

## FIRST LONG-EARED OWL NEST IN NORTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

BY  
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Long-eared Owls (*Asio otus*) are considered to be rare and local winter residents or casual visitors to most of Oklahoma, although a handful of breeding records are known, primarily from western Oklahoma and the Panhandle (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992). Herein we document the first nesting for northeastern Oklahoma, in which three young owls fledged from a nest in Rogers County during the spring of 1990.

On 8 April 1990, while searching a dense stand of pines near Spencer Cove of Oologah Reservoir in Rogers County, Oklahoma, Don Verser flushed two Long-eared Owls and one Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*). On 13 April, Verser, together with Melinda Droege, Michael Gray and Susan Hensley, discovered a Long-eared Owl on a nest (Fig. 2) 5 m up in a 9.5 m pine tree (measurements were taken later; we did not at this time attempt to count eggs or measure nest height for fear the owls might desert). Possibly an old crow's (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) nest, it consisted mainly of large sticks. A second owl was perched nearby in another pine.

Gray and Verser returned to the nest tree on 25 April. The female owl was still incubating and the male was perched not far away. This species lays three to eight eggs (normally four or five), one every other day, and incubation is by the female alone (Harrison, H. 1975; Harrison, C. 1978; Ehrlich et al. 1988). The exact time required for the eggs to hatch is conjectural; authorities cite as few as 21 (Harrison, H. 1975) and as many as 30 days (Harrison, C. 1978). If incubation had begun on 13 April, the earliest possible hatch date would be on or about 4 May.

On 12 May, Verser, Droege and Gray again visited the nest and saw three downy white owlets peering out of the nest. The female owl, much agitated, was perched in an adjacent tree. Verser returned on 25 May to find three small nestlings that were "fuzzy and gray." Bent (1937:159) described newborn Long-eared Owls as "sparsely clothed in short pure-white down...After a week or ten days the white down begins to be replaced by the soft, downy juvenal plumage. When about three weeks old...the body is well covered with the long, soft, downy plumage; this is

### LONG-EARED OWL NEST



Fig. 2. Adult Long-eared Owl on nest near Oologah Reservoir in Rogers County Oklahoma. Photo by Michael L. Gray taken 13 April 1990.

### SHORT-EARED OWL NEST



Fig. 3. Four downy Short-eared Owls in nest on the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve not far north of Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Nest was discovered 13 April 1993. See pages 27-28.

basally dusky on the head and neck, with grayish white tips, giving the body a hoary effect..." Therefore, these young owls were probably between two and three weeks of age.

The last visit to the site was on 7 June when Gray found an adult owl and three young recently out of the nest, one perched on a lower limb of the nest tree and the other two in adjacent pines. The adult, probably the female, hissed and flapped her wings at Gray. Dangling from the nest tree was a rabbit (*Sylvilagus* sp.) skin. Bent (1937:160) stated: "...a very large proportion of its food, probably close to 80 or 90 percent on a seasonal average, consists of injurious rodents...among hundreds of records I can find only one record of a quail and two of ruffed grouse being killed, and very few records of young rabbits." Bent also alluded to a pellet analysis in Wisconsin that yielded more than 3,000 vertebrate prey items, only one of which was a cottontail (a juvenile).

In nearby Missouri, there are four published breeding records for *Asio otus* since 1950 (Robbins and Easterla 1992). Thompson and Ely (1989) reported no nests for southeastern Kansas.

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#### GENERAL NOTES

**Early nesting date for Great Horned Owl in Oklahoma.** — The earliest date given in Baumgartner and Baumgartner (1992, Oklahoma bird life, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 194) for breeding activity of the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) was 28 December 1981. On that date, Paul W. Wilson found a pair at a nest three miles west of Picher in Ottawa County, northeastern Oklahoma. On 16 December 1990, Kenneth and Elizabeth Hayes discovered an incubating owl at a nest about 45 feet (14 m) up in a large, nearly dead ash tree in Tulsa near 156th Street North between Sheridan and Yale avenues during the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. It was an old Red-Tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) nest. They had no way of checking the contents of the nest, but subsequent visits by Paul W. Wilson, Jo Loyd, the author and others followed its progress. On 15 February, Wilson saw a young owl on the edge of the nest. On the 18th, one young was in the nest with either an adult or a second owlet preparing for flight. Two young birds were at the