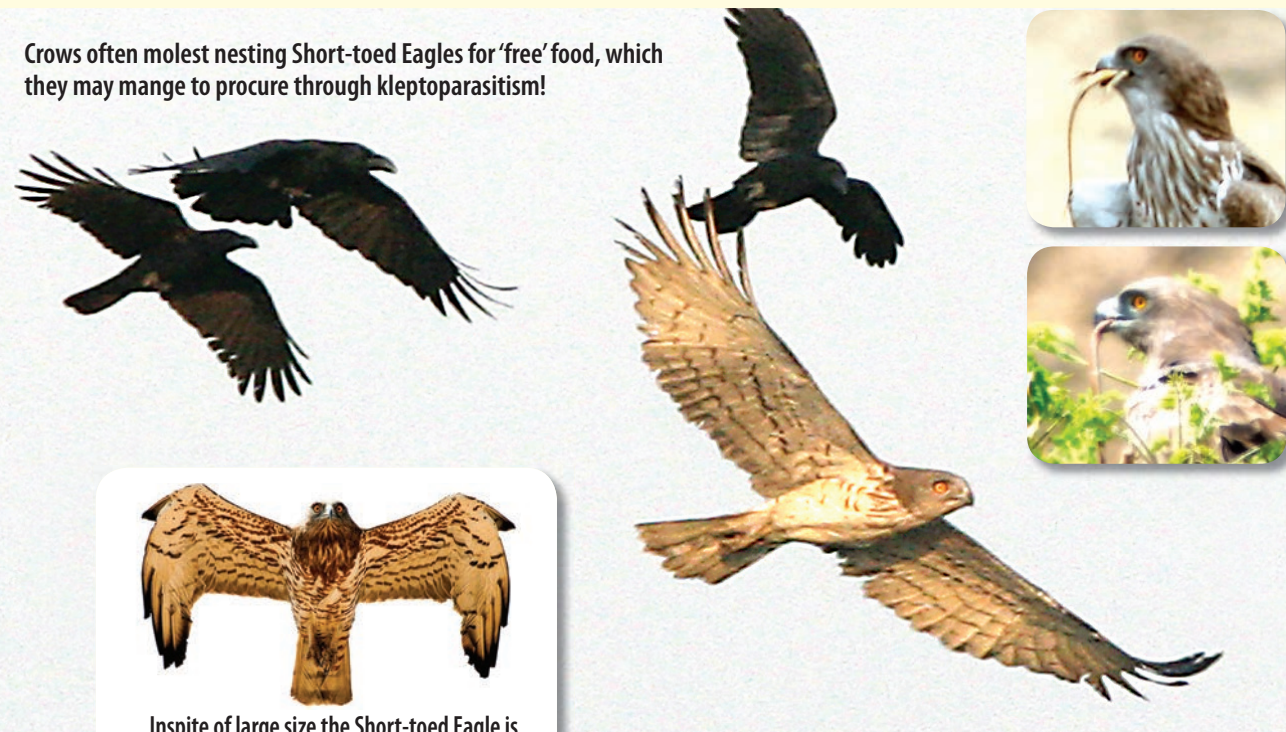




A pair of Short-toed Eagles on an *Acacia* tree in a scrubland, a typical habitat of this snake eagle.

- **Habitat:** Open scrub, semi-arid hilly country, near cropland, away from human habitation. Also near marshes.
- **Distribution:** In India up to 2300 m in Himalayas. Central Europe to Mongolia and North China. South to North Africa.
- **Status:** Resident. Common. In winter, northern populations probably migrate to India.

Crows often molest nesting Short-toed Eagles for 'free' food, which they may mangle to procure through kleptoparasitism!



In spite of large size the Short-toed Eagle is capable of hovering.

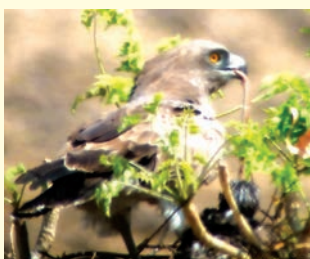


The tail of a Common Calotes (Garden Lizard) found under an active nest of a Short-toed Eagle.

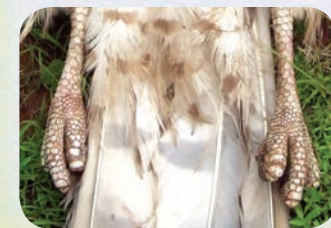
- **Food:** Mainly snakes (cobra, sand snakes, rat snakes, Checkered Keelback, Saw-scaled Viper, Russel's Viper). Large insects, lizards, monitor lizards, rats, frogs and birds. Snakes are swallowed head first. Young are fed by regurgitation.



Adult with partially swallowed calotes and snake. Parent eagles regurgitate prey in the nest while feeding the nestling eaglets.



Key Features:



- Tarsi - long, bare, scaly.
- Iris is orange-yellow in adults; grey in juveniles.
- Cere is grey-white.
- Head - large with 'hood'.
- Upper breast - streaked.
- Underparts - pale.
- Toes - short with claws.
- Wing tips reach tail tips when perched.
- Tail - barred with three bands.
- Primaries - dark tipped.
- Upper-wing coverts - buff.
- Narrow wings broad at carpals.
- Ragged trailing edge to wings.



A single white ovoid egg in the nest with a recently killed cobra cached in the nest. Both non-venomous and venomous snakes are hunted and devoured.



