

Oman - Arabia's Finest Birding

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th February – 10th March 2026



Pallas's Gull



Isabelline Shrike



Sociable Lapwing



Plain Leaf Warbler

Tour report by Martin Pitt



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Summary

We embarked on the grand tour of Oman from Muscat to the south: however, global politics intervened, and we had to comply with travel restrictions after the US/Israeli action against Iran led to 'do not travel' notices and uncertainty across the whole region. Naturetrek's local partner stepped up and replanned the Dhofar component overnight, and as a consequence, we were able to complete the original duration of the tour. It must be emphasised that at no time did we see any evidence of the regional turmoil, and without connection to the outside world we would simply not have known.

That is not to say that for the tour the disruption did not have any consequences. With no access to the monsoon-washed lands in the far south, we lost diversity, and the opportunity for another sixty or so bird species, including the vast majority of the Arabian endemics. However, we still saw many of the species that call this area home, including limited-range species such as Hume's Wheatear and Plain Leaf Warbler.

We also connected with a range of species more typical of the Indian subcontinent, such as Crested Honey Buzzard, White-breasted Waterhen and Indian Pond Heron. Waders were an important group, and we saw thirty-three different species, including the iconic Crab-plover and the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing. Although this was primarily a birding tour, we looked out for anything else of interest, and made a special visit to the breeding beaches of Green Turtles.

The tour also took place during the holy month of Ramadan, which meant a little reorganisation from the standard. However, there were little restriction except for some closed publicly-owned sites (e.g. wastewater plants), and we soon adjusted to shopping for our picnic lunches and eating in whatever shade we could find.

It was an outstanding tour of the beautiful country of Oman. The Omanis are gracious and hospitable people, and their countryside is simply stunning, from the coast to sand seas and high mountains. It is a stark but beautiful land, and this tour enabled us to sample the best of it. We ate well, both in local restaurants and under the shade of trees.

Oman really does have it all, and this tour, enjoyed by a wonderful group of enthusiastic and stoical clients, really did the business. Overall, we saw 138 species of birds, three mammals, nine reptiles, eleven butterflies and eleven dragonflies.

Day 1

Thursday 26th February

London to Muscat

Ten clients and the leader gathered at Heathrow Terminal 4 and caught the 8.05pm Oman Air flight to Muscat, which left without incident.

Day 2

Friday 27th February

Muscat Estuary – Ras as Sawadi

We landed at about 7.00am local time, collected our bags, and met up with Hisham, our local fixer. We swiftly transferred to the Best Western Hotel in central Muscat, had a quick breakfast, and were soon all ready to head out.

Our first stop was almost back at the airport, at the canalised Muscat river mouth, a wet and muddy little estuary either side of the main dual carriageway. The beach held a good mix of gulls and terns, but we initially concentrated on the waders right in front of us, finding Red-wattled Lapwings, Terek Sandpiper and Little Stint in the mix. A Marsh Harrier frequently disturbed the birds, shuffling the pack and meaning that we had constantly to scan. The beach tern flock held both Greater and Lesser Crested Terns among numerous Sandwich and Slender-billed Gulls. Spread across the beach were lots of plovers, with both Greater and Tibetan Sand Plovers giving an identification comparison, with Common Ringed and Kentish mixed in. We headed back to the bridge, checking the herons as we went, adding Western Reef and Indian Pond Herons to our growing list. The upstream section needed a limbo under the highway bridge, and a few extra waders were found, including Black-tailed Godwits and Common Snipe, but best was an inquisitive Desert Wheatear which came close. Our final sighting was of a Black-winged Kite quietly perched on a nearby post. We headed off west in search of lunch.

It being Ramadan, the normal cafés and restaurants were all closed, but a local supermarket had a range of lunches at the deli counter, so we were soon ready to move on to Ras As Sawadi, a low sandy headland flanked by rocky offshore islands. We ate our picnic on the benches provided, while Pallid Swifts hawked overhead and our first Arabian Green Bee-eater entertained.

