

### Travel and accommodation

Direct package tour flights from Finland to Eilat have been ceased for many years now. It's same thing with many other European countries. But the Finnish "Toiviomatkat" travel agency organizes charter flights between Helsinki and Tel Aviv. We bought ours at 520 € / person. We had also booked a Daihatsu Sirion at Tel Aviv airport Budget (174 € a week plus 11 € for 2<sup>nd</sup> driver plus 48 € for "super" cdw). Driving it to Eilat took five and half hours, including two short pauses and a half an hours longer one at Yotvata. The road via Negev Desert and Mitzpe Ramon is good and fast, as was the alternative one via Dimona, which we used on our way back home. The travel agency had also reserved us a room in Eilat, at \*\*\* "Americana Hotel". A double, with a small kitchen cost 400 € a week. The hotel is conveniently situated at Kamen street, near the old, familiar to many birders "Moon Valley", not far from North Beach. Tapio had stayed in "Americana" also the previous spring. Now it seemed to be a lot of lodging available in Eilat.

### General information

A terrorist bomber – the first ever with any success – had entered the town in January. Having read about this, we thought for a moment about cancelling our trip, but then ended up to a conclusion, that now it would be safer than ever in Eilat. And that really was how we felt during all our stay.

Tapio had last visited Eilat the previous March – now he was on his eighth birdwatching trip to Israel. My previous visit to Eilat was in April -99 and I had been birding in Israel twice before that. In spite of the blast, it was a bit surprising, that we met this time no other western birders. But it also meant us the delight of mostly finding our own birds. Of course our timing was a bit early - the spring season was just in a good start during our week. Later in spring, with bird masses, also more birders from abroad did arrive.

The local birders, Noam Weiss at the ringing station and Jonathan Meyrav of Kibbutz Lotan were very helpful, and gave us a lot of valuable information. We also met a few other Israeli birders. But we do have to admit, a few more twitches at Eilat area would have been ok. Noam found an active territory of Hume's Tawny Owl during our stay, and would have taken us there, or to make a try for Nubian Nightjar nearer to Dead Sea, but this time we were too lazy for these.

"Normal" tourists were now a lot more numerous in Eilat than during my previous visits, but they seemed to be almost totally Israeli. Many new hotels, restaurants and at least one shopping mall have been built in the hotel area since 90's. The old town centre has not changed so much. Food in supermarkets there is still cheaper than in Finland, and so is gasoline, and Steimatzky's bookshop near Bus Station still sells very good maps.

### Some sites visited

**North Beach.** Almost like before. But things still change swiftly in Eilat: a new bridge crossing the drainage canal was built near the shore during our stay.

**Eilat bird sanctuary and ringing station** (IBRCE bird reserve). Signposted, situated near (to SW) the border crossing to Jordan. A mixture of trees, bushes, scrub and pools. A good birding area with possibility to see bird ringing in the mornings.

**Northern Date Palm plantation.** To N of IBRCE and Jordan / Aqaba border control road, by the track leading to km 20 pools. An Olive-backed Pipit frequented it in February.

**North (km 19) Sewage Farm.** Situated by the above mentioned track. After ca three km's, the pools are inside a raised embankment to the E of the track. During our visit the gate happened to be open, so we drove in. According to Tapio, in previous spring the area could be alternatively entered through a hole in the surrounding fence.

**Km 20 salt pools, "K20".** Situated ca eight - not 20 - km N from Eilat. After km post 20 turn E from the main Arava road (route 90) to a dirt track signposted "Avrona Farm", among two other brown signposts.

**Km 33.** About halfway between km 32 km 33 posts turn right towards border. Has been a good site for larks etc. Our one short visit there in the hot midday sunshine did not produce anything worth mentioning.

**Yotvata.** Less than half an hours drive (ca 40 km) from Eilat. Especially the **Circular fields** to E of filling station and café were good for larks, pipits etc. At least five Oriental Skylarks, and many Buff-bellied Pipits had been seen there earlier this winter, and there was also observations of Egyptian Nightjar since January. We saw three Egyptian Nightjars there.

**Km 77 (76), "K77".** A good desert species site. Sandgrouse often visiting in the morning. Bar-tailed Lark and Finsch's Wheatear had been seen in February. After km 76 post, near a mast, turn E to a track. Drive towards a fenced area with another mast and white tanks. There is also a small tiny "pond" with reed bed.

