



Pleske's Ground Jay, a most unusual corvid, is endemic to the interior deserts of Iran (Mark Beaman)

IRAN

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TOUR REPORT

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It was great to get back to Iran again. What a brilliant country this is for birding, and so varied and scenic as well, never mind the hospitality of the Iranians, a much misunderstood people (so many of us conflate Iranians with their government of course). This was definitely our most successful Iran tour ever in terms of the number of specialities recorded, among a grand total of 251 bird species (as per current IOC taxonomy) and 13 species of mammal. Among the greatest highlights were the endemic Pleske's Ground Jay, the near-endemic Caspian Tit and the restricted-range Sind Woodpecker, Mesopotamian Crow, Grey Hypocolius, Black-headed Penduline Tit, Basra Reed Warbler, Hume's Whitethroat, Hume's Wheatear, Red-tailed Wheatear, Iraq Babbler and Afghan Babbler, as well as Caspian Snowcock, See-see Partridge, Macqueen's Bustard, White-cheeked Tern, Pallid Scops Owl, Egyptian Nightjar, Steppe Grey Shrike, Plain Leaf Warbler, Radde's Accentor, Dead Sea Sparrow, Pale Rockfinch, Asian Crimson-winged Finch and Grey-necked Bunting, not to mention Indo-



Sind Woodpecker is only found in Persian Baluchistan and Pakistan (Mark Beaman)

Pacific Hump-backed Dolphin, Persian Ibex, Goitred Gazelle and Onager (Asiatic Wild Ass).

The tour started with a flight from Tehran southeastwards to the city of Bandar Abbas, situated on the shores of the Strait of Hormuz in Persian Baluchistan. Once we had landed, the warm air of the Persian Gulf region was immediately apparent. Our initial stop was at a small park where Crested (or Oriental) Honey Buzzard was the main target (this species winters commonly in southeastern Iran and two were still present at the park). Other species here included Shikra, Laughing Dove, plenty of very smart European Rollers, gorgeous Green and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, the restricted-range White-eared Bulbul, Purple Sunbird (an Oriental species that just reaches Iran) and a rather shy Small Indian Mongoose.

Next we headed for the Bandar Abbas waterfront and nearby wetlands, where we were to enjoy a huge number of migratory shorebirds and other waterbirds. Many of the shorebirds were in breeding plumage and we particularly enjoyed the beautiful Grey (or Black-bellied) Plovers, Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers. Two breeding-plumaged Pacific Golden Plovers were a pleasant bonus. Watching around 300 Terek Sandpipers was equally impressive, and we also located three Broad-billed Sandpipers, while other shorebird species included Eurasian Oystercatcher, Black-winged Stilt, Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Marsh and Common Sandpipers, and Dunlin. Gulls and terns were also a feature, with pride of place going to five White-cheeked Terns. In addition, we came across Slender-billed, Black-headed and Caspian Gulls, and Gull-billed, Caspian, Greater Crested, Lesser Crested, Sandwich, Little, Saunders's, Common, Whiskered, White-winged and Black Terns. What an amazing variety of terns in one place!

Other additions to a rapidly growing bird list included Greater Flamingo, Grey and Western Reef Herons, Little Egret, Eurasian Collared Dove, House Crow, Crested Lark, Barn Swallow, Graceful Prinia and Common Myna. Three Indo-Pacific Hump-backed Dolphins cruising along offshore were an unexpected treat.



Afghan Babbler is a restricted-range species that occurs in the southern part of Iran (Mark Beaman)

We spent most of our time in Baluchistan exploring the Minab region, with our first full day devoted to exploring mangroves, palm groves and other habitats. Here we enjoyed some spectacular desert scenery, with range after range of bare, jagged, rocky mountains receding into the far distance.

The major target in this area was the restricted-range Sind Woodpecker, a species found only in Persian Baluchistan and Pakistan, so we were very pleased to find no fewer than four of these smart birds. Other important species included the restricted-range See-see Partridge, Afghan Babbler, Upcher's and Sykes's Warblers, and Pale Rockfinch, while Oriental species that reach southern Iran included Grey Francolin, Red-wattled Lapwing, Spotted Owlet, Indian Roller, Bay-backed Shrike, Yellow-throated Sparrow and Indian Silverbill.

Visits to wetland areas, including some mangrove-lined creeks, produced Great Crested Grebe, Indian Pond Heron (many in their very smart breeding dress), Great Egret, Great Cormorant, Dalmatian Pelican, Western Osprey, Great Stone-curlew, Little Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, an adult Pallas's Gull in breeding plumage, Sand Lark, Clamorous Reed Warbler (the form found here, *brunnescens*, is sometimes treated as a distinct species under the name Indian Reed Warbler) and Oriental White-eyes at the western limit of their distribution.

Other additions in the productive Minab region included Long-legged Buzzard, European Nightjar (with brilliant views of one), White-throated Kingfisher, Red-tailed and Southern Grey Shrikes, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Desert Lark, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Spotted Flycatcher, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Common Redstart and Black-headed Bunting, plus Indian Grey Mongoose (including a mating pair).

