

**Lesser Kestrel in Armenia**  
*Report*

**March 2009-September 2010**



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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Lesser Kestrel is a small falcon breeding in the South of Armenia, near village of Gorayk. It is endangered globally and is facing a high risk of extinction in the wild (IUCN Red List, 2007). In Armenia the colony of birds is located at ca. 2,000 m occupying a TV broadcasting station, which is a high rise concrete building with roof cavities surrounded by pasture meadows and cereal fields. When the breeding colony was initially discovered it counted ca. 20 pairs and was then spotted to decline gradually with years. Based on some preliminary research undertaken that year the reason for that decline was attributed to reduced nest-site availability because of some roof repair done by the local TV management. This work had eventually blocked access to some nests and birds switched to a different building. In 2008 ASPB worked with local schoolchildren to build 18 artificial nest boxes and secure breeding of Lesser Kestrels in the site. First time in Armenia and the Caucasus Lesser Kestrel discovered nesting in artificial nest box constructions. A total of 7 nest boxes were occupied. After this during our research and monitoring activities in 2008 was discovered that local TV management plans to dismantle the building which hosts the birds and the nest-boxes, and use pieces of concrete wall for construction purposes. Limiting the nesting of birds could result in the loss of entire colony in very short periods of time. So ASPB started negotiations with local TV management and reached the agreement to rent out one of the abandoned structures to repair walls and build a two-storied breeding facility for Lesser Kestrel colony. Studies suggested that Lesser Kestrels prefer buildings with many roof and wall cavities, so typically a building with nest cavities and inner chambers was considered and after a new breeding facility with 30 new nest boxes was opened and made available to birds. In total 48 nests were built in Gorayk IBA. This year during our monitoring activities was discovered that 10 pairs of Lesser Kestrel also occupied the first artificial breeding structure in Armenia. As the Armenian Lesser Kestrel population is migratory we ringed about 11 juveniles of LK with the aluminum rings to find out if the juveniles return back to the same breeding site next year. All these conservation efforts are unique in Armenia and not been implemented hitherto.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the project was to study trends of Armenian population of Lesser Kestrel. The activities to achieve this goal were:

1. To monitor the breeding population of Lesser Kestrel in Armenia
2. To ring up to 50-80 juveniles of Lesser Kestrel

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

### Lesser kestrel monitoring

Our studies and observations of the only breeding population of Lesser Kestrel in Armenia started early spring of 2010. The first three birds we observed in early March. They were displaying their breeding behavior and kept close to their breeding sites. Whole colony was back to Armenia in April as last year and in mid of April the population of the colony counted 60-65 individuals (20-25 pairs). Compared to the last year, we had 10 breeding pairs in artificial breeding tower (8 pairs in 2009). The breeding success in artificial tower was higher than in the previous year: 33 eggs and 31 fledglings. However, the population was stable as compared to the last year (2009).



### Lesser Kestrel ringing

This year a total of 33 juveniles and 10 adults of Lesser Kestrel were ringed. First visit was made in late July (20.07.2010) and we ringed about 21 juveniles and 4 adults, the second visit was made early August (20.07.2010) when 12 juveniles and 6 adult birds were ringed. Since some individuals have been back earlier this year, by the mid of July we already had juveniles ready to leave their nests and to make their first flight.



All these birds were ringed using the color rings produced by INTERREX Company (Lodz, Poland). The rings have alphanumeric (ARM) and numeric codes. Rings with alphanumeric codes have been placed on the birds' right tarsi and those with numeric codes have been placed on their left tarsi.



We have announced about this ringing project via [www.MEBird.net](http://www.MEBird.net) and [www.kestreling.com](http://www.kestreling.com) web portals to expect data from wintering grounds of our Lesser Kestrels.

Unfortunately, none of 11 juveniles ringed last year with aluminum rings have been observed. This may mean that juveniles haven't back to their breeding sites or the aluminum rings are not easy to recognize during the birds' flight. Also, there were no ringed birds with aluminum rings breeding in artificial tower.



## RECOMMANDATIONS

ASPB's recommandations are:

1. To follow up monitoring program of Lesser Kestrel in Armenia to find out the trends of the only breeding population for a long period and to find out the limiting factors
2. To continue ringing project of Lesser Kestrel in Armenia to increase the number of individuals for ringing and ensure maximum capture of birds representative of the colony
3. To continue observation of ringed birds in Armenia next year to get "recoveries".
4. Establish reliable contacts and collect possible observations of "Armenian" Lesser Kestrels from African countries.

