

## NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL NEST ON EAST LIMESTONE ISLAND

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A Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus brooksi*) nest found on East Limestone Island on 27 June 2001 is the first documented record of a nest site for this non-migratory sub-species restricted to the Haida Gwaii archipelago (S. Sealy and Rolf Krahe, personal communication). Although common throughout its range, there may be only a few records of potential nest sites of *A. a. brooksi* on Haida Gwaii (Campbell *et al.* 1990).

The nest was in a Sitka spruce snag (*Picea sitchensis*), classified as Category 5 under the British Columbia Wildlife Tree Classification System (no bark, decayed heartwood, dead for at least 15 years). The tree was situated alongside a well-traveled trail, next to a small creek and was on the edge of the shore, 15 m from a small cabin. The snag, Wildlife Tree 1 (WT 1) measured 15 m high with a diameter of 130 cm. The nest entrance was 9 m above ground and the hole was 78 mm tall by 74 mm wide. The cavity extended back 18 cm and was 30 cm deep. The cavity was used by Northern Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*) in 1992.

In 2001, saw-whet calls were first heard on 5 May, (about one month later than recorded in previous years) and continued nightly until 15 June. The owl roosted in a tree near the top of Spring Valley, and emitted a constant “advertising” call (*see* Cannings 1993) from dusk to dawn. These calls were clearly audible from North Cove and in the cabin area.

From 2 - 15 June, an owl would frequent the area near the cabin, calling from trees to the south, west, and north sides of the cabin. During the week of 8 to 15 June, on three occasions, we saw a Saw-whet Owl sitting on a small spruce (20 cm diameter) at dusk directly in front of the cabin, only 3 m from the door. The owl would sit on a branch (3.5 m high.) quietly and not appear disturbed by our presence. On several occasions between 15 and 29 June, an owl flew into the cabin area and headed towards WT 1. On the evening of 27 June, an owl flew towards WT 1 and landed below the old Northern Flicker nest cavity (J. Fournier, personal communication). From that date until camp closure on 27 July, WT 1 was observed daily.

### *Behavior and activities after June 27*

Once we determined the location of the nest, we made daily observations of the nest site, recording activities in the evenings and during the day. We observed a male owl coming to the nest with prey, a female calling from within the nest, chicks calling, both adults on the tree, the feeding of a female and chicks, and heard three distinct calls: a visiting call, a female response and a chick begging call.

When the male came into the nest area, he would make a “visiting” call as he approached. A female within the nest would give a “response” call (soft *tsst, tsst, tsst*). The male then would fly to WT 1, often with prey, briefly stick his head inside the cavity, then immediately fly off. On 2 July, the male landed on the nest tree with prey in his talons (possibly a deer mouse) and we heard young chicks peeping inside the cavity. On 3 July, a female was looking out of the nest hole at 2100 h. The next day, the female left the nest at 2230 h, whilst the male was calling nearby. On 7 July, an owl (probably female) left the nest cavity during the late afternoon and flew away into the forest. The next day, 8 July, an owl stuck its head out of the nest, flew out and sat on a nearby tree then returned into the nest hole at 1700 h.

Both male and female owls seemed undisturbed by human presence, as evidenced by several observations of the female watching people walk by, or when the male would perch on the tree in front of the cabin or sit in the regenerated Spruce trees surrounding the nest tree. A chick stuck its head out of the nest on 20 and 21 July. We noticed that whenever the male would sit in the regenerated spruce trees in the early evenings, Hermit Thrush and Winter Wrens would give alarm calls and on 14 July, Winter Wrens were dive-bombing the unfazed owl sitting on a small spruce near the nest site.

Camp closed on 27 July with the chick(s) still remaining in the nest cavity. On 1 August, I returned to Limestone for a short visit, checked the nest and did not hear, or see any owls, eggshells or pellets in the area around the nest tree.

## REFERENCES

- Campbell, W.R., N.K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-Cowan, J.M. Cooper, G.W. Kaiser and M.C.E. McNall. 1990. The Birds of British Columbia. Volume II: Nonpasserines. Royal British Columbia Museum and Environment Canada. 636 pp.
- Canning, R. J. 1993. Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*). In The Birds of North America, No. 42 (A. Poole and F. Gill, Eds.). Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Sciences; Washington, D.C.: The American Ornithologists Union.

## Appendix 1

## Field notes for the activity of the first Northern Saw-whet Owl nest on East Limestone Island, 2001.

Date	Time (h)	Activity Noted
May 5	2200	Calling throughout night from Spring Valley area
May 7-31	2200	"Advertising call" continuous dusk to dawn
June 7 – July 23	Various hours	Calling, visuals and nesting activity in area of cabin
June 12	2100	Adult on spruce tree branch (3.5 m ht.) in front of cabin (3m from door), flew to tree on north side of cabin (2.7 m from cabin)
June 13	2100	Adult on spruce tree branch in front of cabin
June 16	2030	Adult on spruce tree branch in front of cabin
June 20	2100	Adult flying to and from cabin area, some 'visiting' calls
June 22	2115	Adult heard calling near cabin
June 26	2200	Adult flying to and from North side of WT 1
June 27	2130	Female looking out from nest hole on WT 1 (north side) male flew in 3 times, entered hole, prey in talons; gave "visiting" calls as it approached nest area
July 2	2145	Male flew into nest cavity with prey, loud peeping of young inside nest hole, exited and perched on tree with head inside, then flew off
July 3	2100	Female looking out of nest hole
July 4	2215	Male calling softly and gently (visiting call) from regenerating spruce on west side of WT 1; female left nest at 2230
July 5	1745	Male "visiting" call from tree behind cabin, flew onto nest tree with prey, other bird inside took prey
July 7	2100	Adult left nest cavity, flew away to SW of cabin
July 8	1700	Female exited nest, than sat on close by tree, then re-entered cavity
July 12	1630	Female stuck head out of hole and watched JF walk by on trail
July 13	1400	Male left nest (after feeding?), flew over regeneration area, Winter Wren in regeneration, excited, loud alarm calls
July 13	2100	Male in spruce in front of cabin, flew to WT 1 w/prey in talons, head into cavity, then flew to nearby small tree in regeneration area, perched there for 7 minutes, Winter Wren alarm calling and pestered owl by flying at it
July 14	2100	Male perched in spruce in front of cabin with prey, flew to nest hole, then into regenerating spruce and perched on branch overhanging trail at 3m ht., looking at observers and ignoring 2 Winter Wrens "buzzing" him
July 15	2030	Adult and chick calling from within cavity
July 15	2230	Adult "visiting" call as approached nest with prey, flew in to tree, then departed
July 17	1530	Adult at WT 1, then perched in regeneration with Winter Wren and Hermit Thrush alarm calls and diving on owl
July 18	1430	Adult feeding chick(s) within nest cavity
July 19	2100	Chick looking out of nest hole
July 20	1500	Chick looking out of nest hole
July 20	2030	Adult feeding young in nest hole
July 21	1300	Chick looking out of nest hole
July 22	1400	Chick looking out of nest hole
July 23	1100	Adult brought prey to nest and fed chick(s)
July 23	1115	Adult brought prey to nest and fed chick(s) (possibly second adult?)
July 23	2000	Chick looking out of nest hole
July 24	1500	Chick looking out of nest hole
July 24	2230	Adult gave "visiting" call and flew to nest tree with prey, observed feeding chick, chick peeping loudly