



The red-footed falcons are easy to see since they often sit fully exposed in trees or on poles. These young birds were all born this year, showing the typical brown back and streaked underparts.

Invasion of Red-Footed Falcons at Cape Kolka

This year, at the end of August, several hundreds of red-footed falcons (*Falco vespertinus*) could have been observed gathered together in one place – Cape Kolka. Usually one can encounter these interesting birds in the open areas – flying, floating in the air or sitting on the electric cables, dried tree-branches or the tips of the poles. A red-footed falcon is a small, beautiful bird of prey whose natural range spreads from the Hungarian steppes in Europe to the Baikal region in Asia. Nevertheless, news regarding the possible nesting of these bird species in Latvia is extremely controversial.

Every year, in the period between the end of July and throughout August, falcons fly through the territory of Latvia on the way to their wintering areas in Africa. In this period, they can be observed in Latvia, gathered in small flocks and preying on tiny insects such as dragonflies, grasshoppers and large bugs. Falcons usually return from Africa to their nesting areas in Europe and Asia only when enough of insects have already bred; whereas they prefer to leave their nesting areas early, while there are still some insects left. In comparison to other birds of prey which migrate either alone or in couples, red-footed falcons normally form flocks. Moreover, in the nesting periods they form large nesting colonies (up to 100 birds gathered together in one place).

During the invasion of these birds at the end of summer in Latvia, you are likely to encounter mainly young birds. Their population has experienced a downward trend in the recent years. According to the endangerment classification of the Red Data Book, the current status of this bird species is indicated as “Near Threatened”. However, many ornithologists believe that the recent decades have been extremely favourable for this species. This could be attributed to the special measures carried out to preserve these birds. It is possible that the use of pesticides in the nesting areas has decreased or made more moderate.





Currently, the red-footed falcons are leaving behind the summer in the northern hemisphere to meet it again in the southern hemisphere – in Africa, where the myriads of insects are already expecting them. You have an exclusive chance to observe this phenomenon. So, put your shoes on, grab your binoculars and hurry out into the wild!

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