

Most individuals arrive in West Pakistan in the first half of October and depart again in early March. Whistler saw a flock of seven on the Sohan River (a very small stony stream) north of Rawalpindi on March 3rd which were obviously on northward passage (Whistler 1938). Ticehurst, however, noted an individual in Sind as late as April 5th (Ticehurst *op. cit.*).

It is hoped that as better protection measures are enforced at the new Reserve at Lal Soharan, that increasing use will be made of the area as a wintering ground by these strange and beautiful birds.

ROBERTS COTTON ASSOCIATES LTD.,  
KHANEWAL, MULTAN DT.,  
WEST PAKISTAN,  
February 20, 1969.

T. J. ROBERTS

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#### 6. ON THE OCCURRENCE OF *HALIAEETUS ALBICILLA* (LINNAEUS) IN WEST PAKISTAN

The Whitetailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) in common with the larger raptors over most parts of the world, has suffered a decline in numbers during the 20th century, both as a result of human predation, and more recently no doubt as the result of the damaging effects on fertility resulting from widespread use of insecticides.

Though included in Volume 5 of the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA (Stuart Baker 1928) and listed therein as occurring as a winter visitor to the Punjab, North West Provinces and Sind, S. Dillon Ripley omits it from his SYNOPSIS (Ripley 1961). It is included, however, in Vol. 1 of the new HANDBOOK (Sálím Ali & S. D. Ripley 1968) as a rare casual winter visitor to West Pakistan. A number of observations over the past three winters therefore seem worth recording. In the winter of 1966-67 at Ghauspur Jheel in north-western Sind (Sukkur District on the right bank of the Indus) Roberts saw a party comprising one old bird (with very pale almost white head and neck) and four immatures. There was a vast concourse of water fowl at this time and many other species of raptors. In January 1967, on a second visit, only one immature bird was observed. The following winter on December 8th one immature bird was again observed but in two visits in October 1968 and February 1969



none were seen, due possibly to failure of the monsoon and much less water in the region. On January 21st 1968 Savage saw two adult birds on a sand bank in the Indus River near Chashma (Mianwali District—north-western Punjab) and on February 2nd 1969 a solitary adult bird repeatedly quartering waterfowl over Nammal Lake in the Salt Range—about forty miles due north-west of the sighting at Chashma.

Two facts regarding these sightings are of interest. Firstly that adult birds were seen on three out of five occasions though the adults are considered to be sedentary and only the immature birds inclined to southern migratory movement in winter (Vaurie 1965). It seems, however, that Vaurie must be mistaken in considering adults to be sedentary except possibly in the southern parts of their range as it is inconceivable that northern birds can remain on their breeding grounds during winter. Dementiev does not suggest this and records from Iran and Pakistan certainly show that at least some adults move south. Secondly, in Pakistan at any rate, individual birds appear to visit approximately the same localities in successive winters.

The following records of previous sightings which have come to our notice would seem to be reliable and relevant. Ticehurst (1923) recorded a white-tailed adult on the Habb River in Las Bela near the Mekran coast on November 14th, 1919. In February 1940, Major-General Christison watched a female for several days, in of all places, the refuse dump outside Quetta city. He also cited another female seen on June 10th at Khushdil Khan Lake north of Quetta (Christison 1943). Paludan (1959) recorded an adult bird on March 4th, 1949 on the Hamun-e Sabari in the extreme south-western corner of Afghanistan close to the Iranian border. Moore & Boswell (1956) quoted nine records from Iraq during the months of September to December. In addition there are numerous records from northern Iran where the species is quite common along the Caspian littoral in winter and also breeds, though there is a marked diminution in numbers during spring. It is also a common winter visitor, both adults and juveniles, near the marsh land areas of Fars in southern Iran (L. Cornwallis in litt.), and in February 1969 Jacques Vieilliard (pers. comm.) sighted a pair in south-western Iran which he thought might have been breeding.

