

A Guide to Birding in Israel & Trip Report for 25th April – 5th May 2019



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Purpose of this Trip Report / Guide

I have visited Israel numerous times since spring since 2012 and have produced birding trip reports for each of those visits however for this report I have collated all of my previous useful information and detail, regardless if they were visited this year or not. Those sites not visited this time around are indicated within the following text. However, if you want to see the individual trip reports the below are detailed in Cloudbirders.

[March 2012](#)
[March 2017](#)

[March 2013](#)
[April – May 2018](#)

[April – May 2014](#)

[March 2016](#)

[April – May 2016](#)

Summary of the Trip

This year's trip in late April into early May was not my first choice for dates, not even my second but it delivered on two key target species. Originally I had wanted to visit from mid-April to catch the Levant Sparrowhawk migration that I have missed so many previous times before however this coincided with Passover holidays in Israel and accommodation was either not available (Lotan) or bonkersly expensive (Eilat) plus the car rental prices were through the roof and there would be holiday makers everywhere. I decided then to return in March and planned to take in the Hula (for the Crane spectacle), Mt. Hermon, the Golan, the Beit She'an Valley, the Dead Sea, Arava and Negev as an all-rounder. However I had to cancel the day I was due to travel as an issue arose at home that I just had to be there for. I had taken a late April to May trip to Israel off the table as I was due to go to Fair Isle in May but with the advent of the Observatory suffering a catastrophic fire and no availability elsewhere on the island my spring was all but history. A trip to Ohio was briefly tabled and then removed and I decided to go to Israel again for the Honey Buzzards. Leaving it late to book flights and car rental really hit the wallet and this would turn out to be my most expensive trip yet but I managed to get in a Lotan, my preferred base of operations.

Now to the trip. It was a variable mixed bag of migration fun to bird empty wadi's and salt pans. This spring seemed to be one of either end of the scale. Some species seemed to have been present in good to great numbers, Ruppell's Warblers in March seemed to be having a great year whilst Collared Flycatchers, Broad-billed Sandpipers and Wood Warblers from mid-April onwards were having a bumper year. The flip side to this is most species were having really poor years with very low numbers of most other migrants with poor numbers of all Wheatears, Cretzschmars and Oortolan Buntings were on the low end of the scale etc whilst later in the season Barred Warblers and Thrush Nightingales were very hard to find, Olive-tree Warblers were Ghosts and were virtually none existent.

This trip was at times hard work searching for passerine migrants in the wadi's and park gardens but perseverance at some locations ensured enough good birding to keep interest going. The magic, and often frustration, of migration is that one year there

are often so many birds you don't know what to look at first, had a few of these years, whilst others are you have to work really hard to find birds that you end up savouring species that in good years you would probably not even give a second glance to.

Now the hard work with the small birds was tempered hugely by two key species this year, namely Levant Sparrowhawks and Honey Buzzards. If I had done my first choice of mid-April I would almost certainly have again missed the Levant Sparrowhawk show again but this time it all kicked off when I was there and on several occasions I was fortunate to have been in the right place right time to witness these super birds passed through on-mass.

Watching thousands of Levant's pouring in from Jordan and right over the IBRCE, and most barely above the tops of the bushes, was just magnificent. This event, on both occasions it happened here, started at around 7am and continued to around 8.30am. I probably missed just as many birds that were passing further up the valley at places like KM19 and KM20. Still days of 2800 and 2700 firmly put Levant Sparrowhawk as my second favourite bird of prey. The second of the three events was in the Mountains where large kettles of Levants were seen migrating through, often in mixed flocks with Honey Buzzards, and I saw in the region of 7,000 by the time the days migration stopped.

The other event was the Honey Buzzards. Thousands passed through the mountains which saw increasing numbers with each visit with the first big day being 10,5000-12,000, then increasing a few days later to around 23,000 and then on my very last day the 'BIG' push happened. I didn't get to the mountains till about 7am so I probably missed a lot of birds prior to my arrival but within 40mins I had seen about 9,000. I was joined by Frank Moffett and we enjoyed the spectacle of squadrons of Honey's pouring north. We moved positions a few times as subtle wind direction changes meant birds altered their routes. By 12.30pm, when I eventually left, I had tallied around 93,000 birds, yes 93,000. We later found out than many thousands had also been passing over Eilat which we would not have seen from our positions in the mountains and collectively between us it was probably around 170,000-200,000 bird day. Wow.

These numbers heavy migration events are amongst the wonders of the birding world and something I again emphasis to any serious birder, you must see it, it is pure spectacle. Even if birding is quiet elsewhere in the Arava, it isn't always the case, seeing the Honey Buzzards on migration is worth the air fare alone. If you are lucky to get the Levants on migration at the same time and then this is a top 5 birding experience.

So the questions is now I've made multiple March and multiple late April into May trips will I be back again in spring? We'll the answer to that is 'yes' I will be back, maybe not next year (2020) as I'll be hitting the other migration highway of the Upper Texas coast again but I'll probably be back in 2021. Birding Israel in spring is addictive and with spectacles such as that described above its hard not to see why.

This trip report has had to be saved at the lowest quality possible to allow it to be loaded to Cloudbirders; some images may look poor as a result



The Eilat Mountains looking towards the Gulf of Aqaba – May 2019

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Resources:

Publications

A Guide to the Birding Hot-Spots of Northern Israel and **A Guide to the Birding Hot-Spots of Southern Israel** by Hadoram Shirihi, James P. Smith, Guy M. Kirwan and Dan Alon

The two guides above are indispensable and although some sites and information are a little out of date, much is still valid. Referred to as *Shirihai* in the following text.



Where to watch birds Eilat & Southern Arava by Noam Weiss, Itai Shanni & Re'a Shaish

A new booklet that has been produced by some of the most active birders in the Eilat area. This can be obtained at the IBRCE or from Kibbutz Lotan office and even at Yotvata Shop. It's a small and lightweight booklet but will provide some basic tips on some, but not all, birding areas in the region.

Collins Bird Guide by Killian Mullarney, Lars Svensson, Dan Zetterstrom and Peter J. Grant.

This field guide is a quality guide and one that will likely prove to be a first time visitors main reference. In country I used the App rather than the paper copy though I prefer leafing through actual pages at leisure. If you only take one field guide to Israel take this one.

Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East by Porter and Aspinall

Back in 2012 I used the hardback version but since then I have used the updated paper back copy which has much improved maps. The illustrations are decent enough though perhaps it could do with an increase in plumage variations, such as juveniles, whilst the text is also an improvement. It is the must have book for any trip to the Middle East despite my comments regarding the Collin's Guide

above. From 2014 onwards I have also used the App version for my smartphone to allow for easier use in the field thus reducing the paperback to a reference material back in the car and accommodation.

Flight Identification of Raptors of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East

This stunning book, whilst an absolute must have, is far too heavy to take to Israel which is a shame, but it has been used extensively as a reference on return to the UK when trying to sort out some of the more complex Aquila eagle species and ages. A must have book irrespective of you visit Israel or not.

Lonely Planet – Israel & the Palestinian Territories

Provides information on places to stay and eat as well as general touristy information. It was used for making visits to the ruins in Bet Shan and at Masada in 2012 as well as taking time out from birding to go to the Aquarium in Eilat.

World Mapping Project 1:250,000 Road Map The only road map used, worked well in conjunction with the site guides above.

Websites

The **Israel Birding Portal** is the main source birding information making many of the following sites for bird information redundant: <http://www.birds.org.il/en/index.aspx>

The following are useful websites, blogs and Facebook pages that may provide additional information:

Yoav Perlman's Blog: <http://nubijar.blogspot.co.uk/>

Israel IOC Birds and Birding – Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Israel-IOC-Birds-and-Birding/255991381078737>

IBRCE - <http://ibrceilat.blogspot.co.il/>

IBRCE Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/Eilat-Birding-Center-IBRCE-453744341489897/>

Frank Moffatt Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/frank.moffatt.52>

Kibbutz Lotan Centre for Birdwatching: <http://www.birdingisrael.com/birdsOfIsrael/>

A main source for Trip Reports is the **Cloudbirders** <http://www.cloudbirders.com/> portal whilst other sources, such as Surfbirds <https://www.surfbirds.com/Trip%20Reports/trindex.php> may have a few additional reports not found on Cloudbirders.



Bee-eaters – HaMeishar Plains – May 2019

Travelling:

Flights, arriving in and leaving Israel

Getting to Israel from the UK is relatively straight forward with several airlines serving direct flights to Tel Aviv, these being British Airways, EasyJet and El Al. I prefer British Airways over the others. Not because I think they provide a better service but because there's an overnight flight from Heathrow arriving at around 05:30hours which means you don't lose a day just getting there. The hand luggage allowance is the best and allows all my camera kit to go on with me plus a laptop bag. If you can lift it into the overhead locker you'll be fine.

The new 'Ramon' airport just north of Eilat is now accepting some flights from Europe but as of time of writing I don't think any UK direct flights are yet included, though these are planned for the future. This will mean that if you just want to do the south you can get there more directly without going via Tel Aviv. It has been possible to go via Ovda Airport north of Eilat but flights there have been patchy so the new 'Ramon Airport' will make it easier if you could stomach flying Ryanair, slated as one of the future direct UK flights, with little to no hand luggage allowance.

The flight time from the UK Heathrow to Tel Aviv only takes around 4hours 50mins.

For UK Citizens there is no entry Visa is required.

On both arriving into the country and leaving you should expect a long processing time through customs, Israeli Passport control and security, which are notoriously slow. Expect a lot of questions when you arrive, such as where you are staying, why you are there, if you know anyone in the country etc. The answers you provide will be checked when you leave the country when you will likely be asked the same questions, where did you stay, where did you go etc

When leaving the country allow '**LOTS**' of time to get through Israeli security. It is likely you'll have to go through four queues:

Queue 1. Initial security check before you can even reach the flight check in desk (make sure you get them to put the label on your bag otherwise the check in desk will send you back again and you'll have to queue again (as what happened to me in 2017).

Queue 2. For the flight check in desk.

Queue 3. Passport Control; this was often be the most-lengthy part but this year (2019) it has been improved with automatic passport readers so one will get through a lot quicker.

Queue 4. Security where, depending on the mood of the staff and the length of queues can vary from quick to the so long you start to take root. Expect your entire hand luggage bag to be emptied, swabbed and items individually checked and then possibly even re-emptied once you've carefully repacked it all because another member of staff feels the first time wasn't enough. On this occasion (2019) was expecting my hand luggage to be turfed out and thoroughly checked and swabbed but I went straight through, I am often pulled aside due to the camera gear being tightly packed.

This trips travel experience

Carry On bag plus a Laptop Bag allowance. This I found was extremely helpful when taking lots of optics and camera equipment, as the flight would see me getting into Tel Aviv at around 5:30am and I could be out birding in the morning nearby within a couple of hours or so of leaving the airport. Heathrow Terminal 5 has no real facilities outside of security for anyone picking up or dropping off save for a few coffee shops. Past security there is a fair amount more to choose from.

The flight out wasn't great and I was unable to get any sleep as the cabin crew were serving food until about 1am when the lights finally went out and were then switched back on again only a few hours later when were started to descend. I was completely knackered. The return flight was on a bigger aircraft and a little more leg room but still the seats were uncomfortable and the food was the absolute worst yet experienced which I didn't think was possible.

Despite the negatives of the above I still prefer BA and will suffer the few inconveniences for a short flight to get there quickly. If it was a longer flight then I would have to look at other options but British Airways will have to do for now.

In Country

CAR Rental: There are several car rental companies on the first floor in the arrivals hall at Tel Aviv Ben Gurion Airport. I tend to use Budget car rentals <http://www.budget.co.uk/budgetonline/gb/budget.nsf/c/Locations> as they tend to be the cheapest but still have decent cars and have offices all around the country and relatively good service.

For getting around I usually rent a mid-sized car, something like a Hyundai i25 or a 1.6 Accent over a Compact sized car simply because of the extra room (makes it a bit easier when I'm sticking the big prime lens out the window at the salt pans), boot space, generally more powerful engine and the price difference tends to be minimal. Obviously booking ahead is recommended.

For UK visitors, at least, an International Driving Licence is not required, just your usual standard photo licence.

Note that when filling up with petrol you will have to pay before you pump, known as Pre-Pay. You need to pay at the till the amount you want to pump so getting to know the car's tank capacity will be useful, i.e. how much it takes to fill from half full to full. If you pay an amount and it is not enough to fill-up then you'll have to go back in and pay more to restart the process. If you over pay you'll then have to go back inside and get a refund on the difference. It's a bit of a phaff but it seems to be based on the USA's pay before you pump process.

For 2019 I booked the car, a mid-sized Hyundai i25 sized car, but Budget tried to give me a Toyota Yaris when I arrived which was smaller than what I was paid for (pre-paid in the UK). I argued the fact the car was much too small and not the same size as an i20 and i20 then just happen to become available. Make sure you get the right Group car when you arrive and don't get fooled into a much smaller car even if they tell you it's the same group.

The car was the most expensive part of the trip, a ridiculous £576 for just over 2 weeks. It would have cost more if I paid locally on arrival. As with all automatics it lacked acceleration and breaking was often woeful, would need to really stick foot to the floor to bring it to a halt on more than one occasion. Once it got going though it would run very well though the Air Con made a lot of noise.

In Israel you will find that they add an immobiliser to the car, you have to keep tapping in a security code on the dash to get it started. The immobiliser usually kicks in after the car is switched off for about 2 minutes. The cars beeps when immobiliser is activated. This car also had an added annoyance of a lane checker. What this does is make you leap out of seat if you go slightly over one of the lines in the road. I found out how to switch it off, centre button on the console on the windscreen attachment, press and hold. I had to do this each time I turned the engine on.

ROADS: Main roads in Israel are mostly well maintained, some of the minor roads may be potholed and dirt tracks should be driven with care. Road signs are in Hebrew, Arabic and English but are often right on top of the junction you may be looking which can result in a few drive by's. Once you get used to the sites however you'll be prepared for them but it can be frustrating the first time around. For driving directly to Eilat from Tel Aviv take Route 40 south and takes around, without stops, 5 hours to drive; several birding stops on the way can be made however so expect it to be a day drive, unless your flight arrives in the evening and in which case it's a largely overnight drive.

For estimating travelling distances I used these websites:

http://distancecalculator.globefeed.com/Israel_Distance_Calculator.asp and <http://www.distancefrom.com>

However as a guide I have placed road distances between sites here:

Tel Aviv to Agamon Hula	179km / 111miles
Hagoshim to Kfar Ruppin	100km / 62miles
Mt. Hermon to Eilat	649km / 403 (approx. 6hours drive time)
Mt. Hermon to Tel Aviv	221km / 119.5miles (approx. 3hours drive time)
Kfar Ruppin to Ein Gedi:	140km / 87miles
Kfar Ruppin to Eilat:	326km / 254miles
Ein Gedi to Eilat:	246km / 160miles
Eilat to Yotvata:	48km / 30miles
Eilat to Nizzana:	195km / 112miles
Nizzana to Tel Aviv:	169km / 100miles

Places of interest are marked with '**Brown**' signs and usually well marked.

Driving is on the right side of the road and there will always be someone wanting to overtake you no matter how fast you are going or if you are on a blind bend. Also observe speed limits, especially along Route 90 which is 90km per hour, as the Police will pull you over, I have seen this happening to others.

Traffic lights will flash green just before turning to amber and then almost instantly to red so once they start flashing start slowing down. Many junctions where lights are positioned you will notice pink coloured 'Red Light' camera's which will go off should you jump the lights and there are Speeding cameras along the main highways near Tel Aviv.

Pedestrian Crossing points are a little different to that in the UK. You will need to give way to pedestrians already on the crossing (Obviously) but pedestrians will need to give way to vehicles until there is a gap for them to cross. You don't have to give way to pedestrians waiting to cross; if you do you may end up with an Israeli driving into the back of you. However always note the current conditions and act accordingly.

Special Notes:

1. When leaving the airport look for signs for Highway 1 towards Jerusalem as this will take you to Route 40 North and South.
2. Heading south to Eilat from Yotvata on the R90 you will not be able to turn left to visit the Salt Pans, KM19 Sewage Ponds, North Fields or North Date Palms due to a barrier along the central reservation. You will have to drive to and through the Security Check Point and turn around. Best to do this by keep in the right lane and then looping back around after the checkpoint, there is a vehicle lane for doing this. If heading north from Eilat you won't be able cross the highway to go directly to Amrams Pillars or the Hidden Valley, you will need to travel a long way up the road to be able to U-turn and come back down the road.

Note if you are driving south towards Eilat looking for the turn off for either the Hidden Valley or Amrams Pillars (on the right) and you do over shoot the turn off's the central barrier will prevent you doing a simple u-turn and you will have to do what is described above.
3. At the checkpoint along Route 90 observe the rapidly reducing speed signs because you will hit a series of speed bumps if you do not.
4. At the Yotvata exit follow the **Brown** signs for Yotvata Park and not the white signs saying Yotvata as these are for the Kibbutz which you will not be able to enter. This is a new road, was under construction last year, and takes a few attempts to get right but it seems to work okay.
5. Parking in Eilat cost 5ils for 1 hour, that's about 80pence. Note this applies to roadsides indicated with Blue & White kurbs, Red & White are no parking at all. Make sure you get a parking ticket or you may end up with a parking fine on your windscreen, as I did this year at Central Park.

6. It is birdable by 5.45am at this time of year with sun-up at 6.05am so if visiting the mountains for the Honey Buzzards it is advisable to be there from 6.30am onwards.

The Environment:

Habitats

Israel is blessed with a good range of habitats front with arid deserts of the Arava Valley, Negev Desert, Eilat Mountains and Dead Sea, fertile farmlands in the Urim Plains, rolling grasslands, pine forests, salt pans, fish ponds, date palm plantations, Olive Groves, Acacia Thorn scrub, lakes, flooded wetlands, sea coasts and even a Mountain (Mt. Hermon). Birding across Israel can be very rewarding and visiting these diverse habitats in such a small country will increase the species list of any birding trip.

Weather

Generally, in late April the temperature can vary from Hot to very hot whilst by early to mid-May it can get upwards to very Hot, a couple of days were around the 40 degree Celsius mark, or at least that's what the temperature gauge in the car said.

If you visit Nizanna you will be there for first light and it can be freezing for a good few hours after first light so warm clothes should be taken. In 2017 a group of German birders arrived in the bustard hide in Tee Shirts, Shorts and Sandal's expecting it to be like Eilat and within minutes all had retreated to their van to warm up. Not one got away with the shivers. Once it does warm up here though it really warms up.

This year/2019. It was hot to very hot with average temperatures in the low to mid 30's with the highs of around 40 degree's. This at times made birding uncomfortable and the hottest part of the day was sometimes spent in the room at Lotan with the Air Conditioning on. Morning and evening temperatures were much more pleasant. No rain was experienced but there was a tendency for stronger winds to pick up during the late afternoon.

Accommodations:

Eilat

As to be expected there are plenty of places to stay at in Eilat which range from the luxurious to the budget and searching around websites such as www.bookings.com will undoubtedly result in finding yourself something to fit your budget. I've previously stayed at the low cost Youth Hostel in Eilat <http://www.iyha.org.il/eng/Index.asp?ArticleID=67&CategoryID=81&Page=1> which is okay but can be a little noisy but other budget accommodations, us birders can be tight wads, can be found at the Motel Aviv (£57 per night), Sea Princess Motel (£64 per night), Little Princess Hostel (£49 per night), Fawltly Towers (£61 per night) as examples.

Kibbutz Lotan – Arava Valley

Located in the northern Arava, about 10 minutes north of Yotvata and about 45minutes north of Eilat this Kibbutz has generally had a lot to offer the visiting birder however on-site birding seems to have decline in recent years. Given what you get in each room it's not cheap but it can be pleasantly quiet and away from the hustle and bustle of Eilat. This is my preferred base as it allows easy access to more northly birding sites in the Arava, such as KM82, Yahel, Yotvata and Ovda Valley. The rooms here are very basic with poorly designed bathrooms, the shower curtain tends to hang outside of the shower area meaning the bathroom and nearby kitchen tends to get flooded in seconds unless you use your towel to block the bathroom door. Minor quibbles to stay in a quiet location. <http://kibbutzlotan.com/eco-tourism/?lang=en>

Kibbutz Kfar Ruppim, Beit She'an

Another basic level accommodation for the overall cost but the location is perfect for striking out into the local fishponds, olive groves and Mt. Gilboa areas. There is excellent birding within the grounds of the kibbutz itself, breeding Scops Owl, Great Spotted Cuckoos and Dead Sea Sparrows. The kibbutz has its own fishponds but if you go birding here late afternoon into the evening be mindful that the gates will close automatically just before dusk raising the risk of being shut in/out so make sure you've got the accommodations numbers so they can open the gate remotely if you do get locked in, as we did in 2016.

The rooms, as said, are basic but as its really just a place to sleep and charge batteries etc and food can be bought in nearby Bet She'an, such as McDonalds and several restaurants. So Kfar Ruppim is the perfect location to explore the fishponds nearby. <http://www.birdwatching.org.il/en/accommodation/> and **Google Earth co-ordinates to the Kfar Ruppim Kibbutz:** 32 27'27.17"N, 35 33'20.29"E

Kfar Szold, Hula Valley

In May 2018 Ian and I stayed and the very nice Kfar Szold located along Route 918 though most birders when visiting the Hula Valley tend to stay at Kfar Blum. Szold was/is a great place to base yourself when visiting the area however there was no availability there for my trip this year so I chose not Kfar Blum but the Rothschilds Galilee Hospitality located at Kibbutz Hagoshrim

Kfar Szold revisited for coverage of this guide: There are many plus points for this place which include plentiful habitat around the very nice accommodation bungalows, a very well stocked shop, petrol on site (if paying with credit card), very help lady at the office. I tracked down some vocal Scop's Owls to the large trees by the office where they were spotlighted well for a few minutes before leaving them to continue to call to one another. Really I can't fault this place and its well-placed for visiting Hula and Mt. Hermon. I booked through www.booking.com however they have their own website at <http://www.bakfar.co.il/country-lodging>

Websites

<http://www.birdwatching.org.il/accom212.asp>

http://www.zimmeril.com/site.asp?site_id=1509

Eating

Eilat

I didn't eat out in Eilat this year but there are several half decent places to grab something to eat, such as the Beatles Restaurant and Paddy's Irish Bar.

Yotvata

Apart from the **must have** Ice Cream at the Service Station/Rest Stop, I can recommend the New York Cheese Cake and Berry Sorbet especially, there is a good and varied selection of hot and cold foods available throughout the day plus lots of snacks and drinks available. It is a very good spot for a lunchtime break when up this end of the Arava Valley. The Ice cream here is about as good as you can possibly get. Note however it is closed Friday nights from around 6pm/just after dark.

Shizzafon Junction, Neot Semadar

There is a restaurant at the junction which is meant to be good but it's not much more than a snack shop where you can get one of a couple of limited sandwich options. Their biscuits were nice though. The garden is good spot for birding, there is a small pond, shaded areas for Bluethroats.

Service/Petrol Stations

Numerous service stations are scattered around the country and the main areas visited, some better than others, where you can get sandwiches, drinks and snacks. I also bought some Pot Noodle type things just in case I was out really late and Yotvata was closed, this happened once, on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

- Beit She'an / Kfar Ruppin – The best petrol station that I found is along Route 90 at 'Dor Alon' just to the west of Beit She'an.
- Eilat – The best petrol station if the 'green' one located on the right as heading south and a few hundred metres past the IRBCE turn off roundabout. Other Eilat petrol stations are okay but this one is the best.

Beit She'an

Whilst the town does have some restaurant's I have to say that I've not really explored these as I have always just gone for the McDonalds which is the easiest option when travelling from Kfar Ruppin take route 7079 off the route 71 where the road bends to the right. Carry on up the hill, past the first roundabout, and the McD's is there. However doing a quick search of this McD's it is showing as permanently closed so you may have to locate other eating options. Another potential quick eating place is the Mother Restaurant located along R6667. From the McD's roundabout take the R90 left, as if coming up the hill towards McD's. R6667 is a couple hundred metres on the right and the Mother Restaurant is located along here on the left. Google tends to give this place a high star rating so perhaps worthy of checking out.

Hula Valley

When staying at Kfar Szold there is a 'shopping' area at next to Hagoshrim, which is a 10minute drive from Kefar Szold. North from Kefar Szold to Route 99, left and then 5 minutes to the centre. This is primarily a food / restaurant area and petrol station. Food available ranges from traditional Falafel to McDonalds.

Other information

Shabbat

Most shops, restaurants and other eating places will be closed from sundown on Friday night till sundown on Saturday night which should be taken into account when trying to find somewhere to eat away from Eilat. Petrol Stations will generally be open however you will probably have to pay extra on petrol during this time.

Passover / Pesach

It is important to plan your trip well in advance if visiting around this time as vast majority of accommodation will be full and everywhere will be very very busy with lots of traffic, traffic jams, petrol station closures and prices a little higher than outside of this period but otherwise birding areas, other than North Beach, will be mostly unaffected. Outside of this time it is a little easier but again pre-booking accommodation would be advisable.

Holocaust Remembrance Day

"Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day", known locally in Israel as **Yom HaShoah** and is observed as Israel's commemoration and Memorial Day. It is held on the 27th April unless the 27th would be adjacent to Shabbat in which case the date is shifted by a day. As a result, I would recommend having some back up supplies at your base of accommodation as pretty much everywhere will be closed.

Birding Areas:

1. Mediterranean Coast

Note the Mediterranean Coast was not visited in 2019 with the below compiled from previous trip reports

Ma'agan Michael is a series of fishponds to the north of Tel Aviv and is worth of a couple of days of exploration, we had an evening and a morning which did at least give us a fair selection of birds. In the *Guide to the Birding Hotspots of Northern Israel* review page 16.

