

## ISRAEL 3<sup>rd</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> December 2005

By [Richard Bonser](#)

**Trip Participants: Douglas Barr, Richard Bonser, Andy Clifton, Angus Murray and John Sweeney**

### *Introduction*

With a relatively light amount of holiday taken during the autumn, and the fact that I needed to use all of my holiday allowance up by the end of the year, thoughts turned to where could one gain excellent birding within the Western Palearctic within the month of December. After not too much deliberation, myself and [Andy Clifton](#) realised that a winter trip to Israel was more than likely to produce an excellent birding spectacle in addition to the potential to see some relatively tricky and ‘most wanted’ species. With little persuasion Angus Murray, John Sweeney and Douglas Barr agreed to join us on the trip.

Although John and I had never visited the country before, Andy, Angus and Douglas had visited the country in spring and explained that the infrastructure was excellent and distances were fairly minimal (for example a journey from Eilat (in the far south) to Haifa (in the north) is approximately 5 hours). With this thought in mind, we decided to take in the major birding areas across the whole of the country within a week long trip. Although at times we had to draw ourselves away when perhaps we would have liked more time at certain sites, at no point in time did we feel that this was an unmanageable itinerary.

### *Logistics*

Due to the fact that we wanted to maximise our time in the country, it was decided that the easiest thing to do was to fly [British Airways](#) (£260 per person including taxes) on scheduled flights from London Heathrow to Tel Aviv early morning on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December and return on a late afternoon flight from Tel Aviv on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December (arriving mid evening at London Heathrow). Unfortunately, due to the ‘Hemel Hempstead’ smoke and unforeseen technical problems, our return flight was delayed by approximately 3 hours and we ended up getting out of Heathrow shortly before midnight.

Car hire was booked through the [Holiday Autos](#) website with [Sixt](#) as our ground agent for a total of circa £380 for a Mazda 6 with a local charge for additional drivers. Unfortunately, due to one of our party not seeing a rather large sign in the grounds of Kibbutz Lotan, we unfortunately had to return the car with a rather dented rear bumper.

Overnight accommodation was found on arrival at each destination with incredible ease, although we had pre-booked one night at Kibbutz Lotan before arriving in Israel. Good, clean accommodation could be obtained for as little as 90 shekels per night (where 7 shekels equalled £1 sterling at the time of our visit).

We spent 3 nights at the excellent [Beit Alfa Kibbutz Guestrooms](#) at a price of 90 shekels per person per night whilst we birded the Hula, Kfar Rupin and Golan Heights. After a night at Yoav Perlman’s house after looking for Nubian Nightjar, we stayed at [Kibbutz Lotan](#) in the Arava Valley for one night (the most expensive

accommodation at 135 shekels per person per night), then a couple of nights at the [Pierre Hotel](#) in Eilat (90 shekels per person per night) and finally a night on the Mediterranean coast at [Nahsholim Holiday Village](#) (105 shekels per person per night) near the birding site of Ma'agan Mikhael.

We generally lived off a diet of hommous and pita bread whilst birding and this was thoroughly sufficient to get us through the daylight hours. Evenings were generally a sit down meal varying from lafas (stuffed pita bread with a variety of fillings) to the more usual pizzas or pasta. Additionally, beer was approximately £1.50 per bottle and Goldstar and Maccabi appear to be the beers of choice within Israel. Bottled water was drunk throughout the trip.

### ***Literature***

Israel is an exceptionally small, bird-filled country and the majority of literature and birding focuses on the southern half of the country and locations within easy access of Eilat. '*Finding Birds in Israel*' by Dave Gosney, was an invaluable and can be purchased from [Birdguides](#). The Eilat section of this book was particularly useful, and despite its ageing content, Gosney's meticulous directions still outdo his contemporaries. Two further site guides - '*A Guide to the Birding Hot-spots of Northern Israel*' and '*A Guide to the Birding Hot-spots of Southern Israel*' – both by Hadoram Shirihai, James Smith, Guy Kirwan and Dan Alon were extremely useful and provided more detailed, up-to-date information than Gosney for several sites.

We used a 1:150,000 Israel: The New Road Atlas (published by Mapa Publishers) throughout our visit; purchased from [Stanfords](#). The Collins Bird Guide (Mullarney, Svensson, Zetterstrom and Grant) was used throughout the trip while the 17 CD set Die Vogelstimmen by Andreas Schulze was also a useful resource.

### ***Websites and Acknowledgements***

Information on birding in Israel since 2001 is in relatively short supply compared to what you may expect. In fact, thorough searching on websites such as [Surfbirds](#), [Netfugl](#), [Eurobirding](#) and [Birdtours](#) failed to reveal any 'gems' although [Justin Jansen's](#) November and December 2001 Eilat report was certainly more thorough than any other 'post-millennium' reports.

Of significant help, however, was the response that I gained from a posting on [WestPalBirds](#) and this response formed the foundations for our much needed, up-to-date information. From this source, information was kindly provided by Geoff Barter, Jonathan Meyrav and Noam Weiss. Additionally, James Smith provided us with some extremely helpful information for species in and around the Eilat area. For up-to-date sightings, the [Israbirdnet](#) yahoo group is an excellent resource and imperative in any prior planning for a trip to Israel.

Of particular note, I am indebted to the help that Trevor Ellery gave us – both with information for specific species as well as making the initial contact with a couple of well respected Israeli birders who consequently were more than willing to assist us on our trip. In the north, we spent a couple of days birding with [Barak Granit](#) (his website that includes regular updates on Israeli sightings can be found [here](#)) and we were extremely grateful to Yoav Perlman for his hospitality, knowledge and off-road

driving whilst at Neot Ha'kikar. Many of the species that we saw in the south are due to the details we were given by the two aforementioned local birders. Additionally, Sean Huggins was very helpful when we met him on several occasions whilst birding in the Eilat area.

### ***Other information***

Since the start of the millennium, the number of tourists visiting the country has unfortunately declined seriously. However, throughout our trip, not on one occasion did we encounter any trouble and despite planning our itinerary around not entering the West Bank, we actually were advised that it was perfectly safe to drive Route 90 from Bet She'an through to Ein Gedi. With this latter thought, we did indeed drive through the West Bank and even managed to stop and do a little bit of birding en-route.

Driving in Israel is extremely easy and stress free, and although we never got caught, there is an alarming amount of police patrolling the roads scouring for people driving at excessive speed. The speed limit out of towns is 90 km per hour and on motorways the limit is 110 km per hour.

Unlike other countries I've visited, Israel was completely free of locals hassling you whilst out birding and on no account did we feel anything but safe throughout our trip. The Israeli tourist economy has obviously been hit hard this millennium, and the only 'in-your-face' selling that we encountered was when we initially arrived in Eilat where a couple of people approached us to see whether we wanted any accommodation.

### ***Itinerary***

A brief outline of our trip (with approximate driving times) is detailed below: -

**Saturday** arrived at Tel Aviv airport late afternoon (already dark) and drove to Bet She'an. Overnight at Beit Alfa.

**Sunday** Mount Gilboa at dawn, then spent the rest of the day birding around Kfar Rupin and Maoz Hayyim til dark. Overnight at Beit Alfa.

**Monday** morning spent in the Golan Heights at several sites, and the afternoon spent around the re-flooded area at the Hula. Overnight at Beit Alfa.

**Tuesday** drive southwards along route 90, through the West Bank, stopping at date palms at the north end of the Dead Sea. Explored the area around Ein Gedi, and the evening spent at Neot Ha'kikar. Overnight at Yoav Perlman's house in Be'er Sheva.

**Wednesday** early to mid morning at Nizzana, with the remainder of the day spent at Urim. Overnight at Kibbutz Lotan in the Arava Valley.

**Thursday** the whole day spent in and around Eilat. Overnight at the Pierre Hotel, Eilat.

**Friday** the morning at Mitspe Ramon, and the afternoon spent birding back towards Eilat. Overnight at the Pierre Hotel, Eilat.

**Saturday** up until lunchtime, we birded the Eilat area before heading north, via Yotvata, and ended up staying at Nahsholim Holiday Village near Ma'agan Mikhael.

**Sunday** early morning at Ma'agan Mikhael, then birded the fishponds at Ein Na Khoresh, before returning to Tel Aviv to catch a late afternoon flight back to Heathrow.

### ***Report Format***

I have aimed to write this report considering two distinctly different types of birder. Firstly the 'target species seen' and 'target species not seen' sections will be of use to those individuals who are considering a similar trip to ourselves and have a distinct interest in the locations of specific species. Secondly, the daily sightings section will hopefully cater for those birders who are more interested in the avian diversity that is offered at each site or are largely confined to a specific geographic area due to, for example, a family holiday. Both sections should be used in conjunction with each other as most detail on individual sites will be contained within the 'target species seen' section. If you would like any information that you cannot find on this report, please feel free to e-mail me.

## **TARGET BIRDS SEEN**

When one goes abroad, everyone undoubtedly lists (at least mentally) those species that they would be extremely keen to see. The following is a pretty comprehensive list of species that the 'Western European' birder would have a keen interest in seeing. This list ranges from very easy species to locate such as Yellow-vented Bulbuls, Pied Kingfisher and Smyrna Kingfisher (these three being common to abundant in suitable habitat) right through to more difficult species such as Striated Scops Owl, Nubian Nightjar, Long-billed Pipit and Sinai Rosefinch.

### **Pygmy Cormorant**

This species has rapidly increased its Israeli population over the last decade and we were fortunate to see small numbers in the north of the country – sites such as the re-flooded area of the Hula, Kfar Rupin fishponds and Ma'agan Mikhael were all productive for this species.

### **European White Pelican**

Common (approximately 200 birds on 5<sup>th</sup> December) on the main lake at the re-flooded area of the Hula (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 38, site 4), but not seen elsewhere. However, small numbers were seen by others in the Eilat area at the time of our visit.

