

NEWS & INFORMATION

Dawn Balmer (compiler)

AZERBAIJAN

Birding information

New material on Azerbaijan has been added to Tomas Haraldsson's website (www.tomasharaldsson.se). There is also trip report information for several other Middle Eastern countries. (Contributed by Tomas Axén Haraldsson)

CYPRUS

Cyprus Bird Report 2011

The latest instalment of the Cyprus Bird Report, for the year 2011, was published recently. Its 168 pages are packed with photographs, tables and graphs documenting the island's birding year. Some 293 species were recorded, represented by c53 000 records submitted by 150 different observers. New species for Cyprus reported in 2011 involved the perhaps less than welcome Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* and House Crow *Corvus splendens*, although a new subspecies for the list, Central Asian Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides* should pose no threat to native fauna. As always, a series of short papers round-off this issue among them a discussion of the on-going spread of the Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* through western Cyprus and a review of rare wader records since the new millenium. Once again, the regular team of Colin Richardson and his co-editors, Stavros Christodoulides and Nigel Cottle, have assembled an attractive report, abetted by sponsorship from the Bank of Cyprus. It is available for £12 (including p & p) from Colin Richardson (richar@cytanet.com.cy). (Contributed by Guy Kirwan)

EGYPT

Rarities in Egypt

The report of the Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee (EORC) of decisions taken in 2011 is now online on the EORC website at www.chn-france.com/eorc/eorc.php. (Contributed by Pierre-André Crochet)

IRAQ

Iraq helps Britain's wildlife

Nature Iraq has donated \$1000 to Norfolk Wildlife Trust's appeal to purchase 143 acres of land next to Cley Marshes. Nature Iraq has received much help from colleagues in the UK, especially through BirdLife International, and made this donation as an act of global support for marshland protection. On the new land NWT will create more reed bed, grazing marsh and freshwater for the rare Western Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*, Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris*, Bearded Tits *Panurus biarmicus*, Otters *Lutra lutra*, Water Voles *Arvicola amphibius* and Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*, for thousands of migratory birds and for the 100 000 people who visit each year. Azzam Alwash, president of Nature Iraq, who has stayed in Cley during visits to England, said: "Nature Iraq has received great support from international organisations for the conservation of our famous Mesopotamian marshes. This small token to support the extension of Cley Marshes is to honour that support and show our brotherly care for the environment everywhere". (Contributed by Richard Porter)

ISRAEL

Jerusalem Bird Observatory

Volunteers are wanted at JBO to assist with bird monitoring in the spring and with general maintenance. Those wanting to work in the Gazelle valley would need a bit of Hebrew. Please contact Amir Balaban at amirbalaban1@013.net (tel: +972-52-448879) or visit www.jbo.org.il.

KAZAKHSTAN

Major new steppe reserve in Kazakhstan

On November 28 the Kazakhstan government announced the designation of the new Altyn Dala state nature reserve, protecting almost 500 000 ha of steppe grassland, semi-desert



Plate 1. Steppe between Astana and Arkalky, Kazakhstan. © Geoff & Hilary Welch

and wetland in central Kazakhstan. This is in addition to a proposed 410 000 ha extension of the Irgiz-Torgai state nature reserve and adds a significant piece to the jigsaw of creating an effective network of protected areas in the Altyn Dala (Golden Steppe) project area. Altyn Dala is a partnership involving government, NGOs, local communities and the private sector with the key partners being the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (BirdLife in Kazakhstan), the Kazakh government's Committee for Forestry and Hunting, Frankfurt Zoological Society and the RSPB (BirdLife in the United Kingdom).

