



The gorgeous Blue-cheeked Bee-eater was commonly encountered on this tour (Alec Gillespie).

OMAN

20/23 OCTOBER-01/03 NOVEMBER 2018

LEADER: HANNU JÄNNES

This, Birdquest's twelfth tour of Oman & Bahrain, proved yet again a great success for so many reasons. We recorded a respectable total of 220 taxa and 49 Birdquest 'diamond' species (regional specialities), and saw great migrants and interesting seabirds. Oman's special owls have always been one of the highlights of this tour, and we were again very successful in finding, after much intensive searching, the Omani Owl, a species only a small number of people have seen, and we also recorded the newly described Desert Owl, Arabian Scops Owls, Little Owl, and 'Arabian' Spotted Eagle-Owl (a potential split from Spotted Eagle-Owl). The mix of Middle Eastern specialities and sought-after migrants encountered on the tour, included Arabian Partridge, Persian Shearwater, Jouanin's Petrel, Masked and Brown Booby, Verreaux's Eagle, Red-knobbed Coot, Caspian Plover, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Sooty Gull, Spotted, Lichtenstein's, Crowned and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Oriental Turtle and African Collared Doves, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Forbes-Watson's Swift, Sooty Falcon, Steppe Grey Shrike, Fan-tailed Raven, Greater Hoopoe Lark, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, White-spectacled Bulbul, Streaked Scrub Warbler, Arabian, Asian Desert and Ménéties's Warblers, Abyssinian White-eye, Tristram's Starling, Blackstart, Hume's, Red-tailed & Arabian Wheatears, Nile Valley, Palestine and Shining Sunbirds; Rüppell's Weaver, Indian Silverbill, Yemen Serin, Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak and Striolated Bunting. The Kingdom of Bahrain weighed in again with a wonderful pre-roost gathering of 144 Grey Hypocolius, plus Socotra Cormorant and Egyptian Nightjar. A good line-up well worth the small detour across the Gulf! This year's tour was based on a somewhat changed itinerary, which involved a lot less driving, but skipped the wader watching sites on the east coast of Oman and a few sites in the north of the country. Oman remains the safest country in the Middle East with stunning landscapes, a



Hume's Wheatear in Wadi 'Mac' & below, Red-tailed Wheatear (Alec Gillespie).

great road network, generally good food and accommodation throughout and a warm welcome for tourists. In Bahrain our wonderful host, Abdullah, made our stay a very special one as always.

Our tour began in the morning at Muscat airport, where the car rental procedure, normally a smooth, quick operation, took ages due to the fact that the 4WD we were supposed to have was erroneously given to someone else! After a bit of a wait however, and some extra paper work we were finally given a suitable vehicle, and were ready to move. After a quick check-in to our accommodation in Barka, we were ready for a short birding session in the farmland areas close to our hotel. It was already quite hot and humid, and the results were not exceptional, but we managed to see some commoner local birds, including lovely Indian Rollers, Short-toed Snake Eagle, many Red-wattled Lapwings, two brief Namaqua Doves, Green Bee-eaters, Crested Larks, Graceful Prinias, many Common Mynas, Isabelline and Desert Wheatears, Purple Sunbirds and Indian Silverbills.





Wadi "Mac", home of the legendary Omani Owl (Hannu Jannes) & below, Streaked Scrub Warbler (Alec Gillespie).

In addition, a fruiting tree next to our hotel's restaurant held White-eared, Red-vented and White-spectacled Bulbuls. We then took some time to rest as we had full birding program lined up for both the night and the following morning. Late in the evening we headed for Wadi 'Mac', home of the legendary Omani Owl. The wadi was pretty quiet during the night with only a calling Little Owl and a lone Black-crowned Night Heron breaking the silence except for one short growl heard from the Omani Owls favourite cliff! At dawn we enjoyed a picnic breakfast in the beautiful, remote wadi, and then it was time to enjoy visual birding after the long dark night. Birds seen included several Hume's Wheatears (what a great song it has), Streaked Scrub Warblers, Striolated Buntings, an adult male Red-tailed Shrike, Long-billed Pipits, Desert Larks, and a group





Birdwatching at Ras As Sawadi (Hannu Jännes).

of five Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, which we flushed from the bottom of the wadi. We also found a 'goat' on the rocky slopes, which was later identified as an Arabian Tahr.

After lunch and siesta, we paid an afternoon visit to the shore of Gulf of Oman at Ras as Sawadi, a low-lying promontory just west of Muscat, where our initial plan was to check the shorebirds of the area. As soon as we arrived in this rather busy tourist spot, an eager boatman came to offer us a lift to one of the offshore islands, where Sooty Falcons were breeding. After a short negotiation we boarded a boat and were soon on one of the small islets, where we spent the next hour or so admiring a pair of Sooty Falcons and their offspring. Other birds noted during the afternoon included Lesser and Greater Crested Terns, Striated Heron, several Western Reef Herons and a Whimbrel.