### **Green-backed Heron**

Only seen at the traditional site of Eilat North Beach where small numbers (no more than a handful) were present on the offshore fishing platforms.

### **Western Reef Heron**

Appeared to be relatively common at Eilat North Beach where, in addition to a confiding individual immediately in front of us, it favours the offshore fishing platforms with Little Egrets and Green-backed Herons.

### **Ruddy Shelduck**

Four birds were present on the main lake at the re-flooded area at the Hula (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 38, site 4) during our visit on 5<sup>th</sup> December. However, the dispersive nature of this species means that they are likely to be present almost anywhere and the KM20 saltpans at Eilat have traditionally been a favoured site.

### **Pallid Harrier**

A juvenile performed admirably late afternoon over the reeds adjacent to the hut/hide that overlooks the main lake at the re-flooded area at the Hula (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 38, site 4) on 5<sup>th</sup> December. Although we did not see any, this species is occasionally recorded at Urim.

### **Greater Spotted Eagle**

This species is actually locally common within the winter months and was seen with relative ease at a few sites. In fact, it was one of the birds of the trip in the form of 4 individuals over Mount Gilboa at dawn on our first morning. Additionally, this species was seen regularly in the Maoz Hayyim and Kfar Rupin area with at least 4 individuals noted here on 4<sup>th</sup> December. At least 10 were present in the fields adjacent to the re-flooded area at the Hula (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 38, site 4) during the afternoon of 5<sup>th</sup> December and at least 2 were present at Urim on 7<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Eastern Imperial Eagle**

This impressive raptor is not uncommon, although is somewhat localised in terms of its distribution. Our first observations of this species were made in the far north-east of the country at the Golan Heights. Just south of El Rom on the R98, turn west on the 9799 to Gov Ga'ash and after approximately 400 yards on the left there is a rough area where dead chickens are thrown out – in amongst the numerous Black Kites, at least 3 1<sup>st</sup> year Eastern Imperial Eagles were present. A further individual (again a 1<sup>st</sup> calendar year bird) was noted over the steep gorge near the R959/R918 junction near Gonen (close to the Hula) whilst certainly the best place to see this species in Israel appears to be Urim. Indeed, in one afternoon, we located 7 individuals including 3 adults – most birds favoured the power lines either side of the R234 although exceptional views of an adult were obtained in a field 1km north of the petrol station by the R234 (north of the R241 junction).

### **Lanner**

A notoriously wide-ranging species, we were fortunate to gain exceptional views of an adult at Nizzana sewage works (Site 4b in Birding Hot-spots of Southern Israel, p.128) on 7<sup>th</sup> December. In fact, this bird's presence may actually have been to our detriment as it certainly appeared to make the local sandgrouse population extremely skittish and wary.

### **Saker**

After a thorough search of the Urim area all afternoon on 7<sup>th</sup> December, we were almost about to give up on this species when one of our team located a juvenile flying across a field 1.9km to the west of R234 adjacent to the power lines. The bird then landed in the field, where its 'trousers' and blue cere could be seen, before once again flying off and landing on a distant pylon. [Additionally, a juvenile was seen in fields immediately to the south-west of the re-flooded area at the Hula (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 38, site 4) on 5<sup>th</sup> December. According to Barak Granit, this individual had been caught bearing jesses earlier in the winter, its jesses removed and then released at the Hula. Although the provenance of its jesses were unknown, they were not thought to be of local origin and it was suggested that it may have been trapped on its breeding grounds.]

### **Barbary Falcon**

One zoomed over us at Ein Gedi beach stop i.e. the car park area adjacent to the petrol station and café on 6<sup>th</sup> December, whilst a couple of birds were present at the Km20 salt pans, north of Eilat on 10<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Chukar**

Although this species was not specifically looked for, it was very common in fields at Maoz Hayyim near the Jordanian border whilst further small coveys were noted at Mitspe Ramon (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 96 site 1) and Mount Gilboa (Birding Hot-spots Northern, pages 97-98).

### **Sand Partridge**

This species certainly is typical of the dry wadis in the southern half of the country and is fairly common in suitable habitat. At least 6 were seen at Wadi Arugot, Ein

Gedi, at least 20 at Nahal Hever, south of Ein Gedi and 4 were seen around the football pitch at Mitspe Ramon (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 96 site 1).

### **Black Francolin**

Our first observation of this excellent species on this trip was a male by the roadside south of Kfar Rupin and just NW of Tirat Tsvi near the village of Sde Eliyahu. Though this was a chance encounter, apparently this species is locally common in this area. Most notably, we saw at least 7 of this species at the Hula re-flooded area (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 38, site 4). The birds were south-east of the main lake on the field edge at the extreme south-east of the track that runs around this whole area.

### **McQueen's Bustard**

To see this species, a trip to the Nizzana area (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 125-129) is pretty much essential although it is obviously present in suitable habitat throughout the Western Negev. On our visit, we were fortunate enough to observe at least 8 birds in a single flock south of the military area on the road from Nizzana (or Nitsana) to Ezuz. As described elsewhere (e.g. Gosney or Birding Hot-spots in Southern Israel), we drove south of the military fence and scanned both sides of the road. After an unsuccessful attempt c.200 metres south of where the fence stopped, we drove further south and saw all of our birds to the west of the road in, or immediately adjacent to, the large wadi extending westwards between the roadside posts numbered 109 and 110.

### **White-tailed Plover**

After being alerted to the presence of a long-staying individual by Yoav Perlman, we were fortunate in locating this bird on 11<sup>th</sup> December at Ein Ha Khoresh fishponds. On arrival at the fishponds mid morning, the bird was present with a small flock of Spur-winged Plovers on the first pool on the right after going over the river bridge. Although this individual is unlikely to be present in future years, I feel that full directions to this site (where Painted Snipe have also been present in 2005) are beneficial as it provided us with our only sightings of Moustached Warbler and Citrine Wagtail during our trip. From route 4 north-east of Netanya, turn east onto R581 and after a few kilometres, turn right (south) to Ein Ha Khoresh. Go straight down this road for 0.9km on tarmac (passing through the gates and the industrial area) and then for a further 0.3km on dirt after the tarmac finishes. Fork left here (i.e. 1.2km from the main road) and follow this track for a further 1.1km until you reach a small bridge over a small river. The fishponds are immediately viewable on the right.

### **White-eyed Gull**

This Red Sea endemic was only seen at Eilat North Beach, where it is present in large numbers around the offshore fish platforms.

### **Great Black-headed Gull**

We were fortunate enough to have a few sightings of this magnificent gull. Our first encounter was of a bird flying over the fishponds at Maoz Hayyim on 4<sup>th</sup> December and then a further 56 birds nearby on the reservoirs at Tirat Tsvi (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 95) – most of these were present on the lower of the two large reservoirs. An adult was present off Eilat North Beach on 9<sup>th</sup> December and c.25 seen on the Km20 saltpans north of Eilat on 10<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull (of the race *fuscus*)**

Three birds were present at Eilat North Beach on 8<sup>th</sup> December and a further 2 adults were seen on the beach at Ma'agan Mikhael on 11<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Caspian Gull**

Several individuals of this species (most adults or near adults) were noted at Kfar Rupin fishponds and the nearby Tirat Tsvi reservoirs, although completely outnumbered by Armenian Gull.

### **'Steppe' Gull**

This 'taxon' is included here for the sake of completeness and to highlight our observations, particularly in the southern half of the country. Anybody who has visited Israel will presumably be as perplexed as we were with the 'white-headed gull complex' present – indeed, adult birds present in the Eilat area seemed to show characteristics of *barabensis*. However, Malling-Olsen's book shows slight differences in wing-tip patterning between *barabensis* and *armenicus*, but this was not noted by us in the field and it may be that this difference is not much use without a lot of experience of both forms.

There were only a few large gulls that looked like clear *armenicus* at Eilat North Beach and only a few that didn't look like *armenicus* at Ma'agan Mikhael and Kfar Rupin. The birds that might have been *barabensis* at Ma'agan Mikhael (more powerfully built, with deeper less colourful bills) could also potentially have been *michahellis*. In essence, to attempt to critically analyse this complex in such a brief trip is extremely difficult, and it certainly adds food for thought for future visits.

### **Armenian Gull**

Very common at fishponds in the Kfar Rupin area with hundreds noted at Maoz Hayyim, the fishponds at Kfar Rupin and the adjacent Tirat Tsvi reservoirs. Smaller numbers were seen at the re-flooded area of The Hula whilst this species was again present in good numbers at Ma'agan Mikhael on the final morning of our trip.

### **Spotted Sandgrouse**

A vigil of the pools near Nizzana (Site 4b in Birding Hot-spots Southern, p.128) between 8am and 9.30am produced eight birds of this species as well as at least 50 Black-bellied Sandgrouse. We failed to observe this species anywhere else, despite going to the sewage works at Mitspe Ramon where this species is meant to be seen – from the roundabout on R40, head east (passing the football pitch) for c.3km until the track ends by a small sewage works, with sandgrouse reportedly coming to this site to drink between 8.30 and 9 in the morning.

### **Namaqua Dove**

Being told by Barak Granit that the date palms at the northern end of the Dead Sea are potentially the best place in the country to see this species, we did as he said on our journey south through The West Bank and stopped at the first date palm plantation south-west of the R90 junction at the north end of the Dead Sea. We found one female here, perched on the perimeter fence of the plantation adjacent to the R90 and c.3km north-east of the Kalya junction. Later the same day, whilst driving through the greenhouses and cultivated area at Moshav Neot Ha'kikar close to the Nubian



Nightjar site, a further 3 birds were seen together. At least 3 males were also seen near Yotvata on 8<sup>th</sup> December by the sewage works east of R90 between Km39 and Km40 (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 57 – 61, site 1d).

