

OWL POST

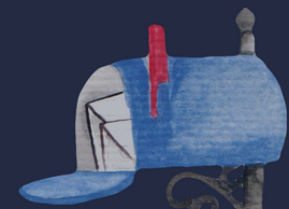




Image: Chinmay Nisal

WELCOME TO OWL POST

How many of us have actually seen an owl from up close? I am talking about a very direct encounter, a close-up experience of witnessing the bird right in your line of vision for a significant period of time allowing you to observe the shape of its head, the size of its body, the colours and patterns on the feathers or the intensity of its gaze. Only a handful of us, I should think. Since they don't visit us in our garden as we are watering our plants, or perch on the balcony railing as we read a book on a Sunday morning. Nor do they greet us with sweet chirps in the morning or fly with our city sky-guardians- the black kites; a bird which probably gets uncomfortable around humans, just like me.

Chances are if you listen closely, you may hear them outside your window at night. *Chiirrrurrrr chirrrrr* by an effervescent spotted owlet, a sudden screech by a barn owl or the drawling *woop woop woop* of a brown hawk owl, these magically beautiful and magnificently misunderstood birds deserve our attention- the right kind. For we now share our habitat with them. We may be citymongers who shiver at the sight of a snake and turn to stone when we see a house gecko scurrying across the wall. I am sure deep within (very very deep within), we wish to connect with nature and build a meaningful coexistence like our ancestors. But unless we learn more about our cryptic and helpful nocturnal neighbours, we may end up disastrously impacting their lives and survival without being aware of it.

So here's a hoot to all of you who have decided to join the parliament! We hope this owl post helps you re-consider your perceptions towards these birds and make you want to know more...

~Debangini



THEY'RE ALL AROUND ME!

Upamanyoo Das



Image: Upamanyoo

Disclaimer: Upamanyoo has rescued wildlife professionally for many years now, including many species of owls. We would recommend that citizens directly try and call authorities if they find an injured owl instead of first handling it themselves without the correct guidance and know-how..

"During spring, there is torrential rain and storm in Assam, which render a lot of birds homeless or injured after they fall from their nests. They mostly either perish or end up becoming prey to other birds or mammals before we can find them. It was one such stormy evening in April 2020, during the lockdown. I was at home with my parents.

The next morning when we went for a stroll around the house, we heard some frail screeches from behind the trees.

Upon further investigation, we discovered this frail, wet and shivering owlet fallen on the ground.

Our first instinct was to thoroughly check for its nest and see if its parents were nearby, but there was no sign of either. So we took it inside the house, very gently dabbed it dry with a soft cloth, layered it carefully with rugs and kept it as warm as possible. We didn't have much hope for its survival since it was very drenched and too young- it didn't even develop feathers!

We arranged for grasshoppers and worms and tried feeding the hatchling by mimicking the way the parents would have fed it- by dangling the worm near its beak and letting it catch and swallow it by itself. It responded well and started accepting the food. I made a nest for the baby bird with twigs, grass and cloth in my bedroom where it would be safe from the other animals in the house. Gradually, it started growing and flying feebly. It loved to perch near the ventilator and knew exactly when it was feeding time. This continued for three months.

With all the owlets I have rescued, I have observed that one fine day after they heal, they will leave the house and return only the next day. This continues until one day they don't come back anymore. You can see them flying around the house and perching close by, but they no longer come as close to you as they did before. It's a bittersweet feeling. It is worth it though, seeing them fly away into the skies and not look back, like this baby here."

QUILLS AND CARVINGS

Debangini Ray

SPOTTED OWLET (*Athene brama*)

Small and stocky (~ 21cm)
Species is nocturnal but is sometimes seen during the day. Bob their head and stare at intruder



Yerkes are similar. Grey-brown upperparts streaked with white

Yellow iris
underparts are white, streaked; white-ish

The call is a harsh and loud chirring and chuckling "chirrrr - chirrrr - chirrrr" ending with a "chewak chirrak". Hunts insects, rodents, lizards, bats, small snakes and a variety of small vertebrates. They have adapted to living in cities and often build their nests around human

Breeding season is from November to April. Courtship behaviour includes bill grasp, allpreening and ritual feeding. Nests may be lined with leaves and feathers.

Parliament
in
Session ...



DID Y'OWL KNOW?

The laughing owl (*Ninox albifacies*) also known as the white-faced owl which was endemic to New Zealand has gone extinct over the last few centuries due to persecution, land use changes, and the introduction of predators like cats and stoats.

Evidence of its short and feeble wings indicates that its powers of flight were limited, while its long legs and shortened toes suggest that the species may have spent more time on the ground than other owl species. This ties in with the evidence found through the remains of its prey preserved in former nest sites. The diet of this owl contained a high proportion of fauna often found in the forest floor, such as seabirds, flightless birds, bats, lizards, frogs, and rats.

Sources:

1. Gould J. 1865. *Handbook to the birds of Australia*, Vol. 2. J. Gould: London.
2. Worthy TH, Holdaway RN. 2002. *The lost world of the Moa*. Christchurch, New Zealand: Canterbury University Press.





WOO! HELLO HUMAN...

I am the Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*)

I am a small owl about 19-21cm (7-8 inches), slightly smaller than the size of your iPad. I have a pale yellow beak and bright yellow eyes; my pretty white-ish face and underparts are streaked with brown but my brown upperparts are streaked with white.

I know I know, I'm adorable!

I am not a morning bird (yawn) and mostly sleep till late in cosy tree holes or branches with my siblings or partner. Whichever city you are in India, I'm pretty sure you'll find us!



Image: Rayhan



What do I like to eat, you ask? Well yummm, let's see, I usually like my diet to consist of a mix of juicy insects like beetles and moths, sometimes I nibble on earthworms and lizards and occasionally enjoy a delicious meal of mice and small birds. I usually like to perch, wait, and pounce on my dinner.

Have you heard me call out at night? I usually share my habitat with you city folks, though you'll find some of my friends in peri-urban and rural areas. We spotted owlets chuckle a lot. Perk up your human ears and you'll hear our distinct harsh calls of *chirurrrr-chirurrrr-chirurrrr...* followed by, or alternating with *cheevak, cheevak, cheevak*. Well, it might not be as sweet as Mr Koel but trust me, it eventually grows on you.

why do owls bob their heads?

Owls have very expressive body language. If you were to stand face to face with an owl, after a while it would start to move its head, bobbing rhythmically from side to side, then forward, then back. Or almost completely upside down, as if curious about something. All while still looking at you, with its body still facing the front.

Nope, they aren't trying to freak you out or make you laugh (though it does look adorably hilarious sometimes). This is to further improve their three-dimensional concept of what they are viewing. The varied head movements help the owls judge the position and distance of things around them including potential prey and help them build a composite picture of their surroundings. As owl eyes are fixed in position, they can't move the way our eyes do. To look up, down, or to the side, they have to move their heads. To make up for their anatomical limitation, they have very flexible necks which can rotate 270 degrees, looking over one shoulder, around the back, and almost over the opposite shoulder. After a few of these head-bobs to triangulate on their prey, they rarely miss.





Pratiksha Chalke

NOW YOU SEE ME!

Pratiksha Chalke and Grace Marian



Grace Marian



GIVE US A HOOT!

Owl Sense by Miriam Darlington

"Our closeness has developed over time like a marriage [...barn owl and humans], but not an altogether happy one." - Miriam Darlington

A book that takes the reader on a fantabulous journey to meet the owls of the United Kingdom, filled with personal anecdotes and delightful references to owls as portrayed across myriad cultures and history. A must-read for bubophiles, birders, naturalists and especially people who want to understand ecology through the lens of culture and anthropology.



Image: ARRC

SAVING OUR HOOTS!

Avian & Reptile Rehabilitation Centre (ARRC)

Location: Horamavu, Bengaluru.

ARRC was founded in 2016 to help native urban wildlife in distress. It is an organisation that practises and strives to promote science-based rehabilitation practices and knowledge sharing with other facilities while facilitating coexistence by addressing human-wildlife conflict through awareness and education through outreach. They recently rescued two mottled wood owls entangled in the deadly manjha string, preventing any major injuries that they could have sustained and successfully releasing them back into the wild.

Citizens of Bengaluru can call their rescue helpline **9449642222**, for matters concerning distressed wildlife. You can follow their page on Instagram @**wildarrc** for their rescue stories.

FEATHER FORECAST



1. Delhi Fire Services rescued 4,182 birds in the year 2022, including owls and other raptors, from kite manjha strings and other anthropogenic dangers. Most of the rescues took place around Independence Day, when a majority of people in the capital city resort to kite flying, endangering the birds. Read more about it [here](#).

2. A Eurasian eagle owl named Flaco, has become quite the celebrity after escaping his vandalised enclosure at Central Park Zoo in February this year. Since he is well adapted to life outside of the cage, the authorities have decided to let him remain free for the time being, while continuously monitoring his movements. Read all about this feisty hoot of a bird, [here](#).

3. Canada's environment minister has declared that logging will be halted along with any further destruction of the habitat of the spotted owls in British Columbia to protect the disappearing endangered owl species. Read about it [here](#).



