

# Trip Report Jordan 31<sup>st</sup> March – 17<sup>th</sup> April 2011

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## 1. Introduction

This report is written by Rosemary Royle, from Pembrokeshire and the trip was undertaken by myself and my husband Peter.

This was a combined birdwatching and sight-seeing trip, with the balance well in favour of birdwatching! We had been attracted to Jordan by the itineraries produced by Naturetrek (one of the few wildlife tour operators who visit Jordan), by the desire to see Petra and Wadi Rum, by the possibility of picking up quite a few “lifers”, by the expected pleasant climate in the Spring, and by the idea of birdwatching in an almost un-birdwatched location. From reading the little information available it also seemed possible to hire a car and drive ourselves, which is the way we prefer to do things if possible.

So how did it turn out? It was a good trip – the scenery, Petra, the Madaba mosaics, Ajloun and Wadi Rum were excellent, people were very friendly, food was good. Birds were quite hard to find but we did get 22 lifers. It was good to be able to drive around on our own and stop when we liked – but see below for more comments on driving. The weather was distinctly “changeable” – April is apparently a wet time of year in the highlands, a fact that had somehow slipped through our research. In fact it was better weather in the UK for much of the time we were there.

In retrospect we would change very little about this trip (apart from to pack more warm clothes!).

## 2. Itinerary

	Day	Night
	31 Fly to Jordan	Arrive and transfer to Madaba, Mariam Hotel
Apr 1	Mosaics at Madaba	Madaba, Mariam Hotel
2	Drive around the Madaba area Drive to Dana via Kings Highway	Madaba, Mariam Hotel
3	and Wadi el Wala At Dana – Barra Forest and	Dana, Dana Lodge
4	around Dana village At Dana – Barra Forest and	Dana, Dana Hotel
5	Rummana walk	Dana, Rummana Campsite
6	Shawbak Castle then Little Petra	Petra, Edom Hotel
7	Petra	Petra, Edom Hotel
8	Wadi Rum	Bedouin Roads Camp
9	Wadi Rum Wadi Rum entrance road then	Bedouin Roads Camp
10	Aqaba area	Aqaba, Captain's Hotel
11	Aqaba Bird Observatory and then south Aqaba	Aqaba, Captain's Hotel
12	Wadi Araba and then north to the Dead Sea	Mujib Chalets, Dead Sea
13	Suwayma, Bethany then to Ajloun	Ajloun, RSCN Cabins
14	At Ajloun	Ajloun, RSCN cabins
15	To the Eastern Desert – Al Safawi	Azraq, RSCN Azraq Lodge

	then the Azraq reserve	
	Shaumari area / Desert Castles /	
16	Azraq Reserve / Shaumari dam	Azraq, RSCN Azraq Lodge
	Shaumari area then return car to	
17	airport and fly home	

### 3. General Notes

**Language** – the guide books tell you that English is pretty widely spoken. This may be the case in tourist spots (though we still found the standard of English rather poor – for example the Wadi Rum guides spoke English but not fluently by any means) but elsewhere it was not spoken at all. Sign language could be quite inventive – when we were searching for the Aqaba Bird Observatory a man flapped his arms, then held his hands up to his eyes as if they were binoculars, and pointed down the road – this did the trick and we found the gate!

**Money** – at the time we visited, the Jordanian Dinar was worth about 95p which made conversion pretty easy. ATMs are not readily available except in the big towns and as we weren't planning to spend much time there we took currency with us. You need some in any case for the visa, though there is an ATM which you can use next to the queue. It also was possible, on one visa desk, to use Visa for your visa, but it took ages and resulted in some fierce glances from the queue behind!

Credit cards were only really useful in hotels. Everything else – restaurants, Petra entrance, Wadi Rum trips, fuel – required cash. When we did use our credit card we got an excellent exchange rate – 1.12 compared with the cash rate of 1.08.

**Costs** The total trip including travel to the airport from Pembrokeshire and overnight stays at Gatwick cost £3400 for the two of us.

**Birding** – if we had not been to Lesbos, Tunisia and Kazakhstan our lifers list for this trip would have been much longer as Jordan has a bird list which combines birds from North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean with floods of migrants on their way to Eastern Europe and Asia. We got the distinct impression that bird numbers were low – this could be due to a succession of dry years combined with obvious overexploitation of the desert areas by overgrazing. The only common birds were the migrants – there was a Lesser Whitethroat in virtually every bush! We used “Birds of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan” by Ian Andrews – an essential guide though somewhat out of date. There are some updates on his website but things are changing very fast and I hope this report will help in some areas. We also use “Birds of the Middle East”, Porter and Aspinall, second edition, which was just fine (apart from the picture of Tawny Pipit where the jizz seems all wrong). There are a few trip reports on the web which were useful but they were often very short trips combined with Egypt or Israel. We did meet a few other birdwatchers – one British couple at Ajloun and a Swiss group of 4 at Azraq. See below for much more birding information.

**RSCN** – the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan is a truly excellent body which is definitely swimming against the stream - the idea of conservation and eco-tourism is still very strange to most people in the Middle East. The website is at [www.rscn.org.jo](http://www.rscn.org.jo). The RSCN runs a number of reserves, most of which have accommodation – we stayed mostly at these locations which we pre-booked from the UK using email and direct bank transfer. However, the lodges when we arrived needed proof of payment which we did not have – luckily we had printed off the sequence of emails, including the email confirmation of the bank transfer from our bank (First Direct).

Apart from the RSCN reserves, there is virtually no protection for wildlife in Jordan so the RSCN definitely deserves support. The reserves are:

Dana – a large reserve in central Jordan encompassing terrain from mountain top to sea level. We stayed both at the Dana Guest House and at the Rummana Campsite (fantastic location though a bit pricey) both run by the RSCN. Due to the heavy rain the campsite was shut for one of our booked nights so we stayed at the Dana Hotel (run by a local co-operative) which has loads of atmosphere and excellent food though it certainly didn't look much!

Ajloun Forest – this is in the north of the country in Mediterranean style countryside and protects evergreen oak forest. We stayed in a cabin (large but chilly) and went on a guided walk which was excellent though expensive. The flowers were absolutely terrific.

Azraq – this is a wetland reserve which is a pale shadow of its former self (it used to be a huge oasis which has dried out due to groundwater extraction). The Azraq Lodge is almost a conventional hotel on the outskirts of Azraq (though it is based on a British Army field hospital) and is fairly close to the reserve. Shaumari Reserve, also close by, where much captive breeding of Oryx etc is carried out, was still closed when we were there.

Wadi Mujib – a huge wide wadi which narrows as it runs into the Dead Sea and is known for its canyoning trails. We stayed at the chalets as they are one of the few reasonably priced accommodation options in the vicinity of the Dead Sea.

**Other accommodation** – we stayed at the Mariam Hotel in Madaba (excellent), the Edom Hotel in Petra (reasonably priced and near the gate), the Captains Hotel in Aqaba (OK, though massage showers in a country with an acute water shortage seems a strange idea; they didn't work anyway) and the Bedouin Roads campsite in Wadi Rum. All these were booked in advance from the UK.

**Souvenirs** The RSCN also runs a number of local craft and workshop initiatives in the areas near and in its reserves. The results of this are a number of tasteful and useful souvenirs and gifts which are available in the RSCN shops. Such things as olive oil soaps, herbs, teas, trail bars, fabric bags, silver jewellery and painted ostrich eggs all make excellent gifts. In Madaba it is possible to buy really attractive rugs and kilims, and everywhere you can buy rather nice beads and necklaces. Dates and sweet pastries are also an option and are available at the airport.

