

# Avifauna of Tver Region (Russia) – Its past and present

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Aside of scarce reports on birds of the Tver Region in medieval and 18<sup>th</sup> century sources, the real monitoring of the regional fauna has started in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since the first relatively long list of birds, which contained 154 avian species and was published by A. DYAKOV in 1878, the number of birds recorded in the Tver Region has increased to 275 species. Although not all of them are nesting or have nested in the region, bird populations and their distribution dynamics show certain trends during the last one and a half centuries. The beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Tver Region was marked by the presence of a number of species typical for the more southern forest-steppe regions. Roller and Scops Owl, as well as Bee-eater have never been recorded nesting in those numbers again. White Stork started to nest in the region in 1930s and since then has expanded its nesting range over the entire region; today the White Stork breeding population is estimated to comprise 200–230 pairs. Collared Dove populated the Tver Region in the 1970s and reached a population peak in the 1980s, when the region harboured about 100 nesting pairs. The number of doves abruptly declined during the early 1990s and today the species completely disappeared from the region. Turtle Dove demonstrates a similar case. Being numerous by the end of the 1980s the species almost disappeared from the Tver Region. These and other results of the long-term monitoring of birds in the Tver Region show that population and distribution dynamics are not only related to climate changes, but also to the type and intensity of human activities.

**Keywords:** avifauna, Tver Region, history, dynamics, agriculture

## 1. Introduction

Tver Region (Tver Oblast) is located in the centre of the East European Plain (Fig. 1) and covers about 84,100 km<sup>2</sup>. It represents the largest region of the Central Federal District. Being as large as Austria it has a variety of natural resources and habitats. Lowlands alternate with highlands covered with peat bogs, meadows as well as temperate and southern taiga forests. The region includes the major part of the so called Valdai Hills, representing the watershed of the Caspian, Baltic and Black Seas. Numerous rivulets, rivers and lakes characterise the Tver Region. The fauna and flora are



**Fig. 1:** The location of the Tver Region (red) within Russia (courtesy of Nicolay Sidorov). – *Die Lage der Tver Region innerhalb Russlands.*

similar to those of the bordering Moscow, Smolensk, Pskov, Novgorod, Vologda and Yaroslavl Regions. The avifauna of the region has been monitored for the last 140 years (DYAKOV 1878).

## 2. History

First scarce reports on birds inhabiting Tver Region can be found within the notes of medieval travellers (after KUTEPOV 1896, 1898). However, the first more or less detailed account was provided by the academic I. A. GÜLDENSTÄDT (1878), who travelled along the rivers Polomet and Msta located on the border of today's Tver and Novgorod Regions. He mentioned 41 species of birds. The academic N. YA. OZERETSKOVSKY (1817) added three more species to this list. Data on bird hunting were reported by several huntsmen (WILDERMET 1834, 1838, 1842, BAIKOV 1901, FUNTIKOV 1915). A. I. DYAKOV (1878) published the first bird list of the Tver Province. It contained 154 species of birds (161 when combined with data of previously mentioned authors). V. ESAULOV (1878) expanded this list to 185 species, providing the first classical annotated checklist of birds of the Toropets District of the Tver Province. The next author adding species to the bird list of the Tver Prov-

ince was K. N. DAVYDOV (1896). He described the birds of the Rzhev District, adding eight new species (193 in total) to the list. Substantial works of N. A. ZARUDNY (1910) comprise data on a further 63 bird species new to the Tver Province (256 in total). Moreover, this author mentioned the possibility that additional species could enter the province as vagrants. Another species (257 in total) was added by N. M. TYULIN (1914), recorded when travelling to his mansion in the Bezhetsk District. V. L. BIANKI (1922) recorded two new species, which he observed in the north-west of the Tver Province, expanding the bird list to 259 species. No new records followed until 1928, when another new species was added to the list of birds (260 in total) (KAPLANOV & RAEVSKY 1930). A. V. TRETYAKOV (1940) published the second annotated checklist of bird of the Kalinin Region (the Tver Province was renamed to Tver Region (Oblast) in 1929 and to Kalinin Region in 1935; the name Tver Region was returned in 1990). This list contained 261 species. Studies carried out during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century expanded the list of birds of the Tver Region to 267 species (for further references see ZINOVIEV *et al.* 2016).

### 3. Trends

The analysis of the aforementioned sources demonstrates certain trends in the avifauna of the Tver Region during the last one and a half centuries.

