

Exploitation in Northeast India

LITTLE STUDIED AND LITTLE VISITED, NORTHEAST INDIA IS THOUGHT TO be second only to the northern Andes in terrestrial species density (1). Because of its distance from Delhi and its predominantly tribal culture, minimal regulation protects biodiversity in the region. As a result, there has been a transition over the past two decades from sustainable harvesting of wildlife to, in many places, empty forests (2).

The Amur Falcon, *Falco amurensis*, recently joined the list of relatively abundant species that are heavily exploited (3). Birdlife International estimates that, worldwide, the population of these birds is more than 1 million (4). In just one location in the state of Nagaland, more than 120,000 of them are harvested annually during their stopover on migration from northeast Asia to their winter quarters in southern Africa. The main reason for high exploitation appears to be market forces, with trappers selling birds at the rate of two per U.S. dollar. Carcasses are piled into pickup trucks, whose destination is currently unknown (3).

We draw attention to this phenomenon for three rea-

sons. First, although overexploitation is a problem globally (5), India has a strong legal framework for species protection and a good record of enforcement in other areas of the country. India recently hosted the 11th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, at which it committed \$50 million to the biodiversity targets agreed upon at the previous meeting in Nagoya, Japan. Second, researchers and tourists alike need to be aware that this magnificent area is now relatively easy to access, and not only to developers. Research is essential. Third, time is of the essence. The next few decades will be critical. Relatively few well-protected areas may conserve a large fraction of the region's biodiversity. Alternatively, local communities can become rapidly engaged in wildlife conservation, given the right incentives (6).

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Captured Amur Falcon.