

Kuwait

12–20 April 2017

Participants

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Bank Myna

Leaders Pekka Fagel, Peter Lansdown and Bill Blake

Day 1 Peter and I met most of the group at London Heathrow Airport; three others travelled from Luxembourg. We left a cool UK behind on our six-hour flight to Kuwait.

Day 2 We landed at Kuwait International Airport shortly after 06.00 local time which is two hours ahead of BST; once we had obtained our free Kuwaiti visas we negotiated immigration and security before meeting up with our local guide, Pekka Fagel, a Finn by birth but now resident in Kuwait, plus Guy, Jean and Guy who had landed earlier from Luxembourg. Pekka took Peter and I to the car hire desk where we completed the paperwork and picked up our hire vehicles, two Mitsubishi Pajeros V6 4WD which are mid-size SUVs. The airport is situated in Farwaniya, about ten miles south of Kuwait City; we followed Pekka, in his own car, to our hotel in the city, the Kuwait Continental Hotel, which was to be our base for the tour. Although it was still early we were able to book in, drop our luggage, freshen up and change. We followed Pekka to our first site, Green Island. It is not actually an island but an artificially-constructed peninsula with an area of parkland with plenty of cover for migrants. We were hoping to find *Hypocolius* here but drew a blank. We did see Western Reef-egret (dark morph), Black-headed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Pallid Swift, European Bee-eater, Tree Pipit, White-eared Bulbul and Pied Wheatear plus Eurasian Collared-dove, Laughing Dove and House Sparrow, all of which would become daily birds. Also seen were Common Myna, Red-vented Bulbul and Rüppell's Weaver, all of which are non-indigenous to Kuwait but are now accepted on the Kuwaiti list and are therefore countable for Western Palearctic listers; Kuwait is the only place the two latter species occur in the Western Palearctic. Next on the agenda was a visit to Sulaibikhat Bay, where we used various vantage points and had lunch at a McDonalds. The bay was teeming with herons, waders and gulls: Squacco Herons, Cattle Egrets and Little Egrets were accompanied by larger numbers of Great Egrets and many Grey Herons whilst two groups of Greater Flamingos made up a total of 44 birds. The only 'duck' present was a single Common Shelduck and the only raptors seen were Western Marsh-harrier and Common Kestrel. Good numbers of Common Ringed Plovers, Black-

bellied (Grey) Plovers, Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers and Bar-tailed Godwits were supported by lesser numbers of Eurasian Oystercatchers, Whimbrels, Eurasian Curlews and Terek Sandpipers plus a few Kentish Plovers, Sanderlings, Dunlins, Spotted and Common Redshanks, Common Greenshanks, Marsh Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones; David picked out a single Temminck's Stint amongst the many Little Stints. Slender-billed Gulls, some beautifully pink-flushed, were the commonest gull but there were a few Black-headed Gulls and a single sub-adult Lesser Black-backed (Heuglin's) Gull was also present. Little Terns, two Gull-billed Terns, four Caspian Terns and a single Lesser Crested Tern were seen plus a couple of White-throated Kingfishers, some flyover Western Yellow Wagtails and a single Whinchat. Peter was alone in seeing and hearing a Corn Bunting so it is not recorded in the checklist as no single-observer records are entered. Two Ortolan Buntings in pristine spring plumage posing on a chain-link fence attracted the photographers in the group.

Our final destination of the day was Jahra Pools Reserve, a fenced nature reserve consisting of a sewage outfall with open, shallow pools and extensive beds of Phragmites reed plus scattered Tamarisk thickets and salt marshes. It is the only significant area of non-marine wetland in the country and it attracts a large variety of migrants as well as wintering and breeding birds; access is by permit only. The reserve's big prize is Afghan Babbler, which has recently been found breeding here; it is a grey-brown, long-tailed bird with well marked upperparts. A pair initially led us a merry dance but with patience and a little bit of luck we eventually had good views of this elusive bird when the male perched in the open on a bare shrub and sang its fluty song. Once considered a race of Common Babbler it has a heavier bill and dark streaks on the breast and sides and a different song. By slowly driving the tracks between reedbeds we had good views of Spotted Crakes and a Little Crake as they fed in the pools at the base of the reeds, seemingly unconcerned by our vehicles, while Grey-headed Swamphens patrolled the larger pools. Other birds seen were a single Great Cormorant, Squacco Herons and singles of Eurasian Griffon, Montagu's Harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Greater Spotted Eagle, Common (Steppe) Buzzard and Common Kestrel. The shallow pools held Eurasian Moorhens, Black-winged Stilts, Kentish Plovers, four White-tailed Lapwings, Little Stints, nine Ruff, at least four Common Snipe, two Black-tailed Godwits and Marsh, Green, Wood and Common Sandpipers. A big surprise was a skua that came from behind us and showed off its 'spoons' as it banked to land on the water in front of us – a superb pale phase Pomarine Jaeger. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters perched in a dead tree and the constant metallic, rattling trill of Graceful Prinias emanated from the Tamarisk thickets; a singing Clamorous Reed-warbler remained hidden in the reed-beds whilst a few Red-rumped Swallows mixed with Eurasian Swallows coming in to roost in the reeds. Common Swift, Pied Wheatear and a Woodchat Shrike completed the day's list. Driving back into Kuwait City in the heavy, fast moving traffic was an experience; dinner was a tasty Indian buffet after which Peter called the log.

Day 3 Breakfast was at 06.30 and was a mix of English/Continental and Indian: cereal, fruit juice, omelette with turkey sausages and coffee seemed to be the most popular mix. Today we headed north out of the city and once we had negotiated the frantic traffic of the city roads the driving was easy on surprisingly un-busy roads. We passed a sign that read "God Bless American Troops" before turning off the highway to our first stop of the day, Mutla'a Ranch. This is an oasis of green in an otherwise featureless desert, apart from the electricity pylons, and when conditions are favourable it can be humming with migrants. We had been told there was a Black Scrub-robin, a Kuwaiti rarity, here but an initial search failed to locate it and the trees and bushes seemed fairly quiet. As our search continued it became apparent that the trees were not empty but did contain an assortment of migrants. Over the next hour or so new birds for the trip were Eurasian Hoopoe, Red-throated Pipit, Common Redstart, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Barred Warbler (including a fine male), Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Isabelline and Masked Shrikes, Spanish Sparrow and Chestnut-shouldered Petronia. Best of the bunch was a group of five Hypocolius that showed well and was a much-wanted species for most of the group. The Black Scrub-robin was seen briefly by just a few but promptly vanished before anyone else could see it. Despite more searching and waiting the bird remained unseen so we decided it was time to leave; Hamish hung back as we

started to walk away and saw the bird. He called us back and we eventually had excellent views of this bird on the ground as it held its tail straight up flicking it to show off the broad white tips to the graduated tail and narrow white tips to the undertail coverts. It was starting to get very warm but feeling very pleased with ourselves we headed back towards the city and had an early lunch at a Burger King; having cooled off in the air-conditioned restaurant we made our way to Sulaibikhat Bay again to check through the wader flocks. We saw much the same as yesterday but new birds were a large flock of '*pamirensis*' Lesser Sand-plovers (Frank counted 237), most resplendent in full summer plumage, a few Broad-billed Sandpipers and a single first-year Caspian Gull; also here was a stunning full summer male Pied Wheatear.

It was now very hot indeed and with the mercury pushing 48°C and a dust storm brewing we made our way to Jahra Farms, an area of traditional commercial and subsistence farms situated in the centre of Jahra. This is the most regular site for Bank Myna in Kuwait, another non-indigenous species that is on the Western Palearctic list. We found at least six birds and watched young birds being fed by adults. Ring-necked Parakeet and Isabelline and Red-tailed Shrikes were also seen here. We ended the day by revisiting the Jahra Pools Reserve and spent a pleasant late afternoon with the day's heat subsiding; we saw more Spotted and Little Crakes and trip ticks here were Little Grebe, a single Glossy Ibis, a drake Gadwall, a pair of Mallards, at least seven Garganey, six Northern Shovelers, 12 or more Ferruginous Ducks and Common Coot plus a Marbled Duck that was seen briefly on the pool by Frank and Mick before it flew off. Although breeding as close as the Basra Marshes in southern Iraq, Marbled Duck is a very rare vagrant to Kuwait and as such Pekka made a few phone calls to alert some Kuwaiti listers. Sadly the duck did not return to the pool but a few Kuwaiti birders had gathered to search for it. Bank Swallows (Sand Martins) and Common House-martins were also new here and Clamorous Reed Warbler was only heard again. We drove back to our hotel for a shower, another tasty Indian buffet and the log call.

