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"Long legs and ears," Rabbit spoke softly. "And fangs. Could I possibly have a fang or two? And claws. I would dearly love to have claws!"

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The Everything-Maker smiled. "I think we could manage some claws and fangs." He smoothed Rabbit's long legs and ears.

"Silly Rabbit!" Owl hooted loudly. "Why don't you ask for something useful, like wisdom?"

"This is your last warning, Owl. Be quiet and wait your turn."

Owl twisted around and glared at the Everything-Maker. "You have to do it," he hooted. "You have to give us what we ask. I demand wisdom!"

"I warned you, Owl!" shouted the Everything-Maker. He shoved Owl's head down into his body, which made Owl's neck disappear. He gave Owl a shake, which made Owl's eyes widen in fright. He pulled Owl's ears until they stuck out from his head.

The Everything-Maker snapped his fingers. "I have made your ears big, the better to listen. I have made your eyes big, the better to see. I have made your neck short, the better to hold up your head. I have packed your head with wisdom, as you have asked. Now, use your wisdom and fly away before you lose what I have given."

Owl was no longer a fool. He flew quickly away, pouting and hooting.

The Everything-Maker turned back to Rabbit, smiling gently. "Claws," he reminded himself. But Rabbit was gone. Rabbit had hopped hurriedly away, too afraid of the Everything-Maker to stay for his fangs and claws.

As for Owl, Owl knew if he angered the Everything-Maker again, he would lose all that he had gained. Even today, Owl only comes out at night, when the

Everything-Maker is fast asleep. As for
Rabbit, his claws and fangs are waiting.
Perhaps someday ...



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All About Owls

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Owls are nocturnal hunting birds with eyes that face forwards. They are closely related to hawks. Owls sleep during the day and emerge at night to hunt small prey.

There are about 162 different species of owls alive today, inhabiting a huge variety of ecological niches, from rainforests to tundra.

Anatomy



Owls have a large head and large eyes that face forwards (unlike other birds, whose eyes are on the sides of their head). This eye placement gives them binocular vision and very precise depth perception. Also, there are circles of radiating feathers surrounding each eye, giving them a wide-eyed, alert look.



Owls cannot move their eyes within their sockets like we can. In order to look around, they have to move their entire head, which has a range of movement of about 270°.

Some owls have feathered ear tufts; these are not ears, but are part of the owl's camouflage.

Flight

Many owls have thick feathers that absorb the sounds that their wings make in flight.

Prey and Hunting



Owls are carnivores that hunt during the night (they are nocturnal). They use their keen sense of sight to find prey in the dark (owls see mostly in black and white). They have an acute sense of hearing which also helps in finding meals. Owls are stealth hunters, they can easily sneak up on their prey since their fluffy feathers give them almost silent flight.

Owls have two methods of hunting

- Perch and pounce - the owl waits on a low tree branch until it spots prey. It then swoops down onto the prey. This method is used often by owls that live in relatively dense forested areas.
- Quartering - the owl flies low over the ground looking for prey. This method is used often by owls that live in relatively clear landscapes.

Owls hunt and eat rodents, insects, frogs, and birds. Owls eat smaller prey whole and larger prey in chunks. They regurgitate the inedible parts (including hair, teeth, bone, feathers, and insect exoskeletons) in oval-shaped pellets. The owl is at the top of the food web; it has no major predators.



Habitat and Range

Owls are found worldwide in a huge range of habitats from rainforests to grasslands to wooded areas to tundra.

Classification

- Kingdom **Animalia** (the animals)
- Phylum **Chordata**
- Subphylum **Vertebrata** (animals with backbones)
- Class **Aves** (Birds)
- Order **Strigiformes** (owls)
- Family **Tytonidae** (barn and bay owls) and **Strigidae** (other owls)

Owls Quizzes and Printouts

 <p><u>Owl</u> Owls are nocturnal</p>	 <p><u>An Owl Quiz</u></p>		
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Owl

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For other uses, see Owl (disambiguation).

Owls are birds from the order **Strigiformes**, which includes about 200 species of mostly solitary and nocturnal birds of prey typified by an upright stance, a large, broad head, binocular vision, binaural hearing and feathers adapted for silent flight. Exceptions include the diurnal northern hawk-owl and the gregarious burrowing owl.

Owls hunt mostly small mammals, insects, and other birds although a few species specialize in hunting fish. They are found in all regions of the Earth except Antarctica and some remote islands.

Owls are divided into two families: the true owls or typical owls, Strigidae; and the barn-owls, Tytonidae.

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Anatomy

Owls possess large forward-facing eyes and ear-holes; a hawk-like beak; a flat face; and usually a conspicuous circle of feathers, a *facial disc*, around each eye. The feathers making up this disc can be adjusted in order to sharply focus sounds from varying distances onto the owl's asymmetrically placed ear cavities. Most birds of prey have eyes on the sides of their heads, but the stereoscopic nature of the owl's forward-facing eyes permits the greater sense of depth perception necessary for low-light hunting. Although owls have binocular vision, their large eyes are fixed in their sockets—as are those of other birds—so they must turn their entire head to change views. As owls are farsighted, they are unable to see clearly anything within a few centimeters of their eyes. Caught prey can be felt by owls with the use of filoplumes—like feathers on the beak and feet that act as "feelers". Their far vision, particularly in low light, is exceptionally good.

