

## SOUTHERN OMAN AUGUST 1 - 4 1990

This trip was done mainly for the seawatching at Mirbat and to see some of the species peculiar to southern Arabia. Many desert species like Sandgrouse and Larks can be seen in and around Salalah if one has more time.

### Flights

Oman Aviation operate flights several times a day between Muscat and Salalah. They are often fully occupied and need to be booked in advance. Price 63 Bahraini Dinars return (1 BD = (roughly) GBP 1.6, 1 Omani Riyal (OR) is c. 0.97 BD). Flight time 1 hour 15 minutes.

### Hotels

I stayed at the Holiday Inn (OR 31 a night) but there are local hotels as well which probably are fully acceptable for a birder. I took the Holiday Inn as I was told there were not any other hotels around. The Holiday Inn is often booked well in advance during the monsoon.

### Cars

There is a Budget office at the Holiday Inn and possibly an AVIS in town. Budget charged OR 14 daily for a small car and OR 36 for a Nissan Patrol. If you intend to go wadi bashing or desert driving a Patrol (long wheelbase, probably seats 8) is essential. If you are content with doing what I did a salon car will do well. The cars seem to be booked well in advance as well and the total number of cars at Budget is very small. International drivers licence is compulsory. Petrol was 115 baiza (1000 baiza to 1 OR) and the roads in general good and well signposted. Camels, which roam around the plains in large flocks seemingly unattended, are a great hazard and cross or walk on the roads both day and night. Flocks of cows and donkeys are also present.

### Maps

I did not shop around after them as I was taken to the important sites and the roads around Salalah are few. Would be essential if you plan to go off-road and I am uncertain where in Salalah they can be obtained. Try Stanfords in London (12 - 14 Long Acre, Covent garden, London WC2E 9LP. Tel. 01 - 8361321).

### Climate

During the monsoon (July to September) the climate is quite different from the rest of Arabia. The nights and mornings were humid, with drizzle, while it cleared up during the days. But there can be rain during daytime as well and rainproof clothing is recommended. Temperatures were around 25 C, but it was a bit chilly on the morning seawatch at Mirbat and a pull-over could be a good idea. Wellingtons not really necessary. Be careful with wearing shorts in Salalah, outside no problem. Even though it is overcast, the sun does burn you so a hat and sun protection can be necessary.

### Malaria, etc.

Malaria pills are essential, I took Paludrin. No other special inoculations necessary. There are stick insects around, especially in the ayns, so insect repellent is recommended.

### Litterature

"Birds of Oman" by Gallagher & Woodcock is the book to study. There are some very useful papers on the Salalah region in Sandgrouse 2:56 - 85 (general list) and 7: 29 - 42 (seabirds). "Birds of the Middle East and North Africa" by Hollom et al is the field guide to use.

### Local birders

Ian Brown and Bill Simpson can be contacted at P. O. B. 18929, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman. They live far away from Salalah though and only have weekends (i. e. Thursday and Fridays) off, so do not expect to be showed around by them. The Oman Bird Records Committee at adress P. O. B. 246, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman is interested in reports from Oman and publish a list of the birds of Oman and their status as well as bird reports.

### Sites

**Ras Mirbat** is c. 70 km east of Salalah and the road to the village is good. To get to the sea-watching point, navigate through the northern part of the village eastwards. When you are through the village there is a small

fishing port to the right (south). Continue east up on a plateau (c. 1 km after the last houses). The first day we sat by the pick-nick site close to the water, but the birds often disappeared in the waves. The second day I tried to sit higher up on the cliffs to the east and could follow them for longer periods (although they were c. 75 m farther away). According to Bundy (in Sandgrouse) they do not feed there, but there were many of them (mainly Masked Boobies and Petrels) which did so on my first visit (between noon and 3 p m). The second time I did a morning watch between 6.45 and 8.45 and all seabirds just flew by, mainly along the coast eastwards. The activity was very intense when I came that morning, but eventually died off when the sun appeared just before 9. The light was best in early morning.

