

*Spotted Eagle Owl*  
**Bubu africanus**  
**Roberts No 401**



**Thoughts that readers might find useful.**

This is what Phil Hockey and Richard Dean have to say about the Spotted Eagle Owl in the big Roberts Birds of Southern Africa.

The bird is considered common and found throughout South Africa. They are residents, there is record of three pairs nesting within an area of 5.8 square kilometres, an area roughly the size of Leisure Isle if it was as wide as it long. This suggests that the pair at the nesting box are not necessarily the same pair that have bred for many years in the gum trees along Links Drive. A female is known to have been resident in one territory for twenty one years, having one male partner for thirteen years and another for eight.

Nesting sites are on the ground, in trees and on buildings, of 269 nests 61% were on the ground and 26% in trees.

It preys on small animals, birds, reptiles and insects, the bulk of its diet being rodents and small birds.

Breeds all year round except March, peak being August to October. Before laying pairs visit the nesting site and cluck and bow to each other. The box has been up for five months. I have kept a fairly careful watch on it and noticed no activity there until two weeks ago. Since then I have seen both birds around the gum tree and three times just before it got dark seen her flying into the nest. There has only been one day, Monday the 24<sup>th</sup>, that she spent the whole day sitting. Yesterday she again spent the day sitting, today she is also sitting so hopefully she now has eggs.

Incubation starts with the first egg laid, the period is from 29 to 33 days and is done by the female alone. The clutch of eggs can be from one to six.

Some species of birds lay their eggs over a period of time with sitting and incubation starting only once the clutch is complete.

The chicks hatch with their eyes closed, after a week they open. The female broods the new chicks for ten days and then spends decreasing time on the nest. Chicks hatched in raised nests leave after about forty days. The male helps with hunting and guarding the chicks and the nest site. After fledging the young remain with their parents in the vicinity of the nest. They will start to hunt with their parents from six to eight before dispersing at about four months.

In an effort to reduce the use of rat poison in the Western Cape farmers were encouraged to try and increase the owl population. This was done by providing nesting boxes. The project was so successful that owl nesting boxes are now commercially available and being used throughout the country. See the web, owl nesting boxes.

Submitted by Mike St Quinten  
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