

Winter Birding in Iran, Systematic List of Birds & Mammals.

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17 Dec 2011 – 8 Jan 2012 In total, 222 species of birds were seen on this three-week winter trip, a quite respectable total. Comparing with my 2010 summer trip (a slightly longer trip, but following broadly the same itinerary), the final species total was fairly similar. However, I saw an additional 79 species on the summer trip which I did not on this (most particularly warblers, wheatears and species such as bee-eaters, etc), but by contrast I recorded over 65 additional species on this trip that I did not in the summer (waterbirds and raptors of most note). The 2010 summer trip also only recorded five species that are in any of the categories of Iranian rarities, as classified by Akbar et al, none of which were considered extreme vagrants. By contrast, this trip recorded 13 species of rarity, multiple records of several of them, and two – Black Drongo and Pallas's Sea Eagle – that are considered extreme vagrants (5th and 14th records for Iran respectively). A relatively poor showing, only five species of mammal were noted, but this did include stunning sightings of Wolf on two occasions.

SPECIES LIST OF BIRDS

Great CormorantThe most impressive numbers were at Fereydoon Kenar, where many thousands roosted on the damgah systems, spending the day on the Caspian Sea. Elsewhere, minimum counts included 140 on the Dez River, 35 at Bandar Khamir, 100 around Qeshm town and 50 at Laft, plus singles or pairs at Shushtar, Tiab and Jask.

Pygmy CormorantA minimum of 20 were seen on the Dez River, then eight both days at Fereydoon Kenar.

Great Crested GrebeTwo birds seen on the sea at Fereydoon Kenar.

Little GrebeOnly recorded at Karun fish pools, where up to 45+ were seen on both visits.

Black-necked GrebeTwo records – a pair at Tiab fish pools and a single at Fereydoon Kenar.

White PelicanOne record only – an adult soaring with a flock of Dalmatian Pelicans over Minab.

Dalmatian PelicanOn the Persian Gulf, a single was noted at Bandar Khamir, then 20 just west of Qeshm town (including flock of 18), followed by a total of 27 in the Tiab area (18 first day, nine second) and, lastly, 18 soaring over the palm groves at Minab (with a White Pelican). Seven birds were also seen flying over Noor on the Caspian coast.

Night HeronAn uncommon wintering bird in Iran, a single immature was seen at dusk at Shushtar. Large numbers occur in this district in the summer.

Indian Pond HeronRecorded only in Hormozgan province, totalling six birds at Bandar Khamir and singles at Bandar Abbas, Laft, Minab and Tiab. The Minab bird was on an irrigation canal, otherwise all were on intertidal mudflats.

Striated HeronA single was seen flying along the waterfront near Qeshm town. On the previous trip, birds were noted at Bandar Khamir.

Cattle EgretOnly recorded in Khuzestan province – a minimum of 80 along the Dez River, plus three at Shushtar and ten at the Karun fish pools.

Western Reef HeronAbundant in the coastal waters of the Persian Gulf – the highest totals being approximately 200 at Tiab (mostly on the fish pools) and a minimum of 120 around Qeshm town (many roosting on fish traps at high tide). Also counts of 40+ at Bandar Khamir, 15+ Bandar Abbas and 30+ Laft.

Little EgretWidespread, recorded at most freshwater wetlands visited - 15 at Shushtar, 50+ along the Dez River, 180+ at the Karun fish pools (most on a single pool being drained), three at Dasht-e-Arzhan and an absolute minimum of 60 at Fereydoon Kenar.

Great White EgretWidespread at both coastal and freshwater localities – a very high count of 95 birds at the Karun fish pools (on a single pool being drained) and more typical minimum counts of 20-30 at Bandar Khamir, Qeshm town, Laft, Tiab and Fereydoon Kenar. Six were also seen at the Dez River, a single at Dasht-e-Arzhan and eight at the small creek in Bandar Abbas city.

Grey HeronThe best count was of over 160 birds at the Karun fish pools, almost all on a single pool being drained. Elsewhere, other good counts included 60+ Tiab, 45+ at Fereydoon Kenar and 35+ just west of Qeshm town. Totals of 10-15 were also seen along the Dez River, at Bandar Khamir and at Laft.

Black StorkThree records, single birds at Karun fish pools and flying over Tiab, then six together at the Tiab fish pools.

White StorkRecorded only in the extreme south-west of Iran – two singles along the Dez River, then a minimum of 80 at a fish pool being drained at Karun.

Glossy IbisSeven birds were seen at Fereydoon Kenar.

SpoonbillThree records – a single at Bandar Khamir, three at Tiab and six on both days at Fereydoon Kenar.

Greater FlamingoOther than a single bird at Fereydoon Kenar, all records were on the Persian Gulf - 25+ Bandar Khamir, 40+ west of Qeshm town, about 30 at Laft and a minimum of 250 at Tiab.

Greylag GooseRecorded only at Fereydoon Kenar, where many thousands present.

Ruddy ShelduckTwo birds were seen at Dasht-e-Arzhan, a minimum of 40 at Fereydoon Kenar.

Common ShelduckThree records – a single at Dasht-e-Arzhan, three birds at Tiab and four birds at Fereydoon Kenar.

