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## 10. THE WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE *HALIAEETUS LEUCOGASTER* (GMELIN) IN INLAND SOUTHERN INDIA

The White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* (Gmelin 1788) is a breeding resident of the seaboard and offshore islands from Bombay (=Mumbai) down the west coast and up east up to E. Pakistan (now Bangladesh) (Ali and Ripley 1987). It is also "...Occasionally met a few miles inland along tidal rivers and at freshwater lakes..." (Ali and Ripley 1987). The only records of the bird from inland areas in India are from Ahmedabad, c. 80 km from the sea coast (Acharya 1936) and one at the mouth of Shatrunji river, Saurashtra (Ali and Ripley 1987).

A White-bellied Sea-Eagle was observed at Maddur lake (12° 5' N, 77° 2' E), a large irrigation tank, with a water-spread area of some 1,500 acres near Yelandur town in Chamarajnagar of south Karnataka on January 23, 2000, nearly 400 km from either coast. The bird was easily identified by its

pure white head and underparts, grey upperparts, white wings with black flight feathers and a white, wedge-shaped tail with a black base. It was seen soaring above the lake and made a spectacular dive from c. 100 m to catch a large fish. The bird then consumed the fish leisurely atop an *Acacia nilotica* tree on the lake shore.

This is the first record of the bird from inland southern India, and the farthest the bird has been recorded from the sea shore in India.

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## 11. A NOTE ON HARRIER ROOSTS IN THE MYSORE AREA

This note records the presence of three minor harrier roosts in Mysore and Chamarajanagar districts of southern Karnataka. The Mandakhalli Airport (12° 13' N, 76° 39' E) is located c. 8 km south of Mysore city (12° 18' N, 76° 33' E). The Mandakhalli airfield, in parts an open expanse of grassland, serves as a roost site for harriers. 73 harriers, including 27 Pallid Harriers *Circus macrourus* (16 males, 6 females and 5 juveniles) and 46 Montagu's Harriers *Circus pygargus* (39 males and 7 females) were observed on January 12 and 14-16, 2002, mostly at dusk. This is the third such roost we have observed in the Mysore, Mandya and Chamarajanagar districts, defined here as the Mysore area,

of southern Karnataka. A roost of 37 harriers, 17 Pallid, 13 Montagu's, 6 Western Marsh *Circus aeruginosus* and a juvenile Pied Harrier *C. melanoleucos* (only in 2000-2001) were observed between November 2000-March 2001 and November 2001 till this note was accepted, at the Yedathore bank of the Kaveri river. This area is open ground, i.e. located at the point where the Kaveri river enters the Krishnarajasagara reservoir (12° 24' N, 76° 27' E) and close to a state highway. Another roost exclusively of the *C. aeruginosus* was located at the Yelandur lake (12° 3' N, 77° 2' E), 65 km southeast of Mysore city. In January 1998, 67 individuals of *C. aeruginosus* were counted on fallow paddy

fields close to the lake. But in subsequent years, cultivation of this area led the harriers to abandon the roost. Reports of harrier roosts from India have been few, and although major sites have been identified (Clarke 1996, Rahmani and Manakadan 1987, Satheesan and Rao 1990), much work remains to be done to identify the smaller, perhaps more numerous sites (Prakash 2001).

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#### 12. OCCURRENCE OF AMUR FALCON *FALCO AMURENSIS* RADDE AND LESSER KESTREL *FALCO NAUMANNI* FLEISCHER IN MYSORE, KARNATAKA

The Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* and Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* were observed in an open expanse of grassland at the Mandakhalli Airport area (12° 13' N, 76° 39' E), c. 8 km south of Mysore city (12° 18' N, 76° 33' E) on January 12 and 14, 2001. On the 12th, SS saw a few kestrels at a distance at the Mandakhalli lake nearby, while he was conducting a waterfowl census. He counted a total of thirteen birds, and since it was unusual for kestrels to congregate, he attempted further investigation but could not confirm the identity of the birds. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, shortly after dawn, we observed several hundred Amur Falcons take off from eight *Acacia nilotica* trees along the periphery of the airfield. They took off singly first, then in twos and threes and finally in small groups of up to seven birds. The estimated number of birds was around 550, the male:female ratio being approximately 60:40. The male was identified by its unmistakable sooty grey body, with rusty red vent and legs. In flight, the white underwing coverts contrast with grey primaries and secondaries. In the female, grey upper-parts, white throat and collar, a blackish stripe on the cheeks, and markings on the underside – longitudinal spots on the chest and lateral barring further down to the abdominal region. The presence of Lesser Kestrels was discerned after light conditions improved, but they were fewer in number than Amur Falcons. We counted 89 birds, of which 56 were males and rest females. Males were readily identifiable by their

unmarked bright brown mantle and back, a grey sub-terminal band to the wings, relatively unmarked chest and absence of a cheek-stripe. Paler claws vis-à-vis the Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, was noted for both sexes using a 15-45 x 60 spotting scope. Females were similar to Common Kestrel females, which differed in having dark claws. After light conditions improved, we could observe these small falcons better. They kept flying about in scattered flocks for around fifteen minutes after leaving the roost, but slowly spread throughout the entire airfield and further. Most of them moved away in a southerly direction, but 35 *F. naumanni* remained behind. The individuals were mostly males and were spread widely in the airfield. In the evening, at 1730 hrs, we could see most of the Amur Falcons and Lesser Kestrels settling in the *Acacia* trees rather noisily, swarming around the trees, frequently dashing in the air as if catching something, just like bee-eaters. Ali and Ripley (1978) recorded similar behaviour for the birds as they settle to roost. The birds were present well before sunset and began to group-up just after. They were present the following morning, but did not return in the evening, or for the next two days. We assume that by then they had left the area completely.

Amur Falcon is described as a passage migrant, with occasional breeding records from N. Cachar, now in Assam (Ali and Ripley 1978), but none in the past several decades. It has been recorded as on passage at several points in



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