



Alaska Great Horned Owl Guide

Your Complete Guide to Alaska's Silent Night Hunter



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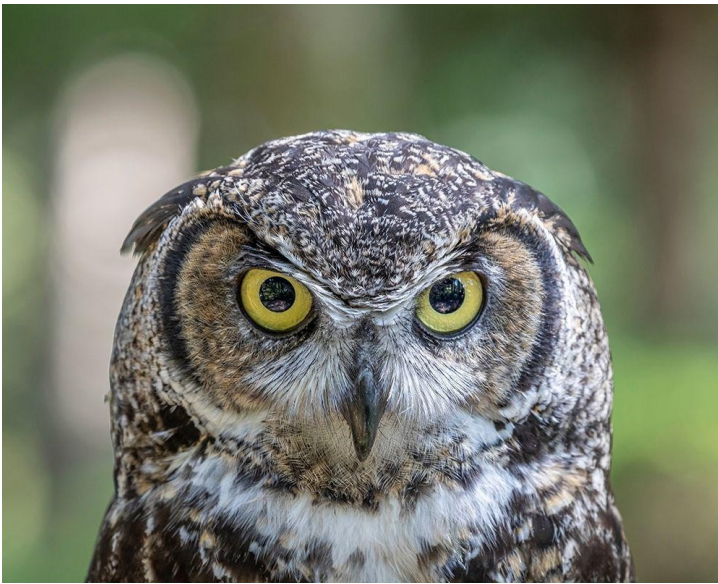
The **Great Horned Owl** is one of Alaska's most powerful and recognizable birds of prey. With its piercing yellow eyes, distinctive feather tufts, and silent flight, this remarkable hunter has earned a reputation as one of North America's most successful predators.

Unlike bald eagles that are often seen soaring during the day, Great Horned Owls are primarily active at night. Their incredible eyesight, exceptional hearing, and nearly silent wings allow them to hunt efficiently under the cover of darkness.

Although they aren't commonly spotted by cruise visitors, travelers spending time in Alaska before or after their cruise may be fortunate enough to hear one calling through the forest—or even see one perched quietly in a tree at dawn or dusk.



Quick Facts



Scientific Name: *Bubo virginianus*

Height:

- 18–25 inches

Wingspan:

- Up to 5 feet (1.5 meters)

Weight:

- 2–5½ pounds

Lifespan:

- 20–30 years in the wild

Diet:

- Rabbits
- Squirrels
- Mice
- Ducks
- Grouse
- Fish
- Occasionally other birds

Great Horned Owls are among the few predators capable of hunting skunks, thanks to their limited sense of smell.

📍 Where Can You See Great Horned Owls?



Great Horned Owls are found throughout much of Alaska.

Common habitats include:

- Interior Alaska
- Anchorage area
- Fairbanks
- Kenai Peninsula
- Denali National Park
- Mixed forests
- River valleys
- Woodland edges

Because they are nocturnal, they're heard more often than they're seen.

★ Masters of Silent Flight



One of the owl's greatest hunting advantages is its nearly silent flight.

Specialized feathers:

- Reduce air turbulence
- Minimize noise
- Allow surprise attacks
- Help them hunt in complete darkness

Many prey animals never hear the owl approaching.

🌙 Nighttime Hunters



Great Horned Owls are most active:

- Around sunset
- During the night
- Just before sunrise

They rely on:

- Incredible hearing
- Excellent night vision
- Sharp talons
- Powerful flight

Their hearing is so precise they can locate prey hidden beneath snow or thick vegetation.



Can You See Great Horned Owls on an Alaska Cruise?

It's **possible**, but uncommon.

Your best chances come during:

- Pre- or post-cruise land tours
- Denali CruiseTours
- Evening wildlife walks
- Forest excursions

- Scenic drives through Interior Alaska

Most cruise passengers are more likely to hear an owl than actually see one.

Photography Tips



If you're fortunate enough to spot one:

- Use a telephoto lens.
- Photograph during early morning or evening.
- Focus on the owl's eyes.
- Avoid using flash.
- Respect nesting birds by keeping a safe distance.

Patience is essential—owls often remain perfectly still for long periods.

Best Time to See Great Horned Owls

May

Excellent.

Owls are actively feeding young.

June

Excellent.

Long daylight hours increase opportunities during dawn and dusk.

July

Very good.

Young owls begin leaving the nest.

August

Very good.

Juveniles become more independent.

September

Excellent.

Cooler evenings increase activity.

Interesting Behaviors

Great Horned Owls are known for:

- Rotating their heads up to **270 degrees**
- Hunting almost silently
- Defending large territories
- Using abandoned hawk or eagle nests instead of building their own
- Remaining with the same mate for many years

Their deep, booming hoot is one of the most recognizable sounds in North American forests.

What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Telephoto lens
- ✓ Warm jacket for evening outings
- ✓ Patience

Listening carefully is often more effective than searching visually.

Premium Travel Group Tip

If you're staying in Alaska before or after your cruise, take an early morning or evening walk in a quiet wooded area. Even if you don't spot a Great Horned Owl, hearing its deep, haunting call echo through the forest is one of those unforgettable Alaska moments.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Bald Eagle Guide
 - Puffin Guide
 - Gray Wolf Guide
 - Moose Guide
 - Denali National Park Guide
 - Best Time to Visit Alaska
 - Alaska Railroad Experience Guide
 - Anchorage Guide
 - Kenai Peninsula Guide (*future guide*)
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Fun Facts

- Great Horned Owls can rotate their heads **up to 270 degrees**.
 - Their eyes are fixed in place, which is why they turn their heads instead.
 - They can grip prey with **over 300 pounds of pressure per square inch**.
 - Their hearing is so sensitive they can locate prey beneath snow or leaves.
 - Despite their large size, they fly almost silently.
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Why Are Great Horned Owls So Special?

The Great Horned Owl is one of Alaska's most skilled nighttime predators. Its silent flight, remarkable eyesight, and powerful hunting abilities have made it a symbol of mystery and wilderness. While sightings are rare compared to eagles or moose, encountering one in the wild—or simply hearing its haunting call—creates a memorable connection to Alaska's untamed forests.



Joe's Logbook

Not every memorable wildlife encounter in Alaska happens in broad daylight. Some of the most special moments come when the sun begins to set and the forest grows quiet.

The Great Horned Owl is one of those animals that reminds you how much life comes alive after dark. Even if you never actually see one, hearing that deep, unmistakable hoot echo through the trees is enough to send a chill down your spine—in the best possible way.

If you're spending a few extra days in Alaska before or after your cruise, take some time to enjoy the outdoors in the early morning or evening. You might not spot a Great Horned Owl perched in a tree, but if you do, it's the kind of wildlife sighting you'll be talking about long after your Alaska adventure is over.