

IRAN

A report on birds seen on a trip to Iran
19 April – 2 May 2017



Pleske's Ground-Jay (photo Wiel Poelmans) – Touran Nature Reserve

By Henk Hendriks

Also: Wiel Poelmans
Vital van Gorp
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INTRODUCTION

The excellent report, written by Bjorn Anderson about his Iran trip in April 2010, was my main inspiration to consider a trip to Iran one day.

And when Vital van Gorp informed me that he was trying to get a team together to do a trip to Iran in April 2017 I immediately jumped into this possibility.

After some debate we would do the trip with 6 birders and I contacted Ms. Parisa of Persia Tours (the one BA also used to organise his trip) to organise our trip.

I have great respect for birders like Jos Stratford and Jens Thalund who made independent birding trips to Iran, mainly using public transport, spending several nights in tents during their trips and who wrote also very informative trip reports but we opted for some more luxury.

Unfortunately some people dropped out and in the end we did the trip with 4 persons, Wiel Poelmans, Vital van Gorp, good old Jan Vermeulen and myself.

The trip was concentrated on finding our main targets in Iran and our itinerary of 12 days was enough to accomplish that. We did spend quite some time in the car travelling from one site to the other and we also had 3 domestic flights during our trip. If you would do this itinerary in a more relaxed way and/or you try for more species, or you need more time photographing birds, you should add another 2 to 3 days.

This would be more expensive of course. Originally the complete arrangement in Iran would cost us 2350 US\$ pp. but as we finally did the trip with only 4 persons it turned out to cost us 2700 US\$ pp.

VISA

You do need a visa for Iran. Parisa arranged a letter of invitation for us. With this letter you can apply for your visa at an Iranian embassy but we opted to obtain our visa at the airport of Teheran on arrival. This was quite a hectic event and took some time.

They also want proof (in English) that you are properly insured during your stay in Iran.

Otherwise you have to buy one on the airport (15 Euro)

A visa for Iran cost you 75 Euro.

NOTE: birders from Canada, USA and Great Britain can apparently only travel around the country of Iran if accompanied by a special Iranian guide. This is of course more costly for birders from these countries as they have to pay for this guide, his flights, his accommodation etc.

GETTING THERE – FLIGHT

We had a very cheap, direct flight from Amsterdam to Teheran with KLM.

For a return flight we paid 285 Euro.

Flight time is only 5 to 5½ hour.

GETTING AROUND

We had 3 domestic flights:

Teheran – Bandar Abbas.

Bandar Abbas – Ahvaz.

Ahvaz – Teheran.

When organising your itinerary you have to keep in mind that the direct flight from Bandar Abbas to Ahvaz does not fly daily. You could end up flying from Bandar Abbas to Teheran and from Teheran to Ahvaz, which is more expensive and more time consuming. Transport on the ground was with minibuses. The one we used from Teheran in the north was rather basic and not very comfortable.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation was fine. During 3 nights we slept in houses of local people in villages, which was an experience in itself. Unfortunately in the village in Sirig we had to sleep on carpets as they did not provide us with mattresses, so we had a rough night. Had we known this beforehand we would have brought some small mattresses with us.

In the second village near Touran we were provided mattresses to sleep on.

FOOD & DRINKS

The food during the trip was excellent. In Bandar Abbas I had some of the best fish ever. In Iran it is absolutely forbidden to drink alcohol, so we ended up drinking a lot of water and coke.

LANGUAGE

Not many people speak English in Iran, so an English speaking guide is rather convenient to get around easily. The Iranian people we met during our trip were without exception very friendly and helpful.

Our guide only spoke very basic English, which made communication rather difficult.

WEATHER

The weather conditions in the Bandar Abbas and Ahvaz area were hot to very hot. In the middle of the day temperatures rose easily above 35 degrees Celsius.

Very nice temperatures in the Touran area but in the Elbruz Mountains around Roodbarak we were very unlucky with the weather. When we left Teheran for our drive to Roodbarak we quickly encountered rain and at higher altitudes snow. When we arrived at Roodbarak it was raining heavily and most of the time in the Roodbarak area we had rain with occasionally dry spells and worse heavy fog. With temperatures just above zero, rain and heavy fog our birding was severely hampered and I think that was the main reason we missed Caspian Tit in this area.

BIRDING

We mainly focussed on our target species and in the process of achieving this we just waited what we would get. We did not record a big list during this trip.

My personal 5 targets were **Sind Woodpecker**, **Caspian Tit**, **Mesopotamian Crow**, **Black-headed Penduline-Tit** and **Pleske's** or **Iranian Ground Jay**. And I succeeded in this.

Unfortunately the **Caspian Tit** was only observed by me, JV and WP.

Wiel's other targets were **Hume's Wheatear** and **Plain Leaf Warbler** of which we only recorded the wheatear.

Vital and Jan targeted also **Afghan Babbler**, **Iraq Babbler** and **Basra Reed Warbler**, which we all saw well.

Other nice species encountered were **Great Knot**, **Egyptian Nightjar** and **Grey Hypocolius**.

