

## Correspondence

### The Changeable Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus*, from Chohal Dam, Punjab, India

The Changeable Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus* is a resident across India, except for its western and northwestern parts. It is found in forests and well-wooded open areas from sea level to 2,200 m asl, but primarily below 1,500 m asl (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Clark et al. 2020). Here, we report a sighting from a site near the Chohal Dam in Shivalik Hills, Hoshiarpur District, Punjab, India, and provide a survey of previous reports from Punjab.

On 26 December 2024, PSA was birdwatching in a forested area near Chohal Dam (31.603°N, 75.974°E; c.441 m asl), Hoshiarpur District, Punjab, which is in the Shivalik Hills. At about 1035 h, PSA noticed a large raptor in the thick foliage of a tree. To avoid disturbing the bird, a few photos were taken from a distance. Though not seen fully, the individual was identified as a Changeable Hawk-Eagle [150] from the combination of brown upperparts with pale edges, light streaks on the head, yellow eyes, and streaked breast (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).



150. Changeable Hawk-Eagle near Chohal Dam, Punjab.

Rajasekhar & Jairath (2008) included the Changeable Hawk-Eagle in a checklist of birds of Keshopur *Chhambh*, Gurdaspur District. However, no further details were provided. Surprisingly, both subspecies, the Changeable Hawk-Eagle sensu stricto (as *Spizaetus cirrhatus limnaeetus*) and Crested Hawk-Eagle (as *S. c. cirrhatus*), were included separately in the list. This itself makes the listing unreliable as *S. c. cirrhatus* (now *N. c. cirrhatus*) is found only from eastern Rajasthan through the south Gangetic plain to southern West Bengal and peninsular India, but not anywhere near Punjab. Bal & Dua (2010) mentioned the species from a study of four natural wetlands around Gurdaspur. However, they did not provide a date, the name of the wetland, a photograph, or a detailed plumage description; hence, we consider it unreliable. Kler & Kumar (2015) indicated the species for Rupnagar District,

but no photograph or additional information was provided. Their list also has several erroneous and doubtful entries and is, hence, considered unreliable. It is quite possible that a female Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* was mistakenly identified as a Changeable Hawk-Eagle. Oriental Honey-Buzzard in some ages and morphs is a common confusion species for the Changeable Hawk-Eagle (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001).

There are, however, some confirmed records of Changeable Hawk-Eagle from Chandigarh, the state capital (Singh 2018; Chaudhary 2019; Waraich 2021; Bhalla & Bansal 2023). In the states adjoining Punjab, the Changeable Hawk-Eagle has been reported from the Sirmour region of Himachal Pradesh and the Kalesar area of Haryana, both of which are closer to Uttarakhand. Additionally, a few sightings have been recorded from the Morni Hills in Haryana (eBird 2024). Another sighting from Himachal Pradesh is from Majathal Wildlife Sanctuary, located in Shimla and Solan districts (Mishra 1996). However, the closest sighting from Himachal Pradesh to the present sighting is from Kangra District – a specimen (UMMZ#78297) collected by Walter Norman Koelz on 12 April 1933 and presently housed in the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, USA (UMMZ 2025). The present sighting, therefore, assumes significance for being the only photographic record from Punjab and bridging the gap between the region from the Shivalik foothills around Chandigarh and the westernmost sighting of Changeable Hawk-Eagle in Himachal Pradesh.

We thank Abhinav Chaudhary for his inputs on the status of the Changeable Hawk-Eagle in Himachal Pradesh and Tim Inskipp for the status in both Punjab and Himachal Pradesh.

### References

- Bal, R., & Dua, A., 2010. Birds of natural wetlands of north-west Punjab, India. *Our Nature* 8: 72–81.
- Bhalla, A., & Bansal, L. M., 2023. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S155138144> [Accessed on 21 January 2025].
- Chaudhary, K., 2019. Webpage URL: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=371909616971103&set=gm.2243732609213977> [Accessed on 21 January 2025].
- Clark, W. S., P. F. D. Boesman, and J. S. Marks (2020). Changeable Hawk-Eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.y00839.01>.
- Ferguson-Lees, J., & Christie, D.A., 2001. *Raptors of the world*. London: Christopher Helm. pp. 1–992.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. pp. 1–528.
- Kler, T. K., & Kumar, M., 2015. Avian fauna in agricultural habitats of Punjab state. *Journal of Research of Punjab Agricultural University* 52 (3): 83–90.
- Mishra, C., 1996. Pheasants and other birds of Majhatal Harsang Wildlife Sanctuary, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Forktail* 12: 1–6.
- Rajasekar, D., & Jerath, N., 2008. *Birds of Keshopur Wetland (a field guide)*. Chandigarh: Punjab State Council for Science & Technology. pp. i–ii, 1–76.
- 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.
- Singh, A., 2018. Webpage URL: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2446252182058638&set=gm.2191813454405893> [Accessed on 21 January 2025].
- UMMZ, 2025. Webpage URL: <https://umMZ-birds-specify-portal.apps.gnosis.lsa.umich.edu/catalog/> [Accessed on 28 July 2025].
- Waraich, B. K., 2021. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S70191025> [Accessed on 21 January 2025].

– Gurpartap Singh & Paramnoor Singh Antaal

Gurpartap Singh, 1969, Sector 64, Mohali 160062, District Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, Punjab, India. E-mail: [prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com](mailto:prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com) [GPS] [Corresponding author]  
Paramnoor Singh Antaal, House No. 26, Urban Estate Phase-I, Patiala 147002, Punjab, India. [PSA]