

protrusion from the cloacal region of the bird, with a drop of fluid at the distal end [101]. The bird, however, showed apparently normal activity and flew off immediately.

Cloacal prolapse is one of the common complications encountered in birds. Some of the common reasons could be calcium deficiency, neoplasia, infections, and obstructions (Chitty & Lierz 2008). However, the present case did not appear to be a pathological condition, as the bird was evidently not in any distress and showed normal behaviour. Since it was breeding season of the species (Ali 1931; Ali & Ripley 1999), it is probable that this bird had recently mated. Cloacal protuberance in birds can also be caused by natural reproductive activity, mostly in males (Schut et al. 2012). Cloacal protuberances have been previously documented in males of Superb Fairywren *Malurus cyaneus* (Mulder & Cockburn 1993), and in males of Stitchbird *Notiomystis cincta* from New Zealand which has been suggested to improve copulation efficiency (Low et al. 2005). It is also possible that the individual we observed was a female showing the cloacal protuberance in order to attract or display to the males that it is ready for mating. This has been previously documented in females of Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* (Chiba & Nakamura 2002).

Our observations appear to be the first documentation of prominent cloacal protuberance in Pale-billed Flowerpecker during breeding season.



Photo: Yash Mayekar

101. Pale-billed Flowerpecker with cloacal protuberance of c. 0.5 cm length (inset).

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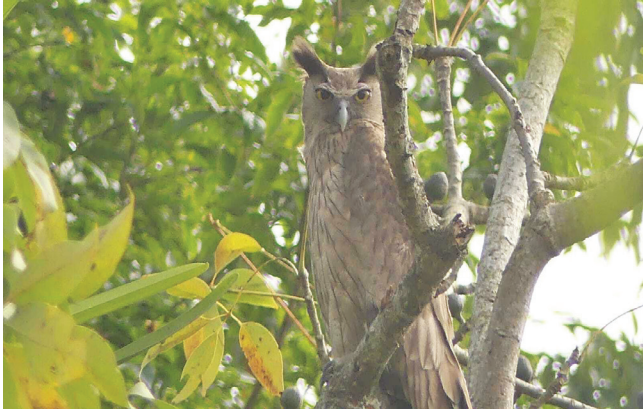
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## A case of predation of nestling of the Dusky Eagle-Owl *Ketupa coromanda* by monitor lizard *Varanus* sp. from Assam, India

The Dusky Eagle-Owl *Ketupa coromanda* is a large owl distributed widely across South Asia and parts of Southeast Asia (Holt et al. 2023). It is resident from Pakistan (mainly Indus River basin) and most of sub-Himalayan region in India, Nepal, and east to western Assam and hills of north-eastern India in Meghalaya, Cachar district in Assam, Manipur, and parts of Bangladesh, south to central India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The breeding season of the species overall occurs between November and April; primarily December to January in northern India, but somewhat later in the southern parts of its range (Ali & Ripley 1981).

During the 2025 breeding season in Singioni village (27.189°N, 94.678°E; 98 m asl), Sivasagar District, Assam, a Dusky Eagle-Owl pair was observed nesting for the fifth consecutive year on a Silk Cotton *Bombax ceiba* (Simulu tree) [102]. The nest was located on a primary lateral branch c. 10 m above ground level, positioned close to the main trunk and supported by epiphytic growth that provided structural stability as well as effective concealment [102]. The nesting tree, with an estimated height of 18–20 m, was situated adjacent to agricultural cropland and in close proximity (c. 70 m) to a large wetland bordered by patches of dense vegetation near rural human settlements. Such a habitat likely offers abundant prey resources, including rodents and small reptiles, making it suitable for a large nocturnal predator like the Dusky Eagle-Owl. The first observation of the adult sitting in the nest was recorded on 17 January 2025; the species is known to reuse nesting sites and this nest had been consistently occupied for five consecutive years. We followed recommended practices and guidelines in Barve et al. (2020) for documentation of the nest observations.

On 25 January 2025, we saw one adult owl with a nestling on nest [104]. The nestling was covered in white natal down and appeared to be c. 10–12 days old. On the same day, at 1425 h, a monitor lizard *Varanus* sp. was observed climbing the nesting tree. The monitor lizard could not be identified to species level conclusively from our photographs [105]. Despite defensive efforts by one adult owl, with another adult perched on a nearby tree, by 1515 h, the monitor lizard successfully preyed on the nestling at nest [105]. Following this event, the nest was abandoned; however, adults remained present nearby for at least ten days but were not sighted thereafter. This incident underscores the vulnerability of even well-concealed nests to predation by large, climbing reptiles. Most monitor lizards are



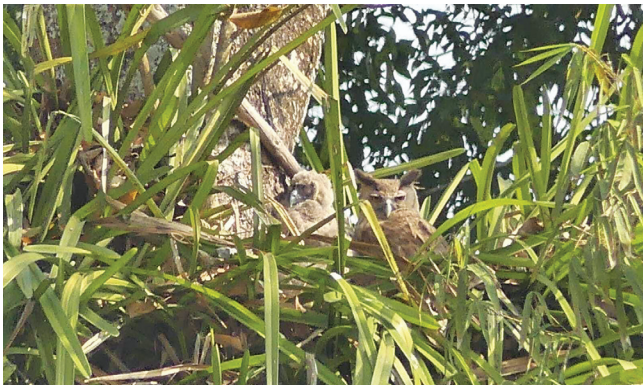
102. An Adult Dusky Eagle-Owl with prominent ear tufts roosting at the day time, dated 17 January 2025.



