

All About Owls



photos courtesy National Park Service

Mini Fact:

The great horned owl is one of the most common owls in North America.

Do you ever hear an owl hooting at night? These majestic **birds of prey*** help people. They have been called the farmer's friend because they eat so many pests. There are more than 100 types of owls worldwide.

Owls come in many sizes. The **pygmy owl** weighs about 3 ounces. The **great horned owl** can weigh about 3 pounds. Male owls are usually smaller than females.



A pygmy owl.

On the hunt

Owls eat mostly meat. Larger owls eat animals such as rabbits and squirrels. Smaller birds prey on rats and mice. Some eat other birds and insects.

Owls swallow small animals whole. They spit up **pellets**, or small balls, made of what they can't digest, such as feathers and bones.

When most birds fly, their stiff wing feathers make a whirring sound. The wing feathers of most owls have soft edges that muffle the sound.

Owls can swoop silently down and surprise their prey. Their silent flight also enables them to hear well when searching for food.

Owls have sharp **talons**, or claws, that help them grab their prey. They also have hooked beaks that enable them to tear their food apart.

Owl families

Different kinds of owls may lay from two to 12 eggs. Usually, only the female sits on the

eggs. The male helps gather food.

Owl eggs hatch in about 30 days. Owlets stay with their parents for about a month or longer.

Some owls live in forests and around farms, or in deserts and canyons. Others live in wooded areas in cities. The **snowy owl** lives in the cold arctic **tundra**, a treeless area in the far north.



A great gray owl with her owlets.

Some owls will nest only in old woodpecker holes. Others nest in barns. The **burrowing owl** nests underground. It might dig out a place for its nest, or it might build a nest in a prairie dog burrow.

Super hearing

Some experts say owls have the best hearing in the world. An owl can hear a mouse moving 1,000 feet away.

An owl's ears are hidden under feathers on each side of its head. Some owls have ear openings that are not the same size. Sometimes these openings are not directly opposite each other. One might be lower than the other.



Birds like this barred owl have a **ruff of feathers circling their faces**. These give the owl a **disc-shaped face that acts like a saucer, directing sounds into the ears**.

* A bird of prey feeds on meat taken from animals it has hunted or found already dead.

Owl eyes

Owl eyes are larger than those of most birds. While they are unable to see in total darkness, they can see very well in dim light.

Most owls can discover an object in only 1 percent of the light a human needs.

Not all owls hunt only at night. A few hunt during the daylight hours.

Most birds have eyes on the sides of their heads. Owl eyes are in the front. Like humans, owls can look at things with both eyes at the same time.

Unlike humans, owls cannot move their eyes. Each eye is "locked" into its socket. But owls can do something we cannot do.



A snowy owl.

Owls can turn their heads way around. While their body faces straight ahead, they can look behind them.

Owl calls

Because most owls hunt at night, they use their voices to protect their territory and find mates in the dark. Since many other birds are quiet at night, it's easy to hear the distinctive calls of different owls. Listen to some owl calls here: bit.ly/MPowcalls

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPallaboutowls

At the library:

- "Owls" by Josh Gregory
- "Owls! Strange and Wonderful" by Laurence Pringle

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of owls are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



BARN, BEAK, BIRD, BURROW, EARS, EATS, EGGS, EYES, FACE, FEATHERS, FLY, FOOD, FORESTS, HORNED, HUNT, NEST, OWL, PELLET, PREY, PYGMY, RUFF, SNOWY, SWOOP, TALON, TUNDRA, WING.

U P E L L E T R N B K A E B W
K T U N D R A E U O W L E N D
U Y E R P F U R E F F U R O T
E D X D E N R O H S Y A O Z S
G N I W Q O K V E M B F O P E
H S N O W Y X Y G T T A L O N
G C H U N T E Y S T S E R O F
E C A F L Q P R D R I B C W L
S B F E A T H E R S E A T S Y
A B L E A R S G G E V M G I O

Cook's Corner

Brown Rice With Fruit

You'll need:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1 small apple, peeled and chopped
- 1/4 cup dried cranberries
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup brown rice



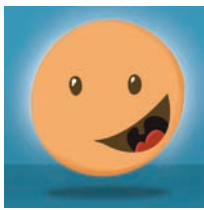
* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

What to do:

1. Melt butter in saucepan. Stir in onion, apple, cranberries and garlic powder.
2. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes until apple and onion are tender.
3. Add chicken broth and rice. Bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes (follow package directions) until all of the liquid is absorbed. Serves 4.

7 Little Words for Kids

Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.



1. cooked in oil (5) _____
2. change places (6) _____
3. smoke comes out of it (7) _____
4. part (7) _____
5. risk of harm (6) _____
6. blue pants (5) _____
7. very smart person (6) _____

ION	JE	CH	IUS
RT	FR	GEN	DAN
TCH	GER	NEY	IED
PO	IM	SWI	ANS

Answers: fried, switch, chimney, portion, danger, jeans, genius.

Mini Jokes



Olive: What do you call an owl with a sore throat?

Ollie: A bird that doesn't give a hoot!

Eco Note



Climate change does a lot more than just heat up our planet. Climate change can also cause more intense weather. That could mean more hurricanes, floods, heat waves, droughts and even cold spells. This extreme weather can be trouble for birds. Scientists have noticed that when extreme weather happens, fewer birds show up in the places they call home. Why? One idea is that the birds avoid the extreme weather by moving to a friendlier area.

adapted from climatekids.nasa.gov

For later:

Look in your newspaper for stories about birds.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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