SPOT-BELLIED EAGLE-OWL

Range extension of *Bubo nipalensis* Hodgson, 1836 (Strigiformes: Strigidae) in Odisha, eastern India

The Spot-bellied Eagle-owl *Bubo nipalensis* Hodgson, 1836 a member of the family Strigidae, is a very large nocturnal owl, native to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, China, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (BirdLife International 2016). In India, the Spot-bellied Eagle-owl is found from the foothills of Uttarakhand to northeastern India, Western Ghats and even the southern Eastern Ghats (Shevaroy Hills) (Grimmett et al. 2011; Srinivasan 2013). According to IUCN it has been categorized as ‘Least Concern’ (BirdLife International 2016). It is also listed in Schedule IV of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Appendix II of CITES. It prefers evergreen and moist deciduous tropical and subtropical
broadleaved forest (BirdLife International 2016); also inhabit in moist deciduous forest and temperate woodlands (Srinivasan 2013).

On 9 May 2015, at about 16:30hrs, we rescued a bird in Deobhuin Reserve Forest (20.495293°N & 85.430737°E) of Athagarh Forest Division, Odisha. It was identified as a juvenile Spot-bellied Eagle-owl, based largely on the presence of ear tufts, paler grayish-cream colour body, pale-yellow coloured beak, and creamy yellow coloured legs (Grimmett et al. 2011). Its primaries, secondaries and tail feathers were dark with heavy barring. The bird was in a good condition. We kept the bird in captivity at the forest guest house, feeding and fostering it until it flew on 11 May 2015. The area from where the bird was sighted is located in the Eastern Ghats of Odisha with a vegetation largely comprising the northern tropical moist deciduous and dry deciduous forests (Champion & Seth 1968).

The Global Distribution of the Spot-bellied Eagle-owl is as follows: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Laos People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam (BirdLife International, 2016). This sighting extends the range of this species further south in Odisha and indicate that the species might be more widely distributed in the State. The present sighting further strengthens the argument that lack of systematic surveys in many parts of Odisha and the Eastern Ghats has resulted in a biased understanding of distribution of many species across the Indian subcontinent as claimed by Mohapatra et al. (2014), Debata et al. (2013, 2015, 2017), Palei (2014). Intensive investigations are required in these unexplored areas of Odisha and northern Eastern Ghats, which might reveal the presence of further unrecorded species.
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References


Nimain Charan Palei1, Himanshu Shekhar Palei2, Bhakta Padarabinda Rath3 & Arun Kumar Mishra4

1 & 3 Office of the PCCF (Wildlife), Nilakanthanagar, Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751012, India

2 Aranya Foundation, 625/12, Mars Villa, Panchasakha Nagar, Dumdoma, Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751019, India

4 Divisional Forest Office, Athagarh Forest Division, Cuttack, Odisha 754029, India

Emails: *wildpalei@gmail.com, himanshu.palei@gmail.com* (corresponding author), *bhaktraprath@gmail.com, arunkumarmishra5@gmail.com*