

Ethical Owling

a quick guide

by Maxwell Matchim



Feminist Bird Club
est. 2016



Introduction

Owls are some of the most beloved birds on Earth. Birders and photographers have long appreciated them, but unfortunately, their actions can threaten the wellbeing of these charismatic animals. We've compiled a guide for birders and photographers of all backgrounds and levels of experience to help ensure the best practices when owling, and help these wonderful birds continue to thrive.



Despite appearing close-up, this picture of a Snowy Owl was taken from several hundred feet away. Try to include details about the lens you used and how far away you were when posting owl pictures online.



Shooting with a long lens is the best way to photograph owls from a respectful distance.

Distance

Owl photos by Mac Marzolini

Make sure you keep a respectful distance from the owl, and indeed, all wildlife you interact with. Look for changes in behaviour, these cues will let you know if you're getting too close. If the animal is changing its behaviour because of your presence, you need to back up.

Lights

Never use a camera flash or flashlights around owls. This may temporarily blind the animal, affecting its ability to successfully hunt and defend itself from threats.

Playback

It's best practice not to play owl calls unless you're a part of an authorized scientific research project such as banding. The use of playback is banned in some parks. The overuse of playback may negatively affect a bird's ability to find a mate. Playback can attract predators or mobbing birds like crows and chickadees which harass roosting owls.

Baiting

Never bait an owl. This includes the use of both live and dead mice, as well as toys designed to look like prey. Baiting causes the bird to associate humans and human modified landscapes like roadsides with food, putting them at a greater risk for collisions with vehicles.

Sharing Locations

Never include a specific location when posting images of an owl online. Some parks have specific policies which ban visitors from reporting owls there. Be extremely careful who you share owl locations with, especially in instances of rare species or nesting pairs. Always remove the GPS information from the metadata of your images before posting them online.

Duration

Try to spend as little time as possible in the presence of the owl. Have a look, take a few pictures and leave.



Never flush an owl deliberately. Most species are nocturnal, they need to roost during the day and hunt for food every night. If you harass a sleeping owl, you're affecting its ability to successfully hunt. If you accidentally flush an owl, take a moment to consider how close you were.

