

NEWS & INFORMATION

Dawn Balmer (compiler)

EGYPT

IBA and proposed World Heritage Site in Egypt threatened by tourist development

The Amer Group, the Egyptian real estate developer responsible for Porto Marina and Porto Sokhna, massive tourism developments along Egypt's north and Ain Sokhna coasts, plans to build 'Porto Fayoum' on 650 acres in the Lake Qarun Protected Area near Fayoum oasis. This is the first development of such huge proportions to be allowed in an Egyptian protected area. This and other tourism developments planned for a 10-kilometer stretch of coastal land along the northern part of lake Qarun will undoubtedly cause damage to this pristine, scenic desert area, known as Gebel Qatrani. This area contains one of the world's most complete fossil records of terrestrial primates and marshland mammals and remains critical to our understanding of mammalian—and human—evolution. Just last year excavations in Gebel Qatrani revealed the complete fossil remains of a prehistoric whale, new to science. Gebel Qatrani has also been listed as a proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site, not only given its priceless fossil deposits, but also its prehistoric and archaeological treasures, including Pharaonic tombs and quarries, and the world's most ancient paved road.

Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE) think that the tourism development will negatively impact birds and their habitats at lake Qarun, a BirdLife International Important Bird Area (IBA). Through the Jensen Foundation, BirdLife supported NCE to establish a Site Support Group to protect the site as well as generate incomes in a sustainable manner. Egypt's official Tourism Development Authority (TDA) participated in numerous studies highlighting lake Qarun's importance for ecotourism. However, it has instead approved this project to promote more conventional—and unsustainable—tourism developments on the lake. This is happening despite

opposition from officials at the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, responsible for managing Egypt's protected areas.

NCE is calling for Gebel Qatrani to be declared Egypt's first UNESCO Geopark to attract tourists, create jobs and as a step towards making the area a World Heritage Site. Through its SSG network in Egypt, NEC hopes that the 'Friends of Lake Qarun' SSG also participate in the project recently funded by the US Embassy's Democracy Grants Programme. For more information on the proposed development contact: Rebecca Porteous at rporteous1@yahoo.co.uk, or Mindy Baha El Din at egyptcalling@yahoo.com or info@nceegypt.org at Nature Conservation Egypt.

IRAN

Publication of the first and second issues of *Balaban* ornithological bulletin

Balaban, the Iranian Bulletin of Ornithology, is published, in Persian, by Zist Andishan Caspian Institute. This periodical (ISSN 2008-7705) is being managed by Afshin Zarei under the editorship of Mohammad Tohidifar and assistant editors Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh and Ahmad Barati.

The first issue of *Balaban* was published in 2009 and covers many short notes: An introduction to birdwatching in Iran; Breeding of Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica* in Bandar Abbas City; Recent report of breeding Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* in Lar National Park, Tehran; A note on breeding of Great Stone-curlew *Esacus recurvirostris* in Hara Protected Area, Hormozgan, southern Iran; A note on breeding and ringing of Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* in AghGol wetland, Hamedan; Ringing herons in northern Iran; Observation of Corncrake *Crex crex* in Hamedan Province; Observation of White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* in Hengam Island, Persian Gulf; Bird damage to melon and watermelon in

Dashli-Boroun area, Golestan Province; and Establishment of Iran Bird Records Committee. Finally, updated species lists of IUCN and CITES were prepared for Iranian birds, some news and a list of 53 Iranian ornithological literature items published in 2007 are presented at the end. In this issue, English summaries are presented together on the first pages, left hand side, of the issue.

The second issue of the *Balaban* was published in 2010 and included a long review article: Checklist of the birds of Tehran Province during the past half century, listing all 338 species recorded in this province during the past 50 years in published materials as well as many unpublished records. This issue also contains a few short notes: Observation of Eurasian Nutcrackers *Nucifraga caryocatactes* in Khorasan-e Razavi and Gilan Provinces, northern Iran; Recent observation of the Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* in Central Iran; Breeding of Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* and Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* at Shirin-Sou wetland, Hamedan Province; and Breeding of White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* and Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* at sewage ponds of Zarrin-Shahr, Esfahan Province. In this issue, English summaries are presented at the beginning of each paper. Finally, some news and a list of 49 Iranian ornithological literature items published in 2008 are presented at the end.

