

1996

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North American Bird Bander

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Recommended Citation

North American Bird Bander (1996) "1995 Owl Project Cape May Point Raptor Banding Project," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 21 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol21/iss1/9>

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1995 Owl Project

Cape May Point Raptor Banding Project

1995 was the year of the saw-whet owl! A record-breaking 637 Northern Saw-whet Owls were captured along with 27 Long-eared Owls, 3 *Common Barn Owls, and 1 Eastern Screech-Owl. Owl banding was conducted at one station in the South Cape May Meadows from 24 October through 19 November, for a total of 19 nights and 608 owls captured. A second owl banding station was operated on eight nights, accounting for the capture of 60 saw-whets and 1 screech owl. An audiolure (taped saw-whet spring song broadcast near mist nets) was used continuously at each station to attract owls.

Table 1 shows the number captured of each species. Major capture nights were 25 October (80 owls), 26 October (72), 9 November (112), 12 November (51), 16 November (70), and 17 November (93). Peak capture nights occurred when expected: following the passage of cold fronts when high pressure dominated and winds were light. This fall, saw-whets continued to be captured in reasonably good numbers even when conditions were less than perfect.

Table 1. Owls captured at Cape May in 1995.

Species	HY	AHY	U	Total
NSWO	543	89	5	637
LEOW	14	8	6	28
COBO	2	1	0	3
EASO	0	0	1	1
TOTAL				669

In addition to mist nets surrounding the audiolure, ten mist nets were positioned for capturing larger owls (Common Barn Owls and Long-eared Owls). These nets caught most of the larger owls and 117 of the saw-whets. Interesting Long-eared Owl captures include one that was squeaked into a net and another that was attracted by a loop tape of mice fighting. Long-eared Owl captures were higher than any year since 1988 when 55 were caught. The low number of barn owls captured is typical of recent years. Barn Owls have not been seen, heard, or captured in good numbers since the early 1980's.

Two of the adult saw-whets and one adult barn owl that we captured were already banded. One saw-whet was banded by Dave Brinker at Assateague Island, Maryland, in January, 1995; while the other saw-whet was banded by J. M. Ficker on 27 October 1994 near Wells, Maine. Information is not yet available on the banding date and location for the Barn Owl.

Saw-whet owls banded at Cape May were retrapped at other owl stations in Maryland and Virginia: At Kiptopete, Virginia, Bryan Watts retrapped 12 saw-whets banded at Cape May; 11 were banded in 1995 and 1 was banded in 1993. Near Newark, Maryland, John Allran retrapped a saw-whet we banded in 1994. Dave Brinker at Assateague Island, Maryland, caught six saw-whet owls banded at Cape May: five banded in 1995 and one banded in 1993. One saw-whet traveled to Assateague Island in a remarkably short period of time. No. 1204-14610 was captured by us at 0515 on 17 November and released at 0530, probably too close to sunrise for it to cross the Delaware Bay. It was recaptured by Dave Brinker approximately 65 miles south of Cape May Point at 2100, less than 3.5 hours after darkness!

Saw-whets banded at Cape May moved north as well as south: four banded saw-whets were found as roadkills up to 55 miles north of Cape May Point nine to 38 days after banding and were turned in to the Cape May Bird Observatory. CMBO also received 55 unbanded roadkilled saw-whets up to the end of December 1995. CMBO continued to receive additional road-killed saw-whets in January and February 1996.

*Common name changed to Barn Owl

We thank Laura Ratti and Doug Barrett for their full-time assistance in all aspects of the owl project. Christ Schultz, Doug Brown, Elijah Goodwin, Bill Clark, Jay VanDerveer, Linda Bode, Kelly Volansky, Samantha Pritchard, and Zach Smith provided invaluable help on busy nights. The Cape May Bird Observatory provided financial and logistical support for the owl project for the fourteenth consecutive year. Liz Johnson, science and stewardship director for the New Jersey office of the Nature Conservancy, allowed us to use TNC's South Cape May Meadows. Eric Stiles, biologist for NJ Nongame, gave permission for us to band owls at the Hidden Valley Station and operated the banding station along with Biologist Sherry Meyer.

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