

Turkey trip report

28th July to 4th August 2009

(parts of central and SE Turkey)

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(all photographs by Richard Dunn)

Itinerary

We flew from Manchester to Istanbul and connected with a flight to Adana, where we arrived in the early hours of 28th July. Collection of the hire vehicle went smoothly and the sleepless night continued as we drove west towards Demircili.

28th July: birded Demircili from dawn (0555hrs) and travelled to Uzuncaburc and then to Tasucu where we checked in at the Lades Hotel, with rooms overlooking a strangely deserted part of the Mediterranean coast. Later we visited the Goksu Delta for a couple of hours until dusk. Adrenalin and a few snacks had kept us going throughout the day and an early night was essential.

29th July: after much needed sleep and breakfast, our departure was delayed by a bad puncture evident on the van (it turned out to be irreparable). The hotel proprietor quickly summoned help, supplying us with very good coffee in the process and, to cut a long story short, the problem was solved by the very imaginative efforts of the local tyre people. Once on the road we visited Demircili again then travelled to the Durnalik area. After some difficulty in finding suitable accommodation, we decided that the best policy was to change plans and head east towards Birecik, where we stayed the night.

30th July: the whole day was spent in the varied habitats in the Birecik area, where the area to the south along the R. Euphrates was especially productive. Night in Birecik.

31st July: after a morning visit to the Euphrates south of Birecik and then a brief look at the Bald Ibis reintroduction centre (incidentally, on the day before we had noticed two Bald Ibis in flight fitted with radio transmitters), we headed west on the longish drive towards Gaziantep. Accommodation again proved difficult to find but a decision to turn into the centre of the city proved to be very fruitful, when some skilful negotiation enabled us to enjoy 5 star luxuries in The Grand Hotel at an amazing knock-down price! We still found time in the evening to visit Isikli. Needless to say, the night was spent in the hotel at Gaziantep; although the luxury was enjoyed there was a disappointing lack of *gratis* champagne/cigars/dressing gowns, although Graeme may still be wearing his free slippers.

1st Aug: the breakfast buffet could only be described as a banquet... our only regret was not stocking our rucksacks. So, full of the most fabulous breakfast foods imaginable, we headed for Durnalik and then on to Adana where we birded at Karatas, south of the city, until dusk. We spent the night in the Princess Maya Hotel in central Adana. It was OK but not what we were used to...

2nd Aug: drove north across plains towards Bor and Nigde and spent some hours at the impressive Akkaya barrage (see more details at the end of the report). Then onwards towards the Ala Dagar Mountains and an overnight stay at the Oz Safak Pension in Cukurbag.

3rd Aug: out at 0450hrs in the van to meet a tractor on the lower slopes of the Ala Dagar Mountains. The tractor duly arrived and we clung on to it, chugging upwards high into the mountains, until the rough track petered out. It was just before dawn by then and the timing was perfect to enjoy the special species of this environment, Caspian Snowcock. After a slow walk down the mountains back to our parked van, we drove to the Pension for breakfast *cum* lunch. After a spot of relaxation in the heat of the day we looked for Radde's Accentor, first trying near the mountain centre at Demikirzak (had to buy tickets from warden), back to the pension before returning half way up the mountain, and another look near the mountain centre on the way down. Another night in the Oz Safak Pension.



4th Aug: went up into the Ala Dagar Mountains again and birded for several hours before collecting our gear from the Pension. We made our way across country to the Akkaya barrage for the final two hours of daylight, before the sun set on our birding visit to Turkey.

Systematic List

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Around 20 were at the Akkaya barrage on 2nd/4th Aug.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

About 15 were in view from the observation tower at the Goksu Delta on 28th July.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

Up to 47 were noted on 30th/31st July along the Euphrates River near Birecik.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Three singles were seen in flight near old gravel pits alongside the Euphrates, south of Birecik on 30th July.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Six+ at the old gravel pits south of Birecik on 30th and three there on 31st July.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Max of six at Akkaya barrage on 2nd Aug; 2 seen there on 4th and singles elsewhere on two other days.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Three were at the Goksu Delta on 28th July.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Noted on four days; max a flock of c.30 en route Demircili-Durnalik on 29th.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

A juv was present at the Akkaya barrage on 2nd Aug before flying N.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Two at the Akkaya barrage on 4th Aug.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

One was at the Akkaya barrage on 2nd Aug.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

At the Akkaya Barrage, 375 (10% juveniles) were estimated on 2nd and 403 counted on 4th Aug.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

At the Akkaya barrage 15 on 2nd and 23 on 4th Aug.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

It was only seen at Akkaya barrage: 50+ on 2nd and 75+ on 4th August.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Two at Akkaya barrage on 2nd/4th August.

