

SPECIAL REPORT

The owl trade in Jakarta, Indonesia: a spot check on the largest bird markets

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Introduction

The bird trade in Indonesia is carried out on a large scale and is considered a threat to numerous species (Shepherd 2006, Metz 2007, Shepherd 2010). The trade, regardless of the species's legal or conservation status, is carried out openly, on a daily basis and in virtually every major city. Three very significant markets, among the largest in Asia, are located in the country's capital city, Jakarta.

The many species of birds recorded in the trade include several owls. Indonesia is home to 45 species of owls, comprising nine Tytonidae and 36 Strigidae. Among them, scops owls *Otus* spp. (17 species) are among the most numerous of those traded. However, little is known about many of them and even less about the impact that the trade has on their conservation status (Widodo *et al.* 1999, Hutchinson *et al.* 2007).

There is no dedicated monitoring or research into the bird trade in Indonesia, but anecdotal information provided to TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade

Plate 1. Oriental Bay Owl *Phodilus badius* in a bird market, Jakarta, Indonesia, 12 June 2012.



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monitoring network, had suggested that the trade in owls was increasing in Jakarta. To investigate this further, three spot checks of bird markets were carried out by the author and the results are published here in the hope that they may encourage more detailed investigation into the owl trade and its potential conservation impact in the region.

During the first spot check, in July 2010, the three largest bird markets in Jakarta—Pramuka, Barito and Jati Negara—plus the annual Jakarta flora and fauna expo, known as Flona Fair Jakarta, were visited. A total of 24 owls of at least three species were observed, including seven Barn Owls *Tyto alba*, five Buffy Fish Owls *Ketupa ketupu* and 12 scops owls *Otus* spp., all of them in Jakarta's Jati Negara market. Later in the same year, on 10 December 2010, another check of Jakarta's markets was made and all owls were again counted. On this occasion, four Barn Owls, one Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*, seven Collared Scops Owls *Otus bakkamoena* and 13 unidentified scops owls were noted, a total of 25, all in the Jati Negara market with the exception of the Collared Scops Owls, which were observed in the Barito market.

However, a third check, carried out at the same locations on 16 June 2012, recorded a much higher number of owls (131 in total) comprising at least five species: eight Barn Owls, five Oriental Bay Owls *Phodilus badius* (Plates 1 & 2), one Buffy Fish Owl, one Reddish Scops Owl *Otus rufescens*, one Collared Scops Owl and a further 115 unidentified scops owls. Photographs were taken when possible as additional documentation although, due to the nature of the trade, some dealers refused to allow their stock to be photographed. Dealers told the author that the owls had been captured either locally or in North Sumatra province. None was said to be captive bred. Of the birds observed, 115 were juvenile scops owls (Plate 3) and were not identified to species level. Clearly the majority of scops owls for sale were therefore taken from nests. One juvenile Barn Owl was observed, also having been removed from the nest. Jati Negara was by far the largest outlet, with 71 of the 131 owls counted there.

Discussion

Many more owls were observed during the latest spot check, as anecdotal information had suggested would be the case. Of the five species identified in

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Plate 2. Oriental Bay Owls *Phodilus badius* in a bird market, Jakarta, Indonesia, 12 June 2012.

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Plate 3. Unidentified juvenile scops owls *Otus* spp. in a bird market, Jakarta, Indonesia, 12 June 2012.

2012, the Reddish Scops Owl is listed as Near Threatened, the remaining four as Least Concern (IUCN 2012). Neither hunting nor trade is currently listed as a threat to any of them. None of the identified owls are listed as protected in Indonesia, but non-protected birds may only be harvested for commercial trade in compliance with an annually set quota, and there is currently no quota set for any owl species in Indonesia, meaning the trade observed was illegal.

Reports of illegal bird trade have been reported to the Indonesian authorities on many occasions, yet the large bird markets in Jakarta remain extremely active, with dealers frequently openly displaying protected species, with little fear of the law.

Until the impact on wild bird populations, particularly owls, is better understood, dealing with the illegal bird trade must become a priority for the Indonesian authorities, and action is required to close it down in these markets. Owls should be clearly included in the list of protected species, making them a higher priority for enforcement action.

References

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