As Omani Owl is the main target of our three-day northern Oman extension, it was pretty obvious what we would be in our program for the night time! Up again around midnight, owling in the wadi "Mac", with little result, till dawn, and then, after a picnic breakfast, birding in the area till late morning. During the morning our target birds included Red-tailed Wheatear and Menetries Warbler, both of which we all saw very well, and the afternoon saw us back at Ras as Sawadi, this time concentrating on the shorebirds. Birds seen included two Parasitic Jaegers (Arctic Skuas), Eurasian Oystercatchers, Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers, Eurasian Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Dunlin and Little Stint, a good gathering of gulls and terns, including the only Sandwich Terns of the tour. Later we paid a visit to nearby *sabhka* (the occasionally flooded mud/sand area above the beach) where we tracked down a Steppe Grey Shrike as well as Isabelline and Desert Wheatears, a total of ca 40 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and a distant Greater Spotted Eagle.

Now it was our last evening in northern Oman, and we still needed to see the Omani Owl, so back to wadi "Mac", where we began by checking an old site for Pallid Scops Owl, and then parked under the cliffs where we had heard the grunts of the Omani Owl on the previous two nights. After a patient wait we began to hear its distinctive hooting, and soon located the bird on a rather distant slope. Luckily the bird sat there for a long time and we all had prolonged scope views of this MEGA! What a relief it was to be able to locate once again travelling with Birdquest! Once again persistence and hard work had paid off!



Adult Sooty Falcon at Ras As Sawadi & below, Green Bee-eater was a common sight in the north of Oman (Alec Gillespie).

The next morning we took a flight from Muscat to Salalah in southern Oman, but by afternoon we were in birding mode visiting a small wetland close to our hotel. One of the first birds we saw was a flavistic Common Sandpiper, a really weird looking creature! Other wetland birds here included Garganey, Glossy Ibis, Red-knobbed Coot, Common Ringed, Little Ringed, Kentish, Lesser Sand and Greater Sand Plovers, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Temminck's Stint, many Common Snipe, Gull-billed, Caspian and Whiskered Terns, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Clamorous Reed Warblers, a single Eurasian Reed Warbler, our first Pied Wheatear and a Citrine Wagtail.



Cinnamon-breasted Bunting is a common bird in the Salalah area (Alec Gillespie).

The following morning found us in a wadi with a spring (ayn) where a patient wait was rewarded with a pair of magnificent Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeaks, one of the key species in southern Oman. During our morning session at this bird filled site and another location nearby, we also encountered many Arabian Partridges (what a splendid looking bird this is), African Paradise Flycatcher, Jacobin Cuckoo, many Cinnamon-breasted Buntings, African Silverbills, Abyssinian White-eyes, Blackstarts, Palestine and Shining Sunbirds, Rüppell's Weavers, Grey-headed Kingfishers, a few Fan-tailed Ravens and many Tristram's Starlings. Migratory birds and winter visitors included Booted, Bonelli's and Short-toed Snake Eagles, Eurasian Nightjars, Blue and Common Rock Thrush, two Common Nightingales, Common Redstart, Willow Warbler, and numerous Spotted Flycatchers. Barbara and 'Whiskers' Mike heroically rescued an Arabian Chameleon from a water filled canal, and we all had a good look at this odd-looking reptile.





African Paradise Flycatcher and Grey-headed Kingfisher at Ayn Hamran (Alec Gillespie).

In the afternoon we headed for the Al Mughsail area for some seawatching and also to check how the khwar, formerly a good birding area, was doing after a typhoon had hit this part of the Arabian sea earlier this year. Our short seabirding session was productive as we found, in addition to the expected Brown Booby, a Brown Noddy flying back and forth along the coast. It came as quite a shock to see that the storm had completely wiped out the coastal highway here and the khwar and its freshwater pools had completely disappeared. We also checked that the route to the traditional Desert Owl site still existed, and found our first Arabian Wheatear of the trip at the end of the dirt track. Back at Al Mughsail at sunset Steve found us our first Broad-billed Sandpiper and we also saw a Barbary Falcon there. During the day we had also visited a site where a total of nine Spotted Thick-knees were enjoying a mid-day snooze.



Jacobin Cuckoo (Alec Gillespie).



Shining Sunbird and Palestine Sunbird (Alec Gillespie).

