

Nest-building in Bonelli's Eagle Hieraaetus fasciatus in  
October in Nepal

Rob G. Bijlsma

While looking for raptor migration just west of Birethanti (1,037 m), 19 km WNW of Pokhara (28°14'N, 85°38'E), Steen Christensen, Mogens Henriksen, Frank de Roder and the author noticed a circling, adult pair of Bonelli's Eagle Hieraaetus fasciatus. The birds were watched with binoculars and a telescope (20-45x60) between 08h15 and 10h30, on 26 October 1984, under excellent weather conditions.

One of the birds was carrying a stick in its feet and dived into the canopy of the wooded hillside south of the Bhurungdi Khala, closely followed by the second bird. Both birds landed in a huge deciduous tree, which stood out on the slope of the hill. A large stick nest was visible in a fork in the upper part of the tree. The stick-holding bird was considered to have been the female, because of its slightly larger size and its banded, darkbrown flight feathers. The supposed male was smaller and much lighter on the underparts; the white breast and belly were sparingly marked with fine streaks, and the flight feathers with hardly recognisable bands were much more transparent than in the other bird.

From 08h15 to 10h30, the female made eight short flights to collect nest material. At least six of these flights were to the same tree, some 60 m away. Here, dead branches were broken off with the beak (jumping up and hanging on the beak with flapping wings) or with the feet (dropping down with outstretched talons). The branches were always carried to the nest in the feet. While the female shuffled around in the nest and re-arranged sticks and twigs, the male stayed on its perch above the nest, preening, head-scratching (under the wing) and idling. Male and female made twice a short flight around the nest site together, without showing any signs of display. Shortly after our departure, both birds were seen gliding along the slope towards Birethanti.

The Jomson trail up to Kalopani is well-known for its Bonelli's Eagles (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985). Some of our data, however, are at variance with statements in Ali and Ripley (1978), who suggested that most nests in the Himalayas are situated on ledges of cliffs, whereas the male is said to provide the nest material for the female; the latter would do the nest-building. Although based on snap information, it is reasonable to propose that the female takes the lion's share in collecting nest material and nest-building, just as her European congeners do (Morvan and Dobchies 1987). Furthermore, it is common procedure to start building or repairing a few months prior to egg-laying (Morvan and Dobchies 1987), which is said to take place in December and Januari, and sometimes a couple of months later (Ali and Ripley 1978).

#### References

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Rob G. Bijlsma, Bovenweg 36, 6721 HZ Bennekom, the Netherlands.