We then circumnavigated the headland. The beach added Bar-tailed Godwits to our growing wader list and a drift of raptors showed, initially a Black Kite heading north, and then a juvenile Greater Spotted Eagle heading south. One lucky observer photographed an Egyptian Vulture overhead, although little did we know how common an occurrence this would become. The mixed tern and gull flock took some working through, especially as the rising tide was making the birds restless. We added Caspian and Little Terns to take us to seven tern species for the day. Among the gulls, Sooty were plentiful, but it was the breeding-plumaged Pallas's Gulls that generated the most excitement. We picked up a late Purple Sunbird in the car park trees, and headed back to the hotel for food and an early night.

Day 3

Saturday 28th February

Wadi Mistal – Ghubrah bowl – Nakhal – Qurm estuary

After breakfast, we set off at 8.00am and drove for over an hour, west of Muscat to the area of Wadi Mistal around Nakhal. Initially, we stopped on the stony plains, finding typical wintering birds of this habitat, such as Red-tailed Wheatears, Arabian Babblers and *halimodendri* Lesser Whitethroat. We also found our first butterflies: the appropriately named Desert Orange-tip and then a Cape White. Then we headed out onto the desert plains. We stopped when we saw interesting birds or habitat, and added Hume's Wheatear, Desert Lark and Arabian Great Grey Shrikes in that manner as we drove closer to the Hadjar mountains.

We headed further south, climbing into the mountains past sheer cliffs on either side. We had a short stop where berry-laden trees were attracting our first White-spectacled Bulbuls, and then further on arriving at the Al Ghubrah 'bowl', a flat confluence of many wadis, surrounded by high peaks. Birds were at a premium, and both the Egyptian Vulture and the female Northern Wheatear would be migrants simply passing through.

We headed down the mountain and back to Nakhal, picking up our picnic lunch on the way to Ain Al Thawarah, a naturally warm spring that supplies fresh water at a comfortable 35°C. We ate our picnic in the shade of the spring-side trees, entertained by the local Indian Rollers and Blue Rock Thrushes. The water had also attracted a few herons, including an Indian Pond Heron and a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron. A mix of dragonflies was also present, including three species of dropwing.



Blue Rock Thrush



Indian Roller



Hume's Wheatear



Red-tailed Wheatear

We then headed the short distance to Nakhal Fort, and took time to visit this seventeenth-century edifice, with commanding views over the surrounding countryside. Afterwards, we headed back to Muscat and walked through a deserted Qurm Park with its lawns and ornamental lakes, finding more new species, including Grey Francolins scurrying around the lawns, Whimbrels and Common Sandpipers. Little Herons were on the lakes, with more Indian Pond Herons, Shoveler, and Little Grebes. A flyover dark-morph Crested Honey Buzzard was more of a surprise. We felt it was time to move on, in part because the park was preparing itself for a post-dusk influx of people who break their Ramadan fast there. We drove the short distance to the beach causeway which overlooks the mangroves, and found more species to finish the day, highlights being a Purple Heron and a small party of Pacific Golden Plovers.

It was time to head back to the hotel, but we arrived to the news of US/Israeli strikes in Iran, and retaliatory strikes in the Gulf region. We were advised by our government to be vigilant.

Day 4

Sunday 1st March

Al Ansab – Bandar Al Rawdah pelagic – Yiti wadis

We were breakfasted and assembled to leave at 8.00am, for the journey to Al Ansab water treatment works. We already knew that due to Ramadan we wouldn't be allowed in, but by scanning through the fence we could view a number of new species. The most obvious was Greater Flamingo, and despite our success with waders already, we managed to add Avocet, Ruff, Little Ringed Plover and Temminck's Stint to our long list. There were numbers of ducks present, and a single drake Pintail hid in plain sight among the plentiful Shovelers. Our vantage point was on the edge of a football pitch, and the grass attracted birds to feed: a flock of Ruffs mixed with a Common Snipe on the lawn under the trees, while an eastern Black Redstart kept close to the trees themselves. The football pitch itself had a flock of ten Little Stints feeding in the goal mouth; however, they were constantly being disturbed by the man carefully painting the line markings. A couple of Citrine Wagtails joined them, and gave us great views.

