

Christopher L. Wood

From: Duane Nelson [leastern@centurytel.net]
Sent: Wednesday, January 16, 2002 1:11 PM
To: GreatGrayO@aol.com
Subject: Re: a really pale Gray Ghost Story

2002-13

rec'd 1/16/02

Tony,

This is my version of a rare bird form. Circulate it if you wish. I sent it to Zell and Tina as a way to reinforce their emotional encounter with a Northern Pygmy Owl at their home in Coaldale.

----- Original Message -----

From: Duane Nelson
To: Christina.Mitchell@UCHSC.edu
Sent: Wednesday, January 16, 2002 1:05 PM
Subject: a really pale Gray Ghost Story

Dear Zell and Tina,

Today, I went up to Blue Lake (Bent County) to count Bald Eagles (there were 19 present). I drove across the dam on the south end of the lake, and as I was looking north to the lake, flushed a large, very pale raptor. For a microsecond, I thought it was a pale Rough-legged Hawk. The bird flew out from under the left front tire, startling me as much as I startled it.

The heavy, fluttering flight was unlike a buteo. Never flying more than four feet above the ground, on bowed wings, it landed 100 feet in front of me, again on the road surface. When its neck rotated about 180 degrees to stare back at me, I was magnetically drawn to two piercing yellow eyes, surrounded by an immaculate white face, the white being almost the pattern of a resting figure 8. Do you remember Maggie Simpson's archenemy, the baby with one eyebrow? Well, the strongest pattern on this bird was the heavy, black unbrow. White was the background of the entire bird, noticeably barred across the top of the head, the back, and the underparts. The net effect of the bird was that it was a pale shade of gray, the blending of the white background with the dark gray barring. I was looking at an immature female Snowy Owl, and it was looking at me. What an incredible, religious experience. I know of no other bird that symbolizes places so remote, or a lifestyle so austere.

I looked, but only for a few minutes. I put my truck in reverse, so I wouldn't flush her again. I backed up for 1/4 mile, hoping to photograph her later. I returned about 3 hours later, but my rendezvous with her was apparently not to be renewed.

Duane.

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

CBRC FILE #: 2002-13

RESULTS: _____

Print this page and then fill out. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species (please include common and scientific names): Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca*

Date(s) of Observation: 17 February 2002

Number of birds seen: one.

Sex: female.

Plumage: immature.

Exact location: Southeast side of Adobe Creek Reservoir (a.k.a. Blue Lake).

County: Bent.

Nearest town: Las Animas.

Elevation: unknown.

Length of observation: 30 minutes.

Time(s) of observation: 2:20pm to 2:50pm.

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Mark Janos.

Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): Duane Nelson found this bird in mid January 2002 and did see it again on 18 February 2002.

Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observer(s) position): Good light, sun to the south of us, we were looking west and north at the bird.

Optical equipment used: B&L Zoom 20-60x spotting scope and 20-60 zoom Leica spotting scope.

Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): Mark first spotted the bird from about 1.5 miles away. We were able to drive closer. We then walked to the lake shore, which was about 300 yards away.

Was (were) bird(s) photographed? No.

If so, are you submitting photos? n/a.

Who took the photograph(s)? n/a.

Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: The bird was seen sitting on the ice of Adobe Creek Reservoir, which is a large reservoir in southeastern Colorado. The bird was sitting on the ice. The ice where the bird was, was more ruffed, than smooth.

Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: Mark spotted the object sitting on the ice at 1.5 miles away. Mark said "this could be a Snowy Owl". I looked at it through his scope, and thought the same thing. It looks like it could be a Snowy Owl. The bird was very far away, so we had to drive closer. We drove to where Bent County Road VV & 10 meet, and

we looked from there, which was still a long ways away (perhaps 1/2 mile or more). We looked through our scopes again, and were able to confirm that the object was a bird, and was indeed at Snowy Owl. We then walked to the edge of the lake and we estimated that we were 300 yards from the bird. The entire time we watched the bird, it sat on the ice. It was facing away from us, though would turn its head around and look at us, every few minutes. It only looked at us for about ten seconds each time. After watching it for 30 minutes, we left with the bird still sitting on the ice.

DESCRIPTION -- This is the **most important** part of this report. Include in these details the overall size and shape of the bird, how you placed the bird in the general group that you did, and give as many plumage details as possible, even including those that you feel might not have relevance to the specific identification. Features to include are the color(s) and/or patterns of the head, eyes, bill, back, folded wings, open wings, tail, chin, throat, breast, sides, flanks, belly, vent, and legs. Also, please include, where possible, shape of the whole bird, of the wings - folded or open, of the bill, and of the tail. Please fill out this portion even if photos are accompanying your report. We welcome attachments of additional sheets of description, drawings, field sketches, or copies of field notes.

The size of the bird was big, perhaps about 2 feet in length. It wasn't with any other birds, though that is the size we came up with. The shape of the bird was a round headed big owl, which sat up at an angle (the tail was at the bottom, angling up to the head). The bird was an owl because of the owl shape and size and round head. The bird was an immature female because of the dark feathers on the entire bird, except for the white face/head. The face was white. The top of the head had black feathers. The eyes were little slits that we could not make out the color of. The bill was small and looked dark. The underparts were white with brown evenly spaced bars, from the chest down to the under tail coverts. The tail was white colored and large and squared shaped. The back of the head, which we saw a lot, had white feathers around behind the head and side of nape. The entire back was white with brown bars with more white in between. More white than the underparts. The wings were white with brown bars with more white in between, like the back. The tail looked pretty white with some brown barring. The legs were feathers of white, as were the feet.

Describe the bird's (birds') call(s) and/or song(s), if noted:

SIMILAR SPECIES -- This is another critical part of your report. Please discuss how you eliminated similar species from consideration.

Not much looks like a Snowy Owl. The white face, round head, large size, owl shape all are good clues for this bird being an owl. Most hawks sit more up right when sitting on the ground, which the bird we saw looked more angled while sitting.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species?

I have seen two previous Snowy Owls. Both were in Colorado. The one I saw at Riverside Reservoir, Weld County, looked very similar to this bird. The other one was more of an adult male north of Lamar, Prowers County.

List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how this influenced your identification (during and after observation): We looked at Sibley later to confirm the age of the bird. We didn't need the book to identify the bird as a Snowy Owl. As Snowy Owls aren't the toughest id.

This report is from notes made from (check one) X noted made during observation ___ noted made after observation ___ later from memory.

Date and time of written report: 18 Feb 2002. 8pm.

Reporting observer: Brandon K. Percival

Signature: *BRANDON K. PERCIVAL*

Address: 835 Harmony Drive, Pueblo West, Colorado, 81007-2632.

Send report to: Colorado Birds Record Committee, Tony Leukering, PO Box 660, Brighton, CO 80601.



Snowy Owl

3/10/02

N of Dam at Adobe Cr Res.
Bent Co CO

Dianne Nelson

3/9/02

Rds 10 + UU, Bent Co
Adobe Cr. Res

Dianne Nelson



3/10/02

SNOW

Turn at Rds 10 + 11
Bent CO Co.

Duane Nuhn