

Discussion

The only published record of a Long-tailed Jaeger from the Indian region is a sighting of three birds near Lakshadweep (Bourne 1989), but the recent field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) still treat this species as a vagrant/possible species. During the recent review and update of the Indian Checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2013), the Long-tailed Jaeger was excluded from the checklist due to a lack of sufficient confirmed sightings, but with a note that it is a very probable bird as there are confirmed records from Maldives and Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The current sighting (from east coast), along with a recent sighting in west coast during a pelagic trip from Mangalore in 2012 (Karuthedathu 2014) indicates that they are indeed not uncommon in Indian coast.

Published data (Praveen *et al.* 2011; Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013; Praveen 2013) from the previous pelagic trips from India's western coast indicate that Parasitic and Pomarine Jaegers are common along that coast, but among the windblown birds of Odisha, these species were absent. Indeed, it would be interesting to find out if jaeger distribution along the eastern coast differs from that of the western. The fact that Long-tailed Jaegers were spotted at Munduli Barrage perhaps indicates that they may not be as rare as considered earlier, and that future pelagic trips off the eastern coast should keep a lookout for them.

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Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* sighted in Delhi after nearly a century

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The sighting of a single Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* in its rufous morph (cinnamon-bay phase) at Raghupur village in South Delhi at approximately 1700 hrs on 05 March 2011 is the first known record from Delhi State since 1925 [93]. It was not sighted subsequently. The site is just a few yards away from the Delhi-Haryana border with only a broken barbed wire fence marking the boundary between the two states. The bird was observed for about forty minutes, until fading daylight and cold winds made it difficult to continue observation. It was found asleep in the bare thorny branches a 'keekar' tree *Acacia nilotica indica* that was putting out new leaf. The tree was along a dirt track through ripe mustard fields, which were being harvested. The sleeping owl occasionally turned its head and opened and closed its eyes. The strong winds blew its prominent ear tufts

backwards almost flattening them to its head.

As shown in the photographs [94], the plumage was the typical rufous morph of the cinnamon-bay phase described in Ali & Ripley (1969). The bird's bare parts were also as described there: iris golden yellow, bill horny yellow tipped blackish and feet dingy yellowish. The wider habitat where the owl was found was a mix of agricultural and human habitation (see the background picture).

The only known previous sighting of the Oriental Scops Owl in Delhi was in 1925 when two sightings were made in February and March. Note at that time, and well into the 1970s, it was considered a subspecies of the Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops*. There have been no further reported sightings from Delhi or indeed Haryana (Harvey *et al.* 2006). Table 1 summarizes the three known sightings.

Table 1. Oriental Scops Owl sightings from Delhi

| Date | Place: village/state | Specimen: number/sex/morph | Habitat: natural/man-made | Activity | Tree species | Status of the bird | Observer |
|---------------------|---|---|--|--|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| 05 March 2011 | Raghopur Village, South Delhi; close to Haryana border | One of unknown sex, rufous morph, cinnamon-bay phase | Amidst cultivation / man-made | Roosting in the middle branches of a keekar tree | Acacia nilotica | Photographed | Janaki Turaga |
| 22 March 1925 | Near New Delhi | One male, reddish-brown morph, Cinnamon-bay phase | keekar jungle | Perched "... amongst the topmost branches of a Keekar tree..." | Acacia nilotica | Specimen collected | Basil-Edwards (Ganguly 1975) |
| 26 February 1925 | Qudsia Gardens, North Delhi | One female, cinnamon-bay phase | 18 th century man-made garden, with many old trees. Re-constructed in 1905–1906 | Not available | Not avail- able | Specimen collected | F. H. Cole (Ganguly 1975) |



93. Oriental Scops Owl rufous morph, at Raghopur village in South Delhi.



94. Oriental Scops Owl rufous morph.

Habitat changes

The habitat of Oriental Scops Owl has been described as, "Forest, wooded areas and habitation," (Grimmett & Inskipp 1999), and, "Affects forest (deciduous and evergreen), orchards, groves of densely foliated trees around cultivation, etc.," (Ali & Ripley 1969). All three sightings were from places

that would fit these broad descriptions. The Qudsia Gardens are medieval Mughal gardens, which were man-made and planted with many exotic species of trees, resembling an orchard. They were reconstructed in 1905–1906. The *keekar* jungle site was most likely part of the Ridge, which was forested by the British in the late nineteenth century. In spite of encroachments, much *keekar* jungle remains along the Ridge in Delhi and it would seem the owl might favour this tree species.

Raghopur village area itself has undergone various land use changes in a short span of three years. The *keekar* tree dried up and was cut down by the villagers when the dirt track road was replaced with a tarred road. The area of Raghopur and the nearby areas of New Palam Vihar (Gurgaon, Haryana state) are being developed with farmhouses, apartment complexes, and independent homes. In 2014, the agricultural lands of Raghopur adjoining the road were approved for building farmhouses with a plot of one acre, for which tarred roads were laid, and electricity infrastructure provided.

Such local changes aside, the main reason there are so few sightings are probably that Delhi is beyond its normal range and its occurrence there is therefore infrequent. In addition it is a small, inconspicuous, nocturnal species that usually roosts in thick cover and is very easily overlooked.

Range & status

Globally, the Oriental Scops Owl's range comprises South Asia, South-East Asia, Japan, and South-East Russia, and it has a 'Least Concern' status (BirdLife 2014). It is a resident breeder of India with a wide range including the Western- and Eastern- Ghats (and adjoining lowlands in north-central and southern India), the Himalayan foothills, the north-eastern region, and the Andaman Islands. It covers an impressive range of ecosystems ranging from tropical rainforests (Western Ghats), deciduous forests (central and southern India), and the entire extent of the Himalayan foothills. There are no known estimates for the population either for India, or for each ecosystem that it inhabits in India. As a consequence, its status in India is not fully known. Any further sightings from Delhi (or indeed Haryana) should be reported.

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