

NOCTURNAL OWL
SURVEY 2022

Nocturnal Owl Survey And the winner is...

I realize that three months is a long time to wait for the results of a survey conducted in May, but I assure you, the wait is worth it.

This year, we (well, Gary Sturge and I) decided to put all the names in a hat and pull out the winner. I will let you know at the end of this summary who that winner is. Actually, there is no winner, but someone has to get the trophy bought by me at the Green Store in 2016 and then nicely engraved, thanks to Ken Gowing. That was the year Lori Anderson and Ken won the trophy, after which it went to Gary, Connie and Rachel Sturge (and once Matt Procnier as part of their team) for a number of years, until last year when Oriana Pokorny won.

Unfortunately, Oriana was not able to repeat her feat of 2021. She so wanted to and even checked out her route a couple of times before she left for a late April holiday in England, but her Sand Dam Route was impassable even with a jeep.

This year for the Feronia route, there were two new participants who accompanied Fred Pinto – Katherine McLeod and Daniel Kaminiski. Katherine took over as leader from Marc Buchanan and did a great job, waxing poetic over the full pink moon, the North Star, Orion’s Belt, the trillion stars in the night sky, and oh yes, two Barred Owls one of which they saw well!

Our 2016 winners, Ken and Lori, did not see/hear as many owls as they usually do, but what they did see they saw “without getting too chilled or very thrilled!” (That line always makes me laugh!) I don’t know about you, but I would have been more than thrilled to hear a Long-eared Owl which they heard at Stop 2 as well as a Barred Owl. The last time I heard of someone in our area not just hearing but seeing a Long-eared Owl was Kaye Edmonds who saw one in Laurier Woods, although I am positive Dick and I heard one on Riding Stable Road last year.



Ken Gowing

April McCrum and her husband, Corey Whitman, had a pair of duelling owls just as the Sturge gang did. In April's case, one flew right over her head, so close she could feel it! In the Sturge case, well no one else but Gary could compare it to the slap heard around the world! I still laugh when I read his line and I have read it at least 5 times!

April's duelling pair happened on her last stop and just as the tape finished, a third owl approached. Unfortunately, it can't count as part of the survey, but, nevertheless, seeing three together makes the survey evening worthwhile. April and Corey also heard 4 other Barred Owls.

If I found Gary's comparison of duelling owls to the slap heard around the world funny, well, as always, there is much more to chuckle about in his report. As last year, when he mentions Green Acres Road, he reminds us of the sunny, open countryside in that TV show, comparing it to the dark, thick forest he and Connie and Rachel find themselves in during the survey on the road with the same name. Still, Gary, Green Acres is the place to be; owl surveyin' is the life for me! I won't give anything else away in Gary's report, but it does warn you right off that it is not a report to be read if you are under 40!

We then have a report by Greg Jaski, another newcomer to owl reports, although not a newcomer to the Nocturnal Owl Survey. Greg sent me his report already in a pdf file, so I was not able to change the font and lay-out to match the rest. (I no longer have that capability.)

The most interesting aspect of Greg's report is that he actually "surveyed" his Kiosk route the same day during daylight hours, using a survey flag to mark each stop on the way to the end of his route. We get to read about all the birds he saw along the way during daylight hours – Snow Buntings and Rusty Blackbirds in particular. And we get to see him enjoying a cup of hot cocoa while



Renee Levesque

admiring the thinly ice-covered Kioshkokwi Lake before beginning the actual survey.

Although Greg did not see or hear any Barred Owls, he did get to hear two Northern Saw-whet Owls. And because usually – in the past anyway – every surveyor sees an animal, Greg was no exception. He saw a Snowshoe Hare hilariously do a huge reverse flying-back kick that sent it about a metre in the air right in the middle of the road as Greg approached in his vehicle.

Greg added photos to his lovely narrative of a day and evening spent surveying his route.

And then there is Dick Tafel. He writes he did not educate anyone, but he actually did. Always be prepared. What was worse for poor Dick is that he was with a newcomer that survey evening, Erica Buck.

Dick has threatened for a couple of years now that it is his last survey, but this time he actually states it in writing. He has been conducting this survey for 20 years and now that he is turning 90 on August 15, maybe he really means it this time!