Day 4 Looking out from the restaurant as we ate breakfast we could see that the dust storm had not blown itself out as Pekka had suggested it might. We headed north again leaving the city behind; once out of the city the dust storm proved to be much worse than it appeared from our restaurant with sand being blown across the roads and visibility very poor at times. We were aiming for Abdaly Farms close to the border with Iraq but were wondering if we would be able to get out of our vehicles to do some birding. Thankfully just before we arrived we either passed the storm or it blew itself out, and we flushed some Crested Larks from the side of the road as we drove past. Soon after we walked through the gates we heard the fluty calls of Afghan Babbler and we had various views of at least five birds. Two more trip ticks were a Namaqua Dove that posed on wires and a Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin that mimicked its black cousin's tail-movements as it scuttled around on the ground; I found a young Long-eared Hedgehog that should have been underground. Moving on we continued northwards before turning off into a 'green' patch of desert to look for the Red-wattled Lapwings that had bred here at Sanam Farm. We eventually picked out two distant birds and decided to drive slowly towards them; some of the people in the first vehicle saw one of the birds well before it crouched down and disappeared from view. When the other vehicles arrived the bird had vanished and despite much searching and driving all over the area we did not re-find the birds. The heads of Golden Spiny-tailed Lizards (an Agamid) sticking out of their burrows caused a few false alarms and the Luxembourgers found a Long-legged Buzzard resting on the ground before we left the area. Our next stop was at the Rawdatain Bottling Plant, which is ringed by Acacia trees and bushes and can attract migrants; we walked around the plant seeing a Eurasian Hoopoe, a Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin, a Spotted Flycatcher and some Willow Warblers.

Lunch was taken at the Kuwaiti equivalent of a transport café where the food was surprisingly good with a choice of chicken and rice or omelette with chapatis; no-one suffered any ill effects afterwards. As we left, Vince found a Masked Shrike in a patch of reeds behind the café. We drove back to the city and visited Jahra East Outfall where new birds were European Roller, Northern Wheatear and Southern Grey Shrike of the race '*aucheri*'. Other birds seen included Great Cormorant, Curlew

Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Terek Sandpiper, Slender-billed Gull, Gull-billed, Caspian and Lesser Crested Terns, Western Yellow Wagtail, Pied Wheatear, Graceful Prinia and Isabelline Shrike but Savi's Warbler and Great Reed Warbler were only heard. Then it was back to our hotel for another tasty Indian buffet and the log call before sleep beckoned.

Day 5 After breakfast we headed south-west on the main highway towards the border with Saudi Arabia; in the middle of nowhere our only Black Kite of the trip flew over our vehicles. We turned north-west on the Al Dubdiba Road towards the border with Iraq then we left the road and headed across the desert where, after driving on the sand for several kilometres, we came upon Al Abraa, another green oasis in the desert. Yesterday's dust storm had blown itself out, the temperature was a very pleasant 24°C and the morning had a good feel to it with overnight weather suggesting a fall of migrants. After just a few minutes of walking the trees, bushes and small fields it became apparent there had indeed been a good fall and we spent an amazing morning birding the area.

