

# Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*—a new species for Egypt

KAI GAUGER & CHRISTOPH VÖLLM

From 16 August to 24 October 2006, while studying migration in the area, we stayed in the holiday resort of El Gouna (27°23'N, 33°40'E) on the Red Sea coast of Egypt, c20 km north of Hurghada (Figure 1, Gauger & Völlm 2008). El Gouna has lagoons and gardens and in contrast to the rest of the region, is rather green, well-structured and therefore attracts birds. On the evening of 2 October, we discovered the bird on the Steigenberger golf course, whose plant cover comprises not only the course greens, but also hedges, bushes, more open sandy stretches dotted with rocks and succulents and also fruit-bearing date palms *Phoenix dactylifera*. At first glance we thought it was

one of the black-and-white wheatears *Oenanthe* spp, but then realised it was a Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*. Early on 3 October, we found the bird again, and observed it clearly at distances of less than 10 m. It remained within a small area of the golf course, close to the seventh hole, where there was a bushy strip about 40 m in length. There were a few dates and succulents on the ground. Usually the bird sat on the lower branches, but it also used a rocky slope dotted with *Aloe* sp and other succulents, where it showed on rock tops (Plates 1–3). It was strongly attracted to this very small area, coming back to 'its' strip of bushes, even when we accidentally disturbed it. We tried but failed to trap the bird, but did catch six other birds, amongst which were Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* and Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. However, the Pied Bushchat eventually flew over the lagoon and landed in the garden of a villa, which is where it was last seen.



Figure 1. Map showing the location of El Gouna. © Kai Gauger



Plate 1 (left). Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*, El Gouna, Egypt, 3 Oct 2006. Note the extension of white on the belly, the worn brown remiges and the brownish tinge to the plumage, especially on the chest and belly. © Kai Gauger



Plate 2 (right). Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* on a date palm, El Gouna, Egypt, 3 Oct 2006. Note the white fringes to the primary coverts and alula and the extremely worn lesser coverts. Renewed dark, almost black, outer greater secondary coverts are conspicuous and indicate that this is a first-year bird. © Christoph Völlm

## DESCRIPTION

The bird called often, uttering a loud 'peeu' resembling the call of Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* and also made rasping sounds. This is noteworthy, because most other migrants were silent and cautious. It undertook short flights with hovering phases and rapidly raised and lowered its tail when it perched. It was not shy, but aware of us when we approached to take photos. The bird's size and shape resembled Eurasian Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*. It was dull black overall with a brownish tinge, especially on the wings, belly and front. Only the vent, undertail-coverts, rump, lower belly and inner greater and lesser secondary coverts were pure white. The uppertail-coverts showed blackish tips. The faded brown primaries, secondaries, primary coverts, alula and outer lesser wing-coverts were very conspicuous. The primary coverts even had pale fringes. However, some outer greater and lesser secondary coverts were fresh black. After studying the photos and comparing our information with the literature, we identified the bird as a male in first year plumage. Adult males lack not only the pale fringes, but also the contrast between extremely faded and fresh wing feathers and the extensive brown tinge in the body plumage.



**Plate 3.** Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* in typical alert pose, El Gouna, Egypt, 3 Oct 2006. © Kai Gauger

## DISTRIBUTION AND OCCURRENCE

The Pied Bushchat, an Asiatic species, breeds (mostly *S. c. rossorum* in the OSME region) from Kazakhstan (rare, Wassink & Oreel 2007), Turkmenistan (Bukreev 1997) and Iran (rare, Scott & Adhami 2006) eastwards to Southeast Asia and several islands of the Pacific ocean, including Indonesia, the Philippines and New Guinea. It is polytypic with 16 subspecies (Urquhart 2002). Only the westernmost subspecies, *rossorum*, is fully migratory—our record refers to this subspecies. Previously, the species has been recorded as a vagrant west to Cyprus (two sightings) and Israel (six). The present record is the first for Egypt. According to Urquhart (2002) and JP Smith and Israel Rarities & Distribution Committee ([www.israbirding.com](http://www.israbirding.com)) the records for Cyprus and Israel are:

- Cyprus: 1 male, Larnaca, 3–11 Nov 1986, 1 female, Paphos, 23 Nov 1997.
- Israel: 1 male, Eilat, Jan 1979, 1 first-winter male, Beeroyatim, 28 Oct 1994, 1 male, Eilat, 4–7 Nov 1996, 1 first-winter female, Kibbutz Lotan, 4 Nov 1997, 1 male, Kibbutz Shizzafon, 18–22 Oct 2000, 1 adult female, Eilat, 20 Nov 2001 to 29 Mar 2002.

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Kai Gauger, Gedser Ring 4 B, 17493 Greifswald, Germany. [kai\\_gauger@yahoo.de](mailto:kai_gauger@yahoo.de)