

Oman & the UAE: Hypocolius & Desert Birds 2009

January 10, 2009 to January 25, 2009

Guided by
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This was the inaugural Field Guides Inc tour to the UAE and Oman, based around some four previous visits by Phil. This is a trip that attracts some folks looking for new families, with the legendary Hypocolius as one of the flagship species, though finding the bird itself proved to be quite a tale!

Dubai is like falling down the rabbit hole in "Alice in Wonderland", a bizarre and irrational place where nothing is quite what it seems and not much makes environmental sense. The sheer number of huge high-rise buildings and construction work is simply staggering, including the world's tallest building which looms way above its neighbors, is sometimes mist shrouded at the top and is actually almost alarming (what if there's a fire? How do the elevators and plumbing work?) That said, it does have some very striking buildings and it is quite fascinating to see all this unfolding.

The birding in the Emirates is actually quite rewarding, there is a keen band of local birders and there are always a number of rarity surprises and scarce Middle Eastern migrants about. This trip we saw Namaqua Dove and Brown Shrike as vagrants, and logged a good number of specials such as Socotra Cormorant, Indian Pond Heron, Spotted Eagle the amazing Crab Plover, Cream-colored Courser, White-tailed Lapwing, Great Knot, Kurdish (Red-tailed), Hume's and Hooded Wheatear.

Lots of wintering migrants add zest too, with such goodies as White, Yellow, Citrine, Gray and Masked Wagtail, Desert Lesser Whitethroat, Menetries's Warbler and Eurasian Hoopoe. The star of the show however proved elusive despite three checks at the site where it had been present immediately before our arrival, and reflecting it's alignment with the Waxwing assemblage, with erratic and unpredictable wanderings.

Our foray into northern Oman was excellent, getting into the desert environment proper and finding Sand Partridge, Asian Desert Warbler, Plain Leaf Warbler, Arabian Babbler and Black-crowned Sparrowlark. A rare migrant here was Pale Martin, another surprise for us.

Going down to the Dhofar Province of southern Oman was a total contrast and gets us into a transition zone between the Palearctic and Africa. African species included local forms of Shining Sunbird, African Paradise-Flycatcher, Bruce's Green Pigeon, White-breasted White-eye, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Ruppell's Weaver. Middle-eastern specials included Persian Shearwater, White-cheeked Tern, Saunders's Tern, Arabian Partridge, the rare Hume's Owl, Palestine Sunbird, Blackstart, South Arabian Wheatear, Arabian Warbler, Yemen Serin and the semi-mythical and hard to find Golden-winged Grosbeak. We also got onto some neat vagrants with the second Oman record of Lesser Whistling Duck, two Black Storks, a Pheasant-tailed Jacana and surprise finds of Ferruginous Duck and White-fronted Goose, both well south.

Going into the edge of the Empty Quarter was quite an experience and got us into some amazing desolate scenery. It was also the scene of our very own miracle in the desert when we found a male Hypocolius at Muntasar oasis. Tom wishes he had recorded my bellow when I found it, and it was a huge buzz to finally connect with the beast. It sat for ages in the lovely afternoon light and was busy flycatching off a thorn tree, what a bird! Another memorable experience here was the flyover of

hundreds of Spotted Sandgrouse coming in to drink, with great guttural calls. Exciting migrants included Black-throated Thrush, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Hume's Warbler.

The final leg of the trip was in beautiful Muscat, a haven of good taste and lovely buildings and an amazing contrast to the metastasizing Dubai. Muscat is one of the ancient centers of Arab culture, so naturally being birders we headed for the sewage ponds and rubbish tip, though some of us did make a foray to the wonderful old Muscat souk one evening. Here in Muscat too we got a vagrant, with a long-staying Pied Kingfisher, and the rubbish dump gave us Spotted, Lesser-spotted and Steppe Eagle and over 30 Egyptian Vulture, a good count for once of this seriously declining species. Notable species included a fantastic flock of over 70 Great Black-headed (Pallas's) Gulls, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler, a surprise Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Black-necked (Eared) Grebe at Al Ansab.

This first run through went very well and we had some really exciting and enjoyable birding in a seldom visited part of the world. Our thanks to Sharon in the office for grappling with the sometimes erratic logistics, to the enthusiastic and tireless local driver and fixer Justin, the excellent Qasim in the UAE who got us everywhere we wanted to go, and to Steve James for local advice. Thanks also to co-leader George Armistead who got lots of lifers and who ably played good cop to my not so nice one when we had logistic problems to unravel.

It is hoped this tour will be a regular feature now, and our initial adventure certainly played out nicely, our thanks to the group for coming along and sharing what was a terrific experience.

