Oman

Arabian Birding Adventure



Grey Hypocolius by Adam Riley

Oman offers one of the finest and most varied birding experiences in Arabia, combining dramatic mountain scenery, vast desert landscapes, productive wetlands, rich coastal mudflats and the tropical influence of Dhofar in the far south. This tour has been designed for the cooler winter period, when temperatures are generally comfortable, wintering birds are well established, shorebird numbers are impressive, and several of the region's most sought-after specialities are at their most reliable.

Beginning in Muscat and ending in Salalah, the itinerary follows a logical north-to-south route with minimal backtracking. We start with coastal birding around Muscat, including Al Fahal Island and Al Ansab, before moving into the Al Hajar Mountains for regional specialities such as Omani Owl, Sand Partridge, Streaked Scrub

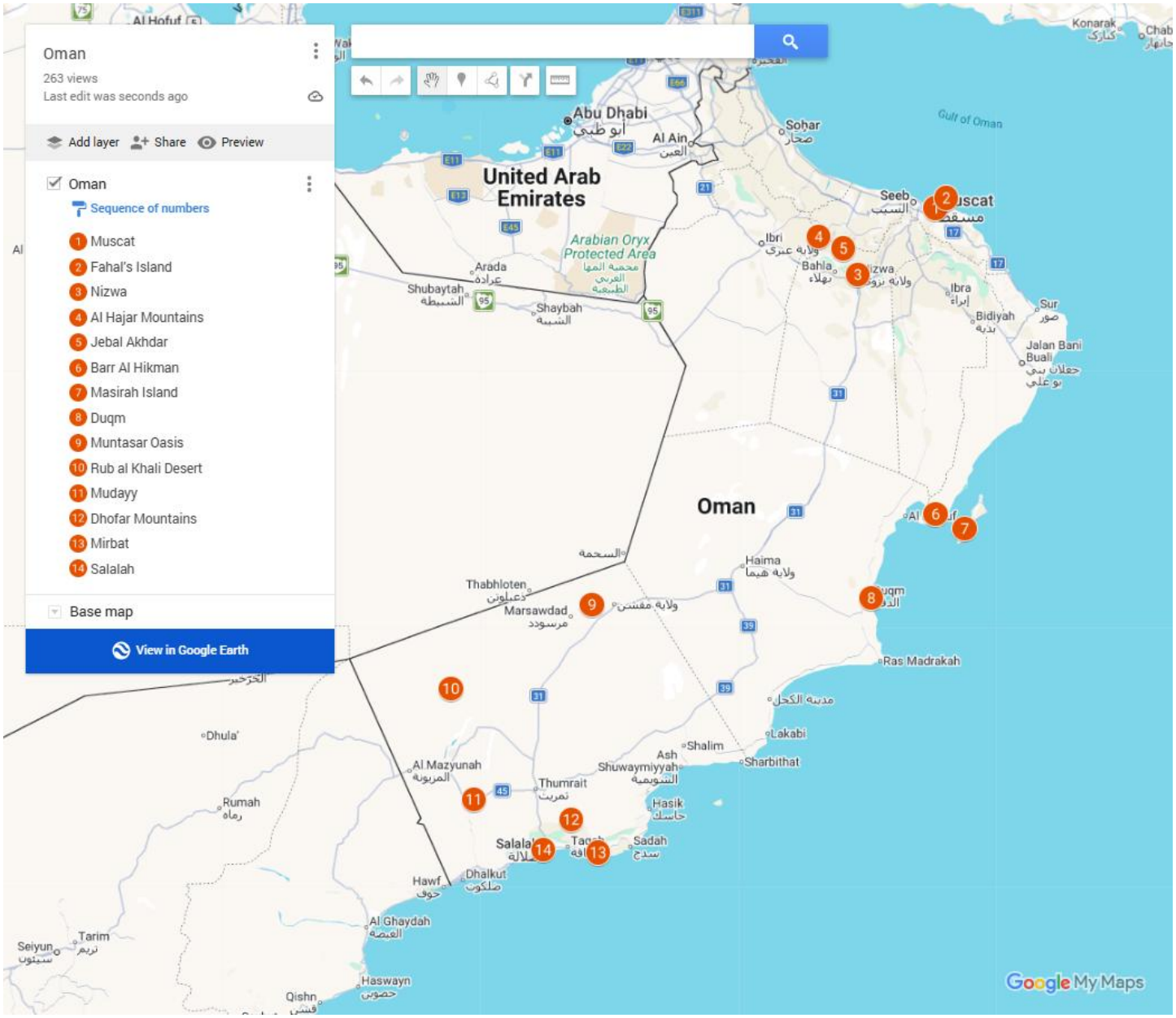
Warbler, Plain Leaf Warbler, Hume's Wheatear, Red-tailed Wheatear and Striolated Bunting. From there we travel south to the extensive tidal flats and coastal habitats of Barr al Hikman and Masirah Island, where large numbers of shorebirds may include Crab-plover, Great Knot, Terek Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper and a range of gulls, terns and migrant waders.

