

Recent breeding records and status of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* in Gilan province, northern Iran

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The Barn Owl *Tyto alba* is a resident breeder in the Middle East with a wide but somewhat fragmented distribution from northern Turkey to southern Yemen with occurrence in southwest Iran (Porter *et al* 1996, Mansoori 2008). However, Osaei *et al* (2007) presented records of 74 birds in 28 localities in 12 provinces of Iran since 1990. They suggested that the Barn Owl's range has expanded eastwards over much of Iran. There were only three records of the species in Iran in the 1970s (from two localities in Khuzestan province and one locality in Bushehr province). Also, they reported an abandoned nest with a single dead nestling at Ali-Abad village (37° 32' 36" N, 49° 14' 59" E), 2 km from Kapour-Chal, Gilan province (Osaei *et al* 2007).

Here we report Barn Owl records for seventeen localities in nine cities of Gilan province 2007–2010 (Table 1, Figure 1). These include three breeding records. On 7 December 2009, one nest with four nestlings (three 22 days and one 16 days old, all not yet able to fly) was observed under the roof of a building in Ziba-Kenar (some 42 km from Ali-Abad village and less than one km from the shore of the Caspian sea). On 16 May 2010, one nest with four nestlings (c18 days old) with one of their parents was observed in an old mosque at the centre of Lashte-Nesha city (c15 km from Ziba-Kenar and 16 km from the Caspian sea).

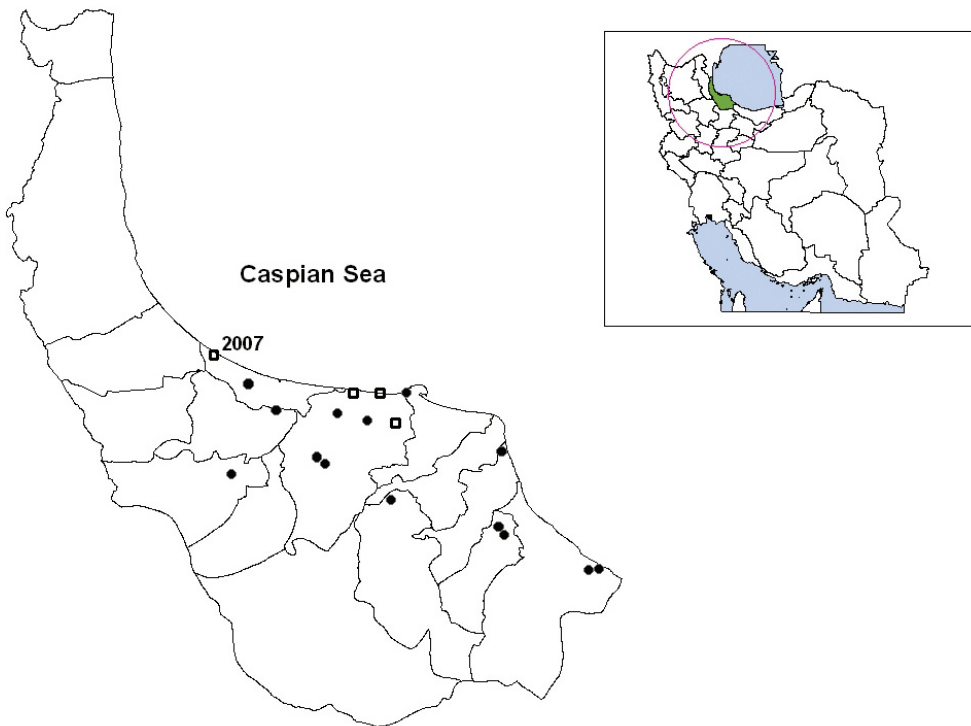


Figure 1. Distribution of all records of the Barn Owl in Gilan province, Iran, 2007–2010. Confirmed breeding records are indicated by white squares, other records by black circles. The white square with 2007 is the Barn Owl breeding record in Ali-Abad village reported by Osaei *et al* (2007).

Table 1. Records of Barn Owls in Gilan province, Iran, 2007–2010.

City	Locality	Date	Number of birds	Source
Roudsar	Chaboksar	Feb 2007	one	R Porhossien
Roudsar	around Chaboksar	Dec 2007	one	AA
Amlash	Amlash center	Dec 2008	one	AA
Amlash	around Amlash	Sep 2010	one captured and released	sh Abdi
Langroud	Chaf village	Jan 2008	one captured and released	M Borji
Siahkal	around Siahkal	Nov 2008	one	AA
Astaneh	Bujagh national park	Feb 2008	one	AA
Rasht	Rasht	Sep 2008	one captured but died	AA
Rasht	Khomam	Nov 2008	one captured and released	AH
Rasht	Khoshkebijar	May 2008	one captured and released	AH
Rasht	Ziba-Kenar	Dec 2009	four nestlings	AA
Rasht	Lasht-Nesha	May 2010	four nestlings and one parent	HA
Rasht	Amin-Abad village	May 2010	five nestlings and one parent	AA
Rasht	Rasht	Feb 2009	one	AA
Somehsara	Selkeh wildlife refuge	Feb 2008	one	AA
Fouman	around Shaft	Feb 2009	one	A Atri
Anzali	Anzali wetland	Dec 2008	one captured and released	A Ghorbanzadeh

On 24 May 2010, a nest with five nestlings (c15 days old) and one of their parents was found on the roof of an inn in Amin-Abad village at Ziba-Kenar (c100 m from the Caspian). The Barn Owl now appears to be a common bird species in Gilan province though breeding has been reported there only at localities close or fairly close to the Caspian sea near rice paddy fields.

At present the worst threat to Barn Owls in Gilan province is capture in flight nets set for waterbird hunting in paddy fields and other wetlands. Fourteen examples of such capture (6 in this study and 8 in Osaei *et al* 2007) have been reported. Additionally, local people, who have a fear of house-dwelling snakes, destroy nests due to the snake-like sounds of nestlings.

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