



Shaheen Falcon on a cliff top and at a nest located in the ledge of a cliff in Western Ghats.

**Habitat:**

Mountains and foothills in peninsular India, including the Western Ghats. In Himalayas up to 2400 m. Also near coasts.

**Distribution:**

In north India in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab to Uttar Pradesh. Assam and few NE states to Kerala in peninsular India; Andaman and Nicobar Islands; Nepal; Ceylon; Myanmar; Pakistan and E. China.

**Status:**

Resident. Uncommon.



Three young at a nest site on the top of a building.

**Various prey species are shown below:**



Birds are hunted in mid air. Pigeons, francolins, quails, egret, iora, parakeet, babbler, etc. Small bats, frogs, rodents, shrews, lizards and large insects. Hunt at dawn and dusk but also during the day during the breeding season.



Adult in the nest with two Cattle Egrets and chicks

**Key Features:**



Front, oblique and side views of the head of an adult Shaheen



The long powerful toes of an adult are clearly seen



Rufous un-barred chest and belly. Bold moustachial stripe and yellow eye ring

- Crown slate-black.
- Typical moustache-like dark cheek stripes.
- Cheek stripe broader than eye.
- Iris light brown.
- Lacks collar; Rufous chest.
- Feet yellowish; Talons dark.
- Pointed long sickle-shaped wings.
- 7th primary longer than 10th
- Dark tail faintly barred; pale tips.
- Sexes similar, except female being larger than the male.

**Breeding Phenology**



Eggs laid in a shallow saucer



Adult approaching the clutch



Incubating



Parent; Chicks - 1 week



3 to 4 weeks old chicks fed by the parent; They are dependent on parents till well after fledging



Chicks - 4 to 5 weeks with parent



Chicks 5 to 6 weeks



Juvenile 7 weeks



Juveniles before fledging



Recently fledged young

**Cultural Aspects:**



As per the ancient Indian Vedic literature, the falcon is said to have procured the divine nectar of immortality from unapproachable high cliffs for gods. The falcon is admired by public because of its admirable flight speed. In India, it was used for falconry till the sport was banned by law. It often featured in traditional art.

**Etymology:**

*Falco*: a sickle, describing the sickle-shaped pointed wings; *peregrinus*: the wanderer. (Pande, Satish 2010).

**Related Species:**



Barbary Falcon *F. p. babylonicus*



Peregrine Falcon *F. p. calidus* in front and side views. The Barbary and the Peregrine falcons are winter visitors to India



**Behavior:**

Male feeds the spouse during breeding season. Come to ground to drink water and to bathe, usually at the same time every morning. Perform aerobatics and indulge in playful stoops on other birds. Falcons are sometimes mobbed by crows to steal prey from them, at times forcing them to part with it.



Parent warming the chicks    Parent feeding the young    The nest becomes dirty due to fecal droppings, pellets and prey remains

**THREATS:**

Illegal trapping to meet the demands of the secret trade for use in falconry in the Middle East countries. Falcons are smuggled out of India and are sold at high prices. It is still trapped for pet trade. Habitat loss due to mining. Natural catastrophes like land-slides can destroy existing nest sites. In case of nests on electric pylons or mobile towers, there is a risk of electrocution or nest removal. The peregrine was once threatened due to use of pesticides like DDT. Today, in India, the Shaheen is an uncommon raptor. Scientific studies are few.

**Conservation:**

Included in Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act. Protection of known nesting sites and strict punishment for wild life traders are effective conservation measures.

**FACT FILE: Shaheen Falcon**  
*Falco peregrines peregrinator* Sundevall, 1837

**Type locality:** At sea between Ceylon and Sumatra = 700 km off the Nicobars. Kamorta.

**Shahi Sasana** (Marathi); **Kohi (M); Kohila (F)** Hindi; **Krulla goya** (Sinhala); **Vulluru** (Tamil); **Karimpullu** (Malyalam).

- **Status:** Resident.
- **Size:** 38 – 46 cm.
- **Wing:** 265 – 295 mm (Male); 312 – 342 mm (Female).
- **Bill:** 25 to 27 mm.
- **Tarsus:** 48 – 50 mm. (Male). 28 – 29 mm (Female).
- **Tail:** 128 – 162 mm.
- **Middle toe with talon:** 53 – 55 mm (Male); 60 – 63 mm (Female).
- **Breeding season:** January to April.
- **Clutch:** 3 – 4 eggs per year.
- **Egg:** Pale brick-red with dark blotches. 51.8 x 40.7 mm (Baker).
- **Incubation:** 27 to 29 d. By female.
- **Fledging:** After 47 d.
- **Post-fledging dependence:** Up to 1 year.
- **Call:** Loudly vocal *Chirrr, ki, kii, kii* calls when intruders approach the nest.



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**Shaheen Falcon**

• **Order:** Falconiformes • **Family:** Falconidae • **Status:** Resident

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**Flight**



**Rare glimpses of the behavior of adult Shaheen Falcon !**



**The amazing life of the young !**



**Display:**

Vocal aerial display in breeding season when male feeds the female on wings. Spectacular dives, plunges, loops, twists and turns are executed in mid air at tremendous speed. It is capable of landing on a narrow ledge in a verticle cliff in well executed flight manœuvre, where as an airplane needs a long run way to land!!

**Nest:**

In natural crevices or holes in vertical cliffs or on inaccessible narrow ledges; exceptional nest in tree. Platform made of sticks and lined with grass or wool; but also unlined. Often nest on the same cliff face with vultures or Common Kestrel. Recently on electric pylons, transmission towers for mobile-phones and platforms or ledges of high rise buildings.

**Amazing Facts:**

Fresh carnal feathered prey is taken on the wings at great speed. Shaheen, a race of the Peregrine Falcon, one of our fastest flyers, stoops on avian prey as if like lightening. Easily lands with food at the nest on the narrow ledge by controlling high speed, in an act of astonishing flight control. We have recorded the Shaheen attacking a peafowl when it came near the nest.

Satish Pande, Vaibhav Deshmukh, Pravin Kawale, Vishwas Joshi and Prashant Deshpande did field research for over 10 years.

Sponsored By:  
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