

SOUTH-EAST TURKEY, 12th – 20th JUNE 2011

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INTRODUCTION

This was a trip I'd been intending to make for many years, and it lived up to my expectations; definitely one of the best foreign holidays I've done for all sorts of reasons, including birds! As things turned out, my visit coincided with the beginning of the civil war in neighbouring Syria, and I was lucky that the crisis hadn't really started spilling over the border at this point.

Not many birders travel alone to this region of Turkey; it's hard work, the roads are pretty hazardous and a basic knowledge of the language is pretty essential. I hadn't done my usual thorough research job beforehand and so ended the week with a rather low tally of 116 species, but some of the rarest species proved very obliging and I only missed two of my targets.



Kurdistan Wheatear, Nemrut Dagı

INFORMATION AND MAPS

Despite June being an ideal time of year to visit, I didn't encounter any other birders during the week. Though somewhat dated, Dave Gosney's 'Finding Birds in Turkey, Ankara to Birecik' is still very useful. Other recommended trip reports, (previously available on the Travellingbirders website), are:

P.Mountain, Turkey, June-July 1990;

R.Bonser, Turkey July 2004;

Klaus Malling Olsen, 2005-7 (essential);

M.Grunwell, 'Birding Tuzla Golu, Demirkazik, Birecik and İşikli', May 2005 (good logistic info);

F.Simpson, 'South & East Turkey', June 2008;

E.G.Ochiatto, 'Turkey – from Cappadocia to Nemrut Dağı', May-June 2010;

T.Reid, 'Southern & Central Turkey', April-May 2011 (good maps);

Many thanks go to Ernesto Ochiatto and Chris Baines for their correspondence.

For guidebooks I brought the Collins bird guide plus Helm field guides 'Birds of the Middle East' second edition (Porter & Aspinall, ISBN 978-0-7136-7602-0). Also the Collins 'Butterflies of Europe' (ISBN 978-0-00-727977-7) which does not actually cover Turkey, but included the few species I saw.

My TomTom Satnav had proved its worth in Spain, so I purchased the Turkey map online for £45. Though invaluable in some situations, it was frequently out of date and directed me around non-existent roundabouts, through building sites, over footbridges and, on three occasions, the wrong way down a one-way street! Also some minor roads were not included. In addition I brought a 1:800,000 roadmap of Eastern Turkey.

HEALTH, PESTS AND HAZARDS

Currently visitors to eastern Turkey are recommended to have Tetanus & Hepatitis A jabs, plus Malaria if visiting the deltas (I only encountered mozzies at Tuzla Gölü). Occasionally there were other biting flies about, including some evil horseflies on the summit of Nemrut Dağı!

The large Anatolian sheepdogs seen everywhere in this part of the world have a reputation as ferocious guard dogs; however the strays I encountered seemed harmless enough.

You'll probably get frequent offers of 'chai' (tea) from the Turks, who are generally very friendly and helpful to foreigners. (Don't give a thumbs-up in reply – this is an obscene gesture in Turkish!)

DRIVING IN TURKEY

I rented a Fiat 'Sole' from Hertz at Adana airport. Be warned, Turkish driving is as dangerous as I've seen anywhere in the world. Don't expect other road users to show any regard for your safety, or even notice your existence. I would advise completely avoiding the cities of Adana and Gaziantep, which are rather chaotic.

Some Turkish 'rules of the road' seem a complete mystery - why are red traffic lights completely ignored by all vehicles at certain major junctions? Other rules make more sense, such as the practice of sounding your horn when overtaking HGVs on single carriageways (Turkish drivers like to sound their horns as often as possible anyway).

Petrol was expensive at around 130-160TL (£50-61) per tank.

The new toll motorways are great and have speeded up road travel considerably. Rather than conventional tollbooths, they operate by swiping a 'KGS' card as you exit the motorway and at other strategic checkpoints. Supposedly you get fined if you drive straight through. Apparently you can top up these cards at the Turkiye Bankasi, but this didn't work for me, so I had to stop and dash across the motorway to the concrete booths by the checkpoints where I could get credit added to my card. It seems to cost about 15TL for 70km (roughly Birecik - Şanlıurfa).

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

The Gaziantep/Işikli district proved a bit of a hassle, because the only hotels in the area were all concentrated in the centre of the city. I ended up spending 160TL for 2 nights at the Hotel Ibis (room only, air conditioned), having heard some bad things about the budget hotels around here.

