

OBSERVATION AND SALVAGE OF GREAT HORNED OWL NEST

by C. Stuart Houston, Saskatoon

On March 13, 1965, Keith Ecklund found a Great Horned Owl sitting on her nest with one egg, one mile west of the Government Elevator, Saskatoon. Seven days later the parent owl was sitting closely on the nest and would not leave it when Keith climbed the tree, but on the March 27 visit, the nest contained two eggs. On April 18 there were two small downy young in the nest, one about four days older than the other. In a severe windstorm on May 6, the nest blew down, depositing the two young owls on the ground. The next morning Keith, with his friends Marvin and Joe Schmidt, nailed a wooden box in the tree and placed the nest material and the two young owls in it. The parent owls adapted readily to the new nest site, and had provided two young rabbits for the larder in the nestbox on May 11. I banded the young owls on May 14, and they were seen flying early in June. The record was completed when one was caught in a trap by Keith Thue at the Beaver Creek Game Farm, 10 and one-half miles south of the nest site on October 12, 1965, and the other was run over by a

car one-half mile south of where banded, and found by Joe Schmidt on October 16.

The Great Horned Owl is the first Saskatchewan species to nest each spring. Dr. John Richardson, recounting his Carlton observations of 1827 (Richardson and Swainson, 1831), stated that "It hatches in March and its young, two or three in number, are generally fledged in June." Later observations have amply confirmed this statement. For example, E. S. Wood found newly hatched young at Lower Rousay Lake near Yorkton on March 21, 1946; one young owl left this nest on June 8 (*in* Houston, 1949). [Lawrence Beckie reported owls incubating at -27°F . in late March, 1955 at Bladworth (*Blue Jay*, 13(2):11). Ed.] At Nipawin, Maurice Street observed successful incubation, beginning in late February, in spite of temperatures as low as -30°F . (62 degrees of frost!) (Houston and Street, 1959).

Even though Keith Ecklund's nest was not a particularly early one, the eggs were successfully incubated through unseasonable temperatures as low as -28°F . From March 15 to 29, Saskatoon airport meteorological station official low temperatures were all below zero, as follows: -6.0 ; -15.2 ; -17.5 ; -12.6 ; -19.8 ; -25.2 ; -18.4 ; -27.3 ; -28.4 ; -14.5 ; -12.5 ; -18.5 ; -20.3 ; -17.7 ; -15.9 (Fahrenheit).

We have previously on similar occasions moved young Horned Owls to another site nearby, such as another crow or magpie nest in the same bush, or even to a man-made (usually Horseman-made!) nest, without any interruption in their feeding by the parent owls. This is a worthwhile protection from ground predators when an owl's nest blows down, as in the present instance.



Photo by Joe Schmidt

Young Great Horned Owls in nest box



Photo by Dr. C. S. Houston

Great Horned Owl nest box

The record of this nest is submitted because it is unusually complete, and documents well the Horned Owl's amazing capacity for insulation and heat production — by which it is able to keep its eggs as much as 125 Fahrenheit degrees warmer than the environment.

LITERATURE CITED

- Houston, C. Stuart. 1949. The Birds of the Yorkton District, Saskatchewan. *Can. Field-Naturalist*, 63:215-41.
- Houston, C. Stuart, and Maurice G. Street. 1959. The Birds of the Saskatchewan River. Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Spec. Pub. No. 2.
- Richardson, John, and William Swainson. 1831 (Feb. 1832). *Fauna Boreali-Americana*, Vol. 2, The Birds. John Murray, London.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLERS ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

by G. A. Poynter, Victoria, B.C.

The interesting article by Mr. F. H. Brazier on Black-throated Gray Warblers in Saskatchewan published in the September, 1965 *Blue Jay* quoted the A.O.U. Check-list as to the distribution of the species.

Some one, apparently many years ago, indicated that this beautiful warbler did not reach Vancouver Island and any reference since (including the A.O.U. Check-list) has pointed this out. However, at least 15 ardent birders in this area have

identified the Black-throated Gray Warbler.

While it is considered infrequent in the Victoria, B.C., area, it is positively an annual fall migrant, passing through this area usually in association with Audubon Warblers during the months of August and September. At least eight individuals were reported during the 1959 migration. Three spring migration records have been noted: May 19, 1946, May 14, 1962, and May 12, 1963, and one summer record of June 19, 1961.