

A brief country by country guide to birdwatching in the OSME region

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The OSME region encompasses some 27 countries and lies between Europe, China and the Horn of Africa on two major migration flyways crossing Central Asia's wind-swept steppes, the Caucasus's towering mountains, Arabia's wide arid deserts and the tropical seas of the Indian Ocean. More than 1000 species of bird have been recorded across the region and no doubt there are more to be discovered. As part of *Supplement 4* we want to promote birdwatching and the conservation of birds in each of our constituent countries. The following country profiles have been compiled using the BirdLife International Datazone as well as local knowledge. With new discoveries on a regular basis such profiles are out of date as soon as they are published, so anyone planning a birdwatching trip to any of the countries should check for the latest information, especially the websites mentioned in the text as well as sections of the OSME web-site (trip reports and the official regional list ORL).

Unfortunately, a number of countries in the region are undergoing a period of political turmoil and are off limits for foreign visitors. You should always check and heed your Embassies latest advice regarding travel, safety and security. However, most countries are open to birdwatchers and are fabulous destinations to search for new bird species and spectacular habitats, as well as experience fascinating cultures. Wherever you may visit your sightings may be of immense value to bird conservation so please consider submitting trip reports to OSME and/or adding your data to systems such as BirdTrack. During the coming months the aim is to add these country profiles to the OSME website and provide regular updates and new information. Currently I do not have complete profiles for Lebanon, Qatar, the West Bank and Gaza and Turkmenistan.

Happy birding!

AFGHANISTAN

Capital: Kabul

Area: 652,864 km²

BirdLife Partner: None, but the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is registered in the country with a fully staffed country programme.

Total number of bird species: 478 (updated according to WCS 2017)

Globally threatened bird species: 16

Country endemics: 1 (near endemic)

Specialities: Afghan Snowfinch, Large-billed Reed Warbler, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Crimson-winged Finch, Sinai Rosefinch.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBA's: 15

Total IBA area: 3 918 188 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Afghanistan.



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Ornithological interest: Afghanistan is a land-locked country with few wetlands but a great variety of biomes and associated bird communities. The Afghan Scrub Sparrow and the Greater Hoopoe-Lark reside in the southern Saharo-Sindian desert areas, whereas in the Irano-Turanian mountains of the centre can be seen the Himalayan Snowcock, the Bearded Vulture, the Afghan Snowfinch and the highest breeding colony of Greater Flamingo in the world (in Dasht-e Nawar). The Eurasian high mountains in the north and northeast host an avifauna typical of the western Himalayan-Tibetan highlands, including species reaching into Wakhan national park at their westernmost distribution such as the Tibetan Sandgrouse, the Snow Pigeon, and the Tibetan Snowcock. A variety of lark and wheatear species and large numbers of wintering Macqueen's Bustards inhabit the Eurasian deserts and sub-deserts in the north. Finally the temperate to sub-tropical Sino-Himalayan forests in the east have the richest bird diversity in the country, as the avifauna is influenced by species from the Himalayan-Indian subcontinent, such as the Himalayan Monal, the Koklass Pheasant, the Black-headed Jay and the Kashmir Nuthatch.

All the species mentioned under 'Specialities' except the Large-billed Reed Warbler can be seen in spring and summer in the Band-e-Amir national park and the plateau north of it, in the province of Bamyán, one of the most secure areas in Afghanistan. The Large-billed Reed Warbler can be easily seen and heard in the riparian forest of Wakhan national park in the north-east province of Badakhshan along with many other species inhabiting the Central Asian highlands.

Best time to visit: With more than 50% of the total land area lying above 1500 m asl and limited infrastructure it is difficult to drive across most of Afghanistan during winter. April–June is the best time to visit the country, when mountain passes are in general accessible, and temperature in lower elevations is still moderate. April is the time for pre-nuptial migration of birds using the Central-Asian flyway and spectacular flocks can be encountered, such as of Demoiselle Cranes. May–June is the appropriate time to view breeding species such as the Afghan Snowfinch, Sinai Rosefinch, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, and especially the Large-billed Reed Warbler which could be very difficult to distinguish from the Blyth's Reed Warbler without the song. Unfortunately security in Afghanistan remains volatile. Any visit outside of the Band-e-Amir and Wakhan national parks, two relatively safe areas, should be carefully planned based on properly informed security conditions and locally on an updated knowledge on the possible presence of landmines.

Essential reading:

Rasmussen, PC & JC Anderton. 2012 *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide*. Vols 1 & 2. Second Edition. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

Ayé, R, M Schweizer & T Roth. 2012. *Birds of Central Asia*. Christopher Helm, London.

Compilers: Stephane Ostrowski and Peter Zahler

ARMENIA

Capital: Yerevan

Area: 29 743 km²

BirdLife Partner: None

Total number of bird species: 372

Globally threatened bird species: 30

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Caspian Snowcock, Crimson-winged Finch, Sombre Tit and Red-fronted Serin.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 18

Total IBA area: 415 132 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Armenia.

Ornithological interest: Armenia is a small land-locked mountainous country with high differences in elevation and a wide variety of habitats. Being part of the Caucasus, Armenia is a biogeographical bridge between Europe and Asia, and becomes a northern or western border for a number of Asian species. The variety of habitats and the reasonably high level of endemism makes for an interesting birding destination for Caucasian species and subspecies. The migration periods could be a productive time although much less is known about numbers and species than in other countries of the region.



© RF Porter

Armenia is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists including breeding populations of White-tailed Lapwing, Ferruginous Duck, White-headed Duck, and Paddyfield Warbler in the wetlands of Ararat plain. Persian and Finsch's Wheatear, Trumpeter Finch, and Grey-necked Bunting can all be found in the semi-deserts of central Armenia. In the Juniper woodlands of Southern Armenia, Sombre Tit and Red-fronted Serin can be seen. Semi-collared Flycatcher, Green Warbler, and Mountain Chiffchaff in deciduous forests of Northern Armenia, and Caucasian Grouse can also be found at higher elevations. Caspian Snowcock, Crimson-winged Finch, and Radde's Accentor occur in high mountains of central and southern Armenia.

Best time to visit: Armenia is a good country to visit at most times of the year. Late April–mid June is good for possible spring migrants and breeding birds. Late August–mid October is good for autumn migration although this is less well known than other parts of the Caucasus. Mid November–early January is a good time for higher altitude species as they descend to lower elevations.

Essential reading:

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. Harper Collins, UK.

The Armenian Bird Census web-site is a useful source of up to date information: <https://www.abcc-am.org/bibliography.html>

Compilers: Karen Aghababyan and Tsovinar Hovhannisyan

AZERBAIJAN

Capital: Baku

Area: 86 600 km²

BirdLife Partner: Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS)

Total number of bird species: 389

Globally threatened bird species: 19

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Caucasian and Caspian Snowcocks, Caucasian Black Grouse, See-see Partridge, Black Francolin, Shikra, Grey-headed Swamphen, White-tailed Lapwing,

Western and Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Wallcreeper, Güldenstadt's Redstart, White-throated Robin, Persian Wheatear, Raddes' Accentor, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Ménétries' Warbler, Mountain Chiffchaff, Green Warbler, Caspian Tit, Pale Rock Sparrow, Red-fronted Serin, Caucasian Twite, Great Rosefinch, Trumpeter, Desert and Mongolian Finches, Grey-necked Bunting.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 53

Total IBA area: 833 242 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Azerbaijan.



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Ornithological interest: Azerbaijan is a small country at the eastern border of the Western Palearctic, which is mainly influenced by the Caucasian mountain ranges and the Caspian sea. It has a high variety of climate zones; from semi-deserts, steppes and huge coastal wetlands in the lowland, through sub-tropical forests and dry rocky badlands, to high mountains in the Lesser and Greater Caucasus. This gives habitat for c250 breeding bird species. Furthermore, the Greater Caucasus and Caspian sea form natural borders on the West Asian–East African Flyway, which funnel millions of migrating birds in a narrow coastal plain, the Besh Barmag bottleneck.

Azerbaijan is an excellent country to see not only a number of regional specialities including the Caucasian endemics and lots of the Anatolian species, but also a perfect destination to enjoy bird migration. During migration season, passing birds can easily be observed at the bottleneck area of Besh Barmag mountain where visible diurnal migration often takes place just at eye-level. In both, spring and autumn, millions of birds of all kinds of species pass this outstanding hotspot. Resting migrants, mainly waterbirds, can be seen along the coast and in the wide lagoons of the Kura delta and Kizil Agach.

