I took the family on a weekend break over Christmas to Petra. We departed Amman by private vehicle on 24 December, arriving at Wadi Musa, via the Desert Highway, three hours later (237 kms).

Our primary quarry, (apart from the glorious 2000 year-old Nabataean ruins), was Sinai Rosefinch and Fan-tailed Raven, both of which were eventually seen without too much difficulty. Birdlife however, was fairly Spartan, possibly due to the cold and breezy weather...
Saturday, 24 December

Arriving in the late afternoon at the town of Wadi Musa (just outside the Petra archaeological site), we checked into the comfortable Sharah Mountains Hotel (JOD 45 per night + b’fast), located on the main street in the centre of town. We spent the rest of the afternoon birding a few sites above the town (approx. 800m asl):

• Rock Dove, *Columba livia* (*domesticus*) – very common around the town
• Laughing Dove, *Streptopelia senegalensis* – commonly observed scratching the desert soils
• House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus* – large colonies feeding around human settlements
• (Common) Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs* – several small parties feeding on ploughed fields
• (European) Greenfinch, *Chloris chloris* – six individuals seen in and around Olive groves
• White (Pied) Wagtail, *Motacilla alba* - common just about everywhere
• (Common) Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus collybia* – a few seen in desert oak trees
• (Common) Blackbird, *Turdus merula* – only one seen
• Great Tit, *Parus major* – several seen in stands of tall poplars
• Pale Crag Martin, *Ptyonoprogne (fuligula) obsoleta* – only 2-3 seen at the top of the wadi
• White-spectacled Bulbul, *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* – common where there is vegetation
• Eastern Mourning Wheatear, *Oenanthe lugens* – the only wheatear seen at Petra and commonly seen around boulders on the wadi (valley) slopes

**Eastern Mourning Wheatear, common at most locations**

With a biting wind blowing from the lower wadi, we called it an early evening and returned to Wadi Musa for a very filling local meal at Al-Arabi restaurant. It had been a long day.
Sunday, 25 December

We spent the day at the glorious 2000 year-old Nabataean ruins at Petra (entrance fee JOD 50) – Jordan’s principal tourist destination and a truly impressive archaeological site (worth every Dinar). We were fortunate to have reasonably sunny weather with a temperature of around 7 C. Many locals commented on the low numbers of visitors this year, a situation possibly made worse by visit cancellations owing to the attacks at the Crusader citadel of Al-Karak (central Jordan) on 17 December which left a Canadian tourist and seven police dead – very tragic and also for the local tourism trade.

The ‘Treasury’, Petra

The birding inside the Siq (canyon), was generally very slow, the only new birds added to the list being:

- **Fan-tailed Raven, *Corvus rhipidurus*** – a small party of 5-6 flying around the steep cliffs in the vicinity of the Treasury. The short tail and broad wing definitely give it a most distinctive, almost *vulturine*, appearance – *lifer*
- **Common Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*** – several seen cruising the wadi walls
• Desert Lark, *Ammomanes deserti deserti* – probably the most common bird encountered; small groups and individuals seen feeding on the ground almost everywhere:

![Desert Lark](image1.jpg)

• Blue Rock Thrush, *Monticola solitarius* – several males and one female seen among the ruins:

![Blue Rock Thrush](image2.jpg)

• (Streaked) Scrub Warbler, *Scotocerca inquieta* – common in low bushes

• European Stonechat, *Saxicola rubicola* – 2 seen around boulders in the Roman Road sector
• Tristram’s Starling, *Onychognathus tristramii* – common along the path up to the Monastery:

The day ended at sunset (16:45), without having spied the Sinai Rosefinch. Reports that is commonly sighted along the Siq at Petra giving us some concern, we decided to try the next day at another site, ‘Little Petra’, where other birding reports suggested it might be present...a not so Merry Christmas!
Monday, 26 December

A decision to drive the 11kms north to the site of ‘Little Petra’ proved fortuitous for us in finding a nesting colony of **Sinai Rosefinch, Carpodacus synoicus** (10-12 birds) - lifer. The nesting site was located at 08:45 in fissures along a cliff face, with the birds also dropping to the ground to drink at a small (man-made) cistern. After 10:00am, the birds had all dispersed and were not seen again by the time we had left the site and departed for Amman at midday:

_Sinai Rosefinch, Carpodacus synoicus – male (above left) and female at the nesting site_
Al-Imti Canyon, near Little Petra showing the fissure (centre of photo) where the Rosefinches were nesting (water point at base)

Also in the vicinity were a number of very smart Black Redstart, Phoenicurus ochuros
We ended the tour with 21 species seen, including two lifers: Fan-tailed Raven and Sinai Rosefinch.

It was a great weekend trip from Amman and truly an amazing experience to wander the ruins of Petra and reflect upon its 2000 year history...

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