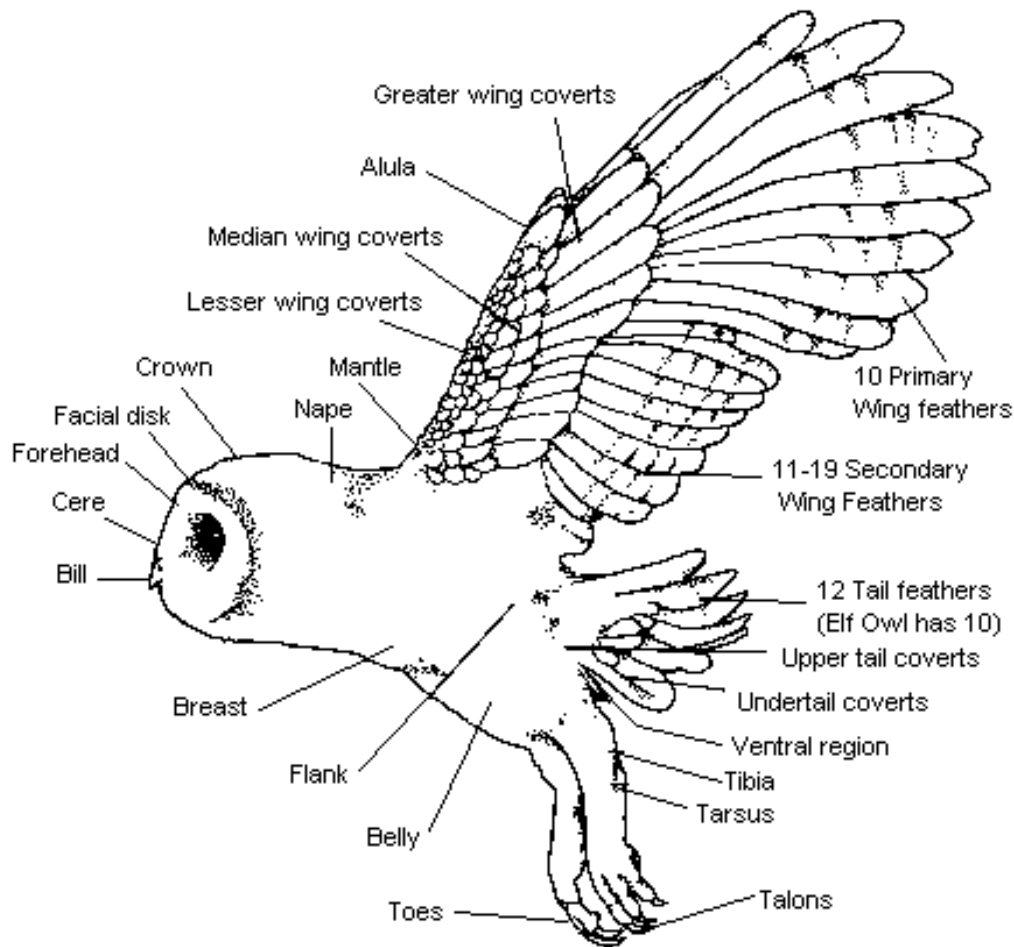
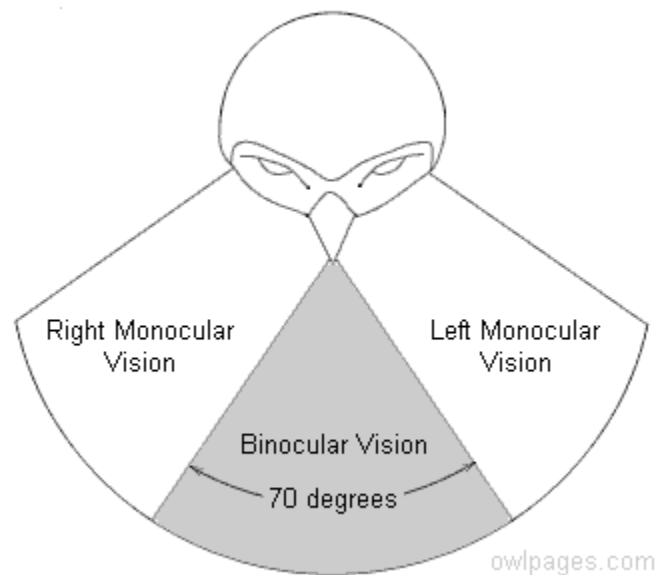


OWL FACTS

1. 222 listed species worldwide
2. Smallest = Least Pygmy Owl (4.5 inches tall)
3. Largest = Eurasian Eagle Owl (28 inches tall)
4. Owls are Raptors, or Birds of Prey, which means they hunt other living things for their food, using their special adaptations and unique abilities that set them apart from any other creature
5. Owls are found on all continents except Antarctica, and in a great variety of habitats, from thick forests to open prairies
6. Parts of an Owl



