



453-01-1992

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A great gray owl--apparently only the second confirmed record for western Pennsylvania (Todd, 1940)--was discovered Jan 28th on the grounds of the United Refining Co. in Warren. Dan Zdarko, an employee at the refinery, took a poloroid photo of the owl and showed it to Mike Toole who also works there. Mike tentatively identified it , and that evening showed it to Chuck and Marjorie Neel and me. In spite of the small image, the yellow eyes and white "bow tie" showed.

The next morning I searched the outside of the west end of the refinery without success. Since the location is across the Allegheny River from Oakland Cemetery, I went up there and found it about 10:00 AM. I left to make phone calls, and when I returned, it had gone. But Marjorie Neel found it, with the help of crows, along the railroad that follows the river bank below the Rt. 6 by-pass and the cemetery. From that time ^{to} ~~through~~ Feb. 13th, it was seen daily, all day, except Jan. 30th.

The owl couldn't have been more convenient and ooliging. There was ample parking at the end of Crescent Park Rd., and it ranged from about 200 feet to a half mile out along the railroad from the parking area. The railroad company even tolerated the crowds until Feb. 11, when the tracks were posted and a warning issued in the local newspaper. I estimated well over 2,000 people saw it in this period. Forty-seven cars were parked there at one time the second Sunday. It was a birders' reunion, with people from Cleveland, Ontario, Rochester, Long Island, Virginia, and points between. It was encouraging to see so many local people only mildly interested in birds, or just curious, come out to see the cause of all the publicity. Many other city newspapers reported it; an Erie ~~Erie~~ TV station had lengthy coverage with excellent pictures. A local drug store had a contest for the best photo, with voting by dollars and the proceeds going to the Warren Humane Society. A shop created a commemorative plaque for sale.

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The owl had the species' legendary tameness. It was alert and hunting most of the time. Some people offered it mice, which it readily accepted. It picked wild mice out of the snow while we watched, although I never saw a mouse on top of the snow. It caught one mouse (or vole) actually at Dan Doherty's feet! He thought he was going to be the target. Someone reported that it flew down to the RR and pulled a mouse out from beneath a tie plate.

The excitement was about over when it was only seen about ⁴:00 PM on Feb. 13th. We thought it had left for points north when it wasn't seen for a week. But on Feb. 22nd and 23rd, it was reported along Mohawk Ave., about one half mile uphill and south of the river. It was also seen once more along the river on the 23rd. From then through the end of March it was only seen on nine dates (about one in four) that I know of, ending March 27th when it was seen and photographed by Walter Atwood. All ^{but one} of these observations were along a 3- or 4-tenths of a mile stretch of Mohawk Ave. [~~except one.~~] It was difficult to find the owl here because of the homes and woods.

Curiously, another great gray owl spent much of the same time period just 10 miles north of the state line near Jamestown, N. Y. and about 26 miles from "our" great gray. The Jamestown owl was larger, so speculation was that it a female and Warren's a male.

LITERATURE CITED

Todd, W.E. Clyde. 1940. Birds of Western Pennsylvania. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Ted

Ted Grisez

453-01-1992

@First Extant Record of Great Gray Owl in the Twentieth Century in Pennsylvania

Ted Grisez

A Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*)—apparently only the second confirmed record for western Pennsylvania (Todd 1940)—was discovered 28 January 1992 on the grounds of the United Refining Co. in Warren, Warren County, Pa. Dan Zdarko, an employee at the refinery, took a @Polaroid photograph of the owl and showed it to Mike Toole who also works there. Mike tentatively identified it, and that evening showed it to Chuck and Marjorie Neel and me. In spite of the small image, the yellow eyes and white "bow tie" showed.

The next morning I searched the outside of the west end of the refinery without success. Since the location is across the Allegheny River from Oakland Cemetery, I went up there and found it about 10 AM. I left to make phone calls, and when I returned, it had gone. But Marjorie Neel found it, with the help of crows, along the railroad that follows the river bank below the Route 6 by-pass and the cemetery. From that time to 13 February, it was seen daily, all day, except 30 January.

The owl couldn't have been more convenient and obliging. There was ample parking at the end of Crescent Park Rd., and it ranged from about 200 feet to a half mile out along the railroad from the parking area. The railroad company even tolerated the crowds until 11 February, when the tracks were posted and a warning issued in the local newspaper. I estimated well over 2000 people saw it in this period. Forty-seven cars were parked there at one time the second Sunday. It was a birders' reunion, with people from Cleveland, Ontario, Rochester, Long Island, Virginia, and points between. It was encouraging to see so many local people, only mildly interested in birds or just curious, come out to see the cause of all the publicity. Many other city newspapers reported it; an Erie TV station had lengthy coverage with excellent pictures. A local drug store had a contest for the best photograph, with voting by dollars and the proceeds going to the Warren Humane Society. A shop created a commemorative plaque for sale.

The owl had the species' legendary tameness. It was alert and hunting most of the time. Some people offered it mice, which it readily accepted. It picked wild mice out of the snow while we watched,

although I never saw a mouse on top of the snow. It caught one mouse (or vole) actually at Dan Doherty's feet! He thought he was going to be the target. Someone reported that it flew down to the railroad and pulled a mouse out from beneath a tie plate.

The excitement was about over when it was only seen about 4 PM on 13 February. We thought it had left for points north when it wasn't seen for a week. But on 22 and 23 February, it was reported along Mohawk Ave., about one half mile uphill and south of the river. It was also seen once more along the river on the 23rd. From then through the end of March it was only seen on nine dates (about one in four) that I know of, ending 27 March when it was seen and photographed by Walter Atwood. All but one of the observations were along a .3 or .4 mile stretch of Mohawk Ave. It was difficult to find the owl here because of the homes and woods.

Curiously, another Great Gray Owl spent much of the same time period just ten miles north of the state line near Jamestown, N. Y., and about 26 miles from "our" Great Gray. The Jamestown owl was larger, so speculation was that it a female and Warren's a male.

LITERATURE CITED

Todd, W.E.C. 1940. *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa.

@Most interesting is the fact that the only other confirmed record for western Pennsylvania is of a bird shot in Greene County in 1898. Todd writes, "The occurrence of this owl as far south as Greene County is somewhat surprising; it might be expected instead along our norther border.

The only other documented twentieth century record for Pennsylvania is of a bird found dead in a snow bank in Nockamixon State Park in February 19__, a year when there was a significant invasion of this species in the Northeast. That bird may have been the southernmost individual known from that invasion.

my comments J

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Great Gray Owl**

Date of Sighting: **28 January 1992 to 27 March 1992**

Observer(s): **Ted Grisez, Wayne Laubscher**

Date of Submission: **1992**

Submitted by: **Ted Grisez, Wayne Laubscher**

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

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

Bm Haas

Date:

2-27-93