

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

February 2003

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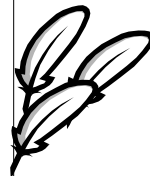
wls of Manitoba



Owls are efficient predators near the top of the food chain. These birds are crucial in controlling the population numbers of prey species, especially rodents. Contrary to popular belief, only a few owl species are strictly nocturnal – most feed during the twilight hours of dusk and dawn. Several species are actually diurnal, meaning they hunt during the day. An example of this is the Snowy Owl.

Owls are well adapted to their predatory role. Their feathers have a soft edge to reduce wing noise, allowing them to approach their prey without being heard. Owls have very muscular feet – this lets them catch and hold onto their prey. When an owl grasps its prey, its legs compress and the feet automatically close. Their strong hooked beak is perfect for tearing meat off of the prey.

Owls have very good day and night vision (35 times better than ours). They have large eyes for the size of their heads – in fact, if the eyes in your head took up as much room as an owl's, each eye would be approximate to the size of a grapefruit. An owl's eyes cannot move in their sockets, so it must turn its entire head to look around. They are able to turn their head 270° to



Did you know?

That there are 11 species of owls in Manitoba.

- Eastern Screech-Owl
- Great Horned Owl
- Snowy Owl
- Northern Hawk-Owl
- Burrowing Owl
- Barred Owl
- Great Gray Owl
- Long-eared Owl
- Short-eared Owl
- Boreal Owl
- Northern Saw-whet Owl



That Manitoba's provincial bird is the Great Gray Owl.



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Owls of Manitoba continued

Owls also have incredible hearing – the Great Gray Owl can hear a vole 30 centimeters under the snow, up to 30 meters away. Their ears are positioned on the sides of their head, and are often asymmetrical with one being higher than the other. This enables the owl to detect the exact direction and distance a sound is coming from.



Owls are extremely territorial – many associate with another individual only during courtship. Nocturnal owls have evolved loud, distinctive voices that travel over great distances, which helps maintain territories and allows them to communicate while farther apart. Owls swallow their food whole and digest the entire animal except the fur, feathers and bones. They regurgitate these remains in the form of a pellet.



Where to see owls in Manitoba

Different owls like different habitats so there is no one good place to see all the owls.

The best locations to spot Snowy Owls are along Highways 1, 2, and 3 within 50 kilometers of Winnipeg and along PR 220 between PR 409 and Oak Hammock Marsh.



For Great Gray Owls and Northern Hawk-Owls the best locations are along Maple Creek Road and surrounding area, northeast of Winnipeg.

For Barred Owls, Northern Saw-whet Owls, and Boreal Owls the best locations are along Spruce Siding Road and forested areas east of Winnipeg.

Commonly asked questions

Do owls eat each other?

Yes. Larger owls will eat smaller ones if they can catch them.

What is the largest owl in Manitoba?

The Great Gray Owl.

What is the heaviest owl in Manitoba?

The Snowy Owl.



What is the smallest owl in Manitoba?

The Saw-whet Owl.

What is the most powerful owl in Manitoba?

The Great Horned Owl.

Do owls migrate?

Yes. Some go farther south but some only migrate to southern Manitoba.

Are those tufts of feathers the owl's ears?

No. Owls ears are on the sides of their heads underneath the feathers. The tufts are just feathers and are used for expression.

