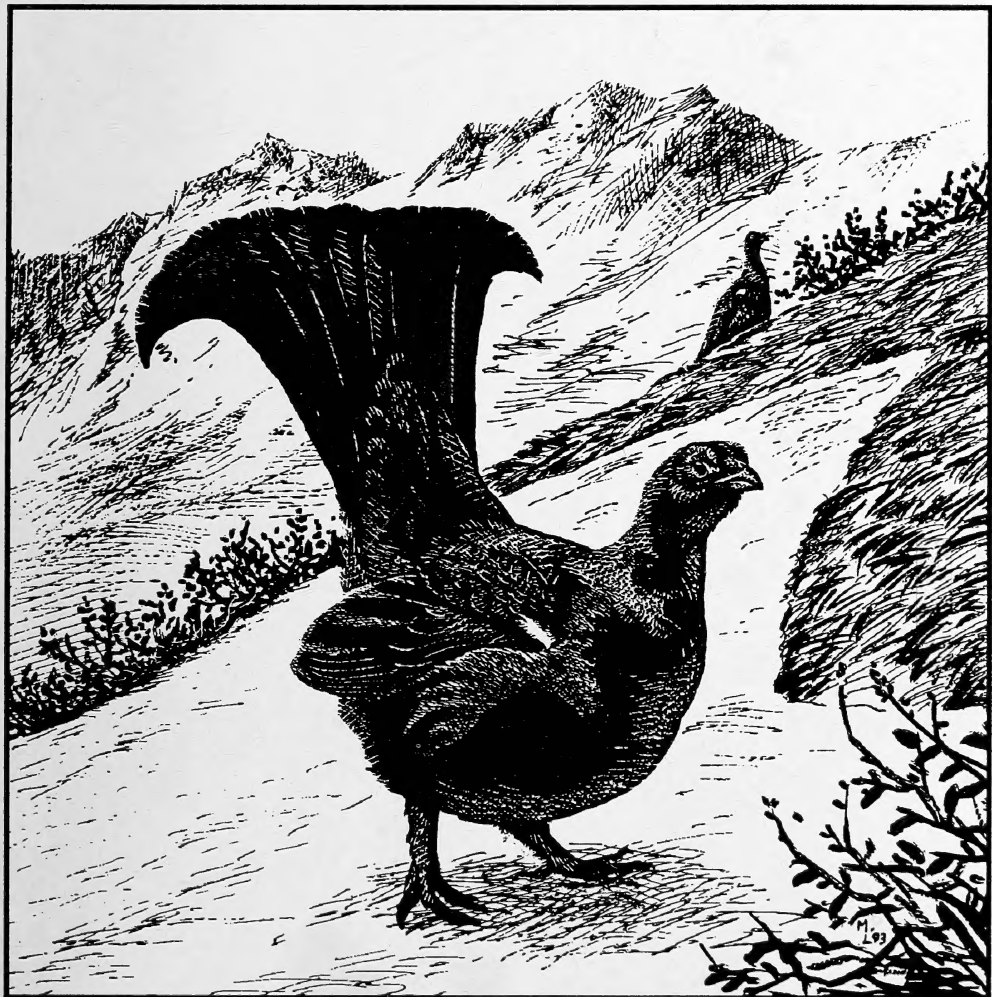


**ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
OF THE MIDDLE EAST**



**BULLETIN 31  
AUTUMN 1993**

# OSME Bulletin 31

Autumn 1993

**All records in this Bulletin are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committees of the country concerned.**

*Any articles, announcements or requests to do with birds in the Middle East are welcome, and may be published free of charge, subject to the discretion of the Editor. Accompanying photographs and line-drawings are welcome. Bird names generally follow those of Birds of the Middle East and North Africa.*

**Contributions to the next Bulletin should be received by 15 February 1994.** They should preferably be double-spaced and typed. Articles on disk (3.5 or 5.25 inch only please) are welcome. Please include both formatted and ASCII files *and a paper copy as well.*

## **Illustrations**

We are grateful to the following artists for the illustrations used in this Bulletin:

**SM Andrews:** Bimaculated Lark 43; Dusky Warbler 46.

**A P Benson:** Swinhoe's Storm Petrel with Wilson's Petrel 20, 22.

**H Welch, courtesy of 'Phoenix':** Lappet-faced Vulture 3; Lesser Kestrel 8; Radde's Accentor 48.

**M Langman:** Caucasian Black Grouse (Cover); Caucasian Black Grouse 14; Caspian Snowcock 16; Golden-winged Grosbeak 27; Pygmy Cormorant 41.

**H Welch:** White-throated Bee-eater 42.

We are grateful to the RSPB for the use of the following illustrations:

**J Busby:** Pochard 12; Short-eared Owl 39; Bewick's Swan 44.

# OSME in Southern Yemen and Socotra

*Richard Porter and Rod Martins*

From the rocky Red Sea promontory of Bab al-Mendab east to the wooded monsoon hills of the Mahra; from the unique island of Socotra north to the ancient Wadi Hadramawt and the desert sands of the Empty Quarter. This was the setting for OSME's second expedition which journeyed to Southern Yemen and Socotra from mid March to mid May 1993. The plan was to complement the work of OSME's first expedition which visited the former North Yemen in the autumn of 1985 and in this respect it was highly successful.

Until twenty or so years ago, little systematic study of the wildlife of Yemen had been conducted due to difficulty of access both politically and geographically. Since then such research has increased, albeit slowly. However it wasn't until the unification in May 1990 of the former North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic) and South Yemen (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) into the Republic of Yemen that the realistic opportunity of work in the southern part of the country and on the island of Socotra was opened to OSME.

A brief report of the first two weeks of the survey was given in the Spring Bulletin but here we are pleased to present a summary of the main achievements together with some of the ornithological highlights.

Full details will appear in a future volume of *Sandgrouse* but in the meantime a 17 page preliminary report has been prepared (Southern Yemen and Socotra, Spring 1993) and can be obtained from Richard Porter, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Beds. SG19 2DL, UK - price £3 including p & p (cheques payable to OSME please).

## **Summary of achievements**

- Systematic surveys of 77 areas of Southern Yemen, recording 266 bird species.
- Systematic surveys of 18 areas on Socotra, recording 79 bird species.
- Two 10-hour surveys by ship on the Gulf of Aden along part of the north coast of Socotra.
- Discovery of 4 bird species previously unrecorded in Yemen and 10 species new to Socotra.

- Collection of data in 64 half-degree squares for the forthcoming Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia.
- Identification of 16 new areas to be internationally recognised as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) within the Middle East, based on habitat quality and species diversity.
- Detailed studies of the Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs* plus 13 south west Arabian and 5 Socotran bird species of global conservation significance.
- Photographed over 100 bird species and made sound recordings of 55.
- Made video recordings of selected birds, of other wildlife encountered and of aspects of the Expedition's work to be edited into a film for Yemen television.
- Documented the distribution of 5 species of amphibian, 55 species of reptile and 20 species of mammal.
- Completed the book on Yemen's birds for children to be distributed by the Yemen Environmental Protection Council, and coordinated with this organisation to provide interpretive slide sets and text on Yemen's birds for future educational programmes.
- Participated with UNICEF in drafting a section about bird life for the Environment Questionnaire being completed by 2,000 Yemeni youths in June-July 1993.

**But most importantly, the project:**

- Provided the opportunity to work closely with a Yemeni counterpart, Dr Omar al-Saghier of the Agricultural Research and Extension Authority (AREA), training him in bird survey and identification techniques and discussing collaboration over future conservation work in Yemen.
- Culminated with a presentation to the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Dr Abdullah Zabarah, and representatives of AREA and the Environmental Protection Council during which the importance of Yemen's birds, their habitats and the threats to their future survival were discussed. Priority areas for follow-up action were agreed. This meeting clearly demonstrated the interest and commitment to the conservation of nature which is emerging in Yemen.

### Some ornithological highlights

**JOUANIN'S PETREL** *Bulweria fallax* Occurrence established of substantial numbers off south coast and Socotra.

**AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER** *Puffinus lherminieri* Mahra coast appears to be important feeding area.

**RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD** *Phaethon aethereus* Pairs recorded on Socotra and at two localities on the south coast where previously unrecorded.

**SOCOTRA CORMORANT** *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* Large feeding flocks observed off south coast with smaller numbers off Socotra.

**BALD IBIS** *Geronticus eremita* No individuals seen but new areas of suitable wetland habitat discovered in the Ta'izz area which require further investigation.

**EGYPTIAN VULTURE** *Neophron percnopterus* Abundant on Socotra, where Black Kite *Milvus migrans* is absent as a local breeder. Probably represents the most significant population in the Middle East.



**LAPPET-FACED VULTURE** *Torgos tracheliotus* Small population (c15) discovered along the eastern fringe of the Wadi Hadramawt region. A significant range extension.

**GABAR GOSHAWK** *Micronisus gabar* Altitudinal range extension: recorded on the highland plateau.

**SOOTY FALCON** *Falco concolor* One early (mid April) record and another from the Mahra (in May). No recent observations.

**ARABIAN PARTRIDGE** *Alectoris melanocephala* Occurrence down to sea level throughout almost any habitat established.

**HARLEQUIN QUAIL** *Coturnix delegorguei* A pair on the Tihama of northern Yemen strongly reinforces suspicion that this species breeds.

**ARABIAN BUSTARD** *Ardeotis arabs* Continued occurrence established for the coastal plain west of Aden.

**SPOTTED THICK-KNEE** *Burhinus senegalensis* First proved breeding record.

**CREAM-COLOURED COURSER** *Cursorius cursor* First record of probable breeding. Breeding proven on Socotra.

**POMARINE SKUA** *Stercorarius pomarinus* Spring passage in substantial numbers established.

**SOOTY GULL** *Larus hemprichii* Importance of south coast as non-breeding area for very large numbers established.

**ROSEATE TERN** *Sterna dougallii* Two or three individuals recorded off Socotra represent the first record for the island. Not recorded from Yemen.

**BRIDLED TERN** *Sterna anaethetus* Very large numbers recorded in Bab al-Mendab area of southern Red Sea.

- OLIVE PIGEON** *Columba arquatrix* Small numbers once more recorded at al-Mahwit - the only known locality in northern Yemen.
- DIDRIC CUCKOO** *Chrysococcyx caprius* Occurrence as a breeding species in the Mahra established.
- KLAAS'S CUCKOO** *Chrysococcyx klaas* One observation was the third known for Yemen.
- AFRICAN SCOPS OWL** *Otus senegalensis* Much commoner, with wider altitudinal range than previously known.
- SPOTTED EAGLE OWL** *Bubo africanus* Occurrence established in the Mahra.
- PLAIN NIGHTJAR** *Caprimulgus inornatus* Substantial breeding populations discovered in Juniper forest on Jabal Iraf and on highly arid wadi slopes within the Wadi Hadramawt region, where clearly common. Only one previous record from Yemen.
- PALLID SWIFT** *Apus pallidus* Substantial passage observed on south coast of the mainland.
- FORBE-WATSON'S SWIFT** *Apus berliozii* Fairly common on Socotra with up to 40 recorded on any one day.
- MALACHITE KINGFISHER** *Alcedo cristata* First record of probable breeding within Yemen, Arabian Peninsula and Asia. Only one previous (historical) record.
- DUNN'S LARK** *Eremalauda dunni* Small apparently breeding population discovered in desert-steppe between Wadi Hadramawt and Ma'rib. One previous record.
- RUFOUS BUSH ROBIN** *Cercotrichas galactotes* Substantial passage observed.
- SOCOTRA WARBLER** *Incana incana* Fairly common in suitable habitat on Socotra with up to 20 recorded in a day.
- AFRICAN PARADISE FLYCATCHER** *Terpsiphone viridis* Altitudinal range as breeding species extended onto highland plateau (of northern Yemen).
- SOCOTRA SUNBIRD** *Nectarinia balfouri* The most widespread of the Socotran endemics with up to 50 recorded in a day.
- SOCOTRA GRACKLE** *Onychognathus frater* Apparently much less common than the non-endemic Blyth's Grackle with which it often associated. Up to 16 recorded in a day.
- BLYTH'S GRACKLE** *Onychognathus blythii* Fairly common in suitable habitats on Socotra with up to 110 recorded in a day.
- SOCOTRA RUFOUS SPARROW** *Passer motitensis insularis* Extremely common on Socotra with up to 200 recorded in a day.
- ARABIAN WAXBILL** *Estrilda rufibarba* Previously undocumented population discovered in Wadi Hadramawt represents a substantial extension of known range to the north-east.
- ARABIAN SERIN** *Serinus rothschildi* Substantial extensions of known range to the north-east (in Southern Yemen).
- GOLDEN-WINGED GROSBEAK** *Rhynchostruthus socotranus* The Mahra apparently supports the highest breeding density of this species in Yemen. In Socotra the local race was found to occur down to near sea-level.
- TRUMPETER FINCH** *Bucanetes githagineus* Recorded from Wadi Hadramawt, the second known locality in Yemen.
- SOCOTRA BUNTING** *Emberiza socotrana* This proved to be the rarest of the Socotran endemics with only one recorded.

