

Short communications

New breeding records and observations of the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus minor* from Ethiopia

The Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* is represented in sub-Saharan Africa by two subspecies, *F.p. minor* and *F.p. calidus*. While the latter is encountered as a winter visitor and passage migrant only, the largely sedentary *minor* (Fig. 1) covers a broad breeding range across sub-Saharan Africa (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Dickinson & Reamsen 2013, del Hoyo & Collar 2014, Gedeon *et al.* 2017). In the Horn of Africa, members of this subspecies are regularly – though infrequently – observed (Ash & Miskell 1998, Ash & Atkins 2009). However, breeding was recorded only very rarely in a few localities: so far, there are only two confirmed breeding records of *minor* from Ethiopia, another ‘probable’, and one from Eritrea (Ash & Atkins 2009). Here we present two confirmed and a potential third recent breeding record as well as three other observations of *minor* from Ethiopia.



Figure 1. Appearance and identification of the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus minor*. **a)** Adult female hunting. Besides its compact body, the overall dark upper side and the broad moustachial streak contrasting with the light cheeks differentiate the subspecies *minor* from *calidus*; the same individual as on Fig. 2i (Photo: T. Pröhl; Bishangari Lodge, Lake Langano, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 26 November 2014). **b)** Adult male. As typical of Peregrines, males are smaller and appear less sturdy than females (Photo: T. Pröhl; Bishangari Lodge, Lake Langano, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 8 November 2013).

One breeding record was made by KG and TT on 19 May 2013 near the town of Mega in the Oromia Regional State in Southern Ethiopia. We observed two adult birds, a female (Fig. 2a) and a male (Fig. 2b), flying and perching between the bare rocks rising above the surrounding savanna. We could clearly ascertain their sub-specific identity as *minor* by their small size, dark overall appearance and head pattern consisting of a dark crown and broad moustachial streaks contrasting with white cheek-patches, unlike *calidus*. Following the birds, we found them entering a hidden nesting site on a sparsely vegetated cliff ledge from where we could also hear the typical begging calls of nestlings (Fig. 2c). The adults were apparently provisioning their offspring with food, although we were unable to see the juveniles because of the position of the nest in a hidden corner of the rock.



Figure 2. Breeding records, breeding sites and observations of the Peregrine Falcon *F.p. minor*. **a)** Adult male perched on a branch of a dead tree on the cliff close to the nesting site near Mega (Photo: K. Gedeon; near Mega, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 19 May 2013); **b)** Adult female roosting on the cliff close to the nesting site near Mega (Photo: K. Gedeon; near Mega, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 19 May 2013). **c)** Breeding habitat of *minor* in the Mega area, seen from the top of the rocks that rise above the savanna. The nesting site is hidden in the cliff on the right in the foreground (Photo: T. Töpfer; near Mega, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 19 May 2013). **d)** Nesting site of *minor* in a cliff in the Wondo Genet Forest. The male is visible in the background, the female in the foreground is seen carrying a Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* as food for the two approximately two-week-old nestlings also visible to the left (Photo: T. Pröhl; Wondo Genet Forest, SNNP, Ethiopia; 14 March 2014). **e)** Breeding habitat of the Peregrine Falcon *F.p. minor* in the Wondo Genet Forest. Note the dense vegetation close to the nesting site. (Photo: T. Pröhl; Wondo Genet Forest, SNNP, Ethiopia; 14 March 2014). **f)** Presumed breeding habitat of *minor* in the Debre Libanos area, occupied by a territorial pair (Photo: T. Pröhl; Debre Libanos, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 6 November 2011). **g)** Adult female quarreling with a Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* (Photo: T. Pröhl; Awassa lakeside promenade, Awassa, SNNP, Ethiopia; 9 October 2012). **h)** Immature female flying off from its perch. Note the heavy streaking on the bird's underside indicative of its age (Photo: T. Pröhl; Bishangari Lodge, Lake Langano, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 8 November 2013). **i)** Adult female resting from hunting; the same individual as shown in Fig. 1a (Photo: T. Pröhl; Bishangari Lodge, Lake Langano, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia; 26 November 2014).

Another breeding record was made by TP and Silvio Herold on 13 to 15 March 2014 in the Wondo Genet Forest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNP) in Southern Central Ethiopia. The adult birds observed were likewise identified as *minor* based on the same characters as described above (Fig. 2d). The nesting site was situated on a small cliff ledge of a north-facing rock with trees rising

up directly in front of the cliff (Fig. 2e). The nest contained two nestlings that were approximately 14 days old. We could observe the adults twice feeding their young with Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* (Fig. 2d). The falcons did not appear shy and let us approach closely. Interestingly, there was a nesting site of a Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* just 150 m away, although the previously observed eagle nestling had disappeared by 13 March.

A third observation, again made by TP and Silvio Herold, led us to presume breeding of *minor* in a cliff near Debre Libanos in the Oromia Regional State in North Central Ethiopia. There was a pair of phenotypically *minor* Peregrines that behaved like a territorial pair, performing characteristic courtship displays and chasing a pair of Lanner Falcons *F. biarmicus* from the cliff. We recorded the Peregrine pair each day from 17 to 19 March 2014 approaching the very same cliff, and we therefore concluded that the pair apparently occupied this territory (Fig. 2f) and that breeding was very likely there, although we did not find the nest site itself.

There are three more records of *minor* Peregrines from Ethiopia made by TP. An adult bird was perched in a withered tree on Awassa lakeside promenade in Awassa on 9 October 2012, where it was mobbed by a Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* (Fig. 2g). Two individuals, an adult male (Fig. 1b) and an immature female (Fig. 2h), who were – independent of each other – observed perching on and hunting around Bishangari Lodge at Lake Langano on 8 November 2013. At the same site, an adult female was observed hunting on 26 November 2014 (Figs. 1a, 2i).

Our observations add two more and a likely third breeding record of the Peregrine Falcon *F.p. minor* to the avifaunal documentation of Ethiopia. Considering the scarcity of properly documented breeding events of *minor* in the Horn of Africa and the long timespan since the last dated record (5 May 1998; Ash & Atkins 2009), our recent records are notable for the region. This also holds true for simple observations of Peregrines if reliably identified on subspecies level. We are convinced, however, that a certain number of observations made by ornithologists travelling in the area may simply not have been published and thus we would like to motivate our colleagues to properly document their past and present observations for the sake of long-term avifaunal documentation.

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