, 1 January 2012 (H & J Eriksen). Ninth record.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*. One Ayn Hamran 19 February 2011 (R Barnes). Second record.

African Swamphen *Porphyrio madagascariensis*. One Al Qurm park 22 October–25 December 2011 (D Bates *et al.*). Second record.

Watercock *Gallinulex cinerea*. One Khawr Al Mughsayl 24–25 November 2011 (H & J Eriksen, D Mackenzie, S Tibbett). Third record.

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*. One adult West Khawr 19–27 November 2011 (H & J Eriksen *et al.*). Seventh record. During 2012 three adults were at West Khawr and a pair bred there during the autumn, the first breeding record for Oman. By

- December 2012 an adult with four downy chicks was present in addition to two other adults.
- Grey-headed Lapwing** *Vanellus cinereus*. One adult Sahnawt farm, Salalah, 3 January 2012 (HG Andersson). First record.
- African Collared Dove** *Streptopelia roseogrisea*. One pair Wadi Rabkut 18 February 2010. One adult male singing Al Balid farm 18 February 2010. Fourth & fifth records (K Mild, T Pettersson).
- Fork-tailed Swift** *Apus pacificus*. One Raysut waste disposal site 25 December 2010 (DL Velasco, GR Lázaro). First record. One East Khawr 4 November 2011 (S Tibbett, D Mackenzie). Second record.
- Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus*. One Sun farm, Sohar, 26 December 2011 (H & J Eriksen). Seventh record.
- European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*. One Qatbit 14 November 2012 (T Perrier). Fourth record.
- Pied Stonechat** *Saxicola caprata*. One sub-adult male Qatbit 26–27 October 2012 (A Kullberg, J Garvelink). Sixth record.
- Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*. One Thumrayt 29 September–9 October 2008 (S Tibbett). Second record.
- Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides*. One Thumrayt 26–29 January 2010 (S Tibbett). Tenth record.
- Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*. One Hilf 22 September 2009 (O Campbell). Fifth record.
- Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. One Mahawt island 31 October 2009 (M Watson). First record.
- Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis*. One adult female Thumrayt 7 December 2011 (S Tibbett). First record.
- Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus*. One Dawkah farm 7 November 2007 (K Mullarney). Fourth record.
- Chestnut-tailed Starling** *Sturnus malabaricus*. One adult male Dawkah farm 11–14 November 2010 (T Perrier). First record.
- Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*. One Qatbit 27 October 2012 (J Garvelink). Ninth record.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Comments on a recently published checklist of the birds of Kazakhstan

In the first issue of *Ornithological news of Kazakhstan and Central Asia*, a new checklist of the birds of Kazakhstan (Kovshar 2012) was published. When scrutinizing the text and comparing it with available literature, all mentioned in Wassink (2012), a large number of omissions, mistakes and some curious suggestions and conclusions were found. A summary of my comments follows.

Kovshar regards **Northern Hawk Owl** *Surnia ulula*, **Eurasian Pygmy Owl** *Glaucidium passerinum*, **Ural Owl** *Strix uralensis*, **Boreal Owl** *Aegolius funereus*, **Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Picus canus*, **Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*, **Black-throated Accentor** *Prunella atrogularis*, **Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* and **Spotted Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* as residents only, though birds from outside Kazakhstan (occasionally) winter in Kazakhstan.

He also states that **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*, **Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* and **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* are occasional breeding migrants, though their breeding has never been proved. **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca*, **Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* and **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* are still considered to be breeding migrants, though no recent breeding evidence is known.

Semicollared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* and **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* are regarded as being extremely rare vagrants, though they are regular passage migrants in very small numbers. According to Kovshar, **Snow Goose** *Anser caerulescens*, **Gyr Falcon** *Falco rusticolus*, **Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis*, **Dusky Thrush** *Turdus eunomus* and **Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni exilipes* (Coues's Redpoll) are occasional or rare during migration and/or winter, though there are only one or a few documented records each and, therefore, these species should be regarded as vagrants.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*, **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca*, **Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus*, **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*, **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avocetta*, **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**

Pterocles alchata and **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* are considered to be breeding and passage migrants only, though there are documented winter records. According to Kovshar, **Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*, **Wood Sandpiper** *Triuga glareola*, **Spotted Redshank** *Triuga erythropus* and **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens japonicus* have occasionally been recorded in winter. However, no documented winter records are known. **Red-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis* and **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* are mentioned as winter visitors. In fact, of the former only three documented records (two in winter) are known, of the latter there are only 12 documented records (only one in winter). Both species should therefore be regarded as vagrants.

Kovshar states that the following species are only accidentally or occasionally recorded in winter, though actually they are annually recorded in winter, some of them in considerable numbers: **Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*, **Western Great Egret** *Casmerodius albus*, **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*, **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*, **Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*, **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*, **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*, **Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*, **Pallas's Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*, **Common Woodpigeon** *Columba palumbus*, **Mew Gull** *Larus canus*, **Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*, **Western Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* and **European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*.

Kovshar allows **Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*, **Western Spot-billed Duck** *Anas poecilorhyncha*, **Snow Pigeon** *Columba leuconota*, **Asian House Martin** *Delichon dasypus*, **Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata* and **Pechora Pipit** *Anthus gustavi* on the Kazakh birdlist, though all records are not or insufficiently documented. On the other hand, he omits or does not even mention species of which good documentation is known: **Eastern Marsh Harrier** *Circus spilonotus*, **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos*, **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus*, **Long-**

billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* and **Naumann's Thrush** *Turdus naumanni*. In the case of three more omitted species I want to make the following remarks.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*: Kovshar omits the (only) record because it is unlikely that it could occur in Kazakhstan and it is very difficult to identify. The observers (Ross Ahmed, Simon Busuttill and Albert Salemgareev) were well aware that the record—at Kushmurun lake, Qostanay province, 14–15 July 2010, probably an adult (Wassink *et al* 2011)—seems hard to explain, although recently the species has been found in Israel (2003), Egypt (2011) and the United Arab Emirates (2011). The latter record was at 56° 21' E, almost as far east as the Kazakhstan record (Wassink *et al* 2011). Franklin's Gull is not difficult to identify in this plumage—the description fits and the photographs show a Franklin's Gull.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*: Kovshar omits the (only) record—16 July 2010, Naurzum nature reserve, Qostanay province (Wassink *et al* 2011) because it could refer to a location in the Turkmenistan part of the Caspian region. This is a curious remark, given that the observers gave the record's exact location and coordinates, 1300 km north of the location suggested by Kovshar.

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*: Kovshar omits the (only) record—Kenderli resort at Fetisovo, Mangghystau province, 30 August–8 September 2010 (Wassink *et al* 2011)—because it could refer to a location in the Turkmenistan part of the Caspian region. Again a strange remark, given that the observers (Patrick Palmén and Arend Wassink) clearly indicated that they stayed at Fetisovo during their trip and gave both the record's exact location and coordinates, 110 km north of the Kazakhstan/Turkmenistan border.

Furthermore, Kovshar regards **Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* to be a resident. However, Central Asian birds (presumably also Kazakh birds) winter in India (Katzner *et al* 2004). There are only two documented winter records. Griffon Vulture is better regarded as a breeding migrant and accidental resident.

Kovshar listed **Slender-billed Curlew** *Numenius tenuirostris* as very rare during

migration or in summer, though seemed to ignore that there have been no documented records in Kazakhstan since 1979 and that recent expeditions did not result in a single record in Kazakhstan or elsewhere. Slender-billed Curlew should probably be regarded as extinct.

Kovshar regards **Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco* as a breeding migrant and winter visitor. However, there are only two documented records of the subspecies *siberiae* and there is no indication that other than local breeding birds of the subspecies *harmsi* winter in Kazakhstan. Therefore, Tawny Owl should be regarded as a resident and accidental winter visitor.

Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe melanoleuca* (treated as *O. hispanica* by Kovshar): the coast of Mangghystau peninsula east to the western edge of the Ustyurt plateau, is inhabited by a polymorphic population of hybrid origin of Pied *O. pleschanka* × Eastern Black-eared Wheatear. Currently, the only gene flow into this population originates from the local pure Pied Wheatear population.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*: Kovshar fails to mention that in 2001 a pair bred at Berel in the southern Altai and probable breeding took place at the nearby Rachmanovski springs in 2002. Apart from these, there are only five other documented records. Olive-backed Pipit should be regarded as an accidental breeding and passage migrant.

Additionally, Kovshar failed to mention that many species breeding and/or wintering in Kazakhstan are also passage migrants. There are also some taxonomic remarks to be made. Kovshar allows *Calandrella leucophaea* specific status while, at the same time, he suggests that new research is needed to unravel the *Calandrella* complex in Central/Middle Asia. Why not leave this 'taxon' under Lesser Short-toed Lark *C. rufescens* pending further research? It is also contradictory that Yellow-headed *Motacilla lutea* and Black-headed Wagtail *M. feldegg* are given specific status whereas Grey-headed *M. thunbergi*, Eastern Yellow *M. tschutschensis* and White-headed *M. leucocephala* are apparently left under Blue-headed Wagtail *M. flava*.

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REVIEW

Birds of Kuwait—A Comprehensive Visual Guide

Edited by Mike Pope & Stamatis Zogaris
Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration
Company, Kuwait/Biodiversity East,
Nicosia. 2012.

