

## Bird deaths by kite *manjha* in Jammu City



Clockwise from top left: Greater Coucal, Spotted Owlet, Blue Rock Pigeon, glass-coated nylon 'manjha'. © Rahul V. Singh.

As a unique tradition, people from all age groups engage in flying kites (from dawn to dusk) to mark the arrival of spring season in the country during the festival of Uttarayan (Makar Sankranti). Kites flown these days are known to use a powerful string that is made by applying glass powder on it (*manjha*) to provide it with a cutting edge. This practice of using a sharp thread has imposed a huge risk of life to birds, fruit-bats, macaques, and even humans (Bareth 2003; Prakash 2003).

Earlier white thread 'sadda' was used without glass powder coating that caused no harm. The glass coated nylon thread, imported from China has a much larger impact on birds and bats as compared to terrestrial life forms (<https://milaap.org/stories/save-the-birds>). When in flight, they fail to notice the fine thread, which often entangles their bodies and injures them very badly, causing fractures, mutilation of wings, and nerve injuries. These strings unlike their cotton

counterparts used earlier, do not lose the strength even after getting wet but also stay for a long time in the environment creating potential threat for the birds, both local and migratory. These festivals on one hand bring joy for humans and on the other hand threat of life for the birds. With more kites competing for space with birds, the number of injuries has risen over the years (<https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/save-birds-from-kite-string-injuries/reports/>).

In Ahmedabad alone, over 2,000 birds including rare and endangered species are injured annually (<https://milaap.org/stories/save-the-birds>). Every year, all over India, several rescue missions are conducted by birders in which large numbers of birds are liberated from deadly thread traps; e.g., Babu et al. (2015) rescued 10–13 bird species in Bangalore, India. In 2018 alone, 4,000 birds were rescued in Gujarat by the State Forest Department after Makar Sankranti festival (Verchot 2019). In 2014, over 300 birds were severely injured during Uttarayan in Gujarat and Rajasthan (<https://www.wti.org.in/news/hundreds-of-birds-injured-during-kite-flying-festival/>).

The present study deals with the area of Jammu City which is located on the banks of the river Tawi. This city sees kite flying in festive season as well as on regular days. These observations were made twice a day, from 09.00–11.00 h and from 15.30–18.00 h. The evidence was collected with photographs and identification of birds was done based on Salim & Daniel (2002). Observations were recorded from

September 2014 to September 2015. A few avian species like *Psittacula krameri*, *Milvus migrans*, *Turdoides striata*, *Corvus macrorhynchos*, *Corvus splendens*, *Acridotheres fuscus*, and *Acridotheres ginginianus* were observed dominant in the study area. In the city areas, few house sparrows were also spotted. It was observed that anthropogenic activities (traffic, sound pollution, radiation) were high in the field due to which lesser number of birds resided in these areas.

Thousands of flying kites were recorded in the sky and after Uttarayan, a high number of dead bird species were also found hung on those kite strings. Only one black kite was found alive during rescue and other birds like Greater Coucal, two pigeons, and one Spotted Owl were dead. There may be thousands of other species also in threat or danger, which go out of record every year. In the last four to five years, awareness has increased among the people about wildlife/bird protection because the number of bird watchers is increasing day by day (Singh 2016). It has become an interesting affair amongst tourists in the areas where different bird species are present including rare, endangered and migratory birds. Ornithologists (professionals studying birds) are quite excited about the exploration of new places for birding especially in protected areas.

In October 2018, the government of Jammu & Kashmir organized a wildlife awareness program cum symposium to create awareness about the importance

of preserving wildlife. A wildlife week was celebrated in Jammu region at Shachera Conservation Reserve with active participation from the staff of Rajouri-Poonch Wildlife Division, students of Gujjar Hostel Rajouri, nature lovers, environmental activists, and locals. Another awareness program was conducted by the Department of Wildlife Protection on World Migratory Bird Day in Srinagar on 12 May 2019 with an aim to impart the importance of the migratory birds among the masses and the school going children (<https://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/kashmir/department-of-wildlife-protection-celebrates-world-migratory-bird-day/>).

Few measures have been suggested below to avoid the unnatural deaths of flying birds due to laxity by humans; some precautions can save their lives.

- (i) Banning or avoiding the glass-coated nylon 'manjha'.
- (ii) Exploring other states and advertising bird watching among people. Government must inquire and survey for other spots in the outskirts of Jammu City to develop a novel bird watching centre in the area to know more about these beautiful creatures and importance of their lives, and
- (iii) Training/ awareness camps should be conducted every year so that people can learn how to protect/save injured birds that are seen hung with 'manjha'. The ones alive can be saved if people have the proper knowledge to disentangle them.

## References

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