

Short communication

Scops Owl nest on the ground under a rock

Paul Harris*, Stephen Harris

Abstract - Unusual Scops Owl nest-site on Giglio island (Tuscan Archipelago National Park, Italy).

Key words: Scops Owl, nest on the ground, Giglio island, Italy.

Riassunto - Nido di assiolo a terra sotto una roccia.

Insolito ritrovamento di un sito di nidificazione di assiolo a terra, sotto una roccia, all'isola del Giglio (Parco Nazionale dell'arcipelago toscano, Italia).

Parole chiave: assiolo, nido sul terreno, isola del Giglio, Italia.

In 2021 we found an unusual Scops Owl nest-site on Giglio island (Tuscan Archipelago National Park, Italy). The nest was on the ground, in a small chamber under a rock in a pine-wood, at about 500m asl (Figs. 1, 2).

We first observed a Scops Owl repeatedly flying to this point, and then disappearing under the rock, on the night of 12th June. The following day a Scops Owl was roosting just inside the rock entrance. At first we were doubtful that this could be a nest-site, as all the 18 Scops Owl nests we had found on the island during the previous 30 years had been at least 2m off the ground, usually in walls or ruins. However, on the evening of the 21st June, we observed a Scops Owl taking a worm-like prey to the chamber, and when we carried out a further check just after dusk on the 13th July, we were surprised to find the Scops Owl nest still in full activity, despite the late date, with the female brooding at least 2 newly-hatched young and 2 yet unhatched eggs (Fig. 3). Allowing roughly 21 days for young Scops Owls to fledge the nest after hatching, we estimated they would probably leave the nest during the first week of August.



Fig. 1 - Scops Owl nest-site and surrounding habitat (above wider view, below close-up of entrance to nest). / La situazione del nido nell'ambiente circostante (sopra la visione più estesa, sotto il dettaglio dell'ingresso del nido).

Via Vitaliano Brancati 65, 00144 Roma, Italia.
E-mail: stephen1985@libero.it

* Corresponding author: wbw@libero.it

© 2022 Paul Harris, Stephen Harris

Received for publication: 29 November 2021
Accepted for publication: 15 March 2022
Online publication: 20 May 2022

We decided not to check the nest again before the end of the breeding season, and so returned on the 16th October to better inspect the site. The chamber under the rock was approximately rectangular, measuring about 30 cm wide, 20 cm deep, and 13 cm tall at its highest point. It did not seem to have been dug out by the owls at all, but they

had created a secondary sideways exit by flattening the vegetation by the rock. There were no signs of predation or disturbance, and the remaining egg-shell fragments and droppings in the nest seemed to indicate that the young owls had fledged successfully.

The only reference we found of Scops Owls nesting at ground level was in Mikkola (1983), that mentions this as occurring occasionally. All other texts we consulted described the nest-site as being in holes in trees, walls and rocks, as well as in nestboxes.

Possibly the scarcity of ground predators on the island (and in particular the absence of foxes, martens, weasels, etc), could have played a part in this unusual choice of nest-site, which may occur more often than thought, (especially on islands with few ground predators). It is interesting to conclude that Scops Owls can resort to such atypical nest-sites when more traditional sites in rocks and trees are not readily available, or are in short supply with respect to the owls' population.

REFERENCES

Mikkola H., 1983 – *Owls of Europe*. T. & A. D. Poyser Ltd., Calton.



Fig. 2 - Scops Owl perched at nest entrance. / Assiolo mimetizzato posato all'ingresso del nido.



Fig. 3 - Scops Owl brooding eggs and young. / Assiolo che cova uova e piccoli.