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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.

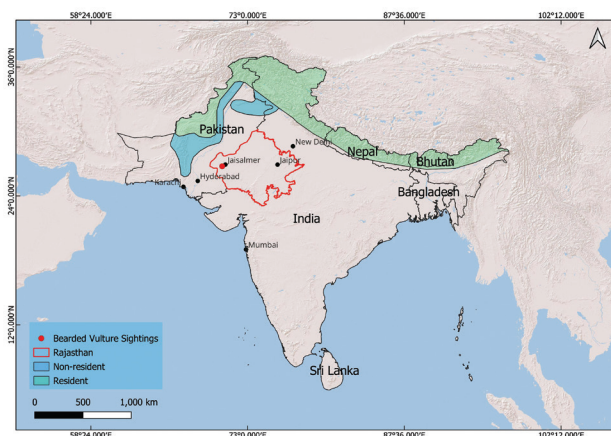


Fig. 1: Map showing the current sighting of Bearded Vulture outside of its known range.

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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### The Caspian Plover *Anarhynchus asiaticus* from Bilaspur: An addition to the avifauna of Chhattisgarh, India

The Caspian Plover *Anarhynchus asiaticus* breeds across Central Asia, including regions around the Caspian Sea, and spends its non-breeding period primarily in eastern and southern Africa, with additional records from Mauritania, Mali, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, and Congo in West Africa, as well as islands of the western Indian Ocean including Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, Rodrigues, Seychelles, and Comoros (Sinclair & Langrand 2004; Message & Taylor 2024). Historically, the Caspian Plover has been regarded as a vagrant in the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1980; Grimmett et al. 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). However, subsequent assessments suggest that it may occur more regularly than previously assumed, with small numbers likely wintering in the region (Sangha et al. 2010). In India, it has been recorded sporadically from Rajasthan (Sangha et al. 2010), Delhi (Vyas 1996), Gujarat (Robson 2007; Sørensen & Tiwari 2009), Goa (Lainer 2004), Maharashtra (Prasad 2006), Puducherry (Balachandran 1994), Tamil Nadu (Kazmierczak et al. 1993; Robson 1996), Haryana, and Kerala (Sangha 2021).

On 04 September 2025, SPP and KP observed a single Caspian Plover during a bird walk at Mohanbhata (22.246°N, 82.020°E) in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. The site is a typical *bhata* habitat—open grassland exposed to cattle grazing, interspersed with small seasonal ponds. The presence of muddy flats and shallow water provides favorable conditions for waterbirds and serves an important stopover site for migratory waders during the monsoon. Several plovers including Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Little Ringed Plover *Thinornis dubius*, and Kentish Plover *A. alexandrinus* were recorded during the bird walk. Among them, one individual appeared distinct while foraging alongside three Little Ringed Plovers, exhibiting typical ‘stop-and-run’ feeding behavior. The bird was identified as a Caspian Plover based on sandy-brown upperparts, contrasting whitish lower tail-coverts, clean white forehead, lores, cheeks, supercilium, and throat with brown ear coverts, and a continuous grey-brown breast band lacking any rufous or black tones. The bill was slender and black, legs relatively long and greyish-green, and iris dark brown. Compared to Greater- *A. leschenaultii* and Tibetan Sand-Plovers *A. atrifrons*, the bird showed a slenderer structure, longer legs, finer bill, and clean white face, and a continuous grey-brown breast band (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The scaled upperparts with pale fringes, diffuse brownish breast wash, broad whitish supercilium, and absence of adult breeding characters

indicate that the individual was a juvenile (first-winter) [107, 108] (Sangha 2021).



107. Juvenile (first winter) Caspian Plover showing narrow rufous scalloping on the upperparts.



108. Caspian Plover showing sand adhering to the bill after foraging. Photographed at Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India on 04 September 2025.

Both photos: Satya Prakash Pandey

There are no previous records of Caspian Plover from Central India including Chhattisgarh and neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. This sighting therefore, constitutes the first documented occurrence of Caspian Plover in Chhattisgarh. The sighting underscores the importance of seasonal grassland–wetland habitats in central India for supporting migratory waders, and suggests that this species may be more widely distributed than previously recognized.

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