

**A new method of preparing owl pellets: boiling in NaOH.**—The bones in owl pellets have traditionally been recovered by manual sorting. They can be recovered easier from large collections of pellets by gently breaking the pellets up by hand and boiling the pieces in a 3% aqueous solution of NaOH. The concentration of the solution can be varied considerably, but the solution should be decanted off the bones as soon as all of the hair and feathers are dissolved. Several washings in water will clean the bones, which are then left in excellent condition for identification. The NaOH solution will corrode aluminum, so glass or enameled containers should be used, and any aluminum bands must be detected before boiling.—Frederick W. Schueler, Department of Zoology, University of Toronto, Toronto 5, Ontario. Received 12 January 1972, accepted 4 April 1972.

**Hunting methods and success of newly-fledged Great Horned Owls.**—

We followed the post-fledged hunting behavior and success of two newly fledged Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) from June through August 1971. The young had fledged in the first week of June from a nest in a juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) located on the eastern bench of the Oquirrh Mountains in central Utah. We frequently observed them in the company of the adults and in the vicinity of the nesting site in the late evening hours, but sport hunters shot one of the adults in the third week of June thereby disrupting the family group. The young, readily identifiable by their immature head and neck feathers, were always observed alone from this time, although the surviving adult might have been present although undetected.

The young were observed for a total of 18 evenings through July and August. All observations were initiated from 20:00 to 20:45 and terminated before 24:00 of each night.

The young wandered separately from the nest site vicinity to lower elevations in the valley. By late August they were approximately 10.4 km from the nest site and 5.1 km from one another. The young owls roosted singly in junipers or shallow ravines during the daylight hours and tended to use the same site for several days unless disturbed. They began hunting after sunset but always from 10-25 min before darkness. Their total observed hunting territory was approximately 1.1 x 0.7 km, and they concentrated their activities over sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) communities and along the edges of dry-farmed wheat fields. The young owls typically began hunting at heights of 13-18 m, then dropped to 4-7 m before an attack. They frequently hovered over a small area from 6-18 sec before an attack, although hovering was not always followed by an attack. Prematurely terminated attacks were also commonly noted and were usually stopped after a short (< 1 m) stoop. Occasionally attacks were halted as low as 0.2 m above the ground. After each completed attack we flushed the owl to determine its hunting success. Only 17.8 per cent of a combined total of 73 observed attacks resulted in prey capture. In addition, the two owls differed somewhat in hunting success with one making 7 kills of 31 attempts (22.5 per cent) and the other only 6 kills of 45 attempts (13.3 per cent). The captured prey consisted entirely of small rodents, primarily microtines. The largest prey attacked during the observation period was a rabbit (*Sylvilagus* sp.). This attack, attempted by the less successful owl, was preceded by a series of three prematurely terminated attacks. On the fourth attempt the owl missed and struck the ground heavily, then abandoned the hunt and flew to another area.

Apparently no comparative information exists for hunting behavior or success of newly-fledged Great Horned Owls. The use of hovering as a hunting method is frequently observed in the Sparrow Hawk (*Falco sparverius*) and has also been reported for the Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*) by Thomsen (*Condor*, 73: 179, 1971). The relative ease with which this hunting method was employed by the young Great Horned Owls suggests that this mode of hunting may be more commonly utilized by nocturnal raptors than has previously been reported in the literature.—Dwight G. Smith and Beth A. Smith, Department of Biology, Southern Connecticut State College, New Haven, Connecticut 06515. Received 10 February 1972, accepted 3 April 1972.