SANDGROUSE

A CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF SYRIA

SUPPLEMENT 2 • 2008

OSME

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST,
CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

OSME

OSME was founded in 1978 as the successor to the Ornithological Society of Turkey. Its primary aims are:

- To collect, collate and publish data on all aspects of the birds of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- To promote an interest in ornithology and bird conservation throughout the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- To develop productive working relationships with governmental and non-governmental organizations with an interest in conservation and/or natural history in the region.

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1–48 A checklist of the birds of Syria. DA MURDOCH & KF BETTON

Photo above: Adult Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* feeding young near breeding site, July 2006. © *MS Abdallah*

Cover photo: Salam, a Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*, caught on 1 June 2006 near the breeding site in the mountains north-west of Palmyra and fitted with a solar transmitter. She lost her mate in the winter of 2006–2007 but paired with a new bird in 2007 and was paired again in 2008. Her transmitter is still working and has provided priceless information on the feeding sites of the Syrian population of Northern Bald Ibis and its migration route to the Ethiopian highlands. Photo June 2006. © *MS Abdallah*

Back cover photo: Saker *Falco cherrug*, Kuwait, November 2007. Once a regular passage migrant through Syria but now locally almost extinct and globally Endangered; unsustainable levels of trapping for falconry have hugely reduced its numbers. © *Rashed Hajji Mohamad*

A checklist of the birds of Syria

D A MURDOCH & K F BETTON

INTRODUCTION

This checklist revises the list of species recorded from Syria, building on reviews by Kumerloeve (1967–1969) and Baumgart *et al* (1995); it presents an assessment of status with more detailed notes on key species, particularly those threatened with global extinction. We used the English translation of the latter publication (Baumgart *et al* 2003), which we refer to throughout the text as 'BOS', Birds of Syria.

The species list is arranged in the order of the OSME Regional list (www.osme.org) and follows its nomenclature. The taxonomy of many groups regularly occurring in Syria is still hotly debated. These include larger gulls *Larus* spp, wagtails *Motacilla* spp, warblers of the genus *Phylloscopus* and shrikes of the 'Isabelline Shrike' complex *'Lanius isabellinus'* and the 'Great Grey Shrike' complex *Lanius excubitor/meridionalis/pallidirostris*. As a result, many scientific names are contentious. Occasionally we have used a square bracket to indicate superspecies (*eg Lanius* [*excubitor*]) and a round bracket for a subspecies that appears to be approaching species status (*eg Lanius* (*meridionalis*) *pallidirostris*). We have suffered the usual problems transliterating place names from Arabic to English, for instance, we have encountered at least five spellings of 'Mheimideh' and 'Slenfe'.

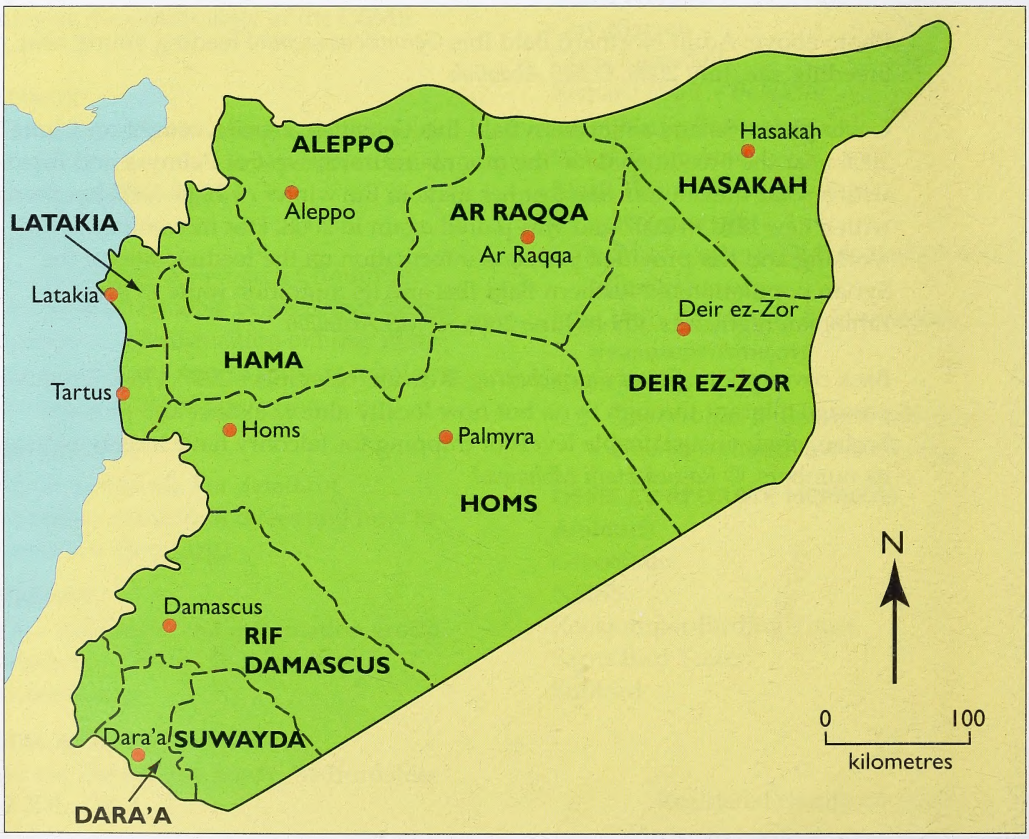


Figure 1. Syrian provinces with major cities.

Names for the ranges of mountains and hills in Syria are also contentious. For the limestone ridge between the Gap of Homs and the Turkish border (Plates 1, 2) we have used the neutral term 'Coastal range'. There appears to be no generally used term for the distinctive area of hills round Kassab, which we have called Jebel Aqra, but at least three names are in use for each of the two highest ranges in Syria. Jebel ash-Sheikh, the range of mountains on the Lebanese border south of the Damascus–Beirut road, rises to 2814 m, the highest point in Syria; it is also known as Mt Haramun or Mt Hermon. The mountains on the Lebanese border between the Damascus–Beirut road and the Gap of Homs, rising to 2423 m asl, above Bloudan (Plate 3), are most easily remembered as the Anti-Lebanon; other names are Jebel al-Sharqi and Jebel Karamun. Syrians refer to the lands between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris as 'The Jazira' (literally 'the island'), which therefore applies to the whole of the north-east beyond the Euphrates. We have used the English name 'Aleppo' for Halab, Syria's second city, and the Roman 'Palmyra' for the town of Tadmor (Figure 1, Appendix 1).

Part of the review's remit was to bring record assessment up to the level of the better recording schemes used elsewhere in the OSME Region. To do this, we anonymised descriptions of species reported from Syria on less than five occasions and passed them for assessment to an expert panel with wide experience of the birds of the Region. We are aware that many observations were made several years before this review, so that it was often difficult for the observers to access their field-notes; it also did not make assessment easier! Nevertheless, we feel that records must be treated rigorously as scientific data; it is important to maintain a high standard. We describe fully authenticated observations as 'records' and those less completely documented (for a variety of reasons) as 'reports' or 'claims'. We have not attempted in-depth assessment of the more taxonomically contentious complexes or of other difficult groups such as the larger *Acrocephalus* warblers, as we feel that a checklist is not the place for these tasks. The data have been filed in the OSME archives; we hope that this review will stimulate observers to carry out a thorough analysis of their status in the OSME Region.

THE SYRIAN LIST

The Syrian avifauna is poorly known (Evans 1994, BOS). This is remarkable considering its geographical position, within the Western Palaearctic and on a major migration flyway. This review lists *c*381 species reliably recorded in Syria, of which *c*30 have been added to the Syrian list since the previous review (BOS). An exact species total is now almost impossible for the reasons outlined above. Several additions are probably genuine vagrants; others, for instance Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* or Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea,* are scarce migrants or visitors to the coast. But several new species, notably Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus,* Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* and Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris,* are resident, distinctive and widely distributed. These additions show how inadequate our knowledge of Syria's birds is. Evans (1994) remarked that 'many parts of the country have never been visited by birdwatchers'; this is still true.

The Syrian list includes 27 'Red Data Book' (RDB) species: species considered at risk of global extinction by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and placed on the IUCN Red List; www.iucn.org. A major purpose of the present review is to summarise their current status in Syria. Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* and Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* are classified as Critically Endangered; Syria is key for subpopulations of both species. Seven RDB species have important breeding populations, at least 14 pass through on migration and at least five winter in significant numbers. The data for most of them are inadequate. To assist their conservation, we request as much information

as possible, which should be sent c/o OSME, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL, UK. Contributions will be acknowledged and contributors credited in any future update.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS: DATA COLLECTION, SURVEY AND CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

This review provides guidance on species requiring full descriptions, which are indicated in **bold** in the Species Checklist. We request a high standard of documentation for observations; reports should include information on habitat, which can be useful, for instance, for the conservation of potential wintering species. The OSME Rarities Form (www.osme.org, in several languages) gives detailed guidance on writing descriptions. These records will be kept in the OSME archives and made available to interested researchers.

Survey priorities. Anyone visiting Syria is aware of the very limited data available on sites and habitats as well as species. To challenge ornithologists, we list a few of the more pressing needs:

- Comprehensive surveys of Syria's premier wetland, Sabkhat al-Jabbul (Plate 4), in winter and in the breeding season.
- A breeding season survey of the Euphrates valley to complement the 2004 Syrian Wetland Expedition.
- Basic ornithological surveys of the coastal range, the Jazira, notably Jebel Abdul Aziz (Plate 5), and the desert along the Iraqi border from the Euphrates to the Jebel Druze (Plates 6, 7).
- Ringing studies of difficult groups to determine their status in Syria, particularly *Acrocephalus* warblers; Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*, a RDB Endangered species, could potentially breed along the Syrian Euphrates.
- A breeding season survey of Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus*, a range-restricted endemic and little-known RDB Vulnerable species.

Conservation priorities. Many key sites are threatened by development, drainage or other human activities:

- Sabkhat al-Jabbul, a Ramsar site, is still heavily hunted and a commercial fishery has recently been authorised in an area of prime conservation interest.
- Mheimideh (Plate 8) is a tiny but outstanding wetland in the Euphrates valley with three breeding RDB species of duck; it is surrounded by houses and could be drained at any time.
- Hunting is still rife, with raptors and gamebirds prime targets; the catastrophic decline in numbers of bustards Otididae and sandgrouse *Pterocles* spp shows that the present level is unsustainable.
- Migrant passerines are caught in large numbers in the desert oases for consumption in upmarket restaurants (the 'figbird trade'; Murdoch 2007a).

Most ornithologists visit a few known localities such as Sabkhat al-Jabbul and the Palmyra area. Observations from these sites are extremely valuable but there is still much to discover elsewhere; the flocks of the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* found on the northern steppes in February 2007 (Hofland & Keijl in prep) are a classic example. We urge visitors to venture 'off the beaten path'—to the coast, the Jazira and the Iraqi border; pioneering birders can still make major discoveries in Syria.

SPECIES CHECKLIST

Avifauna: *c*381 species, of which *c*184 have been proven to breed (including 13 now probably or certainly extinct in Syria).

Checklist date: May 2008.

Abbreviations used:

BOS	Baumgart *et al* 2003
RDB	Red Data Book
SWE	Syrian Wetland Expedition, Jan–Feb 2004 (summary: Murdoch *et al* 2004)
R-SWE	Full report of Syrian Wetland Expedition 2004 (Murdoch *et al* 2005b)

Column 1. Red Data Book (RDB) and other categories. The following standard abbreviations denote threatened species as per the IUCN Red List categories for 2007: CR Critically Endangered, EN Endangered, VU Vulnerable, NT Near Threatened. N denotes a new species for Syria, B a new breeding species and S indicates that a comment on that species is in section 4 of 'Species Notes'.

Column 2. English and scientific names, with family.

Column 3. Breeding evidence. The codes used for evidence of breeding follow standardised criteria, used for instance for the Arabian atlas project (Jennings 1995); in summary, the codes are: 0 extinct breeder, 1 possible breeder, 2 probable breeder, 3 confirmed breeder.

Column 4. Status: Abbreviations are used to indicate species status, a question mark meaning uncertainty:

R	Resident
S	Summer visitor
(s)	Oversummering individuals
WV	Winter visitor
PM	Passage migrant
FB	Formerly bred (no recent breeding records)
v	Vagrant
E	Extinct in Syria
IN	Introduced
IR	Irruptive

Lower case abbreviations (r, s, wv and pm) indicate that the species is rare at the relevant season. This is inevitably subjective but makes assessment slightly less crude. Species status is often provisional, for instance for seabirds (poor coverage of the coast) or desert species such as Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta* (which inhabits a region difficult to visit).

For species in bold, full descriptions with habitat details are requested, preferably submitted on the OSME Rarities Report form (www.osme.org).

