

# Migratory soaring bird arrivals coastal southwest Sinai, spring 2006

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While it is known that some migratory soaring birds on spring migration through mainland Egypt cross the gulf of Suez to Sinai from the Gebel Zeit range (northern end 28° N 33' 28' E, southern end 27° 55' N 33° 31' E, NW–SE distance 11.5 km) on the Red sea coast (Grieve 1996, Hilgerloh *et al* 2009), no observations of birds arriving at the southwestern shore of Sinai appear to have been published until now.

Observations were made on 26 days, 3–4 days per week, 3 March–24 April 2006. The highway from El Tor to the Ras Mohamed national park border (southernmost Sinai) was traversed by car and stops made to observe and count birds. Observations were recorded with reference to previously chosen landmarks *c*2.5 km apart, but no rigid point count protocol was followed. Observations were made 09.00–13.30 h, or until no more birds were observed. The day's wind conditions indicated where the bulk of arrivals were to be expected, but points both north and south of this area were also visited. Of the arrivals seen from the NW–SE highway, 2–4 km east of the west shore of Sinai, an estimated 75% were within the 20 km stretch centred at Ras Garra (28° 02' 11.47" N, 33° 46' 53.03" E).

Assuming that most birds are heading N to NE upon crossing the gulf of Suez, the distance over water, affected by wind direction and force (prevailing wind NW to NWW) at this crossing, may be 26.7 km (northern end Gebel Zeit to the Sinai shore, shortest W–E distance), 30 km (northern Gebel Zeit to the Ras Garra area of maximum arrivals), 26 km (southern Gebel Zeit to Ras Garra) and at the southernmost 'drifted arrival point' up to 48 km from southern Gebel Zeit and 60.5 km from northern Gebel Zeit.

## RESULTS

The number following the species name is the total count. 'All days' means all days that observations were made *ie* 3–6, 11–12, 17–21, 24–27 March and 5–9, 15–17 and 21–23 April. Number after wind direction is estimated ground wind speed (Beaufort scale).

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*. 686. Nearly all days, but with 53% 24–27 March. Almost never travelled with White Storks, but with eagles and buzzards.

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*. 23 995 in March and 165 21–23 April, including a massive arrival of 16 540 at Ras Garra *c*11.00–13.00 h on 27 March. A year later, several White Stork carcasses were found under the newly constructed high voltage electric power line from El Tor to Ras Mohamed that runs parallel to the highway at a distance of 100–200 m to the east (pers obs).

**White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. 200. All on 16 April, on or near the shore 8 km south of El Tor.

**European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*. 582. Possibly many more, considering that 1379 'buzzard spp' were recorded. Passage began third week of March and peaked second week of April. The only species that regularly 'checked' its supposed N–NE flight direction by turning 90 degrees and hovering briefly into a strong N–NW wind, then gliding off south-east towards mountains, drifted by the wind.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*. 292. Began 19 March in north with WNW wind, peak 58% 24–27 March, few thereafter. This is quite unlike Ayn Sokhna (60 km south of Suez on the gulf of

Suez west coast), where passage of Black Kites has been observed in fairly steady numbers throughout the migration season (Coles 2004).

**Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*. 7. Three on 26 March and 4 on 9 April, in SW1 to NW2 breezes, all adults.

**Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*. 4. One in WSW wind at far north 6 April, 2 in NW wind 6–7 April and 1 on 8 April in very low speed wind.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*. 1. On 9 April. Not the time, place or viewing conditions for sparrowhawks.

**Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo vulpinus*. 2112. Throughout the survey, but a decided peak of 60% 24–27 March, and 33% 5–9 April; possibly more, considering the 1379 'buzzard spp' recorded.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*. 2. Both on 24 March.

**Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*. 1. Juvenile, 9 April, north survey area, day of very calm wind SW1–NW2.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina*. 1. On 9 April, north survey area, day of very calm wind SW1–NW2.

**Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis*. 289. Almost all days, but with peak of 30% 11–12 March, nearly all juveniles.

**Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata*. 3. One 19 March, 2 on 9 April, north end of survey area, on days of light wind, or wind from quite a westerly direction.

**Common Crane** *Grus grus*. 1353. 80% 3–6 March, 19% 17–21 March. Despite strong N–NW wind, Common Cranes nearing the south Sinai mountains turned north and flapped away in a N direction.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr Gudrun Hilgerloh encouraged submission and improved the ms. István Moldovan was present the day of the pelicans and Annie Sevin for several days including the 16 000 storks day.

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