



Violet-backed starling

SAUDI ARABIA

Asir and Jazan

12-19.5 2023

by

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Introduction

This was a combined birding- and spider collecting trip carried out with support from The Entomological Society of Stockholm – Stockholms Entomologiska Förening and in cooperation with King Khaled University in Riyadh. This trip report covers the birding aspects of our travels during 9 days, 12-19.5 in the Asir and Jazan region in southern Saudi Arabia.

Day 1, 12.5

We started our trip with smooth flights and successfully getting through security checks with all our equipment: scopes, bins, camera- and sound recording gear, spider collecting equipment and our check-in luggage. However, we encountered serious problems when we arrived at Abha car rental around midnight. We waited an hour during an internet breakdown but once the systems were up and running again we were called to the counter. Unfortunately our prepaid reservation had been lost and we were told to wait even longer. Client after client got their cars, it was getting very late and soon we were the only customers in the room. Nobody from Yelo – the company handling bookings from rentalcars.com took any responsibility and kept telling us in very poor English to seek advice at other agencies or come back the next day. We had a tight itinerary, there was no other option than to be steadfast and wait silently next to the desk. After a long wait, and extensive use of the Google translate app we finally got picked up by a man that would take us to the cars and somehow sort out a new contract. First birds of the trip: **white-spectacled bulbuls** and **crested larks** began to sing in the parking lot. A man in a booth spoke English and we finally got the feeling we were getting somewhere. Then we were told that we were not entitled to a full insurance when visiting Saudi Arabia for the first time, we were also told that it was impossible to have multiple drivers on the same contract, so Raul ended up driving the whole trip. The insurance issue we figured out how to work around if we return the car the next day and sign a new contract. Finally, we had a car so headed for our hotel and slept an hour before heading to the Plow hitch track at [18.161482, 42.429077](#). This proved to be an excellent and readily accessible site with many great birds and endemics. Along the mountain road leading up the site Hamadryas baboons were enjoying the morning sun and chased our car as we drove past, we glimpsed many **red-rumped swallows**, an **African stonechat**, a couple of **little rock thrushes** and flocks of **dusky turtle doves** at the top.

Little rock thrush





Yemen thrush

After arriving at the track we were immediately greeted by singing **brown woodland warblers**, a couple of obliging **Yemen thrushes** plus several **Yemen linnets** in the old Juniper trees. We started to walk down the track, **graceful prinias** sang, a **streaked scrub warbler** carrying prey, **Abyssinian whiteeyes** and the calls of displaying **Philby's-** and **Arabian partridges** from the cliffs around the military radio mast. **Hoopoes** called, and after a little while we stumbled across our first **Yemen warbler**, a distant **African olive pigeon** was heard amongst the many **dusky turtle doves**.

Yemen warbler



After lunch and some raptor watching, with a **crested honey buzzard**, **short-toed snake-** and **booted eagle**, a couple of **common kestrels** and three **Eurasian griffon vultures** we hiked back up to the car. **Pale crag martins** were foraging at the little farm where we parked and a **long-billed pipit** sang.

We then visited the guards at the entrance to the great Raidah Wildlife Sanctuary to get permits to enter the reserve the next day. The guards were very friendly and accommodating and after some delicious coffee, tea and dates we left with our water bottles refilled and permits cleared.

For the remaining day we planned to visit Abha Dam after checking in to our hotel.

After fighting the heavy afternoon traffic we arrived later than we had hoped.

Highlights during our short time here included a couple of **Arabian waxbills**, a family group of **Arabian serins** and **Gambaga flycatchers** with the most birdy area by the bridge, [18.210114](#), [42.488517](#), overlooking the shrubby areas in the south-eastern parts of the area.

Day 2, 13.5

We waited at dusk by the escarpment top, just past the guarded entrance. Due to the heavy wind, activity was low but one **montane nightjar** called briefly. We drove slowly down the winding road, stopping regularly. **Arabian partridges** scurried over the road, single **little rock thrushes** perched on roadside cacti. At one stop a couple of hundred meters down, an exquisite male **African paradise flycatcher** passed through the dense vegetation.

An **African olive pigeon** was heard and one, out of approximately three, was eventually seen a bit further down. Here we also heard our first **Arabian woodpecker** for the trip. Further down the road the mountainside forests were gradually replaced by a drier and sparser landscape. Here we saw our first **Arabian sunbirds** and **blackstarts**. *African olive pigeon*





Arabian woodpecker

Around the little village at [18.194076](#), [42.384768](#) we saw another couple of **African olive pigeons** and **Arabian woodpeckers**.

Wandering along the dried river, several **African grey hornbills** and a handful of **Diederik cuckoos** were heard. In spite of the midday heat the birding was excellent all the way to where the road turned rough at around [18.193137](#), [42.368252](#) with **Bruce's green pigeons**, **white-throated-** and **arabian green bee-eaters**, more hornbills, **grey-headed kingfishers**, **cinnamon-breasted buntings**, an adult male **golden oriole** and a **garden warbler**.

Reluctantly, we left this wonderful area and began our journey back up north towards Tanomah. A fairly long but pleasant drive. Well out of Abha the traffic was much calmer and we did a couple of stops to fill up on energy in the form of ice cream latte or freshly pressed juice. We had brief views of a roadside **Asir magpie** at [18.626248](#), [42.283798](#), and arrived at Mahvar Tourist Park, [18.964496](#), [42.130925](#) for some evening birding. Right before the park, around the cultivated fields we had our first **violet-backed starlings** and **Gambaga flycatchers**. We arrived and parked by the overgrown playgrounds and began exploring. Dusk was fast and in the last light, a couple of **Arabian eagle-owls** started to appear on the mountain tops. Through the increasing chorus of frogs, a couple of **Arabian scops owls** started to call and a **montane nightjar** sang sporadically. We caught a glimpse of a **desert owl's** silhouette, perched on a wall against the gradient blue night sky before it took off.

Day 3, 14.5

Dawn at Wadi Dahna, with distant views of three **Asir magpies** around the village, at least three **Philby's partridges** calling, one flying by **Hamerkop**, calling **Diederik cuckoo**, a pair of **Arabian waxbills** and several **African paradise flycatchers** around [18.899955, 42.204199](#).

The road led us to an agricultured rocky plateau in the wadi with cultivated fields, scattered trees, bushes and single groves. **Cinnamon-breasted buntings** sang and we saw several **Gambaga flycatchers**. At least two **Arabian warblers** were seen, flocks of **Alpine swifts** flew high above and a pair of **Arabian woodpeckers** were feeding their young. Other good birds at this beautiful site included **Yemen warblers**, **Bruce's green pigeon**, two **grey-headed kingfishers**, another **Diederik cuckoo**, a pair of **violet-backed starlings** and a loud flock of 25 migrating **European bee-eaters**.

The afternoon and evening were spent again at Mahvar Tourist Park, where we still needed some target species. In the fields at [18.964871, 42.139950](#) we connected with the first; a group of four **African pipits**.

African pipit ssp. eximius



Upon arrival at the park an **Arabian woodpecker** called and the **Tristram's starlings** announced a stunning male **Shikra** that blasted past us and landed for a few seconds in a nearby tree which allowed for brief (but fantastic) views. In the open rocky area west of the parking lot we had our first **Yemen serin** and a group of **streaked scrub warblers**.



Yemen serin

We could scope a single **Philby's partridge** calling from one of the highest mountains in the sunset. Eventually at least two **Arabian eagle-owls** called and one could be seen hunting from the lamp posts around the parking lot. Three **Arabian scops owls** joined and suddenly we heard a **plain nightjar** in the west and a **montane nightjar** in the east.

Here we were also fortunate to have a very inquisitive **striped hyena** come and check us out from less than 10 meters away, relying on his stealth movement and camouflage, seemingly completely oblivious to our flashlights pointing right at him. Nocturnal life here was splendid with many insects and spiders, with several new species for science in the spider fauna.



Day 4, 15.5

When getting morning coffee in the outskirts of Tanomah from one of the many Saudi coffee stands, a **Hamerkop** flew by. The plan for today was to explore the areas south of Tanomah and bird our way down south to arrive at Marabah Dam in the Jazan region by afternoon. At [18.896768, 42.204534](#) we saw three **Arabian serins**, a little bit further on two **Asir magpies** and at [18.884521, 42.188749](#) three **Philby's partridges**. A terraced field at [18.888120, 42.195889](#) proved to be an excellent stop with two passing through **Jacobin cuckoos**, one **little owl**, one **Philby's partridge**, two **African pipits**, a couple of **violet-backed starlings** and a **lesser grey shrike**.

Asir magpie



Until now we had not seen any **buff-breasted wheatears** but at a stop at Bihan [18.644368, 42.239964](#) we saw at least ten individuals. Other birds worth mentioning here were: a pair of **African stonechats**, two **Asir magpies**, a calling **Diederik cuckoo**, a flock of **Yemen linnets**, a pair of **Yemen warblers** and **Yemen thrushes**, one **long-legged buzzard** and a **crested honey buzzard**.



Buff-breasted wheatear

We finally arrived in the lowland after a hectic drive down the plateau. We stopped by a roadside mango stand, stepped out of our air-conditioned car and got our first experience of the humid and smothering 40+ degree air. After sampling and stocking up on the delicious mango varieties from a stand (that later turned out to be a rather common sight along the bigger roads), we took the Marabah exit of the main road. Our first **black scrub-robin**, perched on roadside power lines, and we arrived at the dam in time for some late afternoon birding.

At our first stop at [17.896858](#), [42.379538](#) we saw another couple of **black scrub-robins**, two **desert larks** and two **Arabian green bee-eaters**. Scanning the dam, there were many **glossy ibises**, two **squacco herons**, two **pink-backed pelicans** and **African palm swifts**. **White-browed coucals** were seen and heard in the bushes close to the dam, a **purple heron**, several **Nile Valley sunbirds**, two **white-browed bee-eaters**, a little group of **violet-backed starlings**, an **Arabian waxbill** and around five **Arabian sunbirds** were seen and a **crested honey buzzard** circling over the dam.

At dusk, we got our headlamps and headed out in the barren wadi. An **Arabian scops owl** called from the eastern slopes, approximately 15 **plain nightjars** were heard and some even seen foraging over the stony river-bed.

Day 5, 16.5

Today we again set course to Marabah. We headed for the south-eastern parts, parked by the bridge and started to walk, we had our first **Namaqua dove** and a couple of **black-crowned night herons**. A Saudi man named Ayed drove up to us and started to talk, after a while when he realised we were birdwatchers after we had showed him a picture of a sand partridge, he offered to take us up into the wadi to visit his shepherd's camp where he claimed we would see them. Since the road is closed and guarded on this side of the dam (and the road is anyway unfit for anything but serious 4WD ala Landcruisers!) we decided to go with him. Along the bumpy road, an **Arabian partridge** appeared. Ayed yelled and wanted to make sure we saw it! For a second, we assumed he had mistaken it for a sand partridge, but to our delight he continued to eagerly scan the mountain sides whilst driving. Eventually, we arrived at the camp and were greeted by two shepherds that immediately started to prepare breakfast for us.

Ayed walked purposefully, calling on us to follow him and got one of the shepherds to call back the twenty-something dogs that followed us excitedly barking.

He stopped by a stony hill in the middle of the wadi, told us to wait, walked a little towards the hill, then took out his phone and put it on a nearby stone. To our great surprise he started to play the call of a **sand partridge**, lit a cigarette and then walked back to us.

A male immediately responded and perched on the rocky top and started to call, while the female and nine chicks were seen further down the slope moving away from us.

Sand partridge



We then enjoyed a lovely breakfast with Ayed and his shepherds before it was time to head back. After saying thanks and goodbye to Ayed we walked out yet again in the blazing hot wadi for some more birding and spider collecting.

Another **Jacobin cuckoo** and a **golden oriole** were seen, **white-throated- and little green bee-eaters** hunted insects from the power lines.

After a very generous lunch at Ayed's house we drove further south, there had been reports of Arabian golden sparrows and we wanted to look for them before heading for the Al Saad lake outside Jazan.

On the wide open desert plain there were suddenly terns on the horizon, we stopped and saw some open water in the distant haze. At roughly [17.495772](#), [42.332557](#) we stopped by the pools and they were teeming with birds, hundreds of cattle egrets, larks, waders and doves, here we also had distant views of our first **Arabian golden sparrows**.

Arabian golden sparrow



We eventually left, headed for the next sparrow site but missed our exit. Once we had realised we took the next possible turn-off to try to get back to the gps-site as soon as we could. The road turned to track, and with a sudden flash of gold over the windshield we were surrounded by hundreds of Arabian golden sparrows at this unexpected location! The reason was right in front of us: a water pump with some leaking hoses.

The water also attracted other birds such as **African silverbills**, **Rüppell's weavers**, **crested- and black-crowned sparrow-larks** and **Namaqua-** and **African collared doves**. We reluctantly left this passer feast and set course for Al Saad lake in order to get there before dark. New birds here included five **ferruginous ducks** and two **little bitterns**. At dusk we enjoyed the display of five **Nubian nightjars** around [17.029362](#), [42.992110](#).

Day 6, 17.5

Because of high water levels we failed to find observation points over Jazan Wadi Dam. The roads and paths were either closed or water-locked. We did however manage to connect with a flock of **helmeted guineafowls** at [17.047909](#), [42.986532](#), the only **red-eyed dove** of the trip and **intermediate egret** at [17.042306](#), [42.988122](#).

We returned to Al Saad lake for a quick scan before leaving for downtown Jazan where we met with Dr. Usama who generously helped us restock on our alcohol for spider- and insect preserving.

Treating us to a tasty lunch at a local fish restaurant, Dr. Usama also made sure all our papers were in order before we embarked the ferry to the Farasan islands.

White-eyed gulls were abundant near the docks and just out of port they were joined by **lesser-** and **greater crested terns**, a few **brown noddies** and **bridled terns**. Unfortunately, it was prohibited (for safety reasons?!) to be outside on deck during the crossing. Notable sightings were two **flesh-footed shearwaters** (seemingly new for SA), one **Persian shearwater** and two **Scopoli's shearwaters**.

We found a nearby place on the map that looked promising and headed there straight away.

Crab plover



Here, [16.654113](#), [42.180028](#) we enjoyed a couple of wonderful hours of birding before sunset. Whilst driving the track out towards the boat club we had one second calendar year **sooty falcon** and a distant soaring **Egyptian vulture**. By the boat club, in the mudflats we saw several **crab plovers**, four **Terek sandpipers**, two **Kentish plovers**, **spotted-** and **common redshanks** and one **common sandpiper**. **Striated-** and **reef egrets** lurked by the outer rocks and **sooty gulls**, a couple of **white-eyed gulls** and a few **Saunders' terns** roosted on the beach.

After ordering take-away dinner at the fish restaurant at [16.693094](#), [42.119764](#), (culinary highlight of the trip, delicious!) we had time for some spider hunting just outside town, accompanied by a calling **Nubian nightjar**.

Day 7, 18.5

Our chartered boat was scheduled to leave at 07.00 for a couple of hours exploring the Farasan archipelago. We birded the mangroves west of the harbour prior to departure and got wonderful views of a **Goliath heron** in the morning sunlight, as we tracked down a **mangrove reed warbler**. At 0700 we were picked up by our captain by the docks and after clearing our permits and papers with the military we headed out to sea. Enjoyably, we encountered closely many of the little islands and reefs with their many hundreds of terns: **white-cheeked-**, **lesser-** and **greater crested-**, **bridled-**, **noddies-** and single **Saunders' terns**, with **brown boobies**, **sooty-** and **white-eyed gulls**. The exquisite finale was seven **sooty falcons** resting in the shade on one of the outer islands.

Goliath heron





Sooty falcon

In the short time before taking the afternoon ferry back to Jazan we saw another four **Egyptian vultures** and added **yellow-billed kite**, **short-toed snake-eagle** and **black-crowned sparrow-lark** to our Farasan list.

Once back on the Saudi mainland we went to the nearby JWTP Mangroves, we birded from the side of the road and were enthusiastically honked at by every truck driver that drove past. In spite of the rather busy setting around this site we got some new species for the trip such as **marsh sandpiper**, **pieb avocet** and **slender-billed gull**, unfortunately we failed to find the previously reported Lesser flamingos among the hundreds of **Greater flamingos**. Down by the mudflats at [16.774886](#), [42.675499](#), we had a fitting end to this day with 58 **Tibetan sand plovers** in full breeding plumage roosting in the fading twilight.

Day 8, 19.5

At dawn, at the Sabya pivot fields, **singing bush larks** and **zitting cisticolas** called, a couple of **black-winged kites** hovered over distant fields and a **crested honey buzzard** flew by. **African silverbills** and doves drank at a water tank and two **Abyssinian rollers** patrolled the sandy fields. Four **Jacobin cuckoos** showed up, and a pair of **chestnut-bellied sandgrouse** foraged in the green pivot field. Suddenly, we flushed a **common buttonquail**! When trying to relocate it another started to call from a different part of the field, and yet another..! Approximately seven were either heard or flushed in this area. We had coffee and then commenced our drive via Either mangroves back up to Abha.

We battled against strong winds and merciless midday heat at Either and had almost given up on **mangrove white-eye** when we finally managed to connect with one and could resort to the air-conditioned car and start our climb up to the cooler mountain plateaus. Our destination for the evening was Habala park, outside Abha. It was sunny with occasional showers up on the plateau. Around [18.071176](#), [42.857787](#), much to our delight there were approximately ten **rufous-capped larks**, displaying over the mountains.

Rufous-capped lark



A **long-legged buzzard** was also seen and a group of five **streaked scrub warblers**. We birded and looked for spiders until nightfall. As we hiked back to the car in the dark we revelled in the distant thunderstorms over the horizon and two **plain nightjars** called down in the valley.

Day 9, 20.5

This was our last day, our flight left in the afternoon.

We decided to return to where we began our trip, at Plow hitch track, [18.161482](#), [42.429077](#) for some final hours of birding and spider collecting.

There were no new trip species and general activity seemed to have diminished since our first visit. But this site proved itself again as an easily accessible place with great opportunities to see many Asir endemics and other regional specialities.

General advice:

-Travel takes time, because of heavy traffic around the cities of Jazan and Abha there is always a risk of getting stuck, especially around rush hour and religious holidays.

-The traffic is terrible, by far the worst we have ever encountered. Make sure you have maxed out the car rental insurance. Don't speed and follow the traffic lights, in spite of the seemingly lawless driving, most crossings have cameras and highways are monitored and fines are huge.

- We booked all our hotels before arriving in Saudi Arabia. It should be theoretically possible to travel to Saudi Arabia and book rooms in hotels on the spot. There are many more hotels in the cities than sites such as booking.com show, and many of the hotels looked half empty, at least when we arrived. However booking beforehand saves precious birding time.

- Regarding car rental we can only say that we would try to never use Yelo again, apparently bookings have been known to disappear when booking through rentalcars.com and it might be better to book directly via Yelo, although we do not know if you can get the same insurance then.

- The Saudis are generally very happy to meet and take pictures of you, we would however recommend always asking for permission before you take their picture and NEVER point your camera at military or security facilities

Species list

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* (LC)

2 Al Saad lake 2023-05-17

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (LC)

1 Al Saad lake

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (NT)

5 Al Saad lake

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris* (LC)

10 Jazan Wadi Dam

Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* (LC)

11 N of Marabha Dam, two adults with nine chicks

Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala* (LC)

Plow hitch track, Raidah and Wadi Dahna, roughly 20 in total

Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi* (LC)

5 Wadi Dahna, 1 Mahvar Tourist Park, 6 Wadi Ghatal, 2 Plow hitch track



Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus* (LC)

5 Al Saad lake, 1 Farasan islands



Montane Nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus* (LC)

1 Raidah, 1 Mahvar Tourist Park

Plain Nightjar *Caprimulgus inornatus* (LC)

1 Mahvar Tourist Park, 15 Marabha Dam, 2 North Habala Park

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* (LC)

2 Marabha Dam , 2 oasis N of Jazan, 1 Khatirah, 6 Abu Arish, 1 Al Saad lake,
6 Sabya pivot fields

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* (LC)

80 Wadi Dahna

Little Swift *Apus affinis* (LC)

Flocks over Abha, Plow hitch track and Wadi Dahna

White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus* (LC)

1 Al Saad lake, 5 Marabha Dam, 3 Jazan Wadi Dam

Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* (LC)

2 Wadi Ghatal, 1 Marabha Dam, 4 Sabya pivot fields



Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* (LC)

4 Raidah, 2 Wadi Dahna, 1 Bihan

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* (LC)

4 oasis N of Jazan, 2 Sabya pivot fields

Rock Dove *Columba livia* (LC)

Seen in urban areas

African Olive Pigeon *Columba arquatrix* (LC)

1 Plow hitch track, 5 Raidah

Dusky Turtle Dove *Streptopelia lugens* (LC)

Many observations in Asir, Raidah, Wadi Dahna, Plow hitch track etc.

African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea* (LC)

Regular in Jazan, Marabha Dam, oasis N of Jazan, Sabya pivot fields etc.



Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* (LC)

1 Jazan Wadi Dam

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* (LC)

Several at Plow hitch track, 10 Wadi Dahna, 1 Farasan islands, regular in Jazan

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* (LC)

4 Marabha Dam, 75 oasis N of Jazan, 4 Sabya pivot fields



Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia* (LC)

6 Raidah, 1 Wadi Dahna, 1 Billasmar

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (LC)

1 Abha Dam

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* (LC)

4 Abha Dam, 10 Jazan Wadi Dam

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (LC)

1 Abha Dam, 40 Marabah Dam , 350 Al Saad lake

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* (LC)

100 JWTP Mangroves

Common Buttonquail *Turnix sylvaticus* (LC)

7 Sabya pivot fields

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (NT)

1 Farasan islands , 1 JWTP Mangroves, 1 Either Mangroves

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (LC)

7 oasis N of Jazan

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (LC)

1 JWTP Mangroves

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* (LC)

1 Jazan Wadi Dam , 4 Al Saad lake, 1 JWTP Mangroves

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (LC)

5 JWTP Mangroves

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (LC)

1 Farasan islands, 1 Either Mangroves

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* (LC)

2 Farasan boat club, 1 JWTP Mangroves, 2 Either Mangroves

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* (LC)

1 Either Mangroves

Tibetan Sand Plover *Charadrius atrifrons pamirensis* (LC)

58 JWTP Mangroves

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (LC)

1 Farasan boat club

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* (NT)

1 Farasan islands

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* (NT)

1 Farasan islands

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (NT)

4 Jazan Wadi Dam, 75 Al Saad lake

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (LC)

1 Farasan boat club

Ruff *Calidris pugnax* (LC)

2 oasis N of Jazan, 5 Farasan boat club, 3 Al Saad lake

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* (LC)

1 Jazan Wadi Dam

Sanderling *Calidris alba* (LC)

1 JWTP Mangroves

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* (LC)

2 JWTP Mangroves

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* (LC)

1 Jazan Wadi Dam, 1 JWTP Mangroves

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (LC)

4 Farasan boat club

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (LC)

1 Farasan boat club

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* (LC)

1 Farasan Boat club

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (LC)

1 JWTP Mangroves, 1 Either Mangroves

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (LC)

40 JWTP Mangroves

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* (LC)

4 Farasan boat club, 4 Al Saad lake

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (LC)

1 Jazan Wadi Dam, 2 Al Saad lake

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola* (LC)

1 Farasan islands, 10 Farasan Boat club, 3 JWTP Mangroves, 2 Either Mangroves

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* (LC)

30 Farasan islands boat trip, singles from the Jazan-Farasan ferry

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei* (LC)

4 JWTP Mangroves

White-eyed Gull *Ichthyaetus leucophthalmus* (LC)

Regular around coastal Jazan and Farasan islands



Sooty Gull *Ichthyaetus hemprichii* (LC)

Common around coastal Jazan and the Farasan islands

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* (LC)

4 oasis N of Jazan

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (LC)

20 oasis N of Jazan, 3 Al Saad lake

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* (LC)

1 Farasan islands, 1 Farasan boat club

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* (LC)

Regular around coastal Jazan and Farasan islands

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* (LC)

Regular around coastal Jazan and Farasan islands

Saunders's Tern *Sternula saundersi* (LC)

5 Farasan Boat club, 2 Farasan islands boat trip



Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* (LC)
Common around breeding islands in Farasan archipelago



White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa* (LC)
Common in Farasan islands



White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (LC)

7 oasis N of Jazan, 4 JWTP Mangroves

Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* (LC)

2 Farasan ferry-crossing

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes* (NT)

2 Farasan ferry-crossing

Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus* (LC)

1 Farasan ferry-crossing

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* (LC)

Common in Farasan islands

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (LC)

17 Marabha Dam, 40 Al Saad lake

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* (LC)

20 Al Saad lake, 30 JWTP Mangroves

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (LC)

2 Al Saad lake

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (LC)

4 Marabha Dam

Striated Heron *Butorides striata* (LC)

4 Farasan islands

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (LC)

3 Marabah Dam, 5 Al Saad lake

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (LC)

350 oasis N of Jazan, flocks also seen at Al Saad lake, Sabya etc.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (LC)

10 Marabah Dam

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* (LC)

1 Farasan islands

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* (LC)

1 Marabha Dam, 1 Al Saad lake, 1 Farasan islands

Intermediate Egret *Ardea intermedia* (LC)

1 Jazan Wadi Dam

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (LC)

4 Marabha Dam

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* (LC)

2 Farasan boat club and singles seen on Farasan boat trip

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* (LC)

1 Wadi Dahna, 1 Tanomah, 1 Jazan Wadi Dam

Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* (LC)

Regularly seen in Jazan region, Al Saad lake, Farasan islands, Either etc. and 3 Marabah Dam



Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (LC)

of the genetically and morphologically distinct population residing in the Red Sea, perhaps of a still undescribed subspecies.

1 Marabha Dam and roughly 10 individuals around Farasan islands



Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* (LC)

4 Sabya pivot fields

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* (EN)

Seven observations in Farasan islands of various age classes, a group of four seen once, approximately 7 individuals in total recorded



Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* (LC)

1 Raidah, 1 Bihan, 1 Marabah Dam, 1 Sabya pivot fields, 1 North Habala Park

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* (LC)

3 Plow hitch track

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* (LC)

1 Plow hitch track, 1 Wadi Dahna, 2 Farasan islands

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* (LC)

1 Plow hitch track

Shikra *Accipiter badius sphenurus* (LC)

1 Mahvar Tourist Park, 1 Marabha Dam, 1 Either, 1 Al Saad lake



Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* (LC)

2 Farasan islands

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* (LC)

1 Raidah, 1 Bihan, 1 North Habala Park, all dark morph

Desert owl *Strix hadorami* (LC)

1 Mahvar Tourist Park

Little Owl *Athene noctua* (LC)

1 Wadi Ghatal

Arabian Scops Owl *Otus pamelae* (LC)

4 Mahvar Tourist Park, 1 Marabha Dam, 1 Wadi Dahna



Arabian Eagle-Owl *Bubo milesi* (LC)

4 Mahvar Tourist Park

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* (LC)

Scarce but regularly seen in Asir, Wadi Ghatal, Wadi Dhila, Raidah etc.

African Grey Hornbill *Lophoceros nasutus* (LC)

4 Raidah

Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinicus* (LC)

2 Sabya pivot fields



Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala* (LC)

4 Raidah, 2 Wadi Dahna, 2 Jazan Wadi Dam

White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis* (LC)

3 Raidah, 4 Marabha Dam

Arabian Green Bee-eater *Merops cyanophrys* (LC)

2 Raidah , 5 Marabha Dam, 5 oasis N of Jazan , 2 Jazan Wadi Dam

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (LC)

25 migrating over Wadi Dahna

Arabian Woodpecker *Dendrocoptes dora* (NT)

3 Raidah, 2 Wadi Dahna, 1 Mahvar Tourist Park

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (LC)

4 Plow hitch track

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* (VU)

1 2cy Farasan boat club, 7 Farasan islands boat trip

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (LC)

1 Raidah, 1 Marabha Dam

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis* (LC)

1 Raidah, 8 Wadi Dahna

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (LC)

1 Wadi Ghatal

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* (LC)

1 Abha Dam

Asir Magpie *Pica asirensis* (EN)

1 en route S of Bihan, 3 Wadi Dahna, 1 Wadi Ghatal, 1 Bihan

House Crow *Corvus splendens* (LC)

Common downtown Jazan

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* (LC)

1 Plow hitch track, 2 oasis N of Jazan

Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus* (LC)

Regular in Asir

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* (LC)

2 Marabha Dam

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps* (LC)

Patchy occurrence but often big flocks when found, mainly in desert in Jazan region and Farasan islands, largest flock of around 200 at oasis N of Jazan



Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra javanica* (LC)

5 Sabya pivot fields

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata brachyura* (LC)

Singles seen regularly both in Asir and Jazan

Rufous-capped Lark *Calandrella eremica* (LC)

10 North Habala Park



White-spectacled Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* (LC)

Common

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* (LC)

2 Bihan

Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta* (LC)

Singles in Asir, Plow hitch track and Wadi Dahna etc.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (LC)

1 Bihan

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (LC)

Fairly common

Streaked Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta buryi* (LC)

1 Plow hitch track, 4 Mahvar tourist park, 5 North Habala Park



Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* (LC)

1 Wadi Dahna

Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens* (LC)

Common in suitable habitat in Asir, mostly in Juniper forests



Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* (LC)

1 JWTP Mangroves, 1 Either Mangroves

“Mangrove” Common Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus avicenniae*

1 Farasan islands, 4 JWTP Mangroves, 1 Either Mangroves

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* (LC)

7 Sabya pivot fields

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis yemenensis* (LC)

Scarce but regular

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (LC)

4 Wadi Dahna

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* (LC)

1 Raidah

Yemen Warbler *Curruca buryi* (NT)

4 Plow hitch track, 2 Wadi Dahna, 2 Bihan, 5 Raidah

Arabian Warbler *Curruca leucomelaena* (LC)

2 Wadi Dahna

Abyssinian White-eye *Zosterops abyssinicus* (LC)

Common in suitable habitat in Asir

“Mangrove” White-eye *Zosterops abyssinicus arabs*

1 Either Mangroves

Arabian Babbler *Argya squamiceps squamiceps* (LC)

Regular

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (LC)

Regular in Jazan region

Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* (LC)

2 Al Wahdah woods, 2 Wadi Dahna, 2 Wadi Ghatal, 3 North Hababa Park, 4 Marabah Dam

Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristramii* (LC)

Regular, good numbers at Plow hitch track, Wadi Dahna, Al Habala area and Mahvar Tourist Park

Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis* (NT)

Regularly seen in Asir, for instance Plow hitch track, Wadi Dahna, Raidah etc.

Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe* (LC)

5 Marabha Dam, 2 Wadi Marabha, 2 waterpump N of Jazan

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (LC)

1 Jazan Wadi Dam

Gambaga Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae* (LC)

2 Abha Dam, 10 Mahavar Tourist Park, 6 Wadi Dahna, 2 Wadi Ghatal



Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinereus* (LC)

Regular in suitable habitat in Asir, best sites were Plow hitch track and Raidah

African Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus felix* (LC)

2 Plow hitch track, 5 Bihan

Buff-breasted Wheatear *Oenanthe bottae* (LC)

10 in Bihan area, 1 Plow hitch track, singles along the road S of Bihan

Blackstart *Oenanthe melanura* (LC)

Singles in Raidah and Marabah Dam

Arabian Wheatear *Oenanthe lugentoides* (LC)

Regular in Asir

Nile Valley Sunbird *Hedydipna metallica* (LC)

15 Marabah Dam, also seen in Al Saad area



Palestine Sunbird *Cinnyris osea* (LC)
Common



Arabian Sunbird *Cinnyris hellmayri* (LC)

10 Raidah, 1 Wadi Dahna, 5 Wadi Marabah

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (LC)

Common

Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchlorus* (LC)

Singles and small flocks at oasis N of Jazan, and roughly 200 at water pump N Jazan



Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula* (LC)

Common

African Silverbill *Euodice cantans* (LC)

Several sightings in Jazan region, 1 Marabah Dam, many at oasis N of Jazan, 6 Al Saad lake, 25 Sabya pivot fields etc.

Arabian Waxbill *Estrilda rufibarba* (LC)

4 Abha Dam, 2 Wadi Dahna, 1 Marabha Dam

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (LC)

1 Farasan boat club

African Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus* (LC)

4 Mahvar Tourist Park, 2 Wadi Ghatal, 2 Bihan

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* (LC) Singles at Plow hitch road, Wadi Ghatal, Wadi Dahna, Bihan etc.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* (LC)

1 Wadi Dahna, 1 Mahvar Tourist Park

Arabian Serin *Crithagra rothschildi* (LC)

6 Abha Dam, 3 Wadi Dahna

Yemen Serin *Crithagra menachensis* (LC)

1 Mahvar Tourist Park

Yemen Linnet *Linaria yemenensis* (LC)

Regular in Asir



Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi* (LC)

2 Raidah , 3 Wadi Dahna, 2 North Habala Park



Spider hunting in Mahvar Tourist Park



Wadi Marabah



Flow hitch track



Marabah Dam

Wadi Dahna



Hamadryas baboon



Final thoughts

The lack of conservation awareness of the unique nature in the region is troubling. One can hope that increased knowledge will bring to attention the conservation priorities needed to protect the unique flora and fauna. We observed for instance extensive road building with precious mountain habitats being blown up around Habala Park. This site, with its rufous-capped lark-populations most certainly has undescribed species of insects and spiders. This and many other pristine areas, should be a conservation priority for Saudi Arabia.

We wish that we had spent more time at a mangrove, to have better views of mangrove white-eye which was very difficult, and to look more closely at the different populations of crested lark in the area (mountain vs. lowland) which seemed morphologically interesting.