

Breeding record of  
**Laggar Falcon** *Falco jugger*  
from Great Rann of Kutch, Gujarat, India



## Abstract

This short-note summarized observation on the breeding record of the Laggar falcon *Falco jugger* in 2014 at a large dry river bed near Naliya-Narayan Sarovar road in the Kachchh district, Gujarat.

## Introduction

The Laggar falcon *Falco jugger* is Resident species and widely distributed throughout the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Naoroji (2006) stated it is 'commonest' in the desert and semi arid zone of the county and rarer in southern parts of India. However, in Gujarat, it is an uncommon or rare species (Bhatt *et al.* 2018). This species is considered a Schedule I species under Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972 being of high legal status. However, it is a 'Near Threatened' falcon species according to IUCN Red List criteria 2022 (BirdLife International 2023a & b).



Breeding habitat of the Laggar Falcon in a large dry river bed, near Narayan Sarovar, Kachchh. Note the vegetation close to the nesting site.

## Nesting preferences

The Laggar falcons *Falco jugger* do not build their own nest but are very adaptive to different nesting situations, including urban environments and are also seen nesting frequently around towns and villages. As per Author observations over the last 10 years in and around the Desert National Park in Rajasthan, the Author has noted several breeding pairs with a high preference given

to communication pylons and Khejri *Prosopis cineraria* trees was given which had large nests of crows, ravens, and Egyptian vultures (See Mori *et al.* 2023). These were mostly abandoned old nests or hijacked mainly by the breeding pairs and then used for years together during the breeding season. Naoroji (2006) has also mentioned the preference for steep earth banks of river. One such unusual observation was made and photographed by Author and his friends Raviraj Shah and Dipesh Rakshit during their trip to the Kutch district for a raptor population density survey in early March 2014.

## Observation

On 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2014, as we were traveling between Narayan Sarovar roads towards Naliya, we were surveying the area to stop at certain spots, make observations and keep moving ahead. Near Sewagram on the Naliya-Narayan Sarovar road, we came around a very large dry river bank on the main highway. Intrigued by its beauty and vastness we decided to explore it and the surrounding area. It was around 11.30 Hrs. in the morning and as we kept walking inside the dry river bed, from a long distance Dipesh Rakshit suddenly noticed a raptor-like bird sticking itself out from a high up ledge of the river bank. As we took a better look from our binoculars, we noted that it was a Laggar falcon which was resting on the ledge, which in an alert mode was observing us coming towards it. As we slowly and gradually moved ahead the falcon decided to fly away and then started soaring high above in the sky. We started moving ahead, exploring the area and saw some bird life there with a sighting of a Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani* and Eurasian collar Doves *Streptopelia decaocto*. The area was full of *Euphorbia cactus* along with patches of *Acacia arabica* and *Prosopis juliflora*. As we reached near the spot just below the ledge where the falcon was perched, we were pleasantly surprised to see another falcon also roosting there in a position as if it was on a nest. Since it was a breeding period for Laggars Falcons, we anticipated that the pair

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would be busy with some nesting activity and hence we kept our distance and walked further away so as not to disturb the perched bird. As we moved far away, we located a good spot behind the *Prosopis juliflora* patch and stationed ourselves to observe the behavior of the bird. At the same time, the other falcon which had flown out was soaring high in the sky in a flying pattern as if it was trying to take our attention off the nest.

As we observed both the birds well, we noticed that this was a breeding pair that had chosen a high ledge on the vast but dry river bank. We decided to remain in the area till sunset to observe the behavior of the falcons to take notes. We managed to photograph the other flying bird as it was soaring and noted from the overall structure (small size, few breast markings) that it was a male bird. The bird on the nest was a female (much larger in size) which we realized as it stepped out to preen and stretch itself. She only remained about 2 or 3 feet away from the nest in the process. The preening lasted for around 15-20 minutes and then she moved back towards the nest. As she got closer, we noticed two tiny

chicks' raise their head in a sort of food-begging behavior. This was when we realized that the chicks had already hatched in the nest and had open eyes.

It was a very hot afternoon and from noon till about 17.00 Hrs the female bird remained on the nest, raising herself and changing positions from time to time. The male bird stayed close by settling on a *Euphorbia* cluster and kept a close eye. We were surprised as to why the chicks were not being fed but later realized that since they were very young, they probably did not need to be fed frequently and probably they were already well fed just before we had arrived. At around 17 Hrs. we noticed the female suddenly take off from the nest and also saw her come back in just about 20 minutes with something in her talons. The prey was a Spiny-tailed Lizard *Saara hardwickii* but she only had the tail of the lizard and the remaining body was completely missing. It appeared to us that the female had gone to collect this from the male which was then missing from the *Euphorbia* cluster. Probably the male had already made this spiny-tailed lizard kill and offered it to the female,



Adult female roosting on the cliff close to the nesting sit.

Adult female in the right is seen carrying an invisible food for the three approximately two-week-old nestlings also visible to the left.

who had quickly devoured it and then carried the remaining tail piece back to the nest to feed the tiny chicks.

By this time, we also realized that there were total 3 chicks in the nest, one of which appeared to be a little smaller than the other 2. The female once inside the nest, started pulling of the meat shreds of the tail and very slowly and carefully took turns to feed all the 3 chicks in turns. It was a very interesting behavior that we observed for almost 45 minutes till all the 3 hungry chicks were fully fed. As the evening set in we decided to leave the area. We decided to stay back for a night at a local hotel in Naliya and re-visit the spot again the next morning before heading back to Ahmedabad. We did visit the place again around 10.30 am the next day and saw the female on the nest who had positioned herself in the same way we had seen her when we had left. We also observed that the male bird was perched at a distance in the Euphorbia cluster and was observing and staying alert on the guard. We decided to move ahead and return back to Ahmedabad as our planned holidays were over and we had to resume work. We thought of making a similar visit plan again in a couple of weeks to monitor the progress but due to some reason or the other, it never materialized.

A year later on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2015, the Author along with his spouse Ruchita Soni & Raviraj Shah again visited this spot. To our surprise, we only saw the male bird and there was no trace of the female. We stayed there for a day and the next day again visited the spot but during this entire period, only the male bird was seen in the area. It was near the nesting place on a Euphorbia cluster close by. We concluded that probably the female had died and that the male probably was not able to get another partner for himself resulting in no nesting in that season.

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 2017, Author and Ruchita Soni again made a visit to the same spot to check if the male had formed a pair or if there was

any activity. Sadly, in spite of spending almost 3 to 4 hours at the spot, we noticed that there were no Laggar falcons around. The nest on the ledge appeared to be abandoned. To check on or any signs of their presence we tried to find any regurgitated pellets or droppings below and around the nesting spot but could not find any. Hence, we concluded that probably the male bird was also not around and it might have either moved to a different location in search of a mate or might have died. Post this I never attempted to visit this location ever. The sightings of Laggars in Kutch also dropped significantly over the last 6-7 years and according to local guides, it's become very rare to see these birds which at one point in time were in good numbers.

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