

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

JORDAN

14 - 29th April 2012

TOUR REPORT

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Jordan has it all; good birding, ancient antiquities, plenty of sunshine and good accommodation. In short it is a splendid destination. The desert scenery was breathtaking and no two areas were the same; in some areas there were lots of sand dunes, in others there were vast black basalt plains, in other areas myriads of tiny black stones and always dramatic cliffs and gorges. Jordan is steeped in history, we literally travelled in the footsteps of Lawrence of Arabia, even visiting the magnificent castle built of basalt at Azraq, where Lawrence of Arabia and the Arab Army rested during the winter of 1917-1918, prior to their final assault on Damascus. We visited the Roman Ruins of Jerash at ancient Gilead. We visited Mount Nebo, a 1,000 metre high mountain, from which Moses looked onto the Promised Land, shortly before his death. Last but not least we visited the magnificent ruins at Petra, hidden in the Sharrah Mountains, part of the biblical mountains of Moab. The tour had been specifically timed to coincide with the peak of the spring migration, when literally thousands of Northern Palearctic birds were making their way through Jordan, to breeding grounds further to the north in Europe and Western Asia. The spectacle of visible migration is simply breathtaking, there were times on the tour when it appeared to us that there were literally migrant birds in every bush! The raptor migration on the morning we visited Aqaba Bird Observatory was a sight to behold, over 1,000 raptors passed overhead in a single morning. Any tour where you can see eight species of stunning wheatears and four species of beautiful shrikes, has to have been, a very enjoyable tour.

Following a long and tiring overnight flight from Australia, we arrived in Abu Dhabi, where we took the short flight to Amman, the capital city of Jordan. On our arrival at the airport we were greeted by the usual Feral Pigeons, Laughing Doves and House Sparrows. We then drove to farmland, not far from Madaba, where a quick roadside stop soon produced good looks at Crested Lark and a flock of a dozen or so Ortolan Buntings. We then drove to the very impressive Mujib Biosphere Reserve, where we walked through a very scenic gorge, which had a small stream running through it. Here we saw our first Eurasian Kestrel, a Pallid Swift, large numbers of Rock Martins and Tristram's Starlings and a few Fan-tailed Ravens. We also found our first of many Blackcaps and Lesser Whitethroats. Deep into the gorge we found a single Desert Lark and a single Striolated Bunting. As we were leaving the reserve, we watched a pair of gorgeous Long-legged Buzzards soaring overhead and a small flock of Red-rumped Swallows.

Our final stop for the afternoon was at the Zara Hot Springs along the shore of the Dead Sea. The hot springs have been famous for centuries Herod the Great came here in 4BC to find treatment for, according to Josephus, 'an unbearable itching all over his body' quite possibly psoriasis. Little remains to be seen at the archaeological site, discovered in 1807 other than the remnants of Roman bathhouses. There was a large number of both resident and migrant birds in the area. A Common

Buzzard soared skywards, a few Eurasian Collared Doves were in attendance, along with flocks of Little Swifts, a Eurasian Hoopoe, a few Barn Swallows and House Martins, good numbers of Yellow-vented Bulbuls, Graceful Prinias, a pair of Palestinian Sunbirds, a beautiful Southern Grey Shrike and best of all, a Bluethroat, a Blackstart and a flock of three Indian Silverbills. As we were heading for our hotel, a single Eurasian Jay, was observed flying along the roadside. .

We started the following day with a little early morning birding around our hotel, in the centre of Amman. Somewhat surprisingly; we added three new species of birds; a splendid Woodchat Shrike, a solitary Hooded Crow and a fine-looking Eurasian Linnet. On the road again and our first short stop was at the Wadi Shuaub, where we added a White-breasted Kingfisher and a Common Blackbird. We then spent some time birding at the Shuna Dam, which produced a large number of new birds. We watched a single Little Grebe swimming in the water and along the edge of the dam we observed a solitary Cattle Egret, several Little Egrets, no less than seven Purple Herons, a few Spur-winged Lapwings, several Common Sandpipers, three Little Stints, a couple of Common Greenshanks, several Green Sandpipers, a single Common Tern, several White Wagtails and we very much enjoyed observing a pair of Alpine Swifts, swooping down and drinking from the lake. We then paid a visit to the much larger Kafrayan Dam, where we found three Grey Herons, a couple of Black-crowned Night-Herons, a single White-winged Black Tern, a pair of delightful Pied Kingfishers and a couple of Western Jackdaws, this is a very scarce bird in Jordan.

We then drove to the Dead Sea for lunch. While driving through the small village of Arawda, we came to a screeching halt in order to have a good look at a pair of Little Green Bee-eaters. Following lunch those that wanted to, went for a float on the Dead Sea. In the afternoon our final birding destination, was the fresh water springs at Suwayma, which unfortunately are now very degraded and overgrazed. Even so, we continued to find new birds to look at, which included a pair of beautiful Namaqua Doves, a splendid Eurasian Wryneck and a stunning Red-throated Pipit, in full breeding plumage, proudly showing off its brick-red throat. We also enjoyed watching a female Black-eared Wheatear, we also watched an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and enjoyed listening to its fine song and we had good close looks at a solitary Chiffchaff.

