



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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

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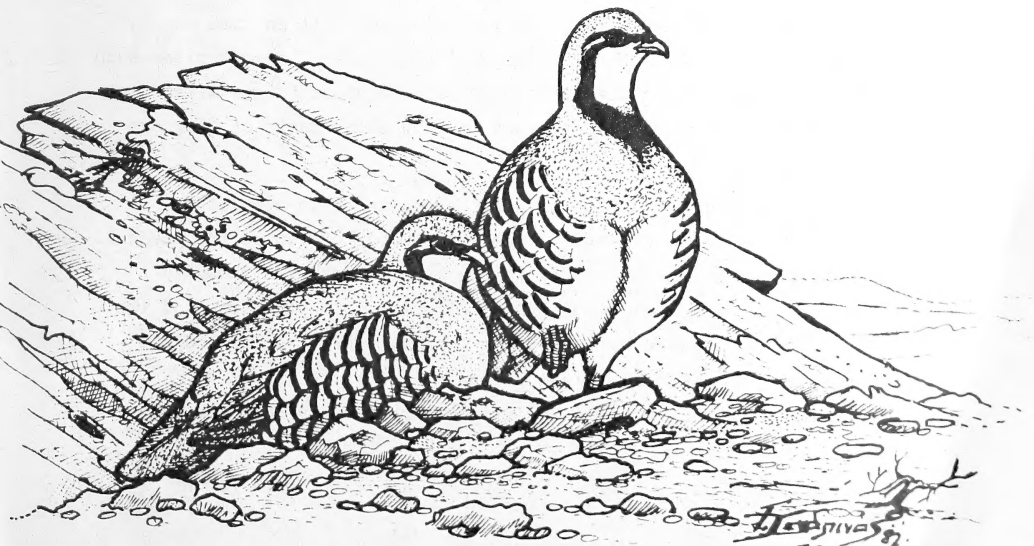
EDITORS & PRODUCTION:

D J FISHER AND C A HARBARD

REGISTER OF ORNITHOLOGICAL SITES IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A PROPOSAL

As the new Chairman of OSME I am very glad of this opportunity to tell members of the formation of a Conservation Research Committee whose main aim will be to initiate and guide research projects for the Society. Amongst the schemes which are currently being considered is one to initiate a register of Middle East sites of ornithological importance - a tall, but very important order.

Ornithologists have become very used to preparing check lists and distribution maps and whilst these are valuable, when it comes to basic conservation needs it is site information that is the most important.



Those of us in Britain have lived with a register of ornithological sites for nearly ten years and the results have formed the backbone of a valuable book recently published entitled "Bird Habitats" by R J Fuller. The scheme in Britain was organised by the British Trust for Ornithology but of course their task was relatively easy in a country which is ornithologically well known and where the help of very many field observers can be called on.

In the Middle East the situation is very different and we do not under-estimate the task. Briefly the aim will be to catalogue sites with information on size, habitat components, threats, potential threats and of course ornithological interest. The eventual object will be to evaluate their ornithological status and most important of all, ensure that the information collected is available to conservation bodies and governments.

One of the main problems will be the definition of a site. Isolated mountain blocks, rivers, estuaries and deserts are all in one sense sites but they can be vast: the Taurus Mountains, the Tigris, the Nile delta and the Kavir Desert for example. Alongside these one could equally include a new sewage farm created just outside Ankara, an irrigated patch of desert, a new barage or even an ancient town in which Lesser Kestrels nest in profusion under the eaves while White Storks breed on the roof tops. Basically a site would have to be defined as what an observer "feels" is a site, which will in turn depend on what areas of a country or region he can visit. The largest sites such as the Taurus Mountains and the Nile delta may end up as "super sites" in which case it would be equally important to know which parts of them are the best.

Before we proceed with the scheme it will be necessary to appoint a co-ordinator for each country and possibly a person to oversee the project. However before that stage is reached we are keen to seek the thoughts and views of members which should be sent directly to the chairman of the Conservation Research Committee, Dr Nigel Collar, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, Great Britain.

This is likely to be an important activity of the Society for many years so do let us know what you think.

