

LITTLE-KNOWN ASIAN BIRD

First breeding record of Mentawai Scops Owl *Otus mentawi*, with notes on the morphology and vocalisations of juveniles

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The Mentawai Scops Owl *Otus mentawi* is endemic to the Mentawai Islands, Sumatra, Indonesia. It is the only scops owl on the islands and is locally common, but little is known of its breeding biology and the juvenile has not been described (van Marle & Voous 1988, König & Weick 2008, Eaton *et al.* 2016, Holt *et al.* 2017). During May 2017 we made a series of observations of Mentawai Scops Owl in west Siberut, the largest of the Mentawai Islands, near the *uma* (traditional Siberut longhouse) at Muntei village, Siberut, Mentawai Islands Regency, West Sumatra province. Here we record our observations, giving information on the morphology, vocalisations and diet of the juveniles.

The presence of a pair of Mentawai Scops Owl had first been noted by IS about a month earlier, when the birds were actively calling to each other in the surrounding area almost every night and before dawn (Plate 1). A variety of calls were noted including: a rough barking call; a single ascending *woup* resembling Collared Scops Owl *O. lempiji*, repeated at intervals of between 15–20 seconds; a double *woup-woup* and also a triple *woup-woup-woup*. However, we were unaware that they were

breeding until noon on 9 May 2017, when a boy, using a catapult, shot one of the adults while it was roosting in a Rambutan tree *Nephelium lappaceum* near the *uma*. He told us that there had been two birds; the second one flew immediately after the shot. The shot bird had a brood patch, suggesting that this was the female of the pair.

Three days later, on 12 May, we heard repeated *woup* calls from the surviving adult and these were immediately followed by a higher pitched *woup* call from another bird, which we discovered was a juvenile. Clearly the remaining adult was continuing to raise the young on its own. The duration of the juvenile's call was about 0.15 seconds, with a frequency in the range 0.7–3.0 kHz—higher than the adult's frequency range of 0.7–1.7 kHz. The adult usually called from high in a tree and the juvenile from a lower branch, sometimes only 2–3 m above the ground. When the adult delivered food, the juvenile responded with a harsh note resembling the sound of a cricket.

On 18 May IS observed for the first time that the family consisted of the surviving adult and two juveniles, both slightly smaller than the adult. The juveniles were of similar appearance (Plates 2 & 3): their underparts were pale greyish-brown

All images taken on Siberut Island, Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra province, Indonesia.

Plate 1. Adult Mentawai Scops Owl *Otus mentawi*, 9 April 2017.



Plate 2. The two juvenile Mentawai Scops Owls when first observed, 18 May 2017.



Plate 3. Juvenile Mentawai Scops Owl showing thin dark streaks on the underparts and dark tail, 18 May 2017.



Plate 4. Juvenile Mentawai Scops Owl three days later; it appeared larger, with browner underparts, now as dark as the breast, 21 May 2017.

with thin dark streaks, upperparts darker, faces reddish-brown (darker than the breast), bills and toes pale greyish-horn and eyes reddish-brown. Their wings projected beyond the end of the short and dark tail. Faint narrow bars were visible on the flight feathers (Plate 3), which became stronger as the birds developed (Plate 4). The appearance of this feature on adult birds can be seen on some images, for example at http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php?Bird_Image_ID=94707 and [Bird_Image_ID=34313](http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php?Bird_Image_ID=34313).

Becking (1994) calculated that the incubation and fledging periods of Javan Scops Owl *O. angelinae* were both about 25 days, based on data from Eurasian Scops Owl *O. scops*, which is about the same size and weight. Assuming this also holds true for Mentawai Scops Owl, it suggests that the pair we found were incubating during March, brooding the chicks during April, with fledging taking place in May. However, as the Mentawai Scops Owl is slightly larger than either Javan or Eurasian Scops Owl, this suggested breeding cycle cannot be considered as any more than a reasonable estimate at this point.

The diet of Mentawai Scops Owl is described as insects, but without any further detail (König & Weick 2008, Holt *et al.* 2017). IS observed the adult carrying a green insect about 5 cm long, identified as a grasshopper or katydid of the family Tettigoniidae.

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