The following day we drove north of Amman to Dibbin Forest, where a walk around the perimeter of the forest provided good looks at three new birds; Eurasian Sparrowhawk, an isolated population of Blue Tits and a few Great Tits. We also birded a rocky escarpment above Dibbin Forest, where we added the very beautiful Finsch's Wheatear, three stunning Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrushes, a scarce passage migrant through Jordan and the exquisite Masked Shrike. We then drove to the Roman Ruins of Jaresh, at ancient Gilead, where we had lunch. Following lunch we enjoyed a very pleasant stroll around the ruins, which is one of the few intact Roman Towns, in existence today. We even found a new bird for the tour, a pair of Blue Rock-Thrushes. Our final birding area was in agricultural land close to the King Talal Dam, where we had distant flight views of a pair of European Bee-eaters.

The next day we drove out into the sprawling Eastern Desert of north-eastern Jordan. We drove to Azraq, where we had lunch, first allowing time to do some birding in the very bleak and seriously overgrazed desert. We were rewarded with great looks at the remarkable Temminck's Horned Lark, Sand Martin and Northern Wheatear. After lunch, we found two new birds for the tour in the grounds of our hotel. We watched a few White-eared Bulbuls and then we enjoyed watching a female Collared Flycatcher, an uncommon bird, anywhere in the world. In the afternoon we walked for many kilometres across the Eastern Desert and we were rewarded with one new bird when we enjoyed good looks at a couple of very close Bar-tailed Desert Larks.

An early start the following morning, found us searching the grounds of our hotel, for any new migrants that may have arrived overnight. We were duly rewarded with prolonged views of a stunning male Semi-collared Flycatcher, yet another very uncommon bird. Following breakfast we birded along the edge of the Shaumari Wildlife Reserve, which unfortunately was closed for renovations! Even so, there was as many migrants along the edge of the reserve as there was in it! It was simply crawling with restless migrants. We enjoyed scope views of a Eurasian Turtle-Dove, brief flight views of a Long-eared Owl, great looks at a pair of Long-billed Pipits, a flock of 10 or so delightful Western Yellow Wagtails, a female Common Redstart, a couple of female Common Whitethroats and a solitary Spotted Flycatcher. We then enjoyed a tremendous afternoon of birding at the wonderful Azraq Wetland Reserve, a true oasis in the desert, which is sponsored by the United Nations. New birds literally came thick and fast, we saw several Squacco Herons, a single Glossy Ibis, half a dozen or so Eurasian Moorhens, a few Eurasian Coots, a solitary Black-winged Stilt, a lonely Black-tailed Godwit, a single Common Snipe in flight, a flock of 14 Wood Sandpipers, a couple of Common Kingfishers, a female Whinchat, enjoyed great looks at a Great Reed-Warbler and best of all watched a Marsh Warbler on the edge of a large reed-bed.

The following day was very much a travel day, as we followed in the footsteps of many a merchant, pilgrim, or indeed, an army, as we drove down the Kings Highway. We made a stop at Mount Nebo, a 1,000 metre high mountain, from which Moses looked down onto the Promised Land, shortly before his death. A quick walk along a hillside a little further on, produced quick looks at a European Greenfinch. We also enjoyed a look around the huge Karak Castle, which was a place of legend in the battle between the Crusaders and the Islamic armies of Saladin. As we neared our campsite in the desert at Wadi Araba, we enjoyed good looks at a stunning White-capped Black Wheatear and a small flock of range-restricted Arabian Babblers.

While breaking camp the following morning there was a large movement overhead of Common Swifts, which started the day off well. We then drove to the Feynan area of Dana Nature Reserve, where the birding was very good. We saw a pair of Eurasian Griffon Vultures circling overhead, had great looks at a group of three Chukars and best of all some of us saw a pair of Spotted Sandgrouse. We also saw a female Black Redstart. We enjoyed a fine picnic lunch at Little Petra as well as three new birds for our ever growing list. They were Willow Warbler, the very uncommon Wood Warbler and a female Pied Flycatcher, yet another uncommon bird.

We spent the following morning birding in the Dana Nature Reserve, it is one of the few unspoilt wadis in Jordan and the scenery is spectacular, featuring literally hundred of rounded sandstone rock domes, somewhat reminiscent of the Bungle Bungles, in Australia. The birding was equally spectacular and impressive. We enjoyed watching a pale morph Short-toed Eagle fly over our heads, it was a joy to listen to the Common Cuckoo calling and we saw it once in flight and then we saw it perched on top of a tall tree, singing his heart out. A single Isabelline Wheatear hopped on the ground just metres away from us and we were very pleased to catch up with an adult male Cretzschmar's Bunting, which was in full breeding plumage. The best was yet to come; we had really good looks at the uncommon and seldom seen, at least in Jordan, Garden Warbler. We then saw two of the rarest species of birds in the world, we watched at very close quarters an adult female Cyprus Warbler and no less than 10 Syrian Serins, and the birthday boy Kevin, got photographs of all of them!

