

Photos: Praveen ES



26. Short-tailed Shearwater in flight.

Though it is considered to be a vagrant in India, there are reports of regular sightings of these birds off the western coasts of the Malayan peninsula (Giri *et al.* 2013). This sighting from the Arabian Sea, first off the Kerala coast, together with the ones mentioned earlier, suggests that some birds drift off from their normal course of migration, in the western Pacific, to cross the Indian Ocean during their spring migration.

On our return journey we photographed a Wedge-tailed Shearwater *A. pacifica* [27], which had been earlier recorded from the seas off Kannur, in Kerala, in May 2011 (Praveen *et al.* 2013). This is the second photographic record of this species from India.

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27. Wedge-tailed Shearwater.

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Buffy Fish Owl *Ketupa ketupu* breeding in Sundarbans Tiger Reserve, India

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On 13 July 2014, at 1030 hrs, Soma Jha [SJ] came across a fish owl (Strigidae) on a nest of twigs in a bare tree, on the edge of Choragazi Channel, close to 'Do Banki' camp in Sundarbans Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, India. As the noisy diesel-engine boat approached the bank, the owl got disturbed and took off, but returned to resume its perch as the boat drifted away. The owl was observed for 30 min from a distance of 10–50 m. On 31 July, at 1306 hrs, we revisited the nesting location and made observations for 20 min. An individual owl was in the nest, which was, apparently, an old, raptor's construction, in a dry tree, c. 08–10 m above the water [28]. The nesting tree was on the edge of a mangrove forest overlooking a 70–80 m wide water channel. We estimated that the nest was at least 38–50 cm

deep, as only the head of the owl was visible above its rim. When the boat approached the bank, the owl flew out of the nest and perched on an open tree trunk some 10 m inside the mangrove forest, offering us a clear view of it. As earlier, as soon as the boat drifted away, the owl returned to the nest. It was first seen there on 26 June 2014 (*pers. comm.*, Nityananda Chowkidar). The dry tree, on which the owl was nesting, was identified as a 'Keora' tree *Sonneratia apetala* (*pers. comm.*, Krishnapada Baidya). The returning behaviour to the nest, suggests that the owl was probably incubating. One chick was observed at the nest site, along with an adult, on 26–27 August 2014 (*pers. comm.*, Jainy Kuriakose), and from 31 August to 02 September (*pers. comm.*, Harkirat Sangha).



28. Buffy Fish Owl *Ketupa ketupu* in nest.

The bird in question was a typical fish owl, superficially resembling a Tawny Fish Owl *Ketupa flavipes*, though smaller in size. The other features we noticed were, a streaked forehead, a prominent white crescent above the bill, white eyebrows, a prominent yellow iris, and a black beak. It had an ill-defined, un-streaked, warm brown facial disk, sideward-directed ear tufts, a diffused white throat patch, and yellowish brown underparts with black streaks that became weaker towards the belly and lower flanks. It had a black mantle, and its dark brown wings were edged tawny, and barred buff-yellow. The flight feathers, and tail sported buff-white barring [29]. It had longish, un-feathered tarsi, and very round wings in flight. Based on these observations, the bird was identified as a Buffy Fish Owl *Ketupa ketupu*.

The Buffy Fish Owl is the smallest of the fish owls (Marks *et al.* 1999), and is categorised under 'least concern' by BirdLife International (2014). It is much smaller than the similar Tawny Fish Owl (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The first published record of this species from the Indian Subcontinent was by Coltart (1904), when a specimen was obtained from 'Upper Assam'. Stevens (1915) records it, 'in all probability generally distributed in plains of upper Assam'. Baker (1927) 'found it not very rare in the hills of south Assam'. However, Ripley (1982) did not include it in his work *Synopsis*, as there are no specimens from the Indian



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29. Buffy Fish Owl *Ketupa ketupu*.

Subcontinent in the British Museum (Abdulali 1972); neither does the collection of Bombay Natural History Society (Abdulali 1972). König *et al.* (1999) do not show its distribution within the Indian Subcontinent. However, Marks *et al.* (1999), and Dickinson & Remsen (2013) include southern Assam, and NE India, respectively, in its distribution range. It has been recorded from the Sundarban area of Bangladesh (Neumann-Denzau & Denzau 2003; Khan 2005; Khan 2009). Khan (2009) record it's breeding from the Sundarbans area of Bangladesh. There have been recent photographic records of the species from the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve. The species was photographed in January 2010 (*pers. comm.*, Nikhil Bhopale). A bird was photographed on 18 March 2012, close to the Sajnekhali watchtower (Das 2012).

BirdLife International (2014) considers it possibly extinct in India, as there are no records of it since Coltart (1904), Stevens (1915), and Baker (1927). Only Baker (1927) records it's breeding from the southern Assam Hills, and Dibrugarh. The present record is the first photographic documentation of a breeding Buffy Fish Owl from India.

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