

Preliminary Report on the China Raptor Watch in Hebei Province

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All raptors are on the list of protected birds in China. Tanshan and Beidaihe are situated on the migration route of migrating birds of prey and are popular resorts. The survey provided data that could be of value to assessments of the population dynamics of migrants that passed through the area during 1981, 1983, and 1986. Particular attention was paid to recording the migrations of large diurnal migrants, especially raptors, in autumn. The results may be compared with those of La Touche (1910-1917), Shaw (1936), Hemmingsen (1942-1945), and Martin (1985-1986).

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The temporary observation room, near Tanshan, was made of willow twig and rice straw. We have used bird decoys, such as Eastern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis schvedowi*), Japanese Buzzard (*Buteo buteo burmanicus*), Menzbieri Buzzard (*Buteo lagopus menzbieri*) and Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). During 17.30-21.30 hours we used a flashlight to look at the drain and waterchannel or sandflat trees. Observation using binoculars and telescopes was the means of identifying and counting migrants. The majority of the birds of prey were located by scanning the horizon with binoculars, by concentrating on the regions north-east of Tanshan and south-west of Beidaihe because these proved to be the most productive sectors for initial detection of passing raptors.

RESULTS

1.Species: 25 diurnal raptors were recorded, including twenty species of *Accipitridae*, five of *Falconidae*. All species of birds of prey, except the Eastern Red-legged Falcon (*Falco vespertinus amurensis*) occur in winter or are transient. Hemmingsen recorded twenty-two species of raptors in Beidaihe, including four species (*Circus macrourus*, *Falco subbuteo*, *Falco naumanni* and *Pandion haliaetus*) not found in our study.

2.Migration time and route: The raptor migration in Tanshan and Beidaihe occurs from the latter part of August to 20th December. The first migrants are always juvenile, and adults follow them, except with the Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) and Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). The Black Vulture migration is in family flocks often made up of several families (e. g. five birds, eight birds, or twenty-eight birds).

All raptor migration comes from the north-east or east and indicates that the birds generally pass along the sea coast, Hebei to Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian to Guangdong provinces. Another migration route is from Liaoning province to the Miaodao archipelago, passing through Shandong to the sea coast of central China, and then to south China.

The observation's results indicate that the waves of migration are associated with changes in local weather variables such as the movement of air masses over the area and very little migration of raptors was evident during periods of weather such as wind, snow, and frost. It appears that the flanks of anti-cyclones provide optimum conditions for migration in autumn, especially after the strong wind, when all the raptors gradually appeared in the sky.

3. Species accounts: Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) was a common autumn migrant in Hebei in the past (La Touche, Shaw and Hemmingsen) but we found the species to be rather scarce, with only 74 recorded in 1986.

Pied Harrier (*Circus melanoleucos*); counts totalled 14,596, which is in agreement with the observations of La Touche and, to a lesser extent, Hemmingsen.

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) totalled 15 birds recorded in 1986, suggesting that the species is now scarce to uncommon in autumn.

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*); total of 1,119 recorded. This figure seems low, given that La Touche noted the species as an abundant autumn migrant.

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*): Four were recorded.

CONSERVATION OF RAPTORS IN HEBEI PROVINCE

Although a wide variety of habitats remain at Beidaihe and Tanshan, the rapid development of the town and city has led to the damage or destruction of certain of the main sites at which raptors were recorded in the past. Many areas that proved more attractive to raptors in autumn than in spring were Henghe, Beidaihe, Baigezhuang, Tanshan and Shanhai Pass, the beginning of the Great Wall, which led to the area becoming a stopping point of raptors during migration in autumn.

It seems likely that pressures on raptors will increase as China's development accelerates. Hence, it would seem that conservation measures are required if the populations of the many migrants that pass along the coast of Hebei province are to be maintained.

A further step would be the establishment of reserves at Beidaihe, Shanhai Pass and other locations on the flyway through eastern China, in a similar fashion to migratory bird refuges in North America.

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