



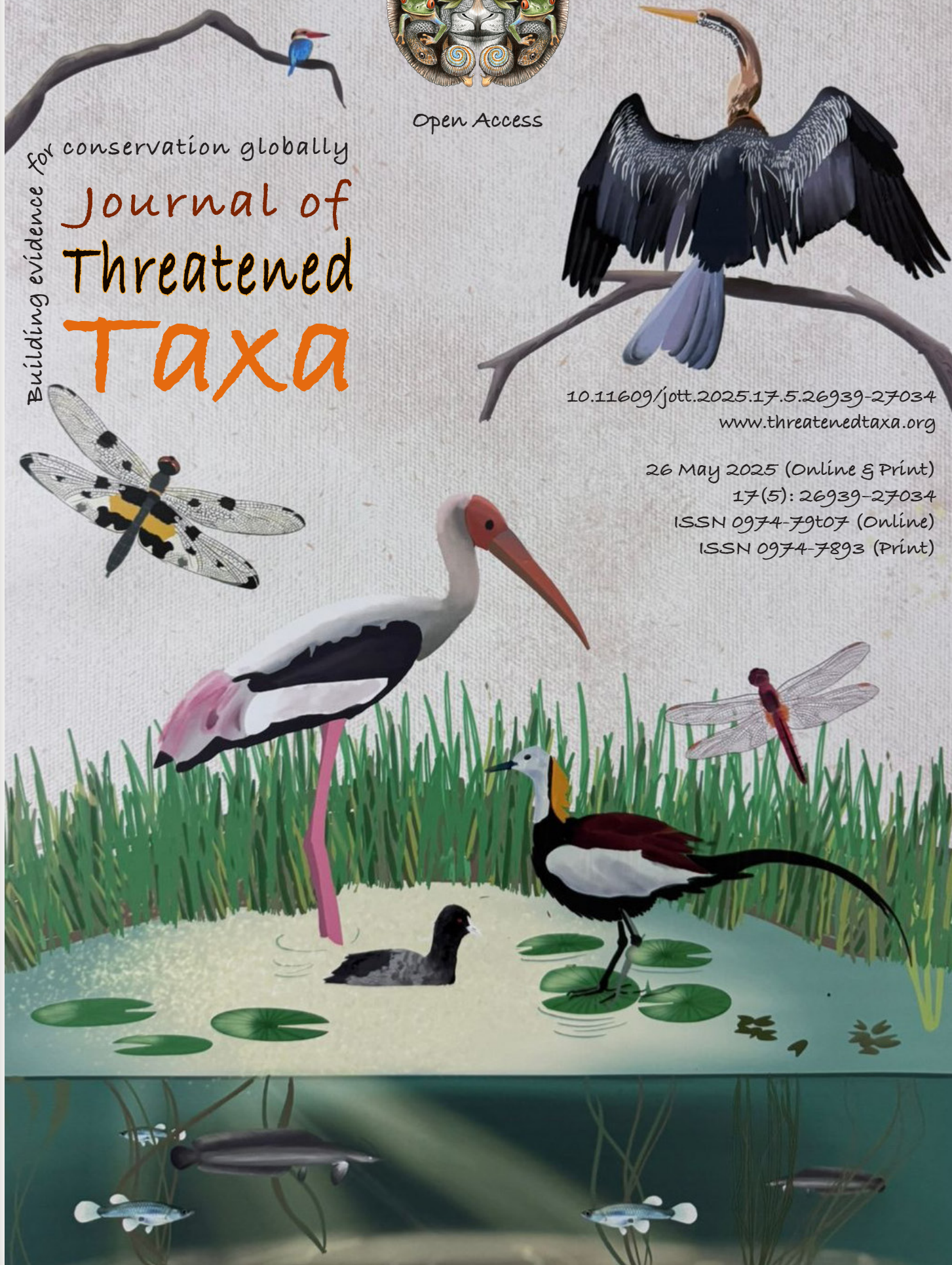
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# Journal of Threatened Taxa

10.11609/jott.2025.17.5.26939-27034  
[www.threatenedtaxa.org](http://www.threatenedtaxa.org)

26 May 2025 (Online & Print)  
17(5): 26939-27034  
ISSN 0974-7907 (Online)  
ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)





ISSN 0974-7907 (Online); ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

Publisher  
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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: A digital art of water birds of Noyyal River and its wetlands in Coimbatore District by Megha A. Kashyap.



