

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



4TH – 12TH FEBRUARY
2010

TOUR LEADERS

Neil Donaghy
Neil Tovey

PARTICIPANTS

Chris Bamford
Peter Carman
Fiona Grant
Christopher Hodgson
John Wilson

4TH FEBRUARY

The group met at London Gatwick and our flight departed on time. With a tail wind, we arrived into Dubai half an hour early and after meeting up with Neil Tovey, we collected our minibus and drove the short distance to our hotel. A cool beer by the pool was just the ticket before we retired following a long day.

5TH FEBRUARY

An early breakfast before we set off to our first stop at the Dubai Pivot Fields. The day was rather overcast and breezy but still quite warm and we were in for a birding treat as many of the target species were noted. Upon arrival, large numbers of White and Yellow Wagtails of various races were seen feeding in the short turf and the first of many Marsh Harriers seen during today quartered overhead. A few small parties of Grey Francolins scurried amongst the scrub, Little Green Bee-eaters gave superb views as they perched on dead bushes and small groups of Pallid Swift flew through. Groups of White-cheeked and Common Myna made for plenty of background noise as they flitted through the vegetation and several parties of Ring-necked Parakeets announced their presence by calling loudly as they flew overhead. Common Kestrels hovered and perched on the pivots and a few Tawny and Red-throated Pipits and good numbers of Sky Lark fed in the grass or on open sandy areas, while we were amazed at how many Water Pipits were present at this site. A couple of Bank Mynas flew through, their greyer plumage obvious, a female Montagu's Harrier was seen alongside the Marsh Harriers for direct comparison, several Common Hoopoe fed in the short turf and some very smart Citrine Wagtails dropped in and gave good views. A couple of Bluethroat flicked through some rank vegetation but were quickly gone and not seen by all, a couple of handsome male Siberian Stonechat showed well and we also saw a couple of females and a few Isabelline Shrikes, including one superbly marked bird perched up obligingly. Small numbers of Rose-coloured Starling were found perched in some waterside trees and we flushed several Common Snipe, Green Sandpiper and a few striking Red-wattled Lapwings from the wetter areas. Up to ten Little Ringed Plover and a couple of Kentish Plover were found, a European Golden Plover was an unexpected surprise, but the shorebird highlight here surely went to the five White-tailed Plovers that gave superb views as they perched on a mound before flying off and out of sight – this site is one of the best places to catch up with this species and we were not disappointed. A search around the market gardens failed to produce the wintering Brown Shrike, but we did get good views of Red-vented Bulbuls and a Common Chiffchaff, while a sweep of another field produced pretty good views of Oriental Sky Lark. The birds were identified by the sharp buzzing call, but we were fortunate to get good enough views to see the Wood Lark like jizz as the birds took flight. Our next site was the Al Warsen Lake complex, where we soon added Little Grebe, Grey heron, Moorhen and a large roost of Great Cormorants to the trip list and careful scanning of the hundreds of Caspian and Black-headed Gulls produced at least one Heuglin's Gull which was obvious by its paler iris, darker mantle and different head shape. A Caspian Tern flew in and straight back out, a few Purple Herons took flight, a large group of Black-crowned Night Heron were roosting in a distant tree, Little and Great White Egrets were present in small numbers and we saw our first Western Reef Egrets; both white and blue morphs. A couple of Common Coot and a probable hybrid Common x Red-knobbed Coot, seven Ferruginous Duck, twenty Tufted Duck and small numbers of Mallard, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler and a drake Northern Pintail were also on the water, a splendid Grey-headed Swamp-hen perched up in the reeds and a few Black-winged Stilts loafed on the waters edge, a deep song of short, deep and resonating phrases from within the reeds eventually led to first flight and then a brief perched up view of a Clamorous Reed Warbler, but again it wasn't seen by all. A Red-wattled Lapwing and a few Green Sandpiper and another White-tailed Plover rounded things off here. We took lunch at a service station before moving on to Ras el Khor, where large numbers of Greater Flamingo were in the lagoons, alongside more Western Reef and Great white Egrets and a party of sleeping Eurasian Spoonbill. Two Common Shelduck fed in the water, while shorebirds counted included good numbers of Little Stint, two Pacific Golden Plover, a Pied Avocet and small numbers of Common Greenshank and a Black-tailed Godwit. Scanning the mangroves produced at least six different Greater Spotted Eagles, including a bird perched in the open, a small flock of Slender-billed Gulls flew straight through and an Osprey that was briefly over the marsh. More Little Ringed and Kentish Plover were also present. The afternoon began to get quite warm as the sun poked through now and then and we headed to the delightful Safa Park, which although busy with families enjoying the start of the weekend, produced more good birds. Good numbers of Indian House Crows, Common Mynas and at least five spectacular Indian Rollers were all seen well as they fed on the grass or perched in the open, a Hume's Leaf Warbler showed fairly well as it actively fed in the canopy and a few Common Chiffchaff were also present. Several Purple Sunbird were in a noisy colony and all kinds of plumage patterns, small numbers of Pied Mynas were first seen in flight but were followed by two very obliging birds that allowed a close approach on the lawns and eventually after seeing several birds going over at height, we were able to finally and satisfactorily distinguish an Alexandrine Parakeet that banked and showed its rufous shoulder patches. A party of five Olive-backed Pipits showed superbly as they rested on a lawn before flying up into a palm tree, a couple more Citrine Wagtails were among the White Wagtails, more Isabelline Shrikes were noted and a Common Sandpiper perched up on a buoy. Small numbers of Swallowtail butterflies were noted passing through here too. Our last stop was Mushrif Park, where we added our first Southern Grey Shrikes and several more Marsh Harrier and a few Greater Spotted Eagle. A few Little Green Bee-eater showed well, a Black Redstart flitted through but was not seen by all, a party of Arabian Babblers were in the scrub and feeding below it, while thousands of Collared and Laughing Doves were perched, flying and feeding everywhere we looked – phenomenal numbers that led to a raptor fest at the end of the day.

