

Iran, summer 2010. Introduction.

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Last Updated Saturday, 15 February 2014

Few birders visit Iran, fewer still that travel independently. But leave aside the preconceptions and venture beyond the media stereotype, the country is truly an amazing place, inhabited by a most gracious people and blessed with a culture second to none and landscapes that incorporate all from high Alpine peaks and lush green valleys through to vast desert vistas, stark coastlines and shimmering marine environments dotted with corals, intertidal flats and mangroves. And then there are the birds - along with an impressive array of desert and mountain species and an unrivalled selection of waterbirds, Iran is home to some mighty fine specialities, including Grey Hypocolius, Iraqi Babbler, Sind Pied Woodpecker and, the jewel in the crown, inhabiting the remote deserts of the interior, the enigmatic Pleske's Ground Jay.

In a month of travels, from 12 August to 6 September 2010, I focussed on five main regions: 1. The Coasts of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. The south-east of the country, the areas around Bandar Abbas and Jask. Superb birding with a rich flavour of the Orient, this region offers species such as Spotted Little Owl, Indian Roller and Purple Sunbird, as well as the localised semi-endemic Sind Pied Woodpecker. With extensive mudflats, offshore islands and mangroves, an abundance of waterbirds also occur, including herons and egrets, a variety of terns and many waders, including both Crab Plover and Great Stone Plover. Exceptional hot and humid in the summer months, temperatures on my trip hovering around 40 C with humidity up to 70%. 2. The Central Deserts, Shahr-e-Babek area. Hundreds of thousands of square kilometres, the central plateau of Iran is arid desert, semi-desert and occasional salt pans, all hot and dry. Far from devoid of birds, the bird fauna is a rich mix of sandgrouse, larks and wheatears. The undeniable star, however, is Pleske's Ground Jay, an elusive endemic confined to areas of mature *Zygophyllum* growth. 3. The Lands of the Ancient Elamite, lowland river. Modern-day Khuzestan, tucked up against the Iraqi border and the hottest, most humid part of the country. Temperatures frequently rise to 50 C in summer and humidity hits a crippling 80%, but the birding is phenomenal. Sharing specialities with the Iraqi Al-Ahwar marshes of Marsh Arab fame, Basra Reed Warbler, Iraqi Babbler and Dead Sea Sparrow all occur here, along with numerous other marsh and waterside birds, plus Egyptian Nightjar. I concentrated on the Dez River, though a visit to marshes south of Khorramshahr or west of Hoveyzeh would also be necessary for Basra Reed Warbler. 4. The Alborz Mountains. Rising to snowy and icy heights of 5760 metres, dramatic and beautiful landscapes and an abundance of mountain species, many shared with the Kurdish regions of eastern Turkey. Caspian Snowcock, Radde's Accentor, Western and Eastern Nuthatches, Persian Wheatear and Grey-necked Buntings, a small selection of the many species present. 5. The Caspian Lowlands. Green and lush, the bird fauna distinctively familiar to a European birder. Lowland lakes rich in herons and gallinules, dense deciduous forests hugging the lower slopes of the Albroz, Green Warblers amongst Blue Tits and Robins! On passing, areas around Shiraz (Persopolis and Arzhan) and Esfahan also visited, Arzhan in particular proving most excellent. For ease of reading, this report is divided into several sections: a. Practicalities (visa, transport, climate, etc). [CLICK HERE](#) b. Part One, the South (daily account of birds & localities). [CLICK HERE](#) c. Part Two, the North (daily account of birds & localities). [CLICK HERE](#) d. Systematic List (full list of all birds and mammals seen). [CLICK HERE](#)