

AROUND THE REGION

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Records in *Around the Region* are published for interest only; their inclusion does not imply acceptance by the records committee of the relevant country. All records refer to 2008 unless stated otherwise.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 31 (2) should be sent by 15 June to atr@osme.org

ARMENIA

Breeding bird surveys in 2008 in extreme NW Armenia, near the border with Turkey and Georgia (lake Arpilich and adjacent areas, Shirak province), produced 43 new species recorded for the area. Of these, 27 were proven to breed there, including **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*, **Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata*, **Corncrake** *Crex crex*, **Eurasian Eagle Owl** *Bubo bubo* and **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria*. Significant breeding range extension for the country also noted here for **Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus*, **Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* and **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*. Territorial songs were recorded for **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* and **Common Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*. Good numbers of **Greylag Geese** *Anser anser* were observed at lake Arpilich, with a maximum of 38 (including juveniles) recorded. **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* was observed on several occasions in a rocky gorge, which is one of the two known breeding sites in the country. Arpilich is the only known breeding site in the country for **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*. Variable numbers (max 35) were recorded throughout the breeding season, but they did not breed in 2008 due to high levels of disturbance. Just two pairs of **Common Cranes** *Grus grus* bred in the area and both successfully raised young.

BAHRAIN

Four **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra* on 31 Oct at the Diplomatic wadi were the first record for Bahrain. On 14 Jul, a **Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* was recorded at Durrat Al Bahrain in southern Bahrain. A **Houbara Bustard** *Chlamydotis undulata* was at the Hamalah experimental farm on 13 Dec. A single **Crab**

Plover *Dromas ardeola* at Maharraq on 13 Aug was the first for several years. The 2nd record of **Indian Roller** *Coracias benghalensis* for Bahrain was at Badaan farm 5 Oct–15 Nov; the first record was in Aug 1996 at Dair. The 3rd record of **Green Bee-eater** *Merops orientalis* was at Badaan farm on 29 Nov; the first since several were recorded on the Hawar islands in 2000. Three **Dark-throated Thrushes** *Turdus atrogularis* were found on 20 Dec at Duraiz and the 7th record of **Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* was a female that was trapped and ringed at Badaan farm on 29 Nov. A **House Bunting** *Emberiza striolata* at Badaan farm on 12 Sep was the first record for Bahrain.

CYPRUS

Two **White-headed Ducks** *Oxyura leucocephala* were at Larnaca sewage works from 13 Dec and there was one at Haspolat water treatment plant on the same date (7th & 8th records since 1995). A juvenile **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* was at Akrotiri gravel pits on 19 Sep; this species is recorded less than annually. A juvenile **Levant Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter brevipes* was at Akrotiri salt lake on 14 Sep and a juvenile was seen at Zakaki on 5 Oct; these are the 11th & 12th records since 1996. An **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* was recorded at Akrotiri environmental centre on 3 Oct and another was near Droushia on 10 Oct and will be the 3rd & 4th records since 1996 if accepted. The 6th record of **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* was at Paphos headland from 27 Aug–21 Oct. A juvenile **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* at Larnaca sewage works on 27 Sep was the 12th record in 10 years. A **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* flew east along the coast off Polis on 18 Sep and is also the 12th record in 10 years. The 2nd **Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia*

senegalensis for Cyprus flew on to wires at Akrotiri on 13 Oct. A **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* reported over Cedar valley on 7 Jul will be the 10th record if accepted. On 5 Oct, a **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* was at Fresh Water lake, Famagusta, and was only the 9th record since 1995. A **Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* found at Paphos sewage plant fields on 29 Sep will be the 1st record for Cyprus if accepted and an **Upcher's Warbler** *Hippolais languida* at Marathounta on 16 Jul will be the 2nd record if accepted. An immature **Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* was found in an olive grove near the Akrotiri salt lake on 29 Aug and a **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas galactotes* was at Paphos lighthouse area on the same date and is only the 13th record since 1998. The 5th record of **Rufous-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna* was at Agia Napa sewage works area on 19 September. A 1st-winter **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* was reported at Armou hills on 18 Oct and will be only the 4th record if accepted and a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* at cape Greco on 2 Sep was the 8th record in 10 years. Three **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** *Passer montanus* at Polis reed-beds on 8 Oct was the first report for three years. Two **Rock Sparrows** *Petronia petronia* were trapped and ringed at Phinikas, near the Asprokremmos dam, on 21 Nov and then up to 14 were present at Marathounta 28 Nov–12 Dec; there have only been four previous records. A juvenile **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* near cape Andreas on 8 Sep will be the 8th record if accepted.

EGYPT

A trip to Abbasa fish farms, Sharqia gov, on 11 Jul recorded around 250 **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* including some fresh juveniles. A local boy described nests on the ground amongst reeds; breeding of this species was suspected in the same area some 15 years ago. Up to 1500 pairs of **Squacco Herons** *Ardeola ralloides*, several thousand **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis* in various colonies, ten **Grey Herons** *Ardea cinerea* and up to 1000 pairs of **Little Egrets** *Egretta garzetta* in scattered nesting sites were recorded on the same trip. A **Goliath Heron** *Ardea goliath* was at Wadi Lahami mangroves again, on 30 Jul. A **Striated Heron** *Butorides striata* was at



Plate 1. Pin-tailed Snipe *Gallinago stenura*/Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago mekala*, 22 Oct 2008, Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. © Andrew Harrop