Our last morning in Persian Baluchistan was spent exploring Kuh-e Geno, the highest mountain in the Bandar Abbas region. The views here of the mountain peaks and down to the city and the Strait of Hormuz far below were truly awesome, and the birding was superb. Pride of place goes to the smart Hume's Wheatears. There are few places birders can get to see this restricted-range species, which is pretty much a 'Gulf' endemic.



The impressive ziggurat of Chogha Zanbil, built in the 13th century BC and then known as Dar Untash (Mark Beaman)

Other good new birds included Pale Crag Martin, Streaked Scrub Warbler (these days a monotypic bird family), Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Variable Wheatear and Striolated Bunting, while more widespread additions included Short-toed Snake Eagle, Eurasian Hoopoe, Syrian Woodpecker, Common Kestrel, Red-billed Chough, Red-rumped Swallow, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush and Long-billed Pipit.

We flew from Bandar Abbas to the city of Ahvaz (or Ahwaz) in the province of Khuzestan in southwestern Iran. Khuzestan was the main theatre of the long and bloody Iran-Iraq war, started in 1980 by the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, at that time armed to the teeth by western powers who were to come to regret their folly later on. The war led to a staggering total of around one million casualties on the ill-prepared Iranian side (Iran had not fought a significant war for over a century) and this terrible conflict still has a huge psychological influence on the country long after its conclusion.

Fortunately for us, Khuzestan is nowadays a peaceful place and the region provided us with truly great birding at the eastern fringe of the huge Mesopotamian Plain.

Our first morning was spent exploring a very rewarding marshy river meandering through the Ahvaz region, where we were delighted to find Iraq Babblers quite common and where we also tracked down our first Basra Reed Warblers, White-tailed Lapwings, Grey Hypocolius and Dead Sea Sparrows. Other new birds for the list were Black Francolin, Little Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, Squacco and Purple Herons, Western Cattle Egret, Black-winged Kite, Common Moorhen, Green and Wood Sandpipers, Collared Pratincole, Common Wood Pigeon, Common Cuckoo, Pallid Swift, Common and Pied Kingfishers, Eurasian Hobby, Sand Martin (or Bank Swallow), Willow, Sedge, Clamorous Reed and Eurasian Reed Warblers, Barred Warbler and Whinchat.

Afterwards we headed north to the huge ziggurat at Chogha Zanbil, an ancient, pyramid-style city (originally named Dar Untash) built by King Untash Napirisha of the Elamite Dynasty in the 13th century BC. It was an



The Iraq Babbler is virtually endemic to the Mesopotamian Plain (Mark Beaman)

impressive place, with much remaining (or reconstructed) of the step-like structure. Here we saw our first Mesopotamian Crow, a strikingly 'black-and-white' corvid that is still lumped in Hooded Crow by the IOC (subspecies *capellanus*), while some of the group found a huge Egyptian Spiny-tailed Lizard.

In the afternoon we explored some remaining woodland and scrubland along the Kharkhe River. What an amazing spot this was for Grey Hypocolius, with a total of about 80 being seen in just a few hours! Many were eating small red berries from the ubiquitous *Berberis* bushes. Another fantastic highlight here was the four Egyptian Nightjars that we watched and photographed down to very close range, while a male Namaqua Dove was a surprise find. Other additions included Eurasian Stone-curlew, many European Turtle Doves, Common Swift and Eurasian Blackcap.

On our second day we initially explored part of the huge Shadegan lagoon, which is one of the largest remaining fragments of the once-vast Mesopotamian Marshes. Indeed it was wonderful to see that the age-old life of the 'Marsh Arabs' still goes on here, in some aspects not that much changed from ancient times. People still go around by poling wooden punts, the local costumes look like the old photographs (well, at least for the older folk) and the local people still use reed huts set on higher patches of land amidst the immense marshy skylines. It was a real experience to travel by boat along narrow waterways fringed by tall reedbeds, inhabited by noisy Iraq Babblers. This was a good area for both Bara Reed Warblers and Mesopotamian Crows, while we also encountered half a dozen Marbled Ducks, Little Grebe, Great Bittern (heard only), Western Marsh Harrier, Grey-headed Swamphen, Common Snipe, Ruff, plenty more Collared Pratincoles and Lesser Grey Shrike.

Afterwards we visited another area of marshland where Pygmy Cormorants, Squacco Herons and other waterbirds were nesting.

After the heat of the south, it was a huge contrast to arrive back in Tehran and head up into the cool heights



The near-endemic Caspian or Hyrcanian Tit can be hard to track down, but we found eight! (Mark Beaman)

of the Elburz Mountains. We crossed the high Kandovan Pass (at about 2900 metres or 9500 feet), where three Bearded Vultures (or Lammergeiers) and some White-winged Snowfinches were welcome finds, and then descended to the resort town of Kelardasht in the northern edge of the range. Other new birds during the journey included Alpine Swift, Eurasian Magpie, Hooded Crow, Horned Lark, Common Rock Thrush, Northern Wheatear, Great Tit, Grey and White Wagtails, and European Goldfinch. We were pretty amazed by the sheer number of holiday homes that had been built around what was once just a small mountain township, but I guess it is little wonder that Tehran's wealthy want to escape to the cool of the mountains during those hot summer months.

