Legge's Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus kelaarti* from the Ritigala Forest Reserve of Sri Lanka

Legge's Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus kelaarti* is a rare breeding resident in the foothills of Sri Lanka (Gjershaug et al. 2008). It is restricted to the hills of southwestern India and Sri Lanka, hence endemic to the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett et al. 2011). It is a medium-sized (70–72 cm), powerful eagle with a prominent crest. Adults have brown to dark brown upperparts, usually dark streaks on the upper breast, rufous barring in the rest of the underparts, and orange-yellow iris (Warakagoda et al. 2012). Females are larger than males and have broader wings.

On 24 July 2022, at 1045 h, AS sighted an adult Legge's Hawk Eagle at the Ritigala Forest Reserve (8.11°N, 80.66°E) in the dry zone of Sri Lanka during a bird excursion. It was seen soaring high above the canopy, nearly one km from the ground for five minutes, and then disappeared. The weather was cloudy and humid. It had broad wings and appeared blackish grey from below. Its underparts were brown with prominent horizontal white belly bands, differentiating it from the Changeable Hawk Eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus*. The wing coverts contrasted with the white on the throat and breast, the tarsus was fully feathered, flight feathers were thinly barred with a black edge, and the tail was dark. We took notes and photographs **[196, 197]**, which were matched with the field guides to confirm the identification (Kotagama & Rathnavira 2019; Warakagoda et al. 2022).

Both: Athula Somasiri

196, 197. Soaring Legge's Hawk Eagle showing horizontal belly bands.

Legge's Hawk Eagle has been recorded a couple of times from the Wilpattu National Park and Sigiriya in the dry zone of Sri Lanka (Gunawardena 2019). Warakagoda et al. (2022) state that this species can wander outside its usual range. It is usually restricted to the wet zone area of the country (MOE 2021), and this would be the first confirmed record from the Ritigala Forest Reserve in the northern dry zone of Sri Lanka. The Ritigala (766 m asl) is the tallest mountain in the dry zone in Sri Lanka (Gunawardene & Wijeyaratne 2020). The climate of the peak of the Ritigala is said to be similar to the climate of the montane region of Sri Lanka, with prolonged cloud cover and mist (Gunawardene & Wijeyaratne 2020).

Legge's Hawk Eagle falls under the Strictly Protected category of the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance in Sri Lanka (MOE 2021). Further efforts should be implemented to study the status, population, and current range of this species for long-term conservation and habitat management. Although the threats and human pressures are low within the Ritigala Forest Reserve, habitat destruction and modification, through encroachments, agricultural expansion, and forest fires are significant threats. Awareness campaigns and training should be provided to people to understand and protect this species.

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Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* from Kewzing, South Sikkim, India

The Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, is a small raptor within the *Falconidae* family. Males feature a smoky grey plumage with whitish-grey underparts, while females display dull grey upperparts with notable black streaks across the breast. Identifying characteristics include a reddish-orange eye ring, cere, and feet, which are unique to the species and differentiate them from other falcons (Clark 1999; Grimmett et al. 2011).

The species breeds in eastern Siberia, south to northern and eastern China and Mongolia, and winters in eastern and southern Africa, flying across the equator on a journey of over 10,000 km, which is one of the longest migrations among all birds (Bildstein 2006). The birds leave their breeding grounds in eastern Siberia and Mongolia in the autumn, transiting via parts of northeast

India and Bangladesh in large numbers (Ali & Ripley 1987; Naoroji 2007). They arrive in their wintering grounds in southern Africa in November to December, and they migrate back in April, reaching their breeding grounds by early May (Mendelsohn 1997). The spring migration route is more dispersed, and part of the population flies back over the Indian sub-continent (Ali & Ripley 1987; BirdLife International 2023).

On the morning of 9 May 2023, we conducted a birdwatching session near Kewzing Village (27.28°N, 88.32°E), West Sikkim, India, at an elevation of *c.*1,700 m asl, close to Bon Farmhouse. At approximately 0600 h, we observed two female Amur Falcons perched on an electric wire. The birds looked striking and entirely different from any raptor found around Kewzing. The birds were bold and did not fly away on our approach. We managed to photograph the bird **[198]**, and the photos were shared with WhatsApp groups like Sikkim eBird and Birding Live Report. The bird was identified as an Amur Falcon female by the group members, noting that it had a reddish-orange eye ring, cere, and feet, and white well-marked underparts. This is the first record of the bird from Sikkim during spring migration. There are two known records from Sikkim during fall migration (October) — one from Zuluk, East Sikkim (Panwar 2018), and another from West Sikkim (Chakraborti 2016). The nearest May record is from Neora Valley in North Bengal (Taylor 2004). Our sighting of the species in May in West Sikkim indicates that this species might be transiting through Sikkim during their spring migration. This needs further investigation.

We are extremely grateful to Aditya Chavan, Himraj Dang, and Peter Lobo for their input. We also thank Praveen J for helping us document this sighting.

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198. One of the female Amur Falcons from Kewzing.

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Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* from Shillong, Meghalaya

AN came to his hometown Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya state, India, to observe Eid-ul-Fitr on 21 April 2023. The next day, late night through very early morning, there was rain with cyclonic wind (commonly known as *kal-baisakhi* in Bengali). Being Eid day, he got up early and was surprised to see a colourful bird lying on a veranda between the two buildings of his house. He intended to save the bird **[199]**, but it was dead. He noticed the bird at 0605 h on 22 April 2023. The locality was Kench's Trace in the Greater Laban area of Shillong (25.56°N, 91.87°E; *c.*1,600 m asl). He was not aware of the name of the bird and thought of showing it to AC in due course. Since AN was unaware of the significance of the bird for Meghalaya, he did not show any urgency. Ultimately, he met AC on 27 May 2023 and, on being reminded by his mother, showed the photo to him. AC immediately identified the bird as an Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*. Its prominent black stripe through the eye with contrasting white supercilium and throat was conspicuous. Green upperparts with shining blue forewing, reddish vent, and parts of buffy underparts were also visible. It was unlike any other pittas occurring in India except the Mangrove Pitta *P. megarhyncha*. However, the latter species is slightly larger with noticeably larger and longer bill, wing coverts, and upper tail coverts deeper shining blue and has a larger white wing patch. The Blue-winged Pitta *P. moluccensis* is like the Mangrove Pitta but has a smaller bill. Unlike Indian Pitta, both lack a white line beneath the eye.

The bird might have collided with the building wall during the cyclonic wind and died. Finding it on the veranda of two buildings also indicates that it may have tried to fly through the gap. It may be mentioned here that there are records of Hooded Pittas *P. sordida* getting injured or killed after colliding with buildings during high winds and drizzle in Jatinga, Dima Hasao district, Assam. This is often misrepresented in the media as the 'Jatinga Bird Suicide' phenomenon (Choudhury 2000).

This happens to be the first record of Indian Pitta from Meghalaya. Surprisingly, the record is from its capital city of nearly two lakh people. Godwin-Austen (1870a, b, 1872, 1874, 1876) and Baker (1907) contain no records. Choudhury (2014) listed it as a possible species for the state. Ali & Ripley (1987), Grimmett et al. (2011), Kazmierczak & van Perlo (2000), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) did not mention the presence of Indian Pitta in Meghalaya. It may be noted here that in 1996, a possible immature Indian Pitta was sighted by AC in Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary, also in Meghalaya. Still, it was not confirmed by a photograph and was outside the known range; hence, it was not published. Records nearest to Meghalaya were from western and southern Assam, i.e., in Kokrajhar and Cachar districts, and northern Bangladesh, i.e., undivided Mymensingh district