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List total: 212 bird taxa and 2 mammal taxa

*If marked to left of list, * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic,
N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant*

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	Little Grebe	<i>(Tachybaptus ruficollis)</i>
	Eared (Black-necked) Grebe	<i>(Podiceps nigricollis)</i>
E	Persian Shearwater	<i>(Puffinus persicus)</i>
	Masked Booby	<i>(Sula dactylatra)</i>
	Brown Booby	<i>(Sula leucogaster)</i>
	Great Cormorant	<i>(Phalacrocorax carbo)</i>
E	Socotra Cormorant	<i>(Phalacrocorax nigrogularis)</i>
	Gray Heron	<i>(Ardea cinerea)</i>
	Purple Heron	<i>(Ardea purpurea)</i>
	Great Egret	<i>(Ardea alba)</i>
	Intermediate Egret	<i>(Mesophoyx intermedia)</i>
	Little Egret	<i>(Egretta garzetta)</i>
	Western Reef-Heron	<i>(Egretta gularis)</i>
	Squacco Heron	<i>(Ardeola ralloides)</i>
	Indian Pond-Heron	<i>(Ardeola grayii)</i>
	Cattle Egret	<i>(Bubulcus ibis)</i>
	Striated Heron	<i>(Butorides striata)</i>
	Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>(Nycticorax nycticorax)</i>
	Black Stork	<i>(Ciconia nigra)</i>
	White Stork	<i>(Ciconia ciconia)</i>
	Glossy Ibis	<i>(Plegadis falcinellus)</i>
	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>(Platalea leucorodia)</i>
	Greater Flamingo	<i>(Phoenicopterus roseus)</i>
	Lesser Whistling-Duck	<i>(Dendrocygna javanica)</i>
	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>(Anser albifrons)</i>
I	Egyptian Goose	<i>(Alopochen aegyptiacus)</i>
	Common Shelduck	<i>(Tadorna tadorna)</i>
	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>(Anas penelope)</i>
	Gadwall	<i>(Anas strepera)</i>
	Eurasian Teal	<i>(Anas crecca)</i>
	Mallard	<i>(Anas platyrhynchos)</i>
	Northern Pintail	<i>(Anas acuta)</i>
	Northern Shoveler	<i>(Anas clypeata)</i>
	Common Pochard	<i>(Aythya ferina)</i>
	Ferruginous Pochard	<i>(Aythya nyroca)</i>
	Tufted Duck	<i>(Aythya fuligula)</i>
	Osprey	<i>(Pandion haliaetus)</i>
	Egyptian Vulture	<i>(Neophron percnopterus)</i>
	Short-toed Eagle	<i>(Circaetus gallicus)</i>
	Western Marsh-Harrier	<i>(Circus aeruginosus)</i>
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>(Accipiter nisus)</i>
	Eurasian Buzzard	<i>(Buteo buteo vulpinus)</i>
	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>(Buteo rufinus)</i>
	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>(Aquila pomarina)</i>
	Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>(Aquila clanga)</i>
	Steppe Eagle	<i>(Aquila nipalensis)</i>
	Imperial Eagle	<i>(Aquila heliaca)</i>
	Verreaux's Eagle	<i>(Aquila verreauxii)</i>
	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>(Aquila fasciatus)</i>
	Booted Eagle	<i>(Aquila pennatus)</i>
	Eurasian Kestrel	<i>(Falco tinnunculus)</i>
	Barbary Falcon	<i>(Falco pelegrinoides)</i>
E	Arabian Partridge	<i>(Alectoris melanocephala)</i>
	Sand Partridge	<i>(Ammoperdix heyi)</i>
	Gray Francolin	<i>(Francolinus pondicerianus)</i>

Common Quail	<i>(Coturnix coturnix)</i>
Baillon's Crane	<i>(Porzana pusilla)</i>
Purple Swamphen	<i>(Porphyrio porphyrio)</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>(Gallinula chloropus)</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>(Fulica atra)</i>
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>(Hydrophasianus chirurgus)</i>
Crab Plover	<i>(Dromas ardeola)</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>(Haematopus ostralegus)</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>(Himantopus himantopus)</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>(Recurvirostra avosetta)</i>
Eurasian Thick-knee (Stone-curlew)	<i>(Burhinus oedicnemus)</i>
Cream-colored Courser	<i>(Cursorius cursor)</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>(Vanellus vanellus)</i>
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>(Vanellus indicus)</i>
White-tailed Lapwing	<i>(Vanellus leucurus)</i>
Pacific Golden-Plover	<i>(Pluvialis fulva)</i>
Black-bellied Plover	<i>(Pluvialis squatarola)</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>(Charadrius hiaticula)</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>(Charadrius dubius)</i>
Snowy (Kentish) Plover	<i>(Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus)</i>
Lesser Sandplover	<i>(Charadrius mongolus)</i>
Greater Sandplover	<i>(Charadrius leschenaultii)</i>
Common Snipe	<i>(Gallinago gallinago)</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>(Limosa limosa)</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>(Limosa lapponica)</i>
Whimbrel	<i>(Numenius phaeopus)</i>
Eurasian Curlew	<i>(Numenius arquata)</i>
Common Redshank	<i>(Tringa totanus)</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>(Tringa stagnatilis)</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>(Tringa nebularia)</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>(Tringa ochropus)</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>(Tringa glareola)</i>
Terek Sandpiper	<i>(Xenus cinereus)</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>(Actitis hypoleucos)</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>(Arenaria interpres)</i>
Great Knot	<i>(Calidris tenuirostris)</i>
Little Stint	<i>(Calidris minuta)</i>
Temminck's Stint	<i>(Calidris temminckii)</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>(Calidris ferruginea)</i>
Dunlin	<i>(Calidris alpina)</i>
Ruff and Reeve	<i>(Philomachus pugnax)</i>
Sooty Gull	<i>(Larus hemprichii)</i>
Heuglin's Gull	<i>(Larus heuglini)</i>
Caspian Gull	<i>(Larus cachinnans)</i>
Steppe Gull	<i>(Larus barabensis)</i>
Great Black-headed Gull	<i>(Larus ichthyaetus)</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>(Larus ridibundus)</i>
Slender-billed Gull	<i>(Larus genei)</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>(Sterna nilotica)</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>(Sterna caspia)</i>
Lesser Crested Tern	<i>(Sterna bengalensis)</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>(Sterna sandvicensis)</i>
Great Crested Tern	<i>(Sterna bergii)</i>
Saunders' Tern	<i>(Sterna saundersi)</i>
White-cheeked Tern	<i>(Sterna repressa)</i>

	Bridled Tern	<i>(Sterna anaethetus)</i>
	Whiskered Tern	<i>(Chlidonias hybrida)</i>
	White-winged Tern	<i>(Chlidonias leucopterus)</i>
	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>(Pterocles exustus)</i>
	Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>(Pterocles senegallus)</i>
	Crowned Sandgrouse	<i>(Pterocles coronatus)</i>
	Rock Pigeon	<i>(Columba livia)</i>
	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>(Streptopelia decaocto)</i>
	Laughing Dove	<i>(Streptopelia senegalensis)</i>
	Namaqua Dove	<i>(Oena capensis)</i>
	Bruce's Green-Pigeon	<i>(Treron waalia)</i>
I	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>(Psittacula krameri)</i>
E	Hume's Owl	<i>(Strix butleri)</i>
	Little Owl	<i>(Athene noctua)</i>
	Pallid Swift	<i>(Apus pallidus)</i>
	Common Kingfisher	<i>(Alcedo atthis)</i>
	Collared Kingfisher	<i>(Todirhamphus chloris)</i>
	Pied Kingfisher	<i>(Ceryle rudis)</i>
	Green Bee-eater	<i>(Merops orientalis)</i>
	Indian Roller	<i>(Coracias benghalensis)</i>
	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>(Upupa epops)</i>
	Singing Bushlark	<i>(Mirafra cantillans)</i>
	Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>(Eremopterix nigriceps)</i>
	Desert Lark	<i>(Ammomanes deserti)</i>
	Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>(Alaemon alaudipes)</i>
	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>(Calandrella brachydactyla)</i>
	Crested Lark	<i>(Galerida cristata)</i>
	Eurasian Skylark	<i>(Alauda arvensis)</i>
	Pale Sand Martin	<i>(Riparia diluta)</i>
	Rock Martin	<i>(Ptyonoprogne fuligula obsoleta)</i>
	Barn Swallow	<i>(Hirundo rustica)</i>
	Northern House-Martin	<i>(Delichon urbica)</i>
	White Wagtail	<i>(Motacilla alba)</i>
	White Wagtail	<i>(Motacilla alba personata)</i>
	Citrine Wagtail	<i>(Motacilla citreola)</i>
	Yellow Wagtail	<i>(Motacilla flava)</i>
	Yellow (Gray-headed) Wagtail	<i>(Motacilla flava thunbergi)</i>
	Yellow (Blue-headed) Wagtail	<i>(Motacilla flava flava)</i>
	Gray Wagtail	<i>(Motacilla cinerea)</i>
	Tawny Pipit	<i>(Anthus campestris)</i>
	Blyth's Pipit	<i>(Anthus godlewskii)</i>
	Long-billed Pipit	<i>(Anthus similis)</i>
	Red-throated Pipit	<i>(Anthus cervinus)</i>
	Water Pipit	<i>(Anthus spinoletta)</i>
	White-spectacled Bulbul	<i>(Pycnonotus xanthopygos)</i>
I	White-eared Bulbul	<i>(Pycnonotus leucotis)</i>
I	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>(Pycnonotus cafer)</i>
	Hypocolius	<i>(Hypocolius ampelinus)</i>
	Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush	<i>(Monticola saxatilis)</i>
	Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>(Monticola solitarius)</i>
	Dark-throated Thrush	<i>(Turdus ruficollis atrogularis)</i>
	Song Thrush	<i>(Turdus philomelos)</i>
	Streaked Scrub-Warbler	<i>(Scotocerca inquieta)</i>
	Graceful Prinia	<i>(Prinia gracilis)</i>
E	Clamorous Reed-Warbler	<i>(Acrocephalus stentoreus)</i>

	Common Chiffchaff	<i>(Phylloscopus collybita)</i>
	Plain Leaf-Warbler	<i>(Phylloscopus neglectus)</i>
	Hume's Warbler	<i>(Phylloscopus humei)</i>
	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>(Sylvia curruca)</i>
E	Small Whitethroat	<i>(Sylvia minula)</i>
	Asian Desert Warbler	<i>(Sylvia nana)</i>
E	Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>(Sylvia crassirostris)</i>
E	Red Sea Warbler	<i>(Sylvia leucomelaena)</i>
E	Ménétries' Warbler	<i>(Sylvia mystacea)</i>
	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>(Ficedula parva)</i>
	Bluethroat	<i>(Luscinia svecica)</i>
	Black Redstart	<i>(Phoenicurus ochruros)</i>
	European Stonechat	<i>(Saxicola rubicola)</i>
E	Hooded Wheatear	<i>(Oenanthe monacha)</i>
E	Hume's Wheatear	<i>(Oenanthe alboniger)</i>
E	Mourning (Arabian) Wheatear	<i>(Oenanthe lugens lugentoides)</i>
E	Red-tailed Wheatear	<i>(Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna chrysopygia)</i>
	Desert Wheatear	<i>(Oenanthe deserti)</i>
	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>(Oenanthe isabellina)</i>
	Blackstart	<i>(Cercomela melanura)</i>
	African Paradise-Flycatcher	<i>(Terpsiphone viridis)</i>
E	Arabian Babbler	<i>(Turdoides squamiceps)</i>
E	Palestine Sunbird	<i>(Cinnyris oseus)</i>
	Shining Sunbird	<i>(Cinnyris habessinicus)</i>
	Purple Sunbird	<i>(Cinnyris asiaticus)</i>
	White-breasted (Abyssinian) White-eye	<i>(Zosterops abyssinicus)</i>
	Rufous-tailed Shrike	<i>(Lanius isabellinus)</i>
	Brown Shrike	<i>(Lanius cristatus)</i>
	Southern Gray Shrike	<i>(Lanius meridionalis)</i>
	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>(Tchagra senegala)</i>
	House Crow	<i>(Corvus splendens)</i>
	Brown-necked Raven	<i>(Corvus ruficollis)</i>
	Fan-tailed Raven	<i>(Corvus rhipidurus)</i>
I	Bank Myna	<i>(Acridotheres ginginianus)</i>
I	Common Myna	<i>(Acridotheres tristis)</i>
	European Starling	<i>(Sturnus vulgaris)</i>
E	Tristram's Starling	<i>(Onychognathus tristramii)</i>
	House Sparrow	<i>(Passer domesticus)</i>
	Spanish Sparrow	<i>(Passer hispaniolensis)</i>
	Rueppell's Weaver	<i>(Ploceus galbula)</i>
	African Silverbill	<i>(Euodice cantans)</i>
	White-throated Munia (Indian Silverbill)	<i>(Euodice malabarica)</i>
E	Golden-winged Grosbeak	<i>(Rhynchostruthus socotranus)</i>
E	Yemen Serin	<i>(Serinus menachensis)</i>
E	House Bunting	<i>(Emberiza striolata)</i>
	Cinnamon-breasted Bunting	<i>(Emberiza tahapisi)</i>
	Corn Bunting	<i>(Emberiza calandra)</i>
	Red Fox	<i>(Vulpes vulpes)</i>
	Rock Hyrax	<i>(Procapra capensis)</i>