

Kennedy Airport Snowy Owls: an Update¹

Sammy Chevalier
147-01 Village Road
Jamaica, New York 11435

With the passing of two more winter seasons, 87-'88' and 88-'89', this now makes a total of 25 years of observations and banding of Snowy Owls at Kennedy Airport, New York, which, at 40°38" north latitude, borders on the southernmost limit of the regular wintering range of *Nyctea scandiaca* on the east coast of North America.

While monitoring my birds during their stay at Kennedy, I frequently visit the location on the day following an all-day stay near a hummock, rock outcrop, or large clump of grass checking for a pellet or other signs of their well-being. This past winter, on one of these checks, I discovered the bare remains of a Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*), one tarsus of which had a Fish and Wildlife Service aluminum band. This was only the second duck recovery out of nearly 100 banded bird recoveries over a period of thirty years. The duck was banded by personnel of the Maine Department of Fish and Game as a HY-F at Costigan, Penobscott County, Maine, on 25 July 87.

The data of the last two years has been added to Tables 1 and 2 and, in addition, two more Snowys became bird strike casualties, prior to banding, making a total of nine for the entire study period.

The following map of Kennedy Airport shows the capture location of the 42 Snowy Owls. The areas adjacent to the northwest-southeast runways and the areas between the northeast-southwest runways are all short-cropped grass (2" short) during the winter months, making all prey species readily accessible.

During the past quarter century I have had countless opportunities to observe these magnificent birds and have experienced the thrill of getting a few in hand, for which I am forever grateful. On one occasion, while searching the airport for a new bird along with Hanna Richard, my dynamic and capable assistant since 1975, we located a very uncommon bird for New York City: a Florida race Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*).²

Many other friends and colleagues have shared in this experience either by seeing or handling these birds for the first time at my private preserve.

¹North American Bird Bander. 1988. Vol. 13, p. 1-3.

²Richard, Arthur. Burrowing Owls on Long Island. 1988. Kingbird: Vol. 38, No. 2.

Table 1. Sightings of Snowy Owls at Kennedy International Airport, New York.

Winter	First Sighting	Last Sighting	Total Number of Individuals At Kennedy Airport	Maximum Daily Count	Number Banded	% Males (of those Banded)
'64-'65	11/28	03/22	5	4	1	
'65-'66	a		0	-	0	
'66-'67	01/15	03/26	5	4	5	3
'67-'68	12/08	02/28	2	2	2	
'68-'69	a		0	-	0	
'69-'70	a		0	-	0	
'70-'71	a		0	-	0	
'71-'72	11/24	11/25	1	1	0	
'72-'73	11/22	12/15	2	1	1	
'73-'74	01/05	01/15	2	1	1	
'74-'75	11/08	02/12	4	3	3	2
'75-'76	12/08	04/07	3	3	2	2
'76-'77	01/20	03/06	2	1	1	
'77-'78	a		0	-	0	
'78-'79	12/11	12/11	1	1	0	
'79-'80	a		0	-	0	
'80-'81	11/18	04/24	6	4	6	2
'81-'82	11/12	03/18	4	4	3	1
'82-'83	12/10	03/16	6	4	5	4
'83-'84	11/15	02/24	2	2	2	2
'84-'85	11/20	03/04	2	2	2	2
'85-'86	12/05	03/05	2	1	1	1
'86-'87	11/15	04/10	6	4	4	1
'87-'88	11/19	03/30	3	2	2	1
'88-'89	11/29	02/26	3	2	1	
MEAN	11/28	03/04	61	4	42	50%

a = No Snowy Owls observed that year.

BAND NO.	AGE	SEX	WING (mm)	WEIGHT (grams)	TAIL (mm)	DATE	BAND NO.	AGE	SEX	WING (mm)	WEIGHT (grams)	TAIL (mm)	DATE
568-15064	HY	F	444	2352	--	03-22-65	608-37245	SY	F	410	2056	225	03-07-81
65	HY	U	425	1870	--	01-22-67	46	SY	M	400	1704	225	03-18-81
66	HY	M	395	2012	--	01-29-67	47	HY	F	425	2145	245	11-13-81
67	HY	U	420	1757	--	02-01-67	48	AHY	M	390	1862	220	02-18-82
68	HY	M	400	1672	--	02-05-67	49	AHY	F	430	2374	245	02-26-82
69	HY	M	360	1388	--	02-22-67	50	U	F	420	1912	240	12-25-82
71	HY	F	440	2017	--	12-08-67	51	SY	M	410	1810	225	01-01-83
73	SY	F	440	2355	--	02-27-68	52	AHY	M	420	1726	225	02-21-83
79	HY	F	440	1940	240	11-23-72	53	AHY	M	410	1764	225	02-22-83
80	HY	U	--	--	--	01-08-74	54	AHY	M	405	1898	236	02-27-83
82	HY	M	440	1703	225	12-23-74	55	SY	M	395	1503	230	01-25-84
85	AHY	F	440	2000	245	12-30-74	56	AHY	M	390	1780	215	02-24-84
87	U	M	405	1704	231	02-11-75	57	HY	M	394	1444	--	11-23-84
89	HY	M	380	1425	252	12-15-75	58	AHY	M	394	1884	234	12-02-84
90	HY	M	400	1544	238	12-29-75	59	AHY	M	410	1683	220	02-19-86
91	AHY	F	435	2174	224	02-28-77	60	HY	F	430	1864	245	11-30-86
608-37241	HY	M	395	1513	215	11-21-80	61	HY	M	425	1767	232	12-01-86
42	AHY	F	432	2020	240	12-17-80	62	AHY	F	445	1987	248	12-03-86
43	SY	F	420	--	--	02-22-81	63	AHY	F	445	2387	248	02-27-87
44	SY	F	410	1936	--	02-22-81	64	AHY	M	420	1757	240	02-18-88
							65	AHY	F	410	2119	225	03-28-88
							608-75986	SY	F	455	2400	240	02-02-89

FIGURE 1.

MAP OF KENNEDY AIRPORT