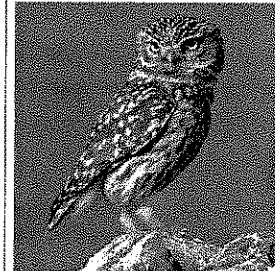
Owls can rotate their heads and necks as much as 270 degrees. Owls have fourteen neck vertebrae compared to 7 in humans which makes their necks more flexible. They also have adaptations to their circulatory systems, permitting rotation without cutting off blood to the brain: the foramina in their vertebrae through which the vertebral arteries pass are about 10 times the diameter of the artery, instead of about the same size as the artery as in humans; the vertebral arteries enter the cervical vertebrae higher than in other birds, giving the vessels some slack; and the carotid arteries unite in a very large anastomosis or junction, the largest of any bird's, preventing loss of blood supply from being cut off while they rotate their necks. Other anastomoses between the carotid and vertebral arteries support this effect.^{[1][2]}

The smallest owl—weighing as little as 31 grams (1 oz) and measuring some 13.5 centimetres (5 in)—is the elf owl (*Micrathene whitneyi*).^[3] Around the same diminutive length, although slightly heavier, are the lesser known long-whiskered owlet (*Xenoglaux loweryi*) and Tamaulipas pygmy owl (*Glaucidium sanchezi*).^[3] The largest owl by length is the great grey owl (*Strix nebulosa*), which measures around 70 cm (28 in) on average and can attain a length of 84 cm (33 in).^[3] However, the heaviest (and largest winged) owls are two similarly-sized eagle owls; the Eurasian eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*) and Blakiston's fish owl (*B. blakistoni*). These two species, which are on average about 2.53 cm (1.00 in) shorter in length than the great grey, can both attain a wingspan of 2 m (6.6 ft) and a weight of 4.5 kg (10 lb) in the largest females.^{[3][4][5][6][7]}

Different species of owls produce different sounds; this distribution of calls aids owls in finding mates or announcing their presence to potential competitors, and also aids ornithologists and birders in locating these birds and distinguishing species. As noted above, the facial disc helps owls to funnel the sound of prey to their ears. In many species, these discs are placed asymmetrically, for better directional location.^[8]

Owl

Temporal range: Late Paleocene to recent



Little owl (*Athene noctua*)

0:00 0:00 MENU

Otus jolandae call

Scientific classification

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Clade: Dinosauria
Class: Aves
Clade: Afroaves
Order: **Strigiformes**
Wagler, 1830

Families

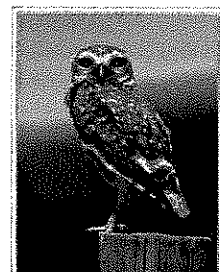
Strigidae
Tytonidae
Ogygoptyngidae (fossil)
Palaeoglaucidae (fossil)
Protostrigidae (fossil)
Sophiornithidae (fossil)



Range of the owl, all species.

Synonyms

Strigidae *sensu* Sibley & Ahlquist



Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*)

Owl plumage is generally cryptic, although several species have facial and head markings, including face masks, ear tufts and brightly coloured irises. These markings are generally more common in species inhabiting open habitats, and are thought to be used in signaling with other owls in low light conditions.^[9]

Breeding and reproduction

Owl eggs typically have a white color and an almost spherical shape, and range in number from a few to a dozen, depending on species and the particular season; for most, three or four is the more common number. Eggs are laid at intervals of 1 to 3 days and do not hatch at the same time.

Behavior

Most owls are nocturnal, actively hunting their prey in darkness. Several types of owl, however, are crepuscular—active during the twilight hours of dawn and dusk; one example is the pygmy owl (*Glaucidium*). A few owls are active during the day also; examples are the burrowing owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*) and the short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*).

Much of the owls' hunting strategy depends on stealth and surprise. Owls have at least two adaptations that aid them in achieving stealth. First, the dull coloration of their feathers can render them almost invisible under certain conditions. Secondly, serrated edges on the leading edge of owls' remiges muffle an owl's wing beats, allowing an owl's flight to be practically silent. Some fish-eating owls, for which silence has no evolutionary advantage, lack this adaptation.

An owl's sharp beak and powerful talons allow it to kill its prey before swallowing it whole (if it is not too big). Scientists studying the diets of owls are helped by their habit of regurgitating the indigestible parts of their prey (such as bones, scales, and fur) in the form of pellets. These "owl pellets" are plentiful and easy to interpret, and are often sold by companies to schools for dissection by students as a lesson in biology and ecology.^[10]

Adaptations for hunting

All owls are carnivorous birds of prey and live mainly on a diet of insects and small rodents such as mice, rats and hares. Some owls are also specifically adapted to hunt fish. They are very adept in hunting in their respective environments. Since owls can be found in nearly all parts of the world and across a multitude of ecosystems, their hunting skills and characteristics vary slightly from species to species, though most characteristics are shared among all species.

Flight and feathers

Most owls share an innate ability to fly almost silently and also more slowly in comparison to other birds of prey. Most owls live a mainly nocturnal lifestyle and being able to fly without making any noise gives them a strong advantage over their prey that are listening for the slightest sound in the night. A silent, slow flight is not as necessary for diurnal and crepuscular owls given that prey can usually see an owl approaching. While the morphological and biological mechanisms of this silent flight are more or less unknown, the structure of the feather has been heavily studied and accredited to a large portion of why they have this ability. Owls' feathers are generally larger than the average birds' feathers, have fewer rachides, longer pennulum, and achieve smooth edges with different rachis structures.^[11] Serrated edges along the owl's remiges bring the flapping of the wing down to a nearly silent mechanism. Research has shown that the serrations are more likely reducing aerodynamic disturbances, rather than simply reducing noise.^[11] The surface of the flight feathers is covered with a velvety structure that absorbs the sound of the wing moving. These unique structures reduce noise frequencies above 2 kHz,^[12] making the sound level emitted drop below the typical hearing spectrum of the owl's usual prey^{[12][13]} and also within the owl's own best hearing range. This optimizes the owl's ability to silently fly in order to capture prey without the prey hearing the owl first as it flies in. It also allows the owl to monitor the sound output from its flight pattern.

