

WILDLIFE WATCHING GUIDE
TO
IDAHO'S OWLS





IDAHO'S OWLS

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Owls are creatures of myth and folklore. They exemplify one of nature's perfectly adapted checks and balances, quietly and inconspicuously helping to keep other species in equilibrium with the environment. From the Palouse Prairie to the Snake River Plain to the rugged Sawtooth Mountains, these birds are universally intriguing and mysterious.

This booklet will introduce you to Idaho's 13 species of owls. Idaho visitors and residents alike value our state's wealth of wildlife diversity. We hope you enjoy learning about it as well.

Fun fact: A group of owls is called a "parliament." This originates from C.S. Lewis' description of a meeting of owls in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- What is an Owl?.....4
- Owls in Myth and Culture.....6
- Adaptation Anatomy.....7
- Mating Game.....8
- The Next Generation.....10
- Nature's Mousetraps.....12
- Owling.....14
- Barn Owl.....16
- Barred Owl.....18
- Boreal Owl.....20
- Burrowing Owl.....22
- Flammulated Owl.....28
- Great Gray Owl.....30
- Great Horned Owl.....32
- Long-eared Owl.....34
- Northern Hawk Owl.....36
- Northern Pygmy-Owl.....38
- Northern Saw-whet Owl.....40
- Short-eared Owl.....42
- Western Screech-Owl.....44
- How to be an Owl-Friendly Viewer.....46

WHAT IS AN OWL?



Owls are raptors (birds of prey). A raptor is a bird that has a **sharp beak** to tear apart flesh; **powerful feet with curved, sharp talons** to capture their prey; and **keen eyesight** to help them hunt for food.

Raptors include hawks, eagles, kites, falcons, and owls. Owls are just like other birds: they are warm-blooded, have feathers, and lay eggs. Many of them hunt at night and sleep during the day. This means they are **nocturnal**. Some are active during the day (**diurnal**) and a few types of owls actually hunt in the early morning and at twilight, which means they are **crepuscular**. Owls quietly and inconspicuously help keep other species in equilibrium with the environment.



Of the nearly 250 species worldwide, only 19 owl species are found in North America, 14 of which have been documented in Idaho! Incredibly, Idaho hosts 13 of these during the breeding season.

With fossil owls found in deposits more than 50 million years old, the owl family is ancient. In Idaho, fossil owls that are related to modern screech-owls, long-eared owls, and burrowing owls have been unearthed in the Hagerman Fossil Beds, dating back 3.5 million years to the Upper Pliocene period.

OWLS IN MYTH AND CULTURE

Owls have been associated with the moon, the night, and even femininity. They have been portrayed as symbols of war and feared by the superstitious as harbingers of tragedy and death. They have also been regarded with affection, wisdom, and awe.



- The ancient Greeks revered Athena, the goddess of wisdom and guardian of the Acropolis. Her symbol was the owl, so the bird became a symbol of a higher wisdom. The owl was considered a bird of prophecy and wisdom in many ancient cultures.
- Owls in China were associated with thunder, lightning, and fire. The ancient Chinese put statues of owls on their buildings to protect them from fire.
- The Aztecs and Mayans considered the owl a symbol of death and destruction.
- In some indigenous cultures, owls are associated with magic, clairvoyance, and out of body experiences.
- The Cree believe that the whistle-sounds of the boreal owl are a summoning call to the spirit world.
- The Pawnee view the owl as a symbol of protection. The Ojibwa equate it as a symbol of evil and death, as well as a symbol of very high status of their spiritual leaders. The Pueblo associate the owl with Skeleton Man, the god of death and spirit of fertility.



ADAPTATION ANATOMY

Adaptations are special features that help animals survive. They help them either find food and water, protect and defend themselves, or find and attract mates.

KEEN EYESIGHT: Large, forward-staring eyes

are fixed in place for great depth perception—some owl eyes may be as much as 100 times more sensitive in low light than humans.

HOOKED BEAK: Short, curved, downward-facing hooked beak for gripping and tearing prey.

FLAT FACE: A round facial disc made of specialized feathers help funnel sound to the ear.

SILENT FLIGHT: Fringed flight feathers muffle the sound of air passing through their feathers, making owls silent fliers.

HEAD ROTATION: Extra vertebrae in their neck allow their head to rotate through a range of 270 degrees!

SENSITIVE HEARING: Offset ear openings allows an owl to hear a sound at two slightly different times to help pinpoint the source of the sound.

TALONS: Sharp talons are excellent tools for grabbing prey.



Fun fact: Female owls are typically larger, heavier, and more aggressive than males for most owl species.