Steppe has been identified by IUCN as 'the earth's most endangered ecosystem' and the Altyn Dala steppe is of vital importance to safeguard the critically endangered Saiga Antelope *Saiga tatarica*, a migratory species that was driven almost to extinction in Kazakhstan in the 1990s. Numbers of Saiga are recovering annually (due to the protection offered) and reached almost 100 000 in 2012. Since 2009, ACBK has been fitting Saiga Antelopes with satellite collars which have allowed key locations (such as calving and rutting grounds) to be identified. These protected areas also support many other species of national and international conservation importance, from Goitered Gazelles *Gazella subgutturosa* and Steppe

Pikas *Ochotona pusilla*, to Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* and Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*. These new protected areas also provide the basis for exciting planned reintroductions of endangered Przewalski's Horses *Equus ferus przewalskii* and Kulan (Wild Ass) *Equus hemionus kulan* to the area, restoring a vital part of the historical wildlife community of the vast rolling Kazakh steppes (Plate 1). (Contributed by Geoff Welch)

LIBYA

Atlas of wintering waterbirds of Libya 2005–2010

A copy of the *Atlas of wintering waterbirds of Libya 2005-2010* is available as a PDF from Abdulmaula Hamza abdhmz@gmail.com.

TURKEY

Ilýsu dam meeting held

Nature Iraq visited Turkey to raise concern about the detrimental effects of the proposed Ilýsu dam in Turkey. The September 2012 meeting was held in Hasankeyf, Batman province, where they shared with locals the consequences of the planned Ilýsu dam on Iraq and Turkey through performance art. The group revisited Mesopotamian flood stories as a metaphor for the struggle for survival against and the impact of environmental destruction. News on 7 January 2013 stated the Turkish State Council ruled in favour of the legal case filed by the Chamber of Architects and Engineers (TMMOB) against the construction of the Ilisu dam project, ordering an immediate halt to the controversial dam construction in southeast Turkey. The reservoir of the Ilýsu dam was expected to submerge Hasankeyf, along with its rich history, natural ecosystem and unique culture, under the Tigris river in only a few years. In Turkey alone, the planned dam threatened 55 000 people from 199 villages in the provinces of Batman, Diyarbakýr, Mardin, Pýrnak and Siirt. Further information is available from www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action;jsessionid=963D04E078A45E934524882881436502?newsId=291911

UZBEKISTAN

Record Sociable Lapwing flock found in Uzbekistan

The Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds discovered more than 400 Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* at Talimarzhan reservoir, in Kashkadarya province. It is an important record because the number of individuals in this migrating flock greatly exceeds the total number of birds that have been recorded wintering in India and Pakistan in recent years. The surveys, conducted by a team of five from UzSPB, were led by Dr Mukhtor Turaev and took place in the Karshinskaja steppe around lake Talimarzhan, at lake Ayakagitma in the Kyzyl Kum desert and at Ecocenter Jeyran and Tudakul reservoir in the Karnabchul steppe. A total of 29 birds were encountered in three groups during visits to lake Talimarzhan 4–8 September but the big flock there was encountered 16–20 September. During the team's third survey 26–30 September the big flock had left to continue its migration but a further seven birds were still present in the area—two birds on a water basin near Talimarzhan town and five more at Tudakul reservoir in the Karnabchul steppe. Lake Talimarzhan is a large reservoir of c800 ha located on the border between a developed agricultural area and the desert and is situated 45 km southwest of Karshi in southern Uzbekistan. The record flock present during September 2012 indicates that lake Talimarzhan is likely to be an important regular staging site for Sociable Lapwings migrating to and from their wintering areas in the Indian sub-continent. At present this IBA is unprotected.

In May 2013 BirdLife International plan to conduct a comprehensive breeding survey throughout Kazakhstan. The primary purpose of this study will be to evaluate the true scale of the breeding population but also aims to fit more satellite transmitters to nesting birds. The undertaking will be considerable and requires six study teams to conduct the necessary research for one month. Follow all the latest from this project at www.birdlife.org/sociable-lapwing. (Source BirdLife International)

OTHER NEWS & INFORMATION

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia: 2012 Records and *Phoenix* 29

Although the Atlas was published in 2010 the database continues and welcomes records of all resident and breeding birds in the seven states of the Arabian peninsula, including potentially breeding species and exotics. Apart from breeding details, information is also being collected on other aspects of species ecology, eg food and feeding, habitats, interactions with other species and the human environment. ABBA database products such as all records of a particular species or records from a specific area are available on request to anyone who needs it.