Hurghada on 13 Nov. A juvenile **Eurasian Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* was at the sewage pools at Sharm el-Sheikh on 27 Nov. **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegyptius monachus* is a rare passage migrant and winter visitor so records of two juveniles at Sharm el-Sheikh on 21 Nov and three juveniles at the sewage pools at Sharm el-Sheikh on 27 Nov are excellent observations. Also at the sewage pools at Sharm el-Sheikh on 27 Nov were a **Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* (late date), a **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*, a first-year **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* and an adult **Bonelli's Eagle** *Hieraetus fasciatus*. A **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* was on the Nile below Edfu on 5 Nov. Two **White-tailed Lapwings** *Vanellus leucurus* were at Fares, on a marsh next to the Nile, on 24 Dec. A **Pin-tailed Snipe** *Gallinago stenura*/Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago mekala* was photographed at Sharm el-Sheikh 'new pools' on 22 Oct and would be the first for Egypt if accepted (Plate 1). Up to 10 **Collared Pratincoles** *Glareola pratincola* were apparently nesting at Abbasa fish farms, Sharqia gov, on 11 Jul. Around 15 **African Skimmers** *Rynchops flavirostris* were on the Nile below Edfu on 5 Nov. A **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* at Sharm el-Sheikh on 22 Nov is an unusual date for this mainly spring passage visitor. A male **Wattled Starling** *Creatophora cinerea* was at Lahami Bay hotel, Hamata from 30 Oct–4 Nov at least. This species is a nomadic resident of eastern and southern Africa (and occurs in Sudan). A **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* was at the same loca-

tion on the same dates, at least. At St Katherine's monastery, near Sharm el-Sheikh, a **Palestine Sunbird** *Nectarinia osea* was recorded on 26 Nov. The first **Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia* for Egypt was a juvenile at Hurgada on 13 Nov. Around 50 pairs of **Lesser Masked Weaver** *Ploceus intermedius* were recorded in one *Typha*-dominated reed bed (with many nests) at Abbasa fish farms, Sharqia gov, on 11 Jul. A flock of 15 **Indian Silverbills** *Lonchura malabarica* were at Sharm el-Sheikh on 21 Nov; this species breeds in Eilat. A **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* was at St Katherine's monastery, in the El Malakhea area, on 26 Nov. Three **Trumpeter Finches** *Bucanetes githagineus* were at Komombo temple on 8 Nov.

GEORGIA

There were two records of solitary adult **Egyptian Vultures** *Neophron percnopterus* in eastern and southern parts of Javakheti upland: first was watched flying near Mt Biketnaya on 4 May and second was near the SE corner of Khanchali lake on 6 May. There are no known nesting sites in this area. At least 87 **Pallid Harriers** *Circus macrourus* were watched 10–16 April (total of c71 hours of observations) at Kobuleti lowland near Ochkhamuri village, Black Sea coastal lowland (northern part of Ajaria autonomous republic). This is a high count for this rare passage migrant. A **Radde's Accentor** *Prunella ocularis* was observed at rocky outcrops c0.5 km below Spasovka village on 11 May, Bugdasheni river gorge. There are very few spring records of this species (apparently a rare breeder in eastern Javakheti upland along Armenian and Turkish borders).

IRAN

A new breeding site for **Armenian Gull** *Larus armenicus* has been discovered on the islands of Meighan wetland (central Iran). Previously, Urumiyeh lake in NW Iran was the only known breeding site. A well preserved corpse of a male **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* was found in Tooran, Semnan, on 15 Apr. A **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* was in the Kurang valley, Chelgerd, Zagros on 25 Apr and a **Houbara Bustard** *Chlamydotis undulata* was at Khosh Yelagh on 14 Apr. On 18 Apr c10 000 **Red-necked Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus*

were at Maharlu, near Shiraz. There were 14+ **Black-winged Pratincoles** *Glareola nordmanni* at Gavekhoni, east of Isfahan, on 28 Apr 2007. At least 24 **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* were at Gavekhoni, E of Isfahan, on 20 Apr, with two there on 28 Apr 2007. An **Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula* was at Khosh Yelagh on 12 Apr and a **White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas canipes* was at Golestan on 7 Apr.

IRAQ

Several **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus*, including family groups and adults feeding young, were recorded at Al-Asad in July.

ISRAEL

A **Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena* was reported at Tishlovet reservoir on 10 Nov and will be the 5th record if accepted. The 10th **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* for Israel was at Urim, W Negev, on 20 Nov. The first **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica*, a juvenile, was at Ma'agan Michael from 21–30 Nov. At least two **Little Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius dubius* were wintering at Geshor ponds in the Jordan valley on 5 Dec, the fourth year they have over-wintered there. An adult **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* at Neve Eitan fishponds, Bet She'an valley, from 25 Sep–1 Oct was the 2nd record for Israel; the 1st record was in June 1977. The first breeding of **Bridled Tern** *Onychoprion anaethetus* for Israel and the Mediterranean involved a pair in courtship, copulating and apparently sitting on a nest on Nakhlie'eli island, N Mediterranean coast, from 7 Jul onwards. Six were off Eilat's north beach from 7 Jul onwards. An exceptional 30 **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* were off Mikhmoret, Mediterranean coast, on 27 Jun. A **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* was trapped and ringed at IBRCE, Eilat, on 8 October and at least six **Yellow Wagtails** *Motacilla flava* were wintering at the Geshor ponds, Jordan valley, on 6 Dec. On 3 Dec a **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* was reported migrating over Yesodot, Judean plains, and will be the 10th record if accepted. The fourth **Sykes's Warbler** *Iduna rama* for Israel was trapped and ringed at IBRCE, Eilat, on 21 Sep; the previous record involved one that over-wintered at Eilat in winter 1993/94. Winter 2008/09 produced several records of **Goldcrests** *Regulus*

regulus, with small groups seen at Hayarkon park (Tel Aviv), Biriya (Galilee), Elrom (Golan) and other sites. A male **Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus atrogularis* was near Sde Boker, C Negev, on 14 Nov and is the 9th record for Israel. Two families of **White-throated Robins** *Irania gutturalis* were noted at Bul'an valley, Mt. Hermon, in early Jul and a **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* at Eilat city from 6 Dec onwards is the first winter record for Israel. There was an exceptional arrival of **Rufous-tailed Wheatears** *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna* at the Judean desert: 2 at Wadi Heimar on 12 Dec, 2 south of Ein Gedi 20 Dec, 1 at Wadi Mishmar 26 Dec.

JORDAN

On 18 Nov, a juvenile **Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* was at Aqaba, five **Namaqua Doves** *Oena capensis* (two males, three females) were at Wadi Rum and two juvenile **Steppe Grey Shrikes** *Lanius meridionalis pal-lidirostris* were at the latter site.

