



NSWO design by Wyatt Hersey

## Northern Saw-whet Owl Migration Monitoring Report 2016

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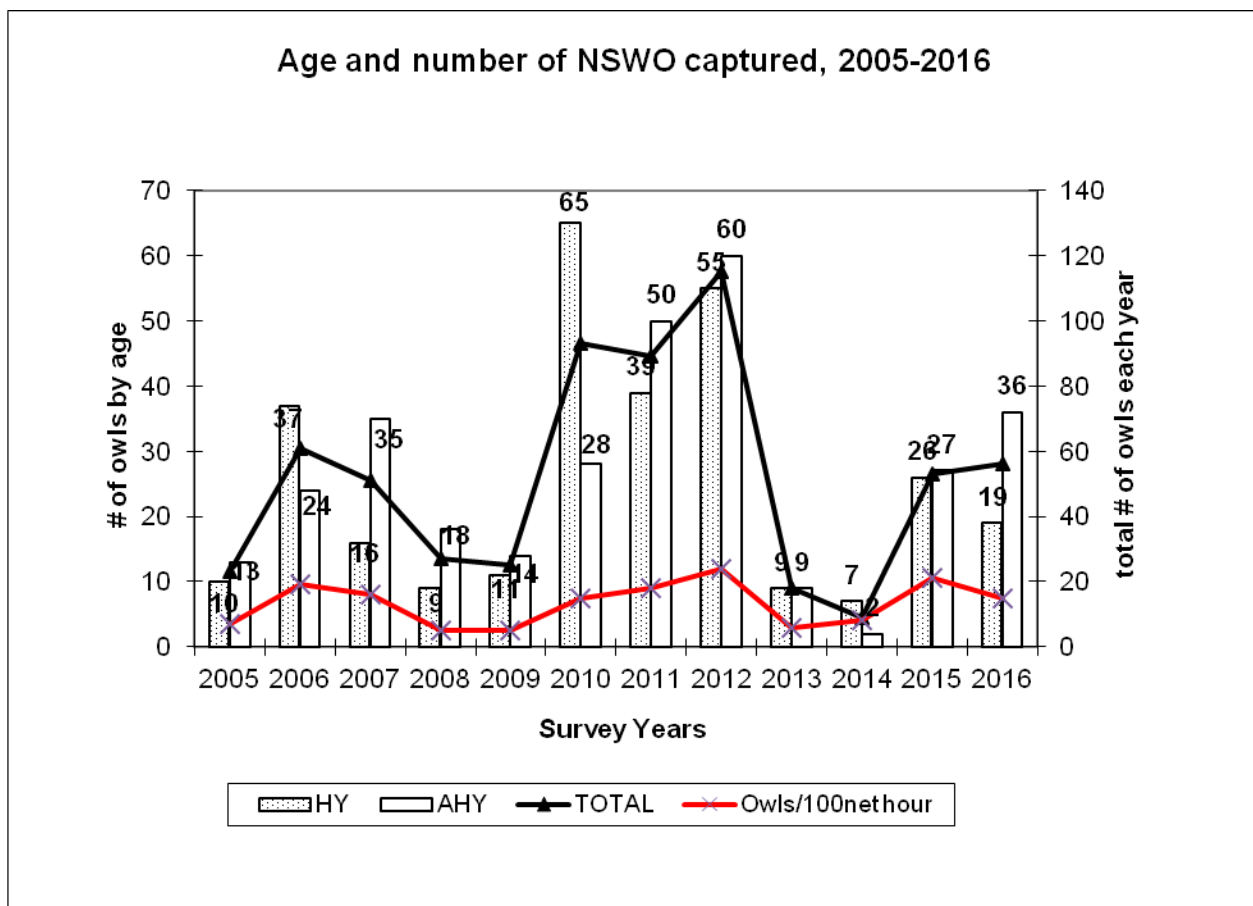
## Northern Saw-whet Owl Season Summary 2016 at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve

November 17 was the closing night to our Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) migration monitoring season for fall 2016 at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve (BCCER). Our twelfth season was similar to 2015 in terms of numbers of owls, with 56 total NSWO (2015 = 53 owls) banded. We had no recaptures of owls previously banded at the Reserve, but we had a record number of same season recaptures (n=9) See more about these recaptures below. We banded 19 nights from October 5- November 17, 2016

### 2016 Owl Population

#### Age

Adults outnumbered young this year, by almost double, where 64% of the birds were 2 years or older (N=36) and 12 of these were 3 years or older (Figure 1). 19 hatch year (HY) owls were hatched in spring 2016 (Figure 1). Although NSWO can live over 9 years (info based on banding), these tiny predators don't typically have a long lifespan. It was good to see so many older birds this year.



**Figure 1.** The number of owls by age: young (HY) shown as hatched bars and adults, (AHY, at least 2 years old) shown in solid white bars, banded during fall migration. The second Y axis (right) and black line show the total number of owls banded each season. In 2016, we captured 56 owls total consisting of 19 hatch year birds and 36 adults. The red line indicates how many owls we captured per our efforts that season (owls/100 net hours), and is the best way to compare our results each season.

### **Sex**

Sex is determined by the wing chord length and mass of the owl. Females are larger than males and there is an overlap zone between the sexes. As usual, our population consisted of mostly females, 44 females, 6 males, and 6 of unknown sex. Theories about this dramatic ratio seen at all NSWOW owl banding stations include, 1) the males remain on territory and do not migrate and 2) males are not attracted to the broadcast of the audiolure we use to attract the owls, and therefore rarely fly into the nets.

### **Recaptures**

This year we had no recaptures from previous seasons, and this figure is generally low over all years ranging from 0-2 recaps. This indicates that the owls don't always use the same migration route and wintering areas used in previous years, and/or are savvy to the nets and audiolure after being captured before (but see below), or may have a variable adult survival rate year to year. I assume a combination of the three.

Interestingly we had 9 same-season recaptures, ranging from 6-28 days from original banding, indicating the owls are spending a good amount of time on the Reserve. The factors that would keep them around would be a good prey base and adequate habitat for foraging and roosting. This is a record number of same-season recaps and most owls maintained a high weight, proving there were a good amount of rodents out there!

### **Incidental Captures**

Every year we capture a few species incidental to our NSWOW targets, like Western screech-owl (*Megascops kennicotti*). Screech owls are year-round residents and seem to be curious about the saw-whet audiolure. They are likely wondering who is intruding on their territory. This year we captured one screech owl, previously unbanded. We also captured and released one very cute and young, Northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*, Figure 2).



Figure 2. Northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*).

### **Community Outreach**

Educating the community about the saw-whets is an important part of our project. This year we partnered with the Forest Service to bring out Girl Scout Troop 70079. The girls enjoyed a night under the starry sky, sharing snacks, binoculars (for moon and star gazing) and stories, even scary ones. And they got to meet a saw-whet owl (Figure 3)! We also conducted a field trip with the Reserve naturalist Jon Aull and eight guests and had several volunteers visit over the season.



**Figure 3.** The Girl Scout Troop had a great outing at the Reserve, and so did we!

**Project Support and Volunteers**

Logistical support continued this year from CSU Research Foundation and Altacal Audubon Society. Main project banders and volunteers were Dawn Garcia, Julie Woodruff, Ken Sobon, Julie Newman, Maureen Morales, Wyatt Hersey, Erika Iacona and new volunteer Kim Armstrong. Thank you project sponsors, banders and volunteers!

**New T-shirt design**

Altacal's owl project was gifted a generous piece of art by bander Wyatt Hersey. We hope to sell these t-shirts at events to help provide funding for the owl fund- which we maintain to purchase and replace equipment for the monitoring project. If you haven't guessed yet, it is the design on the front of this report, thank you Wyatt!