

Preface

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Source: Ardea, 97(4)

Published By: Netherlands Ornithologists' Union

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5253/078.097.0438>

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PREFACE

Although through the centuries many owl species have benefited from the activity of people, nowadays, many species are locally or even globally under threat from intensified human impact on their landscapes. Destruction of natural habitats, forestry practices, changes of land use in agricultural areas, and increased infrastructure such as housing development sites, new factory sites, power-lines, railways and roads all contribute substantially to population declines of owls. In addition, insecticides and rodenticides limit the amount of food available to owls and many cause secondary poisoning. The problems facing owls are not at all solely theirs, as they affect many creatures that share their living space. Many animal species will thus benefit from owl conservation efforts. As most people stand warm heartedly to owls, because of their almost human facial expressions and mysterious nightly way of life, owls provide an excellent vehicle to bring nature conservation issues across to the general public. This is facilitated with better understanding of owl biology and the interactions within ecosystems in which owls live. The gain and spread of scientific knowledge and the exchange of experiences regarding owl-related nature protection projects are very important in achieving conservation objectives. For this reason, international owl conferences have been organised and in this *Ardea* volume we present the proceedings of the fourth conference in this series.

The scope of the contributed papers ranges from behaviour, prey selection and habitat selection to survey and monitoring techniques, citizen science, population trends, and owl conservation. Together, these topics give an overview of current research in owl biology, and scientific conservation issues. At the same time, these proceedings give an update overview of owl conservation efforts, including data from areas of the

world from which little information about nature protection is known, let alone the conservation of owls. The conference organising committee especially sought after scientific contributions from such countries, and due to the financial support for organising the conference, some of delegates from low income countries could be invited to the conference largely on cost of the committee. The conference-editors of these proceedings have likewise put much effort in upgrading manuscripts, so that they meet the standard of international publication. We hope that these contributions will inspire future contacts and co-operations between (owl) researchers all over the world, explicitly including countries of which researchers are not so much part of the international scientific community yet.

The conservation of owls and their habitats is an endless endeavour, which will not get shape if not subdivided into smaller conservation projects and actions. The conference delegates have been asked to submit worries, projects, and desired actions with regard to owl conservation during the conference. These have been discussed and rephrased as action-points, and in the final session, these action points have been voted for. The conference adopted all but one of these actions, which can be found in the separate resolutions leaflet. These resolutions need to be spread to policy makers and people who are otherwise involved in resolving these specific problems that owls (and owl conservationists) have. We hope that these resolutions will be followed up by true conservation actions which can be reported back at the fifth World Owl Conference. These proceedings should provide sufficient insight in the practice of world-wide owl conservation, that everyone could become inspired to make the conservation of owls and their habitats a success.

Johan de Jong and Arnold van den Burg