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Eurasian Hobby: a hunter of dusk and dawn?

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Abstract

The European literature considers the Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* as active during the day, while in the southern African literature the species is - often exclusively - called a hunter of dusk and dawn. This note tracks down the three original sources on which this misunderstanding is based and reviews evidence for the mainly diurnal activity of this species based on European standard literature.

Keywords: Eurasian Hobby; *Falco subbuteo*; diurnal activity; hunting; bats; birds.

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A Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* in Namibia. This second-year bird was caught for ringing at 08h30, two hours after sunrise while hunting dragonflies along the Swakop River in Namibia.

Introduction

In the standard southern African literature, the Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* has been described as "a hunter of dusk and dawn", hunting "mainly" or "usually only" at the beginning and end of the day (Kemp and Kemp 1989; Mendelsohn 1997; Jenkins 2005; Oberprieler and Cillie 2009).

This suggestion of mainly crepuscular activity in southern Africa seems to be largely based on the observations of Fenton et al. (1994) and Pepler (1991, 1993). The former observer reported on interactions between bats around their roosts and raptors over 13 days at nightfall and dawn. This study delivered only restricted observations of about 30 minutes of hunting in the day of a hobby and thus does not seem to justify a generalization. Pepler (1991, 1993) describes that he observed Eurasian Hobbies in town only in the mornings and evenings, as they moved to the mountains and out of sight during the day for hunting. He would follow them sometimes and, on several occasions, was able to distinguish different ways of hunting and identify prey items

during the day. In conclusion, it is unclear why these studies were used as proof that hobbies are hunters mainly at dusk and dawn.

The comprehensive standard European literature considers Eurasian Hobbies to be "diurnal birds of prey" (Cramp and Simmons 1980, p. 317) or "tagaktiv" ("active during the day", Glutz von Blotzheim 1971, p. 816). My own observations of the species (Franke-Bryson 2016) and those of most of my European birding colleagues occurred during the day. The most detailed monograph on the European Hobby (Fiuczynski and Sömmmer 2011) describes extensively daylight activities by this raptor. Several other sources provide descriptions of hobbies hunting during the day but also mention that hunting can extend into the late hours of the day (Forsman 1999, p. 506; Steyn 1982, pp. 216-217; Orta in del Hoyo et al. 1994, p. 286; Bijlsma 1980).

As opportunistic hunters, Eurasian Hobbies are best described as diurnal raptors with hunting activity from first to last light.

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