



The monsoon, or Khareef, as seen from Jebel Samhan.

Light birding in Dhofar, Oman 19-29 July 2016

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This was the second summer my son and I visited Dhofar during the monsoon. We spent the days in the field, often starting relatively late (photo light was really poor early mornings and the hotel breakfast very nice), and did a few late evening excursions. For general information, please see my report from July 2015 and the references therein, this report should be treated as an update to it.

Travel

We flew Qatar Airways again, Copenhagen - Doha - Salalah and back. Very convenient, and with a 30 kg luggage allowance. We had a long stopover in Doha on the way back, but the airport has nice quiet lounges and lots of facilities so it worked out well.

Hire car

As Hertz does not have an office there we rented through Holiday Autos and ended up with a Mitsubishi Otlander 4WD through Interrent/Europcar. A good car and adequate for our needs. A surprise though was that we had to pay for cleaning when we returned the car and there was nothing about that in the voucher. So it is apparently in Oman and on Corsica you have to waste time on that, unless you want to pay OR5. There is a vehicle shortage during the khareef season, the man in the rental counter showed me a list of 15 prebookings which they would not be able to deliver. So an early booking is advised, especially if wanting a 4WD. There are plenty of petrol stations nowadays, also in Mirbat.



Maps

We used the app Scout on an iPad, which one can use offline for navigation. Worked out well, but don't expect it to be very updated, new flyovers and roundabouts were not always shown on it.

Hotel

This time we stayed at the Crowne Plaza in Salalah. It is labelled five stars and is really good. Spotted Thick-knee in the garden at night a clear added attraction. For a rough birding trip this hotel is overkill though, but there are now several seemingly decent hotels in newly built high-rise buildings in downtown Salalah which should be cheaper and good enough.

Wifi

We had in the hotel, but few public places or establishments have.

Restaurants

There are several ok, ethnic places along 23rd July street. Lebanese Balbeek was a favourite. It is situated a bit further east on the street than the map in Trip Advisor depicts (and on the northern side of the street, not the southern). Crowne Plaza's restaurants were good as well, but much overpriced. The food stalls along the road, especially at Taqa, were good for basic meats and wonderful "cheesybreads" (=fresh parathas filled with cheese or nutella).

Food

We shopped for lunches at Mirbat when we headed in that direction. There is a good supermarket at the "Shopping Centre" 16.987816, 54.696728, although on certain days no bread or yoghurt. The Bahjat Mirbat bakery at 16.982757, 54.693219 a few blocks away had a good choice of breads, super-tasty doughnuts and basic dairy and cheese products.

Credit cards and money

ATM machines worked so and so with European Mastercard, VISA and Amex. However, there are plenty of them, so just try another one if you are declined in one. It is advisable to carry cash, especially if venturing out from Salalah, as cards are not taken as extensively as in Europe. This applies for Salalah restaurants too. If you are stuck with large bills, gasoline stations can always change.

Climate

The rain was not very disturbing at all, except in Wadi Hinna where it seems to rain more heavily all the time. It is very local though, so it is often easy to find somewhere drier. Jebel Samhan was usually sunny as well as the parts towards Sath, east of Mirbat. There was more water this year than the year before, and it was extremely muddy in places, so we were happy that we brought sturdy walking shoes with us.

Sites (only updates, see existing literature)

Ras Janjari. My favourite and the best seabird counting site is sadly now out of bounds, a military base is being established there which is a great pity. We had to turn away 1 km before. The

other vantage points along the coast are not as good, even if you are likely to see singles of the species. The area around Sadh could be worth investigating for seabird movements.

Jebel Samhan. The viewpoint 17.103155, 54.698803 was very good for butterflies. I believe this is the place where Verraux's Eagles are seen by visiting birders in late autumn.

New site between Mirbat and Taqah at 17.053146, 54.644479. We did not investigate this thoroughly, but at this site you have both mountain forest and good views of the sky as it is on a slope (and a favoured picknick site). The Verraux's Eagle was heading this way.

