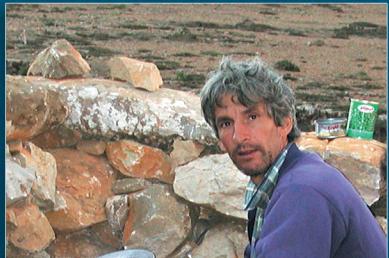


Are you interested in birds? Do you enjoy learning about the natural world? Or do you just want to know the name of that bird you saw in your garden or at the beach? Whatever your level, there is something for you in this easy-to-use guide. Between them, the authors have over 80 years of birdwatching experience in Arabia.

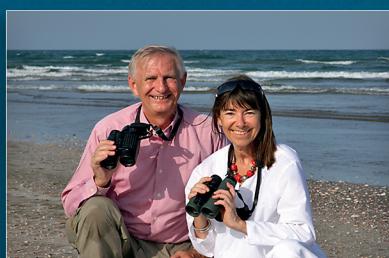
About 530 photographs help identify some 240 species of birds, including all common breeding species and regular migrants to the UAE, as well as several that are not so common. Species have been grouped together according to their preferred habitat to make identification easier. The introduction provides beginners with the vocabulary used for birds and birdwatching and the equipment needed.



Simon Aspinall has lived in the UAE since 1993 pursuing his professional interests in conservation and ecology throughout the Middle East and Caucasus. He has published extensively on natural history, especially within Arabia, with a particular emphasis on birds, being the author of *Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates*, now in its third edition, and co-author of the newly revised *Birds of the Middle East* field guide.



Salim Javed has been in the UAE since 2001 working with the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD). He has a PhD in Wildlife Sciences and has worked extensively on ecology and conservation of birds in India and the UAE and established the Bird Conservation Programme at EAD. He has strong interest in movement and migration of birds using satellite telemetry and has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals.



Hanne & Jens Eriksen have lived in Oman and the UAE for the past 25 years and have traveled extensively in Arabia, the Middle East and all seven continents to study and photograph birds. They are authors or co-authors of nine books on birds including *Birdwatching Guide to Oman* and *Common Birds in Oman*. They have won several photo competitions and more than 10,000 of their pictures have been published worldwide.

Birdwatching is a wonderful hobby that takes you to the best natural habitats in the UAE. It can be enjoyed by anyone, of any age, in parks and gardens, on the coast, in the mountains or in the desert. Happy birding!

Birds of the United Arab Emirates

A guide to common
and important species



Birds

of the United Arab Emirates

A guide to common
and important species

Simon Aspinall, Salim Javed

and

Hanne & Jens Eriksen

assisted by Tommy Pedersen and
the Emirates Bird Records Committee



About EAD

The Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) was established in 1996 to preserve Abu Dhabi's natural heritage, protect our future, and raise awareness about environmental issues. EAD is Abu Dhabi's environmental regulator and advises the government on environmental policy. It works to create sustainable communities, and protect and conserve wildlife and natural resources. EAD also works to ensure integrated and sustainable water resources management, to ensure clean air and minimise climate change and its impacts.

Hooded Wheatear



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© Hanne & Jens Eriksen

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© Hanne & Jens Eriksen

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Foreword

The United Arab Emirates in general and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in particular are blessed with rich bird life. The vast stretches of the coastal mudflats, numerous islands, inland wetlands and even impoverished desert provide a variety of feeding, nesting and resting opportunities for numerous resident and migratory birds.

With 442 bird species recorded to date from the Emirates, birds account for a relatively high percentage of higher vertebrate diversity in the country. There are more than 100 which regularly breed in the country. The country is an important destination for millions of birds which migrate between Europe, Asia and Africa and is particularly important for many regionally and internationally important breeding colonies of seabirds.

Birds are one of the most well studied groups in the country and studies by the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) and its partnership with dedicated bird watchers through the Emirates Bird Records Committee (EBRC) has enhanced our understanding on their distribution, arrival and departure timings and areas where they can be found at different seasons of the year. Such knowledge is essential not only for the conservation of birds, which are an integral part of our cultural heritage and traditions, but also important for the conservation of the country's biodiversity. The legacy of conservation, left behind by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, has been ably carried forward under the leadership of H.H Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, and H.H Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.

