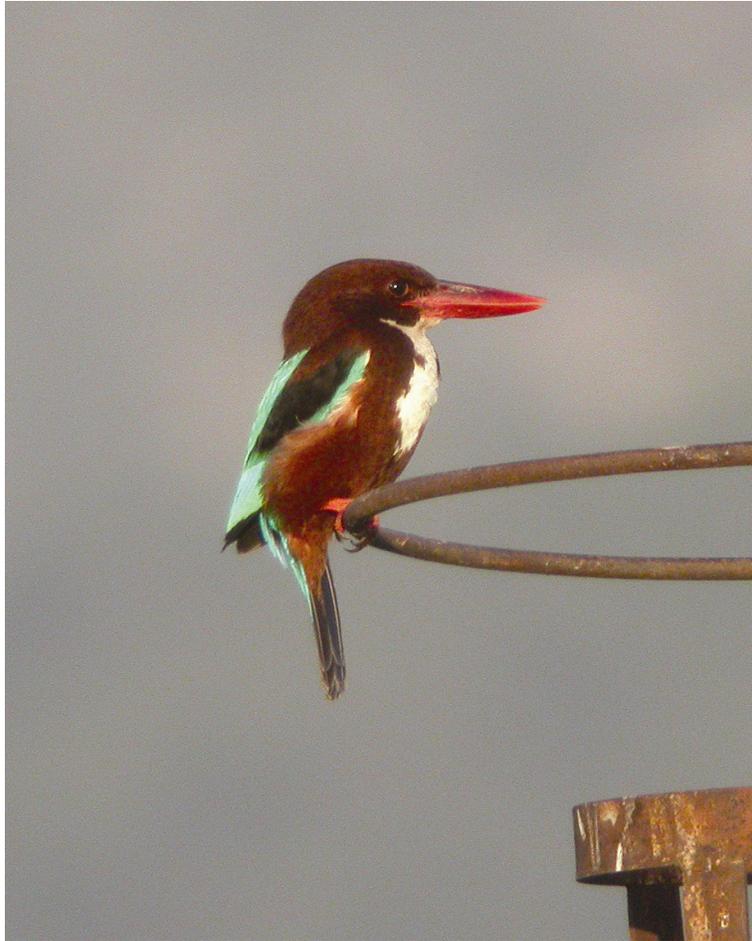


Turkey

Where East meets West
24th May - 4th June 2008



**Celtic Bird Tours & and Glamorgan
Bird Club
Trip Report**

TOUR LEADERS

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PARTICIPANTS

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DAY ONE

A very early start was needed by the majority of the group to reach Heathrow for an antisocial check-in time of 04.55!

The majority coming all the way from Wales fortunately had an uneventful drive over. To great amusement, the check-in assistant accidentally pronounced Clive's name as "Cleeve" and he thereafter got mercilessly stuck with this new name for the whole trip. Fortunately, he's a great sport! The flight to Istanbul went smoothly and we got our visas and headed through to the domestic terminal, noting our first Hooded Crows, Barn Swallows and Common Starlings through the windows as we went. Fiona spotted a good window to keep watching from as we dumped bags in a huddle and set about finding coffees, beers etc. As on previous trips here, it was noticeable that things are not cheap in this airport! The birding here was respectable; three Alpine Swifts, many Common Swifts, Collared Doves, Eurasian Jackdaws and White Wagtails. Soon enough we were boarding our internal flight to Ankara and, after all luggage was safely reclaimed, we were met by Mehmet, our local guide, and installed on a comfortable minibus for the transfer to Kulu. Birds en route began as soon as we got onto the Ankara ring road with flocks of Common Starlings and Common Swifts being inspected in case they contained their more unusual cousins. We counted Long-legged Buzzards as they soared over the ridges of the hills and a kettle of eight White Storks circled lazily above a field followed later by another eight. Surprisingly, we only saw a single Common Kestrel on the journey, although later a party of four Lesser Kestrels were hunting together. A pair of Ruddy Shelduck was by a small pool by the road as Northern Lapwings displayed over the field behind. Larks flew up from the roads and fields as we drove and included both Crested and Calandra. Stopping for coffee beside a large lake produced over fifty Black-necked Grebes; an adult Black-crowned Night Heron; flocks of Common Coot and Great Crested Grebes. At least ten Red-crested and a few Common Pochard supplemented the Mallard flock. Squacco Herons flew back and forth over the far side of the reed bed while a family of Little Grebes were feeding in the edge of the reeds. An explosion of sound announced the presence of an invisible Cetti's Warbler in stark contrast to the large flock of Barn Swallows softly chattering as they skimmed the lake with a few House Martins thrown in for good measure. A party of gulls was initially overlooked as being Black-headed but received the due attention when three Slender-billed Gulls were confirmed. A few larger gulls were not seen well enough to split out which variety of Yellow-legged Gull they were. Nearing Kulu we began to see Gull-billed Terns hunting insects over the fields and counted at least twenty before we arrived at the hotel. Immediately outside was a stunning mosque with two intricately carved minarets standing beside it. Flocks of Common Swifts were dashing around the rooftops and through the narrow streets before launching themselves screaming into the open square by the mosque. We quickly checked in and went out for supper in a nearby restaurant.

DAY TWO

We headed out early to visit the lake Kulu Golu on the edge of town. As we passed the town's fringes, a few Lesser Grey Shrikes were on posts and wires, lots of Isabelline Wheatears were hopping and running about on verges and allotments and a party of thirteen Black-bellied Sandgrouse showed well as they were flushed from the track onto a bund. A very pale brown Little Owl was sitting on a post by the farmhouse near the lake and our first Spur-winged Plovers were running around on the grassy banks. A puzzle here was posed by a bird Chris B found that was largely obscured by the grass, persistence paid off as it eventually moved and became our first Rose-coloured Starling of the trip. There was a large flock of at least three hundred Greater Flamingos standing in the lake with over a hundred Ruddy Shelduck feeding around the edges with around thirty Common Shelduck. A Purple Heron flew overhead, followed by a Collared Pratincole. Black-headed Wagtails were calling from the

grass and we counted at least ten males during the day. Gull-billed Terns, Isabelline Wheatears and Calandra Larks were now so numerous that we were hardly noticing them any more, we estimated we had seen over three hundred Gull-billed Terns and over a thousand Isabelline Wheatears by the end of the day! Around the muddy banks we found Northern Lapwings, Kentish Plovers, Common Redshank, a single Common Teal, Pied Avocets and Black-winged Stilts which were disturbed at regular intervals by the passing Marsh Harriers. Clive heard a Common Quail calling but it stopped as he got our attention and refused to call again. Souslik, the eastern European answer to prairie dogs, were running around in the grass and caught the attention of a Long-legged Buzzard which dropped to the ground and began chasing them on foot with limited success. A pair of Red-necked Phalaropes were found in the edge of the reeds and a thorough search of the gull flock produced at least ten Mediterranean Gulls as well as many Slender-billed and a few Black-headed. Again a group of seven larger gulls were one of the Yellow-legged varieties but weren't specifically identified. Barn Swallows were feeding inches over the grass, the first Black-headed Bunting of the trip was on a post and lots of House Sparrows were on the barn, chattering loudly. A couple of very large examples of the local type of sheepdog got over-excited as the bus passed them and decided to give chase; the very large, spiked collars they wore made them look extremely alarming but in a country where wolves might attack the sheep they are a long tradition. We returned to the hotel for a quick breakfast and rapidly loaded cases onto the bus before setting out to explore the western side of Tuz Golu. This is the largest inland water in Turkey, just not when you are looking for it in late May! We explored several isolated small lakes that form part of the massive lake in winter. Birds found included a Black-necked Grebe, several pairs of Collared Pratincole, more than twenty Little Stints in varying plumages and a lone European Oystercatcher that seemed slightly out of place.

