
January 1994

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Recommended Citation

Tarvin, Keith A. (1994) "Long-eared Owl Observed in Highlands County, Florida," *Florida Field Naturalist*. Vol. 22 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol22/iss4/3>

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Fla. Field Nat. 22(4): 110-111, 1994.

LONG-EARED OWL OBSERVED IN HIGHLANDS COUNTY, FLORIDA

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A Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) was observed by more than 40 biologists and birders for most of the daylight hours of 20 March 1994 in xeric oak scrub at the Archbold Biological Station, Highlands County, Florida (27° 1' N, 08° 12' W). The owl was identified as a Long-eared Owl by its overall size (approximately 30-36 cm total length), generally dark brown plumage, long narrow "ear" tufts rising above the grizzled gray crown from the medial edges of the cinnamon ochre facial discs, bright yellow irides, dark throat, belly with long vertical streaks crossed by shorter, narrow, horizontal bars, narrow, horizontal dark brown bars on the underside of the rectrices, and fully feathered cinnamon buff tarsi and toes. The owl did not vocalize during the 10 hours it was under observation.

I was attracted to the owl at 1015 EST from 17 m away by a mobbing Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*). The owl was perched 2.8 m high on a horizontal limb of a sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*) within a 6 m tall oak copse bordering a dry seasonal pond and surrounded by saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), shrubby vegetation, and widely scattered pines (*Pinus elliottii* and *P. clausa*). When sighted, the owl was perched and engaged in a defensive display (see Johnsgard 1988:64) with wings partly outspread, body feathers fluffed, head and back held horizontally, and bill snapping. The owl seemed to be displaying to me, as it was looking directly at me and not at the jay that had been calling for at least 10 min before I saw the owl. After a few minutes, the owl ceased the display and faced me with back held vertically and body feathers relaxed. I observed the owl from 20 m away for several more minutes before leaving to report the sighting. When several observers returned at about 1040, the owl compressed its body feathers and positioned its right wing in front of its body so that much of its breast and belly were concealed and the whitish anterior margins of both the brachium and manus were exposed.

Various combinations of several observers watched the owl from about 25 m away until after dusk, at about 2000. While under observation, the owl never left the perch on which it was originally discovered. In addition to the Blue Jay and the vireo, a Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) and at least two Florida Scrub Jays (*Aphelocoma c. coerulescens*) responded vocally to the owl's presence, though only briefly. Although the copse and surrounding areas were searched diligently for about two hours the next day beginning at dawn, the owl was never relocated.

Robertson and Woolfenden (1992) consider the Long-eared Owl a casual winter visitor in Florida. Only two Florida specimens are known to exist. One, from Key West, Monroe County, collected by J. W. Atkins on 3 November 1898, is presently housed in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University (MCZ 248345; Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). The second, a female, was found sick or injured in the Royal Trails development near Cassia, Lake County, on 8 December 1992 and brought to the Madalyn Baldwin Center for Birds of Prey where it died on 11 December 1992 (Pranty 1993). It is presently in the collection of the Archbold Biological Station (GEW 5871). Howell (1932) lists a specimen "taken at Cape Florida by Wurdemann," and two collected by Ferguson at Cape Sable and the Chassahowitzka River. None of the three can be located, nor does Howell report dates for any. Indeed, Stevenson (1987) questions the veracity of any specimens collected by Ferguson. The only other credible Florida sight

report (*sensu* Robertson and Woolfenden 1992) is of an individual seen several times (but never photographed) in swampy woods northwest of Cocoa, Brevard County, 20-29 December 1966 (Cruickshank 1980). Unfortunately, details of the Brevard County report were never published. Finally, a vocal response to a tape, presumed to be that of a Long-eared Owl, was reported on the 1970 Carnestown-Wester Water Gateway Christmas Bird Count. The report was considered "improbable" by the CBC editor (Cruickshank 1971). Thus, the video documentation of the occurrence at the Archbold Biological Station, made by Brooks Atherton and deposited with the Records Committee of the Florida Ornithological Society, constitutes the third record for this species from the state, and the second since the 1992 publication of Robertson and Woolfenden's *Florida Bird Species*.

I thank Glen E. Woolfenden, Bruce H. Anderson, Bill Pranty, Peter G. Merritt, and an anonymous reviewer for comments that improved the manuscript. I especially thank Bruce Anderson for information regarding the history of the Long-eared Owl in Florida.

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