White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*

At Akkaya barrage 11 were present on 2nd/4th August.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

Two were seen en route Demircili-Durnalik on 29th July.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Two in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd and one flew over a gorge near Demikirzak on 4th August.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

One was seen in the plains south of Bor on 2nd August.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

One or two were noted on four dates.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

A total of four in the Demircili area and en route on 29th and three at Akkaya barrage on 2nd August.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Singles were seen on 31st July and 2nd August.

Caspian Snowcock *Tetraogallus caspicus*

Three were heard then seen high in the Ala Dagar Mountains soon after dawn on 3rd August.



Chukar *Alectoris chukar*

It was noted on three dates, with a max of 30+ in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 4th August.

See-See Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*

Up to 20 were found in a wadi just to the north of Birecik on 30th July, including half-grown young.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

A total of three were heard at two stops en route on 2nd and one also called at Akkaya barrage on 4th August.

Coot *Fulica atra*

It was noted on five dates, including about 150 at the Akkaya barrage on 2nd/4th August.

Purple Swamp-hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Four were at the Goksu Delta on 28th July.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Only seen at Akkaya barrage where there was a max of 75+ on 2nd August and c30 on 4th.

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*

Noted on three days, max of 10+ at Akkaya barrage on 2nd August.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Two were on the Euphrates south of Birecik on 31st July.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

It was logged on three dates, including eight at Akkaya barrage on 2nd August.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

There was a remarkable 110+ at the Akkaya barrage on 2nd and still c.25 there on 4th August.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

There were three at the Akkaya barrage on 2nd and one on 4th August.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

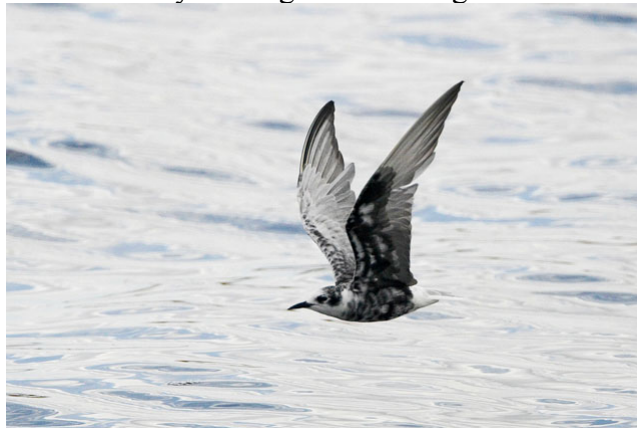
Logged on three dates, including a flock of 22 S on 28th at the Goksu Delta.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*

One along the Euphrates south of Birecik on 30th and six were there on 31st July.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Three at the Goksu Delta on 28th then, along the Euphrates south of Birecik c.50 on 30th and 30+ on 31st July and two were at the Akkaya barrage on 2nd August.



Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Up to three were logged on four dates and also a total of 11 on 4th August.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

One roosting in the tea gardens in Birecik was something of a nice surprise on 30th July.



Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

One was in the close vicinity of the huge mosque in central Adana on the evening of 1st August.

Scops Owl *Otus scops*

One was calling at 0345hrs on 3rd August near the Oz Safak Pension, Cukurbag.

Pale Scops Owl *Otus brucei*

Three juveniles were observed closely at daytime roost in the tea gardens in Birecik and later watched feeding on the ground after dark.

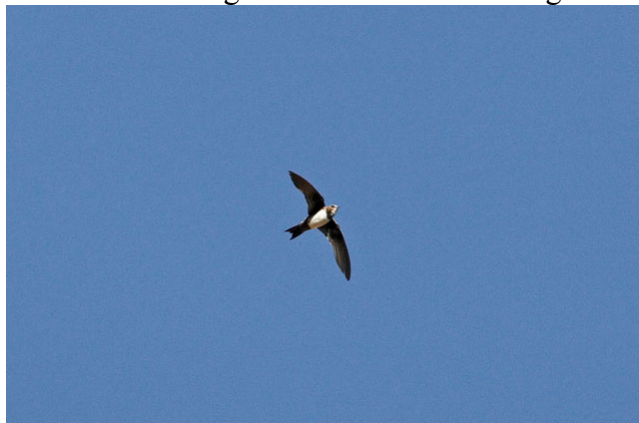


Eurasian Nightjar *Caprimugus europaeus*

Before dawn, on the track up the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd August, three were illuminated in the tractor headlights and another was heard singing.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

An obliging flock of 24 was in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 4th August.



Little Swift *Apus affinus*

Seen only at Birecik: c.40 on 30th July and six next day.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

A remarkable loose flock at Akkaya barrage comprised 19 on 2nd and 23-26 on 4th; otherwise one-four noted almost daily.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Two were seen on 1st August in the sluice area at Karatas, south of Adana.

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

It was seen on three days only: two on 30th and 15 on 31st July and up to 12 on 4th August.

Roller *Coracias garrulus*

Three were in the Birecik area on 30th and one there on 31st July.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopus syriacus*

It was noted on five days with a maximum of seven on 28th July.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor*

One in the Demircili area and one en route on 28th July.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Fairly common throughout.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

In all, an estimated 14 were seen/heard on 2nd August in the plains south of Bora and at Akkaya barrage.

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*

A loose flock of about 60 was found at a random stop en route to Cukurbag on 2nd August; some were coming to water at a roadside trough. One was en route to Akkaya on 4th.

Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

Three, including at least one juvenile, appeared at a random stop en route to Cukurbag on 2nd and c. 20 were in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd and three on 4th.



Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Recorded in the Ala Dagar Mountains: two on 3rd and five on 4th.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*

After 40+ at the Goksu Delta on 28th July low numbers were noted on few other days.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Two were found at a stop en route to Akkaya on 4th.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Three were logged in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 4th.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

One was at Birecik on 31st July then around 30 at Akkaya barrage on 2nd/4th August, including several *feldegg* ('Black-headed' race).

Yellow-vented (Spectacled) Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*

Generally five or more were encountered daily 28th July-1st August but none thereafter.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*

Two were found at high level in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd.

Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*

After spending several hours over two days searching for this species in the Ala Dagar Mountains, a fortuitous call of nature to one of our party led to the discovery of two, at 2220m altitude on 4th August. Naturally, to preserve his modesty, Richard shall not be named.



Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

One was seen on 2nd August near Kilavuz.

Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*

A total of 13 were seen spread over six of the eight days. The relatively dull upperparts of this race, either *syriacus* or *familiaris*, compared to its western counterparts, were notable.

White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis*

A superb, obliging, male on 29th July near Durnalik was very well appreciated, the only full male seen on the trip. Soon afterwards a female was seen in the same area and one-three imms/ females were seen daily at various locations on 1st-4th August.



Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

The vast majority were seen in the Akkaya barrage areas with 25-30 on 2nd and 8+ on 4th August. Also one on 1st August at Durnalik valley.

(Eastern) Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe (hispanica) melanoleuca*

It was recorded regularly in many of the places visited from 28th-31st July and a peak of 15+ in the Durnalik area on 1st August.

Persian (Red-tailed) Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrna*

A surprisingly elusive individual was in a roadside orchard a few kilometres south of Halfeti on 31st July.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

Singles were found on three days up to 31st July and also four in the Durnalik area on 29th.

Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

Three were in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd and some seven there on 4th August.



Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

Two were on the lower slopes of the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd August.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

An adult was at Demircili on 28th July.

(Eastern) Orphean Warbler *Sylvia (hortensis) crassirostris*

Two at Uzuncabrurc on 28th and one on 29th July at Durnalik.



Menetries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*

On 30th July two were in a dry wadi north of Birecik and two, including a male, later in the evening in the old gravel pits area south of Birecik.

Graceful Warbler *Prinia gracilis*

Two were seen at the Goksu Delta on 28th and up to 12 around Birecik on 30th July. Singles were also noted on 31st July and 1st August.



Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

Singles were seen alongside the Euphrates south of Birecik on 30th and 31st July.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

Singles were logged on three dates and also two, adult and juvenile, at Akkaya barrage, on 2nd August.

Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*

Singles were at Demircili on 28th and in the tea gardens at Birecik on 30th July.

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*

It was noted on four dates, maxima six at Birecik on 30th July and six in the Durnalik area on 1st August.



Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*

Up to at least three were seen on a daily basis.

Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*

Two were found in the Durnalik area on 1st August.

Sombre Tit *Parus lugubris*

It was recorded on three days: six on 28th around Demircili, three on 29th July in the Durnalik area and one at Durnalik on 1st August.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

At least six were in the Goksu delta on 28th July.

Kruper's Nuthatch *Sitta krueperi*

Two were at Demircili on 28th July, often seen on the ground coming to water.

Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*

It was recorded on five dates, including maxima of six on 28th July and five on 4th August.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*

Four were seen in the Durnalik area on 29th, two near Halfeti on 31st July and four at Durnalik on 1st August. At Durnalik both Eastern and Western could be found in relatively close proximity.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

After two en route to Cukurbag on 2nd, good numbers were encountered in the foothills of the Ala Dagar Mountains: 16 on 3rd and at least ten on 4th August. Some of these were fledged juveniles still being fed by adults.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

A total of four were logged on three dates.

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*

On 28th July a total of 9+ was logged, including a family party at Demircili and one at the Roman ruins of Uzuncaburc. Four others were seen on three dates.



Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

Singles on 29th and 31st July, three on 2nd and three on 4th August.

Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*

Near the Euphrates south of Birecik four were found on 30th July and three were seen there next day.



Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

In the Ala Dagar Mountains about 20 were seen on 3rd and 4th August.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

In the Ala Dagar Mountains about 30 were seen on 3rd and 4th August.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

It was recorded on six days, including 40 on 30th July; also 95-100 at the Akkaya barrage on 3rd/4th August.

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*

Two flew over near the hotel at Birecik in the early morning of 30th July.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

One on 28th July and a flock of about 20 included three males on 2nd August, en route to Cukurbag.

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*

The first was a singing male in an 'orchard' north of Birecik on 30th July, then three, including two males, south of Birecik along the Euphrates in the evening. Four were noted in the latter area on 31st July.



Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

It was recorded on six days with maxima of 16 in the gorge near the Ibis centre, Birecik on 30th July and 20+ in the Durnalik area on 1st August.

Hill Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla*

One was at the orchard near the radio mast beyond Durnalik on 1st August.

Chestnut-shouldered Sparrow *Gymornis xanthocollis*

At least two were found in the 'orchard' area north of Birecik on 30th July.

Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*

Around 60 were in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd August, most in a single flock.

Serin *Serinus serinus*

A juvenile was at Demircili on 28th July and up to three were noted in the foothills of the Ala Dagar Mountains on 3rd/4th August.

Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*

In the Ala Dagar Mountains four were found on 3rd and five on 4th August.

Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguinea*

In the Ala Dagar Mountains two were found on 3rd and six-seven on 4th August.

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*

It was only seen south of Birecik along the Euphrates but in good numbers: c.20 on 30th and c.40 on 31st July.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

At least one was at Demircili on 28th; two or three were seen en route to Cukurbag on 2nd and four or five in the Ala Dagar Mountains on 4th August.

Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*

A few were found in the Demircili area on 28th, one at Isikli on 31st July and one on 1st August at Durnalik lower orchard.



Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea*

Four or five were at Isikli on 31st July and one was in the Durnalik area on 1st August.

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*

Seven were seen at roadside stops en route to Cukurbag on 2nd, eight on the lower slopes of Ala Dagar mountains on 3rd and at least four en route to Akkaya Barrage on 4th August.



Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

One was in a valley near Kilavuz on 4th.

List of other species recorded on the trip

Little Grebe, Little Egret, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Shelduck, Mallard, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Kestrel (sp.), Moorhen, LRP, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Black-headed Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Little Tern, Rock Dove (Feral), Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Laughing Dove, Tawny Owl, Little Owl, Swift, Kingfisher, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, White Wagtail, Redstart, Black Redstart, Northern Wheatear, Stonechat, Blackbird, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Nuthatch, Magpie, Jay, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Corn Bunting.

Akkaya barrage (near Nigde)

This site was something of a revelation. When heading inland to the Ala Dagar mountains on 2nd August we decided there was time to search for Greater Sand Plover. Not having any details of where to look we found this site on the map and made for it. After a little trouble finding a route to

the shoreline it wasn't long before 'scopes were set up. Water levels were favourable for passage waders, many of which were taking advantage including a remarkable 110 Wood Sandpipers – the commonest wader present (followed by about 75 Black-winged Stilts). About ten Spur-winged Plovers and three Marsh Sandpipers were found amongst small numbers of Lapwings, Little Ringed Plovers, Ruffs, Little Stints, Greenshanks, and Green and Common Sandpipers.

From end to end the water is perhaps a couple of kilometres long but thinner in width. A pack of 375 Greater Flamingos gathered at the shallower end, where a Black Stork stood with a small party of Whites. About 50 Garganey were joined by 20 Black-necked Grebes, 15 Ruddy Shelducks, 11 White-headed Ducks and a couple of Red-crested Pochards.

Notable counts included 95+ Hooded Crows in one loose flock and 19 Hoopoes (including 14 in one scan over a grassy area). With Squacco Herons, Marsh Harriers, Long-legged Buzzards, Isabelline Wheatears and good numbers of Yellow Wagtails around the margins, the place was a real delight and necessitated a return visit on 4th August. The lack of any Greater Sand Plovers was not a disappointment!