



The great horned owl is known for its long, earlike tufts, yellow-eyed stare and deep hooting voice.

# Teeing up great photos

GREAT HORNED OWLETS ARE FOUND NESTING NEAR THE 9TH HOLE.

*Story and photos by Tim Sweet*

Pellets of snow, referred to as “*graupel*” by my favorite TV meteorologist, were falling from the sky intermittently on April 21 last year when I went in search of a baby great horned owl my friend Dan told me about. He had seen an owlet on the ground underneath a grove of hemlock trees while preparing to chip his Titleist onto the 8th green of our neighborhood golf course.

After supper the next evening, I wandered out to see if I could locate the bird. I managed to spot an adult great horned owl perched on a branch before it flew off, and I heard some unusual chirping sounds, but the Norway spruces and hemlocks on this part of the golf course were so dense I couldn’t spy any babies or a nest.

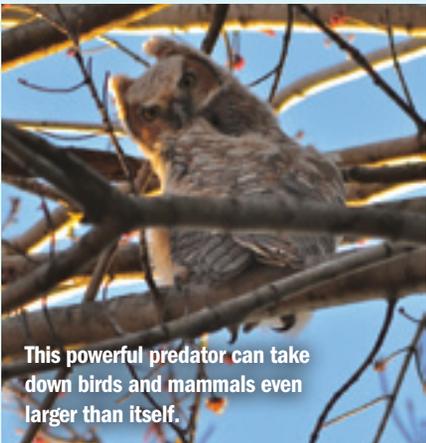
Around 7 p.m. the next day, I heard similar bird calls coming from somewhere in this group of towering conifers. I kept circling the area trying to zero in on the source of the sounds, when I spotted a young owl at eye level perched in a Norway spruce. I excitedly snapped a couple of photos and then ran home to

return with a longer lens. When I got back the owl was gone.

Then, a moment or two later I spied a smaller sibling sitting on the ground under a large hemlock. It was covered in beautiful downy feathers and had piercing yellow eyes. I photographed it from a distance with my long lens.

Over the course of the next two weeks, the two young owls were seen in various trees in the wooded part of the golf course. In the last rays of sunlight, they were at the top of a sugar maple that was beginning to flower.

On April 24, I found them sitting together near the nest in a large hemlock.



This powerful predator can take down birds and mammals even larger than itself.



Great horned owls are at home in wetlands, forests, grasslands, cities and almost any other semi-open habitat — such as a golf course.

The camouflage of their feathers helped them blend into the forested scene.

At twilight on the first Saturday in May, a rapidly growing owlet sat staring at me from a tall maple above the elevated tee box on the 9th hole. Meanwhile, I watched a sibling flap into an ancient basswood not far away.

The highlight of my springtime bird watching came two evenings later. Dan and his son were arriving at the grove just as I was walking out to look for the owls. It took some careful searching, but we discovered one owl high in a hemlock. Then we found another. And to our great amazement, there was a third feathery sibling perched on a nearby limb! Where had this other marvelous creature been hiding for the last two weeks?

May 4 was the last time I saw any of the young ones. But what a wonderful experience it was to observe them for a few weeks in our neck of the woods. Having the opportunity to view wildlife is indeed a splendid treasure! 

*Tim Sweet writes from his home in Clintonville.*