

# TECHNICAL NOTES

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Portland, Oregon

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

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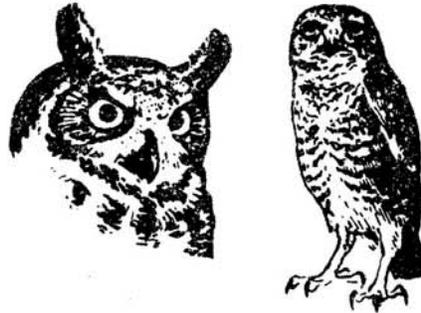
May 1980

CONSERVATION

owls

of

## OWLS



In the State of Oregon

Since owls are nocturnal "birds of prey" they are seldom observed by people. As a group, the owls have large heads, big eyes, a neckless appearance and a noiseless flight. Owls provide added stress to prey species because owls hunt at night while hawks hunt the same species by day, thus providing 24 hour a day predation on the prey species.

Nine species of owls regularly occur in Oregon. Included are the barn owl, burrowing owl, great horned owl, long eared owl, pygmy owl, saw-whet owl and the spotted owl. The snowy owl and hawk owl are uncommon visitors to the state. Owls range in size from the small robin sized pygmy owl to the large great horned owl which has a body length of 20 inches or more and a wingspread of nearly five feet.

### Value of Owls

The food habits of owls, like that of hawks make them highly beneficial to man's interests because they collectively help control rodents and small mammals which are often pests with which agriculturists must contend.

Evidence of the presence of owls can be observed as "pellets" found at the base of trees and poles where owls perch. Birds of prey eat some of the hair, bones or feathers of their victims. This largely indigestible material is formed into "pellets" and is disgorged, generally before the next feeding.

Hawk and owl predation is a highly mobile regulatory force that operates continuously to control all components of the prey species collectively. (Hawks hunt during day and owls hunt at night). Disease may strike one prey species, food shortage another, but hawk and owl predation tends to keep prey population levels more constant.

Spectacular irruptions of a prey species have occurred such as the phenomenal increase of meadow voles in five eastern Oregon counties in 1957 and 1958. Large numbers of hawks and owls along with some gulls responded to this increased food supply and helped establish control of this run-away population level of meadow voles, thus preventing severe agricultural crop damage.

#### Protection

Owls are now protected by federal and state laws. Farmers and ranchers can, upon recognizing the value of hawks and owls, caution hunters and other visitors not to shoot these valuable birds.

The spotted owl has received special attention by federal land managers and others in Oregon because of its special habitat need of old growth timber.

#### References

A Field Guide to Western Birds, by Roger Tory Peterson, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961

Birds of North America; A guide to Field Identification, by C. Robbins, B. Bruun, and H. Zinn. Golden Press, Inc. 1966

Hawks, Owls and Wildlife, by Frank and John Craighead. The Stackpole Company.