

ISRAEL

21st March – 28th March 2015

Ben Macdonald

I. Introduction

Israel is undoubtedly one of the finest and most exciting countries for Western Palearctic birding. My first week in Israel provided the best birding I have ever experienced, not only in terms of species and numbers, but quality of sightings, evocative experiences and outstanding behavioural moments. The experience at all times was one of total saturation and of birds converging from vast areas into a tiny country.

As my first trip to the country, my aims were simple – to locate a specific list of specialist residents and spring migrants. I also wanted to enjoy the varied spectacle of migration during my stay. I was extremely successful on both fronts, seeing 163 species, and 41 new birds, in the course of seven full days birding. This detailed report outlines approaches, background, species and sites complete with GPS coordinates. *For quick reading, it is best to read the 2015 Species Updates and the Trip List Notes, then cross-reference with the daily diary.*

II. Target Species

Before leaving I carefully prepared a list of target species, mindful of season, timing and the fact that certain species occur more easily elsewhere, especially those Hermon birds such as Red-fronted Serin. As a result, my target list before leaving the country was as follows:

Brown Booby; Sand Partridge; White Pelican; Western Reef Heron; Striated Heron; Lesser Spotted Eagle; Spotted Eagle; Steppe Eagle; Eastern Imperial Eagle; McQueen's Bustard; Caspian Plover; Armenian Gull; Baltic Gull; Heuglin's Gull; Great Black-headed Gull; Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse; Spotted Sandgrouse; Namaqua Dove; Nubian Nightjar; Desert Tawny Owl; White-throated Kingfisher; Pied Kingfisher; Little Green Bee-eater; Oriental Skylark; Rock Martin; Long-billed Pipit; Black Scrub-Robin; Blackstart; Cyprus Wheatear; Pied Wheatear; Mourning Wheatear; Hooded Wheatear; Streaked Scrub Warbler; Graceful Prinia; Asian Desert Warbler; Clamorous Reed Warbler; Arabian Warbler; Arabian Babbler; Palestine Sunbird; Fan-tailed Raven; Tristram's Grackle; Syrian Serin; Sinai Rosefinch; Mountain Bunting. Common Myna; Vinous-breasted Starling; Indian Silverbill; Nanday Parakeet (I).

Of these 48 target species, I saw 31 but encountered several quality additions to this list. On arrival in the country, it became clear that this transitional time in the country's birdlife was not ideal for some of the more elusive winter visitors. Syrian Serin and Cyprus Warbler were quickly relegated to winter. Oriental Skylark was searched for once: with the realisation that the species could start to monopolise our time in the south, we did not pursue searching for this bird. As the trip evolved, we decided to leave Desert Tawny Owl, Imperial Eagle, Heuglin's Gull and Sinai Rosefinch to a winter trip and did not search for these species. Relatively short searches for Mountain Bunting, Asian Desert Warbler and Long-billed Pipit likewise resulted in these species being postponed for a second trip.

Seasonally-speaking, the only disappointment of a superb trip was failing to locate an elusive Black Bush-Robin. Subsequent showy individuals were only noted after we moved well north into the Dead Sea Region. A search for Cyprus Wheatear and Asian Desert Warbler in the Meishar Plateau was interrupted by the military. Nanday Parakeets were never a high probability species and Indian Silverbill was heard only. The following targets were located, with additional lifers for the author being shown in italics. All were seen well:

Sand Partridge; White Pelican; Western Reef Heron; Striated Heron; Spotted Eagle; Steppe Eagle; McQueen's Bustard; White-eyed Gull; Armenian Gull; Baltic Gull; Great Black-headed Gull; Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse; Spotted Sandgrouse; Namaqua Dove; Nubian Nightjar; White-throated Kingfisher; Pied Kingfisher; Little Green Bee-eater; Rock Martin; *Bimaculated Lark; Thrush Nightingale; Blackstart; Pied Wheatear; Eastern Mourning Wheatear; Hooded Wheatear; Streaked Scrub Warbler; Graceful Prinia; Clamorous Reed Warbler; Arabian Warbler; Arabian Babbler; Palestine Sunbird; House Crow; Fan-tailed Raven; Tristram's Grackle; Dead Sea Sparrow; Desert Finch; Ortolan Bunting; Common Myna (I); Vinous-breasted Starling (I).*

After this spectacular trip, a following expedition, in December, has already been planned and will hopefully address the remaining resident species and those wintering birds far easier to see at this time of year across the country. These species targeted will include:

Yelkouan Shearwater; Eastern Imperial Eagle; Black Francolin; Sociable Lapwing; Heuglin's Gull; Steppe Gull; Desert Tawny Owl; Striated Scops Owl; Oriental Skylark; Finsch's Wheatear; Long-billed Pipit; Siberian Stonechat; Cyprus Warbler; Asian Desert Warbler; Syrian Serin; Sinai Rosefinch; Mountain Bunting; Pine Bunting. Nanday Parakeet and Indian Silverbill (I)

III. 2015 Species Updates

Western Palearctic information can become quickly out-dated. An example of this would be the number of birders we met during our stay who continued to target the North Beach for Striated Heron. This section is probably the most useful for experienced WP birders visiting the country over coming months or within the next calendar year. It includes information on the more elusive target species we saw, but also those for which we obtained excellent up-to-date information during our stay, marked 'NS'. Coordinates are Google-compatible digital GPS.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

Now an elusive species in Eilat, following the demise of the North Beach fish farms and offshore platforms. This species is readily located, however, at Dolphin Reef in Eilat South Beach (29.525929, 34.934902). Watch from this car park and at least one pair of birds are nesting securely at the end of the fenced-off gantry to the south (right). In March 2015 a pair were commuting between the buoys, enclosing the Dolphin Reef, and the gantry, with sticks for their nest. Do not waste time searching for this species at North Beach. Early mornings prime.

Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*

This striking and sturdy eagle was located with great ease at the Tirat Zvi Fishponds. Of the three fishpond complexes around Beit She'an, we found this site to be universally the best in terms of ease of viewing and number and variety of birds. Two birds, both near-adults, afforded stunning views on the large southern ponds (32.408476, 35.535272).

McQueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*

It's a tribute to the excellent habitat management and high birding standards in Israel that for many years, the famous KM7-8 posts of the Ezuz Road, in the Nizzana Desert, have provided almost every birder with their views of this magnificent bird. For those not familiar with the 'traditional' site, drive S from Nizzana on the road to Ezuz, parking just beyond the KM7 post (30.824996, 34.469842). Scan east of here at first light, no later than 6.30am. We had two superb displaying males; a truly comical and impressive sight.

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus marinus*

This absolutely stunning species can be located with varying regularity around Eilat, but to observe it in numbers, at close range and in a variety of forms, the Tirat Zvi Fishponds are superb. We located over 15 non-adults and a superb breeding-plumaged bird on the southern ponds here (32.408476, 35.535272). This is probably the best site in Israel for this species at this time of year.

White-eyed Gull *Ichthyaeetus leucophthalmus*

This smart Red Sea speciality, here on the very northern edge of its range, was noted at both North and South Beach in Eilat during our visit. We located the species alongside Striated Heron, on the buoys at Dolphin Reef, South Beach (29.525929, 34.934902) early morning.

Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*

With one of the wettest winters on record, the Nizzana Desert was teeming with green life. As a result, the Nizzana Sewage Ponds were not drawing in either Spotted or Crowned Sandgrouse. Fortunately, the Idan sewage pools in the Arava (30.803356, 35.310474) lie within a far more arid area and draw in both species of sandgrouse from 8:00-8:30am. We arrived here rather late, at 8.45am, as the site is not easy to find, but immediately had at least 6 Spotted Sandgrouse coming to drink. Thanks to Oded Keynan for this recommendation.

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*

For at least ten years now, these Arabic tapestries of the bird world have flown out of the Eilat Hills at dusk, and down to the same pool. Indeed, what I thought would be a rather smelly and tawdry experience was one of the trip highlights, as a superb pair of these birds materialised four feet away in the fading light. The site, referred to as 'Eilat North Pools' or, more often, 'KM19', is located at 29.609208, 34.992861. Sit at the NW corner by 5:40pm: birds come down to drink at c. 6.10pm with unerring regularity. Total silence and stillness may result in birds drinking right in front of observers here.

Namaqua Dove *Onea capensis*

This is an expanding species, occupying the fringes between seed-rich agriculture or date palms and natural tamarisk vegetation. Its numbers fluctuate each year and, in addition, the species can be very unobtrusive. Local birders refer to the species as fairly common and 'easy to see', so you can develop the mentality that you will just 'bump into it'. In our view, this was often not the case. A prime site for most birders in March 2015 was the tamarisks at the east end of the Yotvata North Circular Field, where we had 3 birds (29.899238, 35.077666).

Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*

There is probably no other species breeding in the Western Palearctic that is so enigmatic, rare or tied to one location as the Nubian Nightjar. This subspecies, *tamaricus* – Tamarisk Nightjar – has been geographically isolated from its nominate form relatives in Africa for thousands of years. It occupies a different habitat, nesting under tamarisk bushes, and hunts in an entirely different way – from the ground. Its future split, becoming one of Earth's rarest species, is not implausible. Today, 40 pairs inhabit the saltmarsh tamarisks north of Ne'ot Hakkikar, with a further 2-3 pairs in the Arava Valley. Yoav Perlman, Jonathan Meyrev, Hadoram Shirihi and Eran Banker would all be superb guides for this species but we had an excellent experience with Oded Keynan (odedkeynan@yahoo.com) for 70 Euros per head, for three people. You will see, on visiting the site, why a lone visit would be unwise in this maze of marshes, canals and greenhouses just feet from the Jordanian border.

Desert Tawny Owl *Strix hadorami*

NS

The frontier nature of Israeli ornithology is nowhere better illustrated than the recent confirmation, after decades of study, that the earless owl inhabiting the deserts of Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Oman is not Hume's Owl *Strix butleri*, but its own species, Desert Tawny Owl, *Strix hadorami*, separated, at a glance, by its orange iris. The species occurs at low densities in the Eilat Mountains and Negev, with the body of the population in the Judean Desert adjoining the Dead Sea. Whilst several sites are known, there are strong reasons for using a guide, including: the nature of the terrain, the illegality of visits without a permitted guide, coordinating any disturbance to nesting pairs. With fewer than 200 pairs in Israel, we'd strongly advocate using a guide, such as Jonathan Meyrev or Eran Banker, to see this species at any time of year.

Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*

Seen well, in good light, this species is markedly different from the Crag Martins with which it shares its habitat. I found the Eilat Mountains to be a good site to study this bird – namely at a specific pull-in just before Nahal Schlomo on R12 (29.557067, 34.907561). Pass the storage tanks and ascent until you come across a fenced military building on the right, together with a pull-in on the same side. This site held numerous hirundines, including 3-4 Pale Crag Martin; most passing so low and close that you could study some differences with the naked eye.

Eastern Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*

This is a characteristic species of hillsides and plateaux with scattered rocks, vegetation and low bushes, especially on the Negev Plateau. As with any widespread species with a large territory, visiting birders can struggle to catch up with it, whilst local Israeli birders point out the fact it's common and can't be missed. Generally, the entirety of R40, between Mitzpe-Ramon and Sede-Boker, is excellent for the species. We found a breeding territory behind the pay-walled entrance to Ein Avdat National Park (30.791910, 34.770024).

Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*

This extremely sleek, elegant wheatear can be very elusive, with a large territory and a rather hard-to-identify habitat and core range. This had been a good year, with the Eilat Mountains holding at least three territories, thus being perhaps one of the best sites in Israel. During our visit, birds were seen at the Raptor Watchpoints and the Nahal Schlomo (29.567978, 34.892103). With several other birders, however, we had superb views of a territorial male just beyond the storage tanks on R12, at a dry river valley, left of the road heading N (29.557067, 34.907561).

Black Bush Robin *Cercotrichas podobe* NS

Come spring in Eilat and the southern Arava, 1-3 Black Bush Robins usually arrive in March and April. Their locations cannot be guaranteed – the last week in March can provide the best chance in the region to see this striking migrant. During our visit, an elusive bird was present at Holland Park, Eilat (29.573834, 34.960186) from before 18 March. Then, as expected, the *Champions of the Flyway* bird race unearthed 2 further birds, one a showy individual at Yotvata Sewage Works (29.760914, 35.019794). Black Bush Robins do seem to have marginally favoured sites, particularly the Eilat KM19 Pool (see earlier), Yotvata Sewage Works and those at Ne’ot Semadar (30.043452, 35.043262), but this is very much a ‘fast reaction’ species for those in the southern Arava during migration. We were, this time, unlucky not to see it.

Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*

This enigmatic specialist of dry acacia valleys can be infuriating. Very few field guides go out of their way to mention that a bird can vanish without trace, yet Arabian Warbler specialises in suddenly *not being there*. In March, with females on eggs, male activity levels are low, with rare bursts of quiet, Blackbird-like song. Territories are large. Notwithstanding a few sites near Yotvata, the majority of the fragile Israeli population is concentrated in the Sheizaf Reserve, in northern Arava. A prime territory is in the central Nahal Sheizaf, accessed by taking the track E into the desert, between KM161 and KM162 on the R90 (turn at 30.743659, 35.227199, site at 29.575270, 34.885605). I saw a bird briefly here, but we were eventually more successful with a smaller territory at Nahal Gidron, N of the road to Hatzeva, off the R90. Follow the track, marked with blue-painted rocks, through a maze of greenhouses, to some of the oldest stands of acacia outside of the Nahal (wadi) itself (30.782359, 35.263254). Thanks to Eran Banker and Oded Keynan for their advice on this species.

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*

Since the days of publication of Shirihai’s *A Guide to Birding Hot-spots of Northern Israel*, the large numbers of Dead Sea Sparrow described as breeding around Kfar Ruppin have declined. I met Avner Cohen whilst spending a rather large amount of time searching for the species, which I was also unable to locate at Neve Zohar on the Dead Sea (31.142309, 35.374056). As a result of tamarisk destruction, it seems numbers have plummeted in a way comparable to sparrow species in the UK. I did not locate the species in typical areas north of Kfar Ruppin (32.459243, 35.552614) but had excellent views of 2 nest-building pairs – both isolated – south of Kfar Ruppin, as the track cleared the south of the fish ponds (32.433632, 35.553157). This is a prime area to search for the sparrows. Thanks to Avner for his guidance on this species.

Desert Finch *Passer moabiticus*

This enigmatic finch was originally on my Turkey itinerary but I’d recommend that anyone consider it as an Israeli target. A breeding population in the Negev Desert is now established (R.Yosef 1991). We encountered at least 2 breeding pairs on the north approach road to Sede Boker, off the R40 (30.879668, 34.793114), 2 breeding pairs in the ‘campsite’ of the northern Sheizaf Reserve (30.752852, 35.267252) and missed, by a day, a much larger flock of 25-30 birds at the Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (30.795077, 34.468147).

IV. Time Planning

I carefully scheduled a seven-day plan that would combine targeting specific species with the flexibility to catch up with spring migration as it happened. This plan was divided into two-hour blocks of time across the seven days. Whilst this plan naturally evolved as time went on, the overall aim of the trip was to start in Eilat then work gradually north into northern and southern Arava, the Negev and Nizzana, Ne’ot Hakkikar, the Dead Sea, Beit She’an, Mount Gilboa and then across to Tel-Aviv. Overall this approach was logical and successful. In hindsight, I may have inverted the trip, as the *Champions of the Flyway* Bird Race – which took place on 26 March – unearthed several top species including a showy Black Bush Robin, so it would have made sense to be in the south whilst this took place. In the end, the time overview was:

Date	Site	Target First Seen / Notable Species
21 March 2015 (Saturday) <i>Night Motel Aviv, Eilat (Red Sea)</i>	Red Sea: Holand Park, Eilat (05:30-07:30)	Yellow-vented Bulbul, House Crow, Graceful Prinia, Blackstart, Arabian Babbler, Sand Partridge , migrants
	Red Sea: Eilat Mountains (08:00-10:30)	Steppe Eagle, Hooded Wheatear, Palestine Sunbird, Pale Crag Martin , raptor passage
	Red Sea: Eilat South Beach (11:00-12:00)	Tristram’s Grackle
	Red Sea: Eilat Salt pans (12:30-13:00)	Saltpan species, Caspian Tern
	Southern Arava: Eilat KM19-20 (14:15-16:00)	Flamingoes, Slender-billed gulls, wheatears
	Southern Arava: Yotvata Field (16:00-17:30)	Wagtails, waders, larks
22 March 2015 (Sunday) <i>Night Motel Aviv, Eilat (Red Sea)</i>	Red Sea: Holand Park, Eilat (05:30-07:00)	Migrant warblers, Rufous Bush-chat
	Red Sea: Eilat South Beach (07:15-08:00)	Striated Heron, Western Reef Heron, White-eyed Gull
	Red Sea: Eilat Mountains (08:30-10:30)	Raptor passage, Desert Lark
	Red Sea: Ofira Park, Eilat (12:00-13:30)	Migrants: Wryneck, pipits, warblers, buntings
	Red Sea: Eilat Date Palms (14:00-15:00)	Indian Silverbill , Quail, warblers
	Southern Arava: KM 20 Salt pans (15:30-17:15)	Waders, flamingoes, raptors, storks, Masked Shrike

	Southern Arava: Eilat KM19 Pool (17:30-18:30)	Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Pied Kingfisher , herons
23 March 2015 (Monday) <i>Night Kibbutz Yotvata (Arava)</i>	Negev: Ezuz Road, Nizzana (06:45-07:30)	McQueen's Bustard , wheatears, Spectacled Warbler, Chukar, Montagu's Harrier, migrants
	Negev: Nizzana Sewage Ponds (08:00-09:00)	Wagtails, waders, Bluethroat, Garganey, Water Pipit
	Negev: Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (10:00-12:00)	Streaked Scrub Warbler , superb passerine migration with pipits, buntings, wheatears, shrikes, both rock thrushes, Brown-necked Raven, Quail
	Negev: Sede Boker (12:30-13:00)	Desert Finch , Long-legged Buzzard
	Negev: Ein Avdat Fort (14:00-14:30)	Eastern Mourning Wheatear, Little Green Bee-eater
	Dead Sea: Ne'ot Hakkikar (17:30-20:00)	Nubian Nightjar, Clamorous Reed Warbler
24 March 2015 (Tuesday) <i>Night Kibbutz Yotvata (Arava)</i>	Southern Arava: Yotvata North Field (09:00-11:00)	Pied Wheatear, Namaqua Dove , wheatears, shrikes, wagtails, pipits, raptor passage
	Negev: Ne'ot Semadar (12:30-14:00)	Steppe Eagle, Lesser Kestrel
	Negev: Meishar Plateau (14:30-17:00)	Ortolan Bunting, Trumpeter Finch, Streaked Scrub Warbler, wheatears, larks
	Negev: Ovda Valley (17:45-18:20)	
25 March (Wednesday) <i>Night Villa 1000, Arad (Dead Sea)</i>	Southern Arava: Yotvata South Field (06:00-07:00)	Bimaculated Lark , raptors, wagtails
	Northern Arava: Idan Pools (08:30-09:00)	Spotted Sandgrouse , Little Green Bee-eater colony, waders, Night Heron, Sand Partridge
	Northern Arava: Sheizaf North (10:00-11:30)	Desert Finch, pipits, warblers
	Northern Arava: Sheizaf Central (12:30-14:00)	Thrush Nightingale , warblers, Brown-necked Raven
	Northern Arava: Wadi Gidron (14:30-16:00)	Arabian Warbler , larks, warblers inc Scrub Warbler
	Dead Sea: Neve Zohar (17:30-18:00)	Clamorous Reed Warbler, Pallid Swift
26 March (Thursday) <i>Night Beit She'an Guesthouse</i>	Dead Sea: Ein Gedi (09:00-09:30)	Fan-tailed Raven
	Beit She'an: Tirat Zvi Ponds (12:30-15:30)	White-breasted Kingfisher, White Pelican, Spotted Eagle, Common Myna, Armenian Gull, Great Black-headed Gull , herons, storks and Pygmy Cormorant, gulls, pipits, wagtails, raptors, warblers, Pied Kingfisher.
	<i>Rested due to heat stroke</i>	
27 March (Friday) <i>Night Tel Aviv (Couchsurfing)</i>	Beit She'an: Kfar Ruppin (07:45-08:30)	Great-spotted Cuckoo, kingfishers, parakeets, warblers, stone-curlew, sunbirds, raptors, storks
	Beit She'an: Tirat Zvi Ponds (08:45-09:45)	White Pelicans, Bluethroat, same species as yesterday
	Beit She'an: Kfar Ruppin (10:30-11:30)	Syrian Woodpecker
	Beit She'an: Neve Eitan Ponds (11:45-12:30)	Osprey, raptors, Little Bittern, Clamorous Reed Warbler
	Beit She'an: South of Kfar Ruppin (13:30-15:30)	Dead Sea Sparrow , Bee-eaters, Little Green Bee-eaters, Osprey, Turtle Dove, herons, kingfishers, Hoopoes
	Mount Gilboa (16:45-17:45)	Bonelli's Eagle, kites, buntings
28 March (Saturday Morning)	Tel Aviv: South Beaches (09:30-11:00)	Baltic Gull , Blue Rock Thrush, kingfishers, Common Myna
	Tel Aviv: HaYarkon Park (11:30-12:30)	Vinous-breasted Starling , kingfishers, myna, parakeets

V. Transport & Navigation

I flew from London Luton to Tel-Aviv with EasyJet for £107 and returned to London Stanstead, via Istanbul, with Pegasus Airlines for £103. Car hire was with Budget at Tel-Aviv. Whilst their manner was excellent, as was the price of £127 for a week's hire, there was a 3-hour wait behind just three people because they did not have cars available. As a car hire company, this was a fairly large oversight on their part and I will be contacting them to ask for a partial refund; however, that said, Budget may still offer the best deal.

Navigation in Israel is fairly straightforward but I did miss the option to buy a TomTom or Garmin Map for the country, which, amazingly, don't exist due to issues with local service providers. As a result, I used a variety of means to ensure I could navigate with ease:

- Using Google My Maps, I created a standard .KML file of all hotels, sites and key turns and downloaded it to i-phone
- I purchased, for just a few quid, the superb "Maps.Me" App and downloaded offline maps for Israel, to which I added the KML file
- In country, I used a combination of the Freytag & Berndt 1:150,000 map, these offline maps, and print-outs of Google Earth maps
- Together, these compensated for the lack of an effective Sat Nav, though others were successful using Google Earth on their phones

In hindsight, for road navigation, I'd recommend hiring an in-country Sat Nav, to take further time and stress of the trip. Of the few available, the key sat-nav for Israel is *Ituran GPS* or *Novogo*. Petrol is very expensive in Israel. Petrol stations can be surprisingly sparse, so be aware of this when travelling, especially on R90 and R40.

VI. Accommodation & Food

Accommodation and food in Israel are both generally expensive, especially if compared to travel in other Middle Eastern or even some western countries. Budget options are best found in advance via Trip Advisor, which can then link to some good deals via booking.com or other sites. Motel Aviv is the most affordable place in Eilat, at around £28 per room for a bed, fridge and soap. Obviously many other options are available; if cost is less of a concern, there is a wide range of superb accommodation throughout most of the country.

I found that whilst in Europe and Morocco you can 'come across' a range of restaurant options along key streets and town centres, finding places serving reasonably-priced meals, as opposed to snacks, something of a challenge. Whilst I tried on several occasions to seek out Israeli cuisine, this sometimes proved surprisingly hard, so I'd research good eating places beforehand. Food was of variable quality, from the superb local-grown breakfast goods at Kibbutz Yotvata to overpriced burgers and some terrible steaks in Eilat. The key thing to remember is that Israel is a small country of just 8 million people, so a varied restaurant scene does not always exist in smaller towns. That said, the quality of food at larger service stations is absolutely superb, with a range of meals, bread, olives, ice cream and extraordinarily good coffee, and good restaurants, once found, offer a superb range of meals and some of the best beers I've tasted.

VII. Culture & Ornithological Scene

Having travelled extensively in Morocco, there were many marked differences in Israel – the primary one being the sense of travelling within a first-world country, with western values, a high quality of life and an extremely progressive attitude towards the natural world. The Israeli people are very direct, sometimes appearing abrupt, but these initial impressions mostly give way, especially if there is common ground – such as a love of birds. My only experience of direct unfriendliness was at a kosher burger joint in Eilat where it was very clear that, in spite of my attempts to sample 'real' Israel, I wasn't welcome. My experiences in the Yotvata Kibbutz were of very memorable kindness from my host, Yossi Weiss, and my experiences of the Israeli birding scene were inspirational.

In light of the Israel-Palestine conflict, there are several points to bear in mind. Most of the ornithological community here is of a collaborative persuasion, frequently working with Palestinians, and in no way seeming supportive of the current status-quo. Boycotting Israel may seem an effective way of expressing discontent with human rights in Gaza, but in effect will do little in this regard, with one third of Israeli GDP channelled into the military. In addition, Israel's growing conservation movement, which, by any standards, is very progressive, depends on revenue from overseas tourists. Crucially, many of Europe and Asia's migratory birds depend on Israel's ability to conserve its wild places.

In every way, Israel is suited to the travelling birder, from its western sensibilities to small distances between birding sites, the excellent road network and ease of access to sites, the fact that most Israelis speak good English and, above all, the outstanding ornithological grapevine. Add to these twelve hours of sunshine, with just four days rain a year, and you have the perfect recipe for outstanding viewing conditions throughout your stay, and a supportive, extremely safe environment in which to enjoy the natural world. My trip was greatly improved by the company of Colin Butler and Adam XXX, from Cheshire. There were, as always, numerous comic highlights during the trip - including an accidental border crossing into Jordan, a truly awful attempt to disentangle binoculars, signs along the Dead Sea that promised food but ended in barbed wire, and my adoption by a poodle.

VIII. Information & Key Contacts

Prior to leaving, I consulted the vast array of trip reports available for the region. As always, reports by the likes of Richard Bonser made for profitable reading, but many subsequent reports were of use. Particularly excellent, with GPS coordinates, were the 2012-14 reports by Steve Arlow (www.birdersplayground.co.uk) and an excellent 2013 report by Steffan Cherrug with GPS for every site visited.

I am extremely grateful for the generous advice of Israel's birders, all of whom are, for want of a better phrase, shit-hot. Jonathan Meyrev, Eran Banker, Noam Weiss, Itai Shanni, Yoav Perlman, Avner Cohen and Oded Keynan were either obliging once in-country, or extremely helpful beforehand in planning the trip. Thanks to their advice, I was able to avoid several wastes of time and find out specific information for birds like Hooded Wheatear. Likewise, these guys were superb in outlining which species would have left the region by my visit (Cyprus Warbler, Striated Scops Owl) and the latest on Striated Herons, Dead Sea Sparrows and so on. A huge thanks to them all.

IX. Daily Notes

21st March 2015 (Saturday)

Having driven four hours from Tel-Aviv the night before, and arrived at Motel Aviv just after midnight, I awoke to a crisp Israeli dawn and rosy sunrise over the Jordanian Mountains. Superb views of Laughing Dove and Yellow-vented Bulbul heralded the commonest two species I would see during my visit here.

At Holland Park, by 5:45am, three House Crows passed over the road by the entrance ([29.571601](#), [34.960209](#)). Within the park itself, there was a small but clear movement of passerines ([29.572986](#), [34.960004](#)). A smart Red-spotted Bluethroat emerged from under a bush, several Eastern Bonelli's Warblers were passing through, in addition to one of the trip's commonest migrants, Lesser Whitethroats. A single Eastern Orphean Warbler and Red-rumped Swallow formed the remainder of passage. It was then time to enjoy some of Israel's common sedentary species – a superb pair of Arabian Babbler, an alarming pair of Blackstarts, a ringed Graceful Prinia filling the binoculars with morning song, and a pair of Sand Partridge.

By 7.45am, I drove on R12 into the Eilat Mountains. A little way past the large tanks on the left of the road, I reached a small pull-in on the right within the depths of a gorge ([29.557067](#), [34.907561](#)). On arrival, another Red-spotted Bluethroat was just sitting in the open between tamarisks and I also noted White-crowned Black Wheatear, male Blackstart and migrant Chiffchaff. Hirundine passage was noticeable, with Swifts, Red-rumped Swallows, European Swallows, House Martin, Crag Martins and 3-4 Pale Crag Martins all hawking down to five feet. Seen close, the Blackstart-coloured grey mantle of the Pale Crag Martin, and the strikingly pale throat, vent and underwing coverts, are all very noticeable, but the overall impression is also of a strikingly pallid species. The highlight here was a small, sparrow-like nest built into the netting of a military fence. Suddenly, a superb pair of Palestine Sunbird arrived to feed their chicks, with the luminescent male being one of the highlights of the trip.

There are at least three places in the Eilat Mountains for raptor watching, and I ended up at the central of these near the radio mast (c.[29.590868](#), [34.877870](#)) by 8.45. Initial activity appeared slow, but on scoping the skies, over 100 Steppe Buzzards became apparent, in addition to 2 Black Kite, 2 Black Stork and a single Long-legged Buzzard passing over. By 9.15am, at a third watch-point, just beyond the military checkpoint ([29.600807](#), [34.869907](#)), an impressive flock of over 500 Black Storks were rising on thermals over the mountains in the gathering haze. With migration very high, I headed back to Eilat.

By 9:45am, I stopped just north of the storage tanks by a site known as the helipad – a fact not immediately obvious when viewing from the road ([29.557067](#), [34.907561](#)). Here, I soon gained superb views of a male Hooded Wheatear as it flew around its rather large territory, showing off its largely white tail and perching prominently on rocky outcrops. With this elegant species seen well, it was then a bonus when one of Eilat's most famous migrants – a superb juvenile Steppe Eagle – soared close overhead with a small passage of Black Kite.

With an amazing ten new species seen by 10.30am, I headed to Dolphin Reef at Eilat South Beach ([29.525929](#), [34.934902](#)). Surrounded by hordes of tourists and in rising heat, I didn't locate any herons or gulls, but was surprised to find a superb pair of Tristram's Grackle foraging in the gardens here, in addition to two passage Northern Wheatear and a pair of Red-rumped Swallow. Grackles are fast expanding as a species in Israel and, now common around Eilat and Yotvata, are no longer the elusive Judean speciality they were a few decades ago.

By 11:45 am, I was ready for lunch, and drove towards Eilat North Beach. The Eilat Salt pans ([29.569817](#), [34.969795](#)) held a range of expected species, now shimmering in the heat haze, including 12 Greater Flamingo, numerous Slender-billed Gulls, a Spur-winged Plover, several Black-winged Stilt, 2 Ruff, a Great White Egret and a winter-plumaged Caspian Tern. I took an excellent lunch around the North Beach.

By 2pm I headed north towards the KM20 pans, along the unclassified road leading N from R109, off the R90 ([29.583259](#), [34.975399](#)). Along this stretch of road I failed to find Namaqua Dove or Indian Silverbill but had excellent views of Isabelline Wheatear and Eastern Black-eared Wheatear. A brief scan over the KM20 salt pans (from near the 'Flamingo Hide', [29.631698](#), [34.999562](#)) provided superb views of over 100 Greater Flamingo and numerous breeding-plumaged Slender-billed Gulls against the Jordanian Mountains.

By 4pm, I teamed up with my future trip-mates, Colin and Adam, two great lads from Cheshire, and we headed north to Yotvata South Field ([29.899167](#), [35.077452](#)) in time to search for Egyptian Nightjars at dusk. A grilling of a small flock of Short-toed Lark and Crested Lark in the stubble here failed to produce Oriental Skylark but we noted a range of birds in the superb evening light, including 5 Arabian Babbler, 3 White Stork in pea-green fields, 2 Marsh Harrier, a small flock of Black-headed Wagtails, Common Sandpiper and over 50 swirling Spanish Sparrows. The Israeli desert crops are quite a sight to behold – circles of blinding green in a land of orange sand. That evening, we met with Amir Ben Dov who, in spite of much effort, was unable to find the mysterious Egyptian Nightjars that pass through, en-route to unknown breeding grounds, each spring. We did, however, have a superb encounter with a Desert Hedgehog as it scuttled across the crops.

22nd March 2015 (Sunday)

I met Colin and Adam at Holland Park at 5:30am to search for the elusive Black Bush Robin that had been seen there for the previous four or more days. We focused our efforts on the far west end of the park, south of the Nahal Netafim ([29.574164](#), [34.957098](#)). Though we failed to find the target, we had excellent views of residents in the form of a Rufous Scrub-Robin, 4 Sand Partridge, Blackstart and Arabian Babbler, and migrants in the form of 2 Ruppell's Warbler, 5-6 Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, 1 Eastern Orphean Warbler and 1 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler.

By 7.15am we arrived back at Dolphin Reef, Eilat South Beach ([29.525929](#), [34.934902](#)) where a striking White-eyed Gull sat on the buoys offshore. Soon a breeding-plumage white-phase Western Reef Heron drifted past, and 2 Striated Heron flew from the long gantry offshore. I soon picked up the male on the buoys, and, after excellent scope views, he dived into the water to salvage a twig, then flew with it to a secure nesting site on the platform. We also noted 2 pairs of chasing Palestine Sunbird, and yesterday's pair of breeding Tristram's Grackle.

With the skies looking good for raptor passage, we headed to the lowest and seemingly main raptor watchpoint off R12 in the Eilat Mountains (29.582631, 34.886006). With many eyes to the skies, a range of raptors was picked out amid the constant stream of Steppe Buzzards. These included a juvenile Steppe Eagle, a Short-toed Eagle and 3 Black Kite, whilst I was unlucky to miss Lesser Spotted Eagle when Colin and Adam assumed I had fallen off a cliff, as they couldn't see me. A confiding Desert Lark showed down to a couple of feet. Having been transfixed by stories of legendary eagle passage, we found the migration slow, but, later on in the week, it apparently returned to full force.

The enigmatic Mountain or Striolated Bunting was now a target, following its return to the Eilat Mountains. Usually a bird of the Dead Sea, this shy, unobtrusive relative of the House Bunting had been seen around the 'helipad' (29.557067, 34.907561) for most of the winter, with up to 5 birds present. In spite of some birders encountering a single individual at the start of the week, we failed, along with many others, to locate this species here, and thought that birds may have dispersed into breeding territories further from the road. We noted a small passage of Black Kite and Steppe Buzzard very close overhead before I drove to Eilat Centre for lunch.

In Eilat, Ofira Park (29.552252, 34.957012) was everything that I hoped it would be. After lunch, a short walk here provided 5 Tree Pipits, 1-2 Cretzschmar's Buntings, a singing male Subalpine Warbler, Red-rumped Swallows and, best of all, an absolutely stunning Wryneck just hopping around in Mediterranean sunshine, unearthing ants from the watered lawns; entirely unbothered by passing streams of tourists.

Not realising what a common species it would become as I headed north, I devoted 2 hours to searching the Eilat Date Palms for Little Green Bee-eater, hoping to encounter Indian Silverbill and Namaqua Dove. My most profitable stop was along the unmarked road that heads S from the R109, off the R90, parallel with the Eilat Salt pans. At a border of reeds and date palms here (29.569464, 34.973500) I heard Indian Silverbills, found 2 Eastern Olivaceous Warblers and flushed a Quail. To my amazement, the bird landed in the shade of the date palms and, stalking close, I gained privileged scope-filling views of a female Quail, the kind of view that only an exhausted African migrant could provide. Heading north, I stopped briefly to admire 6 Spur-winged Plovers, Graceful Prinias and Red-rumped Swallows.

By 3.30pm I moved towards the KM20 salt pans, noting a Hoopoe en-route. The pans, viewed from the end of the track through the date plantation (29.623841, 34.997931), were alive with birds. These included far and away by best ever view of vibrant breeding-plumaged Greater Flamingos, 4 delicate Marsh Sandpiper, 2 Little Ringed Plover, 40-50 Little Stint, 2 Ruff, 2 Redshank, 3 pairs of Spur-winged Plover, 10 Black-winged Stilt, an overhead Osprey, 100+ Slender-billed Gulls, Shovelers and Pintails – the last a rather surreal sight as they wheeled over pink flamingos in the orange desert. By 5:15pm I started to move towards the KM19 Pool for dusk. On the track there, heading south (29.617666, 34.989969), a little evening passage picked up, with a smart Masked Shrike, Hoopoe and dark-phase Booted Eagle overhead.

By 5:40pm, I joined around 10 birders responsibly settled, quietly, at the NW-edge of the KM19 Sewage Pond (29.609208, 34.992861). The pool teemed with life. Six or more Squacco Herons fought noisily in front of us, a Pied Kingfisher and two Caspian Terns flew in to fish, and the reeds were lined with a Purple Heron, 2 or more Great White Egret, Little Egret and 2-3 Night Heron. Overhead, Black Storks, Cormorants, Marsh Harriers and a Cattle Egret flew to roost. Then, at 6.10pm, exactly as Jonathan Meyrev had predicted, a quiet 'shout' pointed out that a Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse had arrived to drink on the far bank. Then, seconds later, I realised that a pair were just six feet in front of us. With superb fieldcraft from everyone present, the pair started to drink, and I set eyes on what must be one of the most mysterious and striking birds of the whole region – the male a living tapestry of orange, white, black and grey. For about five minutes, the male and female took turns to drink, whilst each looked around warily in turn. Then they took off and flew away into the Eilat Mountains and back into obscurity.

23rd March 2015 (Monday)

One of my most memorable day's birding began at 4:00am as myself, Colin and Adam headed north from Eilat towards the Nizzana Desert. The drive takes 2 and ¼ hours but, with petrol stops and coffee, we arrived a little later than our target time, at 6:50am. Here, on the Ezuz Road south of Nizzana, at the KM7 post (30.824996, 34.469842) I soon picked out a male McQueen's Bustard to the east, at 300m range which, in the cool morning, allowed clear views. Another then appeared even closer, at 150m. Both, to my absolute delight, began to display. Few birds are actually funny, but this display is surreal, comical, and really couldn't be invented. First the feathers inflate, in slow motion, to cover the head, then the bird runs around in circles, with very little idea, if any, where's its going. Finally, as the feathers deflate, the males bow two or three times, then carry on as normal. This was one of the very best behavioural moments I have witnessed in my life.

Before leaving this site, we noted 2 pairs of Isabelline Wheatear and 5 Short-toed Lark. At the first crossing of the Nahal Ezuz, at around KM8 (30.814753, 34.470080), a fertile area of desert provided a smart male Spectacled Warbler, 4 Isabelline Wheatear, 2 Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, 10-15 Short-toed Lark, 2 Crested Lark and 2 Corn Bunting.