Next morning found us at the harbour of Mirbat, where we boarded our small boat for a pelagic excursion. During the morning our captain Hateem took us several kilometres offshore from Mirbat, stopping at regular intervals to chum. At this time of year this did not produce the feeding frenzy people can experience elsewhere, but nonetheless we did see several Jouanin's Petrels, a handful of Persian Shearwaters, quite a few Masked Boobies, Bridled Terns and a single Flesh-footed Shearwater, which was a nice surprise. After the trip we enjoyed a relaxed lunch in a local restaurant near the harbour. In the afternoon we headed for the mountains east of Salalah visiting Jabal Samhan, a wonderful site on an escarpment. Here we had our first contact with our main target bird, Verreaux's Eagle, even before we had exited our vehicles, and later we had several sightings of two soaring birds. We also noted Arabian Wheatears and Long-legged Buzzard here and had close-up views of several Tristram's Starlings. On the way back we stopped to look at Desert Roses, some of which still bore a few pink flowers. The last stop of the afternoon was at Tawi Atayr, the site of an immense limestone sinkhole at which Yemen Serin was found in 1997, more than 1000km from the nearest population in Yemen. The non-descript serins behaved extremely well for us this time.



Pelagic off Mirbat (Hannu Jännes) & Flesh-footed Shearwater, Jouanin's Petrel & Persian Shearwater (Alec Gillespie).



Bruce's Green Pigeon (Alec Gillespie).

seed-eater. In addition we found a brilliant pair of Bruce's Green Pigeon, a new bird for us, and more Arabian Partridges. After dinner there was another, highly successful, owling session, with excellent views obtained of an Arabian Scops Owl (four others were heard) and a stunning pair of 'Arabian' Spotted Eagle-Owls. Why can't all owling be so easy? In addition some of us had brief views of a Gray Wolf.



Yemen Serin at Tawi Atayr (Alec Gillespie).



Verreaux's Eagle, Arabian Wheatear and Black-crowned Tchagra and next page, Arabian Spotted Eagle Owl (Alec Gillespie).

We still needed a few more of the special birds of the Salalah area, so we headed for Ayn Hamran for the morning and easily found both the Arabian Warbler and Black-crowned Tchagra, which both provided us with great views. Then we visited Khwar Rawri, which used to be a superb brackish water pool, but we were disappointed to find it transformed into an ordinary saltwater lagoon by the typhoon. The small numbers of birds we saw included Broad-billed, Curlew and Terek Sandpipers together with commoner waders, but little else. On the way back to our hotel we had a short stop at Khwar Tagt, a reed fringed waterbody, where we added Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail and Black-winged Stilt to our trip list. Back at the hotel it was time to pack our gear and check-out, before paying a visit to a rather posh hotel nearby to raid their sumptuous lunch buffet! In the afternoon we left the lush coastal strip of the Dhofar region behind and headed nearly 300 kms north to Qitbit, a small oasis with service station, restaurant and decent motel in the middle of a hostile desert, which would be our base for the next two nights. Interestingly there had been quite a lot of rain recently and large areas of the desert were green with thriving small bushes and even grass, an incredible sight.

Next morning we began birding in the small "garden" of the Qitbit hotel, but apart from quite a few Spotted Flycatchers (perhaps the most commonly observed migrant on this year's tour), and two Red-backed Shrikes, there was little else to see. Later we searched an interesting looking area where Dunn's Lark had been seen several years previously, but found instead several territorial Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks plus a nest with one or two chicks. The chicks must have been feeling pretty hot as the temperature was +37 in celsius and the nest was beneath the scorching sun with no shade. Other birds noted during the desert walk included Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and Desert, Isabelline and Pied Wheatears. After more birding around Qitbit, lunch and a rest, we decided to head for the Muntasar Oasis for late afternoon birding. This was a good move as the oasis was clearly the birdiest place we had visited during the whole day. Best birds here were a number of European Turtle Doves, a juvenile Oriental Turtle Dove, a flock of 10 Eurasian Teals, several Pallid and one Marsh Harrier, five Common Snipe, a flock of 32 Spotted Sandgrouse in flight and a juvenile Citrine Wagtail.

Next morning it was back to Muntasar oasis hoping to see sandgrouse action, and were not disappointed. First two Crowned Sandgrouse landed near the waterhole, and a while later they were joined, after much hesitation, by a flock of 30 Spotted Sandgrouse. These handsome birds were present for quite some time enabling us all to have great views. Later we headed further southwest and visited a few isolated farms. Again the bird activity around the green pivot fields we checked was rather disappointing, but we still





Two Crowned and one Spotted Sandgrouse at Muntasar Oasis, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and below, Rosy Starling (Alec Gillespie).



