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## Kentucky Warbler (Vol. 49, no. 3)

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# The Kentucky Warbler

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SCREECH OWL

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## THE KENTUCKY WARBLER

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Editor .....H. E. Shadowen, Biology Department, Western Kentucky Univ.,  
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## OUR COVER

We are again indebted to Karl Maslowski for the cover picture of the Screech Owl. Mr. Maslowski is well known to us because of his speaking and writing ability as well as his superb photography.

## SCREECH OWL UTILIZATION OF WOOD DUCK BOXES IN MADISON COUNTY, KENTUCKY

JOHN H. PHILLIPS

Between 1970 and 1972, 53 Wood Duck boxes were constructed and erected in Madison County, Kentucky by the wildlife management classes at Eastern Kentucky University. These boxes were erected to increase the nesting of Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*) in this area. It soon became apparent that other wildlife found these boxes suitable for den and nest sites. The Screech Owl (*Otis asio*) was one of these.

This study was conducted to gather information on the local movements, diet, color phase ratios, nesting and migration of the Screech Owl and competition with other wildlife.

### Study Areas and Habitat

The four study areas were within a 15 mile radius of Richmond, Kentucky. The four areas were Central Kentucky Wildlife Refuge, Lake Reba, Lake Wilgreen, and Silver Creek. They were mapped, with the location of each nest box included. Central Kentucky Wildlife Refuge was mostly open farm land, with most boxes located near small farm ponds. The boxes at Lake Reba were near or in a marsh, and the boxes at Lake Wilgreen and Silver Creek were located by creeks.

Sprunt (1955) stated that the main habitat of the Screech Owl consists of open woodlands, edges of fields or farms, marshland borders, and swamplands. A detailed comparison of these habitats was not made, but it is evident that the aquatic-like habitat of the different study areas strongly affected the diet of the Screech Owl.

### Materials and Methods

The boxes were typical Wood Duck nesting boxes, constructed of milled lumber. The dimensions varied, but most boxes were approximately 10 inches by 10 inches by 18 inches. The opening measured three inches by four inches. All boxes were constructed with removable lids for easy access to the inside of the box. The boxes were nailed or wired to trees, between a height of five and 25 feet from the ground, with an average of 15 feet. The nesting material in the boxes consisted of saw dust to a depth of one inch.

Beginning January 30, 1972, all boxes were checked every two weeks. The last observation was made May 4, 1972. Some boxes were visited more frequently when being used by nesting Screech Owls or Sparrow Hawks (*Falco sparverius*). The boxes were reached by using tree spikes. Each box was numbered so it could more easily be recorded. The presence of pellets was used as an indicator of frequency of box usage. A pellet analysis was

not done in this study, but prey remains were examined to give a general indication of the diet of the Screech Owl.

If a Screech Owl were found in a box, the bird was removed, placed in a paper bag, brought to the ground, and banded with a United States Fish and Wildlife Service band. The bird was weighed while in the paper bag, using a 250 gram Ohaus spring scale, and released. The owls were not aged or sexed, but it was assumed that the heavier owls were females and the lighter ones males. Nesting owls were not disturbed, banded or weighed until their young were two weeks old. At this time the young adults were banded.

### Discussion

A total of 33 Screech Owls (22 adults and 11 young) were banded. Bent (1938) reported that Screech Owls are permanent residents, but that some migration takes place in the northern part of their summer range. Sprunt (1955) wrote that the Screech Owl is not migratory; however, he reported instances where they were found 300 miles or more from the point of banding. Data on long range movements from this study will not be available until sufficient returns are submitted from the Bird Banding Laboratory at Laurel, Maryland.

Fifty percent of the boxes were occupied by owls at least one or more times, and 77 percent showed some usage by Screech Owls. The percentage of boxes used by Screech Owls in this study was much higher than that of similar studies. In a two year study by Brown and Bellrose (1943) in Illinois, only three percent of 3,449 boxes were occupied by Screech Owls at some time, and only four and one half percent of the boxes showed recent use by owls. The higher percentage in our study was possibly due to the location of the boxes in an aquatic environment or to a bigger owl population density in this area.

I observed one box being used by three different Screech Owls at different times, and several boxes were observed being used by two different owls at different times. Hesselschwert (1942) stated that individual Screech Owls may choose a box and establish a territory around it, occasionally using other boxes included within that territory. However, this study did not reveal the establishment of territory.

