

A birding trip to Kuwait 5th – 9th December 2007

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Short daily description:

Dec 5th: Vesa and Kari left from Helsinki by flight 17.10 towards London and further 21.45 towards Kuwait.

Dec 6th: Vesa and Kari arrived in Kuwait International airport 7.00am and got quickly visa. They met Pekka 7.40am. We drove straight to Sulaibikhat Nature Reserve (8.00-8.40) to try to see Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schah*) which had arrived a couple weeks ago. Maybe the same bird as a year ago, but no sign this morning. However, first WP tick: White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*), at least 10 birds. Then we made a short stop at the nearby "Car park" (8.50-9.10) which produced the next WP tick, 20 Crab Plovers (*Dromas ardeola*).

Then we headed to Jahra East Outfall (9.15-10.10) where had been seen several days at least two different Buff-bellied Pipits (*Anthus rubescens japonicus*). Few km before the pipit place was large flock of waders, mainly Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius mongolus*) and Greater Sand Plovers (*Charadrius leschenaultii*). The first one was a WP tick. After some search of about 20 pipits we finally found the Buff-bellied Pipit. It was a WP tick and also a Kuwait tick for Pekka as well. Additionally Kari got Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*) to a WP tick. Good to mention also 3 Greater Spotted Eagles (ad, subad, and 1cy) flying nearby.

Now was time to make a long drive close to the Iraq border, to Abdali Farms 11.15-12.00). Specifically we were searching at Yacoub Boodai two species: Common Babbler (*Turdoides caudatus*) and Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*). Immediately a group of 7 Red-wattled Lapwings loudly revealed their existence. Babblers did some work but finally we found a group of 6 birds. Additionally in search of Babblers Kari got a WP tick: Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides*).

On a return trip we tried to search possible Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) from Sabriya (13.00-13.30) but only juvenile Common Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) was there. The rest of the day was devoted to SAANR (13.50-16.15). Target species were Macqueenii's Bustard (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*), Persian Wheatear (*Oenanthe chrysopygia*) and possible some good larks. Very soon after the entrance on the left side in the wadi we saw a small raptor approaching towards us. Only close by we finally realized that it was a juvenile Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) with very strong dark markings on the breast, rather whitish underwing colour and quite narrow primary wing tip. It continued SW and we continued towards the warden house. There we heard that Bustard had not been seen during the whole day. So we continued to the back wadi to search Persian Wheatear. Just at the end of the wadi Kari finally found a single bird when the visibility started to be weakening. It was a great relief to Kari and Vesa to see the bird. Otherwise a trip to Armenia would be needed. Last moments we spent at Tulha (16.40-17.15) to wait possible Sandgrouses or Nightjars but no luck.

Finally return Kuwait City and the Hotel Hawalli Intercontinental but when we arrived there, they said that the hotel was fully booked for another group and they arranged another hotel, Kuwait Intercontinental, for Kari and Vesa. It was better hotel but we got it with the same price as Hawalli, only 23KWD per night and 2 person. Well-known Husa House is just behind the Kuwait Intercontinental Hotel. Finally Pekka returned his own home after a very long day.

The day, Finnish Independence Day, had succeeded better than expected and Kari got 10 WP ticks and Vesa 8. Also Pekka got a WP and Kuwait tick.

Dec 7th: Pekka picked Kari and Vesa from the hotel 6.40 and we went again to Sulaibikhat (6.50-8.10). It was very warm morning from the beginning, +23C and continuously rising temperature. Two Brown-necked Ravens (*Corvus ruficollis*) flew over. Brian Foster visited shortly there as well and then he headed to Al-Abraq. We were then waiting what he could find there.

We heard few times similar weak call like a Long-tailed Shrike but could not be sure. We also saw something moving on the thick reed bed but not well enough to identify it. There were Bulbuls and other birds also in the reed bed. As Shrike did not make a show-up we drove to Green Island. On the way we saw already more than 10 Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*). Quick tour at Green Island (8.35-9.15) soon produced target species when we saw 7 Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ambelinus*) and one Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*). Satisfied we went to Kuwait Towers parking area where after some search we found 2 Bank Mynas (*Pycnonotus ginginianus*).

Pekka received a phone call from Brian that Al-Abraq was empty, so we could skip that part from our program. All four target species for the morning had been seen already, so we headed to search closer shoreline birds at Manchester Club (10.30-11.30), Doha Spit (11.40-12.25), Doha North (12.20-12.45) and Doha South (13.30-14.10). Visibility was getting worse and worse due to southeast sandstorm and hot wind from Saudi desert. Temperature was already +30C at noon.

Manchester Club hosted great number of waders and the best was an adult winter plumage Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) which was a Kuwait tick to Pekka. Doha Spit had also huge number of waders. Doha North had good number of ducks and Doha South pools provided some new trip species.