Some Ruff, three gorgeously-plumaged Curlew Sandpipers and a Little Egret dropped in while we were scanning around and several Squacco Herons stalked the edges and gullies of the shore. We were continually surrounded by lark-song and Steve pointed out the differences between the Asian Short-toed Larks here and Lesser Short-toed Larks we hoped to see later in the trip. Calandra and Crested Larks abounded, three Greater Short-toed Larks were picked out and a few Tawny Pipits and Corn Buntings were also found. One pool held a colony of Slender-billed Gulls which we estimated at over six hundred individuals and we had long since lost count of the numbers of Gull-billed Terns hunting over the fields. A colony of fifty plus Sand Martins were burrowing into sandbanks edging the pools and the occasional Hoopoe joined them. A party of terns flew through including three adult and two young White-winged Black and two Black Terns. The Common Tern on a small island looked positively lonely by comparison, although it had a pair of White Wagtails for company. We stopped for lunch after driving around searching for access to the largest pool. We could see it in the distance but the local farmers had ploughed the access track up and the bus was in danger of being stuck fast, so we had to abandon the attempt. A couple of tiny young Souslik popped in and out of their holes in the shade of the bus with us standing just a few feet away, no fear in them at all until a Long-legged Buzzard loomed overhead and they vanished. A procession of whirlwinds raised dust-devils and travelled across the dry scrubby fields, a precursor to the big storm that would hit this afternoon.

Heading on southwards, we stopped at various points as things caught our eyes; a Red-backed Shrike in a ditch, White Storks stalking fields, a soaring Common Raven, Long-legged Buzzards galore and then, as we approached Eskil, a large raptor came into view gliding low before vanishing over a small hill. We all jumped out of the bus and dashed across the road to the ridge to relocate the bird. It was suddenly rising up again just over the hill and soared around in circles. Steve confirmed it was a Steppe Eagle. Seconds later another flew into view followed shortly after by a third! Staring up at the distinctive under-pattern of the wings of the immature eagles we watched until they drifted again behind the ridge. Climbing further up the ridge, we discovered that it was a small hill on this side but fell away steeply on the other. Amazingly, standing on the scrubby valley floor, were a total of six Steppe Eagles. The valley appeared to be a migration route and the rising wind had caused the eagles to drop down and rest where Souslik were so plentiful. After a good, long while in which we observed the eagles chasing Souslik on foot and taking off for short chases just above the ground before dropping onto another Souslik, we walked back towards the bus. As we did so, a male Montagu's Harrier flew up over the ridge and across the road. Most of the group had boarded the bus as Steve and Fiona were still packing up their gear when Fiona looked up, saw another eagle overhead and another approaching and called them out to Steve. As the telescopes were still up, Steve was quick off the mark to check both birds and, although the first was another Steppe Eagle, the second was not, instead it was an Eastern Imperial Eagle. Calling frantically to the guys on the bus, Fiona span her scope around for a good look too. Fortunately one of the others had heard and raised the alert to those already relaxing ready for the next drive, so all managed to get good looks before the new arrival drifted off. Finally all back on the bus, we discussed our improbably long run of good luck and compared photos. The storm was really closing in now so there was only time for one more stop as a group of five Lesser Kestrels were spotted hunting from fences and telegraph wires on the edge of a small town. A big flock of Common Swifts was riding the edge of the storm which had now caught up with us and started throwing rain at the bus with enthusiasm. Fortunately it had nearly stopped as we pulled into Sultanhani, found the campsite

whose lodge we were staying the night in and ran inside with our bags, getting only slightly damp. The rooms were set out around a central dining room where a fantastic feast of local dishes was served up. After supper, Steve showed us some of his fantastic field sketches and gave a quick drawing lesson to those who hadn't already crashed into bed: a lovely end to an unbelievable day.

DAY THREE

Everyone was up and ready for the pre-breakfast excursion to the marsh on the edge of Sultanhani. A short bus ride negotiated the serious lorry traffic which appeared to be making the most of the cool of the morning; crossing the road was an interesting experience! From a lay-by, we scoped the marsh, picking out a Red Fox and her three cubs, a Marsh Harrier spooking the Northern Lapwings, a Common Kestrel and both Crested and Calandra Larks. A Tawny Pipit was running on the other side of the road and we soon were joining it as Steve picked up a possible Bimaculated Lark flying over to that side, a much-wanted lifer for many of the group. Sadly, it had vanished by the time we got there and we had to make do with a close pair of Stone Curlews instead. Corn and Black-headed Buntings were singing from power-lines and a Common Cuckoo called and flitted backwards and forwards along the cables. A pair of Lesser Grey Shrikes were on the pylons while Isabelline Wheatears were everywhere we looked and both Black-headed and White Wagtails were feeding in the grasses. Some massive crickets were found although they were so well camouflaged that, even once they had moved, they were hard to find again. We returned to the lodge for breakfast and found the ladies of the house cooking pancakes on special heated dome-shaped heater on a table outside. These were truly delicious, served as a wrap filled with honey or cheese as we preferred and all went back for at least seconds! A Blackbird was heard but not found in the garden during breakfast and a family of House Sparrows were watching wherever crumbs were dropped and keeping the other eye warily on the family's tortoiseshell cat and bouncy sheepdog puppy that were both patrolling under the breakfast table. After everyone had finished and bags loaded up, we headed off south. Birds en route included many Long-legged Buzzards and White Storks, including a kettle of over eighty storks and a few Grey Herons coming down into fields drenched by yesterday's rain where we had stopped to look at a Common Crane standing in the field. As we carried on through a large town with a massive Mercedes Lorry factory and a lorry park to rival the largest shipping ports in the UK, the first sighting of our destination poked out of the clouds; the Hasandag volcano, which towers above the surrounding low-lying fields. As we got closer, you could make out ridges of lower hills that were old lava flows, contrasting in their dry, rocky moonscapes with the lush green fields all around. We stopped in the foothills at Açakent for a stroll through good lark country and a small wood held a party of European Bee-eaters flying through and perching on the fence-wires to eat their prey. A small warbler caused excitement and we trekked around the edges of the enclosed wood trying to get proper views, after some time it finally gave itself up to be a Willow Warbler. A pair of Spotted Flycatchers were also feeding in the trees and an unfamiliar song was traced back to a Black-headed Bunting on the wires behind the wood. The larks were noticeably different as we climbed gently up the hill; the Crested and Calandra at the bottom gave way to Greater and Asian Short-toed Larks higher up. A pair of Turtle Doves shot through, flushing a Hoopoe up from the ground and a distant woodpecker in flight was probably our first Syrian but didn't stay in view long enough to be sure.

Almost every telegraph post held a Black-headed Bunting although a few held Corn Buntings instead and a Cardinal butterfly was found. A European Serin sang but was only seen by a few as an odd looking lark was called and attention switched to our target bird, Bimaculated Lark. Although theoretically similar to Calandra in structure, in the field all the differences were quickly obvious and we followed the bird as it rose, singing, high above and dropped down just over a ridge. Another flew up further along the road and began singing before dropping onto a rock where we could all scope it easily; fantastic! Finally we tore ourselves away as we had a long drive to reach tonight's hotel and a planned very early start the next day. However, just around the corner, we came to an emergency stop to save a life: a Spur-thighed Tortoise was crossing the road! We all hopped out for a look and Steve assisted the journey by carrying the tortoise to the side it was headed for and putting it down in the scrub and leaving it to carry on wherever it was headed. Aside from being bad for the tortoise, it would have been quite a bump for all of us if we had hit it! We stopped for lunch at a restaurant at Bor and noticed a huge flock of swifts and hirundines as we were getting ready to board the bus. A quick scan with telescopes produced a couple of Little Swifts, although only seen by a few, over a hundreds House Martins and many hundreds of Common Swifts. We then became the centre of attention for the local secondary school kids who flocked around John as if he was a celebrity, maybe he has another life here we don't know about? Eventually they released him and we headed on our way. This afternoon only had time for one site, but what a site. The Akkaya Barrage near Nigde has a huge reservoir which was the only site possible on this trip to get White-headed Duck, no pressure then! The bus dropped us off to walk around the edge and birds were quickly everywhere. Chris spotted a group of sparrows on the cliff, our first Rock Sparrows. Fiona could hear an Ortolan Bunting singing but this took longer to track down on the hillside below the dam. A crunching song from a waterside bush was Great Reed Warbler although this remained hidden from most of us and we later located

