

Owls versus Snakes



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Owls....

Most owls are nocturnal and masters of predators as they are at the apex in their environments and, therefore, do not have many predators (König & Weick 2008). They also have a variety of defenses to protect themselves from their enemies, which makes them difficult to kill and hunt. However, few mammalian species are known as predators of owls (juveniles and adults), domestic cats, coyotes, bobcats, and foxes, which can easily kill an adult owl in searching for prey and young owls in an unattended nest (König et al. 1999). Usually, many owl species are masters of killers and are well capable of predating snakes (König & Weick 2008). There are very few incidences as owls are predated by snakes. However, very scanty records on owls were predated by snakes. Here, present a review of published literature and news on social media about a few owl species preying by a few species of snakes.

Recently, a remarkable observation was published on a predator of the Mottled owl (*Strix ocellata*) from Gujarat (Vadher et al. 2023). The Mottled Wood Owl is a large owl and is widely distributed in India and parts of Nepal (Grimmett et al. 2011). Gujarat is home to over 16 species of owls, including the Mottled Owl (Ganpule et al. 2022). Mottled owls commonly inhabit gardens, agricultural fields, and deciduous forests adjacent to the dry thorn forests of Gujarat State (Ganpule et al. 2022). The Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the important protected areas in the Saurashtra region, and it contains diverse avian diversity, including eight species of owls and owlets (Doshi 2021; Patel & Bagada 2022). Vadher et al. (2023) recorded the unusual feeding habits of the Indian Rock Python (*Python molurus*). An adult Indian rock python prey on a mottled owl (*Strix ocellata*). This is the first record of Mottled Owl consumed by Indian Rock Python (Figures 1 & 2) from India.



The present literature survey shows there are a few notable incidences as follows. Earlier, there was a record of a Flammulated Owl (*Otus flammeolus*) predated by the Gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*) in the USA (Rodriguez-Robles 2002). A publication shows Blanford's bridle snake (*Lycodon davisonii*) predated the eggs of the Ryukyus scope owl (*Otus elegans*) in Japan (Toyama et al. 2015). Also, two posts on social media show, on two different occasions, the snake was an attempt to catch an owl. A Gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*) tried to catch a Great horned

owl (*Bubo sp.*) in Texas, USA (Shaws 2017). In another case, a western diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus atrox*) was attacked on a great-horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), but both attempts were unsuccessful by the snake (Martin 2020).

There was a published incident about prey and predator both found dead with severe injuries at a forest trail in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas, USA (Perry et al. 2001). A great-horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) was found entangled with a large southern black racer snake (*Coluher constrictor priapus*). This owl species is a great hunter of snakes, and numbers of snake species are part of diets (Houston et al. 1998; Tyler & Jensen 1981; Wink et al. 1987). The scenario was suggested, it was a mutual death. It is believed that the owl was hunting the snake but the snake overwhelmed the owl. No one conquered, but they injured each other and finally, both died (Perry et al. 2001). However, nature is full of surprises, sometimes masters of predators were preyed on by other predators, too.

Acknowledgments

We thank the Deputy Conservator of Forests and Range Forest Officer, Wildlife Junagadh Division, Forest Department of Gujarat, and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife), Gujarat, for their support.

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