

Eurasian Scops Owl at Mahuva, Bhavnagar

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On 20 October 2015 at around 07:45 hours, I saw a small owl roosting on a branch of a 'Gundi' (*Cordia gharaf*) in a farm. The area (21° 05' N, 71° 51' E) is approximately 600 m from the coast and located south of Naip village near Nikol 'Bandhara' (Tidal regulator), Ta. Mahuva, Dist. Bhavnagar. I captured a few images but I did not hear its call. I forwarded the images to Viral Joshi for identification. It was tentatively identified as Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*).

There are very few records of this species from Gujarat. Hence this sighting was worth recording.

[Eurasian Scops Owl occurs in grey and brown morphs and it is very difficult to separate Eurasian Scops Owl from Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*) and Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*), with Grimmett et al. (2011) stating that it is 'not safely distinguishable in the field from Oriental Scops Owl, except by call'.

Eurasian Scops Owl is vagrant here and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that it reaches western India in fall migration. For Gujarat, Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) collected only one specimen from Bhavnagar, commenting that it is a 'straggler' to Saurashtra. Recent records from Gujarat include a sighting from Surendranagar (Shah et al. 2005), but identification details are not discussed in detail and only the 'pristine long ears' is stated as an identification mark. A photo of a purported Eurasian Scops Owl is posted on the Oriental Bird Images website (Bhatt 2008), with remarks 'uncertain ID'.



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For this individual, due to the excellent photos showing the dorsal and ventral sides, it could be conclusively identified as Eurasian Scops Owl based on the fine horizontal barring on the lower

underparts, uniform black streaks on crown and mantle (Oriental Scops Owl lacks streaking on lower mantle), irregular white spotting on mantle, some rufous on scapulars (Pallid Scops Owl lacks any rufous in plumage), and long wings falling over

the tail. It is difficult to identify it to the sub-species level, as both the northerly pulchellus and turanicus (resident in NW Pakistan) could occur in western India during fall migration (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

We would like to thank Heimo Mikkola for helping with the identification of this bird – Eds]



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