
LETTERS

AN OWL BANDING TRIP IN 1986

WENDY LYON, 765 Horace Street, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4T 5K7

On 8 June 1986 Lloyd Saul and I accompanied Wayne, Anne and Val Harris and Sheila Lamont on what was my first owl banding excursion near Raymore, Saskatchewan.

The first stop of the day was a Great Horned Owl nest located in a large old barn. After searching the loft carefully we realized that the young had already left their nest on top of the bales, so we turned our attention to the nearby hedgerow. The three young owls were roosting in the trees. When they flushed, two flapped along the outer edge of the hedgerow while the third opted for the summer-fallow. Although it did not appear to fly well on its own, with the help of a very strong southerly wind it was capable of gliding for a long distance across the field. The girls set off across the summerfallow, trying to keep the owl in sight as it soared along close to the ground. Eventually it had to land, and after turning to face into the wind, it sat crouched low, wings spread and beak clacking in an attempt to look menacing. We cautiously approached, with Sheila circling behind, but just before she reached it the owl pushed off and was swept away again by the wind.

Several unsuccessful attempts took us across nearly a mile of dusty, black soil. We were ready to give up but realized that the young bird might not be able to return to where its parents were still feeding it. Finally our attempts at circling the owlet confused it long enough to enable us to catch it. The young owl was returned to the farmstead where it was banded and released with the two others which the men had been successful in catching.

The young were banded in several Great Horned Owl nests and one of Short-eared Owls. The real highlight of the day came from a Great Horned Owl nest located a quarter mile north of Semans. In the nest, in addition to the usual array of dead mice and such, we found the unidentifiable remains of a small hawk, with a band on it!

I sent the band away and finally received a reply that the unidentified hawk was a Merlin. It had been banded on 23 June 1985 before it could fly, by Adam Schmidt at Homefield, Saskatchewan, just north of Ituna. After learning of the find Adam reported that the nest had been used consecutively for 5 years, and had raised young each time. Although the Merlin wasn't an exotic visitor from afar, it was no less exciting to learn about its home, particularly since it was Adam's first return.