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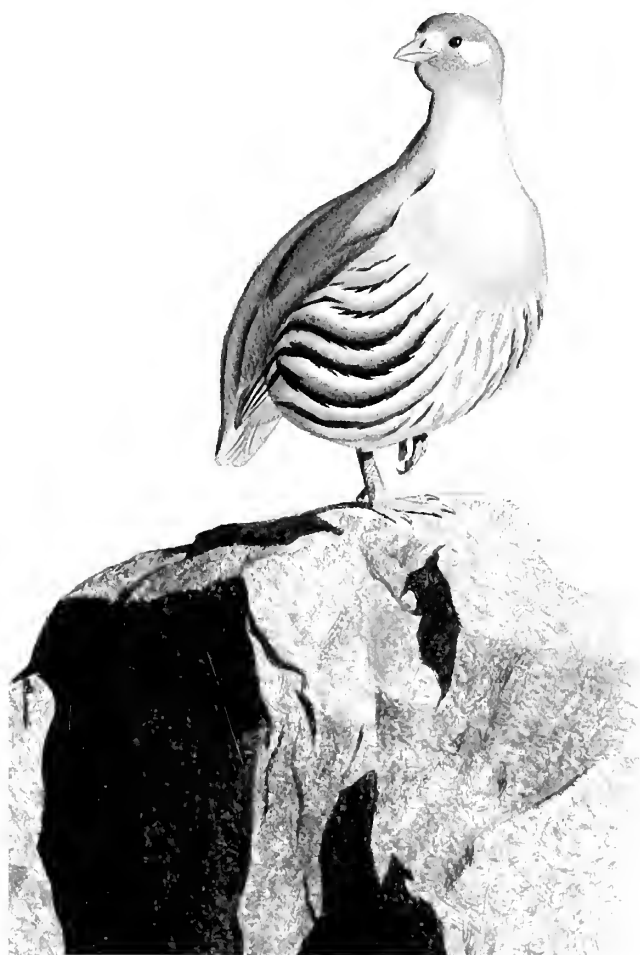
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A newsletter for Arabian ornithology. Compiled and distributed by Michael C. Jennings (ABBA Coordinator)



A recent nest site for the Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* is described on page 10. After 25 years of the Atlas project, no one has yet found and described an active nest with eggs of this species.

ABBA - not long to wait

The final manuscript of the Atlas was sent off to the publishers at the end of March 2009, at the time the objective was to publish it by the end of the year. The plan is for it to be published as a complete volume (Vol 25) of the journal *Fauna of Arabia*, edited by Fareed Krupp of the Senckenberg Institute and Natural History Museum, Frankfurt. *Fauna of Arabia* is jointly published by the Senckenberg and the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, of Riyadh. The published atlas will be approximately A4 size and hardbound but type size will be smaller and layout will differ from past volumes of the *Fauna* on account of the larger size of the atlas. The final MS was approximate 640 A4 pages of single spaced word processed text and to this will be added tables, diagrams, general maps, 100 or so colour plates not to mention distribution maps and vignettes for each of the 273 breeding species. The task was progressed with the editorial team in Frankfurt in August when it became clear that publication would not be until 2010. We are now working to an April publication date.

There are plans for a 'commercial' version which will be more or less identical to the *Fauna of Arabia* version but it will have a different cover and title pages etc. There will be an Arabic introduction and Arabic bird names will be shown in both versions. I would also very much like to see a full Arabic version of the Atlas but that will depend on sufficient funds becoming available and finding a specialist translator.

The wider contents format of *Phoenix* means that the newsletter is now open to articles on any aspect of birds in Arabia, this issue sees three 'first records' of species new to Kuwait and in future there will hopefully be more such notes as it is important to record these events. However I do not believe that it is necessary for such articles to be too ponderous on ID points for

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الإشراف والنشر بواسطة
الهيئة الوطنية لحماية الحياة الفطرية
وإنماها.
ص ب ٦١٦٨١، الرياض.
المملكة العربية السعودية

a species known from the region but not from a particular country, especially where an acceptable photo is produced.

This issue also contains notes on some conservation problems in Arabia. It is a huge disappointment to learn of Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* and Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* being shot in Arabia, despite all governments taking significant steps to combat this sort of behaviour. Lax wildlife laws have also led to the continuation of trafficking of wildlife in Yemen where a Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* chick has recently been offered for sale in the capital city. However this trade is not confined to the less prosperous corner of Arabia, as birds and other wildlife are still trafficked in the Gulf, despite extra enforcement since the avian flu scares of a few years back.



Correction

Apologies to Adrian Drummond-Hill for spelling his name wrong when crediting him for photos in *Phoenix* 25 at pages 12, 13, & 22.

A New Greater Flamingo Breeding Colony in the UAE

by Salim Javed and others

A new breeding colony of the Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* was discovered in the coastal zone of Abu Dhabi Emirate, west of Abu Dhabi Island on 13 April 2009 by biologists from the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi. The colony located in the Bu Al Sayeef area (UA25) held 801 chicks, seen in two creches, one of 359 young chicks and the other of 442 slightly older chicks, see photo page 13.

The new colony is the largest recorded successful breeding of Greater Flamingo from the entire Arabian Peninsula and only the third breeding record in the UAE in over a decade. Flamingos previously bred in 1998-99 at Al Wathba Wetland Reserve and in Shahama Wetland, both in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. The new colony also had 224 active nests with birds incubating and in addition more than 1,700 nests had been damaged in a storm. The number of chicks produced from the colony would have been much higher had it not been for bad weather and thunderstorms at the end of March. No less than 1,143 eggs were found, either washed away or buried in the mounds or in the ground as a result of the bad weather.

One of the first clues, leading to the discovery of the breeding colony was provided by one of the satellite tracked birds, tagged in Al Wathba Wetland Reserve in 2007. The localized reports from the satellite tagged bird and the increase in number of flamingos near our regular monitoring point encouraged a more intensive investigation. Discovery of the new flamingo breeding colony highlights the importance of regular monitoring and use of modern technologies such as satellite tracking in identifying important sites used by flamingos and other birds. The new breeding colony, the presence of more than 18,000 flamingos on occasions and breeding Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* and Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*, makes the coastal area in and

around Bu Al Sayeef one of the 'Conservation Hotspots' in the entire UAE. Throughout summer 2009 some 6,000-8,000 flamingos have been present in the area. The site is also an ideal candidate for declaration as a Ramsar site under the Ramsar Convention, recently signed by the UAE.

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Wing-tagged Eastern Imperial Eagle in Qatar

On 29 October John Thompson photographed an eagle at Abu Nahkla Jail Ponds (RA27) just outside Doha, Qatar (see page 3) which had prominent yellow circular numbered discs displayed on its wings. It was the second Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* to be recorded in Qatar. Through the good offices of Mike McGrady (Natural Research Ltd), Todd Katzner (Conservation and Field Research at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh USA) and Evgeny Bragin it was quickly identified that this eagle had been marked as a nestling on 28 July 2009 in the Naursum forest area of Kazakhstan (Approx coords 51° N 64° E).

The movements of five marked Eastern Imperial Eagles are recorded from Arabia. There have been other wing-tagged Kazakhstan birds in Arabia, one was in Oman in February 2003 and another in Yemen in 2005. Previously in 1996 a bird was satellite tracked to Kazakhstan and later tracked back towards Kuwait where it was unfortunately shot. An adult trapped near Taif in western Saudi Arabia in spring 1995 was radio tracked to China; it came back to Saudi Arabia for the winter 1995/96 and then went back to China for summer 1996. Another Taif bird wintered in the same area in three successive years.

In Kazakhstan they have been using wing tags in three colours - orange (red), white and yellow, each with a combination of a letter and a number. The colour and letter are changed from year to year and in some years birds are only tagged on one wing. This system allows the identification of tagged birds even without a code being read. Anyone seeing a tagged eagle like this should report the details to Evgeny Bragin (Email: naurzum@mail.ru). Please also report any sightings of ringed or tagged birds to ABBA.

Satellite tagged Steppe Eagle winters in UAE and Yemen and spends summer in Kazakhstan

On 10 November 2008 the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD) issued a press release (Website: www.ead.ae) that a Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* had been brought to the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital by a member of the public. The eagle was nursed back to health after several weeks and was released in January 2009 near Al Ain after being fitted with a satellite transmitter. It was tracked by EAD to Yemen, via Oman and Saudi Arabia, in early 2009. It remained in Yemen until the end of February. It then flew north-east through Saudi Arabia to the border with Kuwait and on eastwards through Iran to Kazakhstan where it spent the summer in the area to the east



(Clockwise from top left)

This wing tagged Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* was seen at Abu Nahkla Jail Ponds (RA27), Qatar in 29 October 2009. It was marked as a nestling in Kazakhstan the previous summer. (Photo: John Thompson).

A poorly caged Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* chick at Nuqum animal suq, Sana'a, Yemen. It died shortly afterwards, probably just as well as the confined conditions would inevitably have left it crippled if it had been fed well enough to grow. (Photo: Tarim Contin-Kennedy).

Three Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni* share a cage in the Nuqum animal suq Sana'a Yemen. There were originally five but two died. The knowledge that some falcons are sold for huge sums encourages many people to catch and try to sell any bird of prey. (Photo: Tarim Contin-Kennedy).

Lesser Crested Terns *Sterna bengalensis* chicks ready for ringing on Al Jarrim island (QA29), Bahrain. Like some other terns the chicks of this species are variable in colour of bill, feet and feather patterns. (Photo Adrian Drummond-Hill).

Rounding up a Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* chick creche for ringing on Al Jarrim island (QA29), Bahrain, summer 2009. (Photo: Adrian Drummond-Hill).



of Lake Tenghiz (Approx. 48°N, 68°E). During this whole period it was tracked for over 11,000 km.

Bald Ibis shot in Arabia

The number of wild birds of the western population of the Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* is down to 210 birds in Morocco according to Birdlife International (2009) but the eastern group has reached a perilously low wild population in Syria of only about five birds. Considerable conservation efforts are now being made internationally and in Syria towards conserving them. In Turkey where the species has gone extinct in the wild in recent decades elaborate efforts are being made to rehabilitate the wild population by encouraging captive bred birds to migrate. These efforts have identified that birds are most vulnerable whilst on migration which takes them through Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Djibouti and Eritrea to terminal wintering grounds in Ethiopia. It therefore comes as a desperate blow to all the authorities and individuals involved in protecting this species to learn that one of the wild Syrian birds was shot by a hunter in Saudi Arabia in Autumn 2009.

A satellite-tracking project led by BirdLife International and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in collaboration with the Desert Commission of the Syrian Government, established that the Syrian adults migrate to the Ethiopian highlands each winter, but the wintering area of younger birds remained a mystery. This migration across the deserts of the Middle East to north-east Africa puts these birds under threat from the region's many hunters. Researchers from the above organisations and RSPB (UK) have been trying to find out more about the movements of the young birds and fitted two with satellite tags in Syria. It was one of these birds, an immature female, that was shot.

The tiny Syrian population has been breeding very well since its discovery in 2002, although it has suffered two poor years. The low rate of return of young birds to the colony shows that they are being lost somewhere on migration and this has been a particular source of concern.

In addition to the loss of a wild bird the conservation of the semi-captive population in Turkey suffered a similar setback in Autumn 2009. Some birds released in 2008 did migrate. They flew south as far as Jordan, but subsequently were found dead. Initially, it was feared they had been poisoned, but later it was realised that the birds had been electrocuted, emphasising that other threats can have a devastating impact on the future of small populations in the Middle East. More satellite-tagged birds released from Turkey this year, flew south as far as Saudi Arabia but they too disappeared not much more than 100 km from where the Syrian bird was shot. Although their fate has not been established, researchers believe these birds too may have succumbed to the attention of hunters.

The hunting of Northern Bald Ibis is illegal in Saudi Arabia and when HH Prince Bandar Bin Saud, the Secretary General of the NCWCD, heard the news he immediately dispatched a team to search for information as to what had happened. The team confirmed that an ibis had been shot illegally by hunters. The NCWCD very much regretted that the incident took place in the Kingdom and confirmed it stands ready to support all concerned institutions, both in governments as well as NGOs, in their efforts to conserve wildlife at the national, regional and global levels.

Information is taken from the website of Birdlife International and thanks go Mike Evans of Birdlife for background information.

Sites of Interest

Most issues of *Phoenix* provide details of individual bird sites which can be unique or representative of regions and habitats which may be found throughout Arabia. Some of the accounts provide an up to date comment on the condition of habitats and others are good places to see birds in Arabia.