Vision

Eyesight is a particular characteristic of the owl that aids in nocturnal prey capture. Owls are part of a small group of birds that live nocturnally, but do not use echolocation to guide them in flight in low-light situations. Owls are known for their disproportionately large eyes in comparison to their skull. An apparent consequence of the evolution of an absolutely large eye in a relatively small skull is that the eye of the owl has become tubular in shape.^[14] This shape is found in other so-called nocturnal eyes, such as the eyes of strepsirrhine primates and bathypelagic fishes.^[15] Since the eyes are fixed into these sclerotic tubes, they are unable to move the eyes in any direction.^[16] Instead of moving their eyes, owls swivel their head to visualize their surroundings. Owls' heads are capable of swiveling through an angle of approximately 270°, easily enabling them to see behind them without relocating the torso.^[16] This ability keeps bodily movement at a minimum and thus reduces the amount of sound the owl makes as it waits for its prey. Owls are regarded as having the most frontally placed eyes among all avian groups, which gives them some of the largest binocular fields of vision. However, owls are farsighted and cannot focus on objects within a few centimeters of their eyes.^{[15][17]} While it is commonly believed that owls have great nocturnal vision due to their large (and thus very light-gathering) eyes and pupils and/or extremely sensitive rod receptors, the true cause for their ability to see in the night is due to neural mechanisms which mediate the extraction of spatial information gathered from the retinal image throughout the nocturnal luminance range. These mechanisms are only able to function due to the large-sized retinal image.^[18] Thus, the primary nocturnal function in the vision of the owl is due to its large posterior nodal distance; retinal image brightness is only maximized to the owl within secondary neural functions.^[18] These attributes of the owl cause its nocturnal eyesight to be far superior to that of its average prey.^[18]

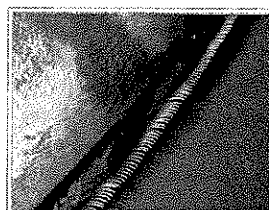
Hearing

Owls exhibit specialized hearing functions and ear shapes that also aid in hunting. They are noted for asymmetrical ear placements on the skull in some genera. Owls can have either internal or external ears, both of which are asymmetrical. Asymmetry has not been reported to extend to the middle or internal ear of the owl. Asymmetrical ear placement on the skull allows the owl to pinpoint the location of its prey. This is especially true for strictly nocturnal species such as the barn owls 'Tyto' or Tengmalm's owl.

^[16] With ears set at different places on its skull, an owl is able to determine the direction from which the sound is coming by the minute difference in time that it takes for the sound waves to penetrate the left and right ears. The owl turns its head until the sound reaches both ears at the same time, at which point it is directly facing the source of the



Captive short-eared owl chick at about 18 days old



The serrations on the leading edge of an owl's flight feathers reduce noise



Owl eyes each have nictitating membranes that can move independently of each other, as seen on this spotted eagle-owl in Johannesburg, South Africa



Owls yawn

sound. This time difference between ears is a matter of about 0.00003 seconds, or 30 millionths of a second. Like the eyes, which utilize feather movements to focus light, the ears are surrounded by feathers to maximize hearing capabilities. Behind the ear openings there are modified, dense feathers, densely packed to form a facial ruff, which creates an anteriorly-facing concave wall that cups the sound into the ear structure.^[19] This facial ruff is poorly defined in some species and prominent, nearly encircling the face, in other species. The facial disk also acts to direct sound into the ears, and a downward-facing, sharply triangular beak minimizes sound reflection away from the face. The shape of the facial disk is adjustable at will to focus sounds more effectively.^[16]

It is a common misapprehension that the prominences above a great horned owl's head are its ears. This is not the case: they're merely feather tufts. The ears are on the sides of the head in the usual location (in two different locations as described above).

Talons

While the auditory and visual capabilities of the owl allow it to locate and pursue its prey, the talons and beak of the owl do the final work. The owl kills its prey by using these talons to crush the skull and knead the body.^[16] The crushing power of an owl's talons varies according to prey size and type, and by the size of the owl. The burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), a small partly insectivorous owl, has a release force of only 5 N. The larger barn owl (*Tyto alba*) needs a force of 30 N to release its prey, and one of the largest owls, the great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) needs a force of over 130 N to release prey in its talons.^[20] An owl's talons, like those of most birds of prey, can seem massive in comparison to the body size outside of flight. The masked owl has some of the proportionally longest talons of any bird of prey; they appear enormous in comparison to the body when fully extended to grasp prey.^[21] An owl's claws are sharp and curved. The family Tytonidae have inner and central toes of about equal length, while the family Strigidae have an inner toe that is distinctly shorter than the central one.^[20] These different morphologies allow efficiency in capturing prey specific to the different environments they inhabit.

Beak

The beak of the owl is short, curved and downward-facing, and typically hooked at the tip for gripping and tearing its prey. Once prey is captured, the scissor motion of the top and lower bill is used to tear the tissue and kill. The sharp lower edge of the upper bill works in coordination with the sharp upper edge of the lower bill to deliver this motion. The downward-facing beak allows the owl's field of vision to be clear, as well as directing sound into the ears without deflecting sound waves away from the face.

Camouflage

The coloration of the owl's plumage plays a key role in its ability to sit still and blend into the environment, making it nearly invisible to prey. Owls tend to mimic the colorations and sometimes even the texture patterns of their surroundings, the common barn owl being an exception. *Nyctea scandiaca*, or the snowy owl, appears nearly bleach-white in color with a few flecks of black, mimicking their snowy surroundings perfectly. Likewise, the mottled wood-owl (*Strix ocellata*) displays shades of brown, tan and black, making the owl nearly invisible in the surrounding trees, especially from behind. Usually, the only tell-tale sign of a perched owl will be its vocalizations or its vividly colored eyes.

Evolution and systematics

The systematic placement of owls is disputed. For example, the Sibley-Ahlquist taxonomy finds that, based on DNA-DNA hybridization, owls are more closely related to the nightjars and their allies (Caprimulgiformes) than to the diurnal predators in the order Falconiformes; consequently, the Caprimulgiformes are placed in the Strigiformes, and the owls in general become a family **Strigidae**. A recent study indicates that the drastic rearrangement of the genome of the accipitrids may have obscured any close relationship of theirs with groups such as the owls.^[22] In any case, the relationships of the Caprimulgiformes, the owls, the falcons and the accipitrid raptors are not resolved to satisfaction; currently there is an increasing trend to consider each group (with the possible exception of the accipitrids) a distinct order.

There are some 220 to 225 extant species of owls, subdivided into two families: typical owls (Strigidae) and barn-owls (Tytonidae). Some entirely extinct families have also been erected based on fossil remains; these differ much from modern owls in being less specialized or specialized in a very different way (such as the terrestrial Sophiornithidae). The Paleocene genera *Berruornis* and *Ogygopteryx* show that owls were already present as a distinct lineage some 60–57 mya (million years ago), and, hence, possibly also some 5 million years earlier, at the extinction of the non-avian dinosaurs. This makes them one of the oldest known groups of non-Galloanserae landbirds. The supposed "Cretaceous owls" *Bradycneme* and *Heptasternis* are apparently non-avian maniraptors.^[23]

During the Paleogene, the Strigiformes radiated into ecological niches now mostly filled by other groups of birds. The owls as we know them today, on the other hand, evolved their characteristic morphology and adaptations during that time, too. By the early Neogene, the other lineages had been displaced by other bird orders, leaving only barn-owls and typical owls. The latter at that time were usually a fairly generic type of (probably earless) owl similar to today's North American spotted owl or the European tawny owl; the diversity in size and ecology found in typical owls today developed only subsequently.

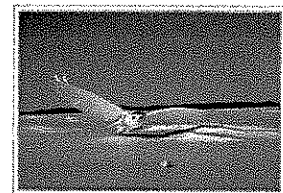
Around the Paleogene-Neogene boundary (some 25 mya), barn-owls were the dominant group of owls in southern Europe and adjacent Asia at least; the distribution of fossil and present-day owl lineages indicates that their decline is contemporary with the evolution of the different major lineages of typical owls, which for the most part seems to have taken place in Eurasia. In the Americas, there was rather an expansion of immigrant lineages of ancestral typical owls.

The supposed fossil herons "*Ardea*" *perplexa* (Middle Miocene of Sansan, France) and "*Ardea*" *lignitum* (Late Pliocene of Germany) were more probably owls; the latter was apparently close to the modern genus *Bubo*. Judging from this, the Late Miocene remains from France described as "*Ardea*" *aureliensis* should also be restudied.^[24] The Messelasturidae, some of which were initially believed to be basal Strigiformes, are now generally accepted to be diurnal birds of prey showing some convergent evolution towards owls. The taxa often united under *Strigogyps*^[25] were formerly placed in part with the owls, specifically the Sophiornithidae; they appear to be Ameghinornithidae instead.^{[26][27][28]}

For fossil species and paleosubspecies of extant taxa, see the genus and species articles.

Unresolved and basal forms (all fossil)

- Berruornis* (Late Paleocene of France) basal? Sophiornithidae?
- Strigiformes gen. et ap. indet. (Late Paleocene of Zhylga, Kazakhstan)
- Palaeoglaux* (Middle – Late Eocene of WC Europe) own family Palaeoglaucidae or Strigidae?
- Palaeobyas* (Late Eocene/Early Oligocene of Quercy, France) Tytonidae? Sophiornithidae?
- Palaeotyto* (Late Eocene/Early Oligocene of Quercy, France) Tytonidae? Sophiornithidae?



Snowy owl blends well with its snowy surroundings



Great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) sleeping during daytime in a hollow tree

Symbolism and mythology

Africa

Among the Kikuyu of Kenya it was believed that owls were harbingers of death. If one saw an owl or heard its hoot, someone was going to die. In general, owls are viewed as harbingers of bad luck, ill health, or death. The belief is widespread even today.^[31]

The Americas

In most Native American folklore, owls are a symbol of death. Hearing owls hooting is considered the subject of numerous "bogyman" stories told to warn children to remain indoors at night or not cry too much, otherwise the owl may carry them away according to Seminole and Apache tribes.^{[32][33]} In some tribal legends, owls are associated with spirits of the dead, and the bony circles around an owl's eyes are said to be made up of the fingernails of apparitional humans. Sometimes owls are said to carry messages from beyond the grave or deliver supernatural warnings to people who have broken tribal taboos.^[34] Also in many other Native American cultures including Cherokee and Choctaw, owls are a very bad omen. According to various legends, if you are outside in the broad day light and an owl flies over your head, a family member or loved one would die within the coming week.

Pawnee tribes viewed owls as the symbol of protection from any danger within their realms. Ojibwe tribes as well as their First Nation counterparts used an owl as a symbol for both evil and death. In addition, they used owls as a symbol of very high status of spiritual leaders of their spirituality. Pueblo people associated owls with Skeleton Man, the god of death and spirit of fertility. Yakama tribes use an owl as a powerful totem. Such taboos or totems often guide where and how forests and natural resources are useful with management, even to this day and even with the proliferation of "scientific" forestry on reservations.^[35]

According to the culture of the Uto-Aztec tribe, the Hopi, taboos surround owls, which are associated with sorcery and other evils. The Aztecs and Maya, along with other natives of Mesoamerica, considered the owl a symbol of death and destruction. In fact, the Aztec god of death, Miclantecuhli, was often depicted with owls. There is an old saying in Mexico that is still in use:^[36] *Cuando el tecolote canta, el indio muere* ("When the owl cries/sings, the Indian dies"). The Popol Vuh, a Mayan religious text, describes owls as messengers of Xibalba (the Mayan "Place of Fright").^[37] The belief that owls are messengers and harbingers of the dark powers is also found among the Hočągara (Winnebago) of Wisconsin.^[38] When in earlier days the Hočągara committed the sin of killing enemies while they were within the sanctuary of the chief's lodge, an owl appeared and spoke to them in the voice of a human, saying, "From now on the Hočągara will have no luck." This marked the beginning of the decline of their tribe.^[39] An owl appeared to Glory of the Morning, the only female chief of the Hočąk nation, and uttered her name. Soon afterwards she died.^{[40][41]} People often allude to the reputation of owls as bearers of supernatural danger when they tell misbehaving children, "the owls will get you."^[42]

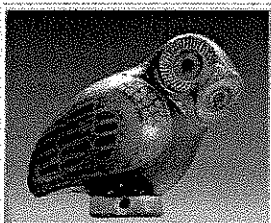
Middle East

In Arab mythology, owls are seen as bad omens.^[43]

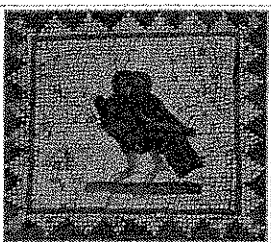
Hinduism

In Hinduism, an owl is the *vahana*, mount, of the Goddess Lakshmi.

