Introduction
I first visited Israel in December 2005 and, since then, had promised myself that I would return in spring to have a look at its famed migration. This was also to be my ‘non-birding holiday’ of the year with my girlfriend so although birding was done and I saw all the target species I had expected, the intensity of birding wasn’t quite as much as you would expect at times. So, you’ll find that reading through this, there may be several species you’ll be surprised I didn’t see despite being in the immediate area.

With flights from the UK to Ovda (the airport near Eilat) in short supply these days due to the downturn in Israeli tourism, we flew to Tel Aviv from Luton with Thomson Fly. We spent the first night in Tel Aviv, the second on The Dead Sea and then five nights in Eilat. Unfortunately our return flight to the UK was delayed by 2 days(!) and therefore a couple of impromptu nights were spent near Tel Aviv waiting for the plane to be fixed and our pilot to fly.

The aim of this report is to update, to an extent, my report from December 2005 with hopefully a fair amount of new information and to document how enjoyable a relaxed spring visit to Israel can be. My visit to Eilat was the week after the Bird Festival week and therefore numbers of birders I encountered were in the 10s as opposed to the 100s.

Literature
A lot of sites visited were either given to me by birders via email or they were sites that I’d been to in 2005. ’A Guide to the Birding Hot-spots of Southern Israel’ by Hadoram Shirihai, James Smith, Guy Kirwan and Dan Alon was useful in The Dead Sea and Eilat area, providing me with a refresher course in how to access some sites.
To navigate around, I used a 1:150,000 Israel: The New Road Atlas (published by Mapa Publishers). Bird reference books I used during my visit included The Collins Bird Guide (Mullarney, Svensson, Zetterstrom and Grant), The Raptors of Europe and The Middle East (Forsman) and the Field Guide to the Birds of The Middle East (Porter, Christensen and Schiermacker-Hansen).

**Websites and acknowledgements**

A lot of the information that was used I got off the ‘usual suspects’ so thanks once again to Chris Batty, Chris Bell, Alan Clewes, Andy Clifton, Lee Gregory and Andy Holden. Thanks to Alan who’s allowed me to use a couple of his photos from his visit the week prior to mine. Other birders that either helped with information either prior or during the trip included Yaron Charka, Sean Huggins, Graham Langley, Yoav Perlman and Noam Weiss. Finally an eternal thanks to Shaun Robson and his crew who miraculously found my GPS and returned it to me safely – I still owe you those beers lads!

The IsraBirding website has up-to-date information and trip reports with the forum section having recent news and comments from Israeli birders.

**Other information**

Driving through the West Bank is perfectly fine and from Tel Aviv we used this route, via Jerusalem, to travel to The Dead Sea. Driving on the whole is stress free and easy – the only hazard you need to be aware of are the huge numbers of police cars that line route 90 between Eilat and Yotvata on a daily basis. The speed limit out of towns is 90 km per hour and on motorways the limit is 110 km per hour.

Israel is not a cheap country and I found that prices of everyday goods, food etc were on a par with UK prices and fuel was only slightly cheaper than the extortionate amount we pay back home. Food was excellent throughout and the accommodation we stayed in was of a high standard, making an excellent combination for a holiday of relaxation and birding. Unlike some of its neighbouring countries, a holiday in Israel lacks any local hassle.

**Daily Diary**

**30th March 2008**

We flew from Luton airport with Thomson Fly early afternoon to Tel Aviv, landing on time just before eight o’clock in the evening. After collecting our hire car (a Hyundai Getz through Budget) we headed the short distance to Tel Aviv where we stayed on its northern outskirts at the Hotel Tal for the evening.

**31st March 2008**

As the saying goes, I was determined to save the best until last. Therefore the target for my first full morning was to ‘clear up’ on what you may term those dreaded Category C species. So I was up at dawn, sensibly leaving Karen to explore Tel Aviv on her own, while I headed 30miles north to the small town of Pardes Khana-Karkur.

**Pardes Khana-Karkur (north-east of Hadera)**

I arrived and parked my car in a small car park off Hadekalim Street and commenced my search for **Black-hooded Parakeet**, a species which maintains a ‘sustainable
(though not expanding) population’ in the area (IRDC bulletin 6:01). Knowing that a couple of mates had seen the species the day before I headed to where they’d seen a single bird after an hour or so of searching. Alas there was nothing unsurprisingly although large numbers of squawking Ring-necked Parakeets flew around the area as offensively as they do in London. Rather nicer was the Cattle Egret and Glossy Ibis colony that was present in the town park that served as a reminder I was a fair way from home.

