



West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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ON THE BARBARY FALCON *FALCO PELEGRINOIDES* IN NORTH EASTERN AFRICA - Although Meinertzhagen (1930) stated that the Barbary Falcon breeds in Egypt and winters in the Sudan, it has in fact been recorded in the neighbourhood of Khartoum by falconers, J. G. Mavrogordato and D. E. Marrash, in every month of the year except March and April. In Khartoum it was regularly seen on certain high vantage points perching through the heat of the day. During March and April, however, in its absence these perches were occupied by blackheaded falcons of similar size, probably African Peregrines *F. p. perconfusus*, arriving presumably from further south. D. E. Marrash (*in litt.*) recorded six immature Barbary Falcons, four of them accompanying adults, between 12 May and 26 August in the years 1960-63 (and a seventh on 26 February). W. Ruttledge (*in litt.*) also recorded two immatures near Wad Medani on 1 and 7 June. The inference is inescapable that the Khartoum birds left to breed elsewhere in March/April, returning towards the middle of May onwards. Where, then, do they go to breed? D. E. Marrash believes that they breed in the Sudan; but there is no record to date.

Is there time for them to migrate to Egypt to breed there and be back at Khartoum by mid-May - a period of *c.* 75 days? Meinertzhagen (1930) stated that they lay in March. Neither Cramp *et al.* (1980) nor Brown *et al.* (1982) give data on incubation and fledging to maturity. But, assuming that the Barbary Falcon takes a time between the periods of the slightly bigger Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae* (63-68 days) and the slightly smaller Hobby *F. subbuteo* (56-65 days), then 60±3 days is probable for it. This allows only about 15 days for the two flights. Moreover the flight back to Khartoum would take place at a time when the stream of small migrants down the Nile valley is much attenuated; however, the passage of Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula*, together with Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax*, Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and Wood Sandpipers *T. glareola*, continues in fair numbers up to mid-May (unpub. observ.).

Meinertzhagen (1930) gave the prey of the Barbary Falcon in Egypt as 'wagtails and pipits *Motacillidae*, Hoopoes *Upupa epops*, doves *Streptopelia* spp., Ringed Plover and, occasionally, Rock Dove *Columba livia*.' Thus the smaller migrants form the bulk of its prey; by May many of these have left Egypt for higher latitudes. In the Sudan W. Ruttledge (*in litt.*) recorded Ruff, doves, bats (invariably taken from behind with an upward sweep and eaten on the wing), a Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and a White-tailed Lapwing *Chettusia leucura*; but he agreed with J. G. Mavrogordato and D. E. Marrash that its favourite prey was the Golden Sparrow *Auripasser luteus*. These sparrows begin to arrive in Khartoum in early February and build up to an abundant peak in June, leaving in October, by which time swarms of Greater Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* and many wheatears *Oenanthe* spp. arrive to winter.

Two of its congeners, Eleonora's Falcon and Sooty Falcon *F. concolor*, have adapted their breeding seasons so that fledging coincides with the maximum passage of migrants. Can it be that the Barbary Falcons of Khartoum have adapted their breeding to coincide with the maximum passage of small migrants through Egypt in March/April and to the maximum density of Golden Sparrows around Khartoum in the months May to August? True, the bulk of its prey species are on passage through Khartoum in March/April; so why fly to Egypt? But most of the favoured small species tail off by the middle of April, just when fledgling falcons would need most food. Most of the Hoopoes, Greater Short-toed Larks and Wheatears have left Khartoum by the end of March and Pipits before the middle of April; wagtails and bee-eaters, however, tail off only in the first week of May. In Egypt the bulk would pass later and be more tired; therefore easier to catch.