

GREAT GRAY OWL IN THE ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

Dorothy Crumb¹ and David J. Cesari²

1 3983 Gates Rd, Jamesville NY 13078

2 5667 Brown Hoag Rd, Rome NY 13440

Matt Perry was birding in the New Hartford Town Park, Oneida County, on 22 February 1996. Crows mobbing an owl perched on a mound on the edge of a mixed hemlock woods drew his attention. On closer approach, he identified the owl as a Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*). It flew off into the woods. He contacted David Cesari from Rome, who arrived shortly after with camera equipment. The owl, contrary to actions of Great Gray Owls seen before, was very elusive. It took some hiking and searching to locate the bird, whereupon, Cesari was able to take several photographs (Figure 1). This bird apparently stayed in the vicinity, though it was only seen fleetingly once or twice more. On 18 March, unfortunately, it flew in front of a car. It was taken to a rehabilitator, but did not survive. The specimen is now at Syracuse University, Utica branch.

Great Gray Owl is an extremely rare species in the Oneida Lake Basin, Region 5. The first confirmation of one was reported in *The Kingbird* in 1962 by Bulger, who saw one at Pulaski, Oswego County. Spofford (1962) describes a photograph of one that was shot and displayed in a window in Canastota, Madison County, during the winter of 1926-27, which was part of a large flight of Snowy Owls. He also attributes one to a sighting by David Corse in Sandy Pond, Oswego County, in March 1962.

In spring of 1979, a number of Great Gray Owls were reported from the Watertown area, just north of Region 5 in Jefferson County. On 17 February, two made their way south to Oswego. They were seen in the same vicinity through 1 March. In that same year, an owl was photographed in Fayetteville, Onondaga County. The photo was eventually shown to a reliable birder who identified the photo as that of a Great Gray Owl. However, this was long after the fact and was never officially reported. Also in 1979 David Cesari photographed a Great Gray Owl in the Town of Whitestown, just west of the Village of Oriskany, Oneida County, on 10 February. The bird was not found again. This was prior to the time Cesari submitted his observations to *The Kingbird*.

On 10 April 1980, a Great Gray Owl was seen perched beside Route 3, about 4 miles north of Mexico, Oswego County. The bird was struck by a truck that same day and turned over to a rehabilitator. The owl was

very emaciated, but survived and was later returned to Canada.

In 1996, a late migrant was found in Brewerton, Oswego County, on 23 April. This bird was observed by many birders and has been written up for NYSARC. It was located late in the afternoon and was seen briefly the next morning being chased by a pair of Red-tailed Hawks. There were no further sightings.

In conclusion, there are now 10 sightings of Great Gray Owl in the Oneida Lake Basin, Region 5.



Figure 1. Great Gray Owl photographed by David Cesari on 22 Feb 96 in New Hartford. The photo was taken from 25-30 feet with a Nikon F4S camera, through a Nikon 500 mm f-4 lens, using Fujichrome 100, 1/125 sec at f-4.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bulger JD. 1962. An occurrence of the Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*) in Central New York. *The Kingbird* 12(2):80.
- Spofford WR. 1962. Note [to the above article]. *The Kingbird* 12(2):80.