

ACCOMMODATION OF SCREECH OWLS TO PLAYBACK OF TAPE RECORDED CALLS

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A technique for locating and censusing Screech Owls (*Otus asio*) is the use of tape recorded calls. Although the method provides good initial results, its long-term reliability is questionable because of potential accommodation by the Screech Owl to the taped call. While studying the response of Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) to tape recorded calls (Cassinia 58:25), I investigated accommodation of Screech Owls along the same census route in Susquehanna County during August, 1979.

The study route was 45 miles long, with Screech Owl calling stations located at one-mile intervals. Beginning on 11 August the route was censused a total of five times, with a one-day interval between each census. Duration of calls was limited to four minutes per station except on days four and five, on which it was extended in an effort to elicit responses from observed Screech Owls.

On the first census Screech Owl responses were heard at 9 stations (20.1%). On the second census responses were heard at 5 of the original 9 stations, plus at 1 additional station (13.6% of original and 55.5% of census responses). On the third and fourth nights only three and two responses (6.8% and 4.5% respectively) were obtained. No Screech Owls were heard at any of the other stations. On census five the calling time was extended to 10 minutes per station in an effort to obtain more responses. Only one Screech Owl response (2.3%) was obtained. The nature of this single response is of interest. Within 1.5 minutes after I started the taped call sequence I observed this owl fly into a tree located about 15 meters away. I continued the calling for another 8.5 minutes before the owl responded with a brief warble call. Thereafter I again played the call for another 25 minutes, but received no additional response.

The observed behavior plus the census results strongly suggest that Screech Owls do in fact rapidly accommodate to playback of tape recorded calls.

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