Two Oriental Honey Buzzards acme into roost and showed very well, whilst a couple of European Sparrowhawk and Shikra hunted in unison sending the flocks of doves skywards in all directions, while allowing us the chance to examine the identification features as they flew side by side. Finally as we drove back to the hotel, a small flock of Greater White-fronted Geese flew alongside the bus. What an amazing first day!!

6TH FEBRUARY

We were away again shortly after dawn for the journey to Al Ain in the south east corner of Abu Dhabi Emirate, near the border with Oman. It was very overcast and it came as no surprise to see a few flecks of rain as we left Dubai. Laughing Doves, Common Mynas and a couple of Marsh Harriers and Indian Rollers kept us company and we made a brief stop for coffee and fuel. Our first proper birding stop was at the imposing Green Muzzabarah wadi, where we spent an excellent couple of hours. Little Green Bee-eaters and a superb Hume's Wheatear greeted us as we left the minibus and shortly after our first Desert Larks of the tour were noted feeding at close range. Several flocks of Rock Doves flew over, but question marks remain over their exact status, so we felt it best to probably note them as Feral Rock Doves, despite the ideal habitat for the genuine article. A Black Redstart showed well and a Lesser Whitethroat flitted around in an Acacia bush, where it was joined shortly after by the first of two of the diminutive Plain Leaf Warblers. The grey/brown upperparts contrasting with the darker tail and strong supercilium as well as its small size were all noted as both birds showed well. A pair of Barbary Falcons dashed over a high cliff, a male Mountain or Striolated Bunting showed superbly as it sang from a rock and a pair of Graceful Prinia chased each other around the short vegetation, but we were unable to find an Asian Desert Warbler found by Neil's friend Dave Clark. Small numbers of African Rock Martins were passing through the wadi, a Sand Partridge posed beautifully to allow scope views and the first of a few Red-tailed Wheatears and more Hume's Wheatears showed very well as they chased each other around the rock faces. A male Blue Rock Thrush also gave excellent scope views, at least three adult and a juvenile Egyptian Vulture drifted overhead, a couple of White-spectacled Bulbul and another Mountain Bunting showed reasonably well and finally, we found a really showy male Hooded Wheatear that gave awesome views as it picked insects from a lawn and perched on lampposts and villa walls. We took lunch at a small café, where a Common Kestrel and several Cattle Egrets were noted before we headed off to Dharira Fodder Fields. Up to one hundred of the beautifully marked Black-crowned Finch Larks were present here and they showed down to a few feet and a single Greater Short-toed Lark was noted with them. A few Brown-necked Ravens flew overhead, a couple of very smart Desert Wheatears perched up nicely, two Asian Desert Warblers proved difficult to pin down, but reasonable views were had by all and a small flock of Indian Silverbill were feeding in the newly cut fodder. As we were about to leave a falcon flew in and landed briefly before spending the next five minutes hawking insects on the wing. It took a bit of examining, but we were eventually able to identify it as a first year male Lesser Kestrel before it drifted off and we also had to go. We arrived at Al Ain Compost Plant just as the heavens opened and an electric storm passed over, but despite the soaking, we enjoyed some excellent birding here. Good numbers of Temminck's Stints, Black-winged Stilt and a few Red-wattled Lapwings, Ruff and Green and Common Sandpipers were on the pools and a mixed flock of Common Teal, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Wigeon flew overhead. A large, mixed flock of Barn Swallow and Sand Martins also contained a single