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Explore with Purpose



Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls

Find, Hold & Band Owls in the Arizona Mountains as We Study a Changing Forest

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Trip Details:

Days
7 Days / Apr–Jun

Price
From $5986

Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls

Find, Hold & Band Owls in the Arizona Mountains as We Study a Changing Forest

In Arizona's Chiricahua National Monument, nights reveal a rare window into the lives of owls few people ever encounter. Here in a high-elevation sky island, where an isolated mountain range rises from the desert floor, join researchers in listening for calls, searching for nest cavities, and helping to band and release owls as part of a long-term effort to understand the health of their forest environment. Each sign matters: a cavity hidden high in an old pine, a pair returning to the same canyon year after year, a call carrying through prime habitat after dark. Together, these details help scientists track where owls live and raise young, and what their presence reveals about changing forest conditions. Along with conducting fieldwork, you'll explore the secluded peaks, canyons and sculpted formations that have earned the Chiricahua Range the nickname "Wonderland of Rocks." This expedition combines hands-on wildlife research with an immersive experience in one of North America's most biologically diverse environments, where four major ecosystems and five biomes converge.

Expedition Highlights

Come Face-to-Face With Wild Forest Owls

Help researchers capture, band, measure and release wild owls. Few wildlife experiences compare to holding one of these elusive birds before it disappears back into the forest.

Explore a Sky Island Wilderness

Travel from Tucson's Sonoran Desert into the Chiricahua Mountains, a sky island ecosystem where cooler, forested peaks rise from the surrounding desert and support a remarkable diversity of life.

Unlock Extraordinary Wildlife Access

Join scientists in protected study areas and active research sites that are off-limits to most visitors—access that most birders only dream about becomes part of your nightly routine.

Research at a Glance



The Research Focus

Researchers study where owls nest, which habitats they use, and how successfully they raise young, to better understand changing conditions within the Chiricahuas' forests.



What You'll Do

Search for nest cavities, track owl activity at active survey sites, and assist researchers with the capture, banding and release of wild owls during nighttime fieldwork.



Why It Matters

Owls depend on healthy forests to survive, and this data helps scientists identify important habitat, understand environmental change and guide conservation efforts throughout the region.



Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls Itinerary

Find, Hold & Band Owls in the Arizona Mountains as We Study a Changing Forest

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Tucson
Day 2	Tucson
Day 3	Tucson / Chiricahua Mountains
Day 4	Cave Creek Canyon
Days 5–6	Chiricahua Mountains
Day 7	Southwestern Research Station / Tucson



Day 1

Tucson

Gather in Tucson before your owl research expedition

- Arrive in the Sonoran Desert, where saguaros rise beneath distant mountain ranges
- Join your Field Guide and research team for dinner and an introduction to owl conservation
- Learn how cavity cameras, GPS units and nighttime surveys support the fieldwork ahead

Arrive in Tucson, where you're met on arrival and transferred to our hotel. Here, the Sonoran Desert sprawls beneath distant peaks, with towering saguaros dominating the landscape—a mosaic of dry washes, cactus forests and desert grasslands that support an astonishing diversity of wildlife.

This evening, gather with your Field Guide, fellow travelers and research team for a welcome dinner. Get an orientation to all that lies ahead during our week in the Chiricahua Mountains, where flammulated owls, elf owls and northern saw-whet owls depend on nesting cavities hidden within pine-oak forests. You'll learn about owl conservation, nest monitoring, and the broader goals of the research project. You'll also be introduced to the tools and techniques used throughout the expedition, including cavity cameras, GPS units and nighttime owl surveys. Discover how researchers locate nest sites, assess habitat quality and monitor owl activity across the forests and canyons of southeastern Arizona. Depending on arrival times and project needs, the evening may also include a hands-on introduction to nest cavity monitoring methods.

Day 2

Tucson

Explore a desert alive with nesting birds and giant saguaros

- Visit Saguaro National Park and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
- Look for Gila woodpecker cavities, Harris's hawks, Gambel's quail and cactus wrens
- Learn how saguaros provide nesting sites, food and shelter for desert wildlife

Our adventures begin today as we explore Saguaro National Park and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum where we learn about the region's climate and wildlife. Two annual rainy seasons support a wide range of plant and animal life, which distinguishes the Sonoran from other deserts that lack its biodiversity. Look for the nesting cavities of Gila woodpeckers in saguaros, Gambel's quail in the desert scrub, and Harris's hawks perched atop towering cacti. Depending on conditions, you may also encounter curve-billed thrashers, cactus wrens, roadrunners and a variety of hummingbird species. Learn how giant saguaros function much like trees, providing nesting sites, perches and food resources. Throughout the day, your Field Guide will help interpret the relationships between the desert's plants, birds and wildlife while drawing connections between these desert ecosystems and the mountain habitats you'll explore later in the week.

