

Presumed hybrid Red X Black Kites in Estonia: analysis of 3 cases

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Hybridization between Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) and Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) is not widely covered in literature. There are known cases reported from Scotland, Germany, Sweden, Italy and Cyprus. In Finland a mixed pair bred in 2016, but the attempt was unsuccessful. We hereby present a few examples of birds showing intermediate characteristics between these species, all recorded in Estonia in 2016-2017.

Black Kite is an uncommon migrant and very rare breeder in Estonia. Red Kite is a scarce migrant with two breeding cases confirmed. The observations of Red Kite are validated by the Estonian Rarities Committee, with about 60 records accepted so far. As both species are rare in Estonia it creates favourable conditions for hybrid pairing.

Case 1: Mündi 2016

A Red Kite was reported from Mündi area by several observers, but photos clearly reveal that it is not a pure Red Kite. Breeding was suspected, and a used raptor nest (looking suitable for *Milvus* species) was found in the area a year later. A Black Kite was also seen nearby in 2016, which could have been part of this pair.



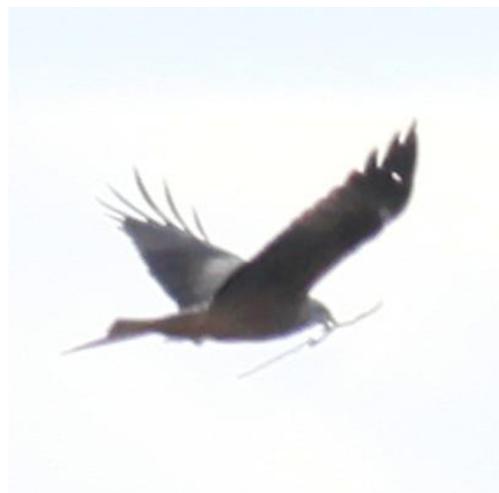
The bird here shows reddish underparts, forked tail and contrast between lesser and median underwing coverts pointing towards Red Kite influence. The primary „window” is not white, the subterminal tailbarring shows coarse bands, and there is a hint of a facial „mask” – characteristics more suitable for Black Kite. Furthermore, the tail is not long enough for a typical Red Kite, with the uppertail brown like the upperparts, which clearly contradicts with Red Kite. 29.03.2016 © Virge Võsujalg



29.03.2016 © Virge Võsujalg



The same bird showing its uppertail which is not contrastingly red. There is also too much dark in the outer tail for an adult Red Kite. P5 is not too long which one would expect from a hybrid. 29.03.2016 © Virge Võsujalg



The same individual bird carrying nest material on 2.04.2016. © Marko Paloveer

Some photos showing variation of uppertail colour depending on the light conditions. P8 on the right has a dent. Also the bird from 2017 has a similar defect there (compare the photo from 13.5.2017). 2.04.2016 © Marko Paloveer



Case 2: Müнди 2017

A bird seen at the previous year's site on several dates was again reported by birders as Red Kite. Later in the year, a nest was found with nestlings, which didn't survive. Ülo Väli was checking the nestsite and heard the bird calling (three-syllable call sounding like a normal Red Kite). Based on the available documentation from the area in 2017, we can't find any bird which looks like a good Red Kite. It could easily be a returning individual, as the fieldmarks are overlapping with the bird seen here in 2016.



The inner primaries show coarse patterning and the bases of the primaries are not pure white. The contrast between the lesser and median underwing coverts appear to have a Red Kite influence. The wing-formula is intermediate between Red and Black Kite.

23.03.2017 © Siim Vaar & 13.05.2017 © Arver Bauer



Despite the tail looking fairly long from some angles, the uppertail colouration is not typical for a Red Kite. 3.04.2017 © Sven Aun



The wing formula is clearly intermediate with a longish P5 (counting outwards) showing Black Kite influence. 10.05.2017 © Kaarel Võhandu. A nest was also found, but the young didn't survive. June 2017 © Ülo Väli

Case 3: Sooblase 2017

The first and only breeding cases for Estonia from the same area are accepted as follows:

09.05.-16.08.2015 Sooblase, Tsirgumäe ja Saru, Hargla kkk., Võrumaa = Valga mk. ♂♀, breeding, >1 pull. (Kalle Muru, Pertti Rasp, Tarmo Teppe, Risto Lammin-Soila jt.) (Photo).

