

Habitat: Rocky hills with sparse vegetation and scrub; ravines, river banks with earth cuttings and dry beds; outskirts of villages near agricultural cropland. Avoids forests.

Habit: A nocturnal raptor. Perches on high vantage points at dawn and dusk to proclaim territory. Attacks if the nest is approached. Perches in dense foliage or on cliffs under rocks in crevices during the day time.

Distribution: From the Himalayan foothills up to 1500 m across peninsular India. Pakistan. Myanmar.

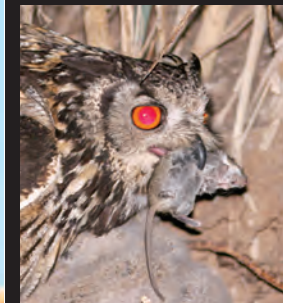
Status: Resident. Endemic to the Indian subcontinent.



They guard their locality for the entire year. Here it can be seen flying over its territory.



The Indian Eagle Owl is majestically silhouetted against the skyline at dusk. It is also known as the 'Rock Owl'.



A rodent held in the beak. Red eye is due to flash light from the camera.



Swallowing a rat head-first. The mouth can be widely opened to accomodate large prey.



Scorpion is a common prey item. Only stings and few chitinous body parts are expelled in pellets.



Owl hunting in an open patch.



Dissection of pellets reveals skulls, mandibles and legs eaten as prey.

Food:

Rodents (rats and mice), shrews, birds, reptiles, other small mammals (squirrels, civet, hare, mongoose, young langooors, bats); Arachnids, Molluscs, Crustaceans, Insects (large beetles), etc.

Identification Features:



Ear-tufts or 'horns'.



Forward facing eyes.



Flat facial disc in side view.



Feathered legs and toes.

- Brown plumage is streaked and mottled.
- Iris - orange-yellow.
- Eyes forward facing.
- Facial disc - dorso-ventrally flat.
- Ears at the edge of the disc.
- Two erect feather tufts - 'horns' on head.

- Bill - horny brown, hooked.
- Wings rounded.
- Legs - fully feathered, grayish-brown.
- Claws – horny black.
- Male smaller than female.
- Cat-like appearance when perched.



Note the beautiful design on the rounded wing as seen from outside.



Wing from inside. Black edges give strength to the feathers.

Cultural Aspects:



In the Uluka- Jataka the owl was commemorated as the king of animals and a sculpture at Mathura depicts the consecration ceremony at the hands of the monkeys. Several superstitious beliefs are wrongly associated with this owl. If seen or heard, it is falsely considered to be a bad omen. It is believed that if a stone is pelted at the owl, the owl supposedly catches it and grinds it slowly to cause the slow but certain death of the offender. This belief has fortunately saved the lives of several owls.

Etymology:

Bubo (L.), the eagle owl; *bengalensis* (L), related to Bengal, formerly denoting Northern India. (Pande, Satish, 2009).

Related Species:



Brown Fish Owl.



Dusky Eagle Owl.



Spot-bellied Eagle Owl.

Amazing Facts:



Adult-broken wing display to distract others.



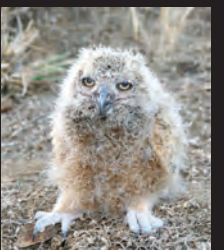
Threat display by young.



Chick under mom's belly.



Chicks show tracts of pteryly and apteria.



Young in mixed down.

Can rotate head 360 degrees, when special adaptations in neck and brain vessels maintain blood circulation. Flies noiselessly during the night. Young walk out of the ground nests at about 3 – 4 weeks even before they can fly. This strategy aids survival because the nests become filthy due to pellets and droppings of the young and may attract ground predators. Under parental guidance, the young change the hiding places every night. They swallow prey whole and regurgitate pellets containing mandibles, skulls, other bones, fur and feathers, after 24 to 36 hours, which are used by ornithologists for study of the diet of these owls.

