

BARRED OWL EATS HATCHLING TURTLE

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Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) are well known as opportunistic feeders, including many species of vertebrates and invertebrates in their diet (Bent 1938). On 7 July 1987, I prepared a male Barred Owl as a skeletal specimen for the Mississippi Museum of Natural Sciences collection. The bird had been found dead next to U.S. highway 82 in Pickens Co., Alabama, in October of 1980, and had probably been struck by a vehicle. At the time of its preparation, it weighed 643.8 g. There was almost no fat on the bird. Its testes measured approximately 6 mm in length. In the stomach I found remains of a hatchling slider (*Chrysemys concinna*), a common species frequently seen basking on logs in sloughs (Conant 1978). Its carapace width was 31.4 mm. I preserved the turtle, along with the owl's skeletal remains, as MMNS # Ab5029.

In reviewing the literature on Barred Owl food habits, I found amphibians and reptiles mentioned frequently. Furthermore, I once saw a Barred Owl flying with a snake in its mouth, although I was not able to identify the species. Cahn and Kemp (1930) list the leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*) as the only amphibian or reptile they found in the diet of Barred Owls. Hamerstrom and Hamerstrom (1951) found unidentified toads, frogs, and a snake. Mendall (1944) found a salamander, frogs, and a garter snake. Wilson (1938) reported amphibians as food items. Turtles are mentioned only rarely. Bent (1938) gave "flesh of a terrapin" as a food item. Karalus and Eckert (1974), writing of the northern subspecies (*S.v. varia*), characterize it as "one of the few owls to bother catching and eating turtles." They state that "...Box tortoises often fall prey... Terrapins are taken by this owl without hesitation, though not without peril, as some owls have lost chunks of their toes to turtles before being able to kill them."

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