During the trip I found out that another target species, the recently split **Afghan Scrub Sparrow** (From Dead Sea Sparrow) can be reliably observed at Zabol in the Zahedan area.

So if you really want to clean up on the specialties of Iran, you should consider a visit to this site, which means you have to add another 3 days to your itinerary to accomplish that. Ali knows the site well and can show you the species.

In retrospect I can only say that Iran is a great birding destination and for birders who birded countries in the Middle East and Turkey, Iran is a logical continuation of their birding explorations in this part of the world. It is also a transition zone from the Western Palearctic to the Oriental region with species like Indian Roller, Sind Woodpecker etc.

Besides that Iran possesses a great variety of some really impressive landscapes, marshes, (semi) deserts, forests, mountains etc and to find the specialties you have to visit them all.

GPS coordinates of some target species.

Unfortunately my battery was down at the Caspian Tit site, but Ali provided me with info.

Sind Woodpecker:	27.151, 57.043
Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>ssp.caspicus</i>:	36.708, 54.589
Black-headed Penduline Tit:	36.717, 53.018
Grey Hypocolius:	32.446, 51.062
	31.369, 48.690
	27.151, 57.043
Mesopotamian Crow:	32.079, 48.232
	32.037, 48.493
Basra Reed Warbler:	31.941, 48.454
Iraq Babbler:	31.941, 48.454
Caspian Tit:	UTM 40S 0282439, 4061947 (info from Ali Khan)

REFERENCES

Books

Reports

Iran-Birding during Ramadan & summer 29 June-13 July 2014 by Jens Thalund

Iran April 4-26 2014 by Jos Stratford

Iran April 8-18 2010 by Björn Andersen

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all Ms Parisa of Persia Tours who took care of all the ground arrangements, logistics and contacted our birding guide Ali Khani to guide us around the country. Our birding guide Ali Khani who tried his best to find our target species. Originally we would undertake this trip with Babak, the guide Bjorn Andersen used in 2010, but unfortunately he cancelled the trip because of personal issues. Also Belgian birder Mark van Mierlo who provided additional info about our target species.

USEFUL CONTACT & ADRESSES

PERSIATOURS

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DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Wednesday 19 April

Around noon I took the train from Eindhoven to Schiphol. Vital was on the same train and at 's Hertogenbosch Wiel Poelmans joined us.

At Schiphol Airport we met Jan Vermeulen.

Because of the recent hectic at Schiphol Airport we were advised to be at the airport preferable more than 3 hours before our flight would depart.

But it turned out to be a rather relaxed affair and at 17.40 pm we flew from Schiphol to Teheran (Iman Khomeini Airport) where we arrived at 02.00 am (2½ hour time difference). With our letter of invitation and our proof of insurance in English we obtained our official visa but it was a time consuming affair. Then we collected our luggage and met our driver outside of the airport. It took almost an hour to drive from the airport to our hotel in Teheran and it was after 04.00 am before we finally went to bed.

Day 2: Thursday 20 April

After a late breakfast at 10.00 am, we changed some money at a nearby money changer shop and together we took a taxi to the main bazaar where we walked around for several hours. We took a taxi back to our hotel and had a late lunch at a nice nearby restaurant. In late afternoon we chilled out at our room. In the evening we had a meal at the same restaurant.

Day 3: Friday 21 April

At 03.30 am we got up and at 04.00 am we met our guide Ali Khani in the lobby of our hotel. We left for the domestic airport and at 05.30 am we flew from Teheran to Bandar Abbas where we arrived at 07.00 am.

After collecting our luggage we boarded our minivan and drove straight to the mudflats of Bandar Abbas. Here we met a friend of Ali and together we birded the mudflats for several hours. It was soaring hot but we observed a whole set of interesting waders. Despite the fact that many waders had already left their wintering grounds, so numbers were much lower than in winter, we still saw uncommon species like **Great Knot** and **Pacific Plover**.

At noon we had a lunch (good fish) at Bandar Abbas and in the afternoon we drove to Geno Protected area for our afternoon birding. We slowly drove up the winding mountain road to higher altitudes. It was quite hot and because it was a Friday, many local people drove up the mountain to escape the heat in the lowlands. During our first stop we observed **See-see Partridge, Desert Lark, Bay-backed Shrike** and our first **Variable Wheatear**. Then our brand new minivan (Chinese brand) broke down. But after a few phone calls, 2 pick-up trucks showed up and we could continue our birding up the mountain. The pick-up drivers were keen Iranian researchers/scientists and photographers of birds, lizards and amphibians and we had some great conversations with these guy's. In the process **Hume's Wheatear** was found but generally the birding was rather slow. Late afternoon we birded around the HQ area and here we observed **Afghan Babbler, Striolated Bunting, Syrian Woodpecker** and a single **Scrub Warbler**.

After dark we drove back to Bandar Abbas where we had a great hamburger with our crew, before we went to our hotel.



