

Yemen & Socotra

18 October to 2 November 2009



Participants

Alf Petersson, Göran Cederwall, Heidi Malmgren, Kjell-Åke Hall, Niklas Holmström and Ulf Ståhle. All six from Sweden.



The Yemen party at Al Mahwit, from left: Yousuf Mohageb, Kjell-Åke Hall, Niklas Holmström, Göran Cederwall, Heidi Malmgren, Ulf Ståhle and Alf Petersson.

Logistics

Getting there

We booked our return tickets with Turkish airlines from Stockholm Arlanda to Sanaa for a total price of 5997 SEK per person plus cancellation insurance from Europeiska 360 SEK. We left Arlanda 12.20 and arrived in Sanaa at 00.50 local time with a stopover in Istanbul for about 3 hours. Total flight-time Arl-Ist 3h25 and Ist-Saa 4h45.

Visas

It was recommended to apply for the visas to Yemen from their embassy in Haag, Netherlands, five weeks prior to arrival in Yemen because the validity of the visas is one month from the date of issue. This included one week posting period to and from the embassy. Invitation letter from Arabian Ecotours, passports and photos were sent in a recommended first class letter and the cost was 30€ per person.

Money

Our cost for the whole trip including everything except money for personal use was 2385 USD per person where 30% was paid in advance from Sweden and the rest when we met our guide Yousuf Mohageb in Sanaa after arrival. USD was also recommended in Yemen and credit cards as VISA and MasterCard are working in banks and larger hotels throughout the country.

Currency: Yemeni rial. 1USD = 225 YER (1 SEK = 30 YER)

Health

Basic vaccination against polio, diphteria-tetanus, hepatitis A and oral vaccine Dukoral against bacterial enteritis are recommended. Malaria protection with cloroquine is only needed from sept-feb in the whole Yemen (and Socotra) for altitudes below 2000 m.

Amoeba dysentery is common in rural areas in Yemen mainland in cheaper restaurants and it is recommended to bring metronidazol as well as norfloxacin or ciprofloxacin against bacterial enteritis.

Safety

There has been an internal conflict around Sada near the border to Saudi Arabia from 2004 which during 2009 was trapped up. Kidnapping of foreign tourists by tribes has been an ongoing problem the last years. In many instances, the kidnappers attempted to use hostage taking to gain leverage in negotiations with the government. Often they have been released after their demands have been solved.

According to the Swedish Embassy one should avoid travelling in Yemen if not necessary and travel insurances from most companies are not valid in Yemen.

Travelling on Socotra is safe and there have been no threats at all to foreigners there. However, we felt totally safe the whole trip when travelling with Yousuf and Arabian Ecotours in Yemen as he knows exactly where it is safe to go in the whole country.

We had no threats at all and we always met great friendliness and generosity from the local people. In Al Mahwit we even were invited to a great national celebration evening with the governor. We enjoyed music and theatre with hundreds of local people. Our trip was paid attention to by media, for example we made two TV-interviews.

Getting around

You get around easily with a 4W-drive everywhere if you go with Yousuf. If you go by yourself it is very difficult if you don't speak arabic. You should rent a car with driver as there are a lot of traffic accidents and you are lawless if you are involved in an accident.

You also need a detailed travel report for the whole trip as it is difficult to get any detailed maps over the country.



Göran is interviewed by the Yemeni Television at Al Mahwit. Yousuf acted as an interpreter from and to Arabic. Photo: Niklas Holmström.



A 4 Wheel Drive is absolutely necessary when travelling on narrow off-roads in Yemen, as well as a good driver! Photo: Ulf Ståhle.

Climate

In the mountains hot days and cold nights and on the coast dry and hot climate.

Yemen mainland has rain period once or twice a year in April and August when there are flash floods

On Socotra there is a strong south-west monsoon June to early October and heavy rain in June.

In October :

Place	Day temp (°C)	Night temp(°C)	Precipitation (mm)
Sanaa	22	9	5
Hodeidah	33	25	0
Taizz	26	14	0
Aden	30	25	0
Socotra	31	23	0

Daylight: Sunrise 05.55 Sunset 17.40

Preparations

Two of us, Göran and Ulf had travelled around in North Yemen and birdwatching for two weeks in March 1990, on their own without any help from a Travel Agency. Ever since then they have been longing back to this beautiful and thrilling country again. When North and South Yemen were united they thought of once going back again to further investigate the mainland Yemen including the Aden area and Socotra. It wasn't possible before 2000 to go to Socotra any other way than by boat. Since 1999 it is possible to make domestic flights from Sanaa and Aden to Socotra.

The planning started in spring 2008 when Niklas contacted Arabian Ecotours director Yousuf Mohageb after recommendations from Dave Sargeant's travel report from 2006. After several e-mail contacts between Niklas-Ulf-Göran and Yousuf we at last decided to go for two weeks to Yemen and Socotra, one week each and that the optimal group size would be six persons, concerning logistics and so on.

We all wanted to make observations of the endemic birds in Yemen mainland although Ulf and Göran had seen them all except the Yemen Accentor on their previous trip.

We also wanted to see all the Socotran endemics and have as many sea-watching occasions as possible including a pelagic trip to Sabunya, a small rocky island with nesting seabirds west of Socotra, only accessible by small fishing-boats.

We had prepared before the trip by collecting birdsounds in MP3 from as many of the more interesting birds in Yemen mainland as possible including Yemen Accentor, Yemen Warbler, Arabian Warbler and Hume's Owl.

We left the MP3-player with all the birdsounds, loudspeakers, strong torches as well as some literature to Arabian Ecotours as it is difficult to get such equipment in Yemen.



Friendly Yemeni people chewing Kat in the shade at Hamam Gearref. Photo: Ulf Stähle

Pelagic trip

Already in an early stage of our planning we were keen to undertake a pelagic trip off Socotra. At first we had Abd al Kuri or the (more realistic) islands of Samhah or Darsah, that are collectively known as *Al Ikhwān* (The Brothers) in mind. Abd al Kuri was out of question as it lies too far away, about 105 km southwest of Socotra. And of the Brothers the small uninhabited island Darsah was ruled out because of its vast numbers of rats, popularly known as “Rat Island”. To get to the last one, Samha Island (47 km off the southwestern coast of Socotra), one needs a relatively large boat and it’s a two-day trip staying overnight. Such a trip would also be rather expensive as the costs will be shared upon six persons only. Add to this the possible risk of sea pirates in the area.

However, at that time we had no knowledge about the rocky islets of Sabuniya (around 1 km²), located 35 km southwest of Qalansiya and 20 km west of Bindar di Shab. This opportunity was a happy surprise as we also wanted to visit the breeding place for Jouanin’s Petrel, which is located at the western part of Socotra and only reachable by boat. The two-day pelagic to Sabuniy and Bindar di Shab were beyond all our expectations! We felt like a group of happy pioneers as no previous commercial birding group have done this before us!



Approaching the rocky islets of Sabuniya, which held a large colonies of Masked Booby and Socotra Cormorants. Brown Booby, Red-billed Tropicbird and Sooty Gull breeds too. Photo: Niklas Holmström.



A welcome party of Brown and Masked Boobies at Sabuniya. Photo: Ulf Stähle.

Arabian Ecotours

Arabian Ecotours with its director Yousuf Mohageb was recommended by Dave Sargeant in his report from 2006 as well as most of the reports from Yemen and Socotra after that including Birdquest's tours.

Yousuf has earlier worked in the travel agency field in Yemen for many years. He is living in Sanaa with his family and has very good knowledge of both Yemenitic people, nature and culture and many good contacts throughout Yemen to make a birdwatching trip just as we wanted it. (he knows the Head of the Yemen Birdwatching Society Dave Stanton for example).

He drives his own 4WD and has another 4WD driven by the chauffeur Abdulhamid, both of them driving very carefully.

All hotels we stayed in had a very good standard and several of them had Wi-Fi (if not there were always Internet cafés in the neighbourhood).

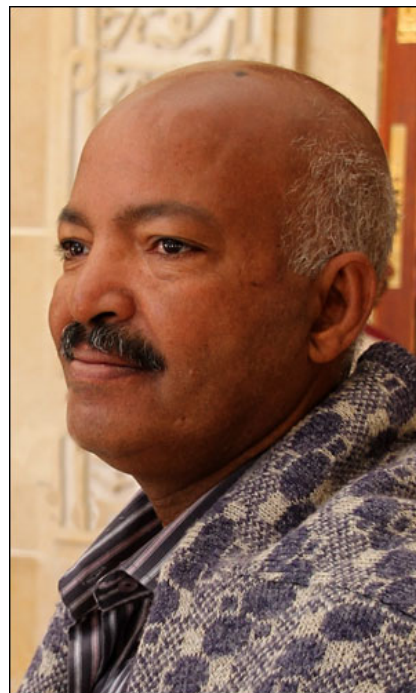
The meals were always very tasty and spicy, lunches often consisted of fresh vegetables, fruits, salad and tuna prepared in the free by Yousuf and Abdulhamid and were just excellent. We also often stopped in local restaurants in the villages we passed through and had very tasty local Yemeni food at all places.

Yousuf took care of everything during our stay in Yemen in an excellent way including contacts with the tourist police, airflights, and our trip to Socotra and we have never been so comfortable on a birdwatching trip before as we were on this trip.

On Socotra we were guided by Ahmed Saeid Suleiman, who lives on Socotra in the main city of Hadibu. He is normally working with biodiversity projects for UN on Socotra and knows everything worth knowing of Socotra's nature, birds and plants.

We can highly recommend Arabian Ecotours for organizing any birdwatching trip in the future in both Yemen and on Socotra, where our contact with Ahmed also was very memorable.

Website: <http://www.seawatching.net/aet> | Contact: e-mail: aet@y.net.ye



Yousuf Mohageb. Photo: Ulf Stähle.



Searching for the Socotra Cisticola. Ahmed Saeid Suleiman in front of the party. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Itinerary

17 October: Flight Stockholm – Istanbul – Sanáa with Turkish Airlines. Arrival Sanáa airport after midnight, transport to hotel Arabia Felix

18 October: Morning in Sanáa, thereafter all day in Hamam Gearref . Night in Arabia Felix Hotel Sanáa

19 October: Early morning from Sanáa to Kawkaban where we were birding till lunch. Spent the afternoon in Al Ahjur. Transport to Al Mahwit, night in Al Mahwit Hotel

20 October: Birding all day in the surroundings of Al Mahwit.

21 October: Birding before breakfast in Al Mahwit, then downhill to Tihamah through Wadi Sarie where we were birding most of the day and had lunch. Stopped at Bajil rubbish dump just before dawn. Night in Al Hudeidah, Aj Awsan Hotel.

22 October: Driving north from Al Hudeidah to Wadi Mawr searching for Arabian Bustard. In the afternoon stop at a site for Arabian Golden Sparrow, then to Al Kadan where we spent the last hour before dusk. Night in Al Hudeidah.

23 October: Early morning to Al Hudeidah Fish Market then to Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds, Al Hudeidah Wetlands and north to the coastal village Saliff for seabirding. Lunch at Al Urj for shorebirds and the first close contact with Crab Plover. Dusk at a palm plantation south of Al Hudeidah trying for Nubian Nightjar. Night in Al Hodeidah.

24 October: Left Al Hudeidah early morning for a long stop for shorebirds and lunch in the coastal village of Al Khawkah. Then a short stop in Al Mukha where a sandstorm made birding difficult. Arrived late afternoon to Taizz rubbish dump for raptors. Night in Taizz, Taj Shamsan Hotel.

25 October: Early morning to Jabal Sabir for Yemen Accentors and Yemen Trush, then late breakfast at the hotel. Spent the rest of the morning in Wadi Dhabab close to Taizz. Long transport to Aden, where we reached Aden marshes for late lunch and birding for two hours before dusk. Night in Mercure Aden Hotel close to Aden Airport.

26 October: Morning flight Aden- Al Mukhallah - Socotra Int. Airport where we arrived at noon. Transport to Hadibo and Taj Socotra Hotel in Hadibo for check in and lunch. In the afternoon birding west of Hadibo, ending with seabirding the last hour. Night in Hadibo.

27 October: Early breakfast, then to the high mountains and Diksam for Socotra Bunting and other endemic birds. Birding there all day and at night back to the hotel in Hadibo

28 October: Early breakfast then birding in Wadi Ayhaft most of the day. In the afternoon sea-watching at the point east of Hadibo. Night in Hadibo

29 October: After early breakfast to Qalansiya for boattrip 35 km to the small island of Sabuniya. In the afternoon boat back to Bindar di Shab where we camped overnight on the beach.

30 October: Left the camp in the morning. Boattrip with seawatching back to Qalansiya. Back to Hadibo for lunch at the hotel before we went to Soq for Socotra Scop's Owl. Late afternoon seawatching east of Hadibo. After dusk to Soq again, now for Socotra Scop's Owl concert. Night in Hadibo.

31 October: After early breakfast trip the whole day to the eastern tip of Socotra and Hala, where we stopped at the lagoons at Serhin and Qaria on the way. Night in Hadibo.

1 November: Early morning as usual. Heading east to Dihamri for birding and snorkeling most of the day. A short stop at Qaria lagoon on the way back and at Soq at dusk for Sandgrouses. Night in Hadibo.

2 November: Late morning flight Socotra to Sanaa where we spent the afternoon and night in old Sanaa.

3 November: Flight back after midnight Sanaa - Istanbul – Stockholm

Travelling route on mainland Yemen by GPS tracking



Travelling route on Socotra by GPS tracking



Birding sites

Hamman Gearref: (N14° 59' 48" E4° 49' 16") A village 45 km south of Sanaa with a well vegetated wadi where one can follow a track about 2 km to some pools. Turn right from the main road at N 14° 59' 42" E 043 53' 39" down to the village. The track starts west of the village.

Birds that can be found are Black Bush-Robin, Arabian Warbler, Golden-winged Grosbeak, Brown Woodland Warbler, Arabian Babbler, Shining Sunbird, Black-crowned Tschagra , Arabian Serin and Arabian Waxbill and several migrants.



Part of Wadi Hamman Gearref. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

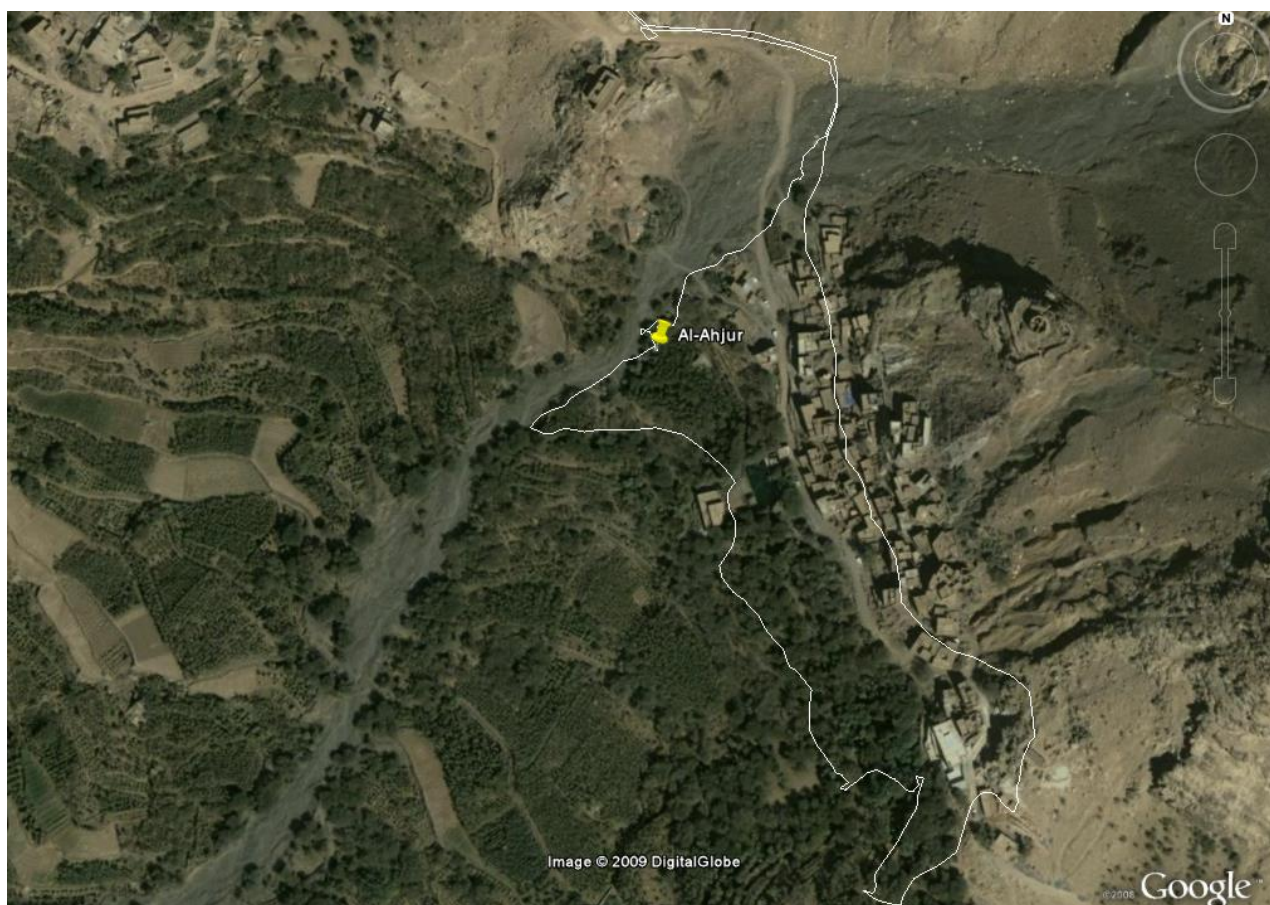
Kawkaban: (N15° 30' 2" E43° 53' 59") 40 km northwest of Sanaa. A mountaintop plateau (altitude 3000 m) with stony uncultivated areas interspersed with small terraced fields. Very steep sides of the massif with ravines and small Acacia trees. The ancient walled village of Kawkaban lies at the edge of the mountain plateau overlooking the village of Shibam.

Birds: Griffon Vulture, Lammergeier, Philby's and Arabian Partridge, Hume's Owl, Yemen Accentor, South Arabian Wheatear, Yemen Warbler, Arabian Warbler, Yemen Thrush, Yemen Linnet, Arabian Serin, Yemen Serin, Little Rock-Thrush, Blanford's Lark, Botta's Wheatear.



The beautiful and ancient village of Kawkaban. The area holds several bird specialties. Photo: Alf Petersson.

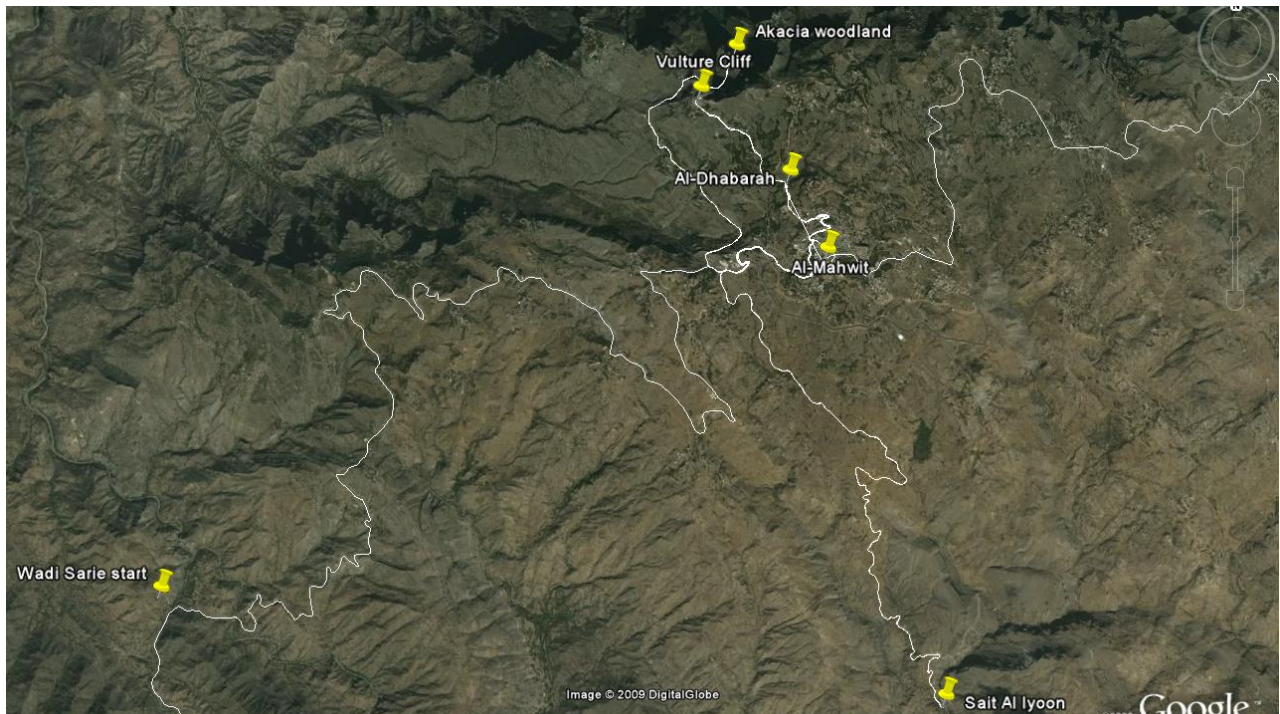
Al Ahjur: (N15° 27' 18" E43° 53' 51") 6 km southwest of Kawkaban take the rough track on the left at N 15° 27' 48" E43° 53' 40". Drive 900 m to a small spring to the left of the road and a small pond to the right. This is a good place for Golden-Winged Grosbeak, Yemen Linnet, African Rock Bunting, Striated Bunting. After another 200 m one can walk through the village and plantations where Arabian Woodpecker is fairly common.



View over Sarhat Mahal in the Al Ahjur area. One should spend at least a half day birding. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Al Mahwit: (N15° 28' 3" E43° 32' 33") A town 73 km west of Sanaa on the Red Sea escarpment at 1900 m altitude with a steep wadi 2 km west of the town down to 1500 m. Extensively terraced where Sorghum is grown. Rocky uncultivated areas and the wadibed seasonally dry. Akacia woodland close to the village on the road to the vulture cliffs of Jabal Al-Mahwit.

Birds: Akacia woodland good for Arabian Woodpecker, Red-eyed Dove, Brown Woodland Warbler, Grey Hornbill, Yemen Thrush, Yemen Warbler, Little Rock-Thrush. From the cliffs good views of Griffon Vultures from above and in the wadi one can find Arabian Warbler.



View from the "vulture cliff" at Jabal Al-Mahwit. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Al-Hudaydah: (N 14° 48', E 42° 57') The 4th largest city in Yemen, an important port with export of coffee, cotton and dates.

Fish market (N 14° 46' 54", E 42° 56' 54") in the harbour with daily fish market, where you easily can see White-eyed Gulls, and other gulls and terns.

Sewage Ponds (N 14° 50' 56", E 42° 57' 37") Take the track to the right about 3,8 km north of the big roundabout in Hodeidah where the main road to the north starts. Here we saw lots of flamingos, ducks, waders and chlidonias terns.

Wetlands (N 14° 52' 8" , E 42° 57' 9") Take the small track to the left 2,4 km north of the track to the Sewage Ponds. Good views here of our first Crab Plovers and other shorebirds and herons.



Scanning the Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds. Here you can easily spend a full day of birding. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Al Urj: (N 15° 6' 12", E 42° 52' 22") 37 km north of Al-Hudeidah. Take left from the main road at N 14° 59' 40", E 42° 59' 7" drive about 21 km on the road to Saliff, turn left at N 15° 6' 19", E 42° 52' 36" down to the sea. A 15 km stretch of the coast south of the fishing village Al-Urj with well developed Mangrove intertidal muds/sandflats and a sand barrier beach. Doum Palms are extensive.

Birds: Striated Heron, A very wide variety of coastal waterbirds occur on passage and in winter. Crab Plovers and Saunder's Terns are resident.



Al Urj is a beautiful coastal oasis. Photo: Ulf Stähle.

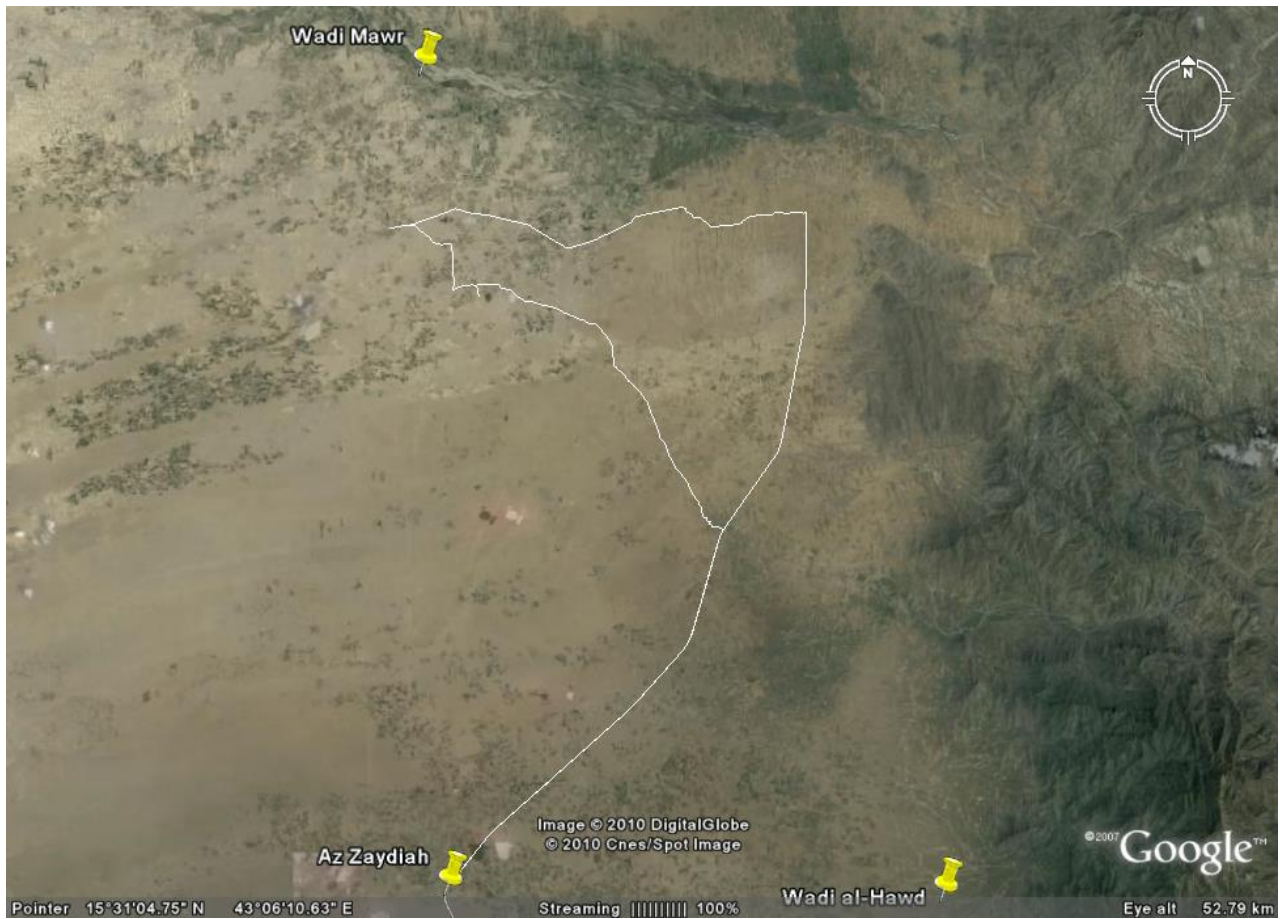
Saliff: (N 15° 18' 8" E 42° 40' 6") 34 km northwest of Al-Urj. A former harbour for salt export. Good for gulls, terns and sea-watching. The saltpans on the roadsides 10-15 km southeast of Saliff can be good for waders.



Seavatching at Saliff Port, but there was not much movement over the sea that day. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Wadi Mawr: (N 15°36'42", E 43°00'57") 90 km north of Al Hudeidah. The largest wadi on the western watershed of Yemen with occasional floods from the northern mountains. Heavily cultivated, but also extensive areas of uncultivated Tamarix woodland. Semidesert dwarf-shrubland in the western parts.

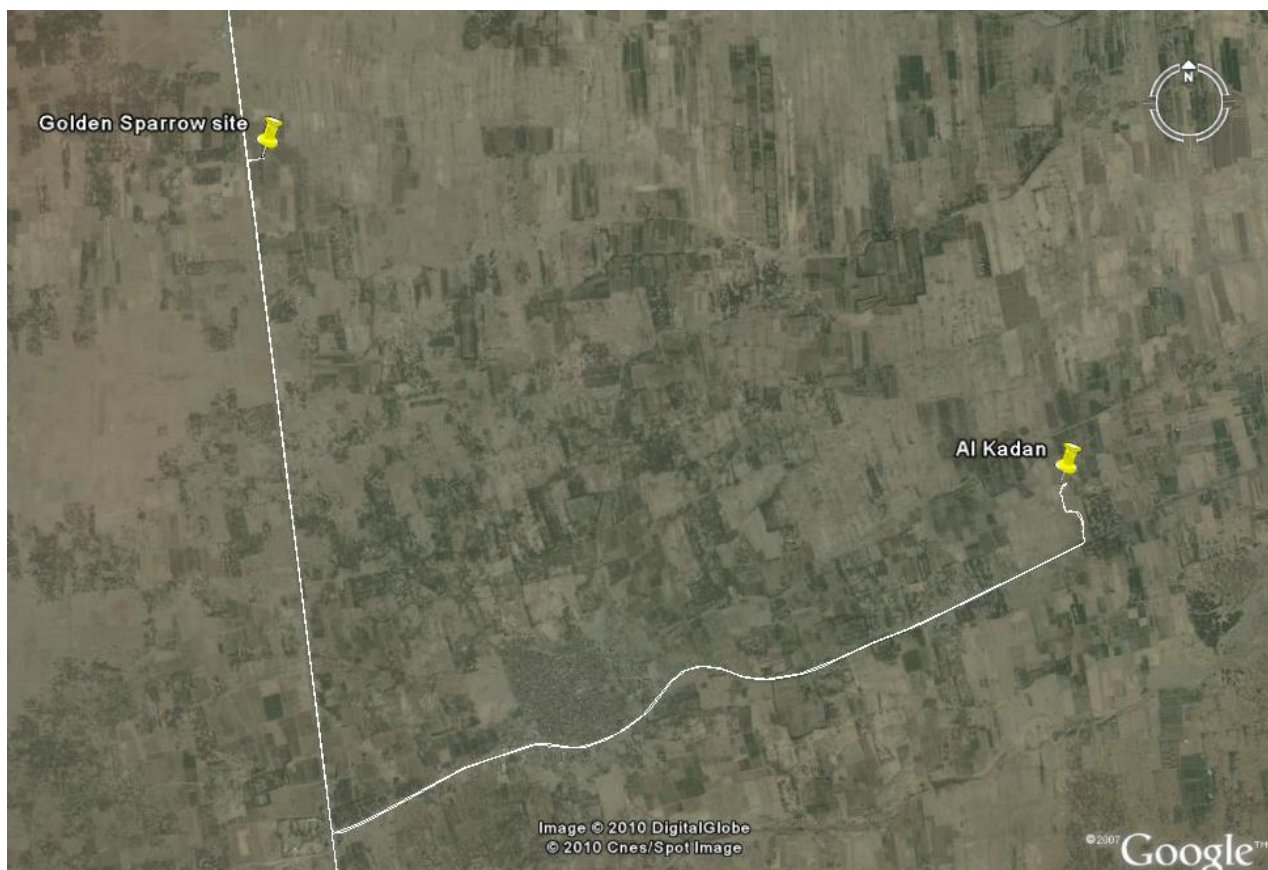
Birds: Arabian Bustard, earlier fairly common but now rare due to hunting. Arabian Golden Sparrow breeding in Akacia bushes. Bird species such as Isabelleine Wheatear, Black Scrub Robin, Zitting Cisticola, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Isabelline Shrike and African Palm Swif are characteristic for the area.



Yousuf scanning the Tihamah plain for Arabian Bustard (or Bastard as we never found one). Photo: Niklas Holmström.

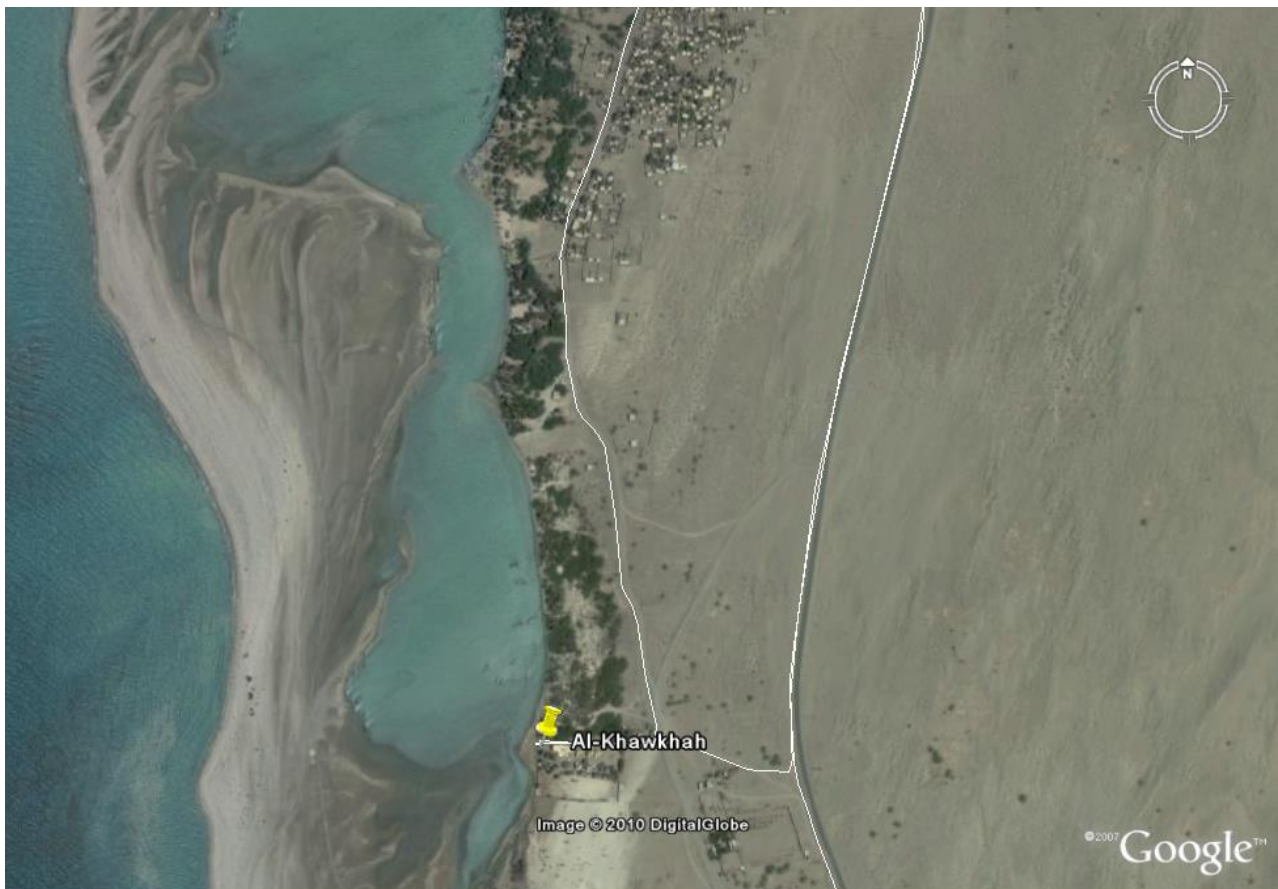
Al Kadan: (N 15°14'46", E 43°15'29") 51 km northeast of Al-Hudeidah. Rocky foothills of the Red Sea escarpment where Wadi Surdud flows onto the plain of western Tihamah north of Bajil. Cultivation and fine parkland with scattered trees of Akacia and denser vegetation along wadi banks.

Birds: Diverse mix of Afrotropical breeding species. Hamerkop, Abdim's Stork, Verreaux Eagle, Tawny Eagle, White-browed Coucal, Abyssinian Roller, African Paradise Flycatcher, Arabian Golden Sparrow (abundant non-breeding visitor in October). Also a major passage of raptors in autumn.



Part of the Al Kadan area, which have great potential and perhaps need a full day to cover. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

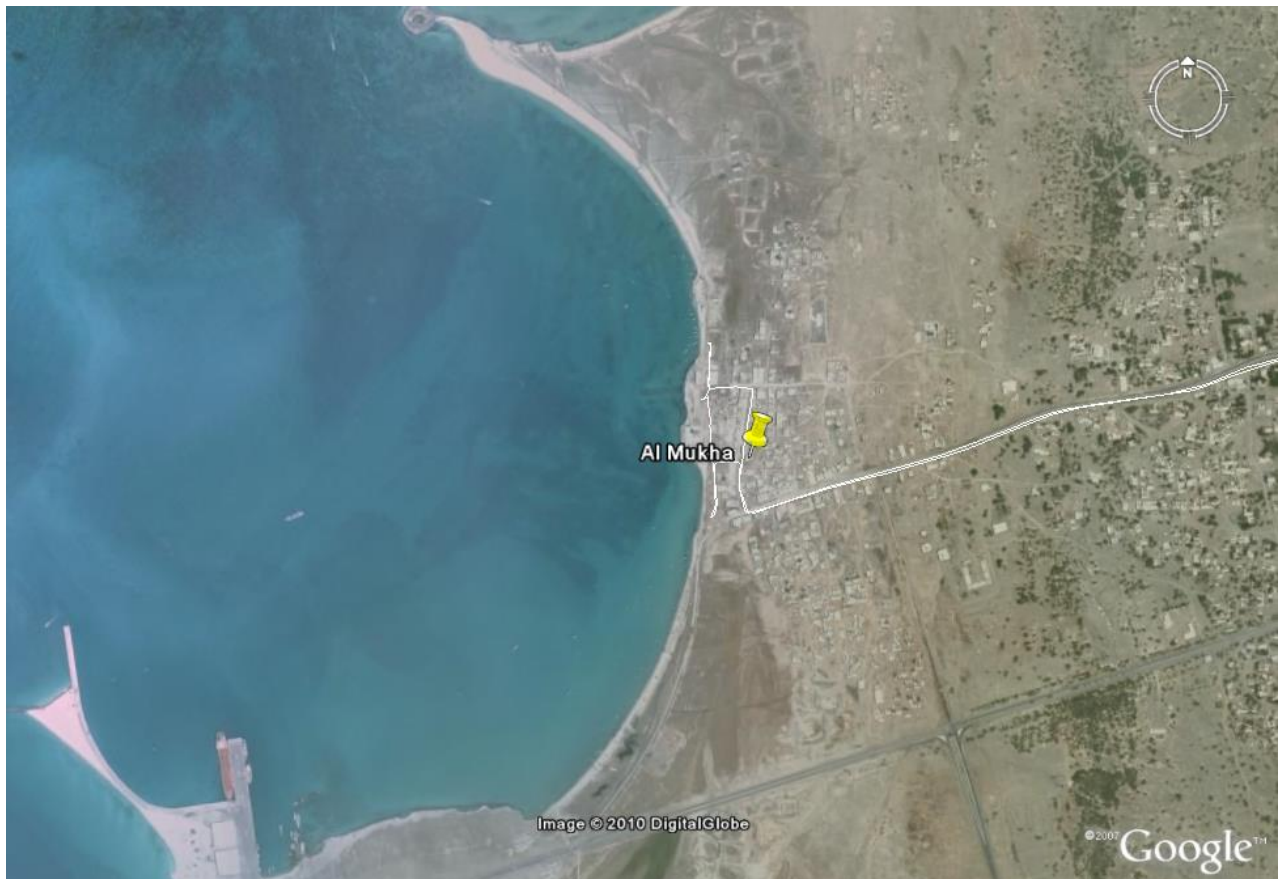
Al Khawkhah: (N 13° 49', E 43° 14')_ 112 km south of Al-Hudeidah. A fishing village with narrow sand beaches where migrating and wintering shorebirds are numerous. Best place for close contact with Crab Plovers. A record 1988 of Slender-billed Curlew. White-cheeked Terns wintering and Saunder's Terns are resident.



At Al Khawkhah we had close contact with several families of Crab Plover! Photo: Alf Petersson.

Al Mukha: (N 13° 19' 15", E 43° 14' 33") A fishing village 70 km south of Al Khawkhah. Holds a large number of roosting gulls and terns.

Only a few people know that as late as 400 years ago all the coffee in Europe came from the port of Al-Mukha, Al-mocha, or Mocha, a tiny town on the Red Sea in what is Republic of Yemen. Yemen Mocha Office Int. The name Mocha is the reminder of the original home of coffee.



There was a sandstorm during our visit to Al-Mukha, which made it a short one. Photo: Ulf Stähle.

Taizz: (N 13° 34', E 44° 02') The 3rd largest city in Yemen with a lot of rain. The economy is based on agriculture.

Rubbish Dump: (N 13° 36' 38", E 43° 55' 37") 10 km northwest of Taizz. Good for raptors as Black and Yellow-billed Kites, Eagles (Steppe, Tawny, Greater Spotted, Imperial) AbdimStorks

Jabal Sabir: (N13° 31' 15", E 44° 3' 7") The highest mountain in the area (3006 m), 8 km southeast of Taizz. Drive for about half an hour and park just beneath the military area close to the top. Very good for Arabian Accentor where we had more than 5 singing males at the same time and Yemen Thrush.

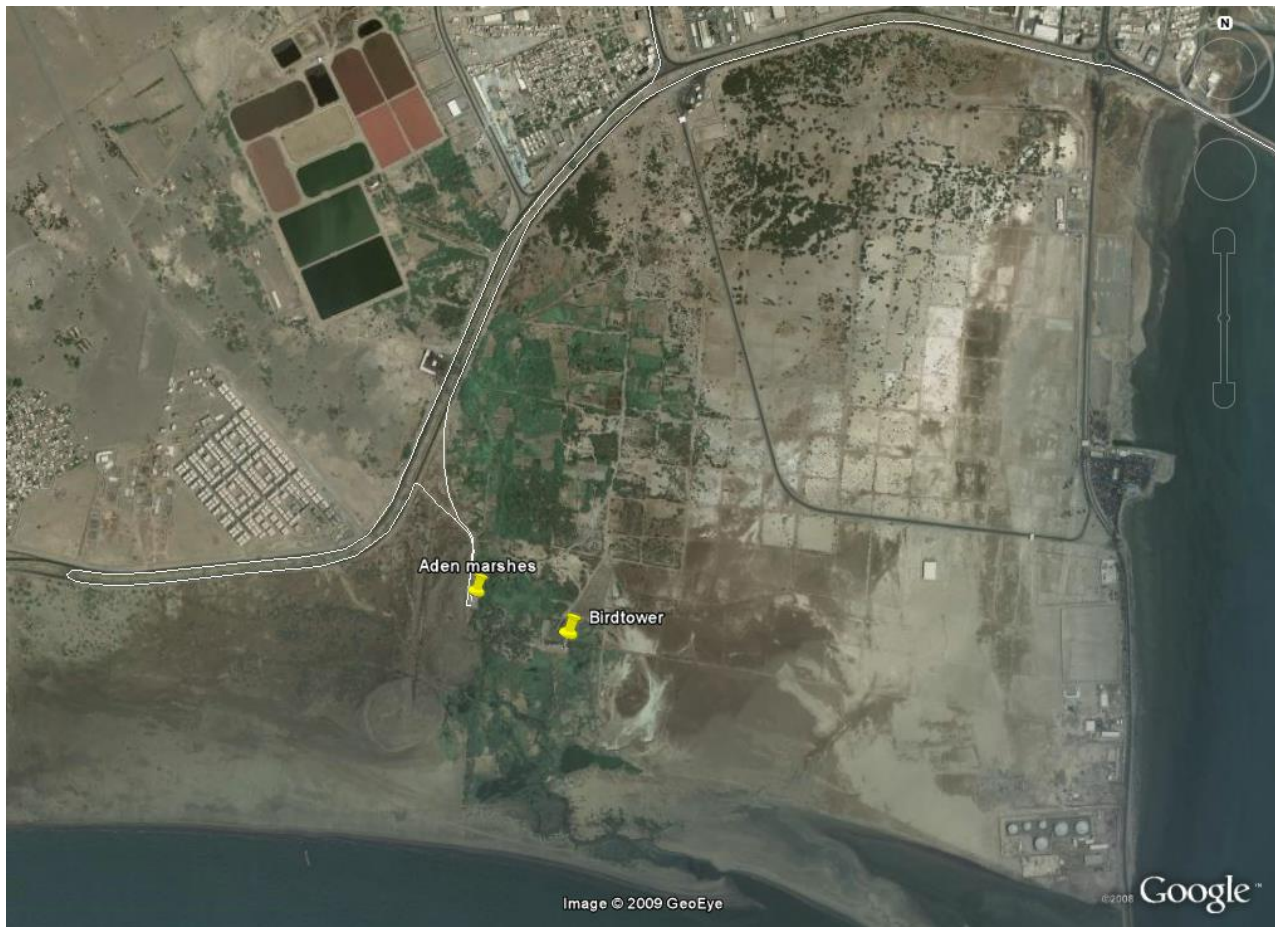
Wadi Dhabab: (N 13° 33' 53", E 43° 56' 18"). A cultivated wadi with easy access 8 km west of Taizz. This is a good place for Zebra and Arabian Waxbill and other passerines.



View from the peak at Jabil Sabir, where we saw and heard at least five Arabian Accentors. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Aden Marshes: (N 12° 50' 03", E 44° 58' 05") Coastal wetland km west of the town caused by sewage outflow.

Birds: Important for migrating and wintering waterbirds as Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, Flamingos, Spoonbills, Broad-billed Sandpipers, Barred Godwits and Crab Plovers. Chance for vagrants from both Africa and India.



View from the birding tower over Aden marshes with Jabal Shamsan in background. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

SOCOTRA

Dixem, Wadi Ayhaft, Wadi Soq, Khor Sirhin, Qalansiya, Khor Qaria, Bindar Di Sháb (Shoep):

For excellent and detailed descriptions of these birding sites on Socotra with waypoints go to Dave Sargeant's Report: Socotra, Yemen Birding Report 12-20 January 2006

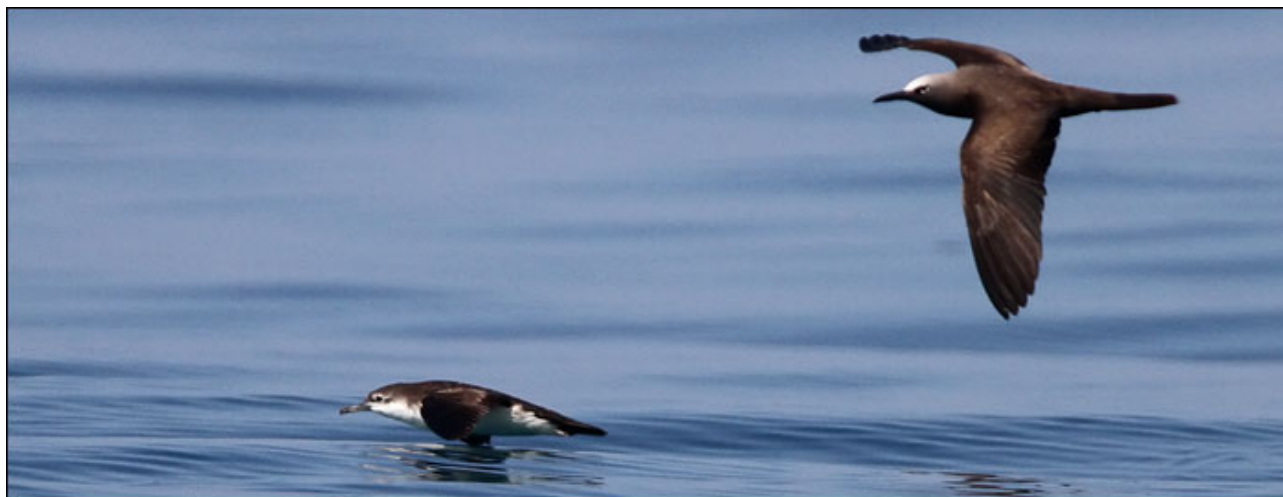
Hala: (N 12° 33' 02", E 54° 27' 33") On the northcoast with beautiful springs and sand dunes close to the eastern edge of Socotra. Can be good for resting migrants. We saw Tree Pipit and Indian Pond Heron here.

Dihamri: (N 12° 40' 17", E 54° 11' 46") A natural marine protected area 20 km east of Hadibo where some of the best natural diving is and with rich coral reefs. You can hire diving equipment at Socotra dive camp. Good seawatching from the tip just north of the camp with among others Wilson's Petrel

Seawatching points:

Ras Hebaq/Qadub: (N 12° 38' 35", E 53° 58' 00") A good seawatching point on the north coast ca 7 km west of Hadibo .

Another good point for seawatching is 11 km northeast of Hadibo (N 12° 41' 57", E 54° 05' 52"), where we also saw dolphins and a Humpback Whale with calf.



Persian Shearwater and Brown Noddy were both seen in good numbers. Photo: Ulf Stähle.

Sabuniya: (N 12° 39', E 53° 09') Small rocky island c. 80 m high and 36 km west of Qalansiya, only reachable by small fishing boats from Qalansiyah when the weather is calm (mostly in the mornings). Masked Boobies, Red-billed Tropicbirds and Socotra Cormorants are breeding here. Jouanin's Petrels, Common Noddies and Persian Shearwaters are easily seen on the boat-trip



Beautiful and untouched beach at Qalansiya! Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Day-by-day diary

17 October

Arlanda Airport. Flight Stockholm – Istanbul – Sanáa with Turkish Airlines. Arrival Sanáa airport after midnight, transport to hotel Arabia Felix

18 October

Most of the day we spent at the wadi Hamman Caref near Sanaa. Nothing rare or special, but nice sightings of regular and beautiful birds such as Hamerkop, Upcher's Warbler, Shining and Palestine Sunbirds.

19 October

Today we did visit Kawkaban, which is a famous birding site with several endemic birds. Right now Ulf and I updating the site from a small Internet cafe, after a lovely dinner and late in the evening. No time for stories this evening. We have to sleep soon. To cut a long day story short. The special sightings as follows: Arabian Partridge (1), Philby's Partridge (3), Hamerkop (1), Bonelli's Eagle (2), Dusky Turtle Dove (30), Arabian Woodpecker (3), Blandford's Lark (40), Brown Woodland Warbler (1), Yemen Trush (1), Red-breasted Wheatear (40), South Arabian Wheatear (40), Little Rock Trush (3), Arabian Waxbill (2), Arabian Accentor (1), Arabian Serin (60), Yemen Serin (40), Yemen Linnet (15) and Striolated Bunting (1). That's all from us today. Tomorrow we will do Al Mahwit and surroundings.

20 October

Today we had a very joyful day with easy birding at Al Mahwit and nearby locations. We started at Al Rayadi to enjoy a colony of Griffon Vultures. We had amazing close-up of the vultures. We had several target species on our list, but we failed on Golden-winged Grosbeak. However, the day was very productive concerning birds and the landscape in the area is just amazing, dramatic and beautiful. In the evening we were invited along with Yousuf to a great celebration by the Governorate of Al Mahwit. This celebration was by the occasion of Yemeni National days of September, October and November. We had a seat on the second row, just behind the governor and his party. The Yemeni Television was there and we were interviewed by two different newspapers. For an hour we listened to traditional and national Yemeni music, which was performed live on stage. Just lovely and a momento for life!

Sightings from today, worthy of mention: Dusky Turtle Dove (20), Red-eyed Dove (3), Bruce's Green Pigeon (1), African Grey Hornbill (3), Arabian Woodpecker (3), Little Rock Thrush (4), Blue Rock Thrush (1), Yemen Thrush (1), Brown Woodland Warbler (10), Arabian Warbler (1), Yemen Warbler (2).

21 October

Today we started birding before breakfast in the woodland in Al Mahwit that was so good yesterday (where we then had Arabian Woodpecker and Yemen Warbler). Now the sun hadn't reached the area and we didn't see many birds except Red-eyed Doves and Brown Woodland Warblers, which were singing everywhere. When we left though a Yemen Warbler started singing.

Before we left Al Mahwit the Yemeni Television had arranged an interview with the group where we among other questions answered about our view of Yemen, its nature, people and how secure we felt travelling around in the country. They were especially interested in how Heidi experienced the Yemen as a woman. Yousuf acted as an interpreter from and to Arabic.

We spent the whole day thereafter driving through Wadi Sari about 60 km on gravel roads, and made several stops for birding. Among other birds we saw about 30 Griffon Vultures having a party on a dead donkey, one White-browed Coucal, Grey Hornbill, Arabian Babblers, Upcher's Warbler and a Southern Grey Shrike of the race buryi.

Later on Tihama on our way to Al Hodeidah we stopped at Bajil's rubbish dump where we in a terrible smell searched for Abdim's Storks without success. We found a lot of White Storks, several Steppe Eagles, two Tawny Eagles, one Greater spotted Eagle and one Egyptian Vulture. On our way we also had some Palm Swifts and Abyssinian Rollers.

Got to the hotel and made an early night after a good fish-dinner.

22 October

Today the main goal was to search for the very rare and 'most wanted' Arabian Bustard at a certain area of the Tihama plain. Yousuf had hired a local weeks ago to find out where the bustards were supposed to be. Unfortunately, this local was very unfair and cancelled the mission early in morning during our breakfast. We anyway went to the place where Yousuf had seen an Arabian Bustard a few weeks ago. With help from locals from several small villages we searched through the area for several hours, but with no luck. Yousuf's effort in this very mission was incredible! However, we had a nice day in the heat of the Tihama plain and lots of kind locals around us!

Exhausted and hungry we had a late lunch. After the tasty lunch of lamb, rise, vegetables, mixed meat and bread there were not many hours left for birding. We headed towards Al Hodeidah and visited two sites before dawn, which produced nice sightings.

Sightings worthy of mention: Dark Chanting Goshawk (3), Gabar Goshawk (2), Spotted Thick-knee (1), Namaqua Dove (25), African Palm Swift (150), Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (a flock of 200!), Abyssian Roller (10), Black-crowned Sparrow-lark (30), Black Scrub Robin (5), Isabelline Wheatear (50), Isabelline Shrike (15) and Arabian Golden Sparrow (80).

23 October

We started early morning at Al Hodeidah fish market to see gulls and terns, but of course, also experience the market itself. Caotic, but interesting to see all these fishes, rays and sharks. After that we visited an area with several sewageponds which held numerous waders, chlidonias and about 1700 Lesser Flamingos and perhaps 60 Greater ones. A few years ago it was the opposite numbers, perhaps it can be due to the extreme dry season in Northeastern Africa. We continued along the coast to Al Hudeidah wetlands and then to Saliff. On the latter site we scanned the strait between mainland and the island Kamaran (second largest after Socotra in Yemen waters). We had lunch along a bay with low tide enjoying Crab Plovers and other waders. In late evening we tried a site for Nubian Nightjar, but found an European Nightjar instead. We ended the day with a dinner, the last one in Al Hudeidah. Tomorrow we are going to Taizz via Al Mukha (Mocha).

Sightings: Ferruginous Duck (2), Dark Chanting Goshawk (1), Crab Plover (41), Lesser and Greater Plover (numerous), Terek Sandpiper (20), White-eyed Gull (30), Sooty Gull (60), terns such as Gull-billed, Caspian, Lesser Crested, Swift, Saunder's (1), Whiskered and White-winged Black Tern, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (12), Palm and Little Swift, Black-crowned Sparrow-lark (30), Hoopoe Lark (1).

24 October

After a nice breakfast with (at last) strong coffee we left Al Hudeidah at seven o'clock and drove southwards along the coast. We did several stops before we reached Khowkha. A lovely place with a small hotel facing the sea. It was low tide and shorebirds just tripping in front of the hotel. Adult Crab Plovers and begging juveniles 30 metres away from us. Greater and Lesser Sandplover everywhere. A single Pacific Golden Plover. White-eyed and Sooty Gulls were passing by as well as Saunder's, Swift and Lesser Crested Terns. A delicious lunch of tasty and spicy fish and rice was served. And then we had coffee and tea in the garden. We spent five hours at this site and then continued to Al Mukha, the famous port from where the excellent Yemeni coffee once upon a time was exported to Europe. Now, the city was more or less in ruins. Sadly. As the wind was hard with sand we headed straight to Taizz instead. On our way we saw lots of raptors such as Egyptian Vulture (25), Booted Eagle (2), Steppe Eagle (11), Buzzard (20) and a single Kestrel. Four Chesnut-bellied Sandgrouses not to be forgotten.

At 16:45, an hour before sunset, we reached Taizz and its huge garbage dump. Immediately we spotted about ten Abdim's Storks on a roof! An unhealthy smoke from the dump filled the air. Imagine the peoples faces when drove through the smoke into the dump and disappeared. On the other side we found a hill and fresh air. Perfect for our activities. The air was filled with Black Kites and mixed up with White Storks and Steppe Eagles. A Hobby passing by as well as a flock of 100 Glossy Ibis. When we left the dump in the dusk we found about 50 Abdim's Storks roosting in two big trees.

25 October

Started with an early visit to Jabel Sabir (2860 m), a mountain close to Taizz, where it was so cold that Kjell-Åke even wore gloves and a cap! We stood there waiting and suddenly a bird started to sing. It was the Arabian Accentor, and soon more and more accentors began to sing. We had wonderful observations and close-ups of at least ten individuals. There were also several Yemen Trushes showing off. Then back to the hotel for late breakfast and after that we left the busy town of Taizz and headed southeast for Aden. On our way we made a stop at Wadi Dhabab to search for Arabian and Zebra Waxbill. We found not only them, also a beautiful Masked Shrike and a Dark Chanting Goshawk. After that we decided that we would skip lunch and head directly for the Aden Marshes. And that turned out to be a wise decision, the Aden Marshes is an Eldorado for birdwatchers! From the fantastic birdwatching-tower we had wonderful views of Sacred Ibises, Black-headed Herons, Pacific Golden Plovers, Collared Pratincoles, hundreds of Flamingos and many other species. Add to this hundreds of hundreds of waders, gulls and terns of many species. We stayed at the Marshes until dusk and went to our very luxury hotel for dinner and a good night sleep.

By the way we also saw four Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse on our way to Aden.

26 October

We got up early and had a great breakfast buffet. We tasted everything as no one knows the standard in Socotra. Yousuf met up outside the hotel along with Abdulhadim, of which we said our goodbye too as he will not join us to Socotra. A bit sad as he had been a happy company and a good driver. At Aden airport we checked in 08:20 and the rather small airplane left at 09:00. We made a stop over at Al Mukalla to fuel for the flight to Socotra, on which we arrived at about 11:50. At last! A long wet dream come true for several of us!

To our very surprise we found an Internetcafe just fifty meters from the hotel! But there is no coverage at all for our mobile phones.

The friend of Yousuf, Ahmed Saeed Suleiman, met us at the airport and drove us to the hotel in Hadibo, just a few kilometers away. The hotel is very nice and perfect for birdwatchers as the balconies face the sea. After a delicious seafood lunch Ahmed (The Socotra Governance and Biodiversity Project) took us on a ride to nearby sites in the afternoon. We saw six Cream-colored Coursers, several Desert Wheatears, Black-crowned Sparrowlark (30), Long-billed Pipits and of course the endemic Socotra Cisticola (6). Then we headed to a nearby tip at the coast for seawatching the last hour before sunset. We saw Persian Shearwaters (300), Jouanin's Petrel (4), Flesh-footed Shearwater (4), Swift Terns and Sooty Gulls.

Other sightings were Socotra Sparrow, lots of Somali Starlings and Egyptian Vultures. In the dusk we heard a few Lichtenstein's Sandgrouses.

27 October

Ulf and Niklas woke up early and did seawatch from the hotel terrace before breakfast. The sea was calm and several hundreds of Persian Shearwaters passed by or foraging offshore.

After a nice breakfast outside the hotel we drove slowly westwards along the coast. The whole coastline was flat with golden beaches and small fishing boats just offshore. Then we drove inland towards the mountains with stops now and then. As we reached higher altitudes the numbers of Dragon Blood Trees increased. We stopped at a place with several trees of different ages. The youngest was over hundred years old and the oldest over several centuries. Ahmed told us very interesting things about the Dragon Blood Tree, for example, it's in fact a herb (like the Banana Tree), its medicinal effects and that a few snail species live only on this tree.

We continued through a dramatic and breathtaking landscape. At 10:30 we reached an area named Diksam, which had been impossible without 4WD and good drivers. The first endemic of the day was a single Socotra Starling followed by Socotra Sparrows. A Socotra Sunbird appeared and the photographers disappeared chasing the bird. A (Socotra) Buzzard took off from a cliff and a minute later Ahmed spotted two Socotra Buntings. Everyone (even Göran), rushed to the buntings and soon all of us had seen these beautiful birds. We enjoyed the birds for nearly half an hour. Ahmed took us to another place not far away and soon discovered a Socotra Warbler and within a minute we saw two more as well as several Socotra Buntings and

sunbirds. Everyone was happy, but there was more to come. Several Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeaks appeared, a Peregrine chasing a Roller, Forbes-Watson's Swifts over our heads and Abyssinian (White-breasted) White-eyes here and there. Then all of us were in need of food and a siesta. Ahmed and Yousuf served a nice picnic buffet, which also attracted a gang of Egyptian Vultures. In late afternoon we drove back to Hadibo and made a stop for seawatching, which produced about thousand Persian Shearwaters.

Endemics and numbers: Socotra Starling (10), Socotra Sunbird (12), Socotra Warbler (15), Socotra Sparrow (numerous), Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak (3) and Socotra Bunting (25).

28 October

Seawatching before breakfast produced hundreds of Persian Shearwaters and a single Flesh-footed Shearwater foraging at moderate distance. We enjoyed a long breakfast and several cups of coffee or tea. The plan of today was to visit a valley between Hadibo and the peak of Hagher not far away. Just when we were about to leave a jeep stopped outside the hotel and three well-dressed men jumped out. They were from Nile Television and wanted to do an interview with us for a reportage about Socotra, which will be broadcast on Friday and then we have been on television three times during the trip! They interviewed Göran and Ahmed about Socotras's vulnerable nature and conservation projects and of course what six birders from Sweden were doing on the island. Göran was perfect for the mission!

The valley Al-Ayhawt were green and lushy. Ahmed showed us different Frankincense trees and myrrh. Deep in the valley we made a longer stop where the tourist police Salim Abdellah and his family live. Some of us bought Frankincense from him while two vagrant Wood Warblers were found. Bruce's Green Pigeons were seen here and there as well as Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeaks. A few (Socotra) Buzzards were seen and we recorded its call. At noon we had a nice picnic lunch. Then we drove to Qadub for seawatching. We found a nice place at the shore a few metres above sea level. There were Persian Shearwaters in a never ending stream and Sooty Gulls passing by. Soon we discovered a couple of Brown Noddy. What a lovely bird! We scanned the sea for 1 ½ hours and noted Persian Shearwater (c. 1000), Flesh-footed Shearwater (1), Jouanin's Petrel (2), Brown Noddy (71!), Masked Booby (8 adults), Sooty Gull (c. 300) and Red-necked Phalarope (c. 500).

29–30 October

We got up at 04:30 and had a quick breakfast. Our 4WD's were packed with food, camping equipments and life jackets. Yes, we were going to undertake a two-day pelagic trip! We drove to Qalansiya, which is located 65 kilometres west of Hadibo. We arrived and two boats were ready to be boarded by eight happy birders. The expectations were high. Yousuf, Ahmed and the skippers arranged with all equipments and soon we were offshore enjoying a calm sea. The sea was full of small crabs, which attracted numerous seabirds. Soon we found ourselves in the centre of a huge flock of Socotra Cormorants while three Red-billed Tropicbirds circled over us high up in the sky. We headed towards southwest and the rocky islet Sabuniay, which is located 35 kilometres from Qalansiya. Brown Noddy, Persian Shearwater and Sooty Gulls were numerous. Singles of Jouanin's Petrel, Brown and Masked Booby were seen now and then. It was a hectic time for the photographers onboard!

After two joyful hours we approached Sabuniay, which is the home of 2000 pairs of Masked Booby and 3000 pairs of Socotra Cormorant! Brown and Masked Boobies checked us up and suddenly a swarm of Masked took off from the islet. What a sight! We landed on the islet for an hour. At least two pairs of Red-billed Tropicbirds were present in the air and were seen displaying several times. Some of us climbed to the top to get close-ups on Masked Booby, adults and their chicks. The whole scenario was dreamlike!

We left Sabuniay and headed slowly towards a remote beach on western Socotra. Jouanin's Petrels and Persian Shearwaters crossed our way now and then. We landed on the beach, which is located close to the breeding site of the Jouanin's Petrel. It was very hot and all of us took a swim. We found shade in a fishermen's (so called) hut. Imagine that we felt the shade cooling, when it in fact was 31 degree in the shade. We enjoyed a delicious lunch of fishes caught by one of the skippers.

One hour of seawatching from the beach in the afternoon was very productive. It was impossible to count all seabirds, but during 10 minutes we counted every bird that passed by: 105 Persian Shearwaters and 316 Brown Noddies! All of them close to the shore!

We put the tents up on the beach and awaited the dusk and then climbed upwards to the cave where the Jouanin's Petrels breed. Unfortunately, the hillside was too steep and the path too narrow for most of us, but Yousuf, Ahmed and Ulf continued up to the entrance of the cave. They heard a few calls and saw several birds entering the cave. The rest of us sat on the beach in the moonlight in company with the fishermen. It was magical!

We woke up just in time to enjoy the sunrise at this lovely and remote beach. Some of us took a refreshing swim while a seabird addict started to seawatch. What a sight when about 3000 Socotra Cormorants arrived to the bay and gathered in a dense foraging flock. Persian Shearwaters passed close to the shore in a seemingly endless stream, along with noddies, boobies, gulls and terns. A big surprise was an adult Indian Pond Heron, which was the first on our trip.

After a nice breakfast on the beach we entered the boats and took off for Qalansiya. We travelled slowly along the coastline. We spotted four Red-billed Tropicbirds circling overhead while heavy numbers of Persian Shearwater and Brown Noddy were seen around the boat! Add to this good numbers of Brown and Masked Booby, Sooty Gull, Lesser Crested and Swift Tern as well as a single Bridled Tern. We also saw Bottlenose Dolphins and a small group of Indo Pacific Humpback Dolphins. What a magnificent boat tour, which lasted for more than two hours.

Back in Qalansiya we saw two vagrant Collared Pratincoles. On the road back to Hadibo we stopped for two lovely chameleons, which slowly crossed the road in their characteristic walk. We made a quick stop at our hotel and then continued to Suq, which is a palm tree area that holds several pairs of Socotra Scops Owl. We heard one in broad daylight and Ahmed found one perched in a palm tree just two metres away from us! We made a short stop for seawatching and then returned to Suq in the dusk. We heard about ten owls and twenty Lichtenstein's Sandgrouses flew overhead.

These two unforgettable days will be a memory for life!

31 October

Ulf and Niklas scanned the sea from the hotel roof an hour before breakfast. They recorded Flesh-footed (1) and Persian Shearwater, Jouanin's Petrel (5), Sooty Gulls and terns. In Hadibo we found a Black Kite, which is vagrant to the island.

A stop at the Serhin lagoon produced lots of shorebirds and a White-winged Black Tern, but nothing exceptional. We drove eastwards to the Qaria Lagoon, which is a protected area and an important breeding site for Kentish Plover. Here we saw a Marsh Harrier, another vagrant. The numbers of shorebirds were not as high as in Serhin, but we recorded Lesser and Greater Sand Plover and five species of herons.

We spent an hour at Socotra Folk Museum. Ahmed told us about Socotras history and showed us a vast numbers of photos from the sixties. Much seems to have changed since then.

At noon we reached Hala with its spring water and beautiful landscape. The area was mountainous with sand dunes while the little spring water and its streams were green and lushy, like a micro oasis. Here we found two juvenile Indian Pond Herons, Common Snipe, Yellow Wagtail and a vagrant Tree Pipit. Imagine these birds remarkable long journey and finally ending up in a little spring water pond in Socotra!

On our way back to Hadibo we made a stop for seawatching and there we soon spotted a huge whale not far from shore. The blows were big, but only a few metres high, and the dorsal fin was triangular, which pointed to Humpback Whale. It travelled slowly westwards along the coastline and suddenly we discovered a calf alongside the mother. They disappeared now and then. And without notice the mother whale breached. What a sight! Impossible to describe by words! Later on the calf breached too! Everyone was sooooo happy.

After these marvellous sightings we went back to our hotel for another fish dinner.

1 November

After the breakfast we spent some time in Hadibo and bought ceramic handicraft painted in red colour from the Dragon Blood Tree. Then we did a stop at the Serhin lagoons a few kilometres east of Hadibo. There we saw Pacific Golden Plover and Green Sandpiper, which was new to our Socotra trip list. Otherwise the species and numbers were as yesterday visit.

On our way eastwards to Di Hamri, a protected coral reef area, we recorded Socotra Cisticola, Socotra Sunbird, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Desert and Isabelline Wheatear. We arrived to Di Hamri at 10:00 and it was already very hot. A few headed to a tip for seawatching while others enjoyed snorkelling or just relaxing in the shade. The seawatch were joyful with species such as Flesh-footed (3) and Persian Shearwater (21), Jouanin's Petrel (20), Masked and Brown Booby, Bridled Tern (1), Brown Noddy (106) and finally two long awaited Wilson's Storm-petrels. The snorkelling were just wonderful with all those colourful fishes and corals! In addition we saw three schools of Bottlenose dolphins and one of them mixed up with Spinner Dolphins.

In late afternoon we headed to a lagoon close to Hadibo to see Lichtenstein's Sandgrouses coming in to drink water. We arrived just in time at sunset. We placed our selves close to where we knew the birds to come. The dark fell quickly and the glare of the full moon made the scenario complete. Soon we heard the calls from the arriving sandgrouses. We waited and waited and then we put the strong torch on. Wow, there were about hundred of sandgrouses on the opposite wall to the lagoon. What an end of the day!

We had a last dinner on Socotra as we leave the island tomorrow. Melancholy indeed.

2 November

After a late breakfast we drove to the airport and there we said goodbye to Ahmed. A bit sad as we became friends during our stay. He was fantastic as a guide, sharing his knowledge about Socotras history and nature, a remarkable bird finder and quick to laugh too. We left Socotra about eleven and made stopovers in Mukalla and Aden then finally arrived to Sana'a at 14:30. Yousuf had booked room for us at Arabia Felix Hotel in the old town of Sana'a, where we enjoyed a late, but delicious lunch. Niklas began to update the travel blog with text and photos from the last six days on Socotra.

We left the hotel about 18:00 for a walk, exploring the old town and shopping in the famous suq (= market). Yousuf guided us through the old town and its narrow roads and alleies. At 18:20 there was a power failure, so it were sparse with light sources. However, the walk got even more magical then in the gleam of the full moon!

The suq were just wonderful. It was like travelling back in time. We spent our last riyals and dollars on art, silver rings, kamaria, scarf and books and myrrh. What a pity that we didn't had more time to explore the whole suq! We went to a nice restaurant, to which Yousuf had invited David Stanton for dinner at 20:00. David is a well-known birder and has lived in Yemen for 18 years. He is the general secretary of the Yemen Ornithological Society and the coordinator of the Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program. The dinner were delicious and happy with lot of laughter. Yousuf had gifts for each of us: cassettes with good music from Yemen!

We left the hotel at 23:00 and at the airport it was time to say farewell to Yousuf. He has arranged with everything in a very professional way throughout the tour as well as being a good and knowledgeable friend. The trip has been beyond all expectations and will be a memory for life. Thanks Yousuf! We miss you already!

Species list for mainland Yemen 18-25 October

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Two at Al Khawkha on 24th and at least 5 at Aden marshes on 25th.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

4 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd and at least 10 at Aden marshes on 25th.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

17 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd and at least four at Aden marshes on 25th.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

50 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd and at least 15 at Aden marshes on 25th.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

About 300 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd and at least 30 at Aden marshes on 25th.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Two at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd.

Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi*

Three birds at Kawkaban on 19th. It was no way easy to find this species and we scanned the fields on the high plateau for an hour. However, three friendly Yemeni men came by and offered their help. They took us for a walk to the top of a steep ravine and after about ten minutes we found three beautiful partridges further down in the ravine.

Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*

Two were seen at the same spot as the Philby's at Kawkaban on 19th and a single at Al Ahjur on 19th.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

At least 10 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

About 70 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd and several at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*

About 1700 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd and hundreds at Aden marshes on 25th October. A few years ago it was the opposite numbers of Greater and Lesser, perhaps it can be due to the extreme dry season in Northeastern Africa.



