

Turkey and Syria - 11th - 26th August 2007

Published by Sander Bot (sanderbot AT yahoo.co.uk)

This summer Jelmer Poelsta, Rob Gordijn and Sander Bot, all from the Netherlands, decided to visit Turkey and Syria. Because we are students we don't have money, so we travelled by public transport. It takes some time, but except White-throated Kingfisher we saw all target species.

Literature

In Turkey we used the 'Gosney': 'Finding birds in Turkey, Ankara to Birecik' by Dave Gosney. Some information is outdated, but you need the booklet for its site descriptions and maps. We used many trip reports from the internet, of which the 'Israeli report' is essential, giving a map how to find the best Caspian Snowcock site:
<http://www.osme.org/osmetrip/turk18.html>

Guiding

You don't need a guide for the places we visited, except one spot: the desert of Syria. If you want to see the Bald Ibis and species like Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Bar-tailed Lark and maybe a Thick-billed or Dunn's Lark you need a guide. We contacted Ahmed Abdallah (ahmedjaber72@hotmail.com) in advance and he was a perfect guide. He knows the desert and the species very well, so a day in the field with Ahmed is highly recommended!

Itinerary

August 2007

- 11: Istanbul
- 12: Aladag Mountains
- 13: Aladag Mountains
- 14: Aladag Mountains – Birecik
- 15: Birecik
- 16: Birecik – Palmyra
- 17: Palmyra
- 18: Palmyra – Deir ez-Zor
- 19: Deir ez-Zor – Mheimideh – Damascus
- 20: Damascus – Bloudan – Damascus – night bus to Turkey
- 21: Gosku Delta
- 22: Cyprus
- 23: Cyprus – Tasucu
- 24: Kulu Golu – Istanbul
- 25: Istanbul
- 26: Istanbul

Day by day

11th August

Our flight arrived in Istanbul in the early afternoon. After booking a bus ticket at the main bus station we spent the rest of the afternoon in the city centre of Istanbul. In the gardens around the blue mosque we saw our first Laughing Doves of the trip. From the blue mosque we walked down hill to the shore, where we had views on the Bosphorus. Scanning the sea resulted in different small groups of Yelkouan Shearwaters flying into the Bosphorus. The upper parts of the birds were dark brown, definitely not as black as Manx Shearwater. I expected them being indistinguishable from Manx in the field, but the upper part colouration really differs from that of Manx. Maybe a worn plumage and the bright sunlight made them lighter than they would appear in October in Holland...From here we saw some Shags, 3 Mediterranean Gulls and many Yellow-legged Gulls as well. In the early evening we walked through the city centre where hundreds of Alpine Swifts were flying around. They are here only later during the day, we didn't see them in the early afternoon. After dinner we took the night bus to Nigde. The long distance buses in Turkey are all luxury air conditioned coaches.

12th August

At 6AM I woke up, the bus being 115 km from Nigde. From the bus I saw 1 Peregrine, 1 Little Owl, 1 Long-legged Buzzard, Crested Larks and Red-Backed Shrikes. In Nigde we took a mini-bus to Demirkazik. During this ride we saw some Lesser grey Shrikes, a Hoopoe and a juvenile Great Spotted Cuckoo. The latter was perched in a wire with 2 Magpies around him, which must have been its poster parents! We were dropped of at the start of the 4 km road to Demirkazik. We started to walk to the village and saw a group of Red-billed Choughs flying from the fields towards the mountains and some Golden Orioles on the way. We soon got a ride from a tractor driver to Demirkazik. He dropped us of at the Demirkazik mountain centre. He appeared to work for the Aladag national Park, because we had to pay entrance fee for the park to him. We had never read anything about having to pay for this, but he showed us some official looking tickets, so we spent some lira's, not sure where we paid for exactly. Anyway, after being dropped of we prepared for the long hike in the mountains. We could store some stuff for free at the mountain centre. While packing our stuff for the walk we saw a flycatcher in the garden of the mountain centre. Hoping it would be a semi-collared we checked the female plumaged bird: a Pied Flycatcher. But soon we found a second flycatcher in the pines and this one was clearly a Semi-collared Flycatcher!! Compared to the pied, this bird had a clear white second wing bar on the median coverts, more greyish upper parts, thin white edges to tertials and more white on primary bases, thus in all respects a typical semi-collared. We decided to walk all the way to the new Snowcock site, described by the Israeli's in 2000, see link in literature section. The first 3 km is the paved road to Pinarbasi Village. We saw twice Asian Crimson-winged Finch in this section. While talking about soccer with 3 persistent juveniles we managed to add Wheatear,

Isabelline Wheatear, Rock Nuthatch and Serin to the list. From Pinarbasi Village we took the dirt road, into the mountains. Birds seen during the 8 km long climb: 1 White-throated Robin, 1 Eastern Orphean Warbler, 3 Ortolan Buntings, 2 groups of Chukar, Horned Larks and many Red-billed Choughs. Because we already nearly ran out of water before even

arriving at the campsite described by the Israelis we were very happy to find out that there was still running water, essential to survive the next day. There was a small spa between the campsite and the jeep road to the chromium mine, and the stream at the camp site was also still running. Besides us, 7 Asian Crimson-winged Finches came to drink as well.

According to different trip reports the road conditions to the campsite are variable. Now the road was in good condition, with a four-wheel drive you should easily reach the campsite, you maybe even can make it with your rental car. The jeep road though is indeed a jeep road. The campsite is a great place, attracting many birds that come to drink. In the late afternoon we saw the following species near the stream: groups of Shore Larks, group of Rock Sparrows, 1 Water Pipit, 2 Radde's Accentors, 3+2 Red-fronted Serins and 1 Golden Eagle. After we pitched the tent it was 6PM so we climbed the same mountains near the campsite as the Israeli did in the hope to see the Snowcock. Despite intensive searching we couldn't find any Snowcocks, only 4 Ring Ouzels, Mistle Thrush, 1 female Rock Thrush and Chukars.

