



# ATHENEWS®

Bulletin du Groupe International de Travail sur la Chouette chevêche  
Newsletter of the International Little Owl Working Group

## Leading

### Pictures and announcement

**p. 1** • from the first ILOWG's meeting, 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> November 2000, in France.

### Little Owl in Slovenia Call for co-operation

**p. 3** • a short paper about the Little Owl's situation in Slovenia,  
by Milan Vogrin  
• a call for co-operation on habitats typologies,  
by Dries van Nieuwenhuysse

### Workshops summaries

**p. 2** • summaries from workshops at Champs-sur-Marne,  
D. van Nieuwenhuysse & P. lecomte

### From 2<sup>nd</sup> ILOWG's meeting

**p. 4** • at Grammont (Belgium), 16 & 18 March 2001,  
by J.C. Génot

**T**wo important meetings took place since our last newsletter i.e. the First International Little Owl Symposium held at Champs-sur-Marne, and the Second International Little Owl Symposium held at Geraardsbergen (Belgium) from 16 to 18 March 2001. This proves the incredible dynamism of our working group, these meetings offered opportunities for extremely fruitful exchanges of knowledge and ideas.

**T**he proceedings will be published very shortly and made available very soon. The Third International Little Owl Symposium is already planned for next year in England at the Owl Centre, Muncaster Castle, Cumbria, on 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002. The fifth Athenews® brings you a synthesis of the past events and the announcement of the next, while everyone is extremely busy with the annual field work. We hope you enjoy

Jean-Michel Lapios & Dries van Nieuwenhuysse

..... **The First ILOWG's Meeting has been held at Champs-sur-Marne (France), on 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> of november, 2000.** .....

**51 participants from eight european countries**



**Proceedings are in press, available end of 2001.**

**A CD-rom (Mac-PC) will be soon available too (interactive presentations).**

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## **Knowledge of the Little Owl** **1st Workshop from the ILOWG meeting at Champs-sur-Marne.**

### **- Aims of this workshop :**

- To identify the most important gap of knowledge Topics;
- Causes for declines and links between the different limiting processes of the species beyond general impressions;
- Real causality between factors;
- Knowledge (e.g. estimates) of local populations and national populations and trends;
- Understanding Population densities;
- Understanding the density limiting factors.

### **- Topics**

- Differences between sub-populations;
- Genetic variance between sub-populations;
- Physiology (basic metabolic rate);
- Population dynamics (structure, age pyramid, floaters/breeders ratio);
- Life expectancy of birds, survival rates;
- Plasticity of the species.

### **- Topics**

- Methodology (standards needed), e.g. post-fledging dispersion;
- Impact of predators (comparative research);
- Impact of nesting sites on predation risk;
- Is inbreeding a real problem?
- Interspecific competition for food and nesting cavities.

### **- Topics**

- Intra-specific relations in relation to habitat (at different scales);
- Role of the food as factor in decline, especially the role of earth worms;
- Availability of cavities;
- Extension of geographic range towards regions with abundance;
- Taxonomic studies.

### **- Topics**

- International Ecological Datawarehouse;
- Ageing and sexing techniques;
- Relation with humans;
- Ethnobiology of Little Owl.

### **- Generalities**

- Objectives
- Means

### **Next step**

- What? We will start with an inventory of who's doing what and what kind of info is available,
  - When? In Geraardsbergen March 2001 this should be ready
    - Who?
      - Where?
        - Why?

## **Conservation of the Little Owl** **2<sup>nd</sup> Workshop from the ILOWG meeting at Champs-sur-Marne.**

### **- What ?**

- ILOWG will centralise the different accomplishments
  - at the conceptual level (e.g. plan of France)
  - for the concrete national applications
  - making of a catalogue of local practical examples

### **INTERNATIONAL REFERENCING - KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE**

### **- Who ?**

- Jean-Michel LAPIOS will launch a call for co-operation and collection of information
- Who will synthesise all this information into workable knowledge ?

### **- How?**

- by E-mail,
- Study financed by CEE? For the credibility.
- Edit a document intended for users and nature conservancy organisations.

### **- With which objectives?**

- Show interest of initiatives for terrain managers, users of the knowledge and for the general population.
  - promoting a holistic environmental approach including built-up areas
  - adapting to different contexts
  - communicating the message through the media?

### **- Which target groups?**

- Farmers, Local governments, ...

### **- When ?**

- March 2001 inventory of existing initiatives in order to measure the scope of the synthesis to make.

**End 2001 synthesis finished.**



## • INTRODUCTION

The Little Owl *Athene noctua* has suffered a large declines during the last decades in many European countries and it is thought that changes in agriculture and landscape structure are the main reasons (e.g. EXO 1992), though traffic may also has contributed to the decline (GENOT et al. 1997). The ecology and biology of Little Owl is being increasingly studied (see e.g. EXO 1992 and references therein); however, little is known about Little Owl in Slovenia. Here I present some data about our knowledge of Little Owl from Slovenia. The analysis is based on literature data (see references) and my own unpublished data.

## • LITTLE OWL IN SLOVENIA

Data about Little Owl from the past and from the present time are scarce. First data about Little Owl in Slovenia come from 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to SEIDENSACHER (1858, 1864) Little Owl was breeding species around town Celje and in north-eastern Slovenia but it was not so common. It is interesting that about 100 years after Seidensacher DOLINAR (1951) on the same area pointed out that the Little Owl could be found elsewhere.

According to Atlas of Slovene breeding birds (GEISTER 1995) Little Owl is today distributed mainly in south-western (Mediterranean) and in north-eastern (sub-Pannonian region) Slovenia. Breeding population was in 1995 estimate from 500-800 pairs with strong negative trend.

The most stable population is those in Mediterranean region, where decline is less emphasised. In north-eastern Slovenia Little Owl is distributed, as elsewhere in Central Europe (e.g. CRAMP 1985, EXO 1992), mainly in traditional orchards close to human settlements. Density on big area, named Dravsko polje (about 210 km<sup>2</sup>) south from town Maribor was up to 0.48 pairs/10km<sup>2</sup> (VOGRIN 1997), what correspond to other areas present by e.g. EXO (1992). However during last years we noticed a decline of this species on this region.

Other example come from Lower Savinja valley where Little Owl was common and abundant species about 50 years ago (DOLINAR 1951). Today Little Owl was extinct from this region (pers. obs.). The main reason was very probably intensive agriculture (hop fields) which completely change the whole valley.

In last few years some Little Owls were found dead (on meadows or in orchards) in north-eastern Slovenia where intensive agriculture are present, presumably because of pesticides. However no detail examination, i.e. chemical analysis were performed on dead owls. Since death from most chemicals is slow and preceded by lethargy, so affected owls are most likely to die at their roosts or nests, where they would be unlikely to be found.

Until recently every farm, country house and suburban garden had its own collections of fruit trees. Yet over the last few decades traditional orchards have disappeared in the wake of cheap imported fruit, the intensification of agriculture (e.g. intensive orchards) and pressures from land development. Slovenia, for example has lost more then 5000 ha of its traditional orchards since 1990 (STATISTIČNI URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE 1996, 1997).

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## Habitat typologies across Europe: a call for co-operation.

In Geraardsbergen I gave a talk on the habitat typology of Little Owl territories. I'm currently finishing the manuscript for the proceedings. In this analysis we used principal component analysis and cluster analysis. These techniques allow us to distinguish different types of habitat in a very objective and scientific way.

In function of future conservation we distinguished 7 main typologies for Flanders that contain up to 93% of a random sample set of 2 344 territories in Flanders. These main types will be monitored in the future on Little Owl presence and on the evolution of the landscape.

To improve our knowledge on the "Plasticity" of the species throughout Europe we have been thinking to do a similar analysis on a much larger scale.

Therefore we would ask everyone that has access to digital landscapes to start selecting all available landscape parameters of 300m around the assumed centre of the territory. Of prime importance are the legends of the landscape elements.

For those that do not have access to a digital GIS, they can always use the method of Maarten Bekaert. In Geraardsbergen he illustrated his way of digitising landscapes manually by using a transparency per landscape elements, a piece of string and mm-paper. This kind of data collection is perfect to let youngsters do some first scientific research in an easy and comprehensible way. This way you might motivate and involve young people to start doing something about the precarious situation of little owls. The different landscape parameters that could be used are :

line elements (length of tree lines, length of brook, length of roads)	area elements (surface of all kinds of cultures -indicate row crops)
maize	cereals etc,
surface of built-up areas, surface of gardens, etc.. as detailed as possible	point elements (number of trees, number of chapels, number of barns, etc...)

We need one row per territory in excel with an identification of the territory, the spatial coordinate (if available), the discription of the landscape (one column per parameter) and the year of occupation.

Of course the data will be made available in the European Little Owl Data Warehouse for future research.

In the Oriolus theme-issue on Little Owls, we will publish the results of the Flemish habitat typology study. We hope to publish the results of this European study within a year from now.

Dries van Nieuwenhuise

## MEETING of GRAMMONT (BELGIUM)

It was a great pleasure to participate in the second ILOWG meeting for a number of reasons :

Firstly I was able to visit the famous Flanders region, where so many Little Owls live. Thanks to a field trip to demonstrate the play-back methods used by the Dries team. I was surprised to listen to 5 calling males in one location, as in my region the density is very low. But in Flanders they answer the play-back with an excitement call, which is like a contact vocalisation before conflict occurs between two birds.

Secondly we saw the great job produced by Dries and his colleagues concerning the standardised method to survey the owls. Alongside how the relationship between habitat and population densities develop.

Thirdly it was also the second meeting of the ILOWG family as Jacques Bultot calls it! I was happy to see our German coordinator Hubertus Illner that I met in 1992! Roy presented our European Action Plan, ambitious, but a great common project for us and a great basis. We are establishing a central database for literature, a datawarehouse for survey and breeding data, and genetic information.

Finally it was also important to have fun. I enjoyed both the Belgian beer and the fantastic cooperation between international little owl workers. Thanks to our Belgian hosts! Because Dries is very efficient you will probably receive proceedings from this meeting, maybe before those of Champs-sur-Marne (France), which are in press.

And now we all must improve our English as Roy has picked up the gauntlet, and next years meeting will be in Britain.

*Jean-Claude Génot*

Feedback on the Geraardsbergen meeting can be found at the following site :

<http://www.wielewaal.be/Wielewaal/Natuurstudie/Project/vogels/steenuil/steenuilsymposium.htm>

### Participants of Geraardsbergen meeting.

**Left to right :** Roy Leigh, Peter Beersma, Wouter Mertens, Marc Leysen, Maarten Bekaert, Hubertus Illner, Harald Everard, Johan Lefebvre, Koen Leysen, Dries Van Nieuwenhuysse, Tom Van Muylem, Ingeborg De Leenheer, Paul Marié, Jacques Bultot, Christian Meisser, Jan van 't Hoff, Jean-Claude Génot, Cien De Roo, Koen Steenhoudt, Duccio Centili.



In the next issue of ATHENEWS®  
Please, send your contributions  
before : **June, 30<sup>th</sup> 2 001.**

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105 specimens - May, 2 001

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