

Diet of the Eagle Owl, *Bubo bubo*, in Syria

by Adwan H. Shehab

Abstract. Pellets regurgitated by the Eagle Owl, *Bubo bubo*, were collected from Al-Karyatien, Central Syria. The analysis yielded 206 food items representing seven mammalian species (five rodents, one insectivore and one lagomorph), unidentified snakes and lizards, three species of birds, five insects, three species of scorpions, and a solifugid. By frequency small mammals constituted 76.2% of the consumed prey items, of which the Long-eared Hedgehog, *Hemiechinus auritus*, constituted 25.3%. Additional distribution ranges for certain small mammals in Syria are discussed.

Kurzfassung. In Al-Karyatien, Zentralsyrien, wurden Gewölle des Uhus, *Bubo bubo*, gesammelt. Die Analyse ergab 206 Nahrungsteile, die sich aus sieben Arten von Säugern (fünf Rodentia, ein Insectivora, ein Lagomorpha), nicht identifizierbare Schlangen und Eidechsen, drei Vogelarten, drei Skorpionarten, fünf Insektenarten, drei Arten von Skorpionen und eine Walzenspinne (Solifuge) zusammensetzen. Kleinsäuger repräsentieren 76,2% aller Nahrungstiere, wobei der Langohrigel, *Hemiechinus auritus*, 25,3% beitrug. Das Verbreitungsmuster einiger Kleinsäuger in Syrien wird diskutiert.

Key words. *Bubo bubo*, Eagle owl, diet, small mammals, desert, Syria, Middle East.

Introduction

Previous studies on the diet of owls in Syria have focused on the Little Owl, *Athene noctua* (SHEHAB et al. 2004) and the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba* (PRADEL 1981, KOCK & NADER 1983, KOCK et al. 1994, KOCK 1998, SHEHAB et al. 1999, SHEHAB et al. 2000, HUTTERER & KOCK 2002). The diet of the Eagle Owl, *Bubo bubo*, is poorly known. OBUCH (2001) studied the dormouse as the prey of owls in the Middle East, and examined a total of 3012 individuals in owl pellets collected from seven locations in Syria; nevertheless none of them belonged to the Eagle Owl.

In neighbouring countries, AMR et al. (1997) concluded that the Eagle Owl is an agile hunter that feeds mainly on *Mus musculus* and *Crocidura suavulens* at Azraq Oasis, Jordan. RIFAI et al. (2000) found that *Meriones crassus* and *Jaculus jaculus* are the main diet consumed by the Eagle Owl in the eastern desert of Jordan. They concluded that the species is an opportunistic hunter that feeds on a wide range of animals.

The present study is the first attempt to analyse the diet of the Eagle Owl in Syria, and also contributes to our knowledge of the distribution of small mammals in Central Syria.

Material and methods

Owl pellets that had accumulated in roosts of the Eagle Owl were collected on 1.8.2001 from an area known as “*Dar Al Boom*” that means in English “The House of Owls”, located 15 km south-