

THE GREAT GRAY OWL

On the afternoon of February 3rd, Bob Stymeist, Dick Veit and I were bound for Gill, Massachusetts. Many birders had flocked there in recent weeks to seek the great gray owl that had been playing hide and seek, appearing and disappearing every few days. Though a few people were successful, most came away without a glimpse of the huge owl. Now it was our turn to try our luck.

We arrived in mid-afternoon and drove along the back roads, scanning the fields and woods. We found very few birds but many birders. By dusk, there were at least 30, including some of the most talented enthusiasts in the northeast, assembled at the farm on West Gill Road where the bird had been last seen. But all was to no avail, for night fell with no sign of the owl.

We couldn't give up and decided to stay overnight at a motel. Rising before the sun, we went directly to West Gill Road. Davis Finch (Northeastern Maritime Regional editor for American Birds) and Bob Smart were already there and informed us, much to our chagrin and dismay, that they had seen the owl just five minutes before (how often have I heard that story), but that it had flown into the woods. Mr. Smart pointed to the group of pines into which he thought the bird had flown.

Several hours of waiting followed before we obtained permission from the owner to walk on his property. By then at least a score of birders were eagerly waiting on the road. At last we started in, tramping through the snow, jumping a couple of streams, and heading directly for the pine grove. Suddenly, there was the owl, not 25 feet away, looming close to the trunk of a pine. It swiveled its head to stare at us with its small yellow eyes. All I could think of was, "It's so big!" After several minutes, the bird apparently became tired of all the ecstatic people. It ruffled its feathers and launched off on huge but noiseless wings. The great gray owl dipped low, then flopped off and disappeared among the trees.

P.M.

