



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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Vernal Ranger District
Ashley National Forest
353 North Vernal Ave.
Vernal, Utah 81648

Reply to: 2670

Date: April 28, 1994

Ella Sorensen
3868 Marsha Drive
West Valley City, UT 84120

Dear Ella:

Thank you for speaking with Russell Norvell the other day; we appreciate your interest in the boreal owl observation. As you requested during the phone conversation on the 25th, here are the specifics of the observation.

1993 marked the second year of on-going owl studies on the Ashley National Forest. These studies have primarily focused on the survey of potential timber harvest areas for boreal, great grey, and flammulated owls. However, we have collected data on the presence and relative abundance of other forest owl species as well. The observers' (Sarah Dewey and Russell Norvell) personal field experience also includes several years of survey and inventory studies of diurnal raptors, picidae species, and breeding land birds.

Their methodology followed the guidelines developed in Region 1 of the Forest Service with the assistance of Greg Hayward. Broadcast stations (spaced at 0.5 mile intervals along linear transects) were surveyed with a series of three, three-minute segments of conspecific territorial calls (obtained from the Laboratory of Natural Sounds, Cornell University). Each vocalization segment was followed by a three-minute observation period. Broadcasts in 1993 were made using a pair of amplified speakers (Sony SRS-55 Speaker System) and a portable cassette player (Sony Cassette Player WM-EX30). As boreal and great grey owls were being surveyed concurrently, the great grey owl vocalizations were played after the boreal segments to avoid inhibiting smaller owl responses.

At approximately 10:30 pm on March 3, 1993, Sarah and Russell heard a boreal owl giving a territorial call at a survey station. The call was heard after all three boreal and great grey vocalization segments had been played and came late in the final observation period. The boreal gave an agitated-sounding territorial call (in phrases) lasting approximately 30 seconds, but did not respond to additional vocalization broadcasts. The call was unmistakably that of a boreal owl (the observers are very familiar with boreal calls as well as the vocalizations of potentially confusing or mimicking species occurring in the area).

It was a very clear, cold (below 0° F) windless night and the ground was covered by 3 to 3 1/2 feet of relatively powdery snow. The station was located in an open wet meadow, bordered on three sides by forest and on one side by East Park Reservoir (Vernal Ranger District, elevation 9020 ft). The boreal owl called from the upper portion of the canopy in a stand of trees bordering the meadow, approximately 250 feet away from the broadcast station (however, due to the cold temperatures dampening headlamp batteries the observers were not able to pick up the owl visually). The forest




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in the area is a mixed conifer type which includes Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmanni*), sub alpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*), and lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*). Pockets of aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) are also present. A mountain pine beetle epidemic swept through the area in the late 1970's and early 1980's killing a large percentage of the larger diameter lodgepole pine. Salvage operations have been concentrated in the area and have consequently fragmented the surrounding habitat.

Sarah and Russell are certain they heard a boreal owl. What strikes them as unusual about its behavior is that it called for such a relatively short duration (since they are reported to be persistently vocal) and that it called after the broadcast of a potential predator. It's atypical behavior remains a question. We did not seek formal acceptance of the observation earlier as it was hoped that corroborating data would be collected this season. However, to date we have been disappointed in this effort with no additional observations to report (although we should note a possible location on the Flaming Gorge District in 1992, but one so brief and distant that confirmation was not possible). We hope our observation will be accepted as a confirmed record and that it will encourage others to seek out this forest owl previously so conspicuously absent from Utah. Thank you again for your interest.

Sincerely,



for MARY WAGNER
District Ranger