

The Ohio



CARDINAL™

Vol. 16, No. 1
Autumn 1992



The Ohio Cardinal is devoted to the study and appreciation of Ohio's birdlife. The Ohio Cardinal is published quarterly.

Subscriptions: The subscription rate for four issues is \$12.00. Send all subscriptions to--

The Ohio Cardinal, c/o Edwin C. Pierce, 520 Swartz Road, Akron, OH 44319

The Ohio Cardinal exists to provide a permanent and timely record of the abundance and distribution of birds in Ohio; to help document the occurrence of rare species in the state; to provide information on identification of birds; and to provide information on birding areas within Ohio.

The Ohio Cardinal invites readers to submit articles on unusual occurrences of birds, bird distribution within the state, birding areas in Ohio, identification tips, and other aspects of ornithology. Bird reports and photographs are welcome from any area in the state. Report forms are not a necessity but will be supplied on request. Unusual species should be documented--documentation forms are also available on request from the Editor, Publisher, and Records Committee Secretary.

In order to keep The Ohio Cardinal timely, seasonal reports are due by the following dates:

Winter--March 10

Spring--June 10

Summer--August 10

Autumn--December 10

Please send all reports to:

Robert Harlan, 7072 Parma Park Blvd., Parma Hts., OH 44130

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Cover: Lesser Golden-Plover, Conneaut Harbor, Sept. 7, 1992

Photo by Gary Meszaros

Great Gray Owl in Ohio by Robert Harlan

It takes a very special attraction to lure over 2500 observers across the snowy western Pennsylvania landscape, but a Great Gray Owl is a powerful magnet. As one of those observers drawn to Warren, PA during the winter of 1991-92, I can well attest to the almost tangible charisma of this species, as, I am sure, can any of the other 2500+ observers (Hall, p. 265) that took part in this pilgrimage. The scene is the same throughout eastern North America whenever these northern invaders appear-- birders are mysteriously, but invariably drawn to them. It is a very special situation indeed when a bird suddenly becomes "an event", allowing many observers the opportunity to convene and become part of the event themselves. In cases such as this, everyone is happy-- the bird stays put, everyone gets a peek, and the bird is so distinctive that identification becomes an afterthought. Identification should be easy with a bird as straightforward as a Great Gray Owl. Except in Ohio, it seems. This species has long presented a troublesome case for Ohio researchers, thanks to sketchy reports, missing specimens, overlooked published records, and just plain bad luck. In this article, I will attempt to bring together all the available literature, introduce some new information, and hopefully clean up many nagging doubts concerning the status of Great Gray Owl in Ohio. In my attempt to coalesce all available information, I have chosen to categorize all observations based on a (mostly) subjective scale, gauging degree of acceptability. All such categorizations are purely my own, and represent no approval/disapproval from any current or former Ohio bird records committee or other individual.

UNACCEPTABLE REPORTS

1). The first published record of Great Gray Owl in Ohio appeared in 1859, in an article "Natural History of the Birds of Ohio", published in the Ohio Farmer newspaper (Kirkpatrick, p. 107). The only data presented is Kirkpatrick's comment that he listed this species "in consequence of an owl answering the description of this species, having been shot some years ago at Huntsburgh, Geauga County." This observation is at least a second-hand report, and fails to include even the season of observation. Strictly anecdotal.

2). In 1970's Birds of the Lake St. Marys Area (Clark & Sipe, p. 37), the authors state that C. W. Williamson, in his History of Western Ohio and Auglaize County (1905) "lists this owl among the birds of Auglaize County and on this basis is included in this list." This report offers nothing at all on which to base an opinion.

3). Homer Price, the well-known oologist from Paulding County,