

# The Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* (L., 1766) (Columbidae) Spreads Further North: A New Record from Turkey

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**Abstract:** An observation of a single female Namaqua dove *Oena capensis* (L.) in the late spring of 2015 from South-eastern Turkey is reported. This constitutes one of the most northern locations of the species currently known, where apparently free ranging birds have been spotted. No sign of breeding could be identified. The landscape properties of the detection site are consistent with those described for former findings in the Middle East. The records in several countries in the region suggest a northern expansion of the species' geographical range of about 28.8 km/year across the Arabian Peninsula.

**Key words:** Namaqua dove, *Oena capensis*, distribution, range expansion, Middle East, Turkey

## Introduction

The Namaqua dove *Oena capensis* (L., 1766) is the smallest columbid in the Western Palaearctic (CRAMP 1998). As an essentially sub-Saharan species, it clearly continues to extend its geographical range during the last decades northwards across the Middle East (JENNINGS 2000, SALIM 2008). In the course of several recent decades, the Namaqua dove appeared in several countries on the Arabian Peninsula as well as in Iran. In Israel, the species was first collected in 1961 in the north-western Negev (MINDELL 1987), while the first breeding was reported in 1985 (SHIRIHAI & GELLERT 1989). In Jordan, it is known since 1966 (KHOURY et al. 2012) and the first evidence of breeding was reported by KHOURY (1996); the species is currently recognised as a probable uncommon resident and uncommon breeding summer visitor for the country (SHIRIHAI et al. 1999). Successive expansion between 1970 and 1992 was reported by JENNINGS (2000) in the following order

of the first appearance: Qatar, Oman (Dhofar; later also in Northern Oman and on the Masirah Island), Saudi Arabia (Al Kharg; later also in Tabuk and in the Eastern Province), Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Subsequently, the species was detected in Cyprus (LAMSDELL & LAMSDELL 2000), Syria (SERRA et al. 2005), Iraq (SALIM 2008), Lebanon (HARALDSSON 2008) and Iran (OSAEI & JAMADI 2008).

The species is currently known to be breeding in seven countries. Besides Israel and Jordan, breeding was recorded in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (JENNINGS 2000). Recently, HARRISON & LAMSDELL (2013) reported about 50 breeding pairs in Iraq.

Turkish records, which previously have denoted single birds, begin with a photo of a female taken by VEYRUNES (2005) on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2005 in Birecik. Later, several photos were shared in a bird photographers forum ([www.trakus.org](http://www.trakus.org)): 23<sup>rd</sup> May

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2008 in Sinop, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2012 in Kozanlı (Konya), 24<sup>th</sup> June – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012 in Şanlıurfa, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012 in Ankara and, as the most recent, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2015 in Göksu Delta (Mersin). Additionally, a record on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009 originates from Birecik ([www.kusbank.org](http://www.kusbank.org)). However, no information is available either on observation site properties or on whether individual birds have originated from captivity or they have been free ranging individuals. Therefore, we could speculate that at least the relatively early record in Sinop (the most northern province of Turkey on the Black Sea coast) might be associated to a cage escapee, while Birecik (Şanlıurfa) and Mersin birds seem freely dispersed, as the location of these provinces and their appropriate climatic or topographical features support this assumption.

Here, we report a new record of Namaqua dove in Turkey, giving information on the habitat properties of the detection site. We also discuss the current state of the noticeable recent expansion of the geographical range of this species in the Middle East.

## Materials and Methods

In the frame of an ornithological project aiming the determination of habitat preferences of another avian species (European roller *Coracias garrulus*), we methodically scanned almost the entire area of Diyarbakır Province (South-eastern Turkey). Excursions were performed between April and July 2015, about twice a week with rather equal intervals of three or four days. Searching for birds was achieved by car driven at a relatively constant speed of  $45 \pm 15$  km/h. Observations were mainly done using field glasses (8×40), telescopes (20-60×80) and cameras with 300-mm lens. Coordinates were taken with a hand GPS receiver. MS Excel® was used for data evaluation and charting, while ArcMap® (ver. 10.0) was used for the mapping.

