

A GOOD OWL DAY IN NEW JERSEY

GEORGE B. REYNARD

Heading for Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge during a drizzle-wet snow early on the morning of December 20, 1964, did not seem to be the most prudent action, but the forecast had indicated a warming trend, and in any case the weather couldn't get much worse. The day turned out to be a most interesting one.

As Stephen Harty and I rounded the slight curve on the north dike, east impoundment, it seemed a good place to look for a Snowy Owl, and there, in the middle of the untracked road, was one of these birds, making Owl Number One for the day and a good "lifer" for me. The bird watched us with intermittent interest as we observed it through the scope. As Steve and I continued along the dike, the bird flew twice briefly and then alighted in some snow-steaked grass clumps in the north marsh area. The owl followed our movements without apparent fear.

After stops to watch two adult Bald Eagles and an immature on the dikes or out on the ice, we were greeted by one and then two more Short-eared Owls in flopping, erratic flight. One of the pair gave a short harsh bark when close to the other in brief aerial jockeying. Several Rough-legged Hawks added their part to the pageant, with one being added to my tape recording collection as it gave its scratchy, descending cry from the top of a small scrubby tree by the center dike.

After scouting other areas of the Refuge, alive with Canada Greese, Blacks, Mallards, Green-winged Teal and a few Shovelers, to say nothing of the Mute Swans and numerous Great Blue Herons, we decided to go after a big owl day. Returning inland on the Lincoln Highway, we stopped to phone Edward Manners in Wenonah, but a negative report cancelled a possible trip to his area for Saw-whet Owls. Owl Number Three we secured with comparative ease at the Dickinson pine woods near Mt. Laurel, where six Long-eareds, thin and intently peering, checked us off on their list of many observers. With three species of owls now, and ten individuals, the next goal was Barn Owls at the usually reliable sycamore tree at the Friends' School in Moorestown. In the past this stop has been a "must" on Christmas Counts and May Roundups, but unfortunately the tree is threatened with removal. Harty's practiced toe scraped the bark just enough to bring out a pair of owls. They looked us over and quickly returned through the south hole entrance, unaware that they were Number Four.

Due to earlier commitments Steve and I had to separate and continue the hunt as time was available. Somewhat later, with about two hours of daylight remaining, I managed to resume the adventure, visiting the south area of the Armstrong Woods in Cinnaminson Township, where two young Great Horned

Owls had been seen in the spring of the year. Unknown to me, Steve had unsuccessfully scouted these woods, the northern area in particular, on his way back to Rancocas Woods. After concealing myself in a laurel thicket in the center of these woods, I gave my best imitations of a Great Horned Owl's song, but this produced no answering call or tufted owl heads. Lowering my sights a bit, I tried a series of Screech Owl whistles, tremulous and descending. A look aloft then showed that my first calls were not in vain, for "Bubo", species Number Five, was almost directly overhead, watching and listening with probable amusement.

Reports had reached me of possible owl calls in the Parry Woods, Branch Pike, also in Cinnaminson, but I had not previously checked this area myself. Just at dusk I stood in the border of cedar trees, and a few imitations brought a silent, shadowy form from somewhere. A lone Screech Owl then began singing its plaintive, sad, ascending and brokenly descending song, reacting to a presumed invasion of its domain.

A late phone call from my fellow huntsman revealed valiant but unrewarded efforts to hear the Great Horned Owl in several formerly inhabited woods. Two Screech Owls, however, had answered his imitation of that species.

Steve and I considered ourselves fortunate in this little roundup for birds generally nocturnal. We had seen six species of owls from dawn to dusk, with a total of sixteen individuals seen or heard. The best, of course, was our Arctic visitor, the Snowy Owl, taking refuge at Brigantine, and in the snow!

105 Midway, Riverton, N. J.

OWL PELLETS WANTED

Donald S. Heintzelman, 629 Green Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania 18102, is making a continuing study of the food habits of birds of prey. In this connection he is requesting that owl pellets be forwarded to him for analysis. The following collecting methods should be adhered to:

1. Collect only pellets of positive species origin.
2. Pellets should be placed in a brown paper bag, and the bag should then be stapled.
3. Each bag should contain pellets for one species at one location on one date.
4. Whole pellets should be placed in bags separate from broken pellets.
5. The date, species, roost location, and name and address of the collector should be marked in ink on the outside of each paper bag.

Collectors will, of course, be advised of the results of studies on owl pellets which they have submitted.