

Eurasian Eagle Owl's Behavior of Eating Dead Chick in a Nest¹

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수리부엉이의 둥지에서 어미의 죽은 새끼 섭식 행동¹

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ABSTRACT

We photographed a nest of *Bubo bubo kiauutschensis* in Icheon, Gyeonggi-do, which had laid 3 eggs and was incubating the eggs. Although 2 chicks were hatched from the 2 eggs, one of them disappeared and the other of them died in March 8, 2007. After that, the parent bird ate the dead chick and left the nest abandoning breeding the next day.

KEY WORD : ICHEON-SI, GYEONGGI-DO, HATCHING, ABANDONING BREEDING

요약

경기도 이천에서 3개의 알을 산란하여 포란 중인 수리부엉이 둥지를 촬영하였다. 2개의 알에서 새끼가 부화하였으나 1마리는 사라졌고, 2007년 3월 8일 남은 1마리가 사망한 후 어미는 죽은 새끼를 먹었으며, 이튿날 어미는 번식을 포기하고 둥지를 떠났다.

주요어 : 경기도 이천, 부화, 번식 포기

INTRODUCTION

There is hardly any record for Eurasian Eagle Owl inhabiting in Korea due to the restraint of research into the nocturnal animal. The hitherto research into the domestic Eurasian Eagle Owl is nothing but the mere subject of "Eating behavior pattern of Eurasian Eagle Owls living in different environments".

Therefore, we have relied largely on foreign documents for information on the ecology and behaviors of Eurasian Eagle Owl. In this circumstance, KBS and the environment special team jointly examined a significant ecological fact

while conducting the research(February~March 2007) into the ecology of Eurasian Eagle Owl, which we will introduce here as a break news.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We succeeded in examining and filming the fact first time in Korea that a female Eurasian Eagle Owl actually eats her own baby chick if it dies. The nest was located at a hill in Beksa-myun, Icheon-si, Gyeonggi-do with three eggs in it to be brooded over for hatching.

Two of them were hatched, one of which disappeared

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for an unknown reason. The female owl was brooding over the last egg for hatching with a single baby chick left in the nest.

In the meantime, the only baby chick died on March 8, 2007, which is 10~12 days after being hatched. The cause for death is presumed to be mostly due to the interference of dogs that joggers and mountain climbers carry around as the nest was between rocks.

The fact that it rained continuously on previous day and that the mother owl left the nest to avoid the interference of humans, which dramatically decreased the body temperature of the baby chick, is attributed to its death. After its apparent death, the mother owl sent a signal to the chick only to receive no reaction from it and then she started to eat the dead chick. She ate half the dead chick for about five minutes and left the nest for a while before she came back to sit on the remaining egg for brooding.

The following day, when production team reexamined the nest the female owl had already left. Presumably, she determined instinctively that the egg was unfertilized one

and that there was no need to sit on brooding.

From time to time, baby chicks of rapacious birds eat their own siblings(usually the eldest eats the youngest) for survival. However, it has never been reported in domestic research that mother rapacious birds eat their own chicks. It is also rarely reported in overseas as well. The reason is that there have not been a lot of researches into rapacious birds for one thing and more importantly, it is difficult in reality and thus rare to make a continuous examination of a nest of nocturnal birds like Eurasian Eagle Owl for research purpose(photo.1~9).

Then why on earth did the Eurasian Eagle Owl, a typical rapacious bird, eat its own chick? It is presumed to replenish energy for propagation of its population. In particular, rapacious birds like Eurasian Eagle Owl that lays 2~3 eggs most likely suffer from nutritious deficiency and thus eating a dead chick is allegedly an energy securing strategy for the rest of remaining chicks. Actually, just one or two eggs out of two or three grow to maturity. It is apparently the effective and efficient

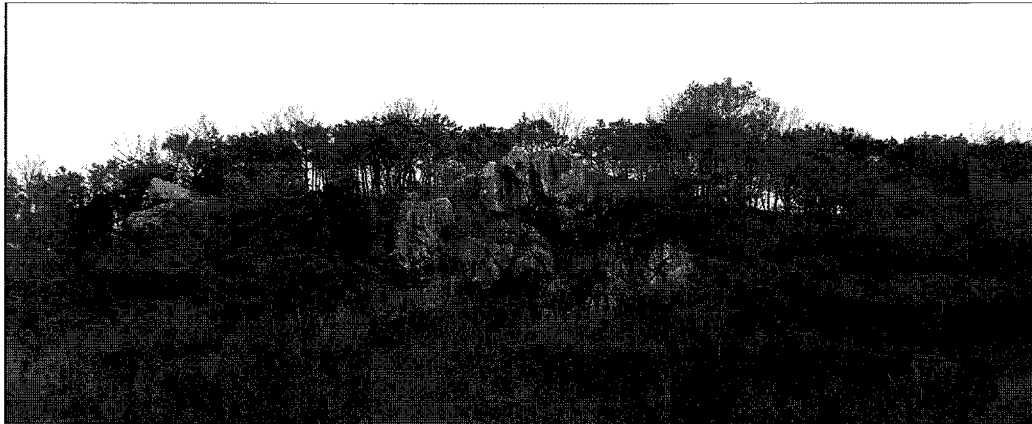


Photo 1. General view of the nest at Icheon

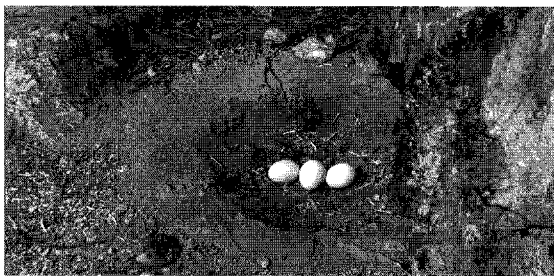


Photo 2. Three eggs in the nest at Icheon



Photo 3. The nest at Icheon (fifth day after hatching)



Photo 4. Chick and egg in the nest at Icheon 2007



Photo 5. Female checking the chick at Icheon 2007



Photo 6. Female embracing the chick at Icheon 2007

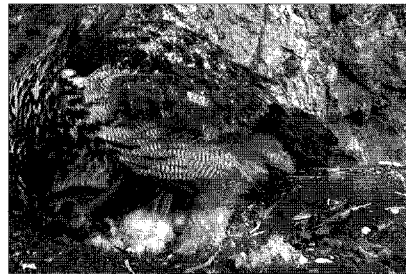


Photo 7. Female eating the dead chick at Icheon 2007



Photo 8. Female eating the dead chick at Icheon 2007

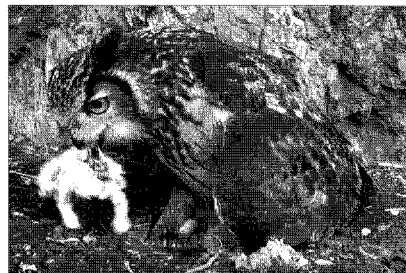


Photo 9. Female leaving the nest, carrying the dead chick at Icheon 2007

nurturing strategy for Eurasian Eagle Owl to concentrate on a few surviving healthy chicks(Cochet, G., 2006; Duncan, J.R., 2003)

However, this is just a single case of examining and filming a Eurasian Eagle Owl eating its own chick and thus a sustained further research based on actual case analysis is expected to reveal more facts on its propagating strategy.

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