

A REVIEW OF NEW YORK STATE BOREAL OWL RECORDS

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The report of three Boreal Owls (*Aegolius funereus*) in New York during the 1978-79 winter represents a record maximum number of occurrences of this retiring, rare owl for any one season in the state. This paper offers further details on two of these reports and summarizes the New York State reports of this species to date.

The first report was of an individual seen by David Smith, between 1000 and 1600 hours on 26 December 1978 in a thick cedar tree border along his driveway at 205 Circular Street, Saratoga Springs, Saratoga County. The bird was very near a feeder and at times during the day was harassed by Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*). Smith reported the sighting to Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club's Dial-A-Bird telephone answering service. Three club members, myself among them, attempted to relocate the bird several days later, but did not succeed. The bird was not reported again.

Because of Smith's previous familiarity with this species in Minnesota, he had no doubt of its identity. I was able to examine three 35-mm. color transparencies that he took at close range with a telephoto lens and there was no doubt about the bird's identity. The bird's appearance in such an urban setting seems unusual. One usually associates the Boreal Owl with locations more remote than a densely settled city street. It is the first ever reported from Saratoga County.

The second record, also in eastern New York, was of a bird found dead on 5 February 1979 by James H. McTaggart under a spruce border in his yard at 24 Droms Rd. Extension, Glenville, Schenectady County. The bird appeared to have died at its roost during a clear, cold night when a northwest wind produced severe wind chill. McTaggart gave the specimen to Barrington S. Havens who in turn notified me of its existence.

When I weighed it on 7 February 1979 when it came into my possession, after having remained frozen since 5 February, it weighed 88.7 g. and appeared severely emaciated. This weight is less than the average weight of the smaller Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*). I gave the specimen to Dr. E. M. Reilly, Jr., of the New York State Museum in Albany where it is now NYSM 35251. It represents the first report of the species from Schenectady County.

The third record was a live specimen, seen and photographed 3-6 March 1979 by many observers at Northrup Creek, Monroe County

(Spahn, 1979). It represents the fifth record from Monroe County, all having occurred since 1964.

A review of the species' past records shows a recent increase in reports most likely resulting more from increased birding activity, more active interest in listing rare species, and improved communications among birders in recent years, than from any real increase in numbers of the species. There is a paucity of records prior to 1960 (three in the past century, four in the period 1914-22 and two in the 1950's) followed by six reports in the 1960's and six in the 1970's. Whereas most of the earlier reports were Adirondack (two reports) or near-Adirondack (seven reports) in origin, the majority of recent reports (nine of ten reports) has been from elsewhere, thereby greatly altering the distribution pattern of this species' presumed range. Monroe County has displaced Franklin County with the greatest number of reports.

However, for a species that is as secretive as this one, it is difficult, at best, to assess accurately the magnitude of its true presence from year to year. While three birds hardly constitute an invasion, this winter's influx is the closest occurrence to such an event yet on record. Seeing one dead or alive in the wild, still constitutes one of the state's rarest ornithological treats that certainly few people have experienced.

Unlike the two other owls of boreal North American forests, the Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*) and Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*), which during their erratic incursions tend to reside for prolonged periods in one location, the Boreal Owl is an unpredictable species. State records show a maximum recorded residence in one location of no longer than seven days. Excluding the seven birds reported as collected, and the five that were found dead, the nine live records ranged from one to seven days duration in a single location, and averaged 2.4 days. For this reason, among others, the sighting of this species remains the much sought jewel in the crown of northern invading species.

