

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ABNSB05010

Data Sensitivity: No

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Bubo virginianus*

COMMON NAME: Great Horned Owl; Hoot Owl; Cat Owl; Chicken Owl; Eagle Owl; King Owl; Virginia Horned Owl

SYNONYMS:

FAMILY: Strigidae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:

TYPE LOCALITY:

TYPE SPECIMEN:

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:

DESCRIPTION: 18-25 inches from tail to beak, wing span from 40-60 inches, females may reach 4 pounds and are larger than males. Both sexes are same color, generally grayish-brown overall and spotted with darker brown. Throat is white, whitish belly heavily barred. Reddish facial disk outlined with black or dark brown. Yellow eyes, large ear tufts and facial disks make perched Great Horned Owls look like a cat.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: Long-eared Owl is more boldly streaked lengthwise of body on underparts (Terres 1980).

ILLUSTRATIONS: B&W photo (AGFD Wildlife Views, 1991: p. 18).
Color illustration (National Geographic, 1999: p. 248).

TOTAL RANGE: Found throughout the Americas from the tree line in Canada and Alaska south to Tierra del Fuego (Tibbitts 1991).

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Statewide from driest deserts of Yuma county to near treeline on San Francisco Peaks (Tibbitts 1991). Common Throughout Sonoran and transition zones except in densest unbroken forests and chaparral, where they are scarcest. Thus scarcest in high mountains of Central-Southern Arizona. Range up to Hudsonian zone, residents of Boreal zones as well as below. Also present in lower edge of the Canadian zone of White Mountains and Hart Prairie of San Francisco Peaks (Phillips 1964).

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: The Western Hemisphere's most widespread raptor. It is a fearsome, versatile predator. Hunts from a perch, detecting motion by acute hearing and superb night vision. The Great Horned Owl swoops a short distance onto the prey, grasping it with extremely powerful feet and talons. Wing and tail feathers well adapted for flight, having fuzzy surfaces that dampen virtually all sound of the wings in flight.

Largely nocturnal, Great Horned Owls are especially active at sunset and sunrise, sometimes abroad during daylight hours. Great Horned Owls may live 20 years in the wild (Tibbitts 1991). Call is variable usually a deep 4-6 note whoo! whoo-who-who! whoo! whoo! Adults lean forward when hooting (Terres 1980).

REPRODUCTION: Typically use nests of other raptors, crows, or ravens. Well also nest in rocky caves of cliffs, in hollow trees, and even on the ground. Also use artificial nest platforms built for them in trees. Most Great Horned Owls do not start breeding until 2 years old. Clutch of 2-3 eggs (but as many as 6) laid from December through February. Incubation 26-30 days (up to 34-35 days) is done by both parents. Young fledge at 9-10 weeks and first fly at 63-70 days after hatching. Adults feed young on ground after they leave the nest before they can fly. Adults fiercely defend young (Terres 1980). Most Great Horned Owls in Arizona nest in spring and fledge their young in June (Phillips 1964).

FOOD HABITS: Feeds mainly on mammals consuming mostly rabbits, rats, mice, and skunks. Also prey on birds from wrens to geese. Castings (pellets) have even contained remains of fish, reptiles, crustaceans, and insects. Well adapted to human civilization the Great Horned Owl well also occasionally prey on unguarded poultry, cats, and small dogs (Tibbitts 1991).

HABITAT: Highly adaptable bird found in cities, suburbs, farmlands, woodlots, deserts, grasslands, and forests. More common where small mammals are found (Tibbitts 1991).

ELEVATION:

PLANT COMMUNITY:

POPULATION TRENDS: Neither State nor Federal Government consider it threatened or endangered. It is distributed throughout widely diverse habitats and across two continents. Status is apparently secure. It is readily encountered in both wilderness and city parks (Tibbitts 1991).

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:

STATE STATUS:

OTHER STATUS:

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: None

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:

SUGGESTED PROJECTS:

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

LITERATURE CITATIONS:

- National Geographic Society. 1987. Field Guide to the Birds of North America. National Geographic Society. Washington, D.C., pp. 238.
- Phillips, A., J. Marshall, and G. Monson. 1964. The Birds of Arizona. University of Arizona Press. Tucson, pp. 51.
- Terres, John K. 1980. The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds. Alfred A. Knopf. New York, pp. 668.
- Tibbitts, Timothy J. 1991. "Nongame Field Notes: Great Horned Owl." Arizona Game and Fish Department Wildlife Views. Arizona Game and Fish Department. Phoenix, pp. 18.

MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Revised: 1999-06-25 (DAS)

To the user of this abstract: you may use the entire abstract or any part of it. We do request, however, that if you make use of this abstract in plans, reports, publications, etc. that you credit the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Please use the following citation:

Arizona Game and Fish Department. 1999. *Buteo virginianus*. Unpublished abstract compiled and edited by the Heritage Data Management System, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, AZ. 3 pp.