

Evidential sighting of Mottled Wood-Owl *Strix ocellate* (Lesson, 1839), in Savitribai Phule Pune University Campus, Pune, Maharashtra

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ABSTRACT

The Mottled Wood-Owl (*Strix ocellate*) is rarely seen endemic species to the Indian subcontinent. It is listed as Least Concern by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The sighting of this species is very rare. This species usually prefers nesting away from the human settlement area. There was no previous record of its presence and nesting in the Savitribai Phule Pune University Campus (SPPU). In this note, we are reporting the first evidential sighting record of the Mottled Wood-Owl in Savitribai Phule Pune University Campus (SPPU).

Key words: Mottled Wood-Owl, *Strix ocellate*, Endemic, Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU).

Mottled Wood-Owl *Strix ocellate* (Lesson, 1839) is the endemic species to Indian subcontinent (Jathar and Rahmani, 2006; Pande *et al.*, 2018). The species is classified as a "Species of Least Concern" because of its large range of occurrence (IUCN, 2016; Boyer and Hume, 1991; Grimmitt *et al.*, 2011; Ali and Ripley, 2001; Ko'ning and Weick, 2008; Holt *et al.*, 2017). This species of owl is divided into three subspecies on the basis of coloration and wing length (Baker, 1927; Ali, 1935; Koelz, 1950; Ali and Ripley, 2001).

The Mottled wood owl is the resident species of India and Holt *et al.* (2017) reported the species to be uncommon to scarce. The habitat of the species includes open wooded areas, grove around the village and plains in the garden (Grimmett *et al.*, 2011).

Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) is located (18.55300° N and 73.82400° E) in Pune city (Maharashtra). The campus is spread over an area of 1.67 sq.km. It is defined by diverse changes in habi-

tat from lush green during the rains and brown after the rains recedes (Pande, 1974). The campus also represents few water bodies in the form of lakes, streams and temporary wetlands that plays an integral role in the ecology of this area. The area receives about 1000 mm of rain every year, in the most prevalent monsoon months from June to September. All such conditions support good diversity of avifauna.

In a previous study carried by Goel, (1976), 91 bird species were recorded. In another study by Choudaj and Wankhade, (2021), 16 new species were added, leading the total count to 106 bird species from SPPU campus.

On 28 March 2021, around 1824 hrs I heard a typical call of Mottled wood owl near university post office. At first, I was not sure about the species because there was no record of this species from the campus. So, I waited there to confirm. After few

minutes, i.e. 1826 hrs I again heard the call. The call was muffled because of vehicular movement. After this I heard the call 6 times at an interval of every 2-3 mints till 1842 hrs. Meanwhile I located the area from where the call was coming. Next day I went there to confirm the presence of the bird and was fortunate enough to spot the bird. I spotted more than 2 individuals roosting on a long tree. I man-

aged to take photograph (Image 1, 2 and 3).

There was no previous record of this species from the campus or nearby areas (Goel, 1976; Choudaj and Wankhade, 2021). eBird database (eBird) also suggests this as a first sighting record from SPPU campus. While reviewing existing records of the MWO it was observed that all the sighting records of this species were from Pune outskirts, namely

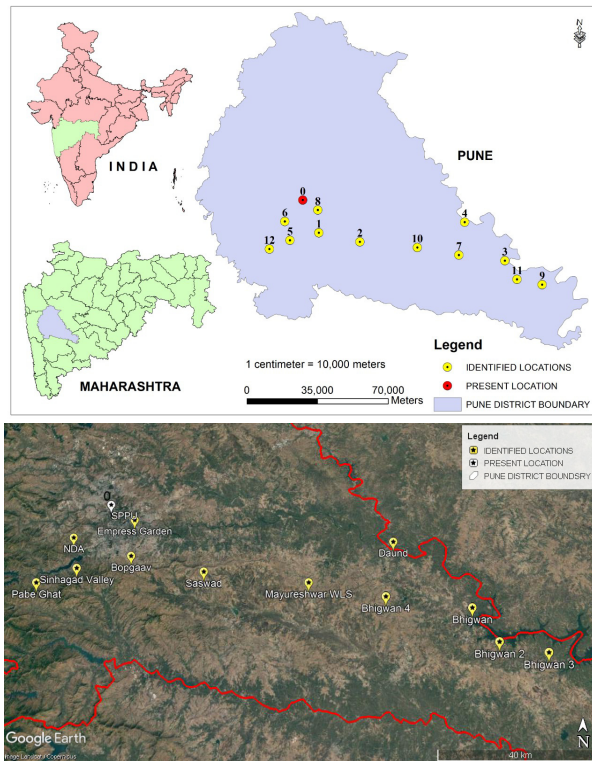


Fig. 1. Sighting records of Mottled Wood Owl in Pune, Maharashtra



Image 1

Image 2



Image: 1, 2 & 3. Mottled Wood Owl in SPPU campus, Pune, Maharashtra. © Mahesh Bilaskar.

Table 1. Identified sighting location's in Pune

Sr.No.	Location	Date of sighting	Observer	Reference
0	SPPU	28-March-21	Mahesh Bilaskar	This paper
1	Bopgaav	10-Dec-13	Pramod Deshpande	eBird checklist S39789807
2	Saswad	28-Oct-17	Swapnil Thatte	eBird checklist S41225591
3	Bhigwan	13-May-18	Avinash Sharma	eBird checklist S45623293
4	Daund	13-May-18	Ritesh Dighe	eBird checklist S45656689
5	Sinhagad Valley	29-Oct-21	Anish Rao	eBird checklist S96867459
6	NDA	06-Apr-21	Saipriya Ajithkumar	eBird checklist S85003877
7	Bhigwan 4	01-Feb-21	Rajashree Kale	eBird checklist S80241271
8	EBG	14-Feb-21	Anonymous	eBird checklist S81296181
9	Bhigwan 3	20-Aug-21	Rujuta Vinod	eBird checklist S93575360
10	Mayureshwar WLS	23-Dec-21	Chirag Ahuja	eBird checklist S99554640
11	Bhigwan 2	01-Jan-22	Kuldeep Mhatre	eBird checklist S99809724
12	Pabe Ghat	22-May-22	Maria Fernandes	eBird checklist S110968516

Bhigwan Bird Sanctuary, Sinhgad Valley, Pabe ghat, Bopgaav, NDA, Daund, Saswad, Mayureswar WLS and Empress Botanical Garden (EBG) (Table 1) but there was no published literature on record of MWO in SPPU campus except one unusual sighting from IUCAA in December, 1997 (Wadadekar, 2000). This record stands unique as all the previous records are located outside the human settlement and on the periphery of the city because of the inability of the species to nest near human activity (Pande *et al.*, 2018), whereas this sighting location falls almost at the centre of the city (Fig. 1).

Though the MWO species is Least Concern because of its stable population (IUCN, 2016), the SPPU campus is under continuous pressure of habitat destruction (Choudaj and Wankhade, 2021), the environment could quickly deteriorate and if not sufficiently protected, the Mottled Wood-Owl could become a conservation concern.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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