

Brief observations on the diet, day roost, and juveniles of the rufous-banded owl (*Strix albitarsis*) in eastern Ecuador.

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The genus *Strix* is globally distributed, except for Australia, and contains 19 relatively large species of owls (del Hoyo et al., 1999). Five species, including the Rufous-banded Owl (*Strix albitarsis* Bonaparte 1850), were once separated into the genus *Ciccaba* based on the size and form of the external ears and dermal flaps (Peters, 1938). Subsequently they have been placed into *Strix* by Voous (1964) and DNA-DNA hybridization data supports this (Sibley et al., 1988).

The feeding habits of owls are probably some of the best known aspects of their biology due in part to their habit of regurgitating compact and easily analyzed pellets. In fact, there remain only a handful of owls in the world where nothing is known of their diet (del Hoyo et al., 1999). Among the *Strix* owls the Rufous-banded Owl (*Strix albitarsis*) is one of the least known in terms of feeding as well as breeding biology. Rufous-banded Owls are distributed through the Andes at elevations of 1700 m to 3700 m from northern Venezuela to western and central Bolivia (del Hoyo et al., 1999). Here I present an analysis of three food pellets as well as notes on the presence of juveniles and a day roosting site in eastern Ecuador.

All observations were carried out at around 2100 m elevation on the private reserve maintained by Hacienda San Isidro and the Yanayacu Biological Station (S 00 35.949 W 77 53.403). Yanayacu lies five kilometers west of the town of Cosanga in the Napo Province of eastern Ecuador. Large tracts of intact habitat abound, interspersed with naturally occurring *Chusquea* bamboo and man made disturbance. Pellets were collected by placing large leaves below the roost to catch falling material. All pellets were placed in 70% ethanol and returned to the lab for further inspection.

In late October 2000 a juvenile with yellow-cream colored down was seen roosting, for several days in a row, beside a bird with adult plumage. Both birds were roosting near the base of large leaves of a tree fern (Cyathaceae), approximately four meters above the ground. The roost was located well inside primary forest but in an area of natural disturbance dominated by *Chusquea* bamboo. The roost site was fairly open, approachable from all sides, and allowed the birds to be seen from all angles. Two pellets were recovered on 9 November.

One contained the hair and bones of a small mammal. No skull or teeth were found.

The second contained the remains of at least two large beetles (*Megaceras*: Dynastinae: Scarabaeidae). On 20 November a final pellet was collected. This one also contained the remains of at least two *Megaceras* beetles. Neither of the beetle pellets contained any parts of the head. On 13 February 2001 an additional juvenile was seen sitting in the middle of a dirt road at around 20:00 h.

Del Hoyo et al. (1999) give the diet of the Rufous-banded Owl as 'probably insects and small mammals,' and the data presented here bear out that prediction. As most other *Strix* species also include a variety of prey such as other insects, birds, frogs, and bats (del Hoyo et al., 1999), it is likely that further research will reveal a much broader diet for *S. albitarsis* as well.

Nothing is known of the nesting sites or breeding biology for the Rufous-banded Owl. A recently fledged juvenile was recorded from Colombia in late June (Hilty & Brown, 1986) and a juvenile was reported in Venezuela from August (Fjeldså & Krabbe, 1990). Records from our area, one during the dry season (October) and one from the rainy season (February), in combination with records from June and August in other areas, suggest *S. albitarsis* may breed throughout the year or may be opportunistic throughout its range.

Ridgely & Greenfield (2001) mention the tendency for *S. albitarsis* to roost inside thick tangles as do other species of this genus, but little has been published concerning day roosts for this species. The roost observed here was quite open and the birds were in plain view. Perhaps, in this case, the birds benefited from their general resemblance to dead leaves hanging across the large tree fern leaves. The dietary, roosting, and juvenile records presented here are only one step in beginning to understand the biology of this poorly known owl. As pointed out by other authors (e.g. del Hoyo et al., 1999), further work is needed to better understand this interesting species.

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