

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* with unusual symmetrically pale claws

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Field Identification, and separation of Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* from Lesser Kestrel *F. naumanni* are challenging. However, detailed notes to do so are given in Forsman (2006), Naoroji (2006), Grimmett *et al.* (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). A combination of different characters is usually required to separate the two, especially juveniles, and females. Adult males of both species are relatively easier to identify. If seen closely, claw colour is diagnostic in separating the two, as the Common Kestrel is known to have black claws, while the Lesser Kestrel has pale yellow claws, in all plumages.

We report here two instances of a Common Kestrel showing unusually symmetrical pale yellowish claws on each leg.

1. On 08 December 2008 at Nalsarovar, Gujarat, NB observed, and photographed [115] a Common Kestrel with pale inner claws on both feet. The inner claws were pale yellowish in colour, similar to those of a Lesser Kestrel, while the other claws were deep black, and 'normal' for a Common Kestrel. The bird was identified as a male Common Kestrel based



Photo: Nirav Bhatt

115. Common Kestrel with pale inner claws on both feet.



Photo: Mihir Godbole

116. Common Kestrel that had pale yellowish claws on the hind toe.

on plumage characters like greyish head with diffused dark moustachial stripe, rufous upperparts, heavily marked with black, uniform and streaked underparts, and structure of head and bill.

2. On 13 January 2014, on the outskirts of Pune city, Maharashtra, Siddhesh Brahmkar and Mihir Godbole photographed [116], a male Common Kestrel that had pale yellowish claws on the hind toe (hallux) on both feet. The other claws were dark (blackish) in colour, and 'normal' for a Common Kestrel. The bird was identified as a male Common Kestrel based on a combination of plumage characters as described above, and by the fact that the primaries did not extend up to the tip of its tail.

Common Kestrels with pale claws have been reported from The Netherlands, where a juvenile with white central claws on both feet, and a first-winter female with a yellowish-white claw on the right leg, were noted by de Schipper (2001). Interestingly, Corso (2001) reported that five Lesser Kestrels (three males, and two females), which was 2 % of all individuals of the species studied in Italy, had brownish or blackish grey claws (but not as black as Common Kestrel). In Lesser Kestrels, it is also possible that the claws appear dark in the field if they are mud-stained or dirty.

We (NB and PG) have scrutinised more than 200 Common Kestrels seen by us in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, over the last ten years, and have never observed individuals with pale claws. We have also looked at more than 300 images of

Common Kestrels on the Internet (www.orientalbirdimages.org; www.indianaturewatch.net; www.abc.lynxeds.com) and have not seen this type of claw colour in any individuals.

It is interesting to note that both the individuals mentioned here, and the one individual photograph that is given in the reference had symmetrical pale claws in both the feet. Hence, this condition could either be rare, or this could be an aberration, but since it has now been documented four times, it would be advisable to check claw colour in Common Kestrels.

This also proves that it is always prudent to confirm the identity of any bird based on a combination of identification characters, rather than relying on any one character as diagnostic.

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Migrating flock of Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* at the Indo-Bhutan border

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On 05 May 2014, at Santrabari (26.74°N, 89.56°E; c. 283 m asl) in Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, India, we observed a flock of Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* soaring on the horizon at 0915 hrs [117]. The number went on climbing and we noted a flock of about 20 raptors overhead [118]. The flock soared eastward with the air currents. In succession, a second flock of an equal number of birds was seen heading in the same direction. In all, we estimated about 50 individuals passing overhead in roughly 45 min. The birds were probably on their spring migration. It is possible that



Photos: Sachin P. Ranade

117. A flock of Oriental Honey Buzzard soaring in Buxa Tiger Reserve.



118. Soon the flock of Oriental Honey Buzzard increased to nearly 20 birds.

the flock roosted on trees in the ravines the previous night. On the following couple of days, no more migrating birds were observed.

The Oriental Honey Buzzard is one of the commonest raptors in protected areas in India (Samant *et al.* 1995). Two races are recorded from the Indian Subcontinent: *P. p. orientalis* is migratory and winters in India, while *P. p. ruficollis* is a resident (Ali & Ripley 1983; Naoroji 2007).

The species is well recorded during its migration in autumn and spring in East Asia. In China, the migration of the species, in