another that showed much better. A party of Tree Sparrows flew around the scrub above the cliff and a family of Linnets flew over. Warblers were flitting around in the scrub on the hillside below us and we took our time tracking them and trying to get conclusive views. Some were definitely Eastern Olivaceous and a few appeared to some to be Upcher's but not all agreed, as it wasn't a well known site for them. After seeing more later in the trip however, it was agreed that we had had at least four Upcher's here. An Eastern Orphee Warbler showed well but a Golden Oriole was fleeting and missed by many. Down by the dam there were hundreds of Sand Martins and Barn Swallows as we started sorting through the shorebirds. A Kentish Plover fed alone while several Spur-winged Plover stalked the drier mud and a Purple Heron strode about in full view. Dotted along the bank were at least ten Black-winged Stilt, four Squacco Herons, three Little Egrets, several Northern Lapwing, three Little Ringed Plover and seven Little Stints. A pair of Glossy Ibis were standing in a roosting flock of gulls, including a dozen Slender-billed and four Black-headed. A party of Whiskered Terns were split between some roosting on and bathing near the bank and some still feeding. Great Crested Grebes growled and chased each other across the water and a Little Grebe was sat on the bank amongst over thirty Ruddy Shelduck and a few of their common cousins. Four Red-Crested Pochard were swimming in the centre of the reservoir with a single Common Coot and at least sixty Common Pochard were near the far bank. A pink haze over the back turned out to be at least 150 Greater Flamingo and we headed off in that direction. A tower hide stood on a hill but the wind was now so strong that sheltering beneath it seemed like a better idea. Twenty Black-necked Grebes were swimming in the bay below and we scanned along the edge of the reservoir which was sheltered from the wind and had many more of the same ducks as earlier. Finally as we were about to give up, Fiona requested a second opinion; a long-distant duck seemed to be White-headed but kept disappearing into cover. Trying to describe where to look took some time but then Terry picked up a similar bird. Confusion ensued as contradicting directions were given until it became clear they both were on separate birds. Eventually all had definite but not great views of the target, the distance of these birds was the first disappointment caused by the weather. This site was also the first to be spoiled by litter, plastic shotgun pellets and broken beer bottles were everywhere and we had to be really careful not to trip as a simple slip would have involved injury. The bus drove over to pick us up and as we were leaving the area, a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos perched on the top of some pine trees for all to see well. We had no more time now, so we headed straight off towards Çamardı although road-works caused a detour as the intended road out of Nigde was closed. Climbing up into the Taurus Mountains, it started to become evident that the rainstorms of yesterday had fallen here as snow. Steve was a little concerned that this might make the pre-dawn excursion tomorrow a non-starter, we'd have to wait and see what Hassan, the hotel owner and our guide for that trip, would say. It was dark by the time we arrived and we were welcomed and hurried inside to drop bags in our rooms as there was little time till supper. A common Nightingale was singing as we sat down on the veranda in our fleeces for a lovely supper and our first taste of the local pistachio nuts, superb. Hassan confirmed that the snow-line was indeed lower, but we should be OK for the trip up the mountain and we were to be up and out extremely early. To complete another great day, as we were finishing supper, a European Scops Owl began calling from the trees at the end of Hassan's garden.

DAY FOUR

Despite the bleary-eyed looks, everyone had assembled, very well-wrapped, on the veranda by half-past three for a cup of sweet tea and we all climbed onto the trailer that Hassan had backed up to the steps and flopped onto the mattresses arranging telescopes in what we thought would be a safe fashion for the trip. With all of us in, it was a bit of a squeeze as we stuck our feet into the middle and held onto the sides with no idea of the experience we were in for. Hassan mounted the tractor and slowly negotiated the gates and drove along the road down the valley. Not bad so far, a bit bumpy but fairly secure and anticipation buoyed the sleepy mood so we were chatting and laughing as we crossed the bridge over the river and turned onto the first track. As Fiona and Chris discovered on the way back down, it was a good job it was dark as we were going up! The track was bumpy and as it became steep, there was the occasional reshuffle as backsides jumped into the air and slipped around alternatively as the trailer hit rocks or steep cambers, fortunately most temporary discomfort was padded by the sheer amount of clothing everyone was wearing! This all added to the experience and we were still having a great, if comedic, time. As daylight slowly arrived, our first birds included Shore Lark and Northern Wheatear which disappeared quickly as a hunting Common Kestrel came by. A Common Cuckoo called unseen and a Northern Wren scolded us for disturbing it so early. We finally stopped near a shepherd's hut and water trough and scrambled off the trailer. A White-winged Snowfinch was flitting around where the water overflowed the trough with more Shore Larks and a Chaffinch still on the ground by the stream. Souliks here were larger than those near the lakes yesterday, presumably necessary for the climate. We set up scopes and scanned around, finding a large flock of chough on the green slope opposite which included at least sixty Yellow-billed and twenty Red-billed.

An eerie atmosphere was created by the misty half-light and was enhanced by the strange whistles emanating from cliffs above us. Slowly due to the altitude, we trekked up the sheep-path to an area which gave a clearer

view and began scanning. It took some time, during which we had found Black Redstarts, more White-winged Snowfinch, some Rock Sparrows and a Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, but eventually the call went up that the target had been acquired. Mild panic as we all hurried to follow the directions and get our scopes on the bird we were up here for; Caspian Snowcock. A pair were in the scree-field on the opposite bank, calling to at least one other bird somewhere on the rock-face above us. We all had excellent views of the pair opposite as they fed and moved around. Searching for the bird above us, we found a few Crimson-winged Finches, genuine Rock Doves, a Rock Bunting and another Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush as well as multiple Black Redstarts spread over the scree-fields. A song below Steve caught his attention and he quickly had us all looking at our first Radde's Accentor as it sat on the top of a stunted bush and sang its heart out. Shortly after, we had seen a total of six different birds flitting around in the gorge below us. Hassan picked up the other Caspian Snowcock and we had even better views of this bird as it sat right out in the open on a rock; brilliant! A Blue Rock Thrush was sitting on a rock below us as Fiona heard and tracked down a smart Oortolan Bunting in the gorge below. A few Alpine Swifts flew through as we found a herd of Ibex on the ridge above us, at least twenty in all. Decisions then had to be made: who would walk down through the gorge and who would take the tractor? Hassan said that it would be scrambling in places and that decided it for Fiona and Chris B, the ladies would ride! All of the men decided to walk but carrying telescopes would not be an option so these were piled into the trailer to be minded by the girls on the way down and the walking party set off. If the trailer ride up had been bouncy, at least the trailer had been weighted down by the number of bodies in it. Going down, it was so much lighter that fairly quickly Fiona, Chris and all the telescopes had bounced to the front of the trailer and desperate rearrangements were quickly made to avoid damage to optics and, more importantly, the girls! Chris braced her back against the wall of the trailer next to the tractor and Fiona braced her feet against it and tried to keep the scopes tucked into the other mattress so they wouldn't bounce so much. This was fairly successful but it meant that as it was now fully daylight, Fiona could now see exactly how narrow and precipitous the track was! Inches wrong and the trailer could easily have slipped from the track to hang over the edge! Oh ye of little faith! Hassan fortunately knew every inch of the track really well and we were never in danger or he wouldn't have brought us up here! Having reached the road at the lower end of the Demirkazik Gorge, Hassan pulled over and we climbed off to wait for the adventurers to return. A Golden Eagle was flying high above the gorge and exploring the lower end, Fiona and Chris paddled across a fast-flowing stream to look at a Western Rock Nuthatch's funnel-shaped nest of mud about twelve feet up on the cliff-face. Crag Martins were buzzing up and down the gorge and an Eastern Orphean Warbler flitted around the scrubby bushes jutting out of the cliff collecting food and nest material which it carried off down-stream. A pair of Chukar were feeding on the lower hillside and Black-headed Buntings, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Linnets and Goldfinches feed on grass-seeds and flower-heads in a meadow just across the road. Red-fronted Serin and Crimson-winged Finches perched on the barbed wire fence and a pair of Lesser Whitethroats was nesting up the hill. A Grey Wagtail calling and flitting down-stream drew our attention to an amazing fact – the stream had dried up to a tiny trickle! Presumably the excess rainfall from yesterday had taken this long to flow down and had then run out. A pair of Red-backed Shrikes on the hill seemed to have a nest somewhere and the male sang from the top of an elderflower bush. A Long-legged Buzzard flew over the meadow as the first sounds of the approaching climbers reached us. The lads scrambling down the gorge had gone by a shorter route but given the height we had reached, this meant it had to be much steeper. At one point they found a rock fall had taken out a section of the trail and a twelve foot drop was involved. Mehmet nimbly jumped down and took packs and directed foot placement so everyone made it safely across the gap. The trip produced Western Rock Nuthatch, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Chukar, Crag Martin and Red-fronted Serin along with more of the high mountain specialists seen earlier. They had also seen good numbers of Lesser Whitethroats and Blue and Great Tits but had not been lucky enough to find the Wallcreeper they had hoped for. We all scrambled back onto the trailer for the trip down the valley to the hotel for lunch and a rest. A few took the chance for a hot shower as the solar-powered hot water had all gone last night! Others had a rest or wandered around the village and down to the river, finding Blackbirds, Olivaceous, Barred and Cetti's Warblers and a Common Whitethroat. A pair of Golden Orioles was by the river along with some Tree Sparrows and a pair of Lesser Kestrels. The Common Nightingale was singing again in the hotel grounds and a pair of Coal Tits was in the boundary trees until some Hooded Crows spooked them. After a good lunch, we set off for the Emli Valley. We stopped at a dry wadi en route where we found some Rock Sparrows and glimpsed a bird that could only have been the much sought-after White-throated Robin. We all found vantage points on the bank where we could keep an eye on the area it had disappeared to and eventually got reasonable views of a female in the shade under a bush before it vanished for good. A little disappointed as the first bird seemed to have been a male, we were walking back to the bus when a park ranger pulled over and started arguing with our driver. When we got there we discovered that the National Park had been extended in the previous month but no notices had been issued or posted yet. We were being told off for being in an unmarked area that we couldn't have known was out of bounds; even Hassan had no idea when we told him later at the hotel. Better communication would clearly avoid misunderstandings of this kind, advising local hoteliers whose guests would need to know would be

