

# Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, a new invasive species breeding in Sinai, Egypt

BASEM RABIA, MINDY BAHA EL DIN<sup>+</sup>, LINA RIFAI & OMAR ATTUM

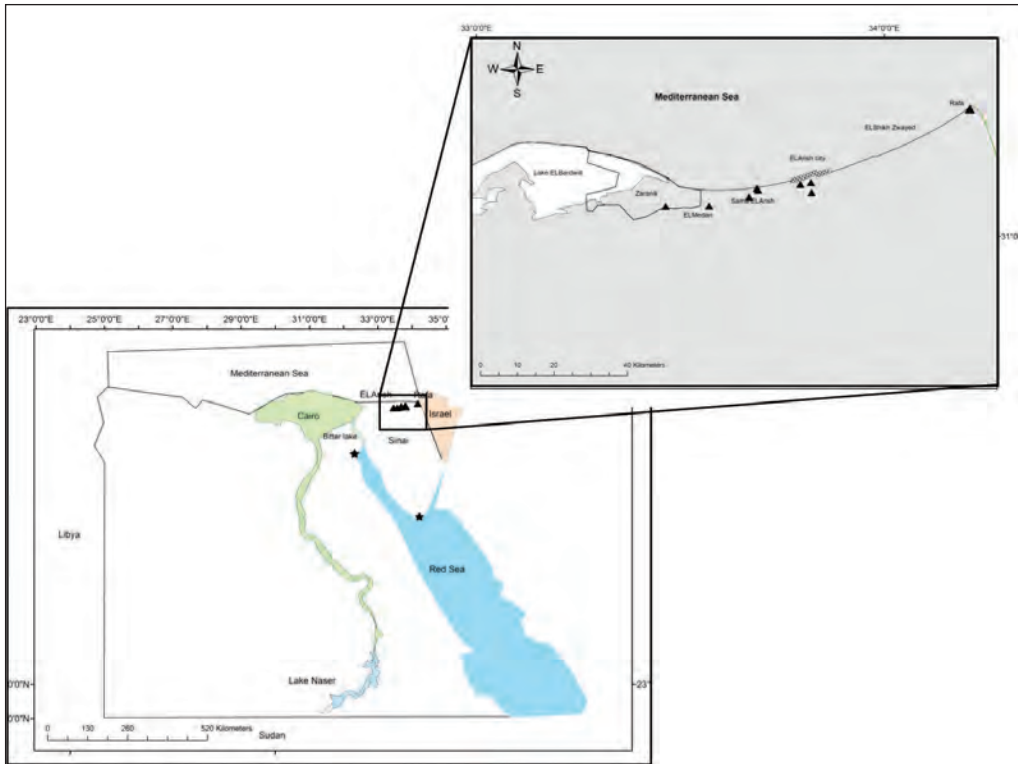
Invasive species are among the major threats to native biodiversity and ecosystems, therefore it is important to understand and document the spread of such species into new regions. Introduced bird species can compete for the same resources as native species (Koenig 2003, Wiebe 2011) and if they are more successful than the native species, they can eventually replace those completely, which can lead to devastating effects on the local fauna and flora as well as agriculture. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus, 1766) is one of the worst invasive bird species worldwide due to its ability to outcompete many native cavity-nesting species as well as being an agricultural pest (BirdLife International 2004, Garrock *et al* 2013ab, Lowe *et al* 2000, Peacock *et al* 2007, Tidemann 2001). The Common Myna's natural range extends from eastern Iran through Central (Middle) Asia, India and southeastern Asia. In the Middle East there are feral populations of Common Mynas in Israel, Turkey and the Arabian gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, due to deliberate as well as accidental introduction (Holzapfel *et al* 2006, Sapir 2003, Shirihai 1996). In countries where this species has established populations, birds increased rapidly in number and distribution into neighbouring countries (Holzapfel *et al* 2006). The closest Common Myna records to Egypt have been from Lebanon, Jordan and Israel (Bara 2002, Holzapfel *et al* 2006). The first record of a Common Myna in Egypt was a single individual recorded at Ain Sukhna, south of Suez, in April 1998 (Millington 2000). The second record was from an unpublished source (Holzapfel *et al* 2006) at Sharm El Sheikh in south Sinai somewhere between 1998–2000. Here we provide further records of this invasive species in Sinai.

Observations were made opportunistically in northern Sinai along the Mediterranean coast July 2008–May 2010 (Table 1). Common Mynas can easily be identified in Egypt, since there are no other similar-looking bird species to be confused with. Over 30 Common Mynas were observed. In the summer of 2008 we recorded the first sighting of this species in northern Sinai along the Mediterranean coast, when four were seen at the Zaranik protected area. About a year later two more were seen in Al Arish, west of the Zaranik protected area. In the summer of 2009, close to the Zaranik protected area, a pair of Common Mynas was observed nesting for the first time in Egypt. They were in a cavity in a salt factory building. Birds were later seen in different locations along the Mediterranean coast of Sinai July 2008–May 2010 (Table 1). All our records are c200 km away from the first record of mynas for Egypt (Figure 1).

Our observations confirm the presence of this species in at least five different localities (Figure 1), during different times of the year in northern Sinai. Breeding pairs have been observed in at least two different locations. In Israel, sightings increased from a single location along the Mediterranean coast in 1997 to sightings all over the country by 2003 (Holzapfel *et al*

**Table 1.** Common Myna encounters in northern Sinai (in chronological order).

Month/Year	Location	Breeding confirmed
7/2008	Zaranik protected area	no
8/2009	Al Arish city	no
8/2009	Salt factory, Zaranik	yes
12/2009	Al Arish city	no
12/2009	Al Medan	no
12/2009	Sama El Arish	yes
4/2010	Al Arish city	no
5/2010	Rafa city	no
5/2010	Zaranik protected area	yes



**Figure 1.** Distribution of Common Mynah in northern Sinai (triangles) 2008–2010. First two records from Egypt 1998–2000 are indicated as stars.

2006). Conservative estimates for Israel were 500 birds by the end of 2003, with the highest concentration of birds occurring in urban and suburban parks (Holzapfel *et al* 2006). We doubt that our sightings of birds in northern Sinai were from escapees or intentionally released individuals, since mynas are not commonly kept as pets in Egypt. It is very likely that they spread south and west from their breeding populations in Israel. Local authorities in Egypt need to be educated on the potential harm this species can cause to national biodiversity and agricultural systems.

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- Basem Rabia, *Zaranik Protected Area, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, 30 Cairo-Helwan Agricultural Road, Maadi, Cairo, Egypt.*
- Mindy Baha El Dint, *Nature Conservation Egypt, 3 Abdalla El Katib Street, Dokki, Cairo, Egypt.*
- Lina Rifai, *School of Sciences, Indiana University Kokomo, 2300 S Washington St, PO Box 9003, Kokomo, IN 46904-9003, USA. LRifai@iuk.edu*
- Omar Attum, *Biology Dept, Indiana University Southeast, 4201 Grant Line Rd, New Albany, IN 47150, USA.*