A local excursion around Kelardasht in the late afternoon, amidst beautiful mountain scenery with snow-capped peaks in the background, turned up our first Green Warbler, as well as Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Red-backed Shrike, Eurasian Crag Martin, Common Chiffchaff (of the form *caucasica*), Lesser Whitethroat, Black Redstart, White-throated Dipper, Common Chaffinch, Common Rosefinch and Rock Bunting. No sign of the hoped-for, near-endemic Caspian Tit, however.

Our full day around Kelardasht was a feast of montane birding experiences. In the morning we visited some dry, nearly treeless, high-altitude valleys, where we found a Caspian Snowcock calling away from a ridge, watched a gorgeous pair of Wallcreepers feeding at close range, admired handsome Red-fronted Serins and eventually tracked down some very co-operative Radde's Accentors. Other new birds in this extremely scenic part of the Elburz, with huge, rocky slopes, cliffs and snowy peaks on all sides, included Chukar, Golden Eagle, Alpine Chough, Eurasian Wren, Siberian Stonechat and Water Pipit. We also watched half a dozen Persian Ibex (or Wild Goats) on the crags high above us.

The afternoon saw us exploring a beautiful wooded area where, to our relief, we amassed a total of eight Caspian (or Hyrcanian) Tits, most at very close range, and also found a lovely singing male Semi-collared



Radde's Accentor is a speciality of the Elburz Mountains (Mark Beaman)

Flycatcher. Other new birds included Common Buzzard, Eurasian Wryneck (heard only), European Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Eurasian Jay, Coal and Eurasian Blue Tits, Common Blackbird, Song and Mistle Thrushes, and European Robin. On the way home a couple of Golden Jackals rounded off a truly wonderful day.

Early next morning, not far from Kelardasht, we found Wood Lark, Black-eared Wheatear, Common Linnet, Tawny Pipit, Corn and Ortolan Buntings, and some smart male Black-headed Buntings (all our earlier sightings had been of females), while a Common Quail was calling from the grassy slopes.

Now it was time to leave the Elburz behind and explore the extensive lowlands along the shores of the Caspian Sea. We made a few stops along the way, turning up Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Nuthatch, Common Starling and, best of all, some very smart Red-breasted Flycatchers.

We eventually arrived at Babolsar, our base for exploring a lake set amidst the endless ricefields. We soon found our major target here, the pretty, restricted-range Black-headed Penduline Tit, so we could relax and enjoy the waterbirds and other local denizens, which included Eurasian Coot and both Cetti's and Great Reed Warblers, not to mention the hordes of Marsh Frogs and good numbers of Grass Snakes and Caspian Pond Turtles.

From the placid Caspian we drove across the dryer and lower eastern Elburz, enjoying yet more amazing scenery. In the Sari area we came across a Lesser Spotted Eagle soaring over the road, as well as a number of Common House Martins, while further on we encountered European Bee-eater, Northern Raven, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Western Rock Nuthatch, Pied Wheatear, Rock Sparrow and, best of all, Asian Crimson-winged Finch. Eventually we reached Bastam, our overnight halt at a nice hotel before heading out into the desert to Touran, where our accommodation was to be a simple, but clean and friendly village homestay.



The restricted-range Black-headed Penduline Tit is a pretty little speciality of the Caspian (Mark Beaman)

The immense Touran (or Turan) National Park and its associated Wildlife Refuge and Protected Area protects over 14,000 square kilometres (over 5,400 square miles) of the northern part of Iran's Dash-e Kavir desert. Naturally, we could only explore a tiny part of this vast protected area in the limited time available, and although Cheetahs still occur here, we knew we had no chance of seeing any. We did, however, see herds of Onagers (or Asiatic Wild Asses) on two occasions and a solitary Goitred Gazelle.

The star attraction of the lower-lying, flatter parts of Touran is surely Pleske's Ground Jay, an aberrant species of corvid that is endemic to the interior deserts of Iran. To my surprise they took more tracking down this visit (they had been truly easy last time), but eventually we enjoyed superb views, including a family party with fully-grown youngsters in tow. As always the adults liked to perch up on the desert bushes, calling away loudly before flying down to the ground, revealing their spectacular black and white wing pattern.

Another much-sought-after bird here is the rapidly declining Macqueen's Bustard, and it was Dianne who spotted one first, as a male walked away from us through the shrubs, having first been seen just a few metres away.

Sandgrouse are a pleasant feature of Touran and we visited some desert springs where numbers of both Crowned and Black-bellied Sandgrouse flighted in to drink. Some tarried on the surrounding flats, allowing us some great views.

Other open desert and semi-desert species included Steppe Eagle, Steppe Grey Shrike, Bar-tailed, Greater Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed Larks, Desert Whitethroat, the perky little Asian Desert Warbler, Pied Bushchat and Desert Wheatear.