By 8:30am, then headed north, through Nizzana, to the Kzi'ot sewage ponds (30.890787, 34.435936), renowned for drinking sandgrouse. Jonathan and others had advised that this would be a waste of time, as the desert was acutely green all over, and the sandgrouse had no need to converge on any one area to drink. The site was still productive, however, with 50 Ruff, 1 Wood Sandpiper, 4 Marsh Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, 2 pairs of Garganey, 1 White-spotted Bluethroat, 1 Water Pipit, Spanish Sparrows, 6 Black-headed Wagtail and a superb lemon-yellow male Citrine Wagtail - all in a tiny area of wetland.

At 9:45am, we headed back down the Ezuz Road, stopping around KM9 (30.807348, 34.470444) for a variety of species including female Montagu's Harrier, Arabian Babbler, a pair of Chukar and Brown-necked Ravens. At the main Nahal Ezuz, which is crossed by a bridge (30.795898, 34.467628), it became clear a large fall of migrants had arrived. In an hour and half here, we noted a range of quality birds, in order: 3 male Palestine Sunbird, 1 Stone-curlew, 2 Chukar, 1 Eastern Orphean Warbler, 3 Hoopoe, 4 Northern Wheatear, 3-5 Isabelline Wheatear, 2 Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, 2 Desert Wheatear, 1 Sardinian Warbler, 12 Cretzschmar's Bunting, 5 Brown-necked Raven, 1 male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, 1 male Blue Rock Thrush, 2 Tawny Pipit, 1 Lesser Kestrel, 2 Tree Pipit, 2 Masked Shrike, Spanish Sparrow, Crested Lark, 1 flushed Quail and 2 Stonechat. The highlight was a nest-building male Streaked Scrub Warbler. It required over an hour of searching before we finally found this charismatic 'mini bush-robin', with its striking white supercilium, in typical low vegetation. Saturated but also extremely hungry, tired and dehydrated, we headed back towards the R40.

From the junction between 211, from Nizzana, we headed south on the R40, flushing a Long-legged Buzzard from a pylon ([30.967832](#), [34.775756](#)). At the north turn towards Sede Boker ([30.879668](#), [34.793114](#)), our quest for food was interrupted by at least 1 pair of Desert Finch, 3 Palestine Sunbird, 100 Spanish Sparrows and a distant pair of Little Green Bee-eater. The finches were subtly attractive, and a male eventually showed well as he waffled a Greenfinch-like song from the cover of small trees lining the road.

Eventually, we succeeded in finding one of Israel's superb service stations at the entrance to Ein Avdat Fort, in the National Park, and feasted on salads, bread, olives and coffee to bring ourselves around. Behind the barrier here ([30.791910](#), [34.770024](#)), we later located another target species, an extremely smart 1st year male Eastern Mourning Wheatear, in typical low stone wall and vegetation habitat. There site also held a single Spectacled Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear, Northern Wheatear and, for Colin and Adam, a Black Redstart.

By 4:00pm, with an evening scheduled in the Dead Sea, we headed east through the spectacular Judean landscape and the land of the Bible. The descent from Dimona towards the filtration pans was particularly spectacular. Clearing Dimona, we noted a juvenile Long-legged Buzzard, whilst the dates lining the R2499, as we approached Ne'ot Hakkikar ([30.984876](#), [35.353161](#)) produced an adult Short-toed Eagle whose battered flight feathers suggested a challenging migration from Africa.

At 5:30pm, we arrived in Ne'ot Hakkikar. Now whilst all Israeli birders are dead keen, only one is Oded Keynan, and Oded joined us for one of my most memorable night's birding to date. The Ne'ot Hakkikar Marshes is one of the strangest places I have visited – a combination of ancient tamarisk saltmarsh and modern agriculture, with drainage channels, fields and greenhouses that form a strange, disorientating maze. Along its margins, the Jordanian Border, lined with razor wire, contributes to the sense of a frontier. Throw in the blindingly bright desert stars and reeds four metres high, and you have a most evocative setting, but one utterly baffling to anybody not an experienced guide.

Entering the marshes, we encountered a close pair of Little Green Bee-eater. Oded then took us to an enormous stand of reeds, where the very loud, guttural call of three Clamorous Reed Warblers was followed by excellent scope views of a male, with its thin, attenuated bill, clear demarcation between white throat and dusker under-parts, and short primary projection. A Night Heron flew overhead. Then, quite suddenly, a Nubian Nightjar flashed close overhead – the impression of a very small, orange Nightjar with large white wing-flashes. Twenty minutes later, as true dark fell, another flashed across the path of our car. Then, standing on the margin between tamarisks and fields, a third was picked out an enormous range on the bare ground; little more than a white eye flash in the dark. It was 8:00pm, and, as we headed along our final stretch of tamarisks, Adam's flashlight picked up not one but two eyes. There in the scope, we enjoyed a pair of Nubian Nightjar down to the last whisker, to the degree whereby the stronger reddish flush on the male's neck was apparent. It was a privileged view of a strange bird in one of the strangest places I have been. After coffee with Oded, I was warmly welcomed, at midnight, at the Kibbutz Yotvata.

24th March 2015 (Tuesday)

After yesterday's incredible birding, today was a quieter day, and I took breakfast with my host, Yossi, at the Kibbutz Yotvata, and learned more about the culture of the Kibbutzim, which seem to be rather tranquil oases of socialism that, on a small scale, function rather well. After a feast of local eggs, olives, bread, hummus and so on, I briefly birded the flowery gardens here, which teemed with Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Lesser Whitethroats and at least one Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, whose nectar-covered yellow throat threw me for a moment. I was also fixated on by Yossi's poodle, which literally kept jumping into my car, and eventually I had to scorch it out of the Kibbutz, with the poodle chasing me down the road with love in its eyes.

I headed to the pumpkin fields due N of Yotvata North Circular Field ([29.908427](#), [35.074284](#)), where a Pied Wheatear had been found that morning. Here in the pumpkin fields, this very smart male was complimented by a female Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Northern Wheatears, 2 Isabelline Wheatears, 2 Short-toed Larks, 1 Woodchat Shrike, 1 Spectacled Warbler, 1 Yellow Wagtail and 2 flyover Red-throated Pipit, whilst Steppe Buzzards and Black Kites streamed over. Finally, after a kind tip-off from Jose Louis-Copete, we finally gained superb views of a female Namaqua Dove settled on the sand, in tamarisks at the E end of these fields ([29.905400](#), [35.082293](#)), as well as a pair in flight, together with very evident Graceful Prinia and pale-phase Eastern Black-eared Wheatear. At a prominent mast just N of the Yotvata Service Station (c. [29.896902](#), [35.065439](#)), a pair of Tristram's Grackle appeared to be carrying food.

The start of a quiet afternoon began as we headed towards the Meishar Plateau, on R40, with the aim of locating Cyprus Wheatear, Asian Desert Warbler and sandgrouse species, all present at specific sites here. We first stopped off at Ne'ot Semadar to see what had arrived. Without easy access here, we birded the southern perimeter of the east sewage works ([30.041461](#), [35.042395](#)), flushing an adult Steppe Eagle and only noting food-carrying Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, 6 Spur-winged Plover, 1 Lesser Kestrel and 10 Corn Bunting. En-route towards the Meishar Plateau, a range of stops provided several Brown-necked Raven and, fleetingly, two Dorcas Gazelle.

As we reached the stark deserts of the Meishar Plateau, the scorching heat killed almost all avian activity. After the teeming days before, it was hard-going. Our first stop ([30.384107](#), [34.949460](#)) provided a pair of Trumpeter Finch, perched, as always it seems, on a sandy bank in the baking heat, whilst much effort turned up 2 Isabelline Wheatear and 1 Eastern Orphean Warbler. A second stop in a sheltered wadi ([30.384726](#), [34.950550](#)) yielded a pair of Sand Partridge, 2 Desert Lark and more Trumpeter Finch. We decided to press on towards 'greener' habitat, but a detour down a possible military road at KM59, on R40, replete with numerous signs indicating death, was productive, with a pair of Desert Wheatear, 1 Streaked Scrub Warbler, 2 Desert Lark and, best of all, an extremely overdue species for me in the form of 3 superb Ortolan Bunting. Having expected to see this species in small-scale farms in eastern Europe, the environs could not have been more different.

Our time on the Meishar was, frustratingly, drawn to a close by the military police, who appeared from nowhere with black cars and sirens, immediately asking us to leave the area due to imminent live bombing and firing operations. Before we left, we did manage excellent views of a Dorcas Gazelle. Our attempts to locate Asian Desert Warbler and Cyprus Wheatear at the 'Monument' (KM60) were therefore thwarted for the trip, and we made the decision, given the low probability of Syrian Serins at Mitzpe Ramon, to head to the Ovda Valley where Colin and Adam were keen to locate Thick-billed Lark. Unusually, we didn't find the right site, and ended a quieter day with a flock of 20 Short-toed Lark.

25th March 2015 (Wednesday)

After a memorable evening with my host Yossi, I left Yotvata Kibbutz and by 6.30am was birding the Yotvata South Circular Field ([29.890796](#), [35.074468](#)) in a second attempt to locate Oriental Skylark or other migrants. In the dawn light, a lazy, settled flock of Black Kite on the eastern, sandy fringes looked particularly evocative under the rising sun, allowing approach to within feet. In the wetter centre of the field, a Green Sandpiper, 3 White Stork, 2 Spur-winged Plover and smart flock of 20 Black-headed Wagtails skimmed around. Then, as I watched a flock of around 30 Short-toed Lark land in the sand, a smart Bimaculated Lark flew overhead with its flight call and landed close by, affording excellent views and proving the find of the trip in terms of relatively unexpected species.

