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RECENT STATUS OF THE EUROPEAN ROLLER IN IRAN

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Abstract. European Roller is currently listed as Near Threatened (NT). The status of this species in Iran is unknown. In this paper, more than 100 records of unpublished data were gathered for the period of 1997 to 2008. Two road counts were also conducted, one in August 2008 in Golestan and another in June 2010 from Tehran to southern provinces. Estimated numbers are given for the Iranian provinces which among them Golestan Province had the highest bird numbers in these periods (at least 50 individuals).

Key words: European Roller, *Coracias garrulus*, distribution, number.

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Современный статус сизоворонки в Иране. - А. Халеджидаде. - Беркут. 20 (1-2). 2011. - Сизоворонка в последнее время включена в список видов, состояние которых близко к угрожаемому. Статус вида в Иране оставался неизвестным. В статье анализируются более 100 встреч за период 1997–2008 гг. В 2008 и 2010 гг. проведены два маршрутных учета на автомобиле. Приводится оценка численности по провинциям.

INTRODUCTION

The European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) has two subspecies. The nominate one breeds from Morocco, through southern Europe to the northwest of Iran and southwest Siberia (Russia) and the subspecies *C. g. semenowi* breeds in Iraq and Iran (except northwest) east to Kashmir and Turkmenistan, south Kazakhstan and west Sinkiang (China) (del Hoyo et al., 2001). It has a large global population, including as estimated 100,000–220,000 individuals in Europe (50–74% of the global breeding range) (BirdLife International, 2004).

Following a moderate decline during 1970–1990 (Tucker, Heath, 1994), the species has continued to decline by up to 25% across Europe during 1990–2000 (including in key populations in Turkey and European Russia) (Birds in Europe, 2004). Overall European declines exceeded 30% in three generations (15 years). Populations in northern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, northern part of Russia) have undergone severe declines (BirdLife International, 2009).

BirdLife International has recently listed the European Roller as Near Threatened (NT). However, there is no evidence of any declines in Central Asia. If similar declines to northern populations are observed elsewhere in the species range it may warrant uplisting to Vulner-

able (BirdLife International, 2009). Because of the lack of information on the species, this paper reviews the status of the Roller in Iran by analysing its available data.

RECENT STATUS

In the period of 1997 to 2008, there were 101 records which their bird number, location and date or period was clear. Other 64 reports lack of date, distinct place or number but were added whatever possible when analysing data. Estimated numbers are given for Iranian provinces in Figure 1. The available data revealed that Golestan Province had the highest bird numbers in the 2000s (Table 1, Fig.). This is supported by two road counts, one on 4 August 2008 in Golestan (Table 2) and another from Tehran to southern provinces between 7 and 14 June 2010 (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

Recent data suggest that its distribution is larger than its previous known range in Iran, where southern parts of Bushehr, Hormozgan and Sistan & Baluchestan provinces were excluded (Mansoori, 2008). Therefore, when drawing the distribution map of the species in Iran, the whole country should be considered.

The species is recorded in a number of national monitoring schemes within its range



Table 1

Records of European Rollers observed in Iran during the period 1997 to 2008 (Iran Bird Records Data Bank)
Встречи сизоворонки в Иране в период с 1997 по 2008 гг.

Province	Location	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	No. of years	Total
Ardabil	Pars-Abad, Moghan plain					present								1	present
Ardabil	Sabalan dam								6					1	6
Bushehr	Hilleh area				dozens									1	dozens
Fars	towards Bamou N.P.				several									1	several
Gilan	Kolvir		5											1	5
Golestan	Golestan NP											2		1	2
Golestan	Minudasht to Azadshahr											25		1	25
Golestan	Kalaleh to Minudasht										63	120		2	183
Hormozgan	Minab											16		1	16
Hormozgan	Bandar Abbas			1	1				1					3	3
Hormozgan	between Suza and Hara N.P.				10									1	10
Hormozgan	Chelo											4		1	4
Hormozgan	Gaz											2		1	2
Hormozgan	Geno											1		1	1
Hormozgan	Lavan Island								2					1	2
Hormozgan	Qeshm Island							6	1			3		5	21
Hormozgan	Bushehr to Hormozgan		99											1 (several localities)	99
Kerman	Bam			1		1								2	2
Khorasam-e Razavi	Asten-e Qods farms					2								1	2
Khorasam-e Razavi	Chenaran					1								1	1
Khuzestan	North of Ahwaz								15					1	15



End of the Table 1

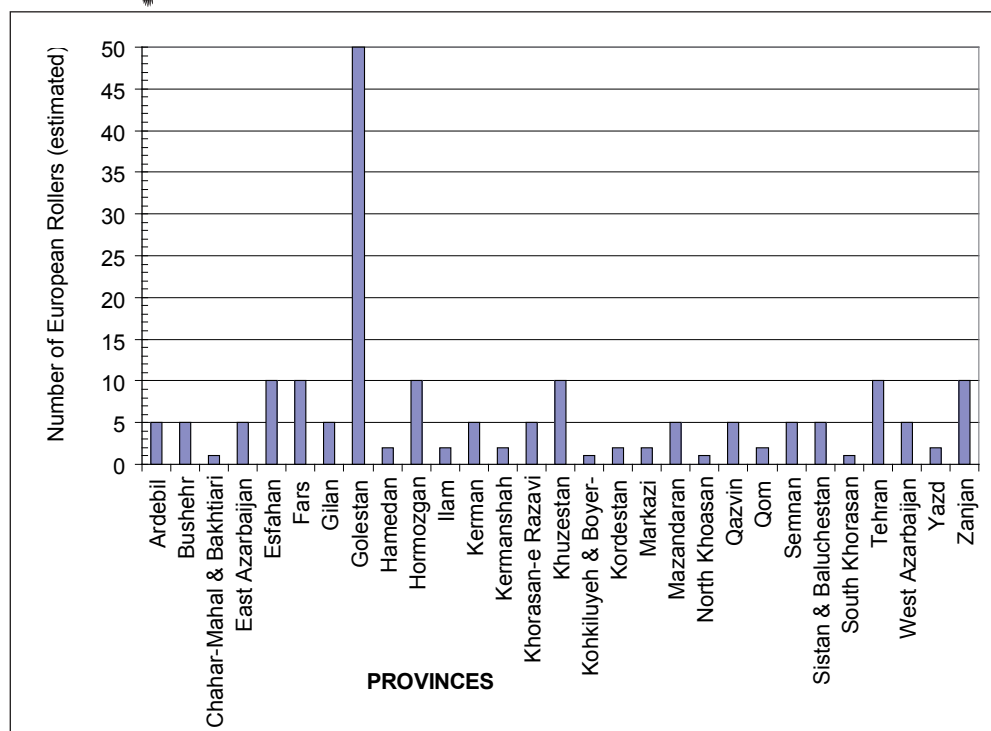
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Table 2

Number of European Rollers on a road count in Golestan Province on 4 August 2008

Число сизоворонок, учтенных во ходе автомобильного маршрута в провинции Голестан 4.08.2008 г.

Time	08 ³⁰	08 ⁴⁵	08 ⁵⁵	09 ⁰⁶	09 ⁰⁹	09 ¹¹	09 ¹⁴	09 ¹⁵ –09 ²⁰	10 ⁵⁰	14 ³⁰	14 ⁴⁰	08 ³⁰ –14 ⁴⁰
Location	Ghorogh Forest park, between Gorgan and Aliabad	W Aliabad	W Aliabad	5 km W Daland forest	W Daland forest	E Daland forest	W Azadshahr	Between Azadshahr and Gonbad	Gonbad Agriculture Station	Khojeh Najaf village near Arek river, Dashiaboroun	60 km N Gonbad, Dashiaboroun	From Ghorogh, west of Aliabad to Dashiaboroun
Number	3	1	3	1	1	4	1	+5	4	3	1	27



Estimated number of European Roller in Iranian provinces in the 2000s.

Оценка численности сизоворонки в провинциях Ирана в 2000-х гг.

and has been the focus of targeted study. BirdLife International (2009) recommended that monitoring population trends be continued and Turkish, Middle Eastern and Central Asian trends be determined. Although numbers are still rather good in Iran and maybe the decline has not been dramatic enough to warrant the IUCN status of NT, a similar monitoring scheme should be considered for Iran. Unfortunately, there were not available any data on its breeding in Iran in recent years. A greater need is necessary for breeding population estimation in Iran. It was only observed that the species mainly breeds in cavities of walls or rocks (A. Khaleghizadeh, pers. obs.).

Threats to the species include persecution on migration in some Mediterranean countries and hundreds, perhaps thousands, are shot for food in Oman every spring, and Gujarat, India (BirdLife International, 2009). Although Iranians do not hunt the species for eating

purposes, they showed previously a tendency to mount specimens at their shops as beauty (A. Khaleghizadeh, pers. obs.).

The species prefers lowland open countryside with patchy forests and woodlands and heathery clearings, orchards, mixed farmland, river valleys, and plains with scattered thorny or leafy trees (del Hoyo et al., 2001). They mostly forage in agricultural habitats, especially meadows (May and August) and in cereals in June-July (BirdLife International, 2009). Golestan province, where the most numerous birds were observed in the 2000s, has such a habitat in northern Iran. In June 2001, a great concentration of European Rollers was also observed around wheat farms in Qazvin plain and west of Golestan National Park when wheat crop was being harvested (A. Khaleghizadeh, pers. obs.). This species is sensitive to loss of hedgerows and riparian forest in Europe which provide essential habitats for



Table 3

Number of European Rollers observed on a road count between 7 and 14 June 2010

Число сизоворонок, учтенных в ходе автомобильного маршрута 7–14.06.2010 г.

Date	Province	Location	Time	Number
7 June	Qom	15 km N Qom	11 ⁵⁰	1
7 June	Qom	90 km N Kashan	12 ¹⁰	1
7 June	Esfahan	10 km N Kashan	12 ⁵⁵	2
7 June	Esfahan	5 km S Mahabad	13 ⁵⁷	1
7 June	Esfahan	4 km S Mahabad	13 ⁵⁸	3
7 June	Esfahan	2 km N Ardestan	—	1
7 June	Esfahan	S Ardestan	15 ¹⁶	1
8 June	Kerman	65 km N Shahr-e Babak	11 ⁰³	1
8 June	Kerman	13 km N Sirjan, 1 km N Nosrat-Abad	12 ⁵⁶	1
8 June	Kerman	96 km N Haji-Abad	14 ²⁵	1
8 June	Kerman	76 km N Haji-Abad	14 ⁴⁸	2
11 June	Fars	W Karian	16 ³⁰	1
11 June	Fars	Mobarak-Abad	17 ²⁸	1
12 June	Fars	Shiraz-Persepolis cross road	11 ³⁵	1
12 June	Fars	2 km W Ghavam-Abad, near Sivan cave (Barn Owl site)	17 ¹⁵	5
12 June	Fars	Rahmat-Abad	17 ³⁵	1
12 June	Fars	1 km E Ramat-Abad	17 ³⁶	2
12 June	Fars	5 km E Pasargad village	18 ⁵⁰	1
14 June	Lorestan	2 km E Borujerd	14 ⁵⁴	1
14 June	Lorestan	5 km E Borujerd	14 ⁵⁶	1
14 June	Qom	110 km S Tehran	17 ⁵³	1
14 June	Tehran	30 km S Tehran	18 ⁴⁵	1
14 June	Tehran	29 km S Tehran	18 ⁴⁵	1
14 June	Tehran	28 km S Tehran	18 ⁴⁵	1
14 June	Tehran	25 km S Tehran	18 ⁴⁹	1
14 June	Tehran	10 km S Tehran, 2 km before Imam Khomeini shrine	18 ⁵⁴	1

perching and nesting. Therefore, persuading farmers to keep hedgerows as their perches and looking for prey is essential in Iran. Use of pesticides and conversion to monoculture also reduces food availability (BirdLife International, 2009). Overall, great attention should be paid to the number, threats and conservation of this species relating to common agricultural policies and integrate appropriate measures into agri-environment schemes by linking the Department of Environment and Plant Protection Organization of Iran.

This species is not protected under Iranian Environmental Laws (Law and Parliamentary Affairs, 1997). Hence, its conservation status should be re-evaluated in national Environmental Laws and Regulations.

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