Blackstart was a common sight at Mudday and below, Sand Partridge (Alec Gillespie).

managed to locate a flock of 22 Rosy Starlings, a good bird in Oman, and photogenic Southern Grey Shrike. In the evening we drove to the truck-stop town of Thumrayt, gateway to Oman's oil and gas fields, for a two nights stay. Heading out in the dark from our hotel in Thumrayt the next morning, we sped west along a new sealed road to Mudday (or 'Mudhai' on road signs). This newly discovered birding site is basically a small village with an oasis and several palm groves but now easily accessible thanks to the new road. As well as being a wintering site for Grey Hypocolius, it is also a very easy place to see both Nile Valley Sunbird and African Collared Dove, both of which have established a breeding foothold in southern Oman. We located the noisy sunbird quickly and the dove was in its regular stake-out just outside the village, but there was no sign of the Grey Hypocolius, and I suspect that they hadn't as yet arrived at this winter site. We also worked quite hard for Sand Partridge and eventually had good views of a single bird sitting on the top of a mountain. On the way back to Thumrayt a roadside stop yielded a gorgeous adult male Isabelline Shrike, the only adult male we saw on this trip. It is always good to see some adult birds of the Isabelline/Red-tailed Shrike complex as the much commoner first-autumn birds are pretty tricky to separate. In the afternoon we headed





Greater Hoopoe-Lark, the symbol of desert birding in Oman (Alec Gillespie).

for the Wadi Rabkut, a scenic area with tall trees and low bushes. The strong wind made birding difficult, but we still managed to find our first Asian Desert Warbler, and adult and juvenile Steppe Grey Shrikes, both of which showed very well.

Next day saw us at Shisr, a small village in the middle of the central desert, where cultivation of grass on a large scale has created a premier staging point for migrants. This was my first visit to this interesting area, which has been pretty much off-limits for a long time due to the very poor road conditions, but with the construction of a new road the access is now easy. Our morning session here produced Purple Heron, new bird for our list, four Eastern Imperial Eagles, Wood Sandpipers and Ruffs, flocks of Spotted Sandgrouse flying around, Common Rock Thrush, many Desert and Isabelline Wheatears, Western Yellow Wagtails including the forms *feldegg* and *thunbergi*, two Richards Pipits, many Tawny Pipits and an Ortolan Bunting. I was becoming a little bit worried as we still hadn't seen Greater Hoopoe-Lark, the symbol of the desert birding in Oman, and we spent time searching this species, hearing one singing bird in the process, but





Hume's Owl was behaving well this year and below one of hundreds of Abdim's Storks at Raysut (Alec Gillespie).

could not locate it. However, on our way back to Thumrayt we connected with a roadside individual, which showed well and even performed his fabulous song flight for us. During the lark show one vehicle got a puncture, but this was fixed quickly thanks to some very efficient team work. A little further along the main road, two more Hoopoe Larks, apparently rivaling males, gave us a terrific roadside show.

After lunch in Thumrayt we headed back to the coast and our hotel stopping en route at a couple of birding sites including a farm, where we added Singing Bush Lark for our birdlist. After dinner we headed out again, this time to try and find the magnificent Desert Owl. For the first one and half hours the traditional Desert Owl wadi was very quiet and there wasn't a sniff of the owl, but just minutes before my predetermined departure time, the owl started to call, first from a distance before coming closer, and eventually showing very well for us. What a magnificent and most co-operative owl this is!

Thanks to the rapid success of our owling excursion we were back in our hotel before two in the morning and managed to catch some sleep before a relaxed seated breakfast, our first of the trip! After breakfast we headed for Raysut Water Treatment Plant, where nose-pegs would have been useful, but by way of compensation the settling pools here were very birdy as always. We added several species to the trip list including: Little Grebe, Ferruginous Duck, Abdim's Storks (450 in total), Black Kite, Pheasant-tailed



Jacana, Spur-winged Lapwing and, perhaps best of all, a total of five Little Crakes, which were performing nicely at the back of one of the pools. Next on the agenda was a visit to Raysut tip, where we watched and photographed many Steppe Eagles (several hundreds in total) and a few Eastern Imperial Eagles. The seaside part of the khwar at Raysut looked very interesting, and we spent the rest of the morning checking this birdy area, where we added Eurasian Wigeon, African Sacred Ibis, Pied Avocet, White-winged Tern, and Marsh Sandpiper to the birdlist.



Eastern Imperial and Steppe Eagle at Raysut Dump and below, Caspian Plover (Alec Gillespie).

In the afternoon we checked Wadi Darbat without finding anything new but had rather decent views of many Forbes-Watson's Swifts. This local speciality is really tricky to identify on plumage characters alone, but luckily these birds were giving their typical call, which readily separates them from Pallid and Common Swifts. We then visited the Ayn Tobrug area, where we remained at a small pool till dusk to see a lone Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse to fly in and have few sips of water. On our last morning in Salalah we paid a short visit to East Khwar, where the birdlife was pretty much the same as on our previous visits except for a welcome Caspian Plover loafing on the beach with other plovers! After breakfast, packing and check-out we flew back to Muscat, where the main tour ended, and we said goodbye to Dominique, Mike, Barbara and Geoff. The rest of us took a flight to Bahrain with thoughts of the grand finale to our tour. Bahrain might not be the most attractive birding destination in terms of landscape, but it has never yet let us down in producing the number one most sought after bird of the tour, Grey Hypocolius. Arriving in Bahrain late in the afternoon we were met by Eva, who was to join us for the short extension. From the airport we continued directly to





One of the Egyptian Nightjars we saw in Bahrain and below, Asian Desert Warbler (Alec Gillespie).

