



The great horned owl is perhaps the most recognized of all owl species.

PHOTO BY GREG HUME

By Angela McLaughlin ~ THE JOURNAL

As night falls and the familiar sounds of darkness begin to emerge, the melancholy “hoo-hoo” of an owl is heard from a nearby tree. You may live your entire life without ever seeing one of these

# Nature News: Owls ~ Watchers of the Night

beautiful, elusive birds of prey, but you have most likely heard them in the night.

San Diego County’s diverse landscape plays host to several species of owl, with the most common being great horned owls, barn owls, Western screech owls and burrowing owls. Less common are spotted, flammulated and long-eared owls.

The great horned owl may very well embody the quintessential owl — the one that comes to mind when the word “owl” is spoken. With its penetrating eyes and distinct tufts on its head, great horned owls live in many types of habitats and is year-round residents of Southern California. When we think of the “hooting” noise of an owl, we are thinking of these guys.

“Great horned owl are the only owl that ‘hoots,’” says Carly Padilla, Community Outreach Educator for Project Wildlife in San Diego.

She adds that great horned owls and barn owls are more often heard than seen, and that barn owls make a loud, screeching sound.

According to the National



Barn owls may be found in both rural and urban areas.

Audubon Society, “These beloved raptors are known for their impressive hoots, of course, but their language consists of a multitude of sounds: yelps, whistles, barks and beak snaps, just to name a few.”

While the great horned variety inhabits many different ecosystems,



Burrowing Owl.jpg - Burrowing owls are among the more common species of owl found in San Diego County.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PROJECT WILDLIFE

barn owls are also widespread, found in both rural and urban areas.

“Barn owls tend to be seen more due to their white coloration,” Padilla adds.

Considered a raptor, these birds of prey are predominately nocturnal and play an active role in

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rodent management.

"Owls are all part of the ecosystem and help to keep populations of rodents in control," says Lauren DuBois, Director of Wildlife Rehabilitation for Project Wildlife. "This helps with disease control, since rodents can carry a variety of diseases that can be transmitted to people and pets."

After an owl consumes its rodent meal, it then regurgitates a lump of undigested parts — bones, fur, etc. — in what is called a "pellet." Many people recall dissecting owl pellets in school, and I, for one, was impressed with the entire process the owl goes

the main predator of skunks. With a poor sense of smell, they think it's a tasty meal. They have the nickname of being the 'tiger of the skies.'

Impressively, great horned owl can carry animals twice their own weight, so small-pet owners should make sure to accompany their animals outside at night.

What allows these airborne predators the ability to sneak up on their prey is a combination of things, one of which is the way their feathers are designed, allowing them to be nearly silent in flight.

"The structure of the feather-comb-like serrations



This fledgling great horned owl hasn't developed its recognizable ear tufts yet, but it will eventually grow into a great predator.

through, from precisely hunting its prey at night to producing a pellet of indigestible bits.

And these beneficial hunters truly help oversee the balance of things.

"Barn owls have a really high metabolism — they can consume up to six rodents per night," says Padilla. "Owls also eat voles and gophers."

Great horned owls have an even more interesting — and unexpected — addition to their diet.

"Great horned owls are

on the leading edges of the feather break up the airflow, or turbulence," says DuBois. "Basically, it streamlines the airflow and reduces the sound that is generated."

With most of an owl's body weight coming from its feathers, Padilla says that they are surprisingly light birds, with most averaging three pounds or less.

While owls pose no threat to humans, people can certainly pose a threat to owls. Aside from impacts with vehicles, owls are also

susceptible to secondary rodenticide poisoning.

"When rodenticides are used to kill rats, mice or gophers, they can inadvertently poison or kill owls who prey on them," says DuBois.

Project Wildlife has seen its fair share of ill and injured owls, with nearly 265 patients in 2018, so far. Some cases are the result of rodent glue traps — a threat most people are not be aware of when it comes to owls.

"We have taken in owls who have tried to get a mouse that was stuck to a glue trap," says DuBois, adding that not only is it a terrible way for the rodent to die, but the owls can get glue stuck to their feathers and possibly even injure themselves struggling to get the trap off.

Padilla says that habitat destruction and rodenticides are both big threats to owls, adding that barn owls have about a 70 percent mortality rate in their first year. While most owls mate during the spring, barn owls nest in the winter.

## Ambra Jensen and Justin Kelly to Marry in October

Ramona residents Ambra Jensen and Justin Kelly are planning an Oct. 31 wedding. Jensen, a graduate of The Art Institute of San Diego, works locally. Kelly, a certified electrician, is known for offering a helping hand to those in the community. The two enjoy volunteering for the Kiwanis Club of Ramona and relaxing at Collier Park, and they look forward to enjoying a long and happy life together in Ramona. ■

Ambra Jensen and Justin Kelly  
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JENSEN FAMILY



"Barn owls like to nest in dead palm fronds around the palm tree, making it important not to cut those down until the end of nesting season," Padilla says.

How can we help owls? Padilla recommends building owl boxes, planting trees and finding humane ways to deter rodents.

These birds have captivated people for generations, and there's no wonder why — they're fascinating.

According to Padilla, they can rotate their heads about 270 degrees, so if you think

you're out of eyesight, you're wrong. Not only are you unlikely to avoid their gaze, but their terrific eyesight is much better than humans'.

A symbol of wisdom in Greek mythology, owls have found a place in modern popular culture. From "Winnie the Pooh" and "Bambi," to the magical world of Harry Potter, owls have served as recognizable and memorable characters.

But it is their existence in the real world that truly deserves our admiration. ■

## Library to Host Seventh Annual Authors' Day & Book Fair

The public is invited to meet local authors at the Seventh Annual Chuck LeMenager Author's Day and Book Fair on Oct. 27, sponsored by Friends of the Ramona Library.

San Diego author Lisa Brackmann will speak at noon to discuss her new book, and a publishing forum at 2 p.m. will offer an informative discussion for those interested in publishing their

works. Drawings will take place each hour, with a grand prize drawing at 2 p.m.

The event will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Ramona Library, 1275 Main St. Admission is free. ■

## Trash and Recycling Collected as Usual on Columbus Day

Ramona Disposal Service trucks and crews will be collecting waste and recycling as usual on Columbus

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