



Burrowing Owl near Shinnecock Inlet, Suffolk Co., New York,
24 October 1985. Photograph by Bertel Bruun.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES 54: BURROWING OWL ON LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK.

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Two widely separated subspecies of the Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*) occur in the United States, each normally found about one thousand miles from Long Island. The western race, *S. c. hypugaea*, breeds east to Minnesota. The northern populations of this subspecies are migratory, leaving their breeding grounds in October and November, to winter as far north as Oklahoma and as far east as Louisiana. The southern race, *S. c. floridana*, occurs in the Florida prairies, and on the Bahamas, Cuba and Hispaniola. It is resident in these areas, although some dispersal does occur after the breeding season. *S. c. floridana* is distinguished from *S. c. hypugaea* by its relatively smaller size, darker brown upper parts with whitish, not buffy spots, whitish underparts and, especially and diagnostically, by its spotted, pale buff or whitish underwing coverts. The legs also are less heavily feathered than in the western subspecies.

The Burrowing Owl has been recorded four times in New York State, three of these being on Long Island. The earliest record is of one caught in New York City (Manhattan) on 8 Aug 1875 (Bull, 1974). This individual was suspected to be an escaped caged bird. The subspecies was not determined and the fate of the specimen is unknown. On 27 Oct 1950, a specimen was collected at Westhampton, Long Island, near the barrier beach (Bull, 1974). The specimen, which was in the collection of LeRoy Wilcox, has since disappeared. It was identified as belonging to the western subspecies, *S. c. hypugaea*. On 27 Oct 1976 a Burrowing Owl was seen at Cedar Beach, Nassau County, about seven miles east of Jones Beach (Davis, 1977). It was not seen again until 27 Dec. As the bird was clearly ailing at this time, it was captured on the following day and brought back to health by the ministrations of Art and Hannah Richards. It was identified as belonging to the southern subspecies, *S. c. floridana*, and on 6 Jan 1977 flown to Florida and released in its natural habitat. On 24 Oct 1985 I, in the company of a Danish birdwatcher Philippe Grandjean, discovered a Burrowing Owl near Dune Road on the barrier beach one mile west of Shinnecock Inlet, Suffolk County. The bird was quite tame and stayed at the location while I returned to my home in Westhampton to collect my camera. Several photographs were obtained, but the underwing coverts were never clearly seen and the bird not captured. A

local duck hunter informed us the bird had been present at the same location for five or six days. The bird was not seen by us after that date. Hurricane "Gloria" had passed over the area on 27 Sep and had brought many subtropical species with it. Unfortunately even a close study of the photographs failed to establish the subspecific identity of this bird and its origin remains unknown.

It is of interest to note that all four New York State records of this species, spread over a period of one hundred and ten years, all stem from an eighty-five mile stretch of coast. Long Islanders, keep your eyes peeled!

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LITERATURE CITED

Bull, J. 1974. *Birds of New York State*. Doubleday/Natural History Press, Garden City.

Davis, T. H. 1977. The Burrowing Owl in New York State. *Kingbird* 27:69-73.