



Exotic birds in Portugal

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ABSTRACT The establishment of free-living populations of bird species outside their natural range as a result of human activities is a serious problem in several parts of the World (Temple 1992).

In Portugal, the number of exotic bird species recorded in the wild has increased markedly in recent years. Some have become established and now have feral populations. This short paper provides an overview of the present situation.

Data were gathered using existing references, and also by asking for information from individual observers. Apart from that, during the last five years, fieldwork on this topic has been carried out in many parts of the country. In all, we obtained information concerning 38 species, of which 14 are breeding or probably breeding in Portugal (table 1 on page 564).

Systematic list of species breeding or probably breeding

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*

The Black Francolin occurs naturally in the Eastern Mediterranean and east to southwestern Asia (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). According to Vowles & Vowles (1994), this species is apparently established in some hilly grassland areas in the northeastern Algarve. No figures or recent data are available.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

This species is native to Eurasia and was introduced, mainly for game purposes, in several parts of the World (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). In Portugal, there are small localised populations in the provinces of Estremadura, Alentejo and Algarve. No figures are available. In the Sado Estuary, the favoured habitat consists of open

woodland areas, mainly Cork Oak *Quercus suber* and Umbrella (or Stone) Pine *Pinus pinea*.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

This parrot has a wide distribution that comprises a large part of Africa and Asia; the species has been introduced in several areas of the Western Palearctic (Cramp 1985). In Portugal, it has been recorded regularly in the city of Lisbon and in Cascais town, where it probably breeds. Several roosts are known, but no figures are available.

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*

This African weaver (Sibley & Monroe 1990) has been recorded breeding in the Arade River valley (Vowles & Vowles 1994). In 1996, three males were seen in the Barroca Marsh and it is strongly suspected that breeding took place (Leitão & Costa 1996); in June 1997, a small colony with five nests was located, in a ditch covered with abundant aquatic vegetation. In this area, the species is confined to rice-fields. The main limitation to its expansion in this region seems to be the size of the area covered by this culture. There are, however, large extensions of the Ribatejo cultivated with rice-fields; thus, expansion of the species' range may occur in the future. In addition, a single individual was recorded in the rice-fields at Ponta da Erva, Tagus Estuary, about 20 km to the north.

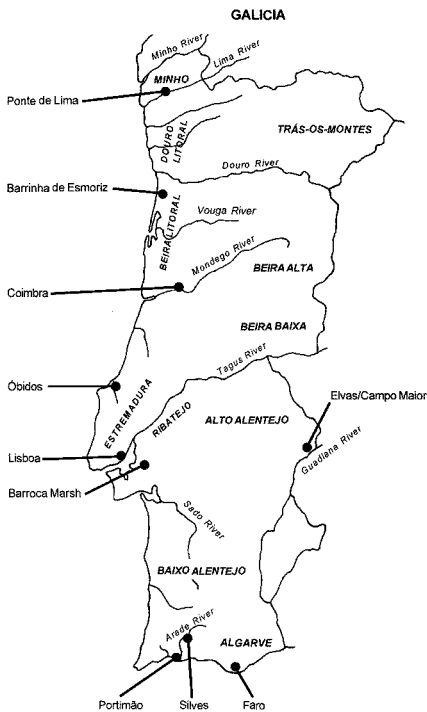


Fig. 1. Location of the Portuguese provinces and of some of the places mentioned in the text.

Scale: 1 cm = 13 km.

Table 1. Summary of status of exotic birds recorded in the wild in Portugal.

Sources: personal data; data from Carlos Pacheco, Ricardo Tomé, João Loureiro, Michael Armelin, Cesar Vidal, João Ministro and José R. Pereira; and L. Gordinho *in* Costa & Comité Português de Raridades da SPEA (1997); De la Cigona (1996); Vowles & Vowles (1994); Lopes *et al.* (1996); Telles & Candeias (1980); Rufino (undated). Sequence: Sibley & Monroe (1990).

Status: O Occasionally seen; RS Regularly seen, throughout the year, but not breeding; PB Probably breeding; B Breeding.

Abundance: R Rare; U Uncommon; C Common; A Abundant.

