Situated on the eastern edge of the Western Palearctic, Iran is not only a geographically diverse country but also host to one of the world’s oldest civilisations. This ancient country, formerly known as Persia possesses over 20 UNESCO world Heritage sites, the only Asian population of Cheetah and a host of endemic and highly range restricted species. Part of the once famous ‘Hippie Trail’, Iran’s poor western public image has hamstrung tourism to the country until recently. The Persian people are without doubt some of the world’s friendliest and most hospitable!

Our fourteen day tour starts in the capital, Tehran with a short flight south to Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf. Here we will spend time investigating the mangrove forest around Jask, the almond and pistachio woodlands and orchards around Minab for Sind Woodpecker, Graceful Prinia, Red-tailed (Turkestan) and Bay-backed Shrike, Afghan Babbler, Dalmatian Pelican and Crab-plover.

We depart Minab and head to Ahvaz for a few days to search the Dez and Karkhe River area for Iraq Babbler, Grey Hypocolius, Hooded Crow (of the distinct Mesopotamian sub-species), Dead Sea...
Sparrow, Egyptian Nightjar and Menetries’s Warbler. Returning to Tehran, we shall spend the rest of our tour traversing the Alburz Mountain Range, the Caspian Sea and Touran National Park. Amongst the many species we can expect to see over the next few days, the highlights are sure to include Caspian Tit, Caspian Snowcock, Red-fronted Serin, Red-tailed (Persian) Wheatear, Black-headed Penduline Tit, Pleske's Ground Jay, Asian Desert Warbler, Macqueen's Bustard and See-see Partridge.

**THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arrival in Tehran and transfer to Minab via flight to Bandar Abbas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Day trip to Jask and Mangrove Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Minab area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Minab to Ahvaz via Bandar Abbas and Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>Ahvaz, Karkeh and Dez Protected areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ahvaz to Kelardasht via flight to Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 &amp; 9</td>
<td>Kelardasht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kelardasht to Sari via Babolsar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>Touran National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Touran to Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Final departures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TOUR ROUTE MAP...
THE TOUR IN DETAIL...

Day 1: Arrival in Tehran and transfer to Minab via flight to Bandar Abbas. The tour officially starts today with a transfer to Minab’s Mehrabad Airport from Tehran, where you will be met by you Rockjumper tour leader and board for a short flight to Bandar Abbas. Bandar Abbas is one of Iran’s major cities in the south, situated on the shores of the Persian Gulf. Upon arrival, we immediately go in search of Sand Lark, along its preferred coastal habitat not far from the city. After hunting down our quarry we will search through banks of waders on the muddy shoreline and try pick out Broad-billed Sandpiper and Great Knot amongst the numerous Greater Sand, Lesser Sand, Kentish and Grey Plover, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Green Sandpiper, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Sanderling and Temminck’s Stint. Other species that could be evident include Eurasian Spoonbill, Caspian Tern, Great Cormorant and Eurasian Oystercatcher. After a great start we make our way by road, to the city of Minab, where we will check in to our hotel looking forward to a welcome dinner.

Day 2: Day trip to Jask and Mangrove Forest. Today will see us having an early start in order to make our way to an area near the city of Jask. The area is dominated by palm gardens and local orchards, which create ideal habitat for some fantastic woodland birding. Our main target this morning will be the Sind Woodpecker, and we will focus our efforts on this rare species. Spotted Owlets are active when the day is still young, the opposite being the case for Oriental Honey Buzzard as they start moving around on thermals as the temperature rises. Purple Sunbird is refreshingly common alongside Indian Roller, Lesser Whitethroat, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear, Red-wattled Lapwing and Yellow-throated Sparrow. In the drier habitats and wadis (dry ravine or watercourse) we may find Graceful Prinia, common Green Bee-eater, White-eared Bulbul, Red-tailed and Bay-backed Shrike, Pallid Swift, Pale Crag Martin, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Indian Silverbill, the scarce Afghan Babbler and Variable Wheatear. After a picnic lunch and some rest in the shade, we will have a short drive to reach the nearby mangrove forests for some more exciting birding. The area is one of the best and most pristine environments of its kind in the Persian Gulf. It provides excellent habitat for Indian Pond Heron, massive Dalmatian Pelican and Great Stone-curlew. With luck we may encounter Crab-plover with some having remained after the

Crowned Sandgrouse by David Hoddinott
migration season. After a long, yet satisfying day, we make our way back to our now familiar accommodation in Minab.

**Day 3: Minab area.** Our birding adventure continues with an early morning stint in some different habitat to the north-east of Minab: an open plateau with scattered shrubs, ideal for Grey Francolin, Chestnut-bellied and Crowned Sandgrouse, Upcher’s Warbler, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and the hard to find Grey-necked Bunting. As the temperature rises during the day, we make our way back to Minab for some lunch and a rest out of glaring sun and heat. When the mercury drops, we head out once again, to find some new species along the myriad of rivers and associated scrub in the area.

**Day 4: Minab to Ahvaz via Bandar Abbas and Tehran.** Today will see us heading back to Bandar Abbas for our flight to the city of Ahvaz, via Tehran. Ahvaz is situated on the shores of the Karun River, nearby the once vast Mesopotamian marshes. Depending on the time of the flight, we may have extra time to bird around Bandar Abbas, or we shall head out for some initial exploratory birding around Ahvaz.

**Days 5 & 6: Ahvaz, Karkeh and Dez Protected areas.** For the next two days we explore the areas north of Ahvaz. Two major rivers, the Dez and Karkhe meander through this land and it is in the habitat created by these rivers that we go in search of the range-restricted Iraq Babbler, the monotypic Grey Hypocolius, the range-restricted *capellanus* sub-species of Hooded Crow (Mesopotamian Crow), Egyptian Nightjar and Menetries’s Warbler. Another major target here is the sought-after and little known Basra Reed Warbler. We have good chances of encountering more Red-wattled Lapwing alongside colourful Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, White-throated and Pied Kingfisher, European Turtle Dove and the impressive Collared Pratincole. We even stand a slight chance of locating Pied Bush Chat and Namaqua Dove. If time permits, we shall visit the Shadegan Lagoon where we may find distant Marbled Duck or White-cheeked Tern. After a full day we head back to Ahvaz ready for the following day’s adventure.

**Day 7: Ahvaz to Kelardasht via flight to Tehran.** Today we transfer back to the airport in Ahvaz for our flight to Tehran’s Mehrabad International Airport. Our 4x4 vehicles will be waiting to take us to our next destination – the picturesque city of Kelardasht. This small city is located on the northern slopes of the Alburz Mountain range and is completely different from the other parts of Iran. We reach this area by driving...
through scenic mountainous roads which connect the barren slopes of southern Alburz to the lush broad-leafed forests of the northern side, and the coastal areas of the Caspian Sea. We will stop en route to do some birding on a mountain pass with an elevation of about 3,000 meters to search for Rock Sparrow. We then head to Kelardasht, our home for the following three nights.

**Days 8 & 9: Kelardasht.** Today we go in search of the little-known Caspian Tit. We shall explore the northern faces of Alburz Mountains surrounding Kelardasht. Areas where Oak and Hawthorn trees are scattered along slopes above 2,000 meters is the ideal habitat for this species, and we shall search diligently for our quarry. Steep and bumpy roads mean that 4x4 vehicles are essential to reach these areas, and give us the best chances of locating this tiny gem. We may also bump into Eurasian Wryneck, European Green Woodpecker, Great, Eurasian Blue, Coal, Long-tailed and Sombre Tit, Ortolan Bunting and Lesser Whitethroat. Whilst in this area we go on another target mission, this time to find Caspian Snowcock. This regal bird resides at very high altitudes on the northern faces of the Alburz and Zagros Mountains, between 3,500 – 4,000 meters. Another early morning is required to get up the mountain in our capable vehicles in order to put ourselves in prime position. Searching for Caspian Snowcock could also produce Black Redstart, Red-fronted Serin, Red-tailed, Northern and Finsch’s Wheatear, Radde’s Accentor and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush.

**Day 10: Kelardasht to Sari via Babolsar.** We leave the Alburz Mountains this morning and make our way to the eastern coastal regions of the Caspian Sea. Near the coastal city of Babolsar, we visit a few ponds adjacent to rice paddies. This is a good area to find the sought-after Black-headed Penduline Tit that weave their nests in the local Willow trees in spring. After searching for this special we head to Sari where we will check in to our accommodations.

**Days 11 & 12: Touran National Park.** Today we set off early and head for the Touran National Park. The park holds vast tracts of steppes, semi-arid deserts and arid mountains. The *Artemisia* and *Zygophyllum* steppes situated in the north of park are the prime stronghold of the attractive and highly sought after endemic, Pleske’s Ground Jay. We will focus our efforts on this species, as well as the very localised Red-tailed (Persian) Wheatear. Other species we should come across include Asian Desert Warbler, Black-bellied and Crowned Sandgrouse, Desert, Bar-tailed and Crested Lark, Pale Crag Martin, Trumpeter and Desert Finch, Steppe Grey Shrike, Macqueen’s Bustard, Streaked Scrub Warbler, Desert Wheatear, *personata* sub-
species of White Wagtail, See-see Partridge, Eastern Rock Nuthatch and even chances for Cream-coloured Courser and Hooded Wheatear. A special mammal we will keep an eye out for in this area is the rare Asiatic Wild Ass or Onager.

**Day 13: Touran to Tehran.** We leave Touran today and drive westward to reach the capital city Tehran. En route we stop in some areas near Parvar to look for White-throated Robin, Rock Sparrow and Trumpeter Finch.

**Day 14: Final departures.** Today is unfortunately the end of our tour and we will transfer to Mehrabad International Airport for one last time and say goodbye to this less-travelled yet rewarding birding destination.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**
Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:
- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 14;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings during the tour;
- All ground transportation;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

This excludes:
- ANY flights;
- Visa fees (although we will handle Visa applications);
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.
- Camera fees.

**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.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**
a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however 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 (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.
b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.
c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.
Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Please note:
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health and reasonably fit.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a good standard and the hotels and guest houses that we make use of range from comfortable to very comfortable. There is no camping on this trip.
- US Citizens: Private travel to Iran is forbidden for many U.S. government employees, including contractors, without prior authorization from the Department of State. Any U.S. government employee or contractor considering private travel to Iran should contact the Department of State’s Office of Iranian Affairs for guidance.
- Islamic law is strictly enforced in Iran. Alcohol is forbidden. Women must wear a headscarf and a long jacket that covers the arms and upper legs while in public. Men may be required to wear long pants and cannot go bare-chested or wear tank tops, especially near religious sites or in conservative areas. There may be additional dress requirements at certain religious sites. Consult a guide book on Iran to determine how to dress and behave properly and respectfully.
- During the holy month of Ramadan, you should generally observe the Muslim tradition of not eating, drinking or smoking in public from sunrise to sunset each day, though there are exemptions for foreign travellers who eat in hotel restaurants. In general, it is best to ask before taking photographs of people. Hobbies like photography and those involving the use of binoculars (e.g., bird-watching) can be misunderstood and may cause trouble with security officials.
- Consensual same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Iran and is punishable by death, flogging, or a lesser punishment.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:
This tour does not include ANY airfares. The tour will begin in Tehran on day 1 with an internal flight to Bandar Abbas. Please ensure that you arrive in Tehran the previous day. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 14 at Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport, Tehran (IATA: IKA).

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.

FLIGHTS:
Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport, Tehran (IATA: IKA) is the main port of entry for international flights into Iran for this tour and is well serviced by many of the world’s major airlines. Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.