

# ELF NOTES

*Environmental Learning for the Future - Vermont Institute of Natural Science*  
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## SEEING IN THE DARK

Owls are well adapted for night life. Our night vision in no way approaches that of owls, although after twenty minutes or so, human eyes do adjust so that we can see far better in the dark. Night is a good time to try using senses other than sight to "see" what's going on. Night comes alive with the sounds of nocturnal animals starting their "day". Listen for sounds of foraging, fluttering and other movement. Listen for calls, squeaks, howls or whistles of communication. Try using your sense of touch to see how many different textures you can find around you. Can you identify a tree by how it feels? A cool, wet night can be a good time to do a little sniffing around. What can you tell about where you are by using your nose? Are there certain scents that tell you about the kinds of plants and animals around you?

## ADAPTATIONS

### OWLS

Different from other birds in many ways, owls have certain distinct characteristics that equip them well for their lives as nocturnal predators. From their feet up, owls have an effective array of adaptations that make it possible for them to thrive in their particular habitats.

North America is home to a wide variety of owls, from the small saw-whet owl (smaller than a robin) to the imposing great-horned owl (larger than a red-tailed hawk). Each species of owl has a distinct call that allows members of the same species to locate or identify each other even in total darkness.

Owls usually swallow smaller prey whole and rip larger prey into pieces, coughing up indigestible parts like bones, teeth, fur, and feathers in the form of a pellet. The content of a pellet tells what an owl has been eating.

## ELF NEWS

