

Trip report from Syria & Jordan

25/9 – 6/10 2008

By Tomas Haraldsson

My part time job as a freelance tour guide brought me yet again to the Near East. This time it was as co-leader on a twelve-day-journey from the ancient Christian mountain villages west of Damascus to sun scorched Aqaba at the Red Sea. The group was a private Norwegian party headed by the well-known professor in archaeology and religion, Öystein Kock Johansen.

It was a trip aimed at the immensely rich cultural and historical heritage of the region, so there were few gaps in the program where I could get out in the field. This report is more of a summary of records, birds seen along the way and during two full mornings, and some general information on travelling in the area.

This region is so rich in exciting birds for a Westerner that you can not avoid to see them even if you are not birdwatching. The birding efforts by me where indeed limited on this trip, but some interesting species where still seen during non-birding activities. F.ex. Striated Heron, Booted Eagle, Sooty Falcon, Alpine and Little Swift, Namaqua Dove, Rock Martin, Tristram's Grackle, Masked Shrike, Fan-tailed Raven and Sinai Rosefinch.

See my web site www.tomasharaldsson.se for photos from the trip and more on birding in Jordan and the Near East!

Itinerary

September

25th - arrival to Damascus in the afternoon. Four nights in Damascus.

26th - full day excursion to the Crusader castle Krak des Chevaliers and Aramaic village of Maaloula.

27th – sightseeing in Damascus old city.

28th – free day. I went to Bloudan and the Zabadani Valley.

29th – crossing the border to Jordan and visiting the magnificent Roman city of Jerash.

Overnight at the Dead Sea.

30th – visiting the baptism site of Jesus at the river Jordan, Mount Nebo, Madaba and then south down to Petra. Two nights in Petra.

October

1st – full day in Petra. Awesome.

2nd – driving south to Wadi Rum, jeep excursion in the desert and in the afternoon on down to Aqaba at the Red Sea. Three nights in Aqaba.

3rd – free day

4th – free day

5th – free day, afternoon/evening drive the 330 km up to Amman, about 5 hrs including break.

6th – night/early morning flight to Stockholm.

Accommodation, food and prices

This was a top-of-the-range tour so we used luxurious Four Seasons in Damascus, Möwenpick both at the Dead Sea and Aqaba and the more worn but still nice Crown Plaza in

Petra/Wadi Musa. Rather unnecessary de-luxe if you come as a birdwatcher. Since birding periods might coincide with high season it is recommended to book hotels well ahead.

Great food abounds in these countries and is a reason only for coming here. The typical eastern Mediterranean *mezze* dishes can be had almost anywhere and is wonderful to indulge in. No need for expensive hotel restaurants when these treats await you just down the road! Touristy but still good *mezze* lunches were had both at Krak des Chevaliers (with raptor migration overhead), old town Damascus, Jerash, Madaba and Petra.

Prices seem to be going up even in these countries but especially Syria is still cheap. Jordan is more expensive and drinks, sightseeing tickets etc. are almost at a European level. Admission for Jerash was for example about 7 euro and a one-day ticket to Petra was about 20 euro!

Remember to keep cash, preferably Syrian pounds, for the border fee when leaving Syria. It was during our visit 500 S£ for land exit and 1500 S£ at the airport.

Trip diary

September 25th

I flew in from Stockholm via Vienna to Damascus with nice Austrian Airlines. The approach to the capital from above is a rather grey and dusty sight, new suburbs and shantytowns sprawling out from the city. A similar feel as in Cairo but on a smaller scale, walking through the shabby airport halls with huge photos of the president staring down on you. After visa formalities with our agent and gathering at the bus, we headed into the city and to the über-deluxe Four Seasons which would be our base for the coming days.

House Sparrows, *Hooded Crows*, *Laughing Doves* and a lone *Black Kite* dominated the urban bird scene. During the evening I met up with some key persons in the birding community concerned with bird conservation in Syria: Osama al-Nouri from the SSCW and Dave Murdoch and OSME hon. Sec. Ian Harrison. We had some inspiring and stimulating talks over the present situation in the country and how to bring birdwatching groups here.

September 26th

We left Damascus in the morning and drove north on the highway towards Homs. Mainly dry and desert-like sceneries along this stretch but as we turned west towards the coastal mountain range it turned more green and fertile. A flock of some 20 *Black Storks* soared near the road. Strategically located at the Homs Gap and overlooking the valleys and villages is the majestic and very well preserved Crusader castle of Krak des Chevaliers (Qalat al-Hosn in Arabic).