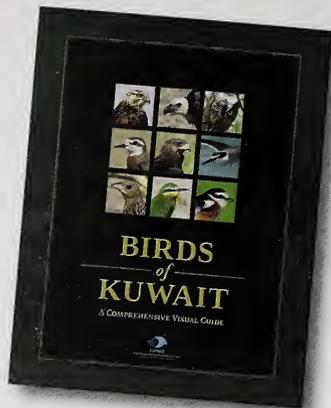
Hardback. 413 pages, colour photos
throughout.

ISBN 978-9963-2811-0-7

This is simply the most awesome book I have seen on the birds of a part of the OSME region. Wow! It is a coffee-table book, perhaps slightly less heavy than Mike Jennings's *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* (2010) and certainly lighter than my favourite *HBW* (vol 9). Mike Pope informs me that currently the book is for presentation purposes rather than retail. However an Arabic version, e-book and i-phone app are all planned, the latter two far more portable.

The subtitle is somewhat misleading. While certainly very visual, the book isn't comprehensive and a field guide is still a requirement. The introductory chapters are aimed at the general reader ('An introduction', 'The lives of wild birds in Kuwait', 'Naming birds: Bird taxonomy and identification', 'Observing and photographing birds', 'Bird conservation'). The latter chapter is a good statement of bird conservation problems in Kuwait and should be read by all dignitaries presented with this book. These chapters are innocuous enough but the pedant in me was awakened by the use of 'Arabian Desert' to refer to the deserts of Arabia. The Arabian desert occurs only in Egypt, east of the Nile valley (aka Eastern desert). 'Important places for birds in Kuwait' is of use to birders visiting Kuwait for the first time or for local beginners.

Things become far more interesting in the next section, 'Species Accounts' (pp 50–401). The late Charles Pilcher would be gratified to know that Kuwait's ornithological rarities committee, which he founded in 1994, functions still and has gone from strength to strength. The accounts usually have a main photo and three subsidiary photos per species. Most of the photos were taken in



Kuwait (it is stated which were not) and are excellent. As well as English and scientific names, which follow the OSME list, each account includes Arabic name (in Arabic script) and the IUCN global conservation status code if threatened or near threatened. A brief description concentrates on status in Kuwait. Mike Pope informs me that one of the Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* photos in fact portrays a Sedge Warbler *A. schoenobaenus*, whilst the main Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus* photo is clearly a Black-bellied *P. orientalis*. My favourite photo is AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan's main Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* whilst the Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (with presumably a Green Toad), the long-tongued Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* and the Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* holding an apparent *Bunopus* gecko by its head are intriguing. The cut-off point for species recorded in Kuwait was June 2012. The species accounts are followed by a general-purpose ornithological and conservation-terms glossary, indices of scientific, English and Arabic bird names, a birding code of conduct, list of contributing photographers, references and acknowledgements.

I would have liked to have seen more attention paid to the history of ornithology in Kuwait. In the more recent era, post-1950 and before use of digital photography became universal, Vic Sales, Stan Howe, Paul Haynes, Bill Stuart, Charles Pilcher and George Gregory (see his *The Birds of the State of Kuwait* 2005) all played significant roles. Also, I was surprised to see so many Greek surnames in the book, however before I am accused of being non-PC I should add that Biodiversity East (www.bio-e.org) of Nicosia have produced a fine book.

Peter Cowan

OSME NEWS

Geoff Welch

OSME Summer Meeting 2012

The 2012 Summer Meeting and AGM on Saturday 7 July were again held at the BTO headquarters in Thetford and attended by 43 members and guests. The day had the theme of migration and the first speaker, Paul Stancliffe from the BTO, set the scene by giving a comprehensive overview of the increasing use of technology to reveal the secrets of the migrations of several species. The BTO is focussing on a range of species, the majority of which are in serious decline and where it is important to understand where the problems driving the declines are actually taking place, on the breeding grounds, wintering grounds or en route? Only once this is understood will it be possible to develop appropriate conservation actions. The two main techniques being used are geolocators and miniaturised satellite tags. Geolocators can only be used on species which return to the same breeding area year to year as the birds need to be recaptured and the data downloaded for analysis. By contrast, satellite tags can be used on any species and provide information on where individual birds are for as long as the tags transmit. To date geolocators have been used successfully on Common Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Common Swifts *Apus apus* and European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus* and satellite tags on Common Cuckoos *Cuculus canorus*. In all cases the results are confirming the importance of western Africa, especially Guinea and Congo, as a wintering area for these species, something we knew or suspected from ringing recoveries. However, what the data is also suggesting is that Liberia may be an important staging ground for many species, especially on their northward migration. Satellite tagging has also highlighted a 'bottleneck' site for Common Cuckoos in northern Italy, and the fact that birds from the same breeding area may use different routes on their southward migration and birds from different breeding areas use different routes to reach the same wintering area. As technology

continues to develop, the weight of satellite tags is decreasing which will make it possible to tag a wider range of species. The other significant element of the BTO's work is that the results from the research, especially the satellite tagging, are being made available via the internet (www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking). This is proving to be an especially effective means of engaging the general public in bird research and conservation. Whilst the BTO's work is concentrated on species that breed in the UK and winter in Africa, the techniques are clearly applicable to similar studies of species in the OSME region. Satellite tagging has already been used to great effect to understand the migration routes and wintering areas of critically endangered Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* and Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* but the scope for studying other species is enormous. Technology will never replace ringing as the techniques provide different types of information, rather they complement each other and now provide researchers and conservationists with a much greater range of tools for addressing the problems facing so many species throughout the world.

The second speaker of the morning was OSME Council member Helen Demopoulos who gave a fascinating talk about Lebanon where she worked for A Rocha for 15 months in 2007 and 2008. After outlining some of the difficulties of living and working in a country recovering from a long period of unrest, Helen described how the geographical location and topography of Lebanon make the country of outstanding importance for migratory soaring birds. Every year millions of storks, pelicans and raptors pass through in spring and autumn and in several areas birds are concentrated at 'bottleneck' sites which makes them easier to monitor but also renders them susceptible to uncontrolled illegal hunting. A key element of A Rocha's work has been to identify such bottleneck sites and other areas of global importance for

birds. Where the appropriate criteria are met, such sites have been designated Important Bird Areas by BirdLife International. To date 15 IBAs have been identified, 10 of them being bottleneck sites. The other sites are important for globally threatened species such as Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* and Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* and for their communities of restricted-range species. During IBA fieldwork, three new species for Lebanon were discovered—Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cinctura*, Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta* and Eastern Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*. Additionally the status of several species was re-evaluated, eg Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* is now known to be a common breeding species, Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* possibly breeds and European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* was found to be a common wintering species. A Rocha has also been instrumental in promoting a renewed interest in the traditional hima system, community-based protection and management of natural resources, to help conserve IBAs. There is clearly still much to be discovered in Lebanon and the country offers many opportunities to visiting birdwatchers though the migration will possibly be the greatest attraction. As Helen said in the title of her talk, rather than just being a country with IBAs, Lebanon is, in fact, an Important Bird Country!

The afternoon session started with a presentation on bird survey and ringing in the Western desert of Egypt, 2010, which was given by Professor Przemyslaw Busse, Krzysztof Stepniowski and Matt White. Prof Busse provided an overview of the development of coordinated networks of ringing sites in Europe, initially focussed along the Baltic, then extending into southwest Europe and finally also taking in southeast Europe and the western fringes of the OSME region. In relation to OSME, initially work was carried out in the Sinai but since 2006 the focus has shifted to the oases of the Western desert, c180 km west of the Nile. Matt White went on to describe the main study areas—lakes Abu Yasser and El Marun. Abu Yasser is a small saline lake surrounded by black desert, low intensity agriculture, mudflats and palm plantations. El Marun lake is surrounded by steep escarpments, tamarisk scrub, irrigated

alfalfa and fruit and palm plantations. Studies at these sites have been a combination of ringing and vantage point counts. To date 83 species have been recorded, 54 at Abu Yasser and 74 at El Marun, with the commonest being Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Western Cattle Egret *Bulbulcus ibis*. Of 30 species of passerine migrant, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* was the most numerous. Finally, Krzysztof Stepniowski talked about the ringing studies in more detail. A study supported by OSME in 2010 looked especially at habitat preferences of migrants and found that the tamarisk scrub and alfalfa were the most important as these habitats provided plentiful food for migrants as shown by measuring fat scores. Species such as Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* rapidly increased their weight in order to be able to cross the Sahara non-stop while increases were less in Eurasian Reed Warblers *A scirpaceus* as this species feeds en route. Orientation tests showed that most migrants selected headings facing west, northwest or southwest, the latter being in the direction of lake Chad which is known to be an important wintering and staging area for many species. Clearly there is a lot more still to be learned.

The fourth talk of the day was by Stoyan Nikolov, from the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife in Bulgaria), who is the project manager for a new European Union LIFE+ Nature project *Egyptian Vulture Conservation Challenges along the Eastern Mediterranean Migration Flyway*. In the last 50 years, the global population of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* has decreased by >50% and the species is now red-listed as endangered. The main threats to the species are electrocution, secondary poisoning, direct persecution, disturbance at the breeding grounds and habitat loss. The species uses two migratory flyways, a western one via Gibraltar to western Africa and an eastern one through the OSME region to Chad. To help understand how best to conserve the species since 2009 a small number of birds breeding in Bulgaria have been fitted with satellite transmitters. Most interesting, but also depressing, one bird travelled 5000 km to Chad but was then killed by local people who saw the transmitter and thought the bird was a 'bad magician'!

