

## Report of occurrence of Eastern Marsh Harrier from Bankura District, West Bengal, India

The Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* Kaup, 1847 is a bird of prey of the family Accipitridae, is categorised as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and the population trend for this bird is stable (BirdLife International 2022). Previously, it was considered as a race of Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Naoroji 2007) but in the present time it is considered a separate species. Eastern Marsh Harrier generally prefers marshlands, flooded fields, cultivated lands, paddy fields, and open grasslands with source of water nearby (Grimmett et al. 2011). According to the available literatures, it is a winter migrant to northeastern India and vagrant elsewhere (Naoroji 2007; Grimmett et al. 2011). Naoroji (2007) describes its distribution from northeastern portion of West Bengal to Arunachal Pradesh and is most commonly seen in the regions between Assam and Manipur. In India, the Eastern Marsh Harrier is reported from Assam,



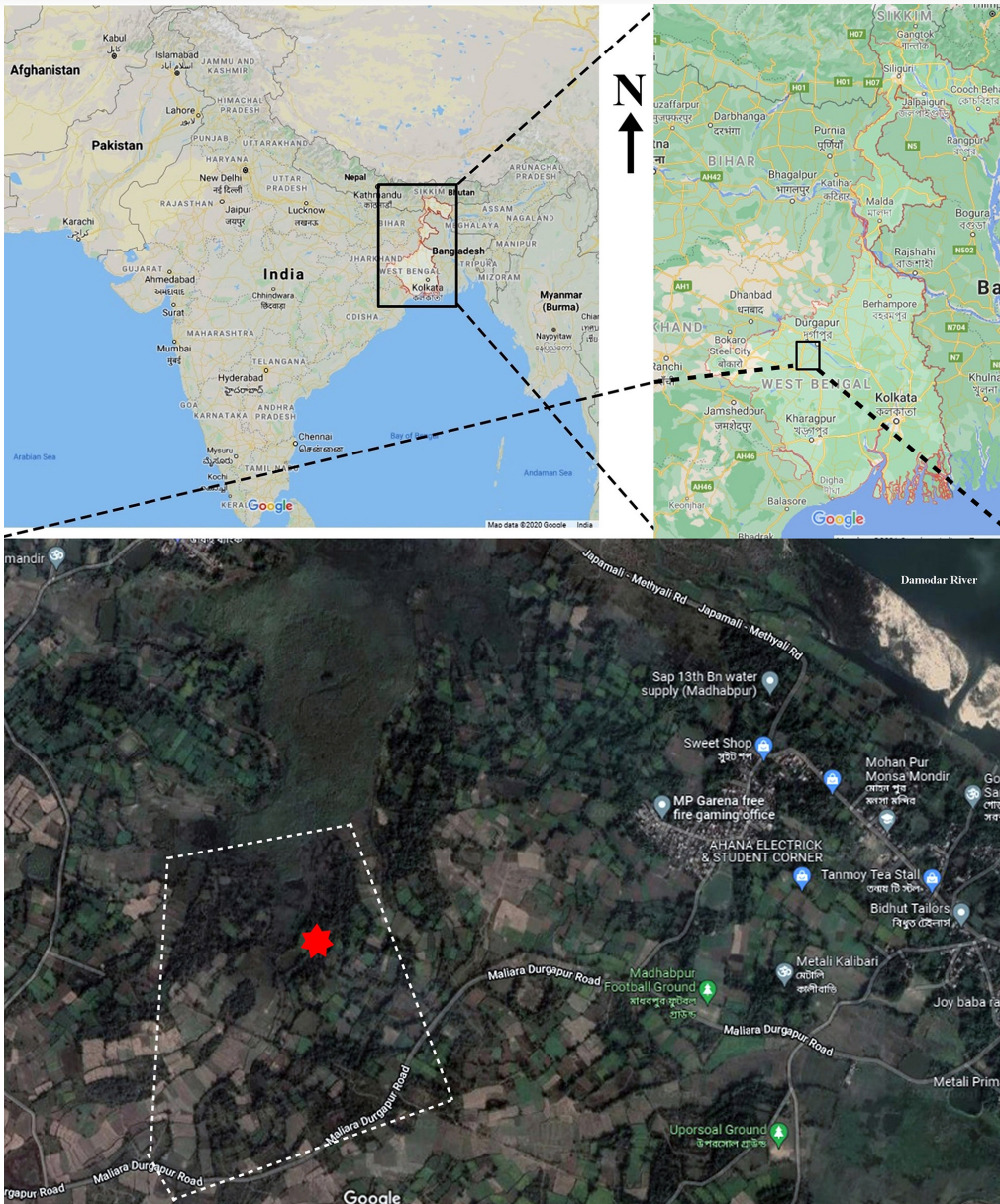
Eastern Marsh Harrier female in flight showing the underparts.



Eastern Marsh Harrier female in flight.

Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala (Naoroji 2007; eBird 2022).

The species was recorded earlier from various districts of West Bengal like Jalpaiguri, Kolkata, South 24-Parganas, Hooghly, Paschim Medinipur, Birbhum, Purba Bardhaman



Study site under present investigation (surrounded by white dotted lines and the point where the bird spotted marked with red coloured star) in Bankura District, West Bengal, India. Source: Google Maps.

and Paschim Bardhaman (eBird 2022) but there is still no occurrence report of the Eastern Marsh Harrier from the district of Bankura in any of the previous literatures (Mukherjee et al. 2015; Payra et al. 2017; Chatterjee 2021) or online citizen science platforms (eBird 2022; Lepage 2022; Oriental Bird Images 2022). Although there may

be some scattered doubtful records of the species in social media platforms but it was not considered in the present study due to lack of confirmations. Gauntlett (1986) reported about the regular sightings of Marsh Hairier *Circus aeruginosus* (Linnaeus, 1758) from Durgapur Barrage and Rondhia Dam adjacent areas in 1970–1971. In this regard, the

author would like to mention that previously *C. spilonotus* was considered to be a subspecies of *C. aeruginosus* and later identified as a separate species (Global Raptor Information Network 2022), so it is impossible to confirm the identity of the bird mentioned in this report (Gauntlett 1986). Hence, in this present communication,

author reports the first confirmed sighting of the Eastern Marsh Harrier from the district of Bankura in West Bengal through photographic documentation.

The present study was conducted on 30 March 2022 in Maliyara-Durgapur road adjacent areas situated in Barjora block, Bankura District to survey the fauna of the mentioned site. The study area (23.484 N, 87.254 E) is situated approximately 10 km upstream far from the Durgapur Barrage, constructed over the Damodar River. The study area is mainly cultivated land with source of water from an unnamed small irrigation canal. Beside the canal, water for irrigation is mainly supplied using a submersible pump situated in the field. The study area is agricultural field in rural landscape with a variety of trees and shrubs. At about 0950h, the author found a bird hovering and gliding over a cultivated field nearby and captured few images for the identification of the species. Nikon D5300, NikkorAf-P 70–300 mm lens were used for observation and photography during the present study. Later, the bird was identified as female Eastern Marsh Harrier using standard field guides (Naoroji 2007; Grimmett et al. 2011; Grewal et al. 2016). In comparison to the Eurasian Marsh Harrier, the Eastern Marsh Harrier is bigger in size (48–56 cm) and both the sexes of Eastern Marsh Harrier have distinct markings in upperparts and underparts of the body, which eliminate it from Eurasian Marsh Harrier (Naoroji 2007). Eastern Marsh Harrier has stouter body and prominent head and is marked heavily than other harriers which makes it easy to identify (Grimmett et al. 2011). Female Eastern Marsh

Harrier can be confused with female Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* (Pennant 1769) in the field, but the former is bigger in size than Pied Harrier and also has broader wings and tail (Grimmett et al. 2011). Juvenile male of the species looks very similar to Pied Harrier female but small size, prominent barring across tail are useful keys to identify the female of Pied Harrier (Grimmett et al. 2011). There is a fine structural difference in adult females of Pied Harrier and Eastern Marsh Harrier, the latter has heavily marked underbody and underwing (Grimmett et al. 2011). Adult female Eastern Marsh Harrier has white upper tail coverts, greyish flight feathers and tail with dark barring, heavily streaked head and breast and broad diffuse rufous streaking on underparts (Grimmett et al. 2011).

As this bird mainly prefers water-saturated cultivated fields, flooded areas, marshlands and open grassland wet naturally or manmade, so the major threats to the species are increasing anthropogenic activities in open lands and loss of habitat, chemical pest control in agricultural field, urbanization, deforestation and declining prey availability. Since the study area has no threat at present hence the author suggests no conservation strategies for the protection of the concerned species. Since this is the first confirmed report of the species from Bankura District, the author recommends a long-term survey in different patches and habitats of the district for a complete documentation of avian species found here which could unveil several new mysteries.

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