Species	Origin	Status	Population trend	Abundance
Black Francolin <i>Francolinus francolinus</i>	Eurasia	PB	Unknown	R
Common Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Eurasia	B	Unknown	U
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	America	O	–	–
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Budgerigar <i>Melopsittacus undulatus</i>	Australia	O	–	–
Grey Parrot <i>Psittacus erithacus</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Rose-ringed Parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>	Africa, Asia	B	Increasing	U
Monk Parakeet <i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>	South America	O	–	–
Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Africa	O	–	–
African Collared Dove <i>S. roseogrisea</i>	Africa	RS	–	–
Marabou Stork <i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Glossy starling <i>Lamprotornis</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Asia	O	–	–
Red-billed Leiothrix <i>Leiothrix lutea</i>	Asia	RS	–	–
Southern Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>	Africa	RS	–	–
Village Weaver <i>P. cucullatus</i>	Africa	B	Increasing	U
Red-billed Quelea <i>Quelea quelea</i>	Africa	RS	–	–
Yellow-crowned Bishop <i>Euplectes afer</i>	Africa	B	Increasing	U
Black-winged Bishop <i>E. hordaceus</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Orange Bishop <i>E. franciscanus</i>	Africa	RS	–	–
Red Bishop <i>E. orix</i>	Africa	PB	Unknown	R
Long-tailed Widowbird <i>E. progne</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Red-cheeked Cordonbleu <i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Lavender Waxbill <i>Estrilda caeruleascens</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Orange-cheeked Waxbill <i>E. melpoda</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Crimson-rumped Waxbill <i>E. rhodopyga</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Black-rumped Waxbill <i>E. troglodytes</i>	Africa	PB	Unknown	U
Common Waxbill <i>E. astrild</i>	Africa	B	Increasing	A
Red Avadavat <i>Amandava amandava</i>	Asia	B	Increasing	C
Zebra Finch <i>Taeniopygia guttata</i>	Australia	B	Unknown	R
African Silverbill <i>Lonchura cantans</i>	Africa	PB	Unknown	R
Scaly-breasted Munia <i>L. punctulata</i>	Asia	O	–	–
Black-headed Munia <i>L. malacca</i>	Asia	B	Unknown	U
White-headed Munia <i>L. maja</i>	Asia	B	Unknown	R
Java Sparrow <i>Padda oryzivora</i>	Asia	O	–	–
Cut-throat Amadina <i>fasciata</i>	Africa	PB	Unknown	R
Straw-tailed Whydah <i>Vidua fischeri</i>	Africa	O	–	–
Pin-tailed Whydah <i>V. macroura</i>	Africa	O	–	–

Yellow-crowned Bishop *Euplectes afer*

This African weaver occurs over a large portion of southern Africa (Sibley & Monroe 1990). In Portugal, there were very few records before 1990, although the species had been trapped during ringing sessions in the Algarve (Leitão 1993). In the early 1990s, it was found breeding at Barroca Marsh (Leitão 1993). The species has been counted there regularly since then, with totals of 14 males

in 1993, 13 males in 1994 and 18 males in 1995. Finally, in August 1996, a census covering 90% of the area resulted in a total of 44 displaying males and 17 females (Leitão & Costa 1996). There is clear evidence of range expansion in this area, where the species' habitat is rice-fields with ditches bordered by dense vegetation. This type of habitat is quite abundant over a large part of the Tagus valley, and a few Yellow-crowned Bishops have already been recorded at Benavente, about 30 km to the north. Given its favoured choice of breeding habitat, the species is likely to increase its breeding range in the near future.

Apart from this area, the species has also been recorded at Barrinha de Esmoriz (João Loureiro verbally; Lopes *et al.* 1996), at a few places in the Mondego valley (C. Pacheco verbally) and in the Algarve, namely in the Arade River valley, where it has been reported breeding (Vowles & Vowles 1994), in the Vilamoura area (Ministro *et al.* 1996) and in the rice-fields at Lagoa, where it also probably breeds (João Ministro & José R. Pereira verbally). There are no figures available from these areas except for Barrinha de Esmoriz, where, according to João Loureiro (verbally), five or six birds are currently seen throughout the year.

Red Bishop *Euplectes orix*

This is an African species (Sibley & Monroe 1990). A male exhibiting breeding behaviour was seen at Barroca Marsh in August 1996 (Leitão & Costa 1996). Isolated individuals have also been seen on two occasions at Zambujal, Sado Estuary, in 1991 and 1997. At Barrinha de Esmoriz, three or four are currently seen throughout the year (João Loureiro verbally). These are the only data available.

Black-rumped Waxbill *Estrilda troglodytes*

Like the other waxbills recorded in Portugal, this is an African species (Clement *et al.* 1993). It has been recorded at several places in Galicia (northwest Spain), close to the Portuguese border, and several have been ringed at Ponte de Lima (De la Cigöña 1996). One was ringed in the 1970s in the area of Coimbra (Telles & Candeias 1980), and the species has also been recorded at several places in the Algarve, where, according to Vowles & Vowles (1994), it may hybridise with Common Waxbill. No figures are available.

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*

This species occurs over most of the southern half of Africa (Cramp & Perrins 1994). It is common as a cagebird and has been introduced into several parts of the World (Clement *et al.* 1993). In Portugal, it was probably introduced near Óbidos in the late 1960s (Xavier 1968). Since then, it has undergone a marked expansion and at present it can be found in most of the country, except in Trás-os-Montes, Beira Alta and Beira Baixa provinces. The species has also been found breeding in some areas of Spain (Reino & Silva 1996). There are no accurate figures available, but, according to the Portuguese Breeding Birds Atlas (Rufino 1989), the population lies between 10,000 and 100,000 pairs. Its habitat consists largely of wetlands, and the species can be found in riverine vegetation, river shores, small reservoirs, ditches with dense cover, reed-beds and rice-fields. It can also be found frequently in agricultural land, including market gardens and hedges.

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*

The Red Avadavat is a waxbill of Asiatic origin that can be found over a large part of the Oriental Region (Ali & Ripley 1987). It has been introduced in many parts of the World (Clement *et al.* 1993).

In the early 1980s, the Red Avadavat was not recorded during the fieldwork for the Portuguese Breeding Birds Atlas (Rufino 1989), and, according to Cramp & Perrins (1994), this species is a vagrant to Portugal.

Recently, however, the species seems to have become established at two locations: in the Eastern Alentejo, along the Guadiana River in the Elvas-Campo Maior region, close to where the species was first found in Iberia (Equipos del CMCC 1974; De Lope *et al.* 1984) and at the Barroca Marsh (Leitão & Costa 1996).

The species has also been recorded at Barrinha de Esmoriz (João Loureiro verbally), the Sado Valley, Baixo Alentejo and in the Algarve, where one was ringed in 1978 (Telles & Candeias 1980) and where it is now regularly recorded in the vicinity of Faro, Silves and Portimão (Vowles & Vowles 1994). There are no accurate counts available, but from our own observations the maximum number at Barroca Marsh was 10-15 in 1994 and in the Elvas area, where the species is common, at least 100 were seen in March 1995. At Barrinha de Esmoriz, Red Avadavats are currently seen in only small numbers (three or four individuals) and only in summer (João Loureiro verbally). Its habitat is quite similar to that used by Common Waxbills: rice-fields and ditches covered with dense growth, as well as reed-beds and riverine vegetation. In fact, the two species associate quite frequently, the Common Waxbill predominating.

Zebra Finch *Taeniopygia guttata*

This bird is a native of Australia (Clement *et al.* 1993). According to Vowles & Vowles (1989), at least 16 were seen in 1988, in the Arade River valley, and one pair bred successfully, but no recent data are available. At Barrinha de Esmoriz, the species is currently recorded throughout the year (six to ten individuals), and it probably breeds (João Loureiro verbally).

African Silverbill *Lonchura cantans*

This African species is regularly recorded at Barrinha de Esmoriz, where it probably breeds; numbers vary from six to ten (João Loureiro verbally).

Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca*

This Asiatic species (Clement *et al.* 1993) has been recorded breeding in the Arade River valley (Vowles & Vowles 1994). At Barrinha de Esmoriz, it is currently recorded throughout the year (six to ten individuals) and breeding is suspected (João Loureiro verbally). A few munias (maximum 15), probably this species, have been recorded at Barroca Marsh, where they tend to form small flocks and associate with native species of finch (Leitão & Costa 1996).

White-headed Munia *Lonchura maja*

This Asiatic species (Clement *et al.* 1993) has been noted breeding in the Arade River valley, Algarve (Vowles & Vowles 1994), but no figures are available.

Cut-throat *Amadina fasciata*

This African species is regularly recorded in small numbers (six to ten individuals) throughout the year at Barrinha de Esmoriz, where it probably breeds (João Loureiro verbally). One was also found dead at Alcobaça in 1996.

Conclusion

Exotic birds seen in Portugal have two distinct origins: accidental escapes from captivity and deliberate introductions.

Exotic species of passerine breeding in Portugal are mainly seed-eaters. Apart from the Common Waxbill, they occur mainly in rice-fields and ditches with dense cover. Considering that this type of habitat is widespread in Portugal, it is likely that some of the species mentioned will expand their ranges; it cannot be assumed that competition with native species will not arise in the future.

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