The endemic mountain species are easiest seen in the eastern Greater Caucasus around the villages of Khinalik and Laza. The southern specialities of breeding species within the borders of the Western Palearctic are Shikra and Caspian Tit. They can be seen around Masalli and Lerik respectively. A distinctively different species composition occurs in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan where eg Radde's Accentor, Persian Wheatears and See-see Partridge are common.

Best time to visit: May is the most pleasant time to see all breeding birds and still some of the later migrants. The autumn migration lasts from July with the first northern waders followed by terns, thousands of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, ducks, herons, pelicans and plenty of raptor species. The later season in November and December is characterised by finches, larks and the impressive passage of Little Bustards. In winter the vast steppes are home to ten thousands of the latter and the wetlands hold as many wintering waterbirds.

Essential reading:

A useful source of up to date information is the Birding Azerbaijan website: www.birdingaze.blogspot.com

Schmidt, S, K Gauger & N Agayeva. 2008. *Birdwatching in Azerbaijan*. Michael Succow Foundation, Greifswald, Germany.

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. Harper Collins, UK.

Compilers: Pia Fetting, Kai Gauger, and Thomas Haraldsson

BAHRAIN

Capital: Manama

Area: 760 km²

BirdLife Partner: Bahrain Natural History Society

Total number of bird species: 330

Globally threatened bird species: 22

Country endemics: 0

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Bahrain.

Specialities: Hypocolius and Socotra Cormorant

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 4

Total IBA area: 25 950 ha



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Ornithological interest: Bahrain is an archipelago comprising of the main islands of Bahrain and Maharraq with closely associated smaller islands mostly merged through reclamation, and a series of man-made islands. There is still a largely pristine group that make up the Hawar islands, 20 kms to the southeast. Development and industrialisation has and continues to erode away at the countries once unique and diverse habitat that gave rise to its name - Bahrain – “land of two seas”, which reflects an upwelling of fresh sweet aquifer water on an island surrounded by a saline sea. Natural and often unspoiled sites still do exist but only now in isolation and are hard sometimes almost impossible to access. However, Bahrain as a direct consequence of its small size still remains an excellent country for a short stopover. A hundred species a day remains an obtainable target throughout the year even in high summer with help from a local birder to provide directions to obscure sites.

Between late October and early March, Bahrain remains one of the few places where you are highly likely to see the Middle East speciality the Grey Hypocolius, often many hundreds at a time. The islands of Hawar for those with the time to visit are home in summer to breeding Sooty Falcons, large heronries and tern colonies while during the winter home to the world’s largest breeding colony of Socotra Cormorants and a significant range and number of waders.

Best time to visit: It’s very hot and humid in summer. Winter (October–March) is a must for Grey Hypocolius. September–November and March and April are pleasant months for birding with good chances to see many of the specialities.

Essential reading:

Porter, R & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*, 2nd Edition. Christopher Helm.

King, H. 2018. *Pocket Guide to the Birds of Bahrain - an Illustrated Checklist*. (ISBN 978-99901-47-23-0)

Up to date information can be found at www.hawar-islands.com/blog/index.php

Compiler: Howard King

CYPRUS

Capital: Nicosia

Area: 9251 km²

BirdLife Partner: Birdlife Cyprus

Total number of bird species: 403 (up to June 2017)

Globally threatened birds: 8

Country endemics: 3

Specialities: The country endemics: Cyprus Warbler, Cyprus Wheatear and Cyprus Scops Owl as well as 3 endemic subspecies; Cyprus Jay, Dorothy's Tree-creeper and Cyprus Coal Tit.



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Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 34

Total IBA area: 310 022 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Birdlife Cyprus Rare Birds Committee

Ornithological interest: Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean sea. Although it is a member of the European Union, it is geographically in the Middle East, 40 miles south of the Turkish coast and 65 miles west of Syria. Its bird life is mostly of Western Palearctic origin, with a country species list of 403 (June 2017), of which 57 are breeding residents. The rest are generally migrants, either passage, winter visitors, summer visitors or accidental visitors. The island is therefore a perfect place to enjoy bird migration. Because of Cyprus's geographical location it is one of the few 'European' countries where Bateleur Eagle, Little Swift, Bar-tailed Lark, Blyth's Pipit and Grey Hypocolius have been recorded. There are a host of other easier-to-see resident species which are hard to find elsewhere in Europe, including Chukar, Black Francolin, Spur-winged Lapwing, Long-legged Buzzard, Bonelli's Eagle and Audouin's Gull. The three breeding endemics are also relatively easy to find. Cyprus Warbler is present throughout year, although some do leave the island in winter, while Cyprus Wheatear is a fairly ubiquitous summer visitor, present late March–October. Cyprus Scops Owl occurs widely in the foothills and lightly wooded areas throughout the island. This owl is in full voice March–June. The upland pine forests host endemic breeding subspecies Cyprus Coal Tit, 'Dorothy's' Short-toed Tree-creeper and Cyprus Jay, all of which are easily found in the Troodos, Paphos and Makheras forests.

Cyprus is an excellent country to see a number of regional ('European') specialities including Black Francolin, Demoiselle Crane, Bonelli's Eagle, Spur-winged Lapwing, Greater Sand Plover, Audouin's Gull, Armenian Gull, Eleonora's Falcon, Cyprus Scops Owl, Bimaculated Lark, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Cyprus Wheatear, Rüppell's Warbler, Cyprus Warbler, Masked Shrike, Wallcreeper, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Desert Wheatear, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Finsch's Wheatear, Cretzschmar's Bunting and Black-headed Bunting.

Best time to visit: Best is March–May and August–early November, during spring and autumn migration, which can be spectacular.

Essential reading:

Porter, RF & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*, 2nd Edition. Christopher Helm, UK. Richardson & Porter (in prep). *Birds of Cyprus*. Christopher Helm, UK.

The Annual Cyprus Bird Report is an excellent publication available from BirdLife Cyprus

Compiler: Colin Richardson and Jane Stylianou

EGYPT

Capital: Cairo

Area: 1 001 450 km²

BirdLife Partner: Nature Conservation Egypt

Total number of bird species: 453

Globally threatened birds: 14

Country endemics: 0 (but several endemic subspecies)

Specialities: Red sea seabirds, spectacular soaring birds migration, good desert birds, wintering waterbirds and strong African elements.



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Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 34

Total IBA area: 3 472 050 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Egyptian Ornithological Rarities Committee: www.chn-france.org/eorc/eorc.php

Ornithological interest: Egypt is mostly a hyper-arid desert, transcended by the Nile river and bordered to its east by the Red sea; both these ecosystems challenge the extreme aridity of the land mass and act as biological corridors that connect the Palearctic and African regions. Lying at this meeting point Egypt offers opportunities to see many species that occur at the edge of their range and cannot be seen elsewhere in the Western Palearctic. Egypt is also an important migration bottleneck for Eurasian birds.

Egypt is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists including Red sea breeding seabirds and waterbirds such as White-eyed Gull, Sooty Gull, Brown Booby, Red-billed Tropicbird, Bridled Tern, Swift Tern, White cheeked Tern, Crab Plover and Goliath Heron. These species can be seen along the Red sea shore and islands near Hurghada and further south near Hamata and Wadi El Gemal. The best time of the year to see most species is the summer months, when most species breed. Mangroves of the Red sea host a range of interesting species including a localised race of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *alulensis* and the recently discovered breeding population of Yellow Bittern at Wadi Lahmi Mangrove. Wadi El Gemal national park provides a good example of the Eastern desert birds, with species like Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Hume's Tawny Owl, Sand Partridge, Hooded Wheatear and occasionally even Black Eagle. The town of Shalatiné near the Sudanese border provides an opportunity to see Lappet faced Vultures at close quarters along with a range of other birds of interest like Black-crowned Finch Larks. The perimeter of the gulf of Suez has several globally important bottlenecks for migratory soaring birds while south Sinai offers several specialties of its own including Sinai Rosefinch and Tristram's Grackle, both of which can be seen at St. Katherine's. The Nile valley hosts multiple African species such as Senegal Coucal, Senegal Thick-knee and Nile Valley Sunbird. Other species of interest for Western Palearctic birders include Painted Snipe, Purple Gallinule, Egyptian Goose and Striated Heron. Several endemic subspecies are found in the Egyptian Nile valley, including most notably the Egyptian race of the Swallow *savignyi*. The lake Nasser region is of special interest as it is often frequented by African stragglers such as Three-banded Plover, Pink-headed Dove, Yellow-billed Stork and Pink-backed Pelican. In winter it is an important wintering ground for Eurasian waterbirds. In

the autumn the Mediterranean coast is good for Palearctic migrants arriving across the sea, but it also experiences unfortunate bird hunting practices.

