

# Manitoba's Nocturnal Owl Survey

## 2009 GENERAL INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

Manitoba's Nocturnal Owl Survey uses standard data forms. Please note the instructions below on how to record your survey data on these forms.

### **Completing the Data Forms:**

The first page of your data sheets can be completed before starting the survey; please fill out the route and surveyor information on this form. A summary of the key survey instructions and definitions for various codes that should be used in completing the data forms is included with your survey package. Detailed instructions for filling out the forms, as well as examples of completed forms are included below.

**Remember to submit one copy of the completed data form per route.**

**Please return the completed copy by email or regular mail to:**

**Jim Duncan, Manitoba Nocturnal Owl Survey, Manitoba Conservation, Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent, Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3 [James.Duncan@gov.mb.ca](mailto:James.Duncan@gov.mb.ca)**

### **COMPLETING DATA FORMS – HELPFUL HINTS**

**USE A PEN** instead of a pencil or felt-tipped marker when filling in forms as they are easier to read.

**PLEASE PRINT** legibly using block letters (i.e. **BARR** not **Barr** for Barred Owl).

**STAY BETWEEN THE LINES** when filling out your datasheet. If you need more room than what is provided, please use the "Comments" section or attach a separate page.

**Route Information: (located on the first page of your data sheets)**

**Number and Name:** Previously surveyed routes have been assigned a standard number (e.g., 52E/12-1 ... which includes information on the 1:250,000 topographic map the route starts on) and name. If it is a new route, then give it a descriptive name (e.g., a numbered highway or regional road, or use the nearest town or lake rather than the local road name). To help us locate your route, provide the name of the nearest town.

**Status:** Please indicate whether this is a new route, existing route (i.e. surveyed previously), or a modified version of an existing route.

**Surveyor/assistant information:** Provide the name, mailing address (where you want further correspondence directed), and phone number of both the surveyor and assistant(s).

**Date:** The data forms provide a space to fill in the year, month and day.

**Weather:** Using the codes provided, record the weather conditions at both the start and end of the survey. Estimate the snow cover %, maximum and minimum snow depth, and temperature and fill in these values in the appropriate spaces.

**Odometer reading:** This information is particularly important if a stop is shifted from the standard station spacing. Please be sure to record distances in kilometers.

**Time at each stop:** Record the time of day using the 24-hour clock at the start of each new stop.

**Owl Information:** At each stop, record each owl detected. This information goes in the column immediately to the right of the time/odometer column. Please use the four-letter abbreviation for each species, as provided on the summary instruction sheet. For each stop, up to 4 different owls can be recorded on the lines provided. Record *each* individual owl on a separate line even if they are the same species. Follow the sample form carefully! If more than four owls are detected at a stop, they should be recorded in the spaces provided at the end of the form. Be sure to write in the stop number beside any additional owls.

**Repeat?** If you think that you are hearing the same individual owl at two different stops (example, same Barred Owl heard at Stops 1 and 2), then mark a ‘Y’ in the “Repeat?” column on the datasheet.

**Direction to owl:** For each owl heard calling, estimate the direction it is calling from *the point when it first began to call* using a compass (e.g. north, north-east, east, south-east, south). Enter the direction (e.g. NE) in the given column, making sure to use the appropriate 2 letter code.

**Distance to owl:** For each owl heard calling, estimate its distance from you *at the point when it first began to call* by checking off the appropriate distance category (<200m, 200-500m, etc.). If you do not have a compass, note the direction as best as you can (i.e. NW, SE, etc.). This will help map owl locations. It is unlikely that the same owl will be detected at more than two consecutive stations (though some owls can be heard up to 4 km away on a calm night).

**Number of other species heard:** At each stop record the number of Ruffed Grouse (RUGR), Common Snipe (COSN), and American Woodcock (AMWO) heard in the “Other Species” section of your datasheet. Extra comments may go under “comments”.