To reach Ma'agan Michael from Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv west on Route/Highway 1 to the Ganot Interchange and take Route/Highway 4 north to the Morasha Interchange and then take Route/Highway 5 west to the West Giliot Interchange and then north on Route/Highway 2. Stay on this highway to the Zichron Ya'akov Interchange. From here to access the ponds and towns you must come off and head east on road 70 to join road 4. Turn right at the traffic lights.

The first access point: **Mayan Zevi**, to the ponds is at the first obvious right turning, at the traffic lights. The poor track winds its way through a mini industrial estate and crosses the railway line and eventually over Highway 2 before snaking down to the ponds. If you turn right here the dirt track will pass several ponds worthy of checking out and will take you to the beach. If you turn left you will normally be able to pass through an open gate. There is a sign here saying that this is 'Private' and the gate is closed at 5pm. This gate is likely to be closed on Saturday's so you will have to explore the ponds to the right after crossing the bridge or enter by foot and walk around. The canal towards the end of the to the beach front can be good for species such as Citrine Wagtail.

Google Earth co-ordinates to the Mayan Zevi access point: 32 34' 43.35"N, 34 55' 19.20"E

The second access point: **Ma'agan Michael**, is clearly signposted along Road 4. You will need to turn right immediately after entering the Kibbutz gate and go past the cow sheds on the right. The tarmac road will bend to the left sharply and start passing fishponds here. There are lots of ponds here and the easiest access point, from the 2012 trip, was on the sharp left-hand bend. On this bend, when the gate is open, take the dirt track and then take the track to the left that runs parallel to the tarmac road on the other side of the pond. Access

Ma'agan Michael Fish Ponds – March 2012

to the ponds to the south can be made from here and best driven.

Alternatively drive to the end of the tarmac and park here and walk along the fishponds but note it will be a fair old jaunt out and the birds are much more approachable with a car.

Note that if you arrive 'on a Saturday' (Shabbat) the Kibbutz and fishpond gates will be closed and no entry other than on foot will be possible. The best ponds are a quite a walk from the gate so allow plenty of time if you are walking in.

Google Earth co-ordinates to the Ma'agan Michael access point: 32 33' 41.34"N, 34 55' 14.59"E

2. Hula Valley, Mt. Hermon and the Golan – Shirihai Northern Guide Page 37

Note the Valley, Mt. Hermon and the Golan was not visited in 2019 with the below compiled from previous trip reports

Agamon Hula

We visited outside of the main season for the Hula valley, which is winter, so we didn't see a huge amount here, we primarily stopped to give the place a look around to get familiar with it for future winter trips. The main centre is somewhat off putting, appearing as a large Cattle Shed or massive marquee where you can hire a Golf Cart or bike to get around the reserve. The cost for the first hour and half is 148ILS, approximately £30, which really steep, and then costs a further 30ILS, about £7, per half hour thereafter. The bikes were much cheaper. As we had limited time to get around in the evening we opted for the Golf Cart but still had to rush to get around. The first 'viewpoint' is quite a way and then on the north side there are several hides which we had flamingo's and Pelicans from as well as resident herons. One hide had a Bee-eater colony opposite which was nice and there were still plenty of Marbled Duck around. It's a bit too far to walk around, at about 9km, so in the future I may be hiring a bike though these looked a bit knackered and hard work. In winter it should shine with tens of thousands of wintering Cranes, with special Crane Bus to get out close to them, and other wetland birds as well as wintering Great Spotted Eagles. Winter IS THE time to visit.

The centre has a shop, drinks mall and toilet facilities and there is currently a new visitor centre being built. Opening Times are a bit random with weekends opening at 6:30am to dusk but from 8am to dusk on weekdays.

HaHula Nature Reserve

The original wetland Hula is not open until 8am and last admission is at 4pm, our first visit we couldn't park as we arrive at 4:08pm. No Golf Carts or Bikes needed here as there is pretty much only a couple of trails to use to view the marshes and main lake. As it's an SPNI reserve it's popular with school parties and coaches so either get here early or put up with more noise than a birder would generally like. Over-all it's an okay location and with nesting White-tailed Eagles in the tall trees to the west, we could see adults and the nest by scoping from the marsh path and from the tower hide. There is a charge to enter here which is a day use and not by the hour.

Sa'ar Falls / River Bridge

We met some visiting birders in Eilat who had been in the north first and had found singing Upchers Warbler at this site so we tried several times here but were unsuccessful in any of our attempts. We did see however plenty of Red-rumped Swallows nesting around the cliff and bridges. Park off the road by the road bridge and follow the short loop trail which takes you a little way down the falls. Pleasant enough walk but nothing significant other than our only Little Swifts of the trip. **Google Earth co-ordinates** 33.239650, 35.704123 for the falls at the junction of Routes 99 and 989

Mt. Hermon

Mt. Hermon entrance: The main gate to the road up to Mt. Hermon is located at Google Earth co-ordinates 33.266246, 35.758645. The gate does not open until 8am which is a little later than most birders would like however there are distractions if you are here early. About 150 metres back down the road on the scree behind what looks like a generator we found a pair of nesting Western Rock Nuthatch with at least one well grown young in attendance at the nest hole. These were located at **Google Earth co-ordinates** 33.266572, 35.760880. Above here was also our only Blue Rock Thrush of the trip.

The road up Mt. Hermon has a few obvious laybys but otherwise pulling off the road can be a little tricky. The largest layby at **Google Earth co-ordinates** 33.276712, 35.756650 has a pair of Rock Bunting nesting on the cliff opposite. The Lower Car park, parking lot 3 on the right as you head up hill, about half way along the road is worth a walk around as can have some good birding whilst at the Upper Car Park by the Cable Car entrance you will want to make your way to the 'drinking pools' at **Google Earth Co-ordinates** 33.311740, 35.769586. When you reach the main car park at the Ski Lift take the road to the left, passed the snow ploughs etc and ignore the road soon on the left. The pools will appear once you crest the hill. Park and walk around the area. Rock Nuthatches are meant to be commoner here in winter, as well as chances of Crimson-winged Finch and Red-fronted Serin, but as we were here in late spring we mustered Syrian Serin without any real issue.

Back along the road there are a couple of trails that are worth exploring. When coming up hill the first is at the sharp bend at **Google Earth Co-ordinates** 33.285053, 35.761948. You can park off the road and walk down the valley where Rock Buntings and Sombre Tits are common as well as plenty of Woodchat Shrikes. The second is at **Google Earth Co-ordinates** 33.287230, 35.753413. We parked 50yards further along in the lay by and walked the track towards the rocky outcrop with Sombre Tits, Woodchats and Eastern black Redstarts readily and easily seen.

Hermonit Mountain Reserve / Valley of Tears Route

South of Mt. Hermon, past Mas'ada is El Rum and opposite the kibbutz's main entrance is a tarmac road. Once onto this road the fields soon become wild and increase in breeding species. We stopped at **Google Earth Co-ordinates** 33.176875, 35.781552 and walked along the track for about a half a mile and found several singing Black-headed Buntings.

Further along the tarmac road there is a road that turns off the left and at **Google Earth co-ordinates** 33.173421, 35.796075 there is a narrow turn off to the left for the Valley of Tears. This road passes through undisturbed grassland habitat with many singing Black-headed Buntings, Corn Buntings and Woodchat Shrikes as well as several memorials to the Syrian / Israel conflict. As there are plenty of mine field signs this is probably why here area was so good for breeding birds.

El Rum

Back on the main Route 98 travel south past El Rum and turn left on Route 9799 and after several miles there is an expansive area on the left of mixed of grassland and tree's. We parked up one of the obvious tracks that lead south and walked out. It was pleasant birding here and we found an Upchers Warblers along commoner species.

Tel Shifon

The actual site has no name and is often used as a live firing range and Tel Shifon is actually the large hill to the south. This was our site for breeding Calandra Larks. From El rum continue south on Route 98 until you reach Route 91 on the right, signposted to Ortal. Continue along this road to **Google Earth co-ordinates** 33.066318, 35.756797 and turn off left onto a tarmac track. This track is a little bumpy and becomes more sealed dirt track as you head south. After several miles you will pass the plantations on the left and emerge into grassland habitat and at **Google Earth co-ordinates** 33.061436, 35.786368 you will see an old building riddled with bullet holes, used for target practice. There is a dirt track that leads off to the left short after this and about 150metres, at **Google Earth co-ordinates** 33.064772, 35.784096 are the Calandra Larks, no needs to continue in the direction of the obvious hill. We also had a mini raptor passage of Lesser Spotted Eagles, Griffon Vulture, Long-legged Buzzards plus storks and swifts. Listen out for Calandra Larks, they sound very much like Skylarks.

Lahavot Fish Ponds

Located at **Google Earth Co-ordinates** 33.143026, 35.639669. We stopped here as they were the most accessible fishponds, main access point off Route 918 opposite the entrance to the Kibbutz Lahavot. Not a lot going on here due to the time of here though plenty of Glossy Ibis and Wood Sandpipers. Again, in the right season, winter, these ponds will be at the peak.



Mt. Hermon, Lower Slopes – May 2018



Valley of Tears – May 2018



Agamon Hula – May 2018



HaHula Nature Reserve – May 2018



Sa'ar River Falls – May 2018



Tel Shifon – May 2018

3. Beit She'an Valley – Shirihi Northern Guide Page 79

Note the Valley was not visited in 2019 with the below compiled from previous trip reports

Kfar Ruppin

kibbutz has excellent birding within the grounds, Fishponds and around the Birdwatching Centre Office, where can provide information on where target birds are and the current best pools. The road up to the Kibbutz has a huge number of Black Kites roosting in the Date Palms and surrounding fields, at least 500 were seen in one field alone, impressive stuff.

Birding around the shaded and vegetated areas near the office of the Kibbutz as this will result in Syrian Woodpeckers, Hoopoes and Great Spotted Cuckoos whilst the evenings there are a fair few Scops Owls present, 1-2 have been seen close to the room and at the same large tree near the Swimming Pool on several visits. <http://www.birdwatching.org.il/en.asp>

The Fishponds at the southerly point of the Kibbutz grounds can hold various waders and gulls and a drive around will be needed to locate the current best drained pools. On a nicely drained pool in March 2016 we had a good selection of waders, including a fair number of Temminck's Stints, along with a stunning male Citrine Wagtail. A windy evening resulted in a flock of swifts being brought down low over the ponds that contained Common, Pallid, Alpine and Little Swifts. The Tamarisks around the ponds at the southern end should be investigated as seems to be a good site for Dead Sea Sparrows. These fishponds shouldn't be neglected even if you visit the ponds detailed further down the page.

To look for Black Francolin leave the Kibbutz via the main gate and travel north along the road for several hundred metres until you come to an obvious track on the right which cuts back around the date palms. Early morning along here can result in numerous Black Francolins in and I've seen several here at close quarters.

Google Earth co-ordinates to the Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz: 32 27'27.17"N, 35 33'20.29"E

Neve Eitan Fishponds – Shirihi Northern Guide Page 80

Located along Road 71 about 10 minutes from Kfar Ruppin and are adjacent to but not connected to the Ma'oz Fishponds. Directly opposite the entrance the Neve Eitan Kibbutz is a dirt track, easily passed by on the road. This dirt track, at **Google Earth co-ordinates:** 32 29'45.55"N, 35 32'00.65"E, will take you to the fishponds which you can drive around. However take note that gate can get locked in the evening so if you are inside when that happens you could be spending the night. Similarly just because the gate is open on a Friday or Saturday, Shabbat; doesn't mean it won't be locked an hour later. Shabbat being the Israeli weekend and the gate might just be open temporarily whilst a worker is checking on machinery. That said I've never had the gate closed on weekend days when I've been there, but just be mindful.

Birding these fishponds can be very rewarding and in winter through to March there can be large numbers of Armenian Gulls to which careful checking several Great Black-headed / Pallas's Gulls can be picked out. Large numbers of storks, pelicans and Kites are usually present, plus it's a good place to find wintering Great Spotted Eagles which lingering into April. During passage time most water birds will see an increase in numbers.

The ponds vary from fully drained and bird free, to partially drained and a bird magnetic to completely full and preferred by gulls and pelicans. There are some overgrown ponds with those with lots of Tamarisk being especially good for nesting Dead Sea

Sparrows, such as the one at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 32 30'16.6"N, 35 31'58.2"E**. Any little patch of seemingly nothing habitat can be bird magnets such as the corner of dead reeds in the pond at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 32 30'11.8"N, 35 31'49.4"E** which in March 2016 had 4 Little Crakes wandering around as well as a couple of Citrine Wagtails and Purple Herons. So check every, little patch of nothing habitat, it might just give you some rewarding birding. **30°11.8"N 35°31'49.4"E**

Kibbutz Ma'oz Haim Fishponds

These fishponds can be accessed at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 32 29'47.13"N, 35 32'36.84"E** and at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 32 29'46.34"N, 35 32'25.22"E**. The first of these has what appears to be an automatic gate which will close at a predefined time whilst the other, as of 2016, is a manual gate relying on someone to physically get out and close and lock it. As with Neve Etan make sure you do not get locked in, especially at Shabbat. These ponds vary in productivity for birds, sometimes they can be the best in the area and sometimes there are no drained pools and have limited birding appeal.

Ganne Huga – Not listed in Shirihai Northern Guide

On the northern end of the Neve Eitan Fish Ponds is Ganne Huga, a nice little turn out from the main road between Beit She'an and Kfar Ruppin, turn out clearly sign-posted at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 32 30'18.15"N, 32 30'18.15"E** Follow the track and there is an obvious covered shelter on the right where we stopped in 2016 and watched raptors, mostly many hundreds of Black Kites and dozens of both spotted eagle species, along with Cranes, Stork and so on. The scrub along the roadside can hold various migrants, such as in 2016 when there were Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, a stunning male *samamisicus* Redstart and other common species. Driving further along the track will take you through rolling hillside.

Tirat Zevi Fish Ponds – Shirihai Northern Guide Page 95

First access point directions: From Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz gate take the road on the left after about 100yards, note this corner can hold Dead Sea Sparrows, and follow to it turns sharply left the junction; the straight on road/track really don't go anywhere. Follow the track 'road' south, with the Olive Grove on your right, until the road turn sharply right, which you will take. Note along here Stone Curlew often get into the Olive Groves so check carefully as you drive past. When the Olive Grove runs out there is a turning on the left which takes you to the Birdwatching / Ringing Centre. This has never been in use when I've been here but birding the immediate area can produce in the early morning Quail, Dead Sea Sparrow and other migrants. There is a nearby hide overlooking a small pond where raptors have been known to come down to drink. Continue along the road to a T junction at a small reservoir at the edge of the Date Plantation. Turn right and then after 100-150yards turn left onto a poor track, going straight ahead will result in a dead end at some fields. The track you have taken will lead you to the fish ponds at **Google Earth co-ordinates 32 25'57.56"N, 35 32'42.08"E**. These ponds, as of 2016 at least, are NOT gated. From here you can explore the many ponds which range in size and could be split into Northern and Southern sections. Any of the smaller ponds can hold pipits, wagtails, smaller waders with some of the extensive reed beds singing Clamorous Reed Warblers.

The road that runs parallel to the border fence is good for species such as Chukar and seeing roosting Great Spotted Eagles.

Second access point directions: From Kfar Ruppin Kibbutz gate take the road on the right after about 100yards, note this corner can hold Dead Sea Sparrows, and follow to it turns sharply left at a junction. Follow this south with the Olive Grove on your right and the road turn sharply right. Note along here Stone Curlew often get into the grove so check carefully as you drive past. When the Olive Grove runs out there is a turning on the left which takes you to the Birdwatching / Ringing Centre. At this junction keep going straight and not left as if visiting the Birdwatching Centre. The tarmac track will take you through more open farmland habitat, usually pretty good for large numbers of Spanish Sparrows until it reaches the main R6678. Turn left on this road and head south towards the Tirat Zevi Kibbutz. Just before the entrance to the Kibbutz is a track, at **Google Earth co-ordinates 32.42'70.78"N, 35. 52'43.75"E** to the Tirat Zevi Reservoir and which will take you to the Sewage Works and Fish Ponds.

If you've not totally fish ponded out but visiting those at Neve Etan, Ma'oz, Tirat Zevi and Kfar Ruppin there are others in the area that could be worthy of exploration, these listed I have not personally visited but could be worth a little time.

Mesilot & Nir David Fish Ponds

Located along R6667 there are access points at the following Google Earth co-ordinates:

- Access Point 1: 32.498792, 35.476680
- Access Point 2: 32.499037, 35.464775
- Access Point 3: 32.499947, 35.463229
- Access Point 4: 32.507060, 35.460029

Beit Alfa Fish Ponds

Located along R669 there are access points at the following Google Earth co-ordinates:

Ponds to the East of R669

- Access Point 1: 32.515645, 35.439027
- Access Point 2: 32.522002, 35.436658

Ponds to the West of R669

- Access Point 3: 32.529821, 35.430680
- Access Point 4: 32.517823, 35.436063 – This seems to be the main route to the ponds to the west and seems to pass next to Bet Alfa Kibbutz before extending out across fields to the main ponds.

As I've not personally visited whether Mesilot, Nir David and Bet Alfa Fish Ponds I do not know if they are gated or not so would require some exploration.

Mount Gilboa – Shirihai Northern Guide Page 97

From Road 669, at the Petrol Station, take the road that heads up the mountain; look for a track on the left side of the road as detailed in Shirihai. We parked at the cross roads along this dirt track by the barns and walked up the track towards the cliffs and then took the track to the left where we found one singing Long-billed Pipit and raptor migration was occurring overhead with several Short-toed Eagles and Long-legged Buzzards.

Google Earth co-ordinates to the turn off for Mt. Gilboa: 32 30'41.98"N, 35 26'32.26"E

Google Earth co-ordinates to the dirt track to Long-billed Pipit site: 32 29'46.64"N, 35 26' 02.91"E

Google Earth co-ordinates to the Long-billed Pipit site: 32 29' 16.60"N, 35 25' 51.40"E



Mt. Gilboa – March 2012



Tirat Zvi Fish Ponds – March 2013



Kfar Ruppin – March 2013



Ganne Huga – March 2013

4. Dead Sea area

Note the Dead Sea was not visited in 2019 with the below compiled from previous trip reports

Nahal Dragot *Shirihai Southern Guide page 114*

Site of one of the few Bonelli's Eagle pairs to be nesting in Israel. Heading south along Highway 90 turn right immediately before the Military checkpoint head up the hill, many switchbacks, to where the tarmac runs out. You can either park here and walk or take your car further along the very bumpy and dusty road, you run the risk of car bottoming out and increased likelihood of damage to the cars underside so recommend walking to the viewpoint. Park just before the dusty track becomes nearly impassable to all by 4x4's and walk.

The Raptor watch point is opposite the Kibbutz further back along the tarmac section but we had better views of the raptors from a layby on a switchback further back down the road.

Google Earth co-ordinates to the dirt track to the Bonelli's Eagle Viewpoint: 31 35'24.52"N, 35 22' 51.93"E

Google Earth co-ordinates to the Bonelli's Eagle Viewpoint: 31 35' 07.02"N, 35 22'45.22"E

Wadi Mishmar *Shirihai Southern Guide page 121*

Clearly sign-posted on the right when heading south along Highway 90. This is a great desert wadi, especially for Sylvia warblers, notably Cyprus Warblers in winter and into early spring, and wheatears. It can be a tough wadi to bird and the ground is very stony, walking here can be tough, but if in the area it is worth visiting a few hours in the morning.

Wadi En Salvadori

If travelling north from the Ein Gedi Rest Stop look out for a small layby on the left between km250 and km251. There is a fairly large layby followed by a smaller one just before a left-hand bend indicated by the upright and a horizontal >>>> sign. There is a small blue signpost which will let you know you are in the right place.

Take the track up the hill for a couple hundred metres to where the Wadi appears and the path starts to go up through boulders. The curvature of the lower Wadi is where we looked for Sinai Rosefinch and Mountain/Striolated Buntings in the evening successfully locating both species in quick succession.

Approximate location of the Wadi Layby **Google Earth co-ordinates** 31.510243, 35.396368

Ein Gedi

Surprisingly not a site I've actually stopped at previously when visiting the Dead Sea region despite its historical importance and birding opportunities.

To be fair most of the Dead Sea specialties that one could get here I've actually seen at the other sites detailed above but it is known to be a great destination, still hard to get one's head around the fact that in 2017 it held a Pallas's Warbler, a Sibe in the desert. Since my first visit in 2012 the area around Ein Gedi has changed due to development of the road and the roadside stop for drinks and petrol is no longer there. Whether this has been relocated to one of the two main Ein Gedi sites I don't know.

There are two sites there is the Hostel and access to the Arugot Nature Reserve and the other further south at the Main Ein Gedi Kibbutz. It is the latter which is likely to be the better for birding.



Nahal Dragot – March 2012



The Dead Sea – March 2013



Wadi En Salvadori – March 2013



Wadi Mishmar – March 2012

5. The Judean Plans

LaHav Reserve – *Not listed in Shirihei Northern Guide*

This can be a stop off on the way to or from Tel Aviv and is about 15km north east of Be'er Sheva and only about 5km from highway 40 and can be good for Spectacled Warbler and Long-billed Pipit. This reserve has a semi alpine feel to it, rolling grassy hills with scattered bushes with plenty of singing Corn Buntings. In 2013 I located a couple of singing Spectacled Warblers along the right track shortly after the fork from the southern entrance. It must be said however that as there was a lot of sheep here we were flicking ticks off our clothing and legs by the dozen so we didn't linger too long.

Weblink to the site map: http://www.israbirding.com/israelbirdsforum/forum_entry.php?id=209

Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point: 31°23'17.22"N, 34°51'25.53"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for spot where found the singing males: 31°23'29.99"N, 34°51'45.03"E

Yeruham Lake – *Not listed in Shirihei Northern Guide*

Only 45minutes south of Mt. Amasa this can be an interesting stop but it should not be visited on either a Friday or Saturday as it can absolutely mobbed by visiting Israeli's. From a birding perspective it is perhaps the closest site to Eilat where one could get species such as Syrian Woodpecker and Purple Gallinule and the lakes and small reedbeds can hold some interesting breeding species.

2019 visit: This isn't a personal favourite site but I visited in the hope of picking up some flycatchers. I was half expecting it to be packed with people as it was still Passover but found it relatively people free. I did though find it full of Collared Flycatchers with anywhere between probably 20-25 being seen, probably a lot more went unseen. This flycatcher bonanza has brought up my expectation of Yeruham somewhat.

Google Earth co-ordinates for the lake: 30°59'20.16"N, 34°54'01.26"E

Mt. Amasa – *Not listed in Shirihei Northern Guide*

This site can be done on either the way from Tel Aviv Airport, which I tend to do as it's only about an hour and half drive, or from the Dead Sea, where a late afternoon onwards here can be rewarding. This site, located just to the North West of the town of Arad, is a personal favourite of mine which is a good interim stop on the way south from Tel Aviv and is a good location for higher elevation, low scrub and rocky area species, such as Spectacled Warbler, Rock Thrushes, Blue Rock Thrushes, Rock Sparrows, Isabelline Wheatears, Finch's Wheatears in winter etc and a few hours in this open habitat can be rewarding. The low bushes on the small hillside to the east side of the highway holds nesting Spectacled Warblers as well as passage Ruppell's Warblers in

March as well as display flight Isabelline Wheatears. Corn Buntings are everywhere here whilst the open hills can be good for, in season, Short-toed Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, White Storks, Montagu's Harriers and Quails heard.

Another good spot is on the north side below the main scree face where the extensive ruins here held singing Blue Rock Thrush and Black-eared Wheatears in March and looks likely to hold Rock Sparrows later in the season. Worthy of exploration here alone. Apposite the turn off to where you park / Access Point is a track that leads up the Wadi into an area of mixed low bushes and rock scree and likely to hold Spectacled Warblers, Rock Thrushes, Woodlarks, buntings and wheatears and would be worthy of spending time there.

2019 visit: Was the quietest I've seen Mt. Amasa. Very little bird activity with my effort concentrated on the west side of the road and up the wadi where I searched for Hill Sparrows, successfully. Wheatears were almost completely missing save for a very few Black-eared's but no Northern's or Isabellines this year. There was a small raptor passage that consisted of Lesser Spotted and Short-toed Eagles, Steppe Buzzards and Long-legged Buzzard but little else was noted.

Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point: 31°20'42.41"N, 35°07'17.30"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for Rock Sparrows: 31°20'37.46"N, 35°07'25.15"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for Spectacled Warblers: 31°20'29.55"N, 35°07'34.96"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for ruins and Blue Rock Thrush (possibly Rock Sparrows): 31°20'51.23"N, 35°07'28.11"E



Mt. Amasa – Late April 2019



LaHav Nature Reserve – March 2013

6. The Negev and Sde Boker area's

Note the Negev and Sde Boker areas were not visited in 2019 with the below compiled from previous trip reports

Nizzana *Shirihai Southern Guide page 127*

It is roughly a three-hour drive from Eilat and as you really need to be at the new Railway Boxcar 'hide at KM7 from 5:30am. From here a scope is really needed for McQueen's Bustard, in 2017 I had 4 birds together but sadly not displaying which happens a little earlier in the season but occasionally a few still uncoupled males will give the 'must see' display. On the opposite side of the road, about half a kilometre towards Ezuz, is perhaps the best spot for looking for Cream-coloured Courser, in 2017 I saw four stunning birds here.

The sewage ponds, *Shirihai Southern site guide page 128*, can often be very good, depending on how much vegetation has been either cleared or left uncleared and is the current best place to look for three species of sandgrouse. Make sure you are here no later than 9am as from here on the sandgrouse begin to appear. Co-ordinates to the entrance gate to the ponds is 30°53'29.49"N, 34°26'11.19"E. On passing through the gate there are a series of ponds of various degrees of water level and all worth checking for various waders etc. The pond for the sandgrouse is the one at the very far end, it is unvegetated and is one of the largest ponds. Using the car as a hide and taking 'careful' drives you can get quite close to the birds. Note that Black-bellied Sandgrouse are a little more jumpy than Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and a little more distance from the corner where they come in is needed. The Pin-tailed Sandgrouse tend to be more tolerant and giving closer views, such as in 2014 when many were just outside of the car window whilst Crowned Sandgrouse are the less common of the species present and occurrences can be more random. Just remember that numbers of sandgrouse vary each year.

