

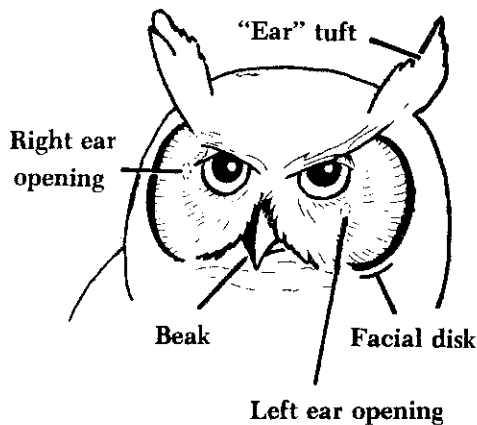
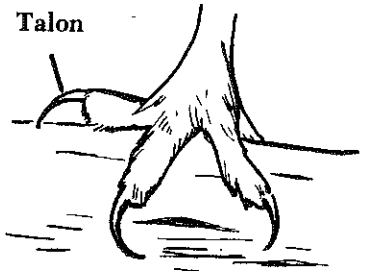
Owl Fact Sheet

How are owls related to other birds?

Birds of prey, owls along with hawks, eagles and falcons, constitute a group called "raptors" whose members are distinguished because they have talons (sharp claws) on their feet for catching prey and hooked beaks for tearing it apart. Owls, however, are only distantly related to their daytime counterparts. They are much more closely related to other nighttime (nocturnal) birds like whip-poor-wills.

Why are owls nocturnal?

The predator life style requires very special refinements, and owls display a variety of fascinating features and behaviors. Their nighttime existence, for example, makes it easier for them to hunt the mice and other small mammals that are also active at that time.



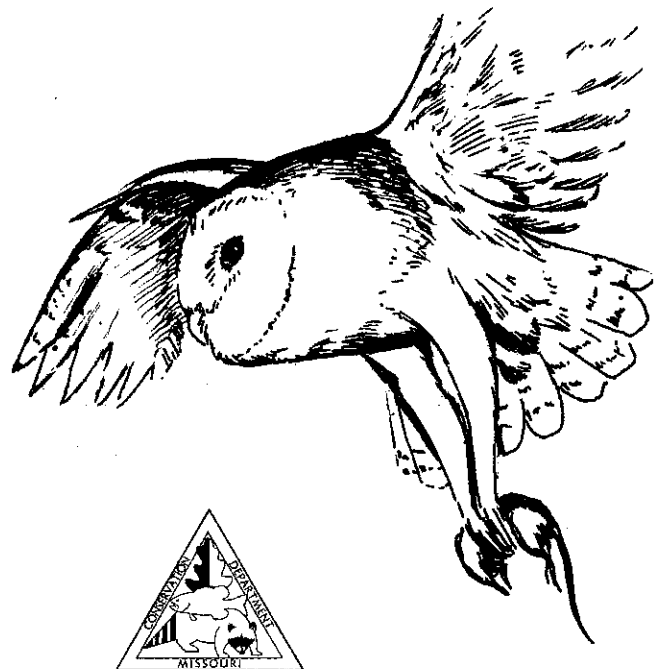
How do owls see?

An owl's eyes are huge so that they can gather more light, thus providing them excellent night vision. In fact, a Great Horned Owl's eyes are nearly as large as a man's.

Unlike other birds, owl eyes look forward and therefore each eye sees the same object from two different angles. This produces three-dimensional perception, similar to humans, making it easier to detect the distance of prey, perches and branches as they fly about in the dark. Unlike a human, an owl's eyes are fixed in their sockets and cannot turn. To focus on another object, an owl must swivel its head. It can do this with amazing quickness.

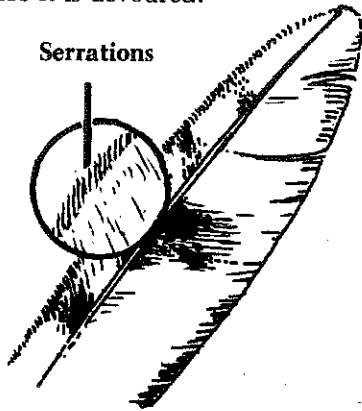
How do owls hear?

The ear openings are also directed forward and are shielded beneath downy feathers within the owl's familiar facial disk. (The ear tufts of some owls have nothing to do with hearing.) The facial disk itself serves to focus sound waves into the ears. Strangely, the ear opening on the right is higher than the one on the left. Each ear therefore receives sound from a slightly different angle. This provides owls 3-D hearing in addition to 3-D seeing, thus doing us humans one better. Experiments have shown this sense to be so effective that Barn Owls can locate prey in total darkness by hearing alone.



How do owls hunt?

To aid in nighttime hunting, owls are gifted with silent flight. This results from tiny serrations along the leading edge of flight feathers that reduce the sound of flowing air. Coupled with this, owls use a surprise attack. Having located their game while on the wing or from a perch they fly in quickly, feet first. Killing is rapid and the victim is usually carried in the feet or beak to a perch or nest where it is devoured.



Owl pellet

How do owls eat?

Large items are torn apart with talons and beak. Small morsels, such as mice, are swallowed whole. Hours later indigestible bones, fur and feathers are coughed up in firm, cylindrical one-to-two-inch pellets. Sometimes many of these pellets can be found under a favorite perch or nest. By identifying the remains in the pellets, the owl's food habits can be studied. The pellets beneath one perch contained the parts of 1,987 field mice, 656 house mice, 210 rats, 92 blackbirds and four frogs.

Owl nest boxes you can build:

