

# **Birding in Oman**

**22 February - 7 March 2015**

**Teet Sirotkin**



This year, as every year, we made a two-week family trip to a place that both produces some good birds and offers leisure for the wife and kids. We chose Crowne Plaza Resort in Salalah, which has some good swimming pools, as well as a nice beach and good birding within walking distance. We chose to only have breakfast included, and that combined with a rental car from Avis offered good flexibility. We flew with Qatar Airways, which was good, since it was daytime flights. The downside was a one night stop-over in Doha on both legs. This was however included in the price and it was fun to see Doha by night and stay in really luxurious hotel. Everyone enjoyed the trip very much and we never felt unsecure or uncomfortable. People are friendly and the unrest in neighboring Yemen, Iran and Somalia didn't seem to affect Oman at all.

I set out to see three target species, which all have restricted distribution.

## Golden-winged Grosbeak



This is a notoriously difficult bird to find, but this particular year it seemed to be reasonably easy to get. I went to the classic site **Ayn Hamran** and found two pairs within one hour. Furthermore, they were quite approachable and I located them just 100 meters NE of the little pool ( $17^{\circ} 05.9990' N, 54^{\circ} 17.0536' E$ ). Here I also had *Arabian Partridges* running around in the dry wadi.

## Grey hypocolius



Many people go to the areas around Qatbit to search for this species, but it was apparently difficult to find there this year, so I tried my luck in the town **Mudayy** instead, which is a two hour drive from Salalah, not far from the Yemeni border. It seems that this is the best locality to get the bird nowadays. As a matter of fact, you can't miss them if they are present. It's a rather small area and you watch from a small children's playground down to a pool surrounded by palm trees, a few hundred meters south of the town ( $17^{\circ} 28.6244' N, 53^{\circ} 21.1604' E$ ). I located the birds immediately and saw them sitting in the open several times. One of them favored a tree within the playground itself. I counted seven birds, but there has apparently been up to 27 here. It is crucial to be here at 7 am, since this is the time when the birds take to the top of the trees to warm up in the sun after the cold desert night allowing ample photo ops. There are also many other good birds here. At least this year there were plenty of *Nile Valley Sunbirds* around the pool and *Sand Partridges* walked around on the hillsides. Also a male *Hooded Wheatear* and a *Red Fox* made brief appearances.



### Yemen Serin

This is by far the easiest one of the specials to get, and honestly a quite boring bird. The only place where it occurs outside of Saudi and Yemen is on the northern slope of the sinkhole at **Tawi Atayr** (**17° 06.826' N, 54° 33.620' E**). Four birds were quickly located, and again, early morning are best, when the birds come out to sit in the sun. *Bonelli's Eagle* was seen in the sinkhole and an *Arabian Wheatear* next to the official parking lot.



### Other stuff

Apart from the aforementioned birds there is plenty of other good stuff to see, such as Socotra Cormorant, and a plentitude of migrant passerines, waders, larks and raptors. However having seen these in other countries I didn't make any specific effort to get them. This time of year is not good for seabirds – the Jouanin's Petrel is virtually impossible and the Persian Shearwater is rare, so I didn't bother with pelagics either. However, I did a trip to the Raysut Waste Disposal Site to witness the massive congregation of eagles. I counted to 600+ *Steppe Eagles* (below), 5 *Greater Spotted Eagles* and 3 *Eastern Imperial Eagles*. Another must-see are the Rosy Starlings at the old gate to Jarziz Farm (**17° 02.387' N, 54° 08.401' E**).