Wandering around the area for a couple of hours I managed to chalk up some interesting species – Syrian Woodpecker, Palestine Sunbird, Graceful Prinia, White-breasted Kingfisher, Jay (of the race atricapillus), Red-rumped Swallow, Laughing Dove, Lesser Whitethroat as well as some more exotica in the form of Common Myna. After a couple of hours searching and the rain had passed, I eventually found a pair of Black-hooded Parakeets in trees at N32°28′18″, E34°58′30″. So, after admiring the birds for what they were worth, I headed off back to Tel Aviv conscious of the time (it was now mid morning) and my heart set on the next Cat C extravaganza – Vinous-breasted Starling.

Hayarkon Park, Tel Aviv
By now it was late morning and it had turned into a decent day weather wise as I pulled into the eastern parking lot at Hayarkon Park. I walked to the area by the waterslide and immediately found the Vinous-breasted Starlings – three in total at N32°06′06″, E34°49′15″. After having my fill of this introduced Asian species I realised I had a bit of time to play with before meeting Karen back at the hotel so set about exploring the area.

A quality Masked Shrike in the area of scrub by the river near the starlings was a good start and, walking through the park area, it was evident that a fall of wagtails had occurred – at least 100 White Wagtails along with Yellow Wagtails of the races flava and feldegg (Black-headed Wagtail). Jackdaws and Hooded Crows were numerous, as were Spur-winged Plovers and Yellow-vented Bulbuls, while smaller numbers of Cattle Egret, Glossy Ibis and Hoopoe were seen. A Steppe Buzzard soared over and three White-breasted Kingfishers posed well at various points on my walk while other exotica other than the starlings included Monk and Ring-necked Parakeets and hundreds of Common Mynas. An adult Night Heron over the road as I headed back to Tel Aviv reminded me that I was actually on the Mediterranean as opposed to the Indian subcontinent.

Having picked Karen up after her morning seeing the sights of Tel Aviv, we headed off east through Jerusalem and The West Bank to Ein Gedi midway along The Dead Sea where we were to spend the night at the rather chilled out and tranquil setting of Ein Gedi Kibbutz.

Kibbutz Ein Gedi
While unloading our stuff in this well-vegetated area overlooking Ein Gedi and the popular birding site of Wadi Arugot, the first Fan-tailed Ravens and Rock Martins of the trip soared above us. A walk around the gardens in the last hour or so of light produced a Red-rumped Swallow and a Wryneck amongst the commoner species with pride of place going to a flock of c.50 European Bee-eaters that were looking to pitch down for the night.
1st April 2008

I awoke early and decided to have a walk around the kibbutz gardens before breakfast. Things were rather noisy so I knew the grackles were in town…

Kibbutz Ein Gedi

They weren’t around yesterday evening but they were here with a vengeance this morning – a flock of c.50 noisy Tristram’s Grackles were moving through the gardens making their presence known to all and sundry. Walking to the northern perimeter of the complex to have a look over Wadi Arugot, I disturbed an active party of three Arabian Babblers that showed well and appeared unperturbed by my close approach. The Wryneck was still present in the bushes with Lesser Whitethroat, Palestine Sunbird and Blackcap also seen. A fair number of Fan-tailed Ravens, Rock Martins and Red-rumped Swallows flew overhead. A lone male Yellow Wagtail on the lawn was of the race thunbergi.

After breakfast we headed down to Ein Gedi spa where guests of the kibbutz get free access to the facilities. I wasn’t too keen on the mud bath and the mineral treatments, but I was persuaded to have a swim in The Dead Sea – Karen couldn’t believe I’d visited the area previously and not even had a paddle! After an hour or so I departed the spa, leaving Karen there, and headed to the north of Ein Gedi to Ein Salvadori with Mountain Bunting and other dry wadi species in mind.

Ein Salvadori

Just a couple of miles north of Ein Gedi, I pulled off route 90 and parked my car then followed the path marked by the blue and white rocks to N31° 31’12”, E35° 23’10” (for directions see Mountain Bunting in species notes). The walk up to Ein Salvadori produced a handful of Blackstarts and numerous Tristram’s Grackles while a dozen or so Ortolans were presumably migrating through the area. Upon reaching the vegetation after scrambling up the path, I flushed a pair of Sand Partridges that settled on nearby rocks and gave good views. After a bit of scanning around, I found the target bird Mountain Bunting singing though it proved remarkably difficult to locate due to the echo in the ‘bowl’ created by the rocks. The scrub in the wadi held a few Lesser Whitethroats and an Eastern Orphean Warbler while Rock Martins and Fan-tailed Ravens appeared overhead in small numbers. A big bonus were a pair of Sinai Rosefinches – the male looking pristine – and a Trumpeter Finch that came down to investigate the area presumably drawn by the small amount of water in an otherwise barren landscape.

I couldn’t get back to the spa quick enough believe it or not. If ever you swim in The Dead Sea, make sure you have a shower afterwards as the chaffing I experienced while climbing the path at Ein Salvadori was one of the most excruciatingly painful moments I’ve experienced to date. And it was then time for the drive to Eilat - my nerves had been severely tested as I’d received a text the previous evening telling me that the Black Bush Robin (found on 28th March) was still at the bird sanctuary.

