Saudi Arabia

Arabian Desert Endemics



Streaked Scrub Warbler by David Hoddinott

Embark on an unforgettable bird-watching expedition through the biologically rich south-western corner of Saudi Arabia. This focused journey explores a remarkable variety of habitats, from Red Sea coastal wetlands and lowland farms to dramatic escarpments, wadis and the cool highlands of the Asir Mountains. Over the course of the tour, we expect to encounter an exceptional diversity of species, including many Arabian Peninsula endemics, regional specialities and a strong African influence rarely encountered elsewhere in the Middle East.

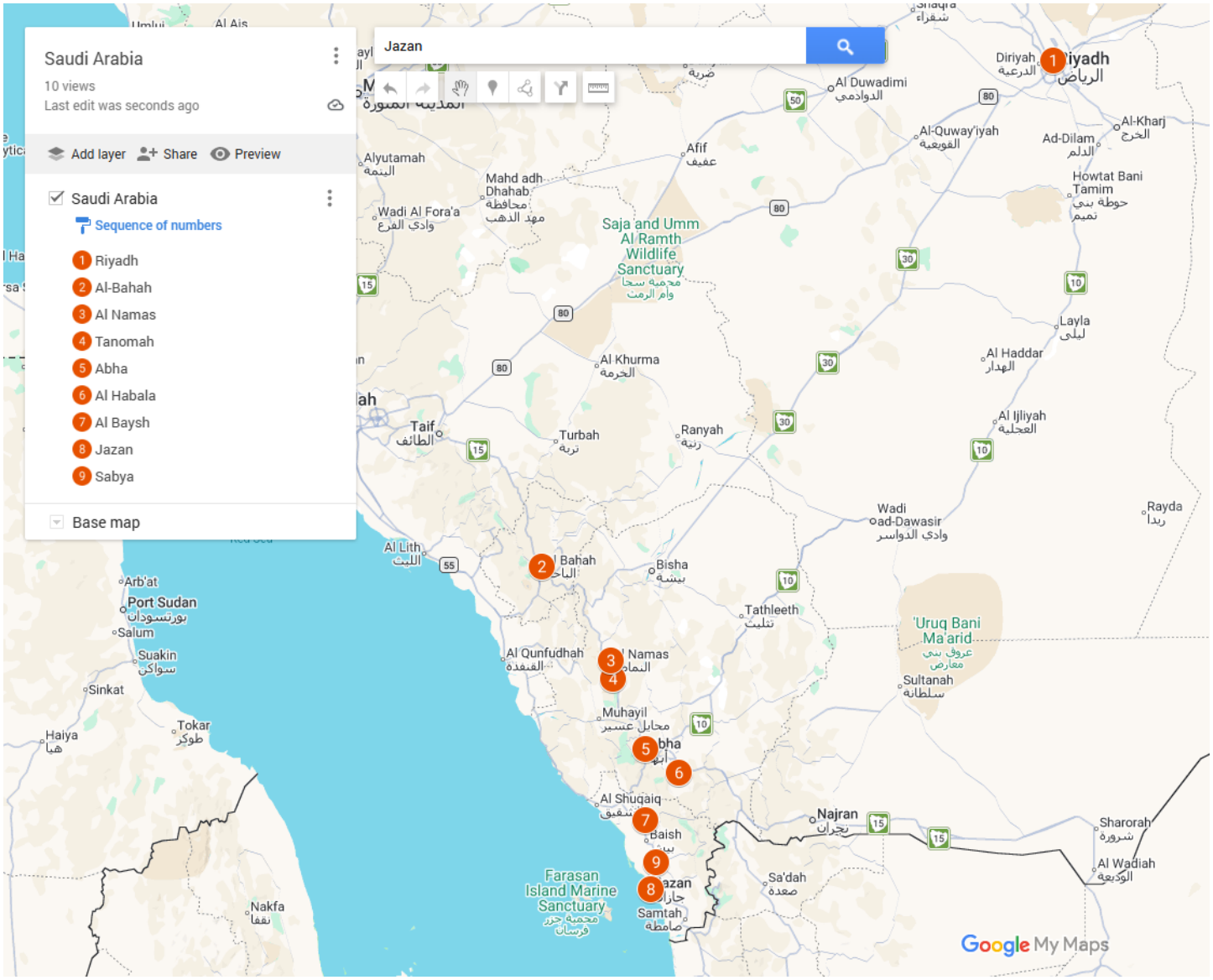
Beginning in Riyadh, we travel south by air to Al-Bahah and the spectacular Asir highlands, birding through key mountain localities such as Tanomah, Al Namas and Abha. These upland forests and escarpments offer prime opportunities for iconic species including Asir Magpie, Philby's Partridge, Arabian Serin, Yemen Thrush, Yemen Warbler, Arabian Woodpecker and Arabian Scops Owl. From here, the route descends to the lowlands and Red Sea coastline around Jazan, where wetlands, farms and coastal habitats provide outstanding birding for waders, herons and seabirds, including Crab-Plover and an impressive variety of gulls and terns.