Geno Protected Area



Desert Lark - *Ammomanes deserti*



Bay-backed Shrike - *Lanius vittatus*

Day 4: Saturday 22 April

At dawn we drove from Bandar Abbas to Minab where we had breakfast in the garden of a friend of Ali. **We birded the garden until 08.00 am mainly searching for Sind Woodpecker.** In the process we observed both **Black Francolin, Grey Francolin, Black-shouldered Kite, Crested Honey-Buzzard, Indian Roller, Purple Sunbird** etc. but no woodpecker. We decided to check another favourable area of the Sind Woodpecker near Minab. (village of Kalantor) When we walked into the dade palm area, it did not take long before we had excellent views of a male **Sind Woodpecker**. The female was also briefly observed.



Dade palm plantation near Minab, site for Sind Woodpecker



Sind Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos assimilis* - female

We then continued to the village of Sirig where we would spend the night. The drive was much longer than expected and it was already noon when we arrived at the village. In retrospect it would have been more convenient to stay at a hotel in Minab to save time, as all the specialties can be observed around Minab.

Having said this, it was an experience in itself to stay with a local family in the rural area. Just before Sirig we saw 3 **Egyptian Vultures** on a carcass, just next to the road.

After lunch we had a little siesta and at 15.00 pm we drove the short distance to a nearby small harbour to board our boat for the trip into the mangroves.

During this boat trip (15.30 – 17.30 pm) a pair of **Oriental White-eyes** was observed by us at an area Ali knew the species occurred. Other species seen on this trip were waders like **Terek Sandpipers**, **Broad-billed Sandpipers** etc, **Great Thick-knee**, **Heuglin's Gull** and a single immature **Greater Spotted Eagle**.

Late afternoon we visited a nearby dam, mainly to look for sandgrouses but we dipped.

In the evening the local family served us an excellent meal of local food but when we went to sleep it turned out that they did not provide us with mattresses to sleep on. As we had not anticipated on this we had a rather uncomfortable night on the carpet floor. Had we known this we had brought some self-inflating mattresses with us from home.

Day 5: Sunday 23 April

At 06.30 am we left Sirig and we drove to a nearby patch of woodland where we birded until 08.00 am.

We had excellent and lengthy views of a female **Sind Woodpecker**. It was also the only site where we encountered a small flock of **Black-headed Buntings**. A vocal **Syke's Warbler** was also nice. At 08.00 am we continued towards Bandar Abbas.

After another fine lunch with fish in Bandar Abbas we flew from Bandar Abbas to Ahvaz. As the plane was a propeller plane it took 2½ hour before we landed at Avahz. (13.45 – 16.15 pm) After dropping our stuff at our hotel we drove to Avahz Forest Park for some casual late afternoon birding. (17.30- 19.00 pm) We unexpectedly bumped into several *Hypocolius*.

Day 6: Monday 24 April

We left our hotel at 05.00 am and drove 2 hours north of Avahz to a swampy area near the village of Mianab.

At our first stop we quickly found **Iraq Babbler** but the biggest surprise was an otter which gave very good views. This was the first time Ali observed an otter in Iran and he was very excited about this observation.

A second stop, a little further was also very productive.

It did not take long before we heard our first **Basra Reed Warbler** and though the species was rather skulky we observed at least 2 different birds, creeping through the vegetation. In the end one bird came very close and showed itself well several times briefly but unfortunately not enough for good photos.

We also heard which sounded like Sedge Warblers but the bird I saw was definitely a **Moustached Warbler**. But the song lacked the distinctive lu-lu-lu notes of that species, which puzzled me at first. Others species seen at this site were **Reed Warbler**, **Indian Reed Warbler**, **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** and **Turkestan Shrike**.

Then it was time for our next target, the distinctive **Mesopotamian Crow**. 2 weeks ago Ali had seen the species in the area around the village but we dipped.

We decided to check the area around a nearby archaeological site, Chogha Zanbil.

But again not a sniff of the Crow.

We decided to have lunch and on our way, suddenly Jan shouted that he saw a **Mesopotamian Crow**, just next to the road. We stopped the car and had excellent views of this very striking bird.

After lunch we drove to Karkheh Wildlife Refuge and just before we arrived we had another three **Mesopotamian Crows** along the road. When we arrived at the HQ area at 15.00 pm it was soaring hot, 37 to 38 degrees. Accompanied by a ranger we started to walk but quickly decided to stick around the HQ area.

Grey Hypocolius was very common and despite the heat we observed a pair of **Dead Sea Sparrows**.

When we walked back to the HQ area we bumped into an impressive **Iran Blunt-nosed Viper**. The ranger took us to an area where he regularly observes **Egyptian Nightjar** and when we crossed the field we saw at least 4 different **Egyptian Nightjars**, giving excellent views in flight and perched on the ground. I also flushed a **Thick-knee**.

Afghan Babblers were very common and around 18.00 we left the Refuge to drive back to Avahz. It was a very productive day with all our target species seen.



Swamp near village of Mianab, site for Basra Reed Warbler



Mesopotamian Crow - *Corvus capellinus*



Grey Hypocolius - *Hypocolius ampelinus*



Iraq Babbler - *Turdoides altirostris*



Egyptian Nightjar - *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

Day 7: Tuesday 25 April

We left our hotel again at 05.00 am and at 06.30 am we arrived at Masrae Seh, also a swampy area. **Iraq Babbler** was very common and during our birding in this area we observed 4 **White-tailed Plovers**, **Collared Pratincole**, **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin**, etc.

