

Brown Fish Owl....

perched on a nearby tree and uttered a few calls. It was dark before the python started swallowing the owl.

I sent the photos to Viral Prajapati and Pinal Patel, and confirmed that it was indeed a Brown Fish Owl. It was surprising to see the Brown Fish Owl become a prey of the python. Though it is known that this python feeds on mammals, birds and reptiles, there are no documented reports of it feeding on a Brown Fish Owl – I did an extensive search on the internet but could not find this owl species as a prey of the python. In direct observations of the python feeding on birds in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, the following species were noted: Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotus*), Cattle

Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) and Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) (Bhupathy *et al.* 2014).

This observation shows the opportunistic feeding behaviour of the python and confirms that owls are also a prey of the python.

References

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Letter to the Editor

Greetings Sir,

I am a student pursuing Masters in Life Sciences in wildlife management and its conservation as my specialization in Navrachana University, Vadodara. Although I am not a member of BCSG (Bird Conservation Society of Gujarat), I frequently come across the amazing articles and interesting notes published in *Flamingo Gujarat*. I came across an article entitled 'A first confirmed breeding record of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) in Gujarat' which was published recently (Trivedi & Mori 2020). Firstly, what concerns me the most is that such invasive methods were used by individual researchers to study a schedule IV species protected under WPA 1972 inside a National Park and this was duly permitted by the concerned forest officer. In June 2018, some photographers had disturbed a pair of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher up to an extent that the pair had to leave the site. They used call playback to lure the bird out and attain good and clear photographs in spite of warnings given by Dang Forest Division. Despite being aware about the status of the bird, the permission was granted.

Continuous presence around the nest may attract a predator or a poacher, giving them a clue about the presence of the nest. There have been several occasions where birds have abandoned the eggs/nest after frequent disturbances caused by photographers. As we all know, the rate of poaching in Dangs is quite high and Oriental Dwarf Kingfishers are considered to be traded as pets and also, it is very critical to disclose or expose the location of the nest. Secondly, *Flamingo Gujarat* is a very well known and inspirational journal among the birders community, not only in Gujarat but in other states also. Amateur researchers like me would be inclined towards using such methods by doing these kinds of studies

which might negatively impact the birds. So, such studies should not be promoted nor motivated amongst the scientific community.

I went through the article and it was quite clear that they did not care about the critical conditions inside the nest while using an endoscope to check the nest. Was it sterile? Did they check the fluctuation in temperature before and after inserting an endoscope inside the nest? Temperature plays an eminent role in incubation and hatching success. As the authors mention in their study that the nest was washed away and exposed due to heavy rains and the hatching was not successful, the pair would have built another nest and raised a second brood while the first one failed (Palkar *et. al.* 2009). It can be concluded that the pair did not show up in that place due to continuous human intervention and disturbance. Such studies should be done with utmost care and precision keeping the birds' welfare in mind.

I also went through several other articles published by the second author on breeding biology and it is quite concerning that there has been a high rate of mortality in the chicks and most of the eggs did not hatch or chicks were eaten by a predator, which is alarming; see Mori (2019A) and Mori (2019B). Recently, in Gandhinagar, a group of photographers allegedly harassed a nest of Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) (Schedule 1, WPA 1972) due to which the three chicks inside died. Two of chicks died in the nest itself and one was found dead on the ground below the nest. So, nest photography should be strictly prohibited and strict action should be taken for the same. This is a criminal offence and the perpetrators should be booked under Section 9 of WPA 1972. If and at all an upcoming researcher adopts such invasive methods for study, who should be held responsible for it? I request you to look into this matter and do the needful.

Thank you for sparing your precious time and taking this into consideration and doing what is right. I respect the authors as well as their approach and participation in research. I have no intention to hurt the feelings of anyone, including the authors mentioned here or the concerned parties. If and at all it did, I apologize for the same.