Lagga Shalyoon 17.185156, 54.943851. No security issues here, climb above the dam (if you are fit) and venture into the wadi. Lots of Green Pigeons and also the only place for Vagrant Emperor on this trip.

Wadi Soop 17.127710, 54.912964. A nice, dry and bird-empty wadi, we had an Arabian Red Fox and Mountain Gazelle, worth driving the tracks for Gazelles and Little Owls.

Some key species

Yellow Bittern - common in East Khor, Al Baleed and Rawri. Walk around the reedy areas on the east side, often they are flushed but can sit open too.

Indian Pond Heron - most wetlands, ratio c 2 Indian to 8 squaccos.

Yellow-billed Kite - the food stalls by the road at the eastern roundabout of Taqa, Taqa is a classic place for the (sub)species. A fresh juvenile at Feyziah, west of Mughsayl.

Bruce's Green Pigeon - Lagga Shalyoon was the best place.

Forbes-Watson's Swift - present everywhere, to see and hear at close range the food stalls at Taqah (above the loads of hay parked next to the roundabout) and Taiq cave are good places.

Malachite Kingfisher - we had one in the small wetland on the left after khor Mughsayl if driving the wadi north. Had attempted breeding at Rowri this year, but we could not find them there.

Fan-Tailed Raven - common, also on the plains. Especially around Mirbat.

Black-crowned Finch Lark - we only saw at Khor Sawli, which seems reliable, but also the plains around Mirbat are good.

Singing Bush Lark - no problems this time of year. Anywhere there is grass, including farms. and lower reaches of ayns.



Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak - good numbers this year, also on the plains behind the palace just east of Salalah. They were in small flocks, mixed juveniles and adults, feeding beneath trees on the ground. Not very shy.

BIRDS

Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*

5 en route 20.7, 2 Fizayah SW Mughsayl 24.7, 3 Wadi Nahiz 25.7 and 2 observed 28.7.

Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*

2 en route 21.7.

Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*

1 Wadi Baqlat 26.7.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

2 Khawr Rawri 20.7, 5 Khawr Rawri 26.7 and 2 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

15 Khawr Rawri 20.7, 35 Raysut beach 21.7, 25 en route 22.7, 7 Wadi Baqlat 26.7, 5 Khawr Rawri 26.7 and 45 Raysut lagoon 27.7.

Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*

1 Wadi Baqlat 26.7.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

4 Raysut lagoon 27.7.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

3 Raysut beach 21.7 and 2 Raysut lagoon 27.7.

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

2 Khawr Rawri 23.7 and singles more or less daily East Khor, Salalah.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

1 immature Wadi Nahiz 25.7, 1 en route 25.7, 25 Raysut lagoon 27.7, singles East Khor, Salalah and 10 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

1 East Khawr 20.7, 5 observed 22.7, 2 observed 23.7, 1 Khawr Rawri 26.7, 2 Raysut lagoon 27.7, 5 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7 and 1 observed 29.7.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

2 observed 22.7, 1 observed 23.7, 2 Raysut lagoon 27.7 and 1 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

15 Khawr Rawri 20.7, 45 Raysut beach 21.7 and 15 Salalah Marriott Resort, Mirbat 22.7.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7 and 1 Khawr Rawri 26.7.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

2 Khawr Rawri 20.7 and 2 Wadi Baqlat 26.7. Observed 3 days in total.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*

6 Salalah Marriott Resort, Mirbat 22.7, 1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 24.7 and 1 Wadi Baqlat 26.7.

Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*

Large numbers fishing along the coast north of Sadh.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*

15 Wadi Baqlat 26.7.

Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchos*

1 subadult ♀ Sahnawt Farms 28.7.

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*

1 Wadi Darbat 28.7.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*

2 en route 21.7, 1 Khawr Sawli 22.7, 1 Khawr Rawri 23.7, 3 Ayn Khees 25.7 and 1 en route 27.7.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

1 observed Taqah food stalls 20.7 and 1 subadult there 21.7. A juv Fizayah 24.7.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

1 en route 28.7

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common all wetlands.

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*

1 observed Crowne Plaza 26.7, 1 heard at night Crowne Plaza 27.7 and 5 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7



Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

15 Raysut beach 21.7 and Fairly Common observed 26.7.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

2 Khawr Sawli 22.7.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

1 Khawr Rawri 20.7, 1 Raysut beach 21.7, 1 observed 23.7 and 4 observed 26.7.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

2 en route 22.7 and 1 Raysut lagoon 27.7.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

5 Raysut beach 21.7, 5 en route 22.7 and Fairly Common observed 26.7.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

10 Khawr Rawri 20.7, 5 observed 23.7, 2 Wadi Baqlat 26.7 and 1 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

1 Raysut beach 21.7 and 1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

1 Khawr Rawri 26.7.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Singles more or less daily.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

1 East Khor 23.7.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

3 East Khor 23.7.

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*

1 Khawr Rawri 20.7, 1 Raysut beach 21.7, 1 Salalah Marriott Resort, Mirbat 22.7 and 5 Raysut lagoon 27.7

Sooty Gull *Ichthyiaetus hemprichii*

500 Raysut beach 21.7 common along coasts.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

1 East Khor 22.7.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*

Observed most days, common.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

1 Khawr Rawri 20.7.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

1 East Khor 28.7.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

6 en route 22.7, 2 Wadi Baqlat 26.7 and 5 en route 28.7

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*

1 Wadi Ataq 23.7.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen daily.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Seen daily.

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*

300 Khawr Rawri 23.7 was a major congregation. Seen daily.



Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*

Singles in most ayns, 6 Lagga Shalyoon, 23.7, 1 Ayn Razat 27.7 and 25 Lagga Shalyoon 28.7.

Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius*

2 observed 20.7, 2 Ayn Khees 20.7, 2 Ayn Khees 22.7, 1 Ayn Sahnawt 25.7, 2 Ayn Khees 25.7, 1 Wadi Nahiz 25.7 and 1 Ayn Razat 27.7.

Arabian Scops Owl *Otus pamela*

1 Ayn Khees 20.7.

Spotted Eagle-Owl *Bubo africanus*

1 Wadi Nahiz 25.7.

Forbes-Watson's Swift *Apus berliozi*

Common.

Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala*

1 observed 20.7, 1 Ayn Khees 22.7, 1 East Khawr Park 23.7, 3 Ayn Khees 25.7, 3 Wadi Nahiz 25.7 and 1 observed 28.7.

Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus*

1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

3 en route 20.7, 1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7, 1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 27.7 and 2 en route 28.7.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Common in Salalah.

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus*

1 Ayn Khees 25.7, 2 Ayn Sahnawt 27.7 and 1 Lagga Shlyoon 28.7

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*

1 Ayn Khees 20.7 and 1 Wadi Darbat 28.7. Smaller numbers than last year.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Common, seen all days.

Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus*

Common, seen all days.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*

2 Wadi Ashawq, Mughsayl 21.7 and 1 en route 23.7.

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*

2 Khawr Sawli 22.7.

Singing Bush Lark *Mirafr cantillans*

2 Ayn Khees 20.7, 2 Ayn Khees 22.7, 2 Ayn Sahnawt 24.7 and 2 Ayn Khees 25.7

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Observed 5 days in total.

White-spectacled Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*

Common.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen nearly daily. 4-5 Mirbat on all visits.

Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*

Common.

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*

Common.

Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*

1 Ayn Sahnawt 25.7 and 1 Lagga Shalyoon 28.7.

Abyssinian White-eye *Zosterops abyssinicus*

Observed daily in ayns and Salalah.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Common.

Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristramii*

Common.

Blackstart *Oenanthe melanura*

Singles in most ayns.

Arabian Wheatear *Oenanthe lugentoides*

2 observed 23.7, 1 Fizayah SW Mughsayl 24.7, 1 Ayn Khees 25.7 and 1 Tawi Atayr Sink Hole 26.7.

Palestine Sunbird *Cinnyris osea*

1 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7.



Shining Sunbird *Cinnyris habessinicus*

1 en route 20.7, 2 observed 21.7, 2 observed 22.7, 2 Ayn Khees 22.7, 1 Khawr Rawri 23.7, 1 Fizayah SW Mughsayl 24.7, 1 Tawi Atayr Sink Hole 26.7, 3 Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7 and 1 Ayn Hamran 29.7. Commonest sunbird.

Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*

Very common.

African Silverbill *Euodice cantans orientalis*

Common, both in ayns and Salalah.

Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus percivali*

12 Ayn Hamran 20.7, 12 observed north of the Palace east of Salalah 29.7 and 11 Ayn Hamran 29.7.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata striolata*

1 East Khawr 20.7 and 2 Raysut lagoon 27.7.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi*

Very common, both on plains and in mountains.

DRAGONFLIES

(not systematically recorded)

Common Citril *Ceriagrion glabrum*

2 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7.

Common Bluetail *Ischnura senegalensis*

Common Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7 and 500 Salalah Marriott Resort, Mirbat 22.7.

Pseudagrion decorum *Pseudagrion decorum*

2 Raysut lagoon 27.7.

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*

1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7, 2 observed 23.7 and 1 Ayn Tobroq 26.7.

Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope*

1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7.

Vagrant Emperor *Anax ephippiger*

5-10 patrolling at Lagga Shalyoon on both visits.

Broad Scarlet *Crocothemis erythraea*

10 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7.

Black Percher *Diplacodes lefebvrii*

Abundant Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7 and 15 Salalah Marriott Resort, Mirbat 22.7.

Epaulet Skimmer *Orthetrum chrysostigma*

Seen on several occasions.

Slender Skimmer *Orthetrum sabina*

1 en route 20.7 and Common Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7.



Phantom Flutterer *Rhyothemis semihyalina*

2 Khawr Rawri 20.7 and 25 Salalah Marriott Resort, Mirbat 22.7.

Violet Dropwing *Trithemis annulata*

1 Khawr Al Mughsayl 21.7 and Common Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7.

Red-veined Dropwing *Trithemis arteriosa*

1 Ayn Khees 25.7.

Blue Basker *Urothemis edwardsii*

Fairly Common Al Balid Archaeological Park 27.7.

Butterflies

(not systematically counted, in alphabetical order)

African Cupid *Euchrysops osiris*

Black-marked Orangetip *Colotis दौरا दौरا*
Caper White *Belenois aurora aurora*
Common Fig Tree Blue *Myrina silenus nzoiae*
Common Threering *Ypthima asterope asterope*
Diadem *Hypolimnastis misippus*
Grass Jewel *Chilades trichylus*
Large Salmon Arab *Colotis fausta*
Leaden Cilate Blue *Athene amarah*
Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui cardui*
Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus chrysippus*



Scarlet Tip *Colotis danae eupompe*
Small Salmon Arab *Colotis calais*
Sulphur Orangetip *Colotis eucharis evarne*
Tarucus *rosaceus* or *balkanicus*
Zebra White *Pinacopteryx eripha trigogenia*
Yellow Pansy *Precis hierta*

MAMMALS

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*
1 Wadi Soop 28.7.

Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis*

2 Watering hole Y-crossing Ayn Athoom & Ayn Tobroq 25.7 and 2 Wadi Darbat 25.7.

Mountain Gazelle *Gazella gazella*

1 observed 23.7.

Bats *Rhinopoma sp*

A small colony in a cave at Fizayah.