

3. NESTING OF THE POND HERON *ARDEOLA GRAYII* (SYKES) ON *EUCALYPTUS* TREES

Nests of the pond heron *Ardeola grayii* (Sykes) as reported in HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1983) are generally seen on trees like *Tamarindus indica*, *Mangifera indica*, *Acacia arabica*, *Salix*, *Tamarix* and many mangroves. I documented 26 nests of *Ardeola grayii* during April to June 1988 on *Eucalyptus* trees planted at Kananpendari, Bilaspur, Madhya Pradesh. These nests were built on three *Eucalyptus* trees growing 200 m away from the village water pond. The nests were located at heights of 10 to 12 m on

trees c. 13 to 14 m tall. Nests were made using the dried twigs of *Eucalyptus* L. Her., *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss., *Butea monosperma* (Lamk.) Taub., *Dendrocalamus strictus* Nees, *Syzygium cumini* (Linn.) Skeels, and twigs belonging to at least five other unidentified species. Besides this, in one nest stubble of *Sorghum vulgare* and *Cajanus cajan* were also recorded. The nesting in *Eucalyptus* is unusual and has not been recorded before.

July 29, 1989

DEEP NARAYAN PANDEY

4. RECORDS OF THE REDLEGGED FALCON *FALCO VESPERTINUS AMURENSIS* IN GUJARAT

From 14 to 16 January 1989, we participated in the annual Asian Midwinter Waterfowl census and visited waterbodies in the southern parts of the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. On the last morning, at about 1015 hrs, we were crossing open countryside north-east of the coastal town of Madhavpur on the highway connecting the port cities of Porbandar and Veraval. This region, called *ghed*, is a low lying area that gets inundated during the monsoon. It was now dry and had been completely cultivated with gram *Cicer arietinum*, wheat *Triticum aestivum* and a few other minor crops.

A group of eight falcons, very much like the kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, were hawking insects above the crops and then resting along an electricity line and posts. Since this species does not normally feed in groups, we stopped to take a better look at them. We were very close to a few of the resting birds, the morning light was favourable and the birds were not unduly disturbed by our presence. After a few minutes of observation, the group lifted off together and flew south, out of view in the direction of the coast about 5 km away. Two of the birds were immediately identified as the kestrel. The other six were slightly smaller and differently coloured. Two of these had slate grey upperparts including the head and nape, white forehead and a very clear moustachial stripe bordering the large white cheek. The underside

was white with black streaks on the breast and upper belly. The most outstanding feature was the pinkish-orange legs, bill and cere. Three of the birds had brown upperparts and were heavily marked below; obviously these were immatures of the same species. The sixth bird was perched on an electric post partially hidden from view but was also of the same species.

None of the birds illustrated in the field guides (Heinzel *et al.* 1979, Peterson *et al.* 1983) that we had in hand, appeared to match our birds. Only the red legs suggested that this species was the redlegged falcon. Subsequently we consulted other books. Brown and Amadon (1986) in their Plate 148 illustrate beautifully the male and female of the two races of the redlegged falcon: *Falco vespertinus vespertinus*, the western race, and *F. v. amurensis*, the eastern race. The illustration of the female of the eastern race perfectly resembled two of the birds that we had observed. Digby (in Cade 1982, Plate 25) also illustrates the female of the eastern race as clearly different from that of the western race. In conclusion, the birds observed by us belonged to the eastern race of the redlegged falcon.

Cade (1982) considers the two races of the redlegged falcon as separate species on the basis of behavioural and other differences. In India, the only race so far recorded, either breeding or as a passage migrant, is the eastern race (Ali and

Ripley 1983a) even though the illustration by Henry (in Ali and Ripley 1983a, Plate 18) depicts the female of the western race, as the crown is painted brown. Similarly, Dick (in Ali and Ripley 1983b, Plates 29 and 30) has also illustrated the female of the western race, both in the sitting posture and in flight as viewed from underneath; the white tip on the tail has been shown, whereas the eastern race appears to lack this.

One of us (P.P.) had previously seen this species in late February 1984, when he had a quick glimpse of a male in the Adhodiya nullah in the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, also situated in southern Saurashtra. The bird, immediately identified as a male by the distinctive dark general coloration and dark red abdomen, landed on a branch of a tree with three other birds, but they were soon chased away by house crows.

From the few records in India, this rare falcon is understood to be a passage migrant from the main breeding grounds in China to the wintering grounds in east and south Africa, though a few

birds breed in Assam in India. The birds have been seen in Karnataka on the west coast of India in November and December on their south-west migration across the Indian Ocean to east Africa. The northern-most record on the west coast so far has been near Bombay (Ali and Ripley 1983a), and there are no published records of this species from Gujarat. The observations reported here, therefore, constitute a northward extension of this species on the west coast of India and suggest that the redlegged falcon may be using more of our western coastline on their migration than was previously known.

On our survey, we were fortunate to have Narendrasinh Jhala, Rishad Pravez and Parimal Joshi with us. We are grateful to Prof. R.M. Naik for his comments on the manuscript and to Shrivraj Kumar Khachar for permitting us the use of his excellent library.

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5. ADDITION TO THE DIETARY OF WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN *AMAURORNIS PHOENICURUS* (PENNANT)

The whitebreasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* is common in the reed-covered marshy wastelands, stagnant water bodies and along the river banks in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu. THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (Ali, S. 1979) states that its food includes "Insects, worms, molluscs, grain and shoots of paddy and marsh plants". At about 0630 hrs on 29 April 1989 we observed a bird of the species emerge from among the reeds on a bank of Kudamurutu, a branch of the Uyyakondan canal of the Cauvery, pick

up a fallen fruit of korkapilly (*Pithecolobium dulce*), isolate the white caruncle from the seed and eat it, breaking it to bits by pecking at it several times. Whether or not this forms a common food item for the bird is not known.

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