

Jordan - Birds & Archaeology

Naturetrek Tour Report

18 - 26 October 2008



Sinai Rosefinch



Syrian Serin



Nubian Ibex

Report & images compiled by Ian Andrews



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Day 1

Saturday 18th October

London – Amman

A straightforward journey from Heathrow to Amman, but it was a late flight and we didn't get to the hotel until after midnight.

Day 2

Sunday 19th October

Amman – Qasr Kharana – Qasr Amra – Wadi al Butm – Shaumari – Azraq Wetland Reserve

With much to fit in, we didn't want to leave late, so we were soon on our way east out of Amman in the direction of the 'desert castles' and Azraq. A leg-stretch at Qasr Kharana was followed by a good look at the frescoes in Qasr Amra and a walk along the tree-lined wadi. We saw our first migrants including Redstarts, Spotted Flycatchers and some warblers. As we drove across the desert towards Shaumari, a stop to look at a roadside Desert Wheatear also produced a few splendid Temminck's Horned Larks. The reserve itself was closed, so we diverted to the Azraq Wetland Reserve for our picnic. Highlights here were a Purple Heron, an eastern Redstart (with white in the wing), Bluethroat and numerous White-cheeked Bulbuls. Having made arrangements to get into Shaumari, we returned there. Crested Larks, Short-toed Larks and one Temminck's Horned Lark fed between the feet of the Oryx.

Day 3

Monday 20th October

Azraq Wetland Reserve – Madaba – Wadi al Mujib – Wadi al Hasa – Dana

A dawn visit to the reserve produced more species than yesterday, with a Little Crane, Squacco Heron, 6 Water Rails, many tame Bluethroats and a Lesser Grey Shrike. The highlight was a close Jackal from the hide – a difficult mammal to see in Jordan.

After breakfast we were soon on our way back west to Madaba (mosaic map) and Wadi al Mujib (picnic). A female Finsch's Wheatear gave good views after lunch. The view from the nearby panorama was rather hazy, but Blackstart, Mourning Wheatear and Desert Lark were new birds for many people, and all performed well. We arrived at Dana in time for a leisurely walk down to the village to meet our minibus at the hotel. Another Finsch's Wheatear, a stunning male this time, Tristram's Grackles and Rock Sparrows were seen.

Day 4

Tuesday 21st October

Dana village – Rummana campsite – Shaubak Castle – Little Petra – Bayda

As the dawn mist lifted, we managed good views of a flock of Syrian (or Tristram's) Serins around the village. In the Rummana campsite area we were treated to an excellent display of Sinai Rosefinches as they came to drink at the small purpose-built pool, along with Yellow-vented Bulbuls. Thinking we were lucky to find one Nubian Ibex, the discovery of two more then a further seven was outstanding for such a rare species in Jordan. A group of Griffon Vultures soared over the wadi and a Short-toed Eagle called plaintively as it displayed overhead. Next stop was Shaubak (Crusader) Castle; again Syrian Serins performed well (who said they were rare and localised?). Descending to Little Petra, we had our first hints as to what Petra would be like tomorrow; we explored the tombs, triclinia and water cisterns before wandering round to the excavations of Stone Age Bayda.

Day 5

Wednesday 22nd October

Petra

Our full day of exploration of Petra started with a guided tour by Ibrahim. He took us through the siq, past the Treasury, amphitheatre and Royal Tombs, before visiting the church mosaics. There was also time for a brief lecture on the geology. After lunch, most of the group made the 800-step ascent to the Monastery. Although we hung around for some time, falcons were notable by their absence. Not that anyone really noticed - the views and the facade were as fantastic as ever. By evening we had seen many Fan-tailed Ravens.

Day 6

Thursday 23rd October

Petra – Wadi Rum – Aqaba

After driving along the highland edge (1700 m), we descended into the Rum Desert. A walk beneath the sandstone cliffs produced White-crowned Black Wheatear. Then an off-road jeep trip took us to Lawrence's Spring, the Khazali Canyon and the Little Rock Bridge. The view from the latter was quite breathtaking. We then made our final descent to Aqaba.

Day 7

Friday 24th October

Aqaba Bird Observatory – Aqaba allotments and beach

Accompanied by Eyad, our circuit of the pools, woods and reedbeds produced a large variety of species. Local specialities included Arabian Babbler, Indian Silverbill, Little Green Bee-eater and (as we drove out) Namaqua Doves. Large gulls are always a challenge to identify, but we finally agreed on Yellow-legged, Caspian and Hugin's Gulls.

A single Masked Shrike and a juvenile Levant Sparrowhawk were seen, and three trumpeting Common Cranes circled over. After a siesta, a walk to the public beach, albeit rather busy as it was Friday, saw us watching a Smyrna Kingfisher and several White-eyed Gulls.

After our evening meal, an hour of rain was greeted by fireworks, car horns and crowds of people – not surprising as it was the first rain there for two years!

Day 8

Saturday 25th October

Aqaba allotments and beach – Wadi Araba acacias – Fidan desert and acacias – Dead Sea – Amman

A small group assembled for a repeat visit to the beach; more White-eyed Gulls. Our first stop at some acacias 40km north of Aqaba produced another Arabian Babbler. Then near Fidan, we walked a circuit across the flat desert to see Hoopoe Lark and Bar-tailed Desert Larks; also another Desert Wheatear. Lunch was consumed under some nearby acacias with Orange-tufted Sunbirds flitting noisily around us. We didn't stop again until we reached the Dead Sea – now at 428m below sea level which means it has been dropping by one metre per year. Nearly everyone had a float, commenting that it was one of the highlights of the trip.

Day 9

Sunday 26th October

Amman – London

Two hours late in leaving, but otherwise a smooth journey home...

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Species Lists

Birds (H=heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		1						
2	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>						13		
3	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		1						
4	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		2				1		
5	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	1	2				1		
6	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>						3	2	
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2	2				20	1	
8	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	1	1						
9	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>						1		
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	1							
11	Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	25	25				100		
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>						100		
13	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	4	4				6		
14	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	2	2				2		
15	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		1				100		
16	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>			10					
17	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			1					
18	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2	1				1		
19	Northern Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	3	1	1		4		
20	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>						1		
21	Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	10		2				
22	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>					1			
23	Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	4	3				5		
24	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>			1					
25	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	
26	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		2						
27	Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>				1	1			
28	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>		1	50					
29	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>						3		
30	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	h	6						
31	Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>		1						
32	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	5	5						
33	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	5	5				20		
34	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>						3		
35	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>						5		
36	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>						1		
37	Spur-winged Plover	<i>Hoplopterus spinosus</i>						50		
38	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>						20		
39	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>						h		
40	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>						20		
41	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1	2				4		
42	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>						1		
43	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>						3		
44	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>						1		
45	White-eyed Gull	<i>Larus leucophthalmus</i>						10	2	
46	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>						15	6	
47	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>						1		

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
48	Heuglin's Gull	<i>Larus heuglini</i>						1	1	
49	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>						1		
50	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>						12	6	
51	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	f	f	6	10	10	f	f	
52	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	50	200	6			10	10	
53	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>						4		
54	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	3	5	30	10	10	20	10	
55	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>						6	6	
56	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1	2					1	
57	White-breasted (Smyrna) Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>						1	1	
58	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>						2		
59	Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>						2	2	
60	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	20	2						
61	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		1						
62	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	6							
63	Bar-tailed Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes cincturus</i>							3	
64	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>		1	10	10	3			
65	Temminck's Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>	4							
66	Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>							2	
67	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>						1		
68	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	10	10	2		6		5	
69	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	10	10				10		
70	Rock Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>		20	50	20	6		5	
71	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	20	30				10	10	
72	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>						2		
73	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	1	20				10		
74	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	5	20			1			
75	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	5	2	1	5		20	10	
76	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i>		5	50	10	2	6	15	
77	White-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>	25	25						
78	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	1	10	1			10		
79	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	12	2	1		1	3	2	
80	Blackstart	<i>Cercomela melanura</i>		2		2			3	
81	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>						1		
82	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	5	2	1					
83	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	2					1		
84	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	2						1	
85	Finsch's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe finschii</i>		2						
86	Mourning Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe lugens</i>		4	10	6	2			
87	White-crowned Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>				1	5		2	
88	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			1	4				
89	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		4	2					
90	Graceful Warbler	<i>Prinia gracilis</i>	h	h					2	
91	Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>			6					
92	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	1	10					h	
93	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>						1	2	
94	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	1					1	2	
95	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	2							
96	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			2					
97	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	6	1		2	1	3	1	
98	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	1						1	

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
99	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	12	1	1	1	1	1		
100	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			2					
101	Orange-tufted (Palestine) Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia osea</i>						1	6	
102	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	1	1	2	1		2	3	
103	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>		1						
104	Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>						1		
105	Arabian Babbler	<i>Turdoides squamiceps</i>						3	2	
106	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>					100	100	50	
107	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>								1
108	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	2	2			25		6	
109	Fan-tailed Raven	<i>Corvus rhipidurus</i>				25			2	
110	Tristram's Grackle	<i>Onychognathus tristramii</i>		2	200	12	4			
111	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	50	50	x	x	x	x	x	
112	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		3				2	2	
113	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		5	1					
114	Indian Silverbill	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>						10		
115	Syrian Serin	<i>Serinus syriacus</i>			54					
116	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	h		6	1				
117	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		h	12					
118	Desert Finch	<i>Rhodospiza obsoleta</i>		6						
119	Sinai Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus synoicus</i>			20	10	2			

Other Taxa

	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>							1	
	Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>		1						
	Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>					1			
	Water Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	3	3						
	Small bat sp.				2		2	2		
	Jerboa sp.	<i>Jaculus sp.</i>	1							
	Nubian Ibex	<i>Capra ibex nubiana</i>			10					
	Toad sp.				5					
	Pitted beetle	<i>Corthylus punctatissimus</i>					1			
	Agama lizard	<i>Agama sp</i>				1				

Also in Shaumari enclosures:

Ostrich,
 Oryx,
 Syrian Wild Ass (Onager),
 Nubian Ibex,
 Fallow Deer
 and gazelle sp.