# OWLS of INDIA

### Imperilled by Illegal Wildlife Trade

Identification cards





### **USING THE IDENTIFICATION (ID) CARDS**

Identification (ID) Cards: Imperilled by the illegal wildlife trade-Owls of India, 2021, have been developed to help wildlife law enforcement agencies identify 16 owl species commonly found in the illicit wildlife trade in India. The ID cards will help in quick reference of important information about commonly traded species, including their main identification features, legal and conservation status, and geographical distribution.

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### INTRODUCTION

Owls belong to the Order Strigiformes and families Strigidae (true owls) and Tytonidae (barn, grass, and bay owls). There are about 250 species of owls worldwide, and of these, about 36 species are found in India.

Owls are primarily nocturnal. They are birds of prey and their diet includes small mammals, birds, frogs, lizards, and insects. They are also prime consumers of common agricultural pests such as mice and rats and help keep the disease vectors at bay.

### LEGAL STATUS OF OWLS

All owl species in India are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, making poaching, trade, or any other form of exploitation a punishable offence. The Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* is listed in Schedule I of the Act, whereas all other species are in Schedule IV.

International trade in owl species found in India is prohibited under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* is listed in Appendix I of CITES, while all other Indian species are listed in Appendix II.

### **OWLS IN ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE**

Owls in India are victims of superstitious beliefs and rituals often promoted amongst the unsuspecting public by local mystic practitioners.

Despite the legal restrictions, every year, hundreds of birds are sacrificed for mystic rituals and practices linked with superstition, totems, and taboos across the country, and this practice usually peaks around the festival of Diwali. The use of owl parts such as the skull, feathers, ear tufts, claws, heart, liver, kidney, blood, eyes, fat, beak, tears, eggshells, meat, and bones are commonly prescribed for ceremonial *pujas* and rituals, especially in smaller towns and villages.

TRAFFIC has identified 16 owl species (as mentioned on the following pages) that are most commonly reported in illegal wildlife trade.

### **References:**

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- Ahmed, A. (2010). Imperilled Custodians of the Night: A study on illegal trade, trapping and utilization of owls in India. TRAFFIC India/WWF-India. New Delhi, India.
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- v. Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. (2016). Birds of the Indian Subcontinent: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- vi. Krys Kazmierczak (2017). *Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Om Books International Publishing, 352 pages.

# BARN OWL Tyto alba







Heart-shaped facial disk with a brown rim Pale pink beak

Dark brown upperparts with black and white dots Ear tufts are absent Dark brown iris Greyish-white underparts with black dots Long legs with

yellow claws

SIZE





(36 cm)



Schedule IV WPA. 1972

Appendix II

### DISTRIBUTION

Widespread resident in India (Grimmett et al., 2016).

Least Concern

# EASTERN GRASS OWL Tyto longimembris





Heart-shaped facial disk bordered by a brown ruff. It is white in males and pale orange buff\* in females

Whitish-cream beak

Brown and buff\* upperparts, spotted – with white

Relatively short white tail with narrow grey barring

\*buff - yellowish beige





House Sparrow (14 cm)





House Crov (40 cm)

### DISTRIBUTION

Northeast and southwest India (Grimmett et al., 2016).

Ear tufts are absent

Relatively small blackish-brown iris with black tear marks

White underparts with scattered brown spots

Heavily feathered, long legs & yellowish-grey in colour. The claws are blackish-brown.

> Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

Least Concern IUCN Red List

# COLLARED SCOPS OWL Otus bakkamoena

TRAFFIC



Pale grey-brown facial disk

Prominent buff\* nuchal collar Ear tufts are present

Dark orange/ brown iris

Tipped black beak

Finely streaked underparts

Unmarked and pale legs

\*buff - yellowish beige

SIZE



Collared Scops Owl (23 cm)



House Crow (40 cm)

### DISTRIBUTION

Widespread distributed, not recorded in parts of northwest and northeast India (Grimmett et al., 2016). Schedule IV WPA. 1972

Appendix II

Least Concern

# **ORIENTAL SCOPS OWL** Otus sunia



TRAFFIC



Facial disk is pale grey-brown/rufous\* with a dark rim

Blackish-grey beak with white around

Grey-brown and rufous\* morphs underparts with dark streaks

Ear tufts are present

Eyes are yellow, and eyebrows are white

Grey-brown and rufous\* morphs upperparts with dark streak

Grey legs

\*rufous - reddish brown



House Sparrow

(14 cm)



**Oriental Scops Owl** (19 cm)



House Crow (40 cm)

Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II

### DISTRIBUTION

Himalayas, northeast, western and southern India (Grimmett et al., 2016).

