



Wildlife Window: The Great Horned Owl Distinctive Late-Night Call. Effective Predators.

By the Ponds & Preserves Committee.

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Often heard at night in Rivendell, but difficult to see, is the Great Horned Owl. Great horned owls make a variety of noises, but their most common call is a 4-5 note “*whoo, whoo-hoo, whoo, whoo.*” Often heard calling back and forth to their mate, a male owl’s call is deeper, while a female owl’s call will have a higher pitch.

The owl was the constant companion of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom; so by association, the owl has come to be identified as wise. Florida is fortunate to be the home to five species of owls. Our owls are most helpful in keeping pesky rodent populations to a manageable level. Smaller owls contribute by eating cockroaches.

The Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) is the largest of Florida’s owls. If you see one often high up in a tree, it is a magical sight. Let’s learn more about these magnificent predators.



Appearance, Diet & Behavior

The Great Horned Owl’s head tufts resemble ears. It can stand a bit taller than the barred owl at 18 to 25 inches with a wingspan of 36 to 60 inches. Unlike the brown eyes of the barred owl, the great horned owl has glowing yellow eyes. Hard to spot, with their patchy grey, brown, and tan body, large yellow eyes, reddish-brown feathers around their face ringed with black, and white chin feathers. Like most raptors (birds of prey), female great horned owls are larger than the males.

A formidable predator, this bird’s diet includes rodents, rabbits, skunks, opossums, ducks, domestic cats, snakes (including copperheads & rattlesnakes) and other owls.

Living in forests, prairies, swamps, and marshes, it will raise one to four owlets a year in nests located in broad forks of trees or vacant nests of other raptors.

(Photos: Bob Frank)

Fascinating Facts

Some extraordinary features of owls include their ability to swivel their heads 270 degrees so they can take a backward look. This is because their eyes are so large, their eyeballs cannot move either side to side, or up and down.



A Nest of Owlets

Another highly defined owl sense is their hearing. Their ears are placed just behind their eyes and are well hidden by flaps of skin and feathers. (Those tufts of feathers some owls have look like ears but are not!)

Owls swallow their food whole, but if their prey is too large, they vomit up the indigestible remains. (These are identified as “owl pellets” and are quite intriguing - you will find bones, fur, and teeth.)



Owl Chick

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