We birded until 10.30 am and drove back to Ahvazh. After lunch we drove to the airport and flew from Ahvaz to Teheran, where we arrived at 18.00 pm. We landed in heavy rain. Drove to our hotel and went to bed early.

Day 8: Wednesday 26 April

We left Teheran at 04.00 am. Hardly any traffic, so we made good progress. As soon as we left Teheran and started to climb into the Elbroz mountains, the rain started to change into snow. It became very cold in the car as the heating was not working properly. When we stopped for breakfast our driver fixed the heating of the car at a nearby garage. When we drove higher into the mountains, the road conditions deteriorated more and more. At one time a faster car overtook us and 10 minutes later we found the same car crashed along the road, slipped on the snow covered road.

We slowly drove over the pass and when we descended the snow changed into rain again.

Late morning we arrived at our accommodation at Roodbarak, which was a large mountain cabin, mainly used by hikers and mountaineers. We had lunch in nearby Kelardasht and in the afternoon we decided, despite the rain, to visit the general area where Bjorn Anderson, Jos Stratford and Jens Thalund had found the **Caspian Tit** in the past. This was only a few kilometres from our accommodation and we easily found the trail, described in the report of Jens. We followed the trail up the hill but failed to find the tit in the nasty drizzle, interrupted with some dry spells. This was of course disappointing. We did see **Rock Bunting**, **White-throated Dipper**.

In the evening we had dinner in Kelardasht and discussed our options for next day.

Prospects were not good as Ali predicted more rain and especially fog at higher altitudes. Ali arranged for two 4-wheel drive cars for the next day to drive up to above 2000 meter altitude to an area along the Azichal Road, where he had observed Caspian Tits a few weeks earlier.



Caspian Tit site, near Roodbarak, Elbroz Mountains

Day 9: Thursday 27 April

The 4-wheel cars arrived at 08.00 am which was in fact too late. It was raining lightly and not too foggy. Looking back we made a mistake at that point to continue to the Azichal road as it turned out later that we encountered, heavy fog along that road and also because of the very muddy and slippery conditions of that road, even the 4-wheel drive cars could not make it up that road. We should have opted to search for the tit at the areas, lower down in the valley which we visited the previous afternoon and which were not too foggy.

Anyway we drove up the Azichal road which started some 30 minutes from Roodbarak to the entrance of the National Park. We birded along the barrier for half an hour but only observed **Great Tit** and **Blue Tit**. We then continued higher into the fog but soon one of the cars could not make it up the slippery road. So we decided to turn around but unfortunately one of the drivers locked the door with the keys still in the ignition. It took another 45 minutes to solve this problem and meanwhile our mood went down to zero.



Rain and fog along the Azichal Road near Roodbarak

We drove back to the valley near Roodbarak and decided to try once more along the trail we walked yesterday afternoon. But to no avail and at 13.00 we have to admit defeat and we left the Roodbarak area for our drive to the Caspian coast, to Babolsar Lake.

We arrived at Babolsar lake at 17.30 and birded around the lake until 19.30 pm.

In the past birders saw the **Black-headed Penduline Tit** rather easy at this site but according to Ali the species had become more and more unreliable at this site.

This was absolutely true as we did not find it. But Ali assured us that he knew another, much better site, which we intended to visit tomorrow morning.

We had dinner at Babolsar and then we drove for another hour through the country side in the dark to find our hotel. Today was certainly not my best birding day!!

Day 10: Friday 28 April

At dawn we left our hotel for our one hour drive to a small wetland area near the town of Sari, called Sied Mahale. This is along the road from Joybar to Sari.

When we drove on a dirt track towards the lake, the car came to an abrupt hold as I discovered a **Black-headed Penduline Tit** flying above the reed, just next to the track. The bird flew into a tamarisk tree and it did not take long before we had excellent views of a pair of this most-wanted species.



Sied Mahale Lake near Sari, site for Black-headed Penduline-Tit



Black-headed Penduline_Tit - *Remiz macronyx*

We also observed a very vocal **Cetti's Warbler**, which showed nicely

Satisfied we left this site and drove further east to the city of Gorgan. Just after Gorgan we left highway 22 and drove south into the mountains, on the Tuskestan Road, to cross over to the other site to the city of Shahroud. Soon the road started to climb and we drove through a beautiful stretch of ancient forest. We made a birding stop and soon added the *caspius* subspecies of **Greater Spotted Woodpecker** and the local subspecies of **Long-tailed Tit** to our list. **Green Warbler** was common and vocal. Other species seen during this stop were several **Red-breasted Flycatchers**. Slowly we drove further to the pass and around 2100 meter altitude, roughly 1 km. before the pass we passed a beautiful patch of forest. The forest floor was covered with a carpet of wild flowers but unfortunately this patch is also frequently visited by picnickers as we saw a lot of rubbish in this forest. When we birded this patch we suddenly heard a song/call of a tit, which alerted us immediately as it could be the call of a **Caspian Tit**. The habitat was certainly suited for the species. Slowly we investigated the area and I was the lucky one to find it and was also able to get Wiel/Jan onto the bird. They saw the bird briefly before it flew off and we warned Vital who was further down the forest. We were confident that we would relocate the bird but despite the fact that we investigated the area thoroughly we never saw it again. So we mixed feelings we left this site. A **Wryneck** was also notable. After passing Shahroud we continued towards Touran Nature Reserve and at 19.00 we arrived at the picturesque village of Ghalebala, nestled against a rocky outcrop in the desert. We had a very nice room in a house of a local family in this village.

