

## Birding Israel April - May 2014



**Trip Participants and report author: Steve Arlow:** [birder.steve@btinternet.com](mailto:birder.steve@btinternet.com)  
**Website for further images:** [www.birdersplayground.co.uk](http://www.birdersplayground.co.uk)

### Summary:

Following visits in the past two springs, end of March into early April, to the super migrant highway that is southern Israel I decided on another visit but this time a month later to hopefully experience the Honey Buzzard and Levant Sparrowhawk passage. This was driven by daily accounts on Birdforum of many thousands of these raptors moving through along with a range of species, such as Barred and Olive-tree Warblers, several shrikes, Black-headed Buntings, Corncrakes, Broad-billed Sandpipers, that I had not yet encountered due to their later migration.

As usual I done research ahead of time, noting several locations I had not previously visited that may pay rewarding exploration, mostly Mt. Amsa and Lake Yeruham as well as some wadi's located on Google Earth.

Flights, car rental and accommodation were all booked with the same companies and people, British Airways, Budget and Lotan respectively.

On a whole I decided that for this trip I would concentrate solely on the south of the country, both previous trips have included the fish ponds around Bet Shean and the Dead Sea. I would spend 11 days in the desert.

So in review of the trip.

Well the Honey Buzzards did not disappoint with several days of many many thousands over the Eilat Mountains and many seen lower in the valley at drinking locations which afforded some outstanding photographic opportunities. However I guess the overall highlight was the finding of Israel's second Dark-chanting Goshawk which caused much twitching amongst the countries birders but unfortunately it was a one day wonder and presented itself only to those who managed to get there by about 4pm. I also found and photographed a fine female Crested / Oriental Honey Buzzard and a less than photogenic Olive-tree Warbler in a copse along the main highway.

There were, as usual, many overall highlights but it was a little disappointing to note that I seemed to have missed the main Levant Sparrowhawk push by about a week which resulted in just two individuals being seen. Migrants were generally scarce, virtually no shrikes, and it was thought that perhaps birds were leap frogging the south due to the heat wave and setting down further north as there was an abundance of birds there.

As with last year's March trip it wasn't wall to wall migrants but quality birds were dug out due to persistence and it was again a pleasure to be in country.

## Resources:

**A Guide to the Birding Hot-Spots of Northern Israel** and **A Guide to the Birding Hot-Spots of Southern Israel** by Hadoram Shirihi, James P. Smith, Guy M. Kirwan and Dan Alon

The two guides above are indispensable and although some sites are a little out of date the majority of information is still valid. Referred to as Shirihi in the following text.

**Collins Bird Guide** by Killian Mullarney, Lars Svensson, Dan Zetterstrom and Peter J. Grant.  
This field guide is a quality reference and one that was referred to as much as the following guide.

**Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East** by Porter and Aspinall

A good field guide with improved maps in the paperback copy, I used the hardback in 2012 which had poorer maps. The illustrations are decent enough though perhaps it could do with an increase in plumage variations, such as juveniles, whilst the text is also an improvement. It is the must have book for any trip here. For 2014 I also used the App version for my smartphone to allow for easier use in the field thus reducing the paperback to a reference for the car and accommodation.

**Lonely Planet – Israel & the Palestinian Territories** provides information on places to stay and eat as well as general touristy information. It was used for making visits to the ruins in Bet Shan and at Masada as well as taking time out from birding to go to the Aquarium in Eilat.

**World Mapping Project 1:250,000 Road Map** The only road map used, worked well in conjunction with the birding site guides above.

## Websites:

Eilat Birding: <http://eilatbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>

Yoav Perlman's Blog: <http://nubijar.blogspot.co.uk/>

Midbar Birding: <http://ramathanegevbirdingcentre.blogspot.co.uk/>

IsraRareBirds: <http://www.israbirdcenter.org/rarebirds/1pagerare.htm>

The Israeli Birding Website: <http://www.israbirding.com/>

Kibbutz Lotan centre for Birdwatching: <http://www.birdingisrael.com/birdsOfIsrael/>

Birding Israel: <http://www.birdingisrael.com/blog/>

Israel IOC Birds and Birding – Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Israel-IOC-Birds-and-Birding/255991381078737>

IBRCE - <http://ibrceilat.blogspot.co.il/>

As in 2012 and 2013 various Trip Reports were reviewed and these are available from several websites such **Surfbirds** <http://www.surfbirds.com/> and **Cloudbirders** <http://www.cloudbirders.com/> with the latter website now taking over the mantle of main website portal from the now sadly defunct Travellingbirders Website.

## Most useful and comprehensive trip reports used:

- Israel 14-28<sup>th</sup> March 2009 by Owain Gabb and Tim Sykes
- Israel 30 March – 7<sup>th</sup> April by Dom and Rod Standing
- Eilat 4-11.3.2007 by Heikki Karhu & Tapio Tuomenoja
- Israel 21<sup>st</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> March 2008 by Ian Graham and Garry Armstrong
- Israel Spring 2008 by Richard Bonser
- Josh Jones March 2013 <http://joshjrjones.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/israel-trip-report-march-2013.html>

## Travelling:

### Flight

As with previous years trips I booked my flight directly with British Airways over Easyjet as they had a greater weight limit allowance, 23kg for Checked Luggage and 23kg for Carry On bag plus a Laptop Bag, this is extremely helpful when taking lots of optics and camera equipment, and because again the flight would see me getting into Tel Aviv at around 5am so I could be out birding nearby within a couple of hours or so of leaving the airport. Heathrow Terminal 5 has no real facilities outside of security for anyone picking up or dropping off save for a few coffee shops. Past security there is a fair amount more to choose from.

There are no direct flights to Eilat. Back in 1996 when I first visited Israel it was possible to fly directly to Ovda Airport and get a short transfer to Eilat however you now have to fly into Tel Aviv which presents two options. It's possible to get an internal flight to the airport in town though luggage restrictions will differ to what you would have had with British Airways or drive, around 4-5hours, more with birding stops en route. I opted as usual for the driving option.

No entry Visa is required for UK Citizens.

When leaving the country allow lots of time to get through Israeli security, arrive early. Be prepared to have everything in your hand luggage removed and swabbed and X-Rayed multiple times. My carefully packed camera bag was emptied and it took a while to get everything back in the right space saving positions. My checked luggage was also investigated but I only learnt of this on arriving back in the UK to find the lock removed and zip damaged, how they managed to damage the zip whilst not damaging the padlock fastening loop is a mystery. I can only assume they wanted to check my bag because of the Wimberley tripod head that must have looked a rather suspicious shape on an X-Ray.

## In Country

For getting around I rented a Compact sized car, a Hyundai i20 but got upgraded to a slightly bigger and higher clearance Nissan Juke from Budget Car Rental <http://www.budget.co.uk/budgetonline/gb/budget.nsf/c/Locations> at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. On arrival go the upper level to the left as you exit into the main hall, this is where the Budget desk is. I had booked the car prior to leaving the UK and for the 10days came to US\$321.46 / approx. £190, including insurances. It may be worth purchasing extra insurance if you intend on driving off tarmac on a regular basis, and you will, as any damage to the underside of the vehicle will otherwise not be covered.

This car was okay but the wing mirrors were way too big for someone trying to point a big lens forward of the car but the extra clearance came in handy a couple of times. The boot was big enough for one large bag and smaller items but to small for two peoples bags. As with most automatics it had no real poke to it but once it got going it would cruise along happily at 100-120km per hour.

For UK visitors at least an International Driving Licence is not required, just your usual standard photo licence. Also note that when filling up and paying cash the Petrol/Service Stations this is Pre-pay, which means paying at the counter the anticipated amount before you can pump.

Roads in Israel are mostly well maintained, some of the minor roads may be potholed and dirt tracks should be driven with care. Road signs are in Hebrew, Arabic and English and are often right on top of the junction you may be looking for.

For driving directly to Eilat take Route 40 south, which will eventually join Route 90 and takes around 5 hours to drive, several birding stops on the way can be made. My first days travel was directly to the hills of Mt. Amsa via LaHave nature reserve and then Yeroham Lake before heading south for some evening birding around Yotvata. On a Saturday when there is no traffic this journey can be quick with LaHav being about an hour and half drive from the airport with Mt. Amsa a further 45mins from there. If you go directly down to Eilat you will be allowing around 5 hours travel time. In total I drove 2699kms so about 900km less than last year. Most of this was made up of travelling up and down the Arava from Lotan to Eilat and back.

For estimating travelling distances I used these websites:

[http://distancecalculator.globefeed.com/Israel\\_Distance\\_Calculator.asp](http://distancecalculator.globefeed.com/Israel_Distance_Calculator.asp)

<http://www.distancefrom.com>

However as a guide I have placed road distances between sites here:

Tel Aviv Airport to Arad:	142km / 88miles ( <i>Mt. Amsa approx. 10 miles further north</i> )
Tel Aviv Airport to Eilat:	349km / 270miles
Eilat to Ein Gedi:	246km / 160miles
Eilat to Yotvata:	48km / 30miles
Eilat to Nizzana:	195km / 112miles
Nizzana to Tel Aviv:	169km / 100miles

Places of interest are marked with 'Brown' signs and usually well marked.

Driving is on the right side of the road and there will always be someone wanting to overtake you no matter how fast you are going or if you are on a blind bend. Also observe speed limits, especially along Route 40 which is 90km per hour, as the Police will pull you over, I have seen this happening to others.

Traffic lights will flash green just before turning to amber and then quickly to red so once they start flashing start slowing down. Many junctions where lights are positioned you will notice pink coloured 'Red Light' that will go off should you jump the lights and there are Speeding cameras along the main highways near Tel Aviv.

Pedestrian Crossing points are a little different to that in the UK. You will need to give way to pedestrians already on the crossing but pedestrians will need to give way to vehicles until there is a gap for them to cross. You don't have to give way to pedestrians waiting to cross, if you do you may end up with an Israeli driving into the back of you. However always note the current conditions and act accordingly.

## Special Notes:

1. When leaving the airport look for sign's for Highway 1 towards Jerusalem as this will take you to Route 40 North and South.

2. Heading south to Eilat from Yotvata you will not be able to turn left to visit the Salt Pans, KM19 Sewage Ponds, North Fields or North Date Palms due to a barrier along the central reservation. You will have to drive to and through the Security Check Point and turn around or continue to the Elot/Border Crossing roundabout and take the old road that runs parallel to Route 40. This is a nuisance, especially if there is a good bird at any of these sites. Likewise if heading north from Eilat you won't be able cross the highway to go directly to Amrams Pillars or the Hidden Valley, you will need to travel a long way up the road to be able to come back down the road.

3. At the checkpoint along Route 90 observe the rapidly reducing speed signs because you will hit a series of speed bumps if you do not.

4. At the Yotvata exit follow the Brown signs for Yotvata Park and not the white signs saying Yotvata as these are for the Kibbutz which you will not be able to enter. This is a new road, was under construction last year, and takes a few attempts to get right but it seems to work okay.

5. Parking in Eilat cost 5ils for 1 hour, that's about 80pence

6. It is birdable by 5.45am at this time of year with sun-up at 6.05am so if visiting the mountains for the Honey Buzzards it is advisable to be there from 6.30am onwards.

### **Weather**

All that can be said is that it was hot, very hot. I noted the temperature in the car each day and the average was 38-40degrees Celsius which tended to peak around three or four pm. The highest temperature recorded was 47degree's when I was at the Salt Pans towards the end of the trip and even the cars AC had trouble coping. Generally overnight temperatures were around 28degrees Celsius and when I left for Nizzana at 3.30am it was still just tipping 28degrees. By 8am it would often be around 34degrees, toasty. I had a little rain on the final day at Nizzana which I thought would prevent the sandgrouse from appearing but this didn't appear to hamper their visit.

### **Accommodation:**

#### **Kibbutz Lotan – Arava Valley**

Located in the northern Arava, about 10 minutes north of Yotvata and about 45minutes north of Eilat this Kibbutz has a lot to offer the visiting birder. There are a multitude of micro birding environments within the Kibbutz grounds. I stayed here throughout at cost of 270Shekels per night, 2700ILS total, which was approximately £460 overall. It really is expensive for what you get, not much more than a room, shower, bed, fridge, kettle etc but it's in a favourable position up the top end of the valley but accommodation options at Elifaz or Quetura might be worth future exploration.

I only walked around the grounds a couple of times and didn't pick up much as the migration was slow with highlights being Thrush Nightingale, Bee-eaters and Hoopoe.



### **Eating**

#### **Eilat**

I didn't eat out in Eilat this year as I was staying in the north of the valley so see previous reports on where to eat.

#### **Yotvata**

Apart from the must have Ice Cream at the Service Station/Rest Stop there is a good and varied selection of hot and cold foods available throughout the day plus lots of snacks and drinks available. It is a very good spot for a lunchtime break when up this end of the Arava Valley. The Ice cream here is about as good as you can possibly get.

#### **Shizzafon Junction, Neot Samader**

There is a restaurant at the junction which is meant to be good but I didn't visit as Yotvata was usually closer to our end of day birding.

#### **Service/Petrol Stations**

Numerous service stations are scattered around the country and the main areas visited, some better than others, where you can get sandwiches, drinks and snacks. I also bought some Pot Noodle type things just in case I was out really late and Yotvata was closed, this happened once, on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

### **Other information**

#### **Shabbat**

Most shops, restaurants and other eating places will be closed from sundown on Friday night till sundown on Saturday night which should be taken into account when trying to find somewhere to eat away from Eilat. Petrol Stations will generally be open however you will probably have to pay extra on petrol during this time. We also found that trying to get into Lotan or Neot Semadar Kibbutz impossible in the morning as no one was on the gates or answering the contact numbers posted.

#### **Passover / Pesach**

Luckily this year my trip didn't coincide with this Israeli holiday, last year it was very busy around Eilat. It is important to plan your trip well in advance if visiting around this time as vast majority of accommodation will be full and everywhere will be very busy with lots of traffic, traffic jams, petrol station closures and prices a little higher than outside of this period but otherwise birding areas, other than North Beach, will largely be unaffected. Outside of this time it is a little easier but again pre-booking would be advisable.

#### **Holocaust Remembrance Day**

"Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day", known colloquially in Israel as **Yom HaShoah** is observed as Israel's commemoration and memorial day. It is held on the 27th April unless the 27th would be adjacent to Shabbat in which case the date is shifted by a day. As a result I would recommend having some supplies at your base of accommodation as pretty much everywhere will be closed.

## Birding Areas:

### LaHav Reserve

A stop off on the way to Mt. Amsa about 15km north east of Be'er Sheva and only about 5km from highway 40 is only about 1½ hours from the airport. This reserve has a semi alpine feel to it. I stopped here to look for Spectacled Warbler, which I failed to find but I did see Lesser Spotted Eagle, a fine pair of Woodchat Shrikes, Short-toed Eagle and plenty of Tawny Pipits.

Weblink to the site map: [http://www.israbirding.com/israelbirdsforum/forum\\_entry.php?id=209](http://www.israbirding.com/israelbirdsforum/forum_entry.php?id=209)

**Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point: 31°23'17.22"N, 34°51'25.53"E**

**Google Earth co-ordinates for spot where found the singing males in 2013: 31°23'29.99"N, 34°51'45.03"E**

### Mt. Amsa

Only a further 45minutes on from Lahav this was my first real birding of the trip where I spent much of the time just to the east of the road, where it starts to head up the hill, in the Wadi and around the rocky area. This was a great place but the species diversity was not high but excellent views were had of European Bee-eaters, Rock Sparrows, Isabelline Wheatears, White Storks, Montagu's Harriers and Long-legged Buzzard. It has a feel of being semi alpine with low vegetation and is surely a place to spend more time at. As I understand it both Rock Thrushes and Finch's Wheatears are more reliable earlier in the season

**Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point: 31°20'42.41"N, 35°07'17.30"E**

**Google Earth co-ordinates for Rock Sparrows: 31°20'37.46"N, 35°07'25.15"E**

**Google Earth co-ordinates for where Spectacled Warblers are likely: 31°20'29.55"N, 35°07'34.96"E**



### Yeroham Lake

Only 45minutes south of Mt. Amsa. I made a stop on the south here as I had heard interesting things but despite the large lake and open wooded surrounding areas I noted little of real interest however this may be more related to being here at the wrong time of day and being here on a Saturday, which is in Israeli is a day off, thus was packed with people. I know from reading reports it can have good birds here.

**Google Earth co-ordinates for the lake: 30°59'20.16"N, 34°54'01.26"E**

### Eilat and Lower Arava Valley

#### **Ofira Park** – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 33*

Not visited this trip but a drive by showed it was being watered. There is plenty of parking. Extract from previous March trip reports as an indicator: Early morning is best with the watered lawns dripping with Cretzschmar's Buntings, Red-throated Pipits, Spanish Sparrows and Yellow Wagtails of numerous forms. Around the park the trees and scrub held a diverse list of species with Masked and Woodchat Shrikes, Quails, Pied and Black-eared Wheatears, Common and Eastern Redstarts, Eastern Bonelli's Warblers, various Sylvia Warblers including Ruppell's.

### Central Park

The other side of the airport near the IMAX this park was a little drier than Ofira but was also bird rich and worth an hour or so exploration. I visited here briefly and found this year that part of it was partitioned off, not sure why, with most of it inaccessible however the tree's and lawns at the western end still happily visitable and worthy of exploration.

### Holland Park

Located on the north side of town there are a couple of ways to reach it. Coming from Ofira Park: Continue along the minor road north, past the salt pans, to join Route 40 at a roundabout after a looping switchback. Go straight over here and head up the hill. Holland Park is located on the right with an entrance indicated by a lay-by and wall. Coming from Eilat: After passing the end of the airport runway turn left at the roundabout and follow the above instructions.

This park is arid with Acacia and scrubland bushes can be good for Sylvia warblers and other dry country species and is certainly best worked earlier in the morning rather than late but this trip it was pretty much birdless on each visit, same as many other hotspots along the Arava. The better birding areas are further up the Wadi so don't limit yourself to the area closest to the layby.



### North Beach – Shirihi Southern Guide page 25

I made several morning and evening visits and located a few interesting but not unusual species such as ten White-eyed Gulls, 1+ White-cheeked Tern, a single Sooty Shearwater and a couple or so Baltic Gulls. The beach had two Common Kingfishers along it and by the canal outflow but I didn't come across any Striated or Reef Herons. Avoid Saturdays, especially the evening, as this can be very busy with people using the beach, though on the other hand there were some sunbathing distractions☺.



### International Birding & Research Centre (IRBC) and Salt pans – Shirihi Southern Guide page 37 & 34

This can be reached from North Beach by following signs along the canal and past the southern Elot Date Palms and from Route 40 down towards to the Jordanian Border Crossing, turn right before the checkpoint and follow signs to the reserve.

This small reserve is probably best visited early morning, it opens at 7am, and has scrubland and salt pans nearby which can be driven around thus providing a variety of species. There is also a hide overlooking one of the pans and a ringing station.

It can easily be combined with the often excellent south Elot Date Palms as a walking route, which should produce many more birds around the greenhouses.

### Elot Date Palms – Shirihi Southern Guide page 34

Located between the IRBC and North Beach. This shady area with wide tracks was again birdless this year when compared to March 2012 when Pied Wheatears, many Black-eared and Northern Wheatears, Eastern Redstarts, Eastern Bonelli's Warblers, Hoopoes, Wryneck, Semi collared Flycatcher and Woodchat Shrikes were all readily available. Best in the morning but cooler evenings are also good times to visit.

### Northern Date Palms – Shirihi Southern Guide page?

Heading north along the tarmac from the north Elot Date Palms, near the border crossing, is a large stand of Date Palms near the Northern Fields. If the north end gate is open you can enter but be mindful of the workers here and to not get locked in. This year I noted some of the vegetation around the perimeter had been removed so didn't linger, especially as due to the overall general lack of migrants around.

### KM19 Sewage Ponds – Shirihi Southern Guide page 53

Located near the large cowsheds only one pool had water in it. The fence has been pushed down in several places so access is possible. The northeast pool has water in it and is where the Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse come into drink at dusk.

I sat down about 20metres from the sluice and a male and two female Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse flew and landed very close to those gathered and were scoped well for around ten minutes before they flew off into the dark. This is the reliable corner for the birds.

Make sure you are in place a good 15-20 minutes before it gets really dark, sit down below the top of the embankment and stay still. If you arrive late you run the risk of preventing the birds coming in and ruining it for others already there.

Birding here at other times of day resulted in other birds, with a huge flock of possibly around 300-400+ White-winged Black Terns in the evening of the sandgrouse visit and was truly spectacular, especially when they went high and started flocking around as a starling like murmuration. Several were generally present on each visit. Additionally last years three Egyptian Geese were still present and other wildfowl, such as Garganey, were at the southern end. There were plenty of Wood Sandpipers and Ruff around the edges of the pool and a resident flock of Slender-billed Gulls.

#### **KM19 Canal**

An often extremely productive water filled area between the sewage ponds and the southern end of the Saltpans. This area was largely devoid of passerines this trip but held numerous commoner waders but was the site of a large number of Honey Buzzards coming down to drink one afternoon, which included a Crested/Oriental Honey Buzzard. There is still a bumpy dirt/mud track that runs from the east and west corners of the southern salt pan to the main track south of the cow sheds.

#### **KM20 Salt Pans / Northern Reservoirs – Shirihi Southern Guide page 49**

These large salt pans can be driven around and can produce some good birding. Each year the water levels vary and this year they seemed to be a little high, with exception of the Southern-most pan, so wading birders were limited to the edges of the embankments. There is a sign saying that they are private but there is free access. This year the southern pan had a relatively large amount of exposed mud and held the largest single flock of waders on the largest expanse; some 200 Little Stints, 30+ Red-necked Phalaropes, Ruff, Wood Sandpipers, Ringed Plovers etc and one afternoon a Broad-billed Sandpiper. The edges all around the pools hold waders and exploration should be made regularly due to the continued turn around of birds, several more Broad-billed Sandpipers were seen as well as Turnstone, Avocet, Grey Plover and resident species such as Stilts and Kentish Plovers. Raptors are also a feature with Booted Eagles, Honey Buzzards and Marsh Harriers all fairly regular.

The scrub behind the raised shade / Flamingo watch-point is also a good spot to bird early morning when migrants are in town.



#### **KM20 Date Palms – Shirihi Southern Guide page 49 & 51**

When travelling north from Eilat on the old tarmac road take a right just past the first date palms on the right. Park near the junction here and bird these palm groves. The plantations are private but the northern ones can be readily birded from the tracks whilst those to the south of the Saltpans track have been 'screened off' so you can't see in there. This could be frustrating if in future years the date palms are once again dripping with migrants, this was the site of Israel's first *Vittata* Pied Wheatear in 2012.

On the left side of the track to the Saltpans by the junction are more date palms and by walking north along the west fence along the dirt track the fence disappears, either broken down, fallen into disrepair or removed, which means you can walk into the palm grove here. However still be mindful that they are private and you may be asked to leave by any workers present.

On the other side of the tarmac track, towards Route 40, is a small clump of scrub and can also be productive and should be checked whilst here.

### **Eilat Mountains / Raptor Viewpoints – Shirihai Southern Guide page 40**

As Honey Buzzards tend to migrate lower through the mountains than Steppe Buzzards I viewed from various advantage points such as the main viewpoint on the right just before reaching Mt Yoash and further down the road at several pulls offs. One particularly productive spot was the old road that leads down to Wadi Shlomo and the first sharp curve right as you head downhill. These had many thousands of Honey Buzzards directly overhead as they cut the corner from one set of cliffs to the other. It is highly recommended that you arrive early as Honey Buzzards will likely to be in the air from around 6:30am and the show could be over by 8am. That said if the birds are further east then it could start a little later and the show lasts less time as they quickly gain height.

NW / NNW wind direction is really what is wanted to get the absolute best out of the Honey Buzzard migration though one day of NW winds didn't produce anything until early afternoon when birds were already further north and over the Arava. This is a spectacular sight to behold and one I would really recommend, it really is a wonder to behold. It is difficult to determine numbers seen on 'my' big days but the first probably had around 10,000 birds go through and the second along the same lines. Not the huge days of 100k that can go through but still hugely impressive.



**Google Earth co-ordinates for upper viewpoint: 29°35'08.37"N, 34°53'15.16"E**

**Google Earth co-ordinates for middle viewpoint: 29°34'40.16"N, 34°53'18.44"E / 29°34'55.17"N, 34°53'11.07"E**

**Google Earth co-ordinates for middle roadside viewpoint: 29°34'35.90"N, 34°53'11.47"E**

**Google Earth co-ordinates for lower roadside viewpoint: 29°34'14.13"N, 34°53'31.24"E**

### **Highway 90 roadside copses**

There are several small isolated stands of small trees and bushes along the roadside, northbound, that are worthy of investigation.

KM20 – By the Saltpans turn off Co-ordinates **29°37'37.91"N, 34°59'17.74"E**

KM23 – By the Doum Palms turn off Co-ordinates **29°39'01.39"N, 34°59'28.06"E**

KM26 – Before the En Avrona turn off, by the two red and white masts. Co-ordinates **29°40'33.93"N, 34°59'26.66"E**

### **Upper Arava Valley & Southern Negev Plateau**

#### **Yotvata Shirihai Southern Guide page 57**

Located 30 minutes north of Eilat the fields around this site are a Lark, Pipit and Wheatear haven but by end of April the fields were harvested were pretty much birdless and were not visited further after the initial drive around. These fields are not actually in the Kibbutz itself but on the east side of the road with access from the rest stop.

I concentrated my birding efforts at the Sewage Ponds. The sewage ponds were very birdy with constant checking to see what had dropped in as I noted a constant change over of species but as days progressed less and less species were encountered. Additionally work was undertaken on the ponds whilst I was there and a lot of the reed bed vegetation was removed from the pools thus affecting the abundance of birds. It was however a great site for watching Honey Buzzards that came down to drink in the mid morning and late afternoon periods and many were seen here. These ponds are either drivable or walk aroundable whilst a track to the right of the gate will take you to a fringed pond which was completely dry this trip, last year it was great habitat full of water with Moustached and Great Reed Warblers, Nightingales singing etc and other interested semi-arid species. The sewage pools were one of my favourite birding sites despite the aggravating flies.

Care should be taken around the fields as it is possible to get stuck in the sand, when in doubt don't attempt to drive it.

#### **Kibbutz Lotan Shirihai Southern Guide page 71**

It's a green oasis in the northern Arava however it was, like the rest of the valley, not particularly birdy this year but is always worth investigation when in the area as there are a number of habitats to explore and should it be another good migrant year some time should be spent here.

#### **Quetura Sewage Ponds Shirihai Southern Guide page 83**

Accessed from the track opposite the southern end of the Quetura Kibbutz these small set of sewage ponds are only 5 minutes south of Lotan and less than 10 minutes north of Yotvata. The ponds varied in water levels with at least one fairly shallow with areas for pipits, wagtails and waders to feed. The bushes to the southeast can hold numerous migrants.

**Google Earth co-ordinates for the pools: 29°57'50.46"N, 35°03'52.34"E**



### Kibbutz Samar

At this kibbutz it is possible to bird the area, especially around the Olive Grove where migrants can be found readily and was this spring home to a lingering Black Bush Robin. Go through the kibbutz gate and turn immediately left and after about 100metres park on the right and explore the Grove.

**Google Earth co-ordinates for the Olive Grove: 29°49'54.43"N, 35°01'22.71"E**

### Samar / Elifaz Palm Plantation

A muck heap was located on the east side of the palm plantation which the day or so before held several wagtails including Citrine but everything had moved on by the time I located it. The plantations here have a lot of vegetation around them and look extremely promising for migrants.

From Route 90 north take the Samar slip road Co-ordinates **29°49'59.03"N, 35°01'46.35"E** on the right / east side (not the kibbutz side) and take the fairly well surfaced track south parallel to the highway. Drive along this road until you reach the building on the left and go through the gates with two metal Peacocks on them, co-ordinates **29°48'56.49"N, 35°01'53.82"E**. Follow the track right to you reach an obvious left bend and follow this to the T junction, a hedge should be in front of you and running along the length of the field. Turn right and follow to the end. This is where the muck heap was located as well as short turn which looks ideal for Caspian Plovers. Co-ordinates **29°48'35.05"N, 35°02'22.51"E**.

Additionally what looks like a sewage works can be located at **29°49'39.74"N, 35°02'04.95"E** and may be worth a visit also.

### KM76 – Highway 90

This can be a green area after rains attracting many migrants but this year it was dry and held very few birds. Earlier in the season when it can be really green it can be very good, for instance in March 2013 as an example it held 50 or so Isabelline Wheatears, Bimaculated and hundreds of Short-toed Larks, Desert Warbler, lots of Sylvia warblers, buntings, wheatears, male Pallid Harrier, and singing Rufous-tailed Bush Robins.

**Google Earth co-ordinates for main vegetated area: 30°06'04.29"N, 35°09'12.83"E**

### Neot Semadar *Shirihai Southern Guide page 87*

In 2012 this was a personal favourite Kibbutz which was simply heaving with birds however the kibbutz has new gates and doesn't seem as accommodating to visiting birders so no visit was made within the boundary. This site really could be the under-estimated birding destination in the area if access is made possible.

**Google Earth co-ordinates 30 02'57.17"N, 35 01'40.28" E**

### Shizzafon Sewage Works *Shirihai Southern Guide page 87*

About half mile to the east of Neat Semadar Kibbutz are the sewage ponds. This is a great little place and you can walk around. The settling beds that were so good in 2012 and pretty much dry in 2013 were at various stages this year with some vegetated, some showing shallow pools etc and was still a great place for birding, had several Corncrakes on a visit here.

**Google Earth co-ordinates: 30°02'34.47"N, 35°02'34.88"E**



### Uvda Valley Road *Shirihai Southern Guide page 88*

Turn left off route 12 after about 1.5KMs from Shizzafon Junction onto the Shaharut road and then about 1km from the Army base take the dust track to the Shayarot Cliffs Nature Reserve **Google Earth co-ordinates for approximate turn off 29°57'35.91"N, 34°58'22.30"E**. It's a little obscure to find but is sign-posted. There are stretches of sand along the track but a bit of acceleration will see you through. This side area held little, as with the rest of southern Israel, but this was made for by finding a stunning Cream-coloured Courser one evening on the stoney area near the way in from the tarmac main road.

Along the main tarmac road explore the area to the south about 1km from the Highway 12 junction, just after the second 'metalled' bridge, where there is an obvious clump of vegetation. The Wadi to the south here is ideal for larks and wheatears and is the site for the Basalt Wheatear in March 2012.

Further along the tarmac road there is an obvious dirt track (between the two closest pylons to the tarmac road and just after the metalled bridge) that leads off to the right/south towards a small fenced compound, around some pipes, and towards two dark, blackish hills. Very soon after heading down this track take the track to the left which runs parallel to the main tarmac road. It was along here that the Thick-billed Larks favoured in 2012. You may get a visit from the Army here as further along the valley is an Airbase.

### Wadi Yahel

Another new site for me and the one that had the most migrants in it and a real gem. From route 90 heading north turn left into Kibbutz Yahel and then turn right in front of the main building and following this round the back and keep the wadi on the right and the kibbutz fence on the left. I parked by the black and white arrowed sign and explored the wadi from here. The wadi goes a long way but is extremely productive. Take plenty of water here. There is also an isolated garden, known as the cemetery, which also has birds due to the taller tree's here. Lots of warblers here and great spot for Thrush Nightingales, Golden Orioles, swifts and Rock Martins, Blackstarts are common.

**Google Earth co-ordinates to track around building: 30°04'57.41"N, 35°07'51.28"E**

**Google Earth co-ordinates to parking area for exploring wadi: 30°05'11.21"N, 35°07'48.94"E**



### The Negev and nearby areas

#### **Nizzana** *Shirihai Southern Guide page 127*

A three hour drive from Eilat, two hours / 192km, from Lotan, meant a 3.40am departure to arrive for 5.50 arrival just as there was enough light for birding. As in the Shirihai guide book the best place for the McQueen's Bustard were at around KM7 along the road to Ezuz with a male found almost immediately but I lost this bird as I drove further along the road to get a better view. Usually there are other birds present but this morning was overcast and spots of rain so little else was noted.

The sewage ponds, *Shirihai Southern site guide page 128* were superb and is the current best place to look for the sandgrouse. Make sure you are here for around 9am. Co-ordinates to the entrance date to the ponds **30°53'29.49"N, 34°26'11.19"E**. On passing through the gate there are a number of ponds, all worth checking for various waders etc however currently the best pond is the one at the very far end, it is un-vegetated and this is where the sandgrouse come in. Using the car as a hide and taking careful drives you can get quite close to the birds, I managed to watch at least 70 at a range of about 15metres.

Other birds of interest here were Whiskered Tern, Purple Gallinule, Temminck's Stint, Alpine Swift whilst previous visits have provided Southern Grey Shrike, Merlin, thousands of storks etc.

It can be a little difficult to locate the ponds, especially as the road nearby has been resurfaced and the access tracks moved however follow these directions and you should have no problem.

It is important to get here earlier and it's easy to waste time searching for the ponds so I have detailed the access here. Coming north along the Ezuz Road, after looking for the Bustards, turn right off the tarmac at the sharp left hand bend at **30°52'24.25"N, 34°26'07.86"E** Stay on this bumpy track past the collapsed bridge and turn left onto the tarmac at **30°52'58.26"N, 34°27'10.41"E** Follow the tarmac until you reach the last cow sheds on the left, if you reach the end of the tarmac you've gone too far. Turn left after this cowshed, at co-ordinates **30°53'37.51"N, 34°26'29.78"E** and then immediately right and follow the dusty track parallel to the road. At the telegraph post with the electrical transformer on it turn left and this dirt track will take you the entrance of the Sewage Ponds. This telegraph post is directly opposite sheds on the other side of the road which has 4 twin sets of silo's. If you've reached the end of the tarmac don't try taking a short cut at any obvious tracks as this quickly runs into soft sand and you run the risk of getting bogged down, as I nearly did after just 3 feet.

## Day to day itinerary:

### **Day 1: Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> April - Daily peak temperature 34°C**

Lahav Nature Reserve / Mt. Amsa / Yeroham Lake / Ramon Crater / Neot Smader Sewage Pools / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / Yotvata North fields

- Day's highlights:
- 1. The Pallid Swift passage over the road south of Mt. Amsa
- 2. The very fine flock of Bee-eaters at Mt. Amsa
- 3. The Long-legged Buzzard at Mt. Amsa
- 4. The adult and juvenile Isabelline Wheatears at Mt. Amsa
- 5. The pair of Woodchat Shrikes at Lahav
- 6. The Montagu's Harrier at Mt. Amsa
- 7. The singing Rufous Bush Robin at Neot Smader

### **Day 2: Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April - Daily peak temperature 36°C**

Eilat Mountains / KM20 Salt Pans / Doum Palms / Kibbutz Samar / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / Quetura Sewage Ponds / Kibbutz Lotan / Kibbutz Samar / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Ponds

- Day's highlights:
- 1. Red-necked Phalarope flock at the Salt Pans
- 2. The flock of Bee-eaters over the Salt Pans
- 3. The Ortolan Buntings, Wryneck, Hoopoe and Black Bush Robin at Kibbutz Samar
- 4. The first flock of Honey Buzzards seen at Yotvata
- 5. The superb flock of hundreds of White-winged Black Terns at K19 Sewage Ponds
- 6. The magical Lichenstien's Sandgrouse at Dusk at KM19 Sewage Ponds

### **Day 3: Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April - Daily peak temperature 34°C**

Eilat Mountains / Holland Park / KM19 Sewage Ponds / KM20 Salt Pans / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / Neot Smadar Sewage Ponds / Sharahut Cliff N.R, Uvda Valley

- Day's highlights
- 1. The 15-20 thousand Honey Buzzards through the Eilat Mountains
- 2. The showy remaining White-winged Black Terns at Km19
- 3. The Masked Shrike at Yotvata Sewage Ponds
- 4. The Steppe Eagle over Yotvata
- 5. Finding the superb Cream-coloured Courser in the Uvda Valley

### **Day 4: Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> April - Daily peak temperature 38°C**

Uvda Valley including Sharahut Cliffs N.R / Neot Smadar Sewage Ponds / Acacia Gazelle Road / Kibbutz Samar / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Canal / North Beach / North Fields / Eilat Mountains / North Beach

- Day's highlights
- 1. The cute Desert Ref Fox cubs at Neot Smader
- 2. Finding the Dark-chanting Goshawk just south of Yotvata, 2<sup>nd</sup> for Israel
- 3. The female Hooded Wheatear that flew up from En Netafim in the Eilat Mountains
- 4. The White-eyed Gulls and White-cheeked Tern at North Beach

### **Day 5: Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April - Daily peak temperature 34°C**

Eilat Mountains / North Beach / Eilat Mountains / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / Kibbutz Lotan / Wadi Yahel /

- Day's highlights
- 1. The many many thousands of Honey Buzzards low through the Eilat Mountains
- 2. The Masked Shrikes at Yotvata and Wadi Yahel
- 3. The showy Namaqua Dove at Yotvata
- 4. The evening stroll at Wadi Yahel producing fine Wood and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers

### **Day 6: Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> May - Daily peak temperature 38°C**

Wadi Yahel / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Ponds / KM26 Roadside Copse / KM76 / Wadi Yahel /

- Day's highlights
- 1. The morning at Wadi Yahel and its migrants including Thrush Nightingales, Barred Warbler
- 2. The Red-necked Phalarope flock at the Salt Pans
- 3. The four Pale Phase Booted Eagles around KM19
- 4. Finding an Olive-tree Warbler at KM26

### **Day 7: Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> May - Daily peak temperature 34°C**

Eilat Mountains / Holland Park / KM20 Salt Pans / Quetura Sewage Ponds / Neot Smader Sewage Ponds / KM20 Salt Pans

- Day's highlights
- 1. Barbary Falcons at Quetura and Neot Smader
- 2. The Booted Eagle at Neot Smader
- 3. The flock of Gull-billed Terns at the Salt Pans

**Day 8: Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May - Daily peak temperature 39°C**

North Beach / Eilat Mountains / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Canal / KM19 Sewage Ponds / KM19 Canal / Yotvata Sewage Ponds

- Day's highlights

1. The Honey Buzzards over KM19 Canal with many coming down to drink including a female Crested Honey Buzzard
2. The Honey Buzzards coming to drink at Yotvata

**Day 9: Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May - Daily peak temperature 41°C, 37°C by 11am**

Wadi Yahel / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / KM20 Salt Pans / Kibbutz Lotan / Wadi Yahel

- Day's highlights

1. The big increase in migrants at Yahel, 10-12 Thrush Nightingales, 7-8 Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, 4 Golden Orioles, immature male Ruppells Warbler, 2 Barred Warblers and Masked Shrikes
2. The three Broad-billed Sandpipers at the Salt Pans, especially the close two
3. The Hoopoe on the Lotan lawns

**Day 10: Monday 5<sup>th</sup> May - Daily peak temperature 47°C, average day temperature 41°C**

Kibbutz Lotan / Wadi Yahel / Neot Smader Sewage Ponds / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / KM20 Salt pans

- Day's highlights

1. The continue migrant list at Yahel with increased Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, Bee-eaters, male Red-backed Shrike, Golden Orioles with 5 Little Bitterns in the ornamental pond by the food centre.
2. The Corncrakes at Neot Smader
3. The Broad-billed Sandpipers at the Salt Pans

**Day 11: Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> May - Daily peak temperature 30°C**

Nizzana Ezuz Road / Nizzana Sewage Ponds

- Day's highlights

1. Male McQueens Bustars at Nizanna along the Ezuz Road
2. The Sandgrouse spectacle at the sewage ponds along with Alpine Swifts, Whiskered Tern, Temmink's Stint and Purple Gallinule



**European Bee-eater – Mt. Amsa**

**Accounts for the 157 Species seen** – following order of *Bird of the Middle East* by Porter and Aspinall

Chukar	Two at Lahav Reserve on 26th April proved to be the only encounter with this species, a brief and distant one at that
Sand Partridge	Several were heard in the Wadi's on several dates but the only ones seen this year were at Wadi Yahel were between 1-3 were seen each visit.
Egyptian Goose	The three from 2013 were still present at the KM19 Sewage Ponds throughout
Mallard	Common at Yeroham Lake on 26 <sup>th</sup> April and Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May
Wigeon	15+ at the KM19 Sewage Ponds on 27 <sup>th</sup> April continued through to 1 <sup>st</sup> May but had dropped to only 3 by 3 <sup>rd</sup> May.
Shoveler	The KM19 Sewage Ponds had two on 27 <sup>th</sup> April and 1 <sup>st</sup> May whilst a flock of 15 was present off North Beach on 29 <sup>th</sup> April. Elsewhere the only others noted were at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May when one flew over.
Pintail	Only seen at the KM19 Sewage Ponds where 2 drakes were present 27 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> April were joined by a female on 1 <sup>st</sup> May.
Garganey	Two drakes and female were at the KM19 Sewage Ponds on 27th April with the drake seen again on 28th April. Five were then here on 1st May whilst two lingered till 3rd May. Two were at the Salt Pans on 3rd May.
Teal	Only seen at KM19 Sewage Pond with 12 there on 1 <sup>st</sup> May only
Little Grebe	Three were at Yeroham Lake on 26 <sup>th</sup> April but no others were seen until 6 <sup>th</sup> May when a minimum of 45+ were at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds.
Sooty Shearwater	One was seen early morning off North Beach on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May
Greater Flamingo	Resident at the northern Salt Pans with around 220+ seen most visits
Black Stork	Singletons were noted; Yotvata Sewage Ponds heading north on 28th April and near Yahel on 30th April
White Stork	<p>Eight were feeding in the long grass at Lahav Reserve on 26<sup>th</sup> April whilst a steady movement of birds was noted at Mt. Amsa an hour or so later with probably around 300+ going through with many coming down to feed the grasslands there also.</p> <p>Relatively scarce in the Arava with, apart from 250+ distantly past Lotan on 27<sup>th</sup> April, only 1-2 were seen on just three dates. Nizzana fared better with an initial eight along the Ezuz road on 6<sup>th</sup> May whilst I was searching for McQueen's Bustard and then flocks of 70+ and 250+ over the road west of Nizzana as I headed towards Tel Aviv.</p>
Glossy Ibis	Seven were seen from the car along Route 40 south from Tel Aviv on 26th April whilst the 28th April at dusk at the KM19 Sewage Ponds produced northbound flocks of 15, 5 and one with presumably the singleton
Little Bittern	I came across a pair that had three juveniles in tow at the ornamental pond at Yahel on 5 <sup>th</sup> May. It appears they nested in the small patch of reeds here which was not much bigger than a Transit Van.
Night Heron	Encountered each visit to the KM19 Sewage Ponds where several adults and immature's were present.
Cattle Egret	From the first seen on 26th April along Route 40 south from Tel Aviv this was a common heron around wetlands with the ponds at Yotvata and KM19 being especially favoured with 10-15 at both locations
Squacco Heron	Commonly encountered and often very confiding. Prime locations were the sewage ponds at KM19, Quetura, Yotvata and Nizzana where up to 10-15 could be seen at each location each visit. Away from here one at North Beach did its best to look like a Striated Heron by feeding in the Canal outflow.
Grey Heron	A largely overlooked species 1-2 were recorded at the Salt Pans, Yotvata Sewage Ponds and KM19 Sewage Ponds on several dates

Little Egret	Somewhat under recorded but noted at all of the main wetland locations. KM19 Sewage Pond had the largest record numbers with 20+ on 27 <sup>th</sup> April and 12 still there on 1 <sup>st</sup> May. Nine came in off the sea at North Beach on 29 <sup>th</sup> April were notable whilst 'lots' were at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.														
Cormorant	The only birds of the trip were two at KM19 Sewage Ponds on 27 <sup>th</sup> April.														
Honey Buzzard	So the main event, the biggest reason for the late April visit and despite quite days in the mountains it did not disappoint. The following is a summary:														
	<table> <tr> <td>Eilat Mountains</td><td>20+ on 27<sup>th</sup> April</td></tr> <tr> <td>Yotvata Sewage Ponds</td><td>70+ over in two flocks but several down to drink on 27<sup>th</sup> April</td></tr> <tr> <td>Eilat Mountains</td><td>After a slow start in the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> April at least 20,000 were seen going through the mountains with some being rather low down.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Eilat Mountains</td><td>30<sup>th</sup> April only 100+ went over by 7:30. The second pulse of birds occurred an hour later with many many thousands passing low overhead, a truly stunning spectacle.</td></tr> <tr> <td>KM19 Sewage Ponds</td><td>40+ overhead on 3<sup>rd</sup> May were part of the much bigger arrival birds at the nearby Canal</td></tr> <tr> <td>KM19 Canal</td><td>5000+, huge kettle and stream of birds across the border early afternoon on 3<sup>rd</sup> May with at least 150 coming down to drink was a major interaction with the birds at they flew in at eye level</td></tr> <tr> <td>Yotvata Sewage Ponds</td><td>25-30 down to drink shortly after the event at the Canal on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May presented unparalleled photographic opportunities of birds both in the air and mere feet away on the water's edge</td></tr> </table>	Eilat Mountains	20+ on 27 <sup>th</sup> April	Yotvata Sewage Ponds	70+ over in two flocks but several down to drink on 27 <sup>th</sup> April	Eilat Mountains	After a slow start in the morning of 28 <sup>th</sup> April at least 20,000 were seen going through the mountains with some being rather low down.	Eilat Mountains	30 <sup>th</sup> April only 100+ went over by 7:30. The second pulse of birds occurred an hour later with many many thousands passing low overhead, a truly stunning spectacle.	KM19 Sewage Ponds	40+ overhead on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May were part of the much bigger arrival birds at the nearby Canal	KM19 Canal	5000+, huge kettle and stream of birds across the border early afternoon on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May with at least 150 coming down to drink was a major interaction with the birds at they flew in at eye level	Yotvata Sewage Ponds	25-30 down to drink shortly after the event at the Canal on the 3 <sup>rd</sup> May presented unparalleled photographic opportunities of birds both in the air and mere feet away on the water's edge
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Crested Honey Buzzard	I had given up on finding this species amongst the many thousands of Honey Buzzards going through but I was fortunate enough to find an adult female coming down to drink at the KM19 Canal early afternoon on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May. Another highlight.														
Black Kite	Very scarce with singletons only at just south of Tel Aviv and at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April														
Short-toed Eagle	Only seen at Lahave Reserve where two were present early morning on 26 <sup>th</sup> April though the light was terrible.														
Marsh Harrier	Fairly common throughout the trip in the Arava with multiple locations recording 1-2 birds per visit whilst majority logged were females.														
Montagu's Harrier	At least two females were seen at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April														
Dark-chanting Goshawk	My MEGA find. The second for Israel, following one back in the 1970's, caused a twitch and was seen by a number of Israeli and visiting birders. Originally I found the bird at the north end of the Acacia Gazelle Reserve whilst I was looking for Arabian Warblers on 29 <sup>th</sup> April and was relocated a couple of KM's further south where it sat on Pylons. Great find.														
Levant Sparrowhawk	I missed the bulk of this species movement through the Arava which resulted in only two sightings of singletons, at En Avrona on 27 <sup>th</sup> April and at Samar on 29 <sup>th</sup> April.														
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	One flew of the Pond at KM19 in evening of 27 <sup>th</sup> April.														
Steppe Buzzard	Following four at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April 1-2 were seen at nine locations on six days until the last seen on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May. Sightings consisted of reddish and typical looking morph birds.														
Long-legged Buzzard	A super bird flew overhead at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April														
Lesser Spotted Eagle	A singleton was seen at Lahve Reserve on 26 <sup>th</sup> April in rather gloomy conditions														
Steppe Eagle	One soared past Yotvata Sewage Ponds on 28 <sup>th</sup> April was unexpected														

Booted Eagle	Fairly commonly seen with mix of pale and dark morph birds noted across various locations though the area around the KM19 Sewage Ponds through to the Salt Pans was a favoured location. The following is a breakdown of those birds seen		
	Neot Smader Sewage Ponds	Pale Morph	26th April
	Yotvata Sewage Works	1	27th April
	KM19 Sewage Ponds	1	28th April
	Salt Pans	1	28th April
	KM19 Canal	1	29th April
	Salt Pans	4 pale morph	1st May
	KM19 Sewage Ponds	1	1st May
	Holland Park	pale and dark phase birds	2nd May
	Neot Smader Sewage Ponds	pale phase	2nd May
	KM19 Canal	dark phase	3rd May
Kestrel	Only recorded in one's and two's on only five dates throughout the trip, none proved to be the sought after Lesser Kestrel.		
Hobby	A brief fly over along Route 211 on 6th May was the only one of the trip		
Peregrine	One over Samar on 29 <sup>th</sup> April		
Barbary Falcon	One flew north on 2nd May at Quetura Sewage Ponds may have been the same bird seen at the sewage ponds at Neot Smader a couple of hours later		
McQueen's Bustard	A male was found from KM7 Marker post 7 along the Ezuz road on 6 <sup>th</sup> May. It was distant so I drove down the road a kilometre to get closer to it but in the 3 minutes or so it took it disappeared and I couldn't relocate it, even back from the original marker post. Still it was an impressive bird		
Corncrake	Four were found at Neot Smader Sewage Ponds on 5 <sup>th</sup> May but one at the Salt Pans looked later the same morning like it had got itself into trouble with its feathers encrusted with salt. It was a little too far away from the embankment for me to attempt to reach it.		
Moorhen	Small numbers were noted at the sewage ponds but it has to be said it was hardly noted down in the notebook. Multiple birds were at Yotvata and Nizzana Sewage Ponds and at Yeroham Lake.		
Coot	Many were at Lake Yeroham on 26 <sup>th</sup> April and were noted as present at KM19 Sewage Ponds during each visit. It was also noted as common at Nizzana Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.		
Purple Gallinule	The only bird noted was when an individual walked out of the reeds at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.		
Cream-coloured Courser	One of the birds of the trip. I found a stunning adult in the evening of 28 <sup>th</sup> April at Sharahut Cliffs reserve in the Uvda Valley. The evening light highlighting it perfectly.		
Avocet	Nine on the 3rd May at the Salt Pans had dwindled to just 3 by 5th May		
Spur-winged Lapwing	Commonly encountered throughout the trip, impossible to miss		
Grey Plover	Only recorded at the Salt Pans where one on 27th April increased to two 1st May, three 3rd May and then peaking at five on 4th May. All were non breeding plumaged birds.		
Ringed Plover	A notable arrival occurred at the Salt Pans during the trip. From just one on 27 <sup>th</sup> April numbers increased to at least 15 by 1 <sup>st</sup> May and then up to 60+ on 4 <sup>th</sup> May. No others were seen away from the Salt Pans in the Arava. The only others seen were two at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.		
Kentish Plover	Eight were at the Salt Pans on 27 <sup>th</sup> April but on average only 2-3 would be found around the pan embankments throughout the trip. At least one or two fledged juveniles were also noted during the visits.		
Snipe	Following one flushed from rank vegetation at the Quetura Sewage Ponds on 2 <sup>nd</sup> May three were seen together at the Salt Pans on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May		
Black-tailed Godwit	The same lone individual was seen at the salt pans on 2nd and 3rd May		
Spotted Redshank	A lone bird was noted at KM19 Sewage Ponds on 27 <sup>th</sup> April		

Redshank	One lingered for several days at the Salt Pans from 27 <sup>th</sup> April
Greenshank	The first was seen briefly at Yotvata Sewage Works on 26th April but there on the KM19 Sewage Ponds, Canal and Salt Pans were the main locations for this species with singles seen on 5 dates
Green Sandpiper	This wader was noted at the sewage ponds of Yotvata and KM19 but oddly not at Quetura. There was generally no more than 1-2 at either of the two locations on several dates
Wood Sandpiper	Commonest of the Tringa's by a wide margin. Most of the sewage ponds, Yotvata, Quetura, Neot Smader, held lower figures, 1-3, most visits the Salt Pans and Nearby KM19 Sewage Ponds held the greatest concentrations. The Pans had a single flock of 27 on 27 <sup>th</sup> April and a flock of 60 on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May which may have been the same as the flock seen and the KM19 pools later the same day. The Nizzana Sewage pools had a least 30+ on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.
Common Sandpiper	Common wader around the sewage ponds and at the Salt Pans with peak of 6+ at KM19 on 27th April and 10+ at Nizzana on 6th May
Temminck's Stint	One was seen on the final morning, 6 <sup>th</sup> May, at the superb ponds at Nizzana
Little Stint	The Salt Pans had the largest concentrations throughout the trip with numbers varying from 70+ - 300+. Much smaller numbers were recorded from other locations with five at the KM19 Sewage Ponds on 28 <sup>th</sup> April, seven at North Beach 29 <sup>th</sup> April, three at the Lotan 'wetland' on 30 <sup>th</sup> April and 30+ at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.
Curlew Sandpiper	Only seen at the Salt Pans with 1-2 there on 3 dates to 2nd May but an obvious arrival of waders on 3rd brought in 18 though only 3 lingered to the following day
Dunlin	Only recorded at the Salt Pans on 4 dates with maximum of 3 on 4th May
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Three were at the Salt Pans in the evening of 4th May, a singleton and two together. Presumably the same two had moved from the southern pan to the north pan next morning and attached themselves to a jumpy
Ruff	The main wetland habitats of the Salt Pans, the KM19 Canal and the KM19 Sewage Ponds produced the bulk of the sightings with 20+ at the sewage ponds on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May being the largest single flock. Elsewhere smaller numbers were noted at the sewage works of Quetura and Yotvata whilst 'many' were at Nizzana on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.
Red-necked Phalarope	Only recorded at the Salt Pans but noted every visit in varying numbers with lowest count being 12 on 29 <sup>th</sup> April and 3 <sup>rd</sup> May and with largest being 39 on 27 <sup>th</sup> April. The birds consisted of a mix of plumages and sexes with some pristine adult females in the full summer dress being the highlights.
Turnstone	One was at the Salt Pans on 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> May
White-eyed Gull	10 off North Beach on 29 <sup>th</sup> April consisted of some superb adults and two were present on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May. It was a shame that most of the time they stayed over on the Jordanian side of the border but the scope views were good.
Slender-billed Gull	Seen primarily at the KM19 Sewage Ponds and the Salt Pans where in excess of 150+ would be the norm for each visit. Elsewhere several were seen off North Beach on each visit. Most birds were non adults but majority of the birds though were rather tatty
Black-headed Gull	Only seen at KM19 Sewage Ponds amongst the Slender-billed Gull flock with 2-3 seen on two dates.
Baltic Gull	7 flew over the Salt Pans on 29th April were presumably the same as the 7 seen at dusk over the KM19 Sewage Pond the same day. 3 immatures at North Beach on 29th April with 1 lingered till 2nd May. Two adults and an immature flew north over the Salt Pans on 2nd May
Little Tern	Fairly regular off North beach 29 <sup>th</sup> and 30 <sup>th</sup> April with several birds present. The Salt Pans and KM19 Sewage Ponds produced the remaining sightings between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 33 <sup>rd</sup> May with a peak of 3 on the 1 <sup>st</sup> .
Gull-billed Tern	A nice flock of nine were at the Salt Pans in the evening of 2nd May and then present again the following morning only
Caspian Tern	One at North Beach in the morning of 30th April was the only one of the trip

