

Iran

8-18 April 2011



Björn Anderson

General

Iran had been on my radar screen for many years. Having seen three of the four Ground-Jays in the other deserts of Central Asia, the time was surely ripe for going for the last Podoces; Pleske's Ground-Jay. In addition there were some more target birds that just waited to be bagged. All in all I had eight targets, and I must say I was pleasantly surprised to see them fall one by one.

My long-term friend Stig-Uno Svensson took, as usual, little convincing to sign up for the adventure. Not very many birders go to Iran, so some of the targets were really gold-edged. Hyrcanian Tit for example, has not been seen by many birders at all, and we were fortunate enough to even find the first ever nest. Another extremely seldom seen species was Black-headed Penduline-Tit, which we enjoyed cracking views of along the southern fringe of the Caspian Sea. Iraq Babbler, Basra Reed-Warbler and the extremely distinct Mesopotamian Crow were all birdy jewels in their subtle shapes in Mesopotamia close to Iraq. In the other direction of the country, we were pleased to find the two specialties Sind Woodpecker and Afghan Babbler. In addition to this we enjoyed a whole billboard full of Middle Eastern and Central Asian birds like Egyptian Nightjar, Grey-necked Bunting, Saunders's Tern, Hypocolius, Dead Sea Sparrow, Caspian Snowcock, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Hume's, Persian and Variable Wheatears, Macqueen's Bustard, Upcher's Warbler and many more.

During the entire trip we experienced wonderfully friendly people, fantastic kebabs (the best being BBQed in the field!), good infrastructure (bar the fact that we were out of bounds for mobile roaming and internet), brilliant and diverse landscapes.

Itinerary

Day 1, April 9th

Having left Stockholm with Qatar Airlines the late afternoon before, we arrived at Tehran at 05.05 after a couple of hours stopover at Doha in Qatar. Babak and a driver met us and we soon found ourselves in a minibus towards the domestic airport. In the late morning the flight left on time and headed for Bandar Abbas in the south of Iran. After a quick lunch at the hotel, we eventually started the birding by visiting the mudflats at the edge of the city. Huge numbers of gulls, terns and waders were present and kept us busy for a couple of hours. The late afternoon was spent in a wadi just north of town, where we got our first Afghan Babblers. Night at a hotel in Bandar Abbas.



Typical wadi birding north of Bandar Abbas

Day 2, April 10th

The drive to Minab would take one hour, so it was an early departure. We wanted to be at the site for Sind Woodpecker at dawn and we were not disappointed, as we soon located a nice territorial male. The birding amongst the palm plantations was quite nice and we had even better views of Afghan Babblers as well as a host of other species more typical of the Indian subcontinent. Breakfast was enjoyed on a huge carpet and consisted of cottage cheese, thinly baked bread and some fruits. After another round in the gardens, where we saw a female Sind Woodpecker, we left the area and drove to Minab dam. Clamorous (or is it Indian?) Reed-Warblers played hide-and-seek for the photographers. The afternoon was spent in a huge wadi behind

the dam. The landscape was fantastic and we had many close encounters with Crowned and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouses. Otherwise the avifauna was rather poor. Night at a hotel in Minab.



Rugged mountains near Minab.



Babak checks if the local guy has seen any Sykes's Nightjars, which was not the case...

Day 3, April 11th

We left the hotel shortly before dawn and drove to the nearby coastal area, although it turned out that we were too early for arranging a boat into the estuary and mangroves. Instead we tried a couple of terra firma spots along the coast, until the fishing village had woken up. The boat trip then turned out to be very rewarding from a photographic perspective, with excellent views of gulls and waders, as well as Greater Spotted and Imperial Eagles. By late morning we were back ashore and drove back to Minab for a lunch. Along the way to Bandar Abbas we stopped at a couple of rocky areas for some general birding, but due to the time of the day it was pretty slow moving. The late afternoon was spent birding along the railway line on the Geno plains northwest of Bandar Abbas. Night at a hotel in Bandar Abbas.

Day 4, April 12th

One hour before dawn we left Bandar Abbas and by the first rays of light we were in the mountains of Geno Protected Area, a mountain area towering the nearby plains. A complete new set of birds appeared on queue and we drove higher and higher along a small mountain road. At the headquarters we enjoyed outdoor BBQed kebab (what else?) for lunch. By late afternoon we descended and made it back to the airport in Bandar Abbas in order to catch the 20.45 direct flight to Ahvaz. We arrived at Ahvaz, which is near the border with Iraq, late at night. Night at hotel in Ahvaz.



Standard breakfast: bread, cheese, juice, tea

Day 5, April 13th

The strong winds the day before created a heavy sand-storm, and the air was completely clouded with dust. Even though we left Ahvaz very early, due to the sand, dawn was significantly delayed and it was dark when we arrived at the first site near Shaver dam. This site though quickly produced the wanted Iraq Babbler. It took us a bit of a run around before we got good views of singing birds. Before it got too late we

were keen to move on to the next site, which held a territorial Basra Reed-Warbler a few years ago. Luck was with us and we almost immediately got a response from the bird at exactly the same spot. Happy with having bagged the two target birds so quickly, we had a relaxed breakfast consisting of bread, local cheese and tea that was offered by the local people. After being energized, we set off for a walk in order to try to find Egyptian Nightjar, which was unsuccessful. The final target in the southwest remained, and we therefore set off to Dez Protected Area. It took us quite a while to find the localized Mesopotamian Crow, an extremely distinct taxon compared to all other Hooded Crow subspecies. In the process we also enjoyed small numbers of Hypocolius. During the afternoon we birded Karkheh Protected Area, and finally flushed an Egyptian Nightjar. Shortly after dark we returned to the hotel in Ahvaz.



Looking for Egyptian Nightjars in the sandstorm

Day 6, April 14th

We were up early in order to catch the 7.40 flight to Tehran. It was only a bit more than an hour, so by mid-morning we were on our way from Tehran airport towards the Kariv Desert. It was a major drive, so it was not until very late afternoon when we arrived at Khar Touran Protected Area. However, there was still time for an initial search for Pleske's Ground-Jay. We eventually found one bird distantly perched atop a bush, so even if it was not the best of views, we happily returned to a private house in a nearby village where we were going to stay for the night. No day in Iran is complete without a kebab dinner, so one of the local restaurants was paid a visit as well.



Kariv Desert, the habbo of Pleske's Ground-Jay



The oasis in Khar Touran.

Day 7, April 15th

The Day of Pleske saw us lined up across the Kariv desert right after dawn. We covered quite a large area until we eventually scored and enjoyed fabulous views of this star bird. During the course of the morning we had plenty of sightings within a few territories. Unfortunately the young birds had just recently fledged, which meant that they were running fast away from us, and this prohibited us from having many real close-up photo opportunities. Nevertheless we were more than happy. We spent most of the morning with these birds and later drove on a dirt road circuit to an oasis near a mountain. A few migrants were present near the water and bushes, and the nice birding was topped off with a saffron-spiced kebab in the shade. Fantastic

and “just a normal day in the field!”. In the early afternoon we returned to the park headquarter and dropped off the local guide. Then it was a very long drive to the coast of the Caspian Sea. The drive took about 7 hours until we reached the destination of Babolsar. The consequently very short night was spent at a hotel in the town.



Pleske's bagged

Day 8, April 16th

Just at dawn we were met by a local guide who would take us to a small wetland just out of town. The target of the day was the very rarely seen Black-headed Penduline-Tit. This is a bird whose range has shrunk rapidly with the habitat changes in central Asia, and northern Iran is one of the few areas where it still occurs in any numbers. Walking the perimeter of the wetland it did not take us long until we had located several birds. Interestingly there were also some Eurasian Penduline-Tits still hanging around. These latter birds normally disappear when the breeding season sets in for the Black-headed. During the morning we were fortunate to have a multitude of close encounters with these smart-looking birds, and we felt truly privileged. In the late morning we said good-bye to the local guide and headed south and up in the mountain range that fringes the Caspian Sea. The landscape was stunning as all the deciduous trees were just turning pale green. The avifauna though was slightly disappointing in that most of the species in the foothills were common Swedish woodland birds. However, the situation improved as we gained altitude. The reason we traveled through these mountains was to try to find the enigmatic Hyrcanian (Caspian) Tit. We had an idea in which kind of habitat we should look for it, but in spite of many stops during the afternoon, we failed to find any signs of it. During the late afternoon we arrived at the small hill resort of Roodbarak and in the last hour of the day we were pretty sure we found the perfect habitat. This was also the place where a local birder had previously reported finding it. We stayed the night at a mountain hikers hotel and closed the day with a..., guess what; kebab.



Colorful roofs



Saffron was good value for money

Day 9, April 17th

We were up well before dawn and drove along a small road that took us higher up a mountain valley, eventually reaching a seemingly good spot on a slope. We climbed up the steep slope that was covered with really old trees and regularly played the calls of Sombre and Willow Tits. Unfortunately there was absolutely no response from the target bird. However, luck was with us and just when we had given up and descended the slope, I suddenly found a silent feeding Hyrcanian Tit. We all got onto the bird, which in fact showed to be two birds feeding quietly together. Soon they disappeared behind a ridge and I quickly ran after them, only to find that one bird flew right into a hole in the tree. This turned out to be the first ever found nest of this extremely little-known bird. We spent considerable time in the area and enjoyed fabulous views of the nest-building pair. Interestingly there was virtually no response whatsoever to the closely related Sombre Tit calls that I played. With e2e (ear-to-ear) smiles we returned to the cars. I was especially happy, as we had scored on all of my eight target birds, some of them very poorly known. The rest of the morning we drove even further up the valley to above the tree-line. The scenery was truly spectacular and our driver made a repeat of our favorite saffron chicken kebab. In the late afternoon we drove back down through Roodbarak and up a largish cultivated hill for some soft-birding. The night was again spent in Roodbarak.



Scenery from the mountains above Roodbarak, the forest with Hyrcanian Tit and the delicious saffron kebab.

Day 10, April 18th

The last day of the trip was essentially spent driving back through the high mountain range to Tehran. However, we did have some time for birding en route and notched up a few high altitude birds like a couple of sightings of Caspian Snowcock and Persian Wheatear near Alborz Protected Area. In the evening we checked in for the overnight flight via Qatar back to Stockholm.



Weather

The weather worked like a schoolbook. Sunshine every day, except for the sand-storm in Mesopotamia. Mostly warm, sometimes bordering hot, temperatures. In the Elbruz mountains in the north, it was a bit on the cool side during nighttime.

Logistics

Due to the fact that very few birders visit Iran, it was not a simple task to work out the ground logistics. Via internet, I eventually found the responsive travel agent Persia Tours, with an extremely service-minded person named Ms Parisa. She made wonders and put together the full itinerary, and hired the best wildlife photographer in Iran. Babak was not only a fantastic photographer, but also a knowledgeable birder. Thanks to Parisa and Babak, the trip turned out extremely well. No hassle, just pure pleasure and fun birding. I am also very grateful to Magnus Ullman who has taken birding groups to Iran a few times during 2004 to 2007. Magnus gave useful advice both personally and through his trip reports. I can thoroughly recommend contacting Persia Tours and Babak respectively.

Babak Musavi, mbabak2002@yahoo.com
Parisa, parisa.persiatours@gmail.com



The streets were not always in top shape. Typical local bedroom, diningroom and tearoom, all in one go.

Site descriptions



Map of Iran showing the three areas we visited.

1) Southeast Iran: We flew in to the city of Bandar Abbas. Sites visited include

- the mudflats directly outside the city
- Minab, which is about one hour drive east of Bandar Abbas. This is the key site for Sind Woodpecker, and also offers general desert birding around the dam and the huge wadi behind the dam. One morning we also hired a boat and toured the river delta with mangroves and mudflats.
- Geno Protected Area, which is less than one hour northwest of Bandar Abbas. This site consists of both a desert plain, and the higher mountains.

2) Southwest Iran: We flew from Bandar Abbas directly (one direct flight a week, avoiding going via Tehran) to Ahvaz. From Ahvaz we drove north to Dez and Kharkeh Protected Areas. These are both roughly one hour drive north of Ahvaz. We also visited Shaver dam (for Iraq Babbler) and a reed-bed at Mazrae Seh (for Iraq Babbler and Basra Reed-Warbler).

3) North Iran: Base destination was Tehran from where we drove more than 8 hours east to Khar Touran Protected Area (for Pleske's Ground-Jay). From there it was a long drive to Babolsar near the coast of the Caspian Sea (for Black-headed Penduline-Tit). Apart from general birding while crossing the Elburz mountain, we focused the birding around Roodbarak (for Hyrcanian Tit).



Map showing (from left to right), the Minab mudflats, the area for Sind Woodpecker, the Minab dam and the large wadi behind the dam. The later is accessed from the south by driving dirt tracks in the dry riverbed.



Map showing the mudflats at the outskirts of Bandar Abbas, and the Geno Protected Area.

Southwest Iran



Map showing the general areas we visited north of Ahwaz. Note that the blue circles are rough estimates, as I have not been able to locate exact sites.

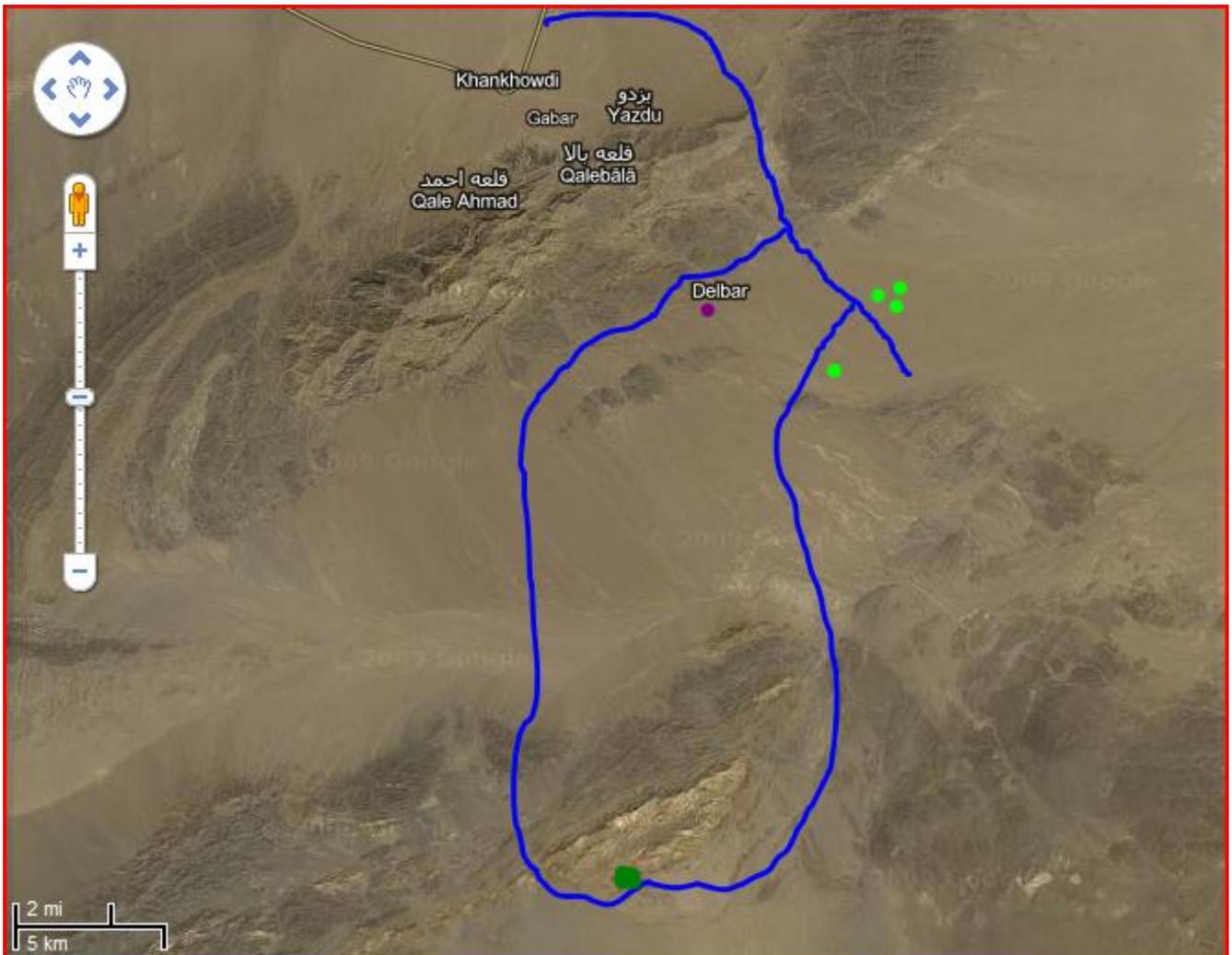


Babak, SUS and the local guys at the site of Basra Reed-Warbler.

Northeast Iran (Kariv Desert)

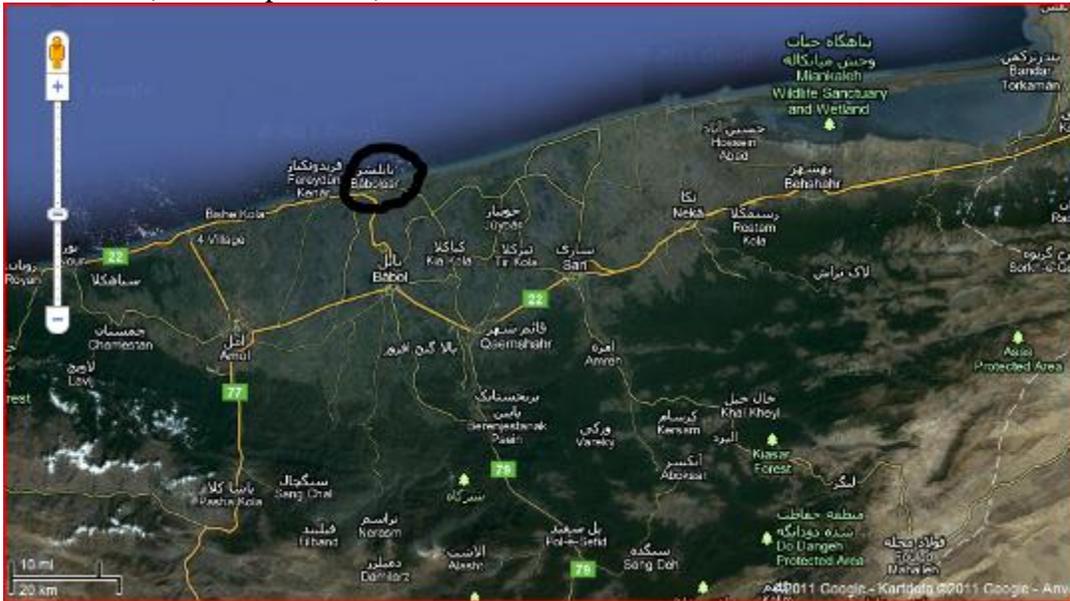


Overview map of Khar Touran Protected Area. Compare with the map below.

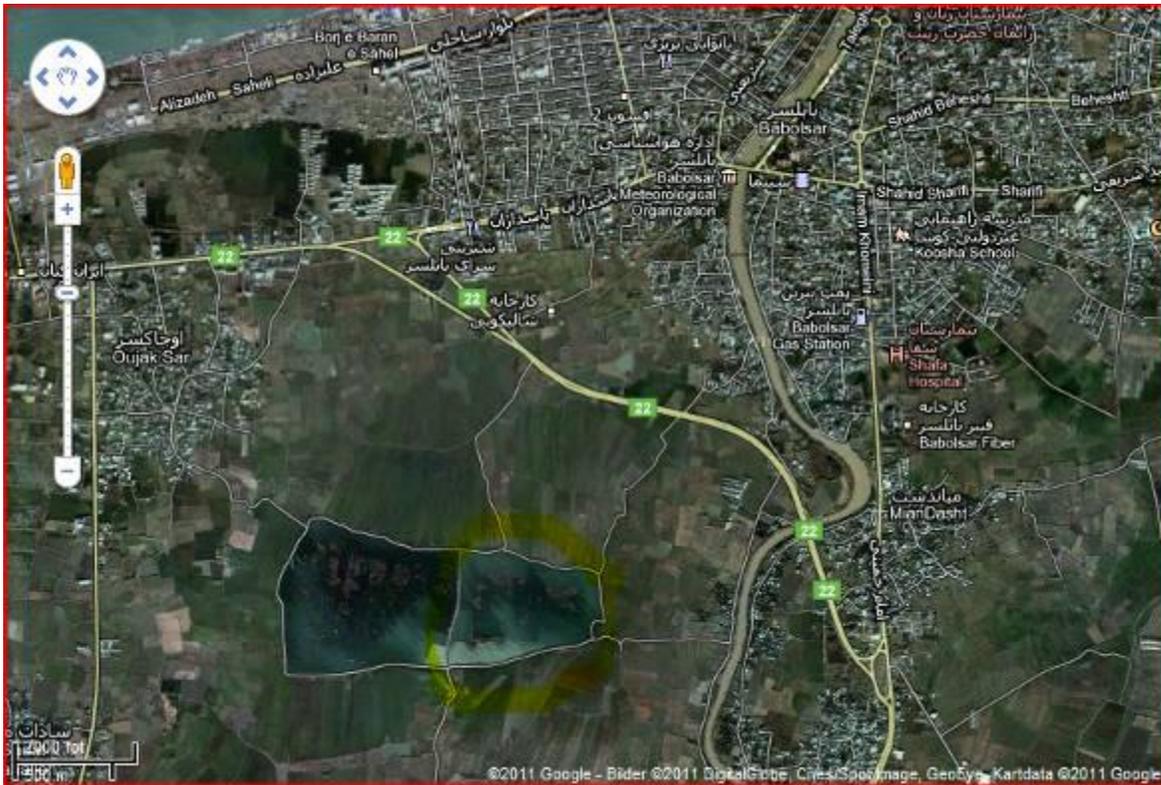


Map showing the areas visited in Khar Touran Protected Area. Blue line is the route we drove, purple dot is the park HQ, lime dots are areas for Pleske's Ground-Jays, darker green dot is the oasis at the foot of the high mountain. This last site is probably a very good migrant trap (has e.g. hosted a record of Ultramarine Flycatcher).

North Iran (near Caspian Sea)



Overview map of Babolsar.



Map of Babolsar wetlands. The official name might be something else, but should anyway be easy to locate. We accessed the site from the small dirt-road leading to the northeast corner of the circled pond.

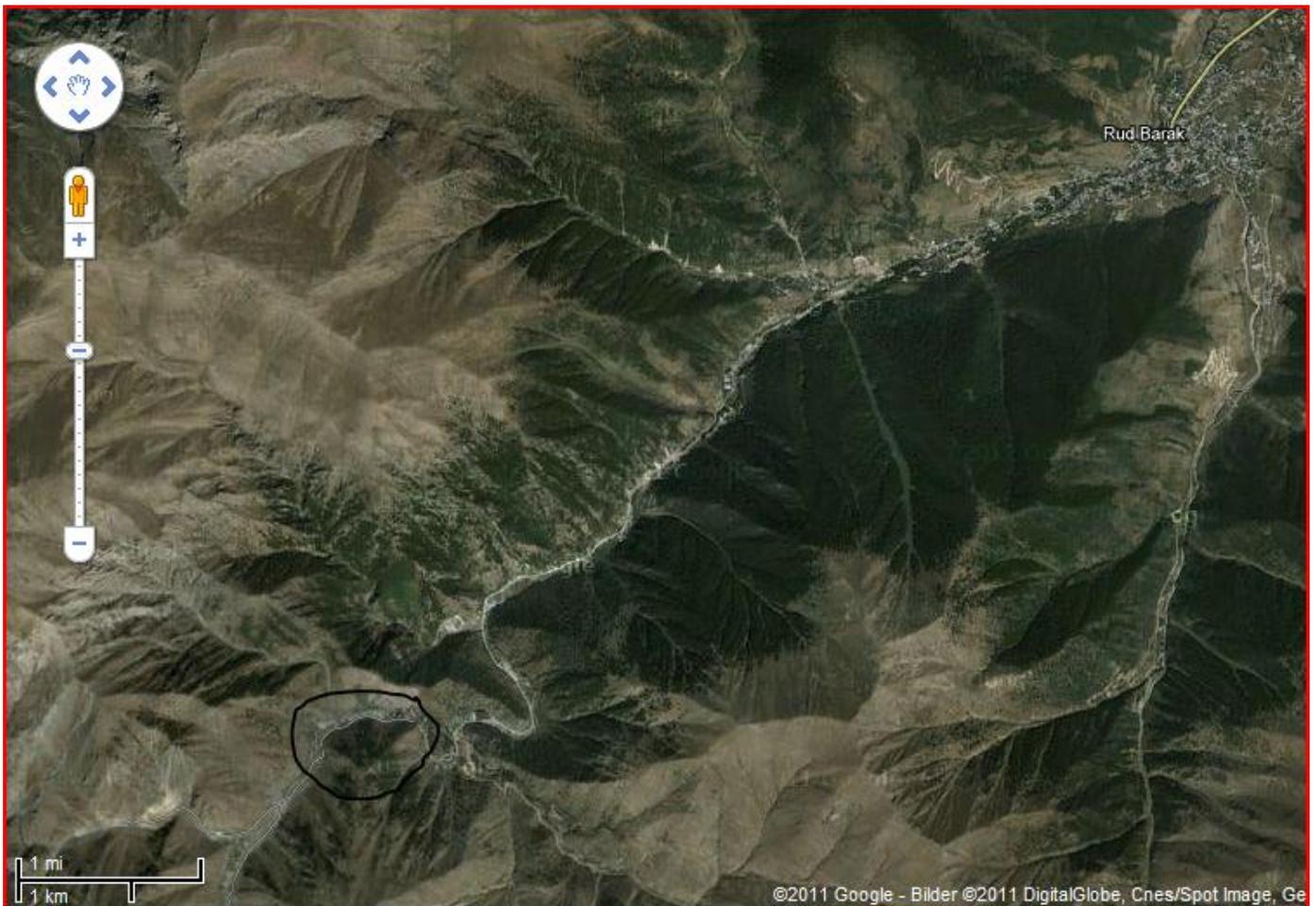


Typical habitat for Black-headed Penduline-Tit

North Iran (Elbruz mountains)



Map of Roodbarak (Rud Barak)



Area for Hyrcanian Tit southwest of Roodbarak.



Nest of Hyrcanian Tit. 36°26.190 N, 51°3.021E, 2250 masl.



Habitat of Hyrcanian Tit

Birds

SE: Southeastern Iran, i.e. the area around Bandar Abbas and Minab.

SW: Southwestern Iran, i.e. the area north of Ahwaz.

NO: Northern Iran, i.e. Tehran, Touran at Kariv Desert, Babolsar at Caspian Sea coast and Elburz mountains.

Dalmatian Pelican, *Pelecanus crispus*

SE: Four at Minab mudflats.



Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*

SE: A few at Minab dam and many at Minab mudflats.

Gray Heron, *Ardea cinerea*

SE: One at Minab dam and many at Minab mudflats.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba*

SE: Many at Minab mudflats.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Western Reef Egret, *Egretta gularis*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and many at Minab mudflats.



Squacco Heron, *Ardeola ralloides*

NO: Ten at the oasis in Touran Protected Area.

Indian Pond-Heron, *Ardeola grayii*

SE: One at Minab mudflats.

Western Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*

SW: Many north of Ahwaz.

Little Bittern, *Ixobrychus minutus*

NO: Two at Babolsar wetland.



Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*

SW: Five at Minab mudflats.

Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*

SE: Ten at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*

SE: Two at Minab mudflats.

Crested Honey-buzzard, *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

SE: Two at Minab.

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and a few around Minab.

Lammergeier, *Gypaetus barbatus*

NO: One adult at Roodbarak.



Eurasian Griffon, *Gyps fulvus*

NO: One at Roodbarak.

Cinereous Vulture, *Aegypius monachus*

SE: One at Geno plains.

Western Marsh-Harrier, *Circus aeruginosus*

SE: One at Bandar Abbas mudflats and one at Minab mudflats.

SW: One north of Ahwaz.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

Montagu's/Pallid Harrier, *Circus pygargus/macrourus*

SW: One unidentified ringtail at Dez Protected Area.

Shikra, *Accipiter badius*

SE: One at Bandar Abbas mudflats and one at Minab.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus*

NO: One at Roodbarak.

Eurasian (Steppe) Buzzard, *Buteo buteo vulpinus*

NO: One at Touran Protected Area and three at Roodbarak.

Greater Spotted Eagle, *Aquila clanga*

SE: Four or five at Minab mudflats.



Steppe Eagle, *Aquila nipalensis*

NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Imperial Eagle, *Aquila heliaca*

SE: Two immatures at Minab mudflats.



Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*

NO: One at Roodbarak.

Lesser Kestrel, *Falco naumanni*

NO: One near Touran Protected Area.

Eurasian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*

SE: Two at Geno Protected Area.

NO: A few at Touran Protected Area.

Eurasian Hobby, *Falco subbuteo*

NO: One near Alborz Protected Area.

Caspian Snowcock, *Tetrao gallus caspius*

NO: One distantly across the major gorge near Alborz Protected Area, and then a nice calling pair scoped up at reasonable distance in good light at Alborz Protected Area.

Chukar, *Alectoris chukar*

NO: Many at Alborz Protected Area.

See-see Partridge, *Ammoperdix griseogularis*

SE: One at Minab dam, a few at Minab wadi, a few at Geno plains and a few at Geno Protected Area.



Black Francolin, *Francolinus francolinus*

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

Gray Francolin, *Francolinus pondicerianus*

SE: Several at Minab, a few at Minab wadi and a few at Geno plains.



Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*

SW: One heard at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: One at Babolsar wetland.

Macqueen's Bustard, *Chlamydotis macqueenii*

NO: Two at Touran Protected Area.

Eurasian Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and many at Minab mudflats.

Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*

SE: A few at Bandar Abbas and Minab.

SW: Many at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: Three at Babolsar wetland.

Eurasian Thick-knee, *Burhinus oedicnemus*

SW: Two at Kharkeh Protected Area.

Great Thick-knee, *Burhinus recurvirostris*

SE: One at Bandar Abbas mudflats and one at Minab mudflats.

Collared Pratincole, *Glareola pratincola*

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

Red-wattled Lapwing, *Vanellus indicus*

SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

White-tailed Lapwing, *Vanellus leucurus*

SW: Several at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.

Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*

SE: A few at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.

Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*

SE: Two near Bandar Abbas.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and a few at Minab mudflats.

Lesser Sandplover, *Charadrius mongolus*

SE: Several at Minab mudflats.

Greater Sandplover, *Charadrius leschenaultia*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats. Many unidentified Sand-Plovers.



Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.



Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*

SE: One at Bandar Abbas mudflats and many at Minab mudflats.

Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata*

SE: Many Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.



Common Redshank, *Tringa totanus*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.

Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatilis*

SE: Two at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.

Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*

NO: One at Babolsar wetland.

Terek Sandpiper, *Xenus cinereus*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.

Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*

SE: Many at Minab mudflats.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*

SE: Several at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Curlew Sandpiper, *Calidris ferruginea*

SE: A few at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*

SE: Several at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.

Broad-billed Sandpiper, *Limicola falcinellus*

SE: Several at Bandar Abbas mudflats and Minab mudflats.

Arctic Skua, *Stercorarius parasiticus*

SE: Three at the sea off Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Sooty Gull, *Larus hemprichii*

SE: One at Bandar Abbas mudflats and one at Minab mudflats.

Caspian Gull, *Larus cachinnans*

SE: One at Minab mudflats and probably one at Minab mudflats.

Tundra (Heuglin's) Gull, *Larus heuglini*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and several at Minab mudflats.

Great Black-headed Gull, *Larus ichthyaetus*

SE: One first summer at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*

SE: One at Minab mudflats.

Slender-billed Gull, *Larus genei*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Gull-billed Tern, *Sterna nilotica*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and a few at Minab mudflats.

Caspian Tern, *Sterna caspia*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas mudflats and several at Minab mudflats.

Lesser Crested Tern, *Sterna bengalensis*

SE: Several at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Sandwich Tern, *Sterna sandvicensis*

SE: One at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Great Crested Tern, *Sterna bergii*

SE: Several at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Little Tern, *Sterna albifrons*

SE: Many at Minab mudflats.

SW: A few at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Saunders' Tern, *Sterna saundersi*

SE: Several in breeding plumage and winter plumage birds at Bandar Abbas mudflats. Only adults in breeding plumage identified with certainty, and those in winter plumage just presumed to be the same species.

Whiskered Tern, *Chlidonias hybridus*

NO: Ten at Babolsar wetland.

White-winged Tern, *Chlidonias leucopterus*
 SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.
 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, *Pterocles exustus*
 SE: 30-40 at Minab wadi.



Black-bellied Sandgrouse, *Pterocles orientalis*
 NO: Several at Touran Protected Area.
 Crowned Sandgrouse, *Pterocles coronatus*
 SE: Three at Minab wadi.
 NO: Two at Touran Protected Area.



Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia*
 SE, SW & NO: Many. Both seemingly wild and feral birds.
 Common Wood-Pigeon, *Columba palumbus*
 SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.
 Eurasian Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia turtur*
 SW: Several at Kharkeh Protected Area.
 Eurasian Collared-Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*
 SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.
 SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.
 Laughing Dove, *Streptopelia senegalensis*
 SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.
 SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.
 Rose-ringed Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri*
 SE: One near Bandar Abbas. Introduced.
 Alexandrine Parakeet, *Psittacula eupatria*
 NO: Several at the museum park in Tehran. Introduced.
 Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*
 SE: Two heard at Geno Protected Area.
 European Scops-Owl, *Otus scops*
 NO: One heard near Babolsar.
 Spotted Owlet, *Athene brama*
 SE: One at Minab and one at Geno Protected Area.
 Little Owl, *Athene noctua*
 NO: Two at Touran Protected Area.
 Egyptian Nightjar, *Caprimulgus aegyptius*
 SW: One at Kharkeh Protected Area was flushed a few times, but always landed out of sight.
 Alpine Swift, *Tachymarptis melba*
 SE: A few at Minab.
 Common Swift, *Apus apus*
 NO: Several at Tehran.
 SW: Many at Kharkeh Protected Area.

Pallid Swift, *Apus pallidus*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas and Minab.

SW: Two at Kharkeh Protected Area.

Little Swift, *Apus affinis*

SE: Many at Bandar Abbas and Minab.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*

SE: Two at Minab mudflats.

SW: Two at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: Two at Babolsar wetland.

White-throated Kingfisher, *Halcyon smyrnensis*

SE: One at Minab dam and one near Minab.

SW: A few at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Pied Kingfisher, *Ceryle rudis*

SW: Several at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Green Bee-eater, *Merops orientalis*

SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, *Merops persicus*

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.



European Bee-eater, *Merops apiaster*

SW: Many at Kharkeh Protected Area.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

European Roller, *Coracias garrulous*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Indian Roller, *Coracias benghalensis*

SE: Many around Minab.

Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*

SE: Two at Geno Protected Area.

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: A few at Touran Protected Area.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major*

NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and one at Roodbarak.

Syrian Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos syriacus*

SE: One at the HQ at Geno Protected Area.

Sind Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos assimilis*

SE: Two at Minab. One of the highlights in the southeast! Restricted to this part of Iran and in Pakistan.



Green Woodpecker, *Picus viridis*

NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Bar-tailed Lark, *Ammomanes cincturus*

NO: A few at Touran Protected Area.

Desert Lark, *Ammomanes deserti*

SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.



Greater Short-toed Lark, *Calandrella brachydactyla*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: A few at Touran Protected Area.

Sand Lark, *Calandrella raytal*

SE: Two at Bandar Abbas mudflats and several at Minab mudflats.

Crested Lark, *Galerida cristata*

SE: Several at Minab wadi.

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

NO: Many at Touran Protected Area.

Wood Lark, *Lullula arborea*

NO: One at Roodbarak.

Horned Lark, *Eremophila alpestris*

NO: Many at Alborz Protected Area.

Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia*

SW: A few at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: A few at Touran Protected Area.

Eurasian Crag-Martin, *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

NO: A few at Touran Protected Area.

Pale Crag-Martin, *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*

SE : Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*

SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

NO: Many at Touran Protected Area.

Red-rumped Swallow, *Cecropis daurica*

SE: Many at Geno Protected Area.

SW: A few at Kharkeh Protected Area.

House Martin, *Delichon urbica*

SW: One at Kharkeh Protected Area.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*

NO: One at Babolsar wetland (personata). A few at Touran Protected Area (alba). Two at Roodbarak (*dukhunensis*). Several between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and at Roodbarak (alba).



dukhunensis

Citrine Wagtail, *Motacilla citreola*

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla flava*

SE: One at Minab mudflats.

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

Gray Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea*

NO: Several at Roodbarak.

Long-billed Pipit, *Anthus similis*

SE: Two at Geno Protected Area.

Tree Pipit, *Anthus trivialis*

SW: Two at Dez Protected Area.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area and one at Roodbarak.

Red-throated Pipit, *Anthus cervinus*

SW: Many at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Water Pipit, *Anthus spinoletta*

SW: A few at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: A few at Roodbarak and one at Alborz Protected Area.

White-eared Bulbul, *Pycnonotus leucotis*

SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

Hypocolius, *Hypocolius ampelinus*

SW: About 20 each at Dez Protected Area and Kharkeh Protected Area. Eating small red berries in the tamarisk scrub.



White-throated Dipper, *Cinclus cinclus*

NO: Four at Roodbarak.

Winter Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*

NO: A few between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and a few at Roodbarak.

Alpine Accentor, *Prunella collaris*

NO: One at Roodbarak.

Dunnock, *Prunella modularis*

NO: A few at Roodbarak and one near Alborz Protected Area.

Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, *Monticola saxatilis*

SE: Several at Geno Protected Area.



Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula*

SW: A few at Dez Protected Area.

NO: Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and at Roodbarak. One near Alborz Protected Area.

Song Thrush, *Turdus philomelos*

NO: Two between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Mistle Thrush, *Turdus viscivorus*

NO: A few at Roodbarak.

Zitting Cisticola, *Cisticola juncidis*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Streaked Scrub-Warbler, *Scotocerca inquieta*

SE: Four at Geno plains, several groups at Geno Protected Area.

NO: Two at Touran Protected Area.



Graceful Prinia, *Prinia gracilis*

SE: One near Bandar Abbas.

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

Cetti's Warbler, *Cettia cetti*

NO: Several at Babolsar wetland.

Grasshopper Warbler, *Locustella naevia*

NO: One heard at Babolsar wetland.

Moustached Warbler, *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Eurasian Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

SW: A few at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Basra Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus griseldis*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam came in to the recording twice. This would have been a tough one without some playback. One of the targets in Mesopotamia.



Indian (Clamorous) Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus (stentoreus) brunnescens*

SE: Two at Minab dam, two at Minab mudflats.

SW: Two at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Sykes' Warbler, *Hippolais rama*

SE: One near Bandar Abbas and one at Minab dam.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, *Hippolais pallida*

SW: Many at Dez Protected Area and Kharkeh Protected Area.

Upcher's Warbler, *Hippolais languida*

SE: One at Geno plains and a few at Geno Protected Area.



Willow Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochilus*

SW: One at Kharkeh Protected Area.

NO: Two between Babolsar and Roodbarak and one at the museum park in Tehran.

Common Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus collybita*

SE: One near Minab.

SW: Two at Kharkeh Protected Area.

NO: Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and at Roodbarak. Confusing taxonomy, many these birds called like tristis but song was like Mountain Chiffchaff. We had too limited time to sort this out.

Green Warbler, *Phylloscopus nitidus*

NO: One on territory at the Hyrcanian Tit site at Roodbarak.

Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*

NO: Several between Babolsar and Roodbarak. One near Alborz Protected Area.

Greater Whitethroat, *Sylvia communis*

NO: Several between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Lesser Whitethroat, *Sylvia curruca*

SE: One of undetermined taxon at Geno plains and another at Geno Protected Area. SW: Three at Kharkeh Protected Area.

Hume's Whitethroat, *Sylvia althaea*

NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Asian Desert Warbler, *Sylvia nana*

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

Barred Warbler, *Sylvia nisoria*

SE: One at Geno Protected Area.

Eastern Orphean Warbler, *Sylvia crassirostris*

SE: Two at Geno Protected Area.

Menetries' Warbler, *Sylvia mystacea*

SW: Several at Dez Protected Area.

Semicollared Flycatcher, *Ficedula semitorquata*

NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Red-breasted Flycatcher, *Ficedula parva*

NO: A few at Touran Protected Area and a few between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

European Robin, *Erithacus rubecula*

NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak and one at Roodbarak.

Common Nightingale, *Luscinia megarhynchos*

SW: One heard at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area (hafizi).

Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, *Cercotrichas galactotes*

SE: One at Minab.

SW: Many at Dez Protected Area and Kharkeh Protected Area.



Black Redstart, *Phoenicurus ochruros*

NO: Many at Roodbarak and one at Alborz Protected Area.

Common Redstart, *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

NO: Many at Roodbarak (*samamisticus*)



Siberian Stonechat, *Saxicola maurus*

NO: Several at Roodbarak and a few at Alborz Protected Area (*armenicus*).



Pied Bushchat, *Saxicola caprata*

SE: A few around Minab.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area.

Hume's Wheatear, *Oenanthe alboniger*
SE: Many at Geno Protected Area.
NO: One at Touran Protected Area.



Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*
SE: Two at Geno Protected Area.
NO: A few at Roodbarak and a few at Alborz Protected Area.

Variable Wheatear, *Oenanthe picata*
SE: Several at Geno Protected Area.



female



male

Pied Wheatear, *Oenanthe pleschanka*
SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.
NO: One male in a pair at Roodbarak was a hybrid with *hispanica*.



Pied Wheatear



Hybrid pleschanka x hispanica



Black-eared Wheatear, *Oenanthe hispanica*
NO: Three between Babolsar and Roodbarak.



Red-tailed (Persian) Wheatear, *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna*
NO: One pair at Alborz Protected Area.



Desert Wheatear, *Oenanthe deserti*
NO: A few at Touran Protected Area.

Isabelline Wheatear, *Oenanthe isabellina*
SE: One at Minab wadi and one at Geno plain.
SW: Two at Kharkeh Protected Area.



Iraq Babbler, *Turdoides altirostris*
SW: About five at the first site at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam and one at the second site.



Afghan Babbler, *Turdoides huttoni*

SE: Three near Bandar Abbas and many around Minab (ssp *huttoni*).

NO: A few at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam and many at Kharkeh Protected Area (ssp *salvadorii*).



Long-tailed Tit, *Aegithalos caudatus alpinus*

NO: Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Hyrcanian (Caspian) Tit, *Poecile hyrcana*

NO: One pair at Roodbarak.



Coal Tit, *Periparus ater gaddi*

NO: Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and at Roodbarak.

Great Tit, *Parus major*

SW: A few at Dez Protected Area (ssp *blanfordi*).

NO: Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak, a few at Roodbarak and one near Alborz Protected Area (ssp *karelini*).

Eurasian Blue Tit, *Cyanistes caeruleus raddei*

NO: A few between Babolsar and Roodbarak and Roodbarak.

Eurasian Nuthatch, *Sitta europaea rubiginosa*

NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak and a few at Roodbarak.

Rock Nuthatch, *Sitta neumayer rupicola*

NO: A few at Roodbarak.

Persian (Eastern Rock) Nuthatch, *Sitta tephronota obscura*

SE: Many at Geno Protected Area.



Eurasian Treecreeper, *Certhia familiaris persica*

NO: One at Roodbarak.

Eurasian Penduline-Tit, *Remiz pendulinus menzbieri*
NO: One or two at Babolsar wetland.



Black-headed Penduline-Tit, *Remiz macronyx neglectus*
NO: 15-20 at Babolsar wetland.



Purple Sunbird, *Cinnyris asiaticus*
SE: Many around Bandar Abbas and Minab.

Turkestan Shrike, *Lanius phoenicuroides*
SE: One at Geno plains and three at Geno Protected Area.



Bay-backed Shrike, *Lanius vittatus*
SE: Many at Geno Protected Area.



Southern Gray Shrike, *Lanius meridionalis*

SE: A few at Minab wadi and one at Geno plains (*aucheri*).

NO: Many at Touran Protected Area (*pallidirostris*), with one at nest with newly hatched young.



aucheri



pallidirostris



pallidirostris

Woodchat Shrike, *Lanius senator*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius*

NO: Two between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and one near Alborz Protected Area.

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica*

NO: One at Tehran. Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and at Alborz Protected Area.

Pleske's (Iranian) Ground-Jay, *Podoces pleskei*

NO: Ten at Khar Touran Protected Area. Bird of the trip!! Proved tricky to get close-ups, as the young birds had just left their nests and ran as fast as the adults.



Red-billed Chough, *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhcorax*

SE: Several at Geno Protected Area.

NO: One at Touran Protected Area and several at Alborz Protected Area.

Yellow-billed Chough, *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

NO: A few at Roodbarak.

House Crow, *Corvus splendens*

SE: One at Bandar Abbas mudflats.

Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*

NO: Several east of Tehran.

Hooded Crow, *Corvus cornix*

NO: Many at Tehran. Several at Touran Protected Area, Babolsar wetland, Roodbarak and at Alborz Protected Area.

Mesopotamian Crow, *Corvus capellanus*

SW: Two at Dez Protected Area. Many crows around the world are treated as separate species based on morphological characters far more subtle than this one. Besides the very pale grayish tone, its bill, tibia and tarsus are significantly larger and longer than the taxon in northern Iran.



Common Raven, *Corvus corax*

NO: One at Touran Protected Area, one at Roodbarak and one at Alborz Protected Area.

Common Myna, *Acridotheres tristis*

NO: Several at the museum park in Tehran. Introduced.

Rosy Starling, *Pastor roseus*

SW: One at Kharkeh Protected Area.

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*

SE: Many around Tehran, Bandar Abbas, Minab.

SW: Many in several areas north of Ahwaz.

NO: Many in the north of Iran.



Spanish Sparrow, *Passer hispaniolensis*

SW: A few at Kharkeh Protected Area.

Dead Sea Sparrow, *Passer moabiticus*

SW: One at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam and many at Kharkeh Protected Area.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus*

NO: One east of Tehran.

Yellow-throated (Chestnut-shouldered) Petronia, *Petronia xanthocollis*

SE: Many at Minab and several at Minab wadi.



Rock Petronia, *Petronia petronia*

NO: A few at Roodbarak and four at Alborz Protected Area.

Pale Rockfinch, *Carpospiza brachydactyla*
SE: Many at Geno Protected Area.



Indian Silverbill, *Lonchura malabarica*
SE: A few around Minab.

Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*
NO: Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and at Roodbarak.

European Greenfinch, *Carduelis chloris*
NO: One at Roodbarak.

European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*
NO: A few between Babolsar and Roodbarak were of the western black-naped taxon.

Twite, *Carduelis flavirostris*
NO: Two at Alborz Protected Area.

Eurasian Linnet, *Carduelis cannabina*
NO: One between Babolsar and Roodbarak, and several at Roodbarak.

Fire-fronted Serin, *Serinus pusillus*
NO: A few at Roodbarak and several at Alborz Protected Area.



Hawfinch, *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
NO: Two between Babolsar and Roodbarak.

Trumpeter Finch, *Bucanetes githaginea*
SE: One at the water-hole at Geno Protected Area.

Rock Bunting, *Emberiza cia*
NO: Many between Babolsar and Roodbarak, at Roodbarak and at Alborz Protected Area.

Gray-hooded Bunting, *Emberiza buchanani*
SE: Several at the water-hole at Geno Protected Area.



Ortolan Bunting, *Emberiza hortulana*
SE: One near Minab, a few at Geno Protected Area.

Striolated Bunting, *Emberiza striolata*
SE: A few at Geno Protected Area.



Black-headed Bunting, *Emberiza melanocephala*
SE: Many migrating around Bandar Abbas and Minab.

Corn Bunting, *Emberiza calandra*
SW: Two at Mazrae Seh south of Shaver dam.
NO: Two at Roodbarak.

Mammals and “others”

Red Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*
One at Touran Protected Area and one at Alborz Protected Area.

Indian Mongoose, *Herpestes edwardsii*
One at Minab dam.

Donkey, *Equus hemionus*
One at Khar Touran Protected Area (plus the three below that were fenced-in).



Wild Goat, *Capra aegragus*
Three at Khar Touran Protected Area.



Sea-snakes mating at Minab muflats



Vipers mating in Mesopotamia



Lizards mating at Khar Touran