

KUWAIT 12<sup>TH</sup> – 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2008



By [Richard Bonser](#)

**Participants:**

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**Introduction**

Three of us first visited Kuwait in April 2007 and had an extremely successful spring trip. Though we saw all of the species we expected at that time of year and witnessed some good migration, we quickly realized that another visit would be needed to target the winter specialities. Thus this was the aim of this trip. A group of four Danish birders joined us throughout the trip and were good company in the many fast food outlets that we frequented in the evenings.

In essence the regular winter specialities (in a Western Palearctic context) for us were Shikra and Indian Roller (and Persian Wheatear for a couple of us). We were also in luck as a couple of Purple Sunbirds were discovered the week before we departed representing the first record of this species for Kuwait and the Western Palearctic. The lads who hadn't visited Kuwait previously also had the opportunity to see a load of species that three of us had seen in April.

This report goes about things very much like my [April 2007 report](#) - for specific site details please see this report. This winter trip was well worth the effort and packed with quality birds but, if you're looking at the whole birding experience, for the obvious reason of spring migration our April trip was probably better. Nevertheless Kuwait is the only reliable place in the Western Palearctic for Socotra Cormorant, Lesser Sand Plover, Red-vented Bulbul and Bank Myna and all of these occur in winter with the exception of the Cormorant. Added to this other quality species we recorded during our visit included MacQueen's Bustard, Crab Plover, Red-wattled Lapwing, Dunn's Lark, Persian Wheatear, White-eared Bulbul and Grey Hypocolius. The Long-tailed Shrike and Common Babblers that we had seen in spring were also seen once again.

## **Reading & Website Information**

Since our April trip (where we were dependent on Andreas Hagerman's [trip report from April 2006](#) and The Birds of the State of Kuwait by George Gregory) information on birding in Kuwait has increased significantly. A lot of information can be found by looking through the [WP Rarities in Kuwait thread on Birdforum](#) and sifting through the diatribe that you regularly encounter on this site. Perhaps the main source of reference these days is [AbdulRahman Al Sirhan's website](#) where latest sightings, trip reports and some outstanding photos can be found with Mike Pope's [Birding Kuwait](#) website being an essential reference point.

We used the 1:500 000 Geo Projects/Arab World Map Library 'Kuwait' map that we'd purchased in April and once again found it to be more than sufficient (we were unable to get extra copies in the airport so it may be worth getting it before you arrive in Kuwait).

## **Acknowledgements**

AbdulRahman Al Sirhan and Brian Foster helped us out with information before and during our stay, with their company in the field being well appreciated. The help and decent company provided by other Kuwait based birders, Pekka Fagel and Mike Pope, was also most welcome. And a big thanks to Rashed Al Hajji who had the fortune and diligence to find a couple of quality birds (Purple Sunbird and Indian Roller) that we saw during our trip.

Olof Jonsson spent an extraordinary amount of time supplying us with information from his trip the week before and without it our trip may have been a little bit more laborious and perhaps less successful. You can read about their trip [here](#). Kris de Rouck also provided me with some good, specific information from their trip.

The Danish crew of Christian Leth, Jacob Bentzon Hansen, Johnny Salomonsson and Andre Riis Ebbesen were pretty much with us in the field throughout and the light-hearted banter that we had over evening meals (much of it involving Allen's Gallinules and Pied Crows) increased the enjoyment factor of the trip. And finally thanks to Andreas Noeske whose gentle reminder to get on with this trip report before his visit to Kuwait gave me a bit of a kick up the proverbial to get it finished.

## **Other Information**

### *Climate*

Our visit was at a time when the Middle East was suffering some uncharacteristically cold weather with snow falling in nearby Baghdad for example. Therefore we wore winter weather gear throughout – as previously mentioned our visit did though coincide with atypically cold weather.

### *Hotel*

We stayed (as did the Danish team) at the [Arinza Towers](#) in the Salmiya district of Kuwait City in a 4 bed apartment (with one of us on the couch) that cost £380 for the week in total. Pizza Hut, KFC and a supermarket were in easy walking distance.

### *Visas*

Entry visas are available on arrival at Kuwait International Airport for 3 Kuwaiti Dinars (£6). Speaking to the Kuwait Embassy in London, Israeli stamps in your passport will have (and did not have) any implication on getting a visa.

### *Car Hire and Travel*

We hired a 4x4 for the duration of our stay and this is recommended – Jahra East and SAANR would be difficult to access in a conventional vehicle. Travel is very easy throughout the country with good roads. Traffic can be heavy in rush hour in Kuwait City with the locals driving rather fast and close, but it is not much different to traveling around any other major city. As Kuwait is an oil rich state petrol prices were extremely cheap – £8 to fill up our gas-guzzler from empty!

### ***Eating/Drinking***

If fast food is what you like then Kuwait will not disappoint. During our trip we managed to sample McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, Subway and Pizza Hut. Getting a large pizza at Pizza Hut and then taking the leftovers into the field the next day was an inspired move. We also had a decent Indian with Brian Foster and Pekka Fagel one evening. Supermarkets are easy to find throughout Kuwait and are well stocked. Do note however that alcohol is, at least theoretically, illegal in Kuwait.

