SANDGROUSE

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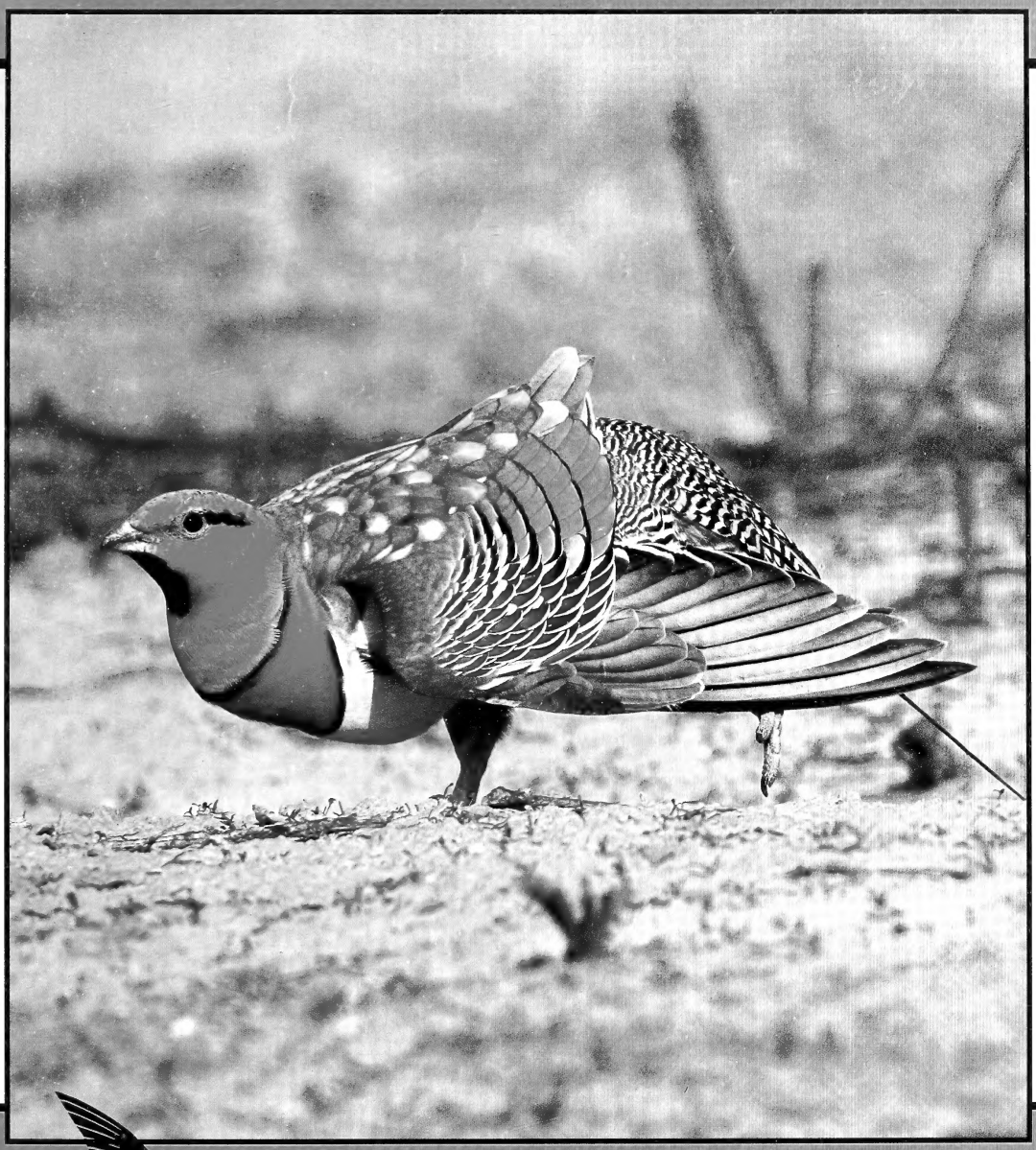

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST,
CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

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.

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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 45 projects since the Conservation & Research Fund was set up in 1982.

MEBirdNet Email Discussion Group

This is an e-mail mailing list (moderated by OSME) that discusses birds and birdwatching in the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia. Subjects include research, conservation, bird news, recent records, identification, requests for information and exchange of information. To join the mailing list, send an empty e-mail to: MEBirdNet-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

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Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* wing-stretching, near Kibbutz Revivim in the Negev, Israel, 1 Mar 06. © Rony Livne.

EDITORIAL

There are three separate subjects warranting editorial comment for this issue.

Firstly, this issue contains an Iranian theme, much along the lines of the recent Syrian theme that was spread over several issues. It is timely to remind ourselves that not only does 'Ramsar' come from the seminal conservation meeting in that city, but that Iran possesses and manages a huge number of important reserves, many of which are IBAs of long standing. On the world political scene, Iran has experienced a great deal of international and internal turbulence over the last 40 years, but despite that, it is entirely to its credit that conservation work continued throughout that period. Difficulties there certainly have been, particularly in conservation funding and policy implementation, but the nature of these has been typical rather of the bureaucratic delays and lack of understanding familiar to anyone in Europe rather than due to factors specific to Iran. Iran has a vital part to play as a leader in conservation generally within the OSME Region, being at its heart. Its role in research into and protection of the many migrant bird species will be of continuing interest to *Sandgrouse* readers. The next issue of *Sandgrouse* will also contain Iranian paper.

Secondly, OSME is launching an Internet companion to *Sandgrouse*, called *Webgrouse*, and it will appear on the OSME website at www.osme.org. *Webgrouse* is intended to help OSME accommodate the increased number of papers submitted, but primarily will be aimed at those papers whose urgency or immediacy would benefit from prompt publication. News items may also appear in *Webgrouse*, but under the caveat that they should not be treated as formal references for citation. However, all papers appearing in *Webgrouse* will be subject to the same editorial and refereeing process as those in *Sandgrouse*. Authors may request a preference for publication in *Sandgrouse* or *Webgrouse*, but as it is the Editor's decision whether or nor to accept a paper, it is also the Editor's final decision as to where it should be published. *Webgrouse* item numbers will follow consecutively throughout the year and so a paper could be described thus, '2006–01'. There will be a constantly updated Contents page.

Thirdly, there is increased interest in having material of interest to OSME translated into languages from the OSME Region (see *OSME News*, this issue). OSME supports this concept whole-heartedly, but the extent to which it can be achieved depends greatly on the willingness of volunteers who are capable of translating material to do so in their spare time. OSME can fund only a few of the more important projects, and these depend in turn on sponsorship. Anyone who considers a *Sandgrouse* paper important enough to have it translated into a language from the OSME Region is welcome to contact us at any of the addresses given elsewhere, for initial discussion. Authors should note that OSME reserves the right to authorise translation of any Sandgrouse paper into another language, but does not intend to do so without consultation!

Mike Blair

ERRATA

1. Our apologies go to Assad Serhal, who has just been appointed to the BirdLife Council, for describing his appointment incorrectly in Around the Region in *Sandgrouse* 28 (1). He is of course Director General of the Society for Protection of Nature in Lebanon. We also apologise to any individual or organisation affected by our error.

2. A picture was duplicated in *Sandgrouse* 28 (1). Plate 1 on page 77 illustrating the 'First documented case of Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* breeding in an open nest in Israel' (© Ronen Vaturi), by Motti Charter and Yossi Leshem was also printed as Plate 1 on page 45, in the paper 'Colonisation of the Middle East by the invasive Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis L.*, with special reference to Israel', by Claus Holzapfel, Noam Levin, Ohad Hatzofe and Salit Kark. The latter picture should have been of a Common Myna in Park HaYarkon (© Martina Petrů). We apologise to the authors and photographers concerned. The Myna picture is reproduced here.

Plate 1. This picture was incorrectly superseded by a duplicated picture in Sandgrouse 28 (1). Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in Park HaYarkon, Tel Aviv, Israel. © *Martina Petrů*, 12 December 2003.

OSME News

OSME SUMMER MEETING

OSME's Summer Meeting and 28th Annual General Meeting was held in London on 29 July. About 40 members attended the meeting to hear a variety of talks. David Murdoch updated members on bird conservation initiatives in Syria following his sixth visit there in the spring. In particular he focused on the need to encourage more people to visit Syria and use local guides, and the importance of providing materials to local people within the country. Roy Beddard spoke about Armenia, a destination not covered in previous Summer Meetings. Being located in the Lower Caucasus Mountains and situated between the Black and Caspian Seas, Armenia is an extremely important area for migratory and breeding species of high mountains and sub-desert habitats. Roy's talk covered a number of key sites including Lake Arpi, Lake Sevan, Mount Aragats and Armash Fishponds. Another new destination was Turkmenistan, and Mark Calderbank shared his experiences having lived and worked there for many years. In particular he focused on the Kopetdagh region. After lunch and the AGM, George Gregory gave us a tour of Kuwait. With approximately 550km of coastline, Kuwait has important islands for breeding seabirds. Most famous amongst these is Bubiyan, the largest island. Steve Rooke talked about birding the Silk Road through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan – two increasingly popular destinations. Finally Paul Doherty showed video footage from several recent autumn trips to northern Israel.

NEW OSME VICE PRESIDENTS

We are delighted to welcome four new Vice Presidents. Sherif Baha el Din of Egypt has kindly agreed to a second spell, having

previously been a Vice President from 1994–2004. Apart from being a respected ornithologist he is also leading Egypt's research to conserve the country's endangered reptiles. Samer Mouasher is a prominent ornithologist in Jordan and runs a tour operation. His late father, Anis Mouasher was President of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation and was an OSME Vice President from 1998 to 2001. Ramaz Gokhelashvili is Director of the Georgian Centre for the Conservation of Wildlife and is developing many projects to engage local people in wildlife conservation with books, posters and leaflets, aiming particularly at students. Ali bin Amer Al Kiyumi is Director General of Nature Conservation in the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment in Oman. In particular he is renowned for his initiatives to help protect nesting turtles. We are very grateful to these people – and indeed all our Vice Presidents – for their advice and guidance on conservation issues within the region.

CHANGES TO OSME COUNCIL

At the 2006 AGM Dawn Balmer came to the end of her term of office. Having joined Council in 2000, Dawn took on responsibility for OSME's publicity the following year. She subsequently agreed to act as Vice Chairman as well. While we are sorry to see Dawn leave the Council, we wish her well, particularly as just weeks after the AGM she was due to give birth! We are pleased to welcome Chris Lamsdell, Dominic Mitchell, Richard Prior and Steve Rooke as new members of Council. Chris, a forensic scientist by profession, has been particularly active with BirdLife Cyprus and currently runs their website. Dominic is well-known as the Editor of the monthly magazine *Birdwatch*, and Steve is Managing Director of leading UK bird tour operator (and OSME Corporate Member), Sunbird. They bring a wealth of birding experience and enthusiasm to Council. As no volunteers have stepped forward to take the role of Treasurer, John Warr has again agreed to continue in this important role which he first took on in 1999.

NEW OSME COUNTRY CONTACT IN TAJIKISTAN

We are very pleased that Raffaël Ayé has agreed to act as our country contact in Tajikistan. He is based in Dushanbe and is happy to hear from visiting birders. He can be contacted by email: raffael.aye@birding.ch

NEW ARABIC FIELD GUIDE NOW PUBLISHED

The Arabic version of Birds of the Middle East has had a long gestation period. Since the translation into Arabic by Saeed Mohamed, an OSME Vice President, the problem has been in finding sponsors for the publication's production and printing. This was finally achieved and in July 2006 (exactly ten years after the English version was published) the book was to be launched in Beirut by its publisher's the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon. The recent crisis in the country has delayed the launch indefinitely. 5000 copies have been printed and 2500 will be distributed free to schools, universities, conservation bodies and government departments in the Middle East. The remainder will be sold with the profits going towards conservation in the Middle East. The major funding for the book has come from the Dutch Embassy in Beirut and from the World Land Trust. With generous support from Swedish tour operator Avifauna, OSME was pleased to pay for the plates and other artwork in the book to be digitised. The sale price is $40 and copies will at some time in the future be obtainable from OSME via our website.

LATE NEWS

Steve Moldovan has agreed to become the OSME Country Contact in Egypt. His e-mail address is idegenvezeto@yahoo.com. OSME Council thanks Mindy Baha el Din for her time in this role.

Keith Betton

NEWS & INFORMATION

compiled by Dawn Balmer & Keith Betton

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, UK, or send it to the appropriate e-mail address shown inside the front cover.

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.

ARABIA

ABBA records for 2006

It is likely that 2006 will be the last breeding season that is added to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia database before publication in late 2007. It is planned that the atlas will be published with a CD, which will provide full details of every record on the database including all published sources and observers. This will allow readers to drill down in the data to find a record to support every location on a map or obtain the actual records that support a remark in the text.

Please make a special effort this year to submit records for this current season promptly (by the end of August) and all other outstanding records. Records can either be submitted on the ABBA report forms (http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/arabian.birds/) or by post with details of species, location, date and observations to Michael C Jennings, Co-ordinator, Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia project, Warners Farm House, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire, PE28 3WD, UK. Further details can be obtained by email: ArabianBirds@dsl.pipex.com (Contributed by Michael Jennings).

BAHRAIN

Threat to Grey Hypocolius

The Bahrain Natural History Society (BNHS) has sounded the alarm over the destruction of prime roosting grounds of the Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*. The Grey Hypocolius breeds in Iran and Iraq, both difficult areas to visit, so the area in the date palm thickets of Saar has proved a popular location for birders to see this species.

A project, led by Dr Brendan Kavanagh, started during the winter to catch and ring the birds to study their movements, habits and survival. Thirty birds were caught over the winter and detailed morphometric data were collected. A DNA sample was also sent to the Swedish Museum of Natural History to try to cast light on the exact phylogeny of the species. More details of the ringing can be seen on the Hawar Islands website: http://www.hawar-islands.com/brendan.html

Members of BHNS were shocked to find that illegal dumping of construction waste in Saar, near the Saraya Villas complex, had all but destroyed the roosting site of the Grey Hypocolius. Following complaints to the Northern Municipality the site was largely cleared up although adjacent development sites still used the area as a dump on a smaller scale and the local municipality is monitoring it to try and prevent any further dumping.

The birds did return to use the site for the balance of the season after the majority of waste was removed. The site at Saar remains under threat from development as it is privately owned and zoned for building by the planning authorities. It was part of a green belt but has now been rezoned based on water supply. The site was never a natural one - the current vegetation grew as a consequence of it being abandoned as an active farm and date plantation when the

ground water levels dropped and became more saline many years ago. (Source: Bahrain Tribune, Howard King, Brendan Kavanagh).

IRAQ

Photo exhibition on Iraqi marshlands

Two photographic exhibitions have recently taken place, showing portraits of Marsh Arabs, village life, wildlife and landscapes taken during a Biodiversity Survey organised in 2005. The photographer, Mr Mudhafar Salim, participated in the Survey undertaken as part of a Canada-Iraq Marshlands Initiative (CIMI) to restore the wetland. The first exhibition was at the new BIRD*scapes* Gallery in Glandford, near Cley in North Norfolk and ran from 22 April to 2 May 2006. The second, entitled 'Eden: Marshlands of Mesopotamia', was jointly organised by MedWet and the Embassy of Canada. It took place during the Ecofilms Rodos International Film + Audio Visual Arts Festival (20–25 June 2006) on Rodos, Greece. For more information see http://www.ramsar.org/wn/w.n.ecofilms 2006_iraq.htm

Training of Iraqi biologists and birds seen in Syria whilst training

The report by Richard Porter and Derek Scott is now available online as a pdf at: http://www.cimiwetlands.net/doclib/CIMI_TechReport_3.PDF

ISRAEL

Hula Valley Bird Festival

The festival will run from 5–11 November 2006 and there will be a huge variety of activities including lectures, identification workshops and birdwatching tours as well as guided tours of general interest around the country. For more information, please see the website: www.hula-birding.com

JORDAN

Threat to Dead Sea Sparrow colony

The large colony of Dead Sea Sparrows *Passer moabiticus* at Sweimeh on the northern shores of the Dead Sea, and in part of an International Bird Area (IBA) is the most accessible breeding colony in Jordan for visiting birdwatchers.

Dr Fares Khoury commented, "The tamarisk habitat patch has been largely destroyed for the construction of a 40m wide street. This started in March 2006 when a large part was eroded; currently the road is being paved with gravel and is expected to be asphalted. Once asphalted, there is no way back and habitat restoration may be impossible".

Dr Khoury has contacted the Non Governmental Organisations and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) and it is still not clear who is responsible for the development. The development is controversial as a proper Environmental Impact Assessment has not been carried out and it is outside the general hotel area (to the south of the Dead Sea in the Mövenpick-Marriott area). There are also plans for a Holiday Inn to be built. Dr Khoury suggested birdwatchers could help by writing to NGOs in Jordan or the Holiday Inn to oppose the development. (Contributed by Dr Fares Khoury). (See also this issue the paper on the eastern Jordan Valley.)

KAZAKHSTAN

Birds of Kazakhstan

Arend Wassink and Gerald Oreel are compiling a book on the birds of Kazakhstan. It is planned for publication in 2007 and will be the first comprehensive work in English. Although the book may be with the publishers when this issue of *Sandgrouse* is published, anyone with recent records of Kazakhstan birds is invited to contact Gerald Oreel at gerald.oreel@planet.nl or Arend Wassink at arendwassink@texel.com.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Second Ramsar site for Kyrgyz Republic.

The Secretariat is pleased to announce that the Kyrgyz Republic has designated its second Ramsar site. The designation is part of a conservation initiative by the Kyrgyz State Forestry Service carried out under the Ramsar Small Grant Fund. Chatyr Kul (16,100 hectares, 40°37'N 075°18'E), a State Reserve in Naryn Oblast, is a saline high altitude lake (3530m asl.) in the Tien Shan Mountains with pristine ecosystem. The main inflow runs from the Ak-say river and the lake plateau is bound between the edges of At-Bashi (4700m) and Kakshalto ridges (5500m) with permanent snowfields and glaciers, forming the border between Kyrgyzstan and China. It

is one of the few habitats for Pamir Brown-headed Gulls *Larus brunnicephalus*, a breeding area for Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus* , and crucial for nine species of moulting ducks, especially Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, representing about 40% of the global population. A significant population of IUCN Red-listed Argali Sheep *Ovis ammon* is also found grazing at the plateau. Located near the Torugart Pass, the lake basin was once a part of the Silk Route, and remnants of a 10th century caravanserai can still be seen. Over hundreds of years, local nomads have been using the lake area for grazing horses in summer. (Source: Wetlands International).

SYRIA

There have been a lot of major developments in Syria in the last 6 months, with an ecotourism project starting at Sabkhat al-Jabbul, the country's most important wetland, the first trip by a British-based bird tour company and the setting up of the first local wildlife society. The project at Jabbul is a collaboration between RSCN Jordan and the Governorate of Aleppo, with support from the Swiss government, which seeks to develop ecotourism at the same time as benefiting the local community. Jabbul has been aptly described as a 'paradise [for birds] and a nightmare [for conservation and access]'. One hopes that there will soon be better protection and easier access. It is expected that The Palmyra Society to Protect Environment and Wildlife will be licensed in summer 2006; initial projects will include a vulture restaurant at Dawara Cliffs, Syria's last accessible Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* colony, which is declining due to poisoning of carcasses; and better protection at Sed Wadi Abied, the desert reservoir, close to Palmyra, that is a magnet for migrating birds. More generally, the Society aims to persuade the local hunting fraternity (till recently very large) to hunt with binoculars rather than guns. This Society is very important, as it could act as a template for wildlife groups throughout the country, which might in turn stimulate interest in nature conservation at a local level. There are many individuals interested in wildlife in Syria, the challenge is to set up the structures to develop that interest.

Bald Ibis tagged in Syria

Two pairs of Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* reared six young this year in the Syrian Palmyra steppes, a remarkable success for the BirdLife International team protecting them. They left the nest site in late July to their unknown wintering area (Aug-Jan), perhaps the southern end of the Red Sea. Three of the four adults have been tagged with satellite transmitters and at the time of writing were together just west of Medina. RSPB and BirdLife Middle East scientists hope to discover from this work why their migration route and locations take such a toll.

TURKEY

The role of Doğa Derneği (Nature Society) during the outbreak of Avian Influenza.

Doğa Derneği (DD) has been actively involved in the outbreak measures throughout the period. Understanding the migration routes and strategies, particularly of wetland species, has been crucial. DD distributed Wetland and IBA information to the concerned state departments and by promoted the general opinion of BirdLife. To accomplish a change of public opinion, two e-newsletters were published, the website was regularly updated DD participated in more than 40 live broadcasts (Radio/TV). As a result of DD's initiatives with the state departments and the related Ministries a Turkey-wide total hunting ban was put into operation.

Furthermore, DD participated on three important governmental meetings on Ministerial level, where control and handling measures have been dealt with and major decisions have been taken. Working with the state on an officially high level resulted in a general change of opinion and in promoting HPAI related issues differently.

Prime Minister Erdoğan's press release, stating that HPAI is transmitted through mistakes in poultry farming rather than by migratory birds will lead to a further change of view.

Additionally DD has employed a consultant working solely on the HPAI subject, like safety measures for field researchers and birders, following up on AI issues and the

coordination of this year's IWC. The IWC 2006 has gained importance as a valuable field monitoring tool and is highly requested by concerned parties. (Contributed by José Tavares).

GENERAL INFORMATION

Free books for conservationists

A new book is available free to conservationists outside W Europe, N America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The book *Conservation Education and Outreach Techniques* by Susan Jacobsen, Mallory McDuff and Martha Monroe is the second in Oxford University Press's *Techniques in Ecology & Conservation Series*. The first in the series was *Bird Ecology and Conservation: a handbook of techniques* by Sutherland, Newton and Green. For further information on this book, and others, see http://www.nhbs.com/Conservation/gratis-books.html.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Look out for Lesser Flamingos

Birdwatchers are encouraged to watch for the appearance of Lesser Flamingos *Phoeniconaias minor* in North Africa, the Middle East and Europe this year. Please record as many details as possible, such as whether they are moving with flocks of Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus*, whether you are able to identify the Greater Flamingos by their rings, or whether the Lesser Flamingos attempt to breed at the Greater Flamingo breeding sites. Please send details to: Dr. Brooks Childress, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, GL2 7BT, United Kingdom or by email to: Brooks.Childress@wwt.org.uk

Turkey Bird Report 2002–06

Preparations are being made for the compilation of the tenth Turkey Bird Report, which will cover the period 2002–06. Once again, the report will be produced by an Anglo-Turkish team comprising Barbaros Demirci, Metehan Özen and Guy M. Kirwan, and published in *Sandgrouse*. Many records have already been received and there is no need for these to be sent again, but we do urge any observers with unpublished or published records to contact any member of the editorial team, or the last-named via GMKirwan@aol.com, or 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 1997–2001 (*Sandgrouse* **25**: 8–31), wherein details of those species for which records are particularly sought can be found. Trip reports are nonetheless welcome, as are photographs, both as documentation and for possible publication in the report. Anyone requiring further details is welcome to contact the editors via the address above. (from Guy Kirwan)


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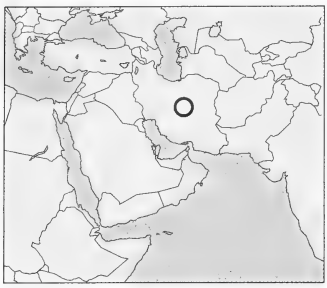
Sandgrouse 28 (2): 106–113 2006

Ringing four breeding waterbird species at Lake Tashk

MOHAMMAD E SEHHATISABET, MOHAMMAD BALOUCH, ARASH BAHMAN-POUR, ABOLGHASEM KHALEGHIZADEH AND ZAHRA ELAHI-RAD



Four breeding waterbird species at Lake Tashk in the Bakhtegan Protected Region, Iran – Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* – were studied from 2004 to 2006. Over these three years, Great White Pelican, though in small numbers, showed no significant changes (although numbers were much reduced from previous decades), Little Egret showed no significant change and Eurasian Spoonbill productivity reduced by 40%, but Slender-billed Gull productivity increased by about 55%. However, Lake Bakhtegan's water level fluctuates according to annual rainfall, and that alone justifies long-term studies of these and other species to determine trends. Better control of water distribution and levels has already been identified as important for improving the conditions of local agriculture, but data are lacking on how present water management may have affected bird populations so that improvements can be compared.

Mohammad E. Sehhatisabet and Zahra Elahi-Rad, Ornithology Unit, Wildlife & Aquatic Organisms Bureau, Department of the Environment (DOE), Tehran, Iran: e-mail m_sehhati@yahoo.com. Mohammad Balouch, Fars DOE Provincial Office, Shiraz, Iran. Arash Bahman-Pour, Bureau of Habitats and Regional Affairs DOE, Tehran. Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh, Ornithology Laboratory, Agricultural Zoology Research Department, Plant Pests & Diseases Research Institute, Tehran, Iran: e-mail akhaleghizadeh@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Lake Tashk and the intervening hill ranges were first protected as the Bakhtegan Protected Region (310 438ha), established in December 1968 (**Fig 1**). This reserve was given the status of a Wildlife Refuge in the early 1970s, and was increased in size to 327 820ha. The hills and plains within the refuge support a breeding bird fauna typical of the semi-arid eastern Zagros. This region is situated along one of the main north-south migration flyways in Iran. In Dasht-e-Arjan, at least 263 species of birds have been recorded at Lake Parishan. At least 220 species (Darreh-Shouri 1984) have been listed for the Bakhtegan Wildlife Refuge (some 100km from Lake Parishan), which respectively are the third and fourth highest recorded totals for locations in Iran (Evans 1994). Lake Tashk and Lake Bakhtegan regularly hold huge numbers of waterfowl in winter (eg 120 000–140 000 surface-feeding ducks (Scott 1995) and 102 400 Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* in January 2005 (pers obs). Cornwallis (1968) studied the lakes' avifauna in the mid-1960s, and the Biology Department at the University of Shiraz carried out some ringing of waterfowl in the late 1960s. Flamingos apparently bred in the early 1960s, but do not appear to have done so since then. Good numbers of Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* breed in wet years (*eg* at least 100bp in 1970), and up to 5000 were present in 1990 (Scott & Rose 1996). The large wintering population of flamingos apparently constitutes the bulk of the breeding population at Lake Uromiyeh, 1145 km to the northwest.

Several interesting species, including Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*, breed in the Bakhtegan area. Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* has been recorded as breeding at Lake Tashk. Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* occasionally appears in large flocks, and was last known to have bred in the 1960s. There has been at least one resident pair of Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides* breeding

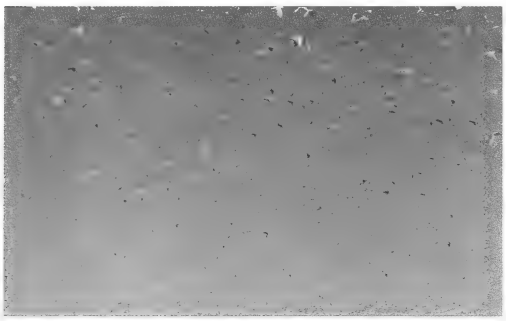


Plate 1. Response of Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* flocks to survey party at Lake Tashk. © *Mohammad Sehhati-Sabet*

Plate 2. Waterbird activity, Jazirah Bozorg island, Lake Tashk. © *Mohammad Balouch*

Plate 3. Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* fledglings paddling back to land after being ringed. © *Mohammad Balouch*

Plate 4. Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* fledglings paddling back to land after being ringed. © *Mohammad Sehhati-Sabet*

in the area (Scott 1995). The scope for studies in the region is enormous, but our research was confined to establishing the present status of four species of breeding waterbirds in Lake Tashk, namely Great White Pelican, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*.

STUDY AREA

Lake Tashk varies in area from 69 to 487km^2 due to rainfall and evaporation cycles. It lies north of Lake Bakhtegan (**Fig 1a**) from which it is normally separated by a strip of land except in very rainy years. It is fed by the outflow from the Kamjan Marshes to the west and by a large permanent spring at Gumboon to the northwest. Lake Tashk holds 20 islands and islets, three of them being over 10ha and the three largest exceeding 100ha. Our ringing work took place on two small islands, Jazireh Bozorg and Jazireh Kouchak. Jazireh Bozorg at 29°43′56.8″N, 53°28′09.2″E is over 1ha (160x100m) in size, rising to 8m above the highest water level in spring, its topography comprising mostly shallow slopes. In 2005 it possessed a scattering of such flora as Mount Atlas mastic tree *Pistacia atlantica*, tamarisk *Tamarix* sp, saltwort *Salsola rigida*, *Artemisia sieberi* (Sage sp), *Ebenus stellata*, ephedra *Ephedra* sp, galingale *Cyperus* sp and knotgrass *Polygonum* sp. Jazireh Kouchak at 29°45′06″N, 53°40′16″E is very much smaller, only *c*1890m^2 (*c*60x50 m) in size, rising to only one metre above the highest water level, and lacking plant coverage.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Our surveys took place during 5–10 July 2004, 18–25 June 2005 and 12–14 June 2006. Our routes and observation points were recorded using GPS. We produced maps by processing our data using GIS software (**Fig 1b**). For our observations, we carried out a 33km line triangular transect; the first side of which extended from a shrine, the Emamzade (29°41′N, 53°35′E) up to the two ringing islands (29°44′N, 53°28′). The second

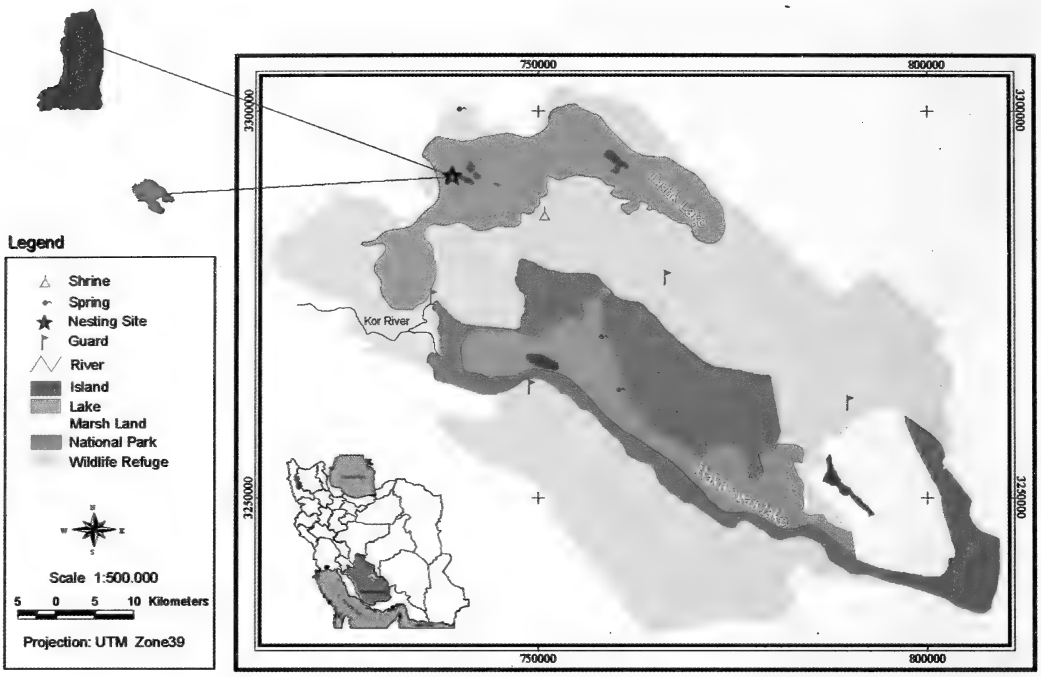


Figure 1a. Map of Lake Tashk, showing Jazirah Bozorg (Great Island) and Jazirah Kouchak (Small Island). *© DOE Iran.*

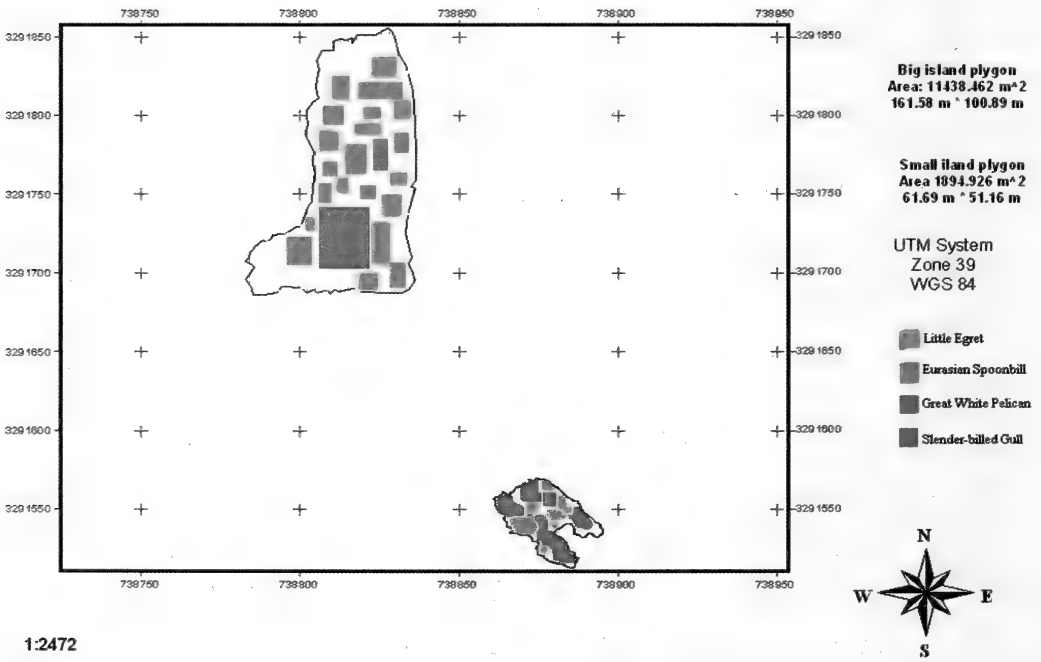


Figure 1b. Map of the Jaziraj Bozorg and Jazirah Kouchak indicating breeding territories occupied by the four breeding study species. *© From an original map by Amir Pasha Kankash, with his permission.*

side stretched from the ringing islands to Nargesi Island (29°45′N, 53°40′E), the third closing the triangle from there back to the Emamzade. From an 85hp motor boat we used 10x40 binoculars, but land-based observations were enhanced by use of an ATS 80 HD Swarovski telescope. For the target species, we were not able to determine easily separate

Plate 5. Waterbird activity, Jazireh Kouchak island, Lake Tashk. *© Mohammad Balouch*

Plate 6. Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* chicks. *© Mohammad Balouch*

Plate 7. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* nest in *Tamarix* sp shrub. *© Mohammad Balouch*

Plate 8. Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* nest; one egg, newly-hatched chick and two older chicks. *© Mohammad Balouch*

Plate 9. Half-grown Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* juvenile. *© Mohammad Balouch*

Plate 10. Dead Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*. *© Mohammad Sehhati-Sabet*

Plate 11. Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* nest with 4 eggs (large clutch). *© Mohammad Balouch*

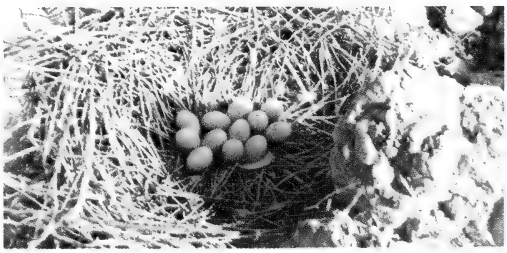


Plate 12. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* nest with 12 eggs – probably more than one female involved. *© Mohammad Balouch*

numbers of adults and immatures, particularly for gulls, because almost inevitably birds would take to the air at our approach (**Plate 1**). In any case, normal activity could be intense (**Plate 2**). We therefore had to use a click-counter to census gulls; **Table 1** gives the totals for the four target species. Where pelican and gull pulli were mobile but still flightless, we would shepherd them slowly and gently into the water at a suitable waterside location and then capture them by hand from the boat (**Plates 3 & 4**). After ringing and processing them in the boat, we released them on the water from which they paddled back to the island. **Table 1** also contains pulli totals. We counted the numbers of eggs in each nest of our target species and noted the numbers of dead birds found. We used letter-prefixed numbered metal rings throughout in both years, but in 2004 a few blue plastic rings were also put on Eurasian Spoonbills (**Tables 2 & 3**) to help compile information about local, regional or national movements and migration routes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of results

Table 1 gives the total numbers of the target species (adults, immatures and flightless pulli) counted on the ringing islands (Totals of all waterbird species counted at Lake Tashk and Bakhtegan in June 2004–2006 will appear in *Sandgrouse* 29(1)). **Table 2** contains the ringing details for the pulli of the 4 target species on the two islets (298 in 2004 and 561 in 2005; 2006 data will appear in *Sandgrouse* 29(1)); ring numbers are also listed. **Table 3** enumerates the 11 blue plastic rings used on Eurasian Spoonbills. **Table 4** presents nest and egg totals (2004, 419 in 149 nests; 2005, 1609 in 471 nests) and clutch size classes; egg measurements (79 eggs from 30 nests) are also given. **Plate 5** indicates the relatively low level of activity on Jazirah Kouchak. **Plates 6–9** are of the young at different developmental stages. **Table 4** also has counts of dead birds found (50 in 2004 and 35 in 2005; see *Sandgrouse* 29(1) for 2006 data), the majority being Little Egrets and

Table 1. Numbers of adults, immatures and of flightless pulli counted on two islands in Lake Tashk in 2004 & 2005.

