

BARRED OWL SIGHTINGS IN WASHINGTON

TIMOTHY A. REICHARD, Dames & Moore, Suite 500, Northgate Executive Center, 155 N.E. 100th Street, Seattle, Washington 98125

At approximately 0900 on 24 April 1974 I was conducting Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) drumming counts near Bacus Hill, approximately 8 km east of Sedro Woolley, Skagit County, Washington. I was startled by an owl that flew past me approximately 50 m away and landed in a Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*). In flight the owl appeared dark brown and when it landed I noticed white spots on its back. It flew before I could see the breast, belly or head.

After ten minutes of searching, I heard owl calls that sounded like the eight-note "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all" call of the Barred Owl (*Strix varia*). I moved in the direction of the calls and saw two owls fly from trees 30 m away. I stalked them until I finally had a good view with 7x35 binoculars of one of the owls perching on the limb of a Black Cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*) 50 m away. The medium-sized owl had a puffy round head, large dark eyes, and was barred crosswise on the breast and streaked lengthwise on the belly. I was then confident the owls were Barred Owls.

I heard the owls calling in the same area on 5 May 1974 at 0930 and 8 August 1974 at 2330. At 2000 on 10 August 1974 at a point 0.25 km south of the area where I first observed the owls on 24 April, Terence Wahl, James Duemmel and Norm Lavers called in a pair of Barred Owls by playing a prerecorded tape of the species' calls. The observers all had close views of the owls and the owls' calls were tape-recorded.

I subsequently called the pair into the same point on 19 August 1974 at 1900, 26 August 1974 at 0800 and 1830, and photographed the owls on 26 August. On these dates, the owls frequently answered the tape recordings and, although they often flew out of view, they normally remained in the area from one to two hours. They often answered with laughing, scolding calls that were very different from the "who cooks for you" call. These calls were probably similar to the cackling, laughing and whooping calls described by Brewster (1925) and "a cry that seems to express anger, sounds like ho-ho-to-whah-ow or whah-whah-whah-to-hooo with loud, nasal rasping notes, as derisive laughter" described by Bent (1938:193). On two of these occasions I was able to get directly below the owls when they were roosting in Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*) and cottonwood trees approximately 10 m above me. Although I feel the owls possibly nested in the area, no nests or young were observed. I also heard a Barred Owl calling in the same area on 2 October 1974 at 1730.

This is the first record of a pair of Barred Owls in western Washington. T. R. Wahl (pers. comm.) has furnished information on the following additional records in this part of the state. One was found dead in December 1973 near Skykomish, Snohomish County (B. and P. Evans). One was heard calling on 16 September 1974 at Colonial Creek Campground, Whatcom County (J. Gibson and C. Smith), and a pair was heard and tape-recorded and one bird seen there on 27 September 1974 (T. R. Wahl and Dennis Heinemann). Other records of the owl west of the Cascade Range include one photographed in Victoria, British Columbia on 26 November 1969 "well to the west of any previous record" (Crowell and Nehls 1970:86), and one photographed 13 November 1972 in Vancouver, British Columbia (Crowell and Nehls 1973).

The first state record is of a bird observed 2 October 1965 at Blueslide, Pend Oreille Co. (Rogers 1966). Other eastern Washington records include a specimen found shot 15 October 1968 on Mica Peak, Spokane Co. (Rogers 1969), and a bird photographed and captured at Spokane, Spokane Co., 11 October 1973 (Ro-

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gers 1974, photo published). A sighting in July 1973 near Middleport, Stevens Co. by D. R. Paulson (T. R. Wahl pers. comm.) and sightings near Park Rapids, Stevens Co. on 23 June, 30 June and 5 July 1974 (Phil Mattocks pers. comm.) suggest the possibility of breeding in eastern Washington.

Larrison and Sonnenberg (1968:151) describe the Barred Owl as a "rare irregular fall and winter straggler to northeastern Washington" and Wahl and Paulson (1973) describe it as a rare winter resident to eastern Washington. Jewett et al. (1953) do not mention the Barred Owl in the *Birds of Washington* and neither do Gabrielson and Jewett (1940) in the *Birds of Oregon*. These recent sightings in western Washington, particularly during the breeding season, suggest a significant range expansion of the species.

The habitat where I observed the owls is best described as an 80 year old second growth mixed hardwood-conifer forest (J. Leder pers. comm.). The area is on a south-facing, relatively steep slope at an elevation of approximately 210 m. Red Alder and Western Red Cedar are the prominent tree species with Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), and Big-leaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) also being present. Alder trees occur predominantly in 30-40 cm diameter size classes; cedar is most abundant in smaller 5-20 cm diameter sizes. There is a moderate shrub and herb cover with Vine Maple (*Acer circinatum*), Red Huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*), Dewberry (*Rubus ursinus*) and Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*) being the most common. The land within 0.7 km of the area is forested. This surrounding area is approximately one-third mixed hardwood-conifer forest, one-third alder forest (alder being dominant with Big-leaf Maple and Red Cedar as subordinates) and one-third coniferous forest (Douglas-fir, Red Cedar and Western Hemlock being dominant). Clear-cut areas occur 0.7 km southwest of the area and pasturelands are 1 km to the southeast.

Because I found no owl pellets, I have no data on the owls' food habits. However, the Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) is abundant in the area with other possible prey species including the Douglas Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*), Northern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*), Townsend Chipmunk (*Eutamias townsendii*), Oregon Vole (*Microtus oregonii*), Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*), Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) and Ruffed Grouse also being present.

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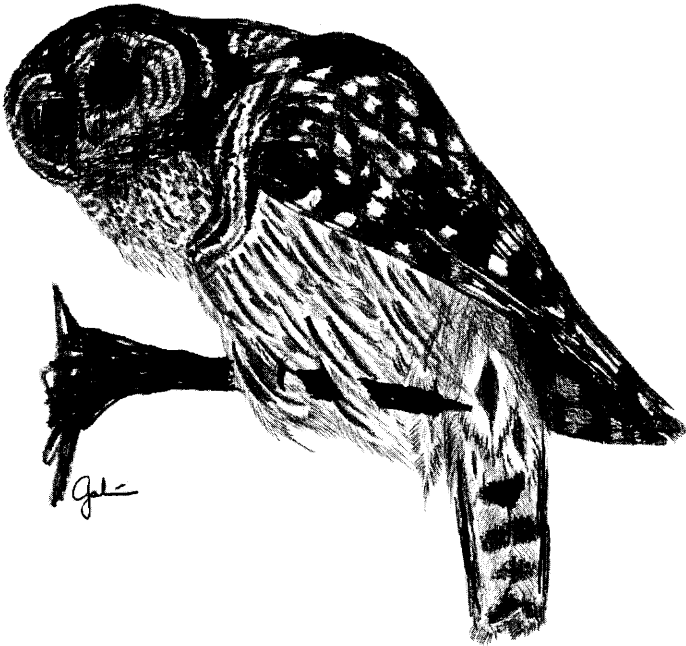
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Sketch by A. Galvão III