

Interview with Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski about the Eurasian Hobby in Germany

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The Eurasian Hobby is a beautiful and elegant little falcon. A long distance migrant, it only spends a few months in Europe.

In this interview, Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski talks about the biology and conservation of the Eurasian Hobby in Germany. Klaus has been studying the Hobby for many years and has just published (together with Paul Sömmer) the 5th edition of a German monograph about the species. See the interview and the links at the bottom for more information about the book.



Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski
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Markus Jais: *What is the current status of the Hobby in Germany?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Red List: endangered. About 3.000 pairs (1)

Markus Jais: *How has the population developed during the last decades?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Decline beginning in the 1960s, but picture not uniform in Europe (2)

Markus Jais: *What are the main threats to the species?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Habitat loss, persecution of corvids as necessary nest builders for the Hobby (1).

Entanglement of young and adults by plastics fibres used in agriculture may be a deadly threat. The Hobbys accidents rank high in the list of these polypropylene fiber accidents registered by Staatliche Vogelschutzwarte Brandenburg.

Markus Jais: *What is the effect of Goshawk predation in Hobby nestlings, recently fledged young and adult birds?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Important. On the other side pairs nesting in open country and being attentively guarding the brood have better chances (3)



Chicks in nest

© Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski

Markus Jais: *How important are crows for the Hobby as a nest provider and what is the relationship between the two species when they breed close to each other?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Corvids are a necessary pre-requisite as they build nests which can be used in the same season or next year. Checks and balances: predation by corvids aims at eggs and small nestlings. In times of extreme high Hooded Crow population in Berlin forests there were the best breeding results for the Hobby (1)

Markus Jais: *What habitat do Hobbies prefer in Germany?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Various. Clumps of wood, coniferous and deciduous (poplar, alder). More recently open agricultural habitats with pylons (3)

Markus Jais: *Is there enough food for the Hobbies? Has intensification of agriculture and habitat destruction depleted the prey base consisting of small birds and large insects?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Those Hobbies breeding close to cities as in Berlin have eaccess to rich avian resources (cf. # 10). In agricultural habitats the decrease of important prey species like Skylark and Swallows could be a negative factor. At the same time the share of bats is increasing (5). Insects: Hobbies are opportunistic hunters and the more common insects are not affected (1)



Juvenile with ring
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Markus Jais: *What is the average breeding success of Hobbies and what parameters affect the breeding success?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Not constant, only brood size (fledged young per successful pair) remained at 2.4 y/p during decades. In our study plot reproduction figure (fledged young per territorial pair) as well as breeding success (% of pairs raising fledged young of all territorial pairs) declined significantly, in the last year around 1.0 y/territorial pair and success around 50 %. Periods of bad weather during incubation and hatching affect breeding success as well as predation (1,6).

Markus Jais: *What is known about the annual migration of Eurasian Hobbies and what knowledge have recent satellite telemetry studies brought to our knowledge of the little falcon's migration?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: A leap forward! The world-wide first 5 g satellite transmitter used in adult birds gave impressive results about migration paths in autumn and spring, ecological barriers such as Sahara and equatorial rain forest, about movements in winter quarter Angola and neighbouring countries. Details see (1) and (7a,b)

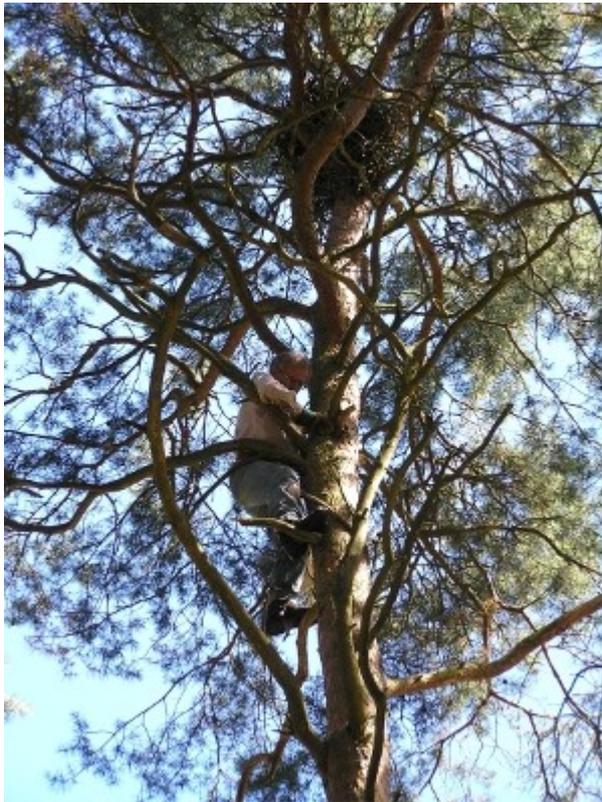
Markus Jais: *What is the main prey of Hobbies in Germany and is there a difference between adult and juvenile birds?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski:

- "Rural" Hobbies: Skylarks, Swallows as known long before. (8)
- "City hunters": Sparrows, swallows, swifts, greenfinches - and escaped budgerigars!
(1) The young are provisioned with avian food by the male until departure but also hunt flying insects for themselves.(1,12)

Markus Jais: *What is known about the diet during migration and in the wintering quarters?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: "Following their prey" - hirundine migration presumably (7). In Africa mainly insectivorous (1)



Klaus climbing a tree with a Hobby nest
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Markus Jais: *How large are the home ranges of a pair of Hobbies?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Research is under way by means of satellite telemetry. Distances between nest and hunting territory may be short (> 500 m) up to 2-3-? Km (1)

Markus Jais: *What is known about the natal and breeding dispersal of juvenile birds after they leave their parent's territory and when they return for the first time from Africa?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: Autumn migration: see review in (1). Pronounced philopatry in the first summer after year of birth, settling in the natal area – but picture not uniform. Only (some) females may pair and breed here.(9)

Markus Jais: *What gaps in our knowledge of the Hobby do still exist? Where should research focus in the coming years?*

- 1. Migration of juveniles (11), fate of the yearlings in Europe in the 2nd calendar year (paired – floater – helper – territory owner, (9)).

- 2. Migration routes of Asian Hobbies: which populations reach southern Africa, which stay in southern Asia? (1)
- 3. Quantitative effect of Goshawk predation on adults and nestlings/fledglings (1)

Markus Jais: *How do you see the future of the Eurasian Hobby in Germany and Europe and what should be done to protect them?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski:

- Habitat conservation: mature wood, mature coniferous stands.
- Absolute priority: protection of corvids
- Handle with care: "Bindegarn" wrapping fibre polypropylene used in agriculture (straw harvest) (10)
- More long-term research such as the Monitoring Programme Raptor & Owls (6) to compare the different development in England (++) and Germany (-) (1)

Markus Jais: *You just published the 5th edition of a German Monograph on the Hobby, which is the definite work on the species in German. What is new in the 5th edition?*

Klaus-Dietrich Fiuczynski: (In fact it is a totally renewed work based on the 1st edition of 1987, the following were mere and unchanged reprints. Now together with Paul Sömmer as co-author. Appearing spring 2011 in Westarp Wissenschaften (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei vol. 575). www.neuebrehm.de)

Review of the results of European Hobby workers like MESSENGER & ROONE (UK), DRONNEAU & WASSMER (France), SERGIO et al. (Italy), ZUBEROGOITIA (Spain), VIGNEAU & DUC (Switzerland), LIPTÁK (Slovakia), BIJLSMA (Netherlands) including the Berlin-Brandenburg observers and ringers Hallau, Hastädt, Herold, Kehl, Lohmann, Reuße, Sömmer, Fiuczynski, then KIRMSE (Leipzig), KLAMMER (Landsberg) also the results of the International Monitoring Programme Population Ecology of Raptors and Owls (6). And the breakthrough in migration research by Bernd-Ulrich Meyburg fitting the new 5 g satellite transmitter to Hobbies beginning with one of our adult females in the Berlin area and thus documenting for the first time two complete migration cycles. (7a,b)



Der Baumfalke -
by Klaus Dietrich Fiuczynski and Paul Sömmer

Markus Jais: *What was your most amazing experience with Hobbies?*

- 1. Observing courtship and territorial flights in May “across the skies” is fascinating as well as observing the adults and young catching insects in the air later in the season.
- 2. Attacks of furious females on my head when I climbed to the nest. In recent years I am rarely attacked – may be my meanwhile white hair protects me?:) (Seriously: I do climb much fewer nests now with 72 years!)

Markus Jais: *Klaus, thank you very much for the interview.*

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