sciendo

Raptor Journal 2025, Vol. 19: 85–89. DOI: 10.2478/srj-2025-0009

First observation of the Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) in Algeria

Prvé pozorovanie sokola amurského (*Falco amurensis*) v Alžírsku

Fouad BEDERRAR, Djawad BENNAACER, Khaled AYYACH & Belkacem Aimene BOULAOUAD

Abstract: We report the first record of the Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) in Algeria and throughout North Africa, based on a single individual observed and photographed on 15 July 2025 and again on 3 August 2025 in the Illizi region, southeastern Algeria. The bird was documented using a Nikon Coolpix P900 camera in an open Saharan habitat characterised by sparse desert vegetation. This observation represents a westward extension of the known distribution of the species into the central Sahara. It constitutes a notable case of vagrancy well beyond its typical migratory corridor between eastern Asia and southern Africa. This finding underscores the species' potential for long-distance dispersal and highlights the importance of continued monitoring for rare migratory birds in arid zones of Algeria or throughout North Africa.

Abstrakt: Uvádzame prvý záznam sokola amurského (*Falco amurensis*) v Alžírsku a v celej severnej Afrike. Jeden jedinec bol pozorovaný a odfotografovaný 15. júla 2025 a opäť 3. augusta 2025 v regióne Illizi v juhovýchodnom Alžírsku. Vták bol zdokumentovaný pomocou fotoaparátu Nikon Coolpix P900 v otvorenom saharskom biotope charakterizovanom riedkou púštnou vegetáciou. Toto pozorovanie predstavuje rozšírenie známeho výskytu druhu na západ do centrálnej Sahary. Ide o pozoruhodný prípad výskytu mimo typického migračného koridoru medzi východnou Áziou a južnou Afrikou. Tento nález podčiarkuje potenciál druhu na šírenie na veľké vzdialenosti a zdôrazňuje dôležitosť pokračujúceho monitorovania vzácnych sťahovavých vtákov v suchých oblastiach Alžírska alebo v celej severnej Afrike.

Key words: Falconidae, North Africa, Sahara, vagrancy, migratory birds, long-distance dispersal, raptors

Fouad Bederrar, **Djawad Bennaacer,** Independent Naturalist, 33000, Illizi, Algeria.
Khaled Ayyach, Belkacem Aimene Boulaouad, Algerian Wildlife Watchers Association, Algiers, Algeria.
Belkacem Aimene Boulaouad, Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University, SNV-TU Faculty, Department of Agronomy, Bordj Bou Arreridj, Algeria, Email: belkacemaimene.boulaouad@univ-bba.dz.

Introduction

The term birds of prey has traditionally been applied to a distinct assemblage of avian predators, comprising, for instance, kites, vultures, hawks, eagles, and falcons, despite the widespread occurrence of predatory behaviour among numerous avian taxa (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). These are now more accurately referred to as 'raptors', specifically 'diurnal raptors' (Wink 2007). Taxonomically, diurnal raptors are grouped into five families: Accipitridae, Pandionidae, Sagittariidae, Falconidae, and Cathartidae, and are generally classified within the order Falconiformes (Del Hoyo et al. 1994).

The family Falconidae comprises diurnal raptors, characterised by sharp talons, hooked beaks, and agile flight. It is currently divided into three subfamilies: Herpetotherinae, Polyborinae, and Falconinae, encompassing 11 genera and 64 recognised species. Notably, approximately 72% of these species are classified within the subfamily Falconinae, which includes the pygmy falcons, falconets, and true falcons (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Fuchs et al. 2015, Leonardi 2020; Gill et al. 2025).

The Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) is a small migratory falcon that breeds across the eastern Palearctic, including southeastern Siberia, central and eastern Mongolia, northeastern China, and the Korean Peninsula (White et al. 1994, Burner et al. 2019, Gill et al. 2025). It migrates to overwinter in southeastern Africa and parts of southern Asia (Borrow & Demey 2014).

In Algeria, the order Falconiformes is represented by a single family, Falconidae, and only one subfamily, Falconinae. This subfamily comprises 11 species (Isenmann & Moali 2000, Ledant et al. 1981). The present note reports the first confirmed record of the Amur falcon in Algeria or throughout North Africa.