13th August

We started walking the jeep track to the chromium mine at 3:30AM. The Israeli report doesn't say anything about a junction on the jeep road to the mine. Well, half way there is one, and turn left there. It is an 1,5 hour walk, but because we first went straight on the junction we arrived at the mine at 5:30. While arriving there we immediately heard the curlew like call of a Caspian Snowcock. We had very brief and bad views before it disappeared. Then it took a while before we heard one again, it was calling from inside the mine. After scanning we finally found one through the scope at 6:15, and we could see the bird for half an hour! When leaving the mine at 8:00 we had seen about 5 birds. In the 2,5 hours stay the birds were calling only infrequently. Other birds seen in and around the mine: some Alpine Accentors, 1 male Asian Crimson-winged Finch, some Snowfinches, 2 Crag Martins and Chamois (but no Ibex). The walk down to the campsite was very productive: 3 very fresh juvenile Asian Crimson-winged Finches, a group of >80 Snowfinches, many ochreros and 1 semirufus-type Black Redstart, >10 Red-fronted Serins, some Alpine Choughs, 10-15 Alpine Swifts and House Martins. The House Martins looked different: upperparts brown-black, flanks and rump with diffuse brown streaking. Racial variation or just juveniles? After a little relaxing at the stream we packed our tent and hiked back to Pinarbasi Village. Most interesting sighting during the walk was a Wryneck in the treeless mountains, perched on a stone. Must have been a migrant. Other birds seen on the way back: 2 Rock Buntings, 1 Long-legged Buzzard, some Snowfinches, Chukars and an Asian Crimson-winged Finch. From Pinarbasi Village we took a bus back to Demirkazik. At the mountain centre we asked for a campground in the neighbourhood, and we could camp near a crane with spa water just behind the mountain centre. We realized we had seen all species we wanted to see here except the Finsch's Wheatear. So the last hours of daylight were spent searching for this species. First we looked at the hillsides near our tent which should be a good spot according to Gosney. No Finsch's, but 3 Hoopoes, 3 Asian Crimson-winged Finches, 2 female types White-throated Robin, 2 Woodlarks, Stonechats, the same Semi-collared Flycatcher as yesterday and many Isabelline Wheatears and Rock Sparrows. A quick search in the gorge and the cemetery just north of the mountain centre was also fruitless. While cooking our meal in the dark we heard a Scops Owl calling from the village.

14th August

Before leaving the area we decided to try one more time on the Finsch's Wheatear in the early morning. A lot of activity in the morning around the mountain centre: male European Stonechat, 6 Asian Crimson-winged Finches, a first winter male Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, a family Rock Bunting, Chukars, a White-throated Robin and again the very same Semi-collared Flycatcher on the very same location as yesterday and the day before yesterday. At the gorge, some 350 metre north of the mountain centre we split. While I searched in the gorge, Rob and Jelmer searched a bit further north, at the walled cemetery just west of the road to Pinarbasi Village. Fortunately I got a phone call only 15 minutes after we split. Jelmer and Rob found a male and 2 females Finsch's Wheatears around the cemetery, what a relief! After this sighting we walked back to the 'camping' and packed our tent. We paid a man in the village to bring us to the main road. We didn't have to wait long for the direct but small and slow bus to Adana. At the Adana bus station, were we saw a Laughing Dove, we took the bus to Birecik, arriving there in the late afternoon. During the long bus ride we saw a Black Stork, a light morph Booted Eagle, and a Red-rumped Swallow. We stayed in the hotel just west of the bridge over the river. We negotiated the price down to about €10 per person per night for the sober air-conditioned room. After dropping our backpack in the room we went to look for the owl café. Gosney says the café has a pepsi sign and a blue fountain. The fountain is still there, the sign is not. Seen from our hotel, cross the bridge, and take the road to the south along the river. The first café on the left is the right one. After the café there is a small park. All other cafes are on the right hand side of the road, thus finding the right one should not be so complicated as described in some trip reports. Because it was only afternoon we decided first to have a walk further south. After leaving the city you come in a cultivated area. And because the cultivations didn't stop we decided to turn around after some 2 kilometres. At the cultivations we saw 2 Rufous Bush Robins a Roller and some Dead Sea Sparrows. Of the latter, we first found some female types, but later we got good views of a male nearly in spring plumage. On the way back we scanned the river and saw some White-winged Terns, a Night Heron and Sand Martins. Back at the owl café we ordered a tea, and after some waiting we asked the staff if they knew the exact spot of the owl. They send some boys to look for the owl, and after they pointed us some doves we had the feeling we'd better try ourselves. We couldn't find them before dark, but while leaving the café from the exit near the park to try tomorrow again we found an owl perched near a light! We could see the owl for a long time, and although it was dark, we could see it very well with the telescope cause it was sitting all the time close to lights. All characters fitted perfect for a Pallid Scops Owl! For the exact location look at the map of the Scops Owl café in the Gosney: we searched fruitless around the 'fountain', and thus the northern part of the café, but found it in the southern part. It used the area between the 'canvas fence', 'toilet' and 'favoured hunting area'.

15th August

At first light we walked from the hotel to the main wadi, behind the Bald Ibis breeding centre. This is site 2 in the Gosney. During this quite long walk we saw 4 Pied Kingfishers, a Kingfisher, a Common Sandpiper and a Green Sandpiper. We walked the wadi for 1-2 kilometres till we heard a dog barking which made us climbing the hills. During the walk through the wadi we saw: 2 Syrian Woodpeckers, a juv. Masked Shrike, some Rufous Bush Robins, a family party Spectacled Bulbuls and a Little Owl. Ménétries's Warbler (only female