Such persecution of tagged birds has been recorded in several parts of Africa and the Middle East which is a great pity as tagging generates a huge amount of vital data but conservationists now have to weigh up the risk of actually endangering the birds they are attempting to study. Whilst much of the LIFE+ project is focussed on conserving the small breeding population of Egyptian Vultures in the Balkans there are clearly things that could be done to help safeguard the species while it is migrating through the OSME region. Future plans include tagging more birds, further expeditions to study birds along the eastern flyway, organising an international conference in 2013 and developing a flyway action plan. There are several opportunities for conservation bodies and active members in the OSME region to assist with some of this work.

The final talk of the day was on migration through Abu Dhabi emirate, UAE, given by OSME Council member, Nick Moran. This demonstrated how regular birding and record keeping by Nick and colleague Oscar Campbell can be analysed to show the phenology of migrants. Between 2007 and 2012, Nick and Oscar covered a range of sites in Abu Dhabi on a regular basis and systematically recorded the species and numbers they observed. The analysis carried out to date shows close parallels to similar studies in Israel and Jordan. Abu Dhabi is already a popular birding location and Nick's presentation provided a taster for prospective first-time visitors. In relation to spring migration, March is the month with the greatest diversity of species and is the peak time for seeing Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Menetries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea* and Daurian Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*. In April the Daurian Shrikes are replaced by Turkestan Shrikes *L. phoenicuroides*, numerous races of Yellow Wagtail, Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, Common Nightingale, Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* and European Roller *Coracias garrulus*. In May, the key species are Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*, European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*.

Added to these there is a wide range of less numerous migrants and always the chance of rarities! Nick was keen to emphasise that there is a lot more analysis that could be done with his and Oscar's records and plenty of scope for more detailed studies but his talk highlighted the value of keeping systematic records when out birding and, most importantly, making the data available for scientific study rather than having it 'locked away' in a forgotten notebook.

During the 34th Annual General Meeting, the following changes to OSME's Vice Presidents and Council members were announced. Imad Atrash and Dr & Mrs Ramadan-Jaradi retired as Vice-Presidents after completing 10 years in office and Guy Kirwan retired from Council after 5 years in office. All were thanked for the important contributions they have made to promoting and assisting with the running of the Society. The following were elected on to Council—Sal Cooke, Phil Cannings and Chris Hughes.

The meeting had a special end when Effie Warr who, together with her husband John, has made and continues to make an outstanding contribution to the running of OSME, was presented with a specially commissioned painting by Michael Warren of Basalt Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens warriae* (Plate 1). This distinct form of Mourning



Plate 1. Geoff Welch presenting Effie Warr with a specially commissioned painting by Michael Warren of Basalt Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens warriae*. © Helen Demopoulos

Wheatear was recently recognised as a separate subspecies by Hadoram Shirihai and Guy Kirwan and given the name *warriae* in honour of the tremendous contribution Effie has made to ornithological research in the Middle East. The day was rounded off by an excellent meal in The Mulberry in Thetford which allowed OSME Council, members and friends to continue discussions in a relaxed atmosphere, renew old friendships and create new ones. A great end to a great day.

Breckland Bird walk

Members of OSME were treated to great views of some Breckland specialities on the morning of Sunday 8 July, following the Summer Meeting/AGM of the previous day. Chris Mills of Norfolk Birding (www.norfolkbirding.com) kindly led a tour of heathland and plantation sites, and the weather cooperated nicely. The first stop was an anonymous patch of open ground. Despite the predominance of tall grasses, two Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedicanus* obligingly stood out on some turf in the foreground to be viewed and appreciated. From birders in the group familiar with North Africa, we learned that these birds can form large wintering flocks in Morocco; it is also a familiar species over much of the OSME region. Encouraged by this early encounter, the group then moved on to have a look for Woodlarks *Lullula arborea*. This involved a drive, a walk down a forest track and then a good look at an area cleared of trees. The tree stumps from the clearing operation had been collected into parallel lines stretching across the now open area. Each line of piled up stumps had become populated with shrubs and small trees. Early signs were positive: Whitethroats *Sylvia communis* used the perches provided by the tangled tree roots to launch into song flights, a flock of Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* settled in a small holly tree, and a pair of Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* busily ferried food to their unseen nestlings. At the edge of the forest on the far side of the site, a Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* sat in branches silhouetted against the sky. Then a Woodlark appeared on one of the distant lines of tree stumps. Whilst this viewing clearly meant something to those more familiar with the

species, a much better view of two birds a few minutes later allowed a fuller appreciation of some of this species' characteristic features—the white supercilium, relatively short tail and signs of a crest. Unfortunately what some would consider to be the best feature of Woodlarks, their song, was only briefly on offer, though some compensation was provided by a singing Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*. And a Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* added a predatory note to this otherwise peaceful scene, grabbing something tasty on the ground alongside the tree stumps, then spreading its wings around its catch while it disembowelled its breakfast. Round our feet, Brown Silver-line moths were in profusion, and a rather worn Red-necked Footman was identified. All in all, the morning provided a wonderful insight to some of the special wildlife and habitats of the Breckland. Our thanks to Chris Mills from Norfolk Birding for his enthusiastic and expert guiding and to Nick Moran of OSME council for organising the excursion. (Contributed by Daniel Owen)

OSME Summer Meeting and AGM 2013

This will be held on Saturday 6 July at the BTO headquarters, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU—see enclosed leaflet for more details. There is ample free parking. The bus station is 10 minutes walk away and the rail station 15 minutes. Road access is via the A11 London–Norwich road, connecting with the A14 from the north and Midlands. Trains operate a regular service on the Birmingham–Norwich line, and also to Cambridge and London. Admission is free and all are welcome.

OSME Raffle 2012

The winners of the 2012 raffle in support of research and conservation of White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* in Kazakhstan were:

- 1st prize S Starling—Opticon Imagic BGA SE 8x42 binoculars (value £439)
- 2nd prize E Moran—Naturetrek voucher for £250
- 3rd prize G Conway—BWPi: Birds of the Western Palearctic interactive (value £140)

- 4th prize M Carroll—Breeding Birds of the Western Palearctic (Birdguides, value £75)
- 5th prize N Moran—Country Innovations New Venture Waistcoat (value £65)
- 6th prize D Cohen— Helm/Poyser books to the value of £50

Congratulations to the winners and thanks to everyone who purchased tickets. Also many thanks to the sponsors for donating the prizes.

Additional support for White-headed Duck conservation in Kazakhstan

OSME is auctioning an original watercolour painting of White-headed Duck by renowned wildlife artist Martin Woodcock to provide additional funding to ACBK for its research and conservation work in Kazakhstan. Full details of how to submit sealed bids is given on the enclosed flier and on the OSME website.

OSME Raffle 2013

This year's raffle will be raising funds to support work by Nature Iraq on the globally endangered Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*. Basra Reed Warbler is one of the most threatened passerines in the OSME region and the research work intended will be used to develop a species action plan and plan habitat restoration work. Tickets are enclosed—so try your luck and help OSME support more conservation in the region!

Conservation and Research Fund update

A revised application form and guidelines have been produced to standardise the application process and both are available on the Conservation page of the OSME website (www.osme.org). At the end of 2012, Vasil Ananian and Michael Brombacher both resigned from the CRF sub-committee due to pressure of work and on behalf of OSME I would like to take this opportunity to thank both of them for their invaluable input into assessing grant applications during the last few years. News on their replacements will be announced in due course.

Request for new OSME Council members

OSME relies on its volunteer Council members in order to operate efficiently and we are currently seeking new members to join Council at this year's AGM in July. Council members serve for 5 years and Council meets formally three times a year but the majority of OSME business is carried out via email. Whilst knowledge of the birds of the region is desirable, the most important attributes of Council members are having the time and enthusiasm to actively help maintain and promote the Society and good communication skills. If you would like to help maintain OSME as one of the premier regional bird clubs, please contact me (chairman@osme.org).

NEWS & INFORMATION

Dawn Balmer (compiler)

AZERBAIJAN

Birding information

New material on Azerbaijan has been added to Tomas Haraldsson's website (www.tomasharaldsson.se). There is also trip report information for several other Middle Eastern countries. (Contributed by Tomas Axén Haraldsson)

CYPRUS

Cyprus Bird Report 2011

The latest instalment of the Cyprus Bird Report, for the year 2011, was published recently. Its 168 pages are packed with photographs, tables and graphs documenting the island's birding year. Some 293 species were recorded, represented by c53 000 records submitted by 150 different observers. New species for Cyprus reported in 2011 involved the perhaps less than welcome Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* and House Crow *Corvus splendens*, although a new subspecies for the list, Central Asian Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides* should pose no threat to native fauna. As always, a series of short papers round-off this issue among them a discussion of the on-going spread of the Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* through western Cyprus and a review of rare wader records since the new millenium. Once again, the regular team of Colin Richardson and his co-editors, Stavros Christodoulides and Nigel Cottle, have assembled an attractive report, abetted by sponsorship from the Bank of Cyprus. It is available for £12 (including p & p) from Colin Richardson (richar@cytanet.com.cy). (Contributed by Guy Kirwan)

EGYPT

Rarities in Egypt

The report of the Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee (EORC) of decisions taken in 2011 is now online on the EORC website at www.chn-france.com/eorc/eorc.php. (Contributed by Pierre-André Crochet)

IRAQ

Iraq helps Britain's wildlife

Nature Iraq has donated \$1000 to Norfolk Wildlife Trust's appeal to purchase 143 acres of land next to Cley Marshes. Nature Iraq has received much help from colleagues in the UK, especially through BirdLife International, and made this donation as an act of global support for marshland protection. On the new land NWT will create more reed bed, grazing marsh and freshwater for the rare Western Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*, Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris*, Bearded Tits *Panurus biarmicus*, Otters *Lutra lutra*, Water Voles *Arvicola amphibius* and Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*, for thousands of migratory birds and for the 100 000 people who visit each year. Azzam Alwash, president of Nature Iraq, who has stayed in Cley during visits to England, said: "Nature Iraq has received great support from international organisations for the conservation of our famous Mesopotamian marshes. This small token to support the extension of Cley Marshes is to honour that support and show our brotherly care for the environment everywhere". (Contributed by Richard Porter)

ISRAEL

Jerusalem Bird Observatory

Volunteers are wanted at JBO to assist with bird monitoring in the spring and with general maintenance. Those wanting to work in the Gazelle valley would need a bit of Hebrew. Please contact Amir Balaban at amirbalaban1@013.net (tel: +972-52-448879) or visit www.jbo.org.il.

