

Tripreport Iran by Paul Vossen 24 December 2018 – 7 January 2019

To escape Christmas and New Year, Iran was our sunny destination this time. As the country is as big as UK, Germany, France and Spain together and my two sons of 17 and 15 are not interested in birdwatching, I decided just to visit the Central,- and the Southeast part of the country, avoiding the cold north and because of lack of time the swampy Southwest. With daytime-temperatures between 15-20 C in Shiraz, Yazd and Bam and even 25-30 in Minab and Bander-e-Abbas, a wintercoat was not necessary. When the sun wasn't shining, temperatures could drop to 10 C so thermal underwear isn't a bad idea.

As birding was not the main aim of our trip and distances are quite long, I choose for visiting four places: Shiraz, Yazd, Bam and Minab.



As it was hard to find reliable information, we just went there and go. To obtain a visum, you can buy an e-visum. We bought one for 55€ each. Notice that this is nothing more than just the preparation of your visum and allowance to get into the country. For the visum itself you have to pay 75€ each at the airport. It seems in Tehran international airport you can get Visum on Arrival, just for 75€.

You'll need a valid passport and a statement of your health insurance that medical costs are also covered in Iran. Let your health insurer explicitly use the name Iran in this statement.

Binoculars, telescopes etcetera is not any problem. We expected Shiraz International Airport as huge, but in fact it has just one strip. The arrival and departure hall is as big as a sportshall, it has one baggage claim, a very small office for visa (just one desk with a computer and a chair) and one old bagagescan.

We arrived at 04.00 am, at 04.15 we changed money at the airport (you don't get a receipt) and 04.45 we were in our hotel. We booked in advance the Karim-Khan hotel, which was a very nice and for Iranian standards luxurious place.

About the money, as there is no bank accepting creditcards, cheques and there are no atm's accepting your card, you have to bring your own money with you. In the cities you can change money but in smaller places it can be difficult.

The rate at our time was between 11.000.000 Rial and 13.000.000 Rial for 100€. Best way is to start with changing 200€ at the airport. For hotels (3 beds a night) we payed 4.000.000 Rial in Shiraz, 1.500.000 Rial in Yazd, 3.000.000 Rial in Bam and 3.000.000 Rial in Minab. We took very comfortable buses from Shiraz to Yazd (5 hours, 500.000 Rial each), Yazd-Bam (7 hours, 500.000 Rial each) and Bandar-e-Abbas – Shiraz (8 hours, 500.000 Rial each). Bam-Minab we travelled by cab (7.000.000 Rial) and Minab-Bander-e-Abbas (600.000 Rial). For small distances we offered cab-drivers 100.000 Rial, which is more then locals will pay but for us it was fine. Notice that car-rental is not an option and domestic flights are very cheap.

Prices in restaurants were between 300.000 Rial and 700.000 Rial each. Entrance-fee in tourist-sites like Persepolis 200.000 Rial each. We did all the things we liked and didn't look at the costs and in the end it turned out we spent about 35€ each for one day.

There are no dangers and annoyances, people are extremely friendly, they don't try to trick you, if you loose something – in our case a mobile phone – they do the utmost to find it and bring it back. Their hospitality is everywhere overwhelming so I would advice everyone: go!

Our trip-scheme:

24th Dec: we drove from Maastricht to Frankfurt Best Western Armedia Hotel and slept there. They have deal with free parking for two weeks and a free shuttle bus to Frankfurt airport. This stay costs 125€.

25th Dec: plane left at 16.00 pm, at 22.00 we arrived at Doha (Qatar) and two hours later we caught our plane to Shiraz where we arrived around 04.00 am.

26th Dec: Eram botanical garden at 08.00 (entrance-fee 200.000 Rial, opens at 08.00) is a lovely place and a must-see if you are in Shiraz, bet here early. Around 11.00 am we went for Perselopolis (200.000 entrance-fee, cab Shiraz-Persepolis including two hours waiting 1.000.000 Rial) was very impressive, even unless I couldn't find one of the Rock Nutaches. In the evening we went to Azadi Park for the fair which is good fun.



Persepolis

27th Dec: leaving our hotel at 08.00 and taking the bus, we were in Yazd around 15.00. We went to Friendly Hotel in the old medina. (info@friendlyhotel.ir or info@yazdfriendlyhotel.com or yazdfriendlyhouse@gmail.com, 0913 3522985/035 36207370), in the afternoon and evening walking through the narrow streets of this old and impressive desert-city.

28th Dec in the afternoon we went to Chak-chak, the famous village of the Zarathustra.

