



This is raptor number 8 of the raptors seen on the CCJ estate. To date we have covered the three Sparrowhawks, the European Honey Buzzard, the Black-winged Kite and the African Harrier Hawk. Still to come is the Gabar Goshawk and Common Buzzard.



Want to learn more about the exciting environment of the Greater Woodmead Estate?

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**THE COUNTRY CLUB
JOHANNESBURG**



Spotted Eagle Owl

**No.8 in our series:
Raptors of the Woodmead Estate**



Description:

The facial disk is off white to pale ochre and the eyes are yellow. It has prominent ear tufts, and the upper body is dusky brown, the lower parts off-white with brown bars. Life span: 10-20 years. Weight: 454-907g. Wingspan: 100-104cm



Distribution:

Spotted eagle-owls are the most common species of owl found in southern Africa with a healthy population in most parts of the region. They are often referred to as urban owls and will live in close proximity to human habitation. They occur throughout sub-Saharan Africa and the Arabian peninsula.



Diet:

Its prey mainly consists of rodents, small mammals, birds, insects and reptiles, although it has a dietary preference for small mammals such as rodents and shrews. It often swallows its prey whole, with much head-jerking, pausing and resting in between, while a portion of the prey remains inside the mouth, until the prey can finally be swallowed down completely.

Undigested substances such as feathers and bone are regurgitated within the next 24 hours of ingestion in the form of a pellet. For prey too large to swallow whole, the owl will tear pieces of meat from the prey, and will also tear shreds to feed nestlings. The male will hunt and bring food when the female cannot leave the nest. The species is a more generalist feeder, in contrast to say, the barn owls and is accordingly itinerant, remaining in a given region to hunt for a few weeks or months, then moving on when the local prey is no longer plentiful or easy to catch.



Behaviour:

The calls are generally typical, musical eagle-owl hoots. Generally the male call with two hoots: "Hooo hooopoooo" and the female answers with three, with less stress on the middle note: "Hooo hoo hooo". The young do not hoot till effectively adult, but from a very young age they will hiss threateningly and snap their beaks castanet-like if alarmed. These sounds they make throughout life, generally in a threatening attitude with head down and wings spread sideways to present their upper surfaces forward, umbrella-like. They might present such behaviour either as a challenge to rival owls or when defending nest or young against enemies.

As with all owls this species, when detected, is subject to daylight harassment by local birds. In the Gauteng area its main and extremely loud tormentor is the Go-away bird. Spotted eagle-owls are regular bathers and during summer thunderstorms may be seen on tree limbs or on the ground with spread wings.

Reproduction:

Spotted eagle-owls are monogamous, but will take a new mate shortly after the loss of a partner if death occurs. They are able to breed at around one year of age. They usually make their nest on the ground but have been known to nest on man-made structures such as window ledges of buildings or in owl boxes, preferring large cavities. Breeding begins typically towards the end of July continuing to the first weeks of February. The female lays two to four eggs and does the incubation, leaving the nest only to eat what the male has brought for food.

The incubation period lasts approximately 32 days. Spotted eagle-owlets will jump out of a nest that is off the ground at about five weeks of age and spend about ten days on the ground before they can fly. During this time, the owlets learn essential skills by mock-hunting and catching smaller prey such as insects. The parents still support feed the young owls during this stage by bringing larger prey such as rodents for the owlets to feed on. Owlets make a rasping noise when they are hungry that can be heard by the parents over far distances to alert them to the owlets location.

The young owls can fly at around seven weeks of age, but continue to stay with the parents for several weeks after they have fledged. They have a life span of up to 10 years in the wild and up to 20 in captivity.

