

# Recent records and indications of breeding of Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus* in Jordan

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The Black-shouldered Kite is a widespread species in Africa, southwest Arabia, and south Asia from Pakistan eastwards (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). This afrotropical/indo-malayan species has expanded its range into southwest Europe in the last decades, and over 1000 pairs are now estimated to breed in the Iberian peninsula. Colonization of southwest Europe was probably facilitated by changes of climate and land use, and the development of open cultivated areas with scattered trees (Balbontin *et al* 2008). The species is currently colonizing parts of western Asia including the Levant, evidenced by breeding records in Iraq (Ararat *et al* 2011) and most recently in Israel (Perlman & Israeli 2013). Although not migratory, the species is known to be highly dispersive or nomadic during the non-breeding season (Mendelsohn 1983). In this note we report the first records (nine) of Black-shouldered Kite in Jordan, of resident and dispersing/nomadic birds.

Table 1 summarizes the records submitted to and accepted by the Jordan Bird Records Committee. The most significant record suggesting local breeding is of an adult in association with two juveniles on 25 June 2015 in the Jordan valley just north of the Dead sea. The young birds appeared to be independent as they were not being fed by the accompanying adult. The birds often perched on high trees (eucalyptus and casuarina) in an agricultural area, and one of the trees contained a large empty nest c8 m above the ground. A local farmer mentioned that the birds were present for some time at the site before our record. Subsequently, single Black-shouldered Kites were present in the same area until January 2016, but none were seen at the site spring–summer 2016. According to Mendelsohn (1983), Black-shouldered Kites may abandon breeding sites as a response to decreasing prey (mainly small rodents) abundance. Annual fluctuations in rodent availability in the Jordan valley are very likely and need to be studied in more detail in view of annual fluctuations of climate and land use.

**Table 1:** Recent records of Black-shouldered Kite in Jordan.

Date	Location	Notes
24 Mar 2013	Aqaba, 29° 30' N, 34° 58' E	First record of apparently migrating bird (GW, G Zeyringer).
25 Jun 2015	Jordan valley, 31° 49' N, 35° 35' E (-310 m asl)	One adult and two fully-fledged juveniles (Plate 1). Adult seen again end July (FK, RM). Apparently suitable breeding habitat: fields with scattered trees.
1 Sep 2015	Aqaba, 29° 34' N, 34° 59' E	One adult (F Rahahleh)
14 Nov 2015	Madaba, 31° 41' N, 35° 48' E	One, seen only this date, hunting in fields (FK, Plate 2). Alfalfa fields with scattered trees and tree lines.
8 Jan 2015	Jordan valley, 31° 50' N, 35° 35' E 31° 52' N, 35° 36' E	Two separate birds, one 1cy and one adult, both hunting (FK, RM, A Abdelhadi). Fields with scattered trees.
2015	Jordan valley	Trapped bird offered for sale (A Al-Hmoud)
5 Feb 2016	Shaumari reserve, 31° 45' N, 36° 45' E	One adult (A Abdelhadi). Arid steppe/desert with stand of planted trees.
11 May 2016	central Jordan valley, 32° 19' N, 35° 34' E	One adult (FK). Fields with scattered trees.



**Plate 1.** Adult (flying) and juvenile Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus vociferus*, Jordan valley, Jordan, 25 June 2015. © Fares Khoury



**Plate 2.** Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Madaba, Jordan, 14 November 2015. The secondaries are somewhat overexposed photographically, apparently masking the grey under-wing secondaries as shown in Plate 1. © Fares Khoury

An adult Black-shouldered Kite offered for sale was confiscated during 2015 by the authorities, but no further information was provided except that it was originally taken in the Jordan valley (A Al-Hmoud pers comm). There are still further, recent records (from 2016–2017) of single birds in the Jordan valley, Madaba, Shaumari, Azraq and a pair in Khirbet As-Samra all of which still need to be considered by JBRC. Most records outside the Jordan valley (Table 1) are clearly of dispersing/nomadic birds outside the breeding season. The subspecies of most birds including those in the Jordan valley were identified as the Asian *E. c. vociferus* due to the grey under-wing secondaries (Plate 1, see also Plate 2). This is not unexpected as the Asian subspecies is apparently expanding westwards towards the Levant and started recently colonizing the western side of the Jordan valley (Perlman & Israeli 2013).

#### LITERATURE CITED

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