**Weather** Jordan is country of “4 halves” – north, south, high and low, and this greatly affects the weather. The north has Mediterranean weather, with hot summers and cool, wet winter weather, and sometimes snow. The south is basically dry desert. The highlands can be very cold at night even in summer, and cool during the day, whereas the lowlands are generally warm or hot. Weather in Spring can be very changeable - we experienced almost everything – sunny days but poor visibility at Madaba, cool and sunny (ideal) at Petra, cool, sunny and windy with thunderstorms at Wadi Rum, rain, low cloud, thunderstorms and temperatures barely into double figures at Dana, pleasant at Aqaba, and at last, almost hot in the Eastern Desert! For some of the time we wished we had packed gloves!

It was good that we had quite a relaxed itinerary so that the bad weather did not affect our bird-finding too much and we did, for example, have enough time for two cracks at Syrian Serin.

**Food** – was always appetising and often excellent. Hummus, mashed grilled aubergine salad, chopped tomatoes and cucumbers, curd cheese, salted/pickled vegetables and flat bread (like large Pitta breads) appeared at virtually every meal. Chicken and rice were also staples. Fried cauliflower, aubergine in tahini, lamb in yoghurt (*mansaf*), fried fish, meatballs, stuffed gourds, crushed fava beans and lentil soups also appeared quite regularly and were very good as was “*muqqlubeh*” or “upside down dish” – often produced with a flourish at buffet meals. The large buffet meals served at hotels in the evening and at tourist restaurants at lunchtimes were excellent value – costing about £10 for as much as you could eat and there was always a huge variety. (But note that they often don't start until 1:00 pm) We had really good meals at El Cardo in Madaba, the Dana Hotel in Dana, at Azraq Lodge and at Assa Musa near Mount Nebo, all recommended by Lonely Planet (except that the latter is not called Mount Moses as in LP but Assa Musa). The Edom Hotel had a go at producing “European” dishes with mixed effects – “Meat Louf wisz Rousmari Sauc” was actually OK though Chicken Tekka was just fried chicken. The puddings here (was it really meant to be Bread Pudding??) were quite bizarre.

Breakfast often included quite a range of jams (fig, apricot and mulberry were good) and syrups – we found that flat bread, curd cheese and jam made a good breakfast. Also usually present were some kind of eggs and maybe dates or halva. A big range was usually on offer in hotels – it is depressing to watch guests in a place like Jordan eating cornflakes and orange juice just as if they were at home.

Snack food really didn't exist, except in hotels – so if you didn't fancy a big buffet twice a day it could be difficult. We bought biscuits and figs for lunch some days and often took lunch boxes from our hotel or lodge. They were rather expensive (5 or 6JD) and unexciting – often a very thick wrap made from Jordanian bread with a scant curd cheese filling (which could be improved a lot by the insertion of a banana) plus some fruit and a drink, but it did give lots of flexibility. They usually needed to be ordered the day before. RSCN lunch boxes always included at Tasali bar – a trail bar made of figs, sesame etc made in one of their workshops – they were excellent.

Sweet Greek-style pastries could be bought in shops in some places (e.g. Madaba) but they rarely appeared in hotels or restaurants. They provided another possible option if you didn't fancy a full meal.

**Drink** – Alcoholic drink was not much in evidence except for Mount Nebo wine (we tried this once – OK but pricey) and local beer (Amstel and Philadelphia) which were fine. These were really only available in touristy hotels and restaurants. All RSCN accommodation discourages alcohol. I have to admit that we bought a litre of gin on the plane (only £10) and drank this in private with a strange assortment of mixers often left over from our packed lunch – orange juice was fine but fizzy strawberry drink was not!

Tea was served in glasses almost continuously and was very refreshing – best drunk with at least some sugar, and mint tea was even better. The coffee was small and thick (Turkish style) and often flavoured with cardamom – I loved it. An English style coffee was always Nescafe. Coffees and teas were usually 1 JD.

**Travel to Jordan** – we took one of the first EasyJet flights from Gatwick to Amman which were very reasonably priced compared with Royal Jordanian and arrived at a better time. We paid a bit extra for priority boarding which was well worth it. There is no in-flight entertainment and no reclining facilities on the seats – OK for the outgoing flight (daytime) but not so good on the return (night time). We had a very long wait in the queue for Visas – they did not seem to have enough staff available. Hopefully this will soon be sorted. We went straight from the airport to Madaba, using a taxi organised by the Mariam Hotel in Madaba.

**Security** The guide books say that Jordan is a safe place and so it seemed. The general level of honesty can be gauged by the fact the shopkeepers and stall-holders just leave all their produce untended when they go off to the mosque, and the soft drinks shop next to our hotel in Aqaba left his stock out all night. I am glad we knew this in advance as the taxi driver who picked us up from the airport stopped on the dual carriageway and beckoned to a suspicious looking character in a leather jacket who got into the front seat. We then set out into the countryside along dark roads ..... Of course he was just giving a lift to a friend, something which happens all the time as car ownership levels are not high. (Usually a driver would ask you if it was OK). We were told that the police would never stop you in order to demand a handout, but they may well ask for a lift.

**Weekends** Friday afternoons and Saturdays are holidays and popular places could be very busy with picnickers (who by the way leave a lot of litter). We tried to organise our itinerary so that we were well out in the country at these times, but in fact watching the Jordanians have a good time (which seems to involve a big group of people having a barbeque with much tea and many cigarettes) was quite interesting.

**Starting in Madaba** – we had no intention of going into Amman and Madaba made an excellent base for the first few days. We spent a day sightseeing in the town - the mosaics are truly excellent (especially in the Hippolyte Hall in the Architecture Park and at the Church of the Apostles) and we spent a lot of time picking out the birds and animals which must have been present when the mosaics were made but are no longer (lions, flamingos, pheasants, peacocks, wolves, cranes etc).

**Car Hire** – we used the recommended Reliable Rentacar [www.rentareliablecar.com](http://www.rentareliablecar.com) who provided us with a roomy automatic Nissan Sunny for £28 per day which hardly looked like a hire car at all. The car was delivered to the hotel in Madaba and at the end of the trip we dropped the car off at the airport.

**Driving** – sometimes I found it pretty terrifying as a passenger but my husband, who did the driving, says it was OK! Apart from in towns the traffic is not heavy and all the roads are surfaced so out of town is mostly easy. Traffic does not, on the whole, travel fast. However here are a few notes:

- Most significant traffic signs have English translations on them. However, there is always one missing when you really need one so a good map is essential. A sense of direction helps too and if the sun is out you can tell if you are going roughly the right way
- We used a German map produced by “World Mapping Project”, Reise Know-How, and called “Jordanein 1:400,000”. We found it on Amazon using the ISBN number which is 978-3-8317-7161-5
- Many roads in towns have up to five lanes – but the inside three lanes are used for pedestrians, market stalls, parking and chatting.
- Vehicles (and pedestrians) pull in and out of these lanes apparently without looking but they usually do it fairly slowly allowing avoiding action to be taken
- In fact, many vehicle manoeuvres are entirely unexpected but again they are usually undertaken fairly slowly
- Wandering all over the road and driving slowly are tolerated (useful when trying to find a hotel!) except in Aqaba and Petra where we found the taxi drivers quite impatient!
- You can very rarely turn left on a dual carriageway – you will need to do a U-turn for which a suitable lane will usually be provided (the signpost may indicate a turn left but it is lying)
- Double parking is normal
- Road closures were a major problem – almost always because the road was being upgraded to a dual carriageway. Sometimes there was a DIVERSION but often not. The road from Ar-Ramtha to Mafraq was ostensibly completely closed but there seemed to be no alternative route so we simply followed the locals, many of whom lived along the road so had no option but to find a way round. This often involved going off-piste on to areas best suited to a 4WD but our trusty Sunny coped OK. The basic idea is to use the bits of carriageway which are available and when they stop, simply improvise. We travelled for about 20km like this on the way to Mafraq, sometimes with traffic going both ways on each of the two closed carriageways!
- Beware of fierce speed bumps – usually, but not always, signed. They could be expected on the entrance and exit to any village and by bus shelters.
- Wandering sheep and goats are always around (even feeding on the central reservation) though they seem to have quite good traffic sense.
- You may be flagged down by traffic police – but this will usually be to see if you can give a colleague a lift to the next town.
- Police and army checkpoints were often unmanned – we were very rarely stopped. Security on the whole seem quite relaxed.
- Petrol is called Benzene – fuel stations were in short supply down the Kings Highway though there were plenty in most other places.
- Navigation through Madaba was not very easy and it seems to have a number of completely uncontrolled crossroads (handled with calm politeness by the locals)
- Navigation in Aqaba was confused by a number of closed roads (e.g. the main road in) and by a huge amount of building in the western suburbs. Also some of the small streets on the map in Lonely Planet seem to be no longer open
- When the cloud comes down in the highlands around Dana the visibility is very poor indeed and driving conditions are dreadful.
- Finding a turnoff can be a challenge – the road often looks most unprepossessing and can be covered in gravel and full of potholes and looking just like a dusty track. You think “That can’t be it!” but it is.
- Things are often only signposted if you are approaching them from Amman – take care going the other way as you will overshoot and have to turn round

**Wadi Rum** – we booked our trip here in advance with Bedouin Roads (see [www.bedouinroads.com](http://www.bedouinroads.com)) We booked for two days – the first day to do the usual touristy things (though in fact we went to some quite remote places) and the second day to explore further. We had plenty of chances to walk, and our guide, Zidane, knowing we were birdwatchers, did his best for us and eventually found us some Sand Partridges, which are apparently numerous later in the year (they shoot them). We stayed in the Bedouin Roads

campsite – which was unfortunately not close to a very large rock face which could have been a possible spot for owls. Lunch spots were often in a remote place and we found some quite good birds during these periods. Apart from birds, the scenery and watching the Bedouin way of life were fascinating. The Bedouin tents were fun – the fire in the middle provided very welcome warmth (where did the smoke go to?) and the endless glasses of tea were welcome, but the goat-wool material from which the tents are made is certainly not waterproof!

**Petra** – well worth visiting (many people come to Jordan just to see Petra) but the site is huge. We covered all the main sights including the Monastery and High Place of sacrifice in one long day. We started at 7:00 am and finished at 5:00 pm and walked at least 10 kms with two long climbs. There are interpretation panels at various spots but some things are not well signposted – e.g. the steps up to the High Place of Sacrifice. We used the Lonely Planet guide for Petra and found the maps and the information to be good and just at the right level. Many other independent travellers were doing the same – using their French, Italian or German Lonely Planets as appropriate! (Note that these were the nationalities of most of the tourists). There is no guide book or audio guide available at the ticket office. The smart restaurant at Petra was offering a buffet for the comparatively huge sum of 15JD and it didn't look very interesting so we drank mint tea at the café and ate biscuits and an apple for our lunch.

The entrance fee for Petra is currently 50JD. If you have the stamina the two day ticket at 55JD is very good value, but you will need your passport to buy one as they put your name on the ticket to stop you selling it or passing it on. If you think 50JD is steep then it is worse if you are coming on a day trip from Egypt - you will pay 90JD!.

**The Dead Sea** - Peter decided you could hardly come to the Dead Sea and not have a swim. Having negotiated the path down to the water at Mujib (the sea level is some 27 metres lower than it used to be) he stumbled in over the rocks and did the obligatory floating things. Getting out was difficult as it is hard to get your legs down – an undignified crawl seemed to be the answer. The water tasted truly terrible – not just salty but full of other minerals and it is pretty well caustic – luckily there are showers to wash it off. An interesting experience but not something you would do more than once.

**Guide books** - we used the Lonely Planet guide which seemed pretty reliable. Also a book called Jordan Jubilee by Ruth - actually a download of the pages on her website [www.jordanjubilee.com](http://www.jordanjubilee.com) which is very useful for background information, and gave an excellent introduction to life in Jordan, particularly the Bedouins.

#### 4. Birding Locations

**Around Madaba** We drove from Madaba along the road towards the Dead Sea Panorama, then down to the Dead Sea, and back to Madaba via Mount Nebo (the main church was closed to visitors which was disappointing). We found a late flock of Corn Buntings on the cultivated land plus numerous Crested Larks. We then made several stops wherever the habitat looked good and started to find Kestrels, Blackstarts, singing Woodchat Shrikes, Black Irises on the slopes, Greenfinches, a pair of migrating Redstarts and a Hoopoe. At the Dead Sea Panorama, the visibility was very poor (we had been planning to spend longer here but the poor visibility and the fact that the restaurant was not open till 1:00 and we could not get a coffee meant we pressed on) but we did see a flock of White Storks spiralling up the cliff face and we looked down on a Short Toed Eagle hunting below. Also plenty of Pale Rock Martins and Spectacled Bulbuls plus some Wheatears which we saw throughout the trip and were often not too sure whether they were Isabelline or female Northern. A very nice White-Crowned Black Wheatear (with a white crown) perched on the sign on the way out. Along the Dead Sea were Tristram's Grackles and a big flock of Fan-tailed Ravens.

**Wadi el Wala** (off the Kings Highway – see Andrews) This was a lovely place, though the locals were baffled by the concept of birdwatching. There was water in the Wadi and there were loads of migrants – Cettis, Great Reed and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers at the bare minimum plus our first encounter with Lesser Whitethroats. Plenty of Graceful Prinias, Blackstarts and Spanish Sparrows. Also Common and Pallid Swifts and one Little Swift, plus Lesser Kestrels and Red-Rumped Swallows. We drove about 10km along here but the road goes on much further.

**Dana** – at the guest house we went for a short walk along the cliffs and had spectacular views of Griffon Vultures. Also our first Desert Larks (strange habitat – big rocks?) and Black Eared Wheatear (pale throated and dark throated forms). We also started to see big flocks of migrating Steppe Buzzards. Despite torrential rain and a thunderstorm overnight a morning walk provided good views of Chukar Partridges which could be heard everywhere here as could Great Tits. We drove down to the Barra Forest (see sketch) to look for Syrian Serin but the weather was poor – low cloud and very cold. No Serins but we did find Linnets and very bright Greenfinches and a male Cretzchmars' Bunting. After another hour of very heavy rain we drove back to Dana with waterfalls flooding across the road! We then drove to Rummana Campsite to check in but it was closed – everything was sodden so we stayed in Dana Village overnight. We went back to Barra Forest the following morning when the weather improved and this time found Syrian Serins in a little sheltered gully to the right of the road – we had reasonable views and also had good views of a pair of Cretzchmar's Buntings and Tristram's Grackles. On the way back up the hill we saw more Serins but they were very flighty and difficult to see well. When they perched in the pine trees they were invisible. However the call was quite distinctive – quite harsh and nasal and not like anything else, and distinct from the Greenfinches and Linnets which were also present.