Richard Porter

DIURNAL MIGRATION OF GOLDEN ORIOLE (ORIOULUS ORIOULUS) OVER THE
MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Neil Baker

The majority of passerines are known to overfly the north African coastline when moving south for the Palearctic winter. In order to cross both the Mediterranean and Sahara in one flight they are known to seek cool airstreams with prevailing winds. Schaefer (1968 in Bundy 1976) has recorded migrants at 1500 - 2500m in the southern Sahara. The autumn migration in Cyrenica north-eastern Libya is poorly documented with only one record for Golden Oriole at Al Adem between 11th and 27th September (Latham in Bundy 1976).

On September 8th 1979 I was watching for raptors along the north facing escarpment of the Jebel Akdar a little east of the Wadi Kouf. The escarpment at this point (approximately 6km inland) overlooks the narrow plain west of the coastal village of El Haniyah and is the most northerly tip of Libya. At approximately 360km the ridge (raising to 500m further inland) must be an important topographical feature for migrants crossing the Mediterranean from the Greek mainland, Crete and south western Turkey.

At 18.15 hours I was scanning the ridge when I located a few Golden Orioles flying in from the north. During the following twenty five minutes at least 110 birds were observed. Using 10x binoculars the ridge was searched in both directions and a continuous movement was noted to the limit of visibility. Searching northwards birds were seen to climb in order to cross the ridge. They were moving in loose flocks, often only 2 or 3 at a time with a maximum of 13. Of those aged and sexed the majority were female/immature birds but enough adult males were observed to indicate a truly mixed flock. No flight calls were heard throughout this movement.

A search for grounded birds the following morning up to 4km further inland revealed only one female/immature bird. Despite the considerable amount of cover available it would seem likely that these birds did not rest but continued flying through the night. If so it is unlikely that they lost height as they approached the coast. This observation would suggest that the flight over the Mediterranean is at a low (less than 300m) altitude.

References

Bundy G - Birds of Libya. BOU checklist No 1 - 1976
N E Baker PO Box 1599, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

OBSERVATIONS OF RAPTOR MIGRATION IN JORDAN, MAY 1982

E W Flaxman

I was in Aqaba from 14 to 18 May, 1982 and as it seemed likely from the recent paper by Christensen et al in Sandgrouse Number 3, that large numbers of Honey Buzzards Pernis apivorus would be passing daily over Eilat only 5 to 10 km to the WNW, I kept observation for raptors for limited periods on each of the 5 days.

On 14 May, from a beach in the north-western part of Aqaba I made repeated transects of the sky using X10 binoculars from 08.30 to 11.15hrs. I saw no raptors until 10.32 when two passed almost overhead at height, circling and drifting eastward. One of these birds was a Honey Buzzard but the other was either a Long-legged Buzzard Buteo rufinus or a Steppe Buzzard Buteo buteo vulpinus. A few minutes later a flock of about 30 raptors at great height and identifiable only as probable Honey Buzzards, appeared just north of the beach, circling and drifting north of east. No more raptors appeared during the next half-hour. In the afternoon I drove down to South Beach and the Saudi border: repeated transects of the sky revealed no raptors.

On 15 May at 08.40 hrs a single Honey Buzzard drifted eastwards over the beach at the limit of naked eye range. On South Beach between 09.30 and 12.30 hrs I carried out at intervals 10 separate transects of the sky but no raptors were seen.

On 16 May I was driven north and east out of Aqaba along the desert road (Route 53), leaving at 09.40 hrs. I scanned the sky continuously for the first 10 km, until the car had climbed through the foothills NE of the town: no raptors were seen.

On 17 May I carried out four transects of the sky above the beach between 12.20 and 12.45 hrs. At 12.40 I found a single Black Kite Milvus migrans overhead, circling steadily eastward.

On 18 May I drove from Aqaba to Amman via the Military Road (Route 65) which follows Wadi Araba to the Dead Sea. At 10.45 hrs, 16 km from our departure point I saw some raptors circling at height to the east of the road. Through binoculars they proved to be Honey Buzzards in two groups of about 20 each. They were drifting north eastwards towards the Jordanian side of Wadi Araba. I saw no more raptors over the next 80 km of road, and then only a single soaring Griffon Vulture Gyps fulvus

These observations, though intermittent and partly negative, tie in broadly with Christensen's description of the pattern of visible raptor migration at Eilat. When plotted on a copy of his Figure 2, the direction of the two flocks of raptors are in line with the migration over Eilat shifting eastwards during the morning.