a good place to start. Having bought a permit from the ranger, we continued on into the park. Several pairs of Chukar scurried away as the bus passed by and we pulled up quickly as we spotted a flock of ten Rose-coloured Starlings feeding in the top of some Berberis-type bushes. Carrying on to the end of the road, we parked and looked around. Fiona spotted a Blue Rock Thrush on the rocks above the bus as a Golden Eagle soared overhead and chose to stop and get some footage while the rest of the group would go on a walk to try and find Wallcreeper. The valley floor proved full of birds in the small trees and shrubs. Flocks of tits and finches included Coal Tit, Eurasian and Red-fronted Serin; the rocks held Black Redstarts, Western Rock Nuthatches, Rock Buntings and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes and at least three pairs of Eastern Orphean Warbler. Red-backed Shrikes were singing and an Ortolan called on the hillside as another Golden Eagle joined the first and soared above the ridge. The Wallcreeper hunt proved intriguing but inconclusive as a whistling call could have been one but it couldn't be found and eventually we all climbed back onto the bus. The early start had definitely caught up with us! The European Scops Owl started calling again over dinner and those who had some energy left to look for it saw a silhouette fly overhead briefly.

DAY FIVE

Due to yesterday's early start, there was no official pre-breakfast excursion so those who chose to rise early strolled down to the river and heard the Cetti's Warbler again. Lesser Grey Shrike, Blackbird and Lesser Whitethroat were among the other sightings. A flock of Rose-coloured Starlings flew up the valley as we were eating breakfast and a Long-legged Buzzard was hunting on the hill. With one day left in the mountains before we headed to the coast, we aimed to find the rest of the areas specialities today. We followed the road out of Çamardi towards Pozanti, stopping at interesting locations to scan for the potential raptors and look out for the much-desired but now almost mythical Red-tailed or Persian Wheatear. Our first stop was at a small hill surrounded by mountains. A Wood Lark was singing and a Common Cuckoo called as we found a pair of White-throated Robins collecting thistle-down and food for their nest. We all wondered why the person who named this stunningly colourful bird had chosen its tiny white throat rather than any of the other markings. A party of European Bee-eaters flew rapidly through the valley and our first Steppe Buzzards, the eastern race of Common Buzzard, were soaring over the ridge behind us as a Common Kestrel scared the White-throated Robins into cover. A Wood Pigeon flew over and a pair of Turtle Doves chased each other around and a single Golden Oriole flew through. Black-headed Buntings sang from the tops of bushes, Isabelline Wheatears were on the lower slopes and Northern Wheatears and a distant Blue Rock Thrush were higher up. The next stop held even more White-throated Robins, a Hoopoe and a pair of Chukar. Several Syrian Woodpeckers were feeding on ants on the roadside and flew up as the bus passed by. We stopped at the roadside on the edge of Pozanti; an unpromising site due to road-building works and huge trucks passing by continually. Fortunately we weren't put off by first impressions: a huge flock of hirundines was flying in and out of the motorway underpass and included at least three Red-rumped Swallows, hundreds of House Martins; lots of Crag Martins and a few Sand Martins along with Barn Swallows galore. A few White Storks were noted crossing the valley and as we watched at least sixteen were counted. The mountains high overhead came to a clear junction here, hence the roads using the valleys, and we set up telescopes and scanned in earnest. Alpine and Common Swifts were flying high up near the main peak and as we watched these a Steppe Buzzard and a couple of Long-legged Buzzards were riding the thermals. As these drifted away, they were replaced by more, it soon became apparent that a major movement of raptors was taking place. Another flock of White Stork flew through and another high raptor was identified as a pale-morph Booted Eagle, followed shortly after by a dark-morph bird. These circled around the peak gaining height before moving off. A sudden panic in the hirundines alerted us to a brownish juvenile Peregrine hunting low over the road and it circled close over us before moving off behind the trees. Another high raptor crested the peak and Steve and Fiona called it at the same time: Lammergeier! Now extremely scarce in Turkey, this was a fantastic sighting and as it crossed the valley towards us its adult plumage was obvious and beautiful. Surely this day couldn't get any better? Mehmet had returned with kebabs for lunch and eating took priority for the less-obsessed among us. As Fiona scanned whilst munching, yet another raptor popped over the ridge. This one was another surprise, a Black Kite, everyone scrambled back to their scopes again. More Long-legged Buzzards and White Storks came next with another Booted Eagle and a Golden Eagle. A lull in activity prompted a change of location as we moved onto the main road and stopped at a service station and market for a comfort stop. Crag Martins were flying here too and another scan of the ridge produced yet another species, at least five Griffon Vultures were crossing the valley overhead. Even more Long-legged Buzzards and a common Raven followed before we had to move on. What had seemed aesthetically a grim spot had turned out to be unbelievably productive.

Heading back up the valley towards Çamardi, we stopped at the side of the road to scan a different area of ridges. We walked up the hill slowly as Coal, Blue and Great Tits called in the woods, a Eurasian Jay flew across

the road and a Song Thrush sang. A small café at the top of the hill seemed the perfect place to stop for a while so we ordered coffees and sat down. Fiona set her scope up to keep working and found a Short-toed Eagle on the horizon and called Steve over for an identity check as it was far away. Although this was confirmed, inertia had gripped some of the group and only a few were keen enough to tick a distant dot when the coffee and comfortable chairs in the shade seemed more appealing. Mehmet and our driver had joined the locals in a game that looked a bit like dominoes and they started to give Chris B lessons. A Lesser Kestrel flew up the road but by now relaxation had taken over almost everyone. Yesterday had been a really long day and it was very warm. Eventually we had rested enough and we moved on to visit a small woodland along a stream. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker called and John saw it briefly before it flew upstream and vanished. A family of Long-tailed Tits was feeding in the poplar trees and a Garden Warbler sang high in the trees. A Spotted Flycatcher was flitting around the orchard alongside the stream and we found a Common Frog in the middle of the path where it had flooded in the recent rains. Several Red-backed Shrikes were seen as we strolled around the orchard and a Syrian Woodpecker played a game of hide and seek in the trees being seen briefly and vanishing as soon as everyone tried to get on it. The fluty calls of a Golden Oriole rang through the poplars but it didn't show. Eastern Olivaceous Warblers flitted around in the woods as we tried unsuccessfully to make them turn into Upcher's Warblers. Finally, we returned to the bus and headed back.