Regards,

Aamir Matli. Email: aamirmatli72@gmail.com

Reply to the letter by Aamir Matli

To Flamingo Gujarat Editorial Team

Dear Sirs,

In reference to the letter sent by Aamir Matli regarding the study of breeding of the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) in Gujarat (Trivedi & Mori 2020), we would like to clarify all the points highlighted by him. Please find the answers clarified and explained below:

Point 1: Permission of working within the National Park and exposing the location of the nest to others as highlighted in the letter

There has been a typographical mistake regarding the location of the nest. The nest was observed while surveying the outskirts of the national park and not within the national park. Since the park is closed during the monsoon season, no visitors are allowed to visit the park. Hence, while Vansada NP is mentioned in the article, the location of the nest was on the periphery and outside the NP area. No location description or GPS co-ordinates are published in the article or were revealed to any other person to avoid any unnecessary attention to the nest. There are already many publications/photographs from Dang forest, published with GPS co-ordinates of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher sightings. The authors decided not to provide the GPS coordinates as they were aware of the potential threats it can lead to the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher nest.

Point 2: Continuous presence of authors around the nest

It is very clearly mentioned in the note that the nest was very close to a dirt road which was used by locals on a regular basis. The numbers of visits are clearly mentioned in the observation table published in the article. All the observations were made far from the road, maintaining necessary distance, to avoid disturbance and all photos were taken using a telephoto lens/point and shoot cameras to avoid getting close to the nest. One can notice that no more than two observations were made in one day. In the span of 30 days, the numbers of visits conducted by the authors at the location were not extensive so as to disturb the birds.

Point 3: Use of endoscopic camera for the nest

It is clearly mentioned that the nest/burrow was exposed due to heavy rain. One of the photos published in the article with kingfisher in the burrow shows the amount of nest exposed due to rain. The endoscopic camera used was actually used to maintain the distance from the nest. The endoscopic camera was five meters long and was brought closer to the opening of the nest to see the status of the nest. It was not inserted in the nest as the nest was already exposed and so the question of infections (if any) due to the camera does not arise. Utmost care was taken while using the camera and making sure the bird or the nest was not being disturbed. And the total observation time was not more than 20 seconds, which would not make any appreciable difference to the temperature inside the nest.

Point 4: Conclusion of kingfisher pair raising second brood at a different location after the failure of first attempt

There are high chances that the pair may have raised second brood at some other place, but it does not conclude that they chose another site for nesting due to the human intervention or disturbance. The pair was habituated to human presence around the nest due to the close proximity of the nest to the road and never showed any signs of disturbance. The fair conclusion is that the pair did not choose the same site for nesting due to the mud bank being washed away due to heavy rain.

Regarding chick mortality mentioned in the letter for the other two studies, the same cannot be concluded to have happened due to the studies carried out on the nests by me/us. In fact, due to these studies, we now know the predators for these species and whenever conservation action is needed, these studies will be helpful in knowing about nest predators. For two other studies which were carried out by me/us but are not mentioned in the letter, the chicks fledged successfully (Mori *et al.* 2017, Mori 2019C). So, to say that chick mortality has been high in the studies carried out by me/us is not correct. All scientific protocols for breeding studies have always been followed by me/us and the well being of the birds was kept as the highest priority.

I/we appreciate the concern of Aamir Matli for the well being of the species being studied by us and we remain confident that we are following the best possible methods and protocols for conducting breeding studies.

Regards,

Devvratsinh Mori. Email: devvratsinhmori@gmail.com

Letter to the Editor....

[A recent paper in Indian BIRDS has given guidelines to be followed for nesting or breeding biology studies for birds in India (Barve et al. 2020A, Barve et al. 2020B). The authors have given suggestions on different aspects of breeding studies and the protocol to be followed. Bird watchers and researchers in Gujarat should refer to the same when conducting breeding biology studies. We believe bird watchers conducting breeding biology studies in Gujarat would have adhered to scientific protocol and followed best practises keeping the welfare of the birds as the highest priority and would continue to do so in the future. Further, we follow the procedure of all authors being required to confirm in their papers that due scientific protocol was followed for the studies conducted by them and this is required to be informed to us when papers on breeding biology are submitted for publication – Eds]

References

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