At Birecik I spent 3 nights at the famous Mirkelam motel, on the main road at the west end of the bridge next to a garage. This was perfectly adequate, en suite with aircon and fridge for only 30TL a night, though slightly shabby these days. Sadly the highly-rated café/restaurant behind the Mirkelam has now closed, but the Kiyi restaurant, by the riverside to the north, is good if pricier. For a more up-market hotel, try the Altin Sofra on the east side of the Euphrates, north of the bridge, and ask for a room overlooking the river.

Arriving late on my first night in the Nemrut Dağı area, I stopped at the first hotel in Karadut village, the 'Hotel Camp Tur' (N 37°55.133' E 38°48.706'). This was 80TL half board, and though it was rather pokey, the proprietor did produce a hot dinner when I rolled up unannounced at 9pm! Much nicer was the Hotel Kervansary (N 37°56.394' E 38°45.692'), the penultimate hotel before the entrance to the Nemrut Dağı park, price 96TL half board.

On my last night I stayed in the small town of Ceyhan east of Adana, a grubby but pleasant place with plenty of eateries and bakeries (and Pied Kingfisher on the river!). There are two hotels in town, I stayed at the Hotel Ceyhan on the Ataturk Caddesi (www.otelceyhan.com); 50TL per night, room only, en suite and air conditioned.

Finding places to eat in Turkey is no problem, although a few evening venues only open at 8pm. Apart from the ubiquitous kebabs, the local speciality is the honey/pistachio pastry 'bakhlava'. Tourists are usually advised to avoid the salads, but they were so fantastic that I decided to go for it and suffer the consequences! I was well armed with Immodium for the inevitable bout of 'Turkey tummy'.

BUDGET – BASIC COSTS:

	<u>TL</u>	<u>£</u>
Flight – Turkish Airlines Heathrow to Adana, Via Istanbul		246.30
Travel Insurance		25.00
Car Hire – 9 days from Hertz, Adana airport		265.85
2 nights Ibis Hotel, Gaziantep	160.00	77.77
3 nights Mirkelam Motel, Birecik	90.00	34.50
1 night full board, Hotel Camp Tur, Karadut	80.00	30.62
1 night full board, Hotel Kervansaray, Karadut	96.00	36.80
1 night Hotel Ceyhan, Ceyhan	50.00	19.16
Fuel	435.00	166.75
Motorway Tariffs	60.00	<u>23.00</u>
	TOTAL:	925.75

ITINERARY/STRATEGY

Sun 12 th	-	Drive Adana airport to Gaziantep
Mon 13 th	-	All day in mountains at Işikli
Tues 14 th	-	Morning Durnalik/ Işikli; to Birecik; evening at owl cafe
Weds 15 th	-	Morning Gravel Works; evening owl cafe
Thurs 16 th	-	Morning 'Ibis Wadi'; evening Ahmet's farm
Fri 17 th	-	Morning north of Birecik; south Babbler site; drive to Karadut
Sat 18 th	-	Morning Nemrut Dağı; afternoon Karadut
Sun 19 th	-	Morning Arsamelia; drive to Ceyhan
Mon 20 th	-	Morning Havutlu kingfisher site; Tuzla Gölü; Adana airport

Originally, I'd planned a 2-day excursion to Çukurbag / Demirkazik to get Snowcock, Radde's Accentor and Crimson-winged Finch. But the addition of Nemrut Dağı to the schedule left too little time for the Çukurbag trip; however I was fairly happy with the way things worked out.

In retrospect I shouldn't have spent so long at Işikli. Wasting so much time searching for Kurdistan Wheatear here was an error, when they were ridiculously easy at Nemrut Dağı. A brief morning stop for White-throated Robin at Işikli and then straight on to Birecik would have been a better plan; the other Işikli specialties, such as Hill Sparrow, Cinereous Bunting and Upcher's Warbler, could be picked up just as easily at Birecik or Nemrut Dağı.

SITE GUIDE

Durnalik / Işikli (prn. Usheekluh)

I spent the best part of two days working this area, which includes some impressive scenery and special birds. Unfortunately at its centre is Işikli, a depressing little slum with not even a café to its name.

Approaching the area on the D90/E400 from Gaziantep (see appendix map), shortly after passing through the village of Yeşilce the village of Işikli is signposted on the left. Soon after taking this turning, you can park in a layby opposite the first house on the left (N 37o10.091` E 37o12.218`). A short distance uphill were singing **Eastern Rock Nuthatches**, **Sombre Tits**, Yellow-vented Bulbuls and best of all two singing male **White-throated Robins**.



Işikli, central valley – are Kurdistan Wheatears at the foot of the cliffs opposite?