Return to our lodging this evening for dinner and continued field preparation. Additional training may include nest cavity identification, research methods briefings, and preparation for upcoming fieldwork in the Chiricahua Mountains. If conditions allow, enjoy the region's renowned dark skies, where minimal light pollution reveals spectacular views of the stars.

Day 3

Tucson / Chiricahua Mountains

Ascend from cactus desert to an owl research base in the Chiricahuas

- Watch saguaros give way to oak woodland and pine forest on the drive into the mountains
- Settle into Cave Creek Canyon at the Southwestern Research Station
- Train with cavity cameras and begin checking potential owl nest sites

After breakfast, leave Tucson behind and drive about three hours into the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona. As we ascend, observe the changes in the landscape as saguaro-studded desert gives way to oak woodland, pine forest and cooler mountain habitat. By early afternoon, arrive at the Southwestern Research Station in Cave Creek Canyon, a biological field station run by the American Museum of Natural History in New York, which will be our base for the next four days. The station provides scientists, educators and students from around the world the opportunity to work and study in one of the most biologically rich environments in the United States. Located at 5,400 feet above sea level, the station lies in the heart of the Madrean Sky Island Archipelago stretching from the tropical Sierra Madre Occidental all the way to the Rocky Mountains. Nearby habitats include an elevational gradient from low desert to alpine meadows, rich riparian areas, and a unique blend of Chihuahuan and Sonoran Desert species.

After we get settled in, begin training with cavity-monitoring cameras and other field equipment before heading into the surrounding habitat. Walk the station grounds with researchers, learn how cavity-monitoring equipment is used, and begin identifying the trees, snags and forest structures that create nesting opportunities for owls. You'll also conduct introductory cavity checks and gain your first hands-on experience evaluating potential nesting habitat. As the sun drops behind the canyon walls, we anticipate the nocturnal research ahead: Depending on conditions and research priorities, the evening may include an introductory nocturnal survey, offering a first opportunity to experience the forest after dark and learn how researchers search for species that are more often heard than seen.

Please note: *Some departures will spend the next four nights at the Southwestern Research Station while others will stay nearby at nearby Cave Creek Ranch. Please check with an Adventure Specialist for accommodation specifics.*

Day 4

Cave Creek Canyon

Search hidden tree cavities for Arizona's smallest forest owls

- Use GPS units, cavity cameras and mirror poles to inspect trunks and snags
- Look for flammulated, elf and northern saw-whet owls in the pine-oak forest
- See owls at close range when researchers safely handle them for monitoring

Today, head into Cave Creek Canyon and the South Fork region, one of the most biologically rich corners of the Chiricahua Mountains where steep canyon walls, pine-oak forests and seasonal waterways create habitats that are home not only to owls and other birds, but white-tailed deer, coatimundi, black bear, coyote and myriad bats. With more than 20 bat species recorded, the Chiricahuas have the highest bat diversity in the United States. For us, the search for owls will begin with trees. Alongside the research team, visit active study sites and look for the natural cavities many owl species depend upon for nesting. Using GPS units, cavity cameras and mirror poles, investigate potential nest sites hidden high within trunks and snags. Learn how to evaluate a cavity's suitability by examining its size, depth, location and surrounding habitat.

At first glance, the forest can appear uniform, but the reward for careful observation can be extraordinary. After hours of searching with researchers, the sudden discovery of an owl can send a jolt of excitement through the group—a tiny bird no bigger than your hand, staring back with luminous eyes from a hidden cavity or shaded branch. Participants may also have opportunities to assist researchers as they safely handle owls for monitoring and data collection, offering a rare chance to see these elusive predators up close. With practice, subtle details throughout the forest begin to stand out. An old woodpecker excavation, a lightning-scarred pine or a dead standing tree may provide critical nesting habitat for species that are otherwise difficult to study. Additional evening field activities may take place depending on research priorities and local conditions.

