

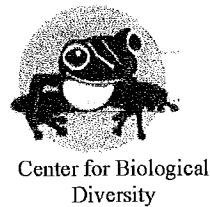
Preliminary report on  
**Hunting and trade of Eurasian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*) in Nepal**



**Report prepared by**

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**Supported by**



## 1.0 Background and rationalization

### 1.1 Biodiversity

Globally, the floral diversity of Nepal is scaled in 27<sup>th</sup> rank. Geographically within just over 0.1% of the land surface area of the earth, Nepal, holds 4.2% of butterflies (635 spp.), 2.2 % of fresh water fish species (185 spp.), 1.1 % of amphibians (43 spp.), 1.5% of reptile (100 spp.), 8.5% of birds (863 spp.) and 4.2% of mammals (181 spp.) out of the globally known individual species.

### 1.2 Status of owls

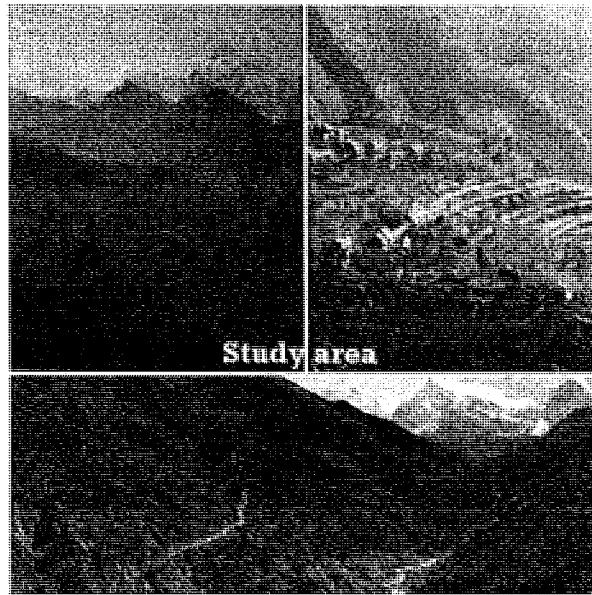
There are 20 species of owls recorded in Nepal. None of these species are listed under any of the prioritization list of IUCN red list and globally threatened birds by Birdlife International, but “The State of Nepal’s Birds 2004” suggests that 134 species of birds in Nepal are nationally threatened, including four owl species. The four owl species are, Dusky Eagle Owl *Bubo coromandus*, Tawny Fish Owl *Ketupa flavipes*, Grass Owl *Tyto capensis*, and Spot-bellied Eagle Owl *Bubo nipalensis*. The former two are kept in critically endangered list and thus need urgent intervention and the latter two are kept in endangered list which also need some quick conservation initiatives. However, Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo Bubo* does not fall under any threat categories till now in Nepal.

In Nepal, there are several incidences of bird trade but the incidences do not get the media hype, as they should be. These issues do not cover any headlines to aware public and people rarely believe the existence of such trade. The bird trafficking is very unusual topic here. On general observation the species that are mostly traded are Peregrine falcon, Eurasian eagle owl, Barn owl.

### 1.3 Why owl trade is important concern?

Nepal is considered as one of the major transit routes for International wildlife trade. Since the 1990s, some attempts have been made to control the illegal trade of the mega species. Nepal has ratified the convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), even though the effort to combat against wildlife trade in the country is not countable. Bird trade has always been overlooked by the concerned authorities. Within this status also, if it is considered then owls are among the least concerned bird in regards to its hunting and trading status in Nepal.

In order to understand the overall trade of the species in Nepal, it is essential to figure out an insight into the current situation. For instance, what is the extent of the Eurasian eagle owl trade? Where are the major suppliers located? Who are involved? What is the reason of trade? Thus to identify these all above concerns, ‘**Friends of Nature**’ (FON Nepal) is currently carrying out a nationwide survey on illegal trade of owls. This report provides the initial findings from various parts of Nepal.



