

First evidence of colonization by Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in Jordan, 2013–2014

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Ecologically, invasive animal species alter the abundance and diversity of native species by predation and competition and alter ecosystem functions and energy influxes jeopardizing the existence of native species (Strayer *et al* 2006, Ehrenfeld 2010, Ricciardi *et al* 2013). Invasive species are introduced either incidentally *eg* passive transfer in ballast water or intentionally to procure some supposed benefit. Incidental introduction of birds is either by pet trade escapees or passive relocation on freighters and ships. The Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* is considered by IUCN as one of the world's most invasive alien bird species (Lowe *et al* 2000). The natural distribution of the Common Myna ranges from central to southeastern Asia (Feare & Craig 1998). It has been introduced either intentionally or unintentionally to various parts of the world including the Arabian peninsula and parts of the Levant, where it has established colonies, mainly in gardens and parks in urbanized areas (Porter *et al* 1996, Holzapfel *et al* 2006). The man-made habitats colonized by Common Myna in the Middle East apparently resemble the tropical and sub-tropical habitats found in its natural range (Holzapfel *et al* 2006).

During 2013 there were three records in three different sites in Jordan (Figure 1); all were accepted by the Jordan bird records committee JBRC. Two birds 17 April 2013 in a western suburb of Amman (along the medical city road, 31° 58' N, 35° 50' E, 970 m asl), and seen at least once more at same location later in the month (once seen visiting a hole in a high, man-made wall there). First confirmed country record. Not seen at this location 2014. One bird shot at initially unknown location in Jordan valley as indicated by photo posted by a Jordanian hunter on his Facebook page (24 June 2013). This record later confirmed to be within Jordan, close to Madaba (c30 km south of Amman). Two birds recorded 12 August 2013 near Queen Alia (Amman) international airport entrance close to a parking lot in an area with landscaping (palm trees, irrigated lawns *etc*), 25 km south of Amman (31° 43' N, 35° 58' E, 715 m asl).

During 2014, there were several further sightings at two locations (records 4–6 for Jordan, accepted JBRC). Kafrein (fourth/fifth records)—two birds observed and photographed perching on electricity pole near Kafrein village, Jordan valley north of the Dead sea, during May 2014. A pair recorded 30 July on Amman–Dead sea main road just east of Kafrein (31° 50' N, 35° 41' E, 150 m asl–150 m bsl, Plate 1, description below). A third bird, apparently associated with the pair, was observed for a few seconds at distance but could not be identified with certainty. The pair was observed once more at the same site in the following week. The birds were frequently using the ground near the road and on a nearby slope for foraging and were perching on scattered *Prosopis juliflora* shrubs (an introduced invasive species), electricity poles, and small abandoned huts. A pumping



Figure 1. Map of Jordan showing the approximate distribution of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* according to the 2013–2014 records from western Amman, south of Amman and Kafrein in the Jordan valley.



Plate 1. Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis*, near Kafrein, Jordan valley, Jordan, 30 July 2014. © Fares Khoury

station building surrounded by planted trees and shrubs was also frequented by the birds. On 3 September 2014 the site was visited again and three mynas were recorded in the early morning flying towards the west. It appeared that the birds were heading to the Kafrein dam or adjacent farmland 2–3 km away, presumably for drinking and feeding. Queen Alia international airport (sixth record)—two Common Mynas were on the ground at the edge of the road near the entrance of Queen Alia airport 31 August 2014. A pair of Common Mynas was reported twice from this site by two birdwatchers, June and July 2014.

The description of the fifth record is provided here (Plate 1; all other records had either a similar description and/or were supported by photographs). The birds had body size and shape between Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and Tristram's Grackle *Onychognathus tristramii*, with a brown coloration which was generally darker on the upper side of the body than the lower. Black head, nape, throat and upper breast, and tail tipped white. Belly much paler brown turning to whitish centrally and lower, under-tail coverts white, obvious white patch visible in broad rounded wing while flying. Beak, legs and naked skin around eye yellow. Occasionally vocal, sounds not loud but variable. When approached alarm call repeatedly uttered, a distinctive loud 'craaah'.

These records of Common Myna in Jordan are not unexpected and are assumed to be of escaped (or released) birds, given this species is occasionally kept as a cage bird in Jordan. However, records of the Common Myna in the Kafrein area are perhaps more likely to be due to the expanding population west of the Jordan in the West Bank (Figure 1).

Landscaped areas in and around cities, as well as some of the disturbed and planted areas in the Jordan valley and along its lower margins where a hot subtropical climate prevails (eg Kafrein), appear to be suitable sites for the establishment of colonies of the Common Myna. Although nests or juvenile birds have not yet been observed, the apparent persistence of one or more pairs for at least 12 months at Queen Alia airport and the presence of three birds close to Kafrein throughout the summer of 2014 suggests breeding or attempted breeding, and thus a prelude to colonization. Another myna species, the Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*, has been recorded previously in the Jordan valley but it did not establish a population there despite attempted breeding near the shores of the Dead sea (Khoury *et al* 2012).

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