Eilat

I wish I could say the drive was uneventful… it did take only 2 ½ hours but I’d forgotten how rife with police route 90 is between Yotvata and Eilat! So we got pulled over and a stern looking Israeli police officer asked me the usual questions –
presumably me deliberately acting like the stupid tourist and Karen smiling sweetly
did the trick and we got a warning not to do it again.

I had a brief look around the bird sanctuary late afternoon but unfortunately the gate
was closed so, rather frustrated, I had to do without the Black Bush Robin for today
with numerous European Bee-eaters being little compensation. I returned to the car
and found Karen with a police car – while I’d been away she’d taken a couple of
photos of the Yitzhak Rabin border crossing that had presumably alerted their
attention. Once they had a look at our passports and established we’d once again been
naïve tourists, we were on our way to North Beach. As we headed into Eilat, a superb
male Palid Harrier drifted north along the airfield providing excellent views.

North Beach was quiet but it was good to see species like White-eyed Gull and
Western Reef Egret again. A few Lesser Black-backed and Armenian Gulls
drifted and Caspian Terns, Slender-billed Gulls and a couple of Sandwich Terns
were offshore. It was here I met Israeli birder Yaron Charka who was extremely
helpful and managed to sort out access for us the next day to access the bird sanctuary
– his help and texts the next day were very much appreciated. Once the plan had been
hatched Karen and I departed for our first of five nights and the rather nice, but rather
expensive, Hilton Queen of Sheba Hotel.

2nd April 2008
I awoke early, bumped into Shaun Robson and his team as I was leaving the hotel,
and met Yaron at North Beach as it was getting light – we then headed to the bird
sanctuary where we met Noam Weiss.

Eilat Bird Sanctuary
Located just to the north of the town, to get here turn right off route 90 (if you’re
going north) to the Yitzhak Rabin border crossing - just after the garage on the
northern edge of town. Follow this road around past the border crossing and then
you’ll pick up ‘birdwatching’ signs and you can park by the gate at N29°34’20”
E34°58’21”. Noam let us in (well, he let Yaron in and I accompanied him) and we
quickly headed to the spot along the main track just beyond the small ringing hut.
And, then, if by magic there it was – a gorgeous Black Bush Robin showing well in
the path side scrub just as the sun was beginning to come up. What a quality bird –
cocking its tail and flicking its wings presumably displaying and interesting to find
out from Noam that despite the brown primaries they’re unsafe to age.

Loads of hirundines flew overhead including lots of Red-rumped Swallows, while
Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and Lesser Whitethroats were present in good numbers.
Back at the ringing hut we were shown a Wood Warbler and Eastern Bonelli’s
Warbler and a scan of the scrapes produced Wood and Green Sandpipers and
several Little Stints. A very nice start to the day and it was only quarter to eight!

Northern Date Palms, Eilat
And so the slog started. Yaron and I walked through the gate at N29°34’57”
E34°58’30” and commenced the search for the wintering Crested Honey Buzzard.
Needing to be back at the hotel for breakfast a quick wander around proved fruitless.
But, after spending five hours at varying points in the day, and seeing countless
Steppe Buzzards in the process it was not until late afternoon that the target bird was
found – particularly nervous and when eyeball contact was made, it moved on through the plantation. A really good bird to see and the first winter record of this species anywhere in the Western Palearctic. Searching the area through the day did produce some good birds though with two Olive-backed Pipits being the undoubted highlights while other birds noted included Redstart, Black-eared Wheatear, Northern Wheatear, Tawny Pipit, Red-throated Pipit and Hoopoe with European Bee-eaters, Red-rumped Swallows and an Osprey overhead.

**Hilton Queen of Sheba Hotel, Eilat**
While chilling out mid morning (in between Crested Honey Buzzard searches) a small movement of raptors flew over the hotel complex – 1 Steppe Eagle and 150 or so Steppe Buzzards – several of which struggling to gain height over our towering hotel as they came in quite low from the Gulf of Aqaba. Three Tristram’s Grackles were present in the hotel grounds most of the morning.

**Ofira Park, Eilat**
I remember being quite impressed with the small parks in Eilat town during my winter visit so, with Karen, we had a quick walk from our hotel and ended up in Ofira Park. Though it was the heat of the day a couple of Masked Shrikes were present along with Hoopoes, Lesser Whitethroats and large numbers of House Crows.

**Elifaz (km38)**
Having just seen the Crested Honey Buzzard at the northern date palms late afternoon, I received the text I’d been waiting for – Yaron had been birding between Eilat and Yotvata and had stumbled on a male Caspian Plover. Being a fan of waders and a new bird for me, this was one of the bird’s I’d most wanted to see anywhere in the world. So you can imagine my reaction when I clapped eyes on this pristine individual as it fed on an isolated patch of dung piles in the early evening sun – what a cracking bird and I watched it for the next hour or so with the crowds. The area was teeming with birds and Short-toed Larks, Northern Wheatears, Red-throated Pipits and Yellow Wagtails made use of the habitat. Thoroughly satisfied I headed back to Eilat for the evening.

