



INTERNATIONAL SPRING MIGRATION FESTIVAL **EILAT 2007**

Festival Report **18-24 March 2007**

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Introduction:

Organized by the Israel Ornithological Center, The IBRCE (International Birding and Research Center Eilat) and Kibbutz Lotan Center for Birdwatching, the Spring Migration Festival brought together birders from all around the world for an unforgettable event during the peak migration period in Southern Israel.

Birding highlights.

The first International Spring Migration Festival was a great success. The tours were excellent, the lectures were interesting and very instructive and the event exceeded expectations. Of course, as expected, the real stars were the birds. The Festival participants enjoyed some great birding and, due to some unexpected weather patterns, some impressive falls of migrants. There were also some added bonuses along the way as well, and due to the guides experience and quick thinking, many people saw some unbelievable birds in amazing places.

We are happy to present you with a summary of the Festival highlights, including a full checklist (a mind boggling 219 species) seen during the week, and specific day by day summaries as compiled by the guides themselves.

Further, we are happy to say that much interest has already been shown for next year's Festival and some of the world's foremost birdwatchers have promised to be around for the event.

Birding tours summary:

19/3/07

The first morning started off well with both short tours fully subscribed and an additional full day Southern Arava birding tour was added due to popular demand.

Yoav Perlman guided the Eilat mountains morning tour. The group enjoyed good views of migration over the mountains, with several Steppe Eagles and Lesser Spotted Eagles and good sightings of common desert birds - White crowned Wheatear, Desert lark etc.

Late morning at K19, 2 Greater Spotted Eagles, good selection of ducks, several more Steppe Eagles, 15-20 Eurasian Crag Martins, Alpine swifts, Balkan Warblers, and in the afternoon at the North beach with Klaus Olsen, 4 Arctic(Parasitic) Skuas , Siberian, Yellow legged, Baltic White eyed gulls, Striated Herons.



White-crowned Black Wheatear

The two full day tours, one led by Itai Shanni and the other by Jonathan Meyrav faired very well with highlights being:

Good numbers of raptors with several species of Eagles, Black Kites and an Osprey en route to K76, where a pair of Barbary Falcons gave nice shows and few Bar-tailed larks along with 13 Crowned Sandgrouse and a beautiful male Pallid Harrier. Up at Neot Smadar; White-crowned, Hooded and Isabelline Wheatears and few Tawny Pipits. On the way down Orphean and Ruppell's Warbler and a single Blue Rock Thrush. Down at Yotvata; a single male Little Crake at the sewage and many Greater Short-toed Larks together with 4 species of Harriers and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk. Further the group led by Jonathan also enjoyed superb views of Arabian Warbler, Namaqua Dove and Sand Partridge at Yotvata and a late White-breasted Kingfisher at the Neot Smadar date plantation.



Steppe Eagle

20/03/07

The Nizzana tour was led by Itai Shanni. The group had a very early start, a long drive but a very fruitful day with the highlights being a dancing male Macqueen's Bustard and few Cream-coloured Coursers. Also seen Woodchat Shrikes, Sardinian, Orphean and Ruppell's Warblers, Greater Short-toed Larks and the desert form of Little Owl while Greater & Lesser Spotted and Short-toed Eagles were soaring overhead. On the way back at the Meishar a pair of Desert Wheatears and 9 Spotted Sandgrouse and both Desert and Bar-tailed Larks.



Macqueen's Bustard

Yoav held a morning ringing session at Lotan with the highlights being, 1 male Subalpine Warbler, 1 *sammisicus* Redstart, 3 Bluethroat, 1 Cretzschmar's Bunting among many Lesser Whitethroats, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs.

Jonathan led the Eilat mountains tour. Israel's first Bean Goose was present and gave good views and then it was up to the mountains. Migration took some time to develop but once the birds showed up the group got great views of hundreds of Steppe Buzzards, some Steppe Eagles and good views of common desert birds including White crowned Wheatear, Desert lark, Sand Partridge etc.

Late morning at K19 two Greater Spotted Eagles performed well, there was a good selection of ducks and migrating raptors overhead. At the southernmost date plantations Rose-ringed Parakeets and Little Green Bee-eaters were seen, and we enjoyed views of a nice feeding flock of Indian Silverbills.

The afternoon & evening were devoted to the southern Dead Sea with the target species being Nubian Nightjar. En route at Shezaf nature reserve 1 Arabian Warbler gave good views, 1 male Cyprus Warbler, Arabian Babblers, Blackstarts etc. and at Neot Hakikar, Great Egret, 2 Whiskered Terns, 1000's of Pallid swifts, 5 calling Penduline Tits, several singing Clamorous Reed Warblers and Dead Sea Sparrow. 3

Nubian Nightjars gave great views while foraging over the agricultural fields with their light butterfly like flight, giving the group a chance to get all the ID features.