Days
5–6

Chiricahua Mountains

Monitor owl nests across the changing mountain forest

- Revisit known cavity trees and document changes in nesting habitat
- Check remote cameras, survey vegetation and search for signs of owl activity
- Learn how wildfire, drought and forest change affect cavity-nesting species

Over the next two days, travel with researchers across the Chiricahua Mountains, where owl habitat is monitored throughout the breeding season. One day may be spent revisiting known cavity trees, inspecting nest sites and documenting changes in forest conditions. The other may focus on checking remote cameras, surveying vegetation or searching for signs of activity around potential nesting locations. The work takes us through a variety of habitats, from pine-covered slopes and oak woodland to canyon bottoms lined with sycamores. Along the way, the observations we collect help build a clearer picture of owl habitat and nesting activity.

Wildlife remains a constant presence, with deer, coatimundi and a variety of bird species occasionally appearing along the trail. As the fieldwork becomes more familiar, individual observations begin to connect to larger patterns. Learn how wildfire, drought and shifts in forest structure can influence nesting opportunities, and how long-term monitoring helps researchers understand changes that unfold over years rather than seasons. Depending on weather and research priorities, nights may include additional fieldwork, offering opportunities to experience the forest after dark and learn how researchers survey for owl activity.

On our final evening, gather with our Field Guide, scientists and fellow travelers for a farewell dinner as we discuss the conservation implications of our research with the project leaders. Reflect on how information gathered from nest monitoring, habitat surveys and long-term field observations helps inform conservation strategies for cavity-nesting owls and the forests they depend upon. Depart with valuable insight into how field research contributes to wildlife management and conservation decision-making across the region.

Day
7

Southwestern Research Station / Tucson

Depart Arizona with a firsthand understanding of forest owls

- Descend from the Chiricahua Mountains into the Sonoran Desert
- Transfer to Tucson for homeward flights

After breakfast, depart the Southwestern Research Station and drive back to Tucson. The route retraces our journey through southeastern Arizona, descending from the forests of the Chiricahua Mountains into the Sonoran Desert. Arrive at Tucson International Airport for homeward flights, reflecting on your valuable contribution to research on owl habitat, nesting ecology and the changing forests of southeastern Arizona.



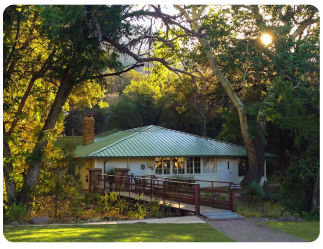
Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls Accommodations

Find, Hold & Band Owls in the Arizona Mountains as We Study a Changing Forest



Hacienda del Sol Guest Ranch Resort

Formerly a 1920s girls' school, this historic desert retreat offers mountain views, Southwestern-style rooms, destination dining, a full-service spa and a floating sound bath beneath the stars.



Southwest Research Station

A comfortable base in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains, this acclaimed research station pairs simple accommodations with outstanding birding, mountain trails and opportunities to spot sought-after species just steps from your room.



Cave Creek Ranch

Set on the grounds of a 1906 homestead at the entrance to Cave Creek Canyon, this historic ranch offers cottage-style accommodations, creekside retreats and mountain views in Arizona's Chiricahuas.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/arizona-forest-owl-research-trip/accommodations.

Meet the Scientists

Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls



Dave Oleyar, Ph.D.

Senior Scientist, HawkWatch International

Dave Oleyar is a senior scientist with HawkWatch International whose research focuses on the conservation of forest owls in western North America. He studies the habitat use, nesting behavior and population dynamics of flammulated owls, to better understand how these migratory birds may be affected by climate change and other environmental pressures. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Washington, following graduate studies in raptor biology at Boise State University. His work centers on understanding what these owls need to successfully breed and persist across changing landscapes. By monitoring nest sites, habitat conditions and populations, he examines how conservation and land-management decisions influence their long-term survival.

Dr. Oleyar's research contributes to practical conservation strategies aimed at protecting owl habitat and improving understanding of a species that remains relatively understudied. The data collected through his projects help inform management decisions that promote healthy forest ecosystems. In the field, much of the work he supervises takes place after dark, listening for owl calls and monitoring nest cavities and nest boxes. One of the most rewarding moments comes when he peers into a cavity and finds a flammulated owl looking back—or discovers that a bird banded years earlier has returned after migrating to Mexico and back.

His work is helping reveal how owls respond to environmental change, providing the knowledge needed to conserve these wondrous birds and the forests they inhabit.