KAZAKHSTAN

Major new steppe reserve in Kazakhstan

On November 28 the Kazakhstan government announced the designation of the new Altyn Dala state nature reserve, protecting almost 500 000 ha of steppe grassland, semi-desert



Plate 1. Steppe between Astana and Arkalky, Kazakhstan. © Geoff & Hilary Welch

and wetland in central Kazakhstan. This is in addition to a proposed 410 000 ha extension of the Irgiz-Torgai state nature reserve and adds a significant piece to the jigsaw of creating an effective network of protected areas in the Altyn Dala (Golden Steppe) project area. Altyn Dala is a partnership involving government, NGOs, local communities and the private sector with the key partners being the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (BirdLife in Kazakhstan), the Kazakh government's Committee for Forestry and Hunting, Frankfurt Zoological Society and the RSPB (BirdLife in the United Kingdom).

Steppe has been identified by IUCN as 'the earth's most endangered ecosystem' and the Altyn Dala steppe is of vital importance to safeguard the critically endangered Saiga Antelope *Saiga tatarica*, a migratory species that was driven almost to extinction in Kazakhstan in the 1990s. Numbers of Saiga are recovering annually (due to the protection offered) and reached almost 100 000 in 2012. Since 2009, ACBK has been fitting Saiga Antelopes with satellite collars which have allowed key locations (such as calving and rutting grounds) to be identified. These protected areas also support many other species of national and international conservation importance, from Goitered Gazelles *Gazella subgutturosa* and Steppe

Pikas *Ochotona pusilla*, to Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* and Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*. These new protected areas also provide the basis for exciting planned reintroductions of endangered Przewalski's Horses *Equus ferus przewalskii* and Kulan (Wild Ass) *Equus hemionus kulan* to the area, restoring a vital part of the historical wildlife community of the vast rolling Kazakh steppes (Plate 1). (Contributed by Geoff Welch)

LIBYA

Atlas of wintering waterbirds of Libya 2005–2010

A copy of the *Atlas of wintering waterbirds of Libya 2005-2010* is available as a PDF from Abdulmaula Hamza abdhmz@gmail.com.

TURKEY

Ilýsu dam meeting held

Nature Iraq visited Turkey to raise concern about the detrimental effects of the proposed Ilýsu dam in Turkey. The September 2012 meeting was held in Hasankeyf, Batman province, where they shared with locals the consequences of the planned Ilýsu dam on Iraq and Turkey through performance art. The group revisited Mesopotamian flood stories as a metaphor for the struggle for survival against and the impact of environmental destruction. News on 7 January 2013 stated the Turkish State Council ruled in favour of the legal case filed by the Chamber of Architects and Engineers (TMMOB) against the construction of the Ilisu dam project, ordering an immediate halt to the controversial dam construction in southeast Turkey. The reservoir of the Ilýsu dam was expected to submerge Hasankeyf, along with its rich history, natural ecosystem and unique culture, under the Tigris river in only a few years. In Turkey alone, the planned dam threatened 55 000 people from 199 villages in the provinces of Batman, Diyarbakýr, Mardin, Þýrnak and Siirt. Further information is available from www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?sessionId=963D04E078A45E934524882881436502?newsId=291911

UZBEKISTAN

Record Sociable Lapwing flock found in Uzbekistan

The Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds discovered more than 400 Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* at Talimarzhan reservoir, in Kashkadarya province. It is an important record because the number of individuals in this migrating flock greatly exceeds the total number of birds that have been recorded wintering in India and Pakistan in recent years. The surveys, conducted by a team of five from UzSPB, were led by Dr Mukhtor Turaev and took place in the Karshinskaja steppe around lake Talimarzhan, at lake Ayakagitma in the Kyzyl Kum desert and at Ecocenter Jeyran and Tudakul reservoir in the Karnabchul steppe. A total of 29 birds were encountered in three groups during visits to lake Talimarzhan 4–8 September but the big flock there was encountered 16–20 September. During the team's third survey 26–30 September the big flock had left to continue its migration but a further seven birds were still present in the area—two birds on a water basin near Talimarzhan town and five more at Tudakul reservoir in the Karnabchul steppe. Lake Talimarzhan is a large reservoir of c800 ha located on the border between a developed agricultural area and the desert and is situated 45 km southwest of Karshi in southern Uzbekistan. The record flock present during September 2012 indicates that lake Talimarzhan is likely to be an important regular staging site for Sociable Lapwings migrating to and from their wintering areas in the Indian sub-continent. At present this IBA is unprotected.

In May 2013 BirdLife International plan to conduct a comprehensive breeding survey throughout Kazakhstan. The primary purpose of this study will be to evaluate the true scale of the breeding population but also aims to fit more satellite transmitters to nesting birds. The undertaking will be considerable and requires six study teams to conduct the necessary research for one month. Follow all the latest from this project at www.birdlife.org/sociable-lapwing. (Source BirdLife International)

OTHER NEWS & INFORMATION

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia: 2012 Records and *Phoenix* 29

Although the Atlas was published in 2010 the database continues and welcomes records of all resident and breeding birds in the seven states of the Arabian peninsula, including potentially breeding species and exotics. Apart from breeding details, information is also being collected on other aspects of species ecology, eg food and feeding, habitats, interactions with other species and the human environment. ABBA database products such as all records of a particular species or records from a specific area are available on request to anyone who needs it.

Contributions are also being sought for the annual newsletter of the ABBA project *The Phoenix*. Notes and articles can be on any aspect of Arabian ornithology (although longer papers might be more appropriate for *Sandgrouse* or other journals) and there is scope for the inclusion of photos, maps and diagrams if needed. Please contact Michael Jennings (arabianbirds@dsl.pipex.com) for further information. Details of how to contribute records to the ABBA project can be found at <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/arabian.birds> though this website is in much need of revision and shows an incorrect email address. (Contributed by Michael Jennings)

Satellite-tracked Scottish Cuckoo reaches the OSME region

The Scottish-ringed Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* 'BB' crossed the Mediterranean sea and, by early evening 25 July, had made it to Egypt. The tag transmission showed him close to the border with Libya and it looked like he was continuing southwards when the transmissions temporarily ended. BB's movement into Egypt makes him the first Cuckoo ringed in Britain to transmit from over Egypt and the OSME region. However, BB continued his movement south from Egypt and successfully completed his desert crossing during the early hours of Saturday 28 July, reaching southwestern Sudan and becoming the first of BTO's tracked Cuckoos recorded



Plate 2. Dr Kuyvandik Poladov (UNESCO World Heritage focal point) and Mark Day (RSPB). © Stephanie Ward (RSPB)



Plate 3. Atamurat Veyisov (OSME country contact) and Mark Day (RSPB). © Stephanie Ward (RSPB)

in that country. By mid December BB was in Congo. Follow the full story at www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking/scotland/BB.

Zoology in the Middle East

Three new volumes of *Zoology in the Middle East* have been published. In addition to two regular volumes a special edition dedicated to the biology and taxonomy of earthworms (*Oligochaeta*) has been produced. The bird-related papers include ones on nest-site selection by the Asian Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* in the Harat steppe of Iran, the nesting habits and breeding success of the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* in the Kizilirmak delta of Turkey, offspring sex ratios and breeding success of a Great Tit *Parus major* population, territory size variations in wintering Finsch's Wheatears *Oenanthe finschii* and electrocution and collision of birds with power lines in Saudi Arabia.

Free field guides for Central Asia

The recent publication of the long awaited Helm field guide *Birds of Central Asia* by Raffael Aye, Manuel Schweizer and Tobias Roth, heralds the start of a new era of birdwatching in this fascinating region. For the first time, all of the species, together with illustrations and distribution maps, are presented in a single volume that is practical to use in the field. Through OSME chairman, Geoff Welch, the publishers, Bloomsbury Publishing, have kindly donated 25 copies to the RSPB for distribution to the national BirdLife partners, local bird clubs

and most active bird conservationists in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The first consignment of these was delivered to Turkmenistan in November 2012 when RSPB staff attended a meeting of the Caspian Ecological Forum in Turkmenbasi (Plates 2 & 3). The field guide is a major step forward for birdwatching, research and conservation in Central Asia and it is hoped that the guide will encourage more nationals to develop an interest in enjoying, studying and conserving the birds and other wildlife of this exciting and important region. (Contributed by Geoff Welch)

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Saudi Arabia

Brian Meadows and Jem Babbington are currently preparing a paper on rare birds in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia that will update *Birds of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia* by G Bundy, RJ Connor and CJO Harrison (1989, H. F. and G. Witherby/Aramco). If anybody has any unpublished records, including a description, of rare birds listed as vagrants in the book or new species seen 1989–2012, inclusive, within the political boundary of Eastern province such records will be gratefully received by Brian Meadows, 9 Old Hall Lane, Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex CO14 8LE, UK (briansmeadows@lycos.com). (Contributed by Brian Meadows)

Dawn Balmer, 7 Fisher Way, Thetford,
Norfolk IP24 2LD, UK. dawn.balmer@bto.org

AROUND THE REGION

Ian Harrison & Chris Lamsdell (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 2012 unless stated otherwise.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 35 (2) should be sent by 15 July 2013 to atr@osme.org.

