



A pair at sunrise roosting on the topmost perches of a tall tree



Red-necked Falcon keeps the crows at bay by intermittent attacks, when it has taken a crow's nest by evicting the rightful owners.



Chicken - in this case dressed, is a common food item.

Habit: The Red-necked Falcon is an arboreal and aerial crepuscular bird. Lives and hunts in pairs. Flight is fast and straight. It is capable of hovering.

Distribution: India upto Himalayan foothills and terrai; Nepal, Pakistan and BanglaDesh. South of Sahara in Africa.

Habitat: Keeps to plain country with deciduous vegetation, hilly terrain, agricultural cropland with groves, semiarid open scrub country and villages. Avoids forests.

Behaviour: Resident falcon with seasonal movements that are not studied. Swiftly chases crows, kites and other raptors that venture near its nest. Shrill call is uttered during such frantic chase. Utters shrill and piercing screams *ki ki ki ki*, with different calls, grates and trills for other occasions. Female feeds the male during the breeding season.

Food:

Small birds like sparrow, bulbul, warblers, larks, sparrow-larks, bushchat, doves, shrikes, crakes, wagtails, kingfisher, ring plover, pipits, starlings, cuckoos, swallows, martins, pipistrellus bats, etc. Takes small bats on the wing at dusk when they emerge from their diurnal haunts. Habitually lift poultry. Likes to drink water and rarely runs on ground to chase insects mice and lizards. Food is often brought before dawn and after dusk. Rarely kleptoparasitic.

Identification Features:

- 1st and 4th primary subequal. 2nd and 3rd primary subequal.
- Crown and cheek stripe chestnut.
- Bill plumbeous, dark tipped.
- Iris brown.
- Cere, orbital skin, legs and feet yellow.



- Claws black.
- Tail broad with black sub-terminal band.
- Thinly barred abdomen and flanks.
- Sickle-shaped aerodynamic wings.



Male begging for food and female with prey



Breeding Phenology:



A clutch of 4 eggs.



4 days old chicks.



2 weeks old.



3 weeks old.



4 weeks old.



Five to six weeks old chicks are practising wing flapping.



Parent feeding entrails to branchers.



Cultural Aspects:

In ancient India this falcon was esteemed by falconers as it hunts in pairs, is easily trained and is obedient. It took birds as large as partridges. In ancient Egypt, Horus, was the falcon-headed god of sun, war and protection and was associated with the Pharaohs.

Related Falcons:

Common Kestrel, Shaheen and Laggar Falcon are residents . The Peregrine, Eurasian Hobby and Merlin are migrants. Red-legged Falcon is extra-limital and is not recorded from India.



Merlin



Common Kestrel



Laggar Falcon



Amur Falcon



Peregrine Falcon



Red-legged Falcon



Shaheen Falcon

Etymology:



Falco chicquera : Late Latin *Falco*, a falcon (L. *falx*, a sickle), wings are sickle shaped. French *Le Chicquera* (from Hindi Shikara or Shikar, a hunt), given by Levaillant in 1799 (1753-1824). Pronounced as Shikara. Levaillant disapproved of Linnean system of classification and gave French names to his discoveries.

Sanskrit name – **Vegi** - One fast in flight or speedy.

Threats:

Falcon's habit of taking poultry attracts wrath of humans and hence this falcon is poisoned or shot. Habitat loss, use of pesticides and tree felling negatively affect falcon's survival. Electrocutation due to adaptive response of nesting on electric pylons is another threat.



Nest on a mobile phone transmission tower



Tree felling for firewood is detrimental



A poultry chick in talons of the falcon



Proximity to electric wires is hazardous

FACT FILE: Red-necked Falcon (Red-headed Falcon)

Falco chicquera Daudin, 1800. Type Locality – Bengal.
Races – *F. c. chicquera* in Asia and *F.c.ruficollis* in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Turmati (Hindi); **Turumati sasana** (Marathi); **Turumthi** (Gujarathi); **Chatwa** (Sind); **Lal siri turmati** (Punjabi); **Jelgadda** (Telugu); **Jelkat** (Yerukali).

- **Length** – 310 - 360 mm.
- **Wing** – 190 - 207 mm. (M); 220 - 232 mm. (F)
- **Weight** – 139 -178 g (M); 190 - 305 g (F).
- **Sexual Maturity** – Two years.
- **Breeding Season** – January to June.
- **Clutch** – 3 - 4 eggs once a year
- **Egg size** – 42.4 x 31.1 mm. Long oval.
- **Egg colour:** Pale, red to brown blotched.
- **Incubation** – Both sexes. 33 - 34 days.
- **Life Span** – About 14 years.



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Red-necked Falcon

- **Order:** Falconiiformes • **Family:** Falconidae
- **Status:** Resident

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Amazing Facts

The falcons are some of the fastest flying birds in the world. They swipe carnal prey like wild birds from mid air, when pairs attack in collaboration. The peculiar shape of the wings makes them ideal living flight machines.



Attacking like lightning to lift prey from the ground



A young falconer is boldly defending an attacking Indian Grey Hornbill

Nest site:

In a fork of eucalyptus, mango, tamarind, ficus (banyan or peepul), Borassus Palm, Raintree or Christmas tree in or near human occupation. On man made structures like electric transmission towers and pylons; 5 - 10 m up.

Nest:

Platform or cup made of twigs, sticks, wires lined with grass and rootlets. Falcons take old or occupied nests of crows by evicting the rightful owners. This causes frequent encounters with crows. Also occupies old nests of Black Kites.

Brood:

Usually 2 chicks from a clutch of 3 - 4 eggs. Nestlings take care of one another and are not mutually aggressive.

The Wonderful Life of the Nestlings:



Observing the surroundings



The attack pose



Stretching the wings



Preening



Flexing leg and toes



Scratching the head



Yawning;



Altruism - At noon, offering shade to the sibling under its belly

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