### **Striated Scops Owl**

One individual was located, and showed exceptionally well, in an acacia tree at Wadi Shahamon (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 47) on the north-western outskirts of Eilat. From the town centre, you want to firstly take R12 in the direction of Eilat Mountains and on the extremity of the conurbation, you will reach a roundabout where R12 carries on straight ahead and the ring road is to the right. Take this right turn and almost immediately you will go over Wadi Shahamon but you'll notice that there is nowhere to park before the block of flats on your right. Therefore, from the roundabout clock 1.7km and turn left onto the dirt track and then drive back on yourself for 1.5km (immediately parallel with the main road) until you reach the wadi entrance. You can drive into the wadi and this is exactly what we did in order to keep a careful eye on our car and belongings. Once in the wadi, systematically check each of the 30 or so acacia trees – we located one bird in a lone acacia to the right of the track 0.7km up from the wadi entrance.

### **Desert Eagle Owl**

A hunting bird, often perching on greenhouses, showed exceptionally well at Neot Ha'kikar during the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> December whilst searching for Nubian Nightjar. Indeed, whilst watching this species, a Nubian Nightjar flew through our field of view!

### **Nubian Nightjar**

Whilst constructing the itinerary of our trip, I had pretty much little hope of seeing this species. However, with a little bit of networking, I was put in contact with Yoav Perlman who said that it was worth giving this species a go due to the fact that, through his studies, realised it is sedentary in the Neot Ha'kikar area. With his skill and perseverance, we eventually obtained views of a bird over fields at Moshav Neot Ha'kikar on the rather balmy evening of 6<sup>th</sup> December. Despite extensive searching, we were unable to find any birds on the deck and, due to the time of year, they were not vocal. A footnote to this observation is that, under no circumstances, should one venture to Moshav Neot Ha'kikar on your own – Yoav contacted the military via phone whilst we were present to let them know that he would be driving around the area (very close to the Jordan border) after dark and, as you will see if you visit due to the innumerable warnings, land mines are present in the area.

### **Smyrna Kingfisher**

A common bird of any fishpond environment, particularly in the north of the country, where it was extremely common at Kfar Rupin, the Hula and Ma'agan Mikhael. Compared to Pied Kingfisher, this species seems more inclined to favour areas without water – with one individual seen in date palms along The West Bank.

### **Pied Kingfisher**

A very common species in suitable habitat, outnumbering the previous species. Most common at Ma'agan Mikhael, the Hula and Kfar Rupin but also present in good numbers in the Eilat area (particularly at the North Beach).

### **Little Green Bee-eater**

A relatively widespread species, though by no means abundant, in the southern half of the country with our observations being from Ein Gedi, south through the Arava valley, to Eilat. Probably the best site for this species was Wadi Arugot at Ein Gedi (Birding Hot-spots Southern, p.120).

### **Oriental Skylark**

This was one of the main target species for this winter trip to Israel. Oriental Skylark is now known to be a scarce winter visitor to the country (between the months of October and March) and consequently there is a realistic opportunity of seeing this species if you are required to put in a little effort. One thing we found, according to Barak Granit, is their high propensity to favour alfalfa fields and therefore knowing what this crop looks like is essential! We located a total of 4 birds (a flock of 3 and a single) amongst Skylarks and pipits in a large alfalfa field north of Maoz Hayyim on 4<sup>th</sup> December – just north-east of the R71/R6688 junction we took a dirt track through arable land and the birds were found in the large alfalfa field beyond a 90 degree left hand bend in the track. Of course, the whereabouts of alfalfa will vary year to year and up-to-date local knowledge is imperative in knowing the whereabouts of this species. Other favoured sites for this species include the fields just beyond the ringing station at Kfar Rupin and, in the south of the country, the southern circular field at Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 1b).

### **African Rock Martin**

This is a common species in the southern half of the country and, after recording them firstly near Ein Gedi, they were seen on a daily basis and at most sites in the Eilat and Yotvata area.

### **Richard's Pipit**

A group of 4 birds were found in fields to the north-east of Maoz Hayyim in fields close to the Jordanian border on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Long-billed Pipit**

Two birds were present (with one showing extremely well) at Mount Gilboa (Birding Hot-spots Northern, pages 97-98 between sites 2 and 3) on the first morning of our trip. We found the birds 2.8km from the turn-off from the R669 just before a hairpin left hand bend as you're heading up the hill, with one bird singing from a bush right beside the road and also seen on the rocky hillside below.

### **Citrine Wagtail**

An adult in winter plumage was present amongst White Wagtails at the fishponds at Ein Ha Khoresh on 11<sup>th</sup> December (see directions to this site under White-tailed Plover).

### **Yellow-vented Bulbul**

Predictably, this was the first species that we saw on the trip and, in all probabilities, the last. This is an extremely common species and was found in all habitats.

### **Black Redstart (of the race *phoenicuroides*)**

Although not a specific trip target, we were aware of a '*semirufus*' Black Redstart present at Ye'elim Holiday Village, Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58

site 2a) whilst in Britain. However, upon finding this bird, several features were at odds with *semirufus* (especially the sooty grey upperpart colouration that contrasted deeply with the glossy black throat and breast) and consequently identified the bird as an 'Eastern Black Redstart' *Phoenicuros ochruros phoenicuroides* after our observations on both the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Blackstart**

This unobtrusive species is a common fixture within the desert environment in the east and south of the country. We first encountered the species at Ein Gedi and then found it to be relatively common at several sites around Eilat including Yotvata and Ein Netafin.

### **Caspian Stonechat**

During our visit, we recorded 2 'eastern' Stonechats and, of these, we were able to closely scrutinise one of these, a first-winter male, in fields to the north-east of Maoz Hayyim – and with white extending at least two thirds the way up in the tail, this would suggest *variegata*. The other bird, noted at The Hula re-flooded area, was not seen sufficiently well to determine racial identification.

### **Finsch's Wheatear**

A female was seen on the first morning of our trip on the rocky hillside at Mount Gilboa (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 97-98 between sites 2 and 3).

### **Mourning Wheatear**

Birds of the nominate race *lugens* were seen at two sites – four were present south of the military area on the road from Nizzana to Ezuz (whilst searching for McQueen's Bustard), 1 at Nizzana sewage pools (Site 4b in Birding Hot-spots Southern, p.128), 3 birds showed well around the football pitch at Mitspe Ramon (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 96, site 1) early morning on 9<sup>th</sup> December and a further individual north of Mitspe Ramon at the dried up sewage pool.

### **Hooded Wheatear**

An adult male showed extremely well as it perched on the perimeter fence of the small sewage works to the east of R90 between Km39 and Km40 (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 57 – 61, site 1d).

### **White-crowned Black Wheatear**

A relatively widespread species, seen at several sites, in the southern half of the country. Typical sites included the spring at Ein Netafin in the Eilat Mountains, Mitspe Ramon and Ein Gedi.

### **Moustached Warbler**

One showed extremely well in reeds adjacent to the track at the fishponds at Ein Ha Khoresh on the final morning of our trip (see White-tailed Plover for detailed directions of this site).

### **Clamorous Reed Warbler**

One showed very well in scrub near the turf fields at Kfar Rupin (Birding Hot-spots Northern page 80, site 1) and a further bird was heard at Neot Ha'kikar fishponds (Birding Hot-spots Southern page 122, site 11). This species is most common in the

north of the country and this species is much commoner than our couple of records suggest.

### **Cyprus Warbler**

A male was located at Wadi Shlomo (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 43) on 8<sup>th</sup> December although perseverance was required in this almost birdless wadi. Park by R12 in the Eilat mountains (or, as we did, drive the rough track to the south of the main road down the wadi) and the bird was present in an obvious side wadi to the left (going downhill) with a few acacia trees and small bushes about 1km down from the main road. Additionally, the wadis around Ein Gedi can also be very good for this species but we failed to locate any – in particular Nahal Hever (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 120-121) is meant to be a favoured locality. This site is 7.5km south of Wadi Arugot – park on the R90, walk east towards the Dead Sea and search the small bushes where the wadi opens up towards the sea.

### **Arabian Warbler**

A singing male showed exceptionally well near Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 3) on 8<sup>th</sup> December. Between Km50 and Km51, locate any track to the west of R90 and park (so that your car is not on the highway), then walk into the area where scattered, tall acacia trees can be found. Although we did not look for this species at one of its traditional sites in the acacia scrub south of Ye'elim Holiday Village, this site does still apparently produce birds but they are less reliable than they once were.

### **Yellow-browed Warbler**

A vocal individual was seen at Ye'elim Holiday Village, Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 2a) on both visits (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December) and favoured the more mature trees at the western side (the side closest to the petrol station and supermarket) of this dilapidated site.

### **Arabian Babbler**

Initially seen by R90 in The West Bank near Einot Tsuku north of Ovnat where 3 were present, others were seen at the cemetery in Eilat, at a dried up sewage pool north of Mitspe Ramon and at Ye'elim Holiday Village, Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 2a). This is very much a species that you will encounter whilst out at sites birding, and suggesting a specific site for this species would be difficult.

### **Palestine Sunbird**

This is a common to very common species throughout the country, although it certainly seemed more numerous in the southern half of the country.

### **Brown-necked Raven**

Recorded first at the date plantations just inside the West Bank, this species is widespread in the arid, desert areas of the southern half of the country with sightings as far north-west as Nizzana and recorded daily in the Eilat area.

### **Fan-tailed Raven**

A localised species, but common where it is present. This species was only seen, typically, in the Ein Gedi area where a flock of 30 birds soared over R90 north of the resort near the West Bank border crossing and produced our first sighting of this

species. Several were noted at Wadi Arugot (Southern Birding Hot-spots, page 120) whilst exceptional views of several birds could be had in the car park of the rest stop/public beach at Ein Gedi.

