

First record of Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* in Lebanon, 2022

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Abstract The Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*) has an extremely large distribution range in Africa and Asia, including the Middle East. The species primary live in deserts and semi-deserts, however its urban population is also increasing. In this paper, I reported the first record of the species for Lebanon. On 8th February 2022, I have seen an individual on the seaside coast near the harbor in Tripoli, North Lebanon. After I took photos of the bird, several ornithologist confirmed my correct identification. The nearest country where it was recorded before is Palestine.

Keywords: First Record, Brown-necked Raven, new species in Lebanon, *Corvus ruficollis*

Összefoglalás A barnanyakú holló (*Corvus ruficollis*) rendkívül nagy elterjedési területtel rendelkezik Afrikában és Ázsiában, beleértve a Közel-Keletet is. Elsősorban sivatagokban és félsivatagokban él, de az utóbbi időszakban városokban is megjelent fészkelőként. Ebben a közleményben a faj első libanoni megfigyeléséről írok. 2022. február 8-án az Észak-Libanonban található Tripoli kikötőjének közelében megfigyeltem egy példányt. A madárról bizonyítófotókat készítettem, majd ezeket elküldtem több ornitológusnak, akik megerősítették a határozás helyességét. Libanonhoz legközelebb korábban Palesztinában észlelték a fajt.

Kulcsszavak: első megfigyelés, barnanyakú holló, Libanon, *Corvus ruficollis*

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The Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*) is a monotypic species with a wide distribution range across North Africa, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, southern Iran and Central Asia (Walker 2009, Madge 2020). In some places its distribution range overlapping with the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), while in the south replacing it (Madge 2020).

The species is a primarily desert and semi-desert bird that avoids areas of cultivation (Madge 2020). Nesting sites can be in a variety of locations, but typically are on thorny trees (Jennings 1998, Shobrak 2005, Cunningham 2019).

It displays a great variety of foraging strategies as well as feeds on a variety of food items. The species' diet consists of rodents, snails, snakes, locusts and other grasshoppers, stranded fish (in coastal areas), grain, dates and other fruits (Belkacem *et al.* 2017, Madge 2020). There are also differences in the consumed food items between breeding and non-breeding seasons, while food waste of people such as pasta and chicken is also a significant part of the species's diet (Belkacem *et al.* 2017). Cooperative hunting on Egyptian Mastigure (*Uromastyx aegyptius*) in the Arava Valley, Israel was also observed which indicates the high intelligence of the Brown-necked Ravens (Yosef & Yosef 2010).

The Brown-necked Raven and Common Raven have both similarities and differences in their morphology. Therefore, for a clear field identification, they need to be carefully



observed in areas where both species occur. The Brown-necked Raven measures 48–56 cm in length and 103–120 wing span. The head and throat are a distinct brownish-black, while the rest of the plumage is black glossed with purple, blue or purplish-blue. The feathers of this species often fade quite quickly to a brownish black or true black, and it can look distinctly brown by the time it moults. It flies with the bill pointing downward, and not uncommonly has less obviously wedge-shape to tail-tip, but these features do not always hold, or are hard to make out. At closest range it may show bronze-brown color on nape. The feet, legs and bill are black. It is larger than the Carrion Crow, but not as large as the Common Raven (Svensson *et al.* 2009).

The population is estimated to be increasing following increases owing to urban development, therefore the species is considered Least Concern conservation biological status (BirdLife International 2023).

On 8th of February 2022, I was birdwatching on the seaside coast near the harbor in Tripoli, North Lebanon, when I heard a bird screeching. The sound was not usual to me. It was coming from afar, near a ship that was emptying its cargo. The bird was attacked by some Yellow-legged Gulls (*Larus michahellis*) and then it went to join the Hooded Crows (*Corvus cornix*) that had rejected it in another fight. The bird's color was dark black at the first sight, I thought it was a Common Raven but its sound was different than that of a Common Raven and that is what drove me to chase it. I tried to take some photos but it was very far from me. I was able to take 5 shots only before it fled the area towards the deck of a big ship. After I went back home, and downloaded the photos, I noticed that this bird was not a Common Raven. It had a brownish color on the neck, a fan shape tail and a slimmer bill than the common crow. Analyzing all the data of what I have heard and seen, it turned out to be a Brown-necked Raven. I sent the photos to many experts from Europe who had to consult their friends from Israel, because they see it frequently there since it's a local breeding bird there. The confirmation came from Eilat Bird Watching Center (IBRCE) through Mr. Richard Prior that this was indeed a Brown-necked Raven, matching with two other ornithologists. The following day, I went to the same location, and sadly, there were 3 poachers on the place who had killed lots of seagulls and waders and many other birds. The Brown-necked Raven did not show up again there.

From nearby countries, the species was recorded recently in Turkey (Jakobsen 2016) and Cyprus (Howard & Howard 2018). I have two theories that made it appear in Lebanon on the north coast. The first one is that it might have come on the deck of a transportation

ship and landed here before it disappeared the next day maybe due to poaching or perhaps it found its way out on the deck of a ship as well. The second theory is that it might have arrived to the area as it did in Cyprus by expanding its range of distribution. The species breeds in Israel (Madge 2020), therefore it is possible that the observed individual was originated from those population.

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