We also made an overnight trip to the sand desert in the Empty Quarter (Rub Al Khalid) with a local bedouin guide who picked us up at our hotel with his Land Cruiser. His name is Bakhit and you can reach him at [bakhitdesert@gmail.com](mailto:bakhitdesert@gmail.com) or (more reliably) at +968 99086619. He speaks good English and has loads of good stories and one or two song. We paid 160 QAR for 4 pax, all included. The night was spent in the sand dunes just north of Shisr



(18° 29.2238' N, 53° 26.6792' E). At this location I could only find one single bird – a *Desert Wheatear*. In the evening we found a *Cheesman's Gerbil* by the eye-shine and in the morning we found the footprints around the camp of what must have been a *Rüppell's fox*. To spend the night under the bare sky with a full moon was an incredible experience. The complete and utter silence is almost unimaginable. Highly recommended. Around Shisr itself there were plenty of birds. Notably *Desert Larks* (left) and *Spotted Sandgrouse*.

*All in all Oman proved to be a superb destination for this type of trip!*



# Itinerary

2015-02-22	East Khawr	2015-03-01	-
2015-02-23	Khawr Al Balid	2015-03-02	-
2015-02-24	Ayn Hamran	2015-03-03	Raysut
2015-02-25	-	2015-03-04	Shisr
2015-02-26	-	2015-03-05	Shisr
2015-02-27	Mudayy	2015-03-06	-
2015-02-28	Tawi Atayr	2015-03-07	Jarziz Farm, East Khawr

# Birds

- 1 **Northern Shoveler** (M) *Anas clypeata*  
Common/widespread - seen on 2 days of 14 with first observation East Khawr 22.2.
- 2 **Northern Pintail** (M) *Anas acuta*  
Common/widespread - seen on 2 days of 14 with first observation East Khawr 22.2.
- 3 **Garganey** (M) *Anas querquedula*  
Common/widespread - seen on 3 days of 14 with first observation East Khawr 22.2.
- 4 **Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca crecca*  
1 East Khawr 22.2.
- 5 **Tufted Duck** (M) *Aythya fuligula*  
1 East Khawr 2.3.
- 6 **Arabian Partridge** *Alectoris melanocephala guichardi*  
15 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2.
- 7 **Sand Partridge** *Ammoperdix heyi intermedius*  
10 Mudayy 27.2 and 15 en route 27.2.





- 8 **Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix coturnix*  
1 Tawi Atayr 28.2.
- 9 **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis*  
Common/widespread - seen on 3 days of 14 with first observation Khawr Al Balid 23.2.
- 10 **Greater Flamingo** (M) *Phoenicopterus roseus*  
Common/widespread - seen on 3 days of 14 with first observation East Khawr 22.2.
- 11 **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus indicus*  
2 Raysut 3.3.
- 12 **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia ciconia*  
3 Raysut Waste Disposal Site 3.3.
- 13 **African Sacred Ibis** (M) *Threskiornis aethiopicus*  
1 East Khawr 22.2 and 1 East Khawr 28.2 and 1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 14 **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia leucorodia*  
1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 15 **Squacco Heron** (M) *Ardeola ralloides*  
10 East Khawr 22.2, 2 Khawr Al Balid 23.2 and observed 1.3 and observed 7.3.
- 16 **Indian Pond Heron** (M) *Ardeola grayii*  
1 East Khawr 1.3.