A highlight of the tour is an excursion to the Farasan Islands, with a dedicated boat trip offering excellent chances for marine and island specialists, while birding around Sabya and Al-Sadd Lake adds further diversity, including possibilities for Arabian Golden Sparrow and nocturnal species such as Nubian and Plain Nightjar. Timed to coincide with optimal conditions in the region, this itinerary showcases Saudi Arabia's richest avifaunal zone,

where African and Middle Eastern bird communities intersect, delivering a rewarding and scenic birding experience from start to finish.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Riyadh**
Day 2	**Riyadh surrounds; flight to Al-Bahah**
Day 3	**Al-Bahah**
Day 4	**Al-Bahah to Tanomah via Al Namas**
Day 5	**Tanomah to Abha**
Day 6	**Al Habala to Jebel Al Aswad**
Day 7	**Al Baysh to Jazan**
Day 8	**Boat to Farasan Island**
Day 9	**Sabya & Al-Sadd Lake**
Day 10	**Jazan coast**
Day 11	**Jazan; flight to Riyadh & final departure**


Saudi Arabia
10 views
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Sequence of numbers
1 Riyadh
2 Al-Bahah
3 Al Namas
4 Tanomah
5 Abha
6 Al Habala
7 Al Baysh
8 Jazan
9 Sabya
Base map
Jazan
Riyadh
Diriyah
Al Duwadimi
Al-Quway'iyah
Ad-Dilam
Al-Kharj
Howtat Bani Tamim
Afif
Alyutamah
Mahd adh Dhahab
Wadi Al Fora'a
Saja and Umm Al Ramth Wildlife Sanctuary
Layla
Al Haddar
Al Khurma
Taif
Turbah
Ranyah
Al Ijliyah
Wadi ad-Dawasir
Rayda
Al Lith
Bisha
Arb'at
Port Sudan
Salum
Suakin
Sinkat
Tokar
Haiya
Tathleeth
'Uruq Bani Ma'arid
Sultanah
Al Qunfudhah
Muhayil
Al Shuqaiq
Najran
Sharorah
Al Wadiah
Sa'dah
Farasan Island Marine Sanctuary
Samtah
Nakfa
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Detailed Itinerary

Al-Bahah: Common birds that can be found along the route to the citadel of Al-Baha, set amid phenomenal scenery and atmosphere, include Black Scrub Robin, Streaked Scrub Warbler (the sole member of the family *Scotocercidae*), Arabian Green Bee-eater, Arabian Warbler, White-spectacled Bulbul, Tristram's Starling, the exquisite Nile Valley Sunbird, Namaqua Dove, Little Swift, African Palm Swift and Pale Crag Martin (Rock Martin). The rugged hillsides hold Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, while areas of human habitation attract Rüppell's Weaver, African Stonechat and Arabian Wheatear, to name just a few possible highlights.



