

# NATURE DETECTIVES

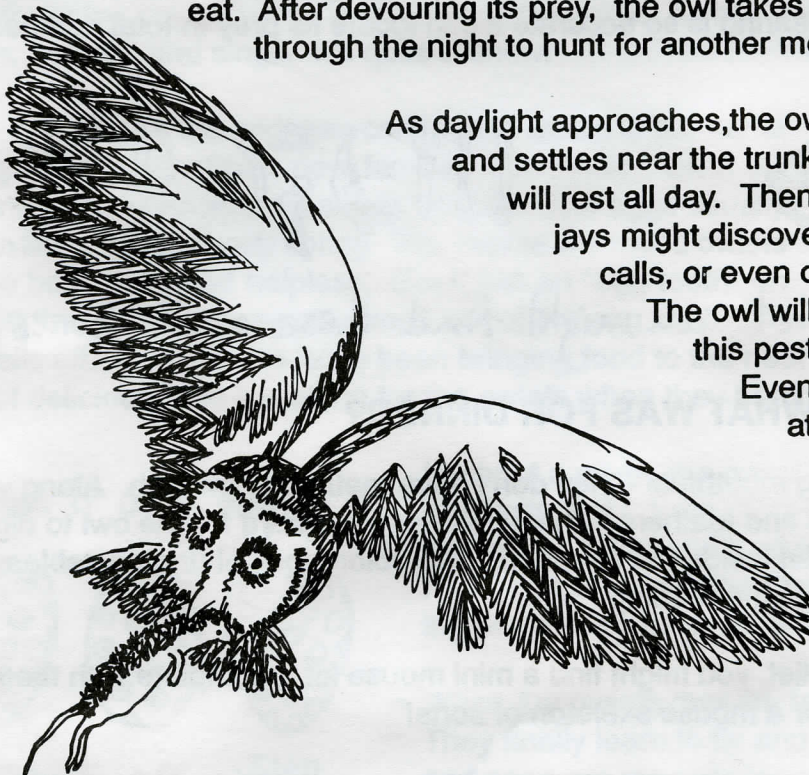
FALL 1994

## WHO WHOO!!

Big eyes suddenly open. The owl turns its head, peering into the night. It might ruffle its feathers or stretch out its wings and slowly fold them again. It might hoot or moan or whistle. Having slept most of the day, now it's time for the owl to "get up".

With a silent lift of wings, the owl soars from its perch high in a cottonwood. All night the owl hunts. It knows its territory well - where the trees are, the clearings, the water, the nests of the other birds, even where to veer in flight to avoid branches or other obstacles in the dark night.

As it flies, the owl is listening for the tiny squeak of a mouse or the rustling of grasses as a rabbit leaps. Aiming for the sound, the owl dives for its prey, sharp talons outstretched. Grabbing the animal, the owl then carries it up into a tree to eat. After devouring its prey, the owl takes off again, moving quietly through the night to hunt for another meal.



As daylight approaches, the owl returns to its favorite perch and settles near the trunk to sleep. Perhaps the owl will rest all day. Then again, a group of Stellar's jays might discover it and sound their alarm calls, or even drive it away by diving at it.

The owl will either sit quietly and endure this pestering or fly to another perch. Eventually the jays will cease their attack and the owl can sleep once again.

Who - whoo - who -  
who - who -  
who. It's  
night again.  
Time to  
get  
up!

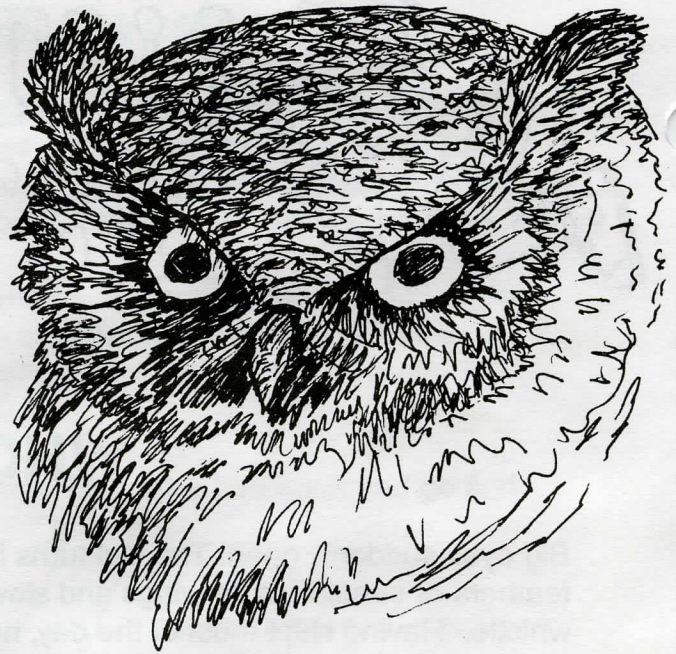


## MY WHAT BIG EYES YOU HAVE

**Have you ever seen an owl staring at you with its big, big eyes? The eyes of an owl are often larger than its brain. Imagine what humans would look like if our eyes were bigger than our brains! Owls need their special eyes to survive.**

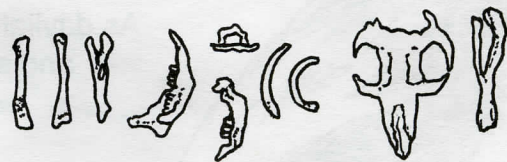
An owl's eyes are perfect for hunting. They can see things far away like a mouse running through a meadow. And since many owls are active at night, their large pupils let in more light, allowing them to see in the dark.

Can you look side to side by only moving your eyes? An owl can't. Its eyes are stuck staring straight ahead. So an owl must move its entire head to look around. Owls can spin their heads almost all the way to the back, but not completely around.



## DID YOU HEAR THAT?

**You may mistake those feathery tufts on an owl's head for ears, but they're not! An owl's ears are hidden beneath the soft edge feathers of its facial disk. The smooth circles of feathers around the eyes direct sound out to the ears, increasing the amount of noise that an owl can pick up. An owl's hearing is so accurate it can locate its prey in total darkness!**



Inside this owl pellet you might find these mouse bones!

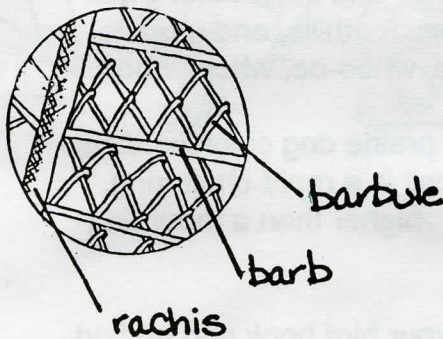
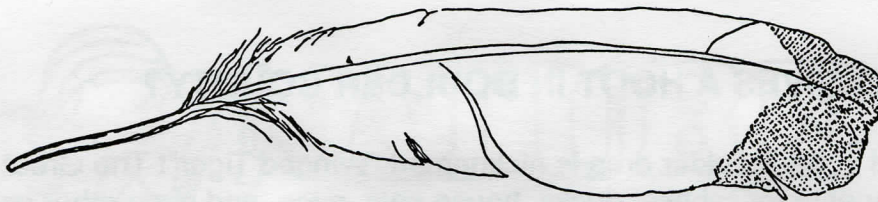
## WHAT WAS FOR DINNER?

**Gulp! Owls eat their food in big mouthfuls - they don't have teeth to chew with. Along with meat, they also swallow bones and feathers. These leftovers are hard for the owl to digest so they are rolled up into a pellet inside the stomach. The oblong ball of undigestables is spit out of the beak a few hours after feeding.**

**If you take a close look at a pellet, you might find a mini mouse kit - complete with teeth, bones, and fur - to put together a mouse skeleton of sorts!**

**Mice aren't the only things owls eat. Rabbits, snakes, frogs, insects and even skunks are on the menu. Who knows what you might find in an owl pellet!**





## OWLS OF A FEATHER

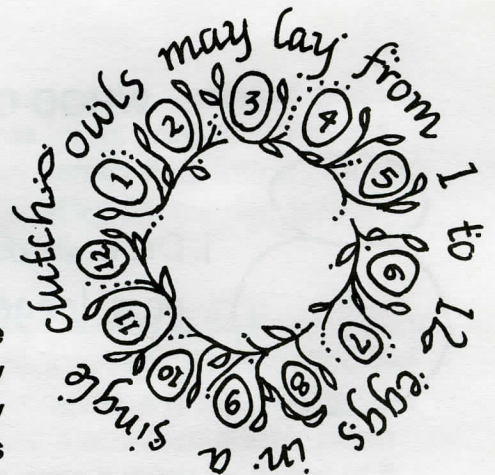
How well could an owl hunt if it made noise when it flew? The prey would hear the owl approaching and run away. An owl has special wings that help it fly silently.

Most bird feathers are made up of a center shaft (the rachis), which holds rows of barbs. Barbules hold the rows of barbs together keeping feathers tight. But owl feathers have no barbules, so the feathers are spread apart making each feather soft and fringy. This allows the owl to fly quietly and sneak up on its prey.

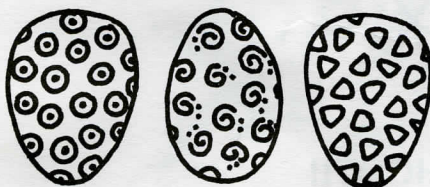
## STARTING A FAMILY

Flap, flap! Snap, snap! After finding a good place to nest, the male owl tries to attract a female by snapping his beak, stretching out his wings and bobbing his head. As he dances, he calls and sings. It's quite a show!

Some owls pair for life and may continue to return to the same nesting area to start their new families each year. Owls lay from one to twelve eggs in a single "clutch". The eggs usually hatch in late winter or early spring. The babies are called owlets and are born blind and helpless. Each has an "egg tooth" on top of its beak which it uses to break out of the egg shell. After the owlet hatches, the egg tooth falls off. Owl parents have been bringing food to the nest since the eggs were laid, so a pile of delicious food is waiting for the owlets when they hatch.



what if owl eggs



weren't all white

In about a week, the owlet can see and is soon covered with fluffy down. The owlet can't fly yet so the parents must defend it when danger approaches by hissing and clicking their beaks at any intruders including people...so be careful!

When the owlets mature, feathers replace the down. They finally learn to fly and can hunt for their own food and soon are ready to leave their parents and fend for themselves.

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who

who

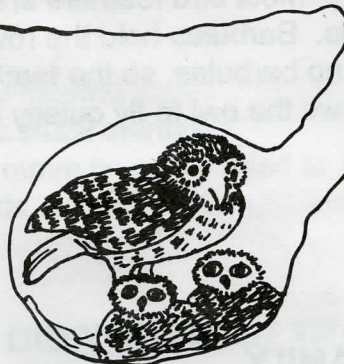


## WHO GIVES A HOOT IN BOULDER COUNTY?

The most common owl in the Boulder area is nicknamed "Winged Tiger"! The Great Horned Owl has an appetite for rabbits, ducks, house cats, mice, and even other owls. These owls have adapted to a variety of local habitats - prairies, foothills, and mountains. The Great Horned Owl has a vibrating call of 3-8 hoots. "Who, whoo-oo, whoo, whoo."

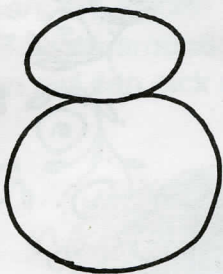
Burrowing Owls make their homes in prairie dog burrows. As prairie dog colonies disappear, so do the Burrowing Owls. A Burrowing Owl's daytime call is a rapid chattering. "Quick - quick - quick." At night you'll hear a mellow "Co-hoo" -higher than a mourning dove's coo.

Many other owls make their homes in Boulder County. Take your bird book and go find them!

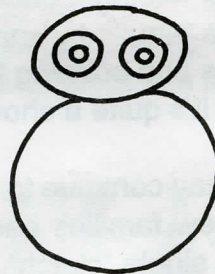


*burrowing owl and babies*

## WHOO CAN DRAW AN OWL? YOU CAN!



1. Draw an oval on top of a larger circle.



2. Add double circle eyes.



3. Now draw two triangle feather tufts and a triangle beak.



4. Add two curving wings, a tail and feet.

## NATURE DETECTIVES: GIVE A HOOT!!

Join us to make owl masks and take a close look at owl pellets. See Discover calendar for details.

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