

- Harvey, B., 2013. Claimed sighting of Black Terns *Chlidonias nigra* in Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (5): 139.
- Kannan, V., Manakadan, R., Rao, P., Mohapatra, K. K., Sivakumar, S., & Santharam, V., 2009. The waterbirds of Pulicat Lake, Andhra Pradesh–Tamil Nadu, India, including those of the adjoining wetlands and heronries. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 105 (2): 162–180 (2008).
- Kazmierczak, K., 2000. *A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. 1st ed. London: Pica Press / Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–352.
- Lainer, H., 2004. Additions to 'The birds of Goa' (Lainer 1999). *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 101 (1): 163–165.
- Menon, V., 1992. On the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger niger* (Linn.). *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 89 (1): 120.
- Mohapatra, K. K., & Rao, P., 1994. Further evidence on the occurrence of the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linnaeus) on India's eastern coast. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 90 (3): 511.
- Natarajan, V., & Balasubramanian, P., 1991. Additional notes on the occurrence of Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linn.) in India. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 87 (3): 451–452.
- Olsen, K. M., & Larsson, H., 1995. *Terns of Europe and North America*. 1st ed. London: Croom Helm. Pp. 1–176.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378, 1–683.
- Robson, C., 1996. India. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin* 23: 50.
- Robson, C., 2004. From the field: India. *BirdingASIA* 1: 79–80.
- Sangha, H. S., 1994. Black Tern at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 34 (2): 34.
- Sangha, H. S., 1999. Records of significance from Pulicat, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 39 (2): 36–37.
- Stevenson, T., & Fanshawe, J., 2002. *The birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi*. London: Helm Field Guides.
- Tatu, K., 2010. First confirmed record of Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* in Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (6): 165–166.
- Tatu, K., 2013. Black Tern versus Whiskered Tern with "Black Tern Patches" in Gujarat, India. *Jalaplavit* 4 (3): 98–120. December 2013. [Website: <http://www.youblisher.com/p/792163-jalaplavit-dec-2013/>. Accessed on 07 June 2014.]
- Tatu, K. S., 1992. Rosy Pelican, White Stork and Black Tern at Thol Wildlife Sanctuary, N. Gujarat. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 32 (5-6): 17–18.
- Thejaswi, S., 2005. Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linn.) in Mysore, Karnataka: First record from inland southern India. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 101 (3): 454–455 (2004).
- van Duivendijk, N., 2011. *Advanced bird ID handbook: The Western Palearctic*. London: New Holland. Pp.1–416.
- Varu, M. S., 2012. Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) in Bhavnagar—a second record from Gujarat. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 51 (4): 59 (2011).
- Vyas, S., 2002. Some interesting bird records from the Delhi area. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 99 (2): 325–330.

## The first breeding record of the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug milvipes* for the Indian Subcontinent in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir

Harkirat Singh Sangha, Sandeep S. Dhumal & Samir Ovalekar

Sangha, H. S., Dhumal, S. S., & Ovalekar, S., 2014. The first breeding record of the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug milvipes* for the Indian Subcontinent in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (5&6): 146–148.

Harkirat Singh Sangha, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021, Rajasthan, India. Email [harkirat.sangha@gmail.com](mailto:harkirat.sangha@gmail.com) [HSS]

Sandeep S. Dhumal, Sandeep Engineering, Shop No. 1/44, Mihir Apt., Udyamnagar, Pimpri, Pune 411018, Maharashtra, India. Email [sandeep.dhumal@rediffmail.com](mailto:sandeep.dhumal@rediffmail.com)

Samir Ovalekar, 3, Jayvant, 36 Mahant Road, Vile Parle (East), Mumbai 400057, Maharashtra, India. Email: [samir7399@gmail.com](mailto:samir7399@gmail.com)

A great favourite with falconers, the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* is a large, powerful bird of prey with an exceptionally broad wingspan for its size. It was used for hunting hare (*Lepus* species) and Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*, and quite exceptionally flown at gazelle (*Gazella* species) and eagles (*Aquila* species) (Osman 2001).

*Falco cherrug* occurs in a wide range across the Palearctic region from eastern Europe to western China, breeding in Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Turkey, Iraq, Armenia, the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China, and at least formerly in Turkmenistan and probably Afghanistan, possibly India (Ladakh), with wintering or passage populations occurring regularly in Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, U.A.E., Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan, with much smaller numbers

or vagrants reaching many other countries (BirdLife International 2014; Global Raptor Information Network 2014).

The species has declined in numbers and has been up listed to Endangered category because a revised population trend analysis indicates that it may be undergoing a very rapid decline. This negative trend is a result of an unsustainable trend to capture the birds for the falconry trade, as well as habitat degradation and the impacts of agrochemicals. The rate of decline appears to be particularly severe in the species' Central Asian breeding grounds (BirdLife International 2014).

