

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

preying on

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*





One can never have enough of Little Rann of Kutch (LRK) as it throws up surprises every time. LRK is a magical place n dream destination for wildlife lovers especially for raptors. In its 360-degree vastness, the trained eye of a birding guide will spot a prey bird that migrated from thousands of miles away, perching on a tiny wood stump or sitting, roosting on the ground that almost dissolves into the land around it.



I was returning from a morning safari. I am sharing thrilling wildlife moments of the natural world which I came across in 2016. I saw a Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) roosting on the ground. I thought of taking a ground-level shot so I got down from the car and slowly approached the bird. LRK has a unique charm with desert ecology beautiful surface patterns and merging horizons. Suddenly from nowhere mighty Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) came and landed on Marsh Harrier. I was stunned and surprised to see the scene happening in front of me. Never thought of in my wildest dream that raptor killing a raptor. It was an amazing encounter and witnessed some epic moments. You simply won't believe your eyes.



Comments on food habits of Eastern Imperial

Eagle: This is the best example of the intraguild predation relationships in vertebrates are usually asymmetrical and size-based, with larger, dominant species preying on smaller ones (Polis et al. 1989; Holt & Polis 1997). It is noted that many predatory species act both as potential competitors and predators for each other or for other species of similar foraging habits (Petty et al. 2003). Here, a similar predation was observed in Eastern Imperial Eagle preying on Western Marsh Harrier by Shah (2023). Also, Bhatt & Dixit (2023) documented a Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) preying on a Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*).

In raptor guilds, there is often a hierarchical structure that appears to be maintained by larger or more aggressive species displacing smaller or less aggressive species rather than by direct killing (Newton 1979), although larger raptors are known to predate smaller ones (Uttendörfer 1952). However, Eastern Imperial Eagle (EIE) *Aquila heliaca* is a large-size raptor species breeding from Central Europe, the Balkans, Central Asia, and South Siberia to China and Mongolia (BirdLife International 2021). Eastern Imperial Eagle is a winter visitor and is uncommonly found in many parts of Gujarat (Ganpule et al. 2022). A recent study shows that the EIE is a top predator exploiting different prey in different parts of its distribution (del Hoyo et al. 1994). The great diversity of species in the food spectrum of the EIE proved its opportunism towards feeding (Demerdzhiev 2011). The literature survey indicated that EIE is predated various types of prey, including two hundred different taxa in the food menu, including Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (Demerdzhiev et al. 2022). – **Raju Vyasa, Editor Note.**

References

BirdLife International. 2021. Species factsheet: *Aquila heliaca*. Downloaded. <http://www.birdlife.org>. Accessed on: 12th June 2023.

Bhatt, N. & Dixit, D. 2023. Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* preying on Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* with notes on observation of prey of Saker falcon and on

raptors feeding other raptors. *Flamingo Gujarat* 6 (2): 65-66.

del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., & Sargatal, J. 1994. Handbook of the birds of the world. In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., & Sargatal, J. (Eds) *New World vultures to guineafowl*. 2. Lynx Editions, Barcelona.

Demerdzhiev, D. 2011. Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca heliaca* Savigny, 1809) (Accipitridae – Aves) in Bulgaria – distribution, biology, ecology, numbers, and conservation measures. National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Sofia, 180 pp. [In Bulgarian with English Summary].

Demerdzhiev, D., Boev, Z., Dobrev, D., Terziev, N., Nedyalkov, N., Stoychev, S., & Petrov, T. 2022. Diet of Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) in Bulgaria: composition, distribution and variation. *Biodiversity Data Journal* 10: e77746. <https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.10.e77746>

Ganpule, P., Varu, M., Trivedi, B., & Raina, A. D. 2022. *A field guide to the birds of Gujarat*. Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat. Ahmedabad. 488pp.

Holt, R.D., Polis, G.A. 1997. A theoretical framework for intraguild predation. *American Nature* 149:745-64.

Newton, I. 1991. Population limitation in birds of prey: a comparative approach. In Perrins, C.M., Lebreton, J.-D. & Hiron, G.J.M. (Eds) *Bird Population Studies: Relevance to Conservation and Management*: 3–21. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Petty, S.J., Anderson, D.I.K., Davison, M., Little, B., Sherratt, T.N., Thomas, C.J., & Lambin, X. 2003. The decline of common kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* in a forested area of northern England: the role of predation by northern goshawks *Accipiter gentilis*. *Ibis* 145: 472-83.

Polis, G.A., Myers, C.A., Holt, R.D. 1989. The ecology and evolution of intraguild predation: potential competitors that eat each other. *Annual Review of Ecology System* 20: 297-330.

Shah, F. 2023. Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* preying on Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. *Flamingo Gujarat* 6 (2): 20-21.

Uttendörfer, O. 1952. *Neue Ergebnisse über die Ernährung der Greifvögel und Eulen*. Stuttgart: Verlag Eugen Ulmer. (In Germany).