

Report of a one-day Birding Trip to the

# United Arab Emirates

24<sup>th</sup> February 2018

Participants:

Arjan Brenkman, Jan van der Laan, Marc Smiles (guide)

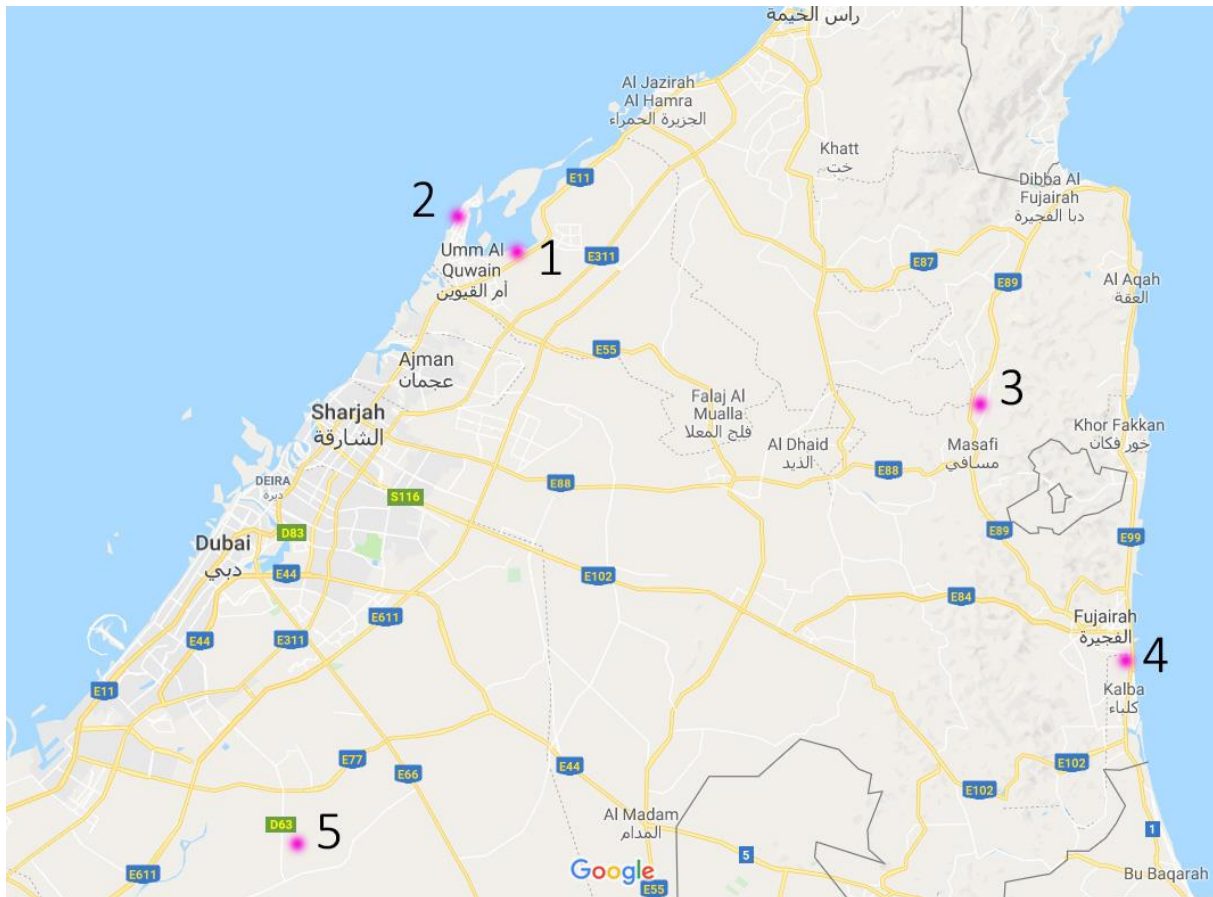


Plain Leaf Warbler, 24 February 2018, Masafi Wadi, Fujairah UAE; © Jan van der Laan



## Introduction

Between 23<sup>rd</sup> February and 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018, Arjan Brenkman and I (Jan van der Laan) travelled to peninsular Malaysia. We thought it would be interesting to have a stopover at Dubai for a one day birding. Peter van Scheepen advised us to choose Mark Smiles - a British expat in Dubai - as our birding guide. Our most-wanted list consisted of Hypocolius, Plain Leaf Warbler, Crab Plover, Variable, Persian and Hume's Wheatear, Socotra Cormorant and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse. For Hypocolius, a Saturday was not the best day to Visit Lulu Island as the island is guarded. Best day is Friday when guides or not on duty. For Variable Wheatear it was just too late, the birds leave the UAE at the start of February. Despite not going after the Hypocolius, the trip turned out to be very fruitful, with Mark as a very good guide.



1. Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain
2. Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain
3. Masafi Wadi, Fujairah
4. Kalba Corniche, Fujairah
5. Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai

## Itinerary

- 23 Feb** We took the EK 148 flight of 14:30 (with the huge Airbus 380) from Amsterdam to Dubai. We arrived in time just after midnight and took a shuttle bus to the **Premier Inn**, a hotel near the international airport of **Dubai**.
- 24 Feb** After a short, but effective sleep, we were picked up by Mark at 5:45 and we immediately drove to **Khor al-Beida**, an estuary at Umm al-Qaiwain, just north of Dubai. Birds seen were Greater Spotted Eagle, Eurasian Flamingo, Western Reef Heron, Laughing Dove, Grey Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Lesser and Greater Sand Plover, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Green Bee-eater, Graceful Prinia, White-eared Bulbul. Yet no trace of Crab Plover. Next we checked the harbour of **Khor al-Beida** to look for Socotra Cormorant as sometimes lone individuals will be there. No cormorants so we continued to the nearby **breakwater** on the western shore and there the Socotra Cormorant was quickly found. Also there were Slender-billed Gulls, Greater Crested Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Pallid Swift, Eurasian Hoopoe, Crested Lark and a lone Isabelline Wheatear. Back at the estuary we found a Pallas's Gull and Little Green Bee-eaters. Yet no trace of any Crab Plover, so we decided to go to the mountains to look for wheatears and Plain Leaf Warbler. On our way we saw Indian Roller, Humes Wheatear and an Isabelline Shrike. We arrived at around 11:00 at the **Masafi Wadi**, north of **Fujairah**. At first we looked for Variable Wheatear, but the birds had already left the area. We now focused on finding Plain Leaf Warbler and after checking several small wadi's, finally one bird responded to Arjan's pishing. We had good views of this small *phylloscopus* and could hear its diagnostic calls. Other birds in the area were Hume's Wheatear, Red-tailed Wheatear (with a Hume's and a Red-tailed Wheatear in a fierce territorial dispute), Southern Grey Shrike, Brown-necked Raven, Desert Lark, White-spectacled Bulbul, Lesser Whitethroat, Black Redstart, Purple Sunbird, House Sparrow and two Indian Silverbills. Next on the program was **Kalba Corniche, Fujairah**, a sandy beach on the east coast. Sooty Gull and White-cheeked Tern were the main quarries plus some gulls and tern study could be possible. This place was again a success with close observations of Sooty Gull, Steppe Gull, Heuglin's Gull, White-cheeked Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Socotra Cormorant and an Arctic Skua. With this quick success already at hand, we decided to drive back to **Khor al-Beida** in order to have another change for Crab Plover. At arrival, we saw the water levels were perfect and very quickly four Crab Plovers were found as were good numbers of Great Knot. Now we had a few hours left, so we drove back into the interior to **Saih al Salam** to look for desert birds. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Cream-coloured Courser and Black-crown Finch Lark were quickly found. We ended at the **Al Qudra Pivots**, also near **Saih al Salam**. Best birds were Pallid Harriers, Long-legged Buzzard, and more shorebirds, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Steppe Grey Shrike, Tawny Pipit, Isabelline Wheatear and a lone Black-shouldered Kite. The last bird was a probable Pied Wheatear seen by Arjan only. Mark brought us to **Dubai International Airport** at 19:00 hours and after saying goodbye to Mark, we checked in, had some coffee and at 21:35 hours our flight to **Kuala Lumpur** departed on time. Our trip to Malaysia will be in another report.



## Species Accounts

Order and nomenclature follows [www.worldbirdnames.org](http://www.worldbirdnames.org), version 11.2. Species important to us are in capitals.

## Recommended Literature

I had only one field guide on my book shelf, *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa* by P.A.D. Hollom, R.F. Porter, S. Christensen en Ian Willis (1988), at that time a useful guide, nowadays a little outdated. In the car, Mark brought the excellent *Birds of the United Arab Emirates* by Simon Aspinall and Richard Porter (2011) which we used in the field. Trip reports can be found at [www.cloudbirders.com](http://www.cloudbirders.com), [www.surfbirds.com](http://www.surfbirds.com) and [www.birdtours.co.uk](http://www.birdtours.co.uk)

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following persons Mark Smiles for guiding and driving us and around Dubai. We can recommend his services to anyone. Peter van Scheepen en Dick Meijer for their [excellent report](#) on an earlier visit to UAE, published on Cloudbirders, as well as helpful advice in the planning stages.