Earlier in May I had also made two sightings of migrating raptors near Amman. On 10 May near Mount Nebo, between 12.30 and 13.00 hrs, I saw two groups of Honey Buzzards (40 birds and 20 birds) circling at height and drifting slowly northward.

On 11 May, in a very strong easterly wind, I drove down the pass on the main Amman to Jerusalem road. At the top of the pass, a few km west of Na'ur just after 11.00 hrs I saw a fairly continuous stream of raptors passing fairly low in a NNE direction. They were heading into the strong easterly wind with wings held sharply back for much of the time. I stopped at the top of the pass for a minute but the howling wind made observation with binoculars so difficult that I only identified 5 out of about 75 birds: all were Honey Buzzards. I then drove down to the next hairpin bend, which was slightly less exposed, and identified about 20 of the first 100 or so birds that went past: again all were Honey Buzzards. In all, I saw between 200 and 300 raptors migrating northwards in about 15 minutes.

These observations, particularly those in the unusual wind conditions of 11 May, suggested that some, at least of the raptors migrating via Sinai were keeping along the western edge of the Moab Mountains in Jordan after crossing the fairly featureless valley of Wadi Araba somewhere to the south.

E W Flaxman 20 Waterlow Road, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 7EX.

ABERRANT CORN BUNTING SUGGESTING 'LOST' MALE PLUMAGE

D T Lees-Smith and S C Madge.

The Corn Bunting Miliaria calandra is unique amongst the Palearctic buntings in the possession of a female-coloured male breeding plumage. DT L-S has suggested that the ancestral stock of the Corn Bunting could well have possessed a distinctive male plumage which has been lost through evolution.

It is probable that during the heights of the Pleistocene glaciation the Corn Bunting became isolated in an area of arid rocky steppe (probably somewhere in Turkestan) and through 'insularisation' lost the male plumage and evolved an enlarged palatal knob to cope with the hard seeds of xerophytic plants. A well-known example of 'insularisation' of characters is found in insular populations of the Mallard Anas platyrhynchos in Mexico and the Pacific, which have lost the distinct male breeding plumage.

Subsequently the modified Corn Bunting was adaptable enough to colonise some mesic situations and disperse westwards to Europe and North Africa. In the hope of turning up birds which could indicate this 'lost' male plumage through a genetic 'hiccup' an appeal for records of aberrantly-plumaged Corn Buntings was made (British Birds 69: 317). Apart from a few records of leucistic or schizochroic individuals, there has only been one such record and that was of a bird observed by SCM at Ardahan in eastern Turkey on 1st October 1979.

The Ardahan bird resembled normal Corn Buntings, with which it was associating, but had a distinct rufous wash to rump, pale straw-coloured head and neck, with weak brownish streaking on crown, pale buffish underparts and rufous-brown streaking on the flanks. It was impossible to take more detailed notes as the flock flew off, disappearing into the early morning mist. DPL-S considers this record worthy of publication as it focuses attention on this little-known evolutionary problem and welcomes further descriptions of aberrant Corn Buntings from observers who might be fortunate enough to encounter them.

It is suggested that the nearest living relatives of the Corn Bunting are Red-headed Emberiza bruniceps and Black-headed Buntings E. melanocephala and that the characters of the Corn Bunting, although distinct enough, are only of specific value and not of a degree to warrant the species being removed from Emberiza to the monospecific genus Miliaria.

DT Lees-Smith, 134 The Avenue, Starbeck, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 4QF
England.

S C Madge, 2 Church Row, Sheviok, Torpoint, Cornwall, England.

LANNER FALCON PREYING ON BLACK-HEADED GULL

Neil Baker

On 25th January 1979 an immature Lanner Falcon of the race Falco biarmicus feldeggii was seen to take a Black-headed Gull Larus ridibundus from a flock near Benghazi Libya.

