



The BC-Yukon Nocturnal Owl Survey 2008



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A dearth of owls

This year 85 participants did 93 owl surveys along 89 routes across British Columbia and Yukon, stopping and listening in the dark 1228 times. This effort was almost identical to last year's survey. Unplowed forest service roads in the Interior of BC again resulted in fewer routes being available. The participants detected 177 owls, well down from last year's total of 287. The

number of owls reported per 10 stops dropped to 1.44 as compared to last year's figure of 2.34. This is one of the lowest detection rates in the survey's history and all the more striking since it comes after last year's record high. The clear source of this decline was a sharp drop in the numbers of Northern Saw-whet Owls reported. This year only 69 were heard as compared to last year's more normal total of 157. Even so, the saw-whet was, as usual, the most numerous species reported, though barely ahead of the Great Horned Owl. The Great Horned was up slightly from last year with 59 heard. Boreal Owl numbers dropped after last year's peak of their four-year cycle—26 were heard this year. Barred Owl numbers dropped in the northern Interior, but rose somewhat in the southern Interior and on the coast.

For the second year in a row, Western Screech-Owls were not detected at all on coastal surveys, despite the fact that the survey in that region uses a playback of screech-owl calls. Two individuals were heard in the Southern Interior, where the species is listed as Endangered. Of the rarer or less widely distributed species, Phil Henderson had a single Barn Owl on his Fort Langley West route and Laurie Rockwell heard a Great Gray Owl at Darke Lake—a very good sighting for the Okanagan Valley. Three Northern Pygmy-Owls were heard. Annual indices for 5 owl species are graphed in figures and summary data for all owl species are presented in Table 1 at the end of this report.

Undoubtedly the happiest owler in this disappointing season was Laurie Rockwell of Summerland. Not only did he hear the Great Gray Owl mentioned above, but tallied 12 owls of



Laurie Rockwell looking for owls and other birds on the Apex-Hedley Christmas Bird Count

4 species on his 10-stop Darke Lake route, including a Western Screech, 2 Great Horned, 2 Barred and 6 Northern Saw-whets. The only other participants to get into double figures were Chris and Stu Withers at Tarfu Creek, YT, who heard 9 Great Horned and one Boreal Owl.

---Dick Cannings,
survey coordinator



Thanks to the owlers:

Ken Anderson, Kris Andrews, Cathy Antoniazzi, Janice Arndt, Jack Bowling, Dick Cannings, Lynne Cannon, Christopher Coxson, Mark Connor, Larry Cowan, Linnaea Cross, Loyd Csizmadia, Chris Dale, Peter Davidson, Rick Dawson, Boris Dobrowolsky, Frank Doyle, Dan Dunlop, Trevor Forder, Julie

Frisch, Mark Gardiner, Mike Gill, Aileen Grant, Helmut Grunberg, Les Gyug, Doug Heard, Phil Henderson, Sharon Henry, Knut Herzog, Paul Jones, Gerald Kerr, Joan Kerr, Sandra Kinsey, Trudy Kowalchuk, Nancy Krueger, John Lambie, Vi Lambie, Laird Law, Sue MacDonald, Wendy Marshall, Nigel Mathews, Kathleen McEachern, Brian McGaughey, Bob McKay, Heather Meier, Elaine Moore, Bob Murkett, Ted Murphy-Kelly, Michael Nelligan, Heather Neville, John Neville, Ann Nightingale, Mark O'Donoghue, Molly O'Donoghue, Cynthia Onions, Clive Osborne, Erin Preston, Anne Redfearn, Trish Reid, Reiner Rembe, Ulla Rembe, Gillian Richardson, Trevor Richardson, Keith Riding, Margaret Riding, Laurie Rockwell, Greg Ross, Sue Ross, Ian Routley, Sonja Satesida, Jean Sawatzky, Madelon Schouten, Gail Spitler, Elsie Stanley, John Theberge, Mary Theberge, Russ Tkachuk, Cain Vangel, Alan Vyse, Frances Vyse, Margaret Waring, Michaela Waterhouse, Wayne Weber, Doug Wilson, Chris Withers, Stu Withers, Ellen Zimmerman.