The study of prey remains found within the boxes during the winter months indicates that the diet of the Screech Owl in this study consisted of 18 percent small birds, 10 percent small mammals, 31 percent aquatic or amphibian organisms, and 41 percent unidentified species.

Color phase ratios were noted. Of the adults, 50 percent were red and 50 percent were grey. Hesselschwert (1942) reported that in every instance in which a pair of owls were found in a box with eggs or young, one adult was red and the other was grey. Brown and Bellrose (1943) stated that birds of both color phases were frequently found in the same box. I found that in five instances when two Screech Owls were together, both were the same color. A color phase ratio could not be determined for the young because they were not developed enough to verify their true color phase.

The first evidence of nesting activity was on March 16, when two red phase Screech Owls were found in a box with one egg. Five other pairs started nesting in late March and two pairs started nesting in late April. The latter two were probably second nesters. A total of six completed nests produced 30 eggs, with an average clutch of five. Only one incubation period was recorded and it lasted 21 days. Both the male and female of this pair were observed incubating at different times. Only three broods were produced from eight attempted nests. The total nest mortality was 55 percent. Most of the nest losses resulted from the nesting boxes falling apart or falling from the trees. No predator related mortalities were observed.

Various other species of wildlife used the boxes. The most common was the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). The presence of Starlings had little effect on box usage by the Screech Owl. Several times a Screech Owl was found in the same box with Starling eggs.

Three active Sparrow Hawk nests were found. A total of 15 eggs made up the three clutches, with each clutch averaging five eggs. Only one brood was produced by the time the study ended.

The near absence of Wood Ducks using the nesting boxes was a surprise. The boxes were designed and erected for this species, but only two pair of Wood Ducks used the boxes.

Two boxes were used by Flying Squirrels (*Glaucomys volans*). A total of nine Flying Squirrels were found, eight of them in one box. Five active Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) nests were observed during the month of February. Two Grey Squirrels were seen leaving boxes, and cuttings were found in several boxes.

The winter use of boxes was restricted to Screech Owls and Grey Squirrels. The boxes provide good shelter from cold wet weather. During the winter there were no recorded sightings of Flying Squirrels, Starlings, or Sparrow Hawks using the nesting boxes. As spring arrived and the weather warmed, the Screech Owls paired up to nest. When the spring breeding season began for Flying Squirrels, Starlings, and Sparrow Hawks, each moved in to compete with the Screech Owls for nesting space in the Wood Duck nesting boxes.

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1942 Use of den boxes in wildlife restoration on intensively farmed areas. *Jour. of Wildlife Management*, 6: 31-37
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1955 *North American Birds of Prey*. Harper and Brothers, New York.  
—111 Sunset Heights, Winchester, Ky. 40391.

## 1973 BIG SPRING LISTS

Four Spring Lists were submitted in time for publication this year, and three of the counts indicated the number of individual birds as well as species. The counting of individuals was initiated in 1972 to add greater significance to the accumulating Spring Lists.

**LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES** (Area essentially the same as for Christmas Counts — most of the LBL north of US 68, including Kentucky Dam). May 6; 3:00 p.m. to May 7; 11:30 a.m. Cloudy with intermittent showers and ending in steady rain. Wind gusty 5-20 m.p.h. The temperature ranged from 60° to 80°. Total, 89 species, approximately 2,421 species.

The lake was extremely high, precluding observation of shorebird habitat. The highlight of the count was the large and varied number of gulls and terns. The water below Kentucky Dam flooded the road and contained large numbers of shad, which provided food for the gulls and terns. The birds were easily approached and observed. — Willard Gray (compiler), Clell Peterson.

**BOWLING GREEN** (Area essentially the same as for the Christmas Counts — a 15-mile diameter circle with the center Three Springs, 6 miles south of Bowling Green). April 27; 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Cloudy with intermittent drizzle; gusting winds during last four hours; temperature 54° to 68°. Total, 77 species, 1,383 individuals.

A large duck concentration on the transient lakes departed a few days prior to the count, and unfavorable weather conditions reduced observation of songbirds. The Common Tern was the only unexpected bird recorded. Dulcie Clark, Jeb Pickard, H. E. Shadowen (compiler), Jacky Shadowen, Mike Wells.

**BARREN RIVER RESERVOIR:** Peter's Creek Embayment. — April 30; 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Clear and cool. Total 87 species; individuals were not counted.

A female Wood Duck with 12 downy young was seen. The Canvasback was evidently crippled. Mike Barr, Rodney Farmer, Russell Starr (compiler).

