

FIRST RECORD OF A GREAT GRAY OWL

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Strix nebulosa, the Great Gray Owl, may now be added to the list of owls recorded on Prince Edward Island. The first record is of a dead owl noted in the early evening of October 29, 1991 on the Mill River Road, near Bloomfield (route 145), and reported by Norma Gard to Lorne MacDougall.

At 6:30 p.m., Mr. MacDougall located the owl lying on the road as reported, still warm but nevertheless dead. Possibly the bird had been hit by a vehicle, or had electrocuted itself while perching on the power lines beside the road. The great Gray Owl was a wingspan of up to 5 feet (1.5 m) and is known to perch on power lines, but the specimen did not show the burn marks typical of electrocution. Therefore it seems more likely that a collision with a vehicle was the cause of death.

The specimen, complete with hordes of feather lice, was retained by Mr. MacDougall, and identified on November 26 by Conservation Officer Nelson Hurry as the largest North American owl, the great gray. The bird is without horns, has yellow eyes as opposed to the dark eyes of the Barred Owl, and is larger than a Great Horned Owl. The sex of this owl will be determined when the specimen is preserved (stuffed) by a taxidermist.

The Great Gray Owl inhabits the black spruce and larch bogs of the boreal forest zone. Breeding activity is confined to this biome from Ontario west to Alaska, with local populations extending through the Rocky Mountains to California. The winter range is coincident with the breeding range, but in harsh winters is expanded southward as far as New York State. Winter records in the Maritimes are scanty. Only three records are available from Nova Scotia since 1882 (Tufts, 1986), but Squires (1976) notes three recent sight records and lists this species as casual in winter in New Brunswick.

The Great Gray Owl, though recently selected as the provincial bird of Manitoba, is scarce through much of its range. Robert Nero, passing on information from the American Birding Association, notes that it is the sixth most wanted bird for the lists maintained by North American birding enthusiasts. It is extremely unlikely that any of us will ever add a living Great Gray Owl to our P.E.I. list. This is indeed one of the rarest of rare records for birds on P.E.I.

For more information on this bird please consult:

Nero, Robert W. 1980. The Great Gray Owl, Phantom of the Northern Forest. Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Squires, W. Austin. 1976. The Birds of New Brunswick edition 2. The New Brunswick Museum, Monograph # 7 221 pages.

Tufts, Robie W. 1986. The Birds of Nova Scotia. N.S. Museum & Nimbus Press. 478 pages.

NECK COLLAR ALERT

by Jay Hestbeck



I need your help. I am coordinating a study for the Atlantic Flyway on migrant and resident Canada Geese. To estimate the necessary population parameters, individuals were marked with a flexible neck band. At present, 13,500 geese are neck-banded in the Atlantic Flyway from Prince Edward Island to South Carolina.

You could greatly help the project if you would record any neck-band codes for Canada Geese that you see. Please send the neck-band colour, colour of symbols, symbols from the top down, date, and latitude and longitude