

Himalayan Buzzard spotted in Chhattisgarh: a new addition to the region's avifauna

The Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo refectus* is a medium-sized, polymorphic raptor found in the Himalaya, from Jammu & Kashmir to possibly Bhutan. It is a resident bird of the Himalaya and a winter visitor to the Himalaya, northeastern India and Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Due to its complex taxonomic history, there has been significant confusion regarding its status and distribution in India. Identifying the Himalayan Buzzard in the field is challenging because it resembles the Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus* and the Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*. Notably, the Long-legged Buzzard is a common winter migrant in Gujarat, while the Common Buzzard is less frequently observed in Gujarat (Ganpule et al. 2022). Grimmett et al. (2011) did not recognize the Himalayan Buzzard as a distinct species in their research.

On 22 October 2023, I visited Ramgarh Hills in Surguja. While trekking up Pugdandee



Himalayan Buzzard. © Pratik Thakur.

Mountain to Maa Kali Mandir (22.895N, 82.908E), I observed a Shaheen Falcon gliding circularly over the cliff. Positioned below the cliffs, our view was limited. When the bird flew closer, I managed to capture some photographs. Subsequently, another raptor, resembling the Shaheen Falcon appeared, and I managed to take a single photograph. Despite waiting until sunset, the buzzard did not return. The bird was not sighted in subsequent visits on 29 October and 12 November at the same location.

The raptor observed had a dark brown belly contrasting with a pale brown breast, a dark moustachial stripe, dark carpals, barring on the lower belly, a dark tail band, and a dark trailing edge to the wings, with barring extending onto the outer primaries. The pectoral band was obscured with barring, and the dark tail band, barred belly, and dark trailing edge indicated it was an adult. The solid, even-width belly band was conspicuous. After thorough comparison with standard literature (Grimmett et al.

2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Ganpule & Bhatt 2014; Ganpule et al. 2022), and in consultation with ornithologists Ravi Naidu and Nirav Bhatt, also confirmed by Envis-BNHS, I concluded that the bird was a juvenile Himalayan Buzzard. Unlike the Common Buzzard, which has more uniform coloration below and lacks dark carpals and a distinct dark belly band, the Himalayan Buzzard features a dark belly band extending further than the upper breast markings, dark carpals, and a prominent moustachial stripe. Additionally, the Himalayan Buzzard has a broader tail band and barring on the outer primaries. Although similar to the Long-legged Buzzard, juvenile Long-legged Buzzards can be distinguished by their sparsely barred secondaries, longer wings, streaked lesser coverts, and longer tarsi. They also have a powerful beak, stronger tarsi, and a smaller head compared to juveniles, while the Himalayan Buzzard appears more compact (Ganpule et al. 2022).

Ganpule (2023) provides compelling evidence of the Himalayan Buzzard's presence in peninsular India beyond the Himalayan Arc, with records from Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat. This species was reported from Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar (Choudhury 2016). Previous bird studies did not mention about the occurrence of this species in Chhattisgarh (Chandra & Boaz 2018 a,b,c; Naidu et al. 2021; Bharos et al. 2023). Bharos et al. (2023) reported nine Himalayan and sub-Himalayan species from the Surguja region. This study, along with findings by Thakur (2023) on the Grey Bushchat and Gupta & Bharos (2023) on the White-capped Redstart, as well as observations of the

Himalayan Buzzard, indicate the distribution pattern of Himalayan species in the northern hills of Chhattisgarh. Tyabji (1994) suggested that conducting a comprehensive survey of the entire northeastern part of Madhya Pradesh (now part of Chhattisgarh), which lies within the Vindhyaachal biogeographic region, could reveal significant insights into the distribution of Himalayan or sub-Himalayan species that were previously thought to exist in central India. The sighting of the Himalayan Buzzard marks the first recorded instance of this species in Chhattisgarh and adds a new entry to the list of Himalayan species observed in Peninsular India.

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