## **Itinerary & Diary**

### **4.3. Sun, Tel Aviv, Ben Gurion airport – Beer Sheva – Mitzpe Ramon – Eilat 340 km**

We left Ben Gurion airport at 14.20 o'clock, southwards on route 40. A probable Booted Eagle was missed in lack of suitable lay-by. After an hours drive we made a short stop at a roadside cafe, Spur-winged Plovers flying and calling ahead, Corn Buntings sitting on wire, and distant white Jerusalem city visible on the background mountains. A few Cattle Egrets were flying over the road near Beer Sheva. In Negev Desert magnificent sceneries, sunset at about 17.30. After 18 o'clock we reached Yotvata in Arava Valley, and made a quick visit on a couple of dirt tracks behind the filling station; just in case we should "bump" with the Egyptian Nightjars, reported from there recently. Behind the date-packing factory we saw lights flashing over the field, and made a u-turn thinking that it would be the border guards. Arriving at Eilat 19.45 and lodging at "Americana".

### **5.3. Mon, Eilat, North Beach – Ringing station – km 20 pools – Yotvata – Eilat 110 km**

Dawn broke before 6 o'clock. We went out at 6.15, and the sun appeared from behind the Jordanian mountains at 6.25. A male **Mourning Wheatear** sat on fence near the Drainage canal. We spent

three quarters at North Beach: a passing-by **Squacco Heron**, several Great White Egrets among Little Egrets on the offshore fish farm, a White-eyed Gull, a Kingfisher and four Pied Kingfishers.

After hotel breakfast we drove to Ringing station, where Noam Weiss was talking to a local group, but had also time enough for our questions. At bird sanctuary pools we saw a Marsh Sandpiper and three Red-rumped Swallows, plus two Long-legged Buzzards and 50 Steppe Eagles migrating overhead. Noam's morning bag included a 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male **Blue Rock Thrush**.



Eilat bird sanctuary (IBRCE bird reserve), Noam Weiss on the foreground.

At K20 pools the “normal” mixture of ducks and waders etc., with 330 Flamingos. Then to Yotvata North Circular Fields – a new site to us – a tip from Noam: hundreds of hirundines and swifts, and among them the first **Little Swift** for the spring. We also found a **Cretzschmar's Bunting** and a prey-plucking female Pallid Harrier. Also two male Black-eared Wheatears, ten Short-toed Larks, seven Corn Buntings, five Water Pipits etc. At dusk we got company: Jonathan Meyrav with a friend and a good lamp. At 18.15 an **Egyptian Nightjar** appeared over the field. Two minutes later there were three of them fast flying here and there with rapid wing beats. No chance to see them without a lamp light. Hyenas were howling in the background. The lights we had seen from here the previous night were not the border guards but Noam and his company (!) – but they had not managed to see the Nightjars. 72 bird species on our list so far.

### 6.3. Tue, Eilat – km 77 – Shizzafon (Neot Smadar) – Eilat Northern Date Palm plantation – Eilat, North Beach 167 km

A **Barbary Falcon** carrying its morning prey clashed with a Common Buzzard in air over the hotel at 6.17 o'clock. A good start for our morning ride, to make a try for some desert birds. An hour later

at “K77” another **Barbary Falcon** landed on a mast. We also saw a 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male **Lesser Kestrel** there. Three hours searching produced also a Savi’s Warbler, a Clamorous/Great Reed Warbler, two Lesser Short-toed Larks, seven Arabian Babblers and sounds of both **Spotted** and **Crowned Sandgrouse**. An army border patrol got some variation to their routines by chatting with us for a while.



Border soldiers may come to check visitors at K77.

At Shizzafon (Neot Smadar) kibbutz we found a Bluethroat, a male Black-eared Wheatear, 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male White-crowned Wheatear and a good many of Chiffchaffs and Lesser Whitethroats. On our way back we checked the N part of the Northern Date Palm plantation, but couldn’t find the Olive-backed Pipit which had wintered there.

Strong North wind made our dusk visit to Eilat North Beach less comfortable, but we saw 60 Pintails coming from sea, a Caspian Tern and at least one **Western Reef Heron**.

