



# Four Flies Flash

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*Spotted Eagle Owl*

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*"Indigenous unimproved"  
Tuli cows*

## **Significance of the owl species**

Owls are one of the oldest species of vertebrate animals in existence. Fossils, dating back 60 million years, show that the bird has changed very little in all that time and that they can be found on all continents except Antarctica.

Seen as either the symbol of good fortune, or as the omen of impending disaster, owls are both revered and feared. Owls are mainly nocturnal birds and they are also raptors. Using their unique abilities and special adaptations they hunt insects, spiders, earthworms, snails and crabs, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, rodents and other small mammals for food.

Owls are truly exceptional birds and they are perfectly adapted to survive:

- They have extraordinary night vision. The forward facing eyes give it binocular vision and the bird can thus see objects in three dimensions. Added to that is the ability to turn its very flexible neck 270 degrees. Contrary to popular belief, owls are not blind in strong light.
- Because owls are mainly active at night, they have a highly developed auditory system. Their ears are extremely sensitive at certain frequencies, enabling them to hear even the slightest movement of their prey. The unique ears also allow the bird to determine direction and even make corrections in flight.
- The beak is designed specifically to grip and tear prey. It is short, curved, down-facing and hooked at the end. The upper edge of the lower bill and the lower edge of the upper bill overlap in a scissor-like fashion, enabling it to cut through the tissue of prey.
- The four toes of the owl's foot are used to capture their prey. The talons have very sharp claws. Feet have a locking mechanism, keeping the toes locked around the prey without the need for the muscles to remain contracted.
- Silent flight enables the owl to capture prey by stealth. The comb-like or fringe-like leading edge of the primary feathers breaks down turbulence in micro-turbulences. This effectively muffles the sound of air rushing over the wing surface.

Having these remarkable hunting abilities one can only revel at the effect these astonishing birds can have on a destructive rodent population. To a farmer that can only mean... *good fortune.*

- *The Owl Pages* -

## **Editorial**

As expected of a dedicated emerging farmer, I recently read extensively about cattle. Although my niece said cattle farming is easy, as bull plus cow equals calf, I suspected that there must be something more to this business. It seemed that I have been correct. I learned of numerous impressive terms and was not surprised to find as many different opinions. What interested me most, however, was a characteristic of our "unimproved" indigenous cattle, of which there are only four or five breeds. That is their ability to thrive in the most difficult circumstances. Unlike "improved" breeds they do not need to be

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## Contact us

Miemie and Wim  
van Loggerenberg  
[www.4flies.co.za](http://www.4flies.co.za)  
[miemie@4flies.co.za](mailto:miemie@4flies.co.za)  
Cell: 083 703 1166 or  
083 703 1287



pampered with special food, medicines and hormones. Having survived for hundreds of years, they go about eating their grass, giving birth to strong healthy calves, raising them on an abundance of milk and produce tasty healthy meat in this process.

That made me think about the human race and I wondered how many "*unimproved un-pampered indigenous*" people we have in our country. You will not recognize them by the colour of their skin or the size of their house or the job they have. You will, however, appreciate their capacity to adjust and survive in precarious times, to go about their daily business, and to thereby make South Africa an exceptional place.

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## Four Flies News

1. **Our dams were stocked again with 1kg – 1.5kg rainbow trout.**
2. Visit us at [www.4flies.co.za](http://www.4flies.co.za) to check availability online. You can also conveniently book online.

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