Education

Ph.D., School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, University of Washington
M.S. in Raptor Biology, Boise State University, Idaho
B.S. in Biology, Baylor University, Texas

Research & Impact

Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls

Small forest owls are among the least understood birds in North America. Species such as flammulated owls, northern saw-whet owls, elf owls and whiskered screech-owls are difficult to study because they are nocturnal, secretive and often nest high inside tree cavities. This project investigates how these owls use the forests of southeastern Arizona, how changing environmental conditions affect their breeding ecology, and whether the nesting resources they depend on will remain available in the future. By combining owl surveys, nest monitoring, cavity mapping and habitat assessments, researchers are answering fundamental questions about species that remain surprisingly understudied.

Research Focus

This project investigates where different owl species occur, which forest types they use, when they breed, and how nesting success varies across habitats. A major focus is understanding the role of natural nesting cavities. Researchers are documenting cavity availability, occupancy and microclimate across the Chiricahua Mountains while examining how forest changes may influence breeding opportunities over time. The research also explores whether conservation tools such as nest boxes can supplement natural nesting habitat in some regions and why those strategies may be effective in certain forests but not others.

Conservation Impact

Many small forest owls remain poorly understood, making it difficult to protect the habitats they depend upon. This research is helping to provide the information needed to guide future conservation decisions across the American West.

- **Informs forest-management decisions** by identifying and mapping important nesting cavities used by breeding owls
- **Provides some of the first long-term data on breeding ecology**, habitat use and productivity for several small owl species
- Generated the **first GPS tracking data ever collected for whiskered screech-owls**
- Helps **determine whether natural cavities can continue supporting owl populations** or whether nest boxes may be needed in some landscapes
- **Builds long-term datasets** capable of detecting how climate change affects breeding timing, nesting success and habitat use
- Expands the **scale of owl conservation research** through thousands of hours of participant-supported fieldwork

In 2024 alone, participants contributed more than 3,900 hours of field research, helping scientists detect 377 owls, monitor 36 nests, map 237 tree cavities and band 172 owls across Arizona and Utah.

Your Role in the Research

Survey for owls, locate and monitor nesting cavities, and collect habitat data used to study breeding ecology across the Chiricahua Mountains. Depending on timing and field conditions, you may also assist with owl banding, nest monitoring and cavity microclimate studies. The information collected helps researchers understand how owls use different habitats, which nesting resources are most important and how changing forest conditions may influence future populations.

Life in the Field

Days may be spent searching for tree cavities, monitoring nests, measuring habitat or checking equipment at active study sites. After dark, attention shifts to nighttime surveys and owl captures, when forest trails become listening stations and every call may signal a new observation. The expedition is based at Southwestern Research Station, where participants live alongside scientists and gain rare access to the realities of field research. Conversations over meals are as much a part of the experience as the work itself, offering insight into the challenges, discoveries and surprises that come with studying wildlife few people ever see..

Field Conditions

Fieldwork takes place on uneven forest trails, rocky canyon bottoms and off-trail terrain throughout the Chiricahua Mountains. Expect daily hiking, warm daytime temperatures and occasional late nights during owl surveys and banding activities. Participants may spend extended periods walking, standing, listening or observing wildlife in low-light conditions. Flexibility is important, as weather, owl activity and research priorities often shape the schedule from day to day.

Discovery in the Field

Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls

1. **Journey From Desert to Mountain Forest**
   Start amid Tucson's towering saguaros and sun-baked desert, then climb into the pine-oak forests and rugged canyons of the Chiricahua Mountains, experiencing two dramatically different Arizona landscapes in a single trip.

2. **Go Beyond Traditional Wildlife Viewing**
   Don't just hope for fleeting glimpses of owls from a distance. Learn how to conduct fieldwork from experienced researchers, and gain access typically reserved for scientists, graduate students or other specialized individuals.

3. **Discover the Wonder of the Chiricahuas After Dark**
   As darkness settles over the mountains, your research day is just beginning. Join nighttime surveys and discover how researchers locate birds hidden within the vast forests and canyons of the Chiricahua Range.

4. **Experience "Owl Adrenaline"**
   Owls can be elusive, and nighttime fieldwork takes dedication and patience. When an owl suddenly appears, it's exhilarating, offering a thrill that researchers call "owl adrenaline."

5. **Arrive With Curiosity, Learn Everything Else**
   No prior science or birding experience is required. Researchers teach you the skills, field techniques and identification methods you'll use during your adventure.

