



Owls

Where Do We Live?

Owls live everywhere in the world except Antarctica. Their **habitat** include deserts, prairies, and even the Arctic tundra. They nest in trees, holes in the ground, in barns, and in caves.

What Do We Eat?

Depending on the species and habitat, **prey** includes invertebrates (insects, spiders, earthworms, snails, crayfish, and crabs), reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds, and small **mammals** (mice and moles). Large owls eat small foxes, rabbits and birds.

What Are Our Natural Enemies?

Many large owls, like the *adult* great horned owl have no natural **predators**. However, young owls can be prey of golden eagles, or northern goshawks. Smaller owls caught out in the open can become prey to foxes, bobcats, coyotes, or domestic cats.

How Do We Adapt?

Owls have several adaptations that make them very good hunters. The color of their feathers provide **camouflage** in trees. Camouflage not only lets owls hide from predators, but also lets them hide from prey animals they are hunting. Soft feathers help make owls very quiet when they are flying and helps them to avoid being heard by prey. Flat faces and large eyes help owls see well when it is dark. Owl eyes are not round like human eyes. Owl eyes are tube-shaped and do not move, giving them binocular vision which helps them focus on prey.

Did You Know?

- **Raptor** is another word for a bird of prey. They are **carnivorous** birds that eat other animals.
- Thanks to extra bones in their necks owls can turn their heads up to 270 degrees around. This helps the owl see behind them because their tube-shaped eyes do not move in their sockets.
- Owls have powerful claws called **talons** that help them catch their prey.
- Owls do not have ears, they have **ear slits** which help capture the sounds, giving the owl an exact location of their prey.
- Baby owls are called **owlets**.
- A group of owls is called a **parliament**.
- The smallest owl is the **elf owl**. It weighs 1.5 ounces and are 5 inches long.
- The largest owl is the **European eagle owl**. It weighs 8 pounds and are 30 inches long.
- Owls cannot digest the fur and bones of their prey. This material is regurgitated through their mouth in a small rounded pellet.
- There are over 200 species of owls in the world. There are 19 species in North America.

North American Owl Species

- **The Barred Owl** is sometimes called the hoot owl because they are the noisiest of the North American owls. It lives in trees and can be found in New York. It's named for the dark brown, vertical feathers on its chests that look like bars.
- **The Barn Owl** is the most widespread of all land birds and is found on six continents. It has a heart-shaped white face. Its call is a scream that can last for more than 2 seconds.
- **The Boreal Owl** likes to live in the northern woodlands in evergreen trees. This owl are not very big but can capture prey under snow or in dense woodland underbrush.
- **The Burrowing Owl** can be found in open landscapes like the grasslands, vacant lots, and even golf courses, burrowing holes in the ground. It takes over holes dug by other borrowing animals, such as prairie dogs, squirrels, armadillos, and tortoises.
- **The Flammulated Owl** is one of the smallest owls in North America, but they have the longest annual migration. This owl fly hundreds of miles twice a year between breeding sites in North America to overwintering sites in South America.
- **The Great Gray Owl** is one of the largest owls in the world with a length of 22 inches and a wingspan of 3 feet. It is a nomadic owl that moves to find abundant rodent populations.
- **The Great Horned Owl** is found all over North America, in forests, deserts, and in the suburbs. This very large owl can be up to 24 inches long with a 3-foot wingspan. You have very likely heard its call right in your own neighborhood.
- **The Long-Eared Owl** has long ear tufts that help it stay camouflaged in its habitat in open woodlands and riverbanks.
- **Northern Hawk Owl** is mostly found in Canada and is diurnal. It migrates only to find food.
- **Northern Pygmy Owl** is diurnal and preys on songbirds. This small owl has been known to hunt at bird feeders.
- **Northern Saw-Whet Owl** is very hard to find unless it is mating season and you can hear its tooting song that can go on for hours.
- **The Short-Eared Owl** is found on most continents, and hunts during the day, at dawn and dusk. Its unusual call is a variety of barks, hisses and squeals.
- **The Snowy Owl** is native to arctic regions of North America. The males are mostly all white and the females have some color. They feed in dunes, open fields and perch on high spots such as fences, telephone poles and hay bales. The snowy owl is a daytime hunter that eats small rodents. These owls mate for life.
- **The Spotted Owl** lives in Western old growth forests and canyons. One of the prey animals they eat are flying squirrels. Its call is a very deep hoot.
- **The Eastern Screech Owl** is very similar to the western screech owl, but its call is a series of whinnies.
- **The Elf Owl** is the smallest owl in the world and is found in the Southwestern United States. It lives in cactus, hardwood trees, and abandoned woodpecker holes in trees. Its call is a mewing noise.
- **The Whiskered Screech Owl** lives mostly in woodlands near the Mexican border. It looks a lot like the Western screech owl but eats mostly large insects and some rodents. Its call is a trilled song.

Owls

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O	I	B	D	E	R	R	A	B	G	H	O	D	A
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TUFTS
 SNOWY
 MAMMAL
 BURROWING
 PREY
 RAPTOR
 SPOTTED
 FLAMMULATED
 TALONS
 WHISKERED
 PYGMY
 BARRED
 BARN
 PARLIAMENT
 ELF
 OWLET
 PREDATOR
 HABITAT
 SCREECH

Great horned owl





Borreal owl