Photographic record of Forest Eagle-Owl *Bubo nipalensis* from Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India

Ajit J. Deshmukh

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Ajit J. Deshmukh, Saralatai Memorial Hospital, Near Tower, Shrawagi Plots, Akola 444005, Maharashtra, India. Email: *ajitortho@rediffmail.com*

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The Forest Eagle-Owl *Bubo nipalensis* is a rare and resident owl of tropical dense evergreen and moist deciduous forest. It inhabits humid and riparian patches of forest. It is normally found at elevations of 900-1,200m but is also recorded up to 2,100m (Ali & Ripley 1981). This bird is distributed in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

On the Indian Subcontinent it is found in the lower Himalayas from Kumaon eastwards through Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan up to Arunachal Pradesh (Dafla Hills), Assam hills, north and south of Brahmaputra River, Nagaland, and Manipur. In peninsular India it is mainly found in the Western Ghats south of Goa and also in the Shevaroy Hills of the southern Eastern Ghats. It affects dense evergreen and moist deciduous forest as in the tropical valleys, terai and duars in the north and sholas in the southern hills.

From 25th-29th May 2007, I was in Kanha National Park of Madhya Pradesh. On 26th May, at 0530hrs, as our vehicle approached an artificial saucer (water-hole) near the Jamun Talao area, approximately 4km from the park's entrance at Kisli, I observed a large bird drinking water from it. As the day was still young, I could not ascertain its identity from a distance, due to poor light conditions. However, the bird appeared to me like a huge raptor. On getting a closer look I was astonished to find that it was a Forest Eagle-Owl. The bird had seen our vehicle approaching it, but seemed to be quite comfortable with that. Even when we were just 15m away, it continued to drink for 3-4 minutes. It kept looking at us, intermittently, without any sign of alarm or fear. I managed to get a few photographs (Fig. 1). The bird flew away into the dense forest after two more vehicles approached the place. My driver and the guide, both of whom are fairly knowledgeable about the birdlife of Kanha, were unable to identify it and both confessed to never having seen this bird before.

After returning from the national park I reviewed all available literature on this species and found that it has not been recorded from Central India in the major works for the region and for the Strigidae (Ripley 1961; Ali & Ripley 1981; Grimmett *et al* 1998; del Hoyo *et al* 1999; König 1999; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). However, D'Cunha & Ali (2001) reported the sighting of a single in February 1994 in 'dense sal forest near Sondhar in Mukki range.' I was surprised to see that Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) did not report its occurrence in central India. Therefore this photographic record is significant and reconfirms that of D'Cunha & Ali (2001) regarding its occurrence in central India.

Further investigation on the distribution of this species is required, especially in moist areas of the central Indian highlands and the Satpura-Maikal ranges, to ascertain its status in the region. Significantly, Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) state, 'In S India, adult plumage as in SL [=Sri Lanka; *B. n. blighi*] but slightly larger; racial identity with *blighi* requires study.'

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Fig. 1. Forest Eagle-Owl in Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India.