

# Breeding Distribution and Diet Composition of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (SCOPOLI, 1769), (Aves: Strigiformes) in the North-Western Upper Thracian Plain (Bulgaria)

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**Abstract:** The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba gutatta*) is a relatively widespread breeding bird in the settlements of the north-western part of the Upper Thracian Plain (91% of visited UTM squares of 10-km grid, n=11). The small mammals predominate in the diet, having 100% occurrence and forming 97% by the number and biomass. Birds, amphibians and reptiles are a negligible part of the food. The voles (*Microtus* spp.) are the most frequent prey (32% of number) and form the larger contribution to the biomass (54%). These, the white-toothed shrews (*Crocidura suaveolens* and *C. leucodon*) and the mice (*Mus* spp.) reach up to 86% by number and 88% by the biomass. The average food-niche breadth in the studied localities is  $3.31 \pm 0.57$  (n=5). It correlates positively with the wetland area within the hunting territory and with the proportions in the diet of Miller's Water Shrew (*Neomys anomalus*), Harvest Mouse (*Micromys minutus*) and Water Vole (*Arvicola terrestris*), inhabiting these areas. The importance of the voles (*Microtus* spp.) in the diet increases with the elevation of localities above the sea level and causes a narrowing of the food-niche.

**Key words:** Barn Owl, *Tyto alba*, breeding distribution, diet composition, Bulgaria