



The Brown Fish-Owl resides near permanent waterbodies and perches on rocks keeping a watch for prey.

Food:

Hunt amphibians, fish, snakes, crabs, mollusks and arachnids. Also eat rodents and birds. Reported to scavenge on crocodile carcass. Observation roosts are rocks in the middle of a water body, an overhanging branch near a river or lake or on the edge of a nulla. Take fish from the surface and do not dive in water. Heaps of loose pellets with crab claws, fish bones, frog skulls and bones, and scorpion stings, fish scales, are seen under favorite perches. These are useful for the scientific study of the diet of the fish owls. Other methods are night observations and camera traps with night vision facility.



Pellet consisting of fish bones.



Crab shell remains.



Scorpion sting, tail segments and frog bone remains in pellet.



Toad held in beak.



Swallowing a Trinket snake.



Wolf snake and Green Vine snake; Snakes are taken in summer.



The avian angler is an accomplished fish eater.

Key Features:



- Rufous-brown plumage is streaked with black.
- Juveniles are more rufous and pale than adults.
- Pale below with wavy lines.
- **Throat and fore-neck:** Prominent white patch.
- **Iris:** golden-yellow.
- Eyes forward facing.
- **Flat facial disc:** Not well defined above.
- Horizontal ear tufts or 'horns' on the crown.
- **Bill:** Grayish - greenish, hooked.
- **Wings:** Rounded; short of tail. 6th primary longest.
- **Legs:** Un-feathered tarsus are granular, dusky and yellow.
- **Claws:** Horny brown. Sharp cutting edge beneath; middle claw has a sharp keel on the side.
- Male smaller than female.



The horns are horizontal.



Whitish neck patch.



Under-wing in flight.



Outer-wing pattern.



Tail feathers outer side.



Bare tarsus are useful for catching aquatic prey; A brancher in juvenile plumage.



Flight



Parent in flight after lifting a snake from the ground and carrying it head first in the beak.



Taking off from the nest for finding food shows the agility of flight; Notable flat facial disc in flight. Flight of the fish owl is silent due to soft feathers and prey is taken by surprise.

Nesting behaviour of adults:



Pair prior to breeding.



Adult excavating the nest.



Male bringing snake to female.



Male feeding the female.



Female eating the snake.



Female incubating.



Female taking a nap; Puffing the throat and panting for regulating body temperature at noon.



Behavior



Sleeping in the morning; Partially closed nictitating membranes; Brood patch of the female.



Cautiously landing on the nest platform.



Young resting in mother's shadow at noon with the sun overhead!!



Chick eating a frog seen on a night vision camera



Tawny Fish Owl *Bubo flavipes*

FACT FILE: Brown Fish Owl *Bubo (Ketupa) zeylonensis* (Temminck), 1820.

Type locality: Eastern provinces of India = Chandernagore.

Huma, Human (Marathi); **Aamrai ka Ghughu** (Hindi); **Bhootoom pecha** (Bengal); **Machimaar Ghuvad** (Gujarati); **Hoodoo** (Assam); **Ooman** (Malyalam); **Babhrupinga** (Sanskrit).

- **Size:** 56 cm.
- **Weight:** 1105 g.
- **Wing:** Male 379 - 443 mm; Female 392 - 430 mm.
- **Breeding season:** May - August; up to December.
- **Clutch:** 1 - 2 eggs. One clutch per year.
- **Eggs:** White, smooth, roundish. 58.4 x 48.9 mm (Baker).
- **Incubation:** 36 - 38 d.
- **Nuptial displays:** Flights, mutual feeding and calls.
- **Fledging:** Around 50 d.
- **Call:** Deep, eerie, ventriloquistic, moans, *Hoom, Hoom*.



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Brown Fish Owl

- **Order:** Strigiformes. • **Family:** Strigidae. • **Status:** Resident.

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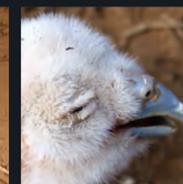
Life of the Nestling



One week old chick.



Naked tarsus of young.



Egg tooth on bill-tip.



Young peeping from mothers belly. Mother is lovingly feeding the young!



Parent catering a fresh snake for the baby.



Four weeks old chick in the nest.



Close-up of tarsus; 5-6 weeks old chick in the nest.



Chicks regularly stretch their wings after 5 weeks; Outer and inner wing pattern can be seen.



The 5-6 weeks old chick exercising in the nest.

Nest

Always near water. On bare soil, on ledge in a cliff, or earth cuttings, ravines near lakes, streams or rivers; nest is devoid of nesting material. In a natural tree hollow or in the cradle in the tree fork. In ruins. Female incubates. Male feeds female up to the first two weeks after the eggs hatch.

THREATS:

In several parts of India it is illegally trapped and killed for use in black magic and other superstitions. Water pollution, habitat loss, forest felling and mining are the other threats. We have rescued fish owls incapable of hunting because they were blind with one eye due to previous trauma. Such owls need lifelong orphanage care.

Economic importance and conservation:

Fish Owl is an indicator species of undisturbed forests and unpolluted water. It is protected under Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act. Occupied habitats should be identified and protected with the help of peoples' participation and public education. An instance is on record when a nest accidentally discovered by mountaineers of 'Mountain Quest' while rappelling was protected. The present file has data from this nest and is also supported by the mountaineers!

Etymology: *Bubo* (L.), the eagle owl; *zeylonensis* (L.), from Ceylon; After the type locality of *B. z. zeylonensis*. (Pande, Satish, 2009).

Amazing Facts:

The tarsus are devoid of feathers, which aid them in efficiently hunting aquatic food like fish, amphibians and crabs. The soles of feet have prickly scales that help in catching slippery fish and snakes. Bathe in water and later spend time in drying and preening the wet feathers. Rotate the head rapidly in 360 degrees. In spite of its name, often eats snakes! If the fish owl falls in water, it can drown. Such fish owls have been successfully rescued.

Cultural aspects:

The Fish Owl is mentioned in the Indian Sanskrit text, Skand Purana (1000 AD). It is mentioned by the name of **Babhrupinga** - deep brown in colour. The deep and mysteriously eerie call of the Fish Owl is wrongly perceived as a sign of ill omen by many.

Dr. Satish Pande, Dr. M.N.Mahajan, Rajkumar Pawar, Prashant Deshpande, Shivkumar Pednekar, Dr. Satish Karmalkar, Amod Moghe and Mandar Bhide (Mountain Quest) did field research.