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New roosting site of Red Kite *Milvus milvus* in the province of Ifrane (Morocco)

Mohamed RADI[(1)], Juan José IGLESIAS[(2)], Rachid EL KHALIMCHI[(3)], Justo MARTÍN[(4)], Karim ROUSSELON[(5)], Franziska LORCHER[(6)], Mehdi BELAMINE[(5)], Carlos TORRALVO[(7)], Beatriz FAJARDO[(8)], Iñigo FAJARDO[(9)] & Jose Rafael GARRIDO[(10)]

[(1)] GREPOM/Birdlife (Groupe de Recherche pour la Protection des Oiseaux au Maroc), Unité régionale Marrakech-Safi (Maroc)
radibam@hotmail.com

[(2)] GREFA. c/Monte del Pilar s/n Majadahonda – Madrid 28220 (Espagne)
jjiglesias@grefa.org

[(3)] GREPOM/Birdlife (Groupe de Recherche pour la Protection des Oiseaux au Maroc), Unité régionale de Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceima (Maroc)
rachid.cocn@gmail.com

[(4)] Environmental Consultant
justomartinmartin@gmail.com

[(5)] Association Marocaine pour la Fauconnerie et la Conservation des Rapaces, AMFCR – Témara (Maroc)
amfcr@yahoo.com

[(6)] Vulture Conservation Foundation, Wuhrstrasse 12 – CH 8003 Zurich (Suisse)
tschessbarbet@gmail.com

[(7)] Fundación Migres. Centro Internacional de Migración de Aves (CIMA). Ctra. N340 Km 85. CP 11390 – Tarifa (Espagne)
ctorralvo@fundacionmigres.org

[(8)] PhD in Archaeology. Université de Montpellier 3 – Montpellier (France)
bea.fajardo@gmail.com

[(9)] Dirección General de Medio Natural, Biodiversidad y Espacios Protegidos. Consjería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca y Desarrollo Sostenible. Junta de Andalucia – Séville (Espagne)
inigo.fajardo@juntadeandalucia.es

[(10)] Agencia de Medio Ambiente y Agua, Junta de Andalucía, c/ Johan Gutenberg 1– 41092 Seville (Espagne)
jrafael.garrido@juntadeandalucia.es

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The Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) is endemic to the Western Palearctic, with more than 95% of the population in Europe (Mougeot *et al.* 2011). It was considered a rare resident in northern Morocco; the last breeding record dates from 2004 when a pair was found nesting in a Cedar tree (*Cedrus atlantica*) at Aguelmame Azigza (Middle Atlas), rearing two chicks (I. Cherkaoui, www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=22434). Previously the species bred in the Rif, the Middle Atlas, perhaps in the Plains and Hills of Eastern Morocco, the High Atlas and the Mamora forest (Thévenot *et al.* 2003), with only 20 pairs in 1987 (Bergier 1987).

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However, according to Mougeot *et al.* (2011), North African countries can be considered at the current southern limit of the Red Kites´ distribution, which seems to be retreating northward due to climate change (Huntley *et al.* 2007) with local extinction in southern Spain (Molina 2015) and declines in Iberia and France for resident breeding birds, as well as for migrants that winter in Spain (BirdLife International 2018).

The North African population would have survived from immigrants of the bigger Spanish population; when this Spanish population declined during the 20th century, the Moroccan population was condemned to decline too. Where previously the majority of the global population wintered in Spain and North Africa, increasingly birds are now remaining on their northern European breeding grounds. So, wintering Red Kites are also declining in North Africa, although they are still observed in Morocco including the Atlantic Sahara (Bergier *et al.* 2017).

In this context, on November 8th, 2019 an international team of ornithologists contributing to the Moroccan Atlas Programme, an initiative under the auspices of the Department of Water and Forests of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural Development and Water and Forests of the Kingdom of Morocco with the support of IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, found a roosting site of Red Kites and Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) in the province of Ifrane (33°27.382'N 5°20.572'W, Middle Atlas). 10 young Black Kites and five Red Kites (three young birds, one adult and one undated bird) were counted roosting in trees (*Eucalyptus sp*.) close to Azrou landfill site. These birds were wintering in the area, feeding on the rubbish dump. This roosting site lies in the former breeding area of the species according to Thévenot *et al.* (2003).

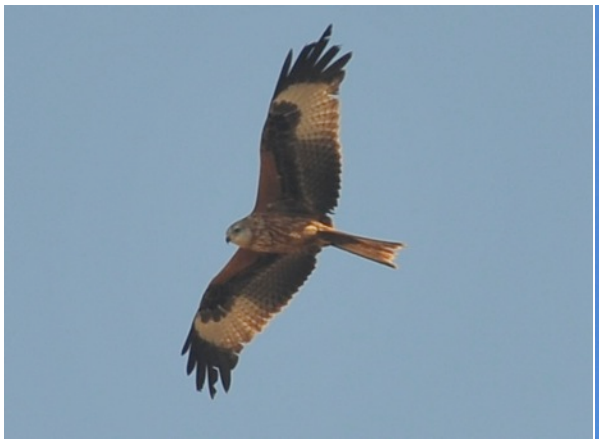


Photo 1. Red Kite *Milvus milvus* near the rubbish dump of Azrou (Photo: M. Radi)

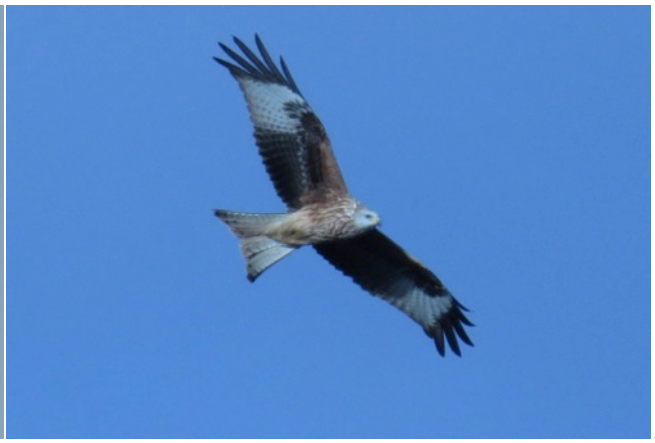
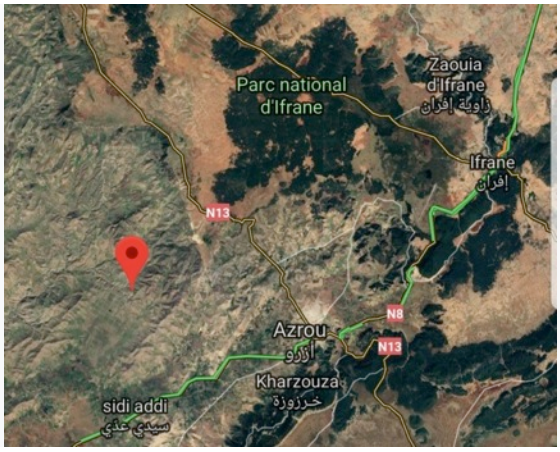
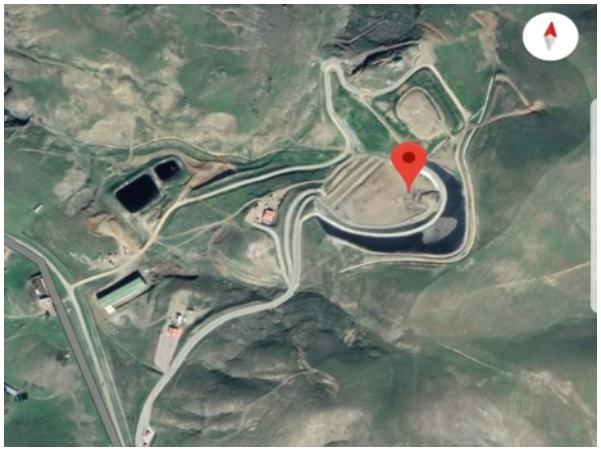


Photo 2. Red Kite *Milvus milvus* near the rubbish dump of Azrou (Photo: J.J. Iglesias)

Photo 3. Red Kite *Milvus milvus*harassed by a Raven *Corvus corax* (Photo: R. El Khamlichi)

Photo 4. Rubbish dump of Azrou (Photo: J.J Iglesias)





Photos 5, 6. Geographic location of the Rubbish dump of Azrou (Photo: Google Map)

Data on the distribution of the Red Kite in the southern Mediterranean basin (Mougeot *et al.* 2011) and the association with wintering Black Kites seem to suggest that they were wintering birds. This is remarkable because the province of Ifrane could be the southernmost region where this species winter.

Although the availability of food from the rubbish dump could be the reason for the presence of Red Kites in the region (JMM & Associates 2015), it is also a threat due to the proximity of power lines. We found one of the biggest bird mortality black-spots due to power lines in Morocco, with about 100 electrocuted birds, including raptors. For this reason, it is urgent to undertake effective mitigation to reduce this threat, according to recommendations of Martín Martín *et al.* (2019).

Acknowledgements

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