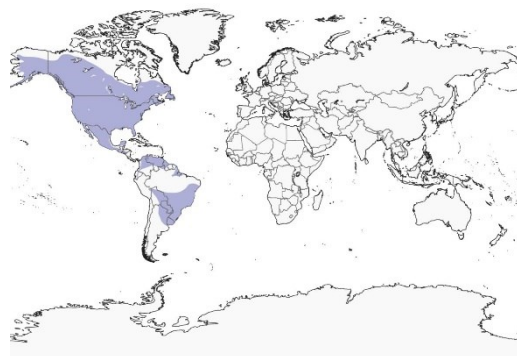


# Great Horned Owl



## Classification

**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Class:** Aves  
**Order:** Strigiformes  
**Family:** Strigiformes  
**Genus:** *Bubo*  
**Species:** *virginianus*



## Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** Across North America and most of South America. One notable area they are not found is the Amazon basin.
- **Habitat:** Able to live in almost any type of habitat, including secondary-growth woodlands, swamps, orchards, agricultural areas, and deciduous, coniferous, and mixed forests. Hunt in more open habitats, such as fields, wetlands, pastures, or croplands. In deserts, they use cliffs and juniper for nesting. Common in wooded parks, suburban areas, and cities.
- **Conservation Status:** Low Concern - Common and widespread throughout much of the Americas.

## Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 18.1 to 24.8 inches (46-63 cm)
- **Wingspan:** 39.8 to 57.1 inches (101-145 cm)
- **Weight:** 2 to 5.5 pounds (910-2500 g)
- **Lifespan:** 20 to 30 years in the wild. The oldest recorded in human care was 50 years old.
- **Identifying Traits:** Large, thick-bodied owl with bright yellow eyes and feathery tufts on top of its head, which gives this species its name. The wings are broad and rounded. Mottled gray-brown with a reddish brown face and a white throat patch.

## Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Mostly nocturnal but have been observed hunting during the day. Most diverse diet of all North American raptors and will eat just about any small to medium-sized animal from tiny rodents and scorpions to hares, skunks, geese, and other raptors. Fly low over the ground, walk on the ground, and even wade into water to get prey items.

- **Breeding:** Male will attract a female with his call during courting season. Mated pairs are monogamous.
- **Nesting:** Don't build their own nests, but use abandoned nests of other large birds, such as ravens and red-tailed hawks. They also nest in tree cavities, on the ground, cliff ledges, rocky outcroppings, and on platforms. Females generally lay 1 to 4 eggs, and incubation lasts for 28-35 days.
- **Migration:** Not Migratory
- **Call:** Three to eight deep, loud hoots in a stuttering pattern like "hoo-hoo-hoo hoo hoo". Young make screeching and hissing noises comparable to a barn owl.

## Resident Bird(s)

**Name:** Gilbert

- **Age:** Hatched in 2022
- **Sex:** Male
- **Background:** Non-releasable due to unintentional overexposure to humans at an important development stage.\*
- **Unique Individual Traits:** He is always curious about his surroundings. You may see him moving his head and bobbing it up and down to learn from sounds about the world around him.

**Name:** Dumbledore

- **Age:** Hatched in 2003
- **Sex:** Male
- **Background:** Non-releasable due to unintentional overexposure to humans at an important development stage.\* See him at a fly-by.
- **Unique Individual Traits:** Full name is "Owlbus" Dumbledore after the Harry Potter books.

**Name:** Atticus

- **Age:** Hatched in 2005
- **Sex:** Male
- **Background:** Non-releasable due to unintentional overexposure to humans at an important development stage.\* See him at a Meet a Raptor, private program or special event.
- **Unique Individual Traits:** Likes to tear and shred things up from newspaper to cardboard boxes to heads of cabbage.

**Name:** Gertrude (Gertie)

- **Age:** Hatched in 2024
- **Sex:** Female

- **Background:** Non-releasable due to unintentional overexposure to humans at an important development stage.\* See her at public programs or during special events.
- **Unique Individual Traits:** Confident and chatty, she vocalizes around staff and everyone she meets.

## Fun Facts!

- One of the few species to frequently prey on skunks.
- It requires 28 pounds of force to open a Great Horned Owl's talons when clenched. For comparison, an average door takes 8.5 to 10 pounds of force to open. This strength and grip are used to sever the spine of large prey.
- Females are larger than males, however the male has a larger voice box and deeper voice than the female.
- In humid habitats, their plumage is generally darker brown, and in more arid habitats, their plumage is lighter in color.

## Importance

- Top predators that help control populations of prey animals, such as rodents and rabbits, and maintain a balance in the ecosystems in which they live. By eating the slower and potentially sick and injured prey species, they lower the chance of disease transmission among those populations of animals. In fact, numbers of this species fluctuate in areas based on the population of prey present. Areas with lower prey populations have lower populations of owls.

## Sources

- [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great\\_Horned\\_Owl/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great_Horned_Owl/overview)
- <https://www.peregrinefund.org/explore-raptors-species/owls/great-horned-owl>
- <https://education.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/great-horned-owl>

\*Bird did not learn to behave in a species typical manner due to exposure to humans at a young age. This can occur when a well-meaning human attempts to care for a baby bird. By the time this human realized they were not best suited to raise a baby bird and called CRC, the bird had been exposed to humans too long and had not learned the required skills to survive in the wild, which it would have received from the bird's parents.