House Martin and Red-rumped Swallow and after much difficulty due to the poor light, we also found a few of the hoped for Plain Martins amongst them – the lack of breast band that distinguishes them more obvious when you had seen the first one. However, it was a very short tailed, ultramarine coloured hirundine with a white underwing that really caught our attention, and after a while studying it, we were able to call it as a Wire-tailed Swallow; an uncommon visitor to the UAE. This bird was a first winter, so showed just a couple of white spots where the tail streamers should have been and a dark instead of chestnut cap – a super bird that we saw very well as it was constantly being mobbed by the other hirundines. As if that wasn't enough, a sub adult Eastern Imperial Eagle flew in and gave scope filling views as it perched in a tree before flying off, just as a Greater Spotted Eagle arrived from over the dunes in the opposite direction, to give us two large eagles in the sky at the same time. We ended the day at Carn Nizwa, where more Brown-necked Raven and Red-tailed Wheatear were present and at dusk, just as we were getting rather anxious a huge Pharaoh Eagle Owl appeared on top of a ridge and posed for scope views as it shook itself down after leaving its roost. What a bird!! It was seen in flight too and perched further away on a different ridge and was also heard to call on several occasions before the light faded, the bird vanished and we had to leave. Fantastic!!

7TH FEBRUARY

Today was a transfer day, so once we had loaded up the van, we headed to Ghantoot on another cloudy and breezy day, but thankfully we saw no rain today. Upon arrival, we checked the plantation for Grey Hypocolius, but with just one bird reported this year, it was always going to be a long shot and we were unsuccessful. A few Southern Grey Shrike, Purple Sunbird, Red-vented Bulbul and the omni-present White-cheeked Bulbul were noted and some of the group saw the first Song Thrush of the tour. The main interest was provided by good views of up to five Desert Lesser Whitethroat as they hopped around the bases of the trees or fed in the canopy. An Arabian Fox ran through the vegetation putting groups of Grey Francolins to flight and Graceful Prinia, Common Hoopoe and Rock Martin were also noted. At the Ghantoot Polo Fields, a Cream-coloured Courser ran around on the short turf, alongside two Common Starling and a few White Wagtail and Common Myna. We moved on to the excellent Al Wathba Lake complex, where we enjoyed an excellent couple of hours birding. A couple of male Menetries Warblers showed briefly, but well in Tamarisks near the entrance, as did several Graceful Prinia and Marsh Harriers were constant companions as they drifted over the reed beds. We heard countless Clamorous Reed Warbler, but it took until the end of our visit to finally get to see one well in the windy conditions and we were pleased that one decided to perch out in the open, as they had proved to be rather frustrating birds until then. Small parties of Ruff, Wood Sandpiper and a lot of Little Stints were present around the main lake, where huge numbers of Northern Shoveler, Greater Flamingo, Common Shelduck and Mallard were also present. Three Greater Spotted Eagles drifted over, sending birds sky wards in all directions and we picked out a few Temminck's Stints, winter plumaged Curlew Sandpiper and Ringed, Kentish and Little Ringed Plover after they had settled again. A Eurasian Spoonbill, two Cattle Egret and a couple of Western Reef Egrets flew overhead, a Bar-tailed Godwit roosted on a sandbank, alongside a Common Redshank, Common Greenshank and a flock of Pied Avocet and two distant Red-necked Phalarope swam on the water. While watching these, we picked out three Marsh Sandpipers feeding on the waters edge, small numbers of Spotted Redshank and one or two Bluethroat flitted out of the reeds.

Over thirty Black-necked Grebe formed a flotilla on a small lake, a Ruddy Shelduck and Glossy Ibis flew in and landed side by side and several Common Moorhen and a few Red-wattled Lapwing fed along the reed edge. More Wood Sandpiper, three White-tailed Plover, two Common Snipe and Water Pipit and Citrine Wagtail were also in the rank vegetation and a couple of Tawny Pipit flushed from a sandy area. Our final stop was at the Al Wathba Camel Track, where we soon picked up sixteen cracking Bimaculated Lark, alongside hundreds of Laughing and Collared Doves, a couple of Greater Short-toed Lark and good numbers of Crested Lark. Small numbers of Isabelline and Desert Wheatears, a large flock of Sky Lark and good numbers of Marsh Harriers that included a superb male that gave close up views as it headed in to roost. Five or six Asian Desert Warblers showed well despite the by now very cool and windy conditions, a couple of Arabian Hare ran quickly through the sueda, two Indian Silverbill flew over and a Common Kestrel hunted at close range. Our main target here however was Egyptian Nightjar, but despite spending an hour searching with the flashlights, we were unable to find any – not too surprising given the poor conditions. We drove back to Dubai, to find a problem with the hotel and ended up staying in the far smarter Marriot Hotel, so not all bad. Quieter today, but still very rewarding.

8TH FEBRUARY

We finally awoke to glorious sunshine and after a bit of a lie in, we all felt better for the journey east to Khor Kalba. We passed through some superb mountain scenery where a few roadside Hume's Wheatears were noted. We drove for approximately two hours before reaching the mangrove swamp on the edge of the crystal blue Indian Ocean at Kalba and the Khor was packed with fantastic birds. First up was a very showy Syke's Warbler that gave us the perfect opportunity to note its short primary projection, long bill and supercilium that was more distinct in front of the eye and also heard its harsh "tak" calls as it flitted languidly in between trees, so typical of the *Hippolais* genus and we also added another two birds, though neither showed as well as this bird – a splendid start to the day. Soon after a couple of Common Redshank and Common Sandpiper arrived on the river as the tide began to drop. A Greater Spotted Eagle and a couple of Grey Heron were also noted in this area, before we drove a short distance to an area of shingle banks and mud. Almost immediately, we found a Collared Kingfisher perched up on a rock; the first of six seen today as they jumped down to feed on the thousands of tiny crabs exposed by the shore. By mid morning, it was getting hot, but the light was excellent as we scanned for and soon found a couple of Indian Pond Herons, one of which gave us a nice fly past before alighting under the shade of a mangrove. Our first Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrel were present, along with a few Common Greenshank, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Great Cormorant, while Red-tailed, Isabelline and Desert Wheatears and Crested Larks were on the sandy areas and an Isabelline shrike hunted from on top of a dustbin. A large flock of gulls posed some tricky identification challenges with Caspian and Heuglin's definitely present, but we also thought Steppe Gull may well have been present. Certainly Black-headed and Slender-billed Gulls were also present in numbers and a Great White Egret and Western Reef Egret were also noted on the banks. The stars of the show here though were undoubtedly the gorgeous Sooty Gulls that were present in good numbers and in a wide variety of plumages. A little further on, a sizeable flock of Lesser Sand Plovers were present, along with a Greater Sand Plover for a side by side master class in these tricky shorebirds. We later saw both acquiring breeding plumage alongside each other too. Kentish Plovers and an over flying Osprey rounded a very enjoyable hour or so. We then drove to the harbour, where a large mixed flock of terns provided us with excellent views of several Lesser Crested Tern, a few of the larger yellow billed and much darker Swift Terns and a few Sandwich Terns as they roosted on an island alongside our first European Oystercatchers and more Caspian Gulls, Great Cormorants and Kentish Plovers. A drive over a small desert area produced a flock of thirty or so of the gorgeous Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse that fed, preened and flew so that we could see all of their markings and a similar number of Lesser Short-toed Larks were also present in the same area and as we left a small party of Green Turtles were seen on the surface in the clear water. A stop at Fujairah Port Beach saw more Caspian and Black-headed Gulls, a couple of Sanderling and two distant Arctic Skua harassing a large flock of terns, but they were too far out to identify. More Sooty Gulls were also on the beach and good numbers of Indian House Crows joined them when a fishing boat came in. A couple of Western Reef Egrets waited hopefully for scraps and a part of six White-cheeked Terns including an almost breeding plumaged bird flew in and landed on a small fishing boat. This allowed us to scope them up and also note the very grey flight appearance that is a very useful feature for identifying this species at sea. A few Lesser Crested and Sandwich Terns passed overhead too as we left for check in at the hotel. Things didn't go entirely to plan and Neil was left behind to sort out the problem after lunch while everyone else moved on to Wadi Helo to be in place at a drinking pool in time for any Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse that may come in and on this occasion the groups luck was in as seven birds duly arrived and performed very well.

