

BLOCK 9



HOW BIRDS CARE FOR THEIR YOUNG



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Agriculture in Central Europe started to develop during so called Neolithic revolution which took place about 5000 BC. Controlled ability to cultivate and breed animals has become an incredibly important achievement in the whole human history. It allowed to gather food supplies which resulted with humans turning from nomadic to sedentary lifestyle. In the next stage it gave an origin for creating urban areas. Agricultural areas is spectacular example of forming landscapes by humans. It is the effect of so called anthropogenic changes.

Agricultural areas have some special characteristics called physiographic features, such as: large open space, flat or slightly undulating terrain surface, seasonal land cover variability, low and dispersed buildings, small human population. Agricultural lands, which cover about 60% of our country's area, can be divided into 3 main economic use types:

- arable lands – terrains used for cultivation of different kind of plants,
- meadows and pastures – areas permanently covered with grass, used in animals breeding process,
- plantations, including orchards – lands covered with the same type of plants for many years (e.g. trees, fruit bushes).

Plants and animals which occur here are introduced and controlled mainly by humans. It is also specific to apply different kinds of exertions in order to improve cultivation: soil reclamation, land reclamation, fertilization and plant growing agents. In such areas there are created specific biocenosis (a set of organisms locally occurring together, they are related in different ways with their habitat and with each other), so called agrocenosis which main characteristics are weakened self-regulation possibilities and substantial simplification regarding composition of species than in comparison with natural biocenosis.

Sometimes chicks themselves engage in anti-predator defences. Hoopoe chicks, nesting in a tree hollow, squirt out a foul-smelling substance produced by the modified uropygial gland or cloacal contents. The ejected substance can travel the distance of up to 50 centimetres. Fulmars, on the other hand, especially young ones, attack predators with regurgitated smelly liquid.

How to behave in the vicinity of a nest?

Under no circumstances should you approach birds' nests or disturb their inhabitants. If you come across a nest, it is advisable to immediately walk away, since the presence of a human may prompt the parents to abandon the clutch (eggs, particularly during the early stage of incubation, are most at risk). Additionally, we need to account for the fact that other animals may be observing us, like inquisitive corvids, who have been known to take advantage of researchers' presence to plunder the studied nests. Birds treat humans as a threat to their offspring, hence their attacks on people in parks during spring. Hooded crows are particularly



aggressive when young fledglings, still inept fliers, leave the nests. It is important not to take home any young birds unless they are visibly weak, hurt, naked or in immediate danger. In the latter case it's best to move the bird to a safe spot nearby. It's a misconception that parents will abandon a chick that has been handled by a human. If the bird is not fully feathered and the nest it came from is impossible to locate, transporting it promptly to the nearest wild animal rehabilitation centre is the best course of action. If the bird is hurt, weak or cold, which is quite a likely scenario for young and not fully-fledged chicks, it should be warmed up. You can start by using the warmth of your hands and later transport the chick to a small cardboard or plastic box lined thickly with woollen or fleece cloth. For additional protection the chick might be placed in a warm sock or glove, so that only its head sticks out.

Do not use cotton wool or any other material prone to fraying to line the box with the chick as you are running the risk of its leg getting entangled in the threads, which can lead to a serious injury. When the bird is warm and snug, it can be watered with previously boiled and cooled water. If the bird is very weak and cold, the water should be lukewarm. It's safest to administer liquids using a small paintbrush dipped in water and releasing drop by drop on the lower mandible whilst observing if the bird swallows the liquid. In the case of a very exhausted bird, there's no need to open the birds beak – it is enough to drip water on the slit between mandibles or on its tip, and the water will trickle inside the beak. A warm and watered bird should be transported as quickly as possible to a wild animal rehabilitation centre, as mentioned above.

Remember to wash your hands thoroughly after you've been handling chicks!



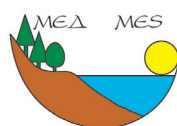
FIG. 1. Owl pellets





This material was prepared as part of the project „We live in harmony with nature. The educational program for teachers of pre-school and primary education”. The project involved selected non-governmental organizations involved in the protection of birds associated as part of the international BirdLife International federation. In addition to the National Society for Bird Protection, which ran the project, the Spanish Ornithological Society (SEO), the Slovak Ornithological Society (SOS), the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES), the Czech Ornithological Society (CSO) and BirdWatch Ireland (BWI) were involved. The University of Gdańsk became the substantive partner of the project responsible for creating materials for teachers.

BirdWatch Ireland is a non-governmental organization with a public benefit status, dealing with the protection of wild birds and the places where they live. The aim of the Society is to preserve the natural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. BirdWatch Ireland is the Irish partner of the global federation of bird protection societies - BirdLife International.



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