

Great Gray Owl

11 Feb 1996

Big Marsh, Butler Co., IA

\*Kent, \*Fuller, \*\*\*\*\*

IBL 66:57; 67:82

Record Number: 96-02

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Thomas H. Kent (11 Feb), 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Jim Fuller (11 Feb), 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

Stephen J. Dinsmore (19 Feb), 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014

Jim Dinsmore (19 Feb), 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014

Peter Petersen (19 Feb), 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport 52803

Chris Edwards (19 Feb), 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317

Mark Proescholdt (21 Feb), Box 65, Liscomb 50148

PHOTOGRAPHS

Thomas H. Kent, 11 Feb 1996, P-0480

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:57

Records Committee: 67:82

Field Notes 50:177, 1996, photo by Stephen J. Dinsmore, 19 Feb

VOTE: 6 A-P, 1 A-D

A-P, Diagnostic photographs.

A-P, Nice!



< >010 19-02 CHENN-01AU 734

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Immature Black-legged Kittiwake in Wilmette, Illinois, December 4, 1995. Photograph/Joe B. Milosevich.

16-24 (LMc, JDu, J&PB), H.B.S.P., Feb. 3 (EB, RHn), and Mel Price Lock & Dam, Madison, IL Feb. 2-Mar. 10 (DK).

The northernmost Greater Roadrunner since the late 1970s was observed in e. Camden, MO Feb. 22 (NS). Snowy Owls were remarkably scarce, with two on the Chicago lakefront, one in Coles, IL, and one that ranged from Allen, IN to Paulding, OH. On Oct. 17, a Burrowing Owl was extricated from the chimney of a Jackson, MO residence; the bird was rehabilitated and released (†K. Hogan, C. Bascom, ph.). Although no other details were available, a Great Gray Owl was photographed in Butler, IA Feb. 19 (SD ph.). It was an excellent winter for the "eared owls," with 70 Long-eared and 141 Short-eareds reported in the Region. Peak Long-eared Owl counts included 12 in Allen, IN Dec. 31-Feb. 17 (CS, m.ob.) and eight in Monroe, IL Feb. 17 (DK). Maximum Short-eared tallies included the following wintering groups: >20 in Franklin, IL (LS) and 22 in Warrick, IN (JCb et al.). Northern Saw-whet Owls were also unusually widespread, with ten birds reported in the n. states; the peak count consisted of four at Killdeer Plains, OH Feb. 18 (RHn).

**Hummingbirds to Shrikes**

A Rufous Hummingbird lingered in Lebanon, MO until the first snow arrived Dec. 9 (LP) and a unidentified hummingbird of the genus *Selasphorus* was reported in Willow Springs, MO Dec. 9 (fide LRi). Red-headed Woodpeckers were present in good numbers in Cleveland, OH (LRo). A very tardy Scissor-tailed Flycatcher lingered near the Bois D'Arc exit of I-44, Greene, MO until Dec. 2 (†JLu). Following last fall's heavy flight, Red-breasted Nuthatches were reported in good numbers across the Region. Most surprising for mid-December was a House Wren in Dayton, OH Dec. 17 (†JDu, ST). Lingering Marsh Wrens were detected at Miami-Whitewater, OH Dec. 5 (fide NK), in

Kent, OH Dec. 17 (LRo), and in Buchanan, MO Jan. 14 (LL). Townsend's Solitaires mentioned in the autumn report lingered at West Beach, IN through Dec. 7 (JMc), at Klehm Arboretum, IL until Jan. 11 (RM), and at Lyons Woods Forest Preserve, IL through the period (EW, DJh, JLa, m.ob.). A Hermit Thrush at H.B.S.P., Feb. 4-Feb. 19 was exceptional for that date (LRo, RHn). Huge Am. Robin flocks, total estimated to exceed 100,000 birds, appeared in Barton, MO in mid-February (fide BJ). Varied Thrushes were seen Jan. 7 in McHenry, IL (fide RB), at Muscatatuck N.W.R., IN Jan. 20 (†DGr), and at Parma Heights, OH Jan. 23-Feb. 22 (†RHn, m.ob.). Rare in winter, the 15-25 Am. Pipits observed at Schell-Osage W.M.A., MO Feb. 17 & 29 (J&EZ, m.ob.) and 16 at R.E.D.A., Feb. 24 (PMc et al.) were noteworthy. Cedar Waxwing concentrations were not reported; peak counts included 250 in Bernheim Forest, KY Jan. 9 (J&PB) and 200 in Lucas, OH Feb. 17 (fide LRo). A sprinkling of Bohemian Waxwings graced the Region, with one at West Beach, IN Dec. 2 (†Haw et al.), three at Ravinia Park, Lake, IL Dec. 19 (LH), and one at Ogden Dunes, IN Dec. 29 (JMc, †DGo).

**SA** The Region enjoyed a major N. Shrike invasion. This flight surpassed the winter 1981-1982 incursion, which involved 43 birds, and may have exceeded the large invasions of the mid-1950's. Even without the lowa report, more than 63 birds were reported across the Region. State tallies included >30 in Illinois, 20 in Ohio, 17 in Indiana, and one in Missouri. The latter, an immature, was seen at Reed W.M.A., in Jackson, w.c. MO Jan. 20 (JZ).

**Vireos to Buntings**

A Dec. 5 window kill at a Michigan City, IN, auto dealership proved to be an imm.



Great Gray Owl in Butler County, Iowa, February 19, 1996. Photograph/Stephen J. Dinsmore.



Northern Saw-whet Owl at Killdeer Plains, Ohio, February 24, 1996. One of at least four present at this site. Photograph/Wendell L. Argabrite.

White-eyed Vireo (\*H. Dancey); the specimen, which constitutes Indiana's first December record, was taken to the Chicago Field Museum. The season's only Orange-crowned Warbler was at Rend L., IL Dec. 16 (DK). A few Yellow-rumped Warblers wintered n. of their normal range, with two in n. LaPorte, IN Dec. 6 (SB) and three at South Bend, IN Jan. 1 (M&VR). Other late-departing warblers included a male Pine Warbler at Hammond, IN Dec. 1 (JB) and Com. Yellowthroats at Miami-Whitewater, OH Dec. 5 and Conneaut, OH Dec. 12 (JPo).

The newly-designated Spotted Towhee was found at Braidwood, IL Dec. 30 (JM) and Lebanon, MO Dec. 8-Feb. 14 (L. Pannell). It was a good winter for sparrows, as was illustrated by the 800 Am. Tree Sparrows counted Jan. 1 at Miami-Whitewater, OH (fide NK). A remarkable four Chipping Sparrows were found in Ohio during December; reports included two in Tuscaravirus Dec. 3 (ES), one at Springfield Dec. 23-Jan. 7 (†DO), and one in Holmes Dec. 21-30 (ES). The number of winter LeConte's Sparrow reports was typical for the Region, with one near King City, MO Jan. 1 (LL), one at Cypress Creek N.W.R., IL Jan. 15 (DK), and two at Bradford Farms, Boone,



96-02

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

*Species:* Great Gray Owl; *Number:* 1

*Location:* Big Marsh, Butler Co., Iowa

*Date:* 11 February 1996; *Time:* 4:59 to 5:30 p.m.

*Name and address:* Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

*Others before/with/after:* Francis Moore earlier in the day and someone else the day before. Jim Fuller with me.

*Habitat and circumstances:* At north edge of large man-made marshy area near the Cedar River.

*Description of bird:* A large gray owl that I judge to be somewhat larger than a Barred Owl. It has a large gray facial disks that are edged by a narrow dark line and are composed of fine black concentric lines. There are gray half-moon areas on the inner side of the eyes. The irises are bright yellow and the pupils are dark. The bill is small and yellow. The chin has prominent white "bow tie" marks that are horizontal white lines that are separated in the mid-line by gray feathers. The underparts are streaked. The back of the head is more finely streaked. The under tail is barred. The bars are not solid and have indistinct edges. In some areas the bird's feathers had a brownish cast. The bird has a fluffy appearance as the feathers are blown by the wind. The head is quite large. We drove into the area where the bird had been seen and found it sitting about 20 feet up in a tree. We turned the car so as to get a good angle and watched the bird for about 25 minutes. It finally flew down into the grass and was out of sight briefly. It flew up to a post and then after a few minutes to another post. We left it there.

*Voice:* Not heard.

*Similar species:* Only Barred Owl is remotely similar. The most impressive marks were the yellow eyes, bow tie mark, and large gray facial disks.

*Any one have reservations?:* no.

*Light:* Overcast, late afternoon gray light; *Distance:* 25 to 30 yards; *Optics:* 10x binocular; 560 mm lens; the bird provided a large image in the viewfinder and the shutter speed registered 1/8 second with 200 ASA film and f8 aperture.

*Previous experience:* I have seen several in Minnesota.

*References before/after viewing:* none.

*Time of notes:* while viewing; *Final typing:* 15 hours.

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

96-02

SPECIES: Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*)

LOCATION: Big Marsh (Butler County)

HABITAT: Tall grass, interspersed with groves and lines of trees.

DATE & TIME: 11 February, 1996 (4:59-5:30 PM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: With me was Tom Kent. Earlier the same day Francis Moore and Tom Stone. Later there were MOB.

DESCRIPTION: The bird was seen sitting only 15 or so feet off the ground in a small tree only about 60 feet away. This was a large owl. Even though there was no direct comparison, it appeared to be larger than either a Barred or Great Horned Owl. The head was also larger and the tail was longer. Generally, the owl was gray and black. The large head also had very large facial discs, surrounded by a black border of varying thickness. The eyes were yellow, and on the inner side of the eyes, there were light gray areas that looked like a shallow letter "C", and together, they looked like a rounded letter "X". Both at the top of where the "X" crossed and at the bottom where the bill was, there was black. The bill itself was relatively small and yellow in color. The facial discs had concentric circles of black on light gray. One of the most notable features was a white area below each of the facial discs which together gave the appearance of a mustache or bow tie. The breast had dark vertical streaking, while the undertail showed dark barring which was a little wavy. The top of the tail and back were more a grayish-brown, and were barred and streaked with lighter gray. The top and back of the head looked dappled with dark and light gray. The tail seemed long and was rounded.

The owl rapidly twisted its head and appeared to be listening for small mammals. After about a half hour in the tree, it suddenly plunged into a grassy area, which was out of sight over a mound. After a minute or so, it flew up to a nearby DNR sign. No vocalization was heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Barred Owl is browner, has a smaller head, a less prominent white bow tie, and it has dark eyes.

DISAGREEMENT: Nobody disagreed with the ID.

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: It was late in the afternoon with cloudy skies. The bird was viewed with Swift Audubon (8.5 X 44) binoculars, at a distance of approximately 60 feet. Direction of viewing was to the east.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen numerous Great Gray Owls in northern Minnesota, as well as at Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks.

FIELD NOTES & REFERENCES: Field notes were prepared later that evening without the use of a reference. This form was typed on 21 February.



## DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Great Gray Owl

Number: 1

Location: Big M., Butler Co., IA

Habitat: grassy fields interspersed with rows and small groves of trees

Date: 19 February 1996

Time: 5:00-6:05 p.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014

Others who saw bird: Jim Dinsmore, m.ob.

Description of bird(s): We arrived at Big Marsh to find about a dozen birders already there waiting for the bird to show itself. I decided it would be more productive to walk the area, rather than wait along the road. After walking for 45 minutes, I located the bird perched in a row of trees about a half mile WNW of the pond and chain gate area where the bird was most often seen. Others joined me by 5:30 and we watched the bird until dusk. The bird was clearly a large owl. Size was about twice that of a Barred Owl I had seen earlier. The head was large, rounded, and lacked any ear tufts. The base color of the facial disks was white with darker, fine concentric rings. The eyes and bill were yellow. The underparts were finely barred with darker black streaks along the flanks. The short tail was barred. The upperparts were darker and unmarked. In flight, the wings were very broad and the flight feathers had a distinct brownish cast to them. The outer primaries and rectrices were frayed and appeared heavily worn. The bird did not vocalize.

Similar species and how eliminated: The combination of large size, lack of ear tufts, ringed facial disks, yellow bill, and white mark under the eyes eliminates other owl, especially Barred and Great Horned owls.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with clear skies. Estimated viewing distance was 25-75 feet. I used 10x42 binoculars.

Previous experience with species: I have seen numerous Great Grays, mostly in northern Minnesota.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes made: written immediately after observation

How long before this form completed: 4 hours

96-02

DOCUMENTATION FORM

**Species** Great Gray Owl **How many?** one

**Location?** Big Marsh WMA, Butler County

**Type of habitat?** rows of trees scattered in grassland

**When? date(s):** 19 Feb 1996 **Time:** 5:30-6:00 p.m.

**Who?** your name and address

Jim Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames

**Others with you** Stephen Dinsmore, Beth Proescholdt, Dennis Henrickson, Pete and Mary Lou Petersen, and a cast of hundreds

**Others before or after you** many

**Describe the bird(s)** including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also describe voice and behavior.

Very large, earless owl. Nothing to compare with but seemed larger than any other owl I have ever seen. Body massive but tail appeared longer than on most owls.

Overall color dark gray, large facial disks. The most obvious field mark were the white half rings below each eye. These were clearly seen on the birds numerous times.

**Similar species** and how eliminated:

Barred Owl-this bird was too large, body shape wrong, and the white eye marks are not found on Barred Owl

**Did any one disagree** or have reservations about identification?

If yes, explain: no

**Viewing conditions:** lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Viewed with 10 power binocs at about 25-30 yards. It was clear with good light (sun behind me) when I first saw the bird and got good looks at it. Light gradually failed and when it flew several times, I could see little detail on it.

**Previous experience** with this species and similar ones: none

**References** and persons consulted before writing description:

none

**How long before field notes made?**

this form completed? nest morning



DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

96-02

What species? Great Gray Owl How many? 1

Location? Big Marsh, Butler Co., IA.

Type of Habitat? Marsh, grassy areas with wooded borders

When? date(s): Feb. 19, 1996 time: 5:35 to 5:40 PM

Who? your name and address: Peter & Marylou Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 528

Others with you: Steve & Jim Dinsmore, Chris Edwards, Dennis Henriksen, several others

Others before or after you: Jim Scheib, Francis Moore, Tom Kent, Jim Fuller, Bruce DeLong, <sup>unob</sup>

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Very large grey owl with long (for an owl) tail. No ear tufts, very noticeable grey circles on facial disk. Vertical streaks on chest, eyes seemed light. whitest area on face on inner side of eyes.

Similar species; how eliminated: Barned Owl - smaller, lacks vertical breast streaks, shorter tail. Great Horned Owl - grey plumage phase - has ear tufts, black "sides" to facial disk.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no  
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment. sun just setting, behind us. Distance est. at 100m., 10X40 binocs, 30X scope on tripod.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen previously in Canada & Minn.

References and persons consulted before writing description: none

How long before field notes made? 10 min. this form completed? 3 hrs.

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

**DOCUMENTATION FORM FOR IOWA BIRD SIGHTINGS**

Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Avenue, North Liberty, IA 52317

**What Species?** Great Gray Owl**How many?** 1**Location?** Big Marsh, Butler Co.**Type of Habitat?** Fields bordered by timber.**When?** February 19, 1996, 5:50 - 6:05 p.m.**Who?** Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317.**Others with you:** Pete Petersen, Jim Dinsmore, Steve Dinsmore, Eugene & Eloise Armstrong, Tim Gedler, Beth Proescholdt, several others.**Others before or after you:**

**Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.**

Very large owl. Large round head with no ear tufts. Very large facial disks. Long tail. Eyes yellow. Two white horizontal "whiskers" on throat, separated by blackish area. Overall plumage grayish-brown with dark brown streaks.

The bird was first observed shortly before dusk perched in a row of trees at the edge of a field. It flew very low over the field and caught a small rodent. It carried the rodent in its bill to a perch and devoured it before taking flight again.

**Similar species; how eliminated:** Barred owl is much smaller, has a smaller head, has dark eyes, and lacks the white "whiskers".

**Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification?** No.

**Viewing conditions:** Low sunlight, 40 yards away. Viewed with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15x - 45x telescope.

**Previous experience with species and similar ones:** No experience with Great Gray Owl; very familiar with regular Iowa owls.

**References and persons consulted before writing description:** None.

**How long before field notes made?** Two hours.

**How long before this form completed?** Two hours.



What species? Great Gray Owl How many? 1Location? Big Marsh — Butler CountyType of habitat? Marshy area with open areas and lots of treesWhen? date(s): Feb. 21, 1996 time: 6:00 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. approximatelyWho? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Beth Proescholdt, Carl + Linda Kurtz, Carolyn Fisher, Pat Hanson, Reva Pedetty  
Alan Martinothers before or after you: Many — Steve + Jim Dinsmore, Jim Fuller, Tom Kent, Rita Gorenson, Eloise Armstrong, others  
Jan Walter

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Alan spotted it first and it was very close to me — 15 yards. I had great close looks at it. Then it flew a little ways away and I waved for all the others to come and we all got good looks at it.

It was a huge big Owl with a big rounded head that had no ear tufts. It had gray facial disks and a very prominent "white bow tie" that really stood out in the fading light. It was grayish in its coloring but showed a little dark brownish coloring on its feathers on its back. Alan said he saw its yellow eyes when he first saw it but I did not. It flew several times a short distance and had slow wing beats. It went to the ground once with snow behind it. It was a magnificent bird!

Similar species and how eliminated: ~~Great Horned Owls~~ have prominent ear tufts. Barred Owls and ~~Great Horned Owls~~ lack the prominent "white bow tie", are smaller, and are not grayish overall with grayish facial disks.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain: :

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: cloudy, getting dark — (Sunset was 5:55 p.m.), Distances estimated at 15 yards, 25 yards and 60 yards away. We had good looks! 8X30 Binoculars.Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen 19 in Duluth, Minnesota, one winter.References and persons consulted before writing description: NoneHow long before field notes made? 10:10 p.m. that night this form completed? Feb. 24, 1996