© Yoav Perlman

Birding the Dead Sea area

21/3/07

The half day morning tour was led by Itai who was joined at the mountains by Dick Forsman, the species seen included Steppe Eagles and Steppe Buzzards, a few Black Kites and Marsh Harriers.

Down at Km19 both Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles and a single Short-toed Eagle were seen and also a group of Eurasian Crag Martins and a single Citrine Wagtail, some Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters at K20. En route back to Lotan a short stop at Yotvata produced a few Bimaculated Larks .

The southern Arava birding tour was led by Yoav. At the Eilat Football pitch the Bean Goose showed well. At K76, 16 Crowned & 30 Spotted Sandgrouse, 1 male Pallid Harrier, 1 adult Great spotted Cuckoo, 2 Ruppell's & 1 Subalpine Warblers, 1 brief Bar-tailed lark.

Neot Smadar - packed with birds, 2 male Ruppell's warblers, many Tawny and Red-throated Pipits, Yellow Wagtails and 2 Linnets that were an excellent northerly surprise.

In the afternoon at Yotvata, dark morph Marsh Harrier with 3-4 Hen Harriers and 1 juvenile Pallid Harrier, 4-5 Bimaculated Larks among 1000 Greater Short-Toed Larks, but no sign of the Pale Rock Sparrow seen earlier by Jonathan.



Israel's first Bean Goose

That night two groups set out for a taste of the night wildlife in the valley. It was a great night to be in the fields and 2-3 Egyptian nightjars showed well, both foraging and on the ground. The resident Pharaoh Eagle Owl gave amazing views as it hunted a rodent and ate it on a dry acacia tree. What a night to remember it was, many people commented that being out there in the desert with Jackals howling and the Owl performing was something unforgettable.

22/3/07

Jonathan Meyrav led the Eilat Mountains tour. The first stop was again the Eilat football pitch where the Bean Goose ever loyal gave superb views. Up at the mountains good numbers of Steppe Buzzards, several Steppe Eagles, Marsh Harriers, Black Kites and Egyptian Vulture. On the way down a nice pair of Rock Thrush, 1 Citrine Wagtail at K19 and all the birds seen previously.

Yoav Perlman led the Dead Sea tour. On the way, at the beautiful Shezaf Nature Reserve, great views of a pair of Arabian Warblers, pair of Desert Finch nest building and amazing views of 2 Long Legged Buzzard sat next to the Arava road.

There was also good migration along the rift valley, with 100's of Steppe Buzzards, several Black Kites and Steppe Eagles and an Osprey.

At the Hemar reservoir there were tens of singing Dead Sea Sparrows, and a White-breasted Kingfisher was heard.

At Ein Gedi - good views of all desert species – Tristram's Grackles, Fan tailed Ravens, 2 Common Ravens, several Short-toed Eagles, and finally stunning views of White breasted Kingfisher. The group of course enjoyed the traditional dip in the sea...



©Thomas Krumenacker
White breasted (Smyrna) Kingfisher

On the way back at the ponds south of Dead Sea works - 3 Spoonbills, 1 Greater Flamingo, 2 Pochard and several Garganey.

Itai Shanni spent the morning ringing at the IBRCE. Balkan and Ruppell's Warblers among the many Lesser Whitethroats were caught and Masked Shrike and both Redstart and Black Redstart were present (though not ringed).

The afternoon K20 and North Beach tour produced several Yellow legged & Baltic Gulls, a group of 600 Garganey flying north and a very close Caspian and Sandwich Terns.

23/3/07

Itai once again led the long haul Nizzana tour but the group was rewarded with a great trip.

Itai summarizes:

The 'Old Faithful' dancing male Macqueen's Bustard was still performing, huge numbers of Greater Short-toed Larks, few Tawny Pipits and a nice Pallid Harrier. A very distinct Spectacled Warbler gave good views as it called from its bush next to the empty Sandgrouse pond.

At Sde-boker big numbers of Griffon Vultures and a pair of Egyptian Vultures together with the many migrant Steppe Buzzards. Down at the Meishar, a single Desert Wheatear and a few Desert Larks, small group of Spotted Sandgrouse were seen at last.

Yoav started the day ringing at Lotan with the highlights being 1 retrap Subalpine Warbler, Northern Wheatear, many Red Throated Pipit's including a retrap from March 2006, 1 Red-rumped Swallow and many Lesser whitethroats and Blackcaps.



