Owls are birds of prey that are mainly nocturnal or active at night. They are stealthy stalkers that use their superior sight and hearing to track prey in the dark.

Owl Optics
Unlike most birds, owls’ eyes face forward like human eyes. In order to see in different directions, owls have to turn their heads. In fact, owls can swivel their necks so far that it appears they have eyes on the back of their heads! With both eyes focusing on one object, owls use binocular vision to see. They can also use telescopic vision, or the ability to see objects very far away because of the way the bones in their head are arranged.

Owls have haunting yet beautiful faces. Their large eyes are each surrounded by feathered facial disks, or depressions on the face that help direct sound to the ears. The ears on an owl are large holes located behind their eyes and are covered by feathers.

Fluffy Feathers
Owl feathers are soft and fluffy on top and have tiny bristles along the edges. This muffles the sound created by a flapping wing and allows owls to better take their prey by surprise. Most owl plumages, or feather patterns, are dull, earthy colors that provide excellent camouflage, or the ability to blend in

Tenacious Talons
Owls depend on their feet for catching and clutching prey. They have four strong toes with sharp talons. These toes are very flexible; they open widely to grasp moving prey and one toe can even go from facing forward in flight to facing backwards to better grip things! The legs and feet are often covered in feathers to trap heat, help owls better sense their prey, and protect the owl from injury due to struggling prey.
Barn Owl

You may recognize this owl from books or movies. Barn owls are known for their white, heart-shaped faces with dark eyes. This bird gets its name from its preferred nesting area, a barn or old building. They live in open habitats like farmlands or grasslands. Barn owls have the best hearing of all owls. In fact, they hunt their prey, such as rodents, snakes, and

Barred Owl

This large owl with dark eyes is found in woods, swamps, and suburban areas. It hunts rodents, rabbits, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. The barred owl has a very round, distinct facial disk. Its plumage is heavily streaked. This owl is known for being very LOUD and sometimes sounds like a monkey that got loose!

Great Horned Owl

The Great Horned Owl is a common owl throughout North America. It is very large with bright yellow eyes and “horns,” or a bunch of feathers sticking up on the head called ear tufts. This owl lives in all different types of habitats and is known for catching larger prey such as cats, skunks, crows, hawks, and even other owls!

Screech Owl

At a mere 8 or 9 inches tall, it is hard to see a screech owl, but many roost and nest among humans. A screech owl may have reddish or grayish plumage. It has ear tufts that can be lowered and hidden on the head. This owl is less common but can be found in many different habitats hunting for small mammals, amphibians, and insects. It is a true cavity nester and will occupy a nest box built by people.

Chippy Challenge

Owls are an important part of an ecosystem’s food web. Create a food web with at least two of the owls you read about above.
Dissecting an Owl Pellet

The contents of an owl pellet tell a story of what a bird has eaten and gives excellent clues to members of the community food web. Equipment you will need: toothpick, tweezers, and magnifying glass.

1. Carefully unwrap the owl pellet on a clean surface. It is okay to touch the pellet with your fingers. Examine the size of the pellet.
2. Gently pull apart the pellet being careful not to break any bones. This is usually easiest to do with your fingers.
3. Using a toothpick, tweezers, or your fingers, carefully separate the bones from the fur or feathers.
4. Roll the last bits of fur gently between your fingers to find little bones or teeth that may have been overlooked.
5. Try to put together the skeleton of the animal you have found in the pellet. Use the chart provided to you to help identify the animal.

- Do you think it came from a small or large owl? What species of owl do you think it is from?
- Which bones of the skeleton did you find the most of? Which bones of the skeleton were missing?
- What type of animal(s) did your owl eat? Use the area below to draw and label the skeleton(s).

Chippy Creative Challenge

Make up a story about the owl whose pellet you just dissected. You have a good idea of what type of owl it is and what it ate. Write a short story or article about this character.