

It has a broad diet of animals from small mammals to rabbits, geese and herons, some reptiles & invertebrates but mostly mammals. Later they regurgitate what their body cannot process as owl pellets. They have excellent hearing and fly silently through the air that aids in hunting nocturnally. They will swoop down to catch their prey in their powerful talons.

**Territories.** The territory for a mated pair may range 1/3 of a mile to 2-5 square miles. The Great Horned Owl mates in December to early February. After the courtship display ends, the male continues to hoot to maintain territory and the female remains near the selected nest until time to lay the eggs. Normally the female lays 2-3 dull white, thick-shelled, oval-shaped eggs. Incubation usually takes 26-35 days with both sexes sharing in the process. The male feeds the female during this time. The eggs are incubated by both parents and hatch in about four weeks. They lay only one clutch of eggs per season.

Once the owlets hatch, the male brings large quantities of food to the nest. Prey is stored in the nest, since young owlets will eat their nest mates if not kept constantly fed.

Newly hatched owls are covered with white natal (birth) down. Their eyes open at 9 days and function poorly for the first 2 weeks after opening. The owlet cannot hold up its head. After 3 weeks buff-colored, mottled looking down replaces the natal down. The owlets need constant brooding (female sits on nest and covers

owlets) to protect them from cold and predators. A female owl will viciously attack both animal and human invaders during this time.

Owlets begin growing their primary feathers (main, adult feathers) at 3 weeks of age. They have light yellow eyes with blue pupils. Less brooding is necessary and they are very active about the nest. Owlets learn to eject excrement (body waste) over the side of the nest but sometimes fall due to their clumsiness. About this time the owlets begin using a defensive display when disturbed. They raise their feathers, fan their wings downward, and hiss or snap their bill. After 5-6 weeks, the female coaxes the owlets out of the nest by offering food



from a nearby branch. At about 9-10 weeks old the owlets first flight out of the nest to the ground. They quickly scramble up a tree using their beaks and talons to

get away from ground level predators. If approached by a predator, they assume a hiding pose by sitting still and erect against the side of the tree. If this pose fails they present the defensive display

Feedings become irregular but the young owlets remain with the female and beg for food until September or October. During mid-June, the young owlets use their inborn instinct to attack prey. Young owls leave their parent's home range in autumn, when they are fully independent and can find their own hunting territory.

When a member of the pair dies, the survivor remains in the home territory until another mate arrives.

Owls with large territories frequently spend each season in a different part of their territory. Owls use specific areas of their territory for nesting and roosting. Some birds use certain trees so regularly that observers can predict in which tree they will find the owl in during a specific season.

During the winter and fall, owls prefer evergreen roost trees since they provide daytime cover. When these are not available, owls will adapt to any place that provides as much concealment as possible during daylight hours. They seem to prefer to roost in isolated trees in small forest openings.

## COOL FACTS

- The Great Horned Owl is the only animal that regularly eats skunks.
- The Great Horned Owl will take large prey.
- The Great Horned Owl is a regular victim of harassment from flocks of American Crows. Crows congregate from long distances to mob owls, and may continue yelling at them for hours. The enmity of the crows is well earned, however, as the owl is probably the most important predator on adult crows and nestlings.
- Even though the female Great Horned Owl is larger than her mate, the male has a deeper voice. Pairs often call together, with audible differences in pitch.
- Great Horned Owls have 14 vertebrae in the neck making it so it can turn its head a full 270 degrees.
- Their eyes are fixed in forward position and cannot look side to side.

## **“KOLA WAKON OF WILDLIFE”**

Roughly translated it means “Sacred Friend of Wildlife”. This is what every Wildlife Rehabilitator, every person who rescues wildlife, everyone who transports and every Veterinarian that works with wildlife are to the wild kingdom.

## **What is a Wildlife Rehabilitator?**

**They wear many hats. They are a nurse, a caregiver, a janitor, a teacher and much more! They are NOT paid. Everything they do comes out of their own pocket. Their oath is to help wildlife that has been injured, orphaned or sick due to storms, cycle of life or humans. Our ultimate goal is to return them back to the wild.**

**How you can help your local rehabbers:**

**Call them and ask what things they need. Give them a gift certificate to a place where they get supplies.**

**In any State, you can call your local Game & Inland Fisheries, local Veterinarian, or animal shelter and they should have some phone numbers for local Wildlife Rehabilitators.**

**If you have any questions you may call Pearl Beamer, State & Federally licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator within the state of Virginia about wildlife. Pearl specializes in Raptors. 757-855-2922 (7am-7pm)**

*(Bubo virginianus)*



The Great Horned Owl is one of the largest owls in North America. They are about 18-25 inches tall, with a wingspan of 40-57 inches and weigh about 32-89 ounces. The “horns” are only tufts of feathers. They are brown and gray with dark barring. They have white throats, orange facial disk outlined in black and yellow eyes with dark bill.

They are found across North America in valleys, grasslands, woodlands, forests and city parks.

## **GREAT HORNED OWL**