

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



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On 1st December 2018, my friends Manisha, Dhairya and I spent the whole day birding in Little Rann of Kachchh (Henceforth LRK) and we were happy with some interesting sightings of a juvenile Red-naped Shaheen (*Falco pelegrinoides babylonicus*) in the deeper parts of LRK. At the end of the day, at around 18:00 hrs, almost after sunset, we saw a falcon with a kill. Upon closer observation, it was very interesting to find that it was a juvenile Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), which is a very rare winter visitor to LRK, and the event was even more interesting as we saw that it was feeding on a juvenile Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) (Photo 1 & 2). White edges on the tip of dark gray secondaries helped identify that it was a juvenile Black-winged Kite (Photo 3).



Although we did not see it hunting, we assume that the kill was done by the Saker as there was no other raptor in the vicinity and there were freshly plucked feathers in the surroundings. The Saker Falcon preys on mainly small mammals (Orta *et al.* 2020). Birds form part of its diet and it is known to prey on mainly medium-sized and ground-dwelling birds, especially sandgrouse, galliforms (partridges, quails, pheasants), corvids, pigeons and larks. Naoroji (2006) stated that in the Indian Subcontinent, the Saker Falcon had been recorded to prey on Spiny-tailed Lizards, Desert Gerbils, and birds like Sandgrouse and waterbirds.

I have observed Saker Falcon feeding on Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus* and Spiny-tailed Lizard *Saara hardwickii*. Besides there are observations with photographs of Saker Falcon feeding on Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (Unpublished Observation; Yogendra Shah, Nov 2017), *Calandrella* Lark sp. (Unpublished Observation; Hardik Patel, Jan 2018) and Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger* (Unpublished Observation; Jay Shah, Jan 2018) from the Little Rann of Kutch as well as Indian Desert Gerbill *Meriones hurrianae* (Unpublished Observation; Jay Shah, Dec 2016) from Jor Beed, Bikaner, Rajasthan. Similar events of a raptor feeding on another raptor have also been observed in LRK previously. Thus, this observation of a Saker Falcon preying on a Black-winged Kite is very unusual and indicates a wider spectrum of birds in its diet in the winter. Further studies will be helpful in knowing the diet of this falcon on its wintering grounds in Gujarat.

References

- Naoroji, R., 2006. *Birds of prey of the Indian Subcontinent*. Om Books International, New Delhi.
- Orta, J., Boesman, P.F.D., Sharpe, C.J. & Marks, J.S. 2020. Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D.A. & de Juana, E.- Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.sakfal1.01>