



OMAN (WITH BAHRAIN) TOUR REPORT 2024

24 October - 5 / 7 November 2024

BY JOHN MCLOUGHLIN

Birdquest's fifteenth tour of Oman and Bahrain once again proved to be an enjoyable one in a safe and friendly country with stunning landscapes, interesting food and amazing birdlife.

We recorded a total of 240 taxa of which 51 were Birdquest "diamond" species (regional specialities) as well as an exciting mix of seabirds, shorebirds, and several interesting migrants.

Oman's special owls have always been a feature of this tour, and we were successful in finding the super-elusive Omani Owl, a pair of the newly described Desert Owls, Arabian Scops Owl, Pallid Scops Owl, and a Eurasian Scops Owl. In addition, we obtained both night and daytime views of a pair of Arabian Eagle-Owls.

Offshore in the south of the country we were entertained by a good selection of seabirds including Socotra Cormorants, Persian and Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Jouanin's Petrel, Wilson's Storm Petrel and both Brown and Masked Boobies. A Verreaux's Eagle was seen in the high mountains of the Jabal Samhan whilst the deserts of the Empty Quarter produced Crowned, Spotted and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse. A mix of Middle Eastern specialities and several sought-after migrants encountered on the tour included Arabian and Sand Partridges, Lappet-faced Vulture, Red-knobbed Coot, White-tailed Plover, Caspian Plovers, Great Knot, and many Cream-coloured Coursers. The beaches of Dhofar held thousands of Sooty and Heuglin's Gulls. In the mangroves at Filim we had a surprising encounter with the reclusive Arabian form of Collared Kingfisher. Elsewhere we located African Collared Dove, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Forbes-Watson's Swift, Sooty Falcon, Fan-tailed Ravens, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, White-spectacled Bulbul, Streaked Scrub Warbler, Arabian, Asian Desert, Eastern Orphean and Menetries's Warblers, Plain Leaf Warbler, Abyssinian White-eye, Tristram's Starling, Blackstart, Hume's, Red-tailed and Arabian Wheatears, Nile Valley, Palestine and Arabian Sunbirds, Rüppell's Weaver, Yemen Serin and Striolated Bunting. The Kingdom of Bahrain was the post-tour venue and here we saw an amazing afternoon gathering of between 70 and 80 Grey Hypocolius.

This year's tour started with a post-breakfast meet-up in the lobby of our Muscat hotel. Very soon we were on our way along the Al Batinah coast to a series of offshore islands at Ras As Sawadi. As the temperatures rose above 30 degrees C, we hoped to secure some small boats to transport the group. Shortly after arriving on the beach a local boatman greeted us and quickly supplied said boats to transport us to an offshore island. Waiting for us was a family group of Sooty Falcons complete with a fledged juvenile. These birds would soon be off to wintering grounds in Madagascar, so we were fortunate to catch them still at their eyrie. The boats continued towards a group of fishing vessels offshore which were attracting a variety of gulls and terns including both Lesser and Greater Crested Terns, Sooty Gulls and we also obtained our first views

of Persian Shearwaters. A second pair of Sooty Falcons were located on the main island along with a Peregrine Falcon. We had our first looks at Striated Herons and Western Reef Herons amongst the wave-beaten rocks on the offshore islets.

Checking into our next hotel in Barka we enjoyed a break from the heat of the day and eventually some local fare in the hotel restaurant. Mid-afternoon we headed out to Nakal and Wadi Hadik made famous in the birding world by the discovery of a pair of Omani Owls during a Birdquest tour in 2014. As dusk fell several calling Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse passed unseen overhead. Shortly after, a Pallid Scops Owl started calling from a nearby cliff face and we watched it with the aid of torchlight. We waited patiently, in vain, for our main target the Omani Owl and left empty-handed. Early the following morning, we were back again in the wadi hoping for a pre-dawn owl encounter. However, again we heard no vocalisations from this mysterious bird. As the dawn broke, we enjoyed an al fresco breakfast in the main bowl of the valley where rough tracks led off into the high mountains. Sightings included both Hume's and Red-tailed Wheatears, the latter defending winter territories here. Desert Lark, Striolated Buntings, Long-billed Pipit and splendid views of a vocal Plain Leaf Warbler followed. We slowly made our way back along the wadi bed and located a pair of Streaked Scrub Warblers (a must-see bird for family listers). A first-winter Red-tailed Shrike set off some discussions as to their identification. At one point we flushed a Common Quail whilst searching the trees for roosting Pallid Scops Owls. The trees were in full bloom with their scent attracting many bees and some striking diurnal moths. After a rest at the hotel and another good lunch we headed onwards to Nizwa on the east side of the towering mountain range above Muscat. On arrival we drove into the mouth of the impressive Wadi Muaydin, also well-known by now as another home to the elusive Omani Owl. We checked out the canyon in daylight to find a suitable point to return to later that evening. In the darkness it is difficult to appreciate how huge the cliffs are that form the walls, which is probably a good thing! After some waiting, we had a contact from this sought-after owl! It was an inquisitive call at first which sounded quite close as if the owl had come to investigate. It was then that we noticed the faint but distinctive hooting calls. Shortly after, we detected an owl in flight in the torchlight and then there it was! Everyone enjoyed prolonged views of this amazing bird through the scopes and cameras for over an hour! It was past midnight when we returned to our hotel on the Sayq Plateau, all in the afterglow of this successful mission.

