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ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST
THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

Syria and Jordan Trip Report

BIRD TRAVEL REPORT: SYRIA 13/2 –5/3 AND JORDAN 6/3-19/3 1998

BY: Jan Wester, Sweden

I travelled with bicycle, the ultimate birding vehicle, from Aleppo to Deir ez-Zur. The weather was pleasant 10-17 in the days but in the mornings often below zero. I made several "shortcuts" away from the mainroad. There were plenty of small ponds after the winter rain which attracted lots of *tringas*, common snipes and white wagtails. After Deir-ez-Zur I rode along the mainroad to Damaskus and from there to the border by the highway. Constantly in sunshine and headwind except from the 28th when it was heavy rainfall and strong eastern wind. I used Lonely planets map over Jordan and Syria which means I'll spell the names according to it. The binoculars I used was a Swift 10x42.

16/2 Tal'urn- As'sifireh- Al Jaboul.

Big flocks, 100, with undistinguished larks, plenty of sparrows. 10 Dead Sea Sparrows at a concrete irrigation line NE As'sifireh. 1 singing European Serin NW Talhasel.

17/2 Al Jaboul

The sewage ditch and its estuary held a many birds

10 Citrine Wagtails, 1 Wren, 1 Night Heron 1k, 10 Bluethroat, 1 Penduline Tit, 1 Broad-billed Sandpiper, 5 Dunlin, 1 Curlew Sandpiper. This was the only place I recorded Citrine Wagtail

In the lake, reedbeds and along the shore. Little Grebe 10 mostly heard, 50-100 Black-necked Grebe, 1 Slavonian Grebe, distinguished by headprofile and shape of bill within a distance of 50m in comparison with Black-necked, 3 Great Crested Grebe, 3 Cormorant, 1 Bittern, 50 Little Herons, 130 Great White Egrets, 50 Grey Herons, 300 Flamingo, 300 Shelduck, 1 Mallard, 2 Wigeon, 3 Shoveler, 2500 Pochard, 3 Marsh Harrier, 5 Waterrail, 10 Moorhen, 700 Coot, 5 Ringed Plover, 35 Kentish, 100 Lapwing, 50 Little Stint, 30 Temmicks, 5 Common Snipe, 3 Spotted Redshank, 20 Redshank, 2 Ruff, 30 Slenderbilled gull, 30 Blackheaded Gull, 1 Armenian Gull, 10 Yellowlegged Gull, 1 Black Tern, 3 Pied Kingfisher, 1 Kingfisher, 3 Little Owl *lilith*, 5 Crested Lark, 2 Calandra Lark, 4 Stonechat, Bearded Tit calls from 2-5 birds heard in the reeds, 20 Linnet, 200 House Sparrow, 5 Reed Bunting.

18/2

I rode eastwards along the lake, at a manmade ditch, nearby the very rich wet meadows. Then I crossed the cultivated land up to the mainroad.

1 Moustached Warbler, 1 Savi Warbler, 10 Graceful Prinia, 50 Bluethroat, 30 Stonechat, 5 Desert Finch, 30 Corn Bunting, 20 Spanish Sparrow, 1 Penduline Tit, 1 Collared Dove, 1 M 3k Pallid Harrier, 1 F Hen Harrier, 1 subad Golden Eagle, 1 pair Red-crested Pochard. Bluethroat was very common in damp places along the road.

19/2 Maskaneh-Al Mansura

1 Merlin, 1 Calandra Lark, 1 F Wheatear spp

20/2 Al Mansura- Al- jabli

3 Long-legged Buzzard, 1 Steppe/Imperial Eagle, 50 Black Kites, 1000 Rook The straight nightingale call from

Chiffchaff heard commonly.

21/2

I went out as far as possible towards Euphrat near Al jabli.

5 Black Francolin displaing in the early morning, 2 Little Owl, 1 Great Black-headed Gull, 1 Pygmy Cormorant.

Along Euphrat NV Al Khmesiyeh

50-150 Coot/100m river, also lots of Teal, Wigeon and Pochard. 10 Gadwall, 7 Pygmy Cormorant. One possible Slender-billed Curlew seen flying away and land on the other side of a huge ditch. It was small and I noticed pale (white) underwings. This was at a wetland with open water at a north/south ditch between Al Khmesiyeh and Tishrien.

Aj'jaber: one swallow/martin in the village.

4000 Rook during the day, 100 Crow, 100 Jackdaw.

22/2 With Beduins 5km W Shima

2 Barn Swallows, 1000 Starling, 1 M Hen Harrier, 1 km W Shima: 1 M Finsch Wheatear, 2 Barn Swallows.

At'tabine

20 Wood Larks in *Trifolium*

Ayyash

40 Pygmy Cormorant

During the day 40 Little Egrets "only" 200 Crested Larks, no Corn Buntings, previous days I've daily seen some 50-300 just along the road. 10 Magpies/day the three last days.

23/2 Deir ez-Zur, southern end of suspension bridge.

One Scops/Striated Scops Owl seen flying.

24/2 Suspension Bridge

10 singing Cetti's Warbler, 1 Bittern, 100 Night Heron, 2 Little Grebe.

In the parks north of the bridge.

1 Dunnock, 20 Chiffchaff with straight call, one of them showed the characters for *tristis*, 1 pair + 1 singing M White-cheeked Bulbul.

