

NEST DEFENSE BEHAVIOR IN SNOWY OWLS (*NYCTEA SCANDIACA*)^{TWS}

J.L. Petersen, D.W. Holt, and S.L. Drasen

Owl Research Institute

P.O. Box. 8335, Missoula, MT 59807

In 1995 and 1996 at Barrow, Alaska, we studied the nest defense behavior of snowy owls at 73 nests. We recorded female flushing distance from the nest, and vocalizations, attacks, distraction displays, and perching distances of both males and females. Females exhibited an unusual decoying behavior during incubation and brooding, flushing from their nests as researchers approached (mean = 393 m, n = 304, range = 57 - 780 m, SD = 137 m). Median flushing distances differed significantly among individual females; $X' = 146.9$, $df = 46$, $p < 0.0005$. Barks, hoots, screams, attacks, and distraction displays differed significantly between the sexes. Males barked often, hooted little, and almost never screamed, while females barked and screamed frequently, but rarely hooted. Males exhibited more aggression than females, attacking during 237 nest visits (n = 2075) while females attacked only 52 times. However, females exhibited more distraction displays, performing on 204 visits (n = 2066), nearly 3 times as often as males. Perching distance differed significantly between the sexes with males perching an average of 40 m closer to researchers; $t = 6.1$, $df = 828$, $p < 0.005$.