

Golan and North Israel, February 2019

Contributed by Jos
Last Updated Tuesday, 05 March 2019

With a duration of just two-and-a-days, this proved to be an extraordinarily productive trip. The basic idea was to visit the Hula Valley for the amazing concentrations of wintering Cranes and other waterbirds, then travel up into the occupied Golan Heights, before dropping down to the Beit She'an area to look for birds around the superb fishpond systems. This short trip truly exceeded expectations - not only seeing the impressive 50,000 Cranes at Hula, but also a whole bunch of other highlights, including Black Francolin, Dead Sea Sparrows, Great Spotted Cuckoo and no less than 19 Pallas's Gulls. Also saw Eastern Imperial, Steppe, Bonelli's and Great Spotted Eagles, plus a number of other targets, such as Vinous-breasted Starlings in the Tel Aviv area and False Apollo butterfly in the Golan Heights.

DAY LOG.

16 February. Tel Aviv and Ma'agan Micheal fishponds. Flying into Tel Aviv mid-morning, thunderstorms either side, a sudden bang and the plane momentarily shuddered, lights flickering ...we had been hit by lightning, an eventful start to the trip! An hour later, Israeli immigration and car rental sorted, I was weaving my way through the city to Yarkon Park. In the shadow of gleaming office blocks, this patch of greenery has plonked itself on the birding itinerary primary for an exotic interloper - Vinous-breasted Starling. With an established population in the Tel Aviv area, Yarkon Park is supposed to be one of the most reliable localities for the species. And so it was, a mere 15 minutes after leaving the airport, I was wandering through this park, city folk enjoying the Sabbath sunshine, me enjoying a surprising wealth of birds - a Syrian Woodpecker, several White-throated Kingfishers, a couple of White-spectacled Bulbuls, a Night Heron, umpteen ultra tame Hoopoes, these latter birds happily feeding mere metres from stomping feet. And then there were the exotica ... introduced species all, hordes of Common Mynas, flocks of Ring-necked Parakeets, quite a few Monk Parakeets, Egyptian Geese by a stream - exotica capital of the Middle East! As for the Vinous-breasted Starlings however, not a single one did I see in the hour I allotted to my search. Wishing to get up to Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, an hour north, I decided to call it quits and perhaps call in on Yarkon again on the way back to the airport. Up at Ma'agan Micheal, the weather turned a little for the worst - a few rain squalls passing through, interspersed by periods of warm sunshine. Did make for some slippery tracks around the pools, but not bad birding - couldn't find any Pallas's Gulls, but ample compensation with quite a few Slender-billed Gulls, as well as a pretty impressive mixed flock of at least 70 Black Storks and 30 Spoonbills. Plenty more to keep me busy too, a few Pygmy Cormorants, three Water Pipits, several Pied Kingfishers, etc etc. Late afternoon however, with the weather looking even more iffy, we decided Ma'agan Micheal was not going to produce much more - time to drive 120 km to the north-east to the Hula Valley. Arrived after dark, stayed in a hotel just south of Agamon Hahula.