Subalpine Warbler

The Nightjar tour enjoyed a nice session at Neot Hakikar with 1 spotted crane and singing Clamorous Reed Warblers. Nubian Nightjars required some work but eventually two nightjars gave brief but good flight views.

24/4/07

The weather deteriorated quickly on the morning of the 24th and by 09:00 it was raining on and off and the windy conditions held no promise... but the weather turned out to be a good thing as classic "fall" conditions had developed and migrants were dropping out of the skies.

Yoav led the Eilat Mountains tour and he summarizes: Rain, no migration, 1 Hooded Wheatear, 2 Sand Partridge and 1 Blue rock Thrush. On the way down from the mountains 1 male Rock Thrush at the entrance roundabout to Eilat.

Jonathan was leading a large group and met up with Yoav at Ofira park where there were several wrynecks, many Cretzschmar's Buntings, Common and Lesser Whitethroats, Tree pipits, 1 bright summer plumage Grey Wagtail and another handsome male Rock Thrush. It was then that we received the message of a, rare for Israel, Dunn's Lark at K76. Yoav and his group set out there and besides succeeding in finding the Dunn's Lark, they saw 4 Bar tailed Larks, 3 Desert Wheatears and witnessed an amazing fall of Northern & Black eared Wheatears.



Dunn's Lark K76



©Yoav Perlman

Dunn's Lark twitch

In the afternoon there was an Eilat North Beach session with Klaus Olsen. This provided some great action and was one of the best seawatching sessions for a long time. Klaus picked out a Saunder's Tern, a rare Red Sea visitor, in a flock of Little Terns. Also at the beach, 1 White-cheeked Tern, 150 Common Terns, 1 Siberian gull and 6 Pallas's gulls.



© Klaus M. Olsen

White-eyed Gull North beach

Evening activities.

The evening assemblies at the Agamim Hotel in Eilat were a welcome treat to many at the days end. The participants and staff enjoyed a cold drink while listening to interesting lectures and just reflecting on the days' birding.

The following activities took place:

18/3/07

The festival officially started with an excellent opening banquet at the Agamim hotel in Eilat. The food and drinks were tasty and well arranged, and over 120 people attended the banquet. After we all ate and drank we gathered for some opening words and a short film by Eyal Bar-tov, after which we enjoyed a beautiful presentation of bird images, courtesy of Rony Livne.



19/3/07

We all gathered to hear the charismatic Dr. Yossi Leshem talk about migration from a regional and global aspect. Yossi gave his unique perspective on migration and was very entertaining and interesting.

20/3/07

The much anticipated lecture by Dick Forsman on birds of prey was a great success.

We all learned a lot from the informative slides and were once again in awe at Dick's extensive knowledge of every plumage detail, down to the feather. Dick also co-guided some of the tours at the Eilat Mountains and was very friendly and helpful.



Dick Forsman in Action

21/3/07

Free evening. Due to the hectic pace of things a much needed rest and a relaxed evening were welcome by many.

22/3/07

Dr. Reuven Yosef gave a thrilling presentation about the importance of Eilat for migrants, through years of hands-on experience at the IBRCE.



23/3/07

The world renowned seabird specialist Klaus Malling Olsen gave us a glimpse into the world of gulls, terns and other seabirds. Klaus with his informative and kind guidance also played an important and helpful role with coguiding some of the tours.

24/3/07

The closing evening of the festival was a friendly way to wrap things up. We all had a drink and shared the week's endeavors, and compiled a checklist of the birds seen during the festival week (a whopping 219 species!).

Acknowledgments:

We would like to express our thanks to the lecturers; Mr. Rony Livne, Dr. Yossi Leshem, Mr Dick Forsman, Dr. Reuven Yosef and Mr. Klaus M. Olsen for taking part in the event, and hope to see them again in the following years Festivals.

Also we would like to express our thanks for the management and staff of hotel Agamim- Isrotel, Eilat, who generously hosted the evening events and contributed in many other ways to the success of the Festival.

**For more details or bookings for the
'International Spring Festival, Eilat 2008'
23-29/03/2008**

Please contact one of the followings:

- **Richard Melzack** at RM Tours info@rmtours.co.uk
- **Dan Alon** at Israel Ornithological Centre ioc@netvision.net.il
- **Jonathan Meyrav** at Lotan Birding Centre jm2bird@yahoo.com



Little Green Bee-eater



Checklist 18-24 March

The following species were seen during the festival week. All the species were seen on the festival tours and workshops. The significant species are highlighted.

