

Ramsar site following the country's recent accession to the Ramsar Convention.

However, sensitive and ecologically important areas of Socotra are currently threatened by uncontrolled development, in particular the proposal to construct a new road system. The scale and construction of many new roads is inappropriate, given the sensitive nature of the Socotran ecosystem. If these roads are built they will seriously impact on the island's wildlife and especially its unique plants and birds. Nineteen bird species of conservation concern could be affected because of the likely destruction of breeding habitat and nest sites. These include Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, Island Cisticola *Cisticola haesitatus*, Socotra Warbler *Incana incana*, Socotra Starling *Onychognathus frater*, Socotra Sunbird *Nectarinia balfouri*, Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus*

*socotranus* and Socotra Bunting *Emberiza socotrana*.

"It is essential that this proposed road building programme is examined carefully by the Yemen Government before it seriously affects Socotra's fragile and internationally renowned environment", said Richard Porter, one of the authors of a report on the roads recently sent to the President of Yemen by BirdLife International and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

BirdLife is calling on the government of Yemen to build only essential roads that are beneficial for local communities, in a way that is sensitive to the environment. In addition, the cost saving would be enormous, allowing much needed small-scale local development, and there would be far less impact on wildlife and the island's increasingly important ecotourism.

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## AROUND THE REGION

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Records in *Around the Region* are published for interest only; their inclusion does not imply acceptance by the records committee of the relevant country. All records relate to 2008 unless otherwise stated.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 31(1) should be sent by 15 December to Around the Region, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, UK; or atr@osme.org

### ARMENIA

A new trip report from Armenia and Georgia is available for download at the Birdquest website: <http://www.birdquest.co.uk/tripreports.cfm?trip=637>. Several **Black Francolins** *Francolinus francolinus* were heard in May in southern Syunik province. At Lake Sevan, around 40 **Greylag Geese** *Anser anser* with juveniles (with some in Shirak province too) were seen in May, and a probable **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus* was also present in May. During Apr and May around 40 **Eurasian Wigeons** *Anas penelope* were at Lake Sevan. At least 15 **White-headed Ducks** *Oxyura leucocephala* were seen in Ararat province during May and a total of seven **Eurasian Spoonbills** *Platalea leucorodia* were seen in Ararat and Shirak provinces during

the same month. In Shirak province during Apr, an immature **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* and two **Cinereous Vultures** *Aegypius monachus* were also recorded. Two breeding pairs of **Common Crane** *Grus grus* were observed throughout Apr and May in Shirak province, two **Eurasian Oystercatchers** *Haematopus ostralegus* were in Ararat province during May, three **Grey Plovers** *Pluvialis squatarola* were seen in May in Ararat province and Lake Sevan and over 600 **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa* were counted in the same area during May. At Lake Sevan, a single **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* was recorded in May and a total of eight **Whimbrels** *Numenius phaeopus* were seen in Apr and May and at least 20 **Marsh Sandpipers** *Tringa stagnatilis* were present in

Apr. During May around 15 **Terek Sandpipers** *Xenus cinereus*, over 50 **Spotted Redshanks** *Tringa erythropus* and two **Broad-billed Sandpipers** *Limicola falcinellus* were counted in Ararat province. At Lake Sevan during May there was a flock of **Black-winged Pratincoles** *Glareola nordmanni*, a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus*, a **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* and a **Little Gull** *L. minutus*. Six **Gull-billed Terns** *Sterna nilotica* were seen in Apr at Lake Sevan and five were recorded in May in Ararat province. A flock of c100 **Whiskered Terns** *Chlidonias hybrida* and a flock of c400 **White-winged Terns** *C. leucopterus* and a **Eurasian Eagle Owl** *Bubo bubo* were recorded at Lake Sevan during Jun. A **Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor* of the nominate race was seen in Jan in Ararat province. Two pairs of **Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus* were found at a new breeding site in May in southern Syunik province.

## BAHRAIN

A **Corncrake** *Crex crex* was reported at Anwaj Islands on 8 May; this species was last recorded in 1991. On 1 May a **Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicephalus* with two chicks was observed between Al Jazair beach and the horse endurance centre and represents a first breeding record for this species if confirmed. A pair of **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* were on sale at Isa Town market on 6 May but before the birds could be recovered the seller had disappeared. Isa Town is the other side of the Island to the known roosts and this might indicate an unknown roosting area for the species.

## CYPRUS

Records of four **Mute Swans** *Cygnus olor* at Potamos Liopetri on 15 Jan and three at Zakaki marsh on 19 Jan were the first records since January 2006. There were two **Marbled Ducks** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* at Larnaca sewage works on 25–26 Jun; this species was a former breeder early in the 20th century and this is only the 5th Cyprus record since 1958. The last record was of 6 birds at the Akrotiri salt lake in Apr 1992. On 25 Apr there was a **Merlin** *Falco columbarius* at Larnaca salt lake and on 4 Apr there was a **Black-winged Kite**