17 February. Agamon Hahula and the Golan Heights. Heavy rain overnight, clear skies at dawn, but a pretty thick fog cloaking the River Jordan. Two Egyptian Mongooses in the pre-dawn, though the lack of visibility scuppered any real hope of Jungle Car, a mammal that is supposedly common around Hula. The sun broke through a little before 8.00 am, the day could begin! With Hula only opening an hour later, I started at fishponds just a few kilometres to the north - not a bad move, White Storks roosting on roadside pylons, two Ferruginous Ducks among mixed Pochard and Tufted Ducks, one japonicus Buff-bellied Pipit and, on the raptor front, one Long-legged Buzzard and one Great Spotted Eagle. An easy way to pass an hour, then it was time to head for the main venue for the day - Agamon Hahula. Agamon Hahula is simply fantastic. An assault on the senses, a wall of sound hits you as you walk the kilometre or so from the entrance, a rising yodel of tens of thousands of Cranes ahead. And then you round the corner and the spectacle is complete, the greatest mass gathering of Common Cranes on planet earth. Attracted to the Jordan Valley by the advent of irrigation in the 1950s, the numbers have steadily risen ever since, the wintering population climbing into the tens of thousands. In order to prevent trampling of agricultural fields, effectively the biggest bird table in the world was established at Hula to attract the birds and avoid conflict with landowners. The result, the feast for the eyes and ears that now lay before me - a seething mass of 50,000 Cranes packed into a foraging area stretching a kilometre or so in each direction. Can't claim I personally counted them, nor could I find a single Demoiselle Crane that was supposed to be hiding in their midst, but this was truly a moment to just pause and take on the atmosphere. Zigzagging through the middle, a tractor spreading grain, a mechanical Pied Piper with Cranes packed shoulder to shoulder behind. Added attractions, oodles of Glossy Ibises weaving between the legs of the Cranes, several Greater Spotted Eagles soaring overhead, White-throated and Common Kingfishers along an adjacent channel. Later, I then walked the 9 km circuit around Agamon Hahula, Cranes constantly flying over, but plenty more too. Among the highlights, two Syrian Woodpeckers, one Bluethroat, a female Black Francolin and a Black-winged Kite. Also loads of Coypu (at least 40!) and quite a nice number of early season butterflies - Painted Ladies, Red Admirals and Small Whites. Rounding off this very fine visit to Hula, one Eastern Imperial Eagle appeared in the skies, a Greater Spotted Eagle also visible for nice comparison. Ever since trips to Syria some years ago, I have wanted to visit the occupied Golan Heights. So, as mid-afternoon passed, so I crossed the River Jordan and climbed into the occupied territories, admiring some mighty fine butterfly habitat protected by means of mine fields. On the Golan, I headed for Gamla Nature Reserve, a splendid area of habitat on the edge of the escarpment, views down to the Sea of Galilee. Blue Rock Thrushes and Black Redstart around the ruins of an old Syrian village, Palestine Sunbirds just nearby, Little Swifts and Crag Martins around the cliff faces. With the sun shining, I however had wishes to look for butterflies - a few Small Whites and Painted Ladies already apparent. And then I struck it lucky, the one butterfly that I had hoped for, a very fine False Apollo. Highly mobile, but settling on warm slopes, this as a treat indeed - only my second ever encounter with this species. Unfortunately, putting pay to anymore butterfly action, it then clouded over, an ominous storm brewing over the Sea of Galilee. This did however have an unexpected and very