The mountain range to the south of the village is comprised of three separate valleys, east, west and central. The central valley is the most dramatic scenically and also the most famous for birds (Gosney p.18). The traditional way of approaching this is to drive along the main road through the centre of the village, turn left at the second shop (N 37°08.649' E 37°11.542'), then follow this road up and park at the end. Here I ran into the local brats who have plagued previous visitors: after some persistent begging, they tried to impress me with their stone-throwing prowess (fortunately not in my direction). Bear left along a rough track, past a radio mast and up into the valley. In this valley the noise of breeding Rock Sparrows filled the air, but I failed to find my target species of Kurdistan Wheatear (which was here early in 2011 – see T. Reid's report). Perhaps I should have concentrated my search at the foot of the sheer cliffs, though this is very difficult ground to work.

At the head of the valley the landscape opens out into the amazing rocky plateau known as the 'moonscape'. This held several singing **Hill Sparrows**, a pair of nesting **Desert Finches**, a Cretzschmars' Bunting, and was positively heaving with **White-throated Robins**, **Cinereous Buntings**, **Eastern Rock Nuthatch** and Black-eared Wheatears.

An alternative route up to this plateau (avoiding the brats) is to continue on the main road through the village to an unfinished house at the western outskirts (N 37°08.754' E 37°11.280'). Directly uphill from this house is the beginning of a path that will lead into the west valley, which also emerges onto the 'moonscape' and from where you can easily access the Central valley.

I also strayed into the east valley that is normally ignored by birdwatchers; it proved disappointing apart from more White-throated Robin and Eastern Orphean Warbler.

On my second day I headed for Durnalik to investigate a possible Upcher's site. The turning before the village is now a good dirt road leading up the valley, thanks to the creation of a new quarry. However this quarry has obliterated some of the habitat at the head of the valley. After passing some crags on the right, a track leads downhill with one parking space at the start. This was supposed to be an area for Upcher's; unluckily the morning was completely overcast with not many birds singing. Further along the dirt road, there is a right hand fork which quickly leads to the quarry, and a left hand fork which eventually leads back to Işikli town. I explored along here, but not much to report.

Birecik – Guhlane Café

This is the well-documented **Striated Scops Owl** site, (p.22 Gosney). The Guhlane is on the left as you head south down the main road from Birecik centre (note that there are about 20 other cafés, but these are all on the right between the road and the Euphrates). The owl was traditionally seen near the 'blue fountain', in the southern segment of the café grounds which is now the family section of the cafe. I had brief views of it hunting on the ground here. However, I was spotted by the gardener who kindly directed me towards the nest hole: in 2011 it was in the end of a north-facing branch, about 10m high in an aspen poplar, not far from the café building in the middle segment of the café grounds. It only cost me the price of a cup of coffee while waiting for the bird to emerge, which it did on both nights at 19:45, returning regularly with food until 20:15 when it became too dark to see.

Birecik – the Gravel Pits

This area on the west bank of the Euphrates has extensively changed due to gravel extraction since the Gosney guide was published. Walking to the area from the Mirkelam motel, take the track signposted to the Kiyi restaurant, and almost immediately on the left you pass Birecik cemetery which is teeming with nesting **Dead Sea Sparrows**.



Dead Sea Sparrow, Birecik Cemetery

After another 1km you pass the gravel plant, then bear right at a fork. Not far after this there is a track on the right leading down to a new causeway which separates the reedy lagoons from the Euphrates. This causeway was lorry-free on my visit and, though it seems to have obliterated the old 'gravel islands' where sandgrouse used to drink, it offers good views of Ibis and other birds flying round the area.

Continuing along the main track, you arrive at the area of reedy pits with **Graceful Prinia**, **Pied Kingfisher** and Squacco Heron. This is just the start of a huge marshy area to the north which I did not fully explore.

Bearing right at the next fork, then almost immediately right at another fork where two sets of power lines cross overhead brings you to what appears to be the Iraq Babbler site (see photo in F.Simpson, South & East Turkey, June 2008). A stakeout between 9.30 and 11.30am failed to produce results, and I later tried coming back at dusk to see if they were singing, but found the area overrun with anglers and then suffered an aerial attack by dung beetles!

Continuing along this right hand fork, the track meanders round some farmhouses before joining up with the new causeway road mentioned above. There are **Black Francolin** in this area (though be warned, you may be ambushed by hospitable locals offering cups of tea!)

