



The Great Horned Owl is the largest owl in North America. It is sometimes called the cat owl. This widespread bird of prey lives in mountains, grasslands, conifer forests, deserts, chapparals, and many other habitats in North and South America. Its scientific name is *Bubo virginianus* (Genus and species). Its call is a far-carrying hoot.

**Anatomy:** This owl is 18 to 25 inches (46-64 cm) long and has a wing span of 52 to 55 inches (1.3-1.4 m); its weight averages about 3 pounds (1.5 kg). The feathers of the Horned Owl are gray to brown to buff to black. There is a patch of white feathers on the brown chest (called a "gular"). The eyes are yellow with round black pupils. Large tufts of feathers on its head give this owl its name; they are neither ears nor horns, they are just feathers.

**Diet:** Owls are carnivores (meat-eaters). The Great Horned Owl is mostly nocturnal (most active at night). Owls use a keen sense of sight to find prey in the dark (they see mostly in black and white). They also have an acute sense of hearing which helps in finding meals. Owls are stealth hunters; they can easily sneak up on their prey since their fluffy feathers give them almost silent flight. The Great Horned Owl hunts and eats mammals (like rabbits, skunks, woodchucks, mice, rats, and squirrels), birds (ducks, quail, and geese), and fish. The owl is at the top of the food web; it has no major predators. It sometimes eats its prey whole and later regurgitates the bones, fur, and feathers in pellets.

**Nest and Eggs:** Great Horned Owls usually use abandoned hawk or heron nests. In each clutch (a set of eggs laid at one time), females lay 2-3 white eggs. The eggs take 28-30 days to hatch; both parents incubate the eggs.