

# EASTERN MARSH HARRIER 'DINES OUT' AT ORAGADAM LAKE NEAR INDUSTRIAL HUB

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An immature Eastern marsh harrier in flight over Oragadam lake. | Photo Credit: Syed Ibrahim

With massive wingspans and streamlined bodies, birds of prey come closest to being a flesh-and-blood representation of the aeroplane. And just like aeroplanes, they need an expansive space — to be parked in jaw-dropping majesty; and for take-off and landing.

The Oragadam lake and its precincts tick all the big boxes (hangout space; dine-in facility; and reasonable quiet) for an immature female Eurasian marsh harrier, and the bird has made this space its hunting ground. On November 15, Syed Ibrahim, a resident of Padappai and a member of Madras Naturalists' Society, spotted the immature female Eastern marsh harrier, a relatively uncommon visitor in these parts. The record shows up on eBird, having been confirmed as an immature female Eastern marsh harrier by eBird reviewer Gnanaskandan Kesavabharathi.

"eBird records of the Eastern marsh harrier for the Tamil Nadu region are thin; and the first sighting of the species in the Kancheepuram district occurred around Sriperumbudur lake in February 2016, when Gnanaskandan Kesavabharathi saw it," says Syed.

Gnanaskandan weighs in: "Subsequently, there were two more sightings of the Eastern marsh harrier — in the 2017-2018 season — in Kaliveli lake, and on both occasions, a male bird came into view. There was another sighting of the Eastern marsh harrier — an adult female — around Trichy region. This season, in October, a juvenile was sighted at Maduranthakam lake." This patch at Oragadam is marked by the Oragadam lake girdled by grassland on one side; and a stretch of paddy fields on the other. "With many of the paddy fields lying fallow, there is extended "landing" space now for this Eastern marsh harrier," says Syed, who believes this bird is using this sweep of water and land as an occasional hunting ground. "After the November 15 sighting, I put in an appearance at the lake on the days immediately following it, and the bird was not to be found. It could be roosting somewhere else, but have this patch as one of its feeding options," Syed observes. The Eastern marsh harrier does not vary noticeably from the Western marsh harrier and other harriers in its "gastronomic" choices.

The immature Eastern marsh harrier creating a flutter among a flock of Eurasian wigeons at Oragadam lake | Photo Credit: Syed Ibrahim

It remains steadfast to the diet-plan of the harrier family: Frogs, birds and small mammals. “Right now, in winter, the Oragadam lake hosts Eurasian wigeons and garganeys,” explains Syed. And paddy fields are a reliable hunting ground for frogs. The MNS member remarks that though Oragadam is an industrial hub, the lake is tucked away, located behind the factory of Daimler India Commercial Vehicle, and there is sufficient quiet, particularly in the morning hours — a factor probably recommending the waterbody as a breakfast joint for this Eastern marsh harrier.

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