

Turkey Trip report

a summary from 7-20th April 2005

by Tomas Axén Haraldsson

I planned this trip with short notice during the 2004/2005 season in Egypt. I wanted to go to Lebanon but due to the political situation there I had to change my plans. Linus Blomqvist, a friend travelling in Turkey that Spring, was contacted and together we decided on this improvised, not-so-serious birding/culture trip through southern Turkey.



Bald Ibis, Menetries Warbler and Citrine Wagtail - birding highlights of southeastern Turkey.

Itinerary

April 7th - me and Linus meet up in Istanbul in the evening.

April 8th - having a look around this amazing city, some birding along the Bosphorus.

April 9th - more sightseeing including *hamam*. In the evening catching the overnight bus towards Birecik.

April 10th - arrival at Birecik after lunch. The rest of the day birding around the village and the Euphrates. Two nights in Birecik.

April 11th - birding around Birecik the whole day.

April 12th - birding around the village Halfeti (30 km N Birecik) until the afternoon, then back to Birecik and on with bus to Gaziantep.

April 13th - we rent a car in Gaziantep and head west. Birding along the way and at Topprakkale. One night in Osmaniye.

April 14th - raptor watch at Topprakkale, then driving to the Göksu Delta/Akgöl. Some evening birding there. Two nights in Tasucu.

April 15th - birding the whole day around Akgöl and in the mountains above the area.

April 16th - early birding at the village Demircili above Tasucu, then driving to Adana and change car to bus for Nidge and from there taxi to Demirkazik. Two nights at Safak Pansion.

April 17th - birding the whole day in the mountains at Demirkazik.

April 18th - early birding at Emlil Valley, Demirkazik, and in the afternoon bus to the Sultan Marshes. One night at Sultan Pansion.

April 19th - birding until the afternoon at the Sultan Marshes. In the afternoon bus to Kayseri. Here we finish our journey with *hamam* and local food. I leave with the overnight bus back to Istanbul and Linus heads for Cappadocia.

April 20th - Flight back to Cairo.

Accommodation, transports, prices etc.

Turkey is a wonderful destination for birders and travellers alike. Accommodation is plentiful, prices often cheap, food is superb and birding sites basically anywhere. We travelled by bus several times and found the coach network just great. Modern buses, good service, cheap and frequent. Hiring a car was a bit of head ache if you haven't booked ahead. Language problems and car availability made for some frustration in Gaziantep. We got a medium size Fiat at 190 USD for 4 days, and they picked it up in Adana (250 km away) afterwards. Petrol also quite expensive at the time (about 1.25 euro/litre). The traffic was not a problem outside the cities and towns, where it was dense and fast.

In Istanbul we stayed at a backpackers, Sultan Hostel in Sultanahmet. Lively, clean and centrally located. About 17 euro/double room.

In Birecik we found a very basic place, Otel Dogan, just north of the village centre. Very simple standard but enough for our kind of trip, and at only 10 euro/double room.

In Gaziantep we stayed at a nice place called Evin, right in the centre. Large room, clean bathroom and TV at only 12 euro!

In Osmaniye (city close to Topprakkale) we ended up at Otel Cinar, behind the petrol station along the main street. Ok standard at 12 euro/double room. Internet café and good food close by.

In Tasucu (Akgöl) of course the "birders hotel" Fatih. 15 euro/double room, good standard and internet and good fish restaurant close by.

In Demirkazik we didn't have much of a choice; Safak Pansion. We bargained for the price, but with little luck. 20 euro per person per night with "full board" in the coldest room east of the Bosphorus. Food very basic but the place is charming and the veranda overlooks the Aladag snow-covered peaks. At another 15 euro per person we were trucked up on the mountain in the ancient tractor at dawn for the snowcocks.

In Ovalifcik, the village at the Sultan Marshes, we stayed at the Sultan Pansion. Also here bargaining for room price and boat trip price. We got a double room with breakfast for 12 euro and the short boat trip at about 25 euro.



Caspian Snowcock and Wallcreeper at Demirkazik

List of interesting species

Since this was not a full birding trip, I will only list the more interesting species seen. Now in mid-April it seemed to early for species like Olive-tree Warbler and White-throated Robin. The numbers of shrikes, bee-eaters and marsh terns was also low.

We recorded about 215 species.

