

A BIRDING TRIP TO KUWAIT 24TH -31ST JANUARY 2007

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Kuwait is a very interesting birding country, especially for birdwatchers who are interested in Western Palearctic (WP) species. Many rare WP-species were found in Kuwait in December 2006 and in January 2007. These wintering records inspired five Finnish WP-birders to arrange a common birding trip to Kuwait. Keijo and Ilkka visited Kuwait already in April 2006 and their report can be found http://www.hawar-islands.com/kuwait_birding/Finns_trip_report. For the other members this was their first visit to Kuwait. We managed to have the same flight, but different hotels. We decided to rent two cars to make more efforts for finding the target species of birds.

Our trip succeeded perfectly, both technically and regarding to the amount of rare birds seen. The total number of observed species was 113 and the first-visitors got to 13 new WP-species. The resident birders gave again excellent support and the general hospitality can nowhere be better than in Kuwait.



Kuwait is a good place for WP-birders. A common babbler in Abdaly Farms. Photo KW



Kuwait is the country of great hospitality. Misters Khalid Al-N., Brian F., Pekka F. and members of the Finnish group. Photo IS

There is a lot of traffic and some people drive fast and dangerously in Kuwait. However, the motor ways are common and all roads in good condition. There were no maps covering the whole country at the airport, but luckily we had the Kuwait map by GEO-projects. The petrol is very cheap (about 20 cents per litre) and car rental is clearly cheaper than in many other countries.

This trip report includes daily itinerary and a review of most important records. All daily records are in an appendix. The descriptions of birding areas are already in the earlier trip report.

DAILY ITINERARY

24.1.2007 Wednesday

Our KLM flight from Helsinki via Amsterdam arrived in Kuwait around 23.30 hours p.m. Before getting our luggage we fixed our visas easily, without applying beforehand. In the airport, we rented a Mitsubishi Nativa, reserved by the local Al-Mulla rental company (like last year). Late at night we got our hotel Quality Suites in Sabriya reserved by internet some days earlier. We had three rooms with kitchen, price 77 € / night. The other group (Jukka and Markku) took a taxi to their hotel, Hussa House in Kuwait City. This group rented a Mitsubishi Nativa later.

25.1.2007 Thursday, 285 km

After breakfast in the hotel (about 4,50 €) we met in Sulaibikhat Nature Reserve (SNR) the other Finnish group and the resident birders, Finnish Pekka Fågel, British Brian Foster and also British Gary Brown. Pekka and Brian had kindly volunteered to show us some of our target species during their days off (Thursday and Friday). Quickly after finding the first target bird some people left for Kabd Desert and some for Jahra Farms. At noon time we all met again at Jahra East Outfall. In the afternoon we met Khalid Al-Nasrallah and three other local birders in great Sabah Al-Ahmed Nature Reserve (SAANR). Khalid kindly served us a tasteful lunch and after that guided us in NR to a wadi to see successfully rare wheatears he had found in the morning. Just before sunset we reached Doha Spit where we watched at 15000 waders, gulls, herons and so on during a high tide. The weather of the day and some coming days was good and very clear; the temperature rose at the afternoon over 20 degrees Celsius, but in the morning it was less than ten degrees.



Birders in Tulha (SAANR): Hannu, Khalid, Jukka, Pekka, Markku, Keijo and Ilkka. Photo BF



The wadi of red-tailed wheatear in SAANR. Photo IS



Looking at waders in Doha Spit during high tide.
Photo MS



Over 10000 waders in the ear in Doha Spit before sunset. Photo IS

26.1.2007 Friday, 95 km

After breakfast the Finnish groups, Pekka, Brian and South-African Mike Pope met at Green Island to find local bulbuls. After that we stopped at Kuwait Towers Park, in Sulaibikhat Bay and in Doha East. Today, the main purpose was to twitch on Failaka Island evermann's redstart found by George Gregory on Thursday. We got catamaran tickets only in the afternoon but missed the bird. We drove around on the island and saw other species and spots of the Iraq war. We returned back to Kuwait City on slow ferry (1.5 hours) late in darkness.



The birders are going to Green Island to meet bulbuls. Photo MS



An evermann's redstart left bushes of Failaka, but the group found a black-throat thrush. Photo MS

27.1.2007 Saturday, 386 km

We left our hotel at six a.m. and drove to the north close to the Iraq border. We met other Finnish birders in Ar Rawdatain and had our breakfast in a local café. The guide of the day was a well-known British birder George Gregory who has lived in Kuwait for many years. He showed us birding places in Ar Rawdatain and some very good farms in large Abdaly Farms area. Before noon we started to Subiah road in the east and reached the interesting Sabriya Farms southeast to Subiah road. Again after a

successful round, we continued to next sites, the southern part of SAANR and Jahra Farms. Then one group visited Qaisat for the last moments of daylight and the other group rented their own car.



