

The phantom Snowy Owls, here one day and gone the next, fascinated Illinois birders. Hirabayashi first noticed a snowy with a distinct dark and white V-patterned head at Montrose Harbor in early November. She saw the bird throughout the month and into December and then finally, or so she thought, at the beginning of January.

"Then much to my amazement, it came back to Montrose on March 8," she recalled. "The same bird with the distinct patterned head." Since adult Snowy Owls will often displace immatures on their winter territories, Hirabayashi's bird could have been a juvenile that was displaced and then later returned migrating back north.

While Hirabayashi was enjoying this Snowy Owl's presence in late December and early January, Jim Neal was discovering another bird at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center during the Waukegan Christmas bird count on New Year's Day.

He later revisited and identified this Snowy Owl under the most peculiar circumstances. On 27 January, Neal, Danny Diaz, and Jim and Wendy Solum entered the abandoned Waukegan Hotel building near Lake Michigan at night to search for a Snowy Owl reported by a city worker as a "large white bird flying around" on the second floor.

#### NIGHTTIME SEARCH

On that frigid evening, the four owl prowlers entered the building in the dark and walked the two flights to where the bird was seen. There sitting on

stacks of old tables with eyes closed was a Snowy Owl. "I recognize him," said Neal. "This is the bird that's been out at the harbor. It has that real black mark on its head."

"And look at the beard on him," Diaz whispered.

Diaz and the other observers surmised that the only way the owl could have entered the building was from the 14th floor through a large open window when it may have been chasing a pigeon at dusk.

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After analyzing the bird's details to prove Neal's theory, they carefully trapped the bird with a bass fisherman's net intending to take it to the harbor. The owl stretched its wings, widened its bright yellow eyes, and snapped its bill in protest.

Neal then gently stroked the bird. When the bird was sufficiently calm, the birders released it at Waukegan Harbor at midnight. It was never seen again.

"Such bizarre occurrences

#### **NEARBY REGIONS RECORDED SNOWY OWL INVASIONS LAST WINTER**

The extent of the Snowy Owl invasion in nearby states and regions to the north was well documented and for some areas this winter's Snowy Owl invasion was the largest on record.

Minnesota, as of this writing, had recorded 120 Snowy Owls, their largest invasion ever, according to Kim Eckert, a Duluth area birder. David Evans banded 33 Snowy Owls during the 1991/92 flight.

The Canadian Ontario region by the end of November 1991 had recorded an astounding 201 individuals (American Birds 46:1.) Whitefish Point Bird Observatory had recorded 21 Snowy Owls in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan by 15 November 1991 and Wisconsin reported 18 on its Christmas Bird Count. Farther south, one Snowy Owl was reported in Kentucky 10 November 1991.

It might be noted that regions to the north had record numbers of Hawk Owls and Great Gray Owls last winter. Perhaps that was due to a vole crash that happened to coincide with a lemming crash and possibly other owl prey availability in the boreal forest and Arctic circum-polar regions.

*-David B. Johnson*