

True bats (Microchiroptera) in the diet of Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus*

Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus* is a large owl widespread in eastern and southern Africa and southern Central Africa, with a discontinuous distribution in West Africa (Marks *et al.* 1999, König & Weick 2008). It inhabits a wide variety of habitats such as woodlands, riparian forests, savannas, semi-deserts, deserts and even tropical rainforests in West and Central Africa (König & Weick 2008). It is an opportunistic predator; its diet has been recorded as comprising mainly mammals, such as rodents, insectivores, primates and fruit bats, plus small to large birds including passerines, ducks, herons, raptors and even smaller owls, such as Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and Spotted Eagle Owl *B. africanus* (Brown 1965, Avery *et al.* 1985, Marks *et al.* 1999, König & Weick 2008). In addition, it also takes reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, spiders and scorpions and it has also been recorded feeding on carrion (Brown 1965, Marks *et al.* 1999, König & Weick 2008, Chittenden 2014). It is a crepuscular and nocturnal hunter and hunting near artificial lights has also been recorded (Brown 1965, Chittenden 2014).

On 3 February 2015 we observed a Verreaux's Eagle Owl perched on a tree branch in a streamside forest (1°43'26"N, 37°16'49"E) about 2 km from the Salato campsite near Ngurunit Village in foothills of the Ndoto Mountains, northern Kenya. Under its perch we found two pellets that contained three lower jaws and one upper jaw bone of bats, Chiroptera. These skeletal remains belonged to three individuals from two different species from the family Molossidae, and one individual of Lander's Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus landeri* (Rhinolophidae).

Bats are common prey items of owls, not surprising considering that both these animal groups are nocturnal (Marks *et al.* 1999). However, the proportion of bats in owls' diets varies between species and populations, and is linked to the ability of individual owl species to catch bats, and to the locational characteristics and availability of bats (Marks *et al.* 1999, Roulin & Christe 2013). In the diet of Verreaux's Eagle Owl, remains of fruit bats of the genus *Rousettus* were known from one Kenyan study (Brown 1965). But neither Marks *et al.* (1999) nor König & Weick (2008) mentioned bats from any other families. The bats described in our study are much smaller than the species of *Rousettus* which inhabit Kenya (according to our information only two *Rousettus* species are extant in Kenya – Egyptian Fruit Bat *R. aegyptiacus* and Long-haired Rousette *R. lanosus*, both weighing over 100 g). While Lander's Horseshoe Bat weighs only 5–11 g (Brown & Dunlop 1997), the jaw bones of the molossid bats that we recovered were even smaller. These findings thus extend our knowledge of the diet spectrum of Verreaux's Eagle Owl and support the notion of its dietary opportunism.

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