POPULATION STRUCTURE AND ANNUAL MIGRATION PATTERN OF STEPPE EAGLES AT THOOLAKHARKA WATCH SITE, NEPAL, 2012–2014

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In 2015, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listed the Steppe Eagle (Aquila nipalensis) as a globally endangered species due to a rapid population decline in the last decade (BirdLife International 2015). In the Asian region, the Steppe Eagle is a long-distance migrant breeding in China and Mongolia and wintering in Nepal, India and beyond (del Hoyo et al. 1994). This species is a broad-front migrant through the Himalayan range, leaving its breeding ground between August and October, and returning between January and May (Welch and Welch 1991, Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). It is the most common eagle in Asia that migrates to the Indian subcontinent via the central Asian flyway (Bildstein 2006).

The population of the Steppe Eagle has declined throughout its breeding range between 1997–2011 and 2013–2015 (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001, Zduniak et al. 2010, Karyakin 2013, BirdLife International 2015), with an extremely rapid decline in Europe (Zduniak et al. 2010). In Asia, the primary threats are intensification of agriculture, overgrazing of steppe habitats by domestic animals (Bird and Symes 2009, Ma and Zhao 2013), and poisons used by farmers to eliminate rodents, particularly in China (Ma et al. 2010).

There have been relatively few season-long counts conducted on this species and other raptors that migrate along the central Asian flyway. In Nepal, Aquila eagle...