

AN ACCOUNT OF TRIO NESTING BY YEARLING SNOWY OWLS IN CAPTIVITY

by

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In July, 1970, nestling Snowy Owls were collected on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska. They were two to three weeks of age at this time. They were acclimated to captivity (Flieg and Meppiel, 1971) and were easily sexed after they assumed their first plumage; the males were finely barred while the females were heavily barred with black. The birds, two males and four females, were first kept in a large aviary and then the six birds were transferred to a small aviary 15x10x12 feet. On June 8, 1971, an egg was discovered in the cage. Courtship feeding was observed. One male began dancing and hooting around the laying female, all the while holding a mouse in its beak. The courtship was consummated by feeding her the mouse. An egg was laid on June 9 and on June 12 four eggs were evident. On June 14 a second female began nesting but was courted only by the aforementioned male. Both females had the feathers of their rump disarranged although no copulation was observed. A total of six eggs were in the cage on June 14; there were 10 eggs on June 22. There was no aggressive behavior in the enclosure between the nesting birds and the other owls which paid no attention. The two nests were about 1½ feet apart and eggs were exchanged back and forth freely until the birds settled down to serious incubation.

The breeding male then began feeding another male. All eggs were infertile, but the age of the breeding birds is significant as to my knowledge this has never before been recorded. If there is any information on early breeding of Snowy Owls, I would hope that fellow members would kindly send your sources and observations to us at the address above.

Reference

Flieg, G.M. and P. R. Meppiel. 1971. Care and Feeding of Snowy Owls. *Game Breeders Gazette* 20(4)36, April 1971.

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