

FIRST CONFIRMED BREEDING OF WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola* IN VITOSHA MOUNTAIN (CW BULGARIA)

Prvo potrjeno gnezdenje sloke *Scolopax rusticola* v gorovju Vitoša (osrednja zahodna Bolgarija)

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Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* is a Palearctic species, breeding mainly in broad-leaved and mixed European forests. In Fennoscandia, it nests in mature coniferous forests. Southern border of the bird's breeding distribution passes through the Balkan Peninsula, Rhodope Mountains (Northern Greece) (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM *et al.* 1986, HOODLESS & SAARI 1997). In Bulgaria, the Woodcock nests mainly in coniferous, mixed, and, occasionally, mature broad-leaved forests between 400 and 1800 m a.s.l. Its population was estimated at 100–200 (NANKINOV 2004) and, more recently, at only 30–100 (NIKOLOV *et al.* 2007) breeding pairs. After the mid-20th century, its confirmed breeding was evidenced only three times, probably due to its secretive way of life, night activity, cryptic coloration, and low numbers. So far, only one nest with three eggs is confirmed from Rhodope Mountains in 1983, two nestlings from Rila Mountain in June 2000, and one nest from Pirin Mountain in 2002 (STOYANOV *et al.* 2003).

On 10 May 2011, a nest containing four eggs was accidentally found at 1,645 m a.s.l., on the northern slope of Vitosha Mountain (N42°37', E23°15'), rising on the outskirts of Sofia. The nest was placed in a 70–80 year old Norway Spruce *Picea abies* plantation on a 7° slope, which was selectively logged in the autumn of 2010 (Figure 1). Canopy cover in a 100 m² sample plot around the nest was 75%. Shrubs of Raspberry *Rubus idaeus* covered < 1% of the sample plot, while herb cover was 15% with prevailing Common Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Wood Stitchwort *Stellaria nemorum* and lungwort *Pulmonaria rubra*. The nest was located some 10 m from a small stream with side bogs. This part of the mountain falls within the boundaries of homonymous Nature Park, so a tourist

track passes ca. 30 m away from the nest with no direct visibility towards it. The nest-site is only 3 km away from the Kumata chalet, where a flying Woodcock was observed on 18 May 2006, but no roding song was reported (NIKOLOV *et al.* 2007). It falls within the altitudinal range of 900–2,185 m a.s.l., where all the confirmed breeding records in Bulgaria have been made (STOYANOV *et al.* 2003).

On 20 May 2011, the female bird was incubating, but on 27 May 2011 the nest with eggs was found depredated (Figure 2). We analyzed the nesting material and a hair from the dorsothoracal body part of Wildcat *Felis silvestris* (compared with University of Forestry's collection) was found, which could have been the possible predator. Nest dimensions measured were: outer diameter = 18 cm, inner diameter = 12.5 cm, depth = 2.7 cm. Thus, the nest was not as deep as usual, which is 3.5–4.5 (6) cm according to GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM *et al.* (1986), but its measures were very close to the only nest measured so far in Bulgaria (STOYANOV *et al.* 2003). The nest was built over half-decayed spruce twigs. Its total dry weight was 70 g. Woodcock female builds the nest with adjacent materials (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM *et al.* 1986), so the prevalence of spruce needles with 53.3 g (76.1%) is expected. Fine spruce twigs (5.7 g, 8.1%), beech leaves (0.6 g, 0.9%), half-decayed spruce cone particles, and other unidentified plant materials (5.7 g, 8.1%) were much less-represented. Furthermore, we found 36 small female Woodcock feathers (0.2 g, 0.3%) mixed with other plant material. In general, the nesting material used was similar to that described by GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM *et al.* (1986).



Figure 1: Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* sitting on the nest under a fallen spruce, Vitosha Mountain (CW Bulgaria), 20 May 2011 (photo: G. Gruychev)

Slika 1: Sloka *Scolopax rusticola* na gnezdu pod podrto smreko, gorovje Vitoša (osrednja zahodna Bolgarija, 20.5.2011 (foto: G. Gruychev)



Figure 2: Depredated nest of Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Vitosha Mountain (CW Bulgaria), 27 May 2011 (photo: G. Gruychev)

Slika 2: Izplenjeno gnezdo sloke *Scolopax rusticola*, gorovje Vitoša (osrednja zahodna Bolgarija, 27.5.2011 (foto: G. Gruychev)

The Woodcock is considered an endangered species in Bulgaria (SHURULINKOV *et al.* 2011). Thus, the report on confirmed breeding is an important piece of information that might help in conservation efforts of its small breeding population and the fact that should not be neglected in Vitosha Nature Park's management plan.

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Povzetek

Sloka *Scolopax rusticola* je maloštevilna in ogrožena gnezdilka Bolgarije, kjer so bila v drugi polovici 20. stoletja znana le tri opazovanja s potrjenim gnezdenjem te vrste. Dne 10.5.2011 sta avtorja na severnem pobočju gorovja Vitoša nad obrobjem Sofije (osrednja Z Bolgarija), na nadmorski višini 1645 m po naključju našla gnezdo s štirimi jajci. Gnezdo je bilo zgrajeno v 70–80 let starem nasadu smreke *Picea abies*, ki je bil jeseni leta 2010 selektivno posekan. Dne 20.5.2011 sta opazovala valečo samico, dne 27.5.2011 pa sta opazila, da je bilo gnezdo izplenjeno. Gnezdo sta premerila in podrobno analizirala gnezditveni material.

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