

# OUTDOORS

## Second wave of snowy owls may be coming

CORNELL LAB STAFF REPORT

What could be the largest-ever influx of arctic snowy owls into the northeast and the Great Lakes states may be followed by another wave, say biologists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The killing of some owls at New York City airports has resulted in an outcry against the practice, which was deemed necessary to protect passengers after instances when owls were sucked into plane engines. The port authority has announced it will move toward non-lethal trap and release methods.

Kevin McGowan, a biologist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, applauded the move by the port authority to pursue non-lethal methods of removing snowy owls from New York City airports. He said the action is essential to reduce risk to people and also preserves the lives of the raptors.

“The sudden influx of these birds, called an ‘irruption,’ may be the first

wave,” said McGowan in a news released. “More snowy owls are poised to head south looking for food and will be attracted to wide open expanses, such as airports, because they resemble their native tundra. Now that we know this is happening, airports can prepare for it by connecting with local wildlife removal experts, as the port authority has done. In most cases, we’ll be talking about a few birds per airport.”

McGowan said it’s likely these snowy owls are moving south from the Arctic because of a shortage of their favorite food up north — lemmings, or because of a bumper crop of young birds.

“We can expect them to stick around through early spring before they head back to the Arctic again,” he said.

This year’s snowy owl irruption is the largest the lab has witnessed in decades in the Northeast, he said, saying it “is an awesome opportunity for people to see these birds. A really great way to find out where they are in

your area is to check out the live maps at eBird, which tracks reports of the snowy owls, at [www.eBird.org](http://www.eBird.org). Snowy Owls are one of the most impressive animals on the planet. You don’t have to be a bird watcher to appreciate how cool they are.”

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website says the snowy owl nests in the arctic tundra in northern Canada and Alaska. But during many winters, this large, white raptor comes to northern Minnesota to hunt voles, mice, and other small animals.

**IDENTIFICATION**

- General description: The snowy owl is a large, white owl with a round head, yellow eyes, no ear tufts and a black beak.
- Length: About 22 inches.
- Weight: Five pounds. (About the same size as a great horned owl.)
- Color: Some snowy owls are nearly pure white. Others are heavily speckled in black or brown.

■ Sound: Although snowy owls hoot and make various other calls during the nesting season, they are mostly silent during winter migration.

**REPRODUCTION**

Snowy owls do not nest in Minnesota. The female snowy owl lays her eggs on a grassy hummock in the arctic. The number of eggs varies, depending on the amount of food in a particular area.

**FOOD**

Snowy owls eat lemmings, voles, mice, rabbits, and birds.

**PREDATORS**

Some snowy owls are killed by great horned owls, coyotes, and foxes.

**HABITAT AND RANGE**

Snowy owls live on arctic tundra, open grasslands and fields, and even on frozen stretches of water. When they migrate into northern Minnesota they are sometimes seen hunting for food

in railroad yards and other city areas. They usually perch on the ground or on buildings or utility poles.

**POPULATION AND MANAGEMENT**

Some years many snowy owls visit Minnesota. Other years almost none come here. They are seen most often in the northern half of the state. However, there is no permanent population of snowy owls in this state. During winters when snow and cold in Canada drive snow owls south (known as “invasion years”) these birds may be seen in the southern part of Minnesota.

**FUN FACTS**

- The snowy owl is well camouflaged to hunt its prey in snow-covered areas. Biologists capture snowy

owls by casting a fake mouse with a fishing pole into an open area and then reeling in as fast as possible. As the owl flies down to catch the mouse, it is netted.

■ Harry Potter’s owl, Hedwig, is a female snowy owl.



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**CONGRATULATIONS!**


**STUDENTS OF THE MONTH ANNOUNCED AT INDUS**  
*The following students have been named "Students of the Month" at Indus School based on their exemplary behavior and attitudes, academic achievement or special achievement, and uniqueness. Four students are chosen from these groupings on a monthly basis: Grades 10-12, Grades 7-9, Grades 4-6, Grades K-3.*

Students recognized in December for October in Elementary are:



Kyle Kramer


Kindergartener Kyle Kramer. Kyle's teacher, Miranda Gustafson, says he is very prepared, efficient, and neat.



Tiana Carlin


Sixth grader Tiana Carlin. Tiana's nomination recognized her good behavior and grades.

High School Students of the Month are:




Maggie Morgan

Seventh grader Maggie Morgan. Maggie "exemplifies responsibility, good work, and leadership," according to her nominator.



Alexandra Knoff

Junior Alexandra Knoff. Alex shows "leadership, dependability, and a flair for design," according to the staff member who nominated her.



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