At only a few feet above the ground (less than four) it surprised the bathing flock by coming in fast over a slight rise. The flock of about thirty birds erupted loudly but soon re-grouped and flew calmly away as the Lanner twisted in mid-air with a bird safely held in its talons.

A visit was made to the site a few hours later to inspect the kill remains. The legs had been neatly snapped off through the tibia and fibula close to the patella. The bill was broken into three pieces but no head was found. The wings had been neatly snapped through the humerus and stripped of meat. Many down, semi plume and a few body contour feathers were scattered around. A few cleaned cervical vertebra were also found. No body or rectices were found. The 'plucking post' was a small clump of grass in a sea of soft mud. The only marks in the mud were the Lanners, no ground scavenger had visited the site. It would appear that the Falcon beheaded the gull and probably fed on the oesophagus and trachea that tend to come away with the head. It then removed the limbs and probably carried the remaining body to a safer eating site.

A search through available literature could not locate L.ridibundus as a prey item for this species. Further, no mention could be found of the methods used to dismember prey before eating although this is presumably well known to falconers. There was no trace of torn feathers as is often the case around an Accipiter kill.

References

Welty, J C 1975 - The Life of Birds

N E Baker, PO Box 1599, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

RECENT REPORTS

From time to time we receive records from members of birds which they have seen in the OSME area. Whilst we do not collect such records for publication in any formal way we will occasionally mention the rarer or more unusual sightings in the Bulletin. Please bear in mind that these are not authenticated records which have been in any way 'accepted' by any relevant recorders or records committees - they are just sightings as reported to us.

Israel 1982

Graham Ekins, Chris Harris and Tim Loseby reported the following: a Greenish Warbler Phylloscopus trochiloides near Yeroham Reservoir on 11th April, two Red-breasted Mergansers Mergus serrator offshore at Ma'agen Michael on 4th April, Great Snipe Gallinago media, Snipe G.gallinago and Jack Snipe Lymnocyptes minimus together on one pool at Bet Shean on 9th April, and perhaps best of all an immature Bateleur Terathopius ecaudatus circling over the salt pans and kibbutz fields at Eilat on 14th April.

Cyprus 1982

Steve Mumford tells us that there was a Pygmy Cormorant Phalacrocorax pygmaeus present at the Phassouri Reed Beds during August - probably the first record for Cyprus.

Egypt 1982

Sherif Baha el Din and Mike Jennings report that the Holy Land Conservation Fund mounted an expedition to the Suez area of North West Egypt during mid-February to mid-May 1982, with the primary aim of studying and quantifying raptor migration. Listed below are some of the interesting species which were observed by the expedition between Hurgada on the Red Sea coast (27°N) and Suez. Some of these species, which are subject to confirmation and acceptance are apparently new for Egypt.

Goliath Heron Ardea goliath, Velvet Scoter Melanitta fusca, Crab Plover Dromas ardeola, Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus, Red-necked Phalarope Phalaropus lobatus, African Skimmer Rynchops flavirostris, Rose-ringed Parakeet Psittacula krameri, White-breasted Kingfisher Halcyon smyrnensis, Cetti's Warbler Cettia cetti, Dunnock Prunella modularis, Penduline Tit Remiz pendulinus, Chough sp Pyrrhocorax sp, Rose-coloured Starling Sturnus roseus, Tree sparrow Passer montanus, Black-headed Bunting Emberiza melanocephala.

REVIEWS

African Handbook of Birds Series two, Vols I and II
Series three, Vols I and II

Birds of the Southern third of Africa and Birds of the West Central and Western Africa - C W Macworth-Praed and C H B Grant, Longman Group Ltd., London and New York 1981. £30 per volume.

Volumes I and II of Mackworth-Praed and Grants' African Handbook (Series one) being two of the six volume The African Handbook of Birds, were reprinted by the Longman Group in 1980 (reviewed in Bulletin No 6). Longmans have now reprinted the remaining four volumes of the Handbook (Series two and three) thus completing the new edition of the six volume set. As with series one, the series two and three volumes have been reprinted without corrections or amendments. There are distribution maps, vignettes and coloured plates for most birds and a number of black and white photographs. Longmans are to be congratulated on making this classic ornithological reference work available to present day ornithologists.

