So, what is this document's usefulness and what light does it shed for more recent researchers into Socotra's birds? First of all, it must be said that having reviewed the manuscript for breeding records for the ABBA project database, its usefulness in this respect has to be deemed relatively insubstantial. Ripley & Bond provided reasonably full details of most breeding behaviours observed by Forbes-Watson, including his important observations on Socotra sunbird *Nectarinia balfouri*. In addition, Forbes-Watson's travels outside his base camp at Kishin in the Haggheir Mountains, were extremely limited, and are in any case more easily referenced from Ripley & Bond (1966), who supplied a full itinerary, unlike the original expedition report. In this respect, the much shorter OSME expedition of spring 1993 travelled more widely and sampled a greater number of areas, albeit more superficially. A minor point is that Forbes-Watson did not examine papers published by Hartlaub 1881 (Proc. Zool. Soc. London 1881: 953–959, and Sclater & Hartlaub in 1881 (Proc. Zool. Soc. London 1881: 165–175), which were also omitted by Ripley & Bond's review. Nonetheless, the importance of the Forbes-Watson expedition and more specifically this document should not be underestimated.

Perhaps of most fascination is the fact that the manuscript provides some insights into Forbes-Watson's own thoughts and conclusions as to the taxonomic position of both the endemic *Buteo* and *Apus berthozi*, as it was subsequently described by Brooke, 1969 (Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 89: 11–16), Ripley, 1966 (L'oiseau et la Revue Française d'ornithologie 35: 101–102), in his description of the new swift, considered it to be a subspecies of pallid swift *Apus pallidus*, a position which no longer enjoys much favour. Details of all of the 523 specimens collected by the expedition are provided, along with important dietary information for those selected species (including all of the endemics) discussed in the main body of the manuscript. For some key species, e.g. Socotra bunting *Emberiza socotrana*, the information provided in the Forbes-Watson manuscript is significantly more detailed than that furnished in the Ripley & Bond summary (although it should be stated that in many cases the latter is quite sufficient as a reference vehicle). The reasons for the lack of records of Palearctic–African migrants receives attention; *Motacilla alba forwoodi*, described by Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes from Abd Al-Kuri, is considered probably to have related to migrants rather than a resident population; and there is valuable and occasionally enlightening discussion of a number of records, made by Hunter. Reg Moreau and others on Socotra or at sea nearby, which have not been accorded recognition in the subsequent literature on the island's birds. On a personal note, it is fascinating to compare one's own experiences of the Socotran avifauna and way-of-life, with those of Forbes-Watson and his two Kenyan taxidermists. In many respects, comparatively little appears to have changed.

Finally, it must be stated that much of the future work outlined by Forbes-Watson remains in need of completion, and would be of value to the final Atlas. Engmas, such as whether Jouannin's petrel *Bulweria fulis*, found commonly in the seas off Socotra during the spring 1993 survey, breeds in the archipelago; the true status of the endemic subspecies of Nubian nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus jonesii* (known with certainty only from the type-specimen, although Forbes-Watson did record an unidentified nightjar south of Suk in late March 1964, a fact not mentioned by Ripley & Bond); and the continuing taxonomic problems posed by Forbes-Watson's swift and the endemic *Buteo*. In addition, due to a complete lack of survey work during the main breeding season of most resident species, considered to be at the end of the year and coinciding with the rains, much remains unknown about the life-histories of the endemic taxa. Even now, the two small islands, known as the Brothers, which may be important for nesting seabirds, remain unvisited by ornithologists, as do the south-western highlands of Socotra island. Hopefully, the recently announced decision of the Darwin Initiative to award £158,000 to further research into Socotra's biodiversity will allow a number of mysteries to be solved.

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**African Spoonbill and Sacred Ibis do Strange Things in Yemen**

Neither the African spoonbill nor the sacred ibis have been known to breed in Arabia, but both could. The following article concerning some extraordinary behaviour by these species noted by David Stanton is repeated from *Lammergeier* 11 (the newsletter of the Yemen Ornithological Society), March 1997.

"During his recent visit, Richard Porter was excited to find both African Spoonbill *Platalea alba* and Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* at the Aden Marshes for the second consecutive year. Although numerous in Africa, both of these birds are considered vagrant to Yemen. In fact, this represents only the second substantiated report of African Spoonbill from the Arabian peninsula. The presence of two adult spoonbills, and eight ibis (including four juveniles), indicates that these birds might actually be resident in small numbers.

Seeing these rare waterbirds was high on Derek Harvey's list when we visited the marshes on the morning of 9 February. It was with great joy that we spotted 2 adult African Spoonbills perched on a dead shrub on an islet in the marsh. Foraging on the island were several juvenile Sacred Ibis. As we watched, one of the spoonbills started manipulating a length of straw. When I pointed this out to Derek, he noticed that the spoonbills were actually standing on a platform that they had apparently constructed from the same material. At about that time, I noticed that one of the ibises was also picking up pieces of straw.