- 20 **Great Egret** *Ardea alba*  
1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 21 **Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia intermedia*  
2 East Khawr 22.2 and 2 East Khawr 7.3.
- 22 **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta garzetta*  
1 Khawr Al Balid 23.2.
- 23 **Western Reef Heron** *Egretta gularis schistacea*  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 2.3.
- 24 **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*  
1 East Khawr 28.2 and 3 there 1.3.
- 25 **Socotra Cormorant (M)** *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis (VU)*  
80 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 26 **Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus haliaetus*  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 27 **Greater Spotted Eagle (M)** *Clanga clanga*  
1 East Khawr 22.2 and 5 Raysut Waste Disposal Site 3.3.
- 28 **Booted Eagle (M)** *Hieraetus pennatus*  
1 East Khawr 1.3.
- 29 **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis orientalis*  
1 Khawr Al Balid 23.2 and 600 Raysut Waste Disposal Site 3.3.
- 30 **Eastern Imperial Eagle (M)** *Aquila heliaca (VU)*  
3 juveniles Raysut Waste Disposal Site 3.3.
- 31 **Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata fasciata*  
1 Tawi Atayr 28.2.
- 32 **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus nisus*  
1 Tawi Atayr 28.2.
- 33 **Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus aeruginosus*  
2 Khawr Al Balid 23.2, 2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2 and 1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 34 **Montagu's Harrier (M)** *Circus pygargus*  
1 Shisr 4.3.
- 35 **Yellow-billed Kite** *Milvus aegyptius aegyptius*  
4 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2, 6 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 28.2 and observed 1.3 and there 2.3.
- 36 **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus chloropus*  
6 Khawr Al Balid 23.2, 2 East Khawr 1.3 and 6 Khawr Al Balid 2.3.
- 37 **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra atra*  
2 East Khawr 22.2.
- 38 **Spotted Thick-knee** *Burhinus capensis dodsoni*  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 3 there 23.2 and observed 24.2-3.3 and observed 5-7.3.
- 39 **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus longipes*  
6 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 1 there 23.2 and 2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 3.3.
- 40 **Black-winged Stilt (M)** *Himantopus himantopus*  
Common/widespread - seen on 3 days of 14 with first observation East Khawr 22.2.
- 41 **Pacific Golden Plover (M)** *Pluvialis fulva*  
1 Khawr Al Balid 23.2, 30 Khawr Al Balid 26.2 and observed 2.3.

- 42 **Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola squatarola*  
30 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 10 there 23.2 and observed 24.2-3.3 and observed 5-7.3.
- 43 **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula tundrae*  
10 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 23.2 and 3 East Khawr 1.3.
- 44 **Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*  
3 East Khawr 22.2.
- 45 **Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*  
50 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 50 there 23.2 and observed 24.2-3.3 and observed 5-7.3.
- 46 **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii*  
1 Khawr Al Balid 23.2.
- 47 **Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago gallinago*  
2 East Khawr 22.2, 2 Khawr Al Balid 23.2, 1 East Khawr 1.3, 1 Khawr Al Balid 2.3 and 1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 48 **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa limosa* (NT)  
Common/widespread - seen on 3 days of 14 with first observation East Khawr 22.2.
- 49 **Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata orientalis* (NT)  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 1 Raysut 3.3.
- 50 **Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus totanus*  
Common/widespread - seen on 4 days of 14 with first observation Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 51 **Common Greenshank (M)** *Tringa nebularia*  
30 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 10 there 23.2 and observed 24.2-3.3 and observed 5-7.3.
- 52 **Wood Sandpiper (M)** *Tringa glareola*  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2.
- 53 **Terek Sandpiper (M)** *Xenus cinereus*  
1 East Khawr 1.3.
- 54 **Common Sandpiper (M)** *Actitis hypoleucos*  
3 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 2 there 23.2 and observed 24.2-3.3 and observed 5-7.3.
- 55 **Sanderling** *Calidris alba alba*  
5 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 15 there 23.2 and observed 7.3.
- 56 **Little Stint (M)** *Calidris minuta*  
Common/widespread - seen on 2 days of 14 with first observation East Khawr 22.2.
- 57 **Temminck's Stint (M)** *Calidris temminckii*  
1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 58 **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina alpina*  
2 East Khawr 22.2 and 6 East Khawr 1.3 and 4 East Khawr 7.3.
- 59 **Ruff (M)** *Philomachus pugnax*  
1 East Khawr 22.2 and 1 East Khawr 1.3.
- 60 **Cream-colored Courser** *Cursorius cursor cursor*  
1 Shisr 4.3.
- 61 **Slender-billed Gull (M)** *Chroicocephalus genei*  
Common/widespread - seen on 13 days of 14 with first observation Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 62 **Black-headed Gull (M)** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*  
2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 63 **Sooty Gull (M)** *Ichthyaetus hemprichii*  
Common/widespread - seen on 13 days of 14 with first observation Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.



