



# Great Horned Owl

(*Bubo virginianus*)

## DID YOU KNOW:

Soft, velvety feathers allow owls to fly silently. Specially adapted eyes allow them to see clearly, even on pitch black, moonless nights. Large ear openings, hidden under the feathers, give owls the finest hearing of any animal on earth.

## EATING HABITS:

The Great Horned Owl is a ferocious night-time hunter who uses its large feet and sharp claws (talons) to catch and kill its prey, which may be as small as a beetle or as large as a skunk or even a wild turkey.

## THE YOUNG:

Great Horned Owls do not make their own nests, but use nests that were made by other animals such as squirrels, crows and especially red-tailed hawks. The female owl lays two to five eggs in February. She



plucks the feathers off her stomach so that her warm bare skin covers the eggs and keeps them warm even when the temperature is below freezing. The eggs hatch in four to five weeks.

### **HABITAT (HOME):**

The owls are covered with feathers of mixed brown, gray, tan, and black. These colors make them difficult to see in trees. Habitats vary from forests to cities to open desert. They may nest in trees or caves, and sometimes even on the ground. These owls are found from the Arctic tundra to tropical rainforests.



### **DEFENSIVE HABITS:**

Large, strong talons are the first line of defense. Perhaps the several feathers that stick up like a set of horns (these are NOT ears), and their huge yellow eyes make them appear more threatening.

### **UNUSUAL FACTS:**

- Crows and Great Horned Owls are mortal enemies. The owls raid the crow's nests, snatching baby crows for food. The crows attack young owls when they find them on the ground. When a crow sees an owl, it will fly close to it and start to caw loudly. Other crows will fly in and join the first crow. If you hear lots of crows cawing together, see whether you can spot an owl nearby.
- These owls are often called "hoot owls." During winter nights the male and female owls hoot back and forth to each other.
- When clenched, a Great Horned Owl's strong talons require a force of 28 pounds to open. The owls use this deadly grip to sever the spine of large prey.
- Even though the female Great Horned Owl is larger than her mate, the male has a larger voice box and a deeper voice.