It was getting hot, and at about 10.00am we left for the thirty-minute transfer to Bandar al Rawdah, for our three-hour boat trip. We headed out onto the calm seas, and soon found our first Red-necked Phalaropes. Little did we know that this species would prove to be present in the hundreds today. Parties from as few as ten to up to eighty birds were almost always in view, and their calls could be heard every time we cut the engines. Our first cetacean sighting was of a pod of Long-beaked Common Dolphins, which soon switched to hunting mode, scattering fish in front of them. We then headed north, pausing for a mating pair of Loggerhead Turtles, and then sailed onwards to the isolated island to the north of our home port. On the way, we slowed for a large shark, but it didn't show well enough to determine if it could have been the Whale Shark seen earlier in the week. The island was home to an Osprey, an expected resident here. However, a circling Egyptian Vulture seemed more incongruous: a passing migrant, perhaps? We headed back to Bandar al Rawdah, stopping for fishing Greater Crested Terns, more Ospreys and the cultural highlight of the Sultan's Palace.

After landing back ashore, we picked up lunch and headed east to the area just south of Yiti, to visit some desert canyons. We passed several feral Donkeys on the road, before stopping at a side wadi, where we ate our lunch while a pair of Hume's Wheatear held territory above us. Egyptian Vultures and Brown-necked Ravens circled above us, but the area was generally quiet. Moving on, we came across a party of five Arabian Babblers, another eastern Black Redstart and some Desert Larks, but soon enough it was time to head back to the hotel and prepare for our departure southbound.

With the worsening international news, it was clear that our itinerary was going to have to change: Foreign Office advice had been issued to stay a minimum of 100km away from Salalah. A review of the options led to a plan which excluded Dhofar, and circled back to Muscat via the interior of Oman.

Day 5

Monday 2nd March

Qurayat Estuary – Sur – Khawr Jirama – Ras Al Kaba

We set off at 8.00am in our three Land Cruisers for the short drive to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, and perhaps due to the early hour, or Ramadan, we almost had this spectacular building to ourselves. Built by order of Sultan Qaboos and finished in 2005, it is one of the largest mosques in the Middle East, and was built with the

best quality materials in a mixture of styles, drawing on the best of architecture from across the Arab world. It also holds the world's largest chandelier, and the world's largest carpet!

And then we were off properly, heading over the mountains and driving east, with Egyptian Vultures seen regularly in groups of up to ten birds. Our first proper stop was at Qurayat estuary. The tide was low, but we added our first Spoonbills and, amazingly, our first Grey Plover, although it was the Pallas's Gulls that were the standout among a plethora of gulls. A multitude of Rounded Ghost Crabs, some as big as plovers, were also patrolling the beach.

We headed out cross-country on *sabkha* tracks, hugging the beach. We found three Egyptian Vultures together, an educational party with containing second-, third- and fourth-year birds, showing the plumage progression for brown to white. The salt pans had been mainly drained for the harvest, but the remaining full pool was home to five summer-plumaged Black-necked Grebes.

We drove on to Sur, where we picked up lunch and headed to the *dhow* shipyard, where we could eat our picnic and visit the traditional craft, still built to the same design used by the Omanis to build their trading empire.

The next stop was the famous Khawr Jirama, a massive tidal inlet on the north-eastern tip of Oman. The tide was low but slowly rising, which meant that the birds were distant; however, we did quickly pick up three Crab-plovers, our major target for the day. Also present were plenty of Terek Sandpipers, and both sand plovers. We had just half an hour to go to our hotel at Ras Al Kaba, where we checked in for the night and had dinner.

We opted to go out for some turtle watching after dinner. Having waited in the visitor centre for news of turtles' arrival, we headed out onto beach with our local guide. We saw two female Green Turtles, both deciding to abort their excavations, having hit rock, and returning to the sea. We also witnessed the release of three hatchlings, which took their first steps into the moonlit sea, itself sparkling with bioluminescence. The challenge faced by these hatchlings was made more stark as we spied a Red Fox hunting the foreshore, one of the principal local predators of the young turtles.

