anyone looking to go somewhere a little different and add some excellent birds to their Western Palearctic lists !!

Itinerary :

Thursday 19th September : Arrived Damascus mid afternoon, drove to Palmyra to meet Gianluca Serra, arriving shortly after dark.

Friday 20th September : Spent the early morning birding around Palmyra, then drove to the Deir-es-Zor area where we spent the afternoon.

Saturday 21st September : Morning around Palmyra, in th

The suspension bridge was our first port of call, to try to establish whether **Iraq Babblers** were no longer to be seen there, or whether we were just unlucky on our first visit. Our other target species was the **White-cheeked Bulbul**, a Western Palearctic tick for us, and another bird we had missed here first time around.

The bridge was much less crowded with people at this time of the day, and we did manage to see both the above species without difficulty. A group of four **White-cheeked Bulbuls** showed well in the small playground and surrounding trees at the north end of the bridge, and while we were watching them at least four **Iraq Babblers** fed in reeds directly below us.

A few raptors drifted through, including a **Honey Buzzard**, and the usual species seen from the bridge included **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**, **Pied** and **Common Kingfishers** and **Little Bittern**.

We were itching to check out Mheidemeh marsh with our scopes, now our tripods had been rescued from Damascus. We took the dirt track off the main road to the same spot, and as soon as we arrived, we were treated to the sight of large waves of migrating **Steppe Buzzards** passing overhead. Mixed in with them, an adult **Steppe Eagle** showed well, plus the surprise addition of a **Goshawk.**

The usual wildfowl and waders were on show, with slightly smaller numbers of **Marbled**, **Ferruginous** and **White-headed Ducks**. New for the trip was a **Marsh Sandpiper**, and 2 **Whiskered Terns** completed the trio of marsh terns on view here, along with good numbers of **Little Terns**, while a **Citrine Wagtail** showed briefly. Miles had brief views of a **Little / Baillon's Crake** as it disappeared into the reeds. After an hour or so, we drove round in the car through the village to the east side of the marsh (see map below), where several **Kentish Plovers** showed with the usual waders, and a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** and a **Honey Buzzard** drifted over in another wave of **Steppe Buzzards**.

By early afternoon, we felt we had seen most of the birds there, and we were keen to try somewhere new. Although basic, our road map of Syria seemed to indicate a small lake just to the north-east of the Euphrates bridge at Deir-es-Zor, which we failed to find (it may have dried up). Human and traffic disturbance in this area was high, so we hit the road again, back towards Palmyra.

A brief café stop just outside Deir-es-Zor revealed hundreds of **Black Kites** circling in the scorching heat, but we didn't stop again until we were about 15km from Palmyra, where a turning on the left is signposted to the Talila reserve (where Gianluca is working to reintroduce the Arabian Oryx).

We cruised slowly down this quiet road for about 2km, stopping for birds, and enjoyed several hours of late afternoon raptor passage. **Pallid**, **Montagu**'s and **Marsh Harriers** passed in small numbers, with **Steppe Buzzards** higher up, along with a single **Booted Eagle**. The desert around the road was surprisingly good, I think we benefited from spending time in the same spot in decent habitat. Along with the usual **Temminck's Horned** and **Crested Larks**, there were also several **Lesser Short-toed** and **Hoopoe Larks**, **Desert** and **Isabelline Wheatears**, two **Cream-coloured**

Coursers, a **Whinchat** and, bizarrely, a male **Redstart.** A **Great Grey Shrike**, the fifth shrike species of the week, showed distantly on telegraph wires.

The Ishtar Hotel was our destination in the evening, one of the few establishments in Palmyra to serve beer. After a few cold ones, Gianluca prepared some delicious Italian home cooking, as a very welcome break from the Tourist restaurant.

Tuesday 24th September :
We were woken at 06.30 (as was the rest of the street) by Adeeb loudly sounding his horn. It was the day of our trip to the desert, and after a few errands around Palmyra we headed east out of town on the Deir-es-Zor road in the back of his ancient Datsun pick-up.

