

Owl Prowl

by Sheryl De Vore

At 5:30 a.m. on a Sunday in mid-February when it is still black as a raven outside, we stand near a northern Illinois wood lot shivering and waiting in the quiet. A light cloud cover diffuses the nearly full moon.

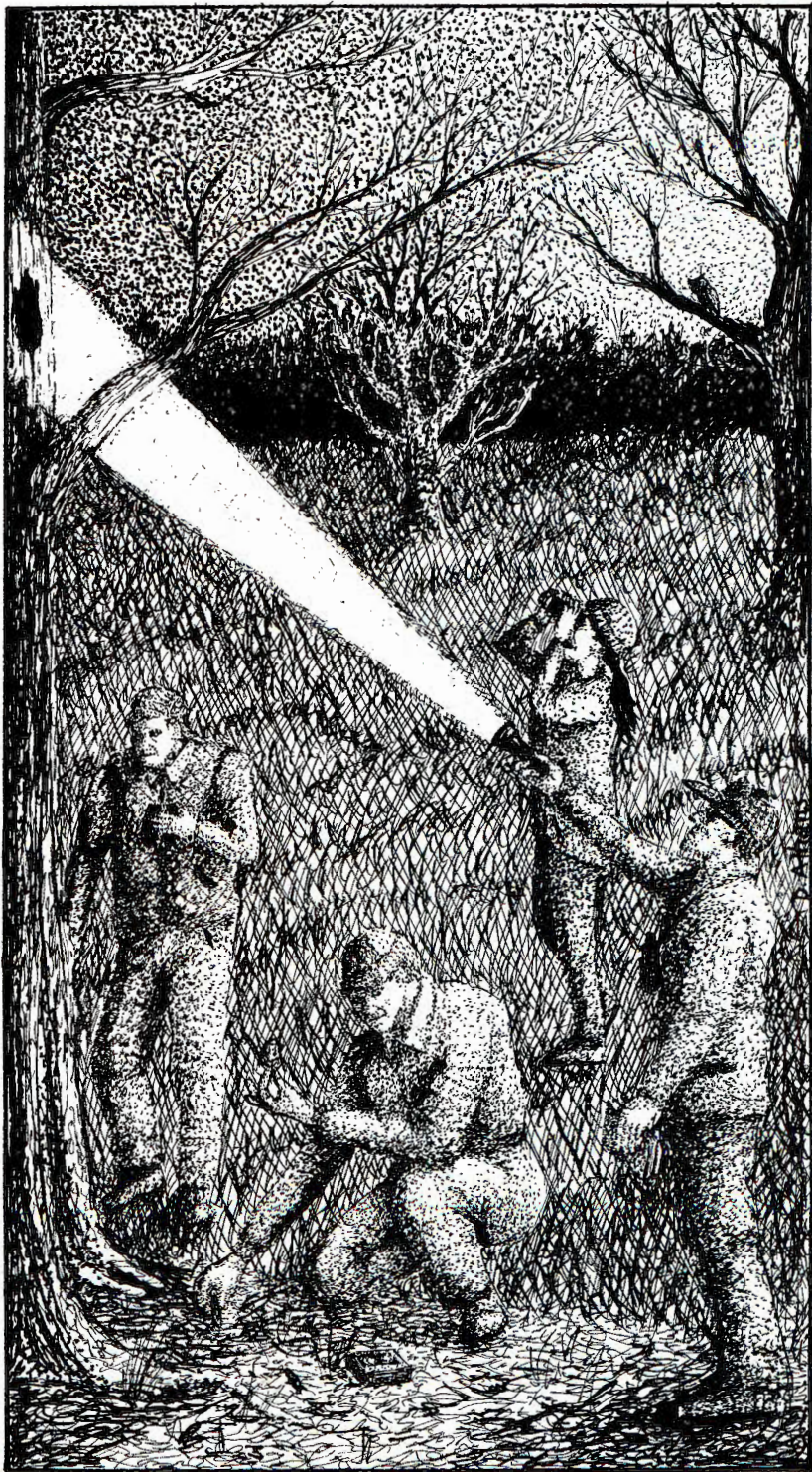
Then, faintly, a soft descending call followed by a shallow-sounding tremolo interrupts the silence. "Hear it?" someone whispers. We nod, then listen as an answer comes from across the woods - another call followed by a tremolo.

"I just saw something fly," someone says, trying not to raise his voice in excitement. Someone shines a light in a tree not more than 20 feet away from us and 10 feet above our heads.

A gray phase Eastern Screech Owl peers down at us, immobile, statue-like. Someone shines another light to our left in a tree. Another screech owl. A red phase Eastern Screech Owl. We can hardly believe our luck seeing both color phases together. These tiny owls, measuring only about eight inches long, have glaring yellow eyes, ear tufts, and streaked breasts of gray or red.

They stare at us blankly, unimpressed, then suddenly, without pomp or noise, they fly into the darkness.

Thus begins our winter owl prow. Such yearly excursions are often taken in the winter months by bird clubs through



Drawing by David Athans.