FLAMMULATED OWL SURVEYS

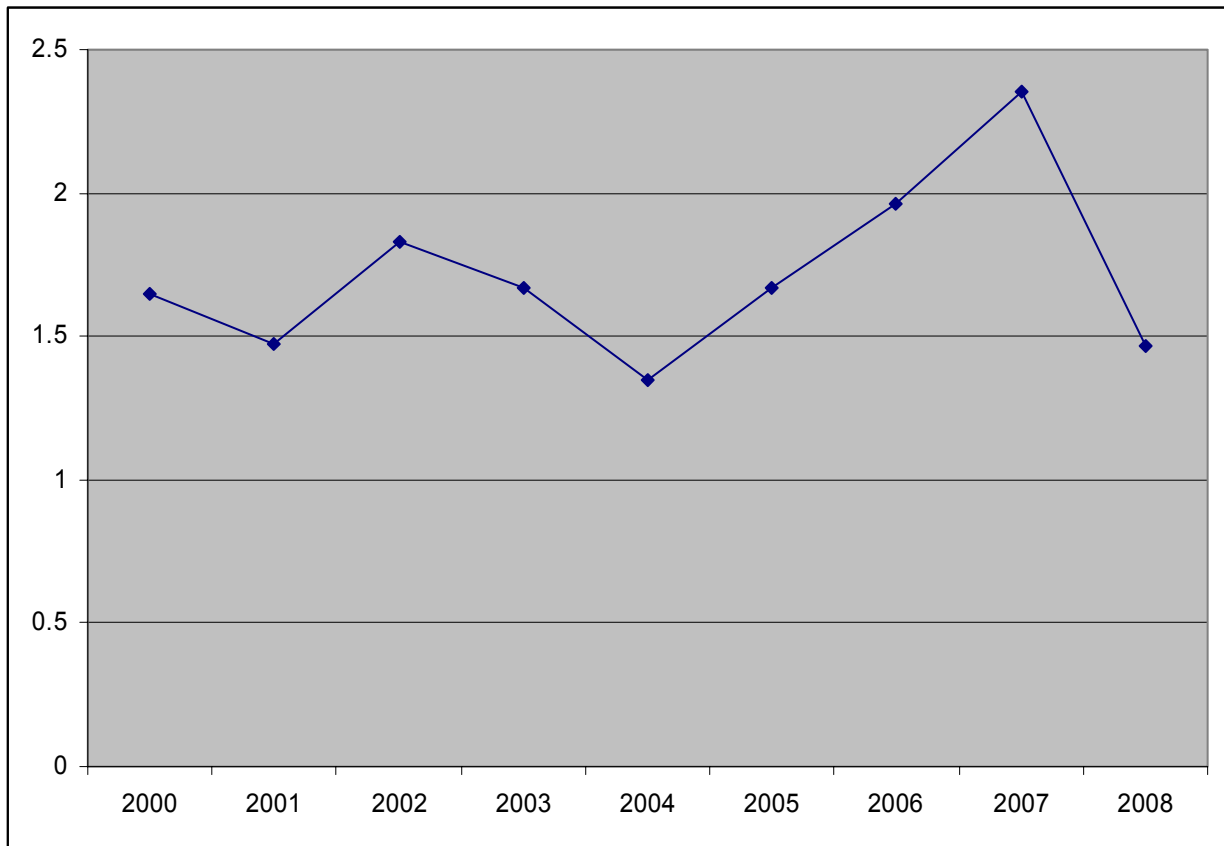


A special survey was carried out in late May and June for Flammulated Owls in the southern Interior. Five observers stopped at 89 sites and heard 14 Flammulated Owls, 18 Common Poorwills, 1 Northern Pygmy-Owl, 1 Great Horned Owl and a Long-eared Owl.

This Flammulated Owl nested near Penticton in 2008—in the same box used almost annually since 1980! *Photo—Dick Cannings*

A BAD SPRING FOR OWLS AND OWLERS

The chart below shows the trend in number of owls per 10 stops over the past 9 years. You can see that 2008 was one of the 3 poorest years for owl detections.

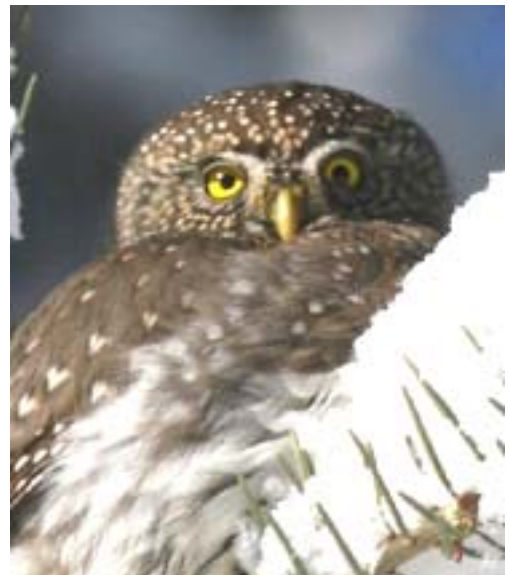
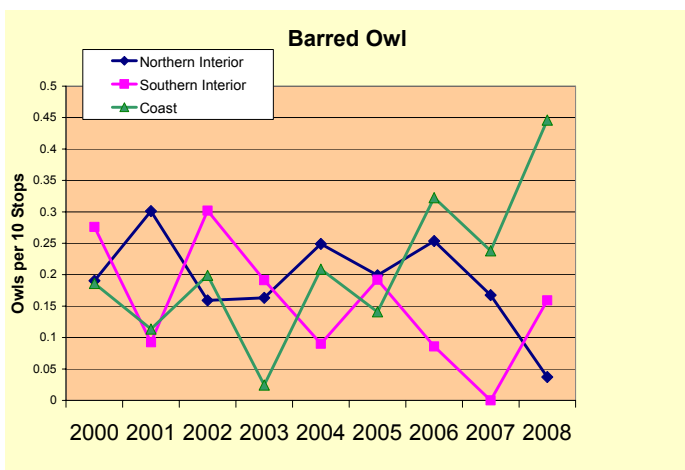
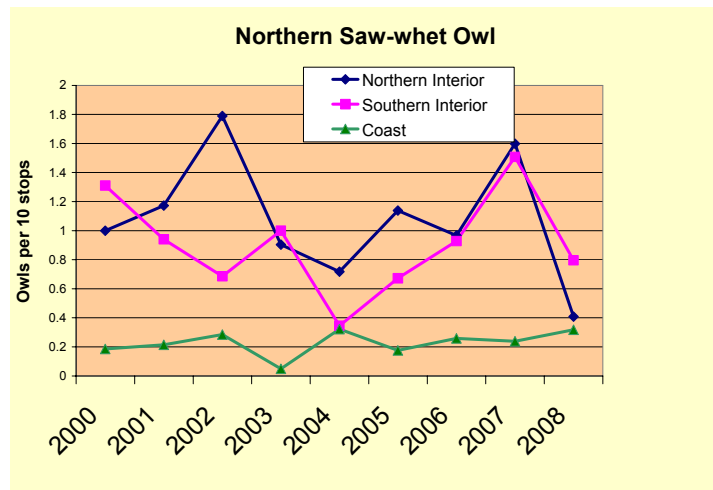
