

Tommy Thompson Park Owl Viewing and Reporting Policy

Tommy Thompson Park is fortunate to host a few owls during the winter as they move south from their nesting grounds in search of food. Human presence can be stressful for owls, so it's important to know some owl facts and follow simple guidelines to ensure their safety.

OWL FACTS

Owls need to spend time doing **two critical activities: hunting and resting**. They spend most of their waking hours hunting for food.

- An owl that is disturbed while resting during the day may not be fit to hunt at night. Likewise, an owl hunting during the day needs to be left alone to find its prey.
- Human disturbance uses up valuable energy during the cold winter months and may prevent the birds from hunting properly.

Ultimately, owls that cannot effectively hunt will die. Please view owls respectfully to avoid fatally disturbing them.

SIGNS THAT AN OWL IS STRESSED

- Eyes wide open and staring directly at you
- Behaviour changes in response to your presence
- Ear tufts straight up, eyes reduced to slits
- Rapid blinking and/or panting
- Defense display (wings spread and body puffed up) or signs of aggression

HOW TO WATCH AND PHOTOGRAPH OWLS ETHICALLY

- **Keep a minimum 12m distance.**
- Limit viewing time to a **few minutes**, or less if the owl appears stressed.
 - Remember that trying for the “perfect” photo may be depriving an owl of much-needed rest or food.
- **Be quiet.** Walk and speak quietly when around an owl.
- **Never chase an owl** if it flies away.
- **Stay on trails.**
- **Do not trim plants or branches** to obtain a better view or photo.
- **Never use flash photography**, especially after dark.
- **Audio playback should not be used** to attract an owl unless conducting authorized ornithological research.
- **Never bait an owl.** Allowing owls to become accustomed to being fed by humans can lead to collisions with vehicles and buildings.
- **Refrain from reporting owl sightings** on the internet or birding hotlines. Use discretion when sharing information about an owl and do not share an owls' exact location.

If you see a person or group disturbing wildlife, report to TRCA Enforcement tips@trca.ca or MNRF Conservation Officers 1-877-TIPS-MNR.