

BUCKBIRD JOURNEYS

YEMEN and SOCOTRA

Tuesday 8 – Sunday 18 November 2007

Participants

Louise Augustine (LA), Hugh Buck (HB), David Daniels (DD), David Hoddinott (DH), Pearl Jordan (PJ), Werner Suter (WS), David Bradford (DB – Socotra only)

This trip was designed to try for all the Southwest Arabia and Socotra endemics in a relatively brief time scale. It also represented an opportunity for regional listers to add an enticing selection of “African” species only entering Asia in Southwest Arabia and a selection of “Asian” species found in Africa rarely outside of Socotra. That the trip was successful on all counts is a tribute to Yousuf Mohageb (YM) of Arabian Eco-Tours in Sana’a who designed, with HB, the itinerary, accompanied us throughout Yemen and knew all the best birding spots, Ali his redoubtable co-driver and Ahmed Saeid Suliman (AS) on Socotra whose knowledge and love of all things on his island home is second to none. Our multinational group (three Americans, two Brits, a South African and a Swiss) kept to the pace admirably, provided exceptional spotting skills and, in WS, some wonderful photographic documentation and memories.

Day by Day

Thursday 8 November

HB, DD and DH meet up at Dubai International Airport for the short Emirates Airlines flight to Sana’a where they are met by YM, Ali in traditional Yemeni costume and LA and PJ who have arrived the previous evening. Under the high bright sun, which will be the norm for the next 10 days, we traverse Sana’a’s sprawling outskirts to the Funduk Arabia Felix, an interesting hotel made up a several old traditional houses right at the edge of the historic and UNESCO rated old town. It is a colourful place and enjoyable – once the management have been persuaded that we don’t wish to hump our baggage (or indeed ourselves) up to 6th floor rooms (no elevators here) in Sana’a’s 7000ft atmosphere!

Outside the birding begins – there are White-spectacled Bulbuls, Tristram’s Starlings and dowdy little endemic Yemen Serins right around the hotel and they will be a common sight in the highlands from now on. We are soon off, along the main Taiz road, and then southwards for our first taste of Yemen’s dramatic mountains and valleys and the extraordinary village architecture often on what appear to be impossible slopes and cliffs. Our first picnic is enlivened by the dramatic sight of a pair of Bonelli’s Eagles going in tandem at a pair of Arabian Partridges and their half grown young. The Partridges seem to survive, part of an impressive 11 we will see today. The slopes also produce the first displaced “African” species – Little Rock Thrush, Black-crowned Tchagra and Cinnamon-breasted Rock-Buntings whilst Graceful Prinias, South Arabian Wheatears and Palestine Sunbirds are more Asian or widespread species.

Our destination is Haman Garif, a well vegetated wadi with permanent water and another plethora of birds - Rueppell's Weaver, the thick-billed Arabian Serin, Arabian Babblers of the yellow billed Yemen race, the delightful Black Scrub-Robin, Blackstarts, Shining Sunbird and the colourful cyanoptrys form of the Little Green Bee-Eater. A special here is the endemic Arabian Waxbill and a flock of these handsome little seedeaters caps a good opening day. A migrant Barred Warbler is also a seldom found species. Our return to Sana'a is in gathering darkness, enlivened by some 50 or so Steppe Eagles coming to roost on power line pylons. WS joins us in the evening and, jet lagged or weary, we are abed early.

Friday 9 November

Sleep is fragmented for most of us as we have to be away at 0300 for the flight to Socotra. We are joined for the Socotra leg by DB, taking time off from his job as Project Manager for the Burj Dubai Tower – already the world's tallest. Sana'a airport is hassle free at this early hour and the Yemenia flight, on time in a spotless new Airbus 320, a nice surprise. We transit via Riyan on Yemen's arid southern coast and by 0700 the mountains of Socotra come into view and excitement mounts. We are met by AS and his trusty co-driver Habib and, in two venerable Land Cruisers, soon start our inroads into Socotra's birds. Egyptian Vultures are everywhere and the first of what will prove to be many Somali Starlings soon bring us to a halt. As well as the Starlings we soon pick up Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks, the Socotra form of the Long-billed Pipit and our first endemic in the numerous Socotra Sparrows.

The drive along Socotra's north coast to Hadibu is short in miles but it takes us some 4 hours as we stop time and again. To our left is the coast with bays and cliffs alternating with wadis and lagoons and to our right the bulk of the Haggier Mountains which in places come right down to the sea and in others are distanced by a flat coastal plain. The plants and trees are unfamiliar (of Socotra's estimated 850 plant species some 350 are endemic to this island chain) and the birds a mixture of the familiar, not so familiar and new. Offshore we pick up Brown Boobies, Common Noddies, Swift and Lesser Crested Terns and our first Socotran Cormorants. Inshore are the first Gull flocks – Sooty, Caspian and Heughlin's seem to dominate, there are Greater Flamingos, Western Reef and other Herons, a few Garganey and Shoveler and plenty of wading "list fodder". A surprise is the presence of several Northern Hobbies (continued over the next few days) and we wrestle with a couple of larger pale looking Falcons before deciding they are Peregrines and not Barbary.

