

Most species of owls show specific habitat preferences. The Short-eared is found in undisturbed prairie, the Barred within dense deciduous forests, the Long-eared and Northern Saw-whet prefer conifer stands, the Burrowing inhabits prairie dog towns, the Snowy hunts flat open country, and the Common Barn-Owl usually seeks man-made structures in open regions. Screech-owls ordinarily live in deciduous woods, but will often take up residence around human habitations in nest boxes. The ubiquitous Great Horned Owl observes few limitations of habitat. Two notes in this *Bulletin* illustrate the adaptability of this species, whose food habits are as catholic as its habitat use. On occasion, it takes such unlikely prey as hawks, house cats, other owls and even striped skunks.

These skillful predators are uniquely adapted for stealthy nocturnal hunting and daily consume enormous quantities of potentially deleterious rodents, rabbits and insects. All are protected by law, and deservedly so. Their haunts and secretive habits make owls difficult to monitor, hence some species may not be as rare as available records indicate. Observers should be aware that much remains to be learned about these fascinating birds. This issue is dedicated to them — *The Editor*.

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL IN CIMARRON COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY

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One of only three small stands of ponderosa pines (*Pinus ponderosa*) known in Oklahoma towers above the rim of a small canyon 4 miles south of Kenton in Cimarron County, at the far west end of the Panhandle. During several previous Audubon Christmas Bird Counts at Black Mesa (Kenton), the Shanes had not taken the time to explore this grove, despite the fact that it lay within their designated area of the official count circle. These pines are located a few hundred meters north-east of the Lawrence Regnier ranch house, which has long been a cynosure for bird observers. The Shanes had earlier planned to investigate this copse of trees during the 1993 count (held on 1 January 1994), which they did.

Around 1000, while searching the ponderosa trunks for fresh sapsucker holes, Tom Shane discovered an adult Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) perched quietly toward the end of a pine bough approximately eight feet high. A moderate amount of whitewash on a limb four feet below the owl had revealed the bird's whereabouts.

The Meisenzahls returned later in the day, together with numerous other Christmas Count participants, to try to obtain a picture of the bird. Photographing it from the ground proved difficult, because from every position the dense rosettes of pine needles obstructed the little owl. Finally, by sitting on her husband's shoulders, Sharon Meisenzahl managed to secure a photograph (Fig. 1).

As is often reported in the literature, this owl is quite tame and we approached it to within a few feet. It moved only once during the entire day, turning on its perch from facing northeast in the morning to southwest that afternoon.

Baumgartner and Baumgartner (1992:413) list only eight records for this owl in their "Stragglers in Oklahoma" appendix. Of relevance are three records from Texas County: on 29 November 1933 a specimen was collected near Eva; another

was taken in Guymon on 29 January 1957; and on 21 November 1981 still another was seen in Guymon (Schwindt 1982). Scott Seltman (pers. comm.) reported that a Saw-whet Owl answered his taped call at the Regnier Ranch on 30 December 1984, about 0900. That bird answered four different times with the "zing zing zing" call.

The Panhandle of Texas has but a single record for this species. One was found dead by Ken Seyffert, Peggy Acord, Rena Ross, and Esther Waddill at Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Randall County on 6 May 1979 (Williams 1979). Not far to the west, there is a recent record in northeastern New Mexico: Wes Cook reported one at Clayton on 1 May 1967 (Williams 1967).

Andrews and Righter (1992) indicate that the range of the Northern Saw-whet Owl in Colorado follows the mesa country eastward from the Rockies along the Colorado-New Mexico border to the southwest corner of Baca County, Colorado. This area is just a dozen or so miles north of Black Mesa. Several Colorado owl enthusiasts feel that the Saw-whet Owl is common west and rare east of Trinidad (Dan Bridges, pers. comm.). After examining our photograph, Bridges wrote that Colorado Saw-whet Owls have light brown streaks on the breast and light brown backs. Our owl had a darker brown back with rusty streaks on its breast, indicating that the bird was probably from the north.

For Kansas, Thompson and Ely (1989) list the Northern Saw-whet Owl as a rare local transient and winter resident statewide. Five records for southwest Kansas include two specimens from Finney County (Menke 1894), a specimen collected by Charles Ely in Hamilton County (Fort Hays State University #1363) on 11 March 1967, one observed by Joan Challans in Ford County during early December 1976, and one seen by Galen Pittman in Clark County during the period spanning 25 December 1989 through 25 February 1990 (Charles Ely, pers. comm.).

The Saw-whet Owl is probably a rare but fairly regular visitor to Cimarron County, Oklahoma. However, the difficulty in finding the species is no doubt the reason it has eluded the many ornithologists who have investigated this region.

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