In the late morning we drove across to Rummana Campsite (now open) where we heard more Syrian Serins on the slope below the Tower (where you check in and leave your car) and then saw two feeding quietly on the small rocky traffic island in the middle of the car park! We spent the afternoon walking the trail around the campsite – fantastic scenery and a few birds including hundreds of migrating Buzzards. There were also Short-Toed Eagles, Long legged Buzzards, Sunbirds, Grackles, Bulbuls, Kestrels, a pair of Hoopoes, Desert Larks, Brown-necked Ravens, Spanish Sparrows and one definite Woodlark. A Scops Owl called during the night. The next morning we saw our first distant Scrub Warblers.

In retrospect, the one thing we wished we had done at Dana was the walk down to Feinan Eco-lodge - this is a 14 km walk going from the highlands down to below sea level and would have been fascinating.

**Shawbak (or Shobak) Castle** - we went to this castle just to get a feel of what a Crusader castle looked like. We had the best coffee of the trip in the new Coffee Shop and Visitor Centre from where we saw a Rock Sparrow, a Mourning Wheatear and Lesser Kestrels. Also more Linnets.

**Little Petra** – a very interesting place (you could imagine it as a kind of Star Wars-type trading post) and few tourists. We had first class views of a very bright male Sinai Rosefinch here.

**Petra** – a very interesting day was spent here but the bird life was very sparse. It is supposed to be a good spot for Rosefinches but we only saw two females and they were very high up on the summits. (I think there was no need to come down to the cisterns to drink as there had been heavy recent rain) We had good views of a Blue Rock Thrush (on the path down the back of the High Place of Sacrifice) plus Mourning Wheatears, Linnets and Greenfinches but nothing else at all.

**Wadi Rum** – once you learnt their call, you realised that Sinai Rosefinches were everywhere here, though not always easy to see and often not very brightly coloured. One pair were building a nest over the heads of the tourists in one of the more popular Siqs. In various spots we found several varieties of Wheatear – White Crowned Black (usually without the white crown) was the most common but we also found a pair of Desert Wheatears and several Mourning Wheatears. Despite intensive searching whilst in the desert and along the road on the way out, we did not find Hooded Wheatear. Desert Larks were common but we also found Bar-tailed Lark. We had some poor views of Scrub Warblers then eventually some first class close views (good photos!). We did eventually find a group of Sand Partridges (about 10) - I was beginning to get worried about these! A flock of about 5 Ortolan Buntings passed through one of our lunch spots, with a probable female Striolated Bunting collecting nest material. (Bird ID was quite hard at midday – the strong light bleached out all the colours). Other birds seen were Tristram's Grackles, Brown-necked Raven and Rock Pigeons. On the way out of Wadi Rum we spent the whole morning birdwatching along the old road which runs parallel to the new road between Rum Village and the Visitor Centre. We saw plenty of displaying



Desert Larks and White Crowned Black Wheatears and eventually a hard-to-spot Striolated Bunting but alas no Hooded Wheatear.

**Aqaba** – we had two target species here – White Eyed Gull and Arabian Babbler. To see the gull we knew we needed to “seawatch” – something we are not very good at, not having enough patience! The first evening we watched from the huge flagpole – the sun was straight in our eyes so it was far from ideal. Also we did not use our telescope - we got enough funny looks as it was! We saw a number of gulls rather far out, mostly in juvenile plumage which were just too hard to ID. But eventually a few gulls flew closer to us and we confidently identified Lesser Black Backed Gulls of the Baltic variety (very black and quite small). Far away flew a couple of terns – probably Common. And then, also far away, two gulls flew by which could really only be White Eyed as the dark upper and underwings and dark head are a unique combination. Still hardly a good view for a lifer though. The following afternoon we spent on the beach at the Royal Jordanian Diving Centre – only one gull flew past all afternoon and it was a White Eyed Gull at close range!! Bingo.

To see the Arabian Babbler, and who knows what else, we needed to get into the Aqaba Sewage Works, also known as the Aqaba Bird Observatory. We had heard stories about how hard it was to get into this place, how you needed prior written permission from the army etc as it was right on the Israeli border. Well, we had consulted <http://www.aqababird.com> and emailed the address on the contact page. We had a nice reply from Feras Rahahleh at [aqaba@jssd-jo.org](mailto:aqaba@jssd-jo.org) and he said “No problem, just contact me when you are in Jordan” and supplied a phone number. So we did – and he said unfortunately he would not be able to guide us, but we could turn up anyway and just wander round! (for a 10JD per head fee but there may not be anyone to take the money) To cut a rather long story short, we eventually found the place (see map) and drove in and parked. We wandered around, firstly along the “Walking Trail” which was absolutely hopping with migrants (Lesser Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Pied Flycatchers, Rufous Scrub-robin) and yes! two Arabian Babblers. (These were not very babbler-like being quiet and a bit furtive, but they did have a very distinctive call) Also Graceful Prinias (not in this area according to the maps) When we got a bit close to the border, an armed guard in a watch-tower waved us back (though we still appeared to be on an “official” path) so back we went!. We then managed to find the main settling ponds where there were plenty of waders, gulls (including Slender Billed) and migrating Night Herons and Purple Herons. Also a bird hide and a birdwatching trail with seats and ID charts. There was nobody in the Visitor Centre and we spoke to nobody all morning – but we had a very good morning’s birdwatching and we found our target bird, all within cooee of the Israeli border. Very satisfactory, but be warned that despite the Aqaba tourist maps showing a vague “Birdwatching” symbol in the general area, absolutely nobody knows where this place is. After having tried once and failed we rang Feras’s number – luckily somebody else answered his phone and was able to help us with directions. The key thing to know is that the entrance is a green gate on the left about 200 yards before the South Wadi Araba Border Crossing, signposted Eilat. There seems to be a new road north from Aqaba which bypasses, to the East, the turning to the this road and to the airport so the technique is probably keep to the West at all major junctions when heading north out of Aqaba. If you are planning to go here then have a look on Google Earth first.

Note that Andrews mentions some sites south of Aqaba for Hooded Wheatear, but there was so much new road development there that we didn’t even try it.

**Wadi Araba** – this was the place to try and find Arabian Warbler. We drove north towards the Dead Sea looking for the turnoff to al-Qurayqira and Feinan Eco-lodge. No signs from this direction so we overshot but found it eventually by a police post. We stopped at Wadi abu Dubana mentioned in Andrews and found a number of good birds, both in the Wadi and in nearby abandoned cultivations e.g. Green Bee-eater, Whinchat, Southern Grey Shrike, Graceful Prinia (again not supposed to be there), Sunbirds, Lesser Whitethroats, Pied Flycatcher, Blackcaps and Blackstarts. We then investigated any suitable stands of Acacia Trees. The best were in a small Wadi by the (now disused) army camp. Most other areas of acacia seemed very degraded or were inhabited by Bedouin tents which inhibited one’s birdwatching somewhat. We tried hard all morning and found quite a lot of birds but no Arabian Warblers. The area along the road towards Petra (which branches off the Feinan road) had some good acacias – but again lots of Bedouins and I fear, imminent development. There seemed to be new water pumps and new parallel tarmac roads – soon to be market gardens possibly.



**Wadi Mujib** (the Dead Sea end) – we were unable to enter the Wadi as there was a storm warning and water levels were expected to rise, but in the entrance to the Wadi, in the vicinity of the chalets, in the road repair yard and by the side of the road we found Masked Shrike, Desert Lark, Crested Lark, Rock Pigeons, Tristram's Grackles, Pale Rock Martins, Kestrel etc.

