

The Journey of a Female Hobby Across Two Continents: From Sweden in Northern Europe to Zambia in Southern Africa

Roine Strandberg, Thomas Alerstam, Mikael Hake and Patrik Olofsson, Department of Animal Ecology, Lund University, and Grimsö Wildlife Research Station, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

During the summer of 2005 an adult female Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* was equipped with a 12g solar PTT* at Kristianstad, at latitude 57 degrees north in Sweden. The Hobby is one of the smallest European falcons, with the females slightly larger than males, with body mass about 275g. This species is known to spend the winter in the southern parts of Africa, mainly south of 10 degrees south, some 8000 km (5000 miles) from Sweden. However, there are no Swedish ring recoveries to show the migration routes and non-breeding distribution south of Sahara.

After attachment to the bird, the transmitter worked without interruptions and provided 660 positions from 17 July to 23 November. In the end of the transmitting period, the bird had been stationary in an area of 1800 km² (800 square miles) for more than ten days, indicating that it had arrived in its winter grounds in northwestern Zambia.

Following a straight route from Sweden, the winter area was situated 7650 km (4750 miles) away from the breeding ground. However, the real migration journey by the bird was more than 10500 km (6500 miles)! The female departed from her breeding site on 9 September and arrived in Zambia on 10 November, which gives a mean migration speed of 167 km/day (104 miles/day).

The journey started via the islands of Bornholm and Rügen as stepping stones across the Baltic Sea. She continued across the European continent, passed west of the Alps and reached the French Riviera. Starting early in the morning of 29 September she made a nonstop flight over a distance of 760 km (470 miles) across the Mediterranean Sea, arriving in Algeria 25 hours later. Thus, she completed half the sea passage during the night! Sahara was passed during two weeks and the course was, somewhat surprising, to the SSW towards West Africa. After a few days stopover in northwest Ivory Coast in mid October, she abruptly veered east. Reaching Cameroon, she again changed course and headed southeast without any contact with the coastline. Passing over the extensive rain forests of Congo and into the highlands of Zambia, she suddenly stopped and settled in a forested area 12.5 degrees south of the Equator.

An amazing journey like this flight of the female Hobby certainly gives fuel to wonderings and theories about migration patterns for species traveling via West Africa towards southern Africa including not only Hobby but also, for example, swallows and swifts. Why did the Hobby make a detour of 3500 km (2200 miles) via West Africa rather than flying directly south towards Zambia? Perhaps she followed prey, like swallows, on migration? Did she travel alone or with other Hobbies? Are the males and juveniles traveling by the same routes? Must juvenile Hobbies rely exclusively on inherited information for their migratory orientation and navigation or can they accompany and learn from adults? To what degree does an individual's experiences and learning during one journey affect its next journey? We have indeed many good reasons to continue tracking Hobbies by satellite telemetry during the coming years, and hopefully some of the questions will be answered. This year we are obtaining further exciting results about the migratory journeys of Hobbies equipped with the smallest 9.5g solar PTT.

* The harness was made of thin 1.4 mm nylon cord (as used in Venetian blinds) covered by Tygon® plastic tubing. The knot of the cord at the transmitter was secured with rapidly drying glue. The harness was secured by an aluminium clip covered with adhesive tape where the harness crosses over on the chest.



Female Hobby with 9.5g solar PTT in 2006.

All Hobby Photos by Patrik Olofsson

Satellite tracking of hobby (adult female) 2005



AUTUMN JOURNEY:
Distance 10,500 km
Duration 63 days
Migration speed 166 km/d

Roine Strandberg with female Hobby

