

# OWLS

A wise old owl sat in an oak,  
The more he heard, the less  
he spoke;  
The less he spoke, the more  
he heard;  
Why aren't we all like that  
wise old bird?



## ***Please Read Aloud:***

We turn our attention today to this most wise of birds...

Owls are very recognisable and have many stories, myths and beliefs around them. They are associated with wisdom and learning as we know from the wise old Owl of our beloved 'Winnie the Pooh', and you may even have met the wise, bookish and somewhat grumpy Owl in Alison Uttley's tales of 'Little Grey Rabbit'...

It's interesting to know that the owl was the sacred bird of Athena, the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom and night.

However, Owls are also feared all over the world, with some people believing them to bring bad luck. Their large staring eyes, feathered 'horns' and haunting call may add to the reasons why people fear them. They are active and effective hunters at night and humans tend to be scared of the dark!

## ***Please ask your students to tell back...***

Like hawks and eagles, owls are called raptors, or birds of prey, which means they use sharp talons and curved bills to hunt, kill, and eat other animals.

But owls are different from hawks and eagles in several ways. Most owls have huge heads, stocky bodies, soft feathers, short tails, and a reversible toe that can point either forward or backward. Owl's eyes face forward, like humans do. Most owl species are active at night, not in the daytime.

There are about **250 species** of owls in the world. They live on every continent except icy Antarctica.

Owls belong to a group of birds called **Strigiformes**. That group is divided into two smaller groups, known as **families**.

One family (Tytonidae) includes Barn Owls, which have heart-shaped faces. The second family, (Strigidae) include all other owls, most of which have round faces.

***Please ask your students to tell back...***

The most common large owl (Strigiforme) found in Southern Africa is the **Spotted Eagle-Owl...**



One of the best ways to learn to identify owls, and birds of any kind, is to learn their songs and vocalisations.

The call of the Spotted Eagle-Owls is a mellow hoot. The males usually give a double hoot, 'hoo-hooooee', which the female answers with a softer triple hoot, 'hoo-hoo-hooee'.

They are most vocal in the cooler months leading up to the breeding season, May to August. Owls call to find partners, to tell their partners where they are and to proclaim their territories.

Any bird that is flying about and singing in the night time must be able to see where it is going, and the owls have special abilities for this!

The eyes are very large and the yellow iris opens and closes about the pupil in a way quite similar to the arrangement in the cat's eye. The owl doesn't need to see behind it, as it is a bird that hunts instead of being hunted, so it only needs to focus its eyes on the creature it is chasing. For this reason, its eyes are in the front of the head (like our own) but it can see behind, if need be, as its head can turn completely around as if on a pivot (unlike our own heads!)

***Please ask your students to tell back...***

Spotted Eagle-Owls have a varied diet.

The type of food they eat depends largely on their habitat (where they live) and what is available to them.



They prey on insects such as crickets and large beetles, small mammals such as shrews, mice, rats, squirrels and mole-rats, and smaller birds. Frogs, lizards and snakes, and rotting meat are also eaten.

Owls hunt from perches where they will be assured of a good view or vantage point, such as trees or rocky ridges, as well as telephone poles, streetlights, walls and even chimneys.

When an owl sees prey, it swoops down and pounces on it, either taking it back to the perch or to a flat area to eat. They can also catch insects and birds in flight.

The whole effect of the owl's plumage (remember that word?) makes it resemble a branch of a tree or a part of the bark, and this protects it especially during the day when it is sleeping/ roosting. Its plumage is very fluffy, and its wing feathers have soft fringes which cushion the stroke upon the air, meaning the owl's flight is noiseless, and the bird is able to swoop down upon its prey without giving warning of approach.

***Please ask our student to tell back...***

There is still much to be learned and discovered about these beautiful birds, but we shall have to pause here to let our hearts and minds ponder a while.

## LET'S CONTINUE LEARNING...

1. Take a look at the attached pages. You will see a beautiful drawing with the Anatomy of the Owl. Study it quietly and carefully for a few minutes, and then see if you're able to fill in the blank spaces, naming each part in the sheet below. Whatever you haven't remembered, take a look to remind yourself and fill in the blanks!
2. You may be interested to explore some of the other Owls typically found in Southern Africa in a local field guide; look up... the **Marsh Owl** (*Asio capensis*), the **Cape Eagle-Owl** (*Bubo capensis*), **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl** (*Bubo lacteus*), **African Barred Owlet** (*Glaucidium capense*), **Pearl-spotted Owlet** (*Glaucidium perlatum*), **African Scops-Owl** (*Otus senegalensis*), **Southern White-faced Owl** (*Ptilopsis granti*), **Pel's Fishing Owl** (*Scotopelia peli*) and the **African Wood Owl** (*Strix woodfordii*). Enjoy marvelling at our God's incredible creation and praise Him for it!
3. Enjoy taking a look at the attached poster with a number of different kinds of owls from all over the world; if you're able to print it out in colour and put it somewhere where you'll be able to keep looking at it. Why not find out what some of the Owl's Calls sound like, and listen in your bed at night to see if you can recognise any!