### **Tristram's Grackle**

A visit to the rest stop/public beach car park at Ein Gedi produced in excess of 200 of this rather noisy species – many were present in the trees of the car park and others were perched on the adjacent radio mast/pylon. Smaller numbers were seen at the nearby Wadi Arugot (Southern Birding Hot-spots, page 120) and at least 15 were seen in the upmarket southern Dead Sea resort of Neve Zohar whilst we stopped to buy food. In the south of the country, 3 flew over Ye'elim Holiday Village, Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 2a) on 9<sup>th</sup> December with a couple over the same site the next day.

### **Common Myna**

A single was seen in the car park adjacent to the Ye'elim Holiday village at Yotvata on 8<sup>th</sup> December. This species initially escaped from a large aviary near Tel Aviv about ten years ago and the total Israeli population is now estimated at about 5000 individuals. Although most are in the Dan region (around Tel Aviv), in recent years there have been considerable movements, with birds reaching Eilat and other parts of the Rift Valley, northern Israel and apparently successfully breeding at many sites. It does appear on category C of the Israeli list, along with Vinous-breasted Starling (information supplied by Yoav Perlman *in lit*).

### **Dead Sea Sparrow**

Our only sighting was of a male seen briefly in reeds by a small sewage area near the entrance to the reservoirs at Tirat Tsvi. As all observers had seen this species previously, we did not specifically look elsewhere although the ponds at Neot Ha'kikar and the Eilat area are both good sites for this species.

### **Indian Silverbill**

Although presumably an introduced species, this was a species that we wanted to see during our trip. As it was, this proved relatively easy with our first sighting being a handful of birds adjacent to the track to Tirat Tsvi cemetery (near Kfar Rupin). We also encountered a small group of birds in the date palms on The West Bank immediately adjacent to R90 at the northern end of the Dead Sea near Kalya (see Namaqua Dove for more specific site directions) and c.20 were present in the date palms next to the sewage works between Km39 and Km40 just south of Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 57 – 61, site 1d).

### **Syrian Serin**

We had been told that small flocks of this species occur in the area immediately adjacent to the football pitch at Mitspe Ramon and roost in the adjacent conifers by the picnic benches – this site being immediately east of the roundabout on R40 by the garage at the southern edge of the town (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 96, site 1). On our visit, and with extensive searching, we were only able to locate one bird briefly as it perched in the parkland on the west side of the roundabout.

### **Sinai Rosefinch**

Our research prior to the trip suggested that there were two accessible sites for this species in the Eilat area. We tried Amran's Pillars (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 47) and were unsuccessful as there appeared to be no fruit or leftovers discarded by tourists that would entice the birds to feed (additionally this site was completely birdless). At the other site, Ein Netafin (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 42), we were extremely successful as we had superb views of at least 10 birds (including 3 'red' males) as they favoured the area near the spring (located in the steep gorge below where you stand) mid morning on 10<sup>th</sup> December. Park in the clearly signposted car park off R12 and walk down the path 10 minutes or so until you reach the spring – note that the track to the spring is completely impassable in a conventional car and 4 wheel drive vehicles may also struggle nowadays.

## **TARGET SPECIES NOT SEEN**

It is inevitable that on any trip, you will not see everything despite your best efforts to do so. The following is a brief summary of the species that can be found in Israel in December of which we did not see.

### **Yelkouan Shearwater**

This species can be found regularly on the Mediterranean Coast. Our visit to Ma'agan Mikhael coincided with poor visibility and as such we failed to see this species. If you want to see this species, the best place to view the sea in the Ma'agan Mikhael area is from the Nahsholim Holiday Village.

### **White-headed Duck**

We did not visit the Jezreel Valley (Northern Birding Hot-spots pages 30-36) although we were aware that good numbers were once again present at Tishlovet Reservoir.

### **Steppe Eagle**

This species is still present in very small numbers in December, and during our visit a couple were seen at the Km33 lark area north of Eilat (Southern Birding Hot-spots, page 69).

### **Verreaux's Eagle**

One was seen in the Eilat Mountains on a single date in early December 2005.

### **Little Bustard**

Although we did briefly try for this species in the Golan Heights (Northern Birding Hot-spots pages 59-70), we were aware that not many had been seen this winter. We tried the area to the west of R808 on the road to Natur without success.

### **Painted Snipe**

Still regarded as a very rare bird in Israel, this species was present throughout the summer months of 2005 at the fishponds at Ein Ha Khoresh (see directions in under White-tailed Plover). Although there had been no recent observations, Jonathan Meyrav saw this species again at this site within a couple of days of us leaving the country.

### **Heuglin's Gull**

Despite searching through the gulls at both Eilat North Beach and Ma'agan Mikhael, we failed to locate any. The most regular site (per observations on Israbirdnet) most definitely appears to be the beach at Ma'agan Mikhael.

### **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse**

After conducting our pre-tour research, the only reliable site for this species appeared to be the pumping station on the western fringes of Eilat town (Southern Birding Hot-spots page 36 site 8) at dusk. With three of our group having previously seen this species at this particular site, it was somewhat alarming on arrival to note the lack of a drinking tray with the only sign of water being a slow drip from a blue pipe below the 'do not disturb, sandgrouse area' signs. We waited until it was pitch black and no sandgrouse came in to drink (though 4 silent small sandgrouse flew over distantly in the fading light).

### **Crowned Sandgrouse**

Undoubtedly the most difficult of Israel's sandgrouse quintet, we attempted to see this species firstly at the pools at Nizzana (Site 4b in *Birding Hot-spots of Southern Israel*, p.128) and again at the sewage works at Mitspe Ramon (for directions see under Spotted Sandgrouse). Our attempts were in vain, and we were told that they no longer occur at Shizzafon (a site in previous years for this species)

### **Hume's Owl**

December is certainly not the most productive time of year for this ever difficult species. In fact, with the departure of both James Smith and Hadoram Shirihai in recent years, there is a severe lack of information and people to help you in your quest for this species. Going forward, things may change and if you are planning a spring visit I would strongly advise you to contact [Israbirding](#) as they seem to be in the preliminary phase of the process for rekindling guidance for this species. The dry wadis around Ein Gedi and the southern Dead Sea are apparently the stronghold for this species in Israel.

### **Hoopoe Lark**

We did not visit the Km33 area north of Eilat (*Southern Birding Hot-spots*, page 69) during our visit, but this species was seen there whilst we were in Eilat.

### **Bar-tailed Lark**

Like the previous species, the lack of a visit to the Km33 area (*Southern Birding Hot-spots*, page 69) inevitable meant that we were going to struggle seeing this species.

### **Asian Buff-bellied Pipit**

We were not made aware of any individuals of this species in the Eilat area and our searching failed to muster up anything. One was seen whilst we were in Israel at the turf fields Ein Yahav (north of Yotvata and south of Neot Ha'kikar, east of R90) but due to the lack of time, we were unable to search for this bird.

### **Radde's Accentor**

A brief search in the orchard at El Rom failed to produce any of this species (where it has been seen on at least a couple of occasions this winter). This site can be found just east of El Rom by turning off R98 by the brown 'Vine U Pick and Blackberries' sign and then turning immediately right again and parking after 0.5km. Walk up the hill to the orchard area and the accentors are supposed to favour the tall coniferous trees on the orchard periphery.

### **Asian Desert Warbler**

We did not search for this species and consequently did not see it. It is an uncommon, widespread species in the Arava Valley and whilst we were in the country we did hear of sightings at Km33 north of Eilat (*Southern Birding Hot-spots*, page 69).

### **Desert Finch**

We did not search for this species. However, we did hear of sightings whilst we were in Eilat of birds in the orchard area between R90 and the km20 saltpans as well as birds being seen in the fields near Yotvata.



### **Pine Bunting**

This species maintains a wintering foothold in extreme north-eastern Israel and with access to Mount Hermon still difficult, the best chance is amongst the Yellowhammers near Alonei ha-Bashan. North of this aforementioned village, turn off the R98 east onto a small road signed 'OP52' towards the Syrian border. Follow this road for 1.5km until you get to a junction with a road on the right – park your car here by a red bordered sign with Hebrew writing on it. Explore the area to the north of the road from here in an attempt to find the Yellowhammer flock. We only saw a handful of this species, but apparently the ratio of Yellowhammers to Pine Buntings averages at a pretty decent 15:1.

### **Asian House Bunting**

This thinly distributed species (also referred to as Striated Bunting or Mountain Bunting) was searched for at Wadi Arugot (Birding Hot-spots Southern, p.120) and the cemetery at Eilat but without success. It is reportedly present at a number of sites in the Eilat area (such as Ein Netafin and Wadi Shlomo) but recent specific information on this species was not available.

## DAILY SIGHTINGS

This section aims to detail my observations on a day-to-day basis and can be used as a narrative in conjunction with the previous sections. Although some detail is undoubtedly contained below, if you are looking for more specific information on certain species then I would certainly have a look at the 'target species found' section. Additionally, this section purely focuses on my own observations and numbers and sightings are based on my field notes (whereas the 'target species found' section details observations for the group as a whole).

### 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2005

Arriving at Tel Aviv just as it was getting dark, we got our hire car and headed the couple of hours or so (via a McDonald's) to the area around Bet She'an and accommodation that we found at Bet Alfa.

### 4<sup>th</sup> December 2005

After a fitful night's sleep, I awoke to the bulbul chorus with much excitement about the day ahead. Before sunrise, we met up with Barak Granit who would spend the next two days birding with us in the northern half of the country.