MATING GAME



Owls usually either mate for life or mate for a season. They are very territorial during the breeding season, defending their nest and feeding areas from other birds that may be competing for the same resources. Breeding occurs during the spring so owlets will hatch around the same time as peak prey abundance.

Owls are opportunistic nesters. They do not build their own nests, although some species will add a little more lining material to a preexisting nest. Most smaller owls nest in tree cavities excavated by woodpeckers. Larger species use abandoned stick nests built by other large birds or nest on cliff ledges or even on the ground.

Fun fact: Not all owls hoot! Barn owls make hissing sounds while barred owls have more than a dozen calls, including one that sounds like a monkey.



Love notes

Owls are most vocal during the nesting season, calling to establish their territory and attract a mate. Owl calls vary depending upon the species; large owls make lower pitched calls than smaller owls and males have lower

pitched calls than females. Along with calling, many owls use flight displays during courtship. Once the pair has mated, they begin to look for a good nest site.



THE NEXT GENERATION



Female owls lay between one and ten eggs, depending on the species, but most lay two to seven eggs. The eggs are rounded and white. In common with other predatory birds, owls often lay their eggs at intervals of one every two or three days. Both parents take care of the eggs, which usually hatch in about four weeks. They hatch in sequence, so the first chick to hatch may be several days older than its youngest sibling. The nestlings are downy-white, weak, and blind.

Both parents hunt to feed their young. If food is plentiful, all chicks usually survive, but when there is a shortage, the younger, smaller chicks often die. This strategy ensures that most owlets survive in good years and at least one or two chicks survive when prey is scarce. The young owls begin flying at about four weeks and can fly well by the time they are nine to ten weeks old. They continue to be dependent upon their parents for several more weeks before taking off on their own.

Nest boxes: Right Bird, Right House

Barn, barred, boreal, saw-whet, and Western screech-owls will readily accept a nest box if a tree cavity isn't available. The Cornell Lab's NestWatch program has a handy guide to what kinds of boxes each bird prefers. It also provides downloadable construction plans and data on what nest boxes are needed most from region to region.

Scan the code to learn more!



Fun fact: When young owls first leave the nest, they often climb on nearby branches until they are ready to fly. This behavior is called "branching."

NATURE'S MOUSETRAPS



Owls eat whatever they can get their talons on. Most common prey animals are small rodents, such as mice and voles. These little mammals are important food sources for many animals. They can also be serious pests for people. Farmers can lose huge amounts of crops and stored grains to rodents. Lost crops means lost money for the farmer and less food for livestock.

Owls play an important role in keeping these potential pests under control. And they do it all for free!

- The average lifespan of a barn owl is approximately 10 years.
- A barn owl needs to eat three to four ounces of food a day.
- The average weight of a mouse is one ounce.

In a year, a barn owl eats about 73 pounds of mice. That's 730 pounds of mice in its lifetime or about 11,000 individual mice!

Each of these mice needs to eat approximately 10% of its body weight each day so 11,000 mice can eat almost 26,000 pounds (13 tons) of food each year.

Having an owl near your farm is very helpful!

What is That?

Because owls often swallow mice, voles, small birds, and other prey whole, their digestive system has to deal with bones, fur, and feathers. The owl's gizzard helps to digest the soft parts while the non-digestible parts (bones, teeth, fur) are formed into an oval mass or **pellet**. Six to 12 hours after its meal, the pellet goes back up the digestive system and the owl spits it out.

Biologists collect the pellets and pull them apart to see what they contain. It's a fascinating way to look at an owl's diet. It is also an accurate way to count how many prey animals the bird ate. Look for owl pellets near old barns, and under trees or cliffs where owls like to rest.



OWLING

owls are easy to hear with their low booming “who, who-who-whooooo-who-who” calls. If you listen closely, you will notice that one owl has a lower voice; this is the male. Listen to see if you can hear the female call back; her voice is higher.

Daytime dining, dawn and dusk snacking, or nighttime noshing?



Diurnal

active during the day



Crepuscular

active at dawn and dusk



Nocturnal

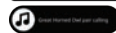
active at night

Because most owls are nocturnal, observing them can be a challenge. Being a good owl observer means using all of your observation skills. During the day, you can search for an owl roost. Just like you might have a favorite place to sit and read at home, owls tend to have favorite roosting spots. Watch for whitewash (owl poop) on the ground and also look for pellets.

To find an owl, carefully scan the tree branches. Move slowly and quietly. If you spot one, watch from a distance so you do not disturb it. The owl might look asleep, but it will know that you are nearby.