George Gregory was our guide in Abdaly Farms. Photo IS



Just seeking for common babbler in their living area in Abdaly Farms. Photo MS

28.1.2007 Sunday, 375 km

Both groups left their hotel after seven a.m. and met at Jahra Farms. Before noon, we visited for a couple of hours the southern part of SAANR again (a guard let us in after calling Khalid). The other group headed to South to round with George and Brian Sabah al Salem, Fahaaheel, Pipeline Beach and so on. We drove via Mutla'a Ranch and Ar Rawdatain back to Abdaly Farms. There we checked some farms, especially last year breeding sites of red-wattled lapwings until sunset, while the other group checked some parks in Kuwait City for grey hypocolius roosting.



Jahra Farms consist of farms, palm trees...



...and a well, the breeding site of bank mynahs.
Photos IS

29.1.2007 Monday, 341 km

This was a windy day and the weather was a little sandy. We drove via Sabah al Salem to Fahaheel to meet Jukka and Markku. After checking the harbour and park, we looked many farms in Wafrah, an area in the middle of deserts. Then we returned to coast areas and looked trough surroundings of Khiran and Al-Jazeera Resorts. In addition, some of us watched sea birds near Al-Jazeera and Pipeline Beach as well and the others areas around Power Plant Reeds. Near Pipeline Beach, a group of four policemen stopped us and asked whether we took photos in the oil industry area. After this short episode we started to move back to Kuwait City just at the beginning of the darkness.



Camels are common in all desert areas.
Photo IS



A moment of sea watching near Al-Jazeera. Photo MS

30.1.2007 Tuesday, 185 km

The weather was cloudy, not so windy. The visibility was only 200m because of sand in the air. It was raining for one to two hours. In the morning both groups left their hotels and visited last time Green Island and Kuwait Towers. From the City Parks we moved to Sulaibikhat Bay. Near Women's Hospital we saw a little mangrove area, too. After our last visit to Jahra Farms we drove to Mutla'a Ranch where we checked the palm forest, again. There we gathered together and finished our bird trip with a good record (the only grey hypocolius) just before sunset. In the evening we had a nice dinner in Jahra shopping centre and after that we drove to the airport to wait for return flight after midnight.



The bad visibility on Sulaibikhat Bay.
Birds look like flamingos! Photo MS



Mutla'a Ranch Photo IS

31.1.2007 Wednesday

Our flight was in Amsterdam after six a.m. We left Netherlands at 10 hours a.m. and landed in Helsinki at 13.20 p.m. We all were so pleased with our successful trip.

THE MOST IMPORTANT RECORDS

We found some new rarities and wintering bird species compared to the trip last April. The new rarities were shikra, white-tailed lapwing, oriental skylark, red-tailed wheatear, black-throated thrush, long-tailed shrike and common babbler. The new wintering species were common shelduck, long-legged buzzard, saker, pied avocet, pallas's gull, eurasian skylark, meadow pipit, water pipit, richard's pipit, european robin, black redstart, finsch's wheatear, mourning wheatear and common blackbird. A very special winter record was european bee-eaters in two places (not found in Kuwait in January and February). The new local species were little owl, white-throated kingfisher and white-vented mynah (not yet a species-status in Kuwait).

We found a total of 113 bird species and the most important records for (Finnish) WP-birders were as follows:

SHIKRA, *Accipiter badius*

27.1.2007 at Sabriya Farm 1, perhaps 2 birds and at Jahra Farms 1 bird

IMPERIAL EAGLE, *Aquila heliaca*

25.1.2007 in Doha East Outfall 1 spontaneously found bird juv

SAKER, *Falco cherrug*

26.1.2007 on Failaka Island 1 spontaneously found bird juv.

