

Breeding Record of Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata* near Dholka Taluka, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

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On 19 March 2026 at 08:45 h, we recorded a breeding group of Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*) roosting on a roadside Siris tree (*Albizia lebbeck*) near Ambareli village (22°38'12.4"N, 72°24'46.6"E), Dholka taluka, Ahmedabad district, Gujarat (Fig. 1). The group comprised a recently fledged juvenile and an adult female perched together, while the male remained nearby. All three individuals were observed for over an hour. Identification was based on characteristic features including large size, a rounded head without ear tufts, a pale facial disc with fine barring, dark eyes, and mottled reddish-brown upperparts. The juvenile was smaller, with a less-defined facial disc and retained downy plumage, indicating recent fledging. Notably, the birds exhibited calm behaviour and effective camouflage within the dense canopy, despite the proximity to human activity. This observation provides clear evidence of breeding in a roadside tree habitat, an uncommon context for the species. Photographic documentation was obtained (Fig. 2).

The habitat around Ambareli comprised a mosaic of rose and marigold cultivation interspersed with roadside Siris Trees and adjoining farmland, supporting abundant prey such as rodents

and snakes (Fig. 1). During the same visit (19 March 2026), the site supported a diverse bird assemblage, including Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*), Yellow-throated Sparrow (*Gymnoris xanthocollis*), Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), Asian Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*), and Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*). This diversity highlights the structural complexity, prey richness, and overlooked ornithological value of the Dholka region.

The presence of a juvenile alongside the adult pair is particularly noteworthy. The breeding season of the Mottled Wood Owl is generally reported to occur from February to April, with nesting in natural tree hollows (Lewis, 2020). The observation of a recently fledged juvenile during this period strongly suggests that breeding occurred in or near the locality, representing one of the first confirmed indications of local breeding of this species in Dholka taluka and the broader central Gujarat region. The subspecies *S. o. grandis* (Koelz, 1950) is endemic to the Saurashtra Peninsula in southern Gujarat and is the largest of the three recognised subspecies (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2012). Records from central

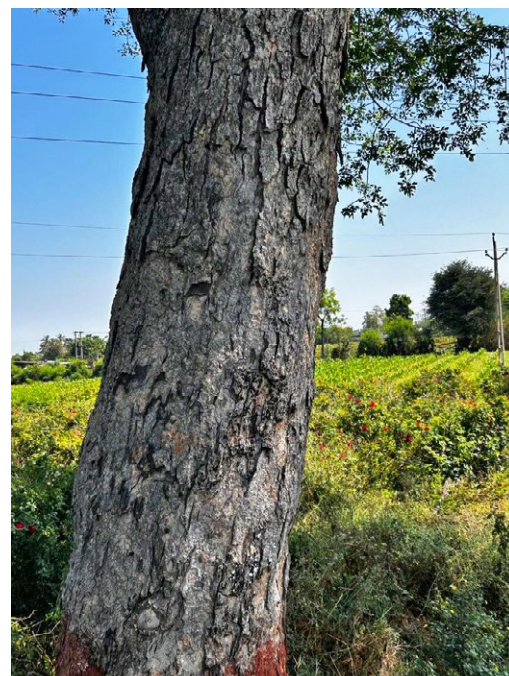


Fig. 1. The Siris tree (*Albizia lebbeck*) on the roadside near Ambareli village, Dholka, in which the family group of Mottled Wood Owl was observed roosting, with rose cultivation visible in the background. 19 March 2026. Photo: Faisal Ghanchi



Fig. 2. Family of Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*) on a Siris tree near Ambareli village, Dholka taluka, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. 19 March 2026. Photo: Umang Nayi and Faisal Ghanchi

Gujarat - particularly from Ahmedabad district - remain poorly documented.

A review of available eBird data did not reveal any prior records of this species from the Dholka region, making this a locally significant observation. According to Ganpule et al., (2022), the species is primarily associated with the Saurashtra region in Gujarat, and records from the central and northern parts of the state remain sparse. The rich avifauna recorded at this site, together with the presence of a breeding family group of Mottled Wood Owl, highlights the conservation importance of agricultural grove habitats in Dholka taluka and underscores the need for systematic bird surveys across this under-documented region of central Gujarat.

References

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