

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/24/00

Great Gray Owl

8 Feb 1997

Clay Banks Forest, Cerro Gordo Co., IA

\*Allen, \*Fisher, \*Fuller, \*S. Dinsmore

P-0537, P0538, IBL 67:60-61, 68:86

Record Number: 97-04

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Pam Allen (8 Feb), 1601 Pleasant St., West Des Moines 50265

[6/15/97]

Carolyn Fisher (8 Feb), 48 Lakeview Ct., Mason City

Stephen J. Dinsmore (9, 16 Feb), 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014

Jim Fuller (13 Feb), 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

PHOTOGRAPHS

Reid Allen (8 Feb), P-0537

Carolyn Fisher (8 Feb), P-0538

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:60-61

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P, White bow tie visible. Great bird!



Great Gray Owl  
P-0537  
Clay Bank F., Cerro Gordo Co.  
8 Feb 1997 Reid Allen 97-04

DOCUMENTATION

97-04

SPECIES: Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*)

HOW MANY: One

LOCATION: Cerro Gordo County, 1/4 mile west of the intersection of Wren and 225th Street; on 225th St.

DATE: February 8, 1997

TIME & LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: First located at 2:52 p.m. C.S.T. and observed until 4:09 C.S.T.

FIRST OBSERVATION MADE BY: Pam and Reid Allen

DOCUMENTER'S NAME & ADDRESS: Reid (photograph) and Pam Allen (written documentation), 1601 Pleasant Street West Des Moines, IA 50265

OTHERS WHO SAW BIRD: Rita Pedelty, Carolyn Fischer, Jan Walter

DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: This very large owl was sitting in the top of a small shrubby tree (about 20 feet off the ground). The first thing noticed was the bright white English gentleman's upcurving mustache or "bowtie." Next noticed were the piercing yellow eyes. Overall the bird was a greyish brown, with no "horns" or "ear tufts." The breast and belly was a little bit paler than the wings, tail and back (including nape and top of head). The face was divided down the center and on each side of the rounded head the eyes were in the center of concentric rings which alternated in color between a medium brownish-grey color and a richer, darker chocolate brown. The feathering on each side of the eyes toward the very center of the face was not a part of the rings around the eyes. This greyish-brown feathering was "tufty." The beak of the owl was yellowish and it was below this area (around the chin) where the white "bowtie" was located. It was interesting watching the bird "hunting." It would fly very low over the grassy area and a couple of times it landed on the ground but did not come away with anything. It was working between two treelines and flew up into a larger tree where it was shouted at by a couple of blue jays. The owl tilted its head up to look at the blue jays and you could see its beak chattering. Because of distance, you could not hear any sounds.

SIMILAR SPECIES & HOW ELIMINATED: There really is no other owl except a Barred Owl which could be confused with this bird. The yellow eyes of the Great Gray Owl eliminated the possibility of a Barred Owl which has dark eyes. Also, size would eliminate the Barred Owl. The Great Gray Owl looked almost twice as large as a Barred Owl.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: I would describe the skies as "cloudy sunlight." This Great Gray Owl was sitting on the north side of the road and when first spotted it was about 100 yards from the road. The closest it came for viewing was about 70 yards.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIES: Have observed this species in the Sax-Zim bog area in northeastern Minnesota.

EQUIPMENT: Kowa TSN-4 spotting scope; Bushnell 8x42 Elite Binoculars. Minolta X-700 camera mounted on Kowa TSN-4 spotting scope.

REFERENCES CONSULTED: FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, National Geographic Society, Second Edition, 1987.

HOW LONG BEFORE FIELD NOTES MADE: While viewing bird.

HOW LONG BEFORE THIS FORM COMPLETED: March 1, 1997.

PHOTOGRAPH: Taken by Reid Allen. Note: So as not to disturb or scare away this owl, this photograph is not as good as it could have been. However, the pertinent field marks are visible in this photograph.

COMMENTS: It should be noted that as soon as this owl was discovered, telephone calls were made to birders in the area so that they could come out and view it. We stayed watching this owl until someone else arrived. Also, we did not leave our car while waiting for others to arrive. The photograph was taken from the car. The I.O.U. hotline was called also. Upon returning home, we were informed that another Great Gray Owl was also in this area.

Mason City

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

97-04

What species? Great Gray Owl How many? 2

Location? Cerro Gordo County, Claybanks Forest area

Type of Habitat? Forest clearing with nearby open area

When? date(s): February 8, 1997 time: 3:30 to 5:00 P.m

Who? your name and address: Carolyn Fischer, 48 Lakeview Ct. M.C

Others with you: Jan Walter, Tom Fischer

Others before or after you: Reid and Pam Allen, West Des Moines

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.

Had a phone call from Allens on Feb. 8. (Sat.) in the afternoon. They had found one <sup>B.</sup> Gray Owl. We drove out to the area in which they had indicated. Wren Ave. + 225 St. With my 8x30 binoculars I could see a very large owl. Using my 30x spotting scope I was able to <sup>see</sup> large circular facial disk - white markings under chin "bow tie" eyes were yellow + looked small - hooked brownish-gray over-all - I found second Great Gray Owl across the road south side of 225 St, in low grassy area  
Similar species; how eliminated: Covered with snow -

Great Horned Owl -  
Could not see ear tufts, and the owl was hunting during day-light.

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

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
partly sunny, 300 yards far Owl on North side + 100 yards far owl on South side -

Previous experience with species and similar ones:  
saw a Great Gray Owl last winter in Bremer Co.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? 1 day this form completed? Feb 11

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

97-04



Cerro Gordo Co.

Great Gray Owl P-0538  
Way Banks F., Cerro Gordo Co.  
Feb 1997 Carolyn Fisher

CAROLYN FISHER

## DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Great Gray Owl

LOCATION: Clay Banks Forest area (Cerro Gordo County)

DATE & TIME: 13 February, 1997 (8:20-30 AM)

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

OTHERS: Originally reported by Pam and Reid Allen. With me were eight other IOU members on a field trip to Duluth; D. Tetrault, C. Caster, H. & D. Fye, D. Porter, G. Foster, R. Muilenburg, and G. White. Seen by MOB before and after.

DESCRIPTION: This was a very large and "long" gray owl, with a relatively long tail and a round head lacking "horns". The large head had large facial discs of gray and white surrounded by a black border. White markings included a very prominent bow tie, and a white "X" between the eyes. The eyes were yellow, as was the bill. The breast was white with dark vertical streaking and fine gray barring. The back, folded wing, and tail were more brownish-gray than gray and also showed wider barring. The tail was long and rounded at the end.

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

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: The bird was sitting in a tree about a hundred yards to the north of the road. It was early morning of a sunny day, with the sun in the southeast. Viewing was through a KOWA TSN4 telescope (20 X 60 zoom).

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen a great many Great Gray Owls in Minnesota and in the western mountains, as well as one at Big Marsh in Butler County, Iowa, last February.

FIELD NOTES & REFERENCES: Field notes were written in the van after sighting, and no references were used at the time.

97-04

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Great Gray Owl

Number: 2

Location: Clay Banks Forest, Cerro Gordo Co., IA

Habitat: small woodlot surrounded by open fields

Date: 9,16 February 1997

Time: 10:50 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on the 9th

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

Others who saw bird: Mark & Beth Proescholdt, James J. Dinsmore, m.ob.

Description of bird(s): When we arrived at the area, we scanned the forest edge from the road without luck. We then decided to cover some of the area on foot. After about an hour of walking, Mark spotted a Great Gray about 30 feet up in a large tree along the edge of a field. The bird was clearly a large owl, estimated to be slightly larger than a Great Horned. The head was large and rounded and lacked ear tufts. The eyes and bill were yellow. The facial disks were lighter than the head with fine, gray concentric rings. The sides of the facial disks were edged with buff. Below the face, there was a narrow white "chinstrap". The underparts were finely barred. The tail was barred, and there was some brown color near the tips of the rectrices. The upperparts were dark gray. When perched, the flight feathers also had some brown color near the tips. The outer primaries and rectrices were frayed and appeared worn. About 200m away we found a second Great Gray, identical in plumage to the first bird.

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 as close as 40 feet. I used 10x42 binoculars.

Previous experience with species: I have seen numerous Great Gray Owls in northern Minnesota, plus one in Iowa in 1996.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes made: written after observation

How long before this form completed: 6 hours