

Short Communication

The First Record of the Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* for Iran

MAARTEN PIETER LANTSHEER^{1*}, REINOUD VERMOOLEN¹, ASHRAF ALI HOSEINI² & HOSEIN ASKARI³

1. THE NETHERLANDS

2. Chabahar Office of the Department of the Environment, Chabahar, IRAN

3. Sistan & Baluchestan Provincial Office of the Department of the Environment, Zahedan, IRAN

* Correspondence Author. Email: mp@lantsheer.net

Received 4 September 2009; accepted 7 May 2010

*** The Editor: "This note is based on an earlier manuscript received from the Correspondence Author. Although we have received no subsequent email messages from him, we have nevertheless finally decided to publish it."

Introduction

In January 2009 a census of wintering waterbirds was carried out by ornithologists from the Iranian Department of Environment and the Dutch WIWO foundation. On 24 January R. Vermoolen, H. Askari and M.P. Lantsheer visited the Lipar Seasonal Marsh (25°17'50"N, 60°48'26"E), which is located 15 km east of Chabahar in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, SE Iran. Whilst carrying out a count of waterbirds, including species such as the threatened Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, a slender falcon *Falco* was observed feeding on Egyptian Grasshoppers *Anacridium aegyptium*. This falcon was identified in the field as an Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, a bird not previously recorded in Iran (Scott & Adhami 2006, Scott 2008).

Description

Photographs were taken to document this record; the following description is based on these photographs (see Fig. 1) and notes taken whilst in the field.

Size and build: a small and slender falcon with fairly long wings and an agile flight. Upperparts: greyish-brown with faint buff edges to coverts and obvious barring on the tail feathers. Underparts: a white base colour with blackish stripes on breast and flanks, less obvious on belly and absent between belly and tail coverts. Underwings: the underwings had a white ground colour with blackish markings and a broad dark trailing edge. Head: greyish with no apparent separation from the

upperparts, but with a narrow white line from above the eye to the forehead. Bare parts: the bill was yellowish orange with a black tip, the eye ring was the same yellowish orange, and the feet were pale reddish. Tail: white with seven grey bars, the subterminal bar being black and broader than the rest. Moulting: Only a few secondaries seemed to have been replaced in the right wing.

When first seen perched, the grey appearance of the upperparts gave the impression of a Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*. However, when seen through a spotting scope, it was apparent that the head pattern was wrong for (first-winter) Eurasian Hobby as was the colouration of the bare parts. In flight, the barring on the upper side of the tail (unbarred in Hobby), the ground colour of the underparts (rufous in Hobby) and the presence of a broad black trailing edge on the underwing further excluded Hobby. Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* was ruled out by the white ground colour of the underparts (buffish in first-winter Red-footed), black markings on the underwings (rufous-brown in Red-footed), and black streaks on the breast and flanks (also rufous-brown in Red-footed) reminiscent of a Merlin *Falco columbarius*. Furthermore, the grey appearance of the upperparts, especially on the crown, is a good indication of Amur Falcon (more sandy coloured in first-winter Red-footed), although some first-winter Amur Falcons can show a more brownish tone on the upperparts (Corso & Clark 1998).



Figure 1. Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* photographed at Lipar wetland, Chabahar, Sistan and Baluchestan Province, SE Iran, 24 January 2009.

Discussion

The Amur Falcon breeds in East Asia and winters in South East Africa where the birds arrive in December. Migrating over India to the East African coast, large numbers of birds pass over the Indian Ocean (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). In India there has been a small number of winter records and some birds are known to winter on the Maldiv Islands (Ali & Ripley 1978). There have also been winter sightings in Oman (Porter *et al.* 2004). A sighting of the Amur Falcon in Iran was therefore not unexpected. Given the increasing number of reports of the species in

western Asia and Europe, with accepted records as far west as Italy (Corso & Dennis 1998), the species might have been overlooked in Iran until now because of difficulties in identification and low number of birdwatchers along the Gulf of Oman coast. It is likely that the species is in fact more common in Iran than had previously been thought and future sightings can be anticipated.

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank Dick Groenendijk, Dick Forsman and Stephen Menzie for providing information and feedback on the sighting. Furthermore we are grateful to Hamid Amini and Marc van Roomen for arranging the 2009 census.

References

- Ali S. & Ripley S.D. 1978. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan; Together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka: Divers to Hawks* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Corso A. & Clark W.S. 1998. Identification of Amur Falcon. *Birding World* **11(7)**: 261–268.
- Corso A. & Dennis P. 1998. Amur Falcons in Italy - a new Western Palearctic bird. *Birding World* **11(7)**: 259–260.
- del Hoyo J., Elliott A. & Sargatal J. 1994. *Handbook of the birds of the world, New world vultures to guineafowl* (Vol. 2). Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
- Porter R.F., Christensen S. & Schiermacker-Hansen P. 2004. *Birds of the Middle East*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Scott D.A. 2008. Rare birds in Iran in the late 1960s and 1970s. *Podoces* **3**: 1–30.
- Scott D.A. & Adhami A. 2008. An updated checklist of the birds of Iran. *Podoces* **1(1/2)**: 1–16.