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Journal of Threatened Taxa

Building evidence for conservation globally

www.threatenedtaxa.org

ISSN 0974-7907 (Online) | ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

NOTE

ON THE OCCURRENCE OF BLACK BAZA *AVICEDA LEUPHOTES* DUMONT, 1820 (AVES: FALCONIFORMES: ACCIPITRIDAE) IN THE GUPTESWAR FORESTS OF THE EASTERN GHATS, ODISHA, INDIA

Swetashree Purohit, Manoj V. Nair & Sharat Kumar Palita

26 November 2017 | Vol. 9 | No. 11 | Pp. 10964–10967

10.11609/jott.2761.9.11.10964-10967



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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online)
ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

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The Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* Dumont, 1820 is a small-sized bird of prey found in broad-leaved evergreen forests of South Asia and Southeast Asia. In India, they are found in the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats, northeastern India and in the Andaman group of islands (Ali & Ripley 1978). A stocky pigeon-sized raptor of Accipitridae

family, it has a conspicuous long spiky crest, black head, neck and upperparts with prominent white and rust blotches on the scapulars and flight feathers; chestnut and black barring on the white underparts, and a broad white gorget on the breast (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Ali 2002). In flight, overall, a black and silver pattern can be observed, wings are broad and paddle shaped but pointed. The underparts are distinct with a black head and foreneck, white breast gorget, prominent chestnut barring (Naoroji 2006; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Black Bazas are usually solitary or found in small, possibly family groups. They feed mainly on lizards, frogs and insects and occasionally on bats and birds. To feed on insects they perch high in the canopy and make aerial sorties to catch prey on the wing or sally-glean them from the foliage (Ali & Ripley 1978). The males are known to have around 3-4 darker chestnut bars in the upper belly region whereas the females have around seven chestnut bars. The white patches on the secondaries are larger in females (Sivakumar & Prakash 2004). The male is approximately 91% of the female in size (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001).

The Black Baza has been described by three

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subspecies. The nominate race from Western Ghats is characterised by a chestnut breast band below the white gorget. The eastern Himalayan race *A. l. shyma* is said to have mainly a black breast band. Another race *A. l. andamanica* found in the Andamans is with under parts nearly unbarred (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

The Black Baza has been reported in southern India during winter, from Trivandrum (Kumar 1999) and Thattekad Bird Sanctuary, Kerala (Sugathan & Verghese 1996), Agumbe State Forest, Karnataka (Karanth 1985), Bhimasankar in Maharashtra (Rane & Borges 1987) mainly from the Western Ghats. It has also been reported from lower West Bengal and Bangladesh (Blyth 1863), Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal and Kaziranga in Assam (Samant et al. 1995), and South Garo Hills, Meghalaya (Naroji 2006).

The Black Baza has been known to breed in northeastern India and Myanmar (Hanxwell 1892;

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.11609/jott.2761.9.11.10964-10967> | ZooBank: urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:D81962E0-2B72-4340-9030-7EAADBA710EF

Editor: V. Santharam, Institute of Bird Studies & Natural History, Chittoor, India.

Date of publication: 26 November 2017 (online & print)

Manuscript details: Ms # 2761 | Received 28 April 2016 | Final received 03 November 2017 | Finally accepted 10 November 2017

Citation: Purohit, S., M.V. Nair & S.K. Palita (2017). On the occurrence of Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* Dumont, 1820 (Aves: Falconiformes: Accipitridae) in the Gupteswar forests of the Eastern Ghats, Odisha, India. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 9(11): 10964–10967; <http://doi.org/10.11609/jott.2761.9.11.10964-10967>

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Funding: University Grants Commission, New Delhi.

Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

Acknowledgements: The authors are thankful to the Head, Department of Biodiversity and Conservation of Natural Resources, Central University of Orissa, Koraput for providing laboratory facilities and permission to carry out the work. The first author would like to thank the University Grants Commission, New Delhi for providing a NON-NET Fellowship to carry out research. The authors also thankfully acknowledge the help and support of Udayan Sarathi Behera in field work and the contribution of photographers.



