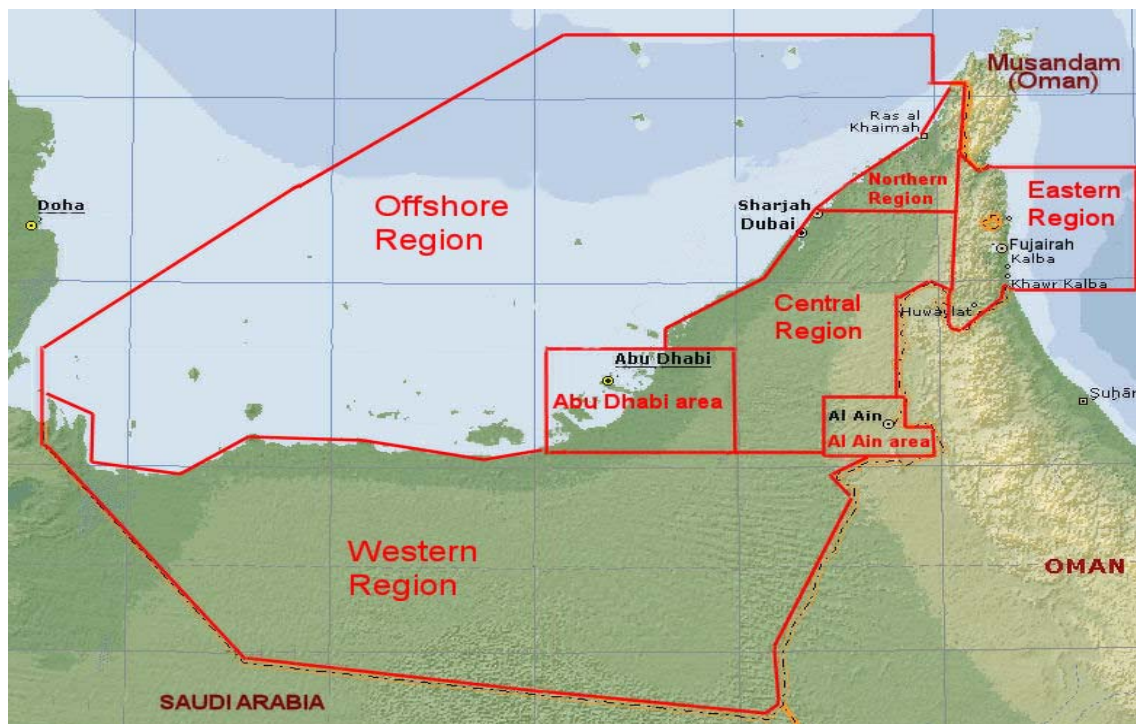


UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 23-26 February 2007

Mike Cram, Neville Davies, Neil Tovey

I finally made the much awaited planned visit to long time birding buddy and best man Neil Tovey in Dubai. Neil has been working out there for 2 years and is due to return after Easter. With domestic approval sorted, a full three days beckoned to 'cram' in as many species and lifers as possible.

The UAE consists of the seven former 'Trucial States'. By the time the British left in the 1970s, Dubai, Sharjah, Umm-al-Qaiwain, Ras-al-Khaimah, Fujairah, Abu Dhabi and Ajman formed the nation of the United Arab Emirates.



DAY 1

Fri 23rd Feb 2007 – Dubai, Central Coast & Northern Region

Birding pal Neville Davies accompanied me as we took our overnight 6-hour Virgin Atlantic flight from Heathrow to Dubai (**£295 return**) on the evening of 22nd Feb.

We landed at Dubai just after dawn on Fri 23rd and with a fairly swift and painless transit through security, we met up with Neil just outside the airport. With accommodation and transport already sorted (we were staying with Neil), bags were slung in the boot and we hit the ground running!

