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VERSITA

Young of the common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) reared by lesser spotted eagles (*Aquila pomarina*) in natural conditions in Slovakia

Mláďatá myšiaka hôrneho (*Buteo buteo*) vychované orlami krikľavými (*Aquila pomarina*) v prirodzených podmienkach na Slovensku

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Abstract: Since 2005 a breeding pair of *A. pomarina* has been observed near the village of Drienovec, Košice-Environs district, eastern Slovakia. Since 2009 occupied nests have been found each year with the subject pair. In the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013 this pair successfully reared one young *A. pomarina*, but in 2012 they reared two *B. buteo* young during the nesting period in natural conditions and without the intervention of human beings. This is the first such documented case in the entire breeding grounds of *A. pomarina*.

Abstrakt: Od roku 2005 bolo pozorované hniezdenie páru *A. pomarina* pri obci Drienovec, okres Košice okolie, východné Slovensko. Od roku 2009 boli u predmetného páru nájdené každoročne obsadené hniezda. V rokoch 2009, 2010, 2011 a 2013 uvedený pár úspešne odchoval jedno mláďa *A. pomarina*. V roku 2012 vychoval tento pár dve mláďatá *B. buteo* v prirodzených podmienkach bez zásahu človeka do priebehu hniezdenia. Je to prvý takýto zdokumentovaný prípad v celom hniezdnom areáli *A. pomarina*.

Key words: breeding ecology, foster parents, nesting behaviour, unusual breeding.

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Introduction

It is exceptional in natural conditions for one species of raptor to raise the young of another species of raptor. It occurs more often if human beings intervene during the process of breeding, for example in order to save a young bird. In a number of cases humans have saved the young of the species *A. pomarina* from cainism, and in such cases the other young were temporarily entrusted to be raised by a different species of raptor. These raised them for a certain period as surrogate parents. Such, for example, were the adoptive parents *Milvus migrans* and *Buteo buteo* which accepted and raised the young of *A. pomarina* (Meyburg 1970). In another case, the adoptive parents were *Aquila heliaca*, which for a certain period raised one inserted young of *B. buteo* (Harvančík 1999). However, these cases involved the raising of the young of one type of raptor by parents of another species through the knowledge and targeted intervention of human beings during the course of natural breeding. Cases in which the parents of one raptor species raise the young of another under natural conditions, without the intervention of human beings, are very rare. In Hungary three cases were found when *Haliaeetus albicilla*, in addition to its own young, also raised the young of *B. buteo*. In this case it is assumed that the *B. buteo* young got to the nest of *H. albicilla* initially as food brought in by one adult individual, but then the young *B. buteo* individuals survived the transport. Subsequently, the adoptive parents accepted and fed them along with their own young (Horváth 2009a, b). A case is known from Slovakia, when *Falco cherrug* successfully raised the young of *Falco tinnunculus*, which bred in nesting boxe intended for *F. cherrug* on high-tension electricity pylon (Mihók & Lipták in


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Fig. 1. Two *B. buteo* young in the nest of *A. pomarina*. July 6, 2012, Drienovec, eastern Slovakia.
Obr. 1. Dve mláďatá *B. buteo* v hniezde *A. pomarina*. 6. júl 2012, Drienovec, východné Slovensko.


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Fig. 2. An adult *A. pomarina* brings food to *B. buteo* young. July 6, 2012, Drienovec, eastern Slovakia.
Obr. 2. Adult *A. pomarina* prináša potravu mláďatám *B. buteo*. 6. júl 2012, Drienovec, východné Slovensko.

verb.). The aim of this article is to describe one case from 2012, when a pair of *A. pomarina* raised two young *B. buteo* individuals in natural conditions, without the purposeful intervention of human beings in the breeding.

Observation

In eastern Slovakia, near the village of Drienovec in the Košice-Environs district, a breeding pair of *A. pomarina* in the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013 successfully raised one young bird of species *A. pomarina*. In 2012 this same pair raised two *B. buteo* young.

On July 5, 2012, during a check of a nest of *A. pomarina* known from previous years, two completely feathered *B. buteo* young were found in the nest. During our presence near the nest, an adult individual of *A. pomarina* arrived with food in its beak and landed at the top of the adjacent tree. A 300 m circle around the nest with the *B. buteo* young was closely checked, but no occupied nest of *A. pomarina* was ever found in the vicinity. Likewise, no attacks by adult *B. buteo* parents were observed on the individual *A. pomarina* sitting in the vicinity of the young *B. buteo*. On the morning of July 6, a check of the location was done and even upon our arrival a female *A. pomarina* was observed sitting on the nest with the two *B. buteo* young. From provisional ground cover in thick undergrowth with a view of the edge of the nest, we observed at 10:00 a. m. the touching down of an A. pomarina individual on an adjacent tree in the vicinity of the nest; the bird then briefly called. From the nest one of the *B. buteo* young immediately responded to it with its typical call. After this vocal contact, the adult *A. pomarina* landed on the edge of the nest with food in its beak, probably a common vole (*Microtus arvalis*), and placed it in front of the young bird. The young bird immediately grabbed the vole and with typical outstretched wings and stance protected the food from the other young bird, as well as from the adult eagle. At this moment it was possible to document the presence of an adult *A. pomarina* with food in the nest, brought to two *B. buteo* young, which the adult pair of *A. pomarina* had raised (Fig. 1, 2). On July 9 the area was observed from the meadow in front of the nesting ground cover. During the observation point-blank attacks by *B. buteo* on the male *A. pomarina* bringing food to the nest as well as on the female *A. pomarina*, which circled over the nest, were repeatedly observed. In 2013 the pair of *A. pomarina* in this same nest again reared one young *A. pomarina*, as usual (Fig. 3).

Discussion

In the mentioned example no conclusive evidence was acquired as to how or when *A. pomarina* took over the care for rearing the offspring of *B. buteo*. It is clear here that a pair of *A. pomarina* completely raised two *B. buteo* young, even though a *B. buteo* pair was present at the same time at the site and did not share in the rearing of these young birds. Moreover, the *B. buteo* pair aggressively attacked the *A. pomarina* pair. In the literature on *A. pomarina* information is lacking that a complete *A. pomarina* pair at some time raised the young of a different species in natural conditions and without human intervention (Wendland 1959, Meyburg 1970, Hudec

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Fig. 3. An adult *A. pomarina* in the same nest with a young *A. pomarina* in the year 2013. July 26, 2013, Drienovec, eastern Slovakia.
Obr. 3. Adult *A. pomarina* na tom istom hniezde s mláďaťom *A. pomarina* v roku 2013. 26. júl 2013, Drienovec, východné Slovensko.

& Černý 1977, Cramp & Simons 1980). The overlapping of the breeding and hunting grounds of *A. pomarina* and *B. buteo* in Slovakia is already known, when both species often use for their existence the same area where their breeding grounds meet (Karaska & Danko 2002, Kropil 2002). Several cases have been documented showing that after the subsequent breeding period *A. pomarina* and *B. buteo* can mutually use their nests for breeding; this means that in one breeding season *A. pomarina* breeds in a specific nest and in the following breeding season *B. buteo* can breed in the same nest, and vice versa. This situation is probably the reason that led to the above-mentioned case, when the original nest used by *A. pomarina* at the beginning of 2012 was occupied by *B. buteo*, which laid its eggs in this nest, but later after *A. pomarina* arrived from its wintering grounds, it forced the *B. buteo* parent(s) from the nest and took over care of the *B. buteo* young. It is difficult to assess whether this occurred at the time of egg incubation or after the hatching of the *B. buteo* young. The fact that *A. pomarina* was capable of successfully rearing the *B. buteo* young up to the time of their complete flight from the nest was also made possible by the fact that the food of these two species is significantly alike, and *Microtus arvalis* is the predominant component in the diet of both species (Dravecký et al. 2008, Sládek 1961, Šotnár 2003, 2007, Šotnár & Obuch 2009, Šotnár & Topercer 2009). The closest case to the presented one was an interesting observation in eastern Slovakia, when during the breeding period in May an incubating *A. pomarina* female was found in a nest, but later during ringing in the nest two *B. buteo* young were found there. The case was not followed in more detail (Lipták in verb.). This is an indication, however, that such cases could occur more often than we presume.

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