welcome consequence - within not very many minutes, massive birds appearing in the sky! Returning to roost on the Gamla cliffs, and flying at eyeball level, no less than 16 Griffon Vultures and three Eurasian Black Vultures, impressive! And, cherries on the cake, one Bonelli's Eagle with the vultures and a male Hen Harrier in the valley! As rain began, we decided to depart. Adding Black-winged Kites and Southern Grey Shrikes in the process, south we went. Skirted the Syrian and Jordanian borders, cut down to the Sea of Galilee. Coffee and snacks in McDonald's in the heart of ancient biblical lands, then south to Beit She'an, arriving just as darkness fell. 18 February. Beit She'an and Tel Aviv. Dotted around the Beit She'an area are the greatest concentrations of fishponds in Israel, all of which are superb for birds in winter. Decided to start my morning at the Kfar Ruppim fishponds, south of Beit She'an and abutting the Jordanian border. And superb it was - within minutes, I was passing through assorted pools full of birds, thousands of Teal, plenty of waders, plus several dozen Pygmy Cormorants (and Great Cormorants), a pod of 14 White Pelicans, an Osprey and a dozen Cranes sitting out on one drained pool. More, however, I was scanning the flocks of gulls. And in not much time, among Armenian Gulls, I found my targets - three Pallas's Gulls, two summer-plumaged adults, one immature. One of my main targets, and my first since a colony in Kazakhstan some years back, these were fine birds indeed. Overhead, two Great Spotted Eagles circling at low altitude and, at the other end of the size scale, at least 15 Little Swifts consorting with Common Swifts. Egyptian Mongoose and Golden Jackals also here. As I explored wider, totalled a total of 15 species of waders, Temminck's Stints, Marsh Sandpipers and Wood Sandpiper included, plus loads of regular breeding species, highlights including Pied and White-throated Kingfishers, several Clamorous Reed Warblers and flocks of Spanish Sparrows. What I wasn't finding however were Dead Sea Sparrows, another species I very much wanted to see. In attempt to remedy this, I left the main area of Kfar Ruppim fishponds and headed along dirt tracks for a couple of kilometres to the west, basically heading towards Tirat Zvi fishponds. Further small fishponds along this way, supporting both Night Herons and Purple Herons, but more importantly, a lot of tamarisk scrub, preferred habitat of the Dead Sea Sparrows. Quickly found flocks of Spanish Sparrows, and dozens of White-spectacled Bulbuls ...all was looking food. And then, after umpteen Spanish Sparrows, the much desired one - setting into the top of a dense clump, a small flock of neater more compact sparrows. Quick look with the binoculars and there they were, 13 smart Dead Sea Sparrows, a nice mix of males and females. Very flighty unfortunately, they certainly were not keen on getting in front of the camera, generally either settling on the opposite side of bushes or plunging into the depths of the tamarisk. Very nice birds however, and nicely complimented by a Wryneck appearing in the same bush. On route to Tirat Zvi, came across a massive flock of at least 600 Black Kites, most still at roost on the arms of sprinkler systems in agriculture fields, many others rising to thermal in the morning sunshine. I presume this was an early migratory flock, but either way, abundant Black Kites remained a feature for the rest of the day. At Tirat Zvi, more Pygmy Cormorants, one Great Spotted Eagle, at least 70 Spoonbills and, among hundreds of White Wagtails, one very nice male Citrine Wagtail and several Water Pipits. The absolute highlight however was yet more Pallas's Gulls, a flock of 16 very smart summer-plumaged adults sitting amongst Black Storks and Glossy Ibises. Perhaps equally amazing was the sheer quantity of herons and allies across the two fishpond systems - estimated minimums of 650 Grey Herons, 250 Great White Egrets, close to 100 Little Egrets and no less than 120 Black Storks! Also had about 20 White Storks. With sunshine dominating, thought it would be the good to then check out the nearby Mount Gilboa for butterflies ...not exactly successful, I managed a grand total of three species - Small White, Orange Tip and Painted Lady - before a stubborn cloud sat itself across the mountain!! Did however see a Steppe Eagle and, better still, a fine Great Spotted Cuckoo. Also managed 12 Mountain Gazelles at this locality. With that cloud hugging the summit of Gilboa and the surrounding vistas still basking in sunshine, I rapidly decided upon a new idea - back to Yarkon Park in Tel Aviv. And so it was, one hour later I was once again parking at Yarkon. And in total contrast to my previous visit, a mere five minutes later, I was looking at my primary target - Vinous-breasted Starling. And not just one, but a cracking flock of 14 feeding in a small orange plantation at the very west of the park. Associating with Common Mynas, these were smart birds indeed. Stayed with them a half hour or so, then explored the park again - plenty of Ring-necked and Monk Parakeets again, bit one notable addition - a Striated Heron, not a species I expected away from the Red Sea. And so ended this mini trip to Israel, watched sunset over the Mediterranean adding Sandwich Tern and Sanderling to the trip list, then headed to a hotel. 19 February. Tel Aviv. Early morning departure, a scatter of city birds seen en route to the airport - White-spectacled Bulbuls, Egyptian Geese, Ring-necked Parakeets, etc. Trip over, numerous species of birds seen, the highlights being the mass of Cranes, the smart summer-plumaged Pallas's Gulls and, naturally, the much sought-after Vinous-breasted Starlings. With a nice mix of mammals also seen, plus False Apollo butterfly, a successful trip I deemed it.

SPECIES LIST. Over the course of the three days, a total of 127 species of bird were noted, along with six species of mammal and five species of butterfly.

Mammals. Egyptian Goose. Exotic species, established in Tel Aviv area. Six seen in Yarkon Park, two elsewhere in the city. Shelduck. Seen at two localities - about 35 at Agamon Hahula and 10 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Mallard. Moderately common, best numbers at Agamon Hahula (160+), smaller numbers at all other wetlands visited. Gadwall. Only recorded in two localities - 15 birds at Agamon Hahula and four at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Shoveler. Total records consisted of about 25 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, 45 at Agamon Hahula and 55 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Eurasian Teal. Many thousands on the Kfar Ruppim and Tirat Zvi fishponds, smaller numbers at Agamon Hahula (80+) and Ma'agan Micheal fishponds (eight). Pochard. About 60 on fishponds just north of Agamon Hahula. Ferruginous Duck. Two on small fishponds just north of Agamon Hahula. Tufted Duck. About 55 on fishponds north of Agamon Hahula. Little Grebe. Seven at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, one at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Black Francolin. A lucky observation in the middle of the day - a female walking along an open track at the eastern end of Agamon Hahula. Chukar. Recorded at both

highland sites visited - several at Gamla NR and six on Mount Gilboa. White Pelican. One record, 14 birds at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Great Cormorant. Seen at all the fishponds visited, 25-40 at each locality. Also seen in Yarkon Park, at Agamon Hahula and on the sea off Tel Aviv. Pygmy Cormorant. Good numbers seen - seven at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, about 40 at Agamon Hahula, 40 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and 25 Tirat Zvi fishponds. Black-crowned Night Heron. Mostly roosting birds, one in Yarkon Park, 12 at Agamon Hahula, 15 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and two at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Striated Heron. One in Yarkon Park - an unexpected record for this species that is usually restricted to the Red Sea coast. Cattle Egret. Small numbers at various points along the coastal strip and in Yarkon Park, plus flocks of up to 25 at Agamon Hahula and at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Little Egret. Widespread, larger numbers including at least 30 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, 60 Kfar Ruppim fishponds and 80 Tirat Zvi fishponds. Great White Egret. Very good numbers at all wetlands visited - 15 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, 40 at Agamon Hahula, about 100 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and 150 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Grey Heron. Massive numbers at the Agamon Hahula and Tirat Zvi fishponds, where absolute minimums of 250 and 400 were seen respectively. Elsewhere, two at Yarkon Park, 35 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, and about 15 at Agamon Hahula. Purple Heron. All in reedbeds, six at Agamon Hahula and four at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. White Stork. 24 roosting on roadside poles near Agamon Hahula, then 20 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Black Stork. Impressive numbers - a single flock of 70 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, then two at Agamon Hahula and an absolute minimum of 120 spread between Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Glossy Ibis. Three localities - a single bird in Yarkon Park, a minimum of 250 feeding with the Cranes at Agamon Hahula, then about 55 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Spoonbill. Very good numbers at two localities - about 30 birds at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, at least 70 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Griffon Vulture. 16 birds returning to roost on the cliffs at Gamla NR. Eurasian Black Vulture. Accompanying the Griffon Vultures, three birds at Gamla NR. Osprey. One at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Eastern Imperial Eagle. One bird soaring over Agamon Hahula at about midday. Greater Spotted Eagle. A total of seven birds seen - four at Agamon Hahula, two at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and one at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Steppe Eagle. One at Mount Gilboa. Bonelli's Eagle. Seen alongside the vultures, one bird at Gamla NR. Long-legged Buzzard. One north of Agamon Hahula, one between Kfar Ruppim and Tirat Zvi. Steppe Buzzard. Only seen at two locations - two birds at Agamon Hahula and two near Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Sparrowhawk. One at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Black Kite. Possibly a migratory flock, a mass flock of at least 600 found roosting on sprinklers in agricultural areas between Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds, thereafter abundant at both fishpond systems throughout the day. A single also seen at Agamon Hahula. Black-winged Kite. One bird at Agamon Hahula, two near Gamla NR. Marsh Harrier. Widespread - two at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, six at Agamon Hahula and about 15 scattered between Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Hen Harrier. One male at Gamla NR. Common Kestrel. Widespread, 15-20 daily. Coot. Seen at all main fishponds and wetlands - about 40 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, 50 at Agamon Hahula and at least 400 scattered between Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Moorhen. Common in all wetlands visited - at least 25 at Yarkon Park, 10 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, about 60 at Agamon Hahula and 40 at both Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Common Crane. A spectacular sight and sound, an estimated 50,000 birds were packed into the main feeding area at Agamon Hahula. In addition, 12 seen at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Avocet. Recorded at two locations - one bird at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and 18 at Agamon Hahula. Black-winged Stilt. Only seen at three sites - about 20 birds at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, 20 at Agamon Hahula and six at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Kentish Plover. Four on the beach at Ma'agan Micheal. Ringed Plover. 25 birds seen at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Common Lapwing. Eight birds in flooded farm fields adjacent to Agamon Hahula. Spur-winged Lapwing. A common species as well as at least 200 scattered between Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds, 15 also seen in Yarkon Park, 15 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and about 45 at Agamon Hahula. Sanderling. Two on the beach in Tel Aviv. Dunlin. Only seen in Beit She'an - two birds at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and 30 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Temminck's Stint. Nine birds seen - three at Agamon Hahula and six at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Wood Sandpiper. Two early migrants - one at Agamon Hahula and one at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Green Sandpiper. A scatter of birds - two at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, two at Agamon Hahula, two at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and three Tirat Zvi fishponds. Common Sandpiper. Three birds noted at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, one at Agamon Hahula, two at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and two at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Common Redshank. Fairly common at wetlands - six at both Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and Agamon Hahula, then about 25 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and 40 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Spotted Redshank. In the Beit She'an area, four at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and six at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Marsh Sandpiper. A total of 12 birds seen - one at Agamon Hahula, five at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and six at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Greenshank. One at Agamon Hahula, two at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and four at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Black-tailed Godwit. About 30 noted on flooded agricultural land adjacent to Agamon Hahula. Eurasian Curlew. One at Agamon Hahula. Common Snipe. Counts of 10-15 noted at Agamon Hahula, Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Ruff. A single bird noted at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, then flocks of about 25 at Agamon Hahula and 20 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Black-headed Gull. An abundant species, with counts of several hundred at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds, as well as off the coast at Tel Aviv. Smaller numbers also at Yarkon Park and Agamon Hahula. Slender-billed Gull. About 15 seen on the beach and pools at Ma'agan Micheal. Armenian Gull. A rather smart gull, at least 40 were noted at Yarkon Park and totals of about 150 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Pallas's Gull. One of the highlights of the trip, three birds at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and an impressive 16 at the neighbouring Tirat Zvi fishponds. Sandwich Tern. One over the sea near Tel Aviv. Rock Dove. Common and widespread. Collared Dove. Moderately common at all localities. Laughing Dove. Common across the country, both in rural and urban areas, including at least 25 in Yarkon Park, 10 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, 15 at Agamon Hahula and a minimum of 50 at both Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Great Spotted Cuckoo. An early migrant, one at Mount Gilboa. Ring-necked Parakeet. Common in the Tel Aviv area, including at least 35 in Yarkon Park. Elsewhere, five at Agamon Hahula. Monk Parakeet. Only seen in Yarkon Park, where at least 15 were present. Alpine Swift. Six over Mount Gilboa were the only birds seen. Common Swift. Surprisingly good numbers for so early in

