Corn Bunting possibly breeding at Hamraniyah, UAE

Evidence is mounting that corn bunting *Miliaria calandra* breeds in the north of the UAE, around the irrigated hay fields at Hamraniyah (WA28) in the Emirate of Ras al Khaimah. Males have been heard singing at several sites, far enough apart to suggest several pairs may nest, although to date no eggs or young have been found.

Winter records of corn bunting in the UAE are irregular and some years it is unrecorded. On 17 January 1992 I found one calling ‘chip...chip’ continuously from the top of a Ghaf tree *Prosopis cineraria* in a 100 ha hay field, south of Ras al Khaimah airport. Six were present there on 24 January, and when MCJ and Rob Morris visited the site on 28 February and 1 March they heard a singing male (*Phoenix* 9:9). There were no further corn bunting records that spring.

In the winter and spring of 1993 the species was very hard to find at Hamraniyah. However, on 22 January John Bannon located three males in full song and on 28 February Klaus Handke and I found two males singing shortly before sunset in locations about 300 m apart. Whilst we watched a male, which had been singing from the top of an irrigation pipe, flew up to an electric cable where a female was sitting. To my surprise copulation then took place. This seemed to confirm our suspicions that they may breed. However, in subsequent months, during five more visits to Hamraniyah, no further birds were seen and no other breeding proof was obtained.

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**Recent Reports**

Some Atlas reports are especially interesting, perhaps on account of the species concerned, an unexpected location or habitat, an unusual time of breeding or a large number of birds involved. The following is a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds received within the last 12 months; some relate to earlier years. Reports of unusual breeding birds often get reported by more than one observer. Care is taken to credit records as appropriately as possible, so apologies if the original finder of a rare bird is not properly identified.

*Spoonbill* *Platalea leucorodia*
Three young in a mangrove tree nest, south of Jeddah (FA19) August 1993. (G R Lobley)

*Knob-billed duck* *Sarkidiornis melanotus*
A male has been present near Salalah for a year and has crossbred with a mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and produced offspring. (*Oman Bird News*: 13:4-5; 14:3 & 12). This species is widespread in Africa and the Indian region and a natural occurrence from either region is quite possible given its highly mobile, wide-ranging habits (in Africa). An escapee seems unlikely.

*Black vulture* *Aegypius monachus*
Three together (with a griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus*) Dibdiba (MB34), extreme north east Saudi Arabia, February 1993 (MCJ & M al Salama). This is thought to be the largest ‘group’ recorded in Arabia. There is still no firm evidence that this species breeds.

*Lappet-faced vulture* *Torgos tracheliotus*

*Griffon vulture* *Gyps fulvus*
Two birds near Ghayl (WA27) UAE, August 1993 (S J Aspinall). Species scarce in UAE, these were possibly migrants.

*Verreaux’s eagle* *Aquila verreauxii*
One over cliffs at Tarim (PA09) Hadramaut Yemen, October 1993 (N Redman). Also a pair Wadi al Lasbah (JB03) Yemen, November 1992 (J F Walsh). New areas for the species.

*Bonelli’s eagle* *Hieraaetus fasciatus*
One nearly full grown nestling being fed by two adults, Wadi Hinna (UB11) Dhofar, April 1992. (Oman Bird Record)

*Sooty Falcon* *Falco concolor*
Probably 60-70 present at Fahal Island (YB24) northern Oman, some almost certainly with young in the nest, September 1992 (Oman Bird Record). Also bred Delma Island (SA26) and Sir Bani Yas Island (SB25), UAE, September 1993. (S J Aspinall)

*Quail* *Coturnix coturnix*
Calling from long grass northern UAE (VB28) 20 March & 3 April 1992. (C Richardson)

*Houbara* *Chlamydotis undulata*
Adult with a ‘third-size’ youngster, central Oman, December 1992. (Oman Bird Record)

*Black-winged stilt* *Himantopus himantopus*
Has bred for first time in Kuwait (NB35), eggs in June 1993. (C Pilcher)