Reports of good raptor migration from this site had me scanning the skies (with only my bare eyes unfortunately) as we walked around the castle. It was almost painful to discover that there was a steady stream of buzzards, eagles, hawks and storks gliding southwest high overhead! At least some 300 passed in waves during 11:30 – 12 am. A few *Lesser Spotted Eagles* and *Black Kites* came close enough for identification. A loose flock of small hawks were presumably Levant Sparrowhawks. There were also several flocks of *Red-rumped Swallows*, *Bee-eaters* and some *Alpine Swifts* in the air.

After lunch we headed back south (a lone *Booted Eagle* and a flock of some 100 unidentified storks migrating along the road) and turned towards the Anti-Lebanon mountains and the Christian village of Maaloula. This is one of the very few places where still the ancient Aramaic tongue is spoken, the language used in Palestine during the time of Jesus. It was quite an atmosphere to be in the tiny Greek-orthodox church of St. Sergius and listen to the prayers in this legendary language.

We returned to Damascus in the late afternoon.

September 27th

This day was for exploring the old inner city of Damascus. We started the day by driving up to the lookout point at Mount Qassioun on its northern outskirts. Here great views are given of this 4-million-inhabitant-city. As we drove down from the heights a young *Pallid/Montagues Harrier* flew past the bus, looking very much like a Pallid, but no sure id unfortunately.

At about 10am the news reached us that a car bomb had gone off in the southern part of the city, near a security police office and also close to a Shiite holy site, 17 dead according to state television. Strangely there was absolutely no sign of this in city, life went on just as nothing had happened. Nobody seemed to care, still this was the first such attack since the 80's. We proceeded according to plan and did not hear much more about it.

Inside the medieval walls of the old city are some spectacular sights, even for the hardened birder. So put aside your binoculars and list for a few hours and marvel at the mausoleum of Salah al-Din, the great ideal hero of the Muslim world, and the 1300-year old splendid Umayyad Mosque. *Souks*, *mezze* eateries, water pipe joints and perhaps a *hamam* will be a just as important part of the Syrian experience as any target species...

September 28th

A free day to relax for the group and a chance for me to get out and see some birds. So I met up with our local guide Ahmed and we drove through the Barada Gorge towards the highlands west of the city. Damascus is growing and the villages seem to turn into suburbs, a shame about the loss of genuine village traditions. Some *Bee-eaters* and swallows were over the fruit orchards, otherwise few birds were seen. We continued all the way up to Bloudan, the cool summer resort and known site for Syrian Serin.

Nearing 1500 meters above sea level the winds were chilly and the slopes seemed empty of small finches. Some *Linnet*s flew by, a male *Red-backed Shrike* in a hotel garden and the odd *buzzard* glided south. I did not know where to search for them and had Ahmed waiting in the car, so we soon headed down to the Zabadani Valley floor and nicer climate. Hundreds of *Sand Martins* swarmed over the fruit orchards and some *Alpine Swifts* as well. I had hoped to connect with some raptor migration and as time neared lunch and the skies were sunny, some single raptors did indeed appear over the ridges. So we turned off the main road at the small Zarzar Lake and I posted myself with good views over the hillsides and farmlands.

Steppe Buzzards came one after the other and some single *Lesser Spotted Eagles* passed nice and close. A harrier appeared and this time with scope and binoculars there was no doubt, a 1cy *Pallid Harrier*. A flock of 41 *Levant Sparrowhawks* also hurried towards the southwest,

and a while later also two male *Red-footed Falcons*! The flow of birds never really picked up, so after about 1 ½ hour we left and headed back to Damascus.

September 29th

Loading the bus in the morning and leaving the city towards the south, we headed for the Jordanian border near Deraa. This corner of the country, the Hauran, is fertile and known for its vineyards dating back to Roman times. The Golan Heights and Mount Hermon were out on our right in the distance. *Isabelline Wheatears* and some flocks of finches were along the road, otherwise fairly empty bird wise.

The visa formalities took a while and we changed buses and met our new local guide at the Jordanian side. The drive to Jerash took us through some nice rolling scenery with fertile valleys and small villages. The very impressive Roman city of Gerasa, today's Jerash, was a true highlight, for the historian as well as for the more leisurely visitor. In the afternoon we continued down to the Dead Sea where the Möwenpick Resort greeted us with some +38 degrees and a not-that-much-cooler dip in the salty sea.