types) were common, so were migrating Yellow Wagtails. Climbing the hills was a good idea: we soon found a group 8 See-see Partridges! Unfortunately they were very shy and we only saw them flying away from us. The next hour we searched on the hills for more See-see Partridges, finding groups of 1, 2, 18, 20, 1 and 2 respectively. All groups had one thing in common: they were very shy, and despite seeing a total of about 50 birds we never got good views. While looking for the partridges some groups of Black-bellied Sandgrouses flew past to the east: groups of 3, 6, 12 and 2 individuals. A dry soft bee-eater like call heard twice that morning came from Desert Finch. After the wadi we had a short visit to the Bald Ibis breeding centre. A bit sad to see all the Ibises in a cage. Anyway, after the visit we walked to the orchards behind the gas station further north along the Euphrates, described in the Gosney as site 4. It was midday and very hot so we sat under a tree in the orchard waiting for less hot weather in the late afternoon. Despite the temperature Jelmer went further into the orchard for some bird watching. He found a nice shaded spot with a small stream. We sat down there and waited for the birds to come to drink. This was a good idea cause in an hour we saw all our target species here: 2 Chestnut-shouldered Sparrows, c 6 Desert Finches and an Upcher's Warbler! Some Dead Sea Sparrows, 2 Sombre tits, 2 Rufous Bush Robins, 3 Syrian Woodpeckers and a few Ménétries's Warblers here as well. Not too bad, it was only afternoon, so we had time left to do Halfeti for Eastern Rock Nuthatch today as well! At the gas station we didn't have to wait long for a bus to Halfeti. About 1500m before Halfeti we got off. Here a small path goes to the left. This path meets up with the main road again just before it reaches Halfeti. We found Eastern Rock Nuthatch here within 10 minutes, perched on an electricity pole! We walked down to Halfeti seeing a Rock Nuthatch on the way. The rest of the afternoon was spent swimming in lake Halfeti. Around the lake we saw a group of Bee-eaters, 3 White-winged terns and 60-70 Pygmy Cormorants.

16th August

After the very successful day yesterday we had only one target species left for Birecik: the Black Francolin. The gravel pits, Gosney site 11, should be a good spot for this species. This is along the west bank of the Euphrates a few km. north of Birecik. We walked to this spot in the early morning. First species of interest this morning was the Iraq Babbler. We saw 3 birds in the reed beds along a pool, 1 bird being a fresh juvenile. Exact location: from Birecik follow the main road to the north on the west side of the Euphrates. After the last houses (where you made a sharp right and a sharp left turn) you see the gravel pits. Take the first to the right, into the gravel pits area. After following this road for a while a big metal fence blocks the road. You can easily walk (literally) through this fence, and soon the road branches. In the fork of this splitting is the pool where we saw the Iraq Babblers. Jelmer also saw two Black Francolins here. It took us nearly half an hour to find more Black Francolins. This time we heard a male calling, and after a while we had cracking views of a calling male ON a gravel pit. In the next hour we were at the gravel pits it became clear that Black Francolin is common here, we saw a total of 12 Black Francolins, half of them being calling males. Some males prefer to call from the top of a sand or gravel pit, so it's easy to get very nice views! Apparently they just don't start calling very early in the morning. We saw other birds as well: 24+ Desert Finches came to drink, 3 Black-bellied Sandgrouses flew past and a Little Owl was perched in the wires. The reedy pools just south of the gravel pits (and thus just north of the last houses) were also productive: 2 Spur-

winged Lapwings, a Purple Heron, some Squacco Herons and a Roller. While leaving the area we saw 5 Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters flying over the first houses!! Within two hours we saw francolins, babblers, Spur-winged Lapwings and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, incredible! We packed our stuff and took the bus to Gaziantep. From there we took the mini-bus to Kilis. At Kilis we took a taxi to the border. At the border a Syrian taxi driver was waiting for costumers. It's a good idea to take a Syrian taxi here, because the driver wants you to pass the border as soon as possible, trying to make the border officials to hurry up all the time. We hoped we could enter the country in the first place, not having arranged a visa in advance. This appeared to be no problem, we could get one at the border without much difficulties. We only had to come to the office of a friendly officer to explain why we came to Syria. With help of the taxi driver it took us only 2 hours to pass the border. The taxi driver took us to Aleppo, from where we took the bus to Homs. In Homs we took the bus to Palmyra where we arrived at 8 PM. So it took us 5 busses, 2 taxi's and 12 hours to reach Palmyra from Birecik. We had contacted a bird guide, Ahmed Abdallah, in advance and he had booked a Hotel for us. The New Afqa Hotel is quite expensive, but good value for money: we payed \$35 per night for three persons, breakfast included. The room was clean and air conditioned and the owner is very friendly and has a good sense of humour. We contacted Ahmed, and together with him and the owner of the hotel we drank a tea and discussed the trip for tomorrow.

17th August

We were picked up from the hotel in the early morning. First we drove to Sad wadi Abiad, not far from Palmyra. On the way we saw our first desert species: a Mourning Wheatear and a Desert Lark. We saw 2 Raven spec., 2 Wheatear, 1 Isabelline Wheatear, Swift, Pallid Swift, Alpine Swift, Red-billed Chough and a group of Yellow Wagtails as well. The latter were hard to identify to (sub)species level cause they were all in female/winter plumage, though we heard both flava and feldegg like calls. Sad wadi Abiad is a very good spot for bird watching. In the bushes around the wadi we saw many Eastern Olivaceous Warblers and Graceful Prinias and a Moustached Warbler. The latter was only seen by Ahmed, would have been a lifer for me. In the reed beds we saw some Reed Warblers and a few Great Reed Warblers. On the mudflats of the wadi we saw a female Citrine Wagtail, many Black-winged Stilts, some Little Stints, 3 Kentish Plovers, 7 Glossy Ibises, 1 Temminck's Stint, 3 Sanderling and a Wood Sandpiper. On the wadi Little Grebe, Garganey, Gadwall and Ferruginous Duck were seen. A group of Yellow Wagtails with feldegg-like calls and 10 Griffon Vultures flew past. After checking the wadi we continued to wadi Abiad. When we just left the wadi we saw 2 adult Egyptian Vultures and while driving through the desert we saw more desert species: Desert Wheatear, Temminck's Lark and Desert Lark. We drove to a water reservoir where we saw a female Black-headed Bunting, a migrating Honey Buzzard and 10 Ravens. We did our very best to make them Brown-necked Raven but after all they probably were the common ones. Driving further to Qattar, the Bald Ibis cliff, we saw a migrating Steppe Buzzard, 27 Rock Pigeons, 9 Bar-tailed Larks, Temminck's Larks, 5 Cream-coloured Coursers and 3 Desert Larks. Near the Ibis cliff we were invited to drink tea with the nomads, an interesting experience. At the Arak Dam Ahmed had a short nap while we saw Ruff, Little Stint, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Spotted Redshank and Wood Sandpiper at the lake. At the next stop, an oasis, we saw 15+ Desert Finches, a juv. Woodchat Shrike, 2 Lesser Grey Shrikes and a Short-toed Lark in fresh plumage. Ahmed

