

Atlantic Canada Nocturnal Owl Survey

Boreal Owl Identification Sheet



Male Boreal Owl vocalizations are often confused with “winnowing” sounds made by the tail feathers of the Wilson’s Snipe during erratic, territorial flight displays. At close range the feathery quality of the Snipe’s sound is apparent, but this is often lost at a distance - making the distinction a real challenge even for the most experienced listener. Snipe displays can follow flushing and include circling and rapid ascents to about 50m up, followed by 45° dives during which the winnowing sound is usually emitted, though it may also be heard during level flight. The Wilson’s Snipe is found abundantly throughout North America living in wetlands such as swamps and the edges of ponds and rivers. Winnowing can be heard throughout the day and night; but is most common at dusk. In addition to the winnowing sounds, Wilson’s Snipe may make a sudden, rasping *scaap* sound that is uttered when the bird is flushed.

The Boreal Owl vocalization often confused with winnowing tends not to be emitted during flight. Boreal Owls are typically found in more wooded areas and will not fly in erratic patterns like the Wilson’s Snipe. Owls vocalize regularly throughout the night, such that noises heard later in the night are more likely owl vocalizations. As well, male owl calls may be followed by female owl vocalizations, and tend to be crisper than winnowing.

Along with training CDs provided for the Boreal Owl Survey, the following questions can help you to accurately distinguish between Boreal Owls and Wilson’s Snipe by sound. Please submit this sheet with your data forms.

Name: _____ Date of Survey: _____

Province: _____ Route #: _____ Stop #: _____

Was the bird vocalizing while in flight? Y N

Please describe the characteristics of this flight (e.g. where was it flying between, how long was it in flight, did it change altitude as it flew, etc.):

Please describe any other sounds heard (e.g. Snipe vocalizations, wing sounds, other owl vocalizations, etc.):

Please describe the habitat at the survey station and in the direction from which the call was heard (e.g. tree cover, proximity to wetlands, etc.):

Have you heard and identified winnowing during the flight display of a Wilson’s Snipe before?
Y N

Have you heard and confirmed (i.e. through visual observation) a Boreal Owl before?
Y N

How confident in Boreal Owl identification by call? Very Somewhat Not very

