



Owl Research
INSTITUTE

Wildlife conservation through research and education since 1988.

Congratulations on your Northern Pygmy Owl adoption! Your generous donation directly funds our work to understand and help protect this beautiful species. Thank you for your support!

Please enjoy the adoption documents that follow. If you would like your adoption certificate personalized, please don't hesitate to let me know at liberty@owlresearchinstitute.org and I will add your name to it right away. :)

E N J O Y!



© Kurt Lindsay



Northern Pygmy Owl
Glaucidium californicum



ORI
FACT
SHEET

Northern Pygmy Owl

This fiesty, but tiny, owl is the embodiment of the popular phrase
Dynamite comes in small packages!



PHOTOS © KURT LINDSAY

Glaucidium californicum

The word “pygmy” means small, an apt description for an owl that stands just 6-7” tall - one of the smallest owls in North America.

Northern Pygmy Owls are hardly taller than a pencil and look like adorable fluff balls. Despite their charming looks, they are powerful predators who can take prey up to three-times their size and carry animals weighing more than 70% their own body weight!

Northern Pygmy Owls are cavity nesters, meaning they move into tree holes made by woodpeckers or use old squirrel cavities. These holes often exist in dead trees, or snags, and the Northern Pygmy’s reliance on these nesting conditions makes them vulnerable to habitat loss due to logging, development, or well-intentioned removal of dead trees. They are also indirectly dependent on the species that create these cavities. Additionally, while some cavity nesting species, like Northern Saw-whet Owls, willingly move into human-made nest boxes, Northern Pygmy Owls do not.

Inside the cavity, a female will lay 2-7 glossy white eggs. Owls typically lay white eggs and, for cavity nesting birds, there is no need to camouflage an egg that is concealed within a tree. The female does all of the incubating while the male does all of the hunting – making regular food deliveries to the cavity entrance though never actually entering the nest. While most owls hatch their eggs asynchronously – in the order laid, or one every 2-3 days – Northern Pygmy Owls’ eggs are believed to hatch at the same time, or nearly so. Also unique to this species; young birds are believed to take flight directly from the cavity, in

contrast to other species who jump from the nest and spend several days on branches and the forest floor before learning to fly. Pygmy Owls may fledge from the nest, one after the other, in rapid succession.

Pygmy Owls are unique in other ways. For one, they do not have the special hearing features that many owl species do. These include asymmetrical ear openings that pinpoint sound and facial disks that, much like a dish-antenna, funnel sound toward the ears. Why doesn’t the Pygmy-Owl exhibit these adaptations? Because they don’t need them. While most owls are nocturnal, this species is primarily diurnal, meaning it is most active during daytime. As a result, they have not developed special hearing features that enable hunting in total darkness and need more vision capabilities than auditory ones. A Pygmy Owl’s diet is also varied and not strictly dependent on small mammals: insects, reptiles, and birds are all consumed by this species. When hunting, these owls usually pin their prey to the ground and rip it apart with their sharp beak and talons.

Perhaps most unusual are the ‘eyes in the back of their head.’ Not really, of course, although Northern Pygmy Owls have prominent eye spots that are believed to help ward-off other birds – both predators and groups of mobbing songbirds – that may be watching the owl. These eye spots are thought to help deter such attacks by tricking stalkers into thinking they are being watched themselves.

Northern Pygmy Owl Research

As with other difficult to access and monitor species, population estimates for the Northern Pygmy Owl are hard to discern. It is listed as Sensitive by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes Wildlife Management Program.



Although our breeding season study of Northern Pygmy Owls began in 1981, it was not officially organized until 1985. Since then we have focused our research efforts on finding and monitoring natural nest-sites in western Montana, which can be a difficult task. To date we have documented 35 natural nest-sites and are in the process of analyzing and writing up our research results, which we believe will have important implications for forest management snag retention policies. Each year, our time in the field expands our understanding of these elusive owls.

Northern Pygmy Owls are associated with a wide variety of coniferous and deciduous forest habitats in western North America. They can occur from near tree line to river bottoms. It was once believed that all owl species hatch their eggs asynchronously (in the order laid). However, some studies suggested Pygmy Owls may hatch eggs synchronously, or nearly so. We have documented novel observations of egg laying and incubation, nestling growth and development, and fledging which provide important information about their life histories.

NORTHERN PYGMY OWLS AT A GLANCE

HEIGHT

Males: 6.3 - 7.3 in

Females: 6.3 - 7.3 in

WEIGHT

Males: approx 2.2 oz

Females: approx 2.5 oz

WINGSPAN, BOTH

15 in

NORTHERN PYGMY OWL DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH AMERICA

Cornell Lab of Ornithology



*Partners in Flight

POP. ESTIMATE

100,000 US & Canada*

FEEDS ON

small to medium sized birds, small mammals,
sometimes insects, occasionally small reptiles and amphibians

NORTHERN PYGMY OWL FACTS

Male and female Northern Pygmy-Owls show less sexual dimorphism (physical differences based on gender) than many other species of owl. However, studies have revealed a pattern between humidity and color morphs of the Northern Pygmy-Owl. It seems that higher humidities produce owls with more brown plumage, while lower humidities produce owls with more grey plumage.

- One of the least studied owls in North America
- May cache prey in tree cavities or hang prey items on thorns, like a Northern Shrike
- Pairs occasionally “sing” to each other or sing duets
- Unlike other owls, females & males have the same pitch of voice
- Have hidden tufts that are raised when threatened
- Safer in nest cavities than some other owls because the small diameter of entrances keep predators out
- Known to line nest with feathers or tree bark
- Rarely use man-made nest boxes
- Often seen in suburban areas during non-breeding season
- Have needle-like talons
- May bathe and drink, unlike most owls



Certificate of Northern Pygmy Owl Adoption

This certificate acknowledges that you have symbolically adopted a Northern Pygmy Owl. This act of generosity and support will help protect this species and its habitats.

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denver W. Holt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Denver" on top and "W. Holt" on the line below.

Denver W. Holt
ORI President & Founder



Owl Research INSTITUTE

wildlife conservation through research and education

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Dear Northern Pygmy Owl Supporter,

Thank you for adopting a Northern Pygmy Owl through the Owl Research Institute! Our long-term research on these birds is funded almost entirely from donations from people like you who care about the future of these incredible owls.

We are so happy you are joining us in making Northern Pygmy Owl conservation a priority in your life. With rapidly changing habitat, the need is more real than ever before. Your gift to the Owl Research Institute will help our research, education and conservation efforts. Our trusted research data will help to influence land management decisions and preserve critical habitat for North American owls.

Please don't hesitate to be in touch if you have questions about your adoption or our work - which is only possible through the support of dedicated people like you who want to make a difference for generations to come.

Again, thank-you. Working together, we can protect a future for this fascinating species.

Sincerely,

Liberty A. DeGrandpre
Development Director

Please note that we are a certified 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Our tax identification number is 81-0453479. No goods or services were exchanged in relation to this donation.

Celebrating 30 years!



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Glaucidium californicum



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Learn more about your Northern Pygmy Owl Adoption at:
<https://www.owlresearchinstitute.org/copy-of-adopt-a-northern-pygmy-owl>