*Elanus caeruleus* at Mazotos which will be the third record if accepted. Eighteen **Pallid Harriers** *Circus macrourus* arriving off the sea on 24 Mar was exceptional and a **Levant Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter brevipes* at Cape Greco on 25 Apr was the 10th record since 1998. Up to two **Baillon's Crakes** *Porzana pusilla* at Aspro dam pools 24–29 Apr was the 12th record since 1998 and around 30 **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo* flew over Phasouri reed-beds at dawn on 26 Mar. A **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* at Phasouri reed-beds on 12 Mar was only the 10th record since April 2000 and 13 **Eurasian Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus* in Larnaca airport fields on 12 Apr was the 10th record since 1998. On 27 Mar a **Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor* was seen inside the Paphos airport fence. A maximum of seven **Great Black-headed Gulls** *Larus ichthyaetus* arrived at Larnaca sewage works on 5 Mar, the largest group ever recorded. Previous high number was six in March 1995. A **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* reported at Phasouri reed-beds on 2 Apr will be the 10th record if accepted. Two **Yellow-billed Choughs** *Pyrrhocorax graculus* were seen over the summit of Mount Olympus on 20 Apr, and will be the first record for Cyprus if accepted. There is one old unsubstantiated report of two birds over the Kyrenia range in Northern Cyprus in April 1987. A **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* was recorded at Fresh Water Lakes, Famagusta on 28 Feb–28 Mar and one at Konia on 29 Mar were the sixth and seventh records in recent years. A **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* mist-netted and ringed on 25 Apr at Polis reed-beds is likely to be accepted as the first record for Cyprus and a **Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides nitidus* seen on the Adonis trail in the Akamas on 14 Apr is under assessment as a first record. The eleventh **Asian Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana* for Cyprus was at Oroklini marsh on 28–31 Dec and single **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins** *Cercotrichas galactotes* were at Cape Greco on 2 Apr, Agia Napa sewage works on 4 Apr and Evretou dam on 17 Apr. Two very rare wheatears were recorded in March, with a **Rufous-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna* at Agia Napa sewage works area 12–14th Mar (fourth record) and a **White-crowned Wheatear** *O.*

*leucopyga* at Polis 6–10 March (seventh record). A female **Hooded Wheatear** *O. monacha* at Cape Pyla on 31 Mar–1 Apr was the 14th record in recent years. It was a good spring for **Collared Flycatchers** *Ficedula albicollis* with 74 records of 140 birds reported and **Semi-collared Flycatchers** *F. semitorquata* were seen at Paphos headland on 17 Apr, one ringed at Agios Minas the following day and one at South Nicosia on 20 Apr. A **Pale Rockfinch** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* at Asprodam pools on 25 Mar, with another there on 5 Apr, constitute the 12th & 13th records. The fourth record of **Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia* involved up to 30 birds feeding on ground with finches and **Corn Buntings** *Emberiza calandra* in Marathounta hills above Paphos from 14–19 Feb. Previous records include a caged bird and a bird found dead. There was also a small influx of **Trumpeter Finches** *Bucanetes githagineus* with one at Agia Napa 26 Mar, one at Timi Beach 11 Apr, one at Paphos lighthouse 12–13 Apr and two at Phasouri reed-beds 15 Apr. There have been just 18 previous records. A **Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea* at Anarita Park, near Paphos on 20 Mar was the first since 2005 and only the 12th record in 10 years. It was also a good year for **Rock Buntings** *E. cia* with one found above Belapais, Kyrenia on 5 Feb and another was seen near Vufavento, in mountains east of Kyrenia on 6 Feb; these are the first reports since 2004.

## EGYPT

On 27 Apr, 16 **Sand Partridges** *Ammoperdix heyi* were at St Katherine's Monastery, Sinai. Three immature **Greater White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* arrived in Nabq Bay, Sharm el-Sheikh from the north-east on 17 Jan and quickly adapted to the heavily disturbed resort area, feeding at a mini football pitch behind the beach early morning and were still present 27 Jan. A count of c180 **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* was made on the River Nile north of Edfu on 28 Feb and c65 were at Kitchener's Island, Aswan on 2 Mar. A **Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* was off Hurghada on 23 Apr and five **Yellow-billed Storks** *Mycteria ibis* were at Abu Simbel on 17 Apr, two **Goliath Herons** *Ardea goliath* at Wadi Lahami on 22 Jan and two **Pink-backed**

**Pelicans** *Pelecanus rufescens* at Abu Simbel on 17 Apr. Two **Brown Boobies** *Sula leucogaster* were at Hamata pier on 21 Jan, with one at Wadi Gimal on the same day and four off Hurghada on 23 Apr. Four pairs of **Lanner Falcons** *Falco biarmicus* were between Hurghada and El Shalatein on the 21 Jan, a **Barbary Falcon** *Falco pelegrinoides* was at Hurghada on 24 Jan and just one **Lappet-faced Vulture** *Aegypius trachelotos* on the outskirts of El Shalatein on 21 Jan. Two **Eastern Imperial Eagles** *Aquila heliaca* (immature and juvenile) were over Wadi Mandar on 23 Jan and juvenile at Sharm el-Sheikh/Naama Bay sewage farm on 24 Jan. An **African Swampphen** *Porphyrio madagascariensis* was found at Ain Sukhna, Suez on 17 Mar and two **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo* were at Abu Ramad near Gebel Elba on 1 Apr. On 28 Feb a **White-tailed Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus* was just south of Edfu, fifteen **Greater Painted Snipes** *Rostratula benghalensis* at Abassa fish-ponds on 6 Apr and two **Cream-coloured Coursers** *Cursorius cursor* were south of Ain Sukhna two days later. Ten **Sooty Gulls** *Larus hemprichii* were on Cifton Island on 12 Apr and three **African Skimmers** *Rynchops flavirostris* were on the River Nile north of Edfu on 28 Feb. At Hurghada, a **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* was seen on 24 Jan. A female **Hypocolius** *Hypocolius ampelinus* was seen at close range in the gardens of the Movenpick Resort Hotel at El Quseir on the Red Sea coast on 14 Feb and later in the day a male was seen at the same place. An **Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula* was found at 'Sinai Golf City', Nabq Bay, Sharm el-Sheikh on 15 Jan, a **White-spectacled Bulbul** *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* was in St. Catherine's Monastery garden in Naqb Bay on 25 Jan and an **African Desert Warbler** *Sylvia deserti* was just north of Hamata pier on 22 Jan. On 26 Jan two **Fieldfares** *Turdus pilaris* were seen in Nabq Bay, a **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* was seen at El Gouna on 14 Mar and a **Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* was at Hurghada on 24 Jan. An immature **Nile Valley Sunbird** *Anthodiaeta metallica* was at Hurghada on 24 Jan, 15 **Red Avadavats** *Amandava subflava* were on Crocodile Island, Luxor, on 25 Feb and two **Indian Silverbills** *Lonchura malabarica* were nest-building in the

