

Canadian finds Moscow a hoot

Northern Hawk Owl enjoying fine vole dining



Geoff Crimmins/Daily News

A Northern Hawk Owl eats a rodent it caught on the banks of Paradise Creek near White Avenue in Moscow on Thursday. The owl, which is native to Canada, has been in Moscow for more than three weeks.

Terri Harber, Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Food is plentiful and the living easy - at least it is these days for a Northern Hawk Owl spotted around Moscow since the beginning of December.

These Canadian birds normally don't make their way to this region, so people with an interest in ornithology have been excited about its extended visit.

The bird has had its photograph taken so often it might want "copyrights to its image," joked Ron Force, president of the Palouse Audubon Society.

It has been sighted repeatedly on the southern side of the city, near the Eastside Marketplace on South Blaine Street.

Terry Gray, a member of the local Audubon Society, has been making daily observations of the bird and writing down what he saw.

On Dec. 25, Gray observed the Northern Hawk Owl "preening and hunting from a deciduous tree at the corner of Blaine and White Avenue this morning at 8:15."

Gray continued: "... observed the bird mainly looking down at some open water of Paradise Creek and the shoreline looking for food. Beautiful sunny morning with light wind and a temp of 28 degrees. Streets were very frosty this a.m."

The local Audubon group took part in the national bird count held Dec. 14. Being able to include one of these birds in the local count was a pleasure because their presence here is rare, said Kas Dumroese, a plant physiologist with a keen interest in ornithology.

People interested in seeking out the Northern Hawk Owl should go out early in the morning. It's spending its time in an area that runs along White Avenue from Blaine Street to Mountain View Road. It also sometimes extends his occupancy toward Spence Hardware and Supply on White Avenue, Dumroese said.

The bird especially seems to enjoy spending time in Lions Park and the nearby creek, which is marshy and an environment this species prefers, mainly because of a good supply of voles for it to eat, he said.

Dumroese compiled the results of the local bird count. Conditions weren't optimal for this year's count because of the cold weather at the time. It caused a significant number of water sources to freeze over. The process went "real well" in spite of the cold, however, Dumroese said.

About 50 people participated in the local count, which was taken within a 15-mile area that reaches toward Pullman.

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