Jasra, where we were supposed to meet Abdullah, our wonderful Bahraini host, who was our key to enter the farm where Egyptian Nightjar is easy to see. Unfortunately the drive to the meeting point took much longer than we had anticipated, and Abdullah had already left by the time we got there. Luckily for us he agreed to come back and took us to the farm, where we had brilliant views, with good photo opportunities, of several Egyptian Nightjars. It was also great to hear Abdullah, a very keen bird ringer, relating stories of Bahraini birds and see video clips of the Egyptian Nightjars, both adults and chicks, at the nest.

We spent the next morning in Jebel, in the middle of the island, which is supposed to be good area for rarer wheatears, but unfortunately we could only find a single Red-tailed Wheatear amongst the more common Desert and Isabelline Wheatears. Perhaps it was still too early in the season for the wintering Iranian (or Persian Mourning) and White-crowned Wheatears? Another rocky area nearby produced our only European Stonechat and only the second Asian Desert Warbler of the trip. We also paid a visit to the nearby Bahrain racecourse, where the artificial lake in the centre of the track held small numbers of duck including Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, and Eurasian Teal, various egrets, a single Spur-winged Plover and several Common Snipe. The irrigated track itself was visited by many Water Pipits and at least two Red-throated Pipits. Later we headed for a seated lunch and then spent the afternoon in the Hypocolius pre-roost





We counted 144 Grey Hypocolius in Bahrain (Alec Gillespie).

area, which consists of patches of acacia scrub, where the birds congregate before making their way down inside the bushes, we think to dust bathe, before flying off to their roost presumably in the palms of VIP gardens. The first birds flew in from height and then more arrived in small groups. As usual, there was no large build up, just lots of comings and goings. The birds tower from the scrub as they leave and head off with purpose towards their roosting area, sometimes swinging from side to side as they gained height, presumably to avoid potential predators. They really are unique superb-looking birds, so reminiscent of waxwings in their appearance and behaviour. We counted 144 of these excellent birds during the afternoon.

Next morning, after saying goodbye to Julian and Eva, the rest of us headed for the sea shore at Busaiteen, where we quickly located Socotra Cormorant, our main target here, and we spent rest of the morning looking at, and photographing, waders, cormorants, gulls and anything else of interest. One of the better species encountered was a Baltic Gull amongst other large gulls and we also had great views of very close to Socotra Cormorants. After lunch it was time for the rest of us to head back to the airport and start our homeward journeys.

BIRD OF THE TRIP (pre-tour extension & main tour)

1. Greater Hoopoe-Lark
2. Desert Owl
3. Verreaux's Eagle
4. Spotted Sandgrouse
5. Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak

BIRD OF THE TRIP (Bahrain extension)

1. Egyptian Nightjar
2. Grey Hypocolius
3. Namaqua Dove & Blue-cheeked Bee-eater



Camel photography in Wadi Darbat (Julian Sproule).

BIRDS

Total of bird species recorded: 215

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

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

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

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

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).

Garganey *Spatula querquedula* Small numbers noted in Salalah and in Bahrain.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* Small numbers were noted in Oman and Bahrain.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope* Two in Salalah.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Noted on two days in Oman and in Bahrain.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Handful of sightings.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* One in Salalah.

Arabian Partridge ◊ *Alectoris melanocephala* Great views on two days in the Dhofar Mountains.

Sand Partridge ◊ *Ammoperdix heyi* Great views of one at Mudday.

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* Several encounters, the first in Muscat. Also seen in Bahrain.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (NL) A singleton in Bahrain.

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes* One on our pelagic off Mirbat in Dhofar.

Persian Shearwater ♦ *Puffinus persicus* Four on our pelagic off Mirbat in Dhofar.



Socotra Cormorant in Bahrain (Alec Gillespie).

Jouanin's Petrel ♦ *Bulweria fallax* Twenty or so on our Mirbat pelagic.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Only noted at the sewage farm in Salalah and at Bahrain Racecourse.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* Noted on seven days with a maximum of 65 at Raysut in Salalah.

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii* Ca.450 at the sewage farm in Salalah.

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* One at Raysut in Salalah was a good find.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* A maximum of 60 at East Khawr.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Singletons seen on three days.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata* One at Ras as Sawadi and another in Mirbat harbour.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* A few were noted in Salalah.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* One in Salalah.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Recorded on five days with a maximum of 100 at East Khwar in Salalah.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Noted almost daily.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* One in Shishr.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* A small scatter of sightings.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* A small scatter of sightings.

Western Reef Heron (W R Egret) *Egretta gularis* Abundant on all coasts visited.

Masked Booby ♦ *Sula dactylatra* Fairly common at sea off Salalah.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* Two off Al Mughsayl.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Noted all coastal areas including Bahrain.

