

Burrowing Owl
Ohio's Second Record

Sandra L. Zenser

On April 5, 1981, in the afternoon of this cloudy and rainy day, Gilbert Gyde of Locust Point, Oak Harbor, Ohio, and I saw an owl in a drainage ditch paralleling Darsch Road, Carroll Twp., Ottawa County, Ohio. Darsch Road connects Zenser Road with State Route 2. The bird was one-half mile south of State Route 2 and standing by a broken 12 x 6 inch culvert tile. Mr. Gyde thought the bird was injured as it was right next to the road but as he walked toward it, it ran away from him faster than a quail. Mr. Gyde had been out West and said he thought it looked like one of those owls that live in the ground.

We returned April 6, 1981, about 9:30 A.M. The sun was shining. I saw the bird again but this time very closely with 7 x 35 binoculars. It was again in the same position. The sun was in front of me. It flew after a time and landed on the opposite side of the road on a mound of dirt. While there, it moved up and down in kind of a bob. In this position, the sun was to my back. I saw very long legs, very bright yellow eyes and a black band around the throat area. The bird was a blond-brown color with white speckles. It was bigger in size than the saw-whet owl I had seen several days earlier at Magee (perhaps because of the very long legs) and smaller than a great-horned owl. The only other burrowing owl I had seen was the previous November at the St. Louis Zoo bird house and I thought that's what this bird was and that was confirmed by the field guides.

This area was very open with no trees or bushes. The field on the side of the road (east) with the ditch was plowed while the other side of the road was a wheat field.

Laurel VanCamp

I did not see the bird, but I did go to the area when I heard of it. I found quite a bit of excrement and two pellets at the east end of the tile culvert indicating an owl had spent considerable time at this spot. This was on the lee side of the road from the prevailing wind. The pellets were about screech owl size and not from a short-eared owl, the only other owl that would have spent time at this spot.

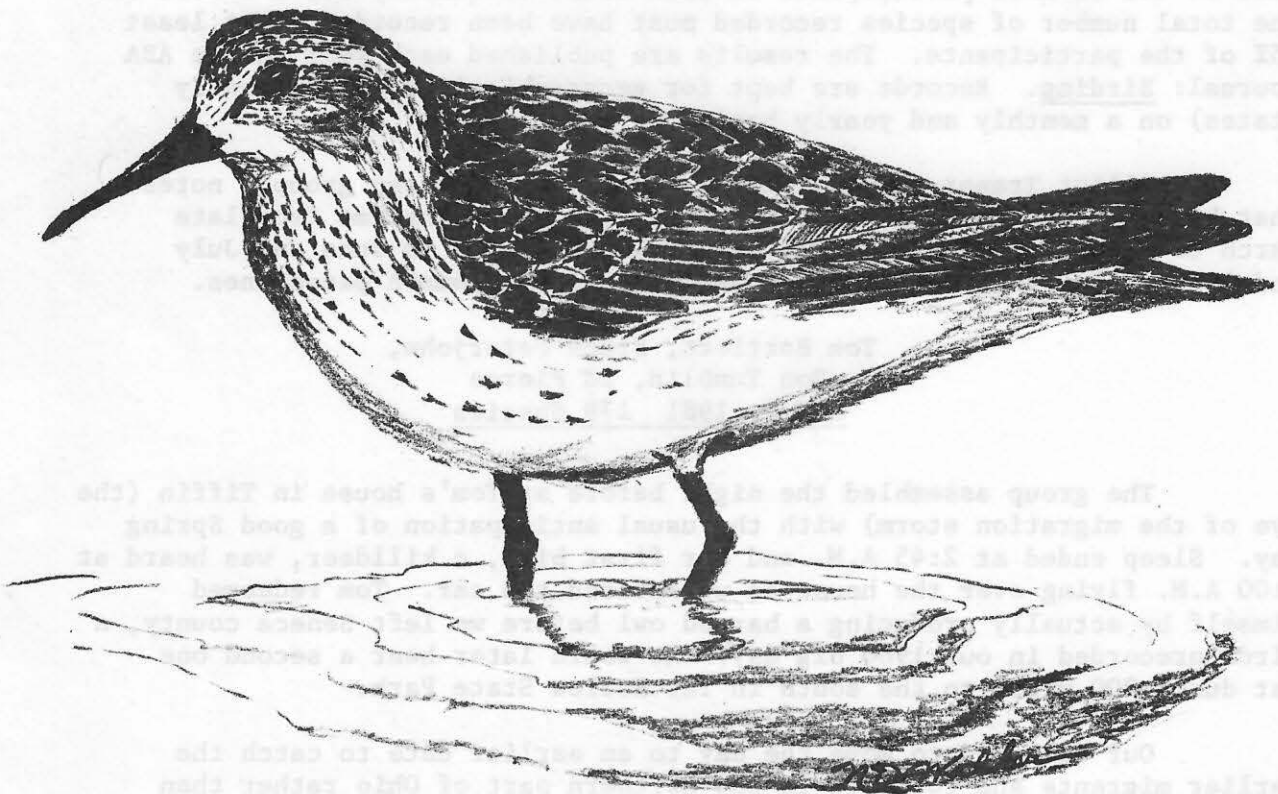
Editor

This record was approved unanimously by the Ohio Records Committee. The above was taken from the documentation forms submitted.

The only other record of a burrowing owl in Ohio appeared in the Auk, Vol. 63, pages 450-451: (Notice the striking similarity of this account to the most recent sighting.)

"Burrowing Owl in Ohio.---My brother Norman called my attention to a small fast owl along an open ditch southwest of Payne in Paulding County, Ohio, during the early part of October, 1944. It insisted upon roosting along the bare bank of a ditch that had been enlarged by a dredge a short time previously. On four occasions it was

seen sitting on the bare bank of the ditch. Two attempts were made to secure it with a 40-gauge shot gun and both times it could have been shot at a distance of 40 feet. However, we did not shoot it as it would have been ruined for a specimen. After flushing, it seemed very shy and would fly a considerable distance out in the harvested soy-bean fields where it tried to conceal itself under bunches of soy-bean straw. It did considerable walking. It was observed at one of its roosting places beside a four-inch tile where this drained into the open ditch. There on October 22, I collected elen pellets of varying sizes. The pellets contained some fur but several seemed to be composed principally of elytra of beetles and legs and wings of grasshoppers and crickets. A mental image of the owl matched up very well with Audubon's plate of a Burrowing Owl. I was impressed by the owl's falcon-like speed as it dashed down to alight on the bank of the ditch. While I have seen but three Saw-whet Owls in this region, they were observed in thickets and woodland. The pellets will be sent to some expert for determination of contents.---Homer F. Price, Payne, Ohio."



Western Sandpiper