



THE INDIAN BLACK EAGLE

ARRCN INDIAN BLACK EAGLE PROJECT



The flying symbol of the Oriental forest

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) is the only species of the genus *Ictinaetus* in the Family Accipitridae. It is a very specialized eagle, in that it has large, long wings with deeply emarginated primaries, but its body weight is very light compared to true eagles. In addition, it has long, slender, and quite-straight inner and middle claws, and very short outer claws. The function of this particular structure is not yet clear.

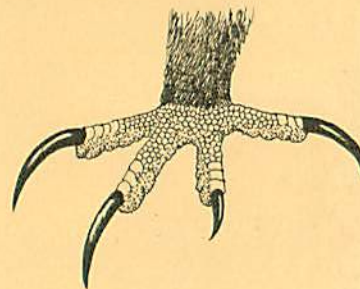


Flying above natural forest

Photo: W.H. Lin



Photo: S.C. Dai



DISTRIBUTION

The Indian Black Eagle's global distribution is confined to the Oriental region of Asia, from the Himalayas to India, Sri Lanka, Indochina, and the Malay Peninsula, extending southward to the Indonesia Archipelago and eastward to southern China and Taiwan. Although it is widespread and not globally threatened, in most areas its populations are uncommon to rare. The main threat it faces is loss of suitable forest habitats.



HABITAT

Throughout its range, the Indian Black Eagle is basically found in mountain forests from the foothills to about 2700 meters in elevation. Although natural forests comprise its main type of habitat, it can adapt and has a fairly wide niche breadth in various countries and zones where it is found. It sometimes ventures into lowland hills very close to human agricultural activities. It can endure a certain degree of forest fragmentation and human disturbance.

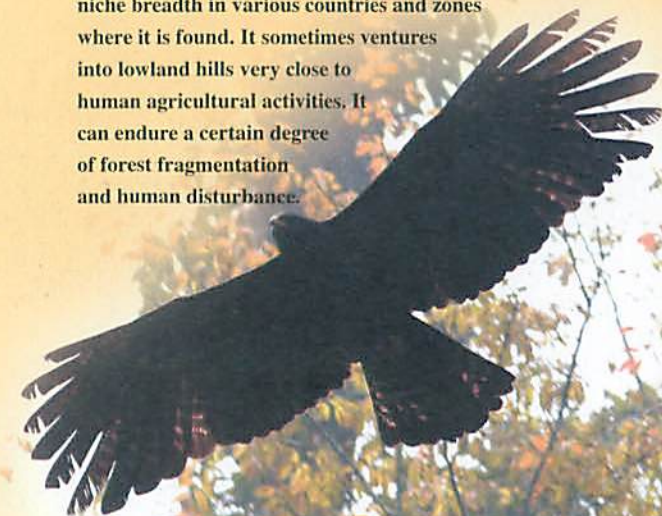


Photo: W.H. Lin

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Although widespread in Asia, little was known about this species until recent years. From 2001 to 2005, ARRCN conducted the collaborative project, the Indian Black Eagle Project (IBEP), among researchers in Asian countries including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Taiwan. The purpose of the IBEP is to accumulate ecological data in order to enhance understanding of this species so as to promote its conservation. Through such efforts, we hope that this magnificent and elegant eagle can soar freely above Asian forests forever.



Project meeting in Taipei, 2001

Photo: T. Murate

ARRCN INDIAN BLACK EAGLE PROJECT
Website: <http://raptor.org.tw/ibep/>

Country coordinators:

India Ashok Verma vermaasok@rediffmail.com

Indonesia Adam A. Supriatna adams@indo.net.id

Malaysia Lim Kim Chye keyian@tm.net.my

Taiwan Wen-Horn Lin wenhorn@cm1.hinet.net



HUNTING METHODS & FOOD

The Indian Black Eagle is a specialized "slow glider". It glides very slowly and very low above the forest canopy. Such a manner of flying enhances its careful search for prey. Once prey is spotted, the eagle swoops down and grasps it with amazing agility. In habitats with cave-roosting animals, it sometimes flies into the mouth of a cave and takes either bats or swiftlets with ease.



Carrying a rat
Photo: W.H. Lin

Its diet includes mammals up to the size of large rats, squirrels, flying squirrels, and roosting bats as well as bird nestlings and eggs, reptiles, snakes, and roosting swiftlets.

Most prey the eagle hunts are resting or roosting. The most-specialized hunting method utilized by the eagle is its "nest robbing" ability. The eagle is not only good at robbing bird nests of nestlings and eggs they contain, but is also adept at seizing certain arboreal mammals which sleep in nests in the daytime such as some flying squirrels and rats.



Pellet with bird egg shells

Photo: W.H. Lin

BREEDING



A nest in northern Taiwan

Photo: RRG

The Indian Black Eagle carries out an aerial undulating display flight year round, but it is seen more frequently in the breeding season when it may make more than 100 undulations in a single run. The nest is built high in a tall tree on a forested slope. It often utilizes huge tree ferns as the base of the nest structure. Pairs often maintain several good nests for years, using them in turn. One egg is laid (two occasionally). The female takes care of the chick, and the male hunts for the entire family when the chick is small. When the nestling has grown larger, both parents go out hunting. The parents still bring food to the eaglet for several months after it can fly. The pairs remain together year round.

