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ACTIONS C

CONSERVATION ACTIONS



LIFE FALKON
LIFE on the move

PROJECT ACTIONS REPORT

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ACTION C1 (NESTBOXES)

Fostering northward
range expansion by
creating safe and novel
breeding opportunities

Action C1 aims at installing at least 200 nests in Italy (Project Area 1) and 200 nests in Greece (Project Areas 2, 3 & 4). Installation of nests is concluded in Project Areas 1, 3 and 4 and partially completed in Project Area 2.

The Action is still considered active as (apart from the nests that are yet to be constructed at Project Area 2) some maintenance and repair works need to take place before the breeding seasons of 2022 and 2023. More in detail, the activities implemented are:

Project Area 1 [Central-Eastern Po Plain, Italy]: A total of 209 nests of two different types have been installed in 37 sites within Project Area 1. Out of them, 18 sites (109 nestboxes) concerned the installation of nest boxes on buildings and 19 sites (100 nestboxes) on powerline poles. 20 of the nestboxes were installed during 2019 and 180 during 2020, whereas 9 nest boxes were installed in the framework of Action A2, as a trial for the rest to follow.

Project Area 2 [Ioannina, Greece]: A total of 19 nestboxes (10 wooden and 9 concrete) were installed during 2021 on 3 buildings. The initial planning also included the construction of an artificial nest-complex (ca. 80 artificial nests) on the roof of the most significant breeding site for the species in the city. The authority responsible for the management of the building (Prefecture of Epirus) decided to reject HOS's proposal in August 2020, despite previous preparatory meetings that took place. This development led to HOS asking for the intervention of the Greek Ombudsman (an independent state authority), in order to state the act of not taking effective measures for the protection of the species as illegal. In June 2021, the municipality of Ioannina provided an alternative, by offering 3 buildings where nest-complexes can be constructed.

The construction works are expected to be finalized before the breeding season of 2022, bringing the overall number of artificial nests within Project Area 2 at around 90.

Project Area 3 [Komotini, Greece]: A total of 53 nests were installed in Project Area 3, during 2020. The nests were sited in 6 different settlements, on public buildings, after having acquired permits from the municipality of Komotini.

16 out of the total, were part of a nest-complex located on a water tower at Ag. Theodori village while the rest were single wooden nestboxes.

Project Area 4 [Lemnos, Greece]: A total of 54 nest boxes in 6 colonies were installed during 2019. Two different types of nest boxes were used (43 wooden and 10 concrete).

Overall, to date objectives of Action C1 concerning the nestboxes installation have been largely fulfilled with artificial nests installation completed in 3 out of 4 Project Areas (335/400) nestboxes. The only pending activity regarding nest-complex construction is in Project Area 2 (Ioannina) where the Action is expected to be fulfilled before the breeding season of 2022.



Figure C1.1.1

Installation activities on the field, Project Area 1, winter 2020/2021.

Figure C1.1.2

Nestboxes and the nest-complex installed at Project Area 3 during March 2021.



ACTION C1 (NESTING TOWERS)

Fostering northward range expansion by creating safe and novel breeding opportunities

Action C1 aims at fostering the establishment of lesser kestrel breeding populations at the northernmost margin of the current European distribution range by means of 1) five nesting towers located in the Po Plain (Italy), and 2) hundreds of nest boxes installed in all project areas (Italy and Greece).

Here we provide an overview of the construction of five nesting towers aimed at providing lesser kestrels with safe breeding sites in Project Area 1, where most of the old rural buildings currently hosting lesser kestrel colonies are being demolished.

The sites for towers have been identified by Action A.1 through intensive field survey and profiting by the solid relations with landowners (either private or public bodies) developed during the initial phase of the LIFE project.

Official agreements with landowners were signed and the authorization processes for the buildings were activated in synergy with the appropriate municipalities and authorities.

Towers were built according to the blueprints defined within the framework of action A2. They are 5 m high, with a 3 x 3 m base. External holes allow birds to enter into nest boxes placed inside the tower. Each tower hosts 22 nest boxes that can be easily inspected from the inside. The construction of the towers took place from 20.02.2020 to 24.04.2021.

Three nesting towers were built within Natura2000 sites and the remaining two outside the Natura 2000 network but in strategic positions for increasing the connectivity of the network and improving the expansion of the species, hopefully, throughout the network.

Three nesting towers are located in close proximity to lesser kestrel colonies settled in old decaying rural buildings that likely will be demolished in the near future.

One tower is located close to a colony settled in a rural building that is in good condition and another one is

located not as much close to existing colonies as the other towers but in a Natura 2000 sites particularly suitable for the species.

Each tower was dedicated to a person who significantly contributed to nature conservation and avian research, with a link with the territory.

Figure C1.2.1

A: the nesting tower 'Matteo' of Minerbio (BO) with the cage for the hacking activity (see Action C2);

B: the nesting tower 'Michele' of Mirandola (MO);

C: the installation of the dedication plate of the nesting tower 'Nicola' of Poggio Rusco (MN).

D: internal view of one of the towers with the wooden smart nest boxes



ACTION

C2

Enhancing nesting tower colonization

Action C2 is one of the two core conservation actions of the project. The action aims at enhancing the colonization of the nesting towers built in Project Area 1 during action C1, fastening the formation of new colonies in safe sites.

During the night between the 8th and the 9th of July 2021, 30 Lesser kestrel chicks of 20 days coming from the Matera source area (identified by means of the action A3) were translocated by car to the “Matteo Griggio” nesting tower in Minerbio (BO) built in the framework of action C1 and specifically equipped to host them until fledging.

The transport took place without any inconvenience and at the first light, the FALKON staff left the young kestrels in six specific boxes inside the tower.

At the tower were also caged two injured and unrecoverable adults from the Wildlife Rescue Centre of Bitetto (BA) to simulate a “colony environment”.

Following the translocation of the young lesser kestrels the hacking activity started. The tower was visited daily by the FALKON team to provide food to the chicks and to make behavioural observations on released and visiting wild individuals from distance. Chicks were provided with mice (18-25 g each) ad libitum.

Young kestrels were free to move between nest-boxes and the outer balcony.

On 14th July 2021, the first fledging of a reared chick was recorded, which was then followed by all the others, with different timing depending on the age. The young kestrels, after the first flight trials, continued to attend the tower regularly for feeding, before abandoning it (the last one at the end of August).

Of great relevance is the fact that, a few days after the translocation of the chicks, some wild lesser kestrels (up to a maximum of 6) began to visit the tower regularly, intrigued by the calls of the chicks and by

the two non-flying individuals housed in the aviary of the tower. The hacking activity is planned to continue in 2022 and 2023 to secure the creation of a lesser kestrel colony at the safe site represented by the tower.

Figure C2.1

Some of the phases of the chick translocations that took place in the night between 8th-9th July 2021.