Ruddy Shelduck	a few pairs at Akgöl
<u>Marbled Teal</u>	2 at Akgöl
Red-crested Pochard	fairly common at Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes
<u>Caspian Snowcock</u>	3 pairs and displaying at Demirkazik
Chukar	fairly common at Demirkazik
<u>See-see Partridge</u>	3 at the wadi, Birecik, and 2 at the plateau, Halfeti
<u>Black Francolin</u>	several displaying around Tasucu and Akgöl
Yelkouan Shearwater	common at the Bosphorus, Istanbul
Northern Gannet	2 2-3cy birds fishing at sea off Akgöl
Shag	several at the Bosphorus, Istanbul
<u>Pygmy Cormorant</u>	fairly common at Birecik
Night Heron	Birecik, Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes
Cattle Egret	5 at the Sultan Marshes
Great White Egret	a few at Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes, a total of 10
Purple Heron	a few at Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes, a total of 10
Black Stork	several recorded
White Stork	fairly common and 300 migrating north at Topprakkale
Glossy Ibis	common at Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes
<u>Bald Ibis</u>	easily seen at Birecik, about 25 birds
Spoonbill	several recorded
Greater Flamingo	Akgöl
<u>Lammergeier</u>	1 seen from Safak Pansion, Demirkazik
Egyptian Vulture	2 at Halfeti
Short-toed Eagle	several recorded, a total of 8-10 birds
<u>Pallid Harrier</u>	1 m migrating north at Topprakkale and 1 2cy at the Sultan Marshes
Montagues Harrier	several recorded, a total of about 7-8 birds
Long-legged Buzzard	several recorded, a total of about 10-12 birds
Lesser Spotted Eagle	migration seen at Halfeti and Topprakkale (125)
Greater Spotted Eagle	1 2-3cy at Akgöl
Golden Eagle	a pair nesting at Demirkazik
<u>Bonellis Eagle</u>	1 2-3cy along the main road west of Gaziantep
Red-footed Falcon	1f Akgöl
Purple Swamphen	2 at Akgöl
Black-winged Stilt	Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes
Stone Curlew	1 at Akgöl
Collared Pratincole	5 at the Sultan Marshes
Kentish Plover	fairly common
Spur-winged Plover	Akgöl
Marsh Sandpiper	30 at Akgöl
Mediterranean Gull	fairly common at the Bosphorus, Istanbul
Slender-billed Gull	Akgöl
Whiskered Tern	Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes
White-winged Black Tern	Akgöl and the Sultan Marshes
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	two flocks at Birecik, about 20 birds
Laughing Dove	common in cities and towns
Spotted Cuckoo	1 each at Birecik and Halfeti

Striated Scops Owl
Eagle Owl
Alpine Swift
Little Swift

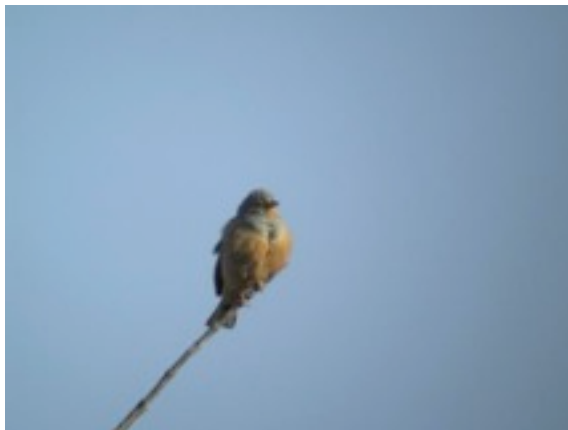
White-breasted Kingfisher
Kingfisher
Pied Kingfisher
Bee-eater
Hoopoe
Syrian Woodpecker

Calandra Lark
Bimaculated Lark

Short-toed Lark
Lesser Short-toed Lark
Shore Lark
Crag Martin
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-throated Pipit
Water Pipit
Citrine Wagtail

2 at the known café in Birecik
1 at the gorge, Demirkazik
fairly common
small colonies at Birecik and Halfeti, 1 at Topprakkale
2 between Tasucu and Akgöl
Sultan Marshes
1 at Birecik
several migrating flocks
fairly common
several recorded

fairly common at Halfeti and the Sultan Marshes
fairly common at the high plains, flocks seen at Halfeti and Demirkazik
several recorded
common at the Sultan Marshes
seen at several places around Demirkazik
Demirkazik
fairly common
at Akgöl an the Sultan Marshes
2 at Demirkazik
6-7m at the Sultan Marshes



Cretzmars Bunting and the Sultan Marshes through the scope.

Yellow-vented Bulbul
Black-crowned Accentor
Alpine Accentor
Isabelline Wheatear
Black-eared Wheatear
Rock Thrush
Blue Rock Thrush
Ring Ouzel
Cettis Warbler
Graceful Warbler
Savis Warbler
Moustasched Warbler
Olivaceous Warbler
Menetries Warbler
Rueppells Warbler
Orphean Warbler
Eastern Bonellis Warbler

fairly common
3-5 at Demirkazik
8-10 at Demirkazik
fairly common in the high, arid plains
fairly common
2 pairs at Demirkazik
fairly common in the right habitat
Demirkazik
several recorded
Birecik och Akgöl
1 singing at the Sultan Marshes
fairly common at the Sultan Marshes
several recorded
fairly common around Birecik and Halfeti
2 singing at Demircili
1 singing at Demircili
1 at Birecik

Collared Flycatcher	1m at Demircili
Sombre Tit	several at Demircili
<u>Krüpers Nuthatch</u>	at least 3 at Demircili
<u>Eastern Rock Nuthatch</u>	common around Halfeti, also seen west of Gaziantep
Rock Nuthatch	fairly common in the right habitat
<u>Wallcreeper</u>	2 at the gorge, Demirkazik
Golden Oriole	1 at Birecik
Woodchat Shrike	several recorded
Masked Shrike	10-12 north of Tasucu and 4-5 at Demircili
Alpine Chough	Demirkazik
Red-billed Chough	Demirkazik
Spanish Sparrow	several records
Rock Sparrow	fairly common in the right habitat
Snowfinch	several records around Demirkazik
<u>Red-fronted Serin</u>	several records around Demirkazik
Serin	fairly common
<u>Crimson-winged Finch</u>	several, also singing, at Demirkazik
Rock Bunting	seen at several sites at Demirkazik
Cretzmars Bunting	5-6 at Demircili
Corn Bunting	common