AFGHANISTAN

2000 **Common Cranes** *Grus grus* were at Bamyan town 9 Sep. This same location held seven **Oriental Turtle-doves** *Streptopelia orientalis meena* and six **Laughing Doves** *Spilopelia senegalensis* on 10 Sep. A **Turkestan Shrike** *Lanius phoenicuroides* was there 9 Sep together with ten **Long-tailed Shrikes** *Lanius schach* which increased to 20 on 10 Sep. Ten **Long-tailed Shrikes** were at Kushkak, Koh-i Baba, 9 Sep. Also present 9 Sep at Bamyan were an **Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula* (again 10 Sep) and six **Pied Stonechats** *Saxicola caprata* (increasing to 15 on 10 Sep). Three **Pied Stonechats** were at Kushkak 9 Sep. A **Sykes's Warbler** *Hippolais rama* was at Bamiyan 10 Sep. Two **Grey-headed Goldfinches** *Carduelis (carduelis) caniceps* and a single **Eurasian Crimson-winged Finch** *Rhodopechys (s.) sanguineus* were at Kushkak 9 Sep together with eight **Grey-necked Buntings** *Emberiza buchanani*. A **Red-headed Bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps* was at Bamiyan 9 Sep and three 10 Sep.

CYPRUS

Two **Red-necked Grebes** *Podiceps grisegena* at Akrotiri salt lake (ASL) 4 Jul were the seventh record for Cyprus, the first since 1996. A **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* was at Larnaca sewage works 15 Nov–4 Dec and another at ASL 19 Dec. An unprecedented passage of **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* occurred this autumn with 2600 arriving at ASL 22 Aug, circling daily from 09.30 h, but not leaving until weather conditions permitted 24 Aug—the largest numbers ever recorded in Cyprus. Eight **Dalmatian Pelicans** *Pelecanus crispus* over Armou 8 Dec, represented the ninth record and first since 1997. An adult male **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

over ASL 21 Oct represents the first record for Cyprus if accepted. An **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* lingered along the coastal strip from Akrotiri to Paphos 22 Sep–4 Oct, a less than annual migrant.

A **Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* was at Akrotiri gravel pits 11 Oct. An unusually high count of 15 **Jack Snipes** *Lymnocyptes minimus* at Larnaca salt lake 24 Dec was the largest group recorded in Cyprus. A **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* at ASL 12–30 Sep was the 19th record. A **Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* off cape Greco 19 Nov was the seventh record. A **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* was at Larnaca sewage works 22 Dec. A **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* at Famagusta freshwater lake 3 Nov and one (probably the same bird) at Akhna dam 20–24 Nov. This species is a rare migrant. A **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* 7–9 Dec at Evretou dam, is the first December record. Several single **White-breasted Kingfishers** *Halcyon s. smyrnensis* at Kouklia 24 Aug–12 Dec, Bishop's Pool 1 Sep to year end and Phasouri reedbeds 16 Nov–13 Dec, were the 19th–21st records.

A **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi* was at Phasouri reedbeds 25 Oct. The 11th record of **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* was at Oroklini 5 Oct while a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* at Agia Napa football fields 18 Sep was the 15th record since 1993. A juvenile **Rose-coloured Starling** *Pastor roseus* was at Mandria 1 Nov. Twenty wintering **Rock Sparrows** *Petronia petronia* were at Syngراسi 16 Dec. A **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* at Agia Napa sewage works 29 Aug was the tenth record whilst the **Western Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza (c.) cineracea* there 4 Sep was the second autumn record in recent years.

EGYPT

A **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* near Qusier 12 Oct will be the 11th record. A **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* at the Novotel hotel, Sharm el Sheik, Nov 15/16 was the fifth record for the country and the first since 1980.

GEORGIA

At Batumi the autumn total reached a staggering 575 770 **Honey Buzzards** *Pernis apivorus* with the best day totals being 99 038 on 30 Aug and 179 342 on 3 Sep, being their highest day counts ever recorded. In September two **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* were seen on the 4th, a single on the 7th, three on the 11th, two on 15th, a single 16th, two 19th and a single 26th. A single **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* was seen 22 Sep.

IRAQ

Six adult **African Darters** *Anhinga rufa* were found on the Tigris in Baghdad, December. In the Dalmaj marshes and surrounding areas, large scattered **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* flocks of more than 350 individuals were seen October–December. **Tufted Ducks** *Aythya fuligula*, **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* and **Common Pochards**



Plate 1. Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* 30 Oct 2012, Dalmaj, Iraq. © Mudhafar A Salim



Plate 2. Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* 28 April 2012, Barzan area, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Muhammad Saddik Barzani

Aythya ferina were seen at Hawiza marsh on various dates in November. A large group of 23 **Macqueen's Bustards** *Chlamydotis macqueenii* were seen in scattered groups and individuals in October and November around the Dalmaj marshes (Plate 1). An **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* fitted with a tracking-device in Turkey was found dead in the Najaf desert near Al-Jawasm village, southwestern Iraq.

The Dalmaj marshes held more than 8000 **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa* in November. A record from April/May 2012 was the first sighting for 100 years of **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* (two birds) in the Barzan area, northern Iraq (Plate 2); interestingly it was on a potential breeding site. 50 breeding pairs of **Namaqua Doves** *Oena capensis* in the Dalmaj marshes and the surrounding areas is the first confirmed breeding of this species for Iraq. In addition, there were three **Indian Silverbills** *Lonchura malabarica* in Baghdad plus **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* and **Yellow-throated Sparrow** *Gymnoris xanthocollis* in the Dalmaj marshes June 2012.

ISRAEL

A single **Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* was at Nahsholim, Carmel coast, 20 Oct. Two **Brown Boobies** *Sula leucogaster* were off Eilat's North Beach 21 Nov. A **Leach's Storm Petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* was off Akhziv, north Mediterranean coast, 8 Dec. **Black-winged Kites** *Elanus caeruleus* continue their colonization, with two new

pairs found breeding in the Yavne'el valley and near Afula. The second record of **Rough-legged Buzzard** *Buteo lagopus* was present at Urim, northwest Negev, 30 Nov–2 Dec (the first in winter 1984/5). Three **Saker Falcons** *Falco (c.) cherrug* have also been wintering at the same location along with 20 **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius*. Single **White-tailed Lapwings** *Vanellus leucurus* were at Yotvata 23 Sep, Eilat 29 Sep, Kfar Yehoshua, Jizreel valley, 7 Oct and Timorim, Judean lowlands, 23 Oct. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* at Neve Ur, Jordan valley, 22/23 Oct and another at Og reservoir, Judean desert, 21 Nov were the 11th and 12th records. A **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* was at Neve Ur 23 Oct. The adult **Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* that has been wintering since 2006 returned to Acre 13 Nov. Two **Lesser Crested Terns** *Thalasseus bengalensis* were at Eilat 19 Aug. There was an **Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia (o.) orientalis* at Nafha, central Negev, 10 Nov and at Agamon Hula 11 Nov.

Steppe Grey Shrikes *Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris* were at Maoz Hayim, Bet She'an valley, 25 Sep, Agamon Hula 12 Oct and another at Btekha, lake Kinneret, 17 Dec. A **Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunnii* was at Elifaz, south Arava, 14 Nov while **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* were at Eilat 7 Oct (one) and Maoz Hayim 16 Oct (two). A **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* has been wintering at Shilat, Judean plains. A **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* ringed at IBRCE, Eilat, 10 Sep was the ninth record. A **Common Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia* ringed at IBRCE, Eilat, 28 Aug and one found dead at Herzliya 9 Sep were the eighth and ninth records. Two **Menetries's Warblers** *Sylvia mystacea* were recorded at Wadi Mishmar, Judean desert, 18–19 Nov.

A **White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis* was at Eilat 14 Aug while a **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* was at Sapir, north Arava, 5 Aug. A **Pied Stonechat** *Saxicola caprata* at Yeroham, central Negev, 18–23 Oct was the seventh record. **Pied Wheatears** *Oenanthe pleschanka* were at Netanya 24 Sep, Sde Boker 19 Oct and Yotvata 31 Oct. Single **Cyprus Wheatears** *Oenanthe cypriaca* were at Hazerim, north Negev, 16 Sep and at Lotan 21 Sep. There have been a number of records

of **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* this winter with five at Mitzpe Ramon 11 Nov, three at Elkana since 15 Nov and singles at several sites in the Arava. Two **Buff-bellied Pipits** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* were at Yotvata 21 Nov and another at Nafha 24 Nov. A **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* was at Lehavim, north Negev, 29 Nov while a **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* was at Uvda valley, south Negev, 28 Nov.

