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# LETTERS

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## FLYING SQUIRRELS IN THE DEAD OF WINTER

Enjoying the winter presence of birds, we keep feeders stocked with seeds and blocks of suet. During the day it is not unusual to see a mixed flock with any number of Common Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks, Blue Jays, White-breasted Nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, and occasionally a Downy, or even a Hairy, Woodpecker. On warm spells, a Red Squirrel might appear to stock up on sunflower seeds.

On 3 January 1993, we were surprised by a pair of Flying Squirrels. We were very surprised, because it was 10:18 p.m., still and cold (-18°C). We spotted the squirrels leaping from the poplar trees to the feeder, which hangs from an outside branch, nearest our driveway, about 8 m from the house. The squirrels were loading up on sunflower seeds, and were not inclined to leave, even when we went outside to try to get a better look at them. They were shy, trying to keep the trunk of the tree between themselves and us, until we both got a flashlight beam on them from two different angles. As indi-

cated by their huge eyes, their nocturnal behaviour was normal, but their activity in the bitter cold was surprising. These were the first Flying Squirrels we had spotted down in our area, and we would not have seen them at all if the feeder had not been illuminated by our yard light.

There were indications of squirrel activity in the yard, including snow tunnels and tracks in the snow, although it is difficult to know whether these were from the more common Red Squirrel or the Flying Squirrels. We tried to find the winter nests of the squirrels, but, while ground tracking is easy, the branches used as aerial highways are not discernible, and we have been disappointed. To date, we have had no more sightings of the Flying Squirrels, during any part of the day.

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Editor's Note: Generally squirrels are active when winter temperatures are above -20°C, with activity tapering off as temperatures drop. There is usually little activity when temperatures drop below -30°C.



The observation of live birds in their natural habitat is a popular pastime and scientific sport that developed almost entirely in this century, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In the 19th century, almost all students of birds carried guns to knock down unfamiliar specimens for examination. As binoculars improved, life got a lot easier for birds. *Globe and Mail. 8 March 1994*

## ALBINO GREAT GRAY OWL IN FINLAND

In April 1994, I photographed an albino Great Gray Owl in central Finland. From a colleague in Toronto, I learned that *Blue Jay* had an article about albino Great Gray Owls with a

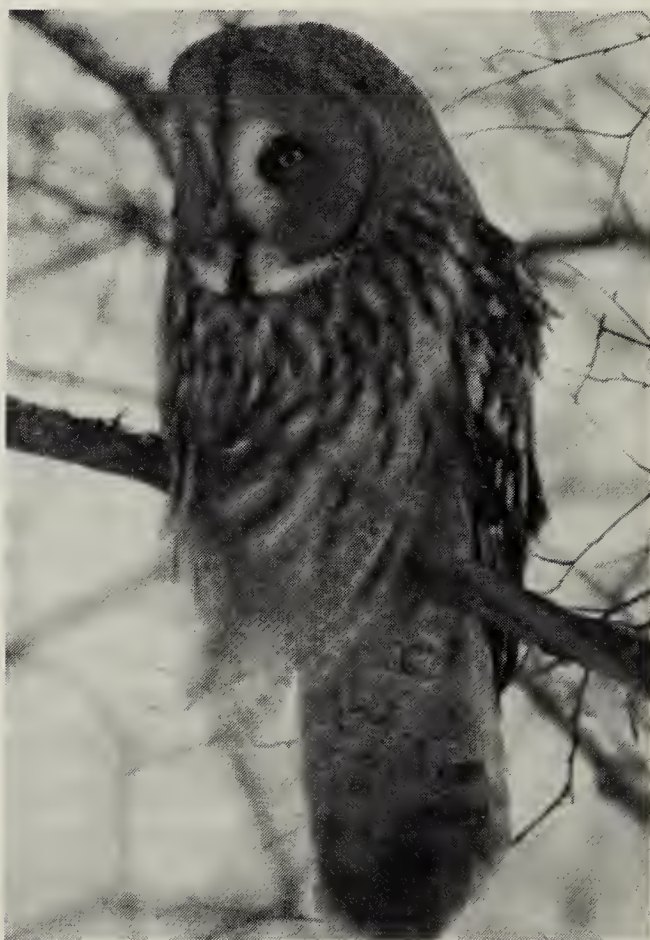
picture on the front page [*Blue Jay* 49:31]. For your use, I enclose two photographs of Great Gray Owls taken near Kuopio, Finland, 1 April 1994.

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*Albino Great Gray Owl.*

*I. Wanders*



*Normal Great Gray Owl photographed in same spot as albino, one hour later.*

*I. Wanders*



Watching watchers: Occasionally, bird watchers themselves have been watched. In 1960, for instance, English psychologist Helen Ross tracked a covey of zoologists in the Norwegian Arctic, recording their foul language. They were most vocal when relaxed and happy, she writes in *Discovery* magazine. "The words used were blasphemous rather than obscene, as is to be expected among the middle class." *Globe and Mail*. 8 March 1994