**Wadi Mujib** (the Kings Highway crossing) – this long winding road down and up again is supposed to be good for birds but we didn't see anything at all!

**Dead Sea / Suwayma (Suweimah)**– we wanted to find Dead Sea Sparrows, but it seems that the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea is no longer a good place to find them. We eventually managed to find the access road to the north shore of the Dead Sea (see map – there is a huge amount of development in this area so it will be changing again). We could see a line of tamarisk bushes between the road and the shore, so we investigated these. In many places the tamarisk was in very poor condition – the reason was apparent when a huge herd of breeding camels appeared together with a flock of goats. Also the ground (which used to be marsh) has dried out. Some House Sparrows were present but none of the Dead Sea sort. A few Rufous Scrub-robins, Nightingales and Olivaceous Warblers though. We did eventually find (what we imagined must be) a few Dead Sea Sparrow nests in some better and bigger tamarisks – the nests really are conspicuous as they are like bunches of twigs out on exposed branches. But no Sparrows. Depressed we had to fall back on Plan B – see below.

Note that the funfair sometimes mentioned is no longer there. Also it may well be possible to access this area on foot from the nearby Holiday Inn (see map).

**Bethany-beyond-Jordan** (The Baptism site of Jesus) – one small note in one trip report I had read said that there were “loads of Dead Sea Sparrows here”. So we signed up for our (poor value) 12JD per head guided tour, first by bus and then on foot. It was an extremely fast whistle stop tour – most people had audio guides so all our “real” guide had to do was say “Select Item 8 now” or some such. (There was not actually time to listen to the guide, take pictures and actually look before being whisked off again.) We were looking quickly at the sights – to be truthful there is not much to see – as well as of course looking for the Sparrows. Lots of Olivaceous Warblers, Lesser Whitethroats (chet, chet everywhere) and Graceful Prinias then we started to see a few nests like the ones we saw earlier. Then I heard it - a harsh insistent chirping, higher pitched than a House Sparrow. And a lovely male Dead Sea Sparrow perched up on an open branch for us! We had short, but good views, and nearly lost our group who had raced on ahead. Later we saw a group of 5 birds flying then a female on a fence. Down by the Jordan we saw introduced Indian Silverbills and heard Great Reed Warblers. Note that you must stay with your guided group and cannot wander around on your own, as again this site is extremely close to the border. It was altogether an unsatisfactory experience but we did get decent views of the Sparrow.

**Ajloun Forest Reserve** – we would never have found this place without the instructions in the Lonely Planet guide! As usual, we approached from the wrong direction, though the road up from the Jordan Valley past Pella was very scenic. It was all such a change from everything we had seen before – it was very green, with lots of flowers and grass. The flowers were terrific – cyclamen, irises, anemones, gentians, orchids etc. In the oak forest the only birds were Blackbirds, Great Tits and Jays - the latter with odd pale faces and dark caps. And of course, Lesser Whitethroats. In the more open areas were Blue Tits and Wrens. In the morning we walked the Prophet's Trail with a guide. We walked through many different types of Mediterranean-style scenery with beautiful flowers and flowering fruit trees. Bird highlights were Syrian Woodpecker (flying views only unfortunately as this was a lifer for us), also Chukar Partridge, Cretzchmar's Bunting, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Lesser and Common Whitethroat, Woodchat Shrike, Jay, Black Eared Wheatear and Crested Lark.

**Eastern Desert – As Safawi** – this is the area of Black Basalt desert. We explored the area about 9km east of As Safawi where you can get on to the old road. The area of old buildings referred to by Andrews was some distance from the road and the ruins were quite interesting – there was a track up to them. It was midday, though not all that hot, and although we spent several hours here we really saw very little of interest bird-wise though we did see Tawny Pipits. Certainly no black morph wheatears.

**Azraq Wetland Reserve** – this seems to be all that remains of a once huge oasis – the current wet areas are kept wet by being actively topped up with water. There are two lakes and some reedbeds which are viewable from a boardwalk and a hide. We visited here on two evenings and saw: Common Kingfisher, Little Egret, Squacco Herons, Little Crakes, Moorhen, Fan Tailed Warbler, Whinchat, White Cheeked Bulbul, Sedge Warbler, Moustached Warbler, Reed Warbler, Snipe, Greenshank, Blue Cheeked Bee-eaters and the inevitable Lesser Whitethroats.

**Shaumari Reserve road** – as mentioned above, the reserve was closed, but the road to the reserve has been mentioned as a good spot for birds. On our first evening we drove along to the end then slowly back with the sun behind us – we had excellent views of Cream Coloured Courser and Desert Wheatears. Early the next morning we drove slowly in the other direction and almost immediately found Temmincks Horned Larks (where they had been the previous day I do not know) – several pairs in total. This was almost eclipsed by roadside views of summer plumage Greater Sand Plovers – we wonder if they had actually been breeding as we could see some very small birds running about like chicks in the distance. On a third visit here we walked along the entrance road to the reserve (the other side of the barrier) and found a huge number of Crested Larks, plus a Tree Pipit, a Spotted Flycatcher, two Redstarts and European Bee-eaters.

**New dam near Shaumari** – we were taken here by a guide from the Azraq wetland – it is accessed by turning west off the main road just a few hundred metres north of the Shaumari turning, but there is no real road, you just drive across the stony desert. Despite the local picknickers (Saturday) there was a good range of waterbirds, many of which must have been breeding. There were Black Winged Stilts, big flocks of Little Stints, Black Tailed Godwits, Ruff, Little Ringed Plovers, Kentish Plovers, Red Throated Pipits, Horned Larks, Grey Herons, Cream Coloured Coursers and both Yellow and White Wagtails plus a tantalising distant large dark eagle. .

**Desert castles area - Wadi Butm (near Qasr Amra)** – this vegetated Wadi had trees and a few pools and we managed to find a few birds – Red Throated Pipits, Woodchat Shrikes, Oortolan Buntings, Redstarts, Desert Finches and Common Sandpiper plus the inevitable migrating warblers – but not as many as we hoped. Being an isolated spot in the desert and something of a migrant trap, I guess the species and numbers of birds found here can be very variable. The frescoes in Qasr Amra are also well worth seeing and entrance is only 1JD for combined ticket for two other castles.

**Desert Castles area - Qasr al Kharana** – the area around this desert castle is recommended by Andrews as a good place for regular desert birds. Well – not any more I think, as now the castle is adjacent to a large military communications centre, and an electricity substation – probably not a good place to wander around with binoculars and telescopes!

## 5. Notes on the birdwatching

We felt the bird density in Jordan was rather low. We have been to dry and desert areas before (e.g. Kazakhstan, Namibia, Australia, Tunisia) and they are often quite rich in birds – for example they can be hopping with larks – so it is true to say we were disappointed. Although we found most of our “expected” birds we found none of the rarer species we were hoping for – e.g. no sandgrouse, interesting owls or rarer larks. We did not even see obvious birds such as Little Owl and Namaqua Dove, or any ducks at all, and were disappointed not to find Hoopoe Lark as they are such a splendid bird. And we managed to not even see a Lesser Short-toed Lark which are supposed to be common! In fact, we were really surprised at the shortage of larks generally – but maybe the overgrazing means that the shrubs never set seed so there is nothing for a lark to eat.