- 64 **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus heuglini*  
Common/widespread - seen on 13 days of 14 with first observation Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 65 **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica nilotica*  
3 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 1 there 23.2 and 2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 1.3 and 2 there 2.3.
- 66 **Caspian Tern (M)** *Hydroprogne caspia*  
4 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2, 5 Khawr Al Balid 23.2, 4 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2 and observed 25-27.2 and observed 2.3.
- 67 **Greater Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bergii velox*  
2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 68 **Saunders's Tern (M)** *Sternula saundersi*  
2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 23.2.
- 69 **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida hybrida*  
20 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 10 there 23.2 and observed 24.2-3.3 and observed 5-7.3.
- 70 **White-winged Tern (M)** *Chlidonias leucopterus*  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 23.2.
- 71 **Spotted Sandgrouse (M)** *Pterocles senegallus*  
Only observed en route with 5 5.3.
- 72 **Rock Dove** *Columba livia palaestinae*  
Observed 22-26.2, 10 Mudayy 27.2, 100 Tawi Atayr 28.2 and observed 1-7.3.
- 73 **Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto decaocto*  
Common/widespread - seen on all days.
- 74 **Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis*  
Common/widespread - seen on 13 days of 14 with first observation Khawr Al Balid 23.2.
- 75 **Bruce's Green Pigeon (M)** *Treron waalia*  
1 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2.
- 76 **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius aegyptius*  
Only observed en route with 1 5.3.
- 77 **Common Swift** *Apus apus*  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2 and 4 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 28.2.
- 78 **Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops epops*  
2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2.
- 79 **Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla torquilla*  
1 Mudayy 27.2.
- 80 **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus rupicolaeformis*  
2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2, 1 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2, 2 en route 27.2, 2 East Khawr 28.2, 2 Shisr 4.3 and 1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 81 **Rose-ringed Parakeet** *Psittacula krameri borealis*  
2 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2, 8 Khawr Al Balid 23.2 and observed 24.2-7.3.
- 82 **Black-crowned Tchagra** *Tchagra senegalus percivali*  
4 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2.
- 83 **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus isabellinus*  
1 Khawr Al Balid 23.2 and 1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 28.2.
- 84 **Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis aucheri*  
1 Shisr 4.3.

- 85 **African Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone viridis harterti*  
1 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2 and 3 Tawi Atayr 28.2.
- 86 **House Crow** *Corvus splendens*  
Common/widespread - seen on all days.
- 87 **Brown-necked Raven (M)** *Corvus ruficollis*  
Only observed en route with 1 4.3.
- 88 **Fan-tailed Raven** *Corvus rhipidurus stanleyi*  
Common/widespread - seen on 3 days of 14.
- 89 **Grey Hypocolius (M)** *Hypocolius ampelinus*  
7 Mudayy 27.2.
- 90 **Greater Hoopoe-Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes*  
8 Shisr 4.3 and 6 en route 5.3.
- 91 **Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti*  
2 Mudayy 27.2 and 2 Shisr 4.3.
- 92 **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix nigriceps melanauchen*  
20 Shisr 4.3.
- 93 **Singing Bush Lark** *Mirafra cantillans simplex*  
1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2.
- 94 **Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata brachyura*  
Common/widespread - seen on 13 days of 14 with first observation Khawr Al Balid 23.2.
- 95 **White-spectacled Bulbul (M)** *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*  
Common/widespread - seen on 14 days of 14 with first observation Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 96 **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica rustica*  
6 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 2 there 23.2 and observed 2.3 and there 3.3 and observed 7.3.
- 97 **Pale Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta arabica*  
4 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2, 20 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2, observed 26.2, 10 Mudayy 27.2 and observed 28.2-7.3.
- 98 **Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*  
1 Mudayy 27.2.
- 99 **Clamorous Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens*  
1 Khawr Al Balid 2.3 and 1 East Khawr 7.3.
- 100 **Graceful Prinia** *Prinia gracilis*  
Common/widespread - seen on 13 days of 14 with first observation Khawr Al Balid 23.2.
- 101 **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca curruca*  
1 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2 and 1 Mudayy 27.2.
- 102 **Arabian Warbler** *Sylvia leucomelaena leucomelaena*  
2 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2.
- 103 **Asian Desert Warbler (M)** *Sylvia nana*  
1 Mudayy 27.2.
- 104 **Abyssinian White-eye** *Zosterops abyssinicus arabs*  
Common/widespread - seen on 4 days of 14 with first observation Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2.
- 105 **Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis tristis*  
Common/widespread - seen on all days.
- 106 **Rosy Starling (M)** *Pastor roseus*  
50 Jarziz Farm 7.3.



