

Black Kite status in Emilia-Romagna: an update

Alessandro Pavesi*, Andrea Ravagnani

Abstract - The aim of this work is to update the status of the Black Kite *Milvus migrans* in the Emilia-Romagna region, reporting new data about nesting attempts, winter observations and major summer gatherings collected during the period 2006-2022.

Key words: Black Kite, *Milvus migrans*, Emilia-Romagna, nesting, wintering.

Riassunto - Lo status del nibbio bruno in Emilia-Romagna: un aggiornamento.

Lo scopo di questo lavoro è quello di aggiornare lo status del nibbio bruno *Milvus migrans* in Emilia-Romagna, riportando nuovi dati sui tentativi di nidificazione, sulle osservazioni invernali e sui principali raduni estivi raccolti nel periodo 2006-2022.

Parole chiave: nibbio bruno, *Milvus migrans*, Emilia-Romagna, nidificazione, svernamento.

The Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) is widely distributed within the Palaearctic, Afro-Malagasy, Indomalayan and Australasian regions (Ferguson-Lees & Christie, 2001). The European breeding population is concentrated in Russia, France, Spain and Germany, which together account for 90% of an overall population of around 100,000 pairs (Keller *et al.*, 2020). In Italy it is a regular migrant (Panuccio *et al.*, 2014), breeder and regular winter visitor (Marotto, 2022). In the mid-2000s, the total Italian population was estimated at 860-1153 pairs mainly distributed in Alpine foothills, in the central and southern Regions and western Po Valley (Brichetti & Fracasso, 2018), but it remains uncommon in the Po Valley, south of the Po River despite the increase of possible and probable breeding attempts in recent decades (Meschini &

Frugis, 1993; Marotto, 2022). In Emilia-Romagna region the Black Kite is considered a regular migrant and irregular breeder (Pavesi *et al.*, 2023a), but also a summer and occasional winter visitor (Bonora & Tinarelli, 2006). According to the regional Red List (Gustin *et al.*, 1997), this species deserves the status of “high conservation priority”.

The aim of this short communication is to update the status of Black Kite in Emilia-Romagna region during the period 2006-2022, reporting detailed observations of probable (pair often present at the same location during breeding season, courtship behaviour, copulation, aggressive behaviour, nest building) and confirmed breeding (nest with adult incubating, nest with nestlings or eggs, adult carrying food for young or presence of recently fledged young that are incapable of sustained flight), wintering individuals (data from 1 of December to 31 of January) and major summer gatherings. In order to obtain the most recent information we collected personal observations of local ornithologists and birdwatchers, checked the latest publications, reports and online databases.

Not much is known about the species in Emilia-Romagna because of the small number of individuals occurring in the breeding season, with a population estimated at less than 10 pairs (Bonora & Tinarelli, 2006). Black Kite is a regular migrant both in autumn (August-September) and spring (March-May) through the Central Mediterranean (e.g. more than 3000 birds crossing the Channel of Sicily in autumn; Panuccio *et al.*, 2014) but few have been recorded passing through the region (Premuda *et al.*, 2006; Premuda, 2007). Summering birds, few tens, are concentrated mostly in proximity of the Po River and in the westernmost part of the region, while breeding pairs are concentrated in its central-western part in proximity of major rivers or wetlands where are present wood or poplar groves, their typical nesting habitat (Chiavetta, 1992; Marotto, 2022). After a brief account of historical nesting we report, for the years 2006-2022, probable breeding attempts in Tab. 1 whereas confirmed breeding cases are reported in Tab. 2.

In Piacenza province confirmed breeding occurred only in 1983 in the proximity of the Po river (Battaglia, 2020); in Parma province the first confirmed breeding was reported in 1995 (Ravasini, 1995); in Reggio Emilia province first known nest was found in the early 2000s,

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Received for publication: 25 October 2022

Accepted for publication: 27 March 2024

Online publication: 24 April 2024

when a pair breed in a heronry and in 2005, at least a pair, successfully raised two fledglings on a poplar grove near the dump of Novellara (L. Ferrari pers com); in Modena province the first nest was found in the '90s whereas in Bologna province first nesting pairs were found in 1977-1982 (Bonora & Tinarelli, 2006). Recent probable or certain breeding are not reported in the easternmost part of the region, where there is known only a confirmed breeding in Ravenna province in 1954 and two in the “Bosco della Mesola” (FE) (Bonora & Tinarelli, 2006).

The Italian wintering population was estimated at 5-15 birds in the late-2000s, concentrated mostly in Sicily and Basilicata (Bricchetti & Fracasso, 2018). In Emilia-Romagna, wintering Black Kites are seen occasionally and, until 2006, only two winter observations were reported from Bonifica del Mezzano reclaimed area (FE) and near Bentivoglio (BO) (Bonora & Tinarelli, 2006).

