

Great Gray Owl
Feb 1921
Sigourney, Keokuk Co., IA
E. D. Nauman
Nauman 1934

Record Number: 81-GB
Classification: NA

REFERENCES

Nauman, E.D. 1934. Notes on the owls in southeastern Iowa. IBL
4:6-7.

DuMont 1933

VOTE (1981): 4-III, 3-IV

III, eye color seems unmistakable.

IV, good observer, fair description.

IV, Account of bird that was caught and caged when observer
saw it. The only mark noted is yellow eyes. In the same article
the observer mentions seeing a flock of Richardson's Owls.

III, Similar to 5 -- eye color seen, closely observed.

DuMont's description adds some details -- kept several days,
facial disk.

Great Gray Owl

Nauman, E. D. 1934. Notes on the owls in southeastern Iowa. IBL 4:6-7.

Notes on Owls in Southeastern Iowa.—The owls as a family have been very interesting to me, and I will give a brief report on them as I have observed them here. We have the Screech Owl and the Barred Owl, both of which are common. We also have the Barn Owl, but it is rare, and the Great Horned Owl is rather rare. I have also seen a small flock of the Richardson's Owl, a northern species. This was during one cold winter many years ago when I was teaching a country school near What Cheer. When passing a certain ravine and washout with overhanging banks covered with tall dead grass, a flock of five or six of these birds would fly out of this retreat. I saw them there many times during the month of January, 1890, as I passed the place on my way to and from school. I have also seen a few individuals of the Long-eared and Short-eared Owls in Keokuk County during the many years in which I have kept records.

During February, 1921, a young man in Sigourney called me to come and see what kind of owl he had caught. Investigation showed that he had a fine specimen of the Great Gray Owl shut up in a box. The owl was blinking his yellow eyes and snapping his bill in a most indignant manner, evidently not enjoying his predicament a bit. The young man had found the owl asleep in a tree and threw a club which stunned it. This owl was later liberated near the place where its slumbers were so rudely disturbed a few days before.

When I was a boy we lived at the edge of an extensive timber area south of Keota, in the east part of this county. This fine hardwood forest has since been mostly destroyed. My mother raised much poultry, including chickens, ducks, geese and wild turkeys. The turkeys were really wild stock, for I was with my father when we flushed the old turkey off the nest and he took the dozen eggs in his big straw hat and ran to the house to give an old hen the job of finishing the incubation. Mother raised this stock for years with the addition of new stock some years later when father found another nest.

When I was about eighteen years old, mother complained a great deal about owls taking many of her chickens. Father suggested that it was more likely minks, weasels or skunks. But the chickens kept disappearing, mostly from the fences and trees about the chicken house where the young chickens were roosting. This was in the late fall, October or November. Finally one of the family saw a huge bird take a chicken off the fence one evening just after it became dark. Later, when the weather got colder, we managed to get all of the chickens into their house, and the trouble almost ended. One evening in December when the door of the building was left open unintentionally, I saw a big owl fly in and carry off a pullet.

During the following February my brother and I were in the woods about 60 rods from our house. We were cutting wood. This occupation was suddenly interrupted by a great fluttering and wing-beating among the limbs overhead. A glance upward showed us a Great Horned Owl leaving a big nest about 30 feet up in an oak tree. The vicinity of the tree looked like a veritable shambles. The ground was covered with four inches of snow, and the snow under the tree was pretty well covered with feathers, bones, hair, skins and pellets of rejected materials. A climb to the nest showed two white eggs a trifle larger than chicken eggs. The nest was erected on top of an old Crow's nest and was somewhat over three feet in diameter. Beside the eggs were portions of rabbit, squirrel, chicken, Quail, and several species of mice, also evidently portions of the little flying squirrel and some shrews. That these birds were incubating when the ground was covered with snow and zero weather prevailed, was certainly a revelation to me.

Our parents decided that these were our chicken thieves, and their destruction was ordered at once. This was soon accomplished. One of the owls had a wing-spread of 56 inches and its mate measured 60 inches.

One summer a pair of Crested Flycatchers made their home in a hollow limb of a large maple that stands near our kitchen window. A pair of Screech Owls had their home in another hollow limb of the same tree for many years, and these owls and the flycatchers had their nests only seven feet apart. The flycatchers did not succeed in raising their family, for after having been seen and heard regularly for about 20 days, they suddenly disappeared. I think perhaps the Screech Owls invaded their lodge and made their breakfast on the flycatchers. Perhaps the owls were unable to catch their regular supply of mice and grasshoppers.—E. D. NAUMAN, Sigourney, Iowa.

Scotiaptex nebulosa nebulosa (Forster). Great Gray Owl

DuMont 1933
p 86

A casual visitor. Anderson (1907) recorded that it was listed by J. A. Allen (White's Geology of Iowa, 1870, p. 424), and it was reported by I. S. Trostler on December 17, 1893 near Omaha (Rev. Bds. Neb., p. 55). Trippe (1872) stated that a very large bird was killed at Oskaloosa in Mahaska County, which, from the description given him by the person who shot it, must have been this species. Walter G. Savage writes from Hillsboro, Henry County: "In 1860 my father shot one. I have not known them to occur since. There is no mistake in this owl. My father shot it in a tree standing in our dooryard one night, and it was nothing else but a Great Gray Owl." David L. Savage, writing in 1894, says: "A friend in Van Buren County shot a Great Gray Owl a few winters ago. This is the only time I ever heard of this species being found in Iowa, but the identity is certain."

A sight record is listed hypothetically by DuMont (1931) because substantiating evidence, in the form of a specimen, is lacking. Four were seen under favorable conditions by A. J. Palas and John Woodmansee in Polk County, December 24, 1922. Nauman reports that one was found during the winter of 1920-21, four miles north of Sigourney, Keokuk County. It was discovered by several boys, high in a tree, and one of them succeeded in hitting it with a thrown club. The bird was caged for several days and during that time Nauman identified it as unquestionably of this species. He noted the great size, large facial disc, yellow eyes, and the lack of ear tufts. (There is some slight discrepancy as to the date of capture. Nauman's report to the writer stated about February 10, while his report to the U. S. Biological Survey gave April 25. He mentions that the ground was covered with snow.) There are no Iowa specimens.

Bent, A. C.: Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey (Part 2).
Bull 170 US Nat Museum, Washington, 1938. p 219

Casual records.—Great gray owls have many times been taken or observed in winter south of what seems to be their normal range. Among these records are the following: One reported as seen on the Humber River, Newfoundland, on August 28, 1899. One taken at Stratford, Conn., on January 6, 1843; another taken at North Haven in March 1907, while a third was reported as seen near the latter point on February 4, 1934. In 1887 one was recorded as having been shot near Mendham, N. J., "many years ago", and another was reported to have been killed in Sussex County in December 1859. One was reported as found in the smokestack of a steamboat at Erie, Pa., about 1900. There are two incomplete records for Clark County, Ohio, and an unsatisfactory record for Huntsburg. A specimen was taken near Fowler, Ind., during the winter of 1897, and another was collected at Hoveys Lake, Posey County, "some years before 1913." One was taken at Hillsboro, Iowa, in 1860, and another was captured alive at Sigourney on April 25, 1921. A specimen was taken at Omaha, Nebr., on December 17, 1893. There are a few records for Yellowstone National Park, Wyo., and one was collected at Wells in April 1899. In southern Idaho a specimen was taken in December 1910 at St. Anthony. One was taken at McCloud, Calif., on September 26, 1913, while there are three records from Quincy, one being a specimen collected on May 12, 1894.

Closely allied races of this owl are found in northern Europe and Asia.