



NOTES ON NATURAL HISTORY

Egyptian Vulture Nesting on Power Transmission Tower, Chhattisgarh, India

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Study Area: Durg, Chhattisgarh, India
Coordinated: 21.4476 N, 81.4582 E

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Key words: Habitat, Rare sighting, Endangered species

Our survey:

It was in the year 2005, after the devastation of vulture population caused by diclofenac, we were fortunate to have sighted 11 Egyptian vultures, feeding on poultry waste, at Chandibhata tank (21.4476 N, 81.4582 E) of Berla block of Durg district, Raipur. This congregation of vultures consisted of adults and juveniles. The presence of juveniles raised curiosity and since then we have been searching their nesting sites at and around the place, where they were regularly seen in varying numbers in subsequent visits. The concentration of the species is in Durg, Rajnandgaon, Kabeerdham, Raipur, Balodabazar, Koriya and Bilaspur districts. This species is classified in the category Endangered by Birdlife International- IUCN (Rahmani *et al.*, 2018). The most populated is the Durg district.

The search was continued and in the year 2015, we counted 15 nests on Power Transmission Towers in Raipur district, but closer observations revealed that these nests belonged to Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*). One of the nests was suspected to be of Egyptian vulture but it remained unconfirmed. More searches were continued in a cluster of 8 Power transmission tower lines passing through a corridor of 2 km width, here old nests were seen in the month of March but Egyptian Vultures were not found around. Previously a nest of Egyptian vulture was found on a microwave tower in front of our residence at Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh in the year 1995 and we were aware that this species is reported to nest/ roost on towers in Gujarat. (Rahmani *et al.*, 2014).

Our team visited the parts of Rajnandgaon district, Chhattisgarh on 28 March 2021, for the purpose of a random bird watch. At village Baldevpur, 6 km before Khairagarh town on Durg-Khairagarh highway we noticed a nest on a power transmission tower located at some distance from the road. The tower was found located inside fenced

farmland. On approaching the tower, 31.9 m in height, we saw a nest built on it at a height of 15 m from the ground (Plate-1). The owner of the farm has built a small house on campus and permitted our entry rather reluctantly, after knowing our purpose of visit. Soon an Egyptian vulture was observed arriving and alighted close to the nest. Promptly a chick raised its head from inside of the nest and was fed by the adult bird (Clip-1). We remained at the spot for about 4 hours and during this period the feeding of the chick was repeated twice. The nest was built using twigs and a few green leaves.

The owner of the land mentioned that the nest is existing on this particular tower for the last 3 to 4 years and every year the nesting is done by the Egyptian Vultures. Two years back a person was caught stealing an egg from the nest for the black magic purpose since then the entry of any person is checked by him and no one is permitted to enter the campus and particularly the tower area.

Owing to the imposition of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic for some time. The site was visited on 29 and 30 May 2021. By this time, the chick had grown into a juvenile and kept more or less close to the nest, but it was observed being fed by parents. In the next visit on 30 June 2021 - no vultures adult or juvenile were seen suggesting the end of nesting and that the birds had left. The feeding behaviour was recorded in videos (3) which shows that the adult was feeding solid matter to the chick, whereas in videos the chick was pecking the bills of adults. It was possibly demanding food or maybe water, a few drops of liquid was noticed dropping from the bill of an adult. The site was revisited on 21 February 2022 and the birds were found present at the tower one of them was inside the nest, confirming repeated nesting at the same location and use of the same nest year after year.

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Plate-1: a) Location of the transmission tower, b) location of nest in the tower, c) Vulture in the nest, d) Vulture feeding its offspring in the nest. (for clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcQGD3h9ZEI>)

Remarks:

The species is known to nest on cliffs, tall trees, abandoned forts and ruins and their nesting period is from February to May (Ali & Ripley 1987, Grimmett *et al.*, 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012; Rahmani *et al.*, 2014).

It is thus evident that in absence of known nesting places, the Egyptian vultures have adopted power transmission towers for the purpose of nesting.

References:

Clip- 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcQGD3h9ZEI>

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