



## ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

c/o THE LODGE, SANDY, BEDFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND.

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EDITOR: A VITTERY

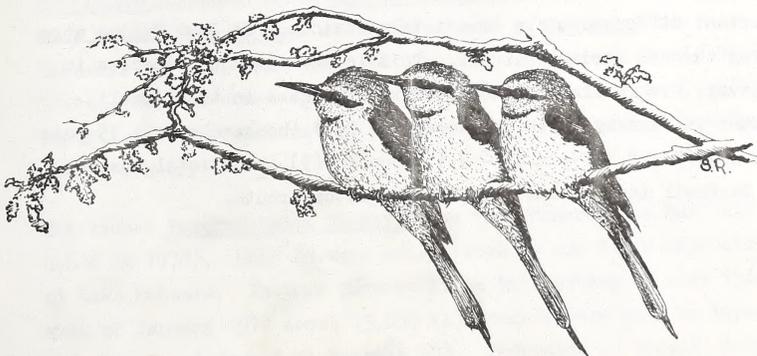
PRODUCTION: D J FISHER

It had been hoped that circulation of the first issue of "The Sandgrouse" would have preceded this Bulletin. Unfortunately printing problems make it likely that members will not receive their copies for a few weeks. The Editors regret this delay but are pleased to report that work is already well advanced on the second issue, which should be published before the end of the year.

### RECENT NEWS

#### Ban on Hunting in Jordan

The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan inform us that a ban on the hunting of all animals (excluding fish) was imposed in August 1979. The ban will remain in force for five years, after which the situation will be reviewed. The Ministry of Commerce has been instructed to cease the issue of import licences for any items of hunting equipment. Hunting licences which were valid at the time the ban was introduced have been revoked.



SOME NOTES ON WATERBIRDS OBSERVED IN EGYPT AND NORTH SINAI - 1978/79

Y Paran

Some valuable information has been added to that collected by the Nature Reserve Authority of Israel over seven years (1972-78) on the migration of waterbirds on the North coast of Sinai (7), by the Netherlands Ornithological Expedition to Egypt (3,4). The expedition surveyed the major wetland habitats of Egypt in January-February 1979 and collected up to date information on the wintering waterbird population of the area concerned.

It is interesting to compare the data collected by the two surveys:

<u>Main Groups of Waterbirds Counted</u>	<u>Sinai Autumn 1978</u>	<u>Egypt Jan-Feb 1979</u>
Grebes	6	13,735
Hérons (except Cattle Egret)	26,151	843
Cattle Egret	324	16,087
Ducks (except Garganey)	402	117,991
Garganey	202,437	-
Coot	-	184,804
Waders	45,429	20,787
Gulls	3,700	84,268
Terns	18,855	24,480

Several important differences are immediately obvious. No Coot Fulica atra were migrating through Bardawil at all. This is the commonest species in the Dutch survey. It is also the most numerous species in the Israeli waterbird count in January, with an average of 29.1 thousand over a 15 year period between 1965 and 1979, s.d.  $\pm$  9.1 thousand (9). The total absence of Coots in Bardawil indicates a different migratory route.

Over two hundred thousand Garganey Anas querquedula were counted in Bardawil in 1978. The number of migrating birds of this species is probably much higher. This species was not encountered in the Dutch survey in January in Egypt. In our opinion the origin of the Bardawil birds is the lower Dnieper (1).

They probably make the journey from the Ukraine without intermediate stops, which would account for their absence in significant numbers in Turkey and Cyprus. The length of this first leg of their migratory flight is certainly feasible. The complete absence of the species in Egypt seems to corroborate the views of Moreau (5,6) that the Garganey follows a diagonal route across the Sahara to wintering grounds in the inundation zone of the Niger.

The paucity of other species of duck in Bardawil, compared to their abundance in Egypt (especially of Teal Anas crecca and Shoveler Anas clypeata) again leads to the conclusion that these birds must use other routes to reach their wintering grounds.