WigeonHundreds seen at Fereydoon Kenar.

GadwallProbably the fourth most abundant species of duck at Fereydoon Kenar, many hundreds present.

MallardAfter Teal, the most numerous duck species at Fereydoon Kenar, many thousands present. Eight also seen at Dasht-e-Arzhan.

TealWith many thousands present, the most abundant species at Fereydoon Kenar. Also six birds seen at the Karun fish pools, five on the Dez River and four at 4 Dasht-e-Arzhan.

PintailProbably the third most abundant species at Fereydoon Kenar, many hundreds present.

ShovelerHundreds of birds seen at Fereydoon Kenar.

Tufted DuckSeveral flocks of 20-40 birds on the Caspian Sea at Fereydoon Kenar, larger offshore flocks also probably this species.

PochardThe only record was of c.10 birds at Fereydoon Kenar (plus unfortunately several more in the Fereydoon Kenar market).

Ferruginous DuckThree birds flying along the coastline at Bandar Khamir.

LammergeierOne record of this dramatic species, a juvenile on Damavand mountain (close to Reynah village).

Egyptian VultureSeen on Qeshm Island, with two just west of Qeshm town and a single near Laft.

Pallas's Fish EagleA very distant adult on a sand bank at Tiab. Distance and heat haze resulted in poor viewing conditions, but basic description was of a large dark eagle, bulky, though in profile seeming not as heavy as White-tailed Eagle. White tail clearly, a dark terminal band at certain angles as the bird shuffled. Pale creamy head appearing to contrast quite strongly with dark shoulder/back, i.e. a feature of Pallas's Fish Eagle. No pale/yellow beak seen, suggesting bill was dark (if an adult White-tailed Eagle with so pale a head, a pale bill should have been apparent in such bright sunlight).

Marsh HarrierOne of the most commonly observed raptors – up to three both days at Karun fish pools, a single at the Dez River, six at Bandar Khamir, five west of Qeshm, two at Laft, a total of seven

in the Tiab area and 20+ at Fereydoon Kenar. Hen HarrierIn north-east Iran, a ringtail was observed in the Bastam Valley north-east of Shahrud town. Montagu's HarrierThree birds seen, all in the south-west of the country – a male and a female at the Karun fish pools and another female at Dasht-e-Arzhan. At both of these sites, despite not being seen, Pallid Harrier is probably more common in winter. Pallid HarrierOne record only – a juvenile at Fereydoon Kenar. I had expected to see more of this species. GoshawkTwo birds, a male and a female, recorded in the Bastam Valley north-east of Shahrud. SparrowhawkWidespread in north and central Iran, two birds at Dasht-e-Arzhan and singles in Shiraz, Yazd, Damavand, Fereydoon Kenar, Abr and Shahrud. The only confirmed record on the Persian Gulf was a single at Tiab. Several unidentified accipiters were also seen in the south, views being insufficient to separate them from Shikra. ShikraAll in Hormozgan province, a single at Bandar Khamir and minimums of two daily at Laft, Tiab and Minab. Several additional accipiters in this southern province were not seen well enough to rule out Sparrowhawk. Long-legged BuzzardSingles were seen at Karun fish pools, the Dez River and at Dasht-e-Arzhan. Common BuzzardTwo at Dasht-e-Arzhan, three at Minab and singles at Bandar Khamir, near Qeshm town, at Laft and along the Jegen River. Oriental Honey Buzzard (Crested Honey Buzzard)An impressive record - four birds were seen in the date palms at Minab, including an adult male. Although Oriental Honey Buzzard was first recorded in Iran as recently as 1999, the species now appears to be a regular winter visitor in very small numbers to the coastal lowlands of the far south-east of the country, a total of 22 records occurring up to the end of 2010. To date, Minab has proved to be one of the most reliable localities for this species. Greater Spotted EagleTwo birds, both in Khuzestan – one at Karun fish pools and one at the Dez River. Steppe EagleFive birds appeared to roost at Dasht-e-Arzhan, the birds seen rising with the morning sun. Additionally, a single seen at the Jegen River. Golden EagleRecorded in the Alborz mountains, a total of 11 birds over two days at Mount Damavand and then a single at Abr. Booted EagleA single bird seen, a dark phase at Tiab. Bonelli's EagleTwo records, both in Hormozgan Province – a single at Minab and a pair at Jegen River. OspreyBoth on the Persian Gulf, one bird was noted at Bandar Khamir and two at Tiab. Black-winged KiteQuite surprisingly, a total of six birds were seen in three separate provinces of the south – a pair at Karun fish pools and a single at the Dez River (both Khuzestan Province), a single along the road 100 km south-east of Shiraz (Fars Province) and another single in the date plantations at Minab (Hormozgan). This species was first recorded in Iran in 1998, but appears to be rapidly colonising the south of the country. There had been 18 records in the country up to the end of 2010. Common KestrelThree records only – singles at Dasht-e-Arzhan, Tiab and Fereydoon Kenar. MerlinOne bird was seen at the Karun fish pools. Saker FalconOne very large individual was seen in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. See-see PartridgeA pair on arid land near the Dez River was the only record. ChukarIn the Alborz mountains, a number of coveys totalling about 85 birds were seen over two days at Mount Damavand and a total of about ten birds were noted at Abr. Black FrancolinCommon at the two main localities visited in Khorestan Province – minimum counts of 15-20 each day at Karun fish pools and the Dez River, most seen early morning or evening. Grey FrancolinCalling birds only, singles at Minab on a couple of occasions and another at Jegen River. No particular effort was made to see the birds on this trip. Water RailAppeared fairly common at Dasht-e-Arzhan (at least five in the reeds) and abundant at Fereydoon Kenar (a minimum of 30 either seen or heard). MoorhenOnly seen in the south-west of Iran – five birds on the river at Shushtar, 15 at the Karun fish pools, 10 along the Dez River and 15+ at Dasht-e-Arzhan. CootHundreds were noted on the damgah at Fereydoon Kenar. Otherwise, only two records – singles at Shushtar and the Karun fish pools. Purple Gallinule A surprise record – three birds along the stream at Dasht-e-Arzhan. Siberian CraneOne adult at Fereydoon Kenar, the last known remaining individual of the western population. Little BustardOne bird was flushed from rough grassland at Dasht-e-Arzhan. OystercatcherAll in Hormozgan, counts were at least 15 at Bandar Khamir, 30 just west of Qeshm town, 40 at Laft and an absolute minimum of 600 at Tiab. AvocetNine at the Karun fish pools were the only birds seen. Black-winged StiltPresent on most freshwater wetlands in the south – two birds on the river at Shushtar, about 15 at Karun fish pools, five at both the Dez River and Dasht-e-Arzhan and at least 50 on the creek in Bandar Abbas city. Crab PloverAbundant on the tidal mudflats in Hormozgan province, counts including 250+ at Bandar Khamir, 140+ west of Qeshm town, 60+ at Laft and 40+ at Tiab. The relatively small number seen at Laft is a reflection of the vastness of the area – lying within the Hara protected area, this part of the Khuran Strait holds over 3000 Crab Plovers in winter. Great Stone PloverOn exactly the same mud bank as seen in 2010, 18 birds were observed just west of Tiab village. Ringed PloverRelatively few records – birds were seen at Karun fish pools, Bandar Khamir, Laft and Tiab, in all cases the daily counts not exceeding five. I probably overlooked certain numbers amongst the numerous Kentish Plovers and Greater/Lesser Sand Plovers. Kentish PloverRecorded at the Karun fish pools and on the Persian Gulf in Hormozgan. At Karun, an impressive 300+ were massed on a single semi-drained pool, with an additional 18 in another part of the pool system. On the Persian Gulf, total records were 60+ at Bandar Khamir, 50+ just west of Qeshm town, 30+ at Laft and an absolute minimum of 200 at Tiab. Lesser Sand PloverThis species was common on the intertidal flats of Hormozgan province, particularly just west of Qeshm town and at Tiab, many hundreds present at both localities. Smaller numbers, ranging from minimums of 10-50, also seen at Bandar Khamir, Laft and on the beach at Jask. Generally less abundant than Greater Sand Plover. Greater Sand PloverGenerally outnumbering Lesser Sand Plover, this species was present at all the same localities, being particularly abundant west of Qeshm town and at Tiab. Counts in excess of 150 were also noted at Bandar Khamir and Laft. Golden PloverAmongst the numerous Lapwing, at least ten were present at Fereydoon Kenar. Grey PloverIn numbers ranging from 20 to 50, this species was recorded at Bandar Khamir, west of Qeshm town, Laft and Tiab. Additionally, a single was on the creek in Bandar Abbas city and three on the beach at Jask. Red-wattled PloverLess frequent than on my summer trip. The only records were of at least 35 on the Karun fish pools, ten near the Dez River and two at Bandar Khamir. White-tailed PloverThis very smart wader was seen on both visits to the Karun fish pools (three birds and seven birds) and near the Dez River (12 birds). LapwingOn the Caspian coast, many thousands were present at Fereydoon Kenar. Elsewhere, the only records were 32 at Karun fish pools and a minimum of 60 at

Dasht-e-Arzhan. Great Knot Two birds were found at Tiab. Prior to the year 2000, there had only been one record of this species in Iran, but it has since been discovered to be a regular winterer in small numbers along the Minab-Bandar Abbas coast. Sanderling Only recorded at two locations – five on the beach at Tiab and at least 15 on the beach at Jask. The lack of records reflects the choice of locations I visited, the sandy beach habitats not figuring on my itinerary. Little Stint Small numbers quite common on the intertidal flats of the Persian Gulf, counts including 15 at Bandar Khamir and minimums of 60 at Laft and 50 at Tiab. Additionally, eight were noted at Karun fish pools. Temminck’s Stint The only records were two birds at Karun fish pools and a single at Dasht-e-Arzhan. Dunlin Many hundreds recorded on the vast intertidal flats of the Persian Gulf, including around Qeshm Island, at Bandar Khamir and the Tiab area. Curlew Sandpiper Presumably overlooked to a degree given the vastness of the intertidal areas and abundance of Dunlins. Only seen at Tiab, where seven were noted on the first visit and about 25 on the second. Broad-billed Sandpiper Appears to be a moderately common species in Hormozgan, minimum counts included 45 at Laft and up to ten both days at Tiab. In calidrid flocks close enough for accurate checking, Broad-billed Sandpipers accounted for about 10% of birds, with Dunlins making up the remainder. With numerous flocks of Dunlin more distant, true totals of Broad-billed Sandpiper must be many times higher than suggested by my totals. Common Snipe Widespread, recorded in moderately low numbers at most freshwater habitats visited. Best counts were 25+ Dasht-e-Arzhan and 40+ Fereydoon Kenar, the latter clearly representing a very small percentage of the true total using the area (restricted access and no viewing opportunities of most pools). Also, up to eight each day at Karun fish pools, 15 along the Dez River and two flying over Minab. Black-tailed Godwit Many thousands on the pools at Fereydoon Kenar, the southernmost pools seeing the most attractive. Elsewhere, six were seen at Shushtar, four at Dasht-e-Arzhan and one on tidal flats west of Qeshm town. Bar-tailed Godwit On the intertidal flats, a minimum of 200 were noted at Laft, with smaller counts of 12 occurring at Bandar Khamir and 20+ at Tiab. Whimbrel Small numbers recorded at most coastal localities visited, the best totals being 150+ at Laft and 50+ at Tiab. Flocks of about 15 also noted at Bandar Khamir and west of Qeshm town. Curlew Occurred in all the same localities as Whimbrel, but far more numerous. Select counts include at least 300 at Laft, 250 at Tiab, about 100 at Bandar Khamir and a minimum of 40 west of Qeshm town. Spotted Redshank Only recorded at Fereydoon Kenar, where at least five present. Common Redshank A common and widespread species, occurring at both freshwater and coastal sites across the country. In south-west Iran, totals included 20+ at Karun fish pools, four on the Dez River and 12 at Dasht-e-Arzhan, while counts on the Persian Gulf included minimums of 80 at Bandar Khamir, 30 on the creek in Bandar Abbas city, 60 west of Qeshm, 120 at Laft and 250 at Tiab. In the north, at least 60 were also noted at Fereydoon Kenar. Marsh Sandpiper Best numbers were on Qeshm Island, where at least 40 were noted west of Qeshm town and a ten at Laft. Elsewhere ten were also noted at Tiab, with singles at Bandar Khamir, Bandar Abbas and, in the north, Fereydoon Kenar. Greenshank Recorded across the south of Iran in small numbers, with counts of up to four occurring at Karun fish pools, the Dez River, Dasht-e-Arzhan, Bandar Khamir, Bandar Abbas and Laft. Only at Tiab were larger numbers seen, a minimum of 20 