THE FIRST COLONY NESTING OF THE ROSY STARLING *Pastor roseus* IN CROATIA (THE PAG ISLAND)

Prvo kolonijalno gniježđenje ružičastog čvorka Pastor roseus u Hrvatskoj (otok Pag)

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The distribution of the Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* extends into Central Asia, western and southern Russia and Belarus. During invasions (several hundred breeding pairs) the species can, however, breed irregularly in eastern Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia and northern Greece (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

In the 19th century, Schiavuzzi (1884) referred to the Rosy Starling as a breeder on the coast of Istria near Kaštel close to the Slovenian border. In the Croatian ornithological literature, sparse data on the observations of the species relate only to springtime (Rucner 1998, Lukač 2011), when these birds return from their wintering grounds in Asia. There are only a couple of earlier mentions of breeding Rosy Starlings in Croatia: a possible nesting in Slavonia and Istria in the late 19th century and a probable nesting on the Krk Island in 1987 (Kralj 1997). The problem with the scarce data lies in the very short observation period of this species, specifically from the end of May to the first days of June. The number of data has greatly increased in the last 20 years, when Rosy Starlings have been regularly and systematically observed on the Pag Island (Šere 2018). Flocks of up to 100 birds are regularly observed around Stara Novalja, Novalja, Vidasovi Stani, Lun, Kolan, Kolansko blato, Sv. Duh, Caska, Pag Town, Gorica, Velo Blato, Dinjiška and Miškovići. In 2002, individual flocks numbered more than 1000 individuals (Šere 2018).

In 2022, a huge influx of Rosy Starlings was observed on the Pag Island, from Stara Novalja via Vidasovi Stani to Lun (Tovarnel) in the north of the island. The observation of the Rosy Starling arrival took place predominantly in the mornings from 30th May to 6th June 2022. During the first 4 days, flocks of 20-30 individuals flew towards the north of the island (Lun), while on 3rd June, the

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first flocks were observed flying back to the south of the island. Due to this fact, i.e. birds returning/flying back, it is impossible to determine their exact number, but there were undoubtedly around 1,000 individuals. The first major wave of Rosy Starlings was recorded on the evening of 3rd June, when ca. 200 birds were quenching their thirst in the Velo Blato lake and resting in the nearby pine forest. On 5th June, ca. 500 birds were foraging all over the pastures in the southern part of the Velo Blato lake, with mating couples and intensively singing/displaying males observed. Rosy Starlings were regularly seen throughout June, foraging in pastures in the wider area of Velo Blato lake in flocks of up to 200. At the end of June, however, Rosy Starlings were also observed at Velo Blato and Povljana, yet they did not behave in the same manner as in the previous years. Through close observation, we quickly ascertained that they mainly collected different types of grasshoppers (Orthoptera) as food for their young. (Figure 1). The flocks, which numbered from 20 to 50 individuals in the air, searched for food in the radius of several kilometres at that time. We monitored these flocks for several days, looking for the place where they were nesting, and on 29th June 2022, we finally managed to find the colony and nests with the young among stones 5 km from

Fig. 1: The Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* with food in its beak, 28th June 2022, the Pag Island (Croatia). Photo: D. Grohar

Slika 1: Ružičasti čvorak Pastor roseus s hranom u kljunu, 28. lipnja 2022, otok Pag (Hrvatska). Foto: D. Grohar

Velo Blato (Figure 2). The breeding colony numbered about 200 pairs. The young were generally still in their nests, with some of them already appearing on the edge of their nests at the time of their parents' arrival. Based on these findings, and taking into account the duration of the breeding (5 egg clutches, incubation of 15 days and fledging after 16 days; Gooders 1988), the breeding birds should have been at their nesting sites already during the time of the first influx of migrants. We decided not to set up nets in the colony of breeding Rosy Starlings in order not to disturb them unnecessarily, as too many individuals would have been caught, but we managed to ring 15 adults outside the colony (Figure 3). On 7th July, freshly fledged young appeared together with their parents on the western side of Dinjiška saltpan (Bartol), while on 10th July, a mixed flock of juveniles and adults was seen in the pine forest near the Velo Blato lake (Figure 4). As the young birds were not yet able to forage, the adults provided food for them. On 29th July, a flock of ca. 200 juvenile Rosy Starlings were seen foraging north of Povljana with no adults present at all (Observation.org 2022). The last observation came from the same area on 5th August, when one adult and three juveniles were observed (Observation.org 2022a).

Fig. 2: The Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* and its chicks at the entrance to the nest, 1st July 2022, the Pag Island (Croatia). Photo: D. Grohar

Slika 2: Ružičasti čvorak Pastor roseus s mladuncima na ulazu u gnijezdo, 1. srpnja 2022, otok Pag (Hrvatska). Foto: D. Grohar

Information on Rosy Starlings breeding on the island of Pag in 2022 was published in the WP reports section (Lawicki & van den Berg 2022). It will be interesting to check in 2023 whether Rosy Starlings are likely to breed again in the same place on the island of Pag.

Fig. 3: The Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* with ring ZAGREB HA17709, 30th June 2022, the Pag Island (Croatia). Photo: D. Šere

Slika 3: Ružičasti čvorak Pastor roseus s prstenom ZAGREB HA17709, 30. lipnja 2022, otok Pag (Hrvatska). Foto: D. Šere

Fig. 4: The Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* adults with fledged juveniles, 10th July 2022, the Pag Island (Croatia). Photo: N. Škoda

Slika 4: Odrasli ružičasti čvorak Pastor roseus s opernaćenim mladuncima, 10. srpnja 2022, otok Pag (Hrvatska). Foto: N. Škoda

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SAŽETAK

Više od 20 godina od kraja svibnja do prvih dana lipnja redovito pratimo proljetnu selidbu ružičastoga čvorka *Pastor roseus* na otoku Pagu. U tom razdoblju čvorci su dolazili svake godine ali s različitom brojnosti. Najviše smo ih zabilježili 2002. godine, kada je opaženo više od 1000 ptica u jednom danu. Samo jednom smo promatrali hranjenje skakavcima, obično smo ih vidjeli na murvama te rijetko na trešnjama, kojih na Pagu nema puno.

Godina 2022. je bila osobito zanimljiva zbog toga što su neka jata već odlazila s otoka Paga početkom lipnja, dok su druga za to vrijeme bila na gnježđenju. Prve ružičaste čvorke smo u 2022. godini vidjeli 27. svibnja na selidbi, no u to vrijeme su bili prisutni i brojni ružičasti čvorci, koji su već bili na gnježdenju. Prvih dana lipnja čvorke smo viđali u letu, kako se vraćaju prema jugoistoku, kao što je opažano ostalih godina. Kolonija od najmanje 200 parova pronađena je nedaleko od Velog Blata na otoku Pagu 29. lipnja 2022. Gnijezda su bila u šupljinama kamenitog tla i u svim gnijezdima roditelji su hranili mladunce. Izvan kolonije uspjeli smo prstenovati 15 odraslih ružičastih čvoraka. Prvi mladunci su bili videni 7. srpnja 2022., dok su 29. srpnja bila promatrana jata od 200 mladunaca. Posljednji mladi ružačisti čvorci bili su viđeni 5. kolovoza 2022. Ovo je prvi nalaz kolonije i potvrđeno gniježđenje ružičastog čvorka na otoku Pagu i u Hrvatskoj. Zanimljivo će biti vidjeti hoće li se čvorci vratiti na gnježđenje u 2023. godini.