

Tim Loseby's bird (Plate 1), active on the ground, exhibits at least two points of interest. The shape of the black "badge" on the fore-neck and upper breast differs from that illustrated in Goodwin (1986) and Madge & Burn (1999). Loseby's appears vertical in orientation whilst the latter two publications show a horizontal badge. Five photos of Pander's Ground Jay on Dave Farrow's website (www.shortwing.co.uk) suggest that posture may play a role.

Another feature of the bird in Plate 1, and also of the perched Pander's Ground Jay shown on the cover of *Sandgrouse* 24 (1), again a Tim Loseby photo, is the partial obscuring of the black and white feathers of the closed wing by body feathers. Tiziano Londei (2004) has proposed that the *Podoces* ground jays, peculiarly, enhance their crypticity by "expanding" the scapular feathers and feathers of the ventral tracts to cover or largely cover the conspicuous feathers of the folded wing. To advertise presence these birds simply reverse this procedure.

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PJ Cowan

REVIEWS

The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar—Sultanate of Oman

Jens Eriksen

Centre for Environmental Studies and Research, Sultan Qaboos University. 2008. Softback. 144 pages, colour photos, maps, tables, bar diagrams.

For availability see www.birdsoman.com.

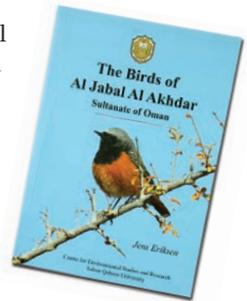
Jens Eriksen's book concerns an area whose landscapes and scenery are frankly magnificent. The Jabal Al Akhdar 'Green Mountain' range is the central massif of the Al Hajar mountains in the north of Oman (Glennie 2006, Hanna 2006). The higher elevations are semi-arid and the highest mountain of the range is Jabal Shams, which reaches 3009 m asl. The area can be explored on foot or by 4WD, and trekking and motoring routes have been described by Dale & Hadwin (2001) and Grist (2006) respectively.

This book is a result of Jen's participation in a conservation and sustainable develop-

ment survey of the Jabal Al Akhdar. Two main areas were studied: the Sayq plateau, which is mostly over 2000 m, and Jabal Shams, and included an intensive six-week breeding bird survey in 2005 by Mike Jennings.

The lowest limit of these two areas was taken as 1800 m. Both areas are described briefly, including the juniper woodlands and terraced cultivation though the maps for both sites are essentially those in Sargeant *et al* (2008). Further information on these two highland areas is given in a section on conservation and ecotourism. The meagre ornithological literature and relevant records from the Oman Bird Records database were also utilised.

A total of 125 bird species have been recorded on the Sayq plateau and Jabal Shams



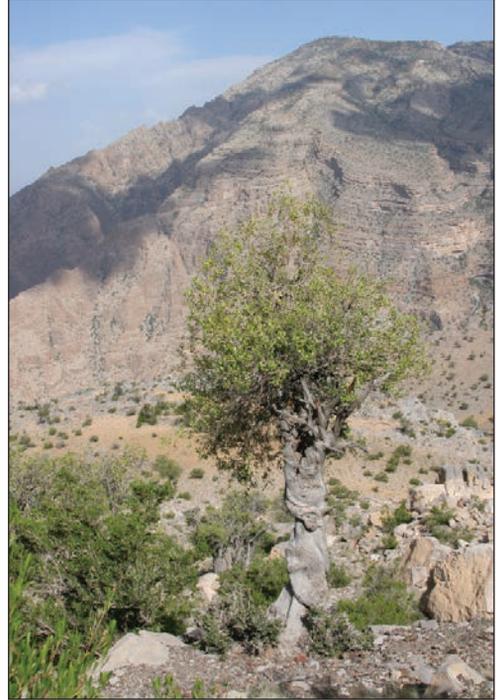


Jabal Akhdar scenery, Oman. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

combined, including 34 species observed only once. Apparently, 31 bird species breed in the Jabal Al Akhdar. A minimum estimated number of breeding pairs for each of these species is presented for the two main study areas, including 1400 breeding pairs of Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* at Jabal Shams and 100 Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta* pairs at both the Sayq plateau and Jabal Shams. An account is presented of the first confirmed breeding record, in 2005, of Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* for Jabal Al Akhdar, on the Sayq plateau.

The Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* breeds in the N Oman mountains and apparently nowhere else on the Arabian peninsula. The majority seemingly breed in the area covered by the present book and observations are presented on its natural history there including details of five nests (see also Jennings 2006b). Observations suggesting breeding of Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* are presented and there may be a small breeding population of Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* (first confirmed breeding record in Arabia, Sayq plateau 2005).

Most of the book is devoted to an annotated systematic list, which describes all the bird species recorded at the Sayq plateau and Jabal Shams. Indeed, the list is essentially a field guide, with identification details and photos by Hanne and Jens Eriksen illustrating the vast majority of the species. Most of the photos are different from those in the Eriksens' (2005) identification guide, and quite a few of the species were not illustrated there. Notes on status in the mountains (including bar diagrams indicating temporal occurrence and



abundance), habitat and habits are also presented. Apart from nine additional species listed at the end, each species receives one page each. Hume's Wheatear *Oenanthe alboniger*, a common resident, has a page, "Common" Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, very rare with just one record, has a page. The book is titled "The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar" but the very rare species recorded there are not of Jabal Akhdar. I would have preferred that the systematic list had concentrated more on the residents and summer and winter visitors of the Akhdar range; however, the pictures are excellent.

The most useful relief map of the Jabal Akhdar is that accompanying the 1977 special report of the *Journal of Oman Studies* and Michael Gallagher's (1977) paper in that volume is still an important read, presenting avian occurrence in the Jabal Akhdar altitudinally: high ground (above 1200 m), foothills (600–1200 m) and plains and flat gravel wadi beds amongst mountains (below 600 m). Jennings (2006a) presented estimated numbers of breeding pairs of birds (eg over 200 Striated Scops Owl *Otus brucei*) for the Ghubrah bowl, an enclosed plain at c700m, in the Jabal Akhdar.

My copy will be well-thumbed, I live at the foot of Jabal Akhdar. The book is essential reading for anyone planning to visit the area, whether for research or tourism. Otherwise, it would be a welcome addition to any Middle East bird enthusiast's library, especially for the photography.

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Peter Cowan

Birdwatching Guide to Oman

Dave Sargeant, Hanne Eriksen & Jens Eriksen
 Al Roya Publishing. 2008.
 Softback. 256 pages, colour photos, line illustrations, maps, tables.
 £22.99
 ISBN 978-9948-03-643-2
 Available from NHBS Environment Bookstore

The first edition of this book was published in 2001—but the speed and scale of development and change in Oman meant that some of the information contained in the book very rapidly became out of date.



Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*, common in the Jabal Akhdar, Oman. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

This second edition is therefore both welcome and necessary.

The new roads that have been constructed, the paving of graded tracks, the expansion of single track roads to dual carriageways and the changes that have occurred at certain sites have all meant changes to the text—although the information on the birds remains basically the same as in the first edition. The accommodation section has expanded to four pages, reflecting the increased number of hotels that have been built in the last seven years.

Over sixty sites are covered in detail, each with a map. A Bird Finder section is included with details of how, where and when to best find each species, as well as a complete checklist with seasonal status.

The species list has also been updated to reflect those which have been added to the official Oman list up to January 2008. As well as textual changes, an extremely useful addition is the inclusion of GPS waypoints and coordinates on the maps. The photographs are also different from those in the first edition and are of the usual superb quality expected from the Eriksens. This book remains an essential purchase for any birdwatcher visiting this beautiful and very accessible country and is indeed a worthwhile addition to the bookshelves of anybody interested in the birds of the region.

Ian Harrison

Birdwatching in Azerbaijan—a Guide to Nature and Landscape

Sebastian Schmidt, Kai Gauger & Nigar Agayeva
Michael Succow Foundation. 2008.
Softback. 224 pages, colour photographs, maps, plus a CD.
£19.99
ISBN 978-3-000-24158-1
Available from NHBS Environment Bookstore

This is the first comprehensive ornithological site guide to Azerbaijan. The authors have divided the country into seven regions to help readers decide where to go. These are the coast, central lowlands, dry foothills, Greater Caucasus, Lesser Caucasus, Talish Mountains and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Each chapter identifies several sites to visit, and each of these is accompanied by a list of typical species. A map of the general location of each site is included, and while these are fine for seeing where the site is in relation to local villages generally they do not give detail of paths or access.

Throughout, the book is well-illustrated with photographs of habitats and species. The accompanying CD contains 75 minutes of stereo atmospheric recordings covering the main habitats. These are very pleasant, and a welcome addition to the book.

Some 55 species are selected for individual treatment as they are target species for the region. A checklist of 394 species is also included indicating both the regions in which each is found but also the time of occurrence.

A typical two-week itinerary to see much of Azerbaijan is sketched out for those wanting to create their own trip and there is also plenty of useful information to assist with planning. A lot of work has gone into the production of this book, and hopefully it will inspire OSME members to visit this country—now just sixteen years



into its second period as an independent republic.

Keith Betton

Yemen: Haraz Mountains—a hiking and trekking guide

Max Kasperek
General Tourism Development Authority / Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit. 2007.
Softback. 88 pages, colour photographs, and an additional colour folding map.
€16.00.
ISBN 978-3-925064-46-3

The Haraz mountains, often called the “green Haraz” and between the Red Sea lowlands and mountain peaks of up to 3000 metres, are home to one of the most attractive terraced landscapes in Yemen. The area has a mild climate with two rainy seasons, April/May and July/August, and is popular with a number of companies offering tours. Of the thirteen endemic bird species in Yemen, eight are found in these mountains. These species are briefly mentioned in this book, together with other unique flora and fauna.

This book focuses on the cultural aspects of mountain life, and particularly the Yemeni people who live in compact fortified villages reminiscent of the Middle Ages. The old customs and practices of mountain life are explained.

The region is ideal for easy and semi-difficult hiking and trekking and, not least because of its relatively good accessibility from the capital Sana’a, is attractive to visitors. In particular, the 1:25 000 scale map provides valuable information to assist anyone considering a visit to the area.

Keith Betton