### ***Hunting***

It was a pleasant surprise not to hear a gun shot during our trip; this being in stark contrast to our experience in April 2007. The advice I would give is be prepared for the worst as the shooting of birds is a popular pastime in Kuwait particularly amongst young men. The only evidence we found on this trip was a long dead sub-adult male Pallid Harrier at Subiyah.

### *Itinerary*

An overview of our day-to-day itinerary is as follows. We were birding pretty much all day every day but the small size of the country meant that relatively little time was spent in transit between sites. To put it into perspective Abdaly Farms was the only site we visited that was over an hour from our base in Kuwait City.

**13<sup>th</sup> January** Arrival early morning – Subiyah – Jahra West – Jahra Farms

**14<sup>th</sup> January** Jahra West – Jahra Farms – Pivot Fields – Kuwait University – Sulaibhikat

**15<sup>th</sup> January** Abdaly Farms – Sabah-al-Ahmad Natural Reserve – Doha Spit

**16<sup>th</sup> January** Salmiya – Green Island – Kuwait University – Jahra East – Pivot Fields

**17<sup>th</sup> January** Green Island – Sabah-al-Ahmad Natural Reserve

**18<sup>th</sup> January** Green Island – Shuwaikh Port – Kuwait University – Sulaibhikat – Jahra Farms – Jahra East

**19<sup>th</sup> January** Jahra Farms – Sabah-al-Ahmad Natural Reserve – Sulaibhikat – South Doha Nature Reserve

**20<sup>th</sup> January** early morning departure to London

## DAILY DIARY

### 13<sup>th</sup> January 2008

After an overnight flight from London we arrived in Kuwait City just as it was getting light. Getting the visas was hassle free compared to last time and probably took no more than half an hour. So, with our 4x4 hire cars collected us and the Danish team were on the road within an hour of touching down.

### SUBIYAH

With a new Western Palearctic species found the week before we arrived, it was an easy choice as to where we were headed first. And so it was that in cold conditions (and you would have described it as cold even if you were in Britain) we arrived in a scattered area of tamarisks (29°33'99N, 48°08'20E) near the Subiyah Power Station entrance. Driving through the area we quickly found our target – **Purple Sunbird** – and we spent the next hour or so watching at least 2 eclipse males of this species feeding on tiny flowers in this exposed area. A couple of **Desert Wheatears** also appeared here whilst a long dead sub-adult male Pallid Harrier was a reminder of the shooting from our previous trip.

### SUBIYAH FARM

A little bit of blind optimism never hurts and at this time of year in 2007 an Eversmann's Redstart was found here. No such luck on our visit with a **Black Redstart**, a dozen **Tawny Pipits**, a **Sparrowhawk**, a **Willow Warbler** and an abundance of **Chiffchaffs** being our haul. An aviary here held at least 3 Grey Hypocolius and a couple of Ortolans along with a few other less noteworthy species.

### JAHRA WEST

From the comfort of our car we scanned the area of bushes at 29°21'09N, 47°39'22E where Kris De Rouck and Dirk Colin had seen 2 Indian Rollers on 1<sup>st</sup> January but it was to no avail – this species seems to be relatively short staying even in midwinter and the birds had moved on. We did see a **Long-legged Buzzard** here but it offered little compensation as the tiredness from the flight started to kick in for some of us. And on this note we headed the short distance to Jahra Farms where, in spring, it was alive with migrants being particularly good for some reason for Semi-collared Flycatchers.

### JAHRA FARMS

We parked in the mosque car park and accessed the area at 29°21'04N, 47°40'27E. It's an area of extensive subsistence farming and it was good to see the locals were as friendly as they were in the spring. This visit started off with a bang as a male **Shikra** was quickly found flying through the area and then seemed to ditch in a distant palm – quality! So all the troops were assembled and we headed round but, whether it was tiredness or ineptitude, we were on top of the bird all too quickly and it flew off again to the far side of the area. A distant *accipter* later on was the closest we came to seeing it again whilst a female **Sparrowhawk** glided over as well. It was good to reacquaint ourselves with the common species of Kuwait City – **White-eared Bulbuls**, **Common Mynas** and **Cattle Egrets**. **White Wagtail**, **Song Thrush**, **Chiffchaffs** and a few **Water Pipits** were also present along with some noisy **Ring-necked Parakeets**. A **Daurian Shrike** allowed a couple of the Danes a new WP tick and a couple of **White-breasted Kingfishers** added a bit of colour to proceedings. And, finally, the notorious **Bank Mynas** were easily found with their numbers seemingly augmented from our spring trip to at least twenty birds.



**Above.** Bank Myna, Jahra Farms 13<sup>th</sup> January 2008

And that was that – a good end to our first day where, after checking into our accommodation at Arinza Towers, we walked the short way to Pizza Hut and got amongst it. The waitresses there seemed a little too interested in whether we were single or not whilst our minds were on the task in hand – where were we going to find that elusive Indian Roller?

#### **14<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

After a fitful night's sleep another day dawned and the temperature seemed even colder than the day before. With reports from the local birders of snow in nearby Baghdad we were certainly experiencing some abnormally cold weather.

#### **JAHRA WEST**

Another visit to the site where the Belgians had seen a couple of Indian Rollers on 1<sup>st</sup> January drew another blank and little else was seen to write home about. So it was back to Jahra Farms – not to see the Bank Mynas as we'd seen them the previous day but to try and get perched views of Shikra and also if we were extremely lucky we may even find an Indian Roller.

