

session of it throughout the chase and capture of the larger prey. It may have been holding on to this vole (rather than storing it) to keep it from freezing. We have watched the bird chase and catch a frozen mouse used as a lure but, upon biting it, the owl would immediately fly off. By 'brooding' the prey, they would remain warm and flexible and in an edible form. As temperatures were between -23.2 C and -17.0 C that day (*fide* Transport Canada Weather Office, Uplands Airport, Ottawa), the prey would have frozen very quickly if exposed to the air. This not only would have made the prey very difficult (if not impossible) for the bird to tear up and eat, it would have used a considerable amount of the owl's core body heat to melt the frozen meat. That, in turn, might be a critical factor affecting a bird's survival during extended cold periods.

Our observations, then, appear to represent the first documented case of a Great Gray Owl being observed to kill and eat an apparently healthy weasel. This Ermine may also represent the largest prey animal actually seen to be killed by a Great Gray Owl.

### Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to Bob Nero for providing useful information and important literature references on Great Gray Owls and to Richard Poulin for providing banding data on the bird in question. Thanks too to Helene Danner and Ted Dyke for their company and assistance in the field.

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## A NOTE ON ALBINISM IN THE GREAT GRAY OWL

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In a mostly dark-plumaged bird such as the Great Gray Owl the occasional occurrence of white albinistic feathers should be expected and noticed. Lack of the pigment melanin in random feathers (partial albinism) has been reported for numerous species. Nero, for example, noted that practically all of more than 200 adult male Red-winged Blackbirds collected near Madison, Wisconsin, showed depigmentation of some otherwise usually wholly black feathers (Auk 71: 131-135, 1954). Although I made no attempt to search out the literature or to contact museums, albinism in the Great Gray Owl appears to be relatively uncommon. None of more than 150 Great Gray Owls banded in Minnesota by Steven L. Loch showed any albinism (pers. comm., 1984). In the process of lengthy handling of more than 300 live grown owls and about 80 dead ones, Herbert W.R. Copland and Robert W. Nero observed only five birds with abnormal white feathers. These Manitoba records are as follows:

An adult male specimen from Pinawa, 9 December 1979, had three white belly feathers and one white inner flank feather. An adult female captured at Lac du Bonnet, 8 December 1979, had a white section on one web at the tip of the third primary on the right wing. An adult female captured on 3 February 1980 near Elma had one main inner left scapular feather that was all white. This feature was first noticed in the field by John Christie who thought the bird had been marked after banding. An adult female captured on 1 June 1981 at Wabowden had two white feathers in the facial disk above the left eye and a few white feathers in the tertial area of one wing.

I was fortunate to be assisting Herb Copland and Bob Nero in banding owls at a nest near Marchand on 6 and 9 June 1984. The adult female at this nest had a tuft of more than 14 white feathers on the upper left side of the breast; these were concealed by the long breast feathers but were noticed while the bird was being inspected. Of greater interest was my discovery of an unpigmented and horn-coloured talon on the same toe of each of the three young from this nest. Neither the female nor the male parent showed any abnormal depigmentation of their talons. The occurrence of a common, specific albinistic feature, namely lack of pigment in the talon of the outer front toe on the right foot of each of three young in one nest, suggests a genetic aberration.

Kay McKeever, Owl Rehabilitation Research Foundation, Vineland, Ontario, has an adult male Great Gray Owl with one white undertail covert, and an adult female with a white scapular feather. In both cases, these single white feathers have been replaced annually for the past six years, indicating permanent follicle damage interfering with deposition of pigment (pers. comm., 1984).

I would like to thank Robert W. Nero for assisting me with the preparation of this note.

## MANITOBA GREAT GRAY OWL RESEARCH PROJECT ANNOUNCED

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The most ambitious non-game research project yet undertaken under the auspices of the Manitoba Wildlife Branch was initiated in April 1984. This is a 4-year radio-telemetry study of the Great Gray Owl, designed to provide information on the movements of a known breeding population over a 4-year period. Use of habitat in all seasons and from year to year is expected to shed considerable light on the habitat requirements of this large raptor.

This project resulted from discussions between Bob Nero and Steven L. Loch, Foley Minnesota. As is generally known, Bob Nero and his colleagues (especially Herb Copland, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature) have been studying the Great Gray Owl for more than 15 years. For the past 4.5 years, Loch has been using radio-telemetry to study Great Gray Owls in Minnesota under Professor Al Grewe, St. Cloud State University. In November 1983, Loch resigned from a full-time position with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to take on the major role in the Manitoba project.

By 11 July 1984 there were radio-transmitters on 25 Great Gray Owls, including males, females and young,