

STATUS AND PROTECTION OF BIRDS OF PREY IN THE USSR

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Changes in population status

Population status of various birds of prey species in the European part of the USSR changed markedly since 70th. To compare with the data published by CRAMP and SIMMONS (1980) which were provided for the USSR territory by this author as well as with our previous papers (FLINT and GALUSHIN 1981, GALUSHIN 1981) the above mentioned changes could be summarized as follows:

1. Common species with markedly increasing populations:

Accipiter gentilis, *Circus aeruginosus*.

Goshawk number is growing everywhere but the most significant increase is noticable close to urban settlements due to abundance of available prey (feral pigeons, hooded crows, magpies). At present Goshawks nest also in parks (in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and other cities).

Marsh Harriers reappear in many places where they had been absent for decades. Their number is increasing year by year during migrations (for instance along the west coast of Caspian Sea).

2. Common species with locally increasing or stable populations:

Accipiter nisus, *Buteo buteo*, *B. lagopus*, *Pernis apivorus*, *Circus pygargus*, *Falco subbuteo*, *F. columbarius*.

Common Buzzard is the most numerous: it makes up to 50-60 percent of the total number of birds of prey. Its local populations are usually stable.

Honey Buzzard populations are also stable or fluctuate slightly from year to year. If migrative Honey Buzzards occasionally pass over big cities (Moscow for example) huge flocks of Hooded Crows beat many of them (mostly young) up to death.

Montagu's Harriers try nesting on cultivated agricultural fields (Voronezh Region, North Caucasus, Ukraine).

3. Rare species with locally stable or slightly decreasing populations: *Pandion haliaetus*, *Accipiter brevipes*, *Circus gallicus*, *Hieraaetus pennatus*, *Aquila chrysaetos*, *A. heliaca*, *A. pomarina*, *Haliaeetus albicilla*, *Neophron percnopterus*, *Gyps fulvus*, *Gypaetus barbatus*, *Falco rusticolus*, *F. peregrinus*. Osprey nesting groups of 50-100 pairs are stable under favourable environment (North Byelorussia, Rybinsk reservoir on Upper Volga, Baltic Republics, Volga delta).

Levant Sparrowhawk was found not so rare as had been thought before. Its number only within Don river basin exceeds one thousand nesting pairs (BELIK 1986).

Short-toed Eagle also turned out not so rare in some western parts of the country. For instance its population in Byelorussia consists of 200-250 breeding pairs (IVANOVSKI 1990).

Golden Eagle is more rare: in Byelorussia 30-40 pairs are recorded (IVANOVSKI 1990a).

Booted Eagle population within the European part of the USSR is estimated at the level of about 600 pairs (PERERVA 1988).

Peregrine Falcon is rare in tundra but practically disappeared from the major part of the forest zone.

4. Rare species with less-known population trends: *Milvus milvus*, *Buteo rufinus*, *Aquila clanga*, *Aegypius monachus*, *Falco cherrug*.

5. Species with markedly decreasing populations: *Milvus migrans*, *Circus cyaneus*, *C. macrourus*, *Aquila rapax*, *Falco tinnunculus*, *F. naumanni*, *F. vespertinus*.

Black Kite population decline is obvious for a major part of its range in the European part of the USSR (in Asian part of the country Kite population is more healthy). Some probable causes of such unexpected and rather unclear phenomenon are chemical pollution of rivers (and so Kite's food) as well as permanent disturbance at the very beginning of breeding season by people (intensive spring tourism and recreation along rivers and lakes).

Steppe Eagle suffers mostly from electrocution at electro-transmission line towers in Kalmykia and adjoining forestless regions at North Caucasus.

Kestrel as well as two other small and mostly insectivorous Falcons, i.e. Lesser Kestrel and Red-footed Falcon, drastically decrease their nesting populations first of all in the southern parts of ranges. The most reasonable causes of the population decline are pesticides (however contamination by them was never studied in the country) as well as disturbance and nest robbing. On the contrary a number of Kestrels in cities is slightly growing despite of press by Hooded Crows. Lesser Kestrel is close to total disappearance.

6. Species with no nesting records in the country: *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, *Falco biarmicus* (since 1949).

7. New breeding species: *Hieraaetus fasciatus*.

Bonelli's Eagle living nest was recorded in Kopet-Dag Mountains (Turkmenia) by POLOZOV in 1987; a fledgeling was seen in south Georgia (Caucasus) by BELIK.

Protection

All species of birds of prey are granted total legislative protection. However some occasional nest destruction and illegal shooting still exist. The latter is very heavy in the south-east corner of Black Sea (ABULADZE 1986). Many raptors (especially Steppe Eagles, Long-legged Buzzards, Saker Falcons) are killed on electro-transmission lines in southern regions. Recently a new threat to birds of prey is growing, i.e. smuggling and illegal sale of them as well as their eggs and young to abroad.

At the same time various forms of protection and attraction of birds of prey are widely practiced: setting up of artificial nesting platforms, feeding of wintering Eagles and nesting Vultures, keeping of particular living nests and their close environment, establishment of new reserves. Many captive breeding projects are being developed; the most successive are in Alma-Ata and Oka reserve. Publicity of birds of prey in mass media including TV is effective way to save them.

18 species of birds of prey are included into the Red Data Book of the USSR (1984). 13 of them live in the European part of the USSR: *Pandion haliaetus*, *Milvus milvus*, *Accipiter brevipes*,

Circaetus gallicus, *Aquila rapax*, *A. heliaca*, *A. chrysaetos*, *Haliaeetus albicilla*, *Gypaetus barbatus*, *Falco rusticolus*, *F. cherrug*, *F. biarmicus*, *F. peregrinus*. Some more species (*Aquila clanga*, *A. pomarina*, *Hieraaetus pennatus*, *H. fasciatus*, *Circus cyaneus*, *C. macrourus*, *Falco naumanni*) are considered as candidates to the 3rd edition of the Red Data Book.

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