#### Mount Gilboa (Birding Hot-spots Northern, pages 97-98)

After leaving the main road, we headed 2.4km to a small pull in where we noted 4 **Spotted Eagles** coming out of their roost site and heading in the direction of the Bet She'an valley. A male **Hen Harrier** patrolled the hillside briefly whilst a Peregrine sat motionless in the early morning sunlight. This gave us the first taste of common northern Israeli birds such as **Yellow-vented Bulbul**, **Palestine Sunbird**, **Stonechat**, **Cattle Egret**, **Hooded Crows** and **Corn Buntings** whilst a **Southern Grey Shrike** (of the race *aucheri*) was a little bit more unusual. Heading up the road a further 0.4km we got out of the car just before a sharp left hand bend and were immediately rewarded with stunning views of a singing **Long-billed Pipit** by the roadside. Two birds were present, with the other one noted on the adjacent rocky hillside where what would turn out to be our only **Finsch's Wheatear** of the trip was seen plus at least a couple of **Black Redstarts**.

#### Kfar Rupin (Birding Hot-spots Northern page 80, site 1)

The first area we were to search in our quest to locate an Oriental Skylark would be the fields immediately after the ringing station – both the alfalfa fields adjacent to the road as well as the turf fields. A **Black Stork** and **Spoonbill** were spotted immediately in a field with herons and egrets whilst the first **Spur-winged Plovers**, **Pied Kingfishers** and **White-breasted Kingfishers** were noted (all of these species were to become a common site on our trip). Having stopped the car by a rather large alfalfa field, we commenced our search on foot and despite large numbers of **Red-throated Pipits** and **Skylarks**, and smaller numbers of **Meadow Pipits** and **Water Pipits**, we could not locate our target species. A couple of **Ospreys** were present in a field opposite whilst the ubiquitous **Black Kites** rested on the irrigation structures and a large flock of **Spanish Sparrows** zoomed around the bushes that also held several **Graceful Prinias**. After getting back to the car we headed off to the turf fields, where bird activity was once again excellent – a **Hoopoe** and **Isabelline Wheatear** feeding on the short turf, a **Merlin** zapping through whilst an adjacent scrub area provided us with what would turn out to be our only sighting of **Clamorous Reed Warbler**. Pipits

were very much in evidence once again, with Red-throats predominating, whilst **Armenian Gulls** and a **Greenshank** added to the attraction of this area.

### Garage west of Bet She'an by R90

Whilst feasting on what was to become the standard trip cuisine – pita and humus – a flock of 20 **Black Storks** and an **Osprey** enlivened the proceedings.

### Alfalfa fields north of Maoz Hayyim

Just north-east of the R71/R6688 junction we took a dirt track through arable land in search of Oriental Skylark once again. After going over a bit of rough ground, and after a sharp left hand bend in the track, we got out in the late morning sun to give another alfalfa field a decent going over. One of the first birds we saw was a **Quail**, shortly followed by a group of 3 **Spotted Eagles** in the sky above us, but after seeing a few **Red-throated Pipits** and **Skylarks**, the rather unmelodic and short call of an **Oriental Skylark** was noted and with a little persistence, a distinct flock of 3 birds were found and viewed well on the deck. After happily viewing this scarce species, we headed off and located a further **Oriental Skylark** as we headed back along the track to the main road.

### Maoz Hayyim fishponds

Located just to the north of the R71 and immediately west of where we had just been, Maoz Hayyim fishponds introduced us to the swarm of birds that would be present throughout the country in this habitat. **Pied** and **White-breasted Kingfishers** were everywhere, as were **Cormorants**, **Armenian Gulls** and **Swallows**, but after a drive around the ponds the definite highlight was a flyover **Great Black-headed Gull** with other decent species here including a **Wood Sandpiper**, a **Black-winged Stilt** and a few **Snipe**. The only sour taste here was the constant firing of Cormorant deterrent devices and the subsequent site of a couple of shot Cormorants on the water's edge.

### Kfar Rupin fishponds and Tirat Tsvi reservoirs (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 95)

In one short statement – this place was teeming with birds! Masses of **Armenian Gulls**, **Little Egrets** and **Great White Egrets** greeted us on arrival at the fishponds and after a bit of scrutiny a couple of **Caspian Gulls** were located. Lots of **Tufted Ducks**, **Teal** and **Coots** were present on the water itself whilst the odd **Bluethroat** tacked away from the adjacent rough ground and a **Pygmy Cormorant** was also present in amongst the hordes of **Cormorants**. Heading through the fishponds by car we reached the two large reservoirs (one at the same level to the fishponds and the other lower down in the valley). The top reservoir was relatively low at one end although plenty of **Pochards** and **Shoveler** made the most of the water whilst a **Whiskered Tern** patrolled up and down, skirting the surface in its quest to feed on insects. A lot of mud was exposed, creating decent habitat for c.10 **Ringed Plover**, 20 **Kentish Plovers**, 5 **Little Stint** and 3 **Spotted Redshanks** whilst larger birds present here included a c.10 **Great Black-headed Gulls**, c.20 **Glossy Ibises** and 5 **Spoonbills**. Once finished on the top reservoir, the lower reservoir provided a host of roosting gulls including just under 50 **Great Black-headed Gulls**, a couple of **Caspian Gulls** and loads of **Armenian Gulls**. Other species present here were 3 **Black-tailed Godwits**, the odd **Little Stint** and **Black-winged Stilt**, a **Common Sandpiper** and a **Peregrine** over. We then headed back, pretty impressed, to a fairly nauseous small sewage pool by the fishponds where I spotted a male **Dead Sea**

**Sparrow** in the reeds, a **Bluethroat** feeding by the reed edge and the call of **Cetti's Warbler** distinctively coming from the reeds.

### **Tirat Tsvi cemetery track**

Situated close to the reservoirs, we drove up the track to the small cemetery at Tirat Tsvi with the car windows down and almost immediately came across a handful of 5 **Indian Silverbills** feeding on trackside vegetation.

### **North of Tirat Tsvi near Sede Eliyyahu**

Heading back towards the main road from the reservoirs (c.100 yards before we hit the main road), our car came to an abrupt halt as a male **Black Francolin** showed very well by the roadside, before noticing us and scurrying back into the vegetation with no further sign.

### **Fields between Kfar Rupin and Maoz Hayyim near the Jordanian border**

After heading back on the R6688 towards Maoz Hayyim, we took an obvious track off the R71 back towards Kfar Rupin and along the Jordanian border. These fertile fields quite quickly produced good numbers (over 50) of **Chukar** along with a few **Golden Plovers** mixed in amongst **Lapwings**. A group of 4 **Richard's Pipits** were an unexpected bonus in trackside fields as was a 1<sup>st</sup> winter male **Caspian Stonechat**. It was obvious that larger species were making the most of the last hour of light and a couple of **Long-legged Buzzards** quartered the fields whilst on the track immediately adjacent to the border fence, at least 6 **Hen Harriers** seemed to roost with flyover **Merlin** and **Peregrine** also noted. A flight of birds down the Jordan Valley proved to be c.140 **Pygmy Cormorants** whilst the last bird of the day was a close **Little Owl** perched firstly on the border fence, then in fact on a bush a couple of yards into Jordan!

After a brilliant day in the field, we stopped in Bet She'an and had a quality meal (again lots of humus and kebab meat rolled in a bread with salad and chips), then retired to the digs at Bet Alfa and had a beer or two (or at least some of us did – Angus, Douglas and Barak had to go back out in an unsuccessful attempt to locate Angus' phone).

**5<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

### **Samakh Revaya Reservoir (west of R808 and north of Natur)**

After rising before sunrise at Bet Alfa, we headed north-east, around the Sea of Galilee, to the Golan Heights. At this first stop, a flock of 23 **Cranes** that flew over were most welcome in the early morning cold whilst birds present on the reservoir included a **Ferruginous Duck**, a male **Gadwall**, at least sixty **Wigeon** and a few **Tufted Ducks**. **Crested Lark**, **Corn Bunting** and **Goldfinch** were all common on the surrounding land.

### **Road to Natur, Golan Heights**

Stopping midway along the minor road between R808 and the village of Natur, we scanned the grassland in vain for Little Bustard for half an hour or so. Pleasant distractions included a **Long-legged Buzzard**, a ringtail **Hen Harrier** as well as a decent flock of **Spanish Sparrows**, a **Great Tit** and a couple of **Woodlarks**.

### Alonei ha-Bashan, Golan Heights

Despite searching we were unable to find any Pine Buntings in amongst the small number of **Yellowhammers** (for directions, see under Pine Bunting in target species missed). It was thought that the unseasonably mild weather had affected the distribution of many finches and buntings, although at least 25 **Chaffinches** and a handful of **Bramblings** were present here.

### El Rom

Turning east off the R98 just south of the town of El Rom, we headed for a brief spell along the track signed 'Vine U Pick and Blackberries', but failed to find any Radde's Accentors in the small orchard on the top of the hill. 4 **Woodlarks** were present, as was a **Chiffchaff**, but the highlight here was the sight of 3 1<sup>st</sup> year **Eastern Imperial Eagles** circling over the adjacent hillside. After a bite to eat in the nearby town (once again a load of humus and pita bread), we headed back to this area and turned west off the road to get closer to the eagles. In amongst the hordes of **Black Kites** that were feeding on dead cows and chickens, 2 of the eagles we had seen earlier on provided excellent views.

### Gonen (near the R959/R918 junction)

As we headed down into the Hula valley, a further 1<sup>st</sup> year **Eastern Imperial Eagle** flew over the road on our steep descent whilst the only **Stock Doves** of our trip were seen by the roadside here.