We spent the whole of the following day marvelling at the world famous antiquities of Petra, the crown of Jordan's many archaeological wonders. We of course checked out any bird that popped into view and even here we added two resident species, Mourning Wheatear and Sinai Rosefinch and one migrant, the rather secretive and decidedly uncommon Common Nightingale.

The following morning we drove to Wadi Rum Nature Reserve arriving in time for lunch, observing a large flock of Brown-necked Ravens close to Wadi Rum. In the afternoon we visited a nearby agricultural research station, which had large amounts of surface water, caused by very leaky irrigation pipes. The acres of greenery and the surface water acted like a magnet for tired and exhausted migrants, it was holding literally hundred of migrant birds. The vast majority were Blackcaps, but every bird needed to be carefully checked and identified, no mean feat, with so many birds vying for your attention. We managed to find three new species, a single Tree Pipit, a single Upcher's Warbler and a single male Red-backed Shrike, in full breeding plumage, a real beauty.

The following morning we awoke to find two new birds in our campsite, a sub-adult Subalpine Warbler and a beautiful adult Hooded Wheatear. A jeep ride deep into Wadi Rum failed to find any new birds, although we did find a second Subalpine Warbler and ancient rock drawings etched by the people of the desert over millennia. Following lunch we drove to Aqaba at the very northern end of the Red Sea. We went birding along the beach, where we found a flock of wintering Lesser Black-backed Gulls. We spent most of our time birding a small area of irrigated small holdings, which was a real migrant trap. Three particularly well marked European Honey-buzzards circled overhead, a small flock of Ring-necked Parakeets flew into a nearby palm tree and House Crows were particularly numerous. In the smallholdings we carefully checked each and every bird and managed to pick out three new birds for the tour; a solitary Tawny Pipit, a solitary Water Pipit and a beautiful adult male Spanish Sparrow.

Up early the following morning and out to the irrigated smallholdings before breakfast. While we were watching the many migrants a Lesser Kestrel flew overhead but there was no new migrants for us. Along the beach, we found a single Slender-billed Gull and a Little Tern. Following breakfast, we drove to the Aqaba Bird Observatory. Where we enjoyed a once in a lifetime experience. The wind was from the north, which is in itself an unusual occurrence, but at this time of year, it meant that all the migrating raptors, instead of hugging the Israeli bank of the Red Sea, they were battling against a strong head-wind on the Jordanian side of the Red Sea! Over, 1,000 raptors flew north over our heads that morning, perhaps two thirds were Common Buzzards, but there was also up to 40 Levant Sparrowhawks, as many European Honey-buzzards, 4 Western Marsh-Harriers, 3 Black Kites, 3 Eurasian Sparrowhawks, 2 Long-legged Buzzards, 2 Booted Eagles, 1 Osprey and bet of all, a single light morph Eleonora's Falcon. During the morning other new birds recorded at the Bird Observatory included White and Black Storks, Mallard, Garganey, Ruff, Common Black-headed Gull, Caspian Gull, a single Pallas's Gull, Whiskered Tern and best of all, a first for Jordan, a solitary Egyptian Goose, which had been at the observatory since December.

In the late afternoon we once again went birding at the irrigated smallholdings and yet again, found another couple of new birds, the beautiful Rufous Bush-Robin and an immature Spectacled Warbler.

On our last day of the tour we travelled down to South Beach, just 10 kilometres from the border with Saudi Arabia, hoping to add to our trip list. We found one new bird, a pair of Kentish Plovers on the beach, unfortunately, they were flushed by a hawk selling brightly coloured floatation devices before we could have a good look at them. While driving back to our hotel for lunch, some of us saw a Collared Pratincole flying north along the beach! In the afternoon we returned to the irrigation small holdings, which once again yielded up yet another new bird for the tour, this time it was an immature Sardinian Warbler.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* This species is a passage migrant in Jordan, we saw a single bird at Shuna Dam, at the beginning of the tour, followed by a second single bird which was observed at Aqaba Bird Observatory, towards the end of the tour.

ARDEIDAE

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* This large species of heron is a winter visitor and passage migrant through Jordan. We found a few birds at Kufrayan Dam and at the Azraq Wetland Reserve.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* This attractive species of heron is a passage migrant and summer visitor to Jordan. We observed it well on a few occasions throughout the tour.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* We enjoyed several small groups of this species throughout the tour, all the birds were passing through the country, on northward migration.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* This species is also a passage migrant through Jordan, we encountered small numbers throughout the tour.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* This species is a passage migrant and summer visitor to Jordan, we saw it very well on a few occasions.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* This nocturnal species is a passage migrant through Jordan, we found two birds present at Kufrayan Dam, followed by a larger flock at Azraq Wetland Reserve.