Species	Adults & Imm		Flightless pulli		Totals	
Years	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
Pelecanus onocrotalus	22	18	3	4	25	22
Egretta garzetta	700	600	200	100	900	700
Platalea leucorodia	950	400	250	150	1200	550
Larus genei	2200	2500	900	2000	3100	4500

Table 2. Pulli ringed on two islets in Lake Tashk in 2004 and 2005, with ring details.

Species	2004	Ring series and serial numbers	2005	Ring series and serial numbers	Species totals
Pelecanus onocrotalus	3	PP - 5051, 5052, 5053	4	PP - 5074,5078,5082,5098	7
Egretta garzetta	42	LL 3951–71, 3981–4000	-	-	42
	50	GG - 3551–3600	50	GG - 4701–4750	100
Platalea leucorodia	95	LL - 53101- 53133, 53136, 53141-53150, 53152, 53153, 39351-39390, 39392- 39400	107	LL - 39401-39420, 39431-39450, 53161-53200, 53051-53060, 53154-53160. 53081-53090	202
Larus genei	100	FF - 0101-0150, 0201- 0250	400	EE - 1251-1300, 1051-1200, 4901-4950, 4601-4750	500
	8	J - 3972, 3974-3980	-	-	8
2004 Subtotal 298			**2005 Subtotal 561**		**2004/5 Grand Total 859**

Table 3. Rings used for Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* in 2004.

Blue plastic rings	TC	TJ	TN	TG	TL	TP	TS	TX	TE	TD	TB
Metal rings	39377	39385	39376	53152	39388	39397	39395	53153	39354	39080	53133

Table 4. Numbers of nests and eggs for four breeding species at Lake Tashk in 2004 &2005.

Species	Years	Nests counted	Clutch size classes & nos of nests in each 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Eggs counted	Nests surveyed	Total eggs measured	Range of egg sizes & Length / Diameter	Total dead birds
Pelecanus	2004	5	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	5	12	85-99.3 (93.33)	56-62 (58.58)	0
onocrotalus	2005	7	1	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	-	-	0
Egretta	2004	51	4	1	4	22	18	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	213	8	33	27-48 (44.74)	22-33.5 (32.29)	14
garzetta	2005	228	3	20	28	49	82	33	7	1	2	1	1	1	1039	0	0	-	-	20
Platalea	2004	19	5	5	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	46	12	23	59.6-74 (66)	40-47 (44.63)	2
leucorodia	2005	140	31	29	49	23	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	368	0	0	-	-	10
Larus	2004	74	18	39	16	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	148	5	11	57.5 (53.64)	37-40 (37.86)	34
genei	2005	96	25	51	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	187	0	0	-	-	5
																				85

Nests 2004 - 149
Nests 2005 - 471

Eggs 2004 - 419
Eggs 2005 - 1609

Slender-billed Gulls (**Plate 10**). Great White Pelican bred only in 2005 (on Jazireh Bozorg), but Slender-billed Gulled numbers increased that year. Of the 471 active nests counted in 2005, Jazireh Kouchak held only a few – 5 Little Egrets, two Eurasian Spoonbills and 8 Slender-billed Gulls; the remainder were on Jazireh Bozorg. Lastly, some large clutches were found during the study (**Plates 11 & 12**).

Changes in occurrence

The numbers of Slender-billed Gulls present during the breeding season at Lake Tashk and the numbers of breeding pairs counted and estimated (800bp) show that it certainly now appears to be a well-established breeding area, despite its recent arrival. It was not mentioned by Scott *et al* (1975), Darreh-Shoori (1984) or Mansoori (2001). Other valuable records of breeding numbers are those of Little Egret (we estimate *c*150bp) and Eurasian Spoonbill (*c*200bp).

Adhami and Bahrami (1970) recorded nests of other species at Lake Tashk, namely Pied Avocet (150), Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* (5) and Marbled Duck (1), none of which we observed breeding during our study. The two-year average of 6bp we found (Table 4) of Great White Pelican contrasts poorly with the records of Darreh-Shoori (1984) of 70 to 200 individuals breeding between 1969 and 1984. Farhadpour (1981) similarly reported the occurrence of *c*1400 individuals and 350 pulli and that 22 pulli had been ringed (ring series PP, numbers 1908–1929) at Lake Tashk in 1981: he also noted that less than 90% of eggs had hatched. Our study found that the Great White Pelican nested at a separation of 0.5–1m. In 2004 on 22 and 23 May, personnel from the Fars DOE Office made counts of breeding birds at Lake Tashk, finding 2400 Eurasian Spoonbill, 2300 Little Egret and 30 Great White Pelican (24 adults and six pulli, as well as 18 eggs). Sheikh *et al* (1996) records similar work – in western Bakhtegan, near Kharameh, on 15 and 16 June 1996, 210 pulli were ringed: 45 Little Egret, 42 Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, 15 Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, 8 Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, 2 Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* and 98 Eurasian Spoonbill were ringed in the reedbeds.

Plate 13. Rescued Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (then with ring number 5053) in Jahrom. *© DOE Iran*

Ringing recoveries

A Great White Pelican, ringed as a pullus (**Table 2,** serial 5053) was recovered on the Ghareh Aghaj river, in Jahrom in Fars province some 140km to the southwest, on 22 September 2004 (**Plate 13**). It was later released at Lake Tashk on 18 October, only to be found alive on 24 October at Haji-Abad, Hormozgan province, 280km to the southeast of the Lake Tashk, then the bird was unfortunately released on Galegah river, Tarom and Tashkouiyeh Non-hunting Area, without its ring. Behrouzi-Rad (1989) deduced the main autumn flight direction juveniles of the species from ringing data to be from Lake Uromiyeh to the southeast, the Bakhtegan and Bandar Abbas areas, although recoveries came from other sites in Iran and the Middle East.

Two Slender-billed Gulls ringed in 2004 (serials FF 0237 and 0242) were found dead on Jazireh Bozorg, after the same year's breeding season. *Sandgrouse* 29(1) will contain 2006 data. It would be an advantage in future studies to use netting techniques in an attempt to improve bird recovery rates.

Food Items

During this study, the food intake and movements of the target species to favoured hunting areas were not studied in detail. From the numbers of birds counted, it is clear that the food resources for successful breeding exist at Bakhtegan and in adjacent areas, such as Gumboon marsh (*c*8.5km from Jazireh Bozorg and Jazireh Kouchak) – some ringing results from Gumboon will appear in *Sandgrouse* 29(1). Earlier surveys of the fish of Bakhtegan National Park and Wildlife Refuge identified 23 species, mostly Cyprinidae, Cobitidae, Balitoridae, Cyprinodontidae, Poeciliidae and Mastacembelidae, the most commonly encountered species and the most numerous being Cyprinidae (BoomAbad 2002). We noted during our ringing activity that several Slender-billed Gull chicks had regurgitated up to 30 fish *c*1.5cm long, and that on one occasion a White Pelican chick produced over 150. Although fish prey form an important part of the diet of all four target species, until we know the full prey spectrum, and how it varies through the year, then the conservation strategy to support these and other bird species cannot be stated for certain.

Status of Bakhtegan and sister sites

Lakes Bakhtegan, Tashk and Kamjan not only comprise a Ramsar site but also form a Biosphere Reserve. The entire Bakhtegan Wildlife Refuge and the Kamjan marshes are designated an Important Bird Area (Evans 1994). Lake Tashk is protected by the DOE as part of the Bakhtegan complex, and one consequence has been the natural development of marshland at the mouths of the two main drainage canals that feed into the western end of the lake. Relatively little is known (Balouch 1991, Cornwallis 1968, Darreh-Shouri 1991, Mansoori 1981) of the overall impact on Bakhtegan and its sister sites of recent large engineering projects. The extent by which the construction in the 1970s of

Dorudsan Dam, a large water storage reservoir on the River Kur and of a variety of other irrigation projects in the upper reaches, affects the area is not known. A large drainage canal has been excavated through the Kamjan marshes, emptying into Lake Tashk (Scott 1995), but the effects on Lake Tashk and the Kamjan marshes, good or bad, have not been quantified. Long-term, the conservation of the colonial breeding waterbirds and the control of water levels and water flow throughout the year require a coherent strategy, linked to the BoomAbad (2002) findings, and that will be underpinned by adequately broad-based studies in the future. Undoubtedly, a network of weirs, water gates and water level monitors will be needed to best control the effects of major irrigation facilities on the Bakhtegan Wildlife Refuge and its sister sites.

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Autumn 2004 raptor migration in the Novosibirsk region and the Kuznetsky Alatau, Russia

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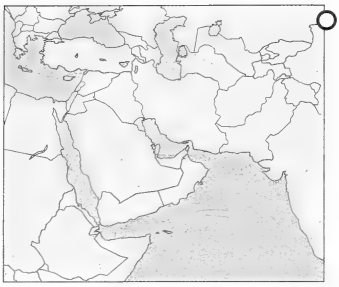

During the autumn 2004 raptor migration in southern Siberia in the Novosibirsk region and in the Kuznetsky Alatau, the northernmost mountains of the Altai-Sayan-range, we recorded 1419 raptors at a rate of 22.9 individuals per hour. Migration was concentrated over some of the selected watch-sites southeast of Novosibirsk. Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans* and Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* were the main species counted, their migration direction being southwest towards Kazakhstan. This course was also taken by Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* which typically winters in southeast Asia. We sought to identify particular subspecies and to assess the general importance of the watch-sites we used.

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Raptor migration in northern Asia follows three major north-south corridors from eastern Siberia to Kamchatka (Eastern Inland, Coastal Pacific and Oceanic Pacific; Decandido *et al* 2004), while birds of a more western origin are presumed to fly in a more south-westerly direction (Zalles & Bildstein 2000). The latter group eventually transit through passes such as the Chokpak in the Tien Shan mountains of Kazakhstan (Gavrilov & Gistzov 1985), but much movement remains undocumented, due to the large gaps that exist between the raptor watch-sites near Lake Baikal (Alexeyenko *et al* 2004) and those in west-central Asia, the only exception being limited data obtained from Chergiskiy Zakaznik, a mountain pass in the Russian Altai (Zalles & Bildstein 2000).

Here we report on our observations of migrating raptors from the environs of Novosibirsk in southern Siberia and the northernmost mountains of the Altai-Sayan-range, the Kuznetsky Alatau (**Fig 1**). In September 2004, we laid special emphasis on identifying species, numbers and flight directions of migrating raptors, noting when possible, sex, age and subspecies. We augmented our observations by examining and measuring raptor skins in the Novosibirsk Zoological Museum.

Figure 1. Map of central Asia, showing raptor watch sites in western Siberia (mainly this study), near Lake Baikal and in eastern Kazakhstan. © *Remo Probst.*

RAPTORS AND SITES

Overall, 1419 raptors were counted (**Table 1**), almost all individuals heading in a southwesterly direction. Steppe Buzzards *Buteo buteo vulpinus* formed the largest flocks, *c*100 birds, observed in the Kuznetsky Alatau. The Novosibirsk, Chulimsk and Yevsino sites were visited only sporadically, because most of the time was spent in the Kuznetsky Alatau (7–14 September), making observations when weather permitted.

Novosibirsk (55°02'N, 82°54'E)
One of the major cities of Siberia, with about 1.5 million people, it is divided by the east-west Trans-Siberian railway and the north-south river Ob. Riparian forests clothe the Ob's banks and islands, where Black Kite *Milvus migrans* is a common summer resident, small assemblies of up to five being recorded. Summer resident Eurasian Hobbies *Falco subbuteo* hunted insects along the riverbanks. In the city centre itself, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* was occasionally seen on buildings. Migrating raptors were comparatively rare, although Eurasian Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* passed through the middle of the city.

Chulimsk (55°05'N, 81°01'E)
The village of Chulimsk was the westernmost point we visited, some 120km west of Novosibirsk. It lies within the forest-steppe, a vegetation zone characterized by open, sometimes still steppe-like areas, interspersed with patches of silver birch *Betula pendula*. Although lacking obvious landmarks, the landscape holds significant numbers of lakes in nearby depressions. Resident raptors included one pair each of White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* and a small number of Western Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*. Compared to Yevsino (*qv*), which is also close to Novosibirsk, migration was weak (**Table 1**). Interestingly, Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* appeared here at the very end of September, earlier than we expected.

Yevsino (54°31'N, 83°22'E)
This small settlement is about 70km south of Novosibirsk, near the Ob. In this hilly area, sightlines are interrupted by woodland (stands of birch and Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*). Despite Yevsino being close to the previous two watch-points mentioned above and although we had fairly unfavourable weather conditions, raptor migration was quite heavy in our few hours of observation (33.9 individuals/hr). The birds apparently flew parallel to the Ob, which is dammed here and forms a large lake ('Sea of the Ob'). The prevalent species was Black Kite, 271 birds being observed in 6 hours on 2 September.

Kuznetsky Alatau (54°42'N, 88°21'E)
The Kuznetsky Alatau are the northernmost mountains of the Altai-Sayan range and are known for its high precipitation (>2000mm/year), amongst the highest in all Siberia (N. Lashchinsky pers comm). Our observation site was near Mount Chemodan (1357m), at about 1000m asl (**Plate 1**) and is characterized by rows of trees (mostly Siberian fir, *Abies sibirica*, Siberian pine *Pinus sibirica*, and downy birch *Betula pubescens*) interspersed with subalpine meadows. The treeline is at about 1100m, with mountain tundra landscape (*golzi*) above it. Resident raptors include Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (N. Demidenko pers comm), Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* and Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* that breed on cliffs in the river valleys. During our stay, the weather was almost consistently unfavourable (including heavy rains and even snowfall) for the migration of soaring raptors, but when the skies cleared, many raptors, mostly Steppe Buzzards, passed. On 10 September, 849 raptors flew over in 7 seven hours, most (80%) occurring between 1500 and 1700.

Plate 1. Kuznetsky-Alatau. View from the watch-site in looking towards of the prominent Mount Chemodan (1357m), which may serve as a waypoint for migrating birds of prey. September 2004. © *M. Pavličev.*

SELECTED SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

According to Stepanyan (1990) Black Kites from the Ob basin are intermediate between nominate *migrans* and the eastern *lineatus*. The birds we observed at close ranges showed pronounced pale underwing patches in the 'hand', more resembling *lineatus* (**Plate 2**). Black Kites were the second commonest migrants. However, they had completely disappeared by mid-September. (Note that Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2005) elevate *lineatus* to a full species, Black-eared Kite - Ed)

Honey Buzzards

The area around and somewhat west of Novosibirsk is of special interest, because it contains the only overlap zone of the breeding ranges of Western *Pernis apivorus* and Crested *P. ptilorhynchus* Honey Buzzards) (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Ryabtsev 2001). Interestingly, we observed only Western Honey Buzzard around Novosibirsk, while we found Crested more to the east in the Kuznetsky Alatau. Our identification acceptance criteria demanded both structure and coloration be recorded, which left a number of distant birds in the Kuznetsky Alatau (**Table 1**) unidentified. However, shape and size suggested that most, if not all, were also *ptilorhynchus*. Crested Honey Buzzards seem to leave their westernmost breeding grounds on a southwesterly heading, opening the possibility that birds from this region are those that appear in the Middle East (*eg* 11 at Eilat in May 2004; *Sandgrouse* **26 (2)**).

Plate 2. Black Kite *Milvus migrans*. Birds from the Ob basin are generally considered intermediate between nominate *migrans* and the eastern *lineatus*. Note the pronounced pale underwing-patch in the hand of this individual, more typical of *lineatus*. Novosibirsk, September 2004. © *M. Pavličev.*

Plate 3. Juvenile Merlins *Falco columbarius* of the steppe subspecies *pallidus* (above) and taiga race *aesalon*. Note the strikingly different shadeing on the upperparts. Zoological Museum of Novosibirsk, September 2004. © *M. Pavličev.*

Accipiters

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* was the third commonest migrant (**Table 1**) but we also saw Northern Goshawk *A. gentilis* regularly, 5 in particular at close range (*eg* when hunting Hooded Crow *Corvus* [*corone*] *cornix* and Rook *C. frugilegus*) 4 juveniles and an adult female. These birds were not of the local, darkish race *schvedowi*, nor were they typical pale northern *buteoides*; they probably originated from the transitional zone, in the more southerly taiga. We base this assumption on our study of over 200 Goshawk skins in the zoological museums of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk. A third Accipiter, the Japanese Sparrowhawk *A. gularis*, reaches the westernmost limit of its breeding range around Novosibirsk (Ryabtsev 2001) and winters in south-east Asia, but we did not find it.

Table 1. Raptor species and numbers observed in the Novosibirsk region and the Kuznetsky Alatau in September 2004.

Species/Site	Novosibirsk	Chulimsk	Yevsino	Kuznetsky Alatau	Total
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*		2	271	53	**326**
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	1				**1**
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*			1		**1**
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*		5	16	1	**22**
Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	2				**2**
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*	9	10	18	37	**74**
Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*		1	7	1	**9**
Western Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*		1	1		**2**
Crested / Western Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus / apivorus*			1	14	**15**
Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*				11	**11**
Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*		11	51	866	**928**
Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*		8			**8**
Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*			1		**1**
Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*		2	3		**5**
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*	1				**1**
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*			1	1	**2**
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*				3	**3**
Merlin *Falco columbarius*	1	1	1		**3**
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*			1		**1**
Unidentified raptors				4	**4**
Total	**14**	**41**	**373**	**991**	**1419**
Hours of observation	10.75	13	11	27.25	**62**
Individuals per hour	**1.3**	**3.2**	**33.9**	**36.4**	**22.9**

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Marsh Harriers observed close to Novosibirsk were typical of nominate *aeruginosus* and showed none of the characteristics (*eg* barred tails in females) of the more eastern form *spilonotus*. Although Ferguson-Lees and Christie (2001) were cautious over treating these forms as full species, they have now (2005) done so, as Western and Eastern.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*
The three birds observed were of northern origin (*aesalon*), not of the local steppe-form *pallidus* (Stepanyan 1990). As shown in **Plate 3**, the latter can be very pale on the upperparts. One individual hunted House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* amongst the crowds in front of the Novosibirsk main railway station.

CONCLUSIONS

Observations in September 2004 revealed that raptor migration in the Novosibirsk region and the Kuznetsky Alatau operates on a southwesterly heading, towards Kazakhstan. Birds coming from Siberia are probably diverted to that route by the high mountains of central Asia. Predominant species were Steppe Buzzard, Black Kite and Sparrowhawks. However, the migration heading of typical eastern raptors like the Crested Honey Buzzard was also southwesterly.

The volume of raptors that annually migrate through the treated area cannot be extrapolated from the few hours of observation. However, it is certainly possible that several thousands pass the Yevsino and Kuznetsky Alatau watch sites. It would be worthwhile to quantify the raptor passage in a larger-scale investigation over the duration of the migration (August to November) at the sites we have defined in this study. It is also important that a more comprehensive search is made for other productive sites. Certainly, there is still no clear understanding of the line of division between eastern and western migrants, nor of where the main wintering areas lie of many of these breeding populations, either on the Indian subcontinent or in Africa.

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Observations on the avifauna of the eastern Jordan Valley, during July–August 2005.

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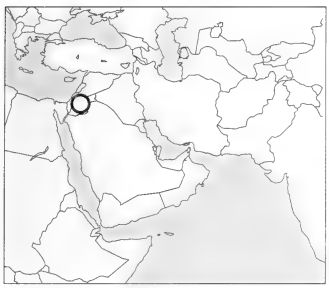

The avifauna of the near-border areas along the Jordan River and at the southern and northern tips of the Dead Sea were studied during a survey from mid-July to early August 2005. Around 15% of the breeding species within the study area do not breed anywhere else in Jordan. These include Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*, Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* and Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*. Large and continuous colonies of the Dead Sea Sparrow and a high frequency of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater were found along the flood plains adjacent to the lower and central Jordan River. Range extensions of Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*, Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* and Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*, in addition to an invasion of Indian Silverbill *Lonchura [Eudice] malabarica* were evident during this survey. The low-lying habitat patches of the study area, many of which have previously been fragmented by agricultural projects, include salt marshes, *Tamarix* scrub and riparian-type habitats along the banks of the Jordan River. Further habitat destruction and fragmentation is expected in the near future, if action is not taken to protect the remnant natural habitats, particularly along the floodplains of the Jordan River.

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INTRODUCTION

The avifauna of the agricultural landscapes on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley is, in general, well documented (Andrews 1995). However, there remains a gap in our knowledge of the birds inhabiting the remnant natural habitats along the Jordan River and south of the Dead Sea due to limited access to this area, which has been a closed military zone for many decades. Natural habitats include flood plains with patches of salt marsh vegetation, riparian vegetation lining the Jordan River, and dense *Tamarix* scrub. These remnant, and for Jordan rather unique patches of natural habitats, are threatened by agricultural, industrial and other forms of developments causing further destruction and fragmentation. We provide here supplementary knowledge about the breeding birds of Jordan in general and the Jordan Valley in particular (Andrews 1995, Andrews *et al* 1999, Khoury 2001). We include significant records of birds in the border areas of the Jordan Valley where status and breeding range had been unclear due to limited access.

STUDY AREA

From mid-July to early August 2005, which period, through less than ideal nevertheless does allow a good indication of breeding species, we observed and counted birds at 20 sites, which are mostly below sea level and are representative of the southern and northern shores of the Dead Sea (*ie* Fifa and Sweimeh) and the flood plains along the Jordan River, from Baqura south to the Dead Sea (**Plate 1**). The flood plains are continuous, but their width varies from 100m to nearly 1km along the Jordan River. They are bordered in the east by the sedimentary *Katar* hills, which separate the flood plains from the rest of the Jordan Valley. We also visited a few sites

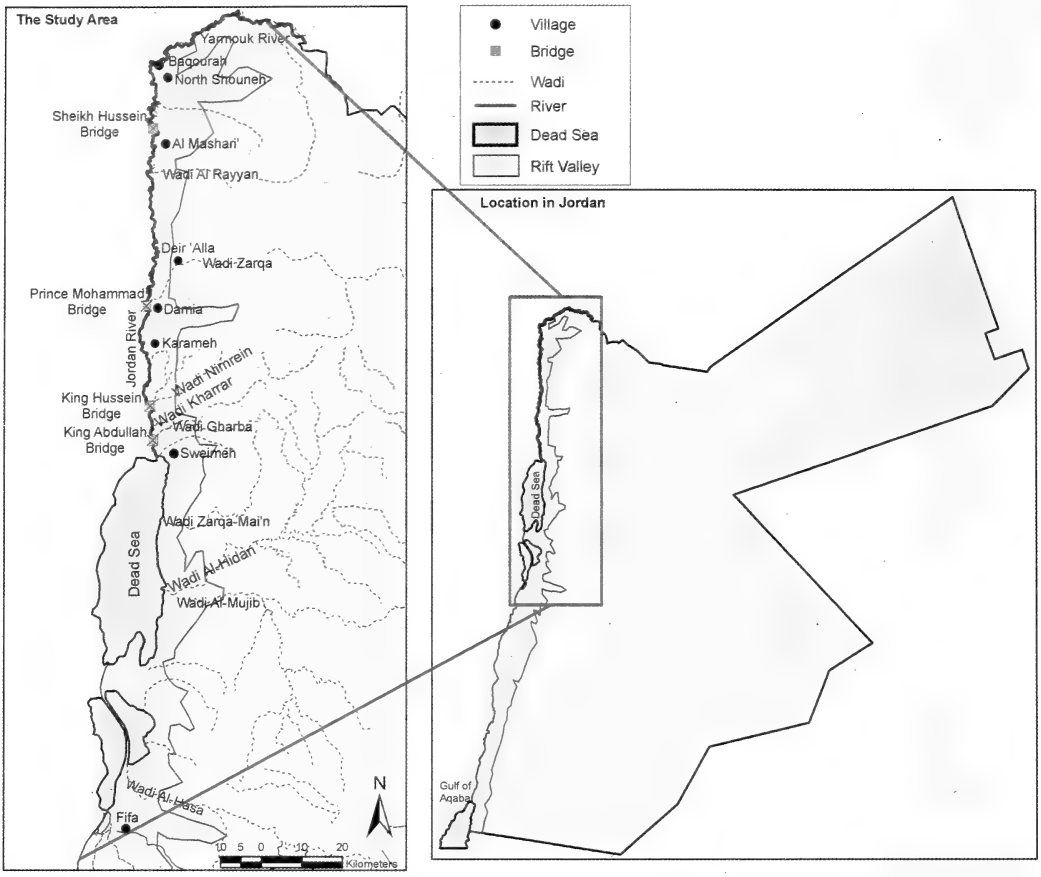

Figure 1. Map of the study area. The northern and upper Jordan River, as referred to in the text, extends from Baqourah south to the Wadi Ar Rayyan area; the central part extends further south to the Karamah area, and the southern and lower Jordan River extends from the Karamah area to the mouth of the Jordan River at the northern tip of the Dead Sea, south of King Abdallah Bridge. The study area comprised only of the near-border areas on the western edge of the Rift Valley. Prepared by Natalia Boulad © *RSCN*.

along the southeastern shores of the Dead Sea, but our study area was generally limited to the near-border region that forms the western edge of the eastern Jordan Valley. Most areas visited have remnant patches of natural habitats that usually comprise dry or waterlogged saltmarshes and *Tamarix* thickets (**Plate 2**) studded with reed *Phragmites sp* and poplar *Populus sp* stands that are characteristic of a narrow and nearly continuous riparian zone along the banks of the Jordan River. Farmland dominates the landscape along the central and northern Jordan River valley and recently also the south-eastern shores of the Dead Sea, where intensive agricultural expansion caused major destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats.

The area is also home to industrial projects; for example an industrial and tax-free zone is planned for the lower Jordan Valley near King Muhammad (Damia) Bridge. Tourist rest houses, hotels and a few isolated villas occur along the northern shores of the Dead Sea and at the Baptism Site at Wadi Kharrar. Intensive grazing by sheep and goats appears not to be a major concern, being noted only locally during our visits at Sweimeh and at few sites along the banks of the central and northern Jordan River.

METHODS

We counted all bird species at the 20 sites, but we include here only significant records of resident and breeding species. We assumed that birds recorded during the eight study days during the period between 19 July and 2 August 2005 were breeding summer visitors or residents, except for those known only to be non-breeding visitors, residents or migrants (Andrews 1995, Andrews *et al* 1999). We recorded the total numbers of birds for each site where possible or logged the daily maximum. In addition, for the Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*, we undertook 100m line transects to count nests and also spot counts (30m radius) of birds in order to estimate the total population and colony sizes. (See News & Information, this issue.)

LIST OF SELECTED SPECIES

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*. Recorded at three different sites along the central (Karamah area) and northern banks (Wadi Ar Rayyan area) of the Jordan River, with 1 – 4 birds per site. It had previously been recorded also in the lower Jordan Valley (Khoury 2001), but we found none at Sweimeh, where it is now probably extinct (Andrews 1995). This species is currently confined in Jordan to the floodplains of the Jordan River, but may also occur at Fifa.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Recorded at four sites along the lower and central Jordan River in small groups of 2–4 in late July. An earlier survey period might provide confirmation of the species' status as a breeder or non-breeder; there birds may have been early migrants.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. Recorded throughout the study area: maximum daily counts of 30 birds, mainly in agricultural landscape in the central and northern Jordan Valley.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*. Recorded throughout the study area: maximum daily counts of 18 in the upper/northern Jordan River area.

Note. Large, unoccupied nests of herons/egrets on Eucalyptus *Eucalyptus sp* trees near the lowermost Wadi Gharba indicate the presence of breeding herons or egrets along the lower Jordan River. Proven breeding of Night Herons, Little Egrets and Cattle Egrets in Jordan has occurred only along the upper, northern banks of the Jordan River (Andrews *et al* 1999). However, the presence of these birds in our study and also of nests that probably belong to at least one of these species suggests breeding further south. Their status in the lower Jordan Valley needs to be established.

Plate 1. *Tamarix* thickets growing on the saline waterlogged soil of the northern shores of the Dead Sea near Sweimeh. © *Masaro Amano.*

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo.* Single adults at two different sites, in the lower (Wadi Nimrein) and central (Karamah area) Jordan Valley. Both were recorded in mid- and late July while hunting larks over the *Katar* hills. It is probably a localized breeding species in the Jordan Valley (*cf* Shirihai 1996), and our records could indicate breeding on the Jordanian side. It certainly breeds in the highlands *c*30km to the east (Andrews 1995).

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis.* Like the three *Streptopelia* species breeding in the Jordan Valley (Andrews 1995, Khoury 2001), the Namaqua Dove has been very successful in colonizing most parts of the valley. It was recorded at all sites except the northernmost, *ie* north of Wadi Ar Rayyan. We usually counted over five birds each day in the southern and central Jordan Valley during mid- or late July. One group of 17, including 8–10 juveniles, was located in the Karamah area on 27 July. The species occupied mainly open saltmarsh habitats scattered with *Tamarix,* saltbush *Atriplex sp* or sea-blight *Suaeda* shrubs, but also occasionally frequented the field-edges in agricultural habitats. Because it is also regularly recorded in winter in this area, it has probably established a resident population in the Jordan Valley, unlike at Azraq, where it appears only from April to early September (Khoury, pers obs).

European Roller *Coracias garrulus.* Single birds recorded at the lower extent of Wadi Zarqa, at Baqqurah and along the Yarmouk River during late July. Previous summer records of 2 adults with 2 juveniles at the lower Wadi Zarqa and one at Wadi Kharrar (Khoury 2001) suggest that this species is a thinly distributed summer visitor breeding along the Jordan River banks, and not just at the rift margins as confirmed by Andrews (1995).

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis.* Singles or pairs were recorded at three sites along the central and northern banks of the Jordan River, as was a group of 15 on the eastern bank of the Jordan River near Wadi Ar Rayyan on 2 August. The presence of numerous nesting holes at this particular site suggests a breeding colony may have existed in recent years.

(Little) Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis.* Recorded in the lower Jordan River area at King Abdullah Bridge (1 adult, 2 juveniles) and the lower Wadi Nimrein (1 juvenile). Recorded also in recent years at Sweimeh and Al-Karamah Dam during April–May (Khoury pers obs). This species seemingly has started to colonise the southern Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea, where it occupies relatively undisturbed, open habitats scattered with trees or shrubs, similar to their breeding habitats in Wadi Araba. It appears that its spread northwards was facilitated by the inadvertent establishment of suitable habitats such as hotel gardens along the Dead Sea's northeastern shores.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus.* Recorded at all sites in the southern and central Jordan Valley, particularly Fifa, and from King Abdullah Bridge northwards to the lower Wadi Zarqa. Significant counts included 13 birds between Damia and lower extent of Wadi Zarqa on 24 July, several of which were juveniles, and 8 at one site, west of the Karamah area, on 27 July. It is mostly absent as breeding species along the upper Jordan River. The current breeding range of this species in Jordan now includes the banks of the central and southern Jordan River, where probably a few hundred pairs breed. There is a colony of 10+ pairs at Fifa, and there are others, including occasional small colonies along the Dead Sea's southeastern shores (Andrews *et al* 1999).

