

RECORDS OF SNOWY OWLS IN CALIFORNIA

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Although the 1957 edition of the A.O.U. Check-list records the "occasional" winter distribution of the Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) to be as far south as Los Angeles County, a search of the literature reveals only one published record of this species in California since 1916, a bird from near Davis, California, in early January 1967 (Hunter, Calif. Fish and Game 53:213-214). Grinnell and Miller (The Distribution of the Birds of California, Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 27, 1944) summarized earlier Snowy Owl records in the state, and of 17 specific records mentioned, 12 were from either Humboldt or Del Norte counties, two were from Alameda County, and one each from Santa Cruz, Sonoma, and Butte counties, and none more recent than late 1916. If this species has occurred in the state in the past 50 years, as seems likely, the records do not appear to have been published.

During early 1967 we were able to obtain observations and (or) reports on several Snowy Owls in California. Archie Mossman of Humboldt State College reported a heavily barred Snowy Owl in a pasture north of Humboldt Bay and approximately three miles west of Arcata, Humboldt County, on the evening of 31 January 1967. It was observed in the same place the next day by several observers, including the authors, but was apparently gone on 2 February when a search of the area failed to reveal it. Two Humboldt State College students reported seeing a white Snowy Owl on the south spit of Humboldt Bay on 2 February, and another student reported a dark bird in the beach dunes west of Arcata on 3 February. The spits and dunes were searched repeatedly in the next few weeks, and Snowy Owls were subsequently observed in a section of large

open sand dunes interspersed with small ponds of rain water directly west of Arcata. Between 12 February and 16 April, at least 18 visits were made to this area by either the authors or other competent observers. On 12 February two Snowy Owls, one white, and one barred, were observed. On subsequent visits from one to three owls, one white and two barred, were seen and photographed until 26 March, when the last known observation, of a barred bird, was made by Mrs. Violet Homem of San Francisco. These owls habitually perched on large nearly bare sand dunes 100-400 yards back from the ocean beach and flew parallel to the beach when flushed. In all, they stayed within an area no more than two miles long and one-half mile wide during the times they were under observation. It is possible that some of them may have used other areas at times because all three could not be found on every visit. The white owl seemed particularly elusive.

In addition to these records, a Humboldt State College student, Perry Baycroft, reported seeing a white Snowy Owl in the hills approximately four miles southeast of Arcata on 18 February at the same time that a white owl was under observation on the beach. This means that at least four separate Snowy Owls occurred in the vicinity of Arcata during February. So far as we know, the latest date a Snowy Owl was seen in Humboldt County in 1967 was 24 April when California Department of Fish and Game Warden Terry Grosz observed a white Snowy Owl on Table Bluff approximately five miles south of Eureka. Warden Grosz also reported seeing Snowy Owls in northeastern California in April, as follows: 14 April: one bird in white plumage observed one-half mile north of Wilson Valley, Modoc County. 17 April: one bird in white plumage eating a male Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) on state-line road at Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, Siskiyou County. While he was watching this bird, two additional Snowy Owls, one white, and one barred, flew south across the highway into California, being carried along by very strong northerly winds.

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A SECOND REPORT ON THE BASIHYALE IN AMERICAN SONGBIRDS, WITH REMARKS ON THE STATUS OF *PEUCEDRAMUS*

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The basihyale of the hyoid apparatus is a cylindrical bone in most families of songbirds, but not within the New World "nine-primaried" Oscines (George, Am. Mus. Novitates No. 2103, 1962). Every family belonging to this assemblage was sampled, and 116 of the genera and 255 of the species were examined in the previous survey. A cylindrical basihyale proved to be characteristic of only (1) Vireonidae, a disjunct, partly 10-primaried group whose real relationships are thought by many to lie outside the New World "nine-primaried" songbird assemblage; (2) *Tersina*, the

notoriously odd swallow tanager whose relationships no one can discern; and (3) one additional form, a supposed wood warbler, *Peucedramus*. In other Parulidae, and in the rest of the assemblage as well, a laterally compressed basihyale was found. Further, none of the examined vireos displayed this or a comparable condition.

Prior to the emergence of these findings, *Peucedramus* seemed to me, as to others who knew the bird in life, to be a typical member of the parulid-coerebidae-thraupid complex at the heart of the assemblage. Some authors (for instance Webster, Auk 25:469-473, 1958) even expressed a desire to merge the bird with *Dendroica*, of which there is no more typical parulid genus. Little or none of the internal anatomy of *Peucedramus* had been described, however, up to the time when the distribution of basihyale alternatives began to throw a disconcerting cloud of doubt around the bird's relationships. Its life history, too, had remained very little investigated. Consequently, a more comprehensive study of the *Peucedramus* appeared desirable, was undertaken, and revealed the bird to have (George, *op. cit.*): (1) jaw muscle