

Short Communication

Review of Ornithological Records Made by S.G. Gmelin and C. Hablitzl in Iran in 1770–1774

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Introduction

The modern history of Iranian ornithology goes back to the late 18th century, when two Russian expeditions headed by Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin (1744–74), a German-Russian naturalist, worked in Gilan Province in 1770–71 and 1773–74, respectively, visiting also Mazandaran in 1771 (see below for the itineraries). Gmelin (1774, 1784) provided only a general overview of birds recorded around the southern Caspian Sea. His writings (posthumously published on the basis of his field notebooks) are of minor importance for the study of the avifauna of Iran and the Azerbaijan Republic, because of the lack of exact dates and localities, and because only those birds that were described by him in detail and/or were figured allow identification to species. Simple listings of bird names by Gmelin (1774, 1784) are of no value, because he often erred in identifying birds (see also Pallas 1784). A collection of birds (and other natural history specimens) made during Gmelin's expeditions was sent to the Imperial 'Kunstkammer' (Museum) in St-Petersburg, Russia, but no relevant publications appeared and no bird specimens survive today (V. Loskot pers. comm. in 2005; Steinheimer 2005).

Fortunately, Gmelin was accompanied by Carl Hablitzl (1752–1821; also known as Karl Ivanovič Gablitz), a German-Russian naturalist, on the 2nd expedition to Iran (Persia). They jointly came to Bandar-e Anzali in the autumn of 1773. Hablitzl was ordered to stay in Bandar-e Anzali and to explore the nature of Gilan, while Gmelin set off toward Russia. Hablitzl did a good job and left us a detailed account of his travels and observations (Hablitzl 1783). Although Hablitzl's collections in St-Petersburg have not survived to the present (V. Loskot, pers. comm. in 2005; see also Steinheimer 2005), his published report (Hablitzl 1783)

includes many useful ornithological records. In spite of this, these data have not as yet been used for faunal purposes (but see Stresemann 1928 and 1948 for taxonomic comments on Hablitzl's birds), although they can make a considerable contribution to our understanding of faunal changes in the region. Hence, I present here an annotated list of Hablitzl's ornithological records.

Interpretation of early ornithological writings depends to a large degree on the scientific sources of the respective author (*e.g.* Mlikovsky & Benda 2005, Mlikovsky 2006). Hablitzl (1783) used binomial nomenclature when describing new species, hence he knew the work of Carl Linné (1758, 1766), but he appears to have derived more of his ornithological knowledge from the much better ornithological treatise by Mathurin-Jacques Brisson (1760, 1763). In spite of this, some of the bird names he listed were not clearly identifiable. These names have not been included in the following lists. The current distribution of birds (*e.g.* Hüe & Etchécopar 1970, Porter *et al.* 1996) has always been taken into account, but possible changes in the distribution of individual species have also been considered. Hablitzl (1783) did not carry out a comprehensive survey of the avifauna of those parts of Gilan that he visited, and thus the absence of a species from his list does not mean that the species did not occur in the region. Hablitzl (1783) apparently identified many species only on the basis of collected specimens. Hence, records limited to particular months or time periods do not automatically imply that the species was absent from the locality on other dates.

The nomenclature and sequence of bird species follow Scott & Adhami (2006). Hablitzl (1782, 1783) used the old-style Julian calendar (OS), as was the standard in 18th-century

Russia. His data are thus recalculated here to the new-style Gregorian calendar (NS), where possible. For the 1770s, Gregorian dates are calculated from Julian dates by adding 11 days.

Gmelin's and Hablizl's Itineraries

First expedition (1770–71): Gmelin entered the territory of modern-day Gilan Province, coming from Baku via Salyan, in late 1770. He overwintered at Bandar-e Anzali, but moved to Rasht in February 1771 (OS), where he stayed until 18 June 1771 [= 29 June 1771 NS]. Then he travelled overland along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea through Babol to Sari in the province of Mazandaran. Gmelin then returned from Sari to Babol, where he had to stay until November 1771 (OS), when he returned to Bandar-e Anzali by ship. Gmelin left an assistant and a taxidermist in Bandar-e Anzali to collect natural history specimens, but both died of typhus before he returned from Sari. Gmelin's first expedition to Iran ended on 10 February 1772 [= 21 February NS], when Gmelin sailed from Bandar-e Anzali to Astrakhan (see Pallas 1784).

Second expedition (1773–74): Gmelin and Hablizl arrived at Bandar-e Anzali in the autumn of 1773, and stayed there until 23 November 1773 (NS), when Gmelin set off for home. Hablizl continued to live at Bandar-e Anzali until 7 June 1774 (NS), when he went via Pir Bazar, Rasht (7–14 June NS), Lahijan, Langarud and Rudsar (21 June NS) to Siahkalarud (26 June NS), where he turned inland, reaching Javaher Dasht on 8 July (NS). He stayed at Javaher Dasht on the northern slopes of Kuh-e Somamus until 19 September (NS), and then returned to Bandar-e Anzali, following the same route. Dated stops were Chinjan (22–24 September NS) and Rasht (3 October NS). One month later, on 28 October (NS), Hablizl left Bandar-e Anzali on board the ship 'Habicht', heading for Astrakhan, Russia, which he reached on 21 November 1774 (NS).

Hablizl's Bird Records

Hablizl (1783) recorded birds at three localities in Iran, namely Bandar-e Anzali, Javaher Dasht and Chinjan, all in Gilan Province (see below). Unfortunately, Hablizl used only general descriptions such as "large numbers" or "common" in quantifying his data. If available,

these descriptions are mentioned in the lists below.

Bandar-e Anzali: Bandar-e Anzali [37°28'N, 49°28'E] and the adjacent Anzali lagoon were studied by Hablizl from at least early November 1773 OS [= mid November NS] to 26 May 1774 OS [= 6 June 1774 NS]. See Hablizl (1783: 7–24). Usually only the months of observation were given by Hablizl (1783) for birds recorded at Bandar-e Anzali. They are given below in the old (Julian) style.

- Diver *Gavia* sp.: Recorded only in March.
- Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: Common on the Anzali lagoon in December.
- Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: Appeared on the Anzali lagoon in late November 1773. See Stresemann (1948) for the identity of this species.
- Pelican *Pelecanus* sp.: Large numbers on the Anzali lagoon in December.
- Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Large numbers in the channel connecting the Anzali lagoon with the Caspian Sea in December.
- Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Large numbers in the channel connecting the Anzali lagoon with the Caspian Sea in December; also recorded in January. Great Cormorants were seen building nests in tall trees in February.
- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Recorded in April.
- Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Recorded in April.
- Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*: Recorded in April.
- Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Recorded in December in paddyfields.
- Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: Common in winter; said to visit Bandar-e Anzali only in winter.
- Swan *Cygnus* sp.: Common in winter on sea shores.
- Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: Recorded in March on sea shores.
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: Common in winter on sea shores.
- Gadwall *Anas strepera*: Common in winter on sea shores.
- Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: Recorded in March.
- Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*: Recorded in January.
- White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: Recorded in December on the shores of the Caspian Sea.
- Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*: Recorded in December in paddyfields. Hablizl (1782) also recorded Siberian Cranes on spring migration at Astrakhan.
- Common Crane *Grus grus*: Appeared in the first days of March (OS) on migration toward Russia; said to be absent from the Bandar-e Anzali area in winter.
- Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*: Common in winter; said to be sedentary at Bandar-e Anzali.
- Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Common in winter; said to visit Bandar-e Anzali only in winter.
- Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: Recorded in March.
- Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: Recorded in March.
- Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: Recorded in March.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: Recorded in April.
 Curlew *Numenius* sp.: Recorded in January.
 Tern *Sterna* sp.: Recorded in April.
 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*: Recorded on migration; its occurrence was limited to two weeks in April (OS).
 Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: Recorded in April.
 Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: Recorded in December.
 Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: Recorded in April.
 Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos* sp.: Recorded in December.
 Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: Recorded in January.
 Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis*: In January in flocks on the shores of the Caspian Sea.
 European Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: Recorded in January.
 Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Arrived in late February (OS).
 Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: Arrived in large numbers in the first days of April (OS).
 European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Recorded in December.
 Nightingale *Luscinia* sp.: Hablizl (1783) mentions having heard one at night in February. He may have been mistaken, as the Common Nightingale *L. megarhynchos* is strictly a summer visitor to Iran and does not arrive back in the south Caspian region until early April, while the Thrush Nightingale *L. luscinia* is strictly a passage migrant in April-May and August-October (D.A. Scott in litt.).
 Wheatear *Oenanthe* sp.: Recorded in March.
 Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Recorded in December.
 Redwing *Turdus iliacus*: Recorded in February. Feeding on fruits of ivy *Hedera helix*.
 Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: Recorded in February. Feeding on fruits of ivy *Hedera helix*.
 Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: Recorded in January.
 Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*: Recorded in January. Hablizl (1783: 14) explicitly stated that Penduline Tits did not breed at the southern end of the Caspian Sea, their nest being unknown there, and indicated that the Penduline Tits wintering at Bandar-e Anzali migrated in spring to Russia for breeding. Hablizl (1782: 11) knew Penduline Tits as summer birds from Astrakhan on the northern shores of the Caspian Sea. It is thus possible that Penduline Tits did not breed south of the Caspian Sea in the 1770s, and spread to the region later. The species is known to have expanded its breeding range considerably in Europe in the past (Kinzelbach 2002), and its expansion is still continuing there (e.g. Flade *et al.* 1986, Valera *et al.* 1990), but historical changes in its range in the Middle East and Central Asia remain unknown.
 Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Recorded in December.
 Great Tit *Parus major*: Recorded in December.
 Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: Recorded in December.
 Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Flocks seen in December.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: Flocks seen in December.
 Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: Recorded in January.
 Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*: Flocks appeared in fields in mid April (OS).
 Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: Recorded in April.
 Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Recorded in April.

Javaher Dasht: Hablizl stayed at Javaher Dasht [36°54'N, 50°23'E] on the northern slopes of Kuh-e Somamus at c. 2000 m a.s.l., from 27 June to 8 September 1774 [= 8 July to 19 September 1774 NS]. See Hablizl (1783: 46–70). Hablizl (1783: 66) remarked that bad weather did not allow him to make excursions in the wider vicinity of this village, except on 17–20 August [= 28–31 August NS]. He did not specify where he went on these days, but he was certainly not far from Javaher Dasht.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*: Recorded between 24 and 28 August (NS).
 Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*: Recorded between 5 and 12 August (NS).
 Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: Recorded between 15 and 18 July (NS).
 White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: Recorded between 4 and 8 September (NS).
 Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*: Recorded on 26 July (NS).
 Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: Recorded between 31 July and 3 August (NS). This is Stresemann's (1928: 389) interpretation of the *Motacilla obscura* of Hablizl (1783: 56). However, some characters (e.g. yellow eyes, long wings) suggest that another species may have been involved. I thus consider Hablizl's (1783) records of the Dunnock from Javaher Dasht to be uncertain. The possible nomenclatural consequences will be discussed elsewhere (J. Mlikovsky, in prep.).
 Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: Recorded between 14 and 17 August (NS).
 Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*: Recorded between 31 July and 3 August (NS).
 Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: Recorded between 19 and 22 July (NS).
 Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: Recorded between 15 and 18 July (NS).
 White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*: Recorded on 13 July (NS).

Chinjan: Hablizl's ornithological observations at Chinjan, NW of Rudсар, [37°09'N, 50°15'E], were limited to 11 September 1774 [= 22 September 1774 NS]. See Hablizl (1783: 86).
 Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Recorded on 22 September (NS).

Concluding Remarks

Gmelin's (Gmelin 1774, 1784) and Hablizl's (Hablizl 1783) data seem to be the only ornithological records of Iranian birds from the

18th century, although anecdotal remarks on birds not adequately identified to species may be found in a variety of travellers' reports. The next expeditions to Iran with ornithological results were probably those of Charles Paulus Bélanger (1805–81) in 1825 (see R.P. Lesson in Bélanger 1832–34 for ornithological results) and Filippo De Filippi (1814–68) in 1862 (De Filippi 1865, see also Schalow 1876, Roselaar & Aliabadian 2007). The subsequent history of ornithological expeditions to Iran is discussed by Roselaar & Aliabadian (2007).

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