



The superb Pleske's Ground Jay, Iran's true endemic, was our undisputed bird-of-the-trip! (Pete Morris)

IRAN

15/17 – 29 APRIL 2019

LEADER: PETE MORRIS

I have to say, leading up to the Iran tour, I was getting quite excited! From those that had actually visited the country, I had heard nothing but good things. Friendly people, great scenery, great food, modern with excellent infrastructure, and other such reassuring phrases. Sadly, the relationship between the Iranian government and Western Governments has not been great in recent years, a theme that continues as we speak, but none of this is apparent in country. Indeed we felt extremely comfortable and welcome throughout our stay and seldom even had to explain ourselves to the authorities, despite being a group of odd-looking westerners doing odd things! Indeed all of what we had heard was true!

Our tour was a great success in terms of the birds. In total we recorded around 265 species (as per current IOC taxonomy) as well as a few species of mammals. Of course it's not just about the numbers. Of more importance are the range-restricted and speciality species, and we did very well with these. Amongst the top birds were the endemic Pleske's Ground Jay, the near-endemic Caspian Tit and Afghan Scrub (Dead Sea) Sparrow, and the restricted-range Sind Woodpecker, Mesopotamian (Hooded) Crow, Grey Hypocolius, Black-headed Penduline Tit, Hume's Whitethroat, Hume's Wheatear, Red-tailed Wheatear and Iraq and Afghan Babbler. We also saw a number of specialities with wider ranges such as Caspian Snowcock, See-see Partridge, Dalma-



The gorgeous Red-headed Bunting was an unexpected bonus towards the end of our tour (Pete Morris)

tian Pelicans, stunning displaying Macqueen's Bustards, superb Crab Plovers, Crowned Sandgrouse, Pallid Scops Owl, Egyptian Nightjar, Sombre Tit, *mimicus* Moustached Warbler, Plain Leaf Warbler, Radde's Accentor, Semicollared Flycatcher, Dead Sea Sparrow, Pale Rockfinch, Asian Crimson-winged Finch and Grey-necked and gorgeous Red-headed Buntings, as well as some interesting migrants such as Spotted Crake and Great Snipe! All in all, a very palatable list!

We began the tour with an optional pre-tour visit to the far east of the country, with a flight to Zahedan in Baluchistan. It was an early morning flight, and as soon as we got off the flight and collected our bags, unfamiliar warbles reached our ears! As our first Shikra and numerous European Bee-eaters passed over, we were soon teasing Sykes's Warblers from the tamarisks in the airport car park! We were soon on our way and powering our way north towards Zabol, situated close to the Afghanistan border. We passed through some pretty barren areas, though there was plenty of evidence of the recent floods as we went! We arrived at our hotel in time for lunch.



Stunning scenery was the norm! (Pete Morris)



Afghan (or Sistan) Scrub Sparrow was our reason for visiting remote Baluchistan (Pete Morris)

That afternoon we explored areas to the west of Zabol. What is usually a dry and dusty landscape had become a surprisingly verdant landscape, a bund bisecting pools and lush green bushes, and in places, very, very muddy! The wet conditions seemed to be to our advantage though, as our prime target, the Afghan (or Sistan) Scrub Sparrow seemed relatively numerous, and easy to see! As this was our prime target, we were pretty happy, and were able to study several males, noting their saturated plumage and yellow-washed underparts. Also here were our first of many Afghan Babblers, more Sykes's Warblers, our first Green Warbler, a couple of assumed *halimodendri* Lesser Whitethroats, our only *aucheri* Great Grey Shrike of the tour and a stunning male *calcarata* Citrine Wagtail, as well as a few common waterbirds. Under somewhat leaden skies, and with frequent downpours, we retired to our hotel.

With the main target under the belt, we decided to head straight back south the following day, for we had a pretty long drive to make. We stopped along the roadside on a few occasions, adding plenty of new species as we went, including Pied and smart Hume's Wheatears, Red-tailed Shrike, some entertaining Pale Crag



Hume's Wheatear and Pale Crag Martin were two species seen on the pre-tour part of the trip (Pete Morris)

Martins, and some obvious brown-necked Brown-necked Ravens! After a pleasant lunch, we continued on our way, making further roadside stops. Now Iran has much great scenery (we had already witnessed plenty) and much apparently good habitat, but one thing I did notice was that numbers of birds were generally not high, and this was the case on this travel day. We did however add a few new species including Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and our first Striolated Bunting.

The following morning we were off early and up into the excellent Makran Mountains. Here, in the lightly wooded hillsides and gulleys we had to work to find our main targets. The smart Hume's Whitethroat took a bit of tracking down, but ultimately showed very well, and we also found the range-restricted Plain Leaf Warbler nearby, and other interesting species such as our only Syrian Woodpeckers and Sombre Tits of the tour and our first Eastern Rock Nuthatches, and a displaying Long-billed Pipit. More widespread species included our first Chukars, Eurasian Hoopoes, Common Redstarts, a Black-eared Wheatear and our first Rock Buntings.



Hume's Whitethroat showed very well in the Makran Mountains (Pete Morris)

We then embarked upon the relatively long drive to Minab, and joined up with the rest of the group on what was a relatively warm afternoon. Still, we had plenty of time to get out and find some birds, so once we'd all assembled and enjoyed the Purple Sunbirds in the garden, we set off to some nearby 'gardens'. And it didn't take too long to find the prime target of the area, a fine male Sind Woodpecker, which allowed close scrutiny to check that it had a full set of requisite features. Nearby were our first Indian Rollers, a fine Crested Honey Buzzard (a dark male), a couple of Black-winged Kites, Yellow-throated Sparrows, and the first Afghan Babbler for those just joining the tour.

The following day we had a long day out south of Minab. We began in some other 'gardens' – essentially an oasis in the barren landscape. The calls of Grey Francolins cut through the air, a Crested Honey Buzzard was perched up, and flocks of Black-headed Buntings passed overhead. Sykes's Warblers sang from the tamarisk tangles and another fine Sind Woodpecker showed well. We then paused to watch a fine pair of Spotted Owlets, and a Brown-necked Raven drifted by, before we headed to a traditional house for breakfast. Here we were entertained by Pallid Swifts and Little Green Bee-eaters, not to mention the mongoose running around the garden! We then took a boat trip out into the mangroves. Our main target was the impressive Great Thick-knee which gave us some great looks. A variety of waders and terns entertained, a couple of impressive Greater Spotted Eagles drifted overhead, several Indian Pond Herons showed well, and Western Reef Herons



Male and female Sind Woodpecker - essentially an Iranian speciality(Pete Morris)

of dark white and mixed morphs entertained. We paused in the mangroves to tease out both Clamorous reed Warbler and the local form of Oriental White-eye and logged our first Eurasian Spoonbills before heading back to the house for lunch and a sit down... it was getting hot. We still had time to add Sand Lark though, and, immediately after lunch, our first Isabelline Shrike and a migrant Eurasian Wryneck. Further explorations of more gardens yielded more Sind Woodpeckers and Spotted Owlets, and an adjacent wetland held a couple of Marbled Ducks as well as our first Rufous Scrub Robin and Desert Lark nearby. Sadly, our nightbirding attempts that evening were not successful, but we did enjoy a fine traditional local dinner accompanied by an unexpected Rose-ringed Parakeet.