We soon got tired of sitting in the back, and opted instead to sit up front in the cab where it was somewhat less dusty and windswept. After about 20km we turned off the main road, heading south along a minor road towards the desert.

We stopped for tea (the first of very many such stops) in a small village, where a small flock of 5-6 **Levant Sparrowhawks**, including a male, passed overhead and a migrant **Tree Pipit** fed by the roadside. After the village, the tarmac road continued as far as a couple of man-made desert reservoirs, where many **Montagu**'s and **Pallid Harriers** came to water (and to traps set for them by falcon hunters). Before long we were on a rough track, and our next stop was at a large Bedouin tent where we again had a few glasses of tea and a decent breakfast of bread, eggs, aubergines, marmalade and houmous. At the tent we also met our first falcon hunters, who had a captive juvenile **Montagu's Harrier** which they used to try and lure the falcons. The harrier had its eyes sewn shut and meat was placed in the harriers' talons along with loops of wire to ensnare any falcon tempted to try and steal an easy meal. We were assured that the harriers eyes are opened and they are released after a few days service, as they become lethargic and depressed if kept in captivity too long.

All the hunters, wherever we stopped, were fascinated by Adeeb's copy of the Collins bird guide, which not so mysteriously always seemed to be open on the pages featuring Saker, Gyrfalcon, Lanner and Peregrine. This was not at all surprising as the larger falcons fetch a king's ransom in Damascus when sold to the Saudis - a decent female Saker worth up to 140,000 US Dollars is the real prize, with Lanners the next most favoured, followed by Peregrine. Adeeb himself caught a female Peregrine last year which earned him $20,000. By contrast, a small male may fetch only $200.

Adeeb told us he could remember the days when the three large falcons were resident in Syria, and many Sakers were caught annually for the falconry trade. Now, resident populations are almost totally extinct, and the large numbers of hunters who congregate in the Hamad desert each year rely on migrant birds, which get rarer every year. Their rarity, allied to the fact that they are very difficult to catch and inexperienced hunters are frequently unsuccessful, means that few are now caught each year.

Due to the large amounts of money involved, cessation of the falconry trade seems a very distant goal (Syria will probably run out of falcons first). However Adeeb has made great progress in encouraging the hunters not to indiscriminately shoot migrant

birds, and it was clear that everyone we met in the desert held Adeeb in very high regard, so I think he had started to make a real impact.

Birding in the desert was at times frustrating, but often very rewarding. Sometimes we didn't see anything for many miles, only to find concentrations of birds in areas with sparse vegetation or artificial reservoirs. One such reservoir held a flock of 14 **Black-necked Grebes**, a **Garganey** and a **White-winged Tern**, with often spectacular concentrations of the three harrier species (**Pallid** most numerous) as they came to drink. Some of the more interesting migrants seen, apart from those mentioned below, included singles of **Great Grey Shrike**, **Roller, Icterine Warbler** and **Pied Wheatear**. Of the true desert species, **Temminck's Horned Larks** were by far and away the most numerous, with regular **Crested** and **Hoopoe Larks**, a few **Lesser Short-toed** and only a single **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** seen. **Isabelline** and **Desert Wheatears** were also frequently encountered, though some (most?) of these could have been passage birds.

On several occasions we encountered a majestic **Steppe Eagle** perched on the ground, visible from far away, but the raptor highlight today was the subadult **Greater Spotted Eagle** which gave incredibly close views overhead. Some of the eagles remained unidentified, though I suspect that most of them were **Steppe**.

Migrant-wise, an afternoon tea stop at one of the two wells in the Hamad provided a taste of what was to come the next morning. The habitat - a small vegetable patch, a few sparse shrubs, a couple of buildings and a few small pools of water, enclosed by a wire fence, was very unremarkable, but as the only patch of cover and shade for miles around it was a magnet for tired migrants. It soon became clear just how many birds the sparse cover could conceal. The highlight was a **Richard's / Blyth's Pipit**, which never allowed a close enough approach for a conclusive identification, and a thorough grilling of the area produced a respectable warbler list including two or three **Willow Warblers**, two each of **Garden**, **Reed** and **Wood Warblers**, and single **Olivaceous Warbler**, **Whitethroat, Blackcap** and **Chiffchaff**. Also here were about ten **Spotted Flycatchers**, three **Red-backed Shrikes**, two **Golden Orioles**, single **Redstart** and **Whinchat**, and four **Ortolan Buntings**.

It was only when I suddenly started feeling dizzy and nauseous that I realised we had spent a couple of hours in the heat of the day being roasted by the desert sun. Thankfully we adjourned to a bedouin tent nearby and enjoyed an awesome meal of salty rice and stewed vegetables, washed down with copious amounts of tea and bottled water, and after an hour or so the heatstroke had subsided and we were able to continue.

Later, as the light faded, we made our way to the site of the second well, which was to be our overnight halt. By the time we arrived, it was too late to check for any migrants, although the area looked to be at least as promising as the first well we visited. There were more buildings, a very well-developed vegetable garden, at least a dozen shrubs and small trees, and a marshy area just outside the fenced compound with a spring and low, relatively lush vegetation, although the total area did not exceed 100 square metres. As we were to discover the next morning, the area surpassed even our best expectations.

Dinner of rice and ropey old chicken was taken in a nearby tent with a large group of falcon hunters, whilst our accomodation was on the floor of one of the blockhouse buildings in the well compound. We learnt that we were within 20km of the Iraq border, which given the current political situation was about as close as we wanted to get! Before retiring for the night, we took some time to look at the night sky, which was as beautiful as you would expect in a place so far from any sources of light pollution

Wednesday 25th September :
Awoken at first light by Adeeb, who had seen a flock of strange birds flying around looking for somewhere to land. They turned out to be **Night Herons**, nine birds in total including five adults. It was frustrating waiting for the light to improve as everywhere we could hear birds fluttering in the bushes, I guessed that new birds were arriving all the time looking for somewhere to rest. It wasn't long before we were looking at the day's first **Spotted Flycatchers** (at least 30 in the area in total during the morning), **Red-backed Shrikes** (20+) and **Common Redstarts** (12+). I knew it was going to be an exceptional morning when I came face-to-face with a **Barred Warbler** in a bush just outside the toilet window! When I emerged, it turned out that Miles had been watching an **Olivaceous Warbler** and a very showy **Marsh Warbler** in the other half of the same bush, plus legions of **Garden Warblers**, **Blackcaps** and **Lesser Whitethroats**.

Many of the birds lingered in the area and we saw them repeatedly during the morning, while others were seen only once, presumably continuing their journey by day. My favourite find of the morning came shortly after the discovery of the **Barred Warbler**, when I noticed a phylloscopus warbler with a single wing-bar perched on the wire fence surrounding the compound. Calling Miles over, we had excellent views of the bird in full view on the fence for several minutes : having established the bird's identity as a **Greenish Warbler**, it disappeared from view round the corner of a bush, never to be seen again.

We then had split-second views of a "mystery bird" on the ground in the vegetable patch, which then flew towards the marshy area just outside the compound. We grilled this area thoroughly but failed to relocate the bird, however ample compensation was provided by a **Great Reed Warbler**, one **Tawny** and three **Red-throated Pipits** (which departed shortly after we found them), several **Short-toed Larks** and **Yellow Wagtails**.

An adult male and female **Pallid Harrier** quartered the boundary fence, ready to snatch up any unwary migrants, while a splash of colour was provided by **two Golden Orioles**, a **Kingfisher** and two brief **Rollers.**

Back in the compound, we were able to tick off an unlikely "double". First, we encountered a first-year **Rock Thrush** on the boundary fence, then Adeeb drew our attention to an adult male **Blue Rock Thrush** on the roof of the blockhouse, which obligingly gave excellent views for most of the morning. Wheatears also featured, the usual **Desert** and **Isabelline Wheatears** accompanied by at least two **Pied** and three **Black-eared Wheatears**, including a "black-throated" male.