Observers are invited to write up other sites, especially those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding or interesting visitors that occur. A site can be as small as a sewage pond or similar microsite, an urban area or as large as a whole mountain range.

A listing of the 60 sites covered in *Phoenix* issues 1-25 is available on request.

Jahra Pool Reserve by Khaled Al Ghanem

The Jahra Pool Reserve (NB35) is one of the most important bird sites in Kuwait and one of the country's few freshwater wetlands (Evans, 1994; Scott, 1995). This review attempts to summarise the importance of the site in terms of the regional birdlife and as an environmental asset for Kuwait, by noting its biodiversity, especially of birds. It is important that Kuwaiti decision makers understand the vital role the site plays in conserving birdlife in spite of its relatively small size, its scientific importance and its utility as an education facility. It incorporates information from recent observations in the area including daily and seasonal bird monitoring and reviews previous reports and records.

The location of Jahra pool has been well known to both hunters and birdwatchers since the 1970s, but it was not recognised as a regionally important location for birds until the late 1980s (Al Ghanem & Al Shihaby, 2006). Its recognition was one result of the Environmental Protection Council (EPC) sponsored survey of the avifauna of Kuwait's mainland from April 1985 to April 1987. This survey conducted by Charles Pilcher, Mahmood Shehab and others identified 251 species in seven months of full-time field work, added five new species to the Kuwait national list and made important amendments to the status of a number of others birds (Pilcher *et al.*, 1990). The survey depended mainly on identification in the field as mist nets, which assist establishing the identity of skulking and difficult to determine species, were not available to the survey until the very end of the period. The great majority of the species recorded during the whole survey were actually recorded at Jahra pool. One of the most important recommendations of the survey was to establish a nature reserve at the site which was already recognised internationally (Pilcher, 1987). The Jahra Pool Reserve (JPR) was established on 24 November 1987 (by decision No. L-Sh-B/236/20/87 of the municipality boards, Al Saqer, 2003), and it was fenced in mid 1989 (Al Ghanem & Al Shihaby, 2006).

The JPR is one of the most important host areas in Kuwait for migrant birds. It is a coastal reserve occupying an area of 3 km² and lies on the south-west side of Kuwait Bay, 28 km west of Kuwait city, at 29° 21' N; 47° 49' E. The area of this wetland has

become more extensive over recent years and may now be classed as a site of special scientific interest. The bay is itself an important site for marine biological diversity.

JPR has relied on treated water since it was established in 1987. In the mid 1990s a rainwater flood drainage system diverted rainwater from Jahra city and the treated supply to JPR direct to Kuwait Bay. Thus the supply to JPR was lost and pool dried out. A brackish water well was dug in 1998 to try to remedy this but the water produced was insufficient for the needs of the pool. In June 2000, a new 1m pipeline was put in which supplied the reserve with tertiary treated water. Unfortunately, the water flow did not continue for long due to the poor location of the outlet. Hence, frequent outages and blockages of water resulted in many poor birding seasons. Recently, in May 2009 the outlet problem was finally solved and the pool filled with water and this is regenerating the reedbeds *Phragmites australis*. It is once again a favourable habitat for many breeding and visiting birds.

The vegetation of the site is dominated by halophytes such as *Tamarix* sp. and *Suaeda aegyptiaca* and there are extensive reedbeds. The pool, reedbeds and coastal area harbour many hundreds of birds during the migration seasons and in winter, attracted by the variety of feeding habitats available and sheltered roosting opportunities.

Some 237 bird species have been recorded at JPR to date, that is two thirds of all birds listed for the Kuwait (365). These include 15 breeding species, see below. The remainder are passing migrants, winter visitors, summer visitors and vagrants.

The site has been recognised as a bottleneck for raptor migration with a maximum of 410 raptors (17 species) recorded in a day (Evans, 1994). Ringing studies are an important aspect of field study and scientific documentation for birds. In November 1991 a trapping programme was conducted for a 25 day period resulting in 1,654 birds of 44 species being examined and ringed. Again in March to May and October to November 1995 another project resulted in 7,851 birds of 72 species ringed throughout Kuwait of which more than 7,000 were trapped at JPR (Anon. 1995; Cleere *et al.*, 2000). Another ringing study was carried out in spring 1997 (Cleere & Kelly, 2009).

The fifteen species that have been recorded as breeding at JPR in the last two decades are summarised below.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. Individuals or small groups are frequently observed in most months. When the circumstances are suitable they breed. First breeding was recorded in September 1993 and then again in 1996 (Gregory, 2005). Breeding was next recorded in July 2006 (Al Ghanem, 2008) and again in July 2009.

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*. In the last few years summering and calling birds have been reported. The confirmation of breeding, the first breeding for Kuwait and Arabia, was in September 2001 (Al Ghanem, 2007).

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*. Present at many sites in Kuwait including JPR. The first breeding recorded at JPR was in 1985 (Gregory, 2005). From mid-May until August 2009 more than 50 pairs are present in the reserve.

Purple Swamp-hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*. The first Kuwait

breeding of this species was recorded at JPR in 1996. The species has been absent from the site since 2000 but in August 2009 two pairs were again recorded.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*. Breeding was confirmed for the first time in Kuwait at JPR in 1996 (Gregory, 2005).

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*. The first recorded breeding in Kuwait was at JPR in June 1993 (Gregory, 2005), it bred again at the site in 2007, in July 2009 there were 30 pairs present with half of them nesting.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*. In May 2000, pairs with chicks were seen for the first time on the coastline at JPR and since it has become a regular breeder there. In 2009 it bred on small islands of the pool.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*. This species was first recorded in Kuwait in 1960 and has since colonised the whole state. A small population of about ten pairs breed at JPR.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*. This species has been known in Kuwait since 1975. Breeding was first recorded in Kuwait at Jahra in 1983 (Gregory, 2005). It is now a common resident bird at JPR.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*. This bird was first recorded in Kuwait in 1966 by Khaled Alelawa when he caught one at Mallah at Almaqwa (Burgan Oilfield). The first breeding in Kuwait was at JPR in 2002 (Gregory, 2005). It remains a rather elusive resident in the area.

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*. Usually recorded as a migrant it also breeds in many places in Kuwait and has been recorded breeding at JPR since 2004 (Gregory, 2005).

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*. This species has colonised Kuwait since 1990, it was first confirmed to breed at JPR in 1997 (Gregory, 2005) and is now common.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. This species was first proven to breed in Kuwait at JPR in 1995 (Gregory, 2005).

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*. First bred in Kuwait at JPR in 1995, discovered as a result of ringing studies (Gregory, 2005).

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Widespread and common in Kuwait including at JPR.

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(A complete listing of species recorded at JPR is available from the author).

Wadi Wurayah, Fujairah: the first UAE Mountain Protected Area by Christophe Tourenq and others.

On 16 March 2009, Wadi Wurayah Fujairah was officially declared the UAE's first protected mountain area by His Highness Shaikh Hamad Bin Mohammad Al Sharqi, Ruler of Fujairah. This declaration came after the completion of a three year project, launched in 2006 by the Emirates Wildlife Society (EWS) in association with WWF and the Fujairah Municipality, to assess the importance of Wadi Wurayah for nature conservation and to establish it as a protected area.

The wadi has a 129 km² catchment that occupies the northern reaches of Fujairah between the towns of Masafi, Khor Fakkan and Bidiyah (WA27). Due to its permanent water resources, the area has been used by local communities for thousands of years and is home to rare and endangered species such as the Arabian Tahr *Hemitragus jayakari* and, the Arabian Leopard *Panthera pardus nimr*. The studies in the past three years have revealed the presence of 12 species of mammals, 73 species of birds, 17 species of reptiles and amphibians and one fish. In addition 74 invertebrate families occur. More than 300 species of plants are recorded including *Typha domingensis* and the unique UAE orchid species *Epipactis veratrifolia*.

Of the birds recorded, four species are considered of worldwide conservation concern. These are: Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and Eastern Houbara *Chlamydotis macqueeni*. The first two probably breed in the region, the other two are visitors. Except for the Lappet-faced Vulture the populations of these endangered birds have decreased dramatically in the UAE since the 1970's. Other birds present include many of the typical birds of the UAE mountains such as Hume's Wheatear *Oenanthe albonigra*, Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*, Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*, and a good cross section of Palearctic migrant species and winterers such as Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*, and Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrma*. Other species are attracted to the permanent water holes and luxuriant vegetation, including Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, and Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*. Thirty nine species recorded in Wadi Wurayah region are known or are thought to breed including Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus*, and

Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*. Because of their nocturnal habits owls are perhaps under represented in observations so far, but Little Owl *Athene noctua* is recorded and an Eagle-owl *Bubo sp.*, probably the Desert Eagle-owl *Bubo ascalaphus* has been heard. The Striated Scops Owl *Otus brucei* is also likely to be present.

The reserve area has not escaped the inadvertent introduction of alien species. A Green Aloe *Furcraea foetida*, which originates from South America, was found recently. It has become a pest species in some tropical countries because it forms dense impenetrable stands which once established exclude native vegetation. In November 2007, a Red-eared Slider Turtle, *Trachemys scripta* (originating from the New World), was discovered in a Wadi Wurayah pool. Alien fish such as Mozambique Tilapia *Oreochromis mossambicus*, and Koi Carp, a variety of the Common Carp *Cyprinus carpio*, were observed in the same pool in May 2008. Targeted eradication operations have been started by the EWS-WWF and the Fujairah Municipality. Naturalised bird species observed in the region include Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis* and House Crow *Corvus splendens*.

Christophe Tourenq P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE. (Email: ctourenq@ewswwf.ae), *Ali Khassim* (Email: enviro@fujairahmunc.gov.ae), *Moaz Sawaf* (Email: msawaf@ewswwf.ae), *Maral Khaled Shuriqi* (Email: lgeologist@gmail.com) and *Emma Smart* (Email: esmart@ewswwf.ae).

(A map of the reserve area and a full list of the birds, mammals and reptiles occurring in the site are available from the first author).

Raptor Trading in Yemen

by David B. Stanton

The image of a bedu sheikh, robes flowing in the desert wind as a falcon sits alertly on his fist, is partly a western fantasy but also typifies a widespread and popular sport within Arabia. However this sport underpins a supply chain that, in its worst case, is playing havoc with wild raptor populations worldwide. While local demand for the most desirable birds is centred in the Arabian Gulf, Yemen's role in the pernicious trade is that of supplier. Every year dozens of trappers congregate at Bab al Mandab in a rough and tumble competition to catch passage birds. The most sought after species: Sakers, Peregrines, and Lanners, *Falco cherrug*, *F. peregrinus* and *F. biarmicus*, are all CITES Appendix I listed; although Yemen is a signatory to the CITES international convention, buyers from neighbouring countries have no difficulty in moving their purchases out of the country. Long gone are the days when Yemeni middlemen in Sana'a dealt with the logistics of getting birds out of the country. In the last ten years good asphalt roads have linked the Gulf directly through to the Bab al Mandab, and customers from the Gulf can simply drive to the source and buy their falcons direct from the catchers. The "formalities" these smugglers face at the border are not too prohibitive or the trade would quickly dry up.

While most Yemenis would not know the difference between a Saker and a Shikra *Accipiter badius*, it is generally known that saqoor (Arabic plural for 'falcon' and a common general term for raptors) can fetch high prices. Therefore, many birds of prey are opportunistically captured in Yemen and offered for sale by the

roadside. Over the years I have observed Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus migrans aegyptius*, Dark Chanting Goshawks *Melierax metabates*, Common Kestrels *F. tinnunculus*, Hobbies *F. subbuteo*, Steppe Buzzards *Buteo b. vulpinus*, Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* as well as other wildlife being offered at byways and city intersections.

Slightly more organized than this diffuse, opportunistic trade is the marketing of wildlife through Sana'a's Nuqum animal suq. Having been alerted last March that a considerable stream of animals passed through the suq, I contracted a student, Tarim Contin-Kennedy to monitor the traffic at Nuqum and the results have revealed an horrendous situation. In less than six months my student has documented with lists and photographs an amazing 48 species of birds, 15 species of mammals, and at least seven reptile species moving through the suq. Of the birds, no fewer than five species of owls and ten species of diurnal raptors have been put up for sale. Many die miserably in the appalling conditions that prevail at Nuqum. While Kestrels and Yellow-billed Kites predominate, the trade is not limited to these commoner species. For example, on 22 May this year a Verreaux's Eagle *A. verreauxii* nestling was on offer, it died within the week (see photo page 3). A month later, a recently fledged Hume's Owl *Strix butleri* was at the market and was quickly snapped up by an expatriate 'enthusiast.' In September, five Lesser Kestrels *F. naumanni* appeared in the market, two soon succumbed as a result of the frightful conditions (see photo page 3).