After two nights spent in the deep canyons of the Jabal Akdar, we were now birding our way in the day. Bird activity was low and there were no wintering warblers or thrushes to be found, sadly. Several Streaked Scrub Warbler were calling however and we ended up improving on our views of the previous day. Other species encountered included several Humes Wheatears which were driving off the newly-arrived Eastern Black Redstarts. The mountain views on offer were simply stunning as we looked back over the massif in the direction of Wadi Hadik. Below lay a succession of mountain homes clinging precariously to the steep valley sides. Lunch was a buffet affair at a local restaurant where many discovered the taste of the traditional Lemon Mint juice for the first time, and maybe the last! A pair of the recently split Delicate Prinias (from Graceful Prinia) graced the restaurant garden. The afternoon was spent looking for migrants in the upper reaches of Wadi Al Ayn and later at the heritage site of Wadi Bani Habib. The latter site proved birdier as the heat of the day subsided and offered a second bite at Plain Leaf Warbler and Purple Sunbird. A night off from owling allowed many to catch up on much-needed sleep.

The next morning, we set off after breakfast towards the east coast at Al Hij. A petrol station stop proved productive as a flooded wadi held a good variety of waders included a smart juvenile White-tailed Plover, the only one of the trip. Here we made our first sightings of Little Ringed Plovers and Temminck's Stints plus several Greenshank. A small flock of White-eared Bulbuls graced the roadside trees. Once at Al Hij we checked into the Mahout Hotel and enjoyed a sit-down lunch across the road at the international restaurant complete with delicious fruit juices delivered from the juice bar next door. Bar al Hikman is a world class wader site, but its sheer vastness makes it difficult to obtain good views of the masses of shorebirds on view. The Masirah causeway at Shannah is one such viewing spot and we arrived there on the rising tide. Amongst the hordes of feeding waders, we identified Grey and Common Ringed Plovers, Greater and Tibetan Sand Plovers, Eurasian Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew of the long-billed *orientalis* subspecies, many Bar-tailed Godwits, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Little Stints, and scores of Terek Sandpipers, Common Greenshank and Common Redshank. Finally, a distant group of Crab Plovers were located by the leader, but as we drove along the beach to obtain closer views the flock had flown off and thus, sadly, only the leader really had views.

Next morning at sunrise we were on the shoreline at Filim and as the first rays of sun appeared migrants were immediately apparent amongst the rocks and pools beyond the desalination plant. In the mangroves we obtained good views of Clamorous Reed Warblers which are abundant at this site. Then, unexpectedly, a Collared Kingfisher was picked out perched low in the trees. After a little wait it reappeared and showed well! Collared Kingfisher used to be seen regularly on earlier Birdquest tours in the mangroves at Liwa in the extreme north of the country, but there have been very few sightings here at Muhut Island. Vocal Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters passed overhead in good numbers whilst many Common Sandpipers, a Pintail Snipe, Bluethroat, Tree Pipits and Common Rosefinches were all present. Meanwhile, all the waders remained distant along the shoreline. More importantly, we could not locate any Crab Plovers, which can usually be expected here. All too soon it was time to move on as we had a long day's drive ahead of us to our next base on the desert highway to the south. Late afternoon we arrived at the AL Ghaftain guesthouse with its impressive gardens, well impressive for a desert garden at least. They proved very birdy and highlights included two Isabelline Shrikes, a Red-breasted Flycatcher and a European Scops Owl that gave excellent views, roosting as it was. Also located in the trees were both Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and at least one Menetries's Warbler was seen by a few. Following a further hours' drive we arrived at Qitbit just prior to dusk. Just time enough to gather our bags, check in and be on the road again to the oasis at nearby Muntasar. An African Wildcat caused a distraction as we tried to locate nightjars in the surrounding desert. Very

soon an Egyptian Nightjar obliged, and we followed it around as it alternately rested on the ground between bursts of hunting flight. Back at our motel a pair of vocal Barn Owls circled the car park whilst Striped Hawkmoths and Vagrant Emperors (dragonfly) were attracted to the lights above the front door.

