

Boreal Owl
Jan 1890
What Cheer, Keokuk Co., IA
E. D. Nauman
Nauman 1934

Record Number: 81-KE
Classification: NA

REFERENCE

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

VOTE (1981): 3-V, 4-VI

VI, no details.

V, no description.

VI, must have been Saw-whets, as he did not mention them.

VI, Habitat and actions totally wrong for this species;
suggest short-eared owl. No detail, record old when recorded.

V, Sounds highly unlikely. However he may be reliable -- the
birds sound like short-eared owls, but he mentions them later.
Behavior definitely not Boreal Owl (nor habitat).

Boreal Owl

Nauman, E. D. 1934. Notes on owls in southeastern Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 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. } 3

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.