The following morning we were up early again, and heading off for another boat trip. We passed more Crested Honey Buzzards perched up catching the first rays of sun and when we arrived at the port, we got the scopes out and enjoyed some close Broad-billed Sandpipers, Terek Sandpipers and our first Marsh Sandpiper. Our boat took us out to the outer reaches of the estuary where big numbers of shorebirds included some brilliant



An impressive Great Stone-curlew (Pete Morris)



A Dalmatian Pelican showing off its true size against a Great Cormorant (Pete Morris)

Crab Plovers – a real highlight for many of the group. On the way we stopped to admire huge Dalmatian Pelicans, subtle Saunders’s Terns and some rather grim gulls which appeared to represent Heuglin’s Gulls and Caspian Gulls, though Middle East gulls are highly confusing and just about impossible to pigeon-hole accurately with current taxonomy! A couple of 2cy Pallas’s Gulls and several Slender-billed Gulls were less controversial! We also noted our first, albeit distant, Greater Flamingos.

We then made our way into Bandar Abbas, tucked into a decent lunch and then explored the mudflats and seafront close to town, and we had another opportunity to look again at this area the following afternoon. The mudflats held huge numbers of shorebirds included our first Collared Pratincoles, big numbers of Lesser Sand Plovers, a couple of Greater Sand Plovers, great flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits, more Broad-billed and Terek Sandpipers and an unexpected Red Knot. It was one of those places where there was always likely to be something else lurking!



Afghan Babblers joined us for breakfast! (Pete Morris)



A few of the highlights from Kuh-e Genu: Pale Rockfinch, Bay-backed Shrike and Eastern Rock Nuthatch (Pete Morris)



On our morning out of Bandar Abbas we headed for the hills, and the wonderful Kuh-e Genu. Here in the cool early morning air, we watched Cheesman's Gerbils and Afghan Babblers taking titbits from our breakfast, Pale Crag Martins buzzed overhead, and nearby we were delighted with several stunning See-see Partridges. Making our way up the hill, we soon encountered several Desert Larks and our first Streaked Scrub Warblers, followed by a singing Striolated Bunting and an excellent Upcher's Warbler. A thin buzzing cut across the valley, heralding the presence of the strange Pale Rockfinch which was soon showing well, and we went on to find more goodies such as Hume's Wheatears, Bay-backed Shrike, cracking Eastern Rock Nuthatches, singing Long-billed Pipits and our only Indian Silverbill of the trip. After an excellent morning, temperatures were rising and we headed back down to town for lunch, pausing for a Steppe Eagle as we went. After our second look at the mudflats we headed to the airport and took a couple of flights, transiting in Tehran, and arriving in Ahvaz after dark!



The delightful See-see Partridge and a Cheesman's Gerbil from Kuh-e Genu (Pete Morris)





The impressive Chogha Zanbil Ziggurat (Pete Morris)

We had two days to explore Khuzestan province in southwest Iran. This involved some long days out from Ahvaz, complicated further by the residual floodwaters which were still high and causing difficulty with certain areas closed altogether, and other roads still closed by floodwater. It was also very clearly a cool and late spring, with many birds late to arrive. We had two days to explore the area, essentially splitting our time between the Mian Abb area where we explored the margins of a river and its adjacent wetlands, and Kharke National Park where we explored more open areas and scrub. We also made a visit to the impressive Chogha Zanbil Ziggurat... It's always good to get a bit of culture in, and we saw our only Little Owl and an impressive Mesopotamian Spiny Lizard nearby!



The amazing Mesopotamian Spiny Lizard (Pete Morris)



A fine Eurasian Honey Buzzard (Pete Morris)

Around Mian Abb, our prime focus was to find the rare Basra Reed Warbler, and this was unfortunately our one ornithological failure. It seems most likely that they simply had not arrived, as despite much searching, we failed to find any sign. The reedbeds held other interesting species such as the range-restricted Iraq Babbler and the scarce *mimicus* form of Moustached Warbler. Black Francolins called from the fields, some perching prominently, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters flew overhead, and other interesting species included the distinctive Mesopotamian Crow (a black and white version of Hooded Crow), numerous Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, White-tailed and Red-wattled Lapwings, a surprise group of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, a low-flying European Honey Buzzard and numerous Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins.



The distinctive Mesopotamian Crow has not yet made species rank with the IOC (Pete Morris)



The smart Grey Hypocolius showed well on numerous occasions (Pete Morris)

In Kharke National Park we were looking for a different set of species altogether. Numerous stunning Grey Hypocolius were one of the stars as groups flew back and forth calling, pausing to feed on berries. Singing Menetries's Warblers were another highlight, and although elusive at first, we got some great looks. Dead Sea Sparrows were found in the bushes, and during our explorations we came across a couple of exciting migrants in the form of a Spotted Crake and a fine Great Snipe. No visit to the park could be complete without a sweep for Egyptian Nightjar, and this was ultimately successful with some stunning views of both males and females in broad daylight. After our second visit to the park, we headed back to Ahvaz and paused at another wetland area where we were pleased to find a few Pygmy Cormorants and numerous Squacco Herons before heading back for a final night at our hotel.



As well as the specialities, we saw a number of interesting migrants such as this Great Snipe (Pete Morris)



Much appreciated Egyptian Nighthawks from Kharke National Park. These cryptic birds were not easy to see well on the ground! (Pete Morris)



We were again up early, this time for a flight back to Tehran, and here, we met up with our new drivers, as we had transferred to 4WDs. After a little reorganization, we were soon winding our way up into the mountains north of the capital. We paused for lunch, in a very different landscape, with Northern Ravens overhead and Grey Wagtails along the river. We were on the back edge of an unseasonably cold period of weather, and by the time we got up to the top of the pass, we hit a virtual white out! We went for a walk near to a pass, though



Adult (above) and 2cy male Ehrenberg's (Common) Redstarts. The lower bird resembles a nominate bird, but the white at the base of the middle tertial is the clue! (Pete Morris)



most of the group soon returned to the sanctuary of the vehicles! A few of us soldiered on and were rewarded with some fine Horned Larks and a flock of lovely Asian Crimson-winged Finches, but in the cold and snowy conditions, we decided to continue. We made another stop in a wooded village, and here it was clear that birds had been forced down by the snow. Gorgeous Ehrenberg's (Common) Redstarts seemed to be on every bush, and we also found a couple of Red-breasted Flycatchers. We finished our journey to Kelardasht and just had a short wander around some gardens in town. Fresh snow was just thawing, and Ehrenberg's (Common) and



Not a bad place to start the day! (Pete Morris)

Black Redstarts, Rock Buntings and Siberian Stonechats, along with Mistle Thrushes were all present in good numbers, a sure sign that the snow was messing things up!