As the poorest nation in the region, Yemen faces some difficult economic challenges. Approximately 40% of the population lives on less than a dollar a day and the wildlife trade is just one response to this untenable situation. Yemen's Minister for Water and the Environment, HE Abdulrahman Al-Eryani, states that enforcement of the wildlife laws is out of his hands and that raising the public's awareness is the only way to stop the wholesale marketing of Yemen's precious wildlife. Since we started this investigation we have also published articles on the Yemen's wildlife trade in *Wildlife Middle East News*, *Yemen Today* and *YooMag*, but awareness must be followed by action. Save Yemen Flora and Fauna, a newly formed NGO has pledged to join the battle to fight animal trafficking through its website and extensive network. The Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program, though focussed on the preservation of Yemen's small population of Arabian Leopards, is also committed to stopping the mining of Yemeni wildlife. However, the real roots of this trade are poverty and greed and until Yemen's poor are provided with opportunities to make a decent living, and all countries involved in the trade of the most coveted birds agree to enforce CITES, Yemen's raptors will continue to decline.

Much like the wildlife trade in Yemen, this report is somewhat opportunistic. When we started monitoring the trade at Nuqum, it was a step towards a more systematic appraisal of wildlife trafficking in Yemen but it is wildly inadequate. With more information, perhaps the government can be stimulated into action and Yemen will begin enforcing the laws that were written to protect this country's wildlife. In the meantime we will keep counting.

David B. Stanton, Coordinator - Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program, P.O. Box 7069, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen. (Email: ylrp@yemenileopard.org).

Breeding terns on Al Jarrim islands, Bahrain

by Brendan Kavanagh

Fasht Al Jarrim is a sandy shoal situated approximately 20 km

north (QA29) of the main island of Bahrain. Three small islands occur on the fasht. The northernmost of these is a natural island which belongs to the ruler of Bahrain and has been occupied by two caretakers until 2009. An access channel is maintained through the fasht from the deeper water to the south-west. Two further islands are found to the south-east of the channel in shallow water. These are manmade, created from the spoils of industrial exploration over 20 years ago. While the islands have no official names, they are referred to in this note as Al Jarrim south, middle and north for ease of identification.

All three islands attain several metres above high tide mark. The Al Jarrim north has a permanent constructed mooring on its southern side, while Al Jarrim south is approachable from the east to a small sandy beach. Al Jarrim middle is the most difficult to approach with extensive shallows on all sides.

Two visits were made to the islands in 2007, two in 2008 and three in 2009. All visits were between late June and early August. Daytime temperatures are in the mid-40's at that time of year. The team of observers and ringers (see below) usually arrived at the islands before 8.30 am and each visit lasted 6 – 8 hours, including travel time to and from the islands. The primary task on each occasion was to ring pulli of the three tern species breeding there in some number; White-cheeked Terns *Sterna repressa*, Lesser Crested Terns *S. bengalensis* and Bridled Tern *S. anaethetus*. The timing of breeding of the three species differs. White-cheeked terns have a protracted season from June to August, Lesser Crested terns breed from June to the end of July with most chicks on the ground in late June and Bridled Terns begin laying in late June with most chicks still on the ground in late July.

Assessment of the size of the populations was conducted by circling the islands to count sitting White-cheeked Terns, then landing to ring chicks. An estimate of the number of chicks in the crèches of Lesser Crested Terns plus the number of nests with eggs was arrived at by scanning each island while collecting and ringing pulli. Bridled Tern numbers were estimated while catching chicks hiding in the vegetation. A large proportion of Bridled Tern but less than 10% of Lesser Crested Tern chicks were ringed each year. Timing of the ringing of Bridled Terns coincided with the period when all eggs had hatched but few birds had fledged, the timing of breeding of this species being highly synchronized.

The size of the team varied from year to year. In 2007 we were made up of one ringer (the author), two helpers and the boatman who also helped catch birds. In 2008 and 2009 the groups were larger consisting of two ringers and 4-6 helpers, with some individuals concentrated on collecting a photographic record. The same boatman has been used each time apart from the first visit in 2009 when two coastguard vessels provided transport.

The total numbers of each species ringed (these were mostly pulli) since 2007 are; White-cheeked, 255; Lesser Crested, 1,003 (see photo page 3) and Bridled, 340.

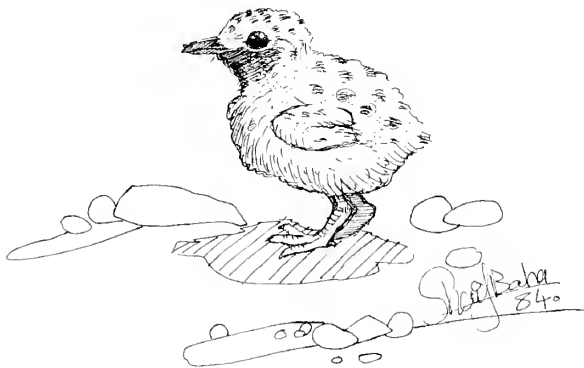
The population of Bridled Terns appears to have been stable over the three seasons. However both the Lesser Crested and the White-cheeked Terns have increased. The most detailed and accurate count was taken in 2009 with the numbers of the three main species as follows; White-cheeked Tern, 650-750 pairs (equivalent to 2% of the world population* and 30-50% of the

Bahrain population); Lesser Crested Tern 5-6,000 pairs (equivalent to 5% of the world population* and 50% of the Bahrain population); Bridled Tern, 300-350 pairs. (* Based on current IUCN data). These numbers would justify nominating the Al Jarrim south and middle islands as an important bird area for the Middle East region.

We are currently seeking funding for a more complete survey of all the breeding colonies of these terns in Bahrain in 2010.

Special thanks are due to Howard King (2007 and 2009), Juhani Kyyro (2007), Adrian Drummond-Hill (2007 and 2009), Ali the boatman (2007-2009), Abdulla Al Khaabi (2008), Ian Grey (2008), Kevin Culligan (2008), Khalifa AlKhalifa (2008), Abdulqader Khamis (2009) and Douglas McGarvey (2009) without whom this work could not have been undertaken.

Brendan Kavanagh, RCSI-MUB, PO Box 15503, Adliya, Manama, Bahrain (Email: bkavanagh@rcsi-mub.com).



White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa* chick.

The first Asian Koel for Kuwait

by Abdulrahman Al Sirhan and Rashed Al Hajji

Ouda Al-Bathalie a member of Kuwait birding forum asked me to come and see a bird at his farm near Abdali, in the north of the state (NB37) which he thought might be a new species for Kuwait. On 22 February 2009 we went to the farm to try to photograph and identify the bird. It was crow sized, with blue-black plumage and a heavy yellowish green hooked bill, unforked heavy rounded tail, yellowish green legs and a gape that extended to under the eye. It was unmistakably a male Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*, see photo page 12, the first for Kuwait and the Western Palearctic as defined by Cramp and Simmons, 1977. The record was accepted by the Kuwait Ornithological Records Committee on 2 May 2009.

The Asian Koel is increasingly recorded in the lower Arabia Gulf from Bahrain to Masirah island. The range of its occurrence in Arabia is wider every year and there are now several records from Dhofar and one from Socotra. Ouda Al-Bathalie, who owns a bird shop in the Kuwait Bird Market advised that this species has not been recorded for sale in Kuwait and indeed no birds have been imported to Kuwait recently because of avian flu controls. Furthermore as a brood parasite of crows and mynahs it would be difficult to breed in captivity.

This first winter bird (identified from the white tips to the

greater coverts and in the breast) must surely have arrived in Kuwait naturally from its breeding areas which extend eastwards from Pakistan.

Reference: Cramp, S. & K. E. L. Simmons. 1977. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York.

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The first Long-tailed Shrike for Kuwait

by Khaled Al Ghanem

On the morning of 7 October 2004 I made my daily observations of autumn migrants at Jahra Pool Nature Reserve (NB35) beside Kuwait Bay. On the fence of the reserve I noticed an unfamiliar shrike which later, from photographs I took, I was able to identify as a Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*, see photo page 12. It stayed only a few seconds and then flew away. In the afternoon the same day I relocated the shrike on a bush in area dominated by *Tamarix* sp. trees, 100m from a small pool of water in the reserve. It was also present at the same place the next day. Over the two days of observation I noticed that the bird came to drink about every 25 minutes and stayed a few minutes near the pool before it returned to the bushy area.

I had no previous experience of this species but on checking the literature available to me I noticed similarities with the smaller Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*. It is a typical shrike with large head, stout laterally compressed hook-tipped bill. My description of the bird follows. Longish graduated, black and rufous tail with buff (not white) outer feathers, bright orange-buff rump and uppertail-coverts. The forehead and a broad band through the eye were black. The crown, nape sides, back of the neck and upper back were clear grey diffusing to rufous or cinnamon on the rest of the upperparts. The chin, throat and upper breast were white and the rest of underparts pale rufous. The wings were blackish with a small white mirror at the base of the primaries. The iris was brown, bill black (flesh coloured at base of lower mandible), legs, feet and claws brownish black.

This species breeds from central Asia and Pakistan eastwards, it is a vagrant in the Arabian Gulf states. This is the first record of the species from Kuwait. There was a second record at the nearby Sulaibikhat Nature Reserve (NB35) on 14 October 2006 by Hussain Al Qallaf.

The record is subject to acceptance by the Kuwait Ornithological Records Committee.

Khaled Al Ghanem, Supervisor of Doha Natural Reserve, Department of Natural Reserves, P.O. Box : 11319, Dasma 15454, Kuwait (Email: khaledmfmg@yahoo.com).

The first Mongolian Trumpeter Finch for Kuwait

by Khaled Al Ghanem

While photographing and monitoring birds near a man-made, shallow pool, at the Sabah Al Ahmed Natural Reserve (NB36) on the morning of 5 March 2009, a small unidentified finch landed with a group of Trumpeter Finches *Bucanetes*

githagineus but it quickly flew away without drinking. The site was surrounded by bushes and situated near the Jal Az-Zor escarpment. During the short period of observation my attention was drawn to a whitish wing panel, which was not present in the Trumpeter Finches. I was not able to photograph the bird but the next day I arrived at the site at 5.00 am, at 5.41 am two of these birds appeared, quickly drank and flew away but not before I was able to take several photos. In the following days I saw the species on 10 March (two), 16 March (four), 19 March (ten) and on 11 March Pekka Fagel saw 12. The last was seen by me on 21 March. The species was seen near to Trumpeter Finch, Pale Rock Finch *Carospiza brachyactyla*, Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* and House Sparrow *P. domesticus*. After comparing photographs and the description below to Porter *et al.*, 1996, it was identified as a Mongolian Trumpeter Finch *B. mongolicus*.

It was sparrow size. Above it was sandy brown with a more or less pink supercilium, the wing and lower rump appeared to be in adult breeding plumage. The tail was dark brown with whitish outer edge. Below it was greyish brown more or less tinged with pink on the chin, throat, breast and flanks; the centre of the belly was whitish. The sexes seemed alike, but supposed females differed only in having less pink in the plumage. Apparent juveniles were similar, but wing-coverts had pale sandy brown fringes, there was no pink below and the breast and flanks were tinged tawny. Both sexes resembled Trumpeter Finch but adults in breeding plumage were distinguished by a large whitish wing panel, streaked crown, brownish yellow legs (orange flesh in Trumpeter) and the bill of the male was brownish yellow, see photo page 12.

The species is known from other places in the Arabian Gulf region but this is the first record in Kuwait. The nearest breeding area is eastern Turkey and northern Iran. The record has been accepted by the Kuwait Ornithological Rarities Committee.

Reference: Porter, R. F., S. Christensen & P. Schiermacker-Hansen. 1996. *Field guide to the birds of the Middle East*. T&AD Poyser, London.

Khaled Al Ghanem, Supervisor of Doha Natural Reserve, Department of Natural Reserves, P.O. Box : 11319, Dasma 15454, Kuwait (Email: khaledmfmg@yahoo.com)

Notes, Announcements and Requests for information

Arabian Bird calendar

Jens and Hanne Eriksen have produced their 2010 Bird Calendar for Arabia. This issue includes another great batch of bird photos. Two of their photos (not in the calendar) of White-tailed Plover *Vanellus leucurus* appear at page 12. If you would like a copy and/or place an early order for the 2011 calendar, please check for availability and price on their website www.birdsoman.com or email them (Email: hjoman@eim.ae).

