



Just like people, owls live in different countries and have different types of homes. This is a passage about a few of the many kinds of owls.

Owls and Their Homes

by Deborah Chase Gibson

- 1 There are over 130 species, or kinds, of owls. Owls can be found in all parts of the world except Antarctica. North America alone is home to nineteen different species of owls.
- 2 Owls are found in many different habitats, such as deserts, forests, prairies and even the Arctic tundra.* They nest in trees, in holes in the ground, in barns, and in caves. And while many other birds migrate to warmer places during the winter, most owls do not. They live in the same place all year round.
- 3 Even though they can't see colors, owls see much better than people do. Good eyesight is helpful to owls because they are nocturnal. That means they are most active at night when there isn't much light.
- 4 Owls aren't very good at building their own nests, so they use nests left by other birds, such as hawks. Owls also like to live in human-made places, like barns or old buildings.
- 5 Barn owls live all over the world. They are known for their large, dark eyes that peek out of feathered, heart-shaped faces.
- 6 Just like the name says, barn owls like to live in barns. Old buildings and hollow trees also make good nesting spots for these owls. In the United States, you can find barn owls in the southern and middle states from coast to coast.
- 7 Farmers like to have barn owls around because barn owls kill and eat rodents, including mice and rats.



*tundra — frozen ground



- 8 The very northern parts of Alaska, Canada, Europe, and Siberia lie in and near the cold, icy Arctic Circle. The land in the Arctic is called tundra. It is so cold in this part of the world that the top six inches of the land is frozen solid all year round. Although it is very cold, there is life on the tundra. Snowy owls live there. Snowy owls blend in well with the icy Arctic. Their white feathers are sprinkled with small black or brown spots. This makes it hard for the snowy owls' predators to see them. It also helps snowy owls sneak up on their prey.
- 9 Snowy owls make their nests in places where they can easily see predators and prey. Big rocks or small hills on the treeless tundra are common nesting places.
- 10 Snowy owls grow to be about twenty inches tall. Small rodents called lemmings are the snowy owl's favorite meal.
- 11 Owls live in deserts too. At just six inches long, elf owls are one of the smallest owls in the world. One of the elf owl's favorite places to nest is in the giant saguaro cactus. Elf owls often nest inside holes in the plant. If they can't find a cactus, elf owls will live in woodpecker holes in trees or in plants on the desert floor.
- 12 Some owls make their homes right in the ground. Burrowing owls find empty holes and tunnels that were dug out by other animals. Gopher and prairie-dog nests are good places for burrowing owls to make their homes. If they can't find any empty nests, these long-legged owls dig their own.
- 13 Burrowing owls live on the open grasslands of North, Central, and South America. Their feathers are usually brown with white spots.
- 14 Other owls don't share their nests, but burrowing owls will share their winter homes with each other.
- 15 Great horned owls are found in cold forests in Alaska, in hot deserts in the southwestern United States, and in warm, tropical rain forests in South America.
- 16 These grayish and white-spotted owls are among the largest owls on Earth. They can grow up to two feet long. The clusters of feathers that stick out of their heads give the great horned owls their name.
- 17 These fierce predators like to find nests that other large birds, such as hawks, have left. Great horned owls use the nest to raise their babies, called owlets.
- 18 When they are ten weeks old, owlets learn to fly. Six to nine months later, the young birds are fully grown and can leave their parents.

Even though owls live all over the world, owls are alike in many ways. Explain how owls are alike. Use information from the passage and your own ideas to support your answer.

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