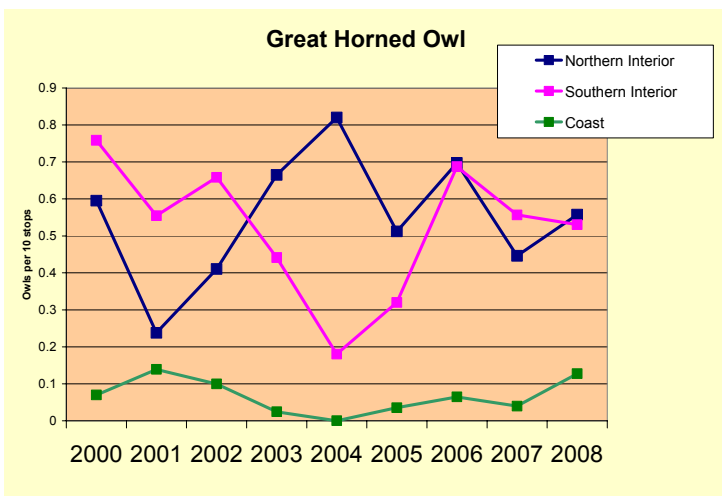
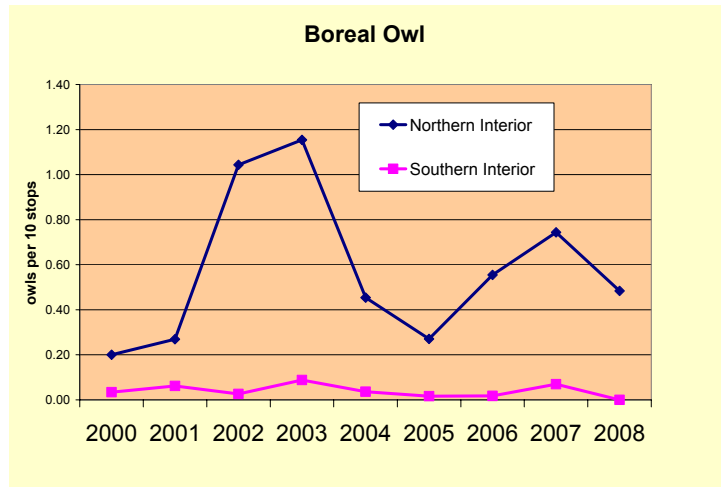
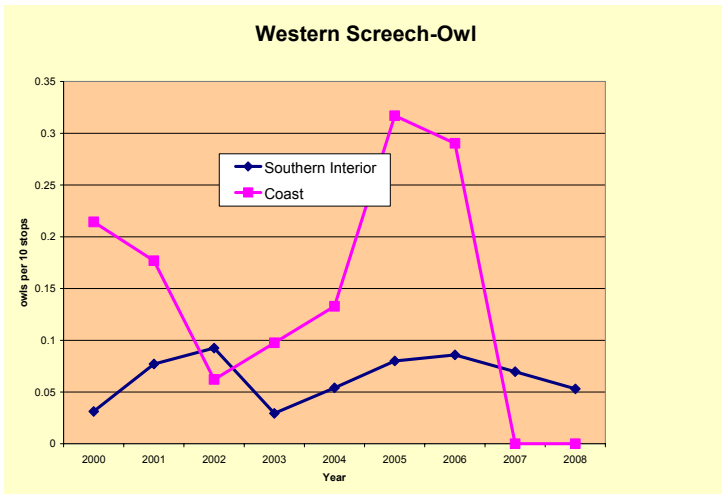


A GOOD FALL FOR OWLS AND OWLERS

While the numbers of owls seemed low this spring, Rocky Point Bird Observatory had a banner year for both Northern Saw-whet and Barred Owls. They banded 636 saw-whets during 36 nights of effort from September 15 to October 31. The peak migration occurred in the first two weeks of October; on October 14 alone they caught 54 saw-whets. About 80 percent of the saw-whets banded were hatch-year birds. Barred Owls were also numerous, with 18 captured—all of them hatch-year birds. This would seem to indicate that these two species had a good breeding year, so maybe the spring of 2009 will be a banner one for the survey.

		BNOW	WESO	GHOW	NPOW	BARR	GGOW	LEOW	BOOW	NSWO	TOTAL
COAST											
18 surveys	Total Birds	1	0	4	0	7	0	0	0	6	18
18 routes	Birds per 10 stops	0.05	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.32	0.97
	# routes with species	1	0	2	0	6	0	0	0	5	11
SOUTHERN INTERIOR											
34 surveys	Total Birds	0	2	24	3	7	1	0	0	38	75
	Birds per 10 stops	0.00	0.04	0.53	0.07	0.16	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.84	1.67
32 routes	# routes with species	0	2	15	3	4	1	0	0	20	26
NORTHERN INTERIOR											
41 surveys	Total Birds	0	0	31	0	2	0	0	26	25	84
	Birds per 10 stops	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.44	0.42	1.42
39 routes	# routes with species	0	0	14	0	2	0	0	15	12	32
TOTAL											
93 surveys	Total Birds	1	2	59	3	16	1	0	26	69	177
	Birds per 10 stops	0.01	0.02	0.48	0.02	0.13	0.01	0.00	0.22	0.56	1.44
89 routes	# routes with species	1	2	31	3	12	1	0	15	37	68

Table 1. Owls reported on the survey in 2008. Species totals are given as birds per 10 stops so that direct comparison can be made among regions and years. Coastal routes are those west of the Coast-Cascade crest; Southern Interior counts are those from the Thompson, Nicola, Okanagan, Columbia and Kootenay valleys and adjacent plateaus; Northern Interior routes include those from the Cariboo-Chilcotin, Prince George, Mackenzie and Fort Nelson areas, the Bulkley Valley, and the Yukon. The number of surveys includes some routes that were done more than once.



Northern Pygmy-Owl being tallied on a Christmas Bird Count.
Photo: Dick Cannings

Trends in owl numbers

Here are the trends for the numbers of five common owl species reported since the survey began, presented in owls per 10 stops. Please note that the effect of playback has not been factored out of the results from the coast for the past five years.

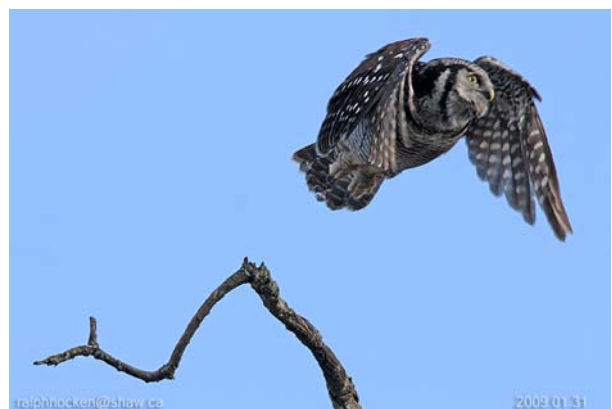
NEWS AND NOTES

Online data entry

Online data entry is coming for the BC-Yukon Nocturnal Owl Survey! Yes, I know I said that last year, but we're still testing the system using Bird Studies Canada employees as guinea pigs. I'll be sending out the usual field forms this spring; please fill them in and send them to me as usual so we don't lose any data while waiting for technology to catch up! I'll be contacting all participants with further instructions. While this may entail a bit more work for owl surveyors, it will ensure that the data gets into the database quickly and accurately. Online data entry will be optional (but encouraged!); you can always mail your forms in for processing.

Northern Hawk Owls everywhere

Northern Hawk Owls are one of the most enigmatic species of owls in the world. They are highly nomadic, wandering the taiga of the Northern Hemisphere in search of areas with good vole numbers. They can show up in an area and breed for two or three years, then vanish for more than a decade. Occasionally they move south out of the northern forests and into southern Canada, and this past winter has been one of those times. Individuals were found on a number of Christmas Bird Counts in southern British Columbia this year, including Hat Creek, Lillooet, Kelowna and Bridesville. One bird even crossed the Strait of Georgia to bring birders on Vancouver Island a new bird for their New Year (see below).



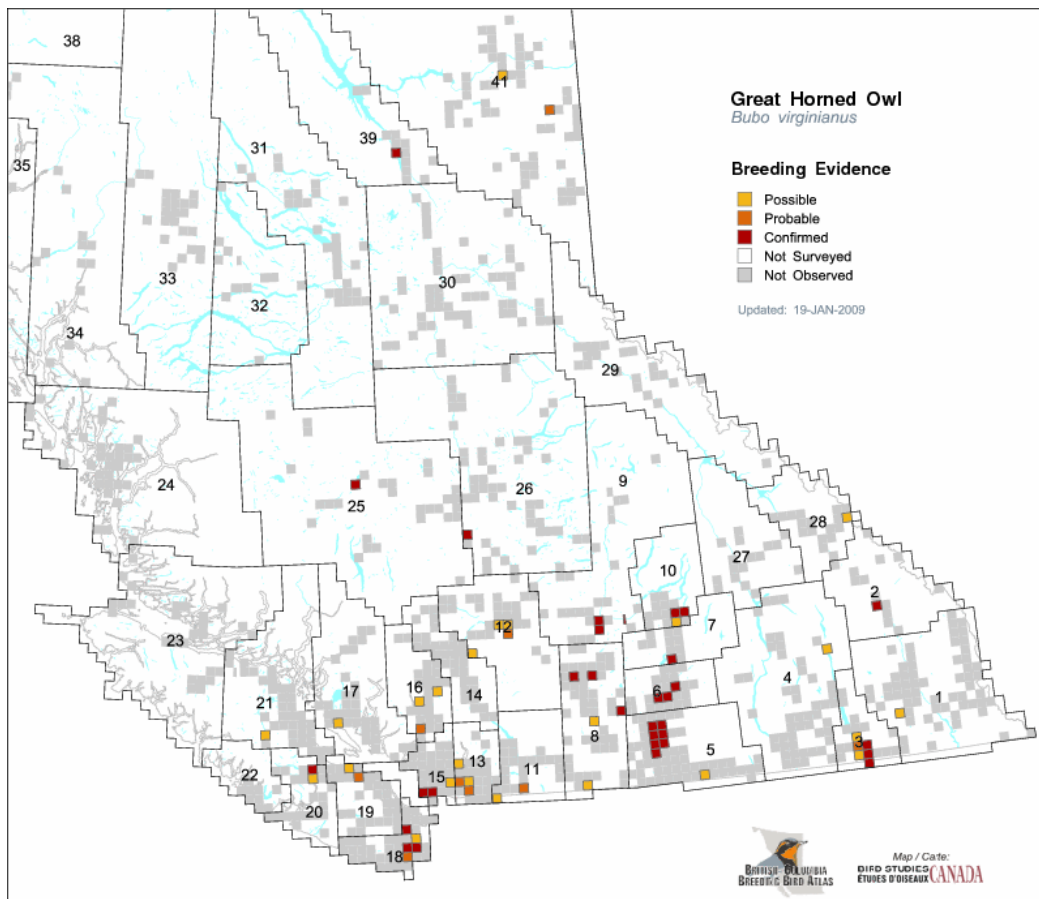
A Northern Hawk Owl at Nanaimo caught a Townsend's Vole, then cached it in the top of a hollow trunk. *Photos: Ralph Hocken*

BRITISH COLUMBIA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

Year 1 of the BC Breeding Bird Atlas is history, and many birders have found a new addiction. And while a lot was accomplished—hundreds of atlasers searched 1251 squares for birds, putting in over 8000 hours of work and finding 299 species—the data gaps left are still rather daunting. The data summaries and species maps have been posted online at www.birdatlas.bc.ca; you can see the Great Horned Owl map below. We need to fill in those white spaces! While out in the woods looking for owls this spring, you enter your owl findings into the atlas.

The concept is simple—the province has been divided up into more than 10,000 10-km² squares, and birders fan out over the countryside, trying to see which species are breeding in which squares. Since owls are among the earliest birds to nest in British Columbia, you can assume that those birds calling on territory in late February and March will be trying to breed at that site. So any owl you detect on your owl survey can be reported to the atlas project. . You can read more about the project—and register as a participant—on the atlas website:

www.birdatlas.bc.ca



First-year atlasing results for Great Horned Owl in southern British Columbia.

It's already 2009...

Participants will be getting their 2009 BC Nocturnal Owl Survey packets by email.
Many thanks for your work on this survey over the years!

--Dick Cannings

BC-Yukon Nocturnal Owl Survey

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**BIRD STUDIES CANADA THANKS THE BRITISH
COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT FOR FUNDING
THIS SURVEY.**