9TH FEBRUARY

We woke to a warm day but with some sea mist as we left Fujairah for Dibba. Our first stop was at Bidya Harbour, but we were unable to find any Persian Shearwaters passing. A couple of Sandwich and Lesser Crested Terns were seen close inshore, a single White-cheeked Tern was perched on a buoy and a Swift Tern passed through and a small flock of Heuglin's Gulls passed through. We continued on the Dairy Farm, where we soon enjoyed excellent views of three Indian Pond Herons, Isabelline Shrike, Green and Common Sandpipers, Indian Silverbill and a Common Chiffchaff. Indian Rollers were perched on many of the water hydrants or bushes, a few Cattle Egret flew overhead, Red-wattled Lapwings and good numbers of Common Snipe flushed from wetter areas and a pair of Siberian Stonechat perched up and showed well. The cow sheds provided us with excellent views of the very distinctive and surely soon to be split Masked Wagtails. At least five of the handsome males were present and a couple of female types dropped in too. A couple of Tawny Pipit were out in the stony hammada type desert and soon after we found the first of our target birds as a Long-billed Pipit perched up right in front of us with a large bug in its considerable bill. Also in this area was a mixed flock of Desert Larks and Mountain Bunting, as well as Desert and Red-tailed Wheatears. A Bank Myna perched up on a fence post and was joined shortly after by a Richard's Pipit that then flew into Oman. Walking more of the wet areas produced four Pintail Snipe – identified by the all dark underwing and lack of white trailing edge to the wing as they took flight and a few Sky Lark and Meadow Pipits also flew out.

We drove to another stony area, where a Little Egret was a surprise find in a ditch and we were delighted to find a delightful chocolate brown Variable Wheatear that gave excellent views and shortly after a Bonelli's Eagle lifted out of a tree and gave amazing views as it circled very low overhead; so low in fact that we could look into its eyes without a scope and the white back patch was clearly visible as it banked before it caught a thermal and drifted away high to the west. We took lunch before making the journey to Ras al Khaimah without further stops. After an hour to enjoy some downtime, we drove to Hamraniyah Fields, where again large numbers of Laughing and Collared Doves were present, along with more Bank Myna, Crested Lark, Indian Roller, Red-wattled Lapwing and Common Hoopoe. A few small parties of Grey Francolin were in the stony areas, a Corn Bunting perched high in a tree was new for the tour, a couple of Southern Grey Shrikes included one among a large roost of noisy and nervous House Sparrows, a Desert Fox and cub played in the last rays of sunshine while parties of Arabian Babblers searched for a final meal, and finally after dark, much to everyone's relief, we found a hunting Egyptian Nightjar, which showed fairly well under lamplight and we heard at least two others before we set off back to the hotel

