

Sighting record of Black Eagle from Kitali Lake, Maharashtra, India

The Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malaiensis* (Temminck 1822) is a large diurnal raptor of tropical and sub-tropical mountainous forests (Clark 1994; **Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001**). It is the monophyletic species, placed in the family Accipitridae. It has two races, *I. m. malaiensis*, found mainly in China and the Indian race *I. m. perniger* is distributed throughout the Himalayan foothills from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, the Western and Eastern Ghats, the highlands of Madhya Pradesh, and the Chhota Nagpur Plateau regions in Odisha and West Bengal (Naoroji 2006; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On the 9 January 2022, during our birdwatching trip to Satbahini foothills, when we were busy taking photographs of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo at a roadside small wetland Kitali pond, we were very surprised to get glimpses of a large black-coloured raptor, perched on *Azadirachta indica*.

Due to vehicular movement on both the sides of the road, the bird got disturbed. It just takeoff from the perched site and passively glided overhead twice. It was a real delight to watch such a passive sail of black raptor, giving me sufficient time to capture



Photo showing location site of Black Eagle over the *Azadirachta indica* on the embankment of Kitali pond. A. Total black with brownish patch on shoulder except, yellow coloured cere and toes. B. Struggling to perch, reveals underparts wings having lighter bars on primaries and secondaries, unique to Black Eagle. C. Perched Black Eagle revealing lighter bars on tail retrices and pale brownish colour at the bottom line of tail. D. Black Eagle glides passively by spreading flat wings.



Site map of Kitali pond among forested hilly ranges and large Ghodazari Lake, showing in inset hydrophytes like *Nelumbo* sp. providing ideal habitat for waterfowl and Jacana's, also surrounded by paddyfields.

of Nagbhid Taluka of Chandrapur District has mixed vegetation of moist and dry deciduous forest interspersed with hill ranges of Shiv Tekdi of Nagbhid, Muktai Hills towards Chimur Taluka and Satbahini Hill nearby study site. Agrarian rural people totally depend upon paddy cultivation for their livelihood. The study site is a perfect wetland habitat for waterfowls like, Grey-headed Swamphen, Bronze-winged Jacana,

photographs in Canon 200D camera. Initially, we thought it to be a Greater Spotted Eagle, but after citing few research articles and referencing through field guides of Grimmett et al. (1999) and Ali & Ripley (2002), it was confirmed as Black Eagle. The body of the bird is entirely black in colour. The beak has yellow cere with a black tip and toes are yellow in colour. A whitish patch is seen at the base of primaries and pale barring on primaries, secondaries and tail coverts.

Kitali Lake (20.502 N, 79.645 E) is located near forested area of Satbahini hill ranges in Nagbhid. It lies within the buffer area of newly declared 'Ghodazari Sanctuary' by Maharashtra Government.

The Kitali Lake is 16 km northeast of Nagbhid and 94 km south of Chandrapur. This part

Pheasant-tailed Jacana and so many waders as the pond is shallow and occupied by hydrophytes like *Nelumbo* sp.

While going through the published research articles, it was found that, there are only a few published records of the species from Vidarbha region. Black Eagle was reported earlier in Maharashtra from Satpuda hill ranges (Wadatkar et al. 2014), which is about 400 km away from Satbahini Hills.

Although widespread in distribution and enlisted as Least Concern as like other raptors, Black Eagle also shows declining trend (BirdLife International 2022). Earlier, it was a regular winter migrant to forested mountainous ranges and hills in peninsular India, but in the recent past, it is very rare and uncommon to locate them in this part of

eastern Vidarbha and is a vagrant species. It was earlier reported from the core zone of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve by Bayani & Dandekar (2017), but there was no photographic record of this raptor, hence, we conclude that sighting of Black Eagle from this unprotected area is a very significant event and further study is recommended for their protection and conservation.

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