**Ayn Hamran** Signposted c. 20 km east of Salalah on the Mirbat road. Drive up to the foothills, park by the well and walk around among the trees. African Rock Buntings, Didric Cuckoos, Masked Weavers, Grey-headed Kingfishers, Bush Shrikes, Fan-tailed Ravens and Tristram's Grackles were all common. On the second visit I also added Arabian Warbler, White-breasted Whiteeye and Golden-winged Grosbeak. We found Bruce's Green Pigeons in trees where the vegetation starts when you come from the plains (c. 1,5 km from the well). They are not very shy and seem to rely on their colour to remain undetected in the trees where they feed and can therefore be difficult to detect. Their wingbeat is very noisy.

**Khawr Sawly** C. 25 km east of Salalah on the Mirbat road just before a hill. Water and reeds on the south side, akacias on the left. Several other khawrs (or khors) can be explored along the coast road and are equally interesting for waterbirds provided you have the time. Four-wheel drive would be necessary to reach some of them though.

**Ayn Sahanawt** Signposted east of the Muscat road. An extremely beautiful place where Spotted Eagle Owl (probably quite common in the mountains) has been recorded. Had most of the woodland birds, South Arabian Wheatear was a bonus. Drive the gravel road till it ends and walk around in and above the wadi.

**Ayn Jazir** Transcribed as Jazrir and other varieties on the signs. East of the Thumrayt road, well signposted. Walk around the woods where the road ends. Only place where I had African Paradise Flycatcher but the species can be seen at the other Ayns as well.

On Thursdays and Fridays these places will be crammed with pick-nicking locals, so be there early in the morning for maximum benefit.

**Mughsayl** A khawr c. 60 km west of Salalah good for waders and seabirds.

**Rasyut** High cliff just west of Raysut village (c. 25 km west of Salalah) where Red-billed Tropicbirds probably breed. A gravel track leads up to the cliffs. Also birded the Khawr east of the village. A seawatch from the cliffs did not produce anything apart from the Tropicbirds.

### Itinerary

**1.8:** Arrived in the evening from Muscat and was met by Ian Brown who still smiled after having seen Oman's third Painted Snipe at Khawr Sawly. Too late to do anything about that.

**2.8:** Morning birding at Ayn Hamran, Khawr Sawly and some other Khawrs. Arrived Mirbat around midday.

**3.8:** Morning at Ayn Sahanawt, then to Mughsayl and at Rasyut for photographing Tropicbirds midday. West Khawr, Ayn Jazir and Ayn Sawly in afternoon/evening.

**4.8:** Short morning stop at Khawr Sawly, then to Mirbat. Visited Ayn Hamran around midday and then back to the hotel and left for Muscat in the evening.

### Thanks

A special thanks to Ian Brown who devoted two whole days to making sure I would see all the specialities. I also enjoyed the company of Bill Simpson who kindly helped me out with some general information before the trip and many thanks to Jens Eriksen and Michael Gallagher of Muscat for their helpful correspondence regarding Omani birds.

### **List of species**

The names herein follow Hollom et al. The names of subspecies have been included in some cases and follow Cramp et al and Gallagher & Woodcock.

**Jouanin's Petrel** Bulweria fallax C. 400 (many feeding) Ras Mirbat 2.8, 311 there 4.8. On the latter day, when the sunlight was good, the ones passing close could be seen having light grey bills with contrasting dark tips, not unlike Pomarine Skuas. All other characters (dark legs, pointed tail, slender wings, light upper wings coverts) point at Jouanin's. The pictures in Harrison show (seemingly) all-dark bills. A bit confusing and should be paid attention to by future observers.

**Pale-footed Shearwater** Puffinus carneipes 20 Mirbat 2.8 and 1 there 4.8.

**Audobon's Shearwater** Puffinus Ilherminieri 20 Mirbat 2.8 and 6 there 4.8. Subspecies *persicus*.

**Wilson's Petrel** Oceanites oceanicus 25 Mirbat 2.8 and 2 there 4.8.

**Red-billed Tropicbird** Phaethon aethereus 1 Mirbat 2.8, at least 6 Rasyut 3.8 and 2 Mirbat 4.8. Subspecies *indicus*.

**Masked Booby** Sula dactylatra C. 100 Mirbat 2.8 and 3 there 4.8. No juveniles. Subspecies *melanops*.

**Socotra Cormorant** Phalacrocorax nigrogularis 1 Mirbat 2.8.

**Little Bittern** Ixobrychus minutus 1 adult with a yellow back at Khawr Sawly 2.8. Yellow Bitterns have been claimed for Oman, but none is accepted. Needs investigation.

