

THE MONTCLAIR BIRD CLUB

YOUR WEEKLY BIRD 24

February 18, 2024

By Rick Wright

Snowy Owl



Project Snowstorm is dedicated to understanding snowy owls and their movements in North America, using data collected by solar-powered transmitters carefully attached to birds captured on the East Coast and in the Midwest. One of the study's many accomplishments is confirmation of snowy owls' close ties to water: Snowstorm has "for the first time . . . documented in detail their hunting behavior at night over the open ocean, often using channel markers and buoys as hunting perches" (projectsnowstorm.org).

Long before the days of electronic tracking, though, snowy owls were observed at sea. In 1712, Mark Catesby saw an owl, presumably a snowy owl, flying low over the waves halfway between Africa and the Americas. A hundred twenty years later, Thomas MacCulloch saw a snowy more than 200 miles off the coast of Newfoundland. In November 1838, the ship *John and Robert*, on a voyage from Quebec to Belfast, recorded thirty or forty snowies some 250 miles out to sea from Labrador; the next day, as the ship approached a distance of 400 miles from land, a few were seen perched in the rigging. Two days later, fifty or sixty napped on board the ship before continuing their flight to an unknown destination.

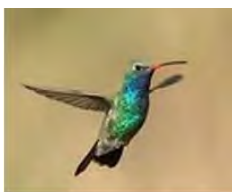
The crew of the *John and Robert* found the sight of the migrant owls “extremely beautiful,” quite a different reaction from that of one sailor in 1864. Finding a snowy owl perched quietly on the ropes, he ran back into the ship, warning his comrades that Davy Jones himself was sitting on the main yard, watching him with great yellow eyes.



Snowy Owl at Mill Creek Marsh, by Sandy Sorkin

Bird Migration on Merchant Ships: [Video](#)

If you would like to see your photographs highlighted here, send one or two pictures with a short paragraph to Sandy Sorkin & Rick Wright at MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.



Southwest Wings

