

Short Communication

First breeding record of Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* in northern Jordan

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The breeding distribution of the Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* extends over large areas of Eurasia, from Ireland (108W) to Kamchatka (1608 E) (Cramp and Simmons 1980, Ferguson-Lees and Christie, 2001). The Eurasian Sparrowhawk is the most abundant raptor species in Europe (BirdLife International 2018) with many northern populations migrating south to winter over a wide area including the Mediterranean, including Jordan and further south.

In Jordan, the species is a common winter visitor, and spring and autumn migrant (Andrews, 1995). It can usually be seen in Jordan from mid September to mid April, but there have been frequent records in May, and more recently, in late June near Tafeelah southern Jordan (El-moghrabi, pers. comm. 2017). The late summer records may indicate possible breeding in Jordan, especially as the Eurasian Sparrowhawk has been recorded breeding in a pine forest in north Palestine since 1989 (Frumkin and Adar, 1989).

On the 24th of June 2018, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature [RSCN] with the aid of the Royal Rangers [Environmental Police] followed up an online advertising five Eurasian Sparrowhawk chicks for sale (Fig. 1). The Royal Rangers confiscated these chicks and sent them to the RSCN, who reared them as orphan birds under a rehabilitation programme.

The authors tracked back the record and contacted the owner, who was helpful and showed the location and the nest used by the breeding birds. The birds had bred in Al-Se'enh village in the north of the country (Lat 32.521426°, Lon 35.741139), in a very narrow strip of pine forest at 400 metres elevation. The nest site was only 700 metres from a settlement (Fig. 2). The confiscated chicks were kept in captivity until the 12th September where they hatched back to the wild in similar habitats of pine forests near Amman.

This breeding record, together with those described by Frumkin and Adar (1989) in Palestine and the observations of El-moghrabi pers. comm. (2017) raises the possibility of further breeding in the forests of Jordan, especially pine forests like that at the Dibeen Forest Reserve, which is close to the recent breeding site.

Lehikoinen et al. (2010) studied the timing of migration (years 2007-1979), breeding phenology (2007-1979), and breeding success (2007-1973) of the Eurasian Sparrowhawk in Finland. Lehikoinen et al., (2010) concluded that the breeding success of Eurasian Sparrowhawks had increased significantly over the study period (2007-1973), but this was most likely caused by factors other than climate change, such as reduced exposure to organochlorine pollutants in Finland.



Figure 1: Five chicks of the Eurasian Sparrowhawk were offered for sale on the web.

In Jordan, the species could be a former breeder as suggested by Andrews (1995). It is not known if a former breeding population was affected by deforestation or habitat modification. A country-wide survey of potential breeding habitat is recommended, which should include the southern parts of the county indicated by the summer observations.



Figure 2: the small patch of pine forest where the Sparrowhawks bred successfully. The nest site is indicated by the black circle, and a close photo of the nest is inset.

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