**Night Heron** Nycticorax nycticorax 1 Ayn Sahanawt 2.8, 1 west of Salalah 2.8.

**Green Heron** Butoroides striatus 1 adult Rasyut 3.8. Subspecies *brevipes*.

**Cattle Egret** Bubulcus ibis C. 4 West Khawr 3.8.

**Western Reef Heron** Egretta schistacea 1 white Mughsayl 3.8, 3 dark Rasyut 4.8.

**Little Egret** Egretta garzetta 1 Khawr Taqah 2.8, 2 Khawr West 3.8.

**Grey Heron** Ardea cinerea Recorded singly along the coast.

**Purple Heron** Ardea purpurea 2 Khawr Sawla 2 - 4.8.

**Spoonbill** Platalea leucorodia 13 Khawr Taqah 2.8.

**Greater Flamingo** Phoenicopterus ruber 2 Khawr Taqah 2.8, 5 Mughsayl 3.8.

**Honey Buzzard** Pernis apivorus 2 on a field just east of Salalah 2.8. Rare summer visitor.

**Black Kite** Milvus migrans 2 Taqah 2.8.

**Kestrel** Falco tinnunculus 1 Salalah Airport 1.8, 5 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, several around Salalah.

**Peregrine Falcon** Falco peregrinus 1 adult Khawr Sawly 2.8 (showing characters of subspecies *pelegrinoides*), 1 adult Mirbat 2.8, 1 adult Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, 1 adult Mughsayl 3.8, 1 juvenile Rasyut 3.8.

**Moorhen** Gallinula chloropus Common in khawrs.

**Oystercatcher** Haematops ostralegus Singles along the coast.

**Collared Pratincole** Glareola pratincola 1 Khawr Sawly 2.8.

**Little Ringed Plover** Charadrius dubius 2 West Khawr 2.8.

**Kentish Plover** Charadrius alexandrinus Max. 30 West Khawr 2.8.[]

**Greater Sandplover** Charadrius leschenaultii 2 Khawr Taqah 2.8, 2 Mughsayl 3.8, 3 Rasyut 3.8.

**Little Stint** Calidris minuta 5 West Khawr 3.8.

**Curlew Sandpiper** Calidris ferruginea 1 West Khawr 3.8.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** Limicola falcinellus 1 West Khawr 3.8.

**Ruff** Philomachus pugnax 6 Mughsayl 3.8.

**Whimbrel** Numenius phaeopus 1 Rasyut 3.8.

**Curlew** Numenius arquata 2 Mughsayl 3.8.

**Redshank** Tringa totanus 5 Mughsayl 3.8, c. 10 West Khawr 3.8.

**Marsh Sandpiper** Tringa stagnatilis 1 West Khawr 3.8.

**Greenshank** Tringa nebularia 3 Khawr Taqah 2.8, 14 Mughsayl 3.8, at least 9 Rasyut 3.8.

**Green Sandpiper** Tringa ochropus 1 Khawr Sawly 2.8, 1 West Khawr 3.8, 2 Ayn Hamran 4.8.

**Wood Sandpiper** Tringa glareola 2 Mughsayl 3.8, 1 Rasyut 3.8, 1 West Khawr 3.8.

**Terek Sandpiper** Xenus cinereus 5 Mughsayl 3.8, 4 Rasyut 3.8.

**Common Sandpiper** Actitis hypoleucos Recorded in most Khawrs, maximum 7 Mughsayl 3.8.

**Turnstone** Arenaria interpres 1 Mughsayl 3.8.

**Sooty Gull** Larus hemprichii very common along the coast, maximum congregation c. 1200 between Mirbat and Taqah 2.8.

**Slender-billed Gull** Larus genei 1 Rasyut 3.8.

**Herring Gull** Larus argentatus 2 - 3 looking like *heuglini* at Salalah 3.8.

**Gull-billed Tern** Gelochelidon nilotica 1 Khawr Taqah 2.8.

**Swift Tern** Sterna bergii Common along the coast, roosting in Sooty Gull flocks. Maximum 360 in one flock between Mirbat and Taqah 2.8. Subspecies *velox*.

