

Bird observations in south Israel March 25-April 2 1997

Erik Hirschfeld (compiler of this list), Thomas Nyberg and Jalle Lorensen visited Israel for a one-week hardcore birding trip. While Israel was a new destination for Jalle, Erik had made four previous visits and Thomas one. The aim of the trip was to clean up southern Israel. As there is plenty of published information on Israel, this report will just focus on the species list and some general comments. The dates were a bit late for species such as Dunn's Lark, Sinai Rosefinch and Striated Scops Owl and we therefore missed out on them. But with some luck at least the two former should be possible to see at this time.

Accommodation

We stayed at the Nova apartments, just west of the airport. The standard was high and the apartments were adequately equipped and well-situated. Daily cleaning (and even washing up of dishes!) was included. Among the facilities were an indoor garage and a nursery and the staff were helpful and service-minded. The package deal with flight to Ovda was bought from the Swedish tour operator Always. We also stayed one night in the Park Inn (sounded cheapest!) on the shore of the Dead Sea south of En Gedi. Much overpriced, but convenient when arriving late in the evening. They also arranged an early package breakfast for us. Room and breakfast costed c. USD 60 per person. Cheaper accommodation is available in En Gedi but if you prebook (advisable during spring) you have to arrive before 6 pm (and consequently miss out on valuable birding time...).

Cars, prices etc

We drove 1440 km during the week. Distances in and around Elat are rather short, and it is possible to bird by taxi or walking (better to stay in the hotels near the North Beach and Marina if you plan to bird on foot). A taxi in town costed up to 10 shekels (c. GBP 2 at the time of writing). Petrol was c. GBP 0.7 a litre. We rented a Fiat Punto (four door with ac) from AVIS, pre-booked from Sweden. The car was OK, but more worn than one would expect from AVIS in Europe. Ground clearance was poor, especially with four people in it. It costed us c. GBP200 for the 8 days with unlimited mileage. Remember that if you fly in to Ovda you must pick up your AVIS car in the Elat office (closes 6 pm). Expect two hours transfer time after disembarking the plane to reach Elat town.

Climate and daylight

Unusually cold and windy with temperatures just above 20°C during the days (except for the last days when it soared up to 30°), Nights and mornings were cold, especially in the Negev and wind-proof clothes and gloves are highly recommended for this time of the year. No rain. Dawn was at 6.30 and dusk at 19.00.

General impressions

Elat was very different from EH last visit, in 1989. More hotels had been built, farmers had switched to less attractive crops (such as grapes) and used more closed greenhouses. A large part of the palm grove had also been destroyed. This, coupled with a poor spring and cold weather, gave an impression of less resting birds than usual, although the variety was large. On the other hand, many interesting places which were unknown in 89, could be found around the kibbutzes in the Arava north of Elat.

Finding sites

Dave Gosney's "Finding birds in Israel" was of great help. Can be ordered from Birdguides, Jack House, Ewden, Sheffield S30 5ZA, tel. ++44 114 283 1002, email dave@birdguides.com, website www.birdguides.com. Watching the video "Gosney in Israel" functioned well as preparation for the trip. Otherwise we used information from the Dutch Birding Travel Report Service (POB 737, NL-9700 Groningen, The Netherlands. Tel. ++31 50 527 4993, fax. 50 527 2668, email Ib.Huysman@net.HCC.nl., internet <http://www.mebweb.nl/DBTRS>) for making checklists. To go with Elat-resident Hadoram Shirihai (tel and fax++972-7 6379326) for Hume's Tawny Owl is highly recommended. He also does guided trips to other places like the Negev. It costed GBP15 per person for a duetting pair of Hume's in a scenic and quiet wadi with the comet as a backdrop.

Itinerary

"Elat" or "Elat area" refers to any sites north to K20 and in the Elat mountains, e. g. Wadi Schlomo.

25th: Arrival Ovda airport c. 14.00. To Elat 16.00, then North Beach after picking up the car.

26th: Shulamit Gardens, new lagoon, North Beach, Middle Fields and ringing station, Arava crossing, K20, graveyard, Shulamit gardens, K20, Shulamit gardens, North Beach.

27th: Shulamit gardens, K33, Shizzafon kibbutz, Yotvata, K40, K33, Amran's Pillars, North Beach.

28th: North Beach, Elat area, wadi Schlomo, K20.

29th: Left Elat 5 am. Nizzana, Ashalim, Ben Gurion's grave, Ayn Avdat, Neot Hakkar, En Tamar fishponds. Night by Dead Sea.

30th: Mizpe Drogot, En Tamar fishponds, En Hazeva, Wadi Paran.

31st: Ringing station, K18, K40, Yotvata, Qetura sewage, K20, K18, North Beach.

1st: Elat area, Yotvata, K40, North Beach

2nd: Elat area in the morning. Birding until 9 am, then departure for Ovda.

Acknowledgements

A big thankyou to Anders Blomdahl who took time off from ringing and cheerfully joined us and navigated to many interesting sites. Also to Hadoram for his company and helpfulness.

List of species

English names are the ones the author uses and do not necessarily follow BOU names. Subspecific names for those species with only one subspecies occurring/or positively identified are taken from Shirihai's "Birds of Israel".

1. Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps n. nigricollis*
One in winter plumage in reedponds at K20 26th.
2. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus r. ruficollis*
Several in En Tamar 29th.
3. Soft-plumaged *Pterodroma mollis*
1 North Beach 25th. Seen close inshore and the first accepted record for Israel. There is a published record of *faeae* from the Dead Sea in February 1963 (Shirihai 1996).
4. Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster plotus*
1 North Beach daily.
5. Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*
2 North Beach daily.
6. Striated Heron *Butoroides striatus brevipes*
1-2 North beach daily.
7. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus i. ibis*
1 K18 31.3.
8. Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*
1 Yotvata 31st, 1 Qetura 31st.
9. Reef Heron *Egretta gularis schistacea*
Singles at the North Beach daily.
10. Little Egret *Egretta g. garzetta*
Recorded daily, maximum 15 28th.
11. Great White Egret *Egretta a. alba*
3 en Tamar 28th.
12. Grey Heron *Ardea c. cinerea*
Recorded daily.
13. Purple Heron *Ardea p. purpurea*
14 north Beach 26th, 1 near ringing station 28th.
14. Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*
41 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
15. White Stork *Ciconia c. ciconia*
Recorded more or less daily, maximum 400 Negev 29th.
16. Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus*
A group of c. 30 at K20 throughout, 1 Eilat salines throughout.
17. Wigeon *Anas penelope*
10 North Beach 25th, 50 there 26th, male En Tamar 29th.
18. Teal *Anas c. crecca*
1 male North Beach 26th.
19. Pintail *Anas acuta*

- Recorded from North Beach more or less daily, maximum 50 26th.
20. Garganey *Anas querquedula*
Flocks at North Beach daily, an impressive 4000 there in strong southerlies 26th.
 21. Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
Recorded daily at North Beach, maximum 400 26th.
 22. Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*
At North Beach 40 26th, 10 27th.
 23. Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Singles or small flocks recorded daily.
 24. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron p. percnopterus*
4 Yotvata 27th, 2-4 Negev 29th, at least 3 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
 25. Griffon Vulture *Gyps f. fulvus*
1 En Avdat 29th, 2-3 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
 26. Short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus*
1 Yotvata 27th, 2 elat 28th, 10 Mizpe Drogot 30th, 2 Arava 31st.
 27. Marsh Harrier *Circus a. aeruginosus*
Singles recorded on four days.
 28. Hen Harrier *Circus c. cyaneus*
2 females Nizzana 29th.
 29. Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*
Male K18 31st.
 30. Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
Single individuals seen on four days.
 31. Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*
Recorded daily.
 32. Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo r. rufinus*
4 Sede Boqer area 29th, 1 Mizpe Drogot 30th, 3 along the road same day.
 33. Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*
C. 20 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
 34. Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis orientalis*
Singles recorded Elat 26th and 28th.
 35. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos homeyeri*
1 Mishpe Ramona 29th.
 36. Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*
1 Wadi Paran 30th.
 37. Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus f. fasciatus*
1 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
 38. Osprey *Pandion h. haliaetus*
Singles recorded on three days.
 39. Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Recorded more or less daily.
 40. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
1 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
 41. Barbary Falcon *Falco p. pelegrinoides*
Male Elat 27th, 2 Elat area 28th, 1 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
 42. Chukar *Alectoris chukar sinaica*
15 Negev 29th, "several" recorded 30th.
 43. Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*
Singles in Elat area on four days.
 44. Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*
2 En Tamar 30th.
 45. Little Crake *Porzana parva*
At least 2 males 1 female En Tamar 29th.
 46. Moorhen *Gallinula c. chloropus*
1 K20 26th, 6 En Tamar 29th.
 47. Coot *Fulica a. atra*
3 K20 26th, 4 En Tamar 29th.
 48. Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata macqueenii*