September 30th

I took a walk with the binoculars in the early morning around the hotel. The temperatures must have been at least +25 C even that time of day. I was hoping for some migrants in the garden but only a *Blackcap* and a *Red-backed Shrike* were found. Easier to see were the locals, like *Yellow-vented Bulbul*, *Palestine Sunbird* and several *Rock Martins* overhead. Crossing the road opposite the hotel entrance, there were some bushes and small trees along a broken water pipe. These seemed to hold plenty of insects since a 1cy *Masked Shrike* refused to leave cover and both *Olivaceous* and *Willow Warbler* hid in there as well.

After a short while in this little area, other exclusive species to the Dead Sea region appeared. A pair of *Fan-tailed Ravens* perched on a pylon, *Little Green Bee-eaters* and two *Tristram's Grackles* flew by and on the sky was a group of *Little Swifts*. Three *Blackstarts* were at the hotel parking lot and a *Southern Grey Shrike* posed in a treetop.

Later in the morning we left the hotel and went to one of the must-see's in the area, the site where Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan. The river is now little more than a stream but has immense symbolical importance in this region. In the scrubs and dense tamarisk stands were plenty of *Graceful*, *Sardinian* and *Cetti's Warblers*. As the thermals build up, six *Black Storks* headed south as did many unidentified raptors. Just as the bus turned out from the parking lot of the site, a *Namaqua Dove* flew by in front of the bus!

Another site of major traditional importance is Mount Nebo. Here it is said that Moses looked out over the Promised Land just before he died, after having lead the Hebrews from their Egyptian captivity. One wonders what he would have thought if he had looked out over this 60-year-old conflict today. The site itself is a rugged hilltop with pines, ruins of ancient churches and plenty of tour groups.

We headed on to Madaba for lunch and then in the afternoon the three-hour drive, mainly on the new Desert Highway, to Petra which we reached at sunset.

October 1st

Full day in the ancient rock-carved Nabatean city. Indeed a great piece of history and a magic feeling to see all the tombs, temple facades and other monuments. Jordan's major tourist attraction and as such, you are met by the expected scenario: a multitude of souvenir stalls, shops, horse rides, donkey rides, tour groups, photo spots, Indiana Jones Rest House and so on. Nevertheless, it does not take away the experience too much, and a cold Coke after the dusty hours of exploring is quite welcome.

To add to the great things to see, the birder also gets some bonuses: *Fan-tailed Ravens* and *Rock Martins* are common, two or three *Blue Rock Thrushes* perched at rocks and cliffs and at the lunch restaurant were a flock of *Tristram's Grackles*. We walked the sweaty 30 minutes up to the so-called Monastery, one of the highlights of two thousand year old rock-carved monuments. Just to left of the façade was a trickle of water coming from the rock face itself. This attracted *Sinai Rosefinches* (at least two stunning males and three females) and *Desert Larks* that could be seen within a few meters.

The afternoon and evening was spent slowly making my way back to the hotel, taking in the spectacular settings of the site.

October 2nd

After an early breakfast I explored the hotel surroundings which had some greener areas that attracted birds. Over the cliffs at the outskirts of the town were nearly a hundred *Fan-tailed Ravens* and their calls echoed over the area. A *Masked Shrike* perched on a wire and a female *Black-eared Wheatear* could be studied at close range. From the area just behind the hotel of Crown Plaza, next to the sports facilities, came some interesting calls and some small birds flitted around. It turned out to be three nice *Scrub Warblers*, feeding in tiny scrubs and bushes. Here came also *Sinai Rosefinches* to drink at a gardener's water pipe and *Desert Larks* and *Palestine Sunbirds* shared the area as well. That's a nice 45 minutes of birding just by the hotel!

Later we loaded the bus and headed south, out of Petra/Wadi Musa on the ancient Kings Highway. Dry hills and sparse vegetation was a habitat that obviously attracted some birds at least. *Mourning Wheatear* seemed to be quite common along this stretch with at least 6-7 birds during a short while. Also at several places *Sinai Rosefinches* taking off from the road side or sitting on rocks and fences.

The hills soon faded out and gave way for scenic and rugged desert *wadi's*. We were approaching the famous Wadi Rum, the start of the real Arabian Peninsula, an area known from the guerrilla campaign lead by Thomas E. Lawrence "of Arabia" and the Arabian royalties during WWI. The visitors centre is really well planned and is an ideal gateway for exploring the desert and Bedouin culture. My hopes for Verraux's Eagle were small to start with, and the rangers' ideas of the few remaining birds were not positive either.