grounds of the Movenpick Hotel, Ciza, on 23–24 Feb. A flock of five **Siberian Buff-bellied Pipits** *Anthus rubescens japonica* were found in Naqb Bay golf course on 15–16 Jan, with at least 4 there until 26th; one was at Sharm el-Sheikh/Naama Bay sewage farm 19 Jan, one Naqb Bay pond 20 Jan, one calling over hotel gardens, Naqb Bay on 27 Jan and one was at Abassa fish-ponds on 6 Apr. Also in Nabq Bay, a **Long-billed Pipit** *Anthus similis* was found on the golf course on 26 Jan.

## ISRAEL

There was an influx of c20 **Mute Swans** *Cygnus olor* into Northern Israel in Jan and four **Velvet Scoters** *Melanitta fusca* seen off Jaffa on 31 Jan represents the seventh record for Israel. Two **Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* at Meizar reservoir, Golan Heights, on 8–10 Feb were the first in Israel since 1990 and four **Smew** *Mergellus albellus* were seen at Bnei Yisrael reservoir, Golan Heights, from 18 Apr. There were two notable seabird records, with a **Streaked Shearwater** *Calonectris leucomelas* off Eilat north beach on 14 May (fourth record) and a **Swinhoe's Petrel** *Oceanodroma monorhis* found dead at Eilat on 24 Jan (fifth record). All previous records of the latter species have also been found dead or dying at Eilat, the last in September 2004. The first-ever winter record of a **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhyncus* in Israel involved a bird that lingered at Eilat from Feb to 25 Mar at least. The ninth **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* for Israel was at Kfar Ruppim, Bet She'an Valley, on 29–30 Dec and one in the N Arava valley on 5 Apr is the tenth record. The seventh **Bateleur** *Terathopius ecaudatus* for Israel flew over Eilat on 28 Mar and a **Verreaux's Eagle** *Aquila verreauxii* was at Ein Gedi on 21 Jun. On 24–25 Jan the sixth **Great Bustard** *Otis tarda* for Israel was at Kanaf, Golan Heights and a **Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio madagascariensis* was at Ma'agan Michael on 21 Apr. Four **Demoiselle Cranes** were at Agamon Lake, Hula, with one over Bet Shemesh, Judean Plains, on 15 Mar and a **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* was at Eilat Km 20 salt-pans on 17 May. Two **Caspian Plovers** *Charadrius asiaticus* remained at Yotvata till 28 Mar, one was at Elifaz, S Arava from 3–8 Apr and one was at Ma'agan Michael

on 24 Apr. The sixth record of **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* was a single at Yotvata sewage ponds from 30 Apr–4 May and the seventh record quickly followed with one at Gesher fishponds, Jordan valley, on 7 May. An **Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii* was off Jaffa on 19 Feb and a second-summer was off Eilat north beach on 9 May. A pair of **Caspian Terns** *Hydroprogne caspia* raising one chick at Eilat during April was the first ever breeding record for Israel. A putative first-summer male **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus optatus* was trapped and ringed at Jerusalem Bird Observatory on 27 April and remained in the area until 5 May (the second for Israel if confirmed; the first was at Eilat in August 1985). Small numbers of **Thick-billed Larks** *Ramphocoris clotbey* were in the southern Arava and southern Negev during March and a few, mainly in Hamei-shar, S Negev were present during April and may have been breeding. A **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii* at Rishpon, Dan on 13 Mar was the fourth record. There was an influx of c1000 **Rose-coloured Starlings** *Sturnus roseus* in the Hula Valley mainly during 11–16 May and there was also a good arrival of **White-throated Robins** *Irania gutturalis* in the Arava valley, Eilat and S Negev with c15 around in late Apr and up to 20 until 23 May. A very obliging male **Black Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas podobe* was at Eilat from 28 Mar and was joined by a female from 14 Apr; one at KM 25, S Arava on 21 Jun was a very late record. A **Rufous-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna* was at Neot Smadar, S Negev on 6–7 Mar, with another at Rishpon on 13 Mar, there was an influx of eight **Pied Wheatears** *O. pleschanka* in S Arava and Eilat during May and eight **Cyprus Pied Wheatears** *O. cyprica* were in the southern Arava during 10–25 Mar. A **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis* was reported at Elifaz on 1 Apr and the tiny breeding population returned to the Hula Valley with at least four adults noted during June. On 14 Apr a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *A. dumetorum* was trapped and ringed at Sde Boker, a **Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata* was at Eilat on 12 Mar (fifth record if accepted), the third record of **Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides nitidus* was trapped and ringed at Sde Boker on 1 May; the previous record being in Aug 2004



and finally the second **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos* for Eilat was there on 3 Apr.