### 7.3. Wed, Eilat, Ofira Park - Nahal Shlomo – Eilat Northern Date Palm plantation – Eilat, North Beach 54 km

Still cool N wind in the morning. Before breakfast I did a short walk in Ofira Park, which is situated near the hotels: two Hoopoes, a male *melanoleuca* Black-eared Wheatear, and over the park two **Arctic Skuas** migrating NE.

The forenoon was spent in Nahal Shlomo, a mountain wadi to W of Eilat. The wadi can be driven through by an ordinary car from Eilat – Ovda road down to sea shore. On the main road at the edge of the town there was a contemporary police checkpoint and at the mouth of the wadi track a soldier patrol. According to the soldiers, this was because of smugglers from behind the Egypt border.



Nahal Shlomo, a wadi near Eilat, good site for wintering and migrant passerines etc.

Steppe Eagles and Common Buzzards were migrating NE over the wadi. We counted 150 of each species in one hour, plus one Black Kite and one **Black Stork**. In the wadi we found three Blackstarts, a **Trumpeter Finch**, a White-crowned Wheatear and our first Balkan (Eastern Bonelli's) Warbler for the spring.

A quick visit to the Date Palm plantation NW of Aqaba Border Control produced this time two Black-eared Wheatears and another Balkan Warbler.

Continuing the track towards km 20 salt pools we noticed, that the gate of "North sewage farm" was open. A ten minute visit gave us five new waterbird and two new wader species for the trip plus a beautiful male **Citrine Wagtail** in breeding plumage.

The next two hours at km 20 salt pools were not that effective, but there was reasonable numbers of Slender-billed Gulls (82), Shelduck (138), Black-winged Stilts (50) and Shoveler (100); also five Marsh Sandpiper and 25 Little Stint. Four **Spoonbills** in breeding plumage soon carried on their migration. Also the wheatear migration had advanced: we were busy for some time with a group of two **Isabelline**, one male Desert and a tricky-plumaged 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male Black-eared **Wheatear**.

The day was finished at North Beach. A flock of 170 Slender-billed Gulls was floating in front of the beach. At the fish farm and passing to roost 11 Great White Egrets, also four adult Caspian Terns inland. 108 bird species so far.

### **8.3. Thu, Eilat, North Beach – Ringing station – Kibbutz Lotan – Qetura – Yotvata - Eilat, North Beach** **128 km**

Already the morning was warmer and not so windy as on the couple of previous days. Afternoon temperature seemed to reach even +30 C.

Bird migration was getting more active, following the warming of weather. The one and a half hour from dawn, spent at North Beach was fine. Three adult and one 2<sup>nd</sup> cal **Pallas's Gulls** passing us at close distance. Two Skua sp. chasing gulls at sea. Also a flock of 34 Lesser Black-backed Gulls migrating inland. The best bird was a **Small Skylark**, which we noticed on ground directly in front of us, and had good views through telescope. Also two Hoopoes migrated E following the shore line.

After breakfast we visited the Bird Sanctuary and found a **Greater Sand Plover** and an adult female **Grey Wagtail** at the pools. Noam Weiss was handling and ringing passerines, and did show us Balkan (Eastern Bonelli's) Warblers, a Sardinian Warbler and an Olivaceous Warbler in hand. Steppe Eagle migration continued overhead.

It took us 45 minutes to drive to Kibbutz Lotan. Jonathan Meyrav just happened to drive out of the gate, otherwise we should have phoned somewhere to get it opened. After reporting ourselves at the reception we were allowed to drive and walk around freely. We found a 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male Blue Rock Thrush, and on the lawns six Red-throated Pipits, six Hoopoes, and a male *cyaneacula* –Bluethroat. The gate to Lotan Bird Reserve was closed and the site looked silent, but a **Dead Sea Sparrow** sat on the fence.

The nearby Qetura sewage farm produced another Dead Sea Sparrow plus more Bluethroats.

On our way back we watched an hour and a half again at the Yotvata North Circular Fields. Hundreds of hirundines again, 30 Short-toed Larks, a Long-legged Buzzard, and landing in front of us a gorgeous **Bimaculated Lark**.

The last half an hour before sunset at North Beach produced 17 White-eyed Gull and three adult **Pallas's Gulls** plus on the floating fish farm a **Striated Heron**.

