

Birds of Persia

Iran is a large country which until recently has been a difficult destination for birders to visit. Birdwatching Breaks is therefore pleased to offer you a comprehensive birding tour of this fascinating country for birds and culture. We should encounter the country's two endemics, Pleske's Ground Jay and Caspian Tit, while other regional specialities we are likely to see include Basra Reed Warbler, Iraq Babbler, breeding Grey Hypocolius, Sind Woodpecker and Black-headed Penduline Tit.

Days 1-2: An evening flight from London to Tehran, where arrival is the following morning. On arrival, we take an internal flight to the southern city of Bandar Abbas, situated on the shores of the Persian Gulf. The waterfront at Bandar Abbas attracts thousands of birds to feed on the extensive mudflats. Habitats here consist of stony out-washed plains with scattered vegetations and bushes, almond and pistachio woodlands and cliffs. Birds include a number of Indo-Malayan species and we should see White-eared Bulbul, Turkestan and Bay-backed Shrikes, Pallid Swift, Pale Crag-Martin, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Afghan Babbler, See-see Partridge, Eurasian Hoopoe, Hume's and Variable Wheatears and Scrub Warbler. Continue to Minab for a three-night stay.

Day 3: Early morning drive along the road towards Jask, where palm gardens and local orchards create an ideal habitat for many woodland birds: Oriental Honey-buzzard, Spotted Owlet, Grey Francolin, Red-wattled Lapwing, Indian Roller, Laughing Dove, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Myna, Isabelline Wheatear, Purple Sunbird and the rare and regional endemic Sind Woodpecker. In the driest habitats and wadis we may find Sand Lark, Graceful Prinia, Green Bee-eater, Chestnut-bellied and Crowned Sandgrouse, Upcher's and Eastern Orphean Warblers. With luck, we may find Oriental White-eye and Clamorous Reed Warblers among the mangroves herons along the shoreline.

Day 4: Half-day excursion to the mangrove forest and inter-tidal areas in the Persian Gulf. This is an excellent habitat for Indian Pond Heron, Crab Plover, Shikra, Greater

Dates

**Wednesday March 28th -
Wednesday April 11th 2018**

Leaders: Ali Alieslam
and Simon Papps

Group size: 8

Birds: 230-250

Spotted Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier, Osprey, White-breasted Kingfisher and Greater Thick-knee. High numbers of migrant shorebirds use the area as a migration stop-over point and wintering ground. We should encounter Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, Grey and Kentish Plovers, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Whimbrel, Temminck's Stint, Sanderling, Eurasian Spoonbill, Dalmatian Pelican, Great Cormorant, Green Sandpiper, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits and Eurasian Oystercatcher. With luck we may see Great Knot, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Indian Pond-Heron.

Days 5-6: Morning flight to Ahvaz. Upon arrival we drive to the north of the city and bird the Karkheh and Dez river systems. This is an important area for Iraq Babbler, Grey Hypocolius, Mesopotamian Crow and Ménétriés's Warbler. Another primary quarry is the range-restricted Basra Reed Warbler. Other birds to expect are Dead Sea Sparrow and Black-winged Kite, and we will encounter large numbers of Red-wattled Lapwing, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, White-throated and Pied Kingfishers, Collared Pratincole and European Turtle Dove. Possibilities include Turkestan Shrike, Pied Bushchat and Namaqua Dove. Return to Ahvaz for an overnight stay.



Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin Photo: Simon Papps

Day 7: Morning trip to Shadegan Lagoon, where the multitudes of waterbirds may include specialities such as Marbled Duck and White-tailed Lapwing. Breeding Collared Pratincoles and Little Terns mingle with migrants including Marsh and Wood Sandpiper. After lunch in Ahvaz, we take an afternoon flight to Tehran. Upon arrival, direct transfer to hotel for rest and an overnight stop.

Day 8: Morning drive to Touran National Park, where we stay for two nights in a local house. Touran consists of vast steppes and semi-arid deserts. Our main interest is locating the endemic Pleske's Ground Jay, which favours bushy steppes. We also hope to find Shikra, Asian Desert Warbler, Crowned and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Bar-tailed and Crested Larks, Pale Crag Martin and Trumpeter and Desert Finches. Common migrants include Green Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher.

Day 9: Early morning birdwatching in Touran to find the endemic Pleske's Ground Jay, in case we have missed it on Day 8. Other possible birds in the area include Steppe Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Saker Falcon, Macqueen's Bustard, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Grey-necked Bunting, Masked Wagtail, Hooded Wheatear and Eastern Rock Nuthatch. We hope to find the rare Onager (Asian Wild Ass) and, with luck, we may be able to make out tracks of Asiatic Cheetah, of which fewer than a hundred remain in the deserts of Iran.

Day 10: Depending on sightings of the previous two days, we make another visit to Touran and then drive to Semnan for a three-night stay. En route we stop for Pale Rock Sparrow, Red-billed Chough and Horned Lark.

Day 11: Full day excursion to Parvar, a protected area which is located in the central



Caspian Tit

Photo: Ali Alieslam

eastern slopes of the Alborz mountain range. Upper habitats include humid and dry high alpine zones. Parvar also covers some semi-arid *Artemisia* steppe in the southern parts and juniper in the southwest. Widespread species are Golden Eagle, Chukar, Water Pipit, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting. Red-fronted Serin, Radde's and Alpine Accentors, and Red-headed, Black-headed and Grey-necked Buntings should be encountered. If luck is on our side, we may see the likes of Caspian Snowcock and White-throated Robins.

Day 12: Early morning drive to Molla-Deh and Roodbarak in the northern slopes of the Parvar Valley, a region of Caspian broadleaf forests and home to the rare Caspian Tit. Other species occurring include Lammergeier, Yellow-billed and Red-billed Choughs, Horned Lark, Eastern Goldfinch and Pied, Isabelline and Finsch's Wheatears.

Day 13: Drive to Balbosar, on the Caspian Sea coast, to look for Black-headed Penduline Tits. Continue to Sari for an overnight stay.

Day 14: Continue, via a mountainous road through the Alborz Mountain Range, with a stop for birding in the mountain habitats along the road, especially in high elevation regions. Possible species include White-winged Snowfinch. Continue to Tehran for an overnight stay.

Day 15: Early morning transfer to the airport and connections back to Europe.

Prices

Ground Price: £3,995
Single room: £390
Deposit: £400
*Air Fare: £465

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport (minibus and 4x4), guidance and taxes.

Not included: visa fee to enter Iran, drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature, departure taxes and any relevant fuel surcharges.

Important: It is necessary for visiting women and men to follow dress codes whilst in public places. For women this includes a loose headscarf, trousers and a lightweight, long-sleeved dress or coat in any colour. For men this includes trousers (no shorts allowed). Please note no alcohol is allowed in Iran nor can it be imported into the country.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*