

A UNIQUE BREEDING RECORD: SAW-WHET OWL
By Fred S. Schaeffer

Two years ago, Roy Barth of Malverne, Long Island, N.Y., who erects all the well constructed wooden nestboxes at Tobay Sanctuary where my Operation Recovery program takes place, decided to put up two owl boxes. One box was designed for a Screech Owl and/or Sparrow Hawk, the other for a larger species of owl.

The smaller box, which measures 7" x 7" x 14" high, with a 3" hole, was placed on the edge of a mosquito control ditch. Phragmites are in the foreground and poison ivy and medium bayberry shrubs are in the background. About 150 to 200 feet north of the box is a large salt marsh which borders on the State Channel and South Oyster Bay.



Left, top: The general area, box is on path in center. Below: the box, among bayberry and poison ivy. Right: Adult female held next to its box (the hand is Bob Paxton's).

Toward the end of March, Roy excitedly informed me that a Saw-whet Owl was seen at this box location. At that time, I passed it up, since Saw-whets are known to winter and linger at the refuge at that time. My first trip to the refuge for banding purposes was April 7th. I planned to check all the boxes and when I came upon box 12, the smaller owl box, a tell-tale snapping sound was clearly audible. I opened the hinged top and found a Saw-whet Owl. Banding it, I noticed a very large brood patch. Now definitely on the alert, I decided to come back soon. The following weekend I couldn't make it, but on April 20, I found six white eggs and a very angry owl. Wearing gloves was definitely in order with this individual of a usually docile species.

May 5th examination revealed three young and three eggs. The young, ranging from about 12 to 36 hours old, were largely naked with dull white down in the feather tract areas. Eyes were closed. I took some pictures,



Two views of the adult Saw-whet Owl in the nest box. The photo at the left, made from a color slide, shows two of the eggs beneath the owl. (All photos by the author.)

which appear on these pages. The adult (the banded one) was very aggressive and I'm sure my fingers would not have survived without my gloves for protection. Even her face looked ferocious, beak open and claws up in the air. This was only the beginning. On May 11th, now with five young, the adult attacked my gloved hands several times, but I managed some more photographs.

On May 26th, I was back at Tobay. Folks who've seen young Saw-whets in juvenal plumage will understand how I felt. They were gorgeous, dark brownish on the back and wings which were 80-90mm long and a light cinnamon, tawny underpart and breast coloration. The face was dark except for a dull white patch around the eyes, lower forehead and just above the bill. The adult was nowhere in sight, probably foraging for food. The male bird had never been seen. On May 30th, I banded the young. The sixth egg was probably infertile and was probably stepped on.



Two of the nestlings - the one at the left is estimated to be 12 to 24 hours old; at right, three or four days old, with eyes barely open.

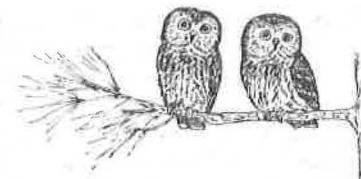
John Bull, in his "Birds of the New York Area" notes one known breeding record in our area: Miller Place, Long Island, in 1879 (Helme). I understand a young bird was found in 1966 in Suffolk County, but no nest was found. This record at Tobay is the first, and hopefully not the last record in quite a while.

Quite a few Saw-whet Owls were observed this winter along the Jones Beach-Captree State Park barrier beach, along which Tobay is located. The habitat, in which this particular owl chose to make a home, is certainly unique. In the Audubon Land Bird Guide (by Richard H. Pough), we read

that Saw-whets frequent dense woodlands, apparently preferring evergreen to deciduous trees and low, wet areas to dry woods. Tobay is low and wet, but is neither dense woodland nor evergreen. I've never seen a reference to salt-marshes.

It is possible that these birds will stick to this area for a while or throughout the summer, but I appeal to those banders who frequently catch Saw-whet Owls during Operation Recovery to be on the lookout for the following band numbers: 524-21171 (the adult) and 524-21172 through -76 (the nestlings). Size 4, lock-on bands were used. I'm particularly interested in wing lengths - so they can eventually be sexed.

139-48 85th Drive, Jamaica, N.Y. 11435



NEWS FROM THE NET COMMITTEE The Net Committee is running a special sale on 9 meter $1\frac{1}{2}$ " mesh, tethered nets. The sale price is \$1.80 for a net that ordinarily sells for \$2.75. The sale will run until Oct. 1, 1968 or until our supply of nets is sold.

As you may know, we are presently stocking a much improved 12 meter $1\frac{1}{4}$ " tethered net, but the price has increased from \$4.30 to \$5.00. In order to offer a better quality net in the 5 meter $1\frac{1}{4}$ " size we have had to increase the cost of that net from \$2.00 to \$2.40.

We are presently stocking a new net that has the following characteristics: it is 70 d/2 $1\frac{1}{4}$ " mesh and about $2\frac{1}{2}$ meters high, 4 shelves and tethered in the top only. This is comparable to a net that many of you obtained from other sources and have expressed an interest in buying from us. The price to EBBA members is \$5.00.

We are continually corresponding with our supplier in Japan to increase the quality of our nets. If you have any suggestions in this matter, please send them to:

Dr. Richard F. Waechter
Department of Biology
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15701