
SANDGROUSE

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ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST,
CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

OSME



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.
- To promote an interest in ornithology and bird conservation throughout the Middle East.
- To develop productive working relationships with other governmental and non-governmental organisations with an interest in conservation and/or natural history in the region.

MEMBERSHIP

OSME is open to all, and its membership spans over 40 countries.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Individual

£15 (UK address)

£20 (Europe)

£20 (Surface mail outside Europe)

£25 (Airmail outside Europe)

Institutions

£30 (Add £5 for Airmail)

Write to the Membership Secretary at the address below for a membership form detailing methods of payment and also rates for Family, Supporting and Life membership. For any other information on the Society, write to the Secretary at the same address.

PUBLICATIONS

OSME publishes a scientific journal, *Sandgrouse*, containing papers, news and features on all aspects of Middle Eastern ornithology. Published twice yearly, it is issued free to members. Further copies are available for sale from OSME.

MEETINGS

An Annual General Meeting is held in London at which guest speakers provide new perspectives on ornithology in the region. There are also occasional special meetings, some taking place outside the UK.

PROJECTS

OSME organises field expeditions to collect data on birds in little-known parts of the region and in areas where OSME can assist by teaming up with local groups.

The Conservation & Research Committee grants funds to valuable field projects and desk studies which further knowledge and conservation of birds in the region. Grants have been awarded to over 30 projects since the Conservation & Research Fund was set up in 1982.

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SANDGROUSE

Volume 23 (2)

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Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris
clotbey* taken by Hadoram
Shirihai in the southern Negev,
Israel, April 1999.

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of printing the colour photographs
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NOSME News



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

Following much deliberation, representation by members (see the OSME Summer Meeting report below) and further discussion within OSME Council, the decision has been taken to amend the OSME strapline to the following: the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia.

Andrew Grieve

OSME SUMMER MEETING 2001

The OSME summer meeting, held on 14 July at the by now traditional venue of the School of Oriental and African Studies, adjacent to London's Russell Square, was once again a both instructive and entertaining event. Pre-meeting fears of recent building works disrupting proceedings, as earlier in the year, thankfully proved unfounded.

Andrew Grieve, OSME Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting, but in particular those overseas members who had made long journeys. He then invited contributions from the floor and was taken up first by José Tavares, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds 'man' in Turkey, who described the now-rapid transition from a country that depended largely on visiting birders to one well able to conceive and administer its own. Keith Betton, Council's new Information Officer, then presented a brief update on the results of the recent OSME membership survey, and also took the opportunity to

request further suggestions for country contacts in the region's more remote corners. Perhaps the most far-reaching step OSME has taken in recent years has been the extension of its area from the Middle East to include adjacent areas of Asia. Simon Busuttill, Council member with particular responsibility for the extended area, whetted the appetites of those present to the ornithological delights and discoveries to be made in Central Asia, by describing his expeditions to the remoter parts of Kazakhstan.

Before lunch the usually staid proceedings of the AGM were enlivened this year by a debate concerning the extension of the OSME area. Though it seemed everyone present agreed to it, the strapline to describe it caused lively, if not heated, debate. One group, ably represented by Peter Cowan, favoured OSME, the Caucasus and Middle Asia, while others preferred the more populist OSME, the Caucasus and Central Asia. To avoid the meeting extending indefinitely, Vice-President Richard Porter, diplomatically suggested the final decision be left to Council.

Lunch, which was taken *al fresco*, was once again provided by Geoff & Hilary Welch, to who thanks are due. First of the two afternoon speakers was Richard Porter, who described in great detail the unique birdlife of Socotra, with particular reference to the status of those species endemic to the island. In a lighter vein, Tim Loseby presented his 'Middle East Miscellany', which in fact concentrated on trips made to Jordan and UAE. As always with Tim, we were shown many stunning images of both birds and scenic grandeur. Interrupting the excellent talks was Andrew's Chairman's quiz. Regulars will know that in order to do well ornithological expertise is less essential than an understanding of the quirks of his mind. Having somehow developed such an ability, the writer was able to triumph over the Middle East birding legends present, and win a book kindly donated by Wildsounds.

Owen Roberts

SANDGROUSE CHANGES

In summer 2001, *Sandgrouse* said farewell to the services of Ian Andrews (Assistant editor) and Derek Harvey (Features editor), both of whom assumed their posts in 1996. Ian is due to take over as President of the Scottish

Ornithologists' Club this autumn, a task with which we wish him well. Their knowledge of the Jordan and south Arabian birding scenes have been brought to bear to OSME's benefit for the past five years, and we thank them for their many efforts and hard work on behalf of the journal. OSME, and particularly myself, will miss their input. Meanwhile, OSME is looking for volunteers to fill the gaps left by Ian and Derek's departures. Interested parties may contact me at sandgrouse@osme.org.

Guy M. Kirwan

UZBEKISTAN SURVEY OPPORTUNITY

OSME members are invited to take part in expeditions to survey Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus* in Uzbekistan this winter. Two surveys are planned: one in November to visit reservoirs in the Amudarya Delta, and the second in January or February to visit Bukhara, Samarkand and Djizak. If you are interested in taking part, please contact Elena Kreuzberg-Mukhina at kreuz@physic.uzsci.net for further details.

AROUND THE REGION—AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE!

Thank you to all who responded so promptly to our request for records for Around the Region. Writing this proved much more difficult than we anticipated—faced with so much information, how does one select the most important items? For some countries, e.g. Israel and Oman, there is much up-to-date information, but for other countries, there is little published information. It would be very helpful, if when sending records for Around the Region, observers could highlight particularly unusual records. We aim to concentrate on reporting records of rare and scarce birds, unseasonal occurrences, new breeding species and notable extensions of breeding or wintering range. This request particularly applies to those living in or visiting countries with little accessible information, e.g. Georgia, Kazakhstan and other ex-Soviet bloc countries. Many observers already do this, making our task much easier! Thank you. Please continue to send records for Around the Region, either by e-mail (aroundtheregion@osme.org) or by post to: Around the Region, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U. K. The next deadline for submission of records is 15 December 2001.

Dawn Balmer and Keith Betton

OSME MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

Many thanks to all who returned the OSME questionnaire, which provides a very useful guide to those activities the membership wish the society to focus on and will form the basis of Council's future planning. Some 74% have belonged to OSME for more than five years and 33% report that their interest in the society had increased during this time, with only 5% stating this had decreased. Ninety-five per cent are planning to renew their membership, and are thanked for their support; 64% stated that they joined to be kept informed about ornithology in the Middle East and 29% were mainly interested in supporting a group focusing on ornithology in the region.

Eight per cent of replies came from people resident in the OSME region, but 60% of all replies were from members who plan to bird independently in the region over the next three years, with 19% also planning to visit the region on an organised bird holiday. There was very strong support for *Sandgrouse* with 98% reporting that the journal either fully or mostly meets their needs, and 62% said the same for OSME's conservation efforts. A great many suggestions were made for new initiatives, and Council is now studying these to find ways in which we can improve what it does. Many of these suggestions focused on increasing membership in the OSME region and finding ways of supporting existing active ornithologists.

The contents of *Sandgrouse* generally met with favour, with significant numbers asking for more news, information, regional bird reports and features on destinations and species. Few items were listed as unpopular, though 25% suggested we reduce the space given to personality profiles. Only 13% of respondents had attended an OSME meeting in the last three years, which is unsurprising as these have been restricted to London. Council is now actively seeking ways to organise events elsewhere and is grateful for offers of support that have been given. An impressive 77% have access to the internet and a further 4% plan to have access very soon, but despite this, only 44% have ever visited the society's website, and most of those were only occasional visits. Council is very aware that the website has not been updated much in the last few months, and is soon to tackle this, hopefully introducing new features.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate which countries in the OSME region they had visited for birding. The results are shown below. If you have not returned your questionnaire, there is still time—please post it to OSME, 8 Dukes Close, Folly Hill, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 0DR.

Keith Betton

Percentage of members who have birded in each country

Afghanistan	4	Iran	13	Lebanon	9	Tajikistan	5
Armenia	5	Iraq	1	Oman	18	Turkey	40
Azerbaijan	1	Israel	57	Palestine	17	Turkmenistan	6
Bahrain	10	Jordan	22	Qatar	3	UAE	22
Cyprus	41	Kazakhstan	17	Saudi Arabia	9		
Egypt	42	Kuwait	5	Socotra	4		
Georgia	5	Kyrgyzstan	10	Syria	11		

OSME COUNTRY CONTACTS

We are pleased to be able to present below the full list of OSME Country Contacts. These people have agreed to help OSME in various ways, mainly in providing a flow of information concerning bird sightings and conservation issues, liaising with visiting OSME members and helping to increase knowledge of OSME in their country. Further appointments are expected later this year.

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NEWS & INFORMATION

compiled by Derek Moore and Guy M. Kirwan

The aim of this section is to inform readers about events in the OSME region. It relies on members and others supplying relevant news and information. If you have anything concerning birds, conservation or development in the OSME area please send it to News and Information, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U. K.

This section is not intended as a definitive report or write-up of the projects concerned. Many of the projects are sponsored; such support is appreciated but is not generally given acknowledgement here.

GENERAL

BOC declares new open-door policy Founded in 1892, as an adjunct to the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU), the British Ornithologists' Club (BOC) has, since 1894, published the well-respected *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*. Possibly more type descriptions have been published in *Bull. BOC*, as it is better known, than in any other journal, and it continues to set a distinguished pace in the publication of new taxa descriptions and novel distributional information. A recent change in the Club's

rules means that full membership is available to all (formerly BOC was open only to BOU members, although it was possible to subscribe to the Bulletin at a higher institutional rate). As of 2001, full membership can be obtained for UK£18, with entitlements including the quarterly Bulletin. BOU members will continue to qualify for a discounted rate of UK£12. We, at OSME, welcome the change and encourage membership of BOC. A free sample copy of the Bulletin can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Michael Casement, at Dene Cottage, West Harting, Petersfield, Hants GU31 5PA, UK, or via e-mail: mbcasement@aol.com. Further details, including the contents of recent issues, can be viewed online at www.boc-online.org. (Source: British Ornithologists' Club press release, May 2001.)

ARMENIA

Ambitious wetland restoration project Lake Gilli is part protected by Lake Sevan National Park (declared in 1978), but most of the area's ornithological importance had already been lost due to a wetland drainage programme initiated almost 20 years previously. Now an Armenian partnership, assisted by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (U.K.), is seeking to restore a 600 ha wetland at the site, which will hopefully benefit species such as Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, all of which formerly bred. (Source: *BirdLife in Europe* 6 (2): 6.)

CYPRUS

Akrotiri threat Recent news bulletins on U.K. television drew attention to the proposed erection of an additional antenna mast (98 metres high and 196 metres wide) with a complex 'net curtain' strung between it and the existing antenna in the north-west part of Akrotiri Salt Lake. The reports showed local people demonstrating quite vehemently against these structures of great intrusion. The construction is within the Ministry of Defence Sovereign Base Area, which is entirely within U.K. jurisdiction. Local protests mainly concerned potential dangers to people, but there may be a significant impact on migrating and breeding birds using the area. Akrotiri Lake is well known as a major ornithological site, especially for its large numbers of wintering Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. Another important user

of the lake is Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*, of which a significant proportion (400–600 individuals in 1999–2001) of the western population rest there overnight in August/September. There is evidence from elsewhere that such structures can cause deaths among nocturnal migrants. The latest situation is that the Cyprus government has withdrawn its support for the British proposal presumably on human health grounds and a political row is brewing. (Source: David Whaley *in litt.* July 2001.)

New conservation initiative Bird-netting on Cyprus is now conducted on a commercial scale, with the consequent annual loss of millions of migrant birds there. It is a loss that cannot be condoned, but by refusing to visit the island birders will not significantly impact upon the Cyprus economy, as their contribution to this will scarcely be noticed within the context of the millions who visit each year simply to soak up the sun. More positive measures are required. One such is the Cyprus Ornithological Society (COS) (1957) Fund for Education, which was opened in 1999, with the aim of bringing the conservation message to the island's current generation of school children. A video entitled *The miracle of migration*, inspired by the Friends of the Earth Wildlife Campaign, has been produced by BirdLife International. The video is the property of the Cyprus Conservation Foundation (CCF), which is working, together with COS (1957), to distribute it to schools on the island. The video has both Greek and English language commentaries, but only describes the hazards faced by migrant birds from hunters using firearms. CCF is attempting to obtain video footage of lime sticking and netting, and to splice the extra content into the video with suitable additional dialogue. COS (1957) has volunteered both its help and funds for the reproduction. Let us hope that this, and any similar initiatives, will help prevent the current generation of Cyprus children from continuing practices, which no longer have any place in what is otherwise a modern society. (Source: Owen Roberts *in litt.* August 2001.)

GEORGIA

The Bird Conservation Union of Georgia was founded in 1997 and principally aims to further the conservation of Georgian birds and their habitats; bring to the attention of the public bird conservation issues; develop

ornithological research in Georgia; develop bird watching as a pastime in Georgia; bring professionals and amateurs to work cooperatively; and cooperate with international and national organisations. For further details contact: The Bird Conservation Union of Georgia, Institute of Zoology, Academy of Sciences of Georgia, Chavchavadze pr. 31, Tbilisi 380079, Georgia. E-mail bcugaa@hotmail.com. (Source: MEBirdNet July 2001.)

IRAQ

UNEP study sounds alarm concerning marshes Drawing on historical and fresh satellite imagery, a new UNEP study shows that the Mesopotamian marshlands of the Tigris–Euphrates delta—the largest wetland in the Middle East and one of the most outstanding freshwater ecosystems in the world—has almost vanished. Despite intermittent reports in past years warning against the imminent decline of the Mesopotamian marshlands, there has been little immediate action to avoid such a fate. Iraq's difficult situation in the past decade has limited access to and hindered monitoring of events in the marshlands. As a result, this major ecological disaster, broadly comparable in extent and rapidity to the drying of the Aral Sea and the deforestation of large tracts of Amazonia, has gone virtually unreported. The UNEP study graphically documents the stunning scale and speed at which the wetlands have disappeared, confirming the most pessimistic scenarios. It concludes that c. 90% of the marshlands had disappeared by May 2000, with devastating impacts on wildlife and unique human communities that have lived there for millennia. Comprising an integral part of the Tigris–Euphrates river system, the marshlands are located at the confluence of the two rivers in southern Iraq, and partially extend into Iran. The report shows that the desiccation of these vast wetland resources, originally covering 15,000–20,000 km², is attributable to two main causes: upstream dams and drainage schemes.

The Tigris and the Euphrates are among the most intensively dammed rivers in the world. In the past 40 years, the two rivers have been fragmented by the construction of more than 30 large dams, whose storage capacity is several times greater than the volume of both rivers. By turning off the tap, dams have

substantially reduced the water available for downstream ecosystems and eliminated the floodwaters that nourished the marshlands. The immediate cause of marshland dewatering, however, has been the massive drainage works implemented in southern Iraq in the early 1990s, following the second Gulf War. Although some of these engineering works were designed to deal with chronic salinisation in the inter-fluvial region, historically Mesopotamia's main environmental problem, they were expanded into a full-fledged scheme to drain the marshlands.

Recent satellite images provide firm evidence that the once extensive marshlands have dried-up and regressed into desert, with vast stretches covered by crusts of salt. Furthermore, satellite imagery shows only a limited area of the marshlands having been reclaimed for agricultural purposes. A small northern fringe of the Al-Hawizeh marsh, straddling the Iran–Iraq border (known as Hawr Al-Azim in Iran), is all that remains of the marshlands. Yet even this last vestige is rapidly dwindling as its water supply is impounded by new dams and diverted for irrigation purposes.

The collapse of Marsh Arab society, a distinct indigenous people that has inhabited the marshlands for millennia, confers a vivid human dimension to this environmental disaster. Around one-fifth of the estimated half-million Marsh Arabs are now living in refugee camps in Iran, while the rest are internally displaced within Iraq. A 5000 year-old culture is in serious jeopardy of reaching an abrupt end. The impact of marshland desiccation on its teeming wildlife has been equally devastating, with significant implications to global biodiversity from Siberia to southern Africa. A key site for migratory bird species, the marshlands' disappearance has placed an estimated 40 species of waterfowl at risk and caused serious reductions in their numbers. Mammals and fish that existed only in the marshlands are now considered extinct. Coastal fisheries in the northern Gulf, dependent on the marshlands for spawning grounds, have also experienced a sharp decline.

Despite this tragic human and environmental catastrophe, UNEP believes that there is hope. Bold measures need to be taken by the custodians of this natural treasure for the

conservation of the remaining Al-Hawizeh/Al-Azim marshes before it is too late. UNEP is also calling on Iraq and other riparian countries, and international donors to give the Mesopotamian marshlands a new lease on life by re-evaluating the role of water engineering works and modifying them where necessary, with a long-term view to reinstating managed flooding. Finally, UNEP is proposing an integrated river basin approach involving the three main riparian countries (Iraq, Syria and Turkey), as well as Iran for the Tigris tributaries) to manage decreasing water resources sustainably and reverse negative environmental trends in the region. To continue in present ways would spell the wholesale ecological demise of lower Mesopotamia, and ultimately undermine the foundation of life for future generations. UNEP therefore urges riparian countries to re-initiate dialogue and adopt an international agreement on sharing the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates for the benefit of people and nature, and to ensure an adequate water supply to the marshes. To help stimulate and better advise this process, UNEP in collaboration with regional organisations is carrying out a comprehensive scientific assessment of the Tigris-Euphrates basin, which should provide the scientific underpinning for the improved management of the twin rivers. (Source: <http://www.grid.unep.ch/activities/sustainable/tigris/marshlands/marshlands.pdf>.)

ISRAEL

Bulletin on Rare Birds in Israel The Israel Rarities & Distribution Committee (IRDC) met in May 2001 to revise the criteria for recording of rare birds. The committee attempted to redefine standards of record assessment in Israel and also discussed and evaluated several outstanding records. These records are listed in the first of the committee's bulletins, which is available on request from James Smith (Israel Rarities & Distribution Committee, c/o Kibbutz Lotan, D. N. Chevel Eilot, 88855 Israel. E-mail: jameslotan@yahoo.com). The committee has been transformed in recent months, with some additions to the membership. Currently serving members are: Barak Granit, Yoav Perlman, Hadoram Shirihai, Eyal Shochat, James P. Smith and Ido Tsurim. The IRDC remit is to improve the standard of rarity recording in Israel and to improve the acceptance/rejection process by meeting at least three times per year, and to publish their

findings on a regular basis. Each record is to be voted upon by at least five of the six members. In general, IRDC considers claims of those species recorded in Israel fewer than 25 times up until and included within *The birds of Israel* (Shirihai 1996). A species list is also available on request from James Smith. Reports can also be submitted via James and should ideally include the following: written documentation of date, location, observers, weather and optical aids used, full written documentation of the events surrounding the observation and the identification (complete with field notes), the inclusion of good-quality photographs, digital images or video images, and ringing data/ biometrics or sound recordings where appropriate, any supporting documentation from co-observers, and brief details of the observer's previous experience of the species. Given the number of extreme rarities recorded in Israel, including many significant reports new to either the Middle East or Western Palearctic (or both), the new structure is to be much welcomed. We urge observers visiting Israel to submit any relevant records to the committee. (Source: James P. Smith *in litt.* May 2001.)

PALESTINE

Palestinian Ornithology and Biodiversity Society This non-profit NGO was established in spring 2000 with the aim of studying and protecting biodiversity in Palestine, with special emphasis on ornithology. The society also aims to implement Palestinian national strategies for environmental protection, to raise local awareness of the importance of environmental preservation and protection of nature, and to provide expertise and consultation services to local, regional and international organisations in the field of ornithology. The organisation has developed a series of more specific objectives designed to further its overall goals. Full details concerning these can be obtained by e-mailing sija9@yahoo.com. (Source: Simon Awad *in litt.* 2001.)

TURKEY

The development of local birdwatching clubs is assisting Dođal Hayatı Koruma Derneđi (DHKD), the BirdLife country partner, develop a caretaker system for monitoring Important Bird Areas (IBAs). DHKD provides training in waterbird identification (most of Turkey's IBAs are wetlands), map reading, census methods and waterbird habitats. (Source: *BirdLife in Europe* 6 (2): 5.)

Tuz Gölü Basin declared an SPA In November 2000, the Turkish Ministry of Environment declared a new Special Protected Area, the Tuz Gölü Basin. This region, which covers 650,000 ha is easily the largest protected area in Turkey and comprises a range of open-country habitats, as well as five Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The boundaries of the SPA were designed in accordance with a Doğal Hayatı Koruma Derneği (DHKD) survey performed in spring/summer 1999. The area supports important populations of the following bird species: Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, Little Tetrao *tetrix* and Great Bustards *Otis tarda*, and Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*. (Source: *BirdLife in Europe* 6 (1): 5.)

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Khor Kalba is well known to those visiting the Middle East for its populations of White-collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris kalbaensis* and Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais (caligata) rama*. Both are locally endangered and the mangrove habitat highly threatened. It appears amazing that the site, which straddles the border with Oman, has received

no proper protection. White-collared Kingfisher is restricted, in Arabia, to this area and occasionally other smaller sites in Oman, and may number no more than 100 individuals. Sykes's Warbler is treated specifically by some authorities and nests in small numbers. Two species of marine turtle formerly bred at Khor Kalba and still occur. Reported threats to the site include indiscriminate shooting, dumping of rubbish and pollutants, removal of topsoil and intrusion by four-wheel-drive vehicles. Local fishermen appear to have no regard for the area, dragging their nets by using their vehicles. Oil tankers clean out their tanks offshore, leaving oil slicks of which just one, if swept inshore, could wipe out the unique wildlife of Khor Kalba. A report highlights these problems and reminds us that the site is important for many other species including herons and shorebirds, as well as arguably the largest concentration of Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii* in the region. It appears high time that the site was accorded proper protection. Ignoring the plight of this wonderful area will surely see the demise and local extinction of White-collared Kingfisher. (Source: David Camilleri *in litt.* to MEBirdNet, quoting from *Gulf News* <http://www.gulf-news.com/Articles/news.asp?ArticleID=17593>.)

REQUESTS for INFORMATION

Turkey Bird Report 1997–2001

Preparations are now being made for the compilation of the ninth Turkey Bird Report, which will cover the period 1997–2001. For the first time, it is envisaged that the report will be the production of a joint Anglo-Turkish team, namely Metehan Özen, Guy M. Kirwan, Bahtiyar Kurt and Rod Martins. Given the new structure, the editors aim to produce the report, which will be, as usual, published in *Sandgrouse*, much swifter than has been the norm, with publication hopefully in spring 2003. Many records have already been received by both OSME and DHKD, and there is no need for these to be sent again. However, we do urge any observers with unpublished records, or those

previously unsubmitted to either body to contact any member of the editorial team (preferably via turkishbirdreport@osme.org). You may also submit records via Turkey Bird Report, OSME, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL, UK. It would be helpful if observers were able to consult the most recent report, covering 1992–96 (*Sandgrouse* 22: 13–35), wherein details of those species for which records are particularly sought can be found. Trip reports are nonetheless welcome. Anyone requiring further details is welcome to contact the editors via the address above.

Tour guide for Turkey wanted

For approximately one year or a shorter period, a tour guide is required to escort visiting birdwatchers, in small groups of two to 14, based at hotels in west and east Turkey. Food and accommodation will be provided and a small remuneration to be negotiated. The position would be suitable for a student or retired hobby birder. For further information please send an e-mail to: turk@ornitours.com, or tel. 0049-7246-92092.

Migration at Chokpak, Kazakhstan

E. I. GAVRILOV AND A. E. GAVRILOV

The mighty Tien Shan (Celestial Mountains) in Central Asia form a huge physical barrier to birds migrating to and from the steppes, deserts, taiga and tundra of Kazakhstan, Russia and central Siberia. At their western end in south Kazakhstan there is a natural flyway through the mountains towards India, the Middle East and Africa. Chokpak Pass (42°31'N 70°38'E) is located within this flyway, between Djabaglytau in the Talasskyi Alatau range and Borolday, a spur of the Karatau ridge. Situated at 1200 metres, it acts as a funnel for birds moving south in the autumn but also attracts migrants in spring, being the first attractive landfall to the north of the mountains. Chokpak Ringing Station is ideally situated to witness the impressive migration of birds at one of the world's most spectacular bottlenecks. A total of 288 bird species, which breed in China, Mongolia, Siberia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, has occurred here on migration.