Don Parr

The Significance of Egyptian Wetlands for Wintering Waterbirds

Peter I Meininger and Wm C Millie

110 pages, numerous maps, photographs, tables and vignettes. Edited and with a contribution by Dr Bertel Bruun (with an Arabic Summary and Arabic Index of Birds). Published by The Holy Land Conservation Fund, 150 East 58th Street, New York, NY 10155. Price including postage US \$ 20.00 from the publishers.

The main body of this work appeared as a contribution to Sandgrouse 3: 62-77 This present publication includes a more detailed and comprehensive description of the threatened habitats with background information on trapping and shooting pressure and a useful review of Nature Conservation in Egypt by Bertel Bruun. A 'preliminary list of the birds of Egypt' appears as an appendix and is based on Meinertzhagen's Nicoll's Birds of Egypt (1930) and all other known data, published and unpublished. The list includes a status symbol for each species as well as the Arabic name.

This work clearly marks an important and significant development in ornithology and conservation in Egypt, a country which has been sadly neglected by serious field workers in the past. We wish both the Fund and the authors well in their efforts to initiate conservation measures and document the avifauna of the country.

Don Parr

The Birds of Jerusalem - M Adar. SPNI, Jerusalem, 1981.

(Available from the Israel Raptor Information Centre, Har Gilo Field School, Mobile Post, Jerusalem Mountains, 91076, Israel, price £2.00 (inc. postage).)

This 96 page book presents the records of The Jerusalem Birdwatching Club from its inception in 1975 until the end of 1981. It contains a full systematic list (in Hebrew) as well as a code system in English. There are 12 pages in English covering the recommended birdwatching sites around Jerusalem (and information on how to find them) and summarising the information contained in the systematic list.

Birdwatchers visiting the Jerusalem area will no doubt find this book invaluable, especially as there is little information available in English on the birds of Israel.

David Fisher

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ornithological Survey of the Red Sea Coastlands, Egypt - Spring 1983

Plans are being made to get together a small group to mount an expedition to the Red Sea coast and hinterland of Egypt during March - April 1983. The expedition would examine, among other things, the distribution of breeding species, locate places of concentration of migrating raptors and collect information on the most important ornithological sites in the region.

Any OSME member who is interested in joining this expedition should contact either of the organisers for further details. It is hoped that some financial sponsorship will be obtained for in-country expenditure but members will probably be responsible for their own return air fare to Egypt. (The cheapest London-Cairo-London fare is approximately £230).

Organisers: Don Parr, 18 Portman Street, Calverley, Nr Pudsey, West Yorkshire LS28 5PC, England.

Mike Jennings, 63 Blandford Road, Chiswick, London W4, England.

Turkey Breeding Bird Atlas - 1983

I am planning a trip to European Turkey (Thrace) for the first two weeks of June 1983 to do a preliminary survey of breeding birds prior to the European Ornithological Atlas Committee survey in 1985 - 1988. I hope to survey previously unvisited areas in the north and west near to the Bulgarian and Greek borders. This will require the hire of a car in Istanbul. If anyone is interested in going on such a trip please contact me at the address below. Assuming a total of 4 people I have provisionally estimated the cost per person of about £250 plus the air fare to Istanbul (currently £166 APEX from London).

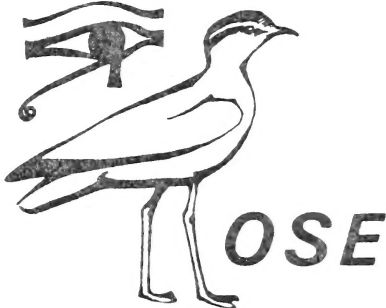
Simon Albrecht, 9 Romsey Terrace, Cambridge, CBI 3NH, England.

New Egyptian Society

Our representative in Egypt, Sherif Baha has announced the formation of the Ornithological Society of Egypt.

The aims of the Society are:

1. Protection of Egyptian birds by all means possible.
2. Encouraging more people to be interested in birds and their protection.
3. To collect and publish ornithological data on the birds of Egypt.
4. To co-operate with other conservation and environmental bodies in the Middle East.