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster.* Summer resident on the Israeli side (Shirihai 1996) and at several sites in the highlands and rift margins (Andrews 1995). Singles and

groups of up to 12 birds at most sites visited along the Jordan River's central and northern floodplains, and also at the Yarmouk River. The species is less frequent in the lower Jordan River area, where it was recorded at the lower extent of Wadi Nimrein (King Hussein/Allenby Bridge) during late July; it previously had been noted at Wadi Kharrar during the breeding season (Khoury 2001). By this time, nest-holes were inactive, but some may have been used by *M. apiaster*. Our summer records support their presence as a summer breeder (Shirihai 1996) in the Jordan Valley.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus.* No previous published records from the Jordan side of the Jordan Valley, but reported on the Israeli side (Shirihai 1996). Resident in highlands and rift margins of NW Jordan and Yarmouk basin (Andrews 1995). Singles recorded only along the banks of the upper Jordan River from Wadi Ar Rayyan north to Baqourah and the Yarmouk River. It appeared to be associated with the presence of large Euphrates poplar *Populus euphraticus* and some planted trees such as Cypress *Cupressus sp* and Eucalyptus sp.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* Resident in the Jordan Valley (Andrews 1995), but not reported before from the floodplain; also in some other localities.. Uncommon in open habitats of the Jordan River flood plain where it usually avoids very dense *Tamarix* thickets. Within the Jordan Valley, it appears to be more numerous to the east of the Katar Hills, in areas scattered with bushes and Rhamnaceae *Zizyphus* (=*Ziziphus*, Kew 2006) trees and also along field edges (Andrews 1995).

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus.* The only previous Jordanian breeding records are from the northern highlands and nearby rift margins. One male adult and single juveniles at 4 sites along the central and northern banks of the Jordan River indicate localized breeding in this area, not mapped by Andrews (1995).

Great Tit *Parus major.* Recorded from the other side of the Jordanian Valley (Shirihai 1995) it is relatively widespread in the northern highlands and rift margins. It also occurs in montane SW Jordan from Dana south to Petra (Andrews 1995). Although not recorded in the flood plains, finding a single singing bird in a garden at Al Mashari' village in the northern Jordan Valley on 2 August is significant, being the first record of this species on the Jordanian side of the Jordan Valley.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti isabellinus* Recorded at several sites, such as Sweimeh and the Jordan River mouth, and along the Katar hills of the lower and central Jordan Valley (up to the lower Wadi Zarqa). It has also been recorded previously at one site in the lower Jordan River (Khoury 2001). It is more widespread in western Jordan north of the Dead Sea than previously known (*eg* Andrews 1995).

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis.* Not recorded in the flood plains or saltmarshes of our limited study area, but the not wholly unexpected discovery of several singing birds over fields at Deir 'Alla on 24 July appears to be significant in the light of the absence of recent summer records.

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus.* Now restricted to the Jordan Valley, mostly along the banks. Single birds seen at 6 sites along the eastern banks of the lower and central Jordan River and the lower extent of Wadi Nimrein during late July. Despite its known attachment to dense, mature reedbeds, such as at Wadi Kharrar (Khoury 2001), during this survey the species was recorded mostly in dense *Tamarix* thickets containing some reed.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna [Hippolais] pallida.* Single birds were recorded at 10 sites, mainly in *Tamarix,* along the banks of the Jordan River during late July. Although no birds were singing, perhaps being early migrants, previous observations at Wadi Kharrar (Khoury 2001) and along the Jordan River (Shirihai 1996) showed that the species does breed, and locally at high densities, in the Jordan Valley (*cf* Andrews 1995).

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala.* Recorded during late July as pairs or family parties of 3–5 at 6 sites near the Jordan River, from King Abdallah Bridge north to the Wadi Ar Rayyan area. Birds were seen always in relatively open habitat bordering *Tamarix* thickets often containing dense bushes (*eg Atriplex, Nitraria* (Zygophyllaceae) or Acacia (Silk-tree) *Prosopis (Albizia) farcta)* (Lasolf 2006). The species' previous status, as described by Andrews (1995), was as a winter visitor to the Jordan Valley. This species' status here would benefit from an earlier survey period.

Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps.* At least two were heard calling at Sweimeh on 19 July, and a group of over 6 were found in a saltmarsh dominated by *Atriplex* to the west of Karamah on 27 July. The species had previously been reported from only two other sites in the lower and central Jordan Valley (Andrews 1995, Khoury 2001).

Nightingale sp. *Luscinia sp.* Up to three individuals recorded in damp *Tamarix* thickets at Sweimeh on 19th July. Common Nightingale *L. megarhynchos* is known to breed along the banks of the Jordan River (Shirihai 1996, Khoury 2001).

Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens.* One adult recorded at the edge of the Jordan River flood plains, along the *Katar* hills, southwest of Karamah. Previously it had not been known from western Jordan north of the Dead Sea (Andrews 1995).

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis.* Locally common, breeding mainly in *Zizyphus* and *Eucalyptus* trees, at Fifa, and from Swaimah north to Baqourah and the Yarmouk River. It was most abundant in the agricultural landscapes bordering the upper Jordan River, and totally absent from those few sites dominated by continuous and undisturbed tamarisk scrub along the lower Jordan River.

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus.* Found breeding in extensive *Tamarix* scrub near water at Fifa (along Seil Al-Nukhbar, south of the Dead Sea, **Fig 1**), the northern shores of the Dead Sea (Sweimeh, **Plate 1**), and nearly continuously along the banks of the Jordan River, and the lower Yarmouk River, particularly near its junction with the Jordan River at Baqqourah. The largest and most continuous concentrations were found in the floodplains adjacent to the southern Jordan River. This undisturbed and undeveloped strip of suitable habitat extends for around 35km between the mouth of the Jordan River and the Karamah area, enclosing extensive *Tamarix* thickets growing on the flood plains. It also extends along the lower parts of several wadis belonging to the Jordan system, just before they join the Jordan River – examples are Wadi Kharrar (Khoury 2001) and Wadi Nimrein. Other sites with large colonies include Fifa (50–100bp), Sweimeh (40–80bp), and some along the central and northern Jordan River, like Damia and the lowermost Wadi Zarqa where it meets the Jordan River, and also confluence of the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers at Baqqurah.

Due to habitat unsuitability (dominance of reed over *Tamarix* and destruction of remaining *Tamarix*-dominated scrub), the species has bred only at a few localities and in low densities along the northern Jordan River (Khoury *et al* 2005). Although not covered completely during this survey, the Dead Sea's southeastern shores, including

the some wadi mouths at Safi (*eg* lower Wadi al-Hasa), and other sites further north did not appear to hold breeding Dead Sea Sparrow. Most of the *Tamarix* scrub in this area, covered by Mike Evans in 1996 (Andrews *et al* 1999), appeared to be fragmented, highly degraded and dry. We estimated the total breeding population in Jordan to be 1300 – 2000 pairs, at least half being concentrated on the Jordan River floodplains between Wadi Kharrar and the Karamah area.

Indian Silverbill *Lonchura [Eudice] malabarica* Its spread since its history was given by Andrews (1995) lacks data. Present only at two sites along the southern and lower Jordan River (Sweimeh and Wadi Kharrar), but further north very frequent and locally common along river, groups of up to 15 birds present per site from the Karamah area north to North Shouneh. The species appears to prefer agricultural landscapes, where it may invade remnant natural habitats such as *Tamarix* scrub close to farms.

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoletus.* Groups of 3–14 at three different sites along the banks of the southern and central Jordan River, between the lower Wadi Nimrein and the lower Wadi Zarqa areas, during late July.

DISCUSSION

The above list considers only significant records of species not previously known to occur or to be widely distributed along the near-border areas of the Jordan River or at the northern and southern tips of the Dead Sea. The breeding bird fauna of the area comprising the Jordan River floodplains and the low-lying saltmarsh and *Tamarix* scrub habitats at Sweimeh and Fifa probably numbers over 60 species (Andrews 1995, Andrews *et al* 1999, Shirihai 1996 and Khoury 2001). If we include the rest of the Jordan River and the lower rift margins, this number of breeding species exceeds 100 (*cf* Andrews 1995 and Shirihai 1996). Around 10 species (*c*15% of our study area's breeding species) appear to be limited (or nearly so) in to this specific area in Jordan, namely several egrets and herons (Andrews *et al* 1999), Black Francolin, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher, Common Nightingale, Clamorous Reed Warbler and Dead Sea Sparrow. Moreover, the breeding ranges of two species characteristic of the Afro-tropical Wadi Araba, Green Bee-eater and Arabian Babbler stretch into the lower and central Jordan River Basin, while a few Mediterranean species typical of the Northern Highlands, such as Syrian Woodpecker, also have ranges that extend into the river's northern and central banks. The result is a unique latitudinal variation of bird communities within the Jordan River Basin.

In terms of recent colonisation, Namaqua Dove has been successful in the lower and central Jordan Valley, and we often found Indian Silverbill frequenting the central and northern banks of the Jordan River, its invasion seemingly facilitated by agricultural expansion. Until recently, it had not been appreciated that the habitats immediately bordering the Jordan River were so varied as to hold such a diverse avifauna, uniquely so in the region. By themselves, such facts would be amongst the prime reasons for any area to be considered for protection and conservation, but the urgent need for action to seek the granting of the highest conservation priority in Jordan is driven by the steady erosion of these fragile habitats by a multiplicity of independent interests using and managing this narrow area.

Natural habitats, including the riparian and saltmarsh vegetation communities of the central and northern Jordan Valley have been mostly converted to farmland. Saltmarsh habitats and *Tamarix* scrub along the Dead Sea's southeastern shores have been recently reduced to a few remnant and degraded patches from agricultural

expansion, leading to the reduction and probable disappearance of several Dead Sea Sparrow colonies. The southern and lower Jordan River floodplain and the near-border area at Fifa still retain relatively intact natural undisturbed saltmarshes and *Tamarix* scrub. The *Tamarix* thickets along the northern shores of the Dead Sea at Sweimeh, although surrounded by land-use changes, offer the best and only opportunity to watch breeding colonies of Dead Sea Sparrow in Jordan, all other sites having very limited access. However, even these near-intact undisturbed habitats are currently under threat because of loss of water resources that feed perennial streams and springs. Not only would these sites become degraded, but year-round water availability is so important for the existence of Dead Sea Sparrow and other species. In addition, introduced mesquite *Prosopis juliflora* shrubs have recently become invasive, apparently replacing *Tamarix* at several sites along the Dead Sea shores. Industrial and tourist projects are also potential major threats to the southern reaches of the Jordan River, despite of the declaration of an IBA along the southern Jordan River (RSCN 2000).

We recommend that the Jordan Valley Authority and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature seek formal protection for all remnant natural habitat patches along the flood plains of Jordan River and at Fifa and Sweimeh and that the IBA inventory of Jordan be reviewed in the light of our newly-acquired information from the Jordan Valley. Accordingly, we suggest that BirdLife International, through its Jordanian partner the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature discuss with the Jordan Valley Authority how this recommendation can be implemented. A continuous and suitably broad belt of riparian habitat could, with little effort, be preserved along the banks of the Jordan River to act as corridors allowing the movement of animals between suitable habitat patches, and to provide appropriate stopover habitats for migrant bird species.

This paper highlights but a few aspects of the value of the habitats within our study area; there remain many gaps in our knowledge of the status of bird species relying on aquatic habitats (*eg* herons, rails and *Acrocephalus* warblers) We also have a poor understanding of the (meta-) population and community structure of birds and how these are affected by the impact of human activities in the northern rift valley. Surveys slightly earlier in the season would probably provide more definitive breeding information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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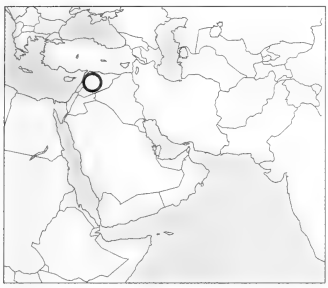
Sabkhat al-Jabbul, a Threatened Ramsar Wetland in Syria

GIANLUCA SERRA, DAVID MURDOCH, FRANCIS TURKELBOOM, FRANÇOIS. TRAVERT, YASEEN MUJAWER AND DEREK A SCOTT



Sabkhat al Jabbul is a large wetland lying between the fertile cultivated areas around Aleppo, the Euphrates basin and the Syrian steppe. In the last 20 years, it has been modified from a typical seasonal saline lake (*sabkhat*) to a complex wetland eco-system with three separate waterbodies that vary from saline to brackish. The maximum water surface is now 270 km^2. The major causes of these changes are the construction of dykes and the expansion of irrigation schemes that use the *sabkhat* as an outlet for irrigation drainage water. Some shores of each of the lakes have recently developed large reedbeds. Ornithological records are limited, but there is good evidence that this is the most important wetland in Syria, with large numbers of wintering and migrant waterbirds and substantial breeding populations. *Sabkhat al Jabbul* nowadays seems to support more than 1% of the world population of a range of waterbirds, including Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*, the globally threatened White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, possibly also Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* , globally threatened Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and the near-threatened Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*. Its geographical position makes it of great importance for a wide range of migrant species. It was designated as a Ramsar site in 1998, but it seems still seriously threatened by uncontrolled water pollution, fluctuating water and salinity levels, degradation of shore vegetation and by hunting. One of the key underlying causes has been the limited coordination of planning and management between the relevant governmental institutions, but there is some hope that the recent establishment by the Aleppo Governorate of a steering committee for the *Sabkhat al Jabbul* will overcome this issue.

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INTRODUCTION

Sabkhat al Jabbul is a large wetland with saline and brackish bodies, partially surrounded by reedbeds, situated in northwest Syria (**Figs 1 & 2**). Its importance as a staging and wintering area for waterbirds, particularly Greater Flamingo, was recognised as long ago as the 1960s (Savage 1968). LK Dijksen and FJ Koning carried out mid-winter waterbird counts in December 1971 and December 1972 (Dijksen & Koning 1972, Koning & Dijksen 1973); they recorded maximum counts of 1600 Greater Flamingo, 2030 Greater White-fronted Geese, 20 Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* and 115 Common Cranes *Grus grus*. These observations led to its identification as a wetland of international importance by Carp (1980) and Scott (1995) and its description as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International (Evans 1994). It was officially designated as a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site) under the Ramsar Convention in 1998. Biologists from the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Aleppo, made further counts in the early 1990s (Scott 1995). A partial survey during the Syrian Wetland Expedition of 2004 led to its recognition as the most important wetland in Syria (Murdoch *et al* 2004). There have been a few informal visits, usually by holidaying birdwatchers (Wester 1998, Vandemeutter & Soors 2001, Murdoch 2003). Though the available data are limited, there are strong indications

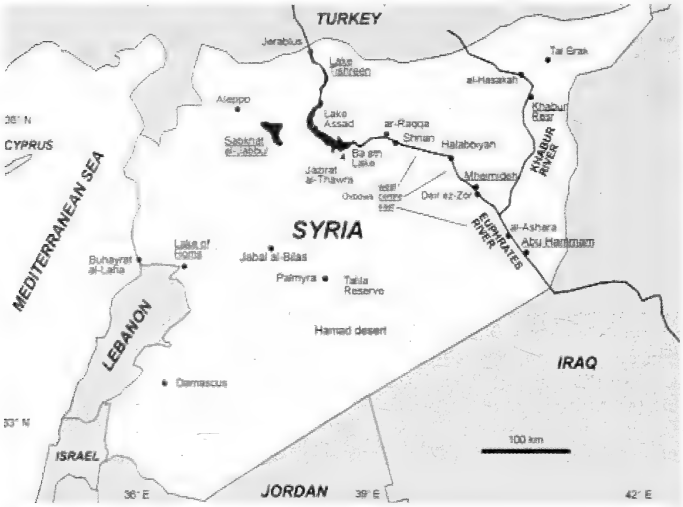

Figure 1. Map showing the position of Sabkhat al-Jabbul within Syria. *© Rene Hofland*

that the populations of wintering and breeding birds have increased over the last 10 years. Since 1991, when the *sabkhat* became officially protected under Syrian law, a number of uncoordinated conservation measures have been taken. However, these seem to be largely inadequate in view of the increasing threats facing the *sabkhat* that would severely compromise its value for wildlife and seriously impact on the livelihoods of the surrounding villages.

This paper aims to describe the hydrology, habitats and birdlife of *Sabkhat al Jabbul*, assessing its conservation importance for birds, discussing known and potential threats, and presenting some key recommendations for its conservation. We request that the Syrian authorities consider these proposals and conserve this outstanding wetland for the benefit of present and future Syrian generations. Further, we wish to stimulate the international birding community to organise comprehensive surveys to confirm its importance before it is irreparably damaged.

DESCRIPTION, CLIMATE AND HYDROLOGY

Sabkhat al Jabbul lies at an altitude of 312m asl south-east of Aleppo (*Haleb*), the second city of Syria (**Fig 1**). It has a moderate continental climate with a temperature range from 2 to 10°C in January and 21 to 37°C in July. The average rainfall is 200–350mm, most falling between October and April.

The *sabkhat* has formed in a closed basin of 5075 km^2, with the river Euphrates to the east and the river *Qwayq*, which passes through Aleppo, to the west. It is a natural sink for rainfall runoff and sediments from the surrounding areas, which reach the *sabkhat* via *wadis* (*ie* river beds dry for most of the year) during heavy winter rainstorms. As in most dry areas, the runoff water carries small amounts of salts and minerals, mainly sodium chloride, which concentrates in the natural closed basin by evaporation during the summer. As a result, a large, dry, saline depression or *sabkhat* forms every year during the hot summer months.

A seasonal river, the *Nahal al Dahab* (Golden River), once drained into the *Jabbul* depression, but water abstraction for irrigation lowered the water table; the river ceased flowing into the lake in the 1960s. The inflow of water into the *sabkhat* declined until the 1980s. However, in 1979 a large-scale irrigation scheme began to abstract water from the Euphrates to irrigate the dry lands north and west of the *sabkhat* (Evans 1994) and significant amounts of drainage water from the irrigated fields started to flow into the basin of the *sabkhat* (source: General Organization of Land Development of Aleppo, Ministry of Irrigation). Work was completed in 1997, on the western side. As a result, the number of months that the *sabkhat* holds water has increased signifi-

cantly over the last 15 years, drainage water becoming significant in the mid 1980s. The maximum area of the waterbodies now reaches 270km^2 and all three lakes in the *sabkhat* hold limited areas of water throughout the summer. By the early 1990s, contamination of the salt by urban and agricultural pollutants had become a major concern. To protect the northwest part of the *sabkhat* from further pollution, a dyke was built in 1996 connecting *Jabbul* village on the northern shore to *Haqlah* village on the southwestern shore. A canal was then dug to channel effluents from *Sfirah* town and nearby agricultural land directly into the central lake near *Haqlah*.

The *sabkhat* now consists of three semi-independent water bodies with markedly different ecosystems whose water and salinity levels fluctuate independently (**Fig 2**):

- *The northwestern lake* (maximum surface area [msa] 47km^2). This is the most saline and is the official site for salt extraction. Its water comes from irrigation channels and groundwater from the northern side of the lake. A state company produces salt by evaporating lake water in cement ponds close to *Jabbul* village.

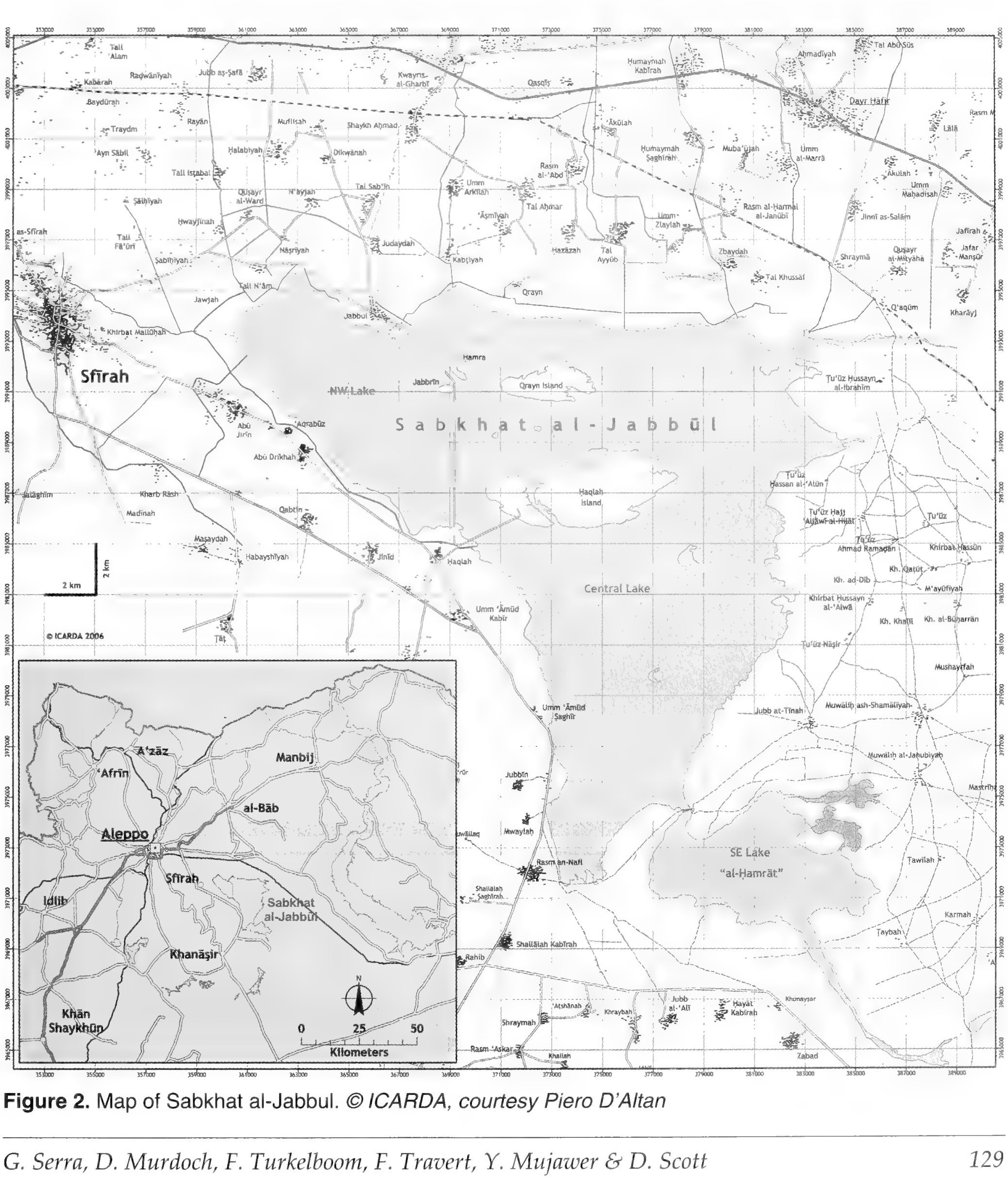

Figure 2. Map of Sabkhat al-Jabbul. *© ICARDA, courtesy Piero D'Altan*

- *The central lake* (msa 194km^2). The largest lake, it receives natural runoff from the slopes of the nearby *Jabel al Hoss*, drainage water and groundwater from the surrounding irrigation schemes, and sewage water from nearby cities and factories. It is brackish in the north, inflow from channels entering the north and the north-east corner (**Plate 1**) seemingly resulting in a local decline in salinity and saline in the south. The central lake has nine permanent islands (whose total surface area is *c*18km^2), of which *Jabbrin* is on the *Jabbul-Haqlah* dyke and *Haqlah* island is accessible from a causeway.
- *The southeastern lake* (msa 29km^2). This lake (officially called *Hussayn sabkhat* but locally known as *al Hamrat*) is fed by natural runoff from the slopes of *Jabel al Shbeith* and by drainage water (from irrigation schemes east of the *sabkhat*) which enters the southeast corner by an artificial channel. An earth dam controls water flow into the central lake by culverts, the southeastern lake being at a higher elevation. Paradoxically, the water level in the south-eastern lake apparently increases in the summer. When the cotton-planting season begins in April, farmers abstract large amounts of irrigation water, resulting in increased flow into the south-eastern lake and a substantial rise in its water level.

LAND USE, VEGETATION AND HABITATS

Areas round the sabkhat

The *sabkhat* is surrounded by distinct farming communities and systems which have a significant impact on its vegetation and habitats:

- Northern and western shores: relatively densely populated agricultural plains, intensively cultivated throughout the year, whose farmers rely heavily on irrigation. Villages are relatively prosperous. Income is mainly from agriculture.
- Southwestern shores (the villages of *Haqlah* to *Umm Amud Saghir*): mixed income from salt extraction, agriculture and off-farm activities.
- Southern shores (the northern part of the *Khanasser* valley): relatively poor communities dependent on dry-land farming (rain-dependent cropping that does not make use of irrigation), sheep-rearing and off-farm activities.
- Eastern shores: settled Bedouin villages at low density that depend on raising sheep and salt extraction. This area has little infrastructure and is the poorest area around the *sabkhat*.

Salt extraction is a traditional economic activity for the villagers round the *sabkhat*. Though it was officially banned in 1984, it continues to generate important income for some villages. The impact of salt collection on biodiversity appears to be negligible as it occurs in areas where the lake has completely dried up.

The sabkhat

Short halophytic communities supporting low biomass dominated the shores of the original saline *sabkhat*. The developments in agriculture and livestock over the last 15 years have led to major changes in the shoreline vegetation:

Plate 1. The central lake seen from the northeastern shore, Jebel al Hoss in the background. *© Gianluca Serra*

Plate 2. Rush *Juncus* sp at the northern shore of the central lake, May 06. *© Francis Turkelboom*

Plate 3. From Jabbrin island towards Hamra island across the dyke, May 06. *© Francis Turkelboom*

Plate 4. From NW Sabkhat al-Jabbul to Jabbrin tell, Feb 06. *© Francis Turkelboom*

Plate 5. Halophyte vegetation on the eastern shore of the central lake. *© Francis Turkelboom*

Plate 6. White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* chicks, southeast lake, 13 May 06. *© David Murdoch*

Plate 7. Shot Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*, May 06. *© David Murdoch*

- Northwestern lake: the shoreline is mostly bare, particularly along the steeper, stonier stretches in the south, which have often been degraded by agricultural or pastoral activities. Stands of *Phragmites* are now developing along the gentle gradients of the north and west shore.
- Along the northern shore of the central lake and the two major inflow channels; here the water is less saline and there are now extensive reed beds, probably an indication of water that is merely brackish. Areas of emergent vegetation, mainly Rush *Juncus* spp (**Plate 2**), have spread rapidly in the last three years to cover several square kilometres between the islands of *Hamra* and *Jabbrin* in the central lake (**Plates 3 & 4**). The reedbeds and other emergent vegetation are very important for nesting and feeding waterbirds.
- Southern and western shores of the central lake: overgrazing along the shore-line has led to the disappearance of the native vegetation cover in some areas such as around the village of *Haqlah*. Beyond a small strip of grazing land along the shore, this area is usually used for extensive barley cultivation and is the preferred foraging area for geese during the winter. 'Grazing' by geese on cereal shoots may cause economic loss for local farmers.
- Eastern shore of the central lake (**Plate 5**): salty west winds result in small dunes and salinisation of the land, preventing agriculture in a band about 1km wide along the shore; this land is used mainly for grazing. Sand or ooze formations and the wet interdunal areas generate unusual habitats and attract birds typical of steppe environments.
- The islands: some Bedouin families have traditional grazing rights for the larger islands (*Haglah, Qrayn, Jabbrin,* possibly *Hamra*), which in spring support large flocks of sheep. Where slopes are steep, as on the central islands, kingfishers and other hole-nesting birds can find breeding sites, but the shores are usually bare. Huge colonies of birds breed on small bare islands or thinly vegetated islands in the central lake and on small reedy islands in the south-eastern lake.
- Southeastern lake: there are reedbeds along the southern shore and the channel in the south-eastern corner. In December 2005 and March 2006, many of the reeds appeared dead and waterbird numbers had fallen dramatically, though the reeds along the channel were still healthy. The likely cause was a fall in the water level (of perhaps 1m) linked to increased salinity. In May 2006, the water level had risen and some reeds were recovering.

AVIFAUNA

Sabkhat al Jabbul was listed as a Ramsar site in 1998 because it fulfilled three criteria for recognition as a 'wetland of international importance for water birds':

- Criterion 1: it contained a representative example of a natural wetland type.
- Criterion 5: it regularly supported 20 000 or more waterbirds.
- Criterion 6: it regularly supported 1% of the individuals of a flyway population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

It was described as "a large, permanent saline lake designated... for providing an important staging, wintering and breeding area for large numbers of waterbirds and supporting more than 1% of the world population of Greater Flamingo."

There have been 18 visits or partial surveys between 1998 and 2006 with 168 species of bird recorded (see summary in **Table 1**). The most significant results are as follows:

- observations of at least six globally threatened or near-threatened species (as defined by BirdLife International 2006):
- White-headed Duck (Endangered)

- Marbled Duck (Vulnerable)
- Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* (Vulnerable)
- Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (Near-threatened)
- Ferruginous Duck (Near-threatened)
- Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* (Conservation Dependent)
- Recent observations of internationally significant numbers of White-headed Duck, representing perhaps 5–10% of the world population (Porter & Scott 2005)
- Confirmation of internationally important numbers of Greater Flamingo with up to 15 000 individuals in winter 2004 and spring 2005 - a breeding colony was located in May 2006.

Sabkhat al Jabbul may now be one of the most important wintering sites in the world for White-headed Duck. This species has recently undergone a dramatic decline in south-west Asia after the drainage of *Burdur Golu*, a Turkish wetland previously its most important wintering site; the global population is estimated at 8000 – 13 000 individuals, of which 5000 – 10 000 are in the East Mediterranean & West Asia (Wetlands International 2002). Porter and Scott (2005) recorded 725 White-headed Duck on 25 January 2005 in the north of the central lake. These observations were confirmed by others in the same location made in December 2005 and January 2006 (see **Table 1**). It appears that White-headed Duck did not previously occur in such numbers at *Sabkhat al Jabbul*; Baumgart *et al* (1995) listed two records of single birds, in March 1965 and June 1994, while Scott (1995) reported its occurrence in small numbers on spring passage. The influx of irrigation water and the development of large reedbeds appear to have created more suitable conditions for this duck than in the past. In the breeding season, adults can be seen along the dyke, along the northern shore of the central lake and near the reedbeds of the southeastern lake. Breeding was proved on 25 May 2005 when local children caught a female and five ducklings along the dyke. The birds were housed overnight and returned to the water the next morning.

Greater Flamingos are difficult to count on the *sabkhat*. Some are scattered over a vast area but others form dense flocks. However, estimates of about 7500 – 15 000 in February 2004 (Murdoch *et al* 2004) and May 2005 (Murdoch & al-Asaad, pers obs) suggest the wetland holds one of the largest populations in the Middle East. Breeding was proven in May 2006 on a small island in the central lake south of *Haglah* island, but this site accounts only for a small proportion of the huge numbers present – other colonies may await discovery.

There have been few visits during the breeding season, but the *sabkhat* may be one of the most important breeding areas for waterbirds in the Middle East. Species present include Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* and Great Egret *Ardea alba* (present in hundreds); Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* and Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (all common); Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Garganey *A. querquedula*, Northern Shoveler *A. clypeata*, Northern Pintail *A. acuta* and Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*; Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and 5 tern species: Gull-billed *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Common *Sterna hirundo*, Little *Sternula albifrons*, Caspian *Hydroprogne caspia* and Whiskered *Chlidonias hybrida* (Murdoch 2004) Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* are very common along the northern shore. In 2006, six 'white islands' in the south of the central lake were probably huge colonies of Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*, which is abundant on the *sabkhat*, but they may hold large tern colonies as well. White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* breeds locally (**Plate 6**). The reedbeds hold large populations of passerines,

Table 1. Selected significant observations from *Sabkhat al Jabbul*, 1998 - 2005
NB SWE – Syrian Wetland Expedition (reported in Murdoch *et al*, 2004). SE – southeastern, NW – northwestern *etc*

Species	Breeding status	Observations, dates	Observers	Comments
Greylag Goose *Anser anser*	Possible 2005	190, 10–11.2.04 5, 4.5.05	Andrews *et al* Murdoch & Asaad	Record from SWE; small wintering population First breeding season record for Syria
Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*	–	>5,000, SE lake, 11.2.04 7,600, SE lake, 27.2.04	Andrews *et al* Hofland *et al*	Records from SWE
Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*	Possible	>13,000, 10–12.2.04 14, 4.5.05 >1,000, 31.3.06 10, 12–13.5.06	Andrews *et al* Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad	Record from SWE No regular Syrian breeding sites
Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*	Likely	50+, SE lake, 8.5.05 10,000 – 20,000, 31.3.06	Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Kullman	No Syrian breeding records yet
Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustifolia*	Proven 2006	>200, 4.5.05 >300, 31.3.06 21, 12–13.5.06 Breeding proven 04.07.06	Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Kullman Murdoch & Asaad Turkelboom	No records during SWE; probably absent in winter
Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*	Proven 2005	50 pairs with nests, 3.5.05	Murdoch & Asaad	First Syrian breeding records
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*	Very likely, not yet proven	42, 10–12.2.04 ~200, 3–4.5.05 40+, 31.3.06 22, 13.5.06	Andrews *et al* Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Kullman Murdoch & Asaad	Record from SWE
Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*	–	1 female, 10.2.04	Andrews *et al*	Record from SWE; third Syrian record
White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*	Proven 2005, 2006	170, SE lake, Feb 2003 725, central lake, 25.1.05 15, central lake, 3.5.05 >380, central lake, 9.12.05 >350, central lake, 6.01.06	Serra Porter & Scott Murdoch & Asaad Serra & Turkelboom Serra & Bruschin	5–10% of world population may winter Second known Syrian breeding site

Horned (Slavonian) Grebe *Podiceps auritus*	–	1, 17.2.98	Wester	Sole Syrian record
Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*	Possible	50, 10–11.2.04 15, SE lake, 8.5.05 1, dyke, 1.5.06	Andrews *et al* Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad	Record from SWE No Syrian breeding records yet
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*	Proven 2006	~12,000, 10–12.2.04 >9,800, 27.2.04 >10,000, 3.5.05 >10,000 with 500+ prs breeding, 12.5.06	Andrews *et al* Hofland *et al* Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad	Records from SWE First Syrian breeding record
Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*	Proven 2005, 2006	68, 10–11.2.04 50 pairs, SE lake, 8.5.05 >300, 50+ pairs, SE lake, 13.5.06	Andrews *et al* Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad	Record from SWE; only Syrian wintering site First Syrian breeding records
Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*	–	14, 10–11.2.04 8, 3.5.05 4, 31.3.06	Andrews *et al* Murdoch & Asaad Kullman & Murdoch	Record from SWE Scarce winter visitor / passage migrant
Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*	–	1, 27.2.04	Hofland *et al*	Record from SWE
Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*	–	1, SE lake, 11.2.06	Andrews *et al*	Record from SWE
Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*	Proven 2005, 2006	>100, 3–4.5.05 >300, spring 2006	Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad	Abundant in emergent vegetation along the dyke
Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*	Proven 2005, 2006	40, 10–12.2.04 5 nests, NW lake, 3.5.05 50 nests, NW lake, 12.5.06	Andrews *et al* Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad First Syrian breeding records	Record from SWE
White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*	Proven 2005, 2006	2 nests, SE lake, 8.5.05 10 pairs, SE lake, 13.5.06	Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad	Range extension; most westerly site in Syria
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*	–	1, 31.3.06	Kullman	First spring record for Syria?