**LOUISVILLE** (same as Christmas Count area). — May 6; 3:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Cloudy; temp. 51° to 68°. Total 149 species, 5,372 individuals. Leonard Brecher, Al Byrd, Virginia Calvert, George Crabtree, Carolene Gresham, Burt Monroe (compiler), Catherine Noland, Ann Norman, Bernice Shannon, Wilbur Jackson, Violet Jackson, Mabel Slack, Larry Smith, Dan Snider, Anne Stamm, Fred Stamm, Don Summerfield.

Species	Land Between the Lakes	Bowling Green	Barren River	Louisville
Common Loon	1			
Pied-billed Grebe		6		1
Great Blue Heron			3	1
Green Heron	3	2	x*	13
Black-cr. Night Heron				16
Yellow-cr. Night Heron				2
Canada Goose	2		x	4
Mallard		3	x	28
Black Duck			x	
Blue-winged Teal		18		17
Wood Duck	14		13	26
Canvasback			1	
Lesser Scaup		1		3
Red-br. Merganser	3			1
Turkey Vulture	2	2	x	5
Black Vulture	1			1
Red-tailed Hawk	1	1	x	4
Red-sh. Hawk	1	1	x	2
Broad-winged Hawk				1
Osprey			x	
Sparrow Hawk		3	x	12
Bobwhite	3	10	x	28
American Coot		200	x	2
Semipalmated Plover				1
Killdeer	1	2	x	24
American Woodcock		2		2
Common Snipe		10		2
Spotted Sandpiper		2	x	32
Solitary Sandpiper	1	1		3
Greater Yellowlegs				2
Lesser Yellowlegs		10		11
Least Sandpiper				10
Semipalmated Sandpiper				3
Herring Gull	25		x	2
Ring-billed Gull	290			17
Laughing Gull	3			
Bonaparte's Gull	6			
Common Tern	35	1		
Least Tern	8			
Caspian Tern	11			
Black Tern	72			
Mourning Dove	36	18	x	159
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	3			2
Black-billed Cuckoo	1			
Great Horned Owl	2			4
Barred Owl	2			1
Chuck-will's-widow	1			6
Whip-poor-will	24			2
Common Nighthawk	3			2
Chimney Swift	12	60	x	260



Species	Land Between the Lakes	Bowling Green	Barren River	Louisville
Ruby-th. Hummingbird		1	x	1
Belted Kingfisher	1		x	8
Yellow-sh. Flicker	4	1	x	61
Pileated Woodpecker	3	2	x	11
Red-bellied Woodpecker	12	6	x	22
Red-headed Woodpecker			x	10
Yellow-bel. Sapsucker				2
Hairy Woodpecker			x	4
Downy Woodpecker	4	2	x	14
Eastern Kingbird	2	2	x	9
Gr. Crested Flycatcher			x	29
Eastern Phoebe	2		x	5
Acadian Flycatcher	9		x	1
Trail's Flycatcher				2
Least Flycatcher				13
Eastern Wood Pewee	2		x	13
Olive-s. Flycatcher				1
Horned Lark				3
Tree Swallow	4	40	x	4
Bank Swallow	6	20		6
Rough-winged Swallow	8		x	15
Barn Swallow	12	40	x	52
Cliff Swallow	600			
Purple Martin		10	x	11
Blue Jay	25	8	x	107.
Common Crow	12	12	x	82
Car. Chickadee	1	6	x	82
Tufted Titmouse	10	2	x	57
White-br. Nuthatch				5
Red-br. Nuthatch				8
House Wren		1		23
Bewick's Wren			x	
Carolina Wren		2	x	44
Short-b. Marsh Wren				3
Mockingbird		12	x	40
Catbird	1	4	x	66
Brown Thrasher	11	9	x	22
Robin	10	100	x	558
Wood Thrush	12		x	57
Hermit Thrush				2
Swainson's Thrush	4			65
Gray-cheeked Thrush				10
Veery	1			9
Eastern Bluebird	1	4	x	4
Blue-gr. Gnatcatcher	6	2	x	22
Ruby-cr. Kinglet		1		9
Cedar Waxwing				48
Loggerhead Shrike		1		
Starling	250	200	x	1020
White-eyed Vireo	5	1	x	17

