

## FIELD NOTES

**Great Horned Owls In Cortland County:** Recently, while teaching a course in conservation, I had occasion to visit a privately owned game farm in Cortland County. During my conversation with the owner the topic of predators came up, and I was surprised to learn of the large numbers of Great Horned Owls which he has pole-trapped during the past seven and a half years.

During the winter of 1951-2 the game farm owner attended a meeting of turkey growers at Cornell University, and learned that Great Horned Owls frequently eat only the head and neck portion of the birds they kill. Since he had noticed several of his Ring-necked Pheasants killed and mutilated in this way, he set up three pole traps surrounding his uncovered pheasant pens. During the next seven days he trapped one owl each night, and during the remainder of that winter he trapped another 19 owls. To mid-October 1959 some 138 owls were trapped, and all were killed. (Two of the Great Horned Owls trapped during this period had only one good eye. In both cases the bad eye appeared to have a cracked cornea, which had subsequently clouded over. It occurs to me that this might have been the work of crows or was perhaps due to misjudgment in maneuvering through trees).

Most of the birds have been trapped during the months of December, January, and February. The owner did not set his pole traps during the summer unless he saw evidence of owl activity. However, eight birds were trapped during the summer of 1959. In addition to these Great Horned Owls he has trapped two Screech Owls since 1952, and a small number of hawks of various species, mostly accipiters. He has had very little trouble from the buteos, although Red-tailed Hawks nested nearby every year.

The game farm owner estimated that he had lost only 25 pheasants to owl depredation since 1952. Most of his pheasants are kept under wire, but the older ones are allowed free run in a fenced-in enclosure without top cover. The owner stated that he realized the owls were largely beneficial, but that he felt he must protect his direct interests. He agreed to cooperate in a project to take trapped owls that are relatively unharmed and band them for release in other parts of central New York. If the usual numbers of owls are trapped during the winter of 1959-60, some further information may be forthcoming regarding owl habits. Mr. John Cecil, a graduate student at the Cortland College of Education, is planning to carry out this work.

Although I have seen a number of nesting Great Horned Owls in Cortland County, I had no idea there might be so many coming into a limited area. The game farm where these birds were trapped is in a narrow valley in the uplands, in country typified by reforested areas and run-down farms. It would seem to me that legislation is needed in New York State to require adequate enclosures to protect farm animals from owl and hawk predation. This would remove the attraction which brings these birds to such places, and the necessity for trapping or otherwise controlling them would be eliminated (Ed. — do readers have comments, suggestions, or perhaps personal experiences like those described here that would pertain to such a proposal?) — John A. Gustafson, S. U. N. Y. College of Education, Cortland.

**A Partially Albino Chickadee (continued):** A partially albino Black-capped Chickadee (see *Kingbird*, Vol. IX, Nos. 1 and 2, field notes section) was again seen on December 6, 1959 at Selkirk Shores State Park at the same site as the May 16, 1959 observation (in a stand of hemlock and red-osier dogwood between the macadam pine grove road and the shore). The part-albino was working the branches for food in the company of three normal-appearing Black-capped Chickadees. The albinistic individual was whiter than the one seen by me the previous February and May. The bird had normally buffy flanks, but the albinism became progressively less from head to tail, as in the case of the Chickadee previously described. The present one also had the black "edging" on a white throat. Its crown and shoulders were white, and it had more white than normal among the gray feathers of the secondaries and tail. The eye was dark, the bill flesh-colored, and the legs were not observed. I am not attempting to state whether this is the same individual observed earlier, now whiter following the moult, or a different one. In any case, it is interesting that albinistic Black-capped Chickadee(s) has (have) remained at Selkirk through two migration seasons. The situation will bear continued observation. — Margaret S. Rusk, 100 Stadium Place, Syracuse 10.