Next day we were back at the oasis just in time before the sandgrouse arrived and we were fortunate as a group of eight Spotted Sandgrouse arrived right on cue. The birds flew around giving nice flight views. A flock of 42 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse gathered nearby waiting for their opportunity to get a drink. A short scout around produced sightings of several Asian Desert Warblers, Desert Wheatears, Water Pipits and a variety of wagtails. We found some evidence of 'wildcat' activity at the oasis as several dead birds were found, including remains of a Golden Oriole and an Egyptian Nightjar. In the afternoon, whilst en route to Thumrait, we visited a complex of farms which have recently sprung up in increasing numbers up along the highway north of Salalah. Using underground water sources to irrigate land to grow fodder for animals and cash crops such as melons destined for European supermarkets. This growing crop of green oases is attracting more passage migrants each year of which we saw White Storks, Montagu's Harriers, Namaqua Doves, amazing number of Cream-coloured Coursers, Common Rock Thrush, both Richard's and Tawny Pipits and Greater Short-toed Larks. A feature of these new farms is that they appear extremely attractive to Greater Hoopoe-Larks and we obtained superb views. A pair of Southern Grey Shrikes proved highly entertaining as they perched on our vehicles and generally chased everything they could see! Three species of wheatear included Desert, Isabelline and Pied.

The following morning, we returned along the 31 and took the highway to Shishr to explore more irrigated farmland. Once more we obtained good views of hunting Montagu's Harriers and yet more Cream-coloured Coursers, over 100 seen over the two days. A flock of Rose-coloured Starlings feeding on fallen dates held one or two scarcer Wattled Starlings. An Asian Desert Warbler in the treetops proved an unusual habitat choice. We bailed out in the heat of the day to try our luck at Mudday, which holds several good birds including the potential of an early returning Hypocolius! This afternoon we had to make do with African Collared Doves whilst other target species would have to wait for the morning.

At dawn we found ourselves in a quiet wadi illuminated only by the crescent moon. The silence broken by the simple song of Blackstart, which we were soon watching at close range. Then Sand Partridges started calling and sharp eyes detected a party of seven birds on the wadi wall. Then another prize in the form of Nile Valley Sunbird as three birds were found nectaring in a flowering tree. An Asian Desert Warbler bathed in the early morning sunshine, but time was moving on, so we headed to another wadi which attracts sandgrouse. On arrival we scattered a party of drinking Sand Partridges whilst flocks of sandgrouse flew over but in the wrong direction! We soon realised that the sandgrouse were heading to another source of water. A small group of Crowned Sandgrouse landed across the valley, and we quickly tracked down a freshly irrigated field on a small holding which was attracting the birds. We came across two dead Crowned Sandgrouse that had sadly flown into overhead wires, after which no more sandgrouse arrived. So, we had to make do with a scattering of migrants which included a few Red throated Pipits, a couple of Isabelline Shrikes and Common Rosefinch. Our early search for Hypocolius also drew a blank on this occasion, although others would see the species here in the near future. After lunch in Thumrait we set off on the final leg to Salalah, stopping on the way to watch many Steppe Eagles at the landfill site then to study *Boswellia serrata*, the frankincense trees in the World Heritage Site at Wadi Dowkah. Salalah was once the capital of the ancient trade in frankincense, a resin derived from the *Boswellia* tree. Food has been put out for the eagles and attracts up to 200 birds over the winter. These are not the same numbers that used to visit the famous dump at Raysut however and many of the Steppe Eagles now winter in Saudi Arabia. As we drove on, we collected more raptor species including Eastern Imperial Eagle and two splendid adult male Pallid Harriers hunting the grasslands of the Dhofar mountains. A final stop on the Dhofar Mountains high above Salalah produced our first sightings of flocks of Tristram's Starlings, Rüppell's Weaver, Abyssinian White-eyes and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings. We then finally dropped onto the plain below and had to navigate the rush hour traffic. We checked in at our hotel which is conveniently placed on the eastern side to the big city. A flock of Abdim's Storks graced the lampposts on one of the many traffic islands along the route.

