

# Israel

Two weekends in July & September 2017

Rob Gordijn & Helen Rijkse ([gordijnrob@gmail.com](mailto:gordijnrob@gmail.com)) - <http://www.penguinbirding.com>

## Introduction

Helen lived in Tel Aviv for four months for work, so this provided a good opportunity to do some birding there as well. In two weekend birding trips we saw quite a few of our targets although visiting during the summer isn't the easiest (it gets quite hot) but the species are still there.

For some photo's see: <https://goo.gl/zPPFHL>

## Itinerary

Day 1	Friday 21 July	Tel Aviv, Nizzana, Sede Boker, Eilat
Day 2	Saturday 22 July	Eilat, Hatzeva, Dead Sea, Tel Aviv

Day 1	Friday 9 sept	Tel Aviv, Ein Salvadori, Hatzeva, Nizzana, Tel Aviv
Day 2	Saturday 10 sept	Tel Aviv, Mt Hermon, Tel Aviv.

We decided on our itinerary to optimize seeing our targets (being lifers for one or both of us): Sand Partridge, Macqueen's Bustard, White-eyed Gull, White-cheeked Tern, Spotted & Lichtenstein Sandgrouse, Streaked Scrub Warbler, Arabian Babbler, Arabian Warbler, Tristram's Starling, Hooded Wheatear, Blackstart, Mourning Wheatear, Palestine Sunbird, Sinai Rosefinch, Syrian Serin and Striolated Bunting.

Out of these targets we only missed the Spotted Sandgrouse (which we searched for at Nizzana without any luck). Other targets would have been Desert Owl and Nubian Nightjar, but the season wasn't perfect and time was limited.

## Practicalities

Both weekends we rented a car with Avis at the airport (one of the few places around Tel Aviv where you can pick up or return a car during the Sabbath). The first weekend we slept one night in Tel Aviv (in Helen's apartment) and the second night in Eilat (hotel). The second weekend we slept both nights in Tel Aviv.

## Visited sites

**Nizzana:** Good desert birding site close to the border with Egypt. We birded here one full morning in July and an afternoon in September. Most important targets here were MacQueen's Bustard and Spotted Sandgrouse.

- Km 7 along the road to Ezuz: Seven km past the village (30.8255, 34.4700) there is an old train wagon that can be used as a shaded platform to scan the plains for the Bustard. From here to the east should be the best

place to find them in the first and last moments of the day (when they become more active). We scanned here from just after dawn (6:15) until 8:30 in July without any luck (note that the sun rises quickly behind the hills so that in the morning the light is terrible for scanning). In September we returned in the afternoon and scanned the last 2,5 hours of the day. Around dusk we finally found a bustard walking along the far end. Other species here: Arabian Babbler, Mourning Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Chukar.

- Nizzana sewage (30.89152, 34.43644): next to the village there is a sewage pond which serves as an important water source in the area. During both visits several ponds were full of waterfowl and waders. The first weekend we birded here from 9:00 – 11:00 to specifically look for drinking Sandgrouse. Although we had no luck with Spotted Sandgrouse we did see 25+ Black-bellied Sandgrouse.

### **Eilat**

- North Beach: famous birding spot in Eilat with the main targets during our stop being White-eyed Gull and White-cheeked Tern. When we arrived around 3pm it had heated up to 45 degrees with a hot wind from the desert, therefore standing or sitting on the beach was almost unbearable hot. Luckily within 45 minutes of scanning both the several terns and one gull flew by.
- North Fields/km 19 pond: A few km north of Eilat there is an area of ponds and some scrubby bushes. We arrived here just before dusk with the main target the Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse. Already at the entrance of the area there was a juvenile Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse (29.6256, 34.9939). We continued to the pond where we found 5 more Sandgrouses drinking at the edge (9.609, 34.9928).
- Wadi Schlomo: A little drive west of Eilat into the rocky hills this Wadi crosses the road. We walked a bit upstream but given that that even at 6am it was still 35 degrees in July bird activity was very low. We saw a few Blackstarts, a pair of Streaked Scrub Warbler, Striolated Bunting and the first migration in the form of a Upcher's Warbler.
- Pillars: A few kilometers north of Eilat we turned left and followed the dirt road to a site called the Pillars. In winter this is a good spot for Sinai Rosefinch but not in summer (less birds and mostly higher up). The heat also made it very quiet. Only birds seen here were two Sand Partridges (one from the car while driving in and the other at the furthest parking spot).