## IRAN

Records from a migration watch on the small island of Ashura Deh (at the extreme SE corner of the Caspian Sea) during 4–18 April included 41 **Lesser Kestrels** *Falco naumanni*, 113 **Common Kestrels** *F. tinnunculus*, 20 **Merlins** *F. columbarius*, a first-summer **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* on 17th (probably first for northern Iran), 424 **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* (including 186 on 16th), three **Egyptian Vultures** *Neophron percnopterus*, 284 **Western Marsh Harriers** *Circus aeruginosus*, 43 **Hen Harriers** *C. cyaneus*, 263 **Pallid Harriers** *C. macrourus* (Plate 1, including 53 on 5th), 39 **Montagu's Harriers** *C. pygargus*, 22 **Northern Goshawks** *Accipiter gentilis*, 567 **Eurasian Sparrowhawks** *A. nisus* (with 103 on 16th), 167 **Steppe Buzzards** *Buteo b. vulpinus*, nine **Long-legged Buzzards** *Buteo rufinus*, two **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis*, two **Eastern Imperial Eagles** *A. heliaca*, two **Booted Eagles** *A. pennata*, 943 **Red-necked**

**Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus* (including 460 on 16th), a **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* (on 8th), also three **Great Black-headed Gulls** *Larus ichthyaetus*, up to 470 **Slender-billed Gulls** *Larus genei* daily, up to 117 **Whiskered Terns** *Chlidonias hybrida*, a **Turkestan Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides* (on 6th), 151 **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** *Merops persicus*, 421 **European Bee-eaters** *M. apiaster*, and an **Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gul-gula* (on 5th), 15 **Green Warblers** *Phylloscopus trochiloides nitidus*, at least 20 breeding pairs of **Menetries' Warblers** *Sylvia mystacea*, two **Common Mynas** *Acridotheres tristis* (on 16th, most likely genuine migrants), eight **Isabelline Wheatears** *Oenanthe isabellina*, nine **Pied Wheatears** *O. pleschanka*, two **Black-eared Wheatears** *O. hispanica*, two hybrid **Pied Wheatear x Black-eared Wheatears**, three **Desert Wheatears** *O. deserti*, up to 15 **Red-breasted Flycatchers** *Ficedula parva* daily, up to 30 **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* daily, and a **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi* (on 15th).



**Plate 1.** Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, adult male, Ashura Deh, Iran, 7 April 2008. © Magnus Ullman

## IRAQ

A pair of **Black-winged Kites** *Elanus caeruleus* with a nest was found with four eggs in May (no region given). A visit was made to the border between Turkey and Iraq, between the rivers Ortasu and Zap/Nahr az-Zab, on 13 June 2008. The following are some of the bird species observed on the Iraqi side of the rivulet that forms the state border: **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* (4), **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster*, **Sombre Tit** *Poecile lugubris*, **Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*, **Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*, **Woodchat Shrike** *L. senator*, **Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*, **Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*, **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida*, **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*, **Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica*, **Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius*, and **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala*.

## JORDAN

On 10 Mar, 16 **Sand Partridges** *Ammoperdix heyi* were at Wadi Haamra, an adult **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* was at Azraq on 11 Mar, c30 **Spur-winged Lapwings** *Vanellus spinosus* were at Aqaba sewage works on 15 Mar and c20 **Cream-coloured Coursers** *Cursorius cursor* were at Shaumari on 11 Mar. At Aquaba, c20 **White-eyed Gulls** *Larus leucophthalmus* were recorded on 14 Mar and a first-winter **Little Gull** *L. minutus* was there the next day. At least two male **Namaqua Doves** *Oena capensis* were at Sawayma (Dead Sea) on 2 May and two **Hume's Owls** *Strix butleri* were in Dana village on 12 Mar. Two **Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta* nests found on 29 Apr at Barra Forest, Wadi Dana, each containing a young **Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*, were very early nests. A male **Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii* was at the Panorama View Hotel, Petra on 3 May and the first **Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens japonica* for Jordan was at Aqaba on 7 Jan. Four nests of **Syrian Serin** *Serinus syriacus* were found at Barra Forest, Wadi Dana between 29 Mar and 1 May; this is the first time nestlings have been described. On 15 Mar, c25 **Desert Finches** *Rhodospiza obsoletus* were at Aqaba and c20 **Sinai Rosefinches** *Carpodacus synoicus* were at Petra on 14 Mar, with eight at Wadi Rum the following day.