### **9.3. Fri, Eilat, North Beach – Ringing station – km 20 - Eilat, North Beach** **51 km**

Lesser Black-backs and Slender-billed Gulls were migrating at North Beach and Sandwich Terns “peaked” with three individuals during the half an hour from dawn, I spent at North Beach. Tapio stayed in bed trying to get rid of his flu, but at the Beach I met for the first time another visiting birder, called Tuvia.

Noam Weiss had kindly admitted me to enter the ringing station to accompany him and his co-ringer, Misha this morning. The catch was not too hectic, so we had time enough to admire the two (Little) Green Bee-eaters and a *samamiscus*-Redstart, which were caught in addition to a Graceful Prinia, Sedge Warbler, Lesser Whitethroats and Chiffchaffs.



(Little) Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, Eilat Ringing station 9.3.2007.



An adult male Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisticus*, 9.3.2007.

Meanwhile, Tapio had also recovered, and after some shopping for maps etc., we left for km 20 pools. Investigating the nearby scrub for Scrub Warbler produced a beautiful male **Rüppell's Warbler**, and on the pool embankments we saw a Tawny Pipit and two male Desert Wheatears.

The dusk hour at North Beach gave nothing really new, but of the swarming gull, heron and egret mixture we picked out a hundred flying Pintail, some White-eyed Gulls, and a Caspian Tern.

### 10.3. Sat, Eilat, North Beach – Mount Yoash – Egyptian border road (nr 10) – Ovda Road - Yotvata - Eilat 195 km

The Slender-billed Gull migration continued at North beach at dawn, with flocks of 80 + 10 migrating N in 45 minutes. Then Tuvia and three other Israeli birders came and we felt ourselves free to leave for breakfast.

After eight a clock we headed for Eilat Mountains, where a light raptor migration was going on. The rate of Common Buzzard was 300 per hour. One or two Steppe Eagles among them every now and then, plus an adult **Egyptian Vulture**.

At Sayarim Junction the soldiers said they allow us drive seven km's along the "Ha-Gvul ha Ma'aravi" road (nr 10), which leads to Nizzana following the border. On my previous visit, with my son Olli in April -99 we had found a nest of Temminck's Horned Lark ca 5 km from the junction. Now we found nothing to mention, and turned back at six km, feeling a bit unpleasant because every time we stopped and got out of the car an Egyptian soldier came out of his watch-hut. And watch-huts were plentiful. Most likely because of the January Eilat blast, caused by a young Gaza man, who had managed to cross the border undetected at night-time.

This early morning rucksack-hitchhiker had got a lift from a local (Lt. Col. in reserve) at Ovda road (nr 12) nearer to Eilat. The driver became suspicious, because the young man did not speak any Hebrew, and let him out of the car at the edge of town. When the alarmed police-patrol got the man in sight, he hurried to explode the bomb in a suburban bakery and killed himself plus three bakers.

We drove past Ovda airport to Shitim at Khion Plain, hoping to see some desert birds. The best observation was three Antelopes. On our way back, we saw a beautiful **Masked Shrike** and a Long-legged Buzzard at Yotvata Southern Circular Field.



Yotvata Northern Circular Field, the site for Egyptian Nightjars.

### **11.3. Sun, Eilat – Dimona – Beer Sheva -Tel Aviv, Ben Gurion airport, 356 km; 1401 km in all**

Up at three a clock, out at four and to the road 4.15 a.m. A termos-coffee break at dawn at Hazeva, Arava Valley, was spent with a singing Black-eared Wheatear by roadside. On another break near Goral Junction, N of Beer Sheva half past seven, we found two **Great Spotted Cuckoos** in an orchard, the sixth new Israeli tick of the trip for me. Further on, three more trip-ticks crossed the road: Goldfinch, Jay, and Jackdaw, bringing the total to 134. Nearer to Tel Aviv the traffic was somewhat jammed. We made a mistake turning off from the route 40 to 42 and drove some more extra kms in Rishon Letzion, but reached the airport still in good time at 9.40. Fuelling and finding the right car return at Terminal 3 took surprisingly forty more minutes, but we did enter the departures hall and join our group exactly the inevitable three hours before departure.

#### **Bird list**

The sequence and names follow the **AERC TAC Checklist** of bird taxa occurring in **Western Palearctic** region - **15th Draft (2004)**.

*Tadorna tadorna* **Common Shelduck**: 5.3. 116, 7.3. 138 and 9.3. 40 at km 20 pools.

*Anas penelope* **Eurasian Wigeon**: 7.3. a pair at N sewage farm.

*A.crecca* **Common Teal**: 7.3. 5 at N sewage farm and 18 at km 20 pools.

*A.acuta* **Northern Pintail**: 6.3. 30N+30 flying at North Beach. 7.3. 30 at km 20. 8.3. 100 flying at North Beach. 9.3. 90 at km 20 and 100 flying at North Beach.

*A.querquedula* **Garganey**: 5.3. 10N+21 flying North Beach, 19 at km 20. 6.3. 2 flying North Beach. 7.3. 2 at N sewage farm.

*A.clypeata* **Northern Shoveler**: 5.3. 16 flying North Beach, 15 at km 20. 7.3. 25 at N sewage farm and 100 at km 20. 8.3. 40N+45 flying+25 flying North Beach in the morning, 40 flying in the evening. 9.3. 20 flying at North Beach.

*Aythya fuligula* **Tufted Duck**: 7.3. 2 at N sewage farm. 8.3. 4 flying at North Beach.

*Aythya ferina* **Common Pochard**: 7.3. 4 female at N sewage farm.

*Coturnix coturnix* **Common Quail**: A total of 4 individuals seen in 3 days.

*Phalacrocorax carbo* **Great Cormorant**: 40 – 100 seen every day.

*Butorides striata* **Striated Heron**: 8.3. 1 adult at North Beach floating fish farm.

*Ardeola ralloides* **Squacco Heron**: 5.3. 1 passing North Beach.

*Bubulcus ibis* **Cattle Egret**: seen on 5 days, max 35 on 5.3. at Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*Egretta gularis* **Western Reef Egret**: 5.3. 1 at North Beach.

*E. garzetta* **Little Egret**: over 50 seen daily in Eilat, max 193 on 7.3. at North Beach.

*Casmerodius albus* **Great Egret**: seen daily at North Beach, max 11 on 7.3.

*Ardea cinerea* **Grey Heron**: 30 – 40 seen daily, most at North Beach.

*Ciconia nigra* **Black Stork**: 7.3. 1 migrating NE over Nahal Shlomo.

*C. ciconia* **White Stork**: 8.3. 1 circling over Kibbutz Lotan.

*Platalea leucorodia* **Eurasian Spoonbill**: 7.3. 4 in breeding plumage at K20 pools.

*Phoenicopterus roseus* **Greater Flamingo**: seen daily at pools, max 330 on 5.3. at K20.

*Milvus migrans* **Black Kite**: 7.3. 1 migrating NE over Nahal Shlomo.

*Neophron percnopterus* **Egyptian Vulture**: 10.3. 1 ad migrating NE at Eilat Mts.

*Circus aeruginosus* **Western Marsh Harrier**: 5.3. 1 female and 8.3. 1 male Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*C. cyaneus* **Hen Harrier**: 5.3. 1 m 2 f and 8.3. 1 f Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*C. macrourus* **Pallid Harrier**: 5.3. 1 female at Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*Accipiter nisus* **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**: 6.3. 2 and 9.3. 1.

*Buteo buteo* **Common Buzzard**: seen every day, max 150 in 1 hour Nahal Shlomo 7.3. and 345 in 1 hr 15 mins at Eilat Mts on 10.3. 11.3. 3 Tel Aviv, Ben Gurion airport.

*B. rufinus* **Long-legged Buzzard**: 5.3. 2 over Ringing station, 8.3. 1 and 10.3. 1 at Yotvata Circular Fields.

*Aquila nipalensis* **Steppe Eagle**: 40 seen on 5.3., 8 on 8.3, 30 on 10.3. and max: 150 in 1 hour at Nahal Shlomo 7.3..

*Pandion haliaetus* **Osprey**: 9.3. 1 N at K20.

*Falco naumanni* **Lesser Kestrel**: 6.3.1 at K77.

*F. tinnunculus* **Common Kestrel**: 4.3. 8 between Tel Aviv and Mitzpe Ramon, 8.3. 1 Arava Valley, 11.3. 7 between Beer Sheva and Tel Aviv.

*F. pelegrinoides* **Barbary Falcon**: 6.3.1 over Eilat hotel area and 1 at K77.

*Fulica atra* **Eurasian Coot**: 7.3. 65 at N sewage farm.

*Himantopus himantopus* **Black-winged Stilt**: max 60 at K20 on 5.3., 7.3. 50 and 9.3. at K20.

*Recurvirostra avosetta* **Pied Avocet**: 1 at K20 on 5.3., 7.3. and 9.3..

*Charadrius dubius* **Little Ringed Plover**: 9.3. 1 at K20.

*C. hiaticula* **Common Ringed Plover**: 7.3. 4 at K20, 8.3. 4 and 10.3. 3 at North Beach.

*C. alexandrinus* **Kentish Plover**: 9.3. 2 at K20.

*C. leschenaultii* **Greater Sand Plover**: 8.3. 1 at Bird Sanctuary (Ringing station).

*Hoplopterus spinosus* **Spur-winged Lapwing**: seen every day, 1 – 10, total amount 48.

*Calidris minuta* **Little Stint**: 5.3. 5 at Bird Sanctuary (Ringing station) and 1 at K20, 7.3. 25 and 9.3. 25 at K20.

*C. alpina* **Dunlin**: 7.3. 1 and 9.3. 1 at K20.

*Philomachus pugnax* **Ruff**: 5.3. 3 at Bird Sanctuary (Ringing station) and 5 at K20, 7.3. 15 and 9.3. 25 at K20.

*Limosa limosa* **Black-tailed Godwit**: 1 at K20 on 5.3., 7.3. and 9.3..

*Tringa totanus* **Common Redshank**: seen on 5 days, max 30 7.3. at K20, total amount 83.

*T. stagnatilis* **Marsh Sandpiper**: 5.3. 1 and 8.3. 1 at Bird Sanctuary (Ringing station), 7.3. 5 and 9.3. 7 at K20.

*T. nebularia* **Common Greenshank**: 5.3. 2, 7.3. 2 and 9.3. 2 at K20. 10.3. 1 at North Beach.

*T. ochropus* **Green Sandpiper**: 1 – 7 seen on 5 days, max 7 on 9.3, 19 in all.

*T. glareola* **Wood Sandpiper**: 9.3. 1 at K20.

*Actitis hypoleucos* **Common Sandpiper**: 7.3. 1 at N Sewage Farm (K19) and 8.3. 1 at Bird Sanctuary (Ringing station).

*Stercorarius parasiticus* **Arctic Skua**: 7.3. 2 (1 dark phase 1 light phase) migrating NE at 7.12 over Ofira Park. 8.3. 2 light phase **Skua sp.** chasing gulls at 7.00 at sea off North Beach.

*Larus leucophthalmus* **White-eyed Gull**: seen every day at North Beach, max 17 on 8.3, 31 in all.

*L. ichthyaetus* **Pallas's Gull**: 8.3. 3 ad 1 2<sup>nd</sup> cal off North Beach.

*L. ridibundus* **Black-headed Gull**: max 600 on 8.3. at North Beach.

*L. genei* **Slender-billed Gull**: 5.3. 50 at K20, 7.3. 82 at K20 and 170 at North Beach, 9.3. 17 N at North Beach and 25 at K20, 10.3. 80 N + 10 N at North Beach.

*L. fuscus* **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: 8.3. 34N and 9.3. 23N North Beach, 10.3. 40 N Americana Hotel.

*L. michahellis / cachinnans* **Yellow-legged / Caspian Gull**: 2 – 7 seen on 5 days at North Beach.

*Sterna caspia* **Caspian Tern**: 6.3. 1 ad, 7.3. 4 ad and 9.3. 1 ad, all flying N to roost over North Beach at dusk.

*S.sandvicensis* **Sandwich Tern**: 6.3. 1 ad, 7.3. 1 ad and 9.3. 3 at North Beach.

*Pterocles coronatus* **Crowned Sandgrouse**: 6.3. voice heard and tape-recorded at 9.57 at K77.

*P.senegalensis* **Spotted Sandgrouse**: 6.3. voice heard at 9.30 at K77.

*Columba livia* **Rock Dove**: seen daily, common, but not so numerous as in earlier years.

*Streptopelia decaocto* **Eurasian Collared Dove**: 50 – 350 seen every day.

*S.senegalensis* **Laughing Dove**: seen on 7 days, 20 – 50 per day.

*Psittacula krameri* **Rose-ringed Parakeet**: 5.3. 2W +1W in the morning at North Beach, 9.3. 2 at Ringing station.

*Clamator glandarius* **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: 11.3. 2 at 7.35 near Goral Jct, N of Beer Sheva.

*Caprimulgus aegyptius* **Egyptian Nightjar**: 6.3. 3 at 18.17 at Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*Apus apus* **Common Swift**: 1 – 10 identified on 5 days, on 9.3. 200 unidentified Swifts at Yotvata.

*A.pallidus* **Pallid Swift**: 5.3. 10 at Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*A.affinis* **Little Swift**: 5.3. 1 at Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*Alcedo atthis* **Common Kingfisher**: 5.3. 1 passing into canal at North Beach and 7.3. 1 flying off North Beach.

*Merops orientalis* **Green Bee-eater**: 1 – 4 seen on 3 days, total number 7.

*Ceryle rudis* **Pied Kingfisher**: 1 – 6 seen on 7 days, mostly at North Beach. Max 6 there on 7.3.

*Upupa epops* **Eurasian Hoopoe**: 1 – 8 on 4 days, max 8.3. 6 at Kibbutz Lotan, 13 in all.

*Melanocorypha bimaculata* **Bimaculated Lark**: 8.3. 1 at 15.50 at Yotvata North Circular Fields.

*Calandrella brachydactyla* **Greater Short-toed Lark**: 5.3. 10 and 8.3. 30 Yotvata N Circ. Fields.

*C.rufescens* **Lesser Short-toed Lark**: 5.3. 2 at K77.

*Galerida cristata* **Crested Lark**: seen on 6 days, 5 – 15 per day, 52 in all.

*Alauda gulgula* **Oriental Skylark**: 8.3. at 6.30 1 at North Beach.

*Riparia riparia* **Sand Martin**: 2 – 20 seen on 5 days, 48 in all.

*Ptyonoprogne fuligula* **Rock Martin**: 1 – 15 seen on 4 days, 31 in all.

*Hirundo rustica* **Barn Swallow**: 5 – 500 seen on 6 days, total number 1355.

*H. daurica* **Red-rumped Swallow**: 5 – 10 seen on 4 days, 29 in all.

*Delichon urbicum* **Common House Martin** : 20 – 300 seen on 4 days, total number 405.

*Anthus campestris* **Tawny Pipit**: 9.3. 1 at K20.

*A.cervinus* **Red-throated Pipit**: 8.3. 6 at Kibbutz Lotan and 5 at Yotvata N Circular Fields.

*A.spinoletta* **Water Pipit**: 5.3. 1 at K20 and 7 at Yotvata N Circular Fields, 7.3. 3 at K20, 8.3. 5 at Qetura sewage farm and 2 at Yotvata N Circular Fields.

*Motacilla flava* **Yellow Wagtail**: 8.3 1 male in breeding plumage at Yotvata N Circular Fields.

*M.citreola* **Citrine Wagtail**: 7.3. 1 male in breeding plumage at N (K19) sewage farm.

*M.cinerea* **Grey Wagtail**: 8.3. 1 female in breeding plumage at Bird Sanctuary (Ringing station).

*M.alba* **White Wagtail**: seen every day (8 days), 3 – 100 per day.

*Pycnonotus xanthopygos* **White-spectacled Bulbul**: seen on 7 days, at Eilat & Arava area 30 – 50 / day.

*Luscinia svecica* **Bluethroat**: 6.3. 1 at Shizzafon, 8.3. 1 male *cyaneola* at Kibbutz Lotan and 2 males at Qetura sewage farm.

*Phoenicurus ochruros* **Black Redstart**: 6.3. 3 at Shizzafon, 8.3. 2 at Kibbutz Lotan.

*P.phoenicurus* **Common Redstart**: 6.3. 1 ad male Eilat Northern Date Palm plantation, 9.3. 1 ad male *samamisisicus* ringed at Ringing station.

*Cercomela melanura* **Blackstart**: 6.3. 3 Wadi Shlomo, 10.3. 1 Eilat Mts.

*Saxicola torquata* **Common Stonechat**: 1 – 7 seen on 6 days, 17 in all.

*Oenanthe isabellina* **Isabelline Wheatear**: 7.3. 2 at K20.

*O.oenanthe* **Northern Wheatear**: 1 – 3 seen on 3 days, total number 7.

*O.hispanica* **Black-eared Wheatear**: 1 – 5 seen on 5 days, 14 in all.

*O.deserti* **Desert Wheatear**: 1 – 2 seen on 3 days, total number 4.

*O.lugens* **Mourning Wheatear**: 5.3. 1 male at 6.20 near Drainage canal nr. North Beach.

*O.leucopyga* **White-crowned Wheatear**: 1 – 2 seen on 3 days, total number 4.

*Monticola solitarius* **Blue Rock Thrush**: 5.3. 1 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male at Ringing station, 8.3. 1 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male at Kibbutz Lotan.



Blue Rock Thrush, a 2<sup>nd</sup> cal male at Eilat Ringing station on 5.3.2007.

*Prinia gracilis* **Graceful Prinia**: 1 – 4 seen on 3 days, 6 in all.

*Locustella luscinioides* **Savi's Warbler**: 6.3. 1 at K77.

*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* **Sedge Warbler**: 9.3. 1 at Ringing station.

*A.arundinaceus / stentoreus* **Great / Clamorous Reed Warbler**: 6.3. 1 at K77.

*Hippolais pallida* **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**: 8.3. 1 at Ringing station.

*Sylvia atricapilla* **Blackcap**: 7.3. 1 at Ofira Park.

*S.curruca* **Lesser Whitethroat**: 1 – 20 seen on 6 days, total number 66.

*S.communis* **Common Whitethroat**: 6.3. 1 at K77.

*S.melanocephala* **Sardinian Warbler**: 1 – 2 seen on 5 days, total number 6.

*Sylvia rüppelli* **Rüppell's Warbler**: 9.3. 1 male in breeding plumage at K20.

*Phylloscopus orientalis* **Balkan Warbler**: 7.3. 1 Nahal Shlomo, 1 N Date Palms, 8.3. 2 Ringing st.

*P.collybita* **Common Chiffchaff**: 3 – 30 on 6 days, incl. unidentified *phylloscopus*. Biggest number on 7.3., total number 80.

*Turdoides squamiceps* **Arabian Babbler**: 6.3. 2 + 5 at K77.

*Nectarinia osea* **Palestine Sunbird**: 10.3. 1 at Yotvata.

*Lanius nubicus* **Masked Shrike**: 10.3. 1 at Yotvata S Circular Field.

*Garrulus glandarius* **Eurasian Jay**: 11.3. 1 over the road between Beer Sheva and Tel Aviv.

*Corvus monedula* **Western Jackdaw**: 11.3. 10 seen from the car between Beer Sheva and Tel Aviv.

*C.splendens* **House Crow**: 10 – 30 seen every (6) day in Eilat.

*C.corone* **Hooded Crow**: 4.3. 20 near Tel Aviv and on way towards Beer Sheva.

*C.ruficollis* **Brown-necked Raven**: 1 – 20 seen on 5 days.

*Passer domesticus* **House Sparrow**: many seen every day.

*P.hispaniolensis* **Spanish Sparrow**: 20 – 200 seen on 6 days in Eilat & Arava area.

*P.moabiticus* **Dead Sea Sparrow**: 8.3. 1 fem. at Kibbutz Lotan and 1 male at Qetura sewage farm.

*Carduelis carduelis* **European Goldfinch**: 11.3. 1 seen from car at N of Beer Sheva.

*C.cannabina* **Common Linnet**: 6.3. 2 at K77.

*Bucanetes githagineus* **Trumpeter Finch**: 7.3. 1 in Nahal Shlomo.

*Emberiza caesia* **Cretzschmar's Bunting**: 5.3. 1 at Yotvata N Circular Fields.

*E.calandra* **Corn Bunting**: 4.3. 3 at 1 hrs drive S from Tel Aviv, 5.3. 7 at Yotvata N Circ. Fields.

This time we did not visit Nizzana or Negev desert bird sites. Neither the sites in Eilat or Arava Valley to make a try for such local specialties like Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Sinai Rosefinch, Indian Silverbill and Arabian Warbler, which we had seen before. Somehow we managed to miss Tristram's Starling, also seen on previous trips. Has it become scarcer? I got six new Israeli ticks. Egyptian Nightjar was a lifer for both of us, and Tapio's 300<sup>th</sup> Israeli tick.

## Links

Trip reports: <http://www.eurobirding.com/>

Observations: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/israbirdnet/>

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