

On the breeding biology of the Syrian Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos syriacus*, in the Gaza Strip

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Abstract. The breeding cycle of three pairs of the Syrian Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos syriacus*, was studied in the Gaza Strip. The distribution, nest, egg and egg-laying, incubation, development of the young and some behavioural aspects are described.

Kurzfassung. Die Brutbiologie von drei Paaren des Blutspechtes, *Dendrocopos syriacus*, wurde im Gaza-Streifen untersucht. Verbreitung, Nest, Eier, Eiablage, Brut, Jugendentwicklung und einige Verhaltensweisen werden beschrieben.

Key words. Distribution, breeding cycle, development of young, behaviour, Middle East.

Introduction

The Syrian Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos syriacus*, is an uncommon breeding resident in the Gaza Strip. It occurs in all kinds of wooded areas and also around villages, farms and occasionally in town gardens, mainly in the breeding season (SHORT 1982, PAZ 1987, SHIRIHAI 1996). The aim of this study is to provide information on the distribution, breeding biology and behaviour of the Syrian Woodpecker in the Gaza Strip and to describe the development of the young which has apparently not been studied previously in detail (cf. BARNEA 1982).

Study area and methods

Since 1996, frequent visits have been paid to various areas of the Gaza Strip in order to study the fauna, and throughout this period special attention was paid to clarifying the status and distribution of the Syrian Woodpecker. The main study was carried out at the Beit Lahia sewage lagoons and in the Al-Shargiah area.

Beit Lahia sewage lagoons area. It is situated about 7 km north of Gaza City and about 4 km east of the sea. The area is flat and sandy, and is about 750 m long and 500 m wide. The area is surrounded by wire netting. In the middle, there are 7 deep concrete basins where the waste water from the neighbouring villages is collected. Unfortunately, the basins are insufficiently large and most of the waste water flows into the surrounding sandy areas, producing big pools. In the study area there is a dense wood of casuarina and a few acacia and camphor trees. Many of the neighbouring areas are cultivated with various vegetables and fruit trees such as citrus, olive, guava, almond, sycamore, fig, grape and date palm. In addition, a few scattered trees of thorn, cypress and tamarisk are found.

Al-Shargiah area. It is situated directly to the east, northeast and southeast of Gaza City and