It is a route so far out of town that it takes almost as long to get there and back as it is to do the route itself. And very isolated, so much so that the last time I did the route with Dick, I got pretty nervous when a strange man approached us in the pitch black of the night!

Lately there has not been much action on this route, but that wasn't always the case. Dick, who did the route for years with Cal Osborne, said it used to be quite the active owl route. When Cal could no longer hear very well, I took over his place for a bit, after which Jim Hasler did. Jim could not make it this time due to illness.



Keith Pearson

So, Dick, it is our special honour to present you with the coveted owl trophy. It was your name we drew out of the hat, but twenty years of surveying along a very dark, bumpy, long road with many potholes and snowy ditches is quite the feat. I have been there. I know.

I just want to add that most everyone made mention of their boombox. It is a thing of the 80s past, now synonymous with the owl survey. You might want to consider ordering a special t-shirt with an owl and boombox logo. There are many for sale. The one I am showing is from eBay.

Thanks to Stephen O'Donnell for the cover photo. All other photos have been credited underneath each one. I thank the photographers, the writers of the entertaining reports and all participants who make this annual trek such an adventure, an adventure worth compiling into a sort of newsletter.

- *Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe*



Nocturnal Owl Survey, Feronia Area

By Katherine MacLeod

We set out on a cool, clear and calm April evening to do the Nocturnal Owl Survey in the Tower Drive, Four Mile Lake Road and Feronia Road area. The participants were Fred Pinto, Daniel Kaminski and I, Katharine MacLeod.

At each of the 10 waypoints, set approximately 2 kilometres apart, we played the Birds Canada owl survey CD on my old, but trusty boombox. The recording was 12 minutes long and consisted of silent listening periods in between Boreal Owl and Barred Owl calls.

We were rewarded for our efforts on the 2nd waypoint when the CD attracted a pair of vocal Barred Owls. We could barely make out their indistinct shapes as they flew around the trees and over a house until they tired of our nonsense and flew off.

At the next stop, the stars were amazing. We made out the Big Dipper pointing towards the North Star and found Orion's Belt just over the tree line. Alas, no owl calls, despite our musings that it looked like perfect owl territory. Fred explained that the Barred Owls in particular need a large cavity in a hardwood tree for nesting and maybe the birds just didn't find what they needed here.

As we drove to our next waypoint near the airport, it was suggested that we should watch out for UFOS, aliens and maybe even woodcocks. But - zero, zip, nada. The mostly full "pink" moon rose as we made our way along Four Mile Lake Road waypoints.

We were in luck on our second last waypoint on Feronia Road. There was just a hint of an owl call from deep in the bush at first, but within seconds, a loud *Who cooks for you awlll!* blasted from up in a tree beside the car. We had a great look at a solitary Barred Owl. It had a great look at us too! Dan managed to get a lovely night time photo to celebrate the evening.

We didn't hear or see any more owls at the last stop, but we had time to enjoy the dark night sky punctuated by a trillion stars and the moon. What more could one ask for on a lovely late April night?



Photos by Daniel Kaminski

Nocturnal Owl Survey, Graham Lake (Chisholm)

By Lori Anderson

Ken (Gowing) and I embarked on our Nocturnal Owl Survey on a mild, quiet evening on April 5, 2022. Initially, there was some cloud cover which soon evaporated. We had perfect weather and a quiet week night, so given this, we were expecting some great owling!

This did not happen.

Stop 1 produced one American Woodcock *peenting*.

Stop 2 gave us one Barred Owl answering the broadcast several times while moving away from the broadcast! A shy individual we presumed. After this owl could no longer be heard, we were answered by a Long-Eared Owl. It did not call for long or come to view. However, it was the first Long-Eared Owl recorded on this route, and so a notable observation.

Stop 2 was the first and last stop to produce owls. We continued the route with nothing more to report. We finished our 10 stops without getting too chilled or very thrilled.

Despite no owls after Stop 2, we were thankful to be able to get out and do the survey. Next year will be better. Maybe.



Long-eared Owl, Kaye Edmonds

Nocturnal Owl Survey, Restoule Route

By April McCrum

Our route begins at the gate of Restoule Provincial Park, and although we heard 4 Barred Owls at various stops along our route, the excitement of the evening didn't occur until the very last stop when my husband, Corey Whitman, and I saw 2 Barred Owls up close and personal. They came right to our vehicle and duelled it out!