1	2	3	4
	STRUTHIONIDAE		
	Ostrich *Struthio camelus*	0	FB, E
	PHASIANIDAE		
	Chukar Partridge (Chukar) *Alectoris chukar*	3	R
S	See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*	3	R

	Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*	**3**	**r**
S	Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*	3	R
	Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*	3	S, wv?, PM
	ANATIDAE		
	Greylag Goose *Anser anser*	1	R?, WV
	Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*		WV
VU, N	**Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus***		**wv?**
	Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*	0,2	FB, r?, WV
	Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*	0,2	FB, r?, WV, pm
	Gadwall *Anas strepera*		WV, pm
	Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*		r?, WV, pm
B	Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*	3	r, WV, PM
B	Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*	3	r, WV, PM
S	Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*	1	r?, WV, PM
S	Garganey *Anas querquedula*	2	s?, PM
	Eurasian Teal (Common Teal) *Anas crecca*		WV, PM
VU	Marbled Duck (Marbled Teal) *Marmaronetta angustirostris*	3	r?, s
B	Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*	3	r, WV, pm
S	Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*	2	r?, WV, PM
NT	Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*	3	r, WV, pm
	Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*		WV, pm
	Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*		**v**
N	Smew *Mergellus albellus*		wv
	Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*		**v**
EN	White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*	3	r, WV, pm
	PROCELLARIIDAE		
N	**Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea***		**v?**
	Yelkouan Shearwater (Levantine Shearwater) *Puffinus yelkouan*		**v?**
	PODICIPEDIDAE		
	Little Grebe (Dabchick) *Tachybaptus ruficollis*	3	R, WV, PM
	Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*		**v**
B	Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*	3	R, WV, pm
	Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*	2	r, WV, pm
	PHOENICOPTERIDAE		
B	Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*	3	R, wv?, pm?
	CICONIIDAE		
	Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*		PM
	White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*	0	FB, PM

	THRESKIORNITHIDAE		
CR	Northern Bald Ibis (Waldrapp) *Geronticus eremita*	3	s
	Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*	2	s?, pm
B	Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*	3	R, pm
	ARDEIDAE		
S	Eurasian Bittern (Bittern) *Botaurus stellaris*		WV, pm
	Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*	3	S, wv?, PM
	Black-crowned Night Heron (Night Heron) *Nycticorax nycticorax*	3	R, WV, PM
B	Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*	3	S, wv, PM
	Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*	2	R?, wv, pm
	Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	1	r?, WV, pm
	Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*		**v**
B	Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*	3	S, PM
B	Great Egret (Great White Egret) *Ardea alba*	3	R, WV, PM
	Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	3	R, WV, PM
	PELECANIDAE		
	Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*		wv, pm
VU	**Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus***		**v**
	SULIDAE		
	Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*		**v**
	PHALACROCORACIDAE		
S	Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*	2	R, WV, pm
	Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*		WV, pm
N	**European Shag *Leucocarbo aristotelis***		**v**
	FALCONIDAE		
VU	Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*	3	S, PM
	Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	3	R, s?, pm
NT	Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*		pm
	Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*	**1**	**s?, pm?**
	Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*		**v**
	Merlin *Falco columbarius*		WV
	Eurasian Hobby (Northern Hobby) *Falco subbuteo*	2	s, PM
	Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*	**0**	**FB, pm**
EN	**Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug***		**pm**
	Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*	0,1	FB, wv, pm
	Barbary Falcon *Falco (peregrinus) pelegrinoides*	**?**	**?**
	ACCIPITRIDAE		
	Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*		PM
	European Honey Buzzard (Western Honey-buzzard) *Pernis apivorus*	1	s?, PM
	Black Kite *Milvus migrans*	0,1	FB, r?, WV, PM
S	**White-tailed Eagle (White-tailed Sea Eagle) *Haliaeetus albicilla***	**0**	**FB, E**

	Lammergeier (Bearded Vulture) *Gypaetus barbatus*		**E**
EN	Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*	3	S, PM
S	Eurasian Griffon Vulture (Griffon Vulture) *Gyps fulvus*	3	r, pm?
NT	**Cinereous Vulture (Eurasian Black Vulture) *Aegypius monachus***		**v? E?**
	Short-toed Snake Eagle (Short-toed Eagle) *Circaetus gallicus*	3	S, PM
	Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	0,2	FB, r, WV, PM
	Hen Harrier (Northern Harrier) *Circus cyaneus*		WV, pm?
NT	Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*		WV, PM
	Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*		PM
	Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*		PM
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*	2	r?, WV, PM
	Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*		**FB?, wv?, pm?**
	Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	2	r, wv, PM
	Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*	3	R, pm
	Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*		PM
VU	Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*		WV, pm
	Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*		wv, PM
VU	Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*		FB?, wv?, pm
	Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*	3	r
	Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*		PM
S	**Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciatus***	**0**	**FB, v**
	OTIDIDAE		
VU	**Great Bustard *Otis tarda***		**FB?, wv?**
VU	Asian Houbara Bustard (Macqueen's Bustard) *Chlamydotis macqueenii*	0	FB, r? wv?
NT	**Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax***		**E**
	RALLIDAE		
	Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*	2	r?, WV, pm
VU	Corncrake (Corn Crake) *Crex crex*		pm
	Little Crake *Porzana parva*		**pm**
	Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*		**pm? v?**
	Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*		**pm**
B	Purple Gallinule (Purple Swamphen) *Porphyrio porphyrio*	3	R
	Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*	3	R, wv
	Eurasian Coot (Common Coot) *Fulica atra*	3	R, WV
	GRUIDAE		
	Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*		**v**
	Common Crane *Grus grus*		WV, pm
	BURHINIDAE		
	Eurasian Stone-curlew (Eurasian Thick-knee) *Burhinus oedicnemus*	3	S, pm
	HAEMATOPODIDAE		
	Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*		pm

	RECURVIROSTRIDAE		
	Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*	3	r, S, PM
B	Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*	3	r, wv, pm?
	CHARADRIIDAE		
	Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*		WV, pm
	Spur-winged Lapwing (Spur-winged Plover) *Vanellus spinosus*	3	R, s?, pm
S	Red-wattled Lapwing (Red-wattled Plover) *Vanellus indicus*	2	r?, s?
CR	Sociable Lapwing (Sociable Plover) *Vanellus gregarius*		WV, PM
S	White-tailed Lapwing (White-tailed Plover) *Vanellus leucurus*	3	r, s
	Eurasian Golden Plover (European Golden Plover) *Pluvialis apricaria*		wv
	Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*		**pm**
	Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*		wv, pm
	Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*	3	S, PM
	Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*	3	r, S, pm
	Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian Sand Plover) *Charadrius (mongolus) atrifrons*		**v**
	Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*	3	s, pm
N	**Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus***		**v**
	Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*		wv, pm?
	SCOLOPACIDAE		
	Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*		wv?
	Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus*		wv
NT	**Great Snipe *Gallinago media***		**pm? v?**
	Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*		WV, pm
NT	Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*		WV, PM
	Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*		**pm**
N	**Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus***		**pm? v?**
	Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*		WV, pm
	Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*		WV, PM
	Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*		WV, PM
	Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*		wv, PM
	Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*		WV, PM
	Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*		WV, PM
	Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*		(s), PM
	Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinerea*		**pm? v?**
	Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*		(s), wv, PM
	Sanderling *Calidris alba*		pm
	Little Stint *Calidris minuta*		WV, PM
	Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*		wv?, PM
	Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*		PM
	Dunlin *Calidris alpina*		(s), WV, PM
N	**Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus***		**v**
	Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*		(s), WV, PM
S	Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*		PM

	GLAREOLIDAE		
	Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*	3	S, pm
	Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*	3	S
NT	**Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni***		**pm**
	LARIDAE		
S	Common Gull *Larus canus*		wv, pm?
	Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*		**v**
	Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*/Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*	3	r, wv, pm
	Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*		WV
	Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*		wv?, PM
	Great Black-headed Gull (Pallas's Gull) *Larus ichthyaetus*		WV, pm
	Common Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*	1	(s), WV, PM
	Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*	3	R, S, pm?
	Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*	1	r? wv? pm?
	Little Gull *Larus minutus*		pm
	Black-legged Kittiwake (Kittiwake) *Rissa tridactyla*		**v**
	'STERNIDAE'		
	Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*	3	S, PM
	Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*	2	s, pm
N	Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*		pm
	Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*	3	S, pm
	Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*	3	S, pm
	Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*	3	R, S, pm
	White-winged Tern (White-winged Black Tern) *Chlidonias leucopterus*	1	s?, PM
	Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*		pm
	PTEROCLIDIDAE		
S	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*	3	R, pm?
S	**Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus***	**0**	**FB, r?**
S	Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*		wv
	COLUMBIDAE		
	Rock Dove (Common Pigeon) *Columba livia*	3	R
	Stock Dove (Stock Pigeon) *Columba oenas*		wv, pm?
B	Common Woodpigeon (Common Wood Pigeon) *Columba palumbus*	3	r, WV, pm
	European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*	3	S, PM
	Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*	3	R
	Laughing Dove (Palm Dove) *Streptopelia senegalensis*	3	R
N	Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*	2	r? s?
	LORIDAE		
	Rose-ringed Parakeet (Ring-necked Parakeet) *Psittacula krameri*	1	IN, E?

	CUCULIDAE		
	Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*	2	s?, pm
	Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	2	s?, PM
	TYTONIDAE		
	Barn Owl *Tyto alba*	3	R
	STRIGIDAE		
	Pallid Scops Owl (Striated or Bruce's Scops Owl) *Otus brucei*	**0,1**	**FB, s?, pm?**
	Eurasian Scops Owl (European or Common Scops Owl) *Otus scops*	2	s, pm
	Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*	3	r
	Pharaoh's Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*	**2**	**r**
	Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis*		**E**
	Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*	2	r
	Little Owl *Athene noctua*	3	R
N	**Long-eared Owl *Asio otus***		**wv? pm?**
S	**Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus***		**wv?**
	CAPRIMULGIDAE		
	European Nightjar (Eurasian Nightjar) *Caprimulgus europaeus*	2	s?, pm
	Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*		**v**
	APODIDAE		
	Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*	3	s, PM
	Common Swift *Apus apus*	3	S, PM
	Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*	3	s, PM
S	Little Swift (House Swift) *Apus affinis*	2	s, pm?
	CORACIIDAE		
NT	European Roller *Coracias garrulus*	3	S, PM
	ALCEDINIDAE		
	White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*	2	r, pm
	Common Kingfisher (European Kingfisher) *Alcedo atthis*		(s), WV
	Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*	3	R, WV
	MEROPIDAE		
	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (Madagascar Bee-eater) *Merops persicus*	3	S, pm
	European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*	3	s, PM
	UPUPIDAE		
	Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*	3	S, PM
	PICIDAE		
	Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*		pm
N,B	Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*	3	r
	Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*	3	R

	LANIIDAE		
	Red-backed Shrike *Lanius* [*cristatus*] *collurio*	2	s?, PM
N	Isabelline Shrike *sensu lato Lanius* [*cristatus*] *isabellinus*		WV, pm
	Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*	1	s?, PM
N	**Great Grey Shrike (Northern Shrike) *Lanius* [excubitor] *excubitor***		**wv? v?**
N	**Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris***		**wv? v?**
N	**Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius* [excubitor] *meridionalis***	**0**	**FB, wv, pm**
	Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*	3	S, PM
	Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*	3	S, PM
	ORIOLIDAE		
	Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*	2	s, PM
	CORVIDAE		
	Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*	3	R
	Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*	3	R
S	Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*	3	r
	Yellow-billed Chough (Alpine Chough) *Pyrrhocorax graculus*		**v?**
	Western Jackdaw (Eurasian Jackdaw) *Corvus monedula*	3	r, WV
	Rook *Corvus frugilegus*	3	r?, WV
	Hooded Crow *Corvus* [*corone*] *cornix*	3	R, wv?
	Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*	3	r
	Northern Raven *Corvus corax*	3	R
	PARIDAE		
	Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris*	3	R
B	Coal Tit *Periparus ater*	3	R
	Great Tit *Parus major*	3	R
	Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*	3	R
	REMIZIDAE		
	Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*	3	R
	HIRUNDINIDAE		
	Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*	3	r, S, PM
	Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	3	S, PM
	Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*	3	R, wv?
	Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*	3	s, PM
	Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*	3	s, PM
	AEGITHALIDAE		
N,B	Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*	3	R
	ALAUDIDAE		
	Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*	3	R
N	**Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey***		**v?**
	Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*	3	R, PM

S	Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*	3	S, PM
	Bar-tailed Lark (Bar-tailed Desert Lark) *Ammomanes cinctura*	3	R
	Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*	3	R
	Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*	3	S, PM
	Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*	3	R
N,B	**Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunni***	**3**	**r? IR?**
	Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*	3	R
	Woodlark *Lullula arborea*	3	R, wv, pm
	Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*		WV, PM
	Horned Lark (Shorelark) *Eremophila alpestris*	3	r, wv?
	Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilopha*	3	R
	CISTICOLIDAE		
	Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) *Cisticola juncidis*	3	R
	Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*	3	R
	Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*	3	R
	PYCNONOTIDAE		
S	White-eared Bulbul (White-cheeked Bulbul) *Pycnonotus (leucogenys) leucotis*	2	r
	White-spectacled Bulbul (Yellow-vented Bulbul) *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*	3	R
	SYLVIIDAE		
	Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*	3	R
	Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*		**v**
	River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*		**pm**
B	Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*	3	S, pm
EN, N	**Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis***		**?**
	Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*	3	S, PM
B	**Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus***	**3**	**r**
	Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*	3	R, pm?
	Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*		pm
N	**Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola***		**v**
	Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*		**v**
	Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*	3	S, PM
	Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*		PM
N	**Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata***		**v**
	Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*	3	S, PM
	Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*	3	S, pm
S	Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*	3	s, pm
N	**Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina***		**v**
	Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*		PM
B	Chiffchaff *sensu lato Phylloscopus collybita*	3	S, WV, PM
	Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*	**1**	**s?, pm**
	Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*		pm

	Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*	1	s?, wv, PM
	Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*		PM
	Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*		PM
	Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*	3	S, PM
	Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia* (*hortensis*) *crassirostris*	3	S, pm
N	**Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia* (*nana*) *nana***		**wv**
	Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*	3	s, PM
S	Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*	3	r?, S
	Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*	3	R, pm?
	Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*	3	S, pm?
	Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli*	3	s
	TIMALIIDAE		
N,B	Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*	3	R
N,B	Bearded Reedling (Bearded Tit) *Panurus biarmicus*	3	R, wv?
	REGULIDAE		
N	**Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla***		**v**
	Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*		**v?**
	TROGLODYTIDAE		
	Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*	3	R
	SITTIDAE		
S	Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*	3	r
	Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*	3	R
	Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*		**wv?**
	STURNIDAE		
	Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*	3	s?, IR
	Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*	3	r?, WV, pm
	TURDIDAE		
	Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*		**v**
	Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*	3	R, wv?
	Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*		wv
	Redwing *Turdus iliacus*		wv
	Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*		WV, pm
	Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*		wv
	MUSCICAPIDAE		
B	European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*	3	r, WV
	Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*		WV, pm
	Thrush Nightingale (Sprosser) *Luscinia luscinia*		PM
	Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*	3	S, PM
	White-throated Robin (Irania) *Irania gutturalis*	3	S, pm
	Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (Rufous Bush-chat) *Cercotrichas galactotes*	3	S, pm

	Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*	3	r, WV, pm
B	Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*	3	s, PM
	Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*		PM
	Eurasian Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*		WV, pm?
	Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola* (*torquatus*) *maurus/variegatus*		WV, pm?
	Red-rumped Wheatear *Oenanthe moesta*	3	R?
	Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*	3	r, S, PM
	Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*	3	s, PM
	Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthoprymna*		**v**
	Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*		PM
	Cyprus Wheatear (Cyprus Pied Wheatear) *Oenanthe cypriaca*		PM
	Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe* (*hispanica*) *melanoleuca*	3	S, PM
	Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*	3	R, s?, pm?
	Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*	3	R
	Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii*	3	R, WV
B	Blackstart *Cercomela melanura*	3	r
	Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (Common Rock Thrush) *Monticola saxatilis*	3	s, pm
	Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*	3	R, wv, pm
B	Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*	3	s, PM
	Eurasian Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*		pm
	Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*		pm
NT	**Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata***		**pm**
N	Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*		pm
	NECTARINIIDAE		
	Palestine Sunbird (Orange-tufted Sunbird) *Cinnyris osea*	3	r
	PASSERIDAE		
	House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*	3	R
	Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*	3	R, wv, PM
	Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*	3	r, S, pm
	Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*		**wv**
S	Pale Rockfinch (Pale Rock Sparrow) *Carpospiza brachydactyla*	3	S, pm
	Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*	3	R
N,B	Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*	3	s
	PRUNELLIDAE		
	Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*		**wv?**
	Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*		**wv?**
	Dunnock *Prunella modularis*		wv
	MOTACILLIDAE		
	Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*	3	S, PM
B	Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*	3	r, pm
B	Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*	3	r, wv, pm
	White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*	3	r, WV, PM

	Richard's Pipit *Anthus (novaeseelandiae) richardi*		**v**
	Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*	3	S, PM
B	Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*	3	r
	Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*		WV, pm
	Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*		PM
	Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*		WV, PM
N	**Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus***		**v**
	Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*		WV, pm?
	FRINGILLIDAE		
	Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*	3	R, WV, pm?
	Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*		wv
	Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*		**wv? v?**
B	European Serin *Serinus serinus*	3	r, WV
VU	Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus*	3	S
	European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*	3	R, wv?
	Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*		wv
	European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*	3	R, WV
	Common Linnet (Eurasian Linnet) *Carduelis cannabina*	3	R, WV
	Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus*	3	**r?, wv**
B	Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*	3	R
	Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoletus*	3	R
N	**Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus***		**v**
	Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*		**v**
	EMBERIZIDAE		
	Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*	3	R, WV
	Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*		wv
N	**Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos***		**wv?**
	Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*	3	R
	Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*		**v**
NT	**Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea***		**pm? v?**
	Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*	2	s?, PM
	Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*	3	S, pm
	Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*		**v**
	Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*	3	S, pm
	Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*		WV

SPECIES NOTES

1. Red Data Book (RDB) species

The standard IUCN Red List abbreviations, as in the Species Checklist, are used for RDB species after the scientific name: CR Critically Endangered, EN Endangered, VU Vulnerable, NT Near Threatened.

Plate 1 (left.). Eastern scarp of the coastal range taken from the Cedar-Firs reserve, Slenfe, 6 May 2006; ornithologically unexplored but probably an important flyway for migrating raptors. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Plate 2 (right). Wadi Jahanim on the eastern edge of the coastal range, 4 May 2006. Very rarely visited but Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius* and Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* recorded. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Lesser White-fronted Goose ***Anser erythropus*** **VU:** Incompletely documented reports include 2 at Tall Tamir on 11–12 Nov 1945 (Goodbody 1946), a stuffed bird 'shot north of Palmyra' in 1994 and examined in 2002 (Serra *et al* 2005a) and a probable at Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 11 Feb 2004 (R-SWE). The first unequivocal Syrian record was of an individual (bird 3H) ringed during its post-breeding moult on 30 July 2006 on the Putorana plateau in northern Russia; it was tracked by satellite telemetry, spending several weeks in January 2007 in eastern Syria before moving into Iraq (http://gis-lab.info/projects/piskulka/piskulka1-eng.html). Kullberg (2007) visited Buhayrat al-Basil, a reservoir on the river Khabur, on 11 Feb 2007, and recorded a minimum of 8 Lesser White-fronted Geese (and possibly up to 40) in a flock of more than 150 Greater White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons*. Hofland & Keijl (in prep) observed 35 on the south side of Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 20 Feb 2007.

Status: records from winter 2006–2007 indicated a regular winter visitor to Syria in substantial numbers, usually with Greater White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons*; however, there were no confirmed observations from winter 2007–2008 (A Kullberg pers comm). More information is needed to clarify its status.

Marbled Duck (Marbled Teal) ***Marmaronetta angustirostris*** **VU:** Few older records; the maximum count was of 20 in October 1982 from Waz Gol, a lake along the river Khabur (BOS). The first confirmed breeding for Syria was from Mheimideh on 17 Jun 2003, a minimum of 50 birds with at least 3 family parties (Murdoch 2005a). Counts at Sabkhat al-Jabbul of more than 200 on 4 May 2005 and at least 300 on 31 Mar 2006 (Serra *et al* 2006b) but breeding has not yet been proven there. Few records from other sites, probably a result of inadequate coverage. Very few winter reports: the only records in Jan–Feb 2004 were of four at Mheimideh on 19 Feb 2004 (R-SWE), which could have been birds returning from wintering areas.

Status: mainly a summer visitor; a few pairs breed at Mheimideh with a larger population likely at Sabkhat al-Jabbul. Rare or absent in winter.

Comments: the low numbers recorded until 1995 (BOS) can be attributed partly to poor coverage but a significant increase since then appears likely. Full protection of Sabkhat al-Jabbul would allow a substantial breeding population to build up but requires a total ban

on hunting. It is not yet clear whether any individuals actually overwinter in Syria; more data from December and January would be welcome.

Ferruginous Duck ***Aythya nyroca*** **NT:** First breeding record from an oxbow at al-Ashara in the lower Euphrates valley (Hofland 1994). Significant breeding season records: common at Mheimideh with at least 30 pairs on 18 May 2006 (Murdoch 2007b); *c*200 at Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 8 May 2005 but not yet formally proven to breed there (Serra *et al* 2006b); 42 at Lake Tishreen in May 2005 with several pairs in suitable breeding habitat (Murdoch pers obs). A series of records from Sed Wadi Abied (Plate 9) in 2005–2007 indicates a small breeding population (Murdoch pers obs). The favourite habitat is secluded, well-vegetated shallow pools.

Winter records: previously recorded at Lake of Homs (BOS) but apparently not recently. Frequently observed (26 records) Jan–Feb 2004 throughout the Euphrates valley and at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, with counts of up to 470 (R-SWE). Four at Lake Khatuniyah (al-Hawl Lake) in the Jazira on 11 Feb 2007 (Kullberg 2007).

Status: local breeder, probably more widespread than records indicate. Relatively common and widespread along the Euphrates valley and Sabkhat al-Jabbul at other seasons; some birds are probably winter visitors.

Comment: the Syrian breeding population may well be in the hundreds of pairs; a comprehensive breeding season census is overdue.

White-headed Duck ***Oxyura leucocephala*** **EN:** Winter records for over 30 years from Lake of Homs with counts of up to 100 (Macfarlane 1978, R-SWE). Recently there have been much higher counts at Sabkhat al-Jabbul; the largest, 982 on 23 Nov 2007 (Porter 2007), was a significant proportion of the world population. Small numbers at all seasons at Mheimideh, with at least two pairs and a female with young on 17 Jun 2003, the first breeding record for Syria (Murdoch 2005a). Breeding proven in 2006 at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, which may hold a substantial population (Serra *et al* 2006b). Apparently no records from other sites, probably a result of poor coverage.

Status: significant numbers winter, and possibly breed, at Sabkhat al-Jabbul; apparently resident in small numbers at Mheimideh; a winter visitor to Lake of Homs.

Comment: there have been few recent visits to Lake of Homs; this is unfortunate as the site supports large numbers of wintering waterfowl (R-SWE) and little is known about its breeding birds.

Northern Bald Ibis (Waldrapp) ***Geronticus eremita*** **CR:** Once a widespread breeding species in the interior of Syria (BOS) with records dating back to 1574 (Kumerloeve 1967), but believed extinct by the middle of the twentieth century (Safriel 1980); hunting was considered the major cause. Records from 1946 and 1964 (Kumerloeve 1967) were linked to the colony at Birecik in Turkey,

Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* colony near Palmyra, June 2006. The last wild population outside Morocco. © *MS Abdallah*

thought at the time to be the last in the region. A relict colony of seven birds was found near Palmyra in 2002 (Serra *et al* 2003). MAAR (Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform) began intensive protection measures at the breeding area. Three pairs (and more recently only two) have bred since, successfully in five years out of seven; productivity has been very high with a total of 24 young fledged, an average of 1.72 chicks/nest. In 2008, four young hatched from two nests but all died before fledging; their deaths have been attributed to the extremely dry spring (S Jbour pers comm).

Adults are present from late February till mid-July; satellite-tagging studies (Lindsell *et al* in press) have shown that they migrate down the Red Sea to winter in the highlands of Ethiopia (Serra *et al* 2007). One adult is believed to have died on migration across the Red Sea. Young birds do not winter with or return with the adults; their wintering grounds are still unknown.

Recruitment is a major issue. Two of the birds reared since 2002 are believed to have bred. Three immature birds returned to the colony in 2007 (and another replaced an adult) but only two in 2008. The survival of the last known migratory population of eastern Northern Bald Ibis is still very uncertain.

Status: formerly common and widespread in Syria's interior; now an extremely rare summer visitor.

Comments: there are now good data on the feeding ecology and behaviour at the colony (Serra *et al* 2008) but not yet on the movements and social structure of immature birds before their return. Suggestions have been made to supplement the population with birds from Birecik; this has been extremely difficult to do with this species elsewhere and is a strategy of last resort, but the situation is critical and it is being thoroughly considered.

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* VU: 'A few cases of individuals or small groups' between November and March (BOS). Only one recent record, from Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 27 Feb 2004 (R-SWE).

Status: vagrant, possibly a rare winter visitor.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* VU: Described by Kumerloeve (1967) as 'a widespread breeder and generally fairly common', but 'no current breeding site' known (BOS). Observers have recently found several sizeable colonies in rarely visited areas: the desert mountains north of Palmyra (Serra *et al* 2005b, Murdoch pers obs) and the Euphrates valley at Ba'ath Lake (Richardson 2004) and near Halabbiyyah (the 'Lesser Kestrel cliffs'; Kullberg & Murdoch pers obs). Other recent breeding season records are from Jebel Abdul Aziz and Jebel Bilas (Murdoch pers obs). Marked migration peak in mid-April (BOS, Serra *et al* 2005b).

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, Bahrain, April 2008. Globally Vulnerable but a common migrant and widespread breeding species in Syria's interior. © *Adrian Drummond-Hill*

Status: summer visitor with several recently discovered colonies; the population is probably in the hundreds of pairs. Common and widespread on passage. No winter records.