# Turkish Bird Sites needing research during 1994

*Gernant Magnin and Murat Yasar*

Over the last couple of years much new information on the Turkish Important Bird Areas (IBAs) has been gathered and more than 15 new IBAs identified. However, for some sites there is no up to date information so DHKD is seeking the assistance of foreign birdwatchers to fill the gaps in our knowledge and facilitate publication of a revised IBA inventory by the end of 1994.

The appeal published in Bulletin 30 resulted in good coverage of a number of sites by visiting birdwatchers and it is to be hoped that during 1994 even more can be achieved. The three articles which follow this list outline some of the variety of work carried out recently.

Sites listed below are described only briefly and those wishing to receive more information should contact DHKD who can provide maps for most areas with indications of the best birdwatching spots. Some sites need to be visited during the breeding season, others during migration; for some several days work are required. Extensive surveys involving groups of birdwatchers are welcomed and often preferable but sometimes require permission from the Turkish government; this may take several months to obtain. Please contact DHKD *early* if you wish to organise a survey lasting longer than two weeks. Even if you cannot visit sites during the periods specified, your information will still be of great benefit.

DHKD and the Turkish IBA project will again be financially supporting a number of expeditions to Turkey. Applications for funding should be received by 15 December at the latest.

Bird records should be submitted on DHKD's new **Site Recording Forms**. This will greatly facilitate transfer of data to a central computer database where it can be used to assess and protect sites. Forms can be obtained from Guy Kirwan, Turkey Officer, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK. OSME members in the Netherlands can obtain forms from Vincent van den Berk, Noorereind 3a, 4012 BT Kerk Avezath, Netherlands.

A final warning: at the time of writing, most of eastern Turkey is 'off-limits' to birdwatchers for safety reasons. Most of the sites described below are situated in the west and are deemed safe. The last four sites however, (indicated >) are in what can be called the 'danger zone' and should not be included in any itinerary unless conditions change.

## List of sites

(those marked with \* were also mentioned in Bulletin 30)

\* **Longoz forests** A large complex of flooded forest on the Black Sea coast, near the Bulgarian border. White-backed Woodpecker and excellent during migration. Required: four day breeding bird study and information from the migration seasons.

**Kocaçay delta (IBA no. 005)** Situated on the Marmara Sea east of Bandirma, two lakes and extensive, partly flooded forests. Required: at least five days coverage during the first two weeks of June.

**Ulubat lake (IBA no. 001)** Large lake between Bursa and Bandirma; good marshy areas along the western and southern shores with breeding Pygmy Cormorant, Spoonbill etc. Urgently required: a breeding bird survey during late May/June. Use of boat/canoe crucial.

**Marmara lake (IBA no. 041)** Lake north-east of Ismir with good breeding populations of egrets etc. Required: a two day survey during June to confirm the importance of the site established during 1993 surveys.

**Küçük Menderes delta (IBA no. 040)** Small wetland system near Selcuk, south of Ismir. Required: two to three days during June to establish the importance of the area.

**Güllük marshes (IBA no. 037)** Small delta west of Milas, south of Ismir. Most western site for Pied Kingfisher. Most of the wetland has been converted to agriculture. Required: a survey (minimum 2 days) during June to reveal how much of the site's importance was lost during the conversion.

\* **Yedigöller National Park** Forest area north of Bolu. Little is known about these forests: similar areas south of Bolu contain five species of woodpecker including White-backed and Grey-headed. Required: a few days camping and birdwatching to obtain an idea of the importance of the area.

\* **Ilgaz mountain range (IBA no. 012)** A well-known botanical site but little is known about its birdlife. Required: a visit during June.

**Yesilirmak delta (IBA no. 018)** Very large delta on the Black Sea east of Samsun; largely drained during past decades but 1993 observations indicate that remaining wetland area may still be of great ornithological importance. Required: a study of the breeding birds during late May and June.

\* **Akşehir and Eber lakes (IBA nos. 019 & 022)** Two large lakes in western Anatolia, recent information lacking. Preliminary surveys indicate breeding Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant, Spoonbill. Both lakes suffer from pollution and DHKD is campaigning for their preservation. This very large complex of seemingly endless reedbeds and open water can only be properly investigated by a team of birdwatchers over a period of weeks. For this permission must be



obtained from Ankara. DHKD would particularly welcome OSME members taking on this project and should be contacted at an early stage by anyone who is interested.

**Seyfe lake (IBA no. 029)** Salt lake north-west of Kayseri with breeding White Pelican, Greater Flamingo, Slender-billed Gull, Gull-billed Tern. The Turkish State Waterworks plan to drain part of the area. For accurate conservation action, more precise information on breeding birds, nesting and feeding areas is crucial. Required: survey of a minimum of one week, preferably two or three, during June. Permission has to be obtained so an early application is necessary.

**Kulu lake (IBA no. 027)** Salt lake 100km south of Ankara. Breeding Ruddy Shelduck, Slender-billed Gull. Required: a three day survey during June to obtain information on breeding bird numbers.

\* **Sultan marshes (IBA no. 030)** One of Turkey's largest and richest inland wetland areas, relatively well-known but recent estimates of the size of breeding bird populations are lacking. Required: at least seven days surveying in June. Permission has to be obtained so an early application is necessary.

\* **Erzurum plain** Newly discovered site just north of Erzurum. 1993 surveys produced important new data. Required: a three day survey during the second half of June.

\* > **Hacli lake** Newly discovered lake in east Turkey, situated north of Van lake. Required: at least three days during late June to obtain an impression of breeding bird populations.

\* > **Kuyucuk lake** Newly discovered lake east of Kars with hundreds of breeding Black-necked Grebes and some Red-necked Grebes. Required: a two day breeding bird survey in June; may also be good during migration.

\* > **Karli lake** A small densely vegetated wetland situated south-east of Kars. Required: one or two days during (late) June for an initial survey.

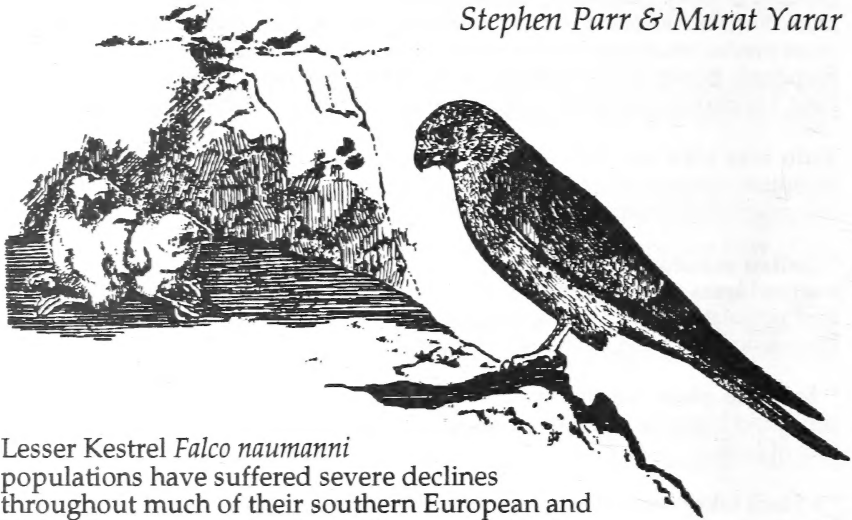
\* > **Igdir plain** Large plain in eastern Turkey, north of Mount Ararat. Cattle Egret, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Menetries Warbler found here in 1991 and 1992, well outside their known range. Required: breeding bird survey during late May/June. This area is very large and a good means of transport is essential.

*Gernant Magnin and Murat Yazar,  
c/o DHKD, PK 18, 80810 Bebek-Istanbul, Turkey*

OSME is especially pleased to be able to assist the conservation work of DHKD in this way. We would welcome similar lists of projects suitable for visiting birdwatchers to undertake from other countries in the region.

# Preliminary results from a Lesser Kestrel survey of Turkey, Spring 1993

Stephen Parr & Murat Yarar



Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* populations have suffered severe declines throughout much of their southern European and Middle Eastern range, principally as a result of agricultural intensification. Biber (1990) showed that the only potentially large population outside Spain was in Turkey. This project's principal objective was to undertake a provisional estimate of the Turkish Lesser Kestrel population. As this would involve visiting large numbers of settlements to count breeding colonies a subsidiary objective was to count the number of occupied and unoccupied White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* nests.

Previous work by DHKD strongly suggested that the best area for breeding Lesser Kestrels is the converted steppes of the Central Plateau. We checked a random sample of 10-km squares throughout this region. A map of Turkey (produced in 1956: GSGS Edition 1 Map) which had a 10-km grid was used for square selection. Figure 1 shows the distribution of 100-km squares within which five 10-km squares were randomly selected, together with the principal natural habitats (Noirfalise 1987). Where the grid was adjusted to fit the lines of longitude, we selected a 100-km square that included some of the 'half squares'.

Two teams of two British birdwatchers worked with ten Turkish ornithologists (mostly students organised through DHKD), spending a month surveying in teams of three. Within each 10-km square, teams spent one day checking every potential breeding site (farm, hamlet, village, town or cliff) and mapping the area.

Summary data for the 100-km squares visited are shown in Table 1. Extrapolating from our results we estimate the Lesser Kestrel population of central Turkey at 2,000 - 3,000 pairs. The Turkish Lesser Kestrel population is thus as important as that in Spain.

Now that baseline data are available, repeat surveys should facilitate some understanding of population trends. Agricultural intensification, especially the use of insecticides, is increasing rapidly throughout the region and Lesser Kestrel populations may be in decline as a consequence. With a rapidly expanding human population, pressure to increase crop yields in Turkey will remain unstoppable.

### Acknowledgements

We thank British Petroleum (BP) for the award of first prize in the Threatened Species category of the company's Conservation Expedition Awards for 1993 and the RSPB and OSME for grants. We also thank Gernant Magnin who facilitated the survey.

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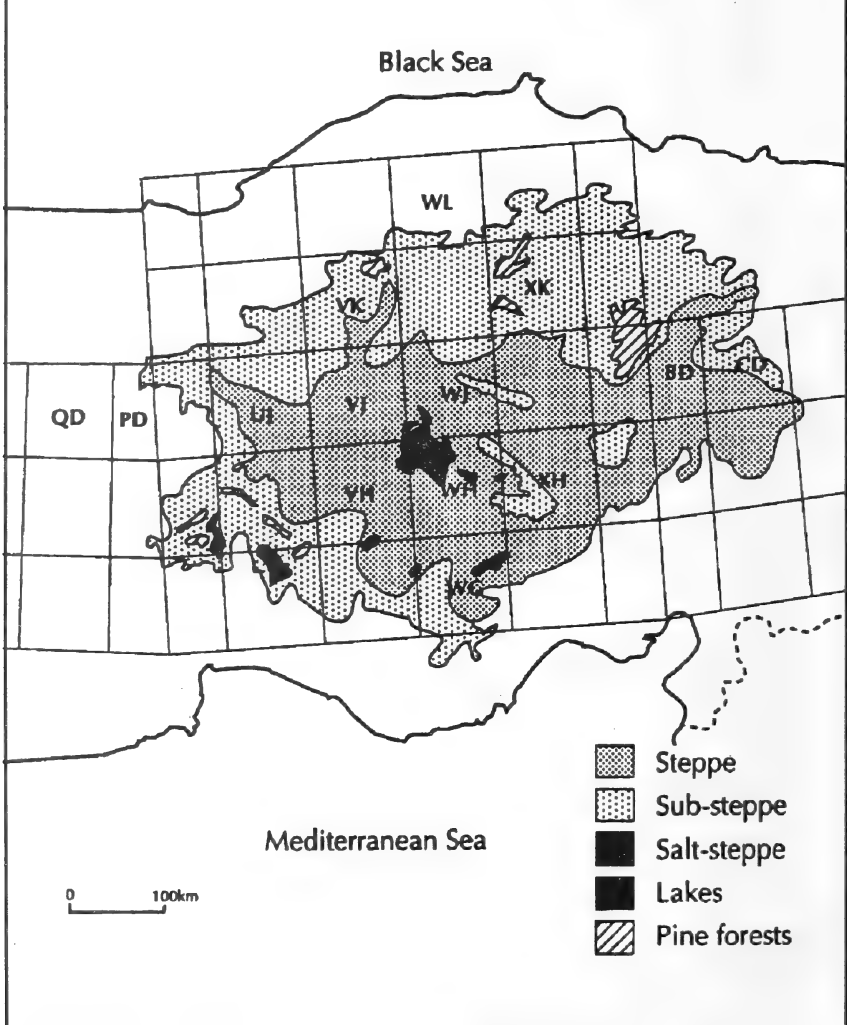
**Table 1**

The number of randomly selected 10-km squares within each 100-km square in which Lesser Kestrels were present. Five 10-km squares were surveyed in each 100-km square. See Figure 1 for the location of the 100-km squares.