[Jan van der Laan](#) and Arjan Brenkman, Alkmaar & Culemborg March 2018.



Mark Smiles in the Masafi Wadi, north of Fujairah; © Arjan Brenkman.



Left: 2<sup>nd</sup> calendar year Tibetan (Lesser) Sand Plover; right: Western Reef Herons, both at Khor al-Beida; © Jan van der Laan.



Spotted Eagle at Khor al-Beida; © Jan van der Laan.



Left: Humes Wheatear at Masafi Wadi, north of Fujairah; © Jan van der Laan.





Left and right: Persian Wheatear at Masafi Wadi, north of Fujairah; © Jan van der Laan.



Plain Leaf Warbler at Masafi Wadi, north of Fujairah; note the broad supercilium! © Jan van der Laan.



Sooty Gulls at Masafi Wadi, Kalba Corniche, Fujairah; © Jan van der Laan.





White-cheeked Tern at Kalba Corniche, Fujairah; note the grey rump and upper tail; © Jan van der Laan.



Left: Lesser Crested Tern; right: Slender-billed Gulls, both at Kalba Corniche, Fujairah; © Jan van der Laan.



Left: Heuglin's Gull (far right with darker mantle); right: Steppe Gull (with diagnostic primary pattern), both at Kalba Corniche, Fujairah; © Jan van der Laan.



First-year Steppe Gulls at Kalba Corniche, Fujairah; © Jan van der Laan.



01. **Northern Shoveler** - *Spatula clypeata*  
24-02                      8   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
02. **Mallard** - *Anas platyrhynchos*  
24-02                      6   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
03. **Eurasian Teal** - *Anas crecca*  
24-02                      4   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
04. **Grey Francolin** - *Fringilla monticola*  
24-02                      1   Saih al Salam - general area, Dubai (not seen by Jan). Introduced.
05. **Pallid Swift** - *Apus pallidus*  
24-02                      2   Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain
06. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** - *Pterocles alchata*  
24-02                      c 20   Saih al Salam (general area), Dubai.  
                                 c 20   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai; birds are said to be introduced in Dubai.
07. **CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE** - *Pterocles exustus*  
24-02                      13   Saih al Salam - general area, Dubai.
08. **Rock Dove** - *Columba livia*  
24-02                      50   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai; introduced.
09. **Eurasian Collared Dove** - *Streptopelia decaocto*  
24-02                      50   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
10. **Laughing Dove** - *Spilopelia senegalensis*  
24-02                      c 15   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 c 30   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
11. **Greater Flamingo** - *Phoenicopterus roseus*  
24-02                      c 250   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
12. **Eurasian Oystercatcher** - *Haematopus ostralegus*  
24-02                      7   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
13. **Black-winged Stilt** - *Himantopus himantopus*  
24-02                      7   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 c 10   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
14. **Red-wattled Lapwing** - *Vanellus indicus*  
24-02                      2   Saih al Salam (general area), Dubai.  
                                 10   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.

15. **Grey Plover** - *Pluvialis squatarola*  
 24-02                      c 40    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
16. **Common Ringed Plover** - *Charadrius hiaticula*  
 24-02                      3    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
17. **Little Ringed Plover** - *Charadrius dubius*  
 24-02                      2    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
18. **Kentish Plover** - *Charadrius alexandrinus*  
 24-02                      c 100    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
    2    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
19. **Lesser Sand Plover** - *Charadrius mongolus*  
 24-02                      c 400    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
 All birds belonged to the so called tibetanus group. Noteworthy were the light grey neck collars.
  
20. **Greater Sand Plover** - *Charadrius leschenaultii*  
 24-02                      c 30    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
21. **Whimbrel** - *Numenius phaeopus*  
 24-02                      2    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
22. **Eurasian Curlew** - *Numenius arquata*  
 24-02                      8    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
23. **Bar-tailed Godwit** - *Limosa lapponica*  
 24-02                      c 30    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
24. **Ruddy Turnstone** - *Arenaria interpres*  
 24-02                      8    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
25. **Great Knot** - *Calidris tenuirostris*  
 24-02                      c 50    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
26. **Curlew Sandpiper** - *Calidris ferruginea*  
 24-02                      c 200    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
27. **Temminck's Stint** - *Calidris temminckii*  
 24-02                      9    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
28. **Dunlin** - *Calidris alpina*  
 24-02                      c 25    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.

