

Long-eared Owl

Icterus spurius

Long-eared Owls are lanky owls that often seem to wear a surprised expression thanks to long ear tufts that typically point straight up like exclamation marks. These nocturnal hunters roost in dense foliage, where their camouflage makes them hard to find, and forage over grasslands for small mammals. Long-eared Owls are nimble flyers, with hearing so acute they can snatch prey in complete darkness. In spring and summer, listen for their low, breathy hoots and strange barking calls in the night.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Long-eared Owls are medium-sized, slender owls with long ear tufts. The head, roughly as wide as it is long, looks squarish. The facial disks are long and narrow.

Color Pattern

Long-eared Owls are fairly dark birds with buff or orange faces and intricate black, brown, and buff patterning on its feathers. The ear tufts are black with buff or orange fringes, the face has two vertical white lines between the eyes, and the eyes are yellow.

Behavior

Long-eared Owls are nocturnal and generally spend days roosting in dense parts of trees, often near the trunk where their plumage provides excellent camouflage. The species is quite vocal, and makes an incredible variety of hoots, squeals, barks, and other noises. They hunt by making low, coursing passes over open ground, but they rarely hunt before true dark. In winter, the species often roosts communally.

Habitat

Long-eared Owls require a combination of grassland or other open country for foraging, and dense tall shrubs or trees for nesting and roosting. Pine stands and windbreaks or shelterbelts are favored winter roost habitat.

Cool Facts

- The hoot of the male Long-eared Owl can sometimes be heard up to 1 kilometer (0.7 mi) away.
- Like other owls, the Long-eared has a body adapted for silent flight and precision hunting. Flight feathers with fringed edges and downy surfaces mute the sound of the owl's passage through air. The owls gain incredible hearing from their asymmetrically placed ear openings and large, sound-catching facial disks.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 13.8 - 15.7 inches
- Wingspan - 35.4 - 39.4 inches
- Weight - 7.8 - 15.3 ounces