Day 6

Tuesday 3rd March

Ras Al Kaba area

A few hardy souls joined a pre-breakfast check on last night's exciting discovery of a Sociable Lapwing close to the hotel. It was still present, so before we left the whole group was assembled for good views of this Critically Endangered, and far from guaranteed, Omani winterer. The little patch of desert immediately south of the hotel came under scrutiny, and we soon added two male Black-crowned Sparrow-larks, two Tawny Pipits, Isabelline Wheatear and a male Namaqua Dove. Somewhat belatedly, we loaded the Land Cruisers and headed south, our first stop being Ras al Ru'ways Khawr where we diligently searched through the waders; however, despite there being good numbers, especially of Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers, nothing new was found. We then tried a sequence of wadis, and despite all looking promising, we found them strangely devoid of birds. We did find a number of fringe-fingered lizards (of two species) and a party of African Wild Asses / Feral Donkeys. Lunch was a picnic: we had called in to our now favourite hypermarket, Lulus.

As the desert was so quiet, we headed back to the hotel area, and continued a few kilometres to Ras Al Kaba itself, a rocky outcrop sticking out into the Arabian Sea. From the cliff tops, we could see Green Turtles diving in the surf below. More excitement came with the discovery of three Red-billed Tropicbirds circling over the beach to the north. We relocated to get closer views, but failed as the birds had moved off.

We returned to the hotel and went back to searching the land to the south. The Sociable Lapwing was still present, and we had more close views of Desert Wheatear, Tawny Pipit and a Brown-necked Raven. Upon reaching the beach, we had a surprise when a Marsh Sandpiper flew in and briefly paused its journey on the edge of the surf. With the sun starting to dip, we headed back to the hotel for our extension night.

Day 7

Wednesday 4th March

Ras Al Kaba – Bar Al Hikman – Al Ghaftain

We started as the previous day with a short walk to the area of rough ground by the hotel. There was no sign of the (un)Sociable Lapwing; however, Black-crowned Sparrow-larks, Tawny Pipit and both wheatear species were still present. With nothing new, we were soon on our way south. The first stop was for some roadside Greater Flamingoes, and an Osprey using the streetlights as a perch.



Greater Crested Tern



Red-necked Phalaropes



Lappet-faced Vulture



Booted Eagle

We stopped at the *dhon*-filled harbour at Al Ashkarah, and found some Common Terns in with the mix of more familiar species such as Greater Crested Terns, Sooty Gulls and the usual melée of Heuglin's and Steppe Gulls. A little further on, Hisham spotted a Greater Hoopoe-Lark on the roadside, and we piled out to catch this most-wanted species. As usual, one good bird yields other sightings, and we soon added Tawny Pipit, Isabelline Wheatear and our first *pallidirostris* Great Grey Shrike from the unprepossessing little patch of desert.

We continued south, trying the north end of Bar Al Hikman, but with the high tides being driven by the full moon, access was tricky, so we continued to Filim, and in the shelter of a fishing shack, had our picnic lunch. Only when the tide started to fall did the waders start to appear, but although there was a good range of species, and plenty of them (especially Bar-tailed Godwits), with nothing new and a way to travel, we headed off to cross the Empty Quarter.

The journey was relatively uneventful, but we arrived before dusk at Al Ghaftain, where we checked into our rooms. Despite the promising-looking trees, could find nothing of interest during a quick tour of the site. We sat in the courtyard for a delicious Indian meal, but were early to bed ahead of our early start the following morning.

Day 8

Thursday 5th March

Muntassar oasis – Haima – Al Khaluf

We set off in the pitch dark, heading south at 5.00am, the target being Al Muntasar oasis, fifteen kilometres off the main Salalah road. With the “do not travel” notice in place for most of Dhofar, this was to be the furthest south we would reach on this tour. The sun started to show just after we had arrived, showing clearly the sulphurous spring and shallow pools lying downslope.



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse



Asian Desert Warbler



Dawn at Al Muntasar oasis



Wahiba Sands

The strong growth of rushes meant that every piece had to be carefully searched. Oddly, the first species found was the rarest: a couple of White-breasted Waterhens dashed from cover to cover, a vagrant from India. It was good to confirm that there *were* actually two present, as suspected by last month's Naturetrek tour. A Coot and a handful of Mallards made it feel more like home, but the couple of Water Pipits were of the Caucasian form *contellii*.