We changed for jeeps and went to a small touristy camp called Captains Camp just in the nearest *wadi*. We had lunch cooked in the ground and some nice spicy tea in an impressive desert surrounding. Touristy or not, it is still a great experience. The staff had a bowl of water behind the tent that was used by some 25 of the local *Sinai Rosefinches*. Great views were given of the birds, accustomed to human presence. At the camp also a *White-crowned Black Wheatear*, *Desert Larks* and *Tristram's Grackles*.

We took a two hour jeep safari in the desert, seeing natural rock arches and ancient rock carvings. At the arch site were plenty of *Brown-necked Ravens* and they were harassing a small grey falcon, coming close enough to be identified as an adult *Sooty Falcon*! Later another bird was seen, giving intense aerial chase to a *Rock Martin*.

In the late afternoon we continued the last 45 minutes south to the Red Sea resort town of Aqaba, located as the “twin town” of Eilat, just across the border in Israel. Here we would stay for the last three days until homebound flight from Amman late night on the 5th/6th.

October 3rd

My only full morning in the field started with a short taxi ride from our hotel in Aqaba to the recently launched Aqaba Birds Observatory (ABO). It is run by the Jordanian Society for Sustainable Development (JSSD) and aims at promoting nature conservation among visitors. It is strategically located along the migration flyway and almost within sight from the more well-known Eilat Bird Observatory.

I had sent my passport details several weeks ahead to get a permit to visit this military sensitive area, it is just on the Israeli border. However, the guards at the checkpoint (which were supposed to have my permit) just before the entrance to the site could not manage to find it amongst their well-structured chaos of documents and passport copies. After a while of frustration, they did find it and I could enter the area. The wait for this was not all bad, since a beautiful male *Namaqua Dove* flew by and landed at an irrigation pipe and flocks of *Short-toed Larks* and *Yellow Wagtails* were on the road side.

The four and half hours of searching the ABO area started slow but the number of species soon picked up and it turned out to be an excellent morning. The tamarisk shrubs, small reed beds, small patches of trees and the bodies of water made up an interesting habitat, although it felt quite sterile and with few migrants at a first glance.

The sewage (?) ponds had a good selection of ducks, a few hundred birds including a *Ferrugineous Duck* and some *Garganeys*. Some waders moved around, the highlight here was two *Marsh Sandpipers* roosting on the shore. A few single *Levant Sparrowhawks* darted low overhead and later in the morning both *Short-toed* and *Lesser Spotted Eagles* took off from their night roost and flapped around, waiting for the thermals to rise. Great views! The vegetation held surprisingly few migrants, but some where nice like a young *Golden Oriole* and several *Masked Shrikes*. An odd flock of 28 *Cranes* and a lone *Spoonbill* came low over the area and soared up over Eilat city. A familiar splash of colour was added when a *White-breasted Kingfisher* showed briefly among the trees. Two young *White-winged Black Terns* were seen quickly over the ponds and both *Slender-billed* and *Caspian Gulls* roosted on a shingle bank.

As I made my way back towards the entrance and the appointed meeting with the taxi, I flushed a female *Namaqua Dove* from a little created dry garden area. It showed well and then another bird appeared, this time a female-looking but with broad buffish tops to the feathers on back and wing coverts, giving it a “juvenile” patterned and sort of scaly look. I assume this was a 1cy bird. Here also many *Indian Silverbills* and the only *Hoopoe* for the trip.

Now at lunch, temperatures were nearing + 40 C and the hotel facilities and lunch felt like the only option. The afternoon was spent at leisure with some Arabic studies and administrative guide work. One of the most common birds in the city was *House Crow* which was seen in

their hundreds at dusk as they gathered for communal roost. Some *White-eyed Gulls* and a lone *Black Kite* was seen along the shore.

October 4th

Me and some of the group went south to one of the dive resorts along the Gulf of Aqaba. They charged an outrageous 15 JD (nearly 15 euro) just to enter the premises and the strong northerly wind made snorkelling difficult. Migrating *Red-backed Shrike*, *Marsh Harrier* and a *Squacco Heron* were noted.

October 5th

The usually crowded and noisy beach at the Möwenpick Resort was silent and lovely in the early morning. So calm that even a 1cy *Striated Heron* found one of the jetties as a good lookout point before one of the beach guards started his shift. Some *gulls* and *Sterna* terns were in the distance over the sea but two *Reef Herons* were close enough to spot on some floating devices just west of the resort. *Bee-eaters* and a shy *Lesser Whitethroat* were in the hotel garden.