Greater and Lesser Flamingos and a Pink-backed Pelican. Photos: Ulf Stähle

Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*

Two in the fishing harbour of Al Hudeidah on 23rd, 4 at Saliff Port on 23rd and along the coast south of Al Hudeidah on 24th October.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A few at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds, c. 20 at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and three at Al Urj on 23rd October. Two along the coast south of Al Hudeidah and five at Al Khawkah on 24th. About 30 at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala*

At least three birds at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

A single at Al Urj on 23rd October and two at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Three at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

A total of four along the road through Wadi Sarie on 21st October. A few at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds and Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd October. Two at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*

Several at Al Hudeidah Fish market, the Sewage Ponds, c. 30 at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and two at Al Urj on 23rd October. Several at Al Khawkah on 24th October and Aden marshes on 25th October. Both dark and white morphs seen.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

A single in a wadi at Sail Al Iyoon on 20th October. A single at Al Khawkah on 24th and two at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Fairly common in the lowland and seen daily between 21 and 25th October.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

One at Saliff Port on 23rd and two at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Two at Aden marshes on 25th October.



Striated Heron, Hamerkop and Abdim's Stork. Photos: Ulf Ståhle (left and middle) and Alf Petersson.

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*

One seen very close on several occasions at Hamam Gearref on 18th. An unexpected sighting of a single on the high-plateau at Kawkaban on 19th. Two along the road through Wadi Sarie on 21st. Two seen along the road towards Aden on 25th October.

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*

At least 80 birds were seen in the evening at Taizz rubbish dump area, of which 50 were found later on roosting in a big tree for the night on 24th October. One flock about 75 birds were seen soaring over the suburb of Aden on 25th October.

European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

About 50 birds at the Bajil rubbish dump on 21st and approximately 200 at Taizz rubbish dump on 24th Oct.

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

At least 18 birds at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

About 20 at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds and two at Al Urj on 23rd. One lovely flock of 100 passing Taizz in the evening of 24th. At least 35 birds were seen at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

16 birds at Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd and two at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A single at Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd, one along the coast south of Al Hudeidah on 24th and one at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Seen daily in varying numbers, max 3-400 birds at Taizz rubbish dump area on 24th October.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

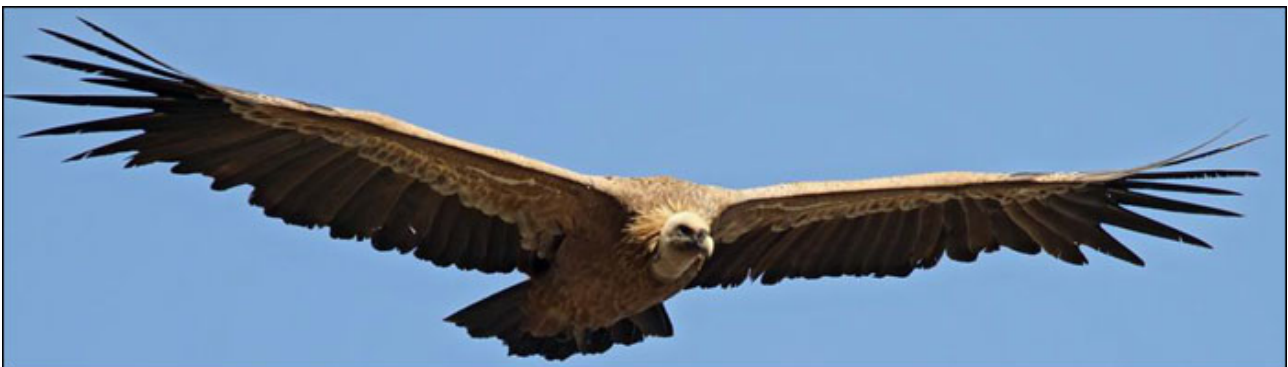
Several seen at Taizz rubbish dump on 24th October, though we didn't scrutinize every Black Kite seen throughout the trip.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

One adult soaring over Bajil rubbish dump on 21st, two seen at the Tihama plain on 22nd and at least 20 birds in various ages between Al Mukha and Taizz on 24th October.

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*

A total of about 100 birds soaring at Kawkaban and 20 at Al Ahjur on 19th October. In early morning we enjoyed nice sightings at the colony at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) and a total of couple hundred birds were seen throughout the day in the area on 20th October. About 30 birds on a carcass off the road just outside Al Mahwit on 21st, which offered close views! About 20 birds seen through Wadi Sarie on 21st Oct. A total of 20-30 birds seen over the Tihama plain on 22nd October.



Griffon Vulture at the Al Mahwit colony. Photo: Ulf Stähle.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Two seen in the Golden Sparrow area at Tihama plain on 22nd, 1-2 at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd and two at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

One adult male south of Al Hudeidah on 24th October.

Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates*

Three birds seen on Tihama plain on 22nd, of which two offered great views. A single seen at Al Hudeidah Sewage lagoons on 23rd, a single seen along the road to Taizz and 1-2 over Wadi Dhabab (close to Taizz) on 25th October. The latter birds were also heard calling.

Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar*

Two different birds were seen during the day of birding on the Tihama plain on 22nd October.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A single at a palm plantation south of Al Hudeidah on 23rd and one at Wadi Dhabab on 25th October. Several sparrowhawks/shikras were seen during the trip, but due to distant and quick observations they were never identified.

Eurasian/Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Seen on six days of eight possible, in varying numbers between 10 to 60 birds.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Two seen in the mountains of Al Ahjur on 19th, probably breeding in the area. One of the birds was of the dark morph. A single seen over Wadi Dhabab (close to Taizz) on 25th October.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*

One immature seen soaring not far from the rubbish dump in Bajil on 21st and two juveniles present at the Aden marshes on 25th October.

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*

Two at Kawkaban on 19th, two soaring over the area at Bajil rubbish dump on 21st, five birds at Taizz rubbish dump on 24th and a single over Wadi Dhabab on 25th October.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

Seen in varying numbers on five days, max 100 birds passing Kawkaban on 19th and 50-60 birds at Taizz rubbish dump on 24th October. Singles and small parties were seen now and then passing southwards through mountainous areas.

Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*

Two of pale morph west of Taizz on 24th and a single pale morph at Wadi Dhabab on 25th October.



Juvenile Steppe Eagle, Dark Chanting Hawk and Booted Eagle. Photos: Ulf Stähle and Alf Petersson (middle).

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Seen daily with up to five birds per day.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

One flying by at the rubbish dump at Taizz on 24th October.

Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*

One seen at the high plateau of Kawkaban on 19th October.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Three at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Crab-Plover *Dromas ardeola*

At least 36 birds at Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd, but most birds were rather distant. Very nice views of 8 birds at Al Urj on 23rd. Excellent sightings of 15 birds (small families of adults and juveniles) at the beautiful coastal place Al Khawkah on 24th October.



Photo friendly Crab Plovers at Al Khawkah. Photos: Niklas Holmström (left) and Ulf Stähle.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Two at Saliff Port on 23rd, 3 at Al Khawkah on 24th and about 10 at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

20 at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and 50 at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A single at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*

One at Al Kadan on 22nd October.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

Two at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*

About 20 at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and in fact the only birds seen.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

One at Al Khawkah on 24 and at least 33 birds in one scan at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

About 20 at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and 2 at Al Urj on 23rd. About 10 birds at Al Khawkah on 24th and several at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Many at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and a few at Al Urj on 23rd. Several at Al Khawkah on 24 and Aden marshes on 25th October.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Several at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and a few at Al Urj on 23rd. Many at Al Khawkah on 24 and several at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus*

About 10 at Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd and 20 at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

About 40 at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and 80 at Al Urj on 23rd. About 40 at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Several at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

A single at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd. Five at Al Khawkah on 24th and about 40 at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

20 at Al Urj on 23rd and three at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Several at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and two at Al Urj on 23rd. A single at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

A single at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds, several at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and 10 at Al Urj on 23rd. Four birds at Al Khawkah on 24th and several at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Several seen at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds, Al Hudeidah Wetlands, Al Khawkah and Aden marshes on 23-25th October.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

One at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and a single at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Several seen at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds, Al Hudeidah Wetlands, Al Urj, Al Khawkah and Aden marshes on 23-25th October.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

A single at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd October.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Several at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and Aden marshes on 23-25th October.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

12 at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and 16 at Al Urj on 23rd and 7 at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Four birds seen along Wadi Sarie on 21st. About 20 Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds and several at Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd, a few at Al Khawkah on 24th and Aden marshes on 25th October.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Three birds in the harbour of Al Mukha on 24th October.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

A few seen at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds and Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd and at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Several seen at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds, Al Hudeidah Wetlands, Al Khawkah and Aden marshes on 23-25th October.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

One seen at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd October.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Two at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd October.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Several at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds and Al Hudeidah Wetlands on 23rd and at least 10 at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Three at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and five at Al Urj on 23rd October.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

About 20 at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd, 20 at Al Khawkah on 24th and many at Aden marshes on 23-25th October.

White-eyed Gull *Larus leucophthalmus*

At least 30 birds in different ages at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour and 27 at Saliff Port on 23rd. Five birds present at Al Khawkah and 13 at Al Mukha on 24th October.

Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii*

At least 200 birds in different ages at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour, several at Al Hudeidah Wetlands and a few passing at Al Urj on 23rd. 20 birds present at Al Khawkah and six at Al Mukha on 24th October. Several distant birds were seen at Aden marshes on 25th October.



Adult Sooty Gull and one adult White-eyed Gull along with a juvenile. Photos: Ulf Stähle.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

A few were seen at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour on 23rd and at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*

Several at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour on 23rd October.

Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*

Several at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour on 23rd October.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*

Three at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour on 23rd October.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*

A single at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and one at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

Five at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour, three at Al Hudeidah Wetlands, 10 at Saliff Port and two at Al Urj on 23rd. At least three birds at Al Khawkah on 24th October. Several distant birds were seen at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*

Four at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour and three at Saliff Port on 23rd. At least 11 birds at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*

Two at Al Hudeidah fish market/harbour and three at Saliff Port on 23rd. At least 13 birds at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Four at Saliff Port on 23rd October.

Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi*

Three birds at Al Khawkah on 24th October.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

Hundreds at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and a few at Aden marshes on 25th October.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Hundreds at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd, one at Al Khawkah on 24th and several at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

12 in the evening at a palm plantation south of Al Hudeidah on 23rd and 4 along the road close to Taizz on 24th October.

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*

Four birds seen sitting close to the road on our way to Aden on 25th October.

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Pure birds were seen in the mountainous parts of central Yemen on 19-20th October.

Dusky Turtle Dove *Streptopelia lugens*

Seen on five of eight days. Good numbers were seen at Kawkaban on 19th and in Al Mahwit area on 20-21st October. At least 10 birds were seen at Jabal Sabir on 25th October.



Male Namaqua Dove, Dusky Turtle Dove and Red-eyed Dove. Photos: Alf Petersson (left) and Ulf Ståhle.

African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*

Several seen each day on 21-23rd in the Tihama plain and Al Hudeidah area.

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*

Several seen and heard at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20-21st October. Two birds at Jabal Sabir on 25th October.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Numerous and seen daily.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*

Four birds seen at Hamam Gearref on 18th and two at Shibani on 19th October. At least 25 birds in total throughout the day on the Tihama plain on 22nd. A few seen at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd October.

Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*

One seen at Al Khillah on 20th and one seen in Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Nine birds in a flock at the parking lot of Aden marshes on 25th October.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

A single at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20th October.

White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus*

One seen in Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One at Kawkaban on 19th October.

Eurasian Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Excellent views of one at dusk at a palm plantation south of Al Hudeidah on 23rd October, when trying for Nubian Nightjar.

African Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

About 10 along the road through Tihamah plain on 21st. At least 200 throughout the day at Tihamah plain on 22nd and about 100 on 23rd (Al Hudeidah/Tihamah area). Several seen now and then on our travel from Al Hudeidah to Aden via Taizz on 24-25th October.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

About 50 at the Al Saleh Mosque in Saana on 18th. A total of 50 on our way through Wadi Sarie on 21st. About 100 at one locality on Tihamah plain on 22nd. At least 20 at Wadi Dhabab close to Taizz on 25th October.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*

A flock of about 40 birds at one locality at the eastern end of Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

10 at the Al Saleh Mosque in Saana on 18th. 40 above Al Hudeidah (seen from the fish market in the harbour) on 23rd and finally about 60 birds at Wadi Dhabab close to Taizz on 25th October.

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

Seen daily now and then except for one day. Max 30 at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd October.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*

A total of at least 200 birds in the evening at Al Kadan on 22nd October. What a spectacle!

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

A single flew by at Hamam Gearref on 18th and a small flock between Al Mukha and Taizz on 24th October.

Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinicus*

At least 10 along the road through Tihamah plain toward Al Hudeidah in the afternoon on 21st and a total of about 30 birds throughout the day on Tihamah plain on 22nd.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

A few seen on five days of eight.

African Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus*

Heard at Hamam Gearref on 18th. A nice photo friendly pair at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) and a single seen at Al Iyoon (Al Mahwit) on 20th. One seen in Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Arabian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos dora*

At least 2 birds of which one offered excellent and close views at Sarhat Mahal (Al Ahjur area) on 19th. A pair (also heard several times) present at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20-21st October. Nice views!



Two different Arabian Woodpeckers at Sarhat Mahal and Al Dhabarah. Photos: Alf Petersson and Ulf Stähle.

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*

A total of about 200 birds throughout the day on Tihamah plain on 22nd and about 100 birds in the Tihamah area and Saliff Port on 23rd. About 40 birds along the road on our way to Taizz on 24th October. Many were heard singing during their circling display flight!

Greater Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*

A single seen when flying along the road close to Saliff Port on 23rd October.

Blanford's Lark *Calandrella blanfordi*

A flock 40 birds were seen on the high plateau of Kawkaban on 19th October.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Fairly common and seen daily except for two days.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Hundreds of hundreds at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and many at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

At least two at the Al Saleh Mosque in Saana on 18th.

Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne (fuligula) obsoleta*

Several seen at Kawkaban on 19th. Several seen in the Al Mahwit area on 20-21st and a total of 20 birds throughout Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily in good numbers, max several hundreds at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd October.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

A few seen on 18, 19 and 22nd October.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

A few seen on 18, 21 and 22nd October.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Many at the dump at Bajil on 22nd. A total of 30 birds seen throughout the day on Tihamah plain 22nd and good numbers at Al Hudeidah Sewage Ponds on 23rd and Aden marshes on 25th October.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Seen on five days of eight, but only singles now and then in right habitat.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

A single seen on Tihamah plain on 22nd October.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*

A single at Al Khillah (Al Mahwit) on 20th, two south of Al Hudeidah on 24th and one at Jabal Sabir on 25th October.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Three at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20-21st October. A single on Tihamah plain on 22nd and another at Wadi Dhabab on 25th October.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

One at Al Kadan on 22nd October.

White-spectacled Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*

Fairly common and seen daily.

Arabian Accentor *Prunella fagani*

One in a ravine on the northeastern part of at Kawkaban (overlooking Shibani) on 19th. At least 5 birds at the peak of Jabal Sabir on 25th October. The birds at the latter site were very photo friendly and there were two or three singing males. Excellent views in early morning!

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

One female type in the Al Ahjur area on 19th October.



