



## Citizen Science Year End Project Summary Report 2023

**Project Title:** Project OWLNET

**No of active volunteers:** 5

**Season Schedule:** 27 October-19 November 2023

**Total # of field project hours (incl field, data, maintenance, etc.):** 160

**Project Overview:** Project OWLNET has three goals:

- Support the continuing expansion of a network of migrant owl banding stations.
- Advocate the use of standardized, comparable netting protocols.
- Improve communication and coordination among owl migration research stations in North America and beyond.

### **Methods:**

- We use standard nylon mist nets, 12m long, 36mm mesh. Our 4 nets are set up in a line, running east to west. A recorded call of a male NSWOW is draws owls into the nets.
- Volunteers check nets hourly, carefully extract any captured owls and take them to the Plummer House for processing. Standard aluminum leg bands are placed on the owls.
- Important data collected are weight and wing length, which indicates sex, and flight feather molt limits, which indicate age.
- Upon completion of the processing the owls are released from outside the house.
- All data are reported to the Bird Banding Lab, Eastern Ecological Science Center, at the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, MD.

### **Key Findings:**

- Our results at the Sanctuary are always lower than at other stations in the Mid-Atlantic.
- Despite these lower results, the owls probably do use our local habitat every year.
- We have placed our nets at different locations on the Sanctuary over the years, with the River Farm and the current Preserve locations providing the best results.

**Impact:**

- Prior to the start of this project NSWOW were not even known to occur at the Sanctuary.
- The project has enabled us to learn important details about the timing and patterns of their migration.
- Recaptures of banded birds, either ours or others, reveal critical data about longevity and migration routes.
- Preservation of diverse habitats with ample prey species such as are found at the Sanctuary is important to the winter survival of NSWOW.

**Challenges Faced:**

- A major challenge is finding a safe and secure processing location near a good net location and in suitable habitat.
- Operating costs are primarily for equipment. They are modest on an annual basis, but some financial support is required to establish and maintain the banding station.

**Recommendations:**

- Continue to participate in the project.
- Monitor peak flight times in the Mid-Atlantic region and adjust our operating season accordingly.
- Keep our lines of communication with the project leaders open to answer questions and monitor trends.
- Continue to consider other locations on the Sanctuary for net placement.

**Volunteer Acknowledgment:**

Thanks to Master Bander Danny Bystrak, the holder of the permit under which we operate. Mike Quinlan, Alan Christian, Kyra Harvey, Jeff Shenot, and others have provided valuable assistance over the years.

**Acknowledgments:** Thanks to the Friends of Jug Bay and Sanctuary Superintendent Pati Delgado for financial support and for permitting us to use the Preserve as our station location.

**Appendix:**

- Photos of birds, to include wing feathers in natural and under black light.
- Statistical charts showing results to include numbers banded by age and sex.
- Explanations and illustrations of ageing and sexing techniques.
- A summary of recaps (Encounters) of banded birds, both ours and others.