### Hula re-flooded area (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 38, site 4)

Quite rightly, the whole afternoon was spent in the spectacular re-flooded area of the Hula valley. Although we obviously had several target species to see at this site, the everlasting memory here will be the constant noise and spectacle of the 10,000 or so **Cranes** that were present – it was truly amazing. At least 150 **White Pelicans** were present on the main lake here and could be viewed from both the south side of the lake or from the north (where a visitor centre allows both views of the lake and the fields). Driving the tracks through the fields and marshy areas that encompass the lake, a raptor frenzy included at least 10 **Spotted Eagles**, 100s of **Black Kites**, a couple of **Sparrowhawks** and **Hen Harriers**, a handful of **Marsh Harriers**, about a dozen **Long-legged Buzzards** and 3 **Common Buzzards**. Pride of place went to a ringtail **Pallid Harrier** that provided lengthy views late afternoon as it quartered over the reedbeds from the visitor centre, whilst a juvenile **Saker** was excellent value (though the origins of this bird were somewhat unknown – it was caught earlier on in the autumn wearing jesses, and these were subsequently removed by Barak Granit *et al*) to the south-west of the main lake. Birds seen on the lake itself were c.30 **Pygmy Cormorants**, lots of **Avocets**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Ruff**, **Redshank** and **Black-tailed Godwits** as well as half a dozen **Marsh Sandpipers**, 15 **Dunlin**, 2 **Temminck's Stints**, 10 or so **Little Stints**, a **Spotted Redshank**, a **Greater Flamingo**, 4 **Ruddy Shelducks**, c.10 **Pintail**, many **Teal**, **Shoveler** and **Mallard**, lots of **Great White Egrets**, **Cattle Egrets** and **Little Egrets**, c.15 **Spoonbill**, 20 **Glossy Ibises**, several **Armenian Gulls**, many **Pied Kingfishers** and smaller numbers of **White-breasted Kingfishers** whilst a **Bittern** flew across the reedbed just prior to dusk. If this was not enough, lots of **Spur-winged Plovers** and **Laughing Doves** favoured the outlying arable land whilst at the extreme south-eastern perimeter of the track to the south of the lake 7 **Black Francolins** were noted. Passerines seen in the

area included an **'Eastern' Stonechat**, a **Bluethroat**, **Fan-tailed Warbler**, many **Red-throated Pipits**, a **Southern Grey Shrike** as well as hordes of **Swallows** and **Starlings**.

With an amazing day in the field, we had a quality meal in Tiberius on the western edge of the Sea of Galilee before parting company with Barak Granit, who headed back to Haifa, and us returning to Bet Alfa for another beer or two.

### **6<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

This was to be predominantly a day of travel, although it must be noted that distances in Israel are pretty small due to the size of the country. After asking around and getting some decent Namaqua Dove info from Barak, it was decided that the West Bank along R90 would be a safe option as trouble, when it does occur, is largely confined to towns such as Jericho, Ramalla and Jerusalem.

#### **R90 in the West Bank ENE of Kalya at the north end of the Dead Sea**

Coming from the north, we hit a prominent T junction on R90 at the extreme north end of the Dead Sea. Driving between 1 and 2 km south of this, there is a large area of date palms to the right (west) of the road where, with a bit of searching, we found a female **Namaqua Dove** perched on the perimeter fence at the south end. At least 4 **Indian Silverbills** were active in the date palms themselves, as was a **White-breasted Kingfisher**, with other birds seen in this area including a couple of **Black Redstarts**, a handful of **Brown-necked Ravens**, a couple of **Ring-necked Parakeets** that flew over and plenty of **Spanish Sparrows**.

#### **R90 in the West Bank north of Ovnat**

Driving along R90, a group of 3 **Arabian Babblers** were found in roadside scrub by a brown sign with Hebrew at Einot Tsuku. A **Southern Grey Shrike**, 5 **Rock Martins** and a **Palestine Sunbird** were also noted here.

#### **R90 border patrol north of Ein Gedi**

As we drove through the West Bank border, we encountered our first **Fan-tailed Ravens** – a group of about 20 birds soaring over the road.

#### **Rest stop/public beach car park at Ein Gedi**

Stopping for some mid morning food at the rest stop at Ein Gedi, over 200 **Tristram's Grackles** were present in the car park and the adjacent pylon whilst superb views of c.15 **Fan-tailed Ravens** were had as well as a **Barbary Falcon** bombing through in the direction of the nearby mountains.

#### **Wadi Arugot (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 120)**

Parking in the car park, we firstly explored the adjacent vegetation, where the odd **Blackstart** was present, before walking east along the wadi bottom and encountering several interesting birds such as half a dozen **Sand Partridges**, several **Little Bee-eaters**, 4 **White-crowned Black Wheatears**, more **Blackstarts**, lots of **Palestine Sunbirds**, 10 **Tristram's Grackle**, 4 **Sardinian Warblers** and 3 **Black Redstarts**. Overhead, **Rock Martins** were common whilst **Fan-tailed Ravens** and **Brown-necked Ravens** were also present.

### **Nahal Hever (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 120-121)**

This dry wadi, 7.5km south of Wadi Arugot, is accessed by parking by R90 and walking east in the direction of the Dead Sea to where the wadi opens out into an area of low vegetation. Although a favoured site for Cyprus Warbler, we failed to locate any although at least 10 **Sardinian Warblers** and 5 **Spectacled Warblers** were seen. **Sand Partridge** was common here, as were **Blackstart**, **Rock Martin** and **Desert Lark**, whilst smaller numbers of **White-crowned Black Wheatear** and **Little Bee-eater** were noted.

### **Neve Zohar town centre**

Stopping off here to stock up on humus and pita, at least 15 **Tristram's Grackles** were present around the parade of shops as was a **Ring-necked Parakeet** and a **White-breasted Kingfisher**.

### **Neot Ha'kikar fishponds (Birding Hot-spots Southern page 122, site 11)**

Having met up with Yoav Perlman, and with time to spare before dusk, we headed to the fishponds to the north of the settlement of Neot Ha'kikar and located a couple of **Black Storks** and a dozen or so **Teal**. Apart from these birds, this site was very quiet except for a calling **Clamorous Reed Warbler** and several **Little Bee-eaters**.

### **Moshav Neot Ha'kikar**

It is imperative that you do not try to access this area without supervision to the close proximity to Jordan coupled with the dangers of unexploded landmines. We headed through the gated community of Moshav Neot Ha'kikar and into an area of greenhouses and discarded fruit where a group of 3 **Namaqua Doves** showed superbly initially, with other birds taking advantage of the ample food supply including a **Bluethroat**, a **Black Redstart** and a **Sardinian Warbler**. As darkness fell and with no sign initially along the irrigation channel of the target species, we were treated to some superb desert driving by Yoav, and as we approached an area of greenhouses the car suddenly came to a sudden halt – a stunning **Desert Eagle Owl** provided us with extremely close views as it perched on the pinnacle of a building. Whilst watching this bird, a sudden movement through our binoculars proved to be a **Nubian Nightjar** and was subsequently tracked briefly as it flew at relative height over the arable land. This was a true bonus, and sincere thanks must be extended to Yoav for his help and determination for locating this species (albeit briefly) for us.

With a relatively late finish, we were extremely grateful that Yoav Perlman offered us some accommodation at his house in Be'er Sheva.

### **7<sup>th</sup> December**

Setting off in the darkness from Be'er Sheva, it was a straightforward drive of just over a couple of hours to the Nizzana area on the Egyptian border.

Nizzana, south of the army camp on the road to Ezuz (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 125-129)

We were fortunate enough to observe at least 8 **McQueen's Bustards** in a single flock south of the military area on the road from Nizzana (or Nitsana) to Ezuz early morning - all of our birds were to the west of the road in, or immediately adjacent to, the large wadi extending westwards between the roadside posts numbered 109 and

110. A couple of **Eastern Mourning Wheatears** and **Graceful Prinias** were also present here.

### **Nizzana Pools (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 128 Site 4b)**

A vigil of these pools between 8 and 9.30am for sandgrouse produced 8 Spotted Sandgrouse and at least 50 Black-bellied Sandgrouse although there was no sign of the hoped for Crowned Sandgrouse. Viewing the pools from a raised mound, a superb Lanner provided us with excellent views as it sat on the side of the pool eyeing up its next meal (and potentially helped reduce the number of sandgrouse that came in to drink!) whilst a juvenile European White-fronted Goose was a bizarre sight on a desert pool, as was a Fieldfare in the adjacent bushes. Teal, Shoveler and Mallard were all common, as was Spur-winged Plover, whilst other birds noted here included an Isabelline Wheatear, a Water Pipit, a couple of Green Sandpipers and Bluethroats as well as a Willow Warbler and Long-legged Buzzard.

### **Urim (Birding Hot-spots Southern page 140 site 3)**

Late morning until dark was spent in this area of steppes in search of raptors. We concentrated our efforts on the area adjacent to the pylons that cross R234 south of Urim and, in particular, we found that most activity was concentrated between 3km west of the road and 10km east of the road (these areas can be accessed by driving along the many rough tracks). After a lot of searching, we eventually located a juvenile **Saker** 1.9km west of the R234 late afternoon as it flew in from the west, perched briefly in a ploughed field, before heading south. A total of 7 **Eastern Imperial Eagles** were seen in total, including 3 adults, with a couple of **Spotted Eagles** also noted – the majority were on the pylons although close views of both species were had in a field 1km north of the petrol station by the R234 (north of the R241 junction). At this latter site, looking east from the road a distant flock of birds proved to be at least 200 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. Other birds noted on the steppes adjacent to the pylons during the afternoon were a couple of **Isabelline Wheatears**, 4+ **Merlins**, 4 **Peregrines**, a **Woodpigeon**, lots of **Spur-winged Plovers** (but no Sociable Plovers), 3 **Hen Harriers**, a **Common Buzzard**, at least 8 **Long-legged Buzzards** as well as plenty of **Skylarks**, **Red-throated Pipits**, **Corn Buntings** and **Crested Larks**.

After a long drive, segmented by a decent spot of food in Mitspe Ramon, we arrived at Kibbutz Lotan late evening. Whilst at the reception area, a **Barn Owl** was seen flying around the complex. Once checked in, we headed across the kibbutz to 'the bar' where we were treated to a rather bizarre environment and a load of rather enthusiastic people. We politely declined the invitation to their rock concert in a couple of nights, and after a couple of beers, went to sleep pretty easily.