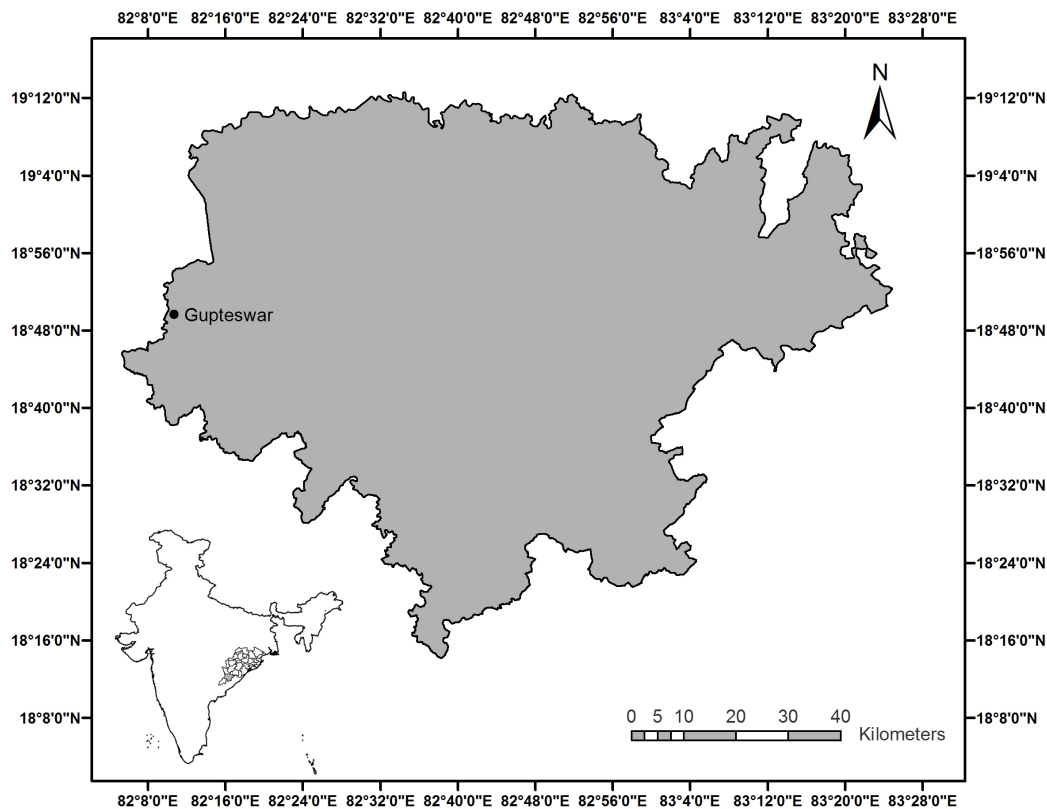


Figure 1. Location of Gupteswar in Koraput District, Odisha.

Primrose 1906). Nesting Black Baza has been reported from Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal (Sivakumar & Prakash 2005), and Tinsukia in Upper Assam of northeastern India (Imran 2010).

Winter records of the species include stray occurrences in or near metropolitan areas such as the Guindy National Park in Chennai (Santharam 1981; Kannan 1985). Individuals have also been recorded at Point Calimere (Sugathan 1982). On the basis of sighting records over a period of 17 years (1980–1997) in and around Chennai, Santharam (2009) suggests it as a regular winter visitor to Chennai. Some recent additions from eastern peninsular India includes sightings from Puducherry in January (Boobalan 2017) and Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu during October (Nagarajan 2017).

On 03 April 2015 at 09:36hr during a field survey of birds at Gupteswar Proposed Reserve Forest (PRF) (18.82750000 N & 82.16722222 E, elevation 482m) (Fig. 1) in Koraput District, southern Odisha a bird was observed to take off from its perch on a tree on the Gupteswar main road and went soaring above the forests of Gupteswar. It was then joined by four others of the same species. They were observed to be soaring in circles. The species was identified to be



Image 1. The Black Baza soaring over the forests of Gupteswar.

a Black Baza from a photographic record (Image 1) of a bird in flight which distinctively showed the black head and foreneck, white gorget, chestnut barring on the chest region and black belly. The under wing with black underwing coverts separated from lighter brownish-grey secondaries by prominent white band extending to the carpal area and silver grey black tipped primaries as described by Naorji (2006) confirmed it to be the Black Baza. This is the first confirmed sighting and



Images 2–4. 2 - Black Baza perching on a *Syzygium cumini* tree; 3 - Black breast band below the white gorget in a Black Baza; 4 - The Black baza sighted during April 2017 with clear crest and white gorget

photographic record of the species from the region, though an earlier unconfirmed sighting on 05 January 2008 exists from Nokedanocha, Upper Barakamura range of Similipal Tiger Reserve, where a solitary bird was fleetingly glimpsed in flight between the canopy of dense evergreen forest. Subsequently, on 18 April 2015, 13:37hr a bird was spotted perching on a *Syzygium cumini* tree on the Gupteswar main road a few hundred metres away from the area of the previous sighting. With its distinct black crest, black body with white blotches on the flight feathers (Image 2) and white gorget on the breast (Image 3), it was conclusively identified to be a Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*. It was observed to be using the same tree by changing different perches for around a minute and then flew off into the forest. The third sighting was on 29 May 2015. The bird was observed around 08:10hr perching on a *Terminalia alata* tree a few meters off the Gupteswar main road, after which it flew off to another tree nearby and was lost in the dense foliage. After about two minutes, it flew out of it and went on to perch on a *Pterocarpus marsupium* tree around 100m away from the previous perch for around 2–3 minutes and then flew off deep inside the forest. During 2016 the species was observed in April and June and during 2017 it was observed during April and May from the same area (Image 4). Nesting has not been traced however and it may be due to inadequate survey efforts.

Gupteswar PRF with moist deciduous forest type spreads over an area of 116.5940ha in the Gupteswar Range in Jeypore Forest Division of Koraput district in the southern part of Odisha. It is separated from the neighbouring state of Chattisgarh by the river Saberi and is a part of the Eastern Ghats of Odisha. This region is known to house many wet zone / discontinuously distributed bird species like Malabar Trogon, Jerdon's Baza, Heart-spotted Woodpecker and Brown-cheeked Fulvetta (through personal observation) of which the sighting of the Black Baza is quite significant as it is known

to have disjunct range in the Indian subcontinent (Naoroji 2006; Grimmett et al. 2011; Manakadan et al. 2011). Abdulali & Ambedkar (1965) reported the collection of a tattered specimen of Black Baza by H.V. Blackburn from Bastar District of Chattisgarh in April 1936. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) describe it to be a passage migrant over Odisha as it is mainly known to breed in the northeast and wintering in the south. It has been observed to be breeding in northern Bengal (Sivakumar & Prakash 2005). The sightings at Gupteswar for around two months and particularly during the breeding season indicate that there may be a breeding population of this species in the region; however, it requires to be confirmed through further surveys. Further studies on its distribution and ecology can help in identifying the breeding population if present in the region. Black Baza being a Schedule-I species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, such studies could suggest better management strategies for its protection, as Gupteswar Forest is not under the protected area network.

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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online); ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

November 2017 | Vol. 9 | No. 11 | Pages: 10865–10984

Date of Publication: 26 November 2017 (Online & Print)

DOI: 10.11609/jott.2017.9.11.10865-10984

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