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*	Proven 2003	Very common with groups of 20+, NW lake, 13.6.2003	Murdoch	Several pairs nesting
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*	–	3, 31.3.06	Kullman	Two previous spring records for Syria
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*	–	3, 31.3.06 1, 13.5.06	Kullman & Murdoch Murdoch & Asaad	Possibly the first Syrian records
Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*		1, central lake, 12.5.06	Murdoch & Asaad	Very rare in Syrian interior
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*	Proven 2003	>100, W side of NW lake, 13.6.03	Murdoch	Active nests, freshly fledged young
Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*	Proven 2005, 2006	Colony of >50 pairs, dyke, 3.5.05	Murdoch & Asaad	Probably scattered colonies throughout *sabkhat*
White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*	Possible	>10,000, 31.3.06	Murdoch & Kullman	Most or all on migration
Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*	Presumed	1, SE lake, 27.2.04 Common, SE lake, 31.3.06 1, north shore, 1.5.06 3, dyke, 12.5.06	Hofland *et al* Murdoch & Kullman Murdoch & Asaad Murdoch & Asaad	Record from SWE Most westerly known site
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*	–	10, 17.2.98 5, Jabbul village marsh, 10.2.04 3, Jabbul village ponds, 25.1.05	Wester Andrews *et al* Porter & Scott	Regular winter visitor

notably warblers such as Savi's *Locustella luscinioides*, Moustached *Acrocephalus melanopogon* and Great Reed *Acr. arundinaceus* and Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*, Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* and Dead Sea Sparrow *Pa. moabiticus*. Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris* is widely distributed in the reedbeds; *Sabkhat al Jabbul* is the only known site west of the Euphrates basin. Most of these species have not yet formally been proven to breed – several would be first breeding records for Syria.

Data comparing breeding seasons are limited. In May 2005, large numbers of waterbirds on the southeastern lake included at least 140 Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* (with 50 nests) and ten species of duck, notably 100 Marbled Duck and 200 Ferruginous Duck. Repeat counts in spring 2006 were dramatically lower, probably linked to the apparent die-back in the reeds round the lake. In May 2005, when there was little human disturbance, large numbers of waterbirds were feeding along the north shore, but in 2006 they were much scarcer when several Bedouin tents were pitched nearby.

There are few migration data so far, but spring brings a huge passage of waders and terns, notably tens of thousands of White-winged Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Little Stints *Calidris minuta* and Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*; at least 25 species of wader can be seen in a morning along the north shore. There appear to have been no observations yet from autumn.

Observations made in February 2004 by members of the Syrian Wetland Expedition (SWE) (Murdoch *et al* 2004) revealed an impressive range of wintering raptors and huge numbers of geese, ducks and waders (**Table 1**); the numbers of Greater White-fronted Goose and Common Shelduck were of international significance.

Thus today *Sabkhat al Jabbul* fulfils Criterion 6 for a Ramsar site for a range of waterbirds; these include Greater Flamingo, Common Shelduck and White-headed Duck, and possibly also Greater White-fronted Goose, Northern Shoveler, Marbled Teal, Ferruginous Duck and Little Stint. However, visits so far have been unsystematic; informed conservation of the *sabkhat* requires regular data collection and organisation of comprehensive surveys.

THREATS

Direct threats

a. *Water pollution.* Pollution of the water entering the *sabkhat* is generally recognized as a major threat to the integrity of the ecosystem. Agricultural, urban and industrial developments round the *sabkhat* have resulted in increased inflow of human effluent, fertilizers and pesticides, and chemical waste from factories (these include a sugar-beet factory and a chlorine factory under construction). As the *sabkhat* is a closed depression, polluted particles will continue to accumulate until their inflow is controlled. Pollution has already made the salt from the central lake unsuitable for any use and salt collection by villagers has been officially banned. However, the salt is still used. Local villagers have regularly reported finding dead fish and dead young flamingos in recent summers; possible causes would include pollution, drying up of the lake or increased salinity.

b. *Fluctuating water and salinity levels.* There is at present no management plan to regulate water levels and salt content, which therefore depend on the quantity of rainfall runoff, sewage water and drainage from irrigation. Sudden changes in water level and salinity can have adverse affect on the reedbeds and ecological value of the *sabkhat*, as noted in the southeastern lake in March 2006 (see above). There are now

plans to divert irrigation water to the *Khanasser* valley rather than to the *sabkhat*; the ecological and economic effects of these proposals are unknown and need thorough investigation before any investment is made.

c. *Mismanagement and degradation of shore vegetation.* The reedbeds are crucially important as safe feeding, breeding and resting areas for a wide range of birds, notably herons and ducks. It is likely that both the local community and relevant authorities are unaware of the reedbeds' ecological importance. This makes the reedbeds vulnerable to random interventions such as garbage dumping or burning. It is vital to include the reedbeds in the protected areas and to police their protection adequately. The shorelines with salt-tolerant vegetation may be important for a number of bird species, but overgrazing and regular disturbance make them unsuitable for nesting birds and reduce their ecological value.

d. *Uncontrolled hunting and fishing.* Hunting and fishing were banned in 1991 when the *sabkhat* became a protected area and a national hunting ban declared in 2001 now runs until 2010. Its enforcement is the responsibility of local police officers, but it is not implemented; shooting can be heard on almost every visit to accessible areas such as the northern shore (**Plate 7**). There may be less hunting in the breeding season when birds are fewer in number. It is also forbidden for four months by an Islamic restriction. The southeastern lake is more remote and has three guards employed by the Department of Agriculture. The protection they confer may be limited but their presence probably has significant deterrence value; for instance, White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*, a vulnerable ground-nesting species, was breeding around the southeastern lake in 2005 and 2006. There is some fishing by villagers in the north of the central lake and in the southeastern lake but at present disturbance seems to be limited; major increases in fishing activity could have conservation implications.

e. *Introduction of invasive alien species.* Alien species have caused massive loss of biodiversity worldwide (Lowe *et al* 2000). There is no evidence so far of such introductions in the *sabkhat*, but introduction of alien fish for economic purposes has occurred in other Syrian wetlands (Serra, pers obs). This practice can cause irreversible damage to the whole ecosystem and should be strongly discouraged.

Underlying causes

The above-mentioned direct threats have their roots in a complex array of underlying causes, among the most serious being: weak coordinated management and protection of the site (mainly due to overlapping responsibilities between government institutions), limited availability of expertise in wetland management and conservation, limited integration of biodiversity conservation into district policies (such as rural development, agriculture and irrigation). The diversity of *Jabbul*'s birdlife still finds little appreciation at local level, both among authorities and among local community. However, the relevant numbers of flamingos, in particular, are an attraction even to non-birdwatchers. The lack of information in Arabic on wildlife conservation or ecology undoubtedly contributes to the lack of awareness. On the other hand, some local people seem to enjoy the landscape and the spectacular flocks of flamingos; family parties can be seen picnicking on Fridays on *Jabbrin* island.

CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Observations over the past seven years have confirmed the international conservation importance of *Sabkhat al Jabbul* and the justification for its Ramsar status. It is crucial to stress the importance of this environment also for the welfare of the local community

and of its future generations. During the past 15 years a number of uncoordinated conservation measures have been taken for the sake of *sabkhat* conservation, but so far without significant and obvious results. In order to further promote and intensify the conservation effort in the *Sabkhat al Jabbul* and to support the welfare of the local community we recommend the following key measures (in no particular order):

1. Surveying the site thoroughly to define its ornithological importance for threatened species particularly White-headed Duck. To obtain baseline data, a comprehensive breeding season survey is urgently needed – winter and migration surveys should follow in time. [1]A medium-term goal should be to carry out annual midwinter waterbird counts as part of the International Waterbird Census (IWC) co-ordinated by Wetlands International.

2. Strengthening the regular monitoring of water pollution, water levels and salinity to establish their impact on human health and on wildlife.

3. Strengthening the institutional, management and scientific capacity of the *Sabkhat al Jabbul* steering committee, recently established under the leadership of the Aleppo Governorate.

4. Ensuring regular and active participation by the local community in the planning and decision-making processes relating to *sabkhat* conservation, so that they can see that they have a worthwhile stake in the management of the *sabkhat* for people and for conservation. Subsequent local community control of hunting would then be a more practical aim, given precedents elsewhere The basis of such participation lies in the preparation of a 5-year scientifically based and socio-economically sensitive management plan for the *sabkhat*.

5. Ensuring allocation of adequate government funds to staff and manage the protected area properly and to provide suitable equipment to do so. At the same time, international assistance should be sought specifically to train staff to a high degree of capability (*eg* to produce wetland management expertise and to train a site manager and the rangers) and to obtain basic optical equipment.

6. Developing awareness campaigns, locally and nationally, to impress the unique value of *Sabkhat al Jabbul* on the consciousness of the local and national communities.

7. Raising awareness amongst international conservation organizations and agencies about *Sabkhat al Jabbul* with the aim of attracting the financial resources needed to implement these recommendations.

CONCLUSION

Sabkhat al Jabbul has been aptly described as 'a paradise and a nightmare'. At present it is one of the most important wetlands in the Middle East but the entire *sabkhat* could become an ecological nightmare if the related processes of water pollution, fluctuating water and salinity levels, vegetation degradation and hunting are allowed to continue. However, there is enormous potential for the *sabkhat* and for the local community if its riches can be used sustainably and equitably. *Sabkhat al Jabbul* could be a showcase for the successful combination of development and conservation in the Middle East, but

[1] The survey tasks will not be easy. Many areas are difficult to reach and often vast numbers of birds are often at extreme range, making the counting task formidable. Any full-scale survey will probably require not only an experienced team of observers, but also access to boats for at least a week.

it will require sustained effective co-ordination between local and national authorities. Coordination requires the preparation of an integrated scientifically-based and socio-economically sensitive management plan. This plan will have to show that active participation is linked to clear benefits for the local community, but it will also need the support of the international conservation community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX 1

Visiting the site at *Sabkhat al-Jabbul*

Information on this huge and complex wetland is largely incomplete but the best birding areas appear to be the dyke, the northern shore of the central lake and the southern shore of the southeastern lake, particularly where the channel carries fresh water into the lake. The mouth of the channel at *Haglah* village can be good. Some shores, for instance the southern tip of the northwestern lake, are stony and are of little interest.

To reach the northern shores of the *sabkhat*, there are turnings off the main Aleppo–*Raqqa* highway south to the villages of *Jabbul* and *Deir Hafer*, and a road east from the town of *Sfirah*. *Jabbul*, about 45 minutes' drive from the centre of Aleppo

(about 40–50km), is the best access point to the north shore and the dyke. There are excellent views of the north of the *sabkhat* from two hills (*tell*), one near the northern end of the dyke and the second about 3km south of it (the '*tell* on the dyke', on *Jabbrin* island). A very poor track with limited visibility runs along the northern edge of the central lake; 4WD vehicles are essential after any rain. The dyke between the northwestern and central lakes runs south for 8.5km from *Jabbul* village to *Haqlah* village on the southern shore. A locked gate at its northern end prevents access by car but Mr Yaseen (see below) is usually able to obtain the key; it is then an easy drive. Semi-permanent obstacles prevent access by car from its southern end. A walk along the dyke, especially starting from the *Jabbul* end, is a pleasant and relaxing experience.

The southwest shores of the northwestern lake and the southern half of the central lake are best reached by a road from *Sfirah* that runs 20–25km from northwest to southeast, roughly parallel to the lake. *Haqlah* island, a large, arid island in the central lake with many bays, is accessible by a causeway that starts just east of *Haqlah* village. It is easy to drive across the island and views are good but there are many fewer birds than along the north shore. The island is still a military area and there is usually a guard at the entrance. It was previously used as a firing range and there is always the danger of encountering an unexploded shell, but there are many Bedouin on the island with large flocks of sheep, so the risks are probably small.

The southeastern lake is about 70km from the centre of Aleppo. A good road runs west-east several km south of the lake and poor tracks run north across fields to its southern shore. It is possible in dry conditions to drive a saloon car round the west and most of the southern side, though it takes great skill to drive over the dam onto the north side. The eastern shores of both central and southeastern lakes are very inaccessible, with very poor roads, although not impossible with 4WD and a knowledgeable driver (via *Rasm an-Nafl* village in the south or *Shrayma* village along the railway in the north). There are still very few ornithological observations from this large area.

The large distances involved require careful planning and clear communication with local guides beforehand. In wet weather, 4WD vehicles are essential to go off-road. The shores of the southeastern lake should be avoided completely; many visitors have become stuck, sometimes for long periods! Visitors are advised to travel with Syrian nationals away from asphalt roads to avoid potential misunderstandings at military sites. Moreover, national and local guides are generally very helpful and knowledgeable. It is important to remember that contact with foreign eco-tourists greatly encourages Syrian conservationists. Mr Yaseen Mujawer, also known as Abu Qalil (tel. 021-6820065) welcomes overnight visitors to his house in *Jabbul* village close to the entrance to the dyke; this option is recommended for those who do not have transport or who do not want to stay in Aleppo. He speaks little except Arabic but he is an invaluable source of information about the *sabkhat's* birds. Mr Ibrahim Waqqas (Abu Steif), also based in *Jabbul* village, appears to be a guard appointed to keep the key of the gate at the entrance of the dyke. Mr Mohammed Abu Nasr (no phone) lives in the enchanting village of *Shalale Saghira* to the south-west of the southeastern lake; visitors are welcome to his beehive home, which is more convenient for the southeastern lake, but facilities are limited.

How to submit records.
All data from Sabkhat al Jabbul are valuable and we ask visitors to send them to OSME. Significant observations will be published with permission in *Sandgrouse*.

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Distribution and population size of Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* in Iran

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INTRODUCTION

Although much of Iran is extremely dry, the country possesses a great diversity of wetland ecosystems. The wetlands of Iran constitute vital staging and wintering areas for millions of migratory water-birds using the west Siberian-Caspian flyway, and also support large breeding population of many species. The wetlands of Iran are very important for eight species of birds listed as globally threatened (Mansoori 1984). The 1996 IUCN list of threatened birds of Iran included Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*, Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*, and Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*.

Ferruginous Duck is distributed in the Palearctic region and has a fragmented breeding distribution at temperate latitudes (north to about 54°N) in the steppe, desert and southern forest zones from western Europe (where now rare) and northwest Africa across central Asia to western China (Sinkiang and northern Szechuan) and western Mongolia. In western Eurasia, the main breeding range lies in eastern Europe (Romania, Hungary, Russia, Ukraine and Moldova), in Turkey) and in the southwestern republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but small numbers breed in isolated pockets throughout west and central Europe. The main wintering areas are in the Black and Caspian Sea regions, the coastal Mediterranean and West Africa, with relatively small numbers of birds reaching the Arabian Peninsula and eastern Africa (south to Kenya and rarely western Uganda) (Scott & Rose 1996).

METHODS

The optical aids used in this study comprised a pair of 10x40 binoculars and a Bushnell x60 telescope. At the wetland sites, I either walked around or traversed them by boat (especially at larger wetlands). All reports and documents pertaining to these surveys, in particular the mid-winter counts, have been examined, analysed and evaluated for this paper.

Results and Discussion

Little information on the status of Ferruginous Duck within Iran has been published. However, it is known that the species has been found in at least 24 wetlands (**Table 1**) of north and southwest Iran, whether wintering or breeding (**Fig 1**; Mansoori 1997), sometimes in very small numbers. According to the midwinter counts data, the total winter population of Ferruginous Duck is estimated as being between 200 and 1000 for the entire country (**Table 2**; Scott 1995), but the most recent midwinter count (2002) estimated only 201 throughout Iran. **Table 2** indicates that the population trend for this duck has steadily declined since at least 1994, a decline mirrored in most suitable habitats throughout the country. **Table 2** also shows sites that have held more than 50 individuals (1% of the regional population, Scott & Rose 1996); these are Gerdeh Ghit, Kaniborazan and Qareh Qeshlagh, Ghopi Lake, the Anzali complex, Fereydoonkenar, Ezbaran, Miankaleh, Bamdej, Shadegan, Parishan Lake and Dasht-e-Arjan. The species

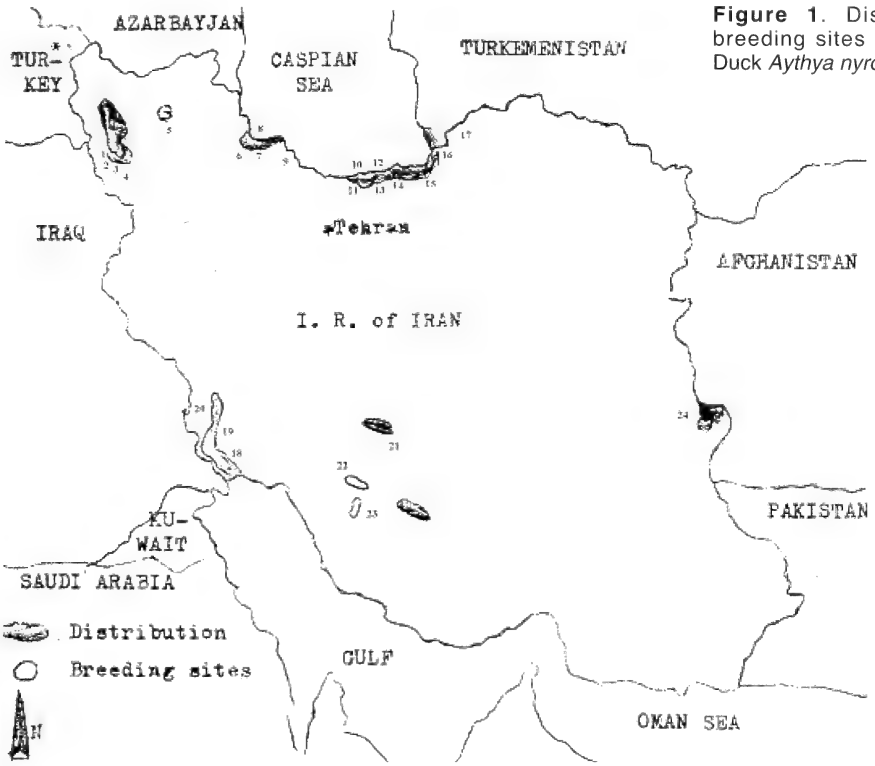

Figure 1. Distribution and breeding sites of Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* in Iran.

usually favours certain wetlands in winter such as the Anzali wetland complex, Fereydoun Kenar Damgah, Parishan Lake; Miankaleh held the maximum count of 424 birds in 2000. Only a few sites such as Changiz Goli, Islam Abad, Fereydoonkenar and Ezbaran, have recently experienced increased populations (**Table 2**).

Table 1. Surveyed wetland sites, their area and general coordinates (See **Fig 1**)

S No	Sites	Area (ha)	General Coordinates
1	Shurgol, Dorgeh Sangi and Yadegarloo	2500	37°01'N, 45°28'E
2	Gerdeh Ghit, Kaniborazan and Qareh Qeshlagh	1800	37°02'N, 45°40'E
3	Changiz Goli, Islam Abad	500	37°03'N, 45°41'E
4	Ghopi Lake	1200	46°51'N, 45°30'E
5	Gorigol	120	37°50'N, 46°40'E
6	Anzali complex	15000	37°25'N, 49°28'E
7	Selke	100	37°25'N, 49°27'E
8	Bujagh	200	37°25'N, 49°27'E
9	Amirkelaych	1230	37°18'N, 50°00'E
10	Fereydoonkenar	1000	36°35'N, 52°31'E
11	Ezbaran	450	36°35'N, 52°30'E
12	Sorkhrud	250	36°35'N, 52°29'E
13	Seydmahalleh	1600	36°45'N, 53°00'E
14	Zaghmarz	950	36°50'N, 53°17'E
15	Miankaleh	97200	36°50'N, 53°45'E
16	Gomishan	20000	37°15'N, 53°55'E
17	Alagol	1540	37°21'N, 54°35'E
18	Bamdej	12000	31°45'N, 48°36'E
19	Shadegan	425140	30°20'N, 48°20'E
20	Horelazjm	100000	31°45'N, 48°25'E
21	Kaftar Lake	4700	30°34'N, 52°47'E
22	Parishan Lake	4000	29°31'N, 51°48'E
23	Arjan wetland	2200	29°37'N, 51°59'E
24	Hamoun wetland	149000	31°20'N, 61°45'E

Table 2. Population size (midwinter counts) of Ferruginous Duck in Iran. Full records are lacking from 1977–1988, because of the revolution and the defensive war.

SN	Site_ Year_	71	72	73	74	75	76	85	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02
1	Shurgol, Dorgeh Sangi, Yadegarloo	31	11	2	5	10	7	7	31	10	7	0	0	27	19	3	0	0	0	0	3
2	Gerdeh Ghit, Kaniborazan, Qareh Qeshlagh	9	3	0	0	2	0	22	17	65	31	10	20	31	0	4	4	11	0	0	0
3	Changiz Goli, Islam Abad	3	19	0	2	8	4	5	16	3	44	0	0	15	5	21	14	22	16	8	9
4	Ghopi Lake	70	162	5	60	10	10	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	3	11	0	0	0	2
5	Gorigol	2	2	23	0	0	0	2	2	1	14	5	27	0	3	4	6	2	4	0	4
6	Anzali complex	0	9	0	7	100	14	4	130	185	51	2	11	13	7	14	12	4	26	4	62
7	Selke	6	6	2	4	4	0	2	26	0	0	5	5	25	5	2	7	11	9	20	16
8	Bujagh	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	3	3	2	16	0	0	11	2	2	12	4
9	Amirkelayeh	4	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	5	5	2	2	22	7	11
10	Fereydoonkenar	84	0	28	20	5	43	0	67	50	72	118	60	29	136	98	120	130	173	41	12
11	Ezbaran	7	21	0	0	0	6	0	62	2	0	0	0	2	28	91	0	66	17	13	6
12	Sorkhrud	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	9	1	11	2	2
13	Seydmahalleh	3	3	8	1	0	0	0	4	6	6	3	0	0	0	9	2	0	2	0	0
14	Zaghmarz.	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	1	5	1	14	0	0	0	0	6	4	4	11	10
15	Miankaleh	1	7	110	9	118	17	34	202	200	2	185	16	0	8	9	8	10	424	43	33
16	Gomishan	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	7	1	0	2	6	2	4
17	Alagol	15	2	0	0	0	3	0	4	2	2	2	4	2	2	5	0	0	0	0	0
18	Bamdej	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	10	20	22	2	0	0	65	0	7	0	0	3	0
19	Shadegan	61	4	71	20	46	19	0	51	3	19	71	20	20	4	21	6	39	10	14	10
20	Horelazim	17	11	26	37	10	0	0	14	0	32	0	0	29	45	13	25	8	10	10	7
21	Kaftar Lake	0	0	0	4	11	0	0	16	22	40	0	8	21	0	2	2	2	2	2	0
22	Parishan Lake	35	198	0	0	42	41	40	10	71	71	72	14	53	29	15	7	0	10	7	6
23	Arjan wetland	72	65	0	0	83	214	64	181	110	117	173	100	45	76	8	14	4	2	0	0
24	Hamoun wetland	16	2	3	5	10	10	15	16	11	10	5	22	11	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	437	543	280	181	471	385	204	867	766	546	668	282	265	429	319	258	318	724	203	201

Of the 24 important sites regularly utilised by Ferruginous Duck, it is known to breed in at least 5. Recent surveys found proof of breeding in particular wetlands to the south of Uromiyeh Lake (Islam Abad, Yadegarloo and Qareh Qeshlagh wetlands, Mansoori 2001), Parishan Lake in Fars province and also Shadegan in Khuzestan province. However, the decline reached a depressing nadir in 2002, the number of breeding pairs counted in Iran being only 2–5 (**Fig 2**), correlating with the overall decline in midwinter counts (**Table 2**). Scott (1995) had reported an estimated 150–300 breeding pairs in Iran only 7 years previously. A major difficulty that faces any survey of Ferruginous Duck is that its secretive behaviour makes any determination of the accuracy of the counts problematical.

The species' movements in Iran are poorly understood. However, the duck is a partial migrant as well as a breeding bird in Iran; some winter in southwest Asia but breed locally (perhaps up to150–300 pairs), but the majority of the wintering population probably breed mainly east of the Caspian Sea east as far as the Aral Sea (Scott & Rose 1996).

Conservation

Ferruginous Duck is recognized as a globally threatened bird and as a

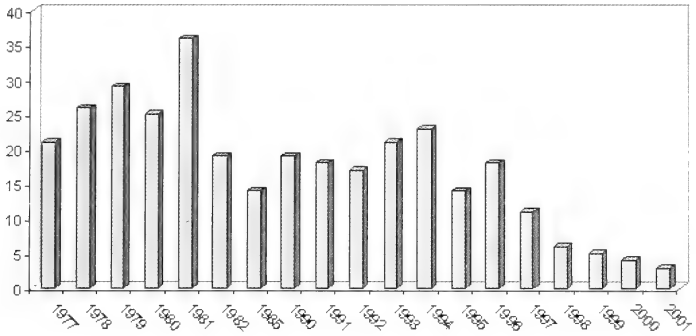

Figure 2. Trend of breeding pairs of Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* in Iran.

protected species in Iran and according to the environmental laws, hunting and trapping it throughout the country are forbidden (Laws and Parliamentary Affairs Office, DOE (1997)). The principal threats to this species are mainly loss and degradation of habitat, but hunting and disturbances also occur in a number of places (Mansoori, 2002). Although it is a protected bird, the achieved conservation status remains unclear. The Department of the Environment is the main Iranian organization responsible for the conservation of wildlife resources in Iran, but there are also some universities and NGOs undertaking long-term research studies on the wildlife resources in the country; such as Tehran University, Esfahan University, Uromiyeh University and the Wildlife Society of Iran. To date, research on Ferruginous Duck has been limited only to general studies such as of its distribution and its appearance in some censuses during the mid-winter counts (Department of the Environment, undated). Officially, the bird is identified as vulnerable and is recognized as a protected duck species throughout Iran, which means that any hunting or trapping is forbidden and that offenders will be legally prosecuted by the Department of the Environment. It is important to recognise that the main problem concerning the Ferruginous Duck's conservation is the lack of information available to local people. Consequently, hunters fail to identify it as a protected species (Department of the Environment, undated). It is vital to implement effective education programs for identification and conservation of this duck and its habitats. Whatever possible, efforts are being made to preserve breeding and wintering habitats of this duck, but it is unlikely that any special research or management project will be undertaken without adequate funding being made available. However, we would appreciate any suggestions or offers of cooperation to establish of a regional working programme of research on this species so that long-term studies can assist its conservation in Iran.

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Further significant extensions of migrant distribution and breeding and wintering ranges in Iran for over sixty species

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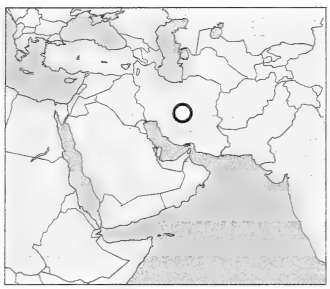

Further to range extensions in Iran published in 2004, we have assessed critically many of the subsequent ornithological records we made in Iran during 2000 to 2005, We have also examined a number of informal records that we would like to see published or at least scrutinised further. The formal records that emerged from our assessment suggested extensions of breeding or winter ranges and of passage migrant distributions for over sixty species and the results are summarised here. We estimate the distances of these observations from previously known ranges or distributions. In addition to these records, we present additional information on some of these and on other species from many other sources, some of which come from the 1970s. We have also amended the distributional information for some other species, mostly migrants or vagrants.

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During the past decade, first records for a number of bird species have been published for Iran, including Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* (Scott 1994), Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus* (Duquet & Richardson 2000), Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus,* Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica* (Kirwan 1998; [ir = informal record]), Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura* (Bradshaw & Kirwan 2000; [ir]), Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* (Roth *et al* 2005), and two Indian River Terns *Sterna aurantia* in Emer Ab-bandan (Foekens & Schlevis 2006), A Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini* appeared on the Caspian Sea coast of Babolsar-Khazar Abad, Mazandaran during the mid-winter Waterbirds Census in 2005 (Amini *et al* 2005). Sometimes, despite the best efforts of the observers, confirmed identifications are not attained; *eg* Asian Brown Flycatcher *Ficedula dauurica* (Sehhatisabet, this issue)

Khlaleghizadeh and Sehhati (2004) mentioned range extension for species such as *Pterocles alchata,* Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis,* Collared Dove *S. decaocto,* Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*. Here we present significant range extensions, changes in migrant distribution and the occurrences of some vagrants in Iran, involving over 60 species.

METHODS

Our ornithological observations were made throughout Iran during from 2000–2005 inclusive. Some of the extensions of migrant distribution and breeding and wintering ranges we recorded are the first known for Iran; others represent extensions beyond that already reported. **Table 1** lists the species recorded, their numbers, each location's geographical coordinates and Iranian province concerned, the date or period of each occurrence, the observer(s) and the distance from the previously known range (Scott *et al* 1975, Mansoori 2001). Areas were visited on foot, by car and sometimes by boat. We identified and studied the birds with binoculars and telescopes and we recorded the geographical coordinates via a Global Positioning System (GPS) (Etrex, Vista). The province map at **Fig 1** will help orient readers unfamiliar with Iran.

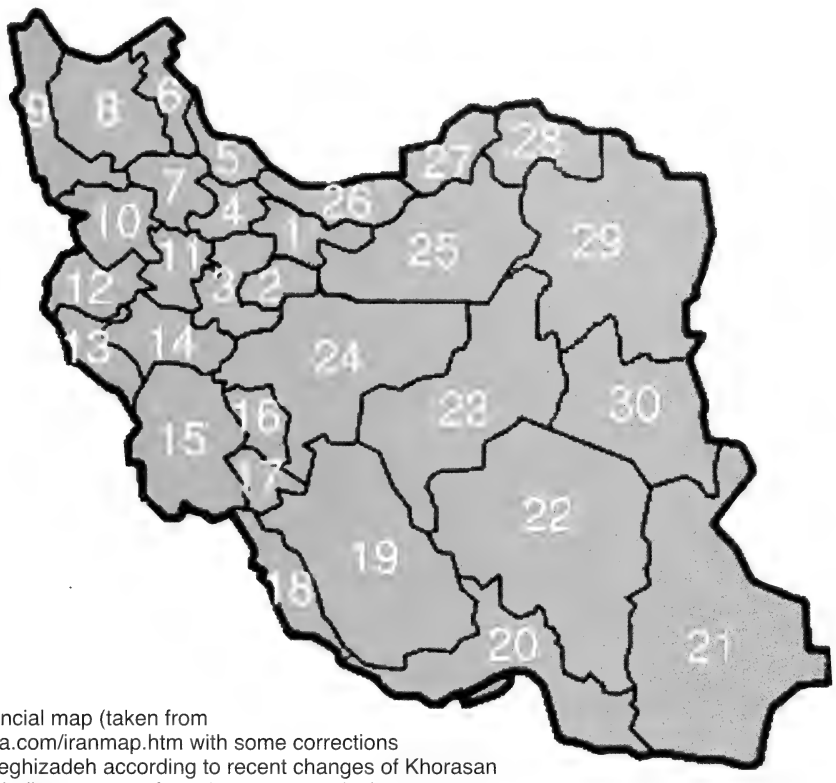

Figure 1. Iran's provincial map (taken from http://www.key2persia.com/iranmap.htm with some corrections by Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh according to recent changes of Khorasan Province). Numbers indicate name of provinces, respectively:
1. Tehran, **2.** Qom, **3.** Markazi, **4.** Qazvin (Ghazvin), **5.** Gilan, **6.** Ardabil, **7.** Zanjan, **8.** East Azarbaijan, **9.** West Azarbaijan, **10.** Kurdistan (Kordestan), **11.** Hamadan, **12.** Kermanshah, **13.** Ilam, **14.** Luristan (or Lorestan), **15.** Khuzestan, **16.** Chahar Mahal & Bakhtiari, **17.** Kohkiluyeh & Buyer Ahmad, **18.** Bushehr, **19.** Fars, **20.** Hormozgan, **21.** Seistan & Baluchestan, **22.** Kerman, **23.** Yazd, **24.** Esfahan (or Isfahan), **25.** Semnan, **26.** Mazandaran, **27.** Golestan, **28.** North Khorasan, **29.** Khorasan Razavi, **30.** South Khorasan.

DISCUSSION

Some of the species below are additional to those recorded in **Table 1**.

At least 200 Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* were present at Bouralan, West Azarbaijan and 180 were at Shorabil in mid-winter 2002. Four were at Ghareh Boulagh Wetland, West Azarbaijan and a further three were at Lake Alagol in 2000 (Results of Mid-winter Censuses). The only previous record of Shikra *Accipiter badius* near the area (see also **Table 1**) was of one seen on Qeshm Island on 3 Dec 99, which may represent the southernmost record in Iran (Bradshaw & Kirwan 2000 [ir]). Two Common Crane

Grus grus were observed in Boujagh National Park, Kiashahr, Gilan on 15 Feb 2001 (A Pasokhi pers comm). There was a report of a Corncrake *Crex crex* from Lahijan Market in 2000 (H Yazdandad pers comm) – it is a common species and is often hunted, sometimes being sold live in Lahijan market (B Nezami pers obs). Some 25 Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* were in Gori Gol, Tabriz, East Azarbaijan on 14 Sep 2000 (Jalving & Vos 2003) and 21 others were in Harat Cheshmeh shour, Khatam, Yazd on 26 Apr 2001 (Neve & Pailat 2002). One Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* was seen beyond its known migration locations in northern Lake Oroumiyeh on 22 Sep 2000 (Jalving & Vos 2003) and another was identified between the south Caspian sea and Hashtpar-Anzali in Jan 2004 (P de Boer pers obs).

Two Eurasian Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* recorded north of Lake Oroumieh, West Azarbaijan on 28 Sep 2000 (Jalving & Vos 2003) were new for the area. Eight Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* were observed in the Harat area between 25 Apr–4 May (Neve & Pailat 2002) probably representing the first confirmation of an already existing breeding range. Although Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* is widespread in the Tehran area (Mansoori 2001), it has spread from naturalised commensal populations. However, records of non-commensal individuals cover 5 birds at Niavaran and Sa'd Abad Palaces, north of Tehran (Khaleghizadeh 2004). A colony in a palm garden, in Bam, Kerman province (B Musavi pers obs) is of uncertain origin. The recent observations of the species in Karaj and Lashgarak (A Khaleghizadeh pers obs) are thought to comprise further natural spread from the fairly small Tehran naturalised population, a range increase of *c*50km. Similarly, recent records of White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* in these locations suggest a naturalised range in a radius of *c*60km around Tehran.

