

PHOTOSPOT—

Pander's Ground Jay *Podoces panderi*



Plate 1. Pander's Ground Jay *Podoces panderi*. © Tim Loseby

Pander's Ground Jay *Podoces panderi* is a desert bird occurring in the Middle Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Cowan 1996, Madge & Burn 1999, Wassink & Oreel 2007). It appears closely related to the sandy-buff Pleske's Ground Jay of Iran (and probably of bordering areas in Afghanistan and Pakistan), another desert bird (Cowan 2000, Goodwin 1986, Hamedanian 1997, Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). These are cursorial birds reminiscent of Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* and Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*.

Pander's Ground Jay is a bird of sandy desert with dunes and good coverage of

shrubs. It gives a clear ringing call from bush tops especially in early morning or evening and is usually met with in pairs or family parties. It feeds along sandy tracks, digging at animal droppings and rummaging at bases of bushes. It has the habit of creating food storage spots by burying food in sand. It is a seed eater, though insectivorous in spring and summer when prey items can include small lizards. Nests are usually placed up to a metre above the ground within bushes and it lays a clutch of four to five eggs. Eggs have been found between late February and late May and it has an incubation period of 16–19 days (Madge & Burn 1999).

Tim Loseby's bird (Plate 1), active on the ground, exhibits at least two points of interest. The shape of the black "badge" on the fore-neck and upper breast differs from that illustrated in Goodwin (1986) and Madge & Burn (1999). Loseby's appears vertical in orientation whilst the latter two publications show a horizontal badge. Five photos of Pander's Ground Jay on Dave Farrow's website (www.shortwing.co.uk) suggest that posture may play a role.

Another feature of the bird in Plate 1, and also of the perched Pander's Ground Jay shown on the cover of *Sandgrouse* 24 (1), again a Tim Loseby photo, is the partial obscuring of the black and white feathers of the closed wing by body feathers. Tiziano Londei (2004) has proposed that the *Podoces* ground jays, peculiarly, enhance their crypticity by "expanding" the scapular feathers and feathers of the ventral tracts to cover or largely cover the conspicuous feathers of the folded wing. To advertise presence these birds simply reverse this procedure.

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PJ Cowan

REVIEWS

The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar—Sultanate of Oman

Jens Eriksen

Centre for Environmental Studies and Research, Sultan Qaboos University. 2008. Softback. 144 pages, colour photos, maps, tables, bar diagrams.

For availability see www.birdsoman.com.

Jens Eriksen's book concerns an area whose landscapes and scenery are frankly magnificent. The Jabal Al Akhdar 'Green Mountain' range is the central massif of the Al Hajar mountains in the north of Oman (Glennie 2006, Hanna 2006). The higher elevations are semi-arid and the highest mountain of the range is Jabal Shams, which reaches 3009 m asl. The area can be explored on foot or by 4WD, and trekking and motoring routes have been described by Dale & Hadwin (2001) and Grist (2006) respectively.

This book is a result of Jen's participation in a conservation and sustainable develop-

ment survey of the Jabal Al Akhdar. Two main areas were studied: the Sayq plateau, which is mostly over 2000 m, and Jabal Shams, and included an intensive six-week breeding bird survey in 2005 by Mike Jennings.

The lowest limit of these two areas was taken as 1800 m. Both areas are described briefly, including the juniper woodlands and terraced cultivation though the maps for both sites are essentially those in Sargeant *et al* (2008). Further information on these two highland areas is given in a section on conservation and ecotourism. The meagre ornithological literature and relevant records from the Oman Bird Records database were also utilised.

A total of 125 bird species have been recorded on the Sayq plateau and Jabal Shams

