



# STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

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## Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*)



**Identifying Marks:** Wingspan 52 inches; length 23 inches. This large yellow-eyed owl is aptly named. An adult male can be almost entirely white. Females and juveniles are marked with dark flecking or barring. Be careful, there are darker males and paler females that are virtually alike in appearance.

**Habitat:** Open tundra from near the tree line to the edge of the polar seas.

**Nest:** Female uses her talons to scratch a shallow depression in the bare ground or turf.

**Diet:** Mostly mammals, ranging in size from small rodents to large hares. They will also eat birds ranging from songbirds to medium-sized geese.

**Voice:** Usually a double *hoo-hoo* but sometimes six or more. Males will hoot from the ground, on a perch, or on the wing. Other calls include a scream and a barking *ha, how, or quawk*.

**Comments:** Stillman's snowy owl was found injured at O'Hare Airport.

*Snowy owl photos by John Longhenry.*



*Snowy owls can often be spotted perched on the ground. Also, unlike other owls, they are likely to be seen during the day.*

State and federal permits are required to keep wildlife for educational purposes

## Who's the Biggest Owl of Them All?



*Note the thickly feathered feet on this flying snowy owl.*

**Large vs. Heavy:** The snowy owl weighs in at four to five pounds. However, the snowy is only 23 inches from head to tail. The great gray owl (*Strix nebulosa*)

has a slightly larger wingspan than the snowy and stands 27 inches tall. Even so, the great gray weighs in at roughly 2.5 pounds. So, the heaviest owl in North America is the snowy owl but the tallest would be the great gray.

**Girls Rule:** Whether it's a hawk, eagle, falcon, or owl, one thing is generally true: females are bigger than males. With smaller birds of prey, there is considerable overlap in size between the larger males and smaller females.

**Why are Females Larger?:** There are a variety of possible explanations for this size difference. Many authorities agree



*Great gray owl photo by Karen Lund.*

that the female's larger size makes her better able to withstand the stress and metabolic demands of laying and brooding eggs.