

# Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* breeding in Israel

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The Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* is a widespread raptor, breeding from southwest Europe, south through most of Africa, east through the southern Middle East across southern Asia to the Orient (del Hoyo *et al* 1994). Within its wide distribution it is mostly resident. Several races have been described and most relevant to the Western Palearctic region are *caeruleus*, breeding in Africa and southwest Europe, and *vociferus* breeding from Pakistan east across Asia (del Hoyo *et al* 1994, Forsman in prep). Asian birds belonging to the form *vociferus* can be separated from nominate birds by colour of underwing secondaries (grey on those of *vociferus*, Forsman in prep, Plate 1). Until 1998, Black-shouldered Kite was a major rarity in Israel, with only five records (Shirihai 1996). Since 1998, Black-shouldered Kites have been recorded more often in Israel, and in 2010 and 2011 this trend increased with at least 30 records during this period. All individuals assigned to subspecies involved *vociferus*, indicating the birds are of Asian origin. In 2011 and 2012 five pairs attempted or succeeded in breeding in Israel (Table 1). All nest monitoring was done by observation using optical aids.

The nests were located on trees of several species, at a height of 6–10 m above the ground. At least two pairs (Hula valley and Migdal Oz) performed consecutive breeding cycles, often mating and nest building while still feeding young of the previous cycle (NI pers obs, Dudu Raved pers obs, Plate 2). All breeding pairs defended their territory with great aggression against birds of prey and crows. Periodic sightings of prey delivery at the



**Plate 1.** Adult Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus vociferus* mating, Hula valley, Israel, November 2011. Note grey on secondaries. © Rony Livne

**Table 1.** Breeding Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus* in Israel, 2011–2012.

| Location                   | Coordinates       | Start of breeding | Number breeding cycles till October 2012 | Total number fledglings | Observers                         | Remarks              |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Nizzana                    | 30.84° N 34.45° E | April 2011        | ?  | ?                       | YP <i>et al</i>                   | Breeding unconfirmed |
| Hula valley                | 33.10° N 35.61° E | September 2011    | 3  | 7                       | NI <i>et al</i>                   |                      |
| Migdal Oz, Dan region      | 32.04° N 34.94° E | April 2012        | 3  | 4                       | Rafi Paz, Dudu Raved <i>et al</i> |                      |
| Yavne'el valley, E Galilee | 32.73° N 35.50° E | July 2012         | 1  | 2                       | S Adi <i>et al</i>                |                      |
| Afula, Jizre'el valley     | 32.62° N 35.30° E | August 2012       | 1  | 2                       | E Haviv <i>et al</i>              |                      |



**Plate 2.** Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus vociferus*, recently fledged juveniles, Hula valley, Israel, November 2011. © Rony Livne

Hula site revealed that their food was based on the Social Vole *Microtus socialis guentheri* (NI pers obs, Plate 3).

This range expansion of the Black-shouldered Kite to Israel corresponds with recent expansion in Iraq. After the first breeding in 2001 (Salim 2002), it now breeds more regularly in Iraq (Ararat *et al* 2011). It also seems to be spreading in eastern Arabia (Jennings 2010), but is unrecorded in Syria (David Murdoch pers comm) and Jordan (Fares Khoury pers comm). There are two old records in Lebanon (Richard Prior pers comm).



**Plate 3.** Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus vociferus* feeding on Social Vole *Microtus socialis guentheri*, Hula valley, Israel, September 2011. © Yoav Perlman

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