Birecik – south Babbler site

An alternative site for Iraq Babbler: heading south in Birecik past the Guhlane Cafe, the road eventually ends at a security gate; turn left and right onto another road heading south out of town. This road zigzags round some houses before reaching a pumping station by the river embankment (N 37°00.270' E37°58.173'); park here. The embankment overlooks an area of marsh about ½km north and south of the pumping station.

I saw 2 **Iraq Babblers** just to the south, plus Red-crested Pochard and Ferruginous Duck on the marsh, and **Bald Ibis** feeding in the fields. It's an easier area to work than the traditional Babbler site, so I would recommend trying here first. On the negative side, this was the one place in Turkey where I sensed the locals didn't appreciate my presence, for some reason!

Birecik – the Ibis Wadi

Although I got two superb ticks here, I couldn't help feeling disappointed with this famous site. Arriving at 6am, numerous **Ménétries' Warbler** and nesting Rollers were about, but apart from that it was very quiet with no sign of the hoped-for See See Partridge, Upcher's Warbler or Hill Sparrow.

I continued along the main ravine until bramble growth blocked the way, then scrambled up the steep left-hand slope to the dry fields above. The main ravine continues under power lines before terminating in a low hill. On this hill I encountered a pair of **Desert Larks**, a species I'd understood was extremely difficult here. The whole area appeared to be undergoing planting for orchards, so who knows how long it will remain as suitable lark habitat.

Returning to the parking area by the Bald Ibis breeding centre, I was met by Mustafa Culcuoglu of the Natur Park, the Birdlife International representative who provided me with some very useful information, and also arranged for me to visit Ahmet Demir's farm that evening.

Birecik – Ahmet Demir's farm

Mustafa at the 'Natur Park' arranged for me to visit this hill farm at the small village of Yeni Akpınar, about 15km NE of Birecik, for the price of 50TL (£19.16 – extortionate by local standards?). At least this cash goes to the farmer, who manages his land considerably for wildlife. I arrived at the village to find Ahmet waiting for me - his farm is one of the first houses on the left. A map showing the location of this village is in T.Reid's report though I am not certain if they had to pay for their visit!

The 2 hours I spent at this site between 17:30 and 19:30 was probably my most productive of the trip. Clinging for dear life to the wheel arch of Ahmet's tractor, we barrelled around the hills seeing **Cream-coloured Courser**, **See See Partridge**, **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, Short-toed, **Bimaculated and Calandra Larks** plus Short-toed Eagles and Stone Curlews. The best spot was one of the livestock ponds, which produced **Trumpeter Finch**, 7 **Desert Finches**, 2 **Hill Sparrow**, **See See Partridge** and Turtle Doves in a 20-minute stop.

Birecik – Yellow-throated Sparrow sites

The traditional site for Yellow-throated Sparrow is a 'tree-filled gully' (Gosney page 20, site 4), which is easy to find heading north from Birecik along the Euphrates: after passing the Ibis centre, you pass a garage opposite a riverside restaurant, then a second garage by a more substantial wadi which includes the tree-filled gully. According to Mustafa the best area to search for YT Sparrow is between these two garages and in all the orchards nearby. I searched the gully, orchards and roadside without success (not a pleasant experience - a fast road). I also searched vainly for the 'substation' mentioned in Gosney, but it's not clear exactly where along the several back roads between Birecik and Halfeti this is located. I eventually caught up with Yellow-throated Sparrow at Karadut, by chance!

Nemrut Dağı area, Adiyaman Province

(not to be confused with Nemrut Dağı crater, by Lake Van, 350km to the east.)

Do not miss this place! In addition to having bags of quality birds, it's a beautiful mountain area with some of the best archaeology in Turkey - the stone heads of Nemrut Dağı, the ruins of Arsamelia (N 37°56.599' E 38°39.477') and the Severan roman bridge.

The village of Karadut is a good base. In the centre of this rural village I encountered **Masked Shrike** and then stumbled across my only pair of **Yellow-throated Sparrows** (N 37°55.820' E 38°47.021'), their unusual song having drawn my attention at first.



Finsch's Wheatear, Nemrut Dagi

Admission to Nemrut Dağı national park is 7TL (same to access Arsamelia ruins). The road from Karadut up to Nemrut Dağı had **Hill Sparrow** and other interesting species, but the summit itself is incredible, with **Finsch's Wheatear** and Rock Sparrow sitting on the visitor centre, and **Snowfinch** and Horned Lark in the car park! I finally ticked **Kurdistan Wheatear** perched on the stone heads themselves, along with Black Redstart. Getting here early is a good idea; at 10am the tourists begin to arrive and the birds disperse a bit.