### **Hatzeva:** along highway 90 at Km 152

Lookout with water towers (30.74956, 35.25958): we drove here our first day (saw Hooded Wheatear) but decided against walking down, and tried to drive into the wadi. This wasn't the easiest with our low-clearance rental car and we decided to walk the last part to an area in the Wadi (30.74971, 35.25396). On our first try we did not find the warbler (midday heat 35+ degrees), but on our second try in September we found one quite easily.

Other species seen here: Sand partridge, Cuckoo, Desert Lark, Palestine Sunbird

### **Dead Sea**

- Wadi Salvadori: Park here (31.518002, 35.392763) and follow trail into the Wadi and walk up to the spring (with a green bush, at 31.5195, 35.3863). We visited on our first morning of the second weekend and saw a few Sinai Rosefinches, Trumpeter Finch, Blackstart, Striolated bunting, Tristram Starling, Fan-tailed raven and groups of European Honey-buzzard on migration.
- Ein Gedi: Touristic spot where we made a short stop in the full heat of the day in the first weekend. Around the parking area many Fan-tailed ravens and Tristrams starlings were heard and seen.

### **Mt Hermon**

We drove up to the parking lot (33.3068, 35.7718), we made a few stops along the way but did not see much. We then walked to the pond (33.3110, 35.7719) where we sat down for a while to watch the birds coming to drink at the edge of the pond. Best birds seen here were Syrian Serin, Ortolan Bunting, Cinereous Bunting. We also used the ski-lift to visit the top, but did not see much else than Syrian Serin and Northern Wheatear. From the ski-lift down we had brief views of a Western Rock Nuthatch.

## Ma'agan Michael

We visited the fishponds shortly on our way back from Mt Hermon to Tel Aviv, most gates were closed but Armenian Gulls were quite easily found (32.561080, 34.913851). The area was full of kingfishers, gulls and Pygmy cormorants all enjoying the abundance of food around here. We drove around to see whether there was any access to other ponds (there wasn't) so we decided to drive on.

## ANNOTATED SPECIES LIST

We have tried to accurately indicate the proper subspecies for all our observations, usually based on geographic locations based on the IOC World Bird List version 7.3. Triplist generated with iGoterra, see [www.igoterra.com](http://www.igoterra.com) for details. In my view the best listing software/website!. All our sightings with accurate GPS-locations for all sightings below can be found there as well

- 1     **Garganey** *Spatula querquedula*  
2 Nitzana 8.9.
- 2     **Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*  
20 Nitzana 8.9.
- 3     **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*  
20 Nitzana 8.9.
- 4     **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* (NT)  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 5     **Chukar Partridge** *Alectoris chukar sinaica*  
4 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7.
- 6     **Sand Partridge** *Ammoperdix heyi heyi*  
1+1 Amram's Pillars 22.7 and 2 Km152 8.9.
- 7     **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis ruficollis*  
1 Nitzana 21.7 and 20 Nitzana 8.9.
- 8     **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*  
15 Qiryat Shemona 9.9.
- 9     **Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*  
4 Km 19 pond 21.7 and 20 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 10    **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides*  
1 Nitzana 21.7 and 1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 11    **Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*  
1 Ben Gurion Airport 22.7.
- 12    **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea cinerea*  
1 Nitzana 21.7 and 1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 13    **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta garzetta*  
1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9 and 1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 14    **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus caeruleus*  
Only observed en route with 1 22.7.
- 15    **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus percnopterus* (EN)

