

FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF THE
SYRIAN WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos*
syriacus IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
WITH A REFERENCE TO ITS PRESENT
STATUS

**Prvi podatek o gnezdenju in sedanji
status sirijskega detla *Dendrocopos*
syriacus v Bosni in Hercegovini**

BRANISLAV GAŠIĆ

Museum of Republic of Srpska, Đure Daničića 1,
BA-78000 Banjaluka, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
e-mail: branegasic@gmail.com

Although on the basis of data on distribution and range expansion of Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* in Europe (MATVEJEV 1976, MUNTEANU & SAMWALD 1997), one might expect the opposite, experts have believed till very recently that this species does not inhabit Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was not referred to by REISER (1939) and OBRATIL (1978 & 1983) in their extensive works on ornithofauna of this region, nor by OBRATIL (1969, 1976, 1984, 1985, 1987A & 1987B) in his works dealing with certain parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and newly discovered species.

It is true that MATVEJEV & VASIĆ (1973) cite Syrian Woodpecker as a breeding bird of Bosanska Posavina, but without stating a single concrete information about the species. V.F. Vasić, the co-author of Catalogus faunae Jugoslaviae, in fact claimed that he personally had not been dealing with the order Piciformes, but that it had certainly been studied by S.D. Matvejev, although he clearly knew nothing concrete about Syrian Woodpecker in Bosnia and Herzegovina, given that he did not produce a single solid information on this woodpecker species for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Overview of Bird Fauna of the Balkan Peninsula (MATVEJEV 1976). It is quite possible that he introduced Posavina to the catalogue after the analogy with Croatian Posavina or Slavonia (V.F. Vasić *pers. comm.*). The claim by MATVEJEV & VASIĆ (1973) therefore is not founded on concrete records, but on the supposition by one of the authors, clearly based on extrapolation of data from the neighbouring regions. KOTROŠAN & PAPES (2007) also report Syrian Woodpecker as a regional breeding bird in Bosnia and Herzegovina but this claim was based solely on that of MATVEJEV & VASIĆ (1973). This information was

also transferred into a work that was later thoroughly supplemented and corrected (KOTROŠAN 2008/2009). No specimens of the Syrian Woodpecker from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina are present in the ornithological collection in The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (D. KOTROŠAN *pers. comm.*). DROČIĆ (2005) includes Syrian Woodpecker in his list of birds of Central Bosnia, although with no specific locality or information in support.

We believe therefore that there is no firmly established record of the breeding of Syrian Woodpecker in Bosnia and Herzegovina prior to our record from 2008, described here.

The first detailed record of this species in Bosnia and Herzegovina was made on 6 Apr 1996 in Banjaluka (northern Bosnia and Herzegovina) on the right bank of the Vrbas River in the shelterbelt of apple trees some 20 m downstream from Rebrovački Bridge (44°46'23.5"N, 17°12'59.6"E; UTM XK75; 159 m a.s.l.), where a female was observed (GAŠIĆ 2001). After seeing this species in 1996, I very rarely returned to the bank of the Vrbas River and have thus been in no position to monitor the presence of Syrian Woodpecker in this area and nobody else, to my knowledge, has observed it there since. It was only in 2006 when further concrete information on Syrian Woodpecker came to light. DENDER (2006) states that he observed a female on 11 Nov 2006 in the area of Blagaj between the village of Buna and the source of the river carrying the same name (UTM YH39, southern Bosnia and Herzegovina). Apart from observing a breeding pair in Banjaluka in 2008, I further recorded a male on a Common Wallnut *Juglans regia* tree trunk near the village of Kotor near Mrkonjić Grad on 27 Mar 2008 (UTM XK62, central Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Table 1, Figure 1).

