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Boobook summer diet

Southern Boobooks hunt insects and birds, mainly in the forest canopy, grass or in bushes. At sundown one male would leave his day roost, some 250 m from his incubating female, and hunt low bushes on his way to the nest, then meet her for their first contact that night. He crashed into low foliage after small passerines like pardalotes and fairy-wrens that had gone into cover at dusk, making a crack when he pitched into the bushes. He often caught a bird, continued toward the nest and delivered the body to his incubating female.

Boobooks also snatched spiders off tree limbs, perched on a limb and stripped off bark to peer underneath or caught insects such as moths in mid-air. They sat in a treetop and watched the night sky, then flew out to intercept moths, flipping backwards and shooting out their feet to snare one. They caught bats in the same way, pulled stick insects from the outer foliage of eucalypts, often hanging upside down to do so. They took centipedes and grasshoppers from the ground and tended to hunt more invertebrates on warm nights when invertebrates were moving and visible. On cold nights, they caught more birds and mammals. Riegert and Fuchs (2004) found the same thing with Common Kestrels in Europe. Mean temperature was positively correlated with the abundance of insect prey found in their diet.

Observations can give some idea of what owls eat, but a more thorough analysis comes from adding prey remains and owl castings that owls shake out of their throats at dusk and drop onto leaf litter. In winter these pellets looked like smaller versions of the Spotted Owl pellets mentioned above, oblong packages of grey felt, packed with fur, bone and feathers and the size of a joint on your thumb (see Figure 10.1).