At 7:00am, with excellent information from Oded Keynan, Colin, Adam and myself headed towards the northern Arava. The green desert of Nizzana had been unsuitable for drinking sandgrouse, but the Idan Pools, surrounded by arid desert, provided an excellent opportunity to see the other 2 Middle-eastern species. We underestimated our journey time, but, by 8.30am, arrived at the hard-to-locate pools beyond Idan, near Hatzeva ([30.803356](#), [35.310474](#)). Immediately, a vocal Spotted Sandgrouse flew in, landing just feet from my car, before circuiting the pool and coming to drink. At least 5 more Spotted Sandgrouse were found on the bank, and had we arrived earlier, there's little doubt we'd also have encountered Crowned, which, fortunately, I saw extremely well in Morocco. The site also held 3 Black-winged Stilt, 2 Ruff, 2 Green Sandpiper, 6 Spur-winged Plover, 1 Black Kite and a smart pair of Night Heron.

On the north-west fringe of Idan, two Little Green Bee-eaters were mating at a breeding site ([30.806936](#), [35.296469](#)), with excellent views of a Sand Partridge on the south-east perimeter road ([30.801567](#), [35.306587](#)). By 10:00am, after coffee and breakfast at Hatzeva, we then began a long quest for Arabian Warbler, starting, in error, at the 'campsite' in the north of Nahal Sheizaf ([30.752852](#), [35.267252](#)). This small area of mature acacia wadi was productive, with 1 Eastern Orphean Warbler, 2 pairs of Desert Finch, 2 Blackstarts, 2 Little Green Bee-eaters, 1 Tawny Pipit and 1 Brown-necked Raven. After contacting Oded, we then moved onto a prime area within the main Sheizaf Reserve.

Turning between KM161 and KM162, on the R90, we followed the track to one of the most mature and pristine sections of acacia wadi in the reserve ([29.575270](#), [34.885605](#)). Here I almost immediately located a male Arabian Warbler for all of a second, registering the white eye-ring and 'large Sardinian warbler' impression of a bird before it vanished. Colin and Adam did not see the bird, and it's hard to overemphasise the ability of this species to simply vanish. An hour and a half later, we did not find it. Searching the wadi with Eran Banker, however, was productive, with Brown-necked Raven over a nest in the sandy cliffs, 2 Little Green Bee-eater, 1 male Common Redstart, 1 female Montagu's Harrier, 1 Hoopoe, 1 Sardinian Warbler and, best of all, excellent views of a migrant Thrush Nightingale hopping around in the shade.

After a long chat to Eran - a kind of ornithological Jack Bauer - we headed off for our third attempt to see Arabian Warbler. We took the unmarked road E into Hatzeva ([30.773739](#), [35.236930](#)) and found our way through the greenhouses to the west Nahal Gidron ([30.782200](#), [35.247211](#)). The heat eased a little, and we had good views of 1 Streaked Scrub Warbler, 1 Hoopoe, 2 Desert Lark, 1 Sparrowhawk, 1 Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, 1 Spectacled Warbler, 2 Little Green Bee-eater and some very habituated Arabian Babblers, the result of the long-term study here. Then, at 4.00pm, after six hours of attrition, I stopped the car to hear a quiet, Blackbird-like *Sylvia* song in a stand of mature acacia just south-east of Gidron ([30.782359](#), [35.263254](#)). There was a characteristically black tail-flicking Arabian Warbler, which performed extremely well for around five minutes - before it vanished, completely, right in front of us.

With an enormous sense of satisfaction, we drove north to the Dead Sea for the next chapter, stopping around 5km S of the Filtration Pans, on the R90, for a pair of Short-toed Eagle. East of the filtration pans on the R90 ([31.114492](#), [35.389465](#)), a flock of Swift contained at least one Pallid Swift, but the Dead Sea was just that - an eerie, floating calm, as close to the Bible as the modern day in terms of sheer nothingness. Our final stop was at Neve Zohar ([31.142013](#), [35.372704](#)). Here, the nests of Dead Sea Sparrow were immediately apparent in tamarisks within the water, but not a bird was in sight. We noted 1 Woodchat, 2 Little Green Bee-eater, 1 Clamorous Reed Warbler, 2 Common Kingfisher, 3 Black-winged Stilt, 1 Little Egret, 1 Black Kite and numerous Graceful Prinia before retiring to Arad for a serious volume of olives, burgers and beer. That night we relaxed, and viewed the WhatsApp-posted results of the *Champions of the Flyway* race. The teams had, as we expected, unearthed no end of quality migrants, including 2 Black Bush-Robins.

26th March 2015 (Thursday)

With Colin and Adam's final hours in the country, we headed north towards Beit She'an via the Dead Sea. This was dead in almost every respect. I had imagined thronging communities along the shore, boats and a variety of human life. Instead, it was, truly, lifeless - an eerie place with little sense of habitation or community. A stop in the car park at Ein Gedi Spa ([31.416938](#), [35.379217](#)) yielded a pair of Fan-tailed Raven, which were rather unattractive, resembling shrunken black vultures in their proportions - and a pair of Tristram's Grackle.

As we headed north, we all became slightly hysterical at the numerous signs that pointed to food, but led to resolutely *no food*. Often, signs that blatantly promised restaurants led to gates and barbed wire. The Quimran service station ([31.741476](#), [35.459501](#)) had a restaurant that opened at 11am to serve tourists bussed in from miles away, and did not serve food before that time. We found a pair of Little Green Bee-eater but otherwise couldn't wait to clear the Dead Sea, finally finding food, petrol and human life shortly north of here.

By 12:30, the countryside changed spectacularly as we gained height and headed north. Flowering meadows and the true 'land of milk and honey' replaced dates, desert and deadness. The birds changed too, with Eurasian temperate species like Blackbird and Greenfinch becoming apparent. Graceful Prinia became omnipresent in every field. We headed straight to the Tirat Zvi Fishponds south of Beit She'an. At the entry pools ([32.422774](#), [35.530782](#)), a vibrant White-breasted Kingfisher was hunting and seemed to be using one of the silos for nesting, and we had Cattle Egret, Glossy Ibis and plentiful Spur-winged Plovers. The north pools ([32.422165](#), [35.539685](#)) provided the warm-up act, with non-native Common Mynas nesting in the silos, numerous Ospreys showing down to a few feet, and large gatherings of Grey Heron and Great White Egret perfectly reflected in the still water.

The southern pools ([32.407749](#), [35.532130](#)) teemed with birds. The margins held countless Graceful Prinia, numerous Clamorous Reed Warbler, one of which afforded excellent views, and 2 flyover Red-throated Pipits. The pools held a few smart Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis, Great White, Little and Cattle Egrets, whilst an assortment of gulls included at least 15 Great Black-headed Gulls, one of which, to our immense appreciation, was truly striking in its hooded summer plumage. There were at least 20 Armenian Gulls, including 2-3 full adults, and at least one first-year Caspian Gull. Attention to the finer aspects of *Laridae*, and even the omnipresent Black Kites and Ospreys, all played second fiddle to a flock of 50 White Pelicans that soared in slow-motion overhead, and 2 near-adult Spotted Eagles which showed down to the last feather as they panted in the heat on the bank, and took to the air, where they joined flocks of White and Black Storks. Pied and White-breasted Kingfishers were abundant and the overall effect was of total saturation. By 3.30pm, with temperatures in the high thirties, we retreated to Beit She'an, where, after a beer, I said my goodbyes to Colin and Adam and retired to the guesthouse to sleep off heatstroke.

27th March 2015 (Friday)

After an evening where heat and exhaustion took its toll, I was back to normal by 7.30am, as the clocks went forward, and headed to Kfar Ruppim to seek out Black Francolins. On the track from Sde Eliyahu to Kfar Ruppim ([32.449614](#), [35.531311](#)) I had superb view of Stone-curlew in the shade of the dates, Spanish Sparrows, Black Kites, White Storks and calling Quail. Towards the north of the village, a productive track ran from the N gate of the Kibbutz ([32.460279](#), [35.553060](#)). By 7:15am, I could not locate calling Black Francolin here or in the wider area, but did have numerous nesting Ring-necked Parakeets, 1 Stone-curlew, 1 Palestine Sunbird, 1 female Spectacled Warbler, 1 Chukar responding to francolin playback, 2-3 Hoopoe, 1 Night Heron and superb views of a pair of Great-spotted Cuckoo as they sailed noisily between the date palms. Immediately north of the Kibbutz gates, a section of tamarisks and ponds was a magnet for noisy White-breasted Kingfishers and Pied Kingfishers, which frequently emerged from the ponds with small, golden fish, which they ate on the wires here ([32.459834](#), [35.552204](#)).

By 8:30am, I returned to the Tirat Zvi ponds in the hope that the White Pelicans would have settled. I gained superb views of 22 birds and finally enjoyed, on the water, this bird that has been hard-wired into my DNA since reading Roald Dahl. Soon after I arrived, a kind of aggressive ice-cream van driver arrived, scaring the birds off with a loud siren in what is actually quite a sustainable form of co-existence: the birds feed and roost on the ponds at dawn and dusk, but, in the interim, are shoed away to preserve fish stocks. A Bluethroat was a new arrival here before I left for breakfast.

With few targets left now, I birded Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz again after breakfast, locating the birdwatching centre where a pair of Syrian Woodpecker were observed ([32.460191](#), [35.557054](#)). With no information forthcoming here, I headed to the Neve Eitan Ponds, where the entrance tamarisks ([32.496321](#), [35.542717](#)) held singing Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, numerous Graceful Prinia and a large colony of House Sparrows but no Dead Sea. The ponds were harder to access and less productive, with 5 or more Ospreys, numerous Black Kites, a calling Little Bittern and the first Turtle Dove of the trip.

