



Great Horned Owl

(*Bubo virginianus*) Order: Strigiformes Family: Strigidae

SIZE: Weight, 2-3 ½ lbs.; height, 18-25 inches; wingspan 36-60 inches. Female larger than males.

DESCRIPTION: Gray-brown and white with thin white and brown stripes running horizontally across belly. Large ear tufts that are used for display and camouflage. Yellow eyes. Strong legs with powerful, sharp talons. Sharp, hooked beak.

FLIGHT: Soft, flexible feathers make flight silent to aid in hunting. May fly up to 40 mph. Most bones are hollow and contain air to make the owl lighter for flying.

SENSES: Excellent binocular vision in daylight and at night. Eyes are fixed in sockets facing forward. Pupils can act independently and can be dilated or constricted to different sizes. Excellent sound perception. Can locate and capture prey on a dark night using sense of hearing only. Owls can hear sounds that are at least ten times fainter than the human ear can detect. Ears are placed asymmetrically on the head and are surrounded by soft, deep feathers that help funnel sounds to each ear. Sense of smell is probably nonexistent. This enables them to prey on skunks.

COMMUNICATION: Series of low, soft, far-carrying hoots.

HABITAT: Widespread. Found in forested areas, deserts, open country, parks and suburbs. Nocturnal, but has been known to hunt in daylight. Highly territorial.

DIET: Rabbits, rodents (mice), birds, squirrels, skunks, reptiles and insects. The owl flies silently, swoops down and captures prey with powerful talons. Swallows small prey whole, or tears apart larger prey with beak. Coughs up a pellet made of nonnutritive materials such as fur, bone and feathers.

RANGE: Resident throughout the United States and Canada down to South America.

FAMILY LIFE: Do not breed until 2 years old. Usually 2-3 eggs are incubated by both parents and hatch after 26-35 days. Young fly around 63-70 days after hatching.

NESTING: Usually an abandoned nest of a hawk, heron or crow. Will also use tree cavity, cave or even on ground.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

- The great horned owl cannot turn its head completely around, only about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way or 270 degrees.
- Although their body only weighs around 2 lbs., their eyes are about the same size as human eyes.
- In the discarded pellet, the bones are always wrapped inside the fur or feathers, so as not to injure the owl when it is coughed up.

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