Contributions are also being sought for the annual newsletter of the ABBA project *The Phoenix*. Notes and articles can be on any aspect of Arabian ornithology (although longer papers might be more appropriate for *Sandgrouse* or other journals) and there is scope for the inclusion of photos, maps and diagrams if needed. Please contact Michael Jennings (arabianbirds@dsl.pipex.com) for further information. Details of how to contribute records to the ABBA project can be found at <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/arabian.birds> though this website is in much need of revision and shows an incorrect email address. (Contributed by Michael Jennings)

Satellite-tracked Scottish Cuckoo reaches the OSME region

The Scottish-ringed Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* 'BB' crossed the Mediterranean sea and, by early evening 25 July, had made it to Egypt. The tag transmission showed him close to the border with Libya and it looked like he was continuing southwards when the transmissions temporarily ended. BB's movement into Egypt makes him the first Cuckoo ringed in Britain to transmit from over Egypt and the OSME region. However, BB continued his movement south from Egypt and successfully completed his desert crossing during the early hours of Saturday 28 July, reaching southwestern Sudan and becoming the first of BTO's tracked Cuckoos recorded



Plate 2. Dr Kuyvandik Poladov (UNESCO World Heritage focal point) and Mark Day (RSPB). © Stephanie Ward (RSPB)



Plate 3. Atamurat Veyisov (OSME country contact) and Mark Day (RSPB). © Stephanie Ward (RSPB)

in that country. By mid December BB was in Congo. Follow the full story at www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking/scotland/BB.

Zoology in the Middle East

Three new volumes of *Zoology in the Middle East* have been published. In addition to two regular volumes a special edition dedicated to the biology and taxonomy of earthworms (*Oligochaeta*) has been produced. The bird-related papers include ones on nest-site selection by the Asian Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* in the Harat steppe of Iran, the nesting habits and breeding success of the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* in the Kizilirmak delta of Turkey, offspring sex ratios and breeding success of a Great Tit *Parus major* population, territory size variations in wintering Finsch's Wheatears *Oenanthe finschii* and electrocution and collision of birds with power lines in Saudi Arabia.

Free field guides for Central Asia

The recent publication of the long awaited Helm field guide *Birds of Central Asia* by Raffael Aye, Manuel Schweizer and Tobias Roth, heralds the start of a new era of birdwatching in this fascinating region. For the first time, all of the species, together with illustrations and distribution maps, are presented in a single volume that is practical to use in the field. Through OSME chairman, Geoff Welch, the publishers, Bloomsbury Publishing, have kindly donated 25 copies to the RSPB for distribution to the national BirdLife partners, local bird clubs

and most active bird conservationists in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The first consignment of these was delivered to Turkmenistan in November 2012 when RSPB staff attended a meeting of the Caspian Ecological Forum in Turkmenbasi (Plates 2 & 3). The field guide is a major step forward for birdwatching, research and conservation in Central Asia and it is hoped that the guide will encourage more nationals to develop an interest in enjoying, studying and conserving the birds and other wildlife of this exciting and important region. (Contributed by Geoff Welch)

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Saudi Arabia

Brian Meadows and Jem Babbington are currently preparing a paper on rare birds in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia that will update *Birds of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia* by G Bundy, RJ Connor and CJO Harrison (1989, H. F. and G. Witherby/Aramco). If anybody has any unpublished records, including a description, of rare birds listed as vagrants in the book or new species seen 1989–2012, inclusive, within the political boundary of Eastern province such records will be gratefully received by Brian Meadows, 9 Old Hall Lane, Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex CO14 8LE, UK (briansmeadows@lycos.com). (Contributed by Brian Meadows)

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