The following morning we were off in the dark, heading up higher into the mountains. Needless to say, when we arrived it was very picturesque, but bitterly cold with plenty of fresh snowfall. We put on all of the clothes we had and set about exploring! It did not take too long to get several Caspian Snowcocks lined up in the scope, and whilst looking we found a number of other Alpine species such as Alpine Accentor, Water Pipit, White-throated Dipper, Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, and White-winged Snowfinch. Numerous impressive Bezoars (Persian Ibex) were also found roaming the rocky slopes. It was a welcome relief when the warm rays of the sun finally reached us and we were able to begin thawing out whilst eating breakfast! Over the crags we found regal Golden Eagles alongside impressive Lammergeiers and a Steppe Eagle, and some diligent searching yielded a pair of spectacular Wallcreepers alongside Western Rock Nuthatches. Try as we might though, we could not find a Radde's Accentor – presumably they had been forced down by the snow?



Rock Bunting and Siberian Stonechat from Kelardasht (Pete Morris)



Tawny Owl - more to show the weather than the bird! (Pete Morris)

After a great morning, we headed to an area of nearby forest, but the weather was taking a turn for the worse, and after a gloriously sunny morning the cloud had thickened, and as we climbed into the forest in our trusty 4WDs, the rain once more turned to snow! It was a chilly picnic in what seemed like a birdless forest, though a few Coal Tits were present and a daytime Tawny Owl was a nice surprise! After lunch, we went a little higher and miraculously found our quarry – the smart Caspian Tit. It was a most welcome sight, and having enjoyed it for a while we bailed out and headed back down. With the weather as it was we decided to head lower, hopefully to warmer climates, and again this worked well. Not only did we find a cracking pair of Eurasian Wrynecks, but we also found the much-wanted Semicollared Flycatcher, albeit a female. It was an educational and showy bird, and much appreciated!



Moving down paid dividends with this female Semicollared Flycatcher (Pete Morris)



Caspian Tit, Common Rosefinch and the surprise Radde's Accentor from Kelardasht (Pete Morris)

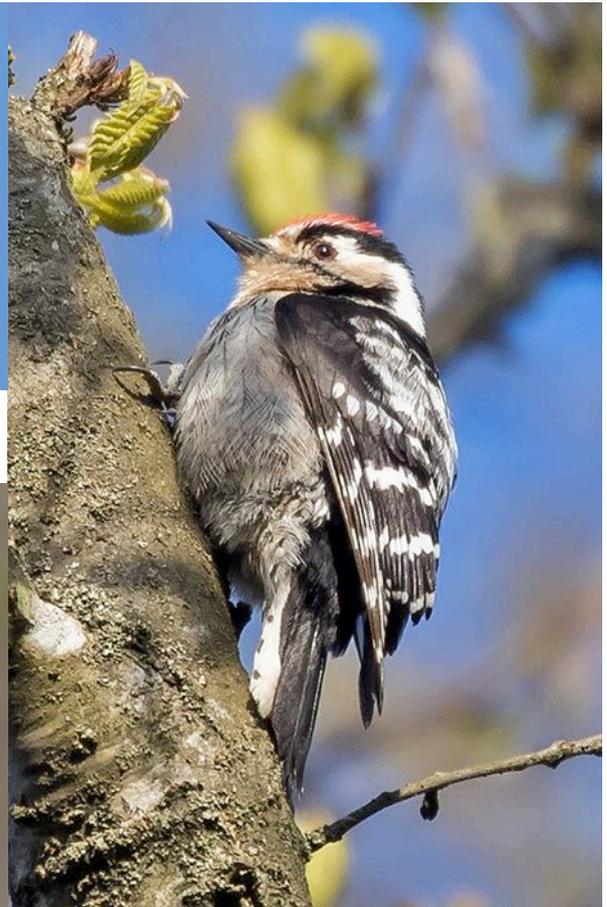


The following morning we had another little foray above the town, though stayed well below the snowline. It was an excellent couple of ours as we gained more stunning views of Caspian Tits, as well as finding the local race of Common Chiffchaff, a few Dunnocks, some smart Common Rosefinches and more Semicollared Flycatchers including our first males. More surprising was a Radde's Accentor that popped up way below where it should have been. Yes, that snow had been playing tricks on us!

We then called in at a rocky hillside where more new birds included smart Black-eared Wheatears as well as tuneful Woodlarks, Tawny Pipits and Corn Buntings. We then headed north towards the shores of the vast

Caspian Sea. We paused for lunch in a popular coastal park where a few birds were present, including smart Great Spotted Woodpeckers, more Red-breasted Flycatchers and some generally elusive Green Warblers. A fine picnic was followed by more travel along the Caspian coast before we arrived at our destination for the afternoon. Sadly the fishponds we stopped at had been recently cleared of much of their marginal vegetation and were very full of water, and hence not the best for birds. That said, our target bird was right there above us, feeding in a large willow! We walked all around the fishponds and when we got back, he was still there. Was that really the only Black-headed Penduline Tit left there? If it was, it's a very sad situation, but we had ample time to enjoy the stunning little bird busily feeding on tiny aphids. Little else was present in what seemed a rather sterile spot, though we did add Cetti's warbler to our list! We then continued on to Sari for our overnight stop.

The following day was essentially a travel day interspersed with numerous birding stops as we made our way from Sari to Shahrud. Our first stop was for a picnic in some woodland, and this turned out to be excellent. Not only did we find some superb Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and other common woodland birds, but we also found several showy Semicollared Flycatchers, and enjoyed our best views of this speciality as several males



Semicollared Flycatcher, a fine male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and the interesting menzbieri form of Common Chiffchaff, and some of the group in Touran National Park(Pete Morris)



prospected nesting sites and attempted to impress the females present. Moving on, further stops yielded Pied Wheatears (and some apparent hybrids), Isabelline Wheatears, Ortolan Buntings, chunky Bimaculated Larks and familiar Eurasian Skylarks. In some scrubby patches we found our first fabulous White-throated Robin, skittish Red-fronted Serins and impressive Eastern Orphean Warblers. Further on still, we were joined by our first Masked Wagtail at our lunch stop, and then climbed higher to a montane wetland. Here we found stunning black-backed Citrine Wagtails, more Horned Larks, our first superb male Common Rock Thrush, Rock Sparrows and a couple of distinctive Eastern Goldfinches.



An apparent hybrid Pied x Black-eared Wheatear, Eastern Orphean Warbler and the calcarata form of Citrine Wagtail (Pete Morris)



Early the following day we found ourselves heading towards the great plains of the Touran National Park. Before we'd even had time to think, the lead vehicle stopped and we jumped out to find ourselves surrounded by gorgeous singing Red-headed Buntings – a real bonus. We enjoyed these for a while and then moved on. Our next stop was the traditional field breakfast, and whilst the lads prepared it, we set about finding gems such as Desert Wheatear and Asian Desert Warbler. We then made our way to the park and to our rustic but charming



What an amazing place to stay! Our accommodation at Touran National Park! (Pete Morris)





Birds and scenery from Touran National Park! Desert Wheatear, Asian Desert Warbler, Desert Finch and Isabelline Shrike (Pete Morris)



accommodation. In some ways this was a real highlight for many of us, and it was amazing how satisfying it can be to lay down in such rustic conditions in the cool desert air, and be comfortable. It really was a pleasure to be looked after in traditional ways and experience a little bit of local life and culture.