We left the airport and made our way to one of Dubai's finest sites. Along the way, we saw the first of many **Laughing Dove** and **Common Myna** and a few birds on pools near the entrance to the site, mainly the first of many **Great White Egret**, **Greater Flamingo** and **Black-winged Stilt**.

The Pivot Fields, Dubai

We worked the reed beds and fields in among the sprinkler systems and encountered many Pipits and Wagtails. Immediately we were struck by an unusual looking **Yellow Wagtail ssp** (below) which had been causing some id headaches for the local birders. This bird was with **Citrine** and **White Wagtails**.



Also present were many **Black-headed Wagtail**, **Crested Lark**, **Red-throated Pipit**, **Water Pipit** plus single **Richard's** and **Blyth's Pipits**. Many waders use the site and we soon saw **Red-Wattled Lapwing**, **White-tailed Plover**, a superb summer plumage **Sociable Plover**, many **Kentish Plover**, **Temminck's** and **Little Stint**, **100+ Common Snipe**, **2 European Golden Plover** (a wintering rarity for UAE), **1 Pacific Golden Plover**, **1 Ruff** and **4 Wood Sandpiper**.

As we worked the site many Snipe were flushed and we soon picked out one of our target birds, **2 Pintail Snipe**. A bit tricky but good flight views were obtained by all, including local birder Clive Temple (who bore a striking resemblance to Minty off Eastenders). We did however fail to find the Oriental Skylark present.

We also noted **6 Glossy Ibis, 2 Marsh Harrier, 1 Pallid Harrier, 3 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, 15 Grey Francolin, 6 Pallid Swift, 1 Little Green Bee-eater, 3 Indian Roller, 2 Barn Swallow, sev Graceful Prinia, 1 Daurian Shrike, 1 Red-vented Bulbul, several White-cheeked Bulbul, 2 Bluethroat** and some over flying **Bank Myna**. Nev and I managed to miss a Siberian Stonechat and a Streaked Weaver, but we were hopeful of catching up with others later on.

As we moved on along the **Emirates Desert Road**, we saw our first 2 **Brown-necked Raven**. We reached the **Al Warsan Lakes**; formerly called Wimpey Pits, as it was a large construction site at one time. We encountered many common water birds and a few **Black-necked Grebe, Ferruginous Duck** and large numbers of **Black-headed** and **Caspian Gulls**. Also noted were our first **Purple Heron**, and the only **Purple Swamp-hen** of the trip.



Umm-al-Qaiwain

At midday we parked near the **Umm-al-Qaiwain breakwater** for a planned seawatch. We were not to be disappointed. Within an hour we had logged **30+ Socotra Cormorant, 2 Grey Heron, 3 Western Reef Heron, 1 Grey Plover, numerous Eurasian Oystercatcher, 2 Sanderling, 2 Ruddy Turnstone, 4 Caspian Tern, 1 Saunders's Tern, 1 Lesser Crested Tern, 2 Sandwich Tern and 10 Slender-billed Gull**. At the brackish areas inland we noted **1 Little Green Bee-eater, 1 Southern Grey Shrike, 1 Common Kingfisher** and our only **Turkestan Shrike** of the trip.



Neil & Nev at Umm-al-Qaiwain



Western Reef Heron at Umm-al-Qaiwain

As a warm afternoon progressed we moved on to **Khor-al-Beida** for the slowly rising tide. As we worked through good numbers of Greater Flamingo and Western Reef Heron, we soon encountered another target species in **15+ Crab Plover**, obligingly doing exactly what it says on the tin! This super site

soon yielded **6 Terek Sandpiper**, **1 Common Greenshank**, **3 Marsh Sandpiper**, **2 Lesser Sandplover** and **10 Gull-billed Tern**. Nev also picked out a fine **Greater Spotted Eagle** roosting in a nearby bush!



Crab Plover at Khor-al-Beida



Slender-billed Gull at Dreamland Beach

We moved inland as the tide had not risen enough to bring in all the waders including another target bird, Great Knot. Our sustained efforts in the desert/dune area yielded a singing **Greater Hoopoe Lark** showing well together with **2 male Black-crowned Sparrow Lark**, **2 male Desert Wheatear**, **3 Isabelline Wheatear** and an **Asian Desert Warbler**.

A fine first day's birding was capped off at [**Dreamland Beach**](#) where the highlight was a flock of **60+ Lesser Short-toed Lark** flying around in perfect evening sunlight.

We retired to Neil's villa at dusk and a well-earned beer and ordered pizza.

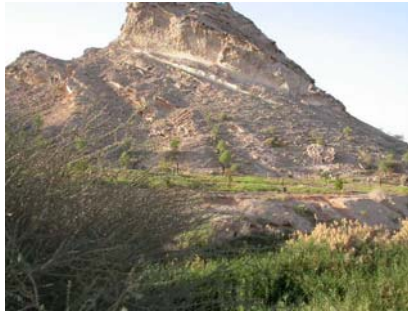
DAY 2

Sat 24th Feb 2007 – Central Region, Al Ain and Abu Dhabi

An inland journey towards the mountains took us to Green Mubazzarah just after dawn. Like a bit of parkland mixed with Wadi habitat, it was greener than usual due to the relatively cool winter. This was the best site of the trip for me, stunning scenery and superb birds. I took more photos here than anywhere else.



Green Mubazzarah



Jebel Hafet

Almost immediately after getting out of the car we saw **1 Striated Heron, 8+ Cattle Egret, Rock Martin, 2 Red-tailed Wheatear, 2 Daurian Shrike, 1 Clamorous Reed Warbler and 1 Purple Sunbird.**



Striated Heron



Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush



Purple Sunbird



Sand Partridge

We met up with another local birding friend of Neil's, American Dave Clark. Together we all moved up into the nearby Wadi. This valley runs for some distance, but in the short visit we made we logged **1 Egyptian Vulture, 4 Sand Partridge, 1 Desert Lark, 2 Long-billed Pipit, 1 Pied Wheatear, 1 Hooded Wheatear, 1 Hume's Wheatear, 2 Blue Rock Thrush, 2 Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, 2 Rufous Scrub Robin, 2 eastern race Black Redstart, the first of many White-spectacled Bulbul, 2 Menetries's**

Warbler, 1 Desert Whitethroat, 1 Asian Desert Warbler and 1 Plain Leaf Warbler. The wintering Mourning Wheatear appeared to have departed.

At 1100 we jumped into Dave's 4x4 and cruised up the road covered in 'Top Gear' to the **Jebel Hafeet Mountain Hotel Gardens**. The views were stunning and we saw an **Egyptian Vulture** en route. When visiting the hotel a small fee is paid to staff to view the gardens, which can be very productive. You then use the ticket to offset the cost of any refreshments you take there. Whilst sipping cool drinks we enjoyed 2 more **Hume's Wheatear, 2 Red-tailed Wheatear** and **2 Blue Rock Thrush**.

We moved further inland and stopped at **Wadi Al-Ain** at 1300, which had recently been supplied by some water. A quick visit logged **Red-wattled Lapwing, 2 Green Sandpiper, 1 Little Ringed Plover, 1 Tawny Pipit** and **1 Red-throated Pipit**.



Red-wattled Lapwing at the Wadi Al-Ain

We reached **Al Wathba Camel track** at 1420 in the afternoon heat. We were rewarded with our target species immediately, **15+ Bimaculated Lark** together with a fine **Booted Eagle** (dark). The nearby **Al Wathba Lakes** and environs were well populated with birds relatively common to the region like **Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover** and **Grey Francolin**, but we only added **Pied Avocet** to our trip list there. The wintering Egyptian Nightjars had moved on apparently so we did not have to visit the site again at dark.

Neil spotted what proved to be the only Arabian Babblers of the trip in Abu Dhabi as they flew over the motorway, but Nev and I missed them.

We reached the **Mushrif Palace Gardens** in Abu Dhabi at 1530. Be aware if visiting this sensitive area. Do not take telescopes or cameras and to be discrete with your binoculars, only using them in the wooded areas around the palace, or you risk being frog-marched away and spending an awkward night in the local cells! Bearing that in mind we still managed to see **Grey Francolin, Little Green Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Purple Sunbird, Ring-necked Parakeet, White-cheeked Bulbul, White-spectacled Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Redwing** (UAE rarity), **Desert Whitethroat, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Graceful Prinia, House Crow, Daurian Shrike** and **Indian Silverbill**. We did not manage to see Red-whiskered Bulbul, which are restricted to this site only. We also failed to see Crested Honey Buzzard, even

though we checked out the nearby [Abu Dhabi golf & equestrian centre](#) where they have also been seen.

We finished off at a disused hotel at [Ghantoot](#) at dusk and did not see much of note except **25+ Pacific Golden Plover** on nearby playing fields. Two of our targets, some wintering Grey Hypocolius and Cream-coloured Courser, had recently left the site.



Ghantoot at dusk



Hitting the town in Dubai!!



Dubai Night Life



After the long drive back to Dubai, we freshened up and hit the town in Dubai.

There is a lot of major construction work going on in Dubai. The development is hectic including that of the roads and transport systems. This made the taxi journey very interesting including views of what will be the tallest building in the world when it is completed, the **Burj Dubai**, probably over 120 storeys.

Compared to Sharjah and some of the “dry” states, it is party central! However drinking laws are still strict and you should dress respectfully, avoid intimate behaviour in public and on no account be caught drunk and disorderly.

Whilst we were there we also witnessed the down side of things including the large camps of immigrant working men, engaged in the massive construction industry, living in what appeared to be cramped and difficult conditions in the shanty type huts on the outskirts of Dubai.

DAY 3

Sun 25th Feb 2007 – Eastern Region and Oman

Our planned dawn start on the east coast was delayed by unexpected thick fog. As we made our way into Fujairah through Dibba after a difficult journey, the fog cleared to reveal stunning mountain scenery. We stopped for a break at the [Masafi Wadi](#) to try for Arabian Babbler again, to no avail, just a few Hoopoe, Pallid Swift and Red-tailed Wheatear.



The road into Dibba



Masafi Wadi

We reached [Fujairah Dairy Farm](#) at 0830. This is one of the best sites in the UAE for birding. At migration times just about anything can turn up. That wasn't to be today, but we still saw 1 Squacco Heron, Red-wattled Lapwing, Little Green-Bee-eater, Indian Roller, Purple Sunbird, 14 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Citrine Wagtail, Pallid Swift, 1 Masked Wagtail, 3 Bluethroat, Bank Myna, Indian Silverbill and House Crow. Also of note were a species of Ground Mantis and a Tiger butterfly.



Fujairah Dairy Farm and the Omani border fence.



As it was quiet for migrants we moved to the coast and stopped at [Al Bidya harbour](#).

Our reward was 5 Swift Tern, but little else so we moved on to [Fujairah beach](#) which proved very productive:- Socotra Cormorant, numerous BH and Caspian Gull an absolutely cracking adult Pallas's Gull, several Lesser Crested Tern and Slender-billed Gull, 10 Sooty Gull and several White-cheeked Tern. Further down the coast we took refuge in the excellent [Hilton hotel, Fujairah](#) at 1200 for some lunch and relaxed with an Orange Vanilla Ice drink, as more of the same flew by!



Swift Tern at Al Bidya harbour



Pallas's Gull at Fujairah beach Mike & Neil at Fujairah beach

Another target hot spot was chalked up by 1400 in the afternoon heat, well into the 30s-Celsius. The mangrove and beach habitat around **Khor Kalba** was very productive. We encountered **6+ Green Turtle** under the bridge at the entrance to the site and within minutes sighted our target birds **5 Indian Pond Heron** and **4 White-Collared Kingfisher**. As we explored the site we also saw **1 Great White Egret**, **1 Arctic Skua**, **1 Pallas's Gull**, **2 Swift Tern**, several **Lesser Crested Tern**, **10+Sooty Gull**, **6 Greater Sandplover** (incl. 1 stunning summer plumaged adult), **40 Lesser Sandplover**, **2 Lesser Short-toed Lark** and 1 male **Black-crowned Sparrow Lark**.



Sooty Gull at Fujairah beach

We moved off inland to the **Hatta Dams** in search of **Lappet-faced Vulture** and House Bunting. We were relatively unsuccessful, but managed nice close views of **Desert Lark**. Neil & Nev saw a **House Bunting**, but we saw little else. This site is also known as good for **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse** at dusk, but they are very difficult to get!



Neil missing **Lappet-faced Vulture**, again, at the Hatta Dams!!

We briefly entered part of **Oman** on the way back to Dubai. Not being one to miss out on the opportunity birding in a new country, I got out my notebook and logged **Indian Roller**, **Collared Dove** and **House Sparrow**.



Qarn Nizva



Sunset over the Mosque at the Pivots

We stopped off at **Qarn Nizva**, a regular roost site for **Desert Eagle Owl**, but were unlucky. All we got were some Camels and a fleet of off-roading Arabs!! Perhaps someone should send Jeremy Clarkson out here?!

We decided rather than risk waiting a couple of hours and seeing nothing, to spend our last UAE hours in the field back at the **Dubai Pivot Fields**. We also gave up the opportunity of another long trip and late finish attempting **Striated Scops Owl** at a site that suffers disturbance at weekends. They are by no means a guarantee.

This was a good decision as Pivot Fields is a super site and was a nice place to finish off and wind down before the long 7-hour flight home the following morning.

We finished off with **Common Snipe**, **Barn Swallow**, **Red-wattled Lapwing**, **White-tailed Plover**, **Clamorous Reed Warbler** and **Siberian Stonechat**.



Avoiding the sewage trucks at the Pivot Fields!

A poignant reminder of the sheer magnitude of the development in Dubai was the long queues of sewage trucks moving from the city to the sewage plant. The queue on the inside lane of the carriageway outside the Pivot Fields must've numbered 100+! Apparently there is no sewer system in town!

Nevertheless this created no stink for us, we finished with a good **trip list of 153 species** between us. I managed 55 lifers plus a race tick in the form of Turkestan Shrike. Neville logged 62 lifers. Neil's only new bird was a UAE lifer in the form of Redwing.

Massive thanks go to my buddy Neil for driving us around everywhere in his Chevy and avoiding all those mad local drivers! It was good crack and excellent birding and much needed warm weather after what we have had to put up with in this country of ours recently. We could not get to all of the best sites but still covered 1,000 miles.

I can thoroughly recommend a visit to the UAE. Have a look at Tommy Pedersen's excellent website www.tommypedersen.com it will give you much of what you need to know and a few contacts as well. Most of the resident birders guide for a reasonable fee and will take you to all of the best sites. A week here probably would have got me 70+ ticks.

Our dates were tied and family commitments shortened our length of visit here. It was a bit early for migration in full swing and a few of the wintering birds and scarcities had moved on. Anyone visiting the region should take this into consideration and maybe come in mid-winter or a little later in spring before it gets too hot to bird comfortably.

