

Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)

Field Marks:

- length: 22 inches, wingspan: 44 inches
- white throat patch and large yellow eyes
- obvious facial disk sometimes accompanied by white “eyebrows”
- horizontal banding across the chest
- near perfect camouflage, perched Great Horned Owls can blend into a tree flawlessly
- call is a stereotypical owl “hoot”



Breeding Range:

Great Horned Owls are found in every state in the United States except Hawaii. They are also found in almost all of Canada and most of Central America. Populations outside of the Americas are not recorded.

Wintering Range:

The wintering range of the Great Horned Owl is consistent with the breeding range. Great Horned Owls are not migratory, although they may occasionally be evicted from their territory by other migrating raptors.

Habitat Preferences:

They are found in a wide variety of habitats including forests, woodlands, swamps, orchards, and agricultural areas. They prefer to hunt along edge habitats where high perches are available with sparse underbrush.

Nesting:

They are strictly monogamous, and usually form pair bonds for at least 5 years. They often steal nests from other birds and modify them in order to create a large enough bowl for the nesting. They are early breeders, and the first clutch usually laid in late January to February. If the first nest is destroyed early enough in the breeding season, they may lay a second clutch. Typically all egg laying is done by early March. Eggs are incubated for 30-37 days, then nestlings fledge approximately 7-9 weeks later. Fledglings are dependant on parents for only 2-3 weeks after leaving the nest but may remain in the parent’s territory until fall.

Feeding:

Great Horned Owls have the widest prey base of any North American owl. They take prey ranging in size from grasshoppers and other invertebrates to large hares, skunks, and birds including the Great Blue Heron. Prey is killed almost instantly with the owl’s talons and foot pressure. Due to their ability to kill prey larger than the owl can carry, Great Horned Owls often cache prey during times of low prey density.

Conservation Status:

Highly adaptive, Great Horned Owl populations are stable or increasing throughout most of their range. Although protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Great Horned Owls are not listed as threatened or endangered. Populations are so high in some areas that they out-compete more threatened species. Illegal shooting near agricultural areas persists but does not significantly threaten Great Horned Owl populations.