

Ural Owl in Romania in December 2004 By Lee G R Evans



The URAL OWL *Strix uralensis* is a medium-sized (Tawny Owl-sized) inhabitant of the boreal forest or taiga and has a wide Palearctic distribution from Norway in the west to Japan in the east. In Europe, the bulk of the population lives in the coniferous forests of Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Russia. Isolated central European populations are restricted to mountain areas, whilst in the Carpathians, and in the Slovenian, Croatian and Bosnian uplands, the Ural Owl's main habitat is deciduous forest.

Ural Owl populations have been relatively stable in Fennoscandia, with many pairs utilising nest boxes, especially in Finland. It is a difficult species to locate, mainly because established pairs are largely silent. The proportion of breeding pairs varies in accordance with vole numbers, which follow a 3-4 year cycle.

In Finland and Sweden, where the species has been intensively studied, maximum population sizes have been estimated at 4,000 breeding pairs each. In comparison, the maxima given for Estonia (2,500), Belarus (1,200), Latvia (2,000) and Romania (1,000) are surprisingly high.

In December 2004, Swiss birders Joel Brueziere and Lionel Maumary visited Romania and spent some time searching for the species. They eventually located a bird at Carpatas Meridionales showing exceptionally well out in the open. These superb photographs were taken of the bird – some of the best I have ever seen of the species.

Reference: Hagemejjer & Blair, *The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds*.



See more of Joel and Lionel's excellent bird images
at www.eyesonsky.com and www.oiseaux.ch.