

**OMAN & THE UAE: BIRDING ARABIA**

Dec 1, 2011 to Dec 17, 2011

George Armistead



*The sun sets over Oman's Empty Quarter, a sand-desert the size of Texas! (Photo by guide George Armistead)*

When you tell people that you are going on a two-week birding trip to Arabia, you get a lot of different reactions. One of the questions you hear is "There are birds there?!". That was a question we were able to answer resoundingly on this tour. Between the farms, the wadis, the ayns, the jebels, the khawrs and even a mubazzarah, we tallied over 200 species and discovered some wonderful country to boot. And we were not disappointed by the inhabitants of these two welcoming countries, or the lodgings and food they provided us.

We began in the utterly strange metropolis of Dubai, one of seven emirates in the United Arab Emirates. There is no place like Dubai. Where until recently there was essentially only sand, now a bumper crop of incredible, affecting skyscrapers loom. Construction is a national obsession, and one wonders where it's all headed. Still, one happy result of all this development is that there are now a lot of new green areas and wetlands, and the birding is quite good. Our first day we were joined by local expert Steve James, and with his help we had one of our most productive days of the trip. We began at the Dubai Pivot Fields and were greeted by a good variety of passerines and some shorebirds too. We managed great views of Richard's, Blyth's and Tawny pipits, had both European and Siberian stonechats, noted Isabelline Wheatears, Rufous-tailed (Daurian) Shrikes, and saw our only White-tailed Lapwings, a bonus Northern Lapwing, and best of all a Sociable Lapwing! An evening outing netted us Variable Wheater, Small (Desert Lesser) Whitethroat, and Pharaoh Eagle-Owl. A visit to the small emirate of Umm-al-Quwain provided us wonderful studies of a variety of wading birds including about 70 Crab Plovers and 20 Great Knots, and dozens of both sandplover species, among many other birds.

We next moved our quarters to the other side of Dubai, and spent a night in a hotel that was originally designed as a palace for a royal but has since been re-outfitted for tourists. It is sort of out in the sticks, and we kind of had the place to ourselves which was nice but also a little eerie. Nearby we found Cream-colored Courser, Lesser Kestrel, a fleeting Menetries's Warbler, and a pair of Arabian Red Foxes. We pushed on, into the emirate of Abu Dhabi, to its second largest city, Al Ain

(a.k.a. Al Ayn). The name means "the spring" and this large oasis is shared by the UAE and Oman, and we visited both sides. Our first night we spent atop the remarkable Jebel Hafeet, and from here we spied not only Hooded and Hume's wheatears, Little Owl, and Egyptian Vultures, but we also enjoyed a wonderful view of the sun setting over the Rub' al Khali. Also known as the Empty Quarter, this is one of the largest sand deserts in the world, and is nearly the size of Texas. We birded the fringes, while admiring the bleak desolation of what lay just beyond. From Al Ain we crossed the border into Buraimi, Oman and visited a couple of productive birding sites. No tour is complete without a visit to at least one sewage treatment plant and at the one in Buraimi we found a host of waterfowl and shorebirds, and obtained nice studies of snipe, and scored a vagrant Little Pratincole.

Eventually it was time to leave the state-of-the-art UAE for what many call "Old Arabia". We landed in Muscat and immediately felt more at home in a city that clearly has a sense of history. We visited the souq where several folks bought and donned traditional dishdashas. Our first day birding we headed up into the Western Hajar Mountains to the large mountain of Jebel Ahkdar that looks off towards Oman's tallest peak, Jebel Shams. The country here is nearly birdless, but it was still very nice to get into the mountains and see the terrain. And we were rewarded with several sightings of Sand Partridge, enormous Lappet-faced Vultures, and a few Eastern Orphean Warblers. Our second day we visited the very birdy Al Ansab Lagoons where Clamorous Reed-Warblers are common, shorebirds and ducks abound, and we were surprised by a trio of Streaked Weavers. Outside of town we had our third sighting of Arabian Babblers before we endeavored out on a lovely boat trip. In our afternoon at sea we enjoyed a gorgeous tour of the shoreline, and also were richly rewarded by no less than 30 Jouanin's Petrels, 23 Pallas's Gulls, and a rare sighting of a Dwarf Sperm Whale. It was a thrilling and relaxing afternoon on extremely calm seas. The boat was fast, comfortable and a welcome change of pace.

The last leg of the trip is always my favorite. If Muscat is quiet compared to Dubai, then Salalah is yet another level of tranquility, and birds are abundant. The beaches are covered up in Caspian and Sooty gulls, and we tallied 10 species of tern in the area. Sardines are abundant along the beach, and Humpbacked Dolphins ride the breakers. Our first day we were bombarded by new birds, finding Blackstart, Red Sea (Arabian) Warbler, Bruce's Green Pigeon, African Paradise-Flycatcher, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, White-breasted White-Eye, Rueppell's Weaver, Bonelli's Eagle, and still more. A Veiled Chamaeleon was a nice surprise too. East Khawr was full of birds and held a nice group of Cotton Pygmy-Geese, 3 vagrant Great White Pelicans, and an African Collared-Dove. The system of estuarine khawrs around Salalah play host to many birds and seeing Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Baillon's Crake, and Yellow Bittern was especially nice.

Inland we explored a variety of wadis, and ains. Perhaps the most spectacular site was Wadi Hanna. Though we found few birds there, it was quite a shock to find the valley suffused with rich lush green vegetation, and the cluster of African baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) trees seemed remarkably out of place, here at their northern limit. Not far away the legendary frankincense trees grow and we found those in a couple places. A visit to a massive sinkhole, called Tawi Attayr, or "the well of the birds" provided the desired views of the lackluster Yemen Serin, a nice pair of Bonelli's Eagles, and a Namaqua Dove. We finished up with a pilgrimage into the Empty Quarter, calling in at a couple of oases, and going as far north as Qatbit (Qitbit). En route we stopped at a remote melon and turf farm that yielded sightings of about 50 Spotted Sandgrouse, ~50 Greater Short-toed Larks, 2 Bimaculated Larks, and several Greater Hoopoe-Larks. Qitbit provided Hume's Warbler, Nile Valley Sunbird, and a nearby melon field had a Meadow Pipit as well.

All in all it was a pretty good haul. Several groups of birds were especially well represented. As mentioned we saw 10 species of terns, 14 heron-types, 15 raptors, about 35 shorebirds/waders (11 plovers), 7 wheatears, 12 pipits/wagtails, but perhaps most surprising were the 3 species of cetaceans. I want to thank all of you for your good cheer, your flexibility, your efforts made to spot birds, and for being such good company. Also, thanks are due to Justin Halls who played a great host to us, and was instrumental in getting us what we needed when we needed it; especially that chicken marsala! I hope the rest of the holiday season treats you all well, and that I'll see you in the field again soon. Shukran!

--George (a.k.a. the Owl)

For more information about this tour, including future departures, please visit our website at [www.fieldguides.com](http://www.fieldguides.com)

---

#### KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

---

## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (EURASIAN)** (*Anser albifrons albifrons*) – A single in Dubai was nice, but the flock of 35 at East Khawr was really nice to see. As usual, most were 1st-year birds, showing little or no white at the bill.

**EGYPTIAN GOOSE** (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) – A couple at Safa Park. [H]

**RUDDY SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna ferruginea*) – One amid the goose flock at East Khawr stuck out.

**COMMON SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – As usual a decent collection was seen at Ras al Khor in Dubai.

**COTTON PYGMY-GOOSE** (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) – Two nice little groups of half a dozen each at East Khawr and Khawr Mugsahl.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Anas penelope*)

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – Our most commonly seen dabbler, seen 8/13 days.

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca crecca*)

**COMMON POCHARD** (*Aythya ferina*) – Seen three days afield, with our first in Dubai at the Al Warsan Lakes.

**FERRUGINOUS DUCK** (*Aythya nyroca*) – Four were seen at West Khawr and one was at Al Ansab Lagoons.

**TUFTED DUCK** (*Aythya fuligula*) – A handful were present at Al Warsan Lakes and also at Al Ansab Lagoons in Muscat.

### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

**CHUKAR** (*Alectoris chukar*) – Never before had we seen them on the tour, and all of a sudden they are abundant in the Al Ain area. One had to wonder if the recent abundance was related to an upcoming falconry convention in Al Ain. Surely many, if not all of these birds are introduced, but they seem likely to establish themselves there permanently. The area is within their native range.

**ARABIAN PARTRIDGE** (*Alectoris melanocephala*) – Seen twice. A handsome endemic. [E]

**GRAY FRANCOLIN** (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – Abundant in the UAE.

**SAND PARTRIDGE** (*Ammoperdix heyi*) – Yes. This can be a tough one, yet we connected with them on four different days at sites that included the (drum roll...) Green Mubazzarah, Al Ansab Lagoons, Wadi Muaydin, and Jebel Qatar. All appeared to be nominate birds.

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**LITTLE GREBE** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

**EARED GREBE** (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – As usual the only ones observed were at Al Ansab Lagoons in Muscat.

### Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

**GREATER FLAMINGO** (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – This most widespread flamingo species we observed on 10/13 days.

### Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

**JOUANIN'S PETREL** (*Bulweria fallax*) – Wow! It was awesome to see no less than 30 offshore from Muscat. Once we got about 6 miles out we started to run into small groups of them, including two groups of five birds. Still, this is a relatively little known bird. Most of the population is believed to breed on Socotra and sea cliffs in Yemen, Oman, and Somalia.

### Ciconiidae (Storks)

**ABDIM'S STORK** (*Ciconia abdimii*) – Among all the White Storks, were about 20 of these smaller darker storks.

**WHITE STORK** (*Ciconia ciconia*) – We saw none until our last full day in Salalah, and then we saw hundreds south of town.



*Sooty Gulls are abundant residents along the Oman coast; here one loaf on the beach outside our hotel in Salalah. (Photo by guide George Armistead)*

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

**MASKED BOOBY** (*Sula dactylatra melanops*) – Dozens offshore from Mirbat.

**BROWN BOOBY (FORSTER'S)** (*Sula leucogaster plotus*) – One bird on a bouy was seen from Mughshahl.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**GREAT CORMORANT (EURASIAN)** (*Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*) – Fairly common throughout, seen 6/13 days.

**SOCOTRA CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*) – The first ones we saw were off Umm-al-Quwain, but later we saw a few more from Salalah.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

**GREAT WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) – Pelicans?! The three birds at East Khawr are apparently the 8th record for Oman.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**YELLOW BITTERN** (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) – A bonus bird that we picked up among the cattails at Mughshahl, this species is resident in much of its range in the Indian Subcontinent and Indonesia. Some populations migrate or wander however, and perhaps it is these that have given rise to the small population in southern Oman. There is even a record from western Alaska.

**GRAY HERON** (*Ardea cinerea*) – Nearly daily.

**PURPLE HERON** (*Ardea purpurea*) – Seen on four occasions. All were juveniles.

**GREAT EGRET (EURASIAN)** (*Ardea alba alba*) – Seen 6/14 days.

**LITTLE EGRET** (*Egretta garzetta*) – 5/16 days.

**WESTERN REEF-HERON** (*Egretta gularis*)

**WESTERN REEF-HERON (EASTERN)** (*Egretta gularis schistacea*) – Both white morphs and dark morphs were common. Stay tuned to the taxonomy of this species, and specifically to its relations with Little Egret. This (*schistacea*) subspecies appears distinct from other *E. gularis*, and also from Little Egret. If you will indulge me in a little tangent: The more westerly form of Western Reef-Heron (nominate *gularis*; of w. Eurasia) appears a subspecies of Little Egret; but comes in both light and dark morphs, with dark morphs predominating. All of this info comes from unpublished findings by a well-known German ornithologist (Andreas Heilbig) who died before it could be published. If he is correct, which seems likely, then the vagrant records in North America of "Western Reef-Herons" may all in fact refer to dark morph Little Egrets!

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*)

**SQUACCO HERON** (*Ardeola ralloides*) – 3/13 days.

**INDIAN POND-HERON** (*Ardeola grayii*) – Quite similar to the previous species but often seen in more open environments, and usually shows a hint of vinaceous color to the mantle even in winter.

**STRIATED HERON** (*Butorides striata*) – Seen twice.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A small collection of them were at Al Warsan Lakes in Dubai.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Seen 4 days in Salalah, and once in Dubai, where they are quite uncommon. They are apparently declining in the region.

**EURASIAN SPOONBILL** (*Platalea leucorodia*) – 6/13 days.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)



A 2nd-year male Pallid Harrier glides past at the Tawi Attayr, or "the well of the birds". (Photo by guide George Armistead)

**EGYPTIAN VULTURE** (*Neophron percnopterus percnopterus*) – Wonderful views in the Western Hajar mountains, especially from Jebel Hafeet. Seeing one from the boat, sitting side-by-side with a Sand Partridge at a sea cliff near Muscat was memorable.

**SHORT-TOED EAGLE** (*Circaetus gallicus*) – Justin nimbly spotted one from the highway near Salalah.

**EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER** (*Circus aeruginosus*) – 8/13 days.

**PALLID HARRIER** (*Circus macrourus*) – Rich and George saw one en route from Al Ain to Dubai, and then we all enjoyed a nice 2nd year male near Tawi Attayr in Oman.

**SHIKRA** (*Accipiter badius*) – This species is a relatively new arrival to Dubai and Mushrif Park seems to harbor several each winter now. We saw at least two there. What the source population is seems unclear at the moment (probably *cenchroides* of Iran, Afghanistan; or *dussumieri* of India).

**COMMON BUZZARD (STEPPE)** (*Buteo buteo vulpinus*) – Most authorities are splitting this highly migratory taxon from Common Buzzard. Steppes average smaller, and occur in two morphs: a dark morph, and a rufous morph. The subspecies name comes from this latter morph (*vulpes*=fox in latin, *vulpinus*="foxy").

**GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE** (*Aquila clanga*) – Seen 4/13 days with dozens to a couple hundred outside Salalah. Most of the large eagles there seemed to be this species. Considered "vulnerable" by Birdlife International, there are estimated less than 4000 pairs in the wild. Oman would appear an important wintering area for the species.

**STEPPE EAGLE** (*Aquila nipalensis*) – Seen three days, all in the Salalah area.

**IMPERIAL EAGLE** (*Aquila heliaca*) – Great studies of this magnificent eagle, and seeing our first adult was a real highlight for Minturn. Most authorities now split this "Eastern" from the "Spanish" Imperial Eagle, as the two differ in morphology and ecology among other differences.

**BONELLI'S EAGLE** (*Aquila fasciata*) – A couple of nice pairs were observed well.

**BOOTED EAGLE** (*Hieraetus pennatus*) – One pale morph adult outside Salalah was a welcome sight. This species along with Little Eagle is believed the closest living relative of the giant extinct Haast's Eagle of New Zealand. The latter fed on Moas, was estimated near 26 lbs, and owned a wingspan that reached nearly 10 feet! Wouldn't want to run into one of those in a dark alley...

#### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**LESSER KESTREL** (*Falco naumanni*) – One adult male at Ghantoot was quite late.

**EURASIAN KESTREL** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – 7/13 days.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – A gorgeous juvenile showed nicely at Mirbat.

#### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**BAILLON'S CRAKE** (*Porzana pusilla*) – One at Mugsahl was furtive but seen by most us.

**COMMON MOORHEN (EURASIAN)** (*Gallinula chloropus chloropus*) – 5/13 days.

**EURASIAN COOT** (*Fulica atra*) – 5/13 days.

#### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**NORTHERN LAPWING** (*Vanellus vanellus*) – A vagrant to the UAE, we saw one at the Dubai Pivot Fields. Apparently we saw it just in the nick of time as well. Steve informed me that a few days after we saw it, it was dined upon by a Marsh Harrier!

**RED-WATTLED LAPWING** (*Vanellus indicus*) – 10/13 days.

**SOCIABLE LAPWING** (*Vanellus gregarius*) – Yes! A great find was seeing one of these in Dubai. Great views of this critically endangered species.

**WHITE-TAILED LAPWING** (*Vanellus leucurus*) – As usual, there was a nice group at the Dubai Pivot Fields, and we saw no others.



*As larks go, the charismatic Greater Hoopoe-Lark is pretty flamboyant. This one gave us wonderful studies at a farm in the Empty Quarter. (Photo by guide George Armistead)*

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

**PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER** (*Pluvialis fulva*) – Seen 3/13 days. This includes at large flock of ~40 birds at West Khawr that briefly were flying around, that I identified after the fact using a photograph.

**LESSER SAND-PLOVER** (*Charadrius mongolus*) – 7/13 days.

**GREATER SAND-PLOVER** (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) – 2/13 days, with large numbers at Umm-al-Quwain.

**SNOWY PLOVER (KENTISH)** (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – 8/13 days. Now split from Snowy.

**COMMON RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – 7/13 days.

**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius dubius*) – A small group were seen briefly at Al Ansab Lagoons in Muscat.

*Dromadidae (Crab Plover)*

**CRAB PLOVER** (*Dromas ardeola*) – Yes! A truly unique bird, whose relations to other birds is unclear. Some have suggested they are related to shorebird, thick-knees, or pratincoles, while others have posited that they are more similar to gulls or auks! They are unusual in that they use warm sand to aid incubation of their eggs.

*Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)*

**EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus ostralegus*) – 3/13 days.

*Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)*

**BLACK-WINGED STILT** (*Himantopus himantopus*) – 4/13 days with dozens at the Buraimi Sewage Treatment Plant.

**PIED AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) – 2/13 days.

*Jacanidae (Jacanas)*

**PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA** (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) – Two seen, with Justin predicting the one at Khor Mughsahl correctly, and it showed very nicely for us.

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**TEREK SANDPIPER** (*Xenus cinereus*) – 2 days.

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

**GREEN SANDPIPER** (*Tringa ochropus*) – 3 days.

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (*Tringa nebularia*)

**WOOD SANDPIPER** (*Tringa glareola*)

**COMMON REDSHANK** (*Tringa totanus*)

**WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – Just two seen. Most in the region are believed to be the nominate form, but "Siberian" Whimbrel might occur as well. The wintering grounds of the highly endangered "Steppe" Whimbrel (*N. p. alboaxillaris*) are unknown, but possibly some winter in this area.

**EURASIAN CURLEW** (*Numenius arquata*) – 6/13 days.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (EUROPEAN)** (*Limosa limosa limosa*) – 4/13 days.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT (EUROPEAN)** (*Limosa lapponica lapponica*) – Seen only at Umm-al-Quwain, but there we saw easily 100.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*)

**GREAT KNOT** (*Calidris tenuirostris*) – At least 20 or so in among all the shorebirds at Umm-al-Quwain. As usual they kept company with the Bar-tailed Godwits, and could be well-hidden among them.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*)

**LITTLE STINT** (*Calidris minuta*) – 9/13 days.

**TEMMINCK'S STINT** (*Calidris temminckii*) – 2/13 days.

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*) – 10/13 days.

**RUFF** (*Philomachus pugnax*) – 4/13 days.



*A trio of Great White Pelicans at East Khawr was a great find, as it was only about the 8th record for Oman! (Photo by guide George Armistead)*

**COMMON SNIPE** (*Gallinago gallinago*) – Quite a few spread over 6 days, especially at Buraimi.

**PIN-TAILED SNIPE** (*Gallinago stenura*) – One bird called several times as it flushed amid the other snipe at Buraimi. It did not provide much of a view but the call was heard very well.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Apparently, this species is quite abundant in the Arabian Sea. We saw them on a couple occasions, and during one seawatch from the beach by our hotel we noted hundreds one morning.

*Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)*

**CREAM-COLORED COURSER** (*Cursorius cursor*) – Great studies at a couple sites in the UAE.

**SMALL PRATINCOLE** (*Glareola lactea*) – One of the nicest surprises of the trip was seeing this species in Buraimi. A handsome little bird, so small that when perched one could almost take it for a swallow. We saw him two days running and enjoyed nice lengthy studies.

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**SLENDER-BILLED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – 5/13 days.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Abundant in the UAE. Common in Oman.

**SOOTY GULL** (*Ichthyaetus hemprichii*) – 8/13 days. Abundant along the coast of Oman.

**GREAT BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*) – Seen distantly in the UAE, and then seen very well offshore of Muscat. On our pelagic we saw 23. That this species shares the same genus as Sooty Gull, etc. seems very odd to me.

**CASPIAN GULL** (*Larus cachinnans*) – Thankfully, Clements lumps *L. barabensis* (Steppe Gull; we noted a couple our first day in the UAE) in with this species. Identifying these two "taxa" seems quite a lot of guess work to me, and mind you I usually enjoy the challenges of gull identification!

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (HEUGLIN'S)** (*Larus fuscus heuglini*) – We saw just a few this year, with a small group on the beach at Muscat being the only ones we studied to any degree.

**SAUNDERS'S TERN** (*Sternula saundersi*) – This is a good tour for terns. We missed Bridled Tern (generally uncommon on this itinerary) and still had 10 species, including this dubious split from Little Tern. Regardless, it is a poorly studied taxon of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and the northern Indian Ocean. We saw them in the UAE at Warsan Lakes, Umm-al-Quwain, and then had one off of Salalah.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

**WHITE-WINGED TERN** (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)

**WHISKERED TERN** (*Chlidonias hybrida*)

**COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – We saw a couple off the beach at Salalah (where care must be taken to separate them from White-cheeked). Which subspecies was involved is unclear as potentially all four ssp. could occur in the north Indian Ocean in winter; perhaps the nominate is most likely.

**WHITE-CHEEKED TERN** (*Sterna repressa*) – Yes! We seemed destined to miss this species this year. It is an unpredictable bird at this season, and though rather common further north along the coast, we saw none around Muscat, and then finally found a couple at the coast in Salalah. Most of the books treat them as being rather similar to Whiskered Tern in winter, but with their long narrow tails, they are much more similar to Common Tern, but White-cheekeds show a gray (rather than bright white) rump. They also average slightly smaller, and a little darker gray overall, and have slightly shorter, darker legs, than Commons. Good views are required, and we were happy to get those at Raysut and then at West Khawr. At the latter site, one White-cheeked was flying around and bathing with a group of marsh terns (not something I would expect from a Common Tern). [E]

**GREAT CRESTED TERN** (*Thalasseus bergii*) – 8/13 days.

**SANDWICH TERN** (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – 2 days.



*Hooded Wheatears can be tough to find, but when they are, they can be incredibly confiding, as was this handsome male we encountered atop Jebel Hafeet in the UAE. (Photo by guide George Armistead)*

**LESSER CRESTED TERN** (*Thalasseus bengalensis*) – 2 days.

*Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)*

**CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE** (*Pterocles exustus*) – Our only ones this year were seen in Dubai. In the past we have seen these right from our hotel parking lot in Dubai.

**SPOTTED SANDGROUSE** (*Pterocles senegallus*) – Our visit to the central desert/Empty Quarter was preceded by a deluge, with 5 days of rain flooding the area a few weeks before we arrived. The result was an abundance of watering holes for birds. This was great for the birds, but less good for the birders. For the first time ever, we saw not a single sandgrouse at the usual drinking site near Qitbit. Luckily we found over 50 of this species at some farms in the desert. We had great views of both males and females, and got to hear their "hiccup"ing call repeatedly.

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Monna was so pleased to see this species doing what comes naturally on the cliffs along the various wadis that we birded. She had this species pegged as a favorite of the trip, until the Jouanin's Petrel usurped that position.

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Daily, and abundant.

**AFRICAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*) – One at East Khawr was a surprise, as was the one at Qitbit.

**LAUGHING DOVE** (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) – Abundant, daily.

**NAMAQUA DOVE** (*Oena capensis*) – One at Tawi Attayr was unexpected.

**BRUCE'S GREEN-PIGEON** (*Treron waalia*) – Amid all the brown birds of this trip, it was nice to get a splash of color from these handsome birds. Good views at Ain Hamran were duly appreciated.



*Eastern Arabia is an excellent place to study wagtails, especially the yellow wagtail complex. This form, known as the Black-headed Wagtail, is likely one of the first in line to be split off as a good species. (Photo by guide George Armistead)*

*Psittacidae (Parrots)*

**ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET** (*Psittacula krameri*) – 8/13 days. [I]

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**PHARAOH EAGLE-OWL** (*Bubo ascalaphus desertorum*) – Great studies of one bird in the UAE.

**LITTLE OWL (LILITH)** (*Athene noctua lilith*) – Seen well twice which pleased Betsy very much. This one may well be split from Little Owl.

*Apodidae (Swifts)*

**PALLID SWIFT** (*Apus pallidus*) – 4/13 days

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**COMMON KINGFISHER** (*Alcedo atthis*) – Great views of one bird at Qurm Estuary.

*Meropidae (Bee-eaters)*

**GREEN BEE-EATER** (*Merops orientalis*) – All the ones we saw were *M. o. muscatensis*. Seen 7/13 days.

*Coraciidae (Rollers)*

**INDIAN ROLLER** (*Coracias benghalensis*) – Seen the first 8 days in a row.

*Upupidae (Hoopoes)*

**EURASIAN HOOPOE** (*Upupa epops*) – Seen 8/13 days. The nominate forms breeds in northern Oman, but birds from other populations (perhaps *U. e. saturata*, *U. e. ceylonensis*) winter as well.

*Malaconotidae (Bushshrikes and Allies)*

**BLACK-CROWNED TCHAGRA** (*Tchagra senegalus*) – Bob spotted our first at Ain Hamran. Seen also at Tawi Attayr.

*Laniidae (Shrikes)*



**RUFOUS-TAILED SHRIKE (TURKESTAN)** (*Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides*) – Rich spotted one of these outside of Salalah, and it was our only one.

**RUFOUS-TAILED SHRIKE (DAURIAN)** (*Lanius isabellinus isabellinus*) – Seen 5/13 days.

**SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE** (*Lanius meridionalis aucheri*) – Seen 5/13 days.

**SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE** (*Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*) – This form, often split as Steppe Gray Shrike was seen in Al Ain at the Dakker Pools. We had two of them there.

*Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)*

**AFRICAN PARADISE-FLYCATCHER** (*Terpsiphone viridis*) – In the Ains near Salalah we found this species quite common.

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**HOUSE CROW** (*Corvus splendens*) – 9/13 days. A fairly recent arrival in Salalah where they are now common. [I]

**BROWN-NECKED RAVEN** (*Corvus ruficollis*) – Seen 7/13 days. A species that appears on the decline in the UAE.

**FAN-TAILED RAVEN** (*Corvus rhipidurus*) – Fairly common on the plateau above Salalah and around Mirbat, we saw quite a few spread over 3 days.

*Alaudidae (Larks)*

**GREATER HOOPOE-LARK** (*Alaemon alaudipes*) – "A real aristocrat" as Minturn noted. Wonderful studies at a farm out in the Empty Quarter. The nominate form is likely the one involved.

**BLACK-CROWNED SPARROW-LARK** (*Eremopterix nigriceps*) – Not so common this year as they are some, we found them at the Dakker Pools and at a couple spots around Salalah.

**DESERT LARK** (*Ammomanes deserti*) – 6/13 days.

**BIMACULATED LARK** (*Melanocorypha bimaculata*) – The melon fields in the desert provided us a nice pair of these birds.

**GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK** (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) – We had a group of about 50 in the melon fields of the central desert. *C. b. longipennis* is probably the subspecies involved, though *C. b. dukhunensis* is possible as well.

**CRESTED LARK** (*Galerida cristata*) – 8/13 days.

**SKY LARK** (*Alauda arvensis*) – Seen 2/13 days.

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**ROCK MARTIN (PALE CRAG-MARTIN)** (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula obsoleta*) – One of a few birds that we saw every single day.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – 3/13 days.

**COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN** (*Delichon urbicum*) – A pair seen at the Buraimi STP.

*Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)*

**RED-VENTED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus cafer*) – Four days in a row in the UAE. [I]

**WHITE-SPECTACLED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus xanthopygos*) – 9/13 days. [E]

**WHITE-EARED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus leucotis*) – 7/13 days. [I]

*Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)*

**COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (SCANDINAVIAN)** (*Phylloscopus collybita abietinus*) – The only form we identified positively was this one. Seen 5/13 days.