29. **Little Stint** - *Calidris minuta*  
24-02                    c 40    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
30. **Common Snipe** - *Gallinago gallinago*  
24-02                    6    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
31. **Terek Sandpiper** - *Xenus cinereus*  
24-02                    1    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
32. **Common Sandpiper** - *Actitis hypoleucos*  
24-02                    2    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                              1    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
  
33. **Common Redshank** - *Tringa totanus*  
24-02                    c 150    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                              1    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
34. **Marsh Sandpiper** - *Tringa stagnatilis*  
24-02                    1    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
35. **Wood Sandpiper** - *Tringa Glareola*  
24-02                    5    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
36. **Common Greenshank** - *Tringa nebularia*  
24-02                    12    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                              1    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
  
37. **CRAB-PLOVER** - *Dromas ardeola*  
24-02                    4    (in the afternoon) Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
  
38. **Cream-colored Courser** - *Cursorius cursor*  
24-02                    2    Saih al Salam (general area), Dubai.
  
39. **Slender-billed Gull** - *Chroicocephalus genei*  
24-02                    13    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                              c 60    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
  
40. **Black-headed Gull** - *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*  
24-02                    c 400    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                              9    Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                              c 100    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
  
41. **Pallas's Gull** - *Ichthyiaetus ichthyiaetus*  
24-02                    1    (adult moulting into summer plumage) Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.



42. **SOOTY GULL** - *Ichthyaeetus hemprichii*  
24-02                      c 25    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
43. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** - *Larus fuscus*  
24-02                      3    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain (ssp *barabensis*)  
                                 c 10    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah (ssp *barabensis*)  
                                 2    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah (ssp *heuglini* or *taymirensis*)
44. **Gull-billed Tern** - *Gelochelidon nilotica*  
24-02                      c 20    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
45. **Greater Crested Tern** - *Thalasseus bergii*  
24-02                      c 5    Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain.
46. **Lesser Crested Tern** - *Thalasseus bengalensis*  
24-02                      1    Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 3    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
47. **Common Tern** - *Sterna hirundo*  
24-02                      6    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
48. **WHITE-CHEEKED TERN** - *Sterna repressa*  
24-02                      1    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
49. **Parasitic Jaeger** - *Stercorarius parasiticus*  
24-02                      2    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
50. **SOCOTRA CORMORANT** - *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*  
24-02                      c 30    Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 c 25    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
51. **Great Cormorant** - *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
24-02                      2    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 3    Kalba Corniche, Fujairah.
52. **Eurasian Spoonbill** - *Platalea leucorodia*  
24-02                      1    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
53. **Black-crowned Night Heron** - *Nycticorax nycticorax*  
24-02                      1    Dubai, seen from the car while driving to the airport.
54. **Western Cattle Egret** - *Bubulcus ibis*  
24-02                      c 30    Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
55. **Grey Heron** - *Ardea cinerea*  
24-02                      2-3    Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.

56. **Great Egret** - *Ardea alba*  
24-02                      2   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
57. **Western Reef Heron** - *Egretta gularis*  
24-02                      c 75   (c 60% were dark phased birds) Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
58. **Western Osprey** - *Pandion haliaetus*  
24-02                      1   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
59. **Black-winged Kite** - *Elanus caeruleus*  
24-02                      1   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
60. **Greater Spotted Eagle** - *Clanga clanga*  
24-02                      3   (one 2<sup>nd</sup> calendar year, two adult-type) Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
61. **Western Marsh Harrier** - *Circus aeruginosus*  
24-02                      3   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 12   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
62. **Pallid Harrier** - *Circus macrourus*  
24-02                      8   (all females and immatures) Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
63. **Long-legged Buzzard** - *Buteo rufinus*  
24-02                      1   (adult) Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
64. **Eurasian Hoopoe** - *Upupa epops*  
24-02                      1   Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain
65. **Indian Roller** - *Coracias benghalensis*  
24-02                      1   Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
66. **Arabian Green Bee-eater** - *Merops cyanophrys*  
24-02                      4   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
67. **Common Kestrel** - *Falco tinnunculus*  
24-02                      2   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
68. **Rose-ringed Parakeet** - *Psittacula krameri*  
24-02                      4   Dubai, general area, Dubai; introduced.
69. **Isabelline Shrike** - *Lanius isabellinus*  
24-02                      1   seen from the car, Dubai, general area, Dubai.
70. **Great Grey Shrike** - *Lanius meridionalis aucheri*  
24-02                      2   (ssp aucheri) Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.