The first trend relates to climatic changes and changes in human activities. Reports from the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century indicate the presence of a number of avian species in the Tver Region typical for the more southern forest-steppe regions (GRAVE 1927). Roller *Coracias garrulus* and Scops Owl *Otus scops*, as well as Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* have never been recorded nesting in those numbers again. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the region was quite warm and dry; during this period the agricultural land expanded continuously from the forest-steppe regions, especially along the large rivers. Occasional warmer and dryer seasons in the 1960s and the 2000s resulted in increased num-

bers of the species mentioned above (VINOGRADOV & VINOGRADOV & ZINOVIEV 2014). However, these species never reached the numbers recorded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the number of comparably warm and dry years was not frequent enough and due to the general decline of agriculture in the Tver Region in the 2000s.

The occurrence of White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* in the Tver Province was first mentioned by V. L. BIANKI (1922). The species started to nest regularly during the 1930s, spreading across the region in a north-eastern direction (ZINOVIEV *et al.* 1990). By the 1980s the White Stork occupied the basins of Volga, Tvertsa and Upper Mologa rivers, reaching its population peak during the 1990s. Today, the number of nesting birds is estimated to comprise 200–230 pairs (NIKOLAEV 2000). The White Stork population in the region is quite stable, though showing the tendency to decline as a consequence of the loss of appropriate feeding and nesting ground due to the degradation of villages and pastures (ZINOVIEV & KOSHELEV 2013).

Two dove species demonstrate interesting dynamics in the Tver Region. Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* populated the Tver Region in the 1970s and reached a population peak in the 1980s, when the region harboured about 100 nesting pairs (BUTUZOV *et al.* 2002). This dynamic appears to represent the general trend of this species during that period (BLAGOSKLONOV 1978, NOWAK 1989). The number of doves abruptly declined at the beginning of the 1990s due to unknown reasons; today the species completely disappeared from the region.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* demonstrates a similar case, though representing a native species of the Tver Region. Being numerous by the end of 1980s it has now almost disappeared from the Tver Region. This development coincides with a decline of agricultural areas, representing typical Turtle Dove feeding habitat.

These and other results of the long-term monitoring of birds in the Tver Region show that population and distribution dynamics do not only relate to climate changes, but also to the type and intensity of human activities.

### 4. Zusammenfassung

Zinoviev, A. V. 2017: Die Avifauna der Tver Region (Russland): Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Vogelwelt 137: 198–200.

Abgesehen von vereinzelt Berichten zur Vogelwelt der Tver Region aus dem Mittelalter sowie dem 18. Jahrhundert, begann die gezielte Untersuchung der regionalen Vogelfauna in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Seit der Publikation einer ersten verhältnismäßig umfassenden Liste der vorkommenden Vogelarten im Jahr 1878 durch A. DЯAKOV, die 154 Arten umfasste, stieg die Anzahl der nachgewiesenen Vogelarten in der Zwischenzeit auf 275 Arten an. Nicht bei allen Arten konnten Brutnachweise erbracht werden.

Die Populationen selbst und deren Verbreitungsdynamik im Betrachtungsgebiet zeigen deutliche Trends über die zurückliegenden eininhalb Jahrhunderte. Der Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts war in der Tver Region durch das Auftreten verschiedener Arten gekennzeichnet, die typischerweise in der weiter südlich gelegenen Waldsteppenregionen vorkommen. Arten wie die Blauracke, Zwergohreule und Bienenfresser wurden niemals wieder in so hoher Zahl als Brutvögel festgestellt. Der Weißstorch besiedelte die Region

in den 1930er Jahren. Seither hat sich die Art in der gesamten Region als Brutvogel etabliert, so dass der Brutbestand heute auf 200–230 Brutpaare geschätzt wird. Darüber hinaus zeigen zwei Taubenarten interessante Entwicklungen auf. Die Türkentaube besiedelte die Tver Region in den 1970er Jahren und erreichte in 1980er Jahren ein Bestandshoch mit etwa 100 Brutpaaren. In den frühen 1990er Jahren zeigte die Art dann einen abrupten Bestandseinbruch und ist heute völlig aus der Region verschwunden. Bei der Turteltaube zeigte

sich ein ähnliches Bild. Während die Art Ende der 1980er Jahre zahlreich vorkam, ist sie heute fast vollständig aus der Region verschwunden. Diese und weitere Ergebnisse des Langzeit-Monitorings der Avifauna der Tver Region zeigen, dass Populations- und Verbreitungsdynamiken nicht ausschließlich durch klimatische Änderungen bedingt sind, sondern ebenfalls stark durch die Art und Weise sowie Intensität anthropogener Aktivitäten beeinflusst werden.

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