



Rat poison almost kills Zeekoevlei owl!

Text by Helen Lockhart and images by Helen Lockhart and Dagny Warmerdam

At the beginning of June Dagny discovered one of our resident male spotted eagle owls, weak and sick, on the ground in a garden in Skipper's End. She called Dalton who arrived to assess the owl – he was able to pick the bird up quite easily, which indicated just how sick it was and he also suspected that it was suffering from concussion.



Dagny and Dalton wrapped the owl in a towel and Dagny drove it through to the Cape Exotic Animal Hospital in Durbanville. X-rays showed that the owl had internal bleeding in his chest, which was as a result of secondary poisoning from eating a poisoned rodent. As apex predators, owls can eat a number of rats and mice in a night and, if these have been poisoned, the poison will build up in the owl's body and it will slowly bleed to death.

Our owl was in a critical condition and stayed with the vet for a week, receiving treatment, including Vitamin K injections. After that he spent two weeks being rehabilitated by Mike Amira, the Owl Box Man. Happily, our owl fully recovered and was released back into his home territory in Zeekoevlei on 14 June 2019. He can often be heard calling at dawn and dusk around the yacht club area.

Keep our wildlife safe

Our neighbourhood would be barren and silent without the diverse wildlife that makes it such a unique and special place to live.



Emergency numbers

If you find a sick or injured owl (or other wild animal) contact the environmental rangers who are on duty 24/7. **Tel: 083-499-1717.**

Mike Amira, the Owlbox Man, builds owl boxes, aviaries and bat boxes. He also rehabilitates all kinds of bird species for release back into the wild.
theowlboxman.co.za

The Cape Exotic Animal Hospital (CEAH) treats exotic pets such as pet birds, reptiles, rabbits, and rodents. They also treat a wide variety of small and large wildlife species. **www.ceah.co.za | Tel: 021 975 0708**



Why do we need owls?



These beautiful birds keep rats and mice under control and the food chain in balance. They add to the magic of night with their haunting calls. Let's keep them safe.

Threats to owls

- Human ignorance and lack of knowledge is one of the main threats – there are many superstitions about owls, including the belief that owls are evil and bring death. In some cultures owls are a symbol of wisdom – let's be wise like owls!
- Rat poison
- Cars at night
- Dogs and cats, which kill chicks when they are on the ground

Rat poison kills owls ... and other animals

Rat poison doesn't only kill rats and mice. It can also kill your dog or cat, and even your child if it is easily accessible.

Scientists in Cape Town have recently discovered that rat poison is killing our wildlife. They found "five different commercially available rat poisons in the livers of 81% of the predators we tested. Predators included common ones such as genets, Cape Eagle owls, and water mongooses, and rarer ones such as caracals, otters, and a honey badger. The detection of rat poison in otters is especially interesting because it suggests that poisons used on land can make their way into the city's streams, wetlands and estuaries".

(www.news24.com/Green/News/how-we-found-out-that-rat-poisons-are-killing-wildlife-in-cape-town-20190530)
Otters, genets, caracals, water mongooses, and owls all live in and around Zeekoevlei and Rondevlei.

Be wise - rethink what you use in your home and garden

We urge all Zeekoevlei residents to rethink the use of poisons and toxic chemicals and to use more environmentally responsible alternatives wherever possible. Given that we share our neighbourhood with so many wild animals that are susceptible to poison, we should avoid rodent poisons and toxic chemicals at all times.

Natural pest control - Owls being introduced to control rodent populations

SA deploys owls to fight rat problem in townships

www.news24.com/Green/News/SA-deploys-owls-to-fight-rat-problem-in-townships-20141026

Owls conscripted to fight rats

www.joburg.org.za/play_/Pages/Play%20in%20Joburg/Culture%20and%20Heritage/Links/Owls-conscripted-to-fight-rats.aspx

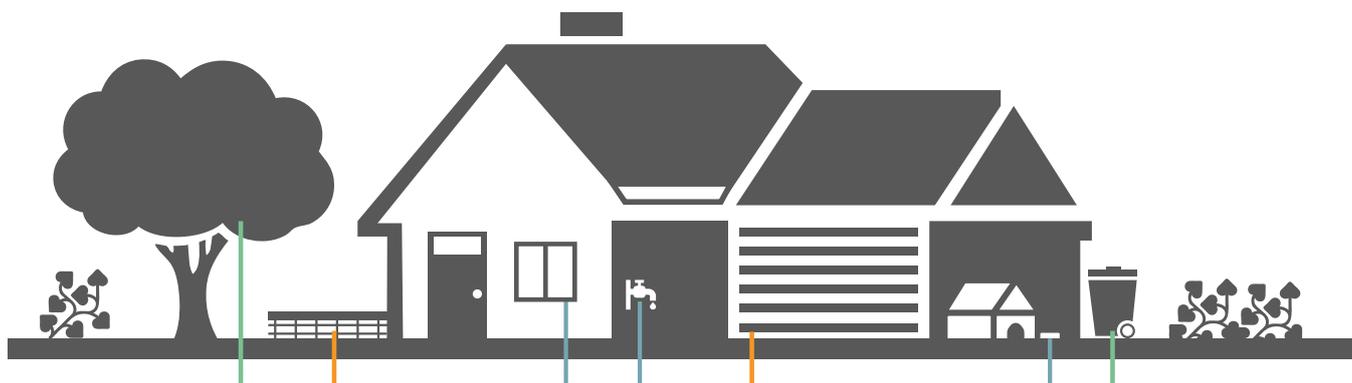
Township Owl Box Project

<http://ecosolutions.co.za/giving-back/township-owl-box-project>

A few 'good news' stories about owls being introduced by schools and businesses to control rodent populations.

Responsible rodent control measures

Rats can enter your home through an opening the size of a R1 coin. The most effective way to prevent a home rodent infestation is to keep them outside. Seal all holes in roofs, walls, foundations, and sheds. Denying access to their 3 basic needs - food, water and shelter - will greatly reduce the chance of rodents in your home.



Vegetation

Cut trees back about a metre away from the roof and remove ivy. Don't put cooked food in compost. Toss compost frequently.

Kitchen

Keep your home clean and don't leave food lying around in the open, which will tempt rodents. Store your food in airtight containers.

Doors and windows

Should be closed when not in use. Doors should have sweeps installed. Provide tight fitting covers on cat/dog flaps.

Standing water

Provides rodents with essential hydration. Check outside faucets and gutters for leaks and puddles.

Food sources

Pet food should not be left sitting outside. Feed small amounts of birdseed at a time and bring feeders in at night.

Garbage

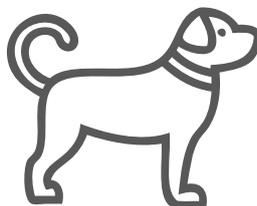
Should be stored in a strong container with a tight lid. Never leave plastic bags of trash sitting outside.

Stay away from:



Sticky traps:

or glue boards cause horrific suffering and other animals get caught in them including songbirds.



Snap traps:

Mouse traps used outdoors can maim and harm other animals.



Pesticides:

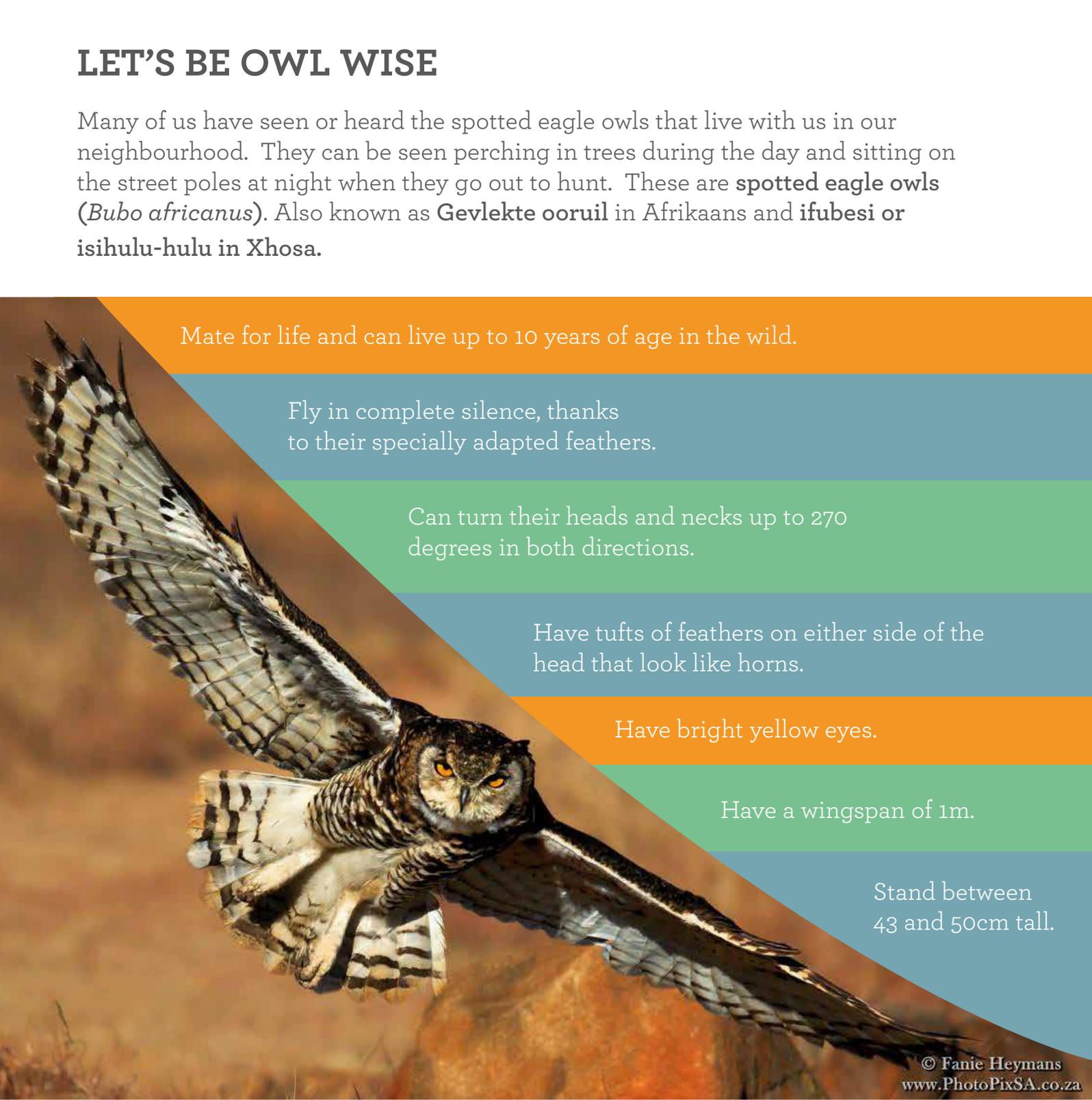
Rat poison kills birds and wildlife, not just rats. When an owl or other eats a poisoned rat, they too become ill and die from secondary poisoning.

Alternative rat traps:

- Put out essential oils like peppermint, eucalyptus and citronella – rodents hate the smell of these!
- Slice up an onion and put it areas where the rodents have been seen.
- Use humane traps – bait such as cheese and peanut butter can be used to attract the rodents into the trap. Once caught you can release the rodents away from your home.
- Use a deep bucket with bait in the bottom – the rodents can't get out once they're in the bucket. You can then take them elsewhere and release them.
- If you absolutely have to use poison, then use it in a contained area where the rodents cannot escape after feeding and cannot be caught by predators such as owls and cats.

LET'S BE OWL WISE

Many of us have seen or heard the spotted eagle owls that live with us in our neighbourhood. They can be seen perching in trees during the day and sitting on the street poles at night when they go out to hunt. These are **spotted eagle owls** (*Bubo africanus*). Also known as **Gevlekte ooruil** in Afrikaans and **ifubesi** or **isihulu-hulu** in Xhosa.



Mate for life and can live up to 10 years of age in the wild.

Fly in complete silence, thanks to their specially adapted feathers.

Can turn their heads and necks up to 270 degrees in both directions.

Have tufts of feathers on either side of the head that look like horns.

Have bright yellow eyes.

Have a wingspan of 1m.

Stand between 43 and 50cm tall.

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- Males and females look the same, but the females are bigger.
- Males call with a double hoot - 'hoo-hooooee' while females reply with a triple hoot - 'hoo-hoo-hooee'.
- Hunt mostly at night and sleep during the day.
- Eat rats, mice, shrews, frogs, snakes, lizards, insects and even small birds.
- Owls are not evil or omens of death. They are birds of prey and play an vital role in the food chain.
- It is illegal to capture and keep spotted eagle owls - all owls are protected by the Convention on Illegal Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).