

SOME DATA ON THE ROOSTING SITES OF RAVENS *Corvus corax* IN BULGARIA

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Normally the Raven occurs solitary or in pairs and rarely in flocks (SNOW & PERRINS 1998). These flocks are consisted of non-breeding immature and juvenile birds, who forage socially and aggregate in communal winter roosts, which may function as ‘information centres’ regarding food locations (WRIGHT *et al.* 2003, Marzluff, J. *et. al.* 1996). The number of Ravens within a flock may reach 574 individuals (JANICKE & CHAKAROV 2007). In Europe as well in North America the preferred Raven’s roosts were located near or in proximity of settlements and birds fed mainly at rubbish dumps (WATTS *et al.* 1991, SARÀ & BUSALACCHI 2003, PRESTON 2005, JANICKE & CHAKAROV 2007). So far in Bulgaria, there is some fragmentary data on the concentrations of Ravens (about 20 ind.) in the region of Sofia city (NANKINOV *et al.* 2005) but there is a lack of data about the roosting sites of the species.

In November 2006, about 80 Ravens were found to roost in a beech forest at 875 m elevation (42°46'52.6"N, 26°19'44.6"E) near the Rakovo village (UTM MH43). On 15.01.2007, a roosting site with 90 Ravens was found on several isolated old trees of the genus *Quercus* at 325 m elevation (42°07'17.2"N, 26°54'18.5"E) near the Malko Sharkovo reservoir (UTM MG96). In the area of vulture feeding place near Pelevun village (UTM MF18) there is a roosting site of Ravens at 325 m elevation (41°24'23.8"N, 26°02'00.6"E) with flock consisting of maximum 70 individuals. Annually, the flock gathers in August, as till the beginning of the breeding period the birds stay mainly near the artificial feeding site. The birds roost on trees that have dried up as a result of forest fires (of the genus *Quercus*). On 24 October 2007, about 40 Ravens were found to

roost in a Beech *Fagus sylvatica* forest at 916 m elevation (42°46'31.1"N, 26°18'28.5"E) in the upper parts of Slivenska Mountains (UTM MH43). The roosting site was located in proximity of extensive dairy farm. The roost trees were 3-4, situated on a hill-top at the very edge of the forest, bordering with mountain meadows. Most of the Ravens were roosting at one single big tree. At the daytime the Ravens searched for food in a large perimeter in the plain around Sliven town and in the evening they fed on the meadows near the dairy farm. Three livestock guarding dogs of the dairy were feeding on scattered cattle bones, so previous abundance of a big carcass from the farm could have influenced the appearance of the roost. On 24 November and 14 December 2007, about 58 Ravens were found roosting in a small plantation of Austrian Pine *Pinus nigra* at 755 m elevation (42°53'27.9"N, 23°09'48.4"E) in proximity of Belidie Han village (UTM FN74). The majority of birds feed at a rubbish dump at 3 km away from their roosting site and in some years the number of feeding Ravens at this site reaches 80 individuals (J. Hristov, *unpubl.*). It is possible that some of the birds from this flock feed also on the garbage-heap of Suhodol (NANKINOV *et al.* 2005) which is located at 20 km from the roosting site.

Although in the last 20 years there is a positive trend in the number and distribution of Ravens in Bulgaria and the national breeding population consists of about 3000 breeding pairs (DASKALOVA *et al.* 2007), the species is still very vulnerable to the setting poisons in the wild (MICHEV *et al.* 1986). That is way it is included in the National Biodiversity Protection Act and the National Red Data Book. The reported above roosting sites hold significant part of the Raven's national population, therefore a special protection status and management plans not allowing poisoning and shooting on Corvids are needed for these areas.

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