Sandwich Tern	A lone bird was seen from North Beach on 30 <sup>th</sup> April
Common Tern	North Beach was the prime location with birds seen each visit, albeit in varying numbers with peak of a minimum of 10 on 29 <sup>th</sup> April
White-cheeked Tern	One off North Beach with Common Terns on 29 <sup>th</sup> April. There was meant to be others present but this was the sole individual I connected with.
Whiskered Tern	A very confiding bird was watched fishing the ponds at Nizzana on 6 <sup>th</sup> May and was photographed perched close to the embankment during a rare down pour
White-winged Black Tern	The first to be encountered were six at the Salt Pans on 27 <sup>th</sup> April where small numbers were present on each visit with a high here of nine on 1 <sup>st</sup> May. The biggest count was of several hundred, possibly as many as 400-500 at the KM19 Sewage Ponds in the evening of the 27 <sup>th</sup> April. It was simply fantastic to watch this flock feverishly and 'murmerating' at dusk. Fantaistic.
Spotted Sandgrouse	Only encountered at the Nizanna Pondson 6 <sup>th</sup> May where at least 15+ came in from 9am. Further flocks were seen perhaps indicating new arrivals during the morning
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	A superb close to the trip saw a minimum of 70+ at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May. Birds started coming in at around 9am and with care I was able to get extremely close to some of them. Magic.
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Only 4 came to the pools at Nizzana on 6 <sup>th</sup> May
Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse	A male and two females came to at 7.40pm at the KM19 Sewage Ponds on 27 <sup>th</sup> April. Superb views in the North East Corner near the sluice. Make sure you get here early, at least 40minutes before dusk and sit below the top of the embankment.
Feral/ Rock Pigeon	Common and widespread
Turtle Dove	As this is a fast declining species in the UK with fewer and fewer birds being seen locally it was nice to see these here. Most sightings were of 1-3 birds from primarily Lahav Reserve, Yeroham Lake, Yotvata Pools and Neot Smader Pools 12 were noted with Palm and Collared Doves on 29 <sup>th</sup> April and seven were at the Nizzana Pools on 6 <sup>th</sup> May. Many more were heard purring.
Collared Dove	Common and everywhere
Palm Dove	Common and everywhere
Namaqua Dove	This diminutive dove seemed much more abundant and widespread that previous years. Some locations regularly held several birds, such as the Yotvata Sewage Ponds were one or two males were especially photographable. Birds were also recorded at Kibbitz Samar, Lotan, KM19 Sewage Ponds, North Fields, the Salt Pans, the KM19 Canal and up at Nizzana Sewage Ponds.
Ring-necked Parakeet	One was seen from the car along Highway 40 south of Tel Aviv on 26 <sup>th</sup> April and then three were seen on my northbound journey along the 40 on 6 <sup>th</sup> May, again just south of Tel Aviv.
Alpine Swift	Five at Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May shortly after final packing was done were the only ones of the trip
Common Swift	Four flew along Wadi Yahel on 4 <sup>th</sup> May at the same time as visible migration was happening, numerous hirundines also passing through
Pallid Swift	A superb movement of birds occurred across the road to the south of Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April where many hundreds passed by low overhead. Elsewhere two were at the Ramon Crater on 26 <sup>th</sup> April, 1 through the Eilat Mountains on 27 <sup>th</sup> April, at least 100+ over the KM19 Pools at dusk on 27 <sup>th</sup> April and two over Eilat on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May.
Hoopoe	Surprisingly rather scarce with only singles noted at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April, Samar and Lotan on 27 <sup>th</sup> April, the Acacia Gazelle Reserve on 29 <sup>th</sup> April and Lotan again on 30 <sup>th</sup> April, 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> May
Pied Kingfisher	Two were at the KM19 Sewage Ponds Sluice on 27 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> April but not subsequently and none were noted at North Beach.
Common Kingfisher	Two were at North Beach on 29 <sup>th</sup> April with one still present on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May

Little Green Bee-eater	As in previous visits most sightings were of either singles or pairs with no one places being favoured. Birds were seen throughout the Arava locations.		
European Bee-eater	The first were 3 over the road near Lahav on 26th April but were swiftly followed by an outstanding flock of 40-50+ at Mt. Amsa where they performed superbly same day. The following is subsequent sightings breakdown.		
	Ramon Crater viewpoint	5+	26th April
	Salt Pans	8	27th April
	Kibbutz Samar	9	27th April
	Salt Pans	5	27th April
	Neot Smader	8+ over the road near the Kibbutz	28th April
	Kibbutz Samar	17	29th April
	Wadi Yahel	3	4th May
	Wadi Yahel	4	5th May
	Route 211	12	6th May
Wryneck	One in the Olive Grove at Kibbutz Samar on 27 <sup>th</sup> April was the only one seen		
Golden Oriole	Only seen at Wadi Yahel with there on 4th May and seven there next morning		
Red-backed Shrike	A stunning male in Wadi Yahel on 5 <sup>th</sup> May was seen all to briefly and proved to be the only one of the trip. The species was surprisingly absent from southern Israel this year.		
Woodchat Shrike	Only encountered at my very first birding stop on the morning of the 26 <sup>th</sup> April with a pair plus separate males and females at Lahav.		
Masked Shrike	Not as abundant as I was expecting but still a spread of birds were encountered with two males and female throughout around Yotvata Ponds, two at KM76 and regularly up to five in Wadi Yahel.		
Southern Grey Shrike	Two were seen along the roadside along route 80 on 26 <sup>th</sup> April and proved to be the only ones of the trip		
Arabian Babbler	Six were in Holland Park on 29th April and one was by the Acacia Gazelle Reserve on 29th April		
House Crow	Several were seen along highway 20 north of Eilat but most were noted at North Beach with a peak of 15+ there on 30th April		
Hooded Crow	Fairly common along the road south of Tel Aviv but birds were not seen much further south than Nizzana		
Brown-necked Raven	Fairly widespread and seen on at least five dates with singletons being the norm		
Common / Northern Raven	A single bird was seen along Wadi Yahel on 4 <sup>th</sup> May could only be attributed this this species rather than Brown-necked Raven.		
Yellow-vented Bulbul	One of 'the' common species with many being seen daily		
Desert Lark	Larks, apart from Crested, were scarce this trip and I only managed to get a total of six birds from 4 locations. The best views were from the Sharahut Cliffs Reserve along the Uvda Valley on 28 <sup>th</sup> April.		
Crested Lark	Common and widespread		
Skylark	Several were heard singing at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April		
Sand Martin	The most frequently encountered hirundine but still nowhere overly common. But notable passage was observed at the Salt Pans on 27 <sup>th</sup> April, at Yotvata Sewage Ponds the same day and through the KM19 Sewage Ponds at dusk that evening.		
Pale Crag Martin	Two were at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April and 12+ were from the Ramon Crater viewpoint later the same day. Thereafter Yotvata Sewage Ponds was a regular location for this species throughout whilst Wadi Yahel had birds on several dates.		
Crag Martin	Two moved through Wadi Yahel with a small number of swallows and martins in the morning of 7 <sup>th</sup> May.		

