

Oman & United Arab Emirates. Introduction.

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A trip of contrasts. Chalk and cheese, eighteen days from 12-29 December 2008, four in the United Arab Emirates, the remainder in Oman. Throughout, amazing birds and stunning desert backdrops. Crab Plover, Grey Hypocolius, Yemen Serin, Socotra Cormorant, names that just conjure up the magic of this little travelled corner of Arabia. In a trip that exceeded my expectations, 5960 km of travel left me in awe of the birds seen in such abundance - tens of thousands of waders on the vast Barr Al Hickman tidal flats, Arabian specials in Dhofar, Desert Warblers and sandgrouse in the remote desert oasis, plenty more in the northern mountains.

Oman

Wild deserts, stark rugged mountains, excellent birding. To sample the best of the birding across the country, localities visited included:

a. Al Batinah and the Al Hajar Mountains in the north. Across Al Batinah, a well-populated coastal plain, habitats from the excellent farm fields at Sohar to acacia woodlands at Khatmat Milahah support an impressive mix of Palearctic and Oriental bird species, everything from Indian Rollers through to Barbary Falcons. The Al Hajar mountains, by total contrast, offer birding to a backdrop of majestic landscapes. Birds are relatively few, but include specials such as Sand Partridge and Hume's Wheatear.

b. Barr Al Hickman on the east coast. Vast inter-tidal mudflats, supporting tens of thousands of waders, including large flocks of Crab Plovers and Terek Sandpipers, plus small numbers of Great Knot.

c. Dhofar in the south. Beyond a 1000 km of featureless desert, the birding in Dhofar is superb - Afro-tropical species such as African Paradise Flycatcher and Bruce's Green Pigeon, South Arabian endemics such as Yemen Serin, Arabian Partridge and Socotra Cormorant, plus good numbers of wintering Palearctic raptors and waterbirds.

d. The Central Deserts. Transitted twice, with stop-overs at prime sites such as the Muntasar oasis. Birding would be better during the migration periods, but was enjoyable nonetheless - highlights including Desert Warblers, Hoopoe Larks, Spotted Thick-knee and various sandgrouses and wheatears.

e. Musandam. A mountain enclave on the northern tip of the Arabian peninsula, separated from the rest of Oman by the United Arab Emirates. The best scenery on the whole trip and excellent birding, particularly on the Al Sayh plateau. Numerous wheatears and the enigmatic Eversmann's Redstart.

United Arab Emirates

An Orwellian nightmare of a country! The U.A.E. is essentially a massive out-of-control construction site, rampant building of high-rises and multi-lane freeways blighting most areas visited. Much of the remainder seemed a mix of unattractive ever-spreading urban sprawl, cement factories and quarries, all complete with heavy road congestion and rubbish littering the birding sites visited. I think I will not get a job with the local tourist board!

That said, in amongst the developments, the country does offer some amazing birding - White-collared Kingfisher, Great Knot and Grey Hypocolius the highlights of my four days in the country, along with flocks of 570 Crab Plovers, 47 Cream-coloured Coursers and 52 White-tailed Plovers, plus U.A.E. rarities such as Moustached Warbler, Brown Shrike and Red-flanked Bluetail, the latter a first for Arabia.

This report consists of:

1. Oman & United Arab Emirates. Southbound. A daily log of birds seen and places visited on the first half of the trip, covering Kalba in the U.A.E., the northern Al Batinah plain in Oman, plus the superb Barr Al Hickman tidal flats, the Central Desert and all of Dhofar, a fantastic birding experience. [Click here to read.](#)
2. Oman & United Arab Emirates. Northbound. This covers the return journey - another visit to Barr al Hickman, plus the northern mountains, the excellent Musandam enclave and a few days birding in the Dubai area in the U.A.E. [Click here to read.](#)
3. A Systematic List of Species. All birds, mammals and reptiles recorded (at a later date, currently only available by e-mail)