It is however the unfamiliarly cloaked slopes which claim most of our attention. The endemic Socotra Sunbird is noisy and conspicuous and we are delighted with our first Golden-winged Grosbeak of the nominate, dark headed, Socotran form. Bruce's Green Pigeon and (Somali) Southern Grey Shrikes are further additions and a pod of Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins enlivens our entry into Hadibu and the unpretentious, shall we say, Taj Socotra Hotel

Fresh fish for lunch and then off again eastwards. AS leads us to the small bush dotted country beloved of the Socotra Cisticola and, after a little patience, most get good views of this dowdy little critter in flight and on the deck. And one more treat to come at dusk at the palm groves of Wadi Denegen. Here the little "Socotra" Scops-Owl performs on cue and gives close views – some even witnessing the arrival of a second bird and bout of copulation. The jury remains out on this one – it has been called African, Oriental and even Striated but seems likely to be an endemic in its own right. Our start is good.

Saturday 10 November

The highlands today as we depart, post breakfast at 0630, back along the airport road then inland and up, via Mahdoh Surilia, to the Dikshikinn (or Dixem) plateau. Socotra continues to surprise as the road is new, tarmac and smooth and we soon stop at mid elevation to rapidly find our first Socotra Warblers and Socotra Starlings. The latter become commoner as we ascend, often mixed with their longer tailed Somali relatives. As the road levels out we spy our first (of several today) “Socotra” Buzzards and distant Swifts and soon enough we are on the Dixem Plateau with spectacular views in a landscape dotted with the unique Dragon’s Blood Tree. This stony plateau and associated steep wadis is the famed home of the Socotra Bunting, most elusive of the island specials. It takes some tramping but eventually a pair is located and they stay around long enough for all, by now strung out far and wide, to reassemble for excellent views. They are in a small mixed flock which included the Socotran form of the White-breasted White-Eye, a potential split from mainland forms in Arabia and Africa.

We lunch by the waterhole of Ling Dixem, favourite drinking spot for Swifts, but the skies are barren and only Northern and Pied Wheatears and a Red-throated Pipit vie for our attention with the scavaging Egyptian Vultures. Lower down on the main road we finally get into the Swifts. In the now rather gloomy light Little Swifts are obvious and the larger Apus ones are presumably the late breeding Forbes-Watson’s although not much detail can be discerned. But extraordinarily there is another, picked out by DH. In all aspects it appears to be a Collocalia Swiftlet, not only a species but a genus as far as we know unrecorded in Africa or the Middle East. We take careful notes and it is the subject of much discussion – but more of that later. Back by the coast our return is enlivened by a full plumaged Indian Pond-Heron in flight – an excellent “African” gain this much appreciated by our senior African lister. Socotra is going seamlessly with a scattering of surprises to boot.

Sunday 11 November

Early again as we head west, this time to Qalansiyah on Socotra’s northwest tip. Before our four hour boat trip we again study the Gulls on the beach this time differentiating the cleaner cut, yellow legged “barabensis” form from the accompanying heuglini. These dark backed Gulls are a real dog’s dinner. Our small boat is powerful enough to get us a reasonable distance offshore and we are soon into numbers of Persian Shearwaters and the occasional dark Jouanin’s Petrel both of which offer stunning views. There are Bridled amongst the numerous other terns and a single Red-necked Phalarope also allows a close approach. Sadly the spectacular cliffs fail to produce their resident Red-billed Tropicbirds and a good “Africa” tick goes a begging. Most extraordinary bird of this “pelagic” is however a Common Quail winging its way over the sea towards the beach at Qalansiyah.

Afternoon and by common consent we are back on the Dixem road and the waterhole. This time the light is good and to our astonishment we immediately find more Swiftlets – up to 6 of them together. All the features, including the grey rump band, are noted and good photographs obtained. At the time of writing they appear to be Himalayan Swiftlets – a known long distant migrant even wintering in the Maldives and an alleged cyclone just before our arrival may account for these as wind blown strays. Whatever it is a sensational find and full reports have been submitted – I will keep you informed of the outcome. This bird will end up as Bird of the Trip for most people – the first time a potentially unidentified species has claimed this honour? Oh and the larger Forbes-Watson's Swifts also allow clinching views.

Monday 12 November

Socotra winds down with a revisit to the Cisticola spot, several Cream-coloured Coursers and a leisurely trip back to the airport with a detour to Wadi Ayhet. Here we again find Golden-winged Grosbeaks and belatedly start to identify, under the expert tutelage of AS, a few of Socotra's unique trees and flowers. Yemenia wings us back across the sea to Aden after a visit to this "Galapagos of the Indian Ocean" which has met or surpassed everyone's expectations.

YM and Ali are at Aden to meet us and, although we have a 3 hour drive to our destination at Taiz, we are allowed a quick look at the impressive Aden Wetland Reserve (AWR). Here we are interviewed by local television and a trio of good "African" birds – Sacred Ibis, African Palm Swift and, outstandingly, a Black-headed Heron find their way onto Asian lists. There are birds a plenty here and we scarcely do it justice but a couple of Citrine Wagtails and a high flying Short-eared Owl trying to get above the pestilential House Crows add spice to the occasion. We bid adieu to DB and settle in for the drive up to bustling Taiz and the comfortable Hotel Taj Shansen. A good buffet ends another busy day and now for Yemen proper!

Tuesday 13 November

Yemen proper begins – with a visit to Taiz Dump! Its actually a mistake (we wanted to go to the Sewerage Works instead!) but we do score White Storks amongst the scavengers which include both Black and Yellow-billed Kites and Steppe and Tawny Eagles. We eventually find the sewerage works where a Long-legged Buzzard gives good views but a search of the nearby hillsides reveals little except a Masked Shrike and (for the wide ranging DH) an Arabian Warbler. Mid-morning we ascend Jebel Saber to a cool 2750 metres and spectacular views down over the city. Here are patches of juniper and we soon find the desired trio of Yemen Thrush, Yemen Warbler and, outstandingly, Yemen Accentor at this new and reliable spot. A few Yemen Linnets also give rather poor flight views.