Best time to visit: Timing is very much dependent on the target species. March–May for spring migrants, July–August for Red sea breeding sea birds, and late August for the dramatic migration of White Storks through south Sinai and the Red sea. September–November is the key period for general autumn migration and the Sooty Falcon breeding season. December–January for winter visitors and waterbirds along the Nile valley.

Essential reading:

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. Harper Collins, UK

Compilers: Sherif Baha El Din

GEORGIA

Capital: Tbilisi

Area: 69 700 km²

BirdLife Partner: Society for Nature Conservation (SABUKO)

Total number of bird species: 283

Globally threatened birds: 16

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Caucasian Snowcock, Caspian Snowcock, Caucasian Grouse, Great Rosefinch, Güldenstadt’s Redstart, Imperial Eagle, Black Francolin, Little Bustard (winter).

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 32

Total IBA area: 1 435 594 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Georgia.



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Ornithological interest: The Caucasus is one of two Biodiversity Hotspots and the only Endemic Bird Hotspot in Europe with around 400 species of birds. Georgia is located right in the middle of it, and is home to species typical of both the Lesser and Greater Caucasus systems. In addition, the vast steppes in the east of the country are home to a great number of threatened species, and are a major wintering ground for bird populations originating from Siberia and Kazakhstan. The country also sits at the center of the main migration route between Eurasia and Africa, with over a million raptors recorded every autumn at Batumi alone, and massive numbers of passerines and waterfowl regularly observed at coastal wetlands.

Georgia is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists, including Caucasian Snowcock, Caspian Snowcock, Caucasian Grouse, Great Rosefinch and Güldenstadt’s Redstart. During migration, Steppe and Greater Spotted Eagles, Pallid Harriers, Red-footed Falcons, Demoiselle Cranes and Black-winged Pratincoles pass through in substantial numbers. Batumi is one of the most amazing migratory bottlenecks in the world and more than a million raptors pass through each year. Winter brings large flocks of Little Bustards, while Pallas’ Gull can be numerous on some wetlands, and flocks of passerines contain rarities such as Pine Bunting.

Best time to visit: November–March for the Greater Caucasus endemics which descend to the valleys in winter and wintering species such as Pallas' Gull, Little Bustard and Pine Bunting. March–May and August–October for the migration, including huge numbers of raptors at Batumi and Kazbegi. May–June for breeding birds.

Essential reading:

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. Harper Collins, UK

A good overview of the best sites is available on the site pages of www.batumbirding.com.

Compilers: Natia Javakhishvili & Brecht Verhelst

IRAN

Capital: Tehran

Area: 1 648 195 km²

BirdLife Partner: None

Total number of bird species: 551

Globally threatened birds: 59

Country endemics: 1

Specialities: Pleske's Ground Jay, Hyrcanian Tit

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 105

Total IBA area: 8 598 207 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Iran Bird Records Committee



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Ornithological interest: Iran is a beautiful country with a wide variety of habitats, and hence a rich avifauna. Iran is at the crossroad of three main zoogeographical regions of the world, Palearctic, Oriental and Afrotropical, in addition to the border between the Western and Eastern Palearctic. The varied habitats include high mountains, such as the Alborz and Zagros ranges, Hyrcanian (Caspian) forests, and oak forests in western Iran. The Caspian sea region is home to a variety of wetland habitats and there are large river valleys throughout the country. The islands of the Persian gulf as well as tidal mudflats are important habitats for many species. Along the eastern and western sides of the Caspian sea are two major migration routes between continents with birds migrating from northern altitudes towards southern countries. Unfortunately, wetlands are under increasing threat due to drought and dam construction. In addition, increase of human population, habitat loss and illegal hunting are putting pressure on many species both resident and migratory.

Iran is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists including:

Highlands: Caspian Snowcock, Horned Lark, Alpine Accentor, White-winged Snowfinch, White-throated Dipper in mountainous rivers.

Northwestern Iran: Caucasian Grouse in Arasbaran, Grey Partridge in the mountains, Demoiselle Crane and Great Bustard mainly in the Bukan area, and Armenian Gull and Bearded Tit.

Northern Iran: Little Bustard in the plains, Siberian Crane in Fereidoun-Kenar wetland, Black Woodpecker and Hyrcanian Tit in the Hyrcanian forests.

Northeastern Iran: Booted Warbler, Eastern Pied Wheatear, White-winged Grosbeak in the mountains, Red-headed Bunting in lowlands, Mongolian Finch into central Iran.

Western Iran: Middle Spotted Woodpecker in oak forests and Kurdish Wheatear in the mountains.

Southwestern Iran: Goliath Heron, Sacred Ibis, African Darter and Basra Reed Warbler in wetlands of Khuzestan.

Southern Iran: Crab Plover, Great Stone Curlew, Bridled Tern, Pallid Scops Owl, Spotted Owlet, Green Bee-eater, Indian Roller, Brown-necked Raven, Sand Lark, Grey Hypocolius, Indian Silverbill, Striolated Bunting.

Southeastern Iran: Grey Francolin, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Syke's Nightjar, Sind Woodpecker, Bay-backed Shrike, Sind Sparrow.

Central Iran: Pleske's Ground Jay, Greater Hoopoe-Lark.

Best time to visit: April can be very productive for passage spring migrants whilst September is one of the best months for autumn migration. April–June is the key time for many of the breeding species. Probably the best time for wintering birds are the months of December and January.

Essential reading:

Kaboli M, M Aliabadian, M Tohidifar, SB Musavi, A Hashemi & C Roselaar. 2016. *Atlas of the Birds of Iran*. Department of the Environment, Karaj, Iran, 617 pp.

Khaleghizadeh A, C Roselaar, DA Scott, M Tohidifar, J Mlikovsky, M Blair & P Kwartalnov. 2017. *Birds of Iran: Annotated checklist of the bird species and subspecies*. Iran-Shenasi Institute, 450 pp.

Porter, RF & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*. 2nd Edition. Christopher Helm

Compiler: Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh

IRAQ

Capital: Baghdad

Area: 438 317 km²

BirdLife Partner: Nature Iraq

Total number of bird species: 408

Globally threatened birds: 20

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Basra Reed Warbler, Grey Hypocolius, Marbled Teal, Pallid Scops Owl, Black Francolin, White-eared Bulbul, Iraq Babbler, Masked Shrike, Upcher's Warbler, Sombre Tit, White-throated Robin, Eastern Rock Nuthatch

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 67

Total IBA area: 2 755 188 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Iraq.

Ornithological interest: The location of Iraq between three continents; Africa, Europe, and Asia makes the country especially important for many migratory species that pass through and/or stopover en route. In addition, there is a great variety of habitat types (including ten ecoregions) which results in a rich avifauna and biodiversity in general. Iraq has recorded at least 410 bird species, including residents, migrants and vagrants, and surely there are



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more to be discovered. Iraq holds populations of at least 20 globally threatened bird species and is home to one of the most important areas of marsh and wetland along the migratory flyway (the southern marshes around Basra).

Iraq is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists especially those which are mostly restricted to the southern marshes including Basra Reed Warbler and Marbled Teal. Grey Hypocolius, Black Francolin, White-eared Bulbul, Iraq Babbler and Pallid Scops Owl can be found in central region of Iraq. Masked Shrike, Upcher's Warbler, Sombre Tit, White-throated Robin, Eastern Rock Nuthatch breed in the deciduous oak forests of the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq.

Best time to visit: Weather is exceptionally hot during the summer months. The migration periods of late February–early May and mid September through until November are good for migration. From mid November until the end of January is good for wildfowl and waders.

Essential reading:

Porter, R & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*. Christopher Helm, London

Salim, MA, RF Porter, P Schiermacker-Hansen, S Christensen & S Al-Jbour. 2006. *Field guide to the birds of Iraq*. Nature Iraq/BirdLife International, Baghdad. [In Arabic]

Nature Iraq. 2016. *Key Biodiversity Areas of Iraq*. Tablet House Publishing, Sulaimaniyah, Iraq.