Kazakhstan is located in the centre of the Eurasian continent and stretches from the Caspian Sea in the west to Lake Alakol and the Chinese border in the east. It covers over 2.7 million km² and has a population of c. 16.5 million. Most land at Chokpak is ploughed for agriculture (wheat, potatoes, clover etc.). Forests, scrub and orchards border streams, fields, and a railway and highway crossing the pass. The land rises to the north, to Djabaglytau, with a maximum height of 2,700–2,900 metres; its lower part is covered by deciduous forest, while *Juniperus* grows at higher elevations. The foothills of Djabaglytau are part of the Aksu-Djabagly Natural Reserve, which merges into the Talassky Alatau range that rises to 4,100 metres.

SPRING MIGRATION

In late February–early March birds make greater use of the lower valleys of the western Tien Shan, as the tops are still snow covered, whereas in the steppe, desert and semi-desert to the north the snow melts early, and vegetation and insects quickly appear. Birds may bypass Chokpak, depending upon weather conditions and it is only those needing to fly east that regularly use the pass itself, some of them in large numbers. Weather conditions obviously affect this migration to a degree, bringing huge movements some days and few birds on others. The first large movements involve Calandra *Melanocorypha calandra* and Bimaculated Larks *M. bimaculata*, Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*, White *Motacilla alba* and Masked Wagtails *M. a. personata*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*, Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs, Brambling *F. montifringilla*, Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* and Pine Bunting *E. leucocephala*. Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* is also numerous, and the status of many other species is incompletely known, due to the relative lack of coverage in this period.

In April–May, when the ringing station is open, a broad range of species migrate through the pass. These include Rufous Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, Yellow *Motacilla flava*, Citrine *M. citreola* and Grey Wagtails *M. cinerea*, Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* and Ortolan *Emberiza hortulana*, Grey-necked *E. buchanani* and Red-headed Buntings *E. bruniceps*. Both Spanish *Passer hispaniolensis* and Indian Sparrows *P. domesticus indicus* (considered a separate species by



Plates 1–3. Views of Chokpak and the ringing station, Kazakhstan. (Mike Pearson)

Russian ornithologists) occur, the latter dominating passage on many days, with huge arrivals. Later migrants such as Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* pass in reasonable numbers too. Other interesting spring migrants have included Small Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Citrine Wagtail (of the subspecies *calcarata*), Golden Oriole (subspecies *kundoo*) and Pale Sand Martin *Riparia riparia diluta*. Snowfall is rare after late April, but on 2 May 1992 a snowfall of 5 cm covered the ground and daytime temperatures fell to -5°C. It was strange to see bright European Rollers *Coracias garrulus* in such wintry conditions!

Birds are trapped mainly using two very large stationary Heligoland-type traps, each 40 metres wide, 8–12 metres high and 60–70 metres long. Diurnal migrants fly into these traps when there is a head wind that also causes them to fly low above ground. Larger numbers are caught in easterly winds, and usually such winds characterise anticyclonic weather when skies are cloudy. In westerly winds with clouds and rain, there is little visible migration and few birds are caught, presumably because they make landfall further up the pass. Mist-nets are rarely used as the large traps provide sufficient numbers of birds to keep the processors busy. This was exemplified on 3 May 1977 when ten people ringed 14,470 birds in c. 14 hours; it was hard work without a break!

Since 1966, when the ringing station first opened, a total of 990,229 birds has been ringed in spring; numbers of each species trapped more than ten times in the last ten years are presented in Table 1. Species trapped fewer than ten times in this period include Hen *Circus cyaneus* and Pallid Harriers *C. macrourus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, Corncrake *Crex crex*, Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Striated Scops Owl *Otus brucei*,

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*, Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*, Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*, Isabelline Oenanthe *isabellina* and Pied Wheatears *O. pleschanka* and Mongolian Trumpeter *Bucanetes mongolicus* and Crimson-winged Finches *Rhodopechys sanguinea*. Some were trapped using mist-nets, e.g. Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* and Eversmann's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*, along with Savi's *Locustella luscinioides*, Paddyfield *Acrocephalus agricola*, Olivaceous *Hippolais pallida* and Orphean Warblers *Sylvia hortensis*. Interestingly, the first Upcher's Warbler at Chokpak, in May 2000, was trapped, using mist-nets, by a visiting group of birdwatchers headed by Mike Pearson, Andrew Lassey, Andrew Grieve (Flamborough Ornithological Group, UK) and Lars Svensson (Sweden), and demonstrates the potential for expanding the ringing programme using this catching technique.

Retraps have come from India (Spanish Sparrow), Kenya (Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, European Nightjar), South Africa (Barn Swallow), Kyrgyzstan (Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*, Barn Swallow, Pale Sand Martin, Spanish and Indian Sparrows) and Russia (Pale Sand Martin, Barn Swallow, Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava thumbergi*, Starling).

AUTUMN MIGRATION

Autumn migration commences in mid-July when the first waders appear and small flocks of Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* can be observed. At this time the station is closed. In August more species are present, particularly European Bee-eater and numbers increase progressively from mid-August when the traps are operated. Red-headed, Grey-necked and Ortolan Buntings migrate nocturnally and are rarely caught, but frequently recorded. Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Sparrowhawk *A. nisus* and Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

Table 1. Numbers of birds ringed at Chokpak in spring since 1991

Species	Scientific name	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	5	6	7	3	6	4	8	1	2	1	43
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	8	12	10	3	10	5	28	12	9	3	100
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	1		1	1	1	3	2	2		13
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	2	4	4		1	1	1	4	3	1	21
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	1	2	3		6	2	1	1	1	2	19
Eastern Stock Dove	<i>Columba eversmanni</i>	3						17		1		22
Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	31	19	82	1	42	5	9		3		192
Rufous Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	151	47	574	5	206	36	367	52	13	1	1452
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	2	1	3	4	5	1	3	2	3	2	26
European Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	1			3	6	5	2			1	18
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	2	1	1	3	7	1	2		15	5	37
European Nighthjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	1	2	17	47	512	9	37	26	13	15	679
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>	20	3	5	7	2	19	10	4	7	5	82
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	125	288	232	112	115	110	218	116	227	186	1729
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	49	6	54	16	53	37	41	59	15	25	355
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	4	2	2	1	4	3	3	4	5	2	30
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	346	366	821	190	166	425	313	370	134	20	3151
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1603	3831	2551	1515	841	2314	2790	2238	1995	1372	21050
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	9	34	20	9	7	12	9	12	10	1	123
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>		4	21	1	2	4		3	11	1	47
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	3	2	9	13	48	39	8	2	7	2	133
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	75	39	7	2	574	129	55	71	155	77	1184
Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>	1	2			57	8	8	9	7	2	94
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	4		3	1	13	13	1	8			43
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	20	1	18		8	43	11	38	15	6	160
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	4	1		1	1	1	1	5	4	1	19
Black-throated Thrush	<i>Turdus rufo-collis atrogularis</i>	1				1	1	20	1	1	1	25
Byth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	2	1		5	1	3	3		11	22	48
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	2	1		2	1	1	4		1	4	16
Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	8	13	13	3	11	21	1	10	11	4	95
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	3		3		6		8	5	1	1	27
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			3		11		10	10			24

Rook						5	3								1	3	1	1	14
Starling		5	1	3	3						5	7	3	7	3			3	50
Rose-coloured Starling		23	32	11	74	812	179	24	233	69	1	1458							1458
Common Mynah				8	5	28	15	24	27	14	9	130							130
House Sparrow				2	2	1					3	2						1	11
Indian Sparrow		4945	3025	5225	3034	7058	7620	4372	4922	1111	396	41,708							41,708
Spanish Sparrow		13,750	11,830	15,668	15,969	39,432	28,383	16,054	11,207	9632	4695	166,820							166,820
Tree Sparrow				4	2	11	6	3				26							26
Desert Finch		2			2	14	4	5	2	3		32							32
Common Rosefinch		5	2	130	7	32	55	7	107	4	2	351							351
Ortolan Bunting			1	2		3	35	1	3	1		47							47
Grey-necked Bunting		2	1			11	8					22							22
Red-headed Bunting		43	44	68	49	139	101	43	38	24	33	582							582
Corn Bunting		34	30	47	30	99	53	29	18	64	58	462							462
Other species		11	6	10	14	34	11	39	21	21	35	202							202
Annual totals		21,308	19,661	25,644	21,139	50,404	39,740	24,594	19,651	13,833	6,998	242,972							242,972

Table 2. Numbers of birds ringed at Chokpak in autumn since 1991.

Species	Scientific name	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	1	4	5	1		1	1	4	16	6	39
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>		1		2				6	7	3	19
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	19	8	38	8	39	33	5	140	22	27	339
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3	1	2	1		1	3	3		3	17
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	8	6	4	5	8	2	3			9	45
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	10	2	7	1	3	7	4	3	8	9	54
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	3	17	4	5	6	2	4	2	9	2	54
Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	3	1	1		3	1	1	1		1	12
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	134	140	167	124	204	166	97	220	133	258	1643
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	7	4	4	1	5	4	3	3	31	2	64
Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>	8	10	24	20	7	15	9	54	15	19	181
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	4	1	5	1	6	10	3	4	6	14	54

Steppe Eagle	1	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	1	3	14
Lesser Kestrel	6	14	31	52	29	23	12	13	15	46	241
Kestrel	10	17	44	30	27	32	20	12	20	35	247
Merlin	1	1	3		3	3	1	5	1	4	22
Hobby	21	15	45	13	19	32	11	27	21	31	235
Grey Partridge	2				4	5	11		1	3	26
Quail	2	3	14	13	5	11	2	1	1	24	76
Little Stint	1								15		16
Red-necked Phalarope						16					16
Rock Dove	1	3	6	1	19				1		31
Stock Dove	463	639	503	308	296	501	307	397	466	253	4133
Eastern Stock Dove	4	7	9	7	7	14	9	11	14	4	86
Woodpigeon	4	9	4	10	2	4	1	4	13	7	58
Turtle Dove	6	14	2	14		7		1	4	2	50
Rufous Turtle Dove	69	310	90	270	6	87	14	82	186	49	1163
Laughing Dove	1	1	1	1	3		1	1	4		12
Common Cuckoo	2	3	7	1	2	8	6	6	12	1	48
European Scops Owl	6	2	8	4	6	2	9	2	13	3	55
Long-eared Owl	40	10	17	15	13	28	5	2	3	31	164
Short-eared Owl	4	1		2	2	3				1	13
European Nightjar	21	10	78	28	9	19	3	22	20	15	225
Common Swift	5	62		6	1	221			12		307
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	11	3	6	3	5	19	18	2		15	82
European Bee-eater	397	129	491	413	264	719	909	630	930	285	5167
European Roller			4	1	1	3	4	1	4	3	21
Hoopoe	8	12	1	3	4	5	12	6	15	1	67
Calandra Lark					4					27	31
Bimaculated Lark	2			2	1			4	7	16	
Short-toed Lark	137	25	176	150	22	13	42	23	126	15	729
Skylark	1	4	16		434	1		2		802	1260
Sand Martin	712	600	949	1186	510	1689	1144	628	592	158	8168

Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	928	916	1083	509	1560	2583	2772	2214	928	1519	15012
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	40	35	31	8	6	15	24	13	17	8	197
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	26	29	118	62	4	12	22	59	13	11	356
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	1	6	11	12	7	7	1	5	14	6	70
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	36	146	129	48	48	68	28	27	66	159	755
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		1		13	1	1	3	2			21
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	150	59	99	5	177	77	37	58	57	180	899
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	476	577	1142	1909	146	1272	1082	1026	1335	166	9131
Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava leidegg</i>	1	7	3	96	3	48	188	35	65	4	450
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	130	25	31	12		2	5	2	1		208
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	2	12		1	2	2	1	5	1	6	32
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	26	70	118	29	27	83	4	15	27	132	531
Masked Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba personata</i>	18	5	8	11	2	13	1		3	15	76
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>		1	3	1	4	3		1	6		19
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	12	6	19	10	13	8	5	2	6	17	98
Eastern Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata maura</i>		5	5	7	2	5		1	2	3	30
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	4	9	24	2	6	1	1	1	5	2	55
Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	10	10	16	6	4	14	8	2	18	8	96
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	6	1	7		5			4	3	2	28
Black-throated Thrush	<i>Turdus rufo-collis atrogularis</i>	5	20	15	13	31	49	1	20	4	50	208
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	6	7	7	7	40	5	13	1	7	7	100
Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	2	3	2			3	2	1	2		15
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	12	18	40	15	140	14	14	3	13	55	324
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	10	104	12	12	28	7	5	2	7	1	188
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>		15	2	2	17	1				5	42
Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>		6	6	2	6			3	3	31	48
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	23	5	65	29	89	28	13	18	58	337	665
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	19	45	15	16	21	25	12		24	8	185
Turkestan Tit	<i>Parus bokharensis</i>	3	2	1	5	10	4	1		5	13	44
Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	2	28	9	12	9	25	38	15	39		177
Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides</i>		4	4	2	3		2	1		3	15

Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	7	8	25	39	12	6	15	17	21	13	163
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	778	747	857	124	1029	362	345	825	536	578	6181
Rock	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	4888	2082	4371	1453	6750	2113	2927	4961	2698	2352	33995
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone corone</i>	114	55	162	86	251	112	282	294	167	100	1623
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>	4	3	1	1	9	3	6	3	3	3	33
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	1129	1297	696	204	1036	404	73	534	232	604	6209
Rose-coloured Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	9	9	1	7	42	42	18	1	34	2	114
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	7	14	39	7	92	5	23	24	43	29	283
Indian Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus indicus</i>	183	116	12	12	79	43	2	39	1	24	499
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	33	127	34	69	394	51	152	928	172	224	2184
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	2	4	1	1	6	25	5	6	1	1	16
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	2367	1319	1449	733	4731	2321	912	2529	2257	2396	21014
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	79	272	547	442	1433	429	109	1526	782	722	6341
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	140	162	64	19	163	26	40	167	29	173	983
Grey-headed Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis (carduelis) caniceps</i>	19	2	3	3	15	15	15	6	3	26	89
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i> *			315	2	25	25	5	5	133	480	480
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	73	70	261	109	346	59	75	88	53	176	1310
Desert Finch	<i>Rhodopechys obsoleta</i>	2	4	3	1	8	3	1	1	2	5	30
Mongolian Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>	6		6		7	7			26	39	39
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	5	834	3	37	15	28	8	5	24	6	965
Pine Bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>	94	94	113	36	369	192	69	415	307	181	1870
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	30	18	44	19	145	12	19	81	84	24	476
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	2	1			7		7		1	2	13
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	49	239	65	72	12	26	44	24	132	16	679
Grey-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>	6	36	1		4	2	5	3	2	2	59
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>					7	3	5	5	3	2	20
Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>	1	531	1	6	3	5	3	3	7	3	559
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>					3	3	1	1	3		11
Other species		9	10	10	18	16	13	15	10	23	42	166
Annual totals		14,105	12,313	14,876	9042	21,323	14,379	11,527	18,342	13,086	12,786	141,779



Plate 4. Masked Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata*, Uzbekistan, May 1992. (Tim Loseby)



Plate 5. Eversmann's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*. (Tim Loseby)



Plate 6. Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*, Sichuan, China. (Ray Tipper)



Plate 7. Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*, Chokpak, Kazakhstan. (Mike Pearson)



Plate 8. Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*, Chokpak, Kazakhstan. (Mike Pearson)

appear in mid-August when the last Hobby *Falco subbuteo* broods are fledging, presenting an unavoidable hazard for ringed birds upon release! September is the main migration period for insectivores and early migrants such as Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, Lesser Kestrel, Common Swift *Apus apus*, European Nightjar, Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* and Spanish and Indian Sparrows; the latter again migrates through the area in very large numbers.

By late September snow can cover the high mountains and many warblers, thrushes and other species move through the lower zone and foothills of the western Tien Shan. A 'guiding' effect of the mountain ridges concentrates birds at Chokpak in huge numbers, and on some days more than 100,000 individuals may be recorded! Mist-nets are more effective than in spring, though their most effective position was only discovered in autumn 2000. As birds migrate southwest at this season they fly into the prevailing wind, which causes them to

move at low levels and fly into the traps. Days with clear skies and easterly winds generate low catching totals as birds migrate at higher altitudes.

October is the main passage period for Calandra and Bimaculated Larks, Masked and Grey Wagtails, Rock Sparrow, Siskin *Carduelis spinus* and Pine Bunting, and many are trapped. Late migrants such as Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* and Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* may also arrive.

Since 1966, 518,242 birds have been ringed in autumn and the results from the last ten years for those species ringed on more than ten occasions are presented in Table 2. Species trapped fewer than ten times include Greater Spotted *Aquila clanga* and Booted Eagles *Hieraetus pennatus*, Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*, Saker *Falco cherrug*, Corncrake, Stone Curlew, Eagle *Bubo bubo* and Striated Scops Owls, White-winged Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucopterus*, Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*, Red-backed *Lanius collurio*,



Plate 9. Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*, Chokpak, Kazakhstan. (Mike Pearson)

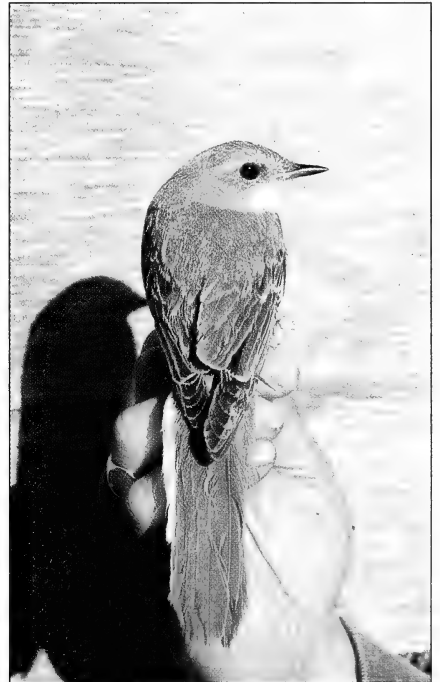


Plate 10. Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos hafizi*, Chokpak, Kazakhstan. (Mike Pearson)

Isabelline L. *isabellinus*, Red-tailed L. (*i. speculigerus*), Long-tailed and Lesser Grey Shrikes L. *minor*, and Azure Tit *Parus cyanus*. Among warblers, there have been fewer than ten each of Cetti's *Cettia cetti*, Booted *Hippolais caligata*, Olivaceous, Pallas's *Phylloscopus proregulus* and Dusky Warblers *P. fuscatus*. Add to these the occasional Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, Blue-capped *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus*, Black *P. ochruros* and Eversmann's Redstarts, and Rufous Bush Robin and the tremendous variety of migrants is complete.

On good days, 1000–2000 birds may be caught, with a maximum of 4707 on 12 September 1978. Ringing of large raptors (eagles, buzzards, harriers and kites) requires a minimum of two persons, and more could be caught given additional personnel.

One young female European Bee-eater ringed on 10 September 1993 at Chokpak was caught on 14 July 1994 in the Camargue (France), at a nesting colony (5246 km to west). Such long-distance latitudinal displacement is unusual and can perhaps be explained by pair formation in the species' winter quarters, or in the first stages of migration from Africa, where birds of different populations mix.

OTHER BIRDING SITES IN THE AREA

On 'quiet' days short trips to nearby areas can be made. In the Karatau Mountains, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, Lesser Kestrel, Saker, Eagle Owl, Bimaculated Lark, Rufous Bush Robin, Pied Wheatear, Upcher's Warbler, Asian Paradise Flycatcher and Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota* breed. Rose-coloured Starling is very common and forms large colonies. At nearby Ters-Astchibulak reservoir and Stone Lake large flocks of Demoiselle Crane

Anthropoides virgo may be observed. Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyæetus*, Small Skylark, various species of waders, gulls, terns, other waterfowl and reedbed passerines are present at suitable wetlands. Nearby forests are inhabited by European Scops Owl *Otus scops*, White-winged Woodpecker, Lesser Grey and Long-tailed Shrikes, and Turkestan Tit *Parus bokharensis*. Various warblers also breed including Greenish *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and Hume's Yellow-browed Warblers *P. humei*, and several races of Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* pose interesting identification challenges (*halimodendri* and *telengetica* etc.). Ménétries's *S. mystacea* and Orphean Warbler can also be found.

Special trips can be organised to Aksu-Dzabagly Natural Reserve where a range of *Juniperus* forest and high-montane species can be found including Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*, Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*, Black-throated and Altai Accentors *Prunella himalayana*, Blue-capped Redstart, Orphean Warbler, Rufous-naped *Parus rufonuchalis* and Yellow-breasted Tits *P. flavipectus*, Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*, Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*, White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes* and Crimson-winged Finch.

Chokpak Ringing Station requires further assistance and foreign ornithologists are very welcome to stay, or visit to help catch, measure, weigh, ring and photograph birds. More detailed information can be sought via e-mail at the address below.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to Andrew Grieve and Jenny Butterworth for helping with the English text.

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PHOTO spot

Armash Fishponds

Armash is the largest and ornithologically most important wetland in the Araks Valley in Armenia. Adjacent to the Turkish border, in the shadow of Mount Ararat, the fishponds are scenically spectacular and offer superb birdwatching. Created at the end of the 1960s, the wetland covers c. 1700 ha, comprising 25 large fishponds of 30–100 ha, plus smaller ponds and channels, and is surrounded by desert, semi-desert and saline areas covering 2000 ha. Scrub and reeds fringe the ponds, including *Alhagi pseudalhagi*, *Atraphaxis spinosa*, Tamarisk and *Artemisia* spp. Water levels are maintained by artesian springs.

The ponds are the only breeding site in Armenia for Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*, and support the bulk of the country's White-headed *Oxyura leucocephala* and Ferruginous Ducks *Aythya nyroca*. Two new breeding species to Armenia have colonised in recent years: White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura* has joined Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* nesting on the muddy shores of shallow pools, with Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* augmenting populations of Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* and

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus* in the reeds. Other significant breeding species include large numbers of Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* and the localised Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*.

With the other two former fish farms in the Araks Valley abandoned due to the country's dire economic situation, Armash has become increasingly important to passage migrants. These include Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*, Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, Red-footed Falcon *F. vespertinus*, Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* and occasionally Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*. Wintering species include Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Smew *Mergus albellus*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* and Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*.

There is a near-complete lack of bird protection in Armenia, even of Red Data species, and fish-eating birds, especially Pygmy Cormorant, are hunted on a large scale, while others (e.g. Greylag Goose *Anser anser*) are taken for food as eggs or adults. In the breeding season, nesting birds are also threatened by the burning of large areas of reed, and filling and emptying of ponds. The site as a whole is threatened by abandonment and consequent drying-out of ponds, and the probability that scrub and semi-desert areas may be converted for agriculture. Immediately adjacent is a large gold-processing site where toxic wastewater is stored. The possibility of a large-scale ecological disaster was demonstrated by an incident in July 2001, which resulted in the poisoning and subsequent destruction of local livestock. The preservation of Armash would be a major step in the conservation of this small country's rich birdlife, but depends on a commitment to protect part of the area for birds, and development of a management plan to achieve this.

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Plates 1–3. Views of Armash Fishponds, Armenia. (Steve Young). **Plate 4.** White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura*, Armash Fishponds, Armenia. (Steve Young)



Plate 5. White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Armash Fishponds, Armenia. (Steve Young). **Plate 6.** Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*, Armash Fishponds, Armenia. (Steve Young). **Plate 7.** Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*, Armash Fishponds, Armenia. (Steve Young)

PROFILE



Richard Porter

Richard Porter is known as a raptor enthusiast and tireless campaigner for bird conservation. In co-authoring *Flight identification of European raptors*, following many years of looking skyward at the Bosphorus, and the more recent, and sorely needed, *Field guide to the birds of the Middle East*, he has become something of a household name, and one, moreover, synonymous with Middle Eastern ornithology. One wonders whether a defining moment was in 1961 when a vagrant White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* caught a fish in front of him, and him alone, at Selsey Bill in his native Sussex. Richard himself relates how, in 1966, after an autumn spent watching migrating raptors in Turkey, his mind was firmly made up as to where his own future lay. Even so, his career could easily have followed a very different path.