Subsequent to the Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* records in **Table 1**, the species disappeared until 2004 due to the intervening drought, at which time it reappeared scattered around the Jiroft area, especially near a mud dam at 28°40'40"N, 57°41'43"E. In the case of Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, we note additional records from Scott (1973) in the Lashgarak area, Dayani & Behrouzi-Rad (1991) at Kheirud Kenar and von Petutschnig *et al* (2002) in Golestan; another record came from Jalving & Vos (2003) at Rashakan, west of Lake Oroumieh, West Azarbaijan in Sep 2000. We note that some other older records occurred beyond Mansoori's mapped area (2001) for Wryneck. For example, Sturhan (*in litt*) mentions early records at Evin, Rogers (2001) notes ringing records of nine birds in the Lar valley in the 1970s, and Passburg (1959) had several records on the Caspian slope and coast in Aug and Sep and one south of Elburz on 6 Apr at Robat Karim, Tehran. These records suggest that the species' range covered the provinces of Mazandaran, Golestan, Tehran and West Azarbaijan and that Wryneck was also a summer visitor in the north of Gilan, Ardebil and East Azarbaijan provinces and a winter visitor to Sistan and Hormozgan provinces (Mansoori 2001).

Additional observations we know of in Iran of wheatears were of a Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* by Rezaei (*in litt*) in the Noor area and a Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* in Islam Abad Wetland, Naghadeh, West Azarbaijan on 30 Sep 2000 (Jalving & Vos 2003). Three Greenish Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides* were in mountain forest and suburban gardens and habitation, Khatam, Yazd on 4–5 May 2001 (Neve & Pailat 2002), one in Fasandoz, Mahabad on 24 Sep 2000 and another on Islami Island, West Azarbaijan on 26 Sep 2000. One Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* was observed on Kabudan Island, Lake Oroumieh on 22 Sep 2000 (Jalving & Vos 2003), and one was in mountain forest on 4 May 2001 (Neve & Pailat 2002) and earlier one had been recorded in the Lashgarak area (Scott 1973). Scott *et al* (1975) had not included it. Mansoori's map (2001) placed the species only

Table 1. Below are details of species, numbers of birds, physical locations, geographical coordinates and dates of records, observers and distances from known ranges (breeding or wintering) or migration distribution for about 60 species birds in Iran. Data have been extracted from the results of many field trips in Iran from 2000–2005 inclusive.

NB - In the 'Distance' column, figures represent distances (in km) from **known** areas, thus: br= breeding range, wr=wintering range and md=migration distribution. Other abbreviations are: vc=very common, wbc=waterbird census, WR=Wildlife Refuge, NP=National Park and PA=Protected Area

Species	Totals	Location	Province	Date or period	Observer	Distance from breeding range or md
Red-breasted Goose	1	Miankaleh	Mazandaran	Dec 2002	PB	Near
Branta ruficollis	1	Freidoonkenar ab-bandan	Mazandaran	Dec 2002	PB	100 wr
Bewick's Swan	6	Miangaran wetland, Izeh	Khuzestan	Jan 2005	PB	700 wr
Cygnus columbianus bewickii	3	Freidoonkenar ab-bandan	Mazandaran	Jan 2001	PB	400 wr
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*	2	Cheshmeh Majerad, Touran, Shahroud	Semnan	Sep 2001	PB	200
Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*	1	The pond in the city of Lahijan	Gilan	5 Jan to mid-Feb 2005	BN	100 wr
White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*	3	Gandoman wetland	Chahar Mahal & Bakhtiari	Mar 2000	PB	50 wr?
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*	3	Dariache-e-mahi (Manmade shrimp *Artemia* sp wetland 70km from Rafsanjan, 31°07_25˝N, 55°27_31˝E	Kerman	winter 2000	DM	200 wr
	8	Dariache-e-mahi	Kerman	spring 2000	DM	200
	9	Dariache-e-mahi	Kerman	summer 2000	DM	200 br?
	5	Kabutarkhan ab-bandan	Kerman	winter 2001	DM	200
	3	Shekarab dam (incomplete, started in 2001), Khabr NP	Kerman	winter 2004	DM	250 wr
Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*	6	Angouran WR & PA, Mahneshan	Zanjan	29 Sep 2002	SS	25
	17	Along Ghezel Ozan River	Zanjan	23 Sep 2001	SS	25
	2	Angouran WR	Zanjan	25 Jun 2003	SS	25 br
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*	2	Takht-e-Soleiman	Zanjan	May 2002	PB	60
Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*	1	Reedbeds of Hozche Zogal Shoii, *c*5km from Zarand	Kerman	late spring 2001	DM	200 br
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*	6	Angouran WR & PA, Mahneshan	Zanjan	23 Sep 2001	SS	70
Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*	2	Kabutarkhan Abbandan 30°12_17˝N 56°19_28˝E, 60km from Kerman (pistachio irrigation)	Kerman	Winters 2001-02, briefly	DM	300 wr
Merlin *Falco columbarius*	1	Bamdej wetland	Khuzestan	Jan 2005	PB	70 wr
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*	1	Vahdat Dam, Sanandaj	Kurdistan	22 Sep 2001	SS	50 md
Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*	1	Chabahar	Seistan & Baluchestan	Sep 2003	PB	480 md

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*	1	Celmir in Tandureh national park	Khorasan Razavi	27 Mar 2005	BM	1100 (vagrant)
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*	1	Chah Mil Plain, Orzoiyeh, Baft	Kerman	23 Nov 2004	SS	350 wr
	3	Manzel Abad Plain, Shahr Babak	Kerman	26 Dec 2004	SS	300 wr
	1	Firuz Abad Plain, Rayen	Kerman	29 Nov 2004	SS	200 wr
	1	Hendijan plain, Mahshahr	Khuzestan	25 Nov 2000	SS	170 wr
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	1 dead	Karaj city	Tehran	9 Jul 2005	AK	Rare, but found in former range
Shikra *Accipiter badius*	5	Breeding on tall druce *Prosopis cineraria* tree in military area in Bandar Abbas city & another nest in another military area	Hormozgan	4 Apr 2004	BM	On limit of known br
Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*	1	Langarud Market	Gilan	Jan 2004	BN	200 wr
Corncrake *Crex crex*	1	Radar Poshteh, Siahkal, Lahijan	Gilan	25 Sep 2002	SS	50 md
	5	Paddy fields, Lasht Nesha, E of Rasht	Gilan	Sep–Dec, after rice harvest	BN	100 md?
Little Crake *Porzana parva*	1	Omidiyeh wetland	Khuzestan	Jan 2005	PB	400 md?
Common Crane *Grus grus*	8	Allah Abad plain, Bouein Zahra	Ghazvin	23 Jan 2001	SS	350 wr
	1imm	Sorkhrud Damgah, Fereidounkenar	Mazandaran	13 Jan 2003	SS	100 wr
	*c*1500	Meighan wetland, 17km northwest of Arak	Markazi	Jan 2001	PB	200 wr
	90	Tarom and Tashkouiyeh, Hajiabad	Hormozgan	Feb 2004	NH	200 wr
	80+	Tarom and Tashkouiyeh, Hajiabad	Hormozgan	Jan 2005	SS	200 wr
Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*	9	Boujagh NP, Kiashahr	Gilan	15 Aug 2001	SS	20 md?
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*	2	Boujagh NP, Kiashahr	Gilan	15 Aug 2001	SS	Rare, but in former range
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*	4	Hozche Zogal Shoii, *c*5km from Zarand, 30°47_22″N, 56°34_35″E	Kerman	Late spring 2000	DM	350 md
Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*	1	Boujagh NP, Kiashahr	Gilan	30 Jul 2001	SS	W Iran border, Caspian coast
	20	Islam Abad Wetland, Oroumieh	West Azarbaijan	7–11 Jul 2002	SS	Previous range, but rare
	13	Hozche Zogal Shoii, *c*5km from Zarand	Kerman	Late spring 2001	DM	300 md
Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*	1	West of Charak city , Seraj PA	Hormozgan	Apr 2005	NH	250 md
Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*	800bp 1500 pulli	Tashk lake	Fars	7 Jun 2004	SS	250 br
	4500ind 2500 pulli	Tashk lake	Fars	21 Jun 2005	SS	250 br

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*	1	Ghabr-e-Nakhoda, Khour Musa	Khuzestan	Jan 2005	PB	130 md? wr?
Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*	2	Ghabr-e-Nakhoda, Khour Musa	Khuzestan	Jan 2005	PB	130 md? wr?
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*	1	Ghabr-e-Nakhoda, Khour Musa	Khuzestan	Jan 2005	PB	130 md? wr?
Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*	1	Boujagh NP	Gilan	Dec 2004	BN	100 wr?
Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*	25	Allah Abad plain, Bouein Zahra	Ghazvin	23 Jan 2001	SS	200 wr
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*	2	Allah Akbar plain, Dehloran	Ilam	21 Nov 2000	SS	100 wr
	7	Allah Akbar plain, Dehloran	Ilam	13 Feb 2001	SS	100 wr
	52	Shoush plains, Shoush	Khuzestan	23 Nov 2000	SS	50 wr
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	1	Lakes Tash and Bakhtegan	Fars	Apr 2001	PB	100 br
Barn Owl *Tyto alba*	2	South of Shahriyar city	Tehran	Apr 2001	PB	Within br
	1	Zaviyeh city	Markazi	May 2002	PB	50 br
Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*	1	Choghazanbil	Khuzestan	Apr 2004	PB	300 br
Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*	1	Kahur town, Chabahar	Seistan & Baluchestan	Sep 2003	PB	1000 (vagrant)
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*	vc	Around Minab freshwater canal and entire mangrove area in Sirik	Hormozgan	In winter quarters	BM	100 wr
Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*	2	Kani Borazan Wetland, Naghadeh	W Azarbaijan	6 Nov 2003	SS	250 wr
	Colony *c*100	Edge of Halil rud River, Deboneh village, near Jiroft	Kerman	Mid-winter wbc 2000	DM	350 wr
Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*	1 dead	Noor plain forests	Mazandaran	1999	SS	300
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*	1	Dez Wildlife Refuge	Khuzestan	Apr 2004	PB	270 md? br?
Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*	1	In garden, Mazar village 60k S of Baft city, Khabr NP, 28°48_47′N, 56°20_37′E	Kerman	Spring 2002	DM	400 br
	3?	Nakhiloo village, west to city of Charak	Hormozgan	Jul 2004	NH	400 br
Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*	1	Forest around Fouman	Gilan	Mar 2005	PB	Very rare (Mansoori)
Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*	25	Angouran WR & PA, Mahneshan	Zanjan	22–26 Jun 2003	SS	300 br?
	14	Angouran WR & PA, Mahneshan	Zanjan	29 Sep–5 Oct 2002	SS	300 br?
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*	14	Shoush Plains	Khuzestan	23 Nov 2001	SS	250 wr?
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*	vc	Tarom and Tashkuiye plains near Haji Abad town	Hormozgan	16 Feb 2005	BM	100 wr

Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*	2	Angouran WR and PA, Mahneshan	Zanjan	29 Sep–5 Oct 2002	SS	250 br
Booted Warbler *Iduna [Hippolais] caligata*	15	Angouran WR and PA, Mahneshan	Zanjan	21–25 Jun 2003	SS	200 br
Green Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides nitidus* (Rheindt 2006)	1	Chahkin Plain, Zarand	Kerman	29 Nov 2004	SS	550 md?
Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus* (Rheindt 2006)	1	Arasbaran Biosphere Reserve, Kalibar	E Azarbaijan	10 Jul 2003	SS	Previous range, but rare
Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*	vc	Manesht and Ghlarang PA, especially around oak forest on mountains	Ilam	21–23 Apr 2005	BM	450 md?
Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*	1	Chahkin Plain, Zarand	Kerman	29 Nov 2004	SS	250 md?
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* **Plate 1**	8–13	Around and near Bazangan lake, on *Tamarix* trees, between Sarakhs and Mashhad city *c*125km from Sarakhs	Khorasan Razavi	28 Apr 2005	BM	400, but see range in Porter *et al* (1996) br
Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia [hortensis] crassirostris* **Plate 2**	3	Banks of River Jegin (Jegin dry woodland), near Jask; mostly *Tamarix* and *Acacia* spp	Hormozgan	21 Jan 2005	BM	220 md?
Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* **Plate 3**	4	Khalasi lagoon, East to Jask	Hormozgan	Julay 2005	NH	Second record for Iran (Vagrant or introduced?)
Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*	1	Angouran WR & PA, Mahneshan	Zanjan	1 Oct 2002	SS	Southern limit of Iran northern range
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*	1	Near Gaz river (Sirik area) between Minab and Jask cities	Hormozgan	8 Apr 2004	BM	1100 br
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*	3	Noor forests	Mazandaran	5 Apr 1999	SS	20 br
Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*	1	Geno mountain (1720m asl)	Hormozgan	8 Nov 2004	BM	300 wr
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*	23	Goude-Ghoul Non-hunting Area, Sirjan	Kerman	25–28 Mar 2002	SS	50 br
	4(1imm)	Geno mountain, Bandar Abbas (1400m asl)	Hormozgan	12 Feb 2005	BM	250 br
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*	9	Zarivar Lake, Sanandaj	Kurdistan	6 Oct 2000	SS	450 br
	1	Islam-Abad, south of Lake Oroumieh	W Azarbaijan	30 Sep 2000	SS	450 br
	15	Around Lake Oroumieh	W Azarbaijan	7–11 Jul 2002	SS	500 br
	20	Islami Island, Lake Oroumieh	W Azarbaijan	7–11 Jul 2002	SS	500 br

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*	1	Geno mountain	Hormozgan	23 Feb 2005	BM	300 wr
Semi-collard Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*	1	Chelmir area in Tandureh National Park	Khorasan Razavi	27 Mar v2005	BM	150 md
	1	Lavan Island	Hormozgan	Mar 2004	NH	850 md
White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*	1	Ajgerak non-hunting area 29°14_N, 56°49_E, Rabar township 20km from Baft,	Kerman	2001 mid-summer	DM	300 br
Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* **Plate 4**	2	On Farur Island and near Bandar Abbas city, one in cultivated area	Hormozgan	17 Jan–Mar 2005	BM	300 wr
	4	In the city of Jask	Hormozgan	17 Jan–Mar 2005	BM	150 wr
	1	*c*23km N of Bandar Abbas in a cultivated area, between Hajiabad and Bandar Abbas	Hormozgan	17 Jan–Mar 2005	BM	100 wr
Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*	6	Bandar Abbas	Hormozgan	Feb 2005	NH	350 wr
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*	2	In rocky area near a road to Ilam city	Ilam	14 Apr 2005	BM	50 br

In the 'Observer' column, SS=ME Sehhati-Sabet, BM=Seyed Babak Musavi, PB=Parviz Bakhtiari, DM=Daryoush Moghaddas, NH=the late Nader Hamidi, BN=Bagher Nezami and AK=Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh.

in southwest Iran. Overall the numbers of records of Garden Warblers outside the mapped range suggest that subsequent maps need to be considerably revised. We note that the second record of Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* (**Table 1**) was not far from the first record east of Jask on 14 May 1978 (Reynolds 1978).

Jalving and Vos (2003) also included mention of 9 Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* on the Oroumieh coast, two in Kabudan Island, one in Hasanlou Wetland and another in Islam Abad in the period 14 Sep to 1 Oct 2000 and of an immature in the Harat plains, Khatam on 4 May 2001. The observation of Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in Harat, Yazd (Neve & Pailat 2002) suggests a new northernmost limit of the species in central Iran. Jalving and Vos (2003) recorded a Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* ssp *pallidirostris* ('Steppe Grey Shrike') on Fasandoz plain, south of Lake Oroumieh on 24 Sep 2000 and 7 Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* on Kabudan Island on 21–22 Sept 2000 and one on Islami Island on 26 Sep 2000; Neve and Pailat (2002) noted another in Harat Chashmeh Shour, Khatam, Yazd on 1 May 2001. Although Dayani and Behrouzi-Rad (1991) had recorded Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* at Kheirud Kenar, Nowshahr, on the south Caspian Sea coast, they did not categorise it as the first record for that region, whereas Mansoori (2001) did so for a record in Khuzestan region in Iran's southwest. Dayani and Behrouzi-Rad (1991) recorded Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*, Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*, Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*, Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida* and Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* at Kheirud Kenar, Nowshahr, Mazandaran. Barn Owl *Tyto alba* was recently recorded in the Kerman area, following the previous record in near Yazd (Khaleghizadeh & Sehhati 2004). Stop Press: *c*10 Ménétries Warbler *Sylvia mystacea* around Lake Alagol on 17 May 2006.

From time to time, translation of lists species names listed from one language to another leads to errors, particularly if, as in Farsi, names within a genus are very similar. For example, the Bay-backed Shrike attributed to Sehhatisabet was more probably Red-

backed Shrike *L. collurio*. In a similar vein the informal record of Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* in Balmer and Betton (2004; [ir]) was an error in translation for Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* (MJ Blair pers comm). Furthermore, we recognise that the Bay-backed Shrike in Dayani & Behrouzi-Rad (1991) was insufficiently separated from Red-backed Shrike. These circumstances reinforce the need to scrutinise and question all records meticulously before they are submitted for formal publication.

We intend to apply strict but neutral scrutiny to all future records, no matter their origin so that evaluations can be re-examined in the light of subsequent observations. This way, unconfirmed observations would remain available for consideration, particularly where the historical records make no mention of the species concerned For example, P Bakhtiari (pers obs) has details of Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps* in Iran's northwest – a species not mentioned by Scott *et al* (1975) nor by Mansoori (2001) in his field guides. We are also encouraged by analyses such as that by Kratochwill and Kirwan (2004) where careful examination of older data in the light of more recent information have enabled corrections to be made, an example being the observations of Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* in Khorasan Razavi province, seemingly a range extension, actually occurred in the range map given in the Middle

Plate 1. Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* near Bazangan lake between Sarakhs and Mashad on 28 April 2005. *© Seyed Babak Musavi*

Plate 3. Two Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* observed at mangrove forest, east of Jask, July 2005. *© the late Nader Hamidi.*

Plate 2. Orphean Warbler *Sylvia* [*hortensis*[*crassirostris* in Jegin woodland (SE of Iran near the town of Jask on 21 January 2005. *© Seyed Babak Musavi.*

Plate 4. Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* in cultivated area near Bandar Abbas on 17 January. *© Seyed Babak Musavi.*

East Field Guide (Porter *et al* 1996). Although as yet there is no established Records Committee in Iran for bird species, we intend to apply the criteria such a Committee would use as best we can to all records we examine for our studies and researches. Meanwhile, as a good means of encouraging reporting of unexpected sightings by inexperienced birdwatchers in Iran, we will continue to publicise the status of rare species in our national journals; for example Ghaemi (in press) and Ahmadzadeh & Khaleghizadeh (in press). We seek to increase awareness of subtle differences between subspecies and of the likelihood of a species being found outside its normal range.

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Status and distribution of selected bird species on the Russia-Kazakhstan border northwest of the Caspian Sea

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The Astrakhan region lies in south-east European Russia on the northwest Caspian Sea coast (**Figure 1**). It possesses a great variety of landscapes ranging from riverine forests to salt lakes (**Plate 1**) and sandy deserts (**Plates 2 & 3**), allowing a wide diversity of birds to breed and to rest during migration. This coast is an area where the fauna of Europe and Central Asia meet, particularly bird species from the Caucasian region and Kazakhstan. It is particularly important that the current distribution and interaction of resident and visiting species be studied now, because the natural environment is in a state of rapid transformation as the prevailing climatic conditions change just when there has been a significant reduction in economic pressures (Viktor Belik *in litt* 2005).Since Lugovoy's very detailed survey (1963), only a few faunistic papers have been published about the region. In 2004 and 2005, I participated in three expeditions, two in 2004 (28 May–5 June and 24–28 September) being supported by the Ecological Travel Centre (ETC) of Moscow, the aim being to carry out broad-brush assessments of bird variety in remote locations close to the Russia-Kazakhstan border and in the lake-knoll area west of the Volga river. On the third expedition (13–25 May 2005), I visited the Astrakhan region as a local leader and guide for two groups of birders from the Danish Ornithological Society (DOF) led by Hans Meltofte and Hans Meilstrup. We spent the majority of our time in the Volga delta and the lake-knoll area, where much new information was obtained – this lies west of the Volga and is almost 6000km^2 in size. The lake-knoll area typically comprises parallel lines of clay knolls interspersed with sweet-water or salt lakes, the knolls having been formed from deposits from successive drastic changes in the level of the Caspian Sea and their subsequent erosion. During these expeditions I collected new information on the distribution, numbers and population status for fourteen bird species and I relate it to previously published data. Moreover, in some cases I present data collected in the study area in my previous expeditions in 1999, 2001 and 2002.

Figure 1. Astrakhan. 2005 © *Vladimir Arkhipov.*

Plate 1. Baskunchak Salt Lake from Mount Bogdo. 2004 © *Sergei Grigoriev.*

Plate 2. Glayesh semi-desert, east of the Volga. 2004 © *Sergei Grigoriev.*

Plate 3. Sand desert east of the Volga. 2004 © *Sergei Grigoriev.*

Plate 4. Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* going to roost in the Volga Delta. 2004 © *Sergei Grigoriev.*

Plate 5. The lake-knoll area west of the Volga. 2004 © *Sergei Grigoriev.*

Notes on selected species

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*. (**Plate 4**). A rare breeding species of the Volga Delta in that only 25 to 242 pairs nested during the 1974–91 period when just a few pairs of the extremely rare **White Pelicans** *P. onocrotalus* were confirmed as nesting (1963 and 1980, Krivonosov *et al* 1994, Rusanov 1997). During my visits in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2005, I registered about 460 Dalmatian Pelicans throughout the Delta, but only two adult White Pelicans (in the eastern Delta near the village of Kalinino on 9 May 2002).

White-tailed Lapwing [Plover] *Vanellus leucurus* [*Chettusia leucura*]. Since 1994 recorded as a rare breeder in the region. The first possible breeding pair was collected in the eastern (Kazakhstan) part of the Delta in May 1980 (Belik 1989). Single breeding pairs, or pairs with breeding behaviour were registered in 1994, 1997 and 2001 in the lake-knoll area west of the Volga river. (Arkhipov *et al* 2003, Rusanov 2003a) and in 1999 on steppe lakes in the Republic of Kalmykia (Kvartalnov 2003). Three probably migrants were recorded on 19 and 20 May 2005 on a small pond near Budarino village, but were not seen in the following 5 days.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*. Rare spring and autumn migrant through the Delta. Of the two observations from the lake-knoll area, one bird was observed on 30 May 2004 on the salt lake near Zenzely train station, and four were seen flying over Protochnoe village on 24 May 2005. Earlier records related only to the Volga delta and the Caspian Sea islands (Lugovoy 1963, Rusanov *et al* 1999, Rusanov 2003b).

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*. Rare, but probably breeds. In adjacent Kalmykia, the first confirmed breeding was confirmed in June 1997 (Bliznjuk 2004). In spring and autumn 2001, small flocks had been observed beside artificial ponds in the sands on the west bank of the Volga west of Narimanov town (Arkhipov *et al* 2003). At the same place on 24 September 2004, a our series of 2-hour observations logged 17 flocks (of 2–60 birds), the highest number present being around 200, which total is many times more than recent estimations for the entire European Russian population of this species (Mischenko 2004). On 31 August – 2 September 2005, my colleagues visited these ponds. They observed Black-bellied Sandgrouse on all three days, the maximum day's count reaching 400 on 31 August (Eugeny Koblik pers comm). On the other (east) side of the Volga on 2 June 2004, we flushed a female several times, in the sand desert east of the settlement of Dosang (46°43´N 48°90´E).

Oriental [Rufous] Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*. Probably scarce migrant in the area. I paid little attention to the record of two sub-adult birds on 5–6 October 2001 in the eastern Volga Delta, until I was unable to find published data on the autumn migration through the Ural River region. In September – October 1973, 1974 and 1975, passage birds were observed along the lower Ural River (Gubin *et al* 1977), which strongly suggests the existence of a migration route from the Urals to Iran along the Ural River valley, and possibly along the Volga too.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*. Rare breeding species. The northern range limits of this species are not well known. A pair that probably bred had been found near Promislovka village (southwestern Astrakhan region) in 2001 (Arkhipov *et al* 2003). On 20 and 23 May 2005, I registered 16 pairs in the same area. Interestingly, this species selects very flat plain as its habitat, unlike **European Bee-eater** *M. apiaster*, which is very common in the region.

'Steppe' Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor pallidirostris*. Locally common breeder to the east of the Volga. The Astrakhan region contains this form's northernmost European occurrence at its westernmost breeding range, where since the 1930s, there have been no data (Vorobiev 1936). However, in June 2004, I found this species rather common in the deserts east of the Volga. Altogether, we found 4 of that year's nests, empty, with juveniles and adults nearby. This species occurs in the sand dunes and haunts the planted bush windbreak strips in the predominantly clay semidesert.

White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera.* Locally common breeder in northern Astrakhan region. Despite very careful searches from 1999 through to 2005, it was not found in Astrakhan and the adjacent Kalmykian steppes west of the Volga nor in the sand deserts on the eastern side of the river. Our most southwesterly records from 2004 came from near Lake Baskunchak (48°80′N 46°54′E) in the northern Astrakhan region, where it was common. Farther west in Kalmykia, but only in 1993, were a few breeding records reported after a mass influx had occurred the previous winter (Belik & Muzaev 1995). The present-day breeding range therefore probably does not extend as far south and southwest as stated in recent literature (Snow & Perrins 1998, Stepanyan 2003).

Sykes's Warbler *Iduna* [*Hippolais*] *rama.* Locally common breeder in the desert east of Volga. Groups of singing males were registered in the bushes on the sand dunes. On 2–3 June 2004 the species was found to occur as far north as Tambovka village.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna* [*Hippolais*] *pallida.* This species has become a common breeder in the western knoll-lake area, but had not been recorded in the Astrakhan region before 1996. Five were collected in 1996 (Rohwer *et al* 2001) in the western lake-knoll area (46o17′N, 47o22′N), one female carrying eggs, the largest being 6mm long (Arkhipov 2004). During 28–31 May 2004, I observed males and pairs in the lake-knoll area near Budarino village. Four singing males were counted along a 1km transect on 28 May amongst the adjacent tamarisk *Tamarix* sp bushes.

'Siberian' Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis.* Probably common on autumn migration. Its high-intensity autumn song is typical of Chiffchaff spp (Cramp 1992). In September 2004 I heard a number of singing chiffchaffs migrating through the Volga Delta, heading south. On 26–27 September 2004 in the riverine forest in the central Delta I found 7 singing birds, 4 of which uttering the typical disyllabic Siberian Chiffchaff song. There are no breeding records of any Chiffchaff subspecies from this region.

Rosy (Rose-coloured) Starling *Sturnus roseus.* Common breeder. Previous published data (Lugovoy 1963) and our observations from 1999–2004 show that it is a mostly regular, common but not numerous breeding species in the region. In 2005, we observed exceptionally high numbers of this species in the lake-knoll area. From 18–25 May we saw several thousand birds each day, flocks in the steppe being up to 1000 strong. On 18 May at least 10 000 throughout the day passed over Budarino village in a northeasterly direction in flocks of 50–300 birds. On 23 and 25 May we visited the Kalmyk village of Dzhalikovo, where I estimated no fewer than 4000bp nested under the house roofs,. There was no detectable difference in the abundance of orthopteran prey from previous years, so in this area, year-to-year variation in prey availability did not explain annual variation in starling numbers.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka.* A probable breeding pair of this species was observed in the backyard of a Buddhist temple in the settlement of Liman on 20 and 23 May 2005. Earlier, it had been regarded as an accidental migrant in the west of the lake-knoll area (**Plate 5**) and in the Volga delta (Vorobiev 1936).

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala.* In 2001 and 2002, it was a locally common breeder to the west of the Volga in steppe-desert on the border with Kalmykia (Arkhipov *et al* 2003). On 25 May 2004 and on 19, 20 and 23 May 2005 we found pairs and singing males in the area west of the Zenzely-Yandiki-Oleynikovo line. This area remains a traditional steppe landscape dotted with small tamarisk bushes and is rather remote from settlements and the planted tree windbreaks that are quickly colonised by **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*, the main cause of the bunting's range contraction further west and south. Corvids remain rare here.

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps.* Locally common breeder to the east of the Volga. During 2–5 June 2004, territorial males and pair were found everywhere east of the Volga. The species was also found in the sand desert near Dosang, east of Tambovka and a few pairs were located in the Baskunchak area. The species had not been registered in the region by Vorobiev (1936). The 1950s saw the first breeding records coming from further northeast (the Volgograd region and adjacent areas of Kazakhstan) (Lindeman 1971), but we discovered that the species has extended its range further southwest than shown in CBWP (Snow & Perrins 1998).

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Malling Olsen & Larsson (1997) and Harrison (1986) refer to Pomarine *S. pomarinus* as a common predator of lemmings, other rodents and various bird species during its High Arctic breeding season, Long-tailed Skua *S. longicaudus* being less lemming-dependent. Snow & Perrins (2004) in BWP*i*, also refer to inland breeding Arctic Skuas *S. parasiticus* feeding chiefly on birds – passerines and shorebirds – taken either in flight or on the ground (likewise insect prey), but its diet also consists of eggs, small mammals, berries, carrion and insects, frequently on an opportunistic basis. However outside the breeding season Malling Olsen & Larsson (1997) confirm that all three species exhibit strong kleptoparasitism or piratical behaviour, mainly towards other seabirds such as auks and small larids (both gulls and terns). Although kleptoparasitism is widely documented (BWP*i*), all three species are accomplished hunters of fish at sea.

My own skua observations include a record of opportunistic hunting. In Norway many years ago, I was watching an adult light morph Arctic Skua sitting near its breeding site when it suddenly flew off in a steep climb to about 30–40m altitude to snatch a dragonfly, before returning. Likewise, Norway's first recorded Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata* narrowly escaped a pursuit across a field by an eager Arctic Skua (*qv* A Gullberg 2000) (Jørn Gustad pers obs & pers comm).

From July to early October from 2002 to 2005 inclusive I have been conducting spot counts of southbound migratory seabirds in Muscat, Oman. I use a Leica Apo Televid 33x on a Manfrotto 055C tripod. Weather conditions are fairly constant – warm and sunny with a light north-easterly breeze, and on most mornings good visibility to 3–4 km. Occasionally, passing Pomarine and Arctic Skuas make brief detours to harass Sooty Gulls *Larus hemprichii* and various terns. However on 15 Sep 2005 an Arctic Skua (juvenile intermediate colour morph), about a kilometre out to sea, came into telescope view while in rapid pursuit of a Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*, just above the surface. This dramatic chase lasted 30–40 seconds: the phalarope kept a fairly straight line of flight, allowing the Arctic Skua to close in and hit it from above, very much like a falcon, knocking the phalarope into the sea. The skua circled back to land beside it. For about a minute the skua pecked the phalarope quite hard perhaps 3 or 4 times, before two other Arctic Skuas, a juvenile dark morph and an adult light morph, arrived overhead, where they circled without landing. The skua on the surface lost interest, quickly lifting off to accompany the other two in resuming migration due south. Over the next few minutes the phalarope showed no signs of activity: undoubtedly it was dead.

On 29 Jul 2005 a bird that was probably a Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* came into telescope view some 1.5 – 2km out to sea. I followed it for more than a minute since it is fairly unusual to see this species on direct migration (My only other sighting of Quail migrating out at sea was of 30 on 29 Aug 1996). It kept a fast, straight southbound flight just above the sea. Suddenly, an immature pale morph Arctic Skua came into view in pursuit. It dived on it once, missed, but seconds later knocked the Quail into the sea with its body. The skua landed beside the Quail and killed it by pecking, appearing, over the next 5 minutes, to feed on its prey.

On 9 Jul 2004 I observed a pale-morph Arctic Skua chasing a Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, some 2.5–3 km out to sea. The storm petrel managed to avoid each attack by abrupt fluttering sideways movements, eventually discouraging its pursuer, both birds continuing their southbound migration, but quite far apart. I interpreted these attacks as an attempt to catch prey, rather than an effort at kleptoparasitism. On 6 Aug 2004 I observed a Pomarine Skua in pursuit of a Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, but this pursuit appeared as a typical piracy attempt, lasting only 15–20 seconds, after which both birds continued their southbound migration peacefully. I cannot confirm that the attacker obtained any regurgitated food, but it seemed unsuccessful. This may be the first documented record of a *Stercorarius* piracy attempt on a Jouanin's Petrel.

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Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* nesting on Mount Erciyes, Kayseri Province, Turkey

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The Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* nests commonly along lakes and rivers across northern Europe and Asia, south to the Black Sea and Caucasus regions (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Although there may be 1000–4500 breeding pairs in Turkey (Burfield &van Bommel 2004) and Kumerloeve (1969) recorded juveniles at Yüksekova and Çatak in East Anatolia in June 1968, I have been unable to find published records of Common Sandpiper nesting in Turkey.

On 14 May 2004, I flushed an adult Common Sandpiper from on or within 0.5m of its nest on the rocky shoreline of a small reservoir near the Erciyes Ski Center on Mount Erciyes (2198m asl, 38.5°N, 35.5°E). The nest was in a slight depression among small stones on the sparsely vegetated reservoir shoreline, about 8m from the water's edge, and was lined with vegetation (Harrison & Castell 1998). The surrounding area is heavily grazed by sheep during the warmer months, and there is little or no woody vegetation (**Plate 1**). We stayed near the nest only long enough to count three eggs, which were confirmed as Common Sandpiper (Harrison & Castell 1998). On 17 May, when there appeared to be fresh snow on the slopes above the reservoir, the nest appeared to be abandoned, and the eggs and nesting material were darker and appeared to have been flooded within the previous 24 hours (**Plate 2**). There had been heavy rain both on the afternoon of the 16th in Kayseri and on the 17th. No birds were seen in the nest area or along the nearby reservoir shoreline on the 17th.

In fieldwork during 2000 and 2001 at Kralkızı Dam, Diyarbakır Province, Karakaş and Kılıç (2005) reported one pair each year performing mating display-flights and showing territorial aggressiveness (at 750m asl). They concluded that the species probably nested in the area, but did not find any nests. Unpublished field observations have confirmed Common Sandpiper as breeding in eastern Anatolia. A pair and 1 chick were seen east of Gürpınar, the chick being *c*1 week old on 2 June 1969 (Richard Porter *pers comm, fide* Geoff Welch), indicating that the first egg was laid in early May. Peter Castell (*pers comm*) found a nest with 4 eggs at Sarıcan on 21 June 2004 (the eggs hatched on 25 June, indicating that the first egg was laid on 1 June). Geoff and Hilary Welch (*pers comm*) observed a pair in suitable habitat along a fast-flowing stream west of Gölbaşı (near Adıyaman), southeast Anatolia, on 10 June 2002 and encountered a pair with young on a mountain river between Posof and Damal, northeast Turkey on 22 June 2005.

