

# Great Horned Owl is, well, grand indeed

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Everyone seems to enjoy owls.

Our association of owls with wisdom comes from Greek mythology where an owl accompanied Athena, the goddess of wisdom.

There are 216 species of owls scattered around the globe, 19 of which reside in North America.

Taxonomically, Barn Owls are distinctly different from other North American owls, which are in the family of true owls. If you're like me, this leads to other questions, which I am content to leave unresolved.

One common question I am asked is, "What is the largest owl?" The answer, "it depends."

Great Gray Owls are the tallest North American owl. Great Horned Owls and Snowy Owls, however, weigh more and have larger feet. Suffice it to say, all three are big birds that astound us when we see them fly.

Great Horned Owls can be found in forests, along streams and in open country across America. They range in size from 18-24 inches and have a wingspan that can approach five feet. They can weigh up to 5.5 pounds.

These gray-brown birds have reddish brown faces and a distinct white patch on the throat. One of their most distinctive "field marks" is the prominent



*Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.*



Who's looking at you? A young Great Horned Owl, above, and an adult, below.

"ear tufts" which are feathers, not ears.

The Long-eared Owl has distinctive ear tufts but they are closer together than those on the Great Horned Owl. Long-eared Owls are also smaller than Great Horned Owls.

Great Horned Owls begin nesting in late winter and will usually lay two to three eggs. The eggs hatch in about 28-35 days and the young fledge at 9-10 weeks.

It is always good to leave bird nests alone and to observe them from a distance. Most of the time the nests will be fairly high in a tree or on a cliff so it becomes natural to move a distance away for better viewing. Of course, binoculars and spotting scopes provide greatly magnified views of distant nests or birds.

Since Great Horned Owls are common across the United

States, don't be surprised if you hear their deep, booming calls.

You can sample a variety of Great Horned Owl hoots on the Audubon website (<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/great-horned-owl>).

I've seen Great Horned Owls in many locations around the United States.

The photo of the adult owl shown here was taken at a roadside rest stop in north central Washington. The fuzzy, young owl photo was taken on private land near Bow, up near Bellingham.

I'm always thrilled to have an owl sit calmly and either sleep or study me as I take photos. I try to not linger with them and hope that they get back to their normal daily lives soon after I depart.

I hope you get the opportunity to see these big, wonderful birds. You may be content just to



hear the hoo-hoo-hoo calls during the evening and night.

Good luck.