A sudden call from Clive stopped the bus; he'd seen a wheatear fly up the bank that could only be a Red-tailed! We quickly disembarked and walked back along the road to the area where the bird had been. A couple took the path up the bank and walked along the top as the rest of us walked on the road scanning upwards. A Starred Agama lizard was on a rock but drew little interest in the intensity of the search. A couple of White-throated Robins and some Turtle Doves flew over the road but we couldn't find the wheatear to our great disappointment. There are so few known sites for the species now that we couldn't try anywhere else and we could only have hoped for this sort of luck in our travels. It was such a shame that the rest of the group didn't see the bird. We returned to the lower end of Demirkazik Gorge for our last stop of the day in the hope of finding a Wallcreeper. Another pair of Golden Eagle was soaring over the end of the gorge and a flock of Red-billed Chough flew over the ridge. The various nesting warblers seen yesterday were still feeding busily and the Western Rock Nuthatch nest was definitely in use with at least two birds coming and going. Several loud bangs caused concern that they might be rock-falls and we wandered back out of the gorge shortly after without finding any sign of the Wallcreeper, just a few Rock Sparrows and a pair of Rock Buntings. An Ortolan Bunting was singing on the hill and a flock of finches included three Red-fronted Serin, a Eurasian Serin and some Linnets. Souselik on the hill fled as a Long-legged Buzzard flew along the ridge. We headed back to the hotel for supper and some of the group tracked down the Common Nightingale as others packed and showered. The European Scops Owl serenaded us during dinner again before we went to bed with mixed feelings. The fantastic raptor-fest and robins of this morning were marred by the excitement and disappointment following the unexpected wheatear. Still, you have to have something to come back for!

DAY SIX

The lack of Wallcreeper yesterday gave rise to an optional pre-breakfast trip to the gorge again, although the adventurers returned having added a male Common Redstart but nothing else new. After a lovely breakfast, we said our farewells to Hassan and his family and Sinbad the very friendly guard dog and took our bags down to the bus. As there was a delay with the bus, we wandered around the garden with Sinbad while it was sorted out and had a Spotted Flycatcher in the orchard and a gorgeous Common Whitethroat singing from the telegraph wire. The problem resolved, we boarded and moved off back down the road to Pozanti. We had a long way to go to the Goksu Delta and couldn't stop much this time. We flushed Syrian Woodpeckers from the road again as we headed for the motorway and stopped at the service station for a break. Scanning the ridge produced over fifty Alpine Swifts, seventeen White Stork, two Egyptian Vultures, a Peregrine and a Long-legged Buzzard, and although the high volumes of raptors of yesterday didn't repeat, it was unlikely this much earlier in the day so we weren't disappointed. Moving on, we covered the motorway miles swiftly and little new was seen, although an immature Egyptian Vulture flying low above the motorway was a surprise. We hit traffic as we left the motorway and headed east along the coast. Mehmet pointed out castles dating from the Crusades as we drove along and we began to see Red-backed Shrikes, Marsh Harriers and Little Owls as the towns gave way to fields lined with telegraph posts. Our first White-spectacled Bulbuls were only glimpses from the bus but good views would wait. We arrived in Tasuçu, checked into the hotel and offloaded luggage before going into the town square for a lunch of kebabs in a shady bazaar. The coolness of the mountains was now long gone and we needed a while to acclimatise before heading out onto the delta itself where shade is a luxury. We called first at the edge of an old factory which appeared derelict, although a few workmen were seen wandering the site. A European Roller was perched on a railing, a Green Woodpecker flew up and several Woodchat Shrikes were sitting on the fences. A Rufous Bush Robin flew up to perch on a fence and we could note the differences from the warmer-coloured birds on Lesbos. A single Tree Sparrow was in a flowering tree and the ubiquitous Black-headed Buntings were

singing away. Our target here was the amazing Smyrna or White-throated Kingfisher but although we searched for a while, we were unlucky. The “toy-trumpet” call of Black Francolin issued from within the fence but we couldn’t see the bird itself. A pair of Turtle Doves was on the road ahead and a Hoopoe flew into a hole in the building. Crested Larks seemed to be everywhere, running on the road and singing in flight and from fences. We moved on to the beach and drove along to the track through the sands to the first hide. Emperor Dragonflies were quartering the delta, up and down tracks and over the water. As the vanguard climbed the tower hide, the rear guard found our first Caspian Reed Warblers in a patch of spiky grass by the path. Catching up, we found the early birder catches the best spot and had to view from behind. Moving caused the hide to rock alarmingly; it possibly wasn’t designed to take all of us at once. Great Crested Grebes, Little and Great White Egrets, Grey and Purple Herons were easily visible. Marsh Harriers hunted over the water, scaring up flocks of duck, and over the grassy dunes. A target here was Grey-headed Swamp hen, the local race of Purple Gallinule, and we were not disappointed; a single bird was tugging at reeds to feed on the roots. In contrast, Common Coot were all around; at least a hundred birds spread across the lagoon. Some Mallards and Ruddy Shelduck were distantly hazy and it looked like there was much more in the far distance just too far to see in the heat shimmer. As we were scanning, a Black Francolin began to call behind us and we turned to try and find it. It sounded close but took some time to find and was a surprising distance away when we found it sitting up on the top of a bush. A little hazy, but good views. We moved onto the next hide where there were more muddy shores and islets. At least thirty Black-winged Stilts, six Kentish and three Little Ringed Plovers were nearby and a dozen Spur-winged Plovers were on the further islands. A pair of Common Redshank flew up alarming as a Marsh Harrier passed by and a party of nine Little Stints and five Curlew Sandpipers were right by the track. Another Rufous Bush Robin popped up singing on a bush behind us as we watched a mixed flock of Common, Little, White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns passing through. Some Yellow-legged Gulls were bathing in the lagoon as more francolins called all around us. Sandwich Terns were passing by over the sea behind us as we moved on to the third hide. Nine Eurasian Spoonbill were busy preening as we worked through the ducks and found eight Marbled Duck, Common Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Common Shelduck, Red Crested and Common Pochard. A movement behind a small island revealed two pairs of Ferruginous Duck. A young Little Gull was dip-feeding as a large party of Barn and Red-rumped Swallows and Sand Martins flew over the reeds and water. Six White Pelicans were over the far side of the lagoon fishing together. A Cetti’s Warbler burst into song but stayed hidden but the insect-like buzzing of a Graceful Prinia eventually led a couple of us to good flight views of the bird itself. Black-headed and White Wagtails fed in the grass and Isabelline Wheatears were in the scrub on the dunes. As we left the delta and headed into the edge of town, a Lesser Grey Shrike perched up on a road sign and we spotted a party of three White-spectacled Bulbuls in a dead tree. We got back in time to clean up and change before having a buffet-style dinner and a relaxing drink.

DAY SEVEN

We set off early to beat the heat and stopped again by the factory. Two European Rollers were on the pylons this time but despite a good look around, there was still no sign of the kingfisher. The river was contained in a virtually dry concrete drainage channel and looked unpromising, however a Little Ringed Plover and a pair of Rufous Bush Robins were feeding on the dry mud and a weir had created a small pool with reeds where a Little Bittern was flying and perched for all to see. We took a different route into the delta and headed for a platform hide that left much to be desired, only about one in three steps were in the ladder and the creak as Steve climbed it dissuaded most of the rest from trying. Fortunately no new birds were seen from the top and we had good views from the ground of Grey-headed Swamp-hens, Marsh Harriers, Eurasian Hobby, Eurasian Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Little and Great White Egrets. Water Rails called and the channel beside us held three Common Terrapins. Red-rumped and Barn Swallows dashed around the tops of the reeds vacuuming up the ubiquitous mosquitoes. The reed beds here were dense and we found Caspian Reed Warblers, Moorhen, Graceful Prinia, Bearded Tits, Cetti’s Warblers and our key target, Moustached Warbler. At least two of these showed well and several each of Squacco, Purple and Grey Herons flew over as well as an immature Black-crowned Night Heron and, the icing on the cake, a skein of seven White Pelicans; truly awesome in flight. The lagoon held similar birds to those of yesterday and we had run out of time before breakfast and had to dash back. We arranged a room shuffle to get the remainder of the group up to the nicer first floor, now that another birding group had moved out, rather than down in the grim basement where Christian’s popularity with the local mosquitoes had been well and truly proven last night. House Martins and Common Swifts were feeding over the swimming pool and were nesting on the building itself.