## Results

We encountered a Namaqua dove (*Oena capensis*) by chance during an ornithological trip on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015, near Çevriksu Village in the Silvan Area, Diyarbakır Province, South-eastern Turkey. It was about 10:30 a.m. when we detected the bird resting on an unpaved land road near Batman Stream, a tributary of the Tigris River. We undoubtedly identified the bird as a female Namaqua dove in adult plumage as described by previous authors (SHIRIHAI & GELLERT 1989, CRAMP 1998) based on field observation and subsequently confirmed by the photograph that we were able to take (Fig. 1). The bird flew low



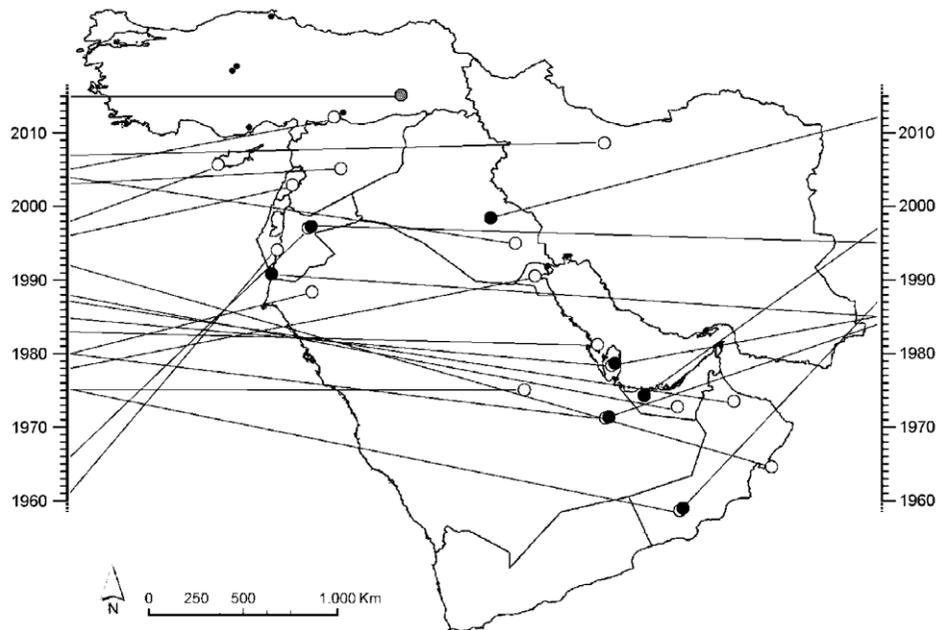
**Fig. 1.** Female Namaqua dove *Oena capensis*, Çevriksu village in Silvan Area, Diyarbakır Province, Turkey, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015 (Photo by Ş. Turğa).

along a narrow road and landed on it at about 150 m. After we took a photo, it took off, flew back along the road in the reverse direction, and landed around the place where it was seen initially. The bird flew away after several minutes towards the river flowing behind a plot of agricultural field, and did not appear again during the next 45 minutes. The immediate area included mostly irrigated maize fields; rows of trees and bushes were present at the field edges. The stream bank was highly degraded due to sand mining. The riparian vegetation consisted mainly of tamarisks. Each of the two nearest settlements was about 1 km away from the first sighting point.

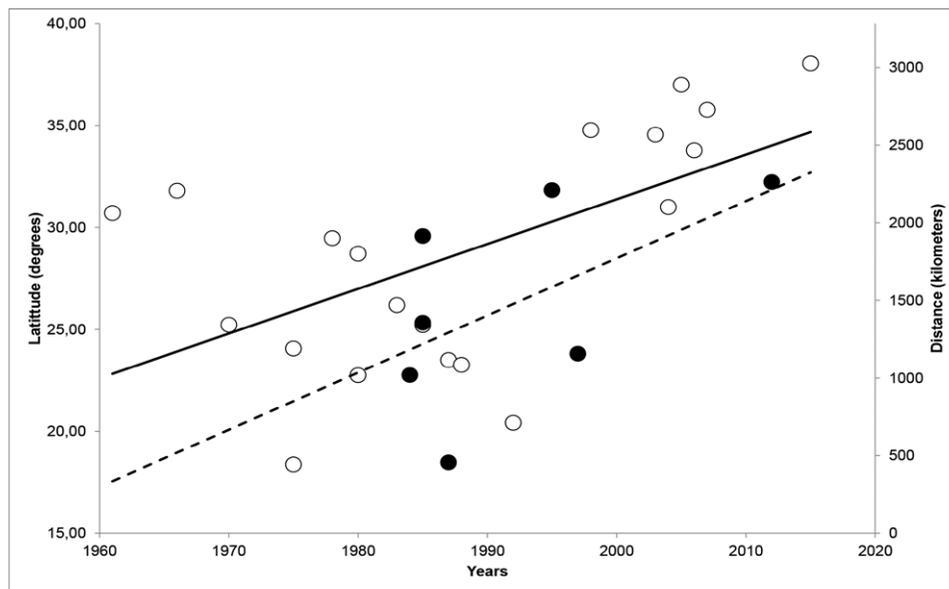
Two additional trips to the area (27<sup>th</sup> May and on 23<sup>rd</sup> June) yielded no further detections, despite that we always spent more than 1 h at the spot and its neighbouring area. We checked all the places where it could be possible to find any individual as well as any cue that would indicate a possible breeding attempt. Our observation session on 27<sup>th</sup> May was performed between 07:00 a.m. and 08:00 a.m., so we rather expected to detect male birds, if there would be any pair breeding, as it is known that males of this species principally incubate between late morning and late afternoon and females – during the rest of the day (HOFFMANN 1969). Local field workers were shown plates from field guides depicting the Namaqua dove but none of them had spotted the bird.

## Discussion

The Namaqua dove has been recorded from several countries in the Middle East during the past five to six decades (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Current distribution of the Namaqua dove (*Oena capensis*) in the Middle East based on national and regional first records. Localities and years of first detection of the species in relevant countries and regions are shown in open circles and on the left time scale, while first breeding records are shown in closed circles and on the right scale. The newest finding presented here is marked by a grey circle on the most northern spot in the distribution range. Turkish records based on photos only are indicated by smaller dots. Note that records from the south-western Arabian Peninsula (Yemen area), assumed source of the birds spreading out, are not depicted here. Data sources in the text.



**Fig. 3.** Recent northwards expansion of the Namaqua dove (*Oena capensis*) in the Middle East based on the national and regional first records. First detections and first breeding records are represented as open and closed circles and with solid and dashed trend lines, respectively. The same data as in Fig. 2 were used.

Despite the disturbing effect of introduced birds and the inhomogeneity of detectability in various countries, the analysis of the first records shows a linear propensity of dispersion towards more northern latitudes, at least during the recent 55 years (Fig. 3). The slope of the trend line between the years of first

records in particular localities and the corresponding latitudes suggests a northwards shift of about 28.8 km/year ( $R^2 = 0.33$ ). Similarly, the trend line for the first breeding records shows that new breeding attempts have been reported every year about 36.8 km further north ( $R^2 = 0.31$ ).

Some other dove species such as the collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (see NOWAK 1965) and the laughing dove *S. senegalensis* (see KASPAREK 1991) have spread out earlier northwards in a similar manner. Factors causing the expansion are not clear. Several causes might be responsible for the phenomenon, including an innate drive to wander, climatic conditions and (or) overpopulation (HOFSTETTER 1960, NOWAK 1965). Likewise, agricultural intensification, habitat alterations and climate change have been proposed as possible reasons for the spread of the Namaqua dove (JENNINGS 2000, HATZOFE & YOM-TOV 2002, SALIM 2008, RAMADAN-JARADI 2011).

The general features of the landscape at the detection site, which include irrigated agriculture fields with scattered bush as well as open sandy areas, fit to that of the relating areas described in previous works (e.g., JENNINGS 2000, SALIM 2008). It might be remarkable to note that tamarisks could be considered typical plants, which are also known to be used by the species for nesting material (MINDELL 1987,

SHIRIHAI & GELLERT 1989, KHOURY 1996).

In conclusion, the recent records of the Namaqua dove in northern latitudes of its current range, including our sighting presented here, along with several first occurrence or breeding records in various regions of the Arabian Peninsula, suggest a northern expansion of the species. Further studies in the immediate future are needed in order to make conclusions on the dispersion pattern and possible factors affecting on it.

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