

First record of Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina*, first breeding record of Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* and first records of Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*, Olive Tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* and Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, for Iraq

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LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE

During a field trip 13 July 2013, 08.39 h, an eagle was observed in Penjween, Kurdistan, northern Iraq at 35° 44' 18" N, 45° 57' 32" E. The eagle was soaring and moving northeast. Photographs were taken (Plates 1–3) and later examined by Dick Forsman, Barak Granit, Richard Porter, Hadoram Shirihihi and Lars Svensson who confirmed that it was an adult Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina*, the first record for Iraq (Salim *et al* 2012). The bird had a relatively small bill and dark unbarred flight and tail feathers contrasting with pale-medium brown upperwing and underwing coverts and head/neck. It had an obvious white primary patch on its upperwing, two light 'commas' on the underwing and a white 'V' on the rump. The overall proportions and wing-formula are correct for Lesser Spotted Eagle, with smaller bill, more slender wings and slightly longer tail than Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga*.



Plate 1 (above left). Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina* 13 July 2013, Penjween, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Korsh Ararat

Plate 2 (left). Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina* 13 July 2013, Penjween, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Korsh Ararat

Plate 3 (above). Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina* 13 July 2013, Penjween, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Korsh Ararat



Plate 4 (above). Habitat where Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* was found breeding, near Khewata village (northwest of Sulaymaniyah city, Kurdistan, Iraq), 17 April 2013. © Korsh Ararat

Plate 5 (right). Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* weaving a nest near Khewata village (northwest of Sulaymaniyah city, Kurdistan, Iraq), 17 April 2013. © Korsh Ararat

Plate 6 (below). Pair of Eurasian Penduline Tits *Remiz pendulinus* nest building near Khewata village (northwest of Sulaymaniyah city, Kurdistan, Iraq), 17 April 2013. © Korsh Ararat



EURASIAN PENDULINE TIT

In the Middle East, the Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* breeds in northwest Iran, Lebanon and parts of Turkey and Syria (Porter & Aspinall 2010). It is an uncommon winter visitor for Iraq (Salim *et al* 2012). Proof of breeding for Iraq was obtained 17 April 2013. The nest site was a willow *Salix* tree at a stream bank (Plate 4) near Khewata village (northwest of Sulaymaniyah city, Kurdistan, northern Iraq), at 35° 45' 36" N, 45° 27' 47" E. It was studied for more than two hours and many photos were taken (Plates 5, 6). Both female and male Eurasian Penduline Tits were actively collecting threads from willow plants at c5 m height and they were weaved into the nest by both birds. After two weeks the nest site was visited again and the nest was complete, it was like a basket with one opening which fitted a penduline tit, and it was occupied.





EASTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER

This species was observed for the first time in Iraq 8 May 2010 during a field survey in deciduous oak forest (with a few walnut trees) on Sakran mountain (Plate 7) in Kurdistan, northern Iraq. The Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* was seen at 36° 34' 51" N, 44° 55' 35" E at c1800m asl. The bird was observed singing on a branch of an oak tree and I photographed it (Plate 8). The bird was similar in size to a Willow Warbler *P. trochilus* but had a rounded head and grey mantle, white underparts and throat and grey-brown upperparts. Its supercilium was indistinct and it had a large dark eye, grey ear-coverts and a pale and relatively strong lower mandible. The unbroken pale eye-ring, a characteristic feature, can be clearly seen in Plate 8. The greater coverts and tertials were green-brown with pale worn edges. Identification of the bird was confirmed by Richard Porter and the British Birds Rarities Committee.



Plate 7 (top). Sakran mountain 8 May 2010, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Korsh Ararat

Plate 8 (above). Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* 8 May 2010, Sakran mountain, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Korsh Ararat

In addition, a singing male was recorded on Peramagroon mountain, Kurdistan, in May 2010 and on 5 June 2015 a singing male was observed on Sakran mountain near the location of the 2010 record above. It is possible that future surveys may discover the species breeding in northern Iraq (proven in southeast Turkey close to the Iraq border, Kirwan *et al* 2008).

OLIVE TREE WARBLER

An Olive Tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* was singing in trees of the campus of Sulimaniye University (Sulaymaniyah city, Kurdistan, northern Iraq) on 10 May 2012. I was attracted to the bird by its loud song which at first reminded me of a Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*. It was quite harsh in tone, but in some ways was like a loud, harsh Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*, a species I know well in Iraqi Kurdistan. It continued



Plate 9 (left). A male Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* | March 2015, Qara Dagħ, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Korsh Ararat

Plate 10 (right). A male Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* | March 2015, Qara Dagħ, Kurdistan, Iraq. © Korsh Ararat

singing, with only occasional breaks, for at least 30 minutes. The bird was a large greyish warbler, noticeably larger than Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida* that I am familiar with as a breeding bird in the scrubby woodland of the nearby mountain slopes. Although I did not have binoculars I was able to get quite close and observed a large, orange-yellow bill and orange gape when it sang. There was a quite prominent pale wing-panel. I was able to record the song on my phone and later in the year played it to Richard Porter, who confirmed the identification. Olive Tree Warbler is to be expected on migration in Iraq as it occurs on passage in Syria and the Levant. It also breeds along the Levant coast and in western and southern Turkey, close to the Iraqi Kurdistan border (Porter & Aspinall 2010).

GOLDCREST

The Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* is known in the Middle East from the nominate subspecies in Turkey and Iran. It is a vagrant to Jordan and Syria (Porter & Aspinall 2010). On 1 March 2015 in a coniferous woodland at 35° 20' 23" N, 45° 23' 47" E in the Qara Dagħ area southeast of Sulaymaniyah city, Kurdistan, northern Iraq, a small bird was seen perched on a branch of a pine tree and photographed (Plates 9, 10). The bird had buff-white underparts, olive-green upperparts and two wing bars. It had a plain face, black irises, two black lateral crown-stripes and a yellow crown-stripe with an orange rear indicating a male.

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