Although a great deal of knowledge has been accumulated about birds over the years by organisations and individuals working in the country, the same knowledge has not been able to reach the public domain because of a lack of suitable books. With Abu Dhabi continuously expanding and promoting nature-based tourism, there is a genuine need for a book with text and photographs which would be helpful to identify birds quickly and easily.

I hope that this beautifully illustrated book will fill this gap and encourage many more people to observe birds in their natural environment and appreciate the rich natural heritage of our country; this will go a long way to develop a new consciousness towards the protection of our natural environment of which we all are part.

Mohammed A. Al Bowardi

Managing Director, Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi,
Secretary General, Executive Council of Abu Dhabi

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Pharaoh Eagle Owl

Introduction

Why watch birds? There are many possible answers to this question but the reasons most frequently given have one thing in common – birds occur everywhere and are interesting and easy to watch. It is true that they are by far the most conspicuous group of animals and they can be studied at any time of day (or night), any time of the year and in any place on earth. A birdwatcher can be as young as five or as old as 105 and anything in between. Birds are captivating to watch and fascinating to learn about - they are often colourful, have beautiful songs, build intricate nests or may have elaborate displays, while many migrate, twice a year, huge distances between continents.

Birdwatching can be undertaken alone or it can be a social event with you and your friends getting together. It can be something to do on a casual basis, just wanting to know the names of those birds seen on a day at the beach or in the desert, or you might want specifically to seek particular species of birds in areas such as mountains or in nature reserves. Birdwatchers often keep a list of birds seen in their gardens or in their own country, or a list of birds seen in any given year or a 'lifelist' of every different bird they have ever seen.

Birdwatching is a very popular hobby in many parts of the world and it could become your lifelong passion. There are some 10,000 different species of birds in the world but nobody has seen them all, in fact no-one has yet seen even 9000 in their lifetime. You may be fortunate to be able to travel to far-flung places to find all those wonderful species you might otherwise only ever have seen in books or on television.

Never forget, birdwatching is first and foremost an enjoyable hobby. To be able to add a name to that creature flying over the coast or your garden instantly makes it more interesting. We hope with this field guide to be able to help you in getting started and add another dimension to your fieldtrips in the UAE whether you are new to birdwatching or new to the birds of the UAE.



Western Reef Heron

About this guide

Identifying birds can be an enormous challenge. A total of 443 species have been recorded in the UAE to date - an impressive number considering that a large proportion of the country is arid sandy or stony desert. It would be a daunting task to try to learn them all, as, in many cases, male and female birds, young and old, and summer and winter plumages are different. One can quickly see the complexity involved in bird identification. It may take you many years to learn all the different plumages and, in fact, the more you watch the more you will realise you never stop learning new things.

For the new birdwatcher, there are so many species, with all the variations in appearance due, as stated above, to their sex, age and time of the year, that it can often make it difficult to be confident about a correct identification. However, of the UAE total checklist, about 135 are vagrants, having been seen here only a few times, while many others are considered rare and are also unlikely to be seen. In this guide we have included all species considered common in the UAE, as well as many species that are either fairly common, quite easy to identify or of special importance to the country - some 240 species in all. Your task in identifying a bird is therefore greatly reduced. When you are starting out, try to concentrate on the common and conspicuous species and gradually you will improve your identification skills. Later you may want to tackle the more difficult ones, the LBJs ('little brown jobs'). You will undoubtedly come across a bird that just doesn't seem to be in the book, and it may not be. Don't worry. Even experts sometimes have to leave a bird unidentified. To simplify the task of identification further, we have grouped the species together according to habitat. This has many advantages, but may also lead to pitfalls. If you are in a park or garden in the east of the UAE, you should see species such as Laughing Dove, Purple Sunbird, Graceful Prinia, Eurasian Hoopoe, Indian Roller, House Crow and Common Myna among others. Forget about these species if



you are in the desert, where you will instead have a chance of seeing Brown-necked Raven, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Southern Grey Shrike and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse. The Great Cormorant may well be seen on lakes, khors and lagoons, but the Socotra Cormorant occurs only on offshore islands and at sea. By identifying the habitat first, you can help cut down the number of different species to be expected. The trouble is, however, that some birds - like the Laughing Dove - are widespread and may be encountered in more than one habitat. Still, when trying to identify a new bird, start by looking in the habitat section of this book that fits best.