### **Survey Instructions**

1. Surveys should be conducted in the last two weeks of March and the first two weeks of April. This can be extended a week or so, depending on seasonal variation or latitude, but don’t do it too late or the frog calls will overwhelm any owl calls!
2. Surveys should be conducted as close as possible to the same day and same time of night over consecutive years.
3. Surveys should be conducted on nights with little or no wind (<20 km/hr or Beaufort scale of 3 or less) and with no rain.

4. Begin survey 30 minutes after sunset (consult local newspaper for correct time). Surveys should be **completed by midnight**.
5. Routes consist of **ten (10) stations at 1.6 kilometre (1 mile) intervals**. If noise at a station (e.g., dogs barking) makes it difficult to hear owls, move the station slightly (100m). Make sure to note this shift in “comments”. So as not to alter the distance of the full route, measure your subsequent station 1.6 km from where this station was originally to be. **If you are doing a new route, please scout out the road beforehand to ensure it is passable for the entire distance of the survey.**
6. If your route is long enough you may want to do two continuous, 10-station routes. They can be done on the same night (if time allows) or on different evenings. Please complete a separate data sheet set for each route.
7. **Please mark your map with the following information:** Starting point (“Start”), number each station, end point (“End”), and your estimate of where any owls detected were located.
8. Routes were either selected by volunteers or by the survey coordinator. Route conditions can change from year to year -- you may discover that your route is not passable. If this happens please let us know and mark on the map where you surveyed.
9. Please do not use owl call playback tapes or human vocalizations (imitations of owl calls) during the survey. If after you have completed the route you want to use playback, please do so responsibly so as not to disturb the owls excessively.
10. At each station, pull off the road a safe distance and turn off the engine. Walk away from the vehicle far enough so that any noise from the vehicle will not interfere with your ability to hear owls.
11. Listening time is **two (2) minutes** per stop. Record all owls heard and/or seen on the data sheet, making an additional notation of owls that are seen. If you are unsure of the sound, take notes for later identification. Please use the four-letter species code provided.
12. Note the direction of each owl recorded on the data sheet (see instructions above) and mark its estimated location on the map.
13. Estimate the distance of each owl as described in the instructions.
14. In “comments” column, please record Ruffed Grouse, Common Snipe, American Woodcock, coyotes, wolves, species of frogs and any other wildlife of interest, including numbers where possible.
15. Record noise level using the codes provided on your survey forms.

### **Items to Bring on the Survey:**

**Warm clothes:** Warm spring evenings can turn cold quickly so please bring suitable clothes. We recommend clothes made of wool, fleece, and/or polyester. Don't forget mittens, a hat, a warm coat

and boots.

**Flashlight:** Just in case you have car trouble or you drop something while outside.

**Thermometer:** To record the temperature during your survey.

**Compass:** To determine directions to calling owls, especially if the moon and stars are obscured by clouds or the road is curving, and hence making it difficult to determine orientation.

**Watch/Clock:** A watch or clock with seconds to time the silent listening periods.

**A Reliable Vehicle:** Breakdowns are undesirable on remote roads in early spring!

**A Map:** We ask that surveyors kindly obtain or prepare a map (a hand drawn map is better than no map) to return with the data. Please information on the map (start, end, stops, where owls were detected).

**Safety supplies:** Some important safety supplies should be included in your vehicle whenever you travel. These include a candle, an empty can and matches (for heat and light), a blanket or warm sleeping bag, a first aid kit, a thermos of water, and some snacks. A tire jack, extra tire, a tire iron, road flares and tools are important if you get a flat tire. It is best to do your survey with a buddy.

Finally, enjoy yourself and safe owling! We thank you for your contribution to this owl survey. If you have any questions, please contact us. Please mail survey results and field maps to:

**Jim Duncan**  
**Manitoba Nocturnal Owl Survey**  
**Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent**  
**Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3**  
**Email: Jduncan@gov.mb.ca**  
**Fax: 204-945-3077**

***Special Note for 2009: Please email or phone me as soon as possible if you detect a Barred Owl. University of Manitoba graduate student Todd Whiklo is starting a research project on this species this spring and the information will be very important to help this effort.***