If you enjoy being outside at night, try listening for owls. Owl calls, like other bird songs, are part of courtship. Both the male and female owls call to each other. Great horned

Scan the code to hear a great horned owl pair courtship call.

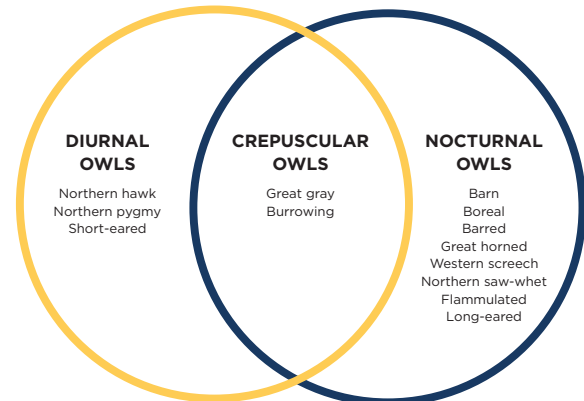


Some owls have evolved to hunt specific prey at a specific time, day or night. Other owls are more flexible and able to adapt to what is available.

Diurnal: Most active during daylight, sleeping at night.

Crepuscular: Most active during dawn and dusk.

Nocturnal: Active during the night, sleeping during the day.





BARN OWL

Tyto alba



BARN OWL

- Found on every continent except Antarctica.
- Make eerie screeching and hissing noises.
- Ghostly in appearance.
- Have very long legs, toes, and talons to help them catch prey hidden under long grass.
- Nests in tree cavities, cliff crevices, haystacks, artificial nest boxes, barns, church steeples, or building ledges; doesn't build a nest, but loosely arranges sticks to form a depression.
- Lays three to eight eggs; female incubates eggs for about 32 days; male brings food to her.
- Can locate prey by sound alone—can catch mice hidden by vegetation or even under snow.

Give a Hoot: Put up a nest box to attract a breeding pair of owls if you have the right habitat; make sure the box is in place well before breeding season (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).

Best Places to View: Barn owls are fairly widespread throughout much of Idaho, though they are more abundant in the southwest portion of the state.



Fun fact: A farmer's friend—eating mostly mice and rats. Barn owls eat about four small mammals every night. That's 1,460 per year!



BARRED OWL

Strix varia

Round head

No ear tufts

Dark brown eyes

Concentric dark rings within the facial disc

Yellow beak

Brown and white striped plumage



BARRED OWL

- Found in deciduous forests, swamps, and riparian habitats of North America.
- They have been expanding their range southwards from Canada into Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.
- Despite their large size, barred owls fly skillfully in dense forest undergrowth; their relatively small talons are adapted to killing smaller amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals such as mice.
- Courtship begins in February; by April two to three eggs have been laid. Incubation lasts about 28 days. Owlets stay in the nest for four to five weeks, and although they can fly at three months, they stay with the parents through the summer and early fall.
- Listen for their instantly recognizable “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all” call.

Give a Hoot: Put up a nest box to help if you are in the right habitat (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).

Best places to view: Sightings of barred owls in the Pacific Northwest have increased in the last three decades. The owls are fairly common in north Idaho and the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. They have been sighted as far south as Ada, Elmore, and Twin Falls counties. Confirmed breeding records have been reported in northern and central Idaho.



Barred Owl

Fun fact: Great horned owls are the most serious predatory threat to the barred owl. Although the two species often live in the same areas, a barred owl will move to another part of its territory when a great horned owl is nearby.



