

# Let's Learn About Owls

There are owls featured in cartoons, movies and even comic books. Can you name your favorite owl? I bet you can! In our culture, owls are often shown as a symbol of high intelligence, but are owls really smarter than other birds?

Let's learn more about the different types of owls that appear in the wild. In this worksheet, you will learn about the habitat, diet, and some other unique and fascinating features about owls.

## All About Owls

Owls are birds, which means they are warm-blooded, have feathers, and lay eggs. There are around 219 species of owls, but only 19 of them are found in the United States and Canada. Out of those, 12 different owls are found in Connecticut. Owls can weigh as little as an ounce and be only 5 inches long, but some can weigh a little over 9 pounds and be up to 28 inches long! That's bigger than some dogs and cats! Our feathered friends can be found all over the world, except Antarctica. Many of them hunt at night and sleep during the day. This means they are **nocturnal**. A few types of owls actually hunt in the early morning and at twilight, though, which means they are **crepuscular**. Owls are divided into two families: True owls, and Barn owls. You can tell the difference between the two easily, as a barn owl (as seen below) has a large head with a heart-shaped face, while True owls do not. The most common owl in CT is the Barred Owl.



Click Here to listen to the hoot of the Barred Owl! (Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?)

<https://www.audubon.org/news/hear-many-different-hoots-barred-owl>

## Habitat, Diet and Social Habits

Owls can be found in grasslands, forests, deserts, prairies, and even the snowy tundra! Some owls will nest in trees, some in barns, and some in caves. They may also nest in cliff crevices, riverbanks, and some even dig underground burrows. Owls are also known for taking over nests that were built by other birds. Owls are solitary, quiet creatures, and typically live alone, or in pairs. Owls are not considered to be smarter than other birds. In fact, they are far less intelligent than a parrot or your typical songbird. The idea that owls are intelligent likely occurred as a result of owls being shown on the shoulder of the Greek Goddess Athena, (Roman-Minerva) who was the Goddess of wisdom.



Great Horned Owl asleep in a tree. By Kasia



Burrowing Owl in California

Owls are **carnivores**, which means they eat only meat. Their diet includes invertebrates (such as insects, spiders, earthworms, snails and crabs), fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds and small mammals. They might eat mice, shrew, voles, foxes, fish, skunks, and other birds, including ducks. The main food largely depends on the species of owl. Owls typically have a hunting ground away from their daytime roost. Like other birds, owls cannot chew their food, so it must be swallowed whole. If the meal is too large, they will tear it apart with their sharp beak and very strong claws. Before they can eat another meal, an owl must expel the bones and hair or feathers that their stomach does not digest. This results in "owl pellets" often being found near owl nests and roosts. Sometimes, owls will store food in the winter, keeping caught prey frozen until they are hungry, defrosting it later with their own body.

## Physical Characteristics

Owls have special features that allow them to thrive in the wild. Owls can swivel their heads 270 degrees in either direction. They have uneven ears, giving them excellent hearing. Large eyes allow them to see prey up to a half of a mile away. However, they don't have a sense of smell. This explains why the Great Horned owl prefers to hunt skunks! The Great Horned owl has a grip strength up to 500 pounds per square inch, compared to a human ability of 100-150 pounds per square inch. They can kill their prey with their powerful claws before flying it up to their nest. Owls are more often heard than seen, because their feathers serve as an excellent camouflage. The Barred Owl, which is very common in Connecticut, blends in with trees. The Snowy White owl is also sometimes seen in CT during their migration. Like many birds, these owls can travel great distances in a single year! The color of the Snowy owl allows them to be nearly invisible in, you guessed it, snow. See the next two pages for more information about owls!

## Barred Owl



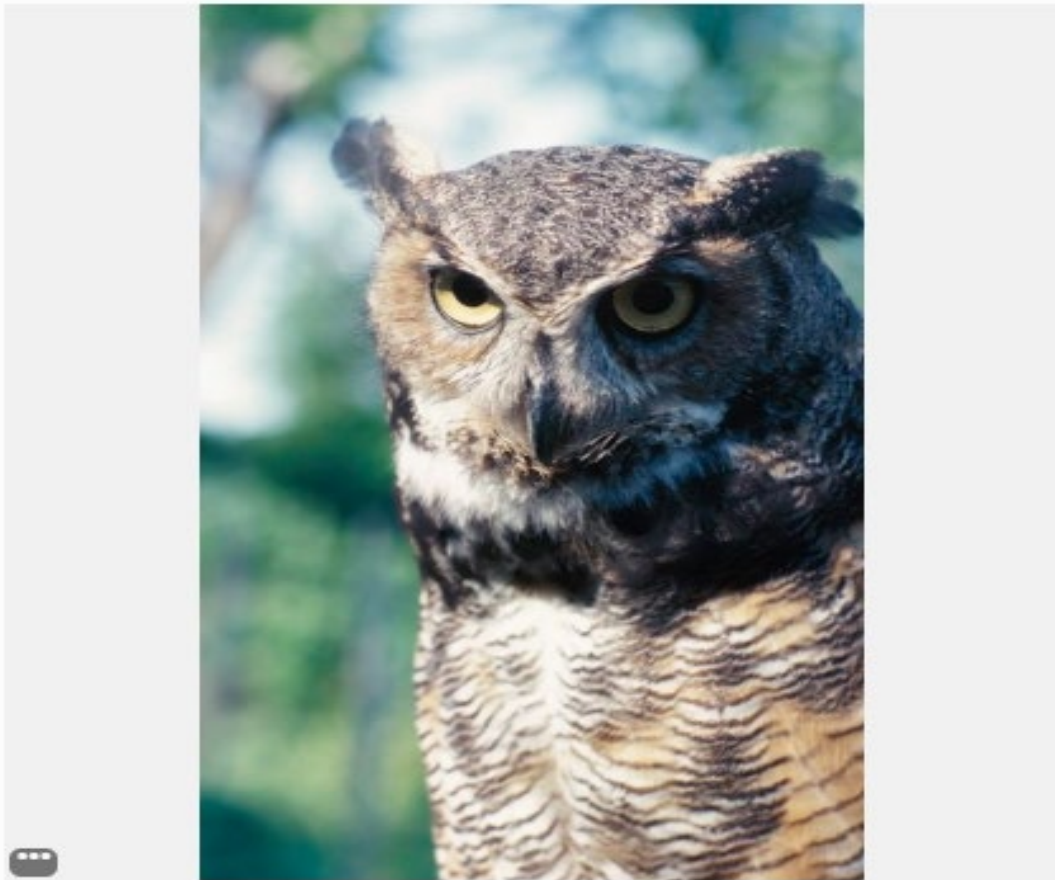
The barred owl (*Strix varia*) is found throughout the eastern U.S. Averaging just over a pound, the owl's coloring is rotated bars of brown and white. The barred owl flies quickly away when disturbed and can sometimes be heard calling during daylight. More northern populations are sometimes migratory.

## Common Barn Owl



The common barn owl (*Tyto alba*) is one of the most common owls around the world and in the northeast. Many barn owls migrate to the southeast during winter, but others are year-round residents. Barn owls are white on the underside of their bodies and have white faces. The head and back are brown. The largest barn owls weigh only about a pound and a half.

## Great Horned Owl



The great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) is the largest and most ferocious predator among the northeastern owls. Weighing more than 3 pounds, great horned owls are found throughout much of the U.S. They prey upon rodents, fish and insects. Their most notable feature is their large ear tufts. Their coloring ranges from shades of brown to black. The great horned owl also has a white marking on its neck and a white belly.

Owl pictures and descriptions courtesy of [sciencing.com](http://sciencing.com)

## Owls: Quiz

1. What type of animal is an owl?
  - a. Reptile
  - b. Bird
  - c. Mammal
  
2. What is the most common owl in CT?
  - a. Barn owl
  - b. Great Horned owl
  - c. Barred owl
  
3. What does nocturnal mean?
  - a. Active at night
  - b. Active in the daytime
  - c. Active in the morning
  
4. What is a carnivore?
  - a. Animals with bones
  - b. Meat eater
  - c. Plant eater
  
5. What special characteristic does an owl have?
  - a. Long, fluffy ears
  - b. Can turn its head 270 degrees
  - c. Good sense of smell
  
6. Why do owls have uneven ears?
  - a. To help with balance
  - b. To help them fly
  - c. To help them hear their prey

(See next page for answers)

Answers: 1.b, 2. c, 3.a, 4.b, 5.b. 6. c