The journey then continues through Oman's central deserts and oases, visiting areas such as Al Ghaftain, Maqshin, Muntasar and the Rub al Khali Desert, also known as the Empty Quarter. These remote sites provide excellent opportunities for Grey Hypocolius, Sociable Lapwing, Crowned, Spotted and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Asian Desert Warbler, Cream-colored Courser, larks, wheatears, pipits and wintering raptors. We then reach Mudayy, an important transition zone between desert and Dhofar habitats, before descending to Salalah.

The final part of the tour is based in Dhofar, Oman's most diverse birding region. Here we explore wooded wadis, mountain slopes, coastal khawrs, agricultural areas and the Mirbat coast. Key possibilities include Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak, Yemen Serin, Arabian Warbler, Arabian Wheatear, Black-crowned Tchagra, Abyssinian White-eye, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Palestine and Arabian Sunbirds, Arabian Scops Owl, Arabian Eagle-Owl and Desert Owl. Weather permitting, we will also undertake a Mirbat pelagic, offering chances for seabirds such as Jouanin's Petrel, Persian Shearwater, Masked Booby, Red-billed Tropicbird, skuas, terns and phalaropes.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Muscat**
Day 2	**Muscat coastal birding, Al Fahal Island / Al Ansab, transfer to Nizwa**
Day 3	**Al Hajar Mountains, Jebel Akhdar area & Wadi Muaydin**
Day 4	**Al Hajar Mountains, Wadi Tanuf & Nizwa area**
Day 5	**Nizwa to Barr al Hikman**
Day 6	**Masirah Island & Barr al Hikman area, transfer to Duqm**
Day 7	**Duqm to Muntasar area via Al Ghaftain & Maqshin**
Day 8	**Muntasar & central desert birding to Rub al Khali Desert (Empty Quarter)**
Day 9	**Empty Quarter to Mudayy, transfer to Salalah**
Days 10 & 11	**Dhofar Mountains, khawrs, coastal birding & Mirbat pelagic**
Day 12	**Salalah & Dhofar surrounds, final departure**


Oman
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Sequence of numbers
1 Muscat
2 Fahal's Island
3 Nizwa
4 Al Hajar Mountains
5 Jebal Akhdar
6 Barr Al Hikman
7 Masirah Island
8 Duqm
9 Muntasar Oasis
10 Rub al Khali Desert
11 Mudayy
12 Dhofar Mountains
13 Mirbat
14 Salalah
Base map
View in Google Earth
United Arab Emirates
Oman
Abu Dhabi
Al Ain
Sohar
Gulf of Oman
Seeb
Muscat
Ibri
Bahla
Nizwa
Ibra
Bidiyah
Sur
Jalan Bani Buali
Arada
Shubaytah
Shaybah
Arabian Oryx Protected Area
Thabhloten
Marsawdad
Haima
Ras Madrakah
Dhula'
Al Mazyunah
Thumrait
Rumah
Shalim
Lakabi
Sharbithat
Ash Shuwaymiyyah
Hasik
Salalah
Sadah
Dhalkut
Hawf
Al Ghaydah
Seiyun
Tarim
Haswayn
Qishn
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Birding sites in detail



Pallid Scops Owl by Adam Riley

Muscat coastal birding, Al Fahal Island and Al Ansab. Depending on access, tide and weather conditions, we expect to visit a mix of coastal sites, Al Ansab Wetland and, weather permitting, Al Fahal Island.

