

On the breeding bird community of Wadi Al-Kharrar, Jordan Valley

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Abstract: The breeding birds of Wadi Al-Kharrar on the eastern banks of the Jordan River north of the Dead Sea comprise 35 species, whose frequency and density has been assessed. Blackbirds and Nightingales breed, at the edge of their breeding ranges, in a dense Tamarix thicket. Their density is very low compared to European habitats. The same is true for Reed Warblers which breed in the reed beds. A small population of Clamorous Reed Warbler (11 pairs) was found breeding, now representing the only site of this species in Jordan. Occurrences of the Indian Silverbill and of the Namaqua Dove indicate range extensions.

Kurzfassung: Die Brutvögel des Wadi Al-Kharrar am Ostufer des Jordans, nördlich des Toten Meeres, umfassen 35 Arten, von denen die Häufigkeit und die Dichte ermittelt wurde. Amsel und Nachtigall brüten in einem Tamarisken-Dickicht am Rande ihres Verbreitungsgebietes. Ihre Dichte ist im Vergleich zu europäischen Vorkommen sehr gering, ebenso die des Teichrohrsängers, der in den Schilfbeständen brüdet. Neu entdeckt wurde eine Population des Stentorrohrsängers (11 Bp.), die einzig derzeit bekannte in Jordanien. Vorkommen des Indischen Silberschnäbelchens und des Kaptäubchen geben Hinweise auf Arealexpansionen.

Key words: bird communities, habitats, wetlands, range extension, Jordan Valley, Middle East.

Introduction

Due to limited access to areas along the Jordan River, the birds on the Jordanian side and adjacent Wadis, including Wadi Al-Kharrar, have not been studied thoroughly. This is the first detailed report on the breeding birds of the eastern banks of the Jordan River.

Wadi Al-Kharrar has recently been recognised as the site where Jesus Christ was baptised by John the Baptist. Due to its historical and religious importance, the site is attracting increasing numbers of tourists. A management plan to develop and use the area for tourism is being carried out by the Ministry for Tourism. The fauna and flora of this area have been studied recently by Jordanian Universities with the aim of determining the biodiversity of this relatively unknown area and to make recommendations to manage the area adequately.

Description of the study area

The study was carried out in a fenced area of approx. 400 ha known as Wadi Al-Kharrar or Baptism site. The Wadi itself is a narrow shallow valley with a perennial stream flowing from a spring for approximately two km in a westerly direction before entering the Jordan River. Lying to the north of the Dead Sea at an altitude of 350 m below sea level, the climate of this area is hot and arid, but the winter seasons are mild and warm.