

# FIRST RECORD OF THE LONG-EARED OWL IN RIDING MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

by William J. Walley, Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary School,  
Dauphin, Manitoba

Previous to this observation, the Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) had never been recorded for Riding Mountain National Park, although its occurrence in the surrounding aspen parkland is well documented (Bird, 1961; Godfrey, 1966). A number of workers have noted its absence even after lengthy studies of the avifauna of the park. Taverner and Sutton (1940) stated that it had "not as yet" been "officially recorded from the park, but of almost certain occurrence as a summer resident and probable nester." Soper (1953) studied the birds of the park at intervals from 1940 to 1946 and did not record it. Godfrey (1953) noted its absence from the 1921 observations of P. A. Taverner and Hoyes Lloyd and the 1938 observations of A. H. Shortt and R. Sutton.

On June 4, 1971 a biology field trip was conducted near Highway 10 on the north slope of the park. The party consisted of the author and grade XII biology students from the Dauphin Collegiate Technical Institute. The objectives of the trip were to study the various habitats and their associated fauna, especially birds. The particular area which was chosen consisted of mixed coniferous and deciduous forest with considerable muskeg and swamp which was located on the summit of the north slope.

While studying the vegetation of a muskeg from a piece of higher, drier land which projected into the muskeg and almost bisected it, the students noticed a bird on a nest in a white spruce (*Picea glauca*). The tree was located in a mixed stand of spruce and aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) which also occurred on this higher ground. A rusty-brown bird could be seen on the nest which was about 15 feet up and built against the trunk

of the tree. The bird was flushed when a student ascended the tree to count the eggs, but identification was not made at that time, although it was apparent that it was an owl. The nest contained two eggs and was constructed of twigs — probably an old crow nest. Because of previous experience with nest desertion in Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*), the area was not visited again until July 4. At that time one young bird was found perched on a spruce bough about 25 feet from the nest tree and approximately 10 feet from the ground. It was approached to within five or six feet for a photograph, but it did not attempt to escape. Another smaller bird was still in the nest. When approached, it snapped its bill, hissed, raised its wings and cowered at that edge of the nest near the tree trunk. The adults were not in the vicinity. When the area was visited about two hours later, an adult, presumably the female, flew from the nest tree some 100 feet and perched on an aspen near the edge of the muskeg. From a distance of about 50 feet, positive identification of the Long-eared Owl was made with the use of 7 x 50 binoculars. This is the first record of the species for the park as well as the first breeding record.

## LITERATURE CITED

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