If you look at the list of birds for the Eastern Desert, or Wadi Butm in Andrews, it bears little relationship to what we saw. Our suspicions that something is wrong were confirmed when we picked up a copy (in the Azraq Lodge) of the fascinating book written after an visit to Jordan in the 1960s by Mountfort, Hosking, Hollom et al. (“Portrait of a Desert: An expedition to Jordan”, 1965) They found huge numbers of birds everywhere but even at that time they were expressing concern about levels of grazing and possible water extraction

consequences. (This book is well worth a read for an insight into ornithology and scientific expeditions at that time, it almost seemed like the 1930's rather than the 1960's)

We can only assume that a sequence of dry years, over-extraction of water, serious over grazing, use of trees and bushes for fuel, over development, and quite possibly, hunting, are all taking their toll.

(Or possibly, we are just getting old and past it and losing our touch!)

Our major dips were Arabian Warbler, Hooded Wheatear and Trumpeter Finch (the last rapidly becoming a bogey bird – we spent two days in Wadi Rum and did not see any sign of one!)

## 6. Bird list (an underline indicates a lifer)

**Chukar Partridge** Common at Dana and quite common at Ajloun, though hard to see well  
**Sand Partridge** The only place we saw this bird (a covey of about 10) was in the far south of Wadi Rum near the Saudi border. I was not expecting it to be this difficult and we looked for it everywhere.

**White Stork** A nice group of 12 birds spiralling up in a thermal by the Dead Sea Panorama.

**Night Heron** A migrating flock of 12 at Aqaba

**Squacco Heron** One at Aqaba B.O., plenty at Azraq

**Cattle Egret** Just one at Aqaba B.O.

**Little Egret** Just one at Azraq

**Great White Egret** One at Aqaba B.O.

**Grey Heron** 4 at Aqaba B.O., 4 at the Shaumari dam

**Purple Heron** Two migrating flocks at Aqaba B.O. of 19 and 33 respectively

**Osprey** One each at Aqaba B.O. and Azraq

**Honey Buzzard** A few birds migrating in Wadi Dana

**Griffon Vulture** Excellent close views of 4 flying birds at Dana

**Short-toed Eagle** Quite common in the Rift Margins and at Rummana campsite

**Montagu's Harrier** Several soaring birds seen on two occasions on the Shaumari road

**Levant Sparrowhawk** Just one bird flew across the Shaumari road carrying a lizard – we had good views and it can only have been this species. We have a flight photo which clearly shows the under-wing pattern.

**Steppe Buzzard** Several hundreds were seen migrating in Wadi Dana, and smaller number were seen at Aqaba, Wadi Rum and Wadi Araba.

**Long-legged Buzzard** Several individuals at Dana, Rummana and Ajloun.

**Steppe Eagle** A distant dark eagle at Shaumari dam was probably this species

**Kestrel** Quite common in any hilly or rocky area

**Lesser Kestrel** Seen at Shobak Castle and at Wadi el Wala

**Moorhen** Only at Azraq though one was heard at Aqaba B.O.

**Little Crake** 3 birds walking around on floating vegetation on the pond viewed from the hide in the late afternoon at Azraq

**Black-winged Stilt** 20 or so at Aqaba B.O. (including a juvenile) and about 10 at the Shaumari dam

**Cream-coloured Courser** A total of 9 birds seen in the Shaumari area

**Little Ringed Plover** One at the Shaumari dam

**Kentish Plover** 20 at the Shaumari dam

**Greater Sand Plover** 3 birds seen on the Shaumari road

**Spur-winged Plover** 12 at Aqaba B.O., also at the Shaumari dam

**Little Stint** About 50 at the Shaumari dam

**Ruff** 4 at Aqaba B.O., 2 at the Shaumari dam

**Snipe** 3 at Azraq

**Greenshank** One at Azraq

**Green Sandpiper** 10 at Aqaba B.O.

**Common Sandpiper** 2 at Azraq, one at Wadi Butm, one at Aqaba B.O.

**Black-tailed Godwit** 3 at the Shaumari dam

**White-eyed Gull** 3 in total seen at Aqaba flying over the Red Sea

**Black-headed Gull** 6 at Aqaba B.O.

**Slender-billed Gull** A flock of about 50 at Aqaba B.O..

**Baltic Gull** Common at Aqaba

**Common Tern** Two birds flew distantly by at Aqaba, probably of this species

**Rock Dove** As well as Feral Pigeons, in the Wadis there were flocks of genuine Rock Doves which had almost no white rump

**Collared Dove** Recorded everywhere in the drier areas but not at Ajloun

**Turtle Dove** 4 at Rummana, heard at Ajloun

**Laughing Dove** Common everywhere

**Cuckoo** Several birds heard and seen in the highlands (e.g. Dana) and at Ajloun

**Scops Owl** Heard calling at Rummana

**Nightjar** I am pretty sure I could hear a Nightjar reeling at dusk at the Shaumari dam

**Swift** Common at Wadi el Wala

**Pallid Swift** Common at Wadi el Wala

**Little Swift** Just one seen in Wadi al Wala

**Common Kingfisher** Probably the same bird seen twice at Azraq

**Green Bee-eater** Excellent views of a pair of these birds in Wadi abu Dubana on the road to Feinan Lodge

**Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** Two pairs of these birds passed over the Azraq ponds while we were in the hide

**European Bee-eater** Small numbers passed through the Shaumari area

**Hoopoe** Single birds in most hilly and wooded places, pair at Rummana

**Syrian Woodpecker** Two birds seen flying whilst we were walking the Prophet's Trail at Ajloun

**Southern Grey Shrike** One bird at Wadi abu Dubana (see above) and one at the Dead Sea Panorama

**Woodchat Shrike** One of the pleasures of the trip was to see plenty of these delightful birds both breeding (singing) and on migration. Any place with trees could have these birds.

**Masked Shrike** One lovely bird on passage at Wadi Mujib in unlikely habitat – bushes in a road repair yard!

**Arabian Babbler** A pair at Aqaba B.O in the dense bushes on the Walking Trail. There must be other sites for these birds but we did not find them anywhere else.

**Jay** Very common at Ajloun, to the apparent distress of the smaller breeding birds. In autumn they presumably feed on the abundant acorns.

**Indian House Crow** The common corvid in Aqaba

**Hooded Crow** Only one seen by the roadside near Mafraq

**Brown-necked Raven** Seen at Dana and common at Wadi Rum

**Fan-tailed Raven** Seen mostly in the vicinity of the mountainous edge to the Dead Sea, either individuals (strange call) or large flocks

**Spectacled Bulbul** Quite a common bird wherever there were a few trees

**White-cheeked Bulbul** We saw about 4 of these rather nice birds at Azraq where they are not native but are naturalised

**Blue Tit** Just one bird seen at Ajloun

**Great Tit** Common at Dana and at Ajloun

**Bar-tailed Lark** One pair at Wadi Rum in a flat stony area

**Desert Lark** Quite a common bird in rocky or rocky desert habitats – seen at Dana, Wadi Mujib, Wadi Araba, Azraq and most commonly in Wadi Rum

**Crested Lark** A very common bird of cultivations and greener areas in deserts

**Temminck's Horned Lark** We really only saw this bird on the gravelly plains in the Shaumari area – either by the road or near the dam. It was much harder to find than we expected.