BOREAL OWL

Aegolius funereus

BOREAL OWL

Species
of Greatest
Information
Need

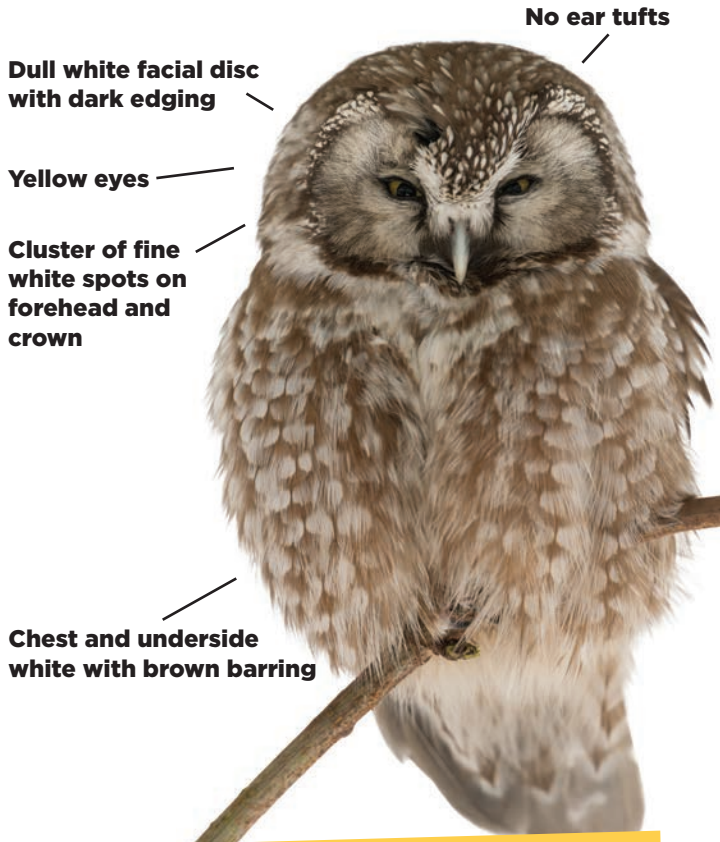
- Their name is derived from the boreal (northern) forests where they make their home.
- Known to breed in the Rocky Mountains as far south as Colorado.
- Prefers mature spruce-fir stands for nesting and summer roosting. A resident population in Idaho's Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness uses mixed stands of old-growth timber.
- Mostly active at night, seeking mice, pocket gophers, and other small mammals.
- Hides excess prey and are known for defending those caches from other birds.
- Boreal owl males start singing in late January, courting females with song and food for weeks.
- Uses holes excavated by woodpeckers for nesting; two to four eggs laid mid-April to late May and incubated for 30 days.

Give a Hoot: Put up a nest box to attract a breeding pair of owls if you have the right habitat; make sure the box is in place well before breeding season (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).

Best places to view: Boreal owls have been recognized as Idaho residents only since 1980. Since then, biologists have seen or heard boreals in remote forested areas of the Panhandle, Clearwater, Payette, Boise, Targhee, Caribou, and Salmon national forests. Confirmed breeding records from Lemhi and Fremont counties indicate that this species probably has bred in Idaho for a long time, but due to its unobtrusive habits and preference for high-elevation forests, its status and distribution are largely unknown.



Boreal Owl call



Fun fact: The oldest recorded boreal owl was a male, and at least eight years old when it was recaptured and re-released during banding operations in Idaho, the same state where it was originally banded.



BURROWING OWL

Athene cunicularia



BURROWING OWL

Species
of Greatest
Conservation
Need

- Ground-dwelling owl with upright stance and long legs.
- Active during dawn and dusk.
- Found in deserts, prairies, and farms from Canada to South America with isolated populations in Florida and the Caribbean.
- In Idaho, they do not dig their own burrows, but use burrows dug by mammals (like marmots and badgers) or spaces in rock piles.
- Burrowing owls mate for life and breed in loose colonies of up to a dozen pairs.
- Three to 12 (usually seven or eight) glossy white eggs are laid in April or May in an underground chamber at the end of a tunnel that may be up to 20 feet long.
- Very vocal and have a variety of calls. If a predator approaches the burrow, the young owls may make a rattlesnake-like buzzing sound.

Give a Hoot: Burrowing owls have benefited from protective legislation, reintroduction and habitat protection programs, and artificial nest burrows. Because they do not require large uninterrupted stretches of habitat, these owls can benefit from the protection of relatively small patches of suitable land.

Best places to view: Burrowing owls can be seen mainly in southern Idaho, mostly in the southwest. They are well camouflaged, especially in wide open habitat, so look for them standing on dirt mounds near burrow entrances in the Snake River Plain. They migrate in late summer to southern Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, or Mexico.



Burrowing Owl Call

Fun fact: Before laying eggs, burrowing owls carpet the entrances to their homes with animal dung, which attracts dung beetles and other insects that the owls then catch and eat.