105. The monitor lizard *Varanus* sp. (encircled) on the nest on 25 January 2025 during the predation event.



103. Nest site on Silk Cotton *Bombax ceiba* tree.



104. Adult and nestling on nest prior to the predation event on 25 January 2025.

All photos: Shitapragyan Mallick

almost entirely carnivorous, opportunistic foragers with a varied diet which includes insects, fish, amphibians, smaller reptiles, birds, eggs, and small mammals (Pianka et al. 2004).

Despite its wide distribution, the Dusky Eagle-Owl remains one of the least-studied owl species globally, with many aspects of its breeding biology poorly known or unknown, including the lack of information on its nest predation (Ali & Ripley 1981; Holt et al. 2023; BirdLife International 2025; Ranade 2020; Reddy & Ramachandran 2023). Information on the kind of predators of the species, the manner of predation and response to predators is also lacking. While nestlings and eggs may face predators such as reptiles like monitor lizards or other raptors at nest, fledglings of the species may face additional predators on the ground, such as, smaller mammals or other larger raptors. Other closely related owl species have known to be predated by other raptors, such as, the Eurasian Eagle-owl *Bubo bubo* is known to be predated by the Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata* (López-López et al. 2016). Similarly, the Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* is known to be predated by the Northern Goshawk *Astur gentilis*, Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*, and by mammal predators like the Pine Marten *Martes martes* and the Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* (Marks et al. 1999; Scherzinger & Mebs 2024). In North America, the Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus* experiences predation from various raptors, reflecting complex intraguild interactions in owl communities (Artuso et al. 2022). Adults of the Great Horned Owl are safe from most predators and competitors; however, fledglings are susceptible to predation by the Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* and the Coyote *Canis latrans* on the ground, and eggs and nestlings can be predated by the Raccoon *Procyon lotor* (Artuso et al. 2022).

The Dusky Eagle-Owl is an opportunistic nocturnal predator itself, feeding on mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes and large insects, and employs both patrol and sit-and-wait hunting strategies. However, its own breeding success is impacted by natural predators, such as, reptiles like monitor lizards, small mammals, and other raptors, in addition to the threats from habitat loss. This case from Assam highlights the importance of understanding prey-predator dynamics and the need of systematically studying bird behaviour and documenting any interspecific interactions.

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## The Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* from the plains of north-western India

On the evening of 26 February 2025, I observed a group of ~30 scavenging raptors near a carcass of a cow close to the Gadeli Nadi enclosure, Desert National Park in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, India (26.764°N, 70.631°E). Most of them were winter migrants, including the Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus*, Himalayan Griffon *G. himalayensis*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, and Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*. Among them, one individual looked significantly different, prompting me to take a few photographs. It was a large raptor, comparable in size to the Cinereous Vulture, and had a black face and neck with a uniform brown torso. Later, the individual moved to perch on a Bare Caper *Capparis decidua*, where its characteristic “beard” became clearly visible. Based on these features, and subsequent comparison with standard field guides and online resources (Grimmett et al. 2011; Orta et al. 2020) the bird was identified as a juvenile Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* [106]. The individual was sighted at 240 m asl (26.764°N, 70.634°E) within the vast flat terrain of the Thar Desert, with the nearest mountain range c.300 km away in the Suleiman and Kirthar Ranges of Sindh and Balochistan Provinces in Pakistan, where the species is a known winter visitor (Roberts 1991; Iqbal et al. 2023).

In India, the species is largely restricted to the Himalayan region (Grimmett et al. 2011) (Fig. 1). However, two vagrant individuals have previously been recorded in Gujarat, Western India: a juvenile from the Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary (Vadher 2019) and an unconfirmed sighting in Kachchh (Ganpule 2016; Thakker 2005).

Bearded Vultures have vast home ranges and often cover large distances in search of carrion (Orta et al. 2020). Additionally,



Photo: David Phinehas N

106. Juvenile Bearded Vulture sighted at Desert National Park, Jaisalmer on 26 February 2025.

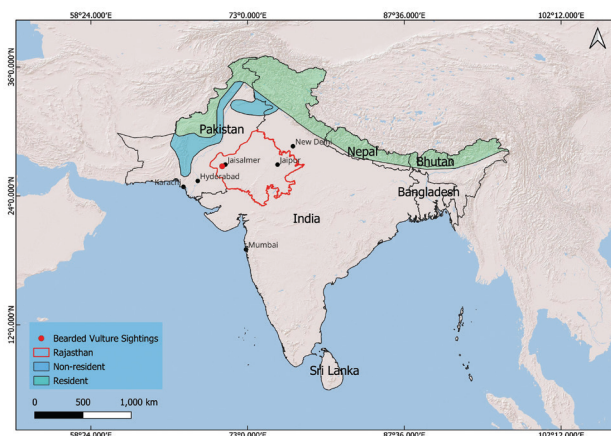


Fig. 1: Map showing the current sighting of Bearded Vulture outside of its known range.

juveniles are known to be more wide-ranging and exploratory and have been recorded moving more than 500 km in a single day (Margalida et al. 2013). Likely, a few individuals like this bird occasionally drift into Gujarat and Rajasthan from neighbouring distribution areas in Pakistan (Vadher 2019). During the last week of February, a cyclonic circulation and western disturbance were reported over southern Pakistan & adjoining southwestern Rajasthan, which further moved over the northwestern Rajasthan plains (National Disaster Management Authority 2025). This unusual regional weather may have pushed this bird to the plains. This might be the first photographic record of a Bearded Vulture in Rajasthan State, and only the third record from the western arid plains of India.

The bird was sighted while conducting fieldwork under the “Thar Scavenger Ecology” project of the Wildlife Institute of India, funded by the Raptor Research and Conservation Foundation, Mumbai.

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