

BIRDMAN

Owl-watching is a hoot

BY TED A. GLOVER

We hardly ever see owls unless we go out at night with the proper equipment and actually seek them out. Owls, for the most part, are mainly nocturnal, roosting in the dense forests during the daylight hours. But when the eagles and hawks that patrol the skies during the day wander off to their roosts at evening time, the owls emerge for their turn at hunting.

Owls, who seem to have no neck at all, have the same strong talons and the same large hooked beaks as their daytime hunting companions, but the owl's eyes are very large and are able to gather light better than our human eyes can. Their hearing is also very sharp. So with extra sharp hearing and extremely sensitive eyesight they hunt small birds, mice and other small rodents, bats, reptiles and even insects.

Over 200 species of owls have been

identified worldwide and new ones are still being discovered. Some of the wonderful names for these owls include Laughing Owl, Ochre-bellied Hawk Owl, Barking Owl, White-chinned Owl, and Vermiculated Fishing Owl. In the United States, according to *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds*, there are 19 species of owls, including such eloquently named ones as Flammulated Owl, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl.

According to the Oregon Bird Records Committee and their "Official Checklist of Oregon Birds," there are 15 species of owls that live here or visit Oregon. Some visit in the winter months, such as the Snowy Owl (a far northern owl) and others visit in the summer months, such as the Burrowing Owl (a species of the agricultural areas of the southwestern

US and Mexico).

Here in the Applegate Valley and in the surrounding foothills and mountains, you may be able to see up to 11 types of owls:

- Barn Owl
- Barred Owl
- Flammulated Owl
- Great Gray Owl
- Great Horned Owl
- Long-eared Owl
- Northern Pygmy-Owl
- Northern Saw-whet Owl
- Northern Spotted Owl
- Short-eared Owl
- Western Screech-Owl

All of these are permanent residents except the Flammulated, a rare summer visitor, and the Short-eared, a winter transient.

Among the commonly seen owls in our area is the Barn Owl, typically flying low over marshes and meadows early in the morning or late in the afternoon as it

hunts. It is known to nest in barns and other old structures, even old burrows, holes in cliff sides, and human-made nest boxes.

The Great Horned Owl is another commonly seen owl, mainly because of its large size. It stands about 22 inches, with very large and wide-spaced ear tufts, giving a horned-like look. It roosts during the day in trees or on cliff ledges. The Great Horned Owl is often pestered by swarms of crows and the crow's loud cawing can be a clue to the presence of the owl.

Owl-watching is mainly a nighttime task, but being alert and knowledgeable about their habits can help us find them here in our beautiful Applegate Valley area.

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The **Northern Spotted Owl**, a medium-sized dark brown owl, is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Photo: Peter J. Thiemann, Flickr photo stream.



Long-eared Owlets have a characteristic call, likened to a rusty hinge. Their ear-tufts make them appear larger to other owls. Photo: Peter J. Thiemann, Flickr photo stream.



The **Snowy Owl** is one of the largest owls in North America, reaching 28 inches long and weighing up to 6.6 pounds. Photo: Peter J. Thiemann, Flickr photo stream.



The **Burrowing Owl** is a tiny but long-legged owl with prominent white eyebrows and a white chin patch it displays when agitated. Photo: Peter J. Thiemann, Flickr photo stream.



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