Least Concern

# **COLLARED OWLET** Glaucidium brodiei



TRAFFIC



Ear tufts are absent -Yellow iris -Pale green beak with pale yellow tip

> Brown underparts with pale barring. The breast and belly region has whitish vertical patches

> > Brown legs

A pale, whitish collar that is visible only when the neck is stretched. From behind, the neck collar with black spots on each side looks deceptively like an owl's face and the species is often referred to as the four-eyed owl.

Dark brown upperparts with white bars

SIZE

House Sparrow

(14 cm)



Collared Owlet (17 cm)



House Crow (40 cm)

### DISTRIBUTION

Himalayas, northeast India (Grimmett et al., 2016).

Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

Least Concern IUCN Red List

# ASIAN BARRED OWLET Glaucidium cuculoides







Not distinct facial disk

Pale green beak with pale yellow tip

> Rufous\* brown upperparts with buff barring

Ear tufts are absent

Yellow iris

Brownish underparts with pale buff\* barring and white patches. There is a prominent white throat patch.

Greenish-yellow legs

\*rufous - reddish brown \*buff - yellowish beige





House Sparrow (14 cm)

Asian Barred Owlet (23 cm)



House Crow (40 cm)

### DISTRIBUTION

Himalayas, northeast India (Grimmett et al., 2016).

Schedule IV WPA. 1972

Appendix II

Least Concern

# JUNGLE OWLET Glaucidium radiatum







Indistinct facial disk with fine concentric bars

Pale yellow beak

Brownish grey upperparts with dense white barring

Ear tufts are absent

Yellow iris

Pale rufous\* underparts with close blackish bars

Pale grey legs

\*rufous - reddish brown







Jungle Owlet (20 cm)



House Crow (40 cm) Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

### DISTRIBUTION

Widespread resident up to 2,000m in the Himalayas except in extreme northeast and northwestern parts of India (Grewal & Bhatia, 2014).

Least Concern

# SPOTTED OWLET Athene brama







White facial disk with spotted crown

Pale yellow beak

Brown upperparts with white spots

Ear tufts are absent

Yellow iris

White underparts, with short brown streaks

Feathered legs with yellow claws

SIZE





Spotted Owlet (21 cm)



Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

### DISTRIBUTION

Throughout India, up to about 1,800m in the outer Himalayas in open forests, orchards, cultivation, vicinity of habitation (Grewal & Bhatia, 2014). Least Concern IUCN Red List

# ROCK EAGLE OWL Bubo bengalensis



TRAFFIC



Buff\* coloured facial disk with a blackish border

Dark grey beak

Whitish underparts with dark streaks

Fully feathered legs with dark grey claws Ear tufts are present

Fiery orange to a dark yellow iris

Tawny brown upperparts, with dark grey markings

\*buff - yellowish beige









Rock Eagle Owl (56 cm)

Schedule IV WPA. 1972

Appendix II

### DISTRIBUTION

Widespread resident up to about 1,500m in the Himalayas. Unrecorded in parts of northeast and northwest India (Grewal & Bhatia, 2014).

Least Concern

### **SPOT-BELLIED EAGLE OWL** Bubo nipalensis





Facial disk is pale grey-brown/rufous\* with a dark rim

Yellow beak -

Pale brown underparts with broad dark brown spots. The flanks have black and white horizontal stripes

Feathered legs with grey claws

Brown tail with white tip .

\*rufous - reddish brown

#### SIZE





House Crow (40 cm)



Spot-Bellied Eagle Owl (63 cm)

### DISTRIBUTION

Himalayas, northeast India, western Ghats (Grimmett et *al.*, 2016).

Two outwardly slanting erect black and white ear tufts, with feathers of different sizes.

Brown-black eyes & white eyebrows

Dark brown upperparts, with black bar-like markings

> Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

Least Concern IUCN Red List

# DUSKY EAGLE OWL Bubo coromandus







Pale facial disk with a distinct narrow black rim Bluish grey beak

Paler underparts and are streaked

Feathered legs with pale grey claws Prominent ear tufts with rounded tips

Paler yellow-orange iris

Sooty or brownish-grey upperparts

Pale grey tail with white tips & greyish brown bars

### SIZE





House Crow (40 cm)



(58 cm)

Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

Least Concern IUCN Red List

### DISTRIBUTION

Widespread residents in north and central part of India (Grimmett *et al.*, 2016).