IDAHO'S OWLS

Illustrations by Alex Lehner



BARN OWL

Tyto alba



BARRED OWL

Strix varia



LONG-EARED OWL

Asio otus



NORTHERN HAWK OWL

Surnia ulula



BOREAL OWL

Aegolius funereus



BURROWING OWL

Athene cucularia



NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL

Glaucidium gnoma



NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL

Aegolius acadicus



FLAMMULATED OWL

Psiloscops flammeolus



GREAT GRAY OWL

Strix nebulosa



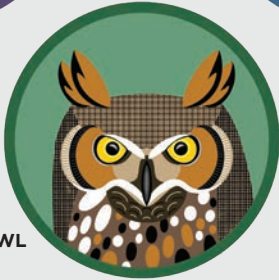
SHORT-EARED OWL

Asio flammeus



WESTERN SCREECH-OWL

Megascops kennicottii



GREAT HORNED OWL

Bubo virginianus

IDAHO'S OWLS

COMMON NAME		LENGTH (inches)	WINGSPAN (inches)	HABITAT	NESTING LOCATION	FAVORITE FOOD	
Barn Owl		12.6-15.8	39.4-49.2	Grasslands	Trees, Cliffs, and Buildings	Mammals	Nocturnal 
Barred Owl		16.9-19.7	39-43.4	Forests	Tree	Mammals	Crepuscular 
Boreal Owl		8.3-11	21.6-24.4	Forests	Cavity	Mammals	Nocturnal 
Burrowing Owl		7.5-9.8	21.6	Grasslands	Burrow	Small mammals, reptiles, and insects	Crepuscular 
Flammulated Owl		5.9-6.7	15.9-16.1	Forests	Cavity	Insects	Nocturnal 
Great Gray Owl		24-33	53.9-60.2	Forests	Tree	Mammals	Mostly nocturnal 
Great Horned Owl		18.1-24.8	39.8-57.1	Forests	Tree	Mammals: supplements with reptiles and insects	Nocturnal 
Long-eared Owl		13.8-15.8	35.4-39.4	Forests	Tree	Mammals	Nocturnal 
Northern Hawk Owl		14.2-17.7	27.9	Forests	Cavity	Mammals	Diurnal 
Northern Pygmy-Owl		6.3-7.1	12	Forests	Cavity	Birds	Diurnal 
Northern Saw-whet Owl		7.1-8.3	16.5-18.9	Forests	Cavity	Mammals	Nocturnal 
Short-eared Owl		13.4-16.9	33.5-40.5	Grasslands	Ground	Mammals	Crepuscular 
Western Screech-Owl		7.5-9.8	21.6-24.4	Open woodlands	Cavity	Mammals	Nocturnal 



FLAMMULATED OWL

Psiloscopus flammeolus



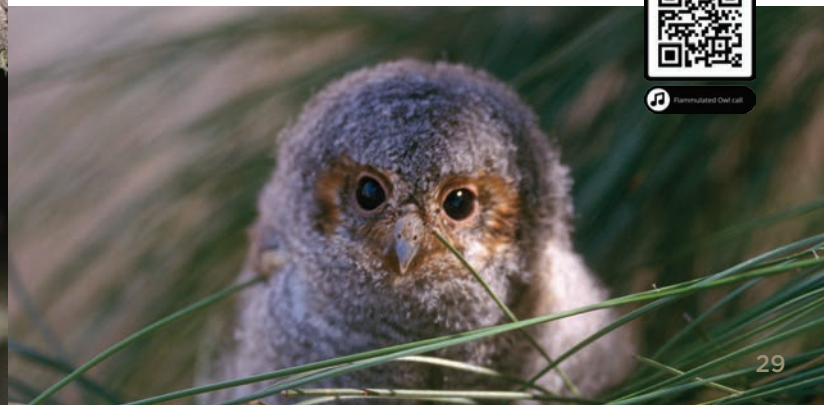
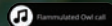
Fun fact: Flammulated owls are the smallest owl in Idaho—six to seven inches tall!

FLAMMULATED OWL

- Found in the western part of North America from British Columbia south to Mexico and Guatemala.
- They frequent coniferous forests and appear to prefer stands of mature ponderosa pine, although in the mountains south of the Snake River they have been found in scattered Douglas-fir stands.
- Diet consists almost entirely of insects and other invertebrates. Because of this, they are highly migratory. They leave Idaho after the breeding season for central Mexico to El Salvador where they can find food.
- Nests from mid-April through the end of May in old woodpecker holes or natural cavities.
- Hard to spot because of their small size and good camouflage.
- One of the most vocal owls in the forest during late spring; listen for an unending series of “boot-boots” spaced about three seconds apart.

Give a Hoot: These owls do not readily nest in boxes. Primary threats include changing forest conditions, climate change, and urbanization.

Best places to view: During the breeding season, flammulated owls appear throughout Idaho in suitable habitat. South of the Salmon River, where ponderosa pine predominates, they may be quite abundant.





GREAT GRAY OWL

Strix nebulosa



GREAT GRAY OWL



- Widespread in northern regions of North America, Europe, and Asia; year-round resident of Idaho.
- They are almost always found associated with mountain meadows in coniferous forests of pine or spruce, but they also use stands of larch, poplar, and aspen.
- Diet is small mammals such as voles and mice.
- They can hear well enough to locate a mouse moving beneath the snow.
- Uses abandoned raptor nests; nests mid-March to June and lays three to four eggs.
- Its territorial song is a sequence of six to eight descending mellow hoots. It also utters a variety of rasping, screeching, and whistling noises.

