

Amur Falcon

Origin

The Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) is a migratory bird of prey that breeds in northeastern Asia, primarily in the Amur-Heilong region, and in winters in southern Africa.

The exact origin of the Amur falcon is uncertain, but it is believed to have evolved in the vast forests of Siberia, Russia, and China, where it breeds in the summer months. The species is thought to have originated from a common ancestor of the genus *Falco*, which includes several other falcon species.

It is believed that the Amur falcon's migration to India dates back to ancient times, and the birds may have been following a traditional migration route established over many generations. The exact mechanism by which the species reached India is not fully understood, but it is likely that the birds flew across the Himalayas or followed the Indus and Brahmaputra river systems.

Distribution and Population

Amur falcons (*Falco amurensis*) are migratory birds of prey that travel from breeding grounds in northeastern Asia to wintering areas in southern Africa, passing through India on their way. In India, they are found mainly in the northeastern states of Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram, although they are also occasionally spotted in other parts of the country.

During their migration, Amur falcons gather in large flocks in specific locations to rest and feed before continuing on their journey. In India, the birds congregate in large numbers in Doyang Lake in Nagaland, as well as in other parts of the

state, such as Wokha and Dimapur. They are also known to visit Tamenglong in Manipur and in the districts of Champai and Aizawl in Mizoram.

The population of Amur falcons in India varies from year to year, depending on factors such as weather conditions, food availability, and hunting pressure. However, their numbers have been steadily increasing in recent years, thanks to conservation efforts by various organisations and the government.

Appearance

Amur falcons are small migratory birds of prey that are about the size of a pigeon. Amur falcons are slender and streamlined with long, pointed wings and a long tail. They have small, hooked beaks and sharp talons for catching prey. The species shows sexual dimorphism, with males having brighter plumage than females. The adult males have a blue-grey head and back, a chestnut breast and belly, and white underparts. The females and immature birds are more brownish with darker streaks and spots on their underparts. Amur falcons are about 25-30 cm (10-12 inches) in length and have a wingspan of about 60-75 cm (24-30 inches). They weigh between 100-200 grams (3.5-7 ounces), with males being slightly smaller and lighter than females. As mentioned above, the males have blue-grey and chestnut coloration, while the females are brownish with darker streaks and spots on their underparts.

Lifestyle

Amur falcons are diurnal and hunt during the day. They are agile flyers, often catching insects and small birds in mid-air. During their migration, they congregate in large flocks to rest and feed, often roosting in large trees or shrubs. Amur falcons breed in northeastern Asia and lay eggs in May-June. After hatching, the young birds fledge in about 25-30

days and leave the nest after another 3-4 weeks.

Food Habits

The diet of Amur falcons is primarily composed of insects such as dragonflies, termites, and locusts. They also feed on small birds and bats, which they catch in mid-air. They are known to hunt in mid air with lot of speed and agility.

Habitat

During the breeding season, Amur falcons are found in dense forests of Siberia, Russia, and China. During their migration, they pass through India and rest and feed in open grasslands, wetlands, and agricultural fields.

Vulnerable Species

Amur falcons were listed as “Near Threatened” on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List in 2012, but their status was later downgraded to “Least Concern” in 2018.

The species was initially considered vulnerable due to the threat of hunting and trapping during their migration through India. Large numbers of the birds were killed for food, sport, and trade, with some estimates suggesting that over 100,000 birds were killed each year. This led to a rapid decline in their population, and the species was considered vulnerable.

However, in recent years, there has been a significant reduction in hunting, thanks to efforts by conservation organisations and the government. The Nagaland government in India has taken measures to ban hunting, create awareness, and protect the birds, which has resulted in a remarkable increase in the population of Amur falcons visiting Nagaland.

Although the hunting threat has been significantly reduced, Amur falcons still face other challenges such as habitat loss, the use of pesticides and other chemicals, and the impact of climate change. However, their population is currently considered stable, and the species is not considered to be at immediate risk of extinction.

Overall, continued conservation efforts are necessary to ensure the long-term survival of the Amur falcon and other migratory bird species.

Protected Areas

In India, the Amur falcon is primarily found in the northeastern states of Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram during their migration period.

Doyang Reservoir Wildlife Sanctuary located in the Wokha district of Nagaland is an important stopover site for the Amur falcon during their migration. It is estimated that over a million Amur falcons roost in the area during their migration. Pangti village in the Wokha district of Nagaland is known for its conservation efforts towards the Amur falcon. The village has banned hunting of the birds and has set up a community conservation reserve for the species. The conservation efforts in Pangti have been successful in reducing hunting and promoting ecotourism.

Tamenglong Wildlife Sanctuary in the Tamenglong district of Manipur is an important site for Amur falcon sightings during their migration. Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary in Kohima district of Nagaland are known for their conservation efforts towards the Blyth's tragopan and other bird species, including the Amur falcon. Vankalai Wildlife Sanctuary in the Champhai district of Mizoram is an important site for Amur falcon sightings during their migration.