

# Kuwait

12–20 April 2011

## Participants

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**Common Babbler**

**Leaders** Peter Lansdown and local guide

**Day 1:** The group assembled mid-evening at Heathrow Airport and boarded an overnight flight to Bahrain.

**Day 2:** From Bahrain we took the short flight to Kuwait City, where, after completing the entry formalities, which included a painfully slow visa application system, we were met by our local guide. In two hired vehicles, and using three taxis for the luggage, we quickly reached the hotel that would be our base throughout the tour. En route we enjoyed our first views of the spectacular Kuwait City skyline. Soon we had checked in and re-assembled ready for birding. We began at Jahra Farms, an inner-city oasis of tiny green fields, watering-channels and mature trees famous for its wintering population of Hypocolius, which, we discovered, had left just prior to our arrival in the country. A very pleasant walk around the farms produced 10 Bank Mynas, a White-throated Kingfisher and our first Laughing Doves, White-cheeked Bulbul, Pallid Swift, Isabelline Shrikes (*isabellinus* and *phoenicuroides*) and Common Myna of the tour. We moved on to the much larger Jahra Pool Reserve with its pools, reed-beds and open country. As well as connecting with our first Squacco Herons, Lesser Kestrels, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Pied Wheatear and Graceful Prinia of the week we saw a Baillon's Crake weaving its way through some reeds and a Whiskered Tern and heard the far-carrying song of a Clamorous Reed-warbler.

**Day 3:** Our birding began at Al Abra, an isolated farm in the far western desert, where we found a dashing Shikra, a Long-legged Buzzard, a Steppe Eagle, a Booted Eagle, a Collared Pratincole, three Eastern Olivaceous Warblers and two gorgeous Masked Shrikes; we also heard a Hume's Warbler, which had wintered at the site, and encountered our first Pallid Harriers and Black-eared Wheatear of the trip. Next we re-visited Jahra Farms, in the mistaken belief that we had simply missed a still-present Hypocolius the previous day, then drove to Jahra East Outfall with its extensive, tall, dense reed-bed. Here several of us were

fortunate to find a Basra Reed-warbler slowly working its way along the edge of the reeds. At the day's final locality, the coastal Sulaibikhat Nature Reserve, we saw 200 Greater Flamingos and our first Western Reef-egrets, Slender-billed Gulls, Gull-billed Tern and Great Reed-warbler of the trip.

**Day 4:** Green Island, actually a popular parkland peninsula in Kuwait City and another wintering site for the sadly now-departed Hypocolius, was our first port of call. Here we discovered a scruffy first-summer Caspian Gull, a smart White-cheeked Tern, three Red-vented Bulbuls, two nondescript Chestnut-shouldered Petronias, an Eastern Orphean Warbler, our first Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin of the tour and a presumed escaped pair of Rüppell's Weavers. At the extensive Pivot Fields we saw Glossy Ibises and Crested Larks for the first time during the week and a Little Bittern, a Collared Pratincole, a spectacular party of 120 Black-winged Pratincoles, eight much-appreciated Caspian Plovers and five Namaqua Doves. A visit to the viewing-tower at the Fahaheel shopping complex produced two White-cheeked Terns, after which we took a pleasant walk in nearby Fahaheel Park. At Messilah we saw a Caspian Tern and our first Terek Sandpiper and Lesser Crested Terns of the trip.

**Day 5:** An early start enabled us to have breakfast at the remote northern truck stop Rawdatain Restaurant on the road to Iraq. Our birding began at the adjacent tiny reed-bed and continued at the nearby Rawdatain bottling plant, where we notched up an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and a smart Semi-collared Flycatcher. Our destination was Abdaly Farms, an enormous area of date-palm plantations, which are home to the only pair of Common (Afghan) Babbler known in the Western Palearctic. Brief views of a White-throated Robin by some of the group were not considered to be adequate reward for several hours of birding in the heat of the day. We left the area disappointed and headed to the coast at Subia. From here we strained our eyes looking east through the heat-haze across the water to the large, distant and sadly inaccessible Bubiyan Island. Were those white dots gulls, terns or egrets and could some of them even be the sought-after Crab Plovers? With commendable patience, each member of the group eventually saw some birds running, some raising their wings and some in flight and we were happy to record 17 Crab Plovers and three Great Crested Terns in amongst other species. The cooler Jahra Farms produced a White-throated Kingfisher, a White-throated Robin, this time for all to see, a Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush and eight Bank Mynas, while the highlights at Jahra Pool Reserve were a Little Bittern, a Baillon's Crake, 10 Black-winged Stilts, four Black-winged Pratincoles, six Marsh Sandpipers and three Whiskered Terns.