CICONIIDAE

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* This species is a passage migrant through Jordan and at the Aqaba Bird Observatory, we observed in excess of 100 birds flying overhead, heading northwards on migration.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* The White Stork is also a passage migrant through Jordan. During our time at the Aqaba Bird Observatory, we saw half a dozen or so birds in the much larger flock of Black Storks. This species is classified as near threatened in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The main threat to this species is the modernisation of farming techniques presently occurring throughout eastern Europe and western Asia.

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Yet another passage migrant through Jordan, we observed a solitary bird during our time in the Azraq Wetland Reserve.

ANATIDAE

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* This very large species of goose is resident throughout much of Africa, the solitary bird we observed at the Aqaba Bird Observatory, was very much a vagrant to Jordan. It was the first time that this species had ever been recorded in Jordan and had been resident at the observatory, for the last five months.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* This species of duck is resident in Jordan and numbers increase during the winter months, when birds from northern Europe and Asia, spend the winter in Jordan. We saw approximately a dozen birds at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* This very attractive species of duck is a passage migrant through Jordan. We observed up to 10 birds during our visit to the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

PANDIONIDAE

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* The cosmopolitan Osprey is only a passage migrant through Jordan, we were fortunate to observe one bird at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* A passage migrant through Jordan, we saw up to 50 birds of this species passing through Aqaba, during the three days we spent there.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* This species is also a passage migrant through Jordan, we saw three birds migrating northwards, amongst the large flock of migrating raptors at Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* This species is resident in Jordan and we observed a flock of four birds spiralling overhead on hot air thermals, during our time in the Dana Nature Reserve.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* This species is a summer visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We observed a pale morph bird very well, while birding in Dana Nature Reserve.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* This small species of eagle is a passage migrant in Jordan, we observed a pale morph bird and a dark morph bird, during the large raptor migration at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* This species is a winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We observed four birds amongst the large flock of migrating raptors at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* This species is both a resident and passage migrant in Jordan. It proved to be the fourth commonest raptor in Jordan and we observed it regularly throughout the tour.

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* This very uncommon species of *accipiter* is a passage migrant through Jordan. Our time at Aqaba coincided with the main migration of this species through the town. During the large raptor migration at Aqaba Bird Observatory, approximately 40 of these birds flew overhead, during our time there.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* This species is both a winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. It was by far the commonest bird of prey in Jordan as this time of year. We recorded it almost daily and during the large raptor migration we observed at the Aqaba Bird Observatory, approximately 750 birds of this species flew overhead.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* This species is resident in Jordan and is also a passage migrant. We recorded it on most days of the tour and during the large raptor migration we observed at the Aqaba Bird Observatory, a couple of this species flew overhead.

FALCONIDAE

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* This species is a common resident and also a passage migrant in Jordan. It was the second commonest bird of prey we saw and we saw it almost every day of the tour.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* A very uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We observed a single male flying over Aqaba, this bird was probably on migration. This species is classified as vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. It has undergone a rapid decline of almost 50% since 1950. The main cause of its decline has been habitat loss of its breeding grounds in the northern Palearctic, as a result of agricultural intensification. Key grasslands in South Africa, where the bird winters, is also being lost to agricultural intensification. The population is estimated to be between 50,000 - 60,000 individuals and is continuing to decline.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* This species is a very uncommon passage migrant through Jordan. We saw a single adult pale morph bird amongst the large movement of raptors, during our time at the Aqaba Bird Observatory. This is a very special bird; it breeds mainly

on small uninhabited islands in the Mediterranean. The vast majority of Eleonora's Falcons winter in Madagascar, with much smaller numbers wintering in East Africa. On its breeding grounds the bird delays its nesting time, to coincide with the autumn migration, when it feeds its chicks on small migrating passerines. Eleonora of Arborea (c.1350-1404) was the warrior-princess national heroine of Sardinia. She passed enlightened legislation to protect birds of prey (although, cynics might say that this was to keep them for the aristocracy alone). She died in 1404 'during an epidemic of the plague'. The falcon was first observed in Sardinia in 1830. Alberto Ferrero Dell Marmora named it in her honour and Gene described it.



Eleonora's Falcon

PHASIANIDAE

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* A bird was flushed from cover by Kevin as he climbed down from the rocky escarpment above Gibbon Forest, unfortunately, Kevin was the only one to see it.

Chukar *Alectoris chukar* A fairly common resident of Jordan, which we saw well on two separate occasions, both sightings took place in Dana Nature Reserve.

RALLIDAE

Eurasian Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* The Eurasian Moorhen is a resident and winter visitor in Jordan. We saw small numbers at the Azraq Wetland Reserve and the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* The Eurasian Coot is a resident, winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. As in the above species we saw small numbers at the Azraq Wetland Reserve and the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* In Jordan the Black-winged Stilt is a summer visitor and passage migrant. We saw it well in a number of wetland areas.