- 3 displaying Nizzana 29th.
49. Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
30-40 K20 throughout, 30 En Tamar 29th.
 50. Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
1 Arava crossing 28th.
 51. Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius c. cursor*
At least 3 Nizzana 29th.
 52. Collared Pratincole *Glareola p. pratincola*
2 K18 31st.
 53. Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius curonicus*
5 Elat 26th, 4 Elat 28th, 10 Elat 31st.
 54. Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula tundrae*
At least 10 Elat 28th-1st.
 55. Kentish Plover *Charadrius a. alexandrinus*
Up to 50 at K20.
 56. Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii columbinus*
1 male K20 1st.
 57. Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus*
Recorded daily around Elat and in kibbutzes.
 58. Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
Up to 30 at K20.
 59. Dunlin *Calidris a. alpina*
Up to 10 at K20.
 60. Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
Up to 25 at K18 and K20.
 61. Common Snipe *Gallinago g. gallinago*
1 En Tamar 29-30th.
 62. Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa l. limosa*
2 North Beach 28th.
 63. Curlew *Numenius a. arquata*
6 North Beach 27th, 2 North Beach 28th.
 64. Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Up to 15 K20 31st.
 65. Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*
2 K20 31-1st.
 66. Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
2 En Tamar 30th, 1 North Beach 31st.
 67. Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Recorded more or less daily in small numbers.
 68. Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
Singles on four days, maximum 5 on 31st.
 69. Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Singles 29th and 31st.
 70. Unid. Skua *Stercorarius sp.*
2 North Beach 31st.
 71. White-eyed Gull *Larus leucoptthalmus*
Seen daily at North Beach, maximum 18 on 26th.
 72. Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
3 North Beach 25th, 1 second-year North Beach 26-28th.
 73. Little Gull *Larus minutus*
1 2nd year North Beach 28th.
 74. Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Recorded in small numbers daily.

Brown-headed/Grey-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus/cirrocephalus*

1 2nd year bird North Beach 27th. Seen flying and pecked. Longer legs and bill than Black-headed, flight silhouette head-on reminiscent of Herring Gull, with heavier wingbeats and drooping

wings with carpal bend, much black on wingtips and primary coverts, white flash on inner part of primaries, small white mirror in the black of p 2 or 3, underwing white but pattern of primaries underneath not checked (unforgiveable!). It was never seen again and was probably a *brunnicephalus*, but the description is too poor for official acceptance.

75. Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*
Recorded daily with between 50 and 100 inds.
76. Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Recorded daily. Single adults of sub(?)species *heuglini/taimyrensis* also seen (some consider these a separate species, Siberian Gull, which seems plausible).
77. Herring/Yellow-legged Gull *Larus argentatus cachinnans*
Recorded daily with up to 50 inds.
78. Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*
1 North Beach 28th-1st.
79. Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
Maximum 20 North Beach 27th.
80. Common Tern *Sterna h. hirundo*
7 North Beach 31st.
81. Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles l. lichtensteinii*
16 pumping station 26th, 4 on the road towards Netafim 28th.
82. Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus vastitas*
17 Schizzafon 27th.
83. Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocoles senegallus*
30 Sede Boqer and 9 Ashalim 29th.
84. Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles o. orientalis*
2 Ashalim 29th, 100 Sede Boqer 29th.
85. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata caudacutus*
30 Nizzana 29th.
86. Rock Dove *Columba livia palaestinae*
Single "pure" individuals in mountains.
87. Collared Dove *Streptopelia d. decaocto*
Boringly common.
88. Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*
2 Yotvata 27th, 2 Arava crossing 28th, 1 En Hazeva 30th, 2 Elat area 31st.
89. Palm Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
Common, not as boringly as Collared.
90. Namaqua Dove *Oena c. capensis*
2 females K20 26th, 1 male K20 28th.
91. Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo ascalaphus*
1 roosting in cliff-face at Ayn Avdat 29th.
92. Little Owl *Athene noctua*
1 Nizzana 29th.
93. Hume's Tawny Owl *Strix butleri*
Male and female duetting Wadi Paran 30th.
94. Swift *Apus apus*
Recorded more or less daily, not counted.
95. Pallid Swift *Apus apus*
As for Swift.
96. Alpine Swift *Apus melba*
5 North Beach 25th, 1 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
97. Smyrna Kingfisher *Halcyon s. smyrnensis*
2 En Tamran 29th.
98. Kingfisher *Alcedo a. atthis*
1 North Beach 27th, 1 En Tamran 29th.
99. Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle r. rudis*
3 Elat 26th, 1 North Beach 31st.
100. Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis cyanophrys*
Small numbers recorded more or less daily in Elat and Arava sites.
101. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops p. persicus*

- 15 K40 27th, 2 K20 31st, 1 K20 1st.
102. Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*
19 Elat area 31st.
103. Hoopoe *Upupa e. epops*
Singles recorded on three days.
104. Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*
3 Shulamit garden 26th, 3 En Tamran 29th, 1 ringing station 31st.
105. Bar-tailed Desert Lark *Ammomanes cincturus arenicolor*
10 K33 27th, 1 Nizzana 29th.
106. Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*
Singles in mountainous areas, 1 K33 27th.
107. Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon a. alaudipes*
4 K33 27th.
108. Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*
1 K33 27th.
109. Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*
1 North Beach 25th.
110. Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Small flocks in Elat area and Negev. maximum 350 29th.
111. Crested Lark *Galerida cristata brachyura*
Common, recorded daily.
112. Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
Recorded daily.
113. African Rock Martin *Hirundo fuligula*
Recorded daily, one inside the terminal building at Ovda airport.
114. Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*
1 En Tamar 29th.
115. Swallow *Hirundo r. rustica*
Common, recorded daily.
116. Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica rufula*
Recorded more or less daily, maximum 50 29th.
117. House Martin *Delichon u. urbica*
Recorded more or less daily in small numbers.
118. Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*
Common in Nizzana, maximum 50 29th.
119. Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*
Recorded nearly daily in plantations.
120. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*
Recorded nearly daily.
121. Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
Small numbers in sewage and the new lagoon.
122. Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens japonicus*
1 new lagoon 26th.
123. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Common, most *feldegg* but also *beema*.
124. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Male En Tamar 29th, two males K18 31st.
125. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Common, recorded daily.
126. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygus*
Common, first bird seen after landing.
127. Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*
1 male K20 26th.
128. Black Bush Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*
1 K40 31st.
129. Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
1 Shulamit gardens 26th.
130. Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