The absence of White Pelicans Pelecanus onocrotalus is also worth noting. The bulk of the tens of thousands of Pelicans migrating over Israel in autumn follow the Rift Valley and probably reach Upper Egypt and the Sudan. Yet the Pelicans seen in flocks of 100-200 over Bardawil should reach the Delta and their absence there is therefore unexplained.

The Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis is very common in Israel and there is a breeding population (10), which by now must be over 10,000 birds. The numbers reported from Wadi Natrun are astonishing. Relatively few were seen over Bardawil. The differences in other herons are also remarkable. Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax, Squacco Heron Ardeola ralloides, Little Egret Egretta garzetta, Grey Heron Ardea cinerea and Purple Heron A. purpurea are migrating over Bardawil in their thousands, yet the Night Heron and Purple Heron are not listed, and the other species are only poorly represented, in the Dutch survey. There is no easy explanation, as the habitats described from Egypt are obviously 'heron country'.

The Avocet Recurvirostra avosetta was very numerous in Bardawil (5,585 in 1973, 4,426 in 1978). Only 85 were encountered by the Dutch expedition, 55 of them at Lake Manzala. In this respect it is interesting to note that in the first week of January 1972 about 15,000 (!) Avocets were seen on Lake Bur Fuad, across the Suez Canal from Lake Manzala (8). Thousands of Avocets were seen on other

dates in January of the same year from the causeway leading to Port Said on both sides of the Canal.

Of the other waders, Sanderling Calidris alba were very numerous in Bardawil (5,223 in 1978, 4,042 in 1973). Meinertzhagan (2) lists the species as 'one of the most abundant shore birds'. Only two were seen by the Dutch expedition! Little Stint Calidris minuta was the most numerous wader in both surveys, but Redshanks Tringa totanus were more numerous in Egypt and Green Sandpipers Tringa ochropus in Bardawil.

As to gulls, fewer migrated through north Sinai than were observed in Egypt (especially impressive are the numbers of Black-headed Gulls Larus ridibundus), on the lakes of Egypt, but at least the species composition is more or less identical. This is not so with terns. In Egypt Gull-billed Tern Gelochelidon nilotica, Caspian Tern Sterna caspia, Common Tern Sterna hirundo, Little Tern Sterna albifrons and White-winged Black Tern Chlidonias leucopterus are all absent from the Egyptian records, whilst in Bardawil they were seen in their hundreds and even thousands!

It has to be emphasised that the Bardawil records refer to autumn migration, whilst the observations in Egypt are concerned with the wintering population. The inference that can be drawn from a comparison of the data is therefore necessarily restricted. The species composition and numbers of migrating birds in Bardawil change with the advance of the season. For example, the tremendous passage of Garganey becomes a trickle towards the middle of October and other ducks take their place (although in considerably lesser numbers). As pointed out in (3), by any criteria, the Bardawil Lagoon is of major international importance, as it probably serves as a stopping area and re-fueling station for whole populations of some species from the Western Palearctic.

It would be useful and rewarding to perform a survey in mid-September (the peak of the autumn passage) to the west of the Suez Canal, in the Lake Manzala area, in order to find out more about this most important flyway beyond what has been mapped out over north Sinai.

References:

- (1) Dementiev G P et al. (1968): Birds of the Soviet Union.
- (2) Meinertzhagen, R. (1930): Nicholl's Birds of Egypt.
- (3) Meininger, P L et al. (1979): Report of the Netherlands Ornithological Expedition to Egypt.
- (4) Meininger, P L and Mullie, W C. (1979): Some results of the Ornithological Expedition to Egypt in January and February 1979, Bull. No 3 OSME.
- (5) Moreau, R E. (1967): Waterbirds over the Sahara. Ibis 109, 232-259.
- (6) Moreau, R E. (1972): The Palearctic-African Bird Migration Systems.
- (7) Paran, Y. (1978): Autumn Migration of Waterbirds on the North Coast of Sinai, XVII IOC
- (8) Paz, U. (1972): Flamingoes near Port Said, Sal'it Vol 1 No 3: 132-133.
- (9) Paz, U. (1976): Report to the International Conference on Conservation of Wetlands and Waterfowl, 1974. (In Hebrew).
- (10) Suarez, S and Paz, U. (1975): Breeding colonies of Herons in Israel, in Nature Conservation In Israel, Report No 1: 43-95.

RAFOS Masirah Expedition 1979

Michael Jennings

For its major 1979 expedition the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society returned to the island of Masirah which lies in the Arabian Sea just off the coast of Oman. The objective was to fill in some of the gaps in the knowledge of the avifauna of the south east corner of Arabia and to answer some of the questions posed by the previous expedition to the island in 1976, (see OSME bulletin number 2 page 16). The expedition was originally scheduled to last three weeks from the end of October: however as transport of stores and members was very much on a 'grace and favour' basis the party had some difficulty in getting back to the United Kingdom and in the event we were away five weeks.

Masirah is a rather low lying island, some 64km long and an average of 10km wide. The coasts are a mixture of surf beaches, rocky shores and tidal mudflats with, in one locality, an area of mangrove. Inland there are extensive scrub plains sloping gently up to some craggy low hills which rise to 222m at the highest point. The plains are dissected by numerous wadis (dry water courses) some lined with date palms and tamarisk.

A basic aim at the expedition was to record and quantify late autumn migrants and early winter visitors and to achieve this four teams were dispersed throughout the island. The teams camped at different sites each few days and visited some of the offshore islets so that the whole of the island was continuously covered. Regular co-ordinated seacounts and high tide wader counts were carried out and there was an extensive programme to ring and colour dye waders and seabirds. In all a total of some 734 birds of 77 species were ringed. Birds found dead were preserved for the skin and skeleton collection of the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.

Of the 180 or so species recorded during the expedition five were new for the island. These were Tufted Duck Aythya fuligula, Pintail Snipe Gallinago stenura, Grey Hypocolius Hypocolius ampelinus, Eversmann's Redstart Phoenicurus erythronotus and Paddyfield Warbler Acrocephalus agricola. (As far as I know the last species was new for the whole of the Arabian Peninsula). Other species recorded which were second records for the island or very rare in the region were Persian Shearwater Puffinus lherminieri, Moorhen Gallinula chloropus, Houbara Bustard Chlamydotis undulata, Little Pratincole Glareola lactea, Rufous Turtle Dove Streptopelia orientalis, Black-throated Thrush Turdus ruficollis, Spanish Sparrow Passer hispaniolensis and Rose-coloured Starling Sturnus roseus. There is a very strong Indian or north-eastern influence in these rare species and it may well be that unusual climatic conditions combined to bring them all to Masirah at this time. Possibly the same conditions also brought the Noctule Bat Nyctalus noctula which was picked up freshly dead in early November. This migratory species has not been found previously anywhere on the Arabian Peninsula; its nearest breeding localities being in Palestine and the south Caspian region.

The main passerine migration had taken place before the expedition arrived but waders and seabirds were still very numerous, mostly on migration, and some species were beginning to settle down for the winter. Over 30 species of wader were recorded, many in large flocks: 4,000 Bar-tailed Godwits Limosa lapponica, mixed flocks of 5,000 Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers Charadrius leschenaultii and C. mongolos, 500 Turnstones Arenaria interpres, 200 Curlew Sandpipers Calidris ferruginea, 1,800 Dunlins C. alpina, 400 Redshanks Tringa totanus, 60 Greenshanks T. nebularia and

400 Curlews Numenius arquata. Gulls and terns were especially numerous. Although not all the wintering gulls had arrived there was a marked passage of terns throughout the period, ten species in all being recorded. (The local breeding Sooty Gulls Larus hemprichii still had young in the nest in early November.) Offshore Wilson's Petrels Oceanites oceanicus were very common (sometimes several hundred could be counted in one sweep of the horizon), and the occasional Masked Booby Sula dactylatra and Red-billed Tropicbird Phaethon aethereus put in an appearance.

In comparison with the coast the birds of the interior were relatively scarce. Being a rather impoverished island with little habitat diversity, it supports only about a dozen regularly breeding land birds. It seems to me however that there is suitable habitat for a few more of the resident desert species from the mainland which for some reason have never managed to bridge the 19km sea gap. Even the House Sparrow Passer domesticus does not occur. The Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse Pterocles exustus was probably the most conspicuous species inland with groups of 500 being seen on occasions. There were also small numbers of Crowned Sandgrouse P. coronatus. Probably the most numerous raptors of the 12 species seen were the migrant Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus and Pallid Harrier C. macrourous although the few pairs of resident Egyptian Vultures Neophron percnopterus were to be seen most days.

A report and cine film of the expedition are in preparation.

THE SPECIFIC IDENTITY OF THE BUZZARDS OF CENTRAL ANATOLIA      A Vittery

During my residence in Ankara (1966-1969) I became familiar with the resident 'red' Buzzards Buteo sp. of the Central Plateau of Turkey. These were dark, bulky, sluggish and generally untidy birds. I was greatly struck by the contrast between these and the classical Long-legged Buzzards Buteo rufinus which passed through the area in small numbers in spring. These immaculate, pale-headed birds were much larger and longer-winged, paler (lacking the chestnut on the underwing of the resident birds) and normally had more uniform tails, never with the broad, well-defined chestnut terminal band of the majority of the residents. The back and upper wing coverts, in particular, were noticeably less saturated.

Other visitors to the Central Plateau, comparing the resident buzzards with nominate Buzzard Buteo buteo buteo and the small rather neat B.b. vulpinus which were to be seen in numbers on migration over the Bosphorus, perhaps understandably assumed the bulky, chestnut plateau birds to be rufinus, not having the opportunity to compare them directly with the migrants, which were never numerous. The existing literature did not help an already confused situation. Voous (1060) shows rufinus as breeding right across Turkey but has a question mark for buteo. Vaurie (1965) regards rufinus as only a summer visitor to south east Europe and Asia Minor, but does not suggest resident status for either of the vulpinus group (Vulpinus/menetriesi) buzzards in Turkey either. However, Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1952) describe 'Buteo menetriesi' as follows:

"Very similar to vulpinus but generally more chestnut; below less barred; under wing coverts chestnut; tail chestnut with a subterminal bar ..... A smaller, darker bird than rufinus but distinctly more richly coloured than vulpinus"

and, moreover, give the distribution as S Russia and Turkey. I agree with Vaurie that their "in non-breeding season to Cape Province" (where vulpinus is a common visitor and displays great variation in plumage) is erroneous, but submit that their diagnosis is otherwise correct. The description fits the Anatolian birds exactly. Personal observation of rufinus in Pakistan and Africa subsequent to my departure from Turkey have reinforced my view that they could not belong to that species.

In recent years there have been reliable reports of nesting rufinus in Central Anatolia but, as I failed to find a breeding pair in three years, they would seem to be either very sparingly distributed or irregular breeders. Of the two species, rufinus therefore deserves the question mark on the distribution map. An examination of specimens, which may be obtainable from Ankara Zoo (where numbers used to be kept in conditions unlikely to encourage longevity), would be a useful exercise.

The buzzards seen during a short visit to Eastern Turkey in September 1971 conformed to the same pattern and, I suggest, also belonged to the race Buteo buteo menetriesi.

References:

- Vocous, K H. Atlas of European Birds (1960)  
Vaurie, C. The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna (Non-passerines) (1965)  
Mackworth-Praed, C W and Grant, C H B. Birds of Eastern and North-Eastern Africa (1952).

The Holarctic Avian Speciation Atlas Project

OSME members may be interested to know that preparations for a Holarctic atlas are now in progress. The intention is to map the 1900-odd 'conventional' bird species which are members of the Holarctic avifauna and regularly breed - or are presumed to do so - within that avifaunal area upon the same lines as was done for the African birds by Hall, Moreau, Snow and others.

The entire OSME area with the whole of Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan is included; the southern limit in northern Africa is that adopted in the Western Palearctic Handbook and by Vocous in his list.

We estimate that the work of preparing this atlas will take ten years, all going well, from start to completion of the final maps ready for the printer. It is envisaged that the work will be an international effort involving authors for the different bird groups in several different countries and the collectors of the 'raw' data in many countries.

Regarding authors, we envisage them plotting the data upon the working-sheet maps, posting after checking to the final maps and then writing a commentary for each map with accompanying selected references pertinent to the species or species-group shown. It must be emphasised that authors are not expected to be left to gather in the 'raw' data themselves for their bird groups, with certain exceptions. This data-gathering is to be a separate operation altogether with authors getting all this delivered to them. A bird group for an author can be very flexible and mean anything from a whole Order down to just one genus in sore need of up to date revision along modern lines - the 'typical' nightjars Caprimulgus and the sandgrouse Pterocles are good examples.

For the data gathering operation we have divided up the entire Holarctic into just over 300 areas grouped into 11 regions; the OSME area is comprised of 25 areas straddling three regions. Each area has been assigned a code number - thus 3.34 is the Caspian slope of Iran with the Atrek basin; the remainder of Iran is 7.13 and eastern Jordan with the Azraq oasis is 8.05.

We would like OSME members to write in to tell us that they are interested in the Holarctic project and support it and that they either (1) cannot volunteer to either author a bird group or organise data collection for any of the 25 Middle Eastern areas; (2) would like to author a bird group - which one?; (3) would like to organise data collection (from field, field records, museum specimens and the literature) for an area - which one?; (4) would like further information/details. We need as much interest in, support for and active participation in, this Holarctic project as possible. Every letter received will be personally answered by

Derek T Lees-Smith  
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#### Rare Breeding Birds in the Middle East

It has been brought to the Society's notice that official bodies in Israel have expressed concern over the disturbance of rare breeding species by the increasing number of birdwatchers visiting the country.

We would ask anybody intending to visit the Middle East to question their motives before approaching a rare breeding bird site and to refrain from circulating information and publicising any such sites or localities. If such information got into the hands of the unscrupulous it could be used by egg collectors and others with disastrous effect. Please exercise caution!

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Colour-ringed Greater Flamingoes

Greater Flamingo (Phoenicopterus ruber roseus) chicks have been colour-ringed in the Camargue each season since 1977 and this programme is likely to be continued for several more years. The PVC 'Darvic' rings are placed on the bird's tibia and are either yellow or white, engraved three times with a series of letters (in black) which allow individual recognition if read with a telescope. According to the year of ringing, there may be a coloured tape placed vertically between the series of letters.

Any sightings of these birds should be reported to the address below with details, even if it is not possible to read the inscription on the ring. All reports will be acknowledged.

Alan Johnson, Foundation Tour du Valat, Le Sambuc, 13200 Arles, France.

The Caucasian Black Grouse

The World Pheasant Association would like to hear from anyone interested in making a study of the Caucasian Black Grouse Tetrao mlokosiewiczii in Eastern Turkey.

Please write to the Administrator, World Pheasant Association, Harraton Square, Exning, nr Newmarket, Suffolk, England.

REVIEW

Waldrapp, Geronticus eremita (LINNAEUS, 1758), und Glattnackenrapp, Geronticus calvus (BODDAERT, 1783): Zur Geschichte ihrer Erforschung und zur gegenwärtigen Bestandssituation. Hans Kumerloewe  
Ann.Naturhistor.Mus.Wien 81: 319-349. Vienna, February 1978

Herr Dr. Kumerloewe is perhaps the greatest living authority on the Bald Ibis and this latest of his many papers on the subject is a fascinating and learned account of the history of its protection and its present dwindling distribution. The author considers that the Birecik colony and the remaining colonies in Morocco contain in total about a thousand birds. The African colonies of the African Bald Ibis G. calvus in the eastern and central regions of South Africa contain only about two thousand birds.

The Bald Ibis's range once reached as far as the Alps but it has declined steadily over the last few hundred years, perhaps as the result of human predation with firearms. Both species are now endangered and require strenuous protection by the Turkish, Moroccan and South African Governments. The paper is supported by an incredible 328 references and is therefore of considerable interest to the bibliographer. They range from 'Ein new Kochbuch' by Rumpolt in 1581 to 'Der Waldrapp (Geronticus eremita)' by Hirsch and Schenker in 1977.

