

Notes on the Waders of Iran

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Introduction

In spring 1969 Pentti Kinnunen, Bo Runesson, Bo Thyselius, and the author spent about two months, 12 April—22 May and 29 May—14 June, in Iran. For nearly one month, 22 April—19 May, we visited the vast and ecologically very diverse Kerman region in the south-east, which is little known ornithologically. Several other parts of Iran were, however, also visited. Our aim was to carry out observations and ringing of migrants and to gather information on the distribution and habitat selection of the breeding species. Our ringing results have been included in a work by Cornwallis & Ferguson (1971). A popular account of our observations at Lake Guri in East Azerbaijan has been published separately (Gyllin 1970) as well as an analysis of the raptor migration (Gyllin 1974). The aim of the present paper is to summarize our observations of waders, a group very poorly documented from most parts of Iran.

One cannot expect to find large numbers of waders in Iran, either breeding or on passage. Most of the country is very arid, particularly the central and south-eastern parts. There are no large rivers and few lakes (cf. the survey of the wetlands of Iran published by the Game and Fish Department of Iran 1971). Doubtless the best resting-places for waders are to be found on the Caspian littoral and along the shore of the Persian Gulf including the Strait of Hormuz, while the former might be the best breeding area for these birds in the country. In all, we recorded 29 species of waders, mainly migrants, and most of them in small or moderate numbers.

Breeding Species

Breeding through records of pulli was proved only for Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), both on Meyan Kaleh at the southeast corner of the Caspian Sea. Only three other species were considered to be certain breeders, viz. the Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*), which no doubt is a widespread breeding bird in Iran, the Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*), which was common on Meyan Kaleh, and the Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*), one individual

of which was recorded in southeast and two pairs in northeast Iran. In addition, the Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) was possibly breeding on Meyan Kaleh, as suggested by Nielsen & Speyer (1967).

Migrants

By far the best place for resting waders which we visited was the sea shore east of Bandar Abbas at the Strait of Hormuz, where eighteen species were noted during a three-day visit. The water was very shallow and low tide gave good feeding conditions for herons, waders, and gulls. During our stay there we counted the waders along a 2 km stretch picked out at random from the uniform shore about 5 km east of Bandar Abbas; the figures are given in Table I.

The well-known Meyan Kaleh was visited on 2—4 June. Both the number of resting species (four) and of individuals encountered seem small considering the distances covered by car along the beach. This comparative lack of waders is, of course, best accounted for by the time of the year. However, no less than seven wader species were recorded resting at the small lake Guri (see below) a week later, so the scarcity of waders on the large Meyan Kaleh remains somewhat puzzling. Note that the figures for Meyan Kaleh in Table I in contrast to those from Bandar Abbas and Lake Guri are not comparable day by day as we visited different parts of the peninsula.

The only lake we visited was Guri (37° 55'N, 46° 42'E) in East Azerbaijan, where we carried out observations on 14 April and 9—13 June (except for most of 11 June, why that date is not included in the table). Here twelve species of resting waders were recorded, although, with the exception of the Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and a flock of Marsh Sandpipers (*Tringa stagnatilis*), in insignificant numbers.

Apart from those at Lake Guri, both species and individuals seen resting inland were few. However, at the tiny pools in the villages in south central Iran, i.e. along the main road from Isphahan to Kerman, some birds were seen in the middle of April. Thus, between Naein and Bayaz we recorded Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*), Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*), Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*), Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), and Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*), but unfortunately we passed through this area very quickly.

In the vast Kerman district, stretching from the sand desert Dasht-i-Lut in the north southwards to the Persian and Oman Gulfs, only two species, Greater Sand Plover and Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), were recorded resting inland during four weeks' intensive watching. This almost complete

lack of observations is rather intriguing, considering that the conditions, although never good, were in many places by no means intolerable. This was particularly so in the higher areas where there are a fair amount of streams and small rivers. The easternmost record of any wader in south-east Iran was of two Wood Sandpipers feeding at a small pool in Balouchistan, not very far from the Pakistan border.

Systematic List

In the list are mentioned all the species of waders seen in Iran. The numbers of resting birds seen at Bandar Abbas, on Meyan Kaleh, and at Lake Guri are given in Table I. All other observations will be found in

Table I: Resting waders at Lake Guri, Bandar Abbas, and on Meyan Kaleh in spring and early summer 1969.

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the text. For places not easily found on a map the coordinates are given. The sequence of species follows Vaurie (1965).

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

On 29 April 3 + 12 flew E along the coast at Bandar Abbas, on 3 June one flew W on Meyan Kaleh. Small numbers were seen resting daily at Bandar Abbas (Table I).