Our first White-throated Robins showed really well and were very popular with everyone and many photographs were taken; by the end of the day we had seen at least seven of these beautiful birds. Eurasian Penduline-tits called overhead but remained unseen whilst a single Hypocolius, an Eastern Orphee Warbler, several Red-backed Shrikes and three male Black-headed Buntings showed very well; an uncooperative warbler eventually gave itself up but it was just a European Reed Warbler. Peter picked out a Hume's Whitethroat working its way along a line of Acacias and it eventually showed well, showing less contrast between the head, nape and back colour and a less obvious black mask than the Lesser Whitethroats present. Frank then spotted one of the prizes of the morning when he saw a large *Acrocephalus* warbler with a long dagger-like bill, and a strong head pattern - a Basra Reed Warbler that Frank managed to put his scope on for all to see. We came across an uprooted bush that we christened the 'magic bush' as it held an amazing selection of *Sylvia* warblers; because the bush was more or less dead and had very few leaves on it combined with the fact that some of the birds were obviously exhausted and hardly moved meant that the warblers showed really well even through telescopes. Pick of the bunch in the magic bush was a pair of Ménétries's Warblers that were perched low down and hardly moved at all; other *Sylvia* warblers in the bush at one time or another were Barred Warbler, Eastern Orphee Warbler, Common and Lesser Whitethroats and Blackcap. Add to these a showy Icterine Warbler, an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and Willow Warblers and it really was a magic bush. A search through some likely-looking habitat for Upcher's Warbler proved unsuccessful but a European Turtle-dove, a European Roller and a Southern Grey Shrike of the form '*pallidirostris*', sometimes called Steppe Grey Shrike, were seen by some of the group. Other birds seen on this memorable morning included Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Swallow, Red-rumped Swallow, Common House-martin, Western Yellow Wagtail, Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin, Common Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher, Isabelline, Red-tailed and Masked Shrikes and Ortolan Bunting - and all this whilst the liquid calls of European Bee-eaters provided a background sound track as they flew overhead.

After some liquid refreshment back at the vehicles and some gentle rain had finished we set off on foot again; Vince had found another Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and close by Peter and Frank spotted a rather brown *Phylloscopus* warbler with a well-marked white supercillium and a short primary projection - a Mountain Chiffchaff that most people had some kind of view of. Next, Hamish found a female flycatcher which close scrutiny confirmed was a Semicollared Flycatcher. Sadly we had to leave this wonderful place and we headed back across the desert to the road, on joining the road we flushed a pratincole; a white trailing edge to the secondaries and a large amount of red at the base of the bill made it a Collared Pratincole. We drove into Jahra for a late lunch at a KFC after which we revisited Jahra Pools. Our only new birds here were Water Rail and Great Reed Warbler, both of which were only heard, while Savi's Warbler and Great and Clamorous Reed Warblers were heard again and a Little Bittern was seen only by Peter. The usual mix of herons, waders, gulls and terns was seen plus Greater Flamingo, Western Marsh-harrier, Montagu's Harrier, two Greater Spotted Eagles, Spotted and Little Crakes, Grey-headed Swamphen, fourteen more Collared Pratincoles,

Common Swift, White-throated Kingfisher, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, European Roller, Red-throated Pipit, Western Yellow Wagtail, Pied Wheatear and Graceful Prinia. There was no Indian buffet tonight so we ordered from the restaurant menus.

Day 6 The traffic was heavy this morning (Monday) as we headed out of the city to visit the Pivot Fields; birders are no longer allowed to enter this large area of fenced off greenery so we could only look in from the outside. Trip ticks here were seven White Storks, a single Common Wood-pigeon and a fine male Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush. Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Kestrel, Pallid Swift, European Bee-eater, Common Redstart, Willow Warbler and Red-tailed Shrike were some of the others species seen. The next site we visited was the Kuwaiti Institute for Scientific Research or KISR, which required special permits and our passports for us to be allowed in; Pekka had arranged the permits for us. As we entered we drove slowly past some well-vegetated fields and birds came thick and fast, beginning with three Lesser Kestrels including a stunning male on a telegraph pole. A flock of birds comprised mostly Red-throated Pipits, many of which were in full summer plumage, but included a couple of Tawny Pipits and five Ortolan Buntings. Eurasian Wryneck, European Roller, White-throated Robin, Common Redstart, Whinchat, Northern and Pied Wheatears, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Lesser and Common Whitethroats, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff and Isabelline, Red-tailed and Red-backed Shrikes were all seen but the best of the bunch was an Upcher's Warbler that posed exceptionally well on the fence as it showed its stout bill and pale secondary panel whilst pumping its tail downwards and swinging it from side to side. The commonest migrants were Common Redstarts and Willow Warblers with numbers of the latter being particularly high. Carrying on past the green fields we entered a grassy desert area looking for larks; we had great views of our target bird, Black-crowned Sparrow-lark, both on the ground and in display flights, seeing at least 15 birds. Also seen were a Montagu's Harrier, a Common 'Steppe' Buzzard, a Greater Hoopoe-lark, Crested Larks, more Willow Warblers and Pied Wheatears and a couple of Isabelline Wheatears. We retraced our route back to the green fields seeing two Common Cuckoos before Frank and I spotted an eagle which we both identified as a Steppe Eagle and alerted the other vehicles by radio; because of the different angles and light for the other vehicles there was some question about the identification but, thanks to Guy's research and careful perusal of photographs of the bird, it was shown that it was indeed a Steppe Eagle, albeit in a rather unusual plumage.