The rocky hills and mountains of Touran hold a different set of birds and here we were to come across such



The White-throated Robin, or Irania, has to be one of the most beautiful specialities of Iran (Mark Beaman)

specialities as Red-tailed (or Persian) Wheatear and Grey-necked Bunting, as well as Little Owl and Trumpeter Finch.

Migration was still going on and oases with trees and bushes held many birds, including large numbers of European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Golden Orioles, Spotted Flycatchers and Common Rosefinches, and smaller numbers of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Green Warblers and Rosy Starlings, plus a single Tree Pipit. A rather macabre reminder of the hazards of migration was a Eurasian Hobby plucking a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater! These habitats also attracted Common Nightingale, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Masked Wagtail and Desert Finch. An evening excursion produced great views of two Pallid (or Striated) Scops Owls.

On our way back to Tehran we paid a visit to the eastern Elburz at Parvar. This beautiful area, with junipers dotting the rocky slopes and blue skies contrasting with snow-spattered peaks, is a paradise for White-throated Robins (also known, appropriately enough, as Iranias) and these beautiful birds stole the show, although if anything the tiny and rather drab Plain Leaf Warbler is even more special. We had three of the latter in total and one performed perfectly, coming right up to us as we photographed it! Other nice birds here included a male Barred Warbler and a singing male Hume's Whitethroat. Cute little Afghan Pikas were everywhere in the warm spring sunshine.

All that was left was to continue to Tehran, taking in more spectacular mountain scenery all the way, an incredibly close singing Pale Rockfinch and more Asian Crimson-winged Finches. What a marvellous country Iran is, with such great birding and in such easy conditions: great roads, modern vehicles, mostly good hotels, awesome scenery and, most of all, Ali's great skills in the field and endless good humour.



OK, a Plain Leaf Warbler is a drab little thing, but it is a very range-restricted speciality! (Mark Beaman)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by (H). Species which were not personally recorded by the leader/s are indicated by (NL), while those seen only by the leader/s are indicated with (LO).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. only seen on a few Birdquest tours; difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

The species and family sequence, taxonomy and species names follow the I.O.C. World Bird List, which is available on-line at www.worldbirdnames.org/

BIRDS

Marbled Duck ◊ *Marmaronetta angustirostris* Six at Shadegan lagoon.

Caspian Snowcock ◊ *Tetraogallus caspius* A male watched calling from a ridge in the Kelardasht area.

Chukar *Alectoris chukar* Small numbers in the Kelardasht area and at Touran and Parvar.

See-see Partridge ◊ *Ammoperdix griseogularis* Common in Baluchistan and in Touran (up to 15 in a day).

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* Common in Khuzestan.

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* Common in Baluchistan.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H) One calling in the Kelardasht area.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Four at Shadegan lagoon.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* One in the Minab area.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* 80 at Bandar Abbas and another 80 in the Minab region.

Eurasian Bittern (Great B) *Botaurus stellaris* (H) One heard at Shadegan lagoon.



The handsome White-tailed Plover is common in Khuzestan (Mark Beaman)

- Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* Common in Khuzestan and in the Caspian lowlands (up to 16 in a day).
- Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* Fairly common in Khuzestan and in the Caspian lowlands.
- Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* Fairly common in Khuzestan and one in the Caspian lowlands.
- Indian Pond Heron** *Ardeola grayii* A total of 14 in Baluchistan.
- Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Common in Khuzestan and small numbers elsewhere.
- Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* A total of three in Baluchistan.
- Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Common in Khuzestan and in the Caspian lowlands. (up to 20 in a day).
- Great Egret** *Egretta alba* Three in Baluchistan and five in the Caspian lowlands.
- Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers in Baluchistan and Khuzestan; common in the Caspian lowlands.
- Western Reef Heron (W R Egret)** *Egretta gularis* Common in Baluchistan (up to 20 in a day).
- Dalmatian Pelican** ◇ *Pelecanus crispus* An immature in the Minab area.
- Pygmy Cormorant** ◇ *Microcarbo pygmeus* 20 in Ahvaz area and one for some in the Caspian lowlands.
- Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* A total of eight in Baluchistan.
- Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* Two in the Minab region.
- Black-winged Kite (Black-shouldered K)** *Elanus caeruleus* Small numbers in Khuzestan.
- Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier)** *Gypaetus barbatus* A total of four in the Elburz mountains.
- Crested Honey Buzzard (Oriental H B)** *Pernis ptilorhyncus* A total of three in Baluchistan.
- Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* One at Kuh-e Geno and two more at Touran.
- Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Clanga pomarina* One in the lower Elburz near Sari.
- Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* One seen at the edge of Touran each time we passed (perhaps the same?).
- Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* One in Kelardasht area and one at Parvar.
- Shikra** *Accipiter badius* Fairly common in Baluchistan; also one at the Caspian and three at Touran.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* One in the Kelardasht area.
- Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* One at Shadegan lagoon and fairly common at the Caspian.
- Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* One at Kuh-e Geno and singles each time we passed Damghan.