Nile Valley Sunbird by Adam Riley

Tanomah & Al Namas: Stopping at these strategic locations, we expect to find Arabian Sunbird, Yemen Warbler, Arabian Babbler, Buff-breasted Wheatear, Streaked Scrub Warbler, Little Rock Thrush, Arabian Serin, Yemen Thrush, Hamerkop, Gambaga Flycatcher, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Arabian Waxbill, Long-billed Pipit, African Pipit, Brown Woodland Warbler, Fan-tailed Raven, Brown-necked Raven, Violet-backed Starling, Abyssinian White-eye and Diederik Cuckoo. This region exemplifies how Saudi Arabia's avifaunal diversity stems from a remarkable blend of African and Asian species, alongside several range-restricted endemics.

Birding at the many sites around the idyllic mountain fortress oases of Al-Baha and Tanomah lays claim to some of the most mouth-watering scenery in the country, not to mention a large proportion of its avian treasures. In the rugged, scrubby hillsides and surrounding regions of these towns, we have a good chance of encountering some of the region's top specialities, including Asir Magpie, Yemen Linnet, Gambaga Flycatcher, Palestine Sunbird, Dusky Turtle Dove, Graceful Prinia, Yemen Thrush, Arabian Partridge, Yemen Warbler, Arabian Waxbill, White-browed Coucal, Rufous-capped Lark, African Paradise Flycatcher and Yemen Serin, to name a few.



Arabian Babbler by Adam Riley

Abha: The jacaranda-laden streets of Abha, which when in flower transform this isolated town into a contrastingly beautiful and aromatic spectacle, form a vivid pocket of colour within an otherwise arid landscape. Birding both in and around the town can be productive for a wide range of species. Some of the highlights here include African Grey Hornbill, the striking Philby's Partridge, Yemen Thrush, Yemen Warbler,

Streaked Scrub Warbler, Rufous-capped Lark, Little Rock Thrush and Arabian Woodpecker, and with luck Arabian Serin and Arabian Waxbill.

Other species show a distinctly African flavour, such as African Olive Pigeon, Black-headed Heron, Dusky Turtle Dove, Abyssinian White-eye and Rock Martin, while Middle Eastern influences include Long-billed Pipit, Blackstart, Fan-tailed Raven, Arabian Wheatear and Tristram's Starling, to mention only a few. Some evening spotlighting in the area can be productive, hopefully yielding both Arabian Scops Owl and the localised Arabian Eagle-Owl.



Arabian Partridge by Forrest Rowland

Al Habala. This is one of the most dramatic birding localities in the Asir region, famous for its sheer cliffs, deep gorges and rugged escarpment landscapes. These precipitous slopes provide ideal habitat for cliff-nesting raptors and highland specialists, with excellent chances for Verreaux's Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard and migrating soaring birds. The surrounding juniper woodland and rocky scrub hold a mix of Arabian and African-influenced species, and this is a productive area for montane passerines including Arabian Wheatear, Yemen Linnet and other escarpment-associated birds. The combination of scenery and species makes Al Habala a standout stop.

Jebel Al Aswad. This site has some of the finest high-altitude birding in Saudi Arabia, with cooler mountain conditions, dense juniper stands and secluded wadis creating excellent habitat diversity. This area is especially important for endemic and range-restricted species, including chances for Philby's Partridge, Arabian Serin, Yemen Thrush and Arabian Woodpecker, alongside mixed flocks of highland warblers and finches. The mountain slopes also attract a variety of raptors and provide prime conditions for searching for elusive species in classic Asir scenery.



Arabian Golden Sparrow by David Hoddinott

Al Baysh. These lowlands mark a striking transition from the cool Asir highlands to warmer, African-influenced coastal plains, with birding centred around irrigated farms, acacia scrub and wetland patches. This fertile region is excellent for a wide variety of passerines and migrant birds, often producing surprises during peak movement periods. Species such as Arabian Golden Sparrow, African Silverbill, weavers and bishops are all possible here, while open habitats attract larks, pipits and hunting raptors. Al Baysh is a key site for experiencing the strong African element that defines south-west Saudi Arabia.

