

## Owl pellets constitute another interesting addition to the dietary list of the Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* – based on an old observation.

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In recent email exchanges regarding the preparation of a joint article concerning a breeding study of the Greyish Eagle-Owl *Bubo cinerascens* in The Gambia, we also discussed the idea of writing about the diet from across its range, based on a planned analysis of pellets that had already been collected. CRB then explained current studies in The Gambia investigating the exploitation of varied food resources by the coastal population of Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes monachus*, scavenged in a diverse range of situations (Barlow 2020). The combination of topics prompted HM's memories of an interesting observation made during a working stay in Kenya in 1977–1978 when on a visit to Lake Baringo (0°37'59.9"N, 36°05'00.0"E) in the Great Rift Valley on 17–18 July 1977. HM stayed at Lake Baringo Lodge where he met with Edward Roberts who told him about a regular well-watched daytime roost site for Greyish Eagle-Owl in a large Umbrella Thorn *Vachellia tortilis* in the hotel gardens. At the time Greyish Eagle-Owl was considered conspecific with Spotted Eagle-Owl *Bubo africanus*. On 17 July 1977 HM visited the roost site with ER, who informed him that the owls had been present in the area for many years. The owls bred in the roof structure of the lodge in the 1970s (Don Turner, pers. comm.). We immediately located a roosting owl and saw a few broken owl pellets and their contents on the ground under the tree, where HM inspected them *in situ*. They contained bones of small and medium-sized rodents with evidence of small birds, frogs, lizards and

invertebrates, including large millipedes. ER and the Baringo Lodge staff informed HM that Hooded Vultures visited the roost site regularly to forage for freshly dropped pellets. On the morning of 18 July, HM visited the roost site alone and watched one Hooded Vulture picking over the ground and swallowing a fresh owl pellet. Stevenson (1980) wrote that the Hooded Vulture was not common at Baringo but did occur in small numbers throughout the year. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* was also present in the vicinity in the 1970s but did not enter the grounds of Lake Baringo Lodge. Both vultures are now absent from the area and the lodge is completely under water (Don Turner, pers. comm.). Although consumption of animal faeces (coprophagy) by Hooded Vultures has been recorded (Reading, Tshimologo & Maude 2017), there is no reference to them using owl pellets as a food resource anywhere in the literature (e.g., Mundy *et al.* 1992, Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Barlow 2020), and it has not been reported in the ongoing diet studies in The Gambia. To the best of our knowledge this is the first time that this type of foraging behaviour has been documented, albeit from over 40 years ago. Owl pellets can therefore be added to the diverse list of dietary items consumed by Hooded Vultures. When Hooded Vultures are observed foraging in unusual circumstances where carrion or other regularly scavenged food items are not obvious, particularly beneath trees and buildings, it could be worthwhile to check for the presence of owls or pellets.

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**References**

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