

Pseudoscops clamator (Striped Owl)

Family: Strigidae (Typical Owls)

Order: Strigiformes (Owls)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Striped owl, *Pseudoscops clamator*.

[http://farm6.staticflickr.com/5131/5389557854_01083b97b5_m.jpg, downloaded 16 November 2012]

TRAITS. The striped owl, *Pseudoscops clamator*, is also known to have an alternate scientific names, *Asio clamator* and *Rhinoptynx clamator* (Motta-Junior and de Arruda Bueno, 2012). It is a relatively large owl (Restall et al., 2006) with two conspicuous tufts or bunches of elongated feathers on the crown, 3.5-5 cm in length (Fig. 1). These feathers can look like ears (Snyder, 1996). The average length of the striped owl is 30-38 cm, average wing length is 22.8-29.4 cm and average weight is 320-546 g (Motta-Junior and de Arruda Bueno, 2012). The female striped owls are generally larger than the males. The wings of the female have a maximum breadth of 45 mm and the male have a maximum wing breadth of 41 mm (Thurber et al., 2009). They possess large faces or facial disks which aids in determining sound direction, large eyes and short necks. These eyes are very sensitive and they are protected by a third eyelid or opaque blinking

membrane. They have two ear openings, one on each side of the head that are slightly different in size from each other. A majority of their bodies, including the lower legs and toes, are covered with long, soft feathers. Each foot has four toes each with a sharp curved talon. The bill (beak) is hook like, short with a cere or fleshy membranous covering at the base. Their faces and throats are covered with white feathers (Snyder, 1996), bordered by black feathers. The back, mantle and axilla (under the wing) are covered with feathers that are brown in colour with black vertical streaks. On the lower back stripes appear horizontally barred and freckled (de Schauensee and Phelps, 1978). The flight feathers and the tail feathers are also brown in colour with barred black stripes (Snyder, 1996). The under parts including the underside of wings, legs and toes are covered with pale brown-yellow feathers with vertical black to dark brown stripes.

ECOLOGY. They are found habits ranging from savannahs, forest edges, dry/desert like areas, suburban areas, marshlands and open grassy fields (de Schauensee and Phelps 1978). This owl is mostly active at twilight and at night being crepuscular and nocturnal (Fig. 2). It can be seen flying low over open fields (Restall et al. 2006) or perching (resting) below treetops (de Schauensee and Phelps 1978). The main diet consists of rodents and birds. During the rainy season they mostly feed on insects and frogs and in the dry season they eat mostly lizards and small mammals such as rabbits, bats and opossums. Occurs from Mexico south to Argentina, and in Tobago (not Trinidad) (Ffrench, 1991).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. Little is known about the social behaviour of the striped owl. Sometimes the striped owl live in pairs, can be seen perching in groups. It usually forages alone to avoid interfering with the hunt of others (Thistleton, 1960). In the tropical region, it is territorial and non-migratory (Thistleton, 1960). It protects its territory and hunts different prey based on abundance in prey population. The striped owl is monogamous or males have two or more mates. The number of mates a male has is determined by the abundance of prey at that point in time since males have to forage for both females and nestlings (Thistleton, 1960). Breeding takes place during the dry season and only one set of offspring is produced yearly.

ACTIVITY. The striped owl is an opportunistic hunter and will catch any prey by any means (Thistleton, 1960). It is a crepuscular and nocturnal hunter that hunts after sunset and at night. Occasionally in the breeding season, it hunts during the day just before midday (Motta-Junior et al., 2004). Hunting activity usually takes 6 hours and up to 11 hours if needed. Between hunts, it can be seen sleeping for short periods on branches of leafy trees below treetops or taking short baths in very shallow collections of water (Thistleton, 1960). It sleeps with its head forward and the feathers fluffed (Smith, 2002). It can also be seen perching above or below treetops before sunrise and after sunset when temperatures are lowered (Thistleton, 1960).

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. The striped owl mostly hunts during flight. It flies low over open fields and dives on prey. Upon diving, it extends its feet forward and grabs the prey with the talons. If prey is small, it will be carried prey in the bill and if larger, the striped owl will carry it using the talons (Thistleton, 1960). After successful capture, it usually returns to branches and swallows the prey whole. If the prey is large, it will remove the head using the bill and then swallows the body. It can also hunt from low branches, quietly watching and listening. By rotating its head and picking up the sounds made by the prey with both ears, the striped owl will know the exact location of the prey (Thistleton, 1960). Once the location is known it will face

towards the direction the sounds were picked up and quietly glides down and grabs. It can be seen hunting on ground of open fields searching for prey.

COMMUNICATION. Most sounds made the striped owl are vocal but some are non-vocal. Vocal communication can fall two groups labelled hoots and barks. The hoots can be considered as “who” sounds. It usually makes two “who” sounds separated by a short time interval where the second “who” is either louder or softer than the first (Smith, 2002). The female “who” sounds occur at a higher pitch than the male. Occasionally, it gives a soft song at a low frequency with the bill closed. There is very little information published about the meaning of these “who” sounds but probably these are calls to mates or to territory ownership (Smith, 2002). When the striped owl is either surprised or threatened, it makes a barking sound which occurs at a slower rate than the “who” sounds. Males often make a rattling call that comprises of closely spaced short barking sounds. Non-vocal sounds are often mixed with vocal sounds. When threatened, the striped owl makes a hissing sound by exhaling forcefully with the bill opened and would sometimes snaps its bill (Smith, 2002). It also makes a rapid rattling sound by snapping the bills. When excited, the striped owl would snap the bill and flap its wings giving a whip snapping sound.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. When the male encounters a female during foraging, it is likely that the male will perform flight display that consists of wing flaps and calls which announces his presence and sex towards the female (Smith, 2002). The male also provides food to the female in an attempt to attract the female to an appropriate nesting site (Smith, 2002). Once the female accepts the food copulation will occur. Copulation involves the female crouching over with its breast touching the floor and the male climbing on her back. The male then deposits his sperm in the cloaca of the female below the tail feathers which lead to the fertilization (Smith, 2002). After copulation they can be seen perching close together, grooming each another or synchronising calls. The female build the nest and lays 1-5 eggs (Pautasso and de la Pena, 2001). She incubates them for about 33 days and protects the nest. During this time the male forages for food, to feed the female and the chicks when eggs hatch.

NESTING BEHAVIOUR. The striped owl is not an efficient nest builder (Thistleton, 1960). The female is responsible for building the nest. It builds nests on the ground under overhanging trees in area of tall grasses or sometimes low in trees (Fig. 3). Nests measure 19cm in diameter with a depth of 3 cm and are made up of dry stems of grasses (Pautasso and de la Pena, 2001). It was reported that these nests are sometimes used for 3 years with minor shifts in location.

JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR. When eggs are hatch, the nestlings are incapable of performing any tasks. They are covered in grey-white down (fine feathers) and weigh 18-22 g. This down quickly falls off and a second pale brown down develops (Fig. 4). Vocal development occurs and they are able to perch and show aggressive behaviour, 12 days after hatching (Smith, 2002). At day 17, they are able to walk and jump. Their vocal repertoire consists of screams that are considered to be begging calls, high pitched “wheehe” screams (Motta-Junior and de Arruda Bueno, 2012). The begging calls are made at sunset when they should be hungry. The male forage for food and the female feeds the nestlings by regurgitating into their mouths. Nestlings become capable of flight after 35 days and are able to consume food on their own. At this stage

they are pale brown down with a brown down on the face and white feathers between the eyes and around the bill (Thurber et al., 2009) (Fig. 5).

ANTI-PREDATOR BEHAVIOUR. Little information on predation of the striped owls is published. If the striped owl sees a potential threat, it can remain motionless, keeps its body erect and wraps wings around the body (Thistleton, 1960). The colour of the feathers helps to camouflage itself within trees. A female that is nesting defends her nest by spreading out her wings above her back to reveal a full display of its body and feathers (Fig. 6). This reaction makes her body look bigger to successfully intimidate intruders (Thistleton, 1960). If juveniles were startled or threatened, it may run away on foot or fly away (Thistleton, 1960).

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Author: Tamara Duchaussee

Posted online: 2012



Fig. 2. Striped owl active at night.

[http://farm5.staticflickr.com/4096/4869002823_44f94c0ae8_m.jpg downloaded 18 November 2012]



Fig. 3. The nest of female striped owl made of stems of grass, under an overhanging tree.

[<http://vireo.acnatsci.org/search.html?Form=Search&SEARCHBY=Common&KEYWORDS=Striped+Owl&showwhat=images&AGE=All&SEX=All&ACT=All&Search=Search&VIEW=All&ORIENTATION=All&RESULTS=24> downloaded 19 November 2012]



Fig. 4. Nestlings covered in pale brown-yellow down.

[<http://www.owlpages.com/pictures/species-Asio-clamator-8.jpg> downloaded 19 November 2012]



Fig. 5. Juvenile covered in pale brown down.

[<http://www.owlpages.com/pictures/species-Asio-clamator-5.jpg> downloaded 19 November 2012]



Fig. 6. Striped owl spreads out wings above the back in a full display of body and feathers.

[http://farm6.staticflickr.com/5149/5650465869_42a9268a2a_m.jpg downloaded 19 November 2012]