White Storks ringed in Armenia

During the years 2007 to 2009, 271 White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* nestlings were ringed in Armenia. The birds received black plastic rings on their tibia. The rings show bold white symbols: "DER" and capital "A" with four digits. The sequential numbers of used rings fall between A6651 and A7996. All observers, who encounter a White Stork with a ring like this should email the Max-Planck-Institut für Ornithologie (Email: fiedler@orn.mpg.de) or the Acopian Center for the Environment (Email: ace@aua.am). All reports will be much appreciated and fully acknowledged.

Karen Aghababyan, Acopian Center for the Environment, American University of Armenia 40 Baghratian Ave, Yerevan 0019, Armenia. (<http://www.aua.am/ace/>).

Slender-billed Curlew in the Middle East

No one has claimed to have seen a Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* for almost a decade. It seems never to have been particularly numerous with a rather local breeding range in central Asia and winter grounds in North Africa and possibly the Middle East, including Arabia. Sadly there is a good chance that this species has slipped into extinction.

In an effort to confirm that the species still exists a full survey and search for this species is planned for winter 2009/10. As a further incentive four members of the Cley Bird Club in North Norfolk, UK are offering a total of \$1,000 reward for any photograph of a live Slender-billed Curlew taken in the Middle East. It is the wish of the club that \$500 will go to the photographer and \$500 to a conservation cause in the country where the photograph was taken.

Because of the identification challenges posed by the species any photograph will have to be verified by the SBC Identification Verification Panel, which comprises wader experts with past experience of the species. Already two photographs have been submitted, taken in Iraq in winter 2009, and another observer in Iran claims to have seen them recently. Unfortunately these reports have not yet been confirmed, so keep looking, it will be great if this reward can be paid out.

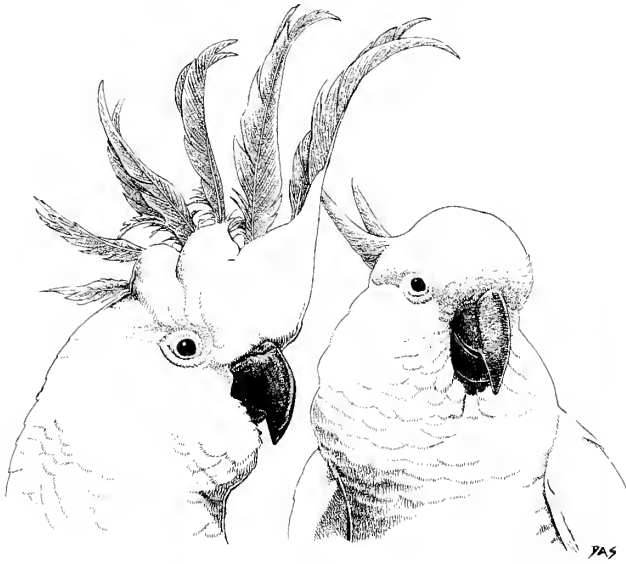
Claims and photos to be sent to Richard Porter (Email: richardporter@dialstart.net).

The Orphean Warbler site Hail al Jawari

The site on Jebal Shems, northern Oman where Orphean Warblers *Sylvia hortensis* were reported singing and almost certainly breeding in 2008 (*Phoenix* 25: 1-2) was visited by Dr Ulli Wernery from UAE in spring 2009. He did not record the warbler but did find a lot of rubbish and recreational pressure at the site and so wrote a letter of complaint to the Oman authorities. Perhaps as a result of the complaint when he visited the site again on 7 August he found it sealed off with a road barrier and an Omani guard. John Atkins also reported fencing work going on there in June.

This beautiful site certainly deserves to be protected and it is to be hoped that is what the barrier and guard are for. However there was an ominous rumour in 2008 that this site might

become another private farm like the one on the Saiq Plateau. That farm was created after bulldozing 1,000 year old Olive trees and uprooting ancient junipers and then robbing the plateau of its shallow topsoil for some considerable distance all around. A huge environmental price to pay for a few fruit trees.



The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* is one of the more exotic of exotics to have bred in Arabia. However it has not succeeded in establishing a viable feral population and will not be given a detailed species account in the Atlas. See page 11.

Courtship behaviour in wintering Common Kestrels

by Simon Aspinall

In late winter, perhaps triggered by an increase in day length, wintering Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* are routinely observed engaged in aerial courtship in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). There is a substantial wintering, non-breeding population both in coastal and inland districts of the UAE, including urban settings, with a smaller resident breeding population present mainly in mountain areas of the country. The species is an abundant passage migrant throughout the UAE and it is assumed that most if not all wintering birds found away from the known breeding areas are also from an Asian migrant population rather than from a more local source. Although many species commence breeding in the early part of the year in UAE, the Common Kestrel is not among them. It is interesting to note that wintering Common Kestrels are paired up and engaged in aerial and perched display at least by mid-February each year (as indeed are pairs in the local breeding population). Although other visiting species of diurnal and nocturnal migrants may apparently arrive as pairs (e.g. European Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*) this does not appear to be the case in Common Kestrels here, which appear to pair only once they are in their winter territories. It is possible that site fidelity results in both individuals of an established pair meeting up in a previously tenanted winter territory even if not having travelled in together. However, for this strategy to be worthwhile they ought then to travel north together in spring and thus arrive simultaneously. As a diurnal migrant this should be possible.

Other migrant species known to display and pair up in winter are in a distinct minority, seabirds (in the North Sea) being one obvious example. Other taxonomically unrelated and distanced species such as Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* often display and appear to pair up before returning north, as do Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* and Black-bellied Sandgrouse *P. orientalis* wintering in the north of Arabia.

I do not believe that this behaviour, of courtship and pairing in winter quarters has been documented previously for a migrant population of Common Kestrels in Arabia and I would be interested to learn of other similar observations for this species or other species wintering in Arabia.

Simon Aspinall, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE. (Email: hudhud10@gmail.com).

A nest site of the Sand Partridge in the Hajar Mountains, Oman

by Gary R. Feulner and Narayan Karki

The Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* is an endearing bird. Few observers can fail to be moved by the occasional sight of a train of plump, determined chicks scurrying gamely over the broken, rocky terrain, and few can fail to be impressed by the species' ability to win a living from the harsh environment it frequents. It is nevertheless a somewhat frustrating species for birdwatchers as it is shy and rarely seen at the observer's leisure. Instead, the most typical view is of a startled bird bursting into explosive flight, wings whirring, often after the observer has nearly passed by, then gliding away, almost always to land out of view.

It is relatively common in most areas where it occurs but there are no detailed reports in the literature of Sand Partridge nests and eggs from Arabia (M. C. Jennings, pers. comm.). This is the more surprising since the species is essentially an Arabian endemic; its range barely extends outside the Arabian Peninsula to Egypt east of the Nile, Sinai, Jordan and Palestine (Porter *et al.*, 1996). We record below details of a nest site of this species and a late breeding occurrence.

In the Hajar Mountains of northern Oman Sand Partridge flourish and are typically seen in an environment of gravel wadis bounded by low, rocky hillsides or steep-sided gravel terraces. In late morning on 28 August 2009 the authors were in Oman adjacent to the UAE border (VB26) west of Hatta (elev. 350 m.) and flushed two Sand Partridge from the shade of a grotto-like niche alongside a small wadi. As a matter of course, we detoured to check the site where the birds were flushed for scrapes and droppings. We saw that the back of the niche tapered downwards to a small, low cave ca. 1.5 m wide, 20 cm high and 2 m deep, see photo page 22. The remains of eggs were clearly visible in the centre of the back of the cave. Clustered on the stony floor and with the shells relatively intact, they gave the immediate impression of being at a nest site, and that impression was confirmed by inspection. The remains of six eggs were present and the breakage was indicative of the hatching of chicks, with the blunt end separated (and in one case still hinged) somewhat like a cap. The inner lining was still flexible suggesting that the eggs had hatched very recently.

The egg shells were collected and examined closely later. The

eggs were ca. 35 mm long, pale beige in colour (most with just a hint of very fine, diffuse dark speckling, concentrated near the zone of rupture) and with the blunt end somewhat more flattened than a chicken's egg. We had little doubt that the eggs were those of Sand Partridge, perhaps even the pair that had just departed. The opening was too small to inspect the nest visually at close quarters. The photo was taken before we had attempted to touch or remove them. The dark material on the ground in front of the eggs is stones, not feathers or down. There were a very few bits of stem in the cavity but they did not seem to be nesting material, so the nest was essentially the barest of scrapes on stones without nesting material.

We continued along the wadi, but we had advanced no more than about 15 m when we detoured into the mouth of a small, steep tributary where another pair of Sand Partridge (or possibly the same pair) fled from a nearby perch, somewhat above us on the rocky south bank. We then noticed a peripheral movement on the ground beside us, at the base of cliff. A Sand Partridge chick was afoot, apparently disturbed by our passage and looking uncertain whether or where to proceed. A quick scan revealed two more close by, motionless and tucked into a hollow at the base of the cliff, see photo page 22. The camouflage colouration of the chicks was superb, capturing all the subtlety of the ever-changing red-purple-grey-brown rocks of the Hajar Mountains. The original chick was healthy and could run and hop, and also flapped its wings. NK reckoned that the chicks were probably 10-15 days old. Despite the proximity of the chicks to the nest site, there was only circumstantial evidence linking them and at that age the chicks could have hatched from another clutch much further away.

Just as for nest sites, good information on breeding success for Sand Partridge is very limited. In May 2008, following relatively abundant spring rains in the mountains, and with surface water present in usually dry areas, the authors encountered at least six coveys of unfledged chicks (including two double coveys) in a single day, the two smallest of which were a hen plus seven or eight chicks. By this standard the clutch described above was relatively small, but our previous experience might have reflected better breeding success in the wetter conditions of 2008 and/or better breeding success in the springtime of any year, consistent with the local pattern of predominantly winter rainfall. In most years the Hajar Mountain environment is quite dry by late August, but the mountains had seen scattered thundershowers in July and August 2009. Working back, the latest chicks we observed must have hatched in early to mid-August from eggs laid in mid-July. This is somewhat later than the period March to May when chicks are most often seen in Arabia (Richardson, 1990; Jennings, 1995). The showers in summer 2009 might have encouraged the late breeding on an opportunistic basis.

References: ● Jennings, M. C. 1995. *An Interim Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia*. National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, Riyadh. ● Porter, R. F., S. Christensen & P. Schiermacker-Hansen. 1996. *Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East*. T & AD Poyser, London. ● Richardson, C. 1990. *The Birds of the United Arab Emirates*. Hobby Publications, Warrington, UK.

G. R. Feulner (Email: grfeulner@gmail.com) and N. Karki, Dubai Natural History Group, P.O. Box 9234, Dubai, UAE.

ABBA Short Species Accounts

In addition to the 273 breeding birds covered by detailed species accounts in the atlas and supported by distribution maps, there are 24 species that did not quite make the cut for 'confirmed breeding in the wild'. These species get a short account in the atlas without a map or vignette. The species are listed below with short notes on why they were excluded. Full details of the records for all these species are provided in the atlas.

Some of these birds will almost certainly be found to breed or establish viable feral populations in due course, species in this category are identified with an asterisk (*).

See-see Partridge *Anmoperdix griseogularis** This species may yet be confirmed as a resident in north central Arabia.

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* Occurrences have been of likely escaped birds with no evidence of breeding.

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* An exotic breeding in sheltered conditions only.

Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* One bird of suspect origin once produced hybrid young with a Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*.

Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor** Several nest building events (see page 16) but eggs have never been laid.

African Spoonbill *Platalea alba* Some nesting activity reported from this rare visitor to the south.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni** Reports of breeding have not been conclusive.

Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppelli* May well have been a former breeder but very few records and none reliable in the last 70 years.

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus** A potential breeding species often present in summer.

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata* There are a few natural occurrences. One of probable escaped origin has produced hybrid young with Common Coot *Fulica atra*.

Grey-crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum* An exotic breeding in sheltered conditions only.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* An escape that has bred on one or two occasions but birds do not survive long.

Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus* Breeding in sheltered conditions only, no viable feral population is reported.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus** Likely to breed in one small eastern region but confirmation needed.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Rumours and suggestions of breeding but no good evidence.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica** Several reports of possible breeding but no firm evidence available.



(Clockwise from top left)

Three firsts for Kuwait; the first Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus* was recorded near Abdali (NB37) on 22 February 2009. (Photo: Abdulrahman Al Sirhan); the first Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* was seen on 7 October 2004 at Jahra Pool Nature Reserve (NB35) on Kuwait Bay. (Photo: Khaled Al Ghanem), there has been another since and the first Mongolian Trumpeter Finches *Bucanetes mongolicus* were at a small shallow pool at Sabah Al Ahmed Natural Reserve (NB36) on 6 March 2009. Between 5-21 March up to 12 of this species were seen in the area. One is shown here accompanied by House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. (Photo: Khaled Al Ghanem).