Authors are encouraged to submit their manuscripts to Mohammad Tohidifar preferably by email: Mohammad_8463@yahoo.com, or mailing hard copies to: Northern No. 9, Yekom Valiye-Asr alley, Eastern 72 Street, Sardasht Street, Resalat Highway, PO Box 16516 43711, Tehran, Iran.

IRAQ

World Migratory Bird Day Celebration and Nature Iraq's Activities

This spring Nature Iraq/BirdLife International organized several conservation-related activities. From 24–29 April Nature Iraq/BirdLife International, with help from Richard Porter (BirdLife advisor for the Middle East), ran their sixth annual training course which trained people from ministries and other sectors. They were trained in bird

identification and their conservation status, field and breeding survey techniques together with implementation on the ground in some designated Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Iraq. In addition, the course focused on future conservation and management plans for the key sites that Nature Iraq and the Ministry of Environment are working on.

One of Nature Iraq's green projects is ecotourism and to further this aim an eco-camp was recently built near one of the key sites for wildlife. Nature Iraq arranged three day eco-tours for people from inside and outside of the country to show them the value of the areas visited and how efforts are being made to preserve them in a sustainable way.

Bird training at Peramagroon area (designated protected area)

On 12 May as one of the activities for World Migratory Bird Day at the French Institute in Erbil (with an exhibition at the same place), Nature Iraq arranged a lecture "Soaring Birds and their Migration" which also focused on the role of Iraq in protecting all birds in general and these birds in particular. Many people attended from different sectors and countries and it was covered by the media. On 29 May Dr Azzam Alwash (CEO of Nature Iraq) gave a talk "The Story of Mesopotamian Marshes, The Past and Future"—this is one of the main key sites for many migratory birds. (Contributed by Richard Porter)

Nature Iraq receives Takreem Arab Achievement Award in Qatar

Initiated in 2004 the Takreem Arab Achievement Award honours the best and brightest of Arab achievements. Nature Iraq was the recipient this year for their achievement in Environmental Development and Sustainability. Dr Azzam Alwash, CEO of Nature Iraq, accepted the award at a ceremony in Qatar at the end of April.

The Takreem Award seeks to identify and promote Arab accomplishments, by highlighting Arab excellence and leadership worldwide. The Award for Environmental Development and Sustainability honours individuals and organizations that have shown leadership in the field of environmental planning, sustainable development and green projects. Such recipients have been

involved in effective environmental planning, addressing community needs through sustainable resource use while protecting the environment, promoting energy efficiency and raising environmental awareness. (Contributed by Richard Porter)

ISRAEL

Volunteers wanted for migration survey

The Israel Ornithological Centre (IOC) will conduct a migration survey of soaring birds in the northern valleys of Israel. This survey is monitoring one of the most important bird migration pathways of the Middle East. They are looking for experienced birdwatchers who are willing to spend long days in the field. The survey runs from 15 Sep–10 Oct. IOC will cover flight costs, food and accommodation and a small fee for volunteers who can stay the whole duration. For more details please contact Nadav Israeli contactnadavisra@gmail.com.

JORDAN

Jordan Birdwatching Club on Facebook

If you're on Facebook and interested in the wild birds of Jordan, please consider joining the facebook group 'Jordan Birdwatching Club'. (Contributed by Fares Khoury)

SYRIA

Jaboul wetland report published

An excellent report outlining the long term monitoring of the Jaboul wetland has been published: Hamidan, N, L El-Moghrabi, E Al-Ibraheem, Y Mujawer & A Mawas. 2010. *Waterbirds Survey Report of Sabkhat Al-Jabboul Aleppo / Syria 2008-2009*. The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, Amman, Jordan. This is a joint effort between SSCW and RSCN funded by SDC. (Contributed by Sharif Jbour)

YEMEN

Minister for Water and the Environment

Abdul Rahman, President of YSPW (BirdLife's Partner) is no longer in post as Yemen's Minister for Water and the Environment.