Day 11: Saturday 29 April

After an early breakfast we left with great anticipation to Touran Nature Reserve as this was supposed to be the day that we were hoping to observe our most wanted species, the enigmatic **Pleske's Ground Jay**. It took around 1 hour to reach the HQ area of Touran Nature Reserve and together with a ranger we started our search in the area where the species is seen regularly. The Ground-jay had finished breeding and is therefore more difficult to find as it wanders around more. One month earlier the rangers knew their breeding territory and the birds were dead easy and easy to photograph. It took us almost 2 hours before we finally found the species. The ranger had found one but it was too far away and the bird vanished before we could have satisfactory views of it. But soon after we found at least 3 different birds and had great views of these birds in the scope. Later we tried to photograph them but only poor record shots were taken as the birds were more shy than we anticipated. Anyway we were relieved and very satisfied with this observation. During the course of the morning we also observed **Upcher's Warbler** and **Syke's Warbler**.



Upcher's Warbler – *Hippolais languida* and Syke's Warbler - *Iduna rama*



Touran Nature Reserve



Ali, scoping for Pleske's Ground Jay

At noon we were back at the HQ area. As we did not bring any food with us, Ali had arranged lunch at the village and we were to return at 15.30 pm for our afternoon birding. This was a mistake. It meant 2 hours of driving, one hour of lunch and back. I regret that I did not convince Ali to take a packed lunch with us and to stay in the reserve all day. We could have birded the sparsely vegetated HQ area or an oasis, mentioned in the trip report of BA.

Anyway we returned late afternoon and birded a different area of the reserve, mainly from the car. Wild asses were seen but we failed to find **Macqueen's Bustard**. We did see **Chukar**, **Green Bee-eater**, **Ortolan Bunting** and **Lesser Grey Shrike**. At dusk we drove back to our village to spend the night.

Day 12: Sunday 30 April

We drove all morning from Ghalebala to Semna and further to Mandisyhan, where we dropped our luggage. In the afternoon we drove further into the mountains to the Parvar area, situated in a nice valley. Ali did not know if **Plain Leaf Warbler** occurs in this area but several stretches looked pretty good for this species, which was a target for Wiel.

We did not find the warbler but saw some nice, new species for our list like **Rock Nuthatch, Red-fronted Serin and Rosy Starling**

In the evening we had some discussions with Ali and our driver about the program of next morning. They want to drive straight to Teheran, which meant that we would arrive at noon, mainly to avoid the terrible traffic jams in the afternoon. But as our international flight was leaving after midnight that was no option for us. So we decided to bird from 08.00 – 11.00 am in the Parvar area before leaving for Teheran.

Day 13: Monday 01 May

We birded from 08.00 – 10.00 in a nice valley in the Parvar area. We later visited a site for **Caspian Snowcock** but we arrived too late. You had to be at the spot at dawn to stand a chance to observe the snowcock. During our birding this morning we saw **White-throated Robin, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Pale Rock Sparrow** and Vital and Jan saw **Radde's Accentor**.

At 11.15 we started our drive to Teheran where we arrived at 16.00 pm.

Here we said goodbye to Ali as he would fly in the early evening to Mashad to his family. We packed our stuff and had a last excellent dinner in Iran and at 23.00 pm we were picked up by our driver to take us to the airport.

Day 14: Tuesday 02 May

After 5½ hour we landed at Schiphol airport, Amsterdam, at 6.30 am.

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Jan Vermeulen, Vital van Gorp, Henk Hendriks & Wiel Poelmans

SHORT ITINERARY

19-04: Flight Amsterdam – Teheran

20-04: Arrival Teheran. Teheran all day

21-04: Flight Teheran – Bandar Abbas. Bandar Abbas mudflats in the morning and
Geno Protected area in the afternoon.

22-04: Drive Bandar Abbas – Minab, Minab area and area around Sirig.

Afternoon boat trip in Sirig mangroves.

23-04: Sirig area in the morning. Drive to Bandar Abbas. Flight Bandar Abbas – Ahvaz.

24-04: Avahz area, morning near the village of Mianab, Chogha Zanbil archeological
Site and in afternoon Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

25-04: Avazh area, morning at Masrae Seh area. Afternoon flight Avazh – Teheran.

26-04: Early morning drive Teheran – Kelardasht – Roodbarak.

Birding in valley near Roodbarak.

27-04: Birding near Roodbarak and drive to Babolsar Lake at Caspian Sea coast.

