

Mountain building in this region started around 35 million years ago (late Eocene/Oligocene) and continued until as recently as about 3 million years ago (Pliocene). The description of the Zagros mountains contains much dubious description to areas around Shiraz (Iran) and beyond, and the mention of Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* as a part of what presumably should be a typical Zagros mountains fauna is unrepresentative. There is a remnant and very isolated population of this species in a remoter part of the Sistan Baluchistan mountains, which though a continuation of the same mountain arc that formed the Zagros, can hardly be called part of the Zagros. As far as I know the Asiatic Black Bear has not occurred historically in the Zagros, which are however occupied, rather sparsely, by Brown Bears *Ursus arctos*.

The photograph section is largely good but what is worrying is the number of duds. The Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta* has twigs across its head and its eye is obscured. The many landscape shots are useful and generally well chosen but again there are some unaccountably poor ones such as the Sivri Kaya shot which illustrates perfectly the impact of sunlight on the landscape.

It would be interesting to map the recording activities of birdwatchers, Turkish and foreign, over the past forty years. In fact, I find it rather strange that this hasn't been at least attempted as in other fields such as Lepidoptera, where Hesselbarth *et al's* magnum opus (*Die Tagfalter der Türkei unter Berücksichtigung der angrenzenden Länder*. Wagener, 1995) not only provides detailed maps for the collections and sightings of all butterflies recorded in Turkey but it also maps the movements of the collectors in detail showing clearly the areas where they have not spent much time or indeed ventured at all.

Overall the drawbacks are few and the book delivers well in terms of providing a thorough resource for information on the birds of Turkey. Anyone with a significant interest in the avifauna of this region will do well to get this book and will be pleased with what they get. The authors have done a very good job. However, I am left with a question. When will the database that this book provides be on the web?

Ian Green

A web page has been set up to disseminate updates and corrections to *The Birds of Turkey*, at <http://www.freewebs.com/guykirwan/turkeybookupdates.htm>.

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## OSME NEWS

Geoff Welch

### Conservation and Research Fund changes

The following important changes have been made to the operation of the Conservation and Research Fund which should be noted by all applicants.

From 1 January 2009, applications will be considered three times a year with the following deadlines for submission: 31 January, 31 May and 30 September. Applicants will be notified of the decision within 3 months of the deadline *ie* in April, August and December. Therefore, please allow sufficient time between your application and the proposed timing of work.

All applications are considered by the Conservation and Research Fund sub-committee, currently Ramaz Gokhelashvili (Caucasus), Michael Brombacher (Central Asia), Richard Porter (Middle East), Rob Sheldon (Scientific Adviser) and myself, with recommendations endorsed by OSME Council.

In order to support as many applications as possible, grants will be limited to a maximum of £500 but this will be reviewed on a regular basis depending on the success of fund raising activities.

Projects should be directed to one or more of the following subject areas:

- i) investigating the status of threatened or near-threatened species
- ii) attempting to further knowledge of existing Important Bird Areas (eg undertaking breeding censuses, visiting out-of-season to conduct systematic counts)
- iii) investigating potential new Important Bird Areas or little-known areas
- iv) conducting ecological studies of little-known species
- v) educational projects.

Priority will be given to projects involving nationals from the region and applicants are required to write up the results of their project for possible publication in *Sandgrouse*.

### Revised Constitution

Although minor amendments have been made over the years, the Society's official Constitution registered with the UK's Charity Commission is dated 1981. Therefore Council has carried out an extensive revision of the Constitution so that it more accurately reflects both the current structure and functioning of OSME and UK charity legislation. The main changes in the new Constitution are in the name of the Society, to reflect the expansion of OSME's area of interest to include the Caucasus and Central Asia (though the Society will continue to be known popularly as OSME), and a clearer definition of the roles and responsibilities of Council members, the majority of whom are also legal trustees of the Society. Council very much hopes that the membership will endorse the revision and this will be voted on formally at the Summer Meeting in July and, if approved, submitted to the Charity Commission in order to update their records. A copy of the draft revision is available on the OSME web site and copies are available on request from the Secretary (please include an A4 self addressed envelope). Any comments on the revised Constitution should be submitted to the Secretary by Saturday 4 July 2009.

### OSME Summer Meeting and AGM 2009

Following the success of last year's Summer Meeting, the 2009 Meeting and AGM will again be held at the BTO Headquarters (The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, UK) on

Saturday 18 July. There is ample free parking. The bus station is about 10 minutes walk away, and the railway station 15 minutes. Road access is via the A11 London–Norwich road, connecting with the A14 from the north and Midlands. Trains operate regular services on the Birmingham–Norwich line, and also to Cambridge and London Kings Cross.

Speakers will include Steve Cale on birding in North Cyprus, Ian Harrison on the Aden Wetlands and Geoff Welch on the Central Asia Important Bird Areas project. We look forward to seeing you there.

### OSME needs you!

As with any charity, the day to day running of OSME relies on the time freely given by its Council members and in order to continue to develop the Society we are seeking new members to join Council, either as full members or in a co-opted role. Council members serve for 5 years and Council meets formally three times a year plus informally at the Summer Meeting/AGM and the British Birdwatching Fair. Whilst a knowledge of the birds of the OSME region is desirable, the most important attributes of Council members are having the time and enthusiasm to actively help maintain and promote the Society and good communication skills. The majority of OSME business is carried out by email. While some of these positions require regular attendance of meetings and, ideally, for the postholder to be based in the UK, others could be carried out 'remotely' and therefore may appeal to overseas members.

We are currently seeking to fill the following positions:

- *Treasurer*. Responsible for maintaining OSME's accounts, preparing the annual budget and liaising with the Charity Commissioners over financial and constitutional issues.
- *Membership Secretary*. Responsible for servicing the membership, primarily maintaining the membership database and coordinating the twice yearly mailing of *Sandgrouse*.
- *Sales Officer*. Responsible for running the small-scale OSME sales operation, both by mail order and at events.

- *Web site Manager*. Responsible for maintenance, updating, and facilitating the development of the OSME web site.
- *Librarian*. Responsible for maintaining OSME's small collection of reference literature, mostly difficult to obtain journals and unpublished papers and reports, and for dealing with occasional requests for information or access to the library from members.
- *Events Coordinator*. This is a new position and the postholder will be responsible for coordinating all aspects of OSME's attendance at key events, currently the Summer Meeting and the BirdFair, such as liaising with venue organisers, arranging staffing rotas etc.
- *Fund-raising Officer*. This is a new position and the postholder will be responsible for seeking core funding for the day to day operation of the Society, for the Conservation and Research Fund and for any specific projects that OSME may develop in the future.

If you are interested in any of the above positions, please contact the Chairman, Geoff Welch, at [chairman@osme.org](mailto:chairman@osme.org).

### Feeling lucky?

In order to raise funds for both the core operation of OSME and the Conservation and Research Fund, thanks to the generosity of several sponsors, especially Opticon who have donated a telescope and tripod kit, OSME is running a major raffle in 2009 with some excellent prizes and we hope that members will support us by buying tickets themselves and selling them to friends and colleagues! Unfortunately, under UK Gaming legislation, raffle tickets can only be sold in the UK so we apologise to all of our overseas members that they are unable to participate, though those with access to a UK bank account are able to buy tickets. A book of tickets is enclosed with this copy of *Sandgrouse* (UK addresses only) and extra books can be obtained from Chris Lamsdell, 4 Hardings Close, Iver, Bucks SL0 0HL, UK.

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## NEWS & INFORMATION

*Dawn Balmer (compiler)*

### ARMENIA

#### Atypical cranes discovered

In May 2008, Russian ornithologist VY Ilyashenko visited a small colony of Common Cranes *Grus grus* in southwestern Armenia, near the border with Turkey and Georgia. He discovered these cranes had clear morphological differences from typical Common Crane. The main differences are a white spot behind the eye and lack of red 'crown'. The taxonomic status of these cranes is currently being assessed. A female was ringed with a white plastic ring with black number 210 on the right leg and standard metal ring A223099 on the left leg. Birdwatchers are asked to look carefully at migrating and wintering Common Cranes in the Middle East for colour-rings. Records of nesting or wintering cranes from Turkey, Iran, Georgia and

Armenia are sought and details should be sent to Valentin Ilyashenko at [ilyashenko@savingcranes.org](mailto:ilyashenko@savingcranes.org).

### EGYPT

#### Wind farm proposals in the migration bottleneck of Zait bay

Plans for a huge wind farm with 3000 MW output in the area of Zait bay, on the west side of the southernmost gulf of Suez, have been amended following a feasibility study that indicated heavy migration of soaring birds in both autumn and spring. The German Development Bank (KfW) commissioned the study which recorded 145 000 soaring birds in the autumn and 179 000 in the spring. An unexpectedly large percentage of birds were observed flying at or below 200 m or even resting on the ground. An alternative propos-