noted at that locality. Terek Sandpiper One of the most abundant waders in Hormozgan, the most impressive totals being absolute minimums of 200 at Bandar Khamir, 50 west of Qeshm town, 400 at Laft and 300 at Tiab. In all cases, the counts are conservative estimates, the Terek Sandpipers not really flocking, but simply scattered across the intertidal flats from very close to as far as the eye could see. Green Sandpiper Moderately common and widespread in freshwater habitats, most typically ditches or irrigation channels. In the south, up to six were seen both days at Karun fish pools, two at the Dez River, five at Dasht-e-Arzhan and up to three daily at both Minab and Tiab. In the north, at least ten were noted in the Fereydoon Kenar area. Wood Sandpiper Three records – two birds at Karun fish pools, two on the creek at Bandar Abbas and four on the southernmost pool at Fereydoon Kenar. Common Sandpiper In Hormozgan, three were seen at Bandar Khamir, five at Laft, a single at Minab and three at Tiab. Ruff One bird seen at Fereydoon Kenar, possibly others present in the huge Lapwing and Black-tailed Godwit flocks. Turnstone Surprisingly few birds seen, the only records being one west of Qeshm town and five at Tiab. Black-headed Gull Widespread, but not particularly abundant. Best numbers were on the sea off Bandar Abbas (40+ daily) and at Fereydoon Kenar (60+). Elsewhere, five were seen at Shushtar, six on the Dez River, 15 at Bandar Khamir and at least ten at Tiab. Slender-billed Gull Only recorded on the Persian Gulf, with four seen at Bandar Khamir, up to 15 daily at Bandar Abbas, at least 40 west of Qeshm town and six at Tiab. Common Gull On the Caspian coast, at least ten were noted at Fereydoon Kenar. Armenian Gull Only confirmed records were two at Shushtar and two on pools at Fereydoon Kenar. Other ‘white-headed’ gulls were seen on the Caspian Sea, but they were distant and specific identification was not carried out. Caspian Gull Several along the Caspian coast at Fereydoon Kenar. Other distant gulls at this locality also probably this species. Also recorded on the Persian Gulf, frequency not noted due to extreme abundance of Heuglin’s Gull. Heuglin’s Gull Abundant along the shores of Qeshm Island and adjacent sites on the mainland, for example Bandar Khamir and Tiab. Ten were also seen on the beach at Jask. Heuglin’s Gulls showed much variation, I presumably overlooked the likes of Steppe Gull (*L.f. barabensis*). Pallas’s Gull (Great Black-headed Gull) A total of six of these impressive gulls were seen – a single at the Dez River, three at a drained fish pool at Karun and two on the coast at Tiab. Little Gull Common on the Caspian Sea at Fereydoon Kenar, a minimum of 50 present. Caspian Tern All on the Persian Gulf, three birds were noted at both Bandar Khamir and Bandar Abbas, five just west of Qeshm town, four at Laft and at least 15 at Tiab. Gull-billed Tern Gull-billed Terns were recorded in good numbers at virtually all sites visited on the Persian Gulf – typical counts included at least 25 at Bandar Khamir, 5 daily at Bandar Abbas, about ten at both Qeshm town and Laft, and a minimum of 40 at Tiab. Sandwich Tern Only recorded just west of Qeshm town, where eight were roosting on the poles of submerged fish traps. Swift Tern (Greater Crested Tern) Common on the coasts of Qeshm Island and neighbouring areas, counts including 25+ just west of Qeshm town, 15+ at Laft, 6 in the Straits of Hormoz off Bandar Abbas and two at Tiab. Further down the coast, at least 15 were also noted on the sea at Jask. Lesser Crested Tern Generally less common than Swift Tern – just three west of Qeshm town and singles at Laft and in the Straits of Hormoz off Bandar Abbas. At Tiab however, at least ten were seen,

outnumbering Swift Tern at this locality. Saunders' Little Tern A distant bird at Tiab appeared to be this species, but a wintering Little Tern could not be ruled out with certainty. Whiskered Tern Recorded at two localities – a minimum of ten daily at Bandar Abbas (almost entirely on the small creek) and six at Tiab, favouring the fish pools. Black Tern A single bird was noted on the creek in Bandar Abbas city. Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse Found feeding on a dune edge, a male and two females were seen at Jegen River. A rarely recorded species in Iran, there are a mere half dozen or so records in the last 30 years. Nevertheless, the species is believed to be resident in the far south-east, my record fitting into the expected pattern. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse Another sandgrouse restricted to the far south-east of Iran, I encountered a flock of about 40 at the Jegen River, initially seeing the birds in flight, then finding them feeding on low dunes west of the river. Crowned Sandgrouse 60+ The most abundant sandgrouse at Shahr-e-Babek, several small flocks seen in flight early in the morning, totalling at least 60 birds. A number of additional flocks of sandgrouse were also seen, totalling about 100 birds, but they were either too distant or into the sun, thus not identified. It is probable that many of these were this species. Black-bellied Sandgrouse One flock of six birds confirmed at Shahr-e-Babek, other possible but too distant or into the sun. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse A winter visitor to the Shahr-e-Babek area, one flock of eight birds was seen. Rock Dove Common to abundant in many desert and mountainous areas, including Shushtar, the Karun fish pools, the Dez River, Dasht-e-Arzhan, Damavand and the Shahrud area. Small numbers also seen on Qeshm Island. Wood Pigeon Abundant at the Dez River, common at the nearby Karun fish pools, but away from these localities, the only record was of three at Minab. Collared Dove A broadly similar distribution of records to that of Wood Pigeon – abundant at the Khuzestan sites of Shushtar, Karun fish pools and the Dez River, but scarce elsewhere, the only records being at least 20 at Bandar Khamir and a single at Shahrud. Laughing Dove Common in the south, few seen elsewhere. In the southern lowlands, minimums of 30 per day were noted at Laft, Minab and the Jegen River, while counts of up to ten were recorded at the Karun fish pools, the Dez River, Dasht-e-Arzhan, Bandar Khamir, around Qeshm town and at Tiab. On the Central Plateau and in the north of the country, four records only – two birds in Shahr-e-Babek town, a single at Polur and singles in two areas of Shahrud. Little Owl Single birds were seen at Shahr-e-Babek and in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Spotted Little Owl One record, an individual in the date palms at Minab. The bird was in the very same tree as seen in on my previous trip in 2010. Alpine Swift Two birds were noted over the town at Bandar Khamir. Pallid Swift Widespread on the southern coast, typically around towns and cities - about 60 were noted at dusk each evening in Shushtar, up to six per day in Bandar Abbas, five over Qeshm town and up to six per day at Minab. Smyrna Kingfisher (White-breasted Kingfisher) Records were as follows: four at the Karun fish pools on both visits, one at the Dez River, two at Tiab, a total of seven at Minab and one at the Jegen River. Pied Kingfisher Two birds at Shushtar and eight along the Dez River were in the expected area for this species, two at Tiab presumably relate to winter movements. Common Kingfisher The most widespread of the kingfishers. In the south, up to three birds were seen per visit to Karun fish pools, Dasht-e-Arzhan, Bandar Khamir, Laft and Tiab. In the north, the species was common at Fereydoon Kenar, a minimum of ten seen in the ditches and pools of that area. Little Green Bee-eater Common in the south-east of the country, particularly in the Minab area, where up to 40 were seen per day. Other counts included eight at Bandar Khamir, three in Qeshm town, ten at Laft, four at Tiab and eight at the Jegen River. Indian Roller At least 15 were seen each day at Minab, with additional records including one in Bandar Abbas city, one in Qeshm town and two at Tiab on both visits. Hoopoe One record, a pair at Minab. Great Spotted Woodpecker One in the wooded grounds of Tardiat Modares University, Noor. Syrian Woodpecker Recorded only in the orchards around Reynah village, where three were seen on the first day and a single the next. Sind Pied Woodpecker About 500 metres north of the road bridge, a male and female were seen at the Jegen River. The global range of this species is restricted to a narrow belt of land from south-east Iran to west Pakistan, it is reported to also occur in the date groves at Minab, but I failed to find any at this locality in 2010 or on this trip. Desert Lark Not very many records – two at Choqal Zimbal (Dez River), two at Bandar Khamir, one at Laft and a total of 12 at Shahr-e-Babek. Lesser Short-toed Lark Four birds were noted on gravel plains at Tiab. Indian Sand Lark A speciality of the south-east, this species seems to frequent edges of coastal villages with some frequency, records on this trip being three at Bandar Khamir, three west of Qeshm town and five in the Tiab area. Crested Lark Widespread and moderately common, the best counts were minimums of 40 at Dasht-e-Arzhan, 12 at Tiab and ten near Shahrud. Elsewhere, pairs or flocks of up to five were noted at the Karun fish pools, the Dez River, Bandar Khamir, Laft, the Jegen River and Shahr-e-Babek. Woodlark Two records – a pair at the Dez River and seven (flocks of three and four) in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Eurasian Skylark Two records – six at the Karun fish pools and at least 15 at Dasht-e-Arzhan. Shore Lark Moderately common in the foothills of the Albroz Mountains, records including 18 at Mount Damavand, six at Shahrud, a minimum of 180 at Abr (mostly in flocks of 30-40) and at least 40 in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. African Rock Martin Small numbers in the south-east – about 20 at Bandar Khamir, three in Bandar Abbas city, five at Minab and four at the Jegen River. Barn Swallow The only records were a single in Bandar Abbas, two flocks of four birds at Minab and three at the Jegen River. Long-billed Pipit A single bird was found on arid land just beyond the date palms at Minab, the habitat open acacia scrub with rocky areas. Tawny Pipit One bird was seen at the top of a beach just west of Qeshm town. Meadow Pipit While common at Fereydoon Kenar, the only other record was a flock of 12 in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Water Pipit Quite common at some localities in the south: about 50 birds at Dasht-e-Arzhan, at least 40 on irrigated road reservations in Qeshm town and at least ten at Karun fish pools. In addition, eight were seen at the Dez River and singles at Bandar Khamir and Tiab. In the north, the only record was of five birds at Fereydoon Kenar. Citrine Wagtail Recorded in four locations – three birds at Dasht-e-Arzhan, one on the creek at Bandar Abbas, one at Tiab and at least ten at Fereydoon Kenar. Grey Wagtail A scatter of records – two at Dasht-e-Arzhan, a total of three at Minab and a single at Shahrud. White Wagtail Widespread, generally in low concentrations. Very common at Fereydoon Kenar, also at least 60 present at the Dez River, but otherwise it was usually two to five birds recorded at each locality, eg. Shushtar, Karun fish pools (ten birds), Dasht-e-Arzhan, Bandar Khamir, Bandar Abbas, Laft, Tiab, Minab, Shahr-e-Babek town. In the

Shahrud area, including the Bastam Valley, up to ten were seen daily, all of the very distinctive 'personata' race. White-cheeked Bulbul Abundant in the Minab area (at least 150 birds per day, mostly in the date palms) and common in the areas around Shushtar, the Karun fish pools, the Dez River and the Jegen River (minimums of 20-40 birds daily at each). Two also seen at Bandar Khamir and two at Laft. Dunnock Five birds seen in the small area of woodland south of the damgah at Fereydoon Kenar. Wren Only recorded in the north – a single at Fereydoon Kenar, several at Noor and one in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Robin Most common in the far south-west, where at least 30 were present along the Dez River. Elsewhere, all records were from the north – at least ten at both Fereydoon Kenar and Noor, plus a single at Abr. Bluethroat A good number of records at wetland localities across the country. In the south, six were seen at the Dez River, eight at the Karun fish pools, three at Dasht-e-Arzhan and singles at both Bandar Khamir and Minab. Two were also seen at Fereydoon Kenar in the north. Eversmann's Redstart Reported to be a low-density winterer across much of Iran, my records would suggest perhaps more common in the highland areas. After searching without success in the woodlands along the Jegen River and acacia groves at Minab, I later found four birds in the north - two adult males in the orchards at Reynah, a first-winter male in similar habitat at Abr and a female in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Black Redstart Most common in south-west Iran, where least 15 birds were seen in the open woodlands of the Dez River and two in the nearby town of Shushtar, birds belonging to both the ocha and semirufus races. In south-east Iran, one was also seen at Minab and four at the Jegen River, all birds at these localities of the semirufus race. Stonechat Only seen in south-west Iran, where a total of four were noted at the Karun fish pools, two at the Dez River and two at 2 Dasht-e-Arzhan. Desert Wheatear Six birds seen in total, all males and all in coastal localities – one at Bandar Khamir, two west of Qeshm town, two at Laft and one at Minab. Eastern Pied Wheatear A reasonable number of records in the expected area of the south-east – three at Bandar Khamir, five at Laft, up to six daily at 6 Minab, one at Tiab and six at the Jegen River. Blue Rock Thrush One record only – a male in Minab village. Blackbird Common in the Dez River (at least 20 birds seen), but otherwise I encountered just a few in the north - five at Noor and singles at Fereydoon Kenar, Abr and the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Song Thrush Similar pattern to Blackbird, but less numerous: six birds in the Dez River, one at Noor and three in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Redwing Not an abundant winterer in Iran, better numbers occur in the far north-west I believe. One record only – two birds in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Graceful Prinia Common in Khuzestan Province, with good numbers seen in Shushtar, at the Karun fish pools and along the Dez River. Two also noted west of Qeshm town. Cetti's Warbler Common in ditches around Fereydoon Kenar. Moustached Warbler Two records – one at Karun fish pools and three at Dasht-e-Arzhan. Clamorous Reed Warbler Two records, both in Khuzestan Province – three along the river in Shushtar and two at Karun fish pools. Hume's Lesser Whitethroat A single bird seen, moving through acacias on a bluff above Laft village. Desert Lesser Whitethroat Appears to become a more frequent winterer the further south-east you go – after a single at Bandar Khamir and a total of nine at Minab (in three days), Desert Lesser Whitethroats were basically the most abundant bird in the woodland along the Jegen River, an absolute minimum of 40 seen in just three hours. Chiffchaff Widespread records, common in some localities. In the south, many along the Dez River, two at both Shushtar and the Karun fish pools, at least ten on irrigated road islands in Qeshm town and two at Minab. In the north, at least ten were seen at Fereydoon Kenar, six at Noor and two in the high altitude forest at Abr, the latter two birds appearing to be of the tristis race. Mountain Chiffchaff Two birds found in the woodland at Jegen River. A localised breeder in the mountains of north-east Iran, but the wintering grounds are basically unknown. Only two previous winter records in Iran, one being at Jegen in 2005. Plain Leaf Warbler A single bird was seen at the Jegen River. Afghan Babbler (considered a split from Common Babbler) Very common in Khorestan province, with multiple family flocks noted at Shushtar, Karun fish pools (15 flocks) and the Dez River (eight flocks). Also moderately common in Hormozgan, with single flocks seen at Bandar Khamir Laft and Minab and two flocks at the Jegen River. Iraq Babbler Common and easy to locate at the two main localities visited in Khorestan – a total of seven flocks seen at the Karun fish pools and at least ten flocks at the Dez River, each of the flocks typically composed of five to seven birds. In both areas, Afghan Babblers were also common, but the Iraq Babblers tended to favour damper habitats, reeds in the case of Karun and riverine forest thickets along the Dez River. Afghan Babblers were mostly found in much drier areas of arid scrub and bushland. Long-tailed Tit One record only, four birds in the small woodland south of Fereydoon Kenar damgah. Blue Tit Recorded at three localities in the north – three birds at Fereydoon Kenar, at least ten in woodland at Noor and four at Abr. Great Tit Occurring in both the west and north of Iran, quite a number of records of this species, including at least 30 along the Dez River, three at Dasht-e-Arzhan, about ten daily at Reynah, five at Fereydoon Kenar, about 15 at Noor, four at Abr and at least 20 in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Penduline Tit Three birds at Dasht-e-Arzhan were presumably migrants. Western Rock Nuthatch Only two records – singles in the Damavand villages of Polur and Reynah. Eastern Rock Nuthatch Surprisingly scarce, with only a single confirmed record - one bird on the lower slopes of Mount Damavand. Three other rock nuthatches calling on the higher slopes were probably this species. Eastern Rock Nuthatches were common at most mountain sites visited on my summer trip in 2010. Purple Sunbird Abundant in the coastal lowlands of Hormozgan province – counts of up to 20 or so a day typical at Bandar Khamir, Minab and the Jegen River. Not seen on Qeshm Island. Isabelline Shrike Scattered records across the south – four birds at Karun fish pools, two at the Dez River, one at Bandar Khamir, two west of Qeshm town and two at Minab. Great Grey Shrike One bird seen at the Jegen River, an individual of the aucheri race. Steppe Grey Shrike On Qeshm Island, a single was seen just north of Laft village. Black Drongo Only the 5th record for Iran, a pair of Black Drongo were discovered in the date groves at Minab. Though the birds were very conspicuous, perching prominently on open perches, a thorough search for them the following day failed to relocate them. Pleske's Ground Jay At the same site as seen in 2010, an adult was found 20 km west of Shahr-e-Babek after a search of about two hours. Vast areas of suitable habitat exist east of Semnan, presumably the bird could also be found there. Magpie Absent from the lowlands of the Persian Gulf, but widespread across the central plateau and

