

Title
Simon Aspinall and I are pleased and proud to dedicate *Birds of the Middle East* to BirdLife International's Middle East conservation programme. Once again it has been great working with world recognised wildlife artists John Gale, Mike Langman and Brian Small. The result is a new book. An entirely new layout with the identification text and maps opposite the 176 colour plates. Over 100 new species are included bringing the total number to over 820. The detailed maps, now in full colour, have been extensively revised to show wintering and migration distributions as well as breeding. It is the only field guide to the birds of the Middle East and covers Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, the Arabian peninsula and Socotra. Why does one write a field guide? Well many reasons, I guess! First because you feel you can - in my case I've spent 45 years studying the birds of the region. Simon is younger than me but has lived in the Middle East for many years - and has the biggest lifelist for the region - blast him! But also because you hope it will help to encourage an interest in and a love of birds and their conservation. In the Middle East there are many pressures on birds and many challenges. Saving the Northern Bald Ibis from extinction is probably the top species priority, but then there is tackling the persecution of migrant birds, the slaughter and trade of which is one of the most serious conservation problems. The ill-considered drainage of wetlands affects many species - and is often foolish when water is at such a premium in the region.



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What's top of my personal wish list? Two things: that the Mesopotamian Marshes will become a huge cross-border National Park - for people and wildlife to live in peace. And that the conservation future of the magnificent Highlands of Yemen, the mist forests of Dhofar and Hawf, and the Socotra Archipelago will be assured through sound and sympathetic management by the Yemen Government and the international community, working through the local people, that I have grown to know and love over the years. Finally let me dispell one myth - you certainly don't write bird books to make money!