

vember, the Snowy Owl invasion picked up in earnest. On 23 November 1996, while 10 Snowy Owls were observed along Wisconsin's lakeshore, 3 of which were in Racine and Kenosha Counties (Andy Sigler pers comm.), David B. Johnson and Denis Bohm set a state record of 9 owls (the most Snowies seen by a single observer or party) in one day along Chicago's lakefront, 5 at Montrose Harbor, 2 at Navy Pier, and 2 at Meigs airport. James Landing saw an additional owl at Jackson Park that day, and at least two owls were present at Waukegan on the same day as well. In addition, at least two were in Indiana on the 23rd. This snapshot total for one day along Lake Michigan's shoreline was 24 owls! On 30 November, Kenneth J. Brock personally set an Indiana record of 5 owls along Indiana's lakefront beaches. By the end of November 1996, observers had recorded 36 Snowy Owls in Illinois, 15 in Indiana, and at least 8 in Michigan (see appendix).

This movement of owls seemed to continue unabated through the end of December with 18 new individuals in Illinois and 14 in Indiana. Illinois CBC reports tallied 16 Snowy Owls in the state (in 5 count circles). During January, numbers seemed to dwindle at the lakefront locations with only 4 new reports from Illinois' lakefront, 4 on Indiana's lakefront, and 1 in Michigan. However more reports originated from inland locations (at least in Illinois) with 7 reports, 5 at O'Hare Airport, Cook County, and 2 in DuPage County. Several birds were already inland with the southernmost at Keyesport at Carlyle Lake. Two owls at La Salle Nuclear Lake were also noted. During February there was one new Snowy Owl report for Illinois and singles were recorded in both Indiana and Berrien County, Michigan.

The last Snowy Owl reports were

of apparent returning migrants with one found dead at Montrose, Chicago, on 10 March, one along I-55 on 27 March 1997, and 4 birds along Lake Michigan in Illinois. The latest report



Snowy Owl. Montrose Harbor, Chicago, Cook County. 14 December 1996. This was one of 72 Snowies that invaded Illinois in the 1996-97 season. Photo by Craig Thayer.

was 15 April 1997 at Midway Airport in Chicago.

Casualties

Of the 73 Snowy Owls recorded in Illinois, 10 percent were casualties. The first known casualty involved an owl found dead from starvation on 17 November in Lake Zurich in Lake County. The second casualty was a male bird killed by a car near Crete in Cook County at Glenwood-Dyer Road and I-394 on 29 November (FMNH 384661). Four other "collision" casualties occurred at O'Hare Airport, either from ground vehicles or aircraft (two of these birds were a male and female and are at the FMNH). One of these owls was a possible victim of "jet wash," a female owl with a broken

coracoid recorded at O'Hare International Airport on 2 April 1997 (FMNH). In addition, another bird was electrocuted at O'Hare in December when the bird landed on a transformer (Glenn Dunn pers. comm.). At Montrose on 10 Mar 1997, a male owl was found dead, washed up to shore, along Lake Michigan (D. Willard pers comm.; FMNH).

An interesting account of a Snowy Owl encounter with a Peregrine Falcon occurred on 24 November and 4 December at Montrose, Chicago (Jeff Sanders pers comm.; John Purcell in litt.). These encounters generally consisted of repeated "stoops" by the falcon and "hissing" by the owl. However, Sanders reported "no harm."

Prey

The following owl prey were noted by observers either by prey in talons or from skeletal remains from examined owl pellets: Mallard, Red-breasted Merganser, Rock Dove, Norway Rat, and "mice." Purcell suggested that Snowies at Montrose might have taken Common Goldeneye as the winter population was ample, however, no direct proof could be provided. At Montrose, a Snowy Owl was observed on a light pole clutching a dead Mallard. Perhaps most interesting was the report to the Chicago rare bird alert on 7 January 1997 of an owl along Chicago's lakefront that swooped down after an owner's small pet dog.

Historical Perspective

There is little past history in the way of quantifying Snowy Owl invasions in Illinois, however Bohlen (1989) listed major invasion years in Illinois as: 1876-77, 1882-83, 1889-90, 1892-93, 1896-97, 1901-2, 1905-6, 1909-10, 1917-18, 1926-27, 1930-31, 1949-50, 1974-75, 1976-77, 1978-79, and 1980-81 (59 records). Unlisted (in Bohlen)