

Growth stages of
Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*
nestlings



Photo 4

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We, as a team, have been studying the breeding biology of Red-necked Falcons (*Falco chicquera*) for more than 15 years. We regularly survey the nesting sites of the Red-necked Falcons in the study area, which comprises Surendranagar District and the outskirts of Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, which is adjoining Surendranagar. Our keen interest in the study of Red-necked Falcons is known to the local guides of Nalsarovar.



Visit 1: On 18th March 2023, at around 15:30 hrs, the first author got a call from Sabbir Belim, the local guide at Nalsarovar, informing that because of a heavy storm and extreme winds, a very young chick of a Red-necked Falcon had just fallen out of a nest on the *Subawal* (*Leucaena leucocephala*) tree, which the first author was monitoring. All four of us immediately decided to visit the location and in the meanwhile, we informed the Deputy Conservator of Forest and the Range Forest Officer of Nalsarovar regarding this incident. As the weather was windy and it was raining heavily, we reached the location at about 17:45 hrs and we were surprised to see that the chick was very small (Photo 1) and assumed it was about 1-2 days

old. We started to figure out the best way to put the chick back in the nest but the nest was located on the top of the tree, where the branches were thin, and which may have caused further damage to the nest if the branch had broken during the attempt to put the chick back in the nest. The eyes of the chick were closed and it was hardly able to move but was calling intermittently, begging for food. As it had been out of the nest for more than 3 hours as per the information provided by the guide, and the more time taken to put it back in the nest would reduce the survival chances of the chick. In the meanwhile, the forester of the area reached the site and he immediately volunteered to climb up the tree himself. He successfully put the chick back in the nest safely. He also clicked photographs of the nest after replacing the chick, which showed that there were 2 chicks and 1 egg in the nest. This further confirmed that the fallen chick would be 1-2 days old while the third egg was yet to hatch. Thereafter, we left the nest with the hope that the chick would survive the trauma and we decided to monitor this nest to see further developments. This was the 1st visit to the nesting site after the chicks had hatched and this chick was considered as approximately 2 days old for further reference. All the following visits after this were carried out by the first author.

Visit 2: 1st April 2023: Three small chicks (approx. 14 days old) were seen with binoculars but as the chicks were small (Photo 2), all three could not be photographed together.

Visit 3: 8th April 2023: All three chicks (approx. 21 days old) had grown healthy (Photo 3). It was heartening to see the adult female bringing a Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) to feed the young and all the chicks were well-fed by the female (Photo 4).

Visit 4: 15th April 2023: There was significant growth observed during the past 7 days wherein the down feathers (Photo 5) on the head and body of the chicks (approx. 28 days old) were replaced by juvenile flight feathers. All the chicks



looked healthy and two of them were observed eating the pieces of prey brought by the female by themselves.

Visit 5: 23rd April 2023: All three chicks (approx. 36 days old) were almost fledged (Photo 6) and they were considered as fledged based on the MAAAS (Minimum Acceptable Age for Accessing Success) considered to be 37 days (Del Hoyo 2020).

Visit 6: 2nd May 2023: This was the last visit when the three chicks were not seen in the immediate surrounding of the nest site. The young fledglings remain with their parents for 69-72 days (Del Hoyo 2020) and therefore, the chicks should not have been very far from the nest site but as time was limited, the first author could not scan the surrounding areas to find out the status of the fledglings.

The successful fledging of the Red-necked Falcon chicks after one chick had fallen was noteworthy. This also shows that inclement weather affects the nesting success of this species. Here, direct intervention by us helped the chick to fledge successfully. While we are monitoring many nests in our area, this was the first time we had directly intervened and put a chick back in the nest.



Acknowledgment

We are thankful to Sabbir and Akbar for providing the information about the fallen chick, Hareshbhai and Manharbhai the Forest Department staff who helped in the rescue, the Range Forest Officer and the Deputy Conservator of Forest, Nalsarovar, who provided all the support for the rescue.

References

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