

September 2022 | Issue 9 | Volume 2

EARTH HERO



• Mammals • Birds • Reptiles • Insects



BIRDS

(BIRDS OF PREY)

(Photos by: Mark Louis Benedict)

Borneo is home to almost 700 different species of birds. They can be found in diverse landscapes such as mountain ranges, lowland forests, swamp forests, and along the coastline. Their different colours and sounds have always captivated birdwatchers who come to see them from all over the world. Among the birds that always catch their attention are the birds of prey. Kinabatangan is home to many different species of birds of prey. According to data from the Kinabatangan River and Sukau bird checklist, there are 20 species of birds of prey that consist of osprey, hawks, eagles, kites, owls, and falcons. The two main types of birds of prey in the Kinabatangan are raptors and owls. The raptors include species like the oriental honey-buzzard, crested serpent-eagle, bat hawk, changeable hawk-eagle, Wallace's hawk-eagle, black eagle, gray-faced buzzard, crested goshawk, Brahminy kite, white-bellied sea-eagle, lesser fish-eagle, and grey-headed fish-eagle. Meanwhile, the owl species include the reddish scops-owl, barred eagle-owl, buffy fish-owl, brown wood-owl, and brown hawk-owl.

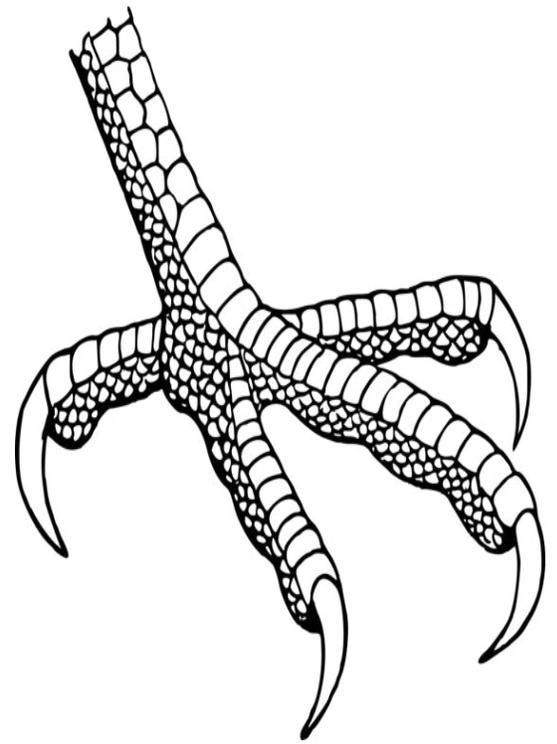


White-bellied sea eagle



Lesser fish eagle

Any bird that hunts other creatures for food is a bird of prey. All birds of prey have powerful talons, which are sharp, curved claws with hook tips. The talons on these birds are also sharper and better equipped to tear flesh. On most birds of prey, these talons are in an anisodactyl toe arrangement with the first toe directed backward and the other three toes directed forward. This allows them to hold their prey firmly while flying with it or when they are eating it while perching on a branch. Birds of prey also have strong, hooked beaks as well as excellent vision. Raptors have eyes that face forward, while owls have eyes



bird-talons

on the front of the face. The eyes of owls are tube-shaped eyes which enable them to maximize the light collected in dark settings, allowing them to hunt at night. The forward-facing eyes give them the ability to see in three dimensions with accurate depth perception that aids them in catching prey, avoiding predators, and navigating their environment.

Birds of prey have carnivorous diets. Their prey include larger insects, fish, small to medium mammals, large birds like pigeons, reptiles, and amphibians. Typically, the larger birds of prey can hunt bigger prey. However, many medium and large raptors may prefer simpler, smaller meals, especially when tiny prey is more plentiful.

Birds of prey that are found in Kinabatangan are solitary hunters that stalk their prey before attacking. Raptors and owls use different strategies to catch their prey. The raptors are mainly active during the daytime while the owls typically hunt at night. Raptors tend to be more aggressive than owls, chasing down their prey until it is caught or killed.

Raptors capture their prey by snatching them using their talons or by knocking them out of the air. Meanwhile, owls typically perch and wait for their prey to come to them, sometimes waiting for hours before making the kill. Once they spot a target, owls will fly down stealthily from their perches to snatch up their prey.

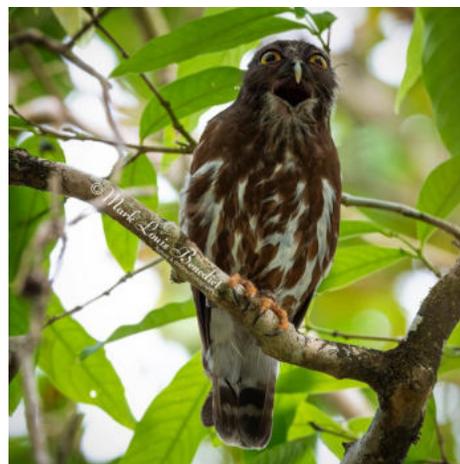


Buffy fish-owl

Physically, in comparison to most owl species, raptors are the largest. Raptors have longer wings, which give them better range and speed when they hunt. In addition, they have a larger body that allow them to carry more weight while hunting.



Crested serpent eagle



Brown hawk owl

Along the Kinabatangan river, raptors can be seen mostly in open areas with trees and on tall trees near the riverbank. They can be spotted perching high up or flying and circling the sky while scanning for prey. Among the species, those that are easily spotted include the Brahminy kite, the lesser fish eagle, and the white-bellied sea eagle. Meanwhile, owls mostly live in wooded areas near water. They are most often observed at night foraging for prey because it is when they are most active.



Oriental honey-buzzard



Wallace's hawk-eagle

Both raptors and owls lay eggs to reproduce. They are good parents and rarely leave the eggs alone. The eggs are incubated until they hatch and the parents will feed the chicks to full plumage until they are ready to fly and leave the nest.

The birds of prey have an important role in the ecosystem. They are apex predators that help to keep the stability of population of small animals. Without birds of prey, we might have an overpopulation of prey species like mice that might cause damage to our forests and crops. Hence, in most countries, farmers use owls as a biological control by building nest boxes near their crops. Using this method, farmers can avoid using pesticides and insecticides, which help protect the environment. In places like Kinabatangan, the birds of prey also have a large impact on tourism. They attract bird watchers and eco-tourists who love to watch these amazing creatures in action and learn about their ecology.