10TH FEBRUARY

Another fantastic days birding with glorious blue skies and a light breeze. We began at the vast wetlands of Khor Al Beidah where almost immediately we found a flock of two hundred or so Crab Plovers roosting on the waters edge. This was probably the most wanted bird of the tour and we enjoyed watching them for a while before the flock flew off. We later relocated them among vast numbers of roosting shorebirds. Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, European Oystercatcher, Common Greenshank and Common Redshank were present in large numbers, while a sizeable flock of Terek Sandpipers were also very welcome additions to the trip list. The birds were often feeding at close range, allowing excellent scope views and because of this we were able to pick out a group of another much wanted species in the form of five Great Knot, while a few Grey and Pacific Golden Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank were also present. A hundred or so Gull-billed Terns and a Lesser Crested Tern were roosting among them, as were fifty or so Slender-billed Gull, some of which were showing large bright pink washes over the breast typical of the breeding dress. A European Sparrowhawk and a couple of Marsh Harriers kept everything alert, a couple of Osprey drifted over and Western Reef Egret, Grey Heron and a couple of juvenile Socotra Cormorant were noted along the shoreline, all of which made for a tremendous spectacle, made so enjoyable by the fact that we got there early and avoided any heat haze. Small numbers of Crested Lark were noted, but we were surprised and very fortunate to get amazing views of a Greater Hoopoe Lark perched down to a few feet on top of a small sand pile; the bird even uttered a few notes of song before it flew off into the desert. We moved on to Umm al Quwain Breakwater and as we walked out to the beach, nothing could have prepared us for the spectacle that awaited us. Thousands more shorebirds, most of which were Lesser Sand Plover were roosting on the beach and these were joined by smaller numbers of European Oystercatcher, Sanderling, Grey Plover and Ruddy Turnstone, while a flock of sixteen huge Pallas's Gulls included several breeding plumaged adults. These birds were another much wanted species and to see them in such a variety of plumages was very enjoyable. However, it was the masses of Socotra Cormorants that stole the show as flocks as far as the eye could see were seen swooping in a curious wave like fashion over the sea as they came in to roost or left to go fishing. It was impossible to accurately guess the numbers, but we felt that between fifteen and twenty thousand was fairly accurate – an absolutely spectacular sight. A few Heuglin's and Slender-billed Gulls were also noted before we left to head back to Dubai. We checked Ras al Khor again, where the highlight was a superb Eastern Imperial Eagle right overhead that was being mobbed by a Greater Spotted Eagle that looked small in comparison, but we were probably there with the tide too low and the haze too strong, so numbers of shorebirds were low. Little Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Common Greenshank, Black-winged Stilt, as well as Western Reef and Great White Egrets, Greater Flamingos and Eurasian Spoonbills were all present in small numbers while a few Common Shelduck and Northern Shoveler were on the water. We decided to check in to our hotel and relax for an hour or so to let the heat die down a bit before spending the last couple of hours of daylight back at the Pivot Fields. This proved to be a good move, as immediately upon our arrival, we had two superb ringtail Pallid Harriers quartering the fields, the rufous underparts and white neck boa obvious as they banked and turned. A master class in pipit identification allowed us to carefully separate at least two, but probably three Blyth's Pipits and a single Richard's Pipit by being able to see most of the salient features such as the median coverts, malar patches, bill length and size, difference in stance and size, while a cracking breeding plumage Red-throated Pipit and a couple of Water Pipits were also noted. A White-tailed Plover dropped in and landed right at our feet and large numbers of White and Yellow Wagtails were present before they all flew off to roost. Common Hoopoe, Red-vented and White-cheeked Bulbuls, Common Chiffchaff, Pallid Swift were also noted and finally as the sun set and the call to prayer began, a flock of twenty Common Teal were seen flying in to roost somewhere nearby.

