

raiding the larder to feed her nestlings.<sup>1</sup> In addition, while she brooded the nestlings at night, the male raided the larder to feed the brooding female. Yosef and Pinshow found that the size of the larder is used to attract potential mates and is related to the reproductive success of pairs.<sup>6</sup> Since the larder we found appeared fully stocked after the young had fledged, it is conceivable that Loggerhead Shrike larders may also be used to provide supplemental food for the young while they are learning to hunt on their own.

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# LONG-EARED OWL ABUNDANCE NEAR SASKATOON IN 2000

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Year 2000 was “the year of the Long-eared Owl.” A survey of raptors in a five-mile wide strip that extends eight miles from the north end of Saskatoon to Martensville and Warman (40 square

miles or 182 square km) yielded 34 breeding pairs of Long-eared Owls. Another two pairs were present immediately outside this area, practically “across the road.” This number of



*Long-eared Owl nestling*

*Marten Stoffel*

breeding pairs, averaging almost one pair per square mile (or per 2.59 km<sup>2</sup>) is unprecedented for Saskatchewan.

Stuart Houston and I banded 115 young, and Stuart banded another 15 elsewhere in Saskatchewan, breaking the North American record for the

number of nestlings banded in a year (115 in Idaho in 1981; Jeff Marks, pers. comm.). Previous banding of this species in Saskatchewan has been concentrated in two years of previous vole (*Microtus* spp.) peaks: 1960 (73 banded in 18 nests) and 1969 (103 banded in 28 nests).<sup>1</sup>

My own interest in Long-eared Owls began as a teenager in Holland, where I assisted banders in finding nests and banding young Barn Owls, Little Owls, and Tawny Owls. Since the Long-eared Owl is relatively rare in Holland, it was a landmark day when I saw my first and only Long-eared Owl nest containing young of banding age in my home country. I resumed my interest in the species in Canada in 1997, when I found three Long-eared Owl nests, each with five young, within what was to become my year 2000 study area. In 1998, I found no nests, but in 1999 there was a single nest with four young. It seems from my five years of study that the number of nests in my study area in average years ranges from zero to three.

The area surveyed is mostly farmland fenced for cattle grazing, but has some untended fields with a good supply of weeds and a fair number of old and new gravel pits surrounded by aspen and willows. It is good habitat for voles and mice (*Peromyscus* spp.), both of which were plentiful throughout the area during the year 2000, and both are known to

be main food sources of the Long-eared Owl.<sup>2</sup>

The 2000 survey began on May 18, when I found a Long-eared Owl nest with five young, two of them already out of the nest. The last young of the season were found on July 10. All nests had been built previously by American Crows (23 nests, 14 in willows, 9 in aspen) or Black-billed Magpies (9 nests, 7 in willows, 2 in aspen), both plentiful in our area. The most common heights above ground were 7 feet (6 nests) and 8 feet (7 nests), and the highest was only 20 feet. Because the female often did not flush until I approached within ten feet, I learned to check every crow and magpie nest in every bush in the area, approaching from every possible angle, so as not to miss a nesting owl.

The young in the May 18 nest were up to a month earlier in their development than young in most other nests. Unlike Great Horned Owl young, which stay in the nest for six weeks until they can fly, young Long-eared Owls leave their nest and crawl out on



***Long-eared Owl nest***

***Marten Stoffel***

branches of the nest tree and adjacent trees, at least two weeks before they can fly.

Twenty-two nests had all the young still in them, but some young had already left from 11 other nests; 25 fledglings from these nests were caught and banded. The nest of origin of these fledglings (with telltale "whitewash" at and beneath the nest) was evident at 8 of these 11 sites; three were not found. At two additional sites, the young were flying well and could not be caught. Only one pair failed to produce any young.

Based on the numbers of young at the 22 nests with all young still present, productivity was 87 young or 4.0 young per successful nest. One pair had six young, five pairs had five young, nine had four young, six had three young and one pair had two young.

When I re-surveyed the same area in 2001, I fully expected to find at least one or two Long-eared Owl nests. To my

surprise, I sighted only a single adult on May 12, saw none thereafter, and failed to find a single nest.

In Europe, Long-eared Owls are known to be cyclical and nomadic, following the four-year cycle of voles. Proof of nomadism in North America would require trapping of adults and then demonstrating that an adult caught and banded in one breeding area, was re-caught while breeding in a widely separated area in a subsequent year. Because there were so many Long-eared Owls here in 2000, and because they raised so many young, I still wonder, in spite of my knowledge of cycles and presumed nomadism, where all those adults and young have gone. One suspects that both the breeding adults and the young which hatched in 2000 have moved to other areas where voles and mice are more plentiful. But where? And where did they all come from in 2000? Perhaps long-term banding efforts will eventually add more pieces to this puzzle.



*Long-eared Owl*

*Brenton Terry*

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***Banding assistants in the summer of 2000, (from left to right) Pieter Stoffel, Eli-Ann Stoffel and Stephane Gérard. Patrick Leighton***