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INTERESTING BREEDING RECORD OF SOOTY OWL *Tyto tenebricosa*

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LOCATION

The site is located on the Bobo River, a tributary of the Nymboida River in northern New South Wales. The forest is an ecotone of wet sclerophyll forest and rainforest with a number of large hollow-bearing trees.

PREFERRED HABITAT

The dense vegetation and the interchange between wet sclerophyll and rainforest gullies provide perfect habitat for the Sooty Owl *Tyto tenebricosa*. Its distribution ranges from just north of Brisbane south along the coastal side of the Great Dividing Range to Melbourne. The Sooty Owl is a true rainforest bird, restricted to the wetter forested country of eastern Australia, with territories of about 200 to 800 ha (Blakers *et al.* 1984). Sooty Owls are generally considered uncommon and are rarely sighted within the dense, dimly-lit forest they inhabit. Dietary information is limited but suggests that the species preys on a range of terrestrial and arboreal mammals of small to moderate size such as Sugar Gliders and Common Ringtail Possums (Blakers *et al.* 1984). They are also known to take bandicoots, antechinus and dunnarts.

OBSERVATION

On 7 April 1997 one adult and two young birds were heard calling in forests near the Bobo River. The young birds were located through their begging calls, to a large Sydney Blue Gum *Eucalyptus saligna*. They seemed very

keen to be fed. The adult bird, however, would not come to the tree, keeping instead to the denser vegetation. It also kept making the bomb whistle call which is characteristic of the species. At the time it was assumed that these young were a very early clutch from this year.

A week later the location was again visited and imitation bomb whistle calls were made to provoke a response. The two young birds started their begging calls. No adult birds were heard or sighted. The two young birds came in very close and were observed using a spotlight and binoculars. We were surprised to observe that the birds had dark plumage. This indicated that these birds were last years' young and were much older than we first thought.

These observations suggest that at least one of the parents was still feeding the young after ten months (which is no doubt well after fledging, although the age at which Sooty Owls fledge has not been accurately documented). This time of ongoing parental care by the Sooty Owl has never been documented before. Further detailed studies are needed on this topic.

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