

## First observation of the White-tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* (Linnaeus, 1758) in CW Bulgaria for the last 132 years

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**Abstract.** An observation of an adult bird on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022 along the shore of Bozalan (Bakardere) Reservoir near Verinsko village (CW Bulgaria) is reported. This is the first species' record in the last 132 years in that part of the country.

**Key words:** White-tailed Eagle, bird range extension, Ihtimanska Sredna Gora Mts.

### Introduction

The White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* (Linnaeus, 1758) is categorized as globally “Least Concern” species (BirdLife International 2022). It is included in Annex I of the EU Wild Birds Directive (Probst & Gaborik 2012). The species is spread in the Palearctic (most of Northern Asia, Eastern Europe and sporadically along the major water bodies and sea coasts of other parts of Europe (Cramp *et al.* 1980).

### Results and Discussion

**Status in Bulgaria.** Species' conservation status in Bulgaria is “Vulnerable” (Ivanov *et al.*, 2014). Residential status: resident and migratory (Simeonov *et al.* 1990).

**Former distribution.** Three localities of subfossil bone remains have been found in three settlements in the country, all along the Danube River: (1) Iatrus (4-5<sup>th</sup> c. AD; Bartosiewicz & Choyke 1991), Malak Preslavets (Neolithic, 6000 BC) and (3) Garvan (Middle Ages, 6-11<sup>th</sup> c. AD) (Boev 1999). Until the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century Patev (1950) has defined two breeding regions – Danube River and Black Sea Coast. Six nesting localities have been reported by Hagemeyer & Blaire (1997), all of them along Danube River, the Black Sea Coast and large reservoirs in the Rhodopes Mts. Three major breeding regions are defined by Todorov *et al.* (2015) - Danube River, Thracian Plain and Black Sea Coast. Shurulinkov & Daskalova (2007) reported new localities along the Tundzha River, the major tributary to Maritsa River.

**Observation.** On 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022 at 12:41 PM summer time EET (UTC+02:00 time zone) an adult individual was observed gliding at about 60 m above the western shore of the Bozalan (Bakardere) Reservoir (Fig. 1). The duration of the observation was approx. 25 seconds.



**Fig. 1.** White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) near Bakardere Reservoir, 20 August 2022. Photo: Zlatozar Z. Boev.

**Weather.** The maximum temperature in the vicinity of Verinsko village (Intiman Municipality, Sofia Region), the nearest settlement in the region, was about 30° C. The weather between 11:00 and 14:00 h was sunny, windless and calm.

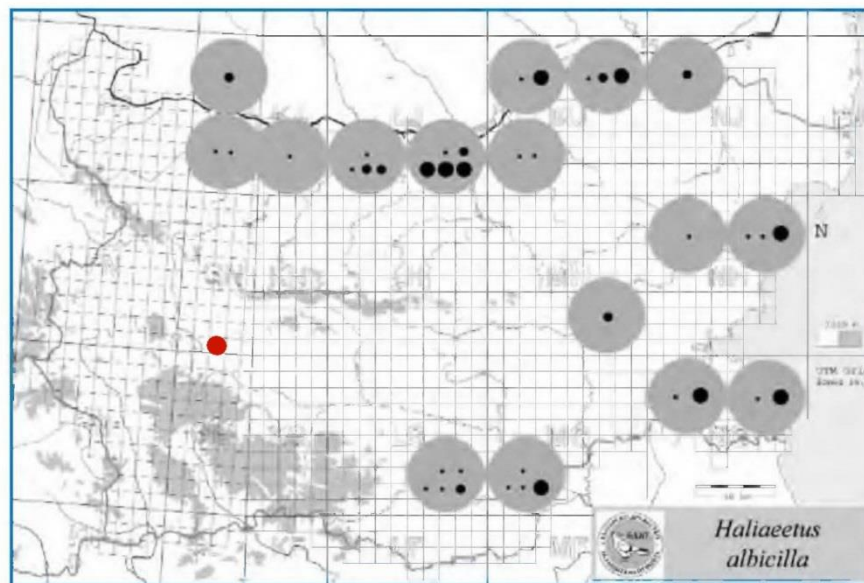
**Locality.** The Bakardere Reservoir (42°29'N, 23°42'E) is 1.40 km long at its maximum and up to 0.75 km wide. It is built near Baba River. Its shores are relatively sloping, and for the most part the reservoir is shallow.

### Discussion

The first mention of the White-tailed Eagle from Bulgarian in the scientific literature was made by Alleon (1866) for the Northern Bulgarian Black Sea Coast in the vicinities of Varna City. The second published observation came from Radakoff (1879) for the region of Burgas City.

The only species' record in W Bulgaria, south of Stara Planina Mts, was published by Hristovich (1890). It is worthy to mention that this is the third published record of the White-tailed Eagle in Bulgaria. No detailed data on this observation is presented in this source. Only piece of information states that the observation was made "half an hour away from Sofia". This unprecisely specified locality of the reported observation is the first one in that part of the country (Fig. 2).

The observation near Bozalan Reservoir falls out of the breeding period (15 April – 15 June) and before the period of autumn migration (20 September – 01 December) after Cramp *et al.* (1977). In the last decades the breeding territories of the species from the Tundzha Lowland and Thracian Plain have gradually expanded in a northwestern direction towards the observation area. The habitat of the locality of observation could be defined as very suitable for the White-tailed Eagle and we assume that the species will soon nest in this area.



**Fig. 2.** Breeding distribution of the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) in Bulgaria (after Ivanov et al., 2007). The locality near the Bakardere Reservoir is marked with a red dot.

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