

Are you seeing a lot of snowy owls?

It may be an *irruption* year.

It is common for some snowy owls to migrate south each winter. Every 3 to 5 years, however, hundreds to thousands of owls overflow into southern Canada and the northern United States. These exceptionally large migrations are known as irruptions.

An irruption is a sign of a baby boom

Irruptions were once thought to be caused by hungry owls flying south in search of food. However, this myth is far-removed from the truth. Winter irruptions are usually caused by an abundance of food during the previous summer. Lemmings — small rodents that make up most of the owls' summer diet — regularly fluctuate in numbers. A boom of lemmings produces a boom of healthy owl chicks migrating south.

Is there a link to climate change?

Irruptions have been recorded since the 1800s — meaning they are not caused by climate change. But climate change is altering Arctic climates in concerning ways. A shift to warmer, wetter winters could affect the lemming cycles snowy owls depend on.

How can you help?

Project SNOWstorm tracks owls to learn more about their winter ecology and movements.

The data can be used to inform conservation efforts and mitigate threats. Our work is funded entirely by public donations.



To learn more, track an owl, or donate, visit our website