- 1 En Tamran 29th.
131. Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*
Singles in suitable habitat, nearly daily.
132. Black Restart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
1 Yotvata 27th, 1 male Sede Boqer 29th.
133. Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*
Seen on three days in Arava, two male *samamisticus* at Yotvata 27th.
134. Blackstart *Cercomela m. melanura*
Recorded daily, mainly in mountainous areas.
135. Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*
1 male Yotvata 27th.
136. Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
10 Nizzana 29th, 1 En Hazeva 30th.
137. Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
Recorded daily. Maximum 50 K20 28th.
138. Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca*
Singles seen almost daily.
139. Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*
Male Nizzana 29th.
140. Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe l. lugens*
2 27th, 10 29th and 1 30th.
141. Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*
One near Ovda 25th.
142. White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga ernesti*
Common in higher areas, recorded daily.
143. Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
Female Elat cemetery 26th.
144. Blackbird *Turdus merula syriacus*
Common around En Gedi.
145. Song Thrush *Turdus philomelus*
1 En Tamran 29th.
146. Graceful Warbler *Prinia gracilis palaestinae*
Common, recorded daily.
147. Scrub Warbler *Scotocerca i. inquieta*
Singles Elat mountains.
148. Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*
1 Shulamit gardens 26th.
149. Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*
At least 5 En Tamran 29th.
150. Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
2 En Tamran 29th, 1 Qetura 31st.
151. Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
1 Shulamit gardens 26th, 5 En Tamran 29th, 1 ringing station 31st.
152. Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus s. stentoreus*
15 En Tamran 29th.
153. Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*
Recorded on five days, maximum 4 Shulamit gardens 26th.
154. Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata*
1 Wadi Schlomo 28th.
155. Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
3 by Dead Sea 30th.
156. Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli*
Male Shulamit gardens 26th, female by Dead Sea 30th.
157. Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelana negevensis*
2 at nest Yotvata 27th.
158. Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis crassirostris*
1 2nd year female Wadi Schlomo 28th, 1 2nd year female by Dead Sea 30th.
159. Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

- Common, recorded daily.
160. Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
2 Yotvata 27th, 1 by Dead Sea 30th, 1 Elat 31st.
161. Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Common, recorded daily.
162. Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli orientalis*
Singles recorded on four days in Elat/Arava.
163. Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Recorded on four days, maximum 25 on 29th.
164. Arabian Babbler *Turdoides s. squamiceps*
Seen nearly daily, mainly in Elat and Arava.
165. Wallcreeper *Tichodroma m. muraria*
1 male En Avdat 29th.
166. Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*
At least 1 K18 1st.
167. Palestine Sunbird *Nectarinia o. osea*
Seen daily in Arava.
168. Great Grey Shrike *Lanius (excubitor) meridionalis*
Singles in desert areas and Arava.
169. Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
Singles seen daily.
170. Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*
1 male K20 27th, 1 female Qetura 31st.
171. Indian House Crow *Corvus s. splendens*
Common in Elat.
172. Hooded Crow *Corvus corone cornix*
Common in Negev.
173. Brown-necked Raven *Corvus r. ruficollis*
Common in desert areas.
174. Raven *Corvus corax subcorax*
1 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
175. Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus stanleyi*
Common at Dead Sea.
176. Tristram's Grackle *Onychognathus tristramii*
Common, recorded daily.
177. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Common, recorded daily.
178. Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*
Common, recorded daily.
179. Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer m. moabiticus*
Maximum 30 Elat 25th, also singles at Yotvata sewage.
180. Pale Rock Sparrow *carpospiza brachydactyla*
1 singing male K40 27th, c. 15 Mizpe Drogot foothills 30th, 1 singing male c. 1 km south of Mizpe Drogot turn-off 30th.
181. Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus*
2 Schizzafon 27th.
182. Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
Seen in small numbers in kibbutzes.
183. Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis niediecki*
4 Mishpe Ramona 29th.
184. Linnet *Acanthis cannabina*
1 Mizpe Drogot 30th.
185. Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*
3 En Hazeva 30th.
186. Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus crassirostris*
2 Wadi Paran 30th.
187. Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

- 20 Mizpe Drogot 30th, 1 Elat 31st.
188. Cretschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*
1 Yotvata 27th, 10 Mizpe Drogot 30th, 1 Elat 31st.
189. Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*
2-3 Nizzana 29th.

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