The rushes held plenty of dragonflies: Black Pennant was probably the most plentiful, but Black Percher, Ferruginous Glider and Desert Bluetail were all present too.

The drier desert edge was not ignored. and we found a couple of Asian Desert Warblers following a Desert Wheatear, a frequent example of commensalism. A Menetries's Warbler was also found in the trees, but it proved difficult to secure clear sightings.

As if by magic, at two hours after sun up, the first of the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse started to fly in to the surrounding desert. All told, nearly fifty arrived for the pre-drinks ritual; we left them and started our long journey north. We bypassed Duqm, and shortly afterwards emergency stopped for soaring raptors: two were moving south, and one north. The northbound bird finally flew over: it was a Steppe Eagle. The scopes were hurriedly put up, and photos were used to confirm the others as a Lappet-faced Vulture and a second-year Eastern Imperial Eagle.

We stopped in a wadi with plenty of trees for our picnic, finding a few familiar species, and then headed north, before cutting to the coast for our night at the White Sugar Sands resort. The hotel was set in the silvery sand dunes at the southern end of Bar al Hikman, and after checking in we walked along the coastal dunes. Among the sparse vegetation were multiple animal tracks, including those of Zarudnyi's Worm Lizards. More Greater Hoopoe-Larks and Asian Desert Warblers were found, while the now normal mix of Caspian Terns, Sooty and Pallas's Gulls was on the coast. The evening ended with sight of the Blood Moon rising over the Arabian Sea.

Day 9

Friday 6th March

Al Khaluf – Filim – Wahiba Sands

We left the hotel at 8.30am and headed north, driving along the beach to Al Khaluf. Waders, gulls and terns were plentiful, although we were mostly looking into the morning sun. Most notable were the enormous numbers of Sanderlings, with easily a couple of thousand birds present. We stopped briefly at Al Khaluf itself, and then at some sea caves further north, before spending more time in the mangroves at Filim. As always, this habitat is special, fragile and difficult to view; however, we persevered, as it is home to a range of specialist species, the most important of which is the endangered *kalbaensis* subspecies of Collared Kingfisher. Unfortunately, we only heard the birds on this visit, and the same was true of the weird mangrove-breeding form of Sykes's Warbler, found only here and on the Batinah coast further north, and just inside the UAE at Khor Kalba. There were lots of Clamorous Reed Warblers singing, Common Kingfishers, and a mix of herons, including Little and Indian Pond. Overhead, we found our first male Marsh Harrier, and Namaqua Doves were plentiful in the mangroves. As expected, at Bar el Hikman there were clouds of waders on the mudflats. Non-avian interest included Barred Mudskippers and Arabian Semaphore Geckos.

We left to head north, making the mistake of hitting town just as the shops shut for Friday prayers, but managed to secure our picnic. A little further north we headed inland, into the rolling dunes of Wahiba sands. Our progress slowed markedly on the sandy tracks in this unique landscape. It is mainly empty; however, every so often we saw camels and the signs of nomad encampments. We stopped for lunch in the shade of an animal shelter, close to one of the hundred mosques that Sultan Qaboos personally funded in 2007: it was an incongruously large and elaborate structure in such a remote setting. We still had a long way to drive on sand tracks, over steep dunes and in a dramatic environment.

After three hours of driving, we arrived at the Arabian Nights resort, dropped our bags, and then headed up the nearest dune to watch the sunset. It was a wonderful end to a pioneering day.

Day 10

Saturday 7th March

Wahiba sands – Birkat Al Mouz – Wadi Muyadin – Al Hamra

We were surprised by the foggy start to the day, but as soon as the sun climbed over the dunes, it burned off very quickly. We drove north for approximately 25km, stopping to photograph the exceptional landscape and pausing to follow tracks that showed the hunt of a Fennec Fox imprinted from the previous night. Suddenly, the sand sea ended, and we were back to gravel plains and flat-topped acacias. We paused in the first town to pump up the Land Cruisers tyres, which had been underinflated to grip the sand, and we were on our way, tracking the southern edge of the Hadjar mountains as we headed towards Nizwa, the former capital of Oman.