emphasized us many times at spots like this oasis that we would see many more species if we would be here one month later, during migration time. Next stop was the Talila reserve, a few km away from the highway between Deir ez-Zor and Palmyra. Hoopoe Lark was common along the road from the highway to the reserve, what a great bird! In the reserve we had only one goal: seeing Pharaoh Eagle Owl. Ahmed knew a spot and after a while only Ahmed saw the bird for a few seconds. It took us till dusk to relocate the bird, when we saw it flying away into the desert. Other birds seen in the reserve during our frenzied search for the owl: Mourning Wheatear, 10+ Cream-coloured Courser, 1 Stone-curlew, some Temminck's Larks, 3 Hoopoe Larks and 1 Little Owl. After a tea with the guards of the reserve we drove back to Palmyra, very satisfied with the great tour de desert.

18th August

Today we relaxed a little. After a long sleep we had breakfast and made a short walk to the Palmyra ruins. It was very hot, but in the shade of the ruins we found 3 Mourning Wheatears, 2 Desert Larks and a Spotted Flycatcher. After lunch we took the bus to Deir ez-Zor. We left our luggage at a basic backpacker hotel in the city centre and walked to the suspension bridge. On the way to the bridge we found out both target species are common here: in the very first bushes after leaving the city centre we saw a family party of both White-cheeked Bulbul and Iraq Babbler! The bulbuls had a few just fledged juveniles. While walking along the Euphrates towards the bridge we heard different groups of Iraq Babblers. At the bridge we saw, besides one bulbul and a few babblers, 2 Pied Kingfishers and a group of 10 Black-necked Grebes.

19th August

We got up at five to catch a taxi to Mheimideh, an oxbow along the Euphrates, c 25 km west of Deir ez-Zor, between the villages Mheimideh and Sfeira Tahtani. We had some problems finding the place. We were in doubt if the reed bed we saw from the road was the oxbow, because we couldn't see any water from the road. The condition of the place was very depressing: it was very dry and many sheep were around. Overgrazing must be a big problem here. Although the bad state of the place we saw still many birds. The dirty and nearly dried out pools are apparently still good enough for good numbers of Marbled Ducks. The northern end of the site was the only part with some good reed beds and standing water left, here we saw c 8 Grey-headed Swamp-hens. We walked the place up and down and saw the following species: Slender-billed Gull(abundant), Blue-cheeked Bee-eater(10), Black Francolin(1, calling), Spur-winged Plover (a few), White-tailed Plover(2), Little Bittern(common), Little Tern(some), White-winged Tern(common), Whiskered Tern(some), Ferruginous Duck(a group), Iraq babbler(small group), Pied Kingfisher (common), Shoveler(2), Moorhen(1), Garganey(1), Mallard(3), Great Crested Grebe(5, some juveniles), Little Grebe(some), Squacco Heron(common), Little Egret(common), Great Egret(2), Spoonbill(1), Black-winged Stilt(common), Little Stint(1), Snipe(1), Red Knot(1), Common redshank(1) Spotted Redshank(some), Greenshank(1), Ringed Plover(some), Little Ringed Plover(1), Graceful Prinia(some), Reed Warbler(1), Magpie(some), Isabelline Wheatear(2) and Whinchat(1). We took a mini-bus back to Deir ez-Zor, where we saw a Little Swift flying above the city centre. In the afternoon we took a bus to Damascus, arriving there in the evening.

20th August

In the early morning we saw many Laughing Doves in Damascus and a group of Swifts and Pallid Swifts. Today we decided to find Syrian Serin in Bloudan. Finding the right bus station for a mini-bus to Bloudan proved a bit difficult, but after finding the bus station we were soon on the road to Bloudan. In an hour we arrived in Bloudan and walked to the southern end of the village, cause there we saw pines on the hill side, the right habitat for Syrian Serin. While leaving the village we found 4 Syrian Serins, 2 adults and 2 juveniles, in the cultivations and in the wires. Some searching on the hill with pines resulted in another 8 Syrian Serins. Other birds seen in and around the village: Jay (subspecies *atricapillus*), Laughing Dove, Backbird, Black Redstart (subspecies *semirufus*), Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Syrian Woodpecker, Red-rumped Swallow and Masked Shrike. Because we saw another 3 Syrian Serins in the village we ended up with 15 Syrian Serins. Back in Damascus we explored the old city and at 10PM we took the bus back to Turkey.

21st August

What a great experience, crossing the border between 2 and 4 AM, hell. At 6 AM changing busses in Antakya, arriving at Tasucu at midday. During the ride we saw a huge flock (must have been 1000s!) of White Storks circling above the highway between Tarsus and Silifke. After this devastating trip we decided to WALK in the heat to the Goksu delta, to search for White-throated Kingfisher. After an 1,5 hour walk we arrived at site 3 of the Gosney, this is just east of the holiday village. Spectacled Bulbul is abundant, we saw many during the walk. We went to the observation tower (site 4, Gosney), on the way we saw a Barred Warbler, Bearded Reedling, a juvenile Penduline Tit, Masked and Woodchat Shrike, a Marsh Harrier and Jelmer flushed a female Black Francolin. A big flock of White Storks circled around, 4 Black Kites is this group as well. From the observation tower we had good views of a huge but empty lake... After a nap at the tower, the lake was still empty so we walked back to the village. From the village we searched intensively for White-throated Kingfisher (site 3 of the Gosney), but no result: our first and last dip of the holiday! We could use some good sleep so we booked the overnight ferry to Girne, Cyprus. This was a terrible decision: we had to enter the boat at 10PM, but it only sailed at 2 AM. Crying kids, old slow boat, no sleeping spots, loud music, hell again.