As we watched, the ibis jumped up on the platform and started adding to it. The spoonbills left and the ibis continued building the platform (nest?). By 09.00 am when we finally left, the spoonbills had resumed possession of the growing construction. They engaged in mutual preening and billing and seemed every inch the happy young couple. At no time did we
observe any interaction between the two species. The spoonbills and ibises completely ignored one another throughout the peculiar goings-on.

When I returned to the marsh in the late afternoon, 2 of the ibises were on the "nest", and the remaining six were in the vicinity of the islet. The spoonbills were nowhere in sight. The following morning the islet was uninhabited.

As the islet is approached daily by local people tending their sheep and cattle, it seems virtually impossible that either the ibises or the spoonbills could successfully rear a brood on the platform. It is interesting, however, that two species of birds hitherto considered vagrant in southern Yemen, should be seen exhibiting "probable breeding" behaviour (Breeding Evidence Codes: 3, 5, 9) in such an intimate manner."

Postscript: David Stanton and Oman al Saghier visited the Aden Marshes again on 5 & 6 June and saw an adult African spoonbill and two juvenile sacred ibis there. There were no further reports of these species indulging in breeding activities.

New Books:

Phoenix aims to give details of all new publications which are relevant to the study of birds and wildlife in Arabia, or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned.

Alternatively, all the titles reviewed in this and earlier issues of Phoenix may be ordered through Subsbase Natural History Books Ltd., Treuddyn, Nr Mold, Clwyd, North Wales, CH7 4LN, UK. When ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number if given. The prices shown here are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new, relevant titles not mentioned in this survey.

Directory of Wetlands in the Middle East by Derek A Scott (Ed) 1995

With an increasing demand for water throughout the Middle Eastern region for agricultural, urban and industrial uses there is a corresponding increase in the pressure put upon the small numbers of wetland habitats in the region. It is not surprising that major irrigation schemes and population growths are the major causes of wetland loss in recent years. This report has been commissioned by a number of international conservation bodies as an aid to decision making by government and non-government planners. It sets out the consequences of wetland loss and the efforts that are needed to achieve sustainable use of resources. This report will be an important baseline for monitoring of wetland habitats in the Middle East for decades and hopefully will lead to a wiser use of wetlands in future. With only a few pages of introduction the body of the book is a systematic treatment of the Middle East state by state, working through a list of sites for each nation. For each country there is a general location map showing the position of sites and an introduction covering area, population, and other general information. Then follows a summary of the wetland situation generally in that country with research and legislation activities as well as the organisations involved in wetland conservation. For each site information is given on the general locality, area, altitude, physical and ecological features, land tenure, conservation measures taken and proposed, land use and changes in land use, disturbance and threats, social and cultural values of the site and notes on important flora and fauna. A total of 92 sites are dealt with in detail for Arabia including 30 in Saudi Arabia and 24 in the United Arab Emirates.

Card Covers, 560 pages (160 x 214 mm). Price £45.00, excl. p& p.


If books were judged by weight this one at 4.1 kg (9 lb) would certainly come out on top. However it also succeeds when judged by various more traditional bird book standards. It is a good read, a competent reference, contains good quality photographs to a high standard of reproduction and has expertly prepared colour illustrations. This is the 3rd volume of the series which will probably run to nine or ten volumes eventually, covering all the birds of the world. This volume covers the single species opisthocomiformes (hoatzin), the gruiformes including cranes, rails and bustards, and the charadriiformes, that is waders, gulls and terns. The series has settled into a consistent format whereby birds are dealt with at two levels, at the family level and at the species level. At the family level treatment, for example of the sterniidae (terns), covers the general aspects of species including systematics, ornithological aspects, habitat, general habits, voice, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relationships with man, and status and conservation. A box at the beginning of the family provides outline world range map for the family, size range, general habitat, the number of genera, species and taxa (total sub-species recognised), for terns this is 10, 44 and 123 respectively. There is also a conservation line highlighting the number of species threatened or extinct since 1600. Five species of terns are threatened but none have recently become extinct. The family sections are illustrated with some stunning photographs of birds engaged in typical activities for the genus such as feeding methods, flocking, nesting, mating etc. Each photo has a very full descriptive caption which compels even the most hurried of browsers to linger. The species accounts provide birds names in French, German and Spanish and deal with each species against the sub-headings of taxonomy, sub-species and distribution, descriptive notes, habitat, food and feeding, breeding, movements and status and conservation. An abbreviated bibliography appears at the end of each species account and cross-refer to the full bibliography in each volume. Within each family all species are numbered and the numbers cross-refer to the nearby colour artwork illustrating each species. Species accounts also have a world range map showing breeding and non-breeding range. These maps change format according to size of range and are quite ample. The species account generally answers most questions the average reader/researcher will need however they are not as lengthy as those in BWP. Rightly or wrongly everyone tends to judge bird books on the quality of the artwork and HBW comes out very well in this respect. Each species is illustrated at least once and sometimes several illustrations appear to show sex/race variations. Volume 3 is illustrated by a top class international team. HBW