KAZAKHSTAN

A maximum of nine **White-headed Ducks** *Oxyura leucocephala* were together at Tengiz-Korgalzhyn on 26–29 May and nine **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* flew over the same site on 28 May which is probably the 3rd record for the area. A record of two **White Pelicans** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at Sorbulak lake, Almaty oblast, on 22 Dec 2007 is the first winter record for Kazakhstan. Two **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhyncus* were observed leaving a morning roost at Aydarly village, Taukum desert, on 21 May; a total of 10 were recorded migrating over Kosmos station in Ili-Alatau national park, southern Almaty oblast, in May and 43 were at Topar lakes, in Almaty, on 12 May. An adult **Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus* was near Big Almaty lake, Ili-Alatau NP, on 25 May; an **Upland Buzzard** *Buteo hemilasius* was near Kegen on 16 May; an **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* was at Qanshengel on 19 May and a **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* was seen at Surgaty plains on 16 May. On 23 May, an **Ibisbill** *Ibidorhynca struthersii* was at Big Almaty lake; two **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius* were at Tengiz-Korgalzhyn on 27 May and at least one **Pallas' Sandgrouse** *Syrnhaptes paradoxus* was at Surgaty plains on

16 May. A **Black-headed Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus macronyx* was at Topar lakes on 20 May and two **Crimson-winged Finches** *Rhodopechys sanguineus* were at Surgaty plains on 15 May.

KUWAIT

A **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhyncus* at Al Abraç on 1 Jan 2009 was an excellent record. The 5th record of **Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* was at the Pivot Fields on 1 Jan 2009 and the 6th record of Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* was at Al Abraç on 15 Nov. The first **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus orientalis* for Kuwait was at Jahra farms on 12–17 Aug, with two present on the last date. The 2nd **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* for Kuwait was found in late Dec at Al Abraç and was still present on 1 Jan 2009. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* was at Al-Abraç Al-Khabari on 3 October.

LEBANON

The autumn and early winter was notable for a significant increase in indiscriminate and illegal shooting throughout the country. The only noteworthy reports received were of three **Eurasian Curlews** *Numenius arquata* and a **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* at Al Mina, Tripoli, on 15 Sep, one **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* at the same site on 26 Nov and ten **Ruddy Turnstones** *Arenaria interpres* there on 27 Nov. A **Carion Crow** *Corvus corone* at Aammîq on 2 Dec is only the 2nd record for Lebanon.

OMAN

A single **Fulvous Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna bicolor* at West Khor on 29 Aug is only the 3rd record for Oman. Four **Lesser Whistling Ducks** *Dendrocygna javanica* 24 Nov–9 Dec at Khor Mughsayl is also the 3rd record, the previous being in Apr 2000. Up to seven **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* were at Khor Mughsayl, 13 Nov to at least 4 Dec, and one was at Khor Sawli on 9 Dec. **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus* is a rare species in Omani waters; a single bird was off Khor Rouri on 31 Oct, the first record for over two years. Two **Swinhoe's Storm-petrels** *Oceanodroma monorhis* were seen off Ras Janjari in the south on 8 and 12 Dec. The 9th

record of **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* occurred at Khor Mughsayl with two birds there on 7 and 13 Nov and single birds were seen at various locations in the Salalah area until at least 9 Dec. Three birds were also at Wadi Baqlat on 8 Dec. This is the 3rd consecutive winter that this species has been seen in Oman. **African Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* is a very rare visitor to southern Oman; one seen at East Khor, Salalah on three occasions, 20 Nov–10 Dec, is only the 6th record. **Yellow Bittern** *Ixobrychus sinensis* is rare in winter so an adult at Khor Taqah on 25 Nov and one at Ayn Razat on 5 Dec are of note. Up to four **Intermediate Egrets** *Egretta intermedia* were in the Salalah area from 1 Nov onwards. Fifty **Sooty Falcons** *Falco concolor* were at Fahal island near Muscat on 27 Oct. A single **Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis* was at Rahab farm, Marmul, on 2 Oct. An adult male and female **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* were together at Al Beed farm on 8 Dec. Eighteen **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus* were at Raysut on 4 Dec. There were a number of records of **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* in November and December, all in the Salalah area: three birds on 2 Nov, one juvenile on 5 Nov, one dark morph juvenile on 20 Nov and five birds (two males and three females/juveniles) on 10 Dec. Eagle numbers built up gradually and by 26 Nov at Raysut rubbish tip there were 62 **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga*, 245 **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis* and 26 **Imperial Eagles** *Aquila heliaca*. One *fulvescens* **Greater Spotted Eagle** was at Khor Rouri on 31 Oct. This has been an exceptional autumn for this species. A sub-adult **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* was seen at Wadi Darbat / Khor Rouri on 9 Dec, the 10th record if accepted.

A single **Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus* at Khor Mughsayl on 13 Nov was the first record of this species for two years. A **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* was seen at Khor Rouri on 27 Nov and 9 Dec and another bird at Qitbit from 5–7 Dec. There was a single **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius* at Wadi Baqlat near Mirbat on 8 Dec and up to 24 birds at Jarziz farm, Salalah, from 27 Nov–19 Dec. A count of 240 **Pacific Golden Plovers** *Pluvialis fulva* at Sahanawt farm on 12 Dec was the second largest from Oman. Most of the few recent records of **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* have been from Sohar Sun

