

In Russia, are loggers an owl's best friend?

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A Blakiston's fish owl in Primorye, Russia. These massive, endangered owls nest in cavities of old-growth trees and eat salmon. Credit: J. Slaght, WCS Russia.

Can owls and loggers get along? A recent study conducted in Primorye in the southern Russian Far East suggests it's not only possible, but essential for endangered Blakiston's fish owls to survive there. The study was conducted by the WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society), the Russian

Academy of Sciences, and the University of Minnesota.

Results showed that the greatest proportion of suitable fish owl habitat in a 20,213 km² [7,804 square mile] study area was located in lands leased to logging companies (43 percent). Only 19 percent of such lands (enough for only eight owl pairs) were protected in nature reserves. The study, "Blakiston's fish owl *Bubo blakistoni* and logging: applying resource selection information to endangered species conservation in Russia," is available free online for a limited time in the peer-reviewed journal *Bird Conservation International*.

While this might sound like a setup for "Spotted Owl vs Loggers II: Russia Edition," the relationship between fish owl advocates and logging companies in Russia is not nearly as contentious as the bitter conflict between spotted owls and loggers in the American Pacific Northwest in the 1990s.

In fact, one of the biggest logging companies in northeastern Primorye, OAO Amgu, is already working with biologists to identify select patches of riverine forest on their lands crucial to the fish owl's survival: huge trees for nesting, and stretches of river where the owls can hunt their favored prey: salmon.

"This commitment to fish owl habitat protection by a logging company is significant," said Sergei Surmach, an ornithologist at the Russian Academy of Sciences and a co-author to the study.

"If OAO Amgu and their parent company, TerneyLes, protect all fish owl habitat under their purview," adds the other co-author and WCS Russia Projects Manager Jonathan Slaght, "the number of fish owl territories currently protected in the region would triple, and result in the protection of nearly half of all potential fish owl home ranges in our study area."

Another recommendation the study makes is for logging companies to close unused logging roads to reduce disturbance to fish owls and other wildlife. As reported earlier in the year, TerneyLes has begun working with WCS to implement such closures in the region by destroying key bridges and erecting dirt barricades to block vehicle passage. These closures minimize illegal [logging](#) and reduce the risk of human-caused forest fires, while at the same time keeping poachers away from wildlife.

"We are always looking for ways to balance the needs of the economy and endangered species like fish owls," says Surmach. "And in this case, everybody wins."

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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