

# First confirmed breeding of the European Serin *Serinus serinus* in Lebanon. A potential threat to Lebanese breeding Syrian Serins *Serinus syriacus*?

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During a monitoring visit 27 April 2015 to the Anjar IBA (33° 43' 51" N, 35° 55' 59" E, BirdLife International 2008) in Lebanon, we heard unusual bird songs in an area in which all breeding and wintering birds are monitored on a yearly basis. We identified the singing males as European Serins *Serinus serinus*. During the last five years, the European Serin has been seen at Anjar in winter to late February only. In Lebanon European Serin is an uncommon passage migrant early March–late April, early October–late November, and common in winter December–mid March (Ramadan-Jaradi *et al* 2008). We counted 7 singing male European Serins 27 April within a rectangle of 14 ha. Males (Plate 1), females (Plate 2) and even one juvenile (Plate 3) were photographed. Reproductive activities of the European Serins continued with additional breeding evidence being gathered *eg* carrying nest materials and/or nests seen with young heard, until our last spring visit to the site 21 June 2015. On 4 May there was an observation of a youngster on a tree seeking food from his mother present on a nearby wall higher than the tree. The mother anxiously called or screamed at the juvenile or at us (because of our close distance to the youngster).



**Plate 1.** Male European Serin *Serinus serinus* on Mulberry tree Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 27 April 2015. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 2.** Female European Serin *Serinus serinus* Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 21 May 2015. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 3.** Juvenile European Serin *Serinus serinus* Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 27 April 2015. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 4.** Female European Serin *Serinus serinus* hunting spiders Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 28 April 2015. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 5.** Female Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* hunting spiders Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 1 May 2014. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 6.** Juvenile Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* on Mulberry tree Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 20 July 2013. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 7.** Male Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* on Mulberry tree Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 20 July 2013. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 8.** Aggressive encounter between Syrian Serins *Serinus syriacus* Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 22 July 2013. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi





**Plate 9.** Aggressive encounters between Syrian Serins *Serinus syriacus* Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 20 July 2013. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi



**Plate 10.** Aggressive encounters between Syrian Serins *Serinus syriacus* Anjar IBA, Lebanon, 1 May 2014. © Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi

On both 8 and 9 June 2011, we observed a female European Serin in the Beirut pine forest coming to drink at a water point but without any evidence of breeding. Macfarlane (1978) recorded a male singing 1 May 1975 at Beiteddine of Jabal Barouk. On 24 August 2010, the sighting by GRJ of a suspected European Serin at Jabal Moussa triggered a discussion on the Yahoo Group BirdtalkLebanon, which contributed to considering European Serin as a possible Lebanese breeding species. This discussion revealed the following three singing males: one Jabal Barouk 22 April 1996 close to the nest of a Syrian Serin (Thierry Bara), one Taanayel in the central Beqaa valley 2 April 2006 (Richard Prior and Colin Conroy) and one observed by Ansii Kullberg at Ksara in the west Beqaa 3 April or May, 2007 or 2008 (Richard Prior pers comm). Porter & Aspinall (2010) indicated that this species may breed

in Lebanon. European Serin breeds in Turkey, Georgia, Jordan, Israel (Shirihai *et al* 1999) and Syria (Murdoch & Betton 2008).

The appearance of European Serin in the main area for Syrian Serins *Serinus syriacus* in Lebanon, at Anjar, is worrying because Syrian Serin is a rare species endemic to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel, and considered vulnerable by IUCN (2014). The year 2015 is the first in which both species were found breeding in the same area. We saw both species eating seeds from the same types of plants, capturing small spiders and aphids (Plates 4 & 5) in the same manner, and nesting in cypress *Cupressus* and, to a much lesser extent, in pine *Pinus* trees. Many of our photos, of both species, were taken of them in the same mulberry tree (Plates 1, 6 & 7). Despite observed aggressive encounters between Syrian Serins (Plates 8–10) we didn't see individuals fighting with European Serins. Do they compete? Future research is planned. Perhaps colonization by European Serin will be temporary.

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