GLAREOLIDAE

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* In Jordan this species is a very uncommon summer breeding species and an uncommon passage migrant. While driving in a taxi some of the group saw a single bird migrating northwards along South Beach, at Aqaba.

CHARADRIIDAE

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* A resident breeding species which we saw very well in a

number of wetland areas.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* This species is a summer breeding bird, winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We observed a couple of birds on South Beach, at Aqaba.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* This species is a winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We saw a single bird in flight in the Azraq Wetland Reserve.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* This species is also a winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We saw a single bird in non-breeding plumage, during our visit to the Azraq Wetland Reserve.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Once again, this species winters in Jordan, in small numbers and passes through on migration in much larger numbers. We observed small numbers at Shuna Dam and Wadi Araba.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* This species is also a winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We observed small numbers at Shuna Dam and Wadi Araba.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Very small numbers of this species winter in Jordan, far greater numbers are passage migrants. We saw a flock of approximately 14 birds in the Azraq Wetland Reserve and a flock of 8 or so birds at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* A fairly common passage migrant through Jordan, we observed small numbers at Shuna Dam and the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* This species is an uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we observed a small flock of three birds very well at Shuna Dam.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* This species is a winter visitor and passage migrant through Jordan. We observed a flock of approximately six birds, at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

LARIDAE

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei* A fairly common winter visitor to Jordan, we saw a single bird at Aqaba Beach and then we saw much larger numbers at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Common Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* This species is a winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We saw large numbers at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus* This species is a very scarce winter visitor to Jordan. We were very fortunate to find a single bird in non-breeding plumage, amongst the large flock of gulls at the Aqaba Bird Observatory. Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811) was a German zoologist and one of the greatest of the 18th Century naturalists. He led numerous expeditions throughout much of Russia between 1768-1774. He described many new species of mammals, birds, fish and insects.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* A fairly uncommon winter visitor throughout Jordan, we observed small numbers amongst the large gull flock at Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* This species is a common winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. It was by far the most numerous gull at Aqaba.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini* A very uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We enjoyed good scope views of a single bird amongst the large gull flock at the Aqaba Bird

Observatory. Theodor von Heuglin (1824-1876) was born in Ditzingen, Germany, where the local school is named after him. He became a mining engineer and ornithologist. He is recorded as exploring Central Africa and Ethiopia in 1861. He also explored in eastern Africa and he published an account of its birds, *Ornithologie Nordost Afrika*, in 1869. Heuglin was a vocal opponent of evolutionary theories, perhaps since he was the son of the local priest in Ditzingen. He died of pneumonia and is buried in Stuttgart.

STERNIDAE

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* A fairly common passage migrant through Jordan, which we saw well in small numbers both on inland lakes and along the coast.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* This species is a fairly common passage migrant in Jordan. We observed a solitary bird at Aqaba Beach.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* An uncommon passage migrant through Jordan. We saw a single bird very well, in non-breeding plumage, at Kufrayan Dam.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* An uncommon passage migrant through Jordan. We saw a flock of approximately 10 birds, all in full breeding plumage, at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

PTEROCLIDAE

Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus* A resident breeding species in Jordan, while walking along a wadi in the Dana Nature Reserve, a pair of birds flew up from a small stream and perched high above us on a cliff face. One bird disappeared behind a rock very quickly, but the other bird stayed in full view and we were able to watch it through the scope. It was a beautiful adult male.

COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia* A resident species in Jordan, feral birds were observed on every day of the tour, but we also saw pure bred Rock Doves in one or two of the areas we visited.

Eurasian Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia turtur* This species breeds in small numbers in Jordan and numbers increase greatly during spring and autumn, when much larger numbers of birds migrate through the country. We enjoyed many good sightings of this very beautiful bird.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* A very common resident which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* This species is also a very common resident, which we saw on every day of the tour.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* An uncommon breeding resident, which we saw very well on a few occasions.

PSITTACIDAE

Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* An introduced species which proved to be quite common at Aqaba.

CUCULIDAE

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* A fairly common passage migrant in Jordan. We saw it once in flight and once perched, where we were able to enjoy good scope views of it. Both sightings occurred on the same day, in Dana Nature Reserve.

STRIGIDAE

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* This species winters in Jordan in very small numbers. Shaumari

Wildlife Reserve is a well known wintering area for this species and it was here that a bird was seen briefly as it flew from cover.

APODIDAE

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* This species is an uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. We enjoyed watching two birds coming down to drink at the Shuna Dam and we saw a second bird in flight, in the Dana Nature Reserve.

Common Swift *Apus apus* A common passage migrant through Jordan, where we saw several large flocks.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* This species is a resident and summer visitor, we saw it well on several occasions.

Little Swift *Apus affinis* A summer breeding species in Jordan, we saw a small flock at the Zara Hot Springs, along the Dead Sea Shore and we saw a single bird during the drive to Dana Nature Reserve.

ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* An uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we saw a couple of birds very well during our visit to the Azraq Wetland Reserve.

