
Birds

NORTHERN HAWK OWL NESTS AT WAITVILLE

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On 27 April 1969, when 10 years old, I watched a Northern Hawk Owl fly into the top of a broken-off aspen stub about 20 feet above the ground, in thick bush on SE13-45-24W2, one mile east of the hamlet of Waitville, or eight miles south and two miles east of Birch Hills. When I reported my find to Doug Whitfield and Dr. Stuart Houston, I met some incredulity, but I was certain of my identification and stuck to my guns. My identification was indeed correct.

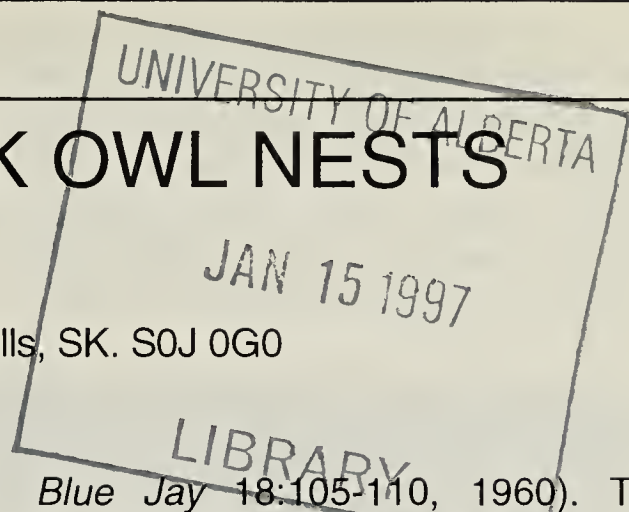
On 10 May 1969, Houston and Whitfield visited the nest. Some new growth has formed over years since the tree broke in a storm. This has created a partial rim around the nest cup. When Whitfield, using spurs, had climbed halfway to the nest, the adult male Hawk Owl attacked him savagely, inflicting deep claw cuts before letting go and dropping to the ground; alert helper Arnold Nijssen quickly caught the male and banded it. When Whitfield reached the nest, which contained eight eggs, the adult female came close enough to be caught by hand, and was also banded. My letter was published in the Junior Naturalists section of *Blue Jay* 27:166, 1969. In mid-June, Whitfield returned to band the five or six young; one unhatched egg remained in the nest.

Mice, chiefly *Microtus*, were present in unprecedented numbers in 1996, reminiscent of the previous "Year of the Owls," in 1960 (Houston,

Blue Jay 18:105-110, 1960). The three main mice-eating raptors responded by having more nests and more young than in any other year. Dr. Houston tells me that in this one exceptional year, 1969, he banded 152 Northern Harriers, 103 Long-eared Owls and 87 Short-eared Owls. For these three species they constituted, respectively, one-third, one-quarter and one-third of his life-long totals over 54 years. He hypothesized that one pair of Hawk Owls that year similarly had responded to the plentiful supply of prey, and in their case nested farther south than usual, rather than returning to their normal habitat in the mixed forest to the north. It was presumed that this unusual range extension southward was a one-time phenomenon.

However, in 1976, Hawk Owls nested half a mile farther south (NE12-45-24W2). This time they used a Pileated Woodpecker hole in a Black Poplar, only about six feet above the ground. The number of eggs or young could not be ascertained. Further land clearing has taken place. There have been one or two fall and winter sightings in the twenty years since, but no more summer records.

P.S. During a fishing trip to Gord Kosolofski's Pilot's Lodge, two miles upstream from Brink Rapids on the Fond du Lac River with my youngest son, now 11, on 1-5 July 1996, we



saw an active Golden Eagle nest with two young on a ledge on a 100-foot sandstone cliff, less than a mile upstream from the lodge, at roughly 59°02' North and 104°35' West. David Thompson had a nearly-fatal canoe trip on this river, from Wollas-

ton Lake to Black Lake, and back, in 1796. Near Gord Kosolofski's fishing camp, Common Nighthawks seemed unusually common, and we flushed a Willow Ptarmigan with a brood of eight.



Gumbo Evening Primrose

Wayne Harris