The White-tailed Plover *Vanellus leucurus* has bred again in Dubai and the species extended its UAE range to near Abu Dhabi (UB25) in 2009. These photos by Hanne and Jens Eriksen were taken at the Dubai pivot fields on 29 May when they estimated at least three pairs were breeding. The nest shown is less substantial than is usual for the species. The chick had just hatched, the adult immediately returned to brood the chick after the brief nest inspection.





(Clockwise from top)

The most successful Arabian breeding colony ever of Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* was recorded in the UAE near Abu Dhabi (UA25) in 2009. Large chicks formed creches of many hundreds. (Photo: Salim Javed/EAD).

Abdulrahman Al Sirhan and some friends from Kuwait visited Yemen in May 2009 on a photography expedition, here are some of his results. The Yemen race of the Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps yemensis* has a distinctive pale face. A particularly colourful breeding summer visitors to Yemen and south-west Saudi Arabia from Africa is the White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albigollis*, it nests colonially in mud banks. The Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinereus* is a resident of the highlands of the south-west, frequenting gardens and terraces. This Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* at Hammam Jarif (KA06), on 6 May 2009 was probably a summer visitor, although the species also migrates through south-west Arabia. (All photos by Abdulrahman Al Sirhan).



Ethiopian Swallow *Hirundo aethiopica* May once have bred at Aden.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* Circumstantial evidence of breeding only, it is probably only a migrant.

Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis** Almost certainly breeds in some eastern highland areas.

Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta* The only reports are from the north-east but none provide evidence of breeding.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina** Circumstantial evidence of breeding in eastern highland areas.

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*, **Yellow-crowned Bishop** *Euplectes after* and **Southern Red Bishop** *E. orix* These exotics have all been reported to breed but no confirmed reports or published notes have been seen.

New Books

Phoenix aims to provide details of all new publications which are relevant to birds and wildlife in Arabia or generally to the Arabian/Middle East environment. Titles mentioned are usually available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned. When ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number, if given. The prices shown against titles are published prices but may not include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of contents. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new and relevant titles not already mentioned in this survey.

***Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea, an atlas of distribution* by John Ash and John Atkins (2009)**

An excellent book on the birds of north-eastern Africa. This comprehensive atlas covers 872 species that occur in the region, 527 of these breed. Distribution maps are provided for all species. There is an introduction to the political units, topography, geology, vegetation and climate as well as bird habitats and conservation. Languages and government notes are followed by an interesting historical account of ornithological activity in the region, which was spearheaded by 19th century collectors, often mixed up with the dark plans of the European powers engaged in the scramble for Africa. Numerous maps illustrate these introductory sections. This part of Africa is extremely interesting from the point of view of the mix of status of species and the huge variety of habitats available. Breeding seasons vary a great deal in a region of major climate variation and altitude range set against a rich variety of intra-African migrant breeders and intra-African winter visitors, as well as the large number of Palearctic migrants and winter visitors. The species accounts provide the English and scientific names and sometimes others names, the status in each country, the subspecies that occur, endemic status as appropriate, distribution, altitudes of occurrence, habitats where found,

population and historical changes in numbers and for migrants/visitors, there are also dates of occurrence. For those species only recorded five or less times full occurrence details are provided. There is information on breeding and phenology and particular sites where the species may be seen. All species are mapped, the distribution grid is the half degree square (there are about 500 squares) and distribution is indicated by four symbols. These are: a small circle for uncertain records (not much used except for records outside the usual range), an open circle represents a confirmed sight or specimen record (the majority of map dots are of this category), an open circle with a dot for an unconfirmed breeding record (where presence is confirmed) and a solid circle means confirmed breeding. In addition lines on the maps define subspecies ranges. The text is necessarily in a condensed format. There are 32 endemics in the region, 18 of these are only found in Ethiopia. Important bird areas are listed. Threatened and near threatened species include, three Critically Endangered, seven Endangered, 15 Vulnerable and 23 Near Threatened. There is a summary of bird ringing (57,000 birds of 498 species) with recoveries listed. A block of about 30 colour photos cover the region's special birds. The book is supported by a glossary, an extensive gazetteer and a good bibliography and index. This book is an excellent companion to the acclaimed *Birds of Somalia* (Ash and Miskell, 1998) although unfortunately neither cover Djibouti. Highly recommended.

Hardbound, 463 pages. Price £45. Published by Christopher Helm, an imprint of A&C Black, 36 Soho Square, London W1D 3QY (www.acblack.com), ISBN 978-1-4081-0979-3.

***Birds of the Horn of Africa* by Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson and John Fanshawe (2009)**

This is the first field guide which covers the more than 1,000 species of birds occurring in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Socotra. About 70 of these are endemics, mostly in Ethiopia. The huge species diversity of this region is understandable with the variety of habitats including savannas, deserts, Afrotropical highlands and coastal sites. The necessary short and succinct species accounts include a short introduction to each bird grouping; names and measurements; their habits; the habitats where they are found, including elevation. Voice and descriptive notes are given for each including possible confusion with similar species and geographical variation. Also for each species there are notes on status/commonality, migration within Africa and the palearctic and vagrants and conservation aspects include threatened status. The maps are unfortunately too small at 25 mm (1 inch) square and appear cramped, including as they do international borders (adjacent countries are greyed out), highlands both within the region and outside which are shaded plus major rivers, lakes and the coast. Then status is indicated by five different shadings in three colours plus 'X's for vagrant or isolated records and '?'s for uncertain records. Over the sea there are two shades, one for visitors and one for breeding. Most users would find a magnifying glass useful even under a bright African sun. The short introductory chapters (30 odd pages) explain and define the contents of the species accounts and maps, outline the taxonomy and nomenclature followed and provide notes on bird identification, geography, climate and habitats and mention protected areas, which are mostly in Ethiopia, and important

bird areas throughout the region. There are 213 colour plates with over 2,600 illustrations covering all species including all Socotra endemics, these are generally excellent. The book is complete with a checklist of the birds of the region, a listing of endemics, references and indexes. The objective of this book and the one by Ash and Atkins (above) are quite different of course and anyone serious about north-east African birds will want both of them. The two Ash *et al.* titles are the best available on status and distribution in the region but this field guide will be needed by visitors.

Waterproof card covers, 496 pages, price £29.99. Published by Christopher Helm an imprint of A&C Black Publishers, 36 Soho Square, London W1D 3QY (www.acblack.com), ISBN 978-0-7136-6541-3.

Arthropod Fauna of the United Arab Emirates (Vol 2) by Antonius van Harten (Ed) 2009

Volume one of this series, which aims to systematically review the arthropod fauna of the UAE, appeared in January 2008 and was mentioned in *Phoenix* 25. The second volume has appeared remarkably quickly and the two together have covered 125 families of the approximately 370 families that have been collected in the UAE. On this basis we might look forward to another four volumes in due course. In Volume 2, there are contributions by 42 specialists from 18 countries. The papers include 83 new species and two new subspecies described for science and add some 390 species to those already known for the UAE. Like the first this second volume contains hundreds of colour photos, mainly close-ups of specimens. There are also a very large number of black and white and colour line drawings. The more than 40 main systematic papers are mostly on insect families but there are two on arachnids, and one on the Entognatha (on springtails). The majority of the insect papers cover the Coleoptera (beetles), Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) and Diptera (flies) with 12, 8 and 12 papers respectively. The series is very quickly building into an indispensable reference to the arthropods of the UAE and indeed the whole region and every serious student of the subject throughout the Middle East region will want to have this series on their library shelf.

Hardback, 786 pages. Published by Dar Al Ummah, P.O. Box 39975, Abu Dhabi, UAE. ISBN 978-9948-15-090-9. Further details of the price and series are obtainable from the editor (Email: tonyvanharten@gmail.com).

The Native Plants of Oman, an Introduction with Notes for Gardeners by Clive Winbow (2008)

This is a useful introduction to some of the commoner and more noticeable plants of Oman including Dhofar. It includes notes for those who want to grow them in their gardens and how to collect seeds and cuttings in a sensible, environmentally friendly way. There are many advantages to growing local flowering plants in Arabian gardens, compared with non-native species, because Omani plants are mostly, by their nature, drought resistant so do not need much water or maintenance. They also require less fertiliser, pesticides and chemicals to keep them thriving. There is an introductory section on how to grow Omani plants which deals with the basics such as soil, salt, sun, ph,

watering and drainage, mulching and aspects of propagation, for example, by seeds, cuttings, or layering. The two main sections of the book cover the plants of northern and central Oman and Dhofar. About 170 species are mentioned in all with about 150 dealt with separately in the guide. The short species accounts describe in non-technical language the plant and its parts, flowers, fruit, foliage, seeds, etc., with interesting notes on how it is used traditionally in Oman, for example as food, medicine and any other utility to which it is put. Each plant has an Arabic and sometimes an English name in addition to the scientific name. The book is illustrated by probably more than 500 photos, with often three or four photos of individual species, showing the plant, flower and seeds. Appendices deal with exotic species on the loose in Oman, edible plants and there are lists of plants for particular purposes in the garden such as shade providers, climbers etc. Finally, lists of references and websites are helpful and there is an index.

Card cover, 127 pages. Price not known. Published by the Environment Society of Oman, PO Box 3955, Ruwi 112, Sultanate of Oman (Email: admin@environment.org.om; www.environment.org.om), ISBN 978-9948-03-775-0.

Journals, Reports and Other Publications

The following notes list some of the papers concerning birds and other wildlife which have appeared in journals and newsletters relevant to the Arabian environment in recent months. Space does not permit the full citation of each article but further information can be obtained from the various societies and organisations shown. Note that in addition to the main papers listed most periodicals also include regular features such as recent reports, brief notes etc.

Fauna of Arabia 24 (2009)

This issue of over 400 pages includes 14 papers all on invertebrates; two on molluscs, two on arachnids and ten on insects. The molluscs papers include a lengthy review of the land snails of the family Pomatiidae of Arabia, Socotra and north-eastern Africa with particular attention to Socotra where no less than 31 species level taxa and seven genera are discussed. Several papers includes descriptions of taxa new to science.

Published by the Senckenberg Institute Frankfurt a. M. and the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, Riyadh. Distributed by Karger Libri Basle. ISBN 978-3-929907-80-3. Details of cost and availability from <http://www.libri.ch/agency/services/faunaofarabia.htm>.

Zoology in the Middle East

No 45 (2008) is comprised of 13 main papers and seven short notes. Arabian interest includes papers on hedgehogs in Qatar, wolves in Saudi Arabia and reptiles in Kuwait. The two papers on birds concern Audouin's Gull breeding on the Kleidhes islands, Cyprus and clutch size and breeding success of the Little Egret in Turkey. In **No 46 (2009)** bird papers concern the

diet and growth of chicks of the Great Cormorant at Ramsar on the Caspian and the song of the Cyprus race of the Short-toed Tree-creeper, which supports its subspecies status. Papers on the fauna of the Arabian Peninsula relate to the fish diet of the Bottle-nosed Dolphin in the Gulf of Aqaba, Fringe-toed Lizards in Kuwait and a new species of scorpion from the UAE. There are 15 main papers (nine on vertebrates) and four short communications (two on vertebrates). Of particular interest are papers on the critically endangered Monk Seal on the southern coast of Turkey, the present day status of critically endangered Caspian Brown Trout (one of the largest trouts in the world reaching 51 kg) and carnivores in the Gaza Strip. **No 47 (2009)** has 11 main papers and seven short notices. The main papers include nine on vertebrates, two of which relate to birds. The seven short notes include three on vertebrates, one of these concerns a *Stenodactylus* gecko from Kuwait. The two main papers on birds are about the distribution of breeding birds in the Gediz delta, western Turkey and the other on the status of the exotic Ring-necked Parrakeet *Psittacula krameri* in Oman. The latter is mainly a review of the one thousand or so records of this species on the Oman Central Bird Database which go back to 1950. The database seems to be the sole source of data and the results are rather two dimensional in the interpretation of the available information. There is quite a lot on the effect of the species on the environment in other parts of the world but almost nothing on these aspects in Oman. Other major papers include a status and habitat review of Arabian Leopard in Dhofar, Oman (field work found scats in an area of good habitat and prey species) another paper looks at habitat selection of otters in Iran. **No 49 (2009)** has 13 main papers and nine short communications. The main papers include three on mammals, Asian Garden Dormouse in Syria, Leopard in Iran and Mole Rats in Turkey and two on birds. One concerns the recent status of the Great Bustard in Turkey (it is decreasing) and the other the habitat preference and diurnal activity pattern of the Sand Partridge in central Arabia. One of the two reptile papers is about nesting Hawksbill Turtles in the Arabian Gulf. The other six main papers concern invertebrates.