Fun though it was, our real reason for visiting the area was to get into Touran National Park, and we had a day and a half to explore the area. Between us and the village lay a series of rocky hills, and stops here soon yielded the hoped-for Red-tailed Wheatear and Grey-necked Bunting as well as cute Afghan Pikas and more Pale Rockfinches. We stopped at one or two gardens that were essentially oases in the desert, and these were magnets to migrants. Red-breasted Flycatchers were in literally every bush, and we went on to find a number of other migrants including confiding Green Warblers, chunky Barred Warblers and even a Rosy Starling. With so many migrants, it was no great surprise that a couple of pairs of Hobby were in close attendance!



Red-breasted Flycatchers and Green Warblers were joined at the Oases by Eurasian Hobby and this European Honey Buzzard (Pete Morris)





The sandgrouse of Touran National Park: Crowned Sandgrouse above and right, and Black-bellied Sandgrouse (Pete Morris)



But it was the desert plains that we really wanted to explore, and here we had two of the avian highlights of the whole trip. Like an incredibly fast clockwork toy, that could be amazingly elusive in the desert scrub, we ended up with some stunning views of the endemic Pleske's Ground Jays, our inevitable bird of the trip. Almost as impressive were the incredible McQueen's Bustards that we saw displaying on a ridge line. The way the males turned themselves inside out and then charged around like demented chickens, really had to be seen to be believed! Other desert denizens included several Long-legged Buzzards, Common Cuckoos, numerous Bar-tailed Larks, Greater Short-toed Larks, more Streaked Scrub Warblers, Steppe Grey Shrikes (now lumped in Great Grey Shrike) and some Asiatic Wild Asses. We also spent some time around the waterholes where we enjoyed spectacular views of Black-bellied and Crowned Sandgrouse coming to drink, as well as unexpected Ruddy Shelducks, smart Desert and Trumpeter Finches and a group of migrant Red-throated Pipits. We also made a concerted efforts at night, and this was were rewarded with brilliant views of both Eurasian and Pallid Scops Owls, living almost side-by-side.

All that remained was for the small matter of getting back to Tehran, and clocking just a few more birds as we went! We said our goodbyes to our wonderful hosts and hit the road once more! A roadside pool held a surprise Temminck's Stint, and finally, we all clapped eyes on the elusive Variable Wheatear and admired more Grey-necked Buntings. Passing the Red-headed Buntings without another brief bit of admiration would have been plain rude and further on we found a couple more Red-fronted Serins. Continuing on, we stopped at a series of spots, admiring many old friends such as Isabelline and Red-tailed Wheatears, and more stunning White-throated Robins, and found an obliging Plain Leaf Warbler for those that were not on the pre-tour extension. Alpine Swifts and Eurasian Crag Martins buzzed overhead and we even watched a Booted Eagle catch a hapless pika in front of us.

As we had been for so much of the tour, we were still admiring wonderful scenery all the way back to Tehran. It had been a truly wonderful journey around a most interesting and welcoming country, but it was now time to go our separate ways. The birding had lived up to its billing and we can only hope that the powers that be see sense so that others are able to enjoy Iran's wonders in the future!



The subtle Plain Leaf Warbler (Pete Morris)



Pallid Scops Owl (above) and Eurasian Scops Owl were both seen well in Touran National Park (Pete Morris)





The cracking Black-headed Penduline Tit... another favourite! (Pete Morris)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species only seen on the pre-tour Baluchistan extension are marked with the symbol (E)

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

(EW) = Extinct in the wild, **(CR)** = Critically Endangered, **(EN)** = Endangered, **(VU)** = Vulnerable, **(NT)** = Near Threatened, **(DD)** = Data Deficient.

For polytypic species, the subspecies seen on the tour, where known, is placed in parentheses at the end of the species comment. Generally, species listed with trinomials are not currently split by the IOC.

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **2019. IOC World Bird List (v 9.1)**. This list is updated twice annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>. Please note, this was the current version when the report checklist was created. Some alternative names are given in parentheses.

All of our checklists are powered by our partner iGoTerra (www.igoterra.com) who provide web and mobile applications for bird and wildlife enthusiasts and businesses. Their suite of services cover observations, rankings, lists, photos and trip management tools.

BIRDS

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* A pair seen two days running in Touran NP.

Garganey *Spatula querquedula* A drake seen in Kharke NP.

Marbled Duck ◊ *Marmaronetta angustirostris* (VU) Good scope views of two on the wetland south of Sirik.

Caspian Snowcock ◊ *Tetraogallus caspius* Great views of at least five southwest of Kelardasht.

Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar* Two forms seen: *koroviakovi* in the east, *kurdestanica* elsewhere.

See-see Partridge ◊ *Ammoperdix griseogularis* Great views of 5+ at Kuh-e Genu, north of Bandar Abbas.

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* Plenty seen in Khuzestan. First scoped in the Mian Abb area [*arabistanicus*].

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* A few flushed and others heard south of Sirik [*mecranensis*].

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H) One heard on the drive from Sari to Foulad Mahelleh [nominate].

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* A single male seen in Kelardasht. Possibly wild and native in this area? [*talischensis*].

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* A few seen in a roadside pool north of Ahvaz [*iraquensis*].

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* A few flocks in the Minab and Bandar Abbas areas.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Two seen circling north of Ahvaz.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Five at Azini Mangroves and two on the mudflats at Bandar Abbas [nominate].

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Quite a few seen in the Mian Abb area [nominate].

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Plenty seen at various sites in Khuzestan [nominate].

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* c15 seen at the wetland near to Elhaei, north of Ahvaz.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* A few seen on the boat trips at Azini Mangroves Khor Tiab Mangroves near to Minab.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Plenty in Khuzestan, were the first.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Several on the coast around Minab etc [nominate].

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Good numbers seen in the Mian Abb area [nominate].

Great Egret (Western G E) *Ardea [alba] alba* Plenty, first seen on the boat trip in Azini Mangroves.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* First seen on the boat trip near to Minab [nominate].

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* Good numbers in the southeast. Dark, light and piebald birds [*schistacea*].



Indian Pond Heron and Western Reef Heron from the southeast coast (Pete Morris)

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* (NT) c20 seen on the boat trip at Khor Tiab mangroves near to Minab.

Pygmy Cormorant ◊ *Microcarbo pygmaeus* 20+ at the roadside wetland near to Elhaei, c35km north of Ahvaz.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Common in the southeast, some were very white on the underparts [*sinensis*].

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* A few in the coastal southeast [nominate].

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* A pair in the gardens c4km northwest of Minab [*vociferus*].

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* (NT) An adult and an immature southwest of Kelardasht [nominate].