To give an idea of the potential a longer and slightly better timed visit could also produce, I've listed the potential lifers that I personally missed out on:- *Lappet-faced Vulture, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Shikra, Crested Honey Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Sooty Falcon, Barbary Falcon, Great Knot, some of the Gulls (complex!!), Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Alexandrine Parakeet, Eagle Owl, Striated Scops Owl, Egyptian Nightjar, Oriental Skylark, Pale Martin, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Grey Hypocolius, Mourning Wheatear, Variable Wheatear, Scrub Warbler, Arabian Babbler, Pied Myna, Streaked Weaver and House Bunting.*

Report written by
Mike Cram

5th March 2007

TRIP List by species (153)

Black-necked Grebe
Great Cormorant
Striated Heron
Indian Pond Heron
Little Egret
Great White Egret
Purple Heron
Eurasian Spoonbill
Eurasian Wigeon
Mallard
Tufted Duck
Greater Spotted Eagle
Marsh Harrier
Common Kestrel
Sand Partridge
Common Coot
Eurasian Oystercatcher
Pied Avocet
Collared Pratincole
Great Ringed Plover
Greater Sandplover
Grey Plover
Pacific Golden Plover
Sociable Plover
Sanderling
Temminck's Stint
Dunlin
Common Snipe
Bar-tailed Godwit
Eurasian Curlew
Marsh Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper
Terek Sandpiper
Ruddy Turnstone
Sooty Gull
Slender-billed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull & races
Gull-billed Tern
Lesser Crested Tern
Sandwich Tern
Saunders's Tern
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
Laughing Dove
Pallid Swift
White-collared Kingfisher
Indian Roller
Lesser Short-toed Lark
Little Grebe
Socotra Cormorant
Squacco Heron
Cattle Egret
Western Reef Heron
Grey Heron
Glossy Ibis
Greater Flamingo
Eurasian Teal
Ferruginous Duck
Egyptian Vulture
Booted Eagle
Pallid Harrier
Grey Francolin
Common Moorhen
Purple Swamp-hen
Crab Plover
Black-winged Stilt
Little Ringed Plover
Lesser Sandplover
Kentish Plover
European Golden Plover
Red-wattled Lapwing
White-tailed Plover
Little Stint
Curlew Sandpiper
Ruff
Pin-tailed Snipe
Whimbrel
Common Redshank
Common Greenshank
Wood Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Arctic Skua
Black-headed Gull
Caspian Gull
Pallas's Gull
Caspian Tern
Swift Tern
White-cheeked Tern
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon
Collared Dove
Ring-necked Parakeet
Common Kingfisher
Little Green Bee-eater
Hoopoe
Desert Lark

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Crested Lark
Greater Hoopoe Lark
Barn Swallow
Richard's Pipit
Tawny Pipit
Tree Pipit
Water Pipit
Black-headed Wagtail
White (incl /Masked) Wagtail
White-spectacled Bulbul
White-cheeked Bulbul
Bluethroat
Isabelline Wheatear
Desert Wheatear
Hume's Wheatear
Siberian Stonechat
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush
Song Thrush
Clamorous Reed Warbler
Menetries's Warbler
Desert Whitethroat
Common Chiffchaff
Arabian Babbler
races)
Southern Grey Shrike
Purple Sunbird
Brown-necked Raven
Bank Myna
House Sparrow
House Bunting

Sky Lark
Bimaculated Lark
African Rock Martin
House Martin
Blyth's Pipit
Long-billed Pipit
Red-throated Pipit
Yellow Wagtail
Citrine Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Red-vented Bulbul
Rufous Bush Robin
Black Redstart
Pied Wheatear
Hooded Wheatear
Red-tailed Wheatear
Blue Rock Thrush
Redwing
Eurasian Reed Warbler
Graceful Prinia
Asian Desert Warbler
Plain Leaf Warbler
Red-breasted Flycatcher
Isabelline Shrike (2

Woodchat Shrike
House Crow
Common Myna
Streaked Weaver
Indian Silverbill

Field Guides used:

Collins, Field Guide to the Birds of Britain & Europe (useful)

Helm: Birds of the Middle East by Porter, Christensen, Schiermacker-Hansen (useful)

OTHER WILDLIFE

Butterflies: Tiger, Painted Lady, Lime plus one yet to be identified

Insects: Ground Mantis sp

Mammals: Blue Iguana sp, Green Turtle