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Forest owl diets

If large Australian *Ninox* prefer arboreal mammals and birds to ground mammals such as rats and rabbits, what about large *Tyto* owls in these same forests – the Sooty and Masked Owl?

The generic name for the Masked Owl, *Tyto*, is derived from the Greek for a type of owl, probably named for its cries. The species name *novaehollandiae* comes from the type locality New Holland = New South Wales. The distribution of Masked Owls is imperfectly known. They are said to occur over much of mainland Australia except the deserts. Wink *et al.* 2008 said the Tasmanian *castanops* was a separate species. Data for weights of these Tasmanian Masked Owls are limited but Fleay (1968) gave 595 g for a Tasmanian male and 1290 g for a Tasmanian female. Mainland Masked Owls are smaller and weigh less.

Masked Owls feed mostly on small- to medium-sized ground mammals, including rodents, but also arboreal or climbing mammals (Higgins 1999). In south-eastern New South Wales Kavanagh (2002a) found they took about 4.6 per cent arboreal mammals such as Sugar Gliders and Ringtail Possums, about 3.8 per cent birds, and about 90 per cent terrestrial mammals including Brown Antechinus *Antechinus stuartii*, Dusky Antechinus *Antechinus swainsonii* and Bush Rat *Rattus fuscipes* (see Table 17.1). On the central coast of New South Wales they took no arboreal mammals, about 70 per cent Black Rats (though Black Rats can climb, owls probably take most of them on the ground) and 20.5 per cent birds. Clearly the Masked Owl diet differs from the Powerful Owl diet and can differ from area to area, as Powerful Owl diet differs between new South Wales and Queensland (Tables 16.2 and 16.3).