Plate 1. Mount Erciyes lakeside, Turkey, 2004. *© Timothy Brush.*

Plate 2. Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* nest, Erciyes, Turkey 2004. *© Timothy Brush.*

In central Anatolia, Common Sandpiper is considered a non-breeding summer visitor or transient migrant in the Kayseri area (Per *et al* 2002) and across the region (Schekkerman & van Roomen 1993, Richardson 2003, Karakaş and Kiliç 2004). Kasparek (1985) recorded Common Sandpipers only as migrants at the Sultan Marshes (*c*1070m asl) but suggested that the species might breed along Yahyalı Cayı. Brush and Özesmi (*in prep*) found no signs of nesting at Sultan Sazliği, Palas Gölü, and Hürmetçi Sazliği wetlands in Kayseri Province during March–June 2004. A pair, with young, was observed on a river, north of Demirkazık (Mediterranean region), on 3 June 1999 (Richard Porter, *fide* Geoff Welch), and a pair with young were seen in riverine habitat west of Samsun, on 24 June 2001 (Geoff & Hilary Welch *pers comm*), indicating breeding in other parts of Turkey. The main nesting area for Common Sandpipers in Turkey is evidently eastern Anatolia, but the species may continue to extend its breeding range across Turkey.

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The first record of Barn Owl *Tyto alba* north of Mount Alburz, northern Iran

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Scott *et al* (1975) and Mansoori (2001) indicate that Barn Owl *Tyto alba* most often has been observed in west and southwest Iran and less often in central Iran (Yazd province) (Khaleghizadeh & Sehhati 2004). Overall, it is uncommon to very rare in Iran (Firuz 2000). On 5 April 2005, we found a Barn Owl by accident when we were in a paddyfield in Dolatabad village *c*15km north of the city of Sari, Mazandaran province, northern Iran. Due to severe rainfall, the Barn Owl's plumage had become saturated and it was unable to fly. We caught it and took it to the Mazandaran Provincial Environmental Research Office, where we work, and noted some biometrics:

Plate 1. The Barn Owl *Tyto alba* taken in the Sari area, northern Iran on 5 April 2005. *© Dariosh Mogaddas.*

Body length	330mm
Tarsus length	75mm
Bill length	15mm
Largest toe	16mm
Wingspan	950mm
Weight	330g

That evening, the Barn Owl (**Plate 1**), having dried out and recovered, was ringed (Serial: L 4627 – DOE) and released in the Dashte-e-Naz Wildlife Refuge, Sari. We understand our record is the first occurrence of Barn Owl north of Mount Alburz in Iran. More research on the species would establish whether its distribution normally extends to the Sari area.

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First confirmed breeding record of Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* for Lebanon, 2004

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Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* is a widespread resident throughout the Western Palearctic from Norway in the north to Sudan in the south. Extralimitally, its range extends east through India to eastern Siberia and China. The subspecies *interpositus* replaces nominate *bubo* in the Levant region – preliminary DNA research indicates that this form may be treatable as a full species (Wink & Heidrich 1999)[1]. Benson (1970) mentioned the Eagle Owl as having 'been recorded from time to time in Lebanon', therein allocating the status 'vagrant or possible breeder'. Subsequently Ramadan-Jaradi & Ramadan-Jaradi (1999), citing just 3 records (1953, 1959 and 1997), assessed the species' status as 'uncertain'. A Rocha Lebanon (2001) suggested that it was a 'scarce resident' in the Aammiq area. Ramadan-Jaradi *et al* (2005) revised that to 'uncommon resident', citing up to 8 additional records in the 2001–2004 period.

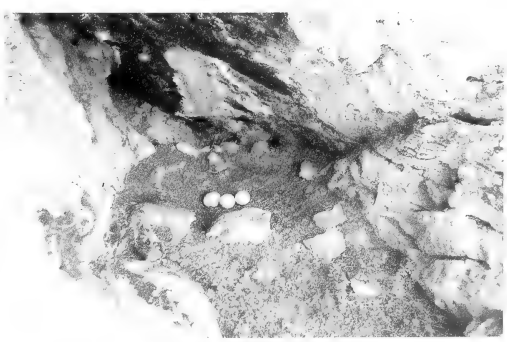

Plate 1. Eggs of Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* in nest, West Bekaa, Lebanon, 12 April 2004. *© Martin Bernhard*

[1] In compiling the OSME Region List, I have noted the possibility that *B.b. interpositus* may in future be treated as a separate species. In any case, it is worth considering *interpositus* as a separate form and suggest that it be named 'Byzantine' Eagle Owl because its distribution, although poorly-known, coincides reasonably with much of the area ruled by the former Byzantine Empire. *Ed.*

Plate 2. Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* chick at nest, West Bekaa, Lebanon, 30 May 2004. *© Martin Bernhard*

Plate 3. Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* fledgling at nest, West Bekaa, Lebanon, 12 June 2004. *© Martin Bernhard*

Observations in 2004

In the afternoon of 21 March 2004, whilst walking up a wadi in the West Bekaa near the town of Qab Elias, RP, Jamie Hooper, Steve and Jean Hughes and Martin Bernhard saw a pair of Eagle Owls fly from a rock face across to the other side of the wadi. Five days later an adult was found in a close cave, apparently incubating. MB and Francois Tron visited the site on 12 and 13 April and established that 3 eggs had been laid (**Plate 1**). Subsequent visits by MB on 26 and 30 May and 6 and 12 June confirmed that one young hatched (**Plates 2 & 3**). The young bird was last seen, near fledging, on 12 June. This constitutes the first proven breeding of the species in Lebanon, confirming the above suggestions that it probably has long been resident in the remoter undisturbed mountainous areas. PB carried out a pellet analysis to establish the species' diet in Lebanon (Bayle & Prior 2006, this issue).

Second breeding proved in 2005

The site was not visited in early 2005 until 24 April, when FT climbed up to the same cave to find two recently hatched young and an egg. On 17 May, RP observed three fledglings and an adult in the cave, and made several observations, with others, up to 10 June, when the two larger young had fledged successfully. MB found the body of the smallest juvenile on the wadi floor later in the month, the state of the corpse making the cause of its demise unclear.

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Prey species of Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* in Lebanon

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Information on the diet of Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* in the Middle East is scarce. Data are provided from Jordan by Bates & Harrison (1989) (18 mammalian prey items) and Amr *et al* (1997) (63 prey), from Syria by Shehab (2004) (206 prey) and from Saudi Arabia by Evans and Bates (1993) (6 prey). We were therefore extremely keen to ascertain the diet of pair discovered breeding in Lebanon's West Bekaa in 2004 and 2005 (Prior & Bayle 2006, this issue). In the Middle East, as elsewhere in its distribution area (Cramp & Simmons, 1985), the Eagle Owl feeds on a variety of animals, but mainly on mammals. Other minor prey categories in the Middle East include birds, reptiles and insects (Bates & Harrison, 1989; Amr *& al* 1997, Shehab 2004), scorpions and solifugids (Evans & Bates 1993, Shehab 2004) and even a freshwater crab (Bates & Harrison 1989). RP retrieved a pellet below the West Bekaa cave in March 2004. Nest debris was collected in April 2005 by Francois Tron. Martin Bernhard and RP retrieved some intact pellets after the birds had fledged in June, and bone debris from the nest floor in August.

Table 1. Prey of the Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* identified near Qab Elias (Lebanon). Analysis by Patrick Bayle. **Key: Col 1 –** Pellet collected 26 March 2004. **Col 2** – Bone remains at front of nest collected 24 April 2005. **Col 3** – 8 pellets and other remains in and under nest collected 28 June 2005. **Col 4** – Bone remains from nest floor collected 7 August 2005.

Mammals, aged _	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Sp Tots**
Eastern hedgehog *Erinaceus concolor*, juv		1			**1**
Cape hare *Lepus capensis*, inf		1	2	3	**11**
Cape hare *Lepus capensis* juv		1	1	3	
Tristram's jird *Meriones tristramii*, ad		4	1	6	**11**
Social vole *Microtus socialis*, ad		6	1	3	**11**
Social vole *Microtus socialis*, juv		1			
Broad-toothed field mouse *Apodemus mystacinus*, ad		2			**2**
Black rat *Rattus rattus*, ad			1	1	**3**
Black rat *Rattus rattus*, juv			1		
Brown rat *Rattus norvegicus*, ad		7	7	4	**21**
Brown rat *Rattus norvegicus*, juv		1	1	1	
Lesser mole rat, *Spalax leucodon*				1	**1**
Birds, aged					
Chukar *Alectoris chukar*, ad			1	1	**2**
Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, ad	2	2		2	**6**
Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*				1	**1**
Small wader sp *Charadriidae / Scolopacidae*, ad		1			**1**
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia _ forma domestica*, ad		1	1	1	**3**
Barn Owl *Tyto alba*				1	**1**
Small thrush sp *Turdidae*, ad		1			**1**
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*, ad			1		**1**
Reptiles, aged					
Tortoise sp *Testudo sp*, ad		1			**1**
Gecko sp *Gekkonidae*, ad		3			**3**
Agama sp *Agamidae*				1	**1**
Large lizard sp *Sauria* ad.		1			**1**
Snake sp *Ophidia*, ad.		1			**1**
Insects					
Large beetle sp *Coleoptera*		1			**1**
Large insect sp *Insecta*		1			**1**
Prey Totals	**2**	**37**	**18**	**29**	**86**

The diet of the Lebanese Eagle Owl, subspecies *interpositus*, is quite similar to that found in other areas of the Middle East. From the 86 items PB analysed, the approximate diet composition was 71% mammals, 19% birds, 8% reptiles and 2% insects (**Table 1**). Of particular interest is the preponderance of brown rat *Rattus norvegicus* in the diet of this pair, probably explained by the site being quite close to two ramshackle farms housing sheep and goats. Although brown rat is known to be a very common prey item of the Eagle Owl across most of its distribution (Cramp & Simmons, 1977), the above studies in the Middle East include only one such identified specimen prey (Bates & Harrison, 1989). The variety of bird species in this pair's diet reflects the location of their territory, which included hillsides and the valley floor wetlands.

Also notable was the presence at Qab Elias of the remains of a tortoise species (probably a spur-thighed tortoise *Testudo graeca*, because Hermann's tortoise *T. hermanni* has not been seen in the area). This is a rarely-recorded prey species of Eagle Owl, having been noted only twice from 630 prey items in northeastern Greece (Papageorgiou *et al* 1993) and once from 3057 in eastern Turkey (Obuch 1994). It is rather surprising that this Lebanese tortoise had been a large adult, as it might be expected that younger individuals would be easier to catch and transport to the nest.

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Prey-exchange and hunting techniques of Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* in Muscat, Oman

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From July to early October each year from 2002 to 2005 inclusive I have been conducting spot counts of southbound migratory seabirds in Muscat, Oman, from a location close to my residence. A pair of Sooty Falcons breeds on the mainland about 400m away from my cliff viewpoint. Their nest is located in a steep cliff face some 10–15m amsl just around the corner from where I stand so my presence poses no threat. From this area I can see the steep cliffs of a rocky island 4km offshore. It hosts a sizeable breeding colony of Sooty Falcons.

Prey exchange displays after morning hunts

On watch most mornings at sunrise or shortly after, I am usually alerted by the characteristic Kestrel-like call, '*ki-ki-ki-ki-ki*', only shriller, uttered towards a single bird returning at great

height, carrying passerine prey caught during its early morning hunt out at sea. I am not quite sure if this vocalization comes from the mate after it lifts off the cliff to meet the incomer, or from the incomer itself. The prey, invariably warbler/pipit-sized, is always exchanged in mid-air some 30–150m or so above the sea, in one of three spectacular variations on a display theme:

1. The commonest display sees the prey-carrier gliding as its mate, stretching its talons forward and upwards, intercepts it from below and behind to seize the passerine prey in a smooth transfer to take it promptly back to the nest site.
2. Less often, the returning prey-carrier is intercepted from above, in which case, timing it perfectly, it rolls inverted, elegantly handing over the prey to its mate, which again swiftly returns to the nest.
3. The rarest display I have observed on only two occasions, 22 and 29 Sep 05, when the prey-carrier was carrying a tiny passerine in its beak; the transfer in both cases was beak-to-beak, the mate then stooping abruptly back to the cliff.

By mid-September such air shows occur daily, but typically only once per morning. However, on 29 Sep 05 I noted the same bird delivering 3 small passerines to its mate within 28 minutes (from 0552 to 0620). After receiving the second 'present', the mate consumed it within my view. A few days later, I observed the first flying juveniles of the year.

Hunts, prey pursuits and other activity

Lone hunts

On 25 Sep 03 a lone Sooty Falcon from the island intercepted a migrating small passerine some 2.5km out to sea, and after 10 or 12 swooping attacks from above, forced it down to just above the sea before catching it and returning to the island. My many observations of prey-exchange suggest that lone hunts probably are the norm, although regular observations from close to a Sooty Falcon colony might establish the frequency and regularity of group hunts, as observed below.

Group hunts

On 11 Sep 2002 I witnessed a spectacular hunt some 2–2.5km out to sea, where a passerine, possibly a lark or wheatear had been intercepted by a group of four (presumably adult) Sooty Falcons. The target, hovering some 5–10m above the sea, was forced into continuous evasive manoeuvres, with one falcon after the other making successive stooping attacks from 20–30m altitude. This circle of non-stop attacks follows the same principle as applies to the classic aerial combat 'dogfight' of fighter aircraft. Several minutes of rapid attacks and evasion clearly were more energy-sapping for the target as it inevitably lost height to just above the sea, and just as inevitably, a falcon struck it, but failed to hold it, knocking it into the sea. The four falcons patrolled it for at least half an hour, only once actually touching it, but when they left, the floating passerine was clearly dead.

I have had the opportunity to watch one other dramatic low-altitude morning hunt involving two falcons. On 26 Jul 02 a Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*, a common breeder, apparently subject to some post-breeding movements in late July to late August (possibly locally), flew southwards past me, overland across a clifftop area totally void of any vegetation. As soon as it was visible to the Sooty Falcons, they both took off and soon had chased it about 20m offshore in an energetic pursuit. After about a minute of attacks, one of them caught it in the air some 1–2m above the sea.

Evening activity

Evening activity appears different altogether from morning behaviour. From the island-breeding population, I typically see birds arriving at the mainland about half an hour before sunset, my highest count (presumably including juveniles) being 16 birds on 17 Oct 02, all arriving individually at various intervals along the same flight path. Occasionally I have seen Sooty Falcons cruising past at low altitudes over my residence, and in a number of nearby wetland areas. However, I've never witnessed any evening kill of any sort, whether of birds or insects. On one occasion I observed over the headland two Sooty Falcons stoop from the soar

twice on a passing Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, but the attacks were half-hearted and pursuit was abandoned.

Usually I see falcons returning to the island as darkness falls on the reverse of the arrival flight path; for example on 17 Oct 02, 7 birds were noted returning, which may indicate some might remain to hunt after dark and then return, or that some return by another route. Although I have a scatter of observations from the one location of probable Sooty Falcons calling birds about one hour after nightfall, I cannot exclude the possibility that these were migrant Hobby *Falco subbuteo*.

Discussion

My sightings suggest that Sooty Falcon hunting in groups during the height of the breeding season (September) may be a regular occurrence. Birds of the Western Palearctic, Interactive Edition (BWP*i*) states: *gregarious, but less closely colonial than Eleonora's Falcon and lacks latter's group-hunting behaviour in breeding period... hunts singly or in pairs....* I would argue that the behaviour I observed is similar to that of the Eleonora's Falcon: *spectacular aerial hunts that usually involve several falcons* – Hedenstrom *et al* (1999). Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2001) note that the species hunts in flocks on the wintering grounds.

Furthermore, my observations in general seem to indicate a fairly good attack success rate, particularly at the height of passerine migration in late September and in October, may not be uncommon: 3 kills by the same falcon within 28 minutes. BWP*i* states: *Low success rate in attacks on birds.* A possible explanation of this apparent contradiction may lie in the species having to fly further out to sea earlier in the season when migrant passerines are fewer, presenting it with a longer daily commute between its nest site and potential prey. A single kill in 2–3 hours might therefore be reasonable from July to late August. Furthermore, at the beginning of that period, only the 'on duty' bird at the nest site needs to be fed, and as the Sooty Falcon chicks hatch, their appetites initially are small.

That a Sooty Falcon hands over prey in a combination of 3 aerial displays, feeding its mate as well as offspring, appears not to have yet been documented. On the other hand, that the Oman Sooty Falcons' breeding strategy coincides with peak autumn passerine migration, thereby providing their broods with an ample supply of food, is in agreement with the behaviour described in Shirihai (1996) and Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2001). Whether this breeding strategy is common to all populations, including those of southeast Libya, is not known, but it is an obligate strategy of the closely related Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* (Hedenstrom *et al* 1999, BWP*i*).

Lastly, my observations align with BWP*i* information on hunting – *most hunting carried out early morning and late evening* – and breeding season – *eggs laid late July to end August.* Jennings (1995) denotes the breeding season as: *eggs July, with young in nest to September.* What perhaps is new is that my observations of a particular pair show a falcon delivering prey to its mate from July to October inclusive, suggesting that the hunter provides food for its mate in the early stages as well as for its offspring later on.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to Mike Blair for reviewing and commenting upon the draft of this note.

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Plate 1. Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea*, Jahra Nature Reserve, Kuwait, 28 Apr 2000. *© Khaled al-Ghanem*

The first Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* in Kuwait - an escape

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On the afternoon of 28 April 2000 I observed a Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* in Jahra Nature Reserve (29°21′N, 47°49′E. The reserve is located at the southwest corner of Kuwait bay, east of Jahra town and 27km west of Kuwait City, and is the country's only fresh water wetland. It is an Important Bird Area (Evans 1994) covering 3km^2 of coastal sabkha and includes a large area of *Phragmites australis* reed, the shallow water being maintained by a spring and the outflow from the treated waste water from nearby Jahra. The bird was identified on the basis of comparing several photographs that I took (see **Plate 1**) with the illustration in Porter *et al* (1996). I was able to observe the bird for some 10 minutes at close range.

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The first Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* in Turkey

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On my routine walk through the city park of Altınpark in Ankara (39°58´10˝N, 32°52´42˝E) on the afternoon of 15 February 2006, I spotted at 12:07 a Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis* drinking water at a water outlet. At that time of year, the day temperature had not exceeded -5°C and the whole park was under 20cm of snow. This water outlet was the only place in the Park environs that was snow- and ice-free – thousands of birds were visiting the spot daily, the commonest species being Fieldfare *T. pilaris* and Redwing *T. iliacus*, of which there were about 200.

When I first saw the Black-throated Thrush, it was holding its head parallel to the ground, even when it was hopping around. After drinking its fill, it flew away on to fruit trees 30 metres downhill. After feeding in these trees for some time, it dropped down to scarlet firethorn *Pyracantha coccinea* bushes beneath the trees, and started feeding on its the red berries. At 1242, a Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* appeared and flushed all the thrushes, which flew off east, and I lost sight of the bird I had been watching. I made sketches and took notes during my observations (**Figs 1 & 2**). I did not have my field guide (Porter *et al* 1996) with me and unfortunately it was too cold for my camera batteries to function.

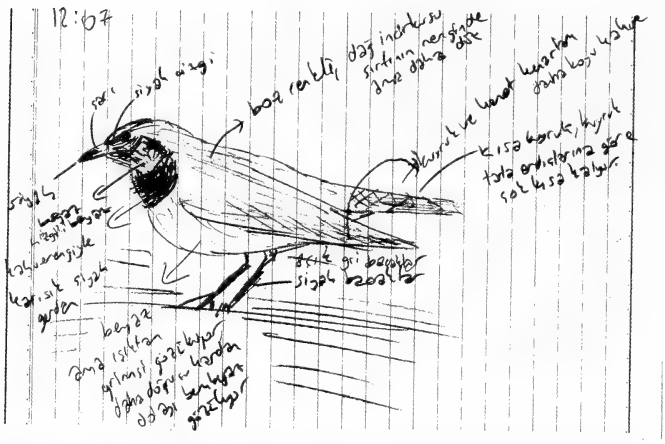

Figure 1. Sketch (side view) of Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* in Altınpark, Ankara, Feb 2006. *© Emin Yoğurtcouğlu.*

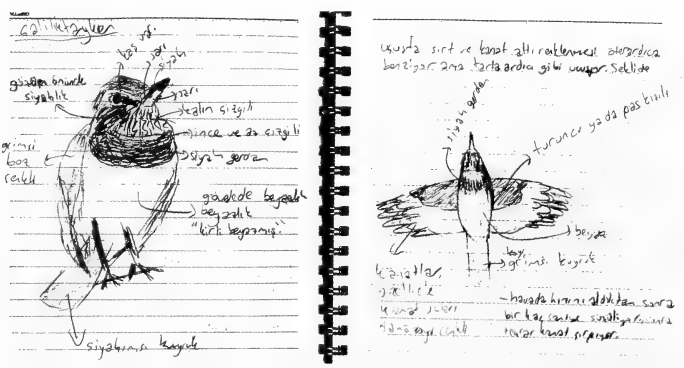

Figure 2. Sketch (underparts) of Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* in Altınpark, Ankara, Feb 2006. *© Emin Yoğurtcouğlu.*

Description:
The bird was slightly smaller than a Fieldfare, but had the same shape. There were broad black stripes from its throat down to the breast. The throat is white but the breast was black, but included some brown coloration. There was black, between the eye and the bill. Two thirds of the upper mandible from the tip was black, but only a third of the lower mandible from the tip – the rest of the bill was yellow. The belly was dirty white, although it looked bright white with the sun reflecting from the snow. The legs looked greyish in sunlight, but black in the shade. The back

and the wings were brownish grey, recalling Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* in winter plumage, but relatively was less streaked. The primaries and the tail feathers were darker than the base plumage colour. The supercilium is thin, greyish but lighter than its surrounding.

In flight the underwing coverts resemble Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, but the flight itself is like a Fieldfare's. Greater underwing coverts are orange, but the rest is brownish with the borders of the wing darker. As it takes off, it enters a short glide to build up speed before it begins flapping flight. It in-flight call is represented by '*djuuv djuuv*', (*juvv jivv* as represented in Turkish script) repeated after two seconds, recalling Redwing, but lower-pitched and louder. Its alarm calls resembles that of Common Blackbird *T. merula*, but harsher and clearer with a less echoing '*chuck chuck chuck*'.

The species winters regularly in Iran and Arabia and is a regular vagrant in many European countries (Handrinos & Akriotis 1997, Ramadan-Jaradi & Ramadan-Jaradi 1999, Rietkerk & Wacher 1996, Shirihai *et al* 1999, Snow & Perrins 1998). The species has never been seen before in Turkey although it was considered as very likely visitor for Turkey.

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First breeding record of Trumpeter Finch *Rhodopechys* [*Bucanetes*] *githagineus* in Syria

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Although breeding by the Trumpeter Finch *Rhodopechys githagineus* in Syria has been suspected, it has never been proved (Baumgart 1995). Although otherwise inconspicuous, in the breeding season the male has a bright pink wash to its flanks and wings, and has a bright reddish-orange bill, and its song is reminiscent of the toy trumpet from which its English name originates. I have seen the species on a number of occasions as have my local colleagues Mahmud Scheisch Abdallah and Ghazy al Qaim as we worked on the implementation of the Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* protection programme, in the *Wadi Abiad* area, which is quite near Palmyra (34° 33.196'N, 38° 17.15'E). Our records were obtained between January and

Plate 1. Trumpeter Finch *Rhodopechys githagineus*, Palmyra, Syria, 2004. *© Gianluca Serra*

September of 2003 and 2004, and between April and June 2006. Because we carried out our survey work mostly from late winter onwards through summer, we cannot rule out that this species is resident in the area. We observed courtship and territorial behaviour on 3 March 2003, and obtained the first definite proof of breeding on 29 April 2004, when an adult was seen feeding a fledged chick outside the nest.

Porter *et al* (1996) map the species as occurring in southernmost Syria, but make no comment other than "mainly resident but dispersive outside breeding season". Snow & Perrins (1998) map the species similarly, but without supporting text.

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Some notes on raptors and other birds from Afghanistan in autumn 2005

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During a stay as medical doctor in Kunduz, north-eastern Afghanistan, PK made some interesting bird observations. Afghanistan is almost a blank spot in the ornithological world atlas, thus making even basic information important. His observations included Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* (**Plate 1**), Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (**Plate 2**), and two Common Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis* on a large river near the town of Ac Tapeh (towards the Uzbekistan border) and some raptor species, detailed below.

Plate 1. Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* near Kunduz, northeastern Afghanistan. Sep 2005. © *Peter Kowatsch*

Plate 2. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* near Ac Tapeh, Afghanistan, towards the Uzbekistan border. Oct 2005. © *Peter Kowatsch*

Plate 3. Adult Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* pair gliding. Note the moult-induced wing ragged trailing edge. Ac Tapeh, Afghanistan, near the Uzbekistan border. Oct 2005. © *Peter Kowatsch*

Plate 4. Immature Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, near Kunduz, Afghanistan. Note the pale cast and the moult pattern. Sep 2005. © *Peter Kowatsch*

Plate 5. Adult and juvenile Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* near Kunduz, Afghanistan. Note differences in wing shape and moulting pattern. Sep 2005. © *Peter Kowatsch*

Plate 6. Juvenile Long-legged Buzzard near Kunduz, Afghanistan. Sep 2005. © *Peter Kowatsch*

Cinereous (Eurasian Black) Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

Two individuals of this species, also known as Monk Vulture, were recorded in October 2005 near the Uzbekistan border, close to Ac Tapeh. They were soaring over the valley of a large river bordered by desert-like habitat. According to the head patterns and the irregular wing trailing edge, these two were probably an adult pair (**Plate 3**). Cinereous Vulture is known to occur in Afghanistan, its mapped distribution comprising a shallow salient from Baluchistan, northwest Pakistan (Fergusson-Lees & Christie 2001).

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

One pale bird observed near Kunduz in September 2005, most probably (Campora & Cattaneo 2005) was an unpaired immature (**Plate 4**). Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2001) map the Short-toed Snake Eagle as non-resident in Afghanistan (and also make no reference to Afghanistan in their text), which suggests that this individual was migrating from summering in Central Asia

towards a wintering area in the Indian subcontinent. This supposition is interesting because the migration pattern of raptors in that immense area is largely unknown (Zalles & Bildstein 2000). However, Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2005) map the species as resident in the Indian subcontinent, with a range just extending into southeastern Afghanistan.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
This large, richly-coloured buzzard species was observed regularly not only near Kunduz but also at the Pakistan border. Observations typically were of single birds, but near Kunduz one adult was observed passing food to its juvenile. All birds were markedly rufous on the underparts (**Plates 5 & 6**).

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Bird Sites of the OSME Region - 1 and 2

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1. Fujairah National Dairy Farm at Dibba, United Arab Emirates

Located on the Dibba plain on the East coast, alongside the Oman border, sits the UAE's premier birding site, Fujairah National Dairy Farm (FNDF), which is situated at the foot of the Musandam mountains just a few kilometres from the Gulf of Oman and is ideally placed to receive both long distance and altitudinal migrants. The site is predominantly irrigated fodder fields, surrounded by *Acacia*-dotted gravel plains. Within the farm there are several slurry pools, some with dense aquatic vegetation, and two rows of mature trees, one of which borders an overgrown ditch. The cattle themselves are housed in large, shaded, insect-filled pens, attracting many wagtails in winter, usually including the *personata* race of White Wagtail (Masked Wagtail) *Motacilla alba*.

Birding can be good at any time of year, with a selection of raptors, waders, larks, pipits, wagtails and shrikes frequenting the site during the winter and a range of common breeding species present all year. Species difficult to locate elsewhere in the UAE or requiring special trips into the mountains can be seen here, such as House Bunting *Emberiza striolata*, Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* (winter), Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (winter/spring; may breed) and Trumpeter Finch *Rhodopechys githagineus* (scarce). Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* regularly come to drink and Pallid (Striated or Bruce's) Scops Owls *Otus brucei* breed on the plains. Passage periods are the most fruitful times, with the species list being swelled by a host of migrants from March to May and September to November. In the last 12 months alone, these periods have yielded several rarities: White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, Little Swift *Apus affinis*, White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, Pied Stonechat *Saxicola caprata*, Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* and Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*. In spring, the added possibility of encountering flocks of European *Merops apiaster* and Blue-cheeked *M. persicus* Bee-eaters, European Rollers *Coracias garrulus* and Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni* increases the level of anticipation when arriving at the site, whilst autumn and winter visits provide the opportunity of studying a range of pipits and larks, with a chance of finding Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* and Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*.

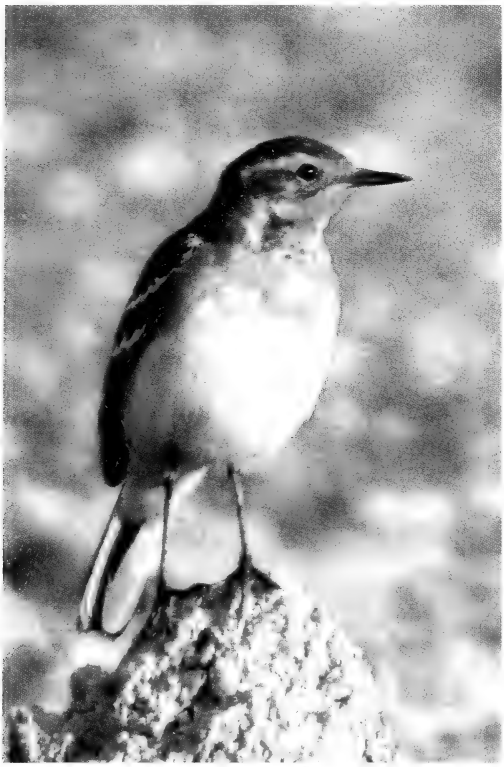

Plate 1. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
© Nick Moran

Plate 2. Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*
© Nick Moran

Plate 4. European Roller *Coracias garrulus.*
© Nick Moran

Plate 3. Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus.*
© Nick Moran

Plate 5. Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus.*
© Nick Moran

FNDF is a working farm and a good relationship exists between the owners and visiting birders. To help maintain this state of affairs, birders must park outside, in line with the farm's hygiene procedures. Reaching the farm is straightforward: arriving from Dubai (1_ hours) on the new Ras Al Khaimah road, bear left at the roundabout just after the cement factory (or bear right if arriving on the old Masafi road) and then turn left at the next roundabout as you reach the outskirts of Dibba. Continue straight on over the next two roundabouts (passing on your right Dibba Park, which, perhaps is worth a brief visit – it held an Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus* in December 2004), then turn right at the T-junction. After two speed humps, take the first asphalt turning on the left and continue for about 3km. The FNDF entrance is on the right hand side after the main area of fodder fields. The farm on the left is inaccessible but the perimeter gravel track can be productive, with the dump at the start of this track hosting a site-faithful Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata* for the past few winters.

2. Al Ghurfa Breakwater, Fujairah

Also spelt al-Gurfa, this man-made promontory rapidly shot to prominence as the UAE's best seawatching spot soon after construction began four years ago. From the centre of Fujairah or Fujairah marina, it is easily located by following the corniche road southbound towards Kalba and then making a U-turn at the roundabout just after passing the breakwater itself. Construction work continues Saturday to Thursday, but this has the advantage of allowing vehicular access through the gate, saving you lugging 'scope, chair, umbrella and cool-box the last few hundred metres, which is what you will have to do if you visit on a Friday!

Common (*Sterna hirundo*), Sandwich (*S. sandvicensis*), Lesser Crested (*S. bengalensis*), Swift (*S. bergii*) and Saunders's (*Sternula saundersi*) Terns are easily seen throughout the year. White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa* numbers build throughout the first quarter of the year and Bridled Terns *Onychoprion anaethetus* arrive in April. Gulls are well represented, the resident Sooty (*Larus hemprichii*) and Slender-billed (*L. genei*) Gulls being joined in varying numbers in the winter by Black-headed (*L. ridibundus*) and Great Black-headed Gulls (*L. ichthyaetus*). Whilst further study is needed of the 'large white-headed' gulls wintering in the Gulf of Oman, it seems that Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans* and Steppe Gull *L. (c.) barabensis* are common winter visitors, Heuglin's Gull *L. heuglini* is fairly common during this period and Baltic Gull *L. f. fuscus* is a scarce autumn migrant. Arctic (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) and Pomarine (*St. pomarinus*) Skuas are often seen, particularly on passage whilst there are occasional reports of both Long-tailed Skua *St. longicauda* and unidentified large *Stercorarius* (*Catharacta*) sp. In April and May, Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* can be observed in good numbers, with triple figure counts possible.

Of the more pelagic species, Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* is seen with some reliability in the summer months (June to August), al Ghurfa offering the best land-based chance in the UAE of seeing this sought-after species. Persian Shearwater *Puffinus* [*lherminieri*] *persicus* is frequently encountered, the record being of 1500 on 2 December 2004. This bird, like most of the other pelagic species visiting the area, is rather unpredictable, coming close inshore only when there are many shoals of fish present. Two UAE firsts, Flesh- (Pale-) footed Shearwater *P. carneipes* (pending acceptance) and Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, were recorded from Fujairah in 2004, whilst all eight records of Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus* (first sighted in 1995) since 2003 have come from the breakwater.

Without resident birders on the East coast, much remains undiscovered about the ideal conditions and seawatching potential of this site. For example, a few 1 to 5-hour seawatches in April and May 2006 more than doubled the number of Sooty Shearwater records for the UAE, three Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*, a Long-tailed Skua and a Brown (Common) Noddy *Anous stolidus* also being recorded. Over the last decade, other rarities found between Fujairah and Kalba to the south have included Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, Brown-headed, Little, White-eyed, Common and Sabine's Gulls (*L. brunnicephalus, L. minutus, L. leucophthalmus, L canus* and *Xema (L.) sabini* respectively), Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*, Sooty (Lesser) Noddy *A. tenuirostris* and Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*.

The potential of this site and its proximity to Qurrayah pools 10km north of Fujairah make it a tasty dish for any birder, especially seabird enthusiasts, visiting the UAE, but the icing on the cake is provided by the beaches, harbour and mangroves of the Kalba area to the south (Sykes's Warbler *Iduna* [*Hippolais*] *rama*, Collared (White-collared) Kingfisher *Todirhamphus* [*Halcyon*] *chloris* and Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*). For maps, recent sightings and more details on these and many other sites in the UAE, just enjoy browsing through Tommy Pedersen's excellent and invaluable website at http://www.tommypedersen.com/UAE.htm. **Plates 1–5** illustrate but a few of the species seen at the two sites above.