107 **Tristram's Starling** (M) *Onychognathus tristramii*

6 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2, observed 23.2 and there 24.2, 4 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2, observed 26.2 and there 27.2, 20 Tawi Atayr 28.2 and observed 1-7.3.

108 **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*

1 Shisr 4.3.



109 **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

1 Mudayy 27.2.

110 **Isabelline Wheatear** (M) *Oenanthe isabellina*

2 Shisr 4.3.

111 **Hooded Wheatear** (M) *Oenanthe monacha*

1 Mudayy 27.2.

112 **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti oreophila*

1 Khawr Al Balid 23.2, 1 Tawi Atayr 28.2, 1 Raysut Waste Disposal Site 3.3, 2 Shisr 4.3 and 1 en route 5.3.

113 **Blackstart** *Oenanthe melanura neumanni*

4 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2, 6 Mudayy 27.2 and 4 Tawi Atayr 28.2.

114 **Arabian Wheatear** *Oenanthe lugentoides boscaweni*

1 Tawi Atayr 28.2.



- 115 **Nile Valley Sunbird** (M) *Hedydipna metallica*  
10 Mudayy 27.2 and 10 en route 27.2.
- 116 **Palestine Sunbird** *Cinnyris osea osea*  
2 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2 and 4 Tawi Atayr 28.2.
- 117 **Shining Sunbird** *Cinnyris habessinicus hellmayri*  
2 Khawr Al Balid 23.2 and 2 East Khawr 7.3.
- 118 **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*  
30 Shisr 4.3.
- 119 **Rüppell's Weaver** (M) *Ploceus galbula*  
Common/widespread - seen on all days.
- 120 **African Silverbill** *Euodice cantans orientalis*  
Common/widespread - seen on 4 days of 14 with first observation Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2.
- 121 **Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*  
Common/widespread - seen on all days.  
*beema*: 1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2 and 30 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 24.2.
- 122 **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola*  
4 East Khawr 22.2, 1 Khawr Al Balid 23.2, 1 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 28.2 and 2 East Khawr 1.3.
- 123 **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*  
Common/widespread - seen on 14 days of 14 with first observation Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 22.2.
- 124 **Long-billed Pipit** *Anthus similis*  
2 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2.
- 125 **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis trivialis*  
5 Salalah, Crown Plaza Resort 28.2.
- 126 **Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak** (M) *Rhynchostruthus percivali* (NT)  
4 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2.
- 127 **Yemen Serin** (M) *Crithagra menachensis*  
4 Tawi Atayr 28.2.
- 128 **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza tahapisi arabica*  
6 Ayn Hamran, Salalah 25.2 and 50 Tawi Atayr 28.2.



# Mammals

- 1 **Red Fox (M)** *Vulpes vulpes*  
1 Mudayy 27.2.
- 2 **Cheesman's Gerbil (M)** *Gerbillus cheesmani*  
1 Shisr 4.3.



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