

LITTLE OWL

athenenoctua

FactFile

Length: 21cm –23cm

Wingspan: 54cm –58cm

Weight: 0.15kg –0.23kg

Habitat: Open country but avoiding dense woodland.

Preferred nest sites are holes in trees, walls and the ground – including rabbit holes.

Little owls can start breeding when only a year old. A single clutch can contain as many as 6 eggs which take about 4 weeks to hatch. The young leave the nest at 21 days and are fully fledged at 5 weeks but the parents continue to feed them for a further month.

The aptly named Little Owl is Britain's smallest owl with a wingspan of less than 60cms and weighing only up to 230gms, but its aggressive expression, accentuated by pronounced eye ridges and a relatively undeveloped facial disk, makes this tiny predator appear fierce out of all proportion to its size.

For most of the year the Little Owl's diet consists mainly of large insects, earthworms and a few small mammals. However, during the breeding season, this is supplemented with small birds such as sparrows and thrushes.

Whilst the Little Owl is now native to this country, it is only a recent arrival having been introduced by man in the late nineteenth century. The first breeding success was recorded in Rutland in 1891 following the importation by Lord Lilford of a great many owls from Holland. The population grew rapidly, reaching a peak in about 1930.

Since then the population declined, due largely to loss of habitat, pesticide poisoning and – because of its largely diurnal habits – persecution and collisions with road traffic



A tiny but effective predator.