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Recorded in small numbers as a passage migrant only at Bandar Abbas (Table I).

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

No doubt rather widespread as a breeding bird in the Kerman district, where it was found in four localities. Two were seen on 27—28 April and one on 2—3 May along a small river 5 km south of Hajiabad (28° 18'N, 55° 53'E) nearly 900 m above sea level. On the high plateau situated between 2,100 and 2,700 m a.s.l. 80 km due south of Kerman, one was seen south of the village of Sarza (29° 30'N, 56° 58'E) and one 2 km west of Shirinak (29° 30'N, 57° 00'E) on 10 May. The weather here was rather cold and rainy, the streams being difficult to cross by car. Two were noted on the sandy river bed 5 km south of Bahramjird (29° 50'N, 56° 58'E) between 1,500 and 2,100 m a.s.l. on 13 May.

On Meyan Kaleh quite a few pairs must breed. Up to six birds were recorded daily 2—4 June, and injury-feigning was seen. In northwest Iran it no doubt occurs in most suitable places. Two pairs were present at Lake Guri on 9—13 June, one was displaying at the Qaranga River 33 km northeast of Mianeh on 9 June, and one was seen at Julfa on the Iranian side of the border with the Soviet Union on 14 June.

In addition, the following observations of probable passage migrants were made. One 5 km south of the Turkish-Iranian border along the main road on 13 April, one 12 km northwest of Zandjan on 14 April, five at a small pool in a village 30 km southeast of Naein and five on an almost dry river bed 75 km southeast of the same town on 19 April, finally two at Bayaz on 21 April.

Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)

A fairly common breeding bird on Meyan Kaleh, where one pullus was ringed on 3 June.

On passage, twice recorded inland. Two were resting at Lake Guri on 14 April and one was seen together with several other wader species at an almost dried up river in Central Iran 75 km southeast of Naein, on 19 April. Small numbers were found resting at Bandar Abbas (Table I).

Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*)

One at Lake Guri on 14 April. Four and one respectively at Bandar Abbas on 29 and 30 April. Two individuals, probably this species, were recorded on the steppe 20 km northwest of Sirjan (29° 34'N, 55° 32'E) in the Kerman district on 4 May. On the same day one was seen standing in the sandy salt desert 21 km west of Sirjan (29° 27'N, 55° 29'E), where there was no trace of vegetation of any kind. Up to eighteen were seen in singles or in small flocks on Meyan Kaleh (Table I), where it may breed.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

Only recorded at Lake Guri and Bandar Abbas (Table I).

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Only recorded in northwest Iran. One and three respectively were seen resting 5 and 12 km east of Makou on 13 April, one at Lake Guri on 13 June.

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

One of the dominant species at Bandar Abbas (Table I). Elsewhere only a single bird on Meyan Kaleh on 4 June.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)

Four 75 km southeast of Naein on 19 April, one at Bandar Abbas on 30 April.

Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*)

Only one record, of an individual resting at a small pool in the middle of a village 30 km southeast of Naein on 19 April.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

One in winter plumage at Bayaz on 20—21 April. Otherwise only a few birds at Bandar Abbas (Table I).

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

At Bandar Abbas one and two respectively on 29 and 30 April.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

The most numerous species at Bandar Abbas and on Meyan Kaleh (Table I), but not seen elsewhere. Most of the birds on Meyan Kaleh on 2—4 June were in summer plumage, but individuals both in winter and transitional plumages were noted.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

One at Lake Guri on 12 June was our only record. This lack of records seems somewhat surprising considering the enormous numbers to be found on its African wintering grounds (see e.g. Moreau 1972, p. 235), but it corresponds well with the results of the French expedition to Iran in spring 1967. Apart from a flock of 80 at a locality not visited by us, Érard & Etchecopar (1970, p. 42) thus only noted two single birds.

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

A few seen on passage in northwest Iran in April: one 5 km south of the Turkish-Iranian border along the main road on 13 April, two 12 km east of Makou on the same day, one at Lake Guri on 14 April. Not seen on Meyan Kaleh, but surprisingly many were recorded at Lake Guri in June (Table I), presumably all on northward migration. The only others noted were a few at Bandar Abbas.

Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*)

Only one record, a flock of 25 at Lake Guri on 12 June. According to Stepanjan & Gladkov (1966) this species has decreased sharply on its breeding grounds in the Soviet Union, and it was e.g. not found by Schüz (1959) at Mordab at the

southwest corner of the Caspian Sea during the whole spring season 1956, nor by Nielsen (1969) at the same locality in spring 1967.