#### **JAHRA FARMS**

We revisited this site for a couple of hours mid morning but we could not re-find yesterday's Shikra – a female Sparrowhawk was as close as we got! It was very much status quo compared to the previous day and walking around the many subsistence farms provided us with a **Graceful Prinia** in addition to what we had seen yesterday whilst close views of another **Daurian Shrike** were appreciated. We'd arranged via SMS to meet AbdulRahman at the Pivot Fields late morning and, having not been to the site in spring and with recent news of a Little Whimbrel there, we were keen to get amongst and so we left Jahra Farms.

#### **PIVOT FIELDS**

Thankfully the Swedes who had visited Kuwait the week before us had sorted us out with some decent GPS coordinates which made life much easier when finding this place. It is only possible to drive around the fields to the south of the road here (the fields to the north are private) – the entrance gate is at 29°15'57N,

47°45'17E and you need to leave the motorway at 29°16'11N, 47°49'26E to get onto the road that leads to the pivot fields.

So we started driving around the area and what was immediately apparent were the numbers of raptors present – a couple of **Pallid Harriers**, a **Spotted Eagle**, four **Eastern Imperial Eagles** and at least a handful of **Long-legged Buzzards**. If anyone has visited the Bet She'an Valley in northern Israel in winter then there are certainly similarities. We hunted around for the Little Whimbrel but were told by AbdulRahman that numbers of Lapwings were down and the Ruff it were with had disappeared. There were still about fifty **Lapwing** present and scanning through the **Skylarks** and **Water Pipits** failed to produce a *japonicus* Buff-bellied Pipit. A **Caspian Stonechat** was a bonus while other birds seen at the site included twenty **Woodpigeons**, **Desert** and **Isabelline Wheatears**, four **Namaqua Doves**, a handful of **Red-throated Pipits**, a **Daurian Shrike** with **Swallows** and **Pallid Swifts** overhead.

AbdulRahman told us that this was probably the worst he had seen the Pivot Fields this winter and suggested that we go elsewhere. He suggested with the tide being high, heading to Sulaibhikat Bay wouldn't be a bad idea. We made it rather clear to him that Indian Roller was our main target species and he said he would have a think about the best spots to perhaps look for this species...

### **KUWAIT UNIVERSITY**

As we headed closer to Sulaibhikat something didn't feel right. Having our GPS with us whilst following AbdulRahman, he'd evidently decided to take us to the university where an Indian Roller had been seen a week or so ago – though subsequent searches had apparently proved fruitless.

We got out of the car by some tennis courts, stuck our head through the fence and there right in front of us was a rather sedate **Indian Roller** chilling out on the fence posts running away from us at 29°20'15N, 47°54'39E – quality! We really had not expected it to be quite this easy and after following it for an hour or so, as it sallied from the goalposts in the stadium, we filled our boots with a gorgeous **Masked Shrike** and headed towards the reserve at Sulaibhikat.



**Above.** Indian Roller, Kuwait University, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008

## SULAIBHIKAT

The main prize here did not take long to find – the returning adult **Long-tailed Shrike** was present pretty much in the same area we had seen it in the spring – the bushes near the small pool a couple of hundred yards in from the entrance gate. In the warm afternoon light it looked absolutely cracking and, despite having seen it previously, was certainly one of the birds of the trip. A **Daurian Shrike**, several **Spanish Sparrows** and **White-cheeked Bulbuls** also showed well but the odd **Bluethroat** proved far more elusive.



**Above.** Long-tailed Shrike, Sulaibhikat 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008

After doing the passerine thing here, we met up with Brian Foster and drove the short distance west to the shore at 29°19'09N, 47°51'40E. Highlight here, especially for Brian as it was a new Kuwaiti bird for him, was a first-winter **Common Gull!** 130 or so **Crab Plovers** pleased us visitors and the evening light made them look quality whilst a dozen or so **Steppe Gulls** (*barabensis*) provided us larophiles with some interest. The place was also packed full of birds feeding by the sewage outlet and these included **Whiskered Terns**, **Gull-billed Terns** along with lots of **Black-headed** and **Slender-billed Gulls**. Wader wise species included **Lesser Sand Plover** in good numbers amongst commoner species while **Western Reef Herons** and **Greater Flamingos** roosted on the mudflats.

Another quality day in freezing temperatures and after chilling out in our accommodation for an hour or two, we and the Danes headed over to an American Diner nearby and enjoyed some good food and banter.



**Above.** 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Common Gull, Sulaibhikat 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008

### **15<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

For those of who hadn't visited the country last spring, a trip up to Abdaly Farms in the north of the country by the Iraqi border was necessary if they wanted to see the group of Common Babblers that had now been present for a year or so. The drive up was uneventful, probably taking no longer than an hour and a half so putting into perspective how good the roads are and how small the country is.

