

## THE FIRST RECORD OF THE THICK-BILLED LARK *RHAMPHOCORIS CLOTBEY* (BONAPARTE, 1850) FOR IRAQ

Mohammad K. Mohammad\* Hayder M. Al-Rammahi\*\*  
Saman R. Lahony\*

\*Iraq Natural History Museum, University of Baghdad, Bab Al-Muadham,  
Baghdad, Iraq

\*\*Green University of Al-Qassim, Babylon Province, Iraq  
corresponding author: [amarmkm82@yahoo.com](mailto:amarmkm82@yahoo.com)

### 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 Shrublands (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.

The first record of the thick-billed lark

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Ramphocoris clotbey* (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

- Allouse, B. E. 1962 Birds of Iraq. Vol. 3. Ar-Rabitta Press, Baghdad, 280 pp. ( In Arabic )
- Anonymous (2010) Iraqi fourth national report to the convention on biological diversity. Ministry of Environment, Republic of Iraq, 282 pp.
- Dean, W.R.L. 2004 Nomadic Desert Birds. Springer – verlag, Berlin.
- Guest, E. and Al-Rawi, A. 1966 Flora of Iraq. Vol. 1: Introduction. Ministry of Agriculture. University Press, Glasgow, 213 pp.
- IUCN. 2012. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (ver. 2012.1). Available at:<http://www.iucnredlist.org>.
- Keith, S.; Urban, E. K.; Fry, C. H. 1992. The birds of Africa vol. IV. Academic Press, London.
- Mahdi, N. and George, P. V. 1969 A systematic list of the vertebrates of Iraq. Iraq nat. Hist. Mus. Publ., 26: 1-104.

Mohammad, *et al.*

- Perlman, Y. and Kiat, Y. 2011 In-hand identification of Thick-billed Larks (*Ramphocoris clotbey*) in the Negev, Israel, February 2011, Israeli Ornithological Center, Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.
- Salim, M.A, Porter, R.F. Christensen, S. Schiermacker-Hansen, P. and Al-Jbour, S. 2006 Field Guide to the birds of Iraq. Amman: Nature Iraq & BirdLife International. (In Arabic).
- Spencer, S.T., Pilcher, C. and Cowan, P. J. 2007 The first breeding record of Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey* in Kuwait and concomitant behavioural observations. Sandgrouse, 29(2): 205-208.



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.

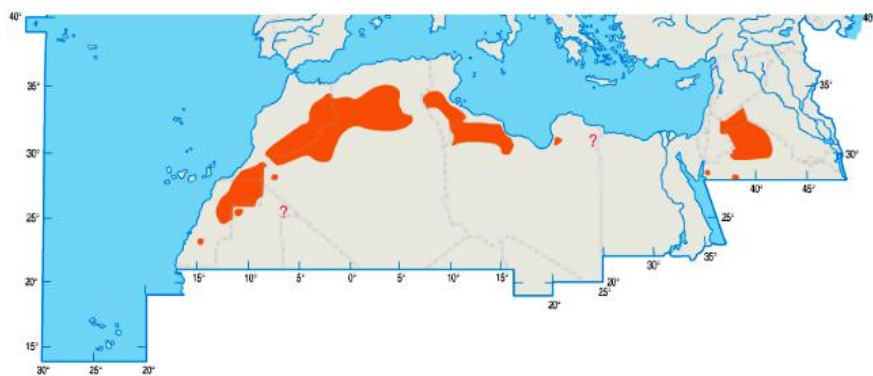


Fig.3: The known distribution of the thick-billed lark *Rhamphocoris clotbey* (Bonaparte, 1850) (the source of this map is: Birds of Western Palearctic. Ver 2.0.1. 2003-2006 Bird Guides Limiter. electronic copy).

*Bull. Iraq nat. Hist. Mus.*  
(2013)12 (3): 37-41

**أول تسجيل للقنبرة سميكة المنقار (*Rhamphocoris clotbey* (Bonaparte, 1850) في العراق**

محمد كاظم محمد\* و حيدر محمد الرماحي\*\* وسامان روستم أفراسياب لهوني\*  
\*متحف التاريخ الطبيعي، جامعة بغداد، باب المعظم، بغداد، العراق  
\*\*جامعة القاسم الخضراء، محافظة بابل، العراق

**الخلاصة**

تم جمع نموذج ذكر من القنبرة سميكة المنقار *Rhamphocoris clotbey* في بادية النجف، صحراء العراق الجنوبية. تم تسجيل القياسات وبعض الملاحظات عن بيئة المنطقة. يعتبر هذا البحث التسجيل الأول لهذا النوع من الطيور في العراق.