In Ladakh, Saker Falcon was reported by Mallon (1987) during consecutive winters (1980–1984), 'in very small number', around plantations and at villages along the Indus Valley, but he did not specify any location. One was recorded at Pannikhar, Suru Valley on 11 July 1977 (Williams & Delany 1979 in Holmes 1986). Rishad Naoroji and HSS observed it a few times during seven summer trips to Ladakh between 1997 and 2003, at Chushul, Mahe, Hanle road, Hanle-Chumur road, and Dungi

(Sangha & Naoroji 2006; Naoroji 2007). Based on these sightings its status was described in Ladakh as mainly a passage migrant, and 'possibly a scarce summer breeder' (Naoroji 2007). Kovács *et al.* (2014) do express that there is a 'possibility of breeding in Ladakh' for this falcon.

In this century it has been sighted in Ladakh at Hanle in August 2008 and Tso Kar in August 2013 (Orientalbirdimages).

While birding near Tso Kar on 27 June 2014, we noticed one Saker Falcon in flight. However, it soon flew away towards the Tso Kar Marsh and was lost. When we were about to leave the area, HSS heard the call of chicks, and after a quick scan of the mountain face, a nest was discovered with four chicks! The nest was in a crevice below the topmost ridge of an overhanging rock. It comprised branches and twigs of *Caragana versicolor* and a wide array, unfortunately, of easily available man-made items, among which were cotton and woolen rags, and wires/cables. The rock below the nest was liberally spattered with the bird's chalk-white droppings. The nest contained four chicks [174], and an adult was noticed flying twice to the nest with food. As the bird flew in from the direction of the marsh, it might have brought vole (*Alticola* sp.) to the young. The nest was observed for c. 30 minutes. Prolonged observations were not possible.

## Discussion

Besides the breeding bird described above we encountered one more adult Saker Falcon at Tanglang La, 5328 m on 24 June 2014 [175]. This bird resembled the bird observed near Tso Kar. Both the birds had a darkish crown, a pale rufous cap, and a contrast between evenly barred flanks and pale unpatterned breast. We identified the birds as Eastern Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug milvipes* and later shared the images with Dick Forsman and Igor Karyakin.

Forsman said that it would be best to call them *milvipes*, which seems to be the preferred name for the eastern birds. Karyakin described them as Tibetan Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug hendersoni* that live at the highest altitude inhabiting Tibet. 'It is similar to *progressus*, but with wider stripes on back, dark head, horizontal stripes on the undertail and pants' (Igor Karyakin *in litt.*, August 2014).



174. Saker Falcon chicks near Tsokar, Ladakh, 27 June 2014. A first breeding record for the Indian Subcontinent.



175. Saker Falcon, Tanglang La (5328m) Ladakh, 24 June 2014.

Eastern Saker Falcon is sometimes known as Shanghar Falcon (Ali & Ripley 1978; Kazmierczak 2000). In its main range it is found in montane areas and may be highly distinct genetically from the nominate race (Wink *et al.* 1998; in Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and also differs from it markedly in overall shape and appearance. The sight records enumerated above, and the breeding record from Tso Kar area, probably indicate that Eastern Saker Falcon is a scarce breeding resident in Ladakh.

Due to the great extent of individual and geographic variation, it is extremely difficult to classify the separate Saker populations into distinct subspecies without a large series of museum specimens. All in all, Saker taxonomy is far from clear and more work is clearly needed. Some authors recognise several subspecies (Dementiev & Gladkov 1966; Dickinson & Remsen 2013), while more recent works recognise just two: *Falco cherrug cherrug* in Europe and western Russia, from the Altai Mountains to China, from northern Mongolia east and *Falco c. milvipes* in southern Central Asia (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994; Forsman 1999). Fergusson-Lees & Christie (2001) recognise two subspecies, although *altaicus* is cautiously treated as a separate species.

The subspecies of the Ladakh birds is not conclusively known, but they are, in all probability, the same as that of the Tibetan facies in south-western China *F. c. hendersoni*, sometimes subsumed under *F. c. milvipes*.

## Acknowledgements

HSS thanks Dick Forsman and Igor Karyakin for commenting on the photographs, and Rishad Naoroji for reviewing an earlier version of this manuscript.

