

Raptors visit Citizens for Conservation

There were light winds when children and adults dressed for temperatures in the 20's prepared to hike a one-mile trail at Citizens for Conservation-owned Flint Creek Savanna. They prepared to view various birds of prey in a natural setting as part of a Leave No Child Inside supported activity. Dawn Keller, President of Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation, instructed everyone on how to behave when approaching each of the volunteers holding a live bird.

Walking a short distance, we approached a volunteer holding a Zen, a beautiful and unusually calm Cooper's hawk. Dawn explained how Cooper's hawks will catch birds as large as mourning doves while visiting local backyard bird feeders. Everyone then walked up a berm overlooking the beautiful freshly snow-covered tall grass prairie and wetland before approaching Red, a twenty-four year old red-tailed hawk. Red's handler held her high so everyone could see her show off her gorgeous plumage and rich mahogany-hued tail.

Crossing the first of several bridges, children counted the number of vole holes they found while walking to the next raptor. They quickly determined that the prairie has a good supply of voles and that voles are a favorite meal of raptors! Approaching more than one hundred year-old oaks, we saw telltale signs of whitewash and owl pellets left by a great-horned owl. Justice, a great-horned owl, and his handler walked slowly up to the crowd so all could see the gorgeous tufts atop his head and his fluffy and soft beak feathers. Class members examined owl pellets, and everyone quickly found several bones peaking from under the undigested feather and fur. Dawn explained that the whitewash was owl poop while the owl had regurgitated the pellets.

About halfway along the trail and further into the oak savanna, we quietly came upon a volunteer holding Meepy, a female barred owl. Dawn shared the barred owl call which sounds like "Who cooks for you... who cooks for you-all?" Back along the trail nearing the end of the oak savanna, we viewed an owl box in one of the oak trees, and Dawn explained that owls use boxes in addition to tree cavities to nest. From behind the tree came a volunteer holding Kotori, a tiny little four to five inch female screech owl whose feathers blended perfectly with the rough oak tree bark. Thinking they were seeing a baby owl, everyone was surprised to learn that Kotori was fully grown.

While everyone approached the end of the mile-long hike, Dawn Keller walked ahead of the crowd, asked for complete silence, and stood perfectly still while blowing a whistle. Seeing movement in the tall prairie grasses, the crowd quickly scanned the grasses by the old silo. Once again Dawn blew her whistle, and a handler with a beautiful white and mottled brown barn owl showed himself within the grasses. Pip, the barn owl, was supposed to fly from the handler to Dawn, but instead of flying, Pip wanted to finish his nap! Realizing that his nap was not to be completed, Pip finally flew above the tall grasses and landed on Dawn's gloved hand.

Hikers gladly warmed up inside CFC's old farmhouse with some very welcome hot chocolate with Pip finally completing his nap while Dawn held him for all to see. Thanking everyone for coming and for their contributions to Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation, children and adults alike eagerly discussed their favorite parts of the hike as they left the farmhouse for home.

For information, to volunteer, or to become an intern with Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation, visit <http://www.flintcreekwildlife.org/>. To learn more about Citizens for Conservation, an all-

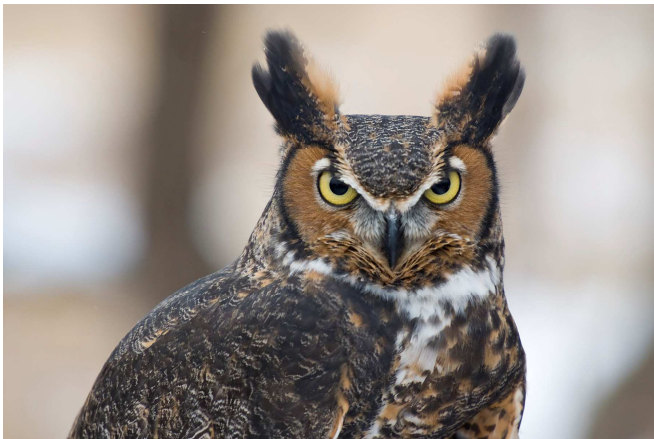
volunteer organization at 40 years young, to become a volunteer or summer intern, or to view our calendar of events, visit <http://www.citizensforconservation.org/>. To make your reservations for the next Youth Education class, the Great Backyard Bird Count, visit <http://www.citizensforconservation.org/youth-education/> or call 847-382-SAVE (7283). For information about Leave No Child Inside, visit www.funoutside.org.



Pip, a male barn owl in flight.



Red, a female red-tailed hawk.



Justice with his large tufts of feathers that look like horns, earning this owl the name.... great-horned owl.
All photos courtesy of Steve Barten, DVM