A marsh west of the road towards Ash'hola

50 Showler, 20 Shelduck, 20 Lapwing, 7 Sociable Plover, 3 Marsh Sandpiper, 4 Calandra Lark, 100 Skylark, 1, 10 Meadow Pipit, 50 Linnet.

During the day some 200 Corn Buntings, 300 Skylarks, 500 Crested Larks.

25/2 Kabajeb-Sukna

1 M Pallid Harrier, 1 F Hen Harrier, 1 Long-legged Buzzard, 1 Common Gull, 500 Crested Lark, 700 Skylark, 40 Calandra Lark, 1 heard Yellow Wagtail, 3 Temminck's Horned Lark.

26/2 Sukna- Palmyra

First mountain after Sukna: The first Desert Larks and Mourning Wheatears

At one of the waterholes along the road:

4 Syrian Serins, 40 Greenfinch.

The first palmgrove on the south side of the road.

1 pair Pallid Harrier, 1 Quail, 1 Hoopoe, 200 Corn Buntings, 250 Linnet.

27/2 The Palmgroove

2 Menetrie's Warbler (the first sylvias on my trip), 5 Chiffchaff breverostris and 5 abietinus, 1 Hobby/Red-footed Falcon.

28/2 Palmyra-Al Basiri (Rain and strong E-Wind, other days the wind came from W-SW)

3 Temminck's Horned Lark, 400 Sky Larks, 400 Crested Larks and 300 Cornbuntings. A flock of five possible Crimson-winged Finch at the roadwork area. Short observatontime.

1/3 Al-basiri- Khan Abulshamat

75 Isabelline Wheatear, incredible! Previous I hadn't seen anyone. 2 Northern Wheatear, 2 Finsch's Wheatear, 4 Temminck's. Today less larks and Corn Buntings.

One strange animal hit by car near Kanhl'manqoura. It seemd much like spotted Hyena as it had round ears and spots, shorter backlegs and a rough nose. The thing is that the spotted Hyena only lives south of Sahara. Usually I saw around 10 dogs hit by car everyday and was chased by at least as many!

6/3 Hamman As-Sarakh- Azraq

Flintstone hills before Azraq

20 Temminck's, 10 Short-toed Larks.

In the reminding water at the oasis:

Approximately 10 000 waterfowl, mostly Showler and Pintail. 500 Avocets and lots of small waders, 3 Dotterel flying north.

7/3 Azraq by the lake

1 Scrub Warbler, 3 Short-toed Larks, 2 Desert Wheatear, 1 Merlin, 2 Whitethroat

Shaumari Wildlife Reserve

400 Collared Dove, 2 Desert Wheatear, 1 Quail, 1 Barn Owl

I was told by the parkmanager they have released a falconers Saker worth 250 000 Dinar. 1 Dinar is approximately 2 U.S Dollar!

8/3 20 km west Azraq (road 40) where two big concretepipes goes under the road. North side.

1 Hoopoe Lark, with almost white wings!, 1 Lesser Short-toed Lark, 4 Short-toed Larks, plenty of Temminck's

9/3 Wadi Mujib

First observations of: Blackstart, Brown-necked Raven, Tristram's Grackle, Rock Sparrow, Spectacled Warbler and Yellow-vented Bulbul. One Finsch's Wheatear just south the Wadi.

10/3 Kerak Castle

4 African Rock Martin, 2 Pale Swift.

11/3 Hammamat Afra Hot springs

One pair Bonelli's Eagle, Blue Rock Thrush, 40 African Rock Martin

12/3 Tafila

2 Alpine Swift, 1 Bonelli's Eagle catching prey south Tafila.

13/3 Shobak Castle

1 Tawny Pipit, 1 Blackeared Wheatear

14/3 Petra

13 Fan-tailed Raven, 1 Orphean Warbler, 2 Sinai Rosefinch

15-18/3 Wadi Rum

Nine o'clock in the morning of 18th I percieved a black shadow next to the cliff on the SE side of Jebel Rum. I

couldn't really believe my outmost wish came true, An adult Verreaux Eagle patrolled the cliff right above my head! This was definately the happiest minute of my life. An other bird emerged and I watched them for five minutes, they took height, one dissappearing in the south and the other in the east.

2 Sand Partridge, 30 Sinai Rosefinch, 2 Trumpeter Finch, 2 Shorttoed Eagle(resident), 10 White-crowned Black Wheatear. Just a few migrating Birds of prey, strong southern wind the whole week.

After this happy end I'll just like to tell a couple of observations from Palestine.

13/4 Northern Jerusalem Road 60 10.00-12.30

Low migration right over the town!

5000 Steppe Buzzard

30 Short.toed Eagle

2 Long-legged Buzzard

5 Lesser-spotted Eagle

200 Black Kite

20 Booted Eagle

350 Steppe Eagle

5 Egyptian Vulture

1 Imperial Eagle

400 White Stork

1 Black Stork

15/4 Ginnosar at Sea of Galilee

Eating a wonderful buffét at a restaurante with a panorama window between 12.00-15.00. Outdoors it was 42o and a massive White Stork migration.

14 000 White Stork

50 White Pelican

I hope you enjoyed reading about my bird observations. Contact me if you want to hear more about the perfect combination birding and biking or see the slideshow!

After visiting Palestine I caught the ferry to Cyprus which I crossed two times with bicycle. Ferry to Athen and then to Thessaloniki with bicycle. Then to Vienna by train and from there home to Linköping in Sweden by bike. I was away from home, birding and biking, four months.

Jan Wester

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