## **2.0 Objectives of the study**

- To find out the general owl trade route in Nepal
- To find out the intensity/ status of owl hunting and trade in Nepal

## **3.0 Methods**

### **3.1 Informal interview:**

Informal interview is effective tool for collecting the information about the hunting and trading of the species. Considering the rapport building technique, team members starts up the talk with the local to increase the understanding and familiarity in concern to the species. The members of the team introduced them as bird watchers and asked some general questions about the Eurasian eagle owl including with other bird species.



**Personel interview to explore information about owl trade**

### 3.2 Observation

Local people use the parts of owl for different purposes. Because of this reason, we observed the different site of the house. As they use

- Roof : people put the feather of owl to chase evil
- Main door: the possible site for placing head to chase evil
- Corners of house: they could keep the owl in captivity.

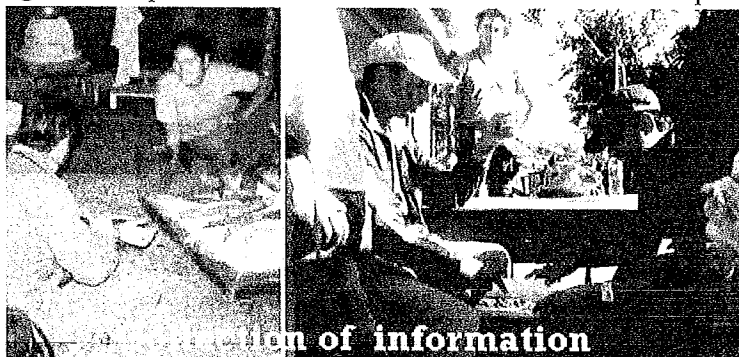
These were observed carefully during our visit to the houses or on observation of village transect routes.

### 3.3 Photograph

Photographs were taken after the social relationship; permission was mended before capturing images.

### 3.4 Consultation

Informal consultations were essentially done with the authorities of District Forest office, Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation, students of University, local leader and villagers. Group discussions were also carried out wherever possible.



#### 4.0 Results

We visited eight districts (75 districts in Nepal) in between November (2008) to March (2009) but information was collected from informants from over 21 districts (including eight districts) of Nepal. We have interviewed altogether to 429 people (personal and group) out of which 37 % were from Manang and 35% from Mustang district and rest represented other 19 districts (Table 1).

We have conducted 17 group discussions in seven districts. The attendance of group meeting ranged from 5 to 35 people. Members of *Mother Group*, local youth club, students participated in discussions. This kind of group meeting is useful to collect the information about ethno-owl relationship. The ethno-owl relationship documentation done at the time of the study in Manang and Mustang district indicates the killing of owl, consumption of egg and meats commonly.

Social and cultural beliefs are strong enough to initiate the local hunting of owl in different districts (Box 1). Beside this, young generations are also involved in the killing of owl-only for entertainment. During the study hours, team observed 4 local hunting incidents (12 *Bubo bubo* killed) only in Dhading district and rest one is in Mustang district. They collect chicks from nest and killed them to prepare breakfast/lunch.

Local people remove chicks from the nest. They transport to nearest city or district headquarters from where it is traded to bigger cities like Pokhara, Kathmandu, Itahari and Dhangadi. After it reaches the city, people care them and raise them to appreciable sizes (>3 kg of weight). They are then traded to India, Bangladesh, China and other Muslim countries (specially the Middle East) (Figure 1). As Muslim community believes that Eurasian eagle owl is an incarnation of god. They keep them in the house believing that god will do best for their life. Very few respondents briefed that owls are traded to UK and USA as well. Two of the respondents even said that the owl traded to USA goes to NASA for scientific research purposes. It goes to UK for pet purpose, however these information need to be verified in the future. In India, the high level magicians are found to be using the owl. They believe that Eurasian eagle owl do not show their images in the mirror. Some people claimed that eye of Eurasian eagle owl can be replaced in human being's eye (Figure 1). Local people indicated that it has social, cultural, medicinal and majestic values in their locality and those countries where traded.