6. **Assist With Hummingbird Banding**
   Depending on timing and research schedules, you may also assist with hummingbird banding, adding another hands-on wildlife experience to your week in the field.

7. **Explore in a Small, Focused Group**
   A limited group size means more opportunities to participate in fieldwork, ask questions and share discoveries with the scientists leading the expedition.

8. **Travel With Purpose**
   Each survey, habitat assessment and field observation contributes to long-term research in the Chiricahuas, helping scientists understand how wildlife and forests respond to changing environmental conditions.



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $5986

Group Size
Limited to 12 Travelers

Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls Dates, Pricing & Info

Find, Hold & Band Owls in the Arizona Mountains as We Study a Changing Forest

2027 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Apr 12 - Apr 18, 2027	$5986	
May 10 - May 16, 2027	$5986	Natural Habitat Explorers Pricing Available
May 17 - May 23, 2027	$5986	
May 31 - Jun 6, 2027	$5986	Natural Habitat Explorers Pricing Available
Jun 7 - Jun 13, 2027	$5986	
Jun 28 - Jul 4, 2027	$5986	

2028 Departures

Departure – Return Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028	Pricing	Notes
Apr 12 - Apr 18, 2028	From $5986	
May 10 - May 16, 2028	From $5986	
May 17 - May 23, 2028	From $5986	

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028		
May 31 - Jun 6, 2028	**From $5986**	
Jun 7 - Jun 13, 2028	**From $5986**	
Jun 28 - Jul 4, 2028	**From $5986**	

See https://www.nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/arizona-forest-owl-research-trip/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Price Includes: Accommodations, meals from welcome dinner through final breakfast, Field Guide, scientist access, ground transfers, activities, permits, and research participation.

Not Included

Flights, personal expenses, optional activities, travel insurance, gratuities, and items of a personal nature.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins and ends in Tucson, Arizona. **You must arrive in Tucson by 2:30 pm on Day 1** in order to make it to the hotel in time for a 5 pm welcome gathering. For guests who come in early, recommended hotels will be included in your pre-departure materials.

You may depart Tucson any time after 2 pm on the final day.

Know Before You Go

Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls

In Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains, owl calls echo through pine-oak canyons long after sunset. Hidden within old woodpecker cavities, standing dead trees and rugged mountain forests, species such as flammulated owls, northern saw-whet owls, elf owls and whiskered screech-owls depend on nesting habitat that few people ever have the opportunity to explore.

Why Are Arizona's Sky Islands One of the Best Places in the World to Study Forest Owls?

Arizona's Sky Islands, including the Chiricahua Mountains, contain an unusual concentration of habitats within a relatively small area. Desert grasslands, oak woodlands, pine forests and mixed-conifer forests occur across steep elevation gradients, allowing forest owl species from the Rocky Mountains, Mexico and the American Southwest to overlap in a single mountain range.

For scientists, this creates a rare opportunity to compare how different owl species nest, hunt and use forest habitats across changing environmental conditions. Combined with decades of ongoing field studies and access to remote mountain forests, the Sky Islands have become one of North America's most important landscapes for understanding forest owls and the ecosystems they inhabit.

Quick Facts: An Intimate Encounter with Arizona's Forest Owls

- **Location:** Chiricahua Mountains, Arizona
- **Research partner:** Southwestern Research Station
- **Primary species:** Flammulated owls, northern saw-whet owls, elf owls and whiskered screech-owls
- **Key activity:** Owl surveys, cavity monitoring and habitat assessments
- **Conservation focus:** Owl nesting habitat, forest health and climate change impacts

What Wildlife Will I See on an Arizona Forest Owl Expedition?

Forest owls are the primary focus of the expedition, but the Chiricahua Mountains support an extraordinary diversity of wildlife thanks to their unique position between the Rocky Mountains, Mexico and the Sonoran Desert. Wildlife sightings vary with habitat, elevation and season, making each expedition different.

Most Likely

- Flammulated owls
- Elf owls
- Hummingbirds
- Gila woodpeckers
- Harris's hawks
- Gambel's quail
- Cactus wrens
- Roadrunners

Medium Likelihood

- Northern saw-whet owls
- Whiskered screech-owls
- Elegant trogons
- Arizona woodpeckers
- Mexican chickadees
- White-tailed deer
- Coatimundis

The Chiricahuas are widely recognized as one of the premier birding and wildlife destinations in the American Southwest, supporting a remarkable mix of desert, woodland and mountain species.

What Is the Climate Like in Arizona During This Expedition?

The Chiricahua Mountains experience a mountain climate that is cooler and wetter than the surrounding Sonoran Desert. Conditions can vary significantly between Tucson and the higher elevations where research takes place.

Condition	What to Expect
Daytime Temperatures	70–90°F
Nighttime Temperatures	45–65°F
Sun Exposure	Strong during daytime fieldwork
Rainfall	Summer thunderstorms and seasonal monsoon activity possible
Terrain Conditions	Rocky trails, forest paths and uneven terrain
Seasonal Notes	Cooler temperatures at higher elevations, especially after dark

Because much of the research occurs in mountain forests and during nighttime surveys, participants should be prepared for both warm daytime conditions and cooler evenings.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need research experience?

No prior research experience is required. Scientists and field staff provide training and guidance in owl surveys, habitat monitoring and field observation techniques used throughout the expedition.

What type of research will I assist with?

Participants assist researchers studying owl distribution, nesting activity, breeding success and habitat use across the Chiricahua Mountains. Activities may include nighttime owl surveys, nest cavity monitoring, habitat assessments and, depending on timing and field conditions, assisting with owl banding and nest monitoring.

What is the conservation impact of this research?

This expedition supports long-term research focused on understanding how forest owls use nesting habitat and how changing environmental conditions affect breeding success. Data collected by participants helps scientists identify important habitats, monitor forest change and guide future conservation decisions.

How physically demanding is the expedition?

Participants should be comfortable walking on uneven forest trails, rocky canyon bottoms and occasional off-trail terrain. Fieldwork may involve extended periods of walking, standing, listening and observing wildlife, along with occasional late nights during owl surveys and banding activities.

Can weather affect research activities?

Yes. Weather conditions, owl activity and research priorities can affect daily schedules and fieldwork plans. Researchers regularly adjust activities to maximize both safety and scientific opportunities.

What happens in case of an emergency?

Participant safety is a priority on all expeditions. Field staff follow established safety procedures and maintain communication during field activities. If medical care is required, staff coordinate transportation to the nearest appropriate medical facility.

What immunizations & travel vaccinations do I need?

Participants should consult a healthcare provider before travel and ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting Arizona. Participants should also prepare for extended outdoor activity in mountain environments.

What should I bring?

Participants receive a detailed packing list before departure outlining recommended clothing, field gear and personal supplies. Essential items include hiking footwear, layered clothing, sun protection and gear appropriate for outdoor fieldwork and nighttime surveys.

What Should I Pack for an Arizona Forest Owl Expedition?

Participants should pack for active days outdoors, variable mountain weather and nighttime fieldwork. Layered clothing is important, as temperatures can vary considerably between daytime and evening research activities.

Recommended items include:

- Comfortable hiking boots or trail shoes
- Lightweight field clothing
- Long pants for hiking and fieldwork
- Lightweight jacket or fleece
- Rain jacket
- Wide-brimmed hat
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Refillable water bottle
- Small daypack

- Headlamp or flashlight with extra batteries
- Binoculars
- Camera
- Insect repellent

Because research often continues after dark, a reliable headlamp and comfortable layers for cooler evening temperatures are especially important.

What Will I Experience on Close Encounters with Arizona's Forest Owls?

Participants assist researchers studying some of North America's least-understood owl species, contributing to surveys, habitat assessments and nest cavity monitoring across the Chiricahua Mountains. Depending on timing and research needs, participants may help monitor nests, search for cavity trees, conduct nighttime surveys and observe owl banding activities.

Beyond the research, participants experience the dramatic transition from the Sonoran Desert to Arizona's Sky Island forests, exploring pine-oak canyons, rugged mountain landscapes and one of the Southwest's most biologically diverse regions.

What Does Daily Fieldwork Look Like?

Fieldwork takes place at active research sites throughout the Chiricahua Mountains. Days may focus on searching for nest cavities, monitoring habitat conditions, checking equipment and documenting owl activity across a variety of forest types.

As daylight fades, research often shifts to nighttime surveys when owl activity increases. Participants may accompany researchers into the field to listen for calls, locate active territories and learn how scientists study species that are more often heard than seen. Field schedules remain flexible and are shaped by weather, owl activity and ongoing research priorities.

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expeditions
by Nat Hab

Natural Habitat Adventures · PO Box 3065 · Boulder, CO USA 80307

US & Canada: 800-548-7555 · International: 303-222-8861

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