

## Subfossil shells in pellets of the Barn Owl in Israel

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Abstract: Three subfossil shells of *Melanopsis praemorsa jordanica* Roth, 1839 are reported from pellets of the Barn owl *Tyto alba* collected in the Hula Nature Reserve, Israel. However, without doubt not Barn owls but the Yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* or one of the other birds present in the same pellets had swallowed the shells.

Key words: Aves, *Tyto alba*, pellets, pseudopredation, subfossil shells.

Recently I was able to report on the presence of several shells of *Euchondrus* aff. *ovularis* (but not Olivier, 1801) in a pellet of the Long-eared owl *Asio otus* in Kibbutz Netzer Sereni, Israel. It turned out that not the owl but a Spurwinged plover *Hoplopterus spinosus*, of which the remains were present in the same pellet, had been the actual predator of the snails (Mienis, H. K. 1994). With other words from the point of view of the owl we were dealing with a case of pseudopredation.

Some time ago I received information concerning a similar case of pseudopredation on snails by an owl in Israel. My colleague Gila Kahila presented me with the shells of three freshwater snails she had encountered in a batch of pellets of Barn owls *Tyto alba*, collected at „Migdal Ram” in the Hula Nature Reserve on 4 May 1989. The material consisted of three subfossil shells of *Melanopsis praemorsa jordanica* Roth, 1839. Remains of nine other prey items were present in those pellets. They included five species of mammals: *Crocidura* spec., *Microtus* spec., *Meriones tristrami*, *Mus musculus* and *Rattus* spec., and four species of birds of which only the Yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* could be identified properly.

Neither the Barn owl nor any of the mammals would feed on the subfossil shells of the former Hula swamps. However, many songbirds are well known to swallow empty shells especially prior to the onset of the breeding season. Therefore I am quite convinced that the Yellow-vented bulbul or any of the unidentified birds had swallowed the shells and certainly not the Barn owl.

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### REFERENCE

Mienis, H. K., (1994): A case of „pseudopredation” on landsnails by the Long-eared owl. Ornithol. Soc. Middle East Bull., in press.

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