### **8<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

The morning starting in rather comical fashion as one of our team (no names to be mentioned) was completely oblivious to a rather large sign in the car park at Kibbutz Lotan and duly reversed into it.

### **South of Yotvata on the west side of R90 between Km50 and Km51**

We searched some large acacia trees to the south of Yotvata early morning, and after a little bit of searching a male **Arabian Warbler** was found and subsequently showed extremely well. During our search, a roosting **Long-eared Owl** was found in a small



bush and other species found here included **Blackstart**, **Black Redstart**, **Hoopoe**, **Palestine Sunbird** and **Sardinian Warbler**.

### **Supermarket adjacent to Ye'elim Holiday Village, Yotvata**

After a successful early morning and no breakfast, we made the first of several stops during our time in the Eilat area to the supermarket at Yotvata. On this occasion, a **Common Myna** was found waling around the car park before flying off in the direction of Ye'elim Holiday Village.

### **Amran's Pillars (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 47)**

The first site visited in our quest for Sinai Rosefinch – this place was potentially the most birdless place that I have ever visited! With no fruit or scraps remaining for the birds to come down to, our total observations here were a **Blackstart** and a couple of **Brown-necked Ravens** over.

### **Sewage works east of R90 between Km39 and Km40 (Birding Hot-spots Southern, pages 57 – 61, site 1d)**

Heading back north from Amran's Pillars (the only reason being because we forgot to do this site heading south from Yotvata!), on arrival at the small sewage works at the southern edge of the date plantation a male **Hooded Wheatear** was showing very well on the perimeter fence. By walking around the perimeter fence of the small sewage works, 3 male **Namaqua Doves** were found on the ground whilst **Rock Martins** hawked overhead. About twenty **Indian Silverbills** were located in the nearby date palms, their active call easily drawing attention to their presence.

### **Wadi Shahamon (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 47)**

Located on the north-west extremity of Eilat town and accessed from the bypass (see directions under Striated Scops Owl), this dry wadi contains a few acacia trees that are favoured by **Striated Scops Owl**. On our visit, by systematically working our way up the valley from the bottom, we easily managed to locate one individual as it roosted unobtrusively towards the top of one of these acacias. **Blackstarts** and **Palestine Sunbirds** were the only other birds noted here.

### **Wadi Shlomo (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 43)**

A mid afternoon visit to a dry wadi was undoubtedly going to be hard work and largely devoid of birdlife but, with a little bit of perseverance, we managed to find a male **Cyprus Warbler** in the first small side wadi down from the R12. Other than that, it was very quiet with only **Sardinian Warbler**, **Blackstart** and **Palestine Sunbird** seen.

### **Eilat North Beach**

After finding our accommodation and being treated to excellent views of **House Crows** whilst we unloaded our baggage, the rest of the day was spent at the North Beach. **3 Green-backed Herons** favoured the offshore fishing platforms, whilst other herons included several **Western Reef Egrets** amongst the more common **Little Egrets**. At least 8 Caspian Terns fished close inshore, as did a couple of **Pied Kingfishers** and a **Common Kingfisher**, whilst **White-eyed Gulls** were very common. The large gull complex was a slight headache, although a couple of *fuscus* **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** proved more straightforward, and we thought that the birds we were seeing most closely resembled *barabensis* as opposed to other races.

## 9<sup>th</sup> December 2005

An early morning rise and a drive north-west to the town of Mitspe Ramon took just under two hours from our hotel in the centre of Eilat.

### Mitspe Ramon (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 96 site 1)

On the southern edge of the town, just east of the roundabout, are a football field and an adjacent coniferous park. Here, in the early morning gloom, we encountered 3 **Eastern Mourning Wheatears**, a **White-crowned Black Wheatear**, several **Palestine Sunbirds**, 10+ **Chukars**, 4 **Sand Partridges** and a handful of **Desert Larks**.

### Mitspe Ramon sewage works

Continuing along the track for 3km past the football field, the road will terminate at the sewage works. After being given information that sandgrouse drink here between 8.30 and 9 in the morning, we were pretty disappointed not to see a single sandgrouse here.

### Mitspe Ramon (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 96 site 1)

After our early morning attempt, we headed onto the town side of the roundabout in order to locate our target species. A **Sardinian Warbler** skulked in an isolated bush in a flower bed, whilst a **Siskin** was a bit of a surprise, but alerted by the Greenfinch-like call, a **Syrian Serin** made an appearance at the top of a pine before flying into the adjacent complex of gardens.

### Gorge just south of Mitspe Ramon on R40

The steep incline immediately south of the town, just before the crater, provided us with our only **Griffon Vulture** of the trip as it soared overhead.

### Shizzafon Kibbutz

Heading south, after the R12/R40 junction, turn left (north) to Neot Smadar and you'll reach the kibbutz immediately – the fields within this kibbutz produced some decent birding including a **Tawny Pipit**, a couple of **Bluethroats**, a **Spectacled Warbler**, many **Spanish Sparrows**, a **Blackstart** and a **Red-throated Pipit**.

### Ye'elim Holiday Village, Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 2a)

This abandoned and now overgrown campsite provided us with probably our best passerine birding of the whole trip. Apart from the numerous **Palestine Sunbirds**, the place was alive with bird activity with the ultimate highlights being a **Black Redstart of the eastern form *phoenicuroides*** and a **Yellow-browed Warbler**. Half a dozen or so **Bluethroats** showed well, 3 **Tristram's Grackles** flew over whilst other species noted included **Black Redstart**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Chiffchaff**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Robin** and **Blackcap**.

### Eilat North Beach

A brief visit to North Beach late afternoon produced an adult **Great Black-headed Gull**, a **Green-backed Heron**, 3 **Caspian Terns** and many **White-eyed Gulls** (as well as many large gulls presumed to be of the race *barabensis*).

### Eilat Pumping Station (Birding Hot-spots Southern page 36 site 8)

Accessed from the Eilat bypass by taking the turn to Nahal Netafin, we got ourselves in place at the pumping station and, although the trough was not present, we identified a pipe with a small amount of water dripping from it. Unfortunately, the Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse did not appear (and we stayed into darkness) although 4 small sandgrouse that flew over the distant mountains may potentially mean this species has not completely abandoned the area.

With it being a Friday night and Passover time, it was extremely difficult to locate anywhere that was open in Eilat. However, going into the heart of the tourist area proved fruitful and we once again feasted on decent food and some beers.

### **10<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

Our last day in the Eilat area, and with the target of getting to the north-west of the country at Ma'agan Mikhael at a decent hour it was very much a case of visiting sites that we had not visited previously.

#### **Ofira Park (Birding Hot-spots Southern page 33 site 2a)**

Situated just behind the main beach hotels in Eilat, this park must be stunning in migration. In fact, even in December, we were pretty impressed with our haul – a **Wryneck**, a couple of **Song Thrushes**, 3 **Blackcaps**, a **Lesser Whitethroat**, a **Garden Warbler**, 4+ **Bluethroats**, 3 **Ring-necked Parakeets** and a handful of **Chiffchaffs**.

#### **Km20 saltpans (Birding Hot-spots Southern page 49)**

These pools, obvious from R90, are situated to the east of the main road via an obvious track that runs through a small orchard where we located **Little Bee-eater** and a couple of **Black Redstarts**. On the saltpans themselves, 25 **Great Black-headed Gulls** were present in amongst other large white-headed gulls whilst 12 **Slender-billed Gulls** gracefully swan about on the water with much larger numbers of **Black-headed Gulls**. 200+ **Greater Flamingos** carpeted some of the place pink, whilst **Dunlin** and **Little Stints** were both commonplace, and other species included a **Barbary Falcon** over, a **Whiskered Tern**, a **Spoonbill** and 18 **Shelduck**.

#### **North Sewage Farm (Birding Hot-spots Southern page 53 site 5)**

This small raised pool, south of the Km20 saltpans, produced our only **Squaccos** of the trip (two of them) alongside the more numerous **Cattle Egrets**, **Little Egrets** and **Great White Egrets** as well as 2 **Great Black-headed Gulls** and a **Spoonbill**.

#### **Ein Netafin (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 42)**

Parking just off the R12 in the Eilat Mountains (as the track down to the spring is not driveable), we walked for about 10 minutes down to the cliff that overlooks the small spring. We were extremely happy when, just before we got to the overhang, we encountered our first **Sinai Rosefinch** and things got even better when we eventually noted at least 10 birds, including 3 red males. Other birds attracted to this water source in this otherwise arid habitat included 2 **Tristram's Grackles**, 2 **Blackstarts** and a **White-crowned Black Wheatear**.

#### **Eilat cemetery**

A late morning search of the cemetery (after a look at first light this morning) failed to produce any Asian House Buntings (this is a favoured site for this species) although an **Arabian Babbler**, a **Sardinian Warbler**, a **White-crowned Black Wheatear** and a **Chiffchaff** were noted.

### **Yotvata southern fields (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 1b)**

Located and accessed along the track just north of the supermarket near Ye'elim Holiday Village, we birded the southern circular field staying strictly on the paths. If we had strayed off the track, it would not have been surprising to have found an Oriental Skylark due to the sheer numbers of **Skylark** present. Additionally, a **Little Bee-eater** hawked from an irrigation structure, loads of **Rock Martins** were present overhead and decent numbers of **Water Pipits** and **Red-throated Pipits** were present in the field itself.

### **Ye'elim Holiday Village, Yotvata (Birding Hot-spots Southern, page 58 site 2a)**

Re-visiting this site, due to its impressive nature yesterday, again produced both the **Yellow-browed Warbler** and **Black Redstart of the eastern form *phoenicuroides*** along with a couple of **Tristram's Grackles**, a **Bluethroat**, a couple of **Arabian Babblers** and a handful of **Chiffchaffs**.