Little Grebe
Great Cormorant
Little Bittern
Night Heron
Mangrove (Striated) Heron
Cattle Egret

Squacco Heron
Little Egret
Western Reef Heron
Great Egret
Grey Heron
Purple Heron
White Stork
Black Stork
Glossy Ibis
Eurasian Spoonbill
Greater Flamingo
Bean Goose (1st for Israel)
Common Shelduck
Mallard
Northern Pintail
Northern Shoveler
Eurasian Wigeon
Garganey
Teal
Common Pochard
Griffon Vulture
Egyptian Vulture
Osprey
Eastern Imperial Eagle
Lesser Spotted Eagle
Greater-spotted Eagle
Steppe Eagle
Booted Eagle
Black Kite
Marsh Harrier
Pallid Harrier
Hen Harrier
Long-legged Buzzard
Eurasian Sparrowhawk
Goshawk
Steppe Buzzard
Common Kestrel
Lesser Kestrel
Peregrine
Barbary Falcon
Chukar
Sand Partridge
Quail
Water Rail
Little Crake
Spotted Crake
Moorhen
Coot
Common Crane
Macqueen's Bustard

Oystercatcher

Avocet
Black winged Stilt
Stone Curlew
Cream-colored Courser
Collared Pratincole
Little Ringed Plover
Ringed Plover
Kentish Plover

Greater Sand Plover

Spur-winged Plover
Dunlin
Little Stint
Curlew Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Marsh Sandpiper
Redshank
Greenshank
Spotted Redshank
Black-tailed Godwit
Common Snipe
Ruff
Curlew

Arctic Skua
Black-headed Gull
Slender-billed Gull

Mediterranean Gull

Little Gull

Pallas's Gull

Armenian Gull
Baltic Gull
Caspian Gull
Siberian Gull
Yellow-legged Gull
White-eyed Gull

Little Tern
Common Tern

Saunders's Tern

White-cheeked Tern

Gull-billed Tern
Sandwich Tern
Whiskered Tern
Caspian Tern
Black-bellied Sandgrouse
Spotted Sandgrouse
Crowned Sandgrouse

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse

Namaqua Dove

Turtle Dove
Collared Dove
Laughing Dove
Rock Dove
Great Spotted Cuckoo
Eurasian Cuckoo
(Pharoah) Eagle Owl
Hume's Tawny Owl
Egyptian Nightjar
Nubian Nightjar
Common Swift
Pallid Swift
Alpine Swift
Hoopoe
Common Kingfisher
Smyrna Kingfisher
Pied Kingfisher
Common Bee-eater
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
Little Green Bee-eater
Roller
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Wryneck
Oriental Skylark
Crested lark
Greater Short-toed Lark
Lesser Short-toed Lark
Desert Lark
Bar-tailed Lark
Dunn's Lark
Bimaculated Lark
Temminck's Lark
Sand Martin
Crag Martin
Rock (pale Crag) Martin
House Martin
Barn Swallow
Red-rumped Swallow
Tawny Pipit
Water Pipit
Red-throated Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Tree Pipit
White Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail
Citrine Wagtail
Spectacled Bulbul
Common Nightingale
Bluethroat

Common Redstart
Black Redstart
Northern Wheatear
Isabelline Wheatear
Desert Wheatear
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear
Blackstart
Hooded Wheatear
Mourning Wheatear
White-crowned Wheatear
Stonechat
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush
Blue Rock Thrush
Song Thrush
Blackbird
Blackcap
Eastern Orphean Warbler
Lesser Whitethroat
Common Whitethroat
Arabian Warbler
Subalpine Warbler
Cyprus Warbler
Sardinian Warbler
Spectacled Warbler
Ruppell's Warbler
Graceful Prinia
Scrub Warbler
Sedge Warbler
Reed Warbler
Savi's Warbler
Cetti's Warbler
Marsh Warbler
Clamorous Reed Warbler
Wood Warbler
E. Olivaceous Warbler
Balkan (E. Bonneli's Warbler)
Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler
Penduline Tit
Woodchat Shrike
Masked Shrike
Southern Grey Shrike
Palestine Sunbird
Arabian Babbler
Common Raven
Brown-necked Raven
Fan-tailed Raven
Hooded Crow
Indian House Crow
Tristram's Grackle

Starling
House Sparrow
Spanish Sparrow
Dead-sea Sparrow
Pale Rock Sparrow
Linnet
Greenfinch
Desert Finch
Trumpeter Finch
Sinai Rosefinch
Ortolan Bunting
Cretzschmar's Bunting
Corn Bunting
Indian Silverbill

Total Species: 219