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Predation on *Testudo graeca* by the Little owl in Israel

(Reptilia: Testudines: Testudinidae)

Observations on the way the Little owl, *Athene noctua* LINNAEUS, 1758, acquires its food in the Negev desert in Israel, led ZINNER (1978) to the conclusion that this bird is most probably preying on all small moving animals in its direct surroundings. His statement agrees with the results of a study of some 70 pellets of *Athene noctua*, which were collected in 1970 from under two roosts in and near the tree nursery of Kibbutz Netzer Sereni, Israel. Among the remains of its preys we could recognize invertebrates like beetles, mole-crickets and snails, and vertebrates like shrews, mice, voles, birds and two reptiles: the Turkish gecko, *Hemidactylus turcicus* (LINNAEUS, 1758) and the Greek tortoise, *Testudo graeca* LINNAEUS, 1758. The latter was represented by a few bones which were identified by Prof. E. TCHERNOV as having belonged to a juvenile specimen.

Additional evidence of predation on *Testudo graeca* was recently obtained through a study of additional pellets of *Athene noctua*, found under a roost along the railway from Rehovot to Ramla, about 1 km NE of the railway station of Rehovot on 16. February 1979. One of these pellets contained the remains of the carapace of a juvenile *Testudo*, with a width of about 3 cm. Greek tortoises of this size have still a rather flexible carapace which is easily torn into pieces by an adult Little owl. In this particular case only 50% of the carapace was still intact.

It is well known that reptiles like small lizards, skinks and geckos are preyed upon by Little owls, however, data concerning predation on tortoises are scarce or non existant. From the two records of predation on juvenile specimens of the Greek tortoise presented here, it is clear that at least in Israel the Little owl has to be considered a natural enemy of *Testudo graeca*.

I thank Prof. E. TCHERNOV (Dept. Zool., Hebrew Univ., Jerusalem) for his help in the identification of part of the discussed material.

Durch Gewölluntersuchungen konnte belegt werden, daß zumindest in Israel neben kleineren Echsen auch juvenile Exemplare von *Testudo graeca* zu den Beutetieren des Steinkauzes (*Athene noctua*) gehören.

R e f e r e n c e

ZINNER, H. (1978): Observations on Little Owls feeding on snails in the Negev. — Argamon, Israel J. Malacol., 6 (3-4): 57-60.

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