

OPERATION SNOWY OWL IN GREEN BAY

By CLARA HUSSONG

The 1960-61 winter will no doubt go down in bird-lore history as one of the heaviest flight years for the Snowy Owl. These birds of the Arctic tundras have been reported from various parts of Wisconsin since last November.

A number of WSO members, including President Fran Hamerstrom, took advantage of the heavy flight by starting "Operation Snowy Owl." In this project the owls were caught in banding traps, examined, weighed, measured, banded (with Fish and Wildlife Service bands), and spray-painted.

This last item is something new for Snowy Owls, although geese and other large birds have been marked in this way before. The spray-painting of left wing, right wing, head, tail or other body part is recorded along with the bird's band number and other details. It is hoped that this marking of the owls will prove helpful in determining the range of the birds in their search for food, the length of their stay in the state, and other data.

Working with Mrs. Hamerstrom on this project were Dr. Hamerstrom, Mr. and Mrs. Helmut Mueller and Dan Berger. The work was carried on weekends, on a voluntary basis; that is, "on their own."

To coincide with a WSO board meeting held in Green Bay on Jan. 21, the group planned a trapping and banding expedition in that area for the weekend. They were accompanied by the Hamerstroms' daughter, Elva, and her room-mate at the University of Wisconsin, Cynthia Schachter of New York.

Enroute to Green Bay one owl was caught near Lake Butte des Morts, just north of Oshkosh. Upon examination, this bird proved to be one of very few free of lice, mites and other parasites. It was given a copper-colored right wing decoration.

In Green Bay on Sunday, Jan. 22, the "Operation Snowy Owl" crew set out at seven in the morning for the nine locations reported to me as places where Snowy Owls had been seen recently, or regularly. They were accompanied by Mr. Hussong, who helped them locate the areas.

By night, five owls had been caught, the best record for a single day. One was caught near the bay shore, one along the Fox River, and three on farmlands near De Pere. The weight of the birds ranged from three and one-half to a little over five pounds. According to crew members, the heaviest bird caught up to that time was six pounds.

The owls were caught by getting their claws tangled in fine nylon netting, looped across the top of a baited trap. Sometimes the owls came to the traps immediately, the bird banders reported, and sometimes it took hours before they ventured near.

The birds were disentangled immediately, their feet were tied and they were slipped, head down, into a nylon stocking. In this "cage" they were much safer and more comfortable than in a wire trap or cage.

IN THE PICTURES TO THE LEFT, THE OPERATION SNOWY OWL CREW AT GREEN BAY IS SHOWN WITH THEIR FIVE OWLS AND PAINTING AN OWL'S WING. AT TOP, L. TO R., MRS. HAMERSTROM, MRS. HELMUT MUELLER, DAN BERGER, CYNTHIA SCHACHTER, ELVA HAMERSTROM, AND HELMUT MUELLER. GREEN BAY PRESS GAZETTE PHOTOS BY ORVELL PETERSON

Processing each bird, that is, examining, weighing, measuring, banding and painting, took quite a while, even with the whole crew working. After the work was finished, the birds were released in the same areas in which they were caught. (A variety of stocking colors and meshes were used in order to tell the birds apart, and to insure their release in the right spot.)

One of the birds turned out to be a "bird of a different feather." Instead of the gray-brown flecks which form a pattern of streaks and bars in an "unruffled" Snowy Owl, this one was mostly pure white, with a gray wash over lower back and tail.

The local newspaper, the **Green Bay Press Gazette**, sent a photographer to take pictures of the banding and spray-painting, and on Jan. 24 carried a full page spread of pictures and story on "Operation Snowy Owl." Readers of the paper were asked to watch for the decorated birds, and to report sightings to the Hamerstoms.

CONVENTION NEWS

Plans for the 1961 Convention of W. S. O. are moving ahead under the able leadership of Vice-President Robert Adams. The new Union at Carroll College, in Waukesha, will be the setting for the paper sessions, banquet, luncheon, and bookstore. The very successful art contest of last year's convention has prompted the Convention Committee to schedule another, under the direction of Clarence Anthes. Plans for the banquet and speaker aren't yet final, but the prospects of an exceptional program appear to be excellent. The space set aside for the bookstore will offer greater room than has often been available. More items will be on display, and more visibly than has sometimes been possible. It is planned to make the store accessible to Carroll College students who may wish to browse about.

Anyone wishing to present a paper is urged to contact Adams for a place on the program, and should do so soon. There are only so many openings, and each presentation will be limited to a fixed period of time.

Convention announcements will soon be in the mail to all W. S. O. members. The officers and directors of W. S. O., and the group in Waukesha which is working on convention plans with Robert Adams, all hope for a fine attendance.

IMPORTANT NOTE!

The editor must apologize for an error which may inconvenience readers of **The Passenger Pigeon** for years to come, unless simple steps are taken to correct his error. The page numbers of the Summer 1960 issue, Number 2 of Volume XXII, should run from 57 to 108, rather than from 1 to 52. Please make the change in your own copy. This will avoid confusion when the Index is published, and when reference is made to the issue in future numbers. Thank you.