



Snowy Owls breeding in Shetland in 1967

March 1968

The nesting of a pair of Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* on Fetlar, Shetland, in 1967 was the first substantiated record in the wild in the British Isles. Publicity was inevitable and so the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds organised a round-the-clock watch until the young had flown. This paper is based on data in logbooks at the observation hut and on my own records. Witherby et al. (1938-41) described the Snowy Owl as 'Almost regular winter-visitor to Shetlands and frequent Orkneys and Hebrides, often on mainland of Scotland and in Ireland' and listed over 30 records for England. Over twenty years later Hollom (1962) noted it as 'Now rare and irregular even in the north of Scotland'. During the five years 1958-62 the Rarities Committee accepted only four records, in Banff, Angus, Kincardine and Anglesey. In Ireland there were 50 records before 1950, but in the next 15 years only one (Ruttledge 1966). From 1963 onwards, however, British records became more frequent. In the four years 1963-66, quite apart from a number in Shetland, over 20 were accepted from 14 counties in Scotland and England. Some of the southerly ones may have been escapes, 'surprisingly large' numbers of this species having been imported in recent years (Harber 1966). On the other hand, Nagell and Frycklund (1965) have described a series of irruptions of Snowy Owls in Scandinavia in the winters of 1960-63, with a peak of 33 in

January 1962 and breeding proved in six areas



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