

BANDING GREAT HORNED OWLS AND LONG-EARED OWLS, 1966

by **C. Stuart Houston**, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon

The GREAT HORNED OWL following the very poor year of 1965 when many pairs appeared not to nest, had a banner year in 1966. One year ago I banded only 13 nestling owls (five nests with two young each and three nests with single birds). This year, thanks to cooperation from readers of the *Blue Jay* and Doug Gilroy's column in the *Western Producer*, I was able to band 115 young in 51 nests. This brought my long-time total to 500 Great Horned Owls banded.

A pair of Great Horned Owls is able to raise four young only when there is an abundant food supply—this was achieved by two pairs this year, as compared to four in 1960, my most successful year (150 Great Horned Owls banded). However, this year there were more nests (21) with three young than with two (19)—an improvement over 1960. Nine nests raised only one young to maturity, but five were known to have had one or two more prior to our visit, and one egg was infertile and one cracked. In three nests, the smallest owl was too small to hold a band, so the 115 banded gives an average of 2.25 owls per nest. The only unsuccessful nests known to us were at Young where a single infertile egg was incubated until the end of May, and at Dilke where the nest was deserted early in May.

On three weekends, and a number of evenings, I put over 3000 miles on the Rambler. Mary accompanied me on two weekends, but the biggest weekend was on May 14 and 15 when my keen-eyed volunteer crew consisted of Bill Horseman, Jonathan Gerrard, Glen Fox, Floyd Connor and Doug Whitfield. They spotted six new nests while we were en route to other nests, speeding down the highway at 60 mph. Once, new nests were sighted only eight miles apart along Highway #2 south of Cudworth and later two active nests were spotted only two

miles apart on Highway #20 east of Domremy. Another nest sighted from the car from Highway #14 west of Saskatoon on an evening outing, contained four young (see photo) and was only a quarter mile from another nest containing three young.

Again this year a careful record was kept of uneaten food items in the nests. Eight nests contained no food at the time of my visit. The remainder contained 30 pocket gophers (as in 1960 the major food item), 12 American Coots, 9 barn rats, 6 rabbits, 5 Mallards, 3 Pintails, 1 Green-winged Teal, 1 Lesser Scaup, 1 Ring-necked Duck, 1 Gadwell, 1 Sora, 1 Yellow-headed Blackbird, 1 crow, 1 adult Long-eared Owl, 1 domestic fowl, 2 Gray Partridge, 1 Ruffed Grouse, 1 Chipping Sparrow, 2 mice and 1 shrew. This year was the first time that we have found domestic fowl or upland game in the owl larder during the nesting season.

I wish to express my appreciation to the following for assistance in locating Great Horned Owl nests in 1966: Steve A. Mann, Piapot; J. H. Brodeur, Assiniboia; David Green, Moose Jaw; Lorne Scott, Indian Head (3 nests); Jim Slimmon (3 nests); Doug Whitfield, Keith Ecklund, Marvin Schmidt, Joe Schmidt, John Black and J. B. Gollop of Saskatoon; Jim Dempsey, Young (2 nests); R. F. Klatt, Esk; Larry Dale, Plunkett; Blaine Bentley, Viscount; David G. Titman, Viscount; Bryan Isinger and pupils, Yellow Creek (3 nests); Marshall Evans, Ruddell; Peter Zadko, Cando; Bill Horseman, Saltcoats (2 nests); Mrs. H. Borman, Piapot; P. Laurence Beckie, Bladworth (2 nests); Trevor and Gwilym Jones, Findlater; Doug Gilroy, Regina; Hugh Smith, Regina; Wesley Carlson, Big Beaver; Mrs. Keith Paton, Oxbow; Ross Fockler, Broadview; Ricky Stevens, Yorkton; Larry Morgotch, Yorkton (2 nests); Gerald Churko, Willowbrook; Harold



Photo by Hans S. Dommasch

Young Great Horned Owls, 12 miles west of Saskatoon, May 20, 1966

Moldenhauer, Allan; J. L. and W. A. Marjerrison, Greenan; Lester Moore, Bradwell.

LONG-EARED OWLS, as in 1960, had a successful nesting season in 1966. Twenty nests yielded 65 banded young, plus two that were too small and two that left the nest some hours before my arrival and could not be relocated. As in 1960, it was common to have two Long-eared Owl nests within 100 or 200 yards of each other and eight of this year's nests were paired in this manner. Joe Schmidt, his brother Marvin and their friends deserve special credit for finding eight Long-eared Owl nests within a few miles of the western edge of Saskatoon. Keith Ecklund found another three. Actually we knew of 19 Long-eared Owl nests within the Saskatoon study area alone (including Bradwell, Asquith and Donovan). Two nests were destroyed by a stubble fire that ran wild, one was deserted, and the young from another nest were kept as pets for four days by children, but the young from the other 15 were banded. Also banded were nests at Okla (David Ashdown), Yorkton (Larry Morgotch), Indian Head (Mrs. Ken Skinner and Lorne Scott) and Hawarden (Harold Kvinge). The day

after I left for the International Congress of Ornithology at Oxford, Harold Moldenhauer found two more Long-eared Owl broods three miles west of Clavet, making a total of 21 Long-eared Owl nests for the Saskatoon area in 1966.

One of the nests destroyed by fire unfortunately was of special interest because it was on the ground. It was found by the Schmidt boys on April 29 and contained three eggs when I photographed it early in May, a week prior to its destruction. The first nest of this species found in Saskatchewan, 139 years earlier, was also on the ground in a bush when found in 1827 by Thomas Drummond, John Richardson's assistant naturalist. That year this species was also plentiful in the woods skirting the plains of the South Saskatchewan River.

The SHORT-EARED OWLS this year were not plentiful concomitantly with the Long-eared Owls, as happened in 1964. A nest on the Marjerrison farm at Greenan which I visited on May 28 contained seven young of different ages and four unhatched eggs. I did not band any of this species this year. Ross Lein had one successful nest on his study area north of Saskatoon.