



LENGTH: 15" ♀ > ♂
WINGSPAN: 38"

Short-eared Owl

Asio flammeus

Short-eared Owls are often seen flying during daylight hours, not typical behavior for most owls. They will soar or swoop low at dawn and dusk hunting for rodents, small mammals and birds, or other vulnerable prey often in open areas and grasslands. They may be mistaken for a low-flying hawk, except for their large, round heads. The short feather tufts on their heads, for which they are named, only resemble ears and are usually difficult to see.

Short-eared Owls nest on the ground, often in tall grass, using small bits of dried weeds and grasses for lining material, just enough to buffer the fragile eggs from the ground. The sparse lining also helps to protect the eggs from cracking when the female turns them for uniform heating during incubation.

Mated pairs of Short-eared Owls typically stay together until one dies. In years when there is an abundance of prey, the couple produce a larger number of eggs. On average, the clutch has four to seven eggs. The male will feed the female while she is incubating.

These hunters will swallow their prey whole, like most owls do, to avoid competition or predators. After digestion they regurgitate a compressed pellet of inedible fur, bones, and feathers. Pellets are found beneath roosting sites and under trees where there are nests. Depending on the size of the owl species, the pellet may be an inch to five inches in length.

LENGTH: 6.75" ♀ > ♂
WINGSPAN: 12"



Northern Pygmy Owl

Glaucidium gnoma (californicum)

These are tiny owls but very aggressive for their size. They live in densely forested areas, and tend to live secretive, solitary lives most of the time. Northern Pygmy Owls are sit-and-wait hunters. They swoop to capture prey such as mice, voles, bats, and songbirds. They can carry up to three times their own body weight.

Code of Birding Ethics

(Adapted from the Audubon Society)

- Observe birds quietly. Do not throw things at or chase birds. Do not "thrash about" the bush to flush birds.
- Avoid approaching a nest, or parents at a nest, too closely. Do not handle eggs or young.
- Use tape recorders with discretion to prevent driving birds from their territories.
- Bird in small groups. Walk in a single file line or spread out to prevent damage to surrounding habitats.
- Do not "tree whack" to arouse cavity dwellers.
- Avoid trampling fragile habitats, especially marshes, grasslands, and wildflowers. Stay on established trails.
- Do not trespass onto private property without written permission.
- Please do not litter.

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OWLS

Owls are adapted for life at night. They have very large eyes, a unique and keen sense of hearing, and large powerful feet for capturing and holding squirming prey.

During the day, most species are superbly camouflaged, with eyes closed, holding their brownish-gray streaked feathers compressed, and, if they have them, their ear tufts held up to blend in with tree bark.



LENGTH: 16" ♀ > ♂
WINGSPAN: 42"

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

Barn Owls are easily seen at night, hunting by swooping silently to capture prey. Barn Owls' diets include voles, shrews, mice, and other small rodents.

Favorite nesting sites include tall trees, old buildings, barns, and in nesting boxes. They usually do not line their nests, but sometimes use sticks or wood chips.

Barn Owls have many predators including other larger owls, hawks, eagles, and both feral and domestic cats.



LENGTH: 22"
WINGSPAN: 44" ♀ > ♂

Great Horned Owl

Bubo virginianus

This large bird has distinctive ear tufts that give a cat-like look to its head. Great Horned Owls live in woodland and riparian habitats. They are highly nocturnal, but may be seen during the day, camouflaged and sitting on the branch of a conifer tree with eyes closed.

During the night they hunt for rabbits, skunks, rodents, frogs, and the nestlings of other owls, crows, and other birds. They perch until they locate possible prey, and then swoop on silent wings for the capture.

The leading edge of their wing feathers is soft and fuzzy, muffling the sounds of their approach as they swoop through the air. This is only effective if the night is calm and windless. Another hunting advantage is the disk of facial feathers which channel sounds toward the owl's ears. These ear openings are located at different levels on the owl's head, fine-tuning the direction of the source of all the sounds.

Great Horned Owls use all of these physical features to great advantage in their night hunting.

The Great Horned Owl's call is a deep muffled hoo-hooing with the female's voice being a little higher in pitch than the male's.

LENGTH: 9.5"
WINGSPAN: 21"
♂ + ♀
Same size



Burrowing Owl

Athene cunicularia

Burrowing Owls are uniquely adapted to open grassland habitat. These long-legged, round-headed owls live in loose colonies of up to 20 individuals. Burrowing Owls typically take over abandoned ground squirrel holes, expanding them by digging with their talons, sometimes to a depth of seven feet. They prefer mounds above their burrows, so that they can stand guard and survey their surroundings, scanning for prey or for predators.

Nest-building activity is shared by monogamous pairs. The male feeds the female while she incubates her clutch of up to nine white eggs. Favorite items in these owls' diets are grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, small rodents, amphibians, reptiles, and birds and their eggs.

Burrowing Owls are listed as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. This is a result of diminished open grassland habitat. A colony of owls needs a minimum of 6.5 acres of open grassland to support and sustain itself. As new communities are built for humans, land is cleared and displaces the colonies living there.

Additional pressure on the colonies comes from other animals. Free-roaming domestic dogs and cats, and the nonnative red fox are among the animals that threaten these beautiful and unique owls.



LENGTH: 8.5"
WINGSPAN: 20" ♀ > ♂

Western Screech Owl

Otus kennicottii

Western Screech Owls are small grayish-brown birds with small black streaks on their feathers. Their preferred habitats are oak and riparian woodlands. They build nests in tree cavities or crevices in old abandoned buildings. Sometimes they will use abandoned magpie nests high in tree tops.

In typical owl style, they are nocturnal, waiting until dusk to swoop low through the woodlands to capture prey. Screech Owls have a varied diet, consisting of insects, spiders, amphibians, reptiles, small vertebrates and small birds.

To capture prey, they use their strong feet to create a "web" of talons. All types of owls have what are called zygodactyl feet. This means that the outer toe of each foot can pivot back and forth, aiding in the ability to capture and hold struggling creatures caught in this "web" of talons.

One of the calls of these nocturnal Screech Owls may sound like short whistles that accelerate, almost like a bouncing ball. Another call is a two-part whistling trill, and a third call sounds very much like a bark or a chuckling kind of sound.