farms; six were there on 28 Oct but there was also a single at Al Baleed in Salalah on 3 Nov. Two **Knot** *Calidris canutus* at Khor Salalah on 9 Dec is only the 6th record if accepted. A juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* at East Khor, Salalah, on 2 Nov is the 9th record. **Small Pratincole** *Glareola lactea* is an infrequent visitor to Oman; two at Khor Taqah on 19 Nov and 5 Dec (with one bird on 10 Dec) and two at Sahanawt farm on 12 Dec were the first records for two years. A **Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* off the Chedi hotel, Muscat, on 16–17 Aug is the only record. **Bridled Terns** *Onychoprion anaethetus* passed Khor Rouri at a rate of 450/hour on 31 Oct while 224 passed Ras Janjari in ten minutes on 4 Nov. A single **Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscata* was off Muscat on 20 August. One **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* was at Ras Janjari on 4 Nov and two at Khor Mughsayl on 7 Nov. The 5th **Red Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia tranquebarica* for Oman was at Sahanawt farm on 12 Dec. One juvenile **Rufous Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia (orientalis) meena* was at Al Jarziz farm on 2 Oct and a 2nd bird there on 5 and 13 Dec. A single **Pied Cuckoo** *Oxylophus jacobinus* was at Rahab farm, near Marmul, on 28 Sep, one in Salalah on 2 Oct and another at Khor Mughsayl on 18 and 24 Nov while there was a late record of **Dideric Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx caprius* at Khor Rouri on 31 Oct. There was an **Asian Koel** *Eudynamis scolopaceus* at Qitbit on 2 Nov and another at Rahab farm on 6 Nov. A **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* was at Jarziz farm on 5 Dec and another, possibly the same bird, at Sahanawt farm on 12 Dec. A single **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* was at Montasar on 6–7 Dec, the first record for two years. Five **Alpine Swifts** *Tachymarptis melba* were at Ayn Razat on 1 Nov; five were also seen at Wadi Mistal in the north on 25 Nov and four at Ayn Sahnawt in the south on 26 Nov. A single **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* was at Salalah East Khor on 4 Dec. The 5th record of **Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* was at Qurm Park on 13 and 20 Dec.

A juvenile/first winter **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* was at Montasar on 4 Nov; this will be the first record for Oman if accepted. The 5th record of **Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus* was at Hilf, Masirah island on 4–5 Dec with the 5th record of **Streak-throated Swallow** *Petrochelidon fluvicola* there on 5 Dec. Five

Bimaculated Larks *Melanocorypha bimaculata* were at Sohar Sun farms on 28 Oct and a large flock of 100 was seen at Sahanawt farm, Salalah, on 12 Dec. Seven **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* were at Sohar Sun farms on 28 Oct, with one there on 15 Dec. One was also seen at Montasar on 6 Dec and two at Jarziz farm, Salalah, on 10 Dec. The 4th record of **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* for Oman, a single bird, was seen at Ayn Hamran on 6 Nov. A **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* was at Montasar on 6–7 Dec with two at Qitbit on 6 Dec and one there the following day. A single **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* was at Al Ghaftain resthouse, in the central desert, on 8 Nov. **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* is rare in December so single birds at Khor Rouri on 2 Dec and Qitbit on 6 Dec are of note. A single **Brahminy Starling** *Sturnus pagodarum* at Al Ghaftain on 15 Oct is the 9th record. A record count of more than 100 **Common Nightingales** *Luscinia megarhynchos* was made in Wadi Darbat on 2 Oct. A **Red-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe (xanthopyrmyna) chrysopygia* along the Muscat–Quriyat road on 19 Aug was very early; this species is not normally seen in Oman, at the earliest, before the second half of September. A male **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* of the form *vittata*, which is rare in Oman, was at Sohar Sun farms on 30 Oct. **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi* has been scarce in recent years but there were two at Khor Taqah on 28 Nov and one at East Khor, one at Khor Salalah and six at Jarziz farm all on 9 Dec. The 8th record of **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* was at Sohar Sun farms on 1 Dec while a **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus*, the 7th record, was at the same location on 30 Nov. Three **Yemen Serins** *Serinus menachensis* were at Ayn Razat, a new location for this species, on 4 Oct.

QATAR

There were three confirmed first records for Qatar this autumn, all photographed: an adult **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* at West Doha sewage ponds on 7 Sep, a male **House Bunting** *Emberiza striolata* at West Doha sewage ponds on 14 Sep and a female **Cotton Teal** *Nettapus coromandelianus* at Al Khor sewage ponds on 30 Nov (Plate 2). Bahrain recorded its first House Bunting 2 days earlier. At least ten **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia*



Plate 2 (top). Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus*, 30 Nov 2008, Al Khor sewage ponds, Qatar. © Michael Grunwelt

Plate 3 (bottom). Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, 9 Dec 2008, Abu Nakhla prison ponds, Qatar. © John Thompson

were seen together, mid-Sep to mid-Oct, at Al Rakkayah farm pivot fields, the largest green area in Qatar. A male and female **Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* were seen together at Abu Nakhla prison ponds, southeast of Doha, from early Oct onward and a 3rd bird might have been present (Plate 3).

NORTH CAUCASUS (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Essentuki lake held the first **Mountain Chiffchaffs** *Phylloscopus (lorenzii) sindianus* on 31 Mar and the first **Red-breasted Flycatchers** *Ficedula parva* on 26 Apr. Although it is the national emblem of the Caucasus/MinVodi region, **Short-toed Snake Eagles** *Circaetus gallicus* are infrequently seen, so one at Uchkeken on 5 Jul carrying a snake in its

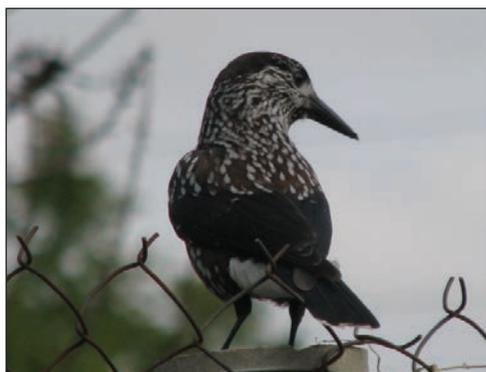


Plate 4. Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*, 6 Oct 2008, Burgustan, North Caucasus (Russian Federation). © Jeff Gordon



Plate 5. Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus*, 25 Jan 2008, Divenoe rubbish tip, Manych wetland, Russian Federation. © Jeff Gordon

talons was a welcome sight. Dombai is a ski resort in the Caucasus mountains; fortunately, the ski lifts are open all year, enabling birders to get to the high ground easily and cheaply. A **Krüper's Nuthatch** *Sitta krueperi* was seen en route in Teberda on 10 Jul. On 11 Jul, a family party of five **Caucasian Snowcocks** *Tetraogallus caucasicus* was seen beyond the 3000 m ski-lift terminus and on 12 Jul there were five **Crimson-winged Finches** *Rhodopechys sanguinea*, two **Alpine Accentors** *Prunella collaris* and many **Red-billed Choughs** *Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax* and **Yellow-billed Choughs** *Pyrhcorax graculus* at the ski slopes. Five **Rock Sparrows** *Petronia petronia* were seen at Teberda on the way out of Dombai on 15 Jul. All the European vultures, including **Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus*, are fairly common in the area, but nine **Cinereous Vultures** *Aegypius monachus* together on 7 Jul on the outskirts of Essentuki was exceptional. West of Pyiatigorsk is the Podkumok river, which is good for migrating raptors in autumn. On 24 Sep, 80 **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans*, two **Montagu's Harriers** *Circus pygargus*, six **Eurasian Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter nisus*, eight **Steppe Buzzards** *Buteo buteo vulpinus* and 400 **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis* were noted in one hour. Totally unexpected were 15 **Eurasian Nutcrackers** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* on 6 Oct at Burgustan, Stavropol region, two at Essentuki lake on 13 Nov and one on 6 Dec, thousands of kilometres outside their normal range; all were believed to belong to the race *macrorhynchos* (Plate 4). An

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* was seen at Essentuki lake on 7 Oct.

The following records for 2008 from the Manych wetland, strictly speaking outside the OSME region, are included because of their exceptional interest. The east of the Manych wetland lies between 46°N and 45°20'N, in Stavropol region. The principal habitat is steppe lakes, which provide breeding sites for tens of thousands of waterbirds and steppe-loving species, wintering grounds for Anatidae and resting and feeding sites for a myriad of birds on passage. Most records come from around Divenoe, a large village in the centre of the wetland.

January found 64 **White-tailed Eagles** *Haliaeetus albicilla* at the Divenoe refuse site along with at least four wintering **Dalmatian Pelicans** *Pelecanus crispus* (Plate 5) and 18 **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* in the immediate area. By 3 Apr, the annual spring concentration of **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* totalled 1380; numbers do not peak until mid-April, with counts of 3850 on 6 Apr 2006 and 3640 on 8 Apr 2007. Also on 3 Apr, 36 **Great White Pelicans** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* had returned and **Dalmatian Pelicans** *Pelecanus crispus* numbered 23. On 4 Apr, the first two passage **Pallid Harriers** *Circus macrourus* and the first six returning **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo* were noted and 130 **Smew** *Mergellus albellus* were present. **Terek Sandpipers** *Xenus cinerea* are frequently seen during both migration periods but counts of 32 on 24 May and 11 on 12 Jun indicate that non-breeders summer here; c7000

Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* on 14 Jun were returning migrants. A second nesting pair of **White-tailed Eagles** *Haliaeetus albicilla* was discovered in April; they successfully raised two young that fledged on 16 Aug. Eight pairs of **Levant Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter brevipes* were breeding in and around Divenoe. Post-breeding flocks of **Great White Pelicans** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* numbered 780 birds on 16 Aug and **Dalmatian Pelicans** *Pelecanus crispus* numbered 600 on 17 Aug. There were 900 **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo* on 7 Sep, some of which could have been migrants joining up with the local breeding population. The now annual **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius* survey took place in September and was centred on the Chagraiskoje reservoir, in the east of the area at 45°20'N. Due to unavoidable difficulties at the main viewing site, the maximum daily count in 2008 was just 13 birds on 8–9 Sep, compared to 236 birds in 2006 and 252 birds in 2007. Also recorded during the survey were 45 000 **Ruddy Shelducks** *Tadorna ferruginea* and 8000 **Black-winged Pratincoles** *Glareola nordmanni* (compared to 28 000 in 2006), and a **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata*, photographed at the survey base at the Pioneer camp. Other migrants passing daily through the trees surrounding the Pioneer camp included **Red-breasted Flycatchers** *Ficedula parva*, **Thrush Nightingales** *Luscinia luscinia*, **Red-spotted Bluethroats** *Luscinia svecica (pallidogularis?)* and **Common Redstarts** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Raptors passing through the survey area included 19 **Pallid Harriers** *Circus macrourus*, 51 **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis*, one **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* and 18 **Hobbys** *Falco subbuteo*. Wintering geese began to arrive on 23 Nov with 550 **Greater White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* and 250 **Red-breasted Geese** *Branta ruficollis* joining the resident **Western Greylag Geese** *Anser anser anser*; **Whooper Swans** *Cygnus cygnus* had already begun to arrive. On 26 Nov there were nine **Bewick's Swans** *Cygnus (columbianus) bewickii*, an extremely rare winter visitor to the area, with 350 **White-headed Ducks** *Oxyura leucocephala* on the same stretch of water. The **Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus* roost at Divenoe hospital grounds held 80 birds on 28 Nov.

SAUDI ARABIA

Nine **Greater White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* at Dhahran sprayfields on 13–22 Feb were considered to be wild birds and constitute perhaps the 3rd country record. A juvenile **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* was at Dhahran effluent lake on 18–19 Jul. This species is a vagrant in east Saudi Arabia with a handful of previous records. The reedbed roost of **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis* at Dhahran effluent lake reached a new midwinter high of 244 birds on 27 Jan. Records from Sabkhat al Fasl, Eastern Province, included two **Corncrakes** *Crex crex* on 16 May and two on 23 May, four adults and a juvenile **Spotted Crane** *Porzana porzana* on 27 Jul, a male **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* on 25 Apr, one **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* on 31 Oct, three **Broad-billed Sandpipers** *Limicola falcinellus* on 12 Sep and a loose migratory flock of ten **Egyptian Nightjars** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* on 22 Aug with a further three on 5 Sep. A pair of **Pharaoh Eagle Owls** *Bubo ascalaphus* was at Dhahran hills from 23 Jul to 24 Oct. Six **Temminck's Horned Larks** *Eremophila bilopha* were at Saadawi, near Hafr Al Batin, on 7 Feb. **White-cheeked Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus (leucogenys) leucogenys* were common at Tabuk in northern Saudi Arabia in April; these were the first records of this exotic from Tabuk. A party of at least 20 **Yemen Serins** *Serinus menachensis* was feeding on rocky ground at As Shafa escarpment around 09.00 h on 9 May; a male was seen feeding a female. Shafa is one of the most northerly mountain sites for this species in Saudi Arabia. A male **Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea* of the race *semenowi* was at Dhahran on 14 Apr; this is a very scarce spring migrant through Dhahran.

