

Down  
Black



AB

Pleasantville Iowa  
50225  
Mar 19, 1975

Dear Vernon, - I am including a list and a map (Iowa) showing Snowy Owl observations Nov 1974 - Mar, 1975. These were in response to a request I made in my "Snowy Owl" article, Des Moines Bur. Register Feb 9, 1975. You may not wish to accept these as valid reports but I gave a detailed description also a picture in my story and as Roger Paris says no one could mistake this big round-headed white owl! So use your own judgment. Several sent photographs too, also located the bird as 7 miles east of such + such a town or 2 miles East, 1 mile south. So I think it was not a case of several people observing the same bird. I checked that carefully.

I had one report of a Snowy ~~at~~ a residence in Des Moines, a one acre lot surrounded by Conifers, a few from small fawns, and a few from farm yards. Most were in open fields, an fence or utility poles and a few in pine trees. Our Conservation Officer got excellent color slides of one in a pine tree in Stephens forest. One of our Fisheries Biologists got excellent slides of one on a fence post, pict printed in Chariton Ia. newspaper. Some observers sent pictures too.

Northwest Ia. was hit Jan 10-11 by a devastating blizzard with wind up to 80 m.p.h. Livestock losses in the millions of dollars. In my Jan letters I had numerous reports of almost every bird wiped out as their feeders - chickadees, Blue jays, Nuthatches, Cardinals and Woodpeckers which was surprising. One lady wrote they lost 30 cattle of 200 and were lucky as most neighbors had greater losses. She reported almost total loss of pheasants, dead pheasants all over their fields. I had another

of a farmer with a good wood lot (Conifers) where he knew he had at least 80 pheasants. Only 30 survived. And he was one of the lucky ones, he felt.

Our Refuge Manager's parents live at Fenton NW Ia. His father the morning after the blizzard picked up a "dirty white" ball in the snow on their porch. It was a Screech Owl with the snow driven into the feathers. They placed him in a paper sack in a pasteboard box in the cool basement to thaw out gradually. I am sure he had clawed thru the sack and was working on the pasteboard box. Later he was released.

An IO member on a farm near Spirit Lake (NW Ia) reported a Screech Owl took refuge in their machine shed and remained there even when her daughters went in to rescue their pet ducks.

She also reported a flock of hundreds of Snow Buntings came to pick up ground feed where her husband has ground corn for the cattle.

Dean Masman reported many flocks of Snow Buntings about 15 miles north of Des Moines after the blizzard apparently forced them farther south than usual.

In our area, the Horned Larks numbered in the hundreds. On one 20 mile ride I saw well over 1000 on the shoulders of the highway. The temp. that day Feb 9, 1975 was  $-13^{\circ}$  below zero.

The first flock of Canada Geese returned to Refuge Mar 17, 18 days later than last year - Feb 27, 1974. Every thing later, snow just melting this week! And the floodwaters were rolling in, covering the Refuge wheat field today so fear we are in for another "Instant Lake" with all the valley flooded to Des Moines. Justice Douglas hit the nail on the head when he placed the Corps of Engineers as public enemy #1, of the environment.