07.05.-31.07.2016 Sooblase, Tsirgumäe & Saru ♂♀, breeding, >1 juv. (Jyrki Tolvanen, Juha Tuomaala, Kristo Lauk, Kaia Kukk jt) (Photo).

These birds from 2015-2016 were photographed and looked like normal Red Kites. In 2017 the situation in the same area became complicated, with one probable hybrid and one pure Red Kite documented. One Black Kite (or the presumed hybrid?) has been seen in the area as well. One undocumented record of two displaying Red Kites from the area has also been reported.



The bird photographed on 2.04.2017 shows a kite with mixed characteristics. Forked tail, reddish underparts and contrast between lesser and median underwing coverts point towards Red Kite. The long 5th primary and patterned inner primaries don't resemble a typical Red Kite. It is hard to get any other relevant details from these recordshots, but overall proportions and broad wings resemble Black Kite. Also the uppertail colour is not strikingly red. 2.04.2017 © Igor Tseskidov

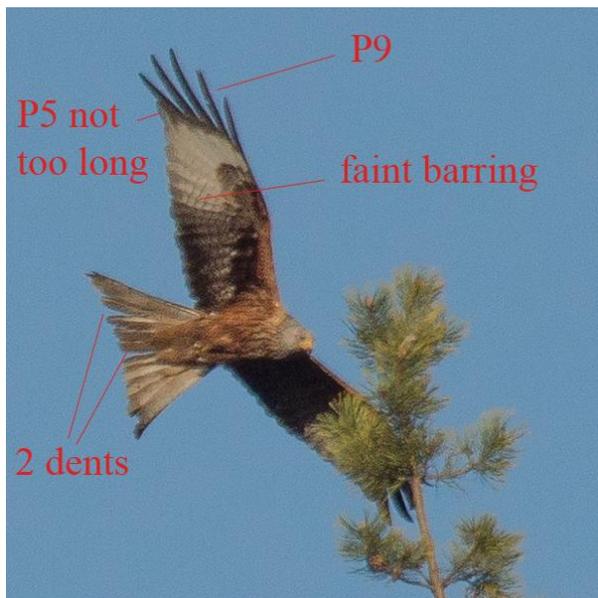


Bird photographed on 22.04.2017 shows a bird which is a Red Kite. 5 fingers, very long and deeply forked tail, white primary flashes – all looks good from here. So there was a Red Kite in the area as well, but without documentation it is hard to judge whether normal or aberrant birds were reported on certain dates. 22.04.2017 © Tarmo Teppe



Compare with the bird (right) seen on 2.04.2017.
© Igor Tseskidov

Things got more confusing on 7.5.2017 when Tarmo Teppe visited the area. He documented two different individuals, as we discovered from photographs. The two birds were spotted just five minutes apart. The first bird disappeared quickly and then, as we have interpreted it, the second individual appeared.



The first bird is probably a Red Kite, likely to be the same bird as on 22.4.2017 based on the tail profile (with two dents visible). The uppertail colour looks very good for Red Kite, and the tail is deeply forked. This bird has a dent on P9 right, two dents on the tail, a fairly short P5, and faint barring on the white inner primaries. 7.05.2017 © Tarmo Teppe



The second bird is probably the hybrid which was already documented on 2.04.2017. Look at the wing-formula and strong barring on inner primaries. This individual has clear dents on P8 on the right wing, and P7 and P6 on the left wing. The tail is clearly barred, not deeply forked and has no visible damage. 7.05.2017 © Tarmo Teppe

Our conclusion about the situation around Sooblase in 2017 is that there was a Red Kite (dates 22.04-7.05.2017), one presumed hybrid (dates 2.04 – 7.05.2017) and possibly one Black Kite in the vicinity.

Observers are encouraged to take great care when identifying possible Red Kites in this area.

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