28-04: Birding at wetland area near Sari, Sied Mahale. Drive from Gorgan along the
Tooskestan Road to Shahroud and further to the village of Ghalebala.

29-04: Touran Nature Reserve all day.

30-04: Drive from Ghalebala to Semna and further to Mandisyhan.

Afternoon birding in the Parvar area.

01-05: Morning birding in the Parvar area. Drive to Teheran.

Evening flight Teheran – Amsterdam

02-05: Arrival at Amsterdam airport in the early morning

LIST OF OBSERVED SPECIES

Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar*

A total of 7 on 2 dates at Touran Nature Reserve.

See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*

21-04: 10+ at Geno Protected area.

24-01: 1 at Khar

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*

22-04: 4 + heard Minab area.

24/25-04: a total of 14 on 2 dates in the areas around Avahz.

Grey Francolin *Francolin pondicerianus*

22-04: 4 + heard in the Minab area.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

25-04: 3 at Shaver Dam

27-04: 1 + heard at Babolsar Lake.

Flamingo *Phoenicopterus*

21-04: 20+ on the mudflats at Avahz.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

A total of 15 on 2 dates in the marshy areas around Avahz.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

A total of 30 on 2 dates in the areas around Avahz.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

22-04: 2 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

22-04: 6 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Recorded on 4 dates in the Ahvazh area and near Babolsar.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

21-04: 1 near Minab.

22-04: 4 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

24-04: a single bird near Mianab village, Avazh area.

27-04: a single bird at Babolsar Lake.

Great Egret *Casmerodius alba*

22-04: 10+ in the mangroves near Sirig.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

22-04: a single bird near Sirig.

Western Reef Heron *Ardea gularis*

21-04: 6+ at Minab mudflats.

A total of 14 on 2 dates at the coast near Sirig.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

22-04: 20+ in the mangroves near Sirig.

29-04: a single bird on a pole at the HQ of Touran Nature Reserve.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

22-04: 2 in the mangroves near Sirig.

27-04: a single bird at Babolsar Lake.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

A total of 5 on 2 dates in the Minab area.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron peecnopterus*

22-04: 3 on a carcass near Sirig.

Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

22-04: twice a single bird in the Minab area.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*

22-04: a single bird in the mangroves near Sirig.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

29-04: a single bird in Touran nature Reserve.

Shikra *Accipiter badius*

22-04: 3 in the Minab and Sirig area.

30-04: 1 near Ghale Bala village.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

26-04: 1 near Roodbarak.

30-04: 1 in the Parvar area.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus auriginosus*

27-04: 3 at Babolsar Lake.

28-04: a single bird at Sied Mahale Lake near Sari.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

24-04: a ringtail seen near Mianab village, believed to be this species.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygarcus*

25-04: 1 near Shaver Dam.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

21-04: 1 at Geno Protected area.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo ssp.vulpinus*

A total of 7 on 5 dates.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*

01-05: a single bird in the Parvar area.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Daily 2 to 3 birds at Touran Nature Reserve.

Hobby *Falco Subbuteo*

30-04: a pair in the village of Ghale Bala.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

30-04: 1 at Parvar

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

27-04: 1 seen in flight at Babolsar Lake.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

24-04; Heard at Shaver Dam.

25-04: 2 at Masrae Seh.

27-04: Heard at Babolsar Lake.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

27-04: 3 at Babolsar Lake

Eurasian Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedichenus*

24-04: 1 at Karkheh Wildlife Reserve.

Great Stone-Curlew *Esacus recurvirostris*

22-04: 4 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

21-04: 40+ at Minab mudflats.

22-04: 10+ in the mangroves at Sirig.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Daily up to 20 around Bandar Abbas, Minab and Sirig.

A total of 6 on 2 dates around Avazh.

Northern Lawing: *Vanellus vanellus*

21-04; a single bird at Bandar Abbas

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

Observed on 5 dates in the Bandar Abbas and Avazh area.

White-tailed Lapwing *vanellus leucurus*

25-04: 4 at Masrae Seh.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common at the Bandar Abbas Mudflats and the mangroves near Sirig.

Asian Golden Plover *Pluvialis*

21-04: a single bird found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

21-04: a single bird found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

21-04: 10+ at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus*

Common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultia*

Common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

27-04: 3 in flight at Babolsar Lake.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

21-04: a single bird at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

21-04: Common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

22-04: 4 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas and the mangroves near Sirig.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

As previous species.

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

As previous species.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

21-04: 10+ at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

27-04: 4 at Babolsar Lake.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

22-04: a single bird in the mangroves near Sirig.

27-04: 100+ in flooded fields at Babolsar Lake.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

Common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas and near Sirig.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

21-04: 2 at Bandar Abbas.

22-04: 4 near Sirig.

27-04: 4 at Babolsar Lake.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas and near Sirig.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*

21-04: a single bird found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

21-04: 20+ found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

21-04: 20+ found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

21-04: common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

21-04: 20+ found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus*

21-04: 20+ found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

22-04: 3 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

25-04: 10+ at Masrae Seh.