throughout the north. Highest totals were counts in excess of 40 at both Fereydoon Kenar and the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud, closely followed by about 30 in the village of Reynah. Smaller numbers were also seen at Dasht-e-Arzhan, Shahr-e-Babek town, Polur, Noor, Shahrud and Abr. Red-billed Chough Records from two areas of the country - Dasht-e-Arzhan (at least 40 birds) and the Albroz Mountains (about 35 on Mount Damavand and two at Abr). Alpine Chough With a more restricted range in Iran than Red-billed Chough, the only record was a large flock of about 80 on Mount Damavand. Jackdaw One record only, a single at Mehrabad airport in Tehran. Rook Three records from widely separated localities - three birds at Mehrabad airport in Tehran, at least 15 at Dasht-e-Arzhan and five in the desert west of Shahrud. Hooded Crow Completely absent from the lowlands of the Persian Gulf and generally absent from the open desert areas, but common and widespread elsewhere, flocks of 10-30 birds at most settlements and agricultural areas from Shahr-e-Babek northwards. Mesopotamian Crow About 25 birds were seen at the Dez River, the key locality for this bird in Iran. Restricted to the marshlands of Mesopotamia, i.e. south-east Iraq and a small section of south-west Iran, this bird is geographically isolated from Hooded Crow and morphologically very distinctive (the greys of Hooded Crow are replaced by a near white, rendering the birds similar to Pied Crows of Africa). Most authorities still consider it a race of Hooded Crow, but it is treated as a separate species in certain quarters. House Crow Seen three times - a flock of ten in Bandar Abbas, a single individual in Bandar Abbas and a single individual in Qeshm town on Qeshm Island. House Crow is a recent colonist to Iran, populations establishing themselves particularly in Bushehr town further to the north-west and on nearby islands, smaller numbers now also breeding in Bandar Abbas. Apparently, the species does not yet breed on Qeshm, but is an occasional visitor from Bandar Abbas. Brown-necked Raven With the species restricted to the south-east of Iran, my three records were typical - individuals at Bandar Khamir, Laft and the Jegen River. Common Raven Four records - two birds at Dasht-e-Arzhan, four just west of Shahrud, two at Abr and then another two west of Shahrud from the bus returning to Tehran. Common Starling Fewer birds than I had expected - after about 80 birds at the Karun fish pools, 50 at the Dez River and at least 150 at Dasht-e-Arzhan (all in the first few days of the trip), the only subsequent record was of about 30 birds at Fereydoon Kenar. Spanish Sparrow A widespread wintering species, with records from all areas of the country. Flocks of between 30 and 50 birds were seen at the Karun fish pools on a couple of occasions, at Dasht-e-Arzhan, at Minab on a daily basis and in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. In addition, an absolute minimum of 250 were noted at Fereydoon Kenar, flocks being seen of various sizes. Tree Sparrow All in the north, two flocks were noted in the orchards at Reynah (of about 30 birds and eight birds), as well as a flock of 15 at Fereydoon Kenar and flock of six in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. House Sparrow Generally common to abundant in all Iranian towns and villages, occurring from the south to north and from mountain village to desert outpost. Also in the settlements on Qeshm Island. Snow Finch At Mount Damavand, a flock of about 60 were observed on snow-covered meadows just above Polur village. Indian Silverbill Another south-east speciality, four birds were noted in the date groves at Minab, a typical location for the species. Chaffinch A scatter of records - totals including 60+ at the Dez River, 40+ at Dasht-e-Arzhan, 150+ at Fereydoon Kenar and about 15 birds in both Shahrud town and the Bastam Valley, immediately to the north-east. Brambling One flock encountered, about 20 birds in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Red-fronted Serin Both in the Albroz mountains, a single was seen on the lower slopes of Mount Damavand and a total of nine at Abr. Greenfinch One record only - a single bird at the Dez River. Goldfinch One record only - a flock of ten at Dasht-e-Arzhan. Linnet Best counts were approximately 300 coming into roost on a traffic island in Shahrud town, a minimum of 60 at Reynah and totals of 40 at both Abr and the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. The only other records were eight birds at Dasht-e-Arzhan and three on the higher slopes of Mount Damavand. Twite One record, a flock of 16 birds quite high on the slopes of Mount Damavand. Mongolian Finch Feeding in a ploughed field, in loose association with Linnets, two birds in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Probably a rare resident in Iran, but only one previous record in the three decades since 1980. Desert Finch At almost the same location as two Crimson-winged Finches, four birds were seen in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Yellowhammer Two records only - at least 55 at Dasht-e-Arzhan and a flock of about 30 in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Pine Bunting Three birds (a winter male and two females) were found in a Yellowhammer flock in the Bastam Valley, north-east of Shahrud. Reed Bunting Two birds at Dasht-e-Arzhan and at least 30 at Fereydoon Kenar were in expected wetland habitats. Two birds at Abr however were in very strange habitat for this species - at relatively high altitude and associating with Rock Buntings, the birds were in a fruit orchard in an otherwise fairly arid location, the temperatures well below freezing with snow on the ground. Rock Bunting Only recorded in the area north-east of Shahrud, but fairly common there - at least 40 in the Bastam Valley and flocks of 10 and 12 at Abr. Corn Bunting Abundant at Dasht-e-Arzhan, where a minimum of 800 were present. No other records. SPECIES LIST OF MAMMALS Wolf One animal at the Dez River, two on the slopes of Mount Damavand. Tracks of three others were also noted on Mount Damavand. Indian Grey Mongoose A single was seen at Karun fish pools and a total of six at Minab. Cape Hare One at Shahr-e-Babek. European Brown Hare One at Abr. Brown Rat One on the rocks by the port in Qeshm town.