**Woodlark** One bird near Rummana campsite

**Sand Martin** Reasonable numbers at Azraq

**Pale Rock Martin** Common where there were cliffs and mountains

**Barn Swallow** Migratory birds at Azraq and local, darker bellied, breeding birds in the villages in the Jordan Valley

**Red-rumped Swallow** Seen at Wadi el Wala and at Rum Village

**House Martin** 10 seen at Azraq were the only birds

**Fan-tailed Warbler (Zitting Cisticola)** One bird at Azraq by a wet grassy area – breeding?

**Graceful Prinia** Found in cultivated areas along the Kings Highway e.g. Wadi el Wala where it was numerous. Also found apparently holding territories in Aqaba B.O., Wadi abu Dhubana on the road to Feinan Lodge and at Azraq.

**Scrub Warbler** A pair seen at Rummana on the hills and at Wadi Mujib but the main sightings were in Wadi Rum where we saw a number of furtive birds probably feeding young and eventually had good photographable views of a scolding bird. These birds are very reminiscent of Australian Grasswrens.

**Cetti's Warbler** 2 birds singing in Wadi el Wala

**Reed Warbler** Birds heard singing and one briefly seen in the reeds from the hide at Azraq

**Great Reed Warbler** Singing birds heard at Wadi el Wala and from the reeds bordering the River Jordan at Bethany-beyond-Jordan.

**Moustached Warbler** One bird seen from the boardwalk at Azraq close to, and fighting with, a Sedge Warbler allowing direct comparison

**Sedge Warbler** One bird (maybe a pair) at Azraq – see previous entry

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** Heard frequently but rarely seen especially at Wadi el Wala, Suwayma, Bethany-beyond-Jordan, Aqaba B.O. and Azraq.

**Sardinian Warbler** Strangely scarce - we only saw a couple of birds (though heard more) at Ajloun and nowhere else.

**Eastern Orphean Warbler** At least two singing birds on the Prophet's Trail at Ajloun.

**Lesser Whitethroat** Abundant almost everywhere – we saw more of this species than all the other species added together. Not singing though.

**Whitethroat** A few birds seen at Dana and Aqaba. 2 singing birds, presumably breeding, at Ajloun.

**Blackcap** The next most common migrant warbler after Lesser Whitethroat particularly at Aqaba B.O.

**Chiffchaff** Just a few Chiffchaffs, mostly at Aqaba B.O.

**Willow Warbler** 2 at Dana, with two Whitethroats, feeding close to the lodge in almost zero visibility

**Tristram's Grackle** Quite a common bird of rocky cliffs and gullies e.g. near the Dead Sea. At Dana and in Wadi Rum they forage around dwellings and eat scraps. Can often be located by the penetrating whistle.

**Wren** Several heard singing at Ajloun but never seen!

**Blue Rock Thrush** Two male birds seen at Petra – one was strangely pale, almost turquoise.

**Blackbird** Quite common wherever there were trees and bushes. Very common in the oak forest at Ajloun.

**Rufous Bush-rob**in One seen singing at Aqaba and 2 seen, one singing, in the tamarisk scrub at Suwayma

**Nightingale** 2 at Suwayma

**Redstart** 2 birds near Madaba and 2 at Shaumari

**Blackstart** A common roadside bird along the central mountains, the Dead Sea and particularly common in Wadi Araba

**Whinchat** 2 birds at Aqaba and one at Wadi Araba

**Northern Wheatear** Two male birds and some females particularly around Azraq and Shaumari

**Isabelline Wheatear** Several birds in the Shawbak area were definitely this species

**Black-eared Wheatear** Common around Dana – both types (the white throated type are particularly attractive). Also a territorial singing bird at Ajloun.

**Desert Wheatear** One pair in Wadi Rum and several pairs near Shaumari

**Mourning Wheatear** Birds seen at Petra, Shawbak and quite commonly in Wadi Rum.

**White-crowned Black Wheatear** The first bird we saw, at the Dead Sea Panorama, was a splendid specimen with a white crown. However most of the birds at Wadi Rum, where it was the commonest wheatear, were black crowned.

**Spotted Flycatcher** Just one bird at Shaumari

**Pied Flycatcher** We saw males and one female at Aqaba B.O, Wadi Araba, Bethany-beyond-Jordan and Shaumari. As far as we could tell they were all Pied and not Semi-Collared though we were looking hard as Semi-Collared would have been a lifer!

**Orange Tufted Sunbird** (stupid name – what's wrong with Palestine Sunbird?) Pairs found at the Dead Sea Panorama, Rummana and Wadi Araba and probably elsewhere.

**House Sparrow** Common everywhere even away from houses

**Spanish Sparrow** Colonies in Wadi el Wala (though the birds were hard to see) and nesting birds in the thatched shelters at Rummana campsite.

**Dead Sea Sparrow** Only seen at Bethany-beyond-Jordan where views were had of one singing male, a female, and 5 flying birds. Nests but not birds were found at Suwayma.

**Rock Sparrow** One bird on the slope below Shawbak Castle.

**Yellow Wagtail** One bird at the Shaumari dam, of the *feldeggi* race

**White Wagtail** A splendid male at the Shaumari dam

**Tawny Pipit** One bird seen in the Basalt Desert near Al Safawi

**Tree Pipit** One bird at Shaumari (on the telephone wires)

**Red-throated Pipit** 2 birds at Wadi Butm and 3 at Wadi al Wala (not very red throats) and 10 much redder-throated birds at Shaumari dam

**Syrian Serin** A total of about 13 birds seen but only 2 pairs seen well, one pair in the Barra Forest (see map) and one pair by the Tower entrance to Rummana.

**Greenfinch** Quite a common bird in the highlands, sometimes in small groups and sometimes in big flocks often with Linnets. Especially common at Dana in the Barra Forest and at Rummana. Males have very bright yellow faces and foreheads.

**Goldfinch** 2 seen at the Barra Forest and one near Madaba was all we saw of this supposedly common bird.

**Linnet** Big flocks of very colourful birds at Rummana and at the Barra Forest. Also at Shawbak.

**Desert Finch** 4 birds drinking at a pool in Wadi Butm

**Sinai Rosefinch** One really bright male at Little Petra, two females at Petra, then at least 8 pairs in Wadi Rum, one of which lived around the campsite and drank from the water tanker outlet.

**Indian Silverbill** Two birds seen by the River Jordan at Bethany-beyond-Jordan – not native but naturalised.

**Striolated Bunting** A hard bird to see even when you know it is there – very low profile not like House Buntings at all. We saw a female collecting nest material during a Wadi Rum lunch stop then eventually found a male on the rocks above the road on the way out of Wadi Rum.

**Ortolan Bunting** A group of 5 birds livened up a lunch stop at Wadi Rum then we later saw a loose group of about 30 birds at Wadi Butm.

**Cretzchmar's Bunting** We had good views of a pair and a single male at the Barra Forest, one bird at Rummana and a singing bird near to the lodge at Ajloun.