22nd August

We arrived at Cyprus only at 8:30 AM. Rob spent some hours seabird watching from the ferry cause he couldn't sleep, he saw 5-10 Scopoli's Shearwaters. After an hour or so we finally went through customs. We took a taxi to the Bellapais Monastery. It was very hot already, so we first dropped our backpacks on the square. Around the monastery we couldn't find the desired endemics, but a probable Spectacled Warbler, seen only by Rob and Jelmer, should have been a lifer only for Sander :-P. Anyway, we went through the village up hill in search for the warbler and wheatear. After a while we found a Cyprus Warbler just above the village in its most ugly plumage: only the diffusely spotted undertail coverts indicated its identification. Jelmer had short views of Cyprus Wheatear here as well. It was so hot that we had not much motivation for searching much longer. From the monastery we had seen some unfinished concrete houses. We went to these houses and rested the rest of the day on the first floor of one of the houses, in the shade of the second

floor. Some bird watching in the vicinity of the houses produced 3 Cyprus Wheatears, some Cyprus Warblers (again only the ugly plumage), Chukars, a Masked Shrike, 2 Little Owls and a Turtle Dove. We camped in the wild on this spot.

23rd August

After packing our crap we were lucky enough to immediately catch a ride down to the harbour of Girne. In the harbour we saw a male Cyprus Wheatear. Now we took the fast boat back to the mainland, which took only 2 hours. The rest of the day was spend laying on the beach and swimming in the Mediterranean Sea. At night we took the bus to Istanbul.

24th August

Jelmer had some energy left to leave the bus at 5AM at Kulu town, near Kulu Golu. Rob and me just wanted some sleep and a terrace in Istanbul, so we wished him good luck and stayed in the bus, seeing only a group of Grey Partridges from the bus near Ankara. Jelmer first walked from Kulu town to the east side of the lake, but some sheepdog made him decide to try the other side of the lake. A taxi brought him to the southwest side of the lake (right outside the village depicted in Gosney) were he was disappointed to see that the lake had almost completely dried out. However, the main target species here, Asian Short-toed Lark, was not difficult to find. Surprisingly, many Short-toed Larks, probably on migration, were also present. While the Short-toeds were mainly foraging in the grassy parts bordering the dry mud flats of the lake, the Asians stayed in the arable fields. As stated in other reports, the Asians are pale and have white outer rectrices. However, while other groups also reported faint breast stripes as a field mark, these stripes appeared quite clear and well-defined now. Large groups of Calandra Larks were also present (500+ in total). Despite quite some effort, no Bimacs were seen among them. Some 15 Black-bellied Sandgrouse were flying around, and 2 were briefly seen sitting. Another bird had apparently been shot in the wing, and could be approached closely. Migration was well underway here with Wryneck, Ortolan Bunting, 2 Black-headed Buntings, Willow Warblers etc. in some low herbs, and fly-over Tree Pipits. Other birds seen included 3 juv. Flamingos, a Marsh Sandpiper, a Gull-billed Tern, a Ruddy Shelduck, 3 Tawny Pipits, a calling Quail, a few Spur-winged Lapwings and 3 Long-legged Buzzards. Early afternoon, Jelmer took the bus to Istanbul and arrived there at night.

25th August

Today we did absolutely nothing. Reading the newspaper in a park near the blue mosque was our main activity, so we only saw the usual Istanbul stuff: Laughing Doves, Alpine Swifts and Yellow-legged Gulls.

26th August

At 4AM took the plane back home.

Species Lists

Black-necked Grebe

18: Group of 10 ind on the Euphrates, seen from the suspension bridge.

Little Grebe

17: At Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.

19: A few at Mheimideh.

Great Crested Grebe

19: 5 at Mheimideh, some being juveniles.

Scopoli's Shearwater

22: 5-10 birds from the ferry to Cyprus.

Yelkouan Shearwater

11: A few small groups flying into the Bosphorus in Istanbul.

Great Cormorant

11: Some birds at the Bosphorus in Istanbul.

Shag

11: Some birds at the Bosphorus in Istanbul. Juveniles off-white below: subspecies desmarestii.

Pygmy Cormorant

15: 60-70 birds flying over Lake Halfeti in the evening.

16: A few birds flying past at the gravel pits, Birecik.

Little Bittern

19: Common at Mheimideh.

Night Heron

14: 1 flying over the Euphrates near Birecik.

Squacco Heron

16: some at the gravel pits, Birecik.

19: Common at Mheimideh.

Little Egret

19: Common at Mheimideh.

Great Egret

19: 2 at Mheimideh.

Purple Heron

16: 1 at the gravel pits, Birecik.

White Stork

21: Huge flocks migrating along the coast between Tarsus and Tasucu.

Black Stork

14: 1 adult seen from the bus between Demirkazik and Adana.

Glossy Ibis

17: 7 at Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.

21: 1 between Tarsus and Silifke.

Spoonbill

19: 1 at Mheimideh.

Flamingo

24: 3 juveniles at Kulu Golu.

Ruddy Shelduck

24: 1 flying past at Kulu Golu.

Mallard

19: 3 at Mheimideh.

21: 1 male at the Goksu delta.

24: 2 at Kulu Golu.

Gadwall

17: At Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.

Shoveler

19: 2 at Mheimideh.

Marbled Duck

19: Common at Mheimideh.

Garganey

17: At Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.

19: 1 at Mheimideh.

24: 5+ at Kulu Golu.

Ferruginous Duck

17: At Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.

19: 50+ at Mheimideh.

Griffon Vulture

17: 10 during the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Egyptian Vulture

17: 2 adults at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Golden Eagle

12: 1 adult near the campsite, Aladag Mountains.

