

UNUSUAL CONCENTRATION OF THE RED-FOOTED FALCON *FALCO VESPERTINUS* IN THE SPRING MIGRATION IN NE SPAIN

Carles Barriocanal, Daniel Burgas, Carles Salvà & Joachim Camps

P.O. Box 161, 17100 La Bisbal d'Empordà, Girona. E-mail barrioca@wanadoo.es

RESUM

Concentració inusual de Falcó cama-roig en migració prenupcial al nord-est espanyol.

Una concentració inusual de Falcó cama-roig en migració prenupcial s'ha registrat a la província de Girona. Fins a 23 exemplars es van observar caçant insectes des de un cable telefònic, emprat com a atalaia, durant 16 dies, entre maig i juny de 2002. Aquesta concentració és la més gran registrada a la província de Girona.

RESUMEN

Concentración inusual de Cernícalo patirrojo durante la migración prenupcial en el noreste español.

Se documenta una concentración inusual de Cernícalo patirrojo, durante la migración prenupcial en la provincia de Girona. Hasta un total de 23 individuos fueron observados, cazando insectos desde un cable telefónico utilizado como atalaya, durante 16 días, entre mayo y junio de 2002. Esta concentración es el mayor registro para la provincia de Girona.

ABSTRACT

A concentration of Red-footed Falcon was recorded in Girona Province (NE Spain) during the spring migration period. Flocks up to 23 individuals together were observed during 16 days between May and June of 2002. The birds used telephone wires which cross-crossed an agricultural landscape as vantage points and look out posts from which they caught insects. This series of records represents the greater ever number of Red-footed falcons recorded in Girona province.

KEYWORDS: concentrations, *Falco vespertinus*, NE Spain, Red-footed Falcon, return migration.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* is considered the most gregarious species of the *Falconidae* family inhabiting the western Palearctic (Snow & Perrins, 1998). They usually breed in loose colonies where up to 200 breeding pairs have been recorded (Hagemeijer & Blair, 1997). On autumn migration groups of several hun-

dred have been recorded migrating in the same flock (Snow & Perrins, 1998). This short note relates to an unusual concentration of Red-footed Falcon sighted on an agricultural landscape in Girona Province (NE Spain).

Between 19th of May and 3rd of June of 2002 we observed concentrations of up to 23 individuals in the same area. The observations were made in an open agricultural area located on Sant Iscle d'Empordà (Serra de Daró, Girona). Individuals were concentrated on ploughed arable fields, where large telephone wires cross them and which the Red-footed Falcons used as look-out posts. On 19th of May we saw the first group with 8 individuals, the next day we registered 18 and numbers peaked with a maximum of 23 (31st of May). The last record being a first summer male was 3rd of June (Table 1). During these days the individuals observed were males and females, with the majority being first-summer males.

Date	Number
19.05.02	8
20.05.02	18
21.05.02	17
22.05.02	6
23.05.02	12
30.05.02	9
31.05.02	23
02.06.02	19
03.06.02	1

Table 1. Recording date and number of registered falcons.

The Red-footed Falcons were observed repeatedly catching flying insects as they drooped from look-out perches. Insects provide the main diet consumed by this species. It is considered that insects are an opportunistic food source depending on seasonal and local abundance (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

The data reported here is of special significance because little is known about Red-footed Falcon migration at least on western Mediterranean. This is probably due to the fact that as the Red-footed Falcon travels long distances at high altitudes it therefore makes the estimation of numbers of birds travelling together far from an easy task (Hagemeijer & Blair, 1997). Moreover, the migration strategies is not like the rest of the raptors passing along the straits, capes and bottle-necks; Red-footed Falcon use a huge threshold of landscapes on migration, from mountains to coast profile and then they are not well censused and counted by raptors watchers.

On Israel, the species is more frequent in autumn than in spring migration (Shiriah, 1996). The author point out that the species migrates by night but as its name imply often is seen arriving and passing at sunset or dusk and prefer to rest in communal roosts depending of the stage of the season.

Migrating in flocks is very common in Mediterranean region for the Red-footed Falcon, a group of c. 800 individuals was recorded on April 1992 in Siracusa where in 1 hour more than 5500 Falcons were recorded (A. Corso *in litt.*). In Girona province spring migration occurs between first of April and the end of June (Copete,

1998, 2000, Martínez, 2001, 2002, Gutiérrez, 2003) being the peak the first ten days of may (figure 1). A group size has reported here has never been previously recorded on the province. Of the last eight years the greatest group recorded was on 16th of May in 1996 where a group of 11 individuals were reported at Aiguamolls de l'Empordà (Martí, 1998).

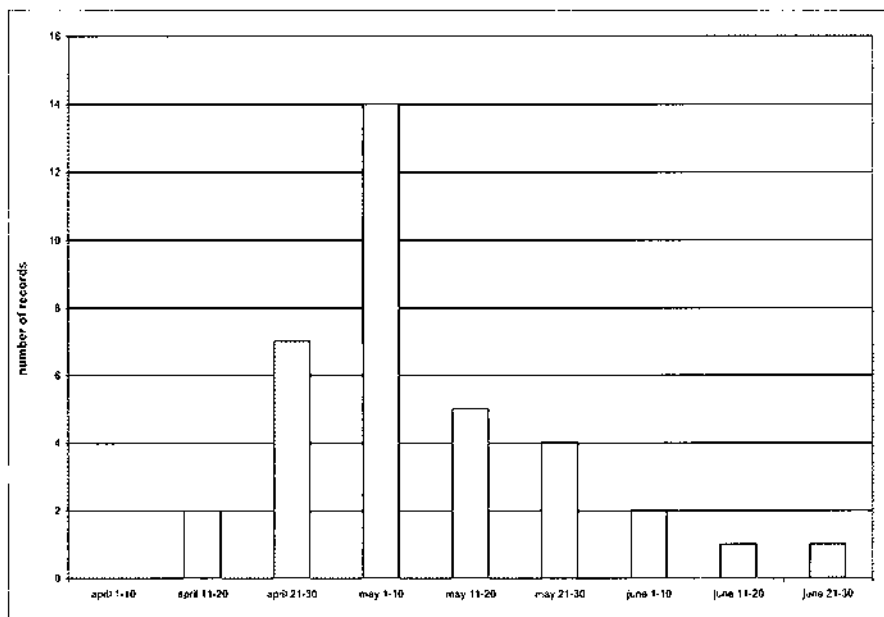


Figure 1. Phenology of the Red-footed falcon during the spring migration in Girona Province.

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