Rawpixel

After the specified time at that last stop, what should happen but a 3rd Barred Owl showed up! I had to duck because one of the three was so close that I felt a breeze over my head!! If it had only arrived a minute or two sooner, it could have been included in my survey results.

Interesting that all the excitement of the evening happened at the last stop. Pays to be patient.

By the time we finished our route, we were cold and happy to head home to a warm bed, but even happier that we had a good owl night all around. In total, we heard 4 Barred Owls and saw 3, although only 2 can be counted for the survey.

Powassan Area, Nocturnal Owl Survey SEX AND THE CITY (oops! I mean BOONIES)

WARNING: The following dissertation may contain descriptions of a sexual or violent nature so put the children to bed and read on!

By Gary Sturge

Well another year rolled by. With Covid, the months all seemed the same except soon we would get to do the Nocturnal Owl Survey, something to look forward to. Awaiting mid-April, we were full of anticipation and lined up the crew - Connie, Rachel, (both Sturges), Matt (Proconier) who had missed a couple of years, and myself, Gary.

We closely monitored the weather hoping to get suitable conditions before the middle of the month and on the 14th we decided to chance it. Unfortunately Matt encountered Covid, the rest of us having experienced it a few months earlier. Sorry Matt, but we had to put you on the disabled list at the last minute.

So on the appointed day at the appropriate hour and minute, we found ourselves out at the end of South River Road with boombox, flashlight, compass and warm winter coats.

STOP 1

We set things in motion and quietly waited - not much noise, less water running in the creek this year, no flooding, no peepers or birds, just more wind than we wanted. The music played on, call after call and nothing. We have always had owls at this stop. Usually they fly out to welcome us to another cold night of owling, but alas not this year!



We were preparing for failure (it must be the wind) when near the end of the 3rd Barr call Rachel heard a very distant *Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?* and after the 4th call, another owl. Yahoo!! Two Barreds. We would not fail.

STOP 2

We gamely mounted up and roared to the next stop, eagerly setting up and waiting, but nothing except an American Woodcock desperately seeking a mate and an even lonelier Mallard in the creek. That'll teach us to be positive!



Renee Levesque

STOP 3

Well at least we know there are some owls out tonight and so we performed the drill. Again no sound except that damn wind. Then just before the final grunt from the boom box ending the stop, we had a very distant Barred return our challenge! It's a good thing Rachel can hear a pin drop at 30 paces!

STOP 4

The first stop on the lonely and dark Kings Road. We usually don't meet with a lot of success at this stop, but at least this year no dog was barking in the distance. Nothing, nothing, wait for it....still nothing, but then after the 3rd call, a Barred Owl silently flew out and landed beside us in a tree. Ok we'll call him Silent Sam and he counts. We did express our appreciation to him before leaving.



Gary Sturge

STOP 5

Quiet, dark, scudding grey clouds and again nothing but the wind - and it's increasing!

WELL HALF DONE - SCORE 4 OWLS

STOP 6

The first stop on Green Acres Road. I cannot get over the incongruity of this name. The TV program was set in the always sunny, open countryside of mid-America, whereas this narrow road is through a dark and thick forest in north central Ontario.

This is another low yield stop, but this year something happened. After the Boreal Owl

BWOO call, we had a distant Northern Saw-whet Owl reply. Obviously he was confused, but not after the ensuing BARR call when he promptly went silent, likely concerned about his wellbeing. Just then out of the trees flew two upset Barred Owls. They were obviously attached. They caterwauled for a minute before falling silent. However something passed between them because the male flew quickly to the female's branch and mounted her. Yup right there in front of us - Owl Sex for all to see!! They carried on for a minute, although maybe it seemed like longer for the owls. Then he flew across the road to give her some space. You never know what you're gonna see out there in the wilds.



Gregg Thompson

So much excitement but we had the survey to complete, so down the road we went.

STOP 7

Again we set up and called and listened and listened. Only a lonely American Woodcock replied. Finally after the 4th BARR call near the end, we received a very distant owl reply. So off to the next stop.



Pinterest

STOP 8

Now every year this is the stop where things turn violent and we're sure it's always the same owl. A couple of years ago he attacked the boom box; last year, it was Con's brown and beige toque which upset him. This year it was worse!

