

# First record of Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus corone capellanus* in United Arab Emirates

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On 26 November 2012 a lone Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus corone capellanus* was seen feeding on the carcass of a young Socotra cormorant chick *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* on Siniya island in the Arabian gulf (Umm al Quwain emirate, UAE). Siniya island is located c100 m offshore to the east of Umm al Quwain town. The bird was feeding on the shore of the inner lagoon (25° 37' 6.00" N, 55° 37' 27.68" E) at c14.22 h and was viewed for 5 minutes (Plate 1). The crow then flew directly in front of the observer (RG) permitting photos of the bird in flight (Plate 2). TP confirmed identification from the photos. The Emirates Bird Records Committee accepted the record as the first for the UAE. Subsequent observations of the bird have occurred sporadically in the same area on Siniya island, up to as recently as 21 March 2013.

The *Corvus corone/cornix* complex consists of crows that have variable plumage and are widely distributed in the Palaearctic (Mayr & Greenway 1962). Although the common name Hooded Crow is attributed to the '*cornix*' group, they are usually treated within *Corvus corone* by most authorities (Jonsson 1992, Cramp and Perrins 1994) although some authors regard them as a separate species *Corvus cornix* (Porter & Aspinall 2010). Hooded Crows are characterized by a combination of glossy black on the head, throat, underwings, primaries and tail and ashy grey in between (Cramp & Perrins 1994). Genetic analyses confirm that Hooded Crows belong to *Corvus corone* (Haring *et al* 2012). Previously described *cornix*-group subspecies (Mayr & Greenway 1962) are also largely supported by genetic analyses that cluster *Corvus corone capellanus*, the Mesopotamian Crow, within the western clade of *C. corone* (Haring *et al* 2012). The Mesopotamian Crow has the glossy black pattern characteristic of Hooded Crows but the ashy grey is replaced by whitish tones, giving it its alternative common name, the Iraq Pied Crow (Cramp & Perrins 1994). It is resident in Iraq and southwest Iran (Porter & Aspinall 2010). Interestingly, the Siniya island individual appears to have black feathering on the front of the tibial region of the leg with white at the rear (Plate 1) whereas the painting in Porter & Aspinall (2010) shows pale grey feathering around the 'thigh' and that in Madge & Burn (1999) black.



**Plate 1.** Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus corone capellanus* on the ground, Siniya island, UAE, 26 November 2012. © Robert Gubiani



**Plate 2.** Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus corone capellanus* in flight, Siniya island, UAE, 26 November 2012. © Robert Gubiani



Strong winds, thunderstorms and rain were reported for the whole region from 8–16 November, with the weather moving in an easterly direction from Kuwait over Saudi Arabia and directly over the UAE and Oman (Emirates

Meteorology Portal 2012). We speculate that high winds and storm activity in the area could have driven the lone individual to the UAE. A Mesopotamian Crow was observed in Kuwait from 23 October 2012, the first confirmed record for Kuwait (al Ghanem 2013).

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