29th Dec 05.00 am heading for the main targetspecies: Pleske's groundjay. Found at 09.30, along the road 82, just 5 km south of the petrolstation. I went with Mehdi (cargoyazd@gmail.com) who is a very recommendable tourguide/taxidriver. He is interested in birds and will do anything to help you finding them. If you don't succeed, try the Shahr e Babak-region. You could try Abdol – living in Kerman (09139533171) to arrange transport and accomodation, he speaks fluent English (which is quite rare in Iran). In general a good way to contact is to phone first and then use WhatsApp.

As the car broke down, we went to a friends place. Actually the house was two small rooms with roomfilling carpets on the ground and no furniture. It's basic and fine and made me think how we fill our houses at home with lots of unnecessary stuff.

Anyway, around noon I was back in Yazd, we tried to arrange a delta plane trip but as someone lethally crashed a few days before, this company was closed. So we went for quaddriving in the Lut-

desert. Again we had bad luck as the quads were not recovered from the day before. But finding some Hoopoe Larks compensated a lot.



Landscape Pleske's Groundjay

30th Dec we joined a small touristgroup-trip visiting Chak-chak again, but also the old village Kharanaq – which provides excellent views of Little Owl (forma *lilith*) and totally unexpected Eversmann's Redstart and Radde's Accentor. The fields at the eastside are so productive that a stay for half a day is advisable but as we were in a group, we went further to Meybod, a small village with a 6.000 years history. And lucky for me, the first two species of butterflies.

31th Dec we left around 09.00 am to catch the bus for Bam. This unfortunately turned out in waiting many hours before the bus actually left at 14.30pm (they told us 12.00). Around 20.00 pm a tyre of the bus exploded and we were directed to another bus, full of Baluchi people. After four hours we were not in Bam but in Zahedan, near to the border of Pakistan. As it is very unwise to be there, we directly turned with another bus back to arrive in Bam at 04.00 pm. We fortunately found a guesthouse where we could stay.

1st Jan Bam was hit by an earthquake in december 2003. Over 40.000 people died which was one third of the population. Most houses are rebuild but the sad consequences can still be seen. As there are many palm plantations, I hoped to find Sind Woodpecker but I failed to find one.

2nd Jan We went to Minab by taxi. We left at 09.00 and were there at 15.00. The scenery with lots of mountains and lots of green, was not productive for birds. Minab has just one hotel (touristhotel Minab) which was very nice. Next to the hotel there is a park where I failed to find the Spotted Little Owl – actually the onliest failure of all my targetspecies.

3rd Jan After Pleske's Groundjay definitely the most wanted species was Sind Pied Woodpecker. I had pointed out 15 locations where I could possibly find this species but I already found it at the first one. The best way to find is to be early and listen carefully, it's the same sound as our Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*. It was nice birding in that area and satisfied I went back.

In the noon we went to Tyhab, 15 kilometres out of Minab and near the coast. The mudlands near the harbour were good for Great Stone Plover and Indian Sand Lark, which I found within one hour.

4th Jan At 09.00 am we took a cab to Bandar-e-Abbas. We saw camels along the road but the heat there was almost unbearable. We got the 12.00 bus to Shiraz, where we arrived at 20.00 pm. Buses are very comfortable but they don't have toilets and they don't stop. So Geno mountain reserve, 50 km north of Bandar-e-Abbas, which is free accessible along the road, I saw it just out of the bus-window which is very frustrating. As by taxi you can stop everywhere, I should strongly advise to stay in Bandar-e-Abbas and hire a cab for a day (around 5.000.000 Rial) or take a cab at least for his part of the journey. In Shiraz we took the Setaregan Hotel (www.setareganhotel.com) which was really very nice.

5th Jan At 08.00 am visiting the Eram garden again, which was just around the corner. Strange to see Hawfinch. In the noon we walked to Babakouhi-tomb with a very nice view over the city but unproductive for birds. The fair in Azadi Park was big fun again.

6th Jan I went for Nazar garden (120.000 Rial) which is more cultivated than Eram garden. In the noon we visited the centre and after dinner we slept for a while as at 03.00 we had to go to the airport to catch our 04.45 plane to Doha.

7th Jan At 08.00 our plane left from Doha to Frankfurt where we arrived at 13.00. Notice that the terminal of the shuttle bus is not pointed out at the airport, it is advisable to find this terminal before you leave.

