

Migratory raptor diversity in West Midnapore, West Bengal

The presence of raptors in the wild serves as an indicator for ecological health. They play a crucial ecological role by keeping the balance. Six hundred species of raptors all over the world and 106 species can be found in India alone. There are primarily two kinds of raptors -diurnal (day flying) and nocturnal (night flying).

West Midnapore is located at 22.4080°N 87.3811°E at 23 m elevation. During our continuous morning survey from 2019 to 2021, we have photographed all migratory raptors (Table 1). We used a binocular (Olympus 10×50) along with Canon DSLR and Nikon P900 for photography. We consulted the literature for the proper identification of the birds (Naoroji 2006; Grimmett et al. 2016; Praveen et al. 2018). We had spotted the following raptors during our survey.

The Black Eagle (family Accipitridae) is the only member of the genus *Ictinaetus*. It soars over forests in the hilly regions of tropical and subtropical southern and southeastern Asia, as well as southeastern China. It is easily identified by its widely splayed and long primary 'fingers'.

The wings are just above the horizontal plane and held in a shallow V during flight. The bird was spotted in Salboni Forest, west Midnapore in the first week of December.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* is widely found in the lakes and rivers of West Bengal during winter. In Bengali it is popular as *Machmural* and in Hindi-as *Machlimar*.

Short-toed Snake-Eagle can be identified in field by its predominantly white underside and upper parts being grayish-brown. The tail has three or four bars. Owl-like rounded head, bright yellow eyes and lightly barred under wing are the other keys (Anon 2022).

Booted Eagle is buzzard-like raptor but definitely eagle-shaped, can be identified by long fingered primary flight feathers and a long square-shaped tail. It has distinctive feathered legs (boots) prominent when perched. Dark morph can be confused with Black Kites and Marsh Harriers.

The Indian Spotted Eagle is a small bird slightly larger than a kite but structurally similar to other large eagles, with six spread 'fingers' at the wingtip and a pale rump.

Hen, Pallid, Montagu's, Western Marsh and Pied are five species of harriers that come to spend the winter in India from central Asia and Russia (Verma 2007). We have documented Montagu's, Western Marsh and Pied Harrier from Midnapore. The Pied Harrier is a small bird of prey. A male and female Pied Harrier shows strong plumage colour differences. The male bird is pale

Table 1. Birds of prey from West Midnapore and their conservation status.

	Common name	Scientific name	IUCN Status	Sighting month
1	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>	LC	December 2020
2	Indian Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga hastata</i>	VU	December 2020
3	Himalayan Buzzard	<i>Buteo refectus</i>	LC	October 2020
4	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	LC	December 2020 and October 2021
5	Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>	LC	October 2021
6	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	LC	December 2020
7	Pied Harrier	<i>Circus melanoleucos</i>	LC	October and December 2020
8	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	LC	October 2020
9	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	LC	December 2019
10	Black-eared Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	LC	November 2020
11	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	LC	October 2020
12	Short-toed Snake-Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	LC	November 2021

grey with black head with mantled back, upper breast and tail coverts. We spotted the bird at grassland associated wetland. On 30 December 2019, we spotted Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* in Kesiyari Block. As this is the first report of the species from the state, it is difficult to conclude whether it is a passage migrant, or a vagrant in West Bengal (Pratihari & Mandal 2020).

Peregrine Falcons are the key falcon over most of the continent, with long, pointed wings and a long tail. Long primary feathers give the Peregrine a long-winged shape, males are smaller than females. We spotted the bird in town area of West Midnapore.

The Amur Falcon is a mesmerizing migratory raptor. Every year, the small birds make the daring expedition from breeding grounds in Russia and China to winter in southern Africa. We have spotted the bird in October 2021.

Common Kestrel occurs over a large range in Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is mostly found around the jungle of Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats of India. We spotted the bird in many places around the Kangsabati River.

This short note on diversity of raptors in west Midnapore District includes twelve species belonging to three families. One species (Indian Spotted Eagle) is Vulnerable as per the IUCN Red List (Table 1).



Common Kestrel

Booted Eagle

Osprey

Black Eagle

Himalayan Buzzard

Indian Spotted Eagle

Pied Harrier

Amur Falcon

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