4. The Wildlife Department rescued a barn owl from Ichkoot village in Central Kashmir's Budgam district in February this year, where sadly some children had captured the bird. Fortunately, with the help of some aware local citizens, the bird was released into Dachigam National Park. Read all about it [here](#).

5. An adventurous barred owl flew in through the chimney to an unassuming citizen's house in Victoria, British Columbia. Thankfully, she gathered her wits and let the uninjured owl out through her front door. This out-of-the-blue experience inspired the lady enough to document this encounter through her watercolour art! Read about the encounter [here](#) and check out some of her wonderful watercolour paintings if you are a lover of art, [here](#).



THE WISE OWL LIBRARY

Owls in the Copper Age through the eyes of children!

Arjit Jere



From the ancient Greeks to the Egyptians, owls have been an important part of many cultures around the world. But a recent study by Negro et al., (2022) suggests that the silent nocturnal raptors may have been culturally intertwined with humans much before the time of the ancient Greeks. The authors found slate plaques with owl inscriptions carved on Copper Age Iberian artefacts. What did these plaques indicate? What do they tell us about the societies of that time? Who could have made them? These are the questions the authors tried to answer in this paper.

Initially, the purpose of these slates was thought to be religious or symbolic, and later, depictions of goddesses or the dead. But a much more simplistic theory is proposed in this paper- the slates are depicting actual owl species (little owl and long-eared owl) and are the products of children scribbling! Historical records indicate these owl species were common in the urban Iberian regions. Interestingly, the researchers tried to emulate these ancient engravings by conducting an exercise where they asked present-day kids to sketch owls. The similarities between the sketches, engravings and extant owl species likenesses were confirmed by Google Lens images. The exercise proved that engravings in the slates might indeed be

made by Copper Age children. The use of these owl-shaped slates as toys/dolls by Copper Age children demonstrates another historic cultural example involving owls. Read this engrossing study to understand the cultural appreciation of owls by the Copper Age children.

Source: Negro, J. J., Blanco, G., Rodríguez-Rodríguez, E., & Díaz Núñez de Arenas, V. M. (2022). Owl-like plaques of the Copper Age and the involvement of children. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 19227.

THE OWL BULLETIN



1. Check out the International Festival of Owls (3rd-5th March 2023) in Houston, Minnesota.
<https://www.festivalofowls.com>
2. Nazneen, S., Jayakumar, S., Albeshr, M. F., Mahboob, S., Manzoor, I., Pandiyan, J., Krishnappa, K., et al. (2022). Analysis of Toxic Heavy Metals in the Pellets of Owls: A Novel Approach for the Evaluation of Environmental Pollutants. *Toxics*, 10 (11), 693. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/toxics10110693>.
3. Nayak, S., Karande, S., & Koparde, P. (2022). Whose Hoot? Identification of Owl Species Using Call Recognition with Neural Networks. In *SSRN Electronic Journal*. Elsevier BV.
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4020038>

DON'T FORGET TO WRITE TO US!



Drop us an email with your feedback and suggestions. Send us your artwork, photographs, encounters, stories, articles and anecdotes on owls.

If you are an owl researcher or professional bird rescuer, share your work and profile with us. You may get featured in our next issue!

Don't forget to follow us on Instagram and give us a shout-hoot if you liked this issue!

MEET THE PARLIAMENT



Debangini Ray

A bubophile and urban ecologist who is studying urban owls from the lens of ethno-ornithology. She believes in the power of citizen science in biodiversity conservation which led her to initiate The False Trail and Urban Owl Network. She is a PhD research scholar at Chatur Ullu Lab, Pune.

IG handle: @carb_on_credit

Email: raydebangini@gmail.com



Dr Pankaj Koparde

An evolutionary ecologist, founder of Chatur Ullu Lab and admin of OwlIndia, DragonflySouthAsia and RoadKill Network, he actively engages in outreach through the use of popular media and citizen science. He is also an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Sustainability Studies, MIT-World Peace University, Pune.

IG handle: @chaturullu

Email: pankaj.koparde@mitwpu.edu.in



Saumitra

A project trainee at Chatur Ullu Lab, Pune, he is currently pursuing MSc in Ecology from Pondicherry University. His Master's dissertation focuses on the spatial ecology of owls around Pune city but his broader interest lies in evolutionary biology and behavioural studies of reptiles.

IG handle: @saumitr_a

Email: saumitra020@gmail.com



Arjit Jere

He wears many hats, two of the major ones being that of a naturalist and science communicator. You can find him working at Chatur Ullu Lab, MIT World Peace University, Pune, as a Programme Coordinator. You can follow his blog footieandnature.blogspot.com/.

IG handle: @ajray007

Email: arjitkjere@gmail.com