11TH FEBRUARY

With it being our last full day, we decided to head back to the east coast as this offered our best opportunity to catch up with the most missing species. Another gloriously warm sunny day greeted us as we left Dubai shortly after dawn and after an hour or so, we stopped at Wadi Helo, which was teeming with birds. Red-tailed and Hume's Wheatears, Purple Sunbirds, Black Redstarts, White-spectacled Bulbul and Desert Larks were the commonest species, but we also noted several Blue Rock Thrush, Common Hoopoe, Mountain Bunting, Plain Leaf Warbler and Desert Lesser Whitethroats. A single Sand Partridge showed distantly on a hill, a few Grey Francolin were noted in the gravelly areas and eventually we found our target birds as a pair of Scrub Warblers showed beautifully in an acacia tree at very close range – superb! From here, we continued on to Fujairah Port Beach, where once again we failed to find any Persian Shearwaters or Saunder's Tern, but enjoyed excellent views of Swift, Lesser Crested, White-cheeked and Sandwich Terns, Sooty, Black-headed and Slender-billed Gulls including one with a wholly pink head and breast, Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers; some of which were in breeding dress, a few Little Stints, Dunlin, Kentish and Ringed Plovers. The large gull complex was as difficult as ever, but today we seemed to pick out lots of Steppe Gulls among the Caspian and Heuglin's – perhaps we are just becoming a bit more attuned to the subtle differences in mantle and eye colours and bill shape, but they are by no means easy and once again nobody was absolutely sure. While searching through these flocks, we did however find a couple of striking adult Pallas's Gulls and a bird that we did all recognize and which turned out to be just the sixth ever record for the Emirates in the form of a Black-legged Kittiwake that flew along the beach and landed right in front of us!

Neil rang the local birding community and it seems there could be quite a twitch on over the weekend despite the fact that the bird flew off and could not be relocated... Following a nice lunch at the Hilton Hotel, we drove the short distance to Khor Khalba Beach, where we immediately picked up a flying Striated Heron. As we stopped the bus to view this bird a stunning Collared Kingfisher flew into the same bush and we could see both birds in the same scope view. They both eventually dropped down to give fantastic views on the beach – the kingfisher catching crabs and the heron watching the water for fish before the were both disturbed and flew off. More sea watching produced a couple more Pallas's Gulls and Lesser Crested and Swift Terns, a few Western Reef Egrets and Grey Herons and a sizeable flock of Sanderling on the beach. We returned to Dubai just as the sun was going down at the end of another memorable day. Later we celebrated John's birthday with a few drinks.

12TH FEBRUARY

Our final morning began with a dash back to Ghantoot, but once again we were unable to find Grey Hypocolius. A Song Thrush showed well and there were further views of Desert Lesser Whitethroat, Red-vented and White-cheeked Bulbul, Little Green Bee-eater, Southern Grey Shrike and Purple Sunbirds. We decided to give the Pivot Fields one last shot and were rewarded with some more excellent views of Pallid Harrier, White-tailed Plover and Red-wattled Lapwing, while a Clamorous Reed Warbler sat right out in the open and sang from the top of a reed in the hot sun. Isabelline Shrike, Marsh Harrier, Crested larks and large numbers of House Sparrow were also noted during our brief visit, but there was no sign of any Streaked Weavers. We made our way to the airport and said our farewells to Neil before checking in for the mid afternoon flight back to London, where the tour concluded.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Greater White-fronted Goose
2. Common Shelduck
3. Egyptian Goose
4. Mallard
5. Gadwall
6. Northern Pintail
7. Northern Shoveler
8. Eurasian Wigeon
9. Common Teal
10. Ferruginous Duck
11. Tufted Duck
12. Grey Francolin
13. Sand Partridge
14. Black-necked Grebe
15. Little Grebe
16. Great Cormorant
17. Socotra Cormorant
18. Black-crowned Night Heron
19. Striated Heron
20. Cattle Egret
21. Indian Pond Heron
22. Little Egret
23. Western Reef Egret
24. Great White Egret
25. Grey Heron
26. Purple Heron
27. Glossy Ibis
28. Eurasian Spoonbill
29. Greater Flamingo
30. Egyptian Vulture
31. Osprey
32. Eastern Imperial Eagle
33. Greater Spotted Eagle
34. Bonelli's Eagle
35. Marsh Harrier
36. Montagu's Harrier
37. Pallid Harrier
38. Oriental Honey Buzzard
39. European Sparrowhawk
40. Shikra
41. Common Kestrel
42. Lesser Kestrel
43. Moorhen
44. Common Coot
45. Grey-headed Swamp-hen
46. European Oystercatcher
47. Pied Avocet
48. Black-winged Stilt
49. Cream-coloured Courser
50. Little Ringed Plover