Possible first Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* in Iran and the Middle East

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Apart from European Pied, Collared and Semi-collared Flycatchers (*Ficedula hypoleuca, F. albicollis* and *F. semitorquata* respectively), two other flycatcher species, namely Spotted *Muscicapa striata* and Red-breasted *F. parva*, have been recorded in Iran (Mansoori 2001), usually arriving early to mid-spring until late summer or early autumn (pers obs, A Khaleghizadeh pers comm) During an avifaunal survey in the Angouran Wildlife Refuge and Protected Area (Zanjan Province, Iran), on 25 September 2001, I observed a bird at Ghareh Bough, in the Area's Core Zone (36°39'07"N, 47°40'46"E at 1425m asl). It hovered many times above an oleaster *Elaeagnus* sp tree *c*4m tall; it resembled a Spotted Flycatcher in its repetitive method of hunting insects, flying up to catch them and landing back on the tree. I watched the bird at a range of *c*15m through my Kowa 20_60 telescope for over a minute before it departed. The tree was close to the Angouran Chay river and was but one of many such trees every 10m or so.

The bird bore little resemblance to any of the Muscicapidae usually found in Iran. I estimated it to be between Spotted and Red-breasted Flycatcher in size. The bird lacked a white wing-patch and had no white on the tail. Furthermore, it had no stripes or streaks on its forecrown and breast. It had a distinctly white eye-ring round its dark eye. Its plumage was as follows: brown-grey upperparts, whitish underparts, dark malar stripe, brown-grey wash across the breast, whitish lores and black legs. Its bill was broader than that of Spotted Flycatcher. Having my Collins Field Guide (Mullarney *et al* 1999) to hand, I rapidly came to the conclusion that it was an Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*, which would be the first for Iran. I discussed my observations and their status as a possible new record for Iran with Mr A Adhami and Mr A Khaleghizadeh. They advised me to visit this area again to try and confirm the record, but despite searching the area in autumn 2002 and June and July 2003, I was unable to find any other individuals.

The distribution of the Asian Brown Flycatcher lies from northeast Asia to the Himalayas and in scattered locations to the south, especially in India. Although recorded in Tadjikistan, its status is uncertain (WCMC 2005). In the Western Palearctic, Asian Brown Flycatcher has been recorded as an accidental, once each in Denmark, Sweden and Greece, all in September (Snow & Perrins 1998). The five above-mentioned Western Palearctic species have been recorded quite widely in the OSME region. Three others, Blue-and-White Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*, African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis* and Gambaga Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae* (Porter *et al* 1996) have

been recorded occasionally, but both are completely different from Asian Brown Flycatcher. On 28 March 2001, a Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina*, also a distinctive species, was recorded in SE Iran (Roth *et al* 2005). I believe that the bird I observed in Angouran was the first Asian Brown Flycatcher for Iran and the Middle East, but because I was unable to relocate the bird and check it as advised, I must be content that my sighting remains unconfirmed. However, I submit this account to encourage others who live in the OSME region to note every detail of unusual bird species they encounter to give themselves the best chance of having their sightings accepted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Plate 1. Caucasian Snowcock *Tetraogallus caucasicus*, Kasbegi, Georgia, May 2004. *© Kris de Rouck* **Plate 2 (inset).** Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla*, Kasbegi, Georgia, May 2004. *© Kris de Rouck*

Plate 1. One of the dark finches found in Ilam, Iran, in April 05. *© Seyed Babak Musavi.*

Dark finches found at Ilam, Iran

SEYED BABAK MUSAVI

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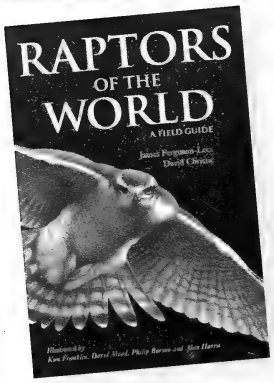
The Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* is a common winter visitor to northern Iran, and probably is not uncommon in Ilam. On 19 April 2005, while photographing birds in Ilam province in western Iran, I saw four mysterious dark finches. I was confused about which species they were. They were very dark grey with faint white spots on the chest; the birds seemed to be 13–15cm long and were in the top of a tree at an elevation of 1270m (Abdanan area - Dinar kuh). They behaved just like Chaffinches and seemed to be in good condition. Derek Scott (2005 pers comm) suggested that they might simply be female Chaffinches that had been dust-bathing, although whatever material had comprised the dust, I would have thought that even the most persistent dust would not have obscured their extensive white wing-patches and outer tail feathers so completely for all four birds. The photo (**Plate 1**) illustrates the uniform greyness rather well. Perhaps they had bathed in water that had contained a dye-like substance that had been absorbed by the feathers. I thank Derek Scott for his kind assistance.

REVIEWS & Recent Literature



Raptors of the World – A Field Guide James Ferguson-Lees and David Christie. Illustrated by Kim Franklin, David Mead, Philip Burton and Alan Harris. A & C Black. £19.99

Which group of birds challenges your identification skills the most? Well, from a quick sample of some friends it seems that raptors scare us as much as any other group. The problem with these birds is that most of them do not enjoy being close to people, and when they do appear before us it is often at great distance and for a brief time only. But even if they put on a good show we can still be confused. There are so many plumage variations depending on race, age and state of moult that the range of possible options is bewildering.

Earlier this year I took a trip to Oman. In one marshy area on the coast I came across a group of six eagles that were the last stragglers heading north after a lazy winter along the Arabian coast. The birds were very obliging – sitting in trees, flying around and generally giving me no excuse for being confused. But I have to admit that even with this level of co-operation it took quite a while for me to work out what they all were. And that's the other problem – most of us just don't get to see raptors often enough to learn their distinctive features.

When the first version of this tome arrived in 2001 it was heralded as an incredible milestone in raptor literature. When it was first conceived as a project in the early 1980s a field guide was planned, but weighing in at a hefty 2.5 kg that book was rarely going to leave your home. With 992 pages it was rarely going to leave anyone's library. That book covered 313 species and included 112 plates. In fact it weighed as much as some eagle species!

This new volume has benefited from a certain amount of updating. Information from birders around the world has allowed distributional data to be improved, although I notice that my eagles (four Greater Spotted and two Steppe Eagles) are not shown as wintering despite the fact that they are a regular winter feature in Oman. The number of colour plates has been increased to 118 and an extra 25 species have been added. Only one of these (the Cryptic Forest-falcon from Brazil) is actually new to science, while all the others are caused by the upgrading of certain races to full species status. A really useful 75 page introduction summarises a huge amount of information on raptor ecology, distribution and migration. The species texts have been cut down to give just the vital identification tips that you need in the field and as a result this softback version runs to 320 pages and weighs in at just 640 grams. Colour distribution maps are given for each species and previous known errors have been corrected. Similarly a few plates have been amended slightly following reviews published about the first edition.

So where in the world is this book going to be useful? With the latest Western Palearctic and Middle Eastern field guides having excellent raptor plates I don't think this book is going to help out much in the OSME region, but I do think it will be useful in South America. With a rather limited set of field guides for that region I think this book will improve your changes of working out what you are looking at.

Keith Betton

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From Colin Richardson in Cyprus

Conservation issues in the United Arab Emirates – a personal view

It seems that all bird conservation organisations should give the UAE a wide berth. There is little serious effort by the new generation of rulers in the Emirates to protect any of the country's remaining International Bird Areas (IBAs). Of the ten non-island IBAs (Evans 1994) in the UAE, not one has been given protection. In fact, the opposite has occurred: by early 2006, four have been destroyed in favour of development, three are scheduled for the bulldozer, two have been inappropriately managed (removal of trees etc), one natural inland site has dried out due to lack of rainfall and one is overgrown by intrusive mesquite trees. The remaining ten sites listed in the country's inventory of IBAs are islands, formerly with important seabird and Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* colonies, but all are off limits to outsiders and one can only assume the worst, as most are privately owned and used for leisure, or contain oil terminals or military bases.

I lived in the UAE from 1976 – 2003 and watched woefully as development increased pace over the years. I returned in January 2006 and was dismayed by what I found. Al Jazeerah Khor, once host to the largest flocks of Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* has been completely filled (thanks to the British engineering consultancy firm, Halcrows); Khor Kalba, the home to the endemic White-collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris kalbaensis* has had a highway built across the main mangrove channel and a vast inland lagoon created (also by Halcrows), so changing the hydrology, scouring out the channels and destroying large areas of the existing mangroves. Khor al Beidah, one of the UAE's most beautiful natural tidal khors, home to the country's largest wintering Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola* flock, plus up to 10 000 migrant northern shorebirds, is to be destroyed to make way for a residential and marina development by the side of the lagoon. Dubai is a city to avoid, as traffic jams clog the coastal zone and hotels are full or over-priced. Former famous birdwatching sites, such as Khor Dubai wildlife sanctuary, are aggressively managed, while security officials are quick to harass birdwatchers on the golf courses, polo clubs and other grassed areas. Wimpey gravel pits have been mostly filled, polluted and surrounded by housing development and another shopping mall. Several other important sites for land migrants have also disappeared, including the hundreds of hectares of irrigated fields associated with the Al Ain and al Wathba camel race tracks, both of which have been closed in the past five years.

A succession of BBC business-specials on the Middle East highlight how much the UAE landscape is changing and how much more pressure has been placed on the remaining land area by mega-projects, mostly in Dubai Emirate, but now affecting all the Emirates. Many breeding UAE species are now in serious danger of disappearing from the country altogether. During an eight-day, 1500km journey around the country in December and January this year, I had difficulty finding (once-common) Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*, Black-crowned Finch Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps* and Hoopoe Larks *Alaemon alaudipes*, while Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Lappet-faced Vulture *Aegypius tracheliotus*, Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii* were totally absent. This decline has been going on relentlessly for 25 years, but it has accelerated since 1991, after the end of the first Gulf war against Iraq, when vast amounts of wealth were transferred by other rich Gulf nations to Dubai, which is regarded as a safe haven.

There seems little hope for the remaining indigenous wildlife, including the natural landscape itself, and the writing is clearly on the wall for virtually all of the country's natural IBAs. Without any environmental NGOs, which are discouraged by the authorities, or any murmur of caution from the local Emirati population or their neighbours, who have never shown much enthusiasm in protecting their natural heritage, one can only fear the worst.

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Sandgrouse 28 (2): 184–192 2006

Around the Region

compiled by
Dawn Balmer and Keith Betton

Records in *Around the Region* are published for interest only; their inclusion does not imply acceptance by the records committee of the relevant country. All records relate to 2006 unless otherwise stated.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 29 (1) should be sent by 15 Dec to: Around the Region, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U.K.; or atr@osme.org

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Bee-eaters
Merops apiaster
by D. Powell

BAHRAIN

At Buhair (between Riffa and Isa Towns) on 24 Jun there were 5 pairs of **Black-crowned Night Herons** *Nycticorax nycticorax* with 8 juveniles, 4 pairs of **Western Reef Heron** *Egretta gularis* and 7 juveniles. At Ras Tubli sewage outfall on the same date there were at least 50 pairs of Western Reef Heron and 110 young – a dramatic increase in breeding numbers at this site. Seven **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* (2 adults, two 2nd years and 3 juveniles) at Buhair on 24 Jun represents a possible breeding record at this site. A **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius* was at Badaan Farm on 28 Jan. A female **Asian Koel** *Eudynamys scolopaceus*, of unknown origin, was seen at Bahrain Fort on 5 May. At Badaan Farm on 28 Jan there was an **Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula* and a **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*. **Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* were discovered roosting at a new site during the winter, with at least 150 at BDF Wadi on 15 Mar. The traditional site at Saar still held over 100 on 3 Apr. Two **White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis* were at the Saar roost on 3 Apr and represent the first of the season.

CYPRUS

A **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* was reported at Akhna Dam on 6 May, the 9th record if accepted. At Larnaca Sewage Works there were 15 **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* on 7 Jan and 8 on 8 Jan - an interesting record. Thirteen were at Paralimni Lake on 21 Feb. The 4th record of **Smew** *Mergus albellus* involved a female at Phasouri Reedbeds on 12 Feb, increasing to three females there 12 Feb to 3 Mar. A **Red-breasted Merganser** *M. serrator* on rocks in Paphos Harbour on 9 Dec 2005 was the only winter record. An **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* seen near Paramali tunnel, on Paphos/Limassol highway on 12 Apr was an interesting report. A **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* was reported at Aspro Pools on 13 Apr; the fourth for Cyprus if accepted. A **Little Crake** *Porzana parva* at Aspro Pools on 3 Dec was an unusual and unseasonal record. There was a **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* at Evretou Dam on 8–9 Apr and another was there on 19 Apr. A **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* at Oroklini Marsh on 31 Jan was unseasonal. There were two records of **Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*: one at Paphos Sewage Plant on 14 Apr and one at Lady's Mile on 1 May. A **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* at Larnaca Sewage Works 27–28 May was only 7th record since 1985. Three **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* were at Meneou Pools, Larnaca on 25 Apr; the 17th record and the first report since Apr 2003. A **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinerea* at Larnaca Sewage Works 16 Apr was the 16th record. There were a good number of sightings of **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* this spring; Larnaca Sewage Works 2 Feb and 15–17 Feb Mandria beach 19 Apr, Blue Sea Hotel, Rizokarpaso 7 May and at the monastery near Cape Andreas 8 May. Thirteen **Audouin's Gulls** *L. audouinii* were east of Kyrenia on 3 Jan. The third **Bar-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes cincturus* for Cyprus was at Cape Drepanum 13 Feb–19 Mar. A **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* of the race *lutea* was at Apostolos Andreas on 17-Apr; the last record was in 1991. The only sighting of **Rufous Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas galactotes* this spring was one near Ayios Filonas, on the north coast 25 May. A male **White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis* was at Cape Kormakiti on 5 Apr and a female was at Cape Andreas 8 May and constitute the 11th & 12th records. A record of around

six **Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus variegatus* at Panagra Dam on 16 Mar is unusual. A female was also at Paphos Lighthouse on 25 Mar. A first-year male **Hooded Wheatear** *Oenanthe monacha* was at Mandria beach from 27 Mar to 1Apr and one a female was at the Baths of Aphrodite 17–20 Apr, the 10th & 11th records. An **Olive-tree Warbler** *Hippolais olivetorum* near Karavas on 20 Apr would be the first record since 2000 if accepted. A **Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis*, probably of the *elegans* race, was at Paphos Lighthouse 20–21 Mar and one of the *aucheri* race was at Cape Greco 14 Apr; the first records of these races. A **Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* was at Nata Ford on 22 May; there have only been about seven records since 1992. On 29 Mar a **Trumpeter Finch** *Rhodopechys githagineus* was at Akrotiri Gravel Pits and another was at Cape Greco on 3 May. A **Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella* was at a viewing point between Platres and Troodos on 19 May. The first and second **Little Buntings** *Emberiza pusilla* for Cyprus involved one at Nata Ford on 2 Jan and one on Pissouri cliffs on 12 Apr.

EGYPT

A **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* was at Hurghada on 25 Feb. Two **Pink-backed Pelicans** *Pelecanus rufescens* were at Abu Simbel on 11 Apr and 16 on 1 May. Two **Striated Herons** *Butorides striata* were in the Abassa area on 19 Mar. An adult **Goliath Heron** *Ardea goliath* was in mangroves at Wadi Lahami on 22 Mar and one was near Hamata on 21 May with one at Shalatein the following day. Eleven **Yellow-billed Storks** *Mycteria ibis* were at Abu Simbel on 10 Apr with 25 there on 30 Apr At least two **Lappet-faced Vultures** *Aegypius tracheliotos* were at Bir Shalatein and one in the desert 5km north of Berenice on 22 Mar; the absence of carcasses may have been the reason for poor numbers. At least 15 were seen at Bir Shalatein on 8 Apr and 28 on 22 May. *A* **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* was seen at Aswan on 22 Jan and over Ain Sukhna on 6 Apr. On 10 Oct 2005 a **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* was in a flock of **Common Cranes** *Grus grus* over Hurghada. Five **Greater Painted Snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* (three males, two females) were in the Abassa area on 19 Mar. On 22 Jan there were three **Kittlitz's Plover** *Charadrius pecuarius* at Aswan and at least 15 were at Wadi El Natrum on 20 Mar. At least 62 **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* were between Esna and Kom Ombo on 1 Dec 2005. Up to four **Terek Sandpipers** *Xenus cinerea* were in the lagoon at El Gouna in early May, 1–4 having been present since 17 Apr. There were three **Sooty Gull** *Larus hemprichii* at Wadi Lahami on 22 Mar and two at Hurghada Port the following day. Seventeen **Swift Tern** *Sterna bergii* were recorded flying north past Hurghada and 31 were at the mangroves 18km south of Safaga on 23 Mar. A pair of **African Collared Doves** *Streptopelia roseogrisea* were displaying 23km north of Marsa Alam on 21 Mar, four were at Shams Alam Resort on 7 Apr, and one at El Gouna on 10 Apr and four near Hotel Calimera, north of Marsa Alam on 20 May. A **Senegal Coucal** *Centropus senegalensis* was at Abbassa on 14 Apr and two there on 22 Apr. In late Apr/early May a **Hume's Owl** *Strix butleri* was at a site near Wadi Gemal. At least 15 **White-breasted Kingfishers** *Halcyon smyrensis* were in the Abbassa area NE of Cairo on 6 Apr. A **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi* was at El Gouna golf course on 23 Mar with two there on 3–12 Apr. Two **Grey Wagtails** *Motacilla cinerea* were seen 50km south of Marsa Alam on 24 May and at least three **African Pied Wagtails** *Motacilla aguimp* were at Abu Simbel on 10–11 Apr and one still present on 30 Apr. On 18 Oct 2005 a **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* was at Hurghada. A first-summer- male **Nile Valley Sunbird** *Hedydipna metallica* at El Gouna on 14 Apr was a good record for the area. A **House Crow** *Corvus splendens* was seen at Hurghada on 9 Oct 2005.

IRAN

Two **Siberian Crane** *Grus leucogeranus* were at Fereidunkenar on 31 Jan 2003; one adult was believed to be wild and one juvenile thought to have been released by the Oka Research Centre in Russia in a programme organised by the Iranian Department of the Environment to replenish the Iranian flock. Two other adults were also reported from this area at this time. Two **Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* at Khojir on 22 Dec 2001 was a good record of this scarce winter visitor.

ISRAEL

An adult **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* was off Eilat's North Beach on 25 Mar with another tropicbird sp there on 13 Mar and two-three adults were seen till at least 8 May. A **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster* was seen off Eilat's North Beach from 20 Mar to 15 May. The long staying **European Shag** *Leucocarbo aristotelis*, the first record for Israel, remained off Ma'agan Michael during Feb and Mar (present since Aug 2005). A **Lesser Flamingo** *Phoeniconaias minor* at Eilat's Km20 saltpans from 19 Mar to at least 1 Jul was the first record for Israel (**See Plate**). Two **Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* overwintered at Gesher, Jordan Valley. At least seven **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* were seen migrating over Eilat Mountains and Arava during the first half of May. A count of roosting **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* in late Jan revealed around 25 000 in six roosts across Israel with the largest roost of 11 266 at Karei Naaman. On 8 Jun a **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* was at Mt Hermon. A **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* was seen migrating over Eilat Mountains on 29 Mar and then at Km33 the following day and probably the same bird was at Hula re-flooded Lake in 2–6 Apr. A **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* was at Km77, Central Arava on 19 Apr and three **Greater Painted Snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* were at Menashe

Plate 1. Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*, at Km 20 salt-pans, Eilat, Israel, 20 Mar 06. *© Chris Batty*

Reservoir, Coastal Plains on 2 Jun. A **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* was at Acre on 14–19 Jan; the eight for Israel. An adult **Franklin's Gull** *L. pipixcan* was seen at Eilat's North Beach on 1 Jul and will be the second record for Israel, if accepted, following one at the same site in Jun 2003. A **Black-legged Kitttiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* remained in Eilat to at least 28 Jan and a **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* was at Lake Kinneret, Galilee on 30 Apr. A **Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis* was at Ma'agan Michael on 18 Jun and is the fifth record for Israel. An **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* was at Ne'ot Hakikar on 24 Apr. A male **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix nigriceps* was near Eilat's cow sheds at Km 19 on 15–17 Apr and three flew over Km77, Central Arava on 3 May. At Hameyshar in South Negev there was a **Thick-billed Lark** *Ramphocoris clotbey* on 11 Mar. A **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* was at Ovda Airport, Eilat Mountains 13 Mar and another was at Ne'ot Smadar, South Negev on 8 May. A **Cyprus Pied Wheatear** *Oeananthe cypriaca* was at the Golan Heights on 12–15 Mar. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* overwintered at Yotvata and a **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** *P. humei* remained at Lotan until at least 10 Mar, while the bird at Mitzpe Ramon was present until at least 20 Mar. A large scale breeding influx of **Pale Rock Sparrow** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* into the Negev Desert occurred from 2 May followed exceptional late spring showers. There were estimated to be 1000s of pairs in the whole region, with about 1000 pairs between Sde Boker and Be'er Sheva in central/north Negev. More pairs were present in the east Negev and Judean Desert. This is the second ever breeding event away from Mount Hermon; the first, which was much smaller was in summer 2001.

JORDAN

Two **Red-billed Tropicbirds** *Phaethon aetherus* were at Aqaba on 3 May. Five **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra* flew north near Ayma, At-Tafila on 26 Mar and six were over Dana on 29 Apr. Over 3000 **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* passed over Aqaba on 3 May, with 650 at Dana on 29 Apr. A male **Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus* was at Fidan on 24 Mar and an adult **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* at Wadi al Mujib on 23 Mar and another adult was near Ayma, At-Tafila on 26 Mar. Two **Black-winged Pratincoles** *Glareola nordmanni* were at Azraq Reserve on 22 Apr. An immature **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* was at Aqaba on 21 Mar and an adult

Plate 2. Female Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*, as-Safi, Jordan, 26 Mar 06. *© Chris Batty*

Franklin's Gull *L. pipixcan* commuted between Eilat's North Beach (Israel) and Aqaba on 1 Jul and will be the first record for Jordan if accepted. A female **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* was at As-Safi on 26 Mar (See **Plate**). An adult **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* was at Fidan on 24 Mar and three **Hume's Tawny Owls** *Strix butleri* were at Little Petra on 25 Mar. An **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* was heard singing at Al-Azraq on 23 Mar and a **White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis* was at Shaumari on 23 Apr. A male **Cyprus Wheatear** *Oeananthe cypriaca* was at As-Safawi on 23 Mar and a female **Hooded Wheatear** *O. monacha* was near Ayma, At-Tafila on 26 Mar and another female was at Wadi Rum on 30 Apr. At Aqaba there was an **Olive-tree Warbler** *Hippolais olivetorum* on 2 May and two **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* were in Wadi Rum on 19 Mar and one there on 25 Mar. A **Pale Rockfinch** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* was at Wadi al Mujib on 23 Mar and a **Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea* was in Wadi Rum on 25 Mar and there was one at Disi on the same day.

KAZAKHSTAN

Extreme cold weather reached Kazakhstan during Feb with lows approaching –40oC at Atyrau (Ural River north of Caspian Sea). Records from here during early Feb include **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* from 3 Feb and **Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris* on 5 Feb. There was a strong movement of **Rooks** *Corvus frugilegus*, **Carrion Crows** *C. corone* and **Jackdaws** *C. monedula* at the end of Feb and the beginning of Mar, with evening roosts in Ucharal between 5000 and 10000 birds. In early spring an **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* was at Lake Alakol on 16 Mar. A **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* was over Ucharal on 14 Mar.

KUWAIT

There was a maximum of eight **Socotra Cormorant** *Leucocarbo nigrogularis* on a platform off Pipeline Beach on 16 Apr. A flock of nine **Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* migrating north along the Wadi Al-Batin sand bern, 100 kilometres inland across dry desert, was an unusual sight at midday on 14 Apr. A juvenile present at Jahra East on 5 Jun was confirmed breeding there. Eight adult **Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* roosting at Abraq Al-Khabari oasis farm, were shot by hunters on 14 Apr. **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* and **Western Reef Egret** *Egretta gularis* were nesting in mixed colonies on a 1m-high sand ridge within five metres of the high tide mark on Bubiyan Island. Nest with eggs were present on 13 Apr. A **Eurasian Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* was near Khabari Al Awazah in N. Kuwait on 28 Mar and others were seen in the Sabah Al Ahmed Natural Reserve (SAANR) on 6 Apr and Subiya Power station on 10 Apr. There was a good spring passage of **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* with a new high daily total of six over Jal Az-Zor escarpment above Qaisat on 15 Apr. At least 100 **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* passed over Subriya on 14 Apr and a second-year **Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* was in the SAANR on 25 May. A good number of **Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata* were recorded in the spring with a new daily high count of six over Qaisat on the 9 Apr and on 15 Apr three were over Jahra east outfall and two over the Jal Az-zour escarpment. A single **Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata* was in the SAANR on 13 Apr and an adult **Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor* was over Kiran Resort on 11 Apr

and a second year bird was over the Jal Az-Zour escarpment on 15 Apr. An approachable **Saker** *Falco cherrug* (no jesses) was at Sulaibikhat Bay on 6 Mar and a **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* was seen at Pipeline beach on 12 Apr. **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* were resident at South Doha with six birds calling from late Feb but breeding has still not been confirmed. Several pre-breeding flocks of **Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola* totaling 2600 birds were seen on a visit to Bubiyan on 13 Apr; the highest winter count was 332 in Salaibikhat Bay on 5 Jan. A **European Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicnemus* was captured by hunters for use with falcons near Khabari Al Awazah on 28 Mar. At least 74 **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* were positively identified amongst several hundred **Collared Pratincoles** *G. pratincola* on 27 Apr after flooding in the SAANR. Twelve **Caspian Plovers** *Charadrius asiaticus* in the SAANR on 16 Mar was the second highest daily count. Several **Red-wattled Lapwings** *Vanellus indicus* were at Abdally Farms and breeding was confirmed there with the discovery of adult birds and 3 nests with 0, 2 and 3 eggs on 10 Apr. Unfortunately a visit on 27 Apr found only a dead adult bird near the nest which had contained 3 eggs; the bird had probably been shot. **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* and **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus* were present on 27 Apr in the SAANR after the flood. A flock of 83 **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* at Jahra East Outfall on 21 Apr was exceptional; a few remained until the 18 May. A first-winter **Little Gull** *Larus minutus* at Jahra East Outfall on 23 Feb only was the fourth record for Kuwait. There were several large colonies of **Slender-billed Gull** *Larus genei* on Bubiyan Island with an estimated 2000 pairs breeding and an estimated 500 breeding pairs of **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* were also there in mid-Apr. A **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*, the second for Kuwait, was seen at South Doha pits on 4 Jun. A count of 2300 **White-winged Tern** *Ch. leucopterus* on the temporary lakes in the SAANR on 27 Apr was an amazing sight in this desert environment. Also a bird shot a few days previously was found at Abraq Al Khabari an oasis farm 100km inland near the Iraq border on 28 May. On 2 Mar a **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* was seen in the SAANR. **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix nigriceps*, **Greater Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes*, **Bar-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes cinctura*, **Desert Lark** *A. deserti* and **Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunni* were all confirmed breeding at SAANR, Salmi/ Wadi Al-Bhatin bern and Kabd during Mar and Apr. **Thick-billed Lark** *Rhamphocoris clotbey* were present at Salmi/Wadi Al-Batin in Feb but breeding was not confirmed. Three pairs of **Temminck's Lark** *Eremophila bilopha* feeding newly fledged young were in the Salmi/Wadi Al-Batin area on 16 Mar. There was a good spring passage of **Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* with one or two at several sites in Mar and Apr and a flock of 24 near Green Island on 12 Apr. The first live record of **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* for Kuwait was at Tulha in the SAANR on 26 Apr and remained until the 6 May. A count of 60 **White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis* at Kabd on 12 Apr was a new daily high. **Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii* wintered in the SAANR and Doha Spur until the 20 Feb and three separate **Red-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe chrysopygia* wintered in the SAANR and were last seen on 30 Mar. A **Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* was at Qaisat on 9 Apr. Several **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis* were seen on passage at Sabah Al Salem reed bed with two singing on 28 Apr and a bird collecting hairs from a dead goat for nesting material on 27 Apr. An **Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina* was seen in trees behind villas north of Pipe-line Beach on 12 Apr. **Hume's Whitethroat** *Sylvia althaea* were recorded at Pipeline Beach on 11 and 16 Apr and at Al Abraq on 14 Apr. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* was north of Pipe-line Beach on 12 Apr and a **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus* was at Abraq Al-Khabari on 14 Apr was was still present in the same area on 14 May. **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* were recorded at several sites on 15 Mar with a new daily high of 16 noted. A **Great Tit** *Parus major*, the first record for Kuwait, was seen and heard singing on Green Island on 12 Apr; it is a resident breeder some 200 km NE in Iran. **Bank Myna** *Acridotheres ginginianus* were confirmed breeding at Jahra farms on 14 Apr when a pair was seen feeding three newly fledged young. A flock of 200 **Pale Rockfinch** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* in the SAANR on 17 Mar was a new daily high. There was a good spring passage of **Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea* with a total of six seen in late Mar and early Apr; three were at Tulha in the SAANR on 24 Mar, one there on 7 Apr, one at Kiran Resort on 8 Apr and one at Pipeline beach on 11 Apr.

LEBANON

Seven **Cory's Shearwaters** *Calonectris diomedea* flew past Beirut on 8 May followed by a single on 14 May. A first-year **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* flew north there on 23 Apr. On 7 Apr a flock of about 450 **White Pelicans** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* headed north above the sea near Palm Islands Nature Reserve. Seven **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis* were present at Tyre Coast Nature Reserve on 11 Jan. A flock of 17 **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* was seen at Anjar on 23 Apr. This is the largest flock recorded of this rare passage migrant. The decomposed corpse of a **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* was found at Bishmizzine man-made marsh on 26 Feb. This is the first record since 1958. At Aammiq marsh single **Eurasian Bitterns** *Botaurus stellaris* were seen on 25 Feb and 25 May. Other Aammiq records included a **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* seen regularly throughout Feb; four **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* on 22/23 Mar, with another four on 5 May; a pair of **Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* until at least 28 May; successful breeding by **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* (following first Lebanon breeding in 2005); several **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* seen between 1 Feb and 13 Mar (with a maximum of five on 14 Feb); and a **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* from 22–24 Mar. **Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* bred successfully at Aammiq with two juveniles on the wing on 30 May, being the first successful breeding in Lebanon for at least ten years. Other spring raptor sightings included single **Eastern Imperial Eagles** *Aquila heliaca* over Khirbet Kanafar on 25 Mar and Tannourine on 30 Mar, **Eleonora's Falcons** *Falco eleonorae* at Aammiq on 20 and 29 Apr and nearby Tel el Akhdar on 17 May, and a male **Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus* at Ras Chekka headland on 3 Mar. **Spur-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus spinosus* was confirmed as breeding when in Jun a pair was discovered nesting at Tyre Coast Nature Reserve. Eleven adult **Cream-coloured Coursers** *Cursorius cursor* were at Ras Baalbek on 27 May, a **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* at Cheikh Zennad salt pans on 17 Apr with 31 **Marsh Sandpipers** *Tringa stagnatilis* also present.

Twenty three **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* were recorded in the Aammiq area between 1 Mar and 26 May and a **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* was at Tel el Akhdar on 16 Apr. An **Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* was at Tripoli on 3 Mar; **Great Black-headed Gulls** *Larus ichthyaetus* were at Beirut on 9 Jan, 12 Feb and 6 Mar, with an adult seen at Tripoli and later past Ras Chekka on 3 Mar. Four **Slender-billed Gulls** *Larus genei* flew north past Tripoli on 3 Mar. A report of a **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* near Aanjar in the east Bekaa valley on 16 May will be the first record for Lebanon if accepted. Three calling **Eurasian Eagle Owls** *Bubo bubo* were recorded in a 5 km stretch of the eastern slope of the Mount Lebanon range in Jan and Feb, and three young were observed in a cave at one site in May. Displaying and calling **Long-eared Owls** *Asio otus* were seen near Aammiq in Apr and May and breeding was confirmed for the first time in Lebanon when two fledged juveniles were seen from 30 May. Two **White-breasted Kingfishers** *Halcyon smyrnensis* were at Aammiq from Jan until 15 Apr. At Ras Baalbek at least seven calling **Bar-tailed Larks** *Ammomanes cincturus* were around the area where in 2005 the species was proved to breed for the first time. The second record of **Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti* was of a single there on 27 Mar. Amazingly, at the same site a pair was discovered collecting nesting material on 14 Apr and three were seen on 27 May. In 2003 **White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis* was found breeding for the first time at Jabal Qammouha. This year it was also seen breeding at Jabal Barouk (about 110 kms south to Kammouha). The second breeding record. On 3 Jun a male **"Eastern" Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca* of white-throated form was seen mating with a female of black-throated form at Barouk (Shouf Cedar Reserve). A **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* was at Yammouneh from 28–31 Mar, and a **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* was there on the 28 Mar. At Ras Baalbek, **Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta* was proved to have bred for the first time when a pair with three young were seen on 27 May. **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* was again found breeding (where). **Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* continues to increase in numbers and in May, 14 were at the American University Campus at least 18 were in the newly reconstructed Beirut Central District. Two **Rose-coloured Starlings** *Sturnus roseus* were at Kfar Zabad near Aanjar on 16 May, with seven at Tel el Akhdar the following day. A singing male **Desert Finch** *Rhodospiza obsoletus* was at Aana, in the west Bekaa on 24 Jun. The species is a scarce/rare winter visitor to Lebanon despite breeding nearby in Syria. A **Yellow-throated Sparrow** *Gymnoris xanthocollis* was at Chtoura town of the Beqaa Valley, near the main road between Beirut and Damascus on 29 Apr, and is the second record.

