

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
near Shakoor Lake, Vighakot, Kachchh



We were on a birding trip from India Bridge to Vighakot (at Indo-Pak border), in Kachchh, on 30 January 2021, with necessary permission from the Border Security Force (BSF). Only binoculars are permitted in this area and no cameras are allowed since it is a sensitive international border. The bird watching was very rich and we saw ten Steppe Eagles (*Aquila nipalensis*), nine Imperial Eagles (*A. heliaca*), four Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*), two Greater Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*) and six Red-tailed Wheatears (*Oenanthe chrysopygia*), besides other common birds.

Reaching Vighakot, we requested the BSF officer there for permission to visit Shakoor Lake (24° 15' N, 69° 04' E), which was granted. We were allowed to visit the area for half an hour. The wetland is about 3 km from Vighakot, is quite large (more than 100 sq km), and is on the fringe of GRK. The wetland lies in both India and Pakistan; approximately one-third of the area falls in Pakistan while two-thirds of the wetland lies in the Indian side. The habitat around the wetland is desert-type, while towards the northern side, in Pakistan, it is desert and farmland. The BSF has constructed a road that passes through the wetland, which is very helpful in scanning for the birds in the area. We saw raptors perched on the border fencing poles. We counted more than 20,000 waterfowl in the lake, along with hundreds of pelicans and other water birds. Then, we saw a large-sized eagle closely in flight and we noted all diagnostic features as it was seen well by us. We concluded that it was a juvenile or immature Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) based on the white patches in the underwings at base of primaries and secondaries, dark plumage, large size, white base on tail and golden nape, which was seen by all of us.

This observation was covered earlier in Ganpule (2021) but is formally published here. There are records of Golden Eagle from Kachchh. An earlier published record of a Golden Eagle from Banni, Kachchh (Khojani 2020) was followed by a recent publication reporting three more sightings,

again from Banni, Kachchh, comprising of two individuals over two winter seasons (Naria *et al.* 2023). Since the area we visited is restricted and permission is required to visit it, many birds occurring here are likely to be missed by bird watchers. A representative photo of a Golden Eagle is given here, which was taken elsewhere. We recommend that this area be regularly visited by bird watchers as this is a very important birding site. We are grateful to BSF for permission to visit Vighakot and Shakoor Lake.

Earlier, Golden Eagle was reported from the Palanpur area of Banaskantha District (Prajapati *et al.* 2018), and recent reports (Ganpule 2021; Naria *et al.* 2023). All these occurrence records show that the Golden Eagle could be a winter vagrant in Gujarat State, especially in arid regions of Kachchh and North Gujarat.

References

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Editor Note: The Shakoor (= Gratitude) Lake is an unexplored wetland and there needs to be more information about its biodiversity due to the restricted borders of Indo-Pak sensitive areas. Shakoor Lake is a lake comprising 300 km², located on the border between the Indian state of Gujarat and the Sindh province on the southern edge of Pakistan. About 90 km² of the lake comes under Pakistan, whilst the majority of the lake i.e. 210 km², lies within India. The Indian built Indo-Pak Border Road runs across the Shakoor Lake (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/shakoor_lake). This lake is formed by the emergence of Allah

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Bund on its southern side by blocking the Nara River, also known as Puran river or Kori river, when a massive earthquake struck the area in 1819. During the river flooding, Shakoor Lake surpluses into the Kori Creek through the gaps formed in

Allah Bund. Geographically and environmentally, Lake Shakoor is part of the cross-border Greater Rann of Kutch, a large seasonal salt marsh (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/shakoor_lake).



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