51. Ringed Plover
52. Kentish Plover
53. Lesser Sand Plover
54. Greater Sand Plover
55. Grey Plover
56. European Golden Plover
57. Pacific Golden Plover
58. Red-wattled Lapwing
59. White-tailed Plover
60. Great Knot
61. Crab Plover
62. Sanderling
63. Ruddy Turnstone
64. Dunlin
65. Curlew Sandpiper
66. Temminck's Stint
67. Little Stint
68. Wood Sandpiper
69. Green Sandpiper
70. Common Sandpiper
71. Terek Sandpiper
72. Common Redshank
73. Spotted Redshank
74. Common Greenshank
75. Marsh Sandpiper
76. Black-tailed Godwit
77. Bar-tailed Godwit
78. Eurasian Curlew
79. Whimbrel
80. Common Snipe
81. Pin-tailed Snipe
82. Red-necked Phalarope
83. Ruff
84. Arctic Skua
85. Black-headed Gull
86. Slender-billed Gull
87. Caspian Gull
88. Pallas's Gull
89. Steppe Gull
90. Heuglin's Gull
91. Black-legged Kittiwake
92. Sooty Gull
93. Sandwich Tern
94. Gull-billed Tern
95. Caspian Tern
96. Lesser Crested Tern
97. Swift Tern
98. White-cheeked Tern
99. Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse
100. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
101. Feral Rock Dove
102. Eurasian Collared Dove
103. Laughing Dove
104. Pharaoh Eagle Owl
105. Egyptian Nightjar
106. Pallid Swift
107. Common Hoopoe
108. Common Kingfisher
109. Collared Kingfisher
110. Little Green Bee-eater
111. Indian Roller
112. Sky Lark
113. Oriental Sky Lark
114. Crested Lark
115. Greater Short-toed Lark
116. Lesser Short-toed Lark
117. Desert Lark
118. Greater Hoopoe Lark
119. Black-crowned Finch Lark
120. Bimaculated Lark
121. Sand Martin

122. Plain Martin
123. African Rock Martin
124. Barn Swallow
125. Red-rumped Swallow
126. House Martin
127. Wire-tailed Swallow
128. Tawny Pipit
129. Long-billed pipit
130. Richard's Pipit
131. Blyth's Pipit
132. Water Pipit
133. Meadow Pipit
134. Olive-backed Pipit
135. Red-throated Pipit
136. White Wagtail
137. Yellow Wagtail
138. Citrine Wagtail
139. Grey Wagtail
140. Common Nightingale
141. Bluethroat
142. Black Redstart
143. Isabelline Wheatear
144. Variable Wheatear
145. Hooded Wheatear
146. Hume's Wheatear
147. Desert Wheatear
148. Persian Wheatear
149. Siberian Stonechat
150. Song Thrush
151. Blue Rock Thrush
152. Scrub Warbler
153. Graceful Prinia
154. Lesser Whitethroat
155. Menetries Warbler
156. Asian Desert Warbler
157. Caspian Reed Warbler [H]
158. Clamorous Reed Warbler
159. Syke's Warbler
160. Common Chiffchaff
161. Plain Leaf Warbler
162. Hume's Leaf Warbler
163. Southern Grey Shrike
164. Isabelline Shrike
165. White-spectacled Bulbul
166. White-cheeked Bulbul
167. Red-vented Bulbul
168. Purple Sunbird
169. Arabian Babbler
170. Brown-necked Raven
171. Indian House Crow
172. Common Starling
173. Rose-coloured Starling
174. Common Myna
175. Bank Myna
176. Pied Myna
177. Ring-necked Parakeet
178. Alexandrine Parakeet
179. House Sparrow
180. Corn Bunting
181. Mountain Bunting
182. Indian Silverbill

OTHER WILDLIFE

Arabian Fox
Desert Hare
Plain Tiger
Swallowtail
Painted Lady
Lesser Millet Skipper
Desert Babul Blue
Blue Pansy