

Status of selected migrant species in Kuwait: observations and ringing, spring 1997

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The first of our ringing studies in Kuwait was carried out between 1 October and 7 December 1995 (Cleere *et al* 2000). Our second survey, reported on here, covered the period 28 March–31 May 1997. Mist nets were used to catch and examine birds at two sites within Kuwait. The first was the Jahra Pool nature reserve 'JPNR' (29° 22' N, 47° 42' E), an area covering 250 ha of coastal sabkha, of which c70 ha was fenced off and closed to the public (Pilcher 1994, Cleere *et al* 2000). Within this enclosed part of the reserve was a large *Phragmites* reed bed and a 4–5 ha pool of open shallow water. The second site was an isolated date palm plantation surrounded by a thin border of trees and tamarisk at Wadi Al Rimam 'WRP' (29° 33' N, 47° 42' E). Different sections of the plantation were watered each day, resulting in varying water levels beneath the palms. The most recently watered areas held 10–12.5 cm of surface water, which would slowly drain into the soil, whilst other parts were merely damp and marshy. The constant rotational watering allowed luxuriant grasses and fresh *Phragmites* to grow beneath the palms. A total of 6008 birds of 60 species were caught and ringed during the study period, the vast majority of these being migrants passing through the country. Our findings for some of these species are compared with their known status in Kuwait prior to our study (Pilcher unpub). More recent status statements by Gregory (2005) are also presented.

SELECTED SPECIES

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Recorded as an accidental visitor (Pilcher unpub). An immature bird observed soaring over JPNR on 7 April was the fourth record for Kuwait. Listed as a vagrant by Gregory (2005), with the latest report 22 February 1998.

Corncrake *Crex crex*

This secretive species is a scarce or uncommon passage migrant and rare winter visitor (Pilcher unpub, Gregory 2005). One bird was present in the trapping area at JPNR on 22 April, but was not caught.

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*

Rarely seen and only an accidental visitor (Pilcher unpub). A single bird was at JPNR on 30 March, our sighting being the fourth record for Kuwait. Listed as a vagrant (Gregory 2005), with the latest record 7 January 2000.

Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

Prior to our study regarded as accidental, with only three records between 1974 and 1986 (Pilcher unpub). None were caught during the study period, but one was at JPNR on 17 April. Subsequent observations (*eg* Gregory 2000, 2005) suggest that it is an uncommon passage migrant, and summer and winter visitor that might breed.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Regarded as an accidental visitor by Pilcher (unpub). Three birds were seen over JPNR on 23 April. A scarce passage migrant according to Gregory (2005).

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Regarded as an accidental visitor (Pilcher unpub). No birds were caught during our field-work, but more than 30 birds passed over JPNR on 14 April. Recorded as a scarce passage migrant and rare winter visitor by Gregory (2005), who also listed the highest daily count as 30 seen at Shaab, Kuwait city, on the same date!

Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

An accidental visitor (Pilcher unpub). Four birds of indeterminate race were caught at JPNR, with singles on 1, 6, 15 and 26 April. The status of this easily overlooked species remains difficult to assess. A scarce passage migrant (Gregory 2005).

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*

A scarce passage migrant occasionally noted in April, but with most previous records in May (Pilcher unpub). During our study, we caught 11 birds between 5 and 12 May, mainly at WRP with only a single trapped at JPNR, on 8 May. Our data suggest that this secretive species may pass through in spring in a relatively short period of time, with small numbers occurring in suitable habitat. Listed as a scarce passage migrant by Gregory (2005).

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*

An uncommon passage migrant, that breeds in small numbers at JPNR (Pilcher unpub). A total of 69 birds were caught and ringed between 14 April and 29 May, with birds present at both JPNR and WRP. It would appear that perhaps this species is more common than previously thought. Breeding was again confirmed at Jahra, females with a well-defined brood patch being caught on 25, 28 and 29 May. A common passage migrant and uncommon summer visitor (Gregory 2005).