House Martin	Uncommon with only two individuals seen, both at Wadi Yahel, so possibly the same bird, on 1st and 4th May
	Mostly seen in small numbers but not regularly. Small movements were noted at several sites but there was a fair sized passage through the desert at Nizzana on 6 <sup>th</sup> May.
Scrub Warbler	Only seen at Wadi Yahel where one, possibly the same bird, was seen on 30 <sup>th</sup> April, 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> May.
Graceful Warbler	Largely overlooked but constantly heard at many locations
Reed Warbler	One singing at Yeroham Lake on 26 <sup>th</sup> April was the first of very few with singles at Yotvata on 1 <sup>st</sup> May, KM19 Canal on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May and Nizzana Sewage Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> May whilst Yotvata Ponds had two singing birds till 3 <sup>rd</sup> May at least.
Sedge Warbler	At least six were singing at Yeroham Lake on 26 <sup>th</sup> April but there were no sightings further south into the Arava
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	Variable numbers seen throughout with an average of 1-3 at numerous scrubby habitat however Wadi Yahel had the bulk of the birds with 7+ on 4th May and minimum of 9 on 5th May
Olive-tree Warbler	I located one in the small roadside copse at KM26 on 1 <sup>st</sup> May. It showed well initially but became much more elusive.
Wood Warbler	A very nice bright individual showed well in an Acacia tree in Wadi Yahel on 30 <sup>th</sup> April
Chiffchaff	One at Neot Smader Sewage Ponds on 29th April was the sole bird of the trip
Willow Warbler	Only two were seen, singletons at Neot Smader on 28 <sup>th</sup> and 29 <sup>th</sup> April and in the roadside copse at KM26 on 1 <sup>st</sup> May
Blackcap	Commonest warbler seen during the trip but not huge numbers seen. Seen near daily in varying numbers from numerous locations however the peak counts came from Wadi Yahel, 70+ on 1st May, and Neot Smader Seage Ponds, 30+ on 30th April
Garden Warbler	Recorded in the scrubbiest habitats with mostly singles but three were at Wadi Yahel on 5th May was the peak count for a single location
Barred Warbler	The first was seen at Wadi Yahel where 1-2 were noted on three subsequent visits till 5th May. The only other bird seen was at Neot Smader Sewage Pods on 5th May
Lesser Whitethroat	Not overly common, outnumbered by Blackcap by a wide margin, the trips peak count was 10+ from Wadi Yahel on 30 <sup>th</sup> April whilst elsewhere the average count was 4-5 at most sites.
Common Whitethroat	Not seen up until 5 <sup>th</sup> May when two appeared in Wadi Yahel
Ruppell's Warbler	I found an immature male in Wadi Yahel on 4 <sup>th</sup> May that had me scratching my head for a while whilst I considered different ID options before settling on the correct one later on.
Common Myna	Commonly seen from the car south of Tel Aviv on 26 <sup>th</sup> April and 6 <sup>th</sup> May
Tristram's Starling	The only birds of this species seen during the trip were at North Beach on 29 <sup>th</sup> April
Blackbird	A male was seen from the car on 26 <sup>th</sup> April just south of Tel Aviv
Rufous Scrub Robin	The first seen was a singing bird at Neot Smader Sewage Ponds in the evening of 26 <sup>th</sup> April. Thereafter numerous birds were encountered throughout the Arava either singing or doing their tail in the air running around under bushes activity. Four were at Yotvata on 27 <sup>th</sup> April was the peak count for a single location.
Black Bush Robin	I scored on second visit the Samar Kibbutz on 27th April where it showed very well in the Olive Grove though it did give me the run around
Thrush Nightingale	Following a couple of skulkers at Neot Smader Sewage Ponds on 29 <sup>th</sup> April numbers varied but generally were no more than 1-2 per site visited with Wadi Yahel being a prime site on 1 <sup>st</sup> May when four were present but had increased to 10-12 during my early morning visit there on 4 <sup>th</sup> May though indicating an arrival. Birds soon moved on however with three the next day. Some of the Yahel birds were super confiding.

Isabelline Wheatear	Only encountered at Mt. Amsa on 26th April were several, 5+ being conservative estimate, showy birds were located including a singing male and a juvenile in attendance with one of the adults																											
Northern Wheatear	What appears to have been the final throws of this species passage was witnessed up until the last sighting on 29 <sup>th</sup> April at the Acacia Gazelle Reserve south of Yotvata. Up until this point birds were noted in the Uvda Valley on two dates and a Yotvata also on two dates.																											
Black-eared Wheatear	A flyby male at Mt. Amsa on 26th April was the only one of the trip. If I had thought that I wouldn't see any others I would have gone off to look for it.																											
Mourning Wheatear	One flew across Route 40 just north of Ramon on 26 <sup>th</sup> April																											
White-crowned Black Wheatear	The first was at the Ramon Crater viewpoint on 26 <sup>th</sup> April followed by a male seen along the road up into the Eilat Mountains on 27 <sup>th</sup> and 30 <sup>th</sup> April.																											
Hooded Wheatear	A female by the car park to En Netaphim spring, just after the military checkpoint, Eilat Mountains on 29th April is reportedly a reliable location for this now difficult species																											
Blackstart	Seen in the more arid areas with Wadi Yahel and Holland Park being prime locations. Regularly 4+ were noted at both locations during visits. Elsewhere birds were noted at Yotvata Sewage Ponds and in the Eilat Mountains.																											
Redstart	A single female was in Wadi Yahel on 1 <sup>st</sup> May																											
Spotted Flycatcher	Following two in the Olive Grove at Kibbutz Samar on 27 <sup>th</sup> April 1-2 were seen at Wadi Yahel and the Sewage Ponds of Neot Smader on 5 dates.																											
Palestine Sunbird	Following two males at Yeroham Lake on 26 <sup>th</sup> April further birds were noted at Yotvata, Lotan and Wadi Yahel on several dates																											
House Sparrow	Common and widespread																											
Rock Sparrow	At least 10+ were found at Mt. Amsa on 26 <sup>th</sup> April that included several food carrying adults																											
Indian Silverbill	One in the Olive Grove at Kibbutz Samar on 27 <sup>th</sup> April was the only one of the trip																											
White Wagtail	Surprisingly only one was seen throughout the trip at Quetura Sewage Ponds on 27 <sup>th</sup> April																											
Black-headed Wagtail	Stunning male was with other 'flava' wagtails around the sluice at the KM19 Sewage Ponds on 27th April																											
Blue-headed Wagtail	Seven at Neot Smader Sewage Ponds were the first of the trip on 26th April however numbers there on were only small and most wagtails were listed as just 'flava' unless bog obvious males were identifiable. Of those identifiable were at the Salt Pans on 27th April, 2 still at Neot Smader on 2nd May and 1 at KM19 Sewage Ponds on 2nd May																											
Ashy-headed Wagtail	A sole male on the Yotvata Fields on 26th April was the only identifiable birds from the numerous 'flava' wagtails seen																											
'flava' wagtails	Several were noted at several wetland locations which were not identified to species.																											
Tawny Pipit	Two were seen at Lahav Reserve on 26 <sup>th</sup> April and three at Mt. Amsa later the same morning. In the south six were in the Uvda Valley on 29 <sup>th</sup> April but the species was not noted in the Arava.																											
Red-throated Pipit	<p>A few scattered calling migrants were noted across multiple locations whilst one was found on the deck at the Salt Pans on 27<sup>th</sup> April that lingered long enough for some excellent photos to be taken. A summary of sightings:</p> <table><tr><td>Mt. Amsa</td><td>2</td><td>26th April</td></tr><tr><td>Salt Pans</td><td>4</td><td>27th April</td></tr><tr><td>Quetura Sewage Ponds</td><td>1</td><td>27th April</td></tr><tr><td>Salt Pans</td><td>2</td><td>27th April</td></tr><tr><td>KM19 Sewage Ponds</td><td>1</td><td>28th April</td></tr><tr><td>Uvda Valley</td><td>1</td><td>29th April</td></tr><tr><td>Quetura Sewage Ponds</td><td>1</td><td>2nd May</td></tr><tr><td>Neot Smader Sewage Ponds</td><td>1</td><td>5th May</td></tr><tr><td>Salt Pans</td><td>1</td><td>5th May</td></tr></table>	Mt. Amsa	2	26th April	Salt Pans	4	27th April	Quetura Sewage Ponds	1	27th April	Salt Pans	2	27th April	KM19 Sewage Ponds	1	28th April	Uvda Valley	1	29th April	Quetura Sewage Ponds	1	2nd May	Neot Smader Sewage Ponds	1	5th May	Salt Pans	1	5th May
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Trumpeter Finch	Four flew over the Eilat Mountains towards En Netafim spring on 28 <sup>th</sup> April whilst two were seen by the car to said spring the following day.
Ortolan Bunting	Two were in the Olive Grove at Samar on 27 <sup>th</sup> April whilst two were seen at the sewage ponds of Neot Smader on 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> May.

### **Non Avian**

Nubian Ibex	One was seen from the car on 26 <sup>th</sup> April just south of Ramon Crater
Dorcas Gazelle	Two separate parties, two and three, were noted around the Acacia scrub near the Doum Palms on 27 <sup>th</sup> April. Two were at the Salt Pans on 2 <sup>nd</sup> May, a buck in Wadi Yahel on 4 <sup>th</sup> May and one along the Ezuz Road at Nizzana on 6 <sup>th</sup> May
Desert 'Red' Fox	A fine individual was at the Sharahut Cliffs, Uvda Valley on 29 <sup>th</sup> April and two rather cute cubs were at Neot Smader Sewage Ponds later the same morning
Jackal	One at Yotvata Sewage Works on 3 <sup>rd</sup> May was a short stayer as it ran around the far pool
Tortoise	Mt. Amsa, One creeping through the undergrowth 28 <sup>th</sup> April
Painted Lady	Of the butterflies the most notable was this species with many thousands being present in the Arava.

### **Species missing**

Several species were noticeably missing or not in the expected volume, i.e. only one Red-backed Shrike and other species were not present as they had completed their spring passage earlier in March and were on the breeding grounds.

Shelduck	None were present at the KM20 Saltpans this year
Brown Booby	One bird had been present a few weeks prior to arrival but had moved on.
Western Reef Heron	The odd bird was reported by other birders off North Beach but I had no success here.
Striated Heron	Seen by others at North Beach but not me.
Levant Sparrowhawk	Included here as there should have been thousands around rather than just the two I had. Seems they peaked earlier.
Crowned Sandgrouse	Again none were seen at the Nizzana Sewage Ponds.
Spanish Sparrow	None seen at all, thought a few nested in the Arava but seems to be a winter visitor.
Lesser Grey Shrike	One of the birds I wanted to see this trip was completely absent



Selection of images from the trip: more and higher resolution images are to be found on my website: [www.birdersplayground.co.uk](http://www.birdersplayground.co.uk)





