Characterizing the Feeding Behavior of Western Screech Owls

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A camera within a Megascops kennicottii nest box recorded the activities of a breeding pair of adult owls and their young. Over 1000 hours of video footage was recorded and 450 hours was manually analyzed to determine the activities of the owls and the kinds and quantities of food delivered to the nest. Food deliveries increased once the owlets hatched and started to grow. At some point the food deliveries subsided, perhaps in an effort to encourage the owlets to fledge and leave the nest. Mice, moths, worms, birds, snakes, and other insects were delivered to the nest. One night over 100 food items were delivered. When the first Megascops kennicottii hatched on May 12, 4 food items were brought into the nest. Out of the analyzed data, the highest number of food deliveries was May 24 when 101 food items were brought in. The day before the owls fledged only 17 food items were delivered. This sudden drop of food deliveries appears to show that the parent owls were “starving” the owlets in an attempt to encourage them to leave the nest.

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