A total of 12 wintering records have been collected during the period 2006-2022 (between 1st of December and 31th of January) nearly all in the Ferrara province (easternmost part of the region) (Fig. 1).

Tab. 1 - Probable nesting attempts in the period 2006-2022. / Probabili tentativi di nidificazione nel periodo 2006-2022.

Province	Locality	Year	Breeding outcome	Observer/s
Reggio Emilia	“Tenuta Riviera”, Novellara	2007-2014	territorial pair	L. Bagni
Parma	Chiesuole	2008	adult transporting a branch	R. Carini
Bologna	Botteghino di Zocca/Pianoro	2009	territorial pair	A. Ravagnani
Reggio Emilia	Castelnuovo di Sotto	2012	territorial pair	M. Campani
Modena	San Cesario sul Panaro	2014-2019	territorial pair	R. Benassi
Parma	Noceto	2017	territorial pair	D. Ronconi
Reggio Emilia	Luzzara	2017-2019	adult transporting a branch	Pavesi & Bagni, 2023
Reggio Emilia	“Tenuta Riviera”, Novellara	2019	territorial pair	M. Fontanesi
Parma	Langhirano	2020	territorial pair	D. Ronconi
Reggio Emilia	Santa Vittoria/Cogruzzo	2020	territorial pair	L. Bagni
Bologna	S. Giovanni in Persiceto/ Sant’Agata Bolognese	2020	occupied nest, then abandoned	A. Ravagnani
Bologna	Sant’Agata Bolognese/ Castelfranco Emilia	2020	adult transporting nesting material	A. Ravagnani
Modena	“Il Torrazuolo”, Nonantola	2021	territorial pair	E. Selmi
Piacenza	Caorso	2022	nest construction	Pavesi <i>et al.</i> , 2023b

Tab. 2 - Confirmed breeding in the period 2006-2022. / Riproduzione confermata nel periodo 2006-2022.

Province	Locality	Year	Breeding out come	Observer/s
Reggio Emilia	“Riviera”, Guastalla	2006	Unknown	L. Bagni
Bologna	“Valle La Comune”, Malalbergo	2011	3 fledglings	M. Colombari
Reggio Emilia	Campegine	2013	1 fledgling	F. Simonazzi
Modena	A.R.E. “Torrazuolo”, Nonantola	2020	>1 fledgling	E. Selmi & S. Donello
Reggio Emilia	Luzzara	2020	>1 fledgling	A. Pavesi
Bologna	S. Giovanni in Persiceto/ Sant’Agata Bolognese	2020	incubation, then abandoned	G. Leoni & A. Ravagnani
Parma	Busseto	2021	2 fledglings	A. Berlusconi & A. Zanichelli
Reggio Emilia	“Riviera”, Guastalla	2021	2 fledglings	A. Pavesi
Reggio Emilia	Luzzara	2021	3 fledglings	A. Pavesi
Bologna	S. Giovanni in Persiceto/ Sant’Agata Bolognese	2021	incubation, then abandoned	G. Leoni & A. Ravagnani
Reggio Emilia	Luzzara	2022	1 fledgling	Pavesi <i>et al.</i> , 2023b
Bologna	S. Giovanni in Persiceto	2022	1 fledgling	Pavesi <i>et al.</i> , 2023b

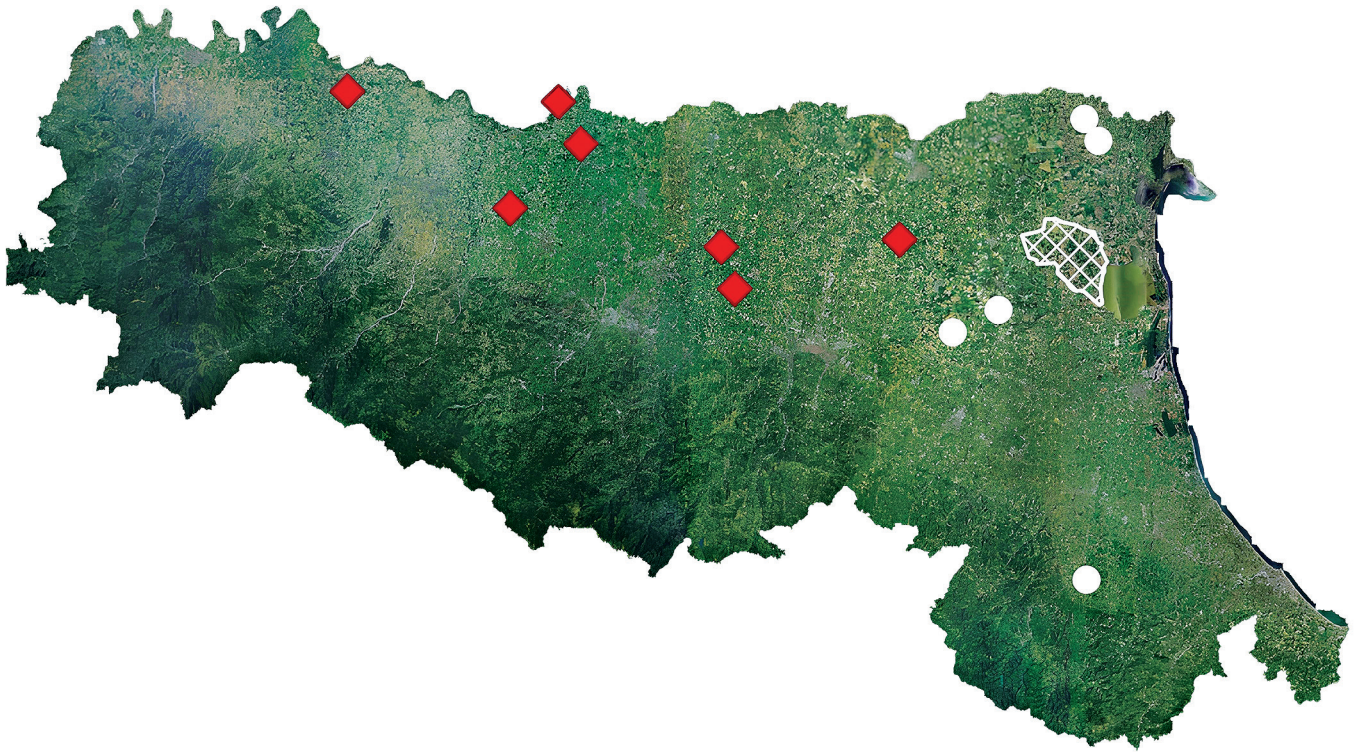


Fig. 1 - Emilia-Romagna region map with locations of confirmed breeding (red diamond) and wintering records (white spot and area), collected in the period 2006-2022. Maps from <https://geoportale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/> edited with QGIS 3.16.9. / Mappa della regione Emilia-Romagna con le località di nidificazione (diamante rosso) e svernamento (macchia bianca e area) confermate, raccolte nel periodo 2006-2022. Mappe tratte da <https://geoportale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/> editate con QGIS 3.16.9.

During summer, single birds or gatherings are reported mostly in the central and western area. In this period, feeding activities of breeding individuals is quite reduced, with females hunting around the immediate vicinity of the nest. Conversely, floaters, non-breeding individuals (generally young birds of 1-7 years old) that return to southern Europe for summertime (Newton, 2008; Blas *et al.*, 2009), have wider range (Tanferna *et al.*, 2013). Both in summer and during migration, large gathering occurs where trophic resources are abundant (Gensbøl, 1992; Panuccio, 2005). Rubbish dumps and burning cultivated fields are points of attraction for the species in which remarkable concentrations of individuals can be observed before or during migration: more than 1000 individuals were recorded at the rubbish dump of Turin, north-western Italy (Carpegna *et al.*, 2007) hundreds in Western Sicily around burning fields (Chiatante *et al.*, 2023). In Emilia-Romagna, few tens of individuals are regularly reported, especially in the central and westernmost part of the region. Major concentrations were observed in 2020 and 2021, with a maximum of more than 200 individuals seen near Gazzola (PC) on July 31, 2021 (A. Battaglia & B. Riboni pers. com.).

Despite the increase of birders, photographers and ornithologists on the field, the reproduction of the species in Emilia-Romagna region is still poorly known, with only few confirmed breeding reported in the last 16 years, however, the presence of floaters during summer is well known but varies in number year to year, scoring hundreds of birds in 2020. Winter presence seems to be more

regular than in the past, especially in Ferrara province. According to the data here collected, we can consider the Black Kite a regular migrant, irregular breeding and irregular winter species in Emilia-Romagna.

Acknowledgments

Azzolini Maurizio, Bagni Luca, Bassano Riboni, Battaglia Angelo, Benassi Romano, Berlusconi Alessandro, Campani Massimo, Carini Renato, Colombari Massimo, Donello Stefano, Estner Gerd, Ferrari Lorenzo, Fontanesi Marco, Grattini Nunzio, Larroux Nicola, Leoni Giorgio, Melandri Pietro, Ronconi Daniele, Roscelli Franco, Selmi Enrico, Simonazzi Fabio, Tinarelli Roberto e Zanichelli Andrea. We are also grateful to Andrea Galimberti for the revision of English text.

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