100-km square	Squares with Lesser Kestrels present
QD/PD	0
UJ	2
VK	0
VJ	1
VH	2
WL	0
WJ	4
WH	2
WG	4
XK	1
XH	3
BD/CD	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>

**Figure 1**

A map of central Turkey showing the distribution of natural vegetation (from Noirfalise 1987), the 100-km square grid and the twelve survey squares



Stephen Parr, c/o Countryside Council for Wales, Directorate of Science and Policy Development, Plas Penrhos, Ffordd Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2LQ, UK

Murat Yazar, c/o DHKD, PK18, 80810 Bebek-Istanbul, Turkey

# IBA Survey Work 1993

*Guy Kirwan*

## Introduction

Between 12 May and 9 June 1993 Mick Davies and I collected data for the Birds of Turkey Project (see Bulletin 30: 17).

### Our objectives were:

- 1 To continue the programme initiated and organised by DHKD of visiting known Important Bird Areas (and identifying new sites) to collect data for the forthcoming revised Turkey IBA book, due for publication in late 1994.
- 2 To collect data for the BirdLife International Dispersed Species Project by conducting line transects in a variety of habitats not normally surveyed by birdwatchers in Turkey.

Fieldwork was concentrated at wetlands around Van Gölü, which have received little systematic coverage, and in the montane forests of the north east near İkizdere (Rize province). The following main areas were visited: Bitlis province - Ahlat Sazligi; Van province - north and south Van Marshes, Erçek Gölü, Cenge Gölü, Bendimahi Deltasi; Dogubayazit province - Saz Gölü; Mus province - Bulanik; Rize province - İkizdere, Ispir and Sivrikaya.

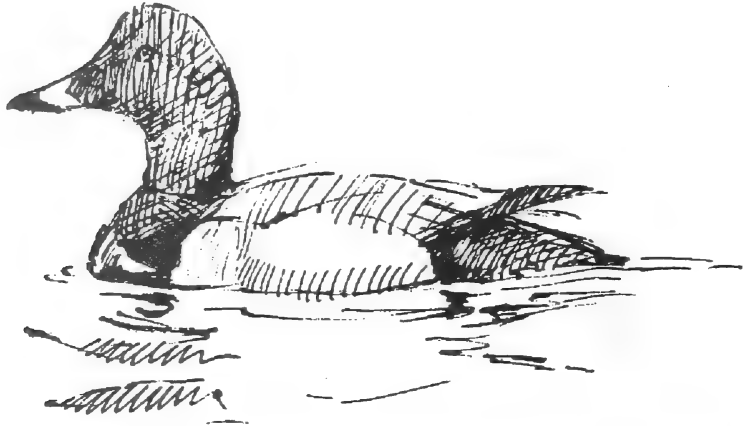
## Methods

Transport was by bus, dolmus, hitch-hiking or walking. Daily activities were organised so that 30 minute transect counts could be conducted in the early morning or evening, to coincide with peaks in bird activity. Such surveys were often restricted to peripheral habitats - wet grassland, semi-steppe, cultivated areas, rock outcrops - around the site being visited.

## Ornithological observations

Small heronries were found or suspected at most wetland sites, and a booming Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* was at Bulanik, apparently a new locality for this species (Kasperek 1986, Kirwan and Martins in prep). Of the globally endangered species, Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris* were seen only at south Van Marshes, where at least 2 pairs were present; Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* only at Bulanik where breeding was suspected but unproven; and White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* was found to be breeding at 3 localities - Cenge Gölü, Erçek Gölü and Bendimahi Deltasi - but appeared to be absent from Van Marshes.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* was recorded at Van, Bendimahi and Saz Gölü. Pochard *A ferina* were widespread but no Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* were seen.



Impressive concentrations of Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, plus display and nest building, were observed at three sites, suggesting that past estimates of the Turkish population of this species are perhaps too low.

Little Crake *Porzana parva* was encountered at 5 sites, with singing males at 4 of these. These observations, together with those from the Çukurova Deltas (Nijmeijer 1990) and Hotamis Marshes (Kirwan 1993), suggest that the species may be a not uncommon breeder in suitable areas and that its status in Turkey is worthy of revision.

A large Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* colony (at least 340 incubating birds) was found at Bulanik. Of particular interest was a probable colony of White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* at Saz Gölü where birds were observed persistently visiting one area. However, this was inaccessible and there remains no proven breeding record of this species in Turkey.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreolla* was recorded from all sites visited, apparently breeding at all but one. As noted by Andersen *et al* (1993), the species appeared to prefer the wettest habitat for breeding and thus probably went under-recorded. For example, at Saz Gölü, singing males were only located by scanning the relatively distant reedbeds.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* was the commonest *Acrocephalus* warbler at all sites. Paddyfield Warbler *A agricola* was found in three areas; Van Marshes (a well-known locality), at least 10 birds at Cenge Gölü (where the species was first located in 1992) and 2, probably migrants, at Bulanik.

Interesting observations of extremely scarce species included a Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* in fragmented, deciduous forest above Alacam - one of several records this spring. Mongolian Trumpeter Finches *Bucanetes mongolicus* were seen at two localities; 6, including 2 singing males, at the regular site close to Dogubayazit, and a probable pair at Tendurek Geçidi, north of Caldiran. This species appears to be firmly established in eastern Turkey. A Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* was seen at Erçek Gölü.

Transects provided much of the data on passerines, and in eastern Anatolia it is considered that this technique will provide good baseline data on breeding densities of such species as Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*, Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*, Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguinea* and Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*.

### Acknowledgements

My thanks to the Bird Exploration Fund, DHKD and OSME who have sponsored my work in Turkey during the past 3 years. In addition the following individuals have been particularly generous and supportive in a variety of ways; Sancar Baris, Ruth Bimson, Max Kasperek, Gernant Magnin, Uygur Ozesmi, Richard Porter and Hilary Welch. Mark Cocker, Remco Hofland, Jon Hornbuckle, Neil and Eleanor MacMahon and Gunnar Sandve provided information on their recent trips to eastern Turkey.

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Guy Kirwan, 6 Connaught Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR2 3BP, UK.



## Caucasian Black Grouse and Caspian Snowcock in north-east Turkey

*Ian Green*

### **Introduction**

During August 1992 I spent two weeks in the Kaçkar Dağları, the highest part of the Pontic Alps, in north-eastern Turkey. The purpose of my visit was to assess the conservation status and populations of Caucasian Blackcock *Tetrao mlokosiewiczzi* and Caspian Snowcock *Tetraogallus caspius*, together with the extent of available habitat, and the suitability of late summer as a census period for these two species. I was accompanied by Owen Mountford, a research botanist from Monk's Wood Research Station, and his brother, Alun Mountford.

Travel in the high Kaçkar is possible only by horseback or on foot. The nearest tarmac road to our study area was about 60km west but there were driveable tracks up to Çat and Ayder on the north side and Altıparmak (Barhal) and Yaylarlar on the south side. Horses and mules could be hired at Yaylarlar. We travelled from here by mule, departing on 9th August, to Dilber Düzü, a flattish meadow in a cirque at about 2750m beneath Kackar Tepe. We spent six nights here before moving north to the next valley at Düpedüz (campsite at 2700m), on the 15th. We passed over the divide on the 16th, camping at Karadeniz Gölü (2850m) for three nights. We returned to Yaylarlar on the 20th before spending two days at Altıparmak.



## The environment of the Kaçkar Dağları

The Kaçkar Dağları is situated on the borders of Artvin, Rize and Erzurum provinces and is an area of high barren peaks, alpine meadows and valleys with extensive deciduous and coniferous forests, and small areas of cultivation in the lower valleys. Our base was located near the main ridge which runs on a north–east/south–west axis from the Marsis group north of Altıparmak to Kaçkar Peak in the south. In this area there are several peaks higher than 3500m and most of the area lies above 2750m. One of the most significant environmental characteristics of the area is the remarkably clear climatic division between the north–west (Black Sea) facing slopes, and those to the south–east of the divide (hereafter referred to as ‘north’ and ‘south’ facing slopes). The north facing slopes experience much cloud and rain, even in late summer, and visibility is often minimal for periods of several days. The cloud develops on the lower slopes closest to the Black Sea and swiftly extends up the valleys, usually between mid-morning and mid-day. It is a severe constraint upon observation-based fieldwork in this region except during the late summer, and in early mornings. In contrast the south facing slopes are generally sunny in late summer although sometimes subject to overspill cloud from the north side and storms can be frequent although this frequency diminishes as the summer progresses. To the south of this divide the alpine areas above the tree line (c 2200m) are characterised by flower-rich meadows and sparsely vegetated rocky slopes. On the northern slopes, which receive far more precipitation, forest cover is normal and *Rhododendron* species comprise the dominant vegetation at higher altitudes.

## Caucasian Black Grouse

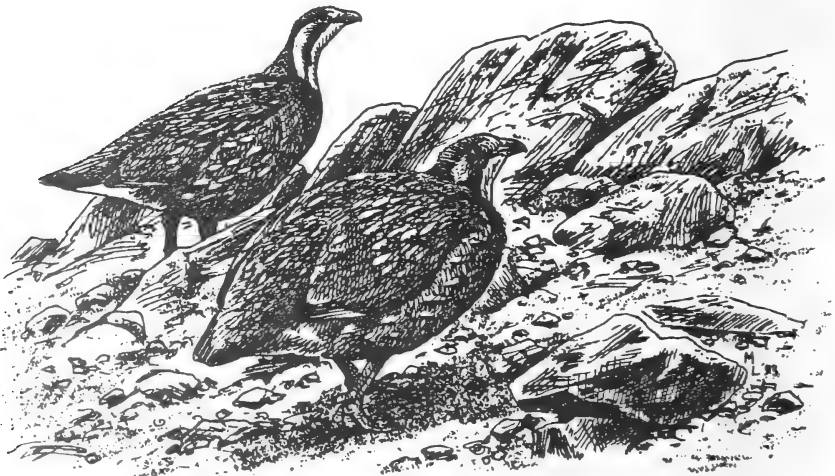
In Turkey this species is little known and there are records from only a small number of sites. Over 90% of records originate from one site: the mountains above Sivri Kaya on the road from İspir to Rize. A nest was found and photographed there in 1991 (J Temple-Lang and Mark Cocker, *Sandgrouse*, 1992). Cramp and Simmons (1980) surmise that the species is ‘probably well-distributed in small numbers in the upper levels of (the) Black Sea coastal range’. The only other observation of this species in Turkey outside of this area is from the Çam Geçidi, east of Savaşat on route 965, in the early 1970’s (Gunther Bauer, pers comm). The species prefers mountain forest and meadows (from 1500m to 3000m) in the Caucasus, also favouring *Rhododendron* thickets and clumps of low willows (*Salix*) and birches (*Betula*) (Cramp and Simmons *et al* 1980). Observations indicate that, at least in summer, they are found almost exclusively on *Rhododendron* covered slopes.

I was able to map accurately the extent of *Rhododendron* only for the south–western quarter of the main Kaçkar range. Anecdotal information

from local people gave me a reasonable insight into the distribution of this habitat within the rest of the main range. Enver Lucas (co-author of *Trekking in Turkey*, Lonely Planet Guides, 1989) provided much useful information on *Rhododendron* distribution, particularly in northern areas. Several species of *Rhododendron* occur in the Pontic Alps: *R caucasicum* is dominant and extensively distributed above the treeline up to 3000m, with *R smirnovii* and *R ungeronii* also occurring, the latter often along streamsides. In the areas we surveyed in detail *Rhododendron* was distributed as follows:

- 1 South of the divide, on steep north facing slopes only. Practically none was found in the valley above or below Dilber Düzü. In Düpedüz, the next valley to the north, there was significantly more on the steepest north facing slopes.
- 2 Most extensively on north or north west facing slopes.

Only one Black Grouse was encountered: an adult male feeding on a *Rhododendron* covered slope in the valley below Buyuk Deniz Gölü and the Kavron Geçidi at about 2700m. Unfortunately, during our stay in what appeared to be good Black Grouse habitat at Karadeniz Gölü, visibility was less than 10m for over 80% of daylight hours.



### **Caspian Snowcock**

I found this species to be quite common in the Kaçkar Dağları. Most birds were located from calls. A wide variety are uttered including a loud, far-carrying Curlew-like call, a number of bubbling and gurgling calls some of which can only be heard at close range and a hard 'chok chok chok' uttered when disturbed or in flight. Calling commences about half an

hour before dawn, reaching a peak just before sunrise, then declining rapidly although it may continue intermittently until mid-day. The species is most common north of the divide and apparently occurs on the highest ridges of the south side.

### **General remarks on habitat and threats**

The Kaçkar Daglari is surprisingly well populated. When approaching from the forests on either slope, upon reaching the alpine zone above the tree line summer settlements (yayla) are often encountered. Such summer villages enable maximum advantage to be made of good pasture at higher altitudes in mid and late summer, and exacerbate degradation of *Rhododendron* through grazing by goats or its destruction to provide more grazing for cattle herds. Collection of *Rhododendron* and trees for fuel is also a significant problem. Davis *et al* (1978) give an altitude range of (1830m) 2000m to 3000m for *R caucasicum*, the dominant species above the tree line, but the current range appears to be 2400m to 3000m indicating that there has been severe habitat degradation at lower levels in the past. Grazing pressure is apparently light in some areas at higher altitudes, at least in the valleys I looked at, as there were some good stands of regenerating *Rhododendron* locally, even in flat areas at about 2700m.