There are not many places to see Egyptian Nightjar, let alone as well as this! (Mark Beaman)

- Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* Two singles in the Elburz.
- Grey-headed Swamphen** *Porphyrio poliocephalus* One at Shadegan lagoon.
- Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* A few in Khuzestan and fairly common in the Caspian lowlands.
- Eurasian Coot (Common C)** *Fulica atra* Three in the Caspian lowlands.
- Macqueen's Bustard** ♦ *Chlamydotis macqueenii* A male seen very well at Touran.
- Eurasian Stone-curlew (E Thick-knee)** *Burhinus oedicephalus* One at Kharkhe.
- Great Stone-curlew (G Thick-knee)** *Burhinus recurvirostris* Two in the Minab region.
- Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* Common in Baluchistan (up to 40 in a day).
- Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* Fairly common in Khuzestan and the Caspian; one in Baluchistan.
- Red-wattled Lapwing (R-w Plover)** *Vanellus indicus* Common in Khuzestan, less so in Baluchistan.
- White-tailed Lapwing (W-t Plover)** *Vanellus leucurus* Fairly common in Khuzestan (up to 12 in a day).
- Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* Two at Bandar Abbas.
- Grey Plover (Black-bellied P)** *Pluvialis squatarola* Very common in Baluchistan (up to 100 in a day).
- Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* Four at Bandar Abbas.
- Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* Two in Minab area, one at Kharkhe and one at Touran.
- Kentish Plover (Snowy P)** *Charadrius alexandrinus* Fairly common in Baluchistan and four at Shadegan.
- Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian P)** *Charadrius mongolus* Very common in Baluchistan (up to 200 in a day).
- Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* Five at Bandar Abbas.
- Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* Two in the Caspian lowlands, and Rod had one at Shadegan lagoon.
- Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* 10 at Bandar Abbas.
- Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* Common in Baluchistan (up to 50 in a day).
- Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* Fairly common in Baluchistan.
- Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* Common in Baluchistan (up to 30 in a day).
- Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* Common in Baluchistan (up to 20 in a day).
- Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* One at Bandar Abbas.



Pallid (or Striated) Scops Owl is another of those sought-after specialities (Mark Beaman)

- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Fairly common in Baluchistan (up to 15 in a day).
- Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* One in the Ahvaz region and one in the Caspian lowlands.
- Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* A few in Khuzestan and very common at the Caspian (up to 200 in a day).
- Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Very common in Baluchistan (up to 300 in a day).
- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Singles at Bandar Abbas and in the Minab region.
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* Common in Baluchistan (up to 50 in a day).
- Sanderling** *Calidris alba* 30 at Bandar Abbas.
- Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* Common in Baluchistan (up to 80 in a day) and one at Touran.
- Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* Common in Baluchistan (up to 30 in a day).
- Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* Fairly common in Baluchistan (up to 10 in a day).
- Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* Three at Bandar Abbas.
- Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* Three at Shadegan lagoon.
- Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* Common in Khuzestan (up to 30 in a day).
- Slender-billed Gull** *Chroicocephalus genei* Common in Baluchistan (up to 200 in a day); also some in Khuzestan.
- Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* 20 at Bandar Abbas.
- Pallas's Gull** *Ichthyaeetus ichthyaeetus* An adult in breeding plumage in the Minab region.
- Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinnans* Four at Bandar Abbas.
- Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* Fairly common in Baluchistan (up to 15 in a day).
- Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* A total of 10 in Baluchistan.
- Greater Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bergii* Not uncommon in Baluchistan.
- Lesser Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bengalensis* Small numbers in Baluchistan.
- Sandwich Tern** *Thalasseus sandvicensis* Common in Baluchistan and Khuzestan (up to 20 in a day).
- Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons* Common in Baluchistan (up to 20 in a day).
- Saunders's Tern (S's Little T)** *Sternula saundersi* Three at Bandar Abbas and one in the Minab region.
- Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* 15 at Bandar Abbas and a total of 8 in Khuzestan.



There are few places where you can see nearly 90 Grey Hypocolius in a day, as we did (Mark Beaman)

- White-cheeked Tern** ◊ *Sterna repressa* Five at Bandar Abbas, one in breeding plumage.
- Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybridus* Very common in Baluchistan, Khuzestan and the Caspian (up to 120 in a day).
- White-winged Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* Small numbers in Baluchistan, Khuzestan and the Caspian.
- Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* One at Bandar Abbas.
- Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles exustus* 18 in the Minab area.
- Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis* A total of 23 at Touran.
- Crowned Sandgrouse** ◊ *Pterocles coronatus* Three in the Minab area and 20 at Touran.
- Rock Dove** *Columba livia* Widespread, with non-feral birds in Baluchistan, Touran and Parvar.
- Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* Locally common in Khuzestan and small numbers in the Elburz.
- European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur* 50 at Kharkhe.
- Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* Common in Baluchistan and Khuzestan, a few in the northeast.
- Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis* Common in Baluchistan and Khuzestan, smaller numbers elsewhere.
- Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* A male at Kharkhe.
- Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* Fairly common in the north; also two in the Ahvaz region.
- Pallid Scops Owl** ◊ (Striated S O) *Otus brucei* Two at Touran. Great views!
- Little Owl** *Athene noctua* One seen at Touran and heard at Bastam.
- Spotted Owlet** *Athene brama* A total of four in Baluchistan.
- European Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus* A total of three in Baluchistan.
- Egyptian Nightjar** ◊ *Caprimulgus aegyptius* Four at Kharkhe gave amazing views!
- Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba* Two in the Elburz above Tehran and 30 between Sari and Bastam.
- Common Swift** *Apus apus* Scattered records of up to 10.
- Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* 20 at Kuh-e Geno.
- Indian Roller** *Coracias benghalensis* A total of six in Baluchistan.
- European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* Fairly common in Baluchistan and at Touran, a few elsewhere.
- White-throated Kingfisher (W-breasted K)** *Halcyon smyrnensis* Five in the Ahvaz region, also one at Minab.



Grey-necked Buntings were quite common in the hills of Touran (Mark Beaman)

- Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* Two in the Ahvaz region and another two in the Caspian lowlands.
- Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* 12 in the Ahvaz region.
- Green Bee-eater (Little Green B-e)** *Merops orientalis* Fairly common in Baluchistan and two at Chogha Zanbil.
- Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus* Common in Khuzestan (up to 42 in a day) and small numbers elsewhere.
- European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* Common in the northeast (up to 33 in a day).
- Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* One at Kuh-e Geno, one at Touran and two at Parvar.
- Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* (H) One heard in the Kelardasht area.
- Sind Woodpecker** ◊ *Dendrocopos assimilis* Four males seen in the Minab region.
- Syrian Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos syriacus* One male at Kuh-e Geno.
- Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* A few in the Elburz and the Caspian lowlands.
- European Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis* Two in the Kelardasht area.
- Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* Six together in the Caspian lowlands and a male between Sari and Bastam.
- Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* Not uncommon across the north and one at Kuh-e Geno.
- Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* Scattered singles in Khuzestan and the north.
- Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* Fairly common across the north, and Moray saw one at Kharkhe.
- Red-tailed Shrike** ◊ (Turkestan S) *Lanius phoenicuroides* Records of up to 10 from the north; two in Baluchistan.
- Bay-backed Shrike** *Lanius vittatus* A total of seven in Baluchistan.
- Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* Two at Shadegan lagoon and three in the Caspian lowlands.
- Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis* Two in the Minab area.
- Steppe Grey Shrike** ◊ *Lanius pallidirostris* One at Touran.
- Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* One in the Minab region and 15 at Touran.
- Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* One in the Kelardasht area.
- Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica* Common across the north.
- Pleske's Ground Jay** ◊ *Podoces pleskei* A total of 13 of these endemics at Touran. Marvellous views.
- Red-billed Chough** *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Small numbers at Kuh-e Geno, the Elburz and Touran.



The perky little Streaked Scrub Warbler is even more appreciated now it is a monotypic bird family (Mark Beaman)

- Alpine Chough (Yellow-billed C) *Pyrrhocorax graculus*** One in the Kelardasht area.
- House Crow *Corvus splendens*** 10 at Bandar Abbas.
- Hooded Crow *Corvus [cornix] cornix*** Common across the north.
- Mesopotamian Crow** ♦ ***Corvus [cornix] capellanus*** A total of six in Khuzestan. See note.
- Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax*** Three near Damghan and one at the edge of Touran.
- Grey Hypocolius** ♦ **(Hypocolius) *Hypocolius ampelinus*** Locally common in Khuzestan (max 80 at Kharkhe).
- Coal Tit *Periparus ater*** A few in the Elburz and the Caspian lowlands.
- Caspian Tit** ♦ **(Hyrceanian T) *Parus hyrcanus*** Seven seen and another heard in the Kelardasht area.
- Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*** Six in the Kelardasht area.
- Great Tit *Parus major*** Small numbers in the Elburz and Caspian lowlands.
- Black-headed Penduline Tit** ♦ ***Remiz macronyx*** Up to five each time we visited the lake in the Caspian lowlands.
- Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*** Common in rocky areas in Baluchistan (up to 20 in a day).
- Bar-tailed Lark (B-t Desert L) *Ammomanes cincturus*** Fairly common at Touran.
- Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*** Five in the Kelardasht area.
- Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*** Common almost everywhere (absent from the moist Caspian slope of the Elburz).
- Horned Lark (Shore L) *Eremophila alpestris*** Small numbers in the higher Elburz.
- Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*** Two at Touran.
- Lesser Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens*** One in Touran.
- Sand Lark** ♦ ***Alaudala raytal*** A total of three in the Minab region.
- White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis*** Common in the south and also a few in Tehran and the Caspian.
- Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*** Small numbers in Khuzestan.
- Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*** Widespread and often common.
- Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*** A few in the Elburz.
- Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*** Seven at Kuh-e Geno.
- Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*** 12 around Sari.



Basra Reed Warbler breeds almost entirely in the Mesopotamian Plain (Mark Beaman)

- Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica* Five at Kuh-e Geno.
- Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* A few in the Caspian lowlands.
- Streaked Scrub Warbler (Scrub W)** *Scotocerca inquieta* Seven at Kuh-e Geno.
- Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* Small numbers in Khuzestan and at Touran and Parvar.
- Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* Locally common in the Elburz; also two in the Caspian lowlands.
- Plain Leaf Warbler** ◇ *Phylloscopus neglectus* Three at Parvar. A tiny star!
- Green Warbler** ◇ (Bright-green W) *Phylloscopus nitidus* Not uncommon in the Kelardasht area.
- Basra Reed Warbler** ◇ *Acrocephalus griseldis* Five in the Ahvaz region and three at Shadegan lagoon.
- Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Common in the Caspian lowlands, and Ali saw two at Kharkhe.
- Clamorous Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus stentoreus* Not uncommon in the south. See note.
- Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* Two in the Ahvaz region and one in the Caspian lowlands.
- Eurasian Reed Warbler (European R W)** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* Three in the Ahvaz region.
- Sykes's Warbler** ◇ *Iduna caligata* Three in the Minab area and a few in the northeast.
- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida* Fairly common in the south, and two at Bastam.
- Upcher's Warbler** ◇ *Hippolais languida* Fairly common in Baluchistan and at Touran.
- Graceful Prinia** *Prinia gracilis* Common in Khuzestan; also one at Bandar Abbas.
- Iraq Babbler** ◇ *Turdoides altirostris* Fairly common in Khuzestan.
- Afghan Babbler** ◇ *Turdoides huttoni* Fairly common in the south.
- Eurasian Blackcap (Blackcap)** *Sylvia atricapilla* Small numbers in Khuzestan and the north.
- Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* A female in the Ahvaz region and a male at Parvar.
- Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia minula* A total of three in the Kelardasht area.
- Desert Whitethroat** *Sylvia minula* One seen and another heard at Touran.
- Hume's Whitethroat** ◇ *Sylvia althaea* A male at Parvar, where this form may breed.
- Eastern Orphean Warbler** ◇ *Sylvia crassirostris* Fairly common in the northeast and one at Kuh-e Geno.
- Asian Desert Warbler** ◇ *Sylvia nana* One at Touran.



This pretty little Semi-collared Flycatcher sang away in front of us for nearly an hour (Mark Beaman)

- Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* Widespread in small numbers.
- Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* One seen and another heard in the Kelardasht area.
- Oriental White-eye** *Zosterops palpebrosus* Six in the mangroves of the Minab region.
- Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* Two in the Caspian lowlands.
- Western Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer* Scattered records of one or two across the north.
- Eastern Rock Nuthatch** ♦ *Sitta tephronota* 12 at Kuh-e Geno and two at Touran.
- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* Two in the Kelardasht area.
- Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* Fairly common in Baluchistan.
- Rosy Starling** ♦ (Rose-coloured S) *Sturnus roseus* Four at Touran.
- Common Starling (Eurasian S)** *Sturnus vulgaris* Small numbers in the Caspian lowlands.
- Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* Scattered records of up to eight across the north; Ali had one at Kharkhe.
- Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* A few in the Elburz and Caspian lowlands.
- Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* Six in the Kelardasht area.
- Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (R Bush Robin)** *Cercotrichas galactotes* Common in the south; also one at Touran.
- Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* Widespread, with a maximum of 28 in a day at Touran
- European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* A total of five in the Elburz and Caspian lowlands.
- Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos* Scattered records of up to three from Khuzestan and the north.
- White-throated Robin** ♦ *Irania gutturalis* 15 at Parvar, where really common.
- Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* A beautiful male in the Kelardasht area.
- Red-breasted Flycatcher (R-throated F)** *Ficedula parva* A few in the Caspian lowlands.
- Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* Not uncommon in the Kelardasht area.
- Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* Not uncommon across the north and one in the Minab area.
- Common Rock Thrush (Rufous-tailed R T)** *Monticola saxatilis* Small numbers in the Elburz and at Touran.
- Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* One at Kuh-e Geno.
- Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* Small numbers in Khuzestan, the Kelardasht area and the Caspian lowlands.



The smart Hume's Wheatear, virtually a Persian Gulf endemic (Mark Beaman)

- Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* Three in the Kelardasht area.
- Pied Bushchat (P Stonechat)** *Saxicola caprata* A male at Touran.
- Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* Small numbers in the Kelardasht area.
- Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* Four in the mountains between Sari and Bastam.
- Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* Small numbers at Touran.
- Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica* Not uncommon in the Elburz.
- Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* Fairly common on the dry side of the eastern Elburz and one at Touran.
- Variable Wheatear** ◇ (Eastern Pied W) *Oenanthe picata* Five at Kuh-e Geno and three at Touran.
- Hume's Wheatear** ◇ *Oenanthe alboniger* Three smart birds at Kuh-e Geno.
- Red-tailed Wheatear** ◇ (Rufous-t or Persian W) *Oenanthe chrysopygia* Common Touran and one E of Tehran.
- White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* A few in the Kelardasht area.
- Purple Sunbird** *Cinnyris asiatica* Common in Baluchistan.
- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* Widespread and often common.
- Dead Sea Sparrow** ◇ *Passer moabiticus* Not uncommon in Khuzestan.
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* Small numbers at Touran.
- Pale Rockfinch** ◇ (P Rock Sparrow) *Carospiza brachydactyla* Up to eight together in the NE and Baluchistan.
- Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia* Not uncommon in the northeast.
- Yellow-throated Sparrow** ◇ (Chestnut-shouldered S) *Gymnoris xanthocollis* Common in the south.
- White-winged Snowfinch (Eurasian S)** *Montifringilla nivalis* Three in the Elburz north of Tehran.
- Indian Silverbill** ◇ (White-throated Munia) *Euodice malabarica* Common in Baluchistan.
- Radde's Accentor** ◇ *Prunella ocularis* Three in the Kelardasht area.
- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* A few in the Kelardasht area.
- White Wagtail** *Motacilla [alba] alba* Not uncommon in the Elburz and Caspian lowlands.
- White Wagtail (Masked Wagtail)** *Motacilla [alba] personata* Some at Touran; also one near Damghan.
- Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* Two singles in the Elburz.



The strange Pale Rockfinch has a far-carrying, grasshopper-like song (Mark Beaman)

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* One at Kuh-e Geno.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* One at Touran.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* One in the Kelardasht area.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Fairly common in the Kelardasht area and the Caspian lowlands.

Eurasian Crimson-winged Finch ◊ (Asian C-w F) *Rhodopechys sanguinea* 3 records of up to 3 in the Elburz.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githaginea* Fairly common at Touran.

Common Rosefinch (Scarlet R) *Carpodacus erythrinus* Scattered records across the north (40 at Touran).

Desert Finch ◊ *Rhodospiza obsoleta* Three at Touran.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* Fairly common across the north.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* One in the Kelardasht area.

Red-fronted Serin (Gold-fronted S) *Serinus pusillus* 15 in the Kelardasht area and one at Parvar.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* Not uncommon in the Elburz.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* Common in the Kelardasht area and one at Parvar.

Grey-necked Bunting ◊ *Emberiza buchanani* A total of eight at Touran.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* Not uncommon in the Elburz and eight at Touran.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata* Nine at Kuh-e Geno.

Black-headed Bunting ◊ *Emberiza melanocephala* Small numbers in Baluchistan and in the Kelardasht area.

MAMMALS

Afghan Pika (Rufescent P) *Ochotona rufescens* Common at Parvar.

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis* Two singles in Touran area. Moray also had one between Sari and Bastam.

Baluchistan Gerbil (Dwarf G) *Gerbillus nanus* Two in the Minab region.

Great Gerbil (G Jird) *Rhombomys opimus* One of these well-named rodents at Touran.



The high Kandovan Pass in the Elburz Mountains (Mark Beaman)

- Small Indian Mongoose** *Herpestes auropunctatus* One at Bandar Abbas.
- Indian Grey Mongoose** *Herpestes edwardsii* A total of three in the Minab region, including a pair mating.
- Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* One in the mountains between Sari and Bastam.
- Golden Jackal (Common J)** *Canis aureus* Two in Kelardasht area, one at Touran and heard at Kharkhe.
- Indo-Pacific Hump-backed Dolphin** *Sotalia chinensis* Three off Bandar Abbas.
- Goitred Gazelle** *Gazella subgutturosa* One in Touran.
- Wild Goat (Persian Ibex)** *Capra aegagrus* Six in Kelardasht area.
- Mouflon (Wild Sheep)** *Ovis orientalis* One at Kuh-e Geno. Not sure if this was restricted to an enclosure or not.
- Onager (Asiatic Wild Ass)** *Equus hemionus* Up to eight together at Touran.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

- Common Grass Snake** *Natrix natrix* Rather common in the Caspian lowlands.
- Caucasian Agama** *Laudakia caucasia* Not uncommon in the Elburz.
- Large-scaled Rock Agama** *Laudakia nupta* Common at Kuh-e Geno.
- Turan (or Touran) Toad-headed Agama** *Phrynocephalus mystaceus* Small numbers at Touran.
- Brilliant Agama** *Trapelus agilis* Two at Chogha Zanbil and common at Touran.
- Persian Racerunner** *Eremias persica* Very common at Touran.
- Green-bellied Lacerta** *Lacerta chlorogaster* Rather common in the Caspian lowlands.
- Egyptian Spiny-tailed Lizard** *Uromastyx aegyptius* One of these big lizards for some at Chogha Zanbil.
- Desert Monitor** *Varanus griseus* (LO) One at Touran for our ranger-guide.
- Caspian Pond Turtle** *Mauremys caspica* Small numbers in the Caspian lowlands.
- Marsh Frog** *Rana ridibunda* Numerous in the Caspian lowlands.



Dinner at Touran. Yes, sadly, there is only Coke and non-alcoholic beer... (Mark Beaman)

NOTES

Mesopotamian Crow \diamond *Corvus [cornix] capellanus* This distinctive 'pied' form is treated as a subspecies of Hooded Crow *C. cornix* by the IOC.

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* The form found in Persian Baluchistan, *brunnescens*, is sometimes (but not by the IOC) treated as a distinct species under the name Indian Reed Warbler.

TOP 6 BIRDS OF THE TOUR

1st: Pleske's Ground Jay

2nd: Macqueen's Bustard

3rd: Caspian Tit

4th =: Caspian Snowcock and White-throated Dipper

6th =: Egyptian Nightjar, Basra Reed Warbler and Desert Finch