Give a Hoot: One potential stressor to great gray owl populations are forest management practices that reduce live and dead large-diameter trees used for nesting, as well as leaning trees and closed canopies needed by juveniles. Nest boxes can help (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).

Best places to view: In Idaho, great gray owls are known to breed in the northern panhandle, along the Montana-Wyoming border of eastern Idaho, in west-central Idaho, and in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. They are also found in many high-elevation areas where wet meadows are associated with lodgepole pine or subalpine fir (such as the McCall area). They are very sensitive to disturbance.



Fun fact: During the breeding season, female great gray owls will eat the feces and pellets of hatchlings. They will then leave the nest to regurgitate pellets of this material far away to help protect the nest.



GREAT HORNED OWL

Bubo virginianus

Large ear tufts

Yellow eyes

Reddish face

White patch
on throat

Mottled
gray-brown



Fun fact: Great horned owls are one of a few species of animals that regularly eat skunks!

GREAT HORNED OWL

- One of the fiercest and most aggressive owls.
- Well-adapted to live almost anywhere; most common owl in North America.
- Can be found in deserts, wetlands, forests, grasslands, backyards, and city parks.
- Their song is a mellow hooting “who, who-who-who-who-who-who-who.”
- Fearless hunter that takes a wide variety of prey— from birds to small mammals.
- An early nester with courtship taking place from November to January; female selects a nest site in an abandoned hawk or magpie nest.
- Two to four eggs are laid, incubated for 33-35 days, and the young are about six months of age before they can skillfully hunt on their own.

Give a Hoot: Great horned owl populations in Idaho are healthy and not in need of management. However, artificial nest sites encourage breeding in areas with limited nest sites (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).

Best places to view: In Idaho, great horned owls are common and widespread except at the very highest elevations. They frequent large trees for shelter. Look for them along a river in daytime, perched high in a cottonwood tree.



Great Horned Owl call





LONG-EARED OWL

Asio otus

Long ear tufts

Dark vertical stripe through eye

Dark brown and buff with barring

Tawny orange face

Dark brown breast with white spots

Slim body

Buff-colored belly with long streaks



LONG-EARED OWL

- Found throughout North America and northern Eurasia.
- Nests in trees, laying five to seven eggs in abandoned stick nests of other species; incubation is 27 days.
- Owlets leave the nest after about three weeks, can fly two weeks later, and parents continue to feed for another few weeks or more.
- Acute hearing and soundless flight help them be an efficient nocturnal predator of small rodents.
- In winter, these owls roost together.

Give a Hoot: The loss of riparian woodlands and isolated tree groves is detrimental to long-eared owls. The maintenance of healthy riparian areas is beneficial to this species.

Best places to view: Long-eared owls live throughout Idaho, especially at low elevations with suitable nesting and roosting habitat. They are most common in southern Idaho. One good way to find them is to listen at night in spring and summer for their long, low hoots. In the Palouse of northwestern Idaho, they may be found nesting and roosting in hawthorn thickets.



Long-eared Owl Lab



Fun fact: Long-eared owls fly in a rather fluttery, moth-like manner.



NORTHERN HAWK OWL

Surnia ulula

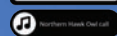


NORTHERN HAWK OWL

- Found in the open boreal forests of Alaska, northern Canada, and northern Eurasia.
- Prefer brushy, tangled areas around swamps or streams or the forest edge near muskeg (peat bogs).
- Nests in tree cavities or abandoned sticks nests of other raptors.
- Four to eight eggs are laid from March to May; eggs hatch after 25 days, and the owlets fledge one month later. Families tend to stay together until the following spring.
- Hunts during the daytime or twilight for small rodents in the summer with birds added to the diet in winter.

Give a Hoot: Populations are considered stable and secure, and barring any major habitat changes in northern boreal forests, this species is not at risk.

Best places to view: Northern hawk owls are a winter visitor to northern Idaho in years when food is scarce and voles are more numerous further south. It is a rare breeder in Idaho's northern Boundary County.



Fun fact: Unlike many owls, Northern hawk owls have symmetrical ear openings—evidence they hunt during the day.



NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL

Glaucidium gnoma



Fun fact: Northern pygmy-owls have “eyes” in the back of their head. They are called “ocelli” (false eyespots). These markings help the owl avoid being attacked by predators or groups of small songbirds because it looks as though the owl is watching them.

NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL

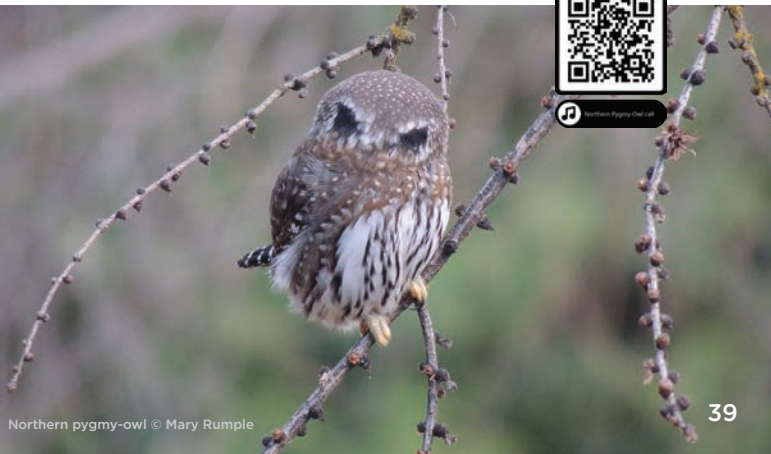
- Second smallest owl species in Idaho!
- Despite its small size (seven inches long and one and a half ounces or as big as a house sparrow), the Northern pygmy-owl is a bold and fierce owl.
- Pygmy-owls are found at elevations of 3,000 to 10,000 feet in forested areas adjacent to openings such as meadows or swamps.
- Pygmy-owls rely on other species to excavate nesting holes, which makes them indirectly dependent on woodpeckers.
- Three to four eggs laid mid-April to late May; incubation is about 28 days.
- Hunts mainly at dawn and dusk.
- Small songbirds make up one third of their diet; rodents are also major prey.

Give a Hoot: If you are in the right habitat, put up a nest box to help (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).

Best places to view: Look for them in a wide variety of forest types, usually partially open habitats rather than solid unbroken forest. Because they are active during the day, keep your eyes open because they fly fast and low from one tree to the next until they swoop up to take a high perch.



NorthernPygmyOwl.org





NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL

Aegolius acadicus



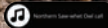
Fun fact: The “saw-whet” call, which sounds like a car back-up signal, is heard only during the breeding season.

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL

- Found in mountainous areas of the western United States from southern Canada to New Mexico.
- Prefers coniferous forest, particularly those in the Douglas-fir zone, but uses a variety of forest types.
- Hunts mouse-sized mammals as well as birds, bats, and amphibians.
- Sometimes kills prey much larger than themselves, like squirrels or weasels. Smaller prey is swallowed whole, head-first.
- Five to six eggs are laid April-May; incubation about 24 days and young fledge at four weeks but may rely on adults for food until late July or August.

Give a Hoot: Put up a nest box to attract a breeding pair of owls if you have the right habitat; make sure the box is in place well before breeding season (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).

Best places to view: Saw-whet owls are found throughout Idaho in more heavily-forested areas. During fall migration, the Boise Front is a great place to search for them.





SHORT-EARED OWL

Asio flammeus



SHORT-EARED OWL

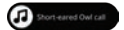


- Found on every continent except, Australia and Antarctica. In North America breeds in the northern US and Canada.
- An open-country species that prefers tundra, marsh, sagebrush, grassland, and meadows.
- Roosts communally in winter.
- Hunts in late afternoon or early evening; prey is mostly rodents, but will take small birds and insects.
- Generally silent, but during the breeding season they give a variety of soft hoots, yapping barks, and whistles.
- In early spring, the males perform spectacular courtship flights. Flying to real heights while hooting and clapping wingtips together, they finish the display with a breathtaking tumbling dive earthward.
- Nest usually is built on the ground in a shallow depression or a tunnel in long grass. Six to nine eggs are laid in April or May. They hatch in about 28 days.

Give a Hoot: Short-eared owl populations are experiencing long-term, range-wide, substantial declines in North America. Protecting native shrublands and grassland in Idaho is of vital importance to this species.

Best places to view: Short-eared owls can be found throughout southern Idaho in suitable habitat and also live on the Palouse and Camas Prairie. Although Idaho residents, they appear to be quite nomadic, following prey concentrations. Some individuals migrate south in winter, but others arrive to take their place.

Fun fact: Female short-eared owls often defecate on their eggs if they are forced to leave the nest. It is thought that the smell may repel predators or mask the scent of the nest.





