

FIELD NOTES

Winter Record of Grasshopper Sparrow in Columbia County — January 16, 1958, began to show our area a few patches of blue sky after two days of a howling blizzard that dumped nearly two feet of snow over our countryside.

Just before noon that day my office intercom rang, and an employee told me that she had found a "young" bird blowing around in the snow outside and wondered as to identification. I hurried to her apartment and found this "young" bird, much the worse for wear, on her window sill. It was nearly dead from hunger and exposure, and I hurried it to my home to care for it. However, the bird lived only a few hours.

I had never handled a Grasshopper Sparrow before and did not want to be responsible for its identification under these strange circumstances and at this time of year. I took the bird to the Alan Devoe Bird Club, and in turn it was passed on to Dr. E. M. Reilly, Jr., of the New York State Museum at Albany. Dr. Reilly definitely identified the bird as a Grasshopper Sparrow and informed me that it was probably a "first" for New York State in midwinter. The bird was a female and now bears NYSM number 18312.

The identification is clear, and the story of this bird ends, but how I would like to be able to piece together the events that led to its deposit at our doorstep during this vicious storm. Where was it when those high winds overtook it? In what directions did these winds blow? Was it late in going south or was it blown back from that direction? And to add to the mystery the lady who phoned me stated that there was a second bird like it outside in the snowstorm. Were there two Grasshopper Sparrows there that day? If so, where did the second one go? These are just some of the unanswered questions that make bird study so interesting. Howard A. Munson, Livingston

Red-tailed Hawks Attack Incubating Great Horned Owl — In the late winter of 1957 a Red-tailed Hawk's nest was discovered in a small woodlot along Louck's Road, close to the Syracuse city limits. Incubation was underway March 11, and the two young left the nest in late May. There was no other nesting site in the small woods, and no other nearby woodlot.

On visiting this nest on Feb. 21, 1958, just after the great blizzards, I was somewhat surprised to see a Horned Owl on the nest surrounded by snow. Instead of sitting flat on the nest, she was sitting rather high and kept her head turning first to one side and then to the other. Almost immediately the explanation was apparent, as a pair of Redtails appeared circling close above the woods. At once the larger one stooped close over the sitting owl, which ducked and turned to face the buzzard at each of several succeeding stoops. During the next twenty minutes the owl was attacked nearly two dozen times, the male Red-tail occasionally taking part, but neither coming closer than a minimum of five feet from the owl.

Although it is well known that buzzard nests (both Red-tail and Red-shoulder) are frequently taken over by owls, who never construct their own nests, this is the first time that I have had opportunity to see that the take-over was accompanied by strife. It may be that the woodlot is too small for an alternate nesting site and that the Red-tails were more upset about losing this nest than is the case in larger woods where several alternate nesting sites are usually available. — Walter R. Spofford, 766 Irving Avenue, Syracuse.

Hawk Flights at Jones Beach, Long Island — Two productive mornings were spent by the writer at Jones Beach in the fall of 1956. Observations were made north of Parking Field No. 1, west of Jones Beach Tower, on both occasions.

On October 7, 1956, with westerly winds at approximately eight miles an hour, I observed from 9:30 to 11:30 A. M. the following species: 16 Sharp-shinned, one Cooper's, six Marsh, 12 Ospreys, two Pigeon Hawks, and 13 Sparrow Hawks. On this day the wind switched from westerly to southerly, and with the change the birds began to veer directly to the west. They had been going in a southwesterly direction previously.

On October 10, 1956, in the same area, with the winds moderate to brisk in a west to northwesterly direction, I observed from 9:00 A. M. to 12:00 noon the following species: 25 Sharp-shinned, one Cooper's, one Red-tailed, eight Marsh, one Peregrine Falcon, three Pigeon Hawks, and an estimated 60 Sparrow Hawks (Ospreys drifted through in various directions but were not counted).