

Project Update: January 2015

Thoolakharka is one of the globally significant raptor migration corridors in Nepal which is used by thousands of raptors that leaving Tibetan plateau and northern Asia, including Mongolia, China and Eastern part of Russia that heading to south in Middle-East or even Africa following the Himalayan Range of Nepal and India. This is only watch site in the world where raptor migrates from east to west direction. The most common species we see here is the Steppe Eagle and small number of around 35 migratory species also can be seen.

With the aim to find out the total species and number of raptor that use foothills of Himalayas to the south of Annapurna during their migration, their status, timing of migration and age class determination of Steppe Eagle, this project is started in 2012 and each year 85 days of count is conducted between 15 September through 8 December. In 2014, 32 species of raptors were seen in migration with total number of 9565 individuals with highest number of 6166 Steppe Eagles. Among the migratory raptors; 8 species were Eagles, 5 species were vultures, Harrier (3 species), Accipiter (3 species), Falcon (6 species), Kite (2 species), Buteo (3 species), Osprey, and Oriental Honey Buzzard.

Eagles: In 2014, we observed nine (9) species of eagles at Thoolakharka. Six species are complete migrants, two species (Mountain Hawk-eagle and Bonelli's Eagle) are local resident and we saw few individuals on migration and one species (Black Eagle) is strictly resident. Among eight migrant eagle species we observed, Steppe Eagle is the most common migrant eagle at Thoolakharka which comprises approximately 65% of all the raptors we see on migration here. First Steppe Eagle was seen on 3rd of October and migration continued till the last date of observation with peak of 614 birds on 7th November. Several occasions we saw more than 300 Steppe Eagles passing us throughout November.

Vultures: Eight species of vulture have been seen at Thoolakharka out of nine species recorded in Nepal. Among them individuals of 5 vulture species (White-rumped, Egyptian, Cinereous, Griffon and Himalayan Vulture) were migratory. Three other species (Bearded, Red-headed, and Slender-billed Vulture) were resident in this region. Several times in a week we saw Bearded Vulture and Red-headed Vulture very close to the watch site and even they perched approximately 50 m. because we set up vulture picnic nearby our watch site. In autumn 2014, Himalayan Vulture was the most common migrant vulture comprises

approximately 86% of all migrant vulture. Although several species of vulture can be seen throughout the season, late October and November is the good time to see many vultures.

Falcons: Small number of falcon migration can be seen at Thoolakharka. Although this year was bad (number is declining) for many raptor species in this part, we see few hundred falcons of six species. Late September through early November is the good time to see different species of falcons at Thoolakharka watch site. In previous years latter half of the October was the best time to see small flocks of Amur Falcon and Lesser Kestrel this year we saw very few individuals these species. Other falcons observed on migration were Saker Falcon, Northern Hobby, Peregrine Falcon (ssp. *calidus*) and Common Kestrel. Besides the migratory Peregrine Falcon ssp. *calidus*, frequently we see resident race ssp. *peregrinator*. This year we counted a total of 373 falcons which is almost 50% less than last year count (721), therefore we assume this might be the bad year for the breeding of falcon.

Accipiters, Buteos and Honey Buzzard: Four species of accipiter out of 5 recorded in Nepal were seen from Thoolakharka. Among them three species (Northern Goshawk, Northern Sparrowhawk and Shikra) are migratory, while Besra is a resident species. Similarly all the three species of Buteos (Himalayan Buzzard, Upland Buzzard and Long-legged Buzzard) recorded in Nepal are observed during our observation. Oriental Honey Buzzard we see here is the ssp. *ruficolis* and we see mostly juvenile birds. The best time to see this species is late September through early November.

Kites and Harriers: Two species of Kites (Black Kite and Black-eared Kite) were seen on migration. Black Kite is the resident species in this area however some individuals migrate from here. During the migration period flocking of 10 to 15 birds were frequently observed. Sometimes kites were also seen engaged to pick up garbage in the nearby village. We also see small number of Harriers on migration. Three species of harriers were observed during the migration.

Species	Total Counted	Peak Time Frame
1. Oriental Honey-buzzard	561	10 Oct – 25 Oct (45)
2. Himalayan Buzzard	66	8 Oct – 22 Oct (5)
3. Long-legged Buzzard	3	26 Oct – 31 Oct (2)
4. Upland Buzzard	7	17 Oct – 13 Nov (2)
<i>Unidentified Buteo</i>	2	----
5. Northern Sparrowhawk	103	11 Oct – 10 Nov Oct (7)
6. Northern Goshawk	15	21 Oct Nov – 31 Oct (3)

7. Shikra	13	10 Oct to 25 Oct (2)
<i>Unidentified Accipiter</i>	3	----
8. Steppe Eagle	6,166	3 Nov – 22 Nov (614)
9. Booted Eagle	118	12 Oct – 1 Nov (13)
10. Crested Serpent-eagle	6	26 Sept – 8 Oct (2)
11. Pallas’s Fish Eagle	2	20 Oct – 21 Oct (1)
12. Imperial Eagle	3	7 Dec (2)
13. Bonelli’s Eagle	23	18 Oct – 27 Oct (3)
14. Mountain Hawk-eagle	9	3 Oct – 15 Oct (4)
15. Golden Eagle	3	26 Nov – 7 Dec (1)
<i>Unidentified Eagle</i>	1	----
16. Black Kite ssp. <i>govinda</i>	287	25 Sep – 1 Nov (16)
17. Black-eared Kite ssp. <i>lineatus</i>	110	2 Oct – 3 Nov (25)
18. Osprey	2	26 Sept – 11 Oct (1)
19. Hen Harrier	19	24 Oct – 9 Nov (2)
20. Western Marsh Harrier	1	2 Nov (1)
21. Pallid Harrier	2	12 Oct (2)
<i>Unidentified Harrier</i>	4	----
22. Peregrine Falcon ssp. <i>calidis</i>	16	6 Oct – 27 Oct (2)
23. Saker Falcon	1	22 Oct (1)
24. Northern Hobby	100	25 Sep – 16 Oct (11)
25. Amur Falcon	20	10 Oct – 28 Oct (5)
26. Lesser Kestrel	22	30 Sept – 15 Oct (8)
27. Common Kestrel	197	1 Oct – 25 Oct (12)
<i>Unidentified Falcon</i>	17	----
28. Egyptian Vulture	19	19 Sep – 25 Sep (3)
29. White-rumped Vulture	138	26 Sep – 12 Oct (17)
30. Himalayan Vulture	1,415	21 Nov – 7 Dec (209)
31. Cinereous Vulture	47	10 Nov – 7 Dec (6)
32. Griffon Vulture	25	22 Nov – 6 Dec (8)
<i>Unidentified Raptor</i>	19	----
TOTAL - TOTAL - TOTAL	9,565	25 Oct – 25 Nov

Table: Raptor species identified and number counted at Thoolakharka (Nepal), 15 September through 8 December 2014 including unidentified raptors. Number in parentheses in “Peak Time Frame” is the highest daily count within the peak migration period.