

OBSERVATION OF EAGLE OWL (*BUBO BUBO*) PREDATION ON ALPINE SWIFT (*APUS MELBA*)

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Parole chiave - Gufo reale, predazione, Rondone maggiore, Lago d'Iseo.

Key words - Eagle owl, predation, Alpine swift, Iseo Lake.

Riassunto - Breve descrizione di un evento di predazione da parte di un Gufo reale su un Rondone maggiore.

Abstract - Short description of a field observation regarding the predation by an Eagle Owl on Alpine Swift.

In nature, the direct observation of an active predation by wildlife species is a very rare event. The Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*), the largest owl in the world, is a generalist species in terms of nest choice but in Italy prefers nesting on cliffs (PENTERIANI, 1996). It is a crepuscular and nocturnal superpredator species that can feed on prey of different size, from beetles (Coleoptera) to roe deer fawns (MIKKOLA, 1983) but prefers the classes Mammalia and Aves (MARCHESI *et al.*, 2002; BASSI *et al.*, 2003; PENTERIANI *et al.*, 2005; BIONDA, 2007). Despite the large amount of information on the diet of this raptor through the analysis of pellets and prey remains collected around nests and perches (MARCHESI *et al.*, 2002; BASSI *et al.*, 2003; BIONDA, 2007), few descriptions of hunting techniques in relation to the prey species are documented in literature. The observation took place on 17 June 2012 in the Iseo Lake area (Province of Brescia, Lombardy, Italy) during a listening session to detect the presence of juveniles in an Eagle Owl territory (no detailed information was given on the position of the nesting cliff to prevent divulging the exact location of breeding site). The landscape is characterized by a mosaic of calcareous cliffs and de-

ciduous forest (*Ostrya carpinifolia* and *Fraxinus ornus*) with grasslands and shrubby areas at the top. The nesting cliff is 80 m high and 180 m longer with a mean altitude of 320 m a.s.l. and with a W-SW orientation. A colony of 8-10 breeding pairs of Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*), a trans-Saharan migrant species, that usually spends most of its life in flight (ARN, 1960), was breeding in holes on the same cliff used by the Eagle Owl (TROTTI *unpubl. data*). At 9.41 p.m. (civil twilight: 9.43 p.m.) the territorial male of Eagle Owl fled away from the cliff and after a flight of about 30 meters (4 wing beats) it preyed an Alpine Swift placed in the nest (a small hole in the cliff). During the capture it had not laid but it remained in flight flapping its wings quickly for about 3-4 seconds. The swift, caught to a wing and still alive, was brought in a rocky cavity (about 10 meters from the location of the capture) but not in the nest where there were 2 chicks. At 9.46 p.m. the female fled away from the cliff and it laid on a tree. At 9.49 p.m. the male fled to the back of the cliff and at 9.53 p.m. the female performed the same trajectory of the male. The observation was made at a distance of 180 m with a 12x50 binoculars.

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