Hunting of both Black Grouse and Snowcock occurs and I observed one hunter during the camping stage of the trip, and heard shots on one other occasion. The remains of a Caspian Snowcock at the camp site at Karadeniz Gölü were beside a fire so the bird had presumably been shot for food.

### **Recommendations for future work**

A full survey of suitable habitat should be undertaken concentrating on the northern parts of the range but including valleys on the south side of the divide. The mountains between the main Kaçkar range and those of Sivri Kaya also presumably hold much suitable habitat and their northern slopes merit investigation as well as the Çam Geçidi (altitude 2640m) to the east of Savaşat and the Yalnızcam Geçidi (2650m) to the east of Ardanuc. It should be noted that the passes over the divide are normally not open until July. In view of the problems associated with local weather conditions, spring is probably the best time to census Caucasian Black Grouse.

## Acknowledgements

I thank OSME for financial support which helped to make this survey possible, Mark Cocker for very useful advice and a good map of the area and Tekin Küçüknalbant for his company and advice in the mountains. The people of Yusufeli, Altiparmak and Yaylarlar were helpful and generous and I particularly thank Idris for provision of mules. Owen and Alun Mountford were good companions in the field and gave me names to apply to some of the beautiful plants of the Kaçkar.

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# First observations of a possible Basra Reed Warbler in Turkey

*Yves Bertault and Jean-Yves Fremont*

During a birding trip to Turkey in April 1987, we observed several species of migrant *Acrocephalus* and *Hippolais* Warblers. These included Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, Reed Warbler *A scirpaceus* (notably *fuscus* race in Istanbul), Marsh Warbler *A palustris* (along Euphrates River near Birecik), Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* (Birecik, Tasucu) and Upcher's Warbler *H languida* (Tasucu, Goksu Delta). However, the observation of an *Acrocephalus* warbler showing characteristics of Basra Reed Warbler *A (arundinaceus) griseldis* was exceptional, possibly being the first record for Turkey, and thus worthy of documentation. The bird was observed on 21 April, in the late afternoon, 10 km north-east of Kilis and 43 km S-SW of Gaziantep in southern Turkey. It was seen mainly in bushes adjacent to an area of marsh.

Despite its elusive behaviour we were fortunate enough to obtain good views and took the following description:

## Description

Our initial impression of the bird, as it moved around in riverside trees was of a large *Hippolais* warbler. This was due to its size, elongated silhouette, primary projection (longer than Reed Warbler), and its olive greyish-brown coloured upperparts.

**Size:** intermediate between Reed Warbler and Great Reed Warbler; perhaps closer to Reed Warbler because of its slimmer silhouette.

**Plumage colouration:** Upperparts; unlike Reed Warbler and Great Reed Warbler it was without any warm tinge (yellowish or rufous), and neither was it greyish enough for Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* or Upcher's Warbler. Underparts; paler than Great Reed Warbler (whitish to creamy white) with a buffish tinge restricted to the lower flanks. The white throat did not show any dark streaking, eliminating the eastern race of Great Reed *A a zarudnyi*. The head pattern was well defined with a long whitish supercilium which was narrow, though distinct, mainly in front of the eye (unlike Great Reed Warbler). The bird showed a thin, but well-marked, blackish eye-stripe (prominent on lores).

**Bill:** distinctly longer than that of Marsh or Reed Warbler and distinctly narrower than that of Great Reed or even than Clamorous Reed Warbler *A stentoreus*. The bill colour was yellowish-horn.

**Wings:** a long winged bird (primary projection almost equal with tertial length), which eliminates Great Reed and Clamorous Reed. The colour of the wings was darker than upperparts, without any pale fringes to the primaries or secondaries (ie. no panel).

**Legs:** Although the colour of the legs was not well seen, we are sure they were not pale (neither yellowish, nor flesh, or pinkish).

**Tail:** no particular note about the tail was taken, although the bird did not show any characteristic tail movements (eg. cocking as in Blyth's Reed Warbler *A dumetorum* or waving as in Upcher's Warbler).

**Call:** the bird was silent.

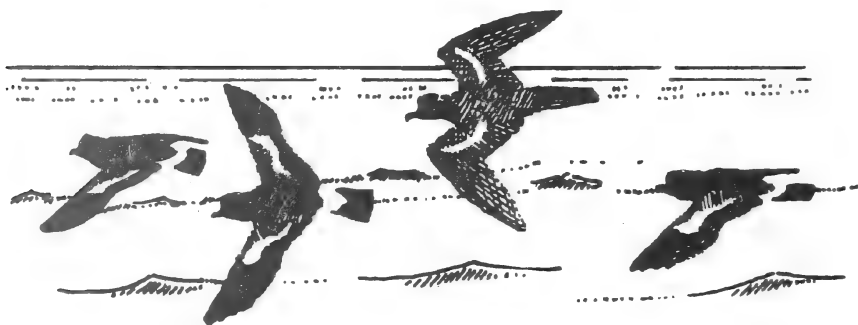
## Discussion

The bird observed in Turkey showed many of the characteristic features of Basra Reed Warbler. However, subsequent literature published on their identification (see British Birds Vol. 81, No.4 pages 171-178 and Dutch Birding Vol. 14, No.2 pages 41-48) has revealed that several other features that are of paramount importance in their identification were not observed. Briefly, these include:

- 1 The shape and colouration of the tail; Basra Reed Warbler should show a dark square ended tail
- 2 The grey leg colour that Basra Reed Warbler normally shows.
- 3 The description of the narrow bill does not necessarily rule out the western race of Clamorous Reed warbler *A s stentoreus*, although the primary projection does.

It is likely that the bird observed in Turkey was a Basra Reed Warbler however our field notes were not adequate to prove this beyond all doubt. Visitors to south-eastern Turkey should however be aware of the possible occurrence of this species. It is also worth noting that a Basra Reed Warbler was trapped in Eilat, Israel, in the spring of 1993, suggesting that some birds may migrate up the western side of Arabia. Although tentative this may add weight to the likelihood of Basra Reed Warbler occurring as a spring over-shoot in Turkey.

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## A record of a possible Swinhoe's Petrel in the Arabian Sea

*A P Benson*

During the summer of 1989 I was serving on board HM ships on Armilla Patrol in the Middle East. Whilst on this deployment we crossed the Arabian Sea several times but in mid-June we did so during unseasonably bad weather.

The 13 and 14 June we were at a position of 15° 48' N , 53° 59.5' E approx 60m off the Omani south coast. The weather was overcast and windy with a south-westerly wind of force 5-6. During this period I saw good numbers of Jouanin's Petrels *Bulweria fallax* and a scattering of Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*. The highlight though came in the form of two Black-bellied Petrels *Fregetta tropica* seen on 14th.

The 15 June was pleasingly calm and bright with a light north-westerly breeze and a pleasant 30° sea temperature. The sea-state had calmed considerably. Our mid-day position showed that we were approximately 40km NE of Ra's Al Hadd, Oman. Jouanin's Petrels were still in abundance along with increasing numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*. Singles were constantly going past and groups of up to six could be seen in feeding parties.

Then up ahead and directly in the ships path, a party of 30+ birds could be seen sitting on the calm sea. As the ship approached, the flock took to the wing leisurely 'scuttling' from the path of the ship. It was at this point that I noticed an all dark 'storm petrel' fly from the flock in a fast deliberate flight. Mentally taking notes on the bird I watched it on the wing through fixed position 30 x 75 Swarovski binoculars until it was out of range. I then took the following notes.

### **Description**

**Jizz and Shape:** seen in direct comparison with Wilson's it was noted to be approximately 1/3 larger than the former with proportionately longer, more pointed wings and sharply angled carpals. The tail was longer in appearance than Wilson's giving the bird an almost 'swift' *Apus* like appearance. No fork in the tail was noted.

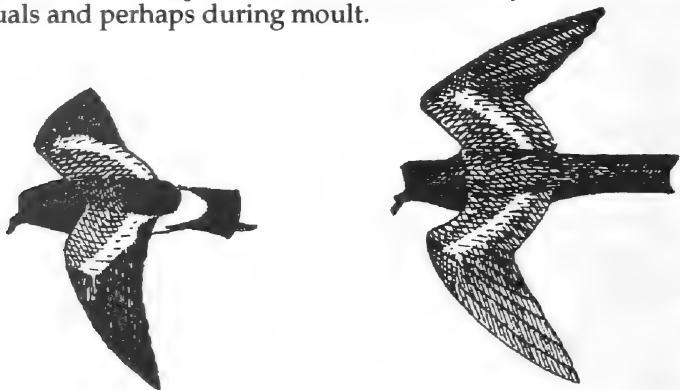
The bird's flight was fast and direct, low over the water with occasional short glides, lacking Wilson's rather indifferent fluttering flight.

**Plumage:** Compared with Wilson's rather blackish plumage, the bird was distinctly dark brown with primaries not appearing darker than the rest of the wing. Paler coverts formed an indistinct wing bar which was noted as being as prominent as some of the duller Wilson's. The rump showed no contrast with the tail or the rest of upperparts being the same dark brown colour. No other markings were present.

I immediately referred to my two seabird guides onboard (*Seabirds an identification guide*, Harrison and the *Photographic guide*, (Harrison). After eliminating several species of dark rumped storm petrels on the basis of my geographical position I considered the three most likely species: Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*, Matsudaira's Petrel *Oceanodroma matsudairae* and Swinhoe's Petrel *O. monorhis*.

Although Bulwer's Petrel's main breeding areas in the North Pacific are from China through to the Marquessa Island, it has recently been suggested that individuals from the East China Sea colonies disperse west into the Indian Ocean (Harrison 1983) and therefore possibly into Arabian Waters. Appearing wholly sooty-brown at sea, Bulwer's also shows pale upperwing coverts forming a wing bar and could possibly be confused with a dark-rumped storm petrel if seen alone. Alongside Wilson's however, the rather long pointed tail, long wings and the general appearance is more like a dark gadfly petrel rule out this species.

Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel breeds only on Volcano Island south of Japan but has proved to be highly migratory moving westwards to winter in the western Indian Ocean seas off the Seychelles, Kenya and Somalia (Bailey 1968). Although a true storm-petrel, Matsudaira's is one of the largest with a wingspan of 56cm (compared to 40cm of Wilson's, Harrison 1987). Again a solitary bird at sea would cause problems when size would be hard to define. However, Matsudairas should show a pale upper wingbar with a rather distinct white 'skua' type flash formed by white bases to the outermost primaries. This feature may of course vary on individuals and perhaps during moult.



Swinhoe's Petrel breeds on islands off Japan, southern and western Korea and China (Yellow Sea). Like Matsudaira's, Swinhoe's Petrel also moves west from the Pacific into the Indian Ocean. It is interesting to note that these two species are thought to be the only sea-birds to make this bi-oceanal migration (Bailey 1969). Although its range is not fully known Swinhoe's has been recorded north to Eilat, at the head of the Red Sea, and west to seas off Cape Guardafuc, Somalia (Bailey 1968). Taxonomy of this species is complex, with some authorities regarding it as a subspecies of Leach's Petrel *O leucorhoa*. Furthermore the recent discovery of 'dark rumped Storm-Petrels' being caught in the North Atlantic initially claimed as Swinhoe's have been suggested to be a new species for the world (Sea Swallow 40:63).



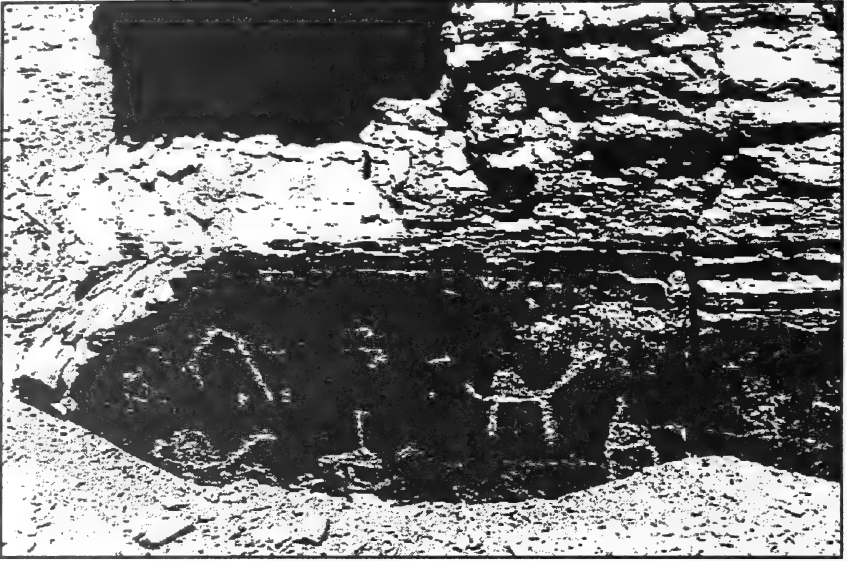
Uniformly dark brown with a wingspan of 45cm, Swinhoe's is slightly larger than Wilson's but is slimmer with longer thinner wings and a longer tail. It is one of the smallest 'dark rumps' to occur. It has a pale covert bar across the upperwing which is less pronounced than on most other 'dark rumps'. (It is noted that birds that have been caught have pale bases to the primaries but these are not apparent in the field, although from photographs the North Atlantic birds do seem to have a more prominent forewing patch).