It can be a little difficult to locate the ponds, especially as the road nearby has been resurfaced and the access tracks are a little tricky to locate however follow these directions and you should have no problem.

It is important to get here earlier and it's easy to waste time searching for the ponds so I have detailed the access here. Coming north along the Ezuz Road, after looking for the Bustards, turn right off the tarmac at the sharp left hand bend at 30°52'24.25"N, 34°26'07.86"E. Stay on this bumpy track past the collapsed bridge and turn left onto the tarmac at 30°52'58.26"N, 34°27'10.41"E Follow the tarmac until you reach the last cow sheds on the left, if you reach the end of the tarmac you've gone too far. Turn left after this cowshed, at co-ordinates 30°53'37.51"N, 34°26'29.78"E and then immediately right and follow the dusty track parallel to the road. At the telegraph post with the electrical transformer on it turn left and this dirt track will take you the entrance of the Sewage Ponds; be careful to not get stuck in the sand. This telegraph post is directly opposite sheds on the other side of the road which has 4 twin sets of silos. If you've reached the end of the tarmac don't try taking a short cut at any obvious tracks as this quickly runs into very soft sand and you will almost certainly get bogged down, as I nearly did after just 3 feet.

There is also the photo hide at Celia's Goat Cheese Farm in Ezuz. One can visit the farm to view the small pool that attracts desert species, most notably Crowned Sandgrouse whilst the photo hide gives eye level photo opportunities. Crowned Sandgrouse tend to appear at around 8:30am onwards. Visit <http://lonelybirder.com/en/item/gevinot-ezim-celias-goat-cheese-farm-2/> or <https://www.couchsurfing.com/people/azuz>. To book the hide contact Celia at cfriede5@gmail.com or by ringing 971-8-655-5889 or 54-465-5588. If in Israel, simply dial 08-655-5889 or 054-465-5588!

- **En Avdat National Park**

This National Park is primarily a gorge through the Negev Desert which has a water feature in terms of a natural spring. This spring results in a number of small pools and scattered bushes which can hold migrants. However I think this location is best due a pair of nesting Bonelli's Eagles, several pairs of nesting Griffon and Egyptian Vultures and Alpine Swifts and Crag and Pale Crag Martins. The area just below the booth where you need to pay to visit, around the top of the switch backs, often has one or two Mourning Wheatears present. As usual early morning is best and not just from a birding perspective as later in the morning it becomes a popular attraction for hordes of visitors.

- **Ben Gurion Grave Memorial Gardens**

There is a parking area at the top of the En Avdat National Park, where one can look out for vultures, and access the park grounds. There is a path that runs along the top of the cliff and back around into the well-watered and vegetated parkland and given this is one of the greenest areas for miles is a magnet for migrants and resident species alike. Walk past the toilet block and there are different options for birding this fine green space. Do expect the site to be very busy at weekends and especially during Passover holidays.

Google Earth co-ordinates for parking: 30°50'55.73"N, 34°46'45.29"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for the gardens: 30°50'54.93"N, 34°46'50.89"E

- **Ben Gurions Desert Home**

Another small area that is alongside the Sde Boker Kibbutz and has plenty of green with significant number of trees. From the main Route 40 road turn off to the petrol station at **Google Earth co-ordinates** 30°87'44.00"N, 34°78'72.26"E. Continue past the petrol station and turn left to the parking lot for the Desert Home. Walk from here.

Back tracking to the petrol station there is a short dirt track that heads towards the Olive Groves. At the end of this, under the tree's, is/was a small pool which seems to attract migrants to its countless flies. I do not know if this pool is permanent or if it just appears as a result of local works but the tress would indicate it is somewhat regular. Exploring here and the Olive Grove can yield a few remaining winter visitors into late March with species such as Blackbird, Song Thrush and Robins being seen.

- **Sde Boker Kibbutz and Fields**

This isn't a site I've done very often but the extensive grounds of the kibbutz are good for migrants and wintering species with good stands of mature trees, football pitches and Olive Groves so diverse birding should be possible. Back along the kibbutz entrance road on the left-hand side, as you approach the Kibbutz, is a tarmac track that leads to what appears to be a small cemetery on a hill but more interestingly to some fields, which can be driven around carefully. These field can result in sandgrouse and Desert Finch.

To the south of the Petrol Station are the Kibbutz's Southern Fields and these can be driven around with care, more soft sand, in search of Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Desert Finch and Trumpeter Finch. There are a couple of small reservoirs here which I believe attract small numbers of the sandgrouse. Finding the access points to these fields from the main round is not easy as there doesn't appear to be an obvious agricultural access track so it may take a bit of trial and error to find one that works however there does appear to be an access at Google Earth co-ordinate 30°87'05.20"N, 34°78'18.28"E



Ben Gurion's Memorial Gardens, Sde Boker – Late April 2016



En Avdat National Park – Late April 2016

7. North of Shizzafon Junction to Mitzpe Ramon

Nehalim Gedolim Nature Reserve / Wadi Zihor – Not listed in Shirihi guide

This small site can be visited on the way to or back from HaMeishar Plains (below). Parking is by a largish Acacia where one would then walk up the Wadi. There is a sign by this Acacia indicating this is a firing range whilst further along this Wadi is another sign indicates that this is a reserve. Probably best visited on a Friday or Saturday, as permission to enter firing zones is permitted but given the location and previous visits I don't think there would be an issue at other times. This is a nicely vegetated Wadi in an otherwise in hospital landscape thus attracts migrants; I have recorded Ruppell's Warblers here amongst Eastern Bonelli's and Olivaceous Warblers as well as resident desert species.

If travelling from the direction of Eilat the Wadi is on the left 2km from the Routes 40/13 Junction so if at Uvda Valley only about 20mins further up the road. **Google Earth co-ordinates** 30 16' 47.41"N, 34 59' 59.56" E

HaMeishar Plains *Shirihai Southern Guide page 85*

This is an often a good winter and mid spring site which usually has Temminck's Larks and Desert Warblers but it can also be very quiet so a little luck and perseverance is needed. This site has lots of very low shrub, almost so low that one would think it birdless but these patches are the places to look for the aforementioned species. Access is best on Fridays and Saturdays, early morning, as this is a Military Firing Zone and on these days there is access to go birding. Park by the not so obvious monument at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 30°25'33.74"N, 34°56'30.03"E** and bird the low scrub and plains here for about 200-300metres out.

Nearby and back down the road a turning on the right, as if heading back in the direction of Eilat, will take you another similar habitat zone at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 30°24'21.43"N, 34°56'06.06"E**. Again weekends (Friday/Saturday) are best as you are otherwise likely to encounter a visit by the Army.

2019 Visit: An evening visit on a very warm but pleasant conditions resulted in the target Hill Sparrows, Bar-tailed Desert Larks, Short-toed Larks and Temminck's Larks. Due to the time of year the site was past its best, the best time for a visit for the listed target species is March to early April, it certainly was this year.

Wadi Nekarot and Yelek Spring

This wadi, located at **Google Earth co-ordinates: 30°34'02.4"N, 34°54'20.2"E**, often has lingering Sinai Rosefinch into mid-March as well as Trumpeter Finch and early passage sylvia's, with perhaps wintering Desert Warbler. Bird the area to the east of the bridge for around 100-300metres. Yelek Spring **Google Earth co-ordinates: 30°33'29.6"N, 34°54'20.2"E** just to the south can also be good for Sinai Rosefinch in season (winter and early spring) as well as a few other desert specialties



HaMeishar Plains – May 2019



The Monument, HaMeishar Plains – May 2019

8. Eilat and Lower Arava Valley

Ofira Park – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 33*

A personal favourite park in 2012 due to the volume of migrants here but subsequent visits have been less successful, probably due to its over development and tidying up of the park and increased numbers of homeless people, at least in 2016, in the sheltered scrubby areas. However still worth a visit as it can produce a few good birds.

Early morning is best when the watered lawns can be dripping with Cretzschmars Buntings, Red-throated Pipits, Spanish Sparrows and Yellow Wagtails of numerous forms. Around the park the trees and scrub held a diverse list of species with Masked and Woodchat Shrikes, Quails, Pied and Black-eared Wheatears, Common and Eastern Redstarts, Eastern Bonelli's Warblers, various Sylvia Warblers including Ruppell's and so on. Great mornings have been spent here.

Not visited in 2019.

Central / IMAX Park - *Not listed in Shirihai Northern Guide*

The other side of the airport near the IMAX this park has largely taken over from the once better of the two Ofira Park. It is a typical park of open lawns, flowerbeds, trees and scrubby habitat which makes it so attractive to migrants and each visit has shown different species to be present. Common species can be found, such as Wrynecks, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler and so on by the larger trees at the far end of the park looked like they could hold a good flycatcher; indeed both Collared and Semicollared Flycatchers have been seen by other birders here during my previous trips. A not to be ignored site in the middle of Eilat. Parking can be found at **Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point: 29°33'09.44"N, 34°57'07.84"E**

2019 visit: Only done the once where a few interesting species were noted, most notably Collard Flycatcher. For the first time ever I received a parking ticket in the car park as detailed at the co-ordinate above so for 'free' parking I have listed new co-ordinates here **Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point: 29.553333, 34.953470**. Park in the dirt car park accessed off Gan Binyamin Street.

Canada Park - *Not listed in Shirihai Northern Guide*

This park is probably best visited early morning as it can be popular with the public, there is an infants school on the southern side so be mindful of walking in that area with Bins and Cameras. The park has plenty of trees and bushy areas and is best approach from the west end. On the northern side at the top of the park is a bottlebrush lined path and across the park from here, by the kindergarten is a scrubby area that held most of the migrants. The park goes downhill and worth working the entire length. There are Scops Owls in here, can be heard at night apparently. In 2017 I didn't find anything here outrageous but it is prime Sylvia and flycatcher habitat and quickly became a favourite site and was stopped at regularly when I came down from the mountains as its not far from the main R12 junction.

To reach the park take the Eilat bypass north and it's the last turning on the left before you reach Route 12 Eilat Mountains Turnoff / Roundabout. It's the turning that has what looks like an outdoor gym. Canada Park / Gardens can be found immediately past this. Park where there are no red/white markings at the kerbside. There are several access points on both sides of the park but best to come in at the main entrance at the top.

2019 visit: visited a couple of times where the usual suspects for the time of year were found but also included Collared Flycatchers. This is a favourite park of mine in Eilat. Top entrance can be found at **Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point:** 29°33'25.77"N, 34°55'5.77"E

Park Shahmon - Not listed in Shirihai Northern Guide

This is a new park for me and came onto my radar when a Brown Shrike was found here in March 2019. It is a long park with tall flycatcher loving tree's and located at **Google Earth co-ordinates:** 29.5450273,34.9323919. The park is crossed by several roads with a wider portion at the lower end. Definitely worth visiting when there are migrants in town.

As it is a 'long park' I would walk in from one end and then reverse the walk. Free roadside parking that I used was located at **Google Earth Co-ordinates:** 29.546745,34.9320561 on road Derech Harim.

Corner Park - Not listed in Shirihai Northern Guide

I had often seen this group of tree's when coming down from the Eilat Mountains but it wasn't until Frank Moffatt visited there in 2019 that I made my visit. His findings were interesting and the park, if you can even call it a park, was great. Collection of warbler and flycatcher attracting trees and low bushes for robins. A worthwhile stop. It hasn't got an official name so currently called 'Corner Park' or Derech Harim Park. Free parking can be found along road Derech Harim next to the park. The park is located at **Google Earth Co-ordinates:** 29.552971, 34.929599

Holland Park - Not listed in Shirihai Northern Guide

Located on the north side of town there are a couple of ways to reach it. Coming from Eilat on R90 going north: at the 'to North Beach Roundabout head west (left) up the hill towards the mountains on the Eilat bypass and Holland Park is located on the right after less than quarter of a mile. The entrance indicated by a lay-by and stone wall.

This park is an arid Wadi with Acacia and scrubland bushes can be excellent for Sylvia warblers and other dry country species and is certainly best worked earlier in the morning and late afternoon/early evening when temperatures are comfortable. I've had stunning birding here over the years with many Ruppell's, Eastern Orphean and Subalpine Warblers, Wrynecks, Eastern Olivaceous and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers and Cretzschmars Buntings.

Look for the large 'Magic' Sylvia attracting bushes midway up the Wadi on the right side, spiky and with small yellow and pink flowers. There is another, and probably the best one, at the top end of the wadi which in March 2017 was covered in Ruppell's and Eastern Orphean Warblers.

This particular warbler wonder bush is identified by the large boulder next to it. Oddly despite probably being the best of the three obvious spiky warbler bushes in this side of the wadi I never seen any other birders watching it, only the ones closer to the road. It is worth the walk all the way up the wadi taking in the 'spur's on the sides as many of the birds preferred these areas. From the parking area there is also the southern part of the wadi which run parallel for a while with the road but soon gets away and quieter. It is possible to walk to the tip, turn right and walk for about 100-150 metres to the top of the main part of the wadi and walk back down. Parking is limited **Google Earth co-ordinates for Access point:** 29°34'18.80"N, 34°57'35.29"E



Magic Bush, Holland Park 2017

These bushes, called Karira Caper (*Capparis decidua*), are Sylvia warbler magnets: there are three obvious bushes in Holland Park; two on the north (right) side of the wadi as you walk up and one nearly as far as you can go up the wadi (the one pictured). These bushes are covered in small pollen rich flowers which can coat the foreheads of feeding warblers. These bushes held around ten or so Ruppell's Warblers each in March 2017.

2019 visit: Only visited once this year and that was when few migrants were around in the Arava and this was reflected in the near emptiness of the park. It is a prime site when conditions are good and should never be over-looked.

North Beach – Shirihai Southern Guide page 25

In March can be a place where birders gather to see what moves up the Red Sea with species like Garganey in numbers, the odd Brown Booby and regular White-eyed Gulls, especially in the morning and evenings as they move back and forth to Jordan. Striated and Western Reef Herons can be found in the mouth of the canal and occasionally Greater Sandplovers can be found along the shoreline whilst the beach is perhaps the most regular site in Eilat to see Pied Kingfisher. Later in the spring, April through May, skuas become more regular and White-cheeked Terns can be found on the offshore Buoys whilst Sooty Shearwaters can be surprisingly regular but recently more pelagic species such as Wilsons and Swinhoe's Petrels have been found offshore and it is conceivable that species these could be scoped from the beach.

However make sure you visit during the week and avoid Shabbat as it can be unbearably crowded by Israeli's making the most of their weekend. **Google Earth co-ordinates for viewing the sea and meeting other birders in morning and evenings:** 29°32'44.76"N, 34°58'14.71"E.

Just inland of the beach at **Google Earth co-ordinates** 29.546221, 34.976008 is, at least in 2019, a new flooded area which attracted lots of waders. Don't get too close to the Army Base and scope from a distance. It would seem likely this is just a temporary water / wader feature and will dry out over the course of the summer but hopefully it will be a new site for the future.

2019 visit: Busy with people at the beach this year but an early morning visit did result in a Sooty Shearwater, 5 Arctic Skuas, a few White-eyed Gulls (in the Jordanian side) and terns. The flooded area just inland by the Army base was a wader hot spot and held amongst the usual species numerous Broad-billed Sandpipers. If still present in future years it should be on the radar for birders.

South Beach – *Not listed in Shirihai Southern Guide*

A regular site in the morning for the increasingly difficult to come by Striated Heron is the pontoon at **Dolphin Reef**. There is a car park for the centre but generally be here early to ensure seeing the birds. That being said in 2017 I saw one at around 1pm on one of the small structures along with a few roosting White-eyed, Armenian and Heuglin's Gulls whilst the area just inside the fence next to the Dolphin Reef centre had a few migrants with the best being a male Collared Flycatcher. The roundabout should also be given a quick look at as it is a water feature and had a Little Bittern in it for a week. Parking at **Google Earth co-ordinates for parking: 29°31'33.24"N, 34°56'05.66"E**

Additionally the ground / bushes of the **Club Inn**, also known as **Bushes of Liebzi**, can hold migrants and had a Black bush Robin and all three Black-and-white Flycatchers in March 2018 so proving anywhere can result in birds.

Elot Date Palms – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 34*

Located between the IBRCE and North Beach this shady area with wide tracks is not the birding hotspot it once was. This is perhaps due to there being Donkey's present which have eaten all of the understory cover thus no habitat for passage migrants. However if there is a good fall of warblers, chats and/or flycatchers it may still be worth a visit, as in March 2012 when Pied Wheatears, many Black-eared and Northern Wheatears, Eastern Redstarts, Eastern Bonelli's Warblers, Hoopoes, Wryneck, Semicollared Flycatcher and Woodchat Shrikes were all readily available. Best in the morning but cooler evenings are also good times to visit.

International Birding & Research Centre (IBRCE) and Saltpans – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 37 & 34*

This can be reached from North Beach by following signs along the canal and past the southern Elot Date Palms and from Route 40 down towards to the Jordanian Border Crossing, turn right before the checkpoint and follow signs to the reserve.

This small reserve is probably best visited early morning and has a freshwater lake, scrubland and saltpans nearby which can be driven around thus providing a variety of species. There is also a hide overlooking one of the pans and a ringing station. The scrubland can be excellent for migrants and regularly holds passage warblers, redstarts and flycatchers whilst the hides along the edge of Lake can hold Penduline Tits, Savi's Warblers, Little and Baillon's Crakes and Bluethroats amongst the various species.

It can easily be combined with the often excellent south Elot Date Palms as a walking route, which should produce many more birds around the greenhouses.

2019 visit: Work is underway to improve the ringing centre with new lake, access, and hides and there's already a new walking trail at the northern end of the reserve is accessed via the information centre by walking along the raised embankment along the canal. Steps at the northern end will take you down and then through the scrub which will be good for birding. My visit this year saw the usual birds at the lake though no crakes as these had all gone through, save for a Corncrake. The highlight was the Levant Sparrowhawk passage on several days where thousands of birds passed very low over the reserve. My position at the northern end near the new steps allowed for near eye level views and allowed for great photographic opportunities. The date palms just to north have been the home of up to 12 Crested Honey Buzzards this year and I saw several from my Sparrowhawk watching advantage point. The Salt Pans were also very birdy with Broad-billed Sandpipers and Red-necked Phalaropes amongst the usual species.

KM19 Sewage Ponds – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 53*

Located near the large cowsheds only one pool has water in it. The fence has been pushed down in several places so access is possible. The northeast pool has water in it and is where the Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse come into drink at dusk.

To view the sandgrouse sit down, standing on the embankment will result in a sandgrouse no show, at the corner by the obvious sluice with your back towards the border fence and not directly above the sluice itself and wait for the birds to fly in, it will be close to nearly fully dark when the birds arrive to make sure you arrive half an hour to 40minutes early to avoid disturbance to both the birds and other birders, there's nothing more annoying to birders than to be waiting patiently only to have late comers arrive and prevent the birds from flying in. **Google Earth co-ordinates for parking: 29°36'33.07"N, 34°59'34.19"E**

Birding here at other times of day can result in a variety of wetland birds and always worth a visit though the reedbed around the edges are now making it difficult for smaller waders, though seems there is periodic clearance of the reeds, for better or worse, but it doesn't take long for the reeds to grow back.

Wildfowl wise there are often Egyptian Geese, Pintail, Shoveler, Teal and Garganey whilst reed edges can result in crakes and scarcer warbler. Where the sluice water runs into the main lagoon there is a large gathering of writhing fish and this is the spot where some exceptional views of two Little Crakes were had in 2017 along with a showing Savi's Warbler and many Sedge Warblers. A Spotted Crake and Paddyfield Warbler had been seen by others here also during the week.

2019 visit: Very birding this year with the outfall into the pool attracted many herons with Little and Great Bitterns being the stars. Over the week the water levels fell a lot and the rapidly expanding muddy edges was an increasingly attractive to waders with most common species present in good numbers whilst pipits and wagtails were often present whilst a couple of Corncrakes were seen one evening feeding on the fringes. A great site this year.

KM19 Canal

Once an extremely productive 'occasionally' water filled area between the sewage ponds and the southern end of the Saltpans. The muddy fringes held several wader species and when water is present a regular site for Honey Buzzards to come down to drink, especially on extremely hot days. However it now seems to be mostly dry but the bushes are likely to hold migrants. Best approached from the southern end of the Salt Pans. **Not visited in 2019.**

KM20 Salt Pans / Northern Reservoirs – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 49*

These large salt pans are the best 'wetland' site in the southern Arava and the raised embankments can be driven around and can produce some good birding. Each year the water levels vary and some regular corners can show various amount of muddy fringes where there can be concentration of waders, gulls, terns and wagtails but in general the majority of the pans can be productive. Obviously mornings and evenings are best. Mornings show what has arrived overnight whilst the evening can reveal migration in action as birds head north up the valley; I've witnessed flocks of Purple Herons, Glossy Ibises, Gull-billed Terns, pratincoles, eagles, buzzards and bee-eaters on the move.

For waders views can often be very close and some special encounters can be had of Caspian and White-tailed Plovers, Collared Pratincoles, Broad-billed Sandpipers and the odd rarity. Non-waders that show well include various wagtails, Red-throated and Water Pipits, even Eastern Bonelli's Warblers whilst views of drinking Honey Buzzards in early May can be amazing. The scrub behind the raised shade / Flamingo watch-point is also a good spot to bird early morning when migrants are in town. This site is one of the best in the southern Arava.

2019 visit: This year it had been noticed by a lot of birders that the pans held very few waders and there were a few theories as to why with suggestions of water dilution affecting fly larvae, water treatments had changed and several others. My visit would reflect the lower than usual wader presence but on occasion numbers would go up with newly arrived migrant waders. Best of the bunch here were the larger than usual number of passage Broad-billed Sandpipers and my peak day count was 19 though I believe a local birder has something in the low thirties. The other feature was the Honey Buzzards that came down to drink from late morning with a lot putting on displays at close range, stunning.

Note: This major birding site in the southern Arava seems to be constantly under threat with a Wind Farm touted for here a few years ago and now, from speaking with Noam Weiss recently, a new risk comes from other developments for possibly residential or building work for the site. This is being opposed. If it is successful this significant location for waders, wildfowl, flamingo's and other wetland species will be history with only the Salt Pans at the IBRCE further to the south being available. The loss of this location would be a major blow to migrant birds.

KM20 Date Palms – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 49 & 51*

If travelling north from Eilat on the old tarmac road take a right just past the first date palms on the right. Park near the junction here and bird these palm groves. The plantations are private but the northern ones can be readily birded from the tracks whilst those to the south of the Salt pans track have been 'screened off' so you can't see in there.

On the left side of the track to the Salt pans by the junction are more date palms and by walking north along the west fence along the dirt track the fence disappears, either broken down, fallen into disrepair or removed, which means you can walk into the palm grove here. However still be mindful that they are private and you may be asked to leave by any workers present. This site has yielded Silverbill in the past. On the other side of the tarmac track, towards Route 40, is a small clump of scrub and can also be productive and should be checked whilst here.

Highway 90 roadside copses

There are several small isolated stands of small trees and bushes along the roadside, northbound, that are worthy of investigation.

KM20 – By the Salt pans turn off Co-ordinates 29°37'37.91"N, 34°59'17.74"E

KM23 – By the Doum Palms turn off Co-ordinates 29°39'01.39"N, 34°59'28.06"E

KM26 – Before the En Avrona turn off, by the two red and white masts. Co-ordinates 29°40'33.93"N, 34°59'26.66"E

Eilat Mountains / Raptor Viewpoints – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 40*

Raptor passage can be variable through the mountains and can often be dependent on wind direction and strength, especially so for the honey Buzzard migration.

In March the species make up is mostly Steppe Buzzards with some tens of thousands seen on good days along with variable numbers of Steppe Eagles, Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Black Kites, Egyptian and Griffon Vultures and Pallid Harriers. Most of Steppe Eagles pass through in the latter part of February and early March but even by mid-March numbers can still reach a respectable 35-40 on good days, such as in 2017. Other soaring birds can move with the raptors such as Black and White Storks and Common Cranes. A good morning here will be extremely rewarding.

Also along the main road at KM34, or just north of, and KM44 are a couple of interesting looking wadi's. As there is pretty much no other vegetation in the area these would surely be a migrant magnet and worthy of exploration.

2019 visit: Despite most of larger raptors, i.e. Eagles, having already passed through the mountains were excellent in several days for Levants Sparrowhawks and Honey Buzzards with the required wind being in the North or just west of North. My personal highlights were day counts of Levants (5,500-6,000) and Honey Buzzard (10,500-12,000, 23,000 and 93,000). Mixed into these days were Steppe Buzzards, Lesser Spotted Eagles, Montagu's Harriers, Black Kites, Booted Eagles, Kestrels, Bee-eaters and Black Storks. The 93K day was part of a probable 200K day in southern Arava with many not seen by me going over Eilat.

Google Earth co-ordinates for upper viewpoint: 29°35'08.37"N, 34°53'15.16"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for middle viewpoint: 29°34'40.16"N, 34°53'18.44"E / 29°34'55.17"N, 34°53'11.07"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for middle roadside viewpoint: 29°34'35.90"N, 34°53'11.47"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for lower roadside viewpoint: 29°34'14.13"N, 34°53'31.24"E

Mt. Yoash Raptor Viewpoint – *Shirihai Southern Guide page 40*

The view from the top of Mt. Yoash across the mountains south across the Sinai is pretty impressive and when the wind is the right direction may thousands of raptors can be seen spiralling across the vast wilderness. The track to the summit is in various states of repair from rough dirt track to patchy tarmac and with some wicked switch backs so getting up and down can be fun, or not depending on your point of view.

