

## Sighting of Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* in Amreli district, Gujarat

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Photo: Kaushal Sharma

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 2023, I was returning from Jafrabad after sighting some waders and going to Rajula to observe more salt pans near Victor Port. En route to Rajula, I observed a red-necked falcon *Falco chicquera* on top of a high-tension line near Lunsapur village. Beneath the Red-necked falcon, I also observed a large raptor. For the confirmation of that unidentified raptor, I took a photograph. After taking one shot of the unidentified raptor, I approached that tower for a clear shot, but the bird looked very shy and flew away to the next tower. Before moving closer to the tower, I clicked the picture because the bird was visible to identify. For clicking more pictures, I approached there but the bird took a long flight and disappeared.

The crown of the bird was pale brown with whitish supercilium, most of the upper parts were rufous brown and the tail-tip was off-white and large buff with dark primaries in flight. I have seen dark underwing coverts heavily striking underparts even flight was lazier than Peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus* also larger bulky body suggests its Saker falcon *Falco cherrug*. This rare and powerful bird of prey is known for its impressive speed and aerial prowess. This is the first-ever sighting in this region of a Saker Falcon.

In Gujarat around 60 sightings of this phenomenal bird have been recorded by ornithologists. Most of them were from the Greater Rann of Kachchh, Little Rann of Kachchh and Nal Sarovar region because of the suitable habitat and

prey availability. One of the reasons behind this sighting in Amreli district is the landscape, which features dry scrubland and salt pans. Such habitat hosts flocks of larks, such as the sand lark, greater short-toed lark, and other lark species. Additionally, spiny-tailed lizards and gerbils are present due to the dry arid land.

The presence of Saker Falcon highlights the ecological richness of the area which is significant for the local biodiversity. Birdwatchers and researchers alike are excited, as this sighting expands our understanding of this region's bird species. It also contributes to our understanding of the distribution of this species in India, given its preference for open grasslands and semi-desert regions. The presence of this species in the Amreli district highlights the importance of conserving diverse habitats to support a range of avian species. This finding further contributes to the ongoing efforts to assess and protect raptor populations in the region.

### Reference

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