

Oakland Owlets Evening with Owls

The Oakland Owlets families and friends spent an evening at the Stage Nature Center in Troy on October 24th. The Stage Nature Center houses five rehabilitated owls that are unable survive in the wild due to injuries and/or disabilities. The owls serve as educational animal ambassadors and are part of the programs offered at the nature center. The Stage Nature Center adopted these owls in 2018 when another educational facility disbanded.



The weather that evening was rainy and dismal. However, the program was indoors. The group gathered in the nature center for a brief time to view the exhibit area before the presentation.

An Owl informational program followed in the nature center classroom. Naturalist Christina Funk shared facts, and dispelled myths about Michigan Owls during an interactive talk. Participants helped with demonstrations and learned several amazing owl adaptations. Features highlighted included the distinct shape of the owl's talons and the anatomy of the owl's eye sockets.

Owl eyes are so large that special bony sockets (sclerotic rings) hold the eyes in place. **Sclerotic rings** prevent owl eye movement. However extra vertebrae in the owl's necks allow owls to rotate their heads about 270 degrees and move up and down to focus. Owls have amazing eyesight for low light.



Christina also covered the natural history about owls. Owls digest their prey along and regurgitate undigested food in the form of **pellets**. Christina showed examples of the contents of owl pellets which include bones and fur of prey animals. The group was also introduced to educational animal ambassador rats. Christina explained that when people control rat populations with poisons like rodenticides, owls and other predators are

harmed. Poisoned rats are consumed by owls ending up killing owls as well.



After learning about owls, the group was able to meet two of the owl ambassadors at the Nature Center. The first was Mortimer, a gray **Eastern Screech owl**. Christina held Mortimer on a tether and took him around the room. At the same



time Christina was holding Mortimer, she played the calls of the Eastern Screech Owl. Everyone was silent and frozen in place as Mortimer and Christina approached them. Mortimer lost vision in one eye making it impossible for him to survive in the wild. Christina patiently answered everyone's questions. When Mortimer was returned to his travel cage, Christina introduced Sam.

Sam the **Barred Owl** was rehabilitated as a juvenile and now has imprinted on people, especially Christina. Christina explained her relationship to Sam. Sam knows her voice and will communicate with Christina when she is nearby. Barred owls are large owls with mottled colors of brown and white, large, rounded head and dark eyes. Barred owls have distinctive calls. The mnemonics sounds like "*Who Cooks for you, you all.*" Sam called so Christina did not need to use a recording. Barred Owls live in forested areas often near water.



After an amazing presentation, Christina invited the group to venture outdoors to listen for owls on the grounds, noting that Eastern Screech Owls and Great-horned Owls live on the property. The group gathered just outside the building where Christina explained the importance of being quiet and listening. Christina played the calls of the Screech Owl and then the Great-horned. Everyone intently listened while scanning the treetops nearby imagining that owls were watching us. After a time without any activity, Christina took the group to the newly dedicated owl housing. Christina shared stories about Great-horned owls regularly visiting the Great-horned owl educational ambassador named Autumn. Everyone had a chance to see the owl housing.



Christina returned to the nature center where participants were grateful for the new knowledge and appreciation that they gained during this evening with the owls. **Thanking Christina Funk for her outstanding presentation along with nature center volunteer, Jody for their time.** The group dispersed.

The Stage Nature Center is supported by a non- profit organization, the Troy Nature Society that supports community outreach and educational programs at the Nature Center. The Society is supported by membership and donations. There is a special fund for the owls that accepts donations for their care. Visit this link to learn more - [Support Our Owls – Stage Nature Center \(troynaturesociety.org\)](https://troynaturesociety.org)

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