Comment: Lesser Kestrel may well be a common and widespread breeding species in the interior of Syria; as a Vulnerable species, it merits a formal survey.

Red-footed Falcon ***Falco vespertinus*** **NT:** 'Occurs sporadically as a passage migrant' (BOS). With *c*25 records in the last 10 years, this assessment still holds. No evidence of breeding or wintering.

Status: scarce passage migrant.

Saker Falcon ***Falco cherrug*** **EN:** 'Passage migrant and more frequently a winter visitor' (BOS); subject to intense pressure from the trappers who infest the desert each autumn. Baumgart (1984) reported that hundreds of birds were once caught every year in the Syrian desert but by the 1980s the annual catch was probably in single figures. Serra *et al* (2005a) documented seven captures in four autumns (2000–2003). Only two recent field observations, on 20 Mar 2001 (Eccles 2001) and 17 Apr 2004 (Weber & Uhlig 2004). No evidence of breeding.

Status: now at best a very rare passage migrant.

Comment: a massive decline in the last half-century with unsustainable levels of trapping the likely cause.

Egyptian Vulture ***Neophron percnopterus*** **EN:** 'Local in small numbers' and 'decreasing annually' (BOS). Still common in the Palmyra area with >100 observations in 2000–2004 (Serra *et al* 2005b). Observations from many other areas in the interior but very few breeding records; the size of the local population is unknown and no information is available on productivity.

Status: still appears widespread and reasonably common, at least during migration.

Comments: the global conservation status has very recently been uplisted from 'Least Concern' to 'Endangered' but its national status is difficult to assess: some observations are of birds breeding in Syria, others of migrants. A more solitary species than Griffon Vulture, it does not nest in colonies that are easily monitored. To assess productivity, we request that all sightings should document age.

Cinereous Vulture (Eurasian Black Vulture) ***Aegypius monachus*** **NT:** Kumerloeve (1967) knew of no sightings but BOS cited several observations, the last on 26 Mar 1982; they considered it a winter visitor with no clearly documented records of breeding. One shot near Qarietayn in autumn 2002 and one soaring over Sed Wadi Abied in September 2004 are the only recent records (Serra *et al* 2005a).

Status: now only a sporadic visitor.

Comment: all vultures have declined in Syria in the last fifty years, mainly from hunting and poisoning.

Pallid Harrier ***Circus macrourus*** **NT:** Still a common passage migrant with distinct peaks in early April and early October (BOS, Serra *et al* 2005b, Murdoch pers obs); males move north before females in spring. A widespread but scarce winter visitor; 11 records of 16

birds, Jan–Feb 2004 (R-SWE), five in the Euphrates valley and six from drier habitats, all in the north-east.

Status: a common passage migrant; widespread but scarce in winter.

Greater Spotted Eagle ***Aquila clanga*** **VU:** Described by Kumerloeve (1967) and BOS as a migrant and winter visitor, though the evidence for passage appears poor. Ten records of *c*17 birds from the Euphrates valley with one bird at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, Jan–Feb 2004 (R-SWE); the best site with up to four birds was Shnan, an oxbow just downstream of ar-Raqqa, which has extensive woods ('Huweijat') bordering the Euphrates. Regular records from other observers in the last ten years. Appears to have maintained its numbers rather better than other large birds of prey.

Status: widespread but uncommon in winter in the Euphrates valley.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Kuwait, October 2007. Globally Vulnerable but still widespread in winter along the Syrian Euphrates. © *Rashed Hajji Mohamad*

Eastern Imperial Eagle ***Aquila heliaca*** **VU:** Described as a winter visitor between November and mid-April but 'valued as a stuffed bird because of its beautiful plumage' (BOS). Two winter records and five during migration since 2000; considering the few observers, there may still be a small wintering population. Two old breeding season observations, of a pair on the Turkish border and a single in the Euphrates valley, both in May 1962 (Kumerloeve 1967).

Status: scarce passage migrant; a few may still winter.

Great Bustard ***Otis tarda*** **VU:** Considered to winter 'in not inconsiderable numbers' in northern Syria (BOS) but no fully documented observations since. Palmyra-based conservationists have reported flocks of up to 16 in mountainous steppes northeast of Palmyra in winter 2003–2004 (Serra *et al* 2005a).

Status: uncertain; small numbers may still winter but there are no recent well-documented records.

Asian Houbara Bustard (Macqueen's Bustard) ***Chlamydotis macqueenii*** **VU:** A calamitous decline that can be attributed directly to hunting; most of Syria's interior has been grossly overgrazed but some areas remain in good condition. Common in April–May 1943 between Aleppo and Palmyra (Pyman 1978); 'widespread and fairly common breeder . . . generally in decline' (Kumerloeve 1967); seen once in three years in the 1970s (Macfarlane 1978) and once in 2000–2004 (Serra *et al* 2005a). A bird that appeared in the Palmyra area a few winters ago was pursued till it was shot (Serra pers comm). One recent breeding season record.

Status: effectively extinct as a result of hunting; now at best an occasional visitor.

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* **NT:** A few very old records from the north suggest that a small population once wintered (BOS). Reported from the desert east of Palmyra between 1948 and 1950 (Jeffery 1978). A female was shot in central Syria between 1975 and 1982 (BOS). There have been no reports since.

Status: presumed extinct in Syria.

Corncrake *Crex crex* **VU:** Four older records (BOS) and five recent observations. A total of five spring records, four in autumn.

Status: scarce passage migrant, no doubt overlooked. No evidence of breeding.

Sociable Lapwing (Sociable Plover) *Vanellus gregarius* **CR:** Considered a rare passage migrant or late winter visitor (Murdoch & Serra 2006) until Hofland & Keijl (in prep) discovered substantial flocks feeding in three areas of overgrazed natural steppe in the Jazira on 25 Feb 2007: 267 at Eiwa, at least 123 at al-Aumair and exactly 1000 at ar-Ruweira; they also witnessed foreign hunters shooting at Sociable Lapwings. Shepherds informed observers that birds stage for several weeks in both autumn and spring and were much commoner in the past. A party of 113 was recorded in the desert at al-Fedha on the Deir ez-Zor–Palmyra road on 1 Mar 2007. Hofland noted small parties in February 2008 at several sites in the Jazira (Eiwa, ar-Ruweira and Lake Khatuniyah) and at al-Fedha; some were clearly migrating north (Hofland pers comm). Intensive research using satellite transmitters has recently shown that northern Syria may form a staging post on northerly migration in late winter/early spring for a significant proportion of the world population (R Sheldon

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, northern Syria, February 2007. Recently shown to stage on migration in northern Syria in early spring. © *David Hoekstra*

& P Donald *in litt* 2008). The route of autumn migration to Africa and its timing are poorly known; three observations at Tell Tamer on the river Khabur between 6 Sep 1945 and 13 Oct 1945 by Goodbody (1946), and seen on four occasions in two days (19–20 Oct 1942) by Rowntree & Maclaren in the Jazira (Kumerloeve 1968).

Status: a passage migrant probably into November and from February but in unknown numbers. As yet no records from December or January, thus no unequivocal evidence of overwintering.

Comment: much research is still needed on the migration strategies of this critically endangered species, and, in particular, into the extent that hunting has been responsible for its decline.

Great Snipe ***Gallinago media*** **NT:** The only previous reports are of birds shot in the Syrian desert in spring 1935 (BOS) and in 1948–1950 (Jeffery 1978). One recent confirmed record (8 Apr 2004 at Sed Wadi Abied, Richardson 2004) with two claims also in April.

Status: probably a rare migrant.

Black-tailed Godwit ***Limosa limosa*** **NT:** Common migrant, particularly at Sabkhat al-Jabbul and in the Euphrates valley. 'Very local in winter but sometimes in large flocks', with more than 100 birds at two sites in the Euphrates valley, the Mustah salt fields on 15 Jan 2004 and oxbow W11 on 16 Feb 2004 (R-SWE).

Status: common passage migrant; local in winter.

Black-winged Pratincole ***Glareola nordmanni*** **NT:** Clarke's claim (1924) of a clutch of eggs from Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 25 May 1919 is generally considered unsafe (BOS); there have been no validated nesting records since and Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* breeds at several sites in northern Syria. Two recent records, both at Mheimideh, of three birds on 13 Apr 2005 (Müller & Glauser 2005) and three birds on 2 October 2006 (Roth 2006). Two claims also from April and October.

Status: probably a scarce and overlooked passage migrant.

European Roller ***Coracias garrulus*** **NT:** A widely distributed summer visitor frequently hunted for its beautiful plumage (BOS); this assessment still applies. A large colony at the 'Lesser Kestrel cliffs' in the Euphrates valley (Murdoch & Kullberg pers obs) and common in the Jebel Abdul Aziz (Murdoch pers obs) in spring 2006.

Status: summer visitor and passage migrant; breeding numbers unknown.

Comment: more detailed observations would be welcome.

Basra Reed Warbler ***Acrocephalus griseldis*** **EN:** First Syrian record: an individual photographed on 24 Apr 2006 at Halabbiyah on the Euphrates (Yésou *et al* 2007).

Status: as yet unclear; could be a vagrant, scarce migrant or perhaps a breeding species (*cf* Iraq Babbler).

Comment: more research is needed into large unstreaked *Acrocephalus* warblers in the Euphrates valley, particularly ringing studies to establish unequivocally their identity.

Plate 3 (left). The Anti-Lebanon above Bloudan, 4 Jun 2007. Breeding species include Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*, Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata* and Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Plate 4 (right). Tell Jabbrin, Sabkhat al-Jabbul, from the dyke 3 km south of Jabbul town, 27 May 2007; a superb observation point. The sedges below are excellent for herons, Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio* and terns. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Semi-collared Flycatcher ***Ficedula semitorquata*** **NT:** Very few Syrian records (BOS), presumably because it is difficult to distinguish from other *Ficedula* flycatchers, particularly in autumn. No evidence of breeding.

Status: unclear; likely to be a scarce migrant.

Syrian Serin ***Serinus syriacus*** **VU:** This little-known endemic has a very restricted breeding range, with the bulk of the world population breeding in Lebanon and Jordan. Syrian records are confined to a mountainous belt along the Lebanese border from Jebel ash-Sheikh north to Seydnaya, Halbun and Bloudan (Baumgart & Kasparek 1992, BOS). There appear to be no observations from further north along the border, which is mostly inaccessible to ornithologists. Brief searches north of the Gap of Homs have been unsuccessful (Murdoch pers obs). There are no well-authenticated reports elsewhere in Syria outside the breeding season; it is presumed to winter south down the Rift Valley.

Status: common in the breeding season around Bloudan but rarely recorded from other sites in Syria. Its status at other seasons is unclear; it appears to winter outside Syria.

Comments: Syrian Serin is still very easy to find at Bloudan but this must not lull the birding community into complacency; human influences in the last generation have greatly modified much of its tiny range. This is a rare bird; much more information about its range and population size is needed for its effective conservation. As a Vulnerable species, it merits a full breeding-season survey.

Cinereous Bunting ***Emberiza cineracea*** **NT:** Two old passage records (BOS) and one summer record from the desert east of Palmyra on 22 Jul 1976 (Macfarlane 1978). The only recent record is of two on 25 Mar 2006 at Wushan on Jebel Druze (Kullberg & Murdoch pers obs). Searches in possible breeding habitat in the north of Syria have so far been unsuccessful (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: rarely recorded passage migrant, probably overlooked; no evidence of breeding.

2. New species for the Syrian list (N in Species Checklist)

Smew ***Mergellus albellus*****:** First Syrian records during the SWE: two individuals, Halabbiyah on the Euphrates, 19 Feb 2004, and a flock of 14, Buhayrat al-Basil (lower Khabur reservoir), 21 Feb 2004 (R-SWE). Further records: 12, Sabkhat al-Jabbul, 26 Jan 2006 and 6, Lake Tishreen, 27 Jan 2006 (Vos pers comm); 15, Buhayrat al-Basil, 11 Feb 2007 (Kullberg 2007).

Status: may well winter regularly in northern Syria.

Comment: the northern reservoirs, Lake Assad, Lake Tishreen and Buhayrat al-Basil, are rarely visited and most individuals probably go unrecorded.

Cory's Shearwater ***Calonectris diomedea*****:** First Syrian record: two individuals off Umm al-Tuyyur, north of Latakia, 5 Sep 2007 (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: hard to determine as coverage of the Syrian coast (Plate 10) is very poor; possibly a regular visitor.

European Shag ***Leucocarbo aristotelis*****:** First Syrian record: a first-year off Wadi Qandil, north of Latakia, 5 Sep 2007 (Murdoch pers obs). An unsubstantiated report of one off Ras el-Bassit on 28 Apr 2000.

Status: unclear; the Syrian coast is rarely visited.