White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* An uncommon resident of Jordan which we saw very well on one occasion, while birding along the Wadi Shuayb.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* A fairly common resident of Jordan which we saw well at the Kufrayan Dam and at the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

MEROPIDAE

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* An uncommon resident of southern Jordan, we saw it twice while travelling, the first time was close to Arawda and the second sighting occurred not far from Little Petra.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* In Jordan this species is a summer visitor and passage migrant. It became progressively commoner as we moved south through Jordan. We observed large flocks at both Petra and Aqaba.

UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* In Jordan this species is a summer and winter visitor and a passage migrant. We observed it on most day of the tour.

PICIDAE

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* This stunning and aberrant species of woodpecker is an uncommon passage migrant in Jordan. We were fortunate to see it on three separate occasions, the sighting in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba, was by far the best sighting.

ALAUDIDAE

Bar-tailed Desert Lark *Ammomanes cinctura* We saw this resident species following a very long walk in the Eastern Desert and we enjoyed a second sighting in our campsite at Wadi Rum.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti* A common resident, which we saw well on several occasions.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* Another common resident which we also saw well, on many occasions.

Temminck's Horned Lark *Eremophila bilopha* This beautiful species is a fairly common resident of the deserts in eastern Jordan. We saw it first in the Eastern Desert and then again at the

Shaumari Wildlife Reserve. Coenraad Jacob Temminck (1778-1858) was a Dutch ornithologist, illustrator and collector. He was appointed the first Director of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, in Leiden, in 1820 and held that post until his death. He was a wealthy man who had a very large collection of specimens and live birds. His first task as an ornithologist was to catalogue his father's very extensive collection. His father was Jacob Temminck, for whom Le Vaillant collected specimens.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Common Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* A common passage migrant throughout Jordan, which we saw well on several occasions.

Rock Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* A common resident throughout most of Jordan, which we saw on almost a daily basis.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* A very common passage migrant through Jordan, which we saw on every single day of the tour.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* In Jordan this species is a summer visitor and passage migrant. We observed small numbers on most days of the tour.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum* A common passage migrant throughout Jordan, which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

MOTACILLIDAE

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* A common passage migrant through Jordan, we observed large numbers of the race *flava*, which breed throughout Central Europe and much smaller numbers of the race *feldegg*, which breed in the Balkans and parts of Eastern Europe.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* A fairly common passage migrant through Jordan, which we saw well on a few occasions, including a single bird migrating northwards along the Red Sea, at Aqaba.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* An uncommon resident of Jordan, we observed a pair of birds at the Shaumari Wildlife Reserve.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* A fairly common passage migrant through Jordan, we observed a single bird very well in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* A common passage migrant through Jordan, we observed a single bird at the agricultural research station at Wadi Rum and this was followed by large numbers present in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* A fairly common passage migrant through Jordan, which we saw well on several occasions.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* A very uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we picked out a single individual in non-breeding plumage in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

PYCNOPNOTIDAE

White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* This species has been introduced to Azraq, where we found it to be quite common.

Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier* A common resident of Jordan, which we saw well on many occasions.

TURDIDAE

Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* A very uncommon passage migrant through

Jordan, we were extremely fortunate to observe three individuals on the rocky escarpment above Dibbin Forest.

Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* An uncommon resident of Jordan which favours old buildings, we saw at the Roman ruins at Jaresh, at Karak Castle and at the ancient ruins of Petra.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* A common resident of northern Jordan, which we saw very often on a number of occasions.

CISTICOLIDAE

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis* A common resident of the Dead Sea Valley, we saw this species very well at Zara Hot Springs and also at the freshwater springs at Suwayma.

SYLVIIDAE

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* A common passage migrant through Jordan, which we saw well on several occasions.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* This species is also a common passage migrant through Jordan, which we saw well on numerous occasions.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* This species is a very scarce passage migrant through Jordan, we were very fortunate to observe a bird in brilliant full breeding plumage, whilst birding at Little Petra.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* In Jordan this species is a summer breeding species and passage migrant. We observed a single male in full song which had taken up a breeding territory at the freshwater springs at Suwayma.

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida* An uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we observed a single bird in the Wadi Rum Nature Reserve and a single bird in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba. Sir Henry Morris Upcher JP (1839-1921), Deputy-Lieutenant of the County of Norfolk, was a close friend and travelling companion of H B Tristram. He was born at Sherringham Hall, near Cley, Norfolk, and was apparently the owner of the only private lifeboat in England in 1911. Ehrenberg described the warbler in 1833 but his original description is rather vague and Tristram redescribed it in 1864, calling it Upcher's Warbler, after his friend.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* A very uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we saw a single bird at the Azraq Wetland Reserve and this was followed by a second sighting of a single bird at the agricultural research station at Wadi Rum.