Fate played a hand as, after failing an interview to become a dustman, he decided to become a commodity-broker and for two years commuted daily from Sutton to the City, be-suited, clutching brolly and the *FT*, bowler-hatted too, of course. There was quite naturally a hidden agenda—simply to raise sufficient money to go on a birding walkabout. It was during a lengthy sojourn in Turkey that he attended, of his own volition, a conference in Ankara to present a paper on his recent survey work on breeding waterfowl of the Anatolian lakes. This was pioneering ornithological work back in 1966, forming as it did a baseline for sites from which hitherto there had been no information. The powers that were in the Turkish government's national parks authority were suitably impressed and Richard was offered a contract. He accepted on condition that he might first return to Britain to learn more about conservation, and was very soon afterwards ensconced at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

After a lengthy wait his promised job in Turkey failed to materialise, but the RSPB had decided he'd make a useful contribution to the ever-expanding organisation. In the mail, quite literally within days, his Turkish job description arrived. Back to the far-sighted director, Peter Conder, he went, and, predictably, artfully negotiated himself six months a year at The Lodge and six in the sun. This mutually beneficial arrangement continued for five years before he joined the RSPB full time. He soon became a Regional Officer, during which time he also successfully completed a degree course in Ecology and Animal Behaviour. Six years on he returned to The Lodge to head-up the Species Protection Department. (This at a time when egg-collecting was still very popular, when supplies of poison were still to be used and when attitudes went against birds of prey in particular.)

Richard was a driving force behind the founding of the Ornithological Society of Turkey (and the Turkey Bird Report), which eventually spawned OSME, of which he is now a Vice-President. His field skills and overseas experience led him to serve the British Birds Rarities Committee, and he was the inevitable choice to fill, in 1995, the role of the first BirdLife International coordinator for the Middle East. Tanned and weather-beaten, Richard even looks the part, so much so that at an early BTO lecture on his recent travels in Turkey, one lady in the audience turned to James Ferguson-Lees who was seated next to her and remarked "Doesn't he speak good English for a Turk".

Charismatic and witty, Richard possesses charm and contagious enthusiasm, both of which he has used to good effect. His *modus operandi* has been cannily perfected, sometimes coupled with animated shouting when things need more forceful delivery

(strangely rather effective in the Middle East).

Now semi-retired, he indulges himself by travelling a great deal, very often to the Middle East, a region which still holds special fascination for him, with Socotra attracting much of his professional attention in recent years. As was always his plan, he has handed the reins to nationals, including Adnan Budieri, his immediate successor at BirdLife. Nonetheless, he remains very actively involved, and as avid as ever, especially in anticipation of a large fall on the north Norfolk coast where he now lives.

A raconteur always good for a tale at someone else's expense (generally one of his many friends), he also regularly pokes fun at himself. His tongue-in-cheek entry in the first *Who's who in ornithology* brought him trouble for being too facetious. He maintains he's not "A big I am", and, without false modesty, publicly proclaims that it is he who actually owes a debt to conservation rather than vice versa. His contribution to ornithology, that of the Middle East in particular, is too great to précis here, but it is abundantly clear that the City's loss, not to mention that of a certain town council's refuse collection service, has certainly been (and continues to be) to conservation's massive gain.

Simon Aspinall

Distribution and current status of Great Bustard *Otis tarda* in the Konya Basin, central Turkey

CAMIEL HEUNKS, ECKHART HEUNKS, GÜVEN EKEN AND BAHTIYAR KURT



A Great Bustard *Otis tarda* survey in Turkey during April 2000 located 83 birds in four different areas within the Konya Basin. Birds were found on three different display grounds. Habitat descriptions of display grounds do not suggest any exclusive relationship between Great Bustard distribution and habitat, but human activity is substantial in all areas and there are strong indications that the suitability of display grounds is dependent on the relative intensity of human activity. Numbers may still be significant in this region, but the species is subject to heavy disturbance and the status of these populations is far from secure. Extrapolation of basin-wide numbers is difficult given current data. Additional surveys are recommended to discover new display grounds and to gain an insight into seasonal movements by Great Bustard. Conservation action is recommended to safeguard the Turkish Great Bustard population in the near future.

INTRODUCTION

GREATER BUSTARD *Otis tarda* is globally threatened and has considerably declined in numbers during the 20th century. The European population estimate is 24,945–29,983 individuals (Heredia *et al.* 1995), of which Iberia, where populations have remained largely stable since gaining legal protection in 1980, holds most (c. 50% of the world total). Turkish populations are also apparently large (3000–4000, Goriup & Parr 1985, 800–3000 birds, Heredia *et al.* 1995), but remain very poorly known, their conservation status being much less secure than that of the Spanish population.

Given the dramatic alteration rate of natural rangeland in Turkey, conservation is urgently required to avoid fragmentation of viable populations and secure meta-populations from extinction. The Great Bustard can be used as a flagship species to increase public awareness of the international importance of steppes and dry grasslands in Turkey. One of the priorities of the species' Action Plan was to survey and identify key areas for Great Bustard in Turkey (Heredia *et al.* 1995). Therefore, we aimed to determine the size and distribution of its population in the Konya Basin.

The species is widespread in the Palearctic between 35°N and 55°N (Cramp & Simmons 1980). It has adapted from its original steppe habitat to pseudo-steppes with low-intensity farming and a mosaic of pastures. In contrast to west and most central European populations, some central and eastern European populations are migratory to a variable degree, wintering perhaps several hundred kilometres from their breeding areas.

Great Bustard is highly sexually dimorphic, with adult males weighing 10–15 kg, but females only 4–5 kg. They generally occur in separate flocks. Between late winter and early spring males concentrate at traditional arenas, where they compete to retain or gain the highest possible hierarchical status within the flock, before dispersing over a wider area (an exploded or dispersed lek) to display individually and attract females.

STUDY AREA

The richest and most important area of rangeland and natural grassland extant in Turkey is on the Central Anatolian plateau, associated with the closed basins of Tuz

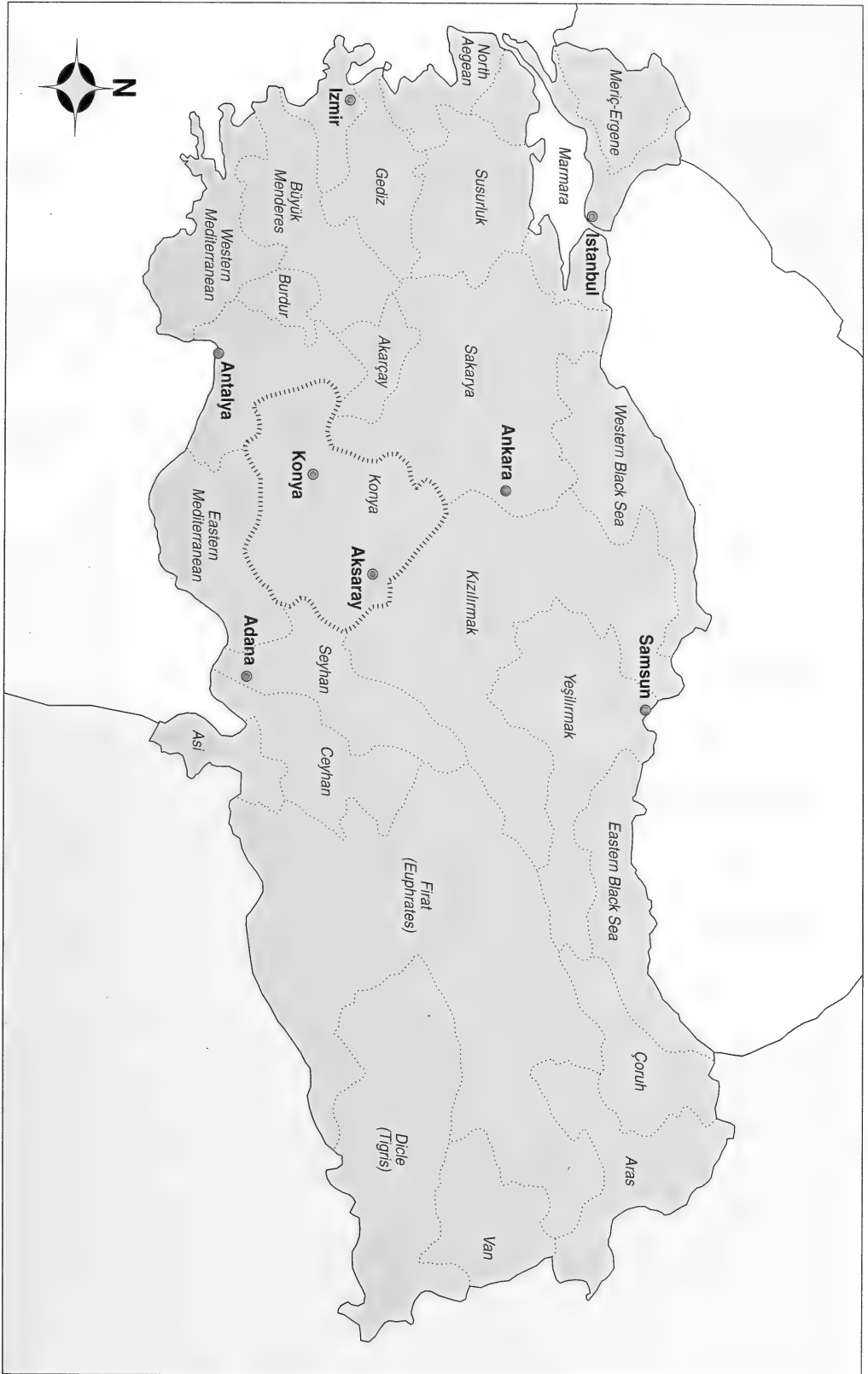


Figure 1. Map of Turkish catchment areas. The study area (the Konya catchment) is highlighted.

Gölu and Konya. This area—termed the Konya Basin—has been identified as requiring urgent conservation action, and identified as a priority by the Society for the Protection of Nature–Turkey (DHKD) during research in 1998–2001. DHKD is seeking to promote basin-wide management within the region, which covers an area slightly larger than the Netherlands. In addition to its extensive rangelands, the Konya Basin also has a number of very important wetlands for birds. Fourteen of the country's 97 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are here (Magnin & Yazar 1997). The basin is outstandingly rich in globally threatened and near-threatened birds.

Main threats to wildlife in the Konya Basin are: conversion of grasslands and steppe to arable cultivation; overgrazing of grasslands; irrigation of agricultural lands; drainage of, and diversion of water from wetlands; artificial water-level increases in certain lakes; and pollution of water courses and lakes. To ensure focused conservation planning in the future, DHKD executed a biodiversity survey in the Konya Basin in 1998. The principal output of this survey will be a Biodiversity Hotspot Atlas (Eken & Magnin in press). Faunal surveys have been undertaken in the basin to identify internationally important hotspots, principally using selected rangeland/wetland birds as indicator species.

METHODOLOGY

Within the Konya Basin, four study areas were selected for detailed surveys. Each area included at least one known site for Great Bustard, as well as unsurveyed, potential areas. Great Bustard observations were extracted from the Konya Basin database (basin-wide survey, April–July 1998). Study areas are plotted in Fig. 2. The areas ranged from c. 225 km² to 898 km² (Table 1), but all were surveyed with equal intensity. For standardisation purposes it was decided to use census methodology identical to that employed during inventories of the Spanish Great Bustard population (Alonso & Alonso 1992, 1996, Alonso *et al.* 1995, 1997). Thus, plots were surveyed from a car, driven at low speed and stopping frequently at points with a panoramic overview to search for birds. Areas were subdivided into different units based on accessibility. All driveable paths were used to ensure maximum coverage; these access routes were identified from detailed maps (1:100,000). Ratio of area surveyed (in km²) to length of itinerary (in km) varied from 2.65 to 3.74 (Table 1). Field work was undertaken on 8–29 April 2000. Censuses were undertaken between dawn and dusk with a midday interruption at 13.00–15.00. Each study area was subject to a 3–6 day continuous survey. Where possible roads between study areas were used as transects, being driven slowly to search for Great Bustards.

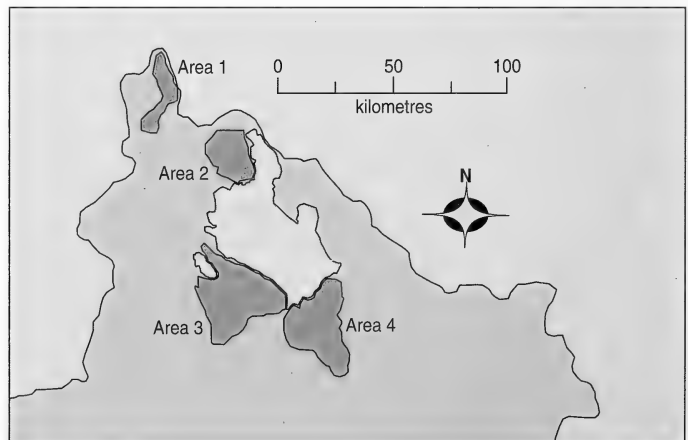


Figure 2. Map of the northern part of the Konya Basin with the study areas highlighted. Areas 2–4 are situated at the border of Tuz Gölu.

Table 1. Great Bustard *Otis tarda* survey intensity in different study areas. The itinerary (in km) is the total distance driven in each area (which are plotted in Fig. 2)

Area	Surface (km ²)	Itinerary (km)	Surface/itinerary
1	225	85	2.65
2	383	160	2.39
3	898	240	3.74
4	754	215	3.51
Total	2260	700	3.23

Birds were observed with telescopes. All observations were immediately mapped using a Global Positioning System (GPS) and the total number of birds, sex ratio, behaviour (resting, feeding and interacting) and habitat type were also recorded. Additionally all noticeable forms of disturbance (hunting, presence of domestic livestock and intense drainage or tilling of land) were recorded. Display grounds were subsequently revisited to provide additional counts and further observations. Interviews with local people were used to derive information on current and former Great Bustard numbers, distribution and status.

RESULTS

Numbers and distribution

Great Bustard was found in all study areas (Table 2), with a total of 83 birds, 34 males and 49 females. The latter were more numerous in all areas, with male/female ratios ranging from 0.0 to 0.74. Age of individual birds could not be positively recorded. Birds were very shy and easily disturbed. Except disturbed individuals, all birds were almost sedentary during the day. Great Bustards were not recorded outside the study areas along transects or elsewhere.

Table 2. Great Bustard *Otis tarda* records in the study areas (plotted on Map 2).

Area	Male	Female	Male/Female	Total
1	7	11	0.64	18
2	13	18	0.72	31
3	0	1	0.00	1
4	14	19	0.74	33
Total	34	49	0.69	83

The majority (95%) were recorded on display grounds. In each area, except 3, we found a single display ground. Several attempts were made to determine the exact layout of each display and the total number of birds using them. Generally, birds were active at display grounds throughout the day. However, the maximum counts were obtained early in the morning (areas 1–2) and just before sunset (area 4). Though displays were counted more than once, Table 3 shows only maximum numbers.

Table 3. Great Bustard *Otis tarda* records on display grounds (maximum numbers).

Area	Display ground(s)	Male	Female	Male/Female	Total
1	1	7	10	0.70	17
2	1	11	18	0.61	29
3	0				
4	1	14	19	0.74	33
Total	3	32	47	0.68	79

Habitat preferences

As most observations concern birds on display grounds, characteristics of these areas offer the best insight into habitat preferences of Great Bustard at this season. However, habitat descriptions of display grounds do not suggest any exclusive relationship between Great Bustard distribution and habitat (Table 4). Neither vegetation, nor geomorphology or dominant land use distinguishes display grounds from other areas. Birds occur in agricultural areas with slight relief, as well as on level areas with semi-natural vegetation.

Table 4. Characteristics of display grounds in study areas 1, 2 and 4.

Display	Description
Area 1	Hilly, treeless area completely covered by large monotonous cropfields and surrounded by montane cultivated area. Extensive agriculture. During winter and spring inaccessible due to muddy roads.
Area 2	Flat depression with large cropfields and bare ground (old cropfields) surrounded (at distance of >1000 metres) by treeless rangelands with semi-sedentary domestic sheep on higher slopes.
Area 4	Flat area with small dunes and natural, herbaceous vegetation (primary steppe) dominated by salt-resistant species (<i>Artemisia</i> sp.). The area is immediately south-east of Tuz Gölü and surrounded by extensive rangelands. During winter and spring inaccessible due to muddy roads.

Though difficult to quantify, there is strong evidence that the suitability of display grounds is dependent on the intensity of human activity: all were situated relatively far from settlements, intensively used cropfields or rangelands. Moreover, the accessibility of display grounds is limited by terrain (muddy roads) and lack of infrastructure.

Disturbance

Disturbance of Great Bustards by human activity is substantial in all areas. Though again difficult to quantify, there is evidence that birds are heavily disturbed by all kinds of human presence. Like most areas of Turkey (which has approximately four million hunters), hunting is very popular in this region. Tracks of hunters were found everywhere and, according to our interviews, Great Bustards were hunted throughout. Additionally domestic livestock (mostly sheep) disturbed birds. Herds of sheep use rangelands under a semi-nomadic regime. Rangelands generally occur close to villages (< 3000 metres), at lakeshores, and on slopes and hills. Natural vegetation in these areas is heavily overgrazed. Finally birds are significantly disturbed by agricultural activities, especially intensive cropping, which accounts for most labour, water and pesticides that threaten birds. Currently huge areas are being irrigated and cultivated with intensive crops. Drainage canals are under construction throughout.

Discussion and conclusions

Our survey discovered much valuable information concerning the central Turkish Great Bustard population. Though limited by time, we were able to define numbers, distribution and disturbance within a large area. The species' population in this area may still be significant, but is heavily disturbed and its status is far from secure.

We believe that the possibility of double counts can be eliminated and that at least 90% of all Great Bustards present in the study areas were located. Nevertheless, extrapolation of numbers in the study areas to achieve a basin-wide population estimate is very difficult based on current data. The study areas we investigated were

not chosen randomly, but based on records from earlier surveys. Therefore, numbers in these areas are likely to be well above average and extrapolation would be inappropriate. Habitat data for the entire basin are unavailable, making it impossible to arrive at a total Great Bustard population for the basin by such means. Moreover, we are unable to prove a direct relationship between habitat and Great Bustard distribution, which is obviously driven by the intensity of human disturbance, but is difficult to quantify. Finally, our distributional data are based on that for displaying birds, which may be difficult to correlate with habitat.

The period chosen for field work was ideal to collect reliable population data. Firstly, birds were relatively easy to detect because of their behaviour. The clumped distribution and the birds relatively immobile behaviour enabled us to double check our counts, but avoid duplication. Finally, observation conditions were very good due to the short vegetation and good weather.

Recommendations

Further surveys in early spring are needed to monitor these display grounds and discover new such areas. Additionally, surveys during the breeding season and winter are recommended to discover if these birds perform any seasonal movements. Finally, conservation work is a priority to safeguard Turkish Great Bustard populations in the near future. Display grounds and adjacent land require extra protection, at least in spring and during the breeding season.

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The occurrence of Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* in Cyprus

ROBERT FROST AND PETER FLINT



The Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* is a scarce but increasingly frequent visitor to Cyprus. We discuss the change in status of the species, through re-examination of all records from the island and evaluation of their pattern, in particular, their distribution within Cyprus and how this relates to wind direction. The increase in records appears to be associated with larger numbers wintering in Israel. The majority of observations have come from the east coast of the island, especially during or after strong easterly to north-easterly winds.

DISTRIBUTION AND MOVEMENTS

GREAT BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ichthyaetus* breeds patchily from the southern Ukraine east across Central Asia to c. 110°E, and winters in Israel, the Nile Delta, the Red Sea and East Africa, east along the south coast of Arabia, the Arabian Gulf and Asia to c. 100°E, with some also in the Sea of Azov, the Caspian Sea and interior Asia (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Snow & Perrins 1998). The eastern Mediterranean is at the extreme western edge of its wintering range, with Cyprus lying just outside this (Map 1).

Little is known of the species' migration routes (Snow & Perrins 1998). In Israel, spring migrants (mainly departing winter visitors) pass north along the Mediterranean coast, singly or in groups of up to approximately ten. Some also migrate via inland valleys. The numerous wintering individuals depart chiefly in late February and the first half of March, but others remain until May. At Eilat, small numbers of passage migrants from further south occur in March–May, with adults preceding immatures (Shirihai 1996). In Egypt, distinct influxes occur in mid-February to March in the Gulfs of Aqaba and Suez, which are also probably passage migrants from further south (Goodman & Meininger 1989).

CYPRUS RECORDS (SEE TABLE 1)

Prior to 1992 there had been only four records in Cyprus and the species was regarded as an accidental, though apparently becoming more frequent (Flint & Stewart 1992). Since then there has been a considerable increase in records (Fig. 1) and it now appears to occur regularly in small numbers, both as a passage migrant in spring and as a winter visitor (Fig. 2). However, observer coverage, while increasing, remains low and infrequent on the east coast in spring (where most probably occur), and it appears certain that some (perhaps many) individuals have been, and continue to be, overlooked there.

The increase in Cyprus is probably related to its changed status in Israel (see below), and to a westward expansion and increase in the breeding population to the north, e.g. in the Ukraine, where numbers of pairs increased from 150 to 180 in 1985, to 1500 in 1993 (Snow & Perrins 1998). In addition to Cyprus, increases in wintering/migrant birds have been noted in Turkey, principally in the Black Sea Coastlands and Southern Coastlands (Kirwan & Martins 2000), and in Israel, where its status has changed from occasional visitor, in 1967, to a currently quite common winter visitor

Table 1. Records of Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaeus* in Cyprus.

Year	Date	Site	Number and age	Heading	Weather (where known) and comments	Reference
1958	23 Jan	Paralimni Lake	adult winter			COS Bull. 6
1984	12-23 Apr	Episkopi/Akrotiri	two immatures			COS Report 31
1987	13-14 Mar	Akrotiri Salt Lake	second-winter		13-14th WNW fresh/strong *	COS Report 34
	16-17 Mar	Phasouri/Akrotiri	adult summer		17th W fresh/strong *	COS Report 34
1991	22 Feb	Cape Greco	two adult summer	flying N	very strong E perhaps F7/8	COS Report 38
1992	3 Apr	Kiti Beach	two adults			COS Report 39
1993	8 Apr	Paphos Lighthouse	second-summer	flying N		COS Report 40
	17 Nov	Akhna Dam	one adult, one juvenile			COS Report 40
	22 Dec	Akhna Dam	two adults		probably same as seen on 27 Dec	D. Whaley pers. comm.
	24 Dec	Akhna Dam	immature		possibly same as seen 24 Dec	COS Report 40
1994	17 Jan	Akhna Dam	immature		calm, extensive atmospheric dust	COS Report 41
	6 Apr	Dhekelia/Larnaca	adult summer	flying W	14th Larnaca NW to NE light/moderate *	COS Report 41
1995	14 Jan	Larnaca Salt Lake	one, unaged		fresh/strong ENE	Flint (1997)
	4 Mar	Zeytin Burnu	two adult summer	flying NE	fresh/strong ENE	Flint (1997)
	5 Mar	Zeytin Burnu	five adult summer, one first-winter	flying NE	light S, then strong SW	Flint (1997)
	8 Mar	Zeytin Burnu	adult summer	flying NE	fresh/strong ENE (at Zeytin Burnu)	O. J. Meirne pers. comm.
	5 Mar	Larnaca bypass	adult summer	inland	SW fresh/strong *	COS Report 43
1996	10 Mar	Larnaca Salt Lake	adult summer			COS Report 43
	18 Apr	Akhna Dam	first-winter	flying N		COS Report 43
1997	16 Apr	Salamis	sub-adult	flying S	NE light/moderate.	Stefan Lunck pers. comm.
1998	28 Feb	Protaros	four adult summer	flying N	NE light/moderate.	R. Frost
	8 Mar	Protaros	two adult summer	flying N	NE light/moderate.	R. Frost
	10 Jan	Girne	adult winter	flying W	W F3	North Cyprus Bird Report 1999
	20 Feb	Larnaca Salt Lake	second-winter			COS Report 46
	24-25 Feb	Larnaca Salt Lake	first-winter			COS Report 46
	3 Mar	Larnaca Salt Lake	adult summer			COS Report 46
	19 Mar	Zeytin Burnu	two adult summer			COS Report 46
	2 Dec	Larnaca Salt Lake	adult winter	flying NE	18th E strong, 19th E F5 very hazy	Flint (2000)
2000	12 Apr	Zafer Burnu	adult summer	flying NE	NE or E light	COS Report 46
	12-30 Dec	Larnaca Sewage Works and Airport Pools South	up to six different individuals (four adult, two first-winter)		First individuals arrived after several days of strong E winds.	T. Parmenter pers. comm. J. Sanders pers. comm.