Caspian Plover ***Charadrius asiaticus*****:** First indisputably Syrian record: an adult male in hills north of Palmyra on 23 Mar 2001 (Eccles 2001). A small flock reported in the desert 50–80 km south of Palmyra on 22 March 2001 (Serra *et al* 2005a) but no description available. It is unclear whether Meinertzhagen's records (1935) from 'near Rutbah' in April 1933 are in Syrian territory.

Status: uncertain; could well be a scarce migrant in the Syrian desert, a very under-watched area.

Whimbrel ***Numenius phaeopus*****:** First Syrian record: three individuals at Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 31 Mar 2006 (Kullberg *in litt*). One reported from Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 13 May 2006. It is surprising that there have been no previous records.

Status: probably a scarce but under-reported migrant.

Broad-billed Sandpiper ***Limicola falcinellus*****:** First Syrian record: an individual photographed at Sed Wadi Abied on 19 Sep 2004 (Müller 2004). An undocumented report from 17 Feb 1998.

Status: unclear; possibly a scarce but overlooked passage migrant.

Sandwich Tern ***Sterna sandvicensis*****:** First Syrian record: two fishing off Tartus on 13 Apr 1996 (BOS). Three coastal records since, 14 Mar 2001, 3 Apr 2006, 16 Apr 2006, with one inland record at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, 11 Sep 2007.

Status: probably a regular coastal migrant; one inland record.

Namaqua Dove ***Oena capensis*****:** First Syrian records: individuals seen on two dates in May 2003 in Palmyra oasis and near Sed Wadi Abied (Serra *et al* 2005a). A series of reports since 2001 from oases round Palmyra (A al-Asaad pers comm), with individuals seen regularly and photographed in summer 2007 at Owyna, three birds photographed in Palmyra ruins on 25 Dec 2007 (Kullberg *in litt*), and six males and one female seen in May 2008 (H Dukhan pers comm).

Status: rare in the Palmyra area, possibly resident; not yet confirmed to breed.

Long-eared Owl ***Asio otus*****:** No well-documented old records (BOS). First Syrian record: at least six in a reedbed at Skabro in the Jazira on 19 Mar 2001 (Eccles 2001). Singles found dead at Gharanij in the Euphrates valley on 21 Feb 2004 (R-SWE); at Deir ez-Zor on 20 Apr 2004 (Bradshaw 2004); and found dead in Palmyra oasis on 20 Jun 2004 (Serra *et al* 2005b). An owlet found near the Turkish border (Manners & Diekmann 1996) in spring 1995 was initially considered to be a Long-eared Owl but was later re-identified as an Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* (Editors 1997).

Status: still unclear; most likely a scarce winter visitor.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker ***Dendrocopos medius*****:** First Syrian record: an individual photographed near Slenfe on 23 Apr 2005 (Kaestner 2005a). Noted since at several sites in the Slenfe area with breeding proven in 2006–2007 (Kullberg, Murdoch pers obs), in Abu Qubeis reserve and Wadi Jahanim.

Status: fairly common resident in mature oak woodland in the coastal mountains; may turn out to be more widespread when this habitat is properly explored.

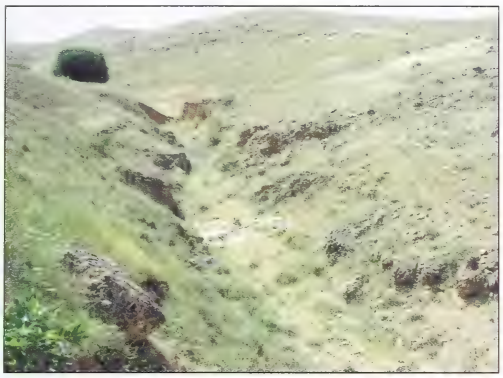
'Isabelline Shrikes' ***Lanius isabellinus*** **and 'large Grey Shrikes'** ***Lanius excubitor/meridionalis*****:** Both groups are very difficult to assess as there have been recent (and controversial) taxonomic revisions, their identification is rarely covered well in field guides and few Syrian reports have good descriptions. Visiting ornithologists are requested to make full field notes so that their status can be properly established.

Isabelline Shrike ***Lanius isabellinus*****:** No reports before 1995 (BOS). At least 25 reports since, all but two between 17 September and 23 April. Ten individuals in Jan–Feb 2004, all in adult-type plumage; seven appeared to be of the form *L. i. arenarius/isabellinus*, two *L. i. phoenicuroides* (R-SWE).

Status: uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Comment: there is a valuable discussion of status, with photographs, by Hofland & Saveyn (2005).

Great Grey Shrike (Northern Shrike) ***Lanius* [*excubitor*] *excubitor*****, Steppe Grey Shrike** ***Lanius* [*excubitor*] (*meridionalis*) *pallidirostris*****, Southern Grey Shrike** ***Lanius* [*excubitor*] *meridionalis*****:** BOS considered that 'observations of Southern Grey Shrike . . . are extremely rare', and usually referred to *S. m. aucheri*; there were no well-documented records of 'birds of a northern origin'. *S. m. aucheri* has bred in valleys in the anti-Lebanon: 'birds were found with young out of the nest' at two sites west of Damascus, the river Barada and the village of Jdeide, on 23–31 Jul 1945 (Hardy 1945). There are no breeding records since but much of the area is difficult to access and coverage is poor away from Bloudan. At least 25 reports



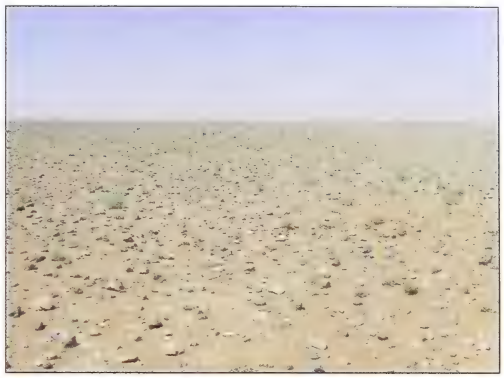


Plate 5 (left). Jebel Abdul Aziz in the Jazira, 16 May 2006; a protected area but ornithological *terra incognita*. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Plate 6 (right). Hamad desert east of Palmyra, 8 Sep 2007. Once habitat for Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* and Asian Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* but both species are now effectively extinct in Syria as a result of overhunting. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

since 2000, from a wide geographical area, at all times of year except midsummer and rarely with descriptions (most being reported as Southern Grey Shrike). Serra *et al* (2005b) recorded 11 individuals of 'Great Grey Shrike' from the Palmyra area, all in spring or autumn.

Two individuals of *L. excubitor homeyeri* were reported during the SWE on 23 Feb 2004 and 25 Feb 2004 (R-SWE).

One Steppe Grey Shrike was reported from Talila on 21–23 Feb 2004 (R-SWE).

Status: Southern Grey Shrike is probably a scarce migrant and winter visitor; it might still breed in the valleys of the anti-Lebanon. The status of the other forms is unclear.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: First Syrian record: a party of four on 5 Apr 1999 in the Foroulloq forest (BOS). Showler & Farrow (2003) recorded three birds on 5 Oct 2002, identifying them as *A. c. tephronotus*. First breeding record for Syria from Kassab in June 2003 (Murdoch 2005a). More than 20 family parties noted in 2005–2007 from Slenfe, Abu Qubeis reserve, Foroulloq–Kassab area and four sites in the hills north-west of Aleppo; often common (Murdoch, Kullberg pers obs).

Status: a common resident of the coastal range, Jebel Aqra and hills north-west of Aleppo.

Comment: it is remarkable that this distinctive bird was not recorded until 1999. Is it a recent colonist?

Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*: First Syrian record: a single in the desert near Palmyra on 1 Apr 2001 (Serra *et al* 2005b). No previous well-documented records.

Status: unclear; possibly a vagrant, perhaps a scarce but overlooked irruptive species.

Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunni*: First Syrian record from Wadi Abied near Palmyra: an individual on 24 May 2003 (Serra 2005) with two on 14 Jun 2003 (Murdoch *et al* 2005a); first breeding record from this site, a bird carrying food on 12 Jun 2004 (Serra 2005). A singing bird in the 'Baghdad road plains' near the Baghdad–Damascus road on 9 Apr 2004 (Richardson 2004) and a single at Wadi Abied on 21 Apr 2005 (Kaestner 2005b).

Status: not yet clear; probably an irruptive visitor, breeding in wetter years.

Paddyfield Warbler ***Acrocephalus agricola*****:** First Syrian record: a single at Sed Wadi Abied, 24 May 2008 (Kullberg 2008).

Status: vagrant.

Booted Warbler ***Iduna caligata*****:** First Syrian record: an individual in song in a Damascus garden in early April 2006 (Kullberg *in litt*).

Status: vagrant or possibly a scarce, but overlooked, migrant.

Icterine Warbler ***Hippolais icterina*****:** First Syrian record: one at a temporary desert pool on the Damascus–Palmyra road, 1 Apr 2006 (Dubois 2006).

Status: unclear; possibly a scarce passage migrant.

Asian Desert Warbler ***Sylvia (nana) nana*****:** First Syrian record: one at Talila reserve on 13 Jan 2001 (Serra 2005b). Singles on five dates in three winters (2001–2004), the latest on 15 April. No records since, possibly a result of less coverage.

Status: possibly a rare winter visitor in suitable habitat.

Comment: much of the Syrian interior has been severely overgrazed but habitat remains in good condition in Talila, which could well be a regular wintering site.

Iraq Babbler ***Turdoides altirostris*****:** No reports in Kumerloeve (1967) or BOS. First Syrian record at the Deir ez-Zor footbridge on 20 Mar 2001 (Eccles 2001). Found as far north as the Turkish border at Jerablus and at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, the first record west of the Euphrates, in Jan–Feb 2004 (R-SWE); many observations since throughout the Euphrates valley, including breeding records 5 km from the Turkish border and at Sabkhat al-Jabbul (many obs). Recorded from Lake Khatuniyah (al-Hawl Lake) in the Jazira on 11 Feb 2007 (Kullberg 2007).

Status: common resident throughout the Syrian Euphrates and at Sabkhat al-Jabbul; also present in the Jazira.

Comment: was it previously overlooked or has there been a recent major range expansion? The former seems unlikely as it is a conspicuous and noisy species outside the breeding season.

Bearded Reedling (Bearded Tit) ***Panurus biarmicus*****:** First Syrian records: 2–3 birds on 22 May 1998 at Sed Wadi Abied with 2–3 recently fledged young there on 27 Aug 1998 (Tavares *et al* 2000). These observations are remarkable as Sed Wadi Abied is over 100 km into the Syrian desert. Recorded since at all seasons in several reedbeds in the Euphrates valley and at Sabkhat al-Jabbul (R-SWE, many obs), though apparently not since at Sed Wadi Abied.

Status: a common breeding species in suitable reedbeds, present at all seasons. Movements unknown.

Firecrest ***Regulus ignicapilla*****:** First Syrian record: one on the island of Jazira al-Thawra in Lake Assad on 14 Feb 2004 (R-SWE). Another reported from Deir ez-Zor on 3 Jan 2006 but no description available.

Status: probably a vagrant; could perhaps be a scarce winter visitor.

Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*, Khuzestan, Iran, January 2007. Now breeding throughout the Syrian Euphrates and into Turkey; possibly a recent colonist. © *Rob Felix*

Red-breasted Flycatcher ***Ficedula parva*:** No records in BOS but 14 reports in the last five years, notably nine in one week (30 Sep–6 Oct 2007, Roth 2007).

Status: a scarce and under-recorded migrant.

Comment: the poor coverage in autumn probably accounts for the previous lack of records.

Yellow-throated Sparrow ***Gymnoris xanthocollis*:** First Syrian record and first breeding record from Haweeka island, Deir ez-Zor, where a small colony was found on 15 Jun 2003 (one nest with young in the top of a telegraph pole and a pair nest-building, Murdoch 2005b). Next day, four individuals were singing in dense conifers around the Deir ez-Zor Agricultural University. There have been further summer records since but not at other times of year. This is the only Syrian colony found so far; the habitat, a rich mix of lush gardens, orchards and thick hedges, is rare along the Euphrates.

Status: a rare summer visitor.

Buff-bellied Pipit ***Anthus* (*rubescens*) *japonicus*:** First Syrian record: one at oxbow W13 in the Euphrates valley on 18 Feb 2004 (R-SWE).

Status: unclear; vagrant or possibly a rare winter visitor.

Comment: this species winters in very small numbers in southern Israel (Snow & Perrins 1998).

Common Rosefinch ***Carpodacus erythrinus*:** First Syrian record: a female in a fruiting mulberry tree *Morus* sp on an irrigated farm at Maksam, west of Palmyra, on 15 May 2006 (Murdoch pers obs). The second record was of a female in the same tree on 23 May 2007.

Status: vagrant.

Pine Bunting ***Emberiza leucocephalos*****:** First Syrian record: four with *c*20 Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* at Bloudan on 4 Mar 2007 (Hofland & Keijl in prep). Seven at the same site on 1 Mar 2008 (Hofland pers comm).