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*

A common passage migrant (Pilcher unpub). Only one bird was trapped during the study, at JPNR on 20 April. During our previous survey, 13 birds were caught at JPNR between 16 October and 1 December 1995, including 2 that had been ringed in Kuwait in November 1991 (Cleere *et al* 2000). Our limited data suggest that this species might be less common in spring. Considered an uncommon passage migrant and scarce resident by Gregory (2005).

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

A scarce to uncommon migrant in May and June (Pilcher unpub). Birds were caught at both JPNR and WRP and a total of 483 were ringed between 22 April and 24 May (Kelly *et al* 2001). This species can be difficult to identify in the field, but it seems obvious from our data that it is a common spring migrant, passing through in a relatively short period of time. Status upgraded to common passage migrant by Gregory (2005).

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

Thought to be an accidental visitor (Pilcher unpub). During our survey, we caught birds at JPNR on 15 & 17 April and 3 May, and at WRP on 9 and 10 May. Our records confirm only that it can occur in very small numbers in spring. A scarce passage migrant (Gregory 2005).

Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus*

Two birds, probably of this species and which were thought to belong to the Caucasian race *P. s. lorenzii*, were trapped during our study, a single at JPNR on 28 March and another single at the same site on 12 April (Cleere *et al* 2004). Now thought to be a rare passage migrant and winter visitor (Gregory 2005).

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Recorded as an accidental visitor with no recent records (Pilcher unpub). A single bird was caught at WRP on 23 May. A scarce passage migrant (Gregory 2005).

Green Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides nitidus*

Prior to our study, there had been only one record in Kuwait (Pilcher unpub). Singles were trapped at JPNR on 30 April and at WRP on 9 May and two birds were caught at WRP on 23 May, suggesting that in spring it may pass through in very small numbers. Gregory (2005) treated this species as a rare passage migrant, but listed our captures erroneously.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Previously listed as an uncommon spring migrant between March and May (Pilcher unpub). During our project, we caught this species at both JPNR and WRP, a total of 95 birds, between 30 April and 27 May. Our data suggest that this warbler is a relatively common spring migrant, although the short duration of passage is of interest. An uncommon passage migrant (Gregory 2005).

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

An uncommon passage migrant (Pilcher unpub, Gregory 2005). We caught 26 birds, all at WRP, with the highest daily total being 11 on 5 May. It seems likely that this large warbler is a reasonably common migrant, at least in spring.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*

Considered to be an accidental visitor (Pilcher unpub). During our survey, singles were trapped at JPNR on 31 March and 4 April and at WRP on 16 May. An uncommon passage migrant (Gregory 2005).

Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*

Although previously regarded as an uncommon passage migrant (Pilcher unpub), we trapped 20 birds at JPNR between 28 March and 12 April. In our previous survey, 13 birds were caught at JPNR between 1 October and 7 December 1995 (Cleere *et al* 2000). Our combined data therefore support Gregory's (2005) statement, a common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*

Thought to be an uncommon passage migrant (Pilcher unpub, Gregory 2005). A total of 11 birds were trapped between 30 April and 29 May, ten at WRP and one at JPNR.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Considered to be a scarce to uncommon passage migrant (Pilcher unpub). Common Nightingales were recorded at both JPNR and WRP, with five birds caught between 29 March and 12 May. Three of the birds were identified as *L. m. megarhynchos*, one was indeterminate and one at JPNR on 28 March was thought to be *L. m. hafizi*. An uncommon passage migrant (Gregory 2005).

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*

Not previously recorded in Kuwait (Pilcher unpub). A female of indeterminate race was caught and ringed at JPNR on 2 April and may have been one of the 7 birds seen and photographed at the same site the previous autumn, on 1 November 1996 (Gregory 2005). This attractive sparrow is considered a vagrant, with subsequent records in 1998 and 2003 (Gregory 2005).

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

An uncommon passage migrant (Pilcher unpub). This species was caught at both JPNR and WRP, a total of 19 birds between 8 April and 11 May. A common passage migrant and rare winter visitor (Gregory 2005).

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

A scarce passage migrant, that in spring occurs from March to May (Pilcher unpub). We caught four birds, a female at JPNR on 8 April and adults at WRP on 5, 16 and 31 May. Our data suggest that it remains scarce, as documented by Gregory (2005).

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