We spent the rest of the afternoon and evening travelling up to Ma'agan Mikhael. Our early arrival time was quashed by the fact that when we stopped briefly at Mitspe Ramon, one of our group realised that they had left their binoculars at the supermarket at Yotvata! A BBRC member without bins wouldn't be ideal, so fortunately the 3 hour detour back to Yotvata was successful and the binoculars were retrieved and on we sped up to Ma'agan Mikhael.

## **11<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

After rising at dawn from our accommodation at Nahsholim, we walked to the sea but soon found that the poor visibility was going to render any attempt at seawatching pointless.

### **Ma'agan Mikhael (Birding Hot-spots Northern, page 17 site 1)**

We were once again in the fishpond habitat, and with that species such as **Pied Kingfisher**, **White-breasted Kingfisher**, **Great White Egret**, **Little Egret**, **Cormorant** and **Spur-winged Plover** were very common. A decent sight as we entered the complex was a small tree full of about fifteen **Night Herons**, whilst a couple of **Pygmy Cormorants** and **Spoonbills** were located. The beach provided good views of largely gulls, the majority being **Armenian Gulls**, although 2 adult **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (of the race *fuscus*) and 4 **Great Black-headed Gulls** were noted. A couple of **Hoopoes** showed well on wires by the path and a **Grey Wagtail** on a small pool was the only one of the trip.

### **Ein Ha Khoresh fishponds**

This site is most certainly worth factoring in to any Israel trip if time permits (and regular Painted Snipe sightings in 2005 prove this). From route 4 north-east of Netanya, turn east onto R581 and after a few kilometres, turn right (south) to Ein Ha Khoresh. Go straight down this road for 0.9km on tarmac (passing through the gates and the industrial area) and then for a further 0.3km on dirt after the tarmac finishes.

Fork left here (i.e. 1.2km from the main road) and follow this track for a further 1.1km until you reach a small bridge over a small river. The fishponds are immediately viewable on the right and almost instantly we picked up the long-staying **White-tailed Plover** in amongst the commoner **Spur-winged Plovers**. Other waders in this small area included a **Green Sandpiper**, a **Temminck's Stint**, a **Greenshank** and about ten **Snipe**. Passerine quality was excellent - a rather showy **Moustached Warbler** in reeds by the track, a **Citrine Wagtail** in amongst **White Wagtails** and **Red-throated Pipits** on the pool, a couple of **Bluethroats** and **Cetti's Warblers** whilst **Graceful Prinia** and **Jay** were both common.

It was now time to depart Israel and we headed off south back to Tel Aviv airport to catch our early evening flight back to London Heathrow. Apart from a rather annoying delay of a few hours, we arrived back in the UK safely and I, for one, will most certainly be coming back to Israel.

## Israel December 2005 - Trip List

Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*  
Black-necked Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*  
Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
Pygmy Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*  
European White Pelican, *Pelecanus onocrotalus*  
Eurasian Bittern, *Botaurus stellaris*  
Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*  
Green-backed Heron, *Butorides striatus*  
Squacco Heron, *Ardeola ralloides*  
Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*  
Western Reef Heron, *Egretta gularis*  
Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*  
Great White Egret, *Egretta alba*  
Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*  
Black Stork, *Ciconia nigra*  
White Stork, *Ciconia ciconia*  
Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*  
Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*  
Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*  
Eurasian White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*  
Ruddy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea*  
Common Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*  
Eurasian Wigeon, *Anas penelope*  
Gadwall, *Anas strepera*  
Common Teal, *Anas crecca*  
Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*  
Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*  
Northern Shoveler, *Anas clypeata*  
Northern Pochard, *Aythya ferina*  
Ferruginous Duck, *Aythya nyroca*  
Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula*  
Black Kite, *Milvus migrans*  
Eurasian Griffon Vulture, *Gyps fulvus*  
Marsh Harrier, *Circus aeruginosus*  
Hen Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*  
Pallid Harrier, *Circus macrourus*  
Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus*  
Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*  
Long-legged Buzzard, *Buteo rufinus*  
Spotted Eagle, *Aquila clanga*  
Eastern Imperial Eagle, *Aquila heliaca*  
Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*  
Common Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*  
European Merlin, *Falco columbarius*  
Lanner Falcon, *Falco biarmicus*  
Saker Falcon, *Falco cherrug*  
Peregrine, *Falco peregrinus*  
Barbary Falcon, *Falco pelegrinoides*  
Chukar, *Alectoris chukar*  
Sand Partridge, *Ammoperdix heyi*  
Black Francolin, *Francolinus francolinus*  
Common Quail, *Coturnix coturnix*  
Water Rail, *Rallus aquaticus*

Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*  
Coot, *Fulica atra*  
Common Crane, *Grus grus*  
Macqueen's Bustard, *Chlamydotis mcqueenii*  
Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*  
Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*  
Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*  
Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*  
European Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*  
Spur-winged Plover, *Vanellus spinosus*  
White-tailed Plover, *Vanellus leucurus*  
Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*  
Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*  
Temminck's Stint, *Calidris temminckii*  
Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*  
Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*  
Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*  
Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa limosa*  
Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*  
Common Redshank, *Tringa totanus*  
Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatilis*  
Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*  
Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*  
Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola*  
Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*  
White-eyed Gull, *Larus leucophthalmus*  
Great Black-headed Gull, *Larus ichthyaetus*  
Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*  
Slender-billed Gull, *Larus genei*  
Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*  
Caspian Gull, *Larus cachinnans*  
Steppe Gull, *Larus barabensis*  
Armenian Gull, *Larus armenicus*  
Caspian Tern, *Sterna caspia*  
Whiskered Tern, *Chlidonias hybridus*  
Spotted Sandgrouse, *Pterocles senegallus*  
Black-bellied Sandgrouse, *Pterocles orientalis*  
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, *Pterocles alchata*  
Stock Dove, *Columba oenas*  
Woodpigeon, *Columba palumbus*  
Collared Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*  
Laughing Dove, *Streptopelia senegalensis*  
Namaqua Dove, *Oena capensis*  
Ring-necked Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri*  
Barn Owl, *Tyto alba*  
Striated Scops Owl, *Otus brucei*  
Desert Eagle Owl, *Bubo ascalaphus*  
Little Owl, *Athene noctua*  
Long-eared Owl, *Asio otus*  
Nubian Nightjar, *Caprimulgus nubicus*  
Smyrna Kingfisher, *Halcyon smyrnensis*  
Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*  
Pied Kingfisher, *Ceryle rudis*  
Little Green Bee-eater, *Merops orientalis*

Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*  
Wryneck, *Jynx torquilla*  
Desert Lark, *Ammomanes deserti*  
Crested Lark, *Galerida cristata*  
Woodlark, *Lullula arborea*  
Oriental Skylark, *Alauda gulgula*  
Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*  
African Rock Martin, *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*  
Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*  
Richard's Pipit, *Anthus richardi*  
Tawny Pipit, *Anthus campestris*  
Long-billed Pipit, *Anthus similis*  
Meadow Pipit, *Anthus pratensis*  
Red-throated Pipit, *Anthus cervinus*  
Water Pipit, *Anthus spinoletta*  
Citrine Wagtail, *Motacilla citreola*  
Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea*  
White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*  
Yellow-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*  
European Robin, *Erithacus rubecula*  
Bluethroat, *Luscinia svecica*  
Black Redstart, *Phoenicurus ochruros*  
Blackstart, *Cercomela melanura*  
Stonechat, *Saxicola torquatus*  
Caspian Stonechat, *Saxicola variegatus*  
Isabelline Wheatear, *Oenanthe isabellina*  
Finsch's Wheatear, *Oenanthe finschii*  
Mourning Wheatear, *Oenanthe lugens*  
Hooded Wheatear, *Oenanthe monacha*  
White-crowned Black Wheatear, *Oenanthe leucopyga*  
Blackbird, *Turdus merula*  
Fieldfare, *Turdus pilaris*  
Song Thrush, *Turdus philomelos*  
Cetti's Warbler, *Cettia cetti*  
Fan-tailed Warbler, *Cisticola juncidis*  
Graceful Warbler, *Prinia gracilis*  
Moustached Warbler, *Acrocephalus melanopogon*  
Clamorous Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus stentoreus*  
Spectacled Warbler, *Sylvia conspicillata*  
Sardinian Warbler, *Sylvia melanocephala*  
Cyprus Warbler, *Sylvia melanothorax*  
Arabian Warbler, *Sylvia leucomelaena*  
Lesser Whitethroat, *Sylvia curruca*  
Garden Warbler, *Sylvia borin*  
Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*  
Yellow-browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*  
Common Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus collybita*  
Willow Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochilus*  
Arabian Babbler, *Turdoides squamiceps*  
Great Tit, *Parus major*  
Palestine Sunbird, *Nectarinia osea*  
Southern Grey Shrike, *Lanius meridionalis*  
Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius*  
Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*



Hooded Crow, *Corvus cornix*  
Brown-necked Raven, *Corvus ruficollis*  
Fan-tailed Raven, *Corvus rhipidurus*  
Tristram's Grackle, *Onychognathus tristramii*  
Common Myna, *Acridotheres tristis*  
Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*  
House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*  
Spanish Sparrow, *Passer hispaniolensis*  
Dead Sea Sparrow, *Passer moabiticus*  
Indian Silverbill, *Euodice malabarica*  
Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*  
Brambling, *Fringilla montifringilla*  
European Serin, *Serinus serinus*  
Syrian Serin, *Serinus syriacus*  
Greenfinch, *Carduelis chloris*  
Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*  
Siskin, *Carduelis spinus*  
Linnet, *Carduelis cannabina*  
Sinai Rosefinch, *Carpodacus synoicus*  
Yellowhammer, *Emberiza citrinella*  
Corn Bunting, *Emberiza calandra*