

Amur Falcons



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Chandan Kumar Duarah 31 October 2013 16416 views

Wildflowers, the birdwatchers' group of Centre for Conservation, Education and Research, counted more than two thousand Amur Falcons at Borbori in Morigaon district on October 29th. The bird arrived in Morigaon district last week and could be seen perching on the High Transmission wires. Thousands of the migratory Amur Falcons have arrived for roosting at hilly forest terrains of Karbi Anglong and Morigaon districts on their way from Mongolia, north China and Siberia to Africa. Mubina Akhtar, a conservation activist and director of CCER says "The Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*), formerly known as Eastern Red-footed Falcon, is a small raptor of the falcon family and this is for the firsttime that bird watchers counted them in such large numbers in this part of Assam. Wildflowers counted about 2000 Amurs at Borbori and Nellie in Morigaon district on 25 October. The number is increasing by the day."

These falcons arrived here from the second week of October. Initially, around 50-60 birds were sighted but the numbers have gone up to a couple of thousands now. Their numbers would peak as more flocks are expected to arrive, the locales say as has been the ritual that they had been witnessing for years now. During 2001, members of Green Guard had first recorded some birds near Morigaon in Assam. The Amur Falcon annual migration route of over 22,000 kilometres includes an amazing transoceanic flight of over 3,000 kilometres during the outbound journey from Asia to Africa across the Indian Ocean. It breeds in south-eastern Siberia and Northern China, wintering in Southern countries of Africa. Its diet consists mainly of insects, such as termites. Males are characteristically dark blue. Females may offer a bit more confusion with a wider range of falcons as they have a typical falcon head pattern. The female has barring on the lower belly. Red cere and feet rule out all other falcons. For juveniles, red feet should restrict ID to the Amur and Red-footed group, and the darker crown and lack of buff all the way up the belly rules out Western Red-footed Falcon. Females and juveniles lack the buff underwing coverts of Red-footed Falcon.

Wildflowers is working to provide safe passage to the bird in Assam with the help of local people, nature lovers and government departments. Last year CCER (Center for Conservation Education and Research) urged Nagaland conservationists to take measures to stop mass killing of Amurs in Doyang. Every year, more than 100,000 Amur Falcons are hunted for meat at Nagaland during their passage between breeding and wintering grounds. The publication of the report of the killings of Amur Falcons in Doyang last year caused widespread outrage and several initiatives have been taken to protect the species. Unlike earlier seasons, this year, there has been no such report of mass killing as local protection groups and village councils are enforcing resolutions to save these birds. Wildflowers has appreciated Naga civil societies for their initiative to save the bird.

After one and half month Amurs will fly away to their final winter-destination in Africa and come back in May, 2014.

Chandan Kumar Duarah

The writer is a former Robert Bosch Fellow, an environmentalist and Guwahati based journalist.

BY CHANDAN KUMAR DUARAH

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