The visibility got worse and when it was already less than 500m, we still went to Jahra East Outfall (14.30-15.30). We met there Rashed Al Hajji who had called a bit earlier Pekka that there was a White-tailed Plover (*Vanellus leucurus*). We found it and saw shortly Buff-bellied Pipit, the same bird as yesterday. The visibility was anymore less than 100m, when we still tried to find the Long-tailed Shrike at Sulaibikhat (15.45-16.30) but no sign. We returned our hotel. Very good bird day in overall.

Dec 8th: We tried again the morning Long-tailed Shrike at Sulaibikhat (7.05-7.40) but no sign. We made short stop at "Car park" (7.45-8.05) and then we drove towards KABD (Sulaibiya Station, KISR) where Dr Gary Brown was expected to guide us. There we explored 8.40-10.40 to search larks and other desert species. We saw about 20 Black-crowned Sparrow-larks (*Eremopterix nigriceps*), 5 Dunn's Larks (*Eremalauda dunni*), 50 Lesser Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella rufescens*) and a Desert Warbler (*Sylvia nana*). Sparrow-lark was a WP tick to Vesa, and Dunn's Lark and Desert Warbler WP tick to Kari.

We had received access to the Pivot Fields where we drove around (11.05-13.30). Gary was with us and we met also Abdulrahman Al Sirhan. The place is like a magnet for birds with its large green area surrounded by the desert habitat. It provides excellent place for raptors, field waders, pipits, field larks etc. We got good number of new species to the trip. The best in Kuwait perspective was a Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricarius*) which was the second observation for Kuwait and certainly a Kuwait tick for Pekka.

For the remaining afternoon we drove to the south coast and to a place called Khiran (14.45-15.50). We managed to get a permission through a property to the shoreline where was a good sandpit which hosted hundreds of gulls and terns. We succeeded to find there 2 Crested Terns (*Sterna bergii*) which was our last WP tick. It is worth to mention that there were also 44 Greater Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ichthyatus*) in different ages and plumages. On a return trip to Kuwait City we made a short stop at Pipeline Beach (16.05-16.20) but it's nowadays fenced and thus, not good to explore.

So, was the time to enjoy good dinner together and thank Pekka for this excellent 3 days extensive birding trip and his good company.

Dec 9th: Kari and Vesa had hotel shuttle bus transportation to the airport leaving 6.45 and the flight left towards London 8.50. We arrived Helsinki at 9pm. Pekka had a normal working day after this extensive 3 days birding.

We got more WP species (Kari 17, Vesa 13) than expected but Pekka also took care that we took all the benefit of the local hospitality and his connections were extremely invaluable during the whole trip. Even Pekka got 3 new Kuwait species which showed that extensive birding can produce all the time new things to see even for a long timer living in Kuwait. The country has a lot to offer for active birders. Thanks Pekka!

APPENDIX: Species List

English name	Genus	Species	06.12.	07.12.	08.12.	09.12.
Black-necked Grebe	Podiceps	nigricollis		1		
Common Shelduck	Tadorna	tadorna	20	40		
Gadwall	Anas	strepera	2	1		
Mallard	Anas	platyrhynchos	1	150		
Shoveler	Anas	clypeata		60		
Teal	Anas	crecca		750		
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax	carbo	1	2250	50	
Cattle Egret	Bubulcus	ibis			50	
Western Reef Egret	Egretta	gularis	20	50	20	
Great Egret	Egretta	alba	1	1		
Grey Heron	Ardea	cinerea	50	50	25	
Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus	roseus	100	1495	500	
Black Kite	Milvus	migrans	10	1	5	
Western Marsh Harrier	Circus	aeruginosus	2	3		
Pallid Harrier	Circus	macrourus			3	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter	nisus	2+2sp			
Shikra	Accipiter	badius	1			
Long-legged Buzzard	Buteo	rufinus	4	1	10	
Greater Spotted Eagle	Aquila	clanga	3	1		
Steppe Eagle	Aquila	nipalensis			2	
Imperial Eagle	Aquila	heliaca		1	4	
Common Kestrel	Falco	tinnunculus	1		6	
Merlin	Falco	columbarius			1	