WESTERN SCREECH-OWL

Megascops kennicottii



Fun fact: Western screech-owls don't really screech. They make an accelerating series of hollow hoots with the rhythm of a bouncing ball.

WESTERN SCREECH-OWL

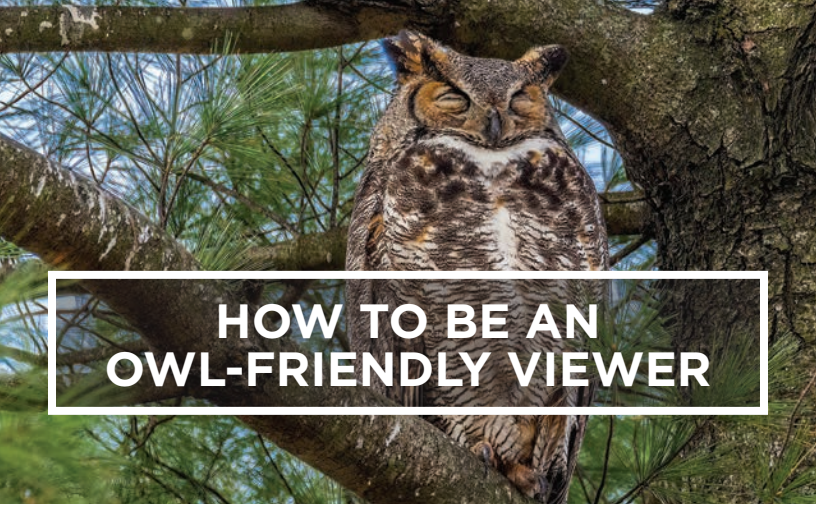
- Found in the western US and Mexico.
- Favors groves of deciduous trees in low-lying areas; look for them in riparian habitats, orchards, city parks, and neighborhoods.
- They are perhaps the most nocturnal of Idaho's owls, roosting concealed in dense foliage or in tree cavities during the day.
- Hunt a wide variety of prey, including small mammals and birds (sometimes much larger than themselves), reptiles and insects.
- Lays four to five eggs in March and April in a tree cavity. The male feeds his mate while she incubates the eggs.
- Owlets are crowded out of the nest hole after four to five weeks, but their parents continue feeding them for another five weeks.
- Often a pair returns to the same nest cavity every year.

Give a Hoot: Put up a nest box to attract a breeding pair of owls; make sure the box is in place well before breeding season (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses).



Best places to view: Western screech-owls are found across Idaho below about 4,000 feet elevation. They are probably quite abundant, but because of their roosting habits are seldom seen.





HOW TO BE AN OWL-FRIENDLY VIEWER

DO:

- ✓ **Keep your distance:** if the owl is reacting to your presence by fidgeting, staring at you, head-bobbing or changing positions, you're too close.
- ✓ **Observe don't disturb:** use binoculars, spotting scopes and zoom lenses to get a closer look.
- ✓ **Leave** dogs at home.
- ✓ **Avoid** sharing the location of an owl.
- ✓ **Leave** nesting owls alone.
- ✓ **Respect private property:** don't trespass on other's land to observe wildlife.

RELAXED OWLS MAY:

- ✓ Have their ear tufts lowered, but not flat.
- ✓ Preen and ignore you.
- ✓ Sleep.
- ✓ Relax with a foot tucked up, feathers held normally.

STRESSED OWLS MAY:

- X Have a wide-eyed look.
- X Rapidly or deliberately blink their eyes frequently.
- X Try to conceal themselves by making their head and body plumage compressed, ear tufts straight up, and eyes reduced to slits.
- X Rapidly look around, bob their head, squat, and put wings slightly out to prepare to fly away.
- X Pant.



Report safety concerns and any suspected illegal activity such as poaching of owls, raptors, and migratory birds to the Citizens Against Poaching Hotline: 1-800-632-5999 or idfg.idaho.gov/poacher



IDAHO BIRDING TRAIL

The Idaho Birding Trail is a network of over 225 premier wildlife viewing sites across the state. It provides the best viewing opportunities to see birds in Idaho. The Trail represents a collection of bird watching hotspots, diverse habitats, and a way to enjoy Idaho's rich natural heritage.

The Trail is a project of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's Wildlife Diversity Program with support from federal, state, and local government agencies.

To find a location near you, visit idahobirdingtrail.org



TO LEARN MORE

For more information on owls and other Idaho wildlife, contact:

**Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Diversity Program-Watchable Wildlife**

PO Box 25, Boise, ID 83707
208-334-3700

idfg.idaho.gov/watch/wildlife

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