Se'ifim Plain – *Not listed in Shirihai Southern Guide but there is a location on the map at the end of this report*

Despite being close to Eilat this location has only recently come onto birders radars. It's about 10km or so past the Eilat Mountain raptor watch point along route 12 heading north along the Egyptian Border. Shortly after passing the sign on the right to Red Canyon there will be a sign, also on the right, to Se'ifim plain. Take the dirt track all the way to the end and either park under the solitary tree or drive along the track further north to where Hoopoe Larks are sometimes present. Winter and early spring is likely to be the best time for here as it's a prime location for larks. This area is extensive and best birded first thing in the morning.

Winter and early spring is likely to be the best time for here as it's a prime location for larks with Bimaculated, Bar-tailed Desert, Desert, Crested, Short-toed, Temminck's Horned Lark whilst scarcer species such as Dunn's Lark and Thick-billed Larks have been recorded here. Other species often recorded here include Cream-coloured Coursers, Rock Thrush, the three Black-and-white Wheatears as well as Desert Wheatears.

2019 visit: Very quiet, no wheatears seen so only brief visits were made.

Google Earth co-ordinates for the turn off for Se'ifim Plain: 29°69'38.90"N, 34°85'82.07"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for the Isolated Acacia Tree: 29°69'53.41"N, 34°86'79.66"E



Ofira Park, Eilat – March 2012



Central / IMAX Park, Eilat – March 2012



Park Canada, Eilat – May 2019



Park Shahmon, Eilat – May 2019



Holland Park, Eilat – March 2017



IBRCE, Anita Lake, Eilat – Late April 2018



Cemetery, Eilat – May 2019



Date Palms, Eilat – March 2012



KM20 Salt Pans – March 2017



KM19 Sewage Pond – May 2014



The Eilat Mountains looking south across the Sinai from the summit of Mt. Yoash May 2016



North Beach, Eilat – March 2017



Se'ifim Plains – March 2016

9. Arava Valley

Elifaz *Not listed in Shirihai Southern Guide but see map at end of this report.*

Currently unsure about actually accessing the kibbutz for birding but the date palms on the east side of the main highway and a little to the south have been visited a couple of times. Pretty much the same as other Date Palms in the Arava but has a little more vegetation around the bases of the palms thus providing a little more cover for migrants. Towards the South East corner of the plantation are the 'turf' fields. Presumably this is where grass is needed for Eilat and grown here. Visits have resulted in plenty of wagtails and pipits, also on the nearby Muck Heap and this site has held Caspian Plovers in the past.

Further to the south, still on the east side of the highway are the Elifaz Reservoirs. These can be seen clearly from the road as raised bodies of water and there is a track that leads to these. The reservoirs are largely barren with no surrounding wetland vegetation but the water does occasionally attract waterfowl and can be a worthwhile short stop. The desert to the south and surrounding area is also worth looking at as Bar-tailed Desert and Hoopoe Larks have been found here.

Kibbutz Samar *Not listed in Shirihai Southern Guide but see map at end of this report.*

This is a great kibbutz and currently better than Lotan for birding, probably due to the amount of vegetated understory. When you go through the main gate keep right and at the roundabout park at the far end, there is space for a number of cars. From here just wander. There is a lot of vegetation with great weedy areas, mature trees, football pitch and as a result the site holds lots of

migrants. The Olive grove on the south side was also productive and worth a walk but south of this it becomes more of a junk yard but after that there are cowsheds, probably best to drive to these, with several muck heaps, check for rare plovers. This was one of my favourite sites during my 2017 trip and I made several visits towards the end of that trip when migrants were arriving and I found Collared Flycatcher here.

2019 visit: A couple of visits resulted in the breeding Black Scrub Robins at the 'Jungle', Collared Flycatchers, Redstarts, Thrush Nightingales and Bee-eaters though it was generally quieter than usual but this was reflected at other Arava locations. Still my favourite birding kibbutz.

Google Earth co-ordinates for the Olive Grove: 29°49'54.43"N, 35°01'22.71"E

Yotvata *Shirihai Southern Guide page 57*

Located 30minutes north of Eilat the fields around this site is a Lark, Pipit, Wheatear and raptor haven. There two 'circular fields', the North and the South. Both vary from year to year as to their level of 'green but one or the other will be managed for crops and whatever is the current one will undoubtedly hold the majority of the birds. These can be huge flocks of Spanish Sparrows along with many Cretzschmars and Ortolan Buntings whilst the dense crops can often ring in the evening to the song of Quail and Savi's Warblers but also as roosts for buzzards and harriers. Even the currently not used field can be productive with the weedy areas holding pipits and larks.

The field complex to the north, the Melon and Onion Fields, can be excellent and the tracks around them drivable but this should be done with care as the sandy tracks can catch some drivers unaware and one become stuck in the sand all too easily. The fields can hold chats, pipits, wheatears as well as Stone Curlews, more easily found during night drives, shrikes and roosting raptors. The entire complex is worthy of repeated visitation.

To the south of the main service station / Visitor Centre are the sewage ponds which up until 2016 were accessible but in 2017 the gates were being locked, though viewing from outside of the fence is still easy enough and can result in good numbers of waders and wagtails. These gates were open again though in 2018. I used to be able to park the car right on the edge of the muddy 'slop' and photograph the Squacco Herons, waders, wagtails, pipits and various other species at very close range so seems a shame that this is no longer possible.

There's a track around the edge of the sewage pools to a reed fringed pond which when there is water present can be excellent for typical reedbed species but when or if even it is wet various from year to year but when it is it is often full of song

2019 visit: the Yotvata Sewage Ponds were still active and held a variety of wetland species but have been greatly reduced in terms of favourable habitat for waders. Work ongoing next to the pools is likely to see these be decommissioned in a few years time. The fields were very poor and after a few near bird-less visits I stopped going. Apparently were a lot better in the spring, March, where more passerines were present.

Quetura / Ketura Sewage Ponds *Shirihai Southern Guide page 83*

Accessed from the track opposite the southern end of the Quetura / Ktura Kibbutz these small set of sewage ponds are only 5 minutes south of Lotan and less than 10minutes north of Yotvata. The ponds vary in water levels each year with various degree of reed vegetation around the edges, though most of this had been removed in 2017, but reed grows back quickly. Most views are from raised embankments around the edges but there is an opening in the fence on the side which remains to be seen whether this will be fixed. These often-excellent pools are always worth a stop and the bushes to the southeast can hold numerous migrants.

2019 visit: Visited several times as held a few good birds despite being quiet. Best seen here were a flock of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, a female Citrine Wagtail and a few scattered waders though the muddy edges looking prime for a crane. Honey Buzzards had been seen coming here to drink. **Google Earth co-ordinates for the pools:** 29°57'50.46"N, 35°03'52.34"E

Kibbutz Lotan *Shirihai Southern Guide page 71*

It's a green oasis in the northern Arava which varies on how good it is for birds, 2012 was superb, 2016 and 2017 were extremely quiet with stunning male Collared Flycatchers in both years amongst the best birds.

The kibbutz has a variety of habitats from the Organic Garden, the main kibbutz living area, the area around the Football pitch and swimming pool whilst the sewage ponds seemed to have dried out complete a few years ago which is a shame as it was once extremely good for pipits, wagtails, Bluethroats, and smaller waders. It is always worth checking at the visitor centre around the current situation of the pools and the nature reserve. Lotan has become fairly reliable in recent years though for Black Bush Robin and the Organic Garden area is perhaps the best place to search.

Just to the north of Lotan are the **Lotan Fields**. Take the right off Route 90 at **Google Earth co-ordinates:** 30°00'20.59"N, 35°05'11.14"E and take the tarmac track towards the Jordan border. There are some tanks, probably for irrigation at **Google Earth co-ordinates:** 30°00'00.91"N, 35°06'26.94"E which could be a good place to park up and walk around the fields. The area looks good for Lark, Pipits, Wagtails and could possibly hold Caspian Plover. Careful beyond these tanks as it rapidly becomes soft sand and a car may get stuck. Also could be a good place to reach out to the sand dunes along the border to search for Hoopoe Lark.

2019 visit: Birding here was variable with the Organic gardens being the best location where Flycatchers, warblers and orioles were seen on several visits. The main part of the kibbutz was oddly very quiet, even when migrants were around earlier in the trip. Work is being undertaken on the 'Bird Park' and water again is present here attracting several species. Hopefully in the next year or so further improvements will be made and the large hide will full of birders taking in many species.

KM67 *Not listing in the Shirihai Southern Guide*

Only a few KM's north of Lotan and just past the KM67 sign-post is a track off Route 90. Come off here and park up. Walk out towards the Jordan border at the obvious Water Tanks taking in the Wadi bushes en-route, which was good for migrants. At the border road/track you are in the area of Hoopoe Larks. Apparently there are at least 6 pairs in the area within a few KM's in either direction (north/south) with 4 on the Jordan side and 2 on the Israeli side. I've seen two birds, both on the Jordan side where scoping was definitely required.

Google Earth co-ordinates for the Pull-off: 30°01'28.56"N, 35°05'41.27"E

Google Earth co-ordinates for the Water Tanks: 35°01'27.40"N, 35°06'17.06"E

Wadi Ye'elon / Wadi Yahel *Not listing in the Shiri Hai Southern Guide*

Since I became aware of this wadi it has become a favourite which has often produced some good days, especially in the early morning but also in the later afternoon. There are some excellent Sylvia bushes along the length of the Wadi and in March can be full of commoner species but also good numbers of Ruppell's, Eastern Orphee and Subalpine. In mid-March 2017 I found a mal flock of Syrian Serin here which lingered for around a week or so and were much twitched by visiting birders.

From route 90 heading north turn left into Kibbutz Yahel and then turn right at the kibbutz Gates and then left onto the dirt track behind the 'service centre building'. Continue on the track keeping the kibbutz fence to your left and park by the Acacia trees by the black and white arrowed sign and explored the Wadi from here. The Wadi goes a long way but is extremely productive. Take plenty of water. There is also an isolated garden, known as the cemetery, which also has birds due to the taller tree's here.

2019 visit: Pretty quiet on my single visit with usual wadi species present but lacking numerous others, no Thrush Nightingales seen here this time around. It's a wadi that is either pumping with birds or empty and this one was closer to the latter. It had been better earlier in the spring.

Google Earth co-ordinates to track around building: 30°04'57.41"N, 35°07'51.28"E

Google Earth co-ordinates to parking area for exploring Wadi: 30°05'11.21"N, 35°07'48.94"E

KM82 *Not listing in the Shiri Hai Southern Guide*

This well vegetated Wadi north of Lotan on Route 90 at KM82 has proven reliable for migrants and given its isolated location it's no wonder. I've visited the site several times now and never found it dull with some great highlights; such as finding a stunning Olive-tree Warbler, Mountain Bunting and Cyprus Warbler alongside the commoner migrants whilst the plains to the south towards the hills are excellent for rarer larks such as Temminck's and Thick-billed which favour vegetation which extremely scant.

Obviously these visits have varied from March, late April and May but it is worth visiting all times. Parking is at **Google Earth co-ordinates:** 30°08'38.57"N, 35°07'54.90"E down the embankment away from the main road (care in the sand) and walk out along the Wadi. Also note that this is a Military Firing Zone so if visiting outside of Friday and Saturday probably best to stay within the main vegetated Wadi only.

2019 visit: My visit to the west side was excellent with may Blackcaps present along with other commoner species but highlights included finding a new Black Scrub Robin, a male Collared Flycatcher, Redstart, Thrush Nightingale and a pair of 'Southern' Grey Shrikes. Many other species were seen during the very entertaining evening visit. However a few days later a visit to the east side on the other side of the road revealed a distinct lack of birds and a mass clear out. Still it remains my favourite wadi.



Kibbutz Samar – May 2019



Kibbutz Lotan, Organic Gardens – May 2019



Ketura Sewage Ponds – April 2014



Yotvata Sewage Ponds – April 2014



Wadi Yahel / Ye'elon – May 2014



KM82 Wadi – May 2019



Eilat and Aqaba from Lower Eilat Mountains – March 2017

10. Upper Arava Valley

Note the Upper Arava Valley areas were not visited in 2019 with below compiled from previous trip reports

KM94 *Not listing in the Shirihai*

Not a site I've visited but it seems to be very good in winter to early spring at least for Desert Warbler, Desert Wheatear and for finding rarer wheatears. A place I must look at myself in future visits.

Sapir Park *Not listing in the Shirihai Southern Guide*

Google Earth co-ordinates: 30°616587, 35°190404

Another site I've not yet visited as it's a little bit too far north but would be a convenient stop on the way back from Hazeva. Appears to be a largest pond and scattered park like habitat so who knows who could go unseen here. Another one for future investigation.

Hazeva *Not listing in the Shirihai*

Whilst there was the intention of visiting this Arabian Warbler site during the trip we never quite got around to make the hour-long drive north of Lotan. From various sources I had gleaned information as to where to search for the Arabians and the primary one is detailed in the map. The Following entry in Birdforum by Nick Moss is helpful in locating this particular site.
<https://www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=351373>

11. West of the Upper Arava (highway 12 & 40)

Neot Semadar *Shirihai Southern Guide page 87*

In 2012 this was a personal favourite Kibbutz which was simply heaving with birds however the kibbutz has new gates and doesn't seem as accommodating to visiting birders so no visit was made within the boundary. This site really could be the underestimated birding destination in the area if access is made possible.

Google Earth co-ordinates 30 02'57.17"N, 35 01'40.28" E

Neot Semadar Sewage Works *Shirihai Southern Guide page 87*

About half mile to the east of Neot Semadar Kibbutz are the sewage ponds. This is a great little place where you can walk around the treatment pools, settling beds and thickets. The pools, same as any of the others in the valley, vary in water levels but generally have a few waders and wagtails present whilst the southern border where there are shrubs and bamboo plus a large Acacia hold most of the passerine migrants. The Acacia lined northern fence-line is also a great spot and best birding from outside of the sewage ponds. Here in late April 2016 I found a White-throated Robin, a Black Bush Robin, Rufous Bush Robin, Thrush Nightingale and Common Redstart for a sweeping 'robin/chat' combo.

2019 visit: A few interesting birds my first couple of days before becoming extremely quiet. The best seen were Barred Warbler, two Citrine Wagtails, Collared Flycatchers, Cretzschmars and Ortolan Buntings and Thrush Nightingale. Water levels in the pools attracted mostly tringa's but a few Temmincks Stints were also noted.

Google Earth co-ordinates: 30°02'34.47"N, 35°02'34.88"E

Shizzafon Junction Rest Stop *Not listed in Shirihai Southern Guide*

Located right at the junction of Routes 40 and 12 this obvious site is a place one can get a sandwich, not much else, and a drink and watch Bluethroats and Redstarts in the back garden. A small oasis this spot has turned up a few rarities over the years with a wintering Hume's Warbler there in 2017.

Uvda Valley Road *Shirihai Southern Guide page 88*

Turn left off route 12 after about 1.5KMs from Shizzafon Junction onto the Shahrut road. About a mile along the road you will see three black hills on the right side of the road, this is the lark area. Park anywhere along here and walk out. The best spots are generally south of the black hills where in March 2017 was a main site to look for Temminck's, Bar-tailed, Thick-billed Larks and a fine pair of Hoopoe Larks plus wheatears and other goodies. Spend time to the south of the black hills. The area the other side of the Black Hills back towards R12 can often be good as well for larks with flocks of Short-toeds being predominant but by the end of April most have moved on so it becomes a much more difficult site to go birding but it is always worth a visit but I didn't visit in 2019.

Further along the Uvda Valley Road, about 1km from the Army base, take the dust track to the **Shahrut Cliffs Nature Reserve** **Google Earth co-ordinates for approximate turn off** 29°57'35.91"N, 34°58'22.30"E. It's a little obscure to find but is sign-posted. There are stretches of sand along the track but a bit of acceleration will see you through. The more vegetated far end of the Wadi can hold Trumpeter Finch whilst the cliffs/hills on the north side opposite the obvious Acacia that will see as you head up the Wadi hold Mourning Wheatear. There were other species here also, such as White-crowned Black Wheatears and other migrants so time it right it would be a good place as any for birding.

Google Earth co-ordinates for the Mourning Wheatears 29°57'41.52"N, 34°59'45.64"E

Route 20 Acacia Groves

From the Shizzafon Junction heading south on Route 20 there are three obvious Acacia Stands. These are worth short walk arounds as they can often hold small numbers of migrants.

- Acacia Stand/Grove 1: only about quarter of a mile from the junction is a small patch; be careful as plenty of rusty Barb wire just lying around. **Google Earth co-ordinates** 30°04'79.93"N, 35°00'25.34"E
- Acacia Stand/Grove 2: the grove pretty much directly opposite the Shahrut Road turn off by the Bus Stop is bigger and has nesting Spanish Sparrows. **Google Earth co-ordinates** 30°02'01.17"N, 34°97'55.10"E
- Acacia Stand/Grove 3: this one, on Google earth is call Abda Parking Lot, only a few KM's further along the road and is a more open picnic site. **Google Earth co-ordinates** 30°00'97.39"N, 34°96'20.18"E

As there is little vegetation along this side of the mountains these sites act as migrant magnets.



Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds – May 2019



Uvda Valley – March 2017

Day to Day itinerary, highlights and daily account:

Day 1: Thursday 25th April

Mt. Amasa / Lake Yeroham / Neot Semadar Sewage Pond / Yotvata Fields

Day's highlights:

1. Hill Sparrows and mini raptor passage (Lesser Spotted and Short-toed Eagles) and the Jerusalem Fritillaries at Mt. Amasa
2. The Collared Flycatcher bonanza at Lake Yeroham
3. The evening session at Neot Semadar ponds with Collared Flycatchers, Redstarts, Nightingale, Barred Warbler, Citrine Wagtails, Ortolan and Cretzschmars Buntings and Rufous Scrub Robins.
4. The Corncrake that wandered across the track at Yotvata Fields at dusk

Day 2: Friday 26th April

IBRCE / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Pond / Kibbutz Lotan / Wadi Ye'elon / Neot Semadar Sewage Pools / Ketura Sewage Pools

• Day's highlights:

1. The bonkers Levant Sparrowhawk migration over the IBRCE from 7:30am onwards hard to beat
2. The in hand Little Bittern at the ringing centre
3. Various waders and wagtails at KM20 but especially the Collared Pratincoles and 13 Whiskered Terns
4. The heron fest at KM19
5. The Eleonora's Falcon over KM19
6. The flock of 35+ Bee-eaters over Lotan in the late afternoon with male and female Collared Flycatchers here.

Day 3: Saturday 27th April

Eilat Mountains / Canada Park / Eilat Cemetery / KM20 Salt Pans / Lotan / KM82 wadi

• Day's highlights

1. The stunning Levant Sparrowhawk migration through the mountains with kettles of many hundreds migrating through
2. The 4000+ Honey Buzzards migrating with the Levants Sparrowhawks plus a couple of Montagu's Harriers
3. The stunning male Collared Flycatcher in Canada Park
4. The stunning male Collared Flycatcher in the wadi at KM82
5. The overall bird filled KM82 Wadi with pair of Southern Grey Shrikes and finding a Black Scrub Robin here.

Day 4: Sunday 28th April

IBRCE / Eilat Canal / IBRCE / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Pool / Kibbutz Samar / Kibbutz Lotan

• Day's highlights

1. The first of the Broad-billed Sandpipers at the IBRCE
2. The Crested Honey Buzzard over the IBRCE
3. The 8 Broad-billed Sandpipers at KM20 Salt Pans
4. The closer than minimum focusing distance Little Bittern at the KM19 Sewage Ponds
5. The ticking over migrants at Kibbutz Samar – Collared Flycatchers, Thrush Nightingales, Golden Orioles, Bee-eaters, Corncrakes, Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, Redstarts and the Black Bush Robin
6. The male Golden Oriole at Lotan in the evening at the Organic Garden

Day 5: Monday 29th April

IBRCE / Central Park / Corner Park / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Pond / KM82 (east) / Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds / Ketura Sewage Ponds

• Day's highlights

1. The second crack at Levant Sparrowhawks over the IBRCE with about nearly 3000 passing by low overhead
2. Two Crested Honey Buzzards at IBRCE during the Levants rush
3. The out of range Great Tit at IBRCE
4. Finding a nesting pair of Hoopoe close to Corner Park
5. Find a 'Great' Bittern at KM19 which was seen nearly all subsequent visits

Day 6: Tuesday 30th April

North Beach / Holland Park / Eilat Mountains / Eilat Mountains / IBRCE / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Pond / KM20 Salt Pans

• Day's highlights

1. Sooty Shearwater and Arctic Skuas off North Beach with Broad-billed Sandpipers on the scrape behind
2. The 10K-12K migration of Honey Buzzards through the Mountains with madness of 7000 Levants Sparrowhawks
3. Finding 3 Black-winged Pratincoles at KM19 and then relocating them at KM20 Salt Pans where they were joined by Collared Pratincole allowing side by side comparison.
4. The Bittern again at KM19
5. Increasing numbers of waders and passerines at KM19

Day 7: Wednesday 1st May

KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Pond / Eilat Mountains / IBRCE / KM20 Salt Pans

• Day's highlights

1. The increase in Broad-billed Sandpipers at KM20 to nine
2. Nice spread of commoner waders at KM20
3. 5000+ Honey Buzzards and 30+ Levants Sparrowhawks in the mountains
4. Ten Broad-billed Sandpipers at the IBRCE Salt Pans continuing the excellent run of records
5. Ten Collared Pratincoles at KM20

Day 8: Thursday 2nd May

Yotvata Fields / Kibbutz Samar / Yotvata Sewage Ponds / Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds / Ketura Sewage Ponds / Grofit Sewage Ponds / Ketura Sewage Ponds / KM20 Salt Pans

- Day's highlights
- 1. The fine Montagu's Harriers at Yotvata fields early morning
- 2. Spending time with the Black Bush Robins in the morning
- 3. The stunning flock of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters at Ketura
- 4. Nice small gathering of six White Winged Black Terns at KM20

Day 9: Friday 3rd May

KM20 Salt Pans / Eilat Mountains / KM20 Salt Pans / Route 12 Roadside Acacia Copses / Neot Semadar / Ketura Sewage Ponds

- Day's highlights
- 1. To peak count of 19 Broad-billed Sandpipers at KM20
- 2. The drinking Honey Buzzards at KM20
- 3. Finding the 3 Rollers at En Avrona

Day 10: Saturday 4th May

Se'ifim Plains / Eilat Mountains / KM20 Salt Pans / KM19 Sewage Pond / HaMeishar Plains

- Day's highlights
- 1. The very sleepy roosting Honey Buzzard at Se'ifim Plains
- 2. Superb flight of 25,000+ Honey Buzzards in the Eilat Mountains with a small supporting cast of Levant Sparrowhawks, Steppe Buzzards, Marsh Harriers and Black Kites
- 3. The mixed Hirundine and Swift flock over the Acacias at KM20
- 4. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters prospecting at Yotvata Sewage Ponds
- 5. The fine evening birding at HaMeishar Plains

Day 11: Sunday 5th May

IBRCE / Eilat Mountains / KM20 Salt Pans / IBRCE / Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds

- Day's highlights
- 1. Honey Buzzard extravaganza in the mountains, 93,000+ with supporting cast of Lesser Spotted Eagles, Levant Sparrowhawks, Black Storks, Steppe Buzzards and Crested Honey Buzzards
- 2. The Corncrake in hand at the IBRCE



Levant Sparrowhawk – IBRCE – April 2019

Species Accounts for the 219 Species seen – following (roughly) the order of *Bird of the Middle East* by Porter and Aspinall

- 1 **Chukar** Only seen at Lake Yeroham on 26-Apr when two ran from scrub whilst I searched for Collared Flycatchers

- 2 **Sand Partridge** Two were in Wadi Yahel / Ye'elon on 25-Apr with another in the Eilat Mountains on 03-May whilst others were heard in usual locations, such as Holland Park

- McQueens Bustard** A pair of the reintroduction program birds were at the HaMeishar Plains in the evening of 04-May where their tameness resulted in close approach. As these are part of the re-introduction they are not included in the over species tally

- 3 **Egyptian Goose** A pair with five goslings were present at KM19 Sewage Ponds throughout

- 4 **Northern Shoveler** Only seen at KM20 Salt Pans and the sewage pond at KM19 with presumably the same birds moving between the two locations with 2-5 on four dates between 26-Apr and 02-May

- 5 **Pintail** A female was present at the Sewage Pond at KM19 on 29-Apr and 30-Apr

- 6 **Mallard** Following the first at Yeroham Lake was only seen at Anita Lake at the IBRCE on several dates

- 7 **Garganey** Only seen at KM19 Sewage Pond where three were seen on 28-Apr and 29-Apr but had increased to six by 04-May

- 8 **Little Grebe** Singles were at Anita Lake, IBRCE on two dates whilst two were at the Ketura Sewage Ponds on 02-May

- 9 **Sooty Shearwater** A single was seen in the early morning of 30-Apr off North Beach

- 10 **Greater Flamingo** Resident at KM20 Salt Pans where the flock was around 200 or so birds. The flock that is usually present at the salt pans of the IBRCE was present but fractured between here and the nearby Eilat Canal were probably no more than 20-25 were seen throughout the trip

- 11 **Black Stork** The highest count came on the first day were 18 migrated over Mt. Amasa on 25-Apr. There after:

Neot Semadar Sewage Pools	1	25-Apr
IBRCE	2	30-Apr
Eilat Mountains	5	05-May
KM20 Salt Pans	1	05-May

