

# Great Horned Owl

*Bubo virginianus*

Bird

## Scientific Name

*Bubo virginianus*

## Other Names

None

## Range

From the Arctic tree line in Canada and Alaska, south through the United States and Central America, and into South America. Can sometimes be seen in Panama and Bermuda.

## Habitat

Deciduous, mixed and coniferous forests, river valleys, lake shores, agricultural areas, and urban areas, mostly found around golf courses and parks.

## Description

A large greyish to tawny brown owl, with a distinctive white throat patch, large yellow eyes, and horn-like ear tufts.

## Average Size

Length: 18 – 24 in; Wingspan: 4 ½ ft.  
Weight: 2 – 5 lbs.

## Lifespan

In the wild: 25 years  
In captivity: 30+ years

## Diet

In the wild: Rabbits, skunks, weasels, reptiles, fish and house cats  
In captivity: Mice

## Clutch Size

1 – 4 eggs

## Incubation

30 – 37 days

## Fledging period

6 – 9 weeks

## Sexual Maturity

1 – 3 years of age

## Predators

Foxes, coyotes, lynx, raccoons and birds of prey; crows eat the eggs

## Population Status

Vulnerable



## Behavior

Great Horned Owls are nocturnal, spending their days roosting in trees, cavities, ledges, or on human-made structures. They are considered sedentary and only make local migrations to search for food or new nesting sites. Their prime hunting times are at dusk and before dawn, but when food supplies are low, they begin hunting earlier in the evening and continue into the early morning. In winter, they have been seen hunting during daylight hours. These highly vocal and communicative birds are territorial and respond to threats with vigorous hooting, bill-clapping, hisses, and screams, eventually spreading their wings and striking with their feet if the threat escalates.

## Reproduction and Breeding

Breeding season in the wild is between the months of November and April. Mated pairs are monogamous and defend their territories with vigorous hooting. This is especially common in the winter before egg-laying and in the fall when their young are fledging.

Great Horned Owls typically adopt a nest built by another species in trees such as cottonwood, juniper, beech, or pine, but may use cavities in live trees. Nests are varied in size and materials, depending greatly on which species originally built the nest (usually Red-tailed Hawks, other hawk species, crows, ravens, herons, or squirrels). The newly acquired nest is lined with shreds of bark, leaves, downy feathers plucked from their own breast, fur or feathers from prey, or trampled pellets. Pairs may roost together near the future nest site for several months before laying eggs. Due to nest deterioration, each nest is only used for one to two breeding seasons. Both members of a pair may stay within the territory outside of the breeding season, but they roost separately.

## Conservation

This owl is listed on Appendix II of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), which means that any international trade in this species should be carefully controlled. It is considered a species of least concern for the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature).

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Once persecuted as a pest to humans and agriculture, the Great Horned Owl is common and widespread throughout much of the Americas. The use of pesticides and rodenticides on agricultural land, traffic accidents and collisions with electrical wires remain at the forefront of conservation concerns for this species. Some illegal hunting still occurs today and their population density fluctuates greatly depending upon prey density, but the Great Horned Owl has remained largely unaffected by habitat loss and changes to the environment. This success is due in part to their ability to adapt to a wide variety of habitats and food options.

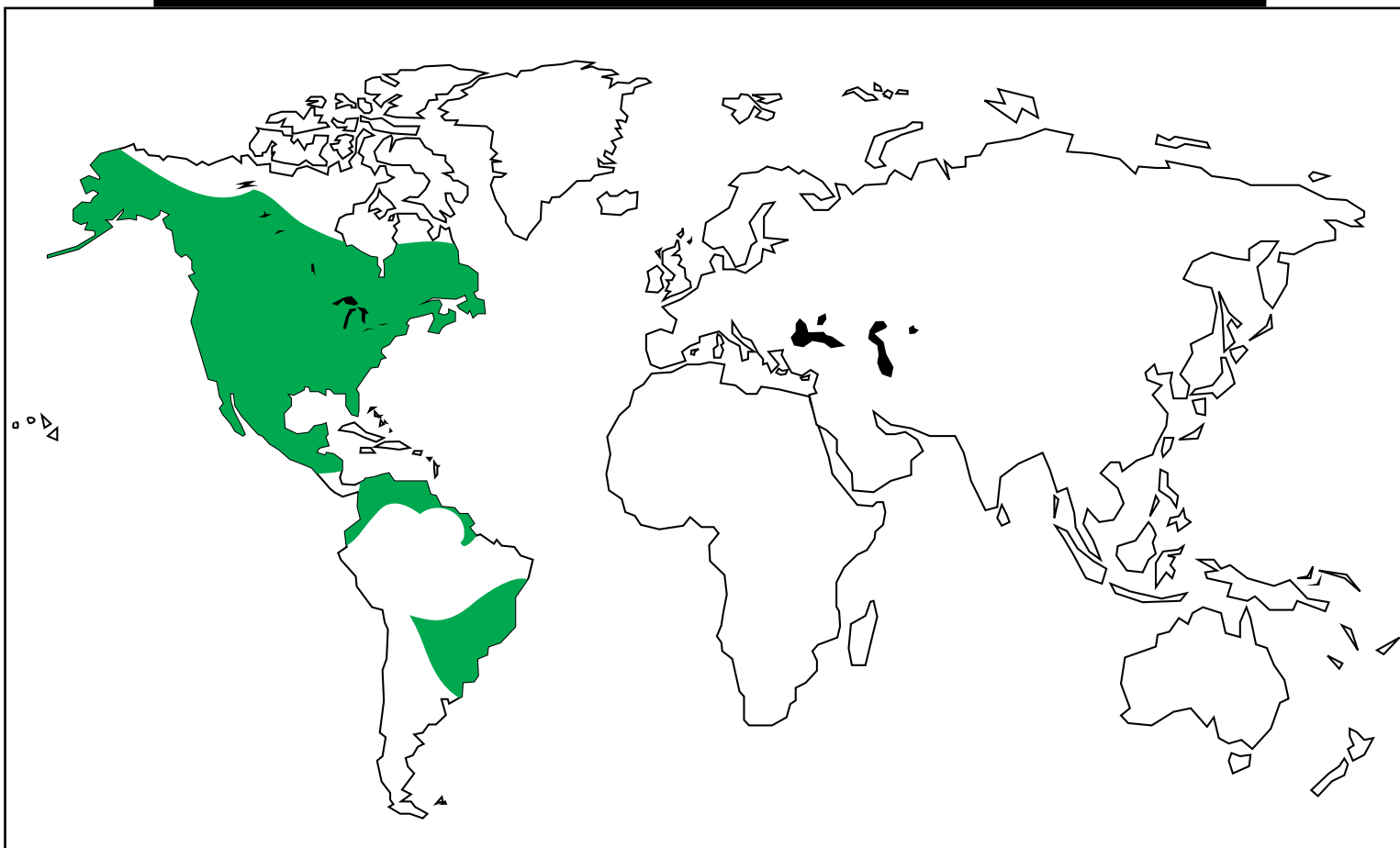
### **Amazing Facts**

Great Horned Owls are the second largest and one of the most common owls in North America.

This bird exerts 28 pounds of pressure with its foot grip.

Great Horned Owls have the most diverse diet of all North American raptors.

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