## KAZAKHSTAN

Arend Wassink and Gerald J Oreel have published an extensive list of new and interesting records in *Dutch Birding* (30: 93–100). The report includes the following records. An adult male **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* found on 17 Dec 2007 at Tengiz, Atyrau province was the first winter record. On 22 Dec 2007, 17 **Great Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax carbo* and two juvenile **Great White Pelicans** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* were found at Sorbulak Lake, Almaty province, again the first winter records for Kazakhstan. Two adult **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis* found at Tengiz, Atyrau province on 28 May 2006 was the third record (although the species has bred in 1992–93). Four summer-plumaged **Lesser Sand Plovers** *Charadrius mongolus* found on 19 May 2006 in the Taukum desert, c25 km from Kolshengel, Almaty province constitutes the eight record. The first breeding of **Black Woodpecker** *Dryocopus martius* in western Kazakhstan was documented on 18 Mar and between 31 Mar and 8 Apr 2006, when birds were seen visiting nest holes at Oral (at Kirov park and in the Chagan valley, respectively). A total of four first-winter **Collared Flycatchers** *Ficedula albicollis* were trapped at Dzhanlybeck in the Volga-Ural semi-desert, West Kazakhstan province on 23 (one), 24 (one) and 28 Aug 2004 (two) and these are the second to fifth records. Of particular interest was a male of the *alboides* race of **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*. This form is split by some authors as a full species (**Himalayan Wagtail**). The bird was photographed on 30 May 2007 at Kaskelen in Almaty province. The paper also reassessed historical records, and **Hooded Crane** *Grus monacha* and **White-naped Crane** *Grus vipio* are now removed by the authors from their systematic list of the birds of Kazakhstan (published 2007).

## KUWAIT

The first **Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel* for Kuwait (and the first Western Palearctic record away from Israel) was watched for about an hour at Zour port on 10 Apr. A male **Shikra** *Accipiter badius* was at Sulaibikhat on 27 Dec 2007, at Abdali on 5 Jan and at Jahra on 13–18 Jan. An immature **Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciatus* was at the Pivot Fields on 28



**Plates 2&3.** First record of Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* for Cramp's Western Palearctic, Kuwait. © Mike Pope

Dec 2007 and an immature at Thula on 2 Jan. Five **Macqueen's Bustards** *Chlamydotis macqueenii* were at Sabah Al-Ahmed on 31 Dec 2007 and 186 **Crab Plovers** were at Doha spit on 20 Mar. At the Pivot Fields, a **Red-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus indicus* was there from 31 Dec 2007–3 Jan, 17 **Caspian Plovers** *Charadrius asiaticus* were recorded on 27 Mar and the **Little Curlew** *Numenius minutus* remained from 12 Dec 2007 until 29 Jan. An **Indian Roller** *Coracias benghalensis* was at Kuwait University on 1–18 Jan, with two more at Jahra on 1 Jan and the **Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach* remained at Sulaibikhat until April. On 3 Jul there was a **Masked Shrike** *L.*

*nubicus* at CP Buehring. On Green Island there were at least 40 **Hypocoliuses** *Hypocolius ampelinus* on 16 Mar and five **Red-vented Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus cafer* there on 1 Jan. Seven **Common Babblers** *Turdoides caudata* were at Abdaly on 30 Dec 2007, at least 30 **Bank Mynas** *Acridotheres ginginianus* were at Jahra during Jan and a first-winter female **Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus atrogularis* was at the Pivot Fields on 28 Dec 2007. The two immature male **Purple Sunbirds** *Cinnyris asiaticus*, the first record for Cramp's Western Palearctic, remained at Subiya from 5 Dec 2007 until at least 19 Jan, with three present there on 10–11 Jan (Plates 2&3).

## LEBANON

Single **Leach's Storm Petrels** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* were seen at El Mina, Tripoli on 24 and 29 Mar following rough weather in the Mediterranean. Other observations of interest there included **Slender-billed Gulls** *Larus genei* on 21 and 22 Mar, and an **Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* on 29th. Three **Eurasian Wigeons** *Anas penelope* at Aammiq marsh on 27 Mar were of note. Visits to the desert region near Ras Baalbek in March and April confirmed the continued presence of three recently discovered breeding species for Lebanon, **Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta*, **Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti* and **Bar-tailed Lark** *A. cinctura*. **Trumpeter Finches** *Bucanetes githagineus* and **Cream-coloured Coursers** *Cursorius cursor* were also present in small numbers and an influx of **Pale Rockfinch** *Carpospiza brachydactyla* had begun by the April visit. With a modest increase in active birders, **Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* is proving to be a more widespread breeder than previously thought, records being received from north of Tripoli south as far as Beirut, all along the Mount Lebanon range and its west facing slopes. **Bimaculated Larks** *Melanocorypha bimaculata* were found breeding in the Jird area in the far north in May. Following sightings of singing displaying males in April 2006 and 2007 at three different sites in the West Bekaa, **European Serins** *Serinus serinus* were seen again at Ksara in April and May, indicating that this species is probably now breeding in Lebanon.

