

BIRDS OF UZBEKISTAN: AN OVERVIEW OF AVIAN FLORA

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Abstract : *Uzbekistan is home to a rich diversity of avian flora, supported by its unique geographical features that include deserts, mountains, river valleys, and wetlands. This article provides an overview of the bird species found in Uzbekistan, highlighting notable resident and migratory species, their habitats, and the conservation challenges they face. Key resident birds such as the golden eagle, houbara bustard, and steppe eagle are adapted to various environments, while migratory species like the common crane and greater flamingo utilize the country as a vital stopover during their journeys. Despite its rich birdlife, Uzbekistan faces challenges such as habitat loss, hunting pressures, and water resource management issues, which threaten avian populations. Conservation efforts, including the establishment of protected areas and international cooperation, are essential for safeguarding Uzbekistan's avian diversity for future generations.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, avian flora, bird species, habitat loss, conservation, migratory birds, golden eagle, houbara bustard, wetlands, biodiversity.*

Uzbekistan, a landlocked country in Central Asia, is home to a rich diversity of bird species. The country's unique geographical position, which includes deserts, steppes, mountains, and river valleys, provides diverse habitats for both resident and migratory bird species. This article explores the avian fauna of Uzbekistan, highlighting notable resident and migratory birds, their habitats, and the conservation challenges they face.

Avian Habitats in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's varied landscape offers numerous habitats suitable for different bird species. The country is characterized by deserts (such as the Kyzylkum Desert), river valleys (like those of the Amu Darya and Sir Darya), mountainous areas (the Tien Shan and Pamir-Alay ranges), and wetlands. Each of these ecosystems supports a unique variety of birds, making Uzbekistan an important location for bird biodiversity in Central Asia. Desert and Semi-Desert Regions: The Kyzylkum Desert and surrounding areas host a variety of bird species adapted to arid conditions, including bustards and larks.[2]

Mountainous Areas: The Tien Shan and Pamir-Alay mountains are home to raptors, game birds, and other species adapted to high altitudes.

River Valleys and Wetlands: The river systems of Uzbekistan, including the Amu Darya

and Syr Darya, support wetland birds such as herons, storks, and waterfowl.

Notable Resident Bird Species

Uzbekistan is home to several resident bird species that thrive in its diverse environments. These birds are permanent inhabitants of the country and are well-adapted to its varying climates.

1. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*): One of the largest birds of prey, the golden eagle is commonly found in the mountainous regions of Uzbekistan, such as the Tien Shan and Pamir-Alay ranges. Known for its impressive wingspan and hunting prowess, the golden eagle is a symbol of strength and freedom in Central Asia.

2. Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*): This large bird is found mainly in desert and semi-desert regions of Uzbekistan. The houbara bustard is well-adapted to arid conditions and is known for its elaborate courtship display. However, it is a species of concern due to habitat loss and hunting pressures.

3. Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*): The steppe eagle is often seen in open landscapes, including steppes and semi-deserts. It is a migratory species that breeds in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, and migrates south during the winter.

4. Chukar Partridge (*Alectoris chukar*): Found in rocky and mountainous areas, the chukar partridge is a ground-dwelling bird known for its distinctive call. It is a popular game bird and is well-adapted to Uzbekistan's rugged terrain.

5. White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*): The white stork is found around agricultural lands and wetlands, especially during the breeding season. It builds large nests on tall structures and feeds on a variety of prey, including insects, small mammals, and amphibians.[3]

Migratory Bird Species

Uzbekistan is an important stopover point for migratory birds traveling along the Central Asian Flyway, which stretches from Siberia to the Indian subcontinent. The country's wetlands, rivers, and lakes provide crucial resting and feeding grounds for many migratory species.

1. Common Crane (*Grus grus*): The common crane is a migratory bird that passes through Uzbekistan during its annual migration. These large, elegant birds can be seen in wetland areas, where they stop to rest and feed during their journey.

2. Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*): Another migratory species, the demoiselle crane is known for its graceful appearance and long migrations. It is often seen in open grasslands and agricultural fields during its migration through Uzbekistan.

3. Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*): Greater flamingos are occasional visitors to the wetlands of Uzbekistan, particularly in the southern regions. These birds are attracted to shallow lakes and salt pans, where they feed on algae and small aquatic organisms.

4. Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*): This duck species is commonly found in Uzbekistan's wetlands during the migratory season. The northern shoveler is easily recognized by its broad, spoon-shaped bill, which it uses to filter food from the water.[4]

The avian flora of Uzbekistan faces several conservation challenges, largely due to human activities and environmental changes:

Habitat Loss: Agricultural expansion, urban development, and infrastructure projects have led to the loss of natural habitats, particularly wetlands and grasslands, which are crucial for many bird species.

Hunting and Poaching: Illegal hunting poses a significant threat to several bird species in Uzbekistan, including the houbara bustard and various raptors. Despite legal protections, enforcement is often insufficient to prevent poaching.

Water Resource Management: The alteration of river systems for irrigation and other purposes has affected the availability of wetland habitats. The shrinking of the Aral Sea, for instance, has had a detrimental impact on the region's birdlife.

To protect the avian diversity of Uzbekistan, several conservation initiatives have been undertaken:

Protected Areas: Establishing nature reserves and protected areas, such as the Chatkal Biosphere Reserve and the Aydar-Arnasay Lakes System, has helped safeguard critical habitats for many bird species.

International Cooperation: Uzbekistan is a member of international agreements such as the Ramsar Convention, which aims to conserve wetlands of international importance. The country also participates in regional initiatives to protect migratory birds along the Central Asian Flyway.

Public Awareness and Education: Increasing public awareness about the importance of bird conservation and promoting sustainable hunting practices are essential steps in protecting Uzbekistan's avian fauna.

Uzbekistan's diverse habitats support a wide range of bird species, both resident and migratory, making it an important region for avian biodiversity in Central Asia. From the majestic golden eagle in the mountains to the graceful cranes that migrate through the country, Uzbekistan's birdlife reflects the rich ecological diversity of the region. However, the challenges posed by habitat loss, hunting, and environmental changes require continued conservation efforts to protect these species. By safeguarding natural habitats and promoting sustainable practices, Uzbekistan can ensure the survival of its remarkable avian fauna for future generations.

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