In addition to the references cited, original field notes have been used to check and correct details of records, and to add additional details relating to age and weather.

* = Met. Office data, otherwise weather data is observers'.

with many hundreds recorded annually. This increase is presumably related to the parallel increase in the numbers of large open fishponds (Shirihai 1996). In Egypt, Goodman & Meininger (1989) considered it a rare passage migrant and winter visitor, mainly along the Red Sea coast where it occurs with some regularity. The low ornithological coverage in Egypt makes it difficult to evaluate the species' current status, but it is possibly increasing in numbers (Mindy Baha el Din pers. comm.). An exceptional report of 75 between Hurghada and Suez, on 12 January 2000 (Sami Tuomela pers. comm.), may be indicative of this.

The geographical distribution of records (Map 2) shows a concentration in east Cyprus, with few in the west. The real distribution is almost certainly far more concentrated in the east: locations in the south and west, e.g. Akrotiri and Paphos, receive daily coverage in spring from many visiting and resident birdwatchers, whereas those on the east coast, e.g. Protaros and Zeytin Burnu, receive almost none. Coastal observations of spring migration at the two latter locations have been largely limited to the few mentioned below.

The species generally occurs singly or in twos, the only record of larger numbers being of five at Larnaca in December 2000 (John Sanders pers. comm.). Almost all records of spring migrants are within the range of departure/passage dates from Israel and Egypt. Most have been adults and, while the number of records of immatures is too low to reveal a clear pattern, the two latest spring observations were immatures, suggesting that (as at Eilat) adults may precede immatures.

Figure 1. Annual numbers of Great Black-headed Gulls *Larus ichthyaetus* in Cyprus during 1958 to 2000.

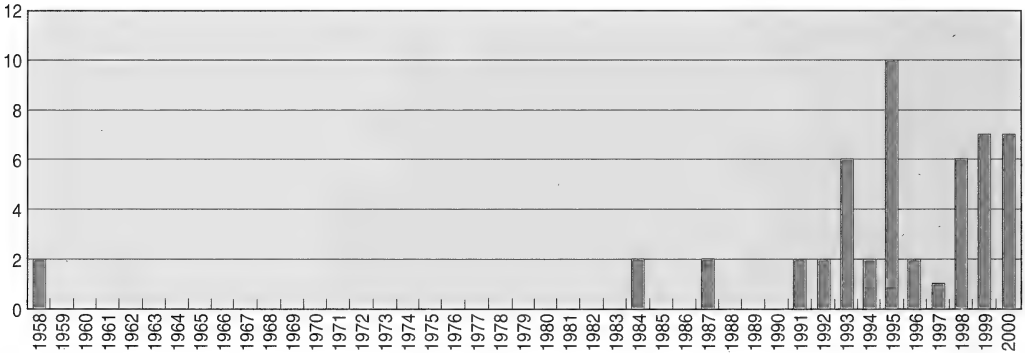
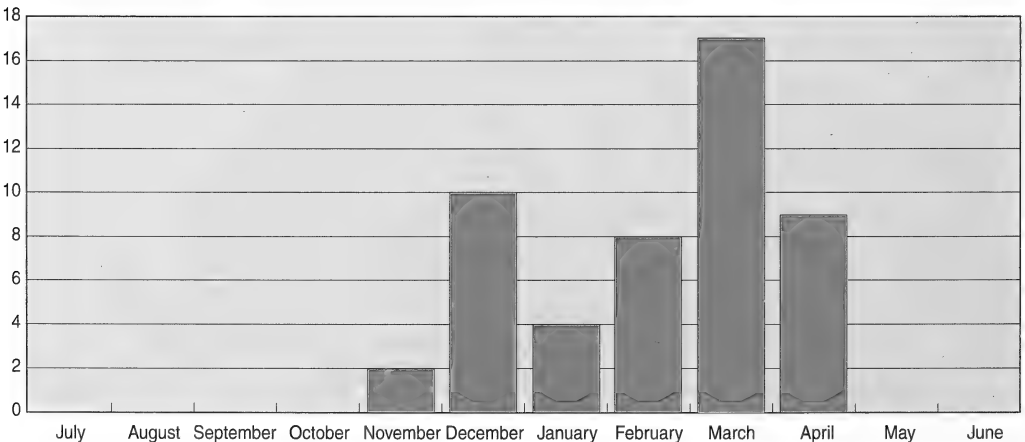
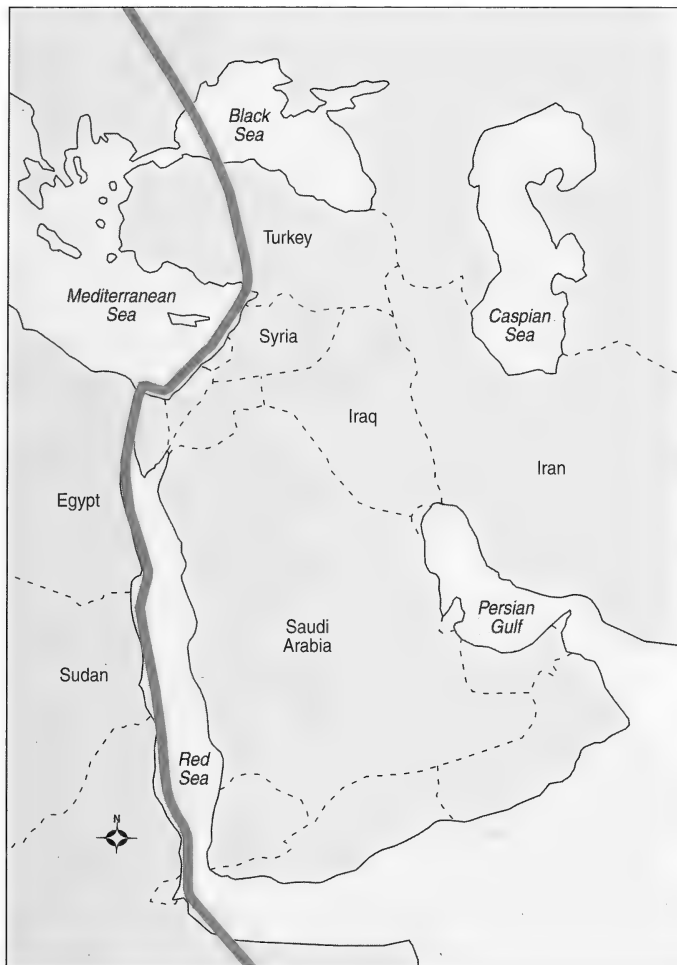


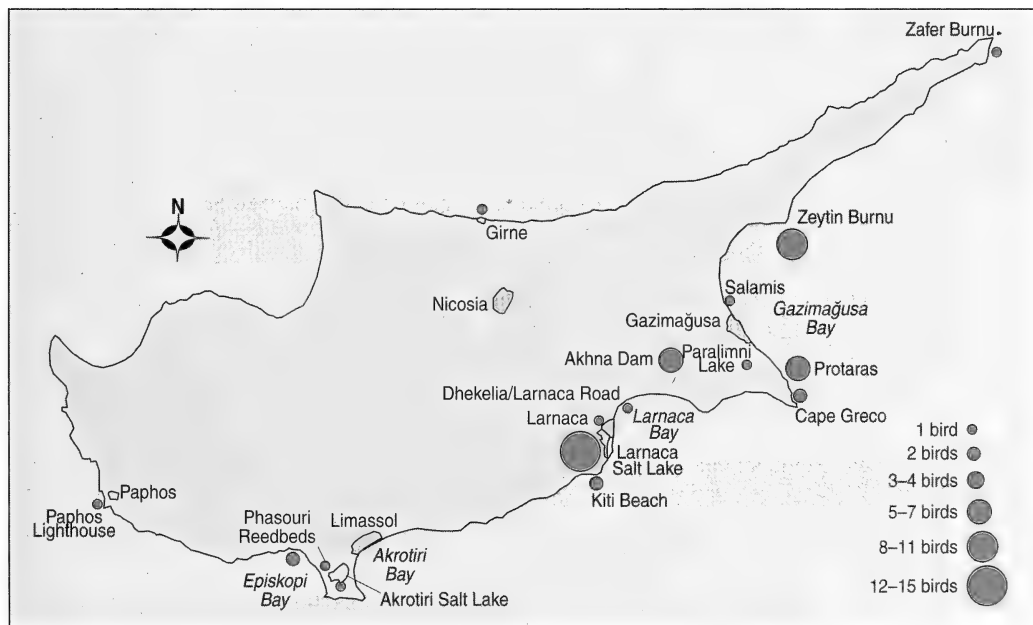
Figure 2. Monthly numbers of Great Black-headed Gulls *Larus ichthyaetus* in Cyprus.





Map 1. Western limit of Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaeus* wintering range in the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea (based on Grant 1986 and Goodman & Meininger 1989).

Map 2. Locations and numbers of Great Black-headed Gulls *Larus ichthyaeus* recorded in Cyprus.



WEATHER INFLUENCE ON SIGHTINGS

Of particular interest are the records described below which demonstrate how the species' occurrence in spring is related to wind direction. In spring 1991 RF speculatively searched for the species in south-east Cyprus (due to the area's proximity to the Israeli coast, where the species is quite common in winter, he considered that it might occur in Cyprus more frequently than records suggested). On 22 February, at Cape Greco, following a thunderstorm and during strong easterly winds, he observed two breeding-plumaged adults flying north along the shoreline, apparently migrating (Flint & Stewart 1992).

On 3–18 March 1995 at Zeytin Burnu (Cape Elea), PF made regular observations of migrating waterbirds, principally ducks *Anas* spp. and gulls *Larus* spp. (Flint 1997). He recorded nine Great Black-headed Gull (eight breeding-plumaged adults and one first-winter), all moving north-east along the shoreline. Eight passed on days with fresh to strong east-north-east winds, and only one when the wind was from the south or west. Hundreds of other gulls, largely Yellow-legged *Larus cachinnans*, also passed in easterly winds, with many fewer when it was from other directions.

During 24 February to 14 March 1998 RF made observations near Protaras for migrating Great Black-headed Gull. During two days of fresh north to easterly winds he counted six breeding-plumaged adults offshore, four moving north, with none on days when the wind was from other directions.

In 1999 strong easterly winds occurred on 18–19 March and on the second date PF visited Zeytin Burnu to look for gull migration. He observed hundreds of gulls migrating north-east along the coast, among them two summer-plumaged adult Great Black-headed Gull (Flint 2000).

Clearly, passage gulls, including this species, tend to occur in spring on the east coast and off the Karpaz Peninsula during strong easterly winds. From his observations in 1995 PF concluded that gulls migrating north in spring along the Levant coast or over the sea east of Cyprus may be blown into Gazimağusa Bay, from where they coast north-east via Zeytin Burnu and the south coast of the Karpaz Peninsula (Flint 1997). If this is so then it appears probable that they are of Israeli, rather than Egyptian origin.

Easterly winds may also bring birds to the island in winter: on 13 December 2000, three (two adults and one first-winter) were at Larnaca sewage works after several days of strong easterly and north-easterly winds (John Sanders pers. comm.).

That easterly winds can bring spring migrants to Cyprus from the Levant has been noted previously by Adams (1962) and Christensen (1967). Adams' radar observations demonstrated that a combination of easterly winds and clear skies can bring huge numbers of passerine migrants to Cyprus, and Christensen found that similar weather conditions brought raptors to the east coast, these then heading north along the same coast.

FLIGHT PATHS OF MIGRANTS

Those seen on 22 February 1991 were flying north along the shoreline on the east side of Cape Greco. The individuals observed off Protaras in spring 1998 were further offshore. The first two, on 28 February, were 200–400 metres from land. Two others seen on the same date were much further out, certainly more than 500 metres away, as were two on 8 March. The flight paths of four of these were very low over the

water, and the other two settled on the sea, where they were sometimes lost to view between the waves (RF). Clearly, under such conditions it would be very easy for birds to pass unobserved.

Observations at Zeytin Burnu in 1995 and 1999 were made from a low, level promontory 1 km east of the headland. All 11 Great Black-headed Gull followed a flight path along or close to the shoreline, though on reaching the promontory some headed overland to cross it. They were quite low, c. 10–20 metres above the surface of the sea or land, but none passed directly above the sea surface (as observed at Protaros). Of the 11, nine passed singly, with the other two together. All but one passed after midday, the times of passage being 11.30–17.25 and a similar, mainly afternoon, passage was noted among other gull species. The timing at Zeytin Burnu would accord with a morning departure from the coast of Israel. However, there is a less clear pattern at Protaros, where two individuals passed in early morning, suggesting either a nocturnal departure from Israel or that they were present locally overnight. The headland west of Zeytin Burnu obscures the flight paths of any birds approaching along the coast from further west. However, many large gulls were often seen distantly approaching across the open water of the bay from the south, arriving at the main headland and then following the shoreline north-east (PF). Thus, it appears that many large gulls (probably including Great Black-headed) do not closely follow the shore of Gazimağusa Bay, but rather cut across the inner bay, perhaps making it less likely that they would be seen from locations within the bay, e.g. Boğaz.

IDENTIFICATION

Great Black-headed Gull is included in the list of scarce and rare Cyprus species that require description, and only records supported by substantive evidence are listed in Table 1. For this reason, several previously published records have not been included, the most significant of these being 16 immatures at Kiti Dam, on 11 April 1995 (Anon 1995). The large number and location do not fit the established pattern of the species' occurrence, and the detailed description provided by the observer accords with immature Yellow-legged Gull (Richard Porter pers. comm.). This record



Plate 1. Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaeus*. (Leo Boon)

highlights that, while adults are easily identified, immatures are less so, and can be confused with immature Yellow-legged Gull. Such confusion is most likely in a brief fly-by observation, especially at long range, as is often the case with passage migrants on the east coast in spring. Thus far all but one of those recorded under such circumstances has been an adult, and immatures are perhaps being overlooked among the many immature Yellow-legged Gulls passing concurrently.

DISCUSSION

Great Black-headed Gull records are increasing in Cyprus and may continue to do so, especially if there is further westward expansion of its breeding range. However, it is doubtful if it will ever be seen in large numbers: the island lies outside the species' main wintering range and there is little ideal wintering habitat, such as fishponds (though there are fish cages offshore at Cape Pyla). The species occurs most frequently in the east of the island: at wetlands in winter and particularly on the east coast (Protaros, Zeytin Burnu and the south coast of the Karpaz Peninsula) in spring, during mid-February to mid-April, in periods of easterly winds. Such winds are infrequent at this season (being usually westerly or southerly), but at such times east-coast observations may prove rewarding.

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Affinities of Cyprus Warbler

Sylvia melanothorax

PETER FLINT



The affinities of Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* are questionable. For morphological reasons it has at various times been linked with either Sardinian Warbler *S. melanocephala* or Rüppell's Warbler *S. rueppelli*. I re-examined the relationships of these three *Sylvia* from the standpoint of island biogeography. This study—involving comparisons of migratory behaviour, wing length and shape, and weight—suggests that it is Rüppell's Warbler, and not Sardinian Warbler, which is the mainland relative of Cyprus Warbler.

INTRODUCTION

TWO SPECIES, SARDINIAN WARBLER *Sylvia melanocephala* and Rüppell's Warbler *S. rueppelli*, have alternatively been suggested as the closest relative of Cyprus Warbler *S. melanothorax*; Vaurie (1959) and Roselaar (in Cramp 1992) favouring the former, and Williamson (1968), McNeile (in Flint & Stewart 1992) and Beaman & Madge (1998) the latter. The main criteria judged by these authors were morphological, especially plumage, though McNeile also cited behavioural differences. In addition, Flint & Stewart (1992) suggested that Rüppell's and Cyprus Warblers might be closely related, in light of their complementary breeding ranges. However, it is also possible to examine the relationships of these three *Sylvia* from the standpoint of island biogeography.

EVOLUTIONARY CHANGES ON ISLANDS

Endemic island forms normally evolve from mainland taxa that have colonised the island in the past. Environmental factors encountered by such colonists on islands usually differ significantly from those on the nearest continental landmass; the most significant differences being the insular climate and a much smaller number of breeding species. As a result, changes typically occur in colonising taxa in response to the novel environmental factors. Of these changes the most commonly repeated are a reduction in the traits that assist them in dispersing over long distances, and size changes, becoming larger or smaller—with corresponding weight changes (MacArthur & Wilson 1967, Grant 1998, Whittaker 1998).

In birds, the mild equable climate of temperate islands and consequent year-round availability of food can reduce or eliminate the need for migration and favour the evolution of shorter and more rounded wings (Grant 1998). On Cyprus, this is observable in the Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*, which is a shorter distance migrant than its mainland counterpart, Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka*, and which has a shorter and more rounded wing than the latter (Cramp 1988).

Insular bird forms present contrasting tendencies in body-size changes, becoming larger than their mainland relatives on high-latitude islands, and smaller on low-latitude islands (Grant 1998). Cyprus is a low-latitude island (<45°), and its endemic birds might therefore be expected to exhibit a tendency towards smaller sizes (which is best indicated by lower weight). When compared with their nearest mainland counterparts, such a change is shown by three of the island's endemic passerines:

Cyprus Wheatear, and the endemic subspecies of Coal Tit *Parus ater cypriotes* and Jay *Garrulus glandarius glaznerii*. Cyprus Wheatear is c. 13% shorter winged and c. 15% lighter in weight than Pied Wheatear, while the endemic Coal Tit is c. 6% shorter winged and c. 5% lighter than its Turkish counterparts. There is no published weight data for the endemic Jay, but it is c. 8% shorter winged and c. 9% shorter billed than its Turkish counterparts (Cramp 1988, Flint & Stewart 1992, Cramp & Perrins 1993, 1994, Roselaar 1995). Elsewhere in the east Mediterranean, evolutionary changes involving reduction in overall size are also exhibited by passerines in the Aegean islands (Watson 1964).

Judging by these island biogeographical criteria, the mainland species from which the other species-level taxa considered endemic to Cyprus, namely Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*, evolved might be expected to be a longer distance migrant (with a correspondingly longer and more pointed wing), and to be larger (and thus heavier). Therefore, it is worthy to compare Sardinian *Sylvia melanocephala* and Rüppell's Warblers *S. rueppelli* with Cyprus Warbler, to examine whether or not they show the differences that could be expected in the latter species' mainland counterpart. The tendency for insular forms to possess typical differences from their mainland counterparts is not without exceptions (e.g. Grant 1965); nevertheless, as demonstrated above, these differences do appear to be present in the endemic passerines of Cyprus, and I believe it is reasonable to utilise them in an examination of the affinities of Cyprus Warbler.

COMPARISON OF CYPRUS WARBLER WITH SARDINIAN AND RÜPPELL'S WARBLERS

Migratory behaviour

Cyprus Warbler is a partial short-distance migrant: many are resident and it remains common on Cyprus throughout the winter, but many also depart the island at this season, wintering south to Israel/Palestine, Sinai and the northern Sudanese Red Sea hills (Flint & Stewart 1992, Snow & Perrins 1998). Sardinian Warbler, within the eastern Mediterranean, is also a partial short-distance migrant: many are resident in Greece, the Aegean, Turkey and the Levant, with others moving south to winter in southern Turkey, Cyprus, the Levant and Egypt (Snow & Perrins 1998). It also now breeds commonly in western Cyprus (e.g. Pomeroy & Walsh 2000), where it is also apparently resident (John Sanders pers. comm.). Significantly, many (presumably) Turkish breeders winter on the island and begin to arrive as Cyprus Warbler is departing (Flint & Stewart 1992), which is not the pattern that would be expected if Sardinian Warbler was the more migratory mainland counterpart of Cyprus Warbler. Rüppell's Warbler, on the other hand, is both wholly migratory and a longer distance migrant. The entire population departs its breeding grounds, in Turkey and Greece, and moves south to winter in Chad and Sudan, almost entirely outside the Palearctic (Snow & Perrins 1998). Clearly, it is Rüppell's Warbler and not Sardinian Warbler which shows the expected difference from Cyprus Warbler in being a longer distance migrant.

Wing length and shape

Mean wing lengths of adult males of the three are: Cyprus Warbler 59.7 mm, Sardinian Warbler 58.5 mm, and Rüppell's Warbler 68.6 mm (Flint & Stewart 1992). The wingtip shape of Cyprus Warbler is rounded, that of Sardinian bluntly rounded and that of Rüppell's bluntly pointed (Cramp 1992); the second primary tip in relation to the other primary tips being: = 5/6 or 6, = 6/8, and = 5 or 5/6 (Svensson 1992). Clearly, it is again Rüppell's Warbler and not Sardinian Warbler that exhibits the

expected differences from Cyprus Warbler in possessing a longer and more pointed wing. The wing of Sardinian Warbler is slightly, but significantly, *shorter* than that of Cyprus Warbler, suggesting that it may be a shorter (rather than longer) distance migrant (Cozens *et al.* 2000) and the more rounded wing of Sardinian Warbler supports this theory.

Weight

When comparing weight data, it is important to compare like with like, since autumn migrants and wintering individuals may be heavier than spring migrants and breeders. Breeding season mean weights (sexes combined) for the three are: Cyprus Warbler 11.25 g, Sardinian Warbler 11.65 g and Rüppell's Warbler 13.5 g (Cramp 1992, Cozens *et al.* 2000). Again it is Rüppell's Warbler that shows the expected difference, being substantially (c. 20%) heavier than Cyprus Warbler, whereas Sardinian Warbler is only slightly (c. 3.5%) heavier.



Plates 1–2. First-winter male Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*, Kibbutz Lotan, Israel, March 2000. (Kevin Hemsley)

DISCUSSION

There are striking similarities in the percentage differences in wing length and weight between Cyprus and Pied Wheatears, on the one hand, and between Cyprus and Rüppell's Warblers, on the other. As stated above, Cyprus Wheatear is c. 13% shorter winged and c. 15% lighter in weight than Pied Wheatear; and Cyprus Warbler is c. 13% shorter winged and c. 17% lighter than Rüppell's Warbler. The corresponding figures for Cyprus Warbler, if compared with Sardinian Warbler, are c. 2% *longer winged* and c. 3.4% lighter. (Note that the shorter wings of Cyprus Wheatear and Cyprus Warbler, when compared with those of Pied Wheatear and Rüppell's Warbler, are a product of a combination of each species' overall smaller size and less migratory nature).

Incidentally, Flint (1995) suggested that the weight difference between Cyprus and Pied Wheatears might be attributable to the difference between the northerly continental climate experienced by Pied Wheatear, and the southerly insular climate of Cyprus (with its considerably higher nocturnal temperatures). The difference between mainland and insular climates may also be a factor in the size difference between Rüppell's and Cyprus Warblers. However, given their geographically close breeding ranges, climate may be a less important factor in the size difference than with Cyprus and Pied Wheatears; and, for both-species pairs, other influences may also be involved, such as the smaller number of breeding species and their higher breeding densities on islands.

Rüppell's Warbler, when compared with Cyprus Warbler, is a longer distance migrant, has a longer and more pointed wing, and is larger and heavier. It thus shows all the differences to be expected in the mainland relative of Cyprus Warbler. Conversely, Sardinian Warbler, when compared with Cyprus Warbler, possesses none of the expected differences (excepting a small weight increase), and in respect of wing length and wing shape the differences are the opposite of what might be expected. Clearly, these results suggest that, judging by island biogeographical criteria, it is Rüppell's Warbler, and not Sardinian Warbler, which is the mainland relative of Cyprus Warbler.

In addition to the size and structural changes discussed above, some island taxa without sympatric competitors exhibit longer bills and tarsi than their mainland counterparts, perhaps because reduced competition permits them to exploit a wider range of food and perch sizes (Grant 1965, 1968). All of the Cyprus endemics have sympatric competitors (at least to some extent), and, in any case, any such changes among the Cyprus endemics would be difficult to detect because of the overall smaller sizes and lower weights of Cyprus birds. However, such changes may exist in Cyprus Wheatear, which though substantially smaller than Pied Wheatear has a bill and tarsus only 3–4% shorter, i.e. relatively large for its overall size (Cramp 1988). Such changes are not obviously present in Cyprus Warbler, whose bill and tarsus are 8–10% shorter than those of Rüppell's Warbler, a difference more or less in proportion to the smaller size and 10% shorter tail of Cyprus Warbler (Cramp 1992).

