



A Winter Walk at the Zoo

When I suggested a walk through the Forestry Farm last month, my kids looked at me strangely. In their teenage years, I think maybe they're at that in-between stage - too old to be amazed by the wonders of nature and too young to appreciate a simple stroll in the great outdoors (without a snowboard strapped to their feet). My husband and I braved the elements alone and headed off to the Zoo.

I found this chilly visit to be one of the most memorable. No, there were no young geese swimming on the pond, no lush green carpets of grass to walk on and no screaming peacocks to sneak up and scare the bejeezes out of me. Instead there were all the usual animals, but they were decked out in their winter finest. The canines were most gallant with their full coats glistening in the sun. The tiger's orange fur was nothing less than regal against the white of the snow.

The snowy owl was a bit of a puzzle to find but alas, we found one after the other hidden in their natural camouflage. The



eagles sat perched and alert, eyeing our every move. The deer and their like were eager to stand still and pose for my camera (something I appreciate as I am not that quick with the shutter). It was getting chilly, so we didn't make it as far out as the buffalo, but I'll make sure to pop in on them the next time I come.

Upon rounding the last bend before leaving the zoo, I heard a loud "hooting" sound. I looked up to the sky and sure enough - high

A wintry walk at the Forestry Farm might be just the thing to ward off those winter blues and see the park and the animals in a different light (and temperature)

above the treetops was an enormous Great Horned Owl. He was magnificent and seemed quite oblivious to us. His attention was focused on the caged owls below. We wondered

aloud if he might be owl or maybe just checking out the local chicks. In any event, he seemed very interested in them and put on quite a show for all to see. The owls below pretended not to notice him as he fluffed up his plumage, ducked and weaved his head up, down and sideways to get their attention.

A little research followed our notable visit to the Forestry Farm that day. The Great Horned Owl is found all over the United States and most of Canada. They usually reside year-round in the same spot and the females and males look similar, except the female is the larger of the two. The fellow that we saw must be the proverbial early bird as their nesting season doesn't start until January or February (or maybe he just doesn't like to leave it until the last minute to get a date). The research suggested that these owls were not very rare, but in all of my 40-something years, I've never seen one in the wild, so it was very exciting (some of you may be suggesting that I get out more - thanks, I've heard it before). I'll be back soon to see what else is going on at the Zoo.

The Zoo is open from 10:00 am - 4:00 pm daily. Admission is free in the winter. Don't forget your camera.

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