Another early start was planned for the first day of November as we found ourselves in the beautiful wadi at Ayn Razat well before dawn. Our target here was the near-endemic Arabian Eagle-Owl and after a short wait a pair gave themselves away and allowed for good, albeit brief, views before they settled to roost in a nearby park. Up the dry wadi new birds came thick and fast: a pair of Arabian Partridges, a pair of showy Arabian Warblers, Black-crowned Tchagras, and a Diederik Cuckoo, which is a lingering summer visitor that parasitises the nesting Rüppell's Weavers here. African Silverbills and Abyssinian White-eyes were abundant whilst glorious Arabian Sunbirds fed on the vibrant yellow flowers of the local trees. Breakfast was taken back out our city hotel before we headed out again late morning to the harbour at Taqah. Here the beaches were literally covered with thousands of gulls, mainly Sooty Gulls and Heuglin's Gulls. Offshore Humpback Dolphins breached amongst the waves and were seen by a few and a multitude of seabirds included Persian Shearwaters, a flock of sixty Socotra Cormorants, Bridled Terns and Common Noddies, Masked Booby and a Brown Booby or two. With no time to linger we were heading up to the heights of Jabal Samhan, with a short detour to watch a group of Yemen Serins at their regular drinking hole. A pair of Bonelli's Eagles displayed well here before we made the final ascent to the cliff top viewpoint. This spot offers simply astounding views of the mountains and desert wadis below, stretching out to the coast at Mirbat. After a wait, a Verreaux's Eagle showed on a couple of occasions with Long-legged Buzzards and a pair of Barbary Falcons / Peregrines in a dramatic overhead display.

The next day found us on the Ayn Hamran plain at dawn, witnessing a steady passage of swallows and Blue cheeked Bee-eaters whilst a Blyth's Pipit flew over calling. An Arabian Scops Owl was tracked down in the still verdant woodland but

stayed away from the gaze of a dozen pair of eyes. So, back to Ayn Razat, where finally the park keeper deigned to unlock the gates and allow us to obtain stunning views of the roosting Arabian Eagle-Owls. A Blyth's Reed Warbler gave itself up after yesterday's brief encounter. Also, some gained views of Bruce's Green Pigeon, Arabian and Palestine Sunbirds, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, a Grey-headed Kingfisher and African Paradise Flycatchers. Lunch was an all-Arabic affair at the Baalbek Lebanese restaurant as we passed by through the old districts of the city. Finally, the road westwards from the suburbs took us through the desert canyons leading to the coast at Al Mughsayl. Here one simply does not know which way to look with many birds both offshore and on the extensive flooded Khawr. A Pheasant-tailed Jacana here proved to be our only one of the tour. Prior to dusk we slowly made our way into the famous Wadi Ashawq and waited for darkness to fall. Our attention was initially diverted by a stunning male Arabian Wheatear and then we heard the distinctive calls of Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse on their evening flight. Shortly after, a distant Desert Owl hooted from deep in the wadi, maybe beyond our reach? However, a deeper set of hoots sounded much closer and soon we had a pair of duetting Desert Owls showing high on an adjacent cliff face; simply brilliant. It was a long drive back to the hotel, but everyone was glowing with first Omani Owl and now Desert Owl to in the bag, as they say.

Sunday morning, we headed east from the city this time, to the harbour at Mirbat, for an appointment with Hatem, the local boatman, for our pelagic. Soon we had seabirds all around the boat, with both Persian and Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Wilson's Storm Petrel, a Masked Booby flying right over the boat and Jouanin's Petrels, which gave repeat views close to boat. A heavier version of the closely-related Bulwer's Petrel, Jouanin's Petrel is found throughout the seas off Oman and also breeds on Socotra. After leaving the dock, we found a roosting flock of Abdim's Storks on the beach near the old town as had been described to us by Hatem. Again, a broad selection of gulls and shorebirds were present to. So, it was back to Salalah for lunch then out again in the afternoon to Ayn Tabraq, one of the regular locations for Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak in recent years. However, this year there had been no sightings since the spring so this time our visit was in hope rather than expectation. Plenty of small birds to be found around the waterholes here with many African Silverbills and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings. An African Wildcat almost caught us by surprise whilst some playful Camels provided distractions. At dusk we headed off again in search of the elusive Arabian Scops Owl and this time we obtained ace views of one close whilst at least two other birds called nearby.

