

# Learn About The Great horned owl



by





The **Great horned owl** is one of the most widely-recognized species of owl. With his familiar ear tufts and bright yellow eyes, he is easily identified in picture books, zoos, and in the wild. We also call him the hoot owl because of his distinctive call: *who-who-who-whoooo*.



Great horned owls grow to 18-25 inches tall. They are thick-bodied, and their rounded wings span 3-5 feet. That means their wings are wider than their body is tall, which helps them in flight. However, they are not too wide, so the owl can navigate through trees while he hunts. Great horned owls are a mottled brown-and-grey color, which helps them blend into their surroundings. This blending is called

camouflage. When an owl sits in a tree, his feathers resemble the bark around him, effectively hiding him from his prey. The tufts on either side of his head that give him his name are called plumicorns. Theories about their use include helping with camouflage, providing the owl with a more threatening appearance, and aiding him in communication, so he can find a suitable mate.

Young are hatched in nests in tree holes, caves, or stumps, usually in February. Both the father and the mother sit on the eggs to incubate them, and the father also hunts for food. Owls are monogamous, which means they choose a mate and stay together. They can have 1-5 eggs per clutch, with 2-3 eggs being typical. The owlets hatch in order of size, so the first one to hatch is the largest. When food is scarce, the



larger owlets will out-compete with little siblings for dinner, and only one might survive. They hatch covered in white down, not getting their first immature feathers until they are 8 days old. After two weeks, about half of their juvenile feathers will have emerged. These feathers are paler than their adult feathers will be. Six weeks after hatching, the owlets will leave the nest and walk around. After nine weeks, they will have learned to fly, but they won't be good at it till they're 10-12 weeks old. Even so, the parents will continue to care for and feed them till as late in the year as October. Great horned owls are fiercely protective of their young, so if you find a nest, be sure to keep well away from it or you might be attacked.

Owls have lots of tools at their disposal for protecting their young and catching prey. Their short, black bills are perfect for tearing. Their wide yellow eyes have pupils that open widely in the dark and contain many rods to provide them excellent vision. Their eyes don't swivel in their sockets, but they can turn their heads 180 degrees in order to see to both sides and behind them. Feathers on their facial discs direct sound waves to their



ears, making their hearing quite sensitive. Owls strike from above, using their powerful talons to kill and carry their prey, which can include rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, crows, and even other owls. Their digestive system is unique. They will swallow smaller prey whole then regurgitate pellets that contain the parts they can't digest. The pellet might contain bone, fur, and other materials not suitable for digestion.

### Fast Facts

- Great horned owls live in farmlands and woodlands, but they can also be found in suburbs.
- Their lifespan can be up to 15 years in the wild.
- The males are smaller than the females, but they have a larger voice box so their call is deeper and louder.
- Great horned owls have no natural predators as adults.
- The oldest known great horned owl was found in Ohio. He was 28.
- Great horned owls are nocturnal, being most active at dusk and just before dawn, though they hunt all night and often start earlier and hunt later when food is scarce.
- Great horned owls are the only animal that feeds on skunks with regularity



Answer these questions about great horned owls.

1. Great horned owls grow to \_\_\_\_\_ feet tall

2. Great horned owls have a wingspan of \_\_\_\_\_.

3. True or False

Owlets are born with full feathers. \_\_\_\_\_

4. The colors of adult feathers are \_\_\_\_\_.

5. True or False

The great horned owl is also known as the hoot owl. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Owlets hatch in order of \_\_\_\_\_.

7. Name three tools owls use to hunt: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,

and \_\_\_\_\_.

8. True or False

Owls are the only animals that regularly hunt skunks. \_\_\_\_\_



## Great Horned Owl Word Search

V N S E S K H N H I A K A J B	OWL	PLUMICORN
U R N K V C T A L O N A G L G	TUFT	
X P U V L A Q A C R O H R E D	OWLET	
Q N H D N M Z T P O U T F V O	PREDATOR	
K N U N M O J U X T N Y Y I W	PREY	
I P M Z Y U C F T A U U Z W L	TALON	
T R D F M F A T V D R B H S E	SWIVEL	
S E C G E L G H U E Z O B K T	SKUNK	
E Y W N H A I U L R X S B F N	HOOT	
N O X U R G T I K P N N T N G	CAMOUFLAGE	
K I Z A B E W H D G I A A N X	FEATHER	
L S Z S R F A U E L W O L R Y	NEST	
P E L L E T O D U R S U G Z C	FLIGHT	
C W Z M G B P L U M I C O R N	PELLET	
N W F L I G H T T J N C W Z S	NOCTURNAL	

