

# ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE BARRED OWL IN ALBERTA

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Previous reports on the distribution of Barred Owls in Alberta have suggested a recent expansion into western North America.<sup>1 3 8 9</sup> In Alberta, Barred Owls seem to be restricted to mixedwood boreal forest and mature foothill forests in the southern portion of the province.<sup>1</sup> Numbers of this species are hypothesised to be increasing largely due to an increased tolerance of forests of a predominantly coniferous character. This selection of habitats in western North America is contrary to its preference for deciduous or mixed transitional forest in eastern North America.<sup>7 2</sup> This report documents further records of the Barred Owl in Alberta and serves to update an earlier paper. The majority of these recent records were gathered from the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division's Occurrence reporting system. This system developed and operated by the Enforcement - Field Services Branch, is called the Animal Incident Documentation System (A.I.D.S.). It is used to document observations of rare species, wildlife species found dead, various forms of human-wildlife interactions (e.g. bear attacks), and illegal activity pertaining to wildlife. This system has been in operation since April 1982. Additional records of Barred Owls were gathered from Christmas Bird Counts, and casual reports from naturalists.

Fifteen Barred Owl specimens have been turned into the Fish and Wildlife Division (Table 1). Another eight owls were given to the Division with no locations provided. Of the 23 specimens, 19 were simply found dead by officers or

citizens; 3 were injured and subsequently died and one owl was orphaned and did not survive to independence.

The geographical distribution of the records in Table 1 is similar to those reported by Boxall and Stepney, with the exception of one owl found near Coronation.<sup>1</sup> This particular bird was found dead in the prairie-parkland ecotone during winter and may have been moving widely in search of food before starving to death or possibly being killed by an automobile. The cause of death for this owl was unknown. All of the other records fall within the montane-foothill region or the mixedwood boreal forest.

The possible expansion of this species southward through the mountain and foothill areas of Alberta is supported by an increase of recent records from the southwestern portion of the province.<sup>1</sup> The Fish and Wildlife Division obtained owls which were found near Morley and Calgary (Table 1). Naturalists have reported other sightings of Barred Owls from Morley, Calgary and Bryant Creek in 1982; the Wildlife Reserve of Western Canada near Cochrane in 1983; and Calgary in 1984.<sup>4 6 5</sup> Prior to 1980 I found only 12 records of this species south of Jasper National Park.<sup>1</sup>

Naturalists also reported observing Barred Owls around Grande Prairie and Edson.<sup>5 10</sup>

Of all owls reported or turned in to the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, Barred Owls were the second fewest in

Table 1. BARRED OWL RECORDS FROM THE ALBERTA FISH AND WILDLIFE DIVISION'S ANIMAL INCIDENT DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM APRIL 1982 TO APRIL 1985

<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>
10 September 1982	Grande Cache
1 December 1982	Fox Creek
9 February 1983	Fox Creek
3 March 1983	Slave Lake
9 June 1983	Edmonton
30 June 1983	St. Albert
19 July 1983	Morley
15 December 1983	Grovedale
4 January 1984	Calgary
10 February 1984	Coronation
4 April 1984	Niton Junction
6 December 1984	Rocky Mountain House
15 January 1985	Fox Creek
24 January 1985	Brule
19 March 1985	Whitecourt

An additional eight owls were turned in without locations.

TOTAL 15 + 8 = 23

number (Table 2). Only the Northern Pygmy Owl was reported less often over the 3-year period. Over 142 times as many Great Horned Owls were reported and about 10 times as many Snowy, Great Gray and Short-eared owls were reported.

Records of the Barred Owl in Alberta are still required in order to define its range. There is no doubt that it is one of the rarest owls in the province despite its large size and characteristic vocal behavior.

I thank Laverne Smith for assisting me with locating published records of this species.

<sup>1</sup> BOXALL, P.C. and P.H.R. STEPNEY. 1982. The distribution and status of the Barred Owl in Alberta. *Can. Field-Nat.* 96:46-50

<sup>2</sup> GODFREY, W.E. 1966. The birds of Canada. National Mus. of Can. Bull. No. 203.

<sup>3</sup> GRANT, J. 1966. The Barred Owl in British Columbia. *Murrelet* 47:39-45.

<sup>4</sup> HARRIS, W.C. 1983. Prairie Provinces region. *Am. Birds* 37:192-194.

<sup>5</sup> HARRIS, W.C. 1984. Prairie Provinces region. *Am. Birds* 38:214-216.

<sup>6</sup> HEILBRUN, L.H. and CBC REGIONAL EDITORS. 1983. The 1983 Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Count No. 157. *Am. Birds* 37:438.

<sup>7</sup> NICHOLLS, T.H. and D.W. WARNER. 1972. Barred Owl habitat use as determined by radiotelemetry. *J. Wildl. Mgmt.* 36:213-224.

<sup>8</sup> SHEA, D.S. 1974. Barred Owl records in western Montana. *Condor* 76:222.

<sup>9</sup> TAYLOR, A.L. and E.D. FORSMAN. 1976. Recent range extensions of the Barred Owl in western North America, including the first records for Oregon. *Condor* 78:560-561.

<sup>10</sup> YOUNG, V. 1984. Alberta Christmas Bird Counts - 1983. *Alberta Naturalist* 14:91-96.



Table 2. NUMBER OF SPECIMENS AND/OR REPORTS OF OWLS TO FISH AND WILDLIFE DIVISION, ALBERTA

<i>Owl Species</i>	<i>Number of Records</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>1982/83*</i>	<i>1983/84</i>	<i>1984/85</i>	
Great Horned	722	1,402	1,143	3,267
Snowy	63	62	120	245
Great Gray	101	74	56	231
Short-eared	65	69	87	221
Saw-Whet	26	26	35	87
Long-eared	23	20	39	82
Hawk	16	13	19	48
Burrowing	8	14	11	33
Boreal	10	7	15	32
Barred	7	10	6	23
Pygmy	1	6	3	10

\* Fiscal years 1 April to 31 March



*Barred Owl*

*Bob Turner*