

THE BARN OWL AS A RED-WINGED-BLACKBIRD PREDATOR IN NORTHWESTERN OHIO¹ In connection with a study of small mammals of northwestern Ohio, barn owl (*Tyto alba*) pellets were collected at a barn in the Little Portage Wildlife Area in Ottawa County in September, 1964, October, 1965, and April and November, 1966. Pellets were dissected and only skulls were saved and identified. Because of the high frequency of occurrence (37%) of Red-winged-Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) remains in the first sample, this report is submitted.

Phillips (1951) found the food of the barn owl in Hancock County, Ohio, to consist of very few birds (less than 2%), none of them blackbirds. He also noted that about 85% of the owl's food was *Microtus*. A. C. Bent (1937) also noted that the barn owl's diet consisted of few birds (less than 5%).

The results of examining 157 pellets are presented in the following table (table 1). Only one pellet contained gross evidence of a species other than small bird or mammal; this was the remains of a Hungarian partridge (*Perdix perdix*). The preponderance of microtine forms was expected and is in agreement with Phillips. It was, however, surprising to find 15 redwing skulls in 11 pellets in the September sample; several other pellets contained unidentified small bird remains. The ossification of nine complete skulls identified them as adults. The pellets were

TABLE 1

Total number of skulls of each species found in various samples. The number of pellets containing remains of a given species is included in parenthesis

Month, year	September 1964	October 1965	April 1966	November 1966
No. pellets	30	21	85	21
Species:				
<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	15 (11)	—	2 (2)	4 (4)
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	—	—	—	2 (2)
<i>Perdix perdix</i>	1 (1)	—	—	—
<i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i>	48 (24)	36 (21)	161 (76)	26 (13)
<i>Blarina brevicauda</i>	5 (5)	5 (4)	17 (14)	1 (1)
<i>Peromyscus</i> spp.	7 (5)	12 (6)	4 (4)	2 (2)
Unidentified bird remains	3 (3)	—	2 (2)	3 (3)

obtained in an important breeding area for redwings; adjacent marshes and agricultural lands serve as roosting and feeding areas for massive concentrations of this species in the late summer and early fall. The fact that a high percentage (37%) of the September pellets contained redwing remains suggests that owls utilize available prey species regardless of any species preference. Because the second sample was acquired at the end of October, when the concentration of blackbirds was reduced, the notable decline in redwing remains in that sample was to be expected.

The April sample was also taken after a period during which there was no major concentration of redwings in the area. It is apparent that spring migration had started, however, as evidenced by the appearance of redwing remains in two per cent of the pellets in this large sample.

For unknown reasons, the quantity of pellets available in November was small; however, in this limited sample, the prevalence of redwing remains was again high (20%). This increase again reflects the concentration of blackbirds in the marsh during the summer and fall.

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The percentage of bird remains in the total sample is exceedingly high (16%), when compared with previous reports. It would appear from the above data that the role of the barn owl as a seasonal blackbird predator may need further evaluation.—MICHAEL L. CARPENTER and MICHAEL W. FALL,² *Department of Biology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.*

LITERATURE CITED

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- Phillips, R.** 1951. Food of the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba pratincola*, in Hancock County, Ohio. Auk 68(2): 239-241.

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