Avian taxa sympatric on islands frequently differ from each other in bill length to a greater extent than their mainland relatives (Grant 1968), and competition with larger billed sympatics may be a controlling factor in the bill length of Cyprus Warbler. It has no congeneric competitors (with the exception of limited sympatry with Spectacled Warbler *S. conspicillata* and, very recently, Sardinian Warbler), but it is sympatric at high densities over large areas, and in a range of habitats, with Cyprus Wheatear and, in woodland and woodland/scrub, with Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* (Flint 2000). These two may appear unlikely competitors of Cyprus Warbler, but because of the very small number of sympatric taxa and their high breeding densities, they probably do exert a competitive influence.

When compared with Sardinian Warbler, Cyprus Warbler is 3.5% shorter billed, has a 6% shorter tarsus and an 11% shorter tail (Cramp 1992). Thus, while Cyprus Warbler biometrics suggest that it is essentially a smaller version of Rüppell's Warbler, Sardinian Warbler is structurally rather different from both, particularly in its longer tail.

While this paper was in preparation I learnt that its findings are supported by recent DNA data (Shirihai *et al.* 2001), which indicate that, while Cyprus and Rüppell's Warblers are not very closely related, they are closer to one another than either is to Sardinian Warbler (Andreas Helbig pers. comm.).

That Sardinian Warbler is probably not the closest relative of Cyprus Warbler may be of some importance for the long-term prospects of the latter. Sardinian Warbler was discovered breeding in Cyprus in 1992 (Aloneftis 1994) and is increasing rapidly, e.g. several thousands of pairs were estimated in 1998. There has been concern, but no definite evidence, that this increase has been at the expense of Cyprus Warbler: there is considerable overlap in habitat preference and the two species often occur sympatrically (Pomeroy & Walsh 2000). However, the closer that sympatric species are related, the more similar will be their ecological requirements and the more likely it is that inter-specific competition will be greater (Grant 1968). Therefore, if Sardinian Warbler is not the closest relative of Cyprus Warbler, then the prospects for their long-term coexistence are more favourable than might otherwise have been true.

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Autumn routes of migrating raptors and other soaring birds in Lebanon

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Lebanon lies on the major flyway for migrant soaring birds in the east Mediterranean. Despite detailed studies to the north and south of Lebanon, the only surveys of raptor passage through the country are either casual observations or short-term counts over part of the passage period. In an attempt to gain data on routes, timing and numbers of birds passing through the whole country, two surveys, one in the north and one across central Lebanon, were organised in autumn 2000. Total passage was estimated at significantly over 107,000 birds between late August and mid-October when field work was curtailed due to mounting political tension in the region. An important concentration of birds was located and their route over the western slopes of the Mount Lebanon chain and Bekaa Valley is plotted. This route is confirmed by casual observations in the previous literature, permitting earlier notes to be contextualised. Priorities for conservation and future work are outlined in the light of our findings.

INTRODUCTION

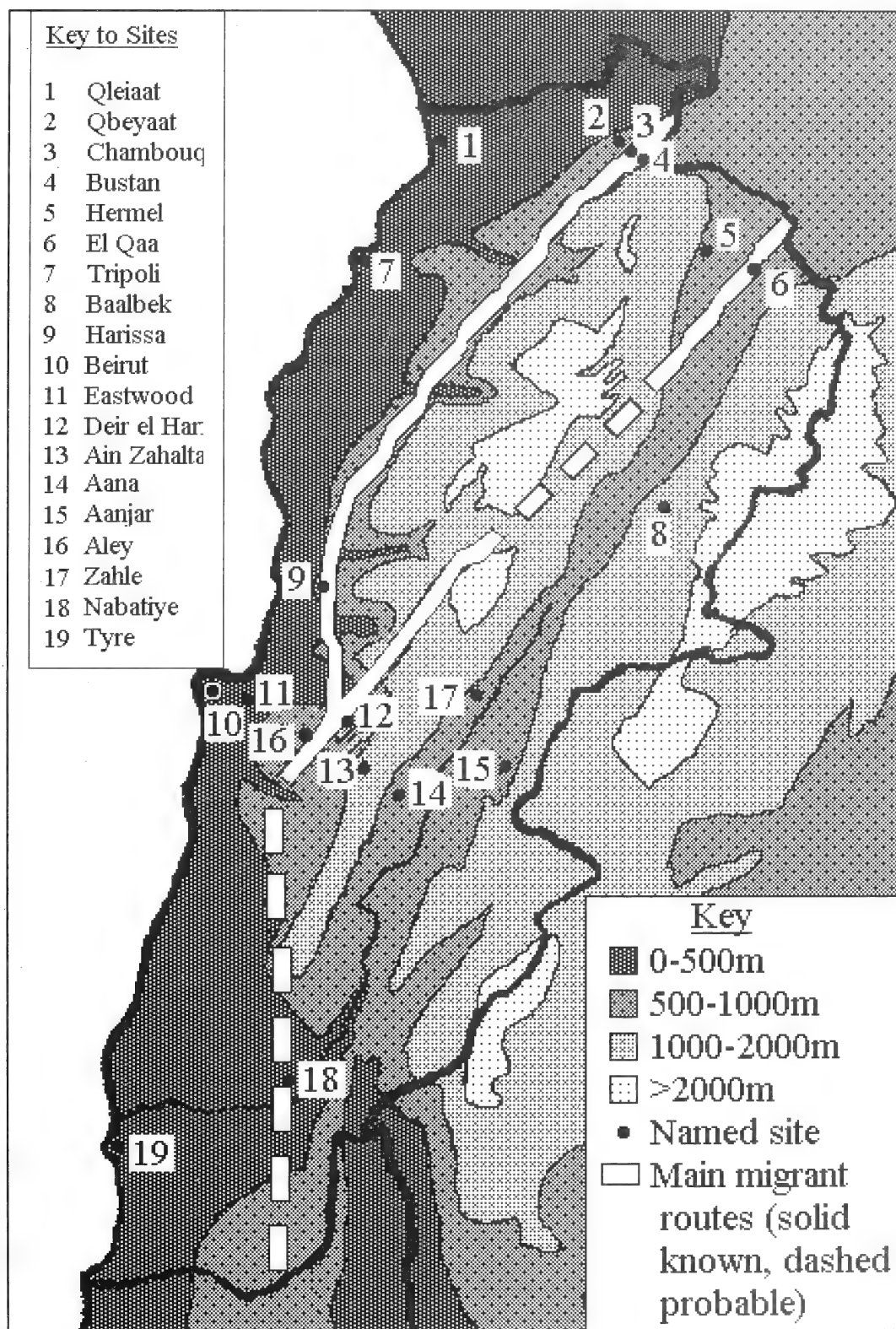
THE MIGRATION OF LARGE SOARING BIRDS through the Middle East is a well-documented phenomenon, with detailed observations available from a number of sites; well-known observation points include the Bosphorus in Turkey, Eilat in Israel and at Suez in Egypt. There have been a number of small-scale observations made in the Lebanon by, e.g., Nielsen & Christensen (1970) in 1968–1969, Macfarlane (1978) in 1974–1975 and Khairallah (1991) in 1981 (with all previous work being summarised by Shirihai *et al.* 2000). However, no large-scale survey has been attempted, and routes used by raptors are still incompletely known.

Conservation of raptors and other large soaring birds is regarded as an international priority, due to many species' global scarcity and known population declines (Tucker & Evans 1997, Shirihai *et al.* 2000, Zalles & Bildstein 2000). Counting large soaring birds on migration serves two main conservation purposes. Due to the concentration of significant percentages, or even the entire population, of some species over narrow corridors because of their dependence on thermals, overall numbers may be monitored with relative ease. Most species are dispersed over extremely broad areas and at low densities in their breeding and wintering grounds, making accurate population estimates, and hence monitoring, extremely difficult. It is important to precisely determine their routes to ensure adequate protection is provided on migration; raptors tend to have low reproductive rates, making them especially vulnerable to threats such as illegal hunting at passage bottlenecks. Obviously their protection on these routes is a responsibility that Lebanon must assume. Given this, two surveys were undertaken in autumn 2000 to assess numbers and routes of birds passing over the country.

METHODS

To assemble the most complete picture of migration in autumn 2000, a detailed survey was initiated across the centre of the country to provide information concerning routes, numbers, dates and species diversity, with a smaller scale survey further north, which was designed solely to confirm route choice. The former survey was planned to consist of two parts: one at low level from late August until early November, with a second phase targeted to the period when most birds were expected to pass, namely the last week of September and first week of October. Observations commenced in late August and were

Figure 1. Map of Lebanon showing counting sites and main routes used by migrating birds over the country during autumn 2000.



made continuously between 08.00 and 18.00 on one day per week, from a hillside where numbers of birds were known to pass, near Deir el Harf above Beirut (see Fig. 1). Unfortunately, due to political tension in the region from mid-October, the survey had to be curtailed and observations in the final period were not possible. During the period of intensive field work on 25 September–6 October, observations were made on weekdays between 08.00 and c. 18.00. Additional volunteers joined the survey from the U. K. at this time, and observations were made at five sites in an approximate line across the country, with three sites being visited each day.

Observations made over the intensive period and during weekly counts involved identification of all species of soaring birds. Numbers of individuals were recorded, together with an indication of distance from the observer and approximate direction of flight. Where birds were seen at great distance and could not be specifically identified, they were identified to the highest level possible, e.g. *Aquila* sp.

In the north, six sites running broadly east to west across the country were watched regularly for short periods throughout 9 September–21 October. Six observers participated in this survey, watching for periods of 45–150 minutes at each site before moving to another watchpoint. Three to five of the six sites were visited on 13 days during the period. All sites are indicated in Fig. 1. Only binoculars were used in this survey, resulting in a lower percentage of birds being specifically identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dates

The first day of the survey, 31 August, recorded a passage of 3398 birds over Deir el Harf, including 3387 Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus*. This suggests that for this species, at least, passage began earlier in August, a hypothesis supported by Ramadan-Jaradi & Ramadan-Jaradi (1999). The curtailment of observations at this site in mid-October meant that for some late migrants, notably Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus* and Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, an unknown proportion of individuals will have passed after the survey ended. These gaps should be noted when comparing totals from our survey with those of other locations along the East Mediterranean flyway.

Nevertheless, for the principal migrant species it is clear that passage through the Lebanon is extended. Table 1 records the dates of peak passage for those migrants with over 500 individuals recorded during the main survey.

Table 1. Dates of peak passage for selected species.

English name	Scientific name	Peak passage period
White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	No noticeable peak
Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Late August to early September
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	Mid-September
Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>	Early to mid-October
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	Late September to early October
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Late September

As Lebanon has a responsibility for all these species any measures designed to protect them on passage must operate throughout their entire passage periods. It is clear that such measures must be in place from mid-August to late October.

Weather

Weather conditions are known to affect numbers of migrants. With the exception of 28–29 September and the final count on 12 October, weather conditions were favourable for migration, with varying wind strengths. In line with 'poor' weather conditions, lower numbers were seen on these days than on those with 'better' weather. With improved conditions on 30 September, large numbers of birds were observed passing that afternoon and the following morning, unfortunately coinciding with days when systematic counts were not undertaken. Minimum estimates of the passage on these days were made, and can be added to the totals from the systematic counts.

Totals

During the central survey a total of 16,904 birds of 33 species (29 of them raptors) was counted. Full details of species, dates and numbers are available on request from CB. The most common raptors were Honey Buzzard and Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, each with 4046 individuals. Next most abundant was Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* (2721 individuals), while the commonest non-raptor was White Pelican (1365 individuals). Additionally, on the afternoon of 30 September at least 7000 birds, probably mostly Lesser Spotted Eagle, were estimated to have passed over Aana and western Bekaa. Passage continued next morning when another 3000 birds (mostly Lesser Spotted Eagle, with smaller numbers of Steppe Buzzard) followed Barouk Ridge above Aana. This passage coincided with improved weather conditions, following two days of bad weather with poor thermal conditions.

A minimum estimate of total passage during the intensive survey was produced by calculating the mean daily totals at each site, multiplied by the number of days with counts (see Table 2). For example, at Eastwood, the total number counted was 925 birds, on seven days. Therefore the main daily total was 132 (925 divided by seven). Given that the total number of days of the survey was 12, the estimated total for Eastwood becomes 1584 (132 multiplied by 12). This number can be further adjusted by adding the c. 10,000 additional birds that passed Aana on 30 September–1 October, rather than employing the site mean for the two days. Overall, an estimated c. 30,500 individuals passed over Lebanon during the 12-day period, 25 September–6 October.

Table 2. Totals per site and estimated total passage of all raptor species.

Site	Total number counted	Days counted	Estimated total
Eastwood	925	seven	1584
Deir el Harf	4153	six	8304
Ain Zahalta	1379	five	3240
Aana	2183	six	13,660 (includes 10,000)
Aanjar	2166	six	3708

Weekly counts were made at Deir el Harf throughout the autumn passage in an attempt to determine the overall phenology of migration through Lebanon. Provided daily variation is low, one count per week will provide a reasonable figure from which to estimate the approximate scale of totals on days between points. An overall estimate is therefore possible using linear interpolation to estimate passage on days without counts, and their sum provides an overall estimate of passage for those periods not covered by the intensive survey. The accuracy of this depends on the level of daily variation in totals, which can be estimated using data from the intensive survey at Deir el Harf. Daily totals at the latter never varied by more than 25% between consecutive days, suggesting that an estimate using these data may be

acceptable. Interpolation between all days with observations during 31 August to 12 October gives a total estimate of over 41,200 birds at Deir el Harf. When counts were undertaken simultaneously at Deir el Harf and other sites, daily totals at the former were consistently higher than at other watchpoints. Assuming such a pattern throughout the migration period, an estimate of total passage over Lebanon may be made by extrapolating the proportion at this site during the intensive survey. Daily means during the intensive observation period revealed that 38.4% of total passage over Lebanon passed this site. Taking this proportion as an estimate for the entire autumn suggests 107,000 birds passed over the country between 31 August and 12 October 2000. With passage of some species probably starting c. 2 weeks before and ending c. 2 weeks after the survey, it is clear that this total, if accurate, will be lower than the true figure for the entire autumn migration.

Routes

Central survey From numbers of birds at each location it is clear that soaring birds move on a broad front across Lebanon. However, a notable concentration (c. 40% of total numbers) occurred at Deir el Harf. Here, birds arrived from two principal directions, one due north, and the other north-east over Bois de Bologne. All tended to depart south-west. Protection of those passing on this route is clearly a conservation priority. Smaller concentrations were also noted following Barouk Ridge and the eastern edge of the Bekaa (see Fig. 1).

Northern survey Mean hourly totals were calculated for each of the five sites visited. These confirm a broad-front passage, though with a clear peak west of the Mount Lebanon chain. This peak, which passed Bustan and Chambouq, accounted for c. 60% of the total passage observed during the northern survey. These sites are relatively close together and some double counting may have occurred, though the general trend is clear. Somewhat higher totals were found over El Qaa and Hermel, in the northern Bekaa Valley, than nearer the coast, confirming the pattern found by the central survey. The results are illustrated in Fig. 1.

Overall pattern Reference to the few published records of other observers can further elucidate the main routes. Nielsen & Christensen (1970) noted passage over Harissa, while Macfarlane (1978) watched two streams of raptors at Bikfaya, which he believed to converge south of there. Benson (1970) reported large numbers of birds near Aley. Our results suggest that a westerly route passes from Chambouq and Bustan to Harissa over the slopes of the Mount Lebanon chain, thence south to Deir el Harf. This route then turns south-west to pass below Aley, and appears to follow land at 750–1500 metres above sea level, thus passing inland and at higher altitude than that over Beirut and Mansouriyé. This route is joined by a second stream arriving from the north-east, at Deir el Harf, probably consisting of birds passing El Qaa and Hermel, and crossing the Mount Lebanon chain north of Mount Sannine. Thus it would appear that Macfarlane (1978) observed these two routes prior to the streams converging, Benson (1970) recorded the enlarged single stream, and Nielsen & Christensen (1970) observed birds on only one of these routes.

It is interesting to speculate how birds reach the country from the north. Observations from Syria suggest that a route runs along the Alawite Mountains (Pyman 1953), a stream that clearly forms the passage first noted in Lebanon at Chambouq and Bustan. Once this stream and that passing El Qaa and Hermel converge south of Aley, the next observations are from Palestine and Israel (see Shirihai *et al.* 2000, Alon *et al.* in prep.). Counts from watchpoints east of Haifa suggest most birds remain at an

altitude of c. 500 metres, indicating that the stream continues at broadly the same altitude from Aley through south Lebanon. Clearly further surveys, particularly in the south of the country are required to verify these routes before they can be properly protected at other points.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Internationally important numbers of raptors and other large soaring birds pass over Lebanon in autumn. Many have a negative conservation status and require adequate conservation while on passage. Passage appears to commence in August and continues to at least late October. Our surveys revealed a large concentration of birds in a narrow corridor over the western slopes of the Mount Lebanon range near Bustan and Chambouq, Harissa, Bikfaya, Deir el Harf and Aley. This is joined, at Deir el Harf, by a second stream probably from the northern Bekaa, crossing the Mount Lebanon range between Mount Sannine and Qornet es Sauda. Smaller concentrations occur along Barouk ridge and the east side of the Bekaa valley. In order to adequately protect these migrant large soaring birds in Lebanon, it is imperative that the hunting ban is rigorously enforced during passage periods, especially along these routes. Further studies south of Aley should determine the most sensitive sites in the south of the country, where protection is most needed.

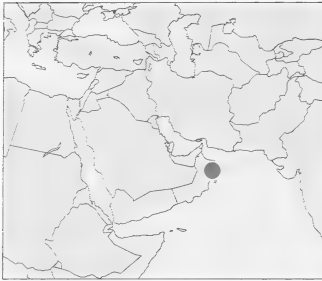
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The discovery of Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* in Arabia

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Following the initial discovery of a white-eye *Zosterops* sp. in the mangroves of Mahawt Island, Oman, in the late 1980s and further observations in March 1999 one was recently trapped. DNA analysis and tape recordings are consistent with Oriental White-eye *Z. palpebrosa* representing a 1000 km westward expansion of the known range of this species.

WHILE WORKING ON A Coastal Management Plan for the Ministry of Regional Municipality and Environment (MRME) in Oman over ten years ago, Rolf Jensen and Dr Rod Salm visited Mahawt Island (20°34'N 58°10'E), in the Gubbat Hashish Bay, in eastern Oman near the village of Filim. Jensen, an experienced birdwatcher, noted a white-eye *Zosterops* sp. in the tall mangrove on the island. He was well acquainted with the resident White-breasted White-eye *Z. abyssinica* of the Dhofar foothills more than 500 km to the south-west, which does not frequent mangroves in that area. Time did not permit further investigation, but the Oman Bird Records Committee was informed verbally and the record filed as a white-eye sp. Precise location and time were not recorded.

Fishermen and their families live on the island of Mahawt and though it may have been possible to hire a boat to reach the mangrove, the site remained unvisited for a decade. HE and JE attempted to reach the area on foot in 1995, but were forced to turn back when the mud became too soft and the tide was rising.

During the Asian Waterbird Count, on 4 March 1999, JE, SAS and Kolbjørn Schølberg had access to a boat provided by MRME and decided to check the mangroves for unusual birds. It was high tide and the boat was able glide through one of the main channels within the mangrove. Unusual calls and songs were heard—unknown to us—in addition to those of several Clamorous Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus stentoreus*. While waiting for a local boy to bring us tea from a nearby house, we sat quietly in the mangrove forest and JE spotted a white-eye. Before long all three observers were able to observe 4–5 individuals moving slowly through the mangrove canopy. It was immediately clear that they were different from the Dhofar white-eyes.

Those at Mahawt were much brighter than White-breasted White-eye. The head, neck-sides, throat and upper breast were bright yellow, the rest of the upperparts greenish-yellow, lacking any trace of wingbars, the breast and belly white washed greyish, and the undertail-coverts yellow. The most striking feature was the head pattern: the white eye-ring was surrounded by a narrow black ring, especially prominent below the eye, while the black lores dissected the white eye-ring. The irides were dark, and the bill and legs black.

Plates 1–3. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*, Mahawt Island, Oman, March. (Hanne & Jens Eriksen)



A survey of the literature at hand eliminated all African white-eyes. The Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* in the plate in Grimmett *et al.* (1998) has pale, flesh-coloured legs, but otherwise resembled the Mahawt birds. Woodcock (1980) depicts the Oriental White-eye with black legs.

Subsequently, Prof. C. Hilary Fry pointed out that white-eyes provide a classic example of speciation and that isolated populations of white-eyes have the capacity to evolve into new taxa within a few thousand generations. We were unaware of the length of time white-eyes have been present at Mahawt, but we wished to investigate their taxonomic status.

Two weeks later we mounted a small expedition with the object of catching one of the white-eyes, taking photographs and sound recordings and collecting feathers for DNA analysis. Given the presumably very small population we did not intend to obtain a specimen. With the ministerial boat at our disposal, we were joined by DES and camped overnight on the island. We swiftly found several white-eyes in the same area as previously. Two mist-nets were placed across a mangrove channel, while an old nest, undoubtedly belonging to a white-eye, was discovered in a mangrove fork c. 3 metres above the waterline. It was constructed entirely of straw.

Photographs and sound recordings were obtained and in the morning of 19 March a white-eye was caught in one of the mist-nets. It was photographed extensively in the hand and detailed measurements taken. Unfortunately, the mensural data are no longer at our disposal. A toe nail and several feathers were collected and sent to Dr Beth Slikas at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., U.S.A., for DNA analysis. We quote the results of this analysis from Dr Slikas:

'I did get some sequence from the feathers that you sent—a short piece (200 base pairs) including the rapidly evolving mitochondrial gene ATPase8. The sequence is identical to the sequence from a *palpebrosus* sample from Nepal. For reference, the difference between other species of white-eye for the same gene region is between 3–8%. Between two geographically separated 'subspecies' of the African Broad-ringed White-eye (*Z. poliogaster*), I find about 1% sequence difference. So the white-eye from Oman doesn't seem to be a separate species, based on its mitochondrial sequence. My first guess from these results is that the white-eyes from Oman colonised recently'.

The tape recordings were sent to Richard Ranft at the National Sound Archive, London, U.K. and proved indistinguishable from those of Oriental White-eye. Thus, we conclude that the Mahawt birds constitute an isolated population of Oriental White-eye in Oman and Arabia. During our stay we estimated having seen 14 individuals and the total population may not exceed 100. The mangrove *Avicennia marina* at Mahawt is the only vegetation on the island of any note and is c. 2 km long and 300 metres wide, giving an area of 0.6 km². This surely represents one of the smallest distributions of any species in the Middle East. There are no other mangroves within several hundred kilometres and surrounding areas are almost void of vegetation.

The mode of arrival and length of time that Oriental White-eye has occupied Mahawt must remain matters for speculation. Local fishermen are aware of the bird; occasionally one becomes entangled in a fishing net. Judging from the DNA analysis it appears the species is a recent colonist. In past centuries, Mahawt was an important stopover for boats moving between India and Africa. It is conceivable that white-eyes were carried on board one of these, either accidentally or purposely, and upon reaching Mahawt flew



Plate 4. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* nest, Mahawt Island, Oman, March. (Hanne & Jens Eriksen)

to the only area of vegetation encountered en route. Alternatively, the Mahawt mangrove may constitute the remnant of a much larger expanse of mangrove or other woodland in a distant past, but this appears a much less likely explanation for the species' presence. If this was the case, we would have expected at least some deviation in the mtDNA sequence from populations of white-eyes in the Indian subcontinent.

Oriental White-eye is represented by several races and is common over most of the Indian subcontinent, south-east Asia and much of Indonesia (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Howard & Moore 1991). The population on Mahawt represents a spectacular 1000 km westward range expansion. Several other breeding species have recently been discovered in Oman (Eriksen & Sargeant 2000) including Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*, Hume's Tawny Owl *Strix butleri* and Yemen Serin *Serinus menachensis*, indicating the capacity for exciting surprises in this, still under-watched corner of Arabia.

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The establishment of Bank Mynah *Acridotheres ginginianus* as a breeding species in Kuwait

GEORGE GREGORY AND KHALID AL-NASRALLAH



Bank Mynah *Acridotheres ginginianus* has occurred outside of captivity in Kuwait for many years, but has not previously been regarded as fully established. The species has spread recently to a number of sites in Kuwait where it is regularly recorded. Following a major increase in numbers at Jahra Farms, a breeding colony was discovered there. We now regard Bank Mynah as fully established as a breeding bird in Kuwait and, therefore, the Western Palearctic region as defined in BWP.

