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8TH CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

RĪGA, 27–30 AUGUST 2011

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HOW DOES PLASTICINE VS. COATED PLASTICINE EGG USE INFLUENCE THE SURVIVAL OF ARTIFICIAL GROUND NESTS?

Presented by **Kornélia Kurucz**

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Artificial nests are widely used to investigate relative rates of nest predation in birds. In most nest predation experiments with artificial nests, plasticine eggs are often used beside real eggs in order to better identify nest predators based on their tooth or beak marks. However, the application of plasticine eggs in ground nests is often heavily criticised, because the smell of plasticine is thought to affect the results by attracting nest predators searching based on olfactory cues. Haskell (1999, *Anim. Behaviour*) in his experiment coated plasticine eggs with a thin rubber layer, but this method did not spread. In our methodological study we aimed to answer the following questions: How does the survival rate of ground nests vary if we place one plasticine (P) vs. one coated plasticine egg (C) next to one quail egg (Q) applying quail-quail egg combination as control? What is the share of different predator types (small or large mammal or bird) in the predation events of different nest types? The study was carried out in the interior part of intensively managed wheat fields in South Hungary during summer in 2010. Artificial nests with 15 randomly placed egg combinations were monitored in ten independent wheat fields. Analysing the Mayfield nest survival rates, we found that nests with quail and plasticine eggs experienced significantly higher predation than those containing two quail eggs or those with quail and coated plasticine eggs (the latter two combinations did not differ significantly). Almost the half of the nests was depredated, mostly by small mammals (69%). The higher predation of nests containing plasticine eggs can be related to its smell thereby attracting more small mammals than nests with natural and coated plasticine eggs. Therefore, we recommend using real eggs with coated plasticine eggs instead of plasticine eggs, since the latter overestimate predation rates, while coated plasticine eggs still allow identification of predator types.

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