Threats

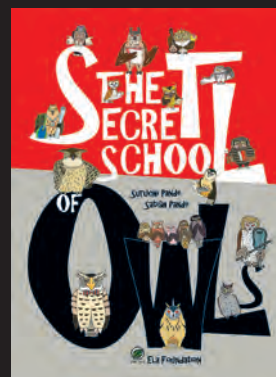


Several owls die from electrocution. Others are trapped for illicit trade for black magic.



A rescued owl recuperates under care. Owl studies often invite local attention during the night when researchers may be mistaken for thieves. Taking local people into confidence while performing field research at night can avoid such unpleasant encounters.

THREATS: Instances are recorded when ground nests with occupants were burned alive due to ground fires. In several parts of India, owls are wrongly and illegally killed for clandestine use in black magic. Pesticide use, habitat loss and change in land use pattern are the other significant threats.



Conservation: It is protected by law. Public education is the key to the protection of owls, wrongly shrouded in superstitions. The comics – ‘**The Secret School of Owls**’, and films by Ela Foundation are such attempts.

FACT FILE: Indian Eagle Owl; Great Horned-Owl. *Bubo bengalensis* (Franklin, 1831).

Type locality: The Ganges between Calcutta & Benares & in the Vindhyan Hills between Benares and Gurra Mundela.

Shrungi Ghubad (Marathi); **Ghughu** (Hindi); **Hutom pecha** (Bengal); **Gug** (Sind);

Terra gudla guba (Telugu); **Komban andai** (Tamil); **Komba munga** (Malayalam); **Uluk** (Sanskrit).

- **Size:** 56 cm.
- **Weight:** 1100 g.
- **Wing:** Male 364 - 390 mm; Female 375 - 425 mm.
- **Breeding season:** October - May.
- **Clutch:** 1 - 6 eggs. One clutch per year.
- **Eggs:** White creamy, glossy. Ovoid. 53.6 x 43.8 mm (Baker).
- **Incubation:** 33 - 34 d.
- **Nuptial displays:** Flights, mutual feeding and calls.
- **Chicks walk out of the nest:** 23 - 28 d.
- **Breeding success:** 1.6 young per nest.
- **Nesting success:** 91 %
- **Call:** Loud, resonant, penetrating, repetitive, eerie *ghoo, ghoo* at dawn and dusk. Varied calls for other occasions.



Sponsored by Adv. Vinayak Bhonsule in memory of his father late **Shri. G.A. Bhonsule**, social entrepreneur, nature conservationist and pioneer in housing finance.

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Ela File 07



Indian Eagle Owl

- **Order:** Strigiformes.
- **Family:** Strigidae.
- **Status:** Resident.
- **Endemic to the Indian Subcontinent.**

ELA FOUNDATION



Conservation Through Education & Research

Flight



The Indian Eagle Owl executes varied flight maneuvers. The flight is rapid, swift and silent due to soft feathers having serrated margins. It is aptly called the ‘Tiger of the Night Sky’.

Breeding



Female leaving the nest on a ledge.



Three eggs with a nestling.



One week old chicks huddled for warmth.



Three and a half weeks old chicks walk out of the nest before they can fly, with feathers in pin.



Four weeks old chick in brown post-natal down.



Five to six weeks old chick resting close to a similarly coloured rock - a survival tactic!

Nest: A shallow scrape on terra firma on bare soil. No nesting material. Ledges in earth cuttings or

ravines near lakes, streams or rivers; ground scrape on steep inclines; crevice under boulder, tree or clump.

Do not nest in trees. Only female incubates. Male feeds the female till young walk out of the nest.



The young owls have short ear tufts.



A brancher with well developed ear tufts. Such seven months old young are capable of hunting.

Dr. Satish Pande is conducting field research on this species for 11 years. He was assisted by Dr. M.N. Mahajan, Amit Pawashe, Rajkumar Pawar, Prashant Deshpande, Unmesh Barbhay, Shivkumar Pednekar, Dr. Suruchi Pande and Nivedita Pande.