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The Status of the Screech Owl in the Northern Florida Keys

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scrapes. Chick-retrieval by parents could increase the chances of survival for nestling skimmers by protecting them from predation or exposure to the sun. However, territorial defense by neighboring adults can act to reduce any such benefits resulting from chick-retrieval behavior.

I thank A. J. Meyerriecks and Helen E. Groves for their suggestions concerning preparation of this paper. — Fred H. Groves, *Department of Biology, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620.*

The status of the Screech Owl in the northern Florida Keys. — Howell (1932, Florida bird life, Tallahassee, Florida Dept. Game and Fresh Water Fish) reported the Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) as occurring on the Florida Keys, Monroe County, from Key Largo, Tavernier, Upper Matecumbe Key and Key West, without listing specimens or specific sight records south of the mainland. Since no one else has published a record of Screech Owls from the Florida Keys, Robertson and Kushlan (1974, pp 414-452 in *Environments of south Florida: Present and past* (P.J. Gleason, Ed.), Memoir 2, Miami Geological Society) concluded that this owl is one of 9 species known to nest "... south to the limit of suitable habitat on the southern mainland and not in the Florida Keys." They predicted, however, that the Screech Owl may yet be found nesting in the Keys.

Actually, the Screech Owl is a fairly common bird on the larger, northern Florida Keys, especially on Key Largo, as the following 14 previously unpublished records show.

1. About 1970: late spring. Northern Plantation Key, mile marker 89. An adult and four fledgling Screech Owls. Sandy Sprunt. Although Sprunt has lived in the Keys since 1957, these were the first Screech Owls seen by him in the Keys.
2. 1973: August. Key Largo Ranger Station, between mile markers 99-100. An owl heard calling on several nights. John C. Ogden.
3. 1974: 7 February. Key Largo, mile marker 102. 2 gray-phase adult owls in yard. Joanna Girardin.
4. 1974: 9 March. Northern Key Largo, south of Ocean Reef. One red-phase owl dead on road, specimen to U.M. (see below). J.G.
5. 1975: May. Northern Key Largo, near U.S. Army radar station. 2 adult owls in woods. Clive A. Petrovic.
6. 1975: 22 October. Plantation Key, between mile markers 86-87. One owl at dusk on utility wire. Rich T. Paul.
7. 1975: November. Key Largo Ranger Station. A bird calling during mid-morning. J.C.O.

8. 1975-76: winter. Key Largo, Garden Cove, mile marker 106. One or more heard calling on several nights. C.A.P.
9. 1976: April. Key Largo, mile marker 102. 2 mostly-downy Screech Owls in gray-phase found on ground, brought to our office, both died. J.C.O., J.G.
10. 1976: 18 May. Key Largo, between mile markers 103-104. 2 adult and 2 fledgling owls in a yard. J.C.O.
11. 1976: May. Upper Matecumbe Key, Islamorada, between mile markers 81-82. One owl reported to S.S.
12. 1976: 11 July. Upper Matecumbe Key, Islamorada. A young owl partially downy and with sheathed primaries, reported to J.G.
13. 1976: 24-27 October. Plantation Key, mile marker 89. One owl heard calling. J.C.O.
14. 1977: April-May. Key Largo, between mile markers 95-96. A pair of owls in a nest box fledged young by mid-May. Karen Achor.

In addition to these 14 records, I've learned of 4 specimens of Screech Owls from the Florida Keys, now in University collections. The oldest, at the Florida State Museum, was a red-phase male collected 25 April 1959 on Plantation Key by O.J. Austin, Jr. (UF number 7501). The other 3 are at the University of Miami, (1) UMRC 4485, a gray-phase bird found dead on Key Largo, 9 December 1961, (2) UMRC 7595, the red-phase bird picked up 9 March 1974, listed above, and (3) UMRC 9318, a gray-phase female found dead on Key Largo, 6 December 1974. The red-phase bird was a female with enlarged follicles (pers. comm. O.T. Owre). No Screech Owl specimens from the Florida Keys are in the collections at Florida State University or the University of South Florida (pers. comm. H.M. Stevenson and G.E. Woolfenden).

These observations and specimens include Screech Owl records from at least 9 different locations on Key Largo, Plantation Key and Upper Matecumbe Key, with nesting as far south as Islamorada, on Upper Matecumbe. Observations since 1970 indicate that Screech Owls are now fairly numerous in the upper Keys, while the scarcity of reports prior to the 1960s implies that Screech Owls were once less common. No quantitative data exists, however, to support this implication, and I know of no habitat changes on the upper Keys that may have benefited this owl. While most observations have been from central and northern Key Largo where the largest tracts of native hardwood forest remains, the owls also occur in more open woods in residential sections. It may be that more Screech Owls are being reported because the number of people living in the upper Keys the year-round has increased. Most owl observations have

occurred during spring and summer, seasons when the human population on the Keys was once considerably lower than at present. Also, Screech Owls are less vocal during winter, and no Screech Owl has been recorded on Upper Keys Christmas Bird Counts since these counts were initiated in 1955. — John C. Ogden, *National Audubon Research Dept., 115 Indian Mound Trail, Tavernier, Florida 33070.*

Orchard Oriole holding food with the feet. — Clark (1973, Bird-Banding 44: 91-99) summarized the records of passerine birds holding food with the feet and suggested that this behavior might be useful as a taxonomic character in certain families. Holding food with the feet has been reported for less than 145 (Clark 1973) of the more than 5000 species of passerines (Mayr 1946, Auk 65: 64-69). Of the 22 North American icterids (AOU Check-list of North American birds, fifth ed., Baltimore, Amer. Ornithol. Union), Clark (1973) lists 6 species as holding food with the feet, including the Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) but not the Orchard Oriole (*I. spurius*).

On 5 October 1976 at the Archbold Biological Station, Lake Placid, Highlands County, Florida, I saw a female Orchard Oriole hold food with its feet. Perched among grape vines (*Vitis* sp.) along the edge of a fallow field, the bird seized a grape with its bill and transferred it to its left foot. Then, while holding the grape against the perch, it picked at the grape with its bill several times. Unfortunately I observed this behavior only once, as the bird was wary and did not remain in view for long.

This type of food holding, "clamping" (Clark 1973), is the most frequent method used by passerines holding food with the feet including 5 of the 6 North American icterids listed by Clark (1973): Northern Oriole, Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*), Boat-tailed Grackle (*Q. major*), Common Grackle (*Q. quiscula*), Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). — Fred E. Lohrer, *Archbold Biological Station, Rt. 2, Box 180, Lake Placid, Florida 33852.*

Report on the 1977 spring meeting. — The 1977 spring meeting of the Florida Ornithological Society was hosted by the Archbold Biological Station and the Highlands County Audubon Society at the Lake Placid Holiday Inn on 22-24 April. Co-chairmen were Fred E. Lohrer and Miriam Beck who along with their local committee received loud plaudits for their skilled planning and management.

Field trips (attended by 164 on Saturday and 110 on Sunday) went to Highlands Hammock S. P., Indian Prairie, ABS, and Fisheat-