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* A male overhead in the Mian Abb area and one seen very well in Touran NP.

Crested Honey Buzzard (Oriental H B) *Pernis [ptilorhynchus] orientalis* Great views of several in the Minab area.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* (NT) Two seen on the boat trip in Azini Mangroves, south of Sirik.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* Excellent views of an adult along the Parvar Road, which caught a pika in front of us!

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* (EN) A total of four seen including an excellent 2cy bird near Kelardasht [*orientalis*]. A

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* At least four southwest of Kelardasht and a couple along the Parvar Road [*homeyeri*].

Shikra *Accipiter badius* First seen at Zahedan Airport. Several other in the gardens in the southeast [*cenchroides*].

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* First on the journey to Kelardasht. Also one near to Biyarjomand [nominate].

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Widely scattered sightings of four individuals [nominate].

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* Widely scattered sightings with best views in Touran NP [nominate].

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* See note.

Macqueen's Bustard ◊ *Chlamydotis macqueenii* (VU) Two males seen displaying in Touran NP. Incredible birds!



Crested Honey Buzzard with inset Greater Spotted Eagle, and Eurasian Spoonbills below (Pete Morris)





Stunning Crab-plovers, a Red-wattled Lapwing and a shocking shot of one of the amazing Macqueen's Bustards (Pete Morris)



- Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* Good but fairly brief views of one on three occasions on a small pool in Kharke NP.
- Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* Two seen in the Mian Abb area and at the ponds near to Ujak Sar [nominate].
- Great Stone-curlew** *Esacus recurvirostris* (NT) Great views of c5 on the boat trip at Azini Mangroves.
- Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* (NT) 50+ seen at Khor Tiab mangroves and also at Bandar Abbas [*ostralegus*-group].
- Crab-plover** *Dromas ardeola* 35-40 seen brilliantly on the boat trip at Khor Tiab mangroves. Mostly smart adults!
- Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* First seen west of Zabol, then first on the main tour near south of Sirik.
- Red-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus indicus* First seen around Gonemordi, south of Sirik [*aigneri*].
- White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* First west of Zabol, then singles near Mian Abb and at the wetland north of Ahvaz.
- Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* Small numbers including some smart summer-plumaged birds in the southeast.
- Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* Several seen in the southeast [*tundrae*].
- Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* First seen at the small wetland south of Sirik [*curonicus*].
- Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus* First seen west of Zabol then small numbers in the southeast [nominate].
- Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* Common at coastal sites in the southeast [*pamirensis*].
- Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* Much scarcer, but seen well at Bandar Abbas. Subtle, but bill distinctive.
- Whimbrel (European W)** *Numenius [phaeopus] phaeopus* Plenty seen at the coastal sites in the southeast.
- Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* (NT) Good numbers at the coastal sites in the southeast [*orientalis*].
- Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* (NT) Quite a few, many in fine breeding plumage, in the southeast [*taymyrensis*].
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* Good numbers on the mudflats at Bandar Abbas, many in fine breeding dress [nominate].
- Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* One in breeding plumage with a flock of Bar-tailed Godwits at Bandar Abbas [nominate].
- Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris falcinellus* Brilliant scope views of c15 at Tiab, and 30+ at Bandar Abbas [nominate].
- Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* (NT) A few including 30+ on the mudflats at Bandar Abbas.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* Good views of one on a roadside pond just outside Biyarjomand.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* Small numbers at the coastal sites in the southeast [nominate].

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Small numbers at the coastal sites in the southeast [*centralis*].

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* First seen near Zabol. Also a few on the mudflats at Bandar Abbas.

Great Snipe ♦ *Gallinago media* (NT) Brilliant views of one which was flushed from a small pool in Kharke NP.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* Good numbers at the coastal sites in the southeast.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* A few seen, the first around Gonemordi, south of Sirik.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* First seen near Zabol. Also singles at the wetland south of Sirik and in Kharke NP.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Good numbers at the wetlands in the southeast.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* One seen from the port at Tiab, near Minab.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Good numbers west of Zabol, and smaller numbers later in the trip.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Good numbers seen in the wetlands in the southeast.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* Four seen well by the mudflats at Bandar Abbas and one other flyover [nominate].

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei* Several on the boat trips in the southeast and on the mudflats at Bandar Abbas.

Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaeetus ichthyaeetus* Two 2cy birds seen well on the boat trip at Khor Tiab and mudflats near Minab.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* See note.



A Caspian 'type' Gull (*cachinnans/barabensis*) and two shots of Saunders's Terns (Pete Morris)



Lesser Black-backed Gull (Heuglin's G) *Larus [fuscus] heuglini* At least two good candidates seen in the southeast.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Plenty seen along the coast in the southeast [nominate].

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Plenty seen along the coast in the southeast [nominate].

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* A few seen in the southeast, especially along the seafront in Bandar Abbas [velox].

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* Best were those alongside the former species off Bandar Abbas [nominate].

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* A few seen including off Bandar Abbas.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* At least one on the boat trip at Khor Tiab and some at Bandar Abbas [nominate].

Saunders's Tern ◊ *Sternula saundersi* Great views of several on the boat trip at Khor Tiab mangroves.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Two seen on the mudflats at Bandar Abbas [nominate].

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* Seen at a few sites with highest numbers off Bandar Abbas.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* A scruffy 2cy bird off Bandar Abbas.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus* Decent scope views of one off Bandar Abbas.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* Four flew over calling near to Mian Abb [caudacutus].

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* Many seen in Touran NP, with great scope views of many [arenarius].

Crowned Sandgrouse ◊ *Pterocles coronatus* 100+ seen at the waterhole in Touran NP. Brilliant views [atratus]!

Rock Dove *Columba livia* Wild birds were particularly common in Touran NP [gaddi].

Rock Dove (Feral) *Columba livia 'feral'* Common and widespread.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* Very common in Khuzestan [iranica].

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur (VU)* A few seen in Khuzestan [arenicola].

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Common and widespread.

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* Common and widespread [cambayensis].

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* A few heard, and several seen in and around Touran NP.

Pallid Scops Owl ◊ *Otus brucei* Brilliant views of a singing bird near Touran NP [obsoletus].

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* Brilliant views of 3+ around Touran NP [turanicus].

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* Great views of a rufous morph bird in the near Kelardasht [willkonskii].

Little Owl *Athene noctua* One seen near to the Chogha Zanbil Ziggurat [bactriana].

Spotted Owlet *Athene brama* Several seen well in the 'gardens' south of Sirik and at Kuh-e Genu [indica].



A fine Spotted Owlet seen near to Sirik (Pete Morris)

Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius* Brilliant daytime views of two in Kharke NP [nominate].
Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* Several seen over the Parvar Road [tuneti].
Common Swift *Apus apus* Just a few seen
Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* A few seen well over Gonari, south of Sirik [nominate].
Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* Many seen in the gardens in the Minab area {nominate}.
White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* First seen around Minab and also seen in Khuzestan [nominate].
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* A few seen in the Mian Abb area [nominate].
Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* Quite a few in Khuzestan, the first in the Mian Abb area [syriacus].
Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* Good numbers seen, the first around of Minab [beludschicus].
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* Quite a few in Khuzestan, first near Mian Abb. Many great views [nominate].