OMAN

A **Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* at Ras Al Khabbah on 30 May is the 6th record. Six **Swinhoe's Storm-petrels** *Oceanodroma monorhis* about 15 km off Muscat on 16 Jun represent only the third sighting in northern Oman. Three South Polar Skuas *Catharacta maccormicki* were also seen on the same trip (4th record). The **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* (2nd record) that was first found at Al Ansab Lagoons on 22 Nov 2005 remained until at least 14 Jun despite being badly oiled in early Feb. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* has often been recorded in Oman, but in the last few years there have been a few records of **Indian Cattle Egret** *B. (ibis) coromandus* – one was at East Khor on 1 Jun. A **Goliath Heron** *Ardea goliath* was at Marirah Island on 8 Apr and is the 6th record. The **Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* that was first seen at East Khawr in Sept 2005 was regularly seen up to 23 Feb; occurrences of this species in the north of Oman may come from the feral breeding population in the UAE, but this bird is probably a genuine migrant from Africa or Yemen. A notable concentration of **Lesser Kestrels** *Falco naumanni* was 37 at Sohar Sun Farms on 15 Apr. Single **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* were over Jarziz Farm on 23 Jan and Sohar on 28 Feb. A **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* at Barr al Hikman on 20 Feb is the 7th record and a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* at Ayn Sahnawt on 24 Jan is the 9th record. A single **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* was at Ayn Razat on 24 Jan. There are now only one or two sightings of **Common Crane** *Grus grus* each year so the four which stayed at Sohar Sun Farms from 15 Feb to 9 Mar are of note, as was the one at Khor Rouri on 2 Feb. 400 **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* at Khor Baleed on 6 Apr is a record count for Oman. Single **Sociable Plovers** *Vanellus gregarius* were at Al Beed Farm on 26 Jan and Sun Farms, Sohar on 2 Feb while three were there on 18 Jan and four on 9 and 15 Feb. A **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* was at Sohar on 15 Apr, being only the 2nd spring record. Inland records of **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* are rare so one at Qatbit on 11 Apr is interesting. A **Common Gull** *Larus canus* was at Barka on 3 Mar. A **Little Gull** *Larus minutus* in first-winter plumage at Shinas on 31 Jan (there were also some records of this species further north in the UAE during the same period) was the first record for Oman. A count of 400 **White-winged Terns** *Chlidonias leucopterus* at Garzeiz farm on 10 Apr is a record number. There was a single **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* at Mabr Farm on 7 May. A **Jacobin Cuckoo** *Clamator jacobinus* was at Harweel on 15 May (2004 was the last record). **Asian Koel** *Eudynamys scolopacea* are regular on Masirah, less common on the mainland – but two were at Nimr 28 Feb/1 Mar. They are particularly unusual in the north so one at Muscat on 24 Feb was noteworthy. A **Desert Eagle Owl** *Bubo ascalaphus* was at Al Beed Farm on 21 Jan. **Grey-headed Kingfishers** *Halcyon leucocephala* are common summer breeding visitors to southern Oman but one at Jarziz Farm, Salalah on 7 Feb was exceptionally early. **Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens* is comparatively infrequently recorded so one at Harweel on 15 May is of note. There were four **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* at Sohar Sun Farms on 18 Jan. Two **Brown-throated Sand Martins** *Riparia paludicola* were at Khawr Taqah on 22 Jan and a single was at Sohar Sun Farms on 3 Feb – the 13th and 14th records. Four **Crag Martins** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* were at Sohar on the 18 Jan while a **Streak-throated Swallow** *Petrochelidon fluvicola* was reported from this site on 17 Mar and is the 3rd record. At least one **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii* was also there on 3 Feb (only one officially accepted record prior to this). There appears to be a regular wintering population of **Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* in the south central desert (Muntasar southwards to the Thumrait area). Three were at both Muntasar and Qatbit on 16 Jan, reducing to two at Qatbit from 21 Jan–27 Feb, and then increasing to four from 3–16 Mar. **Common Nightingales** *Luscinia megarhynchos* were in very short supply this spring –

there was only one sighting. Single **Mourning Wheatears** *Oenanthe lugens (persica)* were at A'Rawdah and Sayh (Mussandam) on 20 Feb – there appears to be a regular but very small wintering population of this species in Mussandam. **Pied Wheatears** *Oenanthe pleschanka* are common passage migrants but singles of the rare *vittata* colour form were at Thumrayt Waste Disposal site on 28 Feb and Sun Farms, Sohar on 9 Mar. Single **Black-eared Wheatears** *Oenanthe hispanica* were at Qatbit on 27 Feb, Al Beed Farm on 9 Mar, Khasab on 8 Apr and Sayh on 10 Apr. **Red-tailed Wheatears** *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* of the eastern *chrysopygia* race are common passage migrants and winter visitors, while the nominate western race *xanthoprymna* is a very rare visitor from Turkey and north-west Iran. A male of this race was in a wadi 30 km east of Ghaba on 17 Feb and is only the 3rd record. A **White-crowned Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga* at Qurayyat from 18 Jan–9 Feb was the first sighting since 1985 and is the 7th record. A **Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* was at Sayh on 20 Feb and is the 7th record. Single **Savi's Warblers** *Locustella luscinioides* were at Qatbit on 27 Feb and 7 Mar, and Qurm Park on 19/20 Mar. A **Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* at Qatbit on 26 Jan was an unusual winter record. A **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* was at Qatbit on 7 May (8th record) while Oman's first record of **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis* was at Khasab on 26 Apr. **Nile Valley Sunbird** *Hedydipna metallica* is an uncommon winter visitor normally from Sep to Mar so a pair at Thumrait on 31 May is interesting. **White-breasted White-eyes** *Zosterops abyssinicus* are unusual in the central desert and two at Muntasar on 12 Mar were of note. While the **House Crow** *Corvus splendens* is widespread in the north, a single in the far south at Ras Mirbat on 25 Jan is unusual. A **Brahminy Starling** *Sturnus pagodarum* was at Jarziz Farm, Salalah on 3 & 6 Mar. 132 **Ortolan Buntings** *Emberiza hortulana* at Sayh Plateau on 10 Apr is a record number for Oman. **Cinereous Buntings** *Emberiza cineracea* were at Qatbit on 7 Mar (unusual outside Mussandam) and Sayh on 8 Apr. A **Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* was at Sayh on 20 Feb and is the 7th record.

QATAR

Three new species were reported for the country. A pair of **Pheasant-tailed Jacanas** *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* over-summered at the prison pools just south of Doha. One bird had been present since at least Feb. Additionally, a pair of **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* also over-summered at the same location. A **Desert Finch** *Rhodospiza obsoletus* was seen by two observers on Ras Abrouq peninsula in western Qatar on a date in late-Apr or early-May.

SAUDI ARABIA

Not far from Dhahran there were two adults and juvenile **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga* at Sabkhat on 24 Feb and a sub-adult there on 20 Apr. A juvenile **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* was west of Na'irayah on 23 Feb. Four adult and two juvenile **Eastern Imperial Eagles** *Aquila heliaca* were west of there on 10 Feb, and an adult and a juvenile were seen on 23 Feb. **Short-toed Eagles** *Circaetus gallicus* are rare in the east so an individual on 15 May was notable. Also scarce was a **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* on 16 Jun. Two **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* were seen at Sabkhat al-Fasl, Jubail on 20 Apr and 18 May. It is possible that they have been overlooked at this site for several years. A visit on 8 Jun revealed six adults although no young birds were seen. A **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* was at Sabkhat on 18 May and is a scarce visitor. Twenty **Northern Lapwings** *Vanellus vanellus* were at Qarya Al Ula on 10 Feb. A **Eurasian Eagle Owl** *Bubo bubo* was at the side of Abqaiq road close to Dhahran on 13 Apr. A **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* was at Dhahran on 21 Apr with two present on 30 Apr and a single on 3 May. Other Dhahran records include a pair of **White-throated Robins** *Irania gutturalis* on 21 Apr, and a male on 6 May, a **Red-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* on 17 Feb, two **Moustached Warblers** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* at Sabkhat on 18 May, two singing male **Clamorous Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus stentoreus* at Dhahran on 20 and 24 Feb, plus several males singing at Sabkhat on 24 Feb and about ten singing males at Uyun Lake on 13 Apr. There were just three records of **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis* on 27 Apr, 3 May and 5 May. A large breeding colony of **Spanish Sparrows** *Passer hispaniolensis* was found at Haradh on 28 Apr with at least 100 pairs present. Fifteen **Pale Rockfinches** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* were in the Dhahran Hills on 10 Apr plus a single on 14 Apr and at least 15 at Shedgum escarpment on 13 Apr. A visit to the Sarawat Mountains over 25–26 May resulted in a number of useful sightings. At Wadi Thee Gazal there was a **Yemen Thrush** *Turdus menachensis* and an **Arabian Warbler** *Sylvia leucomelaena* plus a group of five **Arabian Serins** *Serinus rothschildi*. At Bani Yazid sightings included a single **Eurasian Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*, a pair of **Barbary Falcons** *Falco pelegrinoides*, **Little Rock Thrush** *Monticola rufocinereus*, **Brown Woodland Warbler** *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*, eleven **Gambaga Flycatchers** *Muscicapa gambagae*, two **Arabian Warblers** and a **Yemen Linnet** *Carduelis yemenensis*. At Dhi Ain there were four **Bruce's Green Pigeons** *Treron waalia* and a **Grey-headed Kingfisher** *Halcyon leucocephala*. Finally, at Al Hokair there were four **Arabian Warblers** and up to five **Yemen Linnets**. In Jeddah about 135 **Greater Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus roseus* were recorded in the south corniche on 23 Jan. About 640 **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropides virgo* were recorded in the south corniche and Asafan area (about 50 km east of Jeddah) on 23–24 Mar.

SYRIA

Several visits to Sabkhat al-Jabbul confirmed breeding by **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* and **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* with hundreds of wintering **White-headed Duck**. Most importantly, a breeding site for **Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus* was at last located, the first for Syria. A paper on this magnificent site is in this issue of *Sandgrouse*. **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* has not been reported breeding in the past, but a female with young was at Mheimideh on 26 Apr. An impressive 5620 **Northern Shovelers** *Anas clypeata* were at Al Jabbul Lake on 26 Apr. This is an interesting number for a such a late date. An **Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* was at Jabbul on 26 Apr. Eight **Eurasian Griffon Vultures** *Gyps fulvus* were seen in the Yarmuk valley on 9 May but the only accessible Syrian colony at Diwara near Palmyra appeared to have declined further to only 12 pairs. Krak des Chevaliers appears to be a useful raptor watch spot with several good counts of **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis*, **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *A.*

pomarina, and **Long-legged Buzzards** *Buteo rufinus* in late Mar–Apr. A potential bottleneck for raptor passage was found on the coast south-west of Kassab with several thousand raptors of 15 species on 29 Apr. An **Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonorae* at al-Masrif cliffs on 7 Apr was the first for the Euphrates valley. At least three colonies of **Lesser Kestrel** *F. naumanni* were discovered in the interior with at least 30 pairs at Musrab cliffs in the Euphrates valley. Only four **Northern Bald Ibis** *Geronticus eremita* returned to the Palmyra area; two pairs bred and three birds were fitted with satellite transmitters at the end of the breeding season. A new site for **See-see Partridge** *Ammoperdix griseogularis* was found at Musrab cliffs on 17 May. A **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* at Mheimideh on 24 Apr may be only the second record. An immature **Common Gull** *Larus canus* was at Madan Jadid on 1 Jan with four at Jabbul on 23 Mar. The species was recorded at several sites by the OSME expedition in Jan/Feb 2004, but prior to that there were only three published records. A colony of **Common Terns** *Sterna hirundo* in May on the lower Khabur Reservoir provides the first proven breeding record for Syria. A territorial **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos medius* was at Wadi Jahanim on 4 May, the third Syrian site and a considerable range extension. **White-breasted Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis* was common in the Yarmuk valley but a pair seen on several days at Tel al Hamdaniyah north of the Euphrates was well out of the known range. A **Striated Scops Owl** *Otus brucei* photographed at Tel al Hamdaniyah on 13 Apr may be the first Syrian record for 20 years. **Bimaculated Larks** *Melanocorypha bimaculata* breeding commonly at Jebel al-Bilas and on the Jebel Druze were well out of the known range. Several pairs of **Long-billed Pipit** *Anthus similis* were seen in the Yarmuk valley with the first confirmed breeding for Syria at Heet on 9 May. There was a good passage of **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola*; at Mheimedeh, there was a peak of 20 on 8 Apr and the first breeding record for Syria, a nesting pair on two dates in May. A pair of **Grey Wagtails** *M. cinerea* with young at Saladin's Castle on 5 May was the second Syrian breeding record and a considerable southerly range extension. A **Mourning Wheatear** *Oenanthe lugens* of the basalt form at the Ibis site on 11 Apr was 100 km out of the usual range but four birds in basalt desert east of Jebel Druze on 8 May were in their typical habitat. Two **European Robins** *Erithacus rubecula* were holding territory in the Fourulloq Forest in May and, if breeding was confirmed, would be the first Syrian breeding record and a massive range extension. **Blackstarts** *Cercomela melanura* were common at several sites in the Yarmuk valley; three pairs with young at Tell Shahib on 7 May were the first confirmed breeding for Syria. **Spectacled Warblers** *Sylvia conspicillata* were common on Jebel al-Bilas and individuals were holding territory at Shnan in the Euphrates valley and Tel al Hamdaniyah to its north; **Olive-tree Warblers** *Hippolais olivetorum* were territorial at Saladin's Castle and Wadi Jahanam. These were all significant range extensions. A **Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata* was singing in a Damascus garden on several dates in May. The first breeding record for Syria of **Clamorous Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus stentoreus* was of a pair with a nest at Lake Mzerib on 7 May; one at Deir Ez Zor on 24 Apr was the second for the Euphrates valley. There are very few Syrian records of this species. A **Basra Reed Warbler** *A. griseldis* was photographed at Halabbiyyah on 24 Apr and will be the second record. Two **Firecrests** *Regulus ignicapilla* at Deir ez Zor on 3 Jan were probably the second Syrian record. At Khunayfis on 19 Mar there was a male **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* and a male **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *F. semitorquata*. **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *F. parva* was seen at Jabbul on 31 Mar and at Talila on 5 May. **White-cheeked Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucogenys* was seen regularly by the Euphrates at Deir ez Zor. There were many records of **Iraq Babblers** *Turdoides altirostris* including at Jabbul and Mheimideh, up to eight at Deir ez-Zor on 24 Apr and at least five at Ba'ath Lake on 25 Apr. Several **Coal Tits** *Periparus ater* were singing at Slenfeh on 28 Apr. There is only one previous published record from the breeding season – also from this area. 15 **Syrian Serins** *Serinus syriacus* were at Abou Zad on 30 Apr and they were abundant at Bloudan on several dates. A **European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris* was noted holding territory at Ar Raqqa on 25 Apr which is east of the known breeding range. A **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus roseus* at Maksam near Palmyra on 15 May may be the first for Syria. A **Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* at Arak, near Palmyra on 21 Mar, appears to be the third record for the Central Syrian Desert. A pair of **Cinereous Buntings** *Emberiza cineracea* on the Jebel Druze on 25 Mar was probably the first Syrian record for 30 years. **Pale Rockfinches** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* were holding territory at six sites throughout the interior from the Yarmuk valley on the Jordanian border to Jebel Abdul Aziz north of the Euphrates; they were often abundant. They were previously known to breed only on Mt Hermon but their numbers are known to fluctuate widely. It appears to be a good year for them; there have been large numbers in the Israeli Ne'gev this year. A pair of **Yellow-throated Sparrows** *Gymnoris xanthocollis* was at Deir ez-Zor on 18 May. The main raptor passage was in Apr, except for **European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivoris*, but passerine migration continued into the second half of May in the oases round Palmyra with several observations of species such as Olive-tree Warbler, **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* and **Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus*.

TADZHIKISTAN

Himalayan Griffon Vultures *Gyps himalayensis* have been seen at several locations in the west of the country, including the Romit Vvalley near Dushanbe. Birds have not been reported from the west before. Twelve **Hill Pigeons** *Columba rupestris* were in the Romit Valley on 29 Jan and had been forced down by the vigorous snow falls. **Little Forktails** *Enicurus scouleri* had been found along several mountain rivers in the vicinity of the capital. A **Hume's Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* near Shahrinaw in the west on 23 Jan is indicative of the small number of wintering birds of this species. Early in the year **Blyth's Rosefinches** *Carpodacus grandis* were found wintering in juniper forest in the Hissar range.

TURKEY

A great discovery from Birecik was of breeding **Iraq Babblers** *Turdoides caudatus* which included 4 adults and 2 young at gravel pits on 29 May. This is a new species for Turkey, following the expansion of its range through Syria. Two other new species were a **Black-throated Thrush** *Turdus atrogularis* at Altınpark, Ankara on 15 Feb (in this issue) and a **Lesser Flamingo** *Phoeniconaias minor* at Ereğli Marshes, Konya from 10–16 Apr. A **Common Redpoll** *Carduelis flammea* was at Altınpark on 15 Feb

was the 4th record, as was a **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalus* at Karapınar Afyon on 1 Dec 2005. A **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* at Göksu Delta on 24–25 May was the 11th record and a **Bohemian Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus* at Samsun on 23 Nov 2005 and seven there from 2–7 Apr are the 11th and 12th records. A **Slavonian Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* was at Buyukcekmece Harbour on 28 Jan. Three **Northern Gannets** *Morus bassanus* were at Cukurova Delta between 11–15 Jan, and one was there on 6 Feb and another was at Milleyha Shores of Hatay on 14 Jan. Five **Bewick's Swan** *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* were at Nallıhan on 21 Jan, 22 were at Gulf of İzmit on 25 Jan, nine were at Uzungöl Trabzon on 1 Feb and three were at Meriç Delta on 4 Feb. Two **Bean Geese** *Anser fabalis* were at Büyükçekmece Lake, with 320 **Red-breasted Geese** *Branta ruficollis* and 15,000 **White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* on 11 Feb. More than 50 **Red-breasted Geese** were at Büyükçekmece when the arctic cold came on 28 Jan and 38 were at Sakarya Delta on 5 Feb. There were many **Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* records, between 26–29 Jan two stayed at Büyükçekmece and on 29 Jan and 5 Feb two were at Sakarya Delta, another two observed at Catalca İstanbul 12 Feb and the same day six were at Küçük Çekmece Lake. At this time one was at Terkos Lake Istanbul and five were at Çanakkale Boğazı, and last record was from Kepez Shores with two on 16 Feb. Three **Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* were at Kızılırmak Delta on 17 Dec and a **Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* was at the mouth of the Fırtına River, Rize. There were many **Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* with 72 in Gediz Delta on 4 Feb, five in Buyuk Menderes Delta on 18 Feb and one on Bafa Lake on 19 Feb. Raptors included a **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* at Sariyer Hills on 9 Apr and many **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* in the late winter at Sinop, Cukurova Delta, Afyon, Istanbul and Bursa. Twenty three **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo* were at Kozanli Marshes on 1 Apr and four were at Mogan Lake on 8 Apr. A **Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax* appeared at the Kızılırmak Delta on 17 Dec 2005. At Birecik Gravel Pits there were up to 15 calling male **Black Francolins** *Francolinus francolinus* on 19 Jun. A **Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio* was at Karakaya Dam,Malatya on 27 Nov 2005, and single **Baillon's Crakes** *Porzana pusilla* were at Eymir Lake on 15 Mar and Kozanli Marshes on 1 Apr. A **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* was a Mogan Lake on 21 May and six **Cream-coloured Coursers** *Cursorius cursor* were at Yeni Akpınar Köyü, Birecik on 17 May. **Bar-tailed Godwits** *Limosa lapponica* totalled 11 at Gediz Delta on 4 Feb, seven at Kızılırmak Delta on 18 Feb and nine at Gediz Delta on 26 Feb. **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* have not been reported from Gediz Delta before so the first records were of singles on 26 Nov 2005 and 5 Feb. Also here were 149 **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* on 22 Jan. Interesting seabirds included six **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* at Savros Bay on 22 Apr and a single at Datca-Mugla on 25 Apr, while single **Arctic Skuas** *S. parasiticus* were at Rize Harbour 27 Mar, SarIyer Hills-Istanbul on 1 Apr and on the Bosphorus on 12 Jun. Three **Black-legged Kittiwakes** *Rissa tridactyla* were at Rize Harbour on 27 Mar. **Short-eared Owls** *Asio flammeus* were at Goksu Delta on 12 Jan, Sakarya Delta on 29 Jan and Buyuk Cekmece lake on 14 Feb. Two **Little Swifts** *Apus affinis* were at Uzuncaburç, Mersin on 30 Apr. There were 12 **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** *Merops superciliosus* at Hüyüklü, Urfa on 19 Jun. Two extraordinary winter records were of a **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* at Cukurova Delta on 15 Jan and a **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* on 24 Dec 2005. Three **Spectacled Warblers** *Sylvia conspicillata* were at Karacadağ, Diyarbakır on 21 Jun, two **Alpine Choughs** *Pyrrhocorac graculus* were at Nemrut Da_ı, Adıyaman on 20 Jun and 24 **White-winged Snowfinches** *Montifringilla nivalis* were at Narlidere Bursa on 5 Mar.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Three records of **Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* came from Al Ghurfa Breakwater, Fujairah, where there were no fewer than six on 22 Apr, and singles on 3 and 11 May (10–12th records). **Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra* was also noted here, with an adult and immature on 28 Feb, and a single from 3–11 May (4–5th records). A **Lesser Flamingo** *Phoeniconaias minor* was at Al Wathba lake from 22 Jun (about the 4th record, 1st for Abu Dhabi). The first breeding record of **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*, with 35–40 pairs, was confirmed in a private residence in Dubai on 4 Jun. A single **Greater White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons* was with three **Greylag Geese** *A. anser* at Abu Dhabi Golf and Equestrian Club from 6 Jan–24 Feb, while a **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *A. erythropus* remained (from Dec 2005) at Nad al Sheba Racecourse until 4 Mar (2nd record). Two **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchos* wintered on Abu Dhabi Island, to 9 Apr. Pairs of **Shikra** *Accipiter badius* continue to nest successfully, in an increasing number of localities around Dubai. A male **Merlin** *Falco columbarius* of the race *pallidus* was noted at the Al Wathba Camel Racetrack on 21 Mar. Three **White-breasted Waterhens** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* were recorded: an adult wintering at Sharjah Desert Park until 3 Mar; Qurrayah Pools, 13 Jan, and Fujairah National Dairy Farm, Dibba, an adult, from 18 Feb–14 Apr. A **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* was at Sharjah University City on 10 Mar. Up to three **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* were reported at Al Warsan lakes throughout. There was also a record of **African Swamphen** *P. madagascariensis*. Both species apparently bred this year. **Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica cristata* was seen from 20 Jan–5 Feb but the ongoing infilling of this wetland has seen most waterfowl vacate the area. A **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius* graced Dubai Pivot Fields until 12 Feb, with two more at Lahbab Fields on 3 Feb. The peak count of **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* came from Nouakchott Street Marsh with 104 birds on 2 Jan. A **Eurasian Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* was noted wintering at Nouakchott Street Marsh and adjacent Dubai Pivot Fields until 21 Feb, with a second individual at Al Wathba Lake on 3–4 Mar at least. A **Eurasian Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* showed well in Mushrif Palace Gardens on 13–14 Feb. Al Ghurfa Breakwater produced the first records of **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* since 1999 with a single bird on 3 May, followed by two on 25 May (6th and 7th records). A first-winter **Common Gull** *Larus canus* was at Khor Kalba from 20 Feb–2 Mar, while **Little Gull** *Larus minutus*, not recorded since 2000, showed up at the Kalba Corniche on 7 Jan; Sharjah Tip on 21 Jan and Khor Kalba, 18–23 Feb (8th–10th records). An adult **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* was at Al Ghurfa on 11 May. Dubai's Safa Park produced **Common Woodpigeon** *Columba palumbus* from 2–12 Mar (6th record; first since 1998). The highest count of **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* at Al Wathba Camel Racetrack was of up to four in early Jan, with birds

wintering here until early Mar. **Little Swifts** *Apus affinis* were seen at Abu Dhabi Golf and Equestrian Club on 17 Mar and Fujairah National Dairy Farm on 28 Apr. **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* were recorded at Fujairah National Dairy Farm and Dubai Pivot Fields until 12 Mar, up to 20 **Bimaculated Larks** *Melanocorypha bimaculuta* wintered at Al Wathba Camel Racetrack into early Mar. **Pale Martins** *Riparia diluta* wintered in force at Al Wathba Lake, being present from12 Jan–14 Apr with a peak count of 30 on 9 Feb. Up to two were also noted at Nouakchott Street Marsh on 19 Feb and Al Warsan Lakes on 10 Mar, with a single at the nearby Pivot Fields on 12 Mar. **Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola* appeared at Al Wathba Lake with singles from 5–27 Jan at least. Up to two **Wire-tailed Swallows** *Hirundo smithiii* were also here from 5 Jan into mid-Apr, with a minimum of three being involved. A **Streak-throated Swallow** (4th record) was at Al Wathba Lake intermittently from 12 Jan–4 Mar. No fewer than eight species of hirundine could be seen at this site on some days in the winter! The 3rd record of **'White-headed' Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava leucocephala*, an adult male, showed for four days at the Abu Dhabi Golf and Equestrian Club from 8–11 Apr. UAE is apparently the only country in the Western Palearctic with records of this race. Up to two **Buff-bellied Pipits** *Anthus rubescens* were at Dubai Pivot Fields from 9–12 Mar. Appearances of **Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* have been less predictable, but up to eight were present at Ghantut from 2 Jan–20 Mar, being difficult to locate at times. A female **Eversmann's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythronotus* wintered near the summit of Jebel Hafeet until 12 Feb; a male **Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii* was a welcome, less than annual find, at the Abu Dhabi Heath and Fitness Club from 22–24 Mar. A male **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* was on Jebel Hafeet from 3 Jan–27 Feb, while, rarer still, a **Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* was at the Ajman Kempinski Hotel from 1–4 Mar. A **Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* wintered at the Dubai Pivot Fields until 12 Feb at least. Just one **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* was noted in spring, at Khalidiyah from 26–27 Apr. A **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* was in Safa Park on 13 Apr. Four **Hume's Whitethroats** *Sylvia althaea* were reported: Ghantoot from 12–15 Feb; Wadi Tarabat (Jebel Hafeet) on 10 Mar; Maqta Bridge (Abu Dhabi) on 14 Mar and at the Al Wathba camel racetrack wood on 20 Mar. A solitary **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* was noted in spring, at Khalidiyah from 23–27 Mar. The **Taiga Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicilla* remained in Abu Dhabi city from late 2005 until 24 Mar (4th record). A **Bay-backed Shrike** *Lanius vittatus* was at the Fujairah National Dairy Farm on 21 Apr, while a **Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach* remained at Jebel Hafeet from 3 Jan to 26 Mar (4th record). A **Great Grey Shrike** *L. excubitor* of the race *homeyeri* was at the Abu Dhabi Golf and Equestrian Club, 27 Jan–27 Feb (2nd record of this form). A **Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus* found at Qurrayah Pools 17 Nov 2005 was present to 8 Jan at least (5th record; first since 1991). A new bird for the UAE was **Fan-tailed Raven** *Corvus rhipidurus*, seen inland at Qusaihwira on 20 Feb close to the border with Oman and Saudi Arabia, which it promptly crossed. A **Northern Raven** *Corvus corax* in Abu Dhabi in Nov 2005 has also now been formally accepted, and completes a remarkable duo of corvid firsts for the UAE, the latter also new for Arabia. **Cinereous Buntings** *Emberiza cineracea* put in a good showing in spring with a single at Jumeirah, Dubai, on 15 Mar; up to three birds on Jebel Hafeet from 16 Mar–6 Apr and singles at Green Mubazzarah (Al Ain) on 17 Mar; Dubai Pivot Fields on 8 Apr and Mirfa on 21 Apr; all being of the race *semenowi*.

YEMEN

A visit to the island of Socotra in Jan resulted in many interesting records. Two **Great Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax carbo* were offshore at Hadibu on 14 Jan, and another was there on 18 Jan. A single was at Qalansiyah on 16 Jan. The species is probably overlooked given the huge numbers of **Socotra Cormorants** *Leucocarbox nigrogularis*. Four **Mallards** *Anas platyrhynchos* were at Khor Sirhin on 13 Jan, 14 Jan and 18 Jan. An **Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia* was at Khor Sirhin on 13 Jan, 14 Jan and 16 Jan, increasing to two birds on 18 Jan. An **Indian Pond-Heron** *Ardeola grayii* was in the mangroves at Shoep on 17 Jan and another was in the palms around Khor Sirhin on 18 Jan. A **Yellow Bittern** *Ixobrychus sinensis* was in the palms at Khor Sirhin on 16 Jan and 18 Jan. An immature **Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* was on Khor Dilish on 18 Jan. This bird, the first for Socotra, had been present at this site some weeks. A **Western White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* was by the roadside near Hadibu Airport on 13 Jan. Single **Marsh Sandpipers** *Tringa stagnatilis* were at Khor Sirhin on 14 Jan, 16 Jan and 18 Jan. A **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* was at Khor Sirhin on 14 Jan and 16 Jan. Another was at Khor Qalansiyah on 16 Jan. Two **Eurasian Oystercatchers** *Haematopus ostralegus* were at Ditwah on 16 Jan. Also that day there was a **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* at Khor Qalansiyah. Two first records for Socotra were an immature **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* at Khor Qalansiyah on 16 Jan and a **Slender-billed Gull** *Larus genei* at Khor Qadab on 15 Jan. A **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* was at Khor Qalansiyah on 16 Jan. A **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* was at Khor Sirhin on 16 Jan, and two were there on 18 Jan. One was at Khor Qalansiyah on 16 Jan.

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It would be appreciated that wherever possible all graphics are also produced in hard copy and mailed to the Editor. Figures should be drawn, without lettering, preferably in black ink on good-quality paper on white or translucent paper, and no larger than 150% of the final image. Captions and figure lettering should be given in full at the end of the text of the paper submitted. Do not incorporate drawings, pictures or graphics into the text – just indicate in the text where you would wish them placed. Transparencies or good-quality prints are most acceptable. Negatives may also be sent; the editor will arrange to have them scanned. Hard copy material authors require to be returned will be so.

OSME is undertaking a review of bird species and current nomenclature. The result is likely to comply generally with the IOC recommendations when these are made known. Until then, authors are asked to follow the Porter *et al* (1996) *Field Guide to the birds of the Middle East* for scientific names and sequence of bird species. Where possible, authors should consult a current (post-2005) issue of Sandgrouse and follow the layout conventions therein. The latest revision is summarised below:

Layout

Author addresses will now appear at the start of papers after the summary; where there is no summary, addresses will follow the author names.

Headings

The use of side headings (in **bold** full capitals) for papers will continue, but they no longer require to be underlined. Centre headings, in smaller **bold** font than the side headings, are retained for '**Acknowledgements**' and '**References**' at the end of papers, but these will now appear only with initial capitals.

Tables and Figures - uses of bold type

- Where a Table or a Figure is identified by a title, the words 'Table' and 'Figure' should be in **bold**, thus: **Table** and **Figure**.
- Similarly, when referring to a Table number or a Figure number in the text, these should appear in **bold** thus: **Table 1. Figure 1.** This enables a reader to find references to Tables and Figures very quickly in the text. However, see '**Abbreviations**' below for the use of '**Fig**'.
- Column headings in a **Table** preferably should be in **bold**.

Abbreviations and the form they take

The general principle of modern abbreviations is that they do not have full stops (periods) following them, the argument being that abbreviations are now recognised as such, and by definition a shortening of a word to form an abbreviation should not be accompanied by adding a full stop to lengthen it! Hence we have 'in prep', not 'in prep.' for 'in preparation'. Examples are:

- asl (not a.s.l.) = above sea level
- (pers obs) = personal observation(s), not (pers. obs.) or (*pers obs*) or (*pers. obs.*)
- *eg* (not e.g. nor eg) = *exempli gratia* for example.

The general rule is that words and abbreviations from Latin and occasionally other languages are in ***italic.***

- *et al* (not et al. or et al) = and others
- *ie* (not i.e. or ie) = that is
- *c* is the preferred abbreviation for 'circa' = approximately (not c. or *c.*), and it should be used without a space between it and the quantity, thus: '*c*10 nests'.
- *cf* and not 'cf.' or '*cf.*' for 'compare'.
- unpub and not unpubl. Preferably, 'unpub' should be followed by 'data', 'ms', 'notes' or similar.
- 1km (not 1 km or 1 Km or 1 km.) = one kilometre

The general rule for abbreviations of quantity is that the abbreviation remains singular when the quantities are plural, *eg* 1km, 2km or 500km.

- **Fig** (not Fig. or **Fig.**) = Figure; the use of this abbreviation is preferred in articles, but if 'Figure' is used, please be consistent.

The general rule is that the number of the **Figure** is also in **Bold**, thus: **Fig 1** or **Fig 6**.

References and Citations

- In the reference list, the first author's name is followed by the relevant initials. Subsequent authors should have their initials placed before the surname before the name.

The general rule is that we treat authors of papers first as human beings, and so apart from the lead or sole author whose name must appear first to keep reference lists searchable in alphabetic order, we place the initials first.

- Full stops (periods) are not used to separate an author's initials, hence 'JFP SMITH' and not 'J.F.P. SMITH'.
- A citation in the text with 3 or more authors should cite only the first author, thus '(Smith *et al* 2000), omitting periods (full stops) and without a separating comma (see also *et al* in '**Abbreviations**' above.
- A citation with two authors should follow '(Smith & Jones 2000)' in the text, using the ampersand (&), but should be written as 'SMITH, JFP AND AB JONES. 2000.' in the Reference List. Note the change from '(2000)' to '2000.'
- Multiple citations in the text within a single set of brackets normally should be separated by a comma (,), thus: (Jones & Smith 1999, Heath *et al* 2000, Ramadan-Jaradi 2004). However, multiple citations of a single author or the same team of authors may require separation by a semi-colon, thus: (Brown 1998, 1999, 2001; Jones and Smith 1999, Ramadan-Jaradi 2004).
- Citing an author by name within the text is unchanged, thus: 'as recorded by Jones (1997)'.

General

- Except in regular news features in *Sandgrouse*, the first mention of a species in any paper must include the species name, thus: 'House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*'. Note that placing the scientific name in brackets is no longer required. However, English is such a flexible language that sometimes context may still require the use of brackets. Usually there will be no need to repeat the scientific name in the text unless comparisons between one or more species are being drawn.
- In a species account, if it mentions another species that does not have a preceding species account, that species must have its scientific name included. For example, in an account about, say, Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, in which a prey species, say, Chaffinch, is named, if Chaffinch does not have a species account in the paper, then *Fringilla coelebs* should appear after the English name.

Summaries of full-length papers should be brief (less than 300 words), should not cite references and should cover only the subjects contained in the main text. The convention adopted is that authors will receive one or more edited electronic versions of their original texts to check for typographical errors and to confirm that the changes have not altered the meaning of the content before the journal is sent for typesetting. For authors without access to e-mail, arrangements will be made on an individual basis. No changes of substance can be made to typeset proofs. In research journals, it remains the convention to report in the third person and in the passive voice, purportedly to allow a neutral presentation. In *Sandgrouse* the use of the first person and active voice is encouraged, while noting that the more technical papers may benefit from the former, non-partisan style.

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