Socotra Cormorant ♦ *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* One off Mirbat, and 50 or so on both days in Bahrain.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* A total of 15 was a high count for this tour.

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* A total of five were seen.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* A total of five, the first at Ras As Sawadi in Muscat.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* A total of five were noted.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* Maximum count in Dhofar around 300 at Raysut.



Spotted Thick-knee (Alec Gillespie).

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* Four at Shisr and another four at Raysut in Salalah.

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* A total of three, with good views, in the Dhofar Mountains.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata* A total of five in Dhofar.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* A total of three noted.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* A scatter of sightings.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* A total of ten.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* One in Raysut in Salalah.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* Only two were seen.

Little Crane *Porzana parva* Five with very good 'scope views at the sewage farm in Salalah.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Seen on three days in Salalah.

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata* Two different individuals in the Salalah area.

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis* A total of ten in Salalah.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* Small numbers on all coasts visited in Oman.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Small numbers both in Oman and Bahrain.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Four at Raysut in Salalah.

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* Two at Raysut in Salalah and one in Bahrain.

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* Common around Barka in Muscat.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola* Small numbers both in Oman and Bahrain.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* Ten at Al Qurm.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Only two sightings including a flock of 15 in Salalah.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Common and widespread on all coasts.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* Rather common on all coastal areas. Ssp *pamirensis*.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultia* Small numbers noted. Ssp *columbinus*.

Caspian Plover ♦ *Charadrius asiaticus* One near our hotel on our last morning in Salalah.

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* One at the sewage farm in Salalah.



Greater Sand Plover (Alec Gillespie).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* One at Ras as Sawadi in Muscat.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* A total of 16 noted. Ssp *orientalis*.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* One at Ras as Sawadi in Muscat.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* Ca20 in Dhofar.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* One in Mirbat and three in Bahrain.

Ruff *Calidris pugnax* Thirty or so in Shisr and a small flock at East Khawr in Salalah.

Broad-billed Sandpiper ♦ *Calidris falcinellus* A total of six in Salalah.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* Two at Khwar Rawri and six in Bahrain.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* Small numbers in Dhofar and one in Bahrain.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* One at Ras As Sawadi and up to 10 near our hotel in Salalah.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Small numbers in all coastal areas including Bahrain.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Small numbers in all coastal areas including Bahrain.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Scattered records of small numbers.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* Three in Dhofar.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* A scatter of sightings including one flavistic bird in Salalah.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* A handful of birds were seen.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Fairly common in Salalah, and also noted in Bahrain.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (NL) One for Geoff at Raysut in Salalah.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Only seen on three days.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Small numbers noted on nine days.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* One at Al Mughisail was a nice surprise.

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei* Common in all coastal areas.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* Only small numbers in Oman, but common in Bahrain.

Sooty Gull ♦ *Ichthyaelus hemprichii* Common in coastal areas of Oman.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* Noted in all coastal areas.

Lesser Black-backed Gull ♦ *Larus [fuscus] fuscus* One in Bahrain showed characters of this form.



Eurasian Collared Dove was noted daily on this tour (Alec Gillespie).

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Heuglin's G) *Larus [fuscus] heuglini* Noted in fair numbers in all coastal areas.

Lesser Black-backed Gull ♦ (Steppe Gull) *Larus [fuscus] barabensis* Seen in coastal areas in Oman.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Scattered records of small numbers.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Noted in small numbers in the Salalah area and in Bahrain.

Greater Crested Tern (Swift T) *Thalasseus bergii* Common in coastal areas.

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* Small numbers in all coastal areas.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* Two at Ras As Sawadi was the only record.

Saunders's Tern ♦ *Sternula saundersi* A few were seen in Salalah and another five in Bahrain.

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* Ca 10 off Mirbat in Dhofar.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Small numbers in Dhofar.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* Small numbers in Dhofar.

White-winged Tern (W-w Black T) *Chlidonias leucopterus* One in Dhofar.

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus* Two at Ras as Sawadi.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* 40 at Ras as Sawadi and 10 at Mudday.

Spotted Sandgrouse ♦ *Pterocles senegallus* Around 30 at Muntasar on two days and ca100 at Shisr.

Crowned Sandgrouse ♦ *Pterocles coronatus* Two males at Muntasar Oasis provided us with great views.

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse ♦ *Pterocles lichtensteinii* Five in a wadi near Barka, and one in Salalah.

Rock Dove *Columba livia* Common throughout the tour.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* Up to 15 at Muntasar Oasis.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* One juvenile with European Turtle Doves at Muntasar. Ssp *meena*.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Common throughout the tour.
 African Collared Dove ♦ *Streptopelia roseogrisea* Six, with great views, at Mudday.
 Laughing Dove (Palm D) *Spilopelia senegalensis* Common throughout the tour.
 Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* Two sightings in Oman and one in Bahrain.
 Bruce's Green Pigeon ♦ *Treron waalia* A photogenic pair at Tawi Atayr.
 Jacobin Cuckoo (Pied C) *Clamator jacobinus* One at Ayn Khees was a pleasant surprise.



This Arabian Scops Owl gave us brilliant views (Alec Gillespie).

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* A total of five in the Salalah region.
 Arabian Scops Owl ♦ *Otus pamela* One spotlighted and another eight heard in Dhofar.
 (Arabian) Spotted Eagle-Owl ♦ *Bubo [africanus] milesi* Excellent views of a pair in Dhofar.
 Omani Owl ♦ *Strix omanensis* It took quite a bit of searching, but in the end we saw one in the Al Hajar Mountains.
 Desert Owl ♦ *Strix hadorami* Great views of one in Dhofar.
 Little Owl *Athene noctua* Several birds with some great views in the Al Hajar mountains. Ssp *saharae*.
 European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* Four in the Salalah area. Ssp *unwini*.
 Egyptian Nightjar ♦ *Caprimulgus aegyptius* 20 with some good views at a farm in Bahrain.
 Forbes Watson's Swift ♦ *Apus berliosi* Rather common in the Dhofar area.
 Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* Common in northern Oman.
 European Roller *Coracias garrulus* Remarkably common in the south of Oman with up to 150 a day.
 Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala* Nine sightings in the Salalah area.
 Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Only one was noted, in Salalah.
 Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* Common in northern Oman, and two near Thumrayt.
 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* Rather common in the central desert and in Dhofar.
 Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Scattered records.
 Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Small numbers on five days.



Red-tailed Shrike and Isabelline Shrike (Alec Gillespie).

- Sooty Falcon** ♦ *Falco concolor* 20 in total, with some great views, on islands off Ras As Sawadi.
- Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* One at Muntasar oasis.
- Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* One at the Al Baleed farm in the central desert.
- Barbary Falcon** ♦ *Falco pelegrinoides* One at Al Mughsail.
- Rose-ringed Parakeet (Ring-necked P)** *Psittacula krameri* Small numbers throughout including Bahrain.
- Black-crowned Tchagra** *Tchagra senegalus* Two at Ayn Hamran in Dhofar.
- Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* A total of three in the central desert.
- Isabelline Shrike (Daurian Shrike)** *Lanius isabellinus* Noted in Oman.
- Red-tailed Shrike (Turkestan S, Rufous-t S)** *Lanius phoenicuroides* Rather common this year.
- Great Grey Shrike (Southern G S)** *Lanius meridionalis* A few scattered records including one in Bahrain.
- Steppe Grey Shrike** ♦ *Lanius pallidirostris* A total of three after the first at Ras as Sawadi.
- Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* One at Mudday was a surprise.
- African Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone viridis* 10 noted in Dhofar after the first at Ayn Hamran.
- House Crow** *Corvus splendens* Common almost everywhere.
- Brown-necked Raven** *Corvus ruficollis* Small numbers in the central desert.
- Fan-tailed Raven** ♦ *Corvus rhipidurus* Up to 30 a day in the Dhofar Mountains.
- Grey Hypocolius** ♦ *Hypocolius ampelinus* 144 at a pre-roost gathering in Bahrain.
- Greater Hoopoe-Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes* A total of five in the central desert.
- Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti* Small numbers in the north (*taimuri*).
- Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** ♦ *Eremopterix nigriceps* Noted on four days. We also found a nest with chick(s).
- Singing Bush Lark** *Mirafra cantillans* Common at a farm in Salalah.
- Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* Common and widespread in Oman and Bahrain.
- Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* One at Muntasat and 50 or so at Shisr.
- White-eared Bulbul (introduced?)** *Pycnonotus leucotis* Noted in northern Oman, and in Bahrain.
- Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer* Seen in northern Oman and in Bahrain.
- White-spectacled Bulbul** ♦ (Yellow-vented B) *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* Common in Oman.
- Sand Martin (Bank Swallow)** *Riparia riparia* Small numbers on four days in Oman.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Noted throughout the tour.

Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta* A scatter of sightings in Oman.

Streaked Scrub Warbler ♦ *Scotocerca inquieta* A total of ten in the Al Hajar Mountains.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* One at Ayn Hamran.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Only a handful of birds recorded.

Clamorous Reed Warbler (Indian R W) *Acrocephalus [stentoreus] brunescens* A total of seven.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (NL) One for Geoff at East Khawr.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* One in the north and another one for Geoff only in Salalah.

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis* Small numbers throughout the tour.



Arabian Warbler at Ayn Hamran (Alec Gillespie).

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* A total of four in the oasis of the central desert.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* Common in Al Hajar Mountains (*halimodendri*) and in the south (*blythi/curruca*).

Arabian Warbler ♦ *Sylvia leucomelaena* Great views of three at Ayn Hamran for everyone.