Arsamelia was fairly quiet bird-wise, with some good views of **Eastern Rock Nuthatch**.

*NOTE: if you are travelling to Nemrut Dağı from Birecik, it might be better to backtrack to Gaziantep and then head up via Adiyaman: the easterly route between Siverek and Khata means using the ferry crossing (10TL) on the main D360 near Bujak. This runs every 2 hours in either direction between 8am and 9.30pm, but is not punctual and you may find no room left!!

Adana - Tuzla Gölü

Having heard a rumour of a flock of Pink-back Pelicans at Tuzla Gölü (from Mustafa), I decided to make a short stop here, though the whole area really deserves a day's exploration. Following signs to Tuzla, I passed through the village and accidentally ended up on the road heading northwest towards Tabaklar. This road runs parallel to the distant shore of the lake, getting steadily nearer until it passes close to the shallow northwest end. I parked up on the road (not wanting to risk the sandy farm tracks) and cut across fields towards the lake. This marshy corner was rich in birdlife, with Little, Whiskered, Gull-billed, White-winged Black and **Caspian Terns**, Purple Heron and **Graceful Prinia**. Unfortunately, it was obvious the nesting Black-winged Stilts and **Spur-winged Plovers** were unhappy about my presence here, so this access point probably shouldn't be used during breeding season.

Adana – Havutlu, Kingfisher site

This is currently the most reliable **White-throated Kingfisher** site. The directions given in K.M.Olsen's report are basically correct: head south from Adana on the D815 towards Karatas, and after about 10km you pass the turning to Havutlu village and then go over a canal bridge. Around ¾km beyond the bridge, there is a 'Sunpet' garage on the right of the road, and a tractor store (if you've continued too far on the D815, you'll see a huge obvious red-roofed silo ahead). Turn right just before the garage, and the track almost immediately hits a canal with a footbridge; park around here (N 36054.822` E 35021.232) and walk left along the canal. There were a family of 5 kingfishers were on the wires and in the orchards, making a lot of noise. (The road on the opposite side of this canal is the old road to Tuzla, but is very potholed and not recommended.)



Havutlu, with perched White-throated Kingfisher (top right)

SPECIES LIST (in Voous order): (brackets indicate heard only)

Little Grebe:	2 at the south Babbler site, Birecik.
Great Crested Grebe:	Birecik, 1 pair in the Gravel Pits and 1 pair at the south Babbler site.
Pygmy Cormorant:	Steady passage of birds up and down the Euphrates at Birecik.
Night Heron:	Commonly seen flying along the Euphrates at Birecik.
Cattle Egret:	Daily sightings, at Birecik only.
Little Egret:	Common. Several hundred on Tuzla Gölü, northwest corner.
Great White Egret:	Daily sightings at Birecik, max flock of 5 flying upriver. Good count of 56 at Tuzla Gölü.
Squacco Heron:	Regularly seen around Birecik, also at Tuzla Gölü.
Grey Heron:	4 at Tuzla Gölü.
Purple Heron:	1 at Tuzla Gölü.
Bald Ibis [Cat D]:	Flock of 105 thermalling south of Birecik, later found feeding in fields near the south Babbler site; also good views of flying birds from the Gravel Pits causeway.
White Stork:	Surprisingly few; 2 seen overflying the plains between Sanliurfa and Siverek, and 1 nesting north of Khata.
Red-crested Pochard:	Birecik, ♀ with 2 ducklings at the Gravel Pits and ♀ with 3 ducklings at the south Babbler site.
Ferruginous Duck:	Birecik, a pair at the south Babbler site.
Golden Eagle:	1 immature seen distantly while waiting for the Siverek-Khata ferry.
Short-toed Eagle:	Pair over Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.
Long-legged Buzzard:	1 on the road to Nemrut Dağı.
Kestrel:	Seen most days; present around Işikli, nesting in the Ibis wadi in Birecik, and the Nemrut Dağı area.
Hobby:	1 at Birecik.
Peregrine:	3 at Işikli; 1 over Nemrut Dağı summit.
Black Francolin:	Birecik, two calling (one seen) in the Gravel Pits; one calling at the south Babbler site.
Chukar:	5 in flight at Işikli.
See-see Partridge:	2 at the livestock pool on Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.
Moorhen:	Fairly common around wetlands at Birecik.
Coot:	Fairly common around wetlands at Birecik.
Black-winged Stilt:	Numerous in northwest corner of Tuzla Gölü.