- 1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 16 **European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*  
1000 Dead Sea 8.9.
- 17 **Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*  
5 Neve Ativ 9.9.
- 18 **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus nisus*  
1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 19 **Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus aeruginosus*  
2 Nitzana 8.9.
- 20 **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans migrans*  
1 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 21 **Macqueen's Bustard** *Chlamydotis macqueenii* (VU)  
1 Ezuz 8.9.
- 22 **Grey-headed Swamphen** *Porphyrio poliocephalus seistanicus*  
1 Nitzana 21.7.
- 23 **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus chloropus*  
1 Nitzana 21.7 and 1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 24 **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra atra*  
1 Nitzana 21.7 and 10 Nitzana 8.9.
- 25 **Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oediconemus saharae*  
1 Tel Baruch beach 9.9.
- 26 **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*  
2 Nitzana 21.7, 5 Yeruham reservoir 8.9 and 10 Nitzana 8.9.
- 27 **Spur-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus spinosus*  
5 Nitzana 21.7, 1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9 and 10 Nitzana 8.9.
- 28 **Ruff** *Calidris pugnax*  
1 Nitzana 21.7 and 30 Nitzana 8.9.
- 29 **Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 30 **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 31 **Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago gallinago*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 32 **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 33 **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*  
1 Nitzana 21.7 and 5 Nitzana 8.9.
- 34 **Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis*  
3 Nitzana 8.9.

- 35 **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 36 **Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*  
1 Eilat - North Beach 21.7.
- 37 **White-eyed Gull** *Ichthyaetus leucophthalmus*  
2 Eilat - North Beach 21.7.
- 38 **White-cheeked Tern** *Sterna repressa*  
1 Eilat - North Beach 21.7 and 4 Eilat - North Beach 21.7.
- 39 **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida hybrida*  
1 Eilat - North Beach 21.7 and 1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 40 **White-winged Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus*  
5 Nitzana 8.9.
- 41 **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis orientalis*  
25 Nitzana 21.7.
- 42 **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse** *Pterocles lichtensteinii lichtensteinii*  
1 Eilat - North Fields 21.7 and 6 Km 19 pond 21.7.
- 43 **Rock Dove** *Columba livia palaestinae*  
25 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7.
- 44 **Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus palumbus*  
1 Hatzeva 8.9.
- 45 **European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur turtur*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 46 **Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto decaocto*  
1 Wadi Shlomo 22.7.
- 47 **Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis*  
1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.  
*senegalensis*: 1 Nitzana 21.7.
- 48 **Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus canorus*  
1 Km152 22.7.
- 49 **White-throated Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis smyrnensis*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 50 **Green Bee-eater** *Merops orientalis cyanophrys*  
3 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7, 1 Wadi Salvadori 8.9 and 2 Km152 8.9.
- 51 **Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops epops*  
1 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7, 1 Ein Avdat (Sede Boqer) 21.7 and 1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 52 **Syrian Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos syriacus syriacus*  
2 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 53 **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 54 **Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*

- 2 Nitzana 8.9.
- 55 **Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis aucheri*  
1 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7.
- 56 **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator niloticus*  
2 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 57 **Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus*  
1 Km152 8.9 and 5 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 58 **Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius atricapillus*  
1 Umm el Fahm 9.9.
- 59 **House Crow** *Corvus splendens splendens*  
10 Eilat - North Beach 21.7.
- 60 **Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix pallescens*  
Only observed en route with 10 21.7.
- 61 **Northern Raven** *Corvus corax laurencei*  
2 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 62 **Fan-tailed Raven** *Corvus rhipidurus stanleyi*  
10 Ein Gedi 22.7 and 2 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 63 **Sombre Tit** *Poecile lugubris anatoliae*  
1 heard Majdal al-Shams 9.9.
- 64 **Great Tit** *Parus major terraesanctae*  
2 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 65 **Desert Lark** *Ammomanes deserti isabellina*  
1 Km152 8.9.
- 66 **Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*  
*brachyura*: 1 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7.  
*zion*: 10 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 67 **White-spectacled Bulbul** *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*  
1 en route 21.7 and 1 Ein Avdat (Sede Boqer) 21.7.
- 68 **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia riparia*  
1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 69 **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica rustica*  
1 Hatzeva 8.9 and 10 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 70 **Pale Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta obsoleta*  
1 Mitzpe Ramon 21.7 and 5 Hatzeva 8.9.
- 71 **Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica rufula*  
1 Ein Gedi 8.9.
- 72 **Streaked Scrub Warbler** *Scotocerca inquieta inquieta*  
6 Wadi Shlomo 22.7 and 2 Km152 22.7.
- 73 **Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*  
3 Mt Hermon 9.9.