Al Ansab is one of Oman's most productive freshwater wetland sites and can hold a good selection of wintering and resident waterbirds, including herons, egrets, ducks, crakes, waders, terns and raptors. Possibilities here include Greater Spotted Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier, Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, Little Crake, White-tailed Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint and a variety of other Palearctic migrants.

The Muscat coastline and harbour areas can also be productive, with gulls, terns, cormorants, waders and occasional seabirds adding variety to the day. Weather permitting, a boat trip around Al Fahal Island gives us a very different perspective on the Gulf of Oman and may produce species such as Red-billed Tropicbird, Masked Booby, Socotra Cormorant, Persian Shearwater, various skuas, terns and other offshore species. The exact order of the day will remain flexible, as local access, tides and sea conditions will determine the most productive sequence.

Al Hajar Mountains and surrounds. The Al Hajar Mountains form one of Oman's most dramatic landscapes, rising steeply from the surrounding plains and holding a suite of specialised birds that are quite different from those found along the coast. We will explore a range of mountain, foothill, wadi, orchard and terraced habitats around Jebel Akhdar, Wadi Muaydin, Wadi Tanuf and nearby sites. This gives us time to search for regional specialities such as Sand Partridge, Streaked Scrub Warbler, Plain Leaf Warbler, Hume's, Red-tailed and Arabian Wheatears, Striolated Bunting, Desert Lark, Long-billed and Tawny Pipits. Egyptian Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle, Lappet-faced Vulture and other raptors



Sand Partridge by Forrest Rowland



Crowned Sandgrouse by David Hoddinott

are also possible, while orchards, terraces and small settlements can attract wintering thrushes, buntings, warblers, chats and wheatears.

Wadi Tanuf is among the more productive sites in the region, combining rugged mountain scenery, vegetated slopes, old ruins, permanent water and patches of trees that can attract both resident birds and wintering migrants. Wadi Muaydin and other suitable wadis also give us our best opportunities for nocturnal birding, especially the highly localised Omani Owl and Pallid Scops Owl. As with all owl searches, success depends on weather, wind, moon phase and current local activity, so we keep the mountain schedule flexible.

Barr al Hikman & Masirah Island. This is one of Oman's great coastal birding areas: the tidal flats, sabkha, lagoons and shoreline habitats of Barr al Hikman. This vast wetland system is internationally important for shorebirds, and in winter it can hold impressive numbers of waders, gulls, terns, herons and other coastal species. Careful scanning of the flats may produce Crab-plover, Great Knot, Terek, Broad-billed and Curlew Sandpipers, Tibetan and Greater Sand Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Whimbrel, Kentish Plover and Western Reef Heron, while gull and tern flocks can include Pallas's, Slender-billed, Sooty and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Caspian, Lesser Crested, Greater Crested, Gull-billed, White-cheeked and Saunders's Terns.

The exact sequence of our birding here will depend heavily on tides and ferry timings, and we will keep the programme flexible to make best use of the available conditions. If timings allow, we cross to Masirah Island, which offers a different mix of beaches, coastal lagoons, migrant traps, open scrub and seawatching opportunities. Masirah is well placed for both shorebirds and unexpected migrants, and possibilities include Crab-plover, Socotra Cormorant, Osprey, various gulls and terns, pipits, wagtails, wheatears, shrikes and wintering warblers. The island and surrounding coast also have a strong record of vagrants, so we will remain alert for anything unusual.



Asian Desert Warbler by Adam Riley

Al Ghaftain, Maqshin and Muntasar. Leaving the coast behind, we turn inland into Oman's central desert, crossing a stark but



Tristram's Starlings by Forrest Rowland

rewarding landscape of gravel plains, wadis, acacia scrub, irrigated patches and isolated oases. Although this is partly a travel day, it takes us through some excellent desert birding country, and we will make selected stops where local conditions, recent rainfall and current bird activity look most promising.