### **ABDALY FARMS**

Always trust technology is the moral of the story. We had the GPS coordinate 29°57'58N, 47°48'41E from the Swedes and this was almost identical to the place we had seen them last spring. When we got there however it didn't look like the same place so we thought that we/the Swedes had messed up the GPS reading and so we drove around a bit to find a more likely spot to fit our memory. To cut a long story short, we'd come in on a different track and the GPS was right – as soon as we stepped out of the car we found the group of **Common Babblers** and watched them for the next half hour as they moved busily through the low scrub. At least five, probably nine, birds were present. The odd **White-cheeked Bulbul** and **Graceful Prinia** were also here but our attention was distracted when a group of eight **Red-wattled Lapwings** flew over. We soon found them on the deck in an adjacent plot and found a total of thirteen birds – one of the largest counts for Kuwait.

We moved on but still in the Abdaly Farms area to an enclosed farm at 29°22'08N, 46°57'41E – George Gregory had told us in spring that this was a good winter site for Shikra. So the two groups of birders plied out of our 4x4s and set about exploring on foot. It was not long before we'd seen the second **Shikra** of the trip as it flew around the large area of trees – it proved extremely frustrating to get decent views and fleeting glimpses were all that we got despite spending almost a couple of hours here. A **Daurian Shrike**, an *ochruros* **Black Redstart** and three **Robins** were the other highlights here.



**Above.** Common Babbler, Abdaly Farms 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008

#### **SABAH-AL-AHMAD NATURAL RESERVE**

After refueling at the Iraqi border and getting a look at the Iraqi border crossing, we headed back south and stopped off at SAANR. As our visit wasn't planned, getting through the gate required a couple of phone calls but, once that was done, we drove the kilometre or so to the first ridge and parked the car at 29°31'46N, 47°48'48E. We walked to the right of the road and in the first small wadi quickly found a **Persian Wheatear** sheltering from the strong wind. All the troops were assembled and we obtained good views of this lone bird – a regular winter visitor to the area in small numbers – as well as an **Eastern Mourning Wheatear**. Fed up with the wind battering us we decided to head back towards Kuwait City and spend the remaining hours of daylight at the high tide roost at Doha Spit.

#### **DOHA SPIT**

This site (29°22'39N, 47°50'17E) was one of our favourites from the spring trip and once again good numbers of birds were present at high tide – just make sure you view from the car as the birds are rather skittish. Anyway, the highlight was ten **Great Black-headed Gulls** including one adult in full breeding kit. Other large white-headed gulls provided us to test what we thought we knew – fortunately we didn't come out too badly with most birds being **Steppe Gulls** (*barabensis*) with smaller numbers of **Caspian Gulls**. Waders were packed in roosting and amongst the commoner species we found fifty **Broad-billed Sandpipers**, half a dozen **Terek Sandpipers** and at least 500 **Lesser Sand Plovers**.

The evening was rounded off again with a Pizza Hut; the waitresses once again being rather over-friendly.

#### **16<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

The last few days had been much colder than we'd anticipated and today was no exception. So, after a little bit of a lie in considering the first site was just around the corner from our accommodation, we headed to the sports ground at Salmiya for some real rough birding.

#### **SALMIYA SPORTS GROUND**

Fortunately the target was quickly seen – **Crested Myna** – three birds as they sat on the streetlights and amenities within the sports ground at 29°20'23N, 48°05'19E. These birds had been reported previously as

White-vented Mynas but, after a little bit of research, we correctly identified them for what it's worth as Crested Mynas. They are currently not on the Kuwaiti list but do seem to be present within the city – we saw another individual at the University.

### GREEN ISLAND

This site juts out along the sea front in Kuwait City and is covered in trees and is constantly watered thus attracting a few birds – again we quite enjoyed this place when we visited in April. It is the place to see **Red-vented Bulbul** and again we found this species easy to find, particularly in the trees just beyond the entrance gate where we found at least half a dozen birds. It is also one of the best sites to see the enigmatic and highly prized Grey Hypocolius; presumably the many fruiting trees attract this species to the area. Though this species had been seen here in the last couple of weeks we failed to find it – in fact, a couple of the team decided to stake the site out all day as this was the species they most wanted to see. Unfortunately their valiant effort ended in failure and near hypothermia with only a **Barred Warbler** as sparse consolation! We did manage to see a really pallid looking first-winter **Daurian Shrike**, a **White-breasted Kingfisher** and lots of **White-checked Bulbuls**.

### KUWAIT UNIVERSITY

A revisit to the **Indian Roller** provided us with further views of this vagrant bird – although we tried to approach it, it was extremely skittish and would move off before we could get close. Once again it was seen sallying from the goalposts and the nearby tennis courts and the **Masked Shrike** from a couple of days ago was still around. The bare ground opposite the tennis courts, adjacent to the water tower, provided us with some excellent views of a lone **Red-wattled Lapwing**.



**Above.** Red-wattled Lapwing, Kuwait University 16<sup>th</sup> January 2008

### JAHRA EAST

A site we were rather familiar with from the last trip – probably the best place in spring to see Basra Reed Warbler. Anyway, we remembered our way there (the outfall and end of the track is at 29°21'22N, 47°43'44E) but unfortunately the way in was a little bit on the wet side and the Brits had to help push the Danes out of a little bit of trouble. Problem solved and we were on our way – a pristine male **Citrine Wagtail** amongst the many **White Wagtails** by the outfall was found on arrival. The whole area was full of birdlife and it wasn't long before we met another resident Kuwaiti birder Rashed – he showed us around,

expertly driving across the soft marsh, while we thanked him for originally finding the Purple Sunbirds and the Indian Roller. Top bloke!

