

TURNA

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Türkiye Ornitoloji Konseyi

Nikon

There's this Anatolia here, this Anatolia,
This generous mother the likes of whom no one has ever seen
With teats all over her, with lips and roses all over her,
This rose that blooms again and again, that never takes a damn thing
But keeps giving and giving...

Bedri Rahmi Eyübođlu

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Common Cranes *Grus grus* at the Sultansazlığı



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Back from the brink?

KUŞKOR and bird conservation in North Cyprus

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In 1989 Swiss ornithologist Harry Sigg formed a Bird Protection group in North Cyprus following his witnessing of severe hunting pressure there. Lining and netting were locally prevalent, casual shooting and formalised hunting was widespread, the enforcement of remnant British hunting laws was perfunctory at best. A year later Kuzey Kıbrıs Kuşları ve Doğayı Koruma Derneği (North Cyprus Society for the Protection of Birds), KUŞKOR, was inaugurated. It was bird conservation back from the brink.

Any account of bird conservation in North Cyprus (now the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, KKTC) which wishes to explain the relatively late appearance of an indigenous bird conservation organisation requires as explanation of the political context. Following the Greek coups and the Turkish military intervention of 1974, northern part of Cyprus found itself diplomatically isolated and the fledgling state for Turkish Cypriots struggling to establish both a domestic and international identity for itself. With questions of security, recognition and land exchanges to the fore, wildlife conservation was simply not a priority.

Since 1974 relative stability has allowed conservation question to be asked. In 1990 the International Council for Bird Preservation funded Harry Sigg to do a year's research into the current state of bird conservation, and this highlighted the extensive killing of birds: an estimate based on hunters' bags was one and a quarter million birds each year, mostly passage migrants such as Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* and Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*. Since then KUŞKOR has concentrated its efforts on two main areas of conservation work: education and legislation. The Society has organised educational visits to schools, had negotiations with hunters, government representatives and the police; and provides a selection of educational materials for young members. Full-time director Alev Ören appears regularly on radio and in the newspapers and, she believes, has significantly improved the situation for birds.

Without doubt, KUŞKOR has successfully raised the profile of bird conservation in North Cyprus, but although internationally recognised (at least informally) by non-government conservation organisations in Europe, the ornithology itself still has a low profile as a consequence of a lack of expertise from within North Cyprus. The strength of KUŞKOR's existence is its Turkish-Cypriot membership and leadership, but when it comes to even straightforward specific identification and surveying the Society depends on foreign expertise, most of which is only available on a temporary basis. Systematic population monitoring is currently impossible. However, local expertise is developing and KUŞKOR welcomes ornithological records, both detailed and anecdotal.

Early in 1997, in an attempt to raise the ornithological profile, I proposed a migrant ringing project to KUŞKOR, which the Society enthusiastically embraced. The project had the following aims.

Primary aims:

- to increase the number of recoveries of ringed Western Palearctic migrant passerines,
- to collect biometrical and sub-specific data on these birds,
- to undertake analysis the above.

Complimentary aims:

- to carry out surveys of those species present, together with their associated habitats in order to ensure the conservation of such habitats and their birds in the face of hunting pressure,
- to assist KUŞKOR in drawing attention to the International Importance of Northern Cyprus,
- to collect data, by ringing, on migrant breeding species in Northern Cyprus.

However, the project became the victim of the international situation when the EURING committee prevaricated over giving permission for the British Trust for Ornithology to provide rings for the project. Nevertheless informal news from EURING suggests that the situation may soon be resolved and the project might be able to start in 1998. Either way, KUŞKOR deserves our support and encouragement in all its activities.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to KUŞKOR Director Alev Ören, President Martin Marancos and Harry Sigg for their constructive comments on this note. Errors are of course my own.