12	White Stork	Similar to Black Stork the largest number was at Mt. Amasa on 25-Apr with a paltry nine. There after numbers remain low: <table><tr><td>Yotvata Fields & Sewage Pools</td><td>3 on 25-Apr, 2 on 26-Apr, 5 on 27-Apr and 3 on 02-May</td></tr><tr><td>KM19 Sewage Pools</td><td>1 30-Apr</td></tr><tr><td>Grofit Sewage Pools</td><td>1 02-May</td></tr><tr><td>Eilat Mountains</td><td>1 04-May</td></tr></table>	Yotvata Fields & Sewage Pools	3 on 25-Apr, 2 on 26-Apr, 5 on 27-Apr and 3 on 02-May	KM19 Sewage Pools	1 30-Apr	Grofit Sewage Pools	1 02-May	Eilat Mountains	1 04-May				
Yotvata Fields & Sewage Pools	3 on 25-Apr, 2 on 26-Apr, 5 on 27-Apr and 3 on 02-May													
KM19 Sewage Pools	1 30-Apr													
Grofit Sewage Pools	1 02-May													
Eilat Mountains	1 04-May													
13	Glossy Ibis	One lingered with Cattle Egrets at the Neot Semadar Sewage Pond from 29-Apr to 03-May. At KM20 Salt Pans six dropped in on 26-Apr whilst 15 arrived over the IBRCE in the evening of 30-Apr touring the Eilat / Jordan area.												
14	Spoonbill	Singles were at the KM20 Salt Pans on 26-Apr and 27-Apr with two there on 01-May and four on 28-Apr whilst a very showy and confiding individual was in the canal next the IBRCE on 30-Apr												
15	Great' Bittern	An initially elusive bird was in the reedbeds of the KM19 Sewage Pond but it was seen well on several occasions between 29-Apr and 01-May												
16	Little Bittern	Three were seen in the reed beds of Anita Lake, IBRCE on 26-Apr with a female seen in hand at the ringing centre in same morning. An extremely showy and confiding female was fishing at the sluice at the KMM19 Sewage Pond on28-Apr, at times so close I had to use my phone to take photos.												
17	Night Heron	The first were a nice flock of 19 that circled around Anita lake on 26-Apr with a solitary bird over the northern end of the IBRCE reserve later the same morning, Further birds were seen at the IBRCE with one on 28-Apr and two on 29-Apr. However the pool at KM19 held the most birds overall with 25+ there on 26-Apr and between 4 and nine on multiple dates until 04-May.												
18	Squacco Heron	Fairly abundant and widespread around the various wetland habitats: <table><tr><td>Neot Semadar</td><td>Two 25-Apr to 03-May with peak of six on 05-May</td></tr><tr><td>IBRCE</td><td>Singles on 26-Apr & 28-Apr</td></tr><tr><td>Ketura Sewage Pools</td><td>One on 26-Apr</td></tr><tr><td>KM!9 Sewage Pond</td><td>Birds were recorded on each of the visits made with an average of 2-5 birds being noted but with a peak of eight on 04-May</td></tr><tr><td>KM20 Salt Pans</td><td>One on 28-Apr, four extremely showy birds on 30-Apr and three still present on 30-Apr</td></tr><tr><td>Yotvata Sewage Pools</td><td>One on 02-May</td></tr></table>	Neot Semadar	Two 25-Apr to 03-May with peak of six on 05-May	IBRCE	Singles on 26-Apr & 28-Apr	Ketura Sewage Pools	One on 26-Apr	KM!9 Sewage Pond	Birds were recorded on each of the visits made with an average of 2-5 birds being noted but with a peak of eight on 04-May	KM20 Salt Pans	One on 28-Apr, four extremely showy birds on 30-Apr and three still present on 30-Apr	Yotvata Sewage Pools	One on 02-May
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Yotvata Sewage Pools	One on 02-May													
19	Cattle Egret	The first were noted in a field near Quyat Gat on the drive south on 25-Apr with an estimated 25+. Thereafter birds were recorded widely but no single location scored into double figures. The IBRCE had 6-7 on 26-Apr & 28-Apr, Ketura Sewage Ponds had five on 26-Apr, Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds had between 2-5 throughout, Yotvata Fields and Sewage Ponds 6-7 between 26-Apr and 02-May and KM20 had 2-5 on three dates between 26-Apr and 03-May. KM19 however was the best location with upwards of eight birds seemingly resident throughout.												
20	Little Egret	Commonly encountered at most wetland habitats with most records being not greater than eight birds though a flock of 15 were noted migrating north over the IBRCE Salt Pans on 29-Apr and 22 were counted as a maximum at KM19 Sewage Pond on 29-Apr.												
21	Great Egret	Two were at the KM20 Saltpans on 28-Apr & 29-Apr												

22	Purple Heron	Only noted at four locations with none seen after the 29-Apr. The first were three at the IBRCE on 26-Apr, nine at the KM19 Sewage Pond on same day with three still there on 29-Apr. The only other seen was one at Ketura Sewage Pools on 26-Apr.
23	Grey Heron	Commonly seen at KM19 Sewage Pond and the KM20 Salt Pans where sometimes small flocks or migrating birds were seen. Largest numbers were at KM20 where the average was 4-6 throughout but had peaks of eight on 26-Apr, ten on 27-Apr and 12 on both 28-Apr & 01-May. Elsewhere singles were mostly noted with exception of a migrating flock of six over the IBRCE on 29-Apr.
24	White Pelican	Only two were seen with singles at the IBRCE on 28-Apr and at KM20 Salt Pans on 05-May
25	Cormorant	A lingering individual graced the KM19 Sewage Pond between 26-Apr & 04-May
26	European Honey Buzzard	<p>The BIG event of the trip was the ever increasing numbers of Honey Buzzards following a single bird a Mt. Amasa on my first day, 25-Apr.</p> <p>Arava 2500+ were estimated over the highway between Yotvata and Lotan with good numbers passing over Ketura Sewage Ponds on 02-May</p> <p>Eilat Mountains Migration here really started on 27-Apr where 4000+ were estimated during peak Levant Sparrowhawk migration</p> <p>Eilat Mountains On 30-Apr at least 10,500-12,000 passed through the mountains with some excellent views obtained as many passed low over the road and various viewpoints.</p> <p>Eilat Mountains 5000+ passed through on 01-May and only around 400 on 03-May</p> <p>Eilat Mountains Big push once the winds had moved just to the North with 25,000+ passing through on 04-May. Again migration started early from about 6:60am and lots of birds low overhead.</p> <p>Eilat Mountains I had at the time thought the 25,000 on 04-May was going to be my big count but today beat all expectations. With the winds just slightly in the NNW migration was already well underway by the time I arrived at 7am, probably missed a lot of birds. By time I left at 12:30pm an estimated 93,000 had passed through whilst probably many more thousands being missed due to passing out of view behind the mountains. The views were often spectacular as squadron after squadron of HBs migrated overhead. Pure Spectacle.</p> <p>IBRCE Generally my numbers at the IBRCE were low with a peak count of 49 there on 29-Apr</p> <p>Kibbutz Samar Only two seen on 02-May</p> <p>KM19 Sewage Pond During my visits to the KM19 Sewage Pond one eye was kept on the sky and generally only a few were seen migrating through but at least 700+ passed high overhead into Jordan on 30-Apr with a few coming down to drink. The Only other count apart from singles was of 47 on 04-MAY</p> <p>KM20 Salt Pans Generally small numbers came down to drink however on the days where large numbers passed through the mountains many would come down and on 30-Apr where probably around 50-70 dropped to drink a close quarters with probably 30 or so a few days later.</p> <p>Yotvata Most other locations noted small numbers from late April though 250+ at Yotvata on 02-May had probably roosted in the nearby Date Palm Plantation</p>

27	Crested Honey Buzzard / Hybrid Crested x European Honey Buzzards	One was over the IBRCE on 28-Apr with two different birds over there on 29-Apr which were some of those that had over wintered in the area. In the mountains on 05-May there were around 5-6 candidates seen though likely most relate to hybrids though a juvenile / 1st-winter was probably a pure bird.
28	Black Kite	Few were seen with singles at KM20 Salt Pans 27-Apr and Neot Semadar on 03-May, two at KM19 Sewage Pond on 26-Apr, three through the Eilat Mountains on 27-Apr and peak of 15+ through the mountains on the big raptor day of 05-May.
29	Lesser Spotted Eagle	Only seen on two days with an impressive count for so late in the season of nine at Mt. Amasa on 25-Apr and two through the Eilat Mountains on 05-May.
30	Booted Eagle	Unusually scarce this year with a pale phase bird over the main road just north of Eilat on 26-Apr, a dark phase at KM19 Sewage Pond on 30-Apr, a pale bird at Ketura 02-May, a pale bird along route 12 just south of the Ovda Valley turn off on 03-May and three through the Eilat Mountains on 04-MAY.
31	Short-toed Eagle	Sadly only seen on my first day, 25-Apr, at Mt. Amasa, where five were noted. These were resident birds that included a very pale and unmarked individual.
32	Egyptian Vulture	One was seen from the car as it passed over the highway near the Hai-Bar on 04-May
33	Marsh Harrier	Fairly regularly seen at the main wetland sites of KM19 and KM20 with usually 1-3 maximum being seen, all females. Away from here two females were at the IBRCE on 26-Apr, a male migrated through the Eilat Mountains on 27-Apr, a male was briefly at the Yotvata fields in the evening of 27-Apr, two were there on 02-MAY and a migrating female high over Kibbutz Samar on 02-May. The final migrating birds, not the near resident KM19 & KM20 birds, passed through the Eilat Mountains on 04-May were there was three.
34	Montagu's Harrier	Following a smart male through the Eilat Mountains on 27-Apr a female was over the IBRCE on 30-Apr and two were at the Yotvata Fields early morning on 02-May before they headed north.

35 **Levant Sparrowhawk**

Along with the Honey Buzzard migration the other big event I was hoping for this spring was to witness the Levant Sparrowhawk migration. I had always been a week to late but this year I finally connected and it was spectacular. Three days stand out above all the other for both high counts and stunningly close views; these being 26-Apr with 2800+ low over the IBRCE, 27-Apr with 5500+ migrating through the Eilat Mountains with Honey Buzzards and 28-Apr with 2710 counted over the IBRCE again. Full date order breakdown below:

IBRCE	My first in the morning of 26-Apr were scattered one's and two's with about 12 roosting in the trees on the opposite side of Lake Anita. By 7:30am hawks were pouring through from a South West direct so presumably they had roosted on the date palms in Jordan. Wave after wave passed through with many low over head and some stopping briefly in the reserve trees. The best vantage point was at the northern end of the reserve along the canal embankment where many birds passed within 10 metres or so. By the time the flood had stopped I had estimated around 2800+ birds. I did count some of the waves going through but it was difficult to keep track but some were 200-300 strong at times. Spectacular stuff.
KM19 Sewage Pond	One on 26-Apr, a straggler from the mornings big push
Wadi Ye'elon	One in the evening of 26-Apr, a straggler from the mornings big push
Eilat Mountains	Round two. Early morning raptor madness in the mountains with many thousands of hawks migrating through and I had around 5500+ but probably closer to 6000 whilst I probably missed some thousands that passed unseen beyond Mt. Yoash. Some of the kettles were bonkers with one in the region of a 'minimum' of 1000 birds. This was spectacular birding.
Lotan	Three at Lotan in the evening were actively migrating up the Arava on 27-Apr
Eilat Date Palms	At least 20+ were seen flying from the Eilat Date Palms on 28-Apr where they had presumably roosted overnight
IBRCE	30+ on 28-Apr were presumably, like those above, local roosting birds
IBRCE	Round three. Almost a carbon copy of 26-Apr a huge flight of hawks passed low over the IBRCE from Jordan from the South West with a specific count of 2710 being made. Again the migration started early with birds on the move shortly after 7am.
Eilat Mountains	A good Honey Buzzard migration morning in the Eilat Mountains on 30-Apr saw a still impressive 700+ Levants as a supporting case.
KM19 Sewage Pond	A minimum of 150 passed over the KM19 Sewage Pond mid morning of 30-Apr reflecting the continuing good numbers of hawks in the Arava.
Eilat Mountains	Numbers on 01-May had now started to dwindle with 30+ on migration
KM20 Salt Pans	14 were noted passing through on 03-May
Eilat Mountains	Seven were present on 04-May which was followed by the last hoorah for three figure counts with 150+ on 05-May.
The Arava	During the period numerous small numbers, mostly widely scattered one's and two's were noted from various location up and down the Arava.

36 **Steppe Buzzard**

Steppe Buzzards were vastly outnumbered by Honey Buzzards most counts were single figure tallies with exception of 11 at KM19 Sewage Pond on 26-Apr and 300+ migrating with the Honey Buzzards on 05-May

37	Long-legged Buzzard	Only seen at Mt. Amasa on 25-Apr where two were noted.
38	Common Kestrel	Not as common as in previous years. One or two were apparently resident around Lotan throughout whilst others were seen at just five other locations between 25-Apr and 05-May.
39	Eleonora's Falcon	One passed through the MK19 Sewage Pond on 26-Apr and proved to be, sadly, the only one of the trip
40	Hobby	One migrated through the Eilat Mountains on 27-Apr
41	Water Rail	Only seen at the IBRCE's Anita Lake with one on 26-Apr and two on 29-Apr
42	Corncrake	One wandered across the track in front of the car at the Yotvata Fields in the late evening of 25-Apr. This was followed by two at Kibbutz Samar, one on the football pitch in the heat of the day ! and the other was at the 'Jungle' whilst I waited for the Black Scrub Robins on 28-Apr. Two were feeding along the muddy fringes of the KM19 Sewage Pond in the evening of 30-Apr, one being in same field of view as the Bittern. The final bird was a tired migrant at the IBRCE on 05-May. It had been picked up when it landed exhausted on a town road and brought the ringing centre where it was released into the undergrowth to feed.
43	Moorhen	Commonly seen at KM19 Sewage Pond on each visit though numbers did not exceed a maximum of three. Seen at Grofit Sewage Pond on 02-May and six were at Ketura Sewage Pond in the evening of same day.
44	Stone Curlew	Heard only at Mt. Amasa on 25-Apr. Calling distantly up the hillside.
45	Black-winged Stilt	Common, though lower than usual numbers, at the wetland, most notably the KM20 Salt Pans and the IBRCE Salt Pans though also in the Eilat Canal, at the Sewage Ponds of Neot Semadar, Ketura and KM19.
46	Spur-winged Plover	Common. A species that rapidly goes unnoticed due to being pretty much everywhere where there is water
47	Grey Plover	Only seen at KM20 where numbers were low. Singles on 30-Apr and 02-May, two on 01-May and a peak of three on 03-May
48	Ringed Plover	Common enough to start to ignore by the end of the trip. The best locations were the salt pans at the IBRCE and KM20 with a few in the Eilat Canal. The IBRCE regularly had between 50-70+ between 26-Apr and 29-Apr and KM20 had 40+ on several dates. After 20 on 01-May at KM20 I stopped recording birds though they were present.

49	Little Ringed Plover	This year under-represented with 1-2 seen at the IBRCE on 28-Apr, KM19 Sewage Pond 28-Apr & 30-Apr, Yotvata Sewage Ponds on 02-May and KM20 Salt Pans on 04-May.
50	Kentish Plover	Much lower numbers than expected, only recorded at the salt pans of KM20 and the IBRCE. KM20 averaged 2-3 throughout across all the pans, poor showing, with exception of seven on 30-Apr and four on 05-May whilst the IBRCE had 1-2 on three dates between 28-Apr and 01-May.
51	Common Snipe	Four singles were noted at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr, KM20 Salt Pans 28-Apr & 03-May and Ketura Sewage Ponds 03-May
52	Whimbrel	The only one seen was at the KM20 Salt Pans from dawn on 01-May
53	Spotted Redshank	A summer plumaged individual was at the KM20 Salt Pans on 27-Apr
54	Greenshank	Fairly common at the Salt Pans of KM20 with 11-12 there on 26-Apr & 27-Apr and peaked at 19 on 28-Apr though numbers were down by May with average of 2-5 on four visits. Elsewhere single figures only were noted from the Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds, the IBRCE and the Eilat Canal between 25-Apr and 29-Apr.
55	Redshank	Singles, possibly the same individual, were at the KM20 Salt Pans on 26-Apr to 27-Apr. Further singles were at the IBRCE on 28-Apr and at the North Beach Scrape 30-Apr
56	Marsh Sandpiper	As is usually the case the KM20 Salt Pans was the best place to see this species though it was much scarcer than in previous years. 1-2 were noted on 30-Apr, 01-May & 05-May with 4-5 26-Apr to 27-Apr, 29-Apr and 01-May. Elsewhere single were at the IBRCE on 26-Apr, two there on 28-Apr, in the Eilat Canal on 28-Apr and at the KM19 Sewage Pond on 28-Apr.
57	Common Sandpiper	As expected more wetland habitats had at least a few Common Sands though most were at the KM20 Salt Pans (7 on 26-Apr being the maximum count), the IBRCE (1-2 each visit), the KM19 Sewage Pond (five on 26-Apr being best count with average of 1-3 per visit) and Neot Semadar Sewage Pond with ten on 26-Apr the top tally with average of 4-6 on several dates between 29-Apr and 05-May. Elsewhere 4 were at Ketura on 26-Apr and 1-2 from other widely scattered locations.
58	Green Sandpiper	Not common with presumably the same individual at the Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds 25-Apr to 05-May with the only other bird seen was at the KM19 Sewage Pond on 30-Apr.
59	Wood Sandpiper	Usually found at all of the wetland sites (KM20, KM19, IBRCE, Neot Semadar, Ketura, Eilat Canal) in small numbers, usually 2-5 though peak counts as follows: KM20 Salt Pans Ten on 27-Apr & 29-Apr KM19 Sewage Pond 25+ on 30-Apr and 40+ on 04-May Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds 11 on 29-Apr Yotvata Sewage Ponds Nine on 02-May

60	Little Stint	The commonest small wader seen but overall numbers were way down on previous years. The best numbers/counts detailed below:	
		IBRCE Salt Pans	200+ 26-Apr with an average of 40-50 throughout there after with exception of 70+ on 27-Apr
		KM20 Salt Pans	50+ 26-Apr, 70+ 27-Apr, 150+ 28-Apr, 60+ 29-Apr, 92 on 30-Apr, 87 on 01-May, 250+ as a notable arrival 03-May and 70+ as a notable departure on 04-May
		North Beach Scrape	20+ in the early morning of 30-Apr
		KM19 Sewage Pond	Several usually present but 70+ on 04-May were presumably some of the KM20 birds relocating to better feeding
		Elsewhere 1-2 were seen a Neot Semadar, Yotvata and Ketura Sewage Ponds	
61	Temminck's Stint	Seen widely but was not common	
		Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds	One on 25-Apr
		Yotvata Sewage Ponds	11 on 26-Apr with one there on 02-May
		Ketura Sewage Ponds	Five present on 26-Apr
		KM19 Sewage Pond	Two on 28-Apr
		IBRCE	Two were noted on 29-Apr
62	Dunlin	Small numbers present at the Salt Pans of both KM20 and the IBRCE. An average of 3-5 were at KM20 between 26-Apr & 05-May whilst the IBRCE had a maximum of four on 28-Apr otherwise one was the daily maximum.	
63	Curlew Sandpiper	Low numbers with obvious arrivals with Little Stints. KM20 held one on 28-Apr, two on 30-Apr, three on 01-May and peak of five on 05-May. The only other to be seen was at the IBRCE on 29-Apr	
64	Broad-billed Sandpiper	This species had a very good spring through the Arava and it's rather difficult to asses actual numbers involved.	
		IBRCE	The first four were seen at the salt pans of the IBRCE on 28-Apr with ten there on 01-May
		North Beach Scrape	Five were present early morning of 30-Apr
		KM20 Salt Pans	Eight arrived with a Little Stint flock on 28-Apr whilst the site went to host further birds thereafter with three on 29-Apr, six on 30-Apr, nine on 01-May & 02-May, a peak of 19 on 03-May and then a final three on 05-May.
65	Red-necked Phalarope	Only seen at the IBRCE Salt Pans were a near semi-resident flock of between 11 and 14 were present between 26-Apr & 05-May	
66	Turnstone	A smart summer plumaged bird at KM20 on 27-Apr was the only one of the trip.	

67	Ruff	Far scarcer than in any year I have done previously with the Salt Pans at KM20 strangely devoid of the usual flocks with maximum counts for here being 11 on 26-Apr and 12 on 27-Apr otherwise it was a struggle to reach double figure counts. Elsewhere small numbers, usually the lower single figures, were noted at the IBRCE, the Eilat Canal and KM19 Sewage Pond
68	Collared Pratincole	I have a fondness for Pratincoles and always look forward to seeing them and the usual hot spot of the KM20 Salt Pans was again the place to see them. Seven were present on 26-Apr, one joined the Black-winged Pratincoles on 30-Apr allowing excellent side by side comparisons to be made, ten on 01-May, which may have been part of the 12 that arrived at and then soon departed north from the KM19 Sewage pond on 30-Apr. Three at the salt pans on 03-May were the last to be seen.
69	Black-winged Pratincole	This was actually one of the trip highlights for me. I saw three birds drop out of the sky and into the sewage pond at KM19 on 30-Apr whilst I was at the car getting a drink and I was quickly able to see them hawking briefly over the water before they disappeared. A little while later I relocated the same three birds at the KM20 Salt Pans where they showed well, albeit at a little distance and often in heat haze. They were eventually watched flying north same day and were not seen again.
70	White-eyed Gull	Three were off North Beach, on the Jordan side, early morning of 30-Apr. Low number not necessarily indicating low numbers present but more to do with me not looking for them
71	Slender-billed Gull	Present at the salt pans of KM20 and the IBRCE. Following the first 100+ at KM20 on 26-Apr this largely became a background species during my visits, they were always there I just didn't make any counts.
72	Black-headed Gull	Two were seen in the Slender-billed Gull flock at KM20 Salt Pans on 28-Apr as I made an effort to look through the gulls present
73	Baltic Gull	The first were four at KM20 on 26-Apr followed by a smart adult here on 28-Apr and six on 01-May. 13 passed over the IBRCE on 29-Apr with eight doing the same on 05-May
74	Armenian Gull	A second-year bird flew over the IBRCW with the Baltic Gull flock on 01-May
75	Common Tern	Seen off North Beach on 30-Apr only
76	Whiskered Tern	A fine flock of 13 were at the KM20 Salt Pans for a short time on 26-Apr
77	White-winged Black Tern	No big movement again this year with only small numbers passing through with one at the Yotvata Sewage Ponds on 26-Apr and KM19 Sewage Pond 04-May with KM20 Salt Pans recording two on 29-Apr and six on 02-May
78	Gull-billed Tern	Only seen at KM20 where there were two on 27-Apr, a fine flock of 15 on 30-Apr and two on 30-Apr,

79	Caspian Tern	One lingered at the IBRCE Salt Pans 28-Apr & 28-Apr
80	Little Tern	The first was one at the IBRCE on 28-Apr followed by two at KM20 on 28-Apr with presumably the same two at the nearby KM19 Sewage Pond later the same day. Three were then at KM20 on 29-Apr and a separate singleton at KM19 same day.
81	Arctic Skua	Five were off North Beach early morning of 30-Apr
82	Feral / Rock Pigeon	Common and widespread with largest numbers at the KM19 Cowsheds where many hundreds often gather
83	Collared Dove	Seem to be even commoner this year with flocks seemingly everywhere with the Yotvata fields holding several hundred
84	Turtle Dove	Not as abundant or as widespread as in 2018 but a flock of reasonable number was present at the KM19 Sewage Pond there they frequented the border fence. Up to 70 were there on 26-Apr and 100+ on 28-Apr with smaller low to mid digit numbers on subsequent visits. Elsewhere Numbers were low with 4-5 seen at KM20 and Yotvata whilst several other locations recorded singles.
85	Laughing Dove	Common and widespread
86	Namaqua Dove	Two males and a female were at KM19 Sewage Pond on 26-Apr with a male there on 28=-Apr. The Yotvata Fields and Sewage Ponds recorded 1-3 on 26-Apr, 27-Apr, 02-May and 04-May. The only other to be seen was one at Kibbutz Samar on 28-Apr.
87	Ring-necked Parakeet	Fairly common in the Eilat Parks though the largest numbers were at the IBRCE peaking with 30+ at its northern end on 29-Apr
88	Common Cuckoo	A tail-less individual was at the picnic rest stop along Route 12 south of the Uvda Valley turn off on 03-May
89	Alpine Swift	Only one was seen, migrating north with other swift species and hirundines at the Acacia's next to the KM20 Salt Pans on 04-May
90	Common Swift	Under recorded with more swifts being seen than were assigned to species however the largest confirmed flock of Common Swifts was of 35 migrating north over the KM20 Salt Pans and Acacias on 04-May
91	Pallid Swift	Like Common Swift under recorded and the largest movement was those migrating north over the Acacias at KM20 on 04-May where at least 30 moved through