## A rare Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* sighted after a gap of 22 years in Al Wathba Wetland Reserve in Abu Dhabi, UAE

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A total of nine species of owl have been recorded in the UAE, out of which three are migrants (Majeed & Al Hamoudi 2021). An adult Long-eared Owl was found and photographed on 1 January 2022 in Al Wathba Wetland Reserve (AWWR) where it was roosting on a branch of *Casuarina* tree (Image 1) on the northern side of the Reserve. The bird was recorded early morning at around 0630 h. The previous day (31 December 2021) areas in and around AWWR experienced very high winds early morning and heavy rains throughout the day. The photograph was taken from 10 m distance from the ground and the bird flew away instantly. The previous record of the species was reported on 14 October 1999 from the Reserve (Table 1).

Long-eared Owl is a highly migratory species with an extremely wide distribution range in Eurasia. Outside Europe, they are found as breeding species in Turkey, northernmost Syria, Israel, and Lebanon (Jiguët & Audevard 2017; Birdlife International 2018). Breeding has also been confirmed from northwestern part of Iran (Tohidifar et al. 2011). In UAE, the species is a vagrant and extremely rare. Between 1971 to 2013, nearly 20 individuals of Long-eared Owl have been sighted in different years from the parks, inland wetlands, golf courses, and some offshore islands of UAE (Pedersen et al. 2021). Global population trend of the species is decreasing; however, it is listed as 'Least Concern' (LC) by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Since

2013, the species has not been documented from the entire country of UAE (Pedersen et al. 2021). Most of the individuals were recorded from the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah during the winter months between October and March (Table 1).

### About Al Wathba Wetland Reserve

Al Wathba Wetland Reserve is located 40 km south-east of Abu Dhabi city and covers an area of 5 km<sup>2</sup>. It is the first declared protected area in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, and this site has been under the management of the Environment Agency—Abu Dhabi (EAD) since 1998. In 2013, it was recognised as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Furthermore, in 2018, the wetland was listed in the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas by UNEP.

AWWR is the most important site for migratory waterfowls, waders, diurnal birds of prey and owls, the higher number and diversity of birds are recorded from late August–Early May, whereas the peak numbers occur in mid-winter (Campbell et al. 2019; Soorae et al. 2019). EAD has been regularly monitoring this site for bird diversity for nearly 18 years, and to date 262 species of birds have been recorded in the reserve, which makes up about 61% of the total bird species documented from the entire Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Other owl species recorded from the reserve include Little Owl *Athene noctua* and Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (Soorae et al. 2019).

**Editor:** Anonymity requested.

**Date of publication:** 26 May 2025 (online & print)

**Citation:** Ahmed, S. & S. Javed (2025). A rare Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* sighted after a gap of 22 years in Al Wathba Wetland Reserve in Abu Dhabi, UAE. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 17(5): 27033–27034. <https://doi.org/10.11609/jott.9481.17.5.27033-27034>

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**Funding:** None.

**Competing interests:** The authors declare no competing interests.

**Table 1. Previous sighting of Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* in UAE (Pedersen et al. 2021).**

| Sighting records | Year      | Month   | No. individuals | Location                        | Emirate        |
|------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1                | 1971      | Jan     | 1               | Sharjah City                    | Sharjah        |
| 2                | 1978      | Mar     | 1               | Khor Fakkan                     | Sharjah        |
| 3                | 1979      | Oct     | 1               | Port Rashid                     | Dubai          |
| 4                | 1991      | Dec     | 1               | Das Island                      | Abu Dhabi      |
| 5                | 1994      | Nov     | 1               | Das Island                      | Abu Dhabi      |
| 6                | 1996      | Nov     | 1               | Jebel Ali Hotel and Golf Resort | Dubai          |
| 7                | 1998      | Dec     | 1               | Das Island (Dead one)           | Abu Dhabi      |
| 8                | 1999      | Oct     | 1               | Al Wathba Wetland Reserve       | Abu Dhabi      |
| 9                | 2001      | Apr     | 1               | Das Island                      | Abu Dhabi      |
| 10               | 2003      | Feb–Mar | 4               | Mushrif National Park           | Dubai          |
| 11               | 2003–2004 | Dec–Mar | 2               | Mushrif National Park           | Dubai          |
| 12               | 2004–2005 | Dec–Jan | 2               | Mushrif National Park           | Dubai          |
| 13               | 2006      | Nov     | 1               | Khalidia*                       |                |
| 14               | 2011–2012 | Dec–Jan | 1               | Mushrif National Park           | Dubai          |
| 15               | 2013      | Jan     | 1               | Mushrif National Park           | Umm al-Qaiwain |
| 16               | 2022      | Jan     | 1               | Al Wathba Wetland Reserve       | Abu Dhabi      |

\*—Exact emirate of sighting cannot be determined.



