

The birds of Socotra: an update

Richard Porter, BirdLife International



Socotra Sunbird taking nectar from a *Tricocalyx* flower. Richard Porter

This year – 2020 - has seen some fascinating bird records for the Socotra Archipelago. Ahmed Saeed Suleiman, the ‘Bird Man of Socotra’ has made several important discoveries. Probably the most remarkable was finding a group of twelve White-faced Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna viduata* in Qaria Creek. This is a species found in Africa and South America and has never been recorded as a wild bird in the Middle East. So it was really exciting, as was his discovery of nesting Red-knobbed Coots *Fulica cristata*. Not just one, but several nests and only the second breeding record for the Middle East where it is otherwise a rare vagrant. These observations, as well as those of Baillon’s Crakes *Porzana pusilla*, a bird rarely seen on Socotra, will soon be chronicled in a paper by Ahmed Saeed in the next issue of *Sandgrouse*, the journal of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East.

Ahmed Saeed and I have just updated the Checklist of the Birds of the Socotra Archipelago with these and other sightings and it can be found here:

<https://www.osme.org/2020/04/checklist-of-the-birds-of-the-socotra-archipelago/>

The archipelago bird list now stands at 225.

The world of bird taxonomy and nomenclature is constantly under revision and most ornithologists now follow the recommendations of the International Ornithological Congress (IOC). Their latest list places a number of families in a totally different order from those previously. To most people this will simply be of academic interest, but what won't be is that one of Socotra's most charming birds, the white-eye, has now been elevated to endemic status. Previously Abyssinian White-eye, it is now named Socotra White-eye *Zosterops socotranus*, bringing the total number of Socotran endemic bird species to eleven.



Socotra White-eyes – Socotra's latest endemic bird. These are engaged in mutual preening which is an important part of their courtship display. *Richard Porter*