ZME (ISSN 0939-7140) is available on annual subscription (three issues per year) from Kasperek Verlag Mönchhofstr. 16, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany (Email: Kasperek@t-online.de).

Sandgrouse the journal of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East

The main papers relating to Arabian birds in Vol. 31 (2009 Pts 1 & 2) include the cooling behaviour of desert frequenting larks in Kuwait; the status of selected migrants in Kuwait; nest tree utilisation of Brown-necked Raven in Saudi Arabia; the juvenile plumage of the Socotra Bunting and the status and distribution of the Clamorous Reed Warbler in eastern Saudi Arabia. There are also notes on the first breeding of Black-winged Stilt on Socotra, the first Collared Kingfisher in Yemen and the first Great Knot in Qatar, plus the usual notes and information from Arabia and the OSME region.

Sandgrouse is available on subscription to OSME. Details from the Secretary (Email: secretary@osme.org).

Birds of Oman Film (No 2)

Phoenix 25 mentioned a DVD available from the Ministry of Information, Oman on the birds of Dhofar which had been produced for Oman TV by Hamed al Wardi. Hamad has now produced another DVD on the birds of northern Oman and it is available from the same place. This latest film takes a special look at shorebirds and seabirds with good shots of Crab Plover, Socotra Cormorant and other specialties. (If anyone can identify the large object a Crab Plover is carrying in one sequence they will win a subscription to *Phoenix*). It also includes film from the renowned Al Ansab lagoons near Muscat, including a remarkable shot of a Marsh Harrier deftly catching a fish on the wing. Nearby at the rubbish dump large numbers of raptors notably Egyptian Vultures can be seen. The film also looks at passerines typical in these parts including the several exotic species that now occur as well as some species restricted to the Musandam such as the Chukar. This DVD is a good introduction to the birds of northern Oman and will whet the appetite of those who may be thinking of going to the Oman for a birding holiday.

The film can be purchased on DVD from Rosemary Hector Ministry of Information Oman PO Box 600, Code 113, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman (Email: informus99@gmail.com) at a cost of £5.00. The film mentioned in Phoenix 25 is also still available on DVD at the same price. (Sums to be paid by UK sterling cheque only).

Recent Reports

The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian birds (mostly potential breeding species) received during the last year. Records are from 2009 unless noted otherwise. Note that not all these records have been verified or accepted by local recorders. Notes after the name of the observer are editorial comment and not necessarily part of the original report.

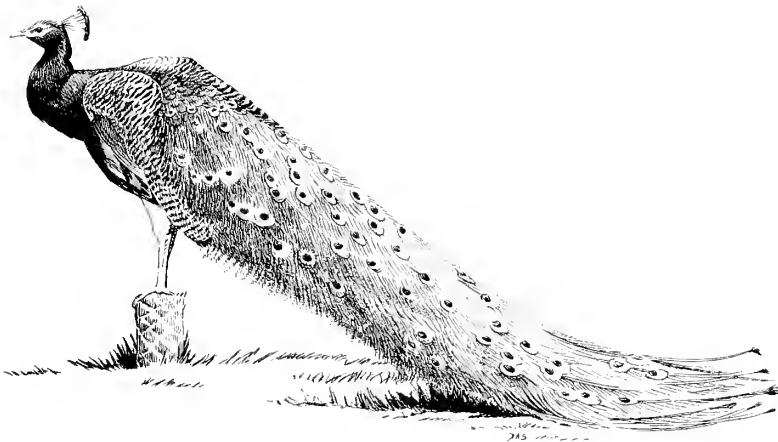
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* One chick on Lulu island (UA25) Abu Dhabi on 12 March, on 14 March two pairs including one pair with three chicks were present (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder).

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* Possible nest building activity by two adults 1 May at west Doha lagoons (RA27), Qatar (Gordon Saunders).

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* There were 85 on the sea between Al Khobar and Dhahran (QA29) in late September (Iwan Roberts). This period probably coincides with the species moult.

Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* Five adults were seen sitting on nests at Aden Marsh (KB02), Yemen, spring 2009 (Safwan Al Saghier). There are now a number of records of this species constructing nest mounds and engaged in courtship rituals, maybe one day they will lay eggs and finally get on the Arabian breeding birds list.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* A group of seven migrants at Dhakira wetland (RB28), Qatar east coast on 21 May, included one with coloured rings on both legs. The photos



The Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* is breeding ferally in the UAE, and perhaps elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf, in sheltered suburban environments, see page 11. Three chicks were recorded, 14 May 2009 at Jebal Ali hotel (VA27), UAE (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder).

taken enabled this to be traced to a bird ringed as a nestling on 18 May 2008 at Bolluk Lake, near Konya, Turkey, 2,240 km (Jamie Buchan). Another Spoonbill with coloured leg rings seen in northern Oman in December 2003 had been ringed as a chick in the Danube Delta, Rumania the previous July.

Squacco Heron *Ardiola ralloides* At least two pairs bred at Nakhla (RA27) Qatar, with juveniles on 19 June (Jamie Buchan). First breeding for Qatar. One was carrying nesting material on 15 May at Dumistan (QA29), Bahrain (Adrian Drummond-Hill).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* One showing the characters of the eastern subspecies *coromandus* was reported from Dibba farm (WA28), UAE on 8 August (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder). There are other *coromandus* records from Oman.

Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* A flock seen off Al Khobar (QA29) was originally estimated at 45-50,000 birds but later, based on calculations from photos the flock was thought to be at least 100,000 birds (Graham Lobley).

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* The return migration route of the Sooty Falcon to Madagascar, where the species winters, was an enigma as a direct route between Arabian colonies and Madagascar in October would involve migration against headwinds coming up the coast of eastern Africa, as part of the South-West Monsoon system. Satellite tracking of a bird from the UAE has solved this mystery in part; in late 2008 one tracked bird went directly across the Arabian Peninsula to the Red Sea then into Africa, to Ethiopia and down eastern Africa before crossing to Madagascar. This discovery puts into a different light several records of autumn birds inland in Arabia and helps explain the general absence of observations on the southern coast of Arabia in the latter part of the year.

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* One was seen briefly and photographed at Sabkhat al Fasl (PA31), near Jubail on 30 October, 2009 (Graham Lobley/MEBirdnet). There are previous Arabian records from Oman and UAE but this

appears to be the first from Saudi Arabia.

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* Up to 15 Sabkhat al Fasl (PA31), Eastern Province, March and April with two downy young, 20 March (Graham Lobley and Phil Roberts). In Dubai (VA27) the long term resident African race bird of probable 'escape' status was seen with one small chick on 24 January (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder).

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Two pairs each with three young on 20 June at Al Karaanah sewage lagoons (RA27), Qatar (Jamie Buchan). First breeding in Qatar since the 1980s. Also four to six pairs were breeding, including one pair incubating, on 25 April at Askaria pool (or Nagda lake) UB25, near Abu Dhabi. On 10 May there were ten chicks at al Wathba nearby. Four chicks were also seen on 14 June (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder).

Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus* One at Sabkhat al Fasl (PA31), Jubail on 30 October (Graham Lobley). The range of this species continues to creep slowly across Arabia, breeding is usually preceded by wintering over a few years.

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* A pair probably bred on the Sila Peninsula (RB25), UAE, 6 June (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder). This is the furthest west 'breeding' record in the UAE.

White-tailed Plover *Vanellus leucurus* Apparently incubating birds and adults mobbing corvids at Al Wathba (UB25), east of Abu Dhabi in 2008 and 2009 and juveniles seen later in 2009 show that the species has now colonised another part of the UAE (Oscar Campbell).

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* Two pairs with eggs nesting close together on the north-west corner of Tiran Island (AA32), 10 May 2003 (Francesco Germi). One of several interesting records from these rarely visited Saudi Arabian islands, at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, the first for several years.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* In excess of 100 at Hamilah experimental farm (QA29), Bahrain in spring 2009 and pairs also seen south of the island (Brendan Kavanagh).

Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata* Several reports with breeding assumed (but not yet proven) in a very restricted area of Doha (RB27), Qatar (Jamie Buchan).

Barn Owl *Tyto alba* Seen over a built up area of Sana'a (KA07), Yemen three times in the last year (David Stanton). Also a pair in a large barn on 10 June at Arakhiya pivots, near Mukeinis (RA27), Qatar (Jamie Buchan). This species is also increasingly reelected on pivot farms where it presumably finds a ready supply of rodent prey.

Desert Eagle-owl *Bubo ascalaphus* Two nests both with chicks (two young and three young) were found in spring near Jubail (PB30), only 1.5 km apart (Stephen Crute). This is the shortest distance between active nests recorded in Arabia. A pair with three just fledged young were at the UAE's most

dependable site for this species at Qarn Nazwa (VB26) on 31 March (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder).

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* Adults collecting food on 12 March, Al Ain (VB25), so presumably young were already in the nest (Simon Aspinall).

Hoopoe *Upupa epops* A pair nesting below ground level under a lawn sprinkler valve cover, appeared to have successfully fledged one chick in April at Dhahran (QA29) Eastern Province (Phil Roberts).

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* This species appears to have been absent from Qatar for several years as it has never been found by Jamie Buchan despite several specific searches for it. It became extinct on Bahrain in 1971.

House Crow *Corvus splendens* It was announced in April that the Socotra campaign to rid the island of this alien species had apparently been successful. It is understood that the last ones were shot by a trained marksman employed on a GEF funded programme (Richard Porter).

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* Singing 27-28 March, Dhahran effluent lake (QA29), Eastern Province (G R Lobley).

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* Suspected to breed Jahra east outfall (NB35) this year as it was present from May to July. Also probably bred there in 2007 but possibly not in 2008 as the site was much disturbed that year (Abdulrahman al Sirhan).

Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* Male and possibly two females, 11 June, at a new site on Jebal Shems (XA23), Oman (John Atkins).

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Nest building 17 April at Hamraniyah (VB28), UAE. On 27 August a group of 18, mostly immatures still attached to parents and food begging, were seen at Dubai pivot fields prompting speculation that they may have bred locally (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder). There are other similar records of juveniles in the Dubai area at this season but the species does not appear to be present in the early to midsummer period, so it may be that these juveniles come from further north in the UAE.

Pied Mynah *Sturuus contra* Nest 29 March, Safa park Dubai (VA27), UAE (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder).

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cineracea* The long staying birds at Thumrait (UA12), Oman (seven arrived in August 2007) had reduced to just one by 15 May (Steve Tibbett).

Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis* A courting pair at Shafa (GA19) near Taif on 7 May and nearby one bird seen feeding on juniper berries (Graham Lobley).

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* Possible breeding indicated by the presence of *feldegg* race birds at Dubai pivot fields (VA27) on 19 June (from Tommy Pedersen, UAE Recorder).

Winter Waterbird Count, Oman, January-February 2008

by Ian Harrison and Mike Green

The West Asian Flyway migration route, that follows the rivers of west and central Siberia towards Arabia and Africa, is important for shorebirds breeding in Scandinavia and west and central Siberia. However, there have been comparatively few studies of this route and data from Arabia is limited.

The Omani Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA), is responsible for conducting the annual winter waterbird counts in Oman. Much of the survey work has been carried out in the past by volunteers from the Oman Bird Group working in their own time during weekends in January and early February, when the wintering populations are relatively stable. Although counts were made at as many as possible of the key areas which are known to contain large concentrations of waders, gulls and other waterbirds these counts were not comprehensive. Coverage of the coastline was often incomplete due to the distances involved.

A detailed study of the highly important Barr Al Hikman area was to take place during January 2008 by a separate team and it was therefore decided to conduct a simultaneous survey of the rest of the entire Oman coastline, the first time that this had been attempted.

The survey took place between 24 January and 6 February 2008. In total, 158,154 waterbirds were recorded. This included 29,802 waders, 120,287 gulls and terns, 2,506 cormorants and 2,505 egrets and herons. In addition, nearly 800 raptors of 16 species, including over 100 Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* and 60 Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* were recorded.

A detailed report is being prepared, which will include the counts of the team at Barr Al Hikman, for publication in *Sandgrouse*, the journal of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East. The article will also include information on key coastal sites that are in need of protection given the large concentrations of waterbirds that are present in winter and the increasing development taking place along the Omani coast.

The team much appreciated sponsorship for the survey from OSME, the Ecology Matters Trust, the Oman Bird Group and Mohsin Haider Darwish (Automotive Division).

I Harrison (Email: ianbirds@gmail.com) Llyswen, Ion y Felim, Aberaeron, Ceredigion, SA46 OED, UK and M Green

ABBA and Phoenix Notes and Notices

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are by the Editor. This newsletter is covered by the *Zoological Record* prepared by Thomson Zoological Ltd, Innovation Centre, York Science Park, Innovation Way, Heslington, York YO10 5DG, UK.

Contributions to *Phoenix* *Phoenix* is published annually and contains papers, reports, correspondence and announcements on all aspects of Arabian ornithology. Papers are not independently refereed but every effort is made to ensure that content is accurate. However the views expressed by authors are not necessarily shared by the Editor or the sponsors of *Phoenix* and the ABBA project. All articles relevant to the ornithology of Arabia and the Arabian environment are welcomed. Notices of reports and publications etc and requests for information are included free of charge. Articles may be emailed, submitted on disk, typed or handwritten. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

Records still needed The 'first phase' of the ABBA project is complete and the atlas is being prepared for publication. However the database will continue to be added to after publication and data will also be available to anyone who needs information on Arabian birds or the region. Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, are urged to make contact with the Coordinator. Old records are still particularly relevant as they help to throw light on the history of population changes, range expansions and contractions. Although the ABBA project primarily concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, notes suggesting possible or probable breeding, particularly uncommon breeding species, are also valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed. There is still much scope for collecting breeding bird information even for common species in well trodden areas. Would observers please continue to send in records and information for their local area and remember to copy ABBA report sheets to the local bird recorder (if there is one). Any outstanding report sheets for 2009 or earlier years should be sent in as soon as possible. There are instructions on how to submit records, ABBA recording forms, breeding birds list etc, on the ABBA website: <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/arabian.birds/>. If potential contributors experience any difficulties they can send hard copies.

How to obtain *Phoenix* One issue of *Phoenix* is published each year. It is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is also sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £25 (€35/US\$45) for the next five issues, i.e. Nos 27-31 inclusive, or by an annual standing order (Sterling bank accounts). Cheques to be made payable to ABBA/*Phoenix* or M C Jennings. Because of excessive bank charges for handling foreign cheques those not having access to a UK bank account are asked to pay in Sterling (£), Euros (€), US\$ banknotes, or the equivalent in other foreign currency notes. Subscribers will notice that their address label includes a number which indicates the last number of *Phoenix* they have

paid for. Would subscribers please send in their new subscription before their old sub runs out to avoid the time and expense of reminders. Subscribers to *Phoenix* are also entitled to receive PDFs of miscellaneous ABBA publications including Survey reports (e.g. the full report of Survey 40 mentioned above). Free copies that are sent out to those in Arabia and irregular correspondents may be discontinued without warning, so to ensure you get a copy of each issue please think about subscribing. Back issues of *Phoenix* (Nos 1-25) are available at £2/€3/US\$4 each (or the whole set for £30/€40/US\$50) including postage. Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Will subscribers please remember to advise of any change of address.

When ordering *Phoenix* please advise if you would like an invoice or a receipt. *Phoenix* is not available through agents. ABBA contact details are on page 24.

Winter Birds in Northern Saudi Arabia, February 2009 - A Summary of ABBA Survey 40

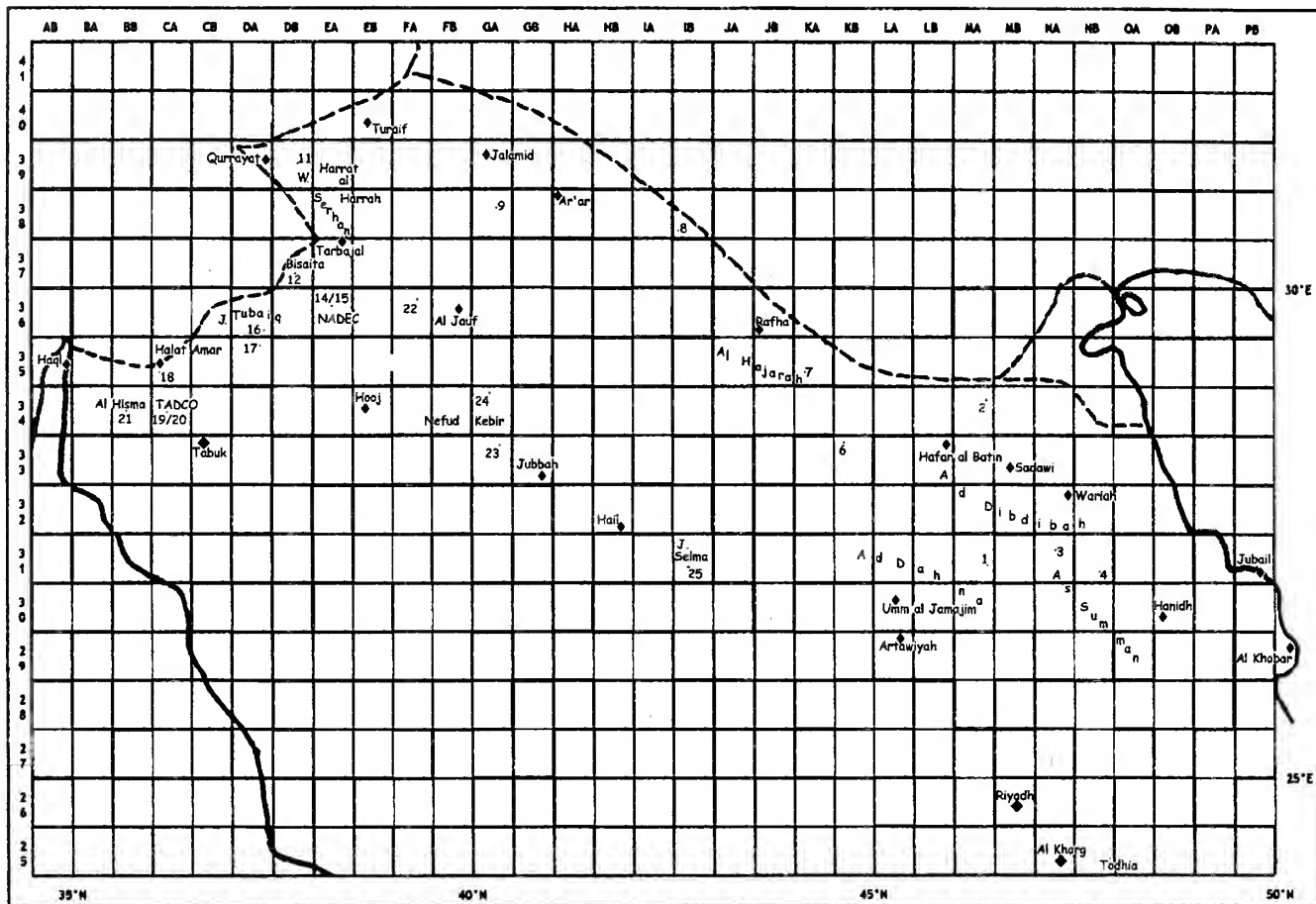
by Michael C Jennings

Introduction

A survey was made of the plains of northern Saudi Arabia, 1-26 February 2009, with the aim of assessing the number of birds present in the area in winter through a variety of census techniques. Information on breeding birds distribution was also to be collected. The author was accompanied (consecutively) by three staff members of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD), Riyadh; Mohammed I. Al Salamah (Manager of the Training Centre and Nature Resources Conservation), 1- 6 February; Baleegh Abu Qabous (Field Researcher, Jubail Marine Reserve), 6-14 February and Hajed N. Al Subaie (Field Researcher, NWRC Taif), 14-26 February.

The team visited the northernmost parts of Saudi Arabia from the Gulf of Aqaba in the west to the northern coast of the Arabian Gulf in the east, usually north of the Nefud Kebir and Ad Dahna sand-seas and in other places generally north of 27°N. Other places visited included the Jebal Selma south of Hail, the al Hair watercourse near Riyadh and Todhia farm east of Al Kharg, central Arabia. Central Arabian sites were visited before or after the main study period mentioned above. The places visited and camp sites of the survey can be seen on the map at page 20.

The plains region studied was mostly within 200 km of the northern Saudi Arabia border with Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, a contiguous area of over 231,000 km², approximately the size of the United Kingdom. This region exhibits a variety of topography; plains, limestone ridges, significant sandstone outcrops, sand seas and volcanic harrat areas. All these landforms were visited, although only the edge of the harrats were touched. Two large irrigated farms, NADEC farm on Al Bisaita Plain and TADCO near Tabuk were also visited.



ABBA Survey 40: northern Saudi Arabia (February 2009) - places visited and campsites. (The numbers on the map are dates in February and the location of campsites. Hotel accommodation was taken at Al Khobar (5th), Turayf (10th) and Qurrayat (13th).

On previous ABBA Surveys in winter and early spring in northern Saudi Arabia wintering species were found in surprisingly large numbers on the plains. These included Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* in groups of up to 125, Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* a rare winter visitor to Arabia was present in groups of a dozen or more and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* sometimes with daily counts of over 1,000. Once a group of 45 of the endangered Sociable plover *Vanellus gregarius*, were seen in early March. In addition numerous eagles, vultures and other birds of prey are known to winter in the area as are several passerine species, notably wheatears *Oenanthe* sp and many larks.

Study methods

Two main censussing methods were used to try to understand the number of birds present in the study area in winter, these were a half-hour walked census at dawn and driven transect counts. For both, all birds seen or heard were recorded and notes made for each site including the superficial geology, elevation, vegetation, habitats, land usage, and weather conditions. In all 21 walked morning censuses were made from the vicinity of camp sites and 25 driven transects completed.

The morning censuses provided a snapshot of birds present (including non-breeding species) on the day but were not necessarily representative of the birds that might occur at other times of the year or from year to year. The full value of this

type of census in assessing bird populations, their habitats and other ecological requirements is only achieved after many censuses over the same or similar sites, preferably at different times of the year. This was clearly not possible in the circumstances but even so the walked morning censuses results, when taken together, provided a yardstick on which rough order population estimates could be calculated. The results were also compared to similar census work in other years in the region and to the results of the driven transect counts through the common denominator of 'birds per square kilometre' found by both methods.

Driven transects present an opportunity to sample birds of small population over wide areas where other census methods might not be practicable. Clearly there will be many reasons why the results will not be fully representative of the actual bird populations in the areas traversed but each driven transect provided an indication of the minimum number of birds present in any one area and these minima can be extrapolated to wider areas. This censussing method was not used in the western part of the survey area (west of Jebal Tubaiq), as the topography there did not lend itself to long distance off-road travel and neither did it have a homogeneous habitat.

Results of censuses and other field work

During the 21 walked morning censuses a total of 208 birds of 44 species were recorded. Of these 32 species were potential breeding residents and 12 were winter visitors or migrants. If one considers that these censuses represent collectively more

than 10 hours of intensive observation the very few birds present during February 2009 in the study area can be appreciated. On two censuses no birds were recorded at all.

The driven transects were carried out at average speeds, mostly in the range of 15-35 kph, although one transect averaged 11 kph and another 45 kph. Whilst on the plains usually two driven transect counts were completed each day, one from the camp site in the morning and the other to the next campsite in the afternoon. The 25 driven transect counts ranged between 15 km and 135 km in length and covered a total of 1,511 km. There was just over one bird seen in each kilometre on average during the driven transects, a result reflecting the extremely low populations levels revealed by the walked censuses. The driven transect count results included records of 19 breeding species and 15 non-breeding species. Up to 16 species were seen on individual transects, but usually it was only 6-8 species. The most commonly recorded resident birds on the driven transects were Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilopha* (219), Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* (93), Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* (83), Greater Hoopoe-lark *Alaemon alaudipes* (76) and Bar-tailed Lark *A. cinctura* (55). The number of birds found on the 24 analysed transects ranged from zero (Transect No 23 over 68 km) to 238 (Transect No 6 over 93 km). The most commonly recorded non-breeding species were the two *Calandrella* sp larks, which were found in small flocks, mostly in the east, with 476 Greater Short-toed Lark *C. brachydactyla* and 78 Lesser Short-toed Lark *C. rufescens*. Surprisingly the next most frequently recorded wintering species on driven transects was Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, with at least 63 individuals. The usually common wintering chats, Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* and Desert Wheatear *O. deserti*, were only 4th and 6th most recorded, with 51 and 27 respectively. It should not be concluded that because more eagles were seen than some small passerines the latter were less common. The eagles were of course seen at a much greater range than the small species and therefore their density per square kilometre, was much less. The results between transects were broadly compared by calculating the average number of birds in a square kilometre, this produced between zero and 47 birds per square kilometre.

General observations were made at other northern sites. Large arable farms were visited at NADEC Farm Bisaita and TADCO Farm near Tabuk. The avifauna of these farms is biased towards human commensals and birds attracted to irrigated sites and they provide significant habitats for migrant and winter visitors. A number of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* (rare winter visitor) were recorded at both farms and at TADCO several small flocks of Eurasian Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* were present, the first record in this part of Arabia. At Al Jauf lake, the only wetlands visited in the north, there were Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, 590 Common Coot *Fulica atra* plus a few duck and waders. Jebal Selma, a granite and volcanic area south of the Great Nefud had the most diverse habitat of all the regions visited and was also the only place visited which had had good spring rains. It held a wide range of typical Arabian species including Sand partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*, Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus*, Hume's Owl *Strix butleri*, Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* and House Bunting *Emberiza striolata*. In central Arabia at the Al Hair watercourse south of Riyadh a walked transect was carried out to assess birds present and the results compared to a previous informal transect in 1999 (Jennings, 1999). The Graceful Prinia

Prinia gracilis, which only started to colonise the Riyadh area in 2001 had become the commonest bird in only eight years. Reductions in other species numbers were suggested but Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* may have increased. Todhia arable farm east of Al Kharg had been visited on two previous occasions but in 2009 Desert Eagle-owl *Bubo ascalaphus* and Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* were recorded for the first time. These species are now frequently associated with arable farms probably because of the high population of rodents in and near crops and grain storage areas at all times of year.

During the main part of the survey in northern Arabia only about 78 species were recorded, of which 10 were only seen at Al Jauf lake. Of the remainder, 33 were likely breeding birds in the area, the others were winter visitors or migrants. Excluding observations at NADEC and TADCO farms, the rocky habitats such as Jebal Tubaiq and Al Hisma, coastal sites and human commensal species, there were only 16 likely regular breeding species met with on the plains. These were Long-legged Buzzard, Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*, Rock Dove *Columba livia*, Desert Eagle-owl, Little Owl *Athene noctua*, Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*, Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*, Greater Hoopoe-lark, Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*, Bar-tailed Lark, Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunnii*, Desert Lark, Crested Lark, Temminck's Lark, Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens* and White-crowned Wheatear *O. leucopyga*.

The objective of counting the previously recorded wintering species mentioned above was not met at all. No Dotterel were seen and only a dozen or so Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were present at TADCO farm.

Discussion

Although rainfall data for the region of northern Saudi Arabia in recent years has not been obtained it is quite obvious from our observations and from the reports of local people and officials that the region has suffered a prolonged drought over probably at least ten years. This had reduced the perennial vegetation to a state of virtual aestivation and ephemerals were very few and limited to areas where there had been recent showers. See photos at page 22 taken in February 2009 and one in 1992 after heavy spring rains. Ultimately all desert birds depend on rainfall, either for food in terms of seeds, green leaves or other plant parts or indirectly because they feed on animal prey which rely on vegetation.

The survey recorded less species diversity and fewer numbers for each species than were noted on previous ABBA Surveys in the region in spring. There had been some rain showers in January, particularly in the eastern part of the survey area which had resulted in the appearance of some green vegetation. Generally speaking more birds and more breeding activity was noted in the east, where Temminck's Lark was commonly singing, courting and nest building in early February but in the much drier west the same species was still in flocks and not showing any sign of breeding in mid-February. When walked censuses in 2009 were compared to similar censuses using the same methodology in previous years in the same area it was found that earlier censuses held on average almost twice as many species and four times as many birds. These proportions held for both breeding and non-breeding species.

(Clockwise from top)

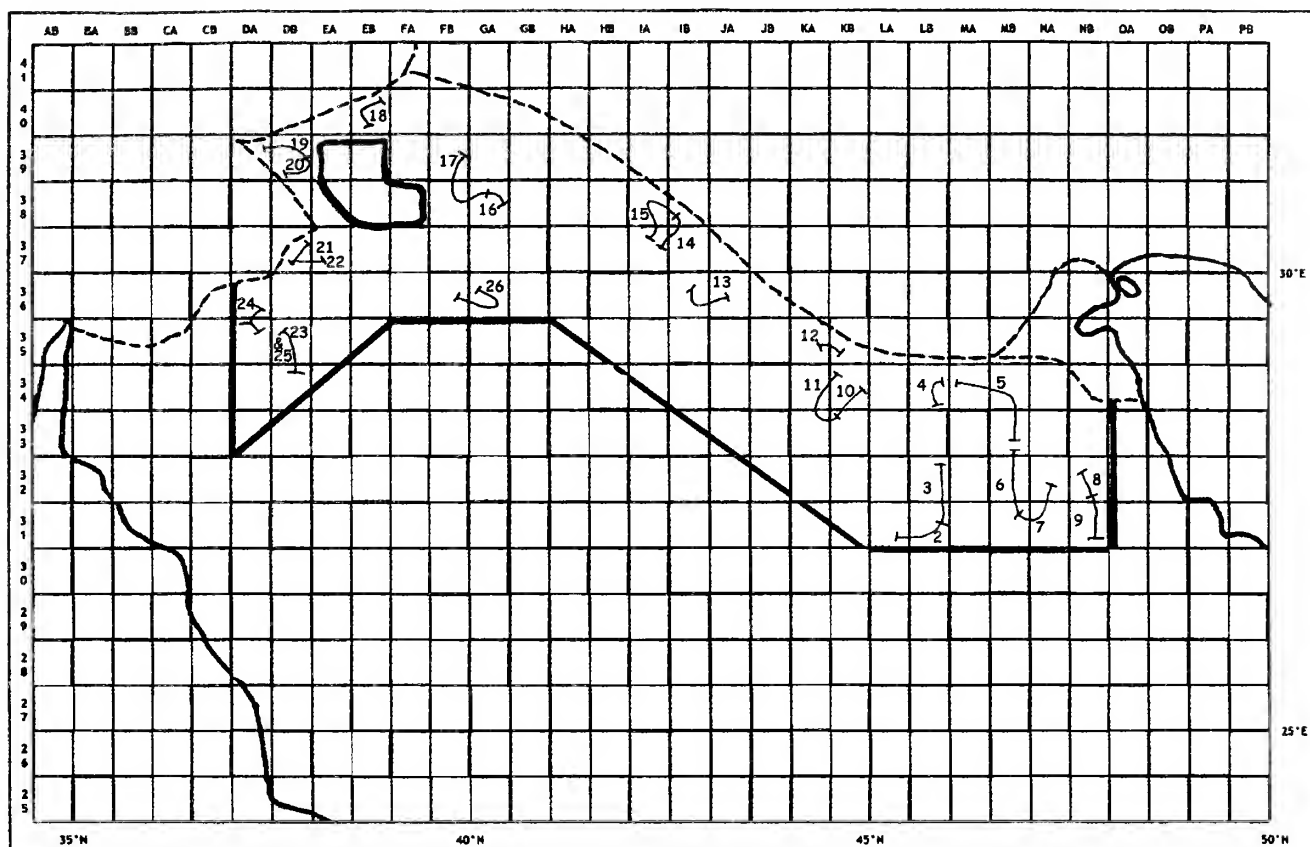
The northern Saudi Arabian plain at Ad Dibdibah (LB34) in February 2009 (walked census site No 2). The area showed signs of having suffered drought conditions for a number of years. (Photo: Michael Jennings).

This is what the north Arabian plain can look like after heavy spring rains: Iraq border (GB40), April 1992. (Photo: Michael Jennings).

The crevice nest site with eggshells in situ of a Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* in the Oman hills (VB26). No active nest with eggs of this species has ever been described from Arabia. (Photo: Gary Feulner).

Two fledged Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* chicks shelter from the August sun in a rock crevice in the Oman hills (VB26) adjacent to the UAE border. (Photo: Gary Feulner).





ABBA Survey 40: Distribution of driven transect counts. The area between the border and the bold line (excluding the Harrat al Harrah) is the northern plain of Saudi Arabia, with an area approximately the size of the United Kingdom.

Analysis of the results of 21 walked morning censuses and 24 driven transect counts revealed that the five most commonly encountered breeding species on the plains of northern Saudi Arabia were as shown at Table 1. The results have been extrapolated and reveal a suggested population density range (pairs per km²). The two census methods not unexpectedly produced significantly varying results, between two and eight times more birds (in each square kilometre) were found on the walked censuses in generally comparable habitats. Obviously the walked morning censuses were more intensive than driven transects, which often missed birds only made apparent by song or with more cryptic plumage and behaviour. The advantage of the driven transects was that they provided base data for a much larger area. There could be several reasons for the failure to make contact with the target wintering species. It could be that these species were concentrated on private farms in the regions which were not open to inspection by the team. However the most obvious reason is the drought conditions of recent years had made it difficult for these species to find suitable food and they had probably wintered elsewhere. The observations of 63 Eastern Imperial Eagles is interesting, this species was often seen in small groups in the open desert associated with dead stock animals, mainly sheep. In the data analysis it was assumed that most eagles were seen within 1 km of the observation vehicle (i.e. a 2 km transect width), and so through extrapolation the theoretical wintering population in the region is over 4,000 birds. Del Hoyo et al. (1994) suggested the world population is only a few thousand breeding pairs, possibly as few as 2,000 pairs. This suggestion may be an underestimate but clearly this part of Arabia holds a very significant proportion of the world population in winter.

The number of wintering passerines, such as Isabelline

Wheatear, Desert Wheatear and Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* were few and previous surveys of these regions suggest numbers were significantly down in 2009. Unfortunately there are no good comparative counts or driven transects on which to judge the magnitude of this supposed reduction. Most noticeable was the lack of *Calandrella* lark species. In past surveys observations of large flocks of these species were commonplace, indeed such flocks are typical of the region in winter. In 2009 they were, by comparison, almost absent. The number of these larks seen even so extrapolates to about a million individuals in the area in February 2009 which suggests that in a wet (green) year when many flocks of hundreds can be seen over a wide area, there may be of the order of 30-50,000,000 of these larks present.

Some important observations of breeding birds were obtained. One of the most notable absences in 2009 was Dunn's Lark. On ABBA Survey 5 to northern Saudi Arabia in February and March 1988 this species was recorded as common throughout the region (Jennings *et al.*, 1988). In contrast only a single bird was seen in February 2009. This nomadic species was clearly finding the region inhospitable to its needs in 2009 and had left the area. Some breeding/potential breeding range extensions were; Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* a pair at Al Jauf lake were in suitable breeding habitat; courting pairs of Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* were observed at Jubbah, Nefud Kebir, a likely range extension; there were White-cheeked Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys* at sites near Al Jauf, a new introduction site; a pair of Long-billed Pipit were in suitable breeding habitat at Jebal Selma, a significant range extension and there were about 30 Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*, at TADCO farm, including at least one singing, suggesting the species breeds locally as it now does on arable farms in parts of central and eastern Arabia.

Table 1. Indicated populations of selected species on the northern plain of Saudi Arabia in February 2009.

Species	Est. from driven transect counts (Bp)	Est from walked morning censuses (Bp)	Factor by which walked census results exceed driven transect counts, e.g. (8.4) and suggested population density range (Bp/km ²)
Cream-coloured Courser	7914	65002	(8.4) 0.03 - 0.28
Greater Hoopoe-lark	39043	93892	(2.4) 0.17 - 0.41
Bar-tailed Lark	36273	216673	(6.0) 0.16 - 0.94
Crested Lark	49463	130004	(2.6) 0.21 - 0.56
Temminck's Lark	141794	303343	(2.1) 0.61 - 1.31

Bp = breeding pairs. The figures in Cols 2 & 3 are extrapolated from the census results to a survey area of 231,407 km².



Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilopha* is a numerous non-nomadic resident of the plains of northern Arabia

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References: • Del Hoyo, J., A. Elliott & J. Sargatal. 1994. *Handbook of the birds of the world*. Vol 2. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. • Jennings, M. C. 1999. Birds along the al Hair

watercourse, April 1999. *Phoenix* 16:19. • Jennings, M. C., M. O. Al Toum & A. A. A. Al Issa. 1988. *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia: Survey 5, Results of an Ornithological Survey of Northern Saudi Arabia: 27 February - 26 March 1988*. NCWCD Technical Report 10 (pp65).

A PDF copy of the full report and Arabic summary (52 pages, 3 mb) which includes a description of the habitats and geography of the region, photos of census sites, the results of all censuses and a systematic list of birds observed is available free to Phoenix subscribers. (Email: arabianbirds@dsl.pipex.com).

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Details of how to obtain *Phoenix* are at page 19.