

BARRED OWL SPECIMEN RECORDS FOR MONTANA

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Taylor and Forsman (1976) reported recent range extensions of the Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) in western North America. Boxall and Stepney (1982) described the species' distribution and status in Alberta. Shea (1974) summarized sightings, a photographic record, and several vocalization records of Barred Owls in western Montana but collected no specimens. Although published nesting records are not available, D. Flath (pers. comm.) stated that breeding is occasionally reported for the Blackfoot, Bitterroot, and Fisher river valleys (see also Skaar et al. 1985). Marks et al. (1984) reported prey identified from 37 Barred Owl pellets from western Montana. Saunders (1921) reported that Thomas collected three Barred Owls near Billings, but the specimens have never been located and Skaar (1975 and pers. comm.) questioned their authenticity. Here we report the first extant Barred Owl specimens for Montana and a range extension east across the continental divide.

During 1974 three Barred Owls were found dead in Montana. The first specimen (Univ. Montana No. 15710), a road kill, was found by Ellis and Gus Wolfe on 13 April on Highway 200 1.6 km west of the junction of highways 200 and 287 in Lewis and Clark County, east of the continental divide. The location is on the open prairie about 30 km east of the forested foothills of the Rocky Mountains. On 26 April Peter Widener IV and Ellis located the remains of a second Barred Owl in Powell County about 0.5 km south of the north fork of the Blackfoot River and approximately 73 km southwest of the first specimen. The scattered remains of this owl (Univ. Montana No. 15709) suggested that it had been plucked by an avian predator perched ca. 5 m up on a horizontal limb in a mature stand of Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). The third bird, an adult female (Univ. Montana No. 15807), was picked up (finder unknown) dead near Patomac, Missoula County, in September 1974.

Two other records are well substantiated and deserve mention. An injured bird, recovered 21 December 1976, was rehabilitated by the John Craighead family and released 6 February 1977 on the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, Ravalli County. Finally, a road-killed female was found 4 October 1981, 1.6 km west of Patomac Bar, Highway 200, Missoula County, by Lynne Meggs and delivered to the University (Univ. Montana No. 17145).

In the years following collection of the 1974 specimens, occasional sightings and vocalization records were reported in issues of *American Birds*. These, the unpublished references to nesting, the food habits report (Marks et al. 1984), and the two additional specimen records all suggest that the Barred Owl has become increasingly common in Montana since the early 1970s.

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Barred Owl

Sketch by Cameron Barrows