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Pel's Fishing-Owl Scotopelia peli is similar in size to Verreaux's Eagle-Owl but is confined to riverine habitat; one of the best places to see it is in the Okavango Delta in Botswana. It is elusive, concealing itself well at its daytime roost and, when disturbed, flies off for some distance. It is an attractive owl with large dark eyes and tawny-rufous plumage. The legs are bare, unlike other owls, and there are spicules on the underside of its feet -- an adaptation for grasping slippery fish which may sometimes weigh as much as 2 kg. The call is a series of very deep sonorous hoots that carry over a considerable distance, but the young owl emits an eerie wailing call described in one early bird book as sounding like 'the cry of a lost soul falling into the bottomless pit.'

Photo and text: Peter Steyn
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