

Possible sighting of an Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus orientalis*

Samir Mehta

Mehta, S. 2010. Possible sighting of an Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus orientalis*. *Indian Birds* 5 (5): 150.

Samir Mehta, #6 'Punil', 9, Ashok Nagar Society, 11th Road JVPDS, Mumbai 400049, Maharashtra, India.

Email: samirmehta01@gmail.com

Manuscript received on 2 August 2009.

On 15 February 2009 a pair of raptors was seen soaring, and circling overhead at 1215 hrs, at Rangdhamali (26°52'N 88°73'E), 10 kms north of the town of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. One bird was photographed, under favorable light conditions. The raptors were observed for 3–5 min before they disappeared over the horizon to the north.



Amit Thakurta

Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus orientalis*?

The Oriental Honey-Buzzard is a common, and widely distributed raptor in the Indian Subcontinent. The resident race is *ruficollis*, and there have been a few records of the migratory subspecies *orientalis*, a vagrant, from different regions of India in the remote past (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

At first glance my attention was drawn to the length of the wings, which seemed longer than those of 'normal' Oriental Honey-Buzzards seen in India. Also clearly evident was the dark, distinct barring on the under-surface of the body, which is unusual for *ruficollis* (Naoroji 2006). On closer examination of the image, a heavy, broad black gorget was noticed. This is a classic

identification characteristic of *orientalis*. The outer primaries below show dark tips grading into paler bases, lacking much contrast. The underwing shows three dark wing-bars across secondaries evenly spaced between the trailing edge and the greater underwing-coverts which are characteristic of female Oriental Honey-Buzzard, as is the tail pattern showing three evenly spaced dark bands in the proximal half of the tail with a sub-terminal dark band framing a broad pale band proximally. From the photographs, the above observations, and the description of *orientalis* in Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2001), I feel that the bird in the photograph is *orientalis*.

Interestingly, while attempting to define the pattern of its few confirmed records it was noticed that the present sighting falls in the vicinity of a number of previous sightings from Mangphu (West Bengal), Charduar (Assam), and Patna (Bihar) (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The Jalpaiguri area is 7°–8°E off the regular migration route to Southeast Asia, and it seems that the most likely cause for the westward vagrancy could possibly be attributed to changes in wind direction, and speed, during the migration period, or the distribution, and abundance of wasps, and bees in the region.

Two systematic studies on raptor migration in the Himalayas (Den Besten 2004; De Roder 1989) did not report sighting *orientalis*.

The migratory route of this Siberian breeder is poorly understood, and documented, unlike that of the migratory *apivorus*, which has been studied by satellite tracking (Higuchi 2005). The only certain diagnostic criteria is measurement of the wingspan of a trapped bird, which makes its field identification challenging.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr Chaiyan for his pertinent inputs.

References

- De Roder F. E., 1989. The migration of raptors south of Annapurna, Nepal, autumn 1985. *Forktail* 4: 9–17.
- Ferguson-Lees, J., & Christie, D.A., 2001. *Raptors of the world*. Christopher Helm, London.
- Den Besten, J. W., 2004. Migration of Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* and other raptors along the Himalayas past Dharamsala, India, in autumn 2001 and spring 2002. *Forktail* 20: 9–13.
- Higuchi, H., et al. 2005. Migrations of Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* based on satellite tracking. *Ornithological Science* 4 (2): 109–115.
- Naoroji, R., 2007. *Birds of prey of the Indian Subcontinent*. New Delhi: Om Books International.
- Rasmussen, P.C & Anderton, J.C., 2005. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. Vol. 2. Washington DC & Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution & Lynx Edicions.