

International Lesser Kestrel Expert Workshop

Project: Greater chance for Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) in Bulgaria – Lesser Kestrel Recovery, LIFE11 NAT/BG/360

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Albania

Status of Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) in Albania

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Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) is considered as a rare nesting bird in Albania with 10-30 breeding pairs reported in 2012. Nevertheless, information on its presence during the breeding season remains very scarce. Recent, but very limited surveys during the late 2016 breeding season, have given evidences for the presence of only one small colony located in the old city of Gjirokastra, southern Albania.

Despite this, Lesser Kestrel is widely present during post-breeding and migration period, with gatherings of small and larger size being observed almost all over the country. Surveys carried out along the last two years, have enabled the identification of two roosts of smaller size with less than 400 individuals and the reconfirmation of a very large roosting site in "Jorgucat", Drino valley, Southern Albania. The latter, with more than 3500 individuals, is also one of the largest pre-migration roosting sites for this species in Europe, and designated recently as a Globally Important Bird Area. The number of birds at the "Jorgucat" roost doubled from c. 1500 individuals in mid-July to c. 3000 at the beginning of August 2016. It continued to increase along August reaching 3500-3800 individuals by the end of the month. The presence of such high number of birds during post breeding period and its contrast with limited reports for breeding birds appears very interesting and raises two main hypotheses on the origin of these birds.

First, Albania seems to have a very limited number of nesting birds, but remains a very important foraging ground during the post-breeding and migration season. This opinion is supported by the lack of evidence on large colonies and the presence of high bird numbers during pre-migration and migration season. The second hypothesis foresees the possible presence of different, so far unfound colonies, which partly compose the large pre-migration gatherings in Drino valley and other sites in Albania. Both hypotheses have their pros and cons and need further field examination during the next years. This examination seems crucial as it will estimate the number of Lesser Kestrels breeding in Albania, update the species conservation status and define the measures for a better preservation of the species in the country.

Bulgaria

Recovering the Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) as a breeder in Bulgaria

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The Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) is one of the rarest raptors in Bulgaria. Although once a common species, Lesser Kestrel has not been confirmed as a breeder in the country for the past few decades. Having implemented feasibility studies, Green Balkans launched the implementation of direct actions aimed at restoring the species as a breeder in Sakar SPA, a NATURA 2000 site in Bulgaria, through release of juveniles into the wild. With regard to this approach, based on a special methodology designed by DEMA called "Ambiente de Colonia" - a Lesser Kestrel Release and Adaptation Module has been established. Lesser Kestrel chicks translocated from Spain are released into the wild. The juveniles are bred in captivity at DEMA's breeding centre. A breeding stock at Green Balkans' Wildlife Rehabilitation and Breeding Centre (WRBC), also provided offspring for release. A total of 428 juvenile Lesser Kestrels were released through the Module as follows – 90 individuals in



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2013, 114 individuals in 2014, 82 individuals in 2015, 142 individuals in 2016. As a result of these actions, the species has been restored as a breeder in Bulgaria. In 2014, there were 8 newly formed pairs, while in 2015 the number of breeding pairs was 9, and in 2016 the number of breeding pairs was 10. The number of chicks that fledged in the colony in Levka village, Sakar SPA, was as follows – 16 individuals in 2014, 17 individuals in 2015 and 33 individuals in 2016.

Bulgaria

Satellite tracking of Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) from a recovered breeding population in Bulgaria

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1 – Green Balkans

We are presenting the data from the satellite tracking of Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) conducted in the course of the species recovery as a breeder in Bulgaria. Within a specialized project funded by the LIFE programme of the European Union, the species was recovered as a breeder in the country and in 2014 the first colony in decades was recorded in Sakar SPA (BG0002021), part of the Natura 2000 Ecological Network. According to IUCN Guidelines for the follow up monitoring of reintroduction programmes as well for monitoring of adaptation of birds from newly established colony, revealing of hunting grounds, roosting sites, dispersion areas, migration routes and wintering grounds Green Balkans used satellite transmitters for birds to be marked.

For the purpose of these studies, 4 PTTs (5g Solar PTT-100 backpack) were used in 2015. Detailed data were collected only for two of the birds tagged, providing information about the breeding period, pre-migration vagrancy, migration routes, and wintering grounds. These were two female individuals from breeding pairs, banded with orange PVC rings with black inscriptions – BSB and BDS.

As a result, roosting place for pre-migratory gathering in the home range of the Levka colony was confirmed and one place for pre-migratory gathering in North West Greece was identified. During the autumn migration, both birds are moving directly south without following seashore the same way as other species. Two birds crossed the Mediterranean entering Africa through Libya (BDS) and Egypt (BSB). BDS wintered in the border area between Nigeria and Niger, while BSB in Central Chad. In the spring of 2016 both birds are using almost the same migration route back to the home colony in Sakar. Presented results are first of its kind for Bulgaria, as well as for the Balkans.

Bulgaria

Bulgarian Lesser Kestrel Action Plan: status of species and conservation measures

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1 – Green Balkans

According to available literature, in the 19th C. the Lesser Kestrel was a common species in Bulgaria, abundant and spread all over the country, but mostly in the southern part of Bulgaria. In the mid-20th C. this was still a common species, showing a trend of decline. The map in the Red Data Book of Bulgaria (2011) presents seventy 10km UTM grids with historical data about breeding Lesser Kestrels. The short-term goal of the Action Plan is improving the conservation status and removing the species from the Critically Endangered category, determined in the Red Data Book of Bulgaria (2011). The long-term goal of the Action Plan is restoring the former distribution range of the species, where possible in today's conditions, by providing appropriate habitats and replenishing the population (reinforcement).

Threats and limiting factors, as well as conservation actions needed are presented.



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Bulgaria

Bulgarian Lesser Kestrel captive breeding stock at the Green Balkans WBRC

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1 – Green Balkans

A breeding stock has been established at Green Balkans' Wildlife Rehabilitation and Breeding Centre, consisting of 40 wild birds, which have undergone rehabilitation at rescue centres in Spain and were provided by the government of Extremadura, Spain.

This breeding stock also provided offspring to be released by Green Balkans' Lesser Kestrel Release and Adaptation Module in Levka, Sakar SPA. In 2014, 29 chicks were reared by 12 breeding pairs. In 2015, 28 chicks were reared by 13 breeding pairs. In 2016, 71 chicks were reared by 21 breeding pairs.

When needed, eggs and abandoned chicks from the colony in Levka were also hatched and reared at Green Balkans' WRBC. Due to such proactive measures the number of released chicks (n=9) makes up 56,25% of naturally fledged chicks (n=16) from Levka colony.

Croatia

Past, present and future: an overview of the Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) population in Croatia through time and space

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The Lesser Kestrel is a rediscovered breeding species in Croatia comprising a small island-breeding colony in the northern Adriatic. We discuss the history of the Lesser Kestrel in Croatia during the 20th century until its rediscovery in 2010. Moreover, we present results of the Lesser Kestrel monitoring in Croatia with insights into population abundances, breeding phenology and pre-breeding movements. In addition, we describe the population features of the island-breeding colony and present a conservation strategy in order to preserve the Lesser Kestrel population in Croatia and to potentially facilitate its range expansion.

France

Wintering areas localization and migration's phenology of French population of Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* using geolocators

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Geolocators were used to study wintering areas of the French population of Lesser Kestrel. The geolocation loggers record ambient sunlight over very long periods. From this recorded information, the areas that the bird visited can be determined with an accuracy of approximately 200 km. In 2012, 20 falcons of the Crau's population and 7 of Aude's population were equipped. The next years, 17 geolocators were recovered. The recorded information allowed to draw the winter distribution of 13 birds and study autumn and spring migration for respectively 13 and 7 birds. The wintering area extends from the west of Senegal to the west of Niger. For the autumn migration, the average date of departure is the 12th September and the average duration is 18.7 ± 5.2 days including the staging (6.7



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