

# River Bend Naturalists Notebook

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## GREAT HORNED OWL

*Bubo virginianus*

The Great Horned Owl is the largest of our four "eared" owls in Minnesota, with an overall length of 24" and a wing span of 60". This is our most common owl, found in most parts of the state, particularly in the hardwood forest areas. Its 2" horns are actually tufts of feathers (not ears) which help to camouflage the bird. These tufts are a convenient form of field identification to quickly separate the Great Horned from the Barred owl which also frequents the same woodland.

The hooting of the Great Horned is deeper and more resonant than that of the Barred Owl, and easily identifiable. Male: Hoo, Hoo-oo HooHoo. Female: Hoo, Hoo-Hoo, Hoo-ooHoo-oo.

The Great Horned diet consists of mainly rodents, small mammals, and birds. It is considered a very useful bird which keeps rodent populations down.

It is the earliest nesting bird of this area, laying 3-7 white eggs as early as February. The nest is built in a dense growth of trees from 10 to 40 feet up, often in Cottonwood trees. The nest is a carelessly made affair of sticks, lined with grass, old leaves or feathers; frequently a reconditioned Crow's, Hawk's or Squirrel's nest.

The three other species of owls in Minnesota with ear tufts are the long-eared owl, (16" long) the short-eared owl, (14" long) and the Screech Owl, (10" long).