Booted Eagle

14: 1 light morph seen from the bus between Demirkazik and Adana.

Black Kite

21: 4 migrating over the Goksu delta.

Marsh Harrier

21: A few at the Goksu delta.

24: Some at Kulu Golu.

Long-legged Buzzard

12: 1, From the bus to Nigde.

13: 1, Aladag Mountains.

24: At least 3 at Kulu Golu.

Common Buzzard

17: 2 birds of the race *vulpinus* at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Honey Buzzard

17: 1 migrating at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Kestrel

A few sightings.

Hobby

18: 1 at Deir ez-Zor.

22: 1 at Cyprus.

Peregrine

12: 1, From the bus to Nigde.

Caspian Snowcock

13: c 5 birds in and around the chromium mine.

Black Francolin

- 16: 12 ind. at the gravel pits, Birecik.
- 19: 1 heard calling at Mheimideh.
- 21: 1 female at the Goksu delta.

Chukar

- 12-14: Common at Aladag Mountains, specially if you know their call.
- 22: Twice a group at Cyrus.

See-see Partridge

- 15: At the main wadi, Birecik. Different groups, in total maybe even 50 birds! Best way to find the birds is searching on the hill tops along the wadi. However, we couldn't get good views, all birds were flying past or away from us.

Grey Partridge

- 23: Group seen from the bus near Ankara.

Quail

- 24: 1 calling at Kulu Golu.

Moorhen

- 15: At the Euphrates.
- 19: 1 at Mheimideh.

Coot

- 15: At the Euphrates.
- 21: Flock at the Goksu delta.

Grey-headed Swamphen

- 19: c 8 at Mheimideh.

Black-winged Stilt

Common, for instance:

- 17: Common at Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.
- 19: Very common at Mheimideh.

Stone-curlew

- 17: 1 during the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Cream-coloured Courser

- 17: 15+ at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Little Ringed Plover

19: 1 at Mheimideh.
24: Some at Kulu Golu.

Ringed Plover

19: A few at Mheimideh.

Kentish Plover

17: 3 at Sad wadi Abiadah, Palmyra.
21: 2 at the Goksu delta.
24: Some birds at Kulu Golu.

Northern Lapwing

24: c 15 at Kulu Golu.

Spur-winged Plover

16: 2 at the gravel pits, Birecik.
19: Some at Mheimideh.
24: Some at Kulu Golu.

White-tailed Plover

19: 2 at Mheimideh.

Red Knot

19: 1 at Mheimideh.

Sanderling

17: 3 at Sad wadi Abiadah, Palmyra.

Temminck's Stint

17: 1 at Sad wadi Abiadah, Palmyra.

Little Stint

17: some around Sad wadi Abiadah and Arak Dam.
19: 1 at Mheimideh.

Wood Sandpiper

17: At Sad wadi Abiadah and Arak Dam.
24: Some at Kulu Golu.

Green Sandpiper

15: Along the Euphrates.
17: At the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
24: Some at Kulu Golu.

Common Sandpiper

15: Along the Euphrates.

Common Redshank

19: 1 at Mheimideh.

Spotted Redshank

17: 1 at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

19: Some at Mheimideh.

Greenshank

19: 1 heard at Mheimideh.

Marsh Sandpiper

24: 1 flying past at Kulu Golu.

Ruff

17: 15 at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Snipe

19: 1 at Mheimideh.

24: Some at Kulu Golu.

Slender-billed Gull

19: Abundant at Mheimideh, both adults and juveniles.

Mediterranean Gull

11: 1 ad. and 2 fresh juv. at the Bosphorus in Istanbul.

24: c 5 at Kulu Golu.

Yellow-legged Gull

11, 24, 25: Common at Istanbul.

21: At the Goksu delta.

Little Tern

19: Some at Mheimideh.

21: A few at the Goksu delta.

Gull-billed Tern

24: 1 flying past at Kulu Golu.

Common Tern

15: 2 at Lake Halfeti.

White-winged Tern

- 14: Some birds at the Euphrates at Birecik.
- 15: 3 at Lake Halfeti.
- 17: 1 at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
- 19: Common at Mheimideh.

Whiskered Tern

- 17: 2 at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
- 19: Some at Mheimideh.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse

- 15: Groups of 2, 3, 6, and 12 birds flying east over the main wadi around 8 PM, Birecik.
- 16: Group of 3 birds flying east at the gravel pits, Birecik.
- 24: 15 birds flying around at Kulu Golu. 1 Bird found with a shot wound in the wing.

Rock Pigeon

- 13: 3 at the Demirkazik mountain centre.
- 17: 27 ind. at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
- 18: A few birds over the Palmyra ruins, one 'wrong' plumaged bird there.

Wood Pigeon

- 15: 2 at the main wadi, Birecik.

Turtle Dove

- 14: A few birds at the owl café, Birecik.
- 15: 1, At the main wadi, Birecik.
- 22: 1 at Cyprus.

Laughing Dove

- Common in Istanbul, very common in Damascus.
- 14: 1, Adana Bus station.
- 16: A few seen from the bus in Syria, also on the bus station of Homs.
- 20: Bloudan.

Great spotted Cuckoo

- 12: 1 juvenile from the bus to Demirkazik.

Pharaoh Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*

- 17: 1 at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Little Owl

Subspecies *indigena*. Birds were only slightly lighter than *noctua*, certainly not as pale as the *lilith* depicted in the Svensson.

12: 1, from the bus to Nigde.

15: 1, at the main wadi, Birecik.

16: 1, at the gravel pits, Birecik.

17: 1, at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

22: 2 at Cyprus.

Scops Owl

13: 1 Calling at Demirkazik.

Pallis Scops Owl

14: Superb views of 1 adult at the famous scops owl café.

Swift

17: At the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

20: Damascus.

Pallid Swift

17: At the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

20: Damascus.

Alpine Swift

11, 24, 25: Abundant above the city centre of Istanbul, but only from the late afternoon on.

13: 10-15 birds at Aladag Mountains.

