

16 July 1981

Dear Dr. Roosa -

When I visited Hayden Prairie in NE Iowa last Sunday, I chatted with a graduate student who had been working on shooting star propagation there. I mentioned that we had found a short-eared owl nest there in May, and he told me that I should write to you giving the details.

The nest was found by Jon Van Loon, who was on a photo trip with several other people to Hayden Pr. on May 16th of this year. Jon was looking for the small white ladyslippers which I had told him of south of the crest of the ridge. Slightly north of the ladyslippers he flushed an owl from a nest on the ground. The nest had 4 eggs in it and 3 just outside it - possibly disturbed by the hasty exit. Jon did not know what kind of owl it was (he isn't a birder), but his description the next day of its flight, the black "wrist" marks, and the ~~tr~~ style and location of the nest convinced me that it was a short-eared owl. Later he got 2 pictures back from the developers, and although 1 wasn't really identifiable the other photo was definitely a short-eared owl, just like in Robins, etc. When Jon returned to the nest several hours later that same day, 6 of the eggs were in the nest and I was nearby.

On June 2nd, I went to Hayden Prairie with Jon + our nature club. Jon led me right to the nest - just a hollowed out spot tucked under an overhanging clump of grass. There were no eggs or young at the nest or close by. There were a few fragments of eggshell several feet from the nest. We did see 2 short-eared owls (+ 2 harriers) coursing over the east end of the prairie, but we did not see or hear any young.

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The other birds that I recall from 2/6 are c. yellowthroats, sedge wrens, R-w. Blackbirds, Bobolinks, Goldfinches, song sparrows and Henslow's Sparrows (3).

The sighting of the short-eared owl was a first for me. I still need them for my Minnesota list.

I guess that it would have been most useful to have found young owls, but I just couldn't get down to the prairie earlier than 2/6, and I wasn't aware of who I should call to report a nest.

If I can be of further help, just write.

Sincerely,

Joel Dunnington

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