Owls of New York

❖ A SAMPLER ❖

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT
OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
George E. Pataki, Governor Erin M. Crotty, Commissioner
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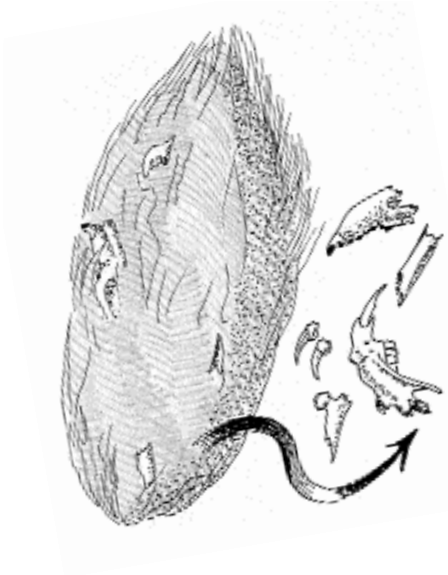
Snowy Owl

This very large, rare winter visitor is white, flecked or barred with a dusky color, and has yellow eyes. Females are much darker than males. Reaches length up to 27", wingspan up to 55". Found in open areas (fields, marshes, beaches, airports, frozen lake shores) where they often perch low or on the ground. Feeds mainly on small mammals. Low lemming numbers in the Arctic are often the cause of their visit to our area.

Owl Pellets

Owls are great hunters that often eat smaller prey, such as mice, whole. Indigestible parts of the prey are regurgitated as owl pellets. The pellets are gray or brown masses about 1-2 inches long, and are made up of fur, feathers, bones, bills, claws, teeth, and sometimes insect or plant parts. Found at owl roosts and nest sites, these regurgitated pellets can tell the story of an owl's diet. If you find an owl pellet, you can soak it in warm water and then dissect it to learn just what foods the owl has eaten.



Artwork by Jean Gawalt
(Art not to scale).
Text by Barbara Loucks

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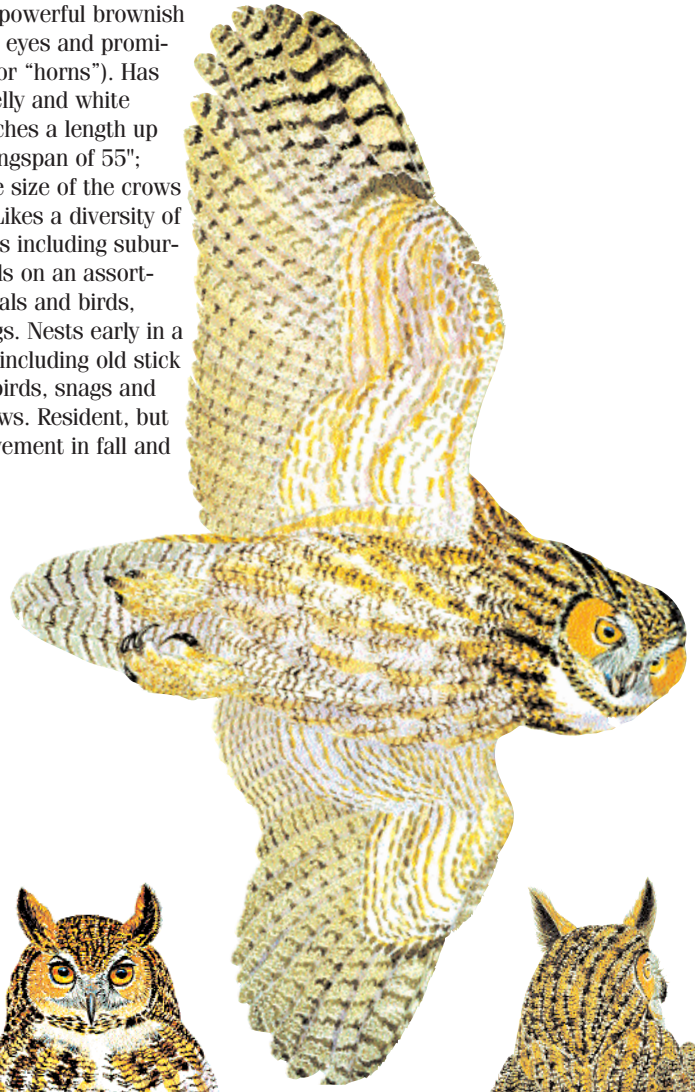
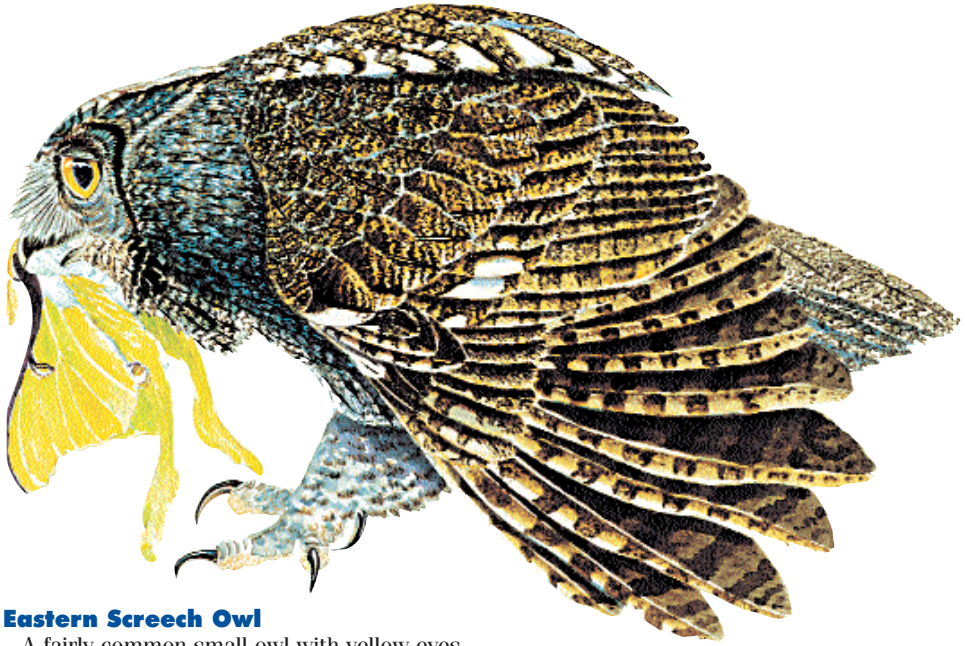
Great Horned Owl