7. Most owls are resident birds, that is they don't migrate but rather have distinct home ranges. In some northern species, some will migrate south in the event of extreme winters.
8. The diet of owls varies from insects to small mammals such as rabbits and even foxes. Owls are opportunist hunters, hunting whatever is easiest to find. The prey items are related to the overall size of the bird as well. If the hunting is especially good, owls will cache extra food in burrows, holes and snags. Indigestible parts such as bones, fur and feathers are regurgitated in the form of a pellet.
9. An owl's eyes may be 1 to 5% of its total body weight. Owls have excellent vision, not quite as well as humans but close. Because an owl's eyes are tube shape, not ball shaped the owl cannot "roll" its eyes but rather must rotate its head. An owl has 14 neck vertebrae, twice that of a human, and can turn its head 270 degrees. It can pivot up and down as well as side to side. Owls can see in the daytime sun as well as they can at night due to their strong pupils and they have three eyelids. The upper lid closes down when the owl blinks. The lower closes upward when the owl is asleep and the third eyelid is a nictitating membrane that keeps the eye lubricated and clean and closes from the inside to the outside.



10. Many of the feathers of owls are fringed on the ends and soft. This allows for silent flight and it very advantageous in hunting
11. An Owl's foot has four toes. When in flight, 3 of these toes face forward, and one backwards. When perched, or clutching prey, the outer front toe on each foot swivels to face the rear. It is able to do this because of a unique flexible joint.

Digestion in Owls

Like other birds, Owls cannot chew their food - small prey items are swallowed whole, while larger prey are torn into smaller pieces before being swallowed. Some Owl species will partially pluck bird and larger mammal prey.

Unlike other birds, Owls have no Crop. A crop is a loose sac in the throat that serves as storage for food for later consumption. Since an Owl lacks this, food is passed directly into their digestive system.

Now, a bird's **stomach** has two parts:

The first part is the glandular stomach or **proventriculus**, which produces **enzymes**, acids, and mucus that begin the process of digestion.

The second part is the **muscular** stomach, or **gizzard**. There are no digestive glands in the gizzard, and in birds of prey, it serves as a filter, holding back insoluble items such as **bones**, fur, teeth and feathers (more about this below).

The soluble or soft parts of the food are ground by muscular contractions, and allowed to pass through to the rest of the **digestive system**, which includes the small and **large intestine**. The liver and pancreas secrete digestive enzymes into the **small intestine** where the food is absorbed into body. At the end of the digestive tract (after the **large intestine**) is the **cloaca**, a holding area for wastes and products from the digestive and urinary systems. The cloaca opens to the outside by means of the **vent**. It is interesting to note that birds (apart from the Ostrich) do not have a bladder. The excretion from the vent is largely made up of an acid which is the white part of a healthy dropping.

Several hours after eating, the indigestible parts (fur, bones, teeth & feathers that are still in the gizzard) are compressed into a **pellet** the same shape as the gizzard. This pellet travels up from the gizzard back to the proventriculus. It will remain there for up to 10 hours before being regurgitated. Because the stored pellet partially blocks the Owl's digestive system, new prey cannot be swallowed until the pellet is ejected. Regurgitation often signifies that an Owl is ready to eat again. When the Owl eats more than one prey item within several hours, the various remains are consolidated into one pellet.

The pellet cycle is regular, regurgitating the remains when the digestive system has finished extracting the **nutrition** from the food. This is often done at a favourite roost. When an Owl is about to produce a pellet, it will take on a pained expression - the eyes are closed, the facial disc narrow, and the bird will be reluctant to fly. At the moment of expulsion, the neck is stretched up and forward, the beak is opened, and the pellet simply drops out without any retching or spitting movements.

Owl pellets differ from other birds of prey in that they contain a greater proportion of food residue. This is because an Owl's digestive juices are less acidic than in other birds of prey. Also, other raptors tend to pluck their prey to a much larger extent than Owls.

References:

Campbell, Wayne. 1994. "Know Your Owls (CD-ROM)". Axia Wildlife
Hollands, David. 1991. "Birds of the Night". Reed Books
König, Weick and Becking. 1999. "Owls: A Guide to the Owls of the World". Yale University Press
Long, Kim. 1998. "Owls: A Wildlife Handbook". Johnson Books
Mikkola, Heimo. 1983. "Owls of Europe". Buteo Books

This pages was taken from:

<http://www.owlpages.com/articles.php?section=Owl+Physiology&title=Digestion>