

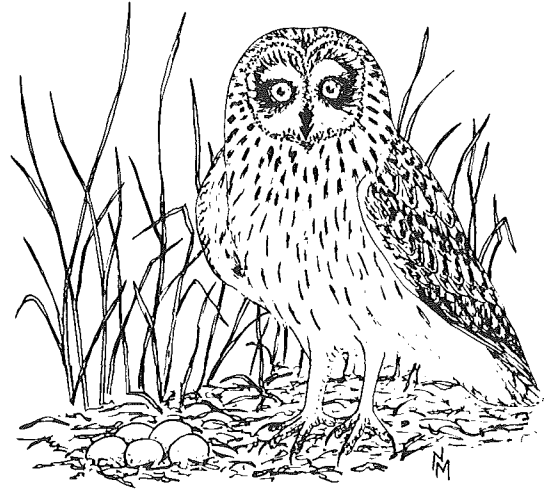
Short-eared Owl

Asio flammeus

The Short-eared Owl is a splendid flier whose range includes all continents except Australia; Vermont is within its zone of permanent residence (Clark 1975). Although the Short-eared had been listed as a Vermont breeding species in the past (Thompson 1842; Fortner et al. 1933), it is rare in the state, and the Atlas Project produced the first breeding records in many years. The species was reported four times and confirmed twice.

The Short-eared Owl requires open country—grasslands, tundra, dunes, or marshes—for hunting and breeding. Unlike most other owls, the Short-eared nests on the ground, builds its own nest, frequently hunts during the day (especially in late afternoon and early morning), and often roosts on the ground. Like the Northern Harrier, the Short-eared quarters the fields, hunting for the mice that constitute its basic diet (Errington 1932). This owl is sometimes considered an irruptive species because of its nomadic movements, specialized feeding habits, and the variability of the time and location of breeding and number of eggs laid (Clark 1975).

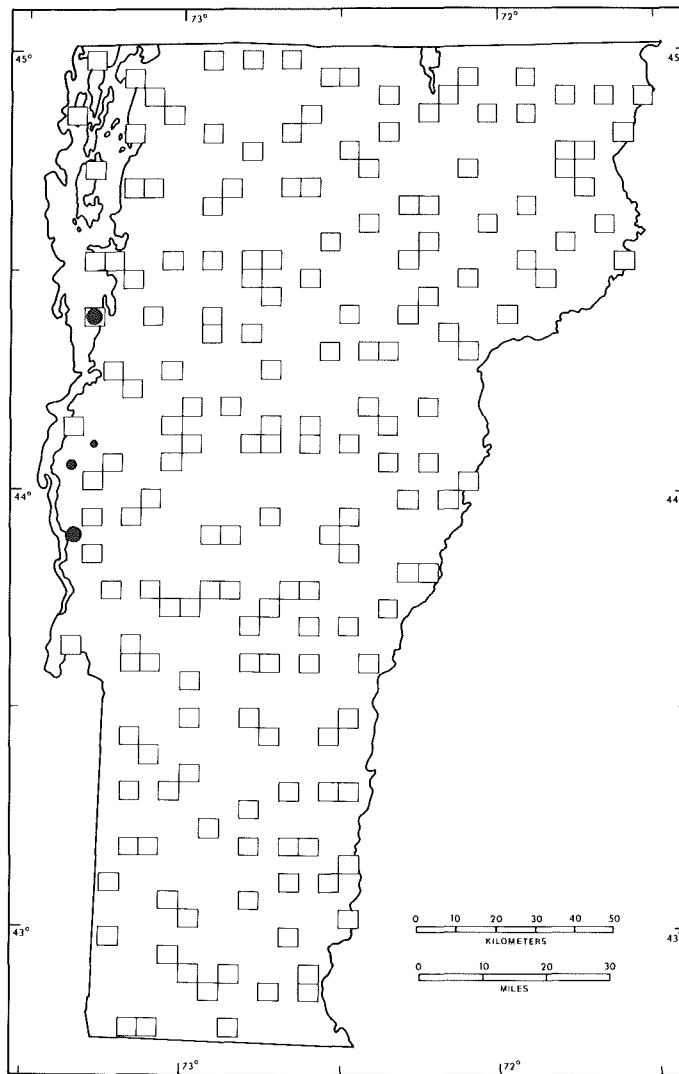
During the years that *Records of Vermont Birds* has been published—1973–1983—the Short-eared Owl has been reported in two fall seasons, four winter seasons, and five spring seasons. The only summer records are in Atlas Project reports. The species occurs almost exclusively in the Champlain Lowlands, but single sightings have also been reported in Craftsbury (October 29, 1974), Newport (October 1, 1977), Springfield (February 28, 1978), and East Montpelier (April 16, 1979) (RVB, 1973–82). In winter, Short-eareds often gather in groups in areas where mice are abundant. Notable Vermont wintering concentrations have occurred in Ferrisburg (4 to 15 owls from December 7, 1974 to April 17, 1975), at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Headquarters in Addison (up to 13 owls in the winter of 1980–81), and at a Vergennes farm (24



were reported on April 9, 1975, though the number had dwindled to 14 by April 12 and 1 by April 18) (RVB, 1973–83).

Two nesting confirmations were obtained during the Atlas Project period. In the summer of 1981 a pair with young was observed in rough fields near a wooded swamp in Shoreham. The adults were observed carrying food on several occasions, and on July 11 the observers followed the adults and found 5 young owls (ASR, E. Weeks). The second confirmation was in Shelburne, where from June 29 to July 2, 1980, 2 downy-headed young were located in a copse of young white pine adjacent to open fields; adults carried food in to them (ASR, B. Farrell). The probable symbol on the map represents 2 adults seen flying near the Brilyea Access of the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area on June 15, 1976—one with “what appeared to be a rabbit in its talons” (ASR, B. and G. Gianetti); since food carrying in raptors does not establish confirmation, the sighting was accepted as probable. The possible record represents a single bird observed April 19, 1977, again near Dead Creek headquarters in Addison, within the egg date range of March 20 to June 28 (Forbush 1929; Townsend 1938; Bull 1974; Clark 1975).

The courtship flight of this graceful species involves wing clapping, in which the male climbs with a rowing wing beat in



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 1 (0.6%)

Possible breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Probable breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 1 (100% 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

tight circles to an altitude as high as 365 m (1,200 ft), then brings his wings together below his body in a clapping motion that is often repeated 15 to 20 times; the flight ends with a spectacular descent—the bird rocks back and forth with the wings held in a dihedral (Clark 1975).

Clutches usually contain 4 to 7 eggs, although up to 9 and even 14 have been reported (Townsend 1938; Terres 1980); young may leave the nest before they fledge (Clark 1975) and hunker down in grass that camouflages them. They fly at 31 to 36 days (Townsend 1938).

Short-eared Owls occur in Vermont

throughout the year, though in limited numbers; the species has been a rare migrant and casual resident since at least the 1930s (Fortner et al. 1933; Smith 1934b). The species is now gone from almost all of New England (L. Master, pers. comm.), is proposed for listing as a Species of Special Concern in Vermont, and is on the National Audubon Society's Blue List (Tate and Tate 1982).

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