INTRODUCTION

BANK MYNAH *Acridotheres ginginianus* is an exotic species in Arabia, all records referring to escapees or their progeny that have bred in the wild. The species is a native of the north and central Indian subcontinent (Feare & Craig 1998), but large numbers are imported into various Arabian states for sale in bird markets. At least one population, derived from escapees, has established itself as a breeding species in the United Arab Emirates (Aspinall 1996), but it appears not to have become so established elsewhere in Arabia (Porter *et al.* 1996), until recently in Kuwait, where it is imported for sale in the main bird market and in smaller markets. Dozens or sometimes hundreds of individuals are displayed in cages in these places, some dyed green, red, yellow or other colours; this coloration is naturally lost during the next complete moult. Birds from the markets are kept as pets in many areas of Kuwait, and we have noted them in Jahra, Kuwait City, Messila, Ahmadi, Fahaheel and Wafra (see Fig. 1). Naturally, given so many birds in captivity, some escape.

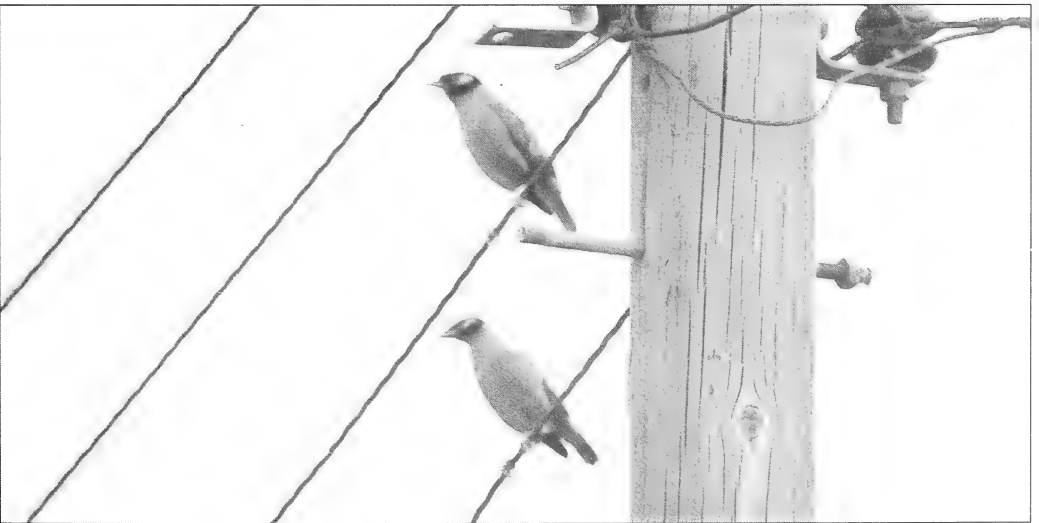
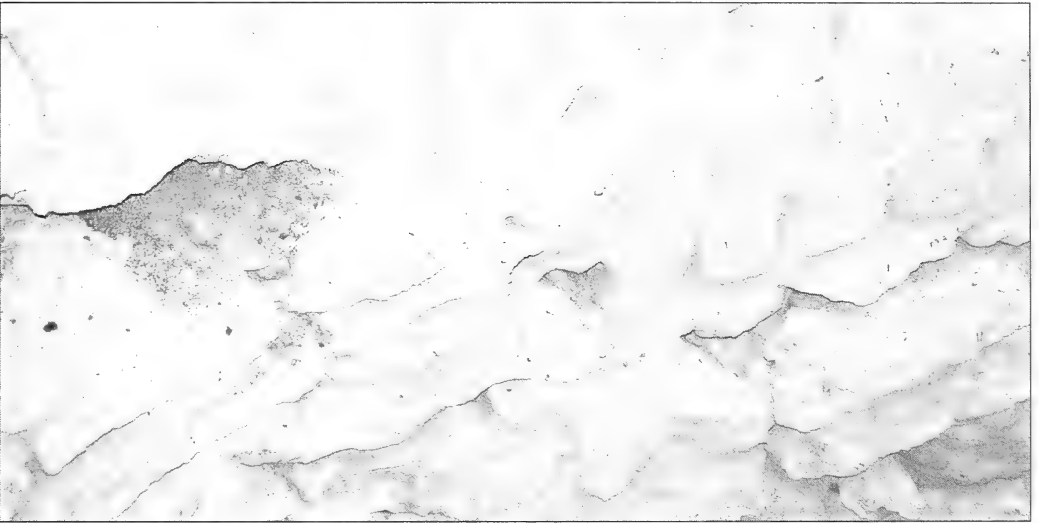
EARLY KUWAIT RECORDS

Since the 1970s, members of Ahmadi Natural History and Field Studies Group observed escaped Bank Mynahs at various localities in Kuwait, though probably some went unrecorded, due to their being regarded as escapees. From at least the mid-1980s up to c.10 were regularly present in the grounds of a hospital on the boundary of Shuwaikh, in Kuwait City, and Sulaibiya, in Jahra Governorate. Small numbers were occasionally observed elsewhere in Shuwaikh and nearby areas of Kuwait City. A few pairs are presumed to have bred, but this was never proven. Accordingly, it was not regarded as being fully established in Kuwait, which is the only part of the Western Palearctic where the species regularly occurs.

RECENT RECORDS

Since the mid-1990s, GG has observed the species increasingly frequently in the centre of Kuwait City, in Khaldiya and Jabriya, and has recently seen 1–4 individuals on the

Plate 1 (top). Well at Al-Habashi Farm, Jahra, Kuwait: general view of the inner wall, with nest-hole entrances of Bank Mynah *Acridotheres ginginianus*, 11 May 2001. (George Gregory) **Plate 2 (middle).** Well at Al-Habashi Farm, Jahra, Kuwait: closer view of the inner wall, with nest-hole entrances of Bank Mynah *Acridotheres ginginianus*, 11 May 2001. (George Gregory) **Plate 3 (bottom).** Adult (upper) and immature Bank Mynahs *Acridotheres ginginianus*, Al-Habashi Farm, Jahra, Kuwait, 11 May 2001. (George Gregory)



coast, at Rumaithiya and Salmiya. South of the city, Gavin Rowlands observed one at Sabah Al-Salem, on 17 April 2001. To the north-west, the bleached remains of one were found at Wadi Ar-Rimam, in the National Park, on 14 October 1999.

At Jahra Farms, in central Jahra, GG has observed Bank Mynahs since 12 November 1999, though he did not cover all parts of the farm until recently and could, in consequence, have missed some birds. In 2000 numbers observed around Al-Habashi Farm increased gradually and Su'ad Al-Ahmadi and GG found five newly fledged young there close to two adults on 11 June 2000. From September 2000 onwards numbers observed at Jahra Farms increased again, with 50 or more present in just a few fields in early May 2001. It became increasingly obvious that there must be a breeding colony nearby, but its location was unknown.

DISCOVERY OF THE BREEDING COLONY

On 11 May 2001, we took a break from filming in the enclosed fields of Al-Habashi Farm, and entered the residential area, where we were informed by Ali, an Iranian farm worker that many small birds were nesting in the nearby wells. Upon looking into the main well a cloud of 70 Bank Mynahs flew out, followed by singles and twos every few seconds for several minutes thereafter. Plate 1 shows part of the well's interior, which is constructed of roughly dressed large stones. The birds had made nesting tunnels between these, as shown in Plate 2. We estimated that there were c.70 pairs of Bank Mynah. At least three adults were dyed green, demonstrating that newly escaped birds may quickly join breeding colonies. Approximately 5 metres from the well was a pair of interlocking cement-lined wells with a number of interior complex cavities. Another, but smaller, group of Bank Mynahs flew out upon our approaching these wells and we estimated that c.30 pairs were nesting there, along with c.15 pairs of House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*.

Ali stated that Bank Mynah had nested in the wells for around ten years, i.e. since c.1991. He added that during most of this time few pairs had nested, but in the last two years numbers had increased greatly, until in 2001 there were hundreds of birds.

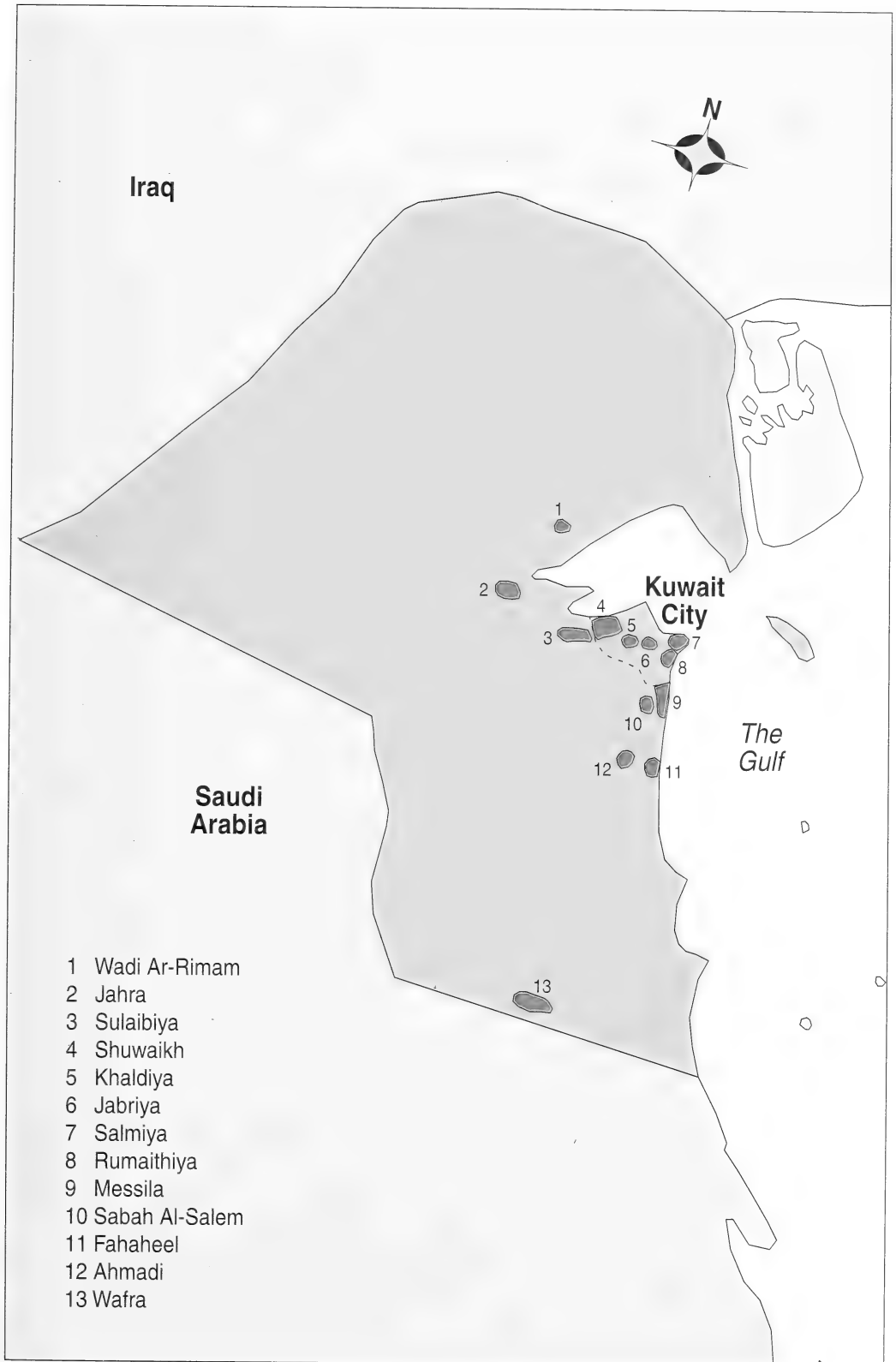
BREEDING POPULATION

Approximately 100 pairs were nesting in the three wells within the residential part of Al-Habashi Farm. Over the next few weeks many newly fledged juveniles emerged and commenced foraging on the irrigated fields. They dispersed increasingly far from the breeding sites, with some eventually observed c.500 metres away.

Each pair was estimated to have produced c.3 young on average. Due to the explosive nature of the increase in their numbers, it is possible that there may be more than one brood per year, and this will be monitored in future. As of mid-June 2001 there were an estimated 500 individuals within the region of the breeding sites.

GG undertook a survey of much of the rest of Jahra to determine if other breeding sites existed should the population continue to increase. Only one other well possesses possible sites for breeding holes. However there are many old buildings, walls, etc. with potential nest holes, as well as exposed banks in which holes could be excavated. Should the main breeding well be cemented over in the future, there are the other two wells plus many additional nearby sites that could be used. Given that small numbers are suspected of breeding at the other locations mentioned previously, the establishment of Bank Mynah as a breeding species in Kuwait is well supported.

Figure 1. Map of Kuwait showing localities mentioned in the text.



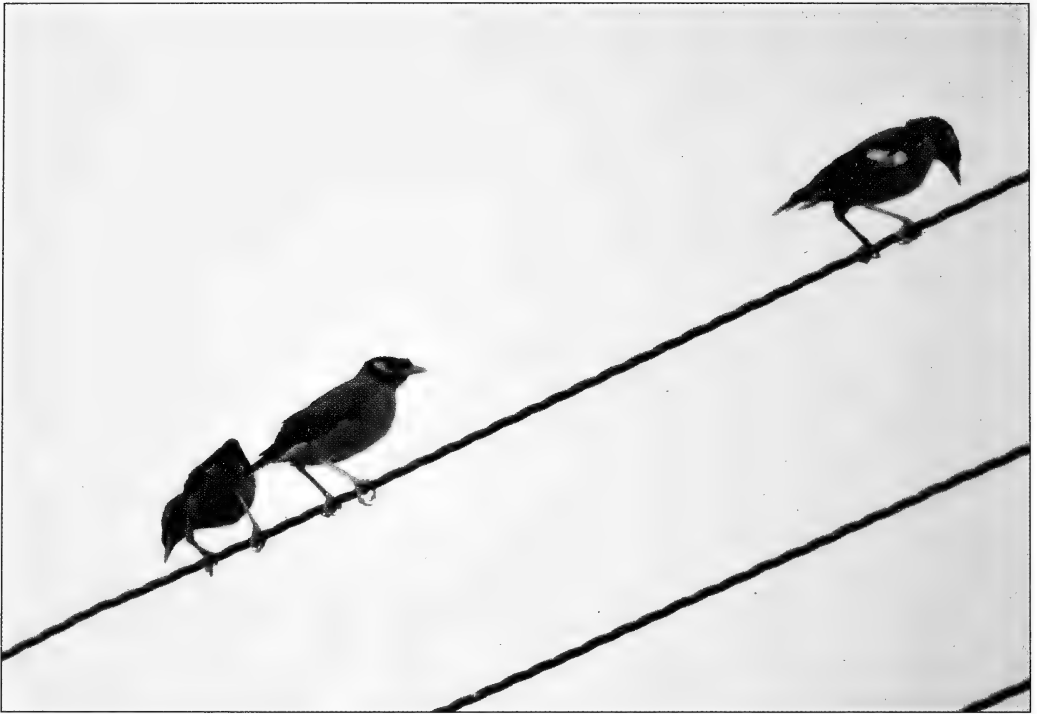


Plate 4. Two adult (left and right-hand birds) and an immature Bank Mynah *Acridotheres ginginianus*, Al-Habashi Farm, Jahra, Kuwait, 11 May 2001. (George Gregory)

HABITAT

Both adults and young spend most of time foraging on the ground, among low crops in small fields, on low grassy margins of irrigation channels and on storage piles of dry manure, from sheep and camels, which is used as fertilizer. The birds perch on wires, walls, trees and occasionally buildings, but are never seen far from fresh water. In other areas of Kuwait they habitually occur on grass near sprinkler systems, around villas with fountains or ponds, or close to open water near plant nurseries.

Bank Mynah is appropriately named: it 'nests in [a] hole in bank or masonry' (Porter *et al.* 1996). The high density of nest holes at Al-Habashi Farm appears to mirror behaviour within the species' native range (Feare & Craig 1998, Roberts 1992).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to Mr Abdullah Al-Habashi for permission to enter the residential and walled areas of his farm. Ali, the Iranian farm worker, was helpful in many ways, and supplied useful information.

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Notes on three bird species in Iran

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LAURENT TATIN, DAVID TATIN AND BIJAN AZMAYESH

WE CONDUCTED ORNITHOLOGICAL observations in Iran on 18 October–11 November 1997 and 29 February–12 March 2000, during other studies. Most field work was in the Touran Protected Area (Semnan Province) and Bahram-e-Goor Reserve (Fars Province) but, in 1997, some observations were made between Shiraz and Bahram-e-Goor Reserve (Fars Province) and between Shiraz and Esfahan. In 2000, records were kept between Tehran and Esfahan, in the Zagros Mountains, and in both years, observations were made on the southern slopes of the Elburz Mountains, between Tehran and Touran Protected Area. For full details of our work and a list of ornithological observations, interested parties may contact the second-named author at the address below.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

One at Persepolis, Fars Province, on 31 October 1997, was unusually far south. The species is a rare winter visitor to the south Caspian region, with very few records south of the Elburz Mountains.

Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

Two in a public garden in Tehran, on 8 March 2000, were presumably escapes from captivity, as the species occurs in the wild no nearer than Pakistan. The only previous record in Iran is a record of two at Chahbahar, Baluchistan, near the Pakistan border, in the 1970s (D. A. Scott pers. obs.).

White-cheeked Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*

Three in a private garden in Tehran, on 7 March 2000. This species has appeared in Tehran only since the 1970s, presumably as a result of escapes from captivity (D. A. Scott pers. comm.). The nearest native wild populations are in Khuzestan and Fars Provinces, in south Iran.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Mr Najmedin and Mr Nasir-Sadeghi, of the Department of Environment (DoE) in Tehran, and Mr Mehrjoo, DoE's director in Semnan province, who facilitated studies in Touran and Bahram-e-Goor Protected Areas, as did DoE wardens in Semnan. Prof. B. H. Z. Kiabi (University of Shahid Beheshti), Mr Razi (Natural History Museum of Tehran), Dr C. Feh (IUCN-Equids Specialist Group), E. Carp, Dr D. A. Scott and G. M. Kirwan made constructive comments concerning our work, which was possible due to the technical and financial support of Fondation Sansouïre-Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat, and its director, J. P. Tatis.

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Apparent predation attempt by Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* on Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* chick in Turkey

AKIF AYKURT AND CEM ORKUN KIRAC

ON 9 JUNE 1996, we observed a strange interaction between Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* and Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* at Kizilcahamam (Soğuksu) National Park, 75 km north of Ankara, Turkey. Our observations were made from a hill (at 1550 metres) just a few kilometres west of the national park boundary, in montane pine forest where Black Vulture breeds.

We located a nest of Black Vulture atop an old *Pinus nigra* tree within an adjacent valley to the south, and c. 300 metres away. The nest contained an adult Black Vulture with a chick approximately nine weeks old, an estimation based on our previous observations of breeding in the species. At c. 16.20, we observed a sub-adult Lammergeier in flight just over the trees above the nest. From the outset, we thought that the Lammergeier was attempting to seize the Black Vulture's chick. This continued until 17.26, with the Lammergeier occasionally landing for short periods on rocks or trees c. 20–50 metres distant from the nest tree. It sometimes approached as close as 15–20 metres and once to within 5 metres, during which the adult Black Vulture adopted a typical defence posture, with open wings shielding the chick. At 17.28, the Lammergeier began to circle closer to the nest, sometimes within a few metres and, at 17.36, it abruptly and apparently fearlessly perched on the upper branches of the nest tree, whereupon the Black Vulture made a sudden wing clapping that chased the Lammergeier onto rocky ground c. 100 metres from the nest tree. Subsequently, the Lammergeier departed the vicinity and was not seen again prior to our ceasing observations at 19.30, when the adult Black Vulture and its chick were still on the nest.

We returned to this area on 12 June 1996, when an adult Black Vulture and the chick were present, but the Lammergeier was not seen between 14.00 and 19.30. On 7 July 1996 the nest was deserted and two adult Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* were standing on it, apparently eating unknown remains.

Lammergeier principally feeds on carcasses (85% of its diet), as well stealing live prey from other birds and occasionally hunting mammals (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Heredia & Heredia 1991, del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). There is no information to suggest that the species will prey on the chicks of other vultures or birds of prey. We considered our 9 June observation to constitute an apparent predation attempt by Lammergeier on the Black Vulture chick, though we do not have any data concerning the reason for the subsequent nest desertion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank Guy M. Kirwan for his help with the manuscript.

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An intrageneric *Accipiter* hybrid from Eilat, Israel

REUVEN YOSEF, ANDREAS J. HELBIG AND WILLIAM S. CLARK

ON 2 MAY 1999, within the framework of the raptor ringing programme at Eilat, Israel, an unusual *Accipiter* was trapped at 07.00 in a 6-metre-high mist-net. This period is that of peak migration for Levant Sparrowhawk *A. brevipes* (Shirihai *et al.* 2000). Initially it was identified as a possible Shikra *A. badius*. However, because of the individual's unusual biometrics, eye colour and general appearance, RY made extensive notes of its plumage characteristics, took measurements and blood samples, ringed it and photographed the bird extensively, before releasing it in good health. Subsequent comparison of these descriptions, biometrics and slides by WSC helped to identify the bird, and the blood sample permitted AJH to mitochondrial DNA-fingerprint it.

Owing to the 'teardrop feathers on the underparts (Clark & Yosef 1998), the unusual *Accipiter* was classified as a second-summer male. An in-hand comparison was made with a second-summer male and adult male Levant Sparrowhawk trapped concurrently. WSC compared the slides of RY to slides of hawks in his extensive slide collection and reached, with some certainty, the conclusion that the unusual hawk is neither a Levant Sparrowhawk nor a Shikra. However, it had characters of both species as listed below.

The biometrics of the bird (EE10864) were: wing chord (unflattened) 201 mm, tail length 153 mm, culmen 13.8 mm, hallux 15.3 mm and body mass 174 g. It was noted to have flat flies but was free of asphalt contamination.



Plate 1. Hybrid Shikra *Accipiter badius* x Levant Sparrowhawk *A. brevipes*, Eilat, Israel, 2 May 1999. (Reuven Yosef)



Plates 2-5. Hybrid Shikra *Accipiter badius* x Levant Sparrowhawk *A. brevipes* (on left, except in Plate 2) and Levant Sparrowhawk (on right, except in Plate 2), Eilat, Israel, 2 May 1999. (Reuven Yosef)



Characters of Levant Sparrowhawk

The tail pattern had too many bands, there was no barring on the flanks and the underwing-coverts were too heavily marked for Shikra. In addition, the primary projection was too long for Shikra and the bird lacked the mesial throat stripe that is always found in juvenile Shikra. Further, Cramp & Simmons (1980) state that Shikra post-juvenile moult commences in May; this hawk had completed extensive moult of its body feathers.

Characters of Shikra

Examination of the wing formula showed that the 6th primary (p6) was notched. In addition, culmen and hallux size were larger than any male Levant Sparrowhawk.

Intermediate characters

The eye colour was the first characteristic that separated this hawk from the more than 80 Levant Sparrowhawks trapped the same morning. It was too orange for a juvenile Shikra and yet insufficiently dark for Levant Sparrowhawk. Further, the colour of the new back feathers were too dark for Shikra but too pale for Levant Sparrowhawk. The tail/wing ratio was 0.76 (see Labinger *et al.* 1991). This is within the upper range of those Levant Sparrowhawk trapped and their tail and wing measurements taken at Eilat (mean 0.72 ± 0.02 SD, range 0.64–0.76, N=202; RY, unpubl. data). Two additional individuals trapped during spring 2000 with orangish eyes had ratios of 0.72 and 0.71. However, analysis of their blood demonstrated that they matched samples previously collected at Eilat of Levant Sparrowhawk.

Given the above, we suspect that the mystery hawk from spring 1999 was a hybrid between Levant Sparrowhawk and Shikra. Their breeding ranges overlap in the south-west corner of the Caspian Sea. Dementiev & Gladkov (1951–54) mention hybrids between the two, with one such specimen in the Zoological Museum of the University of Moscow. Our mystery hawk appears to have more characters in common with Levant Sparrowhawk, so it could be a back-cross, that is, 3/4 Levant and 1/4 Shikra.

