

First two records of Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* and first records of Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* for over 14 and 56 years respectively, for Lebanon

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EURASIAN BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Eurasian Bullfinch is found throughout central and northern Europe from the Atlantic coast of western Europe and Morocco to the Pacific coasts of Russia and Japan. In the south of Europe it tends to be a winter visitor (Peterson *et al* 1993). It is a vagrant to Cyprus (Porter & Aspinall 2010). Kumerloeve (1972) mentioned a specimen in the museum of the American University of Beirut, a male *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* without date and labelled from Syria; knowing that many other birds from Lebanese localities were also labelled from Syria. The term Syria meant in the early 20th century the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean. For reasons that are unclear, Lebanon issued a postage stamp 3 May 1965 with a drawing of a Eurasian Bullfinch on it as a bird from Lebanon (Birdtheme 2014). On 29 November 2014 a female Eurasian Bullfinch was shot in Douar above Bekfayya (Plate 1) and a male was shot 15 January 2015 in Ehden (Plate 2). Both were adults (black bills, caps and faces). These are the first two records for Lebanon.

MARBLED DUCK *Marmaronetta angustirostris*

This species appears to have suffered a rapid population decline and widespread loss of habitat during the 20th century when wetlands were drained for agriculture. This duck formerly bred in large numbers in the Mediterranean region, but is now restricted to a few sites in southern Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, isolated pockets in Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Israel. It survives in the Mesopotamian marshlands in Iraq and in Iran (Shadegan marshes, the world's most important site), as well as isolated populations in Armenia, Azerbaijan and further to the east in western India and western China (BirdLife International 2015a). The Marbled Duck is a vagrant in Bahrain, Cyprus, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Porter & Aspinall 2010). In Lebanon, the Marbled Duck was regarded as 'accidental' by Cramp & Simmons (1977), with two records since: one Qaraoun September 1978 (Tohmé & Tohmé 1986) and one Cheikh Zennad 3 October 2000 (Ramadan-Jaradi & Ramadan-Jaradi 2002, Ramadan-Jaradi *et al* 2008). In the evening of 6 December 2014 a hunter shot one from a hide in West Beqaa province. According to the hunter, this bird was flying low and slow, a flight type that characterizes Marbled Duck. The bird had a brown body speckled with cream and a neck finely streaked white. Its blackish-brown patch around the eye extended to the nape and its wing lacked a speculum. The bill was blackish with grey pale tip and base (Plate 3). This is the third record for Lebanon.

LITTLE BUSTARD *Tetrax tetrax*

The Little Bustard has 2 distinct breeding populations: western and eastern. The western winters in the Mediterranean zone especially the Iberian peninsula. The eastern populations winter from Turkey and the Caucasus to Iran and erratically elsewhere,



Plate 1. Female Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* shot 29 November 2014, Douar, Lebanon. © Rami Hannouch



Plate 2. Male Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* shot 15 January 2015, Ehden, Lebanon. © Hassan El Khoury



Plate 3. Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* shot 6 December 2014 in West Beqaa, Lebanon. © Anon



Plate 4. A Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*, shot 300 m asl above Jiyeh's coastal electricity plant 11 December 2013, Lebanon. © Anon



Plate 5. A Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*, Tal Znoub, Lebanon, 19 November 2014. © Maher Nassif

with Azerbaijan holding the main wintering quarters (BirdLife International 2015b). In Syria, the Little Bustard has a few very old records from the north suggesting that a small population once wintered (Murdoch & Betton 2008). It was also reported from the desert of Palmyra between 1948 and 1950 (Jeffery 1978). A female was shot in central Syria between 1975 and 1982 but no records since (Murdoch & Betton 2008). In Israel the species appears to be a scarce or rare passage migrant and winter visitor, whereas it is absent in Jordan (Shirihai *et al* 1999). In Lebanon there is one previous record, southeast of Saida 17 October 1958 (Flash 1959, Ramadan-Jaradi *et al*

2008). Very recently, four *Tetrax tetrax* were shot by hunters in late 2013 and in 2014: one at 300 m asl above Jiyeh's coastal electricity plant 11 December 2013 during the 'Alexa' storm (Plate 4), one at 500 m above Saida coast late November 2014, one at Anjar 13 November 2014 and one at Tal Znoub in West Beqaa province, 19 November 2014 (Plate 5). These records suggest the species is perhaps a scarce passage migrant. These observations of the Little Bustard constitute the first records in Lebanon for over 64 years.

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