17: At the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Little Swift

19: 1 at Deir ez-Zor city centre.

Kingfisher

15: 4, along the Euphrates.

21: 2 at the holiday village, Goksu delta.

Pied Kingfisher

15: 1, along the Euphrates.

18: 2 at the Euphrates near the suspension bridge.

19: Common at Mheimideh.

Bee-eater

14: 1 seen from the bus between Adana and Birecik.

14-16: Common at Birecik and Halfeti.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater

16: 5 birds near the gravel pits, Birecik.
19: c 10 at Mheimideh.

Hoopoe

Common. Birds appeared more bright buffish-pink than the birds I'm used to see in Europe.

Roller

Seen at different places, at least at:

14: 1 at cultivations just south of Birecik.
16: 1 at the gravel pits, Birecik.
24: 1 at Kulu Golu.

Syrian Woodpecker

15: 2, main wadi, Birecik.
15: 3 at the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.
20: Bloudan.

Wryneck

13: 1, Aladag Mountains.
24: 1 at Kulu Golu.

Skylark

24: c 15 at Kulu Golu.

Woodlark

13: 2 behind Demirkazik mountain centre.

Crested Lark

Common or abundant at many places.

Short-toed Lark

17: 1 at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
24: 30+ at Kulu Golu.

Asian Short-toed Lark

24: 20+ at Kulu Golu.

Desert Lark

17: Fairly common at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
18: 2 birds at the Palmyra ruins.

Bar-tailed Lark

17: 9 birds at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Calandra Lark

24: 500+ at Kulu Golu.

Shore Lark

Common at Aladag Mountains.

Temminck's Lark

17: Common at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Hoopoe Lark

17: Only in and around the Talila reserve, c 10 birds.

Sand Martin

14: Some birds at the Euphrates at Birecik.

17: Some at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Crag Martin

13: 2 near the chromium mine.

Barn Swallow

Common.

Red-rumped Swallow

14: 1 seen from the bus between Adana and Birecik.

16: 1 between Gaziantep and Kilis.

20: 1 at Bloudan.

House Martin

13: common near the chromium mine.

Tawny Pipit

24: 3 at Kulu Golu.

Water Pipit

12: 1 at the campsite, Aladag Mountains.

13: 1, Aladag Mountains.

Tree Pipit

24: c 10 migrating at Kulu Golu.

Yellow Wagtail

- 15: Group, migrating over the main wadi, Birecik.
- 16: Migrating groups over the gravel pits, Birecik.
- 17: Many migrating groups at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Citrine Wagtail

- 17: Female at Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.

Grey Wagtail

- 15: 1, migrating over the main wadi, Birecik.

Spectacled Bulbul

- 15: Family party at the main wadi, Birecik.
- 16: 1 in the wires between Gaziantep and Kilis.
- 21: Abundant around the Goksu delta.

White-cheeked Bulbul

- 18: A family group near the city centre of Deir ez-Zor and 1 from the suspension bridge.

Alpine Accentor

- 13: some birds around the chromium mine.

Radde's Accentor

- 12: 2 at the campsite, Aladag Mountains.

Rufous Bush Robin

- 14: 2 birds at cultivations just south of Birecik.
- 15: Different birds at the main wadi, Birecik.
- 15: At the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.
- 17: 2 at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
- 21: A few at the Goksu delta.

White-throated Robin

Gosney stated that White-throated Robin is 'probably gone by mid August'. We were happy to find them still.

- 12: 1 between Pinarbasi Village and the campsite.
- 13: 2 female types around Demirkazik mountain centre.
- 14: 1 around Demirkazik mountain centre.

Black Redstart

- 12-14: Common at Aladag Mountains, all ochruruos types, but one bird looked exactly like the semirufus depicted in the Svensson on the 13th.
- 20: semirufus-type at Bloudan.

Wheatear

Common.

Isabelline Wheatear

Common.

Desert Wheatear

17: A few birds at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Eastern Black-eared Wheatear

14: 1 first winter male around Demirkazik mountain centre.

20: At Bloudan.

Cyprus Wheatear

22: 3 at Cyprus, 2 males, 1 juvenile.

23: 1 male at the harbour of Girne, Cyprus.

Finsch's Wheatear

14: Pair with juvenile at the cemetery a few 100 metres north of the Demirkazik mountain centre.

Mourning Wheatear

17: A few birds at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

18: 3 birds at the Palmyra ruins.

Whinchat

19: 1 at Mheimideh.

European Stone Chat

13, 14: Some birds around Demirkazik mountain centre.

Rock Thrush

12: 1 female near the campsite.

Blackbird

20: 1 at Bloudan.

Mistle Thrush

12: 4 near the campsite.

Ring Ouzel

12: 4 near the campsite.

Barred Warbler

21: 1 at the Goksu delta.

Eastern Orphean Warbler

12: 1, between Pinarbasi Village and the campsite.

Lesser Whitethroat

13, 14: 1 in the gorge near Demirkazik.

Ménétries's Warbler

15: Common at the main wadi, Birecik.

15: At the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.

Whitethroat

13,14: 2 female types in the gorge near Demirkazik.

Cyprus Warbler

22: Some skulking juveniles at Cyprus.

Spectacled Warbler

22: 1 at Cyprus probable this species.

Graceful Prinia

15: Common along the Euphrates.

16: Very common at the gravel pits, Birecik.

17: Common around Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.

19: Common at Mheimideh.

21: A few at the Goksu delta.

Sedge Warbler

24: 1 at Kulu Golu.

Moustached Warbler

17: 1 at Sad Wadi Abiad

Zitting Cisticola

22: 1 at Cyprus.

Cetti's Warbler

15: 1, Along the Euphrates.

22: A few birds at Cyprus.

Reed Warbler

- 14: 1, near Demirkazik, showing all features of an ordinary first winter *scirpaceus*.
- 14, 15: a few along the Euphrates, showing some features of *fusca*, but not as obvious as depicted in the Svensson.
- 17: Common around Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.
- 19: 1 at Mheimideh.

