

All About Minnesota OWLS

Ten owls – from smallest to biggest – flip the page to see more➔

Northern Saw-Whet



Photo © Denise Dupras

Height: 7"

Wingspan: 17"

Nests: dense thickets & evergreens

Eats: small birds, chipmunks, shrews, mice & insects

Call: series of "toots"

Where can I see one?

Widespread in MN, they are rarely seen except during migration in October. These doll-like owls can seem incredibly tame when captured for banding.

Eastern Screech



Photo © Jerry Pruett

Height: 8"

Wingspan: 20"

Nests: tree cavities, sometimes nest boxes

Eats: small birds, rodents, amphibians, crayfish & large insects

Call: an eerie "whinny" or "trill"

Where can I see one?

Commonly seen in neighborhoods and woodlands, they come in two color morphs - red (shown above) and gray.

Boreal



Photo © Jerry Pruett

Height: 10"

Wingspan: 21"

Nests: abandoned woodpecker holes

Eats: small birds, rodents, bats & large insects

Call: rapid series of "hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo HOO"

Where can I see one?

You'll have to travel to far northern MN. They are most often seen roosting in winter.

Short-eared



Photo © Steve Round

Height: 15"

Wingspan: 38"

Nests: on the ground in a depression concealed by reeds and grasses

Eats: voles, songbirds, some game birds

Call: a low pitched, muffled "hoooo..."

Where can I see one?

Western MN prairies are where this owl lives and hunts by flying low over the ground. Short-eared owls are declining due to the loss of their prairie habitat.

Long-eared



Photo © Sergei Belski

Height: 15"

Wingspan: 36"

Nests: abandoned crow and hawk nests, or tree cavities

Eats: voles, mice, amphibians, reptiles and insects

Call: a variety of calls including barks, mews and slow-paced "hoos"

Where can I see one?

Not often seen, these slender owls with close-set ear tufts can be found in woods near open fields and marshes throughout MN.

Owls often swallow their prey whole, but can't digest the "tough bits." Many hours after each meal they cough up a neat **pellet** of bones and fur, which helps us figure out what they're eating!

Learn more:

at the **International Owl Center** in Houston, MN. Visit in person or check out their web site at **InternationalOwlCenter.org**

Did you know:

Owls have specialized flight feathers with fringes of varying softness that help them fly nearly silently. Even a very big owl could fly low over your head without you even noticing it!



Give a hoot:

The biggest threat to owls is habitat loss.

It's important to leave dead trees standing wherever possible for use as nesting sites.

Most wild owls test positive for rodenticides. We can help prevent that by using traps rather than poisons to control rodents.

One owl can eat hundreds of mice each year.

All owls can see perfectly well in the daytime. Most hunt during the night due to less competition from other predators. Exceptions are the Snowy and Northern Hawk Owls which mainly hunt during the day.

Get outdoors, start birding! Visit **ZumbroValleyAudubon.org**

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Northern Hawk



Photo © Denise Dupras

Height: 16"
Wingspan: 28"
Nests: tree cavities, and abandoned woodpecker holes
Eats: grouse, ptarmigan, birds, rabbits, voles, etc.
Call: variety of whistled trills, rattles & screams

Where can I see one?
The Sax-Zim bog area north of Duluth is a good spot. It is rare to see this owl outside of the NE corner of the state.

Barred



Photo © Denise Dupras

Height: 21"
Wingspan: 44"
Nests: tree cavities and abandoned hawk or crow nests
Eats: mice, rabbits amphibians, reptiles
Call: "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all"

Where can I see one?
Found in wooded areas (even tree-heavy neighborhoods) throughout MN. Barred Owls often call during the day, which helps to locate them.

Great Horned



Photo © Don Anderson

Height: 22"
Wingspan: 52"
Nests: old crow, hawk or heron nests, tree cavities, cliff ledges
Eats: squirrels, rabbits, snakes, skunks, birds and much more
Call: 4 - 6 deep hoots: "hoo, hoo-hoo-hoo, hoo, hoo"

Where can I see one?
Throughout MN, this owl is not picky as long as a nesting site and food are available – try any woodlot with a good squirrel population.

Snowy



Photo © Don Anderson

Height: 24"
Wingspan: 52"
Nests: on the ground in the arctic tundra
Eats: voles, rodents, arctic and snowshoe hares, fish, birds
Call: a generally quiet owl, sometimes "barks"

Where can I see one?
Generally only found in northern MN during winter when some fly south in search of food. They are only occasionally seen in southeast MN.

Great Gray



Photo © Don Anderson

Height: 29"
Wingspan: 57"
Nests: abandoned hawk, crow, or raven nests, or on top of old stumps
Eats: voles, mice, gophers, weasels, sometimes birds and squirrels
Call: slow series of deep hoots

Where can I see one?
Boggy forests in the top third of MN. It would be rare to see one much south of Duluth.



Wow!

If your eyes took up as much space in your head as an owl's, each eye would be **nearly the size of a small grapefruit!**

Did you know:

Owls don't build their own nests. They always use one that was already made by a crow, hawk or squirrel.

Owl's ears are located behind and to the side of their eyes. One ear is usually higher than the other. Their facial disc feathers form parabolic disks, funneling sound to the ears. The "ear tufts" some species have are not ears at all, simply display feathers.

Owls have long and flexible necks which enable them to turn their heads up to 270 degrees and almost up-side-down. That's good, because they **can't move their eyes at all!**

Oxbow Park & Zollman Zoo near Byron, MN is a great place to see several Minnesota owls up close and personal.

While most owls use both sight and hearing to hunt, the **Great Gray Owl** relies most on hearing. It can hear a vole, and catch it, through 18" of snow cover!

Learn more:

Many owls can be seen at the **Sax-Zim Bog** northwest of Duluth. For more information, visit **Sax-Zimbog.com**.

