

First report of Rufous-bellied Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii* (E. Geoffroy, 1835) from Chhattisgarh, India

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ABSTRACT

Rufous-bellied Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii* is essentially a forest dependent, specialist having preference for mainly mature forest. It has a staggered distribution in India as the populations are very disjunct. It is not common but is more widespread than believed previously. This study reports Rufous-bellied Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii* (E. Geoffroy, 1835) from Chhattisgarh, India.

Key words: Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii*, Chhattisgarh.

INTRODUCTION

Rufous-bellied Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii* is essentially a forest dependent, specialist having preference for mainly mature forest. It has a staggered distribution in India as the populations are very disjunct. It is not common but is more widespread than believed previously. Possibly not rare but naturally the species occurs in low density wherever documented (Naoroji 2011). However, this species and similar species (Hiragond, N.C. 2014) has been unreported from Central India till date (Chandra & Singh 2004, D'Cunha & Ali 2001, Chandra *et al.*, 2015). Later on two sightings were recorded from Kanha National Park and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve both of which are located in the state of Madhya Pradesh in the central Indian highlands of the Deccan Peninsula. However there have been no photographic documentations of the earlier sight records (D'Cunha, pers. Comm, 2015).

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The present short note describes and records the first photographic evidence of the occurrence of Rufous-bellied Eagle sighted from two locations (18° 52' 27" N & 81° 55' 26" E) and (18° 51' 54" N & 81° 56' 04" E) on left side of the Kanger Dhara River roughly at 1.5Km distance apart on different dates (winter - 19th January 2014 at 14:02hr and summer - 03rd April 2015 at 07:42hr) in Kanger Valley National Park, Bastar district of Chhattisgarh.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

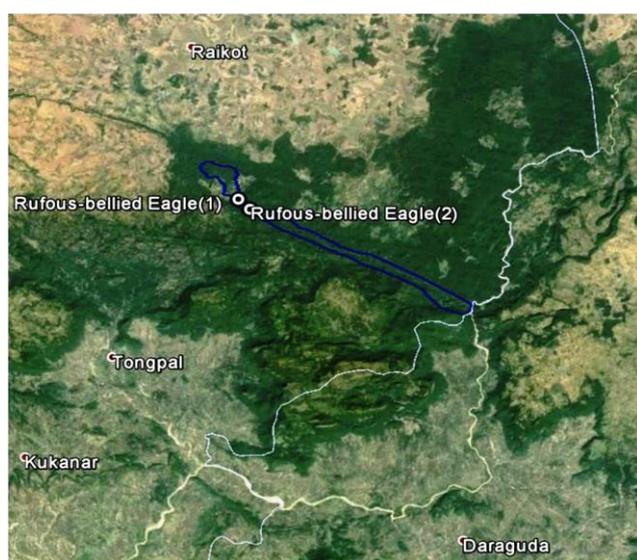
Study site:

The Kanger Valley National Park was declared by the Government of India in 1982 and name derived from the Kanger River located at 18° 45' 0" N & 82° 10' 0" E. It is about 30Km away from Jagdalpur city towards south-east direction (Figure-1). The National Park is a long stretch of 34Km, spreading over an area of approximately 200Km². The landscape is highly heterogeneous and has hilly terrain - with low flat, gentle areas to steep slopes, plateaus, valleys, subterranean dissolution geomorphologic limestone caves and intersected with rivers and streams. The diverse habitats of the National Park help to sustain a large variety of flora and fauna as well and considered to be a hotspot of biodiversity in Central India. Most part of the National Park is Sal forest, *Shorea robusta* with Saja tree, *Terminalia tomentosa* as co-species. However, the National Park is very interesting and peculiar as it is in the transition zone from Teak forest *Tectona grandis* to Sal forest

Shorea robusta, highlighting the aspects of the ecological succession.

The two forest types, viz. the Sal forest and the Teak forest, merge into one another forming an ecotone. The park has several temperate plant species including *Mallotus philippensis* and several fern species like the tree fern, *Cyathia spinulosa*. Ground flora is dominated by *Curcuma sp.* and *Amorphophallus poenifolius*. *Eupatorium odoratum* is the most prominent exotic, invasive plant species with more abundant in the periphery of the National Park.

Figure-1. Map of sighting records of Rufous-bellied Eagle in KVNP



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the faunal diversity aspect the number of large mammals seems to be low, while the numbers of birds and butterflies seems to be good and diversified which needs special attention for further scientific studies and conservation specially for the first record to Central India viz. Black-naped Oriole, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird (Chandra *et al.*, 2015) and rare bird species viz. Rufous-bellied Eagle, White-bellied Drongo and the endangered bird species; *Gracula religiosa peninsularis*, locally called as hill myna or the Bastar myna.

On 14th January 2014, one individual Rufous-bellied Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii* was sighted flying (Figure-2) on the left side of the Kanger River. On 3rd April 2015, encountered second sighting (Figure-3) of possibly the same individual perching after a short flight on the branch of a tall tree and turned around revealing the back and upper parts which has been photographed and video-graphed from the left side of the same river about 1.5Km downstream. The two

sighting events revealed most of the morphological characters helpful for identification. On flight and perching following characters were observed – the lower breast, belly, thighs and undertail-coverts were deep rufous-chestnut, belly and flanks were streaked. Blackish patch on flanks were also visible. Below flight feathers were pale greyish-white, outer primaries tipped blackish.

Figure-2. First sighted an Individual Rufous-bellied Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii* flying on the left side of the Kanger River.



The individual was observed gliding and soaring on flight above the canopy of the forest on first encounter event. While on second encounter event the individual perched on the tree after a short flight and turned around. The head and upper part seemed black, flight feathers black-brownish, chin, throat and upper breast pure white streaked black on breast and sides of neck. Legs and feet were yellow as observed in the field and confirmed from photographs and the reference (Naoroji 2011 and Grimmert *et al.* 2011).

Figure-2. Second sighted picture of Rufous-bellied Eagle, *Hieraaetus kienerii* perched on the branch of a tall tree



The two sighting records of the Rufous-bellied Eagle along the drainage of Kanger Dhara River in the Kanger Valley National Park emphasise to incorporate this area into the global distribution map of the species. The present habitat is contiguous to the same habitat and forest type of Eastern Ghats in northern part of Andhra Pradesh and Southern part of Odisha which has remained as unconfirmed ranges for the species. It further suggest the need to incorporated a fresh extrapolation of its new ranges with confirmed ranges of Himalaya, Gangetic plain, Deccan Peninsula (Eastern Ghats), Western Ghats and North Eastern zones.

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ONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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