Le Groupe International «Chevêche» (ILOWG) va fêter cette année son troisième anniversaire. Depuis sa création, le nombre de ses membres n’a cessé de s’accroître et il représente aujourd’hui une véritable opportunité d’échanges et de mise en commun de nos connaissances. Pendant ces trois années, notre groupe a grandi, puis mûri pour aujourd’hui afficher un bilan très encourageant : deux colloques internationaux et le troisième en préparation, publications des actes de très grande qualité; enfin et surtout, des actions concertées à l’échelle du continent européen. Du Caucase et de l’Iran jusqu’aux îles britanniques, les populations de Chouette chevêche bénéficient enfin de nos connaissances communes, adaptées à l’application de programmes d’étude et de gestion de dimensions européennes.

Les groupes d’étude nationaux coordonnent leurs efforts grâce au groupe international (voir un exemple en page 4) et permettent ainsi de constituer une force de proposition unie et incontournable non seulement auprès des institutions européennes mais aussi et surtout auprès de leurs institutions nationales. Pour ces raisons et parceque ILOWG a été une initiative française, nous rappelons notre soutien et notre intérêt à tous les naturalistes impliqués dans l’étude et la protection de la Chevêche en France et les encourageons à partager et exprimer leurs expériences avec le groupe international.

Jean-Michel Lapios

This special and unusual leading in french is intended for members of LO projects or studies in France who wish to communicate their experiences in the ILOWG bulletin.

La Chevêche d’Athéna
by J.C. Génot & P. Lecomte

Editions «Delachaux & Niestlé», 144 pp., colors with many pictures. in French.

Congratulations to the authors who are ILOWG’s members as you know.
Little Owl (Athene noctua) predation on vertebrates in Italy.

The diet of the Barn Owl Tyto alba and the Tawny Owl Strix aluco, and the winter diet of the Long-eared Owl Asio otus have been studied in Italy (Benussi, 1997, Bon M. Ratti E., Sartor A., 2001). The diet of the Little Owl Athene noctua has been poorly investigated: few papers have been published and they deal with a small number of areas, mainly in Central and Southern Italy. This paper is a whole review of the works about the species preyed on by the Little Owl published in Italy between 1900 and 2001.

A considerable percentage of the Little Owl diet consists of invertebrates. Data about the species preyed on lack, the study of arthropods and gastropods being very difficult. In some papers, data also lack about vertebrates: reptiles, amphibians and even chiropters. Locally, vertebrates can cover an high percentage of the diet, seasonal variations poorly investigated so far can occur. The locally important role of vertebrates and the consequent high amount of biomass they give - has driven me to analyse their occurrence in the alimentation of the Little Owl.

35 papers have been considered, 28 of them report data about vertebrates. The predation on vertebrates occur only in some parts of the country. The studies have been mainly carried out in Lazio (Central Italy), Campania (Southern Italy) and Sicily (Southern Italy).

The analysis of the literature has shown a marked euriphagy and microphagy. In some conditions, the Little Owl adapts itself, feeding on the species occurring in the places it lives in. A checklist of the vertebrates preyed on by the Little Owls has been drawn up in order to enable comparisons. A case of cannibalism have been reported, rests of a juvenile have been discovered in pellets found in Campania (Southern Italy).

The largest bird species are Blackbird Turdus merula and Starling Sturnus vulgaris; the Little Owl diet also includes small and particular species, such as Sand Martin Riparia riparia and Dunnock Prunella modularis. Many birds preyed on usually frequent urban and suburban areas.

17 micromammal species have been reported, amongst them two moles in two different places (Russo, 1997). Chiropters are seldom preyed on, other nocturnal raptors show higher percentages of these mammals in their reptiles.

The predation on reptiles and amphibians by nocturnal raptors has been dealt with (Mastrorilli et al., in press). Lizards (Podarcis ssp) are regularly preyed on by Little Owls, the predation of other reptiles is more occasional. The largest prey turned out to be a Grass Snake Natrix natrix (28 cm. long) seized by daylight, but lost in flight (Mostini, 1998). Predations on anurans are more irregular. The following list includes the vertebrate species reported by the literature.

- **Reptilia** (5 species)

- **Amphibia** (2 species)
  - Hyla arborea / Tree frog, Rana esculenta / Green frog.

- **Aves** (17 species)

- **Mammalia** (17 species)
  - Sorex araneus / Common shrew, Sorex minutus / Pygmy shrew, Neomys anomalus / Miller's water shrew, Suncus etruscus / Pygmy white-toothed shrew, Crocidura suavolens / Lesser white-toothed shrew, Talpa europaea / Common mole, Talpa romana / Roman mole, Moscardinus avellanarius / Common dormouse, Clethrionomys glareolus / Bank vole, Arvicola terrestris / Water vole, Microtus savi / Savi's pine vole, Apodemus sylvaticus / Wood mouse, Micromys minutus / Harvest mouse, Rattus norvegicus / Brown rat, Rattus rattus / Black rat, Mus domesticus / Western house mouse.

References:

Acknowledgements
Special thanks to Armando Nappi and Matteo Barattieri.

Marco Mastrorilli - via Carducci 7 Boltiere (BG) ITALY (flammeus@libero.it)
Is the Little Owl easily disturbed?

There are landowners who, especially during incubation, do not permit nests of Little Owls to be inspected as they fear disturbance and failure of the nests. On the other hand, some researchers nullify the chances of such disturbance if nests are checked in accordance with general practice. It is often presumed that the birds will accustom to nest visits. To conclusively resolve the probability of nest failure due to human disturbance would require scientific research. Here, we provide anecdotal evidence that Little Owls can be disturbed by people at their nests indeed.

A - In March, an old rebuilt nest box that had not housed any owls for years, was within one month unexpectedly occupied by a pair of owls. In contrast to the normal procedure, the nest opening was not closed before the visit which allowed the owls to immediately evacuate the nest box. These owls did not return for the remainder of the breeding season.

B - When monitoring a pair of owls in a nest box which was also fancied by some Jackdaws, it appeared a mistake to check the nest contents around 9 h. in the morning instead of after 7 h. in the evening. In the morning, the male that was roosting in the tree above the nest box, flew about 100 m. afield when the nest was approached. After inspecting and leaving the nest, Jackdaws occupied the little balcony right in front of the nest opening. Typically under these conditions, the male would dart between the nest opening and Jackdaws, enter the nest box, turn around, and assume a threatening posture to defend the nest. On this occasion however, this did not happen; although the male could spot the trouble makers, it stayed away for 3 hours. In the mean time, Jackdaws started to bring sticks to the nest, which required me to scare them off from a position invisible to the Little Owl male.

C - Another pair occupied a nest box which was equipped with a 'English-style Jackdaw lock'. The Little Owls and Jackdaws competed for this nesting space. To study the behavioural responses of the Jackdaws to the nest box occupancy of the Little Owls, the nest box was inspected every few days. This was easily done as the nest could be checked at a glance by lifting the nest box floor by 2 cm. At first, only a single owl resided in the nest box, but later there were often two. To avoid a break in the continuing behavioural observations, it was decided to keep disturbance to a minimum and only check the ring numbers of the Little Owls. This was done at a moment that both owls were inside the nest box. The day after the owls had been handled, they had left this nesting space; the sticks that were sticking out the nest opening indicated that Jackdaws had already claimed the vacancy.

D - On the 14th of May 2001, a Little Owl nest in a hollow tree containing 2 eggs was inspected. From a hollow branch, it was possible to reach the nest cavity with one’s hand, where the female could only be caught by grabbing her legs. The female, at least two years of age, was gently dragged out of the nest cavity by her feet. After ringing the hen was placed back in the nest cavity, but it left after 15 minutes. Later, it became clear that the nest had been deserted.

E - In early spring, the behaviour of Little Owls was observed from 3 m. behind a window, that had a view on a nest box in a chestnut tree, 7 m. away from the window. The window curtains were almost completely closed, leaving only a small slit for making quiet observations. Despite these precautions, the behaviour of the owls (e.g. matings) was disturbed when the observer sat within 3 m. from the window. Also, the presence of other observers than usual scared the owls of. Clearly the owls were aware of being observed; the one year old male was more timid than the second year female.

In conclusion, nest checks should be performed very carefully, as Little Owls can be disturbed by human interference. However, the vast majority of nest visits do not result in nest failure. Still, the possibility of nest failure makes a sound basis for people not to allow such inspections, which should be respected at all times.

Peter en Wies Beersma

Dear Barn Owl and Little Owl enthusiasts,

I am glad to send an extract on the Barn and Little Owls’ “from the Bibliography, compiled by Dipl. Biol. Libbo Hammen and available at his site:
http://www.greifvogelmonitoringuni-halle.de/

Jevgeni Shergalin
poul2@hotmail.com
http://mytele2.ee/birds/

Peter en Wies Beersma
In East Austria, of 33 nesting sites discovered between 1991 and 2000; 53.4% are in buildings, 21.8% in trees, 9% in loess and sand slopes, 3% in haycocks and 12.8% in nestboxes. The breeding success depends on either the food availability or sure nesting sites. A special kind of nestbox in wood-beton was built and put directly on the wall of houses where nesting places are rare (Rottraut Ille, ille@kfunigraz.ac.at).

The south of the Rhine Valley is located in the land of "three frontiers" between Germany, France and Switzerland. The Little Owl has disappeared from 90% of nest sites. In 1992 only 10 pairs bred in this area. Since 1993, 160 nestboxes have been erected, and the population raised to 49 pairs.

The monitoring rate since 1993 is 68% and the average dispersion distance is 2.9 km for females and 5.5 km for males. The average age of the population is 2.3 years. A project aims to the restauration of orchards and ecological management of biotopes of Little Owl (Christian Stange, Grillparzerstrasse 8, D-79102 Freiburg)

In the region of Ludwigsburg (not far from Stuttgart in Germany) started a conservation programme for the Little Owl 15 years ago. This programme includes the census of the population, the erection of 600 nestboxes and a dynamic study with ringing. The population has reached 120 pairs. A telemetry study is going on the programme (Herbert Keil, foge-eulenforschung@t-online.de).

In the frame of the Ludwigsburgs programme, a telemetry study about dispersion of Little Owl and landuse is realized. Two study areas were chosen: one of 2 km² with 4 breeding pairs and the other of 1 km² with 5 breeding pairs. The study is in progress but the first data show that young Little Owls use vineyards in summer as hunting areas, pile of wood as perches and their home range increase when they get older (Michael Eick, mikeeick@uni-hohenheim.de).

In the Hesse region (Germany) between 1999 and 2000, 15 Little Owls were equipped with radiotransmitters to study the action radius and the use of the land in relation with the height of the vegetation. The home range is included between 2.2 ha and 127 ha, the average is 50 ha. The average home range is higher in during the breeding time (31.5 ha) and in winter (21.8 ha). The average home range is smaller during the mating time (12.3 ha). Little Owl use more meadows and avoid agricultural land.

Jean-Claude Génot

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**Meeting about Owls in Germany**

A working group invited me to make a presentation about Little Owls in France at its annual meeting which took place near Stuttgart, on the 14th - 16th September 2001. Some ILOWG were present such as P. Stroeken, N. Groen, R. Van Harxen from Netherlands, L. Schröpfer from Czech Republic, H. Illner from Austria and H. Illner from Germany. The best German specialists of owls participated as C. König; T. Mebs, W. Scherzinger, J. Wiesner, O. Schwerdtfeger, etc.. I would like just to sum up the communications concerning Little Owl.

In the frame of the Ludwigsburgs programme, a telemetry study about dispersion of Little Owl and landuse is realized. Two study areas were chosen: one of 2 km² with 4 breeding pairs and the other of 1 km² with 5 breeding pairs. The study is in progress but the first data show that young Little Owls use vineyards in summer as hunting areas, pile of wood as perches and their home range increase when they get older (Michael Eick, mikeeick@uni-hohenheim.de).

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Jean-Claude Génot
Some first impressions were noted below.

«It’s a pity that our Little Owls in spite of sharp vision probably are not able to understand human languages and the printed text. But they can easily see and recognize how much love, admiration, dedication and inspiration and of course time was devoted by co-editors of this book (chef-d’oeuvre of scientific literature) to its contents and especially design. I think that such great honour will force our Little Owls to breed now as mosquitos throughout entire their breeding range. They simply must do that now! All Little Owls are in debt before co-editors and co-authors of articles in this masterpiece.»

«Let us hope that the Proceedings of both LO symposiums will be good examples of analogous work on other rare owl species in the world.»

«Excellent Guys, I have just received my copies of the proceedings, and want to congratulate you on this volume. I will use it as a tool to gain funding for the Action Plan.»

«I have a lot to live up to (oh god!!!) in England 2002.»

«...as Roy, I am very admiring for the excellent and fast work of 2nd LO symposium proceedings. I am happy to form part of a dynamic group like ILGWG. Thanks for your good job for LO!»

«Bravo pour la réalisation, c’est vraiment ce qu’on fait de mieux pour l’instant avec les dernières infos sur l’espèce. Tu peux être fier du résultat et moi aussi d’y avoir participé!»

«Ik vergat je nog een dikke proficiat te wensen voor het Steenuilennummer van Oriolus! Het mag er zijn!»

«...Et si la «Chevêche» vous intéresse, je confirme l’intérêt du dernier Oriolus sur le symposium de Geraardsbergen, le contenu et le contenant valent le coup.»

«Sans vouloir s’étendre sur le sujet, il y a un passage intéressant sur les “protections” anti-fouine des nichoirs (Julliard notamment) C’est comme le reste fort intéressant.»
Proceedings of the Second International Little Owl Symposium held in Geraardsbergen (Belgium) on 16-18 March 2001 appeared as a special theme issue of Oriolus and are available at:

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The price for this full color 150 pages issue is 20 euros.