

communities may misuse them by luring birds with the played-back calls, and kill them with catapults.

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Status of Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* at Harike, Punjab, India

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The Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* is essentially a Palearctic bird. It has been recorded throughout the Punjab, and Sind, as a sparse and uncommon winter visitor (Roberts 1991). Ali & Ripley (1981) describe it variously as 'a vagrant, rare, and as locally not uncommon...'. It is mainly a winter visitor to parts of north-western India: Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab (Grimmett *et al.* 1998), who also assign the 'rare' status to this owl in India. The Northern Long-eared Owl is 'a summer visitor' (Biddulph 1881), arriving early in March, and is common up to the middle of May in Gilgit (Scully 1881). Its breeding is reported from Baluchistan, Chitral, and western Kashmir, but confirmation is needed (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

While birding with Per Undeland, at Harike (31.17°N, 75.21°E), Punjab, ten Northern Long-eared Owls were found roosting in trees of *Acacia catechu* on 18 December 2015. They were roosting on different trees, spaced 10-15 m apart. These trees were part of a c. 150 x 150 m plantation of mixed trees surrounded by agricultural fields, and the owls were confined to the densest part of the plantation. They were very well hidden in the foliage, and flushed at close range. They rested during the day in the plantation and issued from it, to hunt, about sunset. On one side, beyond the fields, was the River Sutlej, with wide flood plains dotted with tussocks of sarpat grass *Saccharum* sp.. I had observed four birds on 08 March 1999 in a shisham *Delbergia sissoo* plantation, in Harike, along the Sutlej. At that time the trees were almost bare, and the birds were extraordinarily exposed. Contrary of the present observations, all the birds were then

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roosting on a single tree, at the edge of the plantation, where signs of tree cutting were evident. Although fresh leaves of spring had just started sprouting on some trees, they failed to conceal the owls (Sangha 2001). Those birds were extremely confiding. While constantly alert, they permitted photography from close quarters, and did not fly away. However, the birds observed on 18 December 2015 were very shy. When flushed by our approach they flew a short distance, and then suddenly alighted again. They were reluctant to leave the roosting site.

There have been prior reports of similar roosting congregations from this site, and the details are given in Table 1.

Considering the foregoing facts, these recent sightings of Northern Long-eared Owls at Harike, Punjab are not unexpected. Harike is well within the range of the species and the above records suggest that the birds are fairly regular during winter at Harike.

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Table 1: Roost congregations of Northern Long-eared Owl in Harike

Date	Count	Observer	Reference
23 March 1997	17	Per Undeland	Robson (1997)
7 February 1998	4	Per Undeland	Robson (1998)
2 February 1999	6	Ben King	Verbally, 2 February 1999
8 March 1999	4	Harkirat Sangha	Sangha (2001)
18 December 2015	10	Per Undeland & Harkirat Sangha	This work