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# Breeding terns on Al Jarrim islands

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roadside. Over the years I have observed Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus migrans aegyptius*, Dark Chanting Goshawks *Melierax metabates*, Common Kestrels *F. tinnunculus*, Hobbies *F. subbuteo*, Steppe Buzzards *Buteo b. vulpinus*, Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* as well as other wildlife being offered at byways and city intersections.

Slightly more organized than this diffuse, opportunistic trade is the marketing of wildlife through Sana'a's Nuqum animal suq. Having been alerted last March that a considerable stream of animals passed through the suq, I contracted a student, Tarim Contin-Kennedy to monitor the traffic at Nuqum and the results have revealed an horrendous situation. In less than six months my student has documented with lists and photographs an amazing 48 species of birds, 15 species of mammals, and at least seven reptile species moving through the suq. Of the birds, no fewer than five species of owls and ten species of diurnal raptors have been put up for sale. Many die miserably in the appalling conditions that prevail at Nuqum. While Kestrels and Yellow-billed Kites predominate, the trade is not limited to these commoner species. For example, on 22 May this year a Verreaux's Eagle *A. verreauxii* nestling was on offer, it died within the week (see photo page 3). A month later, a recently fledged Hume's Owl *Strix butleri* was at the market and was quickly snapped up by an expatriate 'enthusiast.' In September, five Lesser Kestrels *F. naumanni* appeared in the market, two soon succumbed as a result of the frightful conditions (see photo page 3).

As the poorest nation in the region, Yemen faces some difficult economic challenges. Approximately 40% of the population lives on less than a dollar a day and the wildlife trade is just one response to this untenable situation. Yemen's Minister for Water and the Environment, HE Abdulrahman Al-Eryani, states that enforcement of the wildlife laws is out of his hands and that raising the public's awareness is the only way to stop the wholesale marketing of Yemen's precious wildlife. Since we started this investigation we have also published articles on the Yemen's wildlife trade in *Wildlife Middle East News*, *Yemen Today* and *YooMag*, but awareness must be followed by action. Save Yemen Flora and Fauna, a newly formed NGO has pledged to join the battle to fight animal trafficking through its website and extensive network. The Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program, though focussed on the preservation of Yemen's small population of Arabian Leopards, is also committed to stopping the mining of Yemeni wildlife. However, the real roots of this trade are poverty and greed and until Yemen's poor are provided with opportunities to make a decent living, and all countries involved in the trade of the most coveted birds agree to enforce CITES, Yemen's raptors will continue to decline.

Much like the wildlife trade in Yemen, this report is somewhat opportunistic. When we started monitoring the trade at Nuqum, it was a step towards a more systematic appraisal of wildlife trafficking in Yemen but it is wildly inadequate. With more information, perhaps the government can be stimulated into action and Yemen will begin enforcing the laws that were written to protect this country's wildlife. In the meantime we will keep counting.

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## **Breeding terns on Al Jarrim islands, Bahrain**

by Brendan Kavanagh

Fasht Al Jarrim is a sandy shoal situated approximately 20 km

north (QA29) of the main island of Bahrain. Three small islands occur on the fasht. The northernmost of these is a natural island which belongs to the ruler of Bahrain and has been occupied by two caretakers until 2009. An access channel is maintained through the fasht from the deeper water to the south-west. Two further islands are found to the south-east of the channel in shallow water. These are manmade, created from the spoils of industrial exploration over 20 years ago. While the islands have no official names, they are referred to in this note as Al Jarrim south, middle and north for ease of identification.

All three islands attain several metres above high tide mark. The Al Jarrim north has a permanent constructed mooring on its southern side, while Al Jarrim south is approachable from the east to a small sandy beach. Al Jarrim middle is the most difficult to approach with extensive shallows on all sides.

Two visits were made to the islands in 2007, two in 2008 and three in 2009. All visits were between late June and early August. Daytime temperatures are in the mid-40's at that time of year. The team of observers and ringers (see below) usually arrived at the islands before 8.30 am and each visit lasted 6 – 8 hours, including travel time to and from the islands. The primary task on each occasion was to ring pulli of the three tern species breeding there in some number; White-cheeked Terns *Sterna repressa*, Lesser Crested Terns *S. bengalensis* and Bridled Tern *S. anaethetus*. The timing of breeding of the three species differs. White-cheeked terns have a protracted season from June to August, Lesser Crested terns breed from June to the end of July with most chicks on the ground in late June and Bridled Terns begin laying in late June with most chicks still on the ground in late July.

Assessment of the size of the populations was conducted by circling the islands to count sitting White-cheeked Terns, then landing to ring chicks. An estimate of the number of chicks in the crèches of Lesser Crested Terns plus the number of nests with eggs was arrived at by scanning each island while collecting and ringing pulli. Bridled Tern numbers were estimated while catching chicks hiding in the vegetation. A large proportion of Bridled Tern but less than 10% of Lesser Crested Tern chicks were ringed each year. Timing of the ringing of Bridled Terns coincided with the period when all eggs had hatched but few birds had fledged, the timing of breeding of this species being highly synchronized.

