

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Historical Record of Long-eared Owl on Valcour Island: While researching a natural history exhibit for the Clinton County Historical Museum, Plattsburgh, NY, I uncovered from a relatively obscure Department of Environmental Conservation Research publication, information that I feel should be added to our scanty ornithological history of the Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) for the north country of New York State. The report, "A Study of Predator Control on Valcour Island," (Division of Fish and Game, NY State Conservation Department. *Research Ser. No.* 1; 1949), was an investigation of the effects of predator control on Snowshoe Hare and Ruffed Grouse abundance. For the period 1941-1945, both mammalian and avian predators were trapped, hunted and poisoned on Valcour Island, an island of about 1000 acres situated on Lake Champlain in Clinton County. Avian predators were taken in traps set on poles, which were placed in openings scattered around the island. It was shocking to read about the number of hawks and owls that were destroyed on this small island in the name of scientific investigation. Over a 5 year period 162 Long-eared Owls were killed, 51 in 1941, 43 in 1942, 51 in 1943, 17 in 1944 and none in 1945. Perhaps the only redeeming value of this study was that it identified Valcour Island as a major migratory stopping point for the Long-eared Owl. No data were given as to when these birds were trapped, which would have provided valuable information on the migratory dates for this species. The only other recent report of Long-eared Owl migration for northern New York State (R.S. Slack *et al.* *Wilson Bull.* 99:480-485; 1987) described mist netting a total of 37 Long-eared Owls over a 6 year period at the 90-acre, Richard A. Noyes Wildlife Sanctuary near Lake Ontario. They found spring migration to peak between 21 March and 14 April.

Those involved in the Valcour Island predator control study also destroyed 62 Great Horned Owls, 20 N. Saw-whet Owls, 14 Short-eared Owls, 16 Barred Owls and one Snowy Owl. The list of hawks and falcons slaughtered is long as well, and included 73 Red-shouldered Hawks, 70 Red-tailed Hawks, 41 Northern Harriers, 78 Am. Kestrels, 7 Peregrine Falcons, 25 N. Goshawks and 7 Merlins.

I was surprised to learn that it was not until 1948 that all of New York State's birds of prey were given the status of protected species. In that year the Great Horned Owl, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk and the N. Goshawk were added to the protected species list. As late as 1924 even the New York State Conservation Commission described many hawk and owl species as "vermin" (State of N.Y. Conservation

Commission Annual Report, 1924). This report describes the Department's campaign of destruction against these birds which were said to be inimical to the interest of conservation. Game protectors were instructed to destroy species listed as "vermin" whenever opportunity afforded. The 1921 Annual Report of the N.Y. State Conservation Commission reported that the list of vermin species was even placed on the back of hunting and trapping licenses, together with a request to destroy the vermin species whenever opportunity to do so afforded. So by law the game protectors, hunters, trappers and farmers were all leagued together to destroy birds of prey in the name of conservation. This historical perspective gives us a greater appreciation of just how far we have come in protecting wildlife, particularly birds of prey. Once destroying birds of prey was thought of as conservation while today protecting these species is the law. That is progress! The 1940's Valcour Island predator control study was funded by the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Restoration Act. Would anyone believe that this study had anything to do with wildlife restoration today?

Mark Gretch, 133 Lake Street Box 21, Rouses Point, NY 12979

Huckleberry Island, 1988: The annual census of this Long Island Sound waterbird colony in New Rochelle, Westchester Co., was made again on 22 and 24 June 1988 (see Künstler and Capainolo 1987, and Ducey-Ortiz *et al.*, *in prep.*). Counts obtained of all colonial species were much greater than any previous years, which started with only a few birds in 1975. In addition, one of two newly recorded species bred successfully. This year's census, taken on foot as opposed to the aerial surveys taken until 1983, was the most thorough of our counts (1986-1988) and thus included many nests and birds we would not have recorded earlier. However, it was felt by all returning visitors, including an owner of the island, that the birds had indeed increased in numbers.

The 1988 count, in pairs, with 1987 results for comparison, and relative size of all coastal New York colonies in 1988 (preliminary data, fide Anne Ducey-Ortiz) are as follows:

Species	1988	1987	Relative size
Double-crested Cormorant	284	92	3rd of 4 colonies
Great Egret	67	10	1st of 15 colonies
Snowy Egret	145	30	2nd of 15 colonies
Cattle Egret	1		5th of 5 colonies
Black-crowned Night-Heron	206	127	2nd of 22 colonies
Herring Gull	2405	1000	data incomplete
Great Black-backed Gull	546	400	data incomplete

A Cattle Egret fledgling on 24 June was indication of the first nesting