The eighteen pages of actual text are packed with accurate information compiled with meticulous German thoroughness and includes details of zoos with Bald Ibises, its use as an Egyptian hieroglyphic, that Turkish birds have shorter beaks than Moroccan, details of postage stamps bearing the bird, and so on. This paper is recommended reading for all German-speaking ornithologists.

Bill Griffiths

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

##### A Check List of the Birds of Tabuk, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: A J Stagg

Tabuk is situated in the north west of Saudi Arabia, a corner of the country which is poorly documented. Arthur Stagg has known the area for four years (resident for two) and has compiled this very useful 16 page booklet (A4) for private circulation. Details are given of habitat, status and frequency and times of occurrence of the 172 species dealt with, which include some not previously recorded in Saudi Arabia. He has generously donated some copies to OSME. Any member who would like a copy should forward 80p (includes postage) to the Sales Officer.

##### Preservation of Wetlands in the Middle East

An interesting report by Bertel Bruun on the Third Holy Land Conservation Fund Mission to the Middle East has been produced and copies of it are available from Dr Bruun at 52 East 73rd Street, New York, NY10021, USA.

The mission visited Egypt in January 1980 and aimed to encourage the establishment of Nature Reserves and protection of wildlife in Egypt and particularly the Sinai.

The results of the mission include possible protection of the coral reefs at Ras Mohammed, protection for the eastern part of Lake Bardawil and Lake Malaha and the establishment of an Egyptian wildlife service by the Ministry of Agriculture.

#### A Bibliography of the Avifauna of the Arabian Peninsula ...

The second addendum to this work, comprising a further 100 or so references, has recently been prepared by the author, Major W A C Griffiths, and has been reproduced by OSME. It is distributed with this Bulletin to those members who bought the original bibliography, (see Bulletin Number 1). Printing this twelve page addendum was not expensive but recipients are asked to forward 30p to the Treasurer to cover costs next time they make a payment. Copies of both the first and second addenda are available from the Sales Office, price 50p each (including postage) but unfortunately no further copies of the original bibliography are available. Indeed there is now a waiting list of members who want a copy should there be a reprint. (In this respect if any member has free use of a photocopying machine and could contemplate reproducing 30 copies of this 100 page (A5) booklet on behalf of the Society, the Sales Officer would be very pleased to hear from him.)

#### Sales Officer Post Vacant

Mike Harrison, who is currently looking after Sales, will be retiring (by rotation) at the forthcoming AGM and a volunteer is now required to take on Sales. Any member who could take on this work (which is not onerous and need not necessarily involve attending Council meetings) please get in touch with the Secretary.

#### Future Bulletins

The editor would welcome any contributions for future issues of the Bulletin. They should be sent to him, Alan Vittery, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, England.

#### ... and some notes from the Treasurer

##### East European Members

East European readers who have difficulty in obtaining suitable currency with which to join OSME may, if they wish, order our publication through the state organisation in their country responsible for importing foreign scientific publications. That organisation should be asked to purchase items required from OSME, which can then be purchased by you in local currency.

1980 Subscriptions

Annual subscriptions for 1980 (£3.50) were due on 1st January 1980. Would those members who have not yet paid kindly forward their subscription now. Members living outside Europe and Turkey who wish to receive their publications by airmail should send a supplement of £1.50 (total £5.00).

OSME Constitution

A new format society 'Constitution & Rules' was printed in late 1979. Any member who would like a copy should write to the Secretary or Treasurer enclosing a self addressed envelope.

ADVERTISEMENTS

Birds of Nepal by Fleming, Fleming and Bangdel. Copies are now available from Mrs E Forster, The White House, Wiverton, Holt, Norfolk, England, price £9.50 including postage and packing.

Turkish Report Orders for the report advertised in Bulletin Number 2 should now be sent to C A Harbard, c/o RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, England, as he has now moved and mail from his old address is no longer being forwarded.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Steve Rooke for his vignettes of Little Green Bee-eater and Graceful Warbler.

