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WEEKEND BREAK



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Madeline Kalbach

Great horned owls usually perch fairly close to the tree trunk.

Birds of beauty

A guide to seeing owls on the peninsula

By **MADELINE KALBACH**
For Chinook Observer

Pacific County is home to 10 species of owls. The Long Beach Peninsula has records for eight species.

Peninsula owls are uncommon, but they stay with us during the whole year.

They are easiest to see in winter than in other seasons because the leaves of the deciduous trees have fallen, making the task of searching and observing them easier.

I love to see owls, so I have worked hard at finding them. Here are a few tips to help you find owls.

Many owls are diurnal, which means they are chiefly active during the daylight hours. Thus, a good time to look for them is between the early morning and dusk. I have had good luck locating great horned and barred owls during the daylight hours. They were usually perched on a branch close to the main trunk and about 10 to 15 feet up from the ground. I have only seen them higher when they are feeding owlets or sitting high in a tree near their nest.

A tell-tale sign that an owl might be in the vicinity is the behavior of songbirds like the Steller's jays and chickadees. When these songbirds happen upon an owl (or a hawk) perched in a conifer or a bushy thicket they become extremely noisy, so much so that they attract other songbirds who then come by to see what all the fuss is about. Together, they mob the owl.

Owls tend to use the same roost. Look for the presence of pellets and you will have found such a roost. Whitewash or poop on the trees or shrubby thickets plus pellets littering the ground below are major clues of a current location. The pellets are shaped like a cigar and contain animal parts such as teeth, fur and bones. Owls regurgitate these parts because they are unable to digest them. If you live among the big trees look for a brownish rotund shape flying slowly and silently by. It will likely be an owl.



A barred owl on the hunt during daylight hours.

Slowly driving the highways and back roads is also a good way to find owls. Some owls — like the snowy owl — will hunt for mice and voles in roadside ditches. Keep your eyes open for an owl sitting on the ground or perched on a fence post near the edge of the road waiting for its next meal.

According to Dr. Wayne Lynch, in some years owls “literally flood into the forests and the prairies of southern Canada and the northern United States.” These invasions occur about every three to five years and are driven by a lack of rodents in the boreal forest or the Arctic.

On the peninsula, at least one snowy owl is seen during an invasion year. Leadbetter Point State Park and

the dunes of Long Beach have been lucky enough to have one take up residence one winter a few years ago.

Birders are usually friendly and happy to let other birders know where they can locate a specific bird. Some might even agree to take interested people to the exact location. Birders can report their findings to eBird, so going online and visiting sites like the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is also a useful way to find the exact locations of various species.

Owls are fascinating. Harry Potter and his magical friends thought so. I hope you can locate an owl or two when you are out and about. They are mesmerizing and amazing. Happy birding.