92	Roller	A came across three in the Acacias close the main track just west of En Avrona on 02-May																
93	European Bee-eater	<p>Nowhere near as common as this time last year, where they were everywhere, but there were enough flocks across scattered locations to make them difficult to miss.</p> <table><tr><td>Lotan</td><td>13 were on the perimeter fence near the main gate on 26-Apr with 35 coming into roost later the same evening</td></tr><tr><td>KM20 Salt Pans</td><td>40+ were present along the main track to the pans on 27-Apr followed 2-4 on several dates until 20 on 04-May</td></tr><tr><td>KM19 Sewage Pond</td><td>20+ passed through on 30-Apr</td></tr><tr><td>Kibbutz Samar</td><td>10+ flew over on 28-Apr</td></tr><tr><td>Holland Park</td><td>Four on 30-Apr</td></tr><tr><td>Neot Semadar</td><td>20 flew over the road in the evening of 04-May and four were at the sewage ponds on 05-May</td></tr><tr><td>HaMeishar Plains</td><td>20 or more were hawking Painted Lady butterflies over the plains in the evening of 04-May</td></tr><tr><td>Eilat Mountains</td><td>16 migrated through on 05-May</td></tr></table>	Lotan	13 were on the perimeter fence near the main gate on 26-Apr with 35 coming into roost later the same evening	KM20 Salt Pans	40+ were present along the main track to the pans on 27-Apr followed 2-4 on several dates until 20 on 04-May	KM19 Sewage Pond	20+ passed through on 30-Apr	Kibbutz Samar	10+ flew over on 28-Apr	Holland Park	Four on 30-Apr	Neot Semadar	20 flew over the road in the evening of 04-May and four were at the sewage ponds on 05-May	HaMeishar Plains	20 or more were hawking Painted Lady butterflies over the plains in the evening of 04-May	Eilat Mountains	16 migrated through on 05-May
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94	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	Scarcer this year with 13 at the Ketura Sewage Ponds on 02-May and nine were seen prospecting the sand mound near Yotvata Sewage Ponds on 04-May																
95	Little Green Bee-eater	1-2 were seen in the usual expected locations of Lotan, Yotvata Fields, Eilat Canal, KM82, Kibbutz Samar and Neot Semadar Sewage Pond between 26-Apr and 03-May																
96	Hoopoe	Resident birds were present at Kibbutz Lotan with two present on the lawns and football pitch most days. Elsewhere singles were seen in Canada Park on 27-Apr and Kibbutz Samar on 28-Apr. Two were in Central Park on 27-Apr and at Kibbutz Samar on 02-May whilst I located a nesting pair close to Corner Park, where they were gathering food for the young, on 29-Apr.																
97	Common Kingfisher	Singles possibly relating to the same individual, were seen at the IBRCE and North Beach between 26-Apr and 29-Apr																
98	Pied Kingfisher	A pair were at the KM19 Sewage Pond on 26-Apr to 04-May at least whilst there were 1-2 were present in the Eilat Canal and IBRCE area, probably relating to the same birds, on 28-Apr to 05-May																
99	Syrian Woodpecker	Only seen at Lake Yeroham where one was seen in the woods there on 25-May																

100	Golden Oriole	Quite a good year for this brightest of yellow birds
	Lotan	Two were mobile around the Organic Gardens on 26-Apr with a male there on 27-Apr which was probably the same bird as seen on 28-Apr. A further male was seen to fly into the kibbutz from the south as I was entering at the main gate on 04-May
	Kibbutz Samar	Two were seen flying around the tops of the tall trees on 28-Apr
	KM19 Sewage Pond	A stunning male was along the agricultural road on 29-Apr and a male migrated north on 30-Apr
	Route 12 Copse	A female was present in the copse on the left as you head south on Route 12 from the Shizzafon Junction on 02-May
101	Masked Shrike	Apparently had been fairly scarce earlier in the spring there seemed to be an increase during my visit:
	Lake Yeroham	Four on 25-Apr
	IBRCE	Two were present on 26-Apr
	Lotan	One was seen on 26-Apr & 27-Apr
	Wadi Yahel / Ye'elon	Four were encountered in the wadi in the evening of 26-Apr
	Canada Park	Two on 27-Apr
	KM82 Wadi	Four on the west side in the evening of 27-Apr and only one on the east side on 29-Apr
	Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds	One was present 29-Apr to 03-May
	Route 12 Copse	One on 03-May
	HaMeishar Plains	Two were present on 04-May
102	Southern Grey Shrike	A superb pair appeared to be holding territory at the KM82 Wadi on 27-Apr whilst another apparent pair were at the Yotvata Fields on 02-May where they occasionally hunted from the bales
103	Arabian Babbler	Only seen on three occasions with a party of six at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr, two at Kibbutz Samar on 02-May and at En Avrona with two on 03-May
104	House Crow	Commonly seen in and around Eilat, hard to miss
105	Hooded Crow	A few were seen at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr with the only other being at Central Park, Eilat on 29-Apr where there were two
106	Brown-necked Raven	I again neglected this species somewhat in my notepad with the meagre singles at Mt. Amasa on 25-Apr and Lotan on 27-Apr and three at Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds on 02-May are not really representing the true number seen
107	Yellow-vented Bulbul	Common in Eilat with most locations having plenty

108	Great Tit	Singles were at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr and the surprise location of the IBRCE on 29-Apr with a singing male at the northern end of the reserve
109	Short-toed Lark	I had to wait until my evening visit to the HaMeishar Plains on 04-May to see my first of the trip with around 10 or more being mobile
110	Temminck's Lark	Only two very distant birds at HaMeishar Plains on 04-May were seen
111	Desert Lark	Only seen along the Eilat Mountain road this year were singles were seen on only three occasions from 27-May
112	Bar-tailed Desert Lark	One was seen and heard at the HaMeishar Plains in the pleasant evening of 04-May
113	Crested Lark	Common and widespread
114	Pale Crag Martin	Seen more often than my notepad entries indicate with resident birds present at the Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds throughout whilst additional individuals were noted at the Eilat Canal, Kibbutz Samar and Lotan up until 29-Apr
	Hirundines	Scattered numbers were noted across numerous locations however there was a large mixed flock of Swallows and Martins at the KM20 Acacia Scrub on 04-May were around 300 passed through
115	Sand Martin	Generally I had a small but regular passage of birds heading north with key locations being the IBRCE and the KM19 Sewage Pond, Ketura Sewage Ponds. Most counted did not exceed 20 birds with 15-20 at KM19 on 30-Apr amongst the highest numbers.
116	House Martin	Not seen until 04-May when at least 67 passed through the KM20 Acacia Scrub on 04-May
117	Swallow	As there were a fair few small flocks and passage individuals my overall counts are not representative of the numbers passing through. My peak counts were: Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds 19 on 25-Apr, 15+ at the IBRCE on 26-Apr, 130+ at Ketura Sewage Ponds on 26-Apr and 15+ at the KM82 Wadi on 27-Apr
118	Red-rumped Swallow	KM19 was the only location where this fine species was seen with singles on 26-Apr and 30-Apr only. Both birds were migrating north with Swallows
119	Graceful Warbler	A background noise species but rarely made it to the notebook. Regularly heard at IBRCE for instance
120	Scrub Warbler	Not overly common, to connect the drier habitats are generally requiring a visit. Singles were at KM82 Wadi on 27-Apr & 29-Apr and an apparent family party at the Roadside picknick stop on Route 12 on 03-May

121	Reed Warbler	Usually a few singing at the KM19 Sewage Ponds and IBRCE's Anita Lake throughout with non-singing migrants noted at Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds on 25-Apr, Lotan on 26-Apr and at Corner Park on 29-Apr
122	Sedge Warbler	The only one of the trip was at Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds on 25-Apr
123	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	Not overly common but enough were seen to keep interest alive. With 1-2 from 25-Apr to 03-May 11 different locations totalling 14 birds
124	Wood Warbler	One was finally tracked down, a dull individual at Corner Park on 29-Apr, which was one of the last to be seen as part of a very good year for the species in Israel
125	Chiffchaff	Very small numbers with only 1-2 seen between 26-Apr and 03-May from six locations
126	Willow Warbler	Two were in Wadi Yahel / Ye'elon on 26-Apr with the only other being seen was at Kibbutz Samar on 28-Apr
127	Balkan Warbler	Only one was seen, in Wadi Yahel / Ye'elon, on 26-Apr
128	Barred Warbler	I thought this was going to be a good year for this species as I quickly saw singles at Neot Semadar Sewage Pond on 25-Apr and in KM82 Wadi 27-Apr but there after none were encountered
129	Blackcap	Commonest warbler seen with a handful at most locations though following the 100+ at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr and 300+ in the Wadi at KM20 27-Apr numbers rapidly dropped away
130	Lesser Whitethroat	Remarkably this species didn't have the distinction of being the commonest warbler of the trip this year, that fell to Blackcap. Instead only small numbers were seen, most sites had at least one but that was about it with the exception of Canada Park on 27-Apr which had six. Still I ended up not recording in my notes most of those that I saw.
131	Spectacled Warbler	Only seen at mt. Amasa on 25-Apr where early morning songsters were noted
132	Common Whitethroat	Singles only at Wadi Yahel / Ye'elon on 26-Apr, an in two of the Roadside Copses along Route 12 on 03-May
133	Common Myna	A few were seen from the car during the drive south from Tel Aviv on 25-Apr with two in the copse just south of Lake Yeroham the same day
134	European Starling	Only one was seen, at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr

144	Black-eared Wheatear	Only seen at Mt. Amasa on 25-Apr where male and female were noted	
145	Hooded Wheatear	Scarce this year with only a female seen in the Eilat Mountains on 03-May and 05-May	
146	White-crowned Black Wheatear	The Black-and-white Wheatears were incredibly scarce this year and whilst a few White-crowned Blacks were seen their numbers were right down on previous years.	
	Ramon	A male was seen on the roadside as I drove south on the 25-Apr	
	Eilat Mountains	1-2 were seen at various spots along the road between 27-Apr and 05-May on five dates	
147	Spotted Flycatcher	Quite widespread with mostly one's and two's being seen. Following five at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr	
	Neot Semadar Sewage Pond	One on 26-Apr	
	Canada Park	One on 27-Apr	
	Eilat Cemetery	One on 27-Apr	
	KM82 Wadi	Two in the evening of 27-Apr	
	Kibbutz Samar	One on 29-Apr & 02-May	
	IBRCE	Two on 29-Apr	
	Central Park	Two on 29-Apr	
	Corner Park	One on 29-Apr	
	Route 12 Roadside Copses	Singles in two of the copses on 03-May	
148	Collared Flycatcher	One of the highlights of this year's trip was the abundance of this super black-and-white flycatcher. The trip got off to a flying start at Lake Yeroham 25-Apr where I had a minimum of 19, mostly males, but the true number was probably closer to 25. There after smaller numbers were seen from widespread locations with most areas holding a few until the last seen on 29-Apr:	
	Copse south of Yeroham	A female was present on 25-Apr	
	Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds	Male and Females were present in the evening of 25-Apr with presumably the same female still present on 26-Apr	
	IBRCE	A female was at the northern end on 26-Apr	
	Lotan	Male and Females were at the Organic Gardens on 26-Apr with an immature male on 27-Apr	
	Canada Park	a stunning male on 27-Apr	
	Eilat Cemetery	Male and Female present on 27-Apr	
	KM82	A cracking male in the wadi in the evening of the 27-Apr	
	Kibbutz Samar	Superb males and females present on 28-Apr	
	Central Park	A flighty female on 29-Apr	
	Corner Park	A female on 29-Apr	

149	Pied Flycatcher	Outnumbered by Collared Flycatcher I only had the following individuals that I was happy with: Lake Yeroham
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160	White Wagtail	Only three singletons seen: IBRCE on 26-Apr, at the KM20 Salt Pans on 26-Apr and the KM19 Sewage Pond on 29-Apr
161	Greenfinch	Several were noted at Lake Yeroham on 25-Apr
162	Ortolan Bunting	Three at Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds in the evening of 25-Apr were the only ones seen
163	Cretzschmars Bunting	I caught the final bird of the spring for the Arava with a male at Neot Semadar Sewage Ponds on 25-Apr

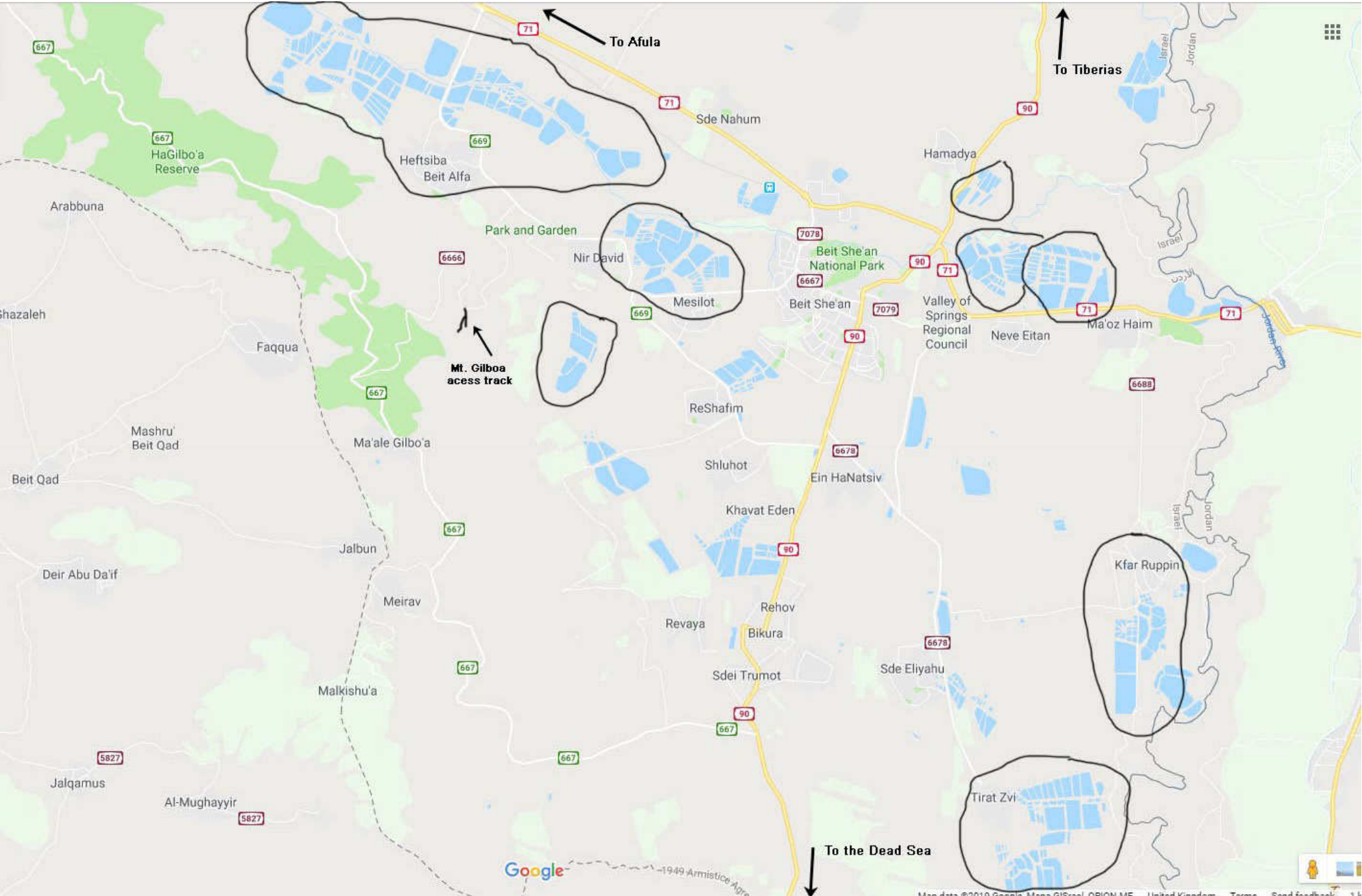
MAPS

I've updated and corrected some glaring errors in the 2018 Maps, a result of a copy and paste action that missed the proof reading (Metzoke Dragot is 'not' on Mt. Hermon). Gone are 'most' of my hastily produced and rather rubbish maps in favour of combination of Google Maps and Google Earth maps. I have retained a few of my own maps as it was proving difficult to produce these in an accurate way using Google.

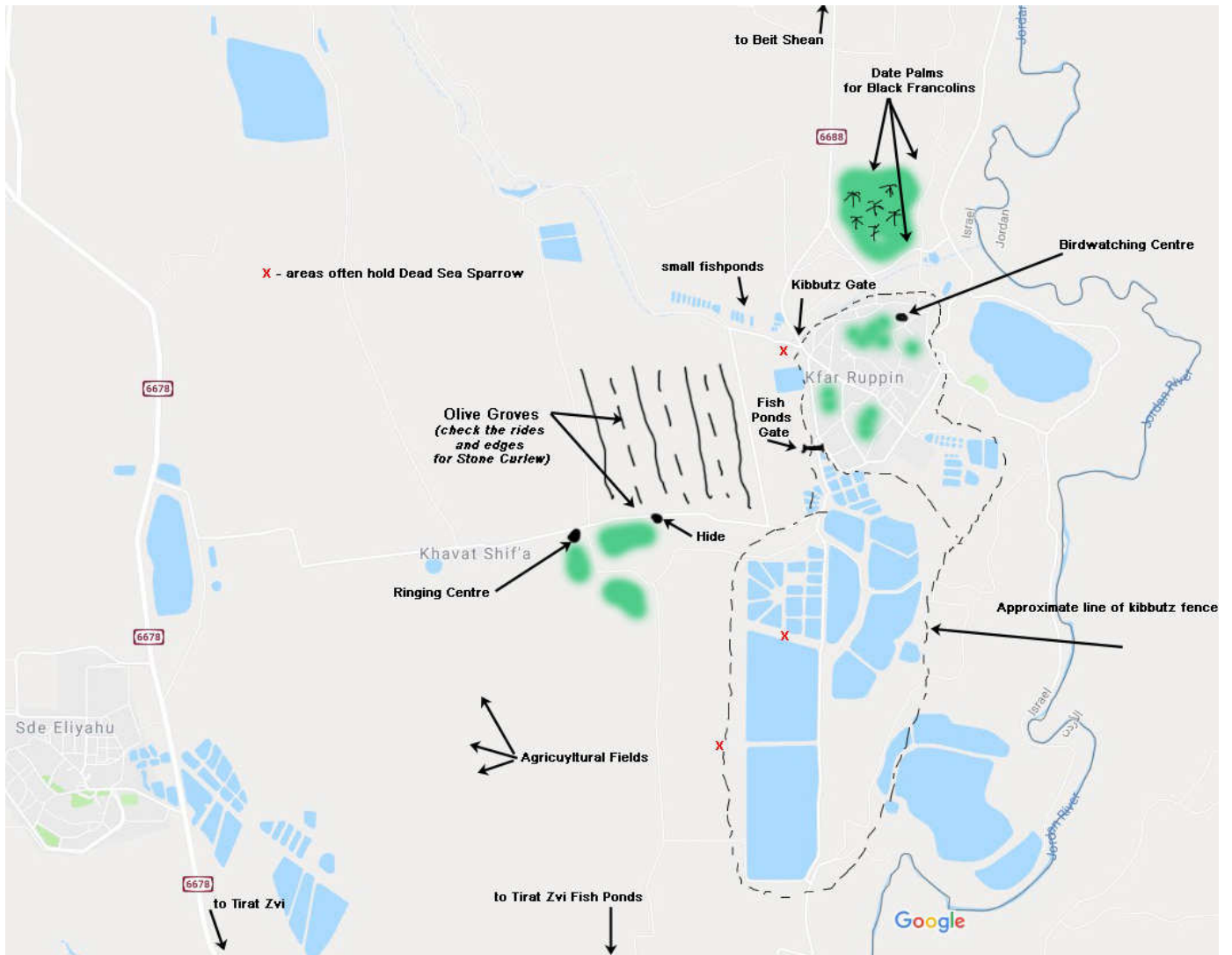
- **Ma'agan Michael**



- Beit She'an Valley



- Kfar Ruppin



- Tirat Zvi Fish Ponds



• Neve Etan and Ma'oz Fishponds



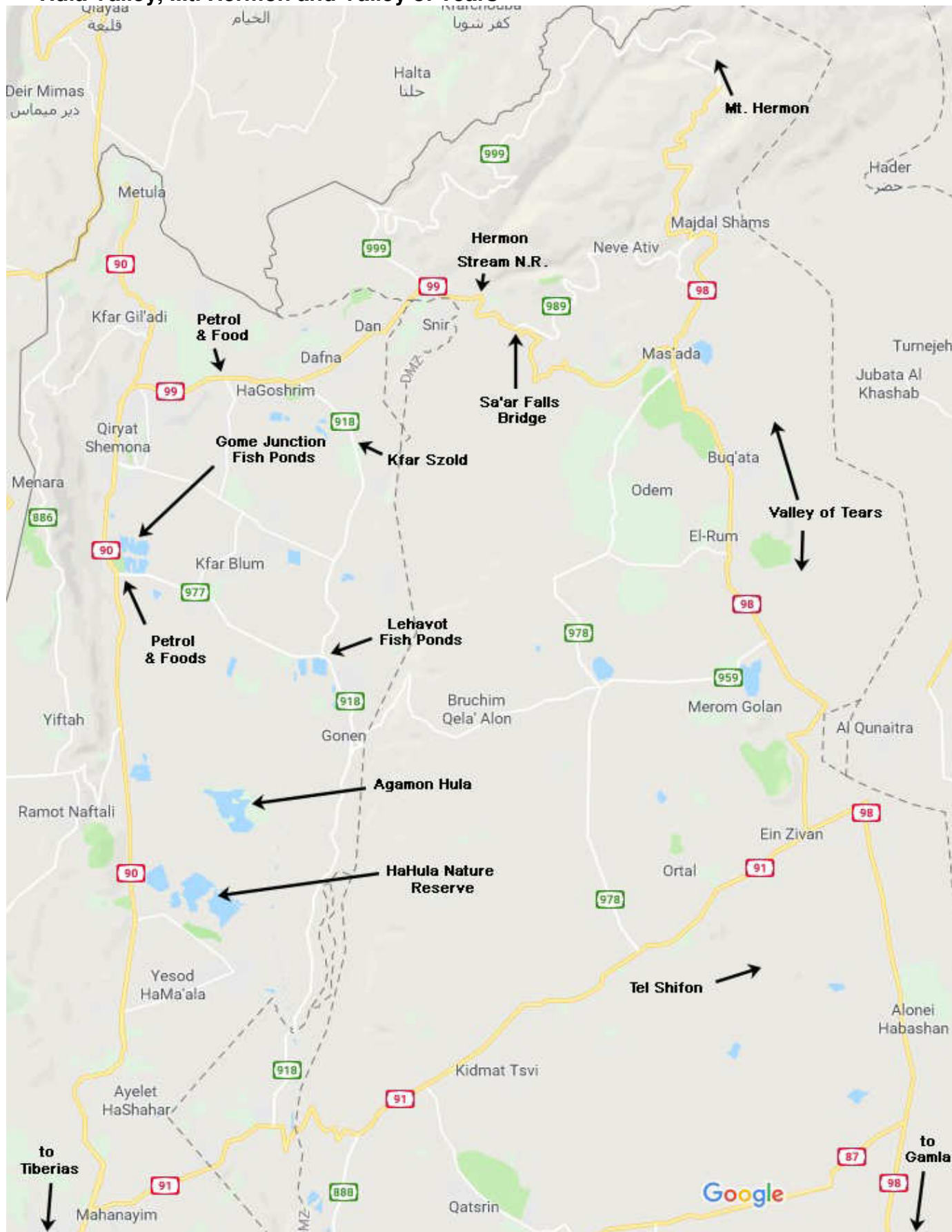
• Mt. Gilboa, Nir David, Mesilot Fish Ponds and Beit Alfa Fish Ponds