After thoroughly soaking up the literature I felt that this bird could not be identified to species level beyond doubt. It is likely that the bird was either a Matsudaira's or Swinhoe's Petrel. The size of the bird points towards Matsudaira's whereas the lack of pale base to the primaries points towards Swinhoe's Petrel (although Swinhoe's can sometimes show this feature). There are very few records of either species from Arabian waters and this may well be the first documented sighting for the area. The prospect of future records of Swinhoe's, Matsudaira's and the other species must surely be possible for any pelagic minded ornithologist lucky enough to find himself in the rich waters of the North Indian Ocean or Arabian Sea in the northern summer.

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## Rock art sites depicting the Ostrich in the Central Hijaz, Saudi Arabia

*Brian S. Meadows & Desmond Stewart*

The Ostrich *Struthio camelus syriacus* has become extinct in the Arabian peninsula during the present century. There is limited information on its former distribution and abundance within the peninsula. However, rock art can give an indication of past distribution or, at least, local knowledge of the species.

In Saudi Arabia the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in the Ministry of Education recently carried out a synoptic survey of rock art sites in the Kingdom that should prove a valuable source of information (al Kabawi *et al*, 1989). In addition the authors, during extensive travel in the central Hijaz from a base at Yanbu, have located eleven rock art centres (most of these include several actual sites) and several of these were apparently overlooked by the survey. Eight out of the eleven centres depict drawings that represent ostriches (Table 1).

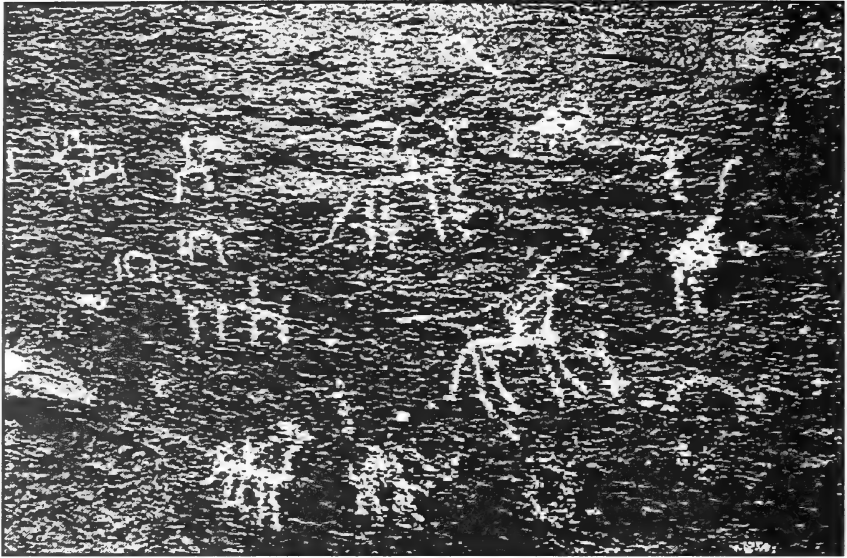
**TABLE 1**

Location of rock art centres depicting ostriches

Wadi Farrah	24° 35'N	38° 25'E to
	24° 40'N	38° 30'E
Wadi Rakhu	24° 40'N	38° 00'E to
	24° 45'N	38° 30'E
Wadi Abath	24° 30'N	38° 35'E
Wadi Khalsah (near Al Biqa)	24° 25'N	38° 35'E
Jebel Figrah	24° 20'N	39° 00'E
Wadi Quhah	23° 20'N	39° 15'E
Harrat east Um Lajj	24° 55'N	37° 45'E
Jadidah (Medina Road near Badr)	23° 45'N	38° 45'E

**Habitat:** Seven of these rock art centres are in wadis, which are lightly wooded with acacias, of the piedmont zone of the Tihama. The wadi areas would probably have been similar to those used today by Ostriches living on the southern edge of the Sahara (Cramp & Simmons, 1977). One centre, however, is at a height of 2000m on the plateau of Jebel Figrah. The vegetation of the jebel is relatively verdant and includes *Juniperus phoenicea*, *Commiphora* spp and a rich ground flora, including thistles; euphorbia's and figs grow on the lower slopes. A sketch depicts a presumed hunting scene with Ostrich, ibexes and a dog. Possibly hunting involved driving animals over the high cliffs of the area. The presence of Ostriches in rock art on the mountain must raise the possibility that Ostriches formerly migrated up the mountain slopes during the dry season. Passage of birds through wadis would have been possible.

**Age:** Rock art, using the pecking technique, as is the case in all central Hijaz sites, dates back to the Neolithic period. However, most of the drawings, particularly at the most prolific centres of Wadi Farrah and Wadi Rakhu, which are associated with Thurmadic script, are clearly Iron Age. A post-Neolithic date is also indicated by the absence of bovids, which disappear from more recent artwork, and by the abundance of camels, ibexes and Ostriches accompanied by stick figures and horse riders holding spears. The Badr site along the Madinah road is the only site, close to Yanbu, where bovids have so far been found. The appearance of camels and larger numbers of Ostriches could have been the result of a change to a more arid climate during the intervening Bronze Age.



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# Description of Nest of Golden-winged Grosbeak

I J A Brown



On 26 March 1992, Bill Simpson and I were birdwatching in Wadi Hinna in the Dhofar Province of the Sultanate of Oman, square UB11. We heard an unusual call which I identified as Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhyncostruthus socotranus*. We sighted a pair of birds in a tree and watched one descend to a smaller tree where it disappeared. Knowing that the species had been identified as having bred in the area the previous year, we proceeded towards the tree and saw the tail of the bird protruding from a fork near the top. There appeared to be a nest there and we obtained some not very good photographs of the bird's head protruding from the other side of the tree. It was obviously sitting on a nest.

A couple of weeks later, I was birdwatching in another area when I encountered Michael Gallagher, Hilary Fry and John Ash (the latter being in Oman on a project). JSA was looking for suitable areas for his project, and mentioned that they were interested in visiting Wadi Hinna. When I mentioned that BS & I had seen the nest site of the Grosbeak, HF (who had reported the breeding the previous year) mentioned that the nest of this species had never been described. Hoping that I could remember where BS & I had seen the nest, we set off for the Wadi.

The relevant tree was identified and the nest appeared to be unoccupied. As the tree did not appear very robust and was leaning at an angle, MDG (as the lightest in the party) was persuaded to ascend the tree. From his precarious perch, he confirmed the nest appeared to be abandoned, and proceeded to describe it roughly:- cup 1.5" deep, cup 2.5" dia., overall depth of nest 5", height agl approx 12'.

MDG then attempted to remove the nest, and this was completed very successfully. Once on the ground the nest was photographed and more accurate measurements taken:- outer dia. 9 x 12 cm, overall depth 7cm, cup depth 4cm, cup dia. 5cm..

The nest consisted of a cup of twigs and fine dead grass on a basal platform of dead twigs. There were obvious signs of it having been

occupied by large young. It was sited in a three pronged fork in an *Anogeissus dhofarica* tree on a hillside of mixed vegetation quite close to a permanent water supply.

The nest was taken to the Natural History Museum in Muscat by MDG for display.

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## Iraqi Marshes doomed

*Mike Evans*

The marshes of southern Iraq are one of the most outstandingly important wetlands for birds in western Eurasia. Several million waterfowl from the Russian taiga are thought to winter in the 15,000-20,000 km<sup>2</sup> of shallow, permanent lakes, reedbeds and seasonally inundated floodplains which are fed by the River Euphrates and River Tigris. The marshes support large proportions of the world populations of six globally threatened species (Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*, Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* and Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*), as well as internationally important numbers of at least 71 other waterfowl and raptor species.

In addition the marshes are a globally important centre of wetland biodiversity: bird-wise, they contain two endemic species (Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* and Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*), two endemic subspecies (Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and African Darter *Anhinga rufa*) and two relict Afrotropical species (Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* and Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*), enough for the marshes to qualify as one of the 221 most important bird biodiversity 'hotspots' globally (Endemic Bird Areas, or EBAs). The southern Iraq marshes are one of only 12 wetland EBAs identified worldwide; their importance for bird biodiversity is mirrored by their importance for other groups, for instance, the marshes are the only home to a subspecies of the globally threatened Smooth-coated Otter *Lutra perspicillata*. The marshes are also economically important, supplying up to one million wildfowl and 36,000 tonnes of fish per year for markets in southern Iraq.

The vast and apparently untamable wilderness of the marshes is now suddenly proving to be a dangerous illusion. A range of Iraqi government hydrological projects, whose development slowed down during two

Gulf Wars, have suddenly been completed in the last one-and-a-half years and are now very rapidly destroying the marshes. The Iraqi government says the schemes are for agricultural improvement, but they are widely viewed in the West as an attempt to destroy the refuge that the marshes represent to the independent, indigenous Ma'dan or 'Marsh Arab' people and to groups opposing the government. Virtually the entire River Euphrates has been diverted away from the marshes into a huge man-made canal, the 'Third River', which discharges directly into the Gulf. Together with other major canalisation and drainage projects associated with the River Tigris (Anfal 3 canal, etc), and the building of high embankments along both rivers, these measures are said to have prevented water from entering up to two-thirds of the marshes during 1992/1993, and satellite images show large areas drying up. In spring 1993, it was reported that dykes were being built to split the marshes into compartments and so encourage the drying process further. By summer 1993, reports indicated that the whole of the Central Marshes, between the two rivers, was dry.

The drainage of marshes for agricultural land and the increasing utilisation of the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates for irrigation in Turkey, Syria and northern and central Iraq have already caused considerable loss of wetland habitat in lower Iraq. It seems likely that the current drainage of the main permanent freshwater lakes and reedbeds of the marshlands will go ahead towards completion. An independent study of the likely environmental impact is currently being undertaken by the wetland Ecosystems Research Group of the University of Exeter (UK): so far, the evidence indicates that the drainage of the marshes will constitute an ecological catastrophe of unprecedented proportions in western Eurasia in recent times.

Further information on the human and environmental situation in the marshlands of southern Iraq can be obtained by writing to: The AMAR Appeal, c/o Emma Nicholson MP, House of Commons, London, SW1 0AA, UK.

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## **Crop Contents of a Spotted Sandgrouse**

*Hew D V Prendergast*

This note reports on the crop contents, mostly seeds, of a Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus* shot between 07.30 and 08.30hrs on 9 April 1968 at Buraimi, United Arab Emirates (24° 13' N, 55° 47' E) by Major W Stanford.

Sandgrouse are specialists of arid regions. In the Western Palearctic and Middle East most of these regions have a well-recognised botanical uniformity placing them in the Saharo-Sindian regional zone of White and Léonard (1991) which stretches continuously from the Atlantic seaboard of the Sahara to the Thar Desert of India. It is scarcely surprising therefore, that many of the plant species (and, even more so, the genera and families) recorded by Cramp (1985) as dietary items of sandgrouse in these regions have a certain similarity. The crop contents reported here are no exception, although for *P senegallus* in particular there are few precise data and none pertaining to the plant species recorded here (Cramp 1985).

Seeds of three species, *Emex spinosus*, *Tephrosia purpurea* and *Asphodelus tenuifolius* (= *A. fistulosus*), accounted for >95% by weight of the crop contents of this bird (Table 1). Although Cramp (1985) mentions several members of the Polygonaceae (eg *Fagopyrum* and *Polygonum* spp) as food items of sandgrouse, surprisingly no record is indicated for the widely distributed *E spinosus*. *Tephrosia* spp are commonly recorded however, especially *T apollinea*, as is *A tenuifolius*. Chenopod and grass 'seeds', minor items here, are also commonly recorded by Cramp (1985). The only identifiable plant fragments were of a species of *Tribulus*, a genus particularly prominent in arid zones. One roundish stone, c.2mm in diameter, was also found.

For the seven species of sandgrouse in the Western Palearctic (and Middle East) food is listed by Cramp (1985) as "mostly seeds" (three species), "mainly seeds" (two species) and "primarily" or "predominantly seeds" (one species each). Since seed production in arid regions is especially rain dependent, and as rainfall itself can be highly variable in both space and time, it may not initially be surprising that sandgrouse are nomadic in order to exploit the best 'pastures'. Seeds, however, do not disappear, as any green and rain-fed desert will testify, although they may well become more difficult to find the longer the season of seed production has passed. In arid regions especially, seeds are capable of withstanding many years of desiccation (down to only a few percent moisture content) until the right conditions for germination appear. Could it be the desiccation state of seeds that is important to sandgrouse? If older, very dry seeds are harder to digest than fresher ones. Could nomadism be more the result of seed age than seed abundance? Anyone who has a chance to examine the crop contents of a sandgrouse could easily find out seed age by weighing seeds as quickly as possible, drying them out (see Table 1) and then reweighing them to calculate their moisture content.