A splash of colour... Our Rose-ringed Parakeet, of dubious origin, and a fine Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (Pete Morris)

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* First seen (c30) over Zahedan Airport. Plenty more noted
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* More common for the second half of the trip [nominate].
Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* A migrant on the coast then great views of a pair near to Kelardasht.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor* Great views of 3, including a pink-crowned male, near Damghan [hyrcanus].
Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis* Brilliant views of several around and south of Minab, 17/4.
Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* (E) Good views of a pair and another male in the Makran Mountains [milleri].
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* A few seen near to Kelardasht and in Sisangan Forest Park [poelzami].
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* The first couple seen on the journey from Tehran to Kelardasht [nominate].
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* A couple of pairs seen in Touran NP [nominate].
Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* One seen well in Gonari Village. Native?? I think most likely an escape.
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* Five or six seen well, including a smart male in Touran NP.
Red-tailed Shrike *(Turkestan S) Lanius phoenicuroides* Several, including some fine males at scattered sites.
Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus* Great views of three at Kuh-e Genu, north of Bandar Abbas [nargianus].
Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* (E) One seen west of Zabol [aucherij].
Great Grey Shrike (Steppe G S) *Lanius [excubitor] pallidirostris* Two males seen in Touran NP.
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* One seen flying across the road on the drive from Sari to Foulad Mahelleh [hyrcanus].
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* First seen in the hills near to Dehbraki, west of Bam. Common in the north [bactriana].
Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei* Stunning views in the deserts of Touran NP. Crackers and incredibly fast runners!
Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Highest numbers were in the Parvar Road/Touran NP areas [docilis].
Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* Several flocks seen high in the mountains near Kelardasht [graculus].
Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula* (LO) Two seen in flight on the journey back to Tehran [soemmerringii].
House Crow *Corvus splendens* A few seen in and around Bandar Abbas [zugmayeri].
Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* First seen on the tour near to Fahraj, on the way to Bam [sharpji].
Hooded Crow *(Mesopotamian C) Corvus [cornix] capellanus* Reasonably common in Khuzestan, many seen well.
Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* Great views north of Zahedan, and another south of Sirik.
Northern Raven *Corvus corax* A few on the journey from Tehran to Kelardasht and around Kelardasht [laurenceij].



Another view of the smart Grey Hypocolius from Kharke National Park (Pete Morris)

- Grey Hypocolius** ◇ *Hypocolius ampelinus* Great views of many, especially in Kharke NP. Great birds!
- Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* First seen around Kelardasht [*phaeonotus*].
- Sombre Tit** ◇ *Poecile lugubris* (E) Excellent views of a pair in the Makran Mountains west of Bam [*kirmanensis*].
- Caspian Tit** ◇ *Poecile hyrcanus* Great views of several smart birds near to Kelardasht.
- Eurasian Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* First seen around Kelardasht [*raddei*].
- Great Tit** *Parus major* Two forms: *blanfordi* in Kharke NP, *karelini* in the north.
- Black-headed Penduline Tit** ◇ *Remiz macronyx* Brilliant views of a male feeding in a willow tree near Babolsar [*neglectus*].
- Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti* Very common at Kuh-e Genu, north of Bandar Abbas [*iranica*].
- Bar-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes cinctura* Great views of several in Touran NP [*zarudnyi*].
- Woodlark** *Lullula arborea* Great views of a pair near to Kelardasht. Heard elsewhere [*pallida*].
- Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* A few seen on the drive from Sari to the Parvar to Foulad Mahelleh [*armenica*].
- Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* At least 3 forms: *magna* in the southeast; *brachyura* in Khuzestan; *subtaurica* in Touran NP.
- Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* Nice views of several, especially along the Parvar Road [*penicillata*].
- Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* A pair and then a singing male seen well in Touran NP [*artemisiana*].
- Bimaculated Lark** ◇ *Melanocorypha bimaculata* Great views of several in the Central Plateau.
- Sand Lark** *Alaudala raytal* A few along the southeast coast. Surprisingly similar to Lesser Short-toed Lark [*adamsi*]!



A Bar-tailed Lark from Touran National Park (Pete Morris)



A few of Iran's larks... A Desert Lark, the subtle Sand Lark (below left) and the smart Bimaculated Lark (Pete Morris)



- White-eared Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucotis* Fairly common and widespread [*mesopotamia*].
- Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* First seen near Zabol and a few seen in the Mian Abb area [nominate].
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* Common and widespread [nominate].
- Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* A pair seen well along the Parvar Road.
- Pale Crag Martin** ◇ *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta* Best were the birds nesting in the building at Kuh-e Genu [*pallida*].
- Common House Martin (Northern)** *Delichon urbicum* Several seen as we passed through Sari [*urbicum/meridionale*].
- Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica* First seen on the main tour at Kuh-e Genu [*rufula*].
- Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* One seen briefly and others heard at the ponds near to Uujak Sar [*orientalis*].
- Streaked Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta* See note.
- Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus* Seen well near Kelardasht and at the Sisangan Forest Park [*alpinus*].
- Plain Leaf Warbler** ◇ *Phylloscopus neglectus* Excellent views in the Makran Mountains and along the Parvar Road.
- Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* Small numbers seen at scattered sites.
- Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* See note.
- Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus nitidus* A few migrants but best were those seen at the waterholes in Touran NP.
- Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (H) (E) Heard (assumed this form) west of Zabol [*zarudnyi*].
- Clamorous Reed Warbler (Indian R W)** *Acrocephalus [stentoreus] brunescens* Seen in the southeast and in Khuzestan.
- Moustached Warbler** ◇ *Acrocephalus melanopogon* Excellent views of several in the Mian Abb area [*mimicus*].
- Eurasian Reed Warbler (Caspian R W)** *Acrocephalus [scirpaceus] fuscus* A few in the Mian Abb area.



The subtlety of warblers... Upcher's Warbler (top left) and Sykes's Warbler (below). Moustached Warbler was common in Khuzestan (Pete Morris)



- Sykes's Warbler** ◇ *Iduna rama* Seen well on the extension and then at several sites on the main tour.
- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida* A subtle species, probably most common in Kharke NP [*elaeica*].
- Upcher's Warbler** ◇ *Hippolais languida* Great views of a few including a pair feeding at a nest, at Kuh-e Genu.
- Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis* Several in the Mian Abb area [*neuroticus*].
- Graceful Prinia** *Prinia gracilis* Common at lowland sites in the south of the country [*lepida*].
- Iraq Babbler** ◇ *Argya altirostris* Great views of several in Khuzestan, the first showing very well in the Mian Abb area.
- Afghan Babbler** ◇ *Argya huttoni* Common in the south of the country, with many seen well [nominate].
- Eurasian Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* A few migrants seen in Khuzestan and more later in the tour.