A couple of **White-winged Black Terns** in full summer plumage were a welcome surprise as was a **Steppe Grey Shrike**. An **Eastern Imperial Eagle** and four **Spotted Eagles** provided us with quality views side by side whilst **Pallid Swifts**, **Swallows** and **House Martins** were also flying around. A **Squacco Heron** was flushed at close range from the reedbed as were four **Jack Snipe** and over twenty **Common Snipe** while a large flock of **Lesser Short-toed Larks** were seen on the saltmarsh. Rashed then showed us an easier way out and we were off again to the Pivot Fields.

### **PIVOT FIELDS**

We arrived here mid afternoon in the vain hope that the Little Whimbrel may have returned. It was not to be but we did manage to see a couple of **Curlews** in amongst the **Lapwing** flock. We met up with Brian Foster and he showed us a rather large crocodile in a reed fringed pool – obviously a **Cattle Egret** roost site with lots of this species present along with a couple of **Great White Egrets** and five or so **Little Egrets**. Driving around the fields we saw three **Namaqua Doves**, a couple of **Eastern Imperial and Spotted Eagles** and several **Long-legged Buzzards** whilst a **Greenshank** and three **Green Sandpipers** were new for the trip. As dusk descended on us, the distant wood was alive with hundreds of *lineatus* **Black Kites** coming in to roost; a fitting end to another good day in the field.

People's tastes were split this evening, some preferring to go for the pure junk food option of KFC, others another Pizza Hut visit whilst those wanting something pseudo-healthy opted for a foot long Subway with extra mayonnaise and whatever else they decided to whack on.

### **17<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

The only species that we'd not seen that we expected to on this trip to date was Grey Hypocolius. Despite the complete failure yesterday we decided to give Green Island another dawn raid.

### **GREEN ISLAND**

Arriving here slightly earlier than yesterday, we initially felt a sense of deja-vu looking forlornly at each bastard bulbul in the hope that it wouldn't be one. After a little bit of walking around, we were in luck – a flock of twenty **Grey Hypocolius** had flown in 'Waxwing-style' to the bushes by the entrance gate and were gorging themselves on the fruiting trees. A quality site and certainly avenging the previous day's failure. A couple of **Red-vented Bulbuls** were once again seen.

### **SABAH-AL-AHMAD NATURAL RESERVE**

With all of our target species safely seen, the remainder of the trip was a little bit more relaxed. Considering the freezing conditions and the Purple Sunbirds that had presumably been pushed over from Iran, the numerous wadis within the ridge within the SAANR deserved some scrutiny in the remote hope of a Hume's Wheatear. So for the rest of the day this is exactly what we did. By driving north and south of the main track along the ridge (either side of 29°31'46N, 47°48'48E), dropping people off at various points, we managed to cover a fair few kilometres but alas there were no Hume's Wheatears!

We did see some good birds though including perhaps a peak Kuwaiti count of five **Persian Wheatears**, about thirty **Eastern Mourning Wheatears**, four **Finsch's Wheatears**, a handful of **Desert Wheatears**, at least seven **Asian Desert Warblers**, a couple of **Steppe Grey Shrikes** and ten **Trumpeter Finches** – the latter at 29°31'24N, 47°47'43E and a rare species in Kuwait. Proceedings were interrupted mid afternoon as the Danes had managed to find a **Macqueen's Bustard** at 29°33'25N, 47°45'11E. We managed to get some distant views of this bird before it headed off over the brow, later finding it again where we got some slightly better views. A **Bonelli's Eagle** over this area was certainly noteworthy whilst a couple of **Isabelline Wheatears** and **Bar-tailed Larks** were also seen. Another good day in the field.



**Above.** Persian Wheatear, SAANR 17<sup>th</sup> January 2008

**18<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

Today was to be a day spent around Kuwait City satisfying the larophiles within the group and also revisiting sites to get better views of the species that we had come out here to see.



**Above.** 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Steppe Gull, Green Island 18<sup>th</sup> January 2008

### GREEN ISLAND

Our third early morning at this place and, like yesterday, we were in luck with Grey Hypocolius – not the spectacular flock like yesterday with just a single pair of birds today feasting on the fruiting trees. Wandering around the area we located the **Daurian Shrike** from a couple of days ago along with a handful of **Red-vented Bulbuls** while a walk along the shore between the island and the car park provided some close views of a couple of adult **Heuglin's Gulls** along with half a dozen **Steppe Gulls**.

### SHUWAIKH PORT

Heading west from Green Island, this fishing port held a couple of small gulls but the lack of activity with it being a Friday (a weekend day in the Muslim week) meant our quest for large white-headed gulls here was a failure.

### KUWAIT UNIVERSITY

A third trip to see the star bird, the **Indian Roller**, once again gave us some decent views of the bird but like the previous visits remained skittish and wary of close approach. The **Red-wattled Lapwing** showed well again on the bare ground by the water tower and the **Masked Shrike** sallied from the adjacent line of trees by the tennis courts. A couple of **House Crows** were a new bird for the trip as they perched on the massive radio mast by the stadium. To illustrate that Kuwait is full of introduced species, walking around the University grounds gave us another **Red-vented Bulbul** – our first away from the Green Island stronghold – while a **Crested Myna** was a surprise in the trees by the tennis courts.

### SULAIBHIKAT BAY

We headed back to the area around the outfall (29°19'09N, 47°51'40E) that we'd last visited four days previously. The tide was well out on this visit but for some unknown reason large numbers of **Crab Plovers** were feeding on the mud right beside the car park and showing extremely well. Added to this about 150 large white-headed gulls were present with a 50/50 split between **Heuglin's** and **Steppe Gulls**, a couple of adult **Caspian Gulls** and one first-winter *fuscus* **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. A hundred or so **Lesser Sand Plovers** were scanned for Greaters but with no luck while **Western Reef Herons**, **Greater Flamingos**, **Gull-billed Terns** and **Avocets** were present in decent numbers. After an extended stay here and chatting to Mike Pope, we headed off to spend the remainder of the afternoon at Jahra Farms.



Above. Crab Plover, Sulaibhikat 18<sup>th</sup> January 2008

### JAHRA FARMS

Success at last! After half an hour or so of searching the area we managed to locate the male **Shikra** perched in a tree. Although views were partly obscured and it was back on for most of the time, very satisfactory views were had until it flew out of the tree and circled the area before we lost it behind some buildings. Whilst looking for the bird again, we saw a dozen **Bank Mynas**, three **Daurian Shrikes** along with commoner species such as **Cattle Egrets**, **Water Pipits** and **Chiffchaffs**. Having arranged to meet the Danes, Brian Foster and Pekka Fagel at Jahra East – they'd spent the day at Al Abraq where the highlight was a **Ring Ouzel** – we headed off in that direction.



**Above.** Daurian Shrike, Jahra Farms 18<sup>th</sup> January 2008

### JAHRA EAST

We arrived at Jahra East slightly later than we'd anticipated by which time it was on the cusp of darkness. Nevertheless while chatting about the day's events seven **Great White Egrets** flew in to roost and a couple of **Marsh Harriers** quartered the reedbed.

Brian and Pekka then drove us into Kuwait City to their favourite Indian restaurant – a quality meal, a lot of banter and a welcome change from the fast food outlets we'd been frequenting near our accommodation all the other evenings.

### **19<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

Today was to be our last day of birding in Kuwait so we wanted to make the most of it. With not everyone seeing the Shikra perched yesterday we all headed off first thing to Jahra Farms to see whether we could do any better than yesterday.

### JAHRA FARMS

All of our previous Shikra sightings here had been in the afternoon and, after drawing a blank again this morning, we perhaps speculated that afternoons were best and it may spend the morning away from this site. Who knows in reality but we didn't see it. A showy **Bluethroat** was some compensation as it fed in one of the cultivated plots while a **Daurian Shrike** once again proved that Kuwait is by far and away the best place to see this species within the Western Palearctic. **Bank** and **Common Mynas** were present again

in good numbers while raucous **Rose-ringed Parakeets** made their presence in the area felt. Having felt like we were flogging a dead horse we headed out of the city and north the short distance to the SAANR.

#### SABAH-AL-AHMAD NATURAL RESERVE

We spent a lot of our time walking along the ride to the south of the main track a couple of days ago. With this in mind we felt a concerted effort to the north of the track was needed just to make sure we hadn't bypassed a Hume's Wheatear. So a good couple of hours were spent walking along the ridge and in the wadis to the north of the main track (from 29°31'46N, 47°48'48E) but again it was to no avail. The odd **Persian Wheatear** was seen, and added to the total a couple of days ago and the two the Swedes saw elsewhere in the reserve, a conservative count would show there to be nine birds wintering in the SAANR – easily a Kuwaiti record.

**Eastern Mourning Wheatears** seemed to be reduced in numbers compared to our previous visit, perhaps the slightly warmer temperatures had made them disperse. **Steppe Grey Shrikes** were seen in small numbers as were **Finsch's Wheatears** while in the desert areas **Isabelline** and **Desert Wheatears** were quite common. Similar to a couple of days ago the Danes interrupted our search of the ridge – although in truth we'd pretty much given up the ghost ourselves – as they had located a handful of **Dunn's Larks** within the reserve 29°33'22N, 47°48'40E. As we headed towards these birds we flushed a couple of **Macqueen's Bustards** from beside the track and while we gained excellent flight views they then landed distantly and had the cheek to walk over a ridge never to be seen again. We managed to catch up with the Dunn's Larks, favouring an area of low vegetation by the helipad, in amongst larger numbers of **Bar-tailed Larks**. **Crested Lark** were common here while singles of **Hoopoe Lark** and **Tawny Pipit** were also seen.

#### SULAIBHIKAT

It was now mid afternoon and we had our final check of the mudflats of Kuwait Bay viewing from the usual area at 29°19'09N, 47°51'40E as well as an area just to the east of the funfair. A handful of **Marsh Sandpipers** provided us with a new bird for the trip while we got some excellent views of thirty **Terek Sandpipers** and lots of **Lesser Sand Plovers**. **Broad-billed Sandpipers** were present along with large numbers of **Dunlin** while five hundred **Greater Flamingos** created a pink glow on the horizon in the fading light. One of our team in particular, who shall remain nameless, was rather keen on seeing some purple chickens before we headed home so with this in mind our last bit of Kuwaiti birding would be done at South Doha.

#### SOUTH DOHA NATURE RESERVE

On our previous trip this place (29°19'37N, 47°47'33E) was stinking, mosquito infested and reeds blocking your views of the pool. So it was understandable to have put this visit off right until last knock-ins on the final evening. It was, however, a pleasant surprise to find a lack of insects and a clear view of the pool – and we quickly located a *seistanicus* **Purple Gallinule**. We saw at total of three birds here before the light went while on arrival back at the car, a **Bluethroat** was attracted to the car's lights and was feeding into darkness.

As this was our final evening we headed over to the American Diner for a good bit of food before our early morning flight home. As with every other evening us and the Danes had some good banter, normally surrounding contentious Allen's Gallinules and Pied Crows in Spain.

#### **20<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

It was an early start but getting to and through the airport was hassle free. We arrived back in London early afternoon and on time – us Brits made our way home whilst the Danes continued up to Norfolk for an extra day of holiday and succeeded in seeing the long staying White-crowned Sparrow. So all in all another highly successful and enjoyable Kuwaiti birding experience.

## Species Notes

**Shikra** – along with Indian Roller this is the winter Western Palearctic speciality of Kuwait. Do note that not every accipiter you see is a Shikra – Sparrowhawk is much more common and widespread. Nevertheless there is a real possibility of seeing this species with a little bit of luck and perseverance. We had sightings of two different birds – a long-staying male at Jahra Farms that we noted on a couple of our visits (park at 29°21'04N, 47°40'27E and explore the area of farms) and a further individual at Abdaly (29°22'08N, 46°57'41E). Other sites that may be worth checking for this species include Al Abraq where one was seen in early spring 2007 and the Pivot Fields where the Belgians located one in December 2007. The subspecies of Shikra that occurs in Kuwait is the larger Iranian race *cenchroides*.

**Macqueen's Bustard** – the 2007/2008 winter has been an exceptional one for this species in Kuwait and our frequency of observations probably doesn't reflect the true rarity of the species within the country. We had three sightings of birds within the SAANR – one at 29°33'25N, 47°45'11E and a further two on the sandy plateau near the main ridge to the south-east of the helipad. The Belgian group located five birds in the SAANR on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007 while presumably the same five birds were seen by the Swedish group at 29°33'33N, 47°44'55E on 26<sup>th</sup> December.

**Crab Plover** – a common winter visitor to the mudflats of Kuwait Bay and a highlight of the week's birding. In April 2007 the largest flock we saw was six birds at Doha spit but this was easily eclipsed with flocks of over 100 regularly encountered in Kuwait Bay. The best place to look was just to the west of Sulaibhikat reserve by the outfall from the car park at 29°19'09N, 47°51'40E with Doha Spit (29°22'39N, 47°50'17E) being good at high tide. Youngsters could still be seen begging for food from their parents.

**Lesser Sand Plover** – although Kuwait is the only reliable country to see this species within the Western Palearctic, it is very common in Kuwait Bay (both in winter and spring) and should be found in good numbers at places such as Sulaibhikat, Jahra East and Doha Spit.

**Red-wattled Lapwing** – an out of range bird walked around the bare ground by the water tower within the confines of Kuwait University near 29°20'15N, 47°54'39E. However the best site for this species in Kuwait is undoubtedly the arid fields of Abdaly Farms. On both of our visits we have seen them from the Babbler site at 29°57'58N, 47°48'41E with three on our April trip and an unprecedented flock of thirteen birds on this trip presumably pushed down from Iraq due to the cold weather.

**Gulls** – probably the best place to obtain views of gulls in Kuwait is from the car park in Sulaibhikat at 29°19'09N, 47°51'40E. On our first visit here on 14<sup>th</sup> January we found a first-winter **Common Gull** that was a new Kuwaiti bird for Brian Foster. A large proportion of the gulls here are *barabensis* (**Steppe Gull**) with smaller numbers of *heuglini* (**Heuglin's Gull**) and *cachinnans* (**Caspian Gull**). From our experience an incoming tide is probably best while even when the tide is low, a roost of gulls was present on the mudflats using the outflow as a place to bathe. The roost at Doha Spit (29°22'39N, 47°50'17E) was the best site to find **Great Black-headed Gulls** on both our spring and winter visits.

**Indian Roller** – the most difficult of the winter specialities in Kuwait. There are rarely more than a handful of records off this species each year and the timing of our visit was extremely fortunate in that 3 birds had been seen the previous week. 2 of these were only seen by Belgian birders on one date at Jahra West (29°21'09N, 47°39'22E) but the other bird, found on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007, remained throughout our visit at the University in Kuwait City where it favoured the goalposts in the football stadium (29°20'15N, 47°54'39E). It would be a very difficult species to target finding as historic records are from various sites (per George Gregory's book) but Jahra Farms seems to have the best track record.

**Dunn's Lark** – in April 2007 we located half a dozen birds of this species in the SAANR including two recently fledged young. Although we couldn't locate any in the exact area where we had seen them in the spring, five birds were seen in the short vegetation adjacent to the helipad at 29°33'22N, 47°48'40E. The key to finding this species, as we have learnt in both Kuwait and Mauritania, is to find the correct habitat.

