

Though the moon was not full, it nonetheless lit up the landscape quite well. We thought we would go to Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve and maybe find a Short-eared Owl actively hunting in the bright, moonlit prairie. We walked out past the marsh nearest to the parking lot, and after 30 minutes of viewing empty prairie and only hearing a few lonesome coyotes, we decided we weren't going to have a nighttime appearance by a short-eared. Instead we decided to head for the McDonalds restaurant just down the road for a much-needed energy boost for the long night and day ahead. We soon returned with the first blush of lightening sky in the east for another try for a hungry Short-eared Owl. After breakfast we again headed out past the marsh. This time a Great Horned Owl watched us from a nearby low perch. Just as the eastern sky began to turn a lighter shade of blue, we spotted two Short-eared Owls beginning to actively hunt, occasionally perching for nicer views, low over the only grass left along the creek after recent prairie burns. We were half way to our goal before the

sun had risen. Just before we climbed into our car at the parking lot, another Eastern Screech-Owl gave us one of its last calls for the evening, signaling that sunrise was not far away.

We decided to stay in DuPage County a bit longer before heading north. We drove to the Morton Arboretum where Steve and Pete tried their Barred Owl imitations one more time and managed to get an almost immediate response from the two Barred Owls that had recently taken up residence on the east side of the Arb in a stand of tall, old conifers. Just for the heck of it, with time to burn, we decided to check for the Northern Saw-whet Owl that had only been making infrequent appearances (or keeping well hidden) in its usual roosting stand of pines behind the Visitor's Center. The previous day it had not been there, but after the three of us had circled the roost tree two or three times, Pete called, "I've got it!" It was well concealed about a dozen feet up. It is always nice to get a visual on a cute saw-whet, and we left the owl still peacefully resting as we walked away with our

second saw-whet owl of the young day. A long drive out to McHenry County was next. Pete had recently seen several Long-eared Owls in a pine grove at a county forest preserve. Once there, we slowly made our way through the pines and with slow, careful searching, hoping not to flush the birds before we all got to see at least one, a single Long-eared Owl was found near the area where a few had been roosting several days earlier. The others that were in the roosting flock were likely nearby, but since we only needed one, and it's always a plus to not have to disturb a roosting owl any more than possible, we did not look any further for the others, and left the owl on the roosting perch where we found it.

We now had a long drive ahead of us to La Salle County. But, we were pretty excited since we now only needed one more species of owl to hold the record of eight owl species located in one day... and we still had about half the daylight hours left, not to mention the following evening to search if need be. Although there was a major Snowy Owl invasion occurring throughout Illinois, and there had been numerous sightings of Snowy Owls throughout the Chicagoland area, we had decided that the LaSalle County Snowy Owl was probably our best bet to still be hanging around in the same area where others had been seeing it. This area near the LaSalle Nuclear Power Plant plays host to one or more Snowy Owls most winters, and the birds can often be found along a set of abandoned railroad tracks running south from the power plant. The birds often sit right along the railroad

*Page 82: The last owl of the owl big day was likely this Snowy Owl at Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area in Grundy County. 5 January 2012. Photo by Jim Tezak.*

Pete Moxon, Jeff Smith and Steve Bailey pet a friendly dog while viewing a Snowy Owl, their eighth owl species of the day.