Vaurie (*op. cit.*) refers to small breeding populations of this eagle in Kirghizia, and in Russian Turkestan on the Amu Darya, but Dementiev (1951) suggests that the species is becoming extremely rare throughout most of the western part of its range; e.g. in 1922 there were less than 20 pairs left in Sweden, and in the Ukraine in 1937 there were thought to be only two pairs left on the lower reaches of the Dnieper. It has already been exterminated as a breeding bird in many parts of its former range though it still occurs as a vagrant, e.g. in north-west Africa (Etchecopar & Hue 1967). Dementiev stated that it was still fairly



abundant, however, in the tundra and forest tundra of the north along the large river valleys such as the Ob, Yenesei, and Kolyma. It seems probable therefore that the sightings in Pakistan were of Russian breeding birds.

The Ghauspur eagles afforded plenty of opportunity for leisurely observations, and in his field notes, Roberts records that immature birds have a very distinctive and easily recognised tail pattern. Besides the flight silhouette with comparatively short and wedge-shaped tail, when viewed closely, each rectrice is dull white with a definite narrow dark brown border around the outer edge of both webs. The tail feathers are somewhat pointed also and not spatulate as in that of most *Aquila* species. The outer tail feathers bear some brown mottling near the main rib but the general pattern of white with a narrow dark brown border is both striking and clearly discernible even from underneath when the bird is soaring overhead. The cere is clear yellow in adult birds, but these immature eagles observed had bluish horn ceres and compared with the other eagle species their loose plumage and rather untidy appearance was noticeable, as was the pale base to many of the breast and mantle feathers.

One of the immature eagles observed at Ghauspur also captured a teal in the following manner. An individual duck had swum some distance from the nearby flock, whereupon the young eagle immediately launched itself from the dead tree stump where it had been sitting and with comparatively ponderous flapping flight it stooped over the teal which dived under the water. Though the eagle took considerable time and space to turn around and make a further stoop it repeated this process four times during each of which the teal succeeded in escaping by diving. On the fifth occasion the duck must have been exhausted as it did not dive in time and the eagle plunged on top of it entering the water (which seemed to be fairly shallow) up to its breast. It thereupon carried off the teal in one foot but was immediately harassed by an Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*)—and though noticeably smaller the latter succeeded in robbing it of its prey. The HANDBOOK (Ali & Ripley *op. cit.*) states that the voice has not been recorded in India, but on another occasion a pair were watched circling overhead and calling frequently to one another with a low yelping sort of noise, reminiscent of a puppy dog and quite unlike the drawn out musical call of its congener, Pallas's Fishing Eagle. They soared effortlessly and to an immense height in exactly the same manner as vultures.

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7. BLACKWINGED KITE, *ELANUS CAERULEUS*  
*VOCIFERUS* (LATHAM) TAKING IN FLIGHT  
 A WOUNDED GREEN PIGEON, *TRERON*  
*PHOENICOPTERA* (LATHAM)

On 6 September 1969, while collecting birds at Shindewadi (near Poona, 2½ kilometres south-east of Katraj Tunnel) I came across a pair of Blackwinged Kites *Elanus caeruleus*. They were very wary. I stalked them for well over an hour without being able to get within range for shooting with a twelve bore shotgun. The birds did not venture very far but kept on changing perches in an approximately 1 sq. kilometre area. While chasing them I noticed some green pigeons, *Treron phoenicoptera* on a tall *Ficus* tree. Giving up the kites I went for the pigeons. At a pre-arranged signal my helper flushed them out of the tree by throwing a stone. As the group of fifteen or so flew above me, I managed a long shot injuring one. As the injured bird was sailing through the air losing height one of the Blackwinged Kites, who immediately after the shot had appeared on the scene, swooped on it and carried it away. By the time I got over my surprise it was well out of range.

The Blackwinged Kite normally takes larger insects, young or sick birds, small reptiles and rodents. Only once has it been recorded to take a wounded quail. All these are much smaller and comparatively lighter in weight than itself. To take a full grown pigeon, almost its equivalent in weight, speaks volumes for the courage and strength of this little Kite.

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