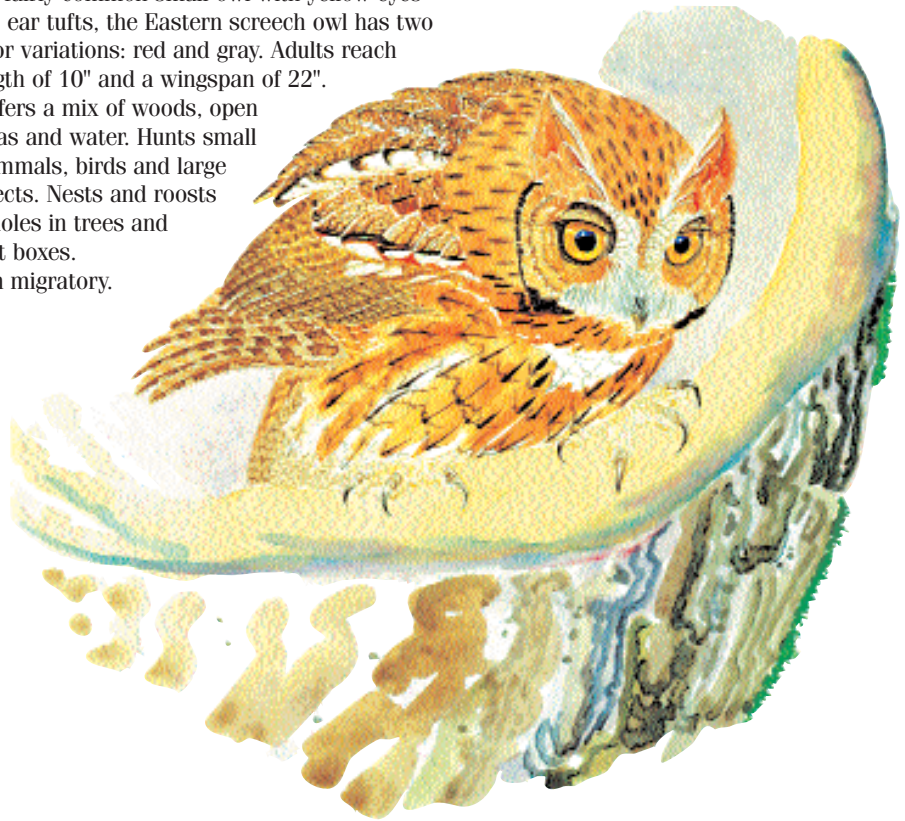
A very large, powerful brownish owl with yellow eyes and prominent ear tufts (or “horns”). Has finely barred belly and white throat bib. Reaches a length up to 25" and a wingspan of 55"; nearly twice the size of the crows that harass it. Likes a diversity of wooded habitats including suburban areas. Feeds on an assortment of mammals and birds, snakes and frogs. Nests early in a variety of sites including old stick nests of other birds, snags and large tree hollows. Resident, but some local movement in fall and winter.





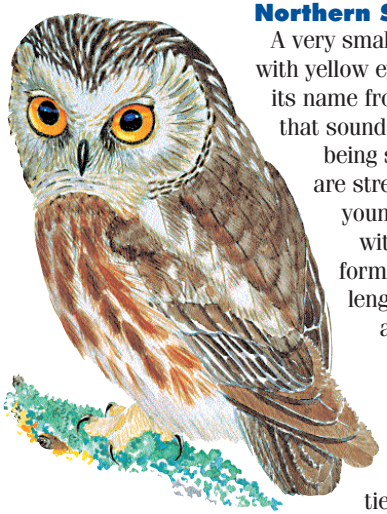
Eastern Screech Owl

A fairly common small owl with yellow eyes and ear tufts, the Eastern screech owl has two color variations: red and gray. Adults reach length of 10" and a wingspan of 22". Prefers a mix of woods, open areas and water. Hunts small mammals, birds and large insects. Nests and roosts in holes in trees and nest boxes.
Non migratory.



Long-eared Owl

A secretive, slender crow-sized owl, the long-eared owl often perches immobile next to tree trunks, appearing invisible. It has long ear tufts, a reddish-brown facial disk, yellow-orange eyes, and reaches a length up to 16" with a wingspan of 39". Males often paler than females. Roosts communally in winter in evergreens. Hunts mainly mammals. A rare nester, often uses old crow nests in conifers in open woodlands, plantations and wooded swamps. Migrates.



Northern Saw-whet Owl

A very small tame brown owl with yellow eyes, this bird gets its name from one of its calls that sounds similar to a saw being sharpened. Adults are streaked underneath; young are deep brown with white eyebrows forming a V. Reaches a length up to 8½", and a wingspan of 17". Feeds mainly on small mammals. Nests in holes in trees (often woodpecker cavities) and nest boxes in mixed forests, coniferous forests, wooded swamps, bogs and forest edges. Roosts in conifers at forest edges. Migrates with occasionally high numbers reported.

Barred Owl

This large, dark-eyed, gray-brown woodland owl is barred across the chest and streaked lengthwise on the belly. Reaches lengths of up to 24", wingspan of 44". Prefers densely forested areas for breeding. Feeds mainly on mammals and birds. Nests in cavities or in an old hawk, squirrel or crow nest. Wanders during fall and winter.

Short-eared Owl

This rare, medium-sized, streaked owl is seen during the day more often than most owls, usually observed hunting small mammals in open areas like old fields, marshes, airports, and meadows. It has yellow eyes, large buffy wing patches on the upper wing with black patches near the bend of the wing. and ear tufts that are not easy to see. Males are generally paler than females. Reaches length of 17" and wingspan of 41". In winter, sometimes occurs in groups. Nests on the ground in open areas along the coast, in marshes and in fields. Migrates.

Barn Owl

A medium-sized pale owl with a white, heart-shaped face, dark eyes and long legs, the barn owl is found in meadow, grassland or marsh areas where it feeds on small mammals. It has a buffy or rusty back with pale underparts. Females are generally darker, especially underneath. Length up to 20"; wingspan 44". Breeds year-round, nesting primarily in tree cavities but also in barns, silos and artificial nest boxes. More common in southern New York. Resident and migratory species.

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