A stop for coffee in a wadi seemed to yield nothing, until a flyover Lappet-faced Vulture drifted over. In the acacias, all seemed quiet until a bit of movement and a soft contact call revealed a hyperactive Plain Leaf Warbler, a much-wanted wintering species which favours only the Hadjar range, and breeds in inaccessible areas of Iran and Afghanistan.

We stopped to pick up lunch, having got back to the familiarity of Lulus, and in this particular case a hypermarket with a view and Hume's Wheatear in the car park. Next, we drove on to Adnan Park, but except for an Indian Roller and our first Small Cupid Butterfly there was little of interest. We ate our picnics in the shade of the trees.

We stopped at the historic village of Birkat Al Mouz and walked through the extensive palmeries where, famously, they grow bananas in the shade of the palms. They were also home to an amazing density of Delicate Prinias and Indian Rollers. Swallowtails were more interesting, with both Lime and Common Swallowtails being remarkably plentiful. Millet Skippers were also present.

Moving closer to Nizwa, we tried Wadi al Mayudin, a known birding spot, and walked the wadi bottom to the source of the spring. More Plain Leaf Warblers were present here, as were singles of Red-tailed Wheatear and eastern Black Redstart. The flowering trees were full of One-pip Policeman butterflies, and the pools were full of fish. We found plenty of evidence of Dhofar Toads: strings of eggs, tadpoles, two large adults and a small hopper. It showed that a little water was a big draw to wildlife in this arid environment.

With time pressing, we headed to our night stop at The View, a hotel perched at 1450m and overlooking Al Hamra, which was to be our home for a couple of nights. The location lived up to its names, with a spectacular outlook over the south-facing slopes of the Hadjar Mountains.

Day 11

Sunday 8th March

Jebel Shams area

We set off at 8.30am for a short drive into Wadi al Hajir. The road cut through a narrow canyon and soon we stopped, arriving only just in time. At the top of the sheer cliffs, seven Lappet-faced Vultures left their roost and

spiralled upwards on the early morning thermal. They were not the only raptors present, as a Long-legged Buzzard passed by and then a pair of Bonelli's Eagles drifted along the canyon walls: a brilliant start to the day. We walked further along the wadi. One-pip Policemen and Plain Tigers were the active butterflies, while another Plain Leaf Warbler and more Hume's Wheatears added to the mix.



Jebel Shams

After an hour, we moved on for the steady climb up to the top viewpoint for Jebel Shams, although at 2030m, there was a further 1000m of mountain above us! The view point overlooks the local 'Grand Canyon'. Here, Egyptian Vultures flew by at eye level and below us, while more Hume's and Desert Wheatears were also present. We had our picnic surrounded by an over-inquisitive herd of goats. Afterwards we dropped down the mountain to Wadi al Muslah. Here, a little water attracted a couple of Green Sandpipers, and other birds were coming to drink: first a party of Indian Silverbills, and then at last a pair of Striolated Buntings, a species that had eluded us until now.

With the sun still high, we called it a day and headed back to the view for a bit of relaxation, before our return to Muscat the following day.

Day 12

Monday 9th March

Nizwa – Jabreen Fort – Wadi Fanja – Muscat

We had a leisurely start to the day, watching the sun rise along the mountain ridge and breakfasting at 8.00am. A few intrepid souls had already been watching from the comfort of their verandas or the outlooks over the valley, and of most interest were singing Long-billed Pipits, a species typical of this habitat that had been strangely missing until now. We loaded up the Land Cruisers and started down the hill, the third vehicle catching sight of two Arabian Partridges which disappeared before the others could catch up with them. We continued to Jabeer Fort, and with the backdrop of the ancient building we concentrated on the surrounding palmeries. A showy Isabelline Shrike was a good find, as they had been scarce on this trip, and we picked up our second pipit species of the day with a couple of Tawny Pipits, surprisingly well-camouflaged around the palms. We tried hard, but only added butterflies, with numerous Plain Tigers, African Emigrants, Dark Grass Blues and Desert Orange-tips, plus a couple of Hadramaut Sand Lizards

We left to head closer to Muscat, picking up our picnic supplies on the way, before leaving the roads and tacking to the bottom of Wadi Fanja. This wet wadi is drivable with care, and forms a migration route through the Hadjar mountains. Today, it seemed to be full of raptors. In all, we found five Greater Spotted Eagles, including two spotty young birds, two Steppe Eagles, and a pale-morph Booted Eagle. On a pylon, a Long-legged Buzzard was harassed by some Brown-necked Ravens.