# BROWN FISH OWL Ketupa zeylonensis







Broad and rounded facial disk -Dark grey beak -

> Reddish-brown upperparts with dark streaks

Ear tufts are present Orange-yellow iris

Pale underparts with dark brown vertical streaks and horizontal bars

Pale yellow legs

### SIZE







Brown Fish Owl (56 cm) Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

### DISTRIBUTION

Widespread resident (Grimmett et al., 2016).

Least Concern IUCN Red List

# TAWNY FISH OWL Ketupa flavipes







Orange-brown facial disk with an ill-defined dark border

> Rufous\* or tawny upperparts with blackish stripes

Two horizontal ear tufts with a tousled appearance Yellow iris Grevish black beak

Pale rufous\* underparts with dark brown stripes and usually a white throat patch

Feathered legs with grey claws

\*rufous - reddish brown



House Sparrow (14 cm)



Tawny Fish Owl

(61 cm)

Schedule IV WPA. 1972

Appendix II

Least Concern

### DISTRIBUTION

Himalayas, northeast India (Grimmett et al., 2016).

# MOTTLED WOOD OWL Strix ocellata







Whitish facial disk with concentric, fine, black barring

Black beak

Reddish-brown upperparts with grey streaks Ear tufts are absent

Eyes are reddish brown and the eyelids are coral-red

Whitish underparts with black barring

Feathered legs with pale yellow claws

SIZE





(40 cm)



Mottled Wood Owl (48 cm) Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

Least Concern

### DISTRIBUTION

Peninsular western and eastern ghats, and in Central India (Grimmett *et al.*, 2016).

# BROWN WOOD OWL Strix leptogrammica







Dark iris

Ear tufts are absent

Greenish-horn beak with bluish base and pale yellowish-green tip

Brown upperparts. Throat has a narrow, white horizontal patch

\*buff - yellowish beige \*rufous - reddish brown

### SIZE

House Sparrow (14 cm)



HouseCrow (40 cm)



rown Wood Owl (50 cm)

### DISTRIBUTION

Parts of the Himalayas, northeast India, eastern and western Ghats (Grimmett et al., 2016).

White facial disk in the Himalayan race and rufous\* in the peninsular race, with a distinct black rim, and a blackish zone around the eyes. Eyebrows are whitish-buffish\* or pale orange-buff\*

Brown underparts

Dusky lead grey legs

Schedule IV WPA, 1972

Appendix II CITES

Least Concern IUCN Red List

# BROWN HAWK OWL Ninox scutulata







Dark facial disk except for white patch above bill

Grevish-black beak

Rufous\* brown to dark brown upperparts

Ear tufts are absent

Yellow iris

 $\odot$ 

Rufous\* brown streaking to dark brown underparts

Yellow legs

\*rufous - reddish brown







(32 cm)



House Crow (40 cm)

### DISTRIBUTION

North, northeast, eastern ghats, western ghats, Andaman and Nicobar Island (Grimmett et al., 2016). Schedule IV WPA. 1972

Appendix II

Least Concern

**TRAFFIC,** the wildlife trade monitoring network, is a leading nongovernmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. In India, TRAFFIC operates as a programme division of WWF-India.

#### **WWF-India**

WWF-India is committed to creating and demonstrating practical solutions that help conserve India's ecosystems and rich biodiversity. Marking 50 years of conservation journey in the country, WWF-India works towards finding science-based and sustainable solutions to address challenges at the interface of development and conservation. Today, with over 70 offices across 20 states, WWF-India's work spans across thematic areas including the conservation of key wildlife species and their habitats, management of rivers, wetlands and their ecosystems, climate change adaptation, driving sustainable solutions for business and agriculture, empowering local communities as stewards of conservation, combatting illegal wildlife trade and inspiring students and awareness campaigns. WWF-India is part of the WWF International Network, with presence in over 100 countries across the globe.

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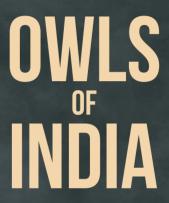
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