On our final day in Salalah the early morning was spent checking out the irrigated fields at Sawhnawt Farm, a former haunt of both Sociable Lapwing and Caspian Plover, but no sign of either today. Car birding at East Khawr provided some with our one and only Intermediate, now known as, Medium Egret of the tour. A delightful selection of confiding gulls and terns and shore birds including Baltic Gull, Steppe Gulls, and lookalike Caspian Gulls with some nice views of Little Terns. A group of Greenshanks and Black winged Stilts graced the shoreline but nothing rarer here today. A nice party of photogenic Blue cheeked Bee-eaters grace the bushes, and some had brief flight views of a vocal Little Bittern. Our views of a Crested Honey Buzzard could have been improved on. In the afternoon we headed west to the harbour at Raysut which produced some excellent shoreline birding. Two African Sacred Ibis showed and a good selection of the usual gulls. A mixed flock of Caspian and Greater Crested Terns was an impressive sight and several Ospreys loafed around the beach area. Amongst the hundreds of Little Stints careful scanning resulted in finding several Broad-billed Sandpipers and, best of all, a Great Knot strolling across the mudflats, an exceptionally good sighting for the south coast. It was then that a passing French birder exchanged gen and in return for the bonus Great Knot filled us in on details of a flock of Caspian Plovers back on the east side of Salalah. We gave Palestine Sunbird a final try at a favoured spot in some hotel grounds without success and then hot-footed back across the city. The Caspian Plovers were still there, briefly, in the wadi at Khwar Souli near Taqah. They were quickly relocated on the nearby beach on which they foraged amongst the flocks of mixed sand plovers. This engaging group of seven birds included two juveniles and provided more than a fitting climax to the tour. The final finale was the sighting of a couple Little Crakes for some and Baillon's Crakes for all on a small marsh next to Highway 47 on the way back to town.

On the final afternoon the tour concluded at Muscat airport as we said farewell to a few, while the rest took a break between flights on the corniche at Qurum Park. A rooftop café offered shelter from the sun and provided some with their first views of Grey Francolin and Purple Sunbirds. Then back we went to the airport for the evening flight to Bahrain.

The one day we had in Bahrain started early searching for any Grey Hypocolius that would be leaving their roosts. Very quickly we picked up on a female perched high in the bushes amongst the numerous. Her mates were probably still hiding deep in the mesquite bushes, a behaviour that makes them hard to observe and harder still to determine numbers. Later in the afternoon we returned to a nearby patch of similar habitat and enjoyed some prolonged views and observations of pre-roost behaviour of many birds. We enjoyed a couple of hours in the autumn sunshine just watching them. Entertained to by an odd mix of Bahraini birds which included Sulphur crested Cockatoos, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Common Mynas, and the occasional Red-vented Bulbul amongst the many White-spectacled Bulbuls.

A final big thankyou to Garry and Zoltan for turning up in Oman at such short notice and ably assisting in making the tour a success with their people and bird spotting skills.

BIRDS OF THE TOUR

1st Grey Hypocolius

2nd Caspian Plover

3rd Jouanin's Petrel

4th Omani Owl

5th Streaked Scrub Warbler

BIRDS

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* A single bird at Taqah for some.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Grey Francolin (introduced) *Ortygornis pondicerianus* Small group seen well in Muscat.

Sand Partridge ♦ ***Ammoperdix heyi*** Endemic to Arabia and the Middle East with two groups performing well on an early morning visit to Mudday

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* Migrants at Wadi Hadik and Muntasar.

Arabian Partridge ♦ ***Alectoris melanocephala*** One pair seen. Endemic to southern half of Arabia.

Egyptian Nightjar ♦ ***Caprimulgus aegyptius*** Found at an oasis in the Empty Quarter.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* Seen in Northern Oman and Bahrain.

Forbes-Watson's Swift ♦ ***Apus berliozi*** Endemic to southern Oman and Socotra.

Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* One at Ayn Razat.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* A migrant seen at Shannah.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* Hundreds seen at Mudday.

Spotted Sandgrouse ♦ ***Pterocles senegallus*** Observed at an oasis in the Empty Quarter.

Crowned Sandgrouse ♦ ***Pterocles coronatus*** Seen coming to water at Mudday by some.

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse ♦ ***Pterocles lichtensteinii*** Heard only. In the Al Hadjar Mountains.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

African Collared Dove ♦ ***Streptopelia roseogrisea*** Only seen at Mudday.

Laughing Dove (Palm Dove) *Spilopelia senegalensis*

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*

Bruce's Green Pigeon ♦ ***Treron waalia*** Seen at both Tawi Atyr and Ayn Razat.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata* A few at East Khawr in Salalah.

Baillon's Crake *Zapornia pusilla* Two birds on a small marsh at Tebraq.

Little Crake ♦ ***Zapornia parva*** Seen alongside the above species near Salalah by some.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola*

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* Seen in small numbers at Bar al Hikman by some of the group.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

White-tailed Lapwing ♦ *Vanellus leucurus* A surprise find on a roadside waterhole.

Caspian Plover ♦ *Anarhynchus asiaticus* A party of 7 birds on a beach near Salalah.

Tibetan Sand Plover *Anarhynchus atrifrons* Now split from Siberian (Mongolian) Sandplover.

