



Field Guides Tour Report

ISRAEL MIGRATION MAGIC 2018

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Doug Gochfeld & local guide

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



During our transit between the northern Negev Desert and Eilat, we made an afternoon stop at HaMeishar Plains in the central Negev. This was a phenomenal taste of desert birding, especially for the time of day, producing elegant Temminck's and subtly beautiful Bar-tailed larks, charismatic Desert Wheatears, and a rather obliging Tawny Pipit, all against the backdrop of an expansive stretch of desert rimmed by rolling desert hills. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

This tour was the inaugural Field Guides trip to Israel, at long last. Our thorough exploration of the southern half of the country featured a splendid ten days of breathtaking scenery, good company, and of course, fantastic birds. Birds weren't the only living things we encountered either, as we had a very nice cross section of the flora and fauna one can see in this ecologically diverse sliver of the world.

We started out in Tel Aviv, and from there headed south to our first port of call in the northern Negev Desert, but not before stopping in the very southern reaches of the Judean Hills for a great introduction to the ecology of the region at Har Amasa. The birds on the ground were great, with hordes of Blue Rock Thrushes, a cooperative and close Little Owl, several still lingering Finsch's Wheatears, Black-eared and Isabelline Wheatears, Masked Shrike, Eastern Orphee and Eastern Subalpine warblers, lots of Spectacled Warblers on territory, and a Long-billed Pipit, all under the canopy of a solid migration of large birds, highlighted by White Storks, Short-toed Snake-Eagles (the powers that be have cut "snake" out of the name, but I daresay keeping it captures the essence of the species much better), and a surprise (Eastern) Imperial Eagle. We also saw one of the rare species of Royal Irises that is endemic to the region, and Eran flipped over a rock at one point to reveal a Deathstalker Scorpion. It was a smashing start to the tour, and we hadn't even reached the Negev yet!

Our first day in the northern Negev Desert featured a trip out towards Nitzana and Ezuz, famed in birding circles as the best places in the Western Palearctic to see both MacQueen's Bustard and Cream-colored Courser. We saw both species very well, and had a great bustard experience, with at least five individuals, including two displaying males, performing their absurd dance where they do their best impression of a bobblehead doll running on stilts while ensconced in a giant feather duster. After our morning experience there, and our picnic breakfast amid the Lesser Whitethroats at Ezuz, we worked our way back towards Mashabei Sadeh, but not before seeing another Little Owl (this one of the Lilith desert subspecies), and a productive stop at the Nitzana sewage pools where we found a crisp Ferruginous Duck and a pile of Ruffs being chased around by a pair of mildly hungry Peregrine Falcons. We finished off the day with a trip to Yeruham Lake, and then a pair of Long-eared Owls back on the grounds of the kibbutz. Our second day in the desert was a bird and travel day, as we headed south towards Eilat. Despite the amount of ground we had to cover, we still saw a pile of great birds. Sde Boker produced an incredible vulture spectacle, with both Egyptian and Eurasian Griffon present in very good numbers. The fields also produced

Desert Finch, good numbers of Spotted Sandgrouse and excellent views of Black-bellied Sandgrouse. The Ovdar Gorge area was yet another incredible setting, and we had a truly special experience with the resident pair of Bonelli's Eagles there, as they flew around in tandem, chased the nesting Griffon Vultures, and terrorized the local pigeons. Heading south we dropped down into the fantastically scenic Maktesh Ramon (the Ramon Crater), known as the Grand Canyon of Israel, and then continued to HaMeishar Plains. The Meishar produced a wonderful subset of desert birds, with the real prizes being Temminck's Larks, Desert Wheatears, a Tawny Pipit, and finally a pair of Bar-tailed Larks. We ended up in Eilat after dark, where the star of the show was the first of our excellent dinner buffets.

Our first day in the Eilat area took us to Ofira Park at dawn, where the continuing male Cyprus Warbler eventually came good for the entire group- what a great bonus bird for the area! After a great breakfast we wended our way up into the Eilat Mountains, with the goal of witnessing a good raptor migration. Our goal was met and then some, as the Steppe Buzzards had just started flowing over the count site less than twenty minutes prior to our arrival. We watched, enthralled by the seemingly endless passage of Steppe Buzzards, Steppe Eagles, Eurasian Marsh Harriers and more as they piled through the mountains heading north to their breeding grounds scattered across Eurasia. We were eventually able to pry ourselves away from this spectacle and head down to the lower mountains, where Wadi Shlomo had another set of great fauna awaiting us, in the form of Ornate Mastiguire, Sand Partridge, White-crowned Wheatear, and a wonderful family of Nubian Ibex. After the rousing success of the morning, and a fantastic and borderline gratuitous lunch, our afternoon had a lot to live up to. It delivered most of the goods. Our visit to the honeypot that is the K20 salt pans was great as expected, with the continuing Lesser Flamingo (only the 2nd ever record for Israel) on site among the several hundred Greater Flamingoes, a rare-for-the-region Eurasian Curlew, Red-necked Phalarope, Common Crane, and much more. At the sewage pool at K19, we were in the good company of one hundred other birders in missing the Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse which usually come to drink at dusk. The consolation prize was much more than a consolation however, with not one, not two, but THREE Great Bitterns taking flight from the reeds half an hour before dark and then circling around and around vocalizing, eventually becoming part of a symphony of several heron species that were circling and calling as they tried to muster up the courage to migrate over the imposing stretch of desert to the north.

The next three full days were all spent in the Eilat Region, largely in the Arava Valley. We went to Yotvata and the International Bird Research Center in Eilat (IBRCE), known locally simply as the Bird Park or Bird Sanctuary, multiple times, and each time found new things. Highlights at Yotvata were Bimaculated Lark, Caspian Stonechat, larks and pipits galore, Egyptian Nightjar, a shocker of a Nubian Nightjar, an elegant male Pallid Harrier, a sea of migrant Black Kites coming in to roost, and a Black-eared Wheatear annihilating a grasshopper without concern for our close proximity. The IBRCE contributed Citrine Wagtail, Water Rail, Little Crake, Sedge Warbler and Red-necked Phalarope. Other highlights from the south were multiple Hooded Wheatears, Rüppell's Warbler, three Semicollared Flycatchers, Crowned Sandgrouse, a big surprise vagrant Turkestan (Red-tailed) Shrike, Greater Sand-Plover, Lesser Kestrels (including a great foraging group at Yotvata), some very friendly (Arabian) Green Bee-eaters and a dizzying array of Western Yellow Wagtail taxa.

Our departure morning from Eilat started with a productive stroll through Holland Park which gave us a very memorable encounter with a low flying dark-morph Booted Eagle. After breakfast and check-out we worked our way north with a farewell visit to the flamingoes at K20, and then blasted north to the Shezaf Nature Reserve, where despite the midday heat, we triumphed by getting preposterously good walkaway views of our main target: Arabian Warbler. In addition to that we came away with Scrub Warbler and our second Cyprus Warbler of the trip, as well as getting close up views of the massive Egyptian Mastiguire for the whole group. We continued to make our way north via yet another good Aroma lunch stop, and ended up at the Navit Pools for the golden hours of the late afternoon. Navit was great, with a plethora of waterfowl, including our only Pochards and quite a few of the regionally threatened Ferruginous Ducks. Dead Sea Sparrows and both Eurasian and Clamorous Reed-Warblers were on site, as was a great male Citrine Wagtail, and the climax: a great performance from the cryptically plumaged and bizarre Eurasian Wryneck! We made our way up to Almog where yet another delicious dinner awaited us.

Our full day in the Dead Sea featured an early morning jaunt, for most of the group, down to Wadi Salvadora. While we were hiking in towards the impressive sheer wall at the head of the canyon, raptors began heading north in a slow trickle, a prelude for what the rest of the day would offer. When we arrived at the spring, we were treated to a very intimate experience with Sinai Rosefinches, Striolated Bunting, and Trumpeter Finch. The rest of the day brought us to Enot Tzukim Nature Reserve (also known as En Fashkha), the lowest Nature Reserve on the planet, at 417 feet below sea level. Here we watched the continuing stream of raptors and storks moving north through the mountains, and also had excellent looks at Clamorous Reed-Warbler. Our lunch at The Last Chance was a delightful affair, and one that was intermittently punctuated by people leaving the table to go outside and watch the raptor migration overhead, which had turned from a stream of birds to a roaring river of raptors overhead, with several thousand coming over just while we were eating lunch. It was truly incredible!

The final leg of the tour saw us heading back to Tel Aviv via the urban nature jewel that is the Jerusalem Bird Observatory, right in the heart of the city, right across the street from the Knesset. It was a brilliant ending, with a great juxtaposition of nature and urbanity to ease us back from the desert into the city. Finches showed very well here, with a couple of awesome Hawfinches, with their big honkin' bills and beautiful patterning, as well as some Eurasian Siskins and a Brambling. The Water Rail that had wintered there also put on a fantastic show just hanging out in the open for most of our time there, in very un-rail-like fashion. We wrapped up the day with an overwhelming culinary experience at Abu Ghosh, followed by the last couple of additions to the checklist in the form of Sardinian Warbler and Eurasian Jay before we said goodbye to Eran and headed into Tel Aviv where we parted with our driver Shibli.

Thanks for joining me and Eran on this adventure through the Holy Land. It was a blast to share this experience with such a knowledgeable and attentive group, and your enthusiasm for and interest in all things relating to the natural history and culture of the region really added to the richness of the tour. Here's to meeting you all again in the field somewhere in this great big birding-verse!

-Doug

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).

EGYPTIAN GOOSE (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) – The first bird of the trip, at night in Tel Aviv. This is an introduced species in Israel, and while the species does occur close enough in the wild to have a potential for occurrence, most or all of the ones encountered in the country are likely of introduced stock. [I]

COMMON SHELDUCK (*Tadorna tadorna*) – There were still around a hundred of these local winterers lingering at the K20 salt pools in Eilat when we first arrived, but by the time of our departure five days later the number had already dwindled to just a couple of dozen.

GARGANEY (*Spatula querquedula*) – We had a really impressive showing of this charismatic teal during our time in Eilat. Our first were a group seen very well at K19 on our first evening there, but we subsequently had migrant flocks of over a hundred at both North Beach and at K20.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – Perhaps the most widespread duck we encountered. The most impressive display was a group of 400 during our first visit to K20, which was likely in large part a recently arrived group of migrants.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – Our only ones were at Navit Pools in the southern Dead Sea.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Mareca penelope*) – A pair at K20 during our first visit there, and then quite a few drakes at the Navit Pools.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Very scarce in Eilat, though we did get a few during our final visit to the IBRCE. We also picked them up in the Negev and at Navit Pools.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – A beautiful pair at the Nitzana sewage pools, which brought on a lengthy and wonderful discourse on their beauty from Eran. We also saw them in several places in Eilat, including a very obliging male at the mouth of the canal at North Beach.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca crecca*) – Scattered throughout. Very widespread, from the Negev to Eilat to Almog.

COMMON POCHARD (*Aythya ferina*) – A pair spotted by Mary in the back of the Navit Pools were our only ones of the tour.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK (*Aythya nyroca*) – We did very well with these oft-scarce ducks this time around, seeing them in four locations (Nitzana, Yeruham, Navit Pools, and Og Reservoir). The golden eye is really quite striking.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

SAND PARTRIDGE (*Ammoperdix heyi heyi*) – We had repeated great experiences watching the goofy antics of these regionally endemic chickens of barren desert canyons. Their monotonous vocals can be incessant in these remote canyons, sometimes being the only thing that breaks the otherwise complete silence. [E]

COMMON QUAIL (*Coturnix coturnix*) – One that flushed at the IBRCE was seen briefly by a few at the head of the line as it flew away.

CHUKAR (*Alectoris chukar*) – They're absent from the Eilat area, but we saw quite a few during our first three days traversing the central part of the country and the northern Negev.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – Seen in several places, with the best overall experience coming at Nitzana, where we had great looks and were also serenaded with their comical cackling calls from the various reed beds.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – A fortuitous discovery upon our evening arrival at K19, since this is a species we don't expect to see on every visit, and it wasn't there the next day.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – What awesome birds! Any time you can see a mass of giant pink birds you know you're doing something right. We saw 500 or more on multiple occasions at K20, and we even saw a northbound flock that could have been in active migration during our dusk vigil at K19.

LESSER FLAMINGO (*Phoeniconaias minor*) – This lingering individual provided a great study of how to differentiate Lesser from the aforementioned Greater Flamingoes. This regional mega rarity was only the 2nd record of this species in Israel, and was found just two weeks before our visit- excellent timing!

