

# Journal of Threatened Taxa

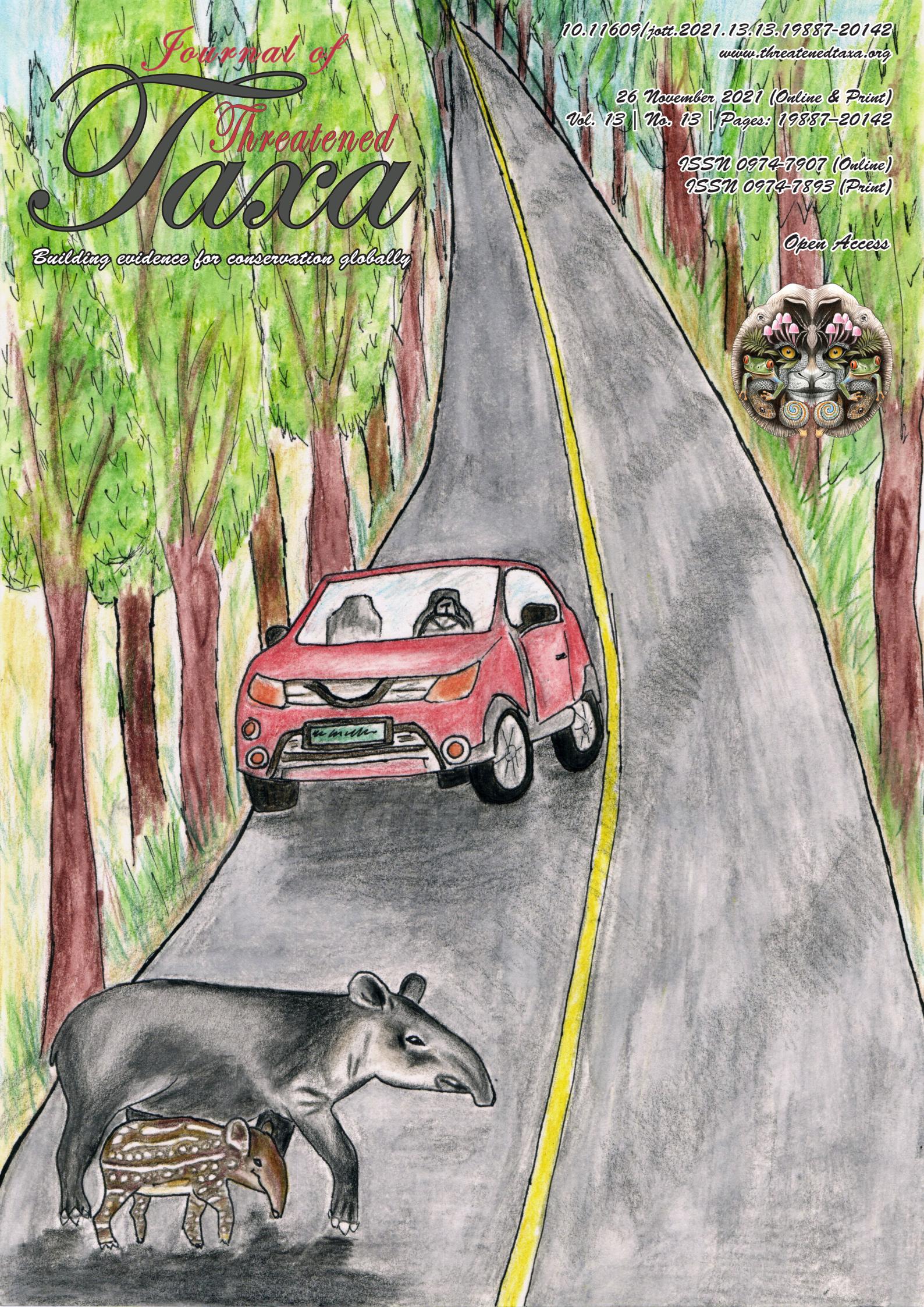
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Caption: Lowland Tapir *Tapirus terrestris* (Medium—watercolours on watercolour paper) © Aakanksha Komanduri.



NOTE

## An unusual vocalization of Brown Hawk-Owl *Ninox scutulata* (Raffles, 1822) (Aves: Strigiformes: Strigidae) recorded from Kerala, India

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The distribution of the Brown Hawk-Owl ranges from the Himalayan foothills of northern India to the Western Ghats of southern India and in Sri Lanka (Ali & Ripley 1974; Grimmet et al. 1998). The species has a viable population in most of the protected areas of Kerala located along the southern Western Ghats, and its encounter rate is reported to be significantly higher in mid-altitude and moist deciduous forest (Jayson & Sivaram 2009). On 08 May 2020, at 2235h, we heard a very distinct and unusual call in the campus of Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), Peechi, Thrissur. The campus (10.526N & 76.350E) is located on a slope of a hill ridge covered with a secondary moist deciduous forest patch near Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary. The call was of one-minute duration comprising of five repetitive 'kuh-hoo' phrases. Since the call was unfamiliar we recorded the call using a mobile phone.

After a gap of one month we heard a very similar call on 10 July 2020 at 2310h, this time the call was intense and more frequent than last time. We followed the call and to our surprise it was found to be produced by a pair of Brown Hawk-Owls. Since then, we heard the distinctive continuous calls of the species for the subsequent 15 days, mostly after 2230 h and more frequently during

2315h to 2345h. We photographed the vocalising bird on 11 July using a Sony DSC-HX400V camera (Image 1).

Spectrograms and measurements of the recorded calls were made using Raven Pro v. 1.6. Each phrase in a call bout comprised of about 8–11 notes (Image 2b) spanning about 0.5 seconds. The centre frequency was c. 3kHz (Image 2b). The recorded call has been deposited in the Xeno-canto foundation (shineraj, XC643715 ([Audio 1](#)); shineraj, XC660215 ([Audio 2](#)))

The pair of Hawk-Owls were seen in the area at multiple times roosting in a big, old tree (*Grewia tiliifolia*), personal observation by the author before the incident. The tree being old and because of its proximity to the road it was removed on concerns of public safety. We suspect that the unusual call from the owls happened as a result of the felling of the *Grewia tiliifolia* tree which might have been their nesting site and the sudden loss of it may have caused this unusual behaviour.

The studies which focussed on the vocalization of Brown Hawk-Owl in India and other Oriental regions (Neelakantan 1979; Hutchinson et al. 2006; Babu & Jayson 2007; Jayson & Sivaram 2009; Rasmussen et al. 2012) and the information available in the public domain such as eBird and xeno-canto did not describe

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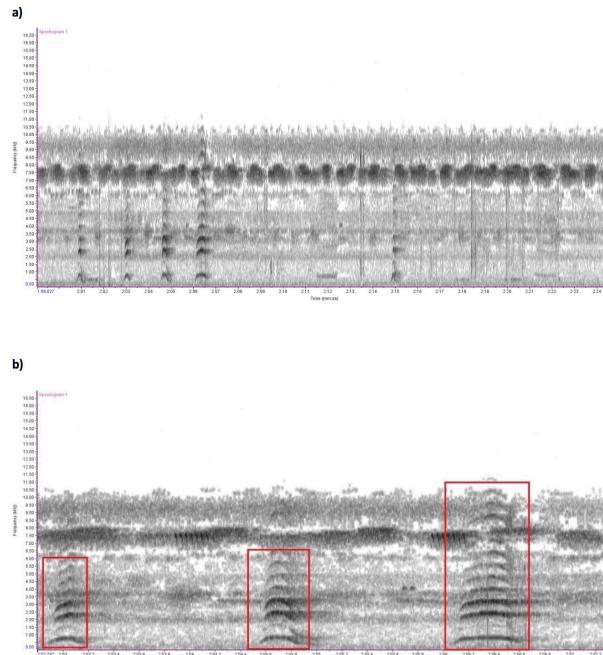
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**Image 1.** Brown Hawk-Owl *Ninox scutulata* at KFRI campus, Thrissur district, Kerala.

the peculiar vocalisation illustrated here which seems to be a new addition to the existing recorded vocalisation of the species.

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**Image 2.** Spectrograms of the unusual call of Brown Hawk-Owl recorded at Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi: a—25 seconds spectrogram showing the frequency of the call phrases | b—7 seconds spectrograms of the call with three phrases, each marked by a red box.

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