

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Further sightings of Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni* at Rollapadu Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh

I read with interest Suhel Quader's short paper published in *Newsletter for Ornithologists* Vol. 1 No. 3, about his sightings of Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni* at Rollapadu Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh in October 2003. He suggests that visitors to the sanctuary in winter may wish to check for this species during their visit. With this in mind the following observation may therefore be of interest.

I visited the Rollapadu Sanctuary with a group of American birders on 9 January 2002. We found a flock of 15 Lesser Kestrels frequenting the area. The birds were in the grassland approximately 2km north-north-west of the nature education centre and were observed for over half an hour both in flight and perched, down to ranges of less than 25m through binoculars and a 38x telescope. The males were identified on the basis of the unspotted chestnut-red back, the plain grey cheeks lacking a dark moustachial stripe and the blue-grey panel in the wing. All birds in the flock had similar structural features, with birds appearing elegant and with some individuals showing the elongated central tail feathers often shown by this species. On at least one of the females it was possible to discern the pale claws whilst perched at close range. The birds were all in a relatively small area and were in a loose flock, behaviour that is typical of the species. I have extensive previous experience of the species from Europe and Central Asia.

This observation confirms Quader's suggestion that it would be worth searching for this species at Rollapadu during the winter months. It may indeed be regular at the site.

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### Siberian Crane range states strategize in Moscow

The Fifth Meeting of Signatory States to the Convention for Migratory Species (CMS) Siberian Crane Memorandum of Understanding concluded successfully on 29 April 2004 in Moscow with the adoption of revised Conservation Plans for the Western, Central and Eastern populations of this endangered species.

Representatives of ten of the eleven Range States, together with specialists from numerous scientific institutes and non-governmental organizations, attended the meeting, which was hosted by the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and organized by the International Crane Foundation (ICF) on behalf of CMS.

The Meeting agreed on the establishment of a network of sites critical for Siberian Cranes of the Western and Central Flyways, which will promote training, capacity-building, exchange programmes, education and public awareness, site monitoring, and information exchange. The site network will be coordinated with related initiatives including the Central Asian Flyway project, the North East Asia Crane Site Network, the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement GEF Project, and the GEF Econet project.

It was recognized that the survival of both the Western and Central populations, which have collapsed over the past two decades, depends on reducing high hunting pressure. The meeting identified strategies for more effective enforcement of hunting regulations and techniques for educating hunters. Efforts in these flyways will also focus on innovative reintroduction methods that will be applied after controlling the problem of hunting. Taking a

cue from successful efforts by Operation Migration and other partners to reintroduce Whooping cranes in North America, by training young birds to follow ultra light aircraft, researchers in Russia plan to adapt the methodology for use with hang-gliders in coming years.

The meeting heard some positive news from Western and Central Asian States. A captive-reared Siberian Crane was successfully released for the first time on the wintering grounds in Iran. Satellite telemetry followed the bird's migration to Dagestan where the signal stopped. Important new migration sites have been recently identified in both of these countries. At the meeting, colleagues from Afghanistan, Iran and Turkmenistan agreed to develop a coordinated survey to identify potential alternate wintering sites along their border areas. Laws against crane hunting have been adopted by some Range States, and there is considerable effort by other States to undertake similar initiatives. Crane Working Groups have been initiated in most of the Range States to undertake many of the responsibilities, including an active role in conducting awareness programmes, and the other States will initiate such Groups soon.

Participants gave enthusiastic accounts of a variety of creative programmes to increase awareness and involve local communities. Highly successful and inspiring Crane Day celebrations were held in several countries in 2002-2003, and will now be conducted in all the Range States.

The remaining Eastern population in China is far more numerous, with recent mid-winter counts at Poyang Lake suggesting that the population may number as many as 4,000 birds. Under the UNEP-GEF wetland project, protection has expanded to 15 reserves around the greater Poyang Lake Basin. A team of hydrologists plans to tackle water management issues at migration resting areas in northeast China at the Zhalong and Xiangha National Nature Reserves.

During the meeting of Signatory States, the representative of Mongolia signed the Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of his Government, and two nongovernmental organisations – the Cracid and Crane Breeding and Conservation Centre (CBCC, Belgium) and Wetlands International (Malaysia) – were invited to join the MoU as cooperating partners.

The CMS Secretariat will circulate the report of the present meeting to interested parties after it has been finalised by ICF in the coming months. Tentative plans were made to review progress again in mid-2006, with Kazakhstan and Pakistan suggested as possible meeting venues.

Note: The Siberian Crane Memorandum of Understanding provided the impetus for the development of a multi-country UNEP-GEF wetland and waterbird conservation project valued at nearly USD 23 million, which is now being implemented in China, Iran and Russia, with Kazakhstan to participate shortly. [Source: Douglas Hykle (Senior CMS Advisor); Claire Mirande (International Crane Foundation).]

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### Evidence for an extension of the breeding period of Red-rumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* in the Indian Subcontinent

I spent 10 weeks sea-watching from the Goa coast, mostly at the base of Fort Aguada, Bardez, in the late monsoon 2003. Sea-watching time was always from 06.30hrs-10.00hrs. On 4.x.2003 I turned around, to check out the chirping calls I had been hearing for the previous two or three days and had assumed the calls to be from Red-rumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* but due to the concentration required in sea-watching and the added difficulty of turning my neck around due to a bad-back, I had not looked carefully at their behaviour. I saw that a pair were collecting mud from a puddle and flying towards the Taj Hotel, where they were obviously building a nest. Similar behaviour was noted on every subsequent day up until at least 10.x.2003, when I also tried to gain access to the hotel to find the nest for future investigation. Access was denied but I intended to try again later in the season, when the young had hatched. But I had to return to the U.K. urgently and so I did not have the opportunity.

The nesting season within the Indian subcontinent was given as April to August (Ali 1955) and more recently March to September (Grimmett et al. 1998), varying locally. The above observations give strong evidence for the breeding season extending throughout October. The rump of these birds was a deep orange.

#### References

- Ali, Salim. 1955. *The book of Indian Birds*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society.  
Grimmett, R., T. Inskipp, & C. Inskipp. 1998. *Birds of the Indian*

*Subcontinent*. London: Christopher Helm.

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#### Newsletter for Ornithologists

I was away on a field assignment and returned to find the excellent second issue of the NLO at WPSI. The ready reckoner is very useful especially for the discussion groups and websites. Since my near-term future may see some intensive travelling and changes in postal addresses without a house of my own in which to store literature, I will not be able to subscribe, but will read the copies of the various others who I have ensured subscribed, and keep myself abreast...

I don't really know what basis you have used to list the bird conservation organisations because some in it do not qualify to be under that title and some that do are missing. I guess you will work to increase this as comments come in.

Your recommended abbreviation "*New. Ornith.*" is not standard and may not find acceptance in journals that still do not have abbreviations for the words "Newsletter" and "Ornithology" and use the full words for citation. It may however work to have the shortform as "NLO" since many newsletters do get abbreviated as standard forms; like the older NLBW.

The sketches by Sachin are simply outstanding!

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