**PLAIN LEAF-WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus neglectus*) – We did well with this species this year seeing several of them well at the wadi near the Green Mubazzarah (...which is surely the best of all Mubazzarahs).

**HUME'S WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus humei*) – A nice surprise was seeing one of these in Qitbit.

*Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)*

**CLAMOROUS REED-WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*) – Seen well at the Dubai Pivot Fields and at Al Ansab Lagoons. [E]

*Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)*

**STREAKED SCRUB-WARBLER** (*Scotocerca inquieta*) – Jebel Qatar yielded great sightings of two pairs, and later we heard another calling up on Jebel Ahkdar.

**GRACEFUL PRINIA** (*Prinia gracilis*) – 6/13 days.

Sylviidae (Old World Warblers)

**BLACKCAP** (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – Two seen in the Dhofar Mountains were likely *S. a. dammholzi*.

**SMALL WHITETHROAT** (*Sylvia minula*) – A.k.a. Desert Lesser Whitethroat. We saw one well at Qarn Nazwa, where it was rather uncharacteristically feeding right out in the open for a minute or two, providing us great views. [E]

**EASTERN ORPHEAN WARBLER** (*Sylvia crassirostris*) – In route to Jebel Ahkdar we found a confiding pair. A close relative of the Arabian Warbler.

**ASIAN DESERT WARBLER** (*Sylvia nana*) – Several good encounters on four different days, with perhaps the best one being at Muntasar.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT** (*Sylvia curruca*) – 8/13 days.

**RED SEA WARBLER** (*Sylvia leucomelaena*) – A.k.a. Arabian Warbler. We found several nice cooperative individuals one day near Salalah. [E]

**MENETRIES'S WARBLER** (*Sylvia mystacea*) – As always, this bird is elusive. We found just one at Ghantoot, and it didn't hang around long but several of us managed pretty good views of it. [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

**RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER** (*Ficedula parva*) – One bird at Qitbit, seen fleetingly.

**BLUETHROAT** (*Luscinia svecica*) – 5/13 days, several birds were singing.

**BLACK REDSTART** (*Phoenicurus ochrurus semirufus*) – 5/13 days.

**HOODED WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe monacha*) – These birds can be difficult to find sometimes, and others you can drive right up to them and have them feeding around your feet, as we did this year. Great views atop Jebel Hafeet.

**HUME'S WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe albonigra*) – Sometimes referred to as the waiters of the Hajars, where they are quite common and elegantly attired with good posture to boot. 5/13 days.

**MOURNING WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe lugens lugentoides*) – This form is split by most authorities and called Arabian Wheatear or South Arabian Wheatear. We only saw one this year, but he put on a good show for us and was right in the same spot we pretty much always see one. [E]

**VARIABLE WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe picata*) – A.k.a. Eastern Pied Wheatear, we enjoyed nice views of several outside of Dubai on our first day of the tour.

**RED-TAILED WHEATEAR (RED-TAILED)** (*Oenanthe xanthopygma chrysopygia*) – A.k.a. Persian Wheatear, we found them commonly around the UAE. Seen 5/13 days, all in the UAE. [E]

**DESERT WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe deserti*) – Seen 9/13 days and as usual, are most regularly detected wheatear.

**ISABELLINE WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe isabellina*) – 3/16 days. The grassy areas in the UAE are often good for this species but we also saw one at a farm in the central desert of Oman.

**STONECHAT (EUROPEAN)** (*Saxicola torquatus rubicola*) – One in Dubai was unusually late.

**STONECHAT (SIBERIAN)** (*Saxicola torquatus maurus*) – 3/16 days.

**BLACKSTART** (*Cercomela melanura*) – A handsome muscicapid chat, we saw them on two days of the Salalah leg of the trip.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**BLUE ROCK-THRUSH** (*Monticola solitarius*) – Seen two days. While Clements still considers this a thrush, some authorities now treat it as a chat (Muscicapid).

**SONG THRUSH** (*Turdus philomelos*) – Seen two day, with a couple in Ghantoot and another two in Qitbit.

Timaliidae (Babblers)

**ARABIAN BABBLER** (*Turdoides squamiceps*) – These birds really helped us out this year showing well on three different days at Al Ain, Buraimi, and again outside of Muscat at Bandar Jissar. [E]

Zosteropidae (White-eyes)

**WHITE-BREASTED WHITE-EYE** (*Zosterops abyssinicus*) – Seen 3 days in the Salalah area.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

**BANK MYNA** (*Acridotheres ginginianus*) – A few in Dubai at the Pivot Fields. [I]

**COMMON MYNA** (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Daily. [I]

**ASIAN PIED STARLING** (*Gracupica contra*) – A couple in Dubai. [I]

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – A small group in Dubai was unusual.