In the middle of 2007, I began to visit the right bank of Vrbas fairly regularly once more, particularly the section stretching from KAB Bridge and Rebrovački Bridge in Banjaluka. The first observation of Syrian Woodpecker in 2008 was made in the early morning of 1 Feb 2008, when I suddenly heard unusual drumming high in the apple trees along the river, no more than a couple of hundred metres downstream from the spot of observation in 1996. It sounded like drumming by the Great Spotted Woodpecker *D. major*, except that it did not keep breaking so abruptly, but was somewhat prolonged and in the end became gradually weaker. After a short observation, I succeeded in catching sight of the bird, quite certain that I was dealing with a female Syrian Woodpecker. After this event, observations of this woodpecker species were made on a more or less regular basis in the morning

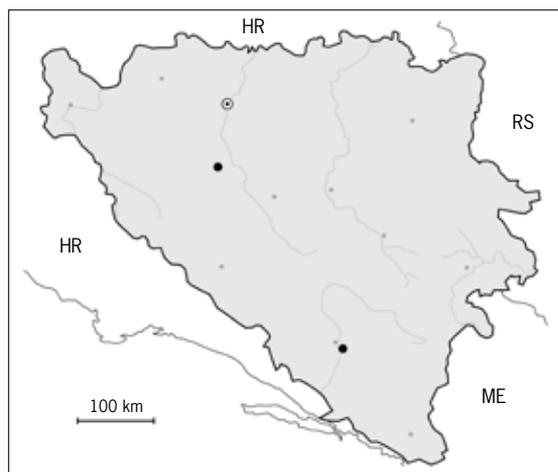


Figure 1: Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina with sites of reliable recordings of Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* (● – observation, ⊙ – confirmed breeding)

Slika 1: Zemljevid Bosne in Hercegovine z lokacijami zanesljivega opazovanja sirijskega detla *Dendrocopos syriacus* (● – opazovanje, ⊙ – potrjena gnezditve)

hours, usually between 7.45 and 8.15 h, and in the afternoon between 15.00 and 15.30 h. The birds were additionally watched for the purpose of their interesting activities and for photographing. On 14 Feb 2008 I observed a pair of Syrian Woodpeckers from a very short distance, which made their identification much more secure. By reminding myself of the rules to be considered when confirming new records, I called my colleague Mrs. Nataša Kovačević, custodian in the Museum of Republic of Srpska, and Mr. Darko Kovačević, to provide for as authentic record of the

bird as possible. Another female Syrian Woodpecker was seen on 21 Feb 2008. Photographs were taken of Syrian Woodpeckers on 29 Feb (Figure 2). This was followed by observation of a single male on 28 May 2008 at the same locality.

On the basis of the fact that a pair of Syrian Woodpeckers regularly frequented the same locality from February to May, when territorial fights with a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were also noted a few times, it was most likely that they would breed nearby. In the afternoon of 6 Jun 2008, while walking past a Box Elder *Acer negundo* in the Duke Stepanović Boulevard, which stretches parallel to the Vrbas bank at an average distance of 285 m (44°46'07"N, 17°12'35.9"E; UTM XK75; 159 m a.s.l.), I heard the characteristic „clicking“ of the young and found an opening through which the young were peeping (Figure 3). The nest was situated in a dry branch with diameter of about 30 cm, with the height of the opening (facing N-NW) at about 5.8 m from the ground. I visited the site the next day, to ascertain which species the young and the nest belong to. Two of the offspring were already out of the nest, with at least one still staying inside it. Both parents were bringing food to them, and it was clear that it was a Syrian Woodpecker family. From then on, we visited the nest on a regular daily basis. Observations of the species were made as follows:

- 3 Jun 2008, alley in front of MUP building, 1 male; Duke Stepanović Boulevard 104, 1 pair, 2 juv. + 1 juv. in the nest (2 juv. observed outside and at least 1 juv. in the nest, with both parents regularly arriving at the nest to feed them);

Table 1: Reliable recordings of Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Tabela 1: Zanesljiva opazovanja sirijskega detla *Dendrocopos syriacus* v Bosni in Hercegovini

Date / Datum	Locality / Lokacija	No. of individuals/ Št. osebkov	Reference/ Vir
6 Apr 1996	Banjaluka, near Rebrovački Bridge / pri Rebrovačkem mostu	1 female / samica	GAŠIĆ (2001)
11 Nov 2006	Between the village of Buna and source of the Buna River near Blagaj / med vasjo Buna in izvirom istoimenske reke v bližini Blagaja	1 female / samica	DENDER (2006)
27 Mar 2008	Kotor village near Mrkonjić Grad / vas Kotor pri Mrkonjić Gradu	1 male / samec	<i>own data/ lastni podatki</i>
1 Feb–19 Jun 2008	Banjaluka, Duke Stepanović Boulevard 104 and its immediate vicinity / Bulvar vojvode Stepe Stepanovića 104 in neposredna okolica	1 pair breeding/ 1 par gnezdi	<i>own data/ lastni podatki</i>



Figure 2: Male (above) and female (below) Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*; Banjaluka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 29 Feb 2008 (photo: B. Marić)

Slika 2: Samec (zgoraj) in samica (spodaj) sirijskega detla *Dendrocopos syriacus*; Banjaluka, Bosna in Hercegovina, 29.2.2008 (foto: B. Marić)

- 4–5 Jun 2008, Duke Stepanović Boulevard 104, at least 1 juv. in the nest;
- 6 Jun 2008, at a parking place in the Stefan Prvojenčani Street, 1 juv., not a single young seen in the nest.

The parents and their young remained in the vicinity of the nest for several days. On 7 Jun 2008 a female and two juveniles were seen near „Maggio“ coffee bar. Yet another observation was made by my colleague Mrs. N. Kovačević, who saw a pair on 19 Jun 2008 in the park of „Branko Radičević“ Primary School in the Duke Stepanović Boulevard very near the nest. Although we were unable to establish the number of the young reliably, we believe that there were at least four of them.

The data published by MATVEJEV (1976) and MUNTEANU & SAMWALD (1997) clearly indicate that Syrian Woodpecker has been expanding its range

towards the west and north. The first records of the species are as follows: Bulgaria 1890, Romania 1931, Hungary 1937, Ukraine 1948, Slovakia 1949, Austria 1951, and Poland 1978. It has been well known for many years that Syrian Woodpecker is an inhabitant of the eastern part of the former Yugoslavia, where its populations have reached significant numbers. For the 1990–2002 period, their sizes are estimated at 23,000–30,000 pairs for Serbia and 2,000–3,000 pairs for Montenegro (PUZOVIĆ *et al.* 2003).

It is particularly interesting to compare the species' situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina with those in Slovenia and Croatia, as Syrian Woodpeckers in these two countries are geographically the nearest to the nest site in Banjaluka and at the same time in the direction in which the species is expanding its range. On the lists of Croatian and Slovenian birds, the Syrian Woodpecker is also listed as a breeding bird. It is considered a rare species in Slovenia (BOŽIČ 2001A & 2001B, JANŽEKOVIČ 2004). The first observation of a single individual on 28 Jun 1973 at Cven near Ljutomer was published by GREGORI (1990). MATVEJEV (1976) states that he recorded it breeding as early as in 1966 at Slovenske Gorice, but this information is not included in the list of rare birds of Slovenia (KOMISIJA ZA REDKOSTI 1993). The information published by R. Hainard from Kočevje in 1955 (in the ornithological journal *Larus*), is claimed by MATVEJEV (1976) to be incorrect. Breeding of a mixed pair (Great Spotted Woodpecker male and Syrian Woodpecker female) was reported at Rožnik in Ljubljana between 20 May and 14 Jun 1978 by TRONTELJ (1984), while nesting of a pure pair of Syrian Woodpecker from 10–20 May 1997 at Malečnik near Meljski Bridge was recorded by BAČANI (1998). Another winter observation of the species was made by BOŽIČ (1997). From the scantiness of published information it is clear that the species is still rare in Slovenia, even though it breeds there. At the end of the 1990s, its population was estimated at no more than 5–10 pairs (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2004).

No complete data are available for Croatia, but according to KRONEISL-RUCNER (1957), the first record of the species was on 18 Oct 1953, when D. Rucner shot an adult female which, however, was later established to be a hybrid *D. syriacus* × *D. major*. KRONEISL-RUCNER (1957) also states the following records made up to 1957: female shot at Goričan, Međimurje, December 1955; ad. female, hybrid *D. syriacus* × *D. major* shot at Bogdanovac, Međimurje, 27 May 1956; one specimen from Preseka, Zagreb, October 1956, shot by A. Lesinger Jr, and one specimen shot at Donji Miholjac, Podravina, 14 Jun 1957. Also stated is an



Figure 3: Location of the nest of Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* in Duke Stepanović Boulevard (above) and the nest's opening with young in the Box Elder *Acer negundo* (below); Banjaluka, Bosnia & Herzegovina, 3 Jun 2008 (photo: B. Gašić)

Slika 3: Lokacija gnezda sirijskega detla *Dendrocopos syriacus* na Bulevaru vojvode Stepe Stepanovića (zgoraj) in odprtina gnezda z mladičem v amerikanskem javorju *Acer negundo* (spodaj); Banjaluka, Bosna in Hercegovina, 3.6.2008 (foto: B. Gašić)

unreliable observation by D. Rucner (pair at Belje, Baranja, autumn 1956). Three stuffed specimens are kept in the collections of the Croatian Natural History Museum: ad. male, Velika Ves, Hrvatsko Zagorje, 5 Jul 1958, shot by I. Igalffy; ad. female, Trnovec, Hrvatsko Zagorje, 12 Dec 1971, shot by K. Igalffy, and ad. female, Trnovec, Hrvatsko Zagorje, 12 Dec 1974, shot by K. Igalffy. According to LUKAČ (2007), Syrian Woodpecker has been recorded in the greater part of Croatia (Međimurje, Podravina, Baranja, Hrvatsko Zagorje, Moslavina, Slavonia, Posavina, Pokuplje, Banovina, Kordun, Gorski Kotar, Lika, Istria and Dalmatia). Although no concrete records are stated

in his work, it is clear that the species has successfully inhabited this country, with its population estimated at 500–1,000 pairs in 2002 (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2004). MATVEJEV (1976) also presents records for this woodpecker species for Montenegro.

The records from Bosnia and Herzegovina thus fit into this general picture of the Syrian Woodpecker expansion to the west. The recent, first observation at Mrkonjić Grad suggests that the species is still expanding its range in this country. In our opinion, the very few published records of the species from Bosnia and Herzegovina do not reflect the true situation in the field – a consequence of the fact that very few people are engaged in bird watching.

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Povzetek

Avtor opisuje gnezdenje enega para sirijskega detla *Dendrocopos syriacus* leta 2008 v Banjaluki (severna Bosna in Hercegovina). Kljub navedbam o gnezdenju vrste v Bosanski Posavini starejših avtorjev, zlasti MATVEJEVA & VASIĆA (1973), je to prvi dokumentirani podatek o gnezdenju vrste v Bosni in Hercegovini. Izkazalo se je, da njihove navedbe temeljijo le na domnevi, verjetno na podlagi dejstva, da je sirijski detel gnezdilka sosednjih predelov Hrvaške. Sirijski detel je bil v Banjaluki opazovan že leta 1996, poleg tega pa sta poznana še dva konkretna objavljena podatka o njegovem pojavljanju na ozemlju omenjene države. Avtor je spremljal opisano gnezdenje med 1.2.2008, ko je bila prvič opazovana samica, do 19.6.2008, ko je bil zadnjič opazovan par s speljanimi mladiči v neposredni okolici mesta gnezdenja. Gnezdilno duplo je bilo odkrito 2.6.2008, nekaj dni preden so mladiči poleteli, in sicer v drevoredu blizu obrežja reke Vrbas, v suhi veji amerikanskega javorja *Acer negundo*, na višini 5,8 m od tal. Podatki o sirijskem detlu v Bosni in Hercegovini se ujemajo s splošno sliko širjenja areala vrste v sosednjih državah.

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