Sincerely,

Gladys Black

Winter of 1974-75 - Red Rock area + Pleasantville Dam

- 400 Canada geese in Red Rock Refuge till Dec 19, 1974
- 5043 Mallard on tailwaters below dam Dec 22, 1974 with 400 to 500 there thru Jan, Feb-1975 and Mar.
- 87 Common Mergansers Dec 22, 1974
- 2 imm. Bald Eagles overwintered below the dam, 2 adults moved in Feb 9, '75
- 19 Red-tailed Hawks Dec 22, 1974 in Red Rock area
- 7 Red-tailed " west of Pleasantville, in So. River bottom Jan '75
- 2 Rough legs " in Red Rock area
- 3 " " " So. River bottoms
- 3 Sparrow Hawks Dec 22, 1974 and on Mar 4, 1975
- 22 Herring Gulls + 1 Ringbill - Red Rock thru Dec '74
- 104 Mourning Doves Red Rock Dec 22
- Snowy Owls - see map + report
- 9 Great Horned Owls - Red Rock
- 3 Short-eared Owls - pine grove, Red Rock thru the winter
- 1 Belted Kingfisher overwintered below the dam
- 20 Red Headed Woodpeckers in Red Rock Area (none last winter)
- Horned Larks - many reports of flocks of hundreds everywhere.
- 76 Blackcapped Chickadees in Red Rock area but only 2 at my feeders, a new low as usually many at feeders, Others here in town complained of few chickadees
- 26 Titmice in Red Rock - 3 (banded) at my feeders daily
- 49 white-breasted Nuthatches - Red Rock but few at my feeders.
- 5 Brown Creepers in Red Rock. 1 in P'ville thru Jan.
- 3 Carolina Wrens Dec 22, Red Rock. One spent nights roosting in a coat sleeve in garage, home near Red Rock dam!
- 6 Golden-crowned Kinglets - Red Rock Dec 22
- 1 " " " Pleasantville Jan.
- 2 Loggerhead Shrikes during winter in this county (Marion)
- 2 " " " " in Warren Co - west of us.
- 107 Cardinals in Red Rock Dec 22 but few at my feeders compared to 10 years ago when I banded 57 here.
- Purple Finches - flock at my feeders by Feb 20 - (gluttons!)
- Gold finches - " " " " " " - (gluttons!)
- " " - a flock overwintered at feeders near the dam (Red Rock)
- 264 Juncos on Dec 22 - Red Rock
- 90 " north of Pleasantville Jan 75
- 335 Tree Sparrows Red Rock Dec 22 but few in P'ville area.

# Reports two Snowy Owls seen in central Iowa

By MRS. GLADYS BLACK

*Mrs. Black of Pleasantville is a licensed bird bander and a well-known Iowa ornithologist.*

The Eskimos call him Ook-pikjuak, the Swedes call him Fjalluggla, the Dutch call him Sneeuwuil and we call him the Snowy Owl. Is this great white owl of the Arctic tundra staging a major invasion of Iowa this winter? Please drop me a card if you have seen one.

Responding to several reports both statewide and local, the latest from Indianola birder Ann Johnson of two seen on one day, one near Newton and one near Indianola, Newton wildlife photographer Herb Dorow, his wife Edie and I set out on a camera safari one cold Janu-

ary afternoon. From Pleasantville to Indianola we scanned every hay rack, every fence post, snowy field and wooded area.

During the two and one half hours we observed over 200 Horned Larks, 30 Juncos, two Meadow Larks, 10 Cardinals, seven Red-tailed Hawks and three Rough-legged Hawks but no Snowy Owl. The sighting of the Rough-legs was encouraging since they also nest on the tundra and are mouse predators and might be apt to share the same type of winter territory. Undoubtedly, the Snowy was there, perfectly camouflaged against the snow fields. The trip was not a loss — Herb photographed a Rough-leg in a tree in a farm yard.

To quote naturalist Roger

Caras, "No one could mistake this ghostly wanderer from the North; its round head and lack of ear tufts distinguish it from all other birds in the world. Its almost pure white color and sparse markings distinguish it from its mate which is more heavily barred with blackish brown." Young birds are generally darker, too.

It is a very large owl, 20 to 26 inches long, with a 55-inch wingspread. No other owl reaching Iowa is so large.

Circumpolar, it is found all the way around the top of the world in both hemispheres, breeding on the Arctic tundra in Siberia, Russia, Norway, Greenland, Iceland, the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Alaska.

According to Dr. George M. Sutton, who observed the Snowies on South Hampton Island from May 15 to June 20, 1932, the courtship consisted of much deep booming hooting. He counted "at least 20 booming males, the air fairly throbbing with the dull thick sounds, some could be heard from across the harbor

seven miles away." Sometimes they do a hoarse "who-who" or a "whowh, whowh, whowh, hah, hah, hah" ending with a quivering sound and occasionally they give a shrill whistle.

The nest is a shallow depression on a raised hummock of the Arctic tundra. An egg is laid every other day with a full clutch of five to eight. Incubation of 32 days by the female begins with the first egg, thus the first one hatched may be 15 days old and nearly fledged by the time the last is hatched. Apparently the older woolly nestlings keep the eggs warm while both parent birds work industriously supplying food — mice, young shorebirds, longspurs, buntings, ptarmigan, gulls, various sea birds and sometimes fish.

While the lemming population cycle is reaching a peak about every five years, the Snowies raise large broods also reaching peak populations. When the lemming population crashes and



they begin their suicidal wandering, the Snowies that normally stay in the north are forced south in search of food.

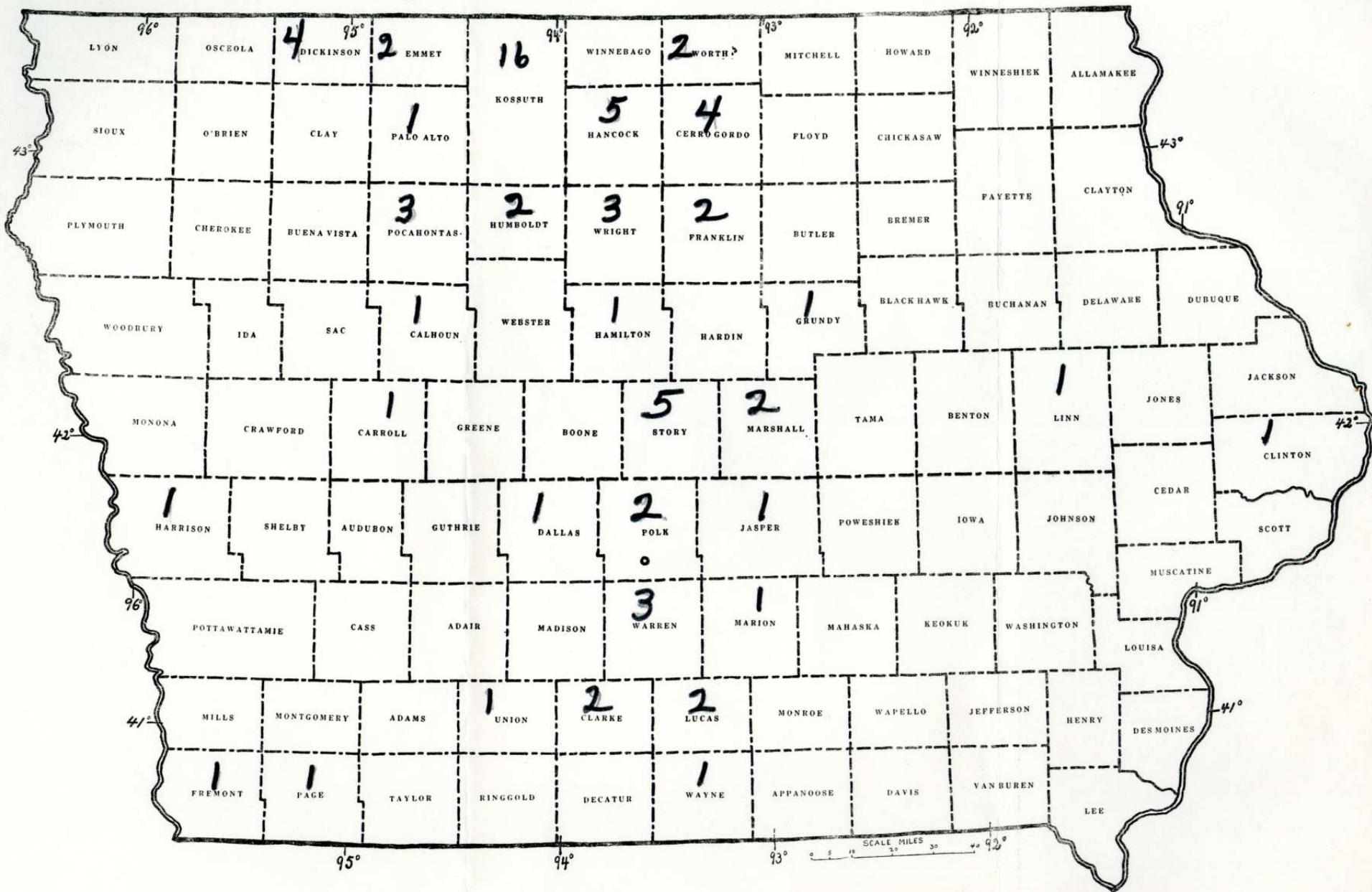
Major invasions have been recorded during winters since 1876-77, occurring every five to six years with the heaviest flights in 1905-06, 1926-27, and 1945-46 when 13,502 reports of

Snowies came from southern Canada and the northern United States.

More than half a century ago, in 1919, I saw my first Snowy Owl and it is still vivid in my memory.

Watch the snowy fields and fence posts and it may be your unforgettable experience.

# 74 Snowy Owl Observations Nov. 1974 - Mar. 1975



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 Pleasantville Ia 50225