

Amur Falcon: A success story of wildlife conservation

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The species : Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*) which is locally known as Akhoipuina or Kahoipuina in the Rongmei dialect is a small raptor bird which migrate in large numbers up-to several lakh from Siberian and Northern China during the winter season to the warmer climatic region in the southern countries such as Myanmar, North East India, Central India, Western India and South Africa in search of food and adaptable temperature. The migration of this bird was taken as a very good sign of bounty harvest and onset of winter season in Tamenglong district in the past and the village elders took it as the messenger of the God of good harvest. In the olden time these birds were admired and never hunted. But in recent past there were hunting of these birds in large number by using different tool such as nylon traps and air guns. Some villagers use to sell these killed birds either in raw or roasted some years back in the local market.

Due to large scale awareness and enforcement of Wildlife Protection Act 1972 by the Forest Department, Manipur with the help of local communities the scenario has improved and menace of hunting and trade in wildlife products is under control.

The approximate size is of common pigeon. The body length is about 26 cm to 30 cm with wing span of about 63 cm to 71 cm. The weight ranges from 97 gm to 170 gm in male bird and from 111 gm to 195 gm in female bird. Amur falcons are raptor birds feeding on several insects. The diets include Termites, Locusts, Ants, Beetles, Mice, etc. The male is blackish grey in color and female bird is brighter in color both having under wing whitish in color. The female is larger in size than the male. The life span of free range Amur falcon is not yet ascertained but its sister species Red footed falcons has the life span of 13.5 years in the wild and upto 18 (eighteen) years in captivity. Thus Amur falcon life span shall be around 10(ten) to 13(thirteen) years in the wild.

The Amur Falcon roosting villages in Tamenglong district : The two river system; Barak and Irang are important for the migratory Amur Falcons. They usually roost in the Moubi Bamboo (*Melocanna baccifera*) forest of the two rivers. The important villages for roosting of Amur Falcons are Chiluan, Khangchiluan, Puching (Khebuching), Guangram, Toubam, Vanchengphai, Sonpram, Lenglong, Bamgaijang, Old Tamenglong etc. The roosting of Amur Falcons are subject to the security to the birds. They may prefer some villages in one year and may change in the next year. This happened to Bhalok (Phalong) village. The village had Amur Falcon roosting upto 2017, but Amur Falcon didn't roost for the last three years.

CMS Or Bonn Convention: The CMS or the "Bonn Convention" is an Environmental Treaty of United Nations which provides for conservation and sustainable use of migratory species and their habitats. It aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range. It has 129 Nations as participant party. India is a participant Nation since 1983.

Conservation status: The bird is categorized as the Least Concern under International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is protected under Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and it is included in the Schedule-IV of the Act. Any person who hunt Amur falcon or sell its meat is liable to be punished with imprisonment up to three years or fine up to Rs 25,000 (Rupees twenty five thousand) or both in India.

Strategy adopted by the Forest Department, Manipur through MOEF &CC funding;

- 1) Large scale awareness program like Amur falcon Dance Festival at District HQ of Tamenglong,
- 2) Seeking support from important public leaders, local leaders, Church leaders etc.
- 3) Utilizing the positive reporting of Wildlife Conservation through print & electronic media,
- 4) Mutual rapport & seeking support from local NGOs, and village authority and village level awareness campaign
- 5) Engaging local unemployed youth for protection of roosting site of Amur Falcons as local protection volunteers during the migratory period

6) Providing alternative means of livelihood & income generation to the jhum cultivators through agro forestry plantation or poultry rearing

7) Protection measure such as surprise market raid to check sale of wildlife product etc.

Migration study: It is one of the longest distance migratory birds covering a distance of about 30,000 kms in a single season migration. The birds being warm blooded could not withstand the severe winter cold climate in its breeding ground in North China and Siberia. As the area is covered by snow the availability of food for the birds also decreases. The migration starts during October from its breeding ground towards the Southern latitude. They stop at Myanmar and come to North East India, Central India, and Western India and further migrate to the South African countries with nonstop flying over the Arabian Sea. The migration route and other detailed is clearer with the recent satellite tracking of Amur Falcon birds namely Chiulon, Barak & Irang by WII, Dehradun and Forest Department Manipur.

The satellite tagged Amur Falcons migrate from their breeding ground from October first week towards North East India. They come through China, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar. They stay from second week to last week of November in North East India in the State of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya etc. They spend the winter cold season in the warm area of South Africa and stay there up-to March, April. From May onward they return to their breeding site in Mongolia, East China, Eastern Russia. Forest Department Manipur in collaboration with Wildlife Institute of India had undertaken a research project of satellite transmitter tagging to few Amur birds since 2018.

(To be contd)

Source: <https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2021/5/12/Kh-Hitler-Singh-The-species-Amur-Falcon-Falco-amurensis-which-is-locally-known-as-Akhoipuina.html>