A nice pale phase Booted Eagle and the release of a captured Steppe Buzzard precede a memorable lamb lunch then south of town we score the neat little Zebra Waxbill, another good African bird for Asia. We finish the day north of town trying to find euphorbia habitat for the Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak – most elusive of Arabia's specials and high on the menu for the morrow.

Wednesday 14 November

So it's early again and away north to Al Quaida (!) and the Dhizafal road. This is a tip from David Farrow and there is plenty of the Grosbeak's preferred euphorbia habitat. It takes a bit of searching however before an excited PJ gets us on to a close, quietly feeding bird and later on another two join in. A tough one this and great to have it in the bag. We celebrate with an excellent local breakfast – lamb again for those that want it.

Now it's down to the coastal tihama plain and hotter, more humid weather. Displaced African birds are again the main draw as we score African Grey Hornbill, Abyssinian Roller and, later, Dark Chanting Goshawk. We lunch, on good local fish, at the resort of Al Kawkhan where the extensive bay yields a couple of the much wanted White-eyed Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Baraba Gull for Asia and fleshes out the list with Caspian and Saunder's Terns, Eurasian Spoonbills and a selection of waders which include a Eurasian Oystercatcher looking surprisingly at home in the shimmering heat. North again, African Collared Doves become positively abundant and, in a treefull of House Sparrows some get onto a couple of Arabian Golden Sparrows. Some don't but it will be rectified. A YM "shortcut" towards Al Hodeidah looks ill advised but lands us exactly where we want to be at dusk and at least 5 calling and flying Nubian Nightjars are a lifer for many. Hodeidah's Al Fakhama Hotel, right on the waterfront, welcomes us and we are still right on track after another action packed day.

Thursday 15 November

And we keep right on track early at Hodeidah Lagoon where Pink-backed Pelicans for Asia and an immature Pallid Harrier keep things moving and then it's inland to the cattle farm at Al Dhani. The hawk eye of WS spots something suspicious and we walk to a distant acacia grove which turns out to be full of Arabian Golden Sparrows in all plumages including several males in their full glory. This is not all – a pair of Bimaculated Larks give rather a poor flight view but closer at hand are a trio of Spotted Thick-Knees, a lovely male Nile Valley Sunbird and a trio of migrant warblers – Menetrie's, Desert Lesser Whitethroat and Upcher's. Back at the coast the "desert road" reveals Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse feeding on spilled grain and both Greater Hoopoe and numbers of Short-toed Larks. We wind down with the Hodeidah Sewerage ponds where a Greater Spotted Eagle is the pick and then with the Gulls, including White-eyed, at Hodeidah's fishing harbour.

Friday 16 November

Our time remains tight and we have plenty more to go for so 0600 finds us off again, now inland towards those stark mountains again. A short stop at Bajil Dump fails to produce the wanted Abdim's Storks but a couple of immature Imperial and another Greater Spotted Eagle amongst the throng are some compensation. As we reach the foothills our first stop reveals a Hamerkop, yet another displaced African species, then the rough road up through Wadi Surdoud and Wadi Sarie is punctuated by a number of stops. Here White-browed Coucal and African Paradise Flycatcher join the "Africa in Asia" list and Eastern Olivaceous and, this time for all, Arabian Warblers are equally appreciated.

Our destination is Al Mahweet set amongst some of Yemen's most dramatic scenery and mountain villages and we have time for an afternoon visit to the spectacular Al Rayadi viewpoint. En route wooded gullies quickly produce 3 of the endemic Arabian Woodpecker but for this group they seem to come second to a couple of male Cinereous Buntings of the yellow eastern semenowi race and also a lifer for many. There are other things as well, numerous Dusky Turtle-Doves, a male samanisicus Common Redstart and numerous Stonechats. Some are clearly males of the nominate felix race of African Stonechat but there are others of the more eastern forms of Common Stonechat. Lack of time fails to do them justice. At the Al Rayadi viewpoint, shortly to be polluted by an ugly under construction hotel, Griffon Vultures are coming to roost, wild, pristine Rock Doves and Eurasian Kestrels fly past and a couple of dark Eagles are probably resident Golden's although we get on to them too late to be sure.

Saturday 17 November

Breakfast over our last full day begins with the drive east and the hillsides above Al Ahjur. Here a little stream on the arid mountain side is a godsend with an abundance of birds coming to drink. Here are Arabian and Yemen Serins in numbers, Yemen Linnets finally give the views we desire, there are at least two male House Buntings and, glory be, at least 3 Golden-winged Grosbeaks join the party. With responsive Scrub Warblers and, lower down, another couple of Arabian Woodpeckers the pickings are rich indeed.

Only a few to go now and the high, arid plateau around the hilltop town of Kawkaban is the place for these. Another Hamerkop at a pool is a surprise in this harsh landscape, Red-breasted Wheatears are common and we have fun with a couple of large tufted tailed rodents digging in the dry earth. They are diagnosed on range and size as King Jirds giving the mammal list a pleasant boost. Next the eagle eye of DH gets us on to a little flock of Blanford's Larks which stick around for close views. Recent work has confirmed these as this species and not the richer plumaged Red-capped Lark of Africa as the books suggest. Blanford's is restricted to arid areas on the Horn of Africa and Southwest Arabia and here is the only easy place to find it. We lunch in splendour off local dishes at a traditional funduk in Shibam then it is back to Sana'a by 1630 and the dear old Funduk Arabia Felix once more.

