

Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* nesting in Sonapat, Haryana, India

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Introduction

The Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* is a poorly studied, and rare species, with a small and declining population and is categorized as Vulnerable by BirdLife International (2009). The species has been sighted in Corbett Tiger Reserve (Uttar Pradesh), Harike Bird Sanctuary (Punjab), Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan), and some areas in the Gangetic flood-plain (Naoroji 2006). This note reports the sighting of a nesting pair of Indian Spotted Eagle at Sonapat, Haryana (28°56'21"N 76°51'09"E), and lists our observations of nesting, and other general aspects of the species.

Methods & study area

SCS spotted a nest of the Indian Spotted Eagle, while birdwatching, on an eucalyptus tree on the bank of an irrigation canal running NW–SE along a parallel road. The tree was in the middle of a long stretch of eucalyptus trees lining the canal for about two kilometres. To the west of the canal were agricultural fields. We observed the chick from the road adjacent to the canal, and occasionally from the agricultural field. The duration of our observations varied from 20 min., up to an hour, and was conducted on a weekly basis from 7 April to 2 August 2009.

Results

The Indian Spotted Eagle pair was first spotted on 7 April 2009, bringing nesting material to what turned out to be a nest under construction. We monitored this nest every week since. The nest was on a *eucalyptus* tree, on the central fork in the middle of the tree, c. 12–15 m high. We first sighted a chick on 20 June 2009. We photographed it, from a distance, on 11 July 2009. The nest was observed for about 30 min. during which time the pair visited it twice, but were mobbed by crows both times. The eagles were possibly taking turns to hunt since there was always one bird near the nest. They would not sit at the nest for long, but would leave immediately after visiting it. The non-hunting bird sat on a tree c. 27 m away. Whenever the eagles moved, or flew, they would be violently mobbed by House Crows *Corvus splendens*, which would settle down only when the eagle settled down.

The chick's cheeping call was distinctly audible from where we watched the nest. It moved about the nest occasionally and became active whenever a parent approached the nest. The chick's general appearance was fuzzy and grey with a fleshy yellow gape. It was last observed on 26 July 2009, and when the nest was visited on 2 August 2009, it was empty. In all probability it may have fallen into the canal, during a massive storm that struck the area on 30 July 2009, and perished.

Discussion

A sedentary breeder, the Indian Spotted Eagle, though present throughout its range, is suspected to have a low density (Naoroji 2006). Parry *et al.* (2006) report that out of 26 records of clutches of the Indian Spotted Eagle, 23 contained only one egg, suggesting low survival rates. This makes our sighting significant, as it indicates that birds find the area conducive to breeding. *Eucalyptus* has not been recorded as a nesting tree for the species (Naoroji 2006). Continuous observation and reporting of these eagles is of utmost importance to assess the actual status of the species and to enable conservation efforts.

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References

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Adult Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* flying away from nest with eaglet.