

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.

References

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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