**Sandwich Tern** Sterna sandvicensis 5 Mughsayl 3.8, 2 Mirbat 4.8.

**Common Tern** Sterna hirundo 1 Mirbat 2.8, although Arctic not ruled out.

**Bridled Tern** Sterna anaethetus C. 50 Mirbat 2.8, 7 there 4.8. Ssubspecies *antarctica*.

**Rock Dove** Columba livia Maximum 25 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8. Subspecies *palestinae*.

**Palm Dove** Streptopelia senegalensis Common.

**Bruce's Green Pigeon** Treron waalia At least 8 Ayn Hamran 2.8, 1 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, at least 4 Ayn Hamran 4.8.

**Didric Cuckoo** Chrysococcyx caprius C. 3 Ayn Hamran 2.8, 3 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, 2 - 3 Ayn Jazir 3.8, 2 Ayn Hamran 4.8.

**Grey-headed Kingfisher** Halcyon leucocephala At least 4, including 1 juvenile, Ayn Hamran 2.8, 4 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, 2 Ayn Jazir 3.8, 3 Ayn Hamran 4.8. Subspecies *semicerulea*.

**Little Green Beeater** Merops orientalis 1 heard Ayn Hamran 2.8. Subspecies *cyanophrys*.

**Singing Bush Lark** Mirafra cantillans Common in agricultural areas around Salalah. Subspecies *simplex*.

**Black-crowned Finch Lark** Eremopterix nigriceps 2 on the plains beneath Ayn Hamran 2.8, singles elsewhere along the roads. Subspecies *melanauchea*.

**Crested Lark** Galerida cristata singles along the plains.

**African Rock Martin** Ptyonoprogne fuligula 15 Ayn Hamran 2.8, 10 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, singles in Mirbat.

**Swallow** Hirundo rustica 2 - 3 Khawr Sawly 3.8.

**Yellow-vented Bulbul** Pycnonotus xanthopygus Common.

**Blackstart** Cercomela melanura C. 10 Ayn Hamran 2.8, 3 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8. Subspecies *erlangeri*.

**South Arabian Wheatear** Oenanthe lugentoides 2 males Ayn Sahanawt 3.8.

**Graceful Warbler** Prinia gracilis Common.

**Arabian Warbler** Sylvia leucomelaena 4 Ayn Hamran 4.8.

**African Paradise Flycatcher** Terpsiphone viridis 2 - 3 Ayn Jazir 3.8. Subspecies *harterti*.

**Shining Sunbird** Nectarinia habessinica 1 male Holiday Inn 2.8, 2 males 3 females Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, 1 Ayn Hamran 4.8. Subspecies *hellmayeri*.

**Palestine Sunbird** Nectarinia osea C. 15 Ayn Hamran 2.8, at least 1 nmale Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, singles Holiday Inn 3 and 4.8, 2 Ayn Hamran 4.8.

**White-breasted Whiteye** Zosterops abyssinica 5 Ayn Sahanawt 3.8, at least 2 Ayn Jazir 3.8, 4 Ayn Hamran 4.8. Subspecies *arabs*.

**Black-headed Bush Shrike** Tchagra senegala 2 - 3 Ayn Hamran 2.8, 3 Ayn Hamran 4.8. Subspecies *percivali*.

**Great Grey Shrike** lanius excubitor 1 on the plains beneath Ayn Hamran 2.8.

**Fan-tailed Raven** Corvus rhipidurus Common in the ayns and in settlements along the coast road.

**Tristram's Grackle** Onychognatus tristramii Common in the ayns, maximum 25 Ayn Hamran 2.8.

**Ruppells Weaver** Ploceus galbula At least 50 Ayn Hamran 2 and 4.8, common in the other ayns and the Holiday Inn garden.

**African Silverbill** Eudice cantans Very common around Salalah (and in the Holiday Inn garden). 3 Ayn Hamran 4.8. Subspecies *orientalis*.

**Golden-winged Grosbeak** Rynchostruthus socotranus 1 male Ayn Hamran 4.8. Subspecies *percivali*.

**African Rock Bunting** Emberiza tahapisi. Common in the ayns and around Salalah. Subspecies *arabica*.

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