

11. Owls!

Did you know that owls are Terri's favorite animal? We have encountered 5 different owl species in the wild, and each was fascinating to photograph and study. Today we will introduce you to the Short Eared Owl, Great Grey Owl, Burrowing Owl, Great Horned Owl and the Northern Hawk Owl, so that you can learn more about them!

Most owls are solitary, meaning they generally prefer to live alone. Owls are usually nocturnal, or active at night, however some are crepuscular, or active at dusk and dawn, while others are diurnal, meaning they are active in the daytime. Owls hunt mostly small mammals, insects, and other birds, and occasionally fish. Owls are found on all continents except Antarctica. Though owls are typically solitary, some owls will live in a group, which is called a *parliament*. Owls vary greatly in size; some are as small as 5 inches and the largest owl, the Great Grey Owl, averages over 28 inches.

Owls have large forward-facing eyes and ear-holes, a flat face, and usually a circle of feathers, called a *facial disc*, around each eye. This disc is made up of feathers which can be adjusted to direct sounds to the owls' ears, helping them hunt more effectively. Although owls have binocular vision, their large eyes are fixed in their sockets so they must turn their entire head to change views. Owls can rotate their heads and necks as much as 270 degrees in either direction. Owls are farsighted, meaning they are unable to see things close to their eyes clearly. Most birds of prey have eyes on the sides of their heads, but an owl's forward-facing eyes give them a good sense of depth perception which helps them hunt in darkness. Did you know that owls are able to move one eye at a time?

Different species of owls make different sounds which helps them find mates and announce their presence to other owls. Much of their hunting strategy depends on stealth and surprise, therefore the color of their feathers helps them blend in with their surroundings; and the serrated edges on the edge of their wings muffles their wing beats allowing the owls flight to be practically silent.

Owls are fascinating creatures, and after learning more about them, we can certainly understand why they are Terri's favorite creature!