Great Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* An uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we saw a single bird at the Azraq Wetland Reserve.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* A very common passage migrant through Jordan, it was the second commonest migrant that we encountered throughout the tour, it seemed particularly fond of water and we recorded it on almost every day of the tour.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* This species is a very uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we were very fortunate to enjoy very close looks at a single bird, while birding in the Dana Nature Reserve.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* This species is a rare passage migrant through Jordan, therefore, we were very fortunate to enjoy good looks at a couple of adult females, during our time at the Shaumari Wildlife Reserve.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* This species is a very common passage migrant through Jordan, it was by far the commonest migrant we encountered. Unfortunately, we did find a

few dead birds at South Beach, to the south of Aqaba. It would appear that the birds migrate along the edge of the Red Sea and at the first landfall they are confronted by a very busy freeway, with fast moving traffic, which unfortunately, they probably fly straight into.

Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* As the name would imply, this species only breeds on the small Mediterranean island of Cyprus. It winters along the Red Sea Coast of Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula. During autumn migration the birds fly directly from Egypt across the Mediterranean Sea directly to Cyprus, however, in spring they return by a much more easterly route passing along the Dead Sea, before flying directly to Cyprus. We were extremely fortunate to observe an adult female at very close quarters in the Dana Nature Reserve.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* The Spectacled Warbler is both an uncommon resident and passage migrant through Jordan, we saw an immature in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* This species is a very uncommon spring migrant through Jordan. We watched an immature bird for quite a while, deep in the desert in Wadi Rum Nature Reserve.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* The Sardinian Warbler is an uncommon resident and passage migrant through Jordan, once again we only saw an immature bird and once again, we watched it in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* This is a common migrant through Jordan, which we enjoyed watching on many occasions.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* This species is a very uncommon migrant through Jordan, we saw a total of four birds during the tour, including both males and females.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* This species is also an uncommon migrant through Jordan and once again we saw a total of four birds during the tour, including both males and females.

Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* This species is a very uncommon migrant through Jordan, which we only saw on two occasions. The first, was a female, which we saw very well, in the grounds of our hotel at Azraq. The second, was a fine looking male which we saw very well in Dana Nature Reserve.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* The Common Nightingale is said to be the most beautiful songster in the world, it is an uncommon passage migrant through Jordan which we saw very well, firstly, at the ancient ruins of Petra and secondly, in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba, where three individuals were present. None could be found the following day, they must have continued their migration northwards during the night.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* The Bluethroat is a fairly common but very shy passage migrant through Jordan. We saw it well on two occasions, firstly, at the Zara Hot Springs on the Dead Sea Shore and secondly, in the Dana Nature Reserve.

Rufous Bush-Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* This species is both a resident and an uncommon passage migrant. We only saw it on one occasion, when we observed a bird which was still migrating, as it was of the race which breeds in Syria. We saw it very well in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* In Jordan the Black Redstart is an uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant, which we saw well on a few occasions.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* The Common Redstart is a common migrant through Jordan, we saw both males and females very well, on a number of occasions.

White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* This beautiful species of wheatear is resident in the southern half of Jordan. We saw a single bird very well in Wadi Araba and

then it became a constant fixture, at our tented camp in Wadi Rum Nature Reserve.

Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha* Yet another delightful species of wheatear, it is a very uncommon resident throughout the southern half of Jordan. We saw both males and females very well, in our campsite at Wadi Rum Nature Reserve.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* This bird of my boyhood, is a common passage migrant through Jordan, we saw both males and females very well, on several occasions.

Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens* Another particularly beautiful species of wheatear, which is an uncommon resident in Jordan. We only found it to be common in one place and that was at the ancient ruins of Petra. Petra is a magnificent place, but add to it Mourning Wheatear and it becomes a magical place. We also saw it in the Wadi Rum Nature Reserve.

Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii* This species is a very uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, we were indeed fortunate to watch a pair of birds at very close quarters in the rocky escarpment above Dibbin Forest. Friedrich Hermann Otto Finsch (1839-1917) was a German ethnographer, naturalist and traveller. He travelled in the Balkans, Lapland, Turkistan, northwestern China, the Marshall Islands and North America. In 1884 Bismarck appointed him Imperial Commissioner for the German Colony of 'Kaiser- Wilhelm-Land', in what is now Papua New Guinea. He founded the town of Finschhafen there in 1885.

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* This species is both a summer visitor and passage migrant in Jordan. It is by far the commonest wheatear occurring in Jordan and we enjoyed watching it on many occasions.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* Some races of Isabelline Wheatear are winter visitors to Jordan, other races are summer visitors and yet others are passage migrants. We saw the bird on only one occasion, during our time in the Dana Nature Reserve.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* This species is a fairly uncommon passage migrant through Jordan, our first two birds, were both immatures, the first, in the Azraq Wetland Reserve and the second, in Wadi Rum Nature Reserve, both of which looked like pretty average little brown jobs. However, in the irrigated smallholdings of Aqaba, we were able to watch beautifully breeding plumaged adult males, which looked spectacular.

Blackstart *Cercomela melanura* This attractive species is an uncommon resident in Jordan, which we saw very well on a few occasions.

