

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF SCOPS OWLS IN MELGHAT TIGER RESERVE, AMRAVATI, MAHARASHTRA

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ABSTRACT

Scops owls (Genus: otus) are small, cryptically marked, and only active at night. They have noticeable ear tufts and face discs. By using survey methodologies, the distribution and population status of these owl species were evaluated. This study found that Indian scops owls were more common than Oriental scops owls.

Keywords: MTR, Owls, Owlets, Population status, Birds of prey, Scops owls, Oriental Scops owl.

1. Introduction

Owls can be found in a variety of environments, including human settlements as well as deserts and woodlands. Despite their widespread prevalence, they are constrained and challenging to perceive (Kumar et al. 2017). Due of owls' significant economic, scientific, and aesthetic values, the species has received a lot of attention (Santhankrishnan et al, 2011).

Scops owls (Genus: otus) comprises a vast family of raptorial birds with soft, cryptically patterned plumage, huge heads with rounded but incomplete facial discs, large, immovable forward-facing eyes, and short, sharply curved bills with feathers mostly covering them. The majority of species roost and lay their eggs in tree holes, some of which are nocturnal exclusively. Owls have keen vision and can see clearly in both light and dim light. Although there is little sexual dimorphism in plumage, females are typically bigger. Except in a few genera of tiny owls, juveniles frequently leave the nest with some down still present (in a transitional or mesoptilic plumage). However, once the first contour plumage is reached, it only slightly differs from that of adults. The majority of species are challenging to find until their characteristic songs are mastered; several are much more common than is often thought. Male owls' territorial songs are typically highly stereotyped, patterned hoots or whistles. Amravati district boasts of dense forest cover of about 1500 sq.miles. It includes the famous widely spread Melghat Tiger Reserve and

many other forests adjoining the Amravati city. Diversity studies have been done many years ago (MTR official checklist) thus requiring re-assessment of current status of scops owl diversity with location data, hence an effort was made in the present work to study the diversity of owls and owlets in this region.

2. Materials and Methods

Melghat Tiger Reserve, in the Amravati district, is where the majority of the state's biodiversity can be found. It is situated in the southern region of the Satpuda hill range in central India. The Melghat Tiger Reserve and surrounding forest are located at the northernmost point of Maharashtra State's Amravati district, close to the Madhya Pradesh border. Melghat Tiger Reserve is an example of the Central Highlands Biogeographic Zone "6 E Deccan peninsula" in central India.

To assess the status of the species, a thorough survey of the Melghat Tiger reserve was conducted between July 2013 and December 2017. To gather information about owl sightings, interviews with local indigenous people were held. Other suggestions from the locals were also taken into consideration. In the current investigation, the following survey approaches were employed:

- 1) Surveys were done systematically in the study area by making use of existing forest roads, local trails, animal trails along rivers and streams and around water holes. Surveys were conducted either by foot or by motorized vehicle. Information provided

by the local people was considered during each visit

- 2) Point survey (around villages and Rest Houses, ancient trees and riverine ecosystem) were done. At larger spatial scales, counts or detections at points have been used to document raptor presence (Kennedy and Stahlecker 1993), community diversity (Manosa and Pedrocchi 1997), and to estimate occupancy (McLeod and Andersen 1998).

Sighted owls were photographed and identified with the help of different field guides, some

owls were identified with self recorded calls, using Sony ICD voice recorder and parabolic disc. The latitude and longitude data (GPS) of the sites of sightings of the owls were recorded by a GPS device.

3. Results

In the present study Oriental Scops owl (*Otus sunia*) is very rare species, in Melghat Tiger Reserve, The species were recorded from dense forest. Total 8 individuals were reported by calls and direct sightings from 3 locations (Table 1).

Table 1: Habitat details and G.P.S location data of Oriental scops owl recorded during survey.

S.N.	No.	Habitat area	Location
1.	03	Chikhaldara range	N21°25'.25.2''E077°17'.34.2''
2.	04	Near Andherianikat area	N21°25'.25.1''E077°17'.34.1''
3.	01	Bhosakhandi Camp	N21°37.18.2 E077°19.43.4

However, Indian Scops owl (*Otus baccamoena*) was found to be more Common owl and found all over Melghat Region. However few sightings were recorded from East Melghat. Total 26 individuals were reported by calls and direct sightings from 21

locations (Table 2). The owl species was generally observed to be present in nest during day time and comes out from nest at evening at. Owl calls are observed as it comes out of the nest, but after sometime the calling ceases.

Table 2: Habitat details and G.P.S location data of Indian scops owls recorded during survey.

S.N.	No's	Habitat details	Location
1.	02	AndheriChikhaldara range	N21°25'.25.1'' E077°17'.34.1''
2.	2	Taragolai camp	N21°39.20.7 E077°26.56.9
3.	1	Rajadoah camp road	N21°39.03.6 E077°26.28.1
4.	1	Kolkas Lower rest house area	N21°30.02.5 E077°12.32.2
5.	1	Kolkas Upper rest house	N21°29.54.5 E077°12.06.6
6.	1	Ghatang to semadoah	N21°29.06.5 E077°22.37.5
7.	01	Near Jarida Village	21°38'06.6"N 77°28'57.7"E
8.	2	Near pilikolkas road	N 21°29.46.9 E 077°16.52.3
9.	1	Belkundresthouse	N21°03.2 E077°08.02.9
10.	1	Belkund road	N21°20.48.8 E077°08.15.14
11.	01	Bhosakhandi camp	N21°37.18.2 E077°19.43.4
12.	01	Near Bhawaiphata to Ghatang	N21°29.01.1 E077°23.13.0
13.	01	Near Chaddupati camp in tourist area	N21°31.52.8 E077°14.32.4

14.	01	Semadoh to Bhawaiphata	N21°29.05.5 E077°22.57.9
15.	01	Raipur Rest house	N-21O34.610' E-077O16.175'
16.	01	Near around Alkund camp	N-21O33.508' E-077 O26.424'
17.	1	Semadoah To Sipnapadaw Road Nr SipnaPadaw	N21°28.761 E077°18.777
18.	01	In semadoh village	N21°30'08.2"E 77°19'13.4"
19.	01	Near Semadoh Village	N21°30'07.7"E 77°18'57.8"
20.	3	Memna road 3km from semadoah	N1°29'24.9"E77°19'09.0"
21.	1	Bhanvar river	N21°36.758"E, 077°06.812'

4. Discussion

Study by Rasmussen and Anderton (2012) asserts that Oriental scops owls spend the summer in Muree Hills, North East Pakistan, Uttaranchal, and at least Nepal, as well as being possibly resident there. These claims are in agreement with the current findings, as Oriental scops owls have only been reported in Melghat Tiger Reserve protected areas and are

considered to be rare. The present findings are also supported by the Checklist of MTR, (1994).

According to Sharma et al. (2018), Indian Scopsowl were sporadically observed in forested areas. On the contrary, the owl species was more frequently noted in the current investigation.

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