OTHER INFORMATION

Bibliography of Arabian Ornithology

The 2011 update to the draft bibliography of Arabian Ornithology is now available. This issue includes the 80 or so references added since 2010. This year's version includes two important addenda. In the preparation of the ABBA atlas it was originally intended to fully reference the text but later it was decided that this would take up too much space and would have made the text less straightforward to read. It was then decided to list all relevant published sources by a numerical code after each species account. However this plan was also abandoned as again it would have taken up too much space. These were important decisions as the atlas crept to an unmanageable 800 pages. In the end only the most relevant sources were quoted in the species accounts and only those sources included in the atlas list of references. The following addenda fill this gap by providing a full list of references for each species and a complete list of all references consulted.

Addendum 1: A list of all published sources which contain at least one record relevant to bird distribution in Arabia and which were used in the preparation of Jennings, MC. 2010. *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia. Fauna of Arabia* 25. These are shown as numerical source codes and grouped for each species, arranged in the species taxonomic order used in the Atlas.

Addendum 2: Is a complete list of all published sources (author, title and other citation details) at Addendum 1, arranged in the order of their numerical source code to allow easy identification of the sources at Addendum 1.

If anyone wants to investigate a particular species in Arabia, or delve into the sources and contents of the atlas species accounts these reference lists are a useful

starting point. Please contact Mike Jennings at ArabianBirds@dsl.pipex.com for further information. (Contributed by Mike Jennings)

Phoenix 27

Issue No 27 of the *Phoenix*, a newsletter for Arabian Ornithology published by the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia (ABBA) project, has been sent out to subscribers and contacts. The contents include: A new Arabian breeding species - Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*; Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus aegyptius* in Arabia; Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola* satellite tracked to Aldabra (Seychelles); Asian Raptor movements through Arabia; Turkish Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* in UAE; Survey report on the highlands and tihama of south-west Saudi Arabia (summary); Origin of Peregrines *Falco peregrinus* wintering in and migrating through Arabia; Counting Crab-plover colonies; Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* breed for the first time in Qatar; A new race of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* found breeding in Arabian mangroves; First breeding of Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana* in the UAE; Birds of the Hajar mountains, UAE; Status of the coastal wetlands in Ras al Khaimah; Survey report on Shaybah oilfield, Empty Quarter, Saudi Arabia (summary); Bulgarian Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* visits Saudi Arabia; Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* juveniles tracked from Oman to Africa; Kazakhstan Eastern Imperial Eagles *Aquila heliaca* in Kuwait. Please contact Mike Jennings at ArabianBirds@dsl.pipex.com for further information. (Contributed by Mike Jennings)

Online Access to *Podoces*—the West and Central Asian Ornithological Journal

Podoces continues to be published successfully and since 2009 has been published online-only, at www.wesca.net. This periodical (ISSN 1735–6725) focusing on West and Central Asia has been entirely in English since 2008. The table of contents of the four online issues since 2009 are given below.

Contents of 4(1): Review of rare birds in Iran, 1860s–1960s; Distribution, population and ecology of Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus bogdanovi* in Sistan Plain, in relation

to plant coverage and drought; Breeding biology of Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* in Siahkeshim Protected Area, northern Iran; The avian community of five Iranian wetlands, Miankaleh, Fereidoon-Kenar, Bujagh, Anzali and Lavandevil, in the south Caspian lowlands; Observations of waterbirds at Abshineh Dam, Hamedan Province, Iran; Autumn records of Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* (Bechstein, 1798) in Southeastern Anatolia, Turkey; Estimating seasonal populations of some Corvids in Iran, 2001–2002.

The 4(2) papers included: Comparison of morpho-skeletal characteristics (using standardised criteria sets) of the Great Tit *Parus major* (Linnaeus 1758) in three Iranian populations (Mashhad, Noor and Hamedan); Distribution and number of herons (Ardeidae), White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* and Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* at their main wintering sites in the Azerbaijan Republic; Waterbird populations during dry and wet years in the Hamoun Wetlands Complex, Iran/Afghanistan border; Some aspects of feeding ecology of the Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* in three different zones in the Kadalundy Estuary, Kerala, South India; and Effects of sunflower cultivars and different sowing dates on the damage rate caused by birds, in particular House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Notes are also given on: The first record of the Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* from Iran; Changes to the Checklist of the Birds of Muzaffarabad City, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan; and Observations on breeding birds of Meyghan wetland and adjacent areas, Markazi Province, west-central Iran.