Western culture



Owl-shaped protocorinthian aryballos, c. 640 BC., from Greece



Roman owl mosaic from Italica, Spain

The modern West generally associates owls with wisdom. This link goes back at least as far as Ancient Greece, where Athens, noted for art and scholarship, and Athena, Athens' patron goddess and the goddess of wisdom, had the owl as a symbol.^[44] Marija Gimbutas traces veneration of the owl as a goddess, among other birds, to the culture of Old Europe, long pre-dating Indo-European cultures.^[45]

T. F. Thiselton-Dyer in his *Folk-lore of Shakespeare* says that "from the earliest period it has been considered a bird of ill-omen," and Pliny tells us how, on one occasion, even Rome itself underwent a lustration, because one of them strayed into the Capitol. He represents it also as a funereal bird, a monster of the night, the very abomination of human kind. Virgil describes its death-howl from the top of the temple by night, a circumstance introduced as a precursor of Dido's death. Ovid, too, constantly speaks of this bird's presence as an evil omen; and indeed the same notions respecting it may be found among the writings of most of the ancient poets.^[46] A list of "omens drear" in John Keats' *Hyperion* includes the "gloom-bird's hated screech."^[47] Pliny the Elder reports that owl's eggs were commonly used as a hangover cure.^[48]

In France, Belgium and the Netherlands, where owls are divided into eared owls (fr. *hiboux* / d. *oehoes*) and earless owls (fr. *chouettes* / d. *bosuilen*), the former are seen as symbols of wisdom while the latter are assigned the grimmer meaning.

Three Canadian provinces have owls as provincial symbols: the great horned owl in Alberta, the great grey owl in Manitoba, and the snowy owl in Quebec.

Three owls appear on the coat of arms of the English city of Leeds, as the crest and the two supporters. They are derived from the arms of the city's first alderman, Sir John Saville.

In contrast, in Finnish culture, the owl has been considered a stupid animal, probably due to its wide-open eyes. The word *pöllö* means both "owl" and "idiot", and *silmät pöllöllään* "eyes owl-y" means "disoriented, dazed".



The Little Owl, 1506, by Albrecht Dürer



the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi with the owl



The coat of arms of Leeds, seen here on Leeds Bridge, displays three owls.

Use as rodent control

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20 Fun Facts About Owls

Do You Know Your Owl Trivia?



By Melissa Mayntz
Birding/Wild Birds Expert

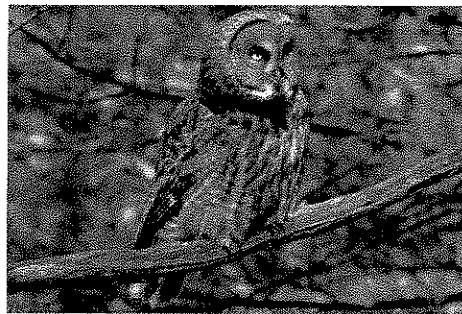
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The great gray owl is one of the largest owl species in the world.
Jim Richmond

Owls are some of the most fascinating and mysterious raptors in the world. While many people know a little bit about these [birds of prey](#), some facts about owls can surprise even the most experienced birders.

Owl Trivia

1. There are more than 150 species of owls in the world, and some counts indicate

more than 220 species depending on how [different owls](#) are classified. Only 19 owl species are found in North America.

2. Owls are found in [all different habitats](#) and there are different owl species found on all continents except [Antarctica](#).
3. All owls have upright posture and forward-facing eyes that give them [binocular vision](#), just like humans.
4. Many owl species have asymmetrical ears that are different sizes and different heights on their heads. This gives the birds superior [hearing](#) and the ability to pinpoint where prey is located, even if they can't see it.
5. Several owls species have "ear" tufts on their heads but they aren't ears at all. These tufts of feathers may indicate the bird's mood, help keep it [camouflaged](#) or be used to show [aggression](#).
6. The flattened facial disk of an owl funnels sound to the bird's ears and magnifies it as much as ten times to help the bird hear noises humans can't detect.
7. An owl's eyes are supported by bony eye sockets and they cannot turn their eyes. Instead, owls rotate their heads up to 270 degrees, but they cannot turn their heads all the way around.
8. An owl has three eyelids: one for blinking, one for sleeping and one for keeping the eye clean and healthy.
9. A [barn owl](#) can eat up to 1,000 mice each year, and many farmers try to attract [barn owls](#) to help control rodent populations in agricultural fields.

10.

TODAY'S TOP 5 PICK



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Owls are carnivorous and will eat rodents, small or medium sized mammals, nocturnal insects, fish ^{Search} and other birds. After digesting their food, owls regurgitate hard pellets of compressed bones, fur, teeth, feathers and other materials they couldn't digest. Ornithologists study those pellets to learn more about an owl's diet.



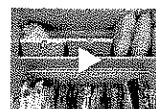
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11. Owls have zygodactyl feet with two toes pointing forward and two toes pointing backward, and all their toes have sharp talons. This gives the birds a stronger, more powerful grip so they can be more effective predators.



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12. Owls have specialized feathers with fringes of varying softness the help muffle sound when they fly. Their broad wings and light bodies also make them nearly silent fliers, which helps them stalk prey more easily.



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13. For most owl species, females are larger, heavier and more aggressive than males. If the birds are dimorphic, the female is often more richly colored than the male.

VIEW MOR

14. Not all owls hoot, and owls can make a wide range of other sounds, such as screeches, whistles, barks, growls, rattles and hisses. During the nesting season, owl calls can often be heard up to a mile away. Female owls generally have higher voices than their mates.

15. Not all owl species are nocturnal. How often an owl is seen during the day depends on the seasonal amount of daylight and darkness, food supplies and habitat.

16. Most owls do not migrate but they can be nomadic in searching for the best food sources. Some species, such as the snowy owl, have regular irruptions.

17. A group of owls is called a parliament, wisdom or study. Baby owls are called owlets.

18. Owls have been found in the fossil record up to 58 million years ago. The largest recorded owl fossil, *Ornimegalonyx oteroi*, stood about three feet tall.

19. Owls have long been cultural symbols and they have been found in cave paintings in France, in Egyptian hieroglyphics and even in Mayan art. Today, owl superstitions associate the birds with bad luck, death and stealing souls in many cultures.

20. The biggest modern threats to owls are habitat loss, pesticides that poison the birds and their food supplies and human persecution because of negative superstitions. Vehicle collisions, wire fences and even well-meaning birders can also be hazardous to owls.

