

Project Update: February 2016

We continued our research of distribution and abundance of the breeding population of spotted eagle in the exclusion zone of Chernobyl National Nature Park in the end of June 2015.

We verified the success of a nesting pair of hybrid spotted eagle which was first discovered in 2012 at Tolstolesovskiy forestry. This hybrid couple has nested in the same area of deciduous forest and, judging from the behavior of adult birds, fed their chicks. We were also able to identify a new territory where the spotted eagle with nesting behavior was observed for the first time. Nesting site is located on the reclaimed territory of the river Sahan, which is a part of the valley of Pripjat.

Spotted eagle territory in the Exclusion Zone, according to our research, is limited to the right bank of Pripjat. We also spent a long time on the left bank of Pripjat, near the large land reclamation system. This territory biotopically could well be suitable for nesting of the eagle, which is known to be very picky about the choice of its habitat. However, spotted eagle was not registered here. Currently, there are at least 2 pairs of spotted eagle, one of which is defined as a hybrid, in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.

The next expedition to study spotted eagle was carried out in the second and third weeks of July 2015 in the north-west of Ukraine - in Rivne and Volyn regions. Its main goals were monitoring of breeding success, identification of new nests, ringing of chicks by metal and plastic rings.

On the territory of the Rivne region, where we have ringed chicks since 2012, we examined and checked all known in 2015. During the research we have also found two new nests. In total seven nests were checked, in six of them there were chicks. Unfortunately, in the nest, where we have been ringing hybrid chicks for 3 years, the pair bred unsuccessfully - in the nest there were found remains of eggs. The cause of unsuccessful nesting was destruction from people. Not far from the nest illegal amber miners were camping. We also identified on this territory a spotted eagle which we had not previously met.

In the Volyn region, we worked on the territory of the river valley Pripjat, where we had previously seen spotted eagle. However, during checking those sites birds were not registered. Only on one site we registered a hybrid pair, but nest of this pair was not found. In other areas, we found two new nests, where we ringed two hybrid chicks.

During the trip eight chicks were ringed, five of which were spotted eagles and three were hybrids. Nine artificial nesting platforms were built in potential habitats of the eagles.

In the diet of Spotted Eagle were noted: great white egret (*Egretta alba*), little ducks (*Anas* sp.), sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*), cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), magpie (*Pica pica*), European brown hare (young) (*Lepus europaeus*), stoat (*Mustela erminea*) and small rodents.

Materials and results of the work can be found on the website of the Ukrainian Center of Birds of Prey Research: <http://raptors.org.ua/ru/824><http://raptors.org.ua/ru/816>



1. Checking of color in nestling of spotted eagle. ©M. Franchuk, S. Domashevsky



2. Spotted eagle chick marked by metal and plastic rings. 3. The process of ringing of hybrid Spotted Eagle nestling. ©M. Franchuk, S. Domashevsky



4. Making artificial nesting platforms for spotted eagle. ©M. Franchuk, S. Domashevsky



5. Climbing the tree to nesting platforms of spotted eagle. ©M. Franchuk, S. Domashevsky



6. Installing artificial nesting platforms for spotted eagle. ©M. Franchuk, S. Domashevsky