

BENCHMARK • P

# *Birds of Prey*



Written by Fran Mason

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Owls.....	5
Barn Owl.....	6
Great Gray Owl.....	6
Northern Pygmy Owl .....	7
Great Horned Owl .....	8
Falcon-Like Birds .....	9
Eagles.....	10
Falcons .....	11
Vultures .....	12
Hawks .....	14
Kites .....	15
Glossary .....	16



## Introduction

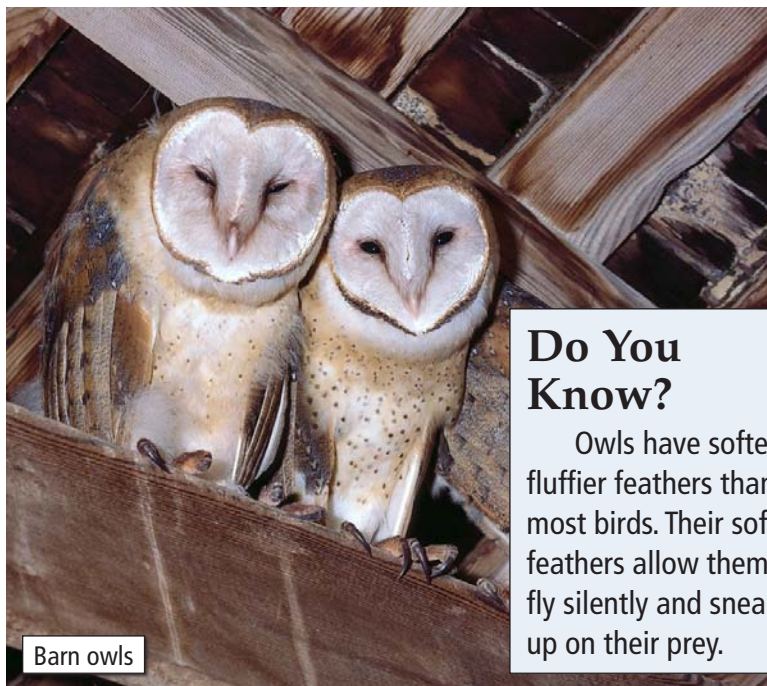
Birds that hunt and eat other animals are called “birds of prey.” Birds of prey have strong feet with **talons**, or claws. They grab their **prey** with their feet. They also have sharp, curved beaks. They use their beaks to tear apart their food. Birds of prey live all over the world. They live in open prairies, on mountaintops, and in deserts. A few birds of prey even live in cities.



European eagle owl

## Owls

Owls are one kind of bird of prey. Most owls hunt at night. They use their sensitive ears to listen for their prey. They use their big eyes to see at night. Owls drop down on their prey and snatch it up in their claws. Some kinds of owls eat small birds, mice, or insects. Other owls can catch fish or crabs in shallow water.



Barn owls

## Do You Know?

Owls have softer, fluffier feathers than most birds. Their soft feathers allow them to fly silently and sneak up on their prey.

## Barn Owls and Great Gray Owls

The common barn owl is found in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. These owls discovered that barns can be good places to live.

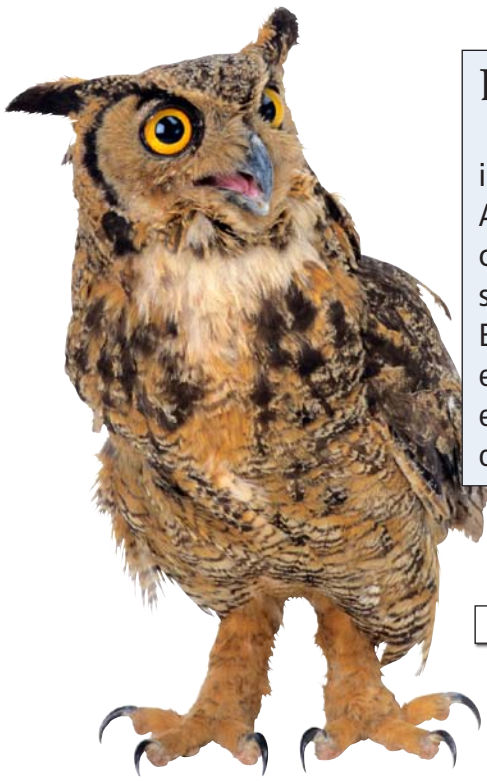
One of the world's biggest owls is the great gray owl. This owl lives in Canada, northern Europe, and northern Asia. It can live to be 40 years old. It can grow up to 84 centimeters (33 in) tall.





## **Northern Pygmy Owl**

One of the world's smallest owls is the northern pygmy owl. It lives in western North America. It is only about 16 centimeters (6 in) tall. But it is fierce! The pygmy owl can often scare off animals bigger than it is. Pygmy owls live in holes in trees. They like to eat small birds, lizards, and insects.



## Do You Know?

The tawny owl, found in Britain, Europe, and Asia, can be found in cities with large parks, such as London and Berlin. It has such good ears that it can hear an earthworm crawling out of its hole.

