

A Morning with a Short-eared Owl

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Since I began bird photography not so very long ago, I have had days when I have been able to observe a particular bird's behaviour and feeding habits. One such great encounter was with the [American Dipper \(Cinclus mexicanus\)](#). This year Vancouver had a record snowfall during November, and when the first good day came along, I had a feeling that birds would be very actively hunting. That day I had the good fortune to observe, quite closely, another bird that has quickly become a favourite of mine, the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) doing just that.

I saw the owl perching from time to time, and when they do, they are constantly looking around for prey - or glancing at photographers (Photo 1).

But, more generally, they are in flight over open marshy country (Photo 2)

When a prey, usually a vole in this particular area, is heard or perhaps seen, they hover for a moment before plunging down to grab the prey (Photo 3)

Then, they either eat the prey where they find it, or take flight when another bird discovers there is food to be had (Photo 4)

And invariably the larger bird, a Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) in this case, steals it (Photo 5)

In my observations that morning of three Short-eared Owls and five Northern Harriers hunting over the same area, I discovered that the Owls were by far the more successful at finding prey under snow cover, confirming their superior hearing abilities. It was a most satisfying time spent that morning and I shall cherish it forever. I do hope that if you ever visit an open marshy area you will also have the opportunity to enjoy such an experience.

Equipment Used

- Canon 1D MkII
- Canon 500mm f4 lens with Canon 1.4 and 2.0 teleconverters
- Canon 580EX flash with Better Beamer
- Gitzo 1348 tripod, Manfrotto 438 leveller, Wimberley Sidekick

Editor's note - You can view more of Kwan's photography in his [online portfolio](#).

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Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5

