

# Whooo Cares for the Owls?

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SPECIAL TO THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

Thank you to Lloyd Jones and The Conway Daily Sun for their wonderful article last week on the plight of the barred owls. I would like to add to their story with a follow-up about what Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife in Madison is doing to help these majestic owls of our north country. It is true that they are in very poor condition, in part due to the very long winter we have had with deep, ice crusted snow. One recent barred owl was called in to Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife by Region 1 Fish and Game (Lancaster) and I met Fish and Game Biologist Will Staats in Twin Mountain. The owl had been picked up in Jefferson and by that, I mean literally picked up. Many barred owls have been plucked off low branches and even found on the ground, depleted and starving. If you see an owl on the ground, it needs help. The owl relayed to me by Biologist Will Staats was deceased by the time I arrived. Upon arrival back at the wildlife center, I weighed the owl, a first-year male, and he weighed 418 grams, 50 grams less than the lowest weight for a male, which is 468 to 774 grams.

Most of the owls we are seeing at Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife this winter are starvation cases and all barred owls. This isn't unusual. Winter in the North Country is rugged to say the least. But when the first plowing took place on Oct. 27 and snow is still falling on April 8, even

a winter-lover like myself is ready to "cry uncle." When you consider that predators, mostly bobcats and barred owls, are illequipped to handle this deep and exhausting snow, it is to be expected that the toll will be heavy.

First year bobcats in December may tip the scale at 12 pounds. When we get a starving one, it is our policy to keep it until spring, releasing it at a healthy weight of 15 to 20 pounds, depending on male or female, which gives them a good start on life. But Barred owls weigh a fraction of that, with males weighing 468 to 774 grams and the larger female of the species weighing 610 to 1051 grams. Doing the math, there are 454 grams in a pound, making these birds, when at a healthy weight, about a pound and a quarter plus. When starved, depleted and dehydrated, they barely stand a chance of making it through our harsh winters.

The barred owl featured in the Sun's story was a sad case for all. The bird was called in to Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife on March 20, and I responded to meet with the caller on Valley View Road. I had a net but we were unable to reach the bird. The caller had a roof rake and with duct tape, we made an extension for the net but were unable to reach the bird which continued to branch-hop higher and out of range.

The Valley View neighbors kept watch but there were no sightings until the Shaw family found him in their yard on March 31. For a bird to be injured, and subsequently



**This barred owl came to Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife in Madison non-responsive, emaciated and dehydrated. (COURTESY PHOTO)**

grounded and unable to hunt for that length of time is hard to believe. Sgt. Lopashanski from Fish and Game brought the bird to me and although immediate treatment was begun the owl passed within a few hours.

Today's owl, came in from Silver Lake. The owl is alive but non-responsive, emaciated and dehydrated. His weight is well below the lowest weight in the male range. The exam shows no apparent breaks but with the starvation and poor body condition, he is one of many not making it through his first year.

The bulk of the barred owls coming

in are first year male birds. They are smaller than the female and they disperse from their home territory, making life difficult when seeking food, shelter and a territory where they will be accepted.

If you are among the lucky to hear barred owls calling in the night, be grateful. In the meantime, we will continue to do our best to help them, one bird at a time.

If you are interested in volunteering at Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife or learning more about our work, contact Cathie Gregg at [rehab@myfairpoint.net](mailto:rehab@myfairpoint.net).