We drove back towards the city to check Sulaibikhat Bay on the high tide hoping to find Crab Plovers but we drew another blank; Western Reef-egrets, a group of 31 Greater Flamingos, Little Stints, Terek and Curlew Sandpipers, a Spotted Redshank, a single Lesser Black-back 'Heuglin's' Gull and three Caspian Gulls were the pick of the birds present. Lunch was taken at a McDonalds before we headed back to the Pivot Fields to visit the other side to that we visited this morning. An uncooperative Basra Reed Warbler was seen skulking in the vegetation at the bases of the date palms and a ringtail Hen Harrier quartered the fields; Spanish Sparrow flocks and a Woodchat Shrike were the best of the rest but it was fairly quiet otherwise. Heading back to our hotel Hamish saw a House Crow as we passed close to the port but no one else saw it so it is not counted in the group total. It had been another pleasant day with the temperature around 26°C and a little rain. Back at the hotel we again ordered from the restaurant menus and called the log whilst we waited for our food to be served; the food was generally good and tasty but the service was rather slow.

Day 7 Driving out of the city southward the traffic was initially heavy but it soon eased off. Our first stop was at Fintas Park, which seemed quiet birdwise apart from Tree Pipits, but birds started to appear as we were about to leave. European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Wryneck, White-eared Bulbul, Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin, Common Redstart, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Common Mynas were all seen and David saw a Rüppell's Weaver while Guy saw an Upcher's Warbler. Back in the vehicles we were leaving the car park when we saw a large warbler at the base of a tree; a closer look revealed there were in fact three birds. Amazingly they turned out to be a Basra Reed Warbler, a Great Reed Warbler and a Barred Warbler with the latter briefly bathing in a puddle at the kerbside before all three birds

moved over the low wall into the park. Our next stop was at another park, Fahaheel Park where once again it was fairly quiet but we did see four European Turtle-doves amongst a group of Eurasian Collared-doves feeding on a lawn, Common Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, White-eared Bulbul, Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin, White-throated Robin, Great Reed Warbler, Willow Warbler, Red-tailed Shrike and Common Myna. Moving on it was a short drive to the Al Kout Shopping Mall where Pekka had a word with the security guides and we were allowed to use a tower overlooking the sea. Various terns on a buoy and a marker post proved to be Common, Sandwich and Lesser Crested Terns plus one of our target species, White-cheeked Tern. Five of the latter were seen and two of them occasionally flew towards the tower and fished directly below us giving excellent flight views. We could see six cormorants on a distant jetty that Pekka said were almost certainly Socotra Cormorants but they were far too distant to be positively identified. We made use of the mall food hall and had a Burger King lunch; we could still see the terns from the food hall and a small gull joined the terns on a marker post; this was dismissed as a Black-headed Gull. Lunch over, we returned to the tower to continue our vigil. Steve commented that the gull had a carpal bar and looked rather dark; he said it must be a Black-legged Kittiwake. Looking at the gull again, now revealing its head, it was obvious especially when it flew around showing the distinctive wing pattern of a first winter Black-legged Kittiwake. Pekka was very excited as it was a Kuwait tick for him; it was only the 2nd or 3rd Kuwait record; the second had been only last week at Jahra Pools and this was almost certainly the same bird. Pekka phoned other Kuwaiti birders with the news.

Pekka said he had one more site further south that we should visit so we made our way to Al Zour close to the oil refinery. A fine male Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush greeted us as we got out of our vehicles. Looking through a chain link fence we had a large area of sea to look over; once again a cormorant on a distant platform was almost certainly a Socotra Cormorant but it was just too far out to be sure. Finally, our search was rewarded when, following three quite distant fly-by first-summer Socotra Cormorants, a fourth individual flew south fairly close in. Lesser Crested Tern, Eurasian Wryneck, Red-throated Pipit, Western Yellow Wagtail and Red-tailed Shrike were also seen around the car park. A Kuwaiti policeman and a Saudi security guard (the Saudis handle security for the refinery) appeared and after an amicable discussion we were asked to leave. Pekka had received a message saying that the kittiwake had gone before the local birders had arrived but that they had seen Bridled and Great Crested Terns and a Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) from the tower so we returned to Al Kout which proved to be a good move as we soon saw up to nine Bridled Terns, one of which was close in. Frank picked up two White-winged Terns moving north and Steve and David saw a Parasitic Jaeger chasing terns. After a good end to the day we returned to the hotel for a curry and the bird log.

Day 8 It was our last day and we decided to return to the Mutla'a Ranch to look for migrants and a Sykes's Warbler that was seen there yesterday. Once again it seemed fairly quiet but, as we spread out, birds started to appear: Common Nightingales were conspicuous this morning and Peter found the Sykes's Warbler. He and David found a Common Redstart of the race '*samamiscus*' and I found a Common Nightingale of the eastern race '*hafizi*'; Sedge Warbler was also a trip tick. Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common 'Steppe' Buzzard, Namaqua Dove, Common Cuckoo, White-throated Kingfisher, European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Wryneck, Bank Swallow, Common House-martin, Eurasian and Red-rumped Swallows, Tree and Red-throated Pipits, Western Yellow Wagtail, White-throated Robin, Common Redstart, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Lesser and Common Whitethroats, Blackcap, Garden, Barred, Eastern Orphea and Willow Warblers, Common Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Masked Shrike and Chestnut-shouldered Petronia were some of the other birds seen. Peter and David unknowingly flushed a Corn Crake that was seen by Guy alone. Moving on we visited Al Liyah. The southern part is an isolated area of irrigated Acacia Trees seemingly in the middle of nowhere and by driving slowly along the circle of trees we were able to see what birds they held. We saw several Common Redstarts, Northern and Pied Wheatears, an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Lesser Whitethroats and many Willow Warblers plus Isabelline, Red-tailed and Woodchat Shrikes. Having checked out the trees we crossed the road and checked out the northern part of Al Liyah, which contains good habitat for larks where Bar-tailed Lark had bred in 2017. We saw Crested

Larks, a group of six Greater Short-toed Larks and an adult Greater Hoopoe-lark with two well-grown young but no Bar-tailed Larks.

We then had a long drive to Al Maghasil where we could overlook Bubiyan Island; Crab Plovers breed on the island and we could see a line of 26 birds becoming restless on the incoming tide. They were distant and in a bit of a heat-haze but through Pekka's Swarovski on 70x magnification they were more than just blobs. The tide eventually moved them off their spit and we watched them fly on to the island proper. I then picked up a Great Crested Tern quite close but almost past us; I shouted but only a few of the group got on the bird – damn! What seemed like a long wait was broken when Frank picked up another bird flying low over the water and, a little later, another, nearer bird flew past which everyone had good views of. Other birds seen here were Western Reef-egret, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Whimbrel, Green and Common Sandpipers, Slender-billed Gull, Little and Lesser Crested Terns, Eurasian Swallow, Red-throated Pipit, Western Yellow Wagtail and Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush. With our two target species under the belt we moved on to our last site of the day and the trip, Sanam Farm where we were hoping for some better views of the Red-wattled Lapwings. We saw Common Kestrel and Pied Wheatear but sadly we found no lapwings. Back at our hotel we thanked Pekka for all his hard work and Hamish gave a short speech and presented him with a collection made by the group before we said our goodbyes. We ordered our last meal in the restaurant, Peter called the last log and some group photos were taken; our meal was served punctually this evening with no mistakes or mishaps. The guys from Luxembourg were leaving a day later than we were so we wished them well and said our goodbyes.

Day 9 One more early start; through hotel reception, Peter had booked a taxi to take some of the group plus luggage to the airport but it was either late or did not turn up so a senior figure from the hotel took them and Peter and I followed him to the airport. The traffic was very light and we were at the airport within 15 minutes; Peter and I returned the hire vehicles and we joined the rest of the group at a busy check-in before boarding our flight to London Heathrow where we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways.

The group total for the trip was 167 species, of which four species were only heard (Water Rail, Savi's Warbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler and Eurasian Penduline-tit). Four more species, Little Bittern, Corn Crake, House Crow and Corn Bunting, were seen by only one person; we also saw three distinct subspecies.

Bill Blake on behalf of **Birdfinders**