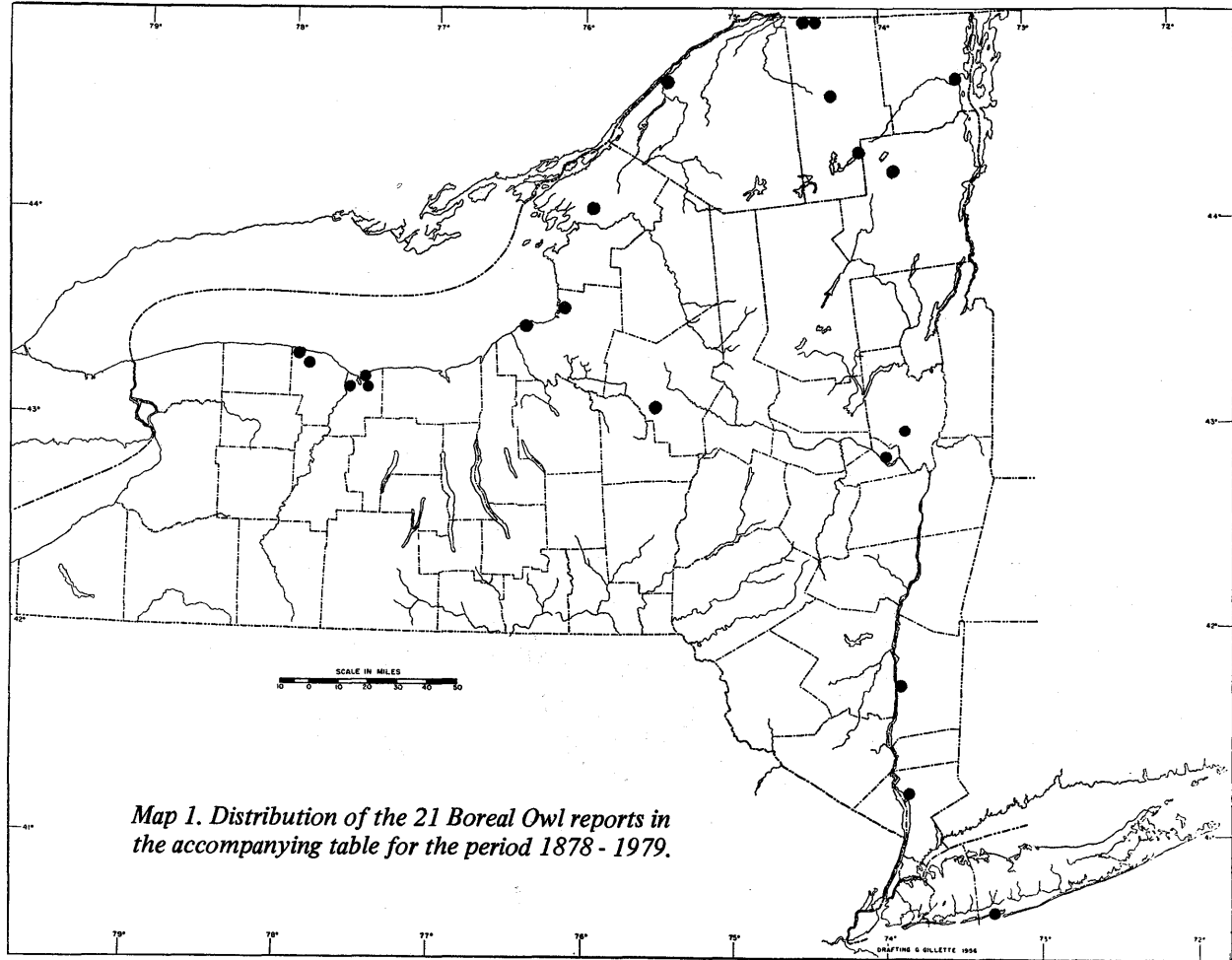
Other than the recent individual sighting reports listed below, previous summaries or collections of reports have been made by Eaton (1914), Stoner (1945), Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962) and Bull (1964, 1974, 1976). Of the 21 birds listed below, 12 were collected as specimens with ten of them listed in museum collections, six were photographed alive, and three are unverified sightings. Among the last (Nos. 8, 10 and 14), the Westchester County sighting was questioned

by Parkes (1952) and rejected by Bull (1974). The Dutchess County and second Oswego County records were not referred to by Bull (1974, 1976). In 1974 Bull referred to nine specimens of this species. I am able to locate records of eight of these, but not the ninth and for that reason it is not included in any of the totals referred to here.

To make the species' recorded history as complete as possible, I would appreciate hearing from persons who know of verified reports in regional club publications, or newspapers. Also, it would be valuable to know of the existence of any specimens in private collections or small regional museums that are not mentioned here.

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SUMMARY OF NEW YORK STATE BOREAL OWL REPORTS

<u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Comment</u>
1	Winter 1878	Franklin Co.	Stoner (1945), Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962)	Collected by Dr. William N. Mac- Artney, Jr., specimen where- abouts unknown.
2	Feb. 1893	Hecla Works (Lowell), Oneida Co.	Eaton (1914), Parkes (1952)	Collected by J. S. Allwood, NYSM 1144; however, specimen missing since 1976; could not be found Sept. 1979
3	mid-Dec. 1896	North Elba, Essex Co.	Eaton (1914), Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962)	Collected by Ezra Cornell, Jr. Specimen whereabouts unknown.
4	14 Nov. 1914	Ft. Covington, Franklin Co.	Miller (1915), Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962), Bull (1974)	Collected by Dr. MacArtney, AMNH 126935. Miller's date of 14 Nov. conflicts with Bull's date of 16 Nov. which is the date on the specimen.
5	19 Jan. 1916	Ft. Covington, Franklin Co.	Stoner (1945), Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962), Bull (1974)	Collected by Dr. MacArtney, AMNH 120290.
6	16 Dec. 1922	Plattsburgh, Clinton Co.	Bishop (1923), Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962), Bull (1974)	Collected by Lt. L. R. Wolfe, NYSM 9467.
7	Dec. 1922	Saranac Lake, Franklin Co.	Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962), Bull (1974)	Collected by Charles Dickert, CUM 3505, formerly Fuertes Collection, LAF 3463.
8	12 Feb. 1951	Croton Point, Westchester Co.	Komorowski (1951), Parkes (1952), Rusk (1962), Bull (1964)	An unverified sighting of one hour duration at 15 ft. by Rose and Mayer.

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<u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Comment</u>
9	13 Mar. 1958	Ogdensburg, St. Lawrence Co.	Clinch (1958), Bull (1974), Belknap (1979)	Found dead by Charles H. May- wood, Jr. after hit by car, NYSM 19022.
10	11 Dec. 1960	Hyde Park, Dutchess Co.	Hough (1961), Rusk (1962)	An unverified sight report at a conifer plantation by Walter Clare, Jr.
11	17-18 Mar. 1962	Pulaski, Oswego Co.	Rusk (1962), Post (1965), Bull (1974)	Live/photograph, seen by several observers.
12	22-29 Feb. 1964	Hamlin St. Park, Monroe Co.	Foster (1964), Miller (1964), Post (1965), Bull (1974)	Live/photograph, seen by several observers.
13	24-26 Feb. 1965	near Webster, Monroe Co.	Kemnitzer (1965, 1965a), Bull (1974)	Live/photograph, seen by several observers.
14	21 Nov. 1965	Nine-mile Pt., Oswego Co.	Rusk (1966)	Live sighting of about one hour at 12 ft. by M. S. Rusk with prior experience with this spe- cies, otherwise unverified.
15	2 Feb. 1969	Philadelphia, Jefferson Co.	Clinch (1969), Bull (1976)	Found dead/emaciated by J. B. Belknap, specimen at Wellesley Is. Nature Center on exhibit.
16	26 Feb. 1972	Hamlin, Monroe Co.	O'Hara (1972), Bull (1976)	Found dead, given to Neil Moon, specimen in Rochester Museum of Science.

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17	15 Jan. 1975	Cedar Beach, Suffolk Co.	Feustel (1975), McGuinness (1975), Bull (1976)	Found dead along highway by Kenneth Feustel, AMNH 821687.
18	4-6 Feb. 1978	Durand Eastman Pk, Rochester, Monroe Co.	Spahn (1978)	Live/photograph, seen by several observers.
19	26 Dec. 1978	Saratoga Springs, Saratoga Co.	This paper & Guthrie (1979)	Live/photograph by David Smith, verified by Robert P. Yunick.
20	5 Feb. 1979	Glenville, Schenectady Co.	This paper & Guthrie (1979)	Found dead/emaciated by J. H. MacTaggart, specimen in NYSM as NYSM 35251.
21	3-6 Mar. 1979	Northrup Creek, Monroe Co.	Dial-A-Bird reports and Spahn (1979)	Live/photograph, seen by several observers after found by Mike Carlson.

Note: Since Number 9 has been previously reported as being from Deferiet near Ogdensburg, the following information from Belknap (pers. comm.) appears worthy of mention. The bird flew into the open window of a car near Ogdensburg. It was discarded by the driver at Deferiet about 60 miles away where Maywood, when he learned of it, retrieved the bird.

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