## OMAN

It seems that **Sooty Shearwaters** *Puffinus griseus* may occur more regularly than had been previously thought off the coast of Oman, mainly in spring; this year there were two records, one off Muscat on 30 May and one off Mirbat in the south on 5 Jun (9th and 10th records respectively). The **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra* seen at Khor Rouri in December were still present in January and had increased to a record nine on 23 Jan. One was also seen in the north at Quriyat on 11 and 24 Jan (8th record). A single **Abdim's Stork** *C. abdimii* was at Mughsayl on 24 Jan. A flock of 500 **Western White Storks** *C. ciconia* were at Raysut near Salalah on 1 Feb. **African Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* is a very rare visitor to southern Oman and one at West Khor, Salalah on 1 May is only the 5th record and the first since 2004. Some of the birds from the influx of **Greater White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* noted in November/December remained in the area—there were six at West Khor, Salalah on 9 and 24 Jan, four at Salalah nature reserve on 24 Jan and one at Mughsayl on the same day. Three were at Qurm park on 1 Feb and seven there on 14 Feb. Seven dead birds were found at Montasar and two at Qitbit on 23 Jan (presumably from the flock of 50 seen in the area in December). **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* is an uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor so a pair at Qurm park on 18 Jan and at Seeb (possibly the same birds) on 4 Feb is interesting. A single **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* at Al Lansab on 8 Feb and eight at Mughsayl on 24 Jan are the only records. A single **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* was at Quriyat on 17 Apr. If accepted, a single **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* at Khor Rouri on 11 Jan will be the 10th record. Another large count of **Steppe Eagles** *A. nipalensis* wintering at Raysut rubbish dump was made on 24 Jan (500). A single **Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor* at Qurm park on 19 Apr was an early record. A **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* was at Qitbit on 24 Jan, the 2nd record this winter. Two **Eurasian Stone-curlews** *Burhinus oedicnemus* were at Dawkah on 24 Apr. It seems that two, possibly three, pairs of **Spotted Thick-knees** *Burhinus capensis* bred in Salalah, eggs and chicks being found in April. Five

adult **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregaria* were at Sahanawt farm, Salalah, on 19 Feb. There was an unusual record of a single **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* at Qitbit in the central desert on 24–25 Apr. A **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* was seen off Muscat on 30 May, the 6th record. A single **Red Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia tranquebarica* was at Sun Farms, Sohar on 1 Feb, the 4th record for Oman. **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* is a rare and irregular visitor so a single at Muscat on 19 Jan is noteworthy. There are no previous records of **Grey-headed Kingfisher** *Halcyon leucocephala* in January so one at Salalah on 9 Jan is interesting. There have been comparatively few records of large numbers of **European Rollers** *Coracias garrulus* in recent years, so 60 at Mabr Farm on 23 Apr and 30 at nearby Haima on 25 Apr are of note. There was a single **Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* at Montasar on 23 Apr. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica*, while not rare, is not seen frequently so one at Sohar Sun Farms on 2 Apr is interesting. A single male **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* of the race *taivana* was at Barka rubbish tip on 7 Feb and would be the 3rd record if accepted. There have been comparatively few records of **Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* this winter but one was at Mabr farm on 20 Mar and one at Wadi Rawnub on the same day. There was a good passage of migrants though the central desert on 23–24 Apr with 10 **European Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* and 50 **Eastern Olivaceous Warblers** *Iduna pallida pallida* being seen at Mabr farm. **Nile Valley Sunbird** *Anthodiaeta metallica* is a rare breeder in southern Oman but eight were seen at Tudho including a pair at the nest with one chick on 27 Mar. **Purple Sunbird** *Cinnyris asiaticus* is very rare in southern Oman so a single female at Qitbit on 24 Jan is noteworthy. A single **Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus* was seen in a small garden just north of Haima on 25 Apr. **House Crows** *Corvus splendens* have been increasing in numbers in the Raysut area near Salalah but two at East Khor on 5 Jun are the first records for this area—a worrying but not unexpected development. **Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* is a rare passage migrant and winter visitor but there were three at Qurm park on 9 Jan, four on 14 Mar



and two on 19 Apr. A flock of 50 **Pale Rockfinches** *Petronia brachydactyla* was seen at Sohar Sun Farms on 2 Apr and five were at Yalooni on 17 Apr.

## QATAR

A really surprising record was that of two **Whooper Swans** *Cygnus cygnus* which flew low over Makhenis farm on 9 Feb. Having flown north over the site they headed back out into the desert. Two **Zitting Cisticolas** *Cisticola juncidis* were reported from Abu Nakhla ponds (formerly called the Jail ponds) on 5 Feb—a new bird for Qatar. A count of 1050 **Grey Herons** *Ardea cinerea* at Abu Nakhla ponds on 5 Feb was impressive, although not unusual. Two **Greater White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* were seen on 10 Feb, as were 34 **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca*. A **Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus* was at Al Khor community sewage ponds on 7–8 Feb. **Greater Short-toed Larks** *Calandrella brachydactyla* included a flock of at least 300 on the north coast around Ras Raffan/Um Tees on 8 Feb. There were 2680 **Socotra Cormorants** *Leucocarbo nigrogularis* at Wakira beach on 9 Feb, and also that day, two **Red-tailed Wheatears** *Oenanthe chrysopygia* at Makhenis farm.