Sunday 18 November

Only one special remains and a predawn return to the Kawkaban Plateau is required. We reach the cultivated fields just as the sun warms them and the sight of a counted 35 Philby's Partridges along with comparative views of 11 of the slightly larger Arabian wraps it up. This is the only known site where these usually altitudinally separated species co-exist and the sighting is so good that at last an endemic gets into the top three birds of the trip.

It has all gone without a hitch so it is perhaps not surprising that Yemenia are at hand to cause the first problems. Their 0900 flight to Djibouti is delayed for 12 hours and the rest of the morning is thus spent in frantic re-organisation before we finally board and arrive in Djibouti after 2200. This last minute hiccup cannot in any way spoil a wonderful clean sweep of all the specials of southwest Arabia and Socotra

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BIRDS and OTHERS recorded in SOCOTRA and YEMEN

8 – 18 November 2007

S = Socotra only

Y = Yemen only

Bold A species endemic to either Socotra or South Arabia

* A predominantly Asian species recorded on Socotra

A predominantly African species recorded in Yemen

- Y 1 Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)
Taiz and Hodeidah sewerage ponds
- S 2* **Jouanin's Petrel** (*Bulweria fallax*)
Only recently proven to breed on Socotra. At least 20 from our boat off Qalansiyah on 11/11. Very close views obtained
- S 3 **Persian Shearwater** (*Puffinus persicus*)
A recent split from Audubon's and abundant in seas off Oman, Yemen and the Horn of Africa. At least 50 off Qalansiyah on 11/11
- Y 4 Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotatus*)
1 Hodeidah Lagoon 15/11
- Y 5# Pink-backed Pelican (*Pelecanus rufescens*)
At least 20 Hodeidah Lagoon on 15/11. A predominantly African species only occurring in Asia along the SW Arabian coast
- S 6 Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)
A few off the north and west coasts of Socotra
- S 7* Socotra Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*)
Despite its name only recently proved to breed on Socotra but present all year . 3 near Hadibu on 9/11 and at least 20 west of Qalansiyah 11/11
- SY 8 Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
- Y 9 Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)
A dead bird near Hodeidah 15/11 was the only record
- Y 10# Black-headed Heron (*Ardea melanocephala*)
A vagrant from Africa to Yemen. I at AWR on 12/11
- SY 11 Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)
- SY 12 Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*)
Different phase birds regularly encountered
- SY 13 Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
- Y 14 Cattle Egret (*Bybulcus ibis*)
- S 15* Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)
One in full breeding plumage near Mahda Surilia on 10/11 was a surprise. A vagrant from further east but apparently regularly recorded on Socotra
- S 16 Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*)
3 near Qalansiyah 11/11
- Y 17# Hamerkop (*Scopus umbretta*)
One lower Wadi Surdoud 16/11. One Kawkaban 17/11. Another African species only reaching Asia here.

Y	18	White Stork (<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>) At least 200 Taiz Dump 14/11 and 50+ Bajil Dump 16/11.
Y	19#	Sacred Ibis (<i>Threskiornis aethopicus</i>) 3 AWR 12/11. Rare in Asia with an isolated breeding population in Southern Iran
Y	20	Glossy Ibis (<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>)
Y	21	Eurasian Spoonbill (<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>)
SY	22	Greater Flamingo (<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>)
Y	23#	Lesser Flamingo (<i>Phoenicopterus minor</i>) 100+ AWR 12/11 and 25+ Hodeidah Lagoon 15/11. Rare in Asia although extending as far east as India
Y	24	Eurasian Wigeon (<i>Anas Penelope</i>)
Y	25	Eurasian Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>)
Y	26	Mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>)
Y	27	Northern Pintail (<i>Anas acuta</i>)
SY	28	Garganey (<i>Anas querquedula</i>)
SY	29	Northern Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>)
Y	30	Common Pochard (<i>Aythya farina</i>) One near Taiz 13/11
Y	31	Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>)
SY	32	Osprey (<i>Pandion heliaetus</i>) 2 Qalansiyah 11/11, 3 Hodeidah 15/11
Y	33	Black-shouldered Kite (<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>) 3 near Hodeidah 14/11. Mobbing a Short-Toed Eagle
SY	34	Black Kite (<i>Milvus migrans</i>) Only one identified on Socotra but many Kite sp. Abundant in Yemen
Y	35#	Yellow-billed Kite (<i>Milvus (migrans) aegypticus</i>) Abundant around Taiz and Al Mahweet
SY	36	Egyptian Vulture (<i>Nephron pernopterus</i>) Abundant and tame on Socotra. Much rarer in Yemen
Y	37	Eurasian Griffon (<i>Gyps fulvus</i>) 4 Jebel Saber 13/11, 15+ Al Rayadi 16/11 and 8+ Al Ahjur 17/11
Y	38	Western Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>) A few along the tihama coast
Y	39	Pallid Harrier (<i>Circus macrourus</i>) One immature male Hodeidah Lagoon 14/11
Y	40#	Dark Chanting Goshawk (<i>Melierex metabates</i>) Another displaced African species in the tihama. 3 near Al Kawkha 14/11, 1 near Hodeidah 15/11
Y	41	Northern Sparrowhawk (<i>Accipiter nisus</i>)
S	42	Socotra Buzzard (<i>Buteo (buteo) socotrae</i>) At least 5 Dixem Plateau 10/11, one 11/11. As with other island forms this distinctive "race" is a candidate for splitting before too long
Y	43	Steppe Buzzard (<i>Buteo (buteo) vulpinus</i>) Regular in Yemen. All seemed of this rufous tailed "race"
Y	44	Long-legged Buzzard (<i>Buteo rufinus</i>) Regular at all altitudes
Y	45	Tawny Eagle (<i>Aquila rapax</i>) A few birds identified. Not as numerous as <i>A. nipalensis</i>

- Y 46 Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*)
The sight of 50 or more going to roost near Sana'a on our opening day was memorable. A few elsewhere
- Y 47 Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
A probable pair going to roost at Al Rayadi 16/11
- Y 48 Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*)
An immature bird at Bajil Dump 13/11
- Y 49 Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*)
One Hodeidah Sewerage Ponds 12/11, one Bajil Dump 13/11
- Y 50 Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila fasciatus*)
A pair attacking a family group of Arabian Partridges near Haman Garif on 8/11 was a great opener
- Y 51 Booted Eagle (*Aquila pennatus*)
A light phase bird on Jebel Saber 13/11
- Y 52 Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)
One being harassed by Black-shouldered Kites near Hodeidah 14/11
- SY 53 Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
- S 54 Northern Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)
Not recorded from Socotra until just before our visit where we coincided with an unexpected influx. Seen daily with up to 10 on 9/11
- SY 55 Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)
A few on Socotra each day
- Y 56 **Philby's Partridge** (*Alectoris philbyi*)
An outstanding 35, including young birds, counted at Kawkaban 18/11. Our final SW Arabian endemic
- Y 57 **Arabian Partridge** (*Alectoris malanocephala*)
Good luck with this endemic. 11 on 8/11 including that family being attacked by Bonelli's Eagle, one in the scope atop a euphorbia at Dhisafat 14/11 and 11 Kawkaban 18/11 in comparative views with Philby's
- S 58 Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*)
One from our boat heading towards shore at Qalansiyah 11/11 was a surprise
- Y 59 Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*)
- Y 60 Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)
One Al Kawkhan 14/11
- SY 61 Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
- Y 62 Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)
- S 63 Cream-Coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*)
5 near Hadibu 12/11
- Y 64# Spotted Thicknee (*Burhinus capensis*)
3 Al Dhani 15/11. A good Africa species for Asia
- Y 65 Collared Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*)
One Hodeidah Lagoon 15/11
- Y 66 Spur-winged Plover (*Vanellus spinosus*)
- Y 67 Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*)
- Y 68 Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)
- SY 69 Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

S	70	Little Ringed Plover (<i>Charadrius dubius</i>) 2 near Qalansiyah 11/11
SY	71	Kentish Plover (<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>)
Y	72	Lesser Sand Plover (<i>Charadrius mongolicus</i>)
SY	73	Greater Sand Plover (<i>Charadrius leschenaultia</i>)
SY	74	Common Snipe (<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>)
Y	75	Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>)
Y	76	Bar-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>)
SY	77	Eurasian Whimbrel (<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>)
SY	78	Eurasian Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>)
SY	79	Spotted Redshank (<i>Tringa erythropus</i>)
SY	80	Common Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>)
SY	81	Greenshank (<i>Tringa nebularia</i>)
Y	82	Green Sandpiper (<i>Tringa ochropus</i>)
SY	83	Wood Sandpiper (<i>Tringa glareola</i>)
SY	84	Terek Sandpiper (<i>Tringa cinereus</i>)
SY	85	Common Sandpiper (<i>Actitis hypoleuca</i>)
SY	86	Ruddy Turnstone (<i>Arenaria interpres</i>)
SY	87	Sanderling (<i>Calidris alba</i>)
SY	88	Little Stint (<i>Calidris minuta</i>)
Y	89	Temminck's Stint (<i>Calidris temminckii</i>)
SY	90	Curlew Sandpiper (<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>)
Y	91	Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>)
Y	92	Broad-billed Sandpiper (<i>Limicola falcinellus</i>)
Y	93	Ruff (<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>)
S	94	Red-Necked Phalarope (<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>) One off Qalansiyah 11/11
Y	95	White-eyed Gull (<i>Larus leucophthalmus</i>) 2 adults Al Kawkhan 14/11, 2 adults and one immature Hodeidah Fishing Harbour 15/11. A Red Sea endemic
SY	96	Sooty Gull (<i>Larus hemprichii</i>) Abundant, the commonest Gull
SY	97	Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>) One near Hadibu 9/11, singles Hodeidah 14 and 15/11
SY	98	Heughlin's Gull (<i>Larus (fuscus) heughlinii</i>) Abundant. Most of the "black backs" seemed to be this species
SY	99	Caspian Gull (<i>Larus cachinnans</i>)
SY	100	Baraba Gull (<i>Larus (cachinnans) barabensis</i>) We took a long time over this "clean" yellow legged, dark backed "species". A few amongst the Heughlin's
Y	101	Black-headed Gull (<i>Larus ribidundus</i>)
Y	102	Slender-billed Gull (<i>Larus genei</i>) Small numbers Aden, Al Kawkhan and Hodeidah Lagoon. A lifer for LA
Y	103	Gull-Billed Tern (<i>Sterna nilotica</i>)
Y	104	Caspian Tern (<i>Sterna caspia</i>)
SY	105	Swift Tern (<i>Sterna bergii</i>)
SY	106	Lesser Crested Tern (<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>)
SY	107	Sandwich Tern (<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>)
SY	108	Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>)

