

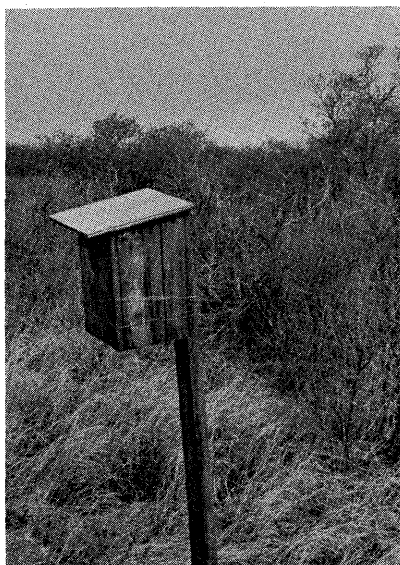
Saw-whet Owl nesting at Tobay Sanctuary, Long Island: Over the last four years, Roy Barth of Malverne, L.I., has erected several dozens of well-constructed wooden nest-boxes at the John F. Kennedy Memorial Wildlife Refuge (Tobay Sanctuary), Nassau Co. On March 26, 1968, Mr. Barth, who was casually examining and cleaning all his boxes saw a Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) fly out of a box. He communicated this fact to me, but at the time, I felt this was just one of the wintering Saw-whets. I was surprised when Mr. Barth observed the owl at this box again on April 7, 1968. I examined the box on April 7th and found a Saw-whet within. It was sitting on a rough lining of dried grasses with some loose downy feathers on top of this. I banded the Saw-whet and noticed the beginning of a brood-patch.

Now definitely on the alert, I revisited the box on April 20, 1968 and found six eggs. The adult, which was the one I had banded and therefore must be a female, was not too aggressive and allowed me to take a few color photographs. The pictures shown here I took on May 5, 1968 when I found three young and three eggs. On May 11 there were five young and one egg.

About this time, Mr. Ed Kirchmeier of the Queensboro Bird Club had also peeked into the box and published this occurrence in his newsletter. Luckily, and for this I sincerely thank him, he did not disclose the location of the box. Had mobs of observers come to see this bird, I am fully confident the young would not have survived. The young attained juvenal plumage by May 26th. The remaining egg was infertile and was removed from the box on May 30th.

White-footed Mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*) seemed to be the main food supply of this bird. I learned from Frank Enders, who had done a study of the mice of Tobay, that this was the commonest rodent.

The location of this particular nest is quite unusual, although a nest in a Wood Duck box was recorded in 1966 in Region 5 [*Kingbird* 16(3): 168, 1966]. Saw-whet



*Photographs by Frederick S. Schaffer
Tobay Sanctuary, L.I., N.Y. 5 May 1968*

Owls normally nest in extensively wooded areas in mountainous country although they have been found breeding in the dense pine barrens of New Jersey and Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The habitat surrounding the Saw-whet's nest at Tobay is low, coastal scrub. The box is located on the edge of one of the many mosquito control ditches in the vicinity of the observation tower. Low reeds (*Phragmites communis*) are in the immediate foreground and medium-sized Bayberry bushes (*Myrica pensylvanica*), Poison Ivy (*Rhus radicans*) and High Tide (*Baccharis halimifolia*) form a background. About 100 feet north of the box are the salt marshes adjoining South Oyster Bay. Nearby nest boxes are occupied exclusively by Tree Swallows (*Iridoprocne bicolor*). These swallows have been seen chasing the owl when it left its nest for short periods early in the day.

The only other definite breeding record in our area was a nest with five eggs at Miller Place, Long Island in 1879 [Bull, 1964, *Birds of the New York Area*: 277]. A young Saw-whet Owl with traces of juvenal plumage was found at Quogue Beach, Suffolk Co. on July 21, 1966 [Kingbird 16(4): 244, 1966]; possibly a pair bred that year in the Long Island pine barrens. Both the above records followed big winter flights. The wintering Saw-whet Owl population last winter was about normal in numbers.

Frederick S. Schaeffer, 139-48 85th Drive, Jamaica, N.Y. 11435.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

April 1—May 31

DAVID B. PEAKALL

"Things ain't what they used to be". This is the standard lament of the old-timer but many birders seem to be making this comment. One can see it expressed in many regional reports, most clearly in that of Region 10 whose editors cannot be classed as old-timers. Davis and Post mention the possibilities for the low numbers of warblers and vireos—weather, pesticides, and habitat destruction. On the last mentioned it should be remembered that destruction of wintering habitat south of the border may also be of importance. They also mention on the positive side that radar shows that large migrations of birds are passing unseen. Radar is a useful way of studying migration, it can monitor flights on a hundred mile front at one time and is virtually independent of weather; whereas the visible record is often the result of abnormal migration. Anyone interested in this fascinating field should read Eastwood's book "Radar Ornithology". However it should be remembered that quantitation of flights is rough and species identification is almost impossible. A preliminary analysis of the breeding bird survey recently issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service for 1966-67 covers 29 species. In general the figures show a fairly stable population, with the increases balancing the decreases, and most changes are not statistically significant. All three warblers studied show small decreases. Although these decreases are not significant for the one year period under study it will be interesting to watch long-term trends. The value of this survey will increase from year to year.