Asian Desert Warbler ♦ *Sylvia nana* Only two this time, one near Thumrayt and another one in Bahrain.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* Ten or so. Ssp *icterops*.

Ménétries's Warbler ♦ *Sylvia mystacea* A handful of birds with some great views.

Abyssinian White-eye (White-breasted W-e) *Zosterops abyssinicus* Common in Dhofar.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* Abundant and now even common in Salalah.

Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* A flock of 22 at a farm in the central desert.

Tristram's Starling ♦ (T Grackle) *Onychognathus tristramii* Common in Dhofar.

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin ♦ (R Bush R) *Cercotrichas galactotes* Two at Qitbit.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* Common, up to 25 were noted nearly every day in Oman.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* Only two.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Three birds in the Salalah area.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* A handful of birds were noted. Ssp *semirufus*.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* Three birds seen.

Common Rock Thrush (Rufous-tailed R T) *Monticola saxatilis* A total of three sightings.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* Two individuals were noted.
European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* One in Bahrain.
Siberian Stonechat ♦ *Saxicola maurus* One at Qitbit.
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* Common and widespread.
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* A common feature of the tour.
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* Nine in total in Oman and three in Bahrain.
Blackstart ♦ *Oenanthe melanura* Rather common in the south of Oman.
Hume's Wheatear ♦ *Oenanthe albonigra* 16 logged in northern Oman.
Red-tailed Wheatear ♦ (Persian W, Rufous-t W) *Oenanthe chrysopygia* Three in Oman plus one in Bahrain.
Arabian Wheatear ♦ (South A W) *Oenanthe lugentoides* Seven noted in Dhofar.
Nile Valley Sunbird ♦ *Hedydipna metallica* Handful of birds at Mudday.
Palestine Sunbird ♦ *Cinnyris osea* Four in Dhofar.
Shining Sunbird ♦ *Cinnyris habessinicus* Ten or so at Ayn Hamran. Stunning bird!
Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* Common in northern Oman.
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Very common. Ssp *hufhufae*.
Rüppell's Weaver ♦ *Ploceus galbula* Good numbers in Dhofar.
African Silverbill *Euodice cantans* Common in Dhofar.
Indian Silverbill ♦ *Euodice malabarica* Small numbers in the north.
Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* A number of unidentified Yellow Wagtails were seen.
Western Yellow Wagtail ♦ (Syke's W) *Motacilla [flava] beema* One in the Dhofar area.
Western Yellow Wagtail ♦ (Black-headed W) *Motacilla [flava] feldegg* Five at Shisr.
Western Yellow Wagtail ♦ (Grey-headed W) *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi* Five at Shisr and one in Dhofar.
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* A total of 11 logged this year.
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* A total of three logged.
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* Rather common in suitable habitat in Oman and Bahrain.
White Wagtail ♦ (Masked W) *Motacilla [alba] personata* One at Qitbit.



Isabelline Wheatear (Alec Gillespie).



Nile Valley Sunbird at Mudday (Alec Gillespie).

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* Two at Shisr.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* Quite scarce this year, seen on four days only.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* Five in the Al Hajar mountains and one at Ayn Khees.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* A total of four on migration.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* Only two were seen.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* 50 logged in Bahrain. Ssp *coutelli*.

Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak ♦ *Rhynchostruthus percivali* Two in the Dhofar Mountains.

Yemen Serin ♦ *Crithagra menachensis* Seven at the sinkhole at Tawi Atayr.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* One at Qitbit and another one at Shisr.

Striolated Bunting ♦ (Striated B) *Emberiza striolata* A total of 15 in the Al Hajar Mountains.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (African Rock B) *Emberiza tahapisi* Very common in the Dhofar Mountains.

MAMMALS

Total of Mammal species recorded: 6

Northern Palm Squirrel (Five-striped P S) *Funambulus pennanti* One in Barka. Introduced.

[Wild Cat *Felix silvestris* Possibly one in the Al Hajar mountains but separation from domestic cat difficult.]

Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* (NL) One in Bahrain by Alec.

Gray Wolf *Canis lupus* One in Wadi Darbat during our nocturnal visit.

Rüppel's Fox *Vulpes rueppellii* Two sightings.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* A total of seven in the central desert.

Dolphin species Two sightings of two unidentified dolphins in the Salalah area.

Arabian Tahr *Arabitragus jayakari* One was seen in Al Hajar mountains.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Sinai Agama *Pseudotrapelus sinaitus* One in Al Hajar mountains.

Oriental Crested Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor* A few in Salalah.

Carter's Rock Semaphore Gecko *Pristurus carteri*

Arabian Chameleon *Chamaeleo arabicus* One at Ayn Hamran in Salalah.

Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* A few were sighted on our pelagic off Mirbat.



Arabian Chameleon at Ayn Hamran (Barbara Cross).