

## Notes

### Breeding Record of Great Gray Owl in Bruce County: Southernmost in Canada

Michael Turisk

On 4 July 1999, two juvenile Great Gray Owls (*Strix nebulosa*) were observed near Stokes Bay, Bruce County, Ontario by the author. Earlier, in May, an adult bird had been observed by John Miles, Jean Iron and others in the vicinity of Stokes Bay; this is what prompted me to perform my relatively swift search of the area during a July visit to the Bruce Peninsula. Dead trees in wet, boggy areas were carefully scrutinized near the site of the initial May observation, in the hope of locating the owl.

My third stop proved fruitful, for I immediately noted a harsh, evenly-pitched call, reminiscent of a young Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*). Within several minutes, I was able to locate a juvenile Great Gray Owl perched fairly low, approximately 2 m up in a dead tree. The bird was in many respects structurally equivalent to an adult bird. However, its coloration tended to be brown overall, particularly on the back and tail. In addition, the facial discs were slate-coloured or blackish; these contrasted with the bright yellow eyes and discernible whitish crescents on both sides of the face. A small amount of down

remained on both the nape and lower belly. A second bird was soon heard begging, and was subsequently located, its appearance matching closely that of the first. This second individual was rather more active in that it flew clumsily from tree to tree, all the while emitting harsh cries. Although the juveniles were observed for nearly ninety minutes, no adults were seen.

The selection of a breeding site by Great Gray Owls generally is dependent upon the existence of semi-open environments, such as bogs or meadows, that are in close proximity to dense coniferous or mixed forests (Johnsgard 1988). Habitat selection is also affected by the availability of microtine prey, shrub density (habitats containing dense shrub layers usually being avoided), and the relative abundance of suitable perches (Servos 1987).

The owls were observed in a beaver meadow and bog habitat. Surrounding the meadow and bog area was a mixed stand of conifers and hardwoods, including Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), and Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), with scattered birch

(*Betula* spp.), and Balsam Poplar (*Populus balsamifera*) noted. Also present, especially around the immediate periphery of the wetland were Black Spruce (*Picea mariana*), Balsam Fir (*Abies balsamea*), and alder (*Alnus* sp.).

Central Algonquin Provincial Park, near Round Island Lake (45° 43' N), provided the previous southernmost known breeding location of this species in Canada (Forbes et al. 1989). The Stokes Bay site (44° 58' N) now constitutes the most southerly published breeding location for this owl. The Great Gray Owl, a semi-nomadic species, appears to show weak nesting site fidelity (Johnsgard 1988). However, if prey remains abundant, it is sug-

gested that this species be checked for again during the breeding season in this region, as extensive suitable habitat exists on the Bruce Peninsula. In addition, it should be noted that young birds occasionally return to breed in the vicinity of their natal areas (Mikkola 1983).

### Acknowledgements

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## First Verified Nesting of Brewer's Blackbird in Muskoka District Municipality

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On 27 May 1999, Jon Grandfield, M. Lynn Sayers and Kenneth Walton observed a male Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) flying over Falkenburg Road, near Bardsville, Muskoka District Municipality, Ontario. Through careful observations, we noted a male and a female Brewer's Blackbird on the wire over the road. The female flew to an open farmland area beside the road

I figured this might be a breeding pair. After consulting Harrison (1975), I looked throughout the field near the road and discovered a nest on the ground in a tuft of grass, with one side open. The nest was loosely woven with plant material, and had four young in it.

On 28 May, I came back to the same area and took a number of photographs of the nest and young, along with a male on the nest. I observed three young around the nest on 5 June. There were three males and three females in the same area, but I could only find one nest.

There is no previously pub-

lished report of Brewer's Blackbird breeding in Muskoka (see Stepney and Power 1973; Gordon 1987; Peck and James 1987, 1998).

I would like to thank Jon Grandfield and M. Lynn Sayers for their assistance in the field.

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## PRODUCT NOTICE

**The Small Gulls of North America. 1999. The Advanced Birding Video Series (ABVS). Video Number 2.** Narration by *Jon L. Dunn*. A Peregrine Video Production.

The small gull video is the second in this series and follows the large gulls (see my review in the April 1998 issue of *Ontario Birds* 16: 39). Narrated by Jon Dunn, the video includes 14 species of small and medium sized gulls: Ring-billed Gull, Mew Gull, Heermann's Gull, Black-tailed Gull, Laughing Gull, Franklin's Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Black-headed Gull, Little Gull, Sabine's Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Red-legged Kittiwake, Ross's Gull and Ivory Gull. The photography is fabulous. The video covers most sub-

species and some hybrids. The extensive treatment of Common Gull and Mew Gull, and comparison of Ring-billed Gull and Common Gull, will be of particular interest to Ontario birders.

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This video is available from John Vanderpoel at \$34.95 US, plus shipping and handling. Phone toll free at 1-888-893-2287; e-mail <jvanderp@peregrinevideo.com>; or visit their website <<http://www.peregrinevideo.com>>. Visa and Mastercard are accepted. *Ron Pittaway*

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