**TRISTRAM'S STARLING** (*Onychognathus tristramii*) – Seen 4 days in the Salalah area. This species traditionally breeds along rocky cliff faces, but is prospering in association with humans. It is named for the Reverend Henry Baker Tristram, a founder of the British Ornithological Union. [E]

*Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)*

**NILE VALLEY SUNBIRD** (*Hedydipna metallica*) – A sweet pickup in Qitbit was at least one male at Qitbit.

**PALESTINE SUNBIRD** (*Cinnyris osea*) – Seen 3/14 days. [E]

**SHINING SUNBIRD** (*Cinnyris habessinicus*) – Two days, with many around this year.

**PURPLE SUNBIRD** (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) – 6/13 days.

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)*

**WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (GRAY-HEADED)** (*Motacilla flava thunbergi*) – A couple in Dubai.

**WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (BLACK-HEADED)** (*Motacilla flava feldegg*) – Several seen well in Dubai. Some suggest that if the Yellow Wagtail complex is split that this would be the first most obvious taxon to split.

**CITRINE WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla citreola*) – 6/13 days, the most common wagtail around the khawrs in Salalah.

**GRAY WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla cinerea*) – 4/13 days.

**WHITE WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla alba*) – 7/13 days.

**RICHARD'S PIPIT** (*Anthus richardi*) – A couple were seen very well on the pivots in Dubai.

**LONG-BILLED PIPIT** (*Anthus similis*) – In a wadi outside of Salalah we found a confiding pair.

**BLYTH'S PIPIT** (*Anthus godlewskii*) – At the Pivot fields in Dubai we saw this species well.

**TAWNY PIPIT** (*Anthus campestris*) – 6/13 days.

**MEADOW PIPIT** (*Anthus pratensis*) – Seeing one in melon field near Qitbit was a surprise.

**OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT** (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – Rich photographed one at Ain Hamran.

**WATER PIPIT** (*Anthus spinoletta*) – 5/13 days.

*Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)*

**HOUSE BUNTING** (*Emberiza striolata striolata*) – Split by most as Striolated Bunting, we saw these birds rather easily this year, finding them on six days.

**CINNAMON-BREASTED BUNTING** (*Emberiza tahapisi*) – A.k.a. African Rock Bunting, this species is abundant in Dhofar. Around Ain Hamran and Tawi Attayr we saw many dozens.

*Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)*

**YEMEN SERIN** (*Serinus menachensis*) – This one took a little work this year, but eventually this LBJ (little brown job) rewarded us with good views. The small population of them in southern Oman appears isolated from the main population by over 700 miles. For what its worth, after seeing the Ankober Serin in Ethiopia last May, I'd bet these two birds are closely related within the *Serinus*. [E]

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus hufufae*) – Nearly daily. All of us were struck by how different they appear here than those do in North America, where the introduced species is from stock of the "domesticus group. P. d. hufufae is within the "indicus" group which some authorities might split as Indian House Sparrow.

*Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)*

**RUEPPELL'S WEAVER** (*Ploceus galbula*) – Common around Salalah.

**STREAKED WEAVER** (*Ploceus manyar*) – Surely introduced but a surprise none the less was seeing three of these birds at Al Ansab Lagoons, outside of Muscat. [I]

*Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)*

**INDIAN SILVERBILL** (*Euodice malabarica*) – Seen 7 days between the UAE and Muscat.

**AFRICAN SILVERBILL** (*Euodice cantans*) – Seen all four days in the Salalah region.

---

## MAMMALS

**ROUSETTE FRUIT BAT SP.** (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*) – A.k.a. Egyptian Rousette, this was the large bat we saw flying around the beach by our hotel.

**INDO-PACIFIC HUMPBACKED DOLPHIN** (*Sousa chinensis*) – This species was quite common along the beaches of

Salalah. We watched a couple riding breakers at West Khawr.

**SPINNER DOLPHIN** (*Stenella longirostris*) – We had a great pod of maybe 18 animals leaping dramatically out of the water from a seawatch we did from Mirbat.

**DWARF SPERM WHALE** (*Kogia simus*) – A great sighting on our pelagic was one of these enigmatic small whales. Most of what is known of these animals is from strandings, so we were quite privileged to see one surface four different times. Unfortunately it got further away each time and so no photographs were obtained. Most authorities place this species along with Pygmy Sperm Whale in the family Kogiidae, but formerly they were placed in the same family as the Sperm Whale.

**RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Seeing a nice pair of the Arabian form (*arabica*) was a treat. With those big ears and duskier appearance they look quite different from those elsewhere.

---

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Reptiles:

Wadi Racer

Veiled Chamaeleon

Blue-headed Agama

Spiny-tailed Lizard (Dub)

We also photographed another lizard at Ain Hamran that Justin says is quite common, yet may remain undescribed.

---

**Totals for the tour: 212 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa**