

Great Gray Owl

< 1872

Oskaloosa, Mahaska Co., IA

fide T. M. Trippe

Trippe 1872

Record Number: 81-FY  
Classification: NA

REFERENCE

Trippe, T.M. 1872. Notes on the birds of southern Iowa. Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist. 15:229-243, p 233.

VOTE (1981): 1-IV, 4-V, 2-VI

V, inadequate.

IV, second hand report -- no description.

V, need description, 'very large bird' could be Gr. Horned Owl.

Trippe, T. M. 1872. Notes on the birds of southern Iowa.  
Proc Boston Society of Natural History 15:229-243. p 233

14. *Syrnium cinereum*. A very large bird was killed at Oskaloosa, in Mahaska County, which, from the description given to me by the person who shot it, must have been this species.

3

164. (370). *Scotiaptex nebulosa* (Forster). Great Gray Owl.

The Great Gray Owl is a resident of the far north and only occurs in Iowa as a casual straggler in winter. It was listed by J. A. Allen in White's Geology of Iowa, 1870 (p. 424), and it has been "reported on Dec. 17, 1893, near Omaha, by I. S. Trostler" (Rev. Bds. Neb., 55). T. M. Trippe records (Proc. Bost. Soc., xv, 1872, 233): "*Syrnium cinereum*. A very large bird was killed at Oskaloosa, in Mahaska county, which, from the description given me by the person who shot it, must have been this species."

2

3

Anderson 1907  
pp 261-262

Walter G. Savage writes from Hillsboro, Van Buren 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."

1

4

*Scotiaptex nebulosa nebulosa* (Forster). Great Gray Owl

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."

DuMont 1933  
p 86

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.

5

6

Genus *Scotiaptex* Swainson.27. *SCOTIAPTEX NEBULOSA NEBULOSA* (J. R. Forster), 370.

Great Gray Owl.

*Field Characters*.—The largest owl without ear-tufts in the state. Dark grayish in general color, with *yellow eyes*. Very rare.

*Description*.—Above, dusky, mottled with white; feathers about the eyes gray, with black concentric rings. Below, white and streaked on breast, and barred and streaked on sides with dusky. Feet and legs with long, hairlike feathers; eyes and bill yellow. Size very large. No ear-tufts.

*Measurements*.—Length, 26 to 28 inches; wing, 17 to 18 inches; tail, about 12 inches.

*Range*.—Boreal North America. Breeds from northern tree limit in central Alaska and northwestern Mackenzie, south to central Canadian provinces. Winters southward to northern United States, straggling to Iowa, Indiana and Ohio.

The Great Gray Owl is without doubt, in apparent size, if not by actual weight, the largest of our Iowa owls. It is a rare straggler from the north, and authentic records of its occurrence are very few. If the bird is in hand, it is not easily mistaken for the Barred Owl, which it most resembles. Its size, however, relatively small feet, and above all its yellow eyes, are in marked contrast to the smaller dimensions, comparatively larger feet, and dark eyes of the Barred Owl. The writer has purchased two specimens of this bird which were taken near Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the autumn of 1913, but has been unable to discover any specimens actually collected in Iowa.

R. M. Anderson notes that it is recorded by J. A. Allen (White's Geology of Iowa, Vol. 2, p. 424, 1870), and by I. S. Trostler on December 17, 1893, near Omaha (Rev. Bds. Neb., p. 55); also by T. M. Trippe near Oskaloosa in Mahaska county (Proc. Bost. Soc., XV., p. 233, 1872). He also records that Walter G. Savage reported one killed by his father in 1860 near Hillsboro, Van Buren county, and "David L. Savage writing in 1894 says 'a friend in Van Buren county shot a Great Gray Owl a few winters ago.'"

The species is looked upon as one that is not successful in the struggle for existence and that is decreasing in numbers.

Bailey, B. H. 1918. The Raptorial Birds of Iowa, Iowa Geological Survey Bull 6

Great Gray Owl

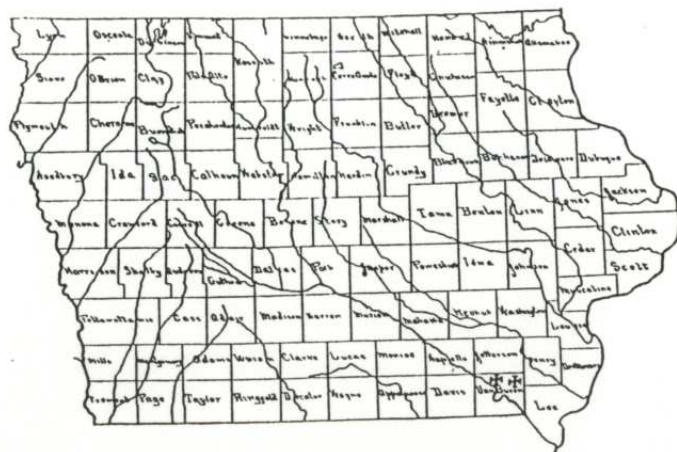


Fig. 82.—Map showing the distribution in Iowa of the Great Gray Owl.

*Scotiaptex nebulosa nebulosa* (J. R. Forster).

- \*Allen, J. A., Catalogue of the Birds of Iowa: Geology of Iowa, White, Vol. 2, App. B, p. 424, 1870.
- \*Trippe, T. M., Notes on the Birds of Southern Iowa: Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History, Vol. 15, p. 233, 1872. (Mahaska County.)
- Warren, B. H., Birds of Pennsylvania, p. 238, 1888.
- Ridgway, R., Ornithology of Illinois, p. 410, 1889.
- Hatch, Dr. P. L., Birds of Minnesota, p. 211, 1892.
- Bendire, Capt. Chas., Life Histories of North American Birds, p. 345, 1892.
- Fisher, A. K., Hawks and Owls of the U. S., p. 157, 1893.
- Woodruff, F. M., Birds of the Chicago Area, p. 103, 1907.
- Anderson, R. M., Birds of Iowa, p. 261, 1907.
- Widmann, Otto, A Preliminary Catalogue of the Birds of Missouri: Trans. Acad. Sci., St. Louis, pp. 107, 108, 1907.
- Cory, C. B., Birds of Illinois and Wisconsin, p. 490, 1909.
- Bruner, L., Wolcott, R. H., Swenk, M. H., A Preliminary Review of the Birds of Nebraska, p. 55, 1909.
- A. O. U. Check-List, p. 171, 1910.
- Chapman, F. M., Birds of Eastern North America, p. 312, 1912.
- Ridgway, R., Birds of North and Middle America, Part VI, Bulletin 50, U. S. Nat. Mus., p. 635, 1914.

81-FY