

primarily a winter resident. Its relative scarcity, small size, and propensity to roost in dense vegetation makes it a difficult bird to locate. And unlike the more common Eastern Screech Owl, the saw-whet is rarely heard on its wintering grounds. Nevertheless, with practice, birders can often locate the saw-whet at favored roost sites during winter in Allerton Park.

Since 1988, Allerton Park, a 1,500-acre hardwood forested area owned by the University of Illinois, has been considered one of the best places to find Saw-whet Owls in Illinois.

Extensive evergreen plantings throughout the park provide excellent roost sites for Saw-whet Owls. They can sometimes also be found in vine tangles or dense shrubs. Younger evergreens, within a mixture of more mature forest and dense thorny thickets, provide the most preferred roosts at Allerton.

Area birders are usually most successful in locating the owls from mid-January, after a sufficient amount of whitewash and pellets has been deposited, to mid-March, when the owls begin migrating north.

Saw-whet Owls have most often been found in the Lost Garden area on the south side of the Sangamon River, which bisects the park (see map on following page). In 1991/92, three Saw-whet Owls were found here.

Lost Garden is an abandoned formal garden site, with a double row of large cedars. To either side of the double row, there are clumps of scattered young cedars, fifteen to twenty feet tall, standing in dense thickets of multi-flora rose,



D. KANIA

*Since 1988, Allerton Park has been considered one of the best places to find Northern Saw-whet Owls in Illinois. Drawing by Denis Kania.*

native roses, honeysuckle, and deciduous saplings, with scattered mature trees. The Saw-whet Owls are usually found in these small cedars, typically at heights of six to fifteen feet.

Two other locations where Saw-whets have been found are on the north side of the Sangamon River. From 1988 to 1990, at least one bird was found near the Sun Singer statue at the extreme west end of the main park drive in a dense thicket of pines, cedars, deciduous trees, and thorny plants. On one occasion, the bird was seen roosting in a tangle of vines around a plum tree nearby. The birds were not seen here in 1991 or 1992, although birders did find whitewash, pellets, and a single feather at that location this year.

Last year, a single bird was

found in some formally planted arbor vitae adjacent to the visitor's center. This bird remained faithful to a few perches and was easily found. Apparently, formally planted areas are just as suitable as long as there is the requisite amount of food, especially mice.

To find the owls, carefully scan all trees for tell-tale whitewash. Saw-whet Owl whitewash is smooth and tends to be an ivory, rather than chalky-white color. Next, carefully examine the ground for pellets. Saw-whet pellets are about an inch in length and tend to have a smooth surface.

When you find the whitewash and pellets, look in the immediate area for the owls. They often sit directly above the whitewash and pellets, although they periodically change their roost sites.