CRAB PLOVER, *Dromas ardeola*

25.1.2007 just before sunset at high tide in Doha Spit 180 birds

26.1.2007 in Sulaibikhat Bay dozens of birds (50+)

LESSER SAND PLOVER, *Charadrius mongolus* in winter plumage

25.1.2007 just before sunset at high tide in Doha Spit hundreds of birds (500+)

26.1.2007 on Failaka Island a group of 24 birds

29.1.2007 in Sabah al Salem a group of 40 birds

RED-WATTLED PLOVER, *Hoplepturus indicus*

28.1.2007 at Abdaly Farms 4 birds (a breeding site in April 2006)

30.1.2007 at Kuwait Towers Park 1 spontaneously found bird



Wintering lesser sand plovers. Photo IS



Red-wattled plover on breeding site.
Photo KW

WHITE-TAILED LAPWING, *Vanellus leucurus*
30.1.2007 at Green Island 1 spontaneously found bird

PALLAS'S GULL, *Larus ichthyæus*
25.1.2007 at high tide in Doha Spit 4 birds
26.1.2007 at Green Island on the sea 1 bird
29.1.2007 in south near Al-Jazeera Resort 60 birds on the strand and on Pipeline
Beach 10 birds

GREATER CRESTED TERN, *Sterna bergii*
29.1.2007 in south near Al-Jazeera Resort 5 birds on the beach

BLACK-CROWNED SPARROW-LARK, *Eremopterix nigriceps*
25.1.2007 in Kabd Desert even 50 birds in a fenced area (no access without resident
birders)

DUNN'S LARK, *Eremalauda dunnii*
25.1.2007 in Kabd Desert 4 birds in a fenced area (no access without resident birders)

ORIENTAL SKYLARK, *Alauda gulgula*
28.1.2007 in Sabah Al-Ahmed NR 2 birds in a group of european skylarks (found
earlier)

WHITE-EARED BULBUL, *Pycnonotus leucogenys*
Every day 5 – 50 birds

RED-VENTED BULBUL, *Pycnonotus cafer*
26.1.2007 at Green Island 5 birds
30.1.2007 at Green Island 2 birds



White-eared bulbul is an usual bird. Photo KW



Some red-vented bulbuls can be found in Green Island. Photo IS

GREY HYPOCOLIUS, *Hypocolius ampelinus*
30.1.2007 at Mutla'a Ranch 1 spontaneously found but shy bird

RED-TAILED (PERSIAN) WHEATEAR, *Oenanthe chrysopygia*
25.1.2007 in Sabah Al-Salem 2 birds (found in the same morning by Khalid Al-Nasrallah)



Dunn's lark is a desert species.



Red-tailed wheatear is a rare winter visitor. Photos JI

BLACK-THROATED THRUSH, *Turdus ruficollis*, the first bird for several years in Kuwait
26.1.2007 on Failaka Island 1 spontaneously found bird

ASIAN DESERT WARBLER, *Sylvia nana*
Almost every day 1 to 8 birds

MENETRIES'S WARBLER, *Sylvia mystacea*
27.1.2007 in Sulaibikhat Bay 1 bird

ISABELLINE SHRIKE, *Lanius isabellinus*
Every day 2 to 8 birds

LONG-TAILED SHRIKE, *Lanius schach*, the second record for Kuwait
25. and 27.1.2007 in Sulaibikhat Bay NR 1 long-staying bird

COMMON BABBLER, *Turdoides caudatus*
27.1.2007 at Abdaly Farms a group of 8 birds (found a month earlier by George
Gregory)

COMMON MYNAH, *Acridotheres tristis*
Almost every day 4 – 30 birds

BANK MYNAH, *Acridotheres ginginianus*
28.1.2007 at Jahra Farms (an old well across the street) a group of 11 birds (not found
in other days)
30.1.2007 at Kuwait Towers Park a spontaneously found group of 6 birds



There are in Kuwait common mynahs...



...and bank mynahs resident birds.
Photos KW

All daily records are in the appendix. We failed to find two target species, eversmann's redstart (*Phoenicurus erythronotus*) and indian roller (*Coracias benghalensis*). The former had left Sabriya Farm and Failaka Island before we visited. We and the resident birdwatchers tried to find the latter every day. Afterwards at home, we read that two birds were found after our visit.

Photos
BF Brian Foster
JI Jukka Ihanus
IS Ilkka Sahi
MS Markku Santamaa
KW Keijo Wahlroos

THANKS

Khalid, George and Brian served us many accesses to the closed and fenced areas, for example to the Nature Reserves. We thank you for this and the excellent guidance. As well, we thank all you and Pekka for the pleasant birding company. Thanks Pekka for good information beforehand. Thanks all residents for the great hospitality, especially Khalid for our first lunch after the long flight.



After evening flight of birds we thank

...



... the good atmosphere in Kuwait.

Photos IS