

Screech Owl Nesting Decline from 1976 thru 1978

by Laurel Van Camp

150 wood duck nesting boxes checked each year for Screech Owl nesting activity in 1976, 1977, and 1978.

55 of the 150 boxes checked in 1978 contained evidence of Screech Owl use. The following was found in the boxes, Screech Owl pellets, song bird feathers and remains, mammals and remains, dead Screech Owls, Screech Owl remains (abundance of Screech Owl feathers, no doubt the carcass was consumed by other Screech Owls), and nesting Screech Owls. No accurate records of evidence of use by Screech Owls was obtained from the boxes in 1976 and 1977.

5 dead Screech Owls or remains were found in the boxes in 1978, none in 1976 or 1977. The evidence contained in the boxes in 1978 showed that Screech Owls used the boxes during the fall of 1977 up to nesting time in 1978, but a good per cent did not survive to nest in 1978. Less nesting, more abandonment, and lower success rate in 1978.

Screech Owls use the boxes for roosting, feeding structures and nesting structures. Example: instead of consuming prey where it is caught, they carry it into the boxes, if not consumed then, they consume most of it later. The reason for this is they are vulnerable to larger owls while they are feeding on prey in the open.

20 nests located in 1976
2 nests abandoned, 18 successful nests.
Average number of young per nest located, 3.6 per nest.
73 young banded.

17 nests located in 1977.
2 nests abandoned, 15 successful nests.
Average number of young per nest located, 3.2 per nest.
56 young banded.

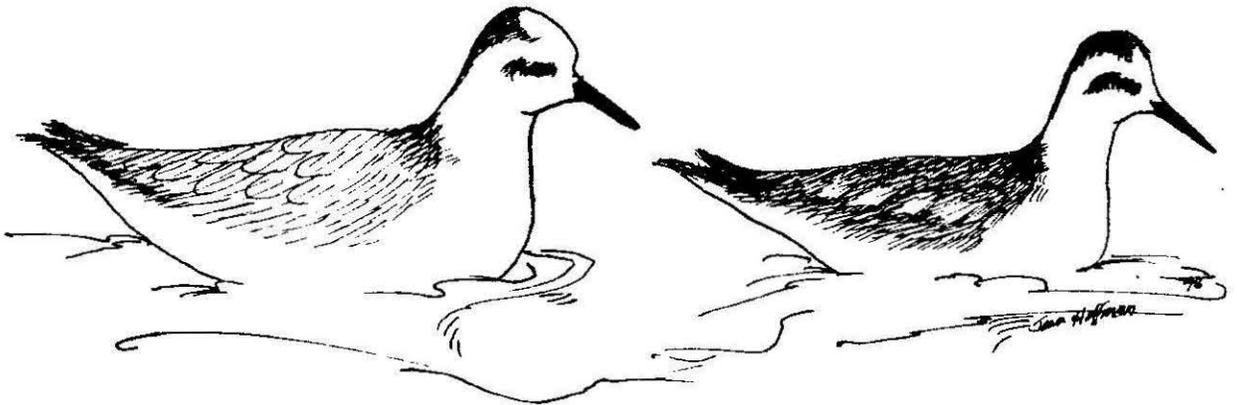
9 nests located in 1978
3 nests abandoned, 6 successful nests.
Average number of young per nest located, 3.0 per nest.
28 young banded.

The reason for such a large decline in nesting in 1978 is, number 1, in winter and during the nesting season song birds are a substantial part of the Screech Owl diet. The blizzard of January 26, 1978 caused a substantial decline in song bird population which lowered their food supply. Number 2, possibly the most important, was the heavy snow cover over a long period of time, all thru March, covering up the mouse population. This was very evident after the snow melted, showing how the mice girdled the trees and shrubs that were covered with deep snow. Thus, the mice did not come to the surface and were not available for food for

Screech Owls, causing some starvation.

The blizzard alone was not the cause of the heavy loss of song birds. Heavy rain before the blizzard wetting their plumage on those that roosted in the open, then the extreme temperature change from 36 degrees to 6 degrees in a short time was more than a lot of the birds could stand.

Phalaropes in Winter Plumage



red phalarope

northern phalarope