Al Ghaftain and the Maqshin area can be productive for both desert specialists and migrants. Depending on conditions, we may search for Asian Desert Warbler, Desert and Isabelline Wheatears, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Bar-tailed, Dunn's and Greater Short-toed Larks, Arabian Babbler, shrikes, pipits, wagtails and wintering warblers. Raptors are also a feature of this open country, with possibilities including Steppe and Eastern Imperial Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Peregrine (Barbary) Falcon and other migrants or winter visitors.

Muntasar's small oasis and surrounding open desert are well known for sandgrouse, especially Crowned, Spotted and Chestnut-bellied, which may come in to drink during the morning. The site can also hold wintering and migrant birds such as our key target, Grey Hypocolius as well as Bluethroat, Asian Desert Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Eastern Black Redstart, warblers, pipits, wagtails, wheatears and small groups of Arabian Gazelle. There will be no shortage of camels, many Bedouin bring their camels to water here, and Cream-colored Coursers often forage nearby.

If conditions allow, an evening drive can be great for mammal watching. Past visits have yielded great views of Ruppell's Sand Fox, Arabian Golden Jackal, and, on one occasion, Small-spotted Genet.

Central desert farms, the Empty Quarter and Mudayy. From Muntasar, we continue through the central desert toward Shisr, Ubar and the northern edge of the Rub al Khali Desert, better known as the Empty Quarter. This is one of the great desert landscapes of Arabia, with immense sand dunes, open plains and isolated areas of cultivation that can be surprisingly productive for birds. Irrigated farms and desert-edge habitats may attract raptors, sandgrouse, coursers, larks, wagtails, pipits,



Bar-tailed Lark by David Hoddinott



Nile Valley Sunbird by Clayton Burne

wheatears and migrant passerines, while open plains in the wider area can be worth checking for Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Dunn's and Bar-tailed Larks, Cream-colored Courser and wintering raptors. The exact route and stops will remain flexible, as bird activity in this region can vary considerably with rainfall, farming activity and access.

The Shisr and Ubar farming areas are also among the better places in Oman to search for scarce wintering Sociable Lapwing, a highly sought-after and Critically Endangered species that can occur in small numbers in irrigated fields and open desert-edge farmland.

After our night in the Empty Quarter region, we travel toward Mudayy, an important oasis and transition zone between the central deserts and the Dhofar Mountains. Mudayy is a key site for Grey Hypocolius in winter, while the surrounding palms, scrub, fields and rocky areas may also hold Nile Valley Sunbird, African Collared Dove, Blackstart, Arabian Wheatear, Desert Lark, Arabian Babbler, shrikes, warblers and wintering raptors. From here we continue south toward Salalah, descending into the greener and more tropical landscapes of Dhofar, where the final part of the tour is based.

Salalah & the Dhofar Mountains. The final part of the tour is based around Salalah and the Dhofar region, where tropical influence from the Indian Ocean creates one of the most distinctive birding areas in Arabia. We will explore a mix of wooded wadis, mountain slopes, escarpments, springs, coastal khawrs, beaches, agricultural areas and nearby coastal sites. This variety of habitats gives us opportunities for many of Oman's most sought-after southern specialities, including Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak, Yemen Serin, Arabian Warbler, Arabian Wheatear, Black-crowned Tchagra, Abyssinian White-eye, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Palestine Sunbird, Arabian Sunbird, Tristram's Starling, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Blackstart. Dhofar is also excellent for raptors, waterbirds and nocturnal birding, with possibilities including Verreaux's, Bonelli's, Eastern Imperial, Steppe and Greater Spotted Eagles, Yellow-billed Egret, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Spotted Thick-knee, Arabian Scops Owl, Arabian Eagle-Owl and Desert Owl. The khawrs and coastal wetlands around Salalah can be especially productive in winter, holding herons, egrets, flamingos, ducks, crakes, waders,



Sociable Lapwing by Forrest Rowland



Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak by Forrest

gulls and terns, while the surrounding mountains and wadis provide some of the most rewarding birding of the tour.