Some people rear the species and make their size and weight appreciable to get handsome money. The Eurasian eagle owl should be of 3 kg or more in weight in order to be prized. Local people informed us that the price for a single owl ranges from \$1500 to \$ 3750 in the national market. The price of juvenile Eurasian eagle owl ranges \$ 60-\$80 for each. However the price of juvenile in Kathmandu (the capital city) ranges from \$200-\$300. Team was unable to explore the difference in price in different cities. During the captivity they feed them with intestine of chicken, cat and frog regularly. Some villagers even accounted the disappearance of domestic cat to the house reared Eurasian eagle owls. .

Kathmandu, Pokhara, Itahari and Dhangadhi are the major cities where Eurasian eagle owls are collected and kept in captivity (Table 2). The large captivity is recorded in Pokhara valley (200 km west to Kathmandu), which need further investigation. There are at least three places in Kathmandu where owls in large numbers are kept in captivity. The rest of the cities have only one. Team suspected more cities have more such captivity centers.

The involvement of high level personnel in the trade is suspected. Few months ago, a conservationist received threat call from Bangladesh as he is quite actively campaigning against the illegal bird trade for which Kathmandu is considered a worldwide hub. In Kathmandu, some small gangsters are also found to be involved in this business. The trade of owl from international airport and through the international boundary clearly indicates the involvement of police force in Nepal. The efforts to control Eurasian eagle owl (including with other birds) trade in Nepal need huge financial resources and clear motivation among the different stakeholders.

**Box 1: Social and cultural beliefs about owl in Nepal**

1. The bone of owl chases the evil if it is used as a neck lace.
2. People can travel during the night without fear if they use the ring made of owl bone
3. The head of owl will prevent the evil from entering home if they hang above the main entrance door
4. The feather of owl will prevent the evil from entering home if they hang above the main door together with the feather of Bearded vulture
5. The soup of owl meat helps to reduce the Asthma
6. The owl meat is more tasty than chicken
7. The paste of owl bone relieves the body pain/ rheumatism and faster recover of bone fracture
8. Number of pest birds reduced in the agriculture field if people hang the body of owl in farm land
9. People die in the village next day if owl calls from the roof of the house

According to people of Nuwakot/Itahari districts Eurasian eagle owl has the highest price if turmeric powder put on its upper part of the wings turns black, if a packet of rice kept under the wings is cooked and if a torch shown directly at its eyes bursts.



Study team at the Himalaya and low land

**Table 1: Hunting/Trade intensity in the different districts of Nepal**

S.N.	Districts	Number of people consulted	Number of group discussions	Trade intensity		
				Low	Moderate	High
1	Kathmandu	15	0			•
2	Kaski (Pokhara)	10	0			•
3	Mustang	150	4	•		
4	Manang	160	6		•	
5	Gorkha	8	1		•	
6	Nuwakot	5	1			•
7	Lamjung	9	2		•	
8	Bajhang	3	0		•	
9	Kailali	2	0			•
10	Sunsari	3	0			•
11	Chitwan	2	0	•	•	
12	Myagdi	4	0		•	
13	Rukum	2	0	•		
14	Banke	1	0			
15	Parwat	5	0	•		
16	Solukhumbu	4	0	•		
17	Sankhuwasabha	13	1		•	
18	Dhading	25	2		•	
19	Kavre	2	0		•	
20	Bajura	4	0		•	
21	Darchula	2	0		•	

**Note:**

**Low:** locally people kill the owl and consume them. Locals have heard about its trade however not sure where and how to sell.

**Medium:** People consume locally and trade them in the nearest market within Nepal.

**High:** People consume, trade them and few people also rear the species in captivity. Trade mediators are live and traded them outside the Nepal.

