

Sightings and preliminary observations of Great Eared-Nightjar in Tinsukia District, Assam

Tinsukia District (27.5°N, 95.37°E), one of the 34 administrative districts in the state of Assam, harbours rich biodiversity as the geographical location is marked with dense forests, serving as natural habitat for a large number of wild species (Abedin 2021).

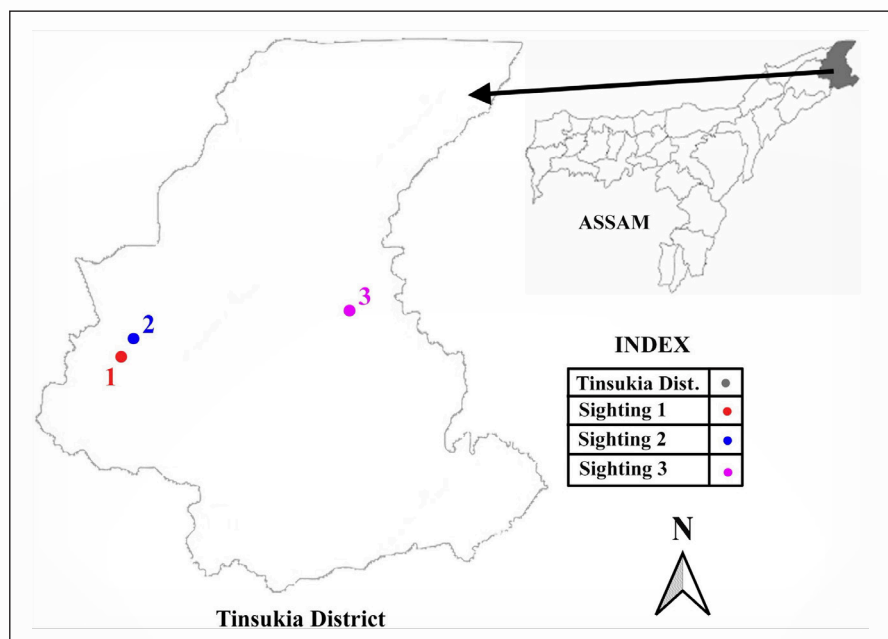
The Nightjars are medium sized nocturnal or crepuscular birds (Order Caprimulgiformes, Family Caprimulgidae), characterised by long wings, short legs, and very short bills. Their primary source of food is insects. Nightjars are found all around the world, with the exception of Antarctica and certain island groups. They can be found in a variety of habitats, most commonly the open country with some vegetation. They usually nest on the ground, with a habit of resting and roosting on roads (Cleere 2017). The colour of their plumage and their unusual perching habits help conceal them during the day and are generally nocturnal.

The Great Eared-Nightjar *Lyncornis macrotis* is a nocturnal species. At

Map showing the sightings of Great Eared-Nightjar *Lyncornis macrotis* in Tinsukia District of Assam.

rest, it shows prominent ear-tufts, and is generally more richly marked with golden buff and rufous than other nightjars. It has fine rufous barring on black ear-coverts and throat, buff underparts boldly barred with dark brown, and tail broadly banded with golden-buff and dark brown. In flight, it appears large, with slow and buoyant flight action (often feeding high in the air), and lacks white or buff spots on wings or tail.

The song is a clear, wailing *pee-wheeeu*. It is the largest species in the family in terms of length, which can range 31–41 cm. Males weigh an average of 131 g (4.6 oz) and females weigh an average of 151 g (5.3 oz) so it is the second heaviest species in the family (Dunning Jr. 2008).



One evening, we noticed a fairly large bird flying above with a long ending note voice. We began to search for it and after a rapid survey of around 20 minutes, we could finally locate the bird. At first sight, we thought it to be a Grey Nightjar; upon observing closely we noticed its ear-tufts, with golden bluff and rufous. We identified it as Great Eared-Nightjar *Lyncornis macrotis* using the field guide (Grimmett et al. 2011). That evening we could only observe it for around five minutes before it took off, but didn't manage to take a photograph.

On the following day, we started looking for the bird in the nearby areas including the garden which resides most of the long-standing trees in the village.

After searching for a few hours, we noticed it sitting on a perch very well camouflaged (Image 2 & 3). We observed the bird for 90

minutes and left the bird undisturbed on the perch. This is the first known record of the bird from this region. Following this sighting, we also recorded this species in Natun Gaon Village, near Maguri-Matapung Beel & Kakopather. The bird was observed using 8 x 40 binoculars and documented using 400 mm lens.

Across the three sightings, we witnessed site fidelity (the tendency to return to a previously occupied location) behaviour very prominently. The habitat of the sighting was near human habitation with trees and bamboo plantations or tea gardens. It was sighted in summer season (June–September), indicating the probability of it being a summer visitor for upper Assam. We could observe only one individual across all the sightings.

Sighting 1 – Daytime, sat on a fallen tree about one metre from the ground, sleeping



Great Eared-Nightjar in the garden of Guijan area.
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Table 1. Sighting data of Great Eared-Nightjar *Lyncornis macrotis* in Tinsukia District by the authors

Sighting	Location	Coordinates	Date	No. of days sighted consecutively	Sighted by
1	Guijan Village	27.580N, 95.331E	30.vi.2015	15 Days	Abedin, I. & J. Abedin
2	Natungaon Village, near Maguri-Matapung Beel	27.567N, 95.369E	25.vii.2018	12 Days	Abedin, I. & J. Abedin
3	Lankadweep Village, Kakopathar	27.635N, 95.704E	21.viii.2021	16 Days	Abedin, I. & J. Abedin

most of the time, rarely showing any movement. It went to feed at dusk and was aerial but low, mostly fed on termites at around 6–8 m high, returned and sat on a branch (5 m high) for around five minutes before it took off again.

Each aerial encounter for feeding was around 7–10 minutes. We were able to observe 3–5 cycles each evening. During the observation, we only heard it calling thrice. It remained quiet in most instances.

Sighting 2 – The call was very prominent here. It used to call each time it returned to its perch. The feeding pattern was exactly the same as the previous one. It sat on a bamboo pole at 5–6 m high approximately. We observed 2–4 cycles in the evening before it flew off.



Great Eared-Nightjar in Maguri-Matapung Beel in Natungaon area. ©Swapnanil Borah



Great Eared-Nightjar in Lankadweep Village of Kakoather.
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Sighting 3 – We observed it only during the day, perched on a bamboo fence 1.5 m high approximately. It went off at dusk and returned at dawn. We were unable to track it at night.

Apart from these three sightings, there were two other sightings, one at Tinsukia (22 October 2019 by M. Sayeer) and the other at Dibrugarh (9 September 2020 by M. Pratim) as per the eBird data.

The bird has a high probability to get sighted in locations near human habitation surrounded with trees and tea gardens or bamboo plantations during summer season.

It also needs dire research in breeding, migration, and behaviour to have a better understanding regarding their conservation implications in the northeastern India.

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