Parent with a snake hanging from the beak. Snakes are swallowed head first. The dangling tail is seen in this photo.

FLIGHT



Threat display consists of lowering of the legs as if in preparation of an attack. Such behaviour is seen when the eagle perceives threat to the young in the nest.



A Black Drongo is chasing the eagle for morsels of food.

PARENTAL CARE



Parent eagle is incubating on the nest.



A seven weeks old eaglet in the nest with parent



The usual clutch is of one egg. Here, a family with both parents and a young are seen in the shallow platform nest. Parents have brought food - a snake - for the eaglet.

- **Behavior:** Soar in circles, singly or in pairs. Stoop at prey. Perch on trees, pylon or rocky hillocks. Hover in search of prey. Aggressively guard territory. Threat display involves lowering of legs in flight.

- **Etymology:** *Circaetus*: Gr. *Kirkos*, a raptor that flies in circles, and a partly mythical hawk. Gr. *aetos*, an eagle. *Gallicus*, L. *Gallicus*, of Gaul, Gallic, France; after the locality of distribution. (Reference: Satish Pande (2009). Latin Names of Indian Birds Explained. Book by Ela Foundation. Published by Oxford University Press and Bombay Natural History Society.)

Cultural aspects:

The Sanskrit names of this eagle are '*Sarpari*' – the enemy of snakes, '*Sarpant*' – the snake killer and '*Nagashi*' – the cobra killer. Names are self explanatory.



A degraded semi-arid habitat of the Short-toed Eagle on the Deccan Plateau of Maharashtra. The nest is located on a solitary *Acacia* on a hill slope. Nest sites are at a premium. Tree felling is a major threat.

- **Threats:** Tree felling for firewood and habitat modification take a toll on nest sites. Agricultural pesticides can enter bodies of eagles through food. Electrocution is another risk.
- **Conservation:** Included in Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act.



An electrocuted juvenile Short-toed Eagle.

FACT FILE: SHORT-TOED EAGLE

Circaetus gallicus (Gmelin, 1771). Type locality: Askraikan, S. Russia.

Sarpagarud (Marathi); **Saapmar** (Hindi); **Malpatar** (Kannada); **Pamuld Gadda** (Telugu); **Onam Koththi** (Tamil).

- **Size:** 63 – 68 cm.
- **Weight:** 1200-2000 g (M); 1300-2300 g (F).
- **Wing:** Male – 52.0 to 53.6 cm; Female – 53.0 to 57.1 cm.
- **Breeding season:** December to May, up to June.
- **Clutch:** 1 egg per year.
- **Egg:** White, ovoid. 73.5 x 58.4 mm. (Baker).
- **Incubation:** 46 to 48 d. By both, mainly by female.
- **Branching:** 55 to 60 d. Fledging: 70 to 75 d.
- **Call:** Usually silent. *Pieoo, pieoo, keea, keea*, during breeding. Also give arrival, contact and begging calls.
- **Chief Editor:** Satish Pande.
- **Associate editor:** Niranjana Sant.
- **Photographs:** Satish Pande, Niranjana Sant, Kumar Pawar, Pramod Deshpande, Pralhad Jadhav.
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- **Copyright and Published by:** Ela Foundation, C-9, Bhosale Park, Sahakarnagar-2, Pune 411009. January 2013. www.elafoundation.org.
- **References:** *Pande, Satish, Saleel Tambe, Niranjana Sant and Clement Francis (2002). Birds of Western Ghats, Kokan and Malabar (including birds of Goa). Oxford University Press and Bombay Natural History Society. . *Ali & Ripley (1969). *Naoroji, R. (2009).
- Amit Pawashe, Shivkumar Pednekar, Kumar Pawar, Pramod Deshpande, Pralhad Jadhav, Sudhir Avadhani, Nachiket Avadhani, Prashant Deshpande, Niranjana Sant and Satish Pande did field research on this species for over 12 years in Maharashtra, India.



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Ela File 04

SHORT-TOED EAGLE

- **Order:** Falconiformes
- **Family:** Accipitridae
- **Status:** Resident

ELA FOUNDATION



The platform nest of the Short-toed Eagle. Male (smaller and slender than female) on the nest and the female (larger in size) on an adjacent branch.



Nest on a high tension electric pylon.



Tree nest on a slender branch of a thorny tree.



Egg in the flimsy nest is seen from below.



A single egg is laid in a clutch.



One week old nestling in white natal down.



A six weeks old eaglet in the nest with a snake - its favourite food!



'Owl' - like face of the adult Eagle.



Hovering flight in side view.

- **Display:** Pairs soar, circle, dive and tumble vociferously during courtship. Male offers food (snakes) to female. Pairs mate several times before eggs are laid.
- **Nest:** Both build using twigs, sticks and branches. Flat, small, untidy nest is built on canopy of *Acacia*, *Prosopis*, Neem, Kadamb, Shisu, *Eucalyptus*, etc. trees; rarely on pylons or cliffs. Recorded to re-use vulture nests. Prey is cached in nest. Young pull dangling tails of partially swallowed snakes from beaks of parents and swallow the snakes slowly.
- **Amazing Facts:** Eagles eat poisonous snakes as long as 6 feet. Feed chicks with saliva and salty nasal fluids from nose. Tough leg scales protect them from snake bite. Can hover in spite of the large size. Have forward facing owl-like eyes.