

Manitoba Nocturnal Owl Survey

2015 Annual Report



James Duncan

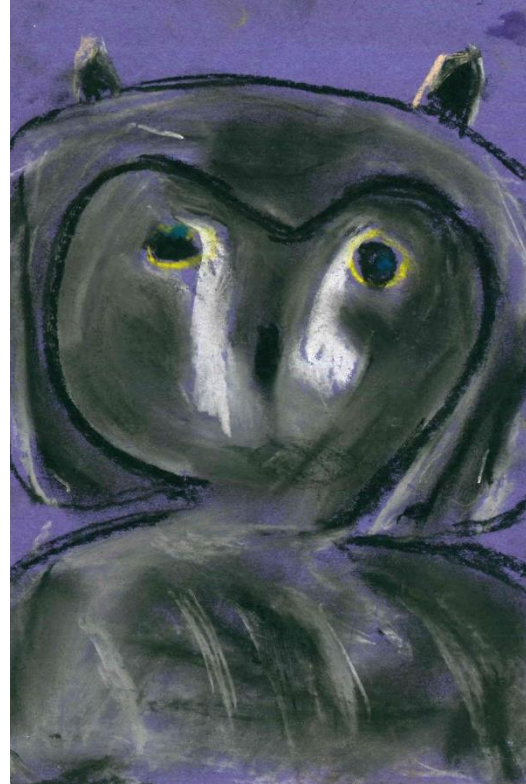
Manitoba Nocturnal Owl Survey - 2015 Annual Report

Congratulations and thanks to the 910 sterling owl surveyors for their role helping the Manitoba Nocturnal Owl Survey reach its silver anniversary! When my wife and fellow zoologist Patsy Duncan and I started the survey in 1991 it was a key part of our plan to monitor owls and their prey for twenty-five years. At the time this seemed ambitious and an unfathomably long-term project. Now we just wonder how the years flew by so fast!

The Manitoba owl survey went through some benchmark changes over the years. I imagine that there are young surveyors who have never seen or used cassette tapes, which is what the survey first used as a means to broadcast owl calls as part of the survey protocol from 1991 to 1999. Somewhere in that time period cassette tapes gave way to CD's and then MP3's. The annual mailing back and forth of paper survey forms eventually gave way to web-based accessibility to owl calls and survey documents. In 1999 we hosted a meeting in Winnipeg because many other Canadian provinces, and a few US states, were interested in how Manitoba was conducting surveys. We were keen to develop standardized owl survey protocols to allow data to be combined and examined at a broader scale. A new standard was 'hatched' at that meeting and Manitoba adopted it. Based on feedback from surveyors, we also dropped the use of playback.

Integrating the owl survey results into the Manitoba Breeding Bird Atlas saw the development of online data entry as an alternative to mailing in paper data sheets. I

am sure that further changes are forthcoming!



Anniversary dates are a great time for reflecting on the past and an opportunity for renewal. After considerable thought I have decided to pass the role of coordinator of this survey on to others. It is time for younger, smarter and more tech savvy people to take over and to improve the survey. A 'few years back' I had the privilege of serving on Bird Studies Canada's (BSC) science advisory committee. It was during that time that I proposed that the Manitoba owl survey become a national Canada-wide survey coordinated by BSC. After a detailed review the national survey was launched by BSC with a growing network of provincial and

territorial coordinators. It is therefore fitting that Dr. Christian Artuso is now running the Manitoba Owl Survey as BSC's Manitoba Program Manager.

Patsy and I look forward to continuing as volunteer surveyors in the survey, and I have some fun times ahead continuing to analyze the owl survey data relative to other owl monitoring data I have been collecting. It has been an absolute pleasure in dealing with you over the years and I hope you continue to share your owl adventures and reports with us.

Information about the owl survey continues to be shared with folks far and wide, including oral presentations at the International Wildlife Society conference in Winnipeg in October 2015, at the Sax Zim Bog Birding Festival in Meadowlands, MN, in February 2016, at the International

Festival of Owls in Houston, MN, in March 2016, and at the International Owl Conference in Italy in March 2017.

Hope you enjoy this annual report, which contains a summary of cumulative owl data, but also some interesting owl artwork from elementary students that I have talked to about owls. This report also contains information about all of us – the owl surveyors that is – based on research by Christopher Ng from the University of Manitoba!

Cheers, James Duncan

Director, Wildlife and Fisheries Branch
Manitoba Conservation and Water
Stewardship



2015 Nocturnal Owl Survey Highlights

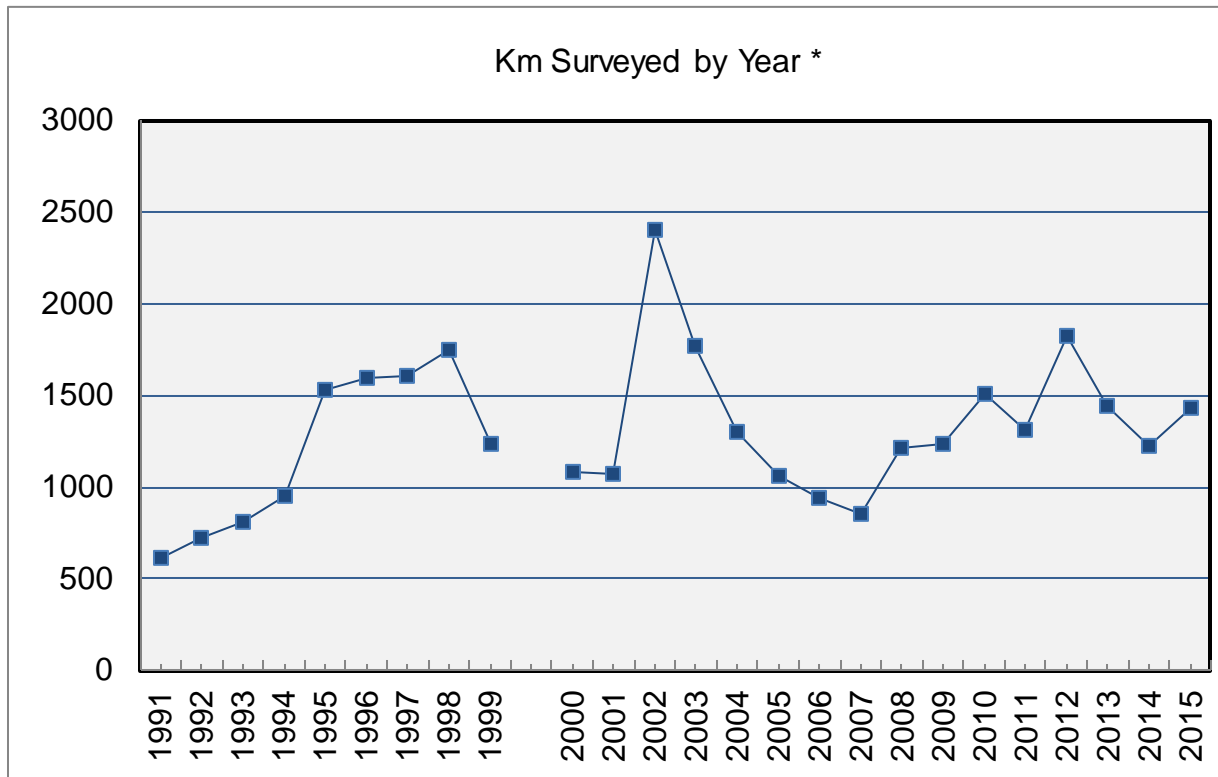


In March and April 2015, Manitoba completed its 25th annual volunteer nocturnal owl survey. Thanks go out to the 121 volunteers who surveyed 86 routes covering 1,435 km. An estimated total of 224 individual owls of nine owl species were detected for an overall detection rate of 0.156 owls per km, about the same as last year.

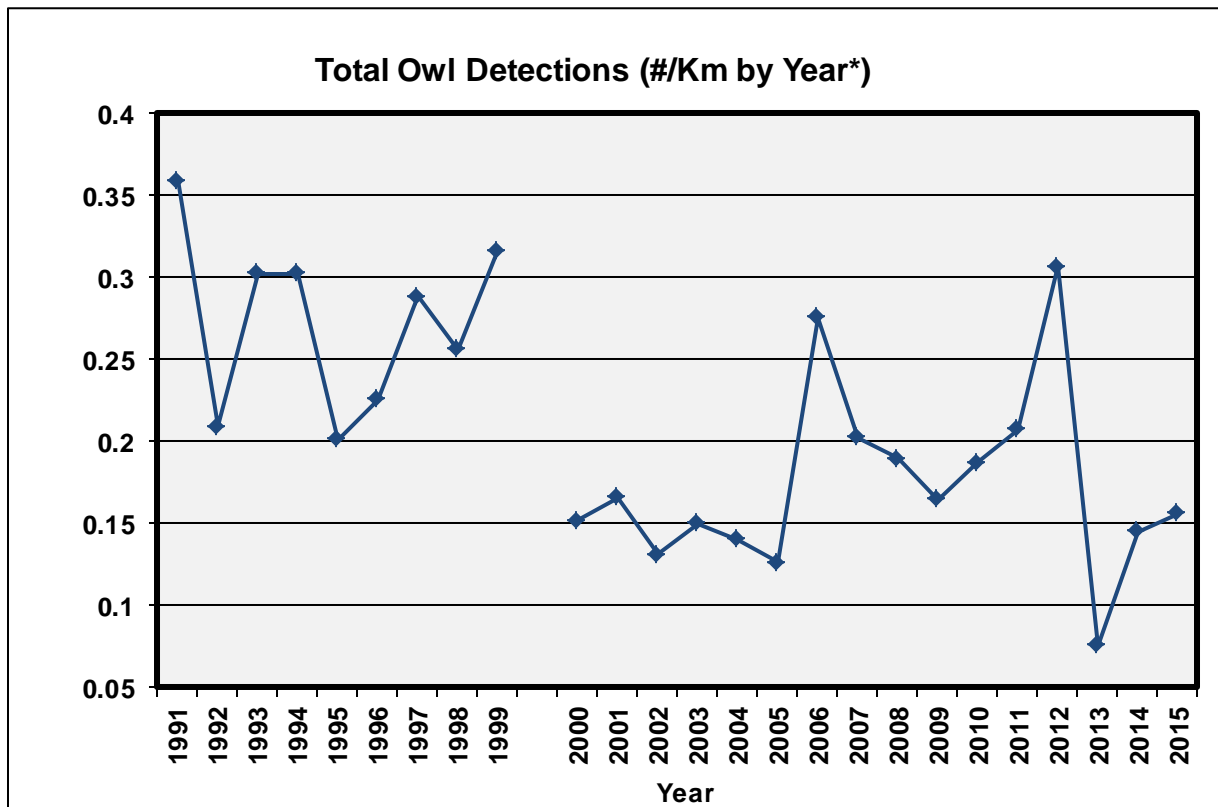
Great Horned Owls (n=85) were, as usual, the most commonly detected species in 2015, followed by 50 Northern Saw-whets, 19 Long-eared Owls, 18 Barred Owls, 16 Boreal Owls, 12 Short-eared Owls, 10 Great Gray Owls, 5 Northern Hawk Owls, 2 Snowy Owls and 7 'unknown owls'. Tables and graphs of cumulative information follow.

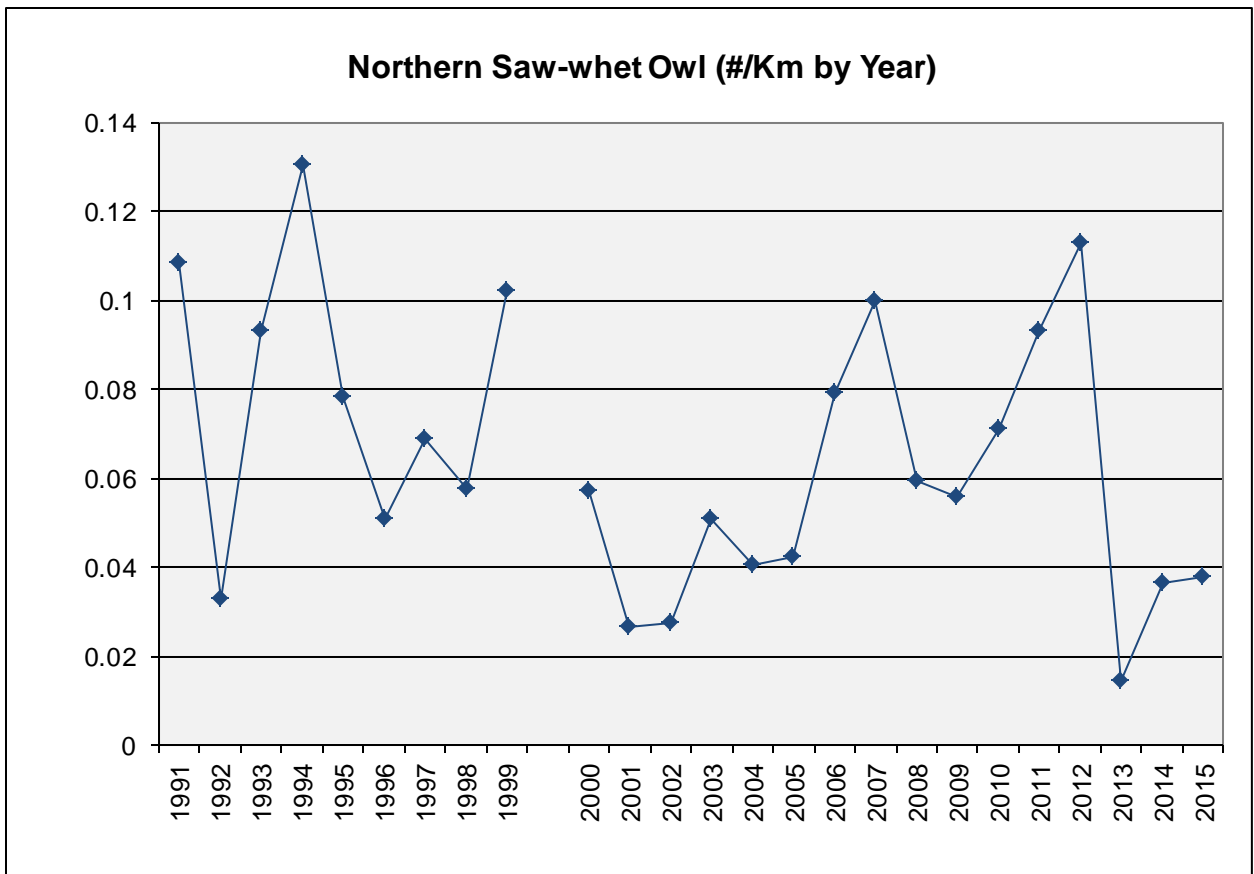
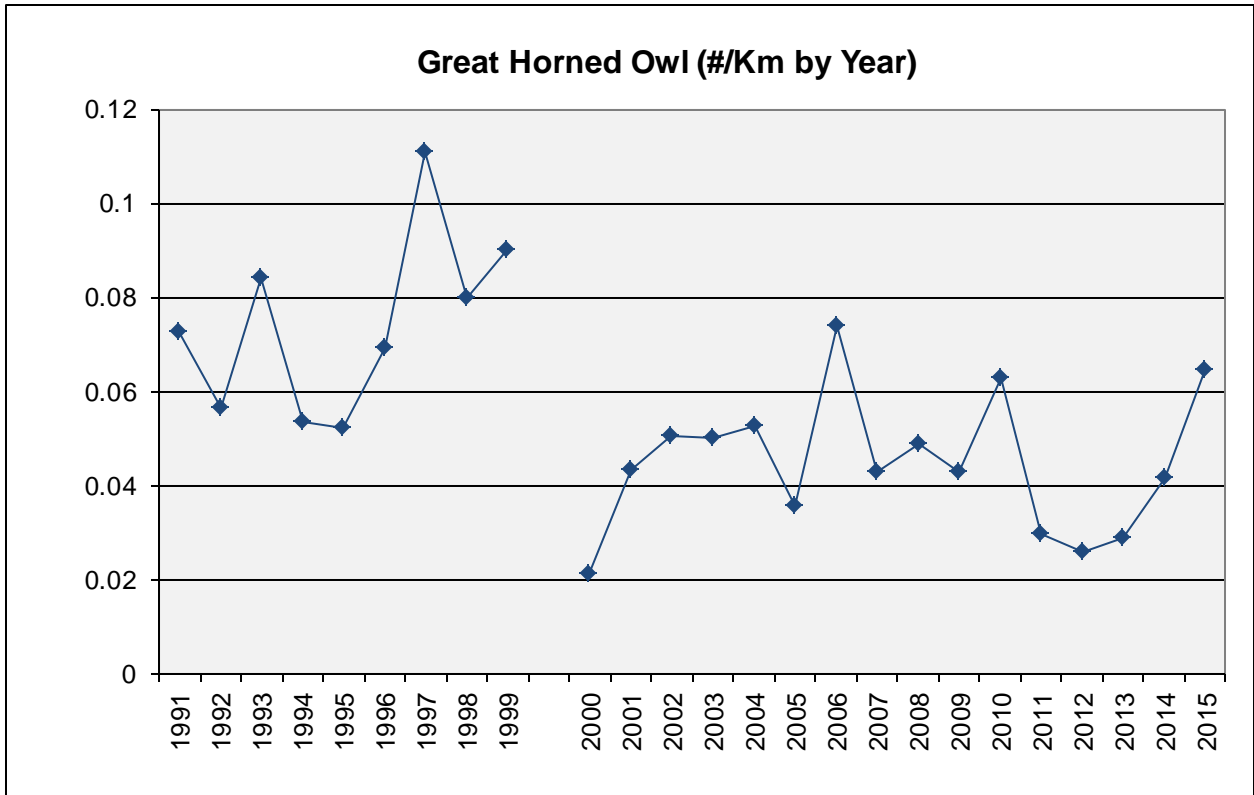
Year*	# Volunteers	Distance Surveyed (km)	# Routes	Total Owl Detections	# Owl Detections per km
2000	106	1,085	57	165	0.15
2001	91	1,070	57	180	0.17
2002	198	2,403	115	315	0.13
2003	162	1,776	107	267	0.15
2004	150	1,304	94	183	0.14
2005	102	1,067	74	135	0.13
2006	91	946	65	262	0.28
2007	68	856	52	170	0.2
2008	78	1,213	73	144	0.19
2009	92	1,237	77	204	0.17
2010	94	1,514	94	254	0.19
2011	103	1,318	84	274	0.21
2012	102	1,830	114	397	0.21
2013	93	1,448	89	110	0.08
2014	100	1,224	77	178	0.16
2015	121	1,435	86	224	0.16

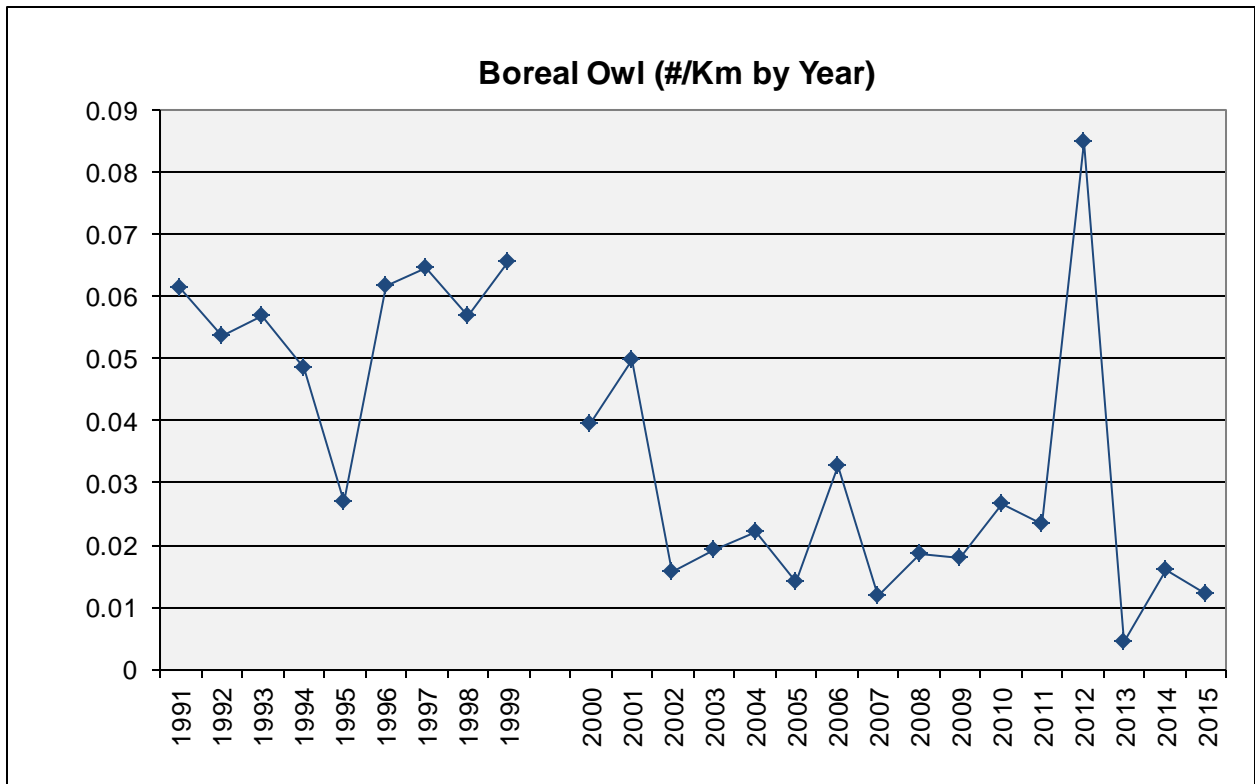
* Not all data presented here. Survey started in 1991 and used owl call playback until 1999.

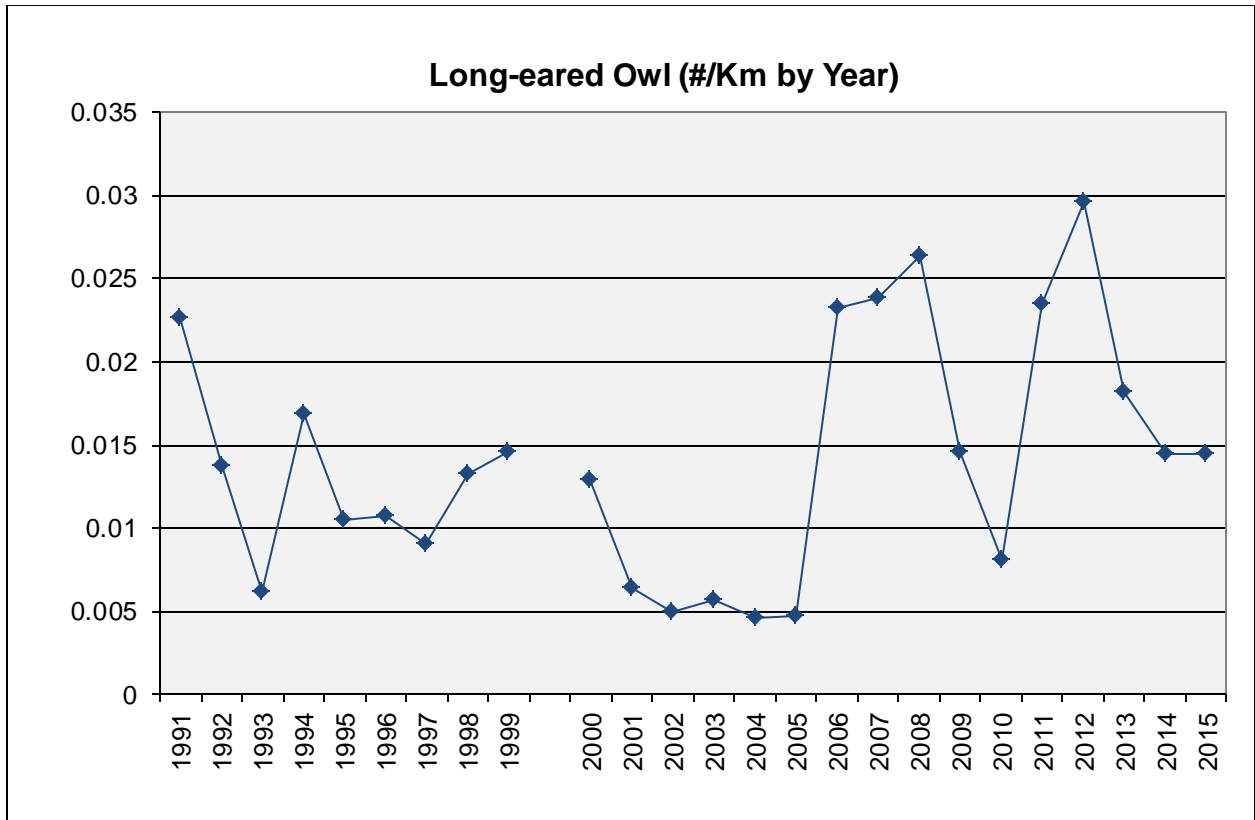


* Note that the survey methods changed in 2000 hence the broken line graph.



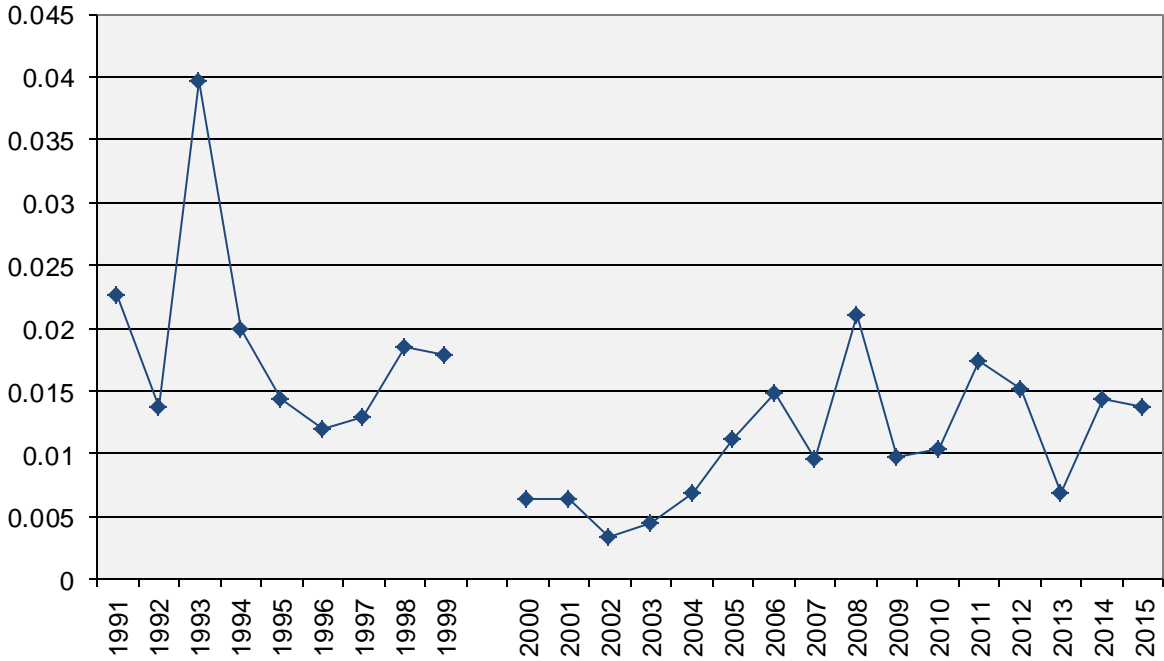


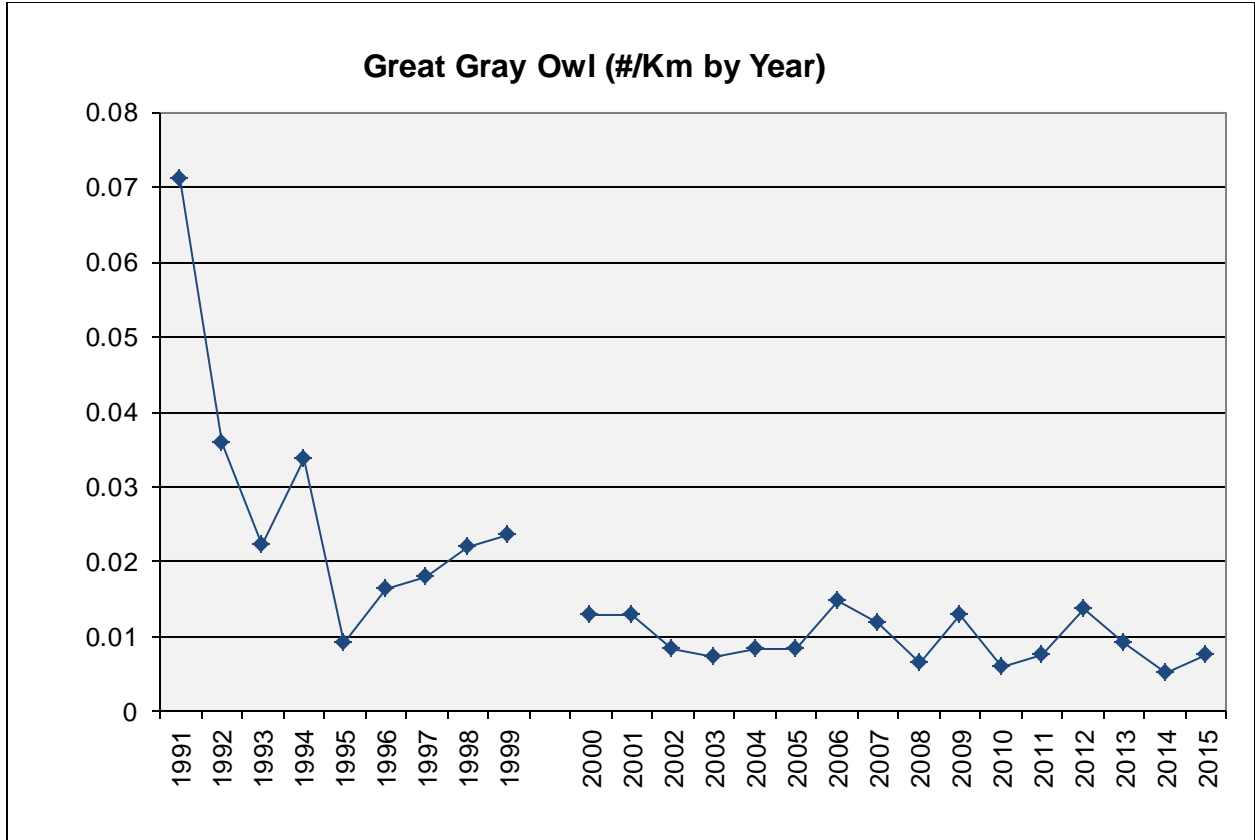






Barred Owl (#/Km by Year)





A Special Thank You



Thanks to the elementary students whose names cannot be published for their beautiful and interesting owl art work, used with permission from their teacher and school. Thanks also to Doug Collicutt for his continued support hosting owl survey information and documents on the Manitoba Nocturnal Owl Survey at:

http://www.naturenorth.com/summer/creature/owl/owl_new/owl2005.html

It would be impossible to collect such widespread information on owls without the help of survey volunteers year after year. So hats off to all the volunteer surveyors and assistants in 2015 listed below.

Christian Artuso, Ron Austin, Devon Baete, Carol Baete, Lynda Baker, Ron Bazin, Wren Bell, Mike Bell, Rob Berger, C-Jae Breiter, Kevin Breiter, Nancy Bremner, Bruce Bremner, Garry Budyk, Neil Butchard, Tim Byers, Sandy Campbell, Bonnie Chartier, Brooklyn Cherniak, Marcey Cherniak, Lewis Cocks, Barrie Creran, Cathy Creran, Linda Curtis, Cal Cuthbert, Chris Danielsen, Paulson Des Brisay, Grant Doak, Brenda Doak, Deanna Dodgson, Peter Douglas, James Duncan, Patsy Duncan, Bev Dunlop, Alvin Dyck, Chelsea Enslow, Michelle Ewacha, Farjana Ferdous, Samantha Fisher, Gary Franzmann, Maureen Frolick, Diane Gagnon, Rob Gagnon, Laura Groening, Tom Groening, Cathy Guttek, Brooke Hanson, Lydia Hildebrandt, Amanda Jacobs, Lars Jansson, Vince Jimenez, Scott Johnstone, Harmony Joyal, Jacqueline Joyal, Joel Kayser, Jason Kelly, Tina Kelly, Brian Kiss, Daniel Klassen, Rudolf Koes, Nicola Koper, Allison Krause-Danielsen, Georgina Larson,

Raymond Larson, Sharon Lidbetter, Jessica Lockhart, Jane MacDonald, Frank Machovec, Jacquie Machovec, Frank Machovec, Donna Martin, Kate McCormick, Laurel McDonald, Alex McIlraith, Marilyn Meyer, Albert Mickey, Barret Miller, Lorelie Mitchell, Mercedes Mueller, Colin Murray, Christoph Ng, Joan Nolan, Marika Olynyk, Justin Paillé, Danielle Papin, Morley Pedwell, Charlotte Pedwell, Ryan Porteous, Shane Pratt, Pauline Priadka, Erin Prokopanko, Sherry Punak-Murphy, Amelia Reid, Gillian Richards, Andrew Robert, Dave Roberts, John Robinson, Alan Robinson, Marion Robinsong, Cora Romanow, Emily Ryall, Jim Sackrider, Alex Sanderson, Erin Schroeder, Ken Schykulski, Serge Scrafield, Florence Scrafield, Bob Shettler, Rosalie Sigurdson, Erica Smith, Joanne Smith, Jo Swartz, Peter Taylor, Sharon Taylor, Dave Uhryniuk, Carol Wall, Margaret Yorke, and Reto Zach.

For information about the 2016 Manitoba Owl Survey please contact:

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If you participated in the 2015 owl survey and your name is not included above please send your 2015 data sheets to:

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Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship
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Manitoba R3J 3W3
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Who's hooting? A summary of a questionnaire sent to Manitoba owl surveyors.

by Christoph Ng (photobiophilia@gmail.com)

*"[My favourite memory is] warming up at Tim Horton's after a cold night out
"Hooting.""*

Who patrols the quiet, starlit backroads, listening for the owls? I invited past and present owl surveyors to help me answer that question, and received 69 responses to my questionnaire. Thank you to all respondents who shared their experiences with me! Here is what you had to say.

Who?

Owl surveyors were split almost evenly by gender, and tend to be older, with the largest cohort being 65 or older (70%), and the smallest cohort being 24 or younger (4%). It turns out owl surveyors are a well-educated lot, with 86% of respondents holding postsecondary credentials of some kind. By comparison, during the last Statistics Canada census, only 64% of Canadians met this qualification. 8.7% of respondents were postsecondary or graduate students.

How?

The average number of seasons that respondents participated for was 7.9. Calculated since an individual's first year, respondents maintained an average participation rate of 70% of years. An impressive seven individuals had participated since the survey's beginning in 1991, and 12 individuals, excluding 2015's first-year volunteers, had never missed a year. Owl surveyors are a keen bunch, as almost half of them (46%) have covered multiple routes during their time participation, and almost a third (32%) of respondents drove 100 km or more to their routes.

With whom?

Like birds of a feather, the majority of owl surveyors prefer to participate with friends or family, or occasionally students. Three individuals specifically said they liked to survey with fellow birders. Many of you shared favourite memories involving your co-surveyors. Some said they liked seeing the excitement of new people at their first owl encounter, but three people said their favourite moments were when they had scares in the dark! One person shared this story about surveying with an out-of-town sister:

“We were standing in a ditch next to the car, not far from a cemetery in the pitch black. It can be spooky listening to the dark in the early spring, when few creatures are stirring and all you can hear is the wind. We were trying to hear an owl we had heard on the last stop, when a grouse flew out of the ditch towards my sister, flapping and making a racket. She screamed so loud and we laughed and laughed and it was hilarious and scary and just the best.”

Why?

When asked what motivated them to participate, 41% of people cited personal reasons, such as a friend inviting them to join in, or a prior interest in birding. One person shared this story of childhood inspiration:

“When I was a kid, I read about the exploits of the original Nocturnal Owl Survey in my town's paper and always thought it sounded really, really "cool." The guys ... who did that were contributing to science and conservation efforts but in a pretty unique ... way. When I met birders through work, and was invited to be an assistant on a volunteer crew, I cleared my schedule and jumped in with both feet.”

A few people said they liked any excuse to be outside, especially at a time of year when there are few outdoor recreational activities.

“It's an opportunity to spend an evening in nature with the hope of hearing or seeing an owl or two. It is often a time to perhaps hear the first frogs of the spring, to be under the moon listening to the coyotes.”

Some people's motivations changed since they started out. For example, six people started out for personal or professional reasons but are now motivated by conservation concerns. In general, owl surveyors care about wildlife conservation and the environment. On a scale of 5, the average score for environmental concern was 4.7, and for conservation concern it was 4.8. Specific environmental concerns respondents described included climate change, pollution, water quality, agricultural drainage, and apathetic government and industries. Specific conservation concerns respondents listed included habitat loss and fragmentation, biodiversity loss, invasive species such as zebra mussels in Lake Winnipeg, overharvesting, poaching, loss of prairies, northern development, and urban sprawl. Several people commented on a disconnect between society and

nature, and others suggested increased partnership between government and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis is an important step toward addressing these issues.

What do they gain?

The majority of people reported that they gained new or increased knowledge from participating (77%). Owl-related experiences and appreciation was the second-most commonly described gain (38%), followed by nature- and outdoors-related experiences and appreciation (32%). Social interactions and satisfaction at having contributed to a conservation project were each described by 28% of people, followed by general enjoyment or “fun” (17%), and finally, a greater understanding for surveying techniques (15%).

When asked why they had stopped or may stop participating, respondents most frequently cited health or aging concerns, or relocation. Loss of a surveying partner was also commonly cited for why people stopped surveying, further highlighting the importance of the social aspect.

Favourite memories

I invited respondents to share a favourite memory of their participation. More than half of these involved wildlife and nature experiences, including owls (62%) and/or unrelated wildlife or nature experiences (42%). One individual described this memory:

“One night I was standing on a quiet country road when a loud pack of coyotes stampeded a herd of deer along the road in front of me. This is a moment you never forget!”

People also described enjoying encounters with lynx and wolves, and seeing the northern lights. Several respondents said they enjoyed the peacefulness of nature at night, for example:

“Experiencing the beautiful silence of a cold star studded night and the swift shadow of a great grey sweeping the sky above you is so well worth it. Taking time to be completely silent and just listen to the owls call, or not.”

Other favourite moments often arose due to social enjoyment of the activity, especially with students or new surveyors. One individual explained said:

“It's been especially rewarding these last few years as I've started to involve former students. It's great seeing their enthusiasm as we collect data.”

Of all the memories people shared, my favourite dates back to the earlier days of the survey:

“Near the beginning, we used to do playbacks and were constantly playing and rewinding tapes on a cold road in the dark. On one of those occasions I must have accidentally pressed record and discovered it too late. So at our next stop I started playing the Boreal call and we heard "toot, toot, toot, OH SHIT!" and were both laughing so loud we ended up laying on the highway holding our stomachs. We were very happy when we no longer needed to do the playbacks!”