JORDAN

The second record of **Striated Heron** *Butorides striata* was at Al Azraq wetland reserve 5 and 13 Nov (Plate 3). 1500+ **Armenian Gulls** *Larus armenicus*, the largest single count ever in Jordan, were recorded at Ikeider (near Irbid) rubbish tips and adjacent sewage ponds 9 Dec. **Syrian Serins** *Serinus syriacus* were seen south of Madaba 15 Oct, up to 50 daily at Fujeij and Rajif in early November and one southwest of Madaba 14 Dec (Plate 4).



Plate 3. Striated Heron *Butorides striata* 13 November 2012, Al Azraq, Jordan. © Omar A'abed



Plate 4. Syrian Serins *Serinus syriacus* 3 November 2012, King's highway, near Petra, Jordan. © Feras Rahahleh

KUWAIT

A single **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* was at Jahra pools in November and another was swimming in the newly created lagoons at Sabah Al Ahmad sea city in December. A **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* at Jahra pools reserve (JPR) 7 Nov was the ninth record. Four **Long-tailed Ducks** *Clangula hyemalis* at JPR 7 Nov (Plate 5) was the first record. Over 2000 migrating **Steppe Buzzards** *Buteo b. vulpinus* were seen during a period of a few days at Khuwaisat in September. A **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* was in the Jahra area in September and two **Levant Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter brevipes* were at Al Abra q in October. A **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* at JPR 6 Oct was the eighth record. A **Spur-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus spinosus* at Jahra East outfall (JEO) on 8 Nov was the 11th record. A **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* was at Green island, Kuwait city, 2 Feb, the sixth record.

A **Hooded Wheatear** *Oenanthe monacha* at JEO 22 Nov was the eighth record. The first record of **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* occurred at JPR 26 Aug while a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* at Sabah Al Ahmad nature reserve (SAANR) on 15 Sep was the third record. **Booted Warblers** *Hippolais caligata* at JEO 27 Aug and SAANR 28 Aug are the second and third records, while the second record of **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus orientalis* occurred at JPR 31 Aug. 30+ **Hypocoliuses** *Hypocolius ampelinus* were seen early on a few mornings in November at Green island. A **Mesopotamian Crow** *Corvus (cornix) capellanus* on 23 Oct at JPR was the first record (Plate 6). Two



Plate 6. Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus cornix capellanus* 13 January 2013, Jahra pools reserve, Kuwait. © Gary Brown

Eurasian Siskins *Carduelis spinus* stayed at Al Abra q in December whilst three **Dead Sea Sparrows** *Passer moabiticus* were at JPR 14 Nov, the 14th record.

LEBANON

A **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* and 125 **Levant Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter brevipes* were amongst 18 raptor species over Bhamdoun, Mount Lebanon, 16 Sep.

OMAN

116 **Little Grebes** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* at Al Ansab wetlands 30 Jul is a new maximum for the site. A number of pelagic boat trips up to 5 km offshore from the Seeb and Muscat areas produced 18 **Persian Shearwaters** *Puffinus persicus* (10 Oct), four **Flesh-footed Shearwaters** *Puffinus carneipes* (19 Aug), 45 **Jouanin's Petrels** *Bulweria fallax* (10 Oct), up to 25 **Wilson's Storm Petrels** *Oceanites oceanicus* (22 Jul and 19 Aug) and **Swinhoe's Storm Petrels** *Oceanodroma monorhis* on 22 Jul (one) and 19 Aug (three). A **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* was at Wadi Darbat 13 Nov and two there 29 Dec. There has been a large influx of **Abdim's Storks** *Ciconia abdimii* this autumn with a record 310 at Raysut sewage treatment plant 28 Dec. Birds were also seen further north—158 roosted overnight at Khawr



Plate 5. Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis* at Jahra pools reserve 7 November 2012, Kuwait. © Mike Pope



Plate 7. A Common *Grus grus* and five Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo*, East Khawr, Salalah, Oman, 27 Dec 2012. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

Ghawi (Al Kahil) 21 Nov before heading north the following morning. A single bird was at Dawkah 27 Dec. Two **Little Bitterns** *Ixobrychus minutus* at Al Ansab wetlands 6 Aug is an interesting record and may indicate possible breeding. An adult summer plumage **Chinese Pond Heron** *Ardeola bacchus* at Qatbit motel 20 Sep is the second record for Oman and the Middle East. An **Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia* was at Al Qurum park 7 Nov.

A **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* was at Muntasar 4 Nov while up to six were seen in the Salalah area from 8 Nov, continuing the increasingly regular over-wintering of this species in the area. A single was at Al Qurum park 17 Nov—an unusual record for the north. **Eurasian Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* is an uncommon passage migrant but one was at Tawi Atair 8 Nov and probably the same bird at Wadi Darbat 13 Nov. **Lappet-faced Vultures** *Torgos tracheliotos* are uncommon in southern Oman so two at Wadi Darbat 13 Nov and three 18 Nov are interesting records. Twelve **Short-toed Snake Eagles** *Circaetus gallicus* at Wadi Darbat 13 Nov is a new maximum. An adult male **Shikra** *Accipiter badius* was at Mughsayl 23 Nov—this species is a rare visitor to Oman. An adult male **Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis* was at Wadi Darbat 21 Dec, the third record. Eight **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga* (one *fulvescens*) were at Wadi Darbat 13

Nov while 23 were at Qurayyat 18 Nov (four *fulvescens*). A **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* at Khawr Taqah 9 Nov would be the tenth record. Twenty **Lesser Kestrels** *Falco naumanni* were seen 11 Oct on Jebel Qara near Salalah—this species is rare in autumn. Single **Amur Falcons** *Falco amurensis* were seen passing southwest 16–21 Nov at Shannah (opposite Masirah island), Duqm, Ras Mirbat and West Khawr with one inland record at Wadi Rabkut 24 Nov.

A single **Macqueen's Bustard** *Chlamydotis macqueenii* was at Qatbit oasis 16 Nov. A **Common Crane** *Grus grus* was at Wadi Darbat 11 Oct and six at Sahanawt farm 25 Nov. A single remained in the Salalah area (feeding at East Khawr and roosting at Sahanawt farm) until at least 31 Dec. Five **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo* first seen at Sahanawt farm 25 Oct followed the same routine as the latter Common Crane and were still present on 31 Dec (Plate 7). Two **Little Crakes** *Porzana parva* were at Mughsayl 7 Nov. The first record for Oman and the Middle East of **Ruddy-breasted Crake** *Porzana fusca* was found at Wadi Darbat 23 Nov and remained there until 4 Dec. The long-staying **Red-knobbed Coots** *Fulica cristata* at West Khawr were seen with chicks 2 Aug (four adults and two chicks seen). Three adults and four downy chicks were there 28 Dec. Oman is an important migration stop and wintering ground for the critically endangered **Sociable Lapwing**

Vanellus gregarius. 69 were at Sahanawt farm 19 Nov and 72 on 26 Dec, with smaller numbers (maximum seven 28 Nov) at Sohar Sun farm (SSF) from 2 Nov. A juvenile **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* was at SSF 30/31 Jul, the only record this autumn. **Great Knots** *Calidris tenuirostris* are regular visitors to Barr al Hikman but rare elsewhere so one at East Khawr 19 Jul was both early and unusual. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* was at Al Ansab wetlands 2–16 Nov. **Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta* is an uncommon visitor to Oman so two at SSF 22–25 Jul is of note. 700 **Red-necked Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus* were seen on a pelagic trip off Seeb 24 Sep. **Small Pratincoles** *Glareola lactea*, an uncommon passage migrant, were seen 18 Nov at East Khawr (three), 25 Nov at SSF (one) and 20 Dec at Khawr Baleed (five). An adult **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* at Qurayyat 18 Nov was a very early arrival. Six **Baltic Gulls** *Larus fuscus fuscus* at Khawr Rouri 26 Jul were unusual in terms of date and number. Four adult **Lesser Noddies** *Anous tenuirostris* were at East Khawr on 9 Aug.

A **Pied Cuckoo** *Oxylophus jacobinus* singing at East Khawr 19 Jul was interesting—presumably one of the influx last winter, but did it attract a mate? Records have been increasing in recent years though usually this species is seen on Masirah and occasionally as overshoots on the mainland. An early record of **Asian Koel** *Eudynamis scolopaceus* in the north 7 Aug at Muscat international airport and one 8 Oct at the nearby Wave residential area are interesting—were they the same bird? A record of **Arabian Spotted Eagle Owl** *Bubo (africanus) milesi* at SSF 7 Sep is a further confirmation that this species is present in the north and not just the south as had been initially thought. A **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* at Ras A'Sawadi 23 Oct was an early record. Pelagics off Seeb on 19 Aug and 10 Oct each produced two **European Nightjars** *Caprimulgus europaeus*. An **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* was at Qatbit 3–4 Nov. Two **Alpine Swifts** *Tachymarptis melba* were seen at Khawr Taqah 9 Nov—this species is a rare migrant in Oman. Three **European Rollers** *Coracias garrulus* were seen 6 Jul at SSF—a very early or a very late record. Nine were also there 25 Sep. A **Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* was at East Khawr 5–10 Nov and

another at Khawr Baleed 20 Dec (the same bird?), the seventh record. 20 **European Bee-eaters** *Merops apiaster* (including at least five young birds) were on Jebel Akhdar 19 Jul.