In the spring of 1996, WSC captured an adult Levant Sparrowhawk at Eilat that had reddish eyes. But, measurements and back colour were consistent with Levant and not Shikra, and the bird was passed off as an example of the former with a lack of pigment.

The complete mitochondrial cytochrome *b* gene of the 1999 bird was sequenced and compared to African *A. badius* and *A. brevipes* (migrants from Eilat). The putative hybrid differed from both by more than 5%, clearly indicating that neither *badius* nor *brevipes* can have been its mother (note that mtDNA is inherited maternally). The sequence also failed to match other *Accipiter* sequences obtained by AJH (*nisus*, *ovampensis* and *tachiro*). Material of Asian populations of *A. badius*, which might be quite divergent from the African form, were unavailable for comparison. So the possibility remains that an Asian *A. badius* was one of the parents of the putative hybrid.

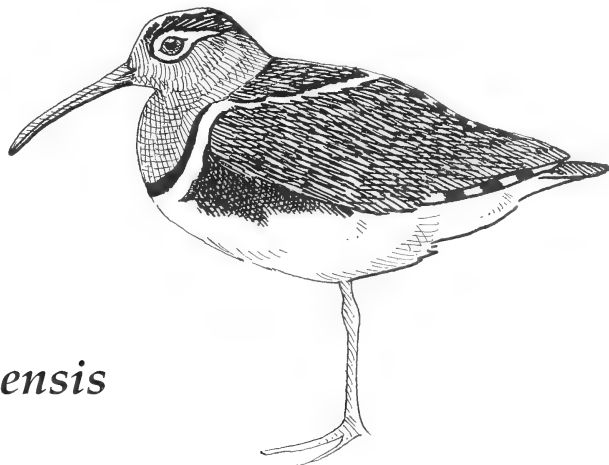
Hybrid raptors are not unknown, especially between congeners. Pierotti & Annett (1993) found that naturally occurring hybridisation between species within the same genus of raptors was 23% in Accipitrinae (9 hybrid / 40 species), 10% (40 / 4) in Buteoninae, 46% (6 / 13) in Milvinae and 12% (7 / 57) in Falconidae. There are several reports of interbreeding between Black *Milvus migrans* and Red Kites *M. milvus* (Sylvén 1977) and between Pallid *Circus macrourus* and both Montagu's *C. pygargus* and Hen Harriers *C. cyaneus* (Forsman 1993). Recently, reports from Italy of juvenile hybrids between Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* and Black Kite are convincing (Corso & Forsman 1997). In western North America there are reports of interbreeding between Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and Prairie Falcons *F. mexicanus*, and a nesting attempt in Texas between a mixed pair of Grey *Buteo nitidus* and Red-shouldered Hawks *B. lineatus* (WSC). WSC has also seen photographs of a *Buteo* with characters of both Rough-legged *B. lagopus* and Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawks *B. jamaicensis* (B. Wheeler pers. comm. to WSC), whose breeding ranges overlap in Alaska.

The hawk trapped at Eilat does not appear to be another species of raptor that might be expected in Israel, even as a vagrant. We are unable to explain its characters other than that it is a hybrid between Levant Sparrowhawk and Shikra.

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The first Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* in Jordan

PETE M. ELLIS AND KEN SHAW

ON THE MORNING OF 6 May 2000, we were birding at Aqaba sewage treatment plant, Jordan. While walking along a bund between two *Phragmites*-fringed lagoons, KS flushed a Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, which flew across the lagoon and landed out of sight behind the opposite bund. We rushed to the area where it had landed and almost immediately flushed it again. It flew across the lagoon and landed, again out of sight, in a small patch of *Phragmites* only c. 250 metres from the Israeli border. When we tried to re-find the bird, the border guards asked us to keep away from the border fence, preventing our relocating it. Our views were brief, but as PME had previous experience of the species we were confident of our identification. The record has been accepted by the Jordan Bird Records Committee.

Description

Similar in size to Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, with very broad rounded wings and a longish, obviously decurved bill (particularly at the tip). Upperparts remarkably uniform, quite dark grey-olive. In flight, the legs and quite large feet dangled slightly below the tail, adding to the Water Rail-like impression. It flew to the next lagoon (only 40 metres away) and turned, before landing, offering a brief, but good view of the broad white eye-ring and short, thick white stripe running behind the eye to the rear of the ear-coverts. Rest of head, breast and upperparts appeared fairly uniform dark. Striking buff shoulder braces either side of the upper mantle, becoming white and crossing the breast-sides to join the white belly. Primaries had a series of rows of pale round spots, but the upperwing-coverts were very uniform dark grey-olive. Bill and legs appeared greyish. The lack of any reddish on the neck suggests a male, but the uniform upperparts (especially the upperwing-coverts) indicate a first-summer female.

Distribution

Painted Snipe breeds in Africa, Asia and Australia, with the nearest breeding area in northern Egypt (Cramp & Simmons 1983). It is an irregular spring and summer visitor to swampy areas of north and west Israel, but there are surprisingly no records from Eilat (Shirihai 1996).

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The first European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* in Jordan

PETE M. ELLIS, KHALDOUN AL OMARI AND ANWAR EL HALAH

DURING EARLY AFTERNOON OF 3 December 2000, we were undertaking a wildfowl count at Qa al Azraq, Jordan, as part of a programme of wildfowl surveys organised by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). While counting waders on the mud flats at the north end of the qa, two European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* were located feeding among 135 Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. They were c. 400 metres away, but we watched them through telescopes for approximately an hour before they took off with the Lapwings and flew south until they were lost from sight. The record has been accepted by the Jordan Bird Records Committee.

Description

Typical plovers, with small heads, short bills and long legs. Slightly smaller, slimmer and proportionately longer legged and smaller headed than nearby Lapwings, but distinctly larger than Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, with a shorter less, broad-based bill. Legs proportionately longer than in Lapwing, but not as long as in Pacific Golden Plover and clearly did not project beyond the tail in flight. The relatively long range prevented us acquiring any detail on relative tertial and primary lengths.

Both had rather plain faces, lacking any prominent pale supercilia. Lores pale and they only had a faint eye-stripe and slightly darker ear-covert spot. Upperparts with dark-centred feathers, neatly spangled golden-yellow. No contrast between upperwing-coverts and scapulars/mantle, which is sometimes evident in Pacific Golden Plover. Underparts paler than upperparts, with whitish belly clearly contrasting with darker mottled breast. Pacific Golden Plover usually has more uniform underparts. In flight, upperwing had a clear whitish wingbar on the primaries and outer secondaries. Axillaries and underwing-coverts seen well when they flew and were pure white, very different from the grey axillaries and underwing-coverts of Pacific Golden Plover. They had dark eyes and dark grey bills and legs. They fed on the mudflats in typical plover fashion, by running, then stopping suddenly and picking food from the surface.

Distribution

European Golden Plover breeds from Iceland across northern Europe, north of 50°, to just over 100° east. It winters south and west, particularly in the British Isles, France, Belgium and Holland, with some reaching as far south as North Africa and western Morocco (Cramp & Simmons 1983). In Israel, it is fairly common in winter, with flocks of up to 300 recorded, and a rare passage migrant at Eilat in August–November (Shirihai 1996). The lack of previous records in Jordan is relatively surprising.

Pacific Golden Plover has been recorded in Jordan. Two were at Al Khirba Samra sewage works on 17 August 1990, with another or the same there on 24 August (Andrews 1995). An unidentified golden plover sp. (either *P. fulva* or *P. apricaria*) was at Aqaba sewage works on 26–27 April 2000 (I. J. Andrews pers. comm.).

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Does Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* breed in Turkey?

TIM MARLOW, GUY M. KIRWAN AND BURAK GÜNES

COMMON SNIPES *Gallinago gallinago* is primarily a winter visitor and passage migrant in Turkey (Kirwan *et al.* 1999). Kasperek (1992) mentions individual summer records and observations of displaying birds. The former publication unwittingly overlooked more recent observations from two areas (in northern and central Turkey) strongly indicating that the species should be considered part of the country's breeding avifauna.

Census work in Kızılırmak Delta during spring 1992, in which GMK participated, recorded *G. gallinago* throughout March–June, with peak numbers in March and the first half of April, when over 1000 were present. In May–June only small numbers (1–3) were observed, with displaying individuals recorded on several occasions, including once in June (Hustings & Dijk 1994). Because the species does not breed in Turkey, the latter authors concluded that that all must have been migrants.

We twice observed displaying *G. gallinago* during the Konya Basin Project (Eken & Magnin in prep.). Ten were noted in 'drumming-flights', between Eskil and Cihanbeyli shortly after dawn on 22 June 1998. A single was in 'drumming-flight' at Golyazi on the evening of 23 June 1998.

In north-west Europe, *G. gallinago* breeds in April–July, with egg-laying commencing at the end of May in Iceland. 'Drumming-flights' are undertaken over territories and are 'considered an important heterosexual activity' (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Indeed, territories are only defended from rivals that display; otherwise individuals are non-territorial and feeding areas communal (Cramp & Simmons 1983). It thus appears likely that the presence of 11 in 'drumming-flights' in late June indicates breeding. We suggest that *G. gallinago* should be regarded as a probable breeding species in Turkey.

Adamian & Klem (1999) consider *G. gallinago* a year-round resident in Armenia, with records in May–July echoing those from Turkey; six observations of small numbers (max. 24 on 3 June 1990), and breeding reported near Noratoos and the former Lake Gilli in the first third of the 20th century.

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The validity of *Monticola saxatilis coloratus* Stepanyan, 1964

GUY M. KIRWAN

MONTICOLA SAXATILIS COLORATUS was described by Stepanyan (1964) on the basis of four males collected at Hinis Kale, in the Bingöl Dağları, east Turkey. It is considered similar to nominate *saxatilis* but for the more saturated colour of the male, which possesses a deep rusty-red breast and undertail-coverts. The validity of this taxon was recently questioned by Roselaar (1995), who found that males from Verçenik, north-east Turkey and a single male specimen from Gürpınar, just south-east of Van Gölü, were identical to *M. s. saxatilis*, but he nonetheless construed a hypothetical range for *M. s. coloratus* in east Turkey, from near Iğdir, in the foothills of the Araş Valley, south to the Yüksekova region and west to the Bingöl Dağları. However, as remarked by M. Kasperek (*in litt.* 1998), Roselaar does not actually appear to map the type-locality of *coloratus* within this range. While questioning the validity of *coloratus*, Roselaar (1995) pointed to the unpublished information of Dufourny, that males on the Nemrut Dağı, near Tatvan, at the west end of Van Gölü, appeared very intensely coloured. Kasperek & Bilgin (1996), in a recent checklist of Turkey's birds, do not acknowledge *coloratus* and it was 'overlooked' by Kumerloeve (1984) in his review of avian taxa described from the country.

In the light of the above, it is worth recording the following observations that appear to confirm Roselaar's (1995) doubts. During early June 1997, I travelled extensively in east and north-east Turkey, recording *M. saxatilis* at four localities (total of 20 individuals, principally male) within the hypothetical range of *coloratus* as mapped by Roselaar (1995), and at a further six sites (14 birds, principally male) nearby and within the range of nominate *saxatilis*. All localities were within 200 km of the type-locality. All observed males, many of which permitted close and prolonged study, were carefully scrutinised, especially their underparts coloration. In no instances, within the supposed range of *coloratus*, did either males or females appear to differ in the field from nominate *saxatilis* observed during the same period. Indeed the only variation noted was an unusually drab and washed-out male at the Ovitdağ pass, south of Sivrikaya, north-east Turkey, on 11 June.

In addition, but largely circumstantially, I travelled widely in eastern Turkey in both June 1990 and May–June 1993, as well as through areas with breeding *M. saxatilis* in west and central Turkey in June–July 1990, April–June 1991, March–June 1992 and June 1996, and failed to note any observable plumage differences *in the field* between the two taxa described, though during these periods differences were not specifically searched for.

It must be stated that all of my results are based upon field observations, not museum studies (though these had been conducted by Roselaar, who initially questioned the validity of *coloratus* and called for further research), and that no observations from the Bingöl Dağları appear to have been published since Stepanyan's visit. Thus it has been impossible to compare directly his specimens with other individuals from the same area, or even directly adjacent localities due to the current political situation in the region. Nonetheless, it appears worthy of remark that no observable plumage differences could be identified between individuals from the two taxa's presumed ranges, when these were specifically

searched for. Further research, particularly in the under-explored Bingöl Dağları, is required to determine whether *coloratus* is a valid taxon under the Biological Species Concept.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Paul Doherty who provided me with the opportunity to conduct the June 1997 observations, as well as Doğal Hayatı Koruma Derneği, OSME and the Bird Exploration Fund who all funded my research in 1990–1993. Max Kasperek made a number of pertinent comments on an earlier version of the manuscript.

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A previously unreported, *Garrulus*-like plumage pattern in Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei*

TIZIANO LONDEI

ALTHOUGH LARGELY TERRESTRIAL, cursorial birds, the so-called ground jays (genus *Podoces*) have long been compared to the typical, arboreal jays of the genus *Garrulus* for plumage as well as other characteristics, and Amadon (1944) stated that they were derived from 'jays somewhat like the existing *Garrulus*'. However, Goodwin (1976) pointed out that all resemblances noted in the ground jays to various corvid lineages (*Garrulus*, *Nucifraga*, *Pica*) might be due to convergent evolution rather than common ancestry. Apparently no ground jay has been subject to DNA comparison, and there is a recent admission (Cibois & Pasquet 1999) that it is difficult to establish corvine intergeneric relationships through molecular comparison alone.

While searching the Internet for information concerning *Podoces*, I located an interesting photograph on the web site of Ecotour Iran Tour & Travel Agency (www.ecotour-iran.com/photo22.htm). It is an adult Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei* photographed at close range, at Marvast, Yazd province, Iran (by Bijan Farhang Darreh-shouri). This otherwise normally plumaged individual has a conspicuous barred pattern on the innermost secondaries (the only well-exposed flight feathers of its folded wings), alternating black and pale blue bars replacing the expected full black before the white tip of each feather.

The same barred pattern was also found in museum specimens of the species, though with less contrasting colours. Close examination of the four specimens held in the Natural History Museum (Tring) revealed the relevant feather tract to be extremely dark blue with black barring (G. M. Kirwan pers. comm.). However, Zarudny (1896), Hartert (1910), Amadon (1944), Goodwin (1976) and Madge & Burn (1994), who all

examined specimens, failed to report any barred pattern for this or the other three species of *Podoces*. Given the general scarcity of specimens the most likely explanation for this seeming incongruity is that only some populations, or individuals, within (one or more) species of *Podoces* possess the barred pattern in a detectable state.

Among corvids only two other genera, the Old World *Garrulus* and the New World *Cyanocitta*, possess barred flight feathers, and *Cyanocitta* has a different form of bars. All three species of *Garrulus* exhibit the same barred pattern on the wing as the *Podoces* in the photograph. Moreover, Jay *Garrulus glandarius* and Lanceolated Jay *G. lanceolatus* have similar-coloured bars, while Lanceolated Jay and Lidth's Jay *Garrulus lidthi* reveal the same model of barred secondaries with white tips. So exclusive similarity between *Podoces* and *Garrulus*, which are so different ecologically, might hardly be due to convergence. Common ancestry is the most likely explanation. The apparently highly variable conspicuousness of the barred pattern in Pleske's Ground Jay suggests the atavistic trait. Marvast is apparently marginal to the known range of the species (c.f. Madge & Burn 1994, Hamedanian 1997), and further work in the area is desirable.

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REVIEWS & Recent Literature

Shirihai, H., Gargallo, G., Helbig, A. J., Harris, A. & Cottridge, D. (2001) *Sylvia warblers: identification, taxonomy and phylogeny of the genus Sylvia*. A. & C. Black, London. pp 576, 20 colour plates, 97 pp of colour photographs, maps and line drawings, £60.00.

Sylvia warblers present a challenging identification problem for even the most experienced birdwatchers. This groundbreaking new book, the latest offering in the popular series of Helm identification guides, covers this genus in a level of detail previously unseen. It covers all members of the genus *Sylvia* and also the five species traditionally treated in the genus *Parisoma*, which are here subsumed within *Sylvia*. This work is the result of a long period of study and research dating back to 1984 and the result is quite simply stunning. The lengthy introduction includes sections on expected subjects and an interesting summary of the background to the research work. The characteristics of the genus are treated in some detail and an overview of the phylogeny and biogeography of the genus makes for fascinating reading, being full of interesting little snippets of information.

The taxonomic approach is a robust modern application of the Biological Species Concept, with a number of new allospecies being recognised as a result. Forms treated as new species here involve Asian *Sylvia nana* and African Desert Warbler *S. deserti*, Marmora's *S. sarda* and Balearic Warbler *S. balearica*, and Western *S. hortensis* and Eastern Orphee Warbler *S. crassirostris*. The authors also suggest that further study of Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans* may result in the elevation of the form *moltonii* to allospecies status in the future. The Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca* complex is considered to represent four separate species. Interestingly, the authors regard eastern populations of Lesser Whitethroat, *blythi*, as being insufficiently distinct to merit valid subspecies status and they have been included within nominate *curruca*.

The species accounts themselves set a new level of detail for such a publication and there is thoroughness not seen in other works in this series. Each account includes an introduction and then sections on field identification, voice, identification in the hand, subspecies taxonomy, moult, age and sex, general biology and ecology, population size and trends, and an appendix that summarises biometric data collected by the authors and those published elsewhere. With such a mass of information being presented, a very useful feature is the inclusion of boxed summaries detailing the main identification features and ageing and sexing criteria. The treatment of geographical variation is very thorough, with all forms treated exhaustively, while the range maps are detailed, very clear and easy to interpret. For each species there is a plate by Alan Harris depicting the various plumages and geographical variation. As usual with this artist, the standard is very high and these are as accurate a set of plates as you will ever see for this group. An attractive feature is the inclusion of field sketches showing the jizz and movement of each species. Each account also includes a series of photographs. Depicting as many plumages as possible, these are all very high-quality images and there are numerous stunning portraits of these most difficult to photograph birds.

No book is ever error free and reviewers tend to point to minor quibbles and errors. However, I was unable to find any worthy of comment in this scholarly work. This book sets a stunningly high new standard for the treatment of a genus. Quite simply there is as much information here as the average reader could possibly want to know and indeed probably a lot more! Despite its significantly higher price than other publications in the series, anyone with a serious interest in *Sylvia* warblers will want to own this work.

Chris Bradshaw

Stattersfield, A. J. & Capper, D. R. (eds.) (2000) *Threatened birds of the world*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona & BirdLife International, Cambridge, U.K. pp 851, numerous colour illustrations, colour distribution maps and colour charts, £75.

Detailed regional Red Data Books require lengthy preparation, thus the concept of the global checklist of threatened birds was devised to provide a regularly updated summary of data on the world's at-risk birds. This is the third such checklist and represents a significant development from its predecessors, *Birds to watch* and *Birds to watch 2*. *Threatened birds of the world* covers 1186 threatened species (the largest number yet) in detail, with distribution maps and illustrations for each, and includes the first full documentation of Near Threatened birds. Species classified as Data Deficient, Not Evaluated and Extinct are also included.

Introductory sections discuss extinction risk, its documentation and assessment. These are followed by the threatened species accounts, presenting information on range and population, ecology, threats and conservation. Heading each species account is its IUCN Red List category, followed by a summary of the rationale for its threatened status. Brief notes on identification, including similar species and voice then follow, along with taxonomic notes, and hints on how to see some species. Each species is illustrated in colour, with the majority of illustrations being reproduced from regional field guides etc. Full-colour distribution maps show species' estimated Extent of Occurrence (EOO), which was determined by plotting known localities and adding a projected range (suitable areas between known localities). Range size, population size, key habitats and principal threats are summarised, and priority actions for conservation complete each account.

For Lower Risk/Near Threatened species range, population and threats/potential threats are summarised and references given. For Data Deficient species the current state of knowledge is outlined and actions that may help clarify a species' true conservation status are suggested where appropriate (again with references). Species are also listed by territory at the back of the book, with maps and charts listing the number of species in each threat category occurring in each country.

Novel design features have been required to house such a remarkable volume of information. Bars use colours, codes and symbols to present critical details 'at a glance', e.g. population estimates are given within a bar, with arrows indicating trends and colour (red) indicating rapid decline. Careful design and use of colour have produced a book that is both attractive and supremely functional. The extensive reference list will ensure that this book is invaluable, not only as an efficient précis but as an unrivaled listing of contemporary work. In short anyone undertaking research on threatened birds will need this book, and anyone with a serious interest in avian conservation should have it.

Tim Marlow

ALSO RECEIVED

Fry, C. H., Keith, S. & Urban, E. K. (eds.) (2000) *The birds of Africa*. Volume 6. Academic Press, London. pp 724, 36 colour plates, numerous line drawings and distribution maps, £99.

The penultimate volume of *BoA*, as it is more or less affectionately known, builds on the increasingly high standards set in recent volumes, with improvements (or at least new designs) evident in several of its features. That *BoA* is the standard work on Afrotropical birds has long since been recognised and understood; the latest volume will not disappoint. Given the also increasing pace at which recent volumes have appeared we might be able to look forward to the final tome within just a few years. I am sure that the editors, at least, will breath a collective sigh of relief at that point. Meanwhile, just like *BWP*, which also matured and improved with age, *BoA* is currently going strong and should be winning new adherents, as well as retaining the support of most of those who bought the first volume nearly 20 years ago.

Guy M. Kirwan

del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Sargatal, J. (eds.) (2001) *Handbook of the birds of the world* Volume 6. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. pp 589, 45 colour plates, 385 colour photographs, 270 distribution maps, £115.

One of the problems in reviewing a series as good as this one is that you quickly exhaust the supply of superlatives. The foreword consists of a 31-page article on avian bioacoustics, which itself requires 12 pages of references. The editors are sufficiently dedicated to maintaining the quality of the series that Volume 6, as originally envisioned, has now been split across two volumes (6 and 7, with the latter scheduled for publication in approximately 18 months). The species covered in the present work—mousebirds to hornbills—are some of the most colourful of birds, and considering the number of high-quality photographs used to illustrate these, the net result has something of 'coffee-table book' appearance. Just keep buying the series, as it is the greatest!

Isenmann, P. & Moali, A. (2000) *Birds of Algeria*. SEOF, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. pp 336, 115 colour photographs, 210 distribution maps, FF240.

A bilingual book that mostly consists of the annotated checklist of 406 species. The colour photographs are for the most part good and descriptions of the main landscapes, history of Algerian ornithology, a gazetteer and a large bibliography are also included.

Ray Daniel

Kasperek, M. & Kinzelbach, R. (eds.) (2001) *Zoology in the Middle East* Volume 22. Kasperek Verlag, Heidelberg.

The latest volume contains two bird papers; one presents further DNA analysis of Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* populations in Asia, which provides additional support for the proposal that *macqueenii* and nominate *undulata* represent species-level taxa, while the second discusses the breeding bird community of Wadi Al-Kharrar in the Jordan Valley.

Guy M. Kirwan

Rouxel, R. (2000) *Snipes of the Western Palearctic*. *Migratory Birds of the Western Palearctic*, Saint-Yrieix. pp 304, FF 190.

This work constitutes a serious attempt to compile a compendium of existing knowledge of those snipes occurring in the Western Palearctic.

Ray Daniel

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Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse 24 (1)* should be sent, by 15 December, to *Around the Region*, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U.K.; or aroundtheregion@osme.org

Armenia

The highest count of **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* since 1928 was made on 30 July 2000 when 15 were at Armash fishponds, together with 50 **Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus ruber*, which was also the species' highest count. The second record of **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* in over 50 years involved four migrating over Tsovaguygh on 22 April 2000. A new breeding site for **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* was found at Spandarian on 30 May 2000, when 15–20 pairs were discovered breeding in an old building. An adult **Lanner Falcon** *F. biarmicus* at Mount Aragats on 15 June 2000 was the first record for over five years. An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* among Armenian Gulls *L. armenicus* at Armash fishponds on 13 May was the third record, and two **Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* at the same site on 1 June 1999 was also the third record. The second **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* was observed near Azat Reservoir on 23 May. Surprisingly, the first breeding records of **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* were obtained at Paghakn on 19 June 1998 and 26 May 2000. Five **Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides* were apparently breeding at Armash on 23 May, 6 and 10 June 2000; the second to fourth records. A singing male was again at Armash on 18 May. A flock of c. 70 **Alpine Chough** *Pyrrhocorax graculus* at Garni on 22 December 2000 was the first record for five years. There were c. 150 **Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* at Armash on 29 December 2000; the highest ever count. New observations have expanded the breeding range of **Pale Rock Sparrow** *Petronia brachydactyla* to cover the west of the republic south to Meghri. The first modern record of **Mongolian Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes mongolicus* involved three, possibly five observed singing and displaying near Vedi on 30 May, and three **Trumpeter Finch** *B. githagineus* at Mount Yeranos on 7 June 2000, represented a new site for the species.