**Table 1**  
Crop contents of a Spotted Sandgrouse

Species	Family <sup>1</sup>	Seed No.	Other	Wt <sup>2</sup> (gm)	% of total
<i>Emex spinosus</i>	Polygonaceae	204		1.23275	47.77
<i>Tephrosia purpurea</i>	Leguminosae-Papilionoideae	91		1.08479	42.04
<i>Asphodelus tenuifolius</i>	Asphodelaceae	109		0.13889	5.38
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.	Chenopodiaceae	6		0.02216	0.86
Chenopod spp.	Chenopodiaceae	10		0.02043	0.79
<i>Chenopodium</i> sp.	Chenopodiaceae	20		0.00865	0.34
<i>Erneapogon</i> sp.	Gramineae	14		0.00538	0.21
Unidentified seeds and plant fragments		30	plant fragments	0.06479	2.51
<i>Tribulus</i> sp.	Zygophyllaceae	0	6 leaves	0.00282	0.11
			<b>Total</b>	<b>2.58066</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Family names follow Brummitt (1992)

<sup>2</sup> Seeds, leaves and plant fragments were oven-dried at 103°C for 24 hours before weighing.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Prof. L Boulos (Kuwait University) and Dr T Cope, A R Radcliffe-Smith and C C Townsend (all Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew) for help with identifying seeds, and to Lt. Col. W Stanford who forwarded them.

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Hew D V Prendergast, Acorn Cottage, Twyford, Horsted Keynes, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 7DH, UK.

# OSME News

## **Fifteenth OSME AGM - Retiring Council members**

This year's AGM saw major changes on Council, with 3 members retiring after completing 5 years service and 4 others standing-down early due to pressure of work.

It is customary for the Chairman to write a paragraph on each of the retiring members but, because of the number this year and limitations of space, I have restricted myself to just a few lines. This in no way reflects a lack of gratitude as all of them have, in their own way, made significant contributions to the running of the Society.

**Mark Andrews**, Publicity Officer from 1988; through his wide range of birding contacts, Mark introduced OSME to a new section of the birdwatching fraternity. His artistic talents have been used to good effect in revamping the OSME displays and have frequently appeared in the Bulletin.

**Major David Counsell**, Treasurer from 1988; with his military training, David helped bring order to much of the financial running of the Society. His knowledge of the region and numerous acquaintances in the ornithological societies of the Armed Forces proved valuable on many occasions.

**Hilary Welch**, Secretary (1988-91) and Librarian; brought to OSME an attention to detail and organisational skill it will be difficult to replace - a combination that ensured standards were always high. Through Hilary, even closer links were formed with DHKD in Turkey and her professional training as a graphic designer was used extensively when OSME upgraded its journals and letterhead.

**Mark Boyd**, Bulletin Editor (1989-93); continued the trend of increasing the quality and content of the Bulletin observed over the years and introduced new features such as Around the Region. His editorial skills and astute comments at Council meetings will be hard to replace.

**Richard Grimmatt** provided OSME with an important link with ICBP (now BirdLife International) and thanks to his intimate knowledge of Turkey, OSME was better able to direct its efforts in that country. Richard's co-authorship of the European Important Bird Areas book enabled him to provide valuable assistance with the current Middle East IBA project.

**Peter Heathcote**, assumed the role of Secretary in 1991 having joined Council the previous year. His affable nature and relaxed style belied an underlying efficiency vital for fulfilling the role. This efficiency was never better demonstrated than at AGMs which were always well

organised and smoothly run. I would like to take this opportunity also to thank Peter's wife, Pauline, for her assistance with the organisation of AGMs.

**Tom Nightingale**, by his own admission not a committee person, provided OSME with a close link with the region, joining Council just after having returned to Britain from Bahrain. Although often quiet at meetings, Tom's comments were always pertinent and succinct.

Whilst OSME depends on the time and commitment of its elected Council, the Society is also very reliant on the work of its co-opted members. Therefore I would like to make special mention of **Chris Tucker** who also left Council after serving as Membership Secretary from 1991 having previously been Postal Clerk. Membership Secretary is one of the most crucial jobs in any society as it provides the vital point of contact with the membership. Chris fulfilled this role admirably, not only maintaining the membership files but organising journal mailings and dealing with a wide range of enquiries about the Society, as well as typing up articles for the Bulletin.

To all of the above, I express my sincere thanks for their support and company during their time on Council and wish them well for the future.

*Geoff Welch*

### **OSME at the British Birdwatching Fair**

For the fourth year running, OSME had a stand at the Bird Fair and attracted a lot of interest, not least because of an Arabian Breeding Bird photographic quiz compiled by Mike Jennings. This was rapidly dubbed the Most Difficult Quiz of the Fair! For those brave enough to have entered, the nine species depicted were as follows:

- 1 **Spoonbill** - close examination of the chick's bill tip revealed a globular lump, the start of the characteristic 'spoon'.
- 2 **Osprey** - although very young, the chick photographed already showed the distinctive black and white head patterning. Everyone got this one.
- 3 **Grey Francolin** - a hard one! Only one person got this right.
- 4 **Houbara** - bustard eggs are distinctively oval and are laid directly on the ground. The northern Arabia locality ruled out Arabian Bustard.
- 5 **Spur-winged Plover** - a difficult one. The chick showed the dark cap of the adult.
- 6 **Eagle Owl** - many birds lay white eggs and make no nest (see Houbara!). Without any scale reference, this one was difficult.
- 7 **Red-rumped Swallow** - the bottle-shaped nest is characteristic of the species, though nests are sometimes reused by Little Swift.
- 8 **Nile Valley Sunbird** - the nest is distinguished by being loosely constructed of wool and other light fibres.
- 9 **Arabian Golden Sparrow** - the black stick nests, sometimes built on top of each other in thorn trees, are very distinctive. But obviously not to those who entered the competition as no-one got it right!

## Sixteenth Annual General Meeting - a date for your diary

Next year's AGM will be held on Saturday 9 July in London. Further details will appear in Bulletin 32.

### Request for information : Birds of the Serengeti

The birds of the Serengeti National Park Tanzania, BOU Checklist No. 5 by Dieter Schmidl will soon be out of print and the author is revising the data for a new printing. Please send Serengeti records to Dieter Schmidl, Max-Planck-Institut, D-82319 Seewiesen, Post Starnberg, FRG. Any records will be gratefully received and acknowledged.

# News and Information

### **Birds of the Western Palearctic - a note of gratitude to contributors.**

Preparation of the 8th and last volume of the Handbook (or BWP as it is more affectionately known) is now complete, and publication is scheduled for 1994. The Editors would like to express their deep appreciation for the help and support generously given over many years by ornithologists and birdwatchers not only throughout Europe, but also in Russia (including beyond the Urals) and other republics of the former USSR, many countries in the Middle East, Africa, India and Pakistan, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and North America. Bringing this great project to fruition has been an immense privilege and pleasure, but we could not have done it without your help. Thank you very much.  
BWP Editors

### **21st World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation**

'Global Partnership for Bird Conservation' will be held in Rosenheim, Germany from 12-18 August 1994. For further details and

registration forms, please contact the local organisers: Bayer. Akademie für Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege (ANL), ICBP World Conference, Postfach 1261, D-8229 Laufen/Salzach, Germany (tel: +49 8682 7097, fax: +49 8682 1560)

### **The Whitley Award for Animal Conservation**

This new, annual award, established by the Whitley Animal Protection Trust and the Royal Geographical Society, is aimed at supporting multi-disciplinary teams whose projects make a practical, lasting and substantial contribution to the protection and conservation of animals in their habitat.

Applications are open to British conservationists working in Britain or overseas. With a value of up to £15,000, the award is intended to cover the major costs of a project, enabling it to proceed without waiting to secure additional funding. For more information, contact The Whitley Award, Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR (tel: 071 589 5466)

## Israel

To celebrate 40 years of nature and environmental protection, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) is organising a series of events in Israel in Spring 1994:

- 20 to 24 March:** The role of Non Governmental Organisations in protecting the environment - an international conference
- 25 March to 10 April:** The SPNI Annual International Seminar on Environmental Education, Conservation and Public Action
- 13 to 25 March:** Migrating, wintering and breeding birds as a subject for protection, research and public education - an international seminar
- 20 to 24 March:** International Bird Festival in Elat
- 3 to 7 April:** Scientific Conference on Bird Migration
- 21 and 28 March:** Paul Winter's Global Flyway Concert
- 28 to 31 March:** Nature Trips Peace Festival - from the Negev to Sinai

For additional information please contact The Secretary of the 40th anniversary's events, SPNI's Executive Director's Office, 4 Hashfela Street, Tel-Aviv 66183, Israel.

## Egypt

In June and July 1993 the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas, Tunisia (RAC/SPA) and the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET), in close cooperation with the National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries (NIOF) in Alexandria, surveyed the Egyptian coast between Alexandria and El Salum on the Libyan border. Approximately 248 kilometres of beach suitable for nesting turtles were found, together with tracks of Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta*, the first time that nesting by this species has been confirmed in this part of the Mediterranean. Compared

with countries like Turkey, only relatively low numbers of turtles were found. Further information on the project and copies of the interim report on this phase of the study are available from Max Kasperek, Bleichstr. 1, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany.

## Kuwait

Following the Gulf War a resurgence of birdlife and vegetation in western Kuwait has been reported with *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* claiming a one hundred-fold increase in bird populations. The presence of thousands of unexploded bombs and mines has halted human encroachment in many areas allowing natural vegetation to become re-established. However, the slowing of desertification is considered temporary, as munitions experts continue to remove mines and unexploded bombs in the area. (From *American Birds*)

Since 1979 Charles Pilcher has been Bird Recorder in Kuwait and in 1985 he took over from the late Paul Haynes as Country Correspondent for *Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait he had maintained a database of bird records on the Faculty of Medicine's mainframe computer, but the Computer Centre was stripped and the machines taken to Iraq. Fortunately, a few storage tapes had been smuggled out of the Faculty early in the Occupation and one of them contained a section of the bird records.

Since returning to Kuwait shortly after liberation, Charles has re-established the computerised database. As Bird Recorder and Chairman of the Rarities Committee in Kuwait, he would be glad to receive details of records from the State after 1990. The address for correspondence is: Professor Charles Pilcher, Faculty of Medicine, PO Box 24923, Safat 13110, Kuwait.

# African Bird Club



African Ornithology has long needed a focus for gathering information on a continental basis and making it more accessible to both resident and overseas birders. From January 1 1994, the African Bird Club will perform this function and in addition will:

- foster an interest in bird conservation in the region
- promote and work with local African societies
- produce a twice-yearly colour bulletin, featuring identification papers and site guides
- encourage visits to lesser-known parts of the region
- locate and publish information on globally threatened and near-threatened species
- develop a Conservation Research Fund

Anyone can join. The standard membership rate is £12 per year. The ABC is also seeking Founder Members to fund its launch and first year of operation. Founder Membership is available as a one-off payment of £30 and includes the first year's subscription.

**For a membership leaflet, please contact: The Membership Secretary, The African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK.**



## Reviews

**del Hoyo J, Elliott A & Sargatal J (eds.) (1992) *Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol 1* Lynx Edicions, Barcelona pp696 price £95.00**

Just as the Birds of the Western Palearctic enters its final volume, so this new, more ambitious tome makes its appearance. Planned to run to ten volumes and covering all of the world's bird species, this first volume sets a high standard which if maintained will make this series an outstanding source of reference. The colour photographs in themselves virtually justify the price and are equally matched by the quality of the colour plates, though I must confess that I found the divers and grebes floating in mid-air a bit off-putting.

The first 70 or so pages are taken up with an overview of the project and a general introduction to the Class *Aves*, the latter covering the general biological aspects

of birds plus short sections on classification, migration and evolution. The remainder of volume 1 then goes on to give information on all bird families from Ostrich to swans - a total of 541 species.

Each Family is prefaced by an introduction giving an overview with sections on systematics, morphology, general habits, relationship with Man etc and is then followed by the species' accounts. As would be expected in a work of this size, the amount of space available for these accounts is limited. However, most species average at least a quarter of a page including a distribution map, all of which are remarkably clear despite the size limitations. Species accounts cover taxonomy, distribution, descriptive notes, habitat, food and feeding, breeding, movements, status and conservation, and a bibliography. The Status sections give global population estimates together with trends where known. Rare, Endangered and species whose status is Insufficiently Known are highlighted along with brief details of the conservation work required or currently underway. Together these give a reasonable account of each species which, when coupled with the bibliography, enables more detailed information to be tracked down easily and quickly.

No book is perfect but the faults I have found are all minor and mostly relate to production rather than factual errors. The most major one is that the breeding distribution maps for Eider and King Eider and Harlequin Duck and Common Scoter are transposed, but I understand amended maps have been produced.

In his Foreword, Christoph Imboden (Director-General of BirdLife International) says that 'any contribution to our knowledge of birds is an additional step towards ensuring their conservation.' This work promises to be a **major** contribution and the editors are to be congratulated not only on the quality of this first volume but for having the courage to undertake such a mammoth task. They deserve to succeed.

*Geoff Welch*

### **Harrison, Dr David L (1992) Mammals of Arabia (2nd Edition) price £75.00**

The recent OSME Expedition to Southern Yemen and Socotra, which ran from mid-March to mid-May 1993, was primarily directed towards the survey of the endemic and near endemic bird species of the region. During the course of the expedition casual records of mammal observations were also kept. The recently published 2nd edition of Dr David L Harrison's '*Mammals of Arabia*' was used as the main source of reference for identification and additional habitat and ecological information.

