

How I Got the Shot – European Goldfinch

Photographer: Bonnie Graham

Where was the picture taken: Armstrong Park, Carol Stream

The Story Behind the Shot:



This European Goldfinch has been hanging around Armstrong Park for a few years. Last year I tried several times to find it, but came back empty-handed. This year, on my first try I located him in some thickets. It was quite cold and when he came out in the open, I had my shot! I usually take continuous shots, but being so cold my battery died after one shot. My fingers frozen, I took the dead battery out, only to break the battery cover off. This finch stayed on the plant for quite awhile but got tired of me fiddling with my camera and flew off. So the point is, if you only have one shot, make it count! My

excursion ended with me slipping on ice in the parking lot and hitting the ground hard. Good news...my camera and I are OK :-) !

How I Got the Shot - Great Gray Owl

Photographer: Hazem Alkhan

Where was the picture taken? Sax-Zim Bog, Minnesota

The Story Behind the Shot:



In the first week of January, 2022, I took my brother, mom's cousin, and friend on my post-graduation trip to Sax-Zim Bog in Minnesota, one of the most renowned winter birding destinations. Our hotel was about 50 minutes from the area, so we left about an hour before sunrise. I decided that my first course of action would be to go to a feeder where two of my target birds, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, were being seen. I was checking the Telegram chat for live sightings of Great Gray Owls, another one of my target species and one of the main bird attractions at Sax-Zim Bog. Things, however, turned out differently.

The sun had just risen when we arrived at the Sax-Zim Bog area. As we drove, I had my eyes set on what I believed to be some ravens flying. We were driving behind a car that seemed to slow down as if trying to get a good look at the birds; it then came to a stop behind another parked car at the shoulder.

The unwritten rule of birding at Sax-Zim Bog is: When you see cars that seem to be birders pulled over, pull over behind them, they're probably seeing something interesting. So, that's what we did.

I got out of the car and walked up to the people standing there. I greeted them and asked what they had. One of them replied. "There's a Great Gray Owl in that distant stand of trees." We happened to pass by where a Great Gray Owl had been seen regularly!! I immediately became frenzied. I excitedly

gestured to my party to get out of the car. As the owl shifted perches, I frantically ran to the car and back more than once to get the various equipment I saw fit for photographing - scope, tripod, camera, binoculars. I began attempting to take a digiscope photo of the owl. Having a broken and nearly non-functional tripod, I had to position the scope with one hand and take a photo with my phone with my other hand, all while trying to balance the scope on the tip of the tripod; a task I had become accustomed to but was particularly more challenging with -30°F wind chills. After a few minutes I was unsuccessful.

Determined to get a photo, I took the glove off my left hand. My hand quickly became so cold that it went numb. I eventually got a couple of poor photos and ran back to the car. As I sat in the passenger seat, wincing in sheer pain, something incredible happened. The Greatest Great Gray Encounter

"Hazem! It's coming here!" my friend shouted. I turned to see the owl fly right up to the top of the tree next to our car (on my side) and perch! The pain in my hand instantly vanished. The others moved closer to our car, as we were now the closest to the bird. The owl sat there for a few minutes, and we all got excellent looks and photos of it from the comfort of our warm car. This photo is a "digibin" photo (taken by my phone through my binoculars). After we were all satisfied with our experience of this bird—which we encountered accidentally and was one of the first birds we saw on our trip—we moved on to see Evening and Pine Grosbeaks.