Status: possibly a regular winter visitor to the anti-Lebanon mountains, particularly at Bloudan.

Comment: this species, Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*, Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*, Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* and Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus* form a distinct group of species that might well winter in low numbers in the anti-Lebanon and coastal mountains. Few ornithologists visit this area at any time of year; better coverage in winter might be very productive.

3. New breeding species since BOS, excluding RDB or species new to Syria (B in Species Checklist)

The list of species proven to breed in Syria (excluding former breeders) is now *c*171 with 31 additions since Baumgart's review (1995). At least 27 further species are likely to breed but formal proof is lacking. The breeding status of Syria's birds is poorly known; this is an important subject for which much more information is needed, particularly from remote areas.

Mallard ***Anas platyrhynchos*****:** First formal breeding record for Syria apparently not until 24 Apr 2006, when a female with four young was seen at Mheimideh (Dubois 2006).

Status: widespread and sometimes common in winter (R-SWE); this appears to be the only breeding record.

Northern Shoveler ***Anas clypeata*****:** First breeding record for Syria in 2007, when a nest with eggs was found at Sabkhat al-Jabbul (Y Mujawer pers comm). A significant breeding population in this huge and inaccessible wetland is a serious possibility. Recent breeding season records from Jazara (Murdoch 2005a) and Mheimideh (Murdoch pers obs) in the Euphrates valley.

Status: common and widespread winter visitor (R-SWE, Porter 2007). Breeds at Sabkhat al-Jabbul but numbers unknown; may well breed in wetlands along the Euphrates valley.

Red-crested Pochard ***Netta rufina*****:** First breeding record for Syria at Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 3 May 2005, when at least 50 pairs with nests were noted in the sedges near Tell Jabbrin (Serra *et al* 2006b).

Status: common and widespread winter visitor in suitable habitat (R-SWE). No breeding season reports from other sites.

Great Crested Grebe ***Podiceps cristatus*****:** First breeding record for Syria at Ba'ath Lake, 18 Jun 2003 (Murdoch 2005a); breeding since noted at Sabkhat al-Jabbul (Serra *et al* 2006b) and Mheimideh (Murdoch 2007b).

Status: probably breeds widely in the Euphrates valley. Common and widespread winter visitor in suitable habitat (R-SWE).

Plate 7 (left). Basalt desert east of Jebel Druze, 8 May 2006—inhabited by the black morph of Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Plate 8 (right). Mheimideh, 17 June 2003. Surrounded by houses and threatened by drainage yet always full of birds; three RDB species of duck breed. Exceptional potential as an educational nature reserve. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Greater Flamingo ***Phoenicopterus roseus*****:** Sabkhat al-Jabbul has long been recognised as an important wintering site, with counts of 6000–8000 on 22 Nov 1975 (BOS) and 19 500 on 23 Nov 2007 (Porter 2007). Syria's first breeding colony was discovered at Sabkhat al-Jabbul on an islet south of Hagla island on 12 May 2006 (Serra *et al* 2006b). Up to 100 in wet winters on Sabkhat al-Moh, a seasonally flooded salt-lake south-east of Palmyra (Macfarlane 1978, Serra *et al* 2005a). Away from these sites there are a few records of singles only.

Status: huge flocks at Sabkhat al-Jabbul with breeding recently proven; very rare elsewhere.

Comments: some of Jabbul's population are probably of Turkish or Iranian origin; ringing studies (Behrouzi-Rad 1992) have shown that young birds from Lake Uromiyeh in north-west Iran disperse widely, including to Syria. Much of Sabkhat al-Jabbul is inaccessible and its size makes accurate counts extremely difficult, but a comprehensive survey of this key site is long overdue.

Eurasian Spoonbill ***Platalea leucorodia*****:** First proven breeding for Syria at the SE Lake ('al-Hamrat'), Sabkhat al-Jabbul, on 8 May 2005, when *c*140 birds and *c*50 occupied nests were visible on distant islets (Serra *et al* 2006b); over 300 birds were present in May 2006 with similar numbers in 2007 (Murdoch, al-Asaad pers obs). The large distances involved and the desire to limit disturbance have prevented accurate colony counts. All records in Jan–Feb 2004 were from Sabkhat al-Jabbul (R-SWE); the maximum winter count is of 112 on 23 Nov 2007 (Porter 2007). A few reports of small numbers from the Euphrates valley, usually from Mheimideh.

Status: a substantial breeding colony at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, where birds are present throughout the year; uncommon and irregular elsewhere.

Comment: previously suspected of breeding at Jabbul (BOS); this colony may have been present for many years.

Squacco Heron ***Ardeola ralloides*****:** Former status unclear (BOS). First recent breeding record at Ba'ath Lake in the Euphrates valley (Murdoch 2005a) but probably nesting in

many other dense reed beds along the Euphrates valley and at Sabkhat al-Jabbul; there are also recent breeding season records from Lake of Homs, Sabkhat al-Jabbul and Mheimideh.

Status: common in the breeding season and on migration; rare in winter (R-SWE).

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: First breeding record for Syria at Ba'ath Lake, 18 Jun 2003 (Murdoch 2005a); likely to breed in other dense reed beds along the Euphrates valley and at Sabkhat al-Jabbul.

Status: widespread on migration and in the breeding season. No winter records.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*: Seems formerly to have been a scarce bird with no well-documented breeding records (Kumerloeve 1967, BOS). Now much commoner and more widespread with flocks of over 100 at Sabkhat al-Jabbul and Lake Assad (R-SWE). Probably (2006) and proven (25 May 2007) nesting, with Spoonbills, at Sabkhat al-Jabbul (Murdoch pers obs); no proper counts have been made to minimise disturbance. This and other egrets can often be seen migrating along the coast, often too far out to be identified to species level (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: breeds but numbers unknown. Substantial numbers are probably resident, some probably overwinter and others are migrants.

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*: Not known to Kumerloeve (1967) and considered 'extinct in Syria' (BOS). Recorded from four sites along the Euphrates in Jan–Feb 2004 (R-SWE); notably common at Mheimideh. First breeding record for Syria from Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 4 May 2005; counts of over 100 birds from Tell Jabbrin indicate a population well into the thousands (Serra *et al* 2006b).

Status: abundant breeding species at Sabkhat al-Jabbul and Mheimideh. Observations from several reedbeds along the Euphrates where it probably also breeds; elusive and under-recorded.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: First breeding record for Syria in May 2005: 5 nests on islets in the North-west Lake at Sabkhat al-Jabbul; at least 50 nests visible in 2006 (Serra *et al* 2006b). Single breeding pairs noted along the north shore of the Central Lake, Sabkhat al-Jabbul, in May 2006.

Status: a small breeding population at Sabkhat al-Jabbul. Winters in small numbers (R-SWE).

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*: Long suspected of breeding in Syria (BOS), with recent breeding season records from many sites including Jebel Abdul Aziz, the coastal range and Euphrates woodlands (Murdoch pers obs). First confirmed breeding from Palmyra oasis (A al-Asaad pers comm), with active nests observed in summer 2007.

Status: secretive in the breeding season but likely to breed widely in small numbers. Common and widespread winter visitor in suitable habitat (R-SWE).

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*: The first Syrian record was not until 21 Apr 1992 from the Cedar-Firs reserve at Slenfe (BOS). Widespread but uncommon in Jebel Aqra pine forests with first breeding record for Syria in June 2003 (Murdoch 2005a). Several observations in

Plate 9 (left). Sed Wadi Abied, 15 km north-west of Palmyra, 10 Sep 2007. An excellent site for migrants crossing the desert but under intense human pressure; it would make an outstanding nature reserve. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Plate 10 (right). Coast north of Umm al-Tuyyur, 5 Sep 2007. Ornithologically unknown but a likely migration route for raptors and possible breeding habitat for Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

2006–2007 from the Slenfe area and Abu Qubeis reserve, in both pines and mature oak woodland (Murdoch, Kullberg pers obs).

Status: widespread but scarce resident of the coastal mountains; range not yet fully established.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: Previously regarded as an autumn passage migrant (BOS). Common at Sabkhat al-Jabbul and Lake Tishreen and in many Euphrates reedbeds in spring 2005–2006 (Murdoch pers obs, Serra *et al* 2006b). Breeding formally proven on several occasions.

Status: widespread breeding species in reedbeds.

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*: Reported from a wide area but the shortage of good descriptions and the identification problems posed by large *Acrocephalus* warblers prevent definitive assessment. Certainly present at Lake Mzayrib near the Jordanian border, where Bradshaw (*in litt*) noted a bird in song in March 2006 and Murdoch photographed an occupied nest on 7 May 2006, the first proven breeding for Syria. One in the Euphrates valley at al-Ashara on 20 Feb 2004 (R-SWE). Reports from Lake Mzayrib on 15 Aug 1964 (Kattinger in BOS), a tributary of the Yarmuk on 22 Oct 1976 (Macfarlane 1978), the Orontes on 1 Apr 1979 (Kinzelbach 1986b), and at Deir ez-Zor on 14 Apr 2006 (Dubois 2006) are not supported by descriptions.

Status: unclear. Has bred in the far south.

Comment: comprehensive descriptions, preferably accompanied by photographs, are requested for significant records of large unstreaked *Acrocephalus* warblers in Syria.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: No documented breeding records (BOS). A characteristic species of the Jebel Aqra pine forests, with a population probably in the thousands of pairs; breeds commonly along the coastal range south through the Slenfe oakwoods at least as far as the Abu Qubeis reserve (Murdoch 2005a, pers obs). Widespread in winter (R-SWE); vocalisations tape-recorded by Farrow & Showler (2002) at Slenfe in October 2002

indicate that many wintering birds have calls very similar to Mountain Chiffchaff *P.* [*c.*] *lorenzii*.

Status: common breeding species in the west; widespread in winter in small numbers; common on passage.

Comment: it is possible that breeding and wintering birds are not from the same populations.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Territorial males noted in May 2006 in Forouloq forest (Kullberg pers comm) with the first Syrian breeding record on 31 May 2007 (Murdoch pers obs): at least 2 males singing and a pair feeding young in an area of mature oak woodland.

Status: common and widespread winter visitor (BOS). One breeding record.

Comment: the Syrian breeding population is likely to be tiny; oak woodland is a rare habitat in the Forouloq area and there are no breeding season records from elsewhere in Syria.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: Breeding by *P. p. samamisicus* suspected (BOS). First confirmed breeding for Syria in Forouloq forest on 31 May 2007 (Murdoch pers obs): a nest on a ledge in the reserve headquarters! The subspecies could not be determined as the male was not seen. Observations from Slenfe and Abu Qubeis reserve in late spring 2006–2007 (Murdoch pers obs) indicate a much wider breeding distribution.

Status: may breed widely in the coastal mountains. A common passage migrant (BOS).

Blackstart *Cercomela melanura*: Common in the Yarmuk valley and its branches (Plate 11), the northern limit of its range; first breeding record for Syria at Tell Shahib, at the eastern end of the valley, on 7 May 2006 (Murdoch pers obs). An individual in a Damascus garden on 12 Dec 2005 (Kullberg pers comm) is the most northerly Syrian record.

Status: common, presumed resident, in the Yarmuk; very rare elsewhere.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Common passage migrant but not confirmed breeding (BOS). First breeding records for Syria from Kassab pine forests and Forouloq forest in 2003 (Murdoch 2005a). Territorial activity noted in Slenfe and Qalaat Saladin areas and coast north of Latakia in June 2006; common in Ouba woods on 7 May 2005 and in Haj Hassan woods on 26–29 May 2007, sites in the hills north-west of Aleppo (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: probably a widespread breeding species north-west of Aleppo, in the Jebel Aqra and the coastal range. Abundant on migration but no winter records.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*: Apparently a rarity in Syria until recently with only three records up to 1995 (BOS). At least 30 records since, from Sabkhat al-Jabbul and Mheimideh in particular, but also from many sites along the Euphrates, and on migration from Sed Wadi Abied and transient desert pools (many obs). The only records in Jan–Feb 2004 were from Sabkhat al-Jabbul and Mheimideh (R-SWE). Hofland (1994) noted a female at Mheimideh in June 1994; the first Syrian breeding record was at this site on 18 May 2006, a male feeding young in sedges by the main road (Murdoch 2007b).

Plate 11 (left). Yarmuk valley taken from south of Heet, 9 May 2006. Habitat for Blackstart *Cercomela melanura* and Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* at the northern edge of their range. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Plate 12 (right). Dawara cliffs, 12 Apr 2006—holds a breeding colony of Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus*, possibly Syria's last. A potential site for a locally based conservation project. © *Dr DA Murdoch*

Status: widespread on migration but scarce in winter, with one breeding record; possibly increasing.

Grey Wagtail ***Motacilla cinerea*****:** First breeding record for Syria along a stream in the Foroulloq forest, 12 Jun 2003 (Murdoch 2005a); up to three pairs in several seasons since. A female feeding young in the gorge below Qalaat Saladin on 5 May 2006 (Murdoch pers obs), a significant range extension.

