



Trip report Lebanon 5-8 April 2019

Bird observations during #birdcamplebanon2019

Bird Camp Lebanon 2019 was arranged a few days in April in the mountain village of Ras al-Matn in the central Mount Lebanon range above Beirut. The place was chosen for the first camp in October 2018 both for being on the main bird migration flyway, with tens of thousands of raptors passing in the autumn, as well as being one of the more progressive and ambitious nature conservation spots in the country.

This was a cooperation between Society for Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL, the BirdLife partner in Lebanon), BirdLife Sweden and the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, Caucasus & Central Asia (OSME). This time we were also joined by one Turkish participant!

Learn more about the Bird Camp Lebanon initiative in guest blogs and other media at www.spnl.org and www.osme.org and learn about Bird Camp Besh Barmag in Azerbaijan at www.birdingaze.blogspot.com and on respective Facebook pages.



Return visit to the high school in Ras al-Matn! Photo Tomas Axén Haraldsson.



Itinerary

Evening Friday 5 April – arrival of Swedish group (three participants and the initiative holder) and the Turkish participant in the village of Ras al-Matn, 30km northeast of Beirut in the Mount Lebanon. Three nights in private housing for Swedish/Turkish group.

6 April - morning at the observation point above the Beirut River Valley. Bird ringing demonstration with two nets and rings. Present are local key persons from the community, a responsible hunter and volunteers from the Homat al-hima group in Hammana. After lunch birding visit to Mount Lebanon ridge at 1500m near Falugha. Visit to the mayor in Hammana. Social dinner.

7 April – excursion with Homat al-hima to the Bekaa valley and the restored wetland of Ammiq. Beautiful weather and lots of birds. Breakfast and lunch in Chtoura. Afternoon birding on the ridge above Hammana. Social dinner.

8 April – school visits during the morning, two schools in Ras al-Matn. Turkish participant went to Aanjar to see Syrian Serins. Reception with the Japanese ambassador at mayors residence. Brief visit in Beirut, then to the airport by 1pm and departure for Istanbul. Unforeseen overnight in Istanbul.

9 April – arrival in Sweden at 10am.



Great views of Ammiq from the hill west of the road. Photo Tomas Axén Haraldsson.



Budget & logistics

All arranged through the Bird Camp project and local transports, restaurants, visits and permits arranged through SPNL and local partner MESD in Ras al-Matn village.

Birdwatching sites

Most birdwatching visits within 20 minutes drive from our base in the village Ras al-Matn, situated at 800m in the Mount Lebanon, 30km northeast of Beirut. Ammiq wetland is in the central Bekaa valley, a few kilometers south of Chtoura. 45min drive from Ras al-Matn.

Observation point, Beirut River Valley We spent the mornings at a local observation point in the hillsides with dry bushes and olive groves outside Ras al-Matn. Views to the south across the scenic Beirut River Valley which is in the bird migration flyway. In the bushes were local species like Graceful Prinia, White-spectacled Bulbul, Sardinian Warbler and Nightingale. Some single few migrants including Wryneck and Tree Pipit. Raptor migration now in spring very sparse, some single Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles and Marsh Harriers overhead and a small flock of White Storks.



Stork migration as seen during workshops and school visits. Photo Simon Carrington.

Above Hammana, Mount Lebanon Above the tree line up on the ridge at some 1500m. Scattered migration overhead with Lesser Spotted Eagle, Osprey, Hobby and 200 White Storks. Territorial Blue Rock Thrush, *semitruffus* Black Redstart and commoner species. Much disturbance by traffic and picnic groups.



Ammiq wetland 45 min drive from Ras al-Matn, joining the Damascus highway, in Chtoura turn south into the Bekaa valley for the last few kilometers. Ammiq is a restored wetland with reeds and pools covering 253 hectares, and a popular visitors spot for daytripping Beirutis and groups. Walking trails, signs, lookout platform and parking lot. A hill just west of the road makes for a good vantage point. Rich with birds now in spring as can be expected but fairly low numbers and virtually no waders, gulls or terns.

The hunting situation was very quiet during our days here. We heard a few tens of gunshots (mainly distant and with no hits seen) during the 2.5 days which is very little compared to other sites in the north and in the Bekaa. We had company of one of the responsible hunters involved in the village initiatives and he claimed only a few percent of the hunters active were actually licensed and legal. But the trend is encouraging with lots of "shaming" of illegal bird killing on social media and a better situation around these villages than some years ago.

List of the 80 species noted 5-8 April 2019 around Ras al-Matn and Ammiq wetland

Garganey (<i>Spatula querquedula</i>)	35 at Ammiq
Eurasian Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>)	one pair at Ammiq
Little Grebe (<i>Tachybates ruficollis</i>)	common at Ammiq, at least 10-15 birds
Black Stork (<i>Ciconia nigra</i>)	2+2 migrating above Ammiq
White Stork (<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>)	30 migrating Ras al-Matn, 270 migrating Hammana and some singles more migrating
Glossy Ibis (<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>)	23 at Ammiq



A flock of Glossy Ibis resting on their migration at Ammiq. Photo Simon Carrington.

Great White Egret (<i>Ardea alba</i>)	c 10 at Ammiq
Purple Heron (<i>Ardea purpurea</i>)	2 at Ammiq
Grey Heron (<i>Ardea cinerea</i>)	2 at Ammiq
Little Egret (<i>Egretta garzetta</i>)	4 at Ammiq
Cattle Egret (<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>)	1 at Ammiq
White Pelican (<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>)	c 500 migrating above Beirut airport
Great Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>)	singles seen
Western Osprey (<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>)	1 migrating Hammana
Short-toed Snake Eagle (<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>)	A total of 5 migrating and one pair in possible breeding circumstances at Ammiq



Short-toed Eagle migration goes on over towns and villages in Lebanon. Photo Simon Carrington.

Lesser Spotted Eagle (<i>Clanga pomarina</i>)	A total of 25 migrating
Booted Eagle (<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>)	A total of 5 migrating
Eurasian Sparrowhawk (<i>Accipiter nisus</i>)	A total of 4 migrating
Western Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	A total of 10 migrating and at least 3 at Ammiq
Pallid Harrier (<i>Circus macrourus</i>)	1 female migrating at Ammiq
Black Kite (<i>Milvus migrans</i>)	A total of 85 migrating
"Steppe" Buzzard (<i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>)	A total of 15 migrating
Long-legged Buzzard (<i>Buteo rufinus</i>)	1 at Ras al-Matn and a pair at Ammiq
Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Singles seen daily, residents
Eurasian Hobby (<i>Falco subbuteo</i>)	1 migrating at Hammana
Eurasian Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>)	common at Ammiq
Common Moorhen (<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>)	common at Ammiq
Little Crane (<i>Porzana parva</i>)	surprisingly many and a highlight of the trip. At least 15 birds, males and females, at close range in the reed fringes at Ammiq



One of many Little Crakes at Ammiq. Photo Simon Carrington.

Common Crane (<i>Grus grus</i>)	3 migrating at Ammiq
Spur-winged Lapwing (<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>)	6 showing breeding behaviour at Ammiq
Green Sandpiper (<i>Tringa ochropus</i>)	1 at Ammiq
Yellow-legged Gull (<i>Larus michaellis</i>)	5 in Beirut
Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>)	5 in Beirut with the Yellow-legged Gulls
Rock Dove (<i>Columbia livia var. domestica</i>)	Daily, scattered observations
Eurasian Collared Dove (<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>)	A few in Beirut
Laughing Dove (<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>)	10-15 in Beirut
Hoopoe (<i>Upupa epops</i>)	1 at Ras al-Matn and 2 at Ammiq
Common Swift (<i>Apus apus</i>)	5 migrating over Chtoura.
Eurasian Wryneck (<i>Jynx torquilla</i>)	1 at Ras al-Matn and 1 at Ammiq
Crested Lark (<i>Galerida cristata</i>)	fairly common at Ammiq
Calandra Lark (<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>)	fairly common in fields next to Ammiq
Barn Swallow (<i>Hirundo rustica</i>)	c 25 migrating at Ammiq



Tree Pipit (<i>Anthus trivialis</i>)	At least 7 migrants seen and heard overhead
Grey Wagtail (<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>)	1 migrating at Ammiq
Northern Wheatear (<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>)	a total of 5 seen
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear (<i>Oenanthe melanoleuca</i>)	several at the hills above Ammiq
Black Redstart (<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>)	1 male <i>semirufus</i> above Hammana and 2 <i>ochruros</i> seen.
Eurasian Wren (<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>)	A few (2-5) heard around Ras al-Matn
Common Nightingale (<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>)	1-2 in song by the net site, Ras al-Matn
Common Blackbird (<i>Turdus merula</i>)	Several seen and heard
Blue Rock Thrush (<i>Monticola solitarius</i>)	1 male in display at Hammana
Graceful prinia (<i>Prinia gracilis</i>)	Seemingly common in bushes and hillside scrub.



A Graceful Prinia was kind enough to take part in ringing demonstration... Photo Simon Carrington.

Eurasian Reed Warbler (<i>Acrocephalus scirpaesus</i>)	common at Ammiq, 15-20 birds
Segde Warbler (<i>Acrocephalus schoenbaenus</i>)	4 at Ammiq
Great Reed Warbler (<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>)	3 at Ammiq



Common Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

2 seen

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

some 10 seen during the trip

Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*)

Seemingly common in bushes and hillside scrub.

Eurasian Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

5 seen

Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*)

some 5 heard during the trip

Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

5 seen

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

Common around Ras al-Matn

Penduline Tit (*Remiz pendulinus*)

6 at Ammiq



The distinctive call alerted us to Penduline Tits in the reeds at Ammiq. Photo Simon Carrington.



Masked Shrike (<i>Lanius nubicus</i>)	1 at the hills above Ammiq
Woodchat Shrike (<i>Lanius senator</i>)	One pair at the hills above Ammiq
White-spectacled Bulbul (<i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i>)	at several sites, fairly common
Palestine Sunbird (<i>Cinnyris osea</i>)	1 male at the gates to AUB in Beirut
Eurasian Jay (<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>)	several records in forests of ssp. <i>atricapillus</i>
Hooded Crow (<i>Corvus cornix</i>)	common
Northern Raven (<i>Corvus corax</i>)	2 at Ras al-Matn
Common Myna (<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>)	several in Beirut
House Sparrow (<i>Passer domesticus</i>)	common
Common Chaffinch (<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>)	several heard and seen
Common Linnet (<i>Linaria cannabina</i>)	1 at Hammana
European Serin (<i>Serinus serinus</i>)	3 at Aanjar
Syrian Serin (<i>Serinus syriacus</i>)	22 at Aanjar, at the historical ruins. Likely breeding site.



Syrian Serin, endemic and exclusive to a small region including Lebanon. Photo Emin Yogurtcuoglu

European Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>)	2-3 in Ras al-Matn
European Greenfinch (<i>Chloris chloris</i>)	Observed daily in the area



(during the brief layover hours at Istanbul were also noted Alpine Swift, Eurasian Robin, White Wagtail, Corn Bunting, Jackdaw and Starling.)

Herptiles

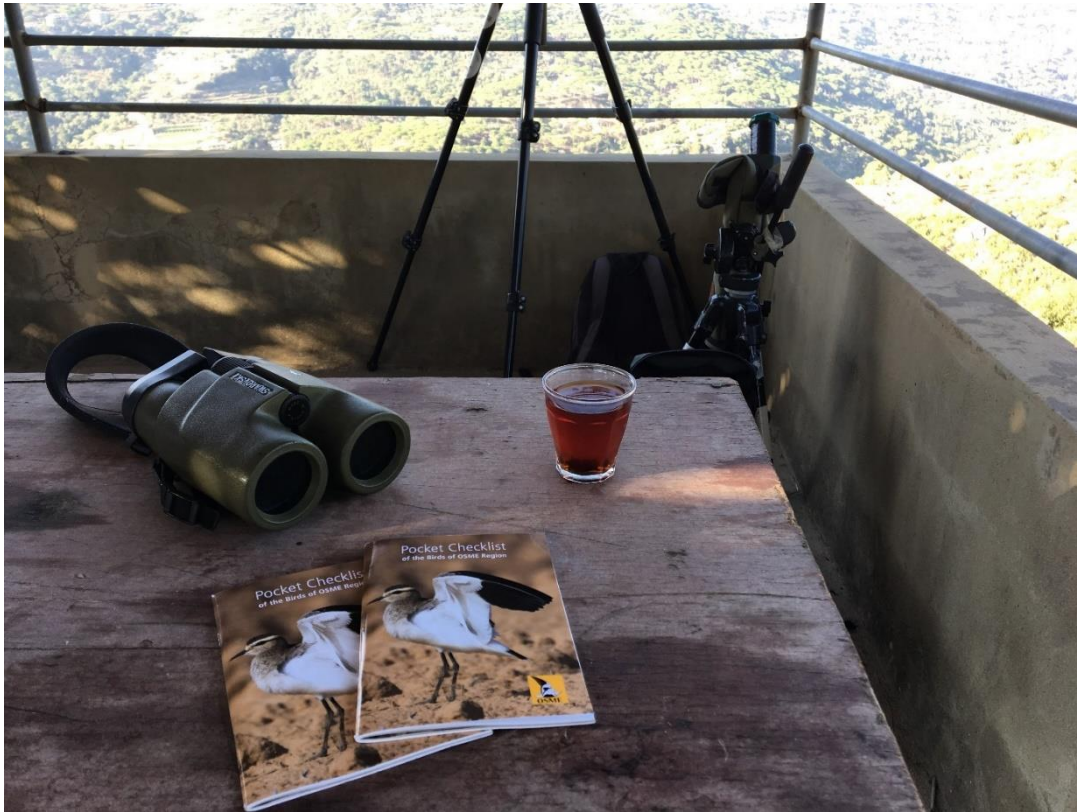
Mediterranean Spur-thighed tortoise (<i>Testudo graeca</i>)	2 at Ammiq
Stripe-necked turtle (<i>Mauremys caspica</i>)	20 at Ammiq
Near Eastern Fire Salamander (<i>Salamandra infraimmaculata</i>)	1 roadkilled at Ras al-Matn

Mammals

Golden Jackal (<i>Canis aureus</i>)	1 seen in car headlights
Rock Hyrax (<i>Procavia capensis</i>)	Family group in the Beirut River Valley, seen from the observation point

Butterflies

Spectacular mass migration of Painted Ladies *Vanessa cardui* going on with probably millions of butterflies heading north through our visited areas!



The Ornithological Society of the Middle East, Caucasus & Central Asia (OSME) encourages and promotes bird conservation and awareness in Lebanon and across the region. Join us! www.osme.org

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