

Article for EcoTourLinq, an ecotourism company (US English)

In Search of Raptors

Do you have a favorite raptor? In the opinion of many birding hobbyists, raptors are bird royalty! They are fascinating to watch, whether you like sea eagles sitting atop huge nests or plucking a fish from the sea, vultures circling high in the sky, owls gliding silently through the night, or the art of falconry. I like owls, entranced by their ability to turn their heads almost full circle and their big eyes to keep sharp watch. Birds of prey are found on almost every continent. To get a quick fix on certain raptor species and where to go to see them, I interviewed several experts.

Rajasthan State, India

When visiting India, Mr. Prashanth MB from the [Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment](#) (ATREE) recommends you head northwest to Rajasthan State which shares borders with Pakistan. There you will find Keoladeo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. More than 330 bird species have been identified in the park. During the winter months, Keoladeo NP is an excellent spot for sighting and photographing marsh harriers, dusky eagles, scops owls, and spotted, tawny, and short-toed eagles. Ranthambore is another popular nature park in Rajasthan.

The base of the Himalayas in northern India is a great place to become familiar with Asian raptors. [BirdQuest](#), an ecotour company from the UK, can take you there.

"You can expect to find 30 to 40 species of eagles, hawks and falcons, as well as 10 to 15 species of owls and nightjars during this trip," says tour guide Craig Robson. "Some of these birds can be seen even during the daytime."

In southern India, Ramadevarabetta Vulture sanctuary or the tiger reserves in Nagarhole and Bandipur National Parks are stand-out locations for bird watchers to visit.

Norfolk, UK

Scotland remains one of Europe's best places to see raptors. That said, the county of Norfolk in the East Anglia region of the UK is great for easy access bird watching opportunities because of its low lying farm land and marsh habitats. There you will find barn owls, the western marsh harrier, the common buzzard, Eurasian hobby, and the red kite, according to [BirdQuest's](#) Craig Robson. If you come during the winter months, you might spot hen harriers or merlin falcons, Britain's smallest bird of prey. [The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds \(RSPB\)](#) nature reserves in Norfolk offer walking trails, viewing platforms, and hides. Back on the road you might decide to stop by the city of Norwich where the cathedral has become a prime nesting site for peregrine falcons!

Arizona, USA

For a trip combining dramatic scenery and birds of prey, join [Raptours'](#) Bill Clark for an Arizona

Raptor Tour in the United States. This 9-day trip promises sightings of over 25 diurnal raptor species including the common black hawk, northern harrier, merlin, peregrine and prairie falcons, bald and golden eagles, turkey and black vultures, white-tailed kite, northern harrier, and red-tailed hawk. You can add a 3-day California Condor extension to watch the largest flying land bird in North America in the stunning setting of the Colorado River Valley's Marble Canyon.

Why Raptors Matter

Raptors are at the top of their food chain, so an abundance of raptors in any one location suggests a healthy ecosystem with adequate food supply. Their prey includes small mammals, birds, reptiles, and insects. Raptors naturally help control overpopulation of prey species.

Sadly, it is now well documented that many types of raptors are in decline. Threats worldwide include deforestation, conversion of land to agriculture and spreading urbanization. Secondary poisoning is also a big problem. This happens when birds of prey eat dead animals and insects with trace amounts of insecticides or certain antibiotics in them. They can also die from lead poisoning after feeding on animals shot by hunters or they may be killed illegally by farm owners or hunters who target them for food, sport, or to get rid of these "pests." Migratory raptors are also at risk from collisions with wind turbines, reflective glass on skyscrapers, or electrocution by power lines.

Raptor Conservation

Today many countries are establishing policies in support of raptor conservation. As individuals, we can also help by joining conservation groups as members and by participating in their fundraising campaigns. Some of the outstanding groups to consider include [The Audubon Society](#) (United States), the [RSPB](#) and [The Wildlife Trusts](#) (UK), and [The Indian Bird Conservation Network and BirdLife International](#).

If you fancy yourself as a citizen scientist, you can assist ATREE in India with their study of Montagu's harriers. You can email a report of sightings of (banded) harriers in open grassland habitats. Write to this address: harrier@ATREE.org.

You can also support farmers who practice organic agriculture and leave borders of trees and natural hedges to separate properties. If you are a farmer or live in a rural area, you can set up nesting boxes which attract owls, in turn, they reduce rodent infestation.