## SYRIA

Four **Northern Bald Ibises** *Geronticus eremita* returned to the breeding cliffs near Palmyra and hatched four young, none of which fledged; the cause has been ascribed to the extremely dry spring. Two immatures returned later in the season. Six **See-see Partridges** *Ammoperdix griseogularis* were at Lake Khatunyah (al-Hawl Lake) in the Jazira on 27 Feb. A flock of 40 **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* flew over Mheimideh in April, the biggest group for many years. At least eight **Lesser Kestrels** *Falco naumanni* had returned to their breeding cliffs in the Euphrates valley on 25 Feb. A **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* and a **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* were reported from the Palmyra area in April. Over 100 **Sociable Lapwings** *Vanellus gregarius* were seen at four sites in the north and east in late February; some were feeding and others clearly migrating north. A **Red-wattled Plover** *Vanellus indicus* and 25 **White-tailed Plovers** *V.*

*leucurus* were at Mheimideh on 25–27 Feb with two **Little Crakes** *Porzana parva* on 28 Feb. At Sabkhat al-Jabbul on 23 Feb there were 84 **Eurasian Spoonbills** *Platalea leucorodia*, 12 **White-headed Ducks** *Oxyura leucocephala*, five species of **tern** *Sterna/Chlidonias*, a **White-breasted Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis* (possibly a new site for this species), 20 **Stock Doves** *Columba oenas* and six **Pallid Swifts** *Apus pallidus*, but no definite **Lesser White-fronted Geese** *Anser erythropus*. Three **Stock Doves** were also near Hasakeh on 27 Feb; this species is now rarely seen in Syria. A flock of seven **Namaqua Doves** *Oena capensis* at Palmyra in May is the biggest group reported so far from Syria. Three flocks of **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* totalling 35 birds passed over Sed Wadi Abied on 24 May; this is a good site for the species, which is likely to breed nearby but there have been no confirmed breeding records yet from Syria. Three **Common Swifts** *Apus apus* were in the Euphrates valley on 25 Feb. **Isabelline Shrikes** *Lanius i. isabellinus* were at Jabbul on 23 Feb and at Mheimideh on 28 Feb; typical dates for this species. However, another **Isabelline Shrike** at Talila on 23 May was unusually late. The cold winter may have accounted for the observations of good numbers of thrushes *Turdus* spp rarely seen in Syria; up to 15 **Fieldfares** *Turdus pilaris* were in the Euphrates valley on 25 Feb with 85 at Bloudan on 2 Mar and two **Mistle Thrushes** *Turdus viscivorus* in the Euphrates valley from 24–25 Feb. A **Cyprus Wheatear** *Oenanthe cypriaca* was at Talila on 1 Mar. This species is probably a regular passage migrant. A **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* at Sed Wadi Abied on 24 May is the first Syrian record. A **Clamorous Reed Warbler** *A. stentoreus* was reported singing at Mheimideh in April. Two **White-eared Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus leucotis* were at Mheimideh on 28 Feb with six at the usual site in Deir ez-Zor. Seven **Pine Buntings** *Emberiza leucocephalus* were at Bloudan on 2 Mar, the 2nd Syrian record. Also there were 85 **Fieldfares**, 40 **Bramblings** *Fringilla montifringilla* and at least 20 **Yellowhammers** *Emberiza citronella*. This is probably a regular wintering site for these buntings as they were seen at the same site in March 2007. Winter trips to Syria might be very exciting as species such as **Pine Bunting**

*Emberiza leucocephalos*, **Radde's Accentor** *Prunellus ocularis* and **Red-fronted Serin** *Serinus pusillus* may winter in the mountains and **Lesser White-fronted Goose**, bustards Otididae spp, **Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus*, **Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris* and **Crimson-winged Finch** *Rhodopechys sanguinea* may be in steppe areas.

## TURKEY

Two **Red-breasted Geese** *Branta ruficollis* were at Büyükçekmece Lake, İstanbul on 10 Jan and five were reported from Kuyucuk Lake, Kars on 28 Apr, a very late date. A total of 25 **Bewick's Swans** *Cygnus bewickii* were at Enez, Edirne, on 26 Jan and 180 were in the Kızılırmak Delta on 22 Jan. It was a good period for wintering seaduck with seven **Greater Scaups** *Aythya marila* in the Yeşilirmak Delta on 19 Jan and one at Enez on 26 Jan, three **Common Eiders** *Somateria mollissima* in the Sakarya-Karasu on 20 Jan, seven **Common Scoters** *Melanitta nigra* in the Kızılırmak Delta on 22 Feb and a **Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* at İğneada on 16 Jan. A single **Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellata* was at Balıkesir on 1 Jan and there was a high count of 65 in the Kızılırmak Delta on 22 Feb. A **Horned Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* was at Sarıyar Dam, north of Ankara, on 27 Jan. There was an exceptionally high, and early, count of 200 **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra* at Haliç, İstanbul on 27 Feb. Two **Northern Gannets** *Morus bassanus* were offshore between Hatay and Samandağ on 1 Jan and two were at Kadıköy, İstanbul on 7 May. Four **White-tailed Eagles** *Haliaeetus albicilla* were at Sarıyar Dam on 27 Jan, there was a *fulvescens*-type **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* at Terkos lake, İstanbul on 2 Feb and a **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* at Ceylanpınar on 24 Mar. A **Corncrake** *Crex crex* was in Çaycuma, Zonguldak on 19 May and four **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo* were in the Kızılırmak Delta on 23 May. A single **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* was at Çaycuma on 10 May, two were at Kuyucuk Lake on 5 May and one in the Kızılırmak Delta on 11 May. There appears to have been a good spring passage of **Eurasian Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus* this spring with a minimum of 206 near Kulu on 23 Mar and 23 in

