An injured Oriental Bay Owl *Phodilus badius* in Goa, India

Jennifer De Souza & Qupeleio De Souza


Jennifer De Souza & Qupeleio De Souza, Backwoods Camp, Matkan, Sanguem, Goa, India. Email: qupeleio@hotmail.com

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The Oriental Bay Owl is a resident of semi-evergreen, and evergreen forests. Its strictly nocturnal habits, low density of populations, and secretive nature contribute to its status as one of India’s more little known owls (Ali & Ripley 1987). Within India it occurs in two widely separated geographic regions, apparently rare in both although, perhaps, as this report might indicate, to some extent overlooked.

The northern race *Phodilus badius saturatus* is known to extend throughout the Himalayan foothills from Sikkim to south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh, and the southern Assam Hills. Two disjunct populations, *P. b. ripleyi* and *P. b. assimilis*, occur in the western Southern Ghats of Kerala/Tamil Nadu, and in the wet and intermediate zones of Sri Lanka, respectively (Inglis 1945; Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). These two southern races are sometimes considered a distinct species, Ceylon Bay Owl *P. assimilis*, on the basis of morphological, and in particular, vocal variations (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

Until the early 1990s *P. b. ripleyi* was known only from a single specimen taken at Periasolai (10° 36'N 74°40'E) in Kerala’s Nelliampathy Hills (Hussain & Khan 1978), following which almost all recorded sightings have been from the Anaimalai Hills (Kannan 1993, 1998; Sugathan & Jacob 1995; Muddappa 1998; Raman 2001). It has therefore long been considered that the distributional range of this species in peninsular India is across a very small section of the southern Western Ghats, although there have been previous extralimital reports from Bandipur National Park (Ahmed & Yekanthappa 1998), and Sirsi (Vasudeva et al. 2005), both in Karnataka state.

Here we present, what is almost certainly, the first record of Oriental Bay Owl in Goa, and the northern-most record within the Western Ghats.

At around 0730 hrs on 8 April 2009 an owl was observed roosting on a low branch in Backwoods Camp (15°26'N 74°14'E; 95 m a.s.l.), within the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary (Goa). The bird was immediately identified as an Oriental Bay Owl, this being a distinctive species, and one that we are familiar with. Excellent views were obtained at close range allowing us to view the bird from all aspects, noting the speckled chestnut and golden back, heavily banded wings, and short tail, pale facial disc with dark vertical eye stripes, and clearly defined chestnut cap.

The bird was clearly unsettled, changing its perch occasionally but never moving far. Disregarding its entirely unexpected appearance here, this uncharacteristic activity during daylight hours, in such close proximity to human habitation, was a cause for concern. It soon became clear that the bird was suffering a facial injury, periodically shaking its head to deter flies, and scratching at the affected area with its foot. At about 0830 hrs the bird flew down onto the ground, clearly weakened, and the decision was taken to capture it to ascertain the extent of its injuries. Once in the hand, closer inspection showed a deep circular wound, approximately 1 cm in diameter, adjacent to the bill, infested with maggots, perhaps initially inflicted as a scratch or bite from a prey item. The bird was taken directly to the Goa clinic of International Animal Rescue for treatment, where sadly it succumbed to its injuries during the night. The specimen is to be donated to the collections of the Bombay Natural History Society following taxidermy.

The core areas of the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary contain pristine, largely unexplored vegetation classified into three main forest types, namely, west coast tropical evergreen, west coast semi-evergreen, and moist deciduous. That an Oriental Bay Owl was found in appropriate habitat as far north as Goa raises questions about its status, and wider distribution within the Western Ghats. This region forms part of over 2,200 km² of protected forests in Goa, and neighbouring Karnataka and Maharashtra which, given the pervasion of suitable habitat, may be hosting previously overlooked populations of Oriental Bay Owl, extending its range considerably further north, than has been earlier supposed.

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**References**


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