

## WISE BIRDS IN WINTER

An accomplished photographer's best tips for finding owls, plus seven locations that attract wise birds and wise birdwatchers alike.

photos by Jim Zipp

Armed with good ears, a little luck, and more than a little know-how, birdwatchers all across North America can find Great Horned and other owls year-round. But as photographer Jim Zipp has discovered, owl watching can be especially good in winter, and in certain years, at certain locations, it can be magical. What's more, as Jim's photos reveal, the magic can occur right in your own backyard.

### MY FAVORITE OWL HOT SPOTS

#### Amherst Island, Ontario

Owls are present ever winter on this private island in Lake Ontario. Noted for the fairly regular appearance of Boreal Owls, Amherst also hosts Long-eared, Snowy, Short-eared, and Northern Saw-whet Owls nearly every winter. In really good years, even Great Gray Owls show up. Screech-owls and Long-eared and Great Horned Owls are resident.

#### Jones Beach, New York

Located on the south shore of Long Island about 30 miles east of Manhattan, Jones Beach near Oceanside can be a great place to find Snowy Owls. The extensive dunes and expansive beaches here are the attraction.

#### Reclaimed strip mines, southeastern Ohio

Open surface-mining areas turned grasslands, including the Woodbury Wildlife Area in Coshocton County and the Wilds in Muskingum County, have been hosting good numbers of Short-eared Owls, which are rare in Ohio.

#### Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, Duluth, Minnesota

The hawk-banding station at Hawk Ridge in Duluth is well known. Less well known is that the station switches over to banding owls at night. Hundreds of Northern Saw-whet Owls, plus a few Long-eareds, are captured every fall.

#### Plum Island and Salisbury Beach, Massachusetts

This barrier island is a plum birding destination year-round, but winter is best for owls. Snowy Owls find the miles of dunes attractive. Close-by Salisbury Beach hosts Snowies as well as Long-eared and Saw-whet Owls, and Short-eared Owls can be seen coursing the marsh toward sunset.

#### Sax-Zim Bog, Minnesota

During the winter of 2004-05, it was possible to see more than 100 Great Gray Owls and one or two dozen Northern Hawk Owls a day here and in surrounding areas just north of Duluth. Both species can usually be found in normal winters. In fact, both sometimes nest in the area.

#### Southeastern Arizona

Spotted Owls are in the Huachuca Mountains outside of Sierra Vista, and Western and Whiskered Screech-Owls and Elf, Spotted, Flammulated, Barn, and Great Horned Owls can be found near Portal. My good friend Rick Bowers of Tucson found 11 species of owl in a single day.

-- Jim Zipp