

Some authors have found digested anura remains in pellets of Burrowing Owls (ERRINGTON & BENNETT, 1935; SPERRY, 1941; BOND, 1942; JAKSIC & MARTI, 1981; BELLOCCO, 1988; SILVA-PORRO & CERQUERA, 1990; E. M. GONZALEZ, unpublished data). However, predation on species with well developed skin glands is exceptional, because its secretions repels potential enemies.

In January of 1995, the author gathered feeding remains of several *A. cucullaria* nests from Santa Teresa National Park (Rocha Department, Uruguay). Among them, many mammals (GONZALEZ & SARALEGUI, 1996) and 14 *Bufo arenarum* (*Amphibia: Anura: Bufonidae*) remains were founded. Amphibian remains consisted in heads and part of the spines, which still conserved part of the skin of the back attached. Some specimens conserved the pelvic girdle and the limbs. The total length of the predated toads, estimated by comparison with collection specimens, was between 8 and 15 cm. At the collecting time, this species of toad was very common in the park. GONZALEZ (1997) reports the capture of some specimens with microammals traps.

Toads of the genus *Bufo* has skin glands, whose secretions make them undesirable for most of the potential predators (DALY & WITKOP, 1966; LUTZ, 1966). The glands are distributed on the back and particularly between the eyes and the scapulas, where the paratoides glands are located.

Despite this, falcons foraging on toads have been recorded (HUERTAS, 1980), though is not specified how did they do it. HUERTAS & VALLEJO (1988) said that *Falco sparverius* (Falconiformes, *Falconidae*) can not kill neither ingest toads of the genus *Bufo* in the 98.2% of the experimental induced cases. According to these authors, the attack caused the predator irritation, whom, after several attempts, learned to recognise the repelling preys and did not attack them again. SCHLATTER *et al.* (1980) consider that amphibians are of secondary importance as prey for Burrowing Owls. These authors and THOMSEN (1977) found killed but undigested anurans, rejected by Burrowing Owls after tasting the seemingly unpalatable secretion of their skin. Although it was not observed, a predation sequence of a Burrowing Owl on a toad should be expected to follow the following sequence: the catch, the carrying to the nest, the accommodation with the belly upwards, and the ingestion. HUERTAS & VALLEJO (1988) observed this technique in a falcon (*Falco sparverius*) feeding on a toad. Using this strategy, the owls may be able to use a locally abundant feeding resource. The fact that toads are found in several nests in this population

may implies that many individuals have learn this feeding technique. Absence of toads foraging records in other places suggests that the technique is learned by imitation or "conspecific observation" (KLOPFER, 1959) among individuals within the population.

This population preference for an unusual food shows the existence of a particular factor that affects the owls hunting selection. CHARNOV & ORIANS (1973) establish four levels of hunting selection: a) habitat selection b) hunting habitat selection c) hunting method selection and d) kind of prey selection. A fifth level may exist, where the selection may be product of individual or populational preference (developed by learning) for certain kind of food. The differences with the fourth level stated by CHARNOV & ORIANS is that, while the prey selection is characteristic of each species and is pointed to an optimum foraging performance, the populational or individual preferences, although respecting the optimal foraging laws, is an unpredictable show of biological diversity.

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