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The First Confirmed Record of Shikra *Accipiter badius* (Gmelin, 1788) in Iraq

<p>Authors Names a. Mudhafar A. Salim b. Salwan Ali Abed c. Zaman Salman Harbi</p> <p>Article History Received on: 16/02/2020 Revised on: 20/03/2020 Accepted on: 25/03/2020</p> <p>Keywords: Shikra, <i>Accipiter badius</i>, Ad-Daghara, IOCN, Iraq</p> <p>DOI: https://doi.org/10.29350/jops.2020.25.2.1083</p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>Over the period of 2015-2020, and during the series of the field surveys arranged and conducted by the Iraqi Organization for Conservation of Nature (IOCN) in various locations and habitats in Iraq, IOCN team had the opportunity to survey various areas within Iraq in different seasons where new observations of bird species were made as the first records for Iraq; additionally, the team have also discovered new breeding evidences and expansions within different habitats in Iraq. During one of these surveys is central Iraq, specifically at the Middle Euphrates region, an individual of Shikra <i>Accipiter badius</i> was observed in the extreme north of Al-Qadisiyah province, Ad-Daghara sub-district. This paper confirms, through the details of the observation and description provided below, the first confirmed record of this species for Iraq.</p>
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1. Introduction

Shikra *Accipiter badius* is a member of the Family Accipitridae that includes small to medium-sized raptors spread over nearly wide range worldwide. Shikra is Least Concern bird (LC) species which is a widespread resident breeder throughout south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa [11,14]. Within the Middle East, Shikra is a rare passage migrant to the area, and vagrant to Israel and Oman [13]. It has been found in Iran, Kuwait, Turkey, Yemen, and the UAE [12,13,7]. The closest breeding grounds of this species are in Armenia, southeast Azerbaijan, northeastern Iran, and the UAE [4,3,10,13] where there might be an expanding breeding population at the UAE [7]. Around Iraq, Shikra has been observed in Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia [12,13,8]. Shikra breeds late in the dry season and early in the wet season, although this means at opposite sides of the equator in different months of the year [9,17,6,5], Brown *et al.*, [6] indicated that Shikra may breed at one year of age, while Thiollay (1975) suggested that some birds do not breed at one year of age. Some bird species have been mentioned in past publications on birds of Iraq, of which Shikra was one of them, but no references to the original records have been found; therefore, the decision was taken by the authors to exclude them from the updated checklist of the birds of Iraq [15]. Additionally, neither Salim *et.al.* [16] nor Allouse [1,2]

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have mentioned this bird species within the Iraqi bird checklists. This paper, along with the detailed description and confirmation, represents the first confirmed observation of Shikra for Iraq.

2. The observation of the 1st Shikra *Accipiter badius* for Iraq

While birding within the northern parts of Al-Qadisiyah province in the Middle Euphrates, in the northern parts of Ad-Daghara subdistrict around the coordinates (N: 32°12'32", E: 44°47'49"), IOCN team have spread out within the observation area to the north of Daghara River. After period of birding time, one of the members of the team (MS) was able to spot a flying *Accipiter* that was first thought to be Eurasian Sparrow Hawk *Accipiter nisus*. The bird has been flushed out by the movement of MS after it was perching on a date-palm at the edge of an orchard, and immediately flew away eastward crossing over open field area. Right away, MS has walkie-talkie called SA that an *Accipiter* has flown towards the area he and ZS are birding at. After a while, the bird was photographed by the birders while the bird was crossing heading to a nearby date-palm orchard. Later on, and after checking the photos, it seemed that the observed *Accipiter* was juvenile based on the key features detailed below.

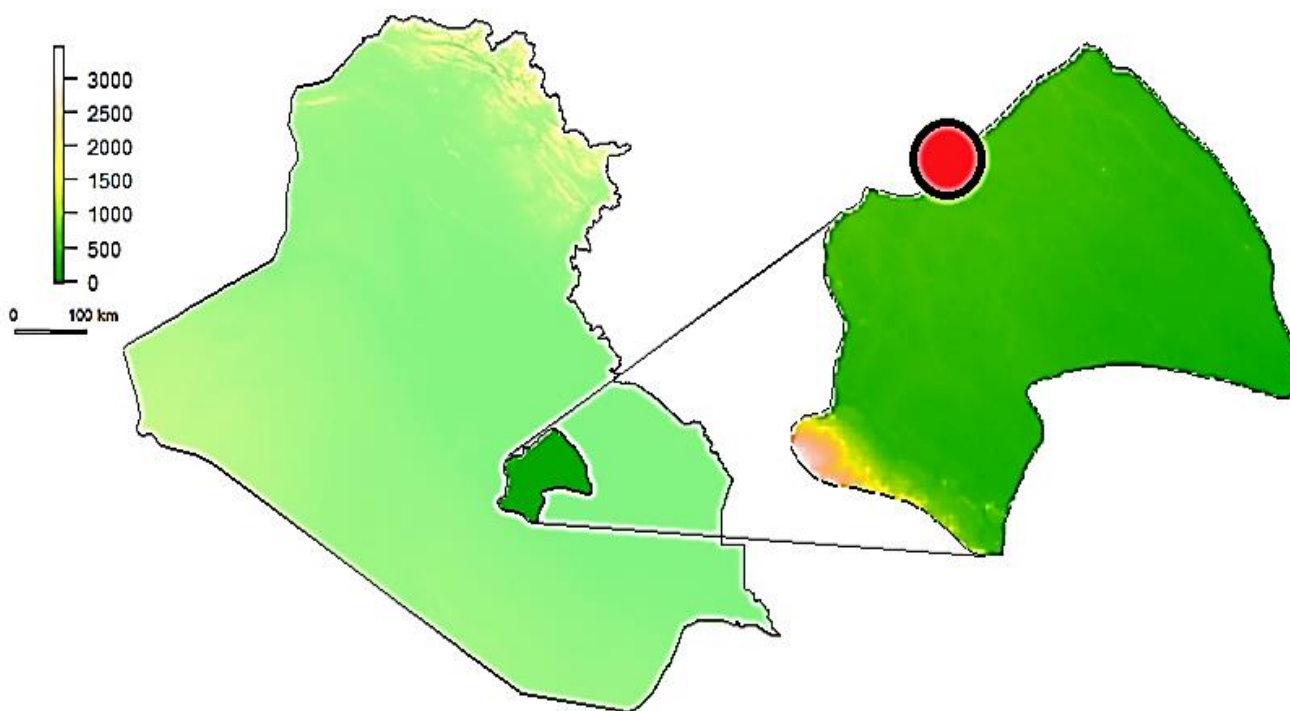


Figure. 1: Iraq Map shows the location of Al-Qadisiyah province and the location where the first Shikra *Accipiter badius* was observed in Iraq.

The observation was made at the 29th of September 2019, within an agricultural area with patches of dense date-palms orchards interspersed with open areas of crops and arid areas with no plant cover. The area also consists of open arid-lands, mainly salt-crested, with scattered Tamarix shrubs. Many flocks of small Passerines were found in this area, and there is a reedbed at the southern edge of the river that seems to be key roosting area for Sparrows. The observation area lies 15km to the northwest of Ad-Daghara center, 3.4km 4km southwest of Sadr Ad-Daghara barrage.



Figure 2: Left: The 1st juvenile Shikra observed in Iraq; Right: Satellite image shows the location where the 1st Shikra *Accipiter badius* was observed. ©IOCN.

The observed individual was a juvenile bird. It was recognized based on the broad wings and the formula of the wing having five ‘free’ primaries (fingers), whereas the Levant Sparrowhawk has only four; the shape of the tail with elongated central tail feathers; the way of flying being similar to Sparrowhawk. The dark, longitudinal, spots on the underparts are very obvious – like the underparts of juvenile Goshawk, but Goshawk differs from the observed bird in size, wing-shape, and the number of the under-tail bands. The wing-tip is rather rounded in comparison with Levant Sparrowhawk that has rather pointed tip. Finally, it can be easily recognized as Shikra juvenile due to the yellow iris (obvious in the photo) as Levant Sparrowhawk juveniles have brown iris.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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