Arabian Accentor and Yemen Thrush at Jabal Sabir and a male Little Rock Thrush at Al Dhabarah. Photos. Ulf Stähle and Alf Petersson (middle).

Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinereus*

A single male at Sarhat Mahal on 19th. At least 3-4 birds were seen in the Al Mahwit area on 20-21st October. One male at the peak of Jabal Sabir on 25th October.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

One before reaching Hamam Gearref on 18th. Two at Kawkaban on 19th and one outside Al Mahwit on 20th October.

Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis*

One in a ravine on the northeastern part of at Kawkaban (overlooking Shiban) on 19th. One at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20th October. At least five birds at the peak of Jabal Sabir on 25th October, which offered excellent and close views!

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

A total of 10 birds throughout the day on Tihamah plain on 22nd and a few at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Streaked Scrub-Warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*

At least four at Kawkaban on 19th, one at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20th and two at Wadi Dhabab (Taizz) on 25th October.

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*

A few seen daily on four days of eight.

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*

One at Hamam Gearref on 18th and two at Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*

Two at Sarhat Mahal on 19th. Five at Al Khillah and four at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20th. Two at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 21st.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

One at Sarhat Mahal on 19th October.

Yemen Warbler *Sylvia buryi*

Two at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20th. Both birds offered excellent views and one of them singing frequently.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

One at Sarhat Mahal on 19th. A few in Al Mahwit area on 20-21st October.



Yemen Warbler, Arabian Warbler and Black Scrub Robin. Photos: Ulf Stähle and Alf Petersson (right).

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

One juvenile at Hamam Gearref on 18th October.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*

One at Hamam Gearref on 18th October.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

One at Hamam Gearref on 18th October.

Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*

One at Al Iyoon (Al Mahwit) on 20th October. The bird offered excellent views.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

One at Hamam Gearref on 18th, two at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20-21st and one in Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*

One at Hamam Gearref on 18th, at least 20 birds were seen throughout the day on Tihamah plain on 22nd, of which several offered excellent and close views. One at Aden marshes on 25th October.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Two at Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20-21st and one female at Wadi Dhabab (Taizz) on 25th October.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola felix*

One at Kawkaban on 19th. Two Al Rayadi (Al Mahwit) on 20-21st and one at Jabal Sabir on 25th October.

Arabian Wheatear *Oenanthe (lugens) lugentoides*

Fairly common in right habitat and seen on five days of eight.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

About 50 birds were seen throughout the day on Tihamah plain on 22nd and a few seen daily on 23-25th October.

Red-breasted Wheatear *Oenanthe bottae*

Four on a spot between Saana and Kawkaban and a total of 20 in the Kawkaban area on 19th October.

Blackstart *Cercomela melanura*

Several seen daily in mountainous areas on 20-22nd October.

Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*

Seen on five days of eight, max 6 at Al Kadan on 22nd October.



Red-breasted Wheatear, Shining Sunbird and a male Golden Sparrow. Photos: Alf Petersson (left) and Ulf Stähle.

Palestine Sunbird *Cinnyris osea*

Seen now and then on six days of eight, max 6-7 birds at a ravine at the northeastern part of Kawkaban on 19th October.

Shining Sunbird *Cinnyris habessinicus*

Two males seen Hamam Gearref on 18th October.

Abyssinian White-eye *Zosterops abyssinicus*

Several seen daily in mountainous areas on five days of eight, max 10 at Al Dhabarah (Al Mahwit) on 20th October.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

One at Wadi Dhabab (Taizz) on 25th October.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

At least 15 birds were seen throughout the day on Tihamah plain on 22nd October.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*

A few seen daily on four days of eight, max four birds on Tihamah plain on 22nd October. Birds of the *buryi* race were seen at Hamam Gearref on 18th and Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*

One at Wadi Dhabab (Taizz) on 25th October.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Incredibly numerous in Al Hudeidah area. Seen daily on 21-25th October.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*

Seen daily, but numbers did vary from day to day.

Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus*

Seen daily, except for two days (Al Hudeidah/Tihamah). Very numerous at some sites, with up to 200 birds.

Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristramii*

Seen daily, except for two days (Al Hudeidah/Tihamah), max 30-40 birds in the Kawkaban area on 19th and at Al Gabhir on 20th October.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Fairly common and seen daily.

Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchlorus*

Seen on two locations in the Tihamah plain on 22nd October. Up to 80 birds on of the sites!



Arabian Waxbill, African Silverbill and a male Zebra Waxbill. Photos: Ulf Stähle.

Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*

Seen daily except for one day. A great colony was found in Wadi Sarie on 21st October.

Arabian Waxbill *Estrilda rufibarba*

A few seen at Sarhat Mahal on 19th, 14 in Wadia Sarie on 21st and 15 at Wadi Dhabab on 25th October.

Zebra Waxbill *Sporaeginthus subflavus*

Four beautiful birds were seen perched for a while at Wadi Dhabab on 25th October.

African Silverbill *Euodice cantans*

Seen daily on six of eight days, max 10 at Wadi Sarie and Wadi Dhabab.

Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*

About 10 birds at a ravine at the northeastern part of Kawkaban and 5 at Bab Al Ahjur on 19th October. Several in the Al Mahwit area on 20-21st October. At least 10 birds at the peak of Jabal Sabir on 25th Oct.

Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi*

About 20-30 birds were positive identified at Kawkaban on 19th October. Many in the Al Mahwit area on 20-21st October. A few seen at Wadi Dhabab on 25th October.

Yemen Serin *Serinus menachensis*

A total of 200 were seen at Kawkaban on 19th October.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata*

One male seen at a fresh water spring at Bab Al Ahjur close to Sarhat Mahal on 19th October.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi*

Seen and heard singing regularly in right habitat on five of eight days.



Yemen Serin, Arabian Serin and a pair of Yemen Linnet. Photos: Alf Petersson (left) and Ulf Stähle.

Species list for Socotra 26 October to 2 November

A total of 96 species were recorded on Socotra.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

One flushed at Di Hamri on 1st November.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

A single at the Serhin Lagoon on 31st October and still present on 1st November.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Four at the Serhin Lagoon on 26th and 31st October, and still present on 1st November.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

About 20 in a small pond west of the Airport on 27th October.

Persian Shearwater *Puffinus [lherminieri] persicus*

About 300 off the northernmost tip, 11 km east of Hadibo, on 26th, c. 200 from our hotel roof in the morning and c. 1000 west of Hadibo on 27th. More than 2000 were seen foraging off Hadibo in the morning from our hotel roof and about 1000 off Qadub in the afternoon on 28th. Several of thousands during the pelagic trip and seawatching from land on 29-30th. In the afternoon at Di-Sha'b on 30th a continuous passage close to the shore was noted with a total of 100 birds every ten minutes. Ten birds were recorded off the northernmost tip east of Hadibo on 30th. Only four and six birds were recorded from the hotel roof on 31st and 1st respectively. Finally, 31 birds were recorded off Di Hamri on 1st November.

The pelagic trip offered excellent and close-up views, especially on the way back to Qalansiya on 30th. It was also nice to study the Persian Shearwaters from land as they often passed very close to shore.



A raft of Persian Shearwaters. We had excellent close-up views during our pelagic trip. Photo: Niklas Holmström.

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*

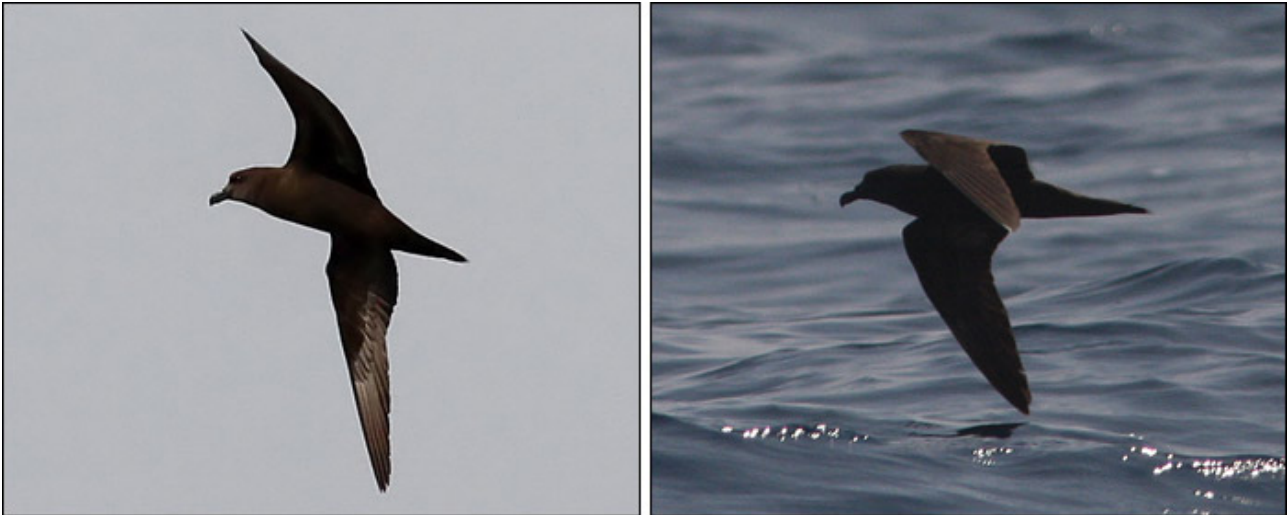
Two seen from the northernmost tip, 11 km east of Hadibo, on 26th, two seen from our hotel roof in the morning on 27 and 28th respectively, a single off Qadub on 28th, one seen off Di-Sha'b on 29th, a single seen from the hotel roof in the morning on 31st and 1st respectively, a single at Hala on 31st and finally three passing at Di Hamri on 1st November.

Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*

Six seen from the northernmost tip, 11 km east of Hadibo, on 26th, two at Qadub on 28th, a total of 14 birds were seen during the pelagic trip on 29-30th, two seen from the northernmost tip, 11 km east of Hadibo, on 30th and 31st as well as a single from Hala on 31st October. Finally, 24 birds were recorded off Di Hamri on 1st November. A few were seen at the breeding cave at night on 29th October.

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

1+1 towards east off Di Hamri on 1st November. In fact we had expected to see more of this one, but probably most of the summering birds had gone south.



Jouanin's Petrels at sea between Qalansiya and Sabuniya. Photos: Ulf Ståhle and Alf Petersson.

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*

Three birds circling high up in the sky, when we travelled by boat a few kilometres south of Qalansiya on 29th. On Sabuniya we got incredible views of these lovely birds as 2-3 pairs were breeding on the islet. We saw the birds (sometimes three together) displaying at several times. 3+4 birds were seen along the coastline by boat between Di-Sha'b and Qalansiya on 30th October.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*

Eight birds towards west in the afternoon at Qadub on 28th. On 29th several were seen during the boat tour to the rocky islet Sabuniya, where about 1000 pairs breed. Excellent and close-up views of adults and chicks! A total of 7 and 13 were recorded at Di-Sha'b on 29th and 30th respectively. About 20 during the boat trip to Qalansiya and a single east of Hadibo on 30th. A total of 21 birds were recorded at the tip of Di Hamri on 1st November.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

Three birds on our way by boat to Sabuniya on 29th. At least 50 birds at Sabuniya, of which several probably was breeding. Great views of birds alongside with masked boobies! A total of 3 and 2 were recorded at Di-Sha'b on 29th and 30th respectively. A few breeders were seen on cliffs on our way back to Qalansiya by boat on 30th. A total of 7 birds were recorded at the tip of Di Hamri on 1st November.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A single immature towards west at the seawatching spot 11 km east of Hadibo on 30th and a immature (probably same bird) heading east off Serhin the day after. Vagrant to Socotra, fewer than five records.



Brown and Masked Booby and Red-billed Tropicbird. All three photographed at Sabuniya on 29th October. Photos: Ulf Ståhle (left) and Alf Petersson.



Socotra Cormorants at Di-Sha'b in morning on 30th. Photo: Ulf Ståhle.

Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*

About 1000 birds in a large and loose flock off Qalansiya on 29th. The sea was full of small crabs, which seem to drift with the underwater stream. Several hundreds on the rocky islet Sabuniya, of which the vast majority were newly fledged birds. About 500 adults in the bay of Shu'ub on 29th. Approximately 2000 birds in a dense flock foraging in the bay of Di-Sha'b in the morning on 30th! Good numbers were recorded during the boat trip back to Qalansiya on 30th. A few were seen along the northern coastline on 31st and 1st.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A few recorded on five days, max eight birds at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

A few recorded on three days, max six birds at Serhin Lagoons on 26th October.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

A single at Serhin Lagoons on 26th and another one at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Seen on four days out of seven, max four birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*

A few recorded on three days, max three at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October. A single seen on Sabuniya on 29th October.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

One adult at Qaria Lagoons on 1st November.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

One nice adult bird flew over the beach of Di-Sha'b and tried to land on top of one of our tents on 30th. Funny sighting. Two juveniles at the little spring water oasis at Hala on 1st November. Mainly a winter visitor.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Two at Serhin Lagoons on 26th.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Two at Serhin Lagoons on 26th October.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A single seen at Di-Sha'b on 30th and singles at the eastern part on 31st and 1st. Resident breeder.



Dinner at Diksam among unafraid and curious Egyptian Vultures. Heidi and Göran just enjoy the moment. Photos: Niklas Holmström.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

A single roosted in Hadibo on 31st October. Vagrant to Socotra, fewer than five records.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

Seen daily in all habitats. Probably the most noticeable resident bird on Socotra. The population is estimated to 1500 pairs, which is the highest concentration in the Middle East!

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

One juvenile seen at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October. Vagrant to Socotra, fewer than five records.

Socotra Buzzard *Buteo socotraensis*

Several seen on four days out of seven, max 3-4 birds at Wadi Ayhaft on 28th October.

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Seen daily with about 3-4 each day.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Seen on 27, 28 and 31st October. One of the birds chased a Roller at Diksum, wonderful air display, but without luck for the Peregrine. Resident breeder.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

A single seen at Di-Sha'b (western part) on 29th October. Vagrant to Socotra, fewer than five records.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Only seen at Serhin Lagoons on 26, 31 and 1st, max three individuals.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Recorded at Serhin Lagoons on 26, 31 and 1st, with max 20 individuals. At total of 20 birds were also seen between Hadibo and Qalansiya on 29th October and 20 birds in the Qalansiya Lagoon on 30th.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*

Three pairs seen a few kilometres east of Hadibo on 26th October. Two east of Qalansiya on 30th and two on 31st October. Excellent views of the birds on 26th! Resident breeder.



Cream-coloured Cursor. Photo: Alf Petersson

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

Two roosting at the Qalansiya Lagoon on 30th October. Vagrant to Socotra, fewer than five records.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

A single at Serhin Lagoons on 1st November. Winter visitor and passage migrant.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Eight birds at Qaria Lagoons on 31st and three on 1st November.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Two at Serhin Lagoons on 26th, 9 on 31st and 12 on 1st. At least 10 birds at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

About 30 inds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st and 1st and 30-40 birds at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October. The latter is an important breeding site for this species.

Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus*

Two at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October.

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

A single at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

One at Serhin Lagoons on 26th, seven at Serhin on 31st, one at the spring water in Hala on 31st and eight birds at Serhin on 1st November.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

A single at Sabuniya on 29th, one at Qaria Lagoons on 31st and 1st, and two at Serhin Lagoons on 1st November.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Three at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October and 1st November.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

A single at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Recorded on five days, max six birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

A single at Serhin Lagoons on 1st November.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Recorded on four days, max four birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Recorded on six days, max 16 birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

At least 12 birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October and several on 1st November.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

11 birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st Oct and several on 1st Nov. 8 birds recorded at Qaria Lagoons on 31st.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

At least seven birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October and several on 1st November.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Three birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October and 1st November.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Four birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October and 1st November.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Two birds at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A total of about 500 birds divided into several groups off Qadub in the afternoon when seawatching on 28th.

Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii*

Common and seen daily along the coast in three digit numbers. Newly fledged birds were seen at Sabuniya and along the western coast. Max 300 birds at Qadub on 28th and at Di-Sha'b in the morning on 30th October.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

A few pure birds seen between Qadub and Hadibo on 26-28th October.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*

Seen on six days, max 60 between Qadub and Hadibo on 27-28th.

Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*

Three birds on the beach at Hala on 1st November.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*

A total of 57 birds passed south in morning at Di-Sha'b on 30th October. Six birds seen from our hotel roof in morning, 20 at Hala and six birds at the seawatching spot 11 km east of Hadibo on 31st October.

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*

Seen all days with up to 50-60 birds a day, max 100 at Di-Sha'b on 30th October.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Four birds heading east off Hadibo and 11 birds in the Hala area on 31st October. Another four birds seen at Di Hamri on 1st November.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

A single at sea between Di-Sha'b and Qalansiya on 30th October. At least 30 birds on the beach west of Hala on 31st October.

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*

One adult roosting on a cliff between Di-Sha'b and Qalansiya on 30th October and a single passing the tip at Di Hamri on 1st November.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

A single at Serhin Lagoons on 31st Oct and 1st November. Mentioned as rare passage migrant to Socotra.



Swift Terns, the most numerous tern on Socotra. Photo: Alf Petersson.



Brown Noddies offered close-ups during the pelagic trip. A beautiful and graceful bird! Photos: Alf Petersson.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*

We were very happy to see hundreds of hundreds of this beautiful and graceful bird! Seen on five days out of seven. First recorded (71) at Qadub during a seawatch session during afternoon on 29th October. About 100 at sea on 29th and a heavy passage of noddies were noted off Di-Sha'b in late afternoon, with 316 counted within 10 minutes! On our way back to Qalansiya by boat on 30th we saw several hundreds of noddies and later in the evening we counted another 34 at the seawatching spot east of Hadibo. About 30 birds seen off Hala on 31st October. A total of 110 were noted at Di Hamri on 1st November.

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*

About 20 birds in the evening at the Date palm plantation in Suq on 30th October, while listening for Socotra Scops Owl. A few seen at Suq in the evening on 31st and about 150-200 on 1st November. What a great spectacle to hear and see all these birds coming in to drink fresh water!

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia x domestica*

Seen on five days out of seven. Introduced to Socotra.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Fairly common and seen on five days.

Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*

Up to 20 birds were seen in Wadi Ayhaft area on 28th October. Only seen in the woodland areas, especially the valleys in Haggeher mountain.

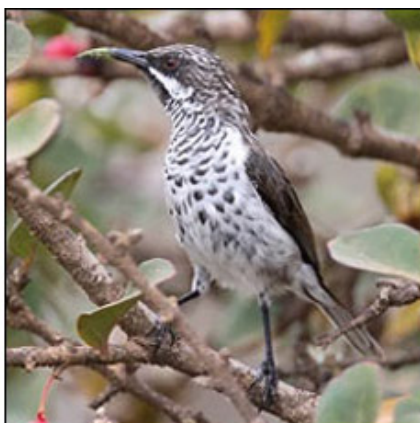


A beautiful couple of Bruce's Green Pigeon and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse (2 male and 1 female). Photos: Ulf Stähle.

Socotra's endemic bird species



Socotra Buzzard, Socotra Cisticola and Socotra Scops Owl. Photos: Ulf Stähle and Alf Petersson (right).



Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak, Socotra Sunbird and a male Socotra Sparrow. Photos: Ulf Stähle and Alf Petersson.



Socotra Bunting, Socotra Warbler and Socotra Starling. Photos: Ulf Stähle and Alf Petersson (right).

Socotra Scops Owl *Otus (sunia) socotranus*

In the afternoon on 30th we visited the Date palm plantation in Suq, known to be a reliable site for Scops Owl. We heard a bird calling immediately and after ten minutes our guide Ahmed Saeed found a little precious one! The bird was incredibly photo friendly. We returned later in the evening and heard about ten owls calling, which not resemble the African or Eurasian species. A single was heard in broad daylight in the Date Palm plantation at Qaria Lagoons on 31st October.

Forbes-Watson's Swift *Apus berliozi*

Hundreds were seen up in the mountains at Diksam area on 27th and many at Haggeher mountains on 28th. Several dense flocks were seen and heard at Suq in the evening on 30th October. A few were seen in Hadibo area on 31st and 1st.

European Roller *Coracias garrulous*

3-4 at Diksam on 27th, of which one was chased by a Peregrine! Wow, what an aerial combat. A single seen at Hala on 31st October.

Black-crowned Sparrow-lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*

Seen daily with up to 50 birds. Lovely birds, especially their song, which is delivered in flight.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

A single overflying between Hadibo and Qadub on 28th October.

Rock Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*

Several up in the mountains at Diksam on 27th and a few at Hadibo on 31st October.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

A few seen daily throughout the stay.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Seen on four days out of seven, but only a few a day, except four at Serhin Lagoons on 31st October.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

A single at Hala on 31st October and two at Serhin Lagoons on 1st November.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*

Seen on four days with up to ten birds a day.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

A single present at the fresh water spring at Hala on 31st October. Vagrant with lesser than five records.

Socotra Cisticola *Cisticola haesitatus*

Several seen and heard at a reliable site about 11 kilometres east of Hadibo on 26th, 31st and 1st November. Several seen and heard at Di-Sha'b on 29-30th October. The total population is estimated to be 3000 pairs.

Socotra Warbler *Incana incana*

About 15 birds in the Diksam area on 27th October and a couple of sightings at Wadi Ayhaft on 28th October. The total population is estimated to be 2500 pairs.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Two seen in Wadi Ayhaft on 28th October. Vagrant with lesser than five records.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Seen daily with up to ten birds per day. Even seen on the rocky islet Sabuniya on 29th October.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

A handful of birds seen on three days out of seven.

Socotra Sunbird *Chalcomitra balfouri*

At least 15 birds in the Diksam area on 27th, 4-5 at Wadi Ayhaft on 28th and two between Hadibo and Di Hamri on 1st November. The number of population is unknown and listed by BirdLife as "Least Concern".

Abyssinian White-eye *Zosterops abyssinicus*

Several seen in the Diksam area on 27th and at Wadi Ayhaft on 28th October.

Southern (Socotra) Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis uncinatus*

Seen on four days with up to three birds a day.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*

A few seen on 27 and 31st October.

Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii*
Seen daily with up to 20-30 birds a day.

Socotra Starling *Onychognathus frater*
Uncommon and mainly seen on higher altitudes. At least 10 birds in the Diksam area on 27th, a few Wadi Ayhaft on 28th and two at Hala on 31st October. However, a few pairs were seen here and there while travelling by car in the mountains.

Socotra Sparrow *Passer insularis*
Widespread and seen daily. Fairly common.

Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*
At least 4 birds in the Diksam area on 27th and 10 at Wadi Ayhaft on 28th October.

Socotra Bunting *Emberiza socotrana*
About 25 birds were seen in the Diksam area on 27th October. Several singing birds were heard throughout the day along with close range sightings. The total population is estimated to be c. 300 pairs (Porter and Suleiman in prep).

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi*
A few were seen and heard on three days.

Animals

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*
One mother with calf passing slowly towards west off the seawatching site east of Hadibo on 31st October. Both the mother and calf breached several times! What a breathtaking sight!

Indo-Pacific Hump-backed Dolphin *Sousa chinensis*
A small pod of at least five animals were seen at sea south of Qalansiya during our boat tour on 30st October.

Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*
Two small groups off Bindar di Shab in morning on 30st October.

Spinner Dolphin *Stenella longirostris*
Several large schools mixed up with Pantropical Spotted Dolphins were seen off Dihamri on 31st October.

Pantropical Spotted Dolphin *Stenella attenuata*
Several large schools mixed up with Spinner Dolphins were seen off Dihamri on 31st October.



Socotran chameleon (*Chamaeleo monachus*) and Hadramout Agama at Kawkaban. Photos: Ulf Stähle.

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Niklas Holmström: <http://www.seawatching.net/yemen2009/index.html>

Reflections and thoughts during the trip

By Heidi Malmgren

My name is Heidi and I'm travelling with my husband Göran and the other guys on this "expedition" to mainland Yemen and Socotra. I'd like to share a little about how I have experienced things around us, beside the birds.

To be a lonely woman amongst seven men, travelling around in the country of the ancient Queen of Sheba is truly a wonderful and interesting experience. One would imagine that they would treat me like a queen, but, I m sorry to say, they don't. They treat me like "one of the boys", I even have to listen to their dirty jokes! But I get some privileges, for instance me and Göran got the honeymoon-suite in Al Masirah. Anyway, we are a happy gang and we all enjoy the adventures we have had so far.

Our guide, Yousuf, is a very competent, pleasant and wise man. Everything has gone so smoothly, we just lean back and Yousuf arranges it so that we all get what we want.

As you can imagine, having to do with male birdwatchers, there is no time planned for one of my other interests, namely shopping! But Yousuf arranged it so that we could get a little shopping in Taizz and he has promised to take us to the old suq in Sana'a on our last day in Yemen. I really look forward to it!



Our two wonderful guides Ahmed Saeid Suliman & Yousuf Mohageb.
Photo: Heidi Malmgren

Yousuf has thought us a lot about Yemen, its traditions and culture (and birds of course). For example, almost all houses have windows with stained glass mosaic in beautiful patterns. This is called Kamera, which is the diminutive form of Kamr that means The Moon. The ordinary windows in the Yemeni houses are placed near the floor because Yemenis often sit on the floor and to get in some extra light in the houses they used to have round windows higher up with Alabaster instead of glass. These windows looked like little



Some of the beautiful Kameran in our hotelroom in Hadibo, Socotra.
Photo: Heidi Malmgren

moons, that's why they are called "little moons", Kamera. When the Dutch occupied Yemen in the 18th century they brought the stained glass with them and the Yeminis started to create their beautiful patterns like they still do, nowadays with glass imported from Germany.

The landscape of Yemen is very beautiful with breathtaking sceneries as you have seen on the pictures of the blog, and much more vegetation than I had imagined. There are green plants everywhere, except for the few desert parts where we have been.

One thing I was a little concerned about before the trip was the question of "The Ladies Room". It is so much easier for a man to find a place to "powder his nose". But one can always find a bush or a shed to hide behind. And when you can't hide, like on the rock Sabuniah in the middle of the ocean, you just ask the gentlemen to turn around.... So it has never been a problem, just remembers to bring along some tissues.

This trip is not only a birding-trip, it is also a health-trip, we live so very healthy even though we eat a lot. We eat healthy food, for example a lot of yoghurt, fruits, vegetables, fish and hummus. And of course we drink a lot, at least 2 litres water (Maa) a day. We also walk much every day, how much depending on the ground terrain. (When we watch seabirds there is not so much walking, we just stand and look in our telescopes. Of course the photographers, Alf and Ulf, run around like Mountain-goats to get the best possible shot. They move around at least twice as much as us others!). So I think that we all have lost a little weight in this trip.

Did I mention that there are a lot of high mountains in Yemen? Well, there are. Very high. And with very deep canyons. And I am afraid of heights. (Or at least I was before this trip). So how can a person in her right mind go to a country that has so many, so high mountains (jabal)? When Göran asked me if I wanted to come along I had two choices:

- 1) stay at home
- 2) go for a trip that is a once in a lifetime experience.

So I decided to come along and take it as it comes, "go with the flow". The first days were an ordeal for me, when I thought that "it can't get worse" the next road (or track) was even steeper and more rough. But one gets used to it and Yousuf and Abdulhamid, our second driver, are excellent drivers that make you feel safe and secure. And that goes of course also for Ahmed Saeid Suliman, our brilliant co-guide in Socotra. (Ahmed works as Head of the Conservation and Research Unit at the EPA, Environment Protection Authority, on Socotra and is a botanist and ornithologist.)

We have even managed to pass a meeting car on a road not wider than two wheel tracks and with a high mountain wall on one side a deep canyon on the other side. But that time I closed my eyes.....:)

Something very common for Yemen and Socotra is goats. They can move around in any biotop and can climb up of the steepest mountain. You see them everywhere, and they seem to be able to eat anything.



Narrow road at Al Mahwit.
Photo: Niklas Holmström

The restaurant at our hotel in Hadibo on Socotra (Socotra means the suq of sap, the sap market), where we are right now, is also a day care centre.....for baby goats! On the evenings Mother Goat comes calling and the small goats, who have spent the day sleeping under the tables (outside of course), run to see Mummy. They even call "ma ma, ma ma"! They are so cute and mostly for keeping up appearances the staff will try to chase them away, but they are feeding them when they think no one is looking. And so is Ulf!



Ulf is feeding the goat Greta at our everyday restaurant on Socotra!
Photo: Heidi Malmgren.

The boat trip to the rocky island and then to the secluded and isolated beach of Shoúab was a magic experience. To take a swim at the long sandy beach in that crystal clear, soft, warm water under the hot sun. To take a rest in the fishermen's shady hut. And at night in the velvet soft arabian night, to sit and drink sweet tea (chai) on a blanket in the sand under the stars and the moon and listen to the fishermen singing soft arabian songs around the campfire. Sigh...

The people of Yemen are so very nice and friendly. When we have met the locals in distant mountain villages they have offered us of what they have, sometimes bread, sometimes fruits or crops. When we come to a place the locals come and greet us and wish us welcome and offer us of what they have.

In Socotra people are very honest. That means that you can leave your car unlocked with cameras and computers in it, and walk away for a couple of hours. When you return everything will be as you left it.

Anyway, this approach to your fellow human is a part of Islam and the people here are really living it, not only talking about it. This is my experience of the Muslims, and it is a picture far from the one you might get when you read the news in the west.

All in all, this has been a wonderful trip in a wonderful country and I hope to be back soon!



Heidi Malmgren. Photo: Göran Cederwall