

ADDITIONAL DATA ON FEEDING HABITS OF THE SHORT-EARED OWL

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During January, 1935, forty large owl pellets were collected from the roosting site of a colony of approximately eighty short-eared owls, located along the northwestern marshy edge of White Rock Lake, near Dallas, Texas. The owls had occupied the area for a period of nearly two months during their migration.

Each of the forty pellets collected was broken up by washing, the bones removed, placed in numbered boxes and sent to the Division of Wild Life Research, U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey, for analysis.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Name of bird	Number of pellets containing bones of this species
<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i> (Redwing blackbird).....	28
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> (Starling).....	6
<i>Zonotrichia querula</i> (Harris' sparrow).....	1
<i>Molothrus ater</i> (Cowbird).....	3
<i>Otocoris alpestris</i> (Horned lark).....	1
<i>Poocetes gramineus</i> (Vesper sparrow).....	1
<i>Junco hyemalis</i> (Slate-colored junco).....	1
<i>Euphagus carolinus</i> (Rusty blackbird).....	2
Undetermined passerine birds.....	7

Discussion

As indicated in the above analysis, all the bones proved to be those of relatively small birds. Most of the pellets contained bones of only one species of bird, but a few had as many as three species represented.

No rodent bones were represented in the findings in spite of the fact that the diet of the short-eared owl is supposed to consist largely of rodents. Mr. Clarence Cottam, in charge of Food Habits, in the Division of Wild Life Research, U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey, writes that in

Dr. A. K. Fisher's food habits summaries of the short-eared owl, the data based on the examination of 101 stomachs, only eleven stomachs contained birds. A total of 61 of the 101 stomachs were taken during November, December, and January with the remaining forty being collected during the other months. Mr. Cottam also states that "since Dr. Fisher's original report, we have examined additional material and now have 162 stomachs for tabulation; of these, 44 contained birds. The bulk of the remaining food consisted of rodents."

During the sojourn of the short-eared owls in this vicinity, hundreds of thousands of blackbirds were roosting among the cat-tails and sedges that covered a large part of the low marshy shore-line. Within a relatively short distance from the roosting grounds of these owls the marsh was literally alive at night with blackbirds, thus providing abundant feeding for any bird that is disposed occasionally to add smaller birds to its diet.

In appraising the economic status of this colony of short-eared owls, on the basis of pellet examination, at least two factors must be kept in mind. First, food in the form of blackbirds was present in huge quantities surrounding the roosting grounds of the owls. Therefore, it seems logical that the owls would take advantage of an abundance of easily acquired food rather than hunt for the less numerous and more elusive rodents that inhabited the marshy shore of the lake. Second, it is agreed by many authorities in ornithology that the damage done to crops by blackbirds is sometimes serious. Such damage is usually the result of flocking and can be attributed largely to overpopulation. Hence the owls, even though they fed exclusively on bird life during their stay in the vicinity, may have rendered desirable service to the farmers.