The size of the team varied from year to year. In 2007 we were made up of one ringer (the author), two helpers and the boatman who also helped catch birds. In 2008 and 2009 the groups were larger consisting of two ringers and 4-6 helpers, with some individuals concentrated on collecting a photographic record. The same boatman has been used each time apart from the first visit in 2009 when two coastguard vessels provided transport.

The total numbers of each species ringed (these were mostly pulli) since 2007 are; White-cheeked, 255; Lesser Crested, 1,003 (see photo page 3) and Bridled, 340.

The population of Bridled Terns appears to have been stable over the three seasons. However both the Lesser Crested and the White-cheeked Terns have increased. The most detailed and accurate count was taken in 2009 with the numbers of the three main species as follows; White-cheeked Tern, 650-750 pairs (equivalent to 2% of the world population\* and 30-50% of the

Bahrain population); Lesser Crested Tern 5-6,000 pairs (equivalent to 5% of the world population\* and 50% of the Bahrain population); Bridled Tern, 300-350 pairs. (\* Based on current IUCN data). These numbers would justify nominating the Al Jarrim south and middle islands as an important bird area for the Middle East region.

We are currently seeking funding for a more complete survey of all the breeding colonies of these terns in Bahrain in 2010.

Special thanks are due to Howard King (2007 and 2009), Juhani Kyyrro (2007), Adrian Drummond-Hill (2007 and 2009), Ali the boatman (2007-2009), Abdulla Al Khaabi (2008), Ian Grey (2008), Kevin Culligan (2008), Khalifa AlKhalifa (2008), Abdulqader Khamis (2009) and Douglas McGarvey (2009) without whom this work could not have been undertaken.

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White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa* chick.

## The first Asian Koel for Kuwait

by Abdulrahman Al Sirhan and Rashed Al Hajji

Ouda Al-Bathalie a member of Kuwait birding forum asked me to come and see a bird at his farm near Abdali, in the north of the state (NB37) which he thought might be a new species for Kuwait. On 22 February 2009 we went to the farm to try to photograph and identify the bird. It was crow sized, with blue-black plumage and a heavy yellowish green hooked bill, unforked heavy rounded tail, yellowish green legs and a gape that extended to under the eye. It was unmistakably a male Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopaceus*, see photo page 12, the first for Kuwait and the Western Palearctic as defined by Cramp and Simmons, 1977. The record was accepted by the Kuwait Ornithological Records Committee on 2 May 2009.

The Asian Koel is increasingly recorded in the lower Arabia Gulf from Bahrain to Masirah island. The range of its occurrence in Arabia is wider every year and there are now several records from Dhofar and one from Socotra. Ouda Al-Bathalie, who owns a bird shop in the Kuwait Bird Market advised that this species has not been recorded for sale in Kuwait and indeed no birds have been imported to Kuwait recently because of avian flu controls. Furthermore as a brood parasite of crows and mynahs it would be difficult to breed in captivity.

This first winter bird (identified from the white tips to the

greater coverts and in the breast) must surely have arrived in Kuwait naturally from its breeding areas which extend eastwards from Pakistan.

**Reference:** Cramp, S. & K. E. L. Simmons. 1977. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York.

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## The first Long-tailed Shrike for Kuwait

by Khaled Al Ghanem

On the morning of 7 October 2004 I made my daily observations of autumn migrants at Jahra Pool Nature Reserve (NB35) beside Kuwait Bay. On the fence of the reserve I noticed an unfamiliar shrike which later, from photographs I took, I was able to identify as a Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*, see photo page 12. It stayed only a few seconds and then flew away. In the afternoon the same day I relocated the shrike on a bush in area dominated by *Tamarix* sp. trees, 100m from a small pool of water in the reserve. It was also present at the same place the next day. Over the two days of observation I noticed that the bird came to drink about every 25 minutes and stayed a few minutes near the pool before it returned to the bushy area.

I had no previous experience of this species but on checking the literature available to me I noticed similarities with the smaller Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*. It is a typical shrike with large head, stout laterally compressed hook-tipped bill. My description of the bird follows. Longish graduated, black and rufous tail with buff (not white) outer feathers, bright orange-buff rump and uppertail-coverts. The forehead and a broad band through the eye were black. The crown, nape sides, back of the neck and upper back were clear grey diffusing to rufous or cinnamon on the rest of the upperparts. The chin, throat and upper breast were white and the rest of underparts pale rufous. The wings were blackish with a small white mirror at the base of the primaries. The iris was brown, bill black (flesh coloured at base of lower mandible), legs, feet and claws brownish black.

This species breeds from central Asia and Pakistan eastwards, it is a vagrant in the Arabian Gulf states. This is the first record of the species from Kuwait. There was a second record at the nearby Sulaibikhat Nature Reserve (NB35) on 14 October 2006 by Hussain Al Qallaf.

The record is subject to acceptance by the Kuwait Ornithological Records Committee.

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## The first Mongolian Trumpeter Finch for Kuwait

by Khaled Al Ghanem

While photographing and monitoring birds near a man-made, shallow pool, at the Sabah Al Ahmed Natural Reserve (NB36) on the morning of 5 March 2009, a small unidentified finch landed with a group of Trumpeter Finches *Bucanetes*