

# Occurrence of the White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* in inland waters

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The White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* is a resident raptor known to affect the seaboard of India. It occurs on the seacoast, tidal creeks and estuaries. It is occasionally met a few miles inland along tidal rivers and at freshwater lakes (Ali & Ripley 1983). Grimmet & Inskipp (1998) mention the habitat for this bird as, "... coasts and offshore islands, tidal creeks, mangroves, lagoons, estuaries; occasionally inland on tidal rivers and freshwater lakes". Naoroji (2007) also has described the habitat of this bird on similar lines.

River Tern Lodge, a unit of Jungle Lodges & Resorts Ltd., is located approximately 675 m msl and 13°41'43"N 75°38'07"E. I am stationed at the River Tern Lodge since February 2006 as a naturalist. Though the White-bellied Sea-Eagle has been reported from the Bhadra Reservoir during March 2006 (Sriram *et. al.* 2008), it was not until 28th February 2007 that I saw this bird for the first time. On this occasion there were as many as four individuals. During the ensuing period, till date, the bird has been seen on several instances. The details are given in the table below.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle has been earlier recorded sporadically from large inland water bodies (Ali & Ripley 1983; Grimmet & Inskipp 1998; Naoroji 2007; Sriram *et. al.* 2008). In recent times,

email discussion groups have had reports of sightings of this bird from Bhadra Reservoir (Shurpali 2008), Periyar Reservoir (Praveen 2008), Upper Bhavani (Ramnarayan 2008), and Dandeli (Singh 2008). It has also been sighted on 13th December 2008 in Dandeli, in the vicinity of Kali Adventure Camp, by my naturalist colleagues H. S. Shashidhar and Pramod D. Naik (*verbally*)—this being the most recent sighting. It also has been seen on 8th November 2008 by Mr Dattatreya R. (*verbally*); Mr Mallikarjun (*verbally*) also claims to have seen it several times in the same area—both are employees at the Kali Adventure Camp.

Interestingly, all these sightings have been near large man-made waterbodies—Bhadra Reservoir, Dandeli, and Kali River in the vicinity of Supa Dam, both sites in Karnataka; Periyar Dam in Kerala; and Upper Bhavani Reservoir in Tamil Nadu. All these sightings are approximately 100 km from the coast, as a crow flies.

I consider these sightings significant, as the species has been seen on a regular basis, almost throughout the year, at Bhadra Reservoir. Its sustained presence at Bhadra Reservoir, over a period of nearly two years, would most definitely change its status from being a mere vagrant (Sriram *et. al.* 2008), to a resident in the area. More observations on the species' presence on such large waterbodies, not too far from the coast, would probably reveal more about its habitat preferences. Also, it would be interesting to find out if the species breeds in the Bhadra area.

**White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* sightings at Bhadra Tiger Reserve**

Date	Approx. time	No. of individuals
28th February 2007	0945 hrs	4
2nd March 2007	1715 hrs	2
4th April 2007	1730 hrs	1*
1st November 2007	1745 hrs	1
10th December 2007	1730 hrs	3
20th January 2008	1715 hrs	1
28th January 2008	1000 hrs	1
10th March 2008	1630 hrs	1
7th April 2008	0800 hrs	1
10th July 2008	0900 hrs	1
21st July 2008	0800 hrs	1
22nd July 2008	0900 hrs	1
3rd August 2008	0900 hrs	2
15th August 2008	1000 hrs	2
12th December 2008	0745 hrs	1

\*The individual White-bellied Sea-Eagle was seen fighting with a Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*, for fish, on the shores of the reservoir.

## References

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