A few European Shags or Great Cormorants had flown across the bay but, unfamiliar with the light and distance, we couldn’t decide which! A new bird for the trip either way, the title “Shagorant” was coined to fit. Not quite right to put this on the list though, guys! We set off again to the far side of the delta and drove through a village full of White Storks on their telegraph-pole nests including several well-grown chicks. House Sparrows were nesting in the base of the storks’ nests and we checked carefully for Spanish Sparrows which we found in good numbers in

the next village. We passed under a pole with a confident pale-brown Little Owl perched on it in the harsh daylight and it simply glared at us as we took pictures from the minibus. We asked permission to walk out along a spit of sand sticking out into the ocean where the local fishermen had built ranks of wooden fish traps. Sand Martins in their hundreds were perched on wires, flying around and darting in and out of nests in a sandbank. Out to sea, gulls included a Slender-billed, a Mediterranean, and several Yellow-legged. As we had already started to walk back, Chris B was lucky enough to spot an Audouin's Gull. Sandwich and Common Terns were again on the sea and the lagoon behind held Little, Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns. We returned to the bus, thanked the villagers and moved onto the next lagoon. The heat-haze was now intense and, although there were plenty of waders and ducks present, it was quickly seen that, other than close views of five feeding pelicans, little was to be gained by hiking around in the heat. We moved instead to a part-constructed building which provided shade and had a complex of concrete pools alongside it. Eastern Olivaceous Warblers sang from the bushes and the usual larks were singing but little else was happening with the birds in this heat. Dragonflies sparkled as they darted backwards and forwards and Steve's expertise was tested. Those identified on these few pools included Green-eyed Hawker, Broad Scarlet, Oriental Scarlet, Slender Skimmer and Black Percher. Even those with little interest in bugs found these beautiful as they buzzed around and perched on the walls and vegetation. Various large crickets and beetles were flying around in the scrub but evaded the photographers as though it was a game. Herpetology here was also astounding; we identified Spur-thighed Tortoise, Pool Frog, Common Tree Frog, Green Toad and Marsh Frog. Black Francolin were calling but remained unseen and a Spur-winged Plover was actually nesting on the edge of the road so the driver had to teeter on the other edge carefully to avoid crushing the bird, which sat tight on the nest throughout. It was now so hot that as we went back to town for lunch, it was suggested that we siesta and swim for a while to allow the heat to ease off before heading out again. We ate in an outdoor café in the shade of the town square before returning to the hotel. The swimming pool was quickly in use while others took the chance to do some laundry as the heat would dry things rapidly. A change of scene next, we headed inland to Selifke Gorge. En route, we passed through an area where several Roman temples were still standing on a scrubby hillside. Almost every post had a Little Owl sat on it and a couple of pairs of White-spectacled Bulbuls were seen. We stopped at an area of Stone Pines on a rocky outcrop and were quickly rewarded with a Krüper's Nuthatch feeding over our heads. A party of Long-tailed Tits were quickly followed by a pair of Sombre Tits. A Eurasian Jay flew out of the wood as a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker flew in and a Common Cuckoo was calling distantly. We looked up in surprise as an Egyptian Vulture flew overhead, not a bird we had expected. A Masked Shrike was working its way across the area and at least four Turtle Doves and a pair of Spotted Flycatchers were in the surrounding trees. A warbler song was coming from the far trees and we headed in that direction, picking our way carefully through the rocks. We flushed a small bird up in front of us and were quickly looking at a female Cretzschmar's Bunting. As we watched, her mate arrived with food and disappeared into the bush in front of us as we watched spellbound. The warbler sang again and woke us up! Moving on, we saw a large warbler flying around in the canopy and gathered round to watch. Fantastic, we had a pair of Olive-tree Warblers right in front of us and showing well! This is virtually unheard of and we watched for some time. A Coal Tit flew through as we relocated the Krüper's Nuthatch. Back at the road, Steve got excited as a wheatear flew away from him and we all followed quickly as it may have been the scarce Finsch's Wheatear. We followed it to the ridge and scanned around. A female wheatear perched up on a rock and we looked carefully at her inconclusively. Fortunately her mate flew in and solved the problem; he was an Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, not a Finsch's. Never mind, it was still a new bird for the list! As we were about to board the bus, a strange-looking insect landed on Chris B's leg. Like a Zebra-striped cross between a dragonfly and a butterfly, we couldn't work out what it was until someone remembered the adult stage of Ant-lions. A rarely seen creature, this was fascinating, although Chris may not have thought so as it was perched where she couldn't have seen it without practising yoga. We were losing the light as we headed back to town so we transferred to the pool for drinks before dinner.

DAY EIGHT

The long drive east today would have left behind any chance of White-throated Kingfisher, so a quick conference was held between Mehmet, Steve and today's driver. With no time for a pre-breakfast trip, we had simply packed up, brought our bags down and watched around the pool while we waited. Chris H had been lucky enough to see a Green Turtle swimming across the bay, but sadly we couldn't relocate it. The Common Swifts streaming along the coast included at least two Pallid Swifts and our "Shagorants" were again seen but again evaded identification. After we were all on the bus, Steve revealed the new plan. We would pass near Adana on the way to Birecik and another group's trip report left with the hotel listed an area near Adana where they had seen the kingfishers last week. It would make the day longer but the driver had agreed we could do it. We headed straight to Adana on the motorway and crawled through the town itself in terrible traffic, stopping briefly for supplies for a picnic lunch. Laughing Doves were dotted throughout the town and were new for the trip. Heading out of town, we found the road to Tuzla and cruised slowly along, checking the canal on the left and drainage ditch on the

right as we went. A Black-crowned Night Heron stalked in the ditch where Common Terrapins were swimming and a Little Bittern flew up and perched obligingly for us. White-spectacled Bulbuls and Rufous Bush Robins perched on the telegraph wires until finally another bird-on-the-wire was distinctly a White-throated Kingfisher. The driver pulled over as soon as it was safe to do so, this road carried a lot of lorry traffic. We walked slowly back up the road to the area where the kingfisher was, scoping it at intervals to get the best views possible in case it flew before we got there. Good job we had! As we got nearer, it flew down to the canal and then off into the trees across the canal, followed quickly by another that we hadn't even seen. We carried on along the road to a saltpan and lagoon where we found a small flock of ten Greater Flamingos, sixty Black-winged Stilts, two Little Stint, four Pied Avocets, a single Dunlin and at least 150 Kentish Plovers. On the open water there were Common Coot and Moorhen with a lonely Little Grebe. Several Squacco and a Purple Heron were fishing around the edge and a Little Egret flew overhead. A large flock of terns and gulls included an amazing three hundred plus Little Terns, a Whiskered Tern, fifty Slender-billed Gulls and four Yellow-legged Gulls.

Sand Martins, Red-rumped and Barn Swallows skimmed the salt flats as we ate an early picnic in the shade of some eucalyptus trees. Somewhere a Common Nightingale and a Great Reed Warbler were singing and a pair of Graceful Prinia flew among the tall grasses at the edge of the lagoon. A Black-headed Wagtail ran around catching flies in the heat-haze. Spanish and House Sparrows were chattering in the trees overhead. We returned back towards Adana and found a Masked Shrike perched on the wires along the road and a pair of White Storks nesting on a rooftop. Getting back on the motorway, we began to cover the distance again. An Egyptian Vulture flew across the road and a coffee stop produced a Short-toed Eagle and a Marsh Harrier. It was getting late now and the driver was feeling the distance badly so he pulled over and swapped places with Mehmet to finish the drive safely. A Little Owl was perched on a pylon as the last light disappeared and we entered Birecik in darkness. The usual restaurant turned out to be closed for refurbishment, so the only place near the hotel to eat was the bus depot! Not ideal, but it was adequate, although kebabs were now getting a little repetitive. Mehmet would see what he could do for tomorrow. This is the equivalent of the "Wild West" in Turkey; right on the Silk Road into Asia and more normally housing truckers the facilities are basic but the only base in the area from which to see the special eastern specialities we had come for.

