

FEBRUARY 15-28, 2022. NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

FEBRUARY SNOWSTORM



A day after the storm looking from our front door to the Inn. © Dick Harlow

Just when we think that our winters are getting warmer, and the snow cover is diminishing along comes a large February snowstorm! After experiencing the snowstorm, we had on February 2-4 it felt similar to what I had experienced in Vermont in 2010 and back in the late 1950's. So, I decided to do a little digging to see if I could come up with information that would suggest that maybe this storm did rival past storms.



A look up Deer Meadow Drive, © Dick Harlow

This year we have had snow on the ground, minimal bare spots, for the whole month of January into February. Temperatures have been quite low compared with the past several years and fairly normal to the way I remember the temperatures here in Vermont back in the late 1950's.



Looking out our back door to our patio facing southeast. © Dick Harlow

Here is the information I was able to glean: No, this storm is not the mightiest or the most snow we have received in a single snowfall. That title is held by the storm in 2010 that produced 31-plus inches in a single snowfall and holds the record for the state. Plus, Vermont sees more snow in a year than any other state in the union, about 54 days and 89.25 inches of snow a year, ranking tops in the nation!

I guess immediate experience needs the information and data of the past to bring realism back into our thinking so that our imagination doesn't run out of control. However, this storm was certainly first-rate

SNOWY OWL



Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*, © Dick Harlow

The Snowy Owl is a nomadic Arctic owl, which means they do not breed in the same place or with the same mate each year. They also are dependent on the fluctuations of lemmings in the Arctic. Every four to five years Snowy Owls have in irruption or an increase in population and that increase will tend to spread below the Canadian border into Vermont and other Northern states just below the border during the winter. Consequently, every four to five years we can see Snowy Owls in Vermont.



Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*, © Dick Harlow

Snowy Owls are native to northern North America and northern Europe and Asia. It is an all-white owl with dark markings or dark tips to white feathers. Immature and female Snowy Owls will have more dark markings than males at maturity. Since these pictures were taken here in Vermont at this time of year, we can conclude that both images of different individuals are either immature owls or females. My guess is that they are immatures.

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An adult male owl will tend to be purer white overall.

Although most owls sleep during the day and hunt at night the Snowy Owl is an exception, especially in summer. Considered both a generalist as well as a specialist hunter. Since they nest in the tundra, they are specialized hunters of lemmings. Since lemming population dynamics are tied to whether their populations is increasing or decreasing, an owl's population will ultimately depend on such an occurrence.

In winter Snowy Owls tend to move below the arctic and where they become generalist hunters. They then will adapt to hunting whatever is available. They will feed on other mammals, water birds such as ducks, even carrion if the opportunity arises.

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Red Fox
Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Average February Precipitation for Vermont = 1.8 inches.

Total precipitation for February was 53.8 mm or 2.1 inches. This is a 0.33- inches above average.

Overcast Days: We had 20 days of overcast skies. Of those overcast skies 6 days produced precipitation, mostly snow. This month definitely helped the draught we are in even though it may not seem like it did.