- 74 **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida elaeica*  
1 Km152 22.7 and 1 Km152 8.9.
- 75 **Upcher's Warbler** *Hippolais languida*  
3 Wadi Shlomo 22.7.
- 76 **Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina*  
2 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 77 **Graceful Prinia** *Prinia gracilis*  
*deltae*: 5 Nitzana 21.7.  
*palaestinae*: 5 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 78 **Arabian Babbler** *Turdoides squamiceps squamiceps*  
3 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7, 1 Ein Avdat (Sede Boqer) 21.7 and 5 Ezuz 8.9.
- 79 **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca curruca*  
2 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 80 **Eastern Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia crassirostris crassirostris*  
2 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 81 **Arabian Warbler** *Sylvia leucomelaena negevensis*  
1 Km152 8.9.
- 82 **Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis communis*  
1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9 and 1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 83 **Western Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer neumayer*  
1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 84 **Tristram's Starling** *Onychognathus tristramii*  
1 Ein Avdat (Sede Boqer) 21.7, 10 Ein Gedi 22.7 and 5 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 85 **Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula syriacus*  
1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 86 **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas galactotes galactotes*  
1 Ein Avdat (Sede Boqer) 21.7.
- 87 **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata striata*  
1 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 88 **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros semirufus*  
3 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 89 **Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisticus*  
1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 90 **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica*  
1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 91 **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*  
1 Nitzana 8.9.
- 92 **Hooded Wheatear** *Oenanthe monacha*  
1 Km152 22.7.
- 93 **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti deserti*

2 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7 and 3 Ezuz 8.9.

- 94 **Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca*  
10 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 95 **Blackstart** *Oenanthe melanura melanura*  
1 Ein Avdat (Sede Boqer) 21.7, 4 Wadi Shlomo 22.7 and 1 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 96 **White-crowned Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga ernesti*  
1 Wadi Shlomo 22.7 and 1 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 97 **Mourning Wheatear** *Oenanthe lugens lugens*  
2 Km 7 Ezuz 21.7, 1 en route 21.7 and 1 Ezuz 8.9.
- 98 **Palestine Sunbird** *Cinnyris osea osea*  
1 Km152 22.7 and 5 Km152 8.9.
- 99 **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus indicus*  
1 Nitzana 21.7.
- 100 **Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava flava*  
10 Yeruham reservoir 8.9 and 3 Nitzana 8.9.
- 101 **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris*  
1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 102 **Asian Crimson-winged Finch** *Rhodopechys sanguineus*  
2 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 103 **Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus crassirostris*  
10 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 104 **Sinai Rosefinch** *Carpodacus synoicus*  
2 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.
- 105 **European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris chlorotica*  
10 Yeruham reservoir 8.9.
- 106 **Common Linnet** *Linaria cannabina bella*  
1 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 107 **European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis niediecki*  
10 en route 9.9 and 30 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 108 **Syrian Serin** *Serinus syriacus* (VU)  
10 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 109 **Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia hordei*  
15 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 110 **Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea semenowi* (NT)  
2 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 111 **Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*  
1+5 Mt Hermon 9.9.
- 112 **Striolated Bunting** *Emberiza striolata striolata*  
5 Wadi Salvadori 8.9.