



146-01-1991

## First Documented Northern Hawk Owl, *Surnia ulula*, in Pennsylvania in the Twentieth Century

Franklin C. Haas

On the evening of 18 February 1991, I received a call from Bill Boyle (Regional editor for *American Birds*) informing me of a possible Northern Hawk Owl in Wayne County, Pennsylvania. He had just received a call from Dana Knowlton who had been called by Terry Gauld. It seems that Terry, who owns a summer place in Wayne County, had been told in early February by a her brother that he had seen a Northern Hawk Owl near there. However, she did not have a chance to go up there until President's Day weekend in February. When she finally saw the bird, she confirmed that it was indeed a Hawk Owl. Upon arriving home, she called Dana, who in turn called Bill Boyle.

Although skeptical of such a "good" bird, (the only confirmed, ie. photograph or specimen, records for this species in Pennsylvania are from the nineteenth century, see below) Barb and I decided to check it out the next morning. So, along with Deuane Hoffman (who is doing a Pennsylvania Big Year) and Bill Stocku, we arrived at the site about 10:00 a.m., 19 February. The location was approximately four miles west of Lookout, Pennsylvania in Manchester Township, Wayne County. As we drove up the road, nearing the location from which it had been reported, we

saw another birder standing in the road looking up at the top of a small tree. At the top of the tree was a Northern Hawk Owl!

Suffice it to say that the identification did not take a lot of study. It was an obvious owl in general shape and structure. It was crow-sized, had no ear tufts and had a long tail. The only other North American owls with long tails are the pygmy owls which are less than half as large as this bird. The strong barring on the total underside and white spotting on the wings and back also confirmed the identification (We have heard of Northern Harriers and Long-eared Owls being identified as Hawk Owls by inexperienced observers!).

Subsequently, we learned that this bird may have been present at this location since late October 1990. The Wood family, who own some of the property on which this bird was most often seen, reported seeing this bird as early as late October. Not being experienced birders, they did not know what it was, but they did realize it was something they hadn't seen before. In fact, they remember discussing whether it was a hawk or an owl! Their accounts are convincing and this author has no reason to discount their information.

After our confirmation of the sighting and many phone

calls, hundreds of birders flocked to the area over the next few weeks to see the bird. The bird was very cooperative for most observers, but sometimes hid in an evergreen tree. Most of the time it was seen perched on top of the many deciduous trees in the area and was seen hunting, catching and caching prey, regurgitating pellets and calling.

The bird was last reported on March 17, 1991.

Northern Hawk Owl records in Pennsylvania are few, and this constitutes the first documented (ie. photograph, specimen or recording) record for the twentieth century. Previous records are as follows.

### Nineteenth Century records:

Warren (1890) reports "Joseph Krider has a specimen captured some few years ago, near Philadelphia, in mid-winter. Messrs. R.C. Wrenshall, Allegheny county, J.F. Kitcham, Bradford county, and J.G. Bohn, report the capture of stragglers."

Turnbull (1869) reports "One was shot at Haddington, near Philadelphia, in 1866."

Poole (unpublished manuscript, 1969) considered the Krider specimen to be the one mentioned by Turnbull. In addi-

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tion, he sites a specimen taken by T.G.Gentry on October 15 (no year) mentioned in Gentry's *Life Histories of the Birds of Eastern Pennsylvania* (1877:-212). Poole discounts the reports of Wrenshall, Kitcham and Bohn mentioned by Warren.

Todd (1940) also discounts the Wrenshall report as "unverifiable and unacceptable."

There is a specimen in the Reading Public Museum with the label "Albany, Berks County, January 26, 1887," with the initials of L.W. Mengel. I personally examined this specimen in 1990. This appears to be the only extant specimen for Pennsylvania.

#### Twentieth Century Records

13 May 1963, Meadville, Crawford County, Mary Leberman and Jean Gills. Sight record reported in *Audubon Field Notes*@@@

13-18 January 1979, Erie, Erie County, Stanley Zagorski. This sight record is the one cited in Leberman (1988) and Stull (1985).

Late October 1990 to 17 March 1991, Lookout, Wayne County, Franklin C. Haas, *et al.*

#### References:

*Audubon Field Notes* @@@

Leberman, R.C. 1988. *A Field*

*List of the Birds of Western Pennsylvania and Adjacent Regions*. Carnegie Museum of Natural History Special Publ. No. 13, Pittsburgh.

Poole, Earl L. 1969. Unpublished manuscript, *Birds of Pennsylvania*.

Stull, Jean, Stull, James A., and McWilliams, Gerald M. 1985. *Birds of Erie County Pennsylvania Including Presque Isle*. Elgin, Allegheny Press, p. 103.

Todd, W.E.Clyde 1940. *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, p. 281.

Turnbull, William P. 1869. *Birds of Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey*. Philadelphia, Henry Grambo & Co., p. 41.

Warren, Benjamin H. 1890. *Report on the Birds of Pennsylvania*. Harrisburg, p. 159.

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # of

Species: Northern Hawk Owl

Date of Sighting: February 19 - March 17, 1991

Observer(s): Franklin C. Haas, Randy Miller

Date of Submission: 1991

Submitted by: ~~Jerry Williams~~ 

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater	X						
B. Haas	X						
F. Haas	X						
R. Leberman	X						
G. McWilliams	X						
S. Santner	X						
P. Schwalbe	X						
TOTALS	7						
DECISION	X						

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

*B. Haas*

Date:

8-15-91