

Mixed flocks of foraging Jackdaws and Cattle Egrets

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The Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* is a rare resident in Israel, restricted to a few colonies in caves (Bet Govrin) and quarries (Migdal Zedaq near Petah Tiqwah) (Hovel, 1987; Paz, 1987). In recent years, the Jackdaw has also bred in growing numbers in the quarry of 'Nesher-Ramla' and some nearby caves.

Since May 1992, large mixed flocks of Jackdaws and Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* have been seen hunting for insects and other prey in an abandoned Avocada plantation between the quarry and the 'Nesher-Ramla' sewage-reservoir. The Jackdaws associate with the egrets among the tall weeds, often flying up briefly to chase an escaping prey item. The mixed flock moves systematically from one end of the plantation to the other. Also during brief rests in the remaining avocado trees, this mixed flock is maintained. At the end of the day, the Jackdaws return to the quarry, while the Cattle egrets move westwards to their roosting colonies somewhere west of the line Ramla-Lod.

References

Hovel, H., 1987. Check-list of the birds of Israel. 196pp. Tel Aviv University and Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

Paz, U., 1987. The birds of Israel. 264 pp. The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington.

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Kestrels feeding on reptiles near Ramla, Israel

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For the past three years, we have been using a number of large nestboxes on tall poles near the 'Nesher-Ramla' sewage reservoir, Ramla, Israel. Although placed initially to attract owls, so far the nestboxes have been occupied only by Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* and House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*.

In 1990 and 1991, a nestbox fixed to an electricity pole near the entrance of the reservoir was used successfully by a pair of Kestrels. In 1990, we observed their diet, directly and indirectly by looking at pellets and other debris. It comprised mainly large insects (grasshoppers, mole crickets, beetles), small birds and a considerable number of Levantine voles.



During 1991, voles were scarce and so the Kestrels changed to eating reptiles. At the end of the breeding season we found below the nestbox the remains of eight Agama lizards *Agama stellio* and eight Chameleons *Chamaele chamaeleon*. The heads and tails of both prey species had been discarded.

Other available reptiles such as juvenile snakes (*Coluber jugularis asianus* and *Natrix tessellata*), lizards (*Ophisops elegans*) and skinks (*Chalcides ocellatus* and *Mabuya vittata*) were not taken.

Although it is well-known that Kestrels occasionally take reptiles, it is unusual for them to be such a prominent part of the diet.

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