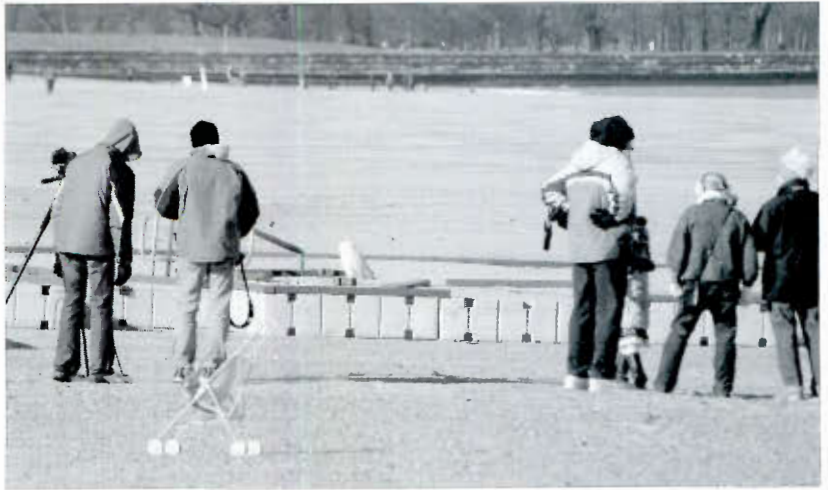


*As people walk along the beach
at Montrose, a Snowy Owl
remains motionless.
Montrose, Chicago,
Cook County.
11 December 2011.
Photo by Andrew Aldrich.*

until the vehicle was stopped and, after driving several miles, the driver then found a huge white owl pinned by its talons to the front grill of his car and wing flapping against the hood. Such encounters occur often with cars and owls. This usually results in the demise of the owl either flattened in the road or roadside by the same or other vehicles, but, such was not to be the case with this Snowy Owl's encounter with a vehicle. While at the driver's place of employment, local police were notified, and officer, Pete Velez, captured the owl when she became dislodged from the grill by herself, then transported the owl to Willowbrook Wildlife Center, in Glen Ellyn, for rehabilitation. The immature female owl suffered from head trauma, a fractured clavicle and two fractured ribs all on the owl's left side where it had made contact with the vehicle. LuAnn LaSusa from Willowbrook who provided much of the owl's care noted that the owl ate on the first day of care, which was rather unusual. After nearly two months of extensive care and rehabilitation including flight exercises, the immature female owl was successfully released back into the wild at Pratt's Wayne Forest Preserve in DuPage County on 23 January 2012.

Another Snowy Owl that probably was struck by a vehicle occurred near Tolono in Champaign County (Pressey 2012) in early January when observers noticed the owl had not moved much while sitting out in a corn stubble field. The owl, extremely weakened and starving, was rescued on 3 January 2012 and was taken to the University of Illinois Wildlife Medical Clinic. Named Qiqiq for a "white hawk that flies in the sky," from Inuit Eskimo culture, the young male owl suffered a broken left wing



that required extensive surgery of the humerus bone. Dr. Julia Whittington performed the surgery that repaired the owl's broken wing. Anne Rivas (2012), a veterinary student and the wildlife clinic's co-manager, and Kim Knap of the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital were successful in restoring the bird's wing extension critical for flight after intensive care. The clinic decided that it would be in the owl's best interest to be flown at the end of March to Sitka, Alaska for flight training at the Alaska Raptor Center where chances for the owl's survival would be much higher. Unfortunately, this owl could not fly despite the surgeries, but does remain at the Alaska Raptor Center and is a popular bird as a visitor to children's classrooms as a tool to develop nature appreciation and conservation (Debbie Reeder pers. comm.).

Close Encounters of the Raptor Kind

Certainly one of the most dramatic and photographically documented encounters with another bird of prey during this irruption occurred at Northerly Island on 29 January 2012. The entire Peregrine Falcon vs. Snowy Owl attack was captured on film by photographer Rick Remington. Remington's series of photos and account of the event were posted on North American Birding website (Neise 2012) and within a day the site went viral and because of so

many hits the website had to be closed down and transferred to another provider. This amazing photographic series noted the falcon would attack and the owl would crouch down in a defense posture and get ready to lunge back at the falcon or spread its wings as a threat display. The owl performed a somersault just as the peregrine approached and openly displayed its large talons in an attempt to scare off the falcon. This threatening encounter lasted for five full minutes before the falcon flew off and the Snowy Owl flew down to the rocks at the edge of Lake Michigan. Remington stated, "It was a surprisingly violent and noisy encounter, with both birds shrieking loudly and the owl extending its giant wings to intimidate the smaller falcon. I fully expected this to end badly for the owl based on what I was watching. In spite of the obvious mismatch, the Snowy Owl managed to hold its own and escape unscathed." The Peregrine was one of the local breeding birds and was likely defending its hunting territory. Very similar encounters between these two species, as well as with wintering Gyrfalcons, have been witnessed by others in northeastern Minnesota (Evans 2000), in New England (see Forbush 1927), near Barrow, Alaska (Pitelka et al. 1955), and on Baffin Island (Sutton and Parmalee 1955), and usually also involved the falcons attacking the Snowy Owl, often to a stand-off but also included the Snowy