SYRIA

Few birders have visited Syria in autumn and little information is available on the timing of autumn migration. Trips in late September–early October provided some useful records. Several substantial passages of raptors included over 250 **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *Aquila pomarina* and 300 **Levant Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter brevipes* north of Slunfe on 28 Sep and 10 000 **Common Buzzards** *Buteo buteo* over Sed Wadi Abied on 5 Oct. Large numbers of **European Bee-eaters**

Merops apiaster (up to 450/day) and **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** *Merops persicus*, **Tawny Pipits** *Anthus campestris* and **Red-backed Shrikes** *Lanius collurio* were passing through. Several wintering species were widespread, notably **Finsch's Wheatears** *Oenanthe finschii* and **Siberian Stonechats** *Saxicola (torquata) maura*; four **Siberian Stonechats** of the form *variegata* were at Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 3 Oct and **Hen Harriers** *Circus cyaneus* were noted on 5 Oct and 7 Oct. Most summer species had departed but **Syrian Serins** *Serinus syriacus* were still common at Bloudan on 13 Oct and at least 40 **Cream-coloured Coursers** *Cursorius cursor* were at Ar Ruweira on 9 Oct. The first Syrian record of **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* was only in 2001, but at least 50 were seen in the first week of October, showing that this species is actually a widespread passage migrant; these observations illustrate how little is known about Syria's birds.

Six **See-see Partridges** *Ammoperdix griseogularis* were recorded at Qalaat Sukkara in the Jebel Abdul Aziz on 9 Oct; this is a new site but few ornithologists have visited this remote mountain range. Six **Northern Goshawks** *Accipiter gentilis* were found at four heavily wooded sites in the coastal mountains 28 Sep–1 Oct. There have been very few recent records of the species from Syria but three sites are remote and not previously visited; a small breeding population is possible. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*, **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* were at Mheimideh on 7 Oct and a new site for **Marbled Duck**, Sarat Al Mohasan, was found very close to Deir ez-Zor on 7 Oct. Singles of **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* and **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinerea* were seen near Palmyra on 23 April.

Five species of *Vanellus* were found in three days in the north-east, with a pair of **Red-wattled Lapwings** *Vanellus indicus* at lake Khatuniyah on the Iraqi border on 8 Oct, at least 95 **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius* at Ar Ruweira on 9 Oct and **White-tailed Lapwings** *Vanellus leucurus* at several sites. At Ar Ruweira there was also a party of falcons from the Gulf who professed to be training their **Peregrines** *Falco peregrinus*. **Red-wattled Lapwings** probably breed at several sites in

north-east Syria but it is unknown if the population is resident. A **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* was at Mheimideh on 8 Oct; this species is a regular but scarce migrant through the Syrian interior. A local conservationist reported two male **Namaqua Doves** *Oena capensis* north of the Euphrates in April 2008, which would be the most northerly records from Syria, and four **Great Bustards** *Otis tarda* shot last winter near Deir ez-Zor. The bustards are likely to have been from the threatened Turkish population, which probably winters in small numbers in northern Syria. The corpse of a **Eurasian Scops Owl** *Otus scops*, discarded next to a mist-net near Qarietayn on 12 Oct was further evidence of the damage this illegal trade does to bird populations. A single **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* was at Sed Wadi Abied, a regular site, on 11 Oct. Several **Scrub Warblers** *Scotocerca inquieta* were singing at Deir Mar Musa on 12 Oct. A **Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* near Kassab on 1 Oct is the first record for several years. Three **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* were in the roadside sedges at Mheimideh on 7 Oct; they have bred there and are probably resident.

TAJIKISTAN

A **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* in the marshes along the river Vakhsh near Yakkatut, Jomi district, on 18 May, was outside the known breeding area in the far south-west. Two **Little Forktails** *Enicurus scouleri* on 29 Jun south of Hakimi in the main Qaratogh valley, Shahrinaw district, were outside the breeding range outlined by Abdusalyamov in 1973. There is another recent sighting from the Qaratogh valley, from Lake Payron on 10 Jun 2007; these observations suggest that the species may breed in the Qaratogh valley. A female **White-throated Robin** *Irania gutturalis* in the Shurob range near Sanchaloni, Khovaling district, on 27 Jul was also outside the known breeding range.

TURKEY

Interesting waterbird records during the period were breeding **Marbled Ducks** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* and **White-headed Ducks** *Oxyura leucocephala* all on the Doremec river, near Edremit, Van, on 2 Jul, where booming **Eurasian Bitterns** *Botaurus stellaris*

were also recorded. There were 30 **White-headed Ducks** at Cernek lake, Kızılırmak delta on 27 Oct, four **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* at Aygır lake, Kars, on 22 Jun and a **Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* at Iğneada, Kırklareli (13th record) on 10 Dec. There was also a report of 10 **Horned Grebes** *Podiceps auritus* at Bafa lake on 27 Jan 2007. Several records of late migrating raptors included a single **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* at the Kızılırmak delta on 9 Nov, 15 **Common Buzzards** *Buteo buteo* at Vize, Kırklareli, on 24 Nov, with 16 at Çamlıca, Istanbul also on 24 Nov and 26 over Samsun on 26 Nov, and two **Short-toed Snake Eagles** *Circaetus gallicus* at Çamlıca on 24 Nov. More typical were single **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga* at Sarıkum lake, Sinop, on 9 Nov and the Kızılırmak delta on 15 Nov. Three **Great Bustards** *Otis tarda* were near Kars on 26 Sep and 43 were at Bulanık, Muş, on 12 Oct. There was a single **Corncrake** *Crex crex* at Terkos lake, Istanbul, on 28 Sep and nine in the Kızılırmak delta on 27 Sep. Other interesting crane records were a **Little Crane** *Porzana parva* at the Kızılırmak delta on 14 Nov and two **Spotted Crakes** *Porzana porzana* at Mileyha, Antakya, on 22 Nov. A total of 105 **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius* were found at Bulanık on 12 Oct and there were 16 **Eurasian Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus* at Kulu lake, Konya, the same day. A single **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* was at Aras, Kars, on 25 Sep. The most outstanding wader records during the period were the 2nd–5th records of **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos*, with one at Kozanlı, Konya, on 20 Sep, one at Kulu lake on 4 Oct and three at Yumurtalık, Adana, on 6 Oct. There were also notable high counts of **Cream-coloured**