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – While we saw a few of them elsewhere, including some migrating along the ridges overlooking the Dead Sea, none of them compared to the great movement of them through the Eilat Mountains during our first visit to the raptor migration watch point. Watching these large birds thermaling up over the barren mountains of Egypt and then streaming over us in glides without so much as a single flap was a truly incredible sight!

WHITE STORK (*Ciconia ciconia*) – Quite a few on our first day in the center of the country, and then at Yotvata. Inexplicably absent from Nitzana, though there weren't very good migration conditions on our morning there.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Scattered around Eilat in small numbers, but the most memorable group may have been the small group that we saw flying high over the Eilat Mountains from lower Wadi Shlomo. These were all adults in pristine plumage, and we could see their impressive breeding garb despite their high altitude. Seeing waterbirds like this flying over desert mountains is a juxtaposition that is provided by very few places in the world, and one better than Eilat.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BITTERN (*Botaurus stellaris*) – Whoa! An incredible and completely unanticipated experience with three or four of these great waders during our evening at K19. It is, like our American Bittern, a cryptically patterned, shy species. The union of those two traits and its proclivity for dense reed beds means that it isn't often seen, but before sunset a pair of them suddenly lifted off from the vegetated edge of the pool, loudly calling to each other, and were shortly joined by a third. Even better (for us) was that instead of just getting up, calling a couple of times, and migrating north, these three (perhaps even joined by a fourth individual later on) circled the pond for 35 (!!!) minutes, and became more vocal as it got darker. Eventually they were part of a concerto of four or more species of herons all calling as they circled in preparation for their impending night migration over the desert to the north.

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Common migrant in Eilat, including an indecisive group of 24 flying circles over K20 one late afternoon.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*) – We had one of these flying around and joining in with the heron cacophony at K19.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Actually quite scarce on the tour route, but quite a few were at Yeruham.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*) – The old world analog to our Snowy Egret was fairly common in Eilat.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Scattered here and there in appropriate habitat throughout.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – K19, IBRC and a couple of other places around Eilat.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Yeruham and K19.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Our first visit to K19 featured a flyover group of these, and we had another three standing on the dike at K20 a few days later.

EURASIAN SPOONBILL (*Platalea leucorodia*) – We encountered one individual at the salt pans south of the IBRCE, and then almost certainly the same individual having worked its way a few miles to the north, at K20 later the same day. We also had one teed up in a dead tree at the Navit Pools.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We had migrants well away from water at both Har Amasa and then the bird that Mary spotted standing on the side of the cliff at the bustard site along the road to Ezuz.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

EGYPTIAN VULTURE (*Neophron percnopterus*) – We had them around their breeding area at the Ovdad Gorge, and then had migrants in the Eilat Mountains, at Wadi Salvador, and in the never-ending stream of raptors going over The Last Chance restaurant and Kibbutz Almog. A couple of the birds at Wadi Salvador were likely local breeders as well. A great looking bird of prey!

EURASIAN GRIFFON (*Gyps fulvus*) – Excellent numbers of them around a monitored carcass at Sde Boker, and then excellent views of several birds in the Ovdad Gorge, including five of them on nests. This formerly abundant species is now very threatened and declining in the region for many reasons. The 75 or so individuals we saw at once near Sde Boker may represent somewhere in the realm of half the remaining individuals in Israel.

SHORT-TOED SNAKE-EAGLE (*Circaetus gallicus*) – Many at Har Amasa, including a noticeable migratory movement, then several moving through the Eilat Mountains, and then many moving through with the amazing flow of raptors on our last birding afternoon around Almog.

LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE (*Clanga pomarina*) – One or two of these (including an adult) were mixed into the mind-numbing waves of raptors at Almog.

GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE (*Clanga clanga*) – We had an adult coming down from its diurnal migration at last light at Yeruham which was seen well by all, and then we had another amongst the raptor migrant madness at Almog.

BOOTED EAGLE (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) – We had a distant one at Yeruham to start, and then a couple of standout light morphs on our morning in the Eilat Mountains, but the most memorable was the excellent dark morph that came in low over the group openly flashing those white headlights without a care as we finished up our final morning walk in Holland Park. It also goes without saying that there were a few mixed into the prayer-answering procession of pajaros at Almog.

STEPPE EAGLE (*Aquila nipalensis*) – This is the common large eagle during the tour, as southern Israel is the concentration point for the spring migration of perhaps the majority of the world population of Steppe Eagles. Seeing these moving through in numbers, including around 50 on our visit to the Eilat Mountains, including some kettles and streams of 7-10 birds at once, was a highlight of the migration through the mountains for many people. There were also dozens during the onslaught of migrant raptors around Almog.

IMPERIAL EAGLE (*Aquila heliaca*) – Our very first large eagle of the tour was surprisingly an immature of this low density migrant at Har Amasa. There was also one picked out in the distance among the throngs of birds passing over The Last Chance.

BONELLI'S EAGLE (*Aquila fasciata*) – One of the highlights of the tour for many people was the show that we were treated to by the pair of Bonelli's Eagles in the Ovdad Gorge. This pair is one of perhaps as few as ten remaining pairs breeding in the country, and our views were some of the best that Eran and Doug had ever gotten.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) – The most widespread harrier in the region. It's a breeder, winterer, and a common passage migrant, and we got repeated good views of them in every context imaginable, from coursing low over fields hunting to gliding thousands of feet up in the sky in migration. We even saw one migrating through the mist at the JBO.

HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Yotvata is the best place for these during March, and it certainly came through for us in this respect, as we picked up this species on bout of our visits. This is the old world analog to our Northern Harrier, with which it was until recently considered conspecific by the AOU.

PALLID HARRIER (*Circus macrourus*) – We had a couple of males in active migration, at the Ovdad Gorge and Holland Park, and then multiples taking a break from their grueling migration to hunt the fields at Yotvata. One gorgeous male put on a show for us on both of our visits to Yotvata, and we even got great scope views of it perched. This is surely in the running for the most elegant of the harriers, which is really saying something for such an overall elegant group of birds.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*) – We had these scattered around in at least six birding locations.

BLACK KITE (*Milvus migrans*) – Very widespread and one of the most common of the migrant raptors we see. While they were indeed a prominent player in the aerial tsunami of raptors overhead at Almog, the most memorable experience with them was the evening roost aggregation at Yotvata, where a cloud of them descended from their migration to roost in the tamarisks to the north as we stood vigil for more crepuscular birds.

COMMON BUZZARD (WESTERN) (*Buteo buteo buteo*) – We had one of these nominate versions of Common Buzzard (which is by many authorities considered to be a different species than Steppe Buzzard) perched at the Nitzana sewage ponds, and we had another one down in the Eilat area a few days later.

COMMON BUZZARD (STEPPE) (*Buteo buteo vulpinus*) – The most common of the migrant raptors by a couple of orders of magnitude, they comprised the bulk of the mayhem in the diurnal migration events which we saw.

LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD (*Buteo rufinus*) – Seen in a couple of locations in the northern Negev, and then as a migrant amidst the very similar looking Steppe Buzzards in the Eilat Mountains, affording an excellent opportunity for comparison of its different structure and patterning.

Otididae (Bustards)

MACQUEEN'S BUSTARD (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*) – These iconic birds of the Negev put on an incredible show for us during our morning in the Nitzana area. In addition to their insanity-laced loony tunes breeding display which would get them put into a padded cell were they human, we also got to see them "gracefully" flying for long distances, showing why their seasonal movements and small scale erratic migrations have been recorded as being "on foot". These are truly incredible birds, and are on their own worth the price of admission.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

WATER RAIL (*Rallus aquaticus*) – We had one of these giving brief glimpses at very close range at the blind at the IBRCE, but that more typical experience was rendered moot when we got to the JBO and saw their absurdly showy version strutting around in the open around their small water feature.

LITTLE CRAKE (*Zapornia parva*) – Most folks caught up to this at Anita Lake at the IBRCE.

AFRICAN SWAMPHEN (*Porphyrio madagascariensis*) – Seen briefly by Mary at the Navit Ponds, one also vocally respond to playback there, though that one stayed hidden.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*) – In appropriate habitat throughout.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – Also widespread in appropriate habitat, with especially good numbers at K19.

Gruidae (Cranes)

COMMON CRANE (*Grus grus*) – We had one wandering individual over the course of a couple of days at both K20 and Yotvata.

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

EURASIAN THICK-KNEE (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) – Carla took the slogan "never stop birding" dead seriously by finding a pair in broad daylight while the rest of us were still lollygagging around the lunch table at Pub 40. We also heard their eerie nocturnal wailing during our night excursion at Yotvata, and then unexpectedly had three of them in the plains at Ovda, which gave excellent, close looks.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – K20 had the highest concentrations of them, but we had them at most every wetland habitat we visited down to the smallest kibbutz sewage ponds.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

SPUR-WINGED LAPWING (*Vanellus spinosus*) – Considered by many to be the actual national bird of Israel (Hoopoe be damned!), these ubiquitous shorebirds certainly do embody many of the (best) traits of the region's populace, including the ability to seemingly survive anywhere.

GREATER SAND-POLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) – We ran into one of these small plovers (a big small plover, really) at K20, which added some nice species spice to the shorebird mecca that those salt pools are.

KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH) (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – Really good numbers at K20 this spring. While some were undoubtedly migrants, this still seems to bode well for the local breeding population.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – This Eastern Hemisphere version of the American Semipalmated Plover was one of the more widespread shorebirds in the Eilat area.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (CURONICUS) (*Charadrius dubius curonicus*) – A few of these smart looking charadrius in the Eilat area.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*) – A rarity here, with typically only a couple seen per spring. We had one fly by us at K20 giving reasonable looks, and then we improved those looks a while later when it all of a sudden landed on the dike next to us and then took off and gave us a slow-motion flyby at point-blank range.

RUFF (*Calidris pugnax*) – One of the most common shorebirds in the region, but the large tight group of up to two hundred at Nitzana (being intermittently harried by a pair of adult Peregrine Falcons) was still very impressive, and certainly signaled migration!

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – Widespread and common around Eilat, but in low numbers.

LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*) – Widespread and common in Eilat, in fairly good numbers, though this year's aggregations weren't that impressive given the numbers that are sometimes here.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago*) – We saw Common Snipe (not to be mistaken with the artist formerly known as Common Snipe which included the Wilson's Snipe of the Americas before the two species were correctly split from each other) in at least five locations, including some very good views. The conditions in water features in the desert are excellent for getting good looks at this species which typically uses its camouflage to seamlessly blend in to marshy settings on both its breeding and wintering grounds.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – We had a couple at K20 on our first visit there, and then had two on the salt pans at the Bird Park's blind on our final two visits there.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Common around Eilat.

GREEN SANDPIPER (*Tringa ochropus*) – Common around Eilat, and it's always interesting to see this species, which is in most ways almost indistinguishable from our Solitary Sandpiper, in flocks as they migrate north. We had flocks of up to twenty at some spots.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – Just a few in the Eilat area, which seemed surprisingly low.

MARSH SANDPIPER (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – These needle-billed waders that sound very much like Lesser Yellowlegs were widespread around Eilat, though in small densities.

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – Nitzana and then a couple around Eilat. Seemed like a low year for them, and tringas in general, in the Eilat area this spring.

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*) – One of the most common and widespread shorebirds. Nitzana, all Eilat water bodies, and around the Dead Sea.

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

CREAM-COLORED COURSER (*Cursorius cursor*) – Seth spotted the first ones while we were ogling the bustards' moves along the road to Ezuz. We eventually spotted a couple here, before picking up some more along the Mandatory Road to the northeast. This is a bird you immediately want to lay eyes upon seeing its picture in the field guide, and when you DO see it, it totally exceeds all expectations with its elegance, grace, and weirdness. Another iconic bird of the Negev, and rightly so!

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – The last rays of light on our final visit to North Beach were the backdrop of our sighting of this awesome beast as it got to the end of its sea crossing and barely hesitated before heading north over land for what would presumably be an all night crossing of the desert and mountains.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – The most common gull on most of our visits to K20, and seen in a few other places around Eilat. Two of them with Black-headed Gulls at Almog were somewhat notable, though migration does mean that a lot of birds can show up almost anywhere.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Common in the Eilat area.

WHITE-EYED GULL (*Ichthyaetus leucophthalmus*) – A Red Sea regional endemic, we got some very nice views of adults on both of our visits to North Beach. [E]

CASPIAN GULL (*Larus cachinnans*) – A couple in a mixed flock flying over the Agamim just as we were departing for birding on our second-to-last day in Eilat.

ARMENIAN GULL (*Larus armenicus*) – We had these at North Beach and then one of our later visits to K20.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (FUSCUS) (*Larus fuscus fuscus*) – The most common migrant gull at this time of year, we saw several flocks of adults of this nominate form of Lesser Black-backed Gull. This subspecies is often known as Baltic Gull, and of all the Lesser Black-backed Gull subspecies it has by far the darkest back.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (HEUGLIN'S) (*Larus fuscus heuglini*) – We had a couple of adults mixed in with Baltic Gull flocks, and also saw a couple of young birds on our second evening at North Beach. This bulky taxon which breeds in north-central Asia, may some day get split out of Lesser Black-backed Gull and into its own species called Heuglin's Gull (it is also known as Siberian Gull).

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – North Beach was the spot for these gigantic terns.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – We found the very first migrant Common Terns of the spring in southern Israel during our second visit to North Beach.

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – North Beach treated us to this old world subspecies of Sandwich Tern in crisp breeding plumage fairly close.

Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse).

SPOTTED SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles senegallus*) – A few flying by at Nitzana, then dozens on the ground and flying around at Sde Boker, and a small flock at HaMeishar Plains before we got down to the Eilat area. Once around Eilat, we also encountered them in the Ovda Valley.

BLACK-BELLIED SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles orientalis*) – The best views were two that came right on overhead at point blank range at Sde Boker, circling around us multiple times before dropping down to feed in the fields.

CROWNED SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles coronatus vastitas*) – A good pickup at Ovda, Mary picked some out in the distance and we were able to drive over to them to get good views of these fairly range-restricted sandgrouse from the roadside. [E]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Some of these in the more remote desert canyons may well have been of wild origin, for a big change of pace! Wild types tend to have very obvious white rumps, which most of the ones we see in the desert do indeed have.

EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*) – We had an early arrival at Yeruham, which was a bit of a surprise, though not too far out of the realm of expectation.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Abundant, including nesting in many desert wadis.

LAUGHING DOVE (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) – Very common around human habitation. These were introduced to the region hundreds of years ago by traders, and are now essentially a part of the natural fauna.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos).

GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO (*Clamator glandarius*) – A fantastically obliging pair of birds flying around Mashabei Sadeh on our evening stroll through the kibbutz upon our arrival. What a cool bird! These large cuckoos are brood parasites, like most other old world cuckoos, but unlike other cuckoos they target corvids, especially magpies (not in Israel!) and crows. The Hooded Crows have been shown to tolerate the cuckoo egg being in the nest, because that seems to lead to higher success rate for the crows brood as well. One reason is perhaps because the young cuckoos emanate a scent that keeps predators away from the nest. The Hooded Crows at Mashabei bore this out, by not acting perturbed at all (a tall order for a crow!) while the cuckoos were flying around and calling.

Strigidae (Owls).

LITTLE OWL (LITTLE) (*Athene noctua glaux*) – The Little Owl we saw in the north, at Har Amasa was likely of this darker subspecies (And it gave great views!).

LITTLE OWL (LILITH) (*Athene noctua lilith*) – This sometimes-split version of Little Owl dwells only in barren deserts. We got a great view of a bird perched up on the rocks alongside the road at Ezuz, and we were able to get frame-filling scope views from inside the bus, allowing us a very intimate experience without disturbing the bird. [E]

LONG-EARED OWL (*Asio otus*) – A couple of these were in the middle of the kibbutz at Mashabei Sadeh, and the one we got in the light was giving some very interesting calls. A very cool pre-dinner experience!

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies).

EGYPTIAN NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus aegyptius*) – Excellent views of at least two individuals during our evening at Yotvata. The structure, wing patterning, and overall color are all highly distinctive.

NUBIAN NIGHTJAR (NUBIAN) (*Caprimulgus nubicus tamaricis*) – A big surprise at Yotvata, we got a couple of brief views of this tiny, butterfly-like nightjar flying around the northern circular field at Yotvata before it flew out into the dunes. [E]

Apodidae (Swifts).

ALPINE SWIFT (*Apus melba*)

COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus apus*) – Especially common around Tel Aviv, where they were already around their nesting sites. We also had a few at Har Amasa, but surprisingly none down in Eilat.

PALLID SWIFT (*Apus pallidus*) – Encountered on every single day of the tour, these swifts are very similar to Common Swift, but a sandier tone to their brown, obvious contrast in the flight feathers, and slightly more bluntly-tipped wings. They migrate through Israel by the tens of thousands, but they also nest in some of the mountains and rocky hills in the region, including in the northern Negev.

LITTLE SWIFT (*Apus affinis*) – Len got a photo of one at our very first birding stop, at Har Amasa, and that was the only one the group ended up encountering!

Upupidae (Hoopoes).

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*) – The national bird of Israel was encountered on every single day of the tour, in the context of both migration and breeding.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers).

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – A few got on one of these little jewels at the Navit Pools in the Dead Sea.

WHITE-THROATED KINGFISHER (*Halcyon smyrnensis smyrnensis*) – One of these big ol' gaudy Halcyons was in evidence at Navit, and we saw it both perched and in flight.

PIED KINGFISHER (*Ceryle rudis rudis*) – We got especially good views of this widespread but snappy-looking kingfisher at the IBRCE in Eilat.

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

GREEN BEE-EATER (ARABIAN) (*Merops orientalis cyanophrys*) – There was simply no way we could improve on our looks at this scintillatingly green and blue species. We saw them in several places, but the pair in Holland Park was as confiding as birds could be. What birds! [E]

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

EURASIAN WRYNECK (*Jynx torquilla torquilla*) – It took us surprisingly long to encounter one of these migrants, but we finally connected with one at the Navit Pools, where we got to watch it perched on rocky cliffs for a while, which gave us a slight hint into how this strange but incredible bird fits into the woodpecker family. This was a big hit with everyone, and it was one of the top three birds of the trip for Carla, Ruth, and Seth.

SYRIAN WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopos syriacus*) – Very good views of this spiffy pecker at Yeruham.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

LESSER KESTREL (*Falco naumanni*) – A low flyover of a nice adult male on our first morning at Har Amasa was a nice prelude to the large group of migrants we saw foraging over the fields at Yotvata. We also had quite a few mixed into the big migration event over the Almog area towards the end of the tour.

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Widespread and seen almost every day of the tour.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – A couple of adults were harassing shorebirds, mostly the large flock of Ruffs, at the Nitzana sewage pools. These were birds of one of a couple of migrant subspecies that will nest much farther north, and were only in this area for the winter. A really cool experience!

PEREGRINE FALCON (BARBARY) (*Falco peregrinus pelegrinoides*) – We had a quick flyover of what was until recently its own species (Barbary Falcon) at Sde Boker.

Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*) – These introduced raucous parakeets were seen on most days. They are common around most settled areas in the country, including Tel Aviv and Eilat. [I]

Laniidae (Shrikes)

RED-TAILED SHRIKE (*Lanius phoenicuroides*) – Turkestan Shrike! This species is a vagrant to the region, and we were in position to make a short chase when one of these was found at Ovda, nearby the area towards which we were already headed. Once we arrived at the site, after some "interesting" directions, we quickly found the shrike, and were treated to extended views of it as it worked a barbed wire fence and some nearby brush piles.

SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE (SOUTHERN) (*Lanius meridionalis aucheri*) – We encountered these in a few locations, including Mandatory Road at Nitzana, and HaMeishar Plains.

MASKED SHRIKE (*Lanius nubicus*) – One of these striking birds at Har Amasa was surprisingly the only one we saw the entire trip. Migrants seemed late this year, and the fact that we only saw one of this species (which is the most common migrant shrike) bears that out fairly well.

WOODCHAT SHRIKE (*Lanius senator*) – Our first one was along the fence at Qetura, and we ran into the species again in subsequent days at Yotvata and along the road near K19.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

EURASIAN JAY (BLACK-CAPPED) (*Garrulus glandarius atricapillus*) – The last bird we added to the trip list, at Latrun. Brief views perched, but excellent in-flight views of this black-capped subspecies. Some of those who came into the country early caught up with these around Tel Aviv as well.

EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*) – This corvid is mostly restricted to the northern two thirds of the country, and we had a few scattered on the drive south on day one, and we had a group of around twenty at the fields behind Kalya in the northern Dead Sea.

HOUSE CROW (*Corvus splendens*) – The abundant crow in the Eilat area, it thankfully hasn't expanded beyond Arava Valley (thank you desert!). These crows ride ships all around the world, and have established themselves in several locations around the old world in this way, and in many places they end up being menaces to both native wildlife and humans. [I]

HOODED CROW (*Corvus cornix*) – The common crow in the northern Negev and farther north. Actually quite good looking when you get past their commonness.

BROWN-NECKED RAVEN (*Corvus ruficollis*) – Seen most days, the common corvid in desert areas of the south.

FAN-TAILED RAVEN (*Corvus rhipidurus*) – In Israel restricted to the Dead Sea area, which is the northern end of its range, which stretches down the Arabian Peninsula and into sub-Saharan Africa. A really neat-looking bird, with that short tail and triangular wings!

Alaudidae (Larks)

BAR-TAILED LARK (*Ammomanes cinctura*) – We saw a pair of these foraging at HaMeishar Plains in gorgeous late afternoon light, at very close range.

DESERT LARK (*Ammomanes deserti*) – Several barren locations, including above the Ovdat Gorge, at the high mountain hawkwatch at Mt. Yoash, Amram Pillars, Ovda, and Wadi Salvador. It's incredible to watch these birds make their way in such seemingly inhospitable habitats.

TEMMINCK'S LARK (*Eremophila bilopha*) – We got some great views of this queen of the desert, ornate headdress and all. They are related to, and reminiscent of, Horned Larks, but they are much more habitat specific, sticking to flat desert areas, and moving around from year to year and season to season as rainfall dictates.

GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) – Huge numbers around the Arava Valley this spring, with hundreds at multiple spots. We got especially good studies of them at Yotvata and Ovda.

BIMACULATED LARK (*Melanocorypha bimaculata*) – Good views of a few at the northern fields of Yotvata in the late afternoon, prior to our nightjar experience. This chunky, short-tailed, large-billed lark is very distinctive!

EURASIAN SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*) – We had a flock still lingering at Sde Boker, giving good looks.

CRESTED LARK (*Galerida cristata*) – One of the most widespread birds in the region, and one of the most impressive songsters anywhere. We probably could've padded our list by a few species were we to count the species we heard them mimic!

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Called Sand Martin in the old world, it is still the same species as the Bank Swallow we have in North America.

ROCK MARTIN (PALE CRAG-MARTIN) (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula obsoleta*) – Common in desert areas.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – They were migrating through in fairly good numbers, and we encountered them in most habitats.

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW (*Cecropis daurica*) – Some really great views of these impressive swallows in several locations. They tend to fly higher up than other swallows when foraging in the same area.

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*) – Migrants here and there. Quite common on a couple of days.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

GREAT TIT (GREAT) (*Parus major terraesanctae*) – Good looks at this charismatic species were at Yeruham and the JBO. This species is absent in the southern Negev, so it was absent from the checklist for a week in the middle.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

WHITE-SPECTACLED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus xanthopygos*) – Widespread. Abundant. Still very cool. [E]

Scotocercidae (Bush Warblers and Allies)

SCRUB WARBLER (*Scotocerca inquieta*) – Brief but good looks at this regional endemic at Shezaf Nature Reserve on our way up to the Dead Sea from Eilat.

CETTI'S WARBLER (*Cettia cetti*) – Heard singing at Yeruham, but as is typical for this species, we didn't lay eyes on it. [*]

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – The most common *Phylloscopus* warbler at this time of year, and one of the most common and widespread passerines. In this region at this time of year, if there is a tree, or even a barely-there bush, there's a good chance that there's a Chiffchaff in it.

EASTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER (*Phylloscopus orientalis*) – A smart-looking but still understated *Phylloscopus*, with that smooth gray head and yellow rump contrasting with the lime green of the rest of the bird.

Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers and Allies)

EASTERN OLIVACEOUS WARBLER (*Iduna pallida*) – These were voicing their chattering songs loudly down in the valley in the Ovdar Gorge.

SEDGE WARBLER (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) – Good, close views at the IBRCE.

EURASIAN REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – Briefly at the IBRCE, and then seen well at the Navit Pools (in direct comparison with Clamorous Reed-Warbler no less!).

CLAMOROUS REED WARBLER (CLAMOROUS) (*Acrocephalus stentoreus levantinus*) – A few singing away at the Navit Pools, and then excellent views at the Ehot Tzukim Reserve along the Dead Sea.

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

GRACEFUL PRINIA (*Prinia gracilis*) – Here, there, everywhere.

Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)

EURASIAN BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – In a few places, including the acacia grove at Ovda and at the JBO.

LESSER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia curruca*) – The most common small passerine, and our constant companion.

ARABIAN WARBLER (*Sylvia leucomelaena*) – Wow! Excellent views despite the midday hour at Shezaf Nature Reserve on our way north to the Dead Sea. This species, in addition to having a very small range, is usually very retiring and difficult to get good looks at. However, we found a male that was intent on singing and foraging, so much so that it had a yellow crown from the pollen. [E]

EASTERN ORPHEAN WARBLER (*Sylvia crassirostris*) – Good views of one of these large *Sylvias* at Har Amasa, and then a couple of brief encounters with one or two in Holland Park.

CYPRUS WARBLER (*Sylvia melanothorax*) – A very low density migrant through Israel, and typically then only in desert wadis that don't contain much else in terms of avian interest. We avoided having to target them in their normal haunts by seeing a bold adult male that spent a few days in Ofira Park, right in the heart of Eilat! We then connected with another individual for good measure, just before encountering our Arabian Warbler at Shezaf.

RUEPPELL'S WARBLER (*Sylvia ruppeli*) – Spectacular views of a sexy looking male in one of the flowering endangered (in Israel) *Retama* Caper plants in Holland Park. If you were going to dress like a *Sylvia*, you'd be hard pressed to find a better one to emulate than this guy.

SUBALPINE WARBLER (*Sylvia cantillans*) – A pleasant surprise at Har Amasa, the males of this species can give the prior one a run for its money. This is one of the lowest density migrants of all the *Sylvia* warblers that come through Israel annually.

SARDINIAN WARBLER (*Sylvia melanocephala*) – We got good views of a singing male in the parking lot across the street from the great restaurant for our final lunch in Abu Ghosh.

GREATER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*) – Har Amasa, Ofira Park, and the JBO.

SPECTACLED WARBLER (*Sylvia conspicillata*) – Har Amasa was completely swarmed by these breeders.

Leiothrichidae (Laughingthrushes and Allies)

ARABIAN BABBLER (*Turdoides squamiceps squamiceps*) – We had some great experiences with these unique and highly social birds at a couple of places in the northern Negev. [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*) – We heard one calling from dense vegetation at Mashabei Sadeh, though it never showed itself. [*]

COMMON NIGHTINGALE (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) – We had one during banding at the IBRCE, and then Keith and Bernie had brief views the next day at Holland Park.

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*) – Some great views of both winterers and migrants, especially at the IBRCE.

- SEMICOLLARED FLYCATCHER** (*Ficedula semitorquata*) – A nice week for them, with sightings at Holland Park, in the Ovda Valley, and at the Neot Smadar Inn.
- COMMON REDSTART (EHRENBERG'S)** (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisticus*) – Real stonking males at Har Amasa, and then again at the Ben Gurion grave park.
- BLACK REDSTART (WESTERN)** (*Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis*) – Another nice surprise at Har Amasa was this migrant European subspecies.
- BLUE ROCK-THRUSH** (*Monticola solitarius*) – All over the place at Har Amasa, and then a few at the Ovdad Gorge as well.
- SIBERIAN STONECHAT (CASPIAN)** (*Saxicola maurus hemprichii*) – Our late afternoon jaunt to Yotvata produced quite a few insectivorous passerines, including this gorgeous male Caspian Stonechat.
- BLACKSTART** (*Cercomela melanura*) – The most widespread and common wheatear (it is still considered one, even though it's not in the *Oenanthe* genus) across dry deserts and canyons. A very charismatic and friendly species, and always a joy to encounter despite our frequent encounters with it.
- WHITE-CROWNED WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe leucopyga ernesti*) – Some great views of this species at the hawkwatch near Mt. Yoash, lower Wadi Shlomo, Amram Pillars, and Wadi Salvador. An iconic wheatear of desert mountains and canyons.
- HOODED WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe monacha*) – A female at Grofit Sewage was a pleasant surprise, and actually more distinctive than the male, with its uniform brown color and orange tail. We got a very cooperative male at Amram Pillars the next day for good measure. The long bill on this species is very distinctive, and can help separate it from all other similar species of wheatears.
- NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – This extremely long-distance migrant was seen on most days, including some exceptionally good views of males at Yotvata.
- MOURNING WHEATEAR (MOURNING)** (*Oenanthe lugens lugens*) – At the Ovdad Gorge overlook at the Ben Gurion grave park.
- FINSCH'S WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe finschii*) – Good views of some lingering winterers during our visit to Har Amasa.
- BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR (EASTERN)** (*Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca*) – A couple of days of very good numbers of migrants at Yotvata, where they were one of our most obliging songbirds. We even got to see one catch and masticate a large insect nearly the size of its own head before finally getting it down its gullet.
- DESERT WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe deserti*) – A pair of these at HaMeishar Plains gave great views.
- ISABELLINE WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe isabellina*) – This widespread species was seen as a migrant and on breeding territories. The understated beauty of its warm earth tones was a winner every time we encountered them.
- Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*
- EURASIAN BLACKBIRD** (*Turdus merula*) – Ben Gurion grave park is where the best views were, and then we also picked it up on our final day at the JBO.
- SONG THRUSH** (*Turdus philomelos*) – A brief view of one teed up on top of a tree at Mashabei Sadeh first thing in the morning was our only encounter with this species, which winters in small numbers that far south, but which has mostly departed north by March.
- Sturnidae (Starlings)*
- COMMON MYNA** (*Acridotheres tristis*) – They thankfully haven't taken over in the southern Negev yet, so we went six days without seeing them, which was a treat given their abundance in the north. [H]
- TRISTRAM'S STARLING** (*Onychognathus tristramii*) – A few in the south, including at the hawkwatch, but also quite a few around the Dead Sea, where they tend to be more common. [E]
- Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)*
- PALESTINE SUNBIRD (PALESTINE)** (*Cinnyris osea osea*) – Common throughout, with perhaps the best views coming of a singing male glittering in the sunlight at the bottom of the Ovdad Gorge. [E]
- Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)*
- WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla flava*) – Yellow Wagtails are one of the common highlights of spring migration in the region, with hordes coming through the region, of several taxa. During one particularly windy day we got to watch them, at point blank range, running and jumping and hopping and doing backflips as they foraged on flies that were staying low to the ground because of the wind.
- WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (THUNBERGI)** (*Motacilla flava thunbergi*) – These are the ones where the males have a slate blue head except for the sides of the face, which are a very dark gray-blue.
- WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (FLAVA)** (*Motacilla flava flava*) – The common form of yellow wagtail in much of western Europe, these are the ones that have blue heads and faces with an obvious white supercilium.
- WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (BEEMA)** (*Motacilla flava beema*) – We had a couple of these beema types, which are very much like flava, except with variable amounts of white flecking within the blue cheeks below the eye.
- WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (FELDEGG)** (*Motacilla flava feldegg*) – The most common taxon of Western Yellow Wagtail that migrates through, these have sharp black heads and faces, making them very distinctive from the rest of the yellow wagtails in the world.
- CITRINE WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla citreola*) – We had one of these at Anita Lake at the IBRCE, and then Seth spotted a really nice male at the Navit Pools which we were able to see well in the scope.
- WHITE WAGTAIL (WHITE-FACED)** (*Motacilla alba alba/dukhunensis*) – Common and widespread. Seen every day of the tour. There were likely still winterers around, but we also saw lots and lots of migrants in various small migrant traps and flying over.
- LONG-BILLED PIPIT (MIDDLE EASTERN)** (*Anthus similis captus*) – Excellent looks at this regionally endemic taxon on our first morning of birding, at Har Amasa! [E]
- TAWNY PIPIT** (*Anthus campestris*) – A few folks got on this species briefly at the Mandatory Road, but our best looks came at HaMeishar Plains and the fields of Yotvata.
- MEADOW PIPIT** (*Anthus pratensis*) – We had one of these at Har Amasa on day one, and then a calling flyover at the fields at Kalya on the second to last day.
- TREE PIPIT** (*Anthus trivialis*) – The first were up the slope at Har Amasa, and then we got very good looks at Ofira Park, and at the K20 plantation.
- OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT** (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – A calling flyover on a windy morning at the date palm plantation just north of the IBRCE was frustrating. It landed in the plantation, and called several times from within, but we were never able to find it on the deck.
- RED-THROATED PIPIT** (*Anthus cervinus*) – Truly abundant at Yotvata, and seen incidentally in a couple of other locations.

WATER PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta*) – Good scope views for all at Nitzana, and then a couple of times at Yotvata.

Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)

CRETZSCHMAR'S BUNTING (*Emberiza caesia*) – Seen in several locations, with good looks at Har Amasa, excellent looks at Ofira Park, and others at Yotvata and at the K20 plantation.

STRIOLATED BUNTING (*Emberiza striolata striolata*) – A couple of males at Wadi Salvadora were a nice reward for those who got to the spring at the top of the canyon.

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*) – We had very good views of these at Har Amasa, where they breed.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

BRAMBLING (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – Another nice surprise at the JBO was this lingering Brambling that most folks saw from the blind before it flew across the street into the shelter of a large conifer.

HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – A couple of individuals at the JBO were big hits on our final morning. It's one of the most visually striking finches in the world, and packs a honker of a beak that you certainly don't want to be on the business end of.

SINAI ROSEFINCH (*Carpodacus synoicus*) – After striking out on this species at Amram Pillars (the photographers a few feet from the water feature likely didn't help), we set our eyes on these at Wadi Salvadora, and those that made it to the end of the hike there were rewarded with a couple of individuals at fairly close range, including one beautiful male that was especially confiding. [E]

TRUMPETER FINCH (*Bucanetes githagineus*) – Good looks at a pair that flew in briefly at Nitzana and then a male coming into the spring at Wadi Salvadora.

DESERT FINCH (*Rhodospiza obsoleta*) – We had these earth-toned finches at both Sde Boker and Midreshet Ben Gurion.

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*) – Common around the northern Negev, including at Yeruham and the Ben Gurion grave park, and then seen again at the JBO.

EURASIAN SISKIN (*Spinus spinus*) – A nice surprise at the JBO on our final morning was a small flock of these migrants from farther north, still lingering. Finches are irruptive, so you never know just how far south they will get, but they are typically much farther north by this time of the year.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus hufufae*) – Present and widespread.

SPANISH SPARROW (*Passer hispaniolensis*) – In large numbers, including several big flocks of migrants.

DEAD SEA SPARROW (DEAD SEA) (*Passer moabiticus moabiticus*) – Very good views of a few perched out in the open at the Navit Pools, and then brief looks the next day at the lowest nature reserve in the world. [E]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

INDIAN SILVERBILL (*Euodice malabarica*) – We had one of these at the banding station at the IBRCE. [I]

MAMMALS

EGYPTIAN FRUIT BAT (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*) – Common around Tel Aviv, where we got to see them foraging on the fruit on street trees on both of our trips back from dinner.

GOLDEN SPINY MOUSE (*Acomys russatus*) – A couple of these gave good looks along Wadi Salvadora.

SYRIAN JACKAL (*Canis aureus syriacus*) – We heard them at K19, and then saw at least one at Yotvata.

ROCK HYRAX (*Procavia capensis*) – Brief views for a few folks at Wadi Salvadora.

DORCAS GAZELLE (*Gazella dorcas*) – A few in the northern Negev, and then more at Ovda.

MOUNTAIN GAZELLE (*Gazella gazella*) – A few animals cavorting and prancing around in the evening at Kalya.

NUBIAN IBEX (*Capra ibex nubiana*) – Seen well at both the Ovdad Gorge and around the Dead Sea, but we had an exceptionally intimate experience with a group of them at lower Wadi Shlomo.

Herps

ROUGH-TAIL ROCK AGAMA (*Laudakia stellio*) – We had the northern subspecies on day one around Har Amasa, and then we had the southern subspecies a couple of days later as we got down into the northern Negev.

EGYPTIAN MASTIGURE (*Uromastix aegyptia*) – Some went to see these monstrous lizards at the IBRCE, and then everyone saw them again at the Shezaf Nature Reserve.

ORNATE MASTIGURE (*Uromastix ornata*) – These bright blue and green lizards are also known as the Madonna Lizard, and they tend to only inhabit the walls of remote desert canyons, and we got to see one very well at lower Wadi Shlomo. [E]

SNAKE-EYED LIZARD (*Ophisops elegans*) – On our first day of the tour up north we had a couple of these lizards with the false eye marks on the head.

NIDUA FRINGE-FINGERED LIZARD (*Acanthodactylus scutellatus*) – At the km 101 rest area and then at Shezaf.

LEBANON LIZARD (*Lacerta laevis*) – At the very end of the tour while searching for Eurasian Jay at Latrun.

Other Creatures of Interest

DEATHSTALKER SCORPION (*Leiurus quinquestratus*) – A nice surprise at Har Amasa, when Eran flipped over a rock to reveal one, before it quickly hustled into the safety of its burrow.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 210 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa