



Bird Notes

From Northeast Kingdom Audubon
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For Immediate Release

THE NEW YEAR'S OWL

The wounded barred owl described in Susan Hand Shetterly's book, *The New Year's Owl*, reminded me that this is the beginning of owls' mating season. So many reports are coming into the bird listservs lately, of owls in the headlights, owls in the yard, owls calling in the woods, and so forth. Recently, I too had an extended visit from a barred owl at my bird feeding station, allowing many great looks and pictures using my digital camera and spotting scope.

The barred owl, *Strix varia*, has been a favorite since the first night I called one in with my imitation of the humorous sound, "who-cooks-for-you, who-cooks-for-you-all". As I gaze onto the wintery landscape in January, I remind myself that February is the time of the mating antics of the barred owl. Soon I'll set the clock, go out and brave the elements to call to them again. Nothing like it. Listening for their raucous calls, shrieks and screams can be more chilling than the temperature.

Along with the vocalizations, the male will fly to a perch nearby a female and proceed to bob, weave and flap his way into her heart. She may voice her approval before they fly away together. He may also bring her food, a mouse present, to convince her. These birds are truly the Valentines of the bird world.

Having found an abandoned nest or natural tree hollow, 2-3 eggs will normally appear in April (the earliest could be mid-March). The male brings food to the female during about 28 days of tireless brooding until they hatch. By September the young will be on their own.

I watched the bird at my feeding station scanning the ground and surrounding branches. Down onto a mouse and then up to a branch to swallow the meal in two gulps, the bird hunted here for four days then disappeared. Even a red squirrel running up the branch to within 6 inches of the bird, chattering away did not seem to bother it. This picture through my window pane will remind me of this winter visit until the next time.

Find out how to "digiscope" your winter sightings at any of the websites you will find through www.google.com. Then try it out during the Great Back Yard Bird Count coming up on February 15-18th. (<http://www.audubon.org/gbbc/index.shtml>)

Happy Winter Birding!

Carolyn E. Boardman is a board member of NEK Audubon living in Brownington, Vermont. NEK Audubon is one of 8 chapters of Audubon Vermont and part of the National Audubon Society. NEK Audubon is a non-profit organization that encourages people's enjoyment of birds, wildlife and natural habitats through field trips, programs and publications. For previous Bird Notes, as well as, information about meetings, field trips and special events, visit www.nekaudubon.org. Art work by Robin Rothman.