Courasers *Cursorius cursor* and **Black-winged Pratincoles** *Glareola nordmanni* with 40+ of the former near Urfa on 30 Jun, with 35 still present on 14 Jul, and 380 of the latter at Kuyucuk lake, Kars, on 16 Sep. Two **Arctic Skuas** *Stercorarius parasiticus* at Filyos, Zonguldak, on 5 Aug were unseasonal. After several years with few or no records, there was a small influx of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** *Pterocles alchata* to the Urfa area with c100 in late May, seven on 30 Jun, seven on 14 Jul and one on 19 Jul (Plate 6). There were four records of **Short-eared Owl** *Asio otus* with singles in the Göksu delta on 4 Oct, at Bulanık on 12 Oct, the Kızılırmak delta on 31 Oct and at Erzurum on 17 Nov. Thirty **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** *Merops persicus* were at Bozova, Urfa, on 20 Jul and five at the Kızılırmak delta on 6 Sep. The 16th–19th records of **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* were singles at Filyos on 2 Oct, Yamansız (Antalya) on 5 Oct, Karkamış (Gaziantep) on 12 Oct and Balık lake (Antakya) on 12 Dec. **Great Grey Shrikes** *Lanius excubitor* were recorded at Kızılcahamam on 19 Oct, Vize on 26 Oct (two), 1 Dec (one) and 13 Dec (three) and Dorddivan, Bolu, on 10 Dec. The 2nd and 3rd records of **Eurasian Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* were a single at Erzurum on 23 Oct and two at Durusu, Istanbul, 16 Nov–8 Dec. The 6th record of **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* was a bird trapped at the Cernek ringing station, Kızılırmak delta, on 17 Oct and there was a report of a **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus* from Aras, Kars, on 25 Sep (potential 6th record). Nine **Iraq Babblers** *Turdoides altirostris* were at Birecik on 15 Jul, with six on 19 Jul and the species now seems to be established in small numbers (Plates 7 & 8). 2008 was a good year for **Pale Rockfinches** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* in the south-east with a single near Ceyhan on 29 April followed by up to 300 near Urfa from late May to mid July. **Chestnut-shouldered Petronias** *Gymnoris xanthocollis* were recorded near Urfa (three on 30 Jun) and at Birecik (two on 19 Jul). Up to five **Richard's Pipits** *Anthus richardi*, and Turkey's first **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus*, were at Mileyha 22 Nov–11 Dec. Turkey's first **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii* and 2nd **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* were ringed at the Dicle ring-



Plate 6. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*, July 2008, near Urfa, Turkey. © Nizamettin Yavuz



Plate 7 & 8. Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*, July 2008, Birecik, Turkey. © Nizamettin Yavuz

ing station, Diyarbakır, in 2006. At least 12 **Trumpeter Finches** *Bucanetes githagineus*, including juveniles, were near Zerneke Barajı in late Jun/early Jul where **Mongolian Finches** *Bucanetes mongolicus* were 'abundant'. A **Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* at Karaburun, Istanbul, on 13 Dec was the 9th record since 1992.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The outstanding record was the first **Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* for Arabia, a first winter/female at Safa park from 7 Dec until the end of the month. A series of exceptional seabird records included several of **Lesser Noddy** *Anous tenuirostris*: one at Fujairah on 9 Aug, the 3rd UAE record, two on 10 Aug and three on 19 Sep, with the last sighting on 24 Oct. Others included the 3rd and 4th records of **Roseate Tern** *Sterna dougallii*, an adult at Khor Kalba harbour from 1 Oct with two adults on 4 Oct; the 3rd and 4th records of **Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscata*, an adult with an immature at Fujairah on 9 Aug, with three birds on 22 Aug, last seen on 7 Nov; and the 10th record of **Long-tailed Skua**

Stercorarius longicaudus, at Fujairah, on 1 Aug. **Persian Shearwaters** *Puffinus (Iherminieri) persicus* were present off the East Coast until the end of Oct, with a maximum of 920 on 10 Aug. A good number of **Brown Noddys** *Anous stolidus* were seen off Fujairah 31 Jul–24 Oct, with the highest count 19 birds.

Other interesting records (of single birds unless stated otherwise) were of **Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* at Safa park on 13 Oct; **Indian Pond Herons** *Ardeola grayii* at Khor Kalba from 9 Aug onwards, with the highest count eight on 24 Oct; **Crested Honey Buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* at Sila peninsula on 7 Nov and at Safa park on 10 Nov; **Golden Eagles** *Aquila chrysaetos* at Jebel Hafit on 25 Nov and Sila peninsula on 9 Dec; **Black-winged Kites** *Elanus caeruleus* at Sila peninsula on 7–9 Dec and near Abu Dhabi on 7 Dec, the first records from the UAE since 2002; **Sooty Falcons** *Falco concolor* at Dubai Pivots on 14 Aug and Fujairah National Dairy Farm on 23 Aug; **Little Crakes** *Porzana parva* at Fujairah NDF on 4 Oct and at Al Wathba lake on 15–22 Oct; **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* at Dubai Pivots on 2 Dec; **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius* at Fujairah NDF from 15 Oct and at Ghantoot from 31 Oct; **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* at Khor Kalba on 21 Sep (the only record); **Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta* at Al Wathba lake on 28 Nov; **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* at Fujairah NDF on 4 Oct; **Small Pratincole** *Glareola lactea* at Fujairah NDF on 4 Oct; and **Little Gull** *Larus minutus* at Khor Kalba from 12–20 Sep. A **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* at Safa park from 10 Dec was the 9th UAE record. The 7th and 8th records of **Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* were of a single at Fujairah NDF on 4 Oct and of three birds at Dubai on 9 Nov. Up to three **Oriental Turtle Doves** *Streptopelia orientalis* were at Fujairah NDF 19 Sep–31 Oct. The maximum count of 72 **Namaqua Doves** *Oena capensis* was made on Sila peninsula on 1 Aug. **Pied Kingfishers** were at Khor Zawra on 7–19 Nov, Ras al Khor on 18 Nov and Abu Dhabi on 30 Nov. The 4th and 5th records of **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* were from Jebel Hafit from 13 Nov until the end of the year and at Dubai Pivots on 2–5 Dec. Records of **Grey Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* came from

