

The Hodgson's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus hodgsoni* in the Garo Hills, Meghalaya

Frogmouths are nocturnal birds in the *Podargidae* family found in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Australia, where India is home to two species - the Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*, which inhabits the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka, and Hodgson's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus hodgsoni*, which has a patchy distribution in north-eastern India and is also found across parts of Southeast Asia (Winkler et al. 2024). These birds typically reside in dense tropical evergreen forests, and lower montane slopes, at 300–1,900 m asl elevation (Holyoak 2020).

Though the records of Hodgson's Frogmouth are scarce in Meghalaya, this species has been sighted infrequently in Khasi Hills district (Karim 2021; Baishya 2023; Kalita 2023; Banerjee 2024; Mathur 2025) and Ri-Bhoi district (Ganguly 2023). The only past record from the Garo Hills consists of a specimen collected from the Tura area, West Garo Hills in 1950 (UMMZ 2025). On 30 January 2025, at 1413 hrs, while birdwatching and trekking through Balpakram National Park, South Garo Hills district, Meghalaya (25.300°N, 90.807°E; c.528 m asl), we heard a lot of screeching from small birds coming from a dense bamboo thicket besides the main trail. As we approached, a medium sized bird suddenly flew out of the undergrowth and perched high up above us and was observing us below. On closer inspection, it was confirmed to be a male Hodgson's Frogmouth. We confirmed the identity by its mottled grey lichen-like plumage, large gape, and unique amphibian-like appearance with long facial bristles (Grimmett et al. 2011). The smaller birds including some warblers were still screeching and mobbing it. The individual was extremely still, barely making any movement, and we were able to photograph it [171]. We observed the bird for around five minutes and then left it alone.



Photo: Daniel Miranda

171. Hodgson's Frogmouth in Balpakram NP, Garo Hills, Meghalaya.

Across a span of four months between February and May 2025, we heard the long haunting whistle of this species on several occasions and recorded it in the Mahadeo (25.199°N, 90.859°E; c.400 m asl) and Baghmara (25.299°N, 90.762°E; c.574 m asl) ranges within Balpakram National Park.

This note is significant as it is the first recorded sighting of this bird from the Garo Hills in the last 75 years. The sites where this species was observed comes under Balpakram National Park, which is an Important Bird Area and Key Biodiversity Area (BirdLife International 2025). However, this species remains understudied and is frequently overlooked, largely due to its nocturnal and secretive behaviour. This record underscores the need for targeted ecological research and the integration of citizen science approaches to enhance data collection across its range.

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