Species	Land Between the Lakes	Bowling Green	Barren River	Louisville
Yellow-throated Vireo	2	2	x	4
Solitary Vireo				4
Red-eyed Vireo	18	2	x	31
Warbling Vireo				14
Black-and-white Warbler	1	1	x	12
Prothonotary Warbler	7	1	x	2
Worm-eating Warbler			x	1
Golden-w. Warbler				4
Blue-w. Warbler				4
Tennessee Warbler	25			26
Nashville Warbler				25
Parula Warbler	4		x	1
Yellow Warbler		1	x	27
Magnolia Warbler				2
Cape May Warbler		2		3
Black-th. Blue Warbler				2
Myrtle Warbler	1	16	x	65
Black-th. Green Warbler				9
Cerulean Warbler			x	3
Blackburnian Warbler				7
Yellow-th. Warbler			x	4
Chestnut-sided Warbler				9
Blackpoll Warbler				9
Pine Warbler			x	
Prairie Warbler	1		x	6
Palm Warbler		8		21
Ovenbird			x	8
Northern Waterthrush				6
Louisiana Waterthrush	1		x	9
Kentucky Warbler	8		x	7
Yellowthroat	25	2	x	43
Yellow-br. Chat	6	1	x	17
Hooded Warbler	2	2		5
Wilson's Warbler				1
American Redstart	1		x	5
House Sparrow	6	30	x	192
Bobolink		16		9
Eastern Meadowlark	12	10	x	110
Red-winged Blackbird	300	22	x	254
Orchard Oriole	12	2	x	10
Baltimore Oriole	1	1		31
Common Grackle	200	300	x	685
Brown-h. Cowbird	100	4	x	71
Scarlet Tanager	3	1	x	11
Summer Tanager	2		x	6
Cardinal	30	35	x	250
Rose-br. Grosbeak	10		x	31
Blue Grosbeak		1		
Indigo Bunting	25	4		87
Dickcissel				1

Species	Land Between the Lakes	Bowling Green	Barron River	Louisville
Evening Grosbeak				5
Purple Finch				12
Pine Siskin				10
American Goldfinch	12	3	x	143
Rufous-sided Towhee	6	8	x	58
Savannah Sparrow				18
Grasshopper Sparrow				3
Tree Sparrow				1
Bachman's Sparrow			x	
Slate-c. Junco		2		
Chipping Sparrow	6	4	x	8
Field Sparrow	4	10	x	42
White-cr. Sparrow		6		37
White-thr. Sparrow	6	42	x	213
Lincoln's Sparrow				3
Swamp Sparrow			x	7
Song Sparrow	4	2		183
DATE OF COUNT	May 6, 7	Apr. 27	Apr. 30	May 6
SPECIES	89	77	87	149
INDIVIDUALS	2,421	1,383	x	5,372
OBSERVERS	2	5	3	17

\*Numbers of individuals not recorded.

## THE 1973 ONE-DAY BALD EAGLE COUNT

ANNE L. STAMM

On February 17, 1973, the Kentucky Ornithological Society marked its thirteenth consecutive year of participation in the One-Day Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) Count conducted in cooperation with the Mississippi River Valley Bald Eagle Survey. Forty-two members and guests checked for eagles in 15 areas ranging from Ballard County in western Kentucky to the Licking River valley in Nicholas and Fleming counties. They counted 44 Bald Eagles: 13 adults, 24 immatures, and 7 not classified as to age. Although the count was down from the previous year, some observers felt that the decrease was due to the extreme cold weather (February 17 was the coldest day in the month). In some sections of the state the ground was covered with snow; bays, inlets, and small bodies of water were frozen. This latter condition may have caused the eagles to move farther south to new fishing areas. The temperature during the day hovered from 8° to 38°; the wind, for the most part, came from the north to northeast and ranged from 3 to 20 m.p.h.

An adult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) was seen at very close range near the wooded bluff along Salt River where it empties into the Ohio River, by Violet and Wilbur Jackson. The golden feathers on the hind neck of the bird glistened in the sunlight and were easily noted as the eagle

flew before them, at approximately 100 feet. Although Golden Eagles were not observed on the count day at Land Between the Lakes, Clell Peterson reported three there on February 24, the occasion of the Kentucky Department of Park's fourth annual Bald Eagle Workshop.

All eagles listed on the table below were observed on February 17, with the exception of those sighted at Wolf Creek and Dale Hollow Lake. They were seen on the following day, February 18.

