

Short note

*First breeding record of Laughing dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* for Greece*

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Abstract. The Laughing dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) is a widespread species in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia. Over the last two decades, the species has begun to expand its distribution northward and has established breeding populations in the Canary Islands, Italy, and Cyprus. For the first time in Greece, a Laughing dove nest with two nestlings was found on a window ledge in the village of Loutra on the eastern Aegean Island of Lesvos, in September 2021. The successful breeding in Loutra, followed by a further two breeding attempts could be the start of the establishment of a permanent population on the island.

Key words: expansion, Lesvos, Laughing dove.

The Laughing dove - *Spilopelia senegalensis* (Linnaeus, 1766) is a common species in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia (Baptista et al., 1997). Throughout its range, *S. senegalensis* can be found in dry or semi-desert habitats but in parts of its global distribution the laughing dove is found in villages or even large cities and in some cases, such as in Western Australia, it seems unable to spread to more natural habitats (Baptista et al., 1997). In the last two decades the Laughing dove has spread northwards and established breeding populations in the Canary Islands (Ramos Melo & Ramirez, 2015), after the first breeding there in 2002, in Italy on the island of Pantelleria in 2004 (Brichetti & Fracasso, 2015), and in Cyprus in 2017 (Flint, 2019). The first record of a single Laughing dove in Greece occurred in 1962 at Aliakmon Delta and the first record for Lesvos was in 1994 at Achladeri (Handrinos & Akriotis, 1997). Subsequently,

single individuals were seen twice on Lesvos: once in the village of Anaxos (Mark Cassidy, pers. comm., 21 October 2021) in May 2014 and once in the village of Panagiouda (Hellenic Rarities Committee, 2019) in November 2018. The fourth record for Lesvos was on 27 September 2021 when an adult was observed by local birdwatcher in the center of the village of Loutra (39°03'24"N 26°32'42"E) in the southeast part of the island. Two days later, the same observer in search of this bird was able to spot and photograph a Laughing dove nest with two nestlings on a window ledge, less than 50 m away from the previous observation (Fig.1).

This is the first documented breeding record of Laughing Doves for Lesvos and the first for Greece. We regularly checked the nest's progress, and we could verify that both nestlings successfully fledged two weeks later. In the months that followed, two more nests

with nestlings were discovered. One was also on a window ledge in April 2022 (Paul Manning pers. comm.) and the other one was on a village shop sign, found on 1 May 2022 (pers. obs.). The two new nests were both within a 20 m radius of the first nest and they were active simultaneously, indicating a minimum of two breeding pairs. We have observed regular feeding of the birds by locals (Fig. 2.), which may explain the birds' success in surviving and breeding.

The sightings of Laughing doves on Lesbos are not unexpected considering the

island's proximity to the coastline of western Turkey, where Laughing doves are common and widespread (Boyla et al., 2019). Given the ability of the species to have multiple broods per year even during winter (Keller et al., 2020), the successful breeding may be the beginning of the establishment and further expansion of Laughing doves across the island of Lesbos in coming years, as has been seen in Cyprus and the Canary Islands. It remains to be seen whether the species will be restricted to areas with artificial food sources or whether it will be able to spread beyond towns and villages.



Fig. 1. Breeding of *S. senegalensis* at Loutra (island of Lesbos) in 2021: (a) nest with two nestlings and one adult bird (photo: V. Karameta Triboulot), (b) the first breeding pair (photo: E. Galinou).



Fig. 2. *Streptopelia senegalensis* and *Streptopelia decaocto* during regular feeding by locals.

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