

# Mexican Spotted Owls Shyer Than Their Northern Cousins

The controversy surrounding the habitat needs and population status of the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) has led inevitably to concern about the Mexican subspecies (*Strix occidentalis lucida*). Therefore, a study of abundance and distribution of Mexican spotted owls in Zion NP was made in 1989 and 1990. During the 2-year study, vocal imitations were used to elicit responses from the owls. A 45.7cm diameter plastic parabolic dish and microphone was used in listening for the owls and to monitor calling between pairs. Remote and inaccessible areas also were surveyed by using the parabolic microphone. In some instances, the owls would not respond to vocal imitations, so the parabolic microphone was used to listen for vocalization between pairs.

The monitoring sessions usually lasted from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. Vocal imitations were done for 10 minutes each hour; the remaining 50 minutes were used to listen for responses. The survey efforts turned up 6 pairs and 4 individuals in 10 different locations. Some banding of both adults and juveniles was accomplished.

Spotted owls are widely distributed in Zion and their locations appear to follow a patchily distributed habitat. Owls were found inhabiting steep-walled canyons and deep gorges. Detecting Mexican spotted owl responses in this country appears to be more difficult as compared to the northern subspecies in the Pacific Northwest. This makes the parabolic dish necessary for locating the owls throughout the rugged terrain of Zion NP.