Location	Adults	Immatures	Not Aged	Total
Ballard Waterfowl Management Area (Ballard County)	2	3	0	5
Land Between the Lakes Dam # 50	7	19	2	28
Henderson County-Ohio River (by boat)	0	0	0	0
Ohio River from Leavenworth to Cannelton, Ind.	0	0	0	0
Ohio River-Rockport Ferry to mouth of Blackford Creek	1	0	0	1
Ohio River below mouth of Otter Creek	1	1	1	3
West Point-Salt River*	0	0	0	0
Barren River Reservoir	0	0	0	0
Shippingport Island	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Harrods Creek to Westport, Ky.)	0	0	0	0
Cumberland River-Wolf Creek Dam	1	1	0	2
Frogue Peninsula and adjacent areas	0	0	0	0
Dale Hollow Lake (Cumberland and Clinton counties)	1	0	0	1
Licking River valley (Nicholas and Fleming counties)	0	0	0	0
	13	24	7	44

\*One Golden Eagle sighted at close range

The KOS Bald Eagle records, as usual, were sent to Elton Fawks, chairman of the Mississippi River Valley Survey. He reported that in the over-all count, the 450 participants tabulated 964 Bald Eagles: 663 adults, 279 immatures, and 22 not aged. The areas where these eagles were counted included most of the Mississippi River from its source to below St. Louis, portions of the Wisconsin River, all of the Illinois River from Ottawa to Grafton, the Illinois Wildlife Refuges, and the state of Kentucky.

The following observers took part in the Kentucky count: Leonard C. Brecher, Al Byrd, Virginia Calvert, Dennis Coskren, George Crabtree, Frances Ellis, C. L. Frazer, Jim Frazer, Marquita Gillenwater, Charles Guthrie, Hunter Hancock, Robert Head, Phillip Hocking, Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Jackson, Dr. and Mrs. Wendell Kingsolver, Larry Lamely, Jack Morford, Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Moore, Robert Morris, Mrs. J. V. Muntan, James Myatt, Raymond Nall, Ann Norman, Jim Pasikowski, Robert Patrick, Clell Peterson, Lawrence Philpott, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Powell, Mrs. Charles Robertson, Lawrence Smith, Robert Smith, Dr. and Mrs. Russell Starr, Anne L. Stamm, Frederick W. Stamm, Paul Sturm, and Bea Whalen.  
—9101 Spokane Way, Louisville 40222.

## FIELD NOTES

### OBSERVATIONS OF SCREECH OWLS

On the night of May 19, 1973 two other observers and I set out to locate the nest of a Screech Owl (*Otis asio*). I had been in the area earlier and had seen a young Screech Owl. We had also observed an unusual pair; one owl was of the red phase and the other of the gray phase. We could not make positive identification of the sexes of the owls, but since the red phase owl was larger we thought it to be the female.

We arrived at the area where I had last seen the owls about 8:30 p.m., got out of the car and began looking for the owls. Shortly the red phased owl thumped my head. We quickly shined our flashlight on the bird and watched it. We were unable to find the nest, although we saw the young Screech Owl and also the grey phased owl. — GIVEN HARPER, Chestnut Street, Carlisle 40311.

(Ed. note: Given is 15 years of age and has great interest in birds of prey. He was accompanied by Dr. and Mrs. Wendell R. Kingsolver.)

## NEWS AND VIEWS

### TWO NEW LIFE MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome two new Life Members into our organization. Mr. and Mrs. Albert L. Powell, Jr. of Maceo have been active participants in the Kentucky Ornithological Society since 1950.

Mr. Powell, better known as Bert, became interested in nature at an early age through the writing of Ernest Thompson Seton and Thornton W. Burgess and through association with Ben and Lula Coffey and the Tennessee Ornithological Society. He has enthusiastically supported the Kentucky Ornithological Society through youth encouragement, participation in bird counts and annual meetings, and contributions to *The Kentucky Warbler*.

Mrs. Powell also became interested in nature study as a young child. Later she majored in biology at Memphis State University and came under the influence of C. E. Moore, an active T.O.S. member. It is of interest to note that Mr. and Mrs. Powell met while traveling to a meeting of the Tennessee Ornithological Society. Their interest and strong support of education and conservation is acknowledged and appreciated.

\* \* \* \*

### FALL MEETING

The Fall Meeting will be held at Kenlake State Resort Park September 28-30, 1973 and will be a joint meeting with the Kentucky Department of Parks. If you desire to participate in the Friday evening program through the presentation of research, observations, or slides, contact A. L. Whitt, Jr., Biology Department, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond.