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## Powerful Owls and dimorphism

Wisps of light drift through gaps in the canopy. You catch an impression above you, a vertical form with striking dark chevron barring across a muscled front. The colour pattern, as if giving warning, is the opposite of the subtle browns of Southern Boobooks. Orange eyes stare down like light bulbs, as if annoyed (Figure 18.1). One foot is tucked up; the other grips a dead Greater Glider. High-arched black talons hold a bloody bundle draped over the branch. Other large owls, such as Great Horned Owls or Masked Owls, never do this. Why Powerful Owls?

As mentioned above, Powerful Owls exhibit NSD (Normal Sexual Dimorphism), with males larger than females. Most owls exhibit RSD (Reversed Sexual Dimorphism) – females larger than males. ‘Reversed’ is perhaps a sexist rendering of a principle in biology – males are larger and heavier because they compete for females, as in Peacocks or Jungle Fowl (domestic chickens), various species of cat and humans. Peacocks and Jungle Fowls have ‘Normal’ Sexual Dimorphism. In contrast, the Pygmy Owl, mentioned above, has females larger than males, as do Tawny Owls, Barn Owls, Eurasian Eagle Owls and Southern Boobooks. Great Horned Owls and Powerful Owls are about the same size but male Great Horned Owls weigh about 1300 g and females about 1700 g, compared with 1500 g for *male* Powerful Owls, and 1250 g for *female* Powerful Owls. Powerful Owls have switched, broken the rules.

Why have they evolved this way? Does the very long breeding cycle in Powerful Owls have anything to do with males being the heavier sex? Not likely, because many large eagles, such as Crowned Eagles in Africa or Harpy Eagles in South America, also have very long breeding cycles, even longer than that of Powerful