A bulletin (in both Arabic and English) will be published every three months. Annual subscription for members living outside Egypt is US \$3.00 a year (plus US \$ 2.00 for airmail).

All applications and correspondence to:

Dr Mosstafa Abbas, Faculty of Science, Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.

We wish this new Society well.

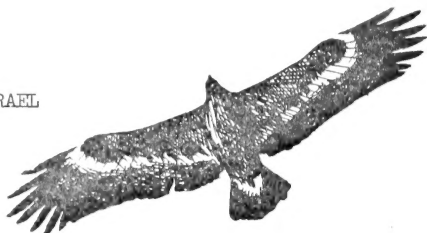
New Hellenic Society



OSME welcomes the formation of the Hellenic Ornithological Society (Kyniskas 9, Athens 502, Greece) whose objects are to promote bird study, interest and conservation. George Handrinos, a Vice President of the new Society, has offered to deal with any queries or requests for information from members concerning Greece and its birds. His address is: 4, Erymanthias St., Peristeri, Athens, Greece.

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY
SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURE IN ISRAEL
ISRAEL RAPTOR INFORMATION CENTRE

BIRDS IN ISRAEL



We are interested in receiving reports of observations and articles written about Birds in Israel at any time, past or present.

We are particularly interested in information about birds observed at Maagan Michael and Eilat.

This information is required for writing a book on the subject.

Any ornithologist whose observations are used in this work will be mentioned in the book.

When writing please

1. State species, numbers, date, time and location of observation
2. Write your full name and address
3. Send information to: Hadoram Shirihai
PO Box 22
Hertzelia 46 100
Israel

ADVERTS

OSME 'Seasons Greetings' Cards

This year we have produced two new greetings cards using illustrations by George Handrinos of a Lammergeier Gypaetus barbatus and of two Chukars Alectoris chukar. For details see the enclosed sales list.

The Birds of Saudi Arabia: A Check-List by Michael C Jennings

Just a few left!! The status and distribution of the 413 birds which have occurred in Saudi Arabia. Much of relevance to nearby regions. Four general maps, 117 breeding distribution maps and habitat notes for most of the 150 or so breeding species. A few line drawings by C J F Coombs, full bibliography, comprehensive gazetteer and Arabic introduction. 112 pages. Cost: £6.50, post free (£7.50 by airmail). Obtainable from the author at 10 Mill Lane, Whittlesford, Cambridge, England. Or credit UK Postal Giro No 50 851 7206 (Cheques to be made payable to M C Jennings and not 'OSME').

ADVERTISE THROUGH OSME

Advertisements, which will reach 600 or so members, libraries and societies especially interested in Middle East ornithology, may be placed in the bulletin at the following rates.

<u>Line Advertisements</u>	£1 per line	
<u>Block Advertisements</u>	(Advertisers to supply camera ready copy)	
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Mail inserts may be sent out with either the bulletin or Sandgrouse. Charges are as follows.		
Single sheet A5 size	£50) There is a surcharge for particularly heavy cards
Single sheet A4 size.....	£65	
Single sheet A3 size.....	£85	

Any special requirements of advertisers may be negotiated. 'Copy' for advertisements in the bulletin or brochures (at least 600) should be sent to the Bulletin Editor by March or August for insertion in the Spring and Autumn bulletins respectively. An invoice will be sent to advertisers after publication.

Please note that details of expeditions, availability of expedition reports, news of members, other Societies and ornithological events are welcomed and may be printed in the bulletin free of charge as 'Announcements', subject to the discretion of the Bulletin Editor.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Council has agreed that subscriptions for 1983 should remain at £5.00 (plus £2.00 airmail supplement if required). It would greatly assist administration and cashflow if all members pay their subscriptions as they fall due, on 1st January.

Bankers Orders are a convenient and helpful method of subscribing and members who do not already pay by this method are urged to do so. Forms are available from the Treasurer.

Members who have still not paid their 1982 subscriptions are requested to settle them immediately. Your continued membership is much valued.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks are due to George Handrinos for the illustrations of Lammergeier and Chukars.

