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Mountain Hawk-Eagles *Spizaetus nipalensis* in Viet Nam

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The Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* is thought to be a widespread migrant in South-East Asia (King *et al.* 1975), but there are no records for Viet Nam in the standard work by Delacour and Jabouille (1931), in the recent checklist for the country (Vo Quy 1983) or from the recent forest surveys (Robson *et al.* 1989, 1993a and b). The only record was of one observed at Tam Dao, north of Hanoi in October 1962 (Fischer 1974).

At 15h00 on 2 January 1992, whilst descending the main track above the headquarters of the Bach Ma National Park (between Hue and DaNang in central Annam), I saw an immature Mountain Hawk-Eagle land on the top of a small tree at an altitude of about 200 m. It was watched for 30 minutes, using 10x40 binoculars and a 30x75 telescope; the permanently raised wispy crest, which was black with white tips to the feathers, was clearly visible. It twice fanned its tail to preen, revealing 8 to 10 narrow, evenly-spaced black and white bars. When it finally took off and glided in a circle around me, the projecting head and the very heavy neck were conspicuous, but the crest was not visible in flight, even at close range. The upperwing was grey-brown with a lighter area on the primary-coverts, a feature that is also shown by immature Changeable Hawk-Eagle *S. cirrhatus*.

This single record might have related to a vagrant to Viet Nam but on 10 January 1992, during a visit to Thao Cam Vien zoo, Ho Chi Minh city, two immature Mountain Hawk-Eagles were found sharing a cage with five Changeable Hawk-Eagles. The director of the zoo understood that all of these birds had been captured in the mountain forests of south Annam (Lam

Dong province). The exact provenance is not known but the director was certain that they originated in Viet Nam. In January 1993 only one of the Mountain Hawk-Eagles was still in the zoo and by January 1994 both had disappeared. A visit on 17 January 1993 to the shop of a wildlife dealer in DaLat city centre (Lam Dong province) revealed one stuffed (adult) and one living Mountain Hawk-Eagle, the latter in a cage at the back of the premises. The owner of the shop said that they were common in the area and claimed to have six more at home in her private 'zoo'. For comparison, other stuffed raptors on display included a Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*, two Grey-faced Buzzards *Butastur indicus* and a Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, none of which is uncommon in Viet Nam. The owner expected U.S. \$100 for the live eagle and seemed accustomed to the negative attitude of European visitors towards wildlife trading. She was confident that she could sell all of her stock of live animals and birds to Chinese dealers from Singapore and Taiwan without any problem.

Finally, on 18 December 1993, another immature Mountain Hawk-Eagle was seen near Cu Jut, a small town on the main road south-west of Ban Me Thuot in south Annam. The bird was perched on the top of a tree in an area of partly-cleared forest and both the crest and pale wing-coverts were clearly visible.

The species may have been overlooked previously, though it is also possible that numbers have increased in Viet Nam recently, if only as a winter visitor. Now that its occurrence in northern, central and southern Viet Nam is established, even greater care will be needed in field identification of similar species such as Changeable Hawk-Eagle and Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*.

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