We eventually caught up with our "mystery bird", which confirmed earlier suspicions that it was a **Thrush Nightingale** by perching on a mound of earth in the open for about ten minutes, quite unlike the earlier brief showing. We did have brief views of a female-type **Pied / Collared Flycatcher** species on the fence but could not relocate it. Nearby three **Ortolan Buntings**, including a male, gave close views on mounds of earth along the boundary fence.

Mid-morning, as the sun rose higher in the sky, we dragged ourselves away to continue our "desert tour". An artificial reservoir not far away produced excellent views of various raptors gathered on its banks, including three **Steppe Eagles** in a single scope view, while a single **Citrine Wagtail** fed with the Yellows. Also here were familiar migrant species including **Little Stint**, **Dunlin, Green Sandpiper**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Garganey**, **Shoveler** and **Teal.**

Our luck appeared to be on the wane as we dipped both **Desert Eagle Owl** and **Macqueen's Bustard** at known sites, however the latter species at least is almost extinct in the Hamad owing to excessive persecution. **Caspian Plover** is another regularly occurring passage bird that we failed to connect with, although luck is undoubtedly required with such large areas of habitat available.

South-west of Palmyra, not long before joining the tarmac road, a desert escarpment produced five **Lesser Kestrels**, with three **Cream-coloured Coursers** and an unidentified **Desert / Bar-tailed Desert Lark** briefly nearby.

We rejoined the main Damascus - Palmyra highway, and were about 10km outside Palmyra when Adeeb's trusty Datsun pick-up spluttered to a halt, having run out of fuel. Very embarrassing for our expert desert guide, and Miles and I were left pondering our good fortune that it didn't happen in the middle of the desert, which could have had very serious implications!! Instead, Adeeb flagged down a passing truck, returning ten minutes later on the back of a motorbike with a full container of petrol. In reflective mood we arrived back in Palmyra, and Adeeb seemed grateful for his payment of 200 US Dollars for his services, money which I felt would ensure he continued to take western visitors to the desert, thus contributing to conservation in the area.

Our final evening was again spent in the Tourist Restaurant in Palmyra. Unfortunately Gianluca had been called to Damascus at short notice so we were unable to see him. That night, long overdue, I was to see most of my dinner again as the long overdue dose of Syrian Stomach finally wreaked its terrible revenge.

Thursday 26th September :
Stomach troubles meant an unpleasant journey back, however the journey was relatively hassle-free. After a late morning departure from Palmyra, we arrived back at Heathrow late evening.

Systematic List :

Little Grebe : about 10 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Great Crested Grebe : 3 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Black-necked Grebe : flock of 14 on a Hamad desert reservoir on 24/9.

Little Bittern : seen only beside the Euphrates at Deir-es-Zor, with 4 on 20/9 and 2 on 23/9.

Night Heron : 2 at Deir-es-Zor on 23/9. A flock of 9 in Hamad on 25/9.

Squacco Heron : 1 at Mheidemeh on 20/9 and 1 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Little Egret : about 40 at Mheidemeh on 20/9 and 23/9, 10 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Great White Egret : 5 at Mheidemeh on both 20/9 and 23/9.

Grey Heron : common at Mheidemeh and Abu Golla.

Purple Heron : the only record was of one at Mheidemeh on 20/9.

White Stork : 2 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Black Stork : 3 juveniles at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Teal : small numbers at Abu Golla on 21/9. Flock of 7 on a Hamad reservoir on 25/9.

Garganey : seen in ones and twos at Mheidemeh, Abu Golla and in Hamad.

Pintail : 2 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Shoveler : 10 at Mheidemeh on 23/9 and 4 in Hamad on 25/9.

Marbled Teal : excellent numbers at Mheidemeh with 25 on 20/9 and 8 on 23/9.

Ferruginous Duck : seen only at Mheidemeh with 25 on 20/9 and 5 on 23/9.

White-headed Duck : at Mheidemeh, 15 on 20/9 and 10 on 23/9.

Greater Spotted Eagle :subadult bird in Hamad on 24/9.

