



Habitat:



A juvenile perching on a branch at sunrise in the steppe country

Habitat: Vast grassland steppe country; also semi-arid and arid regions. Winter in a variety of habitats such as mountains, forests, grasslands, semi-arid areas, river banks and coasts from sea level to 3600 m asl.

Habit: Perch on ground or on trees. Keep in flocks. Affect garbage dumps.

Distribution: Breeding range is SE Europe, S Russia, C Asia, SE Siberia, Tibet, NE China and Mongolia.

Status: In entire India, a winter migrant from October to March. Cross the Himalayas through passes and valleys of Arun, Doodh Koshi and Kali Gandki rivers. In the entire Indian subcontinent except in Sri Lanka.



The steppe habitat in Russia - the breeding grounds of the Steppe Eagle



Perching on a lamp shade in India - the wintering grounds of the Steppe Eagle

Food:



A Viper cached in the nest



Siberian Zokor *Myospalax myospalax*



Yellow Ground squirrel *Spermophilus fulvus*



Long-tailed Ground Squirrel *S. undulatus*



Mongolian Pika *Ochotona pallasi*



Suslik

Steppe Eagles are a carnivorous in habit. Soar and dive at prey by stooping. Also ambush prey near burrows. Eat Suslik, Siberian Zokor, Mongolian Pika, Long-tailed and Yellow Ground Squirrels, marmot, reptiles (viper, lizards), birds and insects (winged termites). Scavenge on garbage dumps for carrion.

Key Features:



The tarsi are fully feathered



The nictating membrane is closed; the wide gape reaches the rear margin of eye



The beak is yellow distally dark at the base



Inner wing



Note the upper wing and tail pattern in flight



Gradual change in the plumage of the young from three to seven weeks

- Deep brown to buff brown plumage of adults.
- Rufous patch on nape.
- Two pale bars on upper and under wings. Barred tail.
- Wings with white trailing edge, best seen in flight. White rump patch.
- Prominent wide gape reaches the posterior margin of eyes.
- Oval nostrils.
- Iris hazel - dark brown. Cere yellow. Bill black.
- Legs and feet yellow.
- Female larger than male.



A brancher exercising its wings

Phenology:



An adult incubating on the stick nest



Two eggs



Nest with broken egg shell



Hatchling



One week old chick



Two weeks old chick with dark tinge in plumage



Three to four weeks old nestlings in the ground nest



Ringed at six weeks



Seven weeks old chicks lying low in the nest



A brancher in near-adult plumage

Related species:

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Indian Spotted Eagle (*A. hastata*), Greater Spotted Eagle (*A. clanga*), Imperial Eagle (*A. heliaca*).

Alarming and Amazing Facts:



Pellet and feather



Mobbed by a Jungle Crow

Once abundant in the breeding range, the populations of this beautiful eagle are rapidly declining due to human interference. It needs urgent protection. During dives it can reach a speed of over 250 km per hour!



Asynchronous hatching is evident by plumage differences of chicks



Chick with a green ring



A young with metal ring in the right leg and coloured ring in the left leg exhibiting threat display

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* Hodgson, 1833.

Type locality: Nepal.

Local names: *Jumiz* (Hindi); *Cong au* (Lepcha).



- **Size:** 76-80 cm.
- **Average weight:** 3060 g.
- **Wing:** Male 510 -595 mm; Female 602 -625 mm.
- **Wing span:** 6.5 to 7 feet.
- **Breeding season:** March - June.
- **Clutch:** 2 to 4 eggs. Hatch in 45 d.
- **Fledging period:** 50 - 65 days.
- **Eggs:** White. Blotched with brown. Broad oval. 77.1 mm x 61.7 mm. (Baker).
- **Average life span:** 40 years in captivity.
- **Call:** Raucous barks. Silent in winter.



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Flight:

Wings flapping, gliding, soaring and diving.



Nest:



Stick nest on the ground



Nest amidst rocks in the steppes



Nest in the fork of a tree



Nest on a discarded pylon

In steppe country on ground, hillocks, rocks, abandoned houses, trees, poles and pylons. Nest is made of sticks, rags, plastic, paper, camel dung, etc.



Nest on boulders



Nest on a gentle rise in steppes



Nest on a live electric pole and an electrocuted eagle



Ground nests are at risk

THREATS: Persecution, habitat loss due to increasing agriculture, urbanization and electrocution are major threats. Steppe fire and pesticide poisoning are other threats. The populations are presently rapidly declining throughout the breeding range in Russia and Kazakhstan. It has disappeared from Romania, Moldova and Ukraine.



In the steppe country for field study



Nestlings in transit for ringing! Colour codes - ringing protocol



Economic importance and conservation:

Steppe Eagle is a flagship species of the Steppe habitats. Electrocutions can be reduced by the use of insulating devices. It is recommended that it should be included in the Red Data Book. It is protected by law and in winter grounds in India occurs in several protected areas. International cooperation, education of common man and protection of habitats are important conservation measures. Listed in App. II CITES and CMS.

Cultural aspects:



It features on the flag of Kazakhstan and is the national bird of Egypt. Military exercises in Kazakhstan are named "Steppe Eagle", where it has a special cultural significance as a symbol of power. Sadly, it is trapped for use in falconry.

Etymology

Aquila (L), an eagle; *nipalensis* (L), of Nepal, from where it was first described. (Pande, Satish. 2009).

STEPPE EAGLE

- **Order:** Falconiformes
- **Family:** Accipitridae
- **Status:** Winter Migrant.

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Conservation Through Education & Research

Based on photographs and field research by Dr. Igor Karyakin and Dr. Elvira Nikolenko (Nizhny Novgorod branch of the Russian Bird Conservation Union; Siberian Environmental Center, Russia) and Dr. Satish Pande and Kiran Ghadge, Ela Foundation, India.