

Bird records from Jordan

24th September – 21st October 2010

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During the autumn of 2010 I had the opportunity to spend a period of internship in Syria and Jordan. This was a part of my Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Stockholm, Sweden. My host and coordinator for the internship was the BirdLife International Middle East office in Amman, Jordan. The period was divided between field visits in Syria with the local partners of BirdLife, such as the Syrian Society for Conservation of Wildlife, and time spent at the office in Amman and various visits in Jordan.

Thus, this was not a bird watching holiday and this document is not to be seen as a trip report but rather a summary of the birding experience and records from the period in Jordan. See the separate report for records from Syria during 10th – 24th September 2010.

The bird seeking efforts were limited to a few days; the sunset hour of September 30th at Azraq, October 2nd at Wadi Shuayb and the Dead Sea area, the morning of October 11th at Khirbet al-Samra and October 13th and 15th at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Some logistics

Jordan is an excellent country for visitors since much of the logistics that can prove a headache in some of the neighboring countries is here well-arranged and more easily available. Hotels, arrangements and facilities are usually close at hand in towns and tourist sites. I had a lot of my visits and arrangements done through the Birdlife office.

Driving from **Amman** the 340km-something **to Aqaba** can be done either on the Desert Highway or along the Dead Sea and Wadi Arava. The latter is smaller, but in good shape, and more scenic and likely to yield some good birds along the road. There are not many chances for food and drinks, a rest house some 110 km north of Aqaba was decent but otherwise there is little, so bunk up. It took us about four hours in all during October 12th. On the way back to Amman we took the bus on the Desert Highway. The ticket was 7.5 JD for the four hour trip (without break) which was pretty uneventful.

A Dead Sea day visit for swimming/floating in the salty waters can be done to the “Amman Tourist Beach” which is just south of the fancy Möwenpick and Marriott resorts. You will find all the facilities for day visitors but it can be quite crowded in the afternoon; arrive early. The entrance is 15 JD and you can rent towels/lockers for a few JD. Lunch buffet is 12 JD and there are snacks and drinks available. We went here with a pleasant and trustable taxi driver called Abu Eissa, his mobile is +962 785 531431. The full day from Amman and back was 50 JD.

Azraq Wetland Reserve



This former glorious wetland haven in the eastern desert of Jordan, some 100km east of Amman, is now a sad remnant of years passed. The water surfaces have shrunk dramatically (last year with a living wetland was 1992) and what now remains, at least in September 2010, were some muddy pools, reed beds, Tamarisk scrub and dry grazing areas for a bunch of relaxed water buffalos. A positive experience though, and truly impressive after the total lack of such in Syria, was the reserve facilities themselves; an informative and educational visitors centre, walking trails, hides, information boards and nearby, the Azraq Eco Lodge.

Still, since I expected it to be totally dry, the pools and muddy edges seemed good enough to attract many birds, especially during migration periods. My visit was far too short, just less than an hour looking through the pools near the visitors centre. A few Purple and Night Herons, some fifty ducks including Garganeys and Northern Pintails, some few waders, Water Rail and a fine Little Crake and, as hoped for even though escaped, a White-cheeked Bulbul. A dozen Steppe Buzzards came in for roost.

Wadi Shuayb, the Karameh Dam and Wadi Himara



The mouth of Wadi Shuayb has a little dam which held some waders, a few ducks and grebes and a drinking Montague's Harrier with Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Little Swift overhead.

This was a nice day trip with Ibrahim al-Hasani from the BirdLife office. We headed west from Amman, through the town of Salt and down the winding and scenic Wadi Shuayb all the way to the Jordan valley floor. Northwest of the town with the same name, among dusty cultivation near the Israeli border, is the Karameh Dam which is an important site mainly in winter for waterfowl. Now it held little but still a nice hour of birding. We then drove south along the Rift Valley margin with spectacular views over the Dead Sea and continued to the Dead Sea Panoramic Complex, an interesting exhibition site. Near this was a *wadi* which we explored in the scorching heat and managed to find a handful of Sand Partridges, a lifer for me 😊

Wadi Shuayb is well vegetated along the little creek with reed, scrubs and huge eucalyptus trees, White-breasted Kingfisher, Cetti's Warbler and Palestine Sunbirds where here. At the mouth of the wadi is a sandy plain and a shallow dam which must be good during migration, but today it was quite poor although pleasant birding in all. After the dam is a checkpoint where it is recommended to bring your passport and hide scopes and cameras (close to the border area on the Jordan Valley floor) but we were waived through. We stopped in Karameh for food and then negotiated a bumpy track down to the northern end of the dam. Some plovers and other waders were feeding along the shore including a Marsh Sandpiper.



Wadi Himara is just a few km's before the visitors centre and offers spectacular views. Sand Partridges were flushed from the slopes and the palm grove had Chukars, Tristram's Grackles, Blackstarts and Rock Martins. Both Short-toed and Bonelli's Eagle soared nearby!

The rugged *wadi's* running down from the Rift Valley escarpment towards the Dead Sea are spectacular and, some of them, good for the local specialties. We searched one of them (follow the road that winds up towards the "Dead Sea Panoramic Complex" and stop at the P-sign a few km's before that, then scramble down in the *wadi* on your right) and were lucky to find Sand Partridge and other species typical for the area. Some refreshments and education at the visitors centre was crowned by the distant view of a Bonelli's Eagle soaring over the hills.

Khirbet al-Samra

This is a sewage treatment plant with some muddy (and smelly) ponds and pools near the desert edge, just north of Zarqa and about 35km north of central Amman (about an hour drive). Most ponds, with various levels of mud, muddy water and/or landfill, were empty of birds but especially one, larger, reed-fringed (to the far left as you enter the area, look for the tall reeds) pond was excellent with at least 500 waders of some 15 species! Also some few herons and ducks, a 1cy Citrine Wagtail, a semi-tame 1cy White Pelican and a bit surprisingly several parties of Indian Silverbills in the reeds. This visit was arranged by the RSCN.

Aqaba Bird Observatory (ABO)

Mirroring the more famous IBRCE at Eilat, on the Israeli side barely more than a kilometer away, is the water treatment plant known since a few years as the Aqaba Bird Observatory. Surrounding groups of trees, scrubs, some patches of reeds and the exciting location all combine to a very interesting migration site. Recently a nature organization (JSSD) has arranged with visitors facilities and a small centre, and guided visits are possible. Interested can contact mr Firas at birding2@yahoo.com or see the website www.aqababird.com

My two visits in mid-October yielded a good selection of waders (including Marsh Sandpiper), ducks and gulls with migrants like Levant Sparrowhawk, Golden Oriole and a 1cy Citrine Wagtail in the vegetation. Several Namaqua Doves and White-breasted Kingfisher appeared and also some raptor migration in the late morning with both Greater Spotted and Short-toed Eagles among Steppe Buzzards over the valley floor. Nice fly-by's of Montague's Harrier and both Peregrine and Barbary Falcon.



A good wader collection can be expected during migration and winter periods at the ABO.

List of species

Garganey / Årta
11/10, at least 2 at ABO 15/10

4-5 at Azraq 30/9, at least 3 at Khirbet as-Samra

Teal / Kricka	~40 at Azraq 30/9, 2 at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10, ~10 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, ~75 at ABO 13 th and 15/10,
Northern Pintail / Stjärtand	1 each at Azraq 30/9 and Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, a few at ABO 13/10
Shoveler / Skedand	2 at Azraq 30/9, 9 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, ~100 at ABO 13 th and 15/10
Mallard / Gräsand	~40 at ABO 13 th and 15/10
Grey Heron / Gråhäger	2 each at Azraq 30/9, Karameh Dam 2/10, Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, ABO 13/10 and 5 migr. there 15/10
Purple Heron/ Purpurhäger	2 at Azraq 30/9
Night Heron / Natthäger	4-5 at Azraq 30/9
Squacco Heron / Rallhäger	1 each at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10 and ABO 15/10 and 2 at Aqaba 16/10
Great White Egret / Ägretthäger	2 at Karameh Dam 2/10
Little Egret / Silkeshäger	common (20+) at Karameh Dam 2/10, 1 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Reef Heron / Revhäger	1 at Aqaba 15/10
Cattle Egret / Kohäger	6 at Azraq 30/9, 5 at Karameh Dam 2/10
Spoonbill / Skedstork	17 roosting at Karameh Dam 2/10
Glossy Ibis / Bronsibis	1 at ABO 13 th and 15/10
White Pelican / Vit pelikan	24 roosting on Karameh Dam 2/10, 1 1cy at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Little Grebe / Smådopping	2 each at Wadi Shuayb and Karameh Dams 2/10, 1 at ABO 13/10
Chukar / Berghöna	at least 8 at Wadi Himara 2/10
Sand Partridge / Ökenhöna	at least 6, both male and female seen well, at Wadi Himara 2/10
Honey Buzzard / Bivråk	1 1cy each migr. over Wadi Himara 2/10 and ABO 15/10
Black Kite / Brun glada	1 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, 3-4 at ABO 13/10

Short-toed Eagle / Ormörn	1 migr. over Karameh Dam and 1 over the Dead Sea visitors centre both 2/10, 3 migr. over ABO 15/10
Marsh Harrier / Brun kärrhök	2 at Azraq 30/9, 2 at ABO 13/10 and 5 migr. there 15/10
Montague's Harrier / Ängshök	1 1cy at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10 and 1f migr. at ABO 15/10
"Steppe Buzzard / Stäppvråk"	~10 at dusk at Azraq 30/9, 3 migr. over the Dead Sea visitors centre 2/10, ~15 migr. over Dibbin 10/10, ~30 migr. over ABO 15/10
Sparrowhawk / Sparvhök	1 at Azraq 30/9, 1 migr. over Wadi Himara 2/10, 3 migr. over Dibbin 10/10
Levant Sparrowhawk / Balkanhök	1 male at ABO 13/10



This magnificent 1cy Greater Spotted Eagle passed just over the ABO visitors centre about 11am on Oct 15th.

Greater Spotted Eagle / Större skrikörn	1 1cy migr. over ABO 15/10
Steppe Eagle / Stäppörn	1 3cy+ migr. along the Dead Sea 18/10
Bonelli's Eagle / Hökörn	1 seemingly adult soaring near the Dead Sea visitors centre 2/10
Osprey / Fiskgjuse	1 1cy migr. at ABO 15/10

Peregrine / Pilgrimsfalk	1 adult at ABO 15/10
Barbary Falcon / Berberfalk	1 subadult at ABO 15/10
Kestrel / Tornfalk	fairly common
Lesser Kestrel / Rödfalk	1 female-type was likely of this species, migrating over the Dead Sea visitors centre 2/10, showing pale/little-streaked underparts, distinct black wingtips and slightly elongated central tail feathers.



Migration can be an entertaining spectacle! This flock of Cranes soared over the ABO before heading off south.

Crane / Trana	a flock of ~100 migr. over ABO 15/10
Moorhen / Rörhöna	common at Azraq 30/9, 1 1cy at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, several at ABO 13 th and 15/10
Coot / Sothöna	several at ABO 13 th and 15/10
Water Rail / Vattenrall	1 adult at Azraq 30/9
Little Crake / Mindre sumphöna	1 f/1cy at Azraq 30/9
Black-winged Stilt / Stytlöpare	3-4 at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10, ~30 at ABO 13 th and 15/10
Spur-winged Plover / Sporrvipa	common at areas with ponds and fields

Northern Lapwing / Tofsvipa	at least 1 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Ringed Plover / Större strandpipare	~25 at Karameh Dam 2/10, ~30 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, ~15 at ABO 13/10
Little Ringed Plover / Mindre strandpipare	1 at Wadi Shuayb dam and 2-3 at Karameh Dam 2/10, heard at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10 and 2 at ABO 13 th and 15/10
Kentish Plover / Svartbent strandpipare	8 at Karameh Dam 2/10, 2 at ABO 13/10
Dunlin / Kärrsnäppa	2 at Karameh Dam 2/10, at least 2 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, at least 5 at ABO 13/10
Little Stint / Småsnäppa	5 at Karameh Dam 2/10, ~150 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, ~50 at ABO 13/10
Temminck's Stins / Mosnäppa	at least 1 at Azraq 30/9, at least 12 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, 4-5 at ABO 13/10
Common Snipe / Enkelbeckasin	1-2 at Azraq 30/9, 20+ at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10, ~10 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, 2 at ABO 13/10
Black-tailed Godwit / Rödspov	2 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Ruff / Brushane	~150 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, ~50 at ABO 13/10
Wood Sandpiper / Grönbena	heard at Azraq 30/9, ~100 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Green Sandpiper / Skogssnäppa	4 at Wadi Shuayb dam and 2 at Karameh Dam both 2/10, ~10 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, 2-3 at ABO 13/10
Greenshank / Gluttsnäppa	1 each at Karameh Dam 2/10 and Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Spotted Redshank / Svartsnäppa	3-4 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Redshank / Rödbena	1 at Karameh Dam 2/10 and at least 2 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, 1 at ABO 13/10
Marsh Sandpiper / Dammsnäppa	1 at Karameh Dam 2/10 and ~10 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, 1 at ABO 13/10
Common Sandpiper / Drillsnäppa	2-3 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10
Lesser Black-backed Gull / Silltrut birds.	2 adult <i>fuscus</i> at ABO 13/10, among the 10 young birds.
Caspian Gull / Kaspisk trut	1 1-2cy at ABO 15/10

<i>Larus</i> sp.	1 1cy bird each at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10 and Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, ~10 at ABO 15/10, most looking like <i>L.f. heuglini</i> with bulky shape, pale head and heavy bill.
Black-headed Gull / Skrattnås	3 at ABO 13/10
Slender-billed Gull / Långnäbbad mås	1 at ABO 13/10
White-eyed Gull / Vitögad mås	fairly common at Aqaba 12-16/10
Caspian Tern / Skrântärna	fairly common at Aqaba 12-16/10 and 9 at ABO 13/10
White-cheeked Tern / Vitkindad tärna	~10 at Aqaba 12-16/10
Whiskered Tern / Skäggtärna	6-7 at ABO 13 th and 15/10
<i>Chlidonias</i> sp. Whiskered Tern <i>C. hybridus</i> .	1 seen briefly at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, probably
Collared Dove / Turkduva	common, for example hundreds both at Azraq 30/9 and at ABO 13/10
Laughing Dove / Palmduva	common
Namaqua Dove / Långstjärtsduva	at least 1 at ABO 13/10 and 2, of which at least 1 was 1cy, there 15/10. 2 between ABO and Aqaba 15/10
Alpine Swift / Alpeglare	4-5 over the hills west of Amman 18/10
Little Swift / Stubbstjärtsglare	2 at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10
Kingfisher / Kungsfiskare	1-2 at all visited small wetlands/dams
Pied Kingfisher / Gråfiskare	several each Wadi Shuayb and Karameh Dam 2/10 and 1 at Shuna South 18/10
White-breasted Kingfisher / Smyrnakungsfiskare	fairly common around Wadi Shuayb and Karameh (6+ seen along the roads) 2/10, 1 at ABO 15/10
Hoopoe / Härfågel	2 at Wadi Shuayb 2/10
European Bee-eater / Biätare	a flock of 55 over Azraq at dusk 30/9 and heard at Dibbin 10/10, 1 migr. at ABO 15/10
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater / Grön biätare	1 at Wadi Shuayb dam and ~10 over Karameh Dam both 2/10

Little Green Bee-eater / Grön dvärgbjätare several at Wadi Himara 2/10, fairly common along the Dead Sea/Wadi Arava road 12/10 and around Aqaba 12-16/10

Wryneck / Göktyta 1 at the BirdLife office in Amman 27/9

Crested Lark / Tofslärka common

Desert Lark / Stenökenlärka several around Wadi Himara and the road 2/10

Rock Martin / Afrikansk klippsvala several around Wadi Himara 2/10, fairly common along the Dead Sea/Wadi Arava road 12/10 and at Aqaba 12-16/10

Barn Swallow / Ladusvala common migrant

Red-rumped Swallow / Rostgumpssvala 1 at the Dead Sea 18/10

Sand Martin / Backsvala fairly common migrant, low numbers

White Wagtail / Sädesärla common at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10, several at ABO 13/10

Yellow Wagtail / Gulärla common (200+) at Azraq 30/9, several at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10 and ABO 13/10

Citrine Wagtail / Citronärla 1 1cy each at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10 and at ABO 13th and 15/10

Grey Wagtail / Forsärla heard from the creek, Wadi Shuayb 2/10 and a creek near Dibbin 10/10

Tree Pipit / Trädpiplärka a few migrants seen

Red-throated Pipit / Rödstrupig pipilärka heard at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10 and at ABO 15/10

Tawny Pipit / Fältpiplärka 1 at Karameh Dam 2/10, 1 at Talal Dam 10/10 and at least 2 at Khirbet al-Samra 11/10

White-crowned Black Wheatear / Vitkronad stenskvätta several along the Dead Sea/Wadi Arava road during 12/10

Mourning Wheatear / Sorgstenskvätta several along the road near Madaba 2/10 and around Petra 14/10

Isabelline Wheatear / Isabellastenskvätta several along the road during 2/10 and 11/10

Northern Wheatear / Stenskvätta 1 each at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10 and near Petra 14/10

Whinchat / Buskskvätta 1 at ABO 13th and 15/10

White-cheeked Bulbul / Vitkindad bulbul 1 at Azraq 30/9. Presumably introduced.

Yellow-vented Bulbul / Levantbulbul common



Tame and obliging Blackstart at the Dead Sea visitors centre.

Blackstart / Svartstjärt several each at Wadi Himara and the visitors centre
2/10

Bluethroat / Blåhake 1 at ABO 15/10

Redstart / Rödstjärt 1f at Dibbin 10/10 and several at ABO 15/10

Cetti's Warbler / Cettisångare heard in Wadi Shuayb 2/10

Graceful Prinia / Streckad Prinia common

Sardinian Warbler / Sammetshätta heard in Wadi Shuayb 2/10, Dibbin 10/10 and at
ABO 15/10

Lesser Whitethroat / Ärtsångare 2-3 at ABO 15/10

Whitethroat / Törnsångare 1 at ABO 15/10

Willow Warbler / Lövsångare fairly common migrant

Chiffchaff / Gransångare a few seen

Spotted Flycatcher / Grå flugsnappare	several migrants seen
Great Tit / Talgoxe	a few in Dibbin 10/10
Palestine Sunbird / Palestinasolfågel	fairly common
Golden Oriole / Sommargylling	1 f/1cy at ABO 13/10
Tristram's Grackle / Sinaiglansstare	20+ at Wadi Himara 2/10, fairly common around Petra 14/10
Southern Grey Shrike / Ökenvarfågel	fairly common
Masked Shrike / Masktörnskata	fairly common, singles at many sites
Red-backed Shrike / Törnskata	several migrants seen
Fan-tailed Raven / Kortstjärtad korp	100+ along the Dead Sea road 12/10
Brown-necked Raven / Ökenkorp	a pair near Petra 14/10
House Crow / Huskråka	common in Aqaba 12-16/10
Hooded Crow / Grå kråka	1 at ABO 15/10
Jackdaw /Kaja	4-5 at Wadi Shuayb dam 2/10
Jay / Nötskrika	common
House Sparrow / Gråsparv	common
Spanish Sparrow / Spansk sparv	~10 at ABO 15/10
Indian Silverbill / Indisk silvernäbb	possibly colonized Khirbet al-Samra 11/10 with at least two parties seen, 3-5 birds each. Several at ABO 13/10
Greenfinch / Grönfink	several records around Amman
Linnet / Hämpling	4 at Wadi Shuayb 2/10
Ortolan Bunting / Ortolansparv	2 at Wadi Shuayb 2/10
Corn Bunting / Kornsparv	common (50+) along Wadi Shuayb 2/10



A Barbary Falcon hunting and perching around the ABO, good for comparison with the adult Peregrine flying by!