

8. THE EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE *AQUILA HELIACA* NEAR MYSORE, SOUTHERN INDIA

The Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* Savigny 1809, listed as a globally threatened (Vulnerable) species (BirdLife International 2001), is considered to be a "rare resident, but mainly winter visitor" to western Pakistan, North and Northwest India up to Gujarat in the south (Ali and Ripley 1987). It has been recorded regularly in winter from Nepal and occasionally from West Bengal and Assam in eastern India, Bangladesh and Bhutan (BirdLife International 2001). There are a few published records of the bird from the central and southern parts of the peninsula – an adult was observed at Nandur-Madhmeshwar in the Nashik district of Maharashtra in 1983 (Goenka *et al.* 1985) and one at the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu in 1991 (Anon. 1991).

An adult bird of this species was observed by one of the authors (Shivaprakash. A) at Bilikere (12° 19' N, 76° 27' E), a moderate-sized irrigation tank situated 27 km west of Mysore city (12° 18' N, 76° 33' E), on the Mysore-Mangalore highway, on January 28, 2001 at 1530 hrs. The bird was initially observed on a 'Jaali' (*Acacia nilotica*) tree on the lake shore and identified by the white scapular 'patches' on the large, dark brown body and the pale, buff head and nape. When it took off, fully feathered tarsi and light greyish-brown tail with a terminal band were visible. Wings were held flat when the bird began to soar, much more so than the Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, which is usually seen at the lake and was present at the time of this sighting. In flight, underside was a dark brown body without the white/buff under-tail

coverts of spotted eagles. The take-off and initial flight appeared to be sluggish and laboured, but once soaring, the bird gained an effortless manner.

The bird was observed again at the Lingambudhi lake (12° 16' N, 76° 37' E) on the outskirts of Mysore city on February 25, 2001 at 1010 hrs and could have possibly been the same individual. The diagnostic scapular patches were visible, confirming its identity. Both the sites are lakes situated in dry lands, with irrigation being limited to the *ayacut* of small irrigation tanks that dot the countryside.

These sightings represent the second report of the bird from south India. Although Ali and Ripley (1987) state that "...how much further east or south uncertain due to records being vitiated by confusion in field identifications", it is possible to separate the *Aquila* eagles in field with practice, but it is always prudent to exercise caution, as contended by Ali and Ripley, in case of uncertainties. The advent of newer, better illustrated field guides with sufficient good pointers to plumage details, flight patterns, adult and juvenile phases has certainly helped improve identification.

July 24, 2002

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9. STATUS OF THE GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE *AQUILA CLANGA* PALLAS IN THE WETLANDS OF THE KAVERI BASIN OF KARNATAKA

The Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* is a globally threatened species, categorized as "Vulnerable" (Collar *et al.* 1994, BirdLife International 2001). Previously described as a rare winter visitor to the southern peninsula (Ali and Ripley 1987), the status of the species has undergone a change in the light of new reports (Perennou 1989, Santharam 1999) and can now probably be regarded as a localized winter visitor, not uncommon in parts, based on new evidence (BirdLife International 2001, George 1994, Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Perennou 1989, Santharam 1999, Aasheesh Pittie *pers. comm.*). This note

is based on the results of a survey in the wetlands of the Kaveri basin in southern Karnataka state.

**The Kaveri Basin:** It covers an area of 81,155 sq. km over the three southern states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, of which 34,272 sq. km lies in the districts of Bangalore, Chamarajanagar, Kodagu (Coorg), Hassan, Mandya, Mysore and Tumkur in southern Karnataka (Dikshit *et al.* 1993). The basin is drained by the Kaveri river and its tributaries, significant among which are Kapila (Kabini), Hemavathi, Lakshmanathirtha, Shimsha, Harangi, Suvarnavathi and



Thejaswi, S. and Shivaprakash, A. 2004. "The Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila Heliaca* Near Mysore, Southern India." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 101, 447–447.

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