Waterbird census at Barr Al Hikman, Sultanate of Oman

23 December 2013

Oman

A team from the Environment Society of Oman, The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, The Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ), and the Office for Conservation of The Environment has surveyed migratory waterbirds at Barr Al Hikman, one of the largest and most important coastal wetlands in the Middle East. The wetland covers a 150-square-kilometre low-lying peninsula made up of largely sand and sabkha (a mixture of sand, mud and salt). It is known for its intertidal mudflats, shallow lagoons, sea bays and straits that sustain rich biodiversity and make it particularly important for passing and wintering water birds.

Every year, at least half a million migratory shorebirds use Barr al Hikman during the winter or as a stopover in spring or autumn. Many of the wintering species originate from high arctic breeding grounds. Some of the species of Arctic shorebirds wintering at the site are the Broad-billed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Great Knot. For 18 shorebird species, the population wintering at Barr al Hikman exceeds one per cent of the total flyway population. No other known site in the Middle East holds comparable numbers of birds in the winter. Much of the site
remains relatively undisturbed and has been proposed for protection.

The Convention on Wetlands came into force for Oman on 19 August 2013, with Qurm Nature Reserve, a 172-hectare mangrove area in the heart of the capital, designated as a Wetland of International Importance.

By Nessrine Alzahlawi, Aquatic Biologist
and Aida Al Jabri, Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, Sultanate of Oman

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