Stone Curlew: 2 on Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.
Cream-coloured Courser: 3 on Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.
Spur-winged Lapwing: 8 at Tuzla Gölü.
Common Sandpiper: 1 at Birecik, on the Gravel Pits.
Green Sandpiper: Birecik, several singles sighted along the river.
Little Tern: Many hundreds nesting at Tuzla Gölü.
Gull-billed Tern: 2 over the Gravel Pits, Birecik; approx 20 around Tuzla Gölü.
Caspian Tern: 1 loafing at Tuzla Gölü.
Whiskered Tern: 5 at Tuzla Gölü.
White-winged Black Tern: 2 very late-lingering migrants at Tuzla Gölü on 20th June.
Black-bellied Sandgrouse: Birecik, c10 flying across the old Halfeti road around 9am; 7 at Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.
Rock Dove: Fairly common.
Woodpigeon: Common.
Collared Dove: Common.
Turtle Dove: 4 on Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.
Laughing Dove: Common in all the towns: Adana, Gaziantep, Işikli, Birecik, Khata.
Cuckoo: Birecik, 1 around the Gravel Pits.
(Tawny Owl): Heard from Hotel Kervansaray, Karadut.
(Scops Owl): Heard from Hotel Kervansaray, Karadut.
Striated Scops Owl: 1 watched hunting and returning to its nest hole on two consecutive evenings. Identified by overall sandier plumage and more indistinct belly streaking.
(Nightjar): Heard from Hotel Camp Tur, Karadut.
Swift: Common.
Alpine Swift: Seen in colonies north of Birecik, and at the Severan Bridge; also heard in Gaziantep.
Little Swift: Birecik, 10 at their regular cliff colony north of the city; also 2 loitering overhead at the Siverek side of the Siverek – Khata ferry.
Hoopoe: Seen daily, often carrying food.
White-throated Kingfisher: 5 at the canal-side site near Havutlu, Adana.
Pied Kingfisher: Birecik, 4 on the Gravel Pits; also 1 hunting along the river Ceyhan, at Ceyhan town.
Bee-eater: Singles and pairs seen regularly overhead.
Roller: At Birecik, nesting on the cliffs along the Euphrates; very noisy and hard to ignore!
Syrian Woodpecker: Quite common in any wooded habitat: heard and seen nearly every day. Good views of pair attending a nest hole in Birecik cemetery.
Crested Lark: Common in most habitats.
Short-toed Lark: Fairly common at Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar; also pair at Tuzla Gölü.
Desert Lark: Pair above the Ibis wadi, Birecik. Also reported to be breeding on Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar, though I didn't encounter them there.
Calandra Lark: Several dozen seen on Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.
Bimaculated Lark: Seemed to be equally common as Calandra Lark on Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar; several dozen here.
Horned Lark: Common at Nemrut Dağı, very good views in the car park!
Sand Martin: Abundant throughout.
Barn Swallow: Common.
Red-rumped Swallow: Several seen at Işikli / Durnalik.
House Martin: Large colonies in the Karadut valley and at the Severan bridge, smaller numbers elsewhere.
White Wagtail: Common.
Black-headed Wagtail: Pair feeding young at Tuzla Gölü.
Spectacled Bulbul: Highly visible and vocal in any wooded habitat: Adana, Işikli, Birecik, Karadut.
(Nightingale): 1 heard along the river at Ceyhan.
Rufous Bush Robin: Seen everywhere from Birecik eastwards; a common roadside bird on the drive down from Khata to Gaziantep.
White-throated Robin: Very vocal and easy in the Işikli /Durnalik area, especially at the

'moonscape', where at least two dozen were seen.

Black Redstart: 1 ♂ at Nemrut Dağı.

Northern Wheatear: Common at altitude around Nemrut Dağı.

Isabelline Wheatear: 2 at Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar; 1 at Nemrut Dağı.

Black-eared Wheatear: Very common at Işikli/Durnalik, and regularly encountered elsewhere.

Finsch's Wheatear: At least 2 pairs around Nemrut Dağı summit.

Kurdistan [red-tailed] Wheatear: At least 3 pairs at Nemrut Dağı summit. No luck finding this species at Işikli /Durnalik, despite a lot of searching.

Blue Rock Thrush: 2 ♂, 1 ♀ encountered at Işikli.

Rock Thrush: 2 pairs at Nemrut Dağı.

Blackbird: Only seen at Işikli, 2 at the first layby here.

Eastern Orphean Warbler: Seen well in the orchards at Işikli, also encountered at Birecik and at Karadut. The species seemed much showier in Turkey than when I encountered them previously in Lesvos!

Ménétries' Warbler: Good views of several feeding young in the Ibis Wadi; occasionally seen elsewhere around Birecik.