- Y 109 Saunder's Tern (*Sterna saundersi*)
- S 110 Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*)
- SY 111 Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hydrides*)
- SY 112 White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)
- S 113 Common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*)
- Y 114 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*)
8 by the roadside north of Hodeidah 15/11. Feeding on spilled grain
- S 115 Lichstenstein's Sandgrouse (*Pterocles lichstensteinii*)
Coming to drink at dusk Wadi Denegen 9/11, pair near the airport road 12/11
- Y 116# Dusky Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia lugens*)
An "African" species common in the Yemen highlands
- Y 117# Red-eyed Dove (*Streptopelia semitorquata*)
And again
- Y 118# African Collared Dove (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*)
A third "African" Dove. Abundant with several hundred seen in the tihama 14 – 16/11
- Y 119 Rock Dove (*Columba livia*)
Genuine wild birds in the highlands of Yemen. The other rubbish has no place in this report
- Y 120# Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*)
- SY 121# Bruce's Green Pigeon (*Treron walia*)
Both the above again of restricted range in Asia
- Y 122# White-browed Coucal (*Centropus superciliosus*)
One Wadi Surdoud 16/11. Another good one for Asia
- Y 123 Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)
One flying high in daylight being harassed by House Crows at AWR on 14/11. A good pick up by DD
- S 124 **Socotra Scops-Owl** (*Otus socotranus*)
One, then a pair (and some copulation) at dusk Wadi Denegen on 9/11. Variously labelled as African, Oriental and even Striated it seem likely this is a good island endemic in its own right
- Y 125 Nubian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus nubicus*)
YM led us right to it south of Hodeidah 14/11. At least 5 flying and calling at dusk. A much desired lifer for many and the only one for WS on Yemen
- Y 126# African Palm Swift (*Cypsiurus parvus*)
Another African special of the Yemen coast. Seen at AWR and around Hodeidah
- S 127 Little Swift (*Apus affinis*)
Several on the Dixem Plateau 10 and 11/11. Although we did not realise it at the time this species is also rarely recorded on Socotra
- S 128 **Forbes-Watson's Swift** (*Apus berliozi*)
Up to recently an endemic breeder on Socotra and the North Somali coast but recently found breeding on sea cliffs in the Salalah area of Oman. Good views of several over the Dixem Plateau 10 and 11/11

- S 129* Himalayan Swiftlet (*Collocalia (Aerodramus) brevirostris*)?
Undoubtedly the surprise of the trip. DH picked out an apparent Swiftlet type amongst the others on 10/11. A return on 11/11 in the afternoon provided better weather and no less than 6 together amongst the Little and Forbes-Watson's. There seems no doubt these were *Collocalia* Swiftlets and they seem to match up best to Himalayan, an intra India migrant which reaches the Maldives in winter. No *Collocalia* Swiftlets have previously been recorded from Africa or the Middle East so at worst these are a sensational new record. Report plus photographs from WS have been submitted to various bodies – I will try to keep you all posted on developments.
- Y 130 Green Bee-Eater (*Merops orientalis*)
The handsome cyanophrys race was common in Yemen
- SY 131 Blue-cheeked Bee-Eater (*Merops superciliosus*)
- Y 132# Abyssinian Roller (*Coracias abyssinicus*)
In Asia restricted to the coasts of SW Arabia. Several 14 – 16/11
- S 133 European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*)
2 near Hadibu 9/11
- Y 134# African Grey Hornbill (*Tokus nasutus*)
Ditto but also extending into the foothills. One near Al Kawkhan 14/11 and 5 Wadi Surdoud / Wadi Sarie 16/11
- Y 135 **Arabian Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopus dora*)
A much desired Arabian endemic. 3 Al Rayadi 16/11, 2 Al Ahjur 17/11
- SY 136 Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark (*Eremopterix nigriceps*)
- Y 137 Greater Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*)
Around 10 north of Hodeidah 15/11
- Y 138 **Blanford's Lark** (*Calandrella blanfordi*)
A recent re-assessment shows birds in Yemen previously labelled as Red-Capped Larks as this species. 6 watched closely at Kawkaban on 17/11. A Horn of Africa endemic extending into SW Arabia
- Y 139 Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)
At least 100 along the roadside north of Hodeidah 15/11. 3 Kawkaban 17/11
- Y 140 Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)
- Y 141 Bimaculated Lark (*Melanocorypha bimacula*)
Poorish views of a pair in flight Al Dhani 15/11
- SY 142 Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)
- SY 143 African Rock Martin (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula*)
- SY 144 White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
- Y 145 Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)
30+ Hodeidah Sewerage Lagoons 15/11. All in plumage ones looked like beema
- Y 146 Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*)
2 AWR 12/11. A scarce migrant here
- Y 147 Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
2 Haman Garif 8/11

- S 148 Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*)
- SY 149 Long-billed Pipit (*Anthus similis*)
Common. Note the Socotran form is also under assessment as a separate species. Its call does seem different.
- S 150 Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*)
A single at Ling Dixem 10 and 11/11
- Y 151 Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)
- Y 152 Yellow-Vented (White-Spectacled) Bulbul (*Pycnonotus xanthopygos*)
Abundant in Yemen
- Y 153 **Yemen Accentor** (*Prunella fagani*)
5 Jebel Saber 13/11. This seems the new hotspot for this sometimes awkward species – Yemen’s only true endemic
- Y 154# Little Rock-Thrush (*Monticola rufocinerea*)
This “African” species is fairly common in the Yemen highlands
- Y 155 Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)
- Y 156 **Yemen Thrush** (*Turdus menachensis*)
Another sometimes tricky Arabian endemic. 3 Jebel Saber 13/11, 2 Dhizafal 14/11
- Y 157 Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola jundicis*)
- S 158 **Socotra Cisticola** (*Cisticola haesitata*)
Not the most striking Socotran endemic but 3 or so east of Hadibu 9/11, 1 10/11 and 1 12/11
- S 159 **Socotra Warbler** (*Incana incana*)
An interesting little endemic placed in its own genus. Up to 6 Dixem road 10/11, one 11/11 and heard at Wadi Ayhet 12/11
- Y 160 Streaked Scrub-Warbler (*Scotocerca inquieta*)
3 Al Ahjur 17/11
- Y 161 Graceful Prinia (*Prinia gracilis*)
Common in the Yemen highlands
- Y 162 Upcher’s Warbler (*Hippolais languida*)
2 Al Dhani 15/11
- Y 163 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais pallida*)
2 Wadi Sarie 16/11
- Y 164# Brown Woodland Warbler (*Phylloscopus umbrovirens*)
Again an “African” bird only found in the Arabian highlands in Asia. 1 Wadi Sarie 16/11 and 2 Al Ahjur 17/11
- Y 165 Northern Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)
- Y 166 Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)
- Y 167 Desert Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia minula*)
One Al Dhani 15/11
- Y 168 Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)
One Haman Garif 8/11
- Y 169 Arabian Warbler (*Sylvia leucomelaena*)
One by DH Taiz Sewerage Works 13/11, 3 Wadi Sarise 16/11
- Y 170 Menetrie’s Warbler (*Sylvia mystacea*)
One fine male Al Dhani 15/11
- Y 171 Barred Warbler (*Sylvia risoria*)
One Haman Garif 8/11
- Y 172 **Yemen Warbler** (*Parisoma buryi*)
Endemic to the Arabian highlands. 5 Jebel Saber 13/11

- Y 173# Black Scrub-Robin (*Cercotricas podobe*)
In Asia again confined to the west Arabian highlands. Common
- Y 174 Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
One Al Ahjur 17/11
- Y 175 Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)
Several females but one well marked male samamisticus Al Rayadi 16/11
- Y 176# African Stonechat (*Saxicola felix*)
Nominate felix is resident in Yemen. Several males Al Rayadi 16/11. Intermediates elsewhere
- Y 177 Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)
A bewilderment of other Stonechat species/races are possible in Yemen in winter. A few rubicola/armenica males at Al Rayadi 16/11 but time was not on our side
- Y 178 **South Arabian Wheatear** (*Oenanthe (lugens) lugentoides*)
Common in the Arabian highlands
- S 179 Pied Wheatear (*Oenanthe pleschanka*)
One Ling Dixem 10 and 11//11
- S 180 Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)
Female Ling Dixem 10/11. Status on Socotra uncertain
- S 181 Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*)
- Y 182. Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*)
- Y 183# Red-breasted Wheatear (*Oenanthe bottae*)
Another predominantly African species common on the high Yemen plateau
- Y 184 Blackstart (*Cercomela melanura*)
Common in the Yemen highlands
- Y 185# African Paradise Flycatcher (*Tersiphone viridis*)
Again of restricted range in Asia. One Wadi Sarie 16/11
- Y 186# Gambaga Flycatcher (*Muscicapa gambagae*)
DD described a candidate at Dhizafal on 14/11 when we were searching for Grosbeaks. A summer, wet season breeder in Yemen
- Y 187 Arabian Babbler (*Turdoides squamiceps*)
The yellow billed Yemen race was common enough in the highlands
- Y 188# Nile Valley Sunbird (*Hedydipna metallica*)
A stunning full tailed male of this largely African sunbird at Al Dhani on 15/11
- S 189 **Socotra Sunbird** (*Chalcomitra balfouri*)
This noisy endemic was conspicuous on Socotra. Seen daily
- Y 190 Palestine Sunbird (*Cinnyris osseus*)
Common in the Yemen highlands usually at higher altitudes than *C. habessinicus*
- Y 191# Shining Sunbird (*Cinnyris habessinicus*)
See above. Common at mid altitudes
- SY 192# White-breasted White-Eye (*Zosterops abyssinicus*)
Common in the Yemen highlands. Note the Socotran form has also been suggested as a split from Arabian and African races. 2 of this form on the Dixem Plateau 10/11

- Y 193 Rufous-tailed Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*)
- SY 194 Southern Grey Shrike (*Lanius meridionalis*)
The taxonomy of these remains complex. Yemen birds were mostly of the darker buryi race, those on Socotra aucheri or “Somali” Shrike
- Y 195 Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*)
2 at Taiz Sewerage Works 13/11, 3 Wadi Surdoud / Wadi Sarie 16/11
- Y 196# Black-crowned Tchagra (*Tchagra senegalensis*)
Yet another “African” species with an outpost in the Yemen highlands. Singles on 8 and 13/11
- Y 197 House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)
Nothing splendid about this unwanted, introduced pest in the lowlands of Yemen. Happily those on Socotra appear to have been exterminated – at least we didn’t see any
- SY 198 Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*)
Abundant
- Y 199 Fan-tailed Raven (*Corvus rhipidurus*)
Super abundant
- S 200 Somali Starling (*Onychognathus blythii*)
Common on Socotra with up to 40 seen daily
- S 201 **Socotra Starling** (*Onychognathus frater*)
Occurs at higher altitudes but often mixed with *O. blythii*. Up to 30 on the Dixem Plateau 10/11, 2 on 11/11. Last African Starling for DH
- Y 202 Tristam’s Starling (*Onychognathus tristamii*)
Abundant in the Yemen highlands
- Y 203 **Arabian Waxbill** (*Estrilda rufibarba*)
Endemic to SW Arabia. A flock of 40+ at Haman Garif 8/aa and 3 at Wadi Surdoud 16/11
- Y 204# Zebra Waxbill (*Amandava subflava*)
Outside of Africa restricted to the central Yemen highlands around Taiz. A nice flock including full plumaged males 13/11
- Y 205# African Silverbill (*Euodice cantans*)
Common in the Yemen highlands
- Y 206 Cinereous Bunting (*Emberiza cineracea*)
2 males of the eastern form *semenowi* were a much appreciated find at Al Rayadi on 16/11
- Y 207 Striolated (House) Bunting (*Emberiza striolata*)
2 males coming to drink at Al Ahjur 17/11. A potential split from North African forms
- Y 208# Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting (*Emberiza tahapisi*)
Another African species found in the Yemen highlands. Common
- S 209 **Socotra Bunting** (*Emberiza socotrana*)
Socotra’s most elusive endemic but the new road to the Dixem Plateau and more knowledge makes it easier. Still took some finding though but eventually a pair in a mixed flock gave prolonged close views. Classified as endangered.

- Y 210 **Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak** (*Rhynchostruthus (socotranus) percivali*)
Notorious as the most elusive of the Arabian specials it was a great treat to find one then 2 more feeding close by at Dhizafal. Well done PJ for relieving the growing tension. 3 more coming to drink at Al Ahjur on 17/11 put the icing on the cake. A special pleasure for HB who had missed it on 3 previous visits to Yemen and Oman. Part of a possible 3 way split of this species
- S 211 **Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak** (*Rhynchostruthus socotranus*)
The Socotran form with a darker head caused no such anxiety with a feeding bird near Hadibu on 9/11, 2 more from the road to Dixem on 10/11 and another 2 at Wadi Ayhet on 12/11
- Y 212 **Yemen Linnnet** (*Carduelis yemenensis*)
This SW Arabian endemic only gave flight views at Jebel Saber on 13/11 but we got close views of several drinking birds at Al Ahjur on 17/11
- Y 213 **Arabian Serin** (*Serinus rothschildi*)
Endemic to SW Arabia with an isolated population in Oman. Relatively common in the Yemen highlands
- Y 214 **Yemen Serin** (*Serinus menachensis*)
Definitely a birder's endemic this one but common enough in the Yemen highlands, even in Sana'a itself
- Y 215 House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
- S 216 **Socotra Sparrow** (*Passer insularis*)
The commonest endemic on Socotra with up to 50 in a day
- Y 217 **Arabian Golden Sparrow** (*Passer euchlorus*)
Restricted to Red Sea coasts we had a couple of out of plumage birds amongst House Sparrows south of Hodeidah on 14/11 but not everyone got onto them. It did not matter, we struck gold (literally) at Al Dhani next morning with a flock of more than 100 including males in full livery

Birds recorded on Socotra	86	species
Birds recorded in Yemen	180	species
Birds recorded in Socotra and Yemen	52	species

Top 5 birds in Yemen and Socotra as voted by the participants

- 1. Himalayan Swiftlet?**
- 2. Cinereous Bunting**
- 3. Philby's Partridge**
- 4. Socotra Bunting**
- 5. Golden-winged Grosbeak**

Mammals

- Y 1 Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis*)
One near Taiz 13/11
- S 2 Indian Civet (*Viverricula indica*)
One road kill near Hadibu on 13/11. An introduced pest
- S 3 Geoffrey's Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus clivosus*)
These would appear to be the small bats that some saw at Wadi Denegen on 9/11
- Y 4 **King Jird** (*Meriones rex*)
On size and range these are the rodents we saw digging at Kawkaban on 11/11. Endemic to SW Arabia
- S 5 Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tersiops aduncus*)
A pod of around 10 inshore near Hadibu on 9/11

Others

- S **Socotra Mabuya** (*Mabuya socotrana*)
The larger of the two lizard species we looked at
- S **Socotra Rock Gecko** (*Pristurus socotranus*)
And the smaller

Plants identified on Socotra (with the required help of AS)

- Socotran Tree Euphorbia** (*Euphorbia arbascula*)
- Socotran Frankincense** (*Boswellia elongate*)
- Socotran Fig** (*Dorstenia gigas*)
- Socotran Aloe** (*Aloe perryi*)
- Dragon's Blood Tree** (*Dracaena cinnabari*)
- Socotran Acacia** (*Acacia pennivenia*)
- Socotran Caralluma** (*Caralluma socotrana*)
- Socotran Desert Rose (*Adenum obesum socotranum*)
- Cucumber Tree** (*Dendrosicyos socotrana*)
- Socotran Croton** (*Croton socotranus*)
- Socotran Jatropha** (*Jatropha unicostata*)
- Socotran Violet** (*Exacum affine*)
- African Sterculia (*Sterculia africana socotrana*)

