Bird-o-soar

Recent sighting record of Great Hornbill at Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam

Great Hornbills Buceros bicornis L., 1758 are monogamous and longlived, exhibiting peculiar reproductive behavior (Kozlowski et al. 2015). Being around 3 kg and 120 cm in length they make their nests in large trees having enough cavities that can accommodate the mother to lay her eggs; hence they face problems in finding such big trees (James & Kannan 2009). Before laying eggs, the female seals the entrance of the cavity using faeces, mud, pulps of fruit, keeping a narrow gap for the male to pass food and this continues up to one month after the hatching of the chick (Kozlowski et al. 2015).

The bird is considered to undergo a population reduction in large number and hence it is now in 'Vulnerable' status (BirdLife International 2022). It is enlisted in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. It belongs to Bucerotidae family and is the largest of all the nine species of hornbills (Ali & Ripley 1968).



Great Hornbills Buceros bicornis. © Manab Jyoti Kalita.



Map showing the sighting location.

We observed a pair of Great Hornbill (one male and one female) in Rojagarh range office (26.7805 N & 91.7549 E) of Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary on 10 May 2022 at around 06.00 am. The sexes are comparable, with the exception that females have a completely yellow casque, a light iris, and naked pink skin surrounding the eye (BirdLife International 2022).

They can be found in tropical rain forests, both lowland and upland evergreen forests (Lekagul & Round 1991).

Bird-o-soar

These vegetation offer nesting locations and wholesome food sources (Chaisuriyanun et al. 2011). It is known that Asian Hornbills breed and forage in agroforestry plantations and fragmented rainforests in human-modified landscapes adjacent to contiguous protected forests (Pawar et al. 2021). The breeding season of Great Hornbill starts once the female starts closing the cavity up to the day of fledging by the chicks and is January–May (Poonswad & Tsuji 1994).

As per study reported by Ouithavon et al. (2005) the Great Hornbill eats more figs (57.3%) compared to non-fig (42.7%) fruits like Lauraceae, Annonaceae and Myristicaceae while consumes 79.3% fruit food and 20.7% animal food.

Datta (2022) described that in the northeastern regions of India, variations in hornbill nesting over time may be linked to unseasonal rainfall, temperature increases, and changes in the peak fruiting season.

Though the major threat to *Buceros bicornis* is habitat loss brought due to deforestation, yet they are hunted for meat and body parts like casque, and feathers of tail for decorations purposes also. However, the existence of this vulnerable species in Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary is definitely an encouraging sign. This location has the potential for additional research on the Great Hornbill.

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