

Ring Ouzel breeding in Northern Timan mountains, Russia, in June 2014

During 17-30 June 2014, avian surveys were conducted in the Northern Timan mountains, as part of a project for creating a new protected area in the Nenets Autonomous District of the Arkhangelsk region, Russia. During this survey, we discovered nesting Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*, a species not yet known to breed there.

Research area

The survey camp was located at the upper river Bolshaya Svetlaya (67.2058°N, 49.1055°E; figure 1). From this location, several radial and two large circular routes were made. These routes covered upstreams of the rivers Bolshaya Svetlaya, Belyi Kechvozh, Volonga and Belaya. Also two rivers with the same name 'Kumushka' were investigated. One of them flows into the river Volonga, the second into the river Belaya. The survey area concerns southern tundra with the border between tundra and forest tundra being nearby, along the Volonga.



FIGURE 1 Location of survey camp at upper river Bolshaya Svetlaya, Russia (67.2058°N, 49.1055°E) (© 2015 Google)

The weather in late June 2014 was not very favourable for breeding birds and ornithological investigations. During the surveys, the temperature fluctuated around 8-10°C, at night sometimes dropping to 1-2°C. Different types of precipitation (drizzle, fog, rain) occurred almost every day.

159 Ring Ouzels / Belfijsters *Turdus torquatus*, male (left) and female, Northern Timan mountains, Arkhangelsk region, Russia, 26 June 2014 (Dmitry Dorofeev)





160 Ring Ouzels / Beflijsters *Turdus torquatus*, Northern Timan mountains, Arkhangelsk region, Russia, 27 June 2014 (Dmitry Dorofeev). Nest with pulli.



161 Ring Ouzel / Beflijster *Turdus torquatus*, adult female, Northern Timan mountains, Arkhangelsk region, Russia, 27 June 2014 (Dmitry Dorofeev)

There are no published avifaunistic studies of the area between the rivers Volonga and Indiga. Earlier researchers worked only further east, along the Indiga (Mineev & Mineev 2009), or west, on the lower western parts of Kanin Peninsula.

Observations of Ring Ouzel

The first two Ring Ouzels were observed in the evening of 25 June 2014 at the confluence of the rivers Belaya and Kumushka. Both birds were alert and behaved typically for a breeding pair (plate 159). A first attempt to find the nest was unsuccessful. On 26 June, the species was observed on five other occasions, during the journey downstream from the confluence of the Belaya and Kumushka, while on 28 June two single birds were observed in the area of the special protected canyon 'Stone Gate'. In the afternoon of 26 June, we re-examined the slope of the gorge where the Ring Ouzels had been seen the previous day. Then, the nest was found in a niche in the rock at a height of c 1.5 m above the ground, which is c 200 m above sea level (plate 160). The nest was located in the middle of a steep slope, on the right bank of the Belaya, c 100 m downstream the confluence of the Belaya and Kumushka, at 67.2583°N, 48.8872°E.

Nest material consisted mainly of thin twigs of shrubs and lichens, while the nest cup was lined with dry grass. The diameter of the nest cup was c 10 cm, while the diameter of the nest was 13 cm.

The nest contained five chicks of c 8-10 days old. Their average weight was 55 g, average tarsus length was 32 mm (n=3) and average bill length

was 9.4 mm (n=3); the wing-feathers were still in pin only, c 10 mm long. During investigation of the nest, the female and male were alert close to the nest and tried to attack the observer (plate 161).

The Belaya valley is a deep gorge of 15 m to more than 100 m deep. The rest of the river valleys – Belyi Kechvozh, Volonga, Bolshaya Svetlaya – have rocky but quite gentle valleys. Only the Kumushka valley is similar to the Belaya valley. We assume that because of this difference Ring Ouzels were observed only in the Belaya and Kumushka valleys.

Status

Breeding of Ring Ouzel was not known for this area. The nearest known breeding site is the Kola Peninsula, c 300 km to the west (cf Bianki et al 1993, del Hoyo et al 2005, Svensson et al 2009). Because, apart from the nest with young, several other single Ring Ouzels were seen in the area as well, we suppose that a small population is present.

Maybe this breeding record of Ring Ouzel indicates an expansion of the species to the east. After the expedition, it appeared that a short ornithological expedition had been made to the Belay river valley in midsummer 1995 and that no Ring Ouzels had been observed (V V Morozov pers comm).

Between the Kola Peninsula and Northern Timan mountains lies a mountain range, the Kanin Kamen. It seems very likely that Ring Ouzel also breeds in the North Kanin Peninsula but this has yet to be confirmed.

Acknowledgements

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