Issue 5(1) of *Podoces*, published in 2010, covers the following papers: Bird atlas as an indispensable monitoring tool: how the first one was conceived in Finland and implications for Iran; Results of mid-winter waterbird counts in Iran in the early 1970s; Breeding biology and success of the Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* in Karfestan Ab-bandan, Roudsar, Gilan Province, northern Iran; Breeding activities and success of Pleske's Ground Jay *Podoces pleskei* in Touran Biosphere Reserve, Semnan Province, Iran; A comparative study on the populations and habitats of the Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* and the Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* in

Lehri Nature Park, Punjab, Pakistan; Habitat-related density and activity patterns of the White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* in Cauvery Delta, southern India; and Current status of the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* in Boukan, West Azerbaijan, Iran. And also a note is given on Distribution of the Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* Gray in Kerala, South India.

The second issue of 2010, 5(2), includes the following papers: Current status of the breeding population of the Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* along the northern coasts of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea, and its wintering population in the south of Iran; Breeding biology and success of the Western Reef Heron on Nakhiloo Island, Persian Gulf; Population estimation and breeding biology of the House Crow *Corvus splendens* on Kharg Island, Persian Gulf; and Diet variations of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (Scopoli, 1769) in Madurai District, Tamil Nadu, Southern India. Three notes are: A note on the breeding of the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* on Sootav Plain, Boukan, northwestern Iran; Diurnal behaviour of the Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* during a tidal cycle on the Bandar Abbas coast, Persian Gulf; and A preliminary study on mite fauna of bird nests in Iran.

Please visit www.wesca.net and then go to *Podoces* journal for the full text of all issues published so far. Authors are encouraged to submit their manuscripts to Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh at akhaleghizadeh@gmail.com. (Contributed by Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh)

Arabic on Worldbirds

Arabic is now available as a language option on the following WorldBirds (www.worldbirds.org) family systems: Middle East Birds; North Africa Birds; East Africa Birds; West Africa Birds.

The implementation of Arabic is still in development and the organisers note the following points. There is still some work to do in redirecting the primary language for some countries to Arabic, so that new users who visit the login page get this instead of English as the default (they can change language at login or while in the system). The system cannot at this stage cope with the right-to-left orientation of the whole

system—so the text will read correctly but the menus *etc* are still on the left. As with any translation, there are going to be areas where expert users may think that different phrases or words would fit better—please feed back suggestions to the organisers.

WorldBirds is grateful to the voluntary help from Ibrahim Al Hasani. It is hoped that by having Arabic available, the system will be more accessible to local Arabic-speaking bird watchers. For further information please email worldbirds@rspb.org.uk. (Contributed by WorldBirds—Ian Fisher & Loraiza Davies)

Middle Eastern Important Bird Areas

A total of 391 sites have been identified as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Middle East, in all covering more than 300 000 km² or about 5% of the land area of the Middle East.

The sites were carefully selected according to criteria which confirmed that they held regionally or globally important populations of birds. Seven main habitat-types can be distinguished in the Middle East: woodland, bush land, grassland, agricultural, desert, wetland and marine. IBAs have been identified in all of these ecosystems. Wetlands dominate the inventory, comprising half of all IBAs. Other habitat types are represented by lower, but roughly similar, number of sites. The large number of wetlands selected as IBAs reflects their great importance to birds and other wildlife in a region where water resources are usually scarce.

About a quarter of the sites have some form of legal protection of their biodiversity, representing more than a third of the total area covered by IBAs. Thus the majority of all IBAs in the Middle East are unprotected by law. About two-thirds of IBAs in the Middle East are not immediately threatened, or are under a low degree of threat of destruction or degradation of their habitats. The IBAs in most urgent need of attention are those whose important habitats or bird populations are under a high degree of threat of destruction or elimination, and where most if not all of the habitat(s) or population(s) are likely to be irreversibly lost unless immediate action is taken.

For more information on the Middle East IBA Programme contact sharif.jbour@

birdlifemed.org (BirdLife Middle East Division Office).

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Request for photos

The *Atlas of Birds of Iran* is in the final stages and photographs of some of the rarer Iranian species are sought. The Atlas will be bilingual Persian/English. If you can provide photographs of publication quality please contact Mohammad Kaboli at mkaboli@ut.ac.ir or mkaboli@univ-montp2.fr. (Contributed by Mohammad Kaboli)

Weavers in the UAE

In the UAE there are now six species of weavers that are breeders or potential breeders. These are Vitelline Masked Weaver *Ploceus vitellinus*, Village Weaver *P. cucullatus*, Golden-backed Weaver *P. jacksoni*, Baya Weaver *P. philippinus*, Bengal or Black-breasted Weaver *P. benghalensis* and Streaked Weaver *P. manyar*. The first three are of African origin, the others are from the Indo-malayan region. Pictures of all these birds and their nests (which are often diagnostic identification clinchers) can be found on the web site of Tommy Pedersen, the UAE recorder, at <http://www.uaebirding.com/photos-birds.html>.

Few birdwatchers report presence or breeding activity of exotics. The result is information is desperately needed of this group in the UAE and in Arabia generally. For example, although all the above have built nests and they are regarded as breeding by many there is no confirmed breeding reported for four of them. Weavers seem to build nests continuously and very often do not take breeding any further, so perhaps some of the above do not breed? Any evidence of breeding weavers would be gratefully received, as would information on the subspecies of local populations, interspecific competition with indigenous or other species and interaction with man/utilisation of man-made habitats *etc.* Information sent to ABBA (ArabianBirds@dsl.pipex.com) should be copied to the UAE recorder Tommy Pedersen at 777sandman@gmail.com, or other local recorders as appropriate. (Contributed by Mike Jennings)

ABBA 2011 records

Although the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* was published last summer, the ABBA project continues to collect records of bird distribution within the Arabia peninsula and publish the *Phoenix* each year. Current observers living in Arabia or visiting are invited to send appropriate records to the project.

The ABBA database is primarily interested in breeding species, including breeding visitors, and other species that show signs of breeding. This includes exotics that appear to be becoming established, visiting species which now find suitable breeding habitat in the region through habitat change and those species that, increasingly, over-summer and thus might breed. Information is scheduled according to a half degree grid square and a breeding evidence code that generally accords with other similar international atlas projects.

Records information is held against five basic data fields; species and species number; a grid scale reference; a breeding evidence code; date and remarks. Information collected is not confined purely to breeding activities, the remarks column (which can be a few words of explanation or a whole page of notes) may be used for comments on ecology, food taken, habitats, interactions with other species and man. In addition information is increasingly being collected not just on birds but in respect of specific habitats, conservation subjects and a range of environmental issues relevant to birds.

Those interested in contributing to the project and have not already received a set of ABBA instructions should let me know so that I can send them the documentation (pdfs and MSWord). This includes Instructions for Contributors, a list of Arabia breeding birds with short notes on status, a grid map of the Arabian peninsula, the breeding evidence code and report forms. There is also a sample completed report form to illustrate the sort of information that is being sought. Contributors will receive *Phoenix* the annual project newsletter as well as various ABBA survey and other reports which become available.

The ABBA project has involved a great many people contributing records and data over a long period. It has been a principle of the project since it started to share as much

data as possible among observers and other individuals and also to groups and other organisations interested in Arabian birds. For example, the project has provided information for many scientific papers by various authors and has made its database available to those preparing various handbooks and field guides. Contributors who are intending to publish their own observations can be provided with up to date details of the distribution of individual species or the birds occurring in finite areas. A close working relationship has been built up with all natural history groups

active in Arabia and with their ornithological recorders, so that benefits may accrue to all parties. Information is regularly passed to such groups and individual contributors are encouraged to copy their own ABBA reports to their local group or bird recorder. All information passed on by the project does, wherever possible, credit the original observer but observers do have the option of remaining anonymous when records are passed on and can put any reasonable embargo on their own records once on the ABBA database. (Contributed by Mike Jennings)

The OSME region

Lies between Europe, China and the Horn of Africa on two major migration flyways crossing Central Asia's wind-swept steppes, the Caucasus' towering mountains, Arabia's wide arid deserts and the tropical seas of the Indian Ocean.

An awesome place for birds and birdwatchers.



**ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST
THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

OSME OSME brings together those curious and knowledgeable about the region's birds

Encourages
conservation and research
through a fund
for small-scale projects.

Publishes SANDGROUSE
an internationally respected journal with papers on
the birds of the OSME region written by local and
visiting scientists and enthusiasts.

OSME c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, UK To join OSME visit www.osme.org

UK registered charity no. 282938