Water Rail	Rallus	aquaticus		1			
Common Moorhen	Gallinula	chloropus	1	15	3		
Coot	Fulica	atra		70			
Purple Swamp-hen	Porphyrio	porphyrio		3			
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus	ostralegus		70	4		
Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra	avosetta		64			
Crab Plover	Dromas	ardeola	20	210	1		
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius	hiaticula	50	100+	7		
Kentish Plover	Charadrius	alexandrinus	150	700	30		
Greater Sand Plover	Charadrius	leschenaultii	10	50	4		
Lesser Sand Plover	Charadrius	mongolus	300	200	6		
Grey Plover	Pluvialis	squatarola	30	50	4		
Golden Plover	Pluvialis	apricaria			1		
Lapwing	Vanellus	vanellus		1	200		
Red-wattled Lapwing	Hoplepturus	indicus	7				
White-tailed Lapwing	Vanellus	leucurus		1			
Sanderling	Calidris	alba		50	20		
Little Stint	Calidris	minuta	5+	50			
Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris	ferruginea	50	10			
Dunlin	Calidris	alpina	500	4000	200		
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Limicola	falcinellus	2	5	1		
Ruff	Philomachus	pugnax			2		
Common Snipe	Gallinago	gallinago	1	5	1		
Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa	lapponica		300			
Whimbrel	Numenius	phaeopus		2			
Eurasian Curlew	Numenius	arquata	10	650	6		
Common Redshank	Tringa	totanus	15	100	25		
Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa	stagnatilis		4			
Common Greenshank	Tringa	nebularia		8	14		
Green Sandpiper	Tringa	ochropus	1	2	1		
Terek Sandpiper	Xenus	cinereus	20	50	10		
Common Sandpiper	Actitis	hypoleucos		1			
Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria	interpres	5	130			
Pallas's Gull	Larus	ichthyaetus		3	45		
Black-headed Gull	Larus	ridibundus	100	1000	1200		
Slender-billed Gull	Larus	genei	20	200	100		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus	fuscus		2	7		
Caspian Gull	Larus	cachinnans		70	450		
Armenian Gull	Larus	armenicus	2	20	20		
Gull-billed Tern	Sterna	nilotica	10	25	15		
Caspian Tern	Sterna	caspia	5	10	7		
Greater Crested Tern	Sterna	bergii			2		
Sandwich Tern	Sterna	sandvicensis		49			
Common Tern	Sterna	hirundo	2				
Black Tern	Chlidonias	niger		1			
Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias	hybrida		1			
Rock Dove	Columba	livia	200	200	400	20	
Wood Pigeon	Columba	palumbus			21		
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia	decaocto	50	100	250	5	
Laughing Dove	Streptopelia	senegalensis	20	25	50	2	
Namaqua Dove	Oena	capensis		1	25		

Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula	krameri	1				
Pallid Swift	Apus	pallidus	5	50	1		
White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon	smyrnensis		1	2		
Kingfisher	Alcedo	atthis		2			
Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa	epops			1		
Black-crowned Sparrow-lark	Eremopterix	nigriceps			30		
Dunn's Lark	Eremalauda	dunni			4		
Bar-tailed Lark	Ammomanes	cinctura	20				
Short-toed Lark	Calandrella	brachudactyla	5		2		
Lesser Short-toed Lark	Calandrella	rufescens			100		
Crested Lark	Galerida	cristata	5		75		
Eurasian Skylark	Alauda	arvensis	50	3	2000		
Sand Martin	Riparia	riparia		1			
Barn Swallow	Hirundo	rustica		1			
Tawny Pipit	Anthus	campestris	5		10		
Meadow Pipit	Anthus	pratensis			2		
Water Pipit	Anthus	spinoletta	20	15	40		
Buff-bellied Pipit	Anthus	rubescens	1	1			
Red-throated Pipit	Anthus	cervinus			5		
White Wagtail	Motacilla	alba	20	30	100		
Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla	flava	1				
White-eared Bulbul	Pycnonotus	leucogenys	30	50	20	3	
Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus	cafer		1			
Grey Hypocolius	Hypocolius	ampelinus		7			
Bluethroat	Luscinia	svecica	2	2			
Black Redstart	Phoenicurus	ochrurus	2	1			
Common Stonechat	Saxicola	torquatus	4	1	2		
Isabelline Wheatear	Oenanthe	isabellina	10		10		
Desert Wheatear	Oenanthe	deserti	25	5	5		
Mourning Wheatear	Oenanthe	lugens	6				
Red-tailed Wheatear	Oenanthe	chrysopygia	1				
Common Blackbird	Turdus	merula	1				
Song Thrush	Turdus	philomelos	5	2	5		
Graceful Prinia	Prinia	gracilis	5	5	2		
Asian Desert Warbler	Sylvia	nana			1		
Menetries's Warbler	Sylvia	mystacea	1				
Clamorous Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus	stentoreus	1	1			
Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus	collybita	2	3	2		
Isabelline Shrike	Lanius	isabellinus	1	3	2		
Southern Grey Shrike	Lanius	meridionalis	5		1		
Common Babbler	Turdoides	caudatus	6				
Brown-necked Raven	Corvus	ruficollis		2			
Common Starling	Sturnus	vulgaris	1	1	300		
Common Mynah	Acridotheres	tristis		50		1	
Bank Mynah	Acridotheres	ginginianus		2			
House Sparrow	Passer	domesticus	500	50	100		
Spanish Sparrow	Passer	hispaniolensis	250	200	30		
Total: 121 species		Total day:	73	88	72	5	

APPENDIX: Pictures



Photo #1: A group of 6 Common Babblers was found in Yacoub Boodai at Jahra Farms close to the Iraq border.



Photo #2 & 3: Around 10 Black-crowned Sparrow-larks were near the drinking pool at KABD.



Photo #4: Lesser Short-toed Larks were numerous near the drinking pool at KABD.



Photo #5: A single White-tailed Plover was resting at Jahra East Outfall in a dense sand storm.