

Observation of 26
Red-necked Falcons *Falco chicquera*
in one day



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As it sounds surprising, it is equally interesting to understand how it is possible to find these rare falcons, which are usually seen in pairs, in such numbers in one day's bird watching. I have been studying the breeding biology of the Red-

necked Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) for the last 18 years and I usually monitor the nesting sites of these birds. The Red-necked Falcon is classified as 'Near Threatened' because it is thought to be undergoing a moderately rapid population decline owing to habitat degradation (Birdlife International 2023). However, the first baseline data on the reproductive rate of the species on the basis of 39 breeding attempts in 18 territories provided insight into the productivity, which was 2.5 ± 1.4 (95% CI) (Bhatt 2022). This means an average of 2.5 chicks successfully fledge out of each nest with a confidence interval of ± 1.4 .

On 15th April 2023, I was on my routine nest survey of the Red-necked Falcons and I was able to observe nesting activities at 5 active nests. Specific locations of the nesting sites are not provided as the nesting territories are frequently used by the nesting pairs and there are various threats involved in sharing the nesting location including disturbance by immature photographers, popularization of a site increases local people's attention and such attention may also come under the surveillance of pet traders whereby the red-necked falcons are highly sought after species. In my previous experience of studying the species, one particular nesting site of Red-necked falcon in Nalsarovar outskirts on a Eucalyptus tree with successful nesting for two years, the tree was cut off by the local farmers owing to the disturbance of birdwatchers/photographers.

I visited these 5 different nests from 06:30 hrs till 18:30 hrs. Here, the methodology I follow at each nesting site is to observe the nest from afar, without disturbing the birds, till the parents provide at least one prey delivery to the chicks. I photograph the number of chicks inside the nest, along with the prey items, if possible. These nesting sites were in

Summary of the observed nest and nesting-related information in Surendranagar district, Gujarat

Nest Sr. No.	Number of Chicks	Age of the chick in number of days (Approx.)	Nesting Substrate	Taluka	Habitat and allied information
1	4	35-40 days old almost fledged inside nest	High Tension Electricity Transmission Pylon	Chotila	Crow/Ibis nest used. Nearby scattered trees and crop fields with groundnut cultivation
2	3	15-20 days old inside the nest	High Tension Electricity Transmission Pylon	Wadhwan	Crow nest used. Nearby uncultivated fallow land with <i>Prosopis juliflora</i> and crop fields with castor cultivation
3	2	Above 40 days old fledged chicks flying outside the nest	High Tension Electricity Transmission Pylon	Lakhtar	Ibis nest used. Nearby crop fields with paddy cultivation surrounded by a few Eucalyptus and Neem trees.
4	4	Above 40 days old fledged chicks flying outside the nest	High Tension Electricity Transmission Pylon	Sanand	Ibis nest used. Nearby open land after harvesting of castor and other crops
5	3	25-30 days old chicks inside the nest	Subawal Tree <i>Leucaena leucocephala</i>	Viramgam	Likely crow nest was used. Nearby open land after harvesting and the tree in campus of a roadside restaurant.

territories that ranged across different talukas of Surendranagar district namely Wadhwan, Chotila, Lakhtar, Viramgam & Sanand and involved a total road travel of about 200 kilometers. The status of each nest, with the number of chicks and their age, and the parent's activities provide in table.

Discussion: Conservation-Related Aspects:

On the basis of the above observations and my study of the species of the last 15 years, there is a high nesting population of Red-necked falcons in Surendranagar and adjoining district and the nesting success and productivity are fairly high and also indicates that the area supports a stable population of Red-necked falcons. Nesting sites are mostly surrounded by agricultural fields and it may suggest that the species is able to tolerate the agro-ecological landscapes but the rapid change in land use from agricultural to industrial use may affect the population. Nesting on high-tension electric pylons are preferred nesting substrate and it may seem safer compared to the trees with threats of the indiscriminate axing

of trees along the roadside and also in private properties which has been recorded over the last few years. However, besides the natural threats like cyclones and extreme heat, there are man-made threats on electric pylons also as there is policy of indiscriminate nest removal from pylons for maintenance work by powerline transmission companies which poses a significant threat to the nesting success of the Red-necked falcons. Thus, a total of 16 chicks (including fledged birds) and 5 adult pairs make the total observation of 26 birds in a day. This is a significant number of individuals seen in a single day.

References

- Bhatt, N., 2022. Reproductive Rate of the Red-Headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) in Surendranagar District, Gujarat, India. *Journal of Raptor Research* 57: 75-80. DOI: 10.3356/JRR-21-73.
- BirdLife International (2023) Species factsheet: *Falco chicquera*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 15 May 2023.