Ceylanpınar on 24 Mar. This species is almost certainly under-recorded. A **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* was in the Kızılırmak Delta on 31 May. Six **Broad-billed Sandpipers** *Limicola falcinellus* in the Gediz Delta on 27 Jan was an interesting winter record and there was a good spring passage with 200 reported from Akçakale, Ceylanpınar on 1 Mar and about 50 in the Kızılırmak Delta on 11 May. Single **Black-legged Kittiwakes** *Rissa tridactyla* were seen in the Gediz Delta and at Foça, İzmir on 4 Feb and in the Kızılırmak Delta on 3 May. Six **Little Swifts** *Apus affinis* in Subaşı, Antakya on 13 Jan, with three on 4 Feb, were unusual winter records. A total of 11 **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** *Merops persicus* in the Kızılırmak Delta on 31 May was the 1st record for the site and six were at Kuyucuk Lake on 18 May. An **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* was reported from the Gediz Delta on 19 Jan. A **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* at Nizip, Gaziantep, on 27 Jan was an interesting record. Yet another **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephala* was recorded, this time from Büyükçekmece Lake on 10 Jan, and there was a **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* at Sakarya-Karasu on 18 Jan.

Our apologies go to Nizamettin Yavuz who should have been credited as the photographer of the Common Eider in the last issue (*Sandgrouse* 30: 17).

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

There were up to six **Sooty Shearwaters** *Puffinus griseus* off Fujairah in May. This species is now seemingly a regular bird off the east coast in late spring. A **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* was in Abu Dhabi on 26 Jan. UAE's 4th **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* was at Khor al Beida on 1 Feb and the 8th–10th records of **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* were six at Dubai Pivots on 20 Jan and 2 Feb, up to three at Al Wathba from 22–26 Jan and another in Al Ain from 1 Feb–14 Mar. A **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* was at Emirates Golf Course on 22 Jan. The long-staying **Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica cristata* was recorded up to 23 Mar, and hybrid birds were also seen. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* present in Al Ain from 28 Nov 2007 until 23 Apr was the first for the UAE, while a **Red-**

**necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis* at Fujairah on 19 May was the 7th record, and a **Red Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicaria* at Al Wathba Lake on 18 Jan was the 3rd record. An immature **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* at Mafrqa on 13 Feb was the 7th record. Single **Common Gulls** *L. canus* were at Ras al Khor from 31 Dec 2007 to 1 Jan, Creekside Park 20 Jan, Al Wathba 31 Jan–29 Feb and at Al Warsan on 7 Mar. A **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* was at Al Wathba from 2–22 Feb. A **Sykes's Nightjar** *Caprimulgus maharrattensis* at the Fujairah Dairy Farm from 20 Dec 2007 until 23 Jan was the 4th record. A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* in Al Ain (Jebel Hafit) from 14–21 Mar was the first record. The UAE's 5th **Streak-throated Swallow** *Petrochelidon fluvicola* was in Al Ain from 4–20 Feb with another at Al Warsan Lakes on 5 Feb. Two **Brown-throated Martins** *Riparia paludicola* were in Al Ain from 2–6 Feb, and a scattering of **Pale Martins** *R. diluta* were reported. An **Asian House Martin** *Delichon dasypus* in Al Ain from 6–8 Mar was the 3rd record. A **Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus* was in Abu Dhabi from 12–19 Jan and up to three **Buff-bellied Pipits** *Anthus rubescens* were at Dubai Pivot Fields up to 23 Mar. A **Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus atrogularis* was in Al Ain on 29 Feb. A **Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* was at Al Wathba from 6–12 Jan, while a **Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata* was in Abu Dhabi on 24 Apr. A **Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* in Abu Dhabi from 8–11 Jan was followed by two in Ruwais from 11 Jan–7 Feb. A **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in Abu Dhabi from 30 Mar–15 Apr was possibly the same bird as seen there in December 2007. Up to 67 **Hypocoliuses** *Hypocolius ampelinus* were at Ghantoot in February. An **Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus* in Al Ain from 29 Feb–20 Mar was the 2nd record for the UAE and the Western Palearctic. A **Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* was at Al Wathba on 11 Jan and 8 Mar.

## UZBEKISTAN

An OSME-supported expedition to the Ayak-Agitma wetland in the Kyzylkum desert north of Bukhara took place from 15 Apr–5 May. While the trip was unsuccessful in finding

migrant **Slender-billed Curlews** *Numenius tenuirostris*, it collected a great deal of new information from this little known region. Interesting records included up to eight **Common Goldeneyes** *Bucephala clangula* between 26–29 Apr, single **Smew** *Mergellus albellus* on 26 and 27 Apr, two **Red-breasted Mergansers** *Mergus serrator* on 26 Apr, a single **Black-throated Diver** *Gavia arctica* on 29 Apr and 4 May (presumably present throughout), eight **Horned Grebes** *Podiceps auritus* on 29 Apr, a single **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* on 2 May and four **Bar-tailed Godwits** *Limosa lapponica* on 4 May.

## YEMEN

High numbers of African species were recorded during the last two weeks of January: 12 **Black-headed Herons** *Ardea melanocephala* (six at Al Hodeidah SF and six near Aden), a flock of 237 **Abdim's Storks** *Ciconia abdimii* on Aden rubbish dump on 28 Jan, and about 2200 **Lesser Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus minor* at Al Hodeidah SF, with around 1700 at Aden fishponds. There were 17 **Sacred Ibises** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* at Aden fishponds on 28 Jan, and in June three pairs were found breeding at Aden.

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