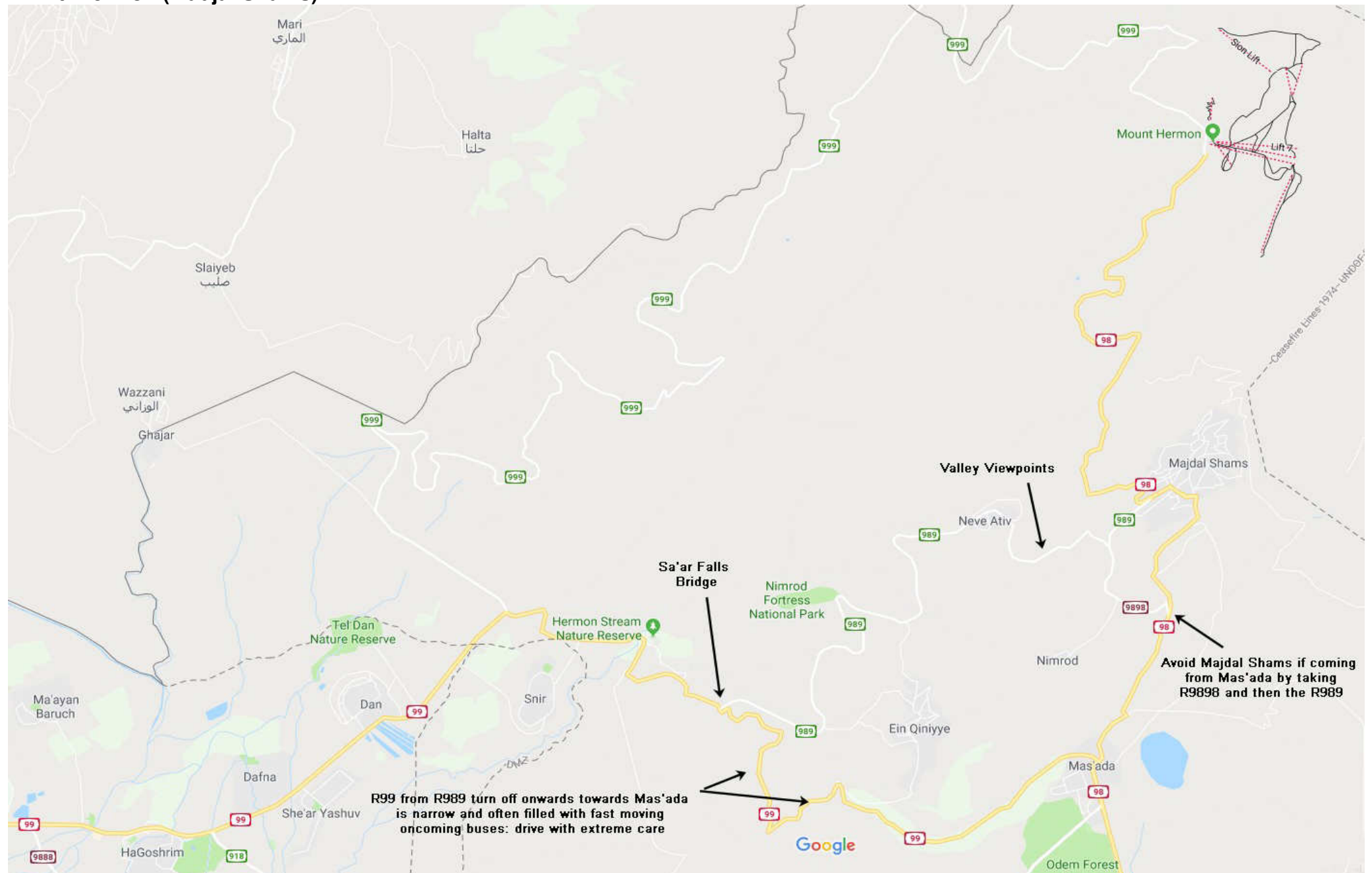
• Mt. Gilboa



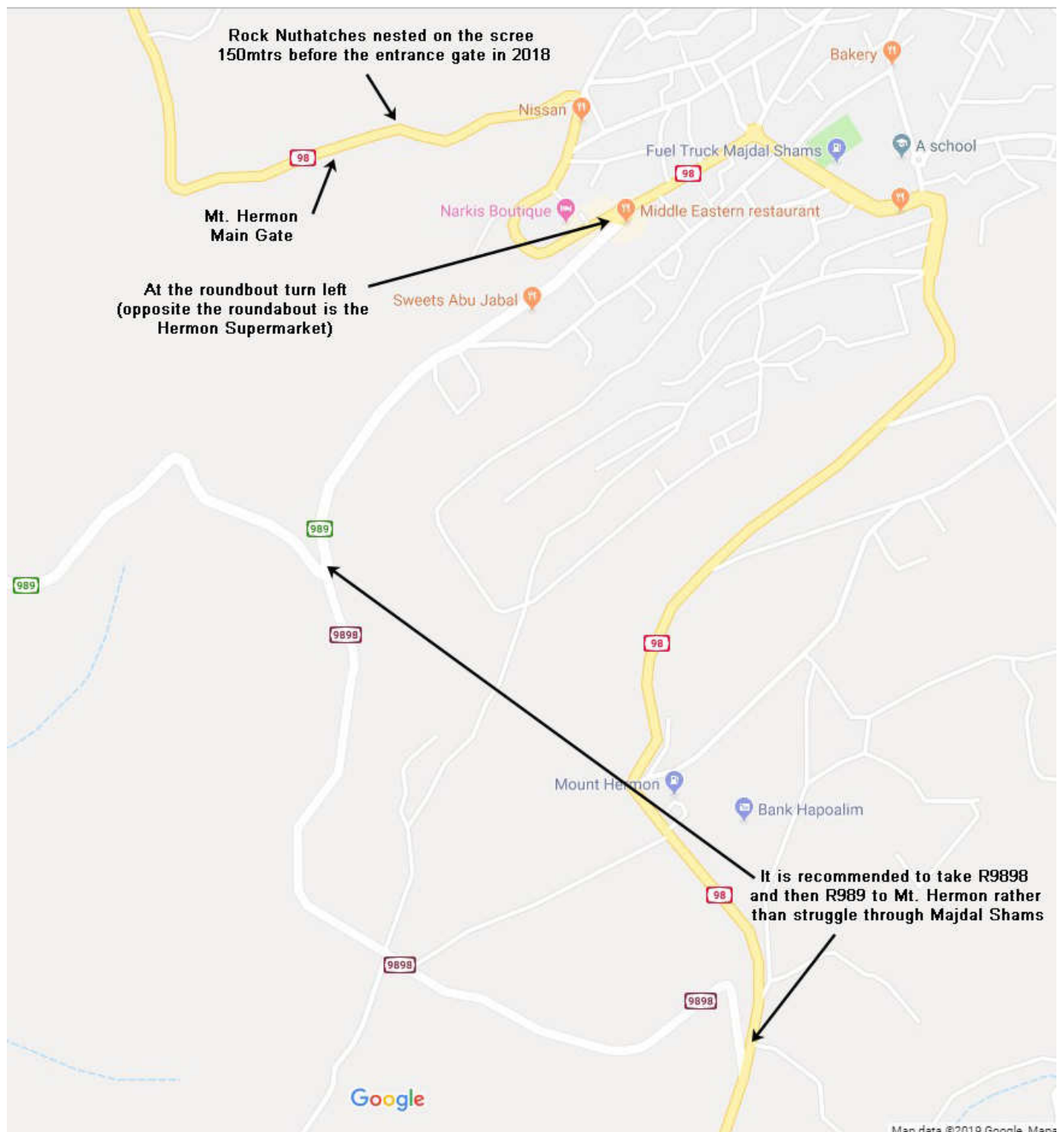
- Hula Valley, Mt. Hermon and Valley of Tears

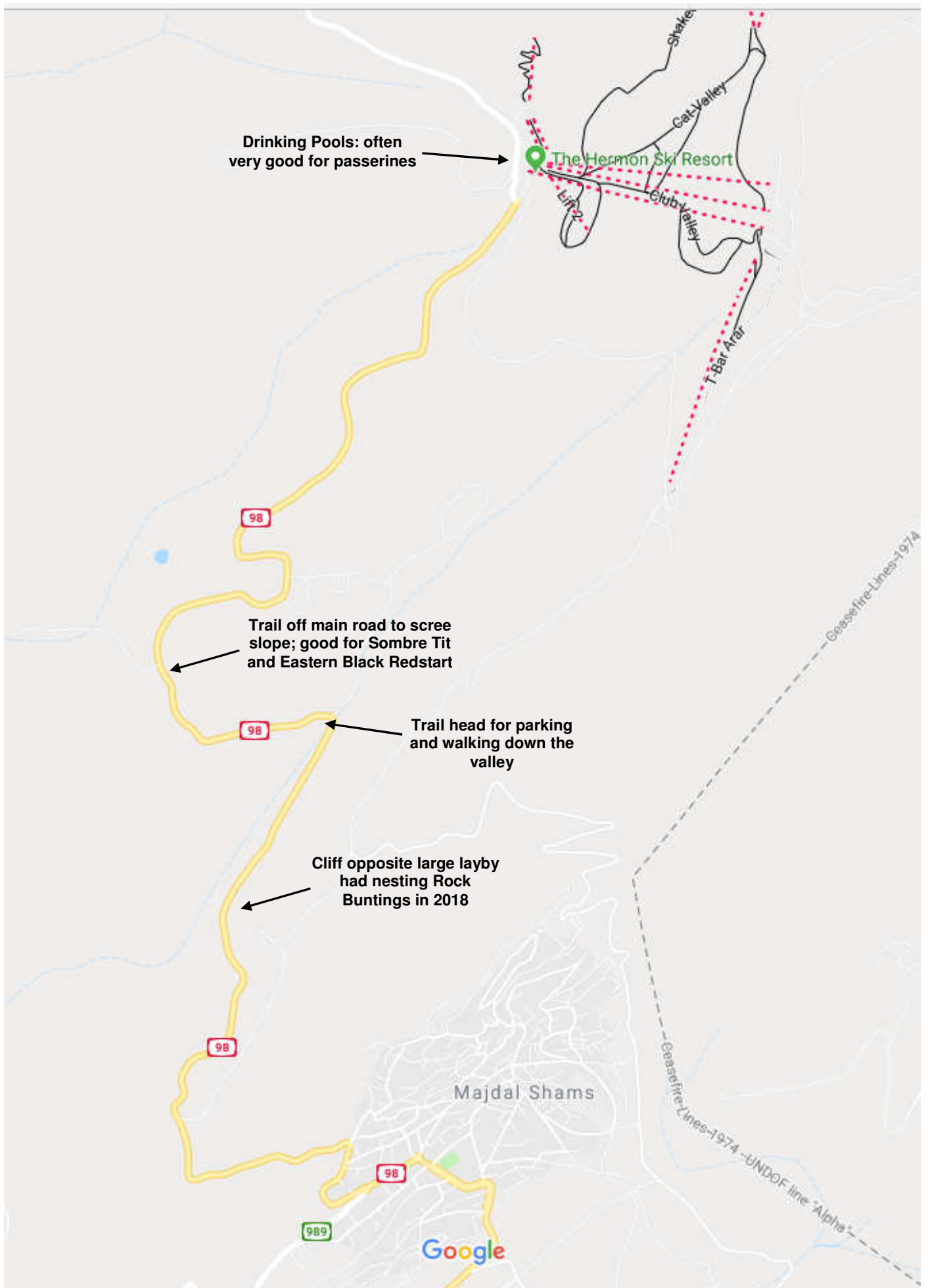


- **Mt. Hermon (Madjal Shams)**

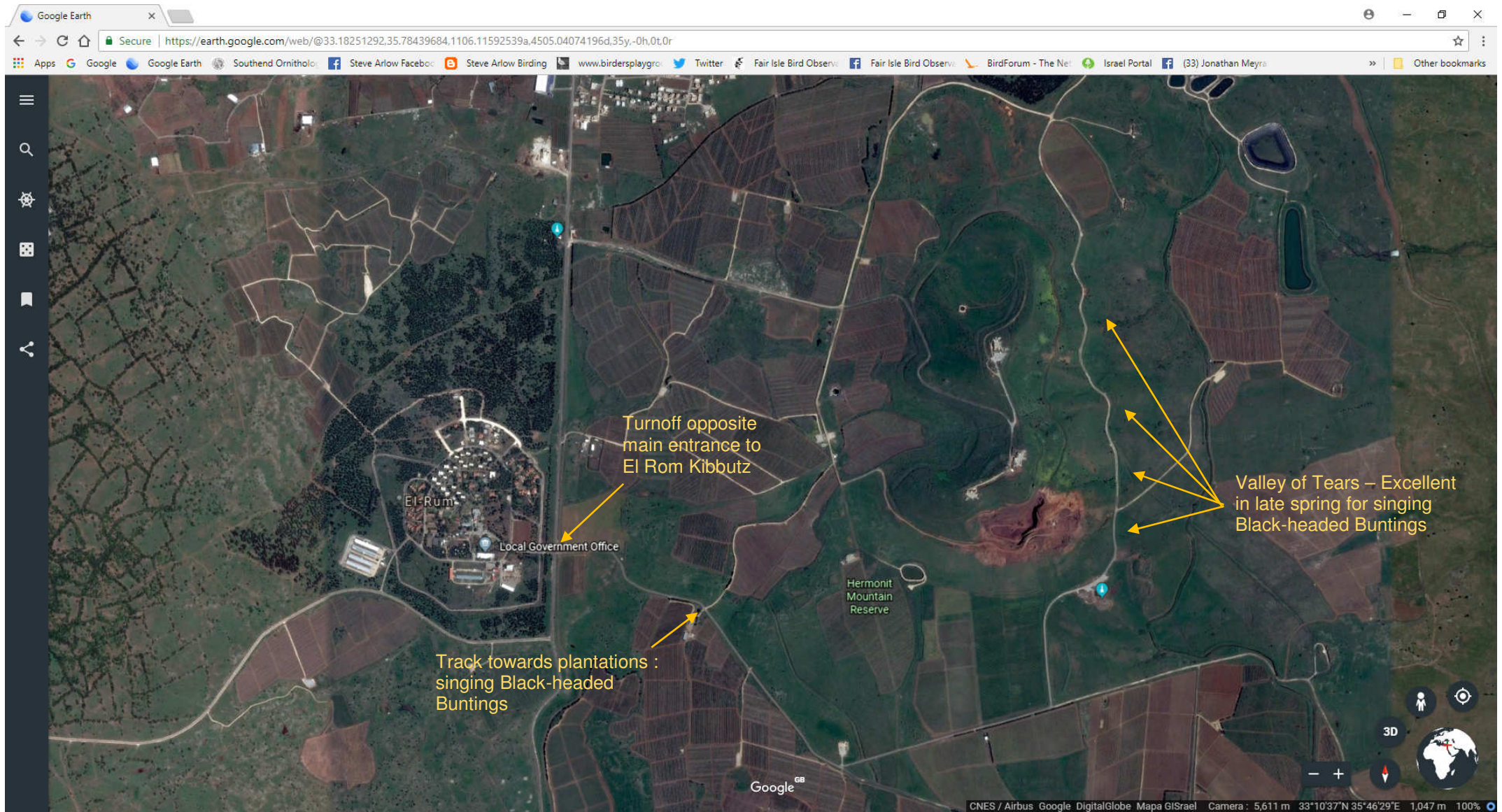


- **Mt. Hermon (Access)**





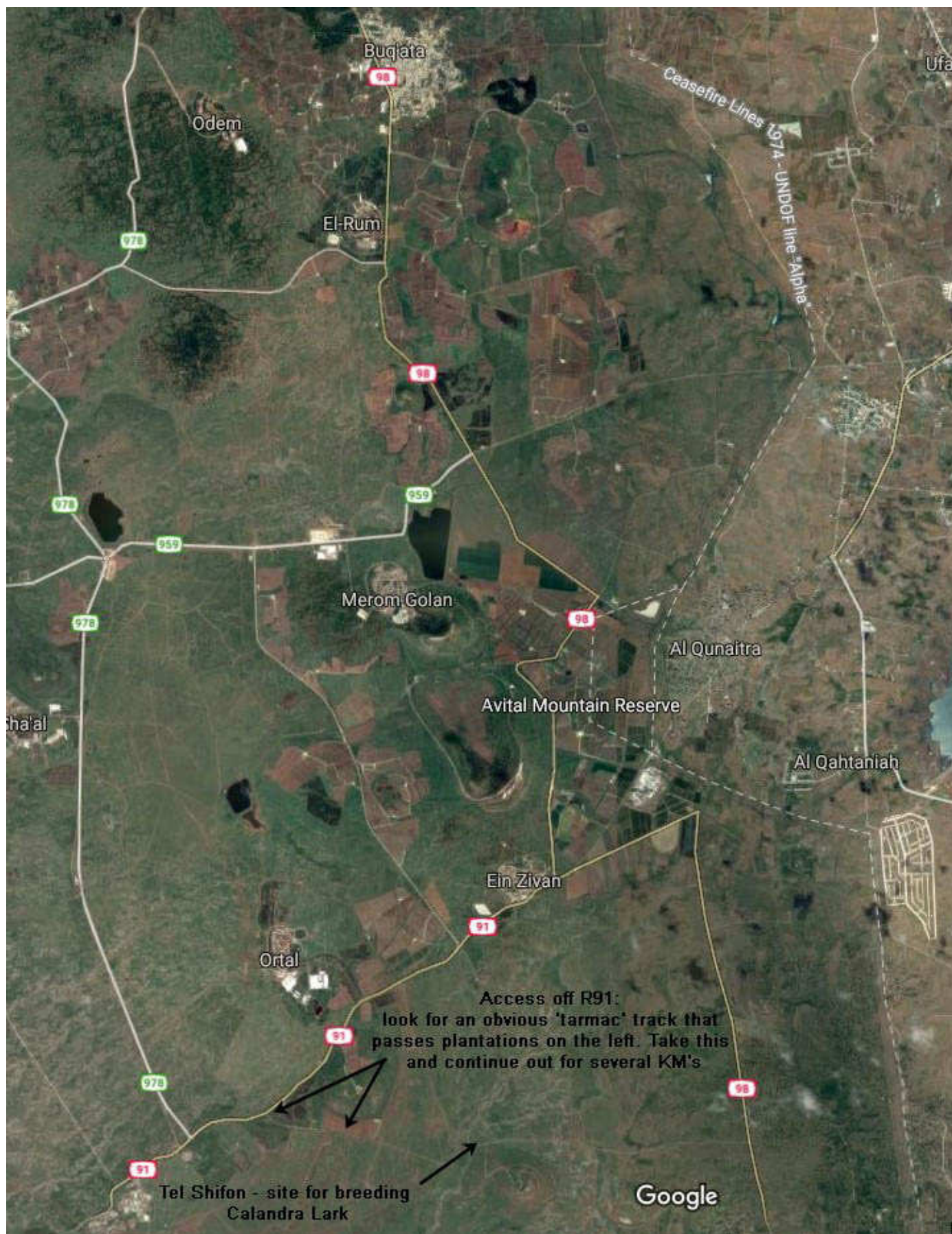
- Hermonit Mountain Reserve and Valley of Tears



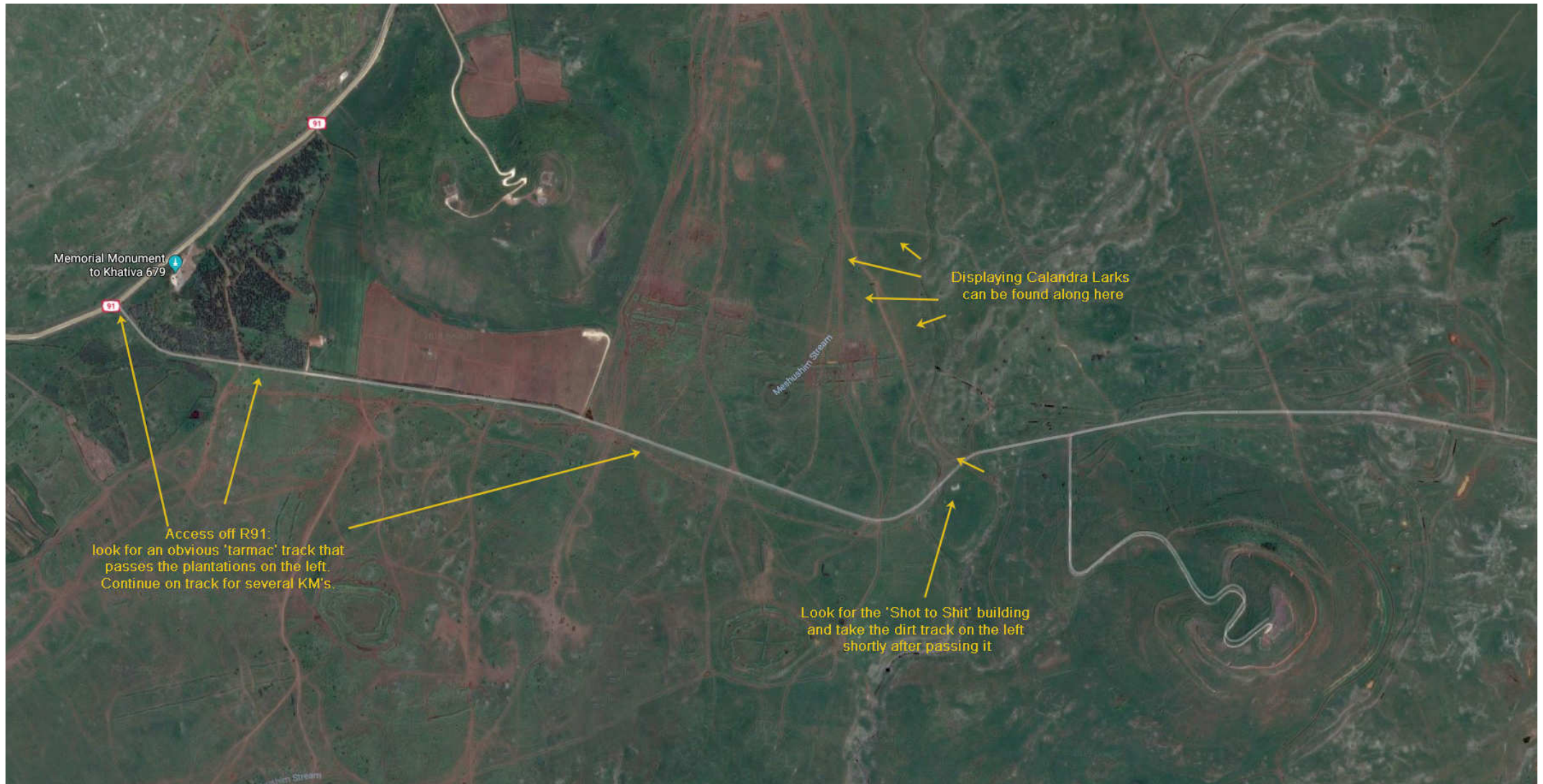
- South El Rum



- Tel Shifon (how to get there)



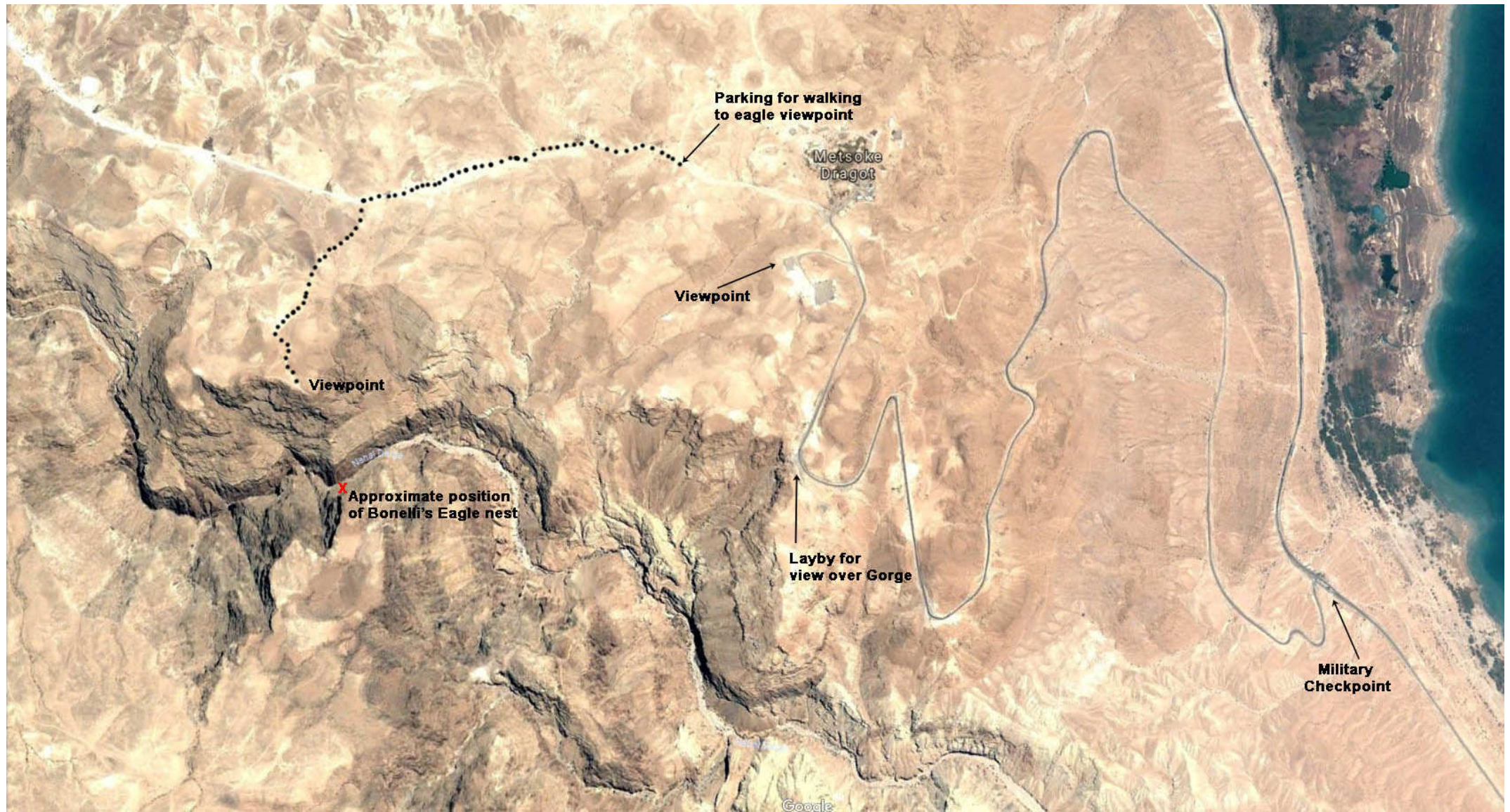
- Tel Shifon (Calandra Lark site)



- The Dead Sea



- Metzoke Dragot



• Judean Plains (Lake Yeruham, Mt. Amasa, LaHav Reserve)