For identification purposes the descriptions of external characters are excellent. For example, I was able to make a positive identification from the remains of a long dead hedgehog, *Paraechinus aethiopicus*, by looking at the spines alone.

For critical features of identification in the more difficult groups such as Soricidae, Chiroptera and Rodentia, dentition and cranial character descriptions are

supplemented by precise line drawings. This is fine for specimens in the hand, in our case those found dead as road casualties etc or caught by live-trapping. However, for field identification (and it must be noted that this is not always possible) it would have been useful especially for the various genera of rats, gerbils and mice to have an accurate line drawing of each species. Some species are illustrated by line drawings but these are of variable quality. Photographs of museum skins are given for some species but as is often the case when using such material it is difficult to display clearly features useful for identification and any idea of 'jizz' is totally lost. A small selection of good field photographs are included but then this book is not attempting to be a 'field guide' and really does contain an immense amount of information making it the standard reference book for the mammalia found in the region.

The distribution maps are based on actual records of species which are plotted individually. I prefer this method of accurate distributional display of known range to the 'blanket shading' technique. Precise locality information is given in many cases.

The 'remarks' section for each species covers their basic ecology and biology and much useful information is given. It is apparent that for many species little is known and there is still much to be learnt about these.

In short if you are a resident in, or are visiting Arabia, and are seriously interested in its mammals then this book is crucial. You must have it or be able to refer to it, there is no other book covering this region comparable to it.

*David Showler*

### **Recently published**

Four items have been received by the Library which will be of interest to OSME members:

Shirihai, H & Bahat, O (1992) **Birdwatching in the Deserts of Israel** - a guide to birdwatching sites from Beersheba south to Eilat. For more information contact the Israel Ornithological Center, 155 Herzl Street, Tel-Aviv 68101, Israel or the International Birdwatching Center Eilat, PO Box 774, Eilat 88106, Israel.

Kirwan, G (1993) **Birds of Turkey 9: Hotamis Marshes** - the latest booklet in the series, available from OSME (see enclosed Sales list).

Peter, H (1990) **Waldrappdämmerung am Euphrat** - a booklet, in German, on the Bald Ibis at Birecik in Turkey. Details from Max Kasperek, Bleichstrasse 1, 6900 Heidelberg, Germany.

Oddie, B & Moore, D (1993) **A Birdwatchers Guide to the Birds of Cyprus** - a site guide and checklist for the birds of Cyprus. Available from Derek Moore, c/o Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Brooke House, The Green, Ashbocking, Nr. Ipswich, Suffolk, IP6 9JY. Proceeds from the sale of this guide are going to the Laona Project which aims to demonstrate the feasibility of ecologically-sound development of the Akamas Peninsula and Laona Plateau.





## Around the Region

Records in *Around the Region* are published for interest only, and their inclusion does not imply acceptance by the records committee of the relevant country. To submit records for *Bulletin 32*, covering the period September 93 to February 94, please write to *Around the Region*, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, UK.

Compiled by *Guy Kirwan*

Records refer to single individuals seen in 1993, unless otherwise stated.

### CYPRUS

**Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*. Asprekremos Dam, until 28 April. Phasouri reedbeds, 27 April-22 May intermittently. 1-3, Akhna Dam, 16-21 May at least. Becoming more regular. *D Whaley*.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*. Pair abandoned nest with four eggs in Paphos district. First breeding record was in 1992. *D Whaley et al.*

**Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*. One, then two, Paphos lighthouse, 31 March-2 April. Akrotiri gravel pits, 17-21 April. *D Whaley et al.*

**Black-winged Pratincole** *Glarcula nordmanni*. Phasouri, 23 April. *J A Rowlands*.

**Oriental Pratincole** *Glareola maldivarum*. Phasouri, 23 April. Third record for the Middle East and fourth in the Western Palearctic. *J A Rowlands*.

**Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus*. Akrotiri salt lake, 26 March. Scarce passage migrant. *D Whaley*.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*. One of race 'alboaxillaris', Akrotiri gravel pits, 9 May. First record of this race. *D Whaley*.

**Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*. Paphos, 8 April. An accidental visitor. *D Whaley*.

**Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus*. Paphos lighthouse, 13 April. Unusual passage migrant. *D Whaley*.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*. Paphos lighthouse: 2, 14 March; 25 March. Lady's Mile, 26 March. Scarce passage migrant. *D Whaley*.



**Bimaculated Lark** *Melanocorypha bimaculata*. Up to 15, Paphos lighthouse, early April, some remaining until 16 April. Unusually large numbers. *R Grimmond, D Whaley*.

**Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens*. Paphos lighthouse: 22 March; 2, 7 April. Akrotiri gravel pits, 24 March. Very scarce and irregular passage migrant. R Grimmond, D Whaley.

**Mourning Wheatear** *Oenanthe lugens*. Paphos lighthouse, 8-13 April. First record. R Grimmond, D Whaley.

**Hooded Wheatear** *Oenanthe monacha*. Ayia Napa Forest, May (exact date unavailable). Male Larnaca salt lake, 12 June. Third and fourth records. per D Whaley.

**White-crowned Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga*. Avagos Gorge, 30 March per D Whaley. Another, locality unavailable, April. T J Kealy. Cape Greco, 14 April. J Atherton, A Tweed. Third to fifth records.

**Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana*. Cape Greco, 12 April. Third record. J Atherton, A Tweed.

**Pale Rock Sparrow** *Petronia brachydactyla*. Cape Greco, 14 April. First record. J Atherton, A Tweed.

## EGYPT

**Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea*. 77km west of Alexandria, 26 February. S & M Baha el Din.

**Long-tailed Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax africanus*. Abu Simbel: 25, 18 March; 28-29 April. Third and fourth records this century. B Bland (Sunbird), M Ullman (SOF RES).

**Lesser Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus minor*. Abu Simbel, 27 November 1992. Apparently the first record for the Western Palearctic. P A Lassey, J M Pearson, T J Willoughby.

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*. Two flew north, Gebel el Zeit, 9 March. First record for the southern Gulf of Suez. A Grieve.

**Lappet-faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotus*. Sharm el Sheikh rubbish dump, 21 November 1992, probably of race 'negevensis'. S & M Baha el Din.

**Three-banded Plover** *Charadrius tricollaris*. Gebel Asfar, 6-26 March at least. First record for Egypt and the Western Palearctic. M Ahmed, M Elliot et al.

**Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii*. Second-winter, Montazah, Alexandria, 23 January-9 March. Scarce and irregular winter visitor. D Evans.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus*. Adult, Suez, 12 April. Scarce winter visitor. M Ullman (SOF RES).

**Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus*. Near adult, Lake Qarun, 28 April. Third record (cf Bull. 30 : 41). P Carr, B Jarvis.

**Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*. Immature, Ras Shukheir, 28 February. Rare visitor to the southern Gulf of Suez. A Grieve.

**African Collared Dove** *Streptopelia roseogrisea*. Abu Simbel, 27 November 1992. P A Lassey, J M Pearson, T J Willoughby. 3, Sharm el Sheikh, 17 April. M Ullman (SOF RES).

**Hume's Tawny Owl** *Strix butleri*. Two, Wadi el Fayran, 15 April. M Ullman (SOF RES).

**Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegypticus*. Dead, Ain Sukhna, 3 March. Rarely recorded from the Eastern Desert and Gulf of Suez areas. A Grieve.

**Syrian Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos syriacus*. Rafah, North Sinai, 23 April. Scarce wanderer to Sinai. S & M Baha el Din.

**Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens*. 1-2, El Fayoum, 25 March. First record for Egypt, several recent records from Israel (cf Bull. 30 : 44). B Bland (Sunbird).

**African Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla aguimp*. Abu Simbel, 29 April. Scarce and irregular at this locality. M Ullman (SOF RES).

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula*. Breeding confirmed during April at Lauran, Alexandria and Agami. Possibly widespread breeder throughout the

north-west Delta (contra 'Birds of Egypt'). *D Evans*.

**River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis*.

Between Safaga and Qena, 21 March. *B Bland (Sunbird), S & M Baha el Din, A Riad*.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*. Birds from 1992 (cf Bull 30 : 42) stayed until 17 March at Montazah, Alexandria, max 5, 15 January. *D Evans*.

**Serin** *Serinus serinus*. Six, in breeding habitat at Gianacilis, north-west Delta, 19 March. Irregularly recorded and status uncertain. *D Evans*.

**Siskin** *Carduelis spinus*. Birds from 1992 (cf Bull 30 : 42) stayed until 2 April, Montazah, Alexandria, max 15, 15 January. *D Evans*.

## ISRAEL

**Schlegel's Petrel** *Pterodroma incerta*. A bird possibly of this species, Eilat, 2 March. Two previous records most recent in April 1989. *L Boon*.

**Streaked Shearwater** *Calonectris leucomelas*. Gulf of Suez, Eilat, 1 May-20 July at least, but irregular. Second record for Israel and the Western Palearctic, first was in 1992 (cf Bull 30 : 42). *L Boon, H Shirihai et al*.

**Tropicbird** *Phaethon sp.* Singles, Eilat, 19 & 27 March. *L Boon, H Jannes*.

**Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*. 65 wintered at En Afeq, Kafr Masaryk and Kfar Rupin. *B Shai/TWRG*.



**Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*.

Two, Beit She'an valley, all winter, one later found dead. *B Shai/IWRG*.

**Yellow-billed Stork** *Mycteria ibis*. Beit She'an and Jezreel valley areas, late May. About ten or eleven records (cf Kumerloeve 1984). *B Shai/IWRG*.

**Fulvous Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna bicolor*. Eilat, 30 March. Potentially first record, but origin unknown. *C Kirtland (Ornitholidays)*.

**Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*. 2, southern Golan Heights area, all winter. Rare in Israel. *L Boon, B Shai/IWRG*.

**Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax*. 7 winter count, two regular at Gan Shmuel Kibbutz, Hafer valley. *B Shai/IWRG*.

**Kittlitz's Plover** *Charadrius pecuarius*. 3, Ma'agan Mikhael, all winter. Now regular at this locality in all winters since 1989. *L N Andersen (DOF), B Shai/IWRG*.

**Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria*. 42, throughout Israel in winter, including 21, Yarkon fields, Tel Aviv. *B Shai/IWRG*.

**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus*. The bird previously mentioned (Bull 30 : 43) either of the nominate race or 'omissus' remained until the end of February at least. *L Boon*.

**Cyprus Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe cypriaca*. Mount Hermon, Golan Heights, 24 March. Scarce passage migrant. *C Kirtland (Ornitholidays)*.

**Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis*. Trapped, Eilat, 26 May. First record for Israel per *L Boon*.

## OMAN

**Comb Duck** *Sarkidiornis melatotos*. Male reported earlier (Bull 26 : 62) bred with a Mallard at Razat Farm in 1992. *I Mcleish*.

**Cotton Teal** *Nettapus coromandelianus*. Female, Masirah airbase, 10-11 December 1992. First record for the island. *J Bryan*.

**Comcrake** *Crex crex*. Dauka, 11 September 1992. Hilf, Masirah, 30 October 1992. *H & J Eriksen, C M Greaves*.

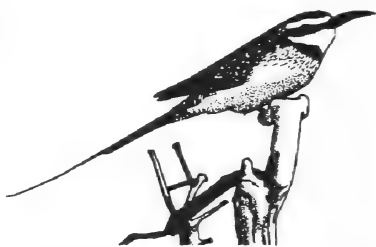
**White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus*. Dagmar, 12 February. Thirteenth record. *H & J Eriksen*.

**Watercock** *Gallixrex cinerea*. Wadi Darbat, 18 & 24 April, 7 & 8 May 1992. First record. *J Ash, C H & K Fry, W F Simpson*.

**Slender-billed Curlew** *Numenius tenuirostris*. Correction: Abb Island, 5 January 1990. Near Filim, 6 January 1990. Barr Al Hikman, 8 January 1990. Second to fourth records.

**South Polar Skua** *Catharcta antarctica*. Rass Rassas, Masirah, 25 October 1991. First record. *J Bryan*.

**Koel** *Eudynamis scolopacea*. Male, Haramel, near Muscat, 26 May-4 June 1992 per *M D Gallagher et al*.



**White-throated Bee-eater** *Merops albicollis*. Two, Sultan Qaboos University, 29 September 1989. First record. *P & R Scraton*.

**Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus*. Hilf, Masirah, 30-31 October 1992. Masirah airbase, 30 January-13 March. First and second records. *J Bryan, C M Greaves*.

**Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka*. A 'vittata', Hilf, Masirah, 20-22 February 1992. *J Bryan, C M Greaves*.

**Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach*. Masirah airbase, 31 December 1992-2 January. Third record. *J Bryan*.

**Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus*. Masirah airbase, 1-2 November 1991. First record. *J Bryan, C M Greaves*.

**Wattled Starling** *Creatophora cineracea*.

Two, Dauka, 9 September 1992. H & J Eriksen.