Migrant shrikes were in good numbers at Qatbit motel 20 Sep—one **Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*, 35 **Daurian Shrikes** *Lanius isabellinus* and five **Turkestan Shrikes** *Lanius (i.) phoenicuroides*. Records of **Hypocoliuses** *Hypocolius ampelinus* included two at Mudday 14 Nov, four at Qatbit 17 Nov, 24 at Shisr 24 Nov and, most unusually, one in the north at Medinat Sultan Qaboos, Muscat, 1 Dec. **Dunn's Lark** *Eremmelauda dumni* is a rare breeding resident and difficult to locate but two were seen at Mudday 24 Aug and two near Qatbit 25 Nov. Two **Hume's Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus humei* were at Qitbit 25 Nov and one at Shisr 27 Dec. Three **Common Mynas** *Acridotheres tristis* were at Qitbit 23 Aug (two 20 Sep)—the first record for this central desert location. A **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* was seen in Wadi Darbat 11 Oct with one there also 6 and 10 Nov (tenth record). 30 **Common Nightingales** *Luscinia megarhynchos* were also at the same location 11 Oct. Four **Isabelline Wheatears** *Oenanthe isabellina* at SSF was an early record. A **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* was at Wadi Darbat 23 Nov, the first record for some years. A male and female **Nile Valley Sunbird** *Anthodiaeta metallica* were at Qatbit 25 Nov and a pair at Shisr on the same date. 300 **Yellow-throated Sparrows** *Gymnoris xanthocollis* were at the Wave, Muscat, on 2 Sep. A **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* was at SSF 16 Nov. A single **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* was at Wadi Darbat 13 Nov while a record six were at Hilf 23 Dec. Sixty **Yemen Serins** *Crithagra menachensis* were found at Shaat (82 km west of Salalah) on 24 Nov—a probable new breeding site. 11 **Eurasian Siskins** *Carduelis spinus* were on Sayq plateau 11 Dec. A **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* at Qatbit 27 Oct was the ninth record.

QATAR

There were two sightings of **European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*, a rare passage migrant—a juvenile at Irkayya farm (IF) 23 Sep and another at Ras Al Shindwee 5 Oct. Two juvenile **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* were



Plate 8. Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciatus* 21 October 2012 Irkayya farm, Qatar. © Neil Morris



Plate 9. Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* 4 November 2012, Sailya sewage treatment plant, Qatar. © Neil Morris

at IF 11/12 Oct. **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* is a rare winter visitor and passage migrant, so two birds (dark morph, age not fully determined) at IF 4 Nov are of note. A juvenile **Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciatus* at IF 25 Sep was the first record for Qatar and it was still there 7 Dec (Plate 8). **Merlin** *Falco columbarius* is a rare winter visitor and passage migrant so a female at IF 7–16 Nov is an interesting record.

Two records of **Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*, a rare winter visitor and passage migrant—one Abu Nakhla 2 Nov and one Sailya (west) sewage treatment plant run-off area 4 Nov. **Little Crake** *Porzana parva* is also a rare visitor but there have been two records this autumn—a juvenile at Abu Nakhla 7 Sep

and another at Ras Al Shindwee 21 Sep, the third and fourth records. The first record of **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* occurred 4 Nov at Sailya (west) sewage treatment plant (Plate 9). An adult and juvenile **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius* were at the latter site 9 Nov. Two **Caspian Plovers** *Charadrius asiaticus*, a rare passage migrant, were at IF 14 Sep. The second record of **Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* was at IF 9–11 Nov. There have been a number of records of **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*, a rare winter visitor, this autumn. One was at IF 5–25 Oct, while six were there 9–16 Nov. One was found dead at Qatar sand treatment plant 28 Oct. A **Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* (a rare winter visitor) was at Abu Nakhla 26 Oct.

The second and third records of **Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* were at Al Corniche, central Doha, 23 Sep and IF 10 Oct. The second and third records of **Eurasian Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* were at Umm Bab desalination plant 27 Nov–1 Dec (three birds) and IF 7 Dec. **Striolated Bunting** *Emberiza striolata* is a vagrant to Qatar so an adult male at Learaig 5 Oct is of note.

SAUDI ARABIA

[Sabkhat Al Fasl (SAF), Jubail, is a wetland site 125 km north of Dhahran. Ash Shargiyah development company farm (ASDCF), Fadhili, is 40 km from Jubail.]

110 **Northern Shovelers** *Anas clypeata* were at Dhahran 18 Oct with two **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* there 15 Nov. Three juvenile **Greater Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus roseus* were an unusual sight inland at Dhahran 23 Nov. A single juvenile **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* was at Dammam port mangroves 18 Jun with five juveniles at SAF 26 Jul. 62 **Western Great Egrets** *Ardea alba* at SAF 13 Nov was a high count for the Eastern province. An adult male **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* was at SAF 29 Nov. 250 migrating **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* roosted in a pivot field 25 km north of Tabuk 27 Sep while 2200 roosted 28 Sep in pivot fields 25 km southeast of Tabuk. Fifteen **Black-eared Kites** *Milvus (migrans) lineatus* were at Batinah island (Abu Ali) 22 Jun and appear to be the first confirmed records of this taxon for the Eastern province with two birds over Marjan compound, Jubail, 13 Jul and



Plate 10. Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* | November 2012, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington

a juvenile at SAF 27/28 Sep. A **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* was at SAF 22 Nov and a max count of 25 **Western Marsh Harriers** *Circus aeruginosus* at that site 29 Nov. A max count of fifteen **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga*, including thirteen juveniles, at SAF 16 Nov (Plate 10) with a max five juvenile birds at Dhahran 15 Nov. A single **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* was at SAF 18 Oct and 29 Nov and a juvenile **Little Crake** *Porzana parva* was there 27 Sep. An adult **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* was at Dhahran 8 Oct.

One adult **Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola* was at Dammam/Al Khobar wader roost south, Tarut bay, 18 Jun with numbers increasing gradually to four by 10 Aug. Other records included one at Jubail corniche 22 Jun, an adult and begging juvenile at Batinah island, Abu Ali, 26 Jul and two adults at Dammam port mangroves 27 Jul. Two **Northern Lapwings** *Vanellus vanellus* were at Dhahran 12 Nov. An adult **Spur-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus spinosus* was at Dhahran 8 Aug with another 27–30 Sep and a third adult at ASDCF 12 Oct. These were only the fifth to seventh records for the Eastern province. Ten **Sociable Lapwings**

Vanellus gregarius were 10 km north of Tabuk 15 Nov, the largest number seen in Saudi Arabia for some years. A moulting adult **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* was at ASDCF 12 Oct. A single **Pin-tailed Snipe** *Gallinago stenura* was at Dhahran settling pond 24 Oct. 50 **Broad-billed Sandpipers** *Limicola falcinellus* were at Dammam wader roost 20 Jul and 162 were at Dhahran Expro high tide roost, Tarut bay, 10 Aug (Plate 11). 35 **Collared Pratincoles** *Glareola pratincola* were in a pivot field northwest of Riyadh at Ha'ir 25 Aug. An adult **Armenian Gull** *Larus armenicus* was at Al Khobar corniche 30 Nov and 106 **Caspian Terns** *Hydroprogne caspia* were at SAF 28 Sep.

Single **Egyptian Nightjars** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* were at SAF 5, 12 and 19 Jul with two 26 Jul. A **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis* was at Dhahran 24 Sep. A large movement of **White-throated Robins** *Irania gutturalis* involving at least 100 birds occurred 16–21 Aug in the Baha area of the Asir mountains (southwest Saudi Arabia). A first year **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* was at Dhahran 22–28 Sep. A **Red-breasted**



Plate 11. Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* 31 August 2012, Sabkhat Al Fasl, Jubail, Saudi Arabia. © Jem Babbington

Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* was at Dhahran 10 Oct and a **Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* was there 16 Nov.

TURKEY

Winter came early this year and a number of species that normally visit later were recorded in October and November. Three **Bewick's Swans** *Cygnus columbianus* at Kızılırmak delta 9 Nov and a single **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* in Erzurum plain 16 Nov are early arrivals. Two **Marbled Ducks** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* in Kars 13 Aug may give hope for the eastern population. The long staying **Eider** *Somateria mollissima* at Istanbul in Riva is no longer there but a male, possibly the same bird, showed up in Karaburun 20 Nov. **Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellata* was already present at Büyükçekmece lake 15 Nov. A sea watching trip off Altinkum, Muğla, resulted in a record number of 120 **Storm Petrels** *Hydrobates pelagicus* on 28 Aug, showing that the species is indeed present off the Turkish coast. A **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* was already at the most northeastern corner of the Mediterranean sea in Milleyha, Hatay, on 20 Oct. The **Lesser Flamingo** *Phoeniconaias minor*

on Kulu lake 24 Oct–2 Nov might well be the same individual observed earlier in the year.

A **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* was at Saroz bay, Çanakkale, on 23 Oct. A single **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* in Milleyha, Hatay, on 4 Nov may prove a pattern of visiting birds in late autumn from the south. Two **Eurasian Griffon Vultures** *Gyps fulvus* were in Nizip, Gaziantep, 10 Nov—this species is rare in southeast Turkey in winter. A juvenile **Shikra** *Accipiter badius* caught at Aras ringing station 30 Aug was the second record, the first being a bird caught by sparrowhawk catchers on the Black sea coast in 2011. The early divers and waterfowl were accompanied by a number of **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus*—one in Gümüşhane 18 Nov, a record number of five over Büyükçekmece lake, Istanbul, 17 Nov and singles 26 and 29 Nov were most likely passage birds moving to the central plateau. An adult **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* at Büyükçekmece lake was first seen 22 Nov and stayed a week. During migration, a juvenile **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* hunted near Riva pastures, Istanbul, 29 Sep. November always produces migrant **Little Bustards** *Tetrax tetrax* along the Black sea coast, but an unexpected

bird was on Bolu Dörtdivan highlands 10 Nov. The passage of **Sociable Lapwings** *Vauellus gregarius* was well documented. Eight were in Erzurum marshes 22 Sep, three in Bismil 25 Sep and a staggering flock of 1300 birds in the traditional area at Ceylanpınar on the Syrian border 7 Oct. Seven **Bar-tailed Godwits** *Limosa lapponica* 13 Jul at Beypazarı is an unexpected mid-summer sighting for this rare coastal migrant. Single **Terek Sandpipers** *Xenus cinereus* were in Alacati marshes 13 Jul and in Milleyha, Hatay, 9 Aug. A single **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* in Çukurova delta 30 Sep was the sixth record for the country. A long staying **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* 15–29 Sep in Tuzla Adana was the fourth record.

