

Some Raptor Notes

By Don G. Follen, Sr.

January Nest Building by Red-tailed Hawks

While enroute to the local garbage disposal area on January 24, 1981, I was flagged down by a local employee of the county highway department. He had been asked to pass on to me the word that there were two hawks or eagles hard at work building a nest. Since this seemed very early to me, and since I was going to Marshfield anyway that day, I drove to the area. The nest was nearly complete in size and structure and looked ready for use. The elm tree is still alive and I spotted the nest at about thirty-five feet, one hundred fifty feet behind a salt shed. The winter thus far has been extremely mild and this is an area of constant and close human activity. A nest across the road, about one quarter of a mile away, had failed in 1980 as a result of kids roaming the woods with guns. We had seen people in this woods on several occasions, and our appeals did little to keep them out for the birds' sakes.

The period from January 12 until the present, Jan. 31, has been unusually mild. Temperatures have been from zero to the mid- and upper-forties and the week of January 19-24 saw many days of January thaw. It may have been this spring-like weather that stimulated the Red-tails to begin home keeping, as we have seldom seen nest building activity before March 15-30.

The Barreds of the Big House

A bit of background with a chronological account of a family of Barred Owls.

In 1963 I purchased one-hundred-eighty acres of forested land in order to have a place closeby to study wildlife. One of the first species noted was the Barred Owl, (*Strix varia*) and this seemed strange because the land had been nearly clear cut in the 1950's. For many years I tried to find the tree or stump that was being used for a nesting site by the owls, but it proved fruitless.

On April 19, 1980, David Rassmussen, my son Eric and I erected a very large bird house about 75 meters behind our home and in full view of most of the north yard. Since it was too late for 1980's nesting, we would see what happened in 1981. Following is the chronology of the family of Barred Owls that moved in, from notes.

February 10, 1981: 'Checked for leaves, cleaned and leveled off the sawdust and chips.'

March 9, 1981: 'Checked - neat cup - 6 to 8 inches on bottom, looks like fully made nest; suspect Bd.O.'

March 9-16, 1981: 'Much hooting - evenings and AM an owl obs. Crows often seen chasing.'

March 17, 1981: 'St. Patricks Day. Bird-thought to be male in yd. on clothesline post, and in trees hunting - early 6 AM. Rough-legged Hawk flies by. Flew off at 6:35 - down lane @ 50 yds., up past the nest hole. 7:00 a.m. bird (owl) seen chased into woods by crows. I walk down to

put some moth crystals around house tree to keep coon from climbing tree. Bird flushes and off to the west. At tree less than 30 sec. & gone.

- March 18, 1981: 'Confirmed, at 6:06 see bird, suspect male, fly up to house - something in bill - sticks head in hole @ 5 seconds and flies away - feeding female?'
- March 23, 1981: 'Squirrel climbs across the tree to the hole but is rebuffed by owl inside. Squirrel leaps to ground.'
- March 24, 1981: 'Tried to sneak past, self, Ira, Steve & Ivan. She flushes and back into the woods about 50 yards. Both heard at 6:25 - squawking up a storm for 3-4 minutes, NOT HOOTING.'
- April 9, 1981: '11:00 a.m. - both owls hooting like crazy.'
- April 4, 1981: 'Owl is daylight hunting around edge of yard. 1½ hrs. before dark.'
- April 12, 1981: 'Owl again hunting at 5:30 p.m.'
- April 14, 1981: 'Owl hunting at 7:30 a.m. yet.'
- April 16, 1981: 'Both ad. seen. Presume female flew from house to ground. Male to west of house.'
- April 19, 1981: '8:30 a.m. - both adults have been seen more often. Eric and I sneak up and put net over hole in Big House. (We think) female comes out, is caught and quickly banded, look in, see three eggs, 1 is pipping; bird back in and we sneak away. The bird comes back out when we are back at the (our) house watching from the window. (Had hoped for young, with female being out of the house so much lately.) We hope it will return. We are now out of the house and see ---??? the second bird is in a tree popping like mad. It is definitely the other bird; it is bigger than the bird we banded ---??? was the male incubating the eggs? Oh yes; in the box were 2 *Peromyscus* sp? and 1 *Clethrionomys gapperi*.'
- April 20-23, 1981: 'Worried - not seeing any owls. Walk behind our house wondering.'
- April 24, 1981: 'See a Bd. 20 ft. from tree. Mary says she heard them last night about 11:30 p.m.'
- April 26, 1981: 'Ira and I sneak, trying to get past the Big House; Ad. comes out. We hurry away and both start clattering & yelping, barking.'
- May 5, 1981: 'Obs. Ad. go into the box at 5:30 a.m.'
- May 11, 1981: '3 yng. banded 3-3½ weeks.'
- May 19, 1981: '1st young stands in hole about 20 minutes.'
- May 21, 1981: 'Young still in hole.'
- May 23, 1981: 'Young standing in hole in box. Ira and I walk down with ladder, young in, only 2 in big house, 3rd can't be found.'
- May 27, 1981: 'Still in hole in box but looking west. We walk back. 1 young owl @ 20 ft. W. of tree in maple - well concealed.'

May 28, 1981: 'All gone can't be found.'

June 13, 1981: 'Adults whooping it up to the NW. Success.'

Since this time the owls have been heard many times. The above chronology possibly indicates too much human interference at some critical times; however, in the cause of ornithological field observation there is not much better than first-hand work. We have documented a timetable for Barred Owls and have learned a lot. Of significance, we feel very confident that the male bird did at least some of the incubating. Bent says, "The female is supposed to do most of the incubating". An interesting study of some very remarkable birds.

Literature Cited:

Bent, Arthur Cleveland "Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey", part two.

Peregrine at Arpin

Date: September 26, 1981

Time: Near noon.

Wind: Calm to SW @ 5 mph.

Temp.: 60 degrees F.

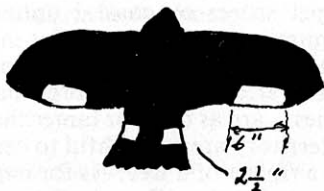
Gen. Conditions: Had been drizzly and rainy most of forenoon.

While helping Dennis SeEVERS, who lives one and one half miles southeast of Arpin, Wood County, Wisconsin, on the above date, I went to the truck to telephone home. As I sat in the truck, I noticed a raptor directly to the south, about one-hundred-fifty feet up. As it approached to within one hundred yards of the barn foundation we were working on, it suddenly turned up and to the west. I called, "Dennis, large falcon." We both immediately glassed and scoped the bird, which was an adult Peregrine. The bird sailed, flew, turning around, and reached about fifty yards from the place we were standing. It then flew slightly to the west and then south again, and eventually flew over the top of a woods. Total time of observation was two to three minutes. The observation was especially rewarding as, after seeing two mid-winter Peregrines in central and north-central Wisconsin (Dorchester) and making another observation, it appears that the effects of the DDT stoppage and possibly restocking wild natural areas are paying off. I have had many years in a row without a single observation of this majestic falcon.

Dark Plumaged Buteo near Petenwell Lake, Juneau County

On March 19, 1981 at approximately 10 in the morning, while doing a Life Forms Survey for Consolidated Papers, Incorporated of Wisconsin Rapids, we saw a very unusual dark Buteo Hawk. With me were Dennis SeEVERS of Arpin and Don Larson of Loyal. Equipment used were two pairs of 7x35 binoculars and my balscope zoom 60 spotting scope. This bird stayed over us for approximately three minutes, then soared to the west over the trees. At the time of observation we were approximately four miles north of the powerhouse on the west dike, which was part of the survey.

The first thought that raced through my mind was dark Rough-leg, but no, the legs were yellowish green and NOT feathered to the feet. The bill was also a dark color, while the eye, through the zoom sixty at twenty power, looked brown. The overall color was very dark brown or black, and the other strange thing about this bird was that it was small, approaching the size of a Broadwinged Hawk. The white patches in the wing were about six inches in width and about two and a half inches in depth, while those on the tail were about two-and-a-half inches square. The white patches on the sides were symmetrical. Another thought was a melanistic bird that someone had captured and marked, but the white in the feathers certainly did look natural. As soon as we reached the van I drew the accompanying sketch of the bird. It is clear in my memory, but will remain an "unidentified buteo".



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The Rules of the Game — Two Views

Two WSO birders discuss the legitimacy of listing "exotics". Not every bird watcher puts such an emphasis on lists. But if he wants to - why not? There is no end to the kinds of lists, state, county, town, property, life, month, country, world — lists of birds seen while dreaming, seen from tractor seat, from car, train, airplanes, bicycles, kitchen window and birds seen while answering the call of nature, and a list of different kinds of lists.

The Case for Counting Exotics

By Tom deBoor

A couple of years ago, many of us had an opportunity to see a beautiful male Red-crested Cardinal at a feeder in Hartford. During the same fall, I found an immature Common Shelduck in Milwaukee. Both were new birds for me and both were exciting to watch. They were lifers, new species -- but according to the "rules of the game", I was not to count them because they were "exotics". Of course every birder is free to come up with his own rules, but if he wants the respect of his peers, he must either follow their rules or have a very good reason for his own. And so I began to ask myself why it is that exotics are held in such low repute that they aren't even mentioned by my region in **American Birds**, and why it is that one can count "accidentals" but not "exotics".

I suppose the Pandora's Box that everyone conjures up with regard to exotics is the spectre of birdwatchers importing hordes of birds, releasing