

Kazmierczak 2000, Mullarney et al. 2001), and having gained more field experience with *Aythya* species that we could confirm the identification as *Aythya nyroca*. The key field marks, which helped in identifying the species, were the broad white wing-bar on the upper wing and pure white under tail coverts and white belly, which eliminated all other similar species. The characteristic “white-eye” of the adult male was absent indicating the bird was a female or an immature bird.

Though included in *Birds of Kerala* (Ali 1969), there has been no recent report of this species from the state (C. Sashikumar, verbally, iv.2005). However, Ali & Ripley (2001) state, corroborating our sighting, “In coastal areas, and in the Kerala backwaters, often spends the daytime riding on the sea beyond the surf, safe from disturbance by passing boats, flying inland at dusk to feed in outlying tanks and paddy fields and returning to the diurnal refuge at dawn”.

Globally, there has been a decline in its population and it has been classified as a Near-threatened species (Kazmierczak 2000). It is perhaps one of the rarest wintering ducks in southern India.

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White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* preying on salt-water crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* hatchling

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White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* affects seacoast, tidal creeks and estuaries and is seen occasionally inland along tidal rivers and at fresh water lakes (Ali & Ripley 1978). Bhitarkanika mangrove ecosystem along the eastern coast of India harbours mangrove forests, rivers, creeks, estuaries, sand bars and mud flats hosting a small resident population of 10–15 White-bellied Sea-Eagles. On 29.xii.2005, we were rowing back on Bhitarkanika River, after nest monitoring of a nearby Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* colony near Gunakar ghat in the Bhitarkanika forest block. When we reached closer to Balijore Creek around noon, we spotted an adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle perching atop a tall *Sonneratia apetala* tree on the riverbank. The tide was receding at that time exposing both the sides of the mud-bank to sunlight—an ideal time to watch many crocodiles basking. Then, the White-bellied Sea-Eagle started hovering along the course of the river for about 30 seconds and all of a sudden, it dashed towards the exposed mud bank and picked up something in its talons. When it flew towards us, we saw a live crocodile hatchling in the powerful talons of the eagle.

White-bellied Sea-Eagles predominantly feed on sea snakes (Hydrophirinae), and to large extent fishes, some of which are of considerable size. It has also been reported to take crabs, rats and dead fish cast overboard from fishing boats. There have been occasional reports of it lifting domestic duck and piglets (Ali & Ripley 1978;

Dharmakumarsinhji & Khacher 1956). del Hoyo et al. (1994) also report rabbits, fruit bats, seagulls (Laridae), cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae) and gannets (Sulidae) in its diet. Murthy & Rao (1989) observed White-bellied Sea-Eagles feeding on dog-faced water snake *Cerberus rhynchops* and a large-sized wart snake *Achrochordus granulatus*. However, there have been no previous reports of White-bellied Sea-Eagle preying on a salt-water crocodile hatchling and this is probably the first observation of this kind.

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