Slender-billed Gull *Croicocephalus genei*

Common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas and near Sirig.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglinii*

21-04: a single bird found at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

22-04: 5 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

21-04: common at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

21-04: 10+ at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

22-04: 10+ in the area near Sirig.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*

21-04: 6 at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis*

21-04: 8 at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

21-04: 10+ at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi*

21-04: 10+ at the mudflats of Bandar Abbas.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

21-04: 1 observed near Bandar Abbas.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*

24-04: a flock of 20 observed Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

29-04: 2 at Touran Nature Reserve.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Observed on 7 days.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

23-04: 1 at forest park, Avazh.

24-04: 10+ at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Observed on 7 dates.

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*

Observed on 8 dates.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

24-04: 1 at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

27-04: Heard at Roodbarak area.

30-04: 2 at parvar area.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops*

26-04: 1 seen at our accommodation at dusk.

Spotted Owlet *Athena brama*

22-04: 5 near Minab.

Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius*

24-04: 4 seen in flight and perched on the ground at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

30-04: 40+ in the Parvar area.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Observed on 7 dates.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*

Single birds observed on 3 dates in the Avazh area.

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*

22/23-04: common around Bandar Abbas, Minab and Sirig.

European Roller *Coracias garrulous*

A total of 14 on 2 dates in the Avazh area.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Observed on 3 dates in the Bandar Abbas and Avahz area.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

22-04: 2 in the mangroves near Sirig.

27-04: 1 at Lake Babolsar.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

A total of 8 on 2 dates in the Avahz area.

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

22-04: Common around Minab and Sirig.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*

Common in the Avahz area. Recorded on 3 dates.

29-04: 10+ in Touran Nature Reserve.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Common the Avahz area. Recorded on 2 dates.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

30-04: 4 in the Parvar area.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

28-04: a single bird near the pass along the Toskestan Road.

Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis*

22-04: a pair in the date palms near Minab.

23-04: 1 female in a small wood near Sirig.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

21-04: 2 at the HQ area of Geno Protected Area.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major ssp. caspius*

28-04: 1 male in beautiful forest along the Tooskestan Road.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

01-05: 1 on transit

Turkestan Shrike *Lanius*

23-04: 1 near Sirig.

24-04: 1 near Mianab village.

29-04: 3 at Touran Nature Reserve.

Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*

21-04: 10+ at Geno Protected Area.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

29-03: 2 at Touran Nature Reserve.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

A total of 6 on 2 dates near Roodbarak

Magpie *Pica pica*

Common around Roodbarak.

28-04: Observed along the Tooskestan Road.

Common at Touran Nature Reserve and around Ghalebala village.

Pleske's ground-Jay *Podoces pleskei*

29-04: It took some time but we had superb views in the scope of at least 3 different birds at Touran Nature Reserve.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

21-04: 4 at Geno Protected Reserve.

26-04: 2 at Roodbarak.

30-04: 2 at Parvar Area.

01-05: 6 at Parvar Area.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

30-04: 10+ at Parvar area.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

30-04: 10+ at Parvar area.

01-05: 20 on transit to Teheran.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Observed on 7 dates. Not around Bandar Abbas.

Mesopotamian Crow *Corvus cappellinus*

24-04: 1+3 at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

27-04: 2 at Roodbarak.

Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*

23-04: 3 at Avahz Forest Park.

24-04: 25-30 at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

Coal Tit *Pariparus ater*

27-04: 7 Roodbarak.

Caspian Tit *Poecile hyrcanus*

28-04: a single bird just below the pass along the Tooskestan Road (from rd.22 to rd.44)

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

27-04: 8 at Roodbarak.

28-04: 4 in forest along the Tooskestan Road.

Great Tit *Parus major*

A total of 7 on 2 dates at Roodbarak.

28-04: 4 at forest along the Tooskestan Road.

30-04: 2 in the Parvar area.

Black-headed Penduline-Tit *Remiz macronyx*

28-04: 2 at Sied Mahale Lake near Sari.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*

21-04: 8 at Geno Protected Area.

Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cincture*

29-04: 4 at Touran Nature Reserve.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Observed on 6 dates.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

29-04: a single bird at Touran Nature Reserve.

White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis*

Observed on 5 dates in the Bandar Abbas and Avahz area.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Observed

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

A total of 7 on 2 dates in the Parvar area.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

21-04: 2 Geno Protected area.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cettia*

27-04: a single bird at Babolsar Lake.

28-04: 2 at Sied Mahale Lake near Sari.

Streaked Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*

21-04: a single bird at Geno Protected area.

29-04: 3 at Touran Nature Reserve.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Heard and briefly seen in forest along the Tooskestan Road.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Observed on 5 dates. Not in the Bandar Abbas and Ahvaz area.

Green Warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus*

Observed on 2 dates around Roodbarak.

28-04: 4 at forest along the Tooskestan Road.

Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*

24-04: 2 seen in the swamp near Mianab village.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

27-04: Commonly heard at Babolsar Lake.

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*

24-04: 2 at swamp near Mianab village.

25-04: 10+ at Masrae Seh.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

24-04: Heard and 1 seen at swamp near Mianab village.

25-04: 4 at Masrae Seh.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

24-04: 6 at swamp near Mianab village.