The water was full of fish, although only a single Grey Heron was seen, but dragonflies included Broad Scarlets and three dropwing species. Waders included Green Sandpipers, and also our first Red-wattled Lapwings since the first days of our tour. The third vehicle found a couple of Sand Partridges to wrap up the day. We rejoined the main road just west of Muscat, and it took only a few minutes to head back to the Best Western Hotel, where we had our last meal together. We finally had confirmation of our return flight check in, so we were able to relax.

Day 13

Tuesday 10th March

Flight home

We left the hotel at 10.30am for the short journey to the airport. We said a proper goodbye to Hisham, our faithful guide. After concerning news of congestion and chaos wrought by evacuation from the war zone, we found Muscat International Airport to be a bastion of organisation and calm: a bit like Oman as a whole.

The flight left a few minutes late, but the routing via Riyadh, Suez and Greece added almost one hour to our flight time. Many of our fellow passengers had stories of interrupted holidays and challenging journeys, which made us thankful that our time in Oman had been so calm and relaxing. Back at Heathrow, we collected our luggage and said our goodbyes, ready for our onward journeys home.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=Introduced		February-March 2026										
Common name	Scientific name	27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	✓								
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>						✓	✓	✓			
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓								
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓								
Grey Francolin	<i>Ortygornis pondicerianus</i>		✓								H	
Sand Partridge	<i>Ammoperdix heyi</i>										✓	
Arabian Partridge	<i>Alectoris melanocephala</i>										✓	
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles exustus</i>							✓				
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>					✓			✓			
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓								
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>							✓				
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>							✓				
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓								
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>				✓							
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓			✓		✓		✓			
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓								
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓		✓		✓			
Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>		✓		✓							
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓						
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			✓								✓
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓						✓
Sociable Lapwing	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>				✓	✓						

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026											
			27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
	Tibetan Sand Plover	<i>Anarhynchus atrifrons</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Anarhynchus leschenaultii</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓				
	Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓			
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓			✓			✓					
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓		✓			✓						
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓		✓									
	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>			✓									
	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	✓			✓								
	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		
	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓										✓	✓
	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>						✓						
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓			
	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		✓										
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓			
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓			✓			✓		✓			
	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	✓		✓			✓						
	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓						
	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>			✓									
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓			✓	✓				✓			
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓					✓	✓		✓			
	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓							
	Crab-plover	<i>Dromas ardeola</i>				✓								
	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	✓								✓			
	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	✓								✓			
	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	✓			✓					✓			
	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓			✓			✓	✓				
	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓			✓								
	Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>	✓								✓			

Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026										
		27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓			✓		✓			
Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓			
Sooty Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus hemprichii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>			✓					✓			
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>					✓						
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓										
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				✓							
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓									
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓							✓			
Western Reef Heron	<i>Egretta gularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Little Heron	<i>Butorides atricapilla</i>		✓	✓			✓		✓			
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	✓	✓	✓					✓			
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		✓	✓								
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓			
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓										
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>		✓									
Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>							✓		✓	✓	
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga clanga</i>	✓										✓
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>											✓
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>							✓				✓
Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>							✓				
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>										✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓										
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓			✓			✓	✓			

