

Case for  
IBL

Memo

Feb. 21, 1977

Dear Gladys:

I think your answer to the question of the large numbers of Snowy Owls lies closer to home than the Arctic. We had a fairly large number of birds here, starting in October, but they later disappeared. Why they should move out when there are lots of jack rabbits and mice, and for a time muskrats--which they fed on quite happily, I don't know. In any case, the owls apparently moved elsewhere and it sounds as if they all moved to Iowa.

Bear in mind that there is a very serious drought situation hereabouts. Lots of bare fields to the west and southwest, and during the autumn period many stubble fields were plowed under. Perhaps some combination of factors related to drought forced the owls to move south or southeasterly.

(over a huge region - SE Alberta to this corner)

I think the true picture of movement and distribution will emerge when the winter reports are in to American Birds, and you will have to wait until that report is available.

I spoke to several local people about this and we all agree that this is the probable explanation, rather than extreme food shortage in the Arctic (though obviously this sends birds southward).

What, one wonders, are all your birds feeding on? I presume that there must be an abundant food supply to support that many owls. This is a question for you to make some enquiries about on a local basis.

Dave Evans, University of North Dakota, Fargo, may have another point of view. You can reach him, I believe, at the Biology Dept.

Hope this helps.

Sincerely,

Bob Nero

Robert W. Nero

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