Great horned owl

## Great Horned Owl

The great horned owl has a famous “hoot.” Its call can be heard from far away on quiet nights. It lives in the forests, deserts, and plains of North, Central, and South America. The great horned owl likes to eat many different animals, such as rabbits and chickens. Sometimes it will wade into the water to catch a frog or a fish.





## **Falcon-Like Birds**

The family of falcon-like birds of prey are different from owls. Falcon-like birds hunt during the day, so they do not need the big eyes and silent feathers that owls have. Instead, they need speed, so they have a sleeker shape.



## Eagles

The eagle is a well-known bird of prey. The African martial eagle has a **wingspan** as long as a grown person's height. This eagle is so big that it can capture a baby gazelle. It usually eats rabbits, squirrels, and birds. Golden eagles and bald eagles live in the open country of western North America. The golden eagle can also be found in Europe, Asia, and northern Africa. Eagles use sticks to build nests that are larger than bathtubs.



## Falcons

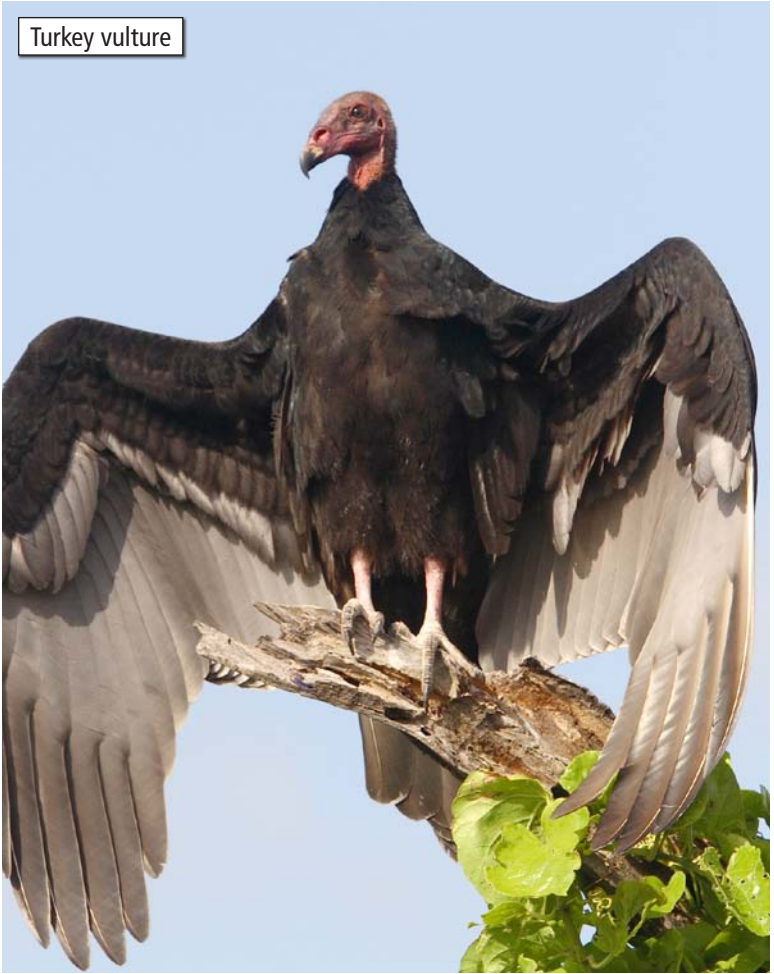
Falcons are fast fliers. The peregrine falcon lives in landscapes that range from arctic **tundra** to tropical rain forest. It is one of the fastest-flying birds of prey. When it dives, it can reach a speed of 322 kilometers (200 mph) per hour. The peregrine falcon usually eats prey that it catches in midair.



## Vultures

You might be surprised to know that vultures are also birds of prey. They are different from hawks and eagles because their prey is dead before they eat it. For this reason, they are known as **scavengers**. The Cape Griffon vulture of southern Africa feeds small bones to its chicks to make their bones strong.

Turkey vulture



The turkey vulture of North, Central, and South America benefits people. It removes dead animals so that diseases do not spread. Its sense of smell is so good that the turkey vulture has been used to help people find gas leaks.





Red-tailed hawk

## Do You Know?

Eagles, hawks, and some other birds of prey with large wingspans can soar on top of warm air masses. They can float high in the air for long periods of time without flapping their wings.

## Hawks

Hawks are sharp-eyed hunters. Many hawks can hunt in dense brush because of their long tail and rounded wings.

The gray hawk has a beautiful black-and-white banded tail. This bird lives along rivers in Mexico and eats lizards.



## Kites

Kites are lightweight birds with large wings and a forked tail. The black kite is found in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and elsewhere. The black kite is a scavenger and a **predator**. Black kites are plentiful because they can eat many different things. Hundreds of them can be seen flying together in some tropical places.

## **Glossary**

<b>predator</b>	an animal that catches and eats other animals (p. 15)
<b>prey</b>	an animal that is hunted and eaten by another animal (p. 4)
<b>scavenger</b>	an animal that finds and eats scraps of garbage or animals that are already dead (p. 12)
<b>talons</b>	claws (p. 4)
<b>tundra</b>	a cold, treeless Arctic region where the ground is always frozen (p. 11)
<b>wingspan</b>	the width of a bird's wings when they are fully spread (p. 10)

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