**Common Mynah** *Acridotheres tristis*.

At least 55, Al Hail, 20 November 1992. Largest ever flock in Oman. H & J Eriksen.

**Grey-necked Bunting** *Emberiza*

*buchannani*. Hilf, Masirah, 23 October-2 November 1991. First record. J Bryan, C M Greaves.

**Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus*

*ichthyæetus*. Over 100, Al Khobar, January-March, max 120, 18 February. G Ramsay.

**Roseate Tern** *Sterna dougallii*. Karan, North-Eastern Province, 12-15 July. P Symens.

**White-breasted Kingfisher.** *Halcyon smyrnensis*. Yanbu al-Sinaiyah, 6 April. First record for western Arabia per I Vickors.

## QATAR

**Palm Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis*.

Abundant, farm 30km west of Doha, 31 May. First record away from towns. B & H Nation.

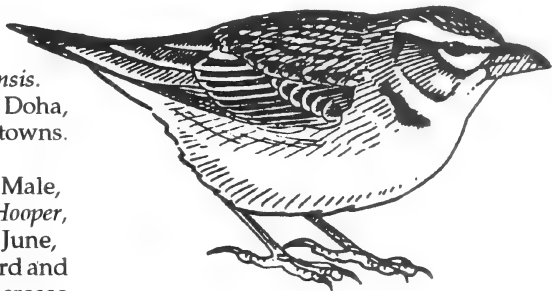
**Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis*. Male, unnamed locality, 16 April. A Hooper, B. & H. Nation. Doha: two, 16 June, male, 18-20 June. M Fearn. Third and fourth records, but see recent increase in Bahrain.

**Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunni*. 3, north of Ghanlya, 16 March. First record, previous records now rejected. J C Oldfield.

**Long-billed Pipit** *Anthus similis*. 2, Mukainas lake and Ras Abrouk, 21-26 March. First record, previous records now rejected. J & C Oldfield.

**Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*. Mamoura date farm: 2, 4 March; one, 5 March. First confirmed records, but not unexpected. J & C Oldfield.

**Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea*. Ras Abrouk, 24 March. First confirmed record per J Oldfield.



**Bimaculated Lark** *Melanocorypha bimaculata*. Nested Karan, North-Eastern Province, July. First breeding record for Saudi Arabia. P Symens.

**Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*. Nest with three young, Wadi Rabigh, 23 July. First proven breeding in central Hejaz. B Meadows.

**Dusky Thrush** *Turdus naumanni*. Adult, Al Qatif, Eastern Province, 10 February. Second record for Saudi Arabia. P Symens.

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. Two, Dafi Park, Jubail, Eastern Province, 14 February. P Symens.

**Pale Rock Sparrow** *Petronia brachydactyla*. 120, Wadi Rabigh, 5 March. B Meadows.

## SAUDI ARABIA

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*. King Abdulaziz airbase. Dhahran, 13 February, of the race '*rubirostris*'. Uncommon winter visitor. G Ramsay.

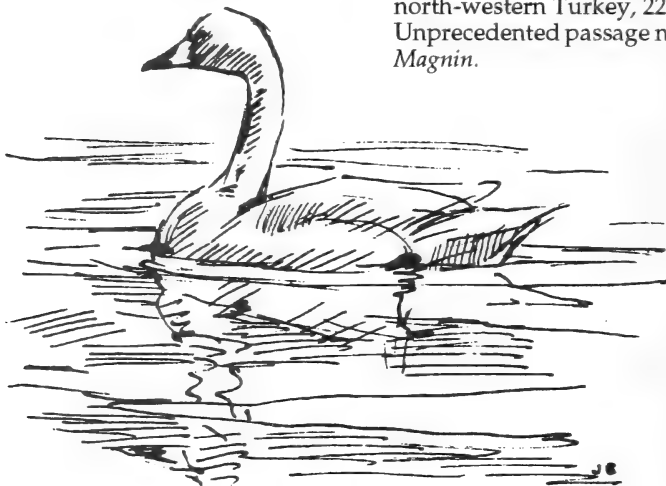
**Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*. Three, northern part of Eastern Province, early February. M Jennings.

## TURKEY

**Slavonian Grebe** *Podiceps auritus*. Kizilirmak Delta, 6 March. Second record since 1972. S Baris, S & B Demircan, S Ofluoglu.

**White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. 23 nests, Ereğli marshes, 16-17 June. Bred again at Seyfe Gölü this year. G Magnin, M Yazar.

**Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus ruber*. c600 pairs, Camalti Tuzlasi, June. M Siki. c300 pairs, Ereğli Marshes, 16-17 June. Bred again at Seyfe Gölü. G Magnin, M Yazar.



**White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala*. 3 males, Yesilirmak Delta, late May. First record from a potential breeding area. S Demircan, 5, Akkaya Golu, near Sultan marshes, 7 June. M Davies. Probably breeding, the first such record from a dam lake. 417, Kizilirmak Delta, 20 February. S Baris, S Demircan.

**Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus*. Several thousand, several areas in north-western Turkey, 22-23 May. Unprecedented passage numbers. G Magnin.

**Bewick's Swan** *Cygnus columbianus*. 51, Burdur Golu, late February at least. Fourth record. A Green, M Yazar et al.

**Bean Goose** *Anser fabilis*. Goksu Delta, February. Details awaited. Very rare winter visitor. DHKD.

**Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus*. Goksu Delta, February. Fewer than five previous records. DHKD.

**Scaup** *Aythya marila*. 22, Kizilirmak Delta, 20 February. S Baris, S Demircan.

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*. 3 females, Kizilirmak Delta, 18 October 1992. Very rare winter visitor. S Baris, S Demircan.

**American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica*. Goksu Delta, 15 May. Second record, first was in 1981. G Kirwan.

**Knot** *Calidris canutus*. Ahlat, 20 May. M Davies, G Kirwan. Kizilirmak Delta, 29 May. S Baris, S Demircan, G Kirwan.

**Slender-billed Curlew** *Numenius tenuirostris*. Kulu Golu, 12 May. Regarded as a possible only, last Turkish record was in August 1986. J Glover, C Skinner.

**Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Picus canus*. Fairly common, Camlihemsin, April-May. J Faldborg. Recorded, Saluklu Golu, May. G Magnin, M Yazar.

Between Alacam and Kizlan, 29 May. G Kirwan. All are new localities indicating that this species is rather more widespread and common than previously thought.

**Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii*.

Male, Boz Dagi, mid May. Most westerly record ever. G Magnin.

**River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis*. 3, Yesilirmak Delta, 6-7 June. Unusually late for migrants, all were singing. G Kirwan.

**Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola*. Van marshes: 2, 21 May; 29 May. Cenge Golu, Ercek Golu area: 10:20 & 23 May. 2, Bulanik, 29 May. M Davies, G Kirwan, M Wheeler.

**Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata*. Ercek Golu, 20 May. Third documented record, another from April 1993, on the Central Plateau remains unsubmitted. M Davies, G Kirwan.

**Mongolian Trumpet Finch** *Bucanetes mongolicus*. 6, Dogubayazit, 24 May; some, 26 May, 3-4, 9-10 July. 2, Tendurek Gecidi, 24 May. 3, near Ozalp, 30 May. 3, Sogusku, near Tendurek Gecidi, 2 June. M Davies, A Hogg, G Kirwan, M Wheeler.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

All records are per C Richardson unless otherwise stated.

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*. 3, Sharjah, 6 March. Rare winter visitor. S Aspinall.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina*. Dubai fish farm, 28 March. Second record.

**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni*. Wadi Bih, 3 January. Unusual in winter. 24, Ras al Khaimah, 1 March. 93, Hamraniyah, 3-4 April. Exceptionally large numbers.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius*. Abu al Abyadh, near Abu Dhabi, 27 February-5 March. Fourth record.

**Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus*. Dead, 20 June. Status uncertain.

**Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*. 98, Khor al Beidah, 28 May. Record numbers.

**Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris*. Flock at Umm al Quwain (cf Bull 30:46) may have dispersed to Murawat Island, where, 227, 22 March. Largest ever flock in the UAE and the Arabian Gulf. S Aspinall.

**Pintail Snipe** *Gallinago stenura*. 7, Emirates golf course, 27 December 1992. Dubai fish farm, 20 April. Continuing run of records from this part of the Arabian gulf region.

**Striated Scops Owl** *Otus brucei*. Recorded at two localities in early April. 3, at nest site in Ras al Khaimah, 16 June. Only recently added to the list of breeding birds, although long suspected.

**Small Skylark** *Alauda gulgula*. 2, Khor Dubai, 17 January. 2, Abu Dhabi, 18 March. 2, Abu al Abyadh, 26 March-18 April. Fifth to seventh records, that previously published as third (Bull 30:47) was fourth.

**Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus*. 2, Abu al Abyadh, 25 February-2 March.

**Hooded Wheatear** *Oenanthe monacha*. 4, Jebel Hafit, 29 December 1992. Al Ain, 16 March. Status unclear.

**Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus (trochiloides) nitidus* Abu Dhabi, 17 April. First record of this (sub) species.



**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. Khor Kalba, 4 January. Third record, most recent was in December 1992 (Bull 30 : 47).

**Dead Sea Sparrow** *Passer moabiticus*. Singing, Murawah Island, 22 February. Second record. Perhaps further indication of where the Iraq/Turkey populations spend the winter. *S Aspinall*.

**Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*. 6, Ras al Khaimah, 20 January. On 2 March a colony of 200 birds was found at this site, the only known colony in the UAE.

**Pale Rock Sparrow** *Petronia brachydactyla*. Over 1000, near Al Ain, 16 March. Largest flock ever in the UAE of this poorly known species.

## YEMEN (INCLUDING SOCOTRA ISLAND)

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus*. Singles, near Sayhut, 23 April; and on a pelagic trip off Sayhut, 23 April. Very few previous records. *OSME*.

**Jouanin's Petrel** *Bulweria fallax*. 260, pelagic trip off Socotra, 2 April. 188, pelagic trip off Sayhut, 23 April. Breeding grounds remain unknown, although previously unrecorded in these waters at this time. *OSME*.

**Masked Booby** *Sula dactylata*. Off Ras Di'billit, Socotra, 4 April. *OSME*.

**Lappet-faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotus*. 2, Mar'aytsprings, 1 May;

12, between Al Ghaydah and Wadi Zawawh, 1 May. First confirmed records and evidence that this species is more widespread in the Arabian Peninsula than previously realised. *OSME*.

**White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus*. Adult, Wadi Hajar, 29 March. First record for Yemen. *OSME*.

**Arabian Bustard** *Ardeotis arabs*. 4 & 5 seen on consecutive days at the best known site and another at a new locality in the south-west. *OSME*

**Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni*. 3, Al Qutay, 16 April. First record for Yemen. *OSME*.

**Knot** *Calidris canutus*. South coast of Socotra, 3 April. First record for the island and second record for Yemen. *OSME*.

**Roseate Tern** *Sterna dougallii*. 1-2, Ras Hebak, near Hadibu, Socotra, 6 April. Rare in Arabian Sea area, first record for Yemen. *OSME*.

**African Scop's Owl** *Otus senegalensis*. 4, Jebal Iraf, 21 March. 2, Wadi Yashbum, 27 March. 3, Wadi Mararah, 27 April. Max 5, different area of Wadi Mararah, 28 April. 2, Shahrut, 29 April. Clarification of the species' range in Yemen. *OSME*.

**Plain Nightjar** *Caprimulgus inornatus*. Up to 3, Jebal Iraf, 21-22 March. 2, as seen, 3 May. 3, Al Ghuraf, 3 May. 5, near Qatn, 4 May. Only one previous record for Yemen. *OSME*.

**Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunnii*. 25, between Shabwa and Marib Dam in possible breeding habitat, 6 May. *OSME*.

I should like to thank the following for their help in compiling this review; S Baris, Arnoud B van de Berg (Dutch Birding), D Evans, A Grieve, Steve Gantlett (*Birding World*), Rod Martins, J Mortemore, Bob Nation, John Oldfield, Adam Rowlands, A J Stones, Magnus Ullman (SOF RES), Effie Warr and D Whaley.





OSME

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Regrettably Mark Boyd has had to stand down early and we are looking for a new Editor of the *Bulletin*, to start immediately. The desktop publishing is being handled by Harry Scott at the RSPB, so the role now consists of correspondence with authors, editing and keeping the *Bulletin* to schedule. Some editorial experience would be an advantage.

### *Sandgrouse* Editor

In July 1994 Duncan Brooks retires after five years as Editor of *Sandgrouse*. To replace him we are seeking someone with editorial experience and a good knowledge of Middle Eastern ornithology. The job currently involves the entire production of the journal, from correspondence with authors to desktop publishing but, as has been done with the *Bulletin*, the potential exists for dividing the job into the editorial and production processes.

### Promotions Assistant

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To collect, collate and publish ornithological data on the birds of the Middle East.

To encourage an interest in and conservation of birds of the Middle East.

To develop a mutually beneficial working relationship with all environmental and conservation bodies and natural history societies in and concerned with the Middle East.

**Membership** is open to all and spans over 40 countries. Membership subscriptions are: £10 individual, £15 family; airmail supplement £1.50 Europe, £3 rest of the world. Life membership £200.

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