

# Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*: first record for Qatar

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Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* has long been anticipated as an addition to the Qatar avifauna. It is a regular passage migrant and occasional winter visitor in the adjacent Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Most efforts to locate Crested Honey Buzzards in Qatar have concentrated on the few large date palm plantations, given that the species has a tendency to use such plantations as roosting places when on migration. Qatar's foremost birding site, Irkaya farm, is relatively well-watched by Doha birders, so this spring I decided to concentrate on the underwatched northern tip of the Qatar peninsula. The north coast strandline, mangroves and the nearby greenery of Al Shamal park are proven migration hotspots. With a strong wind—southerly, easterly or northwesterly—migrants can appear in large numbers at the tip of the peninsula along the northern coastal plain. However, Qatar birders rue the fact that large birds of prey are extremely scarce in the country. It is likely that these travel southeast (autumn) and northwest (spring) along and inland of the Saudi Arabian coast, rarely wandering north up the Qatar peninsula.

In previous days, the Al Shamal area had been full of migrants, though my only large raptor of the spring, other than a harrier or two, had been a single Black-eared Kite *Milvus (migrans) lineatus* just south of the northern headland. On 13 May 2014, I was doing my usual early morning circuit of Al Shamal park when I spotted a large raptor circling low just outside the park. I quickly took some photographs (the first of which was taken at 08.18 h) before the bird disappeared behind trees. I quickly left the park and relocated the bird soaring over the local football stadium c1 km away. In the absence of hills, this was presumably the best bet for a bit of early morning lift. I took my final photograph of the bird at 08.22 h, after which it climbed high out of sight.

On inspecting the images on the back of my camera, I confirmed my impression of six long fingers and pale carpal areas. The wings looked spot on for Crested Honey Buzzard. But having not seen the species in the field before (except for some brief views of a sitting bird in Sri Lanka), I was concerned that the tail showed a classic European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* pattern of two narrow basal bands with thicker terminal band. So I put the



Plates 1 & 2. A Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, Al Shamal area, Qatar, 13 May 2014. © Neil G Morris

news out as a 'possible' and sent an image from the camera's LCD to Jamie Buchan and Simon Tull. Both responded positively in favour of Crested Honey Buzzard. On returning to my apartment later that day, I took a better look at the photographs on my monitor (Plates 1, 2). Six long fingers, rather broad, bulging and blunt wings, and pale carpal patches indeed looked good. I had originally aged the bird as a juvenile in the field (given the tail pattern) but with better images realized there was significant moult in the wing. So I re-aged the bird as an adult/sub-adult (third calendar year plus). And on consulting Svensson (2009) I found a perfect illustration of my bird, labeled as 'adult female'. The text reassured me that adult female Crested Honey Buzzards can have very similar tail patterns to adult European Honey Buzzards. The bird was not seen again. It is the first record for Qatar and has been accepted into category A of the Qatar List by the Qatar Birds Records Committee ([www.QatarBirds.org](http://www.QatarBirds.org)).

## REFERENCE

Svensson, L. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide*. HarperCollins, London.

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