A Brown Fish-Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* preying on hatchling of the Mugger *Crocodylus palustris*

Fish-owls *Ketupa* sp. are large, powerful, nocturnal birds, with some species exclusively piscivorous (König & Weick 2008). They are often diurnal and live along lakes, rivers, and streams with well-wooded banks and feed mainly on freshwater prey from branches or rocks overhanging water, although other prey, such as, small aquatic and terrestrial animals (even carrion) has been recorded (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* is a widespread resident in South Asia, and the species *K. z. leschenaulti* occurs from northern Pakistan and India (south of the Himalayas) east to Myanmar (except north-east), and Thailand (Holt et al. 2020). Here, we describe an observation of the Brown Fish-Owl preying on a hatchling of the Mugger crocodile *Crocodylus palustris*.

On 06 May 2024, PS was visiting the Tourist Zone 3 of Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan, India. This area is famous for tiger-watching locations, including Jogi Mahal, High Point, Padam Talab, Raj Bagh, and Mandook. While exploring the forest area at Jogi Mahal and the surrounding wetlands (26.026 °N, 76.455 °E; 305 m asl), at 0745 h, an adult Brown Fish Owl was found actively feeding, on prey in a canopy of a large tamarind tree *Tamarindus indica* **[225–226]**. It was bright and sunny with a partly cloudy sky and we could observe the owl clearly with good views. The prey was partially eaten and the posterior part of the prey item had not been consumed until then. The owl was in the process of consuming the prey item during our period of observation, and therefore we were able to identify the prey species. The prey was identified as a hatchling of the Mugger crocodile based on examination of various images that visibly showed the distinct features of the species, such as, scale pattern of the belly, hind feet, and tail with scutes. We did not witness the owl during the actual hunting of the prey, and thus, we are unable to describe how the prey item was captured, or whether the prey was situated on land or water when it was captured, and whether it was alive or dead and decaying when it was captured. However, our observation confirms that the owl had successfully captured and consumed the prey item.

Brown Fish Owls mainly feed on fish, frogs, and freshwater crabs; also, crayfish, snakes, and lizards, including a monitor lizard *Varanus* sp. of *c.*28 cm; occasionally rodents and birds (Konig et al. 2008; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); also, insects, e.g., large beetles (Wadatkar et al. 2014). Prey identified in 192 feeding visits to a nest of the species in western India in Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat, consisted of 116 invertebrates (insects, crabs, prawns), 48 anurans, 20 snakes, three lizards, four fish, and one bird (Vyas et al. 2013). There are also occasional records of the species feeding on carrion and it has also been recorded feeding on crocodile carcass (Ali & Ripley 1981; Holt et al. 2020). The diet of Brown Fish-Owl is known to include a variety of prey (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Holt et al. 2020) and our observation proves that the hatchlings of Mugger crocodiles are part of its diet. This incident also highlights the diverse feeding habits of the species in the complex ecosystem of the Ranthambore National Park (see, Tana et al. 2024).

Previous literature shows that some large waterbirds are capable of predating hatchlings of Mugger crocodiles, including Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

225. Brown Fish-Owl with a hatchling of Mugger crocodile as prey at Ranthambore National Park, Rajasthan, India.

226. Brown Fish-Owl with a hatchling of Mugger crocodile as prey at Ranthambore National Park, Rajasthan, India.

Both: Pradeep Singh

(Somaweera et al. 2013; Vyas 2019), and Grey Heron *A. cinerea* (Tana et al. 2024). Some photographic records are available on electronic media on different bird species consuming hatchlings of crocodile spp. (Gillian 2020; Fitzsimons 2020). However, a recent study documented 23 species of birds, bitterns, herons, storks, and cranes were involved in preying/feeding of hatchlings of 15 different species and subspecies of crocodiles (Somaweera et al. 2013). To reverse the situation, Hakim & Sharma (2024) reported an adult Mugger capturing a Brown Fish-Owl that was wading in shallow water in Girwa River at Bardiya National Park, Nepal. Predatory interactions are complex, and have influenced and driven various adaptations in both predators and prey, however, such a role reversal in predator-prey relationships is rare (Vyas 2024).

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– Pradeep Singh & Raju Vyas
Pradeep Singh, Naturalist and Expedition Leader, India.
Email: kokpradeepsingh@hotmail.com [PS]
Raju Vyas, Sashwat Apartment, BPC-Haveli Road, near Splatter Studio, Alkapuri, Vadodara 390007, Gujarat, India. Email: razoovyas@gmail.com [RV] [Corresponding author]

Three additions to the avifauna of the Union Territory of Ladakh, India

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* from Hanley Wetland Complex

During a butterfly survey organized by GoI-UNDP-GEF SECURE Himalaya Project from 11–20 August 2023 in eastern Ladakh, I photographed a bird in flight near the Ragar marshes (32.756°N, 78.958°E; 4,301 m asl), in the Hanley Wetland Complex on 15 August at 0724 h in the morning. Although my initial impression was that of the commonly occurring Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, I left the area without reviewing my photos properly and identifying the bird correctly. After reaching Rumtse village (33.628°N, 77.759°E; 4,208 m asl) on 19 August, I was able to review my photos on the computer and noticed some reddish tinge on the underwings. Careful examination of the bird's bill length, tail length and pattern in the photos, led me to eliminate Green Sandpiper which was structurally very different from the bird I had photographed. I deduced the bird to be a pratincole *Glareola* spp., and after forwarding the images to Ashwin Viswanathan, it was suggested that the bird could be an Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum*. The absence of white trailing edge to the secondaries and the shallow tail-fork (Grimmett et al. 2011)—features that were visible in the photograph **[227]**—eliminated the similar looking Collared Pratincole *G. pratincola*. While Collared Pratincole has been reported from a single sighting in the Upper Indus Valley between Choglamsar and Thiksey in spring of 1982 (Delany et al. 2017), there are no recent records of Oriental Pratincole from Ladakh (Pfister 2014; Sharma et al. 2021; eBird 2024). However, this species is listed in a historical checklist for the region but without any details or location (Ward 1907), and thus it cannot be ascertained whether the report was from Ladakh or Jammu & Kashmir.

Padma Gyalpo

227. Oriental Pratincole at Ragar marshes.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* from Tsokar Wetland Complex

Tsokar Lake (33.301°N, 78.001°E; 4,530 m asl) is a Ramsar site in eastern Ladakh, and an Important Bird Area (IBA) that serves as the breeding site of species such as Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus,* Brown-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus,* and the State bird of Ladakh – the Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* among many other species. During the autumn season from mid-August to mid-September, the number of species near and around the lake is augmented by the presence of passage migrant birds and several rare birds can be seen during this time. With the hope to find some lesser-known passage migrants, I went birding at Tsokar Lake on 08 September 2023. At 0911 h, near Newul Hamlet (33.323°N, 78.039°E; 4,529 m asl), I photographed a godwit *Limosa* spp. which was seen feeding on the shoreline alongside Common Redshanks *T. totanus* and Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*. Initially the bird could not be identified properly due to the heat haze which led to blurry photographs. Then after a while when the bird took off and flew some distance away before landing again to forage, I was able to take few photographs in flight. The photograph **[228]** clearly revealed a barred tail and a white V-shape on the back, eliminating the regular passage migrant Black-tailed Godwit *L. limosa*. The slightly upturned bi-colored bill also helped in elimination of Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata,* Whimbrel *N. phaeopus,* and Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* all of which look similar in appearance from the back in flight. More images are available in Gyalpo (2023a). Although the Dowitcher has not yet been reported from Ladakh, both Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrel are common passage migrant birds and can be seen in the Tsokar wetland complex during August and September (Chamba 2022; Gyalpo 2024). Subsequent to my sighting, there was another record near the same area, on 10 September 2023, possibly the same bird, but without any photos (Norboo 2023). There is one previous record of the species listed in an old report (Gautam et al. 2007), but without any supporting documentation or photographs, and thus rendering the latter two records unconfirmed. Apart from these two unconfirmed records, there