Photo – Great Gray Owl © [Jim Richmond](#)

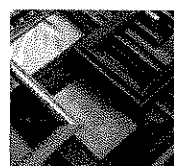
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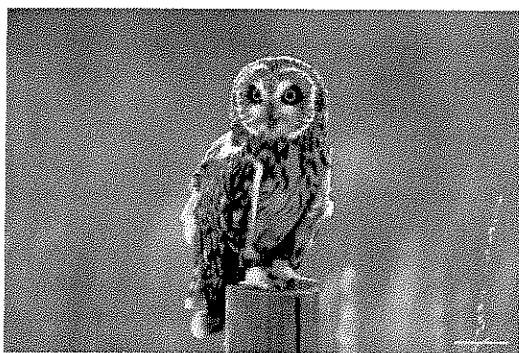
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Lore of Owls



Owls appear prominently in the folklore of many cultures. Ben Queenborough/Photodisc/Getty Images

By Patti Wigington

Owls are a bird that features prominently in the myths and legends of a variety of cultures. These mysterious creatures are known far and wide as symbols of wisdom, omens of death, and bringers of prophecy. In some countries, they are seen as good and wise, in others they are a sign of evil and doom to come. There are numerous species of owls, and each seems to have its own legends and lore. Let's look at some of the best-known

bits of owl folklore and mythology.

Athena was the Greek goddess of wisdom, and is often portrayed with an owl as companion. Homer relates a story in which Athena gets fed up with the crow, who is a total prankster. She banishes the crow as her sidekick, and instead seeks out a new companion. Impressed with the owl's wisdom, and levels of seriousness, Athena chooses the owl to be her mascot instead. The specific owl that represented Athena was called the Little Owl, *Athene noctua*, and it was a species found in great numbers inside places like the Acropolis. Coins were minted with Athena's face on one side, and an owl on the reverse.

There are a number of Native American stories about owls, most of which related to their association with prophecy and divination. The Hopi tribe held the Burrowing Owl as sacred, believing it to be a symbol of their god of the dead. As such, the Burrowing Owl, called *Ko'ko*, was a protector of the underworld, and things that grew in the earth, such as seeds and plants. This species of owl actually nests in the ground, and so was associated with the earth itself.

The Inuit people of Alaska have a legend about the Snowy Owl, in which Owl and Raven are making each other new clothes. Raven made Owl a pretty dress of black and white feathers. Owl decided to make Raven a lovely white dress to wear. However, when Owl asked Raven to allow her to fit the dress, Raven was so excited that she couldn't hold still. In fact, she jumped around so much that Owl got fed up and threw a pot of lamp oil at Raven. The lamp oil soaked through the white dress, and so Raven has been black ever since.

In many African countries, the owl is associated with sorcery and baneful magic. A large owl hanging around a house is believed to indicate that a powerful shaman lives within. Many people also believe that the owl carries messages back and forth between the shaman and the spirit world.

In some places, nailing an owl to the door of a house was considered a way to keep evil at bay. The tradition actually began in ancient Rome, after owls foretold the deaths of Julius Caesar and several other Emperors. The custom persisted in

some areas, including Great Britain, up through the eighteenth century, where an owl nailed to a barn door protected the livestock within from fire or lightning.

The owl was known as a harbinger of bad tidings and doom throughout Europe, and put in appearances as a symbol of death and destruction in a number of popular plays and poems. For instance, Sir Walter Scott wrote:

*Birds of omen dark and foul,
Night-crow, raven, bat, and owl,
Leave the sick man to his dream --
All night long he heard your scream.*

Even before Scott, William Shakespeare wrote of the owl's premonition of death in both *MacBeth* and *Julius Caesar*.

Much of Appalachian tradition can be traced back to the Scottish Highlands (where the owl was associated with the *cailleach*) and English villages that were the original homes of mountain settlers. Because of this, there is still a good deal of superstition surrounding the owl in the Appalachian region, most of which are related to death. According to mountain legends, an owl hooting at midnight signifies death is coming. Likewise, if you see an owl circling during the day, it means bad news for someone nearby. In some areas, it is believed that owls flew down on Samhain night to eat the souls of the dead.

If you find an owl feather, it can be used for a variety of purposes. The Zuni tribe believed that an owl feather placed in a baby's crib kept evil spirits away from the infant. Other tribes saw owls as bringers of healing, so a feather could be hung in the doorway of a home to keep illness out. Likewise, in the British Isles, owls were associated with death and negative energy, so feathers can be used to repel those same unpleasant influences.

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OWL MYTHS AND LEGENDS

by Shani Friedman

Owls and humans are connected from the dawn of history. The nighttime activity, large eyes, acute vision, and "wisdom" of owls were known by the ancients. Dating from a Sumerian tablet (2300 to 2000 BC),

Lilith, the goddess of death, has talons for feet, wears a headdress of horns, and is flanked by owls. She is probably the inspiration for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and warfare. The rock crevices of Athens and the Acropolis were filled with small owls, believed to be the embodiment of Athena. When the Athenians won the battle of Marathon from the Persians in 490 BC, the warrior goddess Athena assumed the shape of an owl and led them from above.

The Romans, who appropriated many of the Greek beliefs, associated owls with Minerva, the goddess of prophesy and wisdom. Minerva's role was similar to Athena's. The prophetic qualities of owls were known. Virgil writes that the hoot of an owl foretold the death of Dido. Pliny reports great confusion and fear in the Forum when an owl entered. Horace associates owls with witchcraft. Romans used representations of owls to combat the evil eye. Owl feathers and internal organs were found in magical potions and pharmaceutical remedies. For example, the ashes of an owl's feet were an antidote to snakebite, and an owl's heart placed on the breast of a sleeping woman forced her to tell all her secrets.

The Ainu of northern Japan placed carved eagle owls on their houses to ward off famine and pestilence. They revered the Eagle owl as a messenger of the gods or a divine ancestor. They drank a toast to the Eagle owl before a hunting expedition. The Screech owl warned against danger, but the Barn owl and Horned owl were demonic.

The owl was an emblem of a royal clan of Chinese masters of the thunderbolt (because it brightens the night) and the regulators of the seasons. Associated with thunder and lightning, owl ornaments were placed at the corners of houses to protect them from fire. The Owl is a symbol of too much Yang (positive, active, masculine, bright energy).

In the Middle East, the owl is linked with destruction, ruin and death. They are believed to represent the souls of people who have died un-avenged. Seeing an owl on the way to battle foretells a bloody battle with many deaths and casualties. Seeing an owl at somebody's house predicts their death. Seeing an owl in your sleep is fine as long as you don't hear its voice. An owl's sound forecasts a bad day. A person who nags and complains a lot is compared to an owl. When someone is grumpy or is delivering bad news, they are said to have a face like an owl.

In India, seizures in children could be treated with a broth made from owl eyes. Rheumatism pain was treated with a gel made from owl meat. Owl meat could also be eaten as a natural aphrodisiac. In northern India, if one ate the eyes of an owl, they would be able to see in the dark. In southern India, the cries of an owl were interpreted by number: one hoot was an omen of impending death; two meant success in anything that would be started soon after; three represented a woman being married into the family; four indicated a disturbance; five denoted coming travel; six meant guests were on the way; seven was a sign of mental distress; eight foretold sudden death; and nine symbolized good fortune.

Many peoples tie owls to death and witchcraft. Some Asians believed that the owl carried away the soul of the deceased. If an owl hooted in a Chinese village, the people thought it was telling them to dig a grave. In Europe,

Sicilians believed that an owl sung around the house of a sick person for three days before death. Italians, Russians, Germans and Hungarians continue to regard owls as the bearers of deathly omens.

In Polish folklore, girls who die unmarried turn into doves, whereas girls who are married when they die turn into owls. An owl cry heard in or near a home usually meant impending death, sickness, or other misfortune. Another Polish story tells how the owl does not come out during the day because it is too beautiful, and would be mobbed by other jealous birds.

You may have heard that owls are the familiars of witches. This belief persists in many parts of Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Because of the more sinister associations regarding owls, the early Christian church seized upon the owl as a symbol of evil and demonic possession. Its affinity with darkness, haunting calls and nocturnal hunting prowess led early clerics to consider the owl a seeker after vain knowledge, one who was unable to perceive the truth. In medieval carving and illustration, owls were seen in the company of apes, the worst of all beasts often representing Satan himself. Just as the devil trapped unwary people, the ape and the owl lurked together in the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge to attract and capture innocent birds.

In North America, a strong link between the supernatural and owls exists. Remarkable parallels exist between many indigenous people's beliefs and those of the people of Asia. In many, if not most tribes, owls are closely associated with impending death. Frequently, an owl is a vehicle by which the spirit of the dead reaches life beyond. For example, for the Ojibwa, the bridge over which the spirit of the dead passes is called the owl bridge. The Oto-Missouri tribes believe that an owl brings a message of death.

The owl also contained unique powers. The Cherokees bathed the eyes of children in water containing owl feathers to help them remain awake all night for ceremony. Creek shamans kept an owl skin with their sacred amulets. In a beautiful ritual of the Pawnees, the ceremonial pipe was decorated in part with owl feathers, stemming from the following visionary instructions:

Put me upon the feathered stem, for I have power to help the Children. The night season is mine. I wake when others sleep. I can see in the darkness and discern coming danger. The human race must be able to care for its young during the night. The warrior must be alert and ready to protect his home against prowlers in the dark. I have the power to help the people so that they may not forget their young in sleep. I have power to help the people to be watchful against enemies while darkness is on the earth. I have power to help the people keep awake and perform these ceremonies in the night as well as the day. (Fletcher, 1900-1901)

Native American creation myths include a part for the owl. Sometimes the losing of a contest by an owl led to the delineation between day and night. According to the Menominee, Wabus (the rabbit) saw Totoba (the Saw-whet owl) perched on a bank of a river. The light was dim, so Wabus said to Totoba, "Why do you want it so dark? I do not like it, so I will cause it to be daylight." Totoba replied, "If you are powerful enough, then do so. Let us put our powers to a test. Whoever wins may decide as he prefers." All the birds and animals came together to witness the contest. The rabbit started repeating, "Light, light..." as quickly as he could. The owl repeated, "Dark, dark..." If one mistakenly spoke the other's word, the erring one would lose the contest. Eventually, the owl repeated the rabbit's words. The rabbit decided that it should be light, but he granted that the night should have a chance, for the benefit of the defeated owl.

The Hopi identify the Burrowing owl with Masau'u, their god of the dead and the night. The same deity is also the guardian of fires and attends to all underground things. As such, he is responsible for the germination of seeds, which lends a more positive aspect to the owl.

To the Hidatsa of the Dakotas, the "big owl" (Great horned owl) was a keeper-of-game spirit, who watched over and controlled the buffalo. "Big owl" had an assistant "little owl" (Burrowing owl) to help with these essential buffalo herding duties. "Little owl" was a protective spirit for a warrior, flying above him if he went to attack an enemy.

Perhaps we need to establish a new mythic view of our North American owls - one that celebrates their aesthetic beauty and sense of mystery, while acknowledging that their sharp sensory awareness is superior to ours. Whether they are seen as power possessing beings or harbingers of death, owls inspire humans wherever they are found on Earth.

Owls Mythology & Folklore

Owls are one of the oldest species of vertebrate animal in existence, fossils have been found dating back 60 million years, showing the bird to have changed very little in that time.

Throughout the history of mankind, the owl has featured significantly in mythology & folklore. Owls are one of the few birds that have been found in prehistoric cave paintings. Owls have been both revered & feared throughout many civilisations from ancient to more recent times.

In ancient Greece, owls were often seen as a symbol of good fortune. The idea of the 'wise old owl' may have come into being from the association of the Little Owl with the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athene.

In contrast, the Romans saw owls as omens of impending disaster. Hearing the hoot of an owl indicated an imminent death, it is thought that the deaths of many famous Romans was predicted by the hoot of an owl, including Julius Caesar, Augustus & Agrippa. While the Greeks believed that sight of an owl predicted victory for their armies, the Romans saw it as a sign of defeat. They believed that a dream of an owl could be an omen of shipwreck for sailors & of being robbed. To ward off the evil caused by an owl, it was believed that the offending owl should be killed & nailed to the door of the affected house.

Beliefs on owls varied between ancient American Indian tribes. Some tribes viewed owls as harbingers of sickness & death. Other tribes saw them as protective spirits, others believed them to be the souls of living or recently departed people & should be treated with respect. Some tribes even saw the owls as earthly incarnations of their gods, the Hopis believed the Burrowing Owl to be their god of the dead. The Inuit explain the flat face & short beak of owls, in the story of a beautiful young girl who was magically changed into an owl with a long beak, as an owl, she became frightened & flew into the wall of her house & flattened her face & beak. Some tribes referred to death as "crossing the owls bridge".

Some people believed that owls were particular bad to children, in Malaya it was believed that owls ate new-born babies, the Swahili believed that owls brought sickness to children, in Arabia it was believed that owls were evil spirits that carried children off in the night.

Some people believed that owls had magic powers, in Arabia it was thought that each female Owl laid two eggs - one with the power to make hair fall out, the other with the power to restore it. In Algeria, it was believed that if the right eye of an Eagle Owl was placed in the hand of a sleeping woman, that she would tell everything you wanted to know (*now that is stretching the imagination too far*).

British beliefs about owls include the Welsh belief that if a owl is heard amongst houses then an unmarried girl has lost her virginity. Another Welsh belief is that if a pregnant woman hears an owl, her child will be blessed. In Yorkshire owl broth is believed to cure whooping cough, amongst other things (see entries for Barn Owl & Little Owl). Because of its ability to turn its head so far & its habit of watching things intently, it was believed that you could get an owl to effectively wring its own neck by walking in circles around it.

While there are many cultures that believe the owl to be bad (in Cameroon, it has no name, it is only referred to as "the bird that makes you afraid"), there are others that believe owls to

be good. In Babylon, owl amulets were used to protect pregnant women. In the Lorraine region of France, owls are believed to help spinsters find husbands. In Romania, it is said that the souls of repentant sinners fly to heaven as Snowy Owls.

In India 'food' made from owls was believed to have many medicinal properties curing seizures in children (owl eye broth) & rheumatism (owl meat). Eating owl eyes was believed to enable a person to see in the dark, while owl meat was believed to be an aphrodisiac. There were also beliefs about events predicted by the number of owl hoots (similar to seeing numbers of magpies in this country) :

- 1 : impending death**
- 2 : success in imminent venture**
- 3 : woman will be married into the family**
- 4 : disturbance**
- 5 : imminent travel**
- 6 : guests arriving**
- 7 : mental distress**
- 8 : sudden death**
- 9 : good fortune**

It is believed that over 1000 owls, including the endangered Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*), are killed very year during Diwali by black magicians in the hope of warding off bad luck & gaining magical powers. This is despite the fact that owls are identified with the goddess of Wealth, Lakshmi, in whose honour the celebration is held (when she travels alone, without Vishnu, she travels on an owl - when she travels with Vishnu they travel on the eagle Garuda). Amulets made from the bones, beaks & talons of owls are in great demand.

Blakiston's Fish Owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*) is one of the most important gods of the native Ainu people of Hokkaidu, in Japan. It is called "kotan kor kamuy", which means the "god of the village" or "god who defends the village".

In France owls were also considered with great esteem, with several named as dukes, for example the European Eagle Owl was called *Hibou Grand-Duc* & the long-eared owl was called *Hibou Moyen-Duc*. This probably stemmed from the custom during the middle ages that nobles below the rank of a duke could not wear a plume of feathers, hence the 'eared' owls must be of rank of a duke. Somewhere along the way though, this attitude changed, with the European Eagle Owl being classified as vermin until the late 1960's.

In China, the popular name for owls, especially "eared" owls, is "cat-eared hawk".

One of the Chinese names for owls is "xiao", these owls have the associated legend of being evil birds that ate their own mothers. The Chinese character representing "xiao" is used in expressions relating to ferocity & bravery.

In Poland it was believed that girls who died unmarried turned into doves, while those who died married turned into owls. It was also believed that owls did not come out during the day because they were so beautiful & would be mobbed by other birds out of jealousy.

In Russia, hunters used to carry owl claws, so that their souls could use them to climb to heaven when they died. The Kalmuks held owls sacred because one was believed to have saved the life of Genghis Khan.

In Welsh mythology, Blodeuwedd, the Goddess of Betrayal, is associated with the owl. According to the story in "The Mabinogion", Blodeuwedd was created from flowers by the magician Gwydion for the prince Llew Llaw Gyffes. She had an affair with Goronwy & they contrived to kill Llew. On his death, Llew was transformed into an eagle, but was healed & returned to human form by Gwydion. Llew returned to seek revenge, rather than killing Blodeuwedd, Gwydion turned her into a white owl, to haunt the night in loneliness & sorrow, saying "I will not slay thee, but I will do unto thee worse than that. For I will turn thee into a bird; and because of the shame thou hast done unto Llew Llaw Gyffes, you shall never show thy face in the light of day. And thou shall not lose thy name, but shall be always called Blodeuwedd." The word Blodeuwedd is still used in Wales to mean owl.

Collective Nouns

A Parliament of Owls
A Wisdom of Owls

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Clothespin

By [Cris](#) | [June 29, 2014](#) | [Inventions](#)

Why don't you pin these clothespin facts?

Clothespins are devices typically used for attaching clothes to a clothesline or airer.

'Clothespins' are also known as 'clothes pins', 'clothes-pegs', 'clothes pegs' and 'pegs'.

Clothespins are most commonly used for pegging up wet clothes, for the purpose of drying, on washing lines outside.

Clothespins are believed to have been first patented early in the 1800s, by Jérémie Opdebec, which was the traditional one piece design, and they were commonly made by hand by English gypsies.

Traditional styled one piece clothespins are usually made of wood although they are sometimes made from plastic, and are often called 'dolly pegs', as they were, and still are, also used for making peg dolls.



Frogs

Objective : to apply the lessons learned from frog stories to ones life

Lesson Plan

1. Tell first frog story and discuss
2. Tell second frog story and discuss
3. Introduce two acronyms for Frog
Fully Rely on God goodness
Forgiveness relieves our guilt
4. Distribute frog keychains to participants

