

First ever record of Amur Falcon from the Union territory of Puducherry, India

A rare sighting of the Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* has been recorded in Puducherry, marking a significant milestone as one of the few documented occurrences of this migratory bird of prey along the southeastern coast of the Indian peninsula. Typically found in the northeastern areas of the Indian subcontinent, with occasional sightings in parts of peninsular India, the presence of the Amur Falcon in Puducherry is considered unusual. Documenting such sightings is crucial for enhancing our understanding of the migratory patterns of these predatory birds.

The Amur Falcon, scientifically known as *Falco amurensis* or the Eastern Red-Footed Falcon, is a bird of prey approximately the size of a pigeon, predominantly observed as a transit migrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987). According to Rasmussen & Anderson (2012), their migratory route encompasses the central and eastern



Amur Falcon (♀), Puducherry, India. © B. Vigneshwaran.

Himalaya, the southern Assam highlands, and the peninsula during the fall season. These falcons undertake long-distance and trans-equatorial migrations, covering nearly 4,000 km over the Indian Ocean between southwestern India and tropical eastern Africa, making it the longest over-water journey recorded for any raptor, often conducting nocturnal flights (Bildstein & Zalles 2005). Due to their adeptness in detecting monsoon tailwinds, Amur Falcons typically reach eastern Africa late in autumn (Ash & Atkins 2009), with migrants arriving at their wintering grounds in southern Africa

around November–December and departing in early May (Mendelsohn 1997). Classified as "elliptical migrants," they follow a return route primarily overland, north, and west of their southbound journey (Kerlinger 1989). Observations of migrants in Ethiopia during late November and early December suggest that the overland transit at higher latitudes may be more consistent than previously assumed (Clement & Holman 2001). The Amur Falcon has been documented in various locations, including Nellore and east Godavari in Andhra Pradesh, and Madurai, Nagapattinam,



Location of Amur Falcon spotted.
Area of the field: 19,325 m²Google Earth image

Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, and Kanniyakumari in Tamil Nadu as well as in Sri Lanka. These observations contribute to our understanding of the migratory patterns and distribution of this fascinating species across the Indian Subcontinent.

A birding trip in and around Puducherry's lakes has been scheduled on 5 November 2020 as a part of the Salim Ali Bird Count. Six wetlands were visited. Towards the end of our birding trip, we observed a bird the size of a feral Pigeon perched on a electricity wire in an open field along the side of the East Coast Road at "11.913°N, 79.809°E" while returning from the Chinnaveerampattinam Estuary. The nearest water bodies include Velrampet Lake which is located at 1.15 km, Chinnaveerampattinam Estuary at 4.32 km and Bay of Bengal at 2.27 km.

Upon closer examination, the bird was identified as an adult female (♀) Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* perched on a wire on 5

November 2020, at 0847 h. A Nikon Coolpix P900 camera was used to capture the bird (Dutta 2016). Multiple sightings of the Amur Falcon have been reported in Tamil Nadu's neighbouring areas, with three sightings recorded in Chennai on 5 and 17 December 2020, following observations in Puducherry (Frederick 2020; Krishnamoorthy 2020). The sighting and photograph of an Amur Falcon near Kodiakkarai by Subhiksha Lakshmi Maxima, a researcher from the BNHS, have been published.

The rare sighting in Puducherry may be attributed to changes in wind patterns caused by the Nivar and Burevi cyclones, leading to altered migration routes. This sighting marks the first-ever record of the Amur Falcon in the Union Territory of Puducherry. Despite no previous reports of this species in Puducherry, this sighting underscores the significance of documenting rare occurrences. The first recorded sighting of the Amur Falcon in Puducherry highlights the importance of ongoing bird population monitoring for understanding migratory patterns and conservation efforts.

References

- Ali, S. & S.D. Ripley (1987).** *Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. 2nd Edition.* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 737 pp.
- Ash, J.S. & J. Atkins (2009).** *Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea: An Atlas of Distribution.* Christopher Helm, London, 463 pp.
- Bildstein, K.L. & J.I. Zalles (2005).** Old World versus New World long-distance migration in accipiters, buteos and falcons: the interplay of migration ability and global biogeography, pp.154–167. In: R. Greenberg & P.P. Marra (eds.). *Birds of Two Worlds: The Ecology and Evolution of Migration.* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 488 pp.

Clement, P. & D. Holman (2001). Passage records of Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* from southeast Asia and southern Africa including first records from Ethiopia. *Bulletin of the British Ornithology Club* 121: 222–230.

Dutta, S.K. (2016). First report of Amur Falcon, *Falco amurensis* Radde, 1863 from Chhattisgarh, India. *Biolife* 4(3): 437–440.

Frederick, P. (2020). Amur Falcon: Chennai gets off the mark. *The Hindu*, 5 December. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/society/amur-falcon-chennai-gets-off-the-mark/article33256175.ece>. Accessed on 30.iv.2025.

Kerlinger, P. (1989). *Flight strategies of migrating hawks*. University of Chicago Press, 375 pp.

Krishnamoorthy, R. (2020). Amur falcon sighted near Point Calimere. *The Hindu*, 17 December. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/amur-falcon-sighted-near-point-calimere/article33350400.ece>. Accessed on 30.iv.2025.

Mendelsohn, J.M. (1997). Eastern Red-footed Kestrel, pp. 262–263 In: J.A. Harrison, D.G. Allan, L.G. Underhill, M. Herremans, A.J. Tree, V. Parker & C.J. Brown (eds.). *The Atlas of South African Birds. Volume 1: Non-passerines*. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg, 784 pp.

Rasmussen, P.C. & J.C. Anderson (2012). *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide. 2nd ed.* Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: 2 vols. 378 pp & 683 pp.

B. Vigneshwaran^{1*}, B. Bhushan Krishnamurthy² & S. Gangasani³

¹9 &10, Mookambigai Nagar, Achariyapuram, Villianur, Puducherry 605110, India.

Email: vigneshebird@gmail.com

²B-34, First cross Ganapathy Nagar, Thanthai Periyar Nagar Extension, Puducherry 605005, India.

Email: bhushan.krish2@live.com

³ Surendranagar, Badvel, YSR Kadapa District, Andra Pradesh 513227, India.

Citation: Vigneshwaran, B., B. Krishnamurthy & S. Gangasani (2025). First ever record of Amur Falcon from the Union territory of Puducherry, India . *Bird-o-soar* #287, In: *Zoo's Print* 40(6): 20–22.