We will also make at least one nocturnal outing in the Dhofar region, targeting Arabian Scops Owl, Arabian Eagle-Owl and Desert Owl, as well as Spotted Thick-knee and any mammals that may be active after dark. Previous night drives in the area have produced species such as Small-spotted Genet, Arabian Golden Jackal and, with luck, Striped Hyena.

Mirbat pelagic. Weather and sea conditions permitting, we will also take a pelagic trip from Mirbat. This is one of the best opportunities in the region for seabirds, with possibilities including Jouanin's Petrel, Persian and Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Masked and Brown Boobies, Red-billed Tropicbird, skuas, terns and Red-necked Phalarope. The exact timing of the pelagic remains flexible so that we can choose the best available weather window while continuing to work the Dhofar mountains, khawrs and coastal sites for any missed targets.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	☐ ☐ ■	Moderate. Suitable for most birders, but includes several long travel days, early starts, some night birding, a pelagic option and remote desert sections.
Birding Ease	☐ ☐ ■	Mostly moderate to easy. Much birding is from roadsides, wetlands, beaches, oases & open desert, but some targets require patience, scanning, tides, night outings or weather-dependent access.
Accommodation	☐ ☐ ■	Comfortable overall. Most nights are in comfortable hotels; one night is in a fixed desert camp/lodge in the Empty Quarter region and may be simpler than city hotels.
Walking / Trails	☐ ☐ ■	Mostly light walking. Short walks on tracks, beaches, wadis, mountain slopes & uneven ground. Most birding is close to vehicles, but sturdy footwear is useful.
Vehicles / Roads	☐ ☐ ■	Good roads overall, with some long drives. 4x4 vehicles are used. Expect winding mountain roads, coastal highways, desert roads, ferry logistics for Masirah & some off-road or rough-track driving.
Photography	☐ ☐ ■	Good. Open-country birding, shorebirds, raptors, desert scenery & Dhofar specialities can provide good opportunities, though there are no dedicated hides.
Annoyances	☐ ☐ ■	Long drives, early starts, variable sea conditions, possible wind/dust, tide/ferry timing, and warm to hot conditions in exposed desert or coastal areas. Salalah can be humid.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 12;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original programme as possible.**

- This tour is timed for Oman's cooler winter period, but conditions can still be warm to hot in exposed coastal and desert areas. Sun, wind, dust, occasional rain and some humidity around Salalah are possible.
- The itinerary may be adjusted according to tides, Masirah ferry schedules, access arrangements, sea conditions for Al Fahal Island and the Mirbat pelagic, owl activity, weather, road conditions and recent bird sightings.
- Although the birding is generally not physically demanding, Oman is a large country and several days involve long drives. Most birding is from roadsides, beaches, wetlands, oases, open desert and areas close to the vehicles, with some short walks on uneven ground, rocky wadis, beaches, mountain slopes and desert tracks.
- We use 4x4 vehicles throughout. Roads are generally good, but the route includes winding mountain roads, long coastal and desert highways, rough tracks, Masirah ferry logistics and occasional off-road driving. Please avoid overpacking and restrict luggage to 20kg (44lb) checked and 8kg (+/-18lb) hand luggage.

- The tour includes early starts, at least one nocturnal outing and a weather-dependent Mirbat pelagic, which may be moved within the Salalah section to use the best available weather window.
- Accommodation is comfortable overall, mostly in standard hotels. One night is planned in a fixed desert camp or lodge in the Empty Quarter region, which is simpler and more remote than the city hotels. There is no participatory camping.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins in Muscat on day 1 with an arrival dinner and concludes in the afternoon at Salalah Airport on day 12.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Muscat International Airport (IATA: MCT) and Salalah International Airport (IATA: SLL) and are the primary points of entry and departure for this tour. Both airports have regular services via Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar and several European airports.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.