

## Short Communication

# *Strix aluco*'s scavenging observation on *Myocastor coypus* in Italy

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**Abstract** - Documentation of cases of scavenging by Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* on coypu *Myocastor coypus* in Italy; highlighting this particular type of feeding behaviour by the species.

**Key words:** *Strix aluco*, Tawny Owl, scavenging, coypu, trophic spectrum.

**Riassunto** - Osservazione di casi di scavenging da parte di allocco *Strix aluco* in Italia.

Vengono descritti due casi di scavenging effettuati da allocco *Strix aluco* su nutria *Myocastor coypus*; si evidenzia così questo particolare tipo di comportamento alimentare da parte della specie.

**Parole chiave:** *Strix aluco*, allocco, scavenging, nutria, spettro trofico.

The Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* is a polytypic species belonging to the order of the Strigiformes with West Palearctic distribution (Keller *et al.*, 2020). This common nocturnal predator is spread throughout Italy and mainly feeds on live prey. Very generalist diet that includes small and young mammals (Rodentia, Lagomorpha, Erinaceomorpha, Soricomorpha and Carnivora), birds (Passeriformes, exceptionally Anseriformes and Charadriiformes), fish (Salmoniformes, Cypriniformes, Perciformes and Scorpaeniformes), amphibians (Anura and Urodela), reptiles (Squamata) and invertebrates (Coleoptera, Odonata, Plecoptera, Orthoptera, Dermaptera, Hemiptera, Neuroptera, Lepidoptera, Diptera, Hymenoptera, Annelida, Mollusca, Crustacea, Chelicerata and Myriapoda) (see Cramp, 1985 for a more detailed review; Brichetti & Fracasso, 2006).

Captive Tawny Owls are routinely fed with dead prey, but several authors have reported occasional scavenging

of carrion by Tawny Owls in the wild (e.g., Roberts, 1944; Gruzdev & Likhachev, 1960; Vásárhelyi, 1967; Kochan, 1979; Jędrzejewska & Jędrzejewski, 1998; Schwartz *et al.*, 2018). This scavenging behaviour may be more frequent when live food is scarce; Tawny Owls appear to have lower hunting success when temperatures are particularly low, windy or rainy and scavenging might be a specialized foraging behaviour of particular individuals (Cramp, 1985). However, scavenging appears to be comparatively rare in the wild (Schwartz *et al.*, 2018).

Currently, dead animals reported to have been consumed by *Strix aluco* are: *Rattus rattus*, *Lepus* sp., *Mustela nivalis*, *Mustela putorius*, young sheep, trout (Salmonidae), *Ungulata* sp., *Ficedula hypoleuca* chicks and *Anas platyrhynchos* (Roberts, 1944; Gruzdev & Likhachev, 1960; Vásárhelyi, 1967; Kochan, 1979; Jędrzejewska & Jędrzejewski, 1998; Schwartz *et al.*, 2018).

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a dead coypu *Myocastor coypus* was found in the locality of Massimbona, in the province of Mantua. The carrion showed signs of predation, most likely by a *Canidae* sp., and was located within a riparian formation composed of *Platanus hispanica*, *Juglans regia*, *Salix* spp., *Sambucus nigra*, *Morus alba*, *Alnus glutinosa*, *Ulmus minor* and *Robinia pseudoacacia* within the boundaries of the Mincio Regional Park (45° 16' 22.2" N, 10° 42' 58.8" E). To better investigate the situation, a camera trap (Scout Guard SG2060-D Motion Sharp 36MP Camera) was placed in the site on the afternoon of the same day. After ten days, on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the camera trap was recovered and the session data downloaded. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at 17:15 (6° C), a Tawny Owl was viewed feeding on the carcass of coypu (Fig. 1). Subsequent observations were recorded on the same evening, at 21:47 (1° C), and the following day, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at 18:01 (1° C). Temperatures recorded by the camera trap were compared with data coming from the Goito weather station, resulting in a fairly accurate approximation. Afterwards, the carrion was found by domestic dogs from the neighboring farm and transported out of the camera's range of vision.

Another similar case had been observed near an oxbow lake of the Adda river (45° 12' 19.6" N, 9° 45' 19.0" E), in the province of Lodi. On January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017,

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Fig. 1 - Documentation of feeding of Tawny Owl on coypu carcass. / Alimentazione dell'allocco su di una carcassa di nutria.

at 17:39, a Tawny Owl was identified feeding on a coypu carcass (Riboni B., pers. com.). The carrion was located at the edge of a country road and the cause of death might be attributable to a car fatality.

These observations would seem to be the first documentation regarding this type of feeding behavior in the natural environment in Italy for Tawny Owl and the first recorded on coypu.

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