

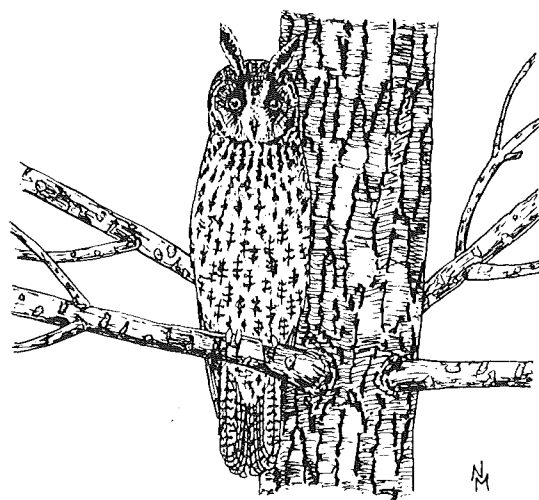
Long-eared Owl

Asio otus

The Long-eared Owl breeds in a broad belt that spans the world's northern temperate zone. In North America it is found from the Great Slave Lake area of the Northwest Territories and southern California eastward, in an increasingly narrow band, to Nova Scotia and Pennsylvania, with an extension along the Appalachians into Virginia. This owl requires wooded cover in which to roost and nest, and although it prefers coniferous woods, it will make do with sparse deciduous cover, fencerows, even desert oases, if necessary. Its density over its huge range is unknown, since the Long-eared is both secretive and local. In Vermont, it has been proposed for Species of Special Concern status.

Reports published in *Records of Vermont Birds* from 1973 to 1983 and Atlas Project data record the presence of 15 different adult Long-eared Owls. These records represent observations in all four seasons, in a geographical range from Craftsbury and Burlington to Bethel and Londonderry, and from West Haven to the Long Trail south of Camels Hump. The observations produced only three breeding confirmations: an active nest located in Sudbury in May 1975 (A. Pistorius, pers. observ.); recently fledged young with adults in Waltham (Addison County) in the summer of 1978 (ASR, D. Potter); and several fledged young associating with an adult Long-eared in an apple orchard in Brandon in June 1981 (ASR, E. Barbarise). The scarcity of encounters is often considered to be a result of the bird's strictly nocturnal activity, its silence away from the nest, and its low-profile roosting habit. Generally it roosts in thick conifer cover or vine-tangled deciduous cover. It is unclear whether this owl is as rare in Vermont as the number of reports seems to suggest.

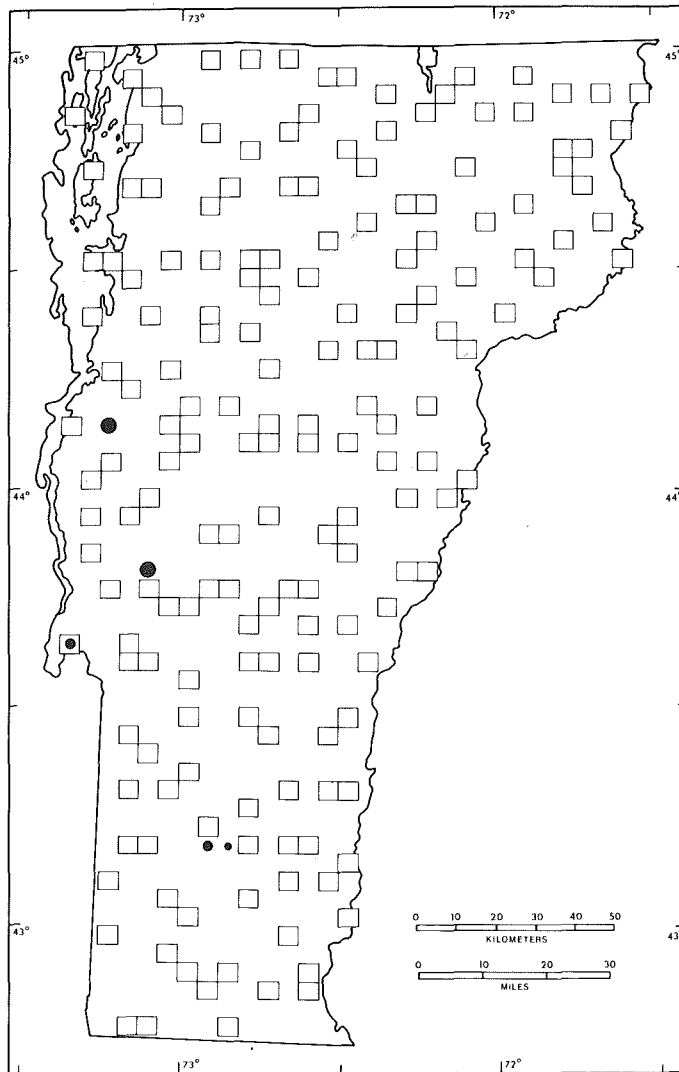
The pre-Atlas Sudbury nest was typical. The pair had taken over an old crow's nest high up in a conifer located near the edge of a mixed woods. This is much the favored



type of nest, though those of squirrels, hawks, and other birds are also used. Occasionally nests are found in bushes, in stub cavities, or on the ground. Nests are usually used as found, although sometimes the owls do repair work, and occasionally add bark, leaves, or their own feathers for lining.

Long-eareds characteristically lay 4 or 5 white, elliptical eggs (the range is 3 to 10). Apparently only the female incubates, starting with the first egg, so that after the 4-week incubation period the nest is populated with young of different sizes. In good prey years all may survive; in most years, however, only the oldest nestlings survive. The young clamber out of the nest in 21 to 26 days and fly 1 to 2 weeks later. The adult female reacts unpredictably when the nest tree is approached. She may slip quietly away or sit tightly; pressed closely, she may raise her wings to form a circular shield and hiss, attack the intruder, or—in behavior apparently unique among raptors—drop to the ground to perform a broken-wing act.

Though woodland nesters and roosters, these long-winged and light wing-loaded owls hunt mostly in the open and on the wing. The Sudbury birds characteristically hunted a hay meadow and an overgrown pasture bordering their nesting woods. Long termed a beneficial owl by economic ornithologists, this species preys largely on rodents such as voles, deer mice; small numbers of shrews and birds (mostly jay-sized



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 1 (0.6%)

Possible breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Probable breeding: 1 (100% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	1	3	100
Green Mountains	0	0	0
North Central	0	0	0
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

and smaller) are also taken, as well as insects, frogs, snakes, and fish. Although Marti (1976) indicated that small mammals make up 89% of this owl's prey in Europe and 98% in North America, there is evidence of occasional opportunistic feeding.

An astonishing variety of calls has been ascribed to the reputedly taciturn Long-eared Owl: low, mellow, *hoooo*'s, doglike yelps and barks, catlike *meows*, and weird shrieks, cackles, whistles, and yowls. The Sudbury adults gave a two-part, metallic nighttime flight note (perhaps a hunting call or a teaching call) strongly reminiscent of the common Killdeer call.

ALAN PISTORIUS