

11

Boobook prey size

Sugar Gliders and possums

Sugar Gliders are commonly found in Canberra woodland with Southern Boobooks. They weigh about 120 g, similar to a parrot's weight; however, the Boobooks seldom took Sugar Gliders. They treated them as enemies, not food. Something about the aggressive behaviour of glider family groups puts the Boobooks on the defensive, and makes the gliders immune to frequent attack as a prey species. Sugar Gliders do not seem to fear the owls as much as they should, and David Lindenmayer from the Australian National University said that Sugar Gliders give a certain call that brings in the rest of the group to mob a Boobook.

Even if they are close to an owl family, Sugar Gliders will climb out onto the end of a thin twig and yap, or sail from a treetop across a gap in the canopy. Sometimes the owls fly after them, clacking their beaks in warning. This clacking is like two pieces of wood clapped together. Some observers believe Boobooks make this clacking sound with their tongue, but others say it is mandibles clacking together. There are reports of Boobooks attacking Ringtail Possums as prey (McNabb 2002), but these Boobooks were beak clacking as warning, not gliding in silently for a kill. This signals an attack on an enemy, not hunting. The owls often follow the glider through the air and try to knock it to the ground. When the owls strike a glider, they strike with talons wide open, as when capturing prey. When the owl attacks a glider clinging to a tree, the glider often drops to the ground and escapes. But sometimes a Sugar Glider will dodge around the trunk of a tree, persist and refuse to leave a patch of trees owned by the owls (see Figure 11.1). Yellow-bellied Gliders behave in a similar fashion with Powerful Owls.