



## **First record of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* in South America**

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# First record of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* in South America

by Frederick Pallinger, Joacil Germano Soares & Fabio Schunck

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**SUMMARY.**—Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* migrates between its breeding grounds in Europe, parts of North Africa and East and South Asia, and non-breeding areas in Africa and Asia. It is a vagrant to many parts of the world, including North America and Australasia. A first-calendar-year individual was photographed aboard a boat near the São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago, off north-east Brazil, in December 2022, providing the first record of this species for South America.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* breeds in Europe, parts of North Africa and East and South Asia. Two subspecies are recognised, *F. s. subbuteo* and *F. s. streichi*. Most *F. s. subbuteo* migrate to central and southern Africa in winter, whereas others move to South and South-East Asia. *F. s. streichi* is resident in southern and eastern China, and possibly northern Myanmar and northern Indochina (Orta *et al.* 2020). Satellite-tracking data reveal that *F. subbuteo* can move at least 10,065 km during migration (Meyburg *et al.* 2011). There are many records of vagrants on oceanic islands, such as in the north-east Atlantic (e.g., the Azores; Costa *et al.* 2011, eBird 2023), Pacific (e.g., Mariana Islands, Guam, Pagan; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Wiles 2005) and Indian Oceans (e.g., Amsterdam Island; Jiguet *et al.* 2007; Cocos and Christmas Islands; James & McAllan 2014). There are also a few records for the Americas, in the Canadian provinces of British Columbia (September 2006) and Newfoundland (May 2004), and the US states of Washington (October 2001, November 2014), Massachusetts (May 2011) and Alaska (June 2003, May 2013) (Howell *et al.* 2014, eBird 2023). Eurasian Hobby was not mentioned by Whittaker *et al.* (2019) as a potential vagrant to Brazil based on vagrancy to St Helena, Ascension, or Tristan da Cunha.

On 29 December 2022, a young *F. subbuteo* (possibly female based on apparent size) was found alive on a small Brazilian vessel 955 km off Rio Grande do Norte, north-east Brazil, and c.0.5 km north-west of the São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago (00°55'6.09"N, 29°20'52.85"W; Fig. 1). The archipelago belongs to the state of Pernambuco and consists of a suite of rocky islets in the Atlantic Ocean, with the surrounding 200 nautical miles being Brazilian territory. The individual arrived flying low but was apparently physically weak and landed on the vessel, where it was captured and fed fish by the crew. It was probably taken to the Brazilian mainland (possibly Rio Grande do Norte) by the crew, where it was photographed in a residential setting (Fig. 2). We were unable to confirm the bird's fate, as the anonymous person who sent us the information and photographed the bird eventually ceased responding to our messages. Nonetheless, we requested the bird be delivered to the local environmental agency, if it was still in their possession.

Initially, the crew member sent JGS the images to identify, and he then contacted FP to confirm the identification. FP requested more details including the locality from the crew, which were provided, including the geographic coordinates mentioned above. Only after FP informed our anonymous correspondent that we planned to publish the record did he or she stop responding. We are confident that the details that were provided are genuine.

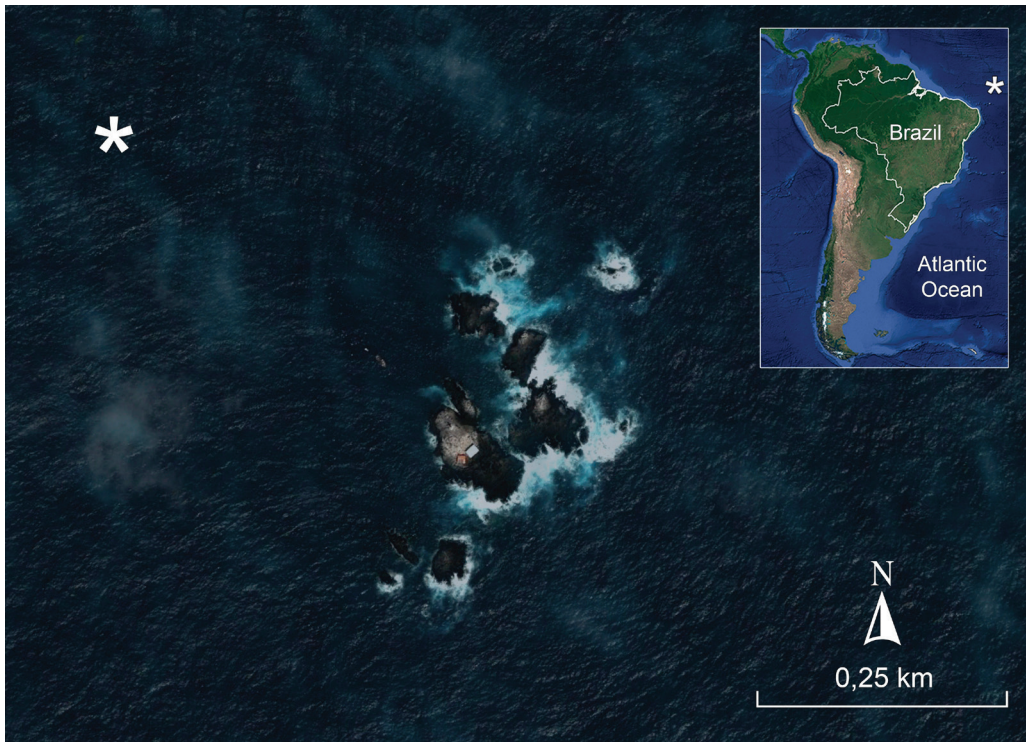


Figure 1. Location of the Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* record off the coast of Brazil. The asterisk on the map of South America (inset) indicates the location of the São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago. The asterisk in the image of the archipelago indicates the site of the record (Images Google Earth Pro / © 2023 Maxar Technologies)



Figure 2. Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* recorded near the São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago, Brazil, December 2022 (anonymous photographer; see text)

The photograph (Fig. 2) shows a first-calendar-year bird in worn plumage (Fig. 3C). We ruled out the possibility of a juvenile Amur Falcon *F. amurensis* (which has occurred on St Helena; Rowlands *et al.* 1998) or the same age Red-footed Falcon *F. vespertinus* (which species

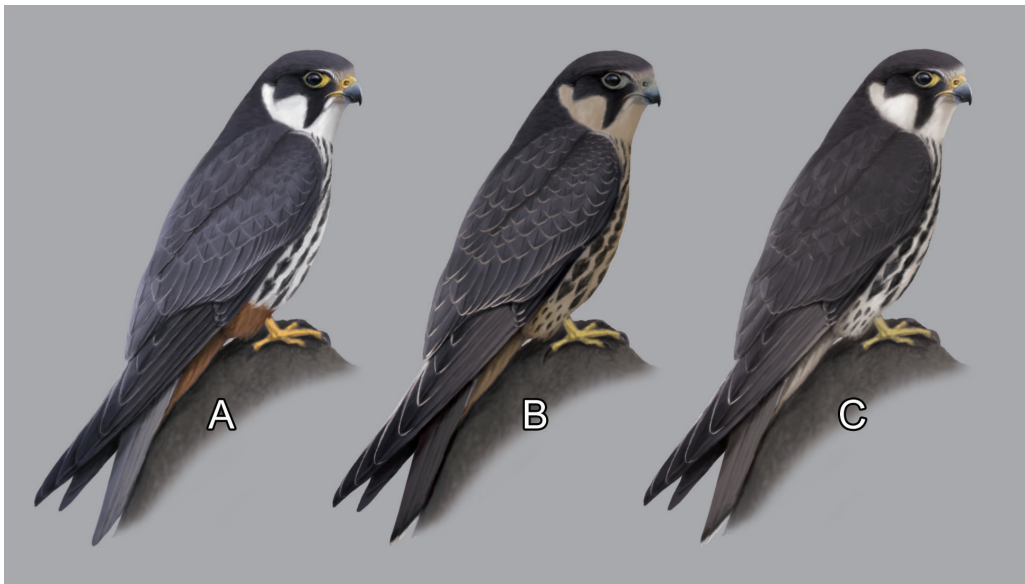


Figure 3. Plumages of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: (A) adult; (B) fledged young ('fresh' juvenile plumage); and (C) young with worn plumage, like the bird recorded near the São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago (Frederick Pallinger)

has wandered to North America; Howell *et al.* 2014) by lacking a yellow cere, having a paler forehead to mid-crown (Red-footed can be similar), generally less obvious pale fringes to the upperparts feathers, a longer and broader malar stripe, and perhaps on average paler yellow feet/tarsi (Small 1995, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). We also eliminated a juvenile of the obviously larger Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonora* which lacks a supraocular line, has a bluish periocular ring, and a long tail that usually extends slightly beyond the wingtips at rest (Ollé & Trabalon 2019).

This is the first record of Eurasian Hobby for South America and will now be assessed by the Brazilian Ornithological Records Committee. The possibility of the bird being a captive property of a crew member was eliminated, as work on the high seas in small boats does not usually permit the presence of 'pets' on board, and the crew was from Brazil, where the species does not occur.

Quite a number of landbird species from Eurasia have been recorded recently in Brazil, among them Corn Crake *Crex crex* on Fernando de Noronha (Burgos & Olmos 2013), Redwing *Turdus iliacus* on a vessel 150 km off the coast of Espírito Santo (Brito *et al.* 2013) and Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* on Ilha Comprida, southern São Paulo (Pacheco *et al.* 2021). The São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago is an important site for these vagrants, including Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (Bencke *et al.* 2005). Most Eurasian Hobbies migrate to southern Africa, where they arrive mainly in November, but departure from Europe is principally in August / September and the first birds reach the southern third of Africa in October (Orta *et al.* 2020), thus an individual near the São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago in December was certainly lost, perhaps due to strong winds or storms, juvenile inexperience, or both. Other small falcons are also much prone to vagrancy, e.g., Amur Falcon, Eleonora's Falcon, Spotted Kestrel *F. moluccensis*, Oriental Hobby *F. severus* and others (Winkler *et al.* 2020).

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