

Rare Indonesian owl photographed by Danes

Title

One of the world's most elusive owls has been found and photographed - in the forest around Mbeliling on Flores in Indonesia, where BirdLife Denmark is involved with a Danida-funded nature conservation project in collaboration with the local communities and the Indonesian BirdLife Partner, Burung Indonesia. The finding of the endemic Flores Scops-owl *Otus alfredi* is an important result for the project. Until now, Flores Scops-owl has only been known from forests further inland on the island, where the species is very rare. Just a few people have ever seen or even heard the small, red owl, which seems to prefer near-inaccessible forests on steep hillsides. There are only a few known sightings of the species, and it's only within the last decade that the owl's status as a species has been recognised. Three specimens collected in 1896 were initially regarded as a colour variation of another Indonesian scops-owl species. However, two birds caught in a net in 1994 determined that Flores Scops-owl was indeed a species. In 2005, two birds were both seen and heard simultaneously, which once and for all determined the bird's call. Previous audio recordings had been questioned, because the call of Flores Scops-owl resembles the call of Red-legged Crake *Rallina fasciata* which can also be found on Flores. The recent sightings were had deep within the Mbeliling Forest in an area called Cunca Lolos on October 19 by Jens Kristian Kjaergaard and Ole Friis Larsen from BirdLife Denmark along with local caretaker Alfons Andi and biologist Langgeng Arief Utemo from Burung Indonesia. The delegation discovered a pair of owls and managed to photograph one of them. It is probably only the second time in history that anyone has succeeded in photographing Flores Scops-owl in the wild. This find shows that the forest surrounding Mbeliling contains all four endemic Flores species, the three others being Flores Crow *Corvus florensis*, Flores Monarch *Monarcha sacerdotum* (a flycatcher) and Flores Hanging-parrot *Loriculus flosculus*. All of them are rare and highly specialised in their choice of habitat. Flores is a hotspot not only for birds but for biodiversity in general; last year, the rare Komodo Dragon, which is normally restricted to neighbouring island Komodo, was seen around Mbeliling. The BirdLife Denmark project in Mbeliling aims at establishing and strengthening a local branch of Burung Indonesia. At present there are nine local caretaker groups counting birds every three months, fortunately they are reporting improvements for many species. A further essential part of the project is to help local farmers gain an income - e.g. from small-scale production, tourism, and organic and sustainable cultivation of cocoa, vanilla and mahogany - in return for their protection of local nature. Jens Kristian Kjaergaard and Ole Friis Larsen were sent to Flores by BirdLife Denmark to report on the project. For further information please contact BirdLife Denmark: dof@dof.dk. To hear a podcast about the owl's discovery, please [click here](#).