Material and methods

The study was conducted in the province of Illizi, situated in the extreme southeast of Algeria, approximately 1,758 km from the capital, Algiers. Illizi lies between latitudes 26° 30′ 29″ N and longitudes 8° 28′ 59″ E, covering a total area of 198,433 km² (Fig. 1). The province shares borders with Tunisia to the northeast, Libya to the east, and by the Algerian provinces Djanet to the south, In Salah to the west, and Ouargla to the north. It forms part of Tassili n'Ajjer, which includes the Tassili n'Ajjer National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site noted for its sandstone formations and prehistoric rock art (Coulson & Campbell 2010). Recent studies have reported notable faunal records in this area, including, for instance, the African crake (*Crecopsis egregia*) (Bederrar et al. 2023), the bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) (Gueroui et al. 2024), and data on new occurrences of mammals (Irzagh et al. 2020).

A bird count was carried out on 15 July 2025 to the north of the town of Illizi (26° 32′ 03.7″ N, 8° 28′ 25.7″ E). The survey lasted two and a half hours, from 17:30 to 20:00, and followed a transect-based counting method. Birds were identified and recorded visually in the field, with the assistance of a professional bird guide. Photographic documentation was obtained using a Nikon Coolpix P900 digital camera, featuring an 83× optical zoom (equivalent to a 2000 mm focal length).

Results

The individual falcon was initially identified in the field as a red-footed falcon (*Falco vespertinus*). However, closer examination of the photographs has cast doubt on this identification. The bird was similar in size to other members of the genus *Falco* and was first photographed on 15 July at 18:35, perched on a tree branch of *Calotropis procera* (Fig. 2 and 3), under natural evening light, which provided adequate conditions for detailed observation and photographic documentation. It remained stationary and in view for several minutes before taking flight and disappearing behind a nearby ridge. A second sighting, likely of the same individual, occurred at the exact location on 3 August 2025 (Fig. 4).

Based on plumage characteristics visible in the photographs, the observed individual was identified as a male in post-juvenile moult. It was uniformly grey-brown above, with buff- or rufous-edged feathers on the back and wings, a hint of a pale collar, and reduced contrast on the sides of the head. The underparts were cream-

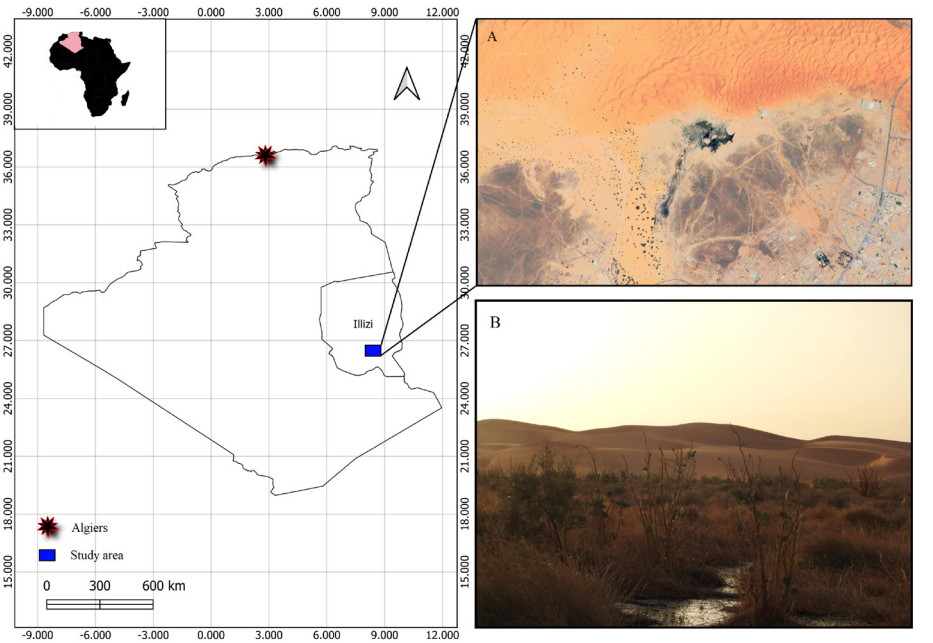

Fig.1. Map of the study site in Algeria - Illizi region (A) and view of the observation site (B).
Obr. 1. Mapa študovanej lokality v Alžírsku - región Illizi (A) a pohľad na miesto pozorovania (B).

Fig. 2. Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) observed in Illizi province, representing Algeria's first record of this species.
Obr. 2. Sokol amurský (*Falco amurensis*) pozorovaný v provincii Illizi, reprezentujúci prvý záznam tohto druhu v Alžírsku.

Fig. 3. Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) perched on a *Calotropis procera* in southern Algeria.
Obr. 3. Sokol amurský (*Falco amurensis*) sediaci na *Calotropis procera* v južnom Alžírsku.

coloured with distinct longitudinal streaking, the tail appeared greyer, and the bare parts, including legs and cere, were yellow (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001).

Discussion

Within the Western Palearctic, vagrant Amur falcon individuals have been documented in several countries, including Italy (Corso & Dennis 1998), Iran (Lantsheer et al. 2009), Iraq (Salim et al. 2024), Sweden and England (Hudson et al. 2010), and the Faroe Islands (Birdingfaroes 2015). Beyond this region, the species has also been reported as an exceptional vagrant on St. Helena Island in the South Atlantic Ocean (Rowlands et al. 1998) and on islands in the western Pacific, such as Saipan and Sarigan in the Mariana archipelago (Stinson et al. 1997).

Our observation is the first confirmed record of the Amur falcon in Algeria and throughout North Africa, adding a new species to the regional *Falconidae* assemblage (Isenmann & Moali 2000, Isenmann et al. 2005). The plumage characteristics indicate that the observed individual was a male in post-juvenile moult, suggesting that its presence in the region most likely corresponds to the first spring migration, a period during which such records are rarely documented. In this case, the possible explanation might be that the observed individual got astray during its first autumn migration, or during the spring migration on its way back to breeding grounds. These observations overall support the notion that some raptors may deviate from their usual migration flyways due to weather or navigational disturbances,

Fig. 4. Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) observed on 3 August 2025 in Illizi province in southern Algeria.
Obr. 4. Sokol amurský (*Falco amurensis*) pozorovaný 3. augusta 2025 v provincii Illizi v južnom Alžírsku.

appearing as vagrants in novel areas. Such occurrences, also reported in studies of Neotropical raptor migration, may result in mortality, successful reorientation, or, in rare cases, settlement and breeding in isolation from the parental population (Bildstein 2004).

During our observational study, we further recorded the presence of several other raptor species, including the common kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), the red-footed falcon, the lanner falcon (*Falco biarmicus*), and the lesser kestrel (*Falco naumanni*). In addition, an osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) was also observed. These observations underscore the significance of the region as a key corridor within the migratory route of raptors between Europe and Africa.

Over the past decade, the avifauna of the Algerian Sahara, which covers nearly 80% of the country, has been enriched by several Afrotropical species, including the Dunn's lark (*Eremalauda dunni*) (Harzallah et al. 2021); African crake (Bederrar et al. 2023); the cricket warbler (*Spiloptila clamans*), the blue-naped mousebird (*Urocolius macrourus*), the northern grey-headed sparrow (*Passer griseus*) and the chestnut-bellied starling (*Lamprotornis pulcher*) (Boulaouad et al. 2024a, 2024b); the bateleur (Gueroui et al. 2024); and the yellow-billed egret (*Ardea brachyrhyncha*) (Kattenhøj & Dinets 2024). These records point to a northward range expansion and highlight the biogeographical importance of the central Algerian Sahara. This context is directly relevant to our Amur falcon observations, which further illustrate how ongoing environmental changes and intensified field monitoring reshape the distribution of Afrotropical birds in the study region.

References

Bederrar F, Hadouchi N, Arab-Saïd A, Lachichi A, Belghit A, Ketfi A, Souahlia M, Demouche M, Bougherab L, Amzel L & Chedad A 2023: Second observation of African crake *Crecopsis egregia* (Peters, W, 1854) (Gruiformes, Rallidae) in Algeria. Bulletin of the Iraq Natural History Museum 17(4): 541–548.

Bildstein KL 2004: Raptor migration in the Neotropics: patterns, processes, and consequences. Ornitologia Neotropical 15(suppl): 83–99.

Birdingfaroes 2015: Sensation or? Retrieved September 26, 2025, from https://birdingfaroes.wordpress.com/2015/07/06/sensation-or/

Borrow N & Demey R 2014: Birds of Western Africa. Second edition. Helm Field Guides, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London, UK.

Boulaouad BA, Djetti T, Belkacem M, Ailam O, Harzallah B, Missoum M, Ayyach K, Telailia S 2024a: Bird diversity and annotated checklist of Afrotropical species in extreme South of Algeria. Acta Zoologica Lilloana 68(1): 17–27.

Boulaouad BA, Missoum M, Attouche K, Hadj Aissa D, Harzallah B, Ayyach K, & Belkacem M, 2024b: First record of the African green bee-eater *Merops viridissimus* (Swainson, 1837) in Southern Algeria. Arxius de Miscel·lània Zoològica 22: 25–29.

Burner RC, Gombobaatar S, van Els P, Burner L R, Usukhjargal D & Bayasgalantselmeg M 2019: Nesting ecology of solitary-nesting Amur falcons (*Falco amurensis*) in central Mongolia. Journal of Field Ornithology 90(3): 266–276.

Corso A & Dennis P 1998: Amur falcons in Italy – a new Western Palearctic bird. Birding World 11(7): 259–260.

Coulson D & Campbell A 2010: Rock art of the Tassili n Ajjer, Algeria. Adoranten, 2010, 24-38.

Del Hoyo J, Elliott A & Sargatal J 1994: Handbook of the Birds of the World. 2. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

Ferguson-Lees J & Christie D A 2001: Raptors of the World. London, UK: Christopher Helm.

Fuchs J, Johnson JA & Mindell DP 2015: Rapid diversification of falcons (Aves: Falconidae) due to expansion of open habitats in the Late Miocene. Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution 82: 166–182. https:// doi.org/10.1016/j.ympev.2014.08.010

Gill F, Donsker D & Rasmussen P 2025: IOC World Bird List (v15.1). Retrieved July 30, 2025, from https://www.worldbirdnames.org/new/

Gueroui B, Belkacem M, Mokhtari A, Ayyach K & Boulaouad BA 2024: Bateleur near Djanet, Algeria, in April 2024. Dutchbirding 46 (5): 327–329.

Harzallah B, Ayyach K, Benmokhtar L & Telailia S 2021: First observation of the Dunn's lark *Eremalauda dunni* in Algeria. Alauda 89(4): 293–294.

Hudson N, & the Rarities Committee 2010: Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2009. British Birds 103(10): 562–638.

Irzagh A, Bounaceur F, Antar D, Benrima A & Aulagnier S 2020: New information on mammals of the Algerian Tassili. Revue Agrobiologia 10(1): 2010–2020.

Isenmann P, Gaultier T, El Hili A, Azafzaf H, Dlensi H & Smart M 2005: Oiseaux de Tunisie–Birds of Tunisia. Société d'Etudes ornithologiques de France, Paris.

Isenmann P & Moali A 2000: Birds of Algeria. Société d'Études ornithologiques de France, Paris.

Kattenhøj MK & Dinets V 2024: Yellow-billed egret at Djanet, Algeria, in May 2023. Dutch Birding 46: 39–41.

Lantsheer M P, Vermoolen R, Hoseini AA & Askari H 2009; The first record of the Amur falcon *Falco amurensis* from Iran. Podoces 4(2): 115–116.

Ledant JP, Jacob JP, Jacobs P, Malher F, Ochando B & Roche J 1981: Update of the Algerian avifauna. Le Gerfaut De Giervalk 71: 295–398.

Leonardi G 2020: Behavioural ecology of Western Palearctic falcons. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Rowlands BW, Trueman T, Olson SL, McCulloch MN & Brooke RK 1998: The Birds of St. Helena. An Annotated Check-list. BOU Check-list 16. British Ornithologists' Union, Tring, UK.

Salim M A, Abed S A, Mohammed H H & Al-Saffah S M 2024: Two additional raptors to the Iraqi avifauna: The first observation of lappet-faced vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos negevensis*) and Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*). Raptor Journal 18(1): 77–83.

Stinson D W, Wiles G J & Reichel J D 1997: Migrant land birds and water birds in the Mariana Islands. Pacific Science 51(3): 314–327.

White C M, Olsen P D & Kiff L F 1994: Family Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras). Pp 216–275. In J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott & J. Sargatal (eds). Handbook of the Birds of the World,

Vol. 2. New World Vultures to Guineafowl. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

Wink M 2007: Taxonomy, phylogeny and systematics. Pp. 57–73. In: Bird D M, Bildstein K L (eds), Raptor Research and Management Techniques. Hancock House Publishers, British Columbia.

Received 1.9.2025
Accepted: 30.9.2025