Iraq Babbler was easy to see well in Khuzestan (Pete Morris)

- Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* Good views of a couple of smart birds in an oasis in Touran NP.
- Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* See note.
- Hume's Whitethroat** ◇ *Sylvia althaea* (E) Excellent views of two singing males in the Makran Mountains.
- Eastern Orphean Warbler** ◇ *Sylvia crassirostris* Brilliant views at several sites including a few in Touran NP [*balchanica*].
- Asian Desert Warbler** ◇ *Sylvia nana* Several great looks around Touran NP.
- Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* A few. First seen southwest of Kelardasht [*icterops*].
- Menetries's Warbler** ◇ *Sylvia mystacea* Excellent views in Kharke NP The form *rubescens* with surprisingly white underparts!
- Oriental White-eye** *Zosterops palpebrosus* Three seen well on the boat trip in Azini Mangroves [nominate].
- Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* A few singing birds around Kelardasht [*hyrcanus*].
- Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* A couple briefly near Kelardasht and along the road to Mazichal near Kelardasht.
- Western Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer* Good views of a few, including one at a nest, near Kelardasht [nominate].
- Eastern Rock Nuthatch** ◇ *Sitta tephronota* See note.
- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* A pair and a male scoped near Kelardasht. The pair may have been at a nest.
- Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* One seen well in the forest near Kiasar, on the road to Damghan [*persica*].
- Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* First seen on the journey to Bam and a few around Bandar Abbas.
- Rosy Starling** *Pastor roseus* A scruffy (female?) seen in Touran NP.
- Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* Just a few, the first seen in the hills near to Dehbraki, west of Bam.
- Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* First seen in Kelardasht [*aterrimus*].
- Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* Seen by some of the group near to Kelardasht [nominate].
- Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* Flocks seen around Kelardasht, presumably forced down by the snow [*viscivorus*]!
- Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas galactotes* Excellent views south of Sirik, in Khuzestan and in Touran NP [*familiaris*].
- Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* A couple of migrants seen in Kharke NP.
- European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* Several seen around Kelardasht [*hyrcanus*].
- Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos* Heard at a few sites and one seen by Ali in Touran NP [*golzii*].
- White-throated Robin** ◇ *Irania gutturalis* Some fine males seen, especially along the Parvar Road.
- Semicollared Flycatcher** ◇ *Ficedula semitorquata* A few seen well, especially breeding birds along the road to Damghan.
- Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* Seen at several sites. Most impressive were the 100s in the Touran NP!!
- Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* Several seen around Kelardasht, some forced down by the snow [nominate].
- Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* See note.



A couple of shots of Isabelline Wheatear, the unassuming Red-tailed Wheatear and a fine Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (Pete Morris)



- Common Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* Excellent views of males along Parvar Road and a few more later.
- Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* At least three migrants seen in Kharke NP. A few more later in the trip.
- Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* See note.
- Pied Bush Chat** *Saxicola caprata* A few on the pre-tour extension and two males seen in the port at Tiab [*rossorum*].
- Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* Plenty seen, including migrants and breeding birds in the hills [*libanotica*].
- Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* Plenty seen well, especially along the Parvar Road.
- Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* A few, including smart males, seen in and around Touran NP [nominated].
- Black-eared Wheatear (Eastern B-e W)** *Oenanthe [hispanica] melanoleuca* See note.
- Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* Great views of smart birds on several occasions.
- Variable Wheatear** ◊ *Oenanthe picata* A fine male showed well in the low rocky hills near to Mayamey.
- Hume's Wheatear** ◊ *Oenanthe albonigra* Great views a few times, especially at Kuh-e Genu.
- Red-tailed Wheatear** ◊ (Persian W) *Oenanthe chrysopygia* A few seen well in the low rocky hills near Touran NP.
- White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* A few seen in the mountains southwest of Kelardasht [*caucasicus*].
- Purple Sunbird** *Cinnyris asiaticus* Very common around Minab and in the gardens south of Sirik [*brevirostris*].



A couple of fine and colourful birds... Common Rock Thrush and White-throated Robin (Pete Morris)

- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* Common and widespread. Forms seen were difficult to determine!.
- Dead Sea Sparrow** ◇ *Passer [moabiticus] moabiticus* A few males seen well in Kharke NP. Surprisingly drab!
- Dead Sea Sparrow (Afghan Scrub S)** *Passer [moabiticus] yatii* Great views west of Zabol. Distinctly yellow underparts!
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* First seen in Zabol [*transcaucasicus*].
- Pale Rockfinch** ◇ *Carospiza brachydactyla* Brilliant views at Kuh-e Genu. A few more seen near to Touran NP.
- Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia* Best were those near to the pass along the Parvar Road [*exigua*].
- Yellow-throated Sparrow** ◇ *Gymnoris xanthocollis* A few seen well in the south east [*transfuga*].
- White-winged Snowfinch** *Montifringilla nivalis* Several seen surprisingly low down southwest of Kelardasht [*alpicola*].
- Indian Silverbill** ◇ *Euodice malabarica* Good views of one at Kuh-e Genu, north of Bandar Abbas.
- Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris* Several scoped around Vanderbon, southwest of Kelardasht [*montana*].
- Radde's Accentor** ◇ *Prunella ocularis* An unusually low bird, presumably forced down by the snow and near Kelardasht.
- Dunnock** *Prunella modularis* Not uncommon around Kelardasht. Song and plumage perhaps a little different? [*obscura*].
- Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* A few near Mayamey with apparently grey/blue heads, but not seen well.
- Western Yellow Wagtail (Black-headed W)** *Motacilla [flava] feldegg* An male seen near Zabol and more near Mayamey.
- Citrine Wagtail (Himalayan W)** *Motacilla [citreola] calcarata* Best were the stunners along the Parvar Road.
- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* A few seen around Kelardasht [*cinerea*].
- White Wagtail** *Motacilla [alba] alba* See note.
- White Wagtail (Masked W)** *Motacilla [alba] personata* Excellent views of several, especially around Touran NP..



Long-billed Pipit and Masked Wagtail (Pete Morris)

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* A few seen, the first near to Kelardasht.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* Great views in the Makran Mountains and at Kuh-e Genu. Quite plain underparts! [*decapus*].

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* Singles in the Makran Mountains and at Mian Abb [nominate].

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* Four seen at the in Touran NP.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* Several seen well southwest of Kelardasht [*coutellii*].

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* First seen on the journey from Tehran to Kelardasht [*alexandrovi*].

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* (LO) One seen by Ali along the road to Damghan.

Asian Crimson-winged Finch ◊ *Rhodopechys sanguineus* A fine flock of c20 at the Kandovan pass.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* A couple seen coming to drink at the waterhole in Touran NP [*crassirostris*].

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* Great views of a fine male near Kelardasht. A few others seen/heard [*kubanensis*].

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* Seen near to Marzanabad and in Kelardasht [*bilkevitchi*].

Desert Finch ◊ *Rhodospiza obsoleta* First seen on the nest in Touran NP, and then several seen coming to drink there.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina* A few seen in the Makran Mountains. Also at the Kandovan Pass etc [*bella*].

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* First seen in Kelardasht.

European Goldfinch (Grey-capped/Eastern G) *Carduelis [carduelis] caniceps* See note.