**Red-vented Bulbul** – easily seen amongst the White-cheeked Bulbuls on Green Island. The best areas to check are the trees immediately beyond the entrance gate. We also found one bird at Kuwait University while walking around looking for the Indian Roller – this bird appeared to be on territory and was the first bird of this species we had seen in Kuwait away from the Green Island stronghold.

**Grey Hypocolius** – the most reliable place to see this quality species in Kuwait is Green Island. The fruiting trees inside the entrance gate were where we saw all of our birds – a flock of twenty one morning followed the next morning by a pair. Although the birds probably do not roost here (as we saw the flock of twenty fly in), they seemed reliable within the first hour or so of daylight. A couple of weeks previously, birds had been visiting Rashed Al Hajji's garden but, by the time of our visit, the food source had diminished and the birds had moved on. Our spring trip in 2007 suggested that this species can be found virtually anywhere as a migrant with our sightings being at Sulaibhikat and SAANR.

**Persian Wheatear** – formerly Red-tailed Wheatear of the race *chrysopygia*; with both sexes alike. A regular winter visitor in small numbers to the ridge in the SAANR where a conservative estimate using our counts and the Swedes observations revealed nine birds present. One bird could be easily found in the small wadis either side of the track at 29°31'46N, 47°48'48E during our three visits to the reserve. Walking along this ridge provided surprisingly frequent sightings of this restricted range species and, from our spring trip speaking to Pekka Fagel, another favoured wadi in the reserve in previous winters for this species is the one at 29°31'24N, 47°47'43E.

**Common Babbler** – a small flock of birds, augmented by the successful breeding of the species in 2007, seems to have established itself in a dry scrub area of Abdaly Farms at 29°57'58N, 47°48'41E. Having seen four birds in April 2007, we saw potentially up to nine birds here in January 2008 as they vocally moved through the area.

**Purple Sunbird** – only the week before we arrived, Rashed Al Hajji found this Western Palearctic first in a scattered area of Lycidium and tamarisk bushes adjacent to the power station at Subiyah at 29°33'99N, 48°08'20E. We observed at least two males on 13<sup>th</sup> January but overgrazing of the area by camels in early February 2008 apparently has moved the birds on.

**Long-tailed Shrike** – the returning male showed extremely well at Sulaibhikat NR. It favoured the same area as it did in spring 2007 – the area of small bushes to the right of the path between the small reedy pool and the back wall of the reserve a couple of hundred yards in from the entrance gate.

**Bank Myna** – this species is easily found at Jahra Farms and there seemed to be far more on this trip than the one in spring, presumably indicating breeding success. The well they use to breed in can be found at 29°20'54N, 47°40'25E while birds were regularly encountered in the fields near the mosque car park at 29°21'04N, 47°40'27E. An additional site for this species (that we did not visit – we'd had enough of them at Jahra Farms to last a lifetime!) is the parking lot by Kuwait Towers in Kuwait City.

**Crested Myna** – perhaps the next species of introduced myna to colonize Kuwait. Although prior to our visit we had been told that the birds were White-vented Mynas, we were rather unsure when we laid eyes on these birds and a little bit of research revealed they were in fact Crested Mynas (already Category C on the Portuguese list). We saw birds at Salmiya Sports Ground at 29°20'23N, 48°05'19E and also found a bird of this species at the university while looking for the Indian Roller near 29°20'15N, 47°54'39E.

### Species List

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*  
Teal *Anas crecca*  
Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*  
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*  
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*  
Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis schistacea*  
Great White Egret *Egretta alba*  
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*  
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*  
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*  
Black Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*  
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*  
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*  
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*  
Shikra *Accipiter badius*  
Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*  
Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*  
Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*  
Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*  
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*  
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*  
Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio seistanicus*  
Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*  
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*  
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*  
Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*  
Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*  
Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*  
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*  
Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*  
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*  
Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*  
Red-wattled Lapwing *Hoplopterus indicus*  
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*  
Sanderling *Calidris alba*  
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*  
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*  
Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*  
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*  
Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*  
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*  
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*  
Curlew *Numenius arquata*  
Redshank *Tringa totanus*  
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*  
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*  
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*  
Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*  
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*  
Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*  
Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*  
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*  
Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*  
Common Gull *Larus canus*

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus*  
Heuglin's Gull *Larus (fuscus) heuglini*  
Steppe Gull *Larus (cachinnans) barabensis*  
Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*  
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*  
Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*  
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*  
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*  
Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*  
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*  
Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*  
Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*  
Little Owl *Athene noctua*  
Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*  
White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*  
Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*  
Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunnii*  
Bar-tailed Lark *Ammomanes cincturus*  
Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*  
Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*  
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*  
Skylark *Alauda arvensis*  
Swallow *Hirundo rustica*  
House Martin *Delichon urbica*  
Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*  
Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*  
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*  
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*  
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*  
White-cheeked Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*  
Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*  
Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*  
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*  
Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*  
European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*  
Caspian Stonechat *Saxicola (maura) variegata*  
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*  
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*  
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*  
Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii*  
Persian Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*  
Eastern Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens persica*  
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*  
Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*  
Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*  
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*  
Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*  
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*  
Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*  
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*  
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*  
Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus*  
Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*  
Daurian Shrike *Lanius isabellinus isabellinus*  
Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*  
Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris*

**Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus*  
**Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis*  
**Bank Myna** *Acridotheres ginginianus*  
**(Crested Myna** *Acridotheres cristatellus*)  
**House Crow** *Corvus splendens*  
**Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus*  
**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*  
**Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*