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Title of research project	Natural rodent control by Barn owls <i>Tyto alba</i> in the face of local superstition

Abstract

Owls face direct persecution in Africa because of the myths and beliefs of the locals who believe owls are used in witchcraft. Habitat loss and secondary poisoning also affect owl populations. Communities ignore or are ignorant of the ecosystem service provided by owls through rodent control. Biological control is an essential, ecosystem service in agricultural systems where rodents potentially threaten livelihoods. The project seeks to investigate issues on rodent proliferation and distribution and to build a framework for the integration and appreciation of owls through investigating and highlighting the magnitude of their effectiveness in rodent control. The diversity and abundance of rodents, rodent-eating raptors and carnivores will be assessed in communal areas adjacent to a protected area and in the protected area. The home ranges of the owls will be assessed using tracking devices. The diet of owls will be assessed from regurgitated pellets. Due to the persecution owls experience in communal areas, it is expected that they will be in low abundance with high rodent populations. The project will take a participatory approach to create a holistic approach addressing ecological, conservation and agricultural issues and hence ensuring improved food security.