

# Owl Thrills!

By Mackenzie Smitley

Owling started out as a very small project -- only about nine people on average attended the event. Kelly Williams-Sieg was the beginning of the Northern Saw-Whet Owl Project in Ross County. She had been reading a bird book and came across the migration patterns of the Saw-whet Owl. She realized that the books had to have been wrong, since the owls appeared to not cross through Ohio on their migration journey. Of course, Kelly knew this was wrong because she had distinctly heard their call and knew they would have to cross through Ohio or add miles to their trip, which was a little inconvenient. She decided to do a study with a couple other bird banders, Bill Bosstic and Bob Placier. Together they set up mist nets in hopes they would catch an owl by using the nets and the Saw-whet Owl's mating call. They managed to catch one on the second day and recorded their data: the length of the wingspan, the weight, age, tail length, and amount of body fat. They placed the little metal band on its leg and released it.



Saw-whet Owl

Years later, they've caught hundreds of Saw-whet Owls, with some recaptures from other banding stations. The project has grown and more groups have ventured out into the cold night with the hopes of capturing and holding these adorable and docile owls. Such was the case on November 10, 2012, when the OYBC members came. Approximately twenty people traveled to Buzzards Roost Nature Preserve with the hopes of interacting with a Saw-whet. Some people traveled all the way from Mansfield to see these little creatures. We were lucky enough to catch one owl that night, despite the unusually warm conditions (which were not good for migration) and hearing a Barred Owl in the distance.



Taking and recording measurements for a Saw-whet Owl

Kelly recorded data such as wing chord, fat content, and tail length and determined the little owl was a male. Using black light allowed us to see the bright fuchsia coloring of his wings. Newer feathers have a pigment called porphyrins, which illuminate under a black light. This male happened to be around 30

months old. As soon as everyone saw this little owl, they were hooked and waiting anxiously to hold him. Everyone had an opportunity to hold this photogenic owl and get pictures for their memory books. The trip was a huge success and hopefully more people will take the time and come see these owls in the future.



Examining the wing of a Saw-whet Owl using black light.