

FIRST SIGHTING RECORDS OF STEPPE EAGLE (*AQUILA NIPALENSIS*) FROM LANSDOWNE FOREST DIVISION, PAURI GARHWAL, UTTARAKHAND, INDIA

Mohan Kukreti, Dinesh Bhatt

Gurukula Kangri University, Department of Zoology and Environmental Science, Avian Biodiversity and Bioacoustics Laboratory; Haridwar 249404, Uttarakhand, India
✉ mohankukreti@gmail.com; dineshharidwar@gmail.com

Abstract. The article presents the first sighting records of Steppe Eagle between years 2012 and 2014 from the Lansdowne forest division, Uttarakhand, Western Himalayas, India. These data indicates that the species is a winter migrant in the region.

Key words: Western Himalayas, fauna, distribution, migration.

Первые встречи степного орла (*Aquila nipalensis*) в Лэнсдаунском лесу, Паури Гарвал, Уттаракханд, Индия. - М. Кукрети, Д. Бхатт. - Беркут. 23 (2). 2014. - Описаны первые встречи степного орла в округе Паури Гарвал штата Уттаракханд в 2012–2014 гг. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что этот вид является зимним мигрантом в регионе.

Ключевые слова: Западные Гималаи, фауна, распространение, миграция.

The Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) breeds from South-Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Russia to Manchuria in Eastern China and migrates in winter to the Southern Africa and Southern Asia including Indian subcontinent (Clark, 1996; Meyburg et al., 2003). The detailed review of sighting records from Indian subcontinent has shown that the species was sighted commonly in North-East India (Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Assam), Eastern India (Orissa and West Bengal), North and North West India (Jammu and Kashmir, Himanchal Pradesh, Uttarakhand etc.), Central India (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh), Western India (Rajasthan, Gujarat etc.), Southern India (Karnataka, Kerala etc.) and in the other countries within the region like Nepal, while poorly reported from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sikkim, Myanmar and Bangladesh (Pande et al., 2013). The avian biodiversity studies conducted from the state of Uttarakhand (Western Himalayas) did not report the presence of Steppe Eagle in this area except few records (Naithani, Bhatt, 2010 in Pauri Hills) and Srivastava (2004 in Corbett National Park) during winter season. In view of these available records, this is the first report from the Lansdowne forest division of Garhwal Himalayas.

On 30.11.2012 as a part of field trip to Pauri via Kotdwar-Gumkhal-Pauri road on national highway 119, we saw two Steppe Eagles (1 sub-adult, 1 juvenile; Photo 1) perched on

Pinus roxburghii tree near main road of national highway at Gumkhal market (26° 53' N, 78° 40' E; 1502 m a.s.l.) between 11³⁰ to 12⁴⁵ hrs. After some time they began to soar around the tree. We started looking at them through our binoculars. We thought that something was dead nearby which they wanted to feed upon, but when we reached closer we did not find any carcasses nearby. The two individuals continued soaring about 15 to 20 minutes in the sky giving us an excellent opportunity to take photographs (Photo 1 and 2) despite of heavy traffic on the national highway. After that they moved towards the thick Pine forest and disappeared. After this sighting we made informal surveys in the Lansdowne range of this forest division in winter till the end of February 2014. On 7.01.2013 between 10⁰⁰ to 13⁵⁰ hrs, we found a juvenile (Photo 3) soaring in the sky moving towards Lansdowne town (29° 51' N, 78° 40' E; 1614 m a.s.l.). After this sighting on 29.02.2014 we found a single juvenile soaring above the Kura village (29° 83' N, 78° 68' E; 1721 m a.s.l.) in the afternoon about 12⁴⁰ hrs in the Lansdowne area.

These observations and photographic records indicates the presence of this species as a winter migrant in the Lansdowne forest division of Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India. Further surveys, are however needed to confirm the migratory status and behavior of the species in this area.

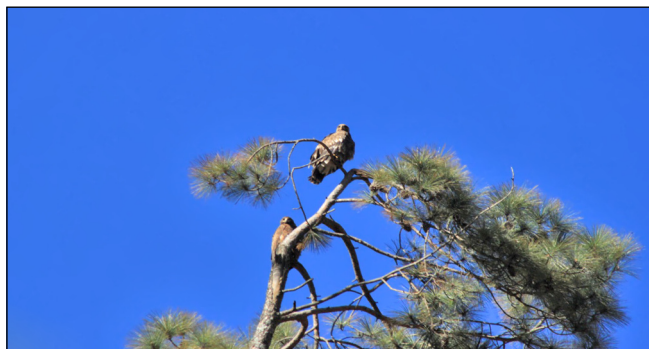


Photo 1. Sub-adult and juvenile Steppe Eagles perched on Pine tree. 30.11.2012.

Фото 1. Неполовозрелый и молодой степные орлы, сидящие на сосне.



Photo 2. Sub-adult Steppe Eagle. 30.11.2012.

Фото 2. Неполовозрелый степной орел.



Photo 3. Juvenile Steppe Eagle from below (A) and above (B). 7.01.2013.

Фото 3. Молодой степной орел сверху (A) и снизу (B).

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