In the exhaustingly hot afternoon we packed our stuff and ourselves on the bus on last time and started the 330 km journey north to Amman. The drive was quite uneventful considering birds and at about 9pm we arrived at the modern and clean capital. We had one last overwhelmingly delicious *mezze* dinner at the Intercontinental Hotel before going to the airport where our flight took off at 3am.

List of species

Just over a hundred species were logged on this culture trip, indicating at the richness of the region. I have added some photos (see the web site) that are to be seen as documentation photos only (considering I used a Fujifilm F50 compact digital camera without adapter through my scope, Optolyth TBS 80, and binoculars, Swarowski 7x42).

m = male

f = female

1cy = first calendar year

ABO = the Aqaba Birds Observatory

Mallard	c. 10 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Shoveler	c. 150 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Pintail	5 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Teal	c. 150 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Wigeon	2 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd

Garganey c. 5 at the ABO on Oct 3rd

Ferrugineous Duck 1 at the ABO on Oct 3rd

Grey Heron 16 at the ABO on Oct 3rd

Squacco Heron 1 at the ABO on Oct 3rd, 1 south of Aqaba on Oct 4th

Cattle Egret 1 at the ABO

Western Reef Heron 2 at the Möwenpick Resort, Aqaba on Oct 5th. On buoys and floating barrels just west of the resort.

Striated Heron 1 1cy at the Möwenpick Resort, Aqaba on Oct 5th. Perched on one of the jetties and took off when people started arriving in the late morning.

Spoonbill 1 1cy migrating south with Cranes over the ABO on Oct 3rd

Black Stork c. 20 soaring near the highway south of Homs on Sept 26th and a few migrating south over Krak des Chevaliers the same day. 6 migrating south over the Baptism site, river Jordan on Sept 30th

stork sp. c. 100 soaring near the highway south of Homs on Sept 26th

Black Kite 2 at Damascus on Sept 27-28th, a few migrating over Krak des Chevaliers on Sept 26th, 2 at the ABO on Oct 3rd and 1 at Möwenpick Resort, Aqaba on Oct 5th

Honey Buzzard 5 taking off from night roost and heading south, Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30th

Marsh Harrier 1 1cy migrating south Zabadani Valley on Sept 28th, 2-3 1cy at the ABO on Oct 3rd and 1 1cy migrating Gulf of Aqaba on Oct 4th

Pallid Harrier 1 1cy migrating south Zabadani Valley on Sept 28th

Montagues/Pallid Harrier 1 “ringtail” each migrating over Damascus on Sept 27th, Zabadani on Sept 28th and the ABO on Oct 3rd

Steppe Buzzard hundreds of raptors, mainly buzzards, passing Krak des Chevaliers on Sept 26th, c. 15 migrating south Zabadani Valley on Sept 28th and several singles migrating along the road during the whole trip.

Levant Sparrowhawk a flock of 41 migrating south Zabadani Valley on Sept 28th and 1 adult + 3 1cy at the ABO on Oct 3rd. Also tens of small hawks among the other raptors over Krak des Chevaliers on Sept 26th, presumably this species.

Lesser Spotted Eagle	a few migrating south over Krak des Chevaliers on Sept 26 th , 3 migrating south Zabadani Valley on Sept 28 th and c. 5 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Short-toed Eagle	2 migrating south Zabadani Valley on Sept 28 th and at least 7 soaring/migrating at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Red-footed Falcon	2m migrating south Zabadani Valley on Sept 28 th
Kestrel	fairly common
Sooty Falcon 2 nd	2 adult, one giving chase to a Rock Martin, at Wadi Rum on Oct 2 nd
Crane	28 migrating south at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Moorhen	heard at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Black-winged Stilt	4 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Spur-winged Plover	c. 80 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Ringed Plover	4-5 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Little Ringed Plover	1 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Little Stint	c. 10 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Wood Sandpiper	4 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Green Sandpiper	5 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Marsh Sandpiper	2 1cy at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Spotted Redshank	2-3 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Common Sandpiper	1 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Common Snipe	5 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Ruff	c. 20 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Lesser Black-backed Gull	5 adult at the ABO on Oct 3 rd . Possibly the same birds later at the Möwenpick Resort.
Caspian Gull	1 1cy at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Black-headed Gull	2 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd

Slender-billed Gull	4 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
White-eyed Gull	fairly common in the Gulf of Aqaba on Oct 3-5 th
White-winged Black Tern	2 1cy at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Rock Dove	several small flocks of seemingly “pure” Rock Doves in the more remote areas of Wadi Rum on Oct 2 nd
Laughing Dove	common
Collared Dove	fairly common
Namaqua Dove	1 at the baptism site, river Jordan, on Sept 29 th , 1m at the checkpoint just north of the ABO on Oct 3 rd and 1f and 1 1cy bird at the ABO the same date.
Alpine Swift	c. 10 at Krak des Chevaliers on Sept 26 th , 5-6 at Zabadani Valley on Sept 28 th and 1 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th
Little Swift	c. 20 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th
White-breasted Kingfisher	1 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Hoopoe	1 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Bee-eater	c. 15 at Krak des Chevaliers on Sept 26 th , several at Zabadani Valley on Sept 28 th and 4 hawking plus a flock migrating south at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Little Green Bee-eater	2 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th and seemingly common around the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Short-toed Lark	c. 30 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Crested Lark	common
Desert Lark	2 at “the Monastery” and 2 at Crown Plaza, both Petra, on Oct 1-2 nd and 2 at “Captain’s Camp”, Wadi Rum, on Oct 2 nd
Rock Martin	seen at several sites in southern Jordan, fairly common
Sand Martin	common on migration
Barn Swallow	common on migration
Red-rumped Swallow	c. 30 at Krak des Chevaliers on Sept 26 th
House Martin	fairly common on migration

White Wagtail	several records, mostly single birds
Yellow Wagtail	several at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Grey Wagtail	2 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th
Tree Pipit	several at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Black-eared Wheatear	1m at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th , 1f at Crown Plaza on Oct 2 nd and 3m at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Isabelline Wheatear	a few along the road and 3-4 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Mourning Wheatear	seemingly common along the “Kings Highway” just south of Petra (6-7 during just a few km’s) and 1-2 at Wadi Rum, both on Oct 2 nd
White-crowned Black Wheatear	1 1cy at “Captain’s Camp”, Wadi Rum on Oct 2 nd
Blackstart	3 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th and 2-3 at “the Monastery”, Petra on Oct 1 st
Stonechat	some single recorded along roads
Blackbird	several around Damascus
Blue Rock Thrush	at least 3 among the monuments in Petra on Oct 2 nd
Yellow-vented Bulbul	common at most areas in Jordan
Cetti’s Warbler	several heard at the baptism site, river Jordan on Sept 30 th
Graceful Prinia	common in dense vegetation in Jordan/Arava Valley
Scrub Warbler	3 at Crown Plaza, Petra on Oct 2 nd
Sedge Warbler	1 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Olivaceous Warbler	2 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th
Sardinian Warbler	several heard at the baptism site, river Jordan on Sept 30 th
Whitethroat	1 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at the Möwenpick Resort, Aqaba on Oct 5 th

Blackcap ABO on Oct 3 rd	1f at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th and 1m at the
Willow Warbler	several migrants seen
Spotted Flycatcher	2-3 at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Palestine Sunbird	fairly common at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th , around Petra on Oct 1-2 nd and at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Golden Oriole	1 1cy at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Southern Grey Shrike	1 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th and 1 at the baptism site, river Jordan the same date
Masked Shrike	2 adult around Damascus on Sept 27 th , 2 1cy at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th , 1 adult at Crown Plaza on Oct 2 nd and 2 adult + 1 1cy at the ABO on Oct 3 rd
Woodchat Shrike	1-2 along the airport road, Damascus on Sept 27 th
Red-backed Shrike	about 10 migrants seen at different sites, mainly 1cy birds
Tristram's Grackle	2 at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th , c. 15 at the restaurant, Petra on Oct 1 st and 5 at "Captain's Camp", Wadi Rum on Oct 2 nd
Hooded Crow	common in Syria
House Crow	very common in Aqaba
Fan-tailed Raven	a pair at the Möwenpick Resort, Dead Sea on Sept 30 th and common around Petra on Oct 1-2 nd , 100+.
Brown-necked Raven	common in Wadi Rum
House Sparrow	common
Indian Silverbill	seemed common at the ABO with a total of c.15 birds
Sinai Rosefinch	2m3f at "the Monastery", Petra on Oct 1 st , 3-4 at Crown Plaza, Petra on Oct 2 nd , 6-7 along the road just south of Petra on Oct 2 nd and c.25 seen close at "Captains Camp", Wadi Rum on Oct 2 nd
Greenfinch	fairly common
Goldfinch	fairly common
Linnet	a few records along the road around Damascus