*3rd April 2008*
Another early morning leaving Karen in bed while I headed out on foot to search for migrants in Ofira Park before breakfast.

**Ofira Park**
The lack of sprinklers and water meant that birds were few and far between. Nonetheless I enjoyed the hour or so in this small park recording a female Ruppell’s Warbler uncharacteristically hopping around on the grass, an Eastern Bonelli’s Warbler and a couple of confiding Ortolans. Several Tree Pipits and Chiffchaff were present along with Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Hoopoe and a Sedge Warbler.

**Km20 saltpans**
After another quality breakfast Karen and I headed out for a few hours. Visits to the Eilat Mountains and Amran’s Pillars were birdless so my side of the bargain was a visit to the saltpans at Km20. The first bird I saw bar the ubiquitous Spur-winged Plovers was a cracking adult Marsh Sandpiper and, upon reaching the eastern
lagoon, noticed a bird ‘spinning’ close by on the water that was inevitably a winter plumaged Red-necked Phalarope – very nice indeed. Carrying on around the saltpans a good variety of waders were found in small numbers with Little Stint and Kentish Plovers the commonest and Wood Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, Ruff, Redshank, Black-winged Stilt and Dunlin all present. Careful scrutiny of the calidrids produced a single adult Broad-billed Sandpiper and hundreds of Greater Flamingos added a bit of colour.

Elifaz (km38)
After relaxing at the hotel for a bit, I headed out on my own late afternoon to have another look at the Caspian Plover. With reduced crowds, the proved exceptionally confiding and in the end I was provided with pant wetting views – the highlight of my trip. A couple of Desert Finches were found on the nearby arable land, welcome indeed as it was a species I’d not seen for a few years. Similar to yesterday large numbers of larks, pipits and wagtails were buzzing around the dung piles with the Yellow Wagtails looking particularly vivid in the bright light.

North Beach
In tune with a couple of nights ago North Beach was once again quiet – the resident White-eyed Gull population always provides something to look at while small numbers of Western Reef Egrets, Caspian Terns and an Osprey were other birds noted. And by this time Karen had walked along the beach from our hotel and I was ready to call it quits for the day.

4th April 2008
Ofira and Central Parks, Eilat
Another early morning visit and, after bumping into Sean Huggins the previous morning who recommended Central Park as being better than Ofira, I decided to do them both. There had been a fall of Ortolans with about a dozen seen and, in amongst these, I recorded my only Cretzschmar’s Bunting of the trip. The parks weren’t
dripping with migrants but a group of five Squaccos that I inadvertently flushed from some trees in Central Park were on obviously migrants. A male Whinchat hopped around the lawn of Central Park with good numbers of White and Yellow Wagtails, Tree Pipits and Northern Wheatears. Two Masked Shrikes were seen and a couple of Common Mynas were the first I’d seen since leaving Tel Aviv.

Km20 saltpans
After spending the morning relaxing in the hotel, I headed out at midday to the saltpans to see what birds were present. The Red-necked Phalarope was again present on the eastern lagoon while much the same selection of birds as yesterday were seen though the Broad-billed Sandpiper was absent. Large numbers of Slender-billed Gulls fed over the pools with smaller numbers of Black-headed Gulls mixed in.

Km19 – area by cowsheds just north of the reservoirs (near N29°36’34”, E34°59’28”)
After a Pine Bunting had been reported here yesterday and a male Pied Wheatear this morning, it was rude not to check the site out. However I had no luck with either species although at least ten Ortolans were feeding on grain within the dairy while large numbers of White Wagtails and Red-throated Pipits were present. Prolonged views of a falcon over the area provided me with good views of an adult Barbary Falcon, a species I’m often rather sceptical of reports of due to the confusion with the various races of Peregrine. Driving back towards route 90 a Subalpine Warbler showed well in an isolated acacia bush.

Elifaz (km38)
Karen and I headed out early evening and, predictably, revisited the male Caspian Plover that was still showing well. In amongst the numerous Short-toed Larks, Yellow and White Wagtails a male Woodchat looked rather out of place and two Bimaculated Larks were an excellent bonus. The lack of wind meant an abundance of flies so Karen was rather keen to leave and as we left I noticed a flock of fifteen or so Desert Finches in the nearby arable field.

Yotvata
Heading north along route 90 I had to swerve the car as to my surprise, walking around on the hard shoulder of this busy road was a Short-toed Eagle. Turning the car around and fearing the worst as I presumed it had been a road casualty, the bird thankfully flew a short distance where we watched it for the next ten minutes or so along with two other cars of birders. When we arrived at the circular fields at Yotvata the wind had got up, the light was fading and very little was around. So we headed back to Eilat, again very satisfied with the day.

5th April 2008
This was to be my final full day in Eilat and I decided to spend the first three hours of light up in the Eilat Mountains seeing whether or not any raptors were passing.

Mount Yoash
I hooked up with a group of four Belgian birders on the track on the right of route 12 just before you get to the brow of the road by Mount Yoash. There was a decent movement of Steppe Buzzards with 400 or so drifting over and kettling along with
about 250 Black Kites, a lone Marsh Harrier and a frustratingly brief view of a Sparrowhawk sp. Other aerial birds included a couple of distant Alpine Swifts and numerous Red-rumped Swallows. The highlight of the morning, however, was a male Hooded Wheatear that appeared on rocks close to where we were standing before our close approach meant that it flew to the other side of the nearby gorge.

Hilton Queen of Sheba Hotel, Eilat
Back at the hotel after breakfast, I chilled out for the rest of the morning and early afternoon watching about forty Steppe Buzzards drift over along with a group of 7 Armenian Gulls. A couple of Tristram’s Grackles were vocal in the hotel grounds and a handful of Rock Martins flew over.

Eilat Bird Sanctuary
The gate was open so I walked in and had a look around. Unfortunately a quick search for the Black Bush Robin mid afternoon drew a blank but it was evidently still around. I flushed a Quail from beside the path, a confiding male Black-eared Wheatear showed well by the parking area and a Masked Shrike sheltered from the heat in a small area of trees. Hundreds of Red-rumped Swallows were passing through, several stopping at the pools to drink along with a dozen or so Yellow Wagtails (including a couple of feldegg) and a Wood Sandpiper.

Elifaz (km38)
The Caspian Plover had unfortunately gone but there were still large numbers of birds on the dung piles. A mini influx of Isabelline Wheatears was apparent while a male Black-eared Wheatear was a new bird from yesterday. Poor views of one Bimaculated Lark were obtained in amongst the commoner Short-toed Larks, Tawny Pipits, Yellow and White Wagtails.

Sewage ponds and reeds near Samar (km39)
This area can be found off the rough track on the east side of route 90 opposite the turn off to Samar. A small area of reeds has developed thanks to the outflow from the small sewage works. During the week both Baillon’s and Little Crakes had been reported but on my brief visit I couldn’t find any crakes. Five Stone Curlews in the adjacent sand dunes were presumably migrants while the sewage ponds held a Squacco and several Spur-winged Plovers and Green Sandpipers. I located an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler in the adjacent scrub and a couple of Sedge Warblers could be found in the reeds. With time pushing on, I headed back to the hotel in Eilat to pick Karen up for the evening’s entertainment.

Km19 modern sewage works (at dusk)
We arrived at 7pm as we’d been advised this was a sensible time by other birders, only to find an obnoxious photographer telling us to hurry up and be seated as the target bird would be arriving any minute. Knowing how late Lichtenstein’s Sandgrouse come in to drink when I’ve seen them previously I just thought what a twat the bloke was (I didn’t say anything as Karen specifically instructed me not to kick off and create a scene) and we sat down on the bank at N29°36’34”, E34°59’28”. And so it was that a full fifteen minutes later in the gathering darkness I located a pair of Sandgrouse as they came into drink on the northern bank of the reservoir. Views weren’t tremendous but the people sitting near me seemed appreciative – and to make things more enjoyable, the twat photographer who at one point switched on a rather
bright beam, didn’t see them. Mind you I have heard a photographer say ‘I’d rather not see a bird than see it poorly’ so perhaps he was happy he missed the birds.

6th April 2008
I woke up just before breakfast, foregoing any early morning birding, and we then sadly left Eilat and headed north during the day ready for our mid evening flight back to the UK. That was the theory anyway – in reality our flight didn’t leave for another two days due to a combination of firstly technical problems and the part being in the UK and secondly lack of pilot hours once the part had been fixed. All I can say is our airline was Thomson Fly.

Birding on the way up was pretty steady. A quick stop at the viewpoint at Mitspe Ramon to view the crater produced a Desert Lark and a Griffon Vulture just north of the town while a walk around the area at Ben Gurion’s grave, Sde Boker produced another Griffon Vulture and a Masked Shrike. The highlight of the day however, under darkening skies and poorer weather, was as we were driving along route 40 just south of Be’er Sheva a spectacular flock of in excess of 3,000 White Storks circled – presumably thinking of ditching down in the inclement conditions.

As mentioned previously, after getting to Tel Aviv airport in ample time, we were due for an extended stay in Israel spending the next couple of nights on The Mediterranean coast at Ashkelon.

7th April 2008
After the carve up of the night before, we didn’t actually get to bed until gone 4.30am in the morning so it was a rather late start as you can imagine. A walk along the sea front/scrub from The Holiday Inn in Ashkelon produced a few birds of note – a Hoopoe, a Northern Wheatear, a pair of Sardinian Warblers, a Graceful Prinia and a couple of Common Mynas. The rest of the day was spent in transit to and from the airport, in the airport and generally becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of the flight back to Luton. This culminated another late night in Ashkelon.

8th April 2008
Another day of hanging around in Ashkelon with a few birds noted while waiting at the hotel to be transported to the airport, the best of which being a couple of European Bee-eaters, a Palestine Sunbird and a pair of Sardinian Warblers. After the shenanigans of the last couple of days, it was a relief to board a plane early evening returning and we returned to Luton late evening.
Species notes

Western Reef Heron
Appeared to be relatively common at Eilat where birds of all colours were seen either on the beach in front of us or on the offshore fish platforms with Little Egrets.

Pallid Harrier
A superb male on active migration was seen flying north late afternoon over the airfield in Eilat town on 1st April.

Crested Honey Buzzard
Small numbers of this species are now seen annually with migrating Honey Buzzards over the Eilat area. However, my visit luckily coincided with the presence of the first wintering individual of this species for Israel and the Western Palearctic. It was to be found in the Northern Date Plantation – though was extremely difficult to locate and required perseverance (it took me five hours to find it), with as many people not seeing it as seeing it during the week I was in Eilat. Access to the area was by walking through the gate at N29°34’57”, E34°58’30” and then checking the three sections of the plantation.

Barbary Falcon
An adult was seen well over the cowsheds at Km19 for a prolonged period during the afternoon of 4th April.

Sand Partridge
A pair was seen at Ein Salvadori, north of Ein Gedi on 1st April. This was a chance encounter while searching for Mountain Bunting and observations from my 2005 trip suggest this is a common species in the dry wadis of the southern half of the country.

Caspian Plover
This species occurs in small numbers each spring in the Eilat area and, from research, can turn up anywhere in suitable habitat from Eilat town to north of Yotvata normally either the last week of March or the first week of April. I was lucky to see a superb confiding male at Elifaz (km38) on 2nd – 4th April that favoured a small area of dung piles that were a magnet to birds (mainly larks, pipits and wheatears) – N29°46’52”, E35°01’12”. Prior to my visit, a flock of 5 birds were at Yotvata North Circular Field for several days during the last week of March at N29°54’15”, E35°04’18”.

Broad-billed Sandpiper
An adult showed well at Km20 saltpans on 3rd April in amongst Little Stints and Dunlins. Up to two had been present in the days prior to my sighting.

Red-necked Phalarope
A winter plumaged individual was a surprise at the Km20 saltpans on 3rd April, being present again the next day.

Lichtenstein’s Sandgrouse
The formerly reliable spot by the pumping station on the western fringes of Eilat town is now defunct. Fortunately, these small sandgrouse have found an alternative dusk drinking site at Km19 with at least two birds reliably coming in to drink five to ten minutes before dark. Turn east by the Km19 post on route 90 onto the sandy track that
takes you between the dairy/cow sheds and the northern side of the modern sewage works. Once parked go through the fence and up the bank to view from N29°36’34”, E34°59’28”. The birds come in at dark so ensure you are in place a good 15-20 minutes before to avoid disturbance – on my visit views of the two birds were quite distant in the gloom but I’ve been assured that some evenings they can appear in the north-west corner of the reservoir close to where you’ll be sitting.

**Bimaculated Lark**

A species I have not encountered that regularly so it was good to see two individuals that showed well at times on the dung piles at Elifaz (N29°46’52”, E35°01’12”) in amongst large numbers of Short-toed Larks and Red-throated Pipits.

**Olive-backed Pipit**

Several individuals of this species remained from the winter at the Northern Date Plantation, Eilat and while searching for the Crested Honey Buzzard on 2nd April, I recorded two individuals in the middle section of the plantation. Access to the area was by walking through the gate at N29°34’57”, E34°58’30”.

**Black Bush Robin**

This species occurs sporadically in the Eilat area in spring and it was fortunate that a male was found a couple of days before I arrived in Israel and lingered throughout my stay at the Eilat Bird Sanctuary. Evidently this individual will be long gone by the time the reader arrives in Israel but it was perhaps no coincidence this was found during the Eilat Bird Festival week. Hopefully with an increase once again in birders to the area in late March, this species may once again become recorded with increasing frequency like it was in the halcyon years of the 90s.

**Hooded Wheatear**
A male was encountered rather fortuitously while looking for raptors at Mount Yoash on 5th April. A male had been seen at nearby Ein Netafin a couple of weeks prior to my visit – it is not inconceivable that this was the same bird.

**Arabian Babbler**
Three showed very well at Ein Gedi Kibbutz early morning on 1st April. It is a relatively common and vocal species in wadi and dry scrub areas in the southern half of the country.

**Tristram’s Grackle**
Present in good numbers and some decent sized flocks at Ein Gedi Kibbutz and Ein Salvadori on 1st April. At least three birds also frequented the Hilton Queen of Sheba Hotel, Eilat during our stay.

**Fan-tailed Raven**
Seen relatively regularly in the day or so that I spent around Ein Gedi with sightings at both the Kibbutz and Ein Salvadori.

**Desert Finch**
A flock of about fifteen birds were seen in the arable field immediately adjacent to the dung piles at Elifaz (N29°46’52”, E35°01’12”) on 4th April (two being present the previous day).

**Sinai Rosefinch**
A male and female were seen on 1st April at Ein Salvadori, north of Ein Gedi (see directions under Mountain Bunting).

**Mountain Bunting**
Asian House Bunting, Striated Bunting or Mountain Bunting – whatever you want to call it – no longer occurs regularly in the Eilat area and to find this species these days the best bet is The Dead Sea. A small area of greenery formed by a spring at Ein Salvadori, north of Ein Gedi has become the best site recently to find this species in Israel. To the north of Ein Gedi on Route 90, park in the small gravel pull in between km250 and km251 at N31°31’01”, E35°23’34” just before a left hand bend if you’re travelling north. From here follow the path with the white and blue painted rocks up to the spring area (it is steep and times and you may need to scramble a little) and a male Mountain Bunting was singing in the ‘bowl’ (along with a couple of Sinai Rosefinches) from where I was standing just beyond the obvious pinnacle rock at N31°31’12”, E35°23’10”.

**Category C Species**
The IRDC (Israeli Rarities and Distribution Committee) in 2007 accepted four species of ‘established exotic bird’ onto Category C of the Israeli list – see here for more details. Two of these – Monk Parakeet and Common Myna – were easily seen with the former common in Hayarkon Park and the latter seen routinely in the Tel Aviv area and in small numbers in the Eilat parks. In a Western Palearctic context Black-hooded Parakeet and Vinous-breasted Starling can be found as Category C species only in Israel so more details are provided below on how to find them.
**Black-hooded Parakeet**

A small population of this species can be found to the north of Tel Aviv in the town of Pardes Hanna (on some maps ‘Pardes Khana-Karkur’). It seems that birders looking for this species recently have only been seeing either singles or a couple of birds in amongst the large numbers of Ring-necked Parakeets. Coming from Tel Aviv turn off the main road (route 2 or route 4) onto route 65 signed towards Nazareth and Afula. You will pass a McDonalds on your left and shortly after this turn left (north) at the Alon junction to the centre of Pardes Hanna. Just before you reach the shops, after a series of roundabouts, there are a number of roadside palm trees and well-vegetated gardens on Hadekalim Street. Walk around this area - from the car park on your left just before the shops to the roundabout at the top of the street – until you see the species. It took me a couple of hours early morning on 31st March but I eventually found two birds in trees at N32°28’18”, E34°58’30”. Other GPS points where birders have seen this species recently are N32°28’26”, E34°58’20” and N32°28’33”, E34°58’09”.

**Vinous-breasted Starling**

This introduced species is relatively easy to find in certain areas of Hayarkon Park, Tel Aviv. It seems that most recent observations have come from the eastern end of the park to the east of the Rokach interchange on route 20 in an area to the north-west of the stadium in an area with a waterslide and ice-cream stands! To access this area, I drove east for 1-2km from the interchange and then parked my car in a parking bay near a garage/car wash immediately adjacent to the park lawns (you can see the waterslide distantly from here). Three birds were easily found at N32°06’06”, E34°49’15” and other birders have found this species in the same general area recently at N32°05’59”, E34°48’50” and N32°06’08”, E34°49’10”. Local birders have also seen this species in the western areas of the park, west of the Rokach interchange in reeds and riverside bushes near the power station.
Species List
Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis
Great Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo
Little Egret Egretta garzetta
Western Reef Heron Egretta gularis
Grey Heron Ardea cinerea
Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis
Squacco Heron Ardeola ralloides
Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax
White Stork Ciconia ciconia
Glossy Ibis Plegadis falcinellus
Greater Flamingo Phoenicopterus ruber
Common Shelduck Tadorna tadorna
Common Teal Anas crecca
Mallard Anas platyrhynchos
Crested Honey Buzzard Pernis ptilorhyncus
Black Kite Milvus migrans
Griffon Vulture Gyps fulvus
Short-toed Eagle Circaetus gallicus
Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus
Pallid Harrier Circus macrourus
Eurasian Sparrowhawk Accipiter nisus
Steppe Buzzard Buteo buteo vulpinus
Steppe Eagle Aquila nipalensis
Osprey Pandion haliaetus
Common Kestrel Falco tinnunculus
Barbary Falcon Falco pelegrinoides
Sand Partridge Ammoperdix heyi
Quail Coturnix coturnix
Moorhen Gallinula chloropus
Coot Fulica atra
Oystercatcher Haematopus ostralegus
Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus
Avocet Recurvirostra avosetta
Stone Curlew Burhinus oedicnemus
Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola
Ringed Plover Charadrius hiaticula
Kentish Plover Charadrius alexandrinus
Caspian Plover Charadrius asiaticus
Spur-winged Plover Vanellus spinosus
Common Redshank Tringa totanus
Marsh Sandpiper Tringa stagnatilis
Common Greenshank Tringa nebularia
Green Sandpiper Tringa ochropus
Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola
Common Sandpiper Tringa hypoleucos
Little Stint Calidris minuta
Dunlin Calidris alpina
Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus
Ruff Philomachus pugnax
Red-necked Phalarope Phalaropus lobatus
White-eyed Gull Larus leucophthalmus
Armenian Gull Larus armenicus
Lesser Black-backed Gull Larus fuscus fuscus
Black-headed Gull Larus ridibundus
Slender-billed Gull Larus genei
Caspian Tern Sterna caspia
Sandwich Tern Sterna sandvicensis
Common Tern Sterna hirundo
Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse Pterocles lichtensteinii
Rock Dove Columba livia
Laughing Dove Streptopelia senegalensis
Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocto
Rose-ringed Parakeet Psittacula krameri
Black-hooded Parakeet Nandayus nenday
Monk Parakeet Myiopsitta monachus
Common Swift Apus apus
Pallid Swift Apus pallidus
Alpine Swift Apus melba
White-breasted Kingfisher Halcyon smyrnensis
Little Green Bee-eater Merops orientalis
European Bee-eater Merops apiaster
Eurasian Hoopoe Upupa epops
Eurasian Wryneck Jynx torquilla
Syrian Woodpecker Dendrocopos syriacus
Desert Lark Ammomanes deserti
Bimaculated Lark Melanocorypha bimaculata
Short-toed Lark Calandrella brachydactyla
Crested Lark Galerida cristata
Sand Martin Riparia riparia
Rock Martin Hirundo obsoleta fuligula
Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica
Red-rumped Swallow Hirundo daurica
House Martin Delichon urbica
Tawny Pipit Anthus campestris
Tree Pipit Anthus trivialis
Olive-backed Pipit Anthus hodgsoni
Red-throated Pipit Anthus cervinus
Water Pipit  Anthus spinolaletta
White Wagtail  Motacilla alba
Yellow Wagtail  Motacilla flava
Black-headed Wagtail  Motacilla feldegg
Grey Wagtail  Motacilla cinerea
Yellow-vented Bulbul  Pycnonotus xanthopygos
Black Bush Robin  Cercotrichas podobe
Bluethroat  Luscinia svecica
Common Redstart  Phoenicurus phoenicurus
Blackstart  Cercomela melanura
White-crowned Black Wheatear  Oenanthe leucopyga
Hooded Wheatear  Oenanthe monacha
Northern Wheatear  Oenanthe oenanthe
Eastern Mourning Wheatear  Oenanthe lugens
Black-eared Wheatear  Oenanthe hispanica
Isabelline Wheatear  Oenanthe isabellina
Eurasian Blackbird  Turdus merula
Cetti's Warbler  Cettia cetti
Graceful Prinia  Prinia gracilis
Sedge Warbler  Acrocephalus schoenobaenus
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler  Hippolais pallida elaeica
Blackcap  Sylvia atricapilla
Subalpine Warbler  Sylvia cantillans
Lesser Whitethroat  Sylvia curruca
Eastern Orphean Warbler  Sylvia crassirostris
Rüppell's Warbler  Sylvia rueppelli
Sardinian Warbler  Sylvia melanocephala
Common Chiffchaff  Phylloscopus collybita
Eastern Bonelli’s Warbler  Phylloscopus orientalis
Wood Warbler  Phylloscopus sibilatrix
Arabian Babbler  Turdoides squamiceps
Great Tit  Parus major
Palestine Sunbird  Nectarinia osea
Woodchat Shrike  Lanius senator
Masked Shrike  Lanius nubicus
Eurasian Jay  Garrulus glandarius
House Crow  Corvus splendens
Hooded Crow  Corvus cornix
Brown-necked Raven  Corvus ruficollis
Fan-tailed Raven  Corvus rhipidurus
Tristram’s Grackle  Onychognathus tristramii
Vinous-breasted Starling  Sturnus burmannicus
Common Myna  Acridotheres tristis
House Sparrow  Passer domesticus
Spanish Sparrow  Passer hispaniolensis
European Goldfinch  Carduelis carduelis
Trumpeter Finch  Rhodopechys githagineus
Sinai Rosefinch  Carpodacus synoicus
Desert Finch  Rhodopechys obsoleta
Ortolan  Emberiza hortulana
Cretzschmar's Bunting  Emberiza caesia
Mountain Bunting  Emberiza striolata