After the first call there was silence, but after the second BARR, three owls flew over us. Then commenced a lot of owl yelling – and swearing, I'm sure. At first we thought the attacker had brought backup for the assault on us, but no. Quickly he attacked the other owl, obviously a male, with the female obviously enjoying being fought over. The brawlers flew across the road and there was a loud whack, bet that hurt! I had a quick flashback to Will Smith and the Oscars, but was brought back by the escaping loser, his pursuer and the female who just

egged them on. After a little distance, things quieted down a bit with the pair quietly talking about it all. Then the boom box grunted and we could all calm down and digest what had happened. You just never know. At least we were not the focus of attack this year!

STOP 9

We set up and after the first BARR call got a distant reply. This was the only response and we figured it was a repeat, an owl from one of the last stops. Maybe it was the loser of the fight at stop 8 who had fled in this direction into the woods. Better luck, fella.

STOP 10

Ah, the last stop of the night. We're all getting tired and it's cold after spending this much time in a late April night standing in the woods. After the first BARR, we got a very distant reply and after the 3rd and 4th another reply from the opposite direction. Somewhere in there was also a drumming Ruffed Grouse. A good way to end the survey with 2 more owls.

Overall, the owls seemed somewhat silent and they mostly called out at a distance from us. Was it too much trouble to fly out to us? Maybe it was the wind that caused them not to. No matter, we were immensely satisfied with another successful survey and so we headed home to warm beds.

Good night Owls!



Gary Sturge



FINAL SCORE:

- 1 Saw-whet Owl
- 13 Barred Owls (1 classified as a repeat and 6 seen)
- 2 American Woodcocks
- 1 Ruffed Grouse
- 1 Mallard

Kiosk Owl Survey Route 099 on Highway 630 to Algonquin Park

April 10, 2022

Sunday April 10 was a beautiful, cool, clear and windless evening. What a treat to be able to spend it outside, and in such a remote area. Route 99 follows the Amable du Fond River right

from the northern tip of Algonquin Park north along the historic highway 630. This was my first time surveying this route but not my first time in this area. That would have been in 1976 during my first canoe trip. My neighbour, Malcolm and his brother, took his nephews and me through Kiosk into Algonquin Park for a fishing trip. That was a snowy weekend in May. This time it was a beautiful Sunday in April. I left North Bay early to pre-survey my route before dark. I stopped before the beginning of the route to test out my speaker system while turkey vultures soared overhead.



I wanted to add a survey flag at each stop in the daylight to make sure that I could quickly find each stop and to check that the GPS coordinates matched the site descriptions. There

were birds at each stop including robins, chickadees, ruffed grouse, song sparrows, Canada Geese, and to my delight one group of rusty blackbirds.

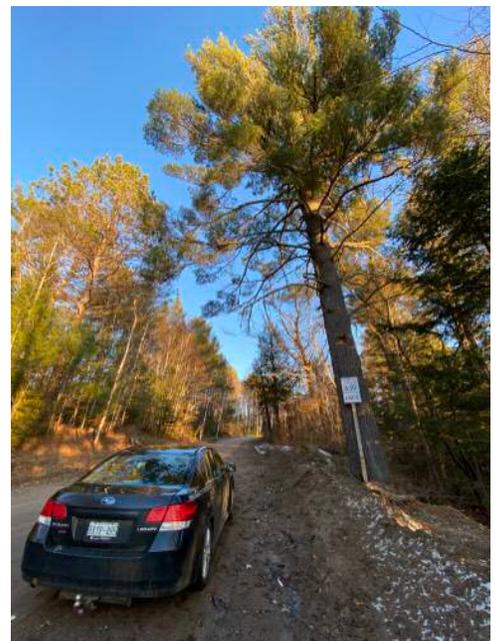




I came to familiar place where the snowmobile trail crosses the Amable du Fond River. I decided to park the car to walk over the snowmobile bridge and admire the river in full flow.



The further south I went the higher the land rose into the Algonquin dome. Snow was seen at the side of the road and in the forest.



Then as Highway 630 ended the snow got a lot thicker.





Once I was finished preparing for the survey there was time to burn until a half hour after sunset. The thinly ice-covered Kioshkokwi Lake shoreline was a nice place to make a

cup of hot chocolate, which was included in my survey package, and to watch the sunset.



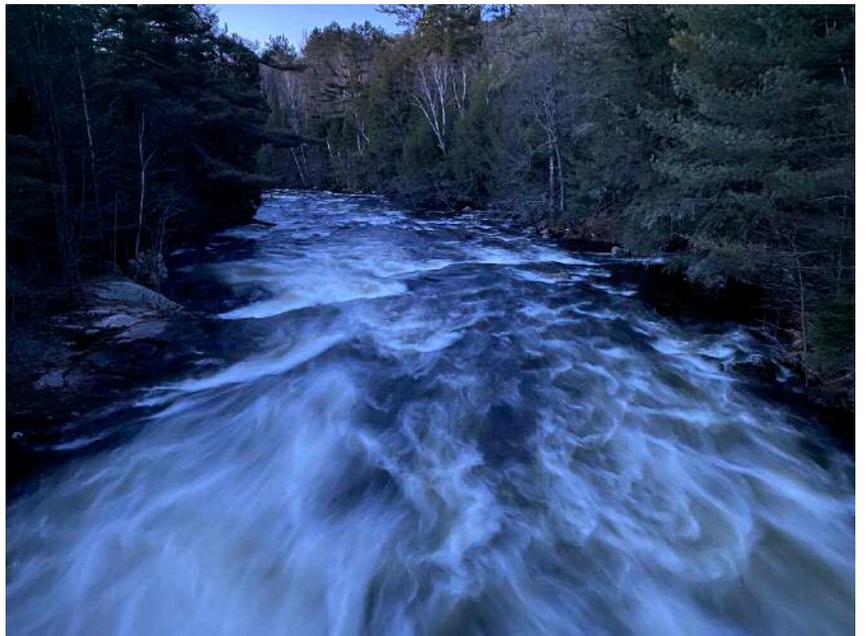
An active group of snow buntings were kind enough to pause on this rock just long enough for a still shot.





Geese were honking away at the mouth of the river.

The Amable du Fond River was flowing heavily as it exited Kioshkokwi Lake.





When the time came to begin the survey American woodcocks dominated the scene. There were three males all calling for attention at this one location! They would 'peent' away then take flight and spiral up into the sky making an increasingly frantic twitter. Then they would dive straight down to land in the spot where they began to start 'peenting' again. One lone ruffed grouse was also heard thumping away in the distance. It was a stunning if not a bit chilly evening. The stars began filling the sky even before it became totally dark. The lack of light pollution was very noticeable.

Not much happened during the next three stops. Then, I was thrilled to hear the "toot, toot, toot" of a northern saw whet owl in response to the recorded barred owl broadcast. The same thing happened two stops later. It was so nice to get some owl action.

In all of this time not one vehicle went by. Highway 630 is a remote place at this time of year. Then at stop eight a vehicle came by. The driver of the highway maintenance truck stopped as he wanted to know if everything was ok. He was keenly interested in the owl survey. We proceeded to talk about birds for about another 20 minutes until I cut the conversation short. I still had two more stops to do by midnight and it was already well after 11pm.

The next stop had another woodcock doing its mating ritual call and spiral flight. Plus a grouse was doing its characteristic wing beat territorial call. It seemed strange to hear the grouse calling so late at night. On my way to the last stop a snowshoe hare ran out onto the middle of the road then stopped and did a huge reverse flying back kick that sent it about a metre into the air. I have seen them jump straight up during mating dances but this was unusually humorous to see. Normally they just run away when startled.

Finally I hit the last station where there were no sounds. The night had cooled off and I was feeling it in my bones. I made another cup of cocoa for the road then closed the sunroof and windows in the car and cranked the heat up for my drive home. While I was hoping to hear a greater variety of owls and possibly see some, especially after reading the entertaining accounts from last years' surveyors, I drove home feeling grateful to have spent a beautiful evening outside doing something so rewarding.



The hot chocolate that was included in the owl surveying kit was greatly appreciated.

Nocturnal Owl Survey, McConnell Lake Road

By Dick Tafel

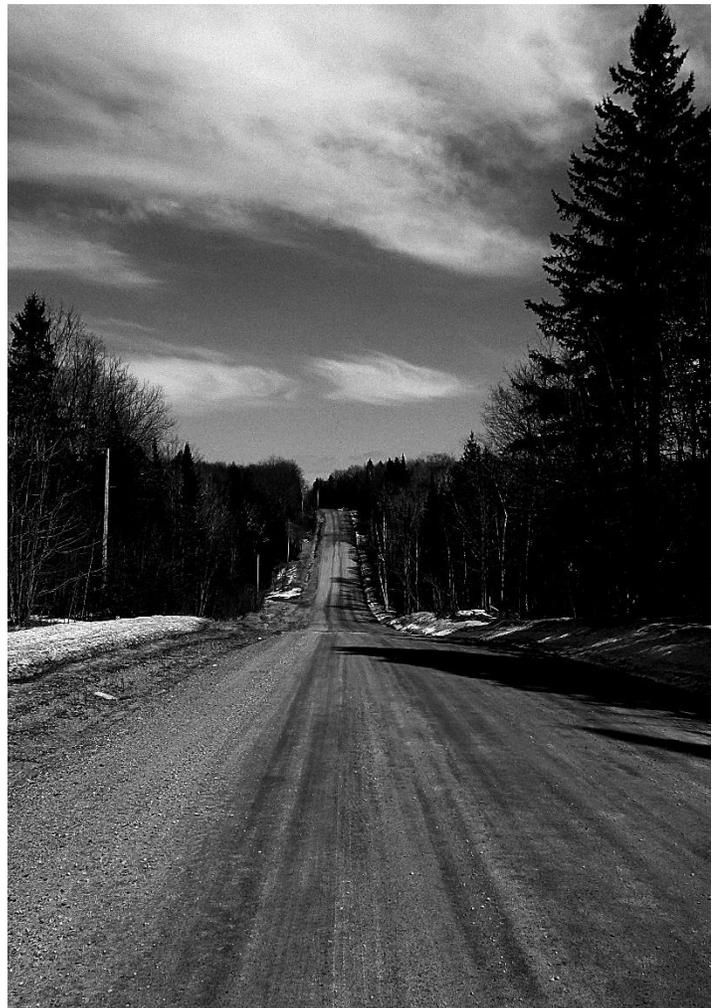
What should one say about owls which do not appear to raucous ministrations from public speakers led by excitable human organizers? What should one say about a completely quiet roadway in the middle of nowhere at the end of April during a late evening in a forest of central Ontario? What should one say about a threesome that becomes a twosome at the last moment before pursuing a major environmental study?

Well to begin with, one should not necessarily blame the owls. They were only bothered by the noisy speakers for four two-kilometre sections, instead of a likely expected ten. They could not have known that a tired out collection of old batteries could stop operating within a very old tape recorder after initial enthusiasms and checks by less than organized human interlocutors.

And then there was the roadway: Well, there were signs of forestry practices en route to reach the beginning of the first stop at the end of the road, and a long road it is! It is also a road with potholes and no hydro lines and deep snow along the edges.

But what of the threesome becoming a twosome? That turned out to be the result of one of the potential observers succumbing at the last moment to sudden illness. However another potential observer, Erica Buck, was luckily available for the adventure after attending, just a few days prior, an exciting owl overture elsewhere within the district.

And so the prowl went ahead despite the driver, Dick Tafel, attending a buffet dinner just hours before the count, organized by participants in the upcoming election. So as not to be late to pick up the other participants



and get to the starting point on time, he sat near the exit and was first in line for the buffet! So despite a dinner engagement and then going to the ill surveyor's house to pick him up, not knowing he was ill beforehand, the survey remarkably still began on time!

The fact that the end result did nothing to enthuse or educate anyone else in the world discouraged the main provocateur to the point whereby he announced he would not attempt such an adventure again. The fact that there were Common Loons and American Woodcocks and Ruffed Grouse around did not make a poor owl survey much better.



David Rooke

And so somewhat sadly, thank you for bothering to read this lacklustre account of non-existent owls, although after 20 years of doing this survey maybe, just maybe, this participant is allowed to have one become a dud because of mechanical problems.

Other district-wide searches have hopefully been more successful and constructive and will continue to be so. Maybe even this one will be taken over by others next April, and spare batteries will be brought along by intrepid and perhaps younger surveyors who will continue the long tradition of finding Barred, Boreal and Great Horned Owls, as have been detected along this route many times in the past.