ABSTRACT

A male specimen of the thick-billed lark Rhamphocoris clotbey (Bonaparte, 1850) was collected in Al-Najaf Desert, south desert district of Iraq. Measurements of the specimen and some notes on the habitat were provided. This report constitutes the first record of this avian species in Iraq.

INTRODUCTION

The site where the specimen collected from, near Husub Dam in Al-Najaf desert lies within Arabian Desert and East Sahero-Arabian Xeric Shrubslands (PA1303) ecoregion with 125 mm of annual precipitation with occasional oases and the daily temperature vary considerably reaching over 45°C or higher in July and August and dropping to the teens in January and February (Anonymous, 2010). The surface is covered with sierozem (grey desert) soils that have less than 1% organic matter of their contents (Guest and Al-Rawi, 1966) supporting growth of only some scattered adapted plants like Lycium shawii, Capparis spinosa and Citrullus colocynthis that providing shelter for desert fauna during day time.

Thick-billed lark Rhamphocoris clotbey (Bonaparte, 1850) is a large, nomadic lark and unique heavy bill (Perlman and Kiat, 2011). This monotypic species occurs over the countries Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia as a resident bird, while it is reported as vagrant in Oman, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen (IUCN, 2012). The bird is said to be frequent to sparse in its native habitats in Africa (Keith et al., 1992).

METHODS

The bird was collected by Dr. H. M. Al-Rammahi during a several days duration monitoring trip in Al-Najaf desert, Husub Dam site (N 31° 36’ 50”, E 43° 56’ 10”) during the period between 30 March-5 April. Due to the lack of suitable preservation facility in the field, the researcher injected the bird with formalin. The specimen was dried and hardened. Although it is not in a very good condition, but the main characters of identification importance are visible and clear such as the massive bill and the white patches on the dark face. The other parts of the body are in a rather good condition like wings, tail, and back.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ramphocoris clothley (Bonaparte, 1850).

The specimen is deposited in the bird collection of Iraq Natural History Museum under the registration number: 2013-3419-Z7, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq.

Measurements (in mm): total length 174, bill 17.4, wing 126.4, tarsus 22, tail 61. sex: male (fig. 1). The key identification character is the massive bill (fig. 2).

The key identification character for this bird is that the bill with contra-curved mandible resulting in a small aperture which is visible when the bill is closed (fig. 2) (Dean et al. 1992). The taxa of the avian family Alaudidae encounter 13, yet, this bird species was not mentioned by the main references as an Iraqi bird species. The bird is known from the neighboring countries around Iraq including Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (IUCN, 2012). These countries provide natural extension of the subtropical dry shrubland habitats and hot deserts which constitute the natural habitat of the bird. This report is the first record for this bird in Iraq.

In view of little information available on this bird, its status is not clear and needs further observations. However, Spencer et al. (2007) found it breeding in Kuwait which is not very far from our collection site area. Along with its being the first for Iraq, the record of this bird shade light on two key factors: first, this observation might represent the further northeastern distribution of this bird in its global distribution (fig.3); second, the elevation of the place where the specimen collected from was (140m asl.), and this might represent the patch (elevation wise) in this bird’s know range, along the extension southward to Kuwait.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude and deep thanks to Mr. Kasim M. Al-Khafaji the head and Mr. Dhergham H. Al-Abidi, collector, Al-Rafidain Association for Hunting and Environmental Protection, Al-Najaf City, Al-Najaf Province for their generous help in providing facilities and support to the researchers.

LITERATURE CITED


Mohammad, et al.


Fig.1: male of thick-billed lark from Al-Najaf desert.
The first record of the thick-billed lark

Fig. 2: head of thick-billed lark showing the massive bill.

Fig. 3: The known distribution of the thick-billed lark *Rhamphocoris clathratus* (Bonaparte, 1850) (the source of this map is: Birds of Western Palearctic. Ver 2.0.1. 2003-2006 Bird Guides Limiter. electronic copy).
أول تسجيل للفنيرة سمكة المنقار (1850) في العراق

Mohammad, et al.

(2013)12 (3): 37-41

*Rhamphocoris clotbey* (Bonaparte, 1850)

محمد كاظم محمد "و حيدر محمد الزماحي" و سامان روستم أفراسیب لهوني "

متحف التاريخ الطبيعي، جامعة بغداد، باب المعظم، بغداد، العراق

جامعة القاسم الخضير، محافظة بابل، العراق

الخلاصة

تم جمع نموذج ذكر من الفنيرة سمكة المنقار *Rhamphocoris clotbey* في بادية صحراء العراق الجنوبي. تم تسجيل القياسات وبعض الملاحظات عن بيئة المنطقة. يعتبر هذا البحث التسجيل الأول لهذا النوع من الطيور في العراق.