Observation of a tailless Black Kite in sustained flight

The Black Kite *Milvus migrans* is one of the most common birds of prey and is usually found around human habitation (Mazumdar et al. 2018). It is a gregarious opportunistic forager feeding on a broad spectrum of food resources, particularly attracted to the food at urban trash and waste-disposal sites (Delibes 1975; Shiraishi et al. 1990; Blanco 1997; Mazumdar et al. 2018). The tail in raptors plays multiple aerodynamic roles, contributing to flight stability, regulating wing angle of attack and balancing wing-generated pitching moments, and generating additional lift during acceleration, turning, and slow flight to supplement that produced by the wings (Tucker 1992; Thomas 1997).

During a bird watching on 07 February 2026 at 0730 h at University of Mysore, Mysuru campus (12.3169°N, 76.6213°E) an adult Black Kite was photographed in sustained soaring flight exhibiting an apparently truncated tail, with complete absence of rectrices. The

A Black Kite lacking rectrices in flight over the University of Mysore campus, Mysuru. © H.R. Abhilash.

tailless Black Kite in our observation exhibited stable, controlled flight with symmetrical wing posture and normal maneuverability which was observed for a duration of 2–5 minutes.

However, we speculate that lack of tail observed in the Black Kite may impact its landing ability; as the bird approaches landing it commonly spreads its tail widely, slows its flight before entering the final landing phase (Thomas 1997). We found two previous records of tailless raptors, a Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malaiensis* (Lin et al. 2021) and a Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (Cholsey Wildlife 2023). This record highlights the ability of the Black Kite to maintain effective flight despite the absence of rectrices.

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