**Day 6:** The wonderful Pivot Fields was our first destination and here we enjoyed two Little Crakes, about 40 Collared and 200 Black-winged Pratincoles, six Caspian Plovers, a Marsh Sandpiper, a European Roller and an Isabelline Wheatear. The busy shoreline at Manchester Club produced a Greater Sandplover, 28 Caspian Terns and four Lesser Crested Terns. We headed south and, thanks to prior permission, we gained access to the large, secure compound at Port Zour, where we saw five Socotra Cormorants, a total of 14 rather distant Bridled Terns, six Lesser Crested Terns, 10 White-cheeked Terns, a Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush and a party of 19 Pale Rockfinches.

**Day 7:** Returning to Al Abraaq, we saw two White-throated Robins, one each of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Ménétries's Warbler and Upcher's Warbler and a *pallidirostris* Southern Grey Shrike, but failed to see the Hypocolius that was discovered after we had left for the coast. Doha Spit was alive with thousands of waders and hundreds of terns just after high tide: the highlights included two Greater Sandplovers, 500 Lesser Sandplovers, mostly in summer plumage, a Broad-billed Sandpiper, a Caspian Gull, 30 Caspian Terns and four Great Crested Terns, while an Asian Desert Warbler remained in the scrub, having wintered at the site. There were 66 Greater Flamingos at Manchester Club, while Jahra East Outfall produced a Little Crake, a Namaqua Dove, a fine Basra Reed-warbler and a Masked Shrike.

**Day 8:** News of a Hypocolius having been seen the previous day at Green Island was enough to persuade us to begin our birding there. Finds included two Red-vented Bulbuls, an Upcher's Warbler, an Eastern Orphean Warbler and the presumed escaped pair of Rüppell's Weavers, but did not include Hypocolius. We headed

north to Abdaly Farms to try again for Common (Afghan) Babbler. After over two hours of searching in the heat of the day, and only a White-throated Robin to show for it, most of the group had started to trudge back to the vehicles, thinking more about ice-creams and cold drinks than birds, when a very distant shout was heard. Soon after, we were all watching Common (Afghan) Babbler; there were five in total, presumably a pair and their three juveniles. Following a well-earned refreshment break, we moved on to the desert at Iron Horse Road, where we saw a European Roller, two Bar-tailed Larks, a Greater Hoopoe-lark, an Upcher's Warbler, a Ménétries's Warbler, another *pallidirostris* Southern Grey Shrike and a Masked Shrike. We finished our last day as we had started our first, at Jahra Farms, which held two Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes and four Bank Mynas.

**Day 9:** We took an early-morning flight to Bahrain to connect with our main flight to London Heathrow, where the tour ended.

Only selected species are mentioned in the above account, while a full list follows. For each species, in brackets, the first figure represents the number of days (out of seven) on which it was seen while the second figure represents the highest daily count or estimate.

Little Grebe (1, 1)	Black-winged Stilt (1, 10)
Great Cormorant (3, 8)	Pied Avocet (2, 12)
Socotra Cormorant (1, 5)	Crab Plover (1, 17)
Little Bittern (2, 1)	Collared Pratincole (3, 40)
Black-crowned Night-heron (3, 6)	Black-winged Pratincole (3, 200)
Squacco Heron (7, 20)	Little Ringed Plover (4, 1)
Cattle Egret (4, 20)	Common Ringed Plover (6, 30)
Western Reef-egret (6, 2)	Kentish Plover (5, 10)
Little Egret (5, 3)	Greater Sandplover (2, 2)
Grey Heron (4, 15)	Lesser Sandplover (1, 500)
Purple Heron (3, 5)	Caspian Plover (2, 8)
White Stork (1, 12)	Grey Plover (3, 100)
Glossy Ibis (4, 8)	Sanderling (3, 50)
Greater Flamingo (2, 200)	Little Stint (6, 30)
Garganey (2, 8)	Temminck's Stint (1, 1)
Northern Shoveler (2, 10)	Curlew Sandpiper (5, 1000)
Black Kite (3, 1)	Dunlin (3, 500)
Western Marsh-harrier (7, 5)	Broad-billed Sandpiper (1, 1)
Pallid Harrier (4, 3)	Ruff (5, 70)
Montagu's Harrier (6, 16)	Common Snipe (4, 2)
Eurasian Sparrowhawk (6, 3)	Black-tailed Godwit (1, 1)
Shikra (1, 1)	Bar-tailed Godwit (1, 100)
Common Buzzard <i>vulpinus</i> (2, 3)	Whimbrel (2, 100)
Long-legged Buzzard (1, 1)	Eurasian Curlew (2, 30)
Steppe Eagle (1, 1)	Common Redshank (4, 15)
Booted Eagle (1, 1)	Marsh Sandpiper (2, 6)
Osprey (1, 1)	Common Greenshank (1, 1)
Lesser Kestrel (4, 7)	Green Sandpiper (2, 4)
Common Kestrel (6, 3)	Wood Sandpiper (7, 20)
Eurasian Hobby (2, 1)	Terek Sandpiper (4, 100)
Common Quail (4, 1)	Common Sandpiper (6, 15)
Spotted Crake (4, 4)	Ruddy Turnstone (3, 50)
Little Crake (3, 2)	Red-necked Phalarope (3, 500)
Baillon's Crake (2, 1)	Black-headed Gull (2, 3)
Common Moorhen (6, 6)	Slender-billed Gull (6, 1000)

Lesser Black-backed Gull *heuglini* (2, 1)  
 Caspian Gull (2, 1)  
 Gull-billed Tern (5, 10)  
 Caspian Tern (3, 30)  
 Sandwich Tern (4, 20)  
 Great Crested Tern (2, 4)  
 Lesser Crested Tern (4, 150)  
 Common Tern (2, 2)  
 Bridled Tern (1, 14)  
 White-cheeked Tern (2, 10)  
 Little Tern (3, 15)  
 Whiskered Tern (2, 3)  
 White-winged Tern (2, 14)  
 Rock Dove (7, 300)  
 Eurasian Collared-dove (7, 50)  
 European Turtle-dove (3, 3)  
 Laughing Dove (7, 50)  
 Namaqua Dove (2, 5)  
 Ring-necked Parakeet (2, 2)  
 Common Cuckoo (4, 3)  
 Common Swift (7, 100)  
 Pallid Swift (4, 6)  
 White-throated Kingfisher (2, 1)  
 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (6, 11)  
 European Bee-eater (7, 80)  
 European Roller (2, 1)  
 Eurasian Hoopoe (7, 6)  
 Eurasian Wryneck (4, 1)  
 Bar-tailed Lark (1, 2)  
 Greater Hoopoe-lark (1, 1)  
 Greater Short-toed Lark (1, 6)  
 Crested Lark (5, 20)  
 Sand Martin (6, 500)  
 Eurasian Swallow (7, 100)  
 Red-rumped Swallow (2, 2)  
 House Martin (5, 15)  
 Tawny Pipit (6, 8)  
 Tree Pipit (7, 30)  
 Red-throated Pipit (7, 500)  
 Yellow Wagtail *beema* (7, 100)  
 Yellow Wagtail *lutea* (3, 5)  
 Yellow Wagtail *thunbergi* (4, 1)  
 Yellow Wagtail *feldegg* (7, 20)  
 Grey Wagtail (2, 1)  
 White Wagtail (4, 2)  
 White-cheeked Bulbul (7, 25)  
 Red-vented Bulbul (2, 3)  
 Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin (4, 4)  
 Total 160 species plus Rüppell's Weaver (2, 2).

Bluethroat (3, 3)  
 White-throated Robin (3, 2)  
 Common Redstart  
*samamisticus* (1, 1)  
 Common Redstart *phoenicurus* (7, 50)  
 Whinchat (6, 10)  
 Common Stonechat (2, 2)  
 Isabelline Wheatear (1, 1)  
 Northern Wheatear (7, 50)  
 Pied Wheatear (7, 6)  
 Black-eared Wheatear (5, 1)  
 Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (3, 2)  
 Graceful Prinia (5, 10)  
 European Reed-warbler (3, 4)  
 Sedge Warbler (3, 1)  
 Basra Reed-warbler (2, 1)  
 Great Reed-warbler (4, 3)  
 Clamorous Reed-warbler (1, 1)  
 Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (3, 3)  
 Upcher's Warbler (2, 2)  
 Ménétries's Warbler (2, 1)  
 Asian Desert Warbler (1, 1)  
 Lesser Whitethroat (6, 10)  
 Common Whitethroat (5, 2)  
 Blackcap (7, 4)  
 Barred Warbler (1, 1)  
 Eastern Orphean Warbler (2, 1)  
 Hume's Warbler (1, 1)  
 Wood Warbler (1, 1)  
 Willow Warbler (7, 200)  
 Common Chiffchaff (7, 100)  
 Spotted Flycatcher (4, 2)  
 Red-breasted Flycatcher (1, 1)  
 Semi-collared Flycatcher (1, 1)  
 Common (Afghan) Babbler (1, 5)  
 Eurasian Golden Oriole (2, 1)  
 Isabelline Shrike *isabellinus* and *phoenicuroides*  
 (6, 5)  
 Southern Grey Shrike *pallidirostris* (2, 1)  
 Woodchat Shrike (6, 15)  
 Masked Shrike (3, 2)  
 Common Starling (1, 5)  
 Common Myna (7, 12)  
 Bank Myna (3, 10)  
 House Sparrow (7, 300)  
 Pale Rockfinch (1, 19)  
 Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (1, 2)  
 Ortolan Bunting (6, 12)

**Peter Lansdown**