Compilers: Korsh Ararat, Laith Ali Al-Obeidi, Mudhafar A Salim & Salwan A Abed

ISRAEL

Capital: Jerusalem

Area: 20 770 km²

BirdLife Partner: Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI)

Total number of bird species: 550

Globally threatened birds: 37

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Desert Tawny Owl, Nubian Nightjar, Sinai Rosefinch, Syrian Serin, McQueen's Bustard, Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, White-eyed Gull, Arabian Warbler, Black Bush Robin, Long-billed Pipit.



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Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 15

Total IBA area: 456 700 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Israeli Rarities and Distribution Committee <http://www.israbirding.com/irdc/>

Ornithological interest: Israel is a global migration hotspot that concentrates more birds during migration than anywhere else. In both migration seasons, huge numbers of migrants can be seen, both large diurnal soaring migrants such as raptors, storks and pelicans. Nocturnal migrants use Israel as a critical stopover site at the edge of the large desert belt to its south. Some parts of the country, like Eilat in the south, and Bet Shean and Hula valleys in the north, are world renowned for their bird migration spectacles. Across Israel's small area, a rich gradient of habitats can be found, each home to specialist

breeding species. From the alpine habitats of Mt Hermon, that host Caucasian species such as Western Rock Nuthatch and Asian Crimson-winged Finch, through Mediterranean scrubs and wetlands to the deserts of the south, where wheatears, sandgrouse, larks and other desert specialists breed.

Most of the sought after specialities are relatively easy to locate in Israel and these include Desert Tawny Owl, Nubian Nightjar, Sinai Rosefinch, Syrian Serin, McQueen's Bustard, Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, White-eyed Gull, Arabian Warbler, Black Bush Robin and Long-billed Pipit. Check the excellent Israel Birding Portal for the latest information and advice.

Best time to visit: Most birders visit Israel in March and early April and concentrate in the south, when migration is in full swing, desert birds are in peak breeding activity, and the weather is perfect. Huge numbers of northern birds enjoy Israel's mild winters, and birders enjoy that in turn. Autumn migration is concentrated more in the north of the country, especially in October and November.

Essential reading:

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. Harper Collins, UK. (There is also a Hebrew version translated by Yoav Perlman) The Israel Birding Portal is essential reading and is available in Hebrew and English: www.birds.org.il/en/index.aspx

Compiler: Yoav Perlman

JORDAN

Capital: Amman

Area: 89 342 km²

BirdLife Partner: Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN)

Total number of bird species: 434

Globally threatened birds: 13

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Hume's Owl, Thick-billed Lark, Long-billed Pipit, Hooded Wheatear, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Sinai Rosefinch, Syrian Serin

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 18

Total IBA area: 541 000 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Jordan Bird Records Committee (JBRC): Fares Khoury (secretary), Richard Porter, Ian Andrews, Firas Rahahleh (www.jordanbirdwatch.com/jbrc.html)

Ornithological interest: Jordan is located on the border of different bio-geographical regions. This location at the junction of three continents, together with its topographic, geological and climatic diversity provides habitats for a wide variety of bird communities. The northern Jordan valley contains sites with Kingfisher, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and Dead Sea Sparrow colonies, whereas the southern rift is more arid and the home of birds such as sandgrouse, Little Green Bee-eater, Arabian Babbler, Arabian Warbler amongst others. The central plateau and the eastern desert is home of several lark and wheatear species. The once famous and extensive Azraq oasis is now a small protected wetland area which was rehabilitated after it dried out four decades ago; the site is now attractive again



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to some migrants and wintering birds. The highlands of southwest Jordan have relict open woodlands, where the Syrian Serin is found breeding. In addition to their scenic beauty, the arid mountains and rift margins of southern Jordan are of great interest for birdwatchers who can observe Sooty Falcon which breeds here in autumn, in addition to several wheatear species, Trumpeter Finch and the Sinai Rosefinch. These are also the best sites to observe the large numbers of migratory soaring birds that use the thermals on their way from Africa to Eurasia in spring. The Levant Sparrowhawk, does not breed in this region but over 90% of the world population is estimated to migrate over Jordan in spring, best sites are Aqaba and the southern rift margins.

Jordan is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialities including Hume's Owl which is resident in the Rum desert and southern rift margins. Long-billed Pipit breeds locally along the higher rift margins, and Hooded and White-crowned Black Wheatear both breed in the Rum desert and along the Dead sea and southern rift margins. Thick-billed Lark is resident in the eastern desert. Desert Lark (*annae*), this dark morph or subspecies is resident in the basalt desert of northeastern Jordan. Clamorous Reed Warbler, its breeding distribution is restricted to the Jordan valley. The Sinai Rosefinch is a typical resident of arid mountains in southwest Jordan and a breeding population of Syrian Serin is present at Dana. Palestine Sunbird is a common resident in western Jordan.

Best time to visit: Jordan offers birding opportunities during most of the year, but the most suitable period in terms of bird richness and weather conditions is spring time. In spring-early summer (March-early June), the climate is warm and both migratory and breeding species can be observed. July-August are the months with highest temperatures (above 32°C), when birding is possible only in the early morning hours. Starting September, day temperatures become more suitable but except for the remarkable White Stork passage August-September, autumn migration is generally less prominent than spring migration. Winter is mild in most parts of Jordan with occasional cold spells. The low-lying areas of the Great rift valley have a more tropical climate which is very pleasant during winter. This season is suitable for observing resident birds and many winter visitors such as Steppe and Imperial Eagles, Pallid Harriers, Finsch's Wheatears, Desert and Cyprus Warblers.

Essential reading:

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. HarperCollins, UK

Porter, R & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*. Christopher Helm, London.

The Jordan Birdwatch Association website also provides useful up to date information:
www.jordanbirdwatch.com/

Compiler: Fares Khoury

KAZAKHSTAN

Capital: Astana

Area: 2 724 900 km²

BirdLife Partner: Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK)

Total number of bird species: 514 (Kazakhstan list); 441 (IUCN list)

Globally threatened birds: 28

Country endemics: 1 endemic subspecies (Pander's Ground-Jay *ilensis*)

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Kazakhstan.

Specialities: Dalmatian Pelican, White-headed Duck, Pallid Harrier, Steppe Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Demoiselle Crane, Ibisbill, Black-winged Pratincole, Caspian Plover, Sociable Lapwing, Pallas's Gull, Relict Gull, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Yellow-eyed Stock

Dove, Pander's Ground Jay, Himalayan Snowcock, White-winged Lark, Black Lark, Booted Warbler, Sykes's Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler, Azure Tit, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Black-headed Penduline Tit, Turkestan Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Steppe Grey Shrike, Saxaul Sparrow.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 127

Total IBA area: 15 414 627 ha

Ornithological interest: Kazakhstan is a big country, ornithologically too. There are many habitats (steppe, semi-desert, desert and mountains) with interesting bird species. More than 500 species have been recorded and no doubt there are more to be added to the list in future. c400 species

breed in the country. The country is well known for the specialist steppe species that occur in large numbers in the grassland areas across the central steppe belt. Kazakhstan is also known as a very important breeding and stop-over site for global populations of Dalmatian Pelican (breeds), Steppe Eagle (breeds), Lesser White-fronted Goose (migrant), Red-breasted Goose (migrant), White-headed Duck (breeds/migrant), Demoiselle Crane (breeds), Sociable Lapwing (breeds), Black and White-winged Larks (breed). A good birdwatching trip should also take in mountain and desert habitats in the south.

Kazakhstan is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists. Part of western Kazakhstan, located within the Western Palearctic, holds a number of breeding species reaching the edge of their ranges including Demoiselle Crane, Caspian Plover, Black-winged Pratincole, Black and White-winged Larks, 'Steppe' Horned Lark, Sykes's Warbler and Red-headed Bunting. Central Kazakhstan is famous because of the steppe grasslands and steppe wetlands (salt and freshwater lakes) which have the capacity to feed 15 million birds on migration. There is the northernmost breeding colony of Greater Flamingos at the renowned lake Tengiz national park. Freshwater lakes hold large numbers of Dalmatian Pelicans, White-headed Duck, Pallas's Gull and a wide range of waterbirds and waders. Steppes are rich with larks (Black, White-winged and Greater Short-toed) and home to Steppe Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Sociable Lapwings and Booted Warblers. A visit to the desert habitats in the south will lead to Greater Sand Plovers, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Bimaculated and Lesser Short-toed Larks, Rufous Bush Robins and Asian Desert Warblers. In the relict Turanga forests along the river Ili live White-winged Woodpeckers, Yellow-eyed Stock Doves, Striated Scops-owls, Saxaul Sparrows and in the surrounding desert inhabits the endemic subspecies of Pander's Ground Jay. Mountains surround Kazakhstan on the south, southeast and east, and here you can find Himalayan and Altay Snowcocks, Ibisbill, White-tailed Rubythroat, Eversmann's Redstart, Blue-capped Redstart, Gldenstdt's Redstart, White-browed Tit Warbler, Rufous-naped Tit, Songar Tit and Red-breasted Rosefinch.

Best time to visit: Mid April is a peak of the breeding season in the south of the country. May–June is the best period for birdwatching in western, central, northern and southeastern Kazakhstan. July is good for visiting Altay mountains in the east. In August



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autumn migration starts. During September–October, huge numbers of geese pass northern Kazakhstan, including Lesser White-fronted Goose and Red-breasted Goose.

Essential reading:

Ryabitshev, VK, AF Kovshar, VA Kovshar & NN Berezovikov. 2014. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Kazakhstan* (in Russian)

Ayé, R, M Schweizer & T Roth. 2012. *Birds of Central Asia*. Christopher Helm, London.

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. HarperCollins, UK

Compilers: Ruslan Urazaliyev

KUWAIT

Capital: Kuwait city

Area: 17 818 km²

BirdLife Partner: Kuwait Environment Protection Society

Total number of bird species: 410

Globally threatened birds: 11

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Basra Reed Warbler, Hypocolius, Asian Shikra, Crested Honey Buzzard, Eversmann’s Redstart, Indian Roller, Socotra Cormorant, Crab Plover and White-cheeked Tern.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 8

Total IBA area: 89 853 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Kuwait Ornithological Rarities Committee



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Ornithological interest: Located at the southeast corner of the Western Palearctic, Kuwait possesses a fairly rich avifauna despite its small size and harsh climate, with more than 400 species recorded. However, 90 species breed in Kuwait with passage migrants and winter visitors of most importance. Kuwait is on the cross-roads of several major bird migration routes between continents with birds from eastern Europe travelling through the river valleys of Turkey, Syria and Iraq before reaching Kuwait. A second important route with birds arriving from north and east of the Caspian sea also sees large numbers of birds crossing Kuwait on migration. Illegal hunting of migratory birds is decreasing due to a strict ban on hunting of birds being increasingly effective.

Kuwait is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists including the Basra Reed Warbler, Asian Shikra, Crested Honey Buzzard, Eversmann’s Redstart, Indian Roller, Socotra Cormorant, Red-tailed Wheatear, White-cheeked Tern, Bridled Tern, Asian Desert Warbler, Ménétries’s Warbler, Lesser Sand Plover, Red-vented Bulbul, White-eared Bulbul, Rüppell’s Weaver, Bank Myna and Common Myna. The small size of Kuwait means that a large number of species can be seen in a relatively short period of time by visiting a few key sites with specific habitats. Bubiyan island, a mudflat with many creeks and islets that is uninhabited, is an important site where a number of target species breed regularly, including Dalmatian Pelican, Crab-plover, Slender-billed Gull, Indian Reef

Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Gull-billed Tern, Lesser and Greater Crested Terns. Desert Finch, Pale Rockfinch, Yellow-throated Sparrow, Hypocolius also breed in Kuwait.

Best time to visit: Winter is the best time to visit, where in November Asian Shikra, Crested Honey Buzzard, Eversmann's Redstart are regular. December is good for Indian Roller, but late December there is a chance to see Lesser Flamingo. From November–March one would see Daurian and Masked Shrikes, Menetries's and Asian Desert Warblers, Barred Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Eastern Black Redstart and Red-tailed Wheatear. Late April is also best to see Basra Reed Warbler, Socotra Cormorant and White-cheeked Tern.

Essential reading:

Porter, R & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*. 2nd Edition. Christopher Helm.

The website <http://birdsofkuwait.com/blog> by A Al-Sirhan is an excellent source of up to date information.

Compiler: AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan

KYRGYZSTAN

Capital: Bishkek

Area: 199 951 km²

BirdLife Partner: Kyrgyz Wildlife Conservation Society

Total number of bird species: 327

Globally threatened birds: 15

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Himalayan Snowcock, Bar-headed Goose, Lesser Sandplover, Himalayan Griffon, Rufous-naped Tit, Azure Tit, White-browed Tit-warbler, Blue-capped Redstart, Red-mantled Rosefinch.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 11

Total IBA area: 188 050 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Kyrgyzstan.

Ornithological interest: With mountains covering nearly 90 % of the country's area, it's home to many mountain specialist species. Due to its geographic location, Kyrgyzstan is home to both Himalayan and Central Asian species, and due to the relatively small size of the country many can be seen within a relatively short period of time. High up in the mountains during breeding period you can find a number of regional endemics, including several species of buntings, tits and redstarts. In winter, some of these species are easy to find even in city parks, particularly after heavy snow falls.

Along mountain streams and rivers you may come across Blue Whistling-thrush and Ibisbill or the more elusive Little Forktail. At the same time, there are some desert and semi-desert habitats in the country and here you have a good chance of finding breeding Black-bellied and Pallas's Sandgrouse, Red-tailed Shrikes and Rosy Starlings. Although Kyrgyzstan lies slightly off the main migratory routes due to its topography, a large number of water bodies, including the vast Issyk Kul lake which does not freeze in winter, provide crucial stopover and wintering sites for several species of waterfowl.



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Best time to visit: Best time to visit to enjoy breeding birds is April–June, when mountains become more accessible and some species are nesting or with young. To see high altitude resident species it might be an advantage to come in December–January, when birds descend to lower altitudes.

Essential reading:

Ayé, R, M Schweizer & T Roth. 2012. *Birds of Central Asia*. Princeton University Press. 336 pp

Website of the local birdwatching community: <http://kyrgyz.birds.watch/index.php?l=ru>

Compilers: Maxim Koshkin

OMAN

Capital: Muscat

Area: 309 500 km²

BirdLife Partner: None

Total number of bird species recorded: 528

Globally threatened species: 19.

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Arabian Partridge, Sand Partridge, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Persian Shearwater, Jouanin's Petrel, Wilson's Storm Petrel, Swinhoe's Storm Petrel, Yellow Bittern, Egyptian & Lappet-faced Vultures, Verreaux's Eagle, Sooty Falcon, Crab Plover, Spotted, Crowned & Lichtenstein's

Sandgrouse, Diederik Cuckoo, Arabian Scops Owl, Spotted Eagle-Owl, Desert Owl, Omani Owl, Forbes-Watson's Swift, Collared Kingfisher, Dunn's Larks, Plain Leaf, Sykes's and Arabian Warblers, Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak, Yemen Serin.



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Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 72

Total IBA area: 7 475 962 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Oman Bird Records Committee (Recorder: J Eriksen hjoman@gmail.com)

Ornithological interest: Situated at the crossroads of three continents, Europe, Africa and Asia, Oman lies along important bird migration routes and in particular the West Asian Flyway. Migrating non-passerines and passerines follow the rivers of west and central Siberia to the Caspian and Black seas and onwards to the Arabian gulf, southern Arabia, East Africa. Oman is also host to breeding and wintering seabirds, migrants from Africa and southern Asia which come to breed during the summer months or to over-winter and finally a variety of resident south Arabian endemics.

The varied habitats include the mountainous Musandam enclave in the north, the Al Hajar mountains, sand and gravel desert, and 1700 km of shoreline with rocky headlands, mangroves, extensive tidal mudflats and islands and the brackish khawrs (creeks) of the Sharqiya, Al Wusta and Dhofar provinces (shoreline length is actually 3418 km, taking into account all inlets and bays). The southwest monsoon affects Dhofar during June–September when the weather is cloudy and misty with what can be considerable rainfall (essential for the lush vegetation on the mountain slopes). In addition, man-made habitats include sewage treatment plants in Salalah (Raysut), Saham and Muscat (Al Ansab Wetland – booking essential, <https://haya.om/en/Pages/Wetland.aspx>) as well as rubbish

dumps in Muscat (Al Multaqa) and Salalah (Raysut). Qurm natural park in Muscat and Al Baleed archaeological park in Salalah are two further productive sites.

Oman is an excellent country to see regional specialities including a number of south Arabian endemics. These include: Chukar Partridge (Musandam), Arabian Partridge, Sand Partridge (widespread), Cotton Pygmy Goose (Dhofar), Flesh-footed Shearwater, Persian Shearwater, Jouanin's Petrel, Wilson's Storm Petrel, Swinhoe's Storm Petrel (all pelagic trips or possibly seawatch), Egyptian Vulture (rubbish dumps N Oman and Masirah Island), Lappet-faced Vulture (rubbish dumps and mountains N & S Oman), Verreaux's Eagle (Dhofar), Sooty Falcon (Ras A'Sawadi/Fahal island, Muscat), Crab-plover (Masirah island, Barr Al Hikman, Khawr Jirama, Khawr Al Hadd), Sociable Lapwing (Sahanawt farm, Salalah, farms on Batinah coast). Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (dry habitat in mainly north Oman), Spotted & Crowned Sandgrouse (oases and farms, central desert), Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse (coming to water dawn/dusk at springs in Dhofar), Diederik Cuckoo (summer Dhofar), Pallid Scops Owl (Khatmat Malaha), Arabian Scops Owl (Dhofar), Pharaoh Eagle-Owl (widespread but rare), Spotted Eagle-Owl (Dhofar), Desert Owl (Dhofar dry wadis), Omani Owl (Al Hajar mountains), Forbes-Watson's Swift (summer Dhofar), Collared Kingfisher (Khawr Liwa, Khawr Kalba, Mahawt island); Grey Hypocolius (desert oases/farms, Mudayy), Dunn's Lark (rare, wanders, Dhofar dry wadis), Streaked Scrub Warbler (at altitude mountains north Oman), Plain Leaf Warbler (Khatmat Malalah, mountains north Oman), Sykes's Warbler (Khawr Liwa), Asian Desert Warbler (widespread, often low dunes by sea), Arabian Warbler (Dhofar wadis), Oriental White-eye (Mahawt island), Abyssinian White-eye (Dhofar), Tristram's Starling (Dhofar), Mourning Wheatear (Musandam), Arabian Wheatear (Tawi Atair), Hume's Wheatear (north Oman wadis), Hooded Wheatear (widespread but rare), Nile Valley Sunbird (Mudayy), Palestine & Shining Sunbirds (Dhofar), Purple Sunbird (north Oman), Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak (springs in Salalah mountains), Yemen Serin (Tawi Atair).

Best time to visit: Late August–November and February–May are best for migrant birds, while November–March is best for wintering species (and also the coolest months). Breeding and visiting southern seabird species are to be seen April–September.

Essential reading:

Eriksen H & J. 2017. *Common Birds in Oman*, 3rd edition, Al Roya Publishing, Oman.

Eriksen, J & R Porter. 2017. *Birds of Oman*. Christopher Helm, London.

Sargeant, D & H&J Eriksen. 2008. *Birdwatching Guide to Oman*. 2nd Edition. Al Roya Publishing, Oman

Also essential is the Eriksens' website www.birdsoman.com which has recent sightings as well as updates to the *Birdwatching Guide to Oman*.

Compilers: Ian Harrison and Jens Eriksen

RUSSIA (southwest including North Caucasus)

Capital: Moscow

Area: 603 225 km²

BirdLife Partner: BirdLife Direct Action Programme

Total number of bird species: 419

Globally threatened birds: 18

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Caucasian Grouse, Caucasian Snowcock, Great Rosefinch, Dalmatian Pelican, Pallas's Gull, Black-winged Pratincole, Demoiselle Crane, Steppe Eagle.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 85

Total IBA area: 5 181 866 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee for south-west Russia.

Ornithological interest: This region offers a variety of biomes and here one can find species typical of deserts, steppes, forests, mountains and sea coasts. In the southwest of Russia there are large expanses of non-cultivated grasslands, where traditionally managed grazing is still main form of land use. Therefore many species which have become rare or have completely disappeared



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from most of Europe can still found in abundance here. Large number of steppe lakes and large river deltas (Volga, Don, Kuban' and Terek) attract hundreds of thousands of breeding and migratory birds. The Kumo-Manych depression and Volga delta are especially interesting for birdwatchers as these areas are located on major migratory routes, and regularly host large numbers of breeding and migratory birds, including many rare and threatened species. Islands of Kumo-Manych wetlands support breeding colonies of cormorants, pelicans, gulls, terns and waders. The high mountains of Northern Caucasus are yet another attraction for birdwatchers, with large number of breeding birds of prey and some of the Caucasus endemics can be found here.

Southwest Russia is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialities including Caucasian Grouse, Caucasian Snowcock, Great Rosefinch, Dalmatian Pelican and Pallas's Gull. Such species as Little Bustard, Black-winged Pratincole, Demoiselle Crane and Steppe Eagle are common in steppes of Kalmykia and Dagestan. Stone Curlew, Lesser Kestrel and Great Bustard are also breeding in the region, although in lower densities. Caucasian mountains are home to Cinereous, Griffon, Bearded and Egyptian Vultures. Large birds of prey breeding in the region include Golden, Eastern Imperial and Lesser Spotted Eagles as well as Saker Falcon. Waterbodies and surroundings of the Kumo-Manych depression during migration attract such long-distance migrants as Sociable Lapwing, Red-breasted and Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus*.

Best time to visit: March–June for spring migration and breeding; August–October for autumn migration.

Essential reading:

Ayé, R, M Schweizer & T Roth. 2012. *Birds of Central Asia*. Bloomsbury Publishing. 336 pp
Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. HarperCollins, UK

Compilers: Viktor Fedosov and Maxim Koshkin.

SAUDI ARABIA

Capital: Riyadh

Area: 2 149 690 km²

BirdLife Partner: Saudi Wildlife Authority

Total number of bird species: 505

Globally threatened birds: 20

Country endemics: 1

There is currently no rare birds committee in Saudi Arabia.

Specialities: Arabian endemics: Philby's Partridge, Arabian Partridge, Arabian Scops Owl, Asir Magpie, Arabian Woodpecker, Yemen Warbler, Yemen Thrush, Arabian Wheatear, Arabian Waxbill, Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak, Arabian Serin, Yemen and Yemen Linnet. Socotra Cormorant, Hypocolius, Egyptian Nightjar, Thick-billed Lark and Dunn's Lark.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 39

Total IBA area: 4 652 558 ha



© J Babbington

Ornithological interest: Saudi Arabia is the largest country on the Arabian peninsula measuring c2 150 000 km² of mainly uninhabited desert land that includes the Rub' Al Khali (The Empty Quarter), the largest mass of sand in the world, and the An-Nafud desert - where sand dunes often exceed 30 m in height. It is bordered by the Arabian gulf to the east and the Red sea on the west. The land rises into hills and mountains in the west and southwest, along the edges of the Red sea. Mountain ranges include the Hejaz in the northwest, and the Azir in the southwest with Jabal Sawda (the Black mountain) the country's highest point at 3100 m. This mountain range that is home to thirteen of the fourteen species endemic to the Arabian peninsula, with the only species not present in Saudi Arabia being Yemen Accentor. The southwest of the Kingdom is also the only place, globally, where the now endangered Asir Magpie is found. The country is situated on a number of major migration flyways and is on important north-south and east-west migratory pathways as well as being an important staging post for many migratory species. Migration is stronger on the west coast than the east coast with many birds migrating down the west side of the Kingdom and into Yemen before crossing the Bab Al Mendab straits into Africa. The Kingdom is also an important wintering location for a number of different raptors including Steppe, Greater Spotted and Eastern Imperial Eagles. Tabuk in the northwest and Haradh in the southeast are important wintering locations for the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing. During the summer months, a number of African species visit the southwest to breed including Abdim's stork, Diderick Cuckoo, Grey-headed Kingfisher and Violet-backed Starling. A number of rarely seen Arabian endemic subspecies occur including African Pipit *eximius*, Small Buttonquail *lepurana* and Harlequin Quail *arabica*.

Saudi Arabia is probably the best country to search for the Arabian endemics as well as a number of other specialities. The summer months are a good time to see Egyptian Nightjar in the east, Thick-billed Lark in central regions and African visitors in the southwest. Summertime is also a good time to try to locate the endemics in the southwest of the Kingdom along with a number of breeding species from Africa. Winter months are a good time for wintering Hypocolius, Sociable Lapwings, Dunn's Larks, Greater Spotted, Steppe and Eastern Imperial Eagles, as well as shorebirds and ducks.

Best time to visit: The spring migration (late February-mid May) is a good time to see a wide range of migrants with a possibility of a few rarities and the increasingly rare summer

breeding Asian Houbara. The summer months can be very hot although they are good for locating the Arabian endemics in the Asir mountains (which can be cooler).

Essential reading:

Jennings, MC. 2010. Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia. *Fauna of Arabia* 25: 1–751.

Porter, R & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*. Christopher Helm, London.

Compilers: Phil Roberts and Jem Babbington

SYRIA

Capital: Damascus

Area: 185 180 km²

BirdLife Partner: The Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW)

Total number of bird species: 382

Globally threatened birds: 19

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Northern Bald Ibis, Sociable Lapwing, Syrian Serin, Greater Flamingo.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 23

Total IBA area: 11 435 km²

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Syria.



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Ornithological interest: Syria encompasses a wide variety of habitats and from deserts to wetlands, and mountains to Mediterranean coast. Due to the location of the country at a crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa, Syria is part of an important migratory route and indeed wintering area for a range of migrants. As part of the Great rift valley–Red sea flyway the country is of huge importance for a number of migratory soaring birds such as storks, cranes, pelicans as well as raptors, including the Saker Falcon, Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, Lesser Spotted and Imperial Eagles on both their spring and autumn migrations along the Mediterranean coast areas. Large numbers of water-birds including the White-headed Duck, Marbled Teal and Ferruginous Duck overwinter at wetland locations such as Qatieneh (Homs), Jabboul (Aleppo), the Euphrates, Orontes and the Yarmouk valleys. The Iraqi Babbler breeds in parts of the Euphrates valley westwards to the Al-Jabboul area. Syrian Woodpecker occurs at the Coastal and Anti Lebanon mountains and can be located in patches of woodlands and orchards. Rollers and Bee-eaters are species worth watching during their migration and breeding season at inland mountains and also over some agricultural plains.

Syria is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists including the Northern Bald Ibis at cliffs and plains around Palmyra, the Sociable Lapwing on its migration routes in Jazeera area and around the Euphrates, the Syrian Serin at the high areas on Anti Lebanon mountains, and the Greater Flamingo at its wintering and breeding site at Al-Jabboul area.

Best time to visit: Early spring is the best time of the year to arrange a visit to see the variety of birds in the country, including a mixture of migrants and breeding birds. August–October are best for autumn migration. Wintering birds (especially water-birds) can occur in large congregations at a number of wetlands, and a visit in November–February can be highly productive.

Essential reading:

Porter, R & S Aspinall. (2010). *Birds of the Middle East*. Christopher Helm, London.

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. HarperCollins, UK

Compilers: Nabegh Ghazal Asswad

TAJIKISTAN

Capital: Dushanbe

Area: 143 100 km²

BirdLife Partner: None

Total number of bird species: 328

Globally threatened birds: 16

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: White-capped Redstart, Little Forktail, Tibetan Snowcock, Blue-capped Redstart, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Ibisbill, Lesser Sandplover, White-browed Tit-warbler, Red-mantled Rosefinch, Large-billed Reed Warbler, Bar-headed Goose, Tibetan Sandgrouse.



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Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 18

Total IBA area: 1 183 171 ha

There is currently no rare birds committee in Tajikistan.

Ornithological interest: This is a small and very mountainous country, largely occupied by the Pamir mountains, with more than 50% of its territory above 3000 m asl. High altitude plateaus in the eastern part of the country host Central Asian mountain specialist birds, including several Tibet/Pamir endemics. Juniper forests are an important habitat for species such as White-browed Tit-warbler and Red-fronted Serin. Tajikistan is ornithologically one of the least known countries in the OSME region and any records could be of great value for bird conservation.

Many of the specialities are associated with mountainous habitats and higher altitude plateaus and woodland such as Juniper forests. These include White-capped Redstart, Little Forktail, Tibetan Snowcock, Blue-capped Redstart, Ibisbill, Lesser Sandplover, White-browed Tit-warbler, Red-mantled Rosefinch, Bar-headed Goose and Tibetan Sandgrouse. Such species as Indian Paradise Flycatcher and Little Forktail can be found in lower western part of the country. The little known Large-billed Reed Warbler was only recently rediscovered and is known to breed in the Afghan and Tajik Pamirs.

Best time to visit: Best time to visit to enjoy breeding birds is May–July, when mountains become more accessible and some species are nesting or with young. To see high altitude resident species it might be an advantage to come in December–January, when birds descend to lower altitudes.

Essential reading:

Ayé, R, M Schweizer & T Roth. 2012. *Birds of Central Asia*. Christopher Helm.

Compilers: R Muratov and Maxim Koshkin

TURKEY

Capital: Ankara

Area: 783 562 km²

BirdLife Partner: Doğa Derneği

Total number of bird species: 483

Globally threatened birds: 20

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Northern Bald Ibis, Egyptian and Black Vulture, Steppe Eagle, Sociable Lapwing, Brown Fish Owl, Pallid Scops Owl, Armenian Gull, Cream-coloured Courser, Caucasian Grouse, Mountain Chiffchaff



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Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 178

Total IBA area: 11 898 239 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Turkish Bird Records Committee acts as the rare birds committee of Turkey.

Ornithological interest: Turkey's birds are well studied and their distributions and occurrence are relatively well known. Located at the junction of three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe, Turkey hosts a wide range of species. Twenty bird species occurring in Turkey are threatened from extinction at the global scale. These include the Critically Endangered Northern Bald Ibis and the Sociable Lapwing. For both, the grasslands in southeast Turkey are of critical importance. Four other bird species are classified as endangered. Among these, Egyptian Vulture and White-headed Duck have globally significant populations in Turkey, for example up to 25% of the global population of Egyptian Vulture may be breeding in Anatolia (Asian Turkey). Central Anatolian steppes are recently identified as a breeding region for the globally threatened Steppe Eagle. Great Bustard, Eastern Imperial Eagle and Dalmatian Pelican have a number of significant breeding populations. Turkey has a central location within the eastern flyway of soaring birds and other species. Bosphorus, Dardanelles and the Marmara sea in general are globally important migratory bottlenecks for the Yelkouan Shearwater.

Most of the Turkish specialities can be seen relatively easily if the timing and location is well planned. The excellent *Birds of Turkey* by Guy Kirwan and colleagues is a must to help locate Northern Bald Ibis, Egyptian Vulture, Black Vulture, Steppe Eagle, Sociable Lapwing, Brown Fish Owl, Pallid Scops Owl, Armenian Gull, Cream-coloured Courser and Iraq Babbler. A visit to the Caucasus mountains is key to locate Mountain Chiffchaff and Caucasian Grouse.

Best time to visit: Birdwatching in Turkey can be productive at any time of the year. Spring (May and June) is arguably the best time to visit for many of the specialities, as well as to locate many breeding birds. Autumn migration in late August–October can be spectacular at the various migratory bottlenecks.

Essential reading:

Kirwan, G, KA Boyla, P Castell, B Demirci, M Özen, H Welch & T Marlow. 2008. *The Birds of Turkey*. A&C Black

Svensson L, K Mullarney, D Zetterstrom & P Grant. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide – Britain and Europe*. HarperCollins, UK

Compilers: Itri Levent Erkol, Güven Eken and Kerem Ali Boyla

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Capital: Abu Dhabi

Area: 83 600 km²

BirdLife Partner: None, but WWF have an active conservation programme.

Total number of bird species: 463 (as of January 2018)

Globally threatened birds: 13

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Socotra Cormorant, Great Spotted Eagle, White-tailed Lapwing, Crab Plover, Egyptian Nightjar, Collared Kingfisher (near-endemic subspecies *kalbaensis*), Hypocolius, Hume's, Variable and Red-tailed Wheatears, Plain Leaf Warbler, Sykes's Warbler.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 19

Total IBA area: 257 990 ha

Rare Birds Committee: Emirates Bird Records Committee



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Ornithological interest: Located on the northeastern edge of Arabia, the UAE has a diversity of landscapes and habitats that belie its small size. These include vast areas of intertidal mud along the Arabian gulf coastline, extensive dune deserts, the Hajar mountains forming a biogeographical link between Iran and Arabia running along the eastern fringe of the country and the offshore waters of the northwestern sector of the gulf of Oman. The UAE is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialities and provides exciting and varied bird-watching all year round. New breeding populations of several species (Omani Owl, Egyptian Nightjar) have been discovered very recently, highlighting that there is still much to learn with regard to the country's avifauna. Whilst diurnal passage of soaring birds is low compared to elsewhere in the region, impressive number of passerines migrate through, especially in spring when they may be obvious in urban parks.

Important populations of seabirds (*eg* Socotra Cormorant, White-cheeked, Bridled and Saunders's Terns) breed during the summer in the Arabian gulf. During winter and migration periods, numbers of over-wintering and passage shorebirds are also impressive here, both at many sites along the coastline and on offshore shoals and mudflats. Species include Great Knot, Crab Plover, large numbers of Greater Flamingos (which now also breed regularly at one site) and Western Reef Egrets. Widespread residents (*eg* Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Brown-necked Raven, Greater Hoopoe-Lark) occur in gravel and sand deserts. Range-restricted breeders and wintering species in the Hajar mountains (*eg* Omani Owl, Hume's, Red-tailed and Variable Wheatears, Plain Leaf Warbler) and elsewhere (*eg* Egyptian Nightjar, Hypocolius) also provide great ornithological interest. An area of old-growth mangroves on the east coast supports the only substantial population of Collared Kingfishers in eastern Arabia.

Best time to visit: The UAE has ornithological interest all year round, although weather conditions from early May–mid October combine very high temperatures with severe humidity. Migration, whilst variable, can be impressive March–mid May and September–

October, with November and December particularly good for finding rarities. Winter visitors arrive from mid October–November and remain reliably present until early March. During the summer months, breeding seabirds in the Arabian gulf are impressive (in particular White-cheeked and Bridled Terns) although generally in sites that are difficult to access. Recent boat trips from the east coast into the northern sector of the gulf of Oman have produced many interesting seabird records, mainly May–October.

Essential reading:

For all bird-related information in the UAE: www.uaebirding.com/

For information on breeding birds: Aspinall, S. 2010. *Breeding birds of the United Arab Emirates*. Environment Agency—Abu Dhabi

For identification: Aspinall, S & R Porter. 2011. *Birds of the United Arab Emirates*. Christopher Helm, London.

Compilers: Oscar Campbell, Jacky Judas, Peter Heller, Mark Smiles

UZBEKISTAN

Capital: Tashkent

Area: 448 844 km²

BirdLife Partner: Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds (UzSPB)

Total number of bird species: 462

Globally threatened birds: 32

Country endemics: 0

Specialities: Sociable Lapwing, White-headed Duck, Lesser White-fronted Goose, Macqueen's Bustard, Dalmatian Pelican, Marbled Teal, Ferruginous Duck, Lesser Kestrel, Saker Falcon, Pander's Ground-jay, Turkestan Tit.



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Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 52

Total IBA area: 2 462 782 ha

Rare Birds Committee: There is currently no rare birds committee in Uzbekistan.

Ornithological interest: Uzbekistan is situated at the intersection of key migratory flyways from Western Siberia and Kazakhstan to the Iranian-Caspian and Indian-Pakistani wintering grounds. Uzbekistan is vital as a migration corridor on the Central Asian flyway. Desert, mountain, wetland and riparian forest ecosystems are essential for millions of migratory, breeding and wintering birds. The country is particularly important for breeding and migrating globally threatened species.

Given the variety of habitats, Uzbekistan is an excellent country to see a number of regional specialists. The Kyzylkum desert and Ustyurt plateau are important for breeding Saker Falcons, Egyptian Vultures and Lesser Kestrels. Mountain ranges are breeding sites for a range of birds of prey species such as Cinereous, Bearded and Griffon Vultures, Golden Eagle and Saker Falcon. Other notable species include Himalayan Snowcock, Hume's Lark, Asian Paradise-flycatcher, White-winged Snowfinch and Red-mantled Rosefinch.

The deserts and semi-arid areas are important for Macqueen's Bustard, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Egyptian Nightjar, Desert Lark and Asian Short-toed Lark, Turkestan Ground-jay and Saxaul Sparrow can be found. Large congregations of waterbirds can

be found in the many large wetlands and can host a number of globally threatened bird species as Marbled Teal, Ferruginous Duck, Dalmatian Pelican, White-headed Duck, Common Crane and Demoiselle Crane. Tugay or riparian forests play an important role as breeding areas for Shikra, seven local sub-species of Common Pheasant, Pallid Scops-owl, White-winged Woodpecker and Turkestan Tit.

Best time to visit: The timing of a visit very much depends on the target species. Early April–May is best for spring migrants with the chance of some late wintering birds and early nesters. September and October is good for autumn migration and a visit in November–February can be excellent for wintering waterbirds as well as some of the mountain specialists than will be at lower altitudes.

Essential reading:

Ayé, R, M Schweizer & T Roth. 2012. *Birds of Central Asia*. Christopher Helm.

Mitropolskiy, OV, SB Bakaev, RD Kashkarov & OR Kashkarov. 2013. *Brief guide on Birds of Uzbekistan. 130 species*. Tashkent: Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds.

Compilers: Oleg Kashkarov

YEMEN (including Socotra)

Capital: Sanaá

Area: 527 968 km²

BirdLife Partner: None and no active wildlife NGOs

Total number of bird species: 428 (221 Socotra only)

Globally threatened birds: 15

Country endemics: 11 (one Yemen mainland; ten Socotra)

There is currently no rare birds committee in Yemen.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Number of IBAs: 57 (Evans 1994), since when provisionally revised to 51, including new IBAs, but awaiting verification (33 mainland Yemen; 18 Socotra).

Total IBA area: c7 500 km².

Endemic Bird Areas: two: part of South West Arabian Highlands and the Socotra Archipelago.

Ornithological interest: The magnificent landscape of terraced mountainsides in Yemen and the dramatic scenery of Socotra dominated by the skyline of the Haggier mountains provide wonderful settings for enjoying the country's many endemics. Spring and autumn migration are impressive as is the raptor passage, particularly over the Bab-al Mandeb. The Yemen mainland holds a number of Afro-montane species, which are only found in extreme southwest Arabia. These include Abdim's Stork, Bateleur, Dusky Turtle Dove, Red-eyed Dove, White-browed Coucal, Klaas's Cuckoo, Arabian Spotted Eagle Owl, Plain Nightjar, Abyssinian Roller, Grey-headed Kingfisher, White-throated Bee-eater, African Grey Hornbill, Blandford's Short-toed Lark, Brown Woodland Warbler, African Stonechat, Red-breasted Wheatear, Little Rock Thrush and Gambaga Flycatcher.

Each year following the southwest monsoon Socotra can host unexpected vagrants, especially from the Indian sub-continent.



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Specialities.

Yemen mainland: in addition to those species mentioned above, the Yemen mainland is an excellent place to see all the southwest Arabian endemics and near-endemics: Philby's Partridge, Arabian Partridge, Arabian Woodpecker, Yemen Thrush, Arabian Wheatear, Yemen Warbler, Arabian Accentor, Arabian Grosbeak, Yemen Serin, Arabian Serin, Arabian Golden Sparrow and Arabian Waxbill.

Socotra: most of the ten endemics are easily found (the bunting is the most difficult), namely Socotra Scops Owl, Socotra Buzzard, Socotra Warbler, Socotra Cisticola, Socotra Starling, Socotra Sunbird, Socotra Sparrow, Abd Al Kuri Sparrow, Socotra Grosbeak and Socotra Bunting. In addition Jouanin's Petrel is a non-resident breeding endemic. Other species of particular interest are breeding Forbes-Watson's Swift and Somali Starling.

Best time to visit: As most of the specialities are resident, visits will be productive at any time of the year, but October–April is recommended as the climate is more equitable and spring and autumn migration can be very exciting.

Essential reading:

Porter, R & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East*. Christopher Helm, London.

Compilers: Omar Al-Saghier, Richard Porter & Ahmed Saeed Suliman