

Oman 2016

A recce by Phil Benstead

Summary

Although Oman has a modest odonate fauna, it has a small number of very exciting species that are found in a spectacular desert landscape. The country also has a strong supporting cast of other wildlife. We greatly enjoyed our two-week trip here and I hope to return some day.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Elaine Cowan for gen provided before we left for Oman. A chance meeting in Oman with Geert de Knif was fortunate and we enjoyed a few days in the field with him.

26/3 Bandar al Rowdah marina area and at sea off there

Dawn broke whilst we were trying to get our hire car sorted, problem resolved, we drove down the coast to take a sleepy dolphin cruise out of Bandar al Rowdah. The marina was busy with birds including sooty gull, crested tern and striated heron. It was a lumpy ride and for the first hour-and-a-bit livened up only by the occasional raft of red-necked phalaropes. But then we struck a huge gang of bottle-nosed dolphins and sneaking through them an excellent Jouanin's petrel. First lifer of the trip. Back at the restaurant we ate an incredibly expensive breakfast and lazed by the pool for the rest of the morning until the temperature hit 30 degrees and we made our way eventually to our hotel. Whilst lazing we spotted a few birds including the breeding pallid swifts and a nice pair of Indian rollers.

27/3 Wadi Tiwi to Ras-al-Jinz

After a morning in Muscat getting some shopping in and getting sorted we got on the road to Wadi Tiwi, arriving at 1300. The site was reasonably easy to find and we stopped just before the track narrowed and got stuck into some great odonates. The two Arabian endemic damselflies (*Arabineura* and *Arabicnemis*) were flying when we started looking but after lunch things quietened down very quickly... Before lunch though we had time for *Zygonyx torridus*, *Orthetrum chrysostigma*, *Anax imperator*, *Trithemis annulata* and *arteriosa*. A female *Ischnura* remained unidentified but was almost certainly *evansi*. At 1500 we relocated to the turtle centre and booked our walk. This proved to be very good despite the supposed low season, probably due to the strong onshore breeze. We had six female green turtles hauling up in total during our two-hour guided walk and watched one egg-laying briefly. Night-walking the desert produced the first reptiles of the trip. A great added benefit was meeting Geert de Knif who told us all about Wadi Shab (next door to Wadi Tiwi!) – we resolved to return the next day.

28/3 Ras-al-Jinz to Wadi Shab and on to Wadi Bani Khalid

Back-tracked to Wadi Shab today. Great wadi, accessed initially by boat from under the bridge. Getting in at 1030 meant that dragonflies were well on the wing when we got on site. It did not take us long to find our first *Urothemis thomasi* therefore and on the way we bagged our first *Pseudagrion decorum* and *Ischnura evansi*. *Orthetrum sabina* and *Lindenia* were abundant at the start of the walk. The kids swam back down the wadi and we bugged out at 1330 for the drive round to Wadi Bani Khalid. We had time to recce the site whilst searching unsuccessfully for somewhere to camp... We ended up staying at the hotel at the main road junction 21 km back down the road.

29/3 Wadi Bani Khalid to Muntasur oasis

Had just an hour downstream of the ford in the village but before we got there I found a nice pair of Hume's wheatear on the drive in. The short walk along the wadi produced a single female *Paragomphus sinaiticus* (!) and also our first *Ischnura senegalensis*. Leaving we took the long road to Muntasur, arriving well after dark.

30/3 Muntasur oasis and Qitbit

Woke up at dawn and walked around. Not a huge amount of obvious migration going on but I bagged a lesser whitethroat and a couple of olivaceous warblers. A shrike remains to be identified. After breakfast and decamping we walked the oasis shores and got stuck into the birds which included red-necked phalarope (4-5!), wood sandpiper (1), green sandpiper (1), snipe sp?, turtle dove (1), desert wheatear (2), northern wheatear (1), red-throated pipit (1)

and white wagtail (1). Stars of the show though were the small numbers of spotted and crowned sandgrouse that came into drink during the walk. Odos included our first *Diplacodes*, *Pantala* and *Anax parthenope*.

As the heat built up we headed the short distance to Qitbit and walked the garden briefly. Not much going on here in the heat of midday but we did bag a brief rufous bush-chat before heading down the road to Salalah.

31/3 Wadi Darbat and Khawr Rawi

Our first day around Salalah saw us heading for Wadi Darbat. A great site. We quickly connected with *Azuragrion nigradorsum* and also added *Urothemis edwardsi* and *Tramea limbata*. Other odos included numerous *Lindenia* and some *Pseudagrion decorum*. It was a lovely birdy spot. We were greeted by a pair of Arabian wheatears at the carpark and cinnamon-breasted buntings were common. A pair of Bonelli's eagles hung about. Fruiting figs held Bruce's green pigeons and Ruppell's weavers buzzed about. We searched hard for *Paragomphus sinaiticus* but eventually headed for the sea at nearby Khawr Rawi.

Khawr Rawi was excellent although we mainly swam in the sea. Bird highlights included pheasant-tailed jacana and white-cheeked tern. *Macrodiplax* was on the wing.

1/4 Ayn Hamran, Ayn Razat, Khawr Taqah

Checked out Ayn Hamran this morning but it was very dry and reduced and produced nothing of note except our first paradise-flycatcher. Ayn Razat was better with great views of male *Paragomphus sinaiticus* and at least one *Nesciothemis*. We ended the day at Khawr Taqah where after coshing off *Rhyothemis* and some waders we hooked up with Geert and his family and he and I hunted out *Ceriagrion glabrum* and Geert excelled himself by finding a female *Agriocnemis pygmaea*.

2/4 Wadi Al Mughsayl

Headed to Wadi al Mughsayl spending much of the day with Geert de Knif and his family. We searched a coastline stagnant pool for the usual *Macrodiplax* and *Rhyothemis*. The wadi pools were superb with lots of *Ceriagrion glabrum*, a few *Urothemis thomasi* and three *Agriocnemis pygmaea* (including one male). Offshore whilst the girls swam we had a nice pod of Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins.

3/4 Wadi Hanna, Tawi Atayr and Ras Janjari

A solo birding morning session for me this morning. Good to get out early for a change. I headed straight for Wadi Hanna to search for the grosbeak (no sign) but a great site nonetheless. Flowering desert rose was nice. Next stop was Tawi Atayr where the easier Yemen serins appeared on cue.

Picked up the team and checked out and hit Wadi Hanna again, same odonates but a nice mouse/rat thing eating fallen figs here. Drove on to Ras Janjari finding a small secluded beach as planned to stay the night on, en route we picked up a nice *Uromastyx benti* on the road. The headland was incredibly busy with seabirds: Jouanin's petrel (65+), masked booby (300+), pomarine skua (20+), Persian shearwater (4) and a streaked shearwater (1). Epic stuff. At night we swam with marine bioluminescent organisms which was superb and something I was hoping we would find.

4/4 Ras Janjari to Hamei via Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah

The headland was quiet at dawn, good thing we got an afternoon session in. Drove north along the fantastic coast road – simply superb scenery. Stopped at the beach shelters in the village before doing the wadi at Ash Shuwamiyah. Here we enjoyed the close views of masked boobies, as well as seven or eight Socotra cormorants and a single Jouanin's petrel. Arrived at Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah in the heat of the day therefore. The hanging gardens pool was fantastic and full of *Azuragrion somalicum*. Job done – the last guaranteed tick. Also here *Urothemis thomasi* and *Rhyothemis* (1). We continued on the road north in a bid to get a night in at the Omani owl site en route to Sohar...

5/4 Hamei to Omani owl type-locality

A day spent driving north to the Omani owl type-locality. On arrival we found green bee-eater and Hume's wheatear in residence but no sign of any calling Omani owls during the night.

6/4 Wadi Abbayed to Sohar

Woke up having failed to hear Omani owl overnight, but did hear striated scops? Drove to nearby Wadi Abbayed which finally produced *Paragomphus genei*, as well as *Arabineura khalidi* and *Zygonyx*. Then we drove to Sohar via Ras al Sawadi to check out the site. Nearby we bumped into both European and blue-cheeked bee-eater.

7/4 Al Buraimi sewage works and Jebel Qatar

Great day out on my own. Headed off to Al Buraimi and checked out the sewage works. Not that good for birds but the cleaner parts of the site produced some odos; best of which were my first *Sympetrum fonscolombii* and *Selysiotthemis*. I was hoping that *fountaineae* might be flying here but I could only find *senegalensis*. As the day warmed I searched out the nearby Jebel Qatar spring. This was great for birds with yellow-throated sparrow and Arabian babbler. Not many odos here with a single *Trithemis annulata* on the first inspection but on the way back I picked up the much hoped-for *Orthetrum ransonneti* – a nice territorial male. Back at the sewage works the *Selysiotthemis* were better-behaved and sitting for photos and I finally found a male *Crocothemis sanguinolenta*, bringing up 33 for the trip. Not bad, just missed *sublacteum* really although odd that no *Hemianax* could be found...

8/4 Sohar

Did the beach in the morning in overcast conditions and the hint of rain to come. Plenty of gulls and terns on the beach including some white-cheeked and one roseate. During the day Arctic skuas harassed terns offshore.

9/4 Liwa

Had an early morning session on our last day. Headed up the coast to Liwa and coshed off white-collared kingfisher, common kingfisher, a pair of Sykes's warbler and a great view of a southern grey shrike. Best though was a crimson speckled moth flushed off the beach and chased about until it settled.

Dragonflies recorded in Oman between 26th March and 9th April

Wandering wisp	<i>Agriocnemis cf pygmaea</i>	One female at Khawr Taqah and three individuals including one male at Al Mughsayl.
Sailing azuret	<i>Azuragrion nigradorsum</i>	Wadi Darbat, Ayn Razat, Al Mughsayl
*Somali azuret	<i>Azuragrion somalicum</i>	Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah
*Desert bluetail	<i>Ischnura evansi</i>	Wadi Shab, Muntasur
Tropical bluetail	<i>Ischnura senegalensis</i>	Wadi Bani Khalid, Wadi Darbat, Ayn Razat, Al Mughsayl, Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah and Al Buraimi sewage works.
Common waxtail	<i>Ceriagrion glabrum</i>	Two at Khawr Taqah. Good numbers at Al Mughsayl. Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah (1).
	<i>Pseudagrion decorum</i>	Wadi Shab, Wadi Darbat, Ayn Razat, Al Mughsayl
*Powder-blue damselfly	<i>Arabicnemis caerulea</i>	Wadi Tiwi, Wadi Shab, Wadi Bani Khalid
*	<i>Arabineura khalidi</i>	Wadi Tiwi, Wadi Shab, Wadi Abbayed
Blue emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>	widespread
Lesser emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>	Muntasur oasis, Wadi Darbat, Al Mughsayl, Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah and Al Buraimi sewage works.
Bladetail	<i>Lindenia tetraphylla</i>	Wadi Tiwi, Wadi Shab, Wadi Darbat and Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah.
Green hooktail	<i>Paragomphus genei</i>	One very briefly at Wadi Abbayed.
*Sinai hooktail	<i>Paragomphus sinaiticus</i>	Single female at Wadi Bani Khalid. A few males at Ayn Razat.
Black-tailed skimmer	<i>Nesciothemis farinosa</i>	Ayn Razat.
Epaulet skimmer	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>	widespread
*Desert skimmer	<i>Orthetrum ransonneti</i>	One male at Jebel Qatar (near Al Buraimi).
Slender skimmer	<i>Orthetrum sabina</i>	widespread
Broad scarlet	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>	widespread

Small scarlet Black percher	<i>Crocothemis sanguinolenta</i> <i>Diplacodes lefebvrii</i>	One male at Al Buraimi sewage works. Muntasur oasis, Wadi Darbat, Al Mughsayl, Wadi Hanna, Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah
Red-veined darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>	Two or three at Al Buraimi sewage works briefly (migrating??).
Violet dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>	widespread
Red-veined dropwing	<i>Trithemis arteriosa</i>	widespread
Kirby's dropwing	<i>Trithemis kirbyi</i>	Wadi Shab, Wadi Bani Khalid, Wadi Abbayed
Phantom flutterer	<i>Rhyothemis semihyalina</i>	Khawr Taqah and coastal sites in Dhofar thereafter. One at Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah
Globe skimmer	<i>Pantala flavescens</i>	Muntasur oasis
Ferruginous glider	<i>Tramea limbata</i>	Wadi Darbat, Wadi Hanna, Wadi Hanna and Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah
Cora's pennant	<i>Macrodiplax cora</i>	Khawr Rawi, Khawr Taqah, Al Mughsayl
Black pennant	<i>Selysiothemis nigra</i>	Small numbers at Al Buraimi sewage works.
Blue basker	<i>Urothemis edwardsi</i>	Wadi Darbat, Al Mughsayl,
*a basker	<i>Urothemis thomasi</i>	Wadi Shab, Al Mughsayl, Wadi Hanna, Wadi Ash Shuwamiyah
Ringed cascader	<i>Zygonyx torridus</i>	Wadi Tiwi, Wadi Shab, Wadi Darbat and Wadi Abbayed.