- 24-02                      1 (ssp pallidirostris) Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
71. **House Crow** - *Corvus splendens*  
 24-02                      15 Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain; introduced.
72. **Brown-necked Raven** - *Corvus ruficollis*  
 24-02                      7 Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
73. **Desert Lark** - *Ammomanes deserti*  
 24-02                      4 Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
74. **BLACK-CROWNED SPARROW-LARK** - *Eremopterix nigriceps*  
 24-02                      2 Saih al Salam (general area), Dubai.  
                               c 20 Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
75. **Crested Lark** - *Galerida cristata*  
 24-02                      2 Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                               c 30 Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
76. **White-eared Bulbul** - *Pycnonotus leucotis*  
 24-02                      3 Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain;  
                               2 Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.  
 Said to be introduced in the UAE. To quote HBW: S Iran (populations in Tehran and N Iran probably introduced) and Kuwait; also E Saudi Arabia (and probably introduced inland, at Riyadh) S to United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman (probably introduced).
77. **White-spectacled Bulbul** - *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*  
 24-02                      2 Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
78. **Pale Crag Martin** - *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*  
 24-02                      2 at a gas station, between Umm al-Qaiwain and Fujairah.
79. **Barn Swallow** - *Hirundo rustica*  
 24-02                      4-5 Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
80. **PLAIN LEAF WARBLER** - *Phylloscopus neglectus*  
 24-02                      1 Masafi Wadi, Fujairah. One of the highlights of the trip!
81. **Common Chiffchaff** - *Phylloscopus collybita*  
 24-02                      1 Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
82. **Delicate Prinia** - *Prinia lepida carpenteri*  
 24-02                      2-3 Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.
83. **Lesser Whitethroat** - *Sylvia curruca halimodendri*  
 24-02                      2 Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.



84. **Common Starling** - *Sturnus vulgaris*  
24-02                      2   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
85. **Black Redstart** - *Phoenicurus ochruros*  
24-02                      2   Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
86. **Isabelline Wheatear** - *Oenanthe isabellina*  
24-02                      1   Umm al-Qaiwain Breakwater, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 2   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
87. **Pied Wheatear** - *Oenanthe pleschanka*  
24-02                      1   (male) seen from the car by Arjan only, between Saih al Salam and Dubai.
88. **HUME'S WHEATEAR** - *Oenanthe albonigra*  
24-02                      3   Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
89. **RED-TAILED WHEATEAR** - *Oenanthe chrysopygia*  
24-02                      4   Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
90. **PURPLE SUNBIRD** - *Cinnyris asiaticus*  
24-02                      1   Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain.  
                                 6   Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
91. **House Sparrow** - *Passer domesticus indicus*  
24-02                      30   Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.  
                                 c 100   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
92. **INDIAN SILVERBILL** - *Euodice malabarica*  
24-02                      2   Masafi Wadi, Fujairah.
93. **Western Yellow Wagtail** - *Motacilla flava*  
24-02                      3   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai. At least one bird belonged to the ssp *beema*.
94. **White Wagtail** - *Motacilla alba*  
24-02                      3   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
95. **Tawny Pipit** - *Anthus campestris*  
24-02                      2   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
96. **Water Pipit** - *Anthus spinoletta*  
24-02                      2   Saih al Salam, Al Qudra Pivots, Dubai.
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Left: Pallas's Gull, Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain; left: Socotra Cormorant passing by at Kalba Corniche, Fujairah; © Jan van der Laan.



Left: one of the four Crab Plovers; right: Arabian Green Bee-eater, both at Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain; © Jan van der Laan.



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouses at Saih al Salam (general area) with two females on the left and right a male; © Jan van der Laan.



Left: Black-crowned Finch Lark; right: Cream coloured Courser at Saih al Salam (general area); © Jan van der Laan.





Pallid Harriers at the Al Qudra Pivots, Saih al Salam, Dubai; © Jan van der Laan.



Steppe Grey Shrikes at the Al Qudra Pivots, Saih al Salam, Dubai; © Jan van der Laan.



Black-crowned Finch Larks; left: male right: female, both at the Al Qudra Pivots, Saih al Salam, Dubai; © Jan van der Laan.



Left: Water Pipit, probably race *coutellii*; right: Tawny Pipit, both at the Al Qudra Pivots, Saih al Salam, Dubai; © Jan van der Laan.





Left: Isabelline Wheatear; right: Red-wattled Plover, both at the Al Qudra Pivots, Saih al Salam, Dubai; © Jan van der Laan.



Skyline of Dubai city; © Arjan Brenkman.