Lesser Spotted Eagle : single at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Steppe Eagle : one at Mheidemeh on 23/9. A fairly common migrant in Hamad, with 3 on 24/9 and at least 6 on 25/9, plus 3+ unidentified aquila eagles which were probably this species.

Booted Eagle : a dark phase bird along the entrance track to Talila reserve on 23/9.

Black Kite : 2 at Deir-es-Zor on 20/9, with at least 200 there on 23/9. In Hamad, 10 on 24/9 and 2 on 25/9.

Marsh Harrier : resident / passage birds commonly seen, high count of 15 in Hamad on 24/9.

Pallid Harrier : one adult female seen beside the road to Deir-es-Zor and a pair along the entrance track to Talila reserve on 23/9. Common migrant in Hamad with high count of at least 15 (including 8 males) on 24/9.

Montagu's Harrier : adult male and juvenile at Abu Golla on 21/9. Less common than Pallid in Hamad with high count of about 8 (including one male) on 25/9.

Common Buzzard : occasional dark brown individuals may have been dark Steppe Buzzards.

Steppe Buzzard : 2 on the outskirts of Palmyra on 21/9. Abundant on 23/9 with over 500 birds seen, mainly at Mheidemeh and the entrance track to Talila reserve. Also noted in small numbers over Hamad on 24/9 and 25/9.

Honey Buzzard : only seen on 23/9 loosely associated with the Steppe Buzzard movement, with 1 seen from the Deir-es-Zor suspension bridge and 1 at Mheidemeh .

Goshawk : 1 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Sparrowhawk : 1 at Palmyra on 21/9. 3 singles associated with the large raptor movement of 23/9.

Levant Sparrowhawk : small flock of 5-6 birds, including an adult male, on the outskirts of Hamad on 24/9.

Lesser Kestrel : 1 on the outskirts of Palmyra on 21/9. 5 in Hamad on 25/9.

Kestrel : 1 along Talila entrance track on 23/9. Occasional singles seen in Hamad.

Water Rail : 2 seen at Mheidemeh on 20/9, heard there again on 23/9.

Little / Baillon's Crake : a small crake seen very briefly at Mheidemeh on 20/9.

Moorhen : recorded at Mheidemeh but no counts made.

Coot : as previous species.

Purple Gallinule : 2 at Mheidemeh on 20/9.

Black-winged Stilt : at Mheidemeh, 3 on 20/9 and 5 on 23/9.

Cream-coloured Courser : small numbers seen at several sites, with 4 near Palmyra ruins and 4 at Abu Golla on 21/9, 3 along the entrance road to the Talila reserve on 23/9, 1 in Hamad on 24/9 and 3 there on 25/9.

Little Ringed Plover : 1 at Mheidemeh on 20/9, 10 at Abu Golla on 21/9 and 1 in Hamad on 25/9.

Ringed Plover : 1 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Kentish Plover : 3 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Spur-winged Plover : seen only at Mheidemeh with 3 on 20/9 and 6 on 23/9.

White-tailed Plover : abundant at Mheidemeh (presumed breeding) - c.40 on 20/9 and c.100 on 23/9.

Dunlin : 1 at Abu Golla on 21/9 and 1 in Hamad on 25/9.

Curlew Sandpiper : 3 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Temminck's Stint : probably a fairly common migrant. 3 at Mheidemeh on 20/9 and at least 4 at Abu Golla the following day.

Little Stint : 3 at Mheidemeh on both 20/9 and 23/9, with 30 at Abu Golla on 21/9 and 16 in Hamad on 25/9.

Wood Sandpiper : 2 at Mheidemeh on 20/9 and 5 there on 23/9. 5 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Green Sandpiper : 1 at Abu Golla on 21/9, 5 at Mheidemeh on 23/9 and 2 in Hamad on 25/9.

Common Sandpiper : only one seen, on the Euphrates near Mheidemeh on 20/9.

Spotted Redshank : 5 at Mheidemeh on 20/9 and 23/9. 1 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Redshank : 10 at Mheidemeh on 23/9, present there but no count made on 20/9.