If you are in Iran for rolling up some Western-Palaearctic species, I would suggest to start in Yazd or Bandar-e-Abbas. There is no need to visit Shiraz or Bam. It must be possible to see the most important ones in four days. There are nightbuses but with a good preparation, domestic flights brings you more easily to other interesting sites: Ahvaz for Iraq Babbler, Mesopotamian Crow, Grey Hypocolius and Basra Reed Warbler, the North-West for Caucasian Blackgrouse and Caspian Snowcock and the North-East for Blackheaded Penduline Tit and Caspian Tit. In the South-east Sind Jungle Sparrow is mentioned in the Fieldguide 'Birds of the Middle East, Porter a.o., 1996) and Sistan Scrub Sparrow *Passer yatii* is possible at the Pakistani and Afghan border but notice that visiting these eastern border-areas is not very advisable.

List of Birds, the exact locations can be found on www.observation.org

1 Western Reef Heron	<i>Egretta gularis</i>	Tihab
2 Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Tihab
3 Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	Tihab (100+)
4 Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Minab (5)
5 Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	common
6 Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1 female Tihab
7 Levant Sparrow Hawk	<i>Accipter brevipes</i>	Shiraz
8 Shikra	<i>Accipter badius</i>	Minab
9 Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	common
10 Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	Minab and Bandar-e-Abbas
11 Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Yazd (20+)
12 Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Yazd (5+)
13 Kestrel	<i>Falco tinniculus</i>	common
14 See-see Partridge	<i>Ammoperdix griseogularis</i>	Minab (6)
15 Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	Minab (8)
16 Great Stone-curlew	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>	Tihab (15)
17 Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Tihab
18 Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	Tihab and Minab (20+)
19 Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Tihab
20 Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Tihab (15)
21 Saunders's Tern	<i>Sternula saundersi</i>	Tihab (2)
22 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>	Yazd (6)

23 Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	Shiraz-Persepolis (5+)
24 Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Shiraz (30+)
25 Eurasian Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Shiraz
26 Laughing dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	common
27 Little owl	<i>Athene noctua f. lilith</i>	Kharanaq
28 White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	Bam and Minab
29 Indian Roller	<i>Caracias garrulus</i>	Minab and Badar-e-Abbas (10+)
30 European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Minab
31 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>	Minab, Tihab, Bandar-e-Abbas (20+)
32 Sind Pied Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos assimilis</i>	Minab (4)
33 Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	Shiraz-Eram garden (2)
34 Greater Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>	Yazd (2)
35 Bar-tailed Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>	Chak-chak (2)
36 Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>	Yazd, Minab (15+)
37 Indian Sand Lark	<i>Calandrella raytal</i>	Tihab (6)
38 Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	common
39 Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Tihab, Bandar-e-Abbas (5+)
40 Rock Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>	Shiraz-Persepolis, Minab, Tihab (15+)
41 White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	common
42 Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Shiraz-Eram garden
43 White-eared Bulbul	<i>Pycnonouts leucotis</i>	common
44 Radde's accentor	<i>Prunella ocularis</i>	Kharnaq (1)
45 Eversmann's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythronotus</i>	kharnaq (1 male)
46 Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	common
47 Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	Minab (1 female)

48 Humes Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe albonigra</i>	Chaq chaq
49 Picata Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe picata</i>	Chaq chaq, Minab
50 Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Shiraz-Eram garden
51 Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomenos</i>	Shiraz-Eram garden (5+)
52 Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia nana</i>	Minab
53 Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>	Minab
54 Plain Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus neglectus</i>	Bam (1)
55 Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Shiraz (20+)
56 Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	Bam, Minab (10+)
57 Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	common
58 Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax</i>	Yazd (100+)
59 Alpine chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax gracuculus</i>	Chaq chaq, Kharanaq
60 Pleske's Groundjay	<i>Podoces pleskei</i>	Yazd (1)
61 Rook	<i>Corvus fragilegus</i>	Yazd (100+)
62 Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Yazd (10+)
63 Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Shiraz (100+)
64 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	common
65 Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	Minab (5+)
66 Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Shiraz (100+)
67 Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Shiraz-Eram garden
68 Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Minab (2)
69 Grey-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>	Chaq chaq

Subspecies: *Columba palumbus iranica*, *Pica pica bactriana*, *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax docilis*, *Galerida cristata magna*, *Alaemon alaudipes doriae*, *Sturnus vulgaris nobilor* and *Passer domesticus hyrcanus*

Mammals

Asian Wild Ass	<i>Equus hemionus</i>	between Bam and Minab
Asian mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>	Bam, Minab

Butterflies

African Monarch	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>	Minab
African Caper White	<i>Belenois aurota</i>	Yazd, Shiraz
Lemon Butterfly	<i>Papilio demoleus</i>	Minab
Mountain Small White	<i>Pieris ergane</i>	Bam
Gram Blue	<i>Euchrysos cnejus</i>	Ardakan
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Yazd



(*Euchrysos cnejus* and *Belenois aurota*)



Pieris ergane and *Vanessa cardui*



Bandar-e-Abbas