**Table 2: Possible illegal captivity of *Bubo bubo* in Nepal**

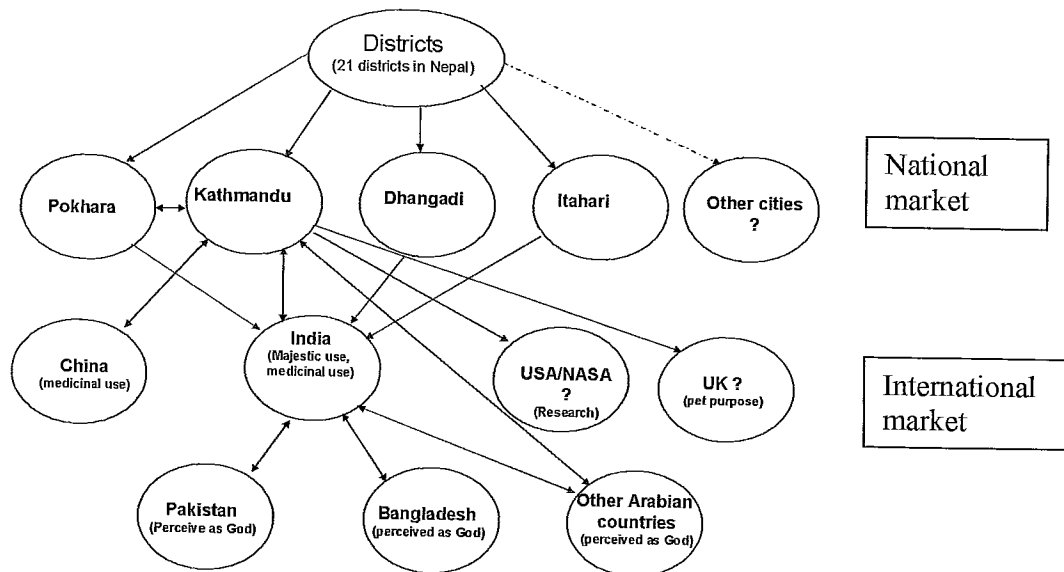
Districts	Hub sites	Number of captivities	Confirmed by
Kaski	? (Need to explore)	>15	Seller and trade expert
Kathmandu	Kalopul, Baudha, Sinamangal	>3	Seller and local people
Kailali	? (need to explore)	>1	Email with students
Sunsari	? (need to explore)	? (need to explore)	Anecdotal information

**5.0 Recommended measures to control hunting and trade of Eurasian eagle owl (including with other birds) in Nepal**

- Need to investigate about detail trade routes
- Need to investigate about trade and hunting intensity
- Need to investigate the type of professionals involved in hunting and trade of owl
- Need to investigate ethno-owl relation in areas with high trade intensity
- Need to develop conservation materials for their wider distribution/dissemination via radio/television and newspaper including owl conservation camps
- Capacity building of police force, custom officers and conservation stakeholders in highly sensitive area
- Develop an owl data bank with the help of local spies and researchers.
- Develop networking among the students, local people, NGO and concern authorities

## 6.0 Summary

Globally, Nepal is one of the important hubs for wildlife trade/traders. Some organizations are contributing on controlling the hunting/trade of flagship mammals (*Panthera tigris*, *Elepahus maximus*, *Uncia uncia* ) only. But this is not enough. Programs and activities to control the bird trade has been overlooked by governmental and non governmental sector in Nepal. Owls are a group of birds which have never been studied systematically in Nepal. However, their scientific research and conservation measures have recently been started by World Owl Trust in collaboration with Center for Biological Diversity/The Global Owl Project, Friends of Nature (FON Nepal) in two districts of Nepal. Nevertheless, mammoth space is available to explore and control owls hunting and trade in Nepal. Among the owls, Eurasian Eagle Owl is highly recommended for further exploration and conservation.



**Fig.1: National and international trade routes for Eurasian Eagle Owl**  
 Note: ? indicates the information need to be further verified with proper evidence.



**Last but not least:**

Not only Eurasian Eagle owl, however number of birds being hunted and traded in Nepal