Greenshank : present at Mheidemeh on both 20/9 and 23/9.

Marsh Sandpiper : 1 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Black-tailed Godwit : 2 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Ruff : abundant at Mheidemeh, also 5 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

Snipe : seen at Mheidemeh and Abu Golla.

Slender-billed Gull : the only gull species seen, c.20 at Mheidemeh on 20/9 with 50 there on 23/9.

Little Tern : 2 at Mheidemeh on 20/9 and 8 there on 23/9.

Black Tern : the same individual at Mheidemeh on both 20/9 and 23/9.

White-winged Tern : the commonest tern, seen in the Euphrates valley, Abu Golla and in Hamad, with highest count of 15 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Whiskered Tern : the only birds were 2 at Mheidemeh on 23/9.

Laughing Dove : common e.g. in Deir-es-Zor and Palmyra towns.

Collared Dove : as above.

Woodpigeon : only seen from Deir-es-Zor suspension bridge, with about 4 there on 20/9 and 23/9.

Great Spotted Cuckoo : 1 at Mheidemeh on 20/9.

Little Swift : 1 around cliffs near Palmyra on 21/9.

Alpine Swift : 20 with Little Swift on 21/9. 2 over Palmyra town the following day.

Common Kingfisher : singles from the Deir-es-Zor suspension bridge on 20/9 and 23/9. 1 in Hamad on 25/9.

Pied Kingfisher : common in Euphrates valley. Up to 15 could be seen together at Mheidemeh.

Hoopoe : 1 at Abu Golla on 21/9.

European Bee-eater : small numbers daily around the Palmyra oasis, and in Hamad on 24/9 and 25/9. Absent from Euphrates valley where replaced by Blue-cheeked Bee-eater.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater : common in Euphrates area, e.g. Mheidemeh and Deir-es-Zor, where replacing European Bee-eater.

Roller : singles at Mheidemeh on 20/9, Abu Golla on 21/9 and Hamad on 24/9, with 2 in Hamad on 25/9.

Wryneck : 1 near Palmyra ruins on 21/9.

Crested Lark : common around settlements, even far out in Hamad desert.

Short-toed Lark : 3 around Palmyra ruins on 20/9, 2 at Abu Golla on 21/9, 5 at Mheidemeh on 23/9 and fairly frequent migrant in Hamad with at least 20 on 25/9.

Lesser Short-toed Lark : two records : 2 along road to Talila reserve on 23/9, and a party of 20 beside a Hamad desert reservoir on 24/9.

Bar-tailed Desert Lark : just one definite record of a single in Hamad on 24/9. An unidentified desert lark sp. In Hamad on 25/9.

Temminck's Horned Lark : abundant in desert, where most numerous away from human habitation.

Hoopoe Lark : scattered singles seen during the week, the most seen in a single day was 6 in Hamad on 24/9.

Sand Martin : common migrant.

Swallow : common migrant as above. Surprisingly, no other hirundine species seen.

Tawny Pipit : 3 by the second Hamad oasis and 2 elsewhere in Hamad on 25/9 were the only records.

Richard's / Blyth's Pipit : 1 by the first Hamad oasis on 24/9.

Tree Pipit : ones and twos daily around Palmyra oasis, singles in Hamad on 24/9 and 25/9.

Red-throated Pipit : 3 around second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Yellow Wagtail : a common migrant. Most not ascribed to race but majority probably *m.f.feldeggi*.

Citrine Wagtail : probably a regular migrant in small numbers. A first-winter seen at Abu Golla on 21/9, two fly-overs at Mheidemeh on 23/9, and one in Hamad on 25/9.

Yellow-vented Bulbul : two seen from the car on the outskirts of Damascus on 19/9.

White-cheeked Bulbul : 4 at Deir-es-Zor suspension bridge on 23/9.

Thrush Nightingale : 1 at second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Common Redstart : a male along the road to Talila reserve on 23/9, 1 in Hamad on 24/9 and at least 12 at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Northern Wheatear : a few migrants seen in Hamad but outnumbered by Isabelline.