Graceful Prinia: Very vocal and visible in the marshes along the Euphrates, also at Tuzla Gölü.

(Cetti's Warbler): Heard around Işikli /Durnalik and Birecik.

Reed Warbler: Several of eastern race seen around Birecik.

Great Reed Warbler: Common at Birecik and Tuzla Gölü.

Olivaceous Warbler: Abundant in all habitat except high altitude.

Great Tit: Quite common, seen at Işikli, Birecik, Karadut.

Sombre Tit: Common in orchards and hill habitat with scattered trees. Seen well at Işikli/Durnalik (even high up in the 'moonscape'), and around Karadut and Arsamelia.

Rock Nuthatch: Only 1 pair seen, at Işikli. I'd previously understood this to be the commoner of the two species in the area.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch: Very common and vocal around Işikli /Durnalik, Nemrut Dağı and Arsamelia. Told from Rock Nuthatch by its larger bill, broader stripe behind the eye, habit of hunting in/ singing from trees and in particular by its much more rufous undertail coverts. I was surprised to find this species outnumbering Rock Nuthatch.

Woodchat Shrike: Abundant in all habitats.

Masked Shrike: Pair at Karadut.

Iraq Babbler: Birecik: finally got two at the south Babbler site, after two failed attempts at the 'Gravel Pits'. Hides very well in the reeds, for such a large bird!

Jackdaw: Several at Istanbul airport; also seen over Birecik.

Hooded Crow: Very common in all habitat.

Chough: Flock of 32 over summit of Nemrut Dağı.

Starling: Common around Işikli and Birecik.

House Sparrow: Abundant throughout.

Spanish Sparrow: Birecik: 1 singing in the ibis wadi; 2 at the 'YTSparrow garage' on the Halfeti road; 1 in old stork nest, Havutlu.

Dead Sea Sparrow: Common around Birecik; numbers nesting in Birecik cemetery.

Rock Sparrow: Very common at Işikli, Nemrut Dağı and elsewhere. Especially noisy at this time of year, with the sound of the young calling from nest holes becoming the background noise in the mountains.

Hill Sparrow: One seen well, singing its distinctive song at the start of the 'moonscape' in Işikli. Other singing birds were later heard both here and on the road to Nemrut Dağı, but locating them proved extremely difficult! 2 birds were seen well at the livestock pond at Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.

Yellow-throated Sparrow: I chanced upon a pair feeding in trees (and also singing) by the main road through Karadut village; not seen in the area the following day. I had previously failed to find them at traditional sites on the Birecik - Halfeti road.

Snowfinch: At least a dozen around the car park on Nemrut Dađı, including one feeding under my car!

Linnet: Common.

Goldfinch: Common.

Greenfinch: Common.

Serin: Several seen along the canal at Havutlu.

Trumpeter Finch: 1 ♂ at Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar.

Desert Finch: Pair nesting at the 'moonscape' at Işikli; 7 coming to the livestock pond at Ahmet's farm, Yeni Akpınar; also a pair sitting on the crash barrier of the slip road off the motorway at Gaziantep! One probable desert finch was seen taking off from the Gravel Pits at Birecik.

Ortolan Bunting: 2 ♂ singing on the road up Nemrut Dađı.

Cretzschmar's Bunting: 1 singing at the 'moonscape', Işikli; 1 carrying food at Durnalik; 1 on the road to Nemrut Dađı.

Cinereous Bunting: Common in the hills at Işikli /Durnalik, also several on the road up to Nemrut Dađı.

Black-headed Bunting: Very common in most habitats.

TOTAL: 116 (plus Category D bald ibis)

Other species, not seen:

Pink-backed Pelican: Mustafa had heard of a flock of Pink-backed Pelicans at Tuzla, discovered only this year by a local birder. Normally any individual of this species in the region is an escape, but a flock is interesting!

Lesser Kestrel: A species I would really have expected to see here. My overall tally of birds of prey was rather disappointing.

Pratincole sp.: 2 presumed Collared Pratincole seen high over Tuzla Gölü.

Armenian Gull: Unfortunately I misread the directions to the 'fishponds' at Birecik and thus never got to this 'dead-cert' site for Armenian Gull. I later attempted to see them at Khata, heading east out of town on the old highway which now leads down to the reservoir's edge. It's supposed to be a good spot but I saw no gulls here at all, or indeed any gulls during the entire trip!

Great Spotted Cuckoo: Apparently a very obliging bird was loitering at the start of the Ibis Wadi in Birecik in 2011.

Crag Martin: Surprised not to see any of this species.

Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes: Very surprised not to see any shrikes other than Woodchat and Masked.

Upcher's Warbler: Many visitors seem to have found Upcher's with very little trouble, (e.g. even at the Kiyi Restaurant, Birecik!), but I was not confident in my ID. The one 'probable' I had, a singing bird at Arsamelia, I later discounted as Olivaceous based on song recordings. Typically the species is meant to occur high up in rocky habitat with scattered trees, quite different from olivaceous – thus the archaeological site at Arsamelia would seem reasonable habitat in which to encounter them. The bird I saw here looked promising, appearing slightly larger and greyer than olivaceous with an obvious wing panel and a dark tail with slightly more white edging (however I had already noted great variation in tail-darkness of many olivaceous). It didn't exhibit the diagnostic 'tail-swinging'.

Corn Bunting: Possibly heard on a few occasions, but always distant.

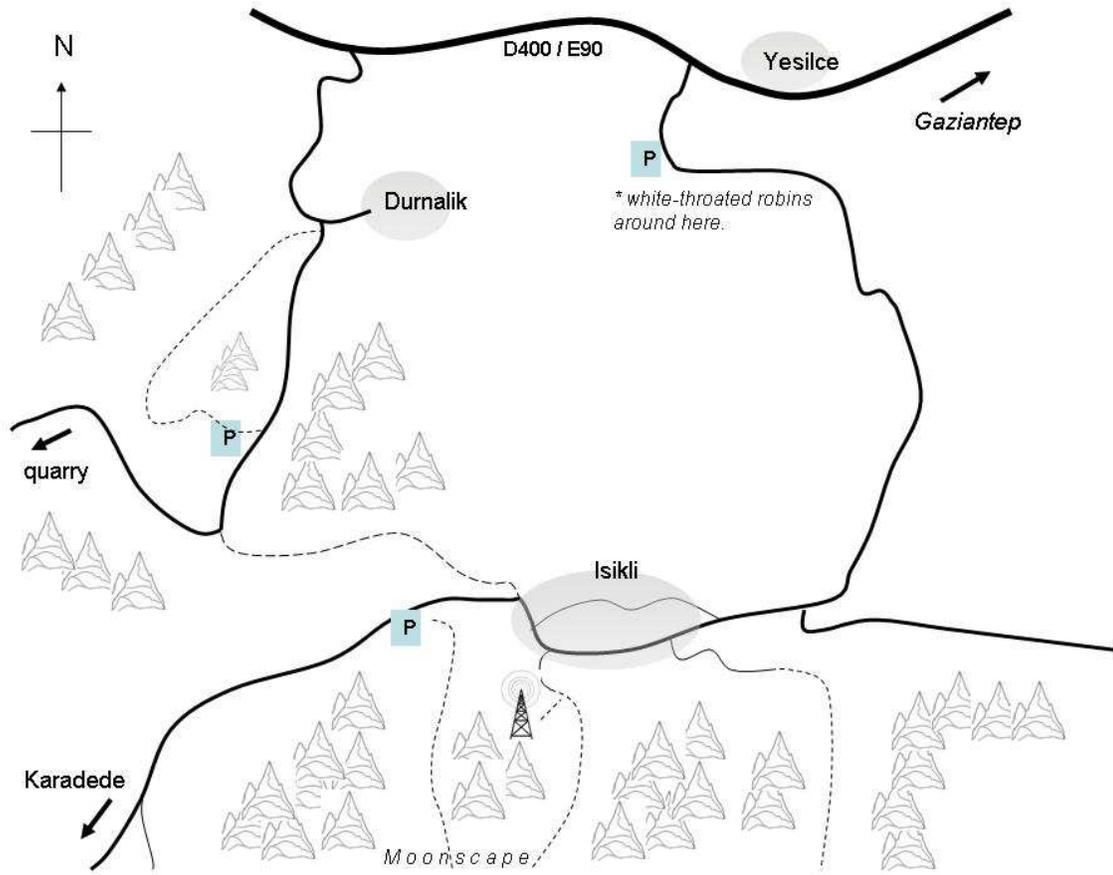
FURTHER INFORMATION

Mustafa Culcuoglu at the Natur Park Cafe at the Ibis centre, Birecik, can be contacted at naturparkcafe@hotmail.com.

Ahmet Demir who owns the farm at Yeni Akpınar can be contacted at eniakpınar@hotmail.com.

If you have any more queries (or spot any errors!) please contact me at pmcallagher@yahoo.co.uk.

MAP OF DURNALIK / IŞIKLI AREA



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