Determined to locate Dead Sea Sparrow, which I hadn't remotely envisaged being a difficult species, I headed south of Kfar Ruppim. Here I was fortunate to meet Avner Cohen, who was amused, as I expected, to find I hadn't seen the species, but confirmed, at the same time, its enormous decline due to tamarisk destruction. The colony of 120 mentioned in Shirihai, for example, is long a thing of the past, but Avner kindly took me around 2km south of the Kibbutz ([32.433632](#), [35.553157](#)). Here, he immediately located a superb male Dead Sea Sparrow alarming at an enormous Black Whip Snake in the roadside grassland. Heading south for another 1km, Avner kindly showed me a pair of Dead Sea Sparrows building up their characteristic nest in roadside tamarisks ([32.418231](#), [35.550575](#)). In a pool close to the Jordan River ([32.379744](#), [35.553863](#)), we stopped again for a smart Purple Heron, a pair of Little Green Bee-eater – with the male feeding a moth to the female - and several newly arrived European Bee-eaters near their sandy nesting sites. Avner left me and I headed on.

In my final hour in this part of Israel, I became very lost, accidentally driving over 10km south along the Jordanian border road ([32.361657](#), [35.548819](#)). This took me into a real wilderness of flowers and pre-agricultural meadows and the most extraordinary section of barbed wire I have ever seen. Almost every third post was a bird of quality perched just feet from the car. Ospreys were commonest, most of them with fish, and there were numerous Hoopoes and several pairs of Little Green Bee-eaters. Commonest was Turtle Dove, a sad reminder of our own rural past, as well as Chukars. Eventually, I re-found myself, and headed via Tirat Zvi towards Mount Gilboa.

The R6666, leaving the R669 beyond Nir-David, traverses a large section of Mount Gilboa and is probably the best-known place in Israel to search for Long-billed Pipits. As I ascended the mountain, noting 20 Corn Bunting, it was interesting to see the specific, boulder-strewn slopes, flower meadows and scattered tree habitat of this bird, reminiscent of a 'Mediterranean' Tree Pipit-style habitat. The elevated bend in the road, and viewpoint, before entering the forest here ([32.494800](#), [35.427264](#)) is one site where many have been successful. Whilst I had a pale-phase Booted Eagle and nest-building Southern Grey Shrike here, I saw, only briefly, a single parachuting pipit for a second or two. Almost certainly this species, I did not have any further views and therefore cannot rule out an unusual flight by another species. From the well-known track S of the road, S of the quarry ([32.494529](#), [35.433069](#)), I likewise failed to locate the species, but, looking up over the mountain, enjoyed an evening passage of Black Kite and an adult Bonelli's Eagle before driving to Tel-Aviv for the evening.

28th March 2015 (Saturday)

After a great evening with my Couchsurfing hosts Dina and Martin, in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel-Aviv, we drove to a beach by the Mediterranean at Palmahim ([31.932276](#), [34.700491](#)). Here, a Baltic Gull, a confiding pair of Hoopoe, 2 Chukar, 1 male Blue Rock Thrush, 1 Sardinian Warbler, 1 rooftop White-breasted Kingfisher, 2 Graceful Prinia, several roof-nesting Spur-winged Plovers and omnipresent Common Mynas made for a memorable goodbye to the coast. In HaYarkon Park, Tel-Aviv, a walk through the western park ([32.097759](#), [34.806260](#)) provided a feast of plastic, with sinister Common Mynas everywhere, omnipresent Ring-necked Parakeet, 2 Monk Parakeet and at least 1 Vinous-breasted Starling. The Yarkon River ([32.096597](#), [34.808050](#)) held a superb Pied Kingfisher and an Egyptian Goose, whilst the Lake ([32.098496](#), [34.812005](#)), a colony of Little and Cattle Egrets. With this final farewell, I drove to the airport and home.

X. Species List

For GPS references and further site information, please refer back to main report.

Species	Recorded
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	1 noted in Yarkon Park (Tel-Aviv) – Category D
Common Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	
Eurasian Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	
Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	
Garganey <i>Anas querquedula</i>	2 pairs at Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev)
Northern Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i>	
Chukar <i>Alectoris chukar</i>	1 pair at Ezuz Road KM9, Nizzana (Negev) 1 pair at Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 male north of Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz (Beit She'an) 2 or more 5km S of Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz (Beit She'an) 1 pair at Palmahim Beach (Tel-Aviv)
Sand Partridge <i>Ammoperdix heyi</i>	1 to two pairs at Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 pair at KM59 R40, Meishar Plateau (Negev) 1 male SW of Idan Village (Northern Arava)
Quail <i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Superb views of female in Eilat South Date Palms (Red Sea) 1 flushed at Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev)
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	
Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
Pygmy Cormorant <i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>	3 or more at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Great White Pelican <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	22-50+ flock flying and settled, Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i> (H)	One heard at Neve Eitan Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	2-3 at KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 at Ne'ot Hakkikar Marshes (Dead Sea) Pair at Idan Sewage Ponds (Northern Arava) 1 over north Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz (Beit She'an)
Striated Heron <i>Butorides striata</i>	Pair at Dolphin Reef, Eilat South Beach (Red Sea)
Squacco Heron <i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	6+ at KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea)
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	1 over KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 1+ over Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) Colony at Yarkon Park Lake (Tel-Aviv)
Western Reef Heron <i>Egretta gularis</i>	1 at Dolphin Reef, Eilat South Beach (Red Sea)
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1 at KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 at Neve Zohar (Dead Sea) Colony at Yarkon Park Lake (Tel-Aviv)
Great White Egret <i>Egretta alba</i>	1 at Eilat Salt pans (Red Sea) 2+ at KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 20+ at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	1 at KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 2 at Kfar Ruppin Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Black Stork <i>Ciconia nigra</i>	500+ over Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 5+ over KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 30+ at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	3 at Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) Several around Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz (Beit She'an)

Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	1+ at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Greater Flamingo <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	12 at Eilat Salt pans (Red Sea) 100+ at KM20 Salt pans, Eilat (Red Sea)
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	3-20 in passage over Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 15 settled Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 1 over Idan Sewage Ponds (Northern Arava) 1 over Neve Zohar (Dead Sea) 20+ at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 10+ at Kfar Ruppin (Beit She'an) 10+ at Neve Eitan (Beit She'an) 15+ passage over Mount Gilboa
Short-toed Eagle <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1 over Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 1 perched 2km W of Ne'ot Hakkikar (Dead Sea) Pair 5km S Filtration Pans, R90 (Dead Sea)
Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3+ Yotvata North Field (Northern Arava) 10+ roosting KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea)
Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>	1 female KM9 Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 1 female Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	
Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>	100-500 <i>vulpinus</i> over Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 10-50 <i>vulpinus</i> over Yotvata North Fields (Southern Arava)
Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus</i>	1 over Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 1 adult R40 N of Sede Boker (Negev) 1 juvenile near Dimona (Dead Sea)
Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila clanga</i>	2 near-adults at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Steppe Eagle <i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	2 over Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 1 at Ne'ot Semadar (Negev)
Booted Eagle <i>Aquila pennata</i>	1 over KM19-20 Dates, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 over Mount Gilboa
Bonelli's Eagle <i>Aquila fasciata</i>	1 adult over Mount Gilboa
Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1 over KM20 Salt pans, Eilat (Red Sea) 10+ at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 5+ at Neve Eitan Fishponds (Beit She'an) 10+ 5-10km S of Kfar Ruppin (Beit She'an)
Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i>	1 hawking over Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 over Ne'ot Semadar (Negev)
Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	
Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	
Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	
McQueen's Bustard <i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>	2 males in superb display at Ezuz Road KM7, Nizzana (Negev)
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Several at Eilat Salt pans (Red Sea) 10 at KM20 Salt pans, Eilat (Red Sea) Several at Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev) 3 at Idan Sewage Ponds (Northern Arava) 3 at Neve Zohar (Dead Sea)
Stone-curlew <i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	1 at Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 2 at 2 sites, Kfar Ruppin Plantations (Beit She'an)
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	
Spur-winged Lapwing <i>Vanellus spinosus</i>	1 Eilat Salt pans (Red Sea) 6 Eilat South Dates (Red Sea) 3 pairs at KM20 Salt pans, Eilat (Red Sea) 2 pairs at KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 6+ at Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev)

	6 at Ne'ot Semadar (Negev) 6 at Idan Sewage Ponds (Northern Arava) 2+ at Yotvata South Field (Southern Arava) 50+ Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 2 roof-nesting Palhamin (Tel-Aviv)
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	
Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	
Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	
Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	4 at KM20 Salt pans, Eilat (Red Sea) 4 at Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev)
Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	3 at Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev)
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	
White-eyed Gull <i>Larus leucophthalmus</i>	1 Dolphin Reef, Eilat South Beach (Red Sea)
Great Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	20+ including stunning summer adult at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	
Slender-billed Gull <i>Larus genei</i>	20+ Eilat Salt pans (Red Sea) 1 Dolphin Reef, Eilat South Beach (Red Sea) 100+ KM20 Salt pans, Eilat (Red Sea)
Baltic Gull <i>L. fuscus fuscus</i>	2 Palmihah Beach (Tel-Aviv)
Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>	1+ Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Armenian Gull <i>Larus armenicus</i>	20+ Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	1 Eilat Salt pans (Red Sea) 2+ KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea)
Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles lichtensteinii</i>	3, superb views of pair, KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea)
Spotted Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles senegallus</i>	6+ Idan Sewage Ponds (Northern Arava)
Feral Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	
Woodpigeon <i>Columba palumbus</i>	
Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	
Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	1 Neve Eitan Fishponds (Beit She'an) 10+ 5-10km S of Kfar Ruppim (Beit She'an)
Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Very common to abundant throughout
Namaqua Dove <i>Oena capensis</i>	3 – female and pair – at Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava)
Rose-ringed Parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>	1-4 over Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 2+ at the Guesthouse (Beit She'an) 5-10 around Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz (Beit She'an) 50+ Hayarkon Park and environs (Tel-Aviv)
Monk Parakeet <i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>	2-3 Hayarkon Park (Tel-Aviv)
Great Spotted Cuckoo <i>Clamator glandarius</i>	Pair N of Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz (Beit She'an)
Nubian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus nubicus</i>	5 individuals, including scope-filling pair, Ne'ot Hakkikar Marshes (Dead Sea)
Swift <i>Apus apus</i>	
Pallid Swift <i>Apus pallidus</i>	1-2 identified S of Neve Zohar (Dead Sea)