Great Reed Warbler

- 16: 1, at the gravel pits, Birecik.
- 17: Some birds around Sad wadi Abiad, Palmyra.
- 21: 1 at the Goksu delta.

Upcher's Warbler

- 15: 1 at the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney. Hard to get good views of this skulking bird.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler

Very common.

Willow Warbler

- 24: Some at Kulu Golu.

Chiffchaff

- 24: Some at Kulu Golu.

Spotted Flycatcher

- 18: 2 at Palmyra ruins.

Pied Flycatcher

- 12, 14: 1 female type in the pine garden of the Demirkazik mountain centre.

Semi-collared Flycatcher

- 12-14: 1 female type in the pine garden of the Demirkazik mountain centre.

Great Tit

Only seen at a few places.

Sombre Tit

- 15: 2 at the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.

Penduline Tit

- 21: 1 juv. at the Goksu delta.

Rock Nuthatch

12-14: Common at Demirkazik Mountains.
15: 1 at Halfeti.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch

15: 1 at Halfeti.

Red-backed Shrike

Common.

Lesser Grey Shrike

Common.

Woodchat Shrike

15: 1 at the main wadi, Birecik.
17: 1 juv. at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.
21: 1 between Tarsus and Silifke.
21: 2 at the Goksu delta.

Masked Shrike

15: 1 juvenile at the main wadi, Birecik.
20: 2 adults at Bloudan.
21: 1 at the Goksu delta.
22: 1 adult at Cyprus.

Iraq Babbler

16: 3 birds at the gravel pits, Birecik. 2 adults and 1 fresh juvenile.
18: Common in Deir ez-Zor.
19: Small group at Mheimideh.

Magpie

12: 2 birds being the foster parents of a Great Spotted Cuckoo near Demirkazik.
19: A few at Mheimideh.

Jay

20: 1, Bloudan, subspecies atricapillus

Red-billed Chough

12-14: Common around Demirkazik and in Aladag Mountains.
17: Some groups at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Alpine Chough

13: Family party at Aladag Mountains.

Hooded Crow

Abundant. Birds on Cyprus perhaps somewhat lighter grey than the mainland birds, in strong sunlight even giving nearly white appearance, reminiscent to Pied Crow.

Raven

17: 15 ind. at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Starling

16: Subspecies *tauricus* seen at Birecik: the birds were more black than the European *vulgaris*, more looking like Spotless Starling.

Golden Oriole

12: Some birds near Demirkazik.

House Sparrow

Abundant

Dead Sea Sparrow

14: some female types and 1 male at cultivations just south of Birecik.

15: some birds at the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.

Rock Sparrow

12: Group at the campsite.

13: Group behind Demirkazik mountain centre.

Chestnut-shouldered Sparrow

15: Male and female-type at the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.

Snow Finch

13: A total of about 100 birds near the chromium mine,

Chaffinch

12: 1 male near Demirkazik.

Linnet

Common at Aladag Mountains.

20: Bloudan.

Goldfinch

15: At the main wadi, Birecik.

Greenfinch

15: At the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.

Serin

12: 2 near Demirkazik.

Syrian Serin

20: 15 birds at Bloudan.

Red-fronted Serin

12: 2+3 at the campsite, Aladag Mountains.

13: >10 at the chromium mine.

Asian Crimson-winged Finch

The Dutch like to split. So Crimson-winged Finch is split in Asian Crimson-winged Finch (*Rhodopechys sanguineus*) and African Crimson-winged Finch (*Rhodopechys alienus*). For more information see:

Kirwan, G M, Atkinson, P W, van den Berg, A B & Shirihai, H 2006. Taxonomy of the Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus*: a test case for defining species limits between disjunct taxa? Bull Afr Bird Cl 13: 136-146.

12: 2+1 near Demirkazik.

12: 7 at the spa near the campsite, Aladag Mountains.

13: 5 at three spots in the Aladag Mountains

13: 3 around the mountain centre.

14: 6 birds around the mountain centre.

Desert Finch

15: Twice heard the call of a bird flying past at the main wadi, Birecik.

15: 6, at the orchard North of Birecik, site 4 in the Gosney.

16: 24+ came to drink at the gravel pits, Birecik.

17: 15+ at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

Ortolan Bunting

12: 3 ind. between Pinarbasi Village and the campsite.

24: 1 at Kulu Golu.

Black-headed Bunting

17: Female at the guided tour in the deserts around Palmyra.

24: 2 at Kulu Golu.

Rock Bunting

13: 2 between the campsite and Pinarbasi Village.

14: Family at the entrance of the gorge.

Dragonflies

Common Bluetail - *Ischnura elegans*

15: Common at the main wadi, Birecik.

17: A few at Sad Wadi Abiadah.

Blue-eye - *Erythromma lindenii*

15: A few males at lake Halfeti.

Lesser Emperor - *Anax parthenope*

Very common.

Bladetail - *Lindenia tetraphylla*

15: Female of this species caught in an orchard north of Birecik (site 4 in the Gosney) was the dragonfly highlight of the trip!

Small Skimmer - *Orthetrum taeniolatum*

15: A few males at the main wadi, Birecik.

Slender Skimmer - *Orthetrum Sabina*

21: Common at Goksu Delta.

Red-veined Darter - *Sympetrum fonscolombii*

Common, for instance:

11: 2 females, 1 male near the blue mosque in Istanbul.

17: Abundant at Sad Wadi Abiadah.

Broad Scarlet - *Crocothemis erythraea*

Fairly common.

Violet Dropwing - *Trithemis annulata*

17: 1 male at Sad Wadi Abiadah.

15: 1 female at the main wadi, Birecik.

Dark-winged Groundling - *Brachythemis fuscopalliata*

16: 1 male at the gravel pits north of Birecik.

Black Percher - *Diplacodes lefebvrii*

21: Female photographed at Gosku Delta.

Black Pennant - *Selysiothemis nigra*

14: 1 female at cultivations just south of Birecik.

15: Male at the main wadi, Birecik.

19: Male at Mheimideh.