

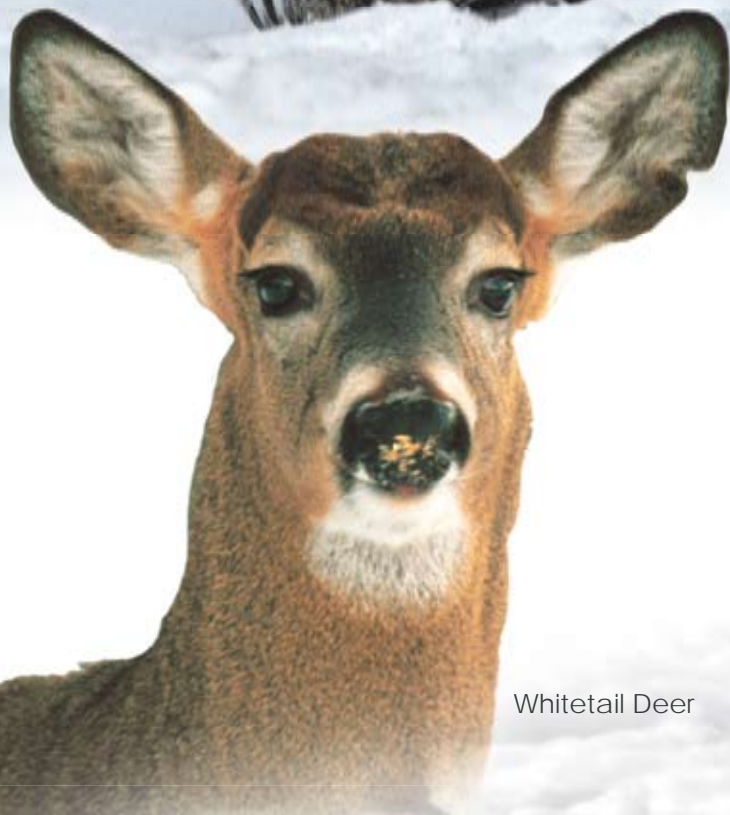
THEY DON'T ALL SLEEP *and for some this is south*



Snowy Owl



Ruffed Grouse



Whitetail Deer

Story and Photography by Ted Krug

As winter approaches many animals are busily preparing for hibernation, while others are ready to embrace whatever Mother Nature bestows. Wildlife lovers in the Parry Sound area fall into both categories and those who do like to get out, can follow some simple guidelines to improve their chances of spotting a variety of animals, birds and insects in their winter environment.

The two keys to finding wildlife lie in knowing where they are and what they eat. Many creatures that had come and gone unnoticed all spring, summer and fall, now leave their telltale marks behind in the snow, and for many, their natural summer camouflage is no longer effective.

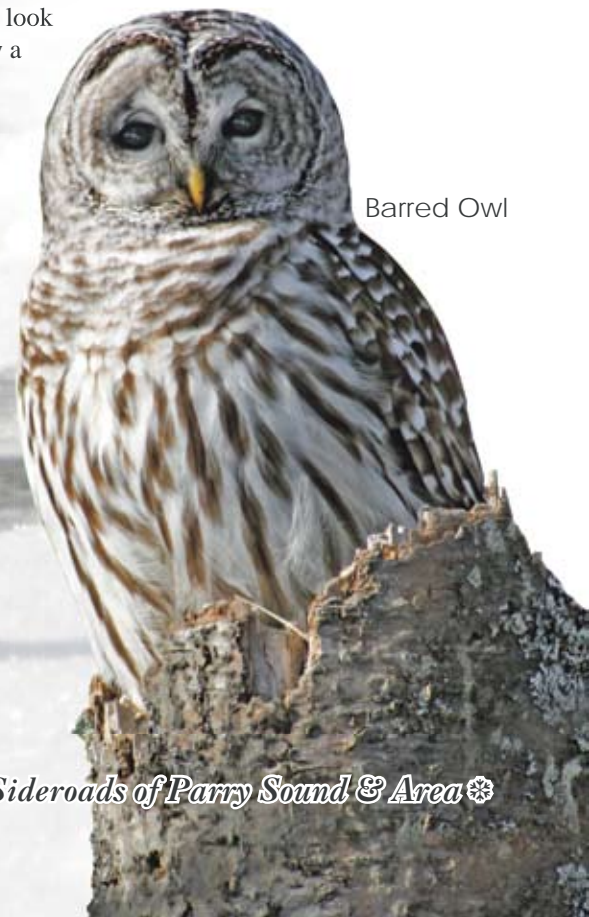
The footprints that are almost in a straight line show where the fox has been venturing. Small footprints of mice can be seen making short trips over the snow before they disappear to the world below. A similar set of prints, but larger, indicate that a squirrel has ventured from its winter home. The large chicken-like tracks reveal the presence of the Ruffed Grouse that was so elusive all hunting season, and yes, those very large bird tracks confirm that the wild turkeys have indeed arrived in our area.

Of course, we don't always have a fresh fall of snow. However, on the very cold winter nights you will find moisture in the air has crystalized and in the morning, has covered the trees and ground with a fine dusting of snow. This is great for tracking the early morning visitors.

On a warm sunny day in the early winter when you are out walking, the snow may look dirty. If you walk through the bush and return by the same route you may even notice that your footprints are lined with black. Look closer and you may see that what appears as dirt is actually the snow flea. As you look closely you will see that these tiny black specks are actually moving.

The creatures of the forest are, like us, creatures of habit. You have heard the expression "free as a bird," but if you watch birds you will see they always approach your feeder using the same perches. Remove one of their favorite branches and they are confused. The fox will follow the same route in search of food and cover its own territory. If you see one on any given day, the chances are that it will be there again at about the same time the next day. The larger the animal, the wider is the territory it covers. Some large animals, like moose, may take several days to cover their territory. If you want to see them, do remember that the animals vary their wanderings based on the sun time. As days get shorter they come later in the morning and earlier in the evening.

The key to it all is food. While we look at the footprints on top of the snow a whole new world is alive beneath the snow. Mice and voles have their network of tunnels that are like a maze below the snow. While awaiting the arrival of an



Barred Owl



Bald Eagle



Otter