

# Further Great Gray Owl Records

Compiled by C. Stuart Houston, Saskatoon



Photo by Jenny Minky  
Great Gray Owl, Sept. 5, 1960

When I visited the High Hill district northeast of Kelvington on January 2, 1960, to band the Barred Owl captured by the Waycheshens, Anton and Steve Waycheshen reported that a Great Gray Owl had been seen the previous day at nearby Warner Lake. Although a search that day failed to disclose the Great Gray, it was seen again the next day by the Waycheshens. Thereafter, it was seen in the same area nearly every Saturday night all winter.

That this bird may have remained in the area to nest is suggested by the following information forwarded by P. J. (Bob) Fraser of Kelvington. On September 5, 1960, four Great Gray Owls (presumably a family group) appeared at the farm of Arvid Lindgren, five miles north and three miles east of Kelvington where Miss Jenny Minky photographed one of these rare owls resting on a pump handle. Miss Minky felt that all four birds were young birds "as they were not very strong on the wing." They flew from the farmyard down to a creek where they lit on some low scrub. At the time, she could hear other owls calling from up the creek and presumed these to be parent birds.

Bill Richards forwarded another report that Great Gray Owls are seen winter and summer on the farm of Jens Knutson in the Etomami district, 20 miles southeast of Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan. Ron Lafreniere of Saskatoon saw these birds several times while visiting the farm — including one seen at 100 feet while he was hunting moose there in the fall of 1960. A Great Gray was found dead in a mink trap by Knutson in the winter of 1959-60.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See also the report of a Great Gray Owl seen north of La Ronge by Douglas and Dorothy Wade, page 10 of this issue.

## Screech Owl at Regina

by Bill Fleming, Regina

On October 17, 1961, the first reported sighting of a Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) in the Regina district for 20 years was recorded. Rick Sanderson and I sighted a Screech Owl sitting about nine feet off the ground in a small spruce tree in the grounds of a large home on the edge of the Regina Waterfowl Park. Mr. Elmer Fox later confirmed the sighting, although he was unable to take pictures because of the lack of light and a telephoto lens. The owl, a bird in the red phase, was gone the next day as the weather turned cold.

The Screech Owl is a small owl which occurs in two colour phases, irrespective of age, sex, or season—grey and rufous. One is rich brown and white with much fine pattern giving a grey effect, the other has the brown replaced by bright rufous, almost brick red.

In western Canada, the Screech Owl is commonly found only in southern Manitoba and British Columbia. Records for Regina are few. Miss Margaret Belcher in **Birds of Regina** (1961. Spec. Pub. No. 3

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The percentage of survival was further reduced to 16 by August 30. Although disease accounted for most of the larval loss, it appeared probable that some of the larvae were destroyed by birds and predaceous insects.

Predation of the pupae also takes place. Frequently cocoons are torn open or totally removed. Many cocoons covered by snow which lodges in shelterbelts during the winter months, are chewed, and the pupae destroyed. These depredations appear to be the work of small rodents. In 1960, 118 cocoons containing pupae were marked in a box elder plantation and in two adjacent hedges. Few cocoons were lost before September 14, but between September 14 and September 28, all but two had been removed or destroyed. The cocoons, with few exceptions, had been torn from the stems and branches and carried away. Those destroyed on the trees had been torn open and the pupae removed. Pictures taken with a field camera triggered to 'planted' cocoons showed Black-billed Magpies (*Pica pica*) tearing at the cocoons to remove them from the trees. Similar depredations in previous years had also been attributed to magpies.

#### Other Factors

Infertility of the eggs and failure of larvae to hatch caused small population losses. In samples comprising more than 2000 eggs these losses were less than three per cent.

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S.N.H.S.) states that in March, 1904, a rufous specimen was taken at Regina for the Chicago Natural History Museum. In December, 1931, a specimen was taken at Tregarva (also rufous). Another was taken in March, 1934, by Mr. Fred Bard (this specimen being found in a store basement). Also Miss Belcher mentions a number of sight records: in December, 1932, a red-phased Screech Owl was seen by Mr. Bard; another was seen in November, 1935, by Knowles; and Mr. Bard identified an owl seen by Mrs. J. Couturier in the fall of 1940 as a red-phased Screech Owl. It is interesting that most of these birds had the rufous plumage.

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Besides that nest ¼ mile north of us, we had another family of flickers, in a post planted for that purpose in our yard. Now that's a lot of flickers in one year for our locality—in comparison with the past. The young flickers in our yard survived quite an experience. When they had begun to feather, our children along with some visiting youngsters filled the nest full of stones. When I went out into the yard the next morning, the adult was noisily flying about. I wondered at her behaviour. Then about noon my young daughter Theresa gave me an inkling of what had happened and I was able to remove the stones. The stones were in the nest from 8:00 p.m. until 12 noon the following day, and yet three of the four young survived.