Asian Crimson-winged Finch, the interesting Eastern Goldfinch and a classic field breakfast (Pete Morris)



Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus* A few seen well though often a bit skittish!.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* One seen by some of the group along the road to Damghan.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* A couple of singing birds near to Kelardasht [nominated].

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* See note.

Grey-necked Bunting ◊ *Emberiza buchanani* Great views of a few in the low rocky hills near to Touran NP [cerrutij].

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* A few seen on the drive from Sari to Foulad Mahelleh and along the Parvar Road.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata* A singing bird on the way to Bam and another at Kuh-e Genu.

Black-headed Bunting ◊ *Emberiza melanocephala* Good numbers south of Sirik, and a few others.

Red-headed Bunting ◊ *Emberiza bruniceps* Brilliant views of 6+ stunning males in roadside crops near Mayamey.



Grey-necked Bunting is a regional speciality; the similar Ortolan Bunting is somewhat widespread (Pete Morris)





The cute little Afghan Pika (Pete Morris)

MAMMALS

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis* One seen in Touran NP.

Afghan Pika (Rufescent P) *Ochotona rufescens* Several seen, especially well in Touran NP

Cheesman's Gerbil *Gerbillus cheesmani* The gerbil seen well at Kuh-e Genu.

Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes auropunctatus* Seen well around Gonari Village.

Golden Jackal (Common J) *Canis aureus* Just a couple seen, the first near to Kelardasht.

Asiatic Wild Ass (Asiatic Wild Ass) *Equus hemionus* A few seen in Touran NP, where they seemed pretty shy.

Bezoar (Persian Ibex) *Capra aegagrus* Some great looks in the mountains near to Kelardasht. Impressive creatures.



Sunrise near to Touran National Park (Pete Morris)

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

The most up to date referenced taxonomic list referred to in the Tour Report is that of the IOC World Bird Names. (Gill, F and Donsker, D Eds). 2019. IOC World Bird Names v9.1. Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

We most likely saw two forms. Two very 'Common Buzzard' like birds near to Marzanabad were assumed to be the form *menetriesi* whilst most of the more widespread and assumed migrant birds were likely to be 'Steppe' Buzzards *Buteo [buteo] vulpinus*.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

A subadult and a 2cy showing characters of this form, or *barabensis*, or intergrades on the boat trip at Khor Tiab mangroves and mudflats near to Minab. The forms *cachinnans* and *barabensis* seem very close if not inseparable in the areas where the two forms meet, though are currently treated as separate species (*barabensis* being part of Lesser Black-backed Gull) by the IOC. I suspect the taxonomy of these forms will continue to evolve!

Streaked Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*

We saw two forms of this smart little species which is now placed in its own family! First we encountered the form *striata* at Kuh-e Genu, north of Bandar Abbas, and later in the trip, we found the form *montana* to be common in Touran NP.



The fabulous Streaked Scrub Warbler (Pete Morris)

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

A few migrants seen in the Mian Abb area were not assigned to form. Around Kelardasht, we saw several singing birds which we assumed to be of the form *menzbieri*. They showed quite green fringes to the flight feathers, and quite white underparts.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

A calling migrant, presumably of the form *curruca* or *blythi* was seen in the Mian Abb area. In addition we saw a couple of birds west of Zabol and a couple at an oasis in Touran NP which appeared pale and quite like Desert Whitethroat in appearance. It seems that these birds were likely of the form *halimodendri*, though we did not hear their distinctive calls. It is a complicated situation. In summary, most, if not all, small pale Lesser Whitethroats in the Middle East, that were formerly identified as Desert (Lesser) Whitethroat, are likely of the form *halimodendri*, which is currently classified as a form of Lesser Whitethroat, though closely resembles Desert Whitethroat in Plumage.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*

I believe that we saw two forms of this large and impressive nuthatch. The form *obscura* was first heard near to the pass above Nosratabad, on the way to Bam. We then had excellent views of several in the Makran Mountains and then on the main tour, brilliant views of a family party at Kuh-e Genu, north of Bandar Abbas. At the end of the tour, we saw several around Touran NP. These were assumed to be the form *iranica*.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Most birds seen were the fabulous 'Ehrenberg's' Redstart, the eastern form with a large white wing patch. We also saw a number of males and females resembling nominate birds, and some of these may well have been just that, migrant nominate birds. However, the complicating factor is that 2cy *samamisticus* can closely resemble nominate birds, and can completely lack the white wing patch. One bird that I photographed and thought was a male nominate Common Redstart could actually be identified as a 2cy *samamisticus* by the pattern of the inner tertial when closely examined! So, as a result, I am not certain of the other nominate birds, though the migrants in places such as Kharke NP may well have been.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*

Several seen well around Kelardasht, some presumably forced down by the snow! The form here should be *variegatus*, though they were not too obvious at all! Females were fairly dark-rumped and there was no white obvious in the tails of the males! The collar was fairly broad and extended onto the sides of the breast, and the white rump was quite obvious.



A breeding Eurasian Wryneck near to Kelardasht, and another stunning Red-headed Bunting (Pete Morris)

Black-eared Wheatear (Eastern B-e W) *Oenanthe [hispanica] melanoleuca*

A singing male seen in the Makran Mountains near to Dehbraki, west of Bam. A couple seen near Largan along the Kolomeh Road, near to Kelardasht. Interestingly, we also saw two or three male birds showing mixed characters between this species and Pied Wheatear, which were presumably the result of hybridization between these two species. One of the hybrids seen on the drive from Sari to Foulad Mahelleh, almost resembled a Finsch's Wheatear.

White Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alba*

A few seen including fairly standard looking migrant birds at Bandar Abbas. A couple seen on the pre-tour extension in the Makran Mountains near to Dehbraki, west of Bam, looked as though they showed some influence from Masked Wagtail *M. [a]. personata*. Some references (including HBW) actually treat such birds as a separate form, *persica*.

European Goldfinch (Grey-capped/Eastern G) *Carduelis [carduelis] caniceps*

An excellent pair scoped by the wetland near the pass close to the Parvar Road junction. Very distinctive birds!! A few more seen on the last day in the same areas. The local form concerned is *paropanisii*.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

We saw two forms of this widespread and attractive bunting. We saw a couple of the form *par* in the Makran Mountains near to Dehbraki. Later in the trip, it was amazing to see 20+ of the form *prageri* in Kelardasht, presumably forced down by the snow, and more in the mountains there!



Another view of the lovely Black-headed Penduline Tit (Pete Morris)

APPENDIX 1

TOP 10 BIRDS OF THE TOUR

- 1st PLESKE'S GROUND JAY
- 2nd EGYPTIAN NIGHTJAR
- 3rd RED-HEADED BUNTING
- 4th Black-headed Penduline Tit
- 5th Macqueen's Bustard
- 6th Crowned Sandgrouse
- 7th Crab Plover
- 8th Caspian Tit
- 9th Caspian Snowcock
- 10th Black-bellied Sandgrouse

A total of 22 species received at least one vote!



Our stunning bird-of-the-trip!!! (Pete Morris)