Dubai Pivots, Ghantoot, Lulu island and Sila peninsula from 27 Nov. Singles of **Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola* were at Fujairah NDF on 12 Sep; **Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* at Abu Dhabi on 6–10 Nov; **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* at Sila peninsula on 7 Nov and **Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus atrogularis* at Jebel Hafit on 15 Nov with two at Sila peninsula on 9 Dec. **Eurasian Stonechats** *Saxicola torquatus* were reported from 3 Nov onwards at several locations; this species seems to be becoming commoner. **Oriental Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* were seen at Fujairah NDF, Dubai Pivot Fields and Sila peninsula from 19 Sep. Singles of **Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia* and **Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides* were at Fujairah NDF on 5 Sep, a **Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* was in Dubai Pivot fields on 17 Dec and a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* at Khalidiyah on 18 Oct. **Sykes's Warblers** *Iduna rama* were reported from Khor Kalba, July–December. There were singles of **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* at Safa park on 10 Nov and at Sila peninsula on 9 Dec. An **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* was at Dabbiyah on 10 Nov with six birds at Safa park on 28 Nov onwards. The earliest UAE record of **Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus* was from Khalidiyah on 14 Sep; another was there 10–15 Oct.

YEMEN

The first **White-collared Kingfisher** *Todirhamphus chloris* for Yemen was found in the mangroves at Al Jar Ecological camp on 4 Oct; it or another bird was still present in late October. These mangroves, like those in Saudi Arabia, support a population of **White-eyes** *Zosterops* sp, the identity of which remains uncertain. Four **Black-headed Herons** *Ardea melanocephala* were seen at Aden lagoons on 28 Oct along with 180+ **Abdim's Storks** *Ciconia abdimii* overhead. Three **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga* and a single **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* were also present. A three-hour watch just north of Bab Al Mandab on 29 Oct produced 974 **Steppe Buzzards** *Buteo buteo vulpinus* and 3823 **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis*, although thermals inland probably pushed the morn-



Plate 9. Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, 25 Oct 2008, Wadi Hadibu, Socotra, Yemen. © RF Porter



Plate 10. Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*, 26 Oct 2008, Wadi Hadibu, Socotra, Yemen. © RF Porter

ing total for all species to over 10 000. Four **Eastern Imperial Eagles**, nine **Short-toed Snake Eagles** *Circetus gallicus*, five **Booted Eagles** *Aquila pennata* and a single **Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciatus* also passed over, and more than 3000 **Steppe Eagles** were preparing to cross from the tip of Bab Al Mandab to Djibouti next morning. Only one **European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* and one **Levant Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter brevipes* were seen in three days spent at Bab Al Mandab; both were on 31 Oct. Raptor passage on 7 Nov included 15 **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *Aquila pomarina*, 1800 **Steppe Eagles** and one **Eastern Imperial Eagle**.

On 25 Oct, 300 **Crab Plovers** *Dromas ardeola* and 150+ **Eurasian Curlews** *Numenius arquata* were on the Red Sea coast at Al Jar. A **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* was at Bab Al Mandab on 7 Nov. Two **Grey-headed Kingfishers** *Halcyon leucocephala* were at Al Burrah on 24 Oct, a **Eurasian Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* flew south at Bab al Mandab on 31 Oct and five **Common Swifts** *Apus apus* were at Al Turbah on 26 Oct. A **Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus* was at Al Burrah on 24 Oct and a **Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola* at Aden marshes on 28 Oct. Over 700 **Greater Short-toed Larks** *Calandrella brachydactyla* were moving down the coast south of Hodeidah late on 25 Oct. A single **Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* at Bab Al Mandab on 30 Oct was one of very few migrant passerines there. A late **Gambaga Flycatcher** *Muscicapa gambagae* was in Sana'a on 22 Oct and a **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi* flew over observers near Hodeidah on 26 Oct.

SOCOTRA (YEMEN)

Several unusual herons were recorded in late Oct–early Nov, including the island's 3rd **Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia* at Wadi Hadibu on 24 Oct, up to three **Indian Pond Herons** *Ardeola grayii* (Plate 9) and two **Great White Egrets** *Egretta alba* at two sites, a juvenile **Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus*, the first for Socotra, from 25–27 Oct and a juvenile **Yellow Bittern** *Ixobrychus sinensis* at Wadi Hadibu on 29 Oct. Yellow Bitterns have now been seen on about five occasions since 1999, including both adults and juveniles, and it is just possible that they breed. Off the Ras

Hebak coast in late Oct and early Nov a spectacular feeding frenzy of **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* and **Persian Shearwater** *Puffinus (Iherminieri) persicus* reached a peak of 2500 and 800 respectively on 2 Nov. A **Yellow-billed Kite** *Milvus aegyptius* was watched over Hadibu on 25–26 Oct. A total of 341 **Egyptian Vultures** *Neophron percnopterus* was counted at dawn departing their roost sites on the cliffs and trees around the town. Could this be one of the largest roosts in the world of this globally endangered species? Small crakes (very rare on Socotra) were represented by a juvenile **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* at Wadi Hadibu on 25–26 Oct (Plate 10) and a juvenile **Little Crake** *Porzana parva* at Qalansiya estuary on 27 Oct. During this period 4 **Whiskered Terns** *Chlidonias hybrida* were feeding at Sirhan lagoon and two adult **White-eyed Gulls** *Larus leucophthalmus* roosted at Wadi Hadibu from 29 Oct–5 Nov. On 26 Oct, a **Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* was seen, only the 2nd record, and the island's first **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* was watched at the western end on 27 Oct.

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