



Field Guides Tour Report

Oman & the UAE: Birding Arabia I 2014

Jan 9, 2014 to Jan 25, 2014

Phil Gregory

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

This was the fifth Field Guides trip to Arabia (and my eighth), and it was an exciting and varied experience as always, beginning in the rather astonishing city of Dubai where we covered a number of desert sites, then going to even more amazing Abu Dhabi with its extraordinary architecture and *Hypocolius* roost, and then out to the huge oasis at Al Ain and the bleak beauty of Jebel Hafeet. Exciting birds were many and highlights included Spotted Eagle, Crab Plover, Great Knot, Desert, Isabelline, Hume's, Hooded, Variable and Red-tailed wheatears, a wintering Eversmann's (Rufous-backed) Redstart, Black-throated Thrush, Plain Leaf-Warbler, and a day-roosting Striated Scops Owl.

A new desert park at Bab al Shams gave an Eastern Imperial Eagle that had been ringed in Tajikistan that summer, Pallid Harrier, Bimaculated and Hoopoe-lark, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, and both Pin-tailed and Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse. Outstanding mammals here included a surprise find of Arabian Oryx, now reintroduced here and still one of the world's rarest mammals, and some very nice Mountain Gazelle.

A foray into the Omani exclave of Buraimi was rewarding albeit bureaucratic as we had to detour to pick up entry and exit visas, but that gave us a bonus Griffon Vulture, and the hanging gardens area at Jebel Qatar gave great Arabian Babblers, Red-tailed and Hume's wheatears, and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, the latter a species we rarely see on this tour.

The historic and graceful city of Muscat was a nice cultural experience, with visits to the ancient souk at night and then to Nizwa on market day, plus a trip up spectacular Jebel Akhdar which gave us Lappet-faced Vulture and the only Menetries's Warblers of the trip, whilst Al Ansab Dam gave a surprise Long-toed Stint, though the main site was unfortunately closed for the weekend!

Dhofar Governate is always a highlight in the far south of Oman and with much more African feel to it, and here we did well with Arabian Partridge, Arabian Warbler, Arabian Wheatear, Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak for those who went early, the newly split Arabian Scops Owl (albeit briefly!), and Yemen Serin at its only known site outside of Yemen. Three species of sea turtle off the spectacular sea cliffs near Mirbat included a huge Leatherback, and Ras Mirbat gave us Masked and Brown boobies and Socotra Cormorant. A trip to the rather dusty and unappealing Raysut dump gave us about 60 Steppe Eagles, plus the bizarre sight of 380 White Storks loafing about and no doubt feeding from the garbage, a far cry from the lovely Black Storks we had seen earlier at Khor Rauri.

The deep desert oasis at Qitbit was overrun with roadworkers building a new highway and making a huge mess, but the birding in the grounds of the Guesthouse was excellent -- *Hypocolius*, Black-throated Thrush and a vagrant Dusky Thrush, Nile Valley Sunbird, Bluethroat, Yellow-browed and Eastern Orphean warblers, Yellow-throated Petronia, and a surprise Golden Eagle. Spotted Sandgrouse flying in and calling at the Muntasar oasis were a great spectacle too.

My thanks to Rob at Muscat Dive for his good company, driving, and assistance, he has the makings of a good birder (but his GPS skills could do with some attention!); Sharon at FG HQ did a great job setting it all up, and my thanks to the UAE guides Steve James, Neil Tovey, and Mark Smiles (who took me round pre-trip). Thanks to Bill for sharing his scope (and his iPad recording of Scrub Warbler) and to both the Byers for their help with navigation at certain sites, and our condolences to them for their tragic loss, which we heard about just after the trip ended, a very sad ending.

I hope to travel with you all again at some point and thanks for coming on our memorable Arabian adventure.

--Phil



*Any time we see *Hypocolius*, it's the star of the show, and this tour was no different! (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)*

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)

GRAYLAG GOOSE (SIBERIAN) (*Anser anser rubrirostris*) – Two birds at Al Ansab lagoons were unexpected.

EGYPTIAN GOOSE (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) – Two at a small pond in the UAE, introduced here. [I]

COTTON PYGMY-GOOSE (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) – A female was at Khor Taqah, a rare but regular migrant here.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Ten at Al Warsan and 40 at Lake Zakher.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Small numbers at the wetland sites including one at Buraimi SP and 20 at Al Warsan.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Ten at Al Warsan, 5 at Al Ansab then 6 at East Khor.

GARGANEY (*Anas querquedula*) – Just a single at Khor Rauri.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca crecca*) – Small numbers at the wetland sites, with 30 at Buraimi the most.

COMMON POCHARD (*Aythya ferina*) – Twenty at Al Warsan was it.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK (*Aythya nyroca*) – Two males at Lake Zakher were a good pick-up of a scarce migrant.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*) – Just 18 at Al Warsan.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

CHUKAR (*Alectoris chukar*) – Well, they were all over Jebel Hafeet and quite tame, being newly introduced when they were seen for the first time on the last tour here in 2011! One of Ellen's favourites. [I]

ARABIAN PARTRIDGE (*Alectoris melanocephala*) – Our early morning foray to Ayn Hamran paid off nicely despite very strong winds, and we had cracking views of a covey of 6 of this big and elusive endemic, they even stayed just long enough for the late breakfast crew to arrive and see them!

Also a feral bird on a green at the Green Mubazzarah, where introduced along with the Chukars. [E]

GRAY FRANCOLIN (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – Quite common in the urban areas of the Emirates and also in Muscat.

SAND PARTRIDGE (*Ammoperdix heyi*) – A lucky find was one sat up on a rock pinnacle on Jebel Hafeet, allowing very nice scope views.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – Six day records from the northern wetlands in UAE and Oman.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – One in the UAE and one at Al Ansab.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – 150 at Ras al Khor, 10 at Khor al Beida and small numbers in Oman.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

PERSIAN SHEARWATER (*Puffinus persicus*) – A single off the headland just before Mughsayl, it flew by and sat on the sea for a while. I was disappointed we did not see them off Muscat on the boat trip. [E]

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – Two fine adults at Khor Rauri were an Arabian tick for Phil.

WHITE STORK (*Ciconia ciconia*) – One near Ras Mirbat, then an amazing 380 at the Raysut rubbish dump, in highly unsalubrious surroundings and clearly a very significant wintering area this year.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

MASKED BOOBY (*Sula dactylatra*) – Three off Ras Mirbat, most folks got quite good looks.

BROWN BOOBY (*Sula leucogaster*) – Two very distant birds near Ras Mirbat off a cliff top just to the south, then great looks at 5 off the headland near Mughsayl.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Quite common around Dubai, the usual cormorant around here, and small numbers in southern Oman.

SOCOTRA CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*) – A punctured tyre cost us this bird off Umm al Quwain, but we got them really well later with 4 flying close off Ras Mirbat, 8 on the sea off Mughsayl headland, and 70 or so flying past low over the sea by our beach hotel in Salalah, where Don saw several hundred.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Small numbers at all wetland sites.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*) – 2 at Al Warsan and 3 at Khor Taqah.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Three at Al Warsan and just three singles in Dhofar.

INTERMEDIATE EGRET (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) – One at Khor Mughsayl.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*) – 5 at Al Warsan, where some other very odd birds had greyish bills and greyish legs and may have been Reef Egrets, I only logged this when it had a slender black bill and blackish legs with yellow on the feet. Three singles seen in Dhofar.

WESTERN REEF-HERON (*Egretta gularis*) – Small numbers throughout, the first being white morph birds at Al Warsan. Dark birds seem to predominate as you go south, and greyish intermediates are widespread.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Eight day records but very small numbers, with a nicely posed one under the legs of a camel in Dhofar.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – 8 at Al Warsan, and 3 distant indeterminate Squacco or Indian Ponds herons in Dhofar.

INDIAN POND-HERON (*Ardeola grayii*) – Two at Qurum Park in Muscat and one at Khor Mughsayl, they were heavily streaked below, kind of dark on the mantle and with a dark loreal line.

STRIATED HERON (*Butorides striata*) – Don found us a single squatting by the pond at Qurum Park in Muscat.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – I missed it at Al Warsan, but we had 3 at Qurum Park later.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Five day records of 2 birds except for a single on day 2 in the UAE.

EURASIAN SPOONBILL (*Platalea leucorodia*) – Ten at Ras al Khor, then 2 at East Khor and one at Khor Mughsayl.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Five day records, seen at Ras al Khor and East Khor and nicely on the cliff near Mirbat.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

EGYPTIAN VULTURE (*Neophron percnopterus*) – Very few, the decline continues but we managed a handful at Jebel Hafeet (5) and one at Al Ansab.

ORIENTAL HONEY-BUZZARD (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) – A lucky find was a fine dark morph bird soaring with a pale morph Booted Eagle near the Crowne Plaza in Salalah on Jan 19.

LAPPET-FACED VULTURE (*Torgos tracheliotus*) – One came soaring over at Jebel Akhdar on Jan 17.

EURASIAN GRIFFON (*Gyps fulvus*) – This was a nice bonus from our enforced visa getting foray to Wadi Jizzi in Oman, when a soaring vulture at our lunch stop near the new hotel there proved to be this species. Some white markings on the back may have been droppings I suspect, the pale head and underwing covers look good for this very scarce species.

SHORT-TOED EAGLE (*Circus gallicus*) – A lovely pale morph bird was atop a thorn tree above Ayn Hamran, and later flew nicely along the ridge.

GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE (*Clanga clanga*) – 4 at Ras al Khor, then singles near Wadi Jizzi and Al Ansab.

BOOTED EAGLE (*Hieraetus pennatus*) – Sandra spotted us a fine pale morph bird soaring over at Jebel Qatar, and we had another later near the Crowne Plaza with a nearby Oriental Honey Buzzard. A perched dark eagle late afternoon at Qurum Park was also I believe this species.

STEPPE EAGLE (*Aquila nipalensis*) – A few in Dhofar, with 70 or so at Raysut rubbish dump in a bewildering array of plumages including a very pale one that raised thoughts of Tawny Eagle for a while, but the gape line was too long in the pix.

IMPERIAL EAGLE (*Aquila heliaca*) – One at Bab al Shams had been ringed as a nestling in Turkmenistan last year apparently, a very nice sighting.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos homeyeri*) – This is a real puzzle to me, this dark bird over Qitbit Resthouse had dark underwing coverts, uniform underwing, dark rusty-brown body and a long, broad almost diamond shaped tail. There were some pale marks on the nape, and the legs and feet were yellow; it soared in a dihedral with well-fingered primary tips when spread, but just seemed rather small.

BONELLI'S EAGLE (*Aquila fasciata*) – Very nice looks at fine adult at Tawi Attair, a great site for this species.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) – Small numbers seen, including a fine male at Salalah.

PALLID HARRIER (*Circus macrourus*) – A ringtail at Bab al Shams, and then a fine male hunting alongside a roadside shelter belt. Two harriers seen nearby were either this species or Montagu's but I did not get to see them.

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*) – A female flew over us by Sahnawt farm as we went out near dusk to Ayn Hamran.

LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD (*Buteo rufinus*) – Two birds near Khor Rauri showed quite well.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

PURPLE SWAMPHEN (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) – A couple of one of the grey-headed races were seen at Al Warsan, probably seistanicus, and a likely split from Purple Swampphen in due course.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*) – Seven day records with small numbers at many wetlands.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – One at Al Warsan, 20 at Lake Zakher and 10 at East Khor.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

RED-WATTLED LAPWING (*Vanellus indicus*) – The most were 30 at Hamanriya turf farm, and we had small numbers in the north but none in Dhofar.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Six day records, mostly singles but 10 at Khor al Beida in Umm al Quwain.

LESSER SAND-PLOVER (*Charadrius mongolus*) – 5 at Khor al Beida and a fine bird right by a Greater Sandplover on Qurum Beach in Muscat, altogether smaller and much smaller billed.

GREATER SAND-PLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) – 30 at Khor al Beida and 3 at Qurum Beach. A large billed taxon here.

KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH) (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – 3 at Ras al Khor, 30 at Khor al Beida and then 30 at Khor Taqah beach.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – Small numbers on 5 days, with just one in Dhofar at Khor Taqah.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*) – Nice looks at 5 at the Dubai pivot fields.

Dromadidae (Crab Plover)

CRAB PLOVER (*Dromas ardeola*) – Absolutely mega, one of the birds of the trip, we had some 72 of them at Khor al Beida on a falling tide and we got there just right, with great views of this singular species that is in a monotypic family and nests in burrows on remote baking hot sandy islands.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus*) – 30 at Khor al Beida, and a single at Qurum Beach.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – Six day records with small numbers at many sites, the most being 30 at Al Ansab.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

TEREK SANDPIPER (*Xenus cinereus*) – 3 at Khor al Beida, and one at Khor Mughsayl, this is the one with the orange legs and upturned beak.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Seven day records with one's and two's at various sites.

GREEN SANDPIPER (*Tringa ochropus*) – 2 at Hamanriya turf farm and singles on 3 days at Al Ansab, East Khor and finally at Ayn Razat. The shrill "pilowit wit" call is very distinctive.

SPOTTED REDSHANK (*Tringa erythropus*) – 3 at Buraimi SP were the only ones we saw.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – Five day records of small numbers, the most 10 at Khor al Beida.

MARSH SANDPIPER (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – One at Buraimi and a single at Al Ansab, a diminutive greenshank-like species with a very fine bill.

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – One at Hamanriya, heard at Buraimi and a single at Al Ansab.

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*) – Just 4 day records, with 5 at Khor al Beida and 3 at Al Ansab the most.

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*) – A single at Qurum Beach, and 2 at Khor Mughsayl, one being chased by a dark morph Reef Heron.

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*) – One at Khor al Beida and one at Lake Zakher, which was a surprise so far inland.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa limosa*) – One at Al Ansab and 6 at Khor Rauri.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – 60 at Khor al Beida with Great Knot amongst them, then an unexpected single at Lake Zakher, way far inland here, before 2 on Qurum Beach.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – 10 at Khor al Beida.

GREAT KNOT (*Calidris tenuirostris*) – 12 at Kor al Beida on Jan 12 with the Bar-tailed Godwits, this is one of the most westerly regular wintering sites.

LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*) – 40 at Ras al Khor, 100 at Lake Zakher and small numbers <6 in Dhofar.

TEMMINCK'S STINT (*Calidris temminckii*) – 5 at Hamanriya turf farm, feeding on the wet grass.

LONG-TOED STINT (*Calidris subminuta*) – This was a surprise find with the Little Stint at Al Ansab Dam on Jan 18, we picked it up by the slightly larger size and pale greenish-yellow legs with upperparts much like the neighbouring stints. They are rare but regular visitors but this was my first in Arabia.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – 250 at Khor al Beida and just a single at Khor Rauri.

RUFF (*Philomachus pugnax*) – Four day records, the best being 3 at Hamanriya which included a white-headed bird. 5 were at Al Ansab.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago*) – Six day records, the most being 20 at Hamanriya, then 6 at Buraimi and 5 at Al Ansab.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Two on Al Warsan lagoon, then about 50 at sea on the pelagic out into the Gulf Of Oman, one of the few sightings of note. Also about 30 in small flocks off Ras Mirbat, and all in winter dress.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – Just singles on 3 days including a lovely pink-washed adult at Ras al Khor, then 10 at Qurum Beach.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Widespread in modest numbers.

SOOTY GULL (*Ichthyaeus hemprichii*) – The first were 2 at Qurum Beach, then we had hundreds down in Dhofar with lots roosting on the beach by our hotel and hundreds at Taqah Beach.

PALLAS'S GULL (*Ichthyaeus ichthyaeus*) – Three of this very large gull with the black head in the harbour at Umm al Quwain turned out to be the only ones we saw. Often known as Great Black-headed Gull.

CASPIAN GULL (*Larus cachinnans*) – Some of the more delicate paler mantled and white-headed gulls we saw were this species.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (HEUGLIN'S) (*Larus fuscus heuglini*) – The taxonomy here is a mess, what were formerly Heuglin's Gull is now lumped with Lesser Black-backed, whilst what was the barabensis Steppe Gull is usually likewise lumped there, though bizarrely Clements lumps it with monotypic Caspian- go figure. Anyway, many of the paler large-billed white headed gulls with streaky heads and mid-grey mantle were this Steppe Gull, whilst darker birds can be assigned to Heuglin's. Both taxa appeared to be quite common in Oman, but the final resolution of what is what remains elusive shall we say. Personally I'd lump them all as Big Paler Gull and have done with the larid theology!

SAUNDERS'S TERN (*Sternula saundersi*) – A few off Qurum Beach and around the beaches near Salalah.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – Seen at the pivot fields and Al Warsan, East Khor and Khor Rauri.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – 3 near Dubai then singles at Lake Zakher and Khor Rauri.

WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – A couple at Lake Zakher and 5 at the Crowne Plaza in Salalah, before 3 at Khor Rauri.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – An adult at Qurum beach and a first winter at Mirbat.

WHITE-CHEEKED TERN (*Sterna repressa*) – 3 feeding offshore at the beach by our hotel in Salalah, the grey rump and tail along with quite a deep tail fork are helpful. [E]

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii*) – Small numbers at the beach sites in Oman, this is quite a dark grey race here (presumably velox), often called Swift Tern.

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – Up to 10 at Qurum Beach, some almost lacking a yellowish tip to the bill which was just visible in photo close-ups on one.

LESSER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bengalensis*) – One at Khor al Beida and one at Qurum beach.

Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)

PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles alchata*) – About 60 at Bab al Shams, which has been stocked with this species, presumably for falconry? [H]

CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles exustus*) – Two at Bab al Shams, easily identified by the black underwing and dark belly, then about 30 at Sahnawt Farm in Salalah, seen nicely both at rest and in flight.

SPOTTED SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles senegallus*) – At least 5 were with the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse at Sahnawt farm, which was unexpected, then we had good looks at about 50 not far from Thumrait and finally a couple of hundred calling and coming in to land in the desert near the springs at Muntasar, a great sight and sound.

LICHTENSTEIN'S SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles lichtensteinii*) – 7 were flushed as we got back near the bus at Jebel Qatar, and we tracked them down to get another flight view, a very good pick-up of an uncommon species.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Feral Pigeons were widespread, I suspect some at Jebel Hafeet and the more remote rocky sites were actually wild Rock Doves.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Widespread, seen every day of the trip.

LAUGHING DOVE (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) – Also widespread, and seen every day.

BRUCE'S GREEN-PIGEON (*Treron waalia*) – The figs at Ayn Hamran held 4 birds and we got some very nice views there.

Strigidae (Owls)

PALLID SCOPS-OWL (*Otus brucei*) – Now this bird was at the same site in Al Ain that it was in back in 2011, and we had a GPS reference to the confusing date palm oasis area, only it was in a decimal not degrees and minutes format. Luckily a group conclave was able to get it sorted and converted and reset Rob's GPS, and we got near enough to the site for me to recognize it then locate the bird. Great views, how nice to see it again.

AFRICAN SCOPS-OWL (AFRICAN) (*Otus senegalensis pamela*) – This was recognized as a split by the IOC the week we were at Salalah, so we tried at dusk at Ayn Hamran and heard 4 or 5 birds calling. It is actually pretty different to African Scops Owl and I was able to record 4 calls of what I think is a male, now downloaded to the xenocanto site and the Internet Bird Collection. I actually got one to rocket out of a thornbush and across the track, seen by most folks but not me! Some of us tried again next day and got a glimpse in a gully, but it was very hard to see. [E]

HUME'S OWL (*Strix butleri*) – Frustrating, I got one to respond in the usual wadi near Mughsayl but did not realize it had moved and had come closer as I was fumbling about with the 4WD. Pity, had I known I'd have continued some playback, but there we are. [E*]

Apodidae (Swifts)

PALLID SWIFT (*Apus pallidus*) – Small numbers in the UAE and around Muscat and a big flock of about 1000 at Lake Zakher where they were hawking about over the water.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – One at Qurum Park was a nice trip addition and new for several folks.

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

GREEN BEE-EATER (*Merops orientalis*) – Small numbers in the UAE and near Muscat, this is the blue-throated race *muscatensis*, a very pretty bird.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

INDIAN ROLLER (*Coracias benghalensis*) – Small numbers in the UAE and around Muscat, and one at Al Beed farm was a long way south.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*) – Small numbers were widespread pretty much throughout.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – A couple at the pivot fields and small numbers on most days in Dhofar.

Psittacidae (Parrots)

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*) – Widespread and noisy in the UAE and around Muscat, also seen in Salalah. [I]

Malaconotidae (Bushshrikes and Allies)

BLACK-CROWNED TCHAGRA (*Tchagra senegalus percivali*) – Just a single at Ayn Hamran, which gave good views as it skulked low down in bushes out of the wind.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

RUFIOUS-TAILED SHRIKE (DAURIAN) (*Lanius isabellinus isabellinus*) – Five day records of singles except for 2 at the pivots.

SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE (SOUTHERN) (*Lanius meridionalis aucheri*) – 7 day records, most around the pivots and Hamanria. The taxonomy of this group is in flux and this race will undoubtedly be reassigned!

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

AFRICAN PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone viridis*) – Very nice looks at Ayn Hamran and Ayn Razat, this form *hartert* has big white shoulder patches and a relatively short tail.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

HOUSE CROW (*Corvus splendens*) – Regrettably common in the urban areas of both countries. [I]

BROWN-NECKED RAVEN (*Corvus ruficollis*) – A few out in the desert regions, with a maximum of 8 at Qitbit. The brown neck does show quite well on good views.

FAN-TAILED RAVEN (*Corvus rhipidurus*) – Common on the Dhofar escarpment only and with a very distinctive flight silhouette.

Alaudidae (Larks)

SINGING BUSHLARK (*Mirafra cantillans*) – A good find up on the plateau, well spotted by Charlotte then tracked down by Don and I for excellent views. The old main site at Jarziz Farm is now destroyed so it was good to find it here again.

GREATER HOOPOE-LARK (*Alaemon alaudipes*) – A fine bird at Bab al Shams, then two sightings en route to Qitbit, a very striking species.

BLACK-CROWNED SPARROW-LARK (*Eremopterix nigriceps*) – Seen well at Bab al Shams and then again at Al Beed farm, with flocks of 20 at both sites.

DESERT LARK (*Ammomanes deserti*) – Great looks at Jebel Hafeet, Jebel Qatar and finally at Jebel Akhdar.

BIMACULATED LARK (*Melanocorypha bimaculata*) – Two at Bab al Shams unfortunately flushed just as we relocated them; the pale tail tip is very distinctive and they have a harsh disyllabic trilled call. A scarce migrant here.

CRESTED LARK (*Galerida cristata*) – Widespread and seen very nicely, with a nice recording of a singing bird at East Khor.

SKY LARK (*Alauda arvensis*) – Just a few at the pivots.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Only seen at Buraimi SP and Al Ansab, very small numbers.

ROCK MARTIN (PALE CRAG-MARTIN) (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula obsoleta*) – Widespread in small numbers and usually split as Pale Crag Martin these days.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – 12 at Buraimi and 10 at Al Ansab were all that we saw.

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*) – A single at Al Warsan was a good find.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

RED-VENTED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus cafer*) – Just a few at the Mercure on Jebel Hafeet. [I]

WHITE-SPECTACLED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus xanthopygos*) – Quite common out in the rocky montane areas, seen on 7 days with the first at the Green Mubazzarah. A favourite of Ellen's, she thought the black head and white eye-ring looked like a terrorist! [E]

WHITE-EARED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus leucotis*) – Quite common in the UAE and a few at Muscat, with one near Buraimi too, so they seem to be spreading [I]

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – Four day records, all singles except for 2 at Qitbit where they were singing the typical song.

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (SCANDINAVIAN) (*Phylloscopus collybita abietinus*) – Some of the birds at Qitbit had the plaintive musical call which denotes one of the more easterly taxa; one in particular was very brownish with an almost black tail!

PLAIN LEAF-WARBLER (*Phylloscopus neglectus*) – One of my favourites, it's small, quite cryptic but really very distinctive in a subtle way with its active behaviour, very small size and bill, unique dry thorn scrub habitat and takking call. Seen very well at the Green Mubazzarah wadi and again at Jebel Qatar.

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) – A surprise at Qitbit on Jan 23, it was a nice well-marked bright plumage bird with the typical musical upslurred "tssooeesst" call. An Arabian tick for me, I have seen Hume's Warbler here but not this one. One small Phyllosc here had bright white underparts and a yellow supercilium with no obvious wing bar, and i have no idea what it was!

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

CLAMOROUS REED-WARBLER (INDIAN) (*Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens*) – Heard at various wetland sites and one was seen very well at Qurum Park. Apparently this taxon may be split as Indian Reed Warbler, just what the world needs, another cryptic *Acrocephalus*.....

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

GRACEFUL PRINIA (*Prinia gracilis*) – Heard on most days and seen well at the pivots and the Green Mubazzarah wadi.

Sylviidae (Sylviids, Parrotbills and Allies)

SMALL WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia minula*) – Five sightings, most being singles in Oman starting at the wadi by the Green Mubazzarah. [E]

EASTERN ORPHEAN WARBLER (*Sylvia crassirostris*) – Heard at Mushrif Park, they have a distinctive loud harsh takking call, and then one was seen skulking at Qitbit, alerting us to its presence by this call. A good find here.

ASIAN DESERT WARBLER (*Sylvia nana*) – Just a single sighting this trip, with a very fine view of one perched up at Buraimi, see the photo!

LESSER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia curruca*) – One at the Green Mubazzarah, and a couple at Jebel Akhdar which were very odd, being very white below with not much contrast between the grey head and lores; I wonder if they are one of the Asian races, maybe *halimodendri*? The call however was typical of Desert Whitethroat, a dry rattling series quite unlike that of Lesser Whitethroat.

RED SEA WARBLER (*Sylvia leucomelaena*) – Nice looks at singles of the Arabian Warbler at Ayn Hamran on two dates, Red Sea is just plain wrong..... [E]

MENETRIES'S WARBLER (*Sylvia mystacea*) – A good find in the wadi en route to Jebel Akhdar where we had two birds and very nice looks at them, one was a male and the other presumably a female. Uncommon and easily missed. [E]

Zosteropidae (Yuhinas, White-eyes, and Allies)

WHITE-BREASTED WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops abyssinicus*) – Four day records starting at Ayn Hamran, this is the taxon arabs.

Leiothrichidae (Laughingthrushes)

ARABIAN BABBLER (*Turdoides squamiceps*) – Two at Mushrif Park, then 4 at Jebel Qatar, always nice to get them. [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*) – Just a single at Qitbit, but a very obliging one with a touch of blue on the throat.

RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER (*Ficedula parva*) – A couple were at Qitbit, giving the dry trilling call but being hard to see well.

RUFIOUS-BACKED REDSTART (*Phoenicurus erythronotus*) – Usually called Eversmann's Redstart, there was a fine winter male at the Mercure at Jebel Hafeet, though how long it will evade the cats there is anyone's guess. It showed very nicely, see the photos on the IBC site, and was the first time I have seen a male. It's a rare winter visitor.

BLACK REDSTART (EASTERN) (*Phoenicurus ochruros semirufus*) – Great looks at Jebel Hafeet with a showy male, also seen at the Green Mubazzarah wadi. This form is a likely split as Eastern Black Redstart; we saw a couple of females but I am not sure they can be assigned to any subspecies.

BLUE ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola solitarius*) – Nice views around the Mercure at Jebel Hafeet.

EUROPEAN STONECHAT (*Saxicola rubicola rubicola*) – I think one of the birds at the pivots belongs here, but stonechat i.d. is complex.

SIBERIAN STONECHAT (SIBERIAN) (*Saxicola maurus maurus*) – Another from the pivot fields, one of those we saw looks good for Siberian.

BLACKSTART (*Cercomela melanura*) – Nice looks at Ayn Hamran and near Mirbat. The black tail is a good character.

HOODED WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe monacha*) – They can be hard to find, so the winter male by the car park atop Jebel Hafeet was very welcome and gave great views- see the photos on the IBC and the FG site.

HUME'S WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe albonigra*) – A smart black and white wheatear of the desert rocky areas, we saw them at Jebel Hafeet, Jebel Qatar and Jebel Akhdar. Quite a restricted range species.

MOURNING WHEATEAR (ARABIAN) (*Oenanthe lugens lugentoides*) – Just a pair en route to Tawi Attair, with both showing nicely up on the rocky plateau. Usually split as Arabian or South Arabian Wheatear, the female is very distinct to other taxa of Mourning Wheatear. [E]

VARIABLE WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe picata*) – This one is a very scarce winter visitor, so finding the one wintering at the Green Mubazzarah was excellent, thanks to Scott Young the local birder I met at the gas station who clued us in on where it was last seen ("These are my people" quoth he on seeing us with all our gear).

RED-TAILED WHEATEAR (RED-TAILED) (*Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna chrysopygia*) – Seen on 4 days, with 3 at the wadi below Jebel Hafeet, and 5 out at Jebel Qatar the most. Last were 2 up on Jebel Akhdar. A great and subtle little bird, this is one of the best places to see it. [E]
DESERT WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe deserti*) – Late coming, but quite widespread in Dhofar, the males are every striking, the one sheltering from the sun in a limestone hole at Sumharam was interesting.
ISABELLINE WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe isabellina*) – Very few, we saw them at Hamrania and then again at Al Beed, and I think that odd wheatear up at Tawi Attair was this species too.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

BLACK-THROATED THRUSH (*Turdus atrogularis*) – One in a ploughed field at Hamrania turf farm was a surprise, then those of us who stayed out in the afternoon saw a fine male sat beside a Dusky Thrush at Qitbit, with another calling and flying by just beforehand.
DUSKY THRUSH (*Turdus eunomus*) – One at Qitbit was perched up late afternoon with a male Black-throated Thrush for company, a vagrant in Oman and an Arabian tick for me.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

BANK MYNA (*Acridotheres ginginianus*) – We only saw these at Hamrania Turf Farm, quite a local introduction. [I]
COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Depressingly widespread, we saw a melanistic bird at Al Warsan which gave us a few initial puzzles, then had one with a bald orangey head at Qitbit alongside a normal one. [I]
EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – 7 at Hamrania turf farm was it for the trip.
TRISTRAM'S STARLING (*Onychognathus tristramii*) – Widespread and quite noisy around Salalah and the escarpment. [E]

Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)

NILE VALLEY SUNBIRD (*Hedydipna metallica*) – Great looks at a fine long-tailed male at Qitbit, with Charlotte seeing a second, then a non-breeding male and a couple of female-plumaged birds as well, they seem to have colonized this outpost.
PALESTINE SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris osea*) – A male near the Crowne Plaza was the only sighting, scarce this trip. [E]
SHINING SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris habessinicus*) – Good views of 3 males at Ayn Hamran, and some 5 males plus a female next day up around Tawi Attair.
PURPLE SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) – A few around in the UAE and some at Jebel Akhdar and Muscat too.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flava*) – Very few, the pivots were virtually devoid of them, though we had a couple at Qurum Park later.
WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (BLUE-HEADED) (*Motacilla flava flava*) – One at Lake Zakher looked good for Blue-headed.
CITRINE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla citreola*) – Seven day records, with very fine plumage birds at Qurum Park and Al Ansab, mostly singles but 3 on Jan 18.
GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*) – A few folks saw one at Ayn Hamran, and there was one briefly at Ayn Razat.
WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*) – Widespread, with up to 50 at Hamrania.
WHITE WAGTAIL (MASKED) (*Motacilla alba personata*) – A nice strikingly plumaged Masked Wagtail was at Hamrania, a rare visitor here and surely a split in waiting? Another alba wagtail there had quite a bit of black on the chin and throat and was probably an early summer plumage nominate bird.
RICHARD'S PIPIT (*Anthus richardi*) – One at the pivot fields.
BLYTH'S PIPIT (*Anthus godlewskii*) – Also one at the pivots, Steve was as usual super-confident but I was glad to hear it call.
TAWNY PIPIT (*Anthus campestris*) – A couple at the pivots, also at Al Ansab and Al Beed.
RED-THROATED PIPIT (*Anthus cervinus*) – Three at the pivots and one at Hamrania, all winter plumage so no red throat.
WATER PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta*) – 5 at the pivots and 25 at Hamrania, then singles at Al Ansab and Qurum.
AMERICAN PIPIT (SIBERIAN) (*Anthus rubescens japonicus*) – This is quite rare here, but we had 3 at Hamrania, and surprisingly distinctive they are too with heavily streaked underparts, a dark malar stripe and paler eye-ring and face. I had seen 5 here the day before.

Hypocoliidae (Hypocolius)

HYPOCOLIUS (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) – I got wind of a roost site the day before the trip, so excused myself from the inaugural dinner as I was checking it out- sure enough we saw 167 come in that night, so next day we went back (with due thanks to Charlotte and Bill's app that got us back there when our guide abandoned us earlier!) Then the construction guys wanted to throw us off the site, but we got 10 minutes in the oncoming rain and were able to see about 70 Hypocolius come in to roost- they fly in quite high in flocks of up to 20 then drop rapidly and out of sight into the mangroves. Great. Happily we then found another pair at Qitbit (after I decided to go and look rather than wait for breakfast), and got good looks at a male and female, this is the third time I have seen them in this area and it seems to be a pretty regular wintering site these days. [E]

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

STRIOLATED BUNTING (*Emberiza striolata striolata*) – 15 out at Jebel Qatar with some fine views, and then a couple at Jebel Akhdar.
CINNAMON-BREADED BUNTING (*Emberiza tahapisi*) – Quite common around Salalah (where I have yet to identify Striolated, though the females are not straightforward), we had great looks at Ayn Hamran and Tawi Attair.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

YEMEN SERIN (*Serinus menachensis*) – This showed very well at Tawi Attair and we eventually saw about 20 birds, an isolated outpost from the main range in Yemen but with so much wild country intervening there must be undiscovered populations. [E]
GOLDEN-WINGED GROSBEAK (ARABIAN) (*Rhynchostruthus socotranus percivali*) – Four of us skipped 0700 breakfast to get out early to Ayn Hamran, where a very strong wind was blowing. We got lucky however and got good views of a pair of this very elusive species in a fruiting Zizyphus tree, only my second sighting. [E]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus hufufae*) – This rather pale quite grey race was widespread, even out at Qitbit.

CHESTNUT-SHOULDERED PETRONIA (*Petronia xanthocollis*) – A surprise find on our mid-afternoon foray at Qitbit was a nice view of this species which is mainly a summer visitor here, a typical rather nondescript Petronia.

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

RUEPPELL'S WEAVER (*Ploceus galbula*) – A few around Salalah and Ayn Hamran, also Tawi Attair, but we only saw the red-eyed rather chestnut faced males at the Crowne Plaza .

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

INDIAN SILVERBILL (*Euodice malabarica*) – Widespread in small numbers in the UAE, seen well at Jimmi Oasis and the Mercure at Jebel Hafeet, also at Qurum and in the wadi near Jebel Akhdar.

AFRICAN SILVERBILL (*Euodice cantans*) – Small numbers in Dhofar starting at the Crowne Plaza in Salalah, then at Ayn Hamran.

NUTMEG MANNIKIN (*Lonchura punctulata*) – Just 2 at Jimmi Oasis were an Arabian tick for me. [I]

MAMMALS

INDO-PACIFIC BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops aduncus*) – I think one of the large grey dolphins on our boat trip was this species.

SPINNER DOLPHIN (*Stenella longirostris*) – The small dolphins with sharply recurved fins and habit of leaping out backwards were I think this species. We saw them off Muscat and off Taqah.

ARABIAN ORYX (*Oryx leucoryx*) – A trip highlight, I found one quite by accident as I was watching a Mountain Gazelle at Bab al Shams, and we saw another later, whilst Rob's car group had a great look at one as we were coming out. They became extinct in the wild but were bred in several zoos and reintroduction attempts are under way in several arab states. Still a mega-rare species, and the first time either Rob or I had seen one. [I]

MOUNTAIN GAZELLE (*Gazella gazella*) – The striking gazelles with the black flank stripe and black on the face are this species, also being reintroduced at various sites.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Whilst watching from the clifftops just south of Mirbat on Jan 21, we saw at least 4 turtles which I think consisted of 3 species:

--Leathery Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) -- This was the huge one that was near the size of a Volkswagen, swimming about over the seaweed beds. I think there were two animals, a huge one and a merely large one. They eat mainly jellyfish, and plastic bags and balloons are a major threat to their survival as they get ingested and then cause blockages. They are in their own monotypic family too, the Dermochelyidae.

--Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) -- One of these with the serrated end to the shell and tortoiseshell pattern was also off the seagrass beds.

--Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) -- I think the rather plain looking turtle with the more rounded shell here was likely to be this species, which has a big colony on Masirah Island not too far away.

A small viper under some plywood at Khor Beida was either Horned Viper or Sand Viper, a nicely patterned animal.

Two large eagle rays with white undersides to their flippers also came inshore at the clifftop site near Mirbat, they are from the family Myliobatidae.

A falcon at the pivot fields had jesses on and looked to be some sort of Peregrine type, but they have hybridised in captivity extensively out here and quite what is what is often problematic. Falcons are big business, one in Kuwait early this year sold for \$20,000 so it is no wonder we now so rarely see Barbary Falcon, and Saker has vanished.

Favourite birds were many and varied, but obviously Hypocolius came out on top, followed by Spotted Sandgrouse fighting in and calling so nicely at Muntasar, the amazing Striated Scops Owl that showed so well, then a diverse range from Chukar (Ellen) to Eversmann's Redstart plus those White Storks at Raysut tip and the wonderful Crab Plovers at Umm al Quwain.

The Arabian Oryx sighting also ranked very high, such a beautiful and rare creature.

Totals for the tour: 204 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa