

Travel report Jordan, October 14 till October 25 2000

From October 14 till October 25, a group of 18 birdwatching tourists from the Netherlands visited Jordan on a roundtrip organised by the Dutch company Eco Tourist Services. This report gives an overview of the birds observed during this holiday.

Daily list of birds observed

October 14

On our arrival in Amman it was already evening and very dark. A bus brought us to our hotel (Arab Wings) in Amman. It rained in Jordan and the streets were wet. Our first 'day' in Jordan passed without birds.

October 15

The next morning in Amman Blackbirds and a Ring-necked Parakeet woke me up. The excitement of the first birds on the trip kept me awake and I decided to start birding from our bedroom window. That turned out to be very rewarding as a adult male Black Redstart of the race *P.o.semirus* showed itself, followed later on by a male Masked Shrike. The small park also contained 2 Kestrels, 10 House Sparrows, 2 Laughing Doves, 10 Feral Pigeons, 3 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 3 Hooded Crows, 3 Jay of the beautiful race *G.g.atricapillus* and 1 Greenfinch.

On route to Azraq, we made our first stop in the desert beside a wadi with rapid flowing mud-brown water. A strange sight for Dutch people, who have this prejudice that desert is dust-dry and never gets any water. The site turned out to be really rewarding: juvenile Red-backed Shrike, female Desert Wheatear, adult Tawny Pipit, a kind of Gerbil, 4 Crested Larks, 6 House Sparrows, several lizards and strange insects.

Alongside the road an electricity pylon contained an adult Imperial Eagle.

Our next stop was at Qasr Al Harana, where we searched the bushes for migrants and walked through the desert to the rapid flowing water in the wadi. 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 Common Redstart of the race *P.p.samariscus*, 1 first-winter Black Redstart of one of the rufous-bellied races (*P.o.ochruros* or *phoenicuroides*), a (for Dutch people) normal coloured Little Owl, an adult male Montagu's Harrier, male and female Desert Wheatear, 10 House Sparrows and 10 Feral Pigeons.

We lunched at Wadi Al Butm and as a huge rain cloud was threatening, we decided to visit the ancient palace. After the rains passed, we searched the wadi for birds, enjoying the quickly rising water levels in the wadi. The wadi contained a male and a first winter Red-rumped Wheatear, 10 Crested Larks, a 'Palestine' Great Grey Shrike (*L.e.elegans*), an adult male Pallid Harrier, a Kestrel, 8 Desert Wheatears, a female Eastern Stonechat (*S.maura*), a female or 1st winter Cyprus Wheatear, 2 Spotted Flycatchers, 4 Common Redstarts, 1 White Wagtail, 1 Grey Wagtail, 3 Sand Martins, 6 Barn Swallows, 5 Laughing Doves, 5 Collared Doves and 6 House Sparrows. It was already late in the afternoon and as the sun was slowly setting, we drove to our hotel in Azraq.

October 16

In the early morning we checked the area around our hotel in Azraq, especially the Wadi ar Rattami area. The trees and bushes around the hotel revealed 3 Common Redstarts, 3 Spotted Flycatchers and an 'Arabian' Great Grey Shrike (*L.e.aucheri*). Laughing Doves (20), Collared Doves (20) and House Sparrows (200) were flying to and from the wadi. 2 Barn Swallows were feeding above the flowing wadi and 10 Crested Larks were present on its banks. 2 Yellow Wagtails of undeterminable (sub)species, a White Wagtail and a Sparrowhawk migrated across the area.

After breakfast we left for the Azraq Oasis. This turned out to be a magnificent place: dragonflies were flying everywhere, a White-cheeked Bulbul was singing in the top of a dead tree and the reed beds and ponds were full of birds. The tall reed beds contained at least 1 Water Rail, 1 Kingfisher, 10 Graceful Prinias, 20 Reed

Warblers, 1 Sedge Warbler and 2 Willow Warblers, but many more birds refused to give us a good look. The pond opposite of the hide contained 4 Moorhen, 1 Common Coot, 2 Garganey, 1 Little Bittern and 1 Great Snipe. One Grey Heron was flying across and raptor migration started with 1 Long-legged Buzzard, 9 Steppe Buzzards, 1 Honey Buzzard and a female Pallid Harrier. The area near the visitor centre also turned out to be highly productive: 1 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, 1 European Bee-eater, Ring-necked Parakeet, an adult Steppe Grey Shrike (*L.pallidirostris*), an 'Arabian' Great Grey Shrike (*L.e.aucheri*), 1 first winter Red-backed Shrike, 3 Eastern Stonechats (*S.maura*), a male Common Stonechat, 5 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 20 Laughing Doves and 100 House Sparrows.

Our next visit was Shaumari, which was difficult to reach because of the floods. A tractor had to come and pick us up. While waiting for our transport to arrive, we saw 3 Northern Wheatears, 1 Isabelline Wheatear, 6 Crested Larks, 50 Barn Swallows and a Sand Martin.

From the observation tower the Shaumari reserve did not reveal many birds, but the picnic area was full of migrants: 1 Kestrel, 5 Spotted Flycatchers, 5 Common Redstarts, 1 Willow Warbler, 1 Penduline Tit, 20 Barn Swallows, 1 House Martin and 1 Sand Martin.

After lunch we walked through the nearby desert in search of desert birds. 5 Crested Larks, 1 Hoopoe Lark, 1 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 10 Temminck's Horned Larks and a Sociable Plover were discovered. A migrating Red-throated Pipit was heard.

As water was rushing down the wadi towards the Qa'a, we stopped where the road crossed the river and checked the area. 6 Night Herons flew out a group of trees near the road. 1 Grey Wagtail, 1 White Wagtail, 1 yellow Wagtail of unknown (sub)species, 20 Barn Swallows and 30 Sand Martins were attracted to the water. In the neighbourhood 2 Desert Wheatears, 1 Lesser Short-toed Lark, 4 Crested Larks, 10 Feral Pigeons and 10 House Sparrows were present.

We ended the day with checking the basalt desert. A male Mourning Wheatear, 2 Desert Wheatears, 2 yellow Wagtails of unknown (sub)species, 20 White Wagtails, 10 Crested Larks, a Spotted Flycatcher, 3 Kestrels and a Sparrow Hawk were all we could find in the limited time we had. As darkness fell, we drove back to Amman.

October 17

From our hotel window in Amman we could see and hear 1 Blackbird, 1 Laughing Dove, 2 Ring-necked Parakeets and 3 Greenfinches. After breakfast we left for Jerash.

In Jerash the group split up. One part entered the ruins and now knows all about the ancient Gerasa, but saw only 6 Crested Larks and some White Wagtails. The other part went birding in a nearby valley with a tiny river and lots of small orchards on the valley slopes. It turned out to be a very good birding spot. We discovered 1 European Bee-eater, 3 White Wagtails, 1 Grey Wagtail, 4 Common Redstarts, 4 Blackbirds, 10 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 2 singing Cetti's Warblers, 2 Reed Warblers, 1 Paddyfield Warbler, 1 singing Icterine Warbler, 2 Chiffchaff, 2 Spotted Flycatchers, 1 Great Tit, 3 Palestine Sunbirds, 1 Jay (*G.g.atricapillus*) 2 Hooded Crows and 1 Goldfinch. In the area some 60 Barn Swallows were flying, of which at least 10 of the red-bellied race *H.r.transitiva*. Remarkably, the resident red-bellied Barn Swallows were singing while flying, whereas all migrant Barn Swallow were silent during the previous days in the desert.

Afterwards we visited the Dibbin forest where we heard Crossbills calling and a Serin singing. Furthermore 1 Sparrowhawk, 4 Collared Doves, 2 Barn Swallows, 1 Tree Pipit, 1 Blackbird, 2 Great Tits, 14 Blue Tits, 1 Jay, 1 Brambling and 1 Chaffinch. Though we observed some nice birds, the general impression was that the woods were quite empty. We visited the forest just before noon and apparently that was not the best time. Next time we try early in the morning.

En route to Aljun we saw a Long-legged Buzzard. Near the castle of Aljun we had a late lunch. The park around Aljun contained 1 Chiffchaff, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 3 Great Tits and 1 Chaffinch.

En route to Zubia some people saw a Red-backed Shrike along the road. Zubia contained 1 Sparrowhawk, 1 European Bee-eater, 2 Common Redstart, 1 Northern Wheatear, 3 Blackbirds, 2 Blackcaps, 3 Sardinian Warblers, 1 Chiffchaff, 4 Spotted Flycatchers, 1 Blue Tit, 6 Jays, 2 Chaffinches, 6 Linnets and 14 Greenfinches. On top of that we saw 3 migrating Cranes, 10 migrating Crag Martins and 1 migrating Red-throated Pipit.

October 18

From our hotel rooms in Amman we discovered 1 Laughing Dove, 2 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, a male Masked Shrike, 2 House Sparrows and 1 Greenfinch.

After breakfast we left for Wadi Shu'ayma. While just starting to descend into the wadi, we stopped at a place with a magnificent view over the mountains and the Jordan valley. The wooded mountains revealed 3 Long-legged Buzzards, 4 Barn Swallows, 1 Yellow-vented Bulbul, 2 Sardinian Warblers, 3 Jays (*G.g. atricapillus*) and 1 Linnet. At the bottom of the wadi we stopped again and checked the picnic area near the small dam. Although the river was flowing, the dam was completely dry. The area turned out to be a splendid birdwatching site: 4 Little Egrets, 2 Cattle Egrets, 1 Spur-winged Plover, a male Lesser Kestrel, 4 Laughing Doves, 4 Rock Doves, 1 European Swift, 40 Barn Swallows, 1 Red-rumped Swallow, 2 'yellow' Wagtails of unknown (sub)species, 10 White Wagtails, 1 Grey Wagtail, 2 Blackstart, a male Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, 1 Northern Wheatear, 1 male Common Stonechat, 20 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Chiffchaff, 2 Spotted Flycatchers, 1 'palestine' Great Grey Shrike (*L.e.elegans*), 1 Hoopoe and 8 Brown-necked Ravens.

While driving towards the Dead Sea, a Pied Kingfisher was discovered. At the northern edge of the Dead Sea, we discovered 5 nests of Dead Sea Sparrows and heard some 10 birds singing in the Tamariks, but they were too hard to find. The tamarisks did reveal 20 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Lesser Whitethroat and 1 Palestine Sunbird. In the neighbourhood we saw 2 Crested Larks, 2 Barn Swallows and a Spanish Sparrow.

We continued along the Dead Sea shore and saw 10 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 2 White-crowned Black Wheatears and 2 Brown-necked Ravens. We stopped for lunch at the mouth of wadi Mujib. There we saw 1 migrating Marsh Harrier, 1 migrating Steppe Buzzard, 1 European Kingfisher, 1 Laughing Dove, 20 Rock Doves, 3 Desert Larks (subspecies *A.d.isabellinus*), 10 Rock Martins, 1 Blackstart, 3 White-crowned Black Wheatears, 14 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 2 'palestine' Great Grey Shrikes (*L.e.elegans*), 30 Tristram Starlings, 4 Fan-tailed Ravens, 3 Dead Sea Sparrows and 50 House Sparrows.

Our next stop was near Potash City, where we happened to stop close to the water treatment facility. A splendid place with 2 spur-winged Plovers, 2 Common Redshanks, 1 Spotted Redshank, 15 Dunlins, 2 Little Green Bee-eaters, 2 White wagtails, 1 Isabelline Wheatear, 4 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Willow Warbler, 1 first-winter Isabelline Shrike (probably *L.i.phoenicuroides*) and 4 Dead Sea Sparrows.

Continuing through the valley, we saw another 4 Little Green Bee-eaters and 3 White-crowned Black Wheatears. Near Fifa, we took a road into the mountains towards Tafilla. We saw 3 Desert Larks, a possible Long-billed Pipit, 1 White-crowned Black Wheatear and 3 Fan-tailed Ravens. Near Tafilla we drove towards Dana. 4 Rock Martins, 3 Mourning Wheatears and 20 House Sparrows were discovered. Just before entering the Rumana campsite at Dana, we saw 10 Chukar Partridge and 2 Kestrels.

October 19

All day we spent birding around the Rumana campsite. We saw 1 Griffon Vulture, 2 Bonelli's Eagles, 9 migrating Steppe Buzzards, 1 migrating Marsh Harrier, 1 Sparrowhawk, 8 Kestrels, 190 migrating Common Cranes, 20 Chukar Partridge, 2 singing Woodlarks, 2 Crested Larks, 8 Desert Larks (at least 4 probably of subspecies *A.d.deserti*), 50 Rock Martins, 60 Crag Martins, 4 Barn Swallows, 4 migrating White Wagtails,

14 Common Redstarts, 1 Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, 28 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 7 Streaked Scrub Warblers, 2 Willow Warblers, 2 Great Tits, 1 Red-breasted Flycatcher, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 6 House Sparrows, 10 Greenfinches, 11 Linnets, 2 Syrian Serins, 1 House Bunting and 1 Corn Bunting.

October 20

At the campsite we saw 1 migrating Short-toed Lark, 1 singing Woodlark, 1 Crested Lark, 1 migrating Red-throated Pipit and 1 Chaffinch. On our way by bus to Dana-village, we saw 1 Kestrel, 1 Chukar Partridge, 1 Feral Pigeon, 2 Crested Larks, 2 Common Redstarts, 2 Mourning Wheatears, a male Blue Rock Thrush, 4 House Sparrows, 30 Rock Sparrows, 4 Linnets and 1 Goldfinch.

In Dana village and the gardens and orchards around it we saw: 3 Kestrels, 1 male Lesser Kestrel, 2 Sparrowhawks, 2 Laughing Doves, 3 possible Little Swifts, 3 Desert Larks, 9 Crag Martins, 2 Rock Martins, 1 Tree Pipit, 1 White Wagtail, 40 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 3 Robins, 2 Common Redstarts, 2 Blue Rock Thrushes, 2 Song Thrushes, 11 Blackbirds, 2 Mistle Thrushes, 1 Icterine Warbler, 2 Lesser Whitethroats, 4 Blackcaps, 1 Sardinian Warbler, 1 Chiffchaff, 1 Willow Warbler, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 10 Great Tit, 3 Palestine Sunbirds, 39 Tristram's Starling, 20 House Sparrows, 6 Goldfinches, 7 Syrian Serins. We heard Common Cranes migrating, but couldn't find them in the clear blue sky.

In the afternoon we visited a small spring near the entrance of the Rumana campsite. Present were 1 Sparrowhawk, 1 Kestrel, 3 migrating Crag Martins, 15 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Common Redstart, 1 Finch Wheatear, 1 Streaked Scrub Warbler, 1 Willow Warbler, 5 Great Tits, 2 Tristram's Starlings, 2 Rock Sparrows, 2 Syrian Serins, 40 Goldfinches, 4 Linnets, 19 Greenfinches and 1 Ortolan Bunting. Next to visit was the area around the entrance with its magnificent viewpoints. Due to the cold windy weather we only saw: 3 Kestrels, 1 Chukar Partridge, 1 freshly dead Common Quail, 2 Chiffchaffs and 1 Linnet. On our way down to the Rumana campsite we saw 2 singing Woodlarks, 20 Goldfinches and 4 Greenfinches. In the late afternoon, a male Goshawk was circling above the campsite, before disappearing (migrating?) in south-westerly direction.

October 21

In the early morning at the campsite we saw 1 Sparrowhawk, 1 Crested Lark, 1 Woodlark, 2 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Streaked Scrub Warbler and 1 Greenfinch. Before leaving the area we had a quick stop at the spring. 1 Kestrel, 1 Desert Lark, 2 Crested Larks, 1 Yellow-vented Bulbul, 1 first winter male Black Redstart of a rufous-bellied eastern race (*P.o. ochruros* or *phoenicuroides*), 2 Finch Wheatears, 1 Blue Rock Thrush, 1 Blackbird, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 Great Tit, 1 Chaffinch, 1 Goldfinch, 3 Greenfinches and 1 Ortolan Bunting were observed.

Near Tafilla we descended from the Rift Margin mountains into Wadi Araba. We stopped at a parking place under construction high in the mountains with beautiful scenery. 1 Kestrel, 1 European Bee-eater, 2 Desert Larks, 1 Rock Martin, 1 White Wagtail, 1 Blackstart, 5 White-crowned Black Wheatears, 2 Mourning Wheatears, 1 Tristram's Starling and 30 Sinai Rosefinches were present. Driving through Wadi Araba towards Fidan, we saw another 2 White-crowned Black Wheatears and a Hoopoe Lark.

Near Fidan, we stopped at the acacia woodland for lunch and of course for birding. The most magnificent observation was definitely the adult male Sooty Falcon, which was hunting for several minutes in the area. Other observations were also not bad: 4 Little Green Bee-eaters, 6 Collared Doves, 12 Laughing Doves, 1 Desert Lark, 1 Crested Lark, 1 White Wagtail, 2 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 3 Blackstarts, 3 Streaked Scrub Warblers, 9 Arabian Babblers, 1 'palestine' Great Grey Shrike (*L.e. elegans*) and 5 House Sparrows. At the Fidan village, only a Palestine Sunbird was observed. Back to the main road, we stopped at the point where a wadi crosses the road and walked through the wadi and adjoining desert. We saw 10 Collared Doves, 2 Little Green Bee-eaters, 1 Hoopoe Lark, 1 Desert Lark, 1 Crested Lark, 1 Desert Wheatear and 1 Streaked Scrub Warbler.

Continuing towards Aqaba, we saw 4 Desert Larks, 1 Common Redstart and 6 House Sparrows at a teahouse and 1 Steppe Buzzard and 4 Brown-necked Ravens in the desert.

Arriving around sunset at Aqaba we saw 1 Ring-necked Parakeet, 10 Barn Swallows, 3 White Wagtails and 30 House Crows. There were neither gulls nor terns to be seen on the Red Sea.

October 22

From our hotel in Aqaba we walked in the early morning to the beach and adjoining park. 5 Grey Herons, 11 Western Reef Herons, 1 first winter Grey-headed Gull, 1 Black-headed Gull, 4 White-eyed Gulls, 3 first winter Pontic Gulls, 1 Siberian Gull (*Larus heuglini*), 2 large terns (probably Sandwich Terns), 2 Laughing Doves, 1 Collared Dove, 200 Feral Pigeons, 5 Ring-necked Parakeets, 1 Kingfisher, 1 Smyrna Kingfisher, 1 Crested Lark, 2 Barn Swallows, 5 migrating Sand Martins, 5 White Wagtails, 2 Grey Wagtails, 1 male Grey-headed Wagtail, 1 'yellow' Wagtail of unknown (sub)species, 4 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 3 Red-throated Pipits, 1 Chiffchaff, 2 Red-backed Shrikes, 40 House Crows, 2 Tristram's Starlings and 20 House Sparrows.

Around noon we went by Glass-boat and saw apart from many colourful fish, only 1 White-eyed Gull, hundreds of Feral Pigeons and 6 Barn Swallows.

In the afternoon we visited Aqaba South Beach, where we saw 2 Kestrels, 2 Ringed Plovers, 2 Crested Larks, 1 red-spotted Bluethroat (*L.s.svecica*) and 10 House Sparrows.

October 23

The next morning we visited the park and beach again. 10 Western Reef Herons, 1 first winter Grey-headed Gull, 3 adult and 2 first winter Black-headed Gulls, 5 White-eyed Gulls, 1 first winter Mediterranean Yellow-legged Gull, 2 first winter Pontic Gulls, 1 first winter Baltic Gull (*L. fuscus (fuscus)*), 2 Laughing Doves, 100+ Feral Pigeons, 2 Ring-necked Parakeets, 1 Smyrna Kingfisher, 1 Wryneck, 4 Barn Swallows, 2 migrating and 1 resident Red-throated Pipit, 3 Tree Pipits, 4 White Wagtails, 1 male Grey-headed Wagtail, 2 'yellow' Wagtails of unknown (sub)species, 4 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Bluethroat, 4 Common Redstarts, 2 male Eastern Common Redstarts (*P.p.samariscus*), 1 Black Redstart of a red-bellied race, 1 immature male Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, 1 Whitethroat, 1 Lesser Whitethroat, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 immature Masked Shrike, 2 Red-backed Shrikes, 10 House Crows, 2 Tristram's Starlings and 1 male Spanish Sparrows were seen.

Driving towards Wadi Rum, we stopped at Wadi Yutm. Only 4 Collared Doves, 2 Laughing Doves, 3 Crested Larks and 3 White-crowned Black Wheatears were seen.

Close to Wadi Rum one of the participants discovered a group of migrating raptors. It turned out to be a group of 10 Steppe Eagles (4 immature, 6 adult and sub-adult), with one Greater Spotted Eagle and 1 male Pallid Harrier. Somewhat later we saw 2 more sub-adult Steppe Eagles migrating. A short walk at the fringe of the mountains rendered 1 Laughing Dove, 4 Desert Larks, 1 Barn Swallow, 5 White-crowned Black Wheatears and 30 Brown-necked Ravens.

At Rum village we saw 1 Kestrel, 15 Rock Doves, 1 Crested Lark, 1 Rock Martin and 1 White-crowned Black Wheatear.

We went to one of the wells about a km outside the town. 2 Long-legged Buzzards, 1 Sparrow Hawk, 2 Lesser Kestrels, 1 large falcon (possibly Lanner or Barbary), 5 Rock Doves, 10 Laughing Doves, 3 Crested Larks, 5 Desert Larks (probably of subspecies *A.d.deserti*), 1 Rock Martin, 2 White Wagtails, 2 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Common Redstart, 1 White-crowned Black Wheatear, 2 Streaked Scrub Warblers, 30 Brown-necked Ravens, 6 Tristram's Starlings and 10 Sinai Rosefinches.

Looking for migrants, we went to another small village close to Rum. The gardens contained 20 Laughing Doves, 1 Barn Swallow, 3 Common Redstarts, 2 Spotted Flycatchers, 20 House Sparrows, 2 Spanish Sparrows and 1 House Bunting.

October 24

At our hotel in Petra we saw 1 White Wagtail and 1 Palestine Sunbird. In Petra we saw 1 Sparrow Hawk, 2 Kestrels, 8 Laughing Doves, 5 Desert Larks, 6 Rock Martins, 8 Yellow-vented Bulbuls, 1 Blackstart, 3 immature White-crowned Black Wheatears, 1 Finsch Wheatear, 2 Mourning Wheatears, 2 Blue Rock Thrushes, 3 Palestine Sunbirds, 20 Fan-tailed Ravens, 26 House Sparrows, 18 Sinai Rosefinches and 1 House Bunting.

While driving towards Amman, we saw 1 Kestrel, 4 Crested Larks, 2 White Wagtails, 2 Brown-necked Ravens and 100+ House Sparrows. The next morning we left Jordan before sunrise; too early to see any birds.

Observation notes on some birds

Goshawk

The migrating male Goshawk above Dana, had a slow and strong wing-beat compared to a Sparrowhawk, broader-based but more pointed wings, deeper belly and more protruding head and neck.

Imperial Eagle

An adult bird was sitting on an electricity pole and flew off as we were watching it. All dark, blackish-brown upperwing and body, with creamish-coloured hindneck, pale grey uppertail, with broad black terminal band and some very small and fine dark bars. White shoulder-braces were also clearly visible as the bird flew off.

Greater Spotted Eagle

An all dark, probably adult individual was flying in a group of Steppe Eagles. While the group was soaring, the bird appeared smaller than the Steppe Eagles, shorter but broader winged and with a less protruding head and neck. The underparts were uniform dark with somewhat darker coverts and underbody feathers and somewhat paler flight feathers without barring or dark trailing edge.

Great Snipe

A large bulky snipe flew for several meters and disappeared again in the vegetation just outside the large hide in the Azraq Oasis reserve. When flushed, it produced a soft gruff croak, very unlike any other kind of snipe in the region. It had a Snipe-like coloration of the upperwing, but lacked the white trailing edge of the wing and had a white wing-bar across the upperwing.

Grey-headed Gull

This first winter individual was equal in size to the nearby first winter Black-headed Gulls, but the general appearance was strikingly different. First of all, the upperwing showed much more contrast than in first winter Black-headed, with a broad black trailing edge (formed by the blackish secondaries and the broad black tip of the primaries), a clear, but smaller white panel on the outer primaries, a large black wing tip, upperwing coverts somewhat darker (mid grey). Shoulder feathers brown, less mottled than in first winter Black-headed. Underwing mid grey, contrasting clearly with blackish flight feathers. Tail and uppertail coverts white with a small black tail-band. The bird was considered to be a Grey-headed and not a Brown-headed because of the small black tail-band, the secondaries were also dark from below, and the white wing-panel was white without black bars running through it and was only visible on the outermost primaries. On both mornings we could get a good look at the bird, with observation distances ranging from 30 to 500m and observation times of 5 minutes on the first morning and at least 15 minutes on the second, while the bird was flying up and down the coastline.

Siberian Gull (*Larus (fuscus) heuglini*)

First winter bird, larger and heavier than Baltic or Pontic Gull. From above, dark brown primaries, secondaries and greater coverts, without pale window on the inner primaries. Darker rump and uppertail-coverts than Yellow-legged or Baltic Gulls.

Baltic Gull (*Larus (fuscus) fuscus*)

Very dark brown, small and slender first winter bird compared to all other first winter large gulls around. On the upperwing primaries, secondaries and greater coverts were equally dark brown, without a pale 'window' on the inner primaries. Underwing-coverts dark brown without a pattern. Tail and rump white with dark spots and a broad blackish terminal band. Head white.

Yellow-legged Gull

First winter bird was larger build than nearby Pontic Gulls, with broader wings and bulkier body. Deep bill, white head contrasting with heavy streaked collar and breast, white rump and uppertail-coverts sparsely spotted. Dark brown outer primaries contrasting with lighter inner primaries.

Pontic Gull

The first winter Pontic Gulls were more slender than the first winter Yellow-legged Gull, with a long slender bill and white head. The mantle colour is pale grey with small dark markings on each feather, giving it a quite different appearance than first winter Yellow-legged, which are coloured more uniformly spotted brown above.

possible Sandwich Terns

Two large, slender-winged terns were seen in the distance. Because of their rather pointed wings, we thought them to be rather Sandwich than Gull-billed Terns. Unfortunately, the terns were not seen at a closer range, although attempts were made to find them again.

Rock and Crag Martins

Both species were quite numerous around Rumman camp at Wadi Dana, but while the Rock Martins were obvious residents, Crag Martins appeared to be migrants. The latter appearing in larger groups feeding for a while higher in the mountains and disappearing after a while. Rock Martins were usually feeding in small groups of less than 10 birds near cliffs and gorges deeper down the mountains and were sometimes checking out overhanging rocks for suitable nesting sites. Sometimes Rock and Crag Martins would mix and on such occasions differences in colour were very obvious.

Barn Swallow

The local red-bellied subspecies of Barn Swallow (*H.r.transitiva*) was not easy to identify by the colour difference of the belly. In October they appear to have a much paler belly than for instance in January. Luckily for us, they were still present at their breeding sites and males were also constantly singing, while migrants were silent or produced only short calls.

Desert Lark

The *A.d.isabellinus* we saw at the mouth of Wadi Mujib was distinctly paler, more sandy coloured than the probable *A.d.deserti* birds we saw at Rumman Camp (Wadi Dana) and near Wadi Rum. The latter birds were more dark greyish above, with the greyish orange tone of the lower parts of the breast and flanks extending further towards the belly. In the paler Wadi Mujib *A.d.isabellinus* the white belly extended more towards the breast.

Long-billed Pipit

The bird flew from the roadside down into the steep barren valley. It was a large pipit, with a relatively long tail and most obvious, was distinctly coloured sandy grey above, greyer and darker than in Tawny pipit. No certainty about the bird's identity could be obtained due to the very short observation time.

'yellow' Wagtails

In autumn it is often very difficult if at all possible to identify the different (sub-)species of 'yellow' Wagtail. Sometimes 'yellow' Wagtails were only heard while flying over us, making it impossible to pin it down to a certain (sub) species.

White-cheeked Bulbul

A very beautiful male was singing at the edge of the marshes in the Azraq Oasis reserve.

Black Redstart

At the first morning in Amman, a Black Redstart of the Middle-Eastern race *P.o.semirus* was present in a small park near our hotel. The head, chest and entire back were very dark blackish-grey or black and the belly up to the chest was intensely red coloured. A very colourful and striking bird. The other observed Black Redstarts with red bellies only had a small reddish spot on the lower belly.

Eastern Stonechat

Seen on several occasions: one autumn female at Wadi Al Butm and 3 more females and first winters at the Azraq Oasis reserve. All birds were strikingly paler coloured than Common Stonechats, with warm pale buff or creamish colours. All birds had an unspotted warm buff rump.

Cyprus Wheatear

General appearance was quite compact for a Wheatear. Underparts deep rusty buff, upperparts and throat dark blackish brown with pale fringes to feathers. Supercilium creamish; crown and nape more sooty-grey.

Cetti's Warbler

Two Cetti's Warblers were singing constantly in this small valley near Gerasa. We were lucky to see one of them popping out off the thickets every now and again.

Paddyfield Warbler

Close to the entrance of the ancient Gerasa in Jerash there is a small valley with a tiny river flowing through it. The valley is abundantly grown with bushes, trees and near the river small patches of reed. Apart from two Reed or Marsh Warblers, there was another *Acrocephalus* warbler in the reeds. Approximately equally large in size, brown above and pale underparts, but with a very conspicuous creamish supercilium. The border of the supercilium was very sharp defined, making it even more conspicuous. The supercilium extended from the bill to well beyond the eye. In fact, when seen from behind, both supercilia could be seen, reaching the back of the head, only separated by ca. 1 cm of brown head feathers. The flanks showed a clear warm wash. The bill was short for an *Acrocephalus* warbler.

Icterine Warbler

On both occasions the birds were singing repeatedly from a bushy area with trees. The song was softer than in spring, but still unmistakable.

Penduline Tit

One Penduline Tit was calling from the Eucalyptus trees in Shaumari. Unfortunately we could not find the bird. The call however was this unmistakable fine and plaintive "tsiiiü".

Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides*)

A first-winter shrike with uniform pale sandy-grey upperparts, except for the remiges, which appeared dark brown with pale sandy-grey edges. Tail red with dark central tail-feathers. Pale white underparts and throat with faint vermiculations on the flanks. Ear-coverts dark brown; supercilium creamish. Some faint barring visible on the crown. The grey tones of the upperparts and the pale white underparts suggest that the bird was of the race *phoenicuroides*. The uniform pale sandy-grey upperparts without any rufous-brown parts rule out the possibility of a young red-backed shrike.

Steppe Grey Shrike

This adult bird was seen just outside the entrance building of the Azraq Oasis reserve. The completely white underparts, dark ear-coverts and pale lores were the first clues that grabbed our attention. The pale bill with its pinkish base and the large white wing-bar could also be observed.

**Crossbill**

Unfortunately we could only hear these birds calling. The loud metallic "kip-kip" was heard several times.

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