



# EURASIAN EAGLE OWL

**Strigiformes**  
**Family: Strigidae**  
**Genus: *Bubo***  
**Species: *bubo***



**Range:** West North Africa, Middle East, Southern Europe into Asia,

**Habitat:** Mountains and forests with cliffs and rocky outcrops, prefers open areas with some trees and rocky areas.

**Niche:** Mainly nocturnal, carnivorous, arboreal

**Wild diet:** Mainly mammals from shrews up to foxes and young deer and a wide range of birds, but also reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects.

**Zoo diet:**

**Life Span:** (Wild) 21 years  
(Captivity) record 64 years

**Sexual dimorphism:** female is larger, males ear tufts are more upright whereas the females are usually drooping down.

**Location in SF Zoo:** Exploration –Animal Resource Center

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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Eagle Owls are the largest owls in the world and can be recognized by their large orange eyes and prominent ear tufts. The ear tufts are a form of camouflage as they break up the round contour of the owl's face among the tree branches. They have asymmetrical ears positioned at about eye level providing accurate determination of distance and sound location.

Eurasian eagle owls are brown-black and tawny-buff in color. Their facial disk is heavily marked with black, gray, and white. These owls have variable coloring throughout their range, becoming paler as you move eastwards in the northern parts of the range up to western Siberia, then progressively darker to the Pacific coast. Birds become paler from north to south in Asia Minor and Middle East. Size decreases East to West, and North to South.

An eagle owl's flight is powerful and fast with shallow wing beats and long, fast glides. This owl will also soar on updrafts. Their flight is similar to buteos or soaring hawks such as the Red-tailed Hawk. They have soft, fringed feathers that don't "swoosh" as they move for slow silent flight while hunting and they have feathered feet that also helps muffle sound as they fly.

**Weight: M** 3.3 - 7 lbs  
**F** 3.9 - 10 lbs

**Length:** 23 – 30 in

**Wingspan:** 5 – 6 ft

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Not globally threatened, although rare or uncommon through most of its range. In some parts of Europe, this species has been successfully reintroduced back into the wild, following restoration of suitable habitat. Eagle owls are considered rare but not yet threatened. Their numbers are steadily declining due to habitat loss from human encroachment.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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The call of the Eagle Owl is a deep resonant "ooh-hu" with emphasis on the first syllable for the male, and a more high-pitched uh-Hu for the female. Individuals can be identified by their vocalizations. They use their various hoots and clucks to let others know they have entered or are entering certain territories. Different hoots represent different moods and are easily recognizable between each member of the species. Also, Eagle owls are able to decipher the size and distance of intruders based on the intensity of their call. They use a low guttural hoot to attract mates. They advertise potential breeding sites by digging a shallow depression into the earth and emitting a light staccato note and various clucking sounds. They also use these calls to keep track of their mate's location.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Both sexes are usually solitary but pair up during courtship and are thought to mate for life. Birds begin breeding in late winter with 1 to 4 eggs laid at 3-day intervals. They will nest on a sheltered cliff ledge, a crevice or a sheltered depression on the ground. If there are not enough food resources, they will breed at a much slower rate and later into the year. The female does all the incubating while the male feeds her. When the owlets hatch, they are brooded for about two weeks. For the first 2-3 weeks the male brings food to the nest or deposits it nearby, and the female feeds small pieces the young. In about three weeks the young begin to feed and swallow by themselves. The young owls fledge at 7 weeks but the parents tend the fledglings for another 3 to 4 months when they become independent and leave their parent's territory or are driven out by them.

Incubation: 31 - 36 days	Sexual Maturity: 2 – 3 years
# of eggs: 2 - 4	Fledging: 7 weeks

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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Eagle owls are at the top of their food chain. They are particularly useful in keeping the number of rodents down in their various ecosystems. The removal of this species can cause the rodent population in a given area to grow significantly. Therefore, they may be a keystone predator.

The Eagle Owl's scientific name comes from its deep booming call. The word "bubo," based on the call, has referred to owls, particularly the Eagle Owl, since the dark ages, and is mentioned in Middle English bestiaries. The Eurasian Eagle Owl is also known as a Common, Great or Northern Eagle Owl.

Owls do not have a crop to store food so they swallow prey whole which results in cough up an owl pellet. These owl pellets contain the hair, feathers, and bones of prey they were unable to digest. They are very useful to scientists because they help them understand the food habits of these elusive birds.

### Sources:

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New Larousse Encyclopedia of Animal Life © 1980 Maurice Burton, p425 - 429

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Birds of the World © 2005 David Alderton, p 361

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<http://www.owls.org/>

<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu>

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