



Rare pale form of juvenile LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE

Pale juvenile forms of the Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina* are rarely documented and to date nowhere mentioned in southern African literature. On a visit to the Kruger National Park in February 2017 we spent a couple of days in an area east of Satara photographing as many different colour forms of this species as possible. Good summer rains resulted in vast breeding flocks of Red-billed Queleas and these migrant raptors were gorging themselves on both nestlings and fledglings.

Very few of the queleas' colonial nests were close to the road, so we had to be content with fairly distant photos of raptors that were dotted around in dead trees scattered in the vicinity. One bird had particularly pale underparts, so I took it to be a bleached juvenile Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*. In spite of being fairly far from the road, this wary individual flew away almost immediately after we stopped and took the first couple of photographs. On closer inspection of the images that evening, it was evident that the pale bird was in fact not a juvenile bleached Tawny as we had thought.

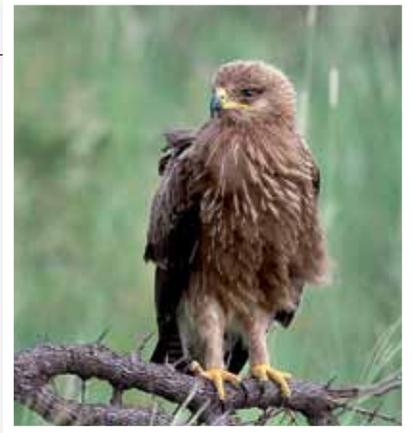
This pale bird was eventually confirmed to be a second- or third-year pale morph Lesser Spotted Eagle by Dick Forsman and Polish researcher Jan Lontkowski. Dick suggested that the bird

'represents the extreme in this group of birds. They only seem to occur at this transitional stage, but never as juveniles or adults.'

Eye colour changes from brown to pale dull yellow by about two and a half years. The pale underparts with darkish blotching or streaking represent the reverse of the more common juveniles, which are dark below with pale streaking!

I thank David Allan, Dick Forsman and Jan Lontkowski for giving clarity on this rare juvenile colour form.

HUGH CHITTENDEN



above, left *The pale form juvenile Lesser Spotted Eagle.*

top *The more common form of juvenile Lesser Spotted Eagle.*

above *A blotched juvenile.*

below *Variations in sub-adult or adult Lesser Spotted Eagle plumage.*

