

Sight records of '*fulvescens*' morph Greater Spotted Eagle in Gujarat

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with streaking on breast while others appearing in a fox-red plumage (Forsman 2006). It is said to occur only in juvenile and immature plumages (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), which is contra to Forsman (2006) and Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2001), who state that '*fulvescens*' occurs at all ages, including in adults. Breeding pairs, containing one or both '*fulvescens*' morph birds, have been observed in Russia, where 2 out of 27 (7.4%) pairs had one or both mates of '*fulvescens*' morph in the Altai-Sayan region (Karyakin *et al.* 2014).

The pale and uniformly yellowish buff birds resemble Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*), causing confusion in identification, while some birds with diffuse darker streaking on breast somewhat look like Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) (Forsman 2006). Hence identification is difficult and good views are needed to separate it from Tawny Eagle and Eastern Imperial Eagle.

The status of '*fulvescens*' morph Greater Spotted Eagle in India is unclear. Naoroji (2006) gives it as 'occasionally seen' in the subcontinent, while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) give this morph as 'rare'. For Gujarat, it is not mentioned either in Ali (1954) or Dharmakumarsinhji (1955).

However, there have been sight records from Gujarat in the past few years. Sightings have been reported from many areas in Gujarat and photos have been posted on birding websites and on the social media. I have tried to collect as many sightings as possible, to get an idea about its occurrence in Gujarat. However, personal records, not posted on the internet or published in journals, may have been overlooked.

Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) is a winter migrant to Gujarat, usually seen around large lakes, canals, marshes, etc. (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is listed as 'Vulnerable' (BirdLife International 2015) with a declining population.

Greater Spotted Eagle is generally dark in colour. But at all ages, it occurs in a rare pale colour morph, called '*fulvescens*', which is said to be more frequent in the eastern part of the species' range, with birds in this morph varying considerably from pale yellowish buff, to a darker sandy yellowish brown

Records of '*fulvescens*' morph Greater Spotted Eagle in Gujarat

Sr. No	Date	Place	Source
1	October 2008	Jamnagar	Sameer Shah, INW*
2	18 February 2009	Surendranagar	Nirav Bhatt, OBI**
3	November 2009	Thol Bird Sanctuary, Ahmedabad	Niraj Mistry, INW
4	March 2011	Thol Bird Sanctuary, Ahmedabad	Tejas Soni, INW
5	January 2012	Thol Bird Sanctuary, Ahmedabad	Yograj Jadeja, INW
6	19 October 2014	Little Rann of Kachchh	Prasad Ganpule, <i>Personal Observation</i>
7	23 November 2014	Little Rann of Kachchh	K Shukla, OBI
8	1 February 2015	Little Rann of Kachchh	V Pawar, OBI
9	27 December 2015 3 January 2016	Little Rann of Kachchh	Prasad Ganpule, <i>Personal Observation</i>

*INW: Website www.indianaturewatch.net, **OBI: website <http://orientalbirdimages.org>

Birds with pale buff / white plumage have been noted more times than darker yellowish brown or fox-red coloured birds. Looking at the records of '*fulvescens*' morph in Gujarat, it seems that this morph is rare. In general, Greater Spotted Eagle is frequently seen in Gujarat, with regular sightings from many places like Little Rann of Kachchh, Thol Bird Sanctuary, Greater

Rann of Kachchh, etc. Hence, the percentage of '*fulvescens*' morph birds seen seems to be very less compared to 'normal' dark coloured birds. In the Altai Region, Southern Siberia, Russia, only 2.4% (11 out of 461) individuals were of this morph (Karyakin *et al.* 2014).

Greater Spotted Eagle...

It is possible that it is overlooked in Gujarat due to identification difficulties. Further records of this rare morph of Greater Spotted Eagle will help in understanding its status in Gujarat.

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Sighting of a juvenile skua at Madhavpur, Porbandar

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Pomarine Skua is shown to be a winter migrant to Pakistan coast (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). There are only few previous records of Skuas from Gujarat. A juvenile Skua (*Stercorarius sp.*) was recorded at Diu (Mundkur *et al.* 2010). Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) was recorded at Nalsarovar (Trivedi put & Sama 2010) and at Venasar, Little Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2011). Hence this is an important record for Gujarat.



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We visited Madhavpur coastal area (Dist: Porbandar) for birding on 30 January 2006 There we saw a gull-like bird sitting on the beach. It had pale brown mask, dark-brown crown, neck, mantle and wing; and greyish bill. One of us (RT) took few photographs. After referring to field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011), we suspected it to be a juvenile skua (*Stercorarius spp.*). A skua is also sometimes called as a 'jaeger' but it is referred to as a skua here, based on Grimmett *et al.* (2011). Further, a Parasitic Jaeger is also known as Arctic Skua.

We sent the images to various birdwatchers but since other features were not seen in the photos, it was tentatively identified as a juvenile Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) (Praveen, J. and Dipu, K., *in litt.*, *pers. comm.*, email dated 7 January 2014)