

BEHAVIOUR OF THE LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE, AQUILA POMARINA, ON A
BALCHATRI TRAP

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When using a balchatri trap for a variety of raptors, one soon learns that it is possible to stop the car a very short distance from birds such as the kestrels and the Little Banded Goshawk Accipiter badius, but that most eagles have to be given rather more room. It is therefore common practice to stop the car at a distance which just allows the eagle to be observed through binoculars until its actions show that it has been caught. In contrast, the habit of some kestrels of calmly biting through a noose which happens to snag them, with no sign of panic or concern, makes it essential that one be close enough to drive up at the right time to ensure that the bird be caught once it has been noosed.

We were recently lucky enough to have a Lesser Spotted Eagle come down to a trap dropped by us, and we followed the usual technique of stopping at an extreme distance. There was the usual occasional wing flap as the bird appeared to lose its balance, but no sign at any time that it had been snagged by a noose. However, on examination of the trap when the bird had finally been chased away by a passing motorist stopping right next to it and the trap, we found that three nooses had been neatly nipped off flush with the wire mesh. Obviously, the bird had used the standard kestrel technique.

The fact that the bird had not left the trap, or even paused in its attempts to get the mice, when a motorist had passed on the other side of the road, and had merely flown a few metres when a car passed within three metres of the trap, coming back immediately afterwards, should have shown us that this particular bird was non-standard in its behaviour. Had we driven up closer at that time, watching the bird for any sign of nervousness, we would have been close enough to see exactly what was happening, and we could have taken counter measures.

Moral? Never generalise on bird behaviour. Even birds of the same species show remarkable personality differences, and these can mean the difference between having a bird in the hand or merely a bald balchatri.
