

Status and distribution of Barn owl *Tyto alba* from Melghat Tiger Reserve, Amravati, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

Distribution and population status of Barn owl Tyto alba was assessed by survey methods. This study implies that owl species distribution is not common and also the species is less observed in dense forests.

Keywords – MTR, Owls, Owlets, Population status, Birds of prey, Barn owl

Introduction

Owls are found in diverse habitats such as from deserts to forests, including human habitations. However, despite their wide presence they are confined and difficult to be seen (Kumar *et al.* 2017). Owls are of great economic, scientific and aesthetic values hence the species has been given much importance (Santhankrishnan, 2011).

All owls have a large, rounded head with eyes directed forward. The basic morphological features of the members of this group include a curved bill with a pointed tip similar to diurnal birds of prey, and talons having curved and sharp claws which are very powerful which may be considered as an adaptation for carnivory. These birds have mostly coloured plumage which is soft and fluffy. Ecologically Owls may be considered as nocturnal counterparts to diurnal birds of prey, without being related to them.

Barn owls are Normally nocturnal, sometimes hunting diurnally in dim weather; flies slowly low over fields. This species roosts and nests mainly in cavities in old buildings, ancient forts and ruins or caves. Breeds throughout year, Nest is a collection of straw, twigs, rags and rubbish padded into tree-hollow and holes. The same site is used year after year.

The Indian subcontinent is home to 32 species of owls, according to Grimmet *et al.* (1999) 30 of them recorded from India. Also recently updated checklist of India by Praveen *et al.* (2016) recorded presence of all 32 owl species.

Amravati district harbours dense forest cover. 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 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.

Materials and Methods -

The work was conducted in the Melghat Tiger Reserve of Amravati district, Melghat is the hotspot of biodiversity of the state. It is located in Central India, as a southern part of Satpuda hill range. The Melghat Tiger Reserve and adjoining forest lies at the Northern extreme of Amravati district of Maharashtra State on the Madhya Pradesh border. Melghat Tiger Reserve is a representative of the Biogeographic Zone '6 E Deccan peninsula' Central Highlands in the central India.



Fig – 1 – Map of Melghat Tiger Reserve.

Extensive Survey of Melghat Tigre reserve was done during the July 2013 to December 2017 to enlist number of owl and owlet species. Interviews with local indigenous people were conducted for collecting

information about sightings of the owls. Various other inputs from the local people were also taken into account. Following survey techniques were used in the present study,

- 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).
- 3) 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.

Result and Discussion–

Species was not commonly recorded in Melghat Tiger Reserve. The species was reported from both East and west Melghat but not in dense forest. Total 21 individuals were reported, of which 10 were sighted. All of which were in association with human habitation such as Rest house premises, and agricultural farms. Surprisingly all nests were found in old or dry Banyan tree holes. It is observed that it is present in its nest in tree cavity for whole day and is not seen generally in day time. Pellets from the owl species were collected and studied.

According to Taylor (1992), Barn Owl selected isolated trees around farm sheds and villages and along hedgerows and woodland edges, rather than in the centres of woodland, which is in corroboration with the present study. Following map depicts an idea about distribution of Barn owls from MTR.

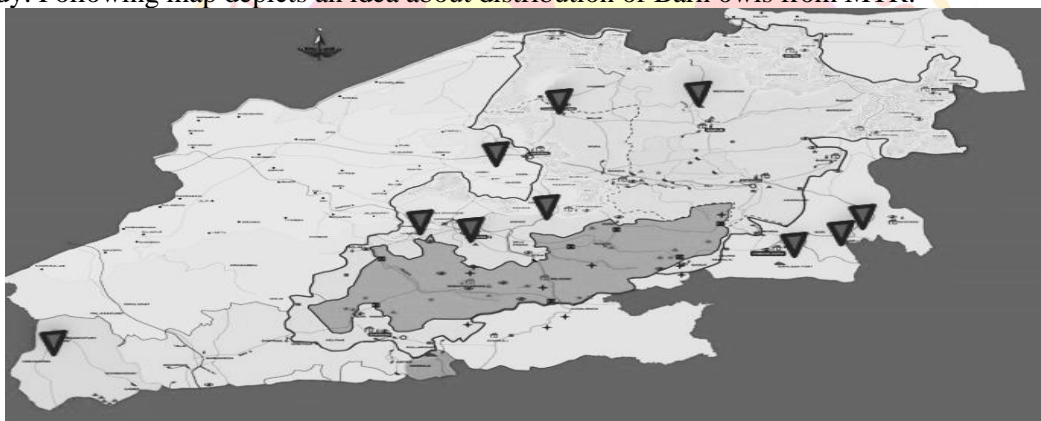


Fig. 2 – Map Showing Barn owl sighting locations recorded during Study.

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