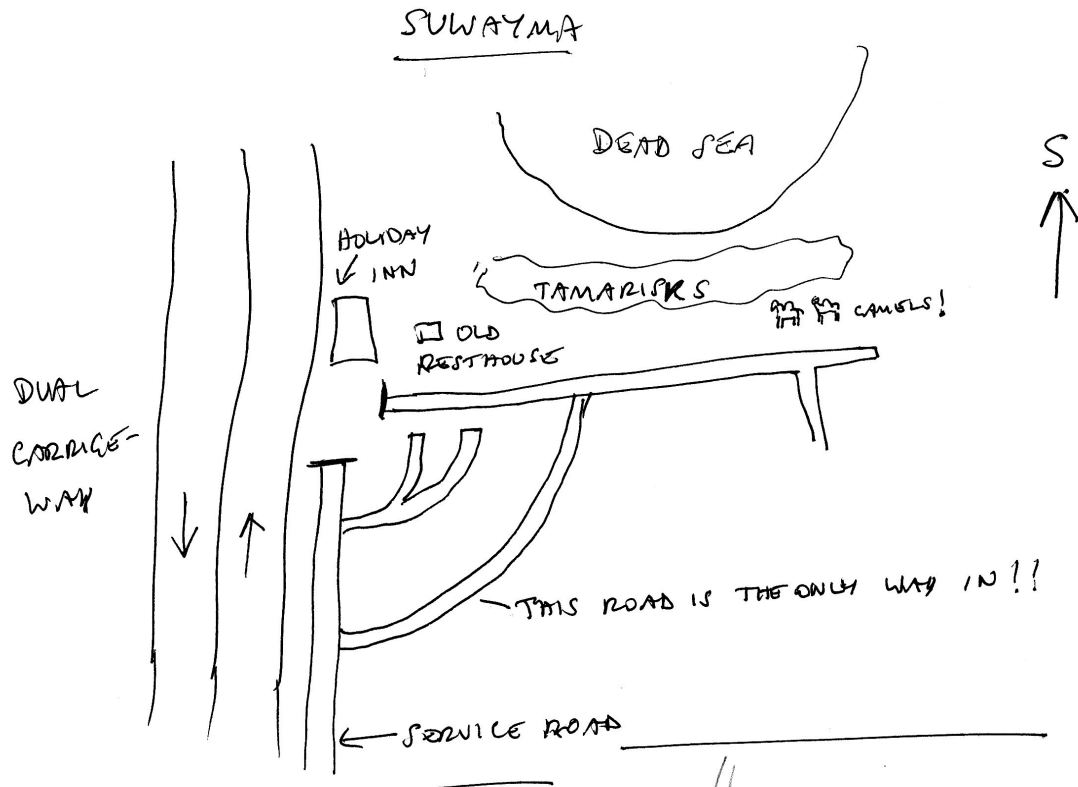
**Corn Bunting** A flock of about 20 birds near Madaba must have been late winter visitors.

**Common Myna** A few birds in the town at Aqaba

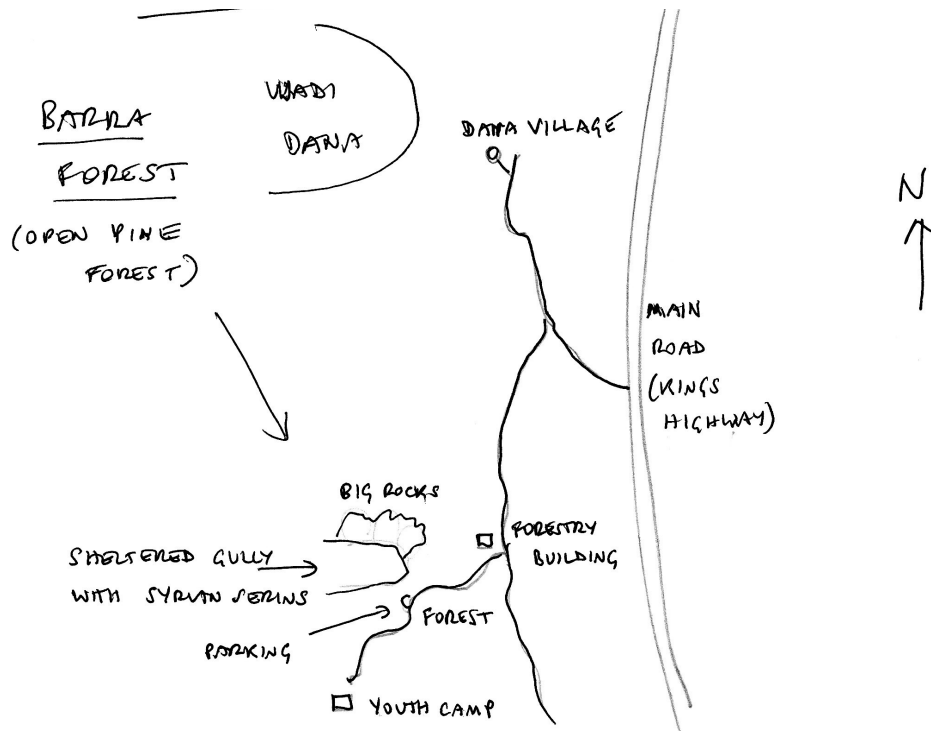


## 7. MAPS

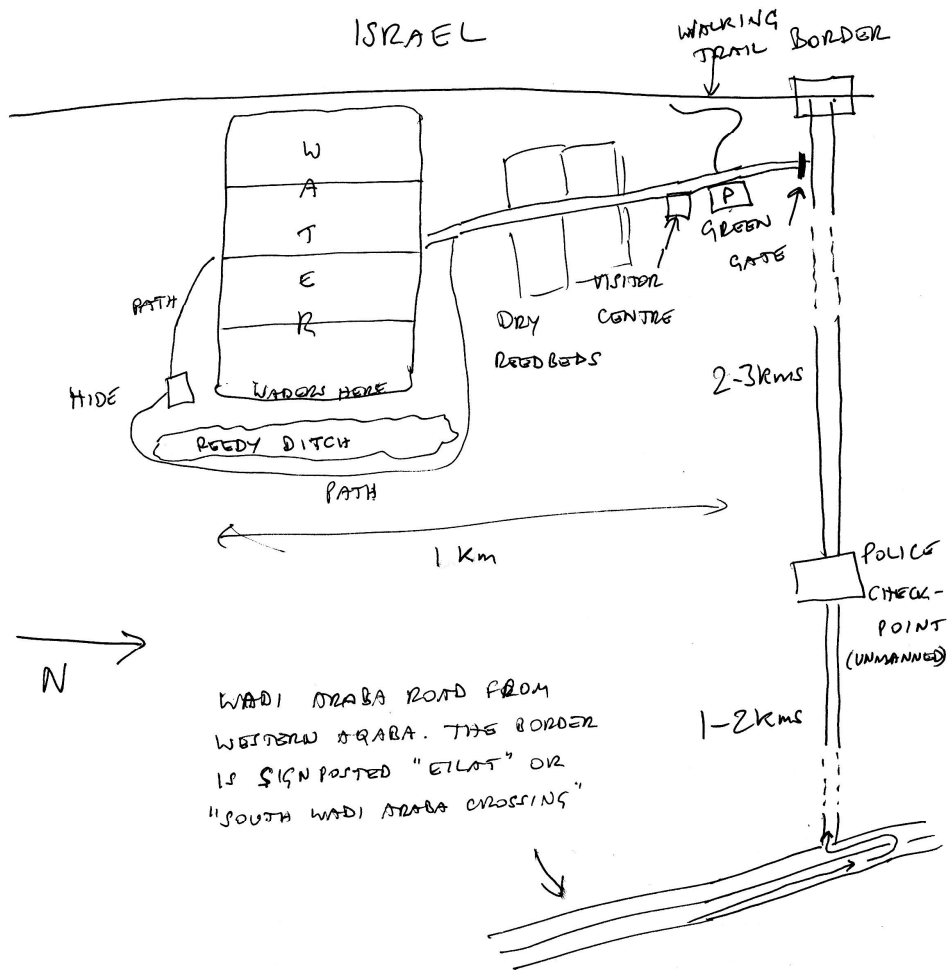
### Suwayma



### Barra Forest near Dana



# Aqaba Bird Observatory



For all the above areas it is worth having a look on Google Earth