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On pelagic seabird bycatch incident in tuna longline at Lakshadweep

Seabird bycatch, where birds are accidentally caught in fishery equipment is well studied across various oceanic provinces (Croxall et al. 2012; Pott & Wiedenfeld 2017). Over the years, this research has highlighted high seabird mortality caused by various fishing gears such as long lines, gill nets and trawls (Anderson et al. 2011; Žydelis et al. 2013). Indian offshore waters have many species of seabirds (Praveen et al. 2013) as they migrate in and out of the region from both the northern and southern hemispheres (Karuthedathu et al. 2013; Mondreti et al. 2020). Here we document two incidents of seabird bycatch from tuna fishing at Kavaratti Island (10.565 °N, 72.642°E), Lakshadweep, India on 11 July 2019.

A Frigatebird *Fregata sp.* was one of at least two potential Frigatebirds trapped on a longline offshore. One bird was released at the incident site, and hence its definite identity cannot be established. The other one was injured and taken by the fishermen to the island. The injured bird [31] was identified as an adult Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* based on its black head and white underparts without any tawny plumage. The amount of white, starting from the throat, indicates it was a female. The blackish throat is restricted and the bill is fairly long indicating that it is neither Lesser- *F. ariel* nor Christmas Island Frigatebird *F. andrewsi*. Additionally, the pinkish bill indicated it was not the smaller subspecies *F. m. listeri* from Christmas Island, Cocos (Keeling) and north-west Australia, but the western Indian Ocean breeding *F. m. aldbrensis*. The bird had lost some of its retrices (tail feathers) and primaries (flight feathers) in the accident and was not able to fly. We saw the bird perching free in the courtyard of one of the fisher's houses. It was yet to gain the lost feathers but was later released.

Great Frigatebirds breed in the Chagos archipelago as well as various other islands across the southern Indian ocean and make non-breeding movements across the tropical Indian and Pacific Oceans (Carr 2015), however this record is likely the first documentation of this species in the Lakshadweep islands.

Seabirds are one of the most threatened groups globally

and are valuable indicators of the health of marine ecosystems. Fisheries bycatch fall among the greatest threats to many of these species, along with invasive predators, disease, pollution and changing climate (Croxall et al, 2012). A global review of the gaps in information regarding seabird bycatch showed that there is a lack of data from the Indian region on this aspect and hence our record is useful. Other known records of seabird bycatch from Indian Ocean waters include a Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* ensnared on a longline fishing thread and a Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus* entangled on a net (Karuthedathu et al. 2013). The Lakshadweep islands are frequently and regularly visited by migratory seabirds (Aju et al. 2021). Dedicated projects on seabird assessment and their fishery interaction in Indian waters guided by a National Action Plan on Seabird Bycatch can effectively set a future course on the comprehensive studies on Indian seabirds. The authors acknowledge the Director, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute for the support given to the work. We are grateful to David James and Dipu Karuthedathu for confirming the identity of the species.

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Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl *Ketupa nipalensis* breeding in Pench Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra

The Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl *Ketupa nipalensis* is a large, mostly nocturnal owl found in tropical evergreen, tropical moist deciduous, and tropical & subtropical broad-leaved forests (del Hoyo et al. 1999; Srinivasan 2013) of India and south-eastern Asia. In India, its primary range spans from the subtropical Himalaya of Uttarakhand to north-eastern India and the Western Ghats (from Goa to Kerala). It is also found, although uncommonly, in the Eastern Ghats, eastern Gujarat, and the Western Ghats of Maharashtra (Whistler & Kinnear 1935; Nandini 2005; Grimmer et al. 2011; Srinivasan 2013; Palei et al. 2018; Sharma & Nafees 2018; Kanthariya 2019). The field guides Grimmer et al. (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) considered it absent from Central India. However, since the mid-1990s, it has been recorded at several places in Central India (Table 1).



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31. A Great Frigatebird rescued from longline fishing equipment.

Table 1. Places with records of Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl from Central India

Place	State	Date of first record	Remarks
Bori Wildlife Sanctuary	Madhya Pradesh	Unknown	First mentioned in Mehta (1998) and then recorded on 09 May 2004 (Jayapal et al. 2005)
Pench Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	Unknown	First mentioned in Sen & Dugriyal (2004) and then recorded on 18 April 2004 (Jayapal et al. 2005). Many subsequent records (Majumder et al. 2011; Rai 2018; eBird 2024).
Achanakmar Tiger Reserve	Chhattisgarh	Unknown	Mentioned in Chandra (2014).
Kanha Tiger Reserve	Madhya Pradesh	February 1994	First mentioned in D'Cunha & Ali (2001). Many subsequent records (Deshmukh 2008; eBird 2024).
Kanger Valley National Park	Chhattisgarh	24 July 2018	Breeding record (Bharos et al. 2019).

On 10 June 2023, Ishita Khemariya, Deepali Sharma, and K.D. Kuklare (member of STPF, Special Tiger Protection Force) recorded a pair of Spot-bellied Eagle-Owls during a bird survey. The location was Arjuna Nala, CN 659, Surewani Beat of Nagalwadi Buffer Range (21.540°N, 79.001°E) of Pench Tiger Reserve, eastern Maharashtra. Thereafter, both individuals were frequently recorded on subsequent days. The location is close to Surewani village, and its habitat is tall and dense, moist deciduous forest. The only other owls recorded near the Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl location were the Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum* and Indian Scops-Owl *Otus bakkamoena*. On 16 June 2023, Srikant Dhoble recorded a juvenile, an offspring of the adult pair, at the same location. The juvenile was seen outside of the nest [32]. Thereafter, the juvenile was frequently recorded on subsequent days. This is the second breeding record in Central India after being recorded breeding in July 2018 at Kanger Valley National Park (Bharos et al. 2019).



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32. Juvenile Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, Pench Tiger Reserve, 16 June 2023.

The owls were seen eating snakes, small birds, mice, and insects. During the day, the owls roosted on large trees, particularly *Terminalia arjuna* and *Ficus bengalensis* (Banyan tree), often occupying the same tree for the entire day. These sightings reconfirm that the Spot-bellied Eagle Owl is a breeding resident in Central India. It also raises the possibility that this species could be widely distributed in Central India in suitable habitat but has largely gone undetected.

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