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TRAVEL IDEAS • local

ALL-INCLUSIVE

Night Owls

Spend an evening listening for these mysterious birds of prey.

Just after dusk, you explore a wintry oak and hickory forest and walk on a snowpacked trail, enjoying the moonlight. And then you hear it! “Whoo-coo-cook-koo! Whoo-coo-cook-koo!” It’s the screechy, whistlelike call of a barred owl. With each hoot, the owl moves closer, or perhaps it flies over your head, apparently intrigued. It wants to know who you are.

Your group is guided by Steven Bailey, an ornithologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey. Bailey has led owl prowls at Starved Rock State Park for the past six years. Stopping

a few times on the trail, he chooses which species of owl call to play from a database on his MP3 player. Listen for the Eastern screech owl, the great horned owl or the barred owl. He plays the sound through a speaker, waits 30 seconds, pivots in another direction and tries again. If there’s no response, he cups his hands over his mouth and uses his own voice, claiming he can do a better impersonation of the barred owl than the barred owl. Bailey has a high success rate of triggering a response. If they’re out there, he says, they’ll probably call back.



IF YOU GO

Owl Prowl 2017 will feature owl night walks as well as daytime educational programs from Hoo Haven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center, March 10-12, Starved Rock State Park, Utica, Illinois. starvedrocklodge.com



“Who” Goes There?

Q&A with Karen Herdtklotz, director of “Hoo” Haven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center.

Q: How do you train a bird of prey?

A: Training birds of prey takes patience and kindness. It also takes learning what the birds are like in the wild and what bothers them. They have a fear of man. So it takes hours of sitting, speaking to them, and earning their trust to sit on your glove. Then the training goes from there.

What special adaptations do owls have?

They have 14 cervical vertebrae, whereas humans have only seven. That’s why they can turn their heads from side to side, 270 degrees. Also, owls are lazy. They actually like to eat little mice, gophers and chipmunks head first in one gulp.

As a wildlife rehabber, what do you do?

We rehabilitate sick, injured and orphaned North American wildlife and release it back into the wild. We keep owls for education or as surrogates if they can’t be released due to injury. hoohaven.org

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