

Breeding

Compared to many birds, the reproductive period of owls is prolonged. Even the Southern Boobook, our smallest owl, takes at least five months to complete a breeding effort. Southern Boobooks breed seasonally, once a year, at least in the southern part of their range, in the spring. Most owls establish nesting territories large enough for breeding and large enough for both the male and female to hunt in. Territorial aggression early in the breeding season probably reflects this long-term goal. Owls show fidelity to these territories, reoccupying them in consecutive years. One or both members of the pair return annually to the same nesting area, often the same nest site, until death or some environmental change causes disruption to this pattern (Craighead and Craighead 1956). Such fidelity to one breeding area enhances breeding success and the longevity of the owls. They can learn all features of a hunting area, where prey lives, feeds and takes refuge, and the location of obstacles, predators and other dangers that cause mortality. Owls can also avoid overlapping the territories with other owls. One would expect the territories of insect specialists to be smaller than the territories of mammal or bird specialists.