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026										
			27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>										✓	✓
	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓									
	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>								H			
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>								✓			
	Arabian Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops cyanophrys</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓
	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓					
	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		✓					✓	✓		✓	
	Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>	✓		✓	✓							✓
	House Crow - I	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓							
	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>							✓	✓	✓		
	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>		✓	✓								✓
	Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>						✓	✓				
	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Red-vented Bulbul - I	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	✓	✓									
	White-eared Bulbul - I	<i>Pycnonotus leucotis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
	White-spectacled Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i>		✓				✓			✓	✓	✓
	Pale Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne obsoleta</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>						✓					
	Plain Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus neglectus</i>										✓	✓
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>											✓
	Clamorous Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>								H			
	Sykes's Warbler	<i>Iduna rama</i>								H			
	Delicate Prinia	<i>Prinia lepida</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓
	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		✓					✓	✓		✓	✓
	Asian Desert Warbler	<i>Curruca nana</i>								✓	✓		
	Menetries's Warbler	<i>Curruca mystacea</i>								✓			
	Arabian Babbler	<i>Argya squamiceps</i>		✓	✓							✓	
	Common Myna - I	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓

I=Introduced		February-March 2026										
Common name	Scientific name	27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>										✓	✓
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		✓									
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓									
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>					✓	✓	✓				
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-tailed Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe chrysopygia</i>		✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Hume's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe albonigra</i>		✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>			✓								
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>					✓	✓	✓				✓
Long-billed Pipit	<i>Anthus similis</i>											✓
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>							✓				
Striolated Bunting	<i>Emberiza striolata</i>										✓	✓

Mammals

I=introduced		February-March 2026										
Common name	Scientific name	27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Long-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus capensis</i>			✓								
Arabian Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes arabica</i>				✓							
African Wild Ass / Feral Donkey - I	<i>Equus africanus asinus</i>			✓		✓			✓			

Amphibians & reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026										
		27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Dhofar Toad	<i>Firouzophrynus dhufarensis</i>										✓	
Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>				✓	✓						
Loggerhead Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>			✓								
Red Sea House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus robustus</i>								✓	✓		
Small Semaphore Gecko	<i>Pristurus minimus</i>									✓		
Arabian Semaphore Gecko	<i>Pristurus guweirrensis</i>								✓			
Snake-tailed Fringe-fingered Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus apheodurus</i>					✓						
Bosc's Fringe-fingered Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus boskianus</i>					✓						
Hadramaut Sand Lizard	<i>Mesalina adramitana</i>											✓

Fishes

Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026										
		27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
a shark	<i>Elasmobranchii</i> sp.			✓								
Barred Mudskipper	<i>Periophthalmus argentineatus</i>								✓			

Butterflies & moths

Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026										
		27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Lime Swallowtail	<i>Papilio demoleus</i>		✓							✓		
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>									✓		
African Migrant	<i>Catopsilia florella</i>											✓
Pioneer White	<i>Belenois aurota</i>		✓							✓		✓
Blue-spotted Arab	<i>Colotis phisadia</i>										✓	
Desert Orange-tip	<i>Colotis evagore</i>		✓			✓				✓		✓
Small Cupid	<i>Chilades parrhasius</i>									✓		
Dark Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria kasandra</i>		✓									✓
Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>		✓		✓	✓					✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026												
		27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
One-pip Policeman	<i>Coeliades anchises</i>											✓	✓	✓
Millet Skipper	<i>Pelopidas thrax</i>											✓		
Crimson Speckled	<i>Utetheisa pulchella</i>													✓

Damselflies & dragonflies

Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026												
		27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
Desert Bluetail	<i>Ischnura evansi</i>							✓						
Black Percher	<i>Diplacodes lefebvrii</i>							✓						
Slender Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum sabina</i>		✓											
Epaulet Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>		✓											
Small Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum taeniolatum</i>		✓											
Broad Scarlet	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>		✓					✓						✓
Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>		✓											✓
Red-veined Dropwing	<i>Trithemis arteriosa</i>		✓								✓			✓
Orange-winged Dropwing	<i>Trithemis kirbyi</i>		✓											✓
Black Pennant	<i>Selysiothemis nigra</i>							✓						
Ferruginous Glider	<i>Tramea limbata</i>							✓						

Other invertebrates

Common name	Scientific name	February-March 2026												
		27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
Pitted Beetle	<i>Adesmia cancellata</i>											✓	✓	✓
a wasp spider	<i>Argiope sector</i>									✓				
Round Ghost Crab	<i>Ocypode rotundata</i>				✓									
Western Calling Fiddler Crab	<i>Gelasimus hesperiae</i>				✓					✓				