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

One at a small puddle at the road side near Nejafabad (29° 23'N, 55° 45'E) on 26 April, one at Bandar Abbas on 29 April.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

One 70 km east of Makou on 13 April, nine 75 km southeast of Naein on 19 April. Not seen at coastal localities.

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)

Three at a small pool in a village 30 km southeast of Naein on 19 April and one 75 km southeast of the same town on the same day. One at Bayaz on 21 April (not there on the preceding day), two at a tiny pool at Ladis, Balouchistan, (28° 56'N, 61° 18'E) on 22 May, and one at Lake Guri on 10 June. Not recorded at coastal localities.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

In northwest Iran, one 48 km northwest of Mianeh on 14 April and one 34 km west of Zandjan on the same day. Furthermore, two at a small salt-rimmed pool 16 km south of Saveh on 18 April, and one at Bandar Abbas on 29—30 April.

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*)

One of the commonest species at Bandar Abbas. On Meyan Kaleh a flock of forty were still present on 2 June and several in ones or twos on 3 June (Table I). Only one inland record, viz. a single bird at Lake Guri on 14 April.

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

Only recorded at Bandar Abbas. The flock of one hundred seen on 29 April (Table I) probably migrated NE or E in the evening.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Only seen at Bandar Abbas on 29—30 April (Table I).

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Only seen at Bandar Abbas on 29—30 April (Table I).

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

In Iran only recorded at Lake Guri, where two were seen on 9 June. Another was recorded between the Iranian and Afghanistan border stations only a few hundred metres inside Afghanistan on 29 May.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

In Iran observed only at Lake Guri, where three were resting on 14 April. However, fifteen were also recorded between the Iranian and Afghanistan border stations only a few hundred metres inside Afghanistan on 29 May.

Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*)

Breeding was proved on Meyan Kaleh, where two pairs were seen, one of which had at least two pulli on 3 June.

Elsewhere only seen at Bandar Abbas, where two were resting on 30 April.

Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*)

One in pure gravel desert 30 km south of Kerman on 14 May. In Khorasan in northeast Iran one pair was recorded 40 km west and another pair 41 km west of the Iranian border town to Afghanistan on 29 May. Erard & Etchecopar (1970) during their expedition in 1967 did not record this species so far to the northeast. For the Soviet Union Dement'ev, Gladkov & Spangenberg (1951) mention the Cream-coloured Courser as a breeding bird only in Turkmenia and even there rather rare and unevenly distributed. However, Bannikov (1972) specifically states that the first nest in the Soviet Union was not found until 1968, when he found and photographed one near Badkhyz in Turkmenia.

Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*)

Common on Meyan Kaleh, where probably hundreds of pairs breed. Elsewhere on the Caspian littoral twenty were seen hunting over rice cultivations 12 km south-east of Farahabad on 2 June and thirty over the fields 15 km southwest of the outlet of the Nika river on 4 June, the latter were also mobbing a male Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*). These birds may all have come from the colonies on Meyan Kaleh. All birds checked were *pratincola*; the presence of *G. nordmanni* was not suspected.

Apart from those on the Caspian littoral, only recorded at Lake Guri on 9 June.

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Summary

Observations were carried out in Iran, chiefly in the Kerman district in the southeast, during April—June 1969. Twenty-nine species of waders were recorded, only five of which were considered to be breeding. Most migrants were seen at Bandar Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz, on Meyan Kaleh on the Caspian littoral, and at Lake Guri in East Azerbaijan (Table I). Whereas some migrants were recorded in south central Iran between Naein and Bayaz, practically no waders were seen on passage inland in the Kerman district.

Zusammenfassung

Bei ornithologischen Beobachtungen im Iran, hauptsächlich im Kerman-Distrikt im Südosten des Landes, wurden in der Zeit vom 12. April bis 14. Juni (außer 23. bis 28. Mai) 29 Watvogelarten festgestellt, von denen aber nur fünf (*Charadrius dubius*, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, *Burhinus oedicnemus*, *Cursorius cursor*, *Glareola pratincola*) als Brutvögel angesehen werden konnten. Die meisten Durchzügler wurden bei Bandar Abbas an der Straße von Hormus, im Küstengebiet des Kaspi-Sees (Meyan Kaleh) und am Guri-See in Ost-Aserbeidschan (s. Tab. 1) gefunden. Während im südlichen Mittel-Iran zwischen Naein und Bayaz einige durchziehende Watvögel beobachtet werden konnten, wurden solche im Binnenland des Kerman-Distrikts praktisch nicht festgestellt.

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