DAY NINE

We drove out of town before breakfast to an area of reed-beds and lakes near the river. A colony of at least twenty European Bee-eaters were feeding and perching on fence-wire. Several European Rollers were displaying on the edge of an industrial area and perched on telegraph wires, glowing as a Rufous Bush Robin flew up to join them. A group of more than a dozen Black-crowned Night Herons flew overhead as we walked down to the pools where a Common Kingfisher was perched on a reed-stem. Graceful Prinia and Cetti's Warblers both perched obligingly in full view as a Black Francolin called beyond the fence. A pair of Moorhen was feeding in the pool when an odd brown bird popped up onto a branch sticking out above the reeds; Steve checked and confirmed this was one of the small colony of Iraq Babblers first discovered on the 2006 Celtic Bird Tours trip here by Neil. Another flew up to perch alongside it briefly before both dropped into cover again. As far as we know this is the only place in the Western Palearctic where this eastern gem can be found. A pair of Little Bitterns chased each other over the reeds as a small flock of Pygmy Cormorants flew in. Another brown bird looked likely to be another babbler but was "only" a Caspian Reed Warbler! A Great Reed Warbler sang loudly from the pool behind us as we moved over the industrial sheds by the fence to check out the sparrow flocks there. Among the many House Sparrows there were four Dead Sea Sparrows and half a dozen Spanish Sparrows for good measure. Excellent, but quickly topped as a single Pied Kingfisher flew in, followed rapidly by four others. A flying pair of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were new for Steve at this site, but the icing was on the cake when a flock of over seventy Bald Ibises flew in and probed, feeding, in the grass by the pools alongside several Cattle Egrets. We were stunned to discover that it was still only breakfast-time and we headed back feeling ecstatic. After breakfast, we drove into the town and stopped by the market to look at the towering cliffs where both Alpine and Little Swifts were nesting. Initially it looked quiet but moments later a screaming cloud had swirled back from the river and the birds were everywhere; at least forty Alpine and thirty-five Little Swift rushed up the cliff at break-neck speed. A Little Owl was perched on a lower ledge and appeared to be a much darker brown than the pale bird back in the Goksu Delta. On a sandbank in the river, a couple of Squacco, several Little Egrets and a Purple Heron were feeding while Grey Herons were on the far bank where there were less people. More Bald Ibises soared over the cliff-top and along the ridge towards the protected breeding colony for this extremely rare bird. Hirundines of all the usual species were dashing over the river and a single Whiskered Tern was noted. We drove out of town and stopped overlooking an area of desert, little was moving and finding birds here seemed improbable. We persevered however, and came up trumps as a pair of See-see Partridges scurried up a track to take shelter in the shade of a small bush. The heat was getting intolerable now and we retreated to the famous Blue Fountain Café. Being a Sunday afternoon, lots of men were sitting and playing the

dominoes-type game in the shade of the huge trees here. A Syrian Woodpecker kept flying up to a nest-hole and working its way around the trees and back again. Clive had a Common Nuthatch but it didn't linger to be seen by all. We were all a little too preoccupied with the ten or so Upcher's Warblers that were singing and flying around in the trees overhead to worry about the same nuthatch we get at home! A Great Tit called loudly, White-spectacled Bulbuls flitted overhead and Laughing Doves were on the ground around the edges of the park. The main bird for this site was Striated Scops Owl which is regularly seen around the park. We wandered around looking at the trees and found one fairly quickly, but had attracted so many children that the noise levels disturbed the bird and it flew off into thicker cover before the full group had seen it; this couldn't happen! We carried on searching until an old man beckoned John away saying what sounded like "by-kush". We followed warily as he pointed up into a tree where, sat higher up but in better view than before was another owl. The swarm of children followed but this time we managed to shush them enough to stop the bird spooking. The full group arrived and Fiona set up her video camera so the kids could see the owl clearly on the screen and hopefully realise that seeing this bird is something to get tourists visiting; we can only hope! We found the old man on our way out of the park and tipped him well. With any luck these birds are worth more alive than not. We ate lunch, more kebabs, at the café and some returned to the hotel with the driver for a rest and a clean comfort stop [even the men were disturbed by state of the loos in the park!]. Chris B and Fiona also did a little shopping before picking the rest of the group up and heading off to the pistachio orchards outside the town. A Honey Buzzard flew over as we strolled along and soared around before drifting away. A Syrian Woodpecker was feeding on the edge of the track and flew up as we approached. Crested Larks were running around and singing. A pair of wheatears were checked out and found to be Eastern Black-eared. Four Wood Pigeons flew up with their wings clapping and a Marsh Harrier was working the edge of a quarry behind us. A Tree Sparrow perched alone but our searching finally paid off with at least four Chestnut-shouldered Sparrows feeding under the trees. Several Hoopoes and a European Roller were nesting in the bank of the quarry. Driving back towards town, we explored several wadis leading off from the road. At one, several Menetries Warblers were feeding in a couple of bushes by the valley entrance and a large red finch seen by Fiona seemed likely for a crossbill, except for the fact they don't occur here! This wadi soon petered out so we returned and tried the next instead. This turned out to be a long wide valley with cliffs on either side. As we strolled along we encountered several Common Kestrels, a pair of Long-legged Buzzards and some Black-headed Buntings and a cliff ledge around a bend held a dozen Bald Ibises.

As we rounded another bend, a clatter of loose scree caused Fiona and Christian to look up just in time to see a Golden-backed Jackal trotting away up a side valley. Sadly, it vanished completely before anyone else managed to get onto it. We walked back down the wadi as dusk was falling and headed back for dinner. Mehmet had a word with the canteen and they had rustled up boiled chicken as an alternative to kebabs. This was simple food but much appreciated as there had been little variety until we asked.

DAY TEN

After yesterday's fantastic start, we returned to the same site before breakfast to see if it could be matched. The area we had started at yesterday was fairly busy with lorries, but still yielded up at least five Squacco, a Marsh Harrier, both Black Francolin and See-see Partridge, more than sixty European Bee-eaters, ten European Rollers and three Hoopoes. A Menetries Warbler hopped up onto a wire fence next to the only Dead Sea Sparrow here today before, more characteristically, hiding in a bush where his lady friend was also glimpsed. We moved to a quieter side of the site and found a pool with a pair of Little Grebes and seven Pygmy Cormorants. A small flock of sandgrouse flew over, followed by more; there were both Black-bellied and Pin-tailed among them and they appeared to land over by the river so we followed them. We were astonished by the numbers when we crested a ridge and scanned the pools by the shore, at least seven Black-bellied and forty Pin-tailed were bathing and drinking below. As we watched them a party of four Desert Finches dropped in to drink alongside them. A Slender-billed Gull was with the Common Terns on an island in the river and a Little Ringed Plover was running around behind them. A massive sandbank was host to at least two thousand Sand Martins and the sound of them coming and going was amazing. The more overgrown of the pools held Little Bitterns, Little Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons, with some Mallards and Moorhen on the edge of the river. The flock of Bald Ibises had dropped in while we were over the far side and numbered seventy-nine today with seven Cattle Egrets for company on the grass. A Common Kingfisher called and, as we looked for it, we spotted a Honey Buzzard gliding over the site. A pair of Common Kestrels was perched on a pylon by the Bee-eater colony and we heard a Common Cuckoo calling but couldn't find it. Several Wood Pigeons flew across from the river and the reeds rang with Great Reed, Cetti's and Caspian Reed Warblers and Graceful Prinia. An invisible Common Nightingale was singing near the road while a Rufous Bush Robin was trying to get run over by the trucks as we returned for breakfast. We headed off into the east today, up into the hills. The drier habitat instantly began to produce different birds; Short-toed Eagles reached a count of at least five, Woodchat Shrikes were on a lot of

posts, there were several Long-legged Buzzards, Isabelline and Eastern Black-eared Wheatears and our first Finsch's. We saw three males and a female in total including a male who perched up on a telegraph post and stretched for us before launching into a song flight and landing back again; gorgeous! A small village turned out in its entirety to look at us as we scoped Calandra, Lesser Short-Toed and Crested Larks before finding at least four Pale Rock Sparrows and three Bimaculated Larks in the scrub around the village. We worked our way towards Halfeti, stopping wherever sites looked good. A large rocky outcrop looked good for Eastern Rock Nuthatch so we all climbed out for a wander around; some bounding with confidence over the limestone pavement with its huge gaps and others picking their way more carefully. For Fiona, this paid off as a Golden-backed Jackal ran quickly out of the way of the speedy party and disappeared from view down the hill. Steve was not happy! This was the second he'd missed this trip! A Short-toed Eagle and a Honey Buzzard were riding the thermals around the valley and a Peregrine shot through quickly. The nuthatches were found and admired, with their massive badger-like stripe nothing like that of the theoretically similar Western Rock Nuthatches we had seen earlier in the trip. We went down the valley to the town that was forced up the hill when the dam was built. A Black-winged Stilt appeared to be walking on water until we realised it was standing on a submerged jetty. Barn and Red-rumped Swallows and House Martins flew around the village and over the lake. Lunch was on a floating pontoon restaurant and while we were eating Mehmet had arranged a special treat; a boat trip around the lake. Even from the pontoon we could see this would be good. The day was now very hot and the lake had a good breeze. Several Short-toed Eagles were riding the air effortlessly over a steep cliff and we could start to make out the abandoned houses of the old village with roofs just sticking out above the water. There were also rooms cut into the cliff faces and footholds cut for steps. These had been storage areas for crops long ago. A citadel stood on a hill, largely cut from the rock and seamlessly blending with the hills around; its position at the meeting of the original river and a tributary must have been strategically important as it appeared to have been quite a costly awkward construction. Common Terns flew alongside us as we chugged around the lake but little else was on the water as it was far too deep for most ducks or grebes. Surprisingly, a grass snake swam past us as we returned to the quay. We returned to the limestone pavement area to end the afternoon. The weather was obviously about to turn nasty so we watched larks and kestrels for a while before heading back to Birecik. The cliffs outside the town still had plenty of Little, Common and Alpine Swifts soaring around them as we drove back to the hotel for supper.

