MARSH BULLETIN
EISSN 2957-9848

New details about the taxonomy of Northern Shikra *Accipiter* (*badius*) *cenchroides* (Severtsov, 1873) from Diyala –Northeastern Iraq

Kamil H. Al-Fayadhi[1] and Saifaddin W. Al-Safy[2]
[1] University of Baghdad, College of Science, Biology, Baghdad, Iraq.
[2] University of Dailya, Veterinary College, Dailya, Iraq.
Kemo.bio.only@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of study to provide a new recorded of Northern Shikra *Accipiter* (*badius*) *cenchroides* (Severtsov, 1873**)** and details of Shikra subspecies within the Iraq. Two juveniles were recorded and described carefully in the Diyala River in Buhriz district – southwest of Diyala. The first recorded of Shikra *Accipiter badius* in Iraq did not refer to a subspecies, and it seems ssp. *sphenurus* (Tihama Shikra, Arabian/African ssp.), Juveniles of various subspecies are more similar and thus difficult to separate, but this ssp. was showing longer central tail feathers which protrude from the tip of the tail as described in this article, while. This recoded shows that ssp. *Cenchroides* (Northern Shikra) that is paler overall, with fewer contrasting markings. Ultimately, our findings could potentially alter the Shikra's status as a rare winter visitor on the future checklist of birds in Iraq. Further research is needed to determine the presence of several subspecies in Iraq and the Middle East.

Keywords: Birds of Iraq, Shikra, Raptors.

Received:20/7/2023 Accepted:23/8/2024 Published:2/9/2024

Introduction

Iraq has a unique geographic location near the southeast corner of the Western Palearctic region, which also covers Europe, Asia (with the exception of the southern half), and North Africa. It is located along the routes taken by numerous migratory bird species from cold climates in the Siberian plateau and Europe to warm climates in Arabia and Africa. Additionally Iraq has a large number of breeding and resident birds, which contribute significantly to the national biodiversity(Al-Sheikhly, 2021).

Shikra *Accipiter badius* is a member of the Accipitridae family, and it includes small to medium-sized raptors spread over nearly a wide range worldwide (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2005). However, it is widely distributed throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Southern Asia (Christie and Ferguson-Lees, 2010). There are little information on the occurrence of Shikra and it subspecies from the Middle East, and it is considered a vagrant and rare winter visitor in Turkey, Saudia Arabia, Qatar, Oman and the UAE (Clark and Parslow, 1991; Smith, 2012; Campbell, 2018; Porter *et al*, 2024) and has been mentioned as breeding in Armenia, southeast Azerbaijan, northeastern Iran, and the UAE (Aspinall,

1997; Heiss and Gauger, 2009; Ananian *et al*, 2010).

In Iraq, this bird species is not mentioned within the Iraqi bird checklist. Salim *et al*. (2020) recently observed one individual of Shikra *Accipiter badius* in the extreme north of Al-Qadisiyah province, without refer to its subspecies. We conducted this research to provide a new recorded of Northern Shikra *Accipiter* (*badius*) *cenchroides* (Severtsov, 1873) and details of shikra subspecies within the Iraq.

Figure 1: shows Diyala governate with green GPS tag belong to Shikra *Accipiter badius b. cenchroides* place. © Google earth.

Materials and Methods

Study area

Buhriz district situated in South West of Diyala governate (Figure 1), in coordinate (33° 42′ 0″ N, 44° 40′ 0″ E). The landscape is generally freshwater with plant cover featured by the abundance of the common reed *Phragmites australis* and date palm *Phoenix* spp. plants (Figure 2).

Figure 2: shows the landscape where Northern Shikra *Accipiter b. cenchroides* has been recorded, Diyala - Buhriz district © Saifaddin W. Al-Safy

Birds survey and equipments

We conducted Line Transect survey to detect Bird species in the Buhriz district during six months (October 2023- March 2024) (Sutherland, 2006). The tools that employed to detect, monitor, and document bird species in the study area including 12x42 mm binocular for close–range and distance monitoring of soaring or perching birds with a digital camera (Nikon Coolpix p1000) that was used to document birds, habitats.

Bird identification guides

Many ornithological classification field guides were employed during the study to achieve precise morphological identification of bird species (Christie and Ferguson-Lees, 2010; Forsman, 2016; Porter, Campbell and Al-Sirhan, 2024).

Results and discussions

The first observation was on 7 November 2023 in coordinate 33°43'23.6543"N 44°38'40.929"E, one juvenile individual of Northern Shikra *Accipiter (badius) cenchroides* was perched on the branch of the short old bridge from iron and captured it with great chance to take another picture from its back in near place. The Juvenile was recognized based on a paler head with a paler iris (yellowish colour), a brown strip in the throat, an underbody that was buffish with a brown-rufous streak on the breast that changed to sparse spots toward the flanks, a brown scaly upperpart from the back view and four central tail-bars (Figure 3. a, b).

The second observation was on 15 January 2024 also, when we conducted a line transect count survey in the same place as the first observation in coordinate 33°43'24.7728"N 44°38'45.0571"E, taking another shot of *Accipiter b. cenchroides* on date palm plant *phoenix spp*. Also, it was a juvenile individual, and it seemed the same individual was still in the same area (Figure 4).

Figure 3: A: a front view of Northern Shikra *Accipiter b. cenchroides*. B: a back view. Diyala - Buhriz district, 7 November 2023. © Saifaddin W. Al-Safy

Figure 4: second recorded of Northern Shikra *Accipiter b. cenchroides* on date palm plant,15 January 2024, Diyala - Buhriz district, © Saifaddin W. Al-Safy

The taxonomy is complex, with multiple subspecies across its extensive range, including most of Sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia. The Western Palearctic area may have up to three subspecies: spp. *cenchroides* of Central Asia are partly migratory and may occur as a vagrant and winter visitor to the Middle East; Indian ssp. *dussumieri* is a probable vagrant to the Arabian Gulf, Arabia, and Africa ssp. *sphenurus* is a breeding resident in portions of Southern Arabia (Forsman, 2016).

The first record of Shikra *Accipiter badius* in Iraq by (Salim *et al*, 2020) did not refer to a subspecies, and it seems ssp. *sphenurus* (Tihama Shikra, Arabian/African ssp.), Juveniles of various subspecies are more similar and thus difficult to separate, but this ssp. was showing longer central tail feathers which protrude from the tip of the fanned tail as described in the article, while. In this discovery shows that ssp. *Cenchroides* (Northern Shikra) is paler overall, with fewer contrasting markings, as show above. Additionally, subspecies descriptions are mentioned in (Forsman, 2016).

Also, the geographical distribution of two ssp. Shikra may support these results, whereas Diyala near the Iran border has ssp. *Cenchroides,* as mentioned in (Clements *et al*, 2023). While ssp. *sphenurus*in SW Arabia may be an expansion to the Southern part of C Iraq, where the first record has been done, as mentioned in (Porter *et al*, 2024).

Conclusion

Ultimately, our findings could potentially alter the Shikra's status as a rare winter visitor on the future checklist of birds in Iraq. Further research is needed to determine the presence of several subspecies in Iraq and the Middle East.

References

Al-Sheikhly, O, F 2021, The avifauna of Tigris and Euphrates River Basin. *In*: Jawad, L. A. (eds) Tigris and Euphrates Rivers: Their Environment from Headwaters to Mouth. Aquatic Ecology Series, vol.11. *Springer*.

Ananian, V, Aghababyan ,K, Tumanyan ,S, Janoyan, G, and Bildstein ,K 2010. Shikra *Accipiter badius* breeding in Armenia. *Sandgrouse*, vol.32, no.2, pp.151-154.

Aspinall, S 1997, Shikra breeding in the United Arab Emirates. *Phoenix*, vol.14, pp.10-11.

Campbell, O 2018, Recent sudden expansion in the breeding range of Shikra *Accipter badius* in the UAE. *Tribulus*, vol.26, pp.65-70

Christie, D, A and Ferguson-Lees, J 2010, *Raptors of the world*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Clark, W, S, and Parslow, R 1991, A specimen record of Shikra *Accipter badius* for Saudi Arabia. *Sandgrouse*, vol.13, pp. 44–46.

Clements, J ,F, Rasmussen ,P, C, Schulenberg ,T ,S, Iliff ,M, J, Fredericks ,T, A, Gerbracht, J ,A, Lepage, D, Spencer ,A, Billerman, S ,M and Sullivan, B, L 2023, The eBird/Clements Checklist of Birds of the World: V. 2023. *Cornell University*, New York, USA.

Forsman, D 2016, *Flight identification of raptors of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Heiss, M, and Gauger, K 2009, The rediscovery of breeding Shikras *Accipiter badius* in the Western Palearctic. *Sandgrouse*, vol.31, no.2, pp.134–137.

Porter, R, Campbell, O and Al-Sirhan, A 2024, *Field guide to birds of the Middle East*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Rasmussen, P C, and Anderton J C 2005, *Birds of south Asia: the Ripley guide*. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. USA.

Salim, M, Abed, S, A and Harbi, Z, S 2020, The First Confirmed Record of Shikra *Accipiter badius*(Gmelin, 1788) in Iraq. *Al-Qadisiyah Journal of Pure Science*,vol. 25,no.2,pp. 1–4.

Salim, M, A, Al-sheikhly, O, F, Majeed, K, A andPorter, R 2012, An annotated checklist of the birds of Iraq. *Sandgrouse*, vol.34, no.1, pp. 4-43.

Sutherland, W, J, Newton, I, and Green, R 2004, *Bird ecology and conservation: a handbook of techniques*.vol. 1. OUP Oxford.

Smith, L 2012, two shikra *Accipiter badius* records from turkey. *Sandgrouse*, vol. 34, no.1 pp. 69–71.

تفاصيل جديدة للباشق الشرقي من محافظة ديالى - شمال شرق العراق

كامل حسن الفياضي[1] و سيف الدين وسام الصافي[2]
[1]جامعة بغداد ، كلية العلوم ، علوم الحياة ، بغداد ، العراق.
[2]جامعة ديالى ، كلية الطب البيطري ، ديالى ، العراق.

المستخلص

هدفت الدراسة لتأكيد تسجيل نويع الباشق الشرقي ضمن العراق مع تفاصيل عن نويعات الباشق. تمت الدراسة في ناحية بهرز جنوب غرب ديالى وتم تسجيل يوافع اثنين. قد يغير هذا التسجيل المهم حالة نوع الباشق لزائر شتوي نادر للعراق بالقوائم التصنيفية المستقبلية للطيور العراقية وهنالك حاجة لمزيد من البحوث لتحديد النويعات في العراق والشرق الاوسط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: Birds of Iraq, Shikra, Raptors.