TIMALIIDAE

Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps* The Arabian Babbler is an uncommon resident of desert scrub, in the southern half of Jordan. We watched a small flock of four birds on one occasion in Wadi Araba.

PARIDAE

Great Tit *Parus major* This species is a fairly common resident which we saw well in Dibbin Forest and in the Dana Nature Reserve.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* There is an isolated population of Blue Tits which breed in the Dibbin Forest, the only place they occur in Jordan. Fortunately, we managed to see them very well.

NECTARINIIDAE

Palestine Sunbird *Cinnyris osea* This species is a common resident of Jordan, which we saw well on many occasions.

LANIIDAE

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* This species is a common passage migrant through Jordan,

somewhat surprisingly, we only saw this bird on two occasions. Both birds were adults in full breeding plumage; the first, was observed very well in the agricultural research station at Wadi Rum. The second sighting, took place in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* A common resident of western Jordan, which we saw very well on many occasions.

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* This stunning species of shrike is both a resident and passage migrant in Jordan. We saw it very well on many occasions.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* Yet another stunning species of shrike, it is also a resident and a passage migrant through Jordan and once again we saw it very well on many occasions.

CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* A fairly common resident of coniferous, oak and mixed woodland in the north of Jordan, where we saw it very well on a few occasions.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* There is an isolated population of this species in one small area of Jordan. Fortunately for us, the Kufryan Dam is within this area, and here we saw a couple of birds along the edge of the dam.

House Crow *Corvus splendens* This species self introduced itself into the port of Aqaba approximately 20 years ago. It is now firmly established there and we saw it very well on many occasions.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* A fairly common resident in the north of Jordan, where we saw it well on a few occasions.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* A fairly common resident of Jordan, we observed several small flocks during our time in the Wadi Rum Nature Reserve.

Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus* A fairly common resident of Jordan, where it is right at the northern edge of its range, which we saw well on many occasions.

STURNIDAE

Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristramii* Once again, this resident species is at the northern edge of its range. It is a common bird in Jordan, which we saw well on many occasions. The Reverend Henry Baker Tristram FRS (1822-1906) was canon of Durham Cathedral and a traveller, archaeologist, naturalist and antiquarian, who assembled a large collection of museum skins. Despite being a churchman he was an early supporter of Darwin. He wrote a number of accounts of his explorations including *A journal of Travels in Palestine* and *The Great Sahara Wanderings South of the Atlas Mountains*, in 1860. In the latter he describes how he penetrated far into the desert and made an ornithological collection in the course of gathering materials for his work. He actually went there because of ill health.

PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* This is a very common resident throughout Jordan, which we saw on every day of the tour.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* In Jordan the Spanish Sparrow is both a resident and passage migrant. We saw an adult male in full breeding plumage, which was on migration, it was observed busily feeding in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.

Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* The Pale Rock Sparrow is a very uncommon resident in Jordan. Therefore, we were very fortunate to see a bird very well indeed, while birding at Little Petra.

ESTRILDIDAE

Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica* A very uncommon resident of Jordan, which we saw very

well on a few occasions.

FRINGILLIDAE

Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus* Another uncommon resident of Jordan, we were very fortunate to see both males and females at the ancient ruins of Petra and in the Wadi Rum Nature Reserve.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* An uncommon resident of Jordan, which we saw well on a few occasions.

Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* A fairly common resident and winter visitor to Jordan, which once again, we saw very well on several occasions.

Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* The Syrian Serin is a very uncommon resident of Lebanon, southern Syria, northern Israel and central Jordan. We were delighted to find up to 10 individuals while birding in the Dana Nature Reserve. Little wonder it was voted 'Bird of the Tour' by tour participants. This species is classified as vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The world population is estimated at 4,000 individuals of which 1,000 - 1,250 occur in Jordan. The main threats to this species are drought, overgrazing by livestock and woodcutting. Between 1996 and 1999 the population dropped by 20% in Jordan and the area they occupied was reduced by 25%. Fortunately, most of the Jordanian population lives within the protected area of the Dana Nature Reserve.

EMBERIZIDAE

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* This species is a common passage migrant through Jordan, which we saw on most days of the tour.

Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia* This species is both an uncommon summer visitor and uncommon passage migrant through Jordan. We observed it very well on a few occasions. Dr Philipp Jakob Cretzschmar (1786-1845) was a German physician who taught anatomy at the Senckenberg Institute in Frankfurt. He was the founder and second director of Die Senckenbergische Naturforschende Gesellschaft, which was a natural history society and he was also a founder of the Senckenberg Natural History Museum.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata* An uncommon resident of Jordan. We saw it only on one occasion and that was on the first day of the tour, in the Mujib Biosphere Reserve.

MAMMALS

Brown Rat *Ratus norvegicus* Well at least it proves that Jordan is not a mammal free zone and the locals have not shot everything on four legs! We observed this species very well in the irrigated smallholdings at Aqaba.