DAY ELEVEN

There wasn't an official pre-breakfast outing but a few eager souls walked down to the river, finding seven Black-crowned Night Herons, two Cattle Egrets, a Moorhen, White Wagtails, a White-spectacled Bulbul and a singing Common Nightingale. We had a quick breakfast, loaded the bus and headed off to Isikli where a small pumping station had a little pool of water outside. The birds visited here in flocks to drink and bathe as we watched; a constant stream of Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Corn Buntings, Linnets and Turtle Doves. The hillsides around yielded up an Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Lesser and Common Whitethroats, some Sombre Tits and three Eastern Rock Nuthatches as we sat quietly waiting by the pool. The more unusual visitors came and went; a small flock of Desert Finches, a female Cinereous Bunting, a male Cretzschmar's Bunting and three Pale Rock Sparrows. Swifts streaming overhead were mainly Common but included a couple of Pallid Swifts. Several lizards were noticed stopping to drink or feed by the pool. This was a gorgeous site with woods further down the valley and flowering shrubs all around set off by glorious sunshine. We were all pretty relaxed, all of the key birds on the trip were "in the bag" and we had smashed the previous trip record by at least twenty species with an amazing 207 species recorded, a feeling of near perfection achieved. Sat in the sun watching essentially a birds' service station was a perfect way to end the trip. Steve hadn't quite finished with us yet however, he eventually rounded us up and we drove a little further to Durnalik. A gentle walk here was quite the thing to round off the trip nicely. We wandered through a tiny village and along a shady track which was filled with butterflies and dragonflies. A White-throated Robin saw us coming and flew over the wall but the Upcher's Warblers were less shy and flew around a large fig tree giving good views.

A pair of Blackbirds gave their alarm calls as a Long-legged Buzzard and a Common Kestrel flew over and we saw both Blue and Great Tits here too. After a while enjoying the warblers, we returned to the bus to make the journey to our final night's stop at Gaziantep. Another treat had been planned for us by Mehmet; a superb lunch at a top restaurant which doubles as the town's best Baklava shop. Turkish coffee was served up on in a tiny cup and saucer placed on a filigree silver plate with a plate cover to match. Having tasted the delicious baklava served for dessert, Fiona and Chris B bought some to take home. A short drive across town then brought us to the hotel and we had time to explore the town and its bazaars before dinner. Fascinating streets lined with stalls with shoes or herbs hanging up as spices and fabrics were laid out beautifully. Laughing Doves scurried around clearing up dropped food and narrowly escaping passing vehicles. Eventually we returned to the hotel for a drink before a good dinner and an early night.

DAY TWELVE

The hotel had arranged an especially early breakfast as we had an early flight. We loaded up quickly and headed to the airport. Traffic was definitely building but we made the airport in good time – before even the airport staff! The place was deserted. Eventually, a check-in desk was opened and we were able to get through to get a cup of coffee, by which time we were gasping. The flight was uneventful and we arrived for another long stopover in Istanbul airport. The shops in the international departures lounge were much better however and souvenir shopping made much of the wait fly by. Another smooth flight later and we said our farewells at Heathrow, all having had a great time and looking forward to the next trip. Steve commented that he was impressed by the quality of guests on the trip and we assured him that he had the crème-de-la-crème of the Glamorgan Bird Club on the trip and should have expected nothing less! Our thanks go to Steve for guiding us to all the must-see birds easily and to Neil for putting together yet another brilliant trip. As usual the group got on well and the humour and camaraderie was brilliant!

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Little Grebe	Eurasian Hobby
Great Crested Grebe	Peregrine
Black-necked Grebe	Caspian Snowcock
Pygmy Cormorant	Chukar
Great White Pelican	See-see Partridge
Little Bittern	Black Francolin
Black-crowned Night Heron	Common Quail
Cattle Egret	Water Rail
Squacco Heron	Common Moorhen
Little Egret	Common Coot
Great White Egret	Grey-headed Swamphen
Grey Heron	Common Crane
Purple Heron	European Oystercatcher
White Stork	Black-winged Stilt
Glossy Ibis	(Pied) Avocet
Northern Bald Ibis	Stone Curlew
Eurasian Spoonbill	Collared Pratincole
Greater Flamingo	Little Ringed Plover
Ruddy Shelduck	Kentish Plover
Common Shelduck	Spur-winged Plover
Eurasian Teal	Northern Lapwing
Mallard	Little Stint
Northern Shoveler	Curlew Sandpiper
Marbled Duck	Dunlin
Red-crested Pochard	Ruff
Common Pochard	Common Redshank
Northern Pintail	Red-necked Phalarope
Ferruginous Duck	Little Gull
White-headed Duck	Mediterranean Gull
European Honey Buzzard	Black-headed Gull
Black Kite	Slender-billed Gull
Lammergeier	Yellow-legged Gull
Egyptian Vulture	Audouin's Gull
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	Sandwich Tern
Short-toed Eagle	Gull-billed Tern
Marsh Harrier	Little Tern
Montagu's Harrier	Common Tern
Common (incl. Steppe ssp.) Buzzard	Whiskered Tern
Long-legged Buzzard	Black Tern
Golden Eagle	White-winged Black Tern
Steppe Eagle	Black-bellied Sandgrouse
Eastern Imperial Eagle	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
Booted Eagle	Rock Dove
Common Kestrel	Wood Pigeon
Lesser Kestrel	Collared Dove

Turtle Dove
Laughing Dove
Great Spotted Cuckoo
Common Cuckoo
Striated Scops Owl
European Scops Owl
Little Owl
Pallid Swift
Common Swift
Alpine Swift
Little Swift
Common Kingfisher
White-throated Kingfisher
Pied Kingfisher
European Bee-eater
European Roller
Eurasian Hoopoe
Green Woodpecker
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Syrian Woodpecker
Woodlark
Calandra Lark
Bimaculated Lark
Greater Short-toed Lark
Asian Short-toed Lark
Lesser Short-toed Lark
Crested Lark
Shore Lark
Sand Martin
Crag Martin
Barn Swallow
Red-rumped Swallow
House Martin
Tawny Pipit
Black-headed Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
White Wagtail
White-spectacled Bulbul
Northern Wren
Radde's Accentor
Rufous Bush Robin
Common Nightingale
White-throated Robin
Black Redstart
Common Redstart
Isabelline Wheatear
Northern Wheatear
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear
Finsch's Wheatear
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush
Blue Rock Thrush
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Cetti's Warbler
Graceful Prinia
Moustached Warbler
Caspian Reed Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Olivaceous Warbler
Upcher's Warbler
Olive-tree Warbler
Menetries Warbler
Eastern Orphean Warbler
Barred Warbler
Lesser Whitethroat
Common Whitethroat
Garden Warbler
Willow Warbler
Spotted Flycatcher
Iraq Babbler
Bearded Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Sombre Tit
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Krüper's Nuthatch
Common Nuthatch
Eastern Rock Nuthatch
Western Rock Nuthatch
Golden Oriole
Red-backed Shrike
Lesser Grey Shrike
Masked Shrike
Woodchat Shrike
Eurasian Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Alpine Chough
Red-billed Chough
Eurasian Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow
Common Raven
Common Starling
Rose-coloured Starling
House Sparrow
Dead Sea Sparrow
Spanish Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Pale Rock Sparrow (Hill Sparrow)
Chestnut-shouldered Sparrow (Yellow-throated Sparrow)
Rock Sparrow (Rock Petronia)
White-winged Snowfinch
Chaffinch
Red-fronted Serin
European Serin
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Common Linnet
Crimson-winged Finch
Desert Finch
Rock Bunting
Cinereous Bunting
Ortolan Bunting
Cretzschmar's Bunting
Black-headed Bunting
Corn Bunting