

Our Night of Owling – Oct. 1, 2011

Gazos Creek Road, San Mateo County

Trip Leader – Lisa Myers

Quick Overview – Owling adventures are always exciting because it gets us outside, after dark, walking around in the woods. It's the perfect setting for a good old fashion horror flick. For this night's adventure we started at 4:30 PM as we met north of Santa Cruz at Coast highway 1 and Gazos Creek Road. We kicked off the evening learning about owls and what makes them uniquely different. Owls have evolved with special characteristics including their need to eliminate indigestible parts of their diet by regurgitating a "pellet" roughly 20 hours after eating a meal. With this in mind, we took time to dissect several Barn Owl pellets. Fur, teeth, jaw bones, skulls, and ribs are just some of the tidbits we pulled from the pellets. Later, to better prep us for what was ahead, we listened to the calls of the several species of owls that can be found in this area during this time of year. We then headed up Gazos Creek Road stopping several times before the the sunset. Songbirds were few, but both male and female Wrentits seemed to be calling from a far with every stop. We then strategically parked ourselves in an open area on Cloverdale to await the sunset. From this vantage point we were surrounded by rolling, open fields that led directly into the forests; an ideal location to hopefully find our nocturnal friends. Shortly after sunset, the crescent moon appeared and we started to hear a Northern Saw-Whet Owl, in fact, there were two answering each other. We also heard the low hoooots of a male Great Horned Owl. The bats also started to appear along with the stars. As the dark set in we worked our way to the end of Gazos Creek to habitat filled with Redwood Trees and ferns. This area proved silent so we headed back to the intersection of Cloverdale and Gazos Creek. From here we experienced four different species of owls vocalizing from every direction – Great Horned Owls, Northern Saw-Whet Owls, Western Screech Owls and a lone flyover Barn Owl. Although I am sorry we did not get any visuals, we had a great study on owl vocalizations, from barking and hooting to mournful whaling. A few local's stopped to ask what we were doing and both Opossum & deer made appearances. Before our night ended we had a look at several shooting stars, the Andromeda Galaxy & Jupiter with its many moons.



Group photo of our adventurous group. A few were missing from the photo, but we found them later!

From top – The group dissecting a Barn Owl pellet – photo taken by Lisa Myers. Two owls heard during our evening, Northern Saw-Whet and Western Screech - photos courtesy of Bill Schmoker (not taken during our adventure.)