

On the distribution and systematic position of the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba*, in Turkey and adjacent areas

by Max Kasperek

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1. Introduction

The Barn Owl has an almost worldwide distribution, though in some regions its occurrence is very rare. A distribution map recently published by CRAMP (1985) shows two spots indicating breeding within Turkey, but the author notes "probably breeding area mapped, although firm proof lacking." For Syria, he states "may breed, but no proof." It thus seems useful to list the Turkish records and to provide some additional data from adjacent areas, especially from Syria.

2. Records from Turkey

The first person to mention the Barn Owl from the İstanbul area was RIGLER (1852), but unfortunately he gave no details. More than a century passed without any records from this well-documented area. In 1965, KUMERLOEVE (1970) received information that an individual had been brought from Anadolu Hisar (on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus) to the zoo at Gülhane Parkı, where it had died. P. A. PAVLOVIC & H. VIERHAUS (pers. comm.) were actually the first to record the Barn Owl in the İstanbul area once again: On 23.7.76, they observed one bird at the Roman bridge of Büyük Çekmece. A year later, K. v. SCHARENBURG & W. v. D. ZANDE (pers. comm.) saw one individual hunting over the camp site at Ataköy on 30.9.77. BRAUN (1904) wrote of the Barn Owl in İstanbul that it "is more common in neighbouring areas such as Bursa", but from later papers by the same author it is clear that he never saw the species in the İstanbul area and it is uncertain what basis there is for his statement about the occurrence at Bursa. Four stuffed specimens are present in the collection of the Kuşcenneti National Park at Manyas Gölü. The wardens confirmed that all are from the surroundings of the park. Within the park, at the observation tower, M. KASPEREK & A. KILIÇ found some pellets on 2.10.86. In the west of Karacabey, at a ruin between Karacabey and Kırınlar, a single fresh pellet was collected on 7.10.86 (M. KASPEREK). At Issız Han, a historical caravanserai

on the north side of Apolyont Gölü, KASparek & KILIÇ found about 15 pellets and some moulting feathers on 2.10.86.

From European Turkey, there are two more recent records: D. MCADAMS heard and saw one Barn Owl at the border post at Ipsala on 9.9.79 and heard one there again on 24.7.80 (BIRD REPORT 1976-81).

The presence of the Barn Owl at Bergama (Pergamon) was confirmed on 30.9.86. KASparek & KILIÇ found a single pellet and a moulting feather in the ancient Asklepiion.

The situation in the İzmir region is similar to that in the İstanbul area. V. GONZENBACH (1852) noted that "*Otus flammea* [= *Tyto alba*] must be added to the list of the birds of İzmir". Unfortunately he did not give any details. SIKI (1982) collected one individual at Bağarası near Foça on 3.2.80. The stuffed bird is now in the collection of Ege Üniversitesi İzmir. The record of P. GEROUDET (in: KUMERLOEVE 1962) must be regarded as the first in the Aegean region with any details. He found some pellets and feathers at Ilyas Bey Camii at Milet in the delta of Büyük Menderes on 11.7.63. At the same mosque, N. KOCH (pers. comm.) also found feathers and pellets on 13.5.80 and M. KASparek, D. KAUS and E. & M. RADDATZ saw and collected pellets (some of them fresh) under a roof in the ruin area of Milet some hundred meters away from Ilyas Bey mosque on 29 and 30.5.86. In the mosque itself, only a single pellet and one feather could be found. M. KASparek again collected pellets, some of them fresh, at several places in the ruins of Milet on 3.7 and 10.10.86. One bird was seen on 10.10. In a cave near Karine at the Büyük Menderes Delta, L. J. DIJKSEN & F. KONING (pers. comm.) collected a feather and pellets of the Barn Owl on 24.1.86. M. KASparek found about 30 pellets (none of them fresh) in a cave at Priene on 20.10.86.

Not far away, in an old barn of the fishery co-operative on the west side of Bafa Gölü, H. JACOBY & B. PORER (pers. comm.) regularly saw one pair between 13 and 25.4.81. H. FRANCKX, D. COLIN & N. KOCH (pers. comm.) saw and heard one individual on 8.4.81 (see also COLIN 1982) and M. SIERING (pers. comm.) also saw one individual at the same place on 5 and 7.4.82. At a ruin away from any settlement on the eastern shore of Bafa Gölü, M. KASparek & M. RADDATZ saw one Barn Owl and collected pellets on 18.5 and 29.5.86. M. KASparek again collected fresh pellets there on 4.7 and 22.9.86. In the ruins of Iasos at the seaside west of Milas, G. & J. KRÜGERKE (pers. comm.) saw one individual on 12.5.86. On 9.10.86, M. KASparek collected about 30 pellets there.

An indication of the presence of the Barn Owl in the Alanya region was provided by R. SCHÜTT et al. (pers. comm.). He saw a stuffed bird in the window of a shop in the city on 6.1.83. In the zoo of Ankara, seven Barn Owls were seen in October 1986 (M. KASparek). According to information

from the directory of the zoo, they were found on the roof of a house at Serik east of Antalya as juveniles of a single brood. From there, they were brought to Ankara in August 1986. At Silifke, M. VAN BEIRS & D. COLIN (pers. comm.) saw one individual on 14.7.82. R. SCHÜTT et al. (pers. comm.) observed one bird in the Göksu Delta on 4.1.83. In the Çukurova plain, the Barn Owl occurred at the Tanrı Verdi farm in the 1940's and the 1950's according to local information given to KUMERLOEVE (1961, 1962). In the same area, in orange plantations between Adana and Tuzla, H. HOLS & U. GLIMMERVEEN (pers. comm.) watched up to three individuals between 1.6 and 4.6.81.

In the Hatay area, KUMERLOEVE (1962) saw one individual at Kamberli in the south of Antakya on 3.5.62. R. KINZELBACH, K.-O. NAGEL et al. found a roosting site in the ruins of the ancient city of Seleucia Pierra, Mağaracık (Samandağ), on 19.9.82 (cf. also HOPPE 1986).

M. ASLAN reported the occurrence of the Barn Owl at Pazarcık in the Kahramanmaraş area, according to KUMERLOEVE (1967), and two juveniles were brought to the Ankara zoo from the Gaziantep area in 1963 (KUMERLOEVE 1970). J. BERG et al. (pers. comm.) found feathers of the Barn Owl at the ruins of Harran south of Urfa on 19.3.86. G. SCHOLL & M. SIERING (pers. comm.) heard one bird at Ceylanpınar state farm close to the Syrian border on 27.4.82.

At Birecik on the Euphrates, P. A. PAVLOVIC & A. VIERHAUS (pers. comm.) heard one Barn Owl several times during the night of 8.8.76. One sick specimen was brought to M. VAN BEIRS & B. O. POULSEN (pers. comm.) by locals on 10.7.81. They gave it to the rearing station for Bald Ibises (*Geronticus eremita*) where it died the next day. At the same locality, O. F. JAKOBSEN (pers. comm.) also noted two individuals at the beginning of July 1985.

Two records are outside the boundaries defined above: ERARD & ETCHÉCOPAR (1968) recorded one individual at Sivas on 16.3.67 and L. J. DIJKSEN and F. KONING (pers. comm.) found a dead individual (wing length 304 mm) as a traffic victim near İlgin in the northwest of Konya on 18.1.86.

3. Records from areas adjacent to Turkey

Dead individuals were found by H. ROERS (in: KUMERLOEVE 1962) near Saloniki in spring 1962, by R. KINZELBACH (pers. comm.) at Sedes near Saloniki on 15.3.63, and by CH. MURPHY (pers. comm.) in the north of Saloniki, towards the Yugoslavian border, on 24.7.83. F. WEICKMANN (pers. comm.) observed two individuals at Mitriko near Lagos in August 1985. These records are a valuable addition to those given by BAUER et al. (1969) for Thrace in Greece.

For Syria, there are several new records: R. KINZELBACH (pers. comm.) saw one individual hunting 3 km NW of Hama, on the road to Maharda on 10.8.77, and heard calls in the ruins of the fortress of Halabiye several times on 15.8.78. On 17.8.78, he found feathers on the terraces at the right bank of a side branch of the Euphrates, north of Maadan. On 14.3.79, R. KINZELBACH found pellets and feathers at a nesting site at Qualat ar-Rutba on the Euphrates. Stuffed specimens (ad. and juv.) were seen in the local museum at Palmyra, labelled Tadmur/Palmyra, on 13.8.78 by R. KINZELBACH.

Two more records should be mentioned here: R. KINZELBACH heard the call of a Barn Owl at a roosting site in Karnak temple, Egypt, on 11.3.85, and E. HERRLINGER (pers. comm.) found feathers in the royal burials at Ur in Iraq on 30.3.65.

4. Discussion

From the records listed above, the Barn Owl is evidently a breeding bird in many parts of Turkey (and not a vagrant, as stated by HOLLOM et al. 1971), although breeding was only proved for Serik east of Antalya. The species occurs in the Mediterranean zone and in the desert regions of the Syrian plateau. The two Turkish records from Sivas and from Ilgin are very extraordinary, as there are no other records from Inner Anatolia, East Anatolia or the Black Sea region. The season of the records (January and March, respectively), however, make it possible that the Barn Owl occurred there as a vagrant and not as a breeding bird. The distribution area along the southern coast of Turkey forms a link between its range in Greece (extending close to Turkey, as e.g. in Rhodes, see BAUER et al. 1969) and its range in the Levant, in Syria and in Iraq.

The situation of the subspecies in Turkey is not fully understood, as little museum material is available. The individual seen at Bafa Gölü on 29.5.86 apparently belonged to the subspecies *guttata* because of its brownish underside (KASPAREK). The same was true for the bird seen at Iasos on 12.5.86 by KRÜGERKE and the individual seen at Milet on 10.10.86 by KASPAREK. The dead bird found by DIJKSEN & KONING near Ilgin belonged to *guttata*, too. The seven individuals of one brood from Serik in the Ankara zoo also have brown undersides and are therefore *guttata* (KASPAREK). The small series of four birds in the museum of Kuşcenneti National Park contains one typical *guttata*. Another individual's underside is completely silky, silver-white and is finely spotted dark brown. The facial disc is also completely white with only dark-brown spots in front of the eyes. The crown is golden with small silver-coloured feathers. This bird must therefore assigned to the nominate *alba* resp. *erlangeri*. The remaining two skins are apparently intergrades between *guttata* and *alba/erlangeri*. The undersides are not completely white, but are slightly

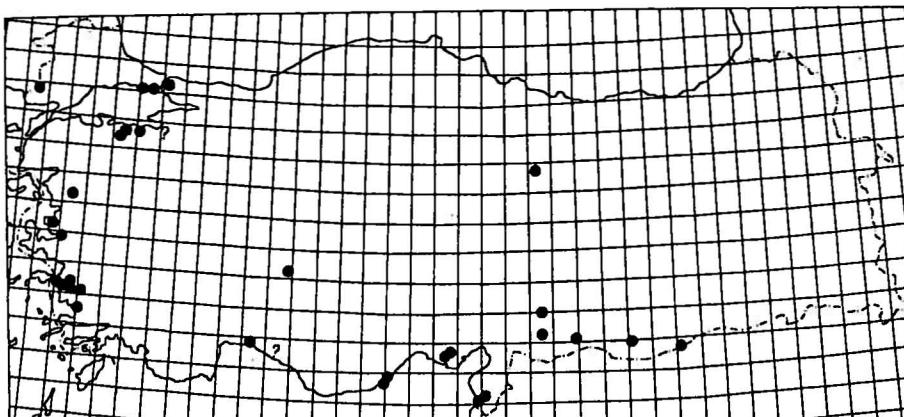


Fig. 1. Distribution map of the records of Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) in Turkey. Question marks indicate records without known details.

brownish. The crowns are brown, tending slightly towards yellow. That means brighter than in typical *guttata*, but not golden as in *alba/erlangeri* (KASparek & KILIÇ). The ground colour of the underside of the specimen from the İzmir area in the collection of Ege Üniversitesi is white, but has a slight yellow tinge (I. BARAN). It must therefore treated as an intermediate bird, tending more to *alba/erlangeri* than to *guttata*. SCHÜTT noted the extremely light colour (light head, unspotted underside) on the individual seen in the Göksu Delta on 4.1.83. This is typical for the Middle East subspecies *erlangeri* and for nominate birds.

Some of the records mentioned above are sight records. It is of course not possible to rule out that the birds were intermediate forms which also occur in Europe at the border between *alba* and *guttata* (see e.g. VOous 1950). The separation of the Middle East subspecies *erlangeri* from nominate *alba* is rather difficult. According to present literature, birds from Cyprus, for example, should be *erlangeri*, but those from Crete *alba*. One would expect that the same subspecies is living on both islands. A study is needed to find out whether *erlangeri* is really a good subspecies or a geographical cline.

Apart from North Africa and the Middle East, *erlangeri* occurs on Cyprus (VAURIE 1960, FLINT & STEWART 1983). Birds from Crete have been assigned to the nominate *alba* (STRESEMANN 1943), but recently they were referred to as *erlangeri* (CRAMP 1985). For the other parts of Greece, the situation is not understood yet. The review of BAUER et al. (1969) is not

very useful in respect to subspecies, as e.g. a record on Corfu is assigned to the nominate *alba*, although one of the authors (POWYS 1860) did not give such information ("*Strix flammnea*") and only REISER (1905) reported the more or less white underside of one individual obtained from there. A record by PEUS (1954) on Lewadia has been allocated to *alba* by BAUER et al., although the author does not give such information. On the other hand, KINZELBACH & MARTEENS (1965) included the subspecies *alba* in their list of birds of the island Karpathos, although the species was only recorded from pellets and feathers (KINZELBACH, pers. comm.). The dead bird found in the Saloniki region by KINZELBACH belonged to the subspecies *guttata* (slide available). Three individuals from the Meriç (Ewros) Delta in the collection of the Institute for Agriculture and Forestry at the University of Saloniki (leg. GÜTTNER) belong to *guttata* (KINZELBACH, pers. comm.). BAUER et al. (1969) apparently referred to these specimens. The two individuals observed at Mitriko were white-breasted (WEICKMANN), so that they belonged to the subspecies *alba/erlangeri*.

From the sparse records we can tentatively conclude that there is a hybrid zone between white-breasted and brown-breasted Barn Owls which stretches along a line from the surroundings of Izmir to Manyas Gölü and from there to Thrace. Herewith, the range of the brown-breasted subspecies *guttata* continues from Romania and Bulgaria to the Marmara and Aegean region as far south as Antalya and the Mediterranean coast. White-breasted Barn Owls occur in Syria, the eastern part of the Turkish southern coast, the western parts of the Aegean and Marmara region, and on the islands Cyprus, Crete, Corfu, and from there along a coastal strip on the Adriatic Sea. This observation is of some importance, as white-breasted Barn Owls are regarded as the older ones in terms of evolution. The center of the postglacial dispersal in Europe must have been situated somewhere in the Mediterranean region. That of dark-breasted Barn Owls is assumed to have been somewhere in South-east Europe (Bulgaria? Crimea?) (VOOUS 1950).

Observers coming across this species in South-east Europe or the Middle East should pay special attention to the subspecies. At least the diagnosis "white-breasted" or "dark-breasted" can be made easily in the field.

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New records of the Red-tailed Wheatear, *Oenanthe xanthoprymna*, in Turkey

by Max Kasparek

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1. Introduction

The distribution pattern of the Red-tailed Wheatear (*Oenanthe xanthoprymna*) in Turkey has recently been described by KUMERLOEVE,