25-04: 3 at Masrae Seh.

Syke's Warbler *Iduna rama*

23-04: 1 near Sirig.

29-04: 10+ at Touran Nature Reserve.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*

Common around Minab and Sirig.

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*

29-04: 3 at Touran Nature Reserve.

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*

22/23-04: 2 at Minab and Sirig.

24/25-04: Common in the Ahvaz area.

Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*

24-04: 10+ at swamp near Mianab village.

25-04: 10+ at Masrae Seh.

Afghan Babbler *Turdoides huttoni*

Observed on 5 dates in the Bandar Abbas and Ahvaz area.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

23-04: a single bird near Sirig.

24-04: 2 at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

26-04: 1 near Roodbarak.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

23-04: 1 near Sirig.

24-04: 1 at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

Hume's Whitethroat *Sylvia althaea*

A total of 7 on 2 dates in the Parvar area.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*

01-05: 5 in the Parvar area.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*

29-04: 2 at Touran Nature Reserve.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

27-04: 3 at Roodbarak.

28-04: 2 along the Tooskestan Road.

30-04: 1 in the Parvar area.

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*

22-04: 2 in the mangroves near Sirig.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A total of 4 on 2 dates at Roodbarak.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

28-04: 2 in forest along the Tooskestan Road.

Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*

30-04: 2 in the Parvar area.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*

21-04: 2 at the HQ area of Geno Protected area.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Common around Bandar Abbas.

Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*

30-04: 2 in the Parvar area.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

01-05: 3 in the Parvar area.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

24-04: 2 at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

A total of 6 on 2 dates around Roodbarak.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

27-04: a single bird at Roodbarak.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

27-04: 2 at Roodbarak.

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*

23-04: 1 near Mianab village.

24-04: 15+ at Masrae Seh.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

24-04: 1 near Mianab village.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

A total of 3 on 2 dates at Roodbarak.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

30-04: 6 in the Parvar area.

White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis*

30-04: 1 in the Parvar area.

01-05: 20+ in a nice valley in the Parvar area.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

28-04: 4 in forest along the Tooskestan Road.

30-04: a single bird in the Parvar area.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

A total of 6 on 2 dates near Roodbarak.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A total of 10 on 2 dates near Roodbarak.

28-04: 2 along the Tooskestan Road.

A total of 8 on 2 dates in the Parvar area.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*

A total of 5 on 2 dates in the Roodbarak area.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

27-04: a single bird near Roodbarak

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

30-04: a single bird in the Parvar area.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

29-04: 2 in Touran Nature Reserve.

Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata*

21-04: 4 at Geno Protected area.

Hume's Wheatear *Oenanthe albonigra*

21-04: 2 in Geno Protected area.

Finch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii*

30-04: a nice male in the Parvar area.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

A total of 3 on 2 dates near Roodbarak.

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*

Recorded on 3 dates in the areas around Bandar Abbas.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Observed on 7 dates.

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*

24-04: a pair gave nice views in Karkheh Wildlife Refuge

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

27-04: 2 near Roodbarak.

30-04: 2 in the Parvar area.

Pale Rockfinch *Carpospiza brachydactyla*

01-05: 2 to 3 in the Parvar area. Very vocal.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

30-04: a single bird in the Parvar area.

Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*

22-04: 4 near Minab.

24-04: Common at Karkheh Wildlife Refuge.

Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica*

22-04: 2 in the Minab area.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

27-04: 2 near Roodbarak.

Radde's Accentor *Prunella*

01-05: 1 in the Parvar area. Jan en Vital only.

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

27-04: 2 at Babolsar Lake.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

A total of 7 on 2 dates near Roodbarak.

30-04: 4 in the Parvar area.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

21-04: a single bird near Bandar Abbas.

A total of 6 on 2 dates Toutan Nature Reserve.

30-04: 4 in the Parvar area.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common at Roodbarak and in the Parvar area.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrurus*

A total of 7 on 2 dates near Roodbarak.

A total of 15 in the Parvar area.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Single birds on 2 dates near Roodbarak.

27-04: 4 in forest between Roodbarak and Babolsar.

A total of 7 on 2 dates in the Parvar area.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

30-04: 2 in the Parvar area.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis ssp. caniceps*

A total of 5 on 2 dates near Roodbarak

30-04: a single bird in the Parvar area.

Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*

28-04: a single bird along the Tooskestan Road.

A total of 40 on 2 dates in the Parvar area.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

30-04: Heard singing in the Parvar area.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

A total of 14 on 2 dates near Roodbarak

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

29-04: a single bird observed at the HQ of Touran Nature Reserve.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata*

21-04: 3 at Geno Protected area.

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*

23-04: 10+ near Sirig.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

24-04: 2 at swamp near Mianab village.

205 species recorded

Some more photos of the trip



Eastern Orphee Warbler



Graceful Prinia



Green Bee-eater



Indian Roller



Rosy Starling



White-throated Robin



Grey Hypocolius



Egyptian Nightjar



The Team: Henk Hendriks, Vital van Gorp, Jan Vermeulen, Wiel Poelmans and Ali Khani