the season - 15 at Yarkon Park, 25 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, about 40 Agamon Hahula, at least 40 Kfar Ruppim fishponds and 15 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Little Swift. Recorded at two localities - about 15 birds at both Gamla NR and Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Hoopoe. At least 10 seen in Yarkon Park, where very tame. Also one at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and one at Agamon Hahula. Common Kingfisher. One bird at Agamon Hahula, one at Tirat Zvi fishponds. White-throated Kingfisher. The most abundant and widespread kingfisher - records included three in Yarkon Park, two at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, four at Agamon Hahula, five at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and six at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Pied Kingfisher. Seen at most wetlands visited, though most common in the Beit She'an area - in total, one in Yarkon Park, four at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, two at Agamon Hahula, ten at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and eight at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Syrian Woodpecker. One seen in Yarkon Park, two at Agamon Hahula. Wryneck. An early migrant, one in tamarisk scrub just west of Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Crested Lark. Widespread and common, up to 30-40 birds seen at most localities. Barn Swallow. Quite large numbers already present records included 15 at Yarkon Park, 80 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, 80 at Agamon Hahula and 60 in the Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds areas. House Martin. Associating with Swallows, two at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and two at Agamon Hahula. Crag Martin. Four around the cliffs at Gamla NR. Buff-bellied Pipit (*japonicus*). One on small fishponds just north of Agamon Hahula. Several were also reported at Kfar Ruppim in the period I was there, but I did not locate. Water Pipit. Rather fewer than expected - three at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and about 10 at Tirat Zvi fishponds. White Wagtail. Widespread. Best numbers in the Beit She'an area, where over 200 divided between Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Elsewhere, scattered individuals across the country and more notable counts of 15 in Yarkon Park, 30 at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and 40 at Agamon Hahula. Yellow Wagtail. One bird at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds. Citrine Wagtail. A very nice male, one bird at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Eurasian Robin. One at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, five at Agamon Hahula, one at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and two in Yarkon Park. Bluethroat. One bird seen in trackside vegetation at Agamon Hahula. Black Redstart. Two birds seen at Gamla NR. Stonechat. Widespread, seen at all localities, typically up to ten at each site, though at least 15 at both Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Song Thrush. One at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Blackbird. One at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, one at Agamon Hahula, two at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and one in Yarkon Park. Blue Rock Thrush. Two in the ruins of the Syrian village at Gamla NR. Graceful Prinia. Common at most localities, e.g. 25 Agamon Hahula and about 40 at both Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Cetti's Warbler. Mostly singing birds, two in Yarkon Park, at least ten at Agamon Hahula and thereafter common around both Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Blackcap. Four at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Sardinian Warbler. Best numbers in the Beit She'an area, where at least 15 around both Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds, plus a further five or so on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. Common Whitethroat. Two on scrubby hillside near Agamon Hahula. Clamorous Reed Warbler. Singing birds, at least six at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Chiffchaff. Six birds noted at Agamon Hahula, four at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Great Tit. A scatter of records - two at Agamon Hahula, two at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and four on Mount Gilboa. Southern Grey Shrike. On hillside slopes, two at Gamla NR and four on Mount Gilboa. White-spectacled Bulbul. Most common in the Beit She'an area, where at least 50 around Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. Elsewhere, two in Yarkon Park, six at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds and two at Gamla NR. Palestine Sunbird. Only a single record - a pair at Gamla NR. Eurasian Jay. Three sightings - one at Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, one at Gamla NR and one on Mount Gilboa. Jackdaw. Eight seen in Yarkon Park, ten at Agamon Hahula. Hooded Crow. Common across the country. Common Starling. Two in Yarkon Park, then flocks of about 40 at both Gamla NR and Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Vinous-breasted Starling. An established exotic in the Tel Aviv area, a flock of 13 were found feeding in a small orange plantation in Yarkon Park. Common Myna. Abundant at most localities, especially throughout Tel Aviv (including Yarkon Park), Ma'agan Micheal fishponds, Kfar Ruppim fishponds and Tirat Zvi fishponds. House Sparrow. Common in urban areas, but also at least 50 at Agamon Hahula and 150 in the area around Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Spanish Sparrow. In flocks of 15-20 birds, a total of at least 80 seen both at Kfar Ruppim fishponds and along tracks immediately west. Dead Sea Sparrow. In same general area as a few small flocks of Spanish Sparrows, a flock of 13 in tamarisk scrub a couple of kilometres west of Kfar Ruppim fishponds (along small tracks to Tirat Zvi fishponds). Chaffinch. Small numbers one in Yarkon Park, then about at 15 Agamon Hahula and 15 at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Linnets. Two on Mount Gilboa. Goldfinch. Up to five birds seen at each of three locations - Yarkon Park, Agamon Hahula and Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Greenfinch. Recorded twice - a flock of six at Agamon Hahula, a flock of ten at Kfar Ruppim fishponds. Siskin. One male in Yarkon Park, I believe quite notable for so far south. Corn Bunting. A flock of about 80 seen at Kfar Ruppim fishponds, then at least eight singing on territory at Mount Gilboa. Mammals. Golden Jackal. Fairly approachable, a total of five were seen in Yarkon Park. On addition, three at Yarkon Park. Red Fox. One at Gamla NR. Egyptian Mongoose. Two seen pre-sawn near Agamon Hahula, one during that day at Tirat Zvi fishponds. Coypu. Abundant at Agamon Hahula, where at least 40 were seen. Field Vole. Presumed this species, one at Agamon Hahula. Mountain Gazelle. 12 on Mount Gilboa. Butterflies. False Apollo. One of the highlights of the trip, one at Gamla NR. Small White. Widespread - at least five at Yarkon Park, 25 at Agamon Hahula, 10 at Gamla NR and two on Mount Gilboa. Orange Tip. Three on Mount Gilboa. Red Admiral. Two at Agamon Hahula, one in Yarkon Park. Painted Lady. Moderately common - 18 at Agamon Hahula, five at Gamla NR and six on Mount Gilboa.