After long northerly storms in the Black sea 19–25 Nov, a heavily moulting **Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* turned up in Karaburun, Istanbul. Single **Eurasian Eagle Owls** *Bubo bubo* often turn up in big cities—an injured individual was found in Istanbul 5 Aug and a single in Ankara 8 Dec. Milleyha produced a passage **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* on 10 Nov. After a long absence, **White-throated Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis* seems to be back on the Euphrates—singles were photographed at Birecik 1 Nov and 1 Dec. The most southern **White-backed Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos leucotos* was recorded again in the Amanos mountains, Hatay on 14 Jul.

Regular visits to the eastern Black sea have proven that **Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata* is indeed a regular autumn migrant. A single was present 3 Sep on the coast at Rize, another 8 Sep and four on 9 Sep. The number of unusual leaf warblers was not as high as autumn 2011. A single **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus viridanus* was ringed in Cernek ringing station, Samsun, 19 Aug and a single **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* showed up in Sinop 2 Nov. **Spectacled Warbler** *Sylvia conspicillata* seems to be a regular passage and winter visitor to Hatay. Two were present on 29 Oct at Kırıkhan. **Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* may be spreading. One singing in Topkapı palace, Istanbul 21 Sep is the first record for the European side, and a single in Gazi University 7 Sep may be the return of the species to Ankara. **Pied Wheatears** *Oenanthe pleschanka* probably bred



Plate 12. White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus (leucogenys) leucotis* 19 October 2012, Birecik, Turkey. © Emin Yoğurtcuoğlu

in the far northwest of the country at Gala lake, Enez—four juveniles were present 10 Aug. A **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* was at Büyükçekmece lake 21 Oct and another Milleyha, Hatay, 29 Sep.

Unusual pipits were concentrated this year in Mileyha, Hatay. A single **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi* was there 10 Nov, the second record, and the first record of **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii* was on 17 Nov. A wintering **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* was there 8 Dec and singles of **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* on 4 and 17 Nov. The first record of the **White-eared Bulbul** *Pycnonotus (leucogenys) leucotis* finally came from Birecik when two were seen on 19 Oct (Plate 12). The species was known to move north along the Euphrates in Syria and was therefore expected to occur some time in Turkey. A single **Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia* 7 Sep at Toygar Tepe, Istanbul, may be the first modern record for the province. Finally a male **Red-headed Bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps* in breeding plumage in Rize 7 Sep is probably the first proven record of the species. All other records are a century old and probably relate to cage birds.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The tenth record of **Cotton Pygmy Goose** *Nettapus coromandelianus* was at Zakher lake 8–26 Dec. A **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* at Al Warsan lakes 14–29 Nov was the sixth record while a **Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* at Ruwais water treatment plant 9–10 Nov was the first. Up to 300 **Jouanin's**



Plate 13. Himalayan Griffon Vulture *Gyps himalayensis* 13 October 2012, Dubai desert conservation reserve, United Arab Emirates. © Stephen James



Plate 14. Brown-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus* 12 Dec 2012, Dibba harbour, United Arab Emirates. © Tommy Pedersen

Petrels *Bulweria fallax* (seventh record) seen during Khor Kalba pelagic boat trips (24 Oct–16 Nov) was an unprecedented count since the previous maximum was only two.

This was surpassed by a count of 609 birds on 21 Dec. A fledgling **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* 20 Aug in Al Ain was the first UAE breeding record. A **Himalayan Griffon Vulture** *Gyps himalayensis* at the Dubai desert conservation reserve 13–16 Oct (Plate 13) is the first for Arabia. It was in the company of 47 **Lappet-faced Vultures** *Torgos tracheliotos* (a new UAE maximum count), four **Eurasian Griffon Vultures** *Gyps fulvus* and a **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* (first record). Some of these birds lingered to 31 Oct. A juvenile **Shikra** *Accipiter badius* at Sila'a peninsula 28 Sep–6 Oct and at Kharran 24 Nov are the second and third vagrant records (there are resident birds in Dubai). A first-winter **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* at Al Warsan lakes 22 Nov is the tenth record while an adult **Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* in Dibba harbour 7–11 Dec is the fifth record. An immature **Brown-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus* Dibba harbour 11/12 Dec (Plate 14) was the seventh record and first since 2001. A single **Lesser Noddy** *Anous tenuirostris* was recorded 16 Nov during a Khor Kalba pelagic (sixth record).

A **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* 20–24 Nov at Wadi Bih was the seventh record. A **Mesopotamian Crow** *Corvus (cornix) capellanus* 26 Nov–7 Dec on Siniyah island is the first record for the UAE. A **Wire-tailed Swallow** *Hirundo smithii* was at Zakher lake 30/31 Dec. The sixth record of **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* was at Sila'a peninsula 15–16 Nov. A **Caspian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus variegatus* at Al Wathba camel racetrack 22 Nov is the first autumn record. A **Taiga Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicilla* was present at Wamm farms 25 Nov–3 Dec while another was in Safa park from 30 Nov onwards (fourth and fifth records). A **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* was at Al Hamrania nursery 26 Nov. A new roost of up to 100 **Hypocoliuses** *Hypocolius ampelinus* was discovered in the mangroves on Yas island from 20 Nov onwards. The first record since 2001 of **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* was in Wadi Bih 26 Oct.

YEMEN

On 29 Nov at Al Hiswah marsh, Aden, more than 200 **Abdim's Storks** *Ciconia abdimii* were seen circling overhead. The birds were seen

later that day roosting at the Aden sewage lagoons. It is interesting that unusually large numbers were seen in Oman at the same period—see above. Also at Al Hiswah more than 200 **Western White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* were seen among numerous wintering waders and waterfowl. A total of nine **African Sacred Ibises** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* were counted at Al Hiswah and the Al Mansoorah causeway but only a single **Black-headed Heron** *Ardea melanocephala* was observed. On 1 Nov seven **Eurasian Griffon Vultures** *Gyps fulvus* were feeding on dead chickens at Sanhan about 25 km south of Sana'a. Two **Short-toed Snake Eagles** *Circus gallicus* were at Al Hiswah 29 Nov with a juvenile **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga*. About 50 **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis* of various ages were feeding with the Eurasian Griffon Vultures at Sanhan on 1 Nov—increasing to 70 on 8 Nov. A juvenile **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* was at Sanhan 1 Nov, increasing to four on 8 Nov (three juveniles and an adult). Two juveniles and a subadult were at Al Hiswah 29 Nov.

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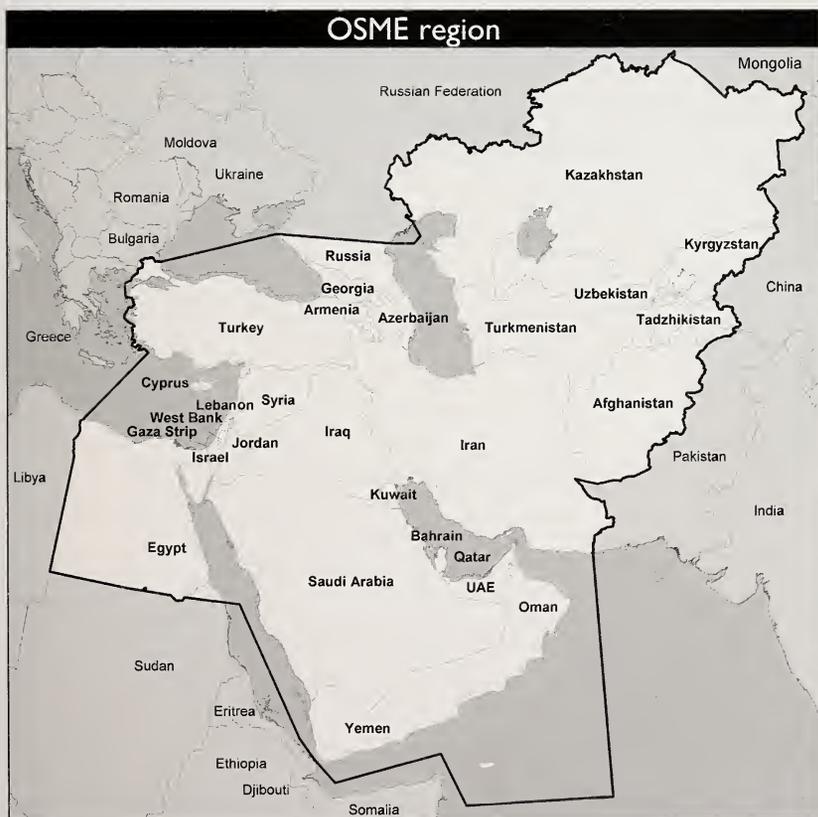
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