

*Unusual Mortality of a Saw-whet Owl.* Wild birds are subject to various types of natural mortality but these are seldom identified or diagnosed. On March 27, 1976, I observed a Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) clinging to the branches of an elm tree in the shelterbelt on my farmstead 3 miles north of Ypsilanti in Stutsman County, North Dakota. At first I thought the bird was sleeping but closer inspection revealed that it was dead. As shown on the accompanying photograph, the owl died with its talons closed. The eeriness of the scene was enhanced by the presence of a dead white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus* sp.) wedged behind small twigs above the dead owl.



A few drops of blood on the abdomen suggested that the bird had impaled itself on a branch. An autopsy performed by Jamestown veterinarian Dr. Gary Pearson revealed that this blood was merely the result of decomposition and that the cause of death was probably visceral gout which infers renal insufficiency. The gout was evidenced by deposits of uric acid crystals on the heart.—Harold A. Kantrud, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, ND 58401.