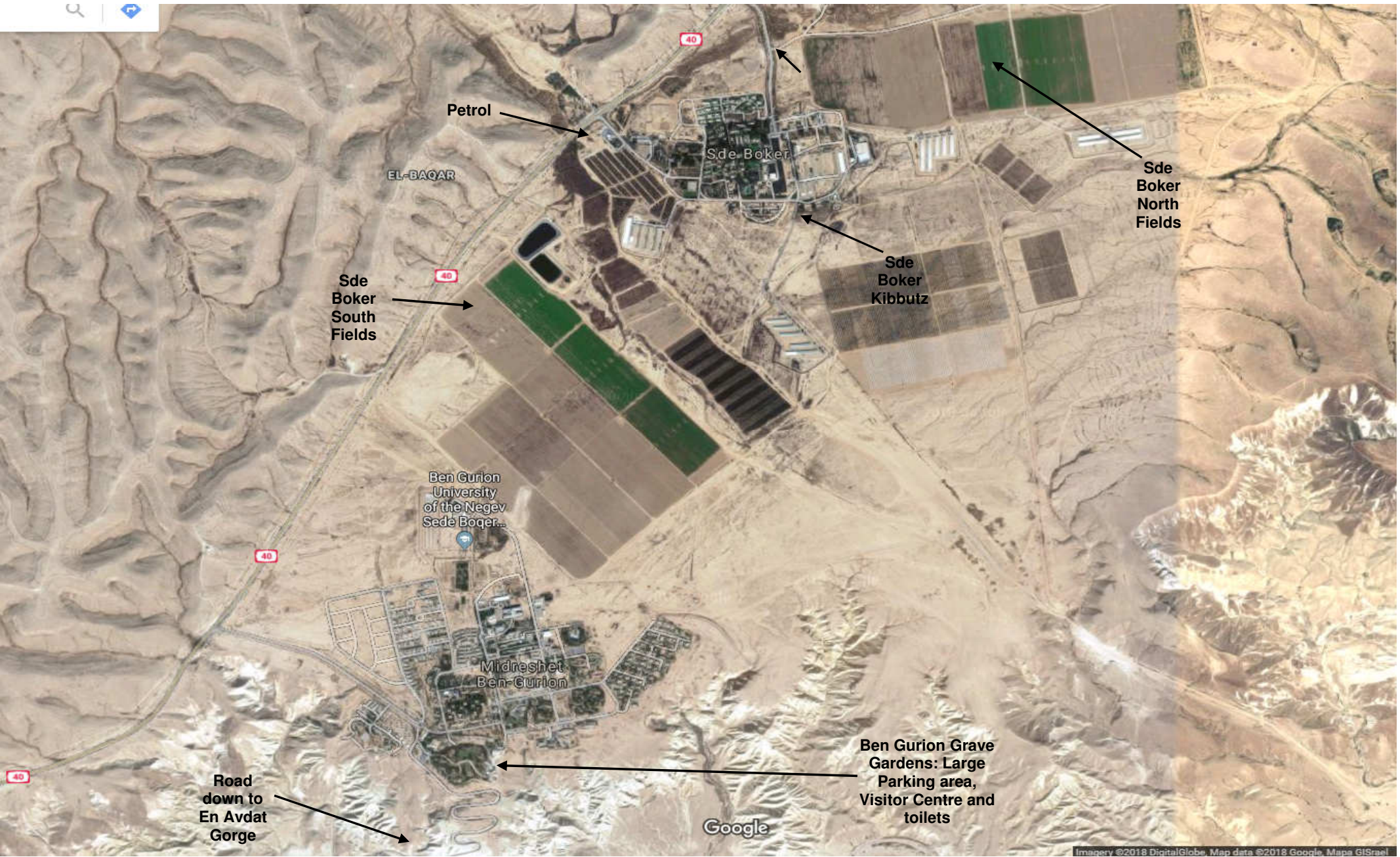
• Mt. Amasa



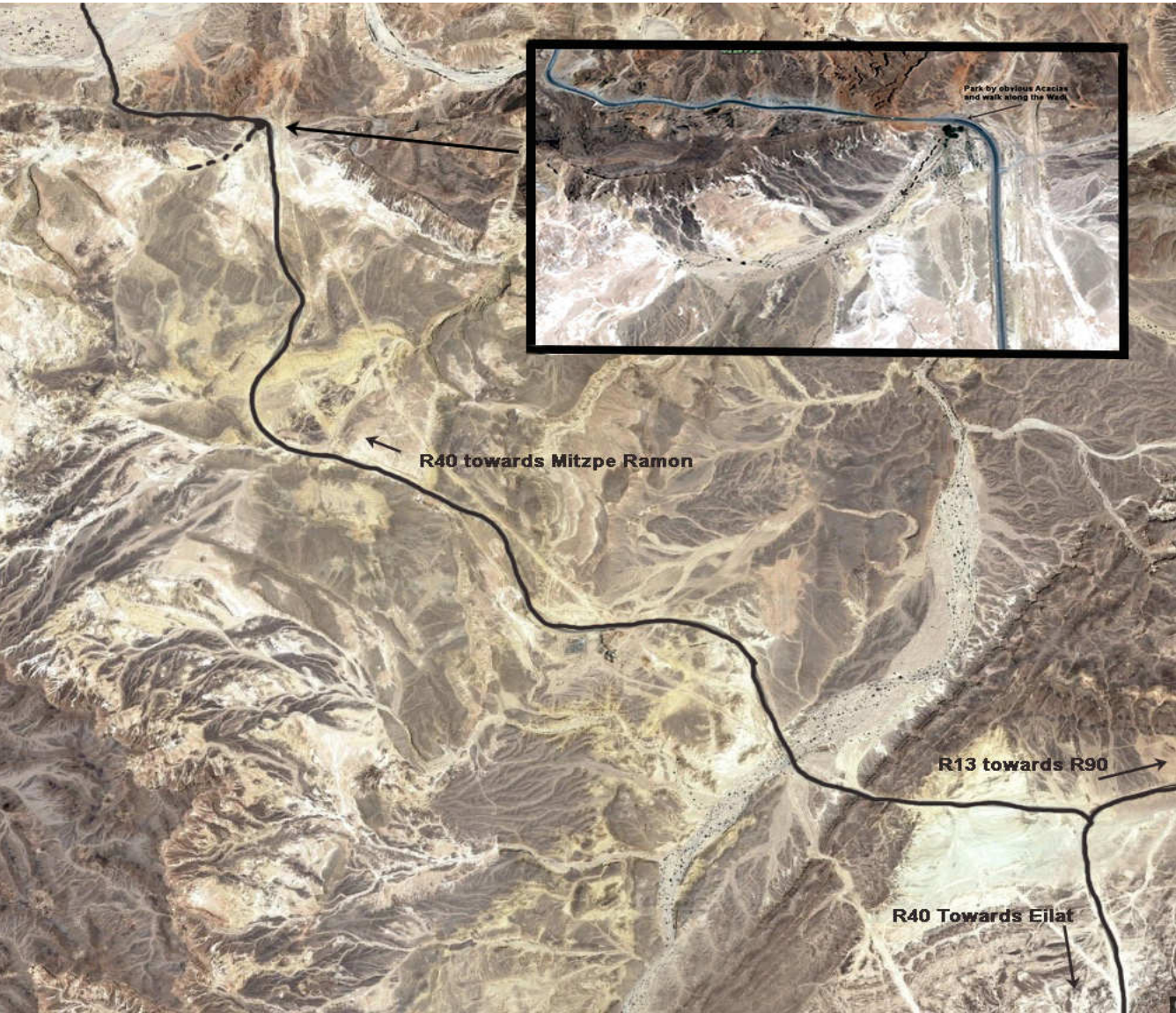
- Negev
- Nizanna and Kmelin Sewage Ponds



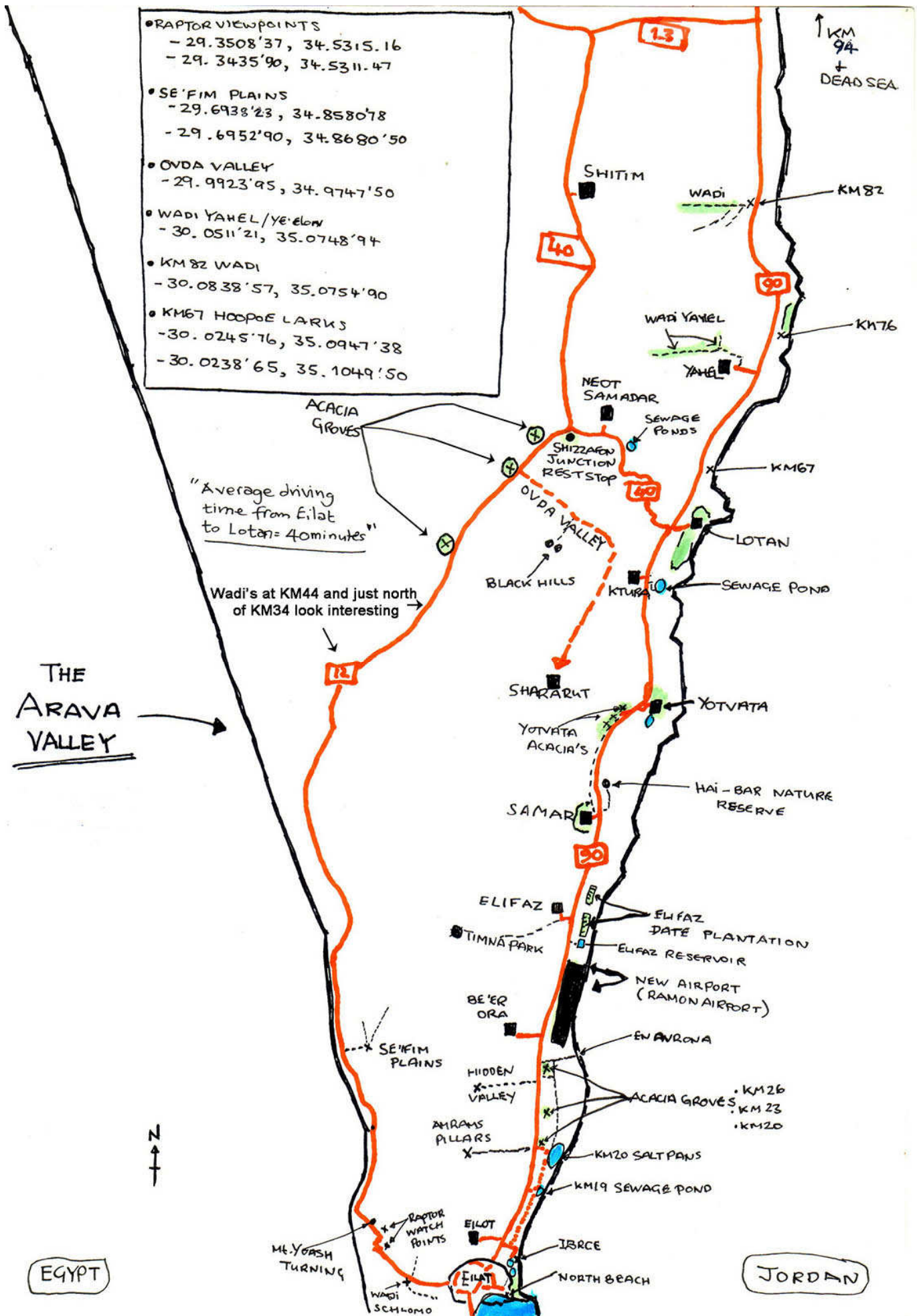
- Sde Boker and Ben Gurion's Memorial Gardens



- **Route 40 North of Shizzafon Junction**



- The Southern Arava

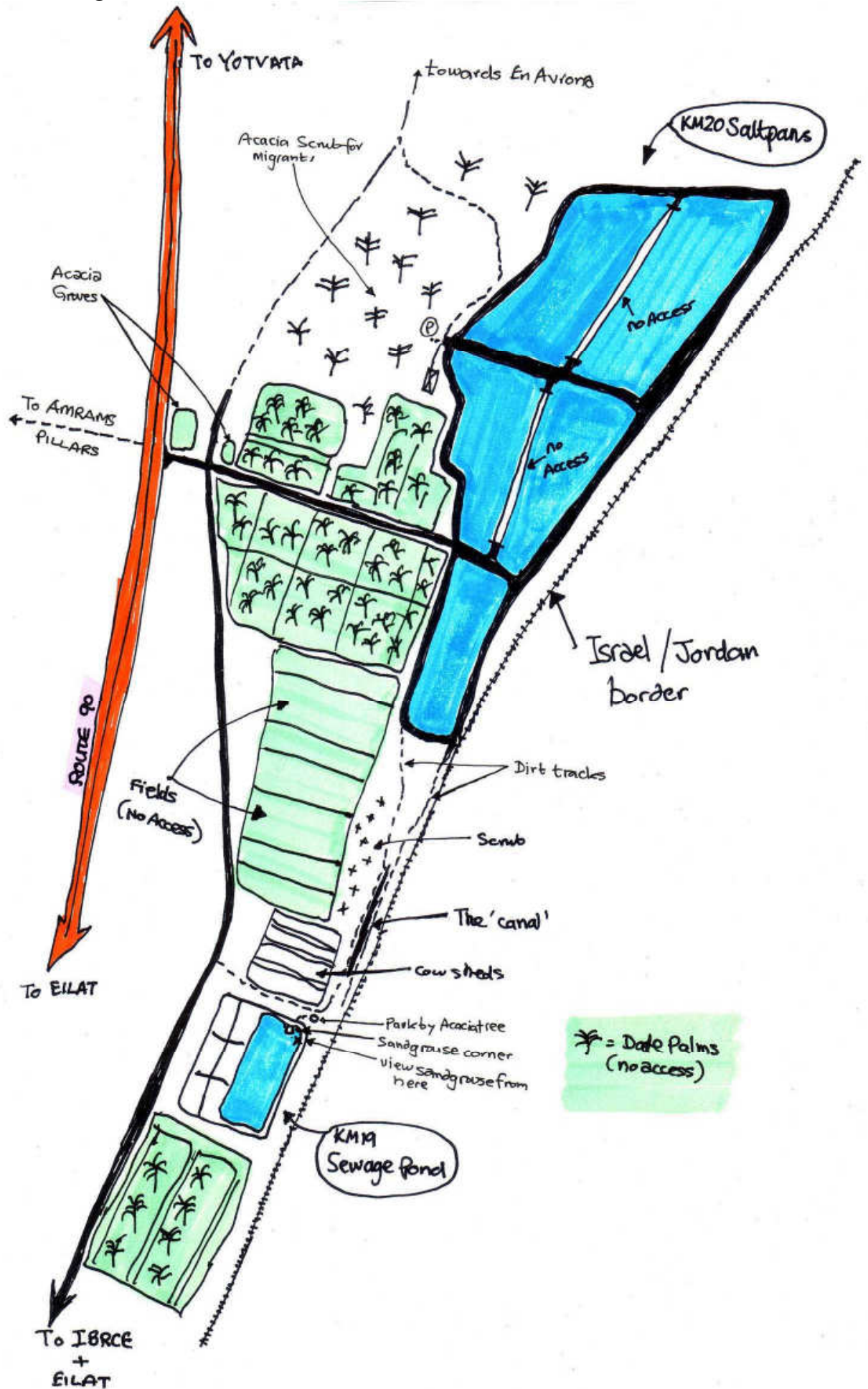


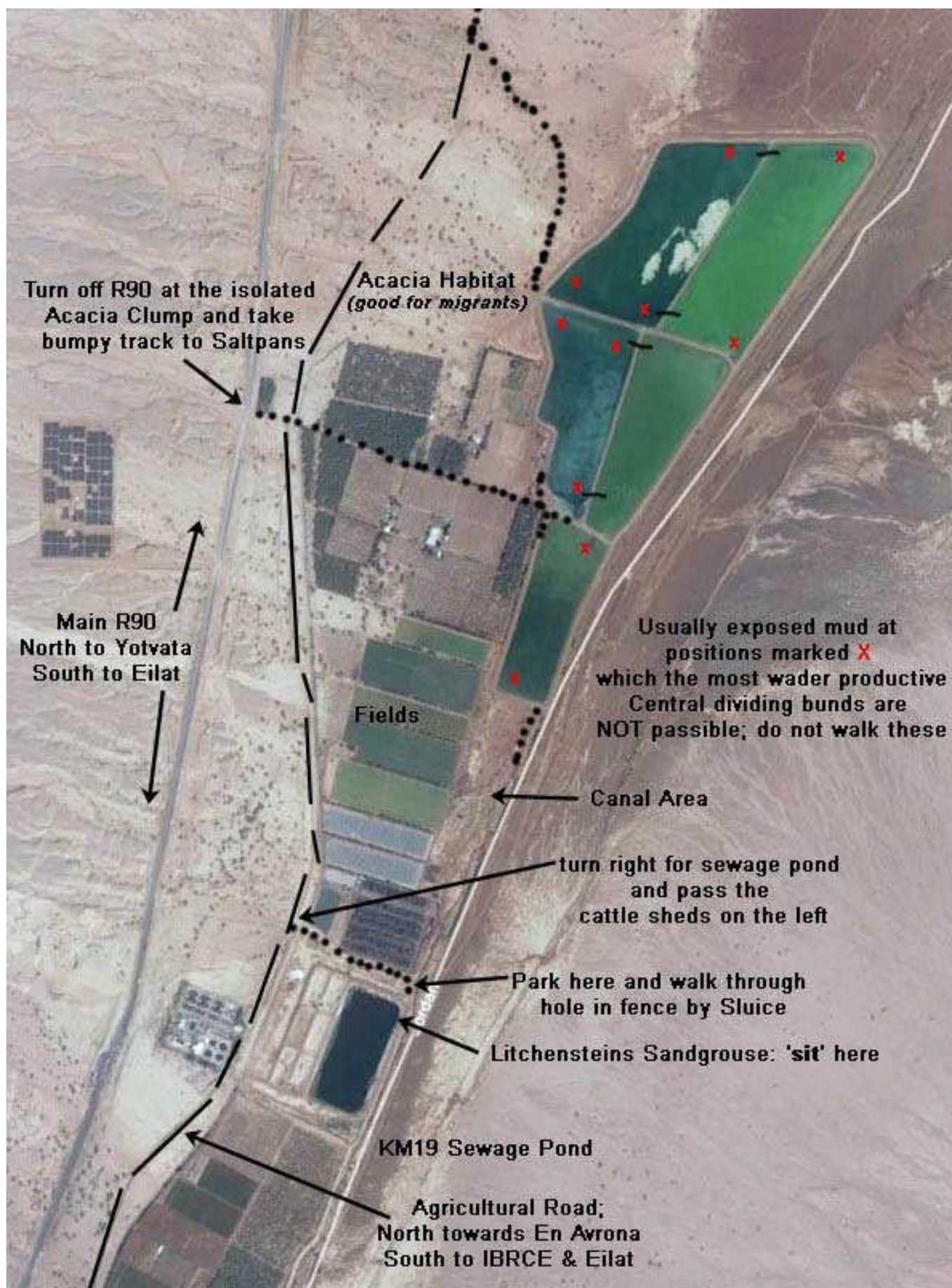
-
- EILAT**
- Compass rose: N
- Key locations and landmarks:
- Neighborhoods:** TSE'ELIM, ARAVA, OFIR, HA ESHEL, GANNIM A', GANNIM B', SHAHAMON, NEW MIDBAR, INDUSTRIAL AREA, NORTHERN BEACH HOTEL AREA.
 - Parks and Green Spaces:** Canada Park, Mitspe Yam, Ofira Park, Central Park, Ofira Park, Lagoon Park, New Lagoon.
 - Water Bodies:** GULF OF EILAT, HA MLEHA (SALT PONDS).
 - Infrastructure:** Eilat Airport, Eilat High School, Eilat Museum, Eilat Prison, Eilat Police Station, Eilat Fire Station, Eilat Hospital, Eilat Post Office, Eilat Bus Station, Eilat Train Station, Eilat Cable Car, Eilat Ferry, Eilat Taxi, Eilat Limousine, Eilat Car Rental, Eilat Boat Rental, Eilat Horse Riding, Eilat Golf Course, Eilat Tennis Courts, Eilat Basketball Courts, Eilat Soccer Field, Eilat Beach, Eilat North Beach, Eilat South Beach.
 - Other Features:** Cemetery, Holland Park, limited Layby parking, To IBRC, To Eilat Airport & En Netiv, to the Mountains, Towards South Beach, North Beach, Dirt track to IBRC and Date Palms, Rough tarmac track to North Beach.
- © כל הזכויות שמורות / www.mapofnet.com

- Eilat South Beach

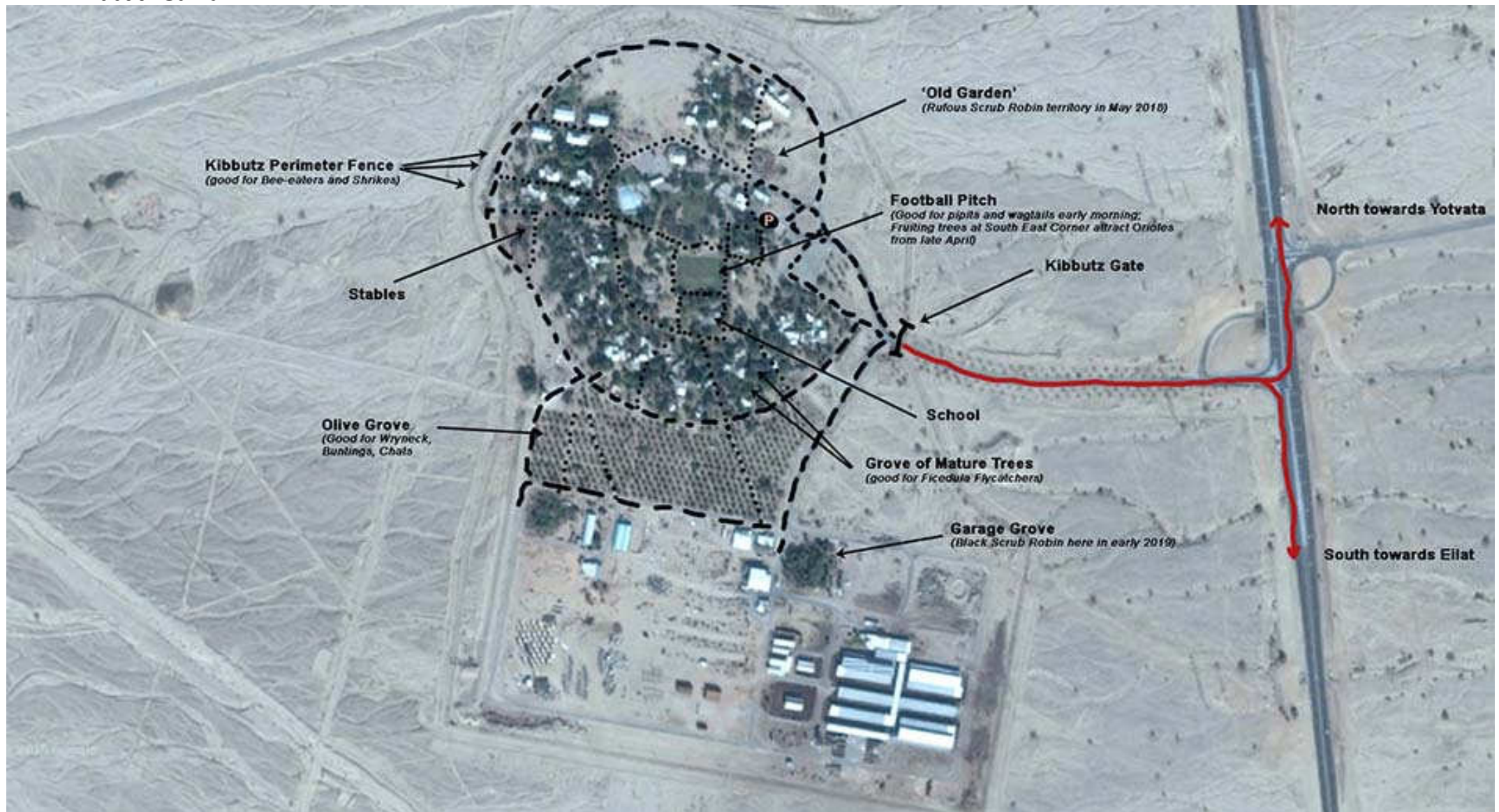


- KM19 Sewage Pond and KM20 Salt Pans

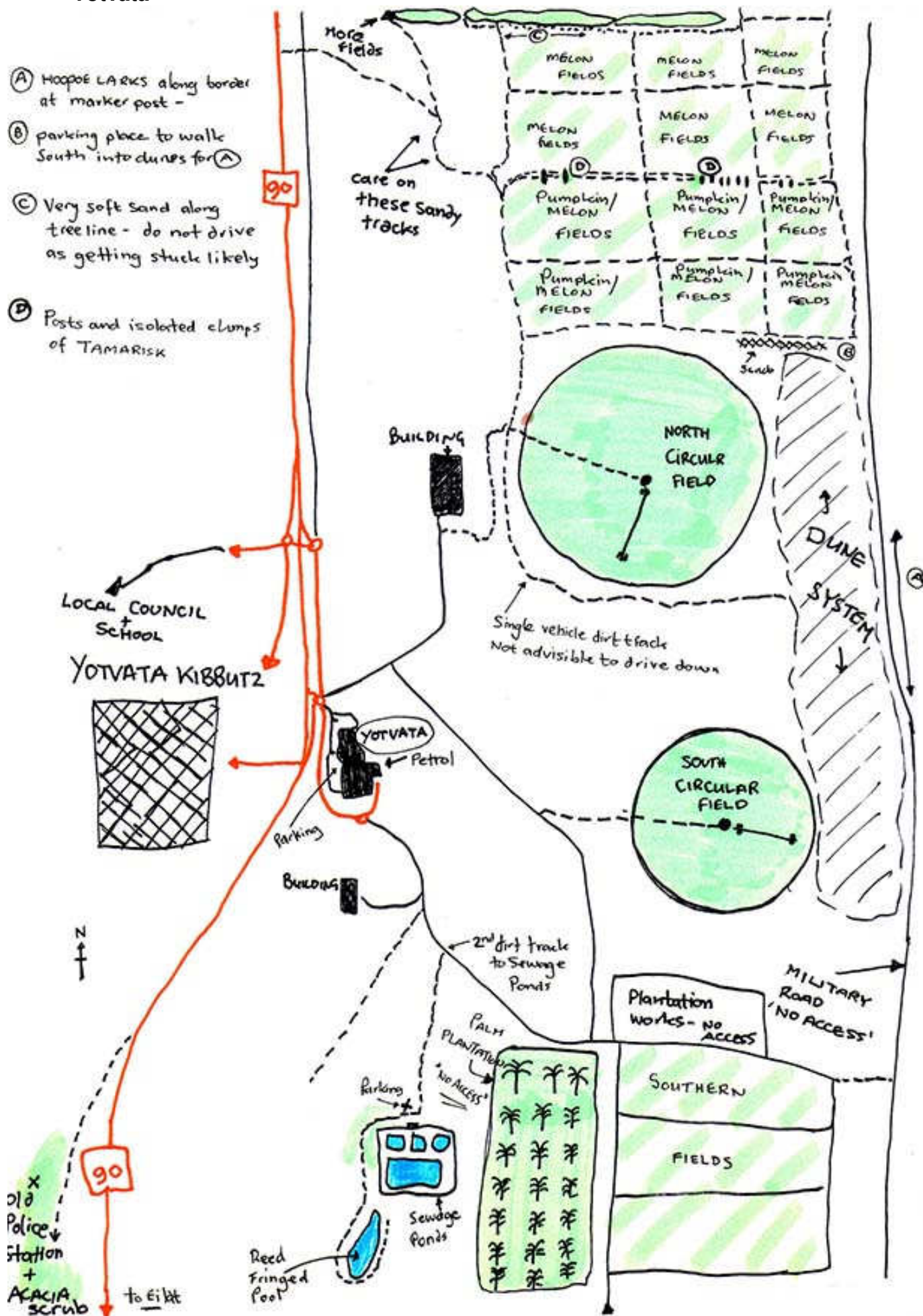




- Kibbutz Samar



- Yotvata



- Wadi Yahel / Ye'elon



- Ovda Valley



- The Northern Arava



- Hazeva

