

## **Abstract**

In previous research, I found that a dummy of the Eurasian Pygmy owl, the most dangerous owl predator of passerines does not elicit strong expressions of fear in the majority of small birds approaching the feeder. Therefore, I decided to compare the behavior of birds visiting the feeder towards four species of European owls differing in their size and food specialization: the Eurasian Pygmy owl, the Little owl, the Tawny owl and the Eurasian eagle-owl. The presentation of their taxidermies was alternated with the presentation of taxidermies of harmless birds of similar size: the Hawfinch, the Song thrush, the Common wood pigeon, and the Common pheasant. In addition to the total number of arrivals at the feeder, I observed whether the birds approached the taxidermies from the front or the back and the distance of the landing site from the taxidermy.

The number of birds approaching the feeder with individual species of owls did not correspond to their dangerousness. Compared to the control (neutral stimulus), the number of arrivals was reduced the most by the Eurasian eagle-owl and the least by the Eurasian Pygmy owl. Compared to harmless birds of a similar size, medium-sized owls reduced the number of arrivals the most. Even large-sized harmless birds commanded respect, in terms of the number of arrivals, the direction of arrivals and the distance from the taxidermy. The results indicate that birds arriving at the feeder do not recognize dangerousness of the owl species presented, in contrast to the dangerousness of diurnal predators presented in other experiments.

**Key words:** owls, body size, food specialization, dangerousness for small passerines, predator recognition