**Image 1. An adult Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* roosting on a tree in Al Wathba Wetland Reserve. © Muhammad Maqsood.**

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Print copies of the Journal are available at cost. Write to:  
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**Journal of Threatened Taxa** is indexed/abstracted in Bibliography of Systematic Mycology, Biological Abstracts, BIOSIS Previews, CAB Abstracts, EBSCO, Google Scholar, Index Copernicus, Index Fungorum, JournalSeek, National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, NewJour, OCLC WorldCat, SCOPUS, Stanford University Libraries, Virtual Library of Biology, Zoological Records.

NAAS rating (India) 5.64



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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online) | ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

May 2025 | Vol. 17 | No. 5 | Pages: 26939–27034

Date of Publication: 26 May 2025 (Online & Print)

DOI: 10.11609/jott.2025.17.5.26939-27034

[www.threatenedtaxa.org](http://www.threatenedtaxa.org)

## Articles

**A review of Tsimlyansk Birch Mouse *Sicista cimlanica* (Mammalia: Rodentia: Sminthidae): distribution, phylogeography, and conservation**

– Mikhail Rusin, Pp. 26939–26950

**First characterization of the bacteriological profile of the Mediterranean Pond Turtle *Mauremys leprosa* (Schweigger, 1812) in Reghaïa Lake, Algeria**

– Feriel Benhafid, Badis Bakhouch, Abdenour Moussouni, Rayane Ahcene Reda Belaidi, Imed Djemadi, Amina Saadi & Naouelle Azzag, Pp. 26951–26962

**Morphological and molecular identifications of sea turtles *Lepidochelys olivacea* and *Eretmochelys imbricata* from the Turtle Bay of Cilacap, Indonesia**

– Chukwudi Michael Ikegwu, Agus Nuryanto & M.H. Sastranegara, Pp. 26963–26972

**Pollen morphology of Annonaceae from the Bicol Region, Philippines**

– Anne O. Retuerma-Dioneda & Grecebio Jonathan D. Alejandro, Pp. 26973–26984

**Plant composition and species diversity in Delhi NCR of India**

– Amit K. Tripathi & Jyoti K. Sharma, Pp. 26985–26998

## Communications

**Wallowing site observations of the Philippine Tamaraw *Bubalus mindorensis* Heude, 1988 (Artiodactyla: Bovidae) using camera trap data**

– Jean-Matthew B. Bate, Nikki Heherson A. Dagamac, John Carlo Redeña-Santos, Emmanuel Schütz & Fernando Garcia Gil, Pp. 26999–27006

**Diversity and abundance of ants from tehsil Salooni of District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh: a research perspective to study ants as bioindicators**

– Joginder Singh Rilta & Minalini Sharma, Pp. 27007–27013

**Studies on *Heliotropium rottleri* Lehm. (Heliotropiaceae) – a threatened endemic plant of Tamil Nadu, India**

– Shamsudheen Abdul Kader & Gothandam Gopal, Pp. 27014–27020

## Short Communications

**First post-tsunami report of Coconut Crab *Birgus latro* (Linnaeus, 1767) (Malacostraca: Decapoda: Coenobitidae) in Car Nicobar Island, Nicobar Archipelago**

– Mayur Fulmali, Dhanesh Ponnu & Nehru Prabakaran, Pp. 27021–27025

**Notes on *Garcinia kydia* Roxburghii (Clusiaceae): a lesser known medicinal plant species along the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, India**

– Gaottham Gogoi, Ashish Paul & Arup Kumar Das, Pp. 27026–27029

## Notes

**First photographic evidence and record of the Indian Pangolin *Manis crassicaudata* (Mammalia: Pholidota: Manidae) from Rajkot, Gujarat, India**

– Aum Agravat, Vikram Aditya, Shreya Pandey, Bhavin G. Patel, Rushi Pathak & Aurobindo Samal, Pp. 27030–27032

**A rare Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* sighted after a gap of 22 years in Al Wathba Wetland Reserve in Abu Dhabi, UAE**

– Shakeel Ahmed & Sálím Javed, Pp. 27033–27034

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