Alpine Swift <i>Apus melba</i>	2+ at range over Mount Gilboa
Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1 at Neve Zohar (Dead Sea)
White-throated Kingfisher <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	5+ Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 5+ N of Kfar Ruppin (Beit She'an) 2+ Kfar Ruppin Fishponds (Beit She'an) 1 rooftops at Palmahim Beach (Tel-Aviv)
Pied Kingfisher <i>Ceryle rudis</i>	1 fishing KM19 Pool, Eilat (Red Sea) 4+ Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 5+ N of Kfar Ruppin (Beit She'an) 2+ Kfar Ruppin Fishponds (Beit She'an) 1 Hayarkon Park River (Tel-Aviv)
Little Green Bee-eater <i>Merops orientalis</i>	Pair at Sede Boker (Negev) Pair close on wires at Ne'ot Hakkikar Marshes (Dead Sea) Pair mating on wires, NE Idan Village (Northern Arava) 2 pairs at north Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava) 1 pair at central Nahal Sheizaf KM162 (Northern Arava) 1 pair Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava) 1 pair Neve Zohar (Dead Sea) 1 pair Quimran (Dead Sea) 2 pairs, male feeding moths to female, Kfar Ruppin Fishponds (Beit She'an) 3-4 pairs 5-10km S of Kfar Ruppin (Beit She'an)
Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i>	5-6 birds newly arrived Kfar Ruppin Fishponds (Beit She'an) 2+ superb views, regurgitating bee shells, 5-10km S of Kfar Ruppin (Beit She'an)
Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	1 c.KM8 N of Eilat (Red Sea) 1 KM19-20 Pools, Eilat (Red Sea) 3 Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 Central Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava) 1 Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava) 1 Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 2-3 Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz (Beit She'an) 8+, 5-10km S of Kfar Ruppin (Beit She'an) Pair, Palmahim Beach (Tel-Aviv)
Wryneck <i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Superb views of one at Ofira Park, Eilat (Red Sea)
Syrian Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	Pair at Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz (Beit She'an)
Desert Lark <i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	1 very confiding bird, Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 1 pair KM59, Meishar Plateau (Negev) 1 pair KM59-60, Meishar Plateau (Negev) 2 pairs, northern Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava) 1 pair at Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava)
Bimaculated Lark <i>Melanocorypha bimaculata</i>	Excellent views of 1 at Yotvata South Field (Southern Arava)
Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Flock of 10-50, Yotvata South Field (Southern Arava) 2, Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 5 birds at KM7, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 10-15 at KM8, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 20 Ovda Valley (Negev)
Crested Lark <i>Galerida cristata</i>	Common throughout all agricultural or semi-arid lands
Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i>	
Sand Martin <i>Riparia riparia</i>	
Crag Martin <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	5+ Eilat Mountains (Red Sea)
Pale Crag Martin <i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>	3+ Eilat Mountains (Red Sea)
Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
House Martin <i>Delichon urbicum</i>	
Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>	1 Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 7+ Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 2 Dolphin Reef, Eilat South Beach (Red Sea) 2-4 Ofira Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 2+ Eilat South Dates (Red Sea) 2 Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)

Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>	3 Ofira Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 2 Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 northern Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	5 Ofira Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 2 Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev)
Red-throated Pipit <i>Anthus cervinus</i>	2 over, Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 2 over, Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	1-2, Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev)
Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava</i>	5-20 Yotvata South Field (Southern Arava) 1 Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 6 Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev)
Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>	1 adult male, Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev)
White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	
Yellow-vented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i>	Commonest species throughout
Dunnock <i>Prunella modularis</i>	
Rufous Bush Chat <i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	1 male Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea)
Thrush Nightingale <i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	1 migrant at KM161-62 Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Bluethroat <i>Luscinia svecica</i>	1 Red-spotted, Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 Red-spotted, Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 1 White-spotted, Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev) 1 Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	1 male at KM161-62 Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Blackstart <i>Cercomela melanura</i>	1-2 pairs Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 2 northern Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Stonechat <i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	
Isabelline Wheatear <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	1 cKM8, N of R109, Eilat (Red Sea) 2 Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 2 pairs, KM7, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 4, KM8, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 3-5, Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 Ein Avdat Fort, R40 (Negev) 2 KM59 R40, Meishar Plateau (Negev)
Northern Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	
Pied Wheatear <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	1 male, Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava)
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear <i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i>	1 cKM7, N of R109, Eilat (Red Sea) 2, KM8, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 2, Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 2, Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 1, Ne'ot Semadar (Negev)
Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	Pair, Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1-2 pairs, KM59-60, Meishar Plateau (Negev)
Mourning Wheatear <i>Oenanthe lugens</i>	1 sub-adult male, Ein Avdat Fort, R40 (Negev)
Hooded Wheatear <i>Oenanthe monacha</i>	1 territorial male, Eilat Mountains (Red Sea)
White-crowned Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	1 male, Eilat Mountains (Red Sea)
Rock Thrush <i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	1 migrant male, Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev)
Blue Rock Thrush <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	1 male, Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 male, Palmihah Beach (Tel-Aviv)
Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	
Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>	3+ Kfar Ruppim (Beit She'an)

Graceful Prinia <i>Prinia gracilis</i>	Common in south, abundant by Beit She'an, including: 1-2 Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 2+ Eilat South Dates (Red Sea) 2+ Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 4+ Neve Zohar (Dead Sea) 20+ Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 10+ Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz (Beit She'an) 2+ Neve Eitan Fishponds (Beit She'an) 2 Palmihah Beach (Tel-Aviv)
Streaked Scrub Warbler <i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>	1 male nest-building at Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 male KM59 R40, Meishar Plateau (Negev) 1 Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava)
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler <i>Iduna pallida</i>	1 Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 1-2 Eilat South Dates (Red Sea) 1 Neve Eitan Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	
Clamorous Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	3 heard and 1 seen well, Ne'ot Hakkikar Marshes (Dead Sea) 2+ heard Neve Zohar (Dead Sea) 5+ heard and 1 seen well, Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 3+ heard Neve Eitan Fishponds (Beit She'an)
Spectacled Warbler <i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	1 male KM8, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 1 Ein Avdat Fort (Negev) 1 Yotvata North Field (Southern Arava) 1 Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava) 1 female, N of Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz (Beit She'an)
Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	1 singing male at Ofira Park, Eilat (Red Sea)
Sardinian Warbler <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	1 Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 at KM161-62 Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava) 1 Palmihah Beach (Tel-Aviv)
Ruppell's Warbler <i>Sylvia ruppeli</i>	1-2 Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea)
Arabian Warbler <i>Sylvia leucomelaena</i>	1 male briefly at KM161-62 Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava) 1 male singing and showing well, Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava)
Eastern Orphean Warbler <i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>	1 male Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 1 KM58 R40, Meishar Plateau (Negev) 1 male North Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Lesser Whitethroat <i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Commonest passage migrant throughout desert regions
Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	
Eastern Bonelli's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus orientalis</i>	3-5 Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 1 Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 1 Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava) 1 Nizzana Village (Negev)
Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	
Arabian Babbler <i>Turdoides squamiceps</i>	2-4 Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea) 5 Yotvata South Field (Southern Arava) 2 KM9, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 3+ Nahal Gidron (Northern Arava)
Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>	
Palestine Sunbird <i>Nectarinia osea</i>	Superb pair feeding chicks at nest, Eilat Mountains (Red Sea) 2 pairs chasing at Dolphin Reef, Eilat South Beach (Red Sea) 3 males chasing at Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 2 males, 1 female at Sede Boker (Negev) 1-2 males N of Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz (Beit She'an)
Southern Grey Shrike <i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	1 2km S of Beit She'an 1 nest-building at Mount Gilboa
Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>	1 Yotvata North Fields (Southern Arava) 1 Neve Zohar (Dead Sea)

Masked Shrike <i>Lanius nubicus</i>	1 KM19-20 Eilat Salt pans (Red Sea) 2 Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev)
Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>	
House Crow <i>Corvus splendens</i>	3-5 Holland Park, Eilat (Red Sea)
Hooded Crow <i>Corvus cornix</i>	
Brown-necked Raven <i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	1-2 KM9, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 5 Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 3+ Meishar Plateau (Negev) 1 North Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava) 1 over cliff nest, KM161-62 Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Fan-tailed Raven <i>Corvus rhipidurus</i>	Pair at Ein Gedi Spa (Dead Sea)
Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis (I)</i>	4+ nesting pairs at Tirat Zvi Fishponds (Beit She'an) 4+ at Palmahim Beach (Tel-Aviv) 50+ at Hayarkon Park (Tel-Aviv)
Vinous-breasted Starling <i>Sturnus burmannicus (I)</i>	Pair at Hayarkon Park (Tel-Aviv)
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	
Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	50 Yotvata South Field (Southern Arava) 10+ Nizzana Sewage Ponds (Negev) 10+ Nahal Ezuz, Nizzana (Negev) 100+ Sede Boker (Negev) 20+ Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz (Beit She'an)
Dead Sea Sparrow <i>Passer moabiticus</i>	Nesting pair and male 2km S of Kfar Ruppim (Beit She'an)
Greenfinch <i>Carduelis chloris</i>	
Desert Finch <i>Rhodospiza obsoleta</i>	2-5 birds, including singing male, Sede Boker (Negev) 2 pairs Northern Nahal Sheizaf (Northern Arava)
Trumpeter Finch <i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	2 pairs KM58 R40, Meishar Plateau (Negev)
Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	3 at KM59 R40, Meishar Plateau (Negev)
Cretzschmar's Bunting <i>Emberiza caesia</i>	1-2 Ofira Park, Eilat (Red Sea)
Corn Bunting <i>Emberiza calandra</i>	2-4 KM8, Ezuz Road, Nizzana (Negev) 10 Ne'ot Semadar Kibbutz (Negev) 20 Mount Gilboa