Bahrain

A small colony of **Bridled Tern** *Sterna anaethetus* and 1000+ pairs of **Lesser Crested Tern** *S. bengalensis* were found on man-made islands north of Manama in early July. During February and March a pair of **Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* was observed near Zallaq, the first record for six years.

Cyprus

An immature **Gannet** *Morus bassanus* at Ladies Mile Beach on 11 April was a late date for this winter visitor. Over



Bee-eaters
Merops apiaster
by D. Powell

1000 **Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus ruber* at Larnaca Salt Lake in late June was a seasonally unprecedented number, and it has been suggested that drought conditions at their breeding site in Iran (Lake Uromiyeh) were responsible. An adult **Heuglin's Gull** *Larus (argentatus) heuglinii* was at Famagusta on 22 January. A male **Stonechat**, *Saxicola torquata variegata* at Cape Greco on 15–16 March is the first accepted description of this form. In May–June **Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala* was discovered to be breeding over at least 80 km² in the Kyrenia range. Singing males have been reported from this area for ten years, and 4000 pairs are now estimated to be breeding. The 8–9th records of **Desert Warbler** *S. nana* were at Cape Greco on 13 April and Paphos Lighthouse on 18 April. Two **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* were recorded: single males at Paphos Lighthouse on 31 March and Aspro Dam Pools on 13 April, these are the 9–10th records. The fourth **Steppe Grey Shrike** *L. (meridionalis) pallidirostris* was also at Paphos Lighthouse from at least 7 December 2000 until early April. A **Pale Rock Sparrow** *Petronia brachydactyla* at Ayios Georgios on 6 May is the seventh island record.

Egypt

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus* was discovered nesting north of Nag Hamadi Barrage, on the Nile, representing an in-country northward extension of its breeding range. The **Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiacus* at Sharm el Sheikh sewage farm, south Sinai was still present on 30–31 March and another was at Wadi El Rayan on 26 May. A colony of 10–15 **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus* nesting north of Edfu on 7 May is considerably south of its known range.

Iran

Following the discovery of the first **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* in Iran in 1998, the second was 20 km north-west of Minab on 13 March and another was 20 km west of Minab in mid-April. The third and fourth records of **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* concern a dark adult over date gardens at Roodhan and an immature near Bandar Abbas in mid-April. The species was first recorded in Iran as recently as December 1999 (also near Bandar Abbas), but it has been recorded at least twice since then, suggesting that it has become a regular visitor. An **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* at Nikshar, south-east Baluchistan on 27 March is the second record. A male

Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* was claimed at Garmit, Rud-e Sarbaz region on 28 March and, if documented, will be the first Middle Eastern record.

Israel

Two adult **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* were at Eilat on 17 June, and one (possibly one of the same) was in the same place on 20 June. **Scaup** *Aythya marila* is a vagrant in Israel, so a male among Tufted Duck *A. fuligula* at Hula Reserve on 20 March is significant. It was an exceptional spring for **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus*: 43 were recorded at Eilat or in the southern Arava between 24 April and 22 May, with a male in the Bet Shean valley on 2 May, a female near Nizzana on 28 April and one over Jerusalem on 24 May. A **Lappet-faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotos* migrated north among **Honey Buzzards** *Pernis apivorus* at Eilat on 21 May. The most recent observations of this former breeder were two exhausted birds found in 1996 and 1998. Twenty-one **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* moving through Eilat on 27 April is a new spring peak for Israel and unusually late. On the same day, 11 immature **Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* were recorded over Eilat, which equals the previous spring record (on 25 February 1977). A winter-plumaged **Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* at Eilat on 22 May will be the second or third country record if accepted (a previous record is still under consideration). An exceptional six **Knot** *Calidris canutus* were reported at Ma'agan Mikhael on 28 April and a **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicaria* was at Eilat on 7–11 April, with perhaps the same individual at Tirat-Tsvi fish ponds, Bet Shean Valley on 15 April. Terns recorded at Eilat during spring included one **Swift** *Sterna bergii*, three **Lesser Crested** *S. bengalensis*, 6–7 **White-cheeked** *S. repressa* and 11 **Bridled Terns** *S. anaethetus*. Of greater interest were two, apparently adult, **Saunders's Tern** *S. saundersi* among Little Terns *S. albifrons* at Eilat on 13 May, which would constitute the third country record if accepted. A female **Black-crowned Finch Lark** *Eremopterix nigriceps* near Retamim on 8 April was the first in the northern Negev and the first country record since 1988. Similarly, a **Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunni* south-west of Ze'elim on 14 March was the first record in the northern Negev; elsewhere, there was one at Eilat on 16 March. Outside its usual range, a **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** *Ammomanes cincturus* at Ze'elim on 14 March was the first record in this area.



Plate 1. Black Bush Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*, Hai-Bar Nature Reserve, Yotvata, Israel, 12 April 2001. (Michaël Collard)

A **Bimaculated Lark** *Melanocorypha bimaculata* adjacent to the Egyptian border road, 60 km north of Eilat on 25 June is an exceptional date away from its breeding areas. A late male **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* was ringed at Jerusalem Bird Observatory on 8 June. Unusually, a male **Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella* at Lotan on 16 April was the latest spring record in the country and the first spring record in the southern Arava.

Jordan

Two **Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* at Azraq on 17 April is noteworthy. An adult **Verreaux's Eagle** *Aquila verreauxii* at Wadi Rum on 21 February is likely to be one of the resident pair in the Rum Desert. Three **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* at Aqaba on 25 April was a typical date for this scarce spring migrant. Three adult **Siberian White Crane** *Grus leucogeranus* reported at Qa Khanna, near Azraq on 2 February will, if accepted, be the first country record. The first record of **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse** *Pterocles lichtensteinii* involved a pair south of Rahma on 30 March. Two female **Cyprus Warbler** *Sylvia melanothorax* at Wadi al Mujib on 24 February was a rare report of this winter visitor. At Wadi Butm the first (subject to acceptance) **Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus nitidus* in Jordan was present on 17 April.

Kazakhstan

An immature **Siberian White Crane** *Grus leucogeranus* was video-taped at Ovrage Karasu, north of Zhuldyz, in northern Kazakhstan on 30 September 2000. A second-year, it was accompanied by two adult Common Cranes *G. grus*. The last observation of the species in this area dates from mid-October 1978, when six were in the same area. Note that records of **White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* and **Dalmatian Pelican** *P. crispus* listed in *Sandgrouse* 23: 76 relate to Uzbekistan.

Kuwait

Records of **Grey Ardea cinerea** and **Western Reef Herons Egretta gularis** breeding in the Bubiyan Channel are the first for many years. The three **Greylag Goose Anser anser** were still in Sulaibikhat Bay on 18 January and the **Common Crane Grus grus** there, present since 30 December 2000, was still present on 8 March. **Greater Sand Plover Charadrius leschenaultii** was confirmed breeding at Sabah Al-Salem for the second year, following a nesting attempt in late May 2000. Ten **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse Pterocles alchata** at Burgan on 20 February is only the third record since 1992. On 4 May, **White-breasted Kingfisher Halcyon smyrnensis** was discovered breeding at Jahra (the first such record in Kuwait and Arabia) and **White-winged Black Tern Chlidonias niger** was also confirmed to breed there during this period. Also confirmed breeding for the first time was **Spanish Sparrow Passer hispaniolensis** in the National Park. A male **Yellow-throated Sparrow Petronia xanthocollis** was at Ras Az Zor, the site of the first breeding record in Kuwait (April 2000), in late April and two juveniles were seen at Jahra in late May. The 12–13th records of **Trumpeter Finch Bucanetes githagineus** involved a pair at Jal Az Zor on 1 January and four near Jahra on 4 January. Thirty-six **Ortolan Bunting Emberiza hortulana** near Jahra on 6 April is the largest flock since 1983.

Lebanon

Bittern Botaurus stellaris is a rare migrant and one at Aammq marshes, Bekaa Valley on 12 May was very late. Two **Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus** at Cheikh Zennad, north of Tripoli on 6 May represent the c. 6th record. A **Spotted Redshank Tringa erythropus** was also there on 19 January, and the 5–6th records of **Great Black-headed Gull Larus ichthyaetus** involved three at Cheikh Zennad on 19 January, followed by at least 24, including several summer-plumaged adults at Lake Qaroun, southern Bekaa on 25 January. On the same day significant numbers of large gulls here confirmed that the vast majority of inland wintering birds are **Armenian Gull L. armenicus**. Much smaller numbers of nominate **Yellow-legged Gull L. cachinnans**, often known as Pontic Gull, were also present. This is believed to be the first time these gulls have been studied in detail in Lebanon. Several **Great Spotted Cuckoo Clamator glandarius** in woods above Aammq, from 19 May, including adults and young juveniles, confirmed breeding for the first time. At least three **Little Swift Apus affinis**

near the Hasbani River, south-east Bekaa, were in suitable nesting habitat. Despite much suitable habitat in northern Bekaa near El Qaa being turned over to agriculture, three **Temminck's Horned Lark Eremophila bilopha** were singing and a pair was observed mating in the foothills of the Anti-Lebanon near there on 17 March. A male **Stonechat Saxicola torquata variegata** at Aammq marshes on 8 March was only the fourth record of this race. A pair of **Mourning Wheatear Oenanthe lugens** carrying nesting material, and a territorial male, were in the foothills of the Anti-Lebanon near El Qaa on 17 March; the species' status is uncertain, with only one documented record from 1996, and this is the first breeding record. Several male **Ménétries's Warbler Sylvia mystacea** were near El Qaa, northern Bekaa on 17 March, and at Aammq marshes on 22 March. A male **Semi-collared Flycatcher Ficedula semitorquata** was at Aammq marshes on 18–19 March (eighth record). Approximately 12 **Palestine Sunbird Nectarinia osea** were at Jounieh, 15 km north of Beirut on 1 October 2000–26 January. The first-winter **Isabelline Shrike Lanius isabellinus** first seen at Aammq marshes, on 15 November 2000 was last seen on 27 December when it appeared to have been injured by shotgun pellets. Another was at Aammq marshes on 28 February. A pair of **Raven Corvus corax** was at Mount Sannine, near Zahle on 23 February, and one was occasionally seen at Jebel Aarabi on 2–24 March. An invasion of **Brambling Fringilla montifringilla** occurred, with flocks of up to 85 present in January at several locations in the Bekaa Valley; 2–3 individuals are more typical. Some remained until 23 March. An adult male and at least two female/young male **Pine Bunting Emberiza leucocephalos** were at Mount Sannine, Bekaa Valley on 7 February (the first record away from Aammq marshes). Just outside Beirut there was c. 12 **Cretzschmar's Bunting E. caesia** at Warwar on 20–24 April.

Oman

An adult **Red-footed Booby Sula dactylatra** was photographed at Khaluf on 8 March (the second record, the first was in August 1979), while a **Black-headed Heron Ardea melanocephala** at East Khor on 20 March was the third record, the last having been seen there in the spring 2000. A **Bittern Botaurus stellaris** at Al Ansab Lagoons on 22 March was relatively late, and the third record of **Black Stork Ciconia nigra** was one in the same place on 3 August, while a

Fulvous Whistling Duck Dendrocygna javanica at East Khor on 29 June was the second record. A **Red-knobbed Coot Fulica cristata** at Wadi Darbat on 16 March was the third record. Two **Sociable Plover Vanellus gregarius** were at Sohar Sun Farm on 19–22 December 2000. The long-staying **Long-billed Dowitcher Limnodromus scolopaceus** at Sohar from October 2000 was joined by another on 22 December 2000, and the original bird remained until 23 March. The fourth **Pectoral Sandpiper Calidris melanotos** was at Khor Hourri on 7 January. A **Grey Phalarope Phalaropus fulicaria** at As Sawda on 18 February was the tenth record, while a **Common Gull Larus canus** at Dibba on 8 January and another at Masirah on 9 March represent the 7–8th records. New for Oman was **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse Pterocles alchata**, a female/immature being seen at Sohar on 22 December; there are few records in the Gulf, and sightings in neighbouring UAE are thought to relate to introduced birds. **Rufous Turtle Dove Streptopelia orientalis** is a rare autumn passage migrant; two at Sunub Dump on 23 March is the first record in that month. Significant were two **White-collared Kingfisher Halcyon chloris kalbaensis** at Shinas mangrove on 19 December; this localised race is found mainly around Khor Kalba, UAE, and may number fewer than 50 individuals. Four **Oriental Skylark Alauda gulgula** at Sohar on 22 December represent the sixth record; the first was as recent as 1996. The third record of **Brown-throated Sand Martin Riparia paludicola** was of two at Al Ansab Lagoons on 18 May (the last was in 1977). A **Meadow Pipit Anthus pratensis** at Montasar on 17 March was the sixth record. The **Robin Eriothacus rubecula** was still at Qatbeet on 5 January and another was on the Sayh Plateau, Musandam on 17–19 January (2–3rd records, the first was in 1982). Seven **White-throated Robin Irania gutturalis** on the Sayh Plateau on 24 April was a maximum count for the country and at the same site there were three **Eversmann's Redstart Phoenicurus erythronotus** on 17 January, with one at Wadi Sal al A'la on 19 January. A **Finsch's Wheatear Oenanthe finschii** (fourth record) was at the Sayh Plateau on 22 April. Seven singing **Booted Warbler Hippolais caligata rama** were at Shinas on 6 March; one was carrying nesting material. Three **Red-headed Bunting E. bruniceps** on Sayh Plateau on 22 April will be the first record if accepted, while an adult male **Cretzschmar's Bunting E. caesia** at Qatbeet on 15 March is the



Plate 2. Adult male Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*, Mansouriyah, Saudi Arabia, 15 March 2001. (Per Anders Bertilsson)

second record.

Saudi Arabia

At Sabkha al-Fasl there were five **Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* on 1 December 2000 and **Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* was present at the same site from 1 December 2000 to 30 March, with record numbers from late February (e.g. 1172 on 23 February, 1302 on 6 March and maxima of 1420 on 2 and 16 March); the influx was possibly a result of falling water levels at natural playa lakes elsewhere in Eastern Province. One of the most interesting records in the period was a **Pallas's Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* on 2 January at Bada'ya in Qassim region. An unseasonal **Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* was at Jubail on 14–15 December 2000. A **Knot** *Calidris canutus* in almost full breeding plumage at Daman, Eastern Province, on 11 May, was the third record for the country. A **Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus* was at a wastewater oasis near Arabian Homes for two weeks in late January and early February, and a **White-breasted Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis* was at Lake Yanbu on 25 January, with another at Jubail on 1 December 2000. Other interesting records (mainly in Central Province) included at least ten **Bank Mynah** *Acridotheres ginginianus* at Mansouriyah on 18 January, with a **White-breasted Kingfisher** also there, while another was at Al Hair on 18 January–3 May at least. Two **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* were at Al Safi Dairy Farm, Al Kharj on 25 January, along with at least 87 **Spur-winged Plover** *Hoplopterus spinosus*; this is a large congregation. Some overwintering and breeding was confirmed in early July 2000, when two chicks were seen. Also present was a female **Merlin** *Falco columbarius*, a rare bird in the country. A **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* was between Yanbu al-Bahr and Yanbu al-Nakhl on 1 June and a **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* at Dhahran on 26 April; both are scarce migrants through Saudi. A male **Spotted Sandgrouse** *Pterocles*

senegallus north-west of Hafr, near the Iraqi border, on 12 January was the first record from this part of Arabia and seven **Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* were east of Hafr on the same date. Two **Hume's Tawny Owl** *Strix butleri* were calling at Wadi Howtah on 1 February, and another was heard at Raydah Escarpment, near Abha, South-West Province. **Black-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis* is scarce and irregular in winter; a sub-adult male of the *atrogularis* race at Thumamah on 19 April is of interest, and a **Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* at Deffi Park, Jubail on 9 January suggests the species is almost annual in this area. Given the availability of suitable habitat, a **Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopoogon* at Dhahran on 10 May was perhaps prospecting; the species possibly breeds at Jubail. Five **Corn Bunting** *Miliaria calandra* were at Thumamah on 8 March, with a male and female/immature **Cretzschmar's Bunting** *Emberiza caesia*. A male **Red-headed Bunting** *E. bruniceps* was at Mansouriyah on 15 March (see Plate 2) and another male there on 5 May. Several sightings were made of **Streaked Weaver** *Ploceus manyar* nest-building along Riyadh watercourse from 15 March, and a male was singing at Dhahran on 14 September 2000.

Syria

A visit to Ras al-Bassit on 28 April 2000 revealed a **Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* on a small island, which is apparently the first country record. Also of note there on the same day was a **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media*, which is a rare passage migrant.

Turkey

A **Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellata* was at Mert Gölü (near the Bulgarian border) on 20 January. **Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena* is a fairly common summer visitor but very rare in winter, thus one at Kızıllırmak Delta on 29 October 2000 is significant. Two **Red-breasted Geese** *Branta ruficollis*

were at Mert Gölü on 20 January. Numbers of **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* at Burdur Gölü remain well down from early 1990s counts: there were 791 on 11 December 2000, increasing to 1320 by mid-February. At the same site were at least 1138 **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*. An unusual sighting at Mert Gölü, near Igneada was two first-year **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* on 20 January, with one remaining until 3 February; though a common passage migrant and scarce summer visitor, there are no previous winter records. A survey on 15 April at Moğan Gölü revealed two **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus*, which is only a vagrant in the country.

United Arab Emirates

An **Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia* of the nominate race was near Dubai sewage works on 25 June–1 July, being the second record (the previous was at Ramtha tip, Sharjah in January 1995). Two **Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* were on the sea off Jumeirah beach, Dubai on 6 April (the fourth record). Groups of up to five **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* were at Sharjah rubbish dump, Wimpey pits, Dubai and Al Wathba marsh until late January, then up to two were at Wimpey pits from 27 February, with three there on 2 March and one until at least 10 March. Four at nearby Sharjah dump on 6 March were presumably some of the same. The sixth **Cotton Teal** *Nettapus coromandelianus* was at Sharjah rubbish dump on 28 December 2000–1 February. A **Marbled Teal** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* (one of two first seen on 22 December 2000) remained near Dubai sewage works until 4 February, and was then at Sharjah rubbish dump on 9 February (third record). The 23–24th records of **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* were two on Abu Dhabi Island, Mushref Palace Gardens and Al Manhal areas (last seen on 13 January) and one at Manhal Gardens, Abu Dhabi on 19 March. **Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* is a rare migrant and one on 15–30 June in fields near Dubai sewage plant is the first summer record. The second **White-eyed Buzzard** *Butastur teesa* was at Emirates golf course on 15 February–9 March. The single **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* was still at Al Wathba on 15 March (having been present sporadically since 24 November 2000). An adult **Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor* was near Dubai sewage plant on 21 June; the species is rarely seen on the mainland and this is apparently the first record for Dubai. A **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* at Emirates

golf course on 7 February–11 May is the 14th record. A **Baillon's Crane** *Porzana pusilla* was at Wimpey pits, Dubai on 11 May, and at the same site the seventh **Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio porphyrio* stayed on 30 March–21 May. **European Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* is a rare migrant in the Gulf, thus one at Emirates golf course on 5 April was noteworthy. Present since 24 November 2000, a **Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* remained at Al Wathba until 3 March (15th record). Single **Caspian Plovers** *Charadrius asiaticus* were near Dubai sewage works on 19 April and Khor Dubai on 28 June. Over 150 **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* were on the Hayl Islands (off Abu Dhabi) on 25 February, while singles at Jumeirah, Dubai in late February and at Khor Dubai on 8–9 March were the first records in Dubai Emirate. A **Long-toed Stint** *C. subminuta* at Wimpey pits on 28 June–6 July was the 19th record. There were two sightings of **Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* bringing total records to four: one at Qurrayah pools, Fujairah on 6 March, and another at Khor Kalba on 27 March. Other significant gull sightings were up to seven **Little Gull** *Larus minutus* at Das Island on 1–4 March (ninth record); a **Common Gull** *L. canus* at Qurrayah pools on 6 March (11th record); and single **Brown-headed Gulls** *L. brunnicapillus* at Fujairah beach on 7 March and Sharjah on 26–28 March (5–6th records). An unsubstantiated sighting of a **Lesser Noddy** *Anous tenuirostris* off Kalba beach on 19 March would be the second record if accepted, as would be a report of two **Common Noddy** *A. stolidus* off Ras Dibba on 20 April. A **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* at Ramtha on 29 March is the seventh record in the northern Emirates. A **Sykes' Nightjar** *Caprimulgus mahratensis* was found in irrigated fields near Dubai sewage works on 4 February (see photograph in *Dutch Birding* 23: 99), with two at Al Wathba on 9 February, of which one remained until 28 February; these are the first and

second records in Arabia of a species resident in south-east Iran, southern Afghanistan and Pakistan, with some winter dispersal to western India. A **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* of the race *diluta* (sometimes known as Pale Martin) was still at Al Wathba on 3 March (present since 20 October 2000); the third record of this race. A **Black Bush Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* at Das Island from 8/9 April into early May is the third record, while also there was a **White-crowned Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga* in early May; if accepted this will be the 11th record. Also on Das, a **Blackbird** *Turdus merula* on 26 February was the 20th record. The 13–14th records of **Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* were singles at Dubai sewage works on 25 December 2000 and 5 January. The 12th record of **Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina* was at Emirates golf course on 12 April. **Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea* is annual in spring, and one was in Abu Dhabi on 5 April.

Uzbekistan

Records of 972 **White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at Adyar Lake on 6–7 April 2000 and 114 **Dalmatian Pelican** *P. crispus* at Tudakal Lake on 8 April were listed as being in Kazakhstan, but both localities are in Uzbekistan, and the delta is the Amu Darya delta (see *Sandgrouse* 23: 76). Important was the discovery of a new wintering site for **Common Crane** *Grus grus* on the border with Afghanistan/Turkmenistan. Most significant was **Slender-billed Curlew** *Numenius tenuirostris* on migration in the Aral Sea region; several were tentatively identified in 2000, but in spring 2001 there was a sighting of two.

Yemen

Avifaunal work on Socotra on 8–29 December 2000 yielded the following. Three **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* and a **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*, both scarce passage migrants, were at Erhina lagoons on 28th. An

Intermediate Egret *E. intermedia* at Qadub on 24th was the first island record. A juvenile **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* was at Erhina lagoons on 27th. Also there were two **Garganey** *Anas querquedula* on 9th and three on 27–28th, a **Shoveler** *A. clypeata* on 9th and 28th, a **Pochard** *Aythya ferina* on 9th, three **Ferruginous Duck** *A. nyroca* on 9th and 27–28th and a male **Tufted Duck** *A. fuligula* (no previous records) on 27–28th. Two **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* were near Denegen on 9th, a single at Firiji on 12th and another at Wadi Ayhaft on 12th. A probable **Little Crane** *Porzana parva* (not previously recorded on Socotra) was flushed on Dixem Plateau, on 27th. Two **Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* (a vagrant) were at Sok lagoons 28th. A total of 17 **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* was recorded at various localities during the period. Eight **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* were at Erhina lagoons on 9th and two at Diham on 21st. Single **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* were at Firiji on 12th, Wadi Ayhaft on 23rd and Erhina lagoons on 27th. Three or four **White-browed Coucal** *Centropus superciliosus* were at Firishi on 10–12th and one south of Hadibu on 26th. **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus* was recorded at Denegen (one on 10th), Handak (on 15th), Wadi Ayhaft (ten on 23rd) and near Hadibu (one on 26th). A **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* was at Handak on 15th. **African Rock Martin** *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* was seen at only two sites: one at 1000 metres near Firishi, on 11th and four at c. 800 metres in Wadi Firiji, on 12th. A **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* was at Hadibu on 9th. A **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* was at Wadi Da Asroh on 13th, a **Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* was on Dixem Plateau on 27th and a **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochrurus* was at Ras Momi on 25th. Nine to ten **Isabelline Wheatears** *Oenanthe isabellina* were recorded at several localities and two **Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* were with Socotra Starlings *Onychognathus frater* at Hayf on 14th.

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SANDGROUSE

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