## References

- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1978. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Divers to hawks*. 2nd (Hardback) ed. Delhi (Sponsored by Bombay Natural History Society.) Oxford University Press. Vol. 1 of 10 vols. Pp. i–lviii, 1–382.
- BirdLife International. 2014. Species factsheet: *Falco cherrug*. URL: <http://www.birdlife.org>. [Accessed on 19 July 2014.]
- del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., & Sargatal, J., (eds.) 1994. *Handbook of the birds of the world. Volume 2. New World Vultures to Guineafowl*. 1st ed. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. Vol. 2 of 17 vols. Pp. 1–638.
- Dementiev, G. P., & Gladkov, N. A., (eds.) 1966. *Birds of the Soviet Union*. 1st ed. Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translations. Vol. 1 of 6 vols. Pp. i–xix+1, 1–704.
- Dickinson, E. C., & Remsen, J. V. J., (eds.) 2013. *The Howard and Moore complete checklist of the birds of the world: 1. Non-passerines*. 4th ed. Eastbourne, U.K.: Aves Press. Vol. 1 of 2 vols. Pp. i–l, 1–461.

- Global Raptor Information Network. 2014. Species account: Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*. URL: <http://www.globalraptors.org>. [Accessed on 19 July 2014.]
- Ferguson-Lees, J., & Christie, D. A., 2001. *Raptors of the World*. 1st ed. London: Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–992.
- Forsman, D., 1999. *The raptors of Europe and the Middle East: A handbook of field identification*. London: T. & A.D. Poyser. Pp. 1–589.
- Holmes, P. R., 1986. The avifauna of the Suru Rivery Valley, Ladakh. *Forktail* 2 (December): 21–41.
- Kazmierczak, K., 2000. *A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Om Book Service. Pp. 1–352.
- Kovács, A., Williams, N. P., & Galbraith, C. A., 2014. Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* Global Action Plan (SakerGAP), including a management and monitoring system, to conserve the species. CMS Raptors MoU Coordinating Unit, Abu Dhabi. CMS Technical Series No. XX, Bonn, Germany.
- Mallon, D. P., 1987. The winter birds of Ladakh. *Forktail* 3 (December): 27–41.
- Naoroji, R., 2007. *Birds of prey of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Om Books International. Pp. 1–692.
- Osman, S. M., 2001. *Falconry in the land of the sun. The memoirs of an Afghan falconer*. 1st ed. Wyoming, USA: Western Sporting Publications. Pp. 1–268.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide: attributes and status*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–683.
- Sangha, H., & Naoroji, R., 2006. Birds recorded during seven expeditions to Ladakh from 1997 to 2003. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 102 (3): 290–304 (2005).
- Williams, C. T., & Delaney, S. N., 1979. Pp. 104–229 in University of Southampton Himalayan Expedition 1977. Unpublished report.

## A Record of Lesser- *Anser erythropus* and Greater-White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons* from Gujarat, India

Shreeram M. V. & Arpit Deomurari

Shreeram M. V., & Deomurari, A., 2014. A Record of Lesser- *Anser erythropus* and Greater- White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons* from Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (5&6): 148–149.

Shreeram M. V., 256/15, 2nd Floor, 7th Main, 17th Cross, BTM 2nd Stage, Bengaluru 560076, Karnataka, India. Email: [mvshreeram@gmail.com](mailto:mvshreeram@gmail.com) [SMV]  
Arpit Deomurari, "Avani", Anand Colony Road No-1, Near "Gurukrupa", Opp. "Rushi" Apartment, Vikasgruh Road, Jamnagar 361008, Gujarat, India.  
Email: [deomurari@gmail.com](mailto:deomurari@gmail.com) [AD]

Manuscript received on 25 August 2014.

On 14 December 2013, one of us (SMV) accompanied a group of birders and photographers to the Nava Talav area (23°12'N, 71°44'E) of the Little Rann of Kachchh, on a birding and photography tour. As SMV approached the lake, he came across five foraging geese of the *Anser* species that seemed to resemble Greylag Geese *A. anser* from a distance. As the group neared the geese, a few things struck SMV as odd. The geese were much smaller in size than a typical *A. anser*. All of them had a faint white mark at the base of their beaks. One of them had a golden eye-ring, and the colour of their legs was orange. That is when SMV realised that they were looking at the much rarer white-fronted geese. After photographing the birds [176, 177], they went back to Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and



177. First two – *A. albifrons* and Last one *A. erythropus*.



Photos: Arpit Deomurari

176. Left- *A. albifrons* and Right *A. erythropus*.

identified the geese they had seen as four adult Greater White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons*, and one adult Lesser White-fronted Goose *A. erythropus*. There was a separate gaggle of c. 20 Bar-headed Geese *A. indicus* with which these white-fronted geese were loosely associating.

SMV informed AD about the sighting, who visited the same place on the morning of 25 December 2013 along with Kunan Naik, Yogendra Shah, and Krinal Hedau. AD also observed these five birds foraging on the lakeside in marshy vegetation, for a full day.

Many photographers have also photographed these birds in January 2014. There were two Lesser White-fronted Geese on 07 January 2014 (Ganpule 2014), and six birds on 27 January 2014 (Cullen 2014).