Jazan Area: Our journey south will be broken up by numerous stops at productive farms and roadside habitats. Some of the top species we hope to encounter include Arabian Sunbird, Nile Valley Sunbird, African Silverbill, Desert Lark, African Collared Dove, Abyssinian Roller, Abdim's Stork, Grey-headed Kingfisher, White-throated Bee-eater, Jacobin Cuckoo, Blackstart, the endemic Arabian race of Black-crowned Tchagra, Helmeted Guineafowl, Zitting Cisticola and Singing Bush Lark, among others.



Crab-plover by David Hoddinott

Farasan Island. Another of Saudi Arabia's birding highlights, offering a unique mix of island, coastal and marine habitats in the Red Sea. This trip provides outstanding opportunities for seabirds, shorebirds and regional coastal specialities, with breeding and foraging species including Crab-plover, terns, gulls and a range of waders along pristine shorelines. The boat trip adds further excitement, with chances for pelagic species and excellent close-range views of Red Sea specialists. The islands also host scattered scrub and mangrove habitats, supporting migrant passerines and making Farasan a truly memorable experience.

Jazan Coastline: The coastline around Jazan is excellent for a variety of waterbirds, including Western Reef Heron, Crab Plover, White-eyed, Sooty and Slender-billed Gulls, Striated Heron, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Tibetan Sand Plover and Pink-backed Pelican. Away from the shoreline, the arid scrublands hold excellent birds such as Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark and Greater Hoopoe Lark, as well as more widespread species including Spectacled Bulbul, Rüppell's Weaver, African Collared Dove and Laughing Dove. For those keeping an eye offshore, there is also a moderate chance of Brown Booby.



Greater Hoopoe-lark by Forrest Rowland

Al-Sadd Lake: Birding at Al-Sadd Lake and the surrounding farms can be outstanding. Key daytime species include Shikra, Gabar Goshawk and, with luck, Dark Chanting Goshawk and Arabian Golden Sparrow. Other excellent possibilities include White-browed Coucal in dense vegetation, the scarce Intermediate Egret, Arabian Babbler, Spur-winged Lapwing and African Openbill. After dark, we will search for the scarce Nubian Nightjar and Plain Nightjar.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Birding is undemanding but a few long travel days, low food diversity & some basic accommodations are taxing.
Birding Ease		One of the most enjoyable & prolific birding destinations in the Middle East. Many species are approachable & provide good visuals in open conditions.
Accommodation		Very variable. Modern & comfortable in large cities to more basic/rustic in remote areas.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks on flat ground. Predominantly roadside birding.
Vehicles / Roads		4x4 Landcruiser style vehicles. Several long drives. Unsealed roads are variable & dusty, sealed roads have potholes & livestock.
Photography		Good to excellent. No dedicated hides. Many species are approachable, habitat & lighting are often conducive.
Annoyances		Food diversity is limited in many areas, accommodation in the south is basic. Temperatures can be very hot.

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 dinner 1 to lunch on day 11;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & site entrance fees;
- All guiding services

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- No tips or 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 are NOT included on this tour. If you feel that your leader/s 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.**
- **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 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 closely to the original program as possible.
- This tour is designed to be a fast-paced tour, attempting to get good views of as many bird species as possible with key emphasis on monotypic bird families and the Arabian endemics. Most of the tour is not physically challenging but there are a few walks in the highlands of Saudi Arabia that may be marginally more strenuous.
- Daytime temperatures are generally extremely hot, while early mornings and late evenings can be much cooler.
- This tour does not require a good level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health as much of our birding will be done on foot.
- Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us well in advance of the tour.
- The standard of accommodation will vary from comfortable in the larger cities to basic in remote areas.
- We move accommodation regularly, so the more luggage you pack the less mobile you are. It is thus important for your comfort and ease of travel that you do not over-pack. Kingly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (18lb) for hand luggage.
- Guests with bee allergies should ensure they are carrying the necessary medication, as bees can be common.
- A tour of Saudi Arabia offers guests the opportunity to experience distinct Muslim cultural norms, which will differ from those of Western culture.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will begin with a welcome group dinner in Riyadh on day 1 and conclude here mid-morning on day 11.

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.

King Khalid International Airport, Riyadh (IATA: RUH) is the main port of arrival and departure for international flights for this tour and is well-serviced by most major airlines.

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.