

# School-to-Nature



## Saw-Whet Owl (Northern)

The Saw-Whet Owl is the smallest North American owl. It stands 6.7 to 8.3 inches tall, about the size of an adult's hand; females are usually the larger of the two. Males weigh just 2.6 ounces, females not much more at 3.5 ounces. This little owl has excellent hearing and exceptional vision, valuable skills for hunting and for protection. Their right ear is higher than their left with two different shapes. It hears so well it could hunt in darkness by hearing alone.

The coloring of the Saw-Whet Owl is reddish-brown with white markings, including a conspicuous Y-shaped marking of white feathers above and between the eyes, as seen in the photos above. It has a round head that is large in proportion to the body, yellow eyes, a black beak, and feathered feet. The wingspan in flight is 18.1 to 22 inches. They are present in our area year-round, preferring to live in coniferous trees (evergreens such as pines, spruces, and balsams). In the wild they live 7-8 years; in captivity they can live 18 years.



Saw-Whet Owls hunt mostly at night, and will even wait an extra night to hunt if the moon is too bright, for their own protection against larger owls. Their prey is eaten in chunks, head-first, and usually in two meals. Like some other owls they do not digest fur, bones, or feathers; and so they regularly regurgitate a grayish "pellet" made up of these things. Favorite prey: voles and deer mice, shrews, red squirrels, chipmunks, flying squirrels, moles, and bats. Occasionally they will eat small birds.

The Saw-Whet female looks for holes in trees to lay her 4 to 6 eggs. She does all of the incubation and brooding, while the male does all of the hunting to feed her and the hatchlings. The female will leave the nest when the young are 18 days old to roost elsewhere, but will bring food to the nest. The young owls fledge 28 to 32 days after hatching. These owls nest just once per year.

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