Status: a rare breeding species in the Jebel Aqra; its breeding range is not yet fully known. Uncommon but widespread winter visitor in suitable habitat (R-SWE).

Long-billed Pipit ***Anthus similis*****:** The only known sites in Syria are the barren, steep-sided valleys of the Yarmuk valley and its tributaries (BOS). Common south of Heet with at least two pairs feeding young on 9 May 2006 (Murdoch pers obs), the first confirmed breeding for Syria.

Status: common in the Yarmuk valley, presumed resident. No well-documented records from elsewhere.

European Serin ***Serinus serinus*****:** BOS cited a single possible breeding record and regarded it as a winter visitor 'in small numbers throughout western Syria'. First breeding record for Syria at Kassab on 12 Jun 2003 (Murdoch 2005a); since found breeding widely in the coastal range, the drier hills north-west of Aleppo, the Jebel Samaan and even in roadside conifers east of Homs (Murdoch pers obs)—all areas rarely visited by ornithologists. It appears likely, therefore, that this successful species has colonised a wide swathe of north-west Syria. Almost no records from wetlands visited in Jan–Feb 2004 (R-SWE).

Status: winter visitor in small numbers mainly to western Syria; breeds in much of the west and north-west.

Comment: this species might start to compete with Syrian Serin in the latter's restricted range.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*: Reported from the central Syrian desert, the Jordanian border and the heights of the anti-Lebanon above Bloudan; most records from the Palmyra area (BOS). First breeding records for Syria from Wadi Abied in 2003–2004 (Murdoch 2005a, Serra *et al* 2006a). Several family parties at 2400 m, above Bloudan, on 4 Jun 2007 (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: widespread in stony areas; its range (in and outside the breeding season) needs further study.

4. Significant change in Syrian status (S in Species Checklist)

See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*: First recorded from the west bank of Lake Assad in 1976 (Macfarlane 1978). Regular reports since 2004 from the Euphrates valley round Halabbiyah; recorded from the Jazira at Tal Brak (R-SWE) and Lake Khatuniyah (al-Hawl Lake, Hofland & Keijl in prep).

Status: inhabits rarely visited areas, but probably widespread along cliffs bordering the upper Euphrates valley and in the Jazira. Range may extend further south than presently accepted.

Comment: a reliable Palmyran conservationist, A al-Asaad, has reported unidentified *Ammoperdix* partridges on the Iraqi border east of Palmyra; for security reasons, foreign ornithologists have never visited the area.

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*: Described in 1995 as 'reduced to critically low numbers, chiefly due to heavy hunting pressure' (BOS). Over 30 records since, throughout the Euphrates valley as far north as Jerablus and from the Jazira. No records from Sabkhat al-Jabbul or further west.

Status: fairly common in a restricted area of north-eastern Syria.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: Frequent May records of birds behaving 'suspiciously' suggest that a small population may breed at Mheimideh and Sabkhat al-Jabbul. Breeds in Turkey (Kirwan *et al* 1998).

Status: widespread winter visitor in small numbers (R-SWE). Possible breeding species.

Comment: proving breeding requires better coverage late in the season.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: Two observations in summer but 'no evidence of breeding' (BOS). Recent records in late spring from several sites, notably Sabkhat al-Jabbul and Mheimideh (Murdoch pers obs), suggest that there may be a small breeding population.

Status: common passage migrant; may breed in small numbers.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*: Regularly observed into late May in suitable breeding habitat at Sabkhat al-Jabbul (Murdoch pers obs); a female at Mheimideh on 16 Jun 2003 (Murdoch 2005a). Very few ornithologists have visited either site in late June when small young might be evident.

Status: likely to breed at these sites but not yet confirmed. Very common in winter (R-SWE).

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: Previously described as 'occasional passage migrant and winter visitor' (Kumerloeve 1967, BOS), but a commoner bird than previously recognised with at least 30 records in the last decade. Observations from Sed Wadi Abied (*eg* 21 Apr 2005, Kaestner 2005b) provide evidence of passage.

Status: widespread winter visitor, secretive but common; scarce passage migrant.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Described as a 'rare visitor' (BOS). In Jan–Feb 2004, 'widespread throughout the Euphrates valley' and 'particularly common in the oxbow reedbeds' (R-SWE). Several thousand flying past Karchemish Tell on the Euphrates near Jerablus on 6 May 2005 (Murdoch & al-Asaad pers obs); birds from a large colony just into Turkey (Tavares pers comm) were using Lake Tishreen in Syria to feed. Other recent breeding season records from Ba'ath Lake, Shnan and Mheimideh indicate a possible colony along the lower Syrian Euphrates. Surprisingly, there are no records from Lake of Homs or Sabkhat al-Jabbul.

Status: widespread and common in winter along the Euphrates valley. Scarce during the breeding season with no known Syrian colonies; a large colony in Turkey feeds on Lake Tishreen.

Comments: a breeding season census of the Euphrates is long overdue. Recently downlisted by IUCN from 'Near Threatened' to 'Species of Least Concern'.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: Bred along the Euphrates until the middle of the 20th century; no documented records since the 1960s (BOS). One reported at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, 24 Mar 1999, but no description available (Neumann in BOS).

Status: extinct.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture (Griffon Vulture) *Gyps fulvus*: BOS commented on the massive decline in numbers throughout the twentieth century and estimated a population of 100–200 pairs. This decline has continued. The only known colony remaining is on the cliffs at Dawara, *c*15 km north-west of Palmyra (Plate 12); it is very difficult to estimate numbers as nests are spaced along several km of inaccessible cliff, but the best estimates seem to be 8–15 pairs. A drilling platform for oil was recently erected within 1 km of the colony but birds were nesting in May 2007 (Murdoch pers obs). A flock of eight birds in the Yarmuk valley on 9 May 2006 (Murdoch pers obs) indicates that a second colony survives in the far southwest.

Status: formerly a common and widespread resident; now rare and in danger of extinction in Syria.

Comment: the Dawara colony is an attraction for tourists interested in Palmyra's wildlife. Palmyra-based conservationists have suggested creating a 'vulture restaurant' on site with a safe source of drinking water; these simple measures might help to save Syria's last Griffon colony.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciatus*: 'In the past . . . a breeding bird in the Syrian desert areas' (BOS). A bird trapped near Palmyra and photographed by G Serra on 23 Sep 2001 (Serra *et al* 2005b, Hofland & Saveyn 2005) is apparently the first record since the 1940s (Pyman 1978, Goodbody 1945, 1946).

Status: now only a vagrant, with hunting the most likely cause for its extinction.

Red-wattled Lapwing (Red-wattled Plover) ***Vanellus indicus*****:** Three records from the river Khabur in autumn 1988 appear to be the first for Syria (BOS). Several recent records from the Jazira: Ain Diwar on the Tigris on 6 Mar 2002 (several birds showing territorial behaviour, Murdoch 2005a); Fish Khabur on 14 Mar 2006; and Lake Khatuniyah (al-Hawl Lake) on 14 Mar 2006 and 11 Feb 2007 (Kullberg pers comm). One at Mheimideh, 25–27 Feb 2008 (Kullberg 2008, Hofland pers comm).

Status: unclear; may breed widely in the north-east but not yet formally proven.

Comment: this species may be widespread in the Jazira but the area's remoteness has deterred ornithologists from visiting. More information during the breeding season would be valuable.

White-tailed Lapwing (White-tailed Plover) ***Vanellus leucurus*****:** 'Excluded both as a breeding and annual bird' (BOS). Regular breeding records since from Mheimideh (*c*10 pairs, Murdoch 2007b) and Sabkhat al-Jabbul (at least 10 pairs, Serra *et al* 2006b) with a pair on an oxbow near Jazara in 2003 (Murdoch 2005a) and four pairs at the Mustah salt-fields in 2006 (Murdoch pers obs). Scarce in winter; two records in Jan 2004 but widespread in Feb 2004 (R-SWE), indicating early return from wintering areas.

Status: at least three established colonies in northern Syria; a few winter along the Euphrates.

Comment: may well be a widespread breeding species along the Euphrates; better coverage needed.

White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*, Kuwait, February 2008. Breeds in a few secluded sites along the Syrian Euphrates. © *Rashed Hajji Mohamad*

Red-necked Phalarope ***Phalaropus lobatus*****:** Only three records up to 1995 (BOS) but at least 15 since, including a flock of 30 at Sed Wadi Abied on 28 Mar 2006 (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: a scarce passage migrant.

Common Gull ***Larus canus*****:** Three records until 1995 (BOS) but eight in Jan–Feb 2004 (R-SWE) with several recent observations during spring migration.

Status: rare but widespread on passage and in winter.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse ***Pterocles alchata*****:** Baumgart's description as 'a characteristic bird of the arid areas of the Syrian interior' (BOS) no longer holds true; analysis of 30 trip reports from the last ten years reveals a disturbingly low number of records: 24 sightings in four years of fieldwork (2000–2004) by Serra *et al* (2005b) and just five by other observers.

Status: resident, once common but with very few recent records; possibly in rapid decline.

Comments: possible explanations include their nomadic habits, poor coverage and unsustainable levels of hunting. The last fits with other evidence such as the eradication of

bustards and recent observations of foreign hunting parties in the north (Hofland & Keijl in prep). In 1983, Baumgart described seeing 'large swarms' subjected to 'decimating hunting, which only a few groups managed to survive' (BOS). This species could follow Ostrich and Asian Houbara Bustard into local extinction. All records of sandgrouse are requested.

Spotted Sandgrouse ***Pterocles senegallus*****:** Formerly bred in small numbers in central and southern Syria (Kumerloeve 1967) but there are no records since 5 Apr 1994 (BOS). A flock of 50 short-tailed sandgrouse probably of this species on the Palmyra–Deir ez-Zor road on 10 Apr 2006 (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: unclear.

Comment: apparently still resident in the hamad desert east of Palmyra (A al-Asaad in Serra *et al* 2005a).

Black-bellied Sandgrouse ***Pterocles orientalis*****:** Six records in the last ten years, four by Serra *et al* (2005b) in four years of fieldwork (2000–2004) in central Syria. This compares with ten records by Macfarlane (1978) during three years (1974–1977) of intermittent observations.

Status: scarce winter visitor. Probably under-recorded, as few observers visit the steppes in winter; possibly declining as a result of unsustainable hunting.

Short-eared Owl ***Asio flammeus*****:** Formerly 'a regular winter visitor' with flocks of up to 100 birds; 'the most frequent of the larger owls to turn up as stuffed specimens in shops' (BOS). The only recent report is of four–five at Talila in November 1998; one was photographed (Serra *et al* 2005b).

Status: even allowing for limited winter coverage in the northern steppes, there has been a dramatic decline.

Comment: another species for which over-hunting may explain its disappearance.

Little Swift (House Swift) ***Apus affinis*****:** Scattered records throughout Syria, most often from the mountains north of Palmyra, the coastal range, Deir ez-Zor and the Yarmuk valley; the maximum count is of 35 at Sed Wadi Abied on 24 May 2008 (Kullberg 2008). Breeding not yet documented. Few winter records, probably a reflection of coverage rather than status.

Status: seems likely to be a scarce but widely distributed breeding species.

Red-billed Chough ***Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*****:** Considered as 'extinct' in Syria (BOS) until Serra *et al* (2005b) discovered a population in the mountains north-west of Palmyra; flocks of 50 birds are common, particularly round Sed Wadi Abied. There are few or no recent records away from this area.

Status: local but common resident in the mountains near Palmyra.

Bimaculated Lark ***Melanocorypha bimaculata*****:** Breeding distribution limited to anti-Lebanon and Jebel ash-Sheikh (BOS). Territorial males recorded from several sites on Jebel Druze and Jebel Bilas in spring 2006 (Murdoch pers obs) though none found on Jebel Bilas in 2008 (Kullberg 2008).

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*. A fairly common migrant, breeding in scattered locations in upland areas; its distribution is poorly known. © *MS Abdallah*

Status: several widely-spread breeding areas. Common on passage in the interior, often with Calandra Lark.

Comment: probably breeds much more widely than presently known.

White-eared Bulbul (White-cheeked Bulbul) ***Pycnonotus (leucogenys) leucotis*****:** A small colony in the Palmyra oasis in 1977–1979 (Kinzelbach 1986a) but no observations from 2000–2003 (Serra pers comm). Regular at Deir ez-Zor on the Syrian Euphrates since 1998 (Wester 1998) though not yet formally proven to breed. Recent records from near Fish Khabur in the Tigris valley on 14 Mar 2006 (Kullberg *in litt*) and from Mheimideh on 28 Feb 2008 (Hofland pers comm).

Status: very local resident in Deir ez-Zor; origin unknown. Few records elsewhere.

Olive-tree Warbler ***Hippolais olivetorum*****:** Discovered breeding in dwarf oaks near Kassab by Baumgart & Stephan (1987). Recent records of singing birds from the Qalaat Saladin–Slenfe area, Wadi Jahanim and Abu Qubeis reserve but much suitable habitat along the coastal range is still unexplored (Murdoch pers obs).

Status: breeds in coastal range though distribution not yet fully known; widespread on migration.

Spectacled Warbler ***Sylvia conspicillata*****:** Old breeding season records from Jebel Druze (Meinertzhagen 1935), near Palmyra (Kumerloeve 1967) and Wadi al-Qarn west of Damascus (Macfarlane 1978). In spring 2006–2007, a common breeding species on Jebel Bilas

and Jebel Samaan with single territorial males at Tel al-Hamdaniyah on the Khabur river and Shnan in the Euphrates valley (Murdoch pers obs). Several scattered winter records.

Status: probably a widespread breeding species but inhabits rarely visited areas; winters but numbers unknown.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: Very few records, the first only on 21 Apr 1992 from the Cedars-Firs reserve above Slenfe (BOS). Recently found in the oakwoods at Slenfe and much farther south in Abu Qubeis reserve, a larger range than formerly suspected (Murdoch pers obs). No records from the Jebel Aqra forests, which are mainly evergreen.

Status: presumed scarce resident; possibly widespread along the coastal range.

Pale Rockfinch (Pale Rock Sparrow) *Carpospiza brachydactyla*: Syrian breeding range poorly known (BOS). Territorial birds recorded in May 2006 from many rarely visited areas in the interior (Murdoch pers obs), indicating a far wider breeding range than previously suspected: Reea al-Hawa (common), Jebel Bilas (common), Yarmuk valley (common), the western slopes of Jebel Druze near Salkhad (very common) and Jebel Abdul Aziz (a single singing male). However no breeding birds were located on Jebel Bilas in May 2008 (Kullberg 2008).

Status: a summer visitor and passage migrant, it breeds widely, at least in some years.

Comment: an unobtrusive and nondescript species, almost certainly under-recorded and notoriously erratic in its breeding habits (BOS, Snow & Perrins 1998); it is possible that 2006 was a year of unusual abundance.

Pale Rockfinch *Carpospiza brachydactyla*, Kuwait, April 2008. A migrant that breeds in variable numbers on stony upland slopes in Syria's interior. © *Rashed Hajji Mohamad*

5. No recent reports

There are valid records from Syria of the following species but no reports since at least 1995 (BOS). This may be due to poor coverage, a genuine population decrease or both. Ornithologists visiting Syria are requested to report all observations and submit descriptions:

Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*

Barbary Falcon *Falco (peregrinus) pelegrinoides*

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*

Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

6. Incomplete reports of species not previously recorded from Syria

No descriptions are available for the following claims and the species are, therefore, not included on the Syrian list:

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: One, Sabkhat al-Jabbul, 25 Feb 1994 (Bailey & Manners in Kirwan 1994).

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*: A flock of six, Sed Wadi Abied, 18 Dec 2001 to mid-Feb 2002 (Serra *et al* 2005a). Hunters shot one bird.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*: One, Sabkhat al-Jabbul, 17 Feb 1998 (Wester 1998).

Lappet-faced Vulture *Aegypius tracheliotos* **VU:** Several reports of birds shot or observed by Palmyrans or Bedu hunters, some recently (BOS, Serra *et al* 2005a). A healthy population of perhaps 200 pairs is present in northern Arabia, *c*700 km away, and within the documented range that juveniles wander in Africa (M Jennings *in litt*); it appears likely that the occasional bird reaches Syria.

Status: good circumstantial evidence but no fully documented Syrian records.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*: Several claims but none fully documented.

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*: Several reports, Jul–Sep 2001 (Serra *et al* 2005b).

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*: One, Sed Wadi Abied, 18 Aug 2007 (Bot 2007). A scarce passage migrant and winter visitor to Turkey (Kirwan *et al* 1998).

Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: A possible in the Sahra valley on the Turkish border in late summer 2006 (Ottelin 2008).

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*: One, Syrian coast, 14 Apr 1998 (Baumgart 1998).

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*: One, oasis near Palmyra, 25 Sep 2002 (Le Croisette & Wheeler 2002).

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*: A singing individual heard near Qalaat Saladin on 1 Apr 1994 (BOS) is the only report from Syria; the bird was not seen and the area has been thoroughly searched since. A wandering individual cannot be discounted but this species is sedentary and evidence of its presence in Syria needs fuller documentation.

Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*: Three reports, Talila / Sed Wadi Abied, 2001 (Serra *et al* 2005a).

White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*: One, Dawara cliffs, 17 Nov 2001; one, Talila, 16 Mar 2004 (Serra *et al* 2005a).

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: A calling individual flying over steppes south of Sabkhat al-Jabbul, 20 Feb 2007 (Hofland & Keijl in prep). A widespread breeding bird in eastern Turkey (Roselaar 1995) that is likely to occur in Syria.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*: One at Sed Arak, c30 km north-east of Palmyra, 2 Jan 2002 (Serra *et al* 2005b).

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*: One, Wadi Abied near Palmyra, summer 2002; one, Tarfa, c15 km west of Palmyra, summer 2003 (Serra *et al* 2005b).

7. Species not yet reported from Syria.

The following species have not yet been reported from Syrian territory but could well occur:

Coastal region: Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*.

Turkish border: White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*, Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*, Krüper's Nuthatch *Sitta krueperi*.

Jordanian border: Hume's Owl *Strix butleri*, Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*, Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristrami*.

Any observations of these species in Syria must be fully documented as per the OSME Rarities Report form.

Pharaoh's Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*. © *MS Abdallah*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Dr Akram Darwish, Osama al-Nouri and May Abido, our colleagues in the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife, for their support and advice. Adib al-Asaad, Mahmud Abdallah and Ahmed Abdallah have accompanied many foreign ornithologists visiting Syria. It is a pleasure to acknowledge Effie Warr at the British Museum of Natural History (Tring), who kindly assisted with publications, and the following who commented on sections of early texts: Chris Bowden, Paul Donald, Mike Jennings, Sharif Jbour, Johannes Kamp, Max Kasparek, Guy Kirwan, Jeremy Lindsell, Rob Sheldon, Jose Tavares and particularly Anssi Kullberg, Remco Hofland and Gianluca Serra.

We are indebted to the anonymous referees of the rarities reports for their expertise.

Invaluable data in the form of trip reports was provided by: Ruud van Beusekom, Sander Bot, Chris Bradshaw, Judy Dawes & David Whaley, Philippe Dubois, Hugues Dufourny, Stephen Eccles, Remco Hofland, Peter Kaestner, Anssi Kullberg, Guy Manners, Werner Müller, Richard Porter, Colin Richardson, Toby Roth, Gianluca Serra, Dave Showler & Dave Farrow, Karen Wade & Mike Orr, M Weber, Jan Wester. We greatly appreciate your labours.

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Appendix 1. Gazetteer of sites mentioned in text, arranged by province

Aleppo (Halab)	
Lake Tishreen, Karchemish Tell (north end)	N36 47.244 E38 02.157
Lake Tishreen, east side	N36 42.720 E38 05.142
Lake Tishreen, Karakozak bridge	N36 37.909 E38 11.956
Jerablus town	N36 49.059 E38 00.639
Ouba village	N36 47.761 E36 46.093
Gorge, Jebel Samaan	N36 21.153 E36 49.620
Haj Hassan woods	N36 28.197 E36 39.231
Sabkhat al-Jabbul	N36 03 E37 29

Tell Jabbrin, Sabkhat al-Jabbul	N36 03 18.42 E37 32 50.64
Hagla island, south side, Sabkhat al-Jabbul	N36 00.537 E37 36.874
South-east Lake ('al-Hamrat'), Sabkhat al-Jabbul	N35 52.352 E37 40.059
Damascus	
Bloudan town centre	N33 43.413 E36 07.507
Abu Zad (peak above Bloudan)	N33 45.612 E36 10.252
Wadi al-Qarn	N33 34 E 36 00
Latakia	
Latakia city	N35 31.588 E35 48.522
Kassab town	N35 55.527 E35 59.066
Foroulloq forest	N35 51.025 E36 00.064
Slenfe town	N35 35.831 E36 11.308
Cedar-Firs reserve above Slenfe	N35 34.824 E36 13.094
Qala'at Saladin (Saladin's castle)	N35 35.721 E36 03.529
Ras el-Bassit town	N35 50.999 E35 50.700
Umm al-Tuyyur village	N35 45.748 E35 50.585
Wadi Qandil, mouth of valley	N35 43.788 E35 50.028
Homs	
Lake of Homs, SW side	N34 35 12.36 E36 31 26.16
Krak des Chevaliers (Qala'at Hosn)	N34 45.271 E36 17.697
Palmyra area (Homs province)	
Palmyra town	N34 33.322 E38 16.578
Owyna oasis	N34 31.730 E38 14.540
Talila reserve	N34 31.640 E38 31.568
Sed Wadi Abied	N34 40.302 E38 13.803
Dawara cliffs	N34 40.365 E38 27.029
Maksam oasis	N34 31.462 E38 11.447
Reea al-Hawa uplands	N34 51.257 E38 26.329
Jebel Bilas uplands	N34 53.073 E37 38.881
Baghdad road plains	N33 47.265 E37 19.992
Hama	
Wadi Jahanim	N35 15.360 E36 16.661
Abu Qubeis village	N35 14.136 E36 18.900
Hasakah	
Buhayrat al-Basil (Lower Khabur reservoir)	N36 16.651 E40 43.802
Tel al-Hamdaniyah	N36 12.368 E40 43.286
Jebel Abdul Aziz	N36 25.086 E40 23.480
Lake Khatuniyah (al-Hawl Lake)	N36 23 E41 13
Ar Raqqa	
Jazira al-Thawra (al-Thawra island), Lake Assad	N35 49 38.58 E38 29 02.64
Ba'ath Lake	N35 51 58.72 E38 43 12.46
Oxbow W11	N35 44 55.81 E39 38 41.09
Oxbow W13	N35 46 20.82 E39 44 15.43
Shnan oxbow	N35 50 03.71 E39 13 35.99

Deir ez-Zor

Jazara oxbow	N35 45 48.46 E39 46 09.82
Mustah salt fields	N35 44.448 E39 40.247
Lesser Kestrel cliffs	N35 43.416 E39 44.216
Halabbiyah gorge	N35 41.286 E39 49.462
Mheimideh village	N35 25.748 E40 06.106
Deir ez-Zor city footbridge	N35 20.783 E40 09.131
al-Ashara oxbow	N34 53.522 E40 33.345
Gharanij floodplain	N34 47 44.11 E40 45 41.92

Dara'a

Lake Mzayrib	N32 42 E36 01
Heet village	N32 44.963 E35 54.532
Yarmuk valley	N32 44.233 E35 54.355
Tel Shahib village	N32 41.582 E35 58.097

Suwayda

Jebel Druze, western slopes	N32 29.973 E36 38.733

Temminck's Lark *Eremophila bilopha*. One of the characteristic birds of Syria's interior. © *MS Abdallah*

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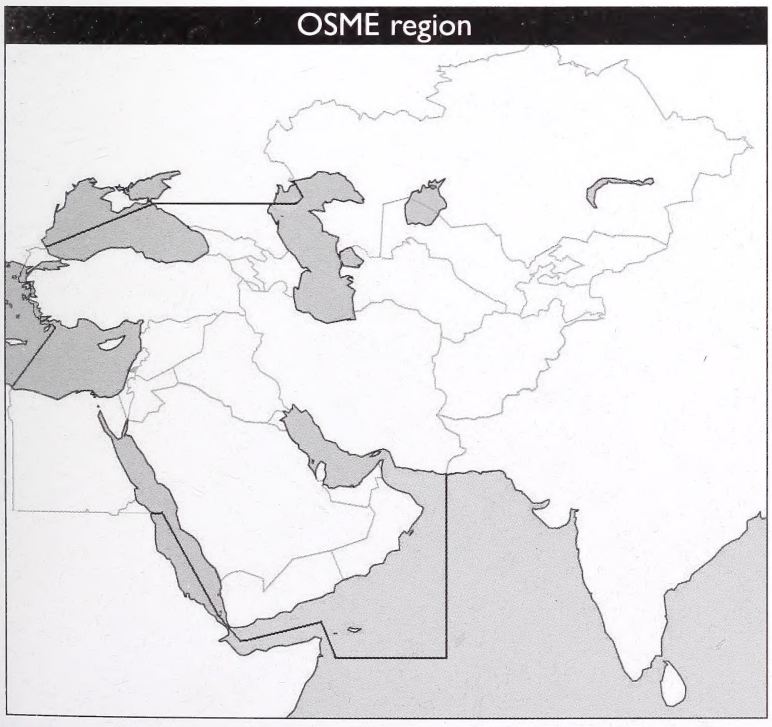

ISSN 0260-4736

Design & layout
by Alcedo Publishing, Arizona
engli@mailsnare.net

Printed by
Crowes of Norwich, UK
sales@crowes.co.uk

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Cert no. SGS-COC-004586
www.fsc.org
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