Isabelline Wheatear : common migrant, 5-10 seen on most days.

Desert Wheatear : a male at Abu Golla on 21/9, 5 along Talila entrance road on 23/9. In Hamad, common with at least 10 seen on 25/9.

Black-eared Wheatear : at least 3 in Hamad on 25/9 including a black-throated male, plus a few others not specifically identified as being this species or Pied Wheatear.

Pied Wheatear : a female in Hamad on 24/9. Several at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9. A few other probables in Hamad not specifically identified (see above).

Cyprus Pied Wheatear : a first-winter beside the road to Deir-es-Zor on 20/9. This species is said to be a regular migrant in Syria.

Mourning Wheatear : seen only around Palmyra ruins, where it was quite common.

Whinchat : one near Talila reserve on 23/9. 5+ daily in Hamad on 24/9 and 25/9.

Rock Thrush : first-winter birds at Palmyra ruins on 21/9 and at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Blue Rock Thrush : male at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Garden Warbler : a common migrant in the Palmyra oasis and in Hamad, high count 10 on 25/9.

Barred Warbler : 1 at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Lesser Whitethroat : a few migrants at Palmyra and in Hamad.

Whitethroat : small numbers of migrants in Hamad only, peak of 6 on 25/9.

Blackcap : small numbers seen at Palmyra and in Hamad.

Graceful Warbler : common in Euphrates valley, heard but not seen at Palmyra on 21/9.

Cetti's Warbler : heard at Mheidemeh on 20/9.

Reed Warbler : common in reeds along Euphrates, migrants seen in ones and twos in Hamad on 24/9 and 25/9.

Marsh Warbler : 1 in Palmyra oasis on 22/9. 1 exceptionally showy bird at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Great Reed Warbler : 1 at Deir-es-Zor on 20/9. 1 at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Icterine Warbler : 1 in Hamad on 24/9. An unidentified *Hippolais* warbler seen briefly in Palmyra oasis on 21/9 could well have been this species.

Olivaceous Warbler : 1 at first Hamad oasis on 24/9 and 1 at the second oasis on 25/9.

Willow Warbler : small numbers of passage migrants in Hamad.

Wood Warbler : 1 in Palmyra ruins on 21/9. 1-2 at first Hamad oasis on 24/9.

Greenish Warbler : 1 at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Chiffchaff : a few migrants in Hamad on 24/9 and 25/9.

Spotted Flycatcher : common migrant. Highest count 30+ in Hamad on 25/9.

Pied / Collared Flycatcher : 1 briefly at the second Hamad oasis on 25/9.

Red-backed Shrike : common migrant. Highest count 20+ in Hamad on 25/9.

Isabelline Shrike : 3 birds seen, all on 20/9 ; 1 in Palmyra ruins, 1 beside the road to Deir-es-Zor, and 1 at Mheidemeh.

Woodchat Shrike : a male in Palmyra ruins on 20/9.

Lesser Grey Shrike : 1 at Mheidemeh on 20/9.

Great Grey Shrike : 3 records : 1 near the Talila reserve entrance on 23/9, and singles in Hamad on 24/9 and 25/9.

Iraq Babbler : about 10 at Mheidemeh in 20/9. At least 4 in reeds below Deir-es-Zor suspension bridge on 23/9.

Magpie : apparently uncommon, noted only around Deir-es-Zor suspension bridge.

Hooded Crow : very few, mainly seen from car near Damascus.

Raven : 2 over cliffs near Palmyra on 21/9 were most probably this species, although Brown-necked Raven not ruled out.

Golden Oriole : 2 at first Hamad oasis on 24/9 could have been the same birds seen at the second oasis the following day.

House Sparrow : small numbers at most sites.

Rock Sparrow : 4 at Palmyra ruins on 20/9 was the only record, apparently absent from much of Syria despite suitable habitat.

Ortolan Bunting : 4 at the first Hamad oasis on 24/9, with 3 at the second oasis the following day.

Total Species Seen : **138**

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