Greater Sand Plover *Anarhynchus leschenaultia*

Kentish Plover *Anarhynchus alexandrines*

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* A singleton on the khawr at Mughsayl.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius Arquata*

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Pin-tailed Snipe *Gallinago stenura* One seen at Filim near the desalination plant.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* Hundreds offshore on our boat trips.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* Over fifty seen at Bar al Hikman.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatillis* A juvenile at Raysut harbour.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Ruff *Calidris pugnax*

Broad-billed Sandpiper ♦ *Calidris falcinellus* Several seen at Shannah and later at Raysut.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temmincki*

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Great Knot ♦ *Calidris tenuirostris* A lone bird on the shore at Raysut harbour.

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola* A small group was spotted on the rising tide at Shannah by some of the group.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* Increasing numbers at the farms near Thumrayt.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* Seen offshore at Taqah and from the Mirbat pelagic.

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* Five juveniles from the Mirbat pelagic.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Eighteen in the harbour at Raysut

Whiskered Tern *Chidonias hybrida* Hundreds on the Salalah farms.

White-winged Tern (W-w Black T) *Chidonias leucopterus*

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* Only seen at As Sawadi and later at Raysut.

Greater crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Sooty Gull ♢ *Ichthyaetus hemprichii* Thousands on the beaches in the south.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

Lesser Black-backed Gull ♢ (Baltic Gull) *Larus (fuscus) fuscus* An adult at East Khawr.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Heuglin's G) *Larus (fuscus) heuglini*

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Steppe G) *Larus (fuscus) barabensis*

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes* Several seen from the Mirbat pelagic.

Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus* Endemic to the seas surrounding Arabia. Five birds offshore at As Sawadi and later several feeding around the boat off Mirbat.

Jouanin's Petrel ♢ *Bulweria fallax* Endemic to the seas surrounding Arabia. Several were attracted to the boat on the pelagic out of Mirbat.

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii* Now seemingly a resident bird in the Salalah district.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* Seen offshore at Taqah.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* One flew right over the boat on the Mirbat pelagic.

Socotra Cormorant ♢ *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* Endemic to the seas surrounding Arabia. We saw some decent sized flocks feeding offshore at Taqah and then later at Mughsayl.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* Two birds in Raysut harbour.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Hundreds on the cattle farms in Salalah.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Individuals seen at Al Ghaftain and East Khawr.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Western Reef Heron (W R Egret) *Egretta gularis*

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* This species bred for the first time near Muscat this year.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Medium Egret *Ardea intermedia* Seen by some of the group.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* A migrant in a tree outside the restaurant at Al Ghaftain.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* A species that is increasing in Oman.

Crested Honey Buzzard (Oriental HB) *Pernis ptilorhynchus* Two sightings in Salalah.

Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos* Several sightings in the south.

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga*

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* A few juveniles around Salalah.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* Good numbers at Thumrayt.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* An impressive sighting at the Jabal Samhan for some of the group and a distant bird seen later on.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata* The usual pair showed well at Tawi Atyr.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* Two adult males on the grasslands above Salalah.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* Three juveniles on the farms north of Thumrayt.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* A juvenile on two dates near Ayn Hanram.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba* Resident in the grounds at the Qitbit Motel.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Pallid Scops Owl ♠ (Striated S O) *Otus brucei* One seen in the Al Hajar Mountains.

Arabian Scops Owl ♠ *Otus pamela* Endemic to the southern part of Arabia. We both saw and heard them well in the wooded wadis near Salalah.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* A lone migrant at Al Ghaftain.

Arabian Eagle Owl ♠ *Bubo milesi* Endemic to the southern part of Arabia. A pair showed well near Salalah on both nocturnal and diurnal visits.

Desert Owl ♠ *Strix hadorami* Endemic to Arabia and the Middle East. One of the tour highlights was of a pair "duetting" in a deep wadi near Salalah.

Omani Owl ♠ *Strix butleri* The tour got off to a great start with, after three attempts, the group watching a pair for over an hour one evening in the Al Hadjar mountains.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala*

Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* One in the mangroves at Muhut Island, Filim.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Arabian Green Bee-eater *Merops cyanophrys* Endemic to Arabia and the Middle East.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* An abundant migrant.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Sooty Falcon ◊ *Falco concolor* Pairs with fledged juveniles still present at breeding colony.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* Six birds hunting together at dusk near Salalah.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Peregrine Falcon ◊ (Barbary F) *Falco (peregrinus) pelegrinoides*

Rose-ringed Parakeet (introduced) *Psittacula kramera*

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus*

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*

Great Grey Shrike (Southern G S) *Lanius (excubitor) aucheri*

Great Grey Shrike (Steppe G S) *Lanius (excubitor) pallidirostris* Only one sighting this year for some.

Isabelline Shrike (Daurian Shrike) *Lanius isabellinus*

Red-tailed Shrike (Turkestan S) *Lanius phoenicuroides*

House Crow (introduced) *Corvus splendens*

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*

Fan-tailed Raven ◊ *Corvus rhipidurus* Ace views over the cliffs at Jabal Samhan.

Grey Hypocolius ◊ *Hypocolius ampelinus* Seen in good numbers on the Bahrain extension

Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* Excellent views on the desert farms in the south.

Desert Lark *Ammonmanes deserti*

Black-crowned Sparrow Lark ◊ *Eremopterix nigriceps*

Crested Lark *Galeridia cristata*

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Red-vented Bulbul (introduced) *Pycnonotus cafer*

White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis*

White-spectacled Bulbul ◊ (Yellow-vented B) *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Streaked Scrub Warbler ◊ *Cecropis daurica* They performed well on the Sayq Plateau.

Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus*

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Common Chiffchaff (Siberian C) *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* Vocal birds at Quitbit.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Only seen on the Bahrain extension.

Clamorous Reed Warbler (Indian Reed W) *Acrocephalus (stentoreus) brunnescens*

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* A migrant at Ayn Razat was photographed.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis* Abundant in southern Oman.

Delicate Prinia *Prinia lepida* A recent split from Graceful Prinia found in northern Oman.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Arabian Warbler ◊ *Curruca leucomelaena* Superb views around the springs near Salalah.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Curruca crassirostris* Seen by some of the group.

Asian Desert Warber ◊ *Curruca nana* Common around the oases in the south.

Menetries's Warbler ◊ *Curruca mystacea* A few in the grounds at Qitbit and Al Ghaftain seen by some.

Common Whitethroat *Curruca communis*

Abyssinian White-eye (White-breasted W-e) *Zosterops abyssinicus*

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Indian Pied Myna *Gracupica contra* A random sighting for one of us in Bahrain at the Hypocolius spot.

Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum* One at the Muntasar oasis.

Rosy Starling (Rose-coloured S) *Pastor roseus*

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* Two with Rosy Starlings at Shishr.

Tristram's Starling ◊ (Tristram's Grackle) *Onychognathus tristramii*

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin ◊ (R Bush R) *Cercotrichas galactotes* One at Ayn Hamran for some of the group.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* In song at Ayn Razat.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* A single sighting at Filim.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus cohrurus*

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Common Rock Thrush (Rufous-tailed R T) *Monticola saxatilis* Two birds on the new farms near Thumrayt.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabelline*

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

Blackstart ◊ *Oenanthe melanura* Abundant in the Dhofar Mountains.

Red-tailed Wheatear ◊ (Persian W, Rufous-t W) *Oenanthe chrysopygia* Singing on winter territories in the Al Hadjar mountains.

Hume's Wheatear ◊ *Oenanthe albonigra* An evocative dawn singer in the Al Hadjar mountains.

Arabian Wheatear ◊ *Oenanthe lugentoides* A localised species in the Dhofar Mountains.

Nile Valley Sunbird ◊ *Hedydipna metallica* A nice sighting of three birds at Mudday.

Palestine Sunbird ◊ *Cinnyris osea* Endemic to Arabia and the Middle East. Only two birds seen in the south, both at Ayn Razat. Non-leader.

Arabian Sunbird ◊ *Cinnyris hellmayri* Endemic to southern part of Arabia. Abundant.

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Rüppell's Weaver ◊ *Ploceus galbula* Abundant in the wadis near Salalah.

African Silverbill *Euodice cantans*

Indian Silverbill ◊ *Euodice malabarica* Small flocks in Wadi Hadik on our morning visit.

Western Yellow Wagtail ◊ *Motacilla flava*

Western Yellow Wagtail ◊ (Yellow-headed W) *Motacilla (flava) lutea*

Western Yellow Wagtail ◊ (Syke's Wagtail) *Motacilla (flava) bema*

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* A few sightings on the farms north of Thumrayt.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewski* A fly over, seen by some of the group, at Ayn Hanram was sound recorded.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* Seen by some.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Yemen Serin ◊ *Crithraga menachensis* Nice views at their regular waterhole at Tawi Atyr.

Striolated Bunting ◊ (Striated B) *Emeriza striolata* Good views in Wadi Hadik.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (African Rock B) *Emberiza tahapisi* Abundant in the south.

MAMMALS

African Wildcat *Felis lybica*

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Indo-Pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphin *Tursiops aduncus*

Egyptian Rousette (E Fruit Bat) *Rousettus aegyptiacus*



Peregrine Falcon ssp pelegrinoides (image by Garry Taylor)



Plain Leaf Warbler (image by Garry Taylor)



Verreaux's Eagle (image by Garry Taylor)



Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (image by Garry Taylor)



Bonelli's Eagle (image by Garry Taylor)



Cave at Ayn Razat (image by John McLoughlin)



Palestine Sunbird (image by Garry Taylor)



Persian Shearwater (image by Garry Taylor)



Sooty Gulls (image by John McLoughlin)



Western Reef Heron (image by John McLoughlin)



Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark (image by John McLoughlin)



Desert Wheatear (image by John McLoughlin)



Hypocoliuses pre-roosting (image by John McLoughlin)



Dhofar Mountains (image by John McLoughlin)



Lappet-faced Vulture (image by Garry Taylor)



Sayq Plateau (image by John McLoughlin)



Yemen Serin (image by Garry Taylor)



Arabian Wheatear (image by Garry Taylor)



Flesh-footed Shearwater (image by Garry Taylor)



Jouanin's Petrel (image by Garry Taylor)



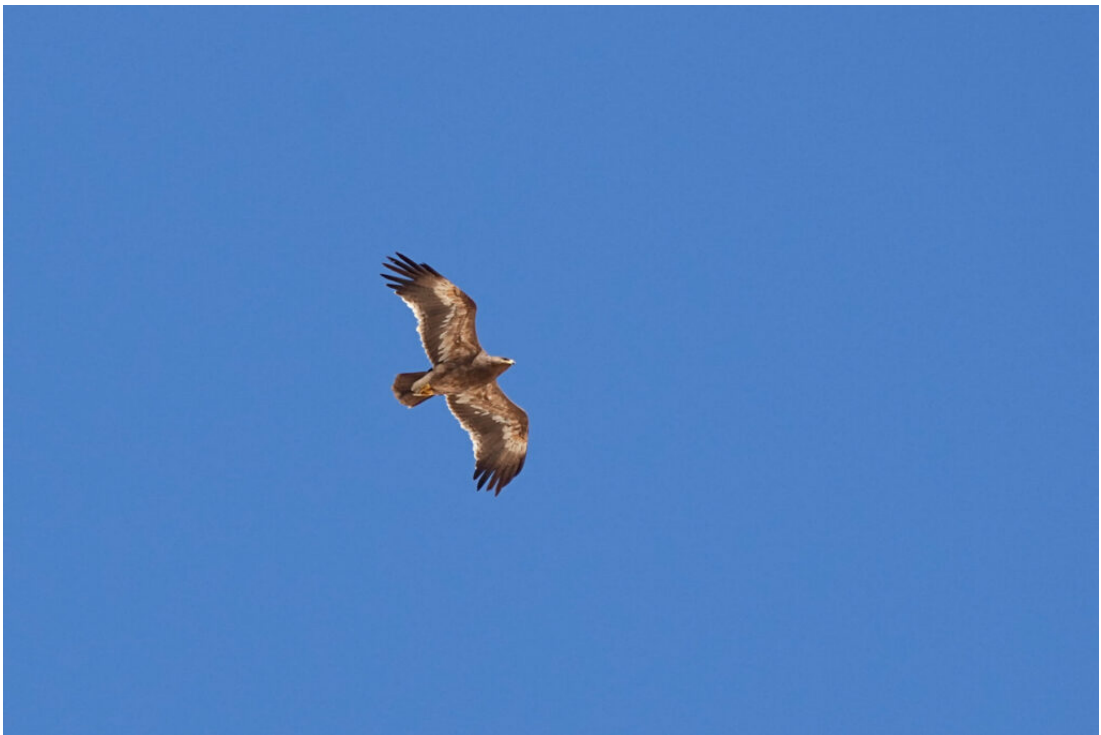
Globe Wanderer (image by Garry Taylor)



Arabian Eagle-Owl (image by Garry Taylor)



Sooty Falcon (image by Garry Taylor)



Steppe Eagle (image by Garry Taylor)



Greater Hoopoe-Lark (image by Garry Taylor)



Caspian Plover (image by Garry Taylor)



Persian Shearwater (image by John McLoughlin)



Medium Egret (image by John McLoughlin)



Wadi Ashwaq (image by John McLoughlin)



Black Kite (image by